

McCormick Hall

McCormick Hall is a two story, brick Italianate structure with a three story entrance tower topped with a pyramidal roof. The tower has dormers on each face for ventilation. The entire building is surrounded with a bracketed cornice. The windows are segmentally arched on the first floor and jack-arched on the second with brick string courses along the springing lines of the arches at each floor level. The main entrance has an elaborate pressed metal hood and a large sign at the top of the tower identifying the building. The building still rests on its original limestone foundation and maintains its original structural and architectural integrity.

McCormick Hall is a fine example of a building type closely associated with educational architecture during the late 19th century. Its basic form could be seen in many communities; but today it is one of a very few remaining examples in the state. McCormick Hall was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975.

The idea for a college in Hastings, Nebraska was conceived by Mr. A.L. Wigton, editor of the Hastings Journal, who published an editorial on August 19, 1873, expressing his desire that a college be located in the growing frontier community. The townspeople were soon very excited about the idea and presented a proposal to the Kearney, Nebraska Presbytery at the November, 1873 meeting. There a planning committee was appointed, but nine years passed before definite steps could be taken. The delay was caused by drought, grasshoppers and economic problems of the time.

During the winter and spring of 1881-82, 93 men contributed \$11,050 to the fund to be used for purchase of a site, construction of buildings and cost of maintenance for the first year. A tract of 100 acres was acquired one mile east of the center of town; and since financial support was assured, the college was incorporated May 10, 1882.

The college opened formally September 13, 1882 with a chapel service in the First Presbyterian Church. This first year there was a student body of 44 and three full-time and two part-time faculty members. After the chapel services, the students went to their classes above the post office in downtown Hastings.

Ground was broken April 25, 1883 for McCormick Hall, the first building erected on the campus. It was named for Cyrus H. McCormick who contributed the initial \$5,000 for the building. Construction began in the summer of 1883 and the building was completed and dedicated in October, 1884. Total cost was \$14,703. It has remained in daily use since that time.

From 1884 to the mid 1950s, McCormick Hall was the principle classroom building with the departments of English, mathematics, speech, drama and chemistry inhabiting the structure. A large room on the second floor, which originally housed the college chapel, was later converted into a little theatre.

Nearly every student who has attended Hastings College since 1884 has had at least one class in this building. Consequently, it is closely associated in the minds of former students, as well as townspeople, and serves as a link to their pioneer forebears on campus.

Source: National Register of Historic Places nomination form available at Adams County Historical Society.
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