

East Union is culmination of 30 years of effort

By Carol Harrah

Thirty years is a long wait.

But in 1977, the Nebraska East Union on UNL's East Campus finally was completed after students and teachers had worked since 1947 to get a union on the campus.

Daryl Swanson, director of Nebraska Union, worked on the planning committee that directed plans for the building.

Editor's Note: Today the Daily Nebraskan is featuring stories about the Nebraska Unions. The union system includes the City Union, East Campus Union and the Culture Center.

Construction began in June of 1975. He said East Campus had a need for the union, but it took a while to get the funding ready and the plans started.

"East Campus was very vocal about their needs for a better facility," he said. "In the '50s, they started planning for one, but it never came about. They also pushed for one in the '60s."

Students congregated in the basement of the Activities Building before the East Campus Union was built. If dances were

held, the gymnasium was used as an auditorium.

Swanson said the East Union cost \$4.5 million to build. This was \$1.5 million over the originally proposed \$3 million in total costs, he said.

In 1969, the NU Board of Regents voted to set aside \$2.50 per student out of student fees to help pay for the costs of building a new union on East Campus, Swanson said.

Because of inflation, he said, the board needed to exceed the original budget for the union's construction and students still are paying for it.

Students pay

"Now students have \$3.50 of their student fees going into the fund," Swanson said. "We had to give ourselves a loan to build the union."

Swanson said the original \$3 million had been set up through a series of revenue bonds established during the 1960s. Since enrollment was increasing, there was a surplus of money coming in and the extra money "created a surplus to build it."

Swanson said there was a three-and-half year planning process for the building. The planning was done by the Union Board

Planning Committee.

The construction firm was selected by the committee. The firm designed the union, and also worked with the East Campus community to find out what type of student union it wanted.

One important decision was what the content of the food service would be. The human nutrition and food service management department within the Home Economics College had a cafeteria in the basement of what is now Ruth Leverton Hall.

The Union Board Planning Committee discussed having just one cafeteria on campus to avoid competition within the school.

Hazel Anthony, dean of the College of Home Economics, worked with the committee on solving the problem.

"My greatest involvement was working with the Union Board on the food service," Anthony said. "At first we didn't want to give it up. Our cafeteria had a lot of tradition. It took us two years to decide what we wanted before we signed an agreement," she said.

Classroom problem

Anthony said the most difficult task was getting a classroom set up within the

building and having students work with the regular staff within the food service in the East Union.

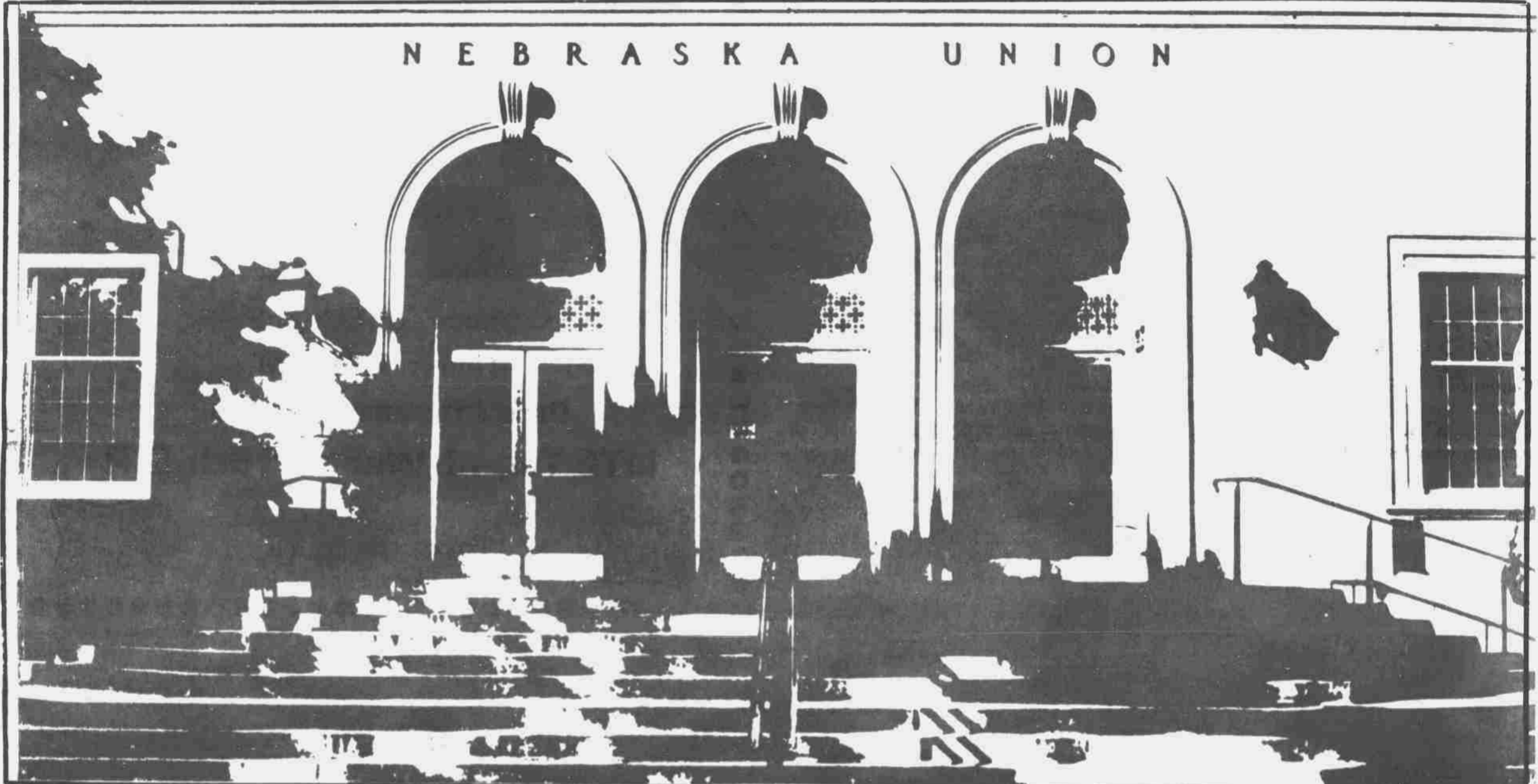
"These areas were paid for by the Office of Academic Affairs," Anthony said, "not student fees. The union is a meeting place for social and extra-curricular activities and that's what the student fees paid for."

