

# OLD HOSPITAL



Fig. 1. Wisconsin General Hospital, c. 1925. [series 9/4 Wisconsin General Hospital, jf-48]

*The Wisconsin General Hospital was erected in 1924 to provide a clinical program for the University medical school, and to care for indigent state residents. In 1949 additions and expansions more than doubled the size of the hospital. When even this expansion proved too small, the hospital and clinics was relocated to a new site on the west end of campus, and the old hospital was remodelled in 1980 for use by medical sciences.*

Dr. Charles Bardeen and Joseph Evans believed strongly that their two-year medical program founded in 1907, (but restricted to two years) at the University of Wisconsin, should be allowed to expand into a full four-year program with clinical training. Unfortunately there were powerful people in the state who disagreed. These forces were mainly established medical men and existing medical schools and the politicians who represented them. This opposition had made the two-year program difficult to establish, and now made the four-year course even more contentious. The university had argued that they would never consider developing a clinical (i.e. four-year) program without a quality hospital under its own control.

Dean Bardeen informed the regents in a report in 1918 that the "attic medical school" (so called because it was housed in attics of several buildings scattered around the university) had reached a critical stage. It had 100 students in the second year and 150 in the first.

Bardeen argued that Wisconsin could restrict enrollment, abandon the medical school, or expand it into a full four year course. After discussing these three approaches, Bardeen voted for the third approach, saying that Wisconsin was losing too many medical men who fail to return after being educated elsewhere, that the state was behind her neighbors most of whom had a full medical school at their universities, and that a hospital facility would be of direct benefit to the citizens of the state by healing patients who might otherwise "be a lifelong inmate of a charitable institution. No expenditure



Fig. 2. Wisconsin General Hospital under construction from University Avenue, c. 1923. [Meuer photo, vol. 10, p. 69]

of public funds is likely to give greater return than that spent for scientific treatment of disease."<sup>1</sup> With a lessening of opposition in the medical community and a sympathetic administration, the bill establishing a four-year medical school was passed on April 25, 1919. In order to support this new school the university had to ask for a suitable hospital. It was widely understood that this would require a large appropriation and "It was therefore fortunate that Governor Emmanuel Phillip, who was a firm friend of the full school plan, could point to the unexpended balance of the Service Recognition Fund as a source of funds for such a project."<sup>2</sup>

This plan for funding a memorial hospital from the Soldier's Bonus Fund had the support not only of the governor and the regents but also the American Legion. A special session of the legislature was called to consider the plan and in June 1920 the bill was passed, providing \$1.3 million for a "Wisconsin General Hospital" and nurses home. The future seemed assured for the hospital and the medical school. There were however still hurdles to be cleared. The site chosen was bounded by University Avenue, Linden Drive Lorch and Charter Streets. This site required the purchase of 20 properties for a total of \$211,000. The preliminary design for the building was executed by state architect Arthur Peabody (who consulted with hospital specialist Frank E. Chapman of Cleveland) and approved September 28, 1920. The contract for the excavation and foundation was let in the October, 1920. The foundations were completed by December 20, 1920. Final plans, by Peabody and his associate Frank Moulton (in consultation with dean Bardeen) were approved November 26, 1921.

Construction was now stopped entirely. The new foundation lay covered for two years while the source of funding was debated and examined. Questions had arisen regarding the amount and availability of surplus funds in the Soldier's Fund. In 1922 the new governor, Blaine, was at last convinced that the balance in the Soldier's Fund was continuing to rise and signed the construction contracts.

The delay in construction caused considerable consternation among the medical school administration. Under the legislation of 1920-1921 providing for the hospital the medical school was required to provide medical care to indigent citizens of Wisconsin. This obligation remained even though the hospital in which such care was supposed to be provided had not yet been built. The school handled this problem by caring for the state's patients in existing facilities, namely Bradley Memorial Hospital (which having been donated as a research facility should not properly have been so used). Dr. Bardeen also warned that the delaying of the contracts was jeopardizing the financial health of the project.<sup>3</sup>

The governor had first authorized the regents to advertise for bids on the superstructure

December 7, 1921. The bids were not opened until January 24, 1922. This long delay between the bids and their award, caused the lowest bidder (Colwell and Long of Minneapolis) to withdraw their bid because prices had risen so sharply in that time. The general construction contract was awarded to the Immel Construction Co. of Fond du Lac for \$668,843. Utility contracts were awarded separately bringing the total contract amount to \$765,670. The regents and the contractor went to arbitration due to price rises during the project delays and the builder was awarded \$14,000.<sup>4</sup>

The formal opening of the hospital was on April 29, 1924. On either side of the door were bronze plaques reading: "A Memorial to Those Who Served the Country in the World War.", and "Erected in Gratitude by the People of the State of Wisconsin." Flanking the arches over the front entrance are four symbolic figures: Humanity, The Lame and the Halt, Medical Science and Jurisprudence, and Maternity.

