

AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING



Fig. 1. Agricultural Engineering from the south east, a corner of old agronomy roof at left, c. 1930. [series 9/3 Agricultural Engineering, jf-31]

Built in 1905 to house the department of agricultural engineering, this building still houses its original discipline, and has been the site of a number of significant developments in the field. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

Arthur Peabody's first new buildings as the university's supervising architect were the old agronomy building and the agricultural engineering building. The agricultural engineering building had been on the drawing board since around 1904 when the department was instituted. But the plans of Peabody's predecessor, J. T. W. Jennings (approved June 1, 1905), had not been built. After Peabody's arrival in 1905, he developed new plans following the guidance of the university's consulting planners, Laird and Cret. The two buildings went out for bid together and local builder T. C. McCarthy was selected as contractor in May of 1905.¹

Probably because of the great amount of work Mr. McCarthy had undertaken in addition to the two agriculture buildings (e.g. the central heating plant) the construction of the agricultural buildings lagged behind schedule. Both buildings were finished in the fall of 1907. Some of this delay may have been due to the unfamiliar nature of the materials, these two buildings were the first on campus to be built of reinforced concrete. It appears that the agronomy building was probably finished first.

The agricultural engineering building is two stories over a full height basement 50 X 150 feet with the long axis running north and south at the corner of Henry Mall and Linden Drive. It has a poured concrete foundation and floors, walls of the same dark reddish-brown paving brick used on

the agronomy building, and a red tile roof. The style is Georgian Revival with a pedimented architrave and dentilated cornice and the large semicircular fanlights which make the building highly recognizable in aerial photos.²

When the building opened the ground level was entirely occupied by the power and cement laboratories. On the main floor were faculty offices lecture rooms, tool rooms, and shop and machinery labs. The entire top floor was a single room, used for machinery display and study.³ Dean Russell gave the cost of the building complete with equipment as nearly \$50,000.⁴

The department of agricultural engineering was and is intended to teach students a general knowledge of farm machinery, operation of farm implements and power plants, the planning and construction of farm buildings, and research in the fields related to these subjects. The department had already outgrown its early home in Agriculture Hall. In order to provide room for the inevitable growth in this field of study, the building was made with expansion in mind, but because the growth of the size of farm machinery was so great and because the room to the west was taken up in 1910 by the new Horticulture building, the planned expansions never took place. The department stayed in this building almost entirely until the 1960s when a new lab building was constructed on Elm Drive. The decision (based on budgetary considerations) to scale back the new lab building leaves the department split between the old and new buildings. Many historic events in the field took place here in the original building, such as E. R. Jones' soil erosion and drainage studies, F. W. Duffee's 1927 development of the first forage harvester, the Duffee dryer, used in seed corn production, and several significant developments in concrete construction. In December 1907 the American Association of Agricultural Engineers was founded in the building, an event commemorated by a brass plaque in the vestibule of the building. For a period of about two years, the building was home to the newly created department of Wildlife Management, under Aldo Leopold.⁵

In 1968, after the Agricultural Engineering laboratory building was erected the old building was remodelled to provide faculty, and departmental offices at a cost of \$183,000. The exterior of the building is largely unaltered, and unusual (if not unique) among university buildings, it is still the home of the department for which it was built. It has never been known by any name other than the original "Agricultural Engineering" still in stone over the main entrance. Though visually overpowered by the huge high-rise biochemistry addition and molecular biology buildings, it still anchors the beautiful and graceful group of buildings on the west side of Henry Mall.⁶

1) *Regents Papers*, June 1, 1905, *Regents Minutes*, May 31, 1906.

2) Nomination papers for the National Register of Historic Places, Wisconsin State Historical Society Historic Preservation Office.

3) *The Wisconsin Engineer*, May 1913, p. 387.

4) *Report of the Regents*, 1908 p. 113.

5) Nomination papers for the National Register of Historic Places, Wisconsin State Historical Society Historic Preservation Office.

6) Agency Request for State Building Commission Action October 9, 1967, series 40/1/3-2 box 1, *Regent's Minutes*, October 4, 1968 exhibit J.