Wilkes Cultural Center Model Is Released

Work was started last week on the Wilkes College Center for the Performing Arts. It is anticipated the building (above) will be ready for operation in September of 1965. A $75,000 building permit was issued by the Wilkes-Barre Bureau of Building Inspection to the Sordoni Construction Company for erection of the Center. Construction was delayed for some time by the need for extensive engineering tests to determine the likelihood of mine subsidence, a possibility associated with the rising of mine waters throughout the area.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held last Tuesday morning, at which time Dr. Eugene S. Farley, Wilkes College President, was joined by Atty. Charles B. Waller, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and Atty. Louis Shaffer, Vice Chairman of the Board, in turning the first spades of earth to get construction underway.

Present for the ceremonies were Dr. Francis J. Michelini, dean of academic affairs; Walter H. R. Mohr, director of development; Annette Evans, president of Wyoming Valley Fine Arts Fiesta and college trustee; Alfred S. Groh, director of theater; George F. Ralston, dean of men; John Whitby, director of admissions; William R. Gasbarro, chairman of the music department; John Davis, of Lacy, Atherton and Davis, architects for the building; A. J. Sordoni Jr., representing the Sordoni Construction Company; presented Dr. Farley with a miniature, silver plated shovel as a symbolic memento of the occasion.

To be built on two levels and facing the south end of the river common at the corner of South River, West South, and West River Streets (adjacent to Temple Israel), the Center will overlook the riverbank, with a view toward the Market Street Bridge and Kirby Park. The property, deeded to the College in 1947 by the Wyoming Valley Society of Arts and Sciences, is located in the area approved by the City Planning Commission for the future expansion of Wilkes College.

The initial phase of the two-part project will involve construction of the theater portion. This part of the Center will contain an upper lobby and plaza deck, an exhibition gallery for paintings and art objects, student workshop facilities, as well as costume, make-up, and storage rooms, offices and rehearsal halls. The 500-seat theater will use a flexible prosenium stage, with a movable forestage and orchestra pit. Phase two, planned for the near future, will involve the addition of classrooms, practice rooms, sculpture court for music and art, Leigh Allen of New York City served as consultant on the design of the building interior, and Donald Oenslager, also of New York, as consultant on stage design.

Under the chairmanship of the late Gilbert S. McClinton, the board of trustees initiated the concept of the Center and the growth of its cultural functions. Hopes for the Center became a reality when the College received a generous contribution from donors interested in the visual and performing arts.

When completed, the Center will stand as a cultural facility to serve not only Wilkes College, but all Wyoming Valley. (Ace Hoffman Photo)