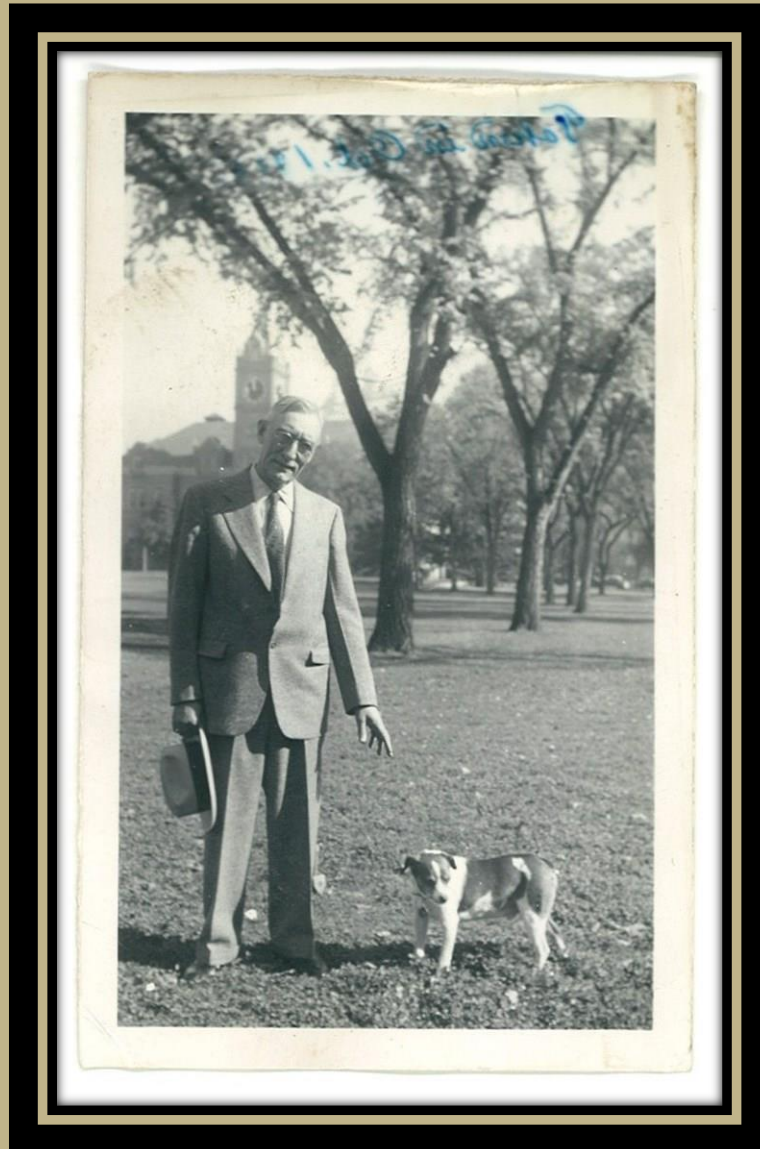


# A TRIBUTE TO G. D. SHALLENBERGER



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## A TRIBUTE TO GARVIN DENNIS (“G.D.”) SHALLENBERGER

The University of Montana in Missoula was chartered in 1883. The Physics department was one of the original departments. In the history of the University of Montana’s Physics Department, one man has left a legacy. Appointed chair of the department in 1923, Dr. Garvin D. Shallenberger played a major role in building up the reputation of the department. He worked to place students in meaningful careers, was an inventor, and was known widely for his wit and service to the community.

### THE EARLY YEARS

Garvin Dennis Shallenberger was born in Muldrow, Oklahoma on September 1, 1889. His parents were farmers, and were reportedly quite poor. Garvin was only able to attend elementary school until about age 9 or 10, when he needed to drop out of school to help with his siblings and work on the farm. When it came time to enter college, he took an entry exam, passed it, and was accepted.



**Dr. G. D. Shallenberger in 1932.**

He obtained a Bachelor’s degree at Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College in Stillwater. In 1919 he earned a Master of Science degree from Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. From there he pursued a Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of Chicago and completed it in 1923. Prior to graduating, Garvin worked with R. A. Sawyor (under the direction of R. A. Millikan) at the University of Chicago on the development of the vacuum spectrograph.

G.D. developed his teaching skills by instructing at high schools, coaching amateur athletics, and serving as a high school principal before entering into college teaching. He taught at Oklahoma Central State Normal, Oklahoma Eastern State Normal, Beloit College in Wisconsin, and at the University of Chicago before coming to Montana in 1923.

