

HORTICULTURE GREEN- HOUSES



Fig. 1. C. 1911: Horticulture greenhouses from the northeast, farm buildings and the University Heights neighborhood in background. The red-roofed building at the right of the picture is the head house. The little building to the left of the head house is the lab for plant pathology. [Series 9/3, Greenhouses, jf-14]

The Horticulture greenhouses and head house were built in 1909 to provide additional space for the expanding horticulture department being crowded out of King Hall by the soils department. The head house and first green houses were built just prior to the horticulture building itself. More green houses were added to the site over the following 60 years. All were removed in 1996 to make way for an addition to the biochemistry building.

The soils department, originally housed in the second (west) half of King Hall, grew at a very fast pace during the first decade of the 20th century under Franklin King. Eventually soils became so large that horticulture, the other occupant of King Hall was being severely squeezed. The two departments shared the University's only greenhouses, located behind King Hall. President Van Hise in his 1908 report to the regents says: "The greenhouses for the horticultural department are entirely inadequate, and it will be necessary to construct additional greenhouses so placed that they will join on the new horticulture building which will be required in the near future."¹ As a first step the regents selected a site for the horticulture building, and approved the construction of new greenhouses "on the new site for horticulture grounds in the rear of the agricultural engineering building. Estimated cost about \$6000-\$8000."² The plans were drawn by university supervising architect Arthur Peabody's office and shown to the regents in January 1909, but Peabody was asked to revise the plans to include laboratory space for plant pathology, without adding more than \$2000 to the cost, the new plans were drawn and were approved by the regents in February 1909.³

Due to the large amount of construction going on during the year of 1909 (especially Lathrop Hall and the Central Heating Plant), almost no work, except planning, was done on this project during the summer of 1909. In October of 1909 the regents advertised for bids on the greenhouse plans, specifying that the project is to be completed by February 1910. At the meeting of the executive committee on October 11, 1909, the regents open the bids for the project. There are only two bids, a result of the University's building program absorbing most of Madison's construction industry at that time. The lowest of the two bids is \$16,800, more than double the estimates of the architect's office. The regents reject the bids and vote that the architect is to build the greenhouses with the University force. This was almost certainly an idea of Peabody's, who argued that considerable money could be saved if the University built small projects without a contractor by using the architect's plans and supervision over the craftsmen and laborers already on the payroll. At that same meeting the committee approved requisitions for \$5750 for Peabody to build the greenhouses.

The architect's monthly reports recount the progress of the project. In November 1909, "Concrete work has been carried up to three feet above grade level and is practically ready for the wood and glass of the superstructure ... It is intended to have the greenhouse in shape by the second semester." December sees the completion of the concrete work, but the weather is so bad that work ceases, orders for glass and steel are placed. In February of 1910, Peabody reports changes in the project due to conferences with professor Jones of plant pathology. Work is resumed in March and by May 1910, the greenhouses are complete except for glass and the excavation for the potting house is done. The work is slow because the force of the university is busy with several buildings, especially Lathrop Hall. Progress on the potting house is reported throughout the summer and fall. In November 1910, Peabody reports that the greenhouses are in use, and that the building is ready for plastering and the roof lacks only the tile for completion. Then on November twenty first, a fire started on the roof between the potting house and the greenhouses, which damaged both the greenhouses and the roof of the potting house. Insurance was in place and the damage was not extensive. The fire damage was repaired by December, and "The use of the greenhouse was but little interrupted by the fire." December 1910 is the last time Peabody mentions this project in his reports, indicating that it was finished and occupied by January 1911 nearly a year after the original contract deadline.

As seen in Fig. 1, the first set of five greenhouses was only about a third of what was eventually built there. As Horticulture, plant pathology, and related fields gained students and researchers, the greenhouses became more and more crowded. Some greenhouses were added in 1912. In 1924, the legislature made a \$15,000 appropriation for greenhouses for experimental work. In 1925, the regents planned and built two additional groups of greenhouses, one group to the west of the original ones, and the second group to the south, with a service road between them.⁴

The horticulture greenhouses and the red-tile roofed potting shed, were physically connected to the horticulture building in the 1980s during the construction of the plant science wing, and are still in heavy use by a number of various departments in the college of agriculture. However they occupy a substantial piece of prime real estate in what has become, unlikely as it must have seemed to the planners and regents of 1910, the center of the agriculture campus. Because of their large footprint and central location, they were demolished in 1996 for another addition to the biochemistry building which lies just to the east of the greenhouses. The potting shed and greenhouses lasted 85 years, a testament to a day when even buildings as insignificant as these were planned and constructed to last a very long time.

1) Report to the regents of the University of Wisconsin, 1906-1908, p. 35.

2) Minutes of the Regents of the University of Wisconsin, December 16, 1908.

3) Minutes of the Regents of the University of Wisconsin, February 17, 1909.

4) Minutes of the Regents of the University of Wisconsin, August 5, 1925.