



Bricks and Mortar and More

Weidler Hall By Dr. Wayne Marty

In March of 1958 two major Westmar campus activities were about to be moved from the basements of buildings on opposite sides of the campus to the new Weidler Hall, named after two prominent United Brethren churchmen, Bishop V. O. Weidler and former York College President Dr. D. E. Weidler. The Board of Trustees had set the maximum cost at \$300,000 for the fully equipped new building. The students had been eating “family style” in the basement of Wernli Hall since the 1920’s and the Student Union, located in the basement of the original 1908 gymnasium, was the site for casual social connections since the construction of the “new” gym in 1941. With a growing student population, Weidler Hall would now provide space for cafeteria style eating on the lower level and space for student services offices, recreational activities, general relaxing, and snack bar on the upper level.

The building was designed with a sub basement hoping that funds would some day be available to install a bowling alley in this new Student Union. But instead of bowling, in 1963, Milt Martin, the newly appointed Westmar wrestling coach, took over the space and brought the Westmar wrestling program out of the depths of Weidler Hall to the heights of national prominence. Milt tells of his daily safety warnings to the team. Out of bounds space was limited so rolling a teammate opponent into the cement wall was a constant danger. And each time Westmar hosted a home meet in the gym, the dedicated wrestlers would roll up the mats and carry them up the long stairway and over to the gym to be reassembled for the meet. This space was home for the wrestlers until the late 80’s when a well equipped wrestling training area was provided in the new Life Sports Center. East of the Weidler wrestling room was an additional smaller room that some (probably in the 70’s) will remember as a popular “Coffee House,” discussion, and informal performance space.

As designed and when newly opened, the main lower level of Weidler was the new cafeteria. The campus community was aware that the switch from family style dining to a cafeteria style would be accompanied by other social changes. Chuck Kehrberg, (W 1958) writes in the April 18, 1958 Gleam, “There is no question in anyone’s mind that the new Student Union and Dining Hall is terrific compared to what we used to have. The light, airy, come and go conditions of the cafeteria make for wonderful dining conditions. Also the snack bar with its fresh newness and wide choice of variety far outshines the old dingy hole. Thanks to the many who helped make this building possible.”

“In connection with the new building, I think there are a

few items which we should look out for. One is that we eat with whom ever we please. We seem to get in a rut and eat with the same people all the time. The one good thing about Wernli was that we had to eat with different people every so often. This was valuable to all of us and a little carry over into the new cafeteria of this spirit would be good.” Kehrberg also gave high praise to Bill Geiger for his student involvement in the planning for the move into this new Student Union.”



Weidler Hall

This dining hall served the campus for only 11 years but I have a personal vivid 1963 memory of coming to the dining hall after teaching my near noon math class in Dubs and learning of the assassination of President Kennedy. When dining was moved to the new Commons in the spring of 1969, a major remodel and rearrangement moved the recreational, lounge and snack bar space to the lower level. The campus bookstore moved into the previous “Private Dining Room” and students using the east entry on their way to the bookstore and break time at the snack bar were greeted by the friendly switchboard operators at the bottom of the stairway. . Some will also recall the Gleam and Yearbook offices in the back hallways and the student mail boxes at the west entry.

The upper level of Weidler was the original location for ping-pong, pool, lounge and snack bar but following the renovation the various student services offices were finally brought together from scattered campus locations – Dean of Students, Admissions, Financial Aid, Job Placement, Chaplain, and others.

It would be nice to list names of the many who worked in the Weidler building but the list would be very lengthy – the many Deans of Students, the many Directors of Admissions, Financial Aid, Job Placement, etc. and their secretaries and receptionists and student helpers. The list would also include the Snack Bar “cooks”, Bookstore employees, Switchboard operators, building custodians, & others. You the reader can make your own recollections of those working in the building during your era. I hope most of your



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memories will be good ones but we know that in a student services building there are “downers” - Admissions denied, job application rejection notices, disciplinary meetings with the Dean of Students and even the self inflicted gunshot death in the upper level Men’s Restroom of Dean of Students, Cornelius Patterson, on January 5, 1984.

After Westmar closed in 1997, the City of LeMars struggled to dispose of or find appropriate uses for the campus buildings. Weidler was chosen to be one of the buildings that would remain city owned. A \$862,000 renovation project in 2002 replaced all of the windows, updated the electrical supply, rearranged the interior and added a 4 stop elevator to the northeast corner of the building. The building, still referred to as Weidler, is a central location for many LeMars social services. The entire upper level is occupied by the Plains Area Mental Health services and the lower level is active with a Head Start Program serving 76 children from age 18 months to 5 years, Outreach and Crisis services for families, women and children, child and maternity care, a Community Center for Persons with

Disabilities, and other service programs. So this building continues in the “Service” business it has since its beginning in 1958.

Wayne G. Marty



Above: the Eagles Nest snack bar



Left: Student Lounge



Weidler Hall Cafeteria and Student Union

Photos are on postcards and were taken 1957-58. Available for purchase. (\$1.00)