

# BIOTECHNOLOGY



Fig. 1. Biotechnology, March 1995, just before opening. The camera is looking northeast from Engineering Mall, across University Avenue. [Author Photo, AP-62]

*Built in 1993, the \$30 million Genetics/ Biotechnology Building extended, updated and consolidated the University's decades old facilities for research into the biological sciences.*

As early as 1983, the space problems for the department of Genetics was becoming crucial. In a building proposal in that year it was made clear that the twenty year old Genetics laboratory building was severely undersized and outmoded. Much of this problem was due to the changing nature of genetic research. In 1963 when the building was new, a genetics research lab could consist of nothing but a bench for a microscope, ears of corn and a mink pelt. By the 1980s, room was needed for ultracentrifuges, chromatography columns, and other bulky expensive and sometimes noisy equipment. In addition the faculty of the genetics department had grown much larger as new discoveries and techniques caused an influx of students and researchers into the field. This crowding had led to the extreme subdivision of the lab space in the building, and to the fragmenting of the Genetics faculty as professors were housed in other buildings around the campus. Equally bad the building contained very little classroom space, since it had been design mainly as a laboratory building. All these factors pointed to the serious need for a new facility. As usual with major building projects there were two major issues: where to put the new building and how to pay for it.<sup>1</sup>

In the next several years, a number of proposals were generated to alleviate the crowding in the genetics building. One was to move the state lab of hygiene from Henry Mall to the new Clinical Science Center, and use the Stovall labs building as an annex to Genetics. Although nothing came of this idea, the concept of an annex to the existing building was to be acted on in a later plan. The most significant step taken during this period was the establishment in November 1984 of the Biotechnology Center. The center coordinates research and development among more than 100 research faculty across the campus. Because of the lack of space in the Genetics building, the Biotechnology Center was assigned 3000 square feet in the Enzyme Institute. Within a year the Center had attracted more than a million dollars in funding. This quick and substantial success in attracting money would prove to be part of the way out of the funding problems for the Genetics laboratory in general.<sup>2</sup>

A 1985 project proposal by a building committee under chairman Millard Susman first proposes a major building intended to alleviate the space problems of all the various disciplines under the heading of Genetics. The disciplines proposed as tenants of the new building included Genetics, medical Genetics, Clinical Genetics (then housed mainly in the Waisman Center), Biotechnology, and a large amount of shared space. The purposes of such an approach was dictated by the high level of interaction among these disciplines, the high growth rate in some of them, and the equipment and facilities needs shared by them. This proposal did not specifically address siting or funding of the building, but recommended that it be near the existing Genetics building to provide proximity to the Medical School, and the departments of the College of Agriculture, with which the Genetics lab traditionally interacted. By 1986 Susman's committee was recommending that the building be erected in three phases on the site of parking lot twenty, between the McArdle Lab building and University Avenue. It was envisioned that funding would be entirely from the state and might take six years to complete.<sup>3</sup>

Early in 1988, when it became clear that state funding for such a large project would be very difficult to get, the University decided to apply for federal funds. Chancellor Donna Shalala began to lobby Senator Robert Kasten for his help in securing federal financing for the Biotechnology and Genetics building. She cited the strong support of governor Thompson and the long and strong history of Genetics research at the University. Kasten became committed to the project and in September 1988 the Congress appropriated \$50,000 for a feasibility study for the new building. This money was in addition to a March 1988 state appropriation of \$490,000 for planning. A building proposal from July 1988 recommended that the new building be adjacent to and connected to the existing Genetics building. It was proposed that the building hold a large number of large labs, four lecture halls, common space and shared equipment areas. Although funding is not discussed, the proposal states that "The potential for grant support for the Biotechnology Center is tremendous".<sup>4</sup>

During 1989 the funding issue was generally developed. An early estimate of cost was \$26.3 million. The federal feasibility study suggested that federal funds provide half of the cost. In March 1989, the regents voted to ask the Vilas estate trustees to create a fund for the project to accumulate \$10 million from the Vilas income over five years. This request was granted. Chancellor Shalala informed governor Tommy Thompson that the project would require \$3.2 million in state funding. Thompson was a strong backer of the project and lent it his support, promising additional state money once the federal funding was resolved. In August 1989 the state selected architects Hammel, Green and Abrahamson for the project. During late 1989 the siting of the building received more attention, when the demolition of the old Wisconsin High School was proposed. The state did a historic building evaluation and concluded that the building was disposable. In January 1990 a schedule was developed for the vacating of the building. By the time of the architects study of April 1990, the site on Henry Mall was resolved.<sup>5</sup>

In late 1990 Congress appropriated \$3 million for the project. The University decided to

partially fund the building with the WISTAR program. WISTAR is state bonding to provide matching funds for federal grants. The regents approved WISTAR funding for the Biotechnology Center in February 1991. In October 1991 Congress appropriated \$7.6 million for the project.<sup>6</sup>

The regents approved the final plans in February 1992. Contracts were let on May 28, 1993 to J. H. Findorff for \$11.3 million, and ground-breaking took place on June 17, 1993. In December 1992 the regents approved the construction of a \$3 million parking ramp on lot twenty behind the new building; ramp construction was begun in the fall of 1994. The Biotechnology Center was opened in the fall of 1995. The parking ramp on lot 20 was completed in the winter of 1995-1996.<sup>7</sup>

The building is five stories, 176 by 142 feet. The front of the building is only four stories to match the scale of other Henry Mall buildings. The four story section has a red tile roof, and is connected to the genetics building on the north. The building is faced with brick and trimmed with precast concrete and stainless steel.

- 1) The Laboratory of Genetics, October 1983, Susman to Campus Planning Committee, February 8, 1984, Walsh to Shain, June 15, 1984, series 4/31/9-3 box 3.
- 2) Laboratory of Genetics, A Major Project, November 1985, series 4/31/9-3 box 3.
- 3) Laboratory of Genetics, A Major Project, November 1985, Memorandum, Burgess and Susman to Campus Planning Committee, February 19, 1986, series 4/31/9-3 box 3.
- 4) Walsh to Shalala, March 3, 1988, Shalala to Kasten, May 9, 1988, series 4/31/9-3 box 3; *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 28, 1988.
- 5) *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 9, 1989, March 15, 1989, March 30, 1989; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 18, 1989, March 14, 1989; *Regent's Minutes*, February 10, 1989, March 10, 1989; Wisconsin Alumni Magazine, May/June 1989 p. 12; Walsh to Macari, October 1989, Denniston to Walsh, November 2, 1989, Shalala to Thompson, February 14, 1990, series 4/31/9-3 box 3; *Capital Times*, February 13, 1990; *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 16, 1990; *Daily Cardinal*, February 14, 1990; Site Density Study for Laboratories, Hammel Green and Abrahamson, April 25, 1990, series 4/31/9-3 box 3.
- 6) *Daily Cardinal*, October 23, 1990; *Badger Herald*, July 19, 1990; UW Clipsheet, October 7, 1991, UW News Release, June 7, 1991, series 4/31/9-3 box 3; Budget January 17, 1990, series 4/31/9-3 box 3. Agency Request for State Building Commission Action, September 1991, series 4/31/9-3 box 3; *Regent's Minutes*, February 8, 1991.
- 7) *Regent's Minutes*, February 7, 1992, December 11, 1992. Brandherm to Brown, May 28, 1993, State Department of Administration, office of Patricia Hillestadt; UW News Release, June 15, 1993, June 16, 1993, October 25, 1995; *Daily Cardinal*, October 26, 1995.