

Sinclair Library



University photo by Masao Miyamoto

GREGG MANNERS SINCLAIR, for whom Sinclair Library is named, served as fourth president of the University from 1942-1956. Born in St. Mary's, Ontario, Canada, Sinclair earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota in 1912 and a master's degree from Columbia University in 1919, but did not obtain a doctorate. He taught English in Japan before coming to the University of Hawaii's English department in 1928.

In modern parlance, Sinclair would be termed a “celebrity hound,” but he turned this interest to the University's advantage and as a faculty member recruited many eminent people as guest lecturers to the University. Among these were Hamlin Garland, Christopher Morley, Thornton Wilder, Carl Sandburg, and Carl Van Doren. His interest in Japan led to the founding of the University's Oriental Institute and he served as the first president of that institution. The Oriental Institute established the University's role in international relations, and would later lead to the establishment of the federally funded East West Center in Hawaii. He was successful in bringing some of the world's best minds to Hawaii for two East-West Philosophers' Conferences, supported by a series of notables ranging from maharajas to America's most wealthy. During Hawaii's war years, Sinclair as University president succeeded in maintaining and developing university programs under exceedingly difficult conditions.

At his side when he was on the English faculty and later University president was the remarkable Marjorie Putnam Sinclair whom he married in 1938. She was twenty-five years his junior. Their natures complemented one another in that, while Sinclair was attracted to eminent people, Marjorie's interest was in the textures of ancient societies. She was to become a prominent novelist of Hawaii, while ably managing to serve as the University's first lady and as hostess for Sinclair's frequent and famous guests.

After his 1956 retirement, Sinclair was Chairman of the Citizen's Advisory Commission on Statehood for Hawaii and an influential member of the Democratic Party. Honors continued to come, among them the “Order of the Sacred Treasure, Second Class” awarded by the Emperor of Japan. He also tried, none too successfully, novel writing. Sinclair died in 1976. In 1980 Marjorie Sinclair married the literary giant Leon Edel, a long-time friend of the Sinclairs.

* Building a Rainbow (Hui O Students, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 1983)

* Day, A Grove, History Makers of Hawaii (Mutual, 1984)

* Nickerson, Thomas. “A University Comes of Age; the Administration of Gregg M. Sinclair.” Alumni News, July 1955: 3-23.