Swanson said an Omaha firm called Backlund Architects, which is no longer in business, designed the East Union. He said the site of the union took some time to choose because there was an argument on where to place it.

"There were six or seven original sites proposed for this," he said. "People had wanted it to be placed east of the C.Y. Thompson Library because there was a feeling at that time that the campus was moving eastward."

"We wanted to keep it in a central location and near Burr-Fedde halls because the Union Food Service planned to (and does) feed the students in those halls. Undergrads are usually the users of the union and the graduate students are on the east side of the campus," Swanson said.

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Staff Photo by Dave Bentz

Expansion highlights Nebraska Union's 44 years

By Ward Triplett

1938 is an important year to the UNL student. In May of that year, the long-awaited Nebraska Union was finally opened on 14th and R streets.

Now, 44 years later, the union may be taken for granted for many, but its importance to the social life at UNL has not diminished.

"I don't think anyone really walks into the union and considers the services we offer them," said the union's eighth director, Daryl Swanson. He has been director since 1974.

In 1935, students who didn't have the food service, study lounges and other services a union could offer began a donation drive to build the structure. Davis and Wilson architects of Lincoln were contracted to draw the plans for the building, which originally was 175 feet long and 124 feet wide.

By 1937, construction had begun on the site of the former Ellen Smith Hall. Opening ceremonies were held in May of the following year. The building, financed by a government grant and a bank loan, cost \$460,000. Bonds payable from student fees were issued in the amount of \$200,000, and by 1952, the debt was paid.

"There had been a trend toward college unions at the time," Swanson said. "They had been building them at some of the Eastern schools. We by no means have one of the oldest unions."

In its early days, in addition to student fees, the union profited mainly from food service, particularly "the Corn Crib" snack bar located in the current South Crib. The union was regarded as the headquarters of the Alumni Association, which joined the Daily Nebraskan in helping raise donations for the building. Nebraska students paid \$3 for a union card, which enabled them to

take advantage of the services that student fees allow them today.

Union board members

The Nebraska Union Board was born a year before the building actually opened. Among its original membership of seven students, six faculty members and three alumni were NU Regent Robert Simmons of Scottsbluff and Mabel Lee, director of the university's department of physical education for women from 1924 to 1952. These 16 people originally were known as the governing board of manager, which controlled the director's position. The board hired Ken Van Sant as its first director in 1938.

"The Union Board operated with a great deal of autonomy then," Swanson said. "They had the power to hire and fire the director. But back then, it was an adult-dominated board with nine non-students."

The board has been restructured twice since then. In the 1960s, the union director's position came under the control of the newly developed division of student affairs. The Union Board then became a policy-setting organization, which was reduced to an advisory board in 1970 because of NU Board of Regents' position was the only policy-making board on the campus.

"Basically, we could call it anything we wanted to," Swanson said. "But the board would be making policies that could be superseded by the regents. Now, the board acts as an advisory committee to me, and it's my decision to accept their suggestions or not."

Rapid growth

In 1955, as the university experienced a rapid growth in enrollment, the regents approved a bond issue for an addition to the union, as well as for the University Health Center building and high-rise residence halls. In 1959, a T-shaped extension to the union was opened. It cost \$1.25 million. The one-floor addition included a base-

ment that housed a bowling alley and billiards room, and allowed for a new snack bar and lounge on the upper level.

That new look lasted seven years before the student population outgrew the building again. In 1964, the regents consolidated the union, health center and residence hall bonds into one. It allowed the union to pay off its previous debt and expand the existing building. The expansion extended the building's north and south corners 30 feet and added the second floor. The university accented the project with the development of the union plaza, including Broyhill Fountain. This brought the union to its current appearance.

Five-year plan

In 1978, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Richard Armstrong commissioned the union to develop a five-year plan for the building's renovation. Swanson said the plan was developed on the assumption gained from statistics that enrollment would decrease instead of increase, and that the University would no longer be able to pay for some of the union's costs, such as utilities.

The major thrust of the five-year plan called for the union to take control of the union bookstores. The plan would have meant better management for the bookstore, and additional income for the union, Swanson said. However, the Office of Business and Finance still controls the two stores in the union on city campus, as well as the East Union bookstore. The only concession the university has made on the matter is to pay the union an annual rental fee.

The five-year plan would have rearranged virtually the entire basement of the building, but because the union is unable to move the bookstores, much of the five-year plan's goals have yet to be accomplished, Swanson said.