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## **Bricks and Mortar and More –** **Kime Hall of Science**

**By Wayne Marty**

The launch of Sputnik I, the first man made satellite, by the Soviet Union on October 4, 1957, sparked an increased interest and increased federal funding for Science Education in our nation. The items discussed when I joined Dr. Danner, in 1959, as a Biology Instructor at Westmar included clear indications that a new Science Building would soon be constructed to replace the modified and adapted WW II barracks buildings. Growth of the college enrollment and the increased interest in Science had already caused the Physics Department to be moved out of the “Old Science Hall” so that the Biology Laboratory space could be doubled. Finally in June of 1966 the original President’s House was moved from the space just west of the existing Old Science Hall to enable beginning construction of the new building. By October 1967 the Construction of the new Kime Hall of Science was completed and the move was made into the new building. The base bid, including equipment, was \$981,000. Financing for the building included some Federal Grants and Loans. It was a grand four floor science facility and I remember the comment by Chaplain French while touring the upper floor of the new building, “It has finally happened. Science has risen to a level higher than the church,” as we could stand in a Chem Lab and look down upon the adjacent Calvary College Church. Westmar was approaching its peak enrollment and the building, the new equipment, and the 14 Math and Science faculty members provided an outstanding educational opportunity.



The Math department was located in the basement with 5 classrooms fully equipped with extensive blackboard space and chalk. (Now, 45 years later, that sounds pretty low tech!) One of the new items of equipment was an Electronic Calculator. It was 18” x 22” x 10”, weighed over 40

lbs. and had a base cost of \$600. We paid an extra \$200 to get the special Square Root Function and it had very limited memory. It was a wonderful new machine but not nearly as powerful or useful as a “credit card” size calculator of today. Although the math department began teaching one introductory computer course in 1964 there was no space in the new building dedicated specifically for computer work. But change was coming. Soon one classroom became a computer room with an IBM 1130 mainframe BIG! Computer with BIG! Floor model printer, and associated card punch and card sorting equipment. More space continued to be computer assigned until, in the latter years, only one of the original five basement classrooms remained as a flexible use math classroom. The Faculty Lounge on the basement level was a vibrant place. Faculty from across campus gathered together for casual coffee time conversation and also scheduled interdisciplinary discussions and book reviews.

The Biology Department with fish and frogs, and fruit flies and flowers occupied the main floor with the smells associated with formalin and live mice and microbes. Creative students made the labs a lively place. Steve Strom took the remains of his fully dissected anatomy class rat to the cafeteria table one evening and carefully placed it among a bed of lettuce leaves on the salad bar. It was a practical joke that not all appreciated. Jay Smith and Becky Palmberg used “hormone therapy” to successfully transform gentle hens into pretty handsome roosters. In addition to regular class offerings the rooms became the staging area for preparation and return from the many Marine Study trips led by Dr’s Ulrich, Divelbiss and Marty. A large (maybe 2 ft. total arm spread) octopus was brought back alive from one of the trips and placed in the salt water aquarium. I recall being asked if the 8 armed creature might not crawl out and I indicated that he probably would not leave his comfortable salt water environment for the dry air space beyond the aquarium. BUT HE DID and was found dead on the floor the next day. So I was wrong this one time!! Dr. Danner worked regularly in the “bubble” greenhouse well beyond his retirement years for classroom support and campus beautification.

The second floor Physics labs were the expected mix of challenge and enlightenment. Mr. Cram taught a fascinating Interim course on the “Physics of Toys”. Mr. De Boer had a special talent for creating attention grabber displays in the main entry lobby of the building. The third floor Chemistry labs were fully filled. Dr’s Rebstock, Franklin and Kells prepared many students for higher degree success and notable careers in medicine and research.

The building was designed for a college enrollment of 1000 and more. Westmar reached its peak enrollment of 1169 students in 1968. The 1982 enrollment was down to

500 students. Adjustments were necessary. Some of the chemistry space was modified and became home for the Home Economics department with an increased scientific emphasis. The Home Ec Dining Room was labeled “The Food Evaluation Room.” Some of the Physics space became the Industrial Arts CAD (Computer Aided Drafting) room. The Business Department Faculty Offices were all moved to the Physics floor. . . Some of the Physics space became the campus Media Center. One of the Chemistry labs was abandoned and became a general classroom. When Tarkio College in Missouri closed in 1990 their Theater and Dance Department moved to Westmar and the Kime Auditorium was converted to a full time theater. The popular Faculty Lounge became part of the theater preparation space. Some of the Biology student research area was then modified to a Faculty Lounge.

The building was used for 30 years and when the college closed in 1997 “the Grand Building” became a unique problem for the new owner who was now the City of Le Mars. All of the chemicals in the Chemistry and Biology Departments were considered Hazardous Waste with special disposal challenges. The City moved quickly to hire professionals for disposal task. City departments and the local schools were provided the first opportunity to take and make use of appropriate equipment – computers, microscopes, glassware, etc. Much was simply discarded. The building was advertised FOR SALE soon after the closing but no offer of interest has been completed. Now after 15 years of non-use, on this day of my writing (5-15-12) the Le Mars City Council sold the lots with the building for \$1000 with the expectation that the building will be

demolished. This will be difficult to watch but we are thankful that the city has been generous for the 15 years and has permitted the Plymouth County Historical Museum to remove many furnishings for use in the museum renovation work. So the Westmar Room, the Religious Heritage Room, the Genealogy Room, the Registrar's office, and others in the museum will show many of the Kime furnishings in continuing use for many years to come. Time marches on and material goods are always temporary. The good memories will only increase in value.

By Wayne Marty