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Smith Hall renter's dream for KU

By Sarah Chadwick
Special to the Kansan

It's anyone's dream: rent for \$1 per year. This is exactly what the University pays to rent Smith Hall, the religious studies building.

Smith, located across the street from the Kansas Union, never has belonged to the University of Kansas, even though students have been taking classes there since 1901, said Phil McKnight, volunteer president of the Board of Trustees of the Friends of the Department of Religious Studies organization.

Smith, now adorned with a statue of Moses and a stained glass picture of the burning bush, originally was an old farm house. The house and property, valued at \$8,000 at the time of purchase, were bought in 1901 through a monetary gift from Mr. and Mrs. C.A. Beurgan of Moline, Kan., members of the Kansas Bible Chair. Chancellor Frank Strong also donated money to help furnish the building.

The Kansas Bible Chair believed it was necessary to have religion taught at the University.

Strong said that the University should assist, in a nonsectarian way, both its students and members of the public who were interested in Bible study and in the study of important social and religious questions.

The first teachers of religious studies were ministers whose salaries

were paid by the congregation, McKnight said. The KU timetable of classes carried a list of the religious studies courses, such as The Life of Christ, The Teachings of Jesus and Introduction to the New Testament Study, even though the classes were not officially a part of the University. It was not until 1922 that KU approved the Kansas School of Religion and offered the religious courses for credit.

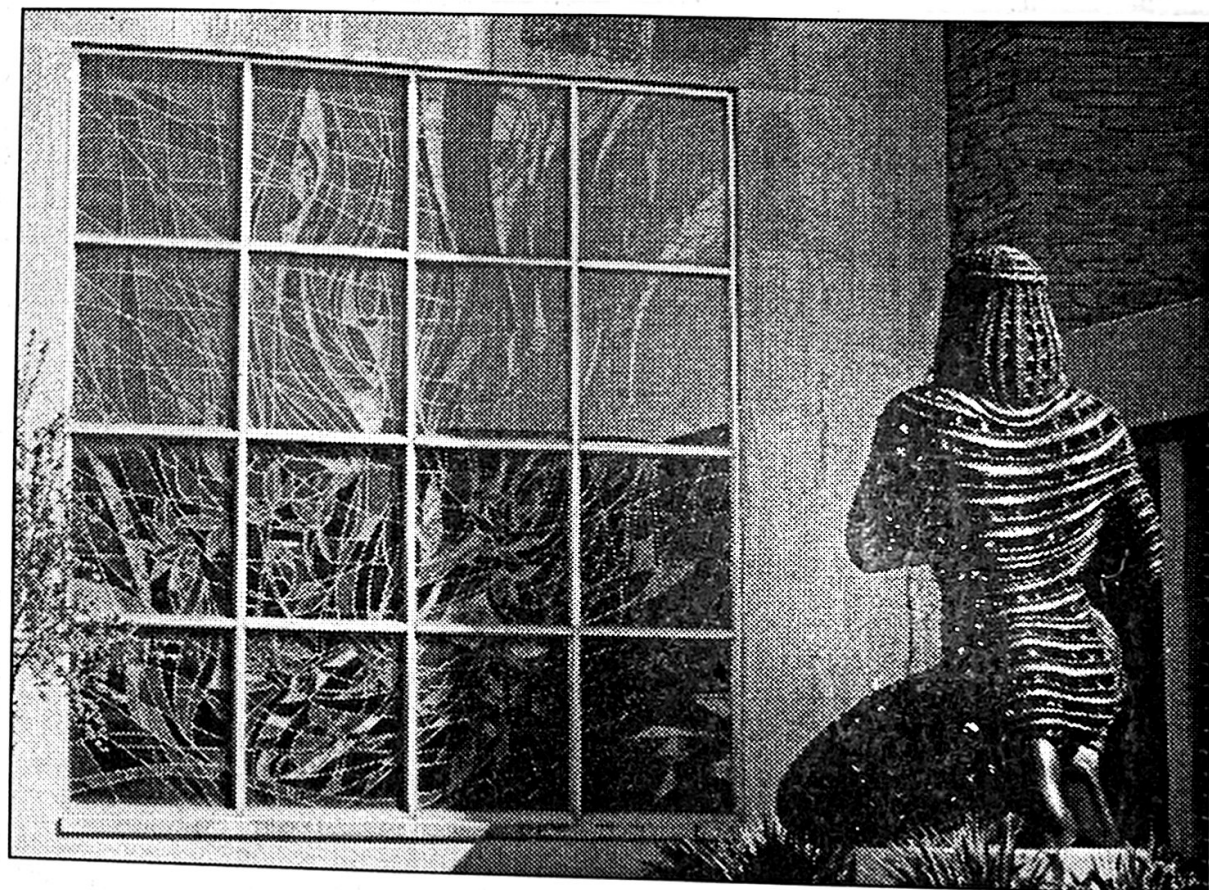
A contract for a new building began in 1966 when the number of students enrolled in the program increased. The building, Smith Hall, was completed the next year and was financed by Christian Churches of Kansas.

It was not until 1978 that the University assumed responsibility for the teaching of classes in the established Department of Religious Studies. A deal was struck to allow the University to pay only \$1 per year to use the building provided that religious studies be taught there, McKnight said.

Chancellor Robert Hemenway admitted the arrangement was odd.

"It's a very different relationship, but it has worked well," Hemenway said. "It probably needs to be examined on a regular basis to make sure it's working well. It's been very positive for the University to offer students religious studies that do not concentrate on any one sect."

Hemenway said that no problems



Heather Clark/KANSAN
Smith Hall, located across from the Kansas Union on Jayhawk Boulevard, is rented by the University for \$1 a year. Religious studies classes are taught in the building.

had come about because of the arrangement. The building, though not owned by the University, must follow the same rules that the rest of the campus does. There has been no pressure from the Kansas Bible Chair for the University to purchase the property.

The University is in charge of maintaining the inside of the building while the Kansas Bible Chair takes

care of the outside.

The Kansas Bible Chair is not losing money on the building or the land because it is all paid for, McKnight said.

The renovations have been paid for by supporting churches, so the University can continue to pay only \$1 a year for rent.

"It was their good will, a wonderful contribution," McKnight said. "It allows the University to spend its money elsewhere, where it's needed."

