50 Years in North Hall

November 2013 marks the 50th anniversary of North Hall being the home of the Department of Political Science.

Over the years, thousands of students have considered North Hall their academic home base on the UW campus. They came through its doors to talk with professors, meet teaching assistants, receive counsel from academic and career advisors, and get help from staff. They have taken classes in the small seminar rooms, done research in the Joel Dean Reading Room, used the computer lab, and talked with their fellow students about life on campus and in the world beyond.

Much has changed in those 50 years, but one thing that has remained a constant is the dedication of the Department of Political Science to provide a first-rate educational experience for its students. The department is proud that North Hall means so much to our legions of undergraduate and graduate alumni. You can find more North Hall history at go.wisc.edu/6i3o16.

Do you have a favorite North Hall memory or story? If so, send it to us at info@polisci.wisc.edu, or in the enclosed envelope. We will print some of your entries in the spring 2014 issue of North Hall News.

Political Science Gets New Home

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The Department of Political Science of the University of Wisconsin is getting a new home—in the oldest building on the Madison campus.

The department, housed since 1910 in South Hall, is moving across Bascom Hill to its “twin” building, North Hall. Professor Clara Penniman, chairman of the department, said the move should be completed by early next week.

North Hall was constructed in 1851 at a cost of $19,000 and was originally a men’s dormitory. Workers have just completed a $75,000 remodeling job on the structure, which is now valued at $400,000.

The Department of Political Science has 25 faculty members, more than twice the number 10 years ago. Professor Penniman said she expects North Hall to be adequate for the department for 10 years or more.

Political Science shared South Hall with offices of the College of Letters and Science, which will take over some of the vacated space. The History of Science Department will also move into South Hall from its current location on Sterling Court.
Memories of the Move to North Hall

The final stages of the move to North Hall took place on the same fateful weekend in November 1963 as the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas. North Hall News asked Emeritus Professors Bernard Cohen, Joel Grossman, David Tarr, and Crawford Young for their recollections of the move and the weekend.

David Tarr: Yes, we were all witnesses/participants in the move. As I recall, [department chair] Clara Penniman explained that the department had wisely avoided the opprobrium from association with the construction of the new Social Science building—because that building project required the destruction of so many trees, which the Capital Times in particular had condemned. Most of the senior professors seemed to agree with Clara, although some of us newcomers thought that, quite apart from the quality of their new versus our ancient digs, isolation from the rest of the social science faculty and facilities might have its disadvantages.

Joel Grossman: The move took place, literally, on November 22, 1963. I’m certain of that! When at noon or so the word arrived that the president had been shot, the work stopped, leaving a desk hanging from a crane outside the window of my soon-to-be new office, 216 (which had become the movers’ portal). When we knew that JFK had been killed, a group of us met with [Congress scholar] Ralph Huitt in his empty office upstairs to find out all we could about the new president, LBJ. He was somewhat reassuring. I spent the rest of the weekend at home watching events on television, including the killing of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby, reading Ayn Rand, and for a time being joined by my soon-to-be girlfriend/wife, Mary Hengstenberg.

M. Crawford Young: I do not remember the move per se. I do recall being on campus the day of the JFK assassination, already established in my new North Hall office. I previously shared an office with Dave Tarr in South Hall for the first fall weeks after we arrived. That day I recall well—a gray and rainy day. My memories begin with a lunch at Tripp Commons, where someone brought the news that the president had been shot. I did turn up for my 2:25 p.m. British politics class, but could not bring myself to continue with the lecture. Only a little later did I learn classes had been cancelled. I then returned home to our newly-acquired TV set and like everyone else, my wife Becky and I were absorbed in the incredible drama unfolding before our eyes.

Bernard Cohen: I had been in Ann Arbor for a couple of days, and got back to Madison in time for lunch at the Union, which we all did in those days. As I was walking in, I heard the news from a friend in sociology, Dave Mechanic. The rest of that day was a haze. I spent the weekend in bed recuperating from a neck problem, watching everything: the funeral, Oswald being shot, etc. I even had a home visit by a physician. When I was back on my feet, we were fully moved into North Hall. Incidentally, the prior Sunday, November 17, there had been a full-page review of a new book of mine in the New York Times book review section. I spent a portion of that week crafting a letter of reply to the editor of the Book Review—whose supervisor, the Sunday editor of the Times, was the author of the review! All of that was totally lost and gone forever, of course, after November 22.