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Bricks and Mortar and More

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Charles A. Mock Library-Administration Building
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When I came to Westmar as a freshman in the fall of 1949, the New Library was under construction. My first specific memory of activity in the building was my participation as a volunteer guard for the Friday night vigil to protect the building from vandalism prior to the Saturday football game with Buena Vista College. The rivalry was intense in those years and pre-game pranks included the frequent painting of the Westmar Eagle. Fear of destructive vandalism may have been justified because a group from Westmar at one time used gasoline and fire to burn a big W on the BV football field. (Maybe someone can tell me if this really happened or if it is one of my old age embellished memories.)



At this time the Library was still located on the third floor of the Dubs classroom building and all of the Administration offices were also in Dubs. The building was completed and the major moving activity was during Christmas break of December of 1949 when all the books and the administrative offices were moved to the new location. Special wooden boxes with good handles were constructed for the purpose and students who stayed through the break provided the labor. Maybe there are some alumni who were involved in that move and can share some of their memories and provide more details.

President Kime, from his new office, now had a view of most of the campus and he shared the second floor space with the Academic Dean, G. O. Thompson, the Registrar's office with transcript storage, and a convenient conference room. I was personally involved, along with many others, in numerous meetings: hiring and firing discussions, curriculum planning and changes, budget and financial shortage struggles, building and campus development planning, etc. The results produced significant growth for the college through the 60's, creative curriculum design with a successful January (One Course Only) Interim but, unfortunately, also the final closing actions in 1997.

The new library space enabled significant growth to the library holdings which was an

essential requirement for obtaining the important North Central accreditation in 1953. In contrast to the electronic information systems of today (Google, etc.) books and periodicals were the storage systems of that era and the “search engine” was the Card Catalog. (That sounds like an ancient term now.) The Library was the information system. “Meet you at the Library” was common. It was a quiet study place. It was a dating place. The Library may not sound romantic but perhaps the walk home was.

My wife, June, attended the 1952 summer school session after staying out a semester earlier to earn money to continue school. Library use was encouraged by awarding an airplane ride for the one who spent the most time in the library each week. Students signed in and out each time they visited the library and June’s diligent library use earned her the flight over and around Le Mars while seated beside President D. O. Kime as the pilot.

I recall the faculty orientation meetings in the main reading room of the library at the beginning of the school year. Faculty assembled with the men in their coats and ties. But culture and expectations change. In my latter years at Westmar in the 90’s I seldom wore a tie.

The library basement had multi-uses. It was the location for Dr. Zuehl’s old hand operated printing press where he cranked out posters for various occasions. The press is now in the Plymouth County Historical Museum along with many other Westmar memory items. For some years the Bookstore was in the basement and easily accessible following the course registration sessions that were held in the library main reading room upstairs. I bought my first tennis racket in that bookstore - my wooden “Bobby Riggs” racket that still hangs loosely strung in my closet.

The major addition added to the building in 1970 provided additional shelving space, more variable use space (small group study rooms, typing rooms – noisy typewriters really were used in those days), and additional administrative office space.

One of the first concerns after the closing of the college in November 1997 was the question of “what to keep and what to destroy.” The archive section of the library holdings suddenly seemed to be very important. With the support of a grant jointly funded by the State Historical Society of Iowa and the Siouxland Community Foundation Millie (Steiber) Mandernach (Westmar Class of 1967 and a library staff member when the college closed) was hired to work with and manage a group of volunteers charged with the task of putting the Westmar Archives in order. From July to December 1999, this group did a magnificent job of appropriately protecting and organizing hundreds of individual items and over 50 boxes of historic paperwork. This was the last organized activity in the basement of the library building. Finally in September 2003, after some additional renovation work at the Plymouth County Historical Museum, all of these materials were moved to climate controlled space where they are now stored in orderly arranged archival boxes and available for our frequent search for information of the past.

In the fall of 1999 the entire library book collection, including shelving, was sold to Southern Virginia College which had recently changed (1996) from junior college status to a four year liberal arts college. They were in the process of seeking accreditation just as Westmar was in 1950 when the Charles A. Mock Library was built. So the books we used at Westmar may still be available on the shelves of Southern Virginia University

The library building has been For Sale since the closing of the college and is still

without a buyer. It was rented for use by the newly organized Rejoice Community Church for nearly three years (2000-2002) until they purchased their own building and also rented during a period in 2004 by the First United Methodist Church of Le Mars after their building was declared unsafe and until the union with Calvary United Methodist Church was arranged to become the new United Methodist Church of Le Mars. After 13 years since the college closed, there is now discussion of possible demolition of the building. Any buyers out there? The building may be destroyed but the intellectual progress and accomplishments that occurred within the walls will long remain. The Mock Library is much more than Bricks and Mortar.