

HAWARDEN...HOW IT ALL BEGAN

SIOUX EMPIRE COLLEGE BECOMES A REALITY

Chapter 42:

By: Mary Truesdell Johnson

As work began on the site finally chosen for the Sioux Empire College, even more citizens of the Hawarden community became involved; this time not with money, but with physical labor and moral support.

The Hawarden Explorer Scouts were enlisted to join with members of the community as well as the SECO Board to help clean up the site where the buildings for the college would be located. Men and women, business owners and farmers, all volunteered to help with the work and it resulted in the saving of thousands of dollars by eliminating the need to hire the work done.

During this period in the mid 1960's, Hawarden was in a very energetic and progressive era. At this time in history Hawarden had a hospital expansion fund drive in progress as well as the college drive. The hospital expansion was ready for new equipment and furnishings, but money was still needed to provide all these necessities. This was also the time when plans were discussed to hire a Hospital Administrator to replace Ruth Kennedy who had not only been Director of Nursing but also in charge of the financial applications of the Hospital. In 1967 HIDCO purchased the Medical Clinic and plans were approved to apply for a Sears Foundation Grant to build a new building to house the Clinic. Other activities on the Hawarden City Council's agenda were the purchase of the Golf Course and improvements to the Hawarden Airport site. This was an exciting time for the entire community. Progress and expansion were the two operative words of the era.

In June of 1966 it was reported in the *Hawarden Independent* that SECO had received its first grant. This grant came from the Federal Government and the \$5,000.00 would be used for library materials. It was also reported that the college would be eligible for a similar grant in the next year if progress goes as expected and will continue for an additional three years if Congress continues to appropriate the funds.

With work progressing on the college site, the members of the SECO Board were rapidly making plans and obtaining the necessary permits and contracts for the ground breaking of the first college building.

The board had made contact with four financial firms, three located in Iowa, who were prepared to construct the necessary buildings and then lease them back to the Sioux Empire College Corporation over a thirty year period of time. There was even the possibility of including the price of the land in the lease agreement. Everything seemed to be falling into place.

Dr. Wellborne did not renew his contract with the City and College in 1966 and Dr. George S. Reuter was installed as the new president. Excitement was high in November of 1966 when ground was broken for the new 7,000 sq.foot classroom building. The original farm house on the property was converted into the Sioux Empire Administration and Library Center. As with all projects, large and small, the building of a college was a huge task and delays and disappointments were commonplace.

By September, 1967 there were six full time and 4 part time faculty members for the college as well as 55 excited students; but no buildings. The fall semester began with the students housed in the homes of generous members of the community and classes were held in the First Methodist Church Educational unit. By November 1, the classroom building was completed. By December 1, the students were living in the new dormitories.

In February, 1968 SECO was officially dedicated and in May the first spring banquet, prom and graduation for seven graduates was held. In June, SECO received confirmation that the state schools would accept credits from this new college; a necessary requirement for a two year school. September of 1968 saw an enrollment of 108 fulltime students for its second year of operation.

Growing pains would be an understatement for this small struggling college. By the end of the decade of the 60's the school was in serious financial trouble. Enter Dr. Al Hudek who was hired to be Dean of the college. Dr. Hudek spearheaded a fund drive. Again Hawarden and area residents responded and \$80,000 was raised which allowed the college to pay off and settle all past debts and allow a contingency fund for a continued program.

When the fall 1970 classes began there was new hope that the college could still be a viable force in the Hawarden Community. The student body numbered 65 students. Dr. Hudek was president of the college and Marian Ryger Dean of Instruction. Classes were taught by the president, the dean and several part time instructors. Saturday and evening classes were emphasized and attracted students of all ages from the surrounding area. Once again the future was looking bright and Sioux Empire College was entering a time of growth.

By the mid 70's Sioux Empire College could boast several sports teams such as, Girls and Boys Basketball, Volley Ball and Baseball. Other programs were also listed in their curriculums such as Choir, Speech, Theatre and more; their school newspaper THE TITAN was published weekly in the Hawarden Independentⁱ. In 1974 a multipurpose building was under construction which would house a gymnasium as well as other amenities.

In 1977 one of the biggest announcements of the college was the news that approximately 300 veterans had been accepted to their enrollment in addition to their regular admissions. Classes for these Veterans would be held on the Hawarden Campus as well as three satellite campuses in the area. Classes for veterans would allow them to receive an Association in Arts Degree upon finishing the requirements. At this same time in history, President Nixon made higher education a possibility for qualifying Native Americans with expanded federal grants, and Sioux Empire College was a recipient of many Native American students from nearby areas who chose Hawarden to attend a two year school.

The 1980's saw the Sioux Empire College Theatre present Gore Vidal's "Visit to a Small Planet", and the Art Department exhibited their collections. In 1984 the Titans (SECO Boys Basketball Team) played in the Region II Jr. College playoffs at Waldorf College, eventually losing to the number one seeded college; Iowa Central Community College of Fort Dodge, Iowa. May of 1984 was SECO's 17th Annual Graduation. It would be its next to the last.

Next week: Sioux Empire College: Twenty years of Dreams and Disappointments. The Final Chapter.

ⁱ Hawarden Independent
Hawarden Centennial Book