HIRAM SMITH HALL

Fig. 1. Smith Hall in 1893. [9/3 Hiram Smith Hall folder jf-14]

Hiram Smith Hall was built in a record seven months in the winter of 1890-91, with a state appropriation of $32,000. It was the first permanent diary instruction building in the western hemisphere. Added to in 1901 and 1909, it served as the University dairy building until 1951 when Babcock Hall opened. It has since been used mainly as the home of Agricultural Journalism. Hiram Smith Hall was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.

The building of Hiram Smith Hall was a triumph for the University in several respects. First it was the first building project funded by the state legislature since the debacle of Science Hall in 1888 (see appendix A). The legislature was persuaded partly by the lobbying skills of Dean William Henry, and partly by the arguments of state farmer, legislator and regent Hiram Smith. Second the building was planned and built with remarkable dispatch, staying within severely constrained budgets and time schedules. Thirdly it marked the beginning of a large and successful expansion of the physical plant of the school of agriculture under Dean Henry, which lasted fifteen years.

In June of 1890 Stephen Babcock developed in his lab at Agriculture Hall [South Hall], a simple and foolproof test for the butterfat content of milk. Throughout the 1890 word of the test spread through Wisconsin. By the time the dairy short course opened in January of 1891, enrollment had risen from two (in January of 1890) to seventy-five. The state's dairymen were convinced that the scientific education available at the university was of value to them. The crowding in the old dairy

Fig. 2. Smith Hall on right, Agricultural Heating Plant on left, c. 1900. [series 9/3 Hiram Smith folder, x25-341]

building was severe and obvious to the legislators, especially after Dean Henry brought them to visit the class and made them stand for lack of room. With Henry and congressman Hiram Smith pushing the whole way the state legislature of 1891 enacted a one-tenth mill tax to go to the university's building fund, specifically for a dairy building, a school of law and a gymnasium and armory.[1]

Dean Henry and regent True (the chairman of the farm committee) had already been to visit other colleges to gather ideas for a new building in October of 1890.[2] When they returned they heard the news of the mill tax appropriation which would fund the new building, although the money would not be available until February of 1892. At the regents meetings in April and June of 1891[3], Henry and the architect George B. Ferry[4] presented plans for the dairy building, whose cost had been fixed by the regents at their April 9 meeting at "not to exceed $25,000".

In August 1891 the building committee received seven bids ranging from $23,600 to $29,500. The regents rejected all bids and entered into direct negotiations with one of the bidders T. C. McCarthy. The committee reported on September 29, 1891, that they had agreed with McCarthy for a reduction of $300 from his initial bid and that he need not receive more than $10,000 before February first and that he begin at once.[5] The contract called for the building to be begun by October 1, 1891, and usable to the first floor by January 1, 1892, leaving fourteen weeks of Wisconsin's most treacherous weather for the job.

On January 18, 1892 dean Henry reported to the Farm Committee:

> At its meeting in September when the Board of Regents directed that the construction of the dairy school building begin at once and that the first floor be made ready for pupils by January first, a heavy burden was laid upon both the contractor and those immediately interested in placing these rooms in condition for the reception of pupils. With an ordinary contractor I think the attempt would have been a failure, but Mr. McCarthy did everything possible ... to

the desired end. The school opened on the day advertised and at this date there are 97 students in attendance with three more to come.[6]

The classes begun by Henry and Stephen Babcock in 1890 in the wooden dairy building were the first systematic teaching of the principals of dairying in the country. Thus Smith Hall was the first *permanent* dairy instruction building in the United States. Henry says "Ours was the first dairy school in the world where students are given practical instruction in both butter and cheesemaking."[7]

The Queen Anne style building as designed by Ferry and Clas was three and a half stories high, 103 feet wide (north to south) by 56 feet deep. The foundation and ground floor are of cream brick, the upper floors are wood-framed with applied half-timber and a pebble finish. It is the only educational facility on the campus designed by Ferry and Clas.

Although the first classes were able to meet in Smith Hall in January of 1892, the building was not really completed until months later. In April 1892, the building committee asked the regents to appropriate an additional $3040 to finish the building, citing such items as finish painting, tiling floors, insulating the attic, and grading a road in front of the building. This time span of seven months, and in the winter too, stands as the speed record for the erection of a major University building. In the 1892 regents report the total cost of the building was $32,305.

No discussion appears regarding naming the building after the great farmer, regent and congressman who had been instrumental in the founding and development of the university's agriculture department. Hiram Smith died on May 15, 1890, just weeks before Babcock's milk test changed the Wisconsin farmer's lot forever.

Smith Hall was full the day it opened. Henry gives the attendance as limited to one hundred, and he had that many students that first year. In less than ten years, it would get its first expansion. In an 1898 letter to governor Scofield, Henry says it is not surprising that, since they had no model in America for a dairy building, the one they built should be crowded and have some undesirable features.[8] As a result a two store brick north wing with red tile roof , containing cheese and butter rooms, was designed by architect J. T. W. Jennings in 1901. Also at this time the agricultural heating plant was built and much equipment was removed from Smith Hall. Again in 1909 a smaller single story north wing was added for more modern milk bottling equipment. When these additions were complete, Smith Hall reached its maximum capacity of 170 dairy students in 1915.

The department made do with this space throughout the first half of the century, but in 1945 the Daily Cardinal ran a photo of the building captioned: "This is the antiquated, obsolete, inadequate dairy building of the state university of the greatest dairy state of the country."[8]

In 1951 the dairy department moved across Babcock Drive into the newly completed Babcock Hall. Most of Smith Hall was taken over by agricultural journalism and poultry science. Its current occupants include agricultural journalism, cooperative extension and Wisplan computer services.

Smith Hall was nominated for the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. It stands into its second century as a living link to Henry, Babcock and Smith, giants among the early history of agricultural instruction at the University.

1) Thwaites, Reuben Gold, *The University of Wisconsin Its History and Alumni,* p. 200.
2) *Aegis,* October 10, 1890, p. 71.
3) *Regents Minutes*, June 16, 1891, volume D p. 104, and July 9, 1891 volume D p. 118.
4) Ferry had recently formed a partnership with Alfred Clas after leaving his job as draughtsman with H. C. Koch's architecture office.
5) *Report of Dairy Building Committee*, September 16, 1891, Reports Vol. C. pp. 365-366.
6) W. A. Henry to John True Chairman of Farm Committee January 18, 1892, memorial archives series 1/1/3 box 10, January 19, 1892 folder.
7) Ibid.
8) W. A. Henry to Eward Scofield, November 30, 1898 series 1/10/4-2 box 1.
9) *Daily Cardinal*, January 11, 1945 p. 1.