In the fall of 1924 Dr. Bardeen described the new building: "The State of Wisconsin General Hospital has six stories, a basement and a roof garden. The general design is in the form of a T, the horizontal wings of which face the south and the vertical wing of which points toward the north. The former are designed primarily for the immediate care of patients, while the latter is essentially a service wing with kitchens and dining rooms in the lower stories, laboratories and interne's quarters intermediate and an operating room on the top floor."<sup>5</sup> The building was 275 feet across the south (University Avenue) face and 107 feet deep, the north wing protruding another 88 feet to the north. Construction was fireproof with steel frame and brick sheathing, with the lower two floors sheathed in Bedford stone. Capacity was approximately 300 beds.

The central core of the building contained waiting rooms, administrative offices and treatment rooms. In the basement were hydrotherapy equipment, an electrocardiographic laboratory and storage. The upper floors of the main wings contained outpatient facilities (floor 1), neuropsychiatric wards (2nd), obstetrics and private patient care (3rd), general medical wards (4th), eye, ear nose and throat surgery and orthopedics (5th), and general surgery (6th). The roof (later enclosed) was equipped with a kitchen, duty rooms, and bathrooms for patients who were taking open air treatment.<sup>6</sup> The total cost of the hospital was \$1,000,000.

It is noteworthy that there were no purely instructional facilities in the hospital, even though the stated aims of the hospital were to provide medical care to the indigent of the state and provide clinical facilities for the university medical school. The educational work of the medical school continued to be located in attics and scattered building around the campus, until later when the Service Memorial building was built (1928).

The new hospital was a tremendous boost to the medical school. The first class to graduate as doctors from the new program, began their third year of training at the new hospital in 1925, and graduated (twenty men and six women) in 1927. President Van Hise's insistence on nothing less than the best university in the world seemed a little closer to becoming true. Some figures compiled for the twentieth anniversary of the hospital celebration in 1954 illustrate the use of the hospital: 4.8 million patient hours provided, 72% of these hours were for public patients. Even in the purely financial realm the hospital was a success. In that same twenty years, income was \$37.8 million, and expenses were \$37.6 million. The story of great service to the state is clear. By 1942, 680 doctors and 320 nurses graduated from their respective programs.

But as early as 1941 the very success of the medical school was beginning to present problems. The building had been designed for 300 beds, and was now through constant compression of space (and the 1931 connections by corridors to the Bradley Memorial and the infirmary) handling as many as 600. The increasing popularity of the school was placing further strains on the facility. In 1946 the legislature approved \$460,000 to build the east wing addition to alleviate the incessant demand for more patient space. Not until 1949 did funds become available for the west wing when



Fig. 3. A drawing showing the layout of the Medical Science Group in 1960. The sections marked East, West, and North are the original (1924) hospital. Sections A, B, C, and D are the 1949 additions. The connecting links to McArdle and the Bradley Hospital were also added at that time. The School of Medicine section was built up over several years, beginning with the Service Memorial Building in 1928.

the federal government made a grant of \$975,000. At this point the planning for the hospital expansion entered a new stage of scale and ambition.

By August of 1949, the plan comprised huge east and west wings that would double the bed capacity of the hospital, an expansion and remodelling of the north wing, and the addition of an extension of the lobby into the old landscaped gardens at the front of the building for administrative space. The total cost of the project had risen to \$3.7 million with a four year timetable. Ground was broken August 9, 1949, by Governor Oscar Rennebohm. Slowdowns due to material and labor shortages in the postwar building boom dragged the project out until February 1954.<sup>7</sup>

After the expansion was finished the medical school seemed very happy, and spoke glowingly of the alleviation of over crowding (capacity was now 1000 beds) and improved service to the state. But there must have been disquiet, since the paint was barely dry when the university commissioned a study of the "Program Management and Physical Plant of the Medical Center of the University of Wisconsin" by Hospital consultants James A. Hamilton Associates of Minneapolis. The Hamilton Report was submitted April 5, 1957. In the summary of the report is the statement: "It is pointedly obvious that the Medical Center has not adjusted sufficiently to the rapidly changing scene in medical care, medical education and health resources of the state." The report recommends another \$4.5 million in construction to eliminate the worst of the perceived problems. This report cannot have been good news for the university after having just worked through a long and expensive expansion project. Nonetheless, within fifteen years, ground was broken for an entirely new hospital complex, and plans were made to turn the old hospital buildings into the Medical Sciences Group. This remodelling cost nearly \$25 million.

1) Bardeen to Birge, November 24, 1919.

2) Curti and Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin Vol II* p. 493. The service recognition fund was raised by a 3 mill per assessed dollar to provide every Wisconsin WW I veteran or their family with a cash bonus of \$10 per month of service with a minimum of \$50. Laws of Wisconsin 1919 Ch. 667.

3) Bardeen to Birge May 1, 1922.

4) Arthur Peabody, *Short Resume of University Buildings*, 1934, p. 47.

5) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, November 1924, p. 6-10.

6) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, November 1924, p. 9.

7) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, February 1954, p. 14.