A. O. Thomas Hall

In 1925, the Legislature appropriated $85,000 to build a laboratory school building. The cornerstone was laid on March 20, 1926. Much of the construction was accomplished by Nebraska State Teachers College students under the direct supervision of Professor Verne C. Fryklund of the Industrial Training Department. (Contracts were let to build the tunnel to carry steam pipes to the building from the heating plant, and for the plumbing.) On December 6, 1926, President George Martin reported to the State Board of Education for Normal Schools that the approved construction was complete, and that the Training School had moved in, except for Grades Five and Six.

Classrooms designed to seat 20 to 30 children were 22 feet by 28 feet, with twelve-foot ceilings. Each classroom had a conference room where the “critic teacher” and the “practice teacher” could consult. The west end of the first floor housed a kindergarten for 60 children. As an integral part of the College’s mission to train K-12 teachers for the State, the school taught Kindergarten through Grade Twelve, and by 1935, 110 were enrolled.

On November 21, 1932, the State Board of Education for Normal Schools approved a request from the students and faculty that the building be named in honor of Augustus Orloff (“A. O.”) Thomas, the first president of the Nebraska State Normal School at Kearney, and the building became known officially as the A. O. Thomas Laboratory School.

Due to the Depression, the A. O. Thomas Laboratory High School was closed at the end of the 1938-1939 school year. Due to declining enrollment, the seventh and eighth grades were dropped at the end of the 1939-1940 school year. This left the School operating with Kindergarten through Grade Six.

The school was ordered closed in October, 1963, and closed for good at the end of the 1963-1964 school year.

The building was expanded and renovated in 1984, at a cost of $902,000. A. O. Thomas Hall now (2009) houses the University of Nebraska at Kearney’s Departments of English, Journalism, and Foreign Languages.
Laying the Cornerstone of A O Thomas Hall, March 20, 1926
This Photograph of the Main (East) Door of A O Thomas Hall Appeared in the 1927 Blue and Gold. At That Time the Building Was Less Than a Year Old.
A O Thomas Hall as Seen From the Northeast, Before 11th Street Was Paved

Date Unknown, Probably Late 1920's

Note Child at Bush in Center
A O Thomas Student Council, 1933-34

Front and Center, With Gavel, is President Ray Swayne
ANNUAL STATE COMMERCIAL
CONTEST DRAWS STUDENTS
HERE TO COMPETE TODAY

Kearney College is Host
to Students Who Won
District Honors

The annual state commercial
contest is being held
today in the State Teachers
College. Entries in this
contest are those who won
places in the district con-
tests.

Each district in the
state holds a contest. The
winners from each district
represent their respective
schools in the state con-
test today. A. O. Thomas
entered contestants in
every field of the district
and placed thirteenth among
the sixteen schools repres-
tented. Three of the
schools did not place.

Zelda Day, who won fifth
in novice shorthand, is the
entrant from A. O. Thomas.

RECEPTION PLANS COMPLETE

The plans for the A.O.
Thomas junior-senior recep-
tion, which is to be held,
in the Eva J. Case Hall on
May 13, are being made.
Special committees for
entertainment, refreshments
and the general reception
have been appointed.

The cast for the one-act
play, "The Burglary," has
been selected. It will be
presented as part of the
evening's entertainment.

H. E. A. HOLDS
MONTHLY DINNER

The Kearney chapter of
the National Education
Association held the month-
ly dinner at Green Terrace
Hall, April 8.

The program following
the dinner consisted of
reports concerning the na-
tional convention recently
held at St. Louis. The re-
ports were followed by open
forum discussion.

Members of the associa-
tion, and school superin-
tendents were present.

MR. BURR TAYLOR IS GUEST
SPEAKER AT SPECIAL CONVO

Mr. Burr Taylor, repre-
sentative of Nebraska Fire
Prevention Association, ad-
dressed the student body at
a special convocation,
Wednesday, April 22. Mr.
Taylor's speech was spon-
sored by representatives of
the Kearney Fire Prevention
Committee including Mr. Roe
Gordon of the city fire
department, Mr. Clem Heck-
enville, Mr. Carol Morrow,
and a representative of Boy
Scouts. Mr. Taylor urged
education in fire preven-
tion, stressing the dangers
caused from cleaning
clothes with gasoline, and
careless smoking habits.
He showed that there are
few natural causes for
fire, and he urged sensible
control of "man made" fire
hazards.

EIGHT SCHOOLS CONVENE
FOR TRI-VALLEY YEARLY
MUSIC FESTIVAL

Programs of the Afternoon
and Evening are Well
Presented

The second annual Music
Festival, which brought to-
gether eight schools in the
Tri-Valley conference, was
held Friday, April 17, in
both afternoon and evening
sessions.

The schools which were
represented in the festival
included: Elmoree, Gib-
bon, Litchfield, Loomis,
Overton, Shelton, and A. O.
Thomas. Only the Wood Riv-
er solo numbers appeared.
The Cairo school representa-
tives were not present at
the festival.

The festival was not a
contest, but rather a dem-
stration of vocal and
instrumental work. Profes-
sor H. M. Fuhr, head of the
music department of Has-
tings College, served as
critic judge.

A. O. Thomas entered
the primary grades, the girls'
glee club, the boys' glee
club, and the high school
orchestra.

TEA FOR SENIOR GIRLS

May 23 is the date set
for the annual A.A.U.W. tea
this year. The invitation
list includes the senior
girls from A. O. Thomas and
Kearney high school. Spe-
cial guests will be the
deans of these groups.
Industrial Arts Class in

A O Thomas Laboratory School

Date Unknown, Late 1940’s?
A O Thomas Hall, 1956, Seen From the Southeast

The Sculpture Above the Main Door is “The Appeal To The Great Spirit,” a Gift of the Classes of 1937 and 1939. The Sculpture Now (2009) is On Display On the First Floor of the Hall
Bike Rack at A O Thomas Hall, 1960

Note Fire Escape
East Elevation of A O Thomas Hall, 1966
Kearney State College President William R. Nester

Speaking at Dedication of Addition to

A O Thomas Hall, 1984

Mathematics Professor Charles Pickens Looks On
“Joan of Arc” by Henri Michel Antoine Chapu

On Display in A O Thomas Hall, Second Floor Hall
A.O Thomas Hall From the Northwest, April 2009
This Western Addition Was Dedicated in 1984.
A.O. Thomas Hall, Main (East) Door, April 2009
A.O. Thomas Hall From the Northeast, April 2009
A.O. Thomas Hall, Showing the Eastern Part of the Building From the Northeast, April 2009
Sculpture "Joan of Arc" by Henri Michel Antoine Chapu. On Display in A.O. Thomas Hall, Second Floor.
A.O. Thomas Hall, Stairway to Second Floor, April 2009
A.O. Thomas Hall South Elevation
From the Southeast, April 2009