

NURSES DORMITORY



Fig. 1. The nurses dorm with home-coming decorations c. 1930. Note the hipped roof center section with flat roofed wings. [series 9/4, Nurses Dormitory, x25-2240]

Built in 1926 as the home of the University nursing program, this building was a dormitory for 96 nursing students until 1960 when it became nursing offices only. In 1978 it was taken over by the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1987.

After the lull in campus expansion during the first world war, after the battles over whether there should be a four-year medical program at the university had been fought and won the legislature appropriated \$1.3 million for a hospital and nurses dormitory. The hospital was built in 1923, but due to delays in funding, and some further disagreement about the medical school the final planning and construction of the nurses dorm was not begun until 1924.

The department of nursing at the university was founded in 1920, after the landmark Goldmark report on the study of nursing at public institutions. An earlier attempt in 1918 had failed due to inadequate facilities. The legislative appropriation for the hospital specifically included money for better facilities for nurses. The main nurse's home, beginning in 1919 was in a large house at 450 N. Charter Street (later demolished). The nursing department was still embryonic and considerably fragmented, but under the drive and energy of Helen Denne and her second in command Lila B. Fletcher this situation rapidly changed.¹

In June of 1923 the team of Bardeen, Birge and state architect Peabody selected property on University Avenue occupied by homes between Lorch and Warren [later Randall] Streets, as the exact location for the nurses dorm. The land was purchased and plans were undertaken by Peabody and his staff. These plans were approved by the governor in October 1924.

The contracts for the construction of the nurses dorm were awarded by the regents beginning in December of 1924. The main construction contract went to the Deveraux-Olson Construction Co. of Minneapolis for \$106,407 on December 10, 1924, stipulating that the building must be complete by September 1, 1925. Reflecting the growing specialization in the construction business at the time, for the first time separate contracts were let for the various utilities in the building. With the usual delays the building was not complete by the original goal date of September 1, 1925, but was first occupied in 1926.² The total cost of the building was about \$136,214.

The design of the building was the work of state architect Arthur Peabody and his employee Frank Moulton³ and was done in the Italian Renaissance Revival style which had been brought to the general campus plan by the architectural commission of Laird Cret and Peabody in 1908. The steel framed building consists of a 34 foot by 96 foot central block and two identical 29 foot by 30 foot wings. The central section is four stories in height with the first floor higher than the upper three, with all four sitting above a raised basement. This reinforced concrete basement extends three feet above grade, and the exposed wall surface is covered with Carthage marble. The front (south) side of the first floor of the center section is sheathed in terra-cotta resembling limestone. The upper floors are sheathed in the buff colored brick that had been made the standard for that section of campus. The center section is topped by a red tile hip roof which contains dormers on the east and west sides which are hidden from view by the parapet walls of the side wings. The two side wings are also four stories in height arranged symmetrically with the center section and contain the main entrances and stairwells. The wings have flat roofs hidden by parapet walls.⁴

The building was designed as a dormitory and made provisions for 96 nurses in 48 double rooms on the upper three floors. The first floor was given over to living quarters for the matron and supervisors of nurses, the nurses library, and a nurses lounge. There was a small lounge on each of the upper floors as well. The nursing program under Denne and Fletcher was such a success that the dorm operated at full capacity throughout its life as a dormitory. Nursing students in their junior and senior years were given free room and board in return for nursing duties at the hospital.

The nursing school was a successful and self contained unit both professionally and socially. This state of affairs lasted until the middle 1950s when several circumstances coincided to change matters completely. One was the rising enrollment in the school of nursing after WW II (the class of 1955 nearly doubled its previous enrollment). For a school which could accommodate no more than 100 nurses, this was a severe shock. The second major change was the increasingly widely held opinion in the medical profession that the social segregation of nurses in their own dormitory was a bad idea, and that the nurses should be integrated with the general student population.

As a result of this new situation, in 1960 the use of the building as a dormitory was discontinued in favor of integrating the nurses living arrangements with the rest of the students. The building was used for the offices of the school of Nursing from 1960 until 1978 when the completion of the new University Hospital and Clinics Building allowed the relocation of the school of nursing to entirely new quarters in that complex. At that time [1978] the old nurses dorm was reassigned to the offices and classrooms of the university's Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). Because of the original use of the building for a dormitory, little alteration was needed to change the building into offices, and the nurses dormitory building remains almost completely intact. The ROTC's signs placed over each main door on the front of the building cover the original inscription "Nurses Dormitory".

1) Clark, Paul F., *The University of Wisconsin Medical School*, p. 203-208.

2) In a rare factual error Curti and Carstensen say that the nurses dorm opened in 1924 vol. 2, p. 493. As stated construction contracts were not let by the regents until 1924; *Regent's Minutes* December 10, 1924.

3) Alden Aust, *A Tabular History of the Buildings of the University of Wisconsin*, 1934.

4) Nomination papers for the National Register of Historic Places by the Historic Preservation Department of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Office.