

WSU News

August 24, 2021

Long-lost sundial finds new home on WSU campus

By Sara Ornelas, Marketing Content Developer



Morgan Barnes, professional services manager for the Public Policy and Management Center, speaks at the rededication ceremony for a sundial that was donated to Wichita State in 1934. The sundial was dedicated to the late Dr. George Platt, professor emeritus at the Hugo Wall School of Public Affairs, and is located on the east side of Hubbard Hall.

A precious piece of Wichita State University's story was almost lost to the dusty shelves of history — if not for the historical instincts of a faculty member.

In 1934, the class of 175 graduating seniors purchased and dedicated a sundial to Wichita State, which was then known as the Municipal University of Wichita; and it was placed at the southwest corner of Jardine Hall.

According to the Sunflower student newspaper, “The dial was made of white granite and is about 3 feet in height. Brass comprises the material of the top, which is approximately 16 inches in diameter.”

Photos in The Parnassus yearbook show the sundial situated in its original location throughout the 1940s, but an early 1950s photo from the University Special Libraries' Collection shows the sundial with a missing gnomon, which is the piece that protrudes from the top of a sundial to calculate the time.



Eventually, in the mid-1950s, the sundial was altogether removed from Wichita State's grounds and, ironically, lost to time — until ...

In 2017, after the death of Wichita State's beloved Dr. George Platt — professor emeritus at the Hugo Wall School of Public Affairs — some of his colleagues were cleaning out his office and came across — wait for it — a mysterious sundial.

“I could tell from his notes on it, he was very specific in that he wanted it back where it was supposed to go. But he couldn't find out where it was supposed to go exactly,” said Morgan Barnes, who currently works for Wichita State as professional services manager for the Public Policy and Management Center. In 2017, Barnes worked as an administrative assistant for the Hugo Wall School.

From his notes, it appears that Platt came into possession of the sundial in 2014; but it's anyone's guess where had been since the 1950s. It was clear that he had been working with Special Collections and wanted it to once again be displayed on campus. Barnes wanted to do her best to honor her friend and colleague.

“He was just a wonderful piece of campus history who walked around with kindness and was always happy to see somebody and happy to talk to students,” she said. “He always had a listening ear for whatever might be going on. He was just a fantastic addition to campus. Everyone should have a Dr. Platt in their lives.”

For about nine months, Barnes was unsure how to get the sundial reinstalled on campus. It was in 2018 when she saw Kristin Beal, Wichita State placemaking coordinator and College of Fine Arts faculty member, talking about how to create a sense of place on university campuses.

“Part of building connection and community on our campus is about honoring our past,” Beal said. “The sundial is a tangible piece that connects us to our past while we build our future. The class of 1934’s sundial gift established an enduring and poetic connection.”

Finally, Barnes had some direction, and she worked with staff from the Office of Strategic Communications and Facilities Services to find a permanent and prestigious home for the sundial.

On July 19, 2021, the sundial found, hopefully, its forever home. It was dedicated to Dr. George Platt and placed on the east side of Hubbard Hall. During the ceremony, Dr. Rick Muma, president of Wichita State, spoke of the sundial’s inscription, which quotes poet Robert Browning: “Grow old with me, the best is yet to be.”

“The sundial itself will surely be enjoying the days ahead. In the 87 years since it was installed near Jardine Hall, and then later removed in the 1950s, the sundial has spent more than half its existence in disrepair, on dusty shelves in storage facilities — and for several years — mysteriously unaccounted for,” Muma said. “Here in its new location, the sundial will be displayed in all its glory for what we hope will be years and years to come.”