

OLD AGRONOMY



Fig. 1. Old Agronomy c. 1910. [series 9/3, Agronomy, ns-310]

Old Agronomy was built in 1906, the first reinforced concrete structure on campus. Agronomy moved out in 1930 and the building has since housed genetics, dairy science and its current occupant Agricultural Journalism.

The agronomy department was founded almost solely by the efforts of the un-degreed Ransom Asa Moore in 1895 (under dean William Henry) when he began the practice of selecting strains of grain on a one acre experimental plot on the current site of the stock pavilion in an attempt to produce a seed crop with superior yield and blight resistance. Moore was also extremely active in the recruitment of students for the agricultural short courses, scouring the state on his bicycle convincing farm youths to enroll.¹ By the first years of the 20th century the study of agronomy had produced so many successes and attracted so many students that it had outgrown its quarters in agriculture hall.

As early as 1904 the regents planned for an agronomy building, but did not follow through. In 1905 as part of the enormous building program driven by new president Charles Van Hise, plans were drawn by new supervising architect Arthur Peabody for two relatively small buildings for the agriculture campus, Agronomy and Agricultural Engineering. These were Peabody's first solo design projects and were done in the Beaux Arts Style favored by the university's planning consultants Laird and Cret. These buildings were the first to occupy the proposed mall linking Agriculture Hall with University Avenue. Because the Agricultural College was physically a rather independent unit of the university, the architecture did not require the classical and sandstone treatment given to the buildings on the central campus. Peabody chose instead of cut stone a dark brown brick (which became standard for later buildings associated with the college of agriculture), and in order to meet the modern requirements of fire protection the buildings were constructed with concrete floors and tile partition walls. They were the first buildings on campus so constructed.²



Fig. 2. c. 1910 Agronomy building in foreground, agricultural engineering in center background, Horticulture left background, Agriculture Hall right background. Agronomy and agricultural engineering were built together, but agronomy seems to have been finished first, making it the first reinforced concrete framed building on campus. [series 9/3, Agronomy, jf-29]

The regents opened bids for construction of the agronomy and agricultural engineering buildings in May of 1906 and selected from the six bidders T. C. McCarthy, a local builder. The contract was for \$68,400 for construction of both buildings.³ Construction was slower than anticipated and agronomy was not opened until the fall of 1907.⁴

The agronomy building is 46 feet X 96 feet, two stories above a full basement. It had a red tile roof and was built of reinforced concrete and a hard dark brown brick that became standard for later agricultural buildings. The basement held rooms for curing storage and display of grain. The first floor contained lecture halls, classrooms and offices. The entire second floor was a single room given over to the seed judging department.⁵

The new agronomy building was a great success, giving Professor Moore and his students (more than 600 took agronomy in 1906) ample room and facilities. However as plant genetics and plant pathology were given an increasing amount of space in the little building, there was a loss of lab and instructional space. By the late 1920s the crowding was becoming intolerable. The solution was to construct a three story wing on the east end of the Horticulture building. In 1930 this addition to Horticulture was built and named Moore Hall in honor of R. A. Moore.

The agronomy and plant pathology departments moved into Moore Hall, leaving the old agronomy building to the genetics department. Genetics remained there (producing Nobel prize-winning Joshua Lederberg) until space limitations drove them to a new building across the Mall in 1963. The old building passed into the hands of Dairy Science who used it until 1972, when the animal science building was built. The Agricultural Journalism department was the next user moving in 1972. The building name was then officially changed to Agricultural Journalism.⁶ Agricultural Journalism remains the occupant of the little brick building in the center of the west side of Henry Mall. The ninety years since its construction has seen the erection of banks of huge agriculture buildings in this area (biochemistry with its endless additions, molecular biology on Linden Drive, the building and demolition of the Wisconsin High School, leaving the old agronomy building a kind of survivor through insignificance. It remains a useful and attractive contrast to the monster buildings favored by a later vision.

1) R. A. Moore Biographical file University Archives.

2) *Memoires*, Arthur Peabody Archives biographical file, p. 4-5.

3) *Regents Minutes*, May 31, 1906.

4) *Daily Cardinal*, September 25, 1907, May 6, 1907, January 4, 1907.

5) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, June-July, 1906, pp. 440-44

6) *Minutes of the Regents*, August 3, 1973