

FIRST DAIRY BUILDING



Fig. 1. First Dairy Building at original location c. 1890. [series 9/3 First Dairy Building, x25-337]



Fig. 2. First Dairy Building after 1909 move to location east of Stock Pavilion. [series 9/3 First Dairy Building, x25-6331]

Erected in 1890 by Stephen Babcock for \$1000, this wood frame building served as the University's dairy building until Hiram Smith Hall opened in January 1892. It was later moved and used for storage until its demolition in 1949.

In 1889 the University of Wisconsin instituted a dairy short course, including instruction in the manufacture of butter and cheese, partly as a response to an English contention that there was nowhere in the United States which offered systematic instruction in dairy skills. This challenge as well as the pressure of Wisconsin farmer (and University regent) Hiram Smith, resulted in the short course.¹ Rudimentary dairy farming instruction on a casual basis had been carried on in a one room milk house on the farm campus. In connection with the new short course, Hiram Smith persuaded the regents to spend \$1000 for a better building to encourage dairy students.

Professor Stephen Babcock later explained how that money was used: "Of course we knew that if we let that out on a contract that we wouldn't get much of a building: and so we just hired a carpenter, used a few of the farm laborers, and built it ourselves."² The material was scrounged from other old farm buildings by Babcock and farm superintendent Leslie Adams. The result of that effort was the building seen in Fig 1. The next regents report says: " Important additions have been made to the farm buildings, notably the construction of a dairy house for the accommodation of the new dairy school."³ The first class in 1890 attracted only two students.⁴

But in June of 1890 Dr. Babcock developed the world famous butterfat content test for milk, thereby changing the future of dairying around the world, and at the University of Wisconsin.⁵ As word of the simple reliable test spread around the state so did enthusiasm for the dairy short course. By January of 1891 enrollment at the \$1000 do-it-yourself building had risen from two to seventy five. Dean of Agriculture William Henry, an accomplished lobbyist for the University, took to inviting legislators to see the dairy class in action, then inform them that due to crowding they had to stand up

Fig. 3. August 1949, the first dairy building is demolished to make way for Babcock Hall, named for the man who built this building. [9/3 First Dairy School folder jf-13]



to attend the proceedings.⁶

Henry's lobbying paid off in 1891 when the state appropriated \$40,000 for a permanent dairy building. But in the two academic years before that building could be planned and constructed, the dairy course was held in this frame building. The location is given as behind Dean Henry's house.⁷ Since Dean Henry first lived in the farm house by the horse barn, prior to the construction of his house at 10 North Babcock, the first dairy building evidently stood near the site of the horse barn.

In 1909 the agriculture department moved the old dairy building to a new site just east of the stock pavilion. The building was being used in the 1920s by the Dairy Records Office. Fig. 2 shows the building after the move to the stock pavilion location. The oval plaque on the front of the building reads: "The first Dairy School in America was held in this building during the Winter of 1890-91 as an educational outgrowth of the invention of the Babcock Milk Test."⁸

The old dairy building stood for about 60 years (remarkable for a cheap, heavily used and amateur built woodframe building). Finally in August of 1949 near the beginning of the massive postwar building boom it was demolished (see Fig. 3) to make way for Babcock Hall.⁹ Hiram Smith Hall is often cited as the first Dairy School building in the country, or the world, but in fact was not even the first on the UW campus. That honor belongs to the now departed first dairy building pictured here.

1) Curti and Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin A History*, vol. 2 p. 396.

2) *Wisconsin Country Magazine*, November 1919, p. 47.

3) *Regents Report*, 1889-1990 p. 46.

4) Glover, W. H., *Farm & College*, p. 137.

5) Glover, W. H., *Farm & College*, p. 119. Of this test governor William Dempster Hoard said "the Babcock test to the farmer was a more potent factor for righteousness than the bible, because it showed up the culprit quicker."

6) *Wisconsin Country Magazine*, November 1919 p. 47.

7) *Wisconsin Country Magazine*, November 1919 p. 47.

8) This inscription incorrectly implies that the building was erected after the Babcock test was developed. The Report of the Farm Committee of June 24, 1890 series 1/1/3 box 10, indicates that the building was already complete.

9) *Daily Cardinal*, August 5, 1949 p. 5, *Regent's Minutes*, July 14, 1949.