G.D. married Grace Hubbell in 1915. She was a teacher, also from Oklahoma. They had three children: William Fulton (1917-1959), Garvin Fletcher (1921-2006), and Katherine [Katy] Louise (1927-2005). William became a lawyer and federal District Judge. Garvin became a prominent lawyer in California and a President of the California Bar Association; Garvin was also a member of the University of Montana (UM) Alumni Association, served as trustee emeritus for the UM Foundation, and in 1999 was awarded the Distinguished Alumni Award for UM. Katy served as President of the U M Alumni Association, and, together with her husband John Delano received the Neil Buckley Presidential Service award in recognition of their long service to the University of Montana.

## THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA YEARS

In 1923 at the age of 34, Dr. Shallenberger was hired by Dr. C. H. Clapp, President of the State University of Montana<sup>1</sup>. At that time the physics department consisted of Dr. Shallenberger, who served as professor and chair, and a teaching assistant, E. T. Lenigan. He served in the department until his retirement in 1960 and was recognized as Professor Emeritus until his death in 1970. During his working years at the University, Dr. Shallenberger (known by everyone as “G.D.”) served as the Director of the summer session from 1938 to 1942, Director of the placement center from 1943 to 1944, and as the Chairman of the Division of Physical Sciences from 1943 to 1954.



G.D. (photo left) with two colleagues.

G.D. Shallenberger was fully engaged in scientific pursuits. His memberships included the American Physics Society, American Association of Physics Teachers, the American Association of University Professors, Sigma Xi Club, and the Northwest Scientific Association (NWSA).

In the same year that G.D. came to Montana (1923), a group of diverse scientists met in Spokane, Washington to form the NWSA with the purpose “*that would enable them to meet annually for the promotion of scientific research and the diffusion of scientific findings*” in the Inland Empire. G.D. served in the NWSA as Councilor (now known as the Board of Trustees) from 1928 to 1932 and assisted in publishing Volume IV (1930) of the *Northwest Science* journal. Now in its 92<sup>nd</sup> year and hosting its 86<sup>th</sup> conference, the NWSA in 2015 stands strong because of Councilors like G.D.

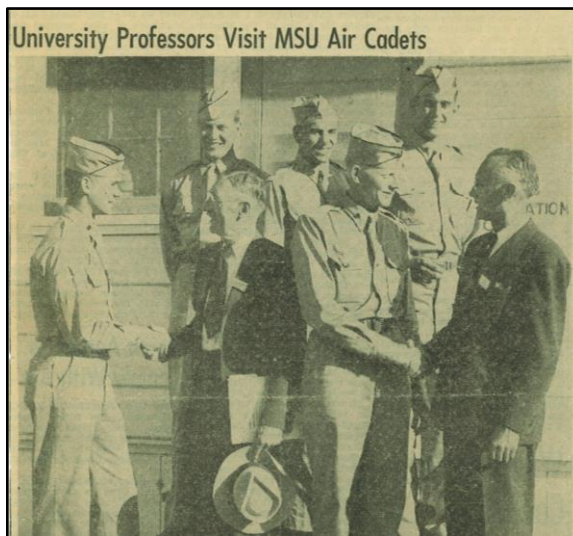
G.D. had a keen interest in practical, applied physics. In 1925, he started the first licensed radio station in Missoula. This station is still on the air-ways at KGVO News Talk 1290 AM. He held a patent on the first tape dispenser, a shoe shine kit, and other inventions. In the mid-1950s he spent a summer in suburban Los Angeles working on developing rocket fuel for the Rocketdyne Corporation. This corporation, known later as Rockwell International and more recently as Aerojet Rocketdyne, was instrumental in developing the Navaho missile used in the Korean War and in making space booster rockets.

While stationed in England during World War II, G.D. taught mathematics, physics, and French to American soldiers at the Shrivenham American University in Swindon. This was one of a few Universities established overseas to help the American service men and women transition back to a life at home.

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<sup>1</sup> The school was chartered in 1893 as the University of Montana. In 1913 when the Montana University System was established, the school's name was changed to the State University of Montana, and in 1935 the name of Montana State University was adopted. In 1965 the name was changed back to its original form, University of Montana.

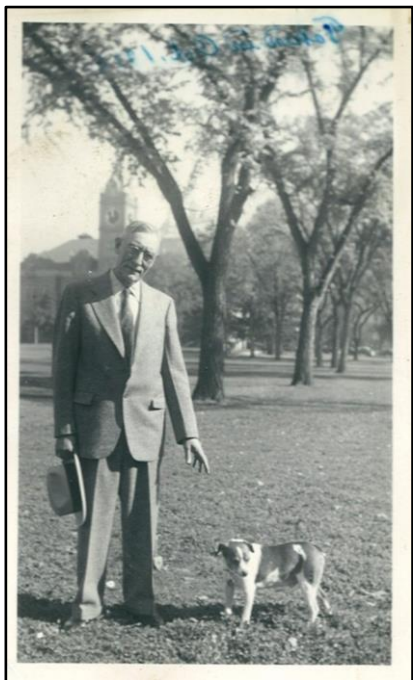
G.D. was known for his wry, delightful sense of humor and for his genuine, caring nature, especially for those less fortunate. His son, Garvin, remarked that his father “had a great sense of humor and all his students have stories about his jokes”. At times, some of his grandchildren found him to be a bit intimidating and strict, as grandfathers were often seen in those days. He helped his grandchildren with their homework, but one of them, Joan, said he helped her with math “because he felt sorry for me”! Joan remembers going to Grizzly football games with her grandfather. G.D. was an avid Grizzly fan.



