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**Bricks and Mortar and More**

*Union Hall*

By Dr. Wayne Marty and Mary Holub

**“Union Hall, the College Dormitory, was opened for occupancy January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1904. This is the student’s home and is situated at the northwest corner of the campus. In outward appearance it resembles an ordinary dwelling. The second and third floors contain large, well-lighted student rooms. On the ground floor are the kitchen, the large dining hall and the parlor. The building is new, clean and modern, being provided with furnace heat, electric lights and bath with hot and cold water. It accommodates 25 students with rooms and 50 or more for boarding.”** – From the 1914 Western Union Pilot (yearbook), p 41.



**Union Hall Dormitory (Picture from the 1914 Pilot Yearbook)**

The adjectives in the 1914 description raise interesting questions. What is a large room? What is modern? What is a well-lighted room? The answers were probably very different from the standards of today. Originally, this first dormitory was “co-ed” with women living on third floor and men on second. In those early years, most of the students found “Rooms for Rent” in the residential homes of Le Mars. After Wernli Hall was built in 1925, Union

Hall became a Men's residence Hall and in the 40's and 50's "Union Stables" was often heard as the nickname for the "old" wooden frame building. In 1964 the building was demolished because it was considered to be unsafe and inadequate as a college residence hall. However, it housed students for nearly 60 years and where there are college students there will be stories to remember.

Clarence (Skip) Westphal (Class of 1927 and probably the oldest Alumnus and Wafa member at age 102) lived in Union Hall with his older brother Earl. He remembers getting together in one of the rooms with upperclassmen Golden Thompson and Harry Kalas to talk about plans for their future. They may not have realized that in later years, Kalas and Thompson would be prominent leaders as President and Academic Dean of Westmar College.

Alice Kruse (Class of 1929) tells of her days in the new Wernli Hall when the girls (always at least two, and not one at a time) would go to the basement of Union Hall and pump water from the cistern that collected roof drain rain water, and carry it back to Wernli so they would have nice soft water for washing their hair.

In the fall of 1947 most of the Union Hall residents were football players who came to school early for practice. The new Men's dormitory was nearly completed and was expected to be ready for the other men students when they arrived (However, that did not quite happen, and all of the potential Men's Dorm residents lived together among the rows of bunk beds in the gymnasium for a number of weeks before the dorm was ready.) Dave Schneider (Class of 1951) was one of those football players that lived on the second floor of Union Hall in 1947 and became a student proctor for the facility during his sophomore year (1948). Dave remembers the beautiful spring weather when he and his roommate, Rollie Utzinger, would climb out the window and "study" on the roof of the north facing porch. Dave also remembers his "not so comfortable days" as proctor when he heard an unusual irregular "thump" sound coming from third floor. After cranking up enough courage to investigate he arrived at the top of the stairs and heard a "swoosh" go by his head. Dave found a classmate (from Brooklyn, New York) who was using the hall to practice his "knife throwing". Numerous knife marks were in the door at the end of the hall. Dave also faced the tough task of responding to the sound of "clinking glassware" and having to confront his own peer football players as he enforced the strict "No Alcohol" policy of the college.

Lowell and Grace Pieper used Union Hall for their "Honeymoon Cottage" following their Easter wedding in 1953 and until graduation in May. They provided no more details.

Ardith Faber Hill (1955) recalls, "One of the uses for Union Hall in '52 and '53 was roller skating. We had some good times. I hope it was legal!"

We invite your additional memories or corrections to this Union Hall story and your notes will be added to the Union Hall Archive File.

In the next newsletter we will discuss the original gym built in 1909. Your comments and memories are welcome.