

Bricks and Mortar and More

Industrial Arts Building by Dr. Wayne G. Marty

The Industrial Arts Department first appears in the Western Union catalog in 1934 but for many years the wood and metal shop activities were located in the basement of Thoren Hall. During the Western Union “building boom” of 1946, following the end of WW II, the department was finally able to occupy a building of its own. Four government surplus wood frame barracks buildings were moved to the campus from the Sioux City Air base. Two of these four were assembled into a T-shaped building located south of the Heating Plant, with the drawing classroom occupying the short branch of the T and the long branch providing the space for the Wood and Metal shop activities. The entire assembly was brick veneered to make a nice looking campus building.

Professor Eldon Danne was the only instructor for the department at this time. The drawing tools were the sloped drafting table, T-square, 30-60 and 45 triangles, pencil, pen, and scaled ruler. Hand tools were common in the shop with a limited number of power tools – table saw, band saw, jig saw, lathes, and sander. Many beautiful pieces of furniture and works of art were created in that shop and an annual Open House reception to show off the student work was commonplace in the 70’s.

Professor Rod Scholten recalls the very successful January Interim program during the 70’s when the involved college students worked hard in the wood shop to make preliminary material preparations and appropriate assembly jigs so that simple projects, such as rubber band power boats could be assembled and completed by kindergarten classes in the Le Mars area. Also, joyfully remembered by many, are the popular Industrial Arts Club “Top Hat” entries in the various local annual parades (see photo). A huge black top hat covered the head, shoulders, and arms of the male parade volunteer and a big face was painted on the bare chest and abdomen. It was a fun time to watch this “midget with a big face and a big top hat” walking along between the bands and vehicles of the parade.

The Industrial Arts building saw its first major change in the early 80’s when the wooden floor of the drawing classroom was removed and replaced with concrete to make space for a specific metals shop

with appropriate safety and venting equipment. The engineering drawing activities were moved to Dubs. After just a few years, in 1984, the metal shop was also moved to Dubs so the short branch of the T building could be demolished to make room for the construction of the new Life Sports Center. Professor Don Buryanek remembers teaching in the remaining wood shop for most of a year with only a plastic wall covering the east end during the Life Sports building construction. The shops continued in these locations until 1987 when the basement of the Life Sports building was completed and the metals shop, under the guidance of Professor Robert Pettit, with newly acquired robotic machinery training equipment could be moved into the new space designed for that use. Finally a dust collection system was also added to the remaining original wood shop. By this time computerized CAD/CAM drawing equipment was acquired and the drawing and design portion of what now had become an Industrial Technology department, was moved into space available in Kime Science Hall.

Because of the difficulty of “keeping up” with rapidly advancing technology, the Industrial Education program was terminated at Westmar in 1991. At about this same time, Tarkio College in Tarkio, MO closed and the entire Drama and Dance departments moved to Westmar. The wood shop took on a new life. The historic shop equipment was removed, the concrete floor was covered with a newly refinished wood floor, mirrors were installed on the “Shop” walls and ballet bars were added to make the building a very suitable dance studio. When the dance program was discontinued in 1994, the studio was used for cheerleader practice and miscellaneous storage. After the college closed in 1997, the City of Le Mars became the owner of all campus buildings. The Le Mars Recreation Department and the YMCA combined to make full use of the “Old Gym” and the new Life Sports Center as the Community Wellness Center. The “remains” of the WW II Sioux City Air Base barracks that was used for many years as the Industrial Arts department educational Wood Shop, is now a part of the Wellness Center and is known as the CWC Fitness Annex. At least 20 exercise and fitness classes use the space every week. When constructed in the 1940’s during WW II who could have predicted the life of this building and

its usefulness is not over yet. Death-time for this building has not yet arrived.

In the next issue we will discuss the Memorial-Koehler Complex. Your remembrances are invited as are your comments about the Industrial Arts Department.



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