ORIGINS OF THE ART DEPARTMENT
ART TRAINING, LIFE TRAINING
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Given the fact that Senator James Huff Stout spent much of his early adulthood in the rough and tumble world of the lumber industry, it is somewhat surprising that he would develop a deep appreciation for art. This was readily apparent after he came to Menomonie to take up permanent residence. One of the earliest public service efforts on the senator’s part was to establish a traveling art exhibit. The exhibit was designed to bring art to the people of western Wisconsin and consisted of artworks that were largely contributed by the senator himself.

It is equally surprising that Senator Stout would use that same appreciation of art and blend it with his views on education. Stout aimed to make art not only an important part of the curriculum, but an area that would enhance the educational goals of the existing areas of training. For example, students in carpentry soon learned the importance of freehand drawing for their future careers. Senator Stout hired Kate Murphy to create and develop the art program. Murphy attended the St. Louis School of Fine Arts in 1887-1889 (this may have been where Senator Stout met her when he was a resident of St. Louis) and the New York School of Technical Design. Under the senator’s auspices, she would later spend time in Europe. Her most recent job prior to arriving at Stout was teaching drawing in the Chicago Public Schools. As director of the art department of the Stout Manual Training School, she taught drawing, color work, design and illustration. Like the rest of the school, art training experienced a severe set-back following a major fire in 1897. However, the construction of the new school building (Bowman Hall) reflected the importance that Stout and Murphy placed on art training. Four rooms on the third floor of the building were devoted to art education and a museum. During the summer of 1900, Stout sent Murphy on an extended trip to Japan where she acquired additional artworks.

The art program on campus went into decline following the death of Senator Stout in 1910. Money was tight and President Lorenzo Dow Harvey believed the money could be better spent elsewhere. This probably contributed to Murphy’s decision to leave the campus in 1913. It would be close to 50 years before the art department would again be a major part of the campus.