A plaque honoring James Huff Stout is near Bowman Hall on the UW-Stout campus. The James Huff Stout Bell in the hall was rung in remembrance of him Wednesday, the 100th anniversary of his death.

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A century gone: UW-Stout remembers its founder

By UW-Stout News Bureau

MENOMONIE — Any way you size him up, James Huff Stout was a tour de force.

Stout was a state senator for 16 years, was a member of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, founded the state's first traveling libraries, was president of three Menomonie financial institutions and started an energy company. His full-time job was managing the lumber holdings for Menomonie-based Knapp, Stout & Co., at one time the world's largest lumber firm.
But Stout's lengthy list of accomplishments pales in comparison to a cause that dominated the last 20 years of his life and has far outlasted all his other interests and endeavors - education.

In 1891, Stout started what today is known as UW-Stout. On Wednesday the university marked the 100th anniversary of Stout's death. He died Dec. 8, 1910, at age 62 of Bright's disease, a kidney ailment.


Chancellor Charles Sorensen, the seventh university leader in 120 years, called Stout a visionary.

"James Huff Stout's applied learning vision is alive and well at his school a century after his death," Sorensen said Wednesday during a ceremony honoring Stout.

UW-Stout offered four majors 50 years ago; it now has 40 undergraduate majors and a graduate school celebrating its 75th year. The number of students attending the university topped 1,000 for the first time in 1955. This year the school had record enrollment of more than 9,300.

Stout's death also roughly marks the university's centennial as a state-funded institution. It was a turning point in school history.

"It was found that Stout left neither a will nor an endowment for the institution. His wife, for her own reasons, chose not to continue to subsidize the Stout Institute and offered the buildings of the campus and their contents to the state," said Kevin Thorie, UW-Stout archivist.

After Stout's passing, Stout Institute President Lorenzo Dow Harvey formally asked the state to take over the school.

When he was alive, Stout personally financed building projects and about 40 percent of the school's day-to-day operations. He also provided $100,000 to rebuild the school after an 1897 fire destroyed it and the adjacent high school.

UW-Stout History

UW-Stout, named for its founder, Dubuque, Iowa, native James Huff Stout, is the only university in the UW System named after an individual.
The Stout Manual Training School opened Jan. 5, 1891, in a two-story building as a branch of the Menomonie school district. As course offerings expanded, it became Stout Institute in 1908 and Stout State College in 1955, when it joined the Wisconsin State College System.

In 1964, the Board of Regents gave university standing to the state colleges, and the institution was renamed Wisconsin State University-Stout.

In 1971, following the merger of the Wisconsin State University System and the UW System, the name of the institution was changed to UW-Stout.