

# MACHINE SHOPS



Fig. 1. Machine shops from SW c. 1890. [x25-2482]



Fig. 2. Machine shops, after addition c. 1895. [x25-2473]

*The machine shops were one of the four buildings erected in 1885-1888 to replace the original Science Hall. It housed the equipment of the engineering departments, including lathes, saws, forges and foundries. It caught fire in 1900 and in 1965. Occupied after the 1900 exit of engineering mainly by art education and journalism, it was demolished in 1968 to make way for Helen C. White Hall.*

**B**orn in the uproar and scandal surrounding the construction of the new Science Hall group (see Appendix A), the machine shop building was erected as the first the home to the University's embryonic engineering department. The suspicion that a forge had started the fire that destroyed the original Science Hall in 1884 was the main reason that the machine shop, forge and foundry functions were isolated in a building of their own.

As if in despair of protecting from fire a building housing such departments, it was built in a method called slow-burn mill construction, rather than the completely fireproof method used in Science Hall. Slow burn mill construction was much cheaper too.

Begun on June 23, 1885 and finished March 26, 1886<sup>1</sup> the machine shop was located just to the west of the chemistry building at 600 North Park Street. It was a 'U' shape with the base side running north-south. The side wings containing the light machines (south wing) and the forges and foundry (north wing) pointed east toward the chemistry building. Within five years of its opening the machine shop building was out of space. Caught in the burgeoning enrollment in mechanical arts, the shop building was expanded in 1893-4 by Conover and Porter, by extending the west end of the south wing into the hill 75 feet, and 50 feet to the north<sup>2</sup> (see Fig. 2).

This arrangement was generally sufficient until seven years later, when in January 1900, a fire broke out in the south end of the main section. Due to the slow-burn construction (and prompt action by the fire department) the fire did not reach the carpenter shop, and damage to the building was limited to the axe and water damage of the fire department, mostly in the west wing.<sup>3</sup>

Later in 1900 the new engineering building (now old Education) on Bascom Hill opened and the machine shops, forge room, and most of the rest of the engineering departments moved. Only the laboratory part of electrical engineering stayed in the west section of the shop building leaving the

Fig. 3. August 11, 1965. Fire guts the west wing of Journalism Hall. [Journalism Hall folders-188]



east side empty until about 1920 when the east wing became the home of the art and art education departments. The building was known as the art building throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The art education department left the machine shop in 1954 when the engineers released the building on Bascom Hill (now old Education), into which art education moved.<sup>4</sup>

Beginning with the huge enrollment surges in the 1940s the building became a kind of catchall for various departments in need of temporary quarters or storage space. By 1965 in addition to engineering and the art department, it had housed the psychology department, the Daily Cardinal offices, and the foreign language laboratory. After a \$171,000 remodeling by Weiler and Strang in 1951, the building welcomed its last long term tenant, the Journalism School, which moved into the remodelled building in 1953 and stayed until Spring of 1965 when it left for the old Wisconsin High School Building on Henry Mall.

The timing of journalism's departure was fortunate since on August 11, 1965 the building caught fire again (see Fig. 3). The origin of this fire was in the west wing where it gutted the offices of the alumni mailing and records and destroyed many works of art stored there by the Art Department. But as in the case of the 1900 fire, the slow-burn construction contained the fire and did not allow the fire to destroy the building.<sup>5</sup> Remarkably, despite the fears of its planners and several opportunities, fire never destroyed this building. It stood until it was demolished.

In 1965 the site at 600 N. Park Street which included the machine shop and the old chemical building was already being eyed by the University as a prime development location. Candidates were the Communication Arts Building, the Education Building, and the eventual winner the Undergraduate Library (Helen C. White Hall). Thus in 1968, the machine shop's wild ride came to an end at the hands of a wrecking ball.

1) *Badger Press*, March 26, 1886 p. 9.

2) The location of this addition is largely responsible for the odd and twisted shape of Observatory Drive behind Helen C. White Hall.

3) *Daily Cardinal*, January 11, 1900 p. 1.

4) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, February, 1954 p. 24. The engineers moved to the new Engineering Hall at camp Randall.

5) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, August 1965 p. 4.