

LATHROP HALL



Fig. 1.
Lathrop Hall
from the south
west c. 1926.
[series 9/1,
Lathrop Hall,
x25-1300]

Lathrop Hall was built as the gymnasium and social center for University women in 1910. The social functions were transferred to the Memorial Union in 1927. Many significant events affecting women's physical education took place at Lathrop. A major restoration is currently planned.

When Charles Van Hise became president of the university in 1903 he brought a determination to extend the benefits of a university education to all students who wanted it. This especially included women students who had first been admitted in the 1860s. The women had no university facilities outside of Chadbourne Hall, originally called the "Ladies College". Van Hise meant to end this situation. He succeeded to such an extent that by the late 1920s the men's facilities at the university were distinctly inferior to the women's. The women had on-campus dormitories, a modern gymnasium, and a social center, all of which the men lacked. The first project which helped bring this about was the construction of Lathrop Hall.

The regents with Van Hise's urging had appointed an architectural commission, consisting of University of Pennsylvania architectural professors Warren Laird and Paul Cret, and the university supervising architect Arthur Peabody. The work of this commission was to produce a cohesive plan for the orderly expansion of the university. The very rapid expansion and disorganized growth of the buildings of the university made clear the need for such a master plan. While the resulting plan was

delivered to the regents in 1908, it was never formally adopted or rigidly followed. Still it influenced the thinking of the university planners for decades to come. The commission was committed to a plan that would gracefully absorb the best of the old buildings on campus, notably North, South and Bascom Halls; since they were regarded as particularly good restrained classically influenced designs executed in local material (Madison sandstone). The general plan called for a group of buildings for women students, to be located near the corner of University Avenue and Park Street, the existing site of Chadbourne Hall. The commission was responsible not only for the general plan but for the design of specific buildings for which there was immediate need.

The opening of the armory and gymnasium (the red gym) in 1894 had given the men a suitable physical education facility, but despite petitions the women were not allowed to use it. The 1895 remodelling of Chadbourne Hall added a women's gymnasium was added, but it was quickly out-moded. In his first report to the regents, Van Hise stressed this problem: "Last year there were in the university five hundred thirty five young women. ... There is an immediate need for a commodious and modern building, which will serve as a gymnasium and social center for the women of the University."¹

In this context the commission designed Lathrop Hall. Preliminary studies were underway in late 1906. It was intended by the commission that the building serve the dual purpose of gymnasium and social center until a separate women's union was built, at which time the building would revert to housing only a gymnasium. The commission had preliminary drawings of the proposed "Women's Building" ready for Van Hise to show the legislature by February 1, 1907. They specified that the building would be faced with Madison sandstone and would form part of a quadrangle of women's buildings. The legislature promptly approved the appropriation for the building. The plans were then presented by Peabody to various faculty members who would have the most to do with using the new building.² By October 15, 1907, the revised plans were complete and ready for bids. There were further changes made after this date and the regents did not advertise for bids until January 1908. When the bids were opened March 16, 1908, the lowest bidder was T. C. McCarthy with a bid of \$175,574.

The contract with McCarthy was signed April 14, 1908. The contract specified that the building should be enclosed by December 1, 1908, and "the entire building in all its parts shall be completed on or before September first, 1909".

Ground was broken May 1, 1908. By the end of the summer, all the walls were up to the level of the second floor. The work continued smoothly into the late fall and winter. By February 1909, the walls were all erected, the roof completed and finish stonework was begun. The heating and plumbing systems were completed by April, 1909. In May 1909, a fire at the planing mill of J. H. Findorff destroyed all but a small portion of the finish wood trim for the building. In June 1909, the regents approved some changes to the interior layout of the fourth floor to include administration offices. The regents building committee on equipping the Women's Building met October 5, 1909 estimated the cost of equipment at \$36,282. About this time Abbey Mayhew complained that only 500 lockers would be available in the gym. She estimated that they would need at least 800. This would not be the last time that the people who had helped plan the facility would revise upward their estimates.³

In late 1909 the question had arisen of what to name the building, a suggestion was received from the students that it be named Adams Hall apparently after Mary Adams the popular and recently deceased wife of ex-president Charles K. Adams. Some regents objected to the foolishness of calling the women's building "Adams Hall", proposing that "Eve's Hall" was more appropriate!⁴ President Van Hise offered Lathrop Hall as a compromise and it was accepted.

