

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)



Pemberton Hall residents gather around the central stairway in a 1955 photo, reprinted with permission from the University Archives, next to some of the current Pemberton Hall Residents. Pemberton Hall became the first residence hall for women in Illinois in 1909. (Courtesy of university archives/Eric Hiltner | The Daily Eastern News)

Bringing back Pemberton memories

By: Jessica Leggin/Activities Editor

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Livingston Lord thought it was "absolutely necessary" to have a residential facility on Eastern's campus.

"He was a visionary," said Mark Hudson, director of housing and dining services. "He wanted to make the university experience as rich as it can be with a residential component."

During Homecoming, Eastern will celebrate 100 years of Pemberton Hall.

Pemberton Hall is named after state senator Stanton C. Pemberton who was from Oakland, Hudson said. Pemberton became the champion of building the residence hall.

"Without him it wouldn't have happened," he said.

In 1901, Livingston Lord, Eastern's first sit-in President, proposed the idea to the Appropriations Committee of the General Assembly to have a women's residential facility on its campus.

Lord was not taken seriously, and his request was denied several times.

"When you are trying to set a new trend, others do not know how to respond to that," Hudson said.

Pemberton thought otherwise of Lord's plan of a dormitory on campus.

According to Pemberton Hall's Web site, Pemberton's confidence in Lord is what made him become active and anxious to go along with the building of a residential facility.

In 1907, after three attempts, \$100,000 was allocated with Pemberton's help to build the dormitories along with a gymnasium.

In 1909 Pemberton Hall became the first residence hall for women in Illinois.

"There is some historical significance," Hudson said.

Right after President Lord received the ok for the building, other universities followed in pursuit.

"It is a source of pride that we are the first," Hudson said. "It is an important responsibility for us as a university to help our students reflect upon the significant events that impact their college experience."

This year the EIU Alumni Association will bring back past residents of Pemberton Hall during Homecoming weekend to celebrate.

Chelsea Frederick, assistant director of alumni services said, the association have had past student body presidents, and former Homecoming queens to come back and celebrate Homecoming.

"We thought what a great idea to invite back the ladies of Pemberton to enjoy Homecoming," she said.

Frederick said Alumni Services branched the idea from Housing and Dining Services.

"This event is a lot bigger than the others," she said. "We have received more registration forms than any other special groups we have had."

Doris Enochs, a past resident assistant director from 1969-1979, said she is anxious to get back.

"I loved the place," she said. "Pemberton was real homey."

Enochs said it would feel good to touch basis with people again.

"I hope to visit with former Pemmites, and talk and exchange lives," she said.

Enochs remembers old ghost stories such as the Mary Hawkins story.

Hawkins was an early director at Pemberton who is rumored to haunt the residence hall.

Hudson said she had gotten sick and later on died, but her death did not take place in Pemberton or on campus.

"There are a lot of ghost stories but no ghost," Hudson said.

There is some remodeling work scheduled for Pemberton Hall.

"There will be wood work, and new doors put in," Hudson said.

Hudson said along with the changes, most things would stay the same.

"We don't want to change the whole thing," he said. "We want to embrace the historical nature of the building and not lose the charm of it."

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