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Bricks and Mortar and More

“Old” (Kime) Science Hall

by Dr. Wayne Marty

During the 1946-47 school year the science classes and laboratories continued to be located in Thoren Hall as they had been since Western Union College began but post WWII changes were in progress. Enrollment was increasing with returning veterans and also surplus military materials were becoming available for civilian use. Surplus military barracks were acquired from the Sioux City Air Base, reconfigured into an L-shaped building, and brick veneered to become a nice looking “new” Science Hall ready for the Fall 1947 school year.

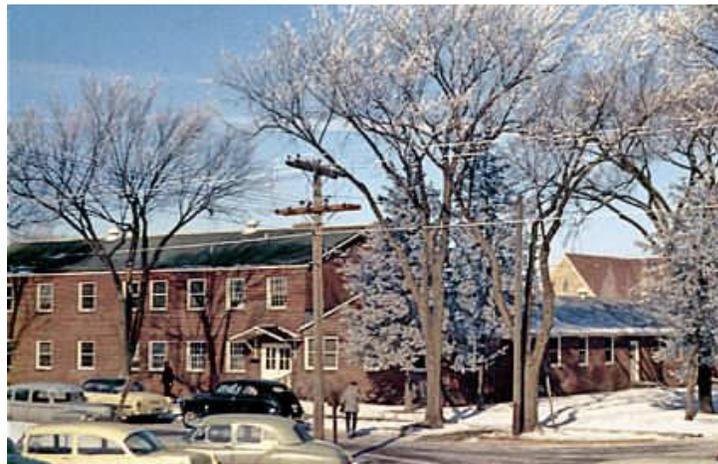
The upper level of the two story wing was occupied by the Biology Department under the direction of Dr. Danner who at that time, with the help of student assistants, taught the entire Biology curriculum. The first floor of the two story wing was for Physics and the primary Physics professor and also president of the college was D. O. Kime. The single story wing provided a large lecture room and the Chemistry laboratories with Dr. Hershberger as the only Chemistry professor.

Many will remember the “foot long” paper wasp nest that hung on one of the pillars in the biology lab. The nest and various pieces of antique laboratory equipment are now saved in the Plymouth County Historical Museum. Memories may include the numerous holes in clothing and even shoes from acid spills in the chem. labs or the shocking color change of the newly painted chem. lab ceilings and walls following the Hydrogen Sulfide experiment. Hydrogen Sulfide reacts with lead to produce a black pigment and the summer painters had used lead based paint. But the education in the WWII recycled building produced nationally recognized educators, research scientists, and Medical doctors – too many to mention by name.

“Hershey” was also an avid photographer and many students enrolled in his Photography course. In the early 50’s a quality photography lab was built in the basement at the far end of the Chem. lab with a spiral staircase leading down to these dark rooms with the shiny stainless steel sinks and counter space lined with the bottles of developing chemicals and processing trays.

Continuing enrollment growth created space pressures for more laboratory space during the 1950’s. The merger with York College in 1955 not only brought more students to Westmar but also brought Dr. Noll from York to join Dr. Danner in the Biology Department. In the fall of 1959, I (Marty) as a “kid” just six years past my 1953 Westmar BA degree replaced Dr. Noll and Dr. Rebstock joined the “Hershey” in the Chemistry department. There was only one telephone in the building and it was in the hall outside the Marty upper level office. Sometimes I had to get “Hershey” to the telephone from the basement Photo Lab – two flights of stairs and a long walk away.

More science space was needed and there was serious talk of a new science building but temporary adjustments were made by moving the physics labs back to the basement of Thoren Hall which then provided two laboratory rooms for biology. In 1967,



“Old” Kime Science Hall about 1955.
Photo contributed by Leland Eyres.

after 20 years of science in the WWII “barracks”, the move was finally made into the new four story Kime Science Hall. The faculty had grown to four in Biology, three in Chemistry, and two in Physics. More faculty growth was yet to come.

The “old” Science Hall was now available for a new era of versatility. The next 30 years would include several significant renovations and modifications with changing occupancy until the college closed in 1997. The Department of Psychology occupied the upper level under the leadership of Dr. Embree. The building had housed mice, and frogs, and fish, subjects of study for the first 20 years, but the remodeling now provided space for the study of behavior – space and equipment for experiments with pigeons and the one way glass window for the observation of human behavior. The Development Office occupied the lower level so the building soon became known as the Dev-Psyc Building.

Various service offices occupied the longer one story segment of the building and remodels often preceded the changes. Many will recall their experiences with faculty and staff in Admissions, Financial Aid, Dept. of Education, Area Education and even the offices for the Dream Team effort that some will remember from the 1990’s. The mailroom and “print shop” occupied the north end above the basement photo lab. It was a common conversation location as faculty and staff picked up mail and placed copy orders. It was a very important “service center” that provided support for the entire Westmar community.

The building was demolished in February 2002, 4 ½ years after the college closed in Nov. 1997 but memories of the experiences in the “old” Science Hall and the Dev-Psyc building will last for many more years.

Next time we will take a look at the Industrial Arts Building.