

HOME ECONOMICS



Fig. 1. Home Economics and Extension before construction of west wing; c. 1940. Looking north east. [series 9/3 Home Economics, jf-44]

Erected in 1912 as the home for both home economics and the University extension, this building was first built without its west wing. The west wing was added in 1951. The extension moved out in the early 1960s, and home economics has been renamed Family Resources and Consumer Sciences.

Although instruction of home economics was initially begun in 1903 (as Domestic Science) under the school of Letters and Sciences, the limited facilities in South Hall, and evident lack of student interest, showed little promise. Then in 1909 the department was transferred to the College of Agriculture under the impetus of the Nelson Act which provided funding for home economics programs geared to agricultural education and problems. Agriculture dean Russell was given a year to reorganize the department. It was housed for a semester in the basement of Agriculture Hall, then moved in 1909 to the attic of Lathrop Hall. During this period the department was in the hands of Abbey Mayhew and Carolyn Hunt.

Dean Russell says in his report to the regents in 1910: "A casual examination of ... facilities in Lathrop hall will reveal the utter impossibility of handling this work permanently in these quarters. A new building devoted entirely to this work should be planned at once." In the same report, president Van Hise agrees, saying that "It appears that there is to be a very large demand for the work of this department."¹ With Van Hise and Russell both pushing the project there was quick activity. The architectural committee of Laird Cret and Peabody, originally proposed to locate the home economics building as part of the "women's group" around Lathrop Hall. They knew that the home economics



Fig. 2. The Home Economics building c. 1960 after the west wing was built. Looking toward the northwest. [series 9/3 Home Economics, jf-43]

department would at first share quarters with the extension department, and suggested putting the building between Lathrop and the chemistry building [now Chamberlin Hall] on University Avenue. The logic was that if extension, which could be located anywhere, got its own building elsewhere, home economics would expand into the extension's vacated space.

The extension department was also undergoing tremendous expansion. Although announced in the catalogs for years, only the agriculture extension amounted to anything but sporadic lectures held when called for by citizens. President Van Hise appointed Dr. Charles McCarthy to investigate the situation, who found an enormous pent-up demand for quality correspondence work. As a result of this investigation the regents and then the legislature in 1906-1907 began to allocate small sums to support the extension. The success of the effort to energize the extension led the legislature to appropriate funds for an extension building. In the spring of 1911 the regents allocated \$75,000 each for home economics and extension buildings.²

After some thought and consultation, they decided to use the idea of Laird and Cret and combine the needs of the two departments in one building. The regents then resolved "that the departments of home economics and University Extension be housed in a building to cost approximately \$115,000 and to be located east of Agriculture Hall and north of the Mall [Henry Mall]; same to be constructed immediately; this estimate is for brick construction and includes equipment for both departments."³ The plans generated by Laird and Cret, were for a central section running east-west, with a north-south wing on each end. Budget constraints forced the regents to reduce the initial construction to the center section and the east wing; leaving the construction of the west wing for a later date [see Fig. 1]. They had the architects provide a separate entrance for the Extension division.

The construction of the building turned out to be a star-crossed project. The contract for the excavation and foundation was let to Madison Engineering and Construction Company on October 23, 1911 for \$2114. In less than a month they defaulted on the contract. The regents turned to the second lowest bidder, George Nelson of Madison, who signed the contract on November 24, 1911, for \$3350. Nelson began the job on November 27, 1911. In March of 1912, the regents awarded the contract for the superstructure of the building to the lowest bidder, W. H. Grady and Co. for \$100,879, "provided it is found that these are responsible companies..."⁴ Someone didn't look very hard. The regents declared Grady in default on the contract in May, 1913. In a statement dated February 18, 1914 the university lists \$102,191 in payments to Grady before he disappeared with the

money and leaving a trail of unpaid subcontractors. The university finished the building itself and settled up the outstanding liens and debts.

The building was completed in March 1914. It consisted of a five-story central portion, 100 ft. X 58 ft., with a four story east wing, 49 ft. X 92 ft. with a total of 50,000 square feet of floor area. It was a steel and concrete structure faced with buff vitreous brick with Bedford limestone trimming, and a red tile roof. The Extension was housed in the lower floors of the center section. The Home Economics department occupied the east wing and the upper floors of the center section. The spaces vacated by Home Economics in South Hall and Lathrop were immediately filled by bacteriology and women's physical education, respectively. Future expansion was provided for by the addition of the missing wing on the west side of the central section which had a rather blank look (fig. 1) due to its relative lack of ornamentation.⁵

This building was successful and filled its dual purpose well for many years. But starting in the 1920s the enrollment in home economics began to squeeze the departmental space. The department was gradually spread around the campus in Babcock Hall, and several temporary buildings, besides the Home Economics building and practice cottage. It was not until 1951 that the regents decided to complete the building by adding the west wing (18 feet longer than the original east wing). The construction contract was let to the lowest bidder, George Nelson and Son, for \$393,793. In the spring of 1953 the west wing was finally completed. The laboratories were now up-to-date, conference rooms, lecture rooms and office space were now available.⁶

In 1962 the new university extension building at 632 Lake Street opened and left Home Economics (which had become a school in 1951) in sole possession of the building (fulfilling the last detail of the vision of the builders in 1913). In 1968 the school was renamed "Family Resources and Consumer Sciences". It now is involved with child psychology, and consumer goods study. The building remains a handsome and imposing presence on the Linden Drive hill.

1) *Regent's Report*, 1909-1910 p. 173.

2) *Regent's Minutes*, April 6, 1911.

3) *Regent's Minutes*, July 11, 1911.

4) *Regent's Minutes*, March 13, 1912.

5) *Regent's Report*, 1913-1914, p. 341; *Regent's Report*, 1908 p. 102, this entry details the movement of the departments at the time of their reassignment to the college of agriculture.

6) *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 7, 1953; *Regent's Minutes*, January 13, 1951, p. 12.