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WHEN THINGS LOOKED BAD FOR THE COLLEGE AND ITS NEW PRESIDENT



Faculty With Its President, Summer of 1914



Russ Hall and the Summer School After the Fire of 1914

Big Problem Faced Pres. Brandenburg As First Year Ended

President Brandenburg had to wrestle with a most formidable problem at the end of his first year at Kansas State Teachers College. That problem was the rebuilding of Russ Hall, the administration building, after it was practically destroyed by fire.

On the night of June 29, 1914, Pittsburg was visited by a severe electrical storm. One bolt hit Russ Hall, and the building was soon a mass of flames.

Rex R. Tanner, a student who was trying to aid in fighting the blaze, was killed when he came in contact with a live wire. The gloom that the fire itself caused in Pittsburg was increased by this tragedy.

President Brandenburg was one of the first at the scene. All night long he aided the firemen and did not return to his home until nearly noon to take food and obtain dry clothing.

Only one building remained on the campus—Industrial Arts—in which the big summer session could be carried on.

Fear that the people over the state who did not want a college at Pittsburg anyhow would now urge the state to abandon the project crept into the minds of faculty and Pittsburgers.

But Governor George H. Hodges and the members of the board of administration were on the campus before the ruins had ceased smoking. With President Brandenburg taking the leadership at this crisis, they promised the citizens of Pittsburg that if they would advance the money for rebuilding, the board would ask the legislature to repay them. Mass meetings were held, the fighting spirit of Pittsburg was aroused, and the needed money was soon subscribed.

Until temporary quarters on the campus for housing displaced classes could be erected, Pittsburg citizens undertook the task of transporting members of those classes back and forth between the College and the Pittsburg High School. Chief temporary quarters were a large frame building erected where the Cafeteria now stands and used for a number of years later as an auditorium. Movable partitions swung from the ceiling dividing the building into classrooms. Several other small buildings were hastily put up, but even then there was still a scarcity of classrooms. A number of tents were also used, and the campus looked much like an army camp. Summer school went ahead through July and August almost as if there had not been a fire.

Whatever danger there had been that the state might abandon the young college was now over, thanks to the aggressive action of its new executive and the firm support that Pittsburg business men and the college students gave him. It was afterward said that only one student went home on account of the fire.