



A History of Nelson Hall

Nelson Hall, the second-oldest building on the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point campus, has quite a pedigree. The oldest existing dormitory of the former State Normal School System, it was built in 1915. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation's 10 most endangered historic properties and is named to the Wisconsin State Inventory of Historic Structures and the Stevens Point City List of historic places. Unfortunately, the future of this grand old structure may be uncertain. Its feasibility for renovation has been reviewed by the state Division of Facilities Development and UW System administration. Both agencies decreed it is not cost effective to use state tax money to save the building. The worst scenario would see it torn down and replaced with an asphalt parking lot. A more constructive plan would have it converted to apartments, offices or other uses affiliated with the university.

In 1992 things looked rosier when UWSP requested \$32 million from the state to restore the former residence hall.

"Given the historical considerations, distinctive architectural features, sentiments of alumni, and the fact Nelson is structurally sound, it would seem to make more sense to renovate than tear down and build new," a campus administrator said at that time. The plan received approval by the UW System Board of Regents but apparently ran into trouble with the State Building Commission.



Nelson
Hall

Today there seems to be some renewed interest in preserving the edifice constructed in 1915 and bearing the name of George B. Nelson, a Stevens Point attorney who served on the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Nelson, a regent of the State Normal School System at the time fought valiantly with legislators opposed to spending the \$100,000 to build the hall. It was designed by the Milwaukee-based architectural team of Henry Van Ryn and Gerrit de Gellecke.





Since it was built, the residence has housed women students, the Student Army Training Corps organizing for World War I, trainees for World War II and the ROTC. Currently it provides a home for Administrative Computing, plus several other auxiliary programs and services. It frequently is filled to capacity with offices and people who would have to be relocated if it is razed. The HPC asks, "Why couldn't part of the building be remodeled for use by university offices such as the UWSP Foundation and Alumni Relations?"

This is one of many questions that need to be asked and answered in the future before the grand old structure becomes only a memory. Oh, if only George Nelson were still around to plead the case of this fine old building.

