

Bricks and Mortar and More

Airport

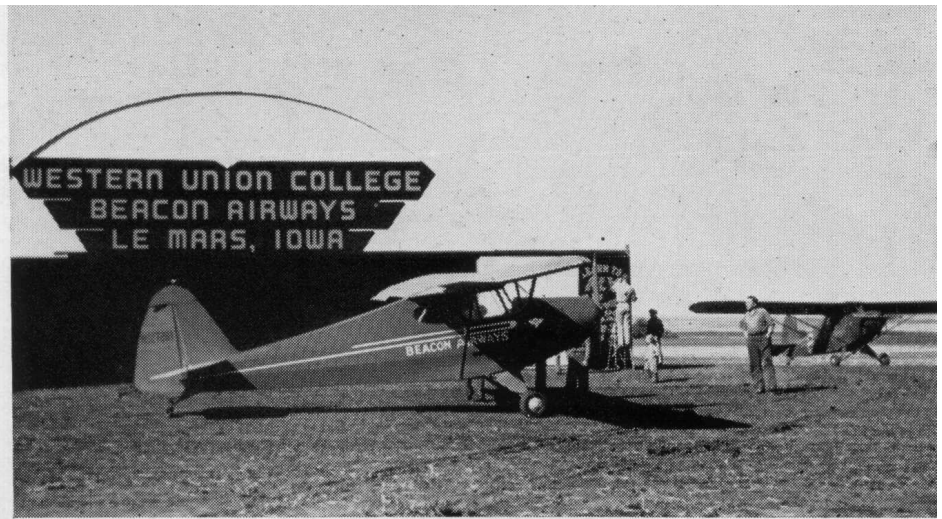
By Dr. Wayne G. Marty

D. O. Kime, president of Western Union and Westmar College for 26 years (1930 to 1956), began his tenure at the college in 1920 when he was hired as Professor of Mathematics, and Physics and The Athletic Coach. His positive influence on the students and the college in general was recognized already in 1922 by the dedication of the 1922 Pilot yearbook to David Orion Kime "in appreciation of the service he has rendered to our Alma Mater..."

Kime was an innovator and by 1925 he had led Western Union College to the forefront of radio broadcasting. President Kime continued his innovative ideas but was also a prudent financial manager. In the late 1930's he was encouraging the Board of trustees to build a stable endowment for the college by investing in farmland. In his report to the Board at the annual meeting of March 11, 1941, Kime writes, "The third farm recently acquired as an endowment investment, and as a part of the college plant is located on highway 75, one mile from the campus. This tract is almost level containing approximately one hundred seventy acres and is suitable for an airport and as an addition to the Dairy Farm. It is perhaps the only site available for this purpose near Le Mars."

During the 1940-41 academic year, the college had already introduced a C.P.T. (Civilian Pilot Training) course and had enrolled the first 20 students even though there was, as yet, no runway or airport. They were flying from a farm field 3 miles west of Le Mars. The first class sat for their Civil Air Regulation and Navigation-Meteorology exams in January of 1941. The top scores in the exams were earned by Sylvia Dahmes who later became a member of the WASPs (Women's Army Service Pilots) that provided non-combat pilot services for the U. S. Army. Construction of the runway on the new farm close to campus was scheduled to begin in April of 1941 and the first hangar was built as the runway was being constructed. President Kime, in his report of April 12, 1944 says, "A large sign on Hangar No. 1 identifies the College with the airport. It is plainly visible to all who travel U. S. Highway No. 75 and the Illinois Central and Northwestern Railroads."

The tragic Japanese bombing of Pearl



Western Union College Airport
(taken from the 1941 Eagle yearbook)

Harbor on December 7, 1941 plunged our nation into WW II and the intensive war effort demanded a rapid increase in military equipment and trained pilots. It was unusual for a college to own its own airport and have a pilot training program already in place. A government contract to train Naval Aviation Cadets was obtained in 1942 and hangar No. 2 was built. During the 1943-44 academic year only 308 regular students were enrolled at Western Union College but a total of 400 Naval Cadets were housed and fed in Wernli Hall while they received their basic flight training on the new college field. In 1944 Hangar No. 3 and the two story Administration building were constructed. The Naval Cadet Training contract with the government was terminated in June of

1944 which prompted innovative Dr. Kime to search for other pathways that could keep Western Union College in the Aviation business. (See the story of the Mars Skycoupe in the Jan. 05 WFAA Newsletter.)

The Westmar College airport was sold to the City of Le Mars in 1964. The Grass runway was replaced with concrete and new individual hangars were built. Commercial business hangars were constructed in 1979 and 1984 to accommodate the private commercial jets for the growing Le Mars industries.

Of the original hangars, only No. 2 remains and it is now used only as a storage shed. However, the Administration building is still "flying". It is now owned by Bernie De Boer, Westmar Class of 1960,



Control tower, office and two of the three hangars at the college airport.
(taken from the 1944 Eagle yearbook)

and is home for his "Hobby Haven" business that is a major service supplier for radio controlled model airplane enthusiasts in the northwest Iowa territory. The airport runway has just recently been lengthened to provide a safer landing strip for the larger corporate jets and the airport is now tied to the City of Le Mars by the new

winding ribbon of concrete that curves by Hobby Haven, old Hangar No. 2, the new runway extension, along the banks of the Floyd River, past Wal-Mart, and continuing for a total of 9 miles to the Municipal Park on the opposite edge of the city. What is today has resulted from the active minds and determination of dreamers from

yesterday.

Next time we will discuss "Old" Kime Science Hall. Your memories are welcome.

The picture below is of the Administration building which is still in use today. (From the 1945 edition of the Eagle yearbook.)

