

# HAWARDEN....HOW IT ALL BEGAN

## HISTORY OF COLLEGES IN HAWARDEN

### Chapter 41

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As we have discussed in earlier articles, Sioux County schools originated in Calliope, Iowa in 1869. Did you know that as early as in 1883 a school was established in Calliope for higher education? This school was called Calliope Academy and was located at 2105 Avenue F.

Schools were always a passionate and complex topic through the years, as Calliope and Hawarden developed each in their own way. The Calliope Academy did not have a long life in Calliope and information about it is scarce. We do know that it moved to Storm Lake in 1884 and was associated with the Presbyterian Church. Logical opinion would agree that it was the early stages of Buena Vista College.

Any other discussion of a school of higher learning that continues after high school was not mentioned again until the 1960's.

It was during the decade of the 60's that the quest for higher education was becoming the normal rather than the exception. It was during this period that the state funded colleges in Iowa, i.e.: the University of Iowa and Iowa State University were experiencing an influx of freshman and sophomores beyond their capacities. It was because of this, the State Board of Regents recommended that the state supported schools raise their admission standards and only accept those who met the higher standards. The recommendation of the Board of Regents was to enforce these higher standards at the beginning of the 1967-68 school years. They also recommended that the students not meeting these higher requirements begin their journey into higher education at a smaller two year college.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson passed the Economic Opportunity Act. This was the centerpiece of the "War on Poverty" which was the legislative agenda of his administration.

When President Johnson signed this bill into law on August 20, 1964, he cited education, job training and relearning for the men and women who were facing hard times and needed a program to offer opportunity and preparation for productive lives. I quote President Johnson. "Our American answer to poverty is not to make the poor more secure in their poverty but to reach poverty and move with the large majority along the high road of hope and prosperity."

It was with these two obvious opportunities in mind that the forward-thinking community leaders of Hawarden in 1965 appointed a committee of three men, Harlan Hummel, E.V.Slife Jr. and Supt. Robert O. Blake to go to Washington, D.C. in February, 1965 to investigate the possibility of establishing a two year college in Hawarden. Upon their return, a report of the trip was given to the board of men who had expressed an interest in developing Sioux Empire College. They were all impressed and encouraged with the information they were given.

Research on area communities who had previously established two year colleges was gathered and in all cases, examples of self-development and self-improvement were cited for the cities as well as entire communities that participated. In an editorial in the February 20, 1965 *Hawarden Independent* Superintendent Roger Blake wrote: "We need to look for "new fields to conquer". We need to search out the true leadership in our area and put it into positions where it will do the most good. The challenge is ours, each and everyone in the area. What will we do with it?"

The answer was clear: by September of 1965 Directors of the proposed Sioux Empire College agreed on a letter of intent to enter into a contract with a Des Moines firm to provide architects and engineers for the college.

The Sioux Empire College Board and the Hawarden Industrial Development Corporation had already researched and interviewed Dr. Ray Wellborne, a promoter with a high educational background and a keen knowledge of economics to come to Hawarden as an Industrial Public Relations person with the purpose of establishing a Junior College for

Hawarden and to encourage industry to locate here. Dr. Wellborn cited the fall of 1966 as a date when the college would start educating its' first students. This time frame was eventually realized a year later when the college opened its doors to incoming freshmen.

In November, 1965 the Sioux Empire College Fund Campaign was announced. The SECO Board of Directors set \$105,000.00 as its target goal. This was the minimum amount needed to assure full operation of the college through its' first three years, after which it was expected that the college would be self-sustaining.

A week after the Fund Drive was announced, \$18,060 had been pledged by the eighteen members of the SECO Board; a legal corporation formed ten months earlier. It was decided by the Board that anyone contributing \$100.00 or more would be issued a certificate showing they were eligible to vote on any major issue before the Board.

The intention of these forward thinking leaders of Hawarden was for the college to be a private, nonprofit, tax free and self sustaining enterprise. It was also the intention and hope of the people involved to give the youth of this area the opportunity to expand their education at a location close to home and provide it at an affordable price. The indirect result of the college would also be to advance the economic opportunities of the businesses and residents of the area.

In May, 1966, HIDCO (Hawarden Industrial Development Corporation) agreed to purchase the farms of Calvin Smith and Cleone Dewey on the north edge of Hawarden for the Sioux Empire College site. Other sites considered earlier were dismissed for various reasons. Smith's farm consisted of 145 acres and the Dewey land was 5 acres. This land was located across the intersection of 23<sup>rd</sup> street and Avenue L. Dave Gearhart, representing HIDCO stated that they had the funds available to purchase the land, and would resell whatever land needed to the college. With this co-operation between the Hawarden Industrial Development Corporation and the SECO board of directors, the dream of so many citizens and friends of Hawarden was taking shape; it now had a home

By June of 1966 pledges had been secured reaching the goal of \$105,000.00, thus allowing contracts to be let for construction of buildings. Trustees anticipated an enrollment of 300 students in the fall of 1967 when the school hoped to open.

Mountains of red tape, meetings, disappointments and delay, challenges and success, the courage of a few brave men, now joined by an enthusiastic group of investors and help from HIDCO to purchase the land were all ingredients necessary to make this dream come true.

Next week: Sioux Empire College becomes a reality.