

GENETICS



Fig. 1. Genetics building c. 1965. 72 by 128 feet, five stories of precast concrete curtain wall panels, face brick and a gross size of 53,000 square feet. The 1995 biotechnology center connected at the right of this picture. [series 9/3, Genetics, jf-78]

Built in 1961 to provide unified space for the division of genetics, this building remained the home of both medical genetics and agricultural genetics, until 1994 when the new biotechnology building, with its attachment to the genetics building opened.

Two major factors caused the construction of the genetics building on Henry Mall. The first was the fire in the old genetics research barn in 1955, the second was the founding of the medical genetics department in 1957.

The genetics barn fire demonstrated that the genetics department was extremely crowded, and had done great work in poor conditions for a long time. The paper written by Agricultural dean Rudolph Froker to justify the replacement of the barn, was used with only slight updating to explain the need for the construction of the new genetics office and research building. The response to the barn fire had also demonstrated that the University and the state were ready to recognize the increasing importance of genetics to the University.

Until 1957, all genetics at the University was agricultural genetics and the department was under the jurisdiction of the School of Agriculture. Then in 1957, the department of medical genetics was organized. Its early staff included Joshua Lederberg, James Crow, and Dr. Demars. While the medical group maintained an independently administered and staffed department, it continued to meet regularly with the staff of agricultural genetics, and indeed formed an informal and administratively nonexistent "Division of Genetics".¹

In November 1958, professor Irwin, chairman of the genetics department, sent to dean Froker a document entitled "Plans for sustaining and developing genetics at the University of Wisconsin.", that laid out the shape of the program to come. It pointed out the inadequacies of the physical facilities, which had been occupied essentially unchanged since 1932, and urged that a new building be erected that would house both the department of Genetics and medical genetics, in both teaching and research. Dean Froker put his support behind this project, and in September 1959, the regents decided to locate the genetics building on Henry Mall, between the Hygiene Laboratory and the Wisconsin High School. At this time neither firm plans nor funding had been arranged for the building. That month dean Froker applied to the National Institute of Health (NIH) for a grant of \$850,000, representing half the cost of erecting a building of 60,000 square feet to house the departments of Genetics and Medical Genetics. Froker and Irwin proposed that this \$1.7 million facility be funded half by the NIH grant and half by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF).²

Most of 1960 was taken up by the arrangements for funding the project. By May 1960 WARF had authorized \$850,000 of which \$35,000 was to be spent on planning the building. With this money the building committee got an estimate from architect Mark Purcell of Siberz and Purcell, who had been assigned to the project in August 1960, of \$1.68 million for the building. In September 1960, in response to a reduced award from the NIH, the Campbell Soup Company offered to contribute to the building fund, in the amount of \$189,000. This money was to be used primarily for equipment and specially equipped laboratories. By the end of 1960, the \$1.7 million in funding was ready: the NIH grant of \$638,225, WARF grant of \$850,000, and gifts of \$189,000. The regents had approved the preliminary plans. The approval of final plans came in May 1961.³

Contracts were awarded for construction of the genetics building on June 20, 1961 with J. H. Findorff & Son getting the general contract for \$609,170. Total contracts awarded were \$1.79 million. Construction began in June 1961. Construction was delayed for a considerable period in 1962 by a strike of the Teamsters Union over wages and working conditions. The building was ready for occupancy in the fall of 1963, when the bulk of the genetics staff moved across Henry Mall from the old genetics building. The finished building (see Fig. 1) was 72 by 128 feet, five stories of precast concrete curtain wall panels, face brick, matching the Hygiene Lab next door; gross size was 53,000 square feet. Each floor contained five principal laboratories. In later times the inadequate nature (some were without gas supply or running water) of these labs would require constant remodelling and updating.⁴

On January 6, 1965, the faculty of genetics and medical genetics, voted to seek administrative approval for uniting the two departments into the "Institute of Genetics". With the approval of the chancellor and the regents, the two departments became one as of July 1, 1965. The genetics department has remained united in the new building since that time. In 1994 during the construction of the new biotechnology building that replaced the Wisconsin High School, the genetics building was attached to the new building on its south side.

1) R. A. Brink, Early History of Genetics at the University of Wisconsin, p. 16-17, manuscript at Memorial Library Archives, in genetics departmental file 9/17.

2) M. R. Irwin, *Plans for sustaining and developing genetics at the University of Wisconsin*, November 1958; Regent's Minutes, September 12, 1959, series 4/0/3 box 182.

3) *Regent's Minutes*, November 4, 1960, December 9, 1960, April 7, 1961, May 12, 1961; *Daily Cardinal*, October 7, 1960; Peterson to Irwin, July 26, 1960, Muns to Peterson August 17, 1960, Peterson to governor Nelson, September 20, 1960, series 24/9/2 box 12.

4) *Regent's Minutes*, July 20, 1961; Findorff to Regents, April 17, 1962, series 24/9/2 box 13; *Daily Cardinal*, May 13, 1961. Plans in physical plant plans room.