

# COMMERCE



Fig. 1. The Commerce building, from the corner of Charter and Observatory Drive, 1959. The first of the "modern" buildings on the upper campus, the strong horizontal lines, are broken by the vertical stone panels, and still do not quite abandon the illusion that the outer walls are load bearing. [Series 9/1, Commerce, jf-70]

*Erected in 1954, Commerce was the first modern design to be built on Bascom Hill, and provided a unified home for the school of commerce for the first time since 1918. Commerce has now moved to Grainger hall, and the old commerce building renamed Mark Ingraham Hall. It will be used by the social sciences after a remodelling to be finished in 1996.*

The origins of the Commerce department at the University date back to 1857 when in response to requests that the University provide for "the preparation of young men for trade in its several branches", the regents annexed Bacon's Commercial College of Madison. In 1900 under president C. K. Adams, commerce courses became the School of Commerce. Still later under Charles Van Hise, the semiautonomous school of Commerce became attached to the College of Letters and Science. Finally in 1944, at the urging of state business leaders, the regents split commerce from L&S, and created the school of commerce. In the course of these wanderings through the administrative world, Commerce had steadily grown in enrollment. In 1918 when Sterling Hall opened, commerce moved into the fourth floor. They would stay there until 1956. By 1950 Commerce had outgrown their Sterling Hall quarters so badly that courses were being taught in 29 separate buildings, including several WW II temporary buildings, scattered around the campus. Clearly a new home for the school of commerce was badly needed. In addition to the obvious need, the school had powerful allies. The legislature was sympathetic to the requests of state business interests for a more modern training facility, and the Dean of the school of commerce, Fayette Elwell, was a powerful force and persuasive advocate within the University.<sup>1</sup>

In 1952 the state building commission allotted \$1.75 million for a building for the school of commerce. The availability of the money found the University ready. The site for the new building,

immediately west of Bascom Hall, and east of Charter Street, had been selected in 1950, at the peak of enrollment in Commerce. The new building was regarded as the first unit of a Social Studies building, and after a building boom in laboratory buildings was significant as the first construction of a purely classroom building since the 1930s. Plans for the building, by Law, Law, Potter and Nystrom of Madison, were approved by the regents in February 1954. In April of 1954, the awarding of contracts and fees for a total of \$1.57 million were approved. The general contractor was J. H. Findorff and Son of Madison, for \$900,842. The unexpected surplus of \$156,249 from the building allotment was applied to the remodeling of the Chemistry building for the use of Pharmacy.<sup>2</sup>

Ground was broken for the new "ultramodern" building on May 26, 1954, with speeches by president Fred, governor Walter Kohler, and regent Matt Werner, who said of dean Elwell "he has done more than anyone to make this building a reality." The schedule for construction called for the building to be ready for use in the second semester of 1955. This was an aggressive schedule for a modern building on a steeply sloping site. The excavation was completed and mason work begun in April of 1955, but this fast start was negated by a shortage of bricklayers and constant material shortages. The labor problems were caused in large part by the huge amount of construction taking place on the University campus, Findorff finally pulled masons off the less crucial biochemistry addition job in order to complete commerce in time. In September 1955, the University decided to put a protective coating on the Bedford stone wall on the south side of the building, to discourage "student art work". Cement and glass shortages caused further delays, but by February 1, 1955 classes were being held in the new building.<sup>3</sup>

The formal dedication of the Commerce building was held May 4, 1956. Dean Elwell was now emeritus, and had been replaced by dean Erwin Gaumnitz; both spoke at the dedication, as did president Fred. The new building was steel and concrete, with brick sheathing and a small amount of stone trim. It was the first modern style building to be erected on the central campus, and it set a precedent for the location of new buildings for the Social Sciences. It was five levels, a subbasement, a basement and three upper floors. Because of the steeply sloping site, the basement level is almost completely above ground, and is fully finished space. The building is roughly 'U' shaped opening to the west, with the 70 foot by 170 foot, basement and two story north arm containing classrooms, reading rooms, storage, and offices. This arm looks out over Observatory Drive and the Carillon tower. The 70 foot by 178 foot east wing is a basement and three stories and contains more classrooms, offices, and on the second floor large Accounting and Statistic laboratories. The south wing of the building is only the basement and subbasement levels in height and provide two large lecture halls. These lecture halls are the first known classrooms on campus to explicitly provide writing desks for the lefthanded.<sup>4</sup>

Reflecting the changing emphasis of the discipline, the name of the building was changed in 1966 to the School of Business. Since enrollment continued to rise throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the business school was moved in 1993 to newer and elaborately developed quarters in the new Grainger Hall. The old commerce building is providing temporary space during the asbestos abatement work in the Social Science building across the street, and will eventually be remodelled for use by the Social Sciences. It has been renamed Mark Ingraham Hall.<sup>5</sup>

1) Curti and Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin*, v.1. p. 77; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, April 1954, p. 13; *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 29, 1956.

2) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, April 1954, p. 13; *Regent's Minutes*, April 10, 1954, April 15, 1950;

3) *Daily Cardinal*, May 21, 1954, May 27, 1954.

4) *Daily Cardinal*, May 11, 1956; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, June 1956, p. 16; Archives subject file, "commerce building". *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 15, 1944; *Capital Times*, December 30, 1956.

5) *Regent's Minutes*, March 5, 1993.