

# AGRICULTURAL DEAN'S HOUSE



Fig. 1. 10 North Babcock c. 1974. [series 9/3 Dean's House, jf-19]

*Built as the private residence of dean of agriculture William Henry in 1896, the house served as housing for the ag dean until 1945, then for president emeritus Fred until 1980 when it became Agricultural Research Offices. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.*

William Arnon Henry came to the University of Wisconsin in 1880, when the Agricultural department existed almost entirely on paper. Within ten years he had attracted enough attention outside the state to have received lucrative job offers from Iowa State College and Stanford University and for Wisconsin to try to keep him. When UW President Thomas Chamberlin asked dean Henry what terms would induce him to stay, Henry asked for a salary of \$3500 per year and a house costing between \$4000 and \$5000 to be constructed prior to 1893. He also asked for a raise for Stephen Babcock.<sup>1</sup> The regents agreed and met his salary requests. However, nothing was done about the house until in 1895 Henry was offered a job at the New York Experiment Station and the regents suddenly remembered that they had promised him a house. The regents upped Henry's salary to \$4500 and the house appropriation to \$6,500.<sup>2</sup> They advertised for construction bids on January 21, 1896. On April 21, 1896, they accepted the bid of T. C. McCarthy at \$8,510 and added \$2000 to the appropriation.<sup>3</sup> The site had been moved (at the suggestion of Dean Henry) from the lake shore (the present site of Adams and Tripp Halls) to the edge of the experimental farm. The plans were developed and drawn by architects Conover and Porter with considerable input from Mrs. Henry (who called the house "Lake Dormer"). Funds were to come from the surplus of the Agricultural Department. Construction took place in the summer of 1896. The house has two stories and an attic over a full basement. The walls are brick, the foundation stone. It is about 285 by 160 feet in plan.

On December 3, 1896, professor Henry told the board the house was done, and that he would take over responsibility. However, after the Henry's moved in, a steady stream of receipts signed by both Dean Henry and Mrs. Sara Henry, for decoration items as well as repairs to the furnace and other expenses were all paid by the regents. Mrs. Henry died at the house in 1904. Dean Henry's son Arnon and his family received permission from the regents to live with Henry in 1905. Dean Henry's health failed in 1907, and he retired to California.

The new dean of Agriculture, H. L. Russell, lived in the house from 1907 until 1931, when he resigned to become head of WARF. His successor as dean of agriculture, and in the house, was Dean C. L. Christenson from 1931 until 1943.<sup>4</sup> The house then passed into the hands of its longest resident, Edwin Broun Fred. E. B. Fred became dean of agriculture in 1943 and held that post until 1945, when he resigned to become president of the university. The Fred's wished to stay at the house, and as Fred reports, "They [the regents] understood the situation. I explained it to them."<sup>5</sup> Fred lived at 10 North Babcock throughout his career and his emeritus years until his death in 1980. The house was then assigned its 1993 use as Agricultural Research Offices. In the late 1980s the very beautiful and public Van Allen Gardens were constructed next to the house.

The interior of the house was only slightly rearranged over the years and is still very much like the Queen Anne Gothic home that Sara and William Henry planned in 1896. In 1993 to conform to the new buildings along the street, the address was changed to 620 Babcock. Its beautiful leaded glass windows and carved wood trim alone make it worth a visit. It makes an interesting comparison to examine its original cost in today's [1993] dollars. The \$10,000 cost in 1897 was 2.2 times the Dean's salary. That amount today would be roughly \$220,000 and even considering that the lot was not included in the original cost, such a beautiful house could hardly be built on that budget.

1) W. A. Henry to T. C. Chamberlin June 10, 1891, series 1/1/3 box 10. Henry was not a ferocious bargainer, he also politely asked if he could make use of surplus produce from the experimental farm.

2) Regent's Minutes, October 8, 1895.

3) Regent's Minutes, April 21, 1896.

4) Nomination Form, National Register of Historic Places, 10/31/1984, State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Office.

5) *Oral History*, E. B. Fred p. 105

Fig. 2. What "out in the middle of nowhere" used to mean! Agricultural Dean's house, looking west c. 1898. [folder 7/7 #1 jf-23]

