

Many graduates of country school moved on to campus setting at University High School

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From 1919 to 1946, many graduates of area country schools went straight to the University of South Dakota.

That's because during that time USD's Science Hall was known as University High School and was attended by close to 50 students annually.

"It was established for what they called the 'practice teachers,' which would be student teachers today," explained Cleo Erickson, a University High alum who graduated in 1944. "Those students who were in the education department who were becoming schoolteachers could come in and – they were supervised – but they would teach our classes."

The "practice teachers" generally would instruct classes for a period of approximately six weeks, Erickson said.

The other focus of University High was to provide a school for young people from communities without a four-year high school, as well as to assist college freshmen make up for "high school deficiencies," according to the USD Archives and Special Collections Web site.

"The country kids could go to either University High or Vermillion High, but the kids in town, if they went to University High, they had to pay tuition," Erickson said. "Some of my classes were with university kids, like typing and shorthand and all that sort of thing that we took at that time."

University High offered languages, mathematics, social science, natural science, vocational studies, music and physical education.

Among the extracurricular activities were a school newspaper, speech, drama and a football team called "The Pups."

Students also had the opportunity to take advantage of various university offerings, Erickson said.

"Sometimes we would have university professors come in and talk to us. We could go to the convocations ... on Wednesday morning, and we had free music lessons from the university professors," she said.

Constructed in 1902, the Science Hall was located between the W.H. Over Museum and the Danforth Chapel.

"The med school was on the third floor," Erickson remembered. "We were on part of second floor. The first floor had the geology department, and I think the med school had the basement area. It was a big building."

Being located in such close proximity to the medical school had one drawback: Cadavers were stored in the basement.

"You had the whole formaldehyde (smell) all the time. Lucky us. It was awful,"



ABOVE: University High School students in biology lab. c. 1945.

LEFT: University High School Students study mammals at the University museum c. 1945.

(Archives and Special Collections, University Libraries, USD)

Erickson laughed.

By its final year, enrollment dropped to 34 students, and student teaching was shifted to Vermillion public schools.

Science Hall eventually was condemned as unsafe, and was razed in 1958.

For more information on University High, visit

<http://archivesandspecialcollections.wordpress.com/2011/09/23/university-high-school/>.

Did you know ... ?

- In February 1879, territorial legislature gave women the right to vote in school elections. The first woman school director of Clay County was elected more than a decade later, in 1879. Mrs. D.W. Myers was elected by a vote of 33 to 23.
- Clay County's first attendance law was passed in 1883. It required that all children ages 10 to 14 attend at least 12 weeks, six of which had to be consecutive. Legislation passed in 1885 extended the necessary schooling amount to six months.