

HOME MANAGEMENT HOUSE



Fig. 1. The home management house c. 1944. [Series 9/3, Home Management House, jf-61]

Erected in 1940 the home management house was used to provide practical instruction in homemaking to home economics majors. In the 1960s it was converted to office space.

By 1939 the old home economics practice cottage was worn out. In a letter to president Dykestra, dean of Agriculture Christensen described it: "The present house used for practice training is an old house built in 1911. Not only is it too small, but it is poorly planned, impractical, and inadequately equipped for the training in home practice management which is conducted by the Home Economics staff." Dean Christensen, and Miss Frances Zuill, head of the home economics department, had discussed and planned for a new home economics practice house since the late 1930s. No building was done because of the lack of funding for construction during the depression, but the plans were refined and discussed.¹

So it was that when, in January 1940, the Wisconsin Utilities Association offered \$20,000 in private funding for the home management project, Dean Christensen could present to the regents sketches and estimates at the same time that he announced the gift.² So prepared was the dean, that before the end of the regents meeting, he had obtained approval of his plans (including the proposed site between home economics and agriculture hall), permission to advertise for bids, and approval to raze the old solar observatory, by then used only for storage and in the way of the new building.

Formal plans and specifications were drawn up by the state architect, Roger Kirchhoff, in the spring of 1940.

Unfortunately for these plans, when bids were opened on June 28, 1940, all were far above the amount available for building and all were rejected. There were three principal reasons for the overruns: first, the specification of Madison sandstone for the exterior, which had all but run out in the old quarries on the west side of Madison, second, the concrete floors, roof construction, and hollow tile walls, needed to make the building fireproof, and third the paucity of almost all building materials in Madison. By respecifying the exterior in brick, and proposing alternate materials to the bidding builders the cost was lowered considerably. The new plans were put out for bids in July 1940, but again the bids were too high for the funds donated. It was clear that the project was going to cost about \$32,000 as envisioned by Christensen and Zuill, and not the \$20,000 available.

In August 1940, the Wisconsin Utilities Association offered an additional \$12,500 for construction and furnishing the home management house. This bonus removed all difficulties from the project. The general construction contract was awarded to the Fritz company for \$20,988. The work was to be finished by January 1, 1941 (later extended to March 17, 1941). With utilities and subcontracts the total contracted cost was \$33,900. The \$1400 above the donation was made up by the physical plant budget. Work began on the building on September 23, 1940. During construction the project ran into small difficulties with the Industrial Commission, due to the commission's insistence that the building was a dormitory, and requiring multiple exits on that basis. The changes were minor, and Kirchhoff made them rather than pursue the issue. Delays were minor and completion was about two months late.

The home management house was opened for examination on June 21, 1941.³ It was a two story colonial revival, of light brick, with stone trim, an asphalt shingled hipped roof, enclosing about 3700 square feet. There were four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a study, an instructors suite, kitchen, a laundry, demonstration rooms, and sun porch. It was intended to accommodate an instructor and eight students at a time, and was pressed into service immediately in the fall of 1941. Every senior in home economics was required to spend two weeks in the house.

The house filled its role beautifully for twenty five years. Then in the middle 1960s when anything that looked archaic was in peril, a home management house ceased to be of use, and after the departmental name change from "Home Economics" to "Family Resource and Consumer Science", the building was converted to office space.

1) Regent's Minutes, January 19-20, 1940; Christenson to Dykestra, January 19, 1940, *Wisconsin Country Magazine*, February, 1940, October 1941, December 1942, November 1955; *University Press Bulletin*, January 26, 1940.

2) Christenson to Dykestra, January 19, 1940, ; Regent's papers, August 1940, January 19-20, 1940.

3) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, July, 1941, p. 329, February 1941