

"What a long, strange After 43 years of change, Behrend still

by Robb Frederick
The Collegian

Buttoning his yellow cardigan sweater against the evening chill, Ben Lane stares at the wire fence surrounding Niagara field, the future site of Behrend's new library/academic complex.

"A library is symbolic of a worthy institution," he says. "It represents the core, the heart and soul of a university. And now that we're finally getting a library that can fulfill the needs of this College, we're going to be able to do anything."

For Lane, associate professor emeritus of English, the construction of the new library complex represents the latest step in Behrend College's expansion -- an expansion which began on Oct. 30, 1948, when a local paper manufacturing tycoon's isolated summer retreat became part of the Penn State system.

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"I feel grateful that the opportunity to make this gift came exactly as it did," an elegantly clad Mary Behrend announced that day. "It will further one of his (Ernst Behrend's) greatest interests -- education -- to be carried on where he loved best to be -- Glenhill Farm."

With those words, spoken from the courtyard of the familiar Glenhill Farmhouse, Mrs. Behrend gave birth to the Behrend Center. Within months, the 422-acre estate she and her husband built to escape "the mill yard with the engines snorting past the front porch" was populated by a class of approximately 146 freshmen, walking the dirt paths

to and from makeshift classrooms or meeting with one of the Center's 10 full-time faculty members.

Today, more than 3,000 students crowd the College's sidewalks, working their way through a diversifying catalog of undergraduate courses and continuing studies toward one of four associate degrees or 24 four-year degree programs available at Behrend.

The rich history of the campus remains, however; embedded in the cracked paint of the Glenhill Farmhouse, the cramped hallways of the Carriage House, and the rustic exterior of the Studio Theatre.

It is this history that embraces students with feelings of familiarity. And it is what brings Ben Lane back to campus for yet another evening stroll, marked by discussion of past planning sessions, long-abandoned rules and regulations, and the future of Behrend College.

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"This is where the campus started," explains Lane, standing where the main drive splinters into the Carriage House parking lot. "These buildings, from the Carriage House to the Studio Theatre, were the only buildings on campus. Beyond that, the land was nothing but fields and strawberry patches."

The Carriage House, which was originally used as servant's quarters and a five-car garage, became the faculty housing building. The Center's few professors, many of whom served as individual departments, lived there with their families.

Rooted in the center of the

original campus was the Glenhill Farmhouse, which housed the administrative offices. The upstairs floor served as a dormitory for about 22 women who lived under a 9 p.m. curfew; the lower floor contained the cafeteria and a few classrooms.

Most of the Behrend Center's first classes were held across the sidewalk in Turnbull Hall. This building, formerly the Behrends' barn, was still undeveloped when the Center opened, and classroom space was limited to the first floor.

Through the years, Turnbull Hall would serve other functions as well, becoming the cafeteria (lower floor), and housing the library (second floor), which had "outgrown" its earlier locations in the Carriage House loft and the Studio Theatre.

"The students always took the library in stride," Lane explains. "In the first years, the Student Government Association actually joined the "Book of the Month" club and donated the books to the campus library."

The land beyond the Studio Theatre, which was used as a recreation room after the sparse library resources were moved to Turnbull Hall, consisted of horse paths and open fields, which the State Police used as target ranges.

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The campus' first growth



And away we go: A sizable crowd gathered on the lawn of 1948, to hear Mary Behrend dedicate the Behrend Center. "M with young people and to be of help to them to the best of his busy he was, there was always time in his day to listen to the to him."



Greg Geibel/The Collegian

"I've always looked at Behrend's students as agents of change."

Associate Emeritus