

# BABCOCK HALL



Fig. 1. Babcock Hall after the 1990 addition. [Del Brown photo, AP-81]

*Babcock Hall was built in 1951 to replace the outmoded Hiram Smith Hall as the home of the dairy department. It contains instructional space and an entire working dairy plant. Babcock Hall was substantially enlarged in 1990.*

As dairy Professor Howard C. Jackson was fond of pointing out in the 1940s, there was a time when the University of Wisconsin had the finest dairy building in the world. But that time was 1893, when Hiram Smith Hall was built. By 1945, Smith Hall was completely inadequate to its task. The first difficulty was that it was too small. In a state that led the world in production of Swiss cheese, the state university had no room for a Swiss cheese facility. Second and worse, Smith Hall was nearly impossible to keep clean, its wood floors, plaster walls and wood furnishings simply could not be sterilized to the standards of a modern dairy operation. The depression and cessation of construction in the 1930s meant that the dairy department just did the best they could with the embarrassingly antiquated facilities they had. However the department, especially Professor Jackson kept planning for the day when a new structure could be built. This vision and persistence was rewarded in 1945, when the state legislature, who had been kept continually aware of the disservice to the state's dairy farmers, appropriated \$8 million for postwar University construction. Significantly the only restriction the legislature put on the appropriation was that \$600,000 was for a dairy building. Professor Jackson who appears to have been principally responsible for the building planning, selected Milwaukee architects Grassold and Johnson to develop plans. By January 1948, their plans for the dairy building had been approved.<sup>1</sup>

At that time the project was still constrained by the \$600,000 appropriation. In August of 1948, the state architect told the University's Albert Gallistel that he had asked Grassold and Johnson about the estimated cost, and received the reply of \$2.1 million, "this cost information is distressing". The grim realities of the postwar building business were sinking in. The \$600,000 that had seemed so generous only four years earlier seemed like a sarcasm now. During 1949, the dairy department discussed with the architects, the possibility of erecting only a part of the building. The 'T' shaped

Fig. 2. Winter 1950, Babcock Hall under construction, Stock Pavilion and horse barn in background. Series 9/3, Babcock, ns 556]



design with its relatively discrete functions between classroom (stem) and manufacturing (crossbar) sections made this a reasonable approach. The \$600,000 was not even enough to build half the planned structure. They also revised the plans with an eye to reducing cost.<sup>2</sup>

Bids received by the regents in February 1949 showed that, even after cost reductions, the "distressing" estimates had been surprisingly accurate, the building would cost about \$2.4 million. Labor costs, which were being negotiated by the American Federation of Labor were in such flux that the regents asked bidders to extend the bids' validity until May 1, 1949 instead of March 8. The need for a new dairy building was so acute that on April 18, 1949, governor Oscar Rennebohm ( who was generally opposed to building during times when prices were so high) agreed to release \$2.4 million from the 1945 postwar building fund for the Dairy Building. The regents awarded contracts a week later, the general construction contract went to J. H. Findorff & Son for \$1.2 million. Total construction contracts (exclusive of equipment) let were for \$1.897 million. The specialized equipment for the building cost another \$200,000.<sup>3</sup>

Groundbreaking took place in mid May 1949, and construction proceeded throughout the rest of 1949, with the cornerstone ceremony in the fall. It had already been decided, by the faculty of the College of Agriculture, to name the building after the inventor of the first reliable butterfat content milk test, Stephen Moulton Babcock (1843-1931). The building went into use in the fall of 1951, when the dairy department moved out of Hiram Smith Hall to the new Babcock Hall. The legislature toured the new building on March 15, 1951.<sup>4</sup>

The official dedication ceremony was held February 7, 1952. The ceremony included hymns by the University choir, the presentation of the building by Governor Walter J. Kohler. More than 3000 people visited the building during the ensuing open house. After many years of neglect, the University again had the finest dairy building in the world. It must also be mentioned that the Agricultural Journalism, the new occupants of Smith Hall, got a wonderful facility also since their requirement for sterile conditions were less stringent.

The building was two stories over a basement of steel reinforced concrete with a flat roof, sheathed in red brick. Because of the terrain, the basement was not exactly below grade, and was referred to as the ground floor. The style was the new (in 1950) International style, the glass block windows, aluminum window and door frames, and general streamlined look, point to the new architecture that would replace the old predominantly Renaissance revival style used on campus. In the ground floor were many large and well equipped labs and storage for the industrial wing. The first



Fig. 3. Air view of Babcock Hall as completed in 1952.  
[Series 8/5, jf-65]

floor of the stem of the 'T' contained offices and class rooms, including a large lecture hall with a capacity of 275. The second floor was used for more lab space especially for advanced and research labs. The poured concrete floors throughout were covered with ceramic tile as were the walls to a height of five feet. This use of tile was the direct result of the old difficulty of sterilizing the old dairy building.<sup>5</sup>

The industrial portion of Babcock, in the top of the 'T' carries the tiling feature to an extreme, with tile carried clear to the two story ceilings. This industrial section was intended to be a complete commercial dairy operation to give practical instruction in dairy industry manufacturing and marketing. An aspect of this instruction, deeply imbedded in the affections of Madisonians and UW graduates everywhere is the production of tremendously high quality ice cream. This famous Babcock ice cream is sold in serving or bulk quantity at a small store section in the first floor of the west section. An entertaining feature of Babcock is the public observation deck on the second floor of the industrial wing. Visitors can watch the actual work of the dairy in operation, hours are typically 6 AM to noon.

In the late 1980s the food science facilities in Babcock Hall became inadequate and an addition for more lab space was planned. The regents approved the \$6 million dollar project in October 1988. The job was begun in March 1990, and completed in October 1992. This addition filled in the open area of the 'T' along Linden Drive, and brought Babcock Hall to its 1994 configuration.<sup>6</sup>

1) *Regents Minutes*, December 11, 1949; Dedication speech by John Jones, February 7, 1952, archives Babcock Hall subject file. *Wisconsin Country Magazine*, March 1950.

2) Kirchhoff to Gallistel, August 30, 1948, series 24/1/1 box 255; This (designing buildings to be built in sections) was a trick that was contemplated for many of the high priority buildings in the 1950s including the engineering building, the dairy building, and the library. It was a legacy of the state ignoring the estimates of the University of a \$12 million need in 1945. The buildings were sorely needed, but the money was insufficient. *Wisconsin Country Magazine*, March 1950.

3) Peterson to Halbert, April 23, 1949. series 24/1/1 box 255.

4) Froker to Fred, December 23, 1948. series 24/1/1 box 255.

5) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, November 1951; Acceptance speech, by John Jones, February 7, 1952, and dedication pamphlet, archives Babcock Hall subject file;

6) *Regent's Minutes*, March 6, 1987, October 7, 1988; State Budget Letters, dated March 1990 and October 1992.