**Dr. G. D. Shallenberger (center) shaking hands with a cadet.**

After the war, G.D. acquired Tag, a little fox terrier, who was his faithful companion. Tag went everywhere with him except to Rotary meetings. He would take him to his classes, and when he thought his students were getting bored, he would call to Tag, who was snoozing at his feet, “Wake ‘em up, Tag!” and Tag would obediently bark.

At some point, the University Board of Directors passed a motion to prohibit dogs on campus.



**G.D. and his dog, Tag, in front of Main Hall on the Montana State University Campus (later re-named the University of Montana). October 1955.**

The ordinance was duly published in the *Kaimin* newspaper. G.D. just ignored it. One day while strolling across campus with Tag trotting beside him, President McFarland came out of this office and called him over. He asked G.D. if he had seen the article in the *Kaimin* about prohibiting dogs on campus. Without skipping a beat, G.D. replied, “Oh, Carl, you know Tag can’t read!” At other times G.D. often told his students that his dog had graded their papers.

Dr. Shallenberger always had an interest in student job placement and served as the center’s Director from 1943 to 1944. He was also interested in the organization of the University’s physical science course. It was very fitting that a scholarship be started in memory of Dr. G. D. Shallenberger to honor his many years of service in teaching, helping to place students with jobs, and helping the community. The scholarship was started by John and Katy Shallenberger Delano and promoted by Dr. Mark Jakobson, Chairman of Physics and Astronomy Department (1989-1990) in 1990. Contributions by numerous former students and friends financially built *The Shallenberger/Alumni Association Scholarship in Physics*.

The scholarship awards about \$2,000 each year to a Montana high school student interested in pursuing a degree in physics or physics-astronomy at the University of Montana. Since the inaugural award given in the academic year of 1991-1992 to the academic year of 2014-2015, 29 students have received the scholarship.

### **THE MISSOULA YEARS (THE LATER YEARS)**

Dr. Shallenberger's interests were many and varied, and throughout his lifetime he served his community. He served one term (6 years) as the County Commissioner for Missoula County from 1961-1967. The bridge over Rattlesnake Creek on Lolo Street is dedicated to the County Commissioners who funded that bridge. The bridge, with an engraved stone, bears witness to those commissioners and their contribution.

He started a private consulting service following his years on the County Commission. If an auto accident case went to court, he was hired to examine the skid marks, which allowed him to estimate the speed of the car and the likely cause of the accident. Clearly his background in physics was key to his testimony.

G.D. was active in the Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce. He had a particular passion for chess and always had a game in progress. He was the fundraising chairman for the Missoula Community Chess Club. The KGVO radio station named G.D. as "man of the year."

During his working years the Shallenbergers rented a house close to the University. Upon retirement they bought 14 acres located at 2712 Spurgin Road because they wanted to be outside of town. In an interesting return to his childhood years of growing up on a farm in Oklahoma, he planted raspberries, a vegetable garden, and a field of potatoes. When the potatoes matured, he let local Mormons come in to harvest the potatoes for free. He planted corn and harvested it himself. He would then load-up his pick-up truck and take bushels of newly-harvested corn to some of the "less fortunate" people in the community.

Not a strongly religious man, he would complain to his wife, Grace, and even to his preacher friends that he couldn't go to church because "my knees don't bend." (His grandchildren suspected it was because he couldn't take Tag along!)

After the sudden death of his oldest son William, age 42, in 1959, he helped to raise his youngest grandson Ford Shallenberger, then in his early teens, from 1959 to 1965.

Dr. Shallenberger was a pipe smoker and in the later years developed emphysema. He died at the age of 80 on April 28, 1970 from a stroke. His wife Grace died in 1985.



G.D. Shallenberger with daughter Katy, at about age 7, around 1934. They are standing near the corner of MacLeod and Arthur Avenue.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In 2014 while reading *A History of the Northwest Scientific Association* I learned of Dr. Shallenberger. Through conversations with his granddaughters, Joan Hantz Delano and Leslie Shallenberger DePietro, I instantly became fascinated by his many interests and achievements. As in his life, his legacy continues to touch students, who I hope can now know the person who came before them to assist in their education.

Andrea Pipp