

ATHLETIC ANNEX



Fig. 1. The athletic annex from Langdon Street, c. 1920. [Meure photo M243]

The athletic annex was built on the east side of the red gym in 1911. It provided space for a running track and a baseball cage, allowing the gym's fourth floor to become a gymnasium. The annex stood until the completion of the Camp Randall memorial Shell made it obsolete. In 1956 it was demolished.

In his 1910 report to the regents, George W. Ehler, director of the department of Physical Training tells the regents that the facilities for athletics are very bad. Many of the problems with the facilities were the result of the continued presence in the 'red gym' of the military department. Among other complaints Ehler says that when ball games are played on the lower campus "the danger to the passerby is very great, and even more so to the spectator." He recommends that the university build an annex on the east side of the gym for offices and lockers. As the enrollment at the university continued its upward spiral, the thinking about the proposed annex turned more and more toward providing expanded gym space instead of just offices and storage. The Athletic Council, which was responsible for funding athletic facilities, from the income of the events, borrowed \$15,000 from the regents to be paid back in \$3,000 installments.¹

The design for the Annex was done by the office of university supervising architect Arthur Peabody. The specifications for the building are dated August 11, 1911, only a month after university approval for the project. The bids (received September 27) were all rejected as too high and modifications were made to the plans. The construction contracts were awarded on August 21, 1911, the structural steel contract to the Milwaukee Bridge Company for \$4524. The construction contract for the remainder of the building went to the Copps Brothers of Madison for \$8966 on October 2. The whole building was supposed to be finished by February 1, 1912.

As detailed in the architect's monthly reports, foundations were completed October 24, the same day that steel members began to arrive from Milwaukee. The mason work began immediately, and in its materials included "a quantity of old brick which had been taken out of the main gymnasium was used".² Presumably this brick came from the opening of the east wall of the gym to make a doorway to the annex. In the November report (the last monthly report that mentions the annex) the steel work is erected and ready for paint.

Architect Peabody says: "The Athletic Annex was occupied in January 1912 ... This building located north [sic] of the Men's Gymnasium, consists of a single room for athletic practice, 82 feet wide by 190 feet long, and has total area of 17,000 square feet including entrances. The building is faced with red brick and is supported with steel trusses. The earth floor is arranged for a running track and ball field. The cost of construction was \$15,000, about 5 cents per cubic foot."³

Director Ehler has good things to say about the annex: "The erection of the Athletic Annex, 84 ft. X 235 ft. on the site of the outdoor handball courts has made possible certain changes in the main building that have more than doubled its capacity and at the same time has provided a place that has been found suitable for numerous purposes not originally contemplated." These included Prom and Alumni dinners, and Engineering Exhibits. "The Annex provides an indoor track fourteen feet wide and twelve laps to the mile, quite the equal of that possessed by any other university ... the baseball cage is fifty eight feet by one hundred and eight in length and twenty feet under the trusses". The changes in the red gym mentioned by Ehler were: "With the removal of baseball, track and rowing from the fourth floor of the main building, that floor has been converted into the gymnasium 65 ft. X 165 ft."⁴

It is clear from the university records of the time is that the burgeoning interest in collegiate sports was requiring a drastic rethinking of the kind of physical education facilities needed for the university. Talks about the development of athletic facilities at Camp Randall were constantly bogged down in questions of size, appropriateness, and finance. In this context, the gym annex was clearly a stopgap measure which bought the university some time in the physical education debates. The university would later claim that this building was the first university field house (indoor facilities for outdoor sports) in the country.⁵ The annex seems to have performed this function very well. Shortly after completion, complaints about the quality of the lighting in the annex (an item which had suffered in the cost reduction efforts in the first design) led to the installation of "proper and sufficient skylights".⁶ Other than this no complaints about the annex are heard.

The Annex served the athletic department in its role until the completion of the Camp Randall Memorial Shell in 1956, when the annex space became needed for the erection of the Wisconsin Center building. In the summer of 1956, the gym annex (and the old YMCA building) were razed by the Madison Moving and Wrecking Company for \$4000.

As far as its looks go [see Fig. 1] Mr. Peabody says in his memoir: "...my burden was to design something sufficiently mediocre to harmonize with the existing building. In this I believe I succeeded, the Annex looking perhaps more mediocre than the Armory itself. The building is so inconspicuous that nobody knows it is in existence."⁷

1) *Regent's Minutes*, July 11, 1911

2) Report of the Supervising Architect for the month of October, 1911 Arthur Peabody, papers of the executive committee, October, 1911.

3) *Regent's Report*, 1913-1914, p. 339.

4) *Regent's Report*, 1911-1912, p 233.

5) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, March, 1933, p. 169.

6) *Regent's Minutes*, January 17, 1912

7) Peabody, Arthur, *A Short Resume of University Buildings*, p. 16. University Archives Biographical files, Peabody file.