

Demolition of Ferguson Hall stirs memories

BY JEAN ORTIZ JONES

In the spring of 1951, university officials gathered to dedicate Ferguson Hall.

The building was one of the first new buildings on campus after World War II. It was named for O.J. Ferguson, a former dean of engineering.

It originally housed administrative offices for the College of Engineering, and teaching and office space for the electrical engineering program. Physicists began moving in during the early 1970s as they ran out of room in nearby Brace and Behlen laboratories and as engineering programs started moving to Nebraska Hall.

A 2006 UNL Master Plan called for the building's demolition, which was carried out this past August. State law dictates that the building had to come down because the state paid for

its replacement, Jorgensen Hall. It also would have been too expensive to renovate, officials said.

Associate professor Christian Binek remembers his many years in Ferguson Hall and the squirrel that frequently visited his second-floor window for a snack. Even when Binek rearranged his office furniture with his back to the feeding window, the squirrel began going to another window to wave or knock to announce its arrival.

"We lived happily ever after until that day I had to leave Ferguson. The last thing I could do was to empty my entire heart-healthy, unsalted peanut bag for the goodbye party," he said. "It was a blast."

When Greg Snow, physicist and College of Arts and Sciences' associate dean for research, left his office of 17 years, he wrote "Farewell Ferguson" on the window for passers-by to read.

But Snow found himself returning on multiple occasions to take photos and to urge the demolition crews to preserve the red granite slabs surrounding the entrances. After a few weeks, Snow received a package from the contractors: a red brick salvaged from the debris with an attached plaque that reads "Ferguson Hall 1950-2010." It includes the logos of UNL and the companies involved in the project.

"This quite substantial and sentimental paperweight will be displayed in my new office for the rest of my career at UNL," Snow said.

