

BOCK LABS



Fig. 1. Bock Labs from Linden Drive c. 1968. Forty feet from Agricultural Engineering on the east, and 55 feet from Moore Hall on the west, Bock Labs is connected by tunnel to the Biochemistry building to the south. Bock Labs has two levels below ground and seven stories above ground. [Series 9/3, Biophysics - Molecular Biology, jf-84]

Bock Labs was built as an interdisciplinary research lab in 1965. It houses research labs in molecular biology and molecular virology, and is named for longtime dean of the graduate school Robert Bock.

In an application to the National Science Foundation (NSF) dated September 1, 1961 the University in the persons of Drs. H. O. Halverson of Bacteriology and Robert M. Bock of Biochemistry requests \$1.97 million to construct a Laboratory of Molecular Biology. The proposed lab was to be an interdisciplinary research facility housing 90 investigators, from Bacteriology, Biochemistry, Genetics, Medical Genetics, Oncology, Physiological Chemistry and Zoology. The site was to be on Linden Drive between Moore Hall and Agricultural Engineering. This site was desirable because of its proximity to the departments whose faculty would be using the new lab. The proposal emphasizes

the large number and scattered nature of research programs in molecular biology, and the need for a centralized center to house such research. The lab would be administered by the graduate school, and function not only as a center of research but as a center of interdisciplinary graduate and postgraduate training. The structure in the proposal is a 'T' shaped building with the stem connected to the north end of the biochemistry building, and the crossbar along Linden Drive. It was to be two basement levels and three floors above ground. This building was divided into two discrete sections, Molecular Biology and Biophysics. The proposal notes that application for funding the Biophysics section has been made to the NIH.¹

Although the structure proposed in this application was not built, many of the ideas outlined in it survived into the next round of planning. The major change in thinking after this period was the realization that Molecular Biology and Biophysics shared many requirements, and that much time, money and real estate could be saved by combining the two centers into one building. As planning along these lines proceeded, with the help and guidance of the architects Durrant and Bergquist, during 1962 and 1963, the concept of a low-rise building was abandoned to the realities of space requirements and the shortage of real estate on the central campus gradually gave way to a high-rise plan.

By late 1962, the NSF was informed that the combined laboratories would cost an estimated \$2.2 million. The NIH had granted \$500,000 for the project, and the University asked the NSF for 790,000 with the understanding that WARF would also be asked for funds. These requests were successful. In March 1963, the regents accepted \$600,000 from the NSF for the Laboratory of Molecular Biology. In May 1963 the regents accepted \$1.1 million from WARF to construct and equip the Molecular Biology and Biophysics labs. Most other likely sources of funding were being absorbed by the Biotron project, then under development. In March of 1963 the regents approved the area bounded by Moore Hall, Agricultural Engineering, Biochemistry, and Linden Drive as the site for Molecular Biology. The only use of the site at that time was as a parking lot.²

State approval for the project was sought beginning in May 1963 and after various delays was gained on August 17, 1964. The building committee (Drs. Bock, Beeman, Halverson and D. C. Buchholz) headed by Dr. Robert Manley Bock, spent 1964 refining the plans. Preliminary plans were approved by the regents in August 1965, Final plans were approved on February 5, 1965.³

On March 9, 1965 bids for the building were opened. They were \$200,000 over the budget. For months Bock searched for additional funds to add to the project, petitioning the college of Agriculture, asking the federal agencies to increase their grants. But even after all possible cutbacks, there were not enough funds. One of Dr. Bock's fears was that building costs were rising so fast that further delays would lead to more erosion of his budget. Eventually with a few cost reductions, small grants from various sources, and a large appropriation from the state, enough funding was found to let building contracts. Contracts were let by the regents on May 13, 1965 with the general contract going to Vogel Brothers of Madison for \$1.08 million. Total contract costs were \$2.37 million (WARF \$1.1 million, NIH \$500,000, NSF \$600,000, state funds \$141,000, and departmental and gift funds \$30,000). Groundbreaking took place on June 1, 1965. By March 3, 1966 the building was up to the penthouse level. The building was first occupied by researchers in November 1966. In 1987 the Biophysics laboratory changed its name to the Institute for Molecular Virology. In May 1992, after the 1991 accidental death of Robert Bock, one of the original planners and dean of the graduate school for 22 years, the building was renamed the Robert M. Bock Laboratories.⁴

The building is 91 by 91 feet, of steel and reinforced concrete with two levels below ground, and seven stories above ground with an entry plaza at ground level. The building is sheathed in cut stone, precast concrete and face brick. Floors two through five are occupied by Molecular Biology, and floors five through eight house Molecular Virology. The building is 100 per cent research, there are no classrooms.

After serving its intended purpose as a interdisciplinary research center for almost thirty years, the Robert M. Bock Laboratory building is scheduled for a major remodelling project. The \$5.8 million project will be funded by WISTAR, and will completely renovate and upgrade the heating ventilation and air-conditioning systems, scheduled to be finished by August 1997. This project will not close the labs, the 132 workers in the building will relocate as their floors are reconstructed.⁶

- 1) Application to The National Science Foundation, September 1, 1961, Developments in Molecular Biology and Biophysics, undated, series 24/9/2 box 13;
- 2) *Regent's Minutes*, March 8, 1963, May 1963, Exhibit A;
- 3) *Regent's Minutes*, August 14, 1964, October 16, 1964; Agency Request for Action, April 1965, series 4/0/3 box 190; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, October 1964.
- 4) Bock to Fleming, March 15, 1965, series 40/1/7-1 box 53; *Regent's Minutes*, June 11, 1965; *Daily Cardinal*, March 3, 1966; *Wisconsin Week*, September 9, 1992; Program for Bock Lab renaming, September 10, 1992, offices of Bock Labs, *Regent's Minutes*, May 8, 1992.