

Campus bids farewell to 'Dairy Bar'

Standing near a curb on Monroe Street, a student waits at the bus stop. Behind him, an old brick building, known as "the Dairy Bar," stands obscured by the nearby buildings sprawled across campus.

A lone air conditioner stands quiet, making no attempt to cool the empty building that once housed a bustle of activity.

Classes once housed in this building have been moved; the restaurant inside that once sold cinnamon rolls and sandwiches to hungry students has closed its doors for the last time. Students will never again hold last-minute study sessions across the scarred tables and wobbly chairs or chuckle as they look upon the comical cream pitcher depicting a happy cow.



Original entrance on the east side of the Dairy Science Building. (Photo by Sheri Ishmael-Waldrop)

Demolition plans, announced in spring 2006, forced landscape architecture classes to move and the restaurant to close.

The end of an era

Built in 1928 to house the university's dairy herd, the Dairy Science Building was one of the first buildings on the campus of Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College.

"It anchored the northwest corner of campus," said Monty Karns, facilities engineer for the Oklahoma State University Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. "A person could buy fresh milk and ice cream back in 1970."

Throughout the years, the building was transformed from a production agricultural facility to an active classroom building and social hotspot for students. In the 1990s, the second level of the three-story building was renovated to house two design studios for landscape architecture students.

LA students get new home

The fourth- and fifth-year landscape architecture students spent a lot of time in the Dairy Science Building, sometimes 20 to 30 hours per week, said Michael Holmes, assistant professor of landscape architecture.

"The students basically lived in those rooms," he said.

With the closing of the building, these classes were moved back into Agricultural Hall. To make room, some upper-division classes were moved to the vacant University Print Shop.

"I'm happy with the new facilities," said Dale Maronek, head of the OSU Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture. "The Dairy Science Building wasn't built to meet our needs."

Holmes agreed.

"The rooms were ill configured," he said. "We were able to organize classes better in Agricultural Hall."

OSU has made numerous attempts to demolish the Dairy Science Building. One such attempt was as early as 1970. However, lack of funding to

expand the Physical Science building kept the it open until now.

Due to the historical significance of the building, the OSU Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture attempted to gain funds to renovate the structure to meet building and health codes.

"It's not like we didn't try to rehabilitate the building," Maronek said. "We had a plan to renovate [the building]. We tried to raise the money, but we were unsuccessful."

Even with the knowledge of the upcoming move, students and staff did not vacate the premises until July.

"There were a lot of rumors about when we had to be out, but we had to have a place to go first," Holmes said.

Loss of historical architecture

Though the building has been through many near misses with the wrecking ball, this time the Dairy Science Building cannot be saved.

The structure is not up to building code, Karns said.

"There is no way to economically renovate the building," Karns said. "The structure doesn't lend itself to being renovated."

During the demolition, items such as fixtures, doors and windowpanes will be removed. Though the structure itself will be destroyed, some mementos will be kept for posterity.

"The contractor has worked to salvage the cornerstone and time capsule," Karns said.

Architects are trying to incorporate the salvaged materials, such as limestone portions of the architecture, into the new technology building.

Students said they are sad to say goodbye to the building, but in this case, the change is for the better.

"Space is needed for a new research building," Maronek said.

As the student boards the bus, he takes one last look at the historical structure behind him. Almost 80 years of service from the old building will not be enough to earn its keep, but the promise of a new and brighter future waits just around the corner. ☺