

# HAWARDEN...HOW IT ALL BEGAN

## FROM OLD TO NEW

### Chapter 33

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Remember Y2K? A once in a lifetime experience. Some people will NEVER see the turn of a century, but unless you are under the age of 12, you did, and you survived the experience. The biggest worry as the calendar turned from 1999 to 2000 was caused by the electronic age. One hundred years before; midnight struck; the pages of the calendar were turned to January, 1900; and that was that.

With each day approaching the year 2000, more fears were uncovered. Would the computers worldwide all shut down and cause mass confusion? Some people withdrew their money from the banks, some bought generators, some predicted chaos and mayhem, some even predicted the end of the world. Cities and towns put contingency plans on standby just in case there was loss of electricity and heat. Generators for hospitals and nursing homes were on checked out, and disaster plans were dusted off and reviewed; just in case.

Of course, none of that happened in Hawarden, and life went on with little more adjustment than changing the calendars. Oh, we did get a new mayor, George Jacobs, and Hawarden's first City Administrator, Craig Coffey, who actually started his job in November of 1999

It was also in 2000 that West Sioux completed their new addition that resulted in closing the old middle school and moving the students and teachers into the newly constructed space at the site of West Sioux High School.

In March of 2000, Wee Care, Hawarden's child care facility, received a \$375,000 grant to relocate into a new facility. Talk began about possible sites for the new building, and the site of the old Middle School on Central Avenue was chosen as a perfect spot due to its location; close to the elementary school, parks, and convenient for everyone. Discussion then began among the City Council, as well as community members, about the fate of the 1926 School. Public informational meetings were held, and at a November, 2000 Council Meeting the council was presented a petition with 341 signatures asking the council to reconsider their decision to not let the new Wee Care facility attach to the old Middle School. The council was split on the decision. Those who did not want to attach the new building to the old felt that the 75 year old building should not be saved, and should be demolished. Those who were in favor of incorporating the two facilities had a vision of saving the historic landmark and providing the community with a long needed new Community Center.

At the December 18, 2000 Hawarden Council meeting the council unanimously passed a resolution calling for a vote of the community for a \$950,000 bond issue, which would save the 1926 building and renovate it into new City Offices including police department, meeting rooms, council chambers, and a Community Center which would accommodate 200 – 300 guests.

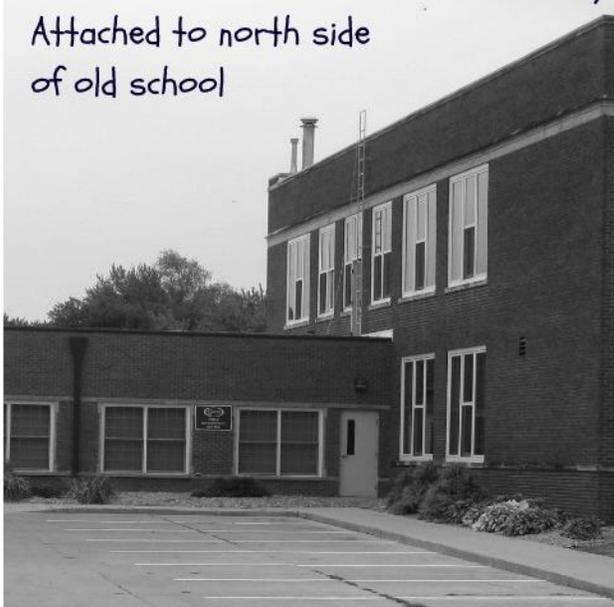
After many public meetings, articles pro and con, mailings and very spirited discussions at the coffee shops and dinner tables, February 27, 2001 was the day the Citizens of Hawarden decided the fate of our old school. The City Council was very emphatic that if the bond issue failed, the school would be demolished. The council had support from many citizens that the school should not be kept, so the results of the vote would please many and upset many, no matter what the decision.

Five hundred eighty- eight voters went to the polls on that cold February day, with 359 voting to save the school and 229 for demolishing it. (That was not how it was printed on the ballot, but that was the purpose of the election.) When the votes were counted, the required 60 % majority was attained by 6 votes! The School was saved! Basically, 6 people saved the school. Had they not shown up to vote it would only be a memory.

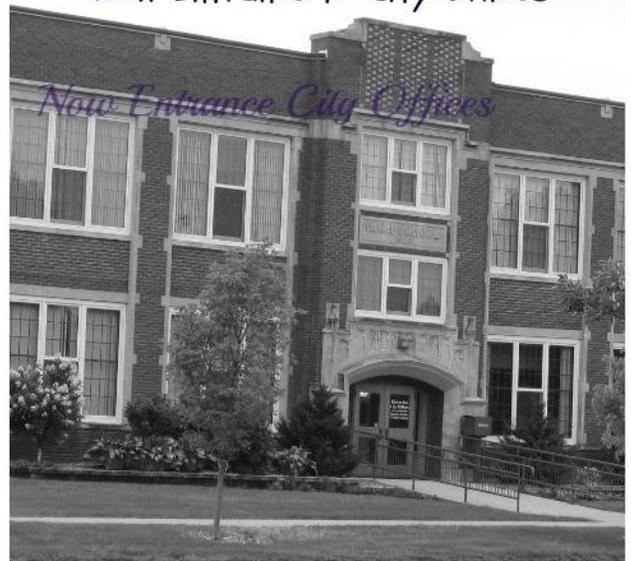
East Entrance to Hawarden  
Community Center  
Formerly area of gymnasium  
and stage in old school



Wee Care (Hawarden Child Care Facility)  
Attached to north side  
of old school



Original West Entrance to School  
Now Entrance to City Offices



The City Council had wanted input from the voters on the issue, and as soon as they received it, Councilman Mike Dorhout expressed his excitement and said they were ready to move forward with the renovation.

The renovation was done in two phases; the first was the building of the Wee Care addition and the Community Center with its new canopied entrance that reflected the architecture of the era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The parking lot for the Community Center was reclaimed land where Dry Creek once flowed and often threatened the town. With the flood diversion project of the 60's the old creek bed had been filled in and gave the Community Center a large parking lot.

The second phase was the restoration of the west side of the school to incorporate the Hawarden City Offices. New windows were installed in the entire building to replicate its' original appearance, and the entire west side including the entrance is historically correct. The architects were very careful to preserve the arched halls, terrazzo floors, period

lighting and windows, keeping the buildings best components while adding modern amenities, including a public elevator, making the second floor accessible to everyone.

On January 15, 1925 Hawarden voters passed a \$93,000 bond issue to build a new high school. The students were so happy they held a parade. Over 76 years later the residents of Hawarden went to the polls to vote on a \$950,000 bond issue to save that same school. On February 4, 2005, eighty years later, the former school reopened as a Community Center and home of the Hawarden City Govt.

<sup>1</sup>At the open house, Mayor Ric Porter presided over the festivities with one word: WOW. Mayor Porter exclaimed that you just have to practice saying “wow” as you walk through the building. This is one of the biggest “wows” to hit Hawarden in a long time.

For the 359 voters who helped make this vision a reality, they are proud and grateful for the vision and planning that went into securing their dream. For the 229 voters who opposed it, they are also grateful for the results of the project. At almost any event that is held at the Community Center, when the discussion of the process is revisited, you will hear someone admit, “I voted against it, but I’m sure glad it passed.”

Preserving our history while enhancing our present and future. What better way to show that the pioneering spirit of our town’s forefathers is still alive and well in our community.

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<sup>1</sup> Hawarden Independent/Examiner Feb. 5, 2005 by Tim Gallager