

Professor's book illustrates YSU history

By JOHN GATTA

According to Dr. Alvin Skardon, history, Jones Hall was once the residence of John C. Wick.

This is just a small piece of YSU's historical background that Skardon has presented in his book *Steel Valley University: The Origins of Youngstown State University*, which will be out April 1 at the YSU bookstore.

Skardon said the idea of writing a book on YSU's history was suggested to him around 1970 by Professor Hugh Earnhart, history, and Phillip Snyder, director of University Relations. Skardon said the subject matter interested him because YSU is an urban university and YSU's history coincided with his teaching field of urban studies.

Serious work began in 1974 when Skardon took a year off from teaching and completely immersed himself in the book. With the help of student assistants, the bulk of the research was completed in that year, Skardon said.

Because he was working full-

time as a history professor since 1975, it slowed down considerably the process of writing the book. But the final manuscript was completed in 1982, just in time for YSU's Diamond Jubilee, and is presently being printed in a Cincinnati publishing house.

The year 1908 is officially dubbed the beginning of YSU, but Skardon found that the University's history dates back 40 years earlier. YSU's "roots" were linked to the founding of the first Youngstown YMCA in 1868.

This first YMCA folded, but a new one was started in 1883 by prominent Youngstown families, including the Wick and Stambaugh families. Classes aimed at elementary education and vocational training were held in both buildings.

According to Skardon, the first college-level class YSU offered was in law. The class, and a later one in mechanical drawing, were "characteristic of the school since 1888." Skardon adds, "Everything that has been introduced here has been in

response to some need of the community."

The need for higher education that the YMCA helped fill in the Youngstown area as well as in many other areas of the United States was not forgotten by Skardon.

He says, "The book has dual purposes: to be an institutional history of YSU and to be a contribution to (the history of) urban higher education. I go into the history of municipal colleges and YMCA schools."

Among those universities besides YSU that have become independent of their YMCA founders are Northeastern University in Boston and the University of Hartford. Skardon says that these commuter-type colleges have an advantage over other universities because they attract "a serious student body." He says that a reason for this is because "the average student is working his way through (college), and he isn't going to waste his time."

The book stops in 1967, the year Youngstown University became a state university. The additions of the Maag Library and Stambaugh Stadium were later chronicled by Skardon in a five-part series published by the *Youngstown Vindicator*.

As for the absence of such items in the book, Skardon says, "I think most people in Youngstown know a great deal about the

University in the last 10 years; and it's always difficult for a historian to write about contemporary events."

Skardon has previously written *Church Leader in the Cities: William Augustus Muhlenberg*. He has also supplied dates that are of significance to the University for the YSU Diamond Jubilee Commemorative Calendar.