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Bricks and Mortar and More

Dubs Memorial Building

By Dr. Wayne Marty

In 1920 the foundation was laid for the Bishop Dubs Memorial classroom building. Bishop Rudolph Dubs was the primary negotiator at the meeting in the Union Hotel in Le Mars “which led to the organization and incorporation of the ‘Western Union College of the United Evangelical Church.’” (1914 Western Union Pilot, page 38) On March 29, 2002 two excavators attacked the east end of the building to begin the demolition. Imagine the many professor–student exchanges, the eye opening educational events, the spiritual growth, and the love life beginnings that occurred within and around that building during the intervening 82 years.

The basement hallway was lined with composite pictures of previous graduating classes. Alice Kruse and other English professors, in their classrooms on the south side, improved the writing of many new freshmen struggling to put words into meaningful order. Reuben Job was one such freshman admitted to Westmar College without completing high school. He failed the first writing assignments but with the encouragement and guidance of Miss Kruse went on to graduate, complete seminary, serve as pastor in local churches, become Editor of the Upper Room and to be elected as Bishop of the United Methodist Church. The last educational use of the Dubs basement was for a Black Box Theater by the drama department in the 90’s. The only restrooms for the four story building were on the north side of the basement hallway - hardly acceptable architecture in this 21st century.

The second floor originally provided space for the administration offices. I remember paying my first college tuition (\$150/semester) to Mr. Olson who stood behind the iron cage in the Treasurer’s office. The office contained a vault with the big iron door. I knew little of this vault until some of us roamed through the building just prior to the demolition in 2002 and as remnants in the vault I found the 1947 chemistry grades for my older sister. The administration offices were moved to the new Library building in 1950 and the offices were then occupied by professors of the psychology and religion and education departments. Typing and Shorthand instruction was offered in the southwest rooms until the computer surge made that instruction obsolete. In another south room Prof. Dipert in his chalk smudged blue suit would extend his equations on the blackboard while exclaiming “It’s obvious” to we confused math majors. Next door Dr. Kempers may have been reading Ellis Butler’s 1905 “Pigs is Pigs” to a history class. In another room Prof. Dunn was using the new 1948 Senior Class gift of a “Wire Recorder” so that student speeches could be replayed for their speech improvement.

In the early years the east end of the third floor was the location of the library with reading and study space. The large south Upper Room was used for many years as the location for a pre-class devotional time but in later years was converted into another classroom. The big north Room 300 was used for large classes and was the meeting place for the monthly Faculty Senate in the early 60’s. Many years previously an “overcharged” chemistry demonstration set up by Dr. Hershberger had blown a cork stopper into the soft ceiling material. The cork was in that ceiling “watching over” the Faculty Senate meetings, Mr. Price’s Government classes and later the Audio-Visual Media classes, until the demolition day in 2002. After construction of the new library in 1950 the large vacated space was used for chorale rehearsals and eventually remodeled for the Education department with faculty offices constructed around the perimeter.



Dubs Memorial Hall 1921-23

Westmar College, Founded 1896

By 1926 the fourth floor (Penthouse) was home for the Radio Station KWUC which was said to have an outstanding acoustical studio for “the best 50-watt station on the air.” By the 1940’s KWUC was off the air and the space housed the Western Union museum with geology and biology artifacts. The collection also included various artifacts from Westmar Alumni missionaries who served throughout the world. Later the space became the foreign language instruction labs and a Psychology experimental facility. The “how” is not clear but I know that some student couples were able to gain access to the roof of Dubs through the “Penthouse” so that they could experience the rooftop moonlight.

Portions of the Dubs building live on at the Plymouth County Historical Museum. The Bulletin Board (Gift from the Class of 1920) is now set into the wall of the Westmar Room at the museum. The exterior steel double doors from Dubs are now fire break doors in the museum corridors. Various artifacts from the former WUC museum are now a part of the PCHM museum collection. But, of course, the Dubs building primarily lives on in the memories of the many who sat in the classrooms of that building with instruction from so many memorable professors.

The Heating Plant will be the topic of this column in the next newsletter.