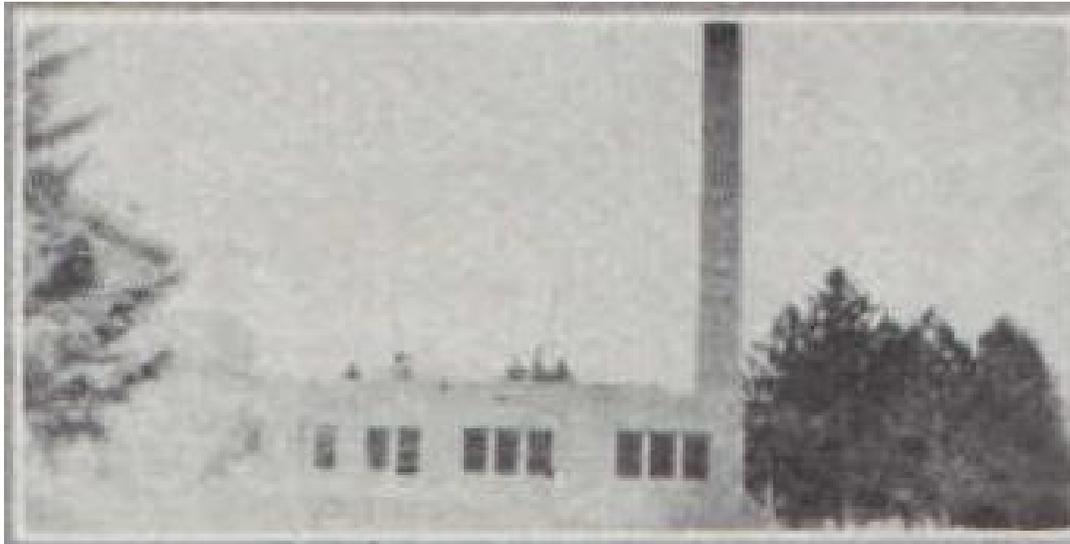


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## Bricks and Mortar and More

### *Heating Plant*

By Dr. Wayne Marty



#### **Heating Plant**

*(taken from the 1926 Pilot yearbook)*

Sometime during the Western Union 1920-21 or 1921-22 school years, while the Dubs Memorial classroom building and the Wernli Hall girls dormitory were being completed, a little “working” building, only 38 ft. x 50 ft., was also constructed. The Heating Plant was somewhat like the servant slaves of the early American south. The little building, located at the center of the campus, was visible from all parts of the campus because of its tall smoke stack. It had no fancy name but it provided the heat, and many other services for the 20 year old Thoren Hall, and the new Dubs and Wernli buildings.

The front portion of the building (north side) was the Spartan living quarters with bunks and study desks for the two or three students who earned their way through college by working in the heating plant. In the basement below the living quarters were the bathroom and storage rooms. The back part of the building (south side) was one big room from basement floor to roof that contained three big gas fired boilers, commercial size laundry equipment, and water treatment equipment. As more buildings were added to the Westmar campus in later years additional tunnels were channeled to the heating plant for installation of the steam pipes radiating out from the big boilers. When Westmar was serving its greatest number of students in the 1960's and 70's the boilers were providing heat for Thoren, Dubs, Wernli, the Industrial Arts building, the 1908 gym (Art & Home Ec.), the 1941 gym, Weidler, Memorial Hall, Eastview Apartments, and the Library.

The “Heating Plant Guys” were on duty around the clock and every day. They could have used the term 24-7 but it was probably not a popular term then. They scheduled their classes (and probably their dates) so that one of them would always be on duty in the Heating Plant. Primary duties were watching the boilers and doing laundry. At least through the 30's 40's, 50's and into the 60's all of the dining hall table clothes and towels and the sheets and towels for the girls in Wernli hall were washed, dried, and ironed (using commercial roller irons) by the heating plant guys. Laundry for the athletic department was also done in the heating plant. Coach Milt Martin says that, “the heating plant guys never had to buy socks”. There were always extra athletic socks that got “stuck in the washer and dryer.” But Bob Enck, a heating plant resident of 1954 says that “the athletes never had to buy towels” because the number in the wash became fewer and fewer as the year progressed. So there are often two sides to a good story.

The boss of the “Heating Plant Guys” was the Director of Maintenance and their jobs were many and varied. They cleared sidewalks and shoveled snow before class time in the winter. They mowed the lawns, serviced the college vehicles, hauled garbage, and hauled (unpasteurized) milk directly from the college farms by the airport to the dining hall in the 1940’s and 1950’s. They repaired roofs and gutters, trimmed trees, watered plants, changed light bulbs and repaired electrical switches when needed. Elgie Fireoved was the “Boss” in the 1940’s and 50’s and it led to a special sign over the Heating Plant door:

“St. Elgie’s Monastery – Put off thy shoes from off your feet for this is Holy Ground”.

Frugal budget management was usually a part of the Westmar business plan. Cal Hartman, a heating plant guy in the late 40’s says that the thermostat in Wernli Hall did not really control the heat. When the thermostat was turned up it only turned on a red light in the heating plant and then the guys would maybe release more steam to Wernli. Now Cal, who at age 82 gets cold more easily, says he feels badly that they often did not give Mrs. Daeschner, the Wernli Hall Housemother, all the heat that she wanted.

We owe a BIG THANK YOU to the long list of those who served Westmar by living and working in the Heating Plant. It appears that resident students in the heating plant ended in the early 1960’s. It was also at that time that the “little slave” building began to grow. A 28 ft. addition was added to the east to provide a more useful and accessible shop area and a 20 ft. addition was built to the west for a campus Laundromat that functioned through the 1970’s

Now all the boilers (still in place) are idle. All buildings that have been sold to private parties or are now owned by the City of Le Mars have their own independent heating systems. So no smoke come out of the tall stack, one city employee uses the shop area, and the little building waits for the determination of its final assignment.

**Update:** During the last week of August 2007, workers from the Mayfield Hutterite Colony near Watertown, South Dakota, removed all three of the 7 Ton boilers, along with the burners, water tanks and associated piping. The Hutterite workers with their trouser suspenders and beards communicated during the work in German, which is the primary language of the colony. The boilers will be converted to coal burning units and used to heat the livestock and poultry barns of the colony. So the boilers return to a "German" culture - the German culture that holds the roots of the Evangelical United Brethren church which gave birth to Westmar College.

The next issue of the newsletter will feature Wernli Hall.



**Joe Waldner, the manager of the Mayfield Colony, checks progress on the removal of the boilers with two left to go. The three boilers used to deliver steam to all of Westmar's campus. (Photo courtesy of the Le Mars Daily Sentinel.)**

# Update on fate of Westmar Heating Plant

(From the November 2007 issue – Volume 9, Issue 4)

The following is an update to the August newsletter story on the Heating Plant taken from the *Le Mars Daily Sentinel*.

The current list of some nine properties being listed for sale by the city will, however, be down one from its current level, the result of action by the council during its session to demolish the old Westmar physical plant building.

Council members, responding to city administrator Scott Langel's request for direction on the future of the building with a current city asking price of \$70,000, agree that demolition of the site with use of the vacated property for additional parking appears to be the best of three options.

It is hoped, council members said, that the demolition will be complete by next summer.

The additional two options cited were continued city ownership of the property for use by the city and future sale of the building.

The council, at the same time, gave Langel the go-ahead to reroute what he termed "the balance of the electrical and natural gas" facilities in the building citing the work as a "priority" measure prior to razing the structure.