The grand opening was held on April 1, 1910. As described by the Wisconsin Alumni magazine: "Lathrop hall, the new women's clubhouse and gymnasium, was dedicated with appropriate

exercises in the presence of a large audience of alumni, students, faculty, and citizens of the state..." President Van Hise presided, and the guest of honor was Gardiner Lathrop, the son of John H. Lathrop for whom the building was named.⁵

The finished building was an elongated H-shape, with a four story center section and two five story wings on the east and west ends. The style is a highly refined Renaissance Revival design mainly executed by Paul Cret of the commission who was near the beginning of a long and award winning architectural career. The building had a red tile roof with skylights on the south slope. It is one of nine campus buildings that were designed and built with the aid of the Architectural Commission of Laird, Cret, and Peabody. The Lathrop Hall Historic Structure Report says of the design "Lathrop Hall is an especially skillful and impressive design that shows great respect for the Roman and Florentine models on which it is based."⁶ The imposing aspect of the building up on its hill overlooking University Avenue has undoubtedly been diminished by later development (Barnard to the east, Chamberlin to the west, and Birge and Law to the north). Architectural Historian Timothy Heggland says that except for the Stock Pavilion Lathrop is the most original and best preserved of the commission's buildings.⁷

The new building with its huge second floor gymnasium, concert hall, stage, swimming pool with lockers, a running track, kitchen and social rooms, bowling alleys, a laundry, and a theatre was immediately popular with the women of the university. The only serious flaw in the building was the increasingly common one at the university, that improved facilities attract more enrollment, which swamps the size of the initial plan. By 1914 lockers and dressing rooms were being added to Lathrop. During the first world war Lathrop and the men's gymnasium were used as barracks for the Student Army Training Corps. The crowding problems were generally addressed by further building (as predicted by the commission) when Barnard Hall (1912) freed up the dining and kitchen spaces in Lathrop; but especially by the construction of the Memorial Union (1927) which allowed all the social spaces in Lathrop to revert to the physical education department. Lathrop Hall became nationally significant due to the work of two faculty members, Blanche Trilling and Margaret H'Doubler. Trilling, hired as director of the Women's Gymnasium in 1912, founded the Athletic Conference of American College Women (ACACW) in 1917, a nationally important organization now known as College Women in Sports (CWS). Trilling also hired and encouraged H'Doubler. H'Doubler founded at the U.W. the nation's first dance curriculum, which in 1926 offered a major in dance, another national first. A large number of dance departments at American Universities were later founded by students of H'Doubler, who retired from the university in 1954.⁸ Also of historic significance is the work at Lathrop Hall in kinesiology (the study of body movement) by professor Ruth Glassow.

A major restoration project for Lathrop will begin in 1996. The projected use is for the dance department to occupy the lions share of the restored building with the Department of Continuing and Vocational Education (CAVE), moving from the Teachers Education Building to the basement of the restored Lathrop Hall. The projected cost of the restoration is approximately \$7.2 million. The remodelled performance areas will be named the H'Doubler Performance Space.

1) Report of the Regents of the University of Wisconsin, 1902-3 and 1903-04. pp. 39-40.

2) These included Cora Woodward (adviser of Women), Dr. George Elson (director of the Department of Physical Education), Florence Buckstaff (a university regent), and Abbey Mayhew (Director of the Department of Physical Education for Women).

3) A. S. Mayhew to Van Hise, November 28, 1909.

4) Wisconsin Alumni Magazine, February 1909 p. 209.

5) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, May, 1910 p. 329. *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 1, 1910, p. 6.

6) *Historic Structure Report Lathrop Hall*, University of Wisconsin June 1993 Vol. 2, p. 25

7) *ibid.* p. 26

8) *ibid.* vol. 2 p. 1 (program uses)