

# NEW LAW BUILDING



Fig. 1. The law complex c. 1989. The empty area in the center is the location of the original brownstone law building. The 1939 library wing is the L-shaped section in the foreground. The 1959 library addition is the section on the left end of the library. The 1963 construction removed the brownstone, and added

classrooms and auditorium around the quadrangle and the 6-story office section at the right. The 1995 construction removed and expanded the auditorium and classroom sections, leaving the office building and library intact. [Photo courtesy of Ed Riesner, copy in Author's collection]

*The current law complex was built as a series of additions to the original brownstone law building. These additions were a library in 1938, a library addition in 1958, and classrooms and offices in 1963. The 1963 construction also removed the old brownstone building.*

**T**he law school waited more patiently for modern quarters than the cynical might expect. The original sandstone law building was built in 1891 and was still in daily use until 1963. This in spite of the fact that the teaching of law had altered radically in terms of the teaching facilities required.

The only significant change in the old law school in the first half of the twentieth century was the addition of a library wing to the old building. This library wing became a necessity after structural

engineers forbade any more expansion of the library (originally 4000 volumes) in the old wood-framed structure. The library addition was proposed in September 1938, when the federal Public Works Authority appropriated \$79,000 for the library, provided that the University raise an additional \$100,000 within eight days. The University had access to a borrowing entity for such purposes, the Wisconsin University Building Corporation (WUBC), formed to help finance the Van Hise dorms in the 1920s. The architect for the new wing was Wisconsin State Architect Roger Kirchhoff. It was built in the then modern method of steel and reinforced concrete, and faced with Mankato sandstone to harmonize with other Bascom Hill buildings. The new library wing was finished and dedicated in May 1940. Enrollment in the law school stood at 418 that year. The five story, 40 by 94 foot addition had a capacity of 125,000 volumes, a 150 seat reading room, and a few faculty offices. This reading room was decorated with a huge mural, the Emancipation Proclamation, by John Stuart Curry, originally intended for the Federal Justice Department but rejected as too controversial. The library addition was viewed by the faculty of the law school, the University and the campus planners as a first section in an all new facility that would replace the 1893 sandstone building. No further steps along this path would be taken for 13 years.<sup>1</sup>

In 1955 the state legislature appropriated \$2 million for a building that would house both the law school and the Sociology department. The planning of this joint Law- Sociology project proceeded throughout 1955-57. The site selected was the law building site, since it would be central to the colleges of Letters and Science, and could incorporate the 1940 library structure. Preliminary plans for this joint building were approved by the regents on July 26, 1957. Preparations of final plans began in the state architect's office. However by the fall, cracks began to appear in the coalition of law and Sociology faculty on the planning committee. The law members went on record at the October 1957 meeting as supporting a separate building for law. In March 1958, the regents decided that unless the campus planning commission made a contrary recommendation within 30 days, the original combination building would proceed. In late March the law school faculty agreed that they could live with only the library part of the project for a while. At their meeting on April 10, 1958, the regents did something that they have rarely done (or had to do), they reversed themselves on a decision after money had been spent. Acting on the recommendation of the planning commission, they decided to abandon the combined law-sociology building, and use those plans to build only the library wing section to be used by law, to defer the construction of the balance of the law building, and to add a wing to commerce for the use of sociology. All this could be funded from the appropriation for the combined building. Considerable muttering was heard about the \$25,000 already spent on plans, and about the future credibility of the planning commission.<sup>2</sup>

In July 1958 architect Kirchhoff had completed preliminary plans, and they were approved by the regents. Final plans were approved in December 1958. Construction contracts were awarded November 14, 1959, with the general contract going to J. P. Cullen and Son for \$393,624. Total contracts were for \$800,000, with funds coming entirely from state appropriations. The new library wing went into use in the fall of 1960. It was a 50 by 120 foot, five story wing of steel and concrete, faced with brick, protruding to the west of the 1940 section. It had room for 200,000 books and 248 students. It alleviated current crowding and provided a modest amount of expansion space. It was hoped at that time that the balance of the law building could be built within 2-3 years.<sup>3</sup>

The Annual Report of the Board of Visitors in 1960-61 said " CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW LAW SCHOOL BUILDING SHOULD BE GIVEN TOP PRIORITY." [emphasis original] They went on to enumerate the inadequacies of the 1891 building. The law department estimated they needed space for a projected student body of 800. Part of the plan was an entire structure dedicated to faculty offices, a faculty library, and administrative offices. The plans were drawn by state architect Karel Yasko. Cost estimates were about \$1.55 million. Planning contin-

ued through 1961, and on December 7, 1962 the regents approved the final plans.<sup>4</sup>

Contracts were awarded on February 8, 1963, with the general contract going to Precour Construction of Oshkosh for \$841,200. Total contracts came to \$1.56 million. The entire amount came from state appropriations. Groundbreaking took place in the spring of 1963 with the demolition of the ancient sandstone building, and completion was scheduled for August 1964. This schedule was met and classes began in the new building in the fall of 1964. The cornerstone and a gargoyle from the 1891 building decorate the main entrance to the new building.<sup>5</sup>

The finished complex includes a six story office wing on the uphill (west) side, a three story classroom building on the south side, and a two story lobby and corridor section linking the two new buildings with the existing library (see Fig. 1). The traditional stone for Bascom Hill buildings was abandoned for economy (and lack of stone), giving the law building an unfortunately stark look. A reconstruction of the middle section begun in the fall of 1994 will help to alleviate the effect. There are now 925 students using the facility designed for 800.<sup>7</sup>

1) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, April 1929 p. 217, July 1939 p. 392, July 1940 p. 340; Plans for financing law school addition, September 28, 1938, series 4/15/1 box 32.

2) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, December 1952, p. 23; Memorandum, Law school building committee to Dean Rundell, February 13, 1952, series 24/9/2 box 5; Dean Ritchie to Gallistel, August 6, 1953, Rowland to Runge, September 28, 1953, series 24/9/2 box 6; Memorandum, committee on Law- Sociology Building to Ira Baldwin, November 18, 1955, Kirchhoff to Dean Ritchie, November 28, 1955, Kirchhoff to Peterson, March 19, 1956, series 24/9/2 box 8; Gallistel to Kirchhoff July 18, 1957, Law-Sociology Building Committee minutes, October 28, 1957, Executive Committee of the Law School, to President Fred, December 10, 1957, (This letter to Fred is the final statement of the law faculty regarding their opinions and position on the joint law-sociology project), Wendt to Culbertson, May 9, 1958, Clarke to Wendt, March 18, 1958, (This is the thirty day ultimatum), Memorandum, Law School staff meeting, March 26, 1958, Gallistel to kirchhoff, march 10, 1958, series 24/9/2 box 10; Gallistel to Dean Ritchie, April 8, 1957, series 24/9/2 box 9; *Capital Times*, April 11, 1958, December 6, 1958; Regent's Minutes, November 12, 1955, December 10, 1955, July 26, 1957,

3) *Regent's Minutes*, April 10, 1958, July 11, 1958, December 6, 1958, October 24, 1959, November 14, 1959.

4) *Regent's Minutes*, May 14, 1960, May 12-13, 1961, December 7, 1962.

5) *Regent's Minutes*, February 8, 1963; *Daily Cardinal*, January 5, 1961, December 8, 1962, March 6, 1963, July 19, 1963; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, December 1964, p. 9.