

# OLD ADMINISTRATION BUILDING



Fig. 1. The Porter House looking SE c. 1890. [series 9/2 administration, old, x25-1338] .



Fig. 2. From the Park Street side after addition, c. 1910. [series 9/2, Administration, old, ns-264]

*This building was constructed as a private home in 1855 by Isaac DeForest, later owned by architect Lew Porter, who sold it to the University in 1906. The University added to it and used it for administrative offices until it was demolished in 1965 .*

In 1855 a Belgian immigrant named Isaac De Forest bought land for \$650 from New York real estate speculator John D. Clute who had purchased land in western Madison from the Regents of the University (the deed was signed by John Lathrop). In 1855 De Forest built on his lot, located at the corner of State and Park Streets a substantial but plain sandstone home for himself and his family (see fig. 1). They added to their yard the adjoining lot on the Park Street side. In the next fifteen years they lived there raising the first seven of their children, in the thickly wooded and somewhat isolated homestead on the western edge of Madison.

De Forest had earlier (1854) purchased considerable land north of Madison and in the middle 1860s platted and developed the town of De Forest. In the late 1860s the De Forests sold off their Wisconsin lands; the house in Madison was sold to speculator Shepard L. Shelton for \$6000 in 1870.

In 1871 Shelton sold the house and both lots for \$4500 to Henry E. Howe and his wife Mary Ann (Sweet). The Howes raised four children in the house, and on Henry's death the house passed to his wife. By 1885 she was taking in boarders, one of whom was a young civil engineering student at the University named Lew Porter. During a visit to her mother, Carolyn Howe met Porter, and in 1887 they were married. In 1892 after the death of their mother, who left the four Howe children equal shares of the property, the Porters bought the shares of the other Howe children and took ownership of the property. By this time the extra lot along Park Street had been sold.

The house at State and Park would be known as the Porter house for many years. It must



Fig. 3. Making way for Humanities, 1965. From Park Street. [folder 9/2, administration, old, jf3]

have been a wonderful place for Lew Porter (the principal architect of the red gym) to live. The location meant that he could view the progress and effect of the construction from his own home. For the first time in its history, the house was home to no children. In the face of financial necessity the Porters decided in 1905 to sell the property to the University.

The regents paid Lew and Carolyn Porter \$20,000 for the house and lot. According to the alumni magazine the university had long had plans for an administration building on that site.<sup>1</sup> In their report of 1906, the regents say that they have purchased the house and built an addition to it "so that it very well serves the needs of the regents as an administration building."<sup>2</sup> The addition was designed by Arthur Peabody and constructed by T. C. McCarthy along the Park Street side (See Fig. 2), and indeed the building did serve well and for a very long time as the administration building. For sixty years the students of the University came here to register, pay entrance and lab fees, collect pay checks, and visit the student loan officers.<sup>3</sup>

With the enormous growth of the University after WW II, the house that had served so many so long, was hopelessly swamped. A new administration building was erected at University Avenue and Murray Street in 1962 and by 1965 most of the residents of the old administration building had moved to the new Peterson Building. In that year [1965] construction began on the Humanities Building, a huge structure which engulfed the entire block in which Isaac De Forest had built his house, and the 110 year old house was demolished (see Fig. 3). The sandstone block from the house was saved by the University to be used in repairing the older sandstone buildings on campus. It is said that more than half the house has now become part of Bascom Hall.

1) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, October 1905 p. 36.

2) *Regents Report* 1906 p. 7.

3) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, May 1965 p. 7.