

# SHORT COURSE DORMS



Fig. 1. Short course dorms from south west. c. 1950. [Series 9/3, Short Course Dorms, ns-1723]



Fig. 2. Construction of short course dorms, April, 1949. [Series 9/3, Short Course Dorms, ns-1724]

*The short course dorms rectified a serious lack of housing for the agricultural short course students. Built in 1949, they were the first permanent building erected with state funds since 1931. In 1960 the two dorms were named for two agricultural professor, Byron Jorns and George Humphrey.*

By 1940 the agricultural short course facilities had become quite an embarrassment to the university. Since 1932 the students in the oldest university short course in the nation, were housed in a remodelled sheep barn, fed and instructed in WW I barracks salvaged from camp Randall. In the winter of 1940 and the spring of 1941, agriculture dean Christensen began planning for the construction of short course buildings. Christensen and state architect Roger Kirchhoff developed several plans, some of which were quite elaborate. They included two dormitories, and a central building containing a commons, a lecture hall for 950 seats, lobbies and lounges. This complex of three buildings was intended to occupy the site at Babcock Drive and Linden Drive (the current site of Russell labs).

To support these plans the regents included the short course buildings in their high priority list to the legislature of 1941. In notes prepared for the legislature, regent Cleary refers to the short course buildings: "...too small and wholly unfit for their purpose ... located less than twenty feet from a slaughter house ... These buildings were cheaply constructed when built and any expenditure on them at present would be a waste of money. They are dangerous fire traps and the boys are packed in double bunks with no modern facilities ... The place is too small to hold all the boys and a sad picture to present to visiting business men. The enrollment has increased in these short courses from 148 in 1931-32 to 440 in 1940-41." On July 1, 1941 the legislature appropriated \$200,000 for the construction and equipment of a short course agricultural student's dormitory. This amount was that estimated by Mr. Kirchhoff in January 1941, using the 1938 Kronshage dormitory costs. This estimate would cause trouble later. Plans were completed in 1941, but war time restrictions on building made the construction impossible at that time. During the following four years the regents continued to con-

sider plans for the project. The scope of the project was reduced from a cluster of buildings to two dormitories. In December 1945, they approved the new site near the president's residence, 10 North Babcock. In 1945 the legislature earmarked \$7.4 million for postwar construction. The regents allocated \$150,000 from this fund to the short course project, bringing the total financing available to \$350,000. In August 1946 the regents authorized the state offices to draw up plans and advertise for bids. A month later on September 14, 1946, the regents approved two Kronshage type dormitories. At the same time the regents allotted another \$100,000 from the post war funds to the project. In January 1947, the regents advertised for bids. When these bids were opened in February, the dismay was severe. The lowest bids exceeded estimates by 308%! All bids were rejected. The principle problem was that architect Kirchhoff's nine year old estimate had given the regents a false sense of current building costs in the post war world.<sup>1</sup>

The regents believed that the bids were not realistic and that building costs would soon drop, so they allowed the January bids to expire. During the rest of 1947 the regents repeatedly called for bids which continued to rise. By July 1947, it was clear that because of costs and other commitments, the state was not going to release their \$260,000 share of the project's cost. The old frame buildings still in use had been condemned in 1942, causing the enrollment in the short course to be capped, at a level considered safe for the old fire traps.

On December 11, 1948, the regents faced the reality of the new costs of building and asked the governor to release \$339,465 from the post war appropriation for the short course dorms. The general construction contract was awarded to J. H. Findorff & Son for \$338,833. Utilities and sub-contracts brought the total to \$539,465. Ground was broken in March of 1949, with the goal of completion by fall 1949. This goal was met. This was the first new building since 1930 to be built with a state appropriation. As designed by state architect Roger Kirchhoff, the dorms were structurally identical to the Kronshage dorms. They were three story and basement fireproof buildings. Each building contained forty rooms, intended for three students each, provided housing for 240 students, and contained lounges, and recreational facilities in the basements. Since the dorms contained no dining facilities, the students at the short course dorms were boarded at the Van Hise refectory, and later at the Breese Terrace cafeteria, and later still at Holt commons. The exterior sheathing was lannon stone instead of the depleted Madison sandstone rubble used on the Kronshage dorms. The old sheep barn and barracks were still used to house overflow students.<sup>2</sup>

In 1941 the regents had passed a motion to name the short course buildings after W. A. Henry the first dean of agriculture and founder of the short course. But in December of 1960, president Elvehjem recommended and the regents approved, that Unit A, be named George Colvin Humphrey Hall, and unit B, be named Byron Charles Jorns Hall. Humphrey was chairman of animal husbandry for thirty five years (1903-1942), and died in 1947, during the planning for the dorms. Jorns was a professor of agriculture Journalism (1935-1958) and a noted watercolor artist. Both were closely identified with short course student welfare and progress.<sup>3</sup>

The dorms still [1994] house the agriculture short course students from November to March, and serve as temporary housing for short term visitors to the campus, visiting professors, athletes etc.

1) *Regent's Minutes*, December 1, 1945, January 19, 1946, September 14, 1946, January 17, 1947, February 15, 1947, June 25, 1947; Laws of Wisconsin 1941 chapter 49 203-s; M. J. Cleary, notes on Bill 555A. Regent's meeting papers, May 1941; Halverson to Peterson, June 28, 1941, series 24/1/10 box 2.

2) *Regent's Minutes*, December 11, 1948; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, March, 1949, p. 7, October 1949, p. 5; Plans in plans room of University physical plant.

3) *Regent's Minutes*, December 6, 1941, December 9, 1960; archives biographical files "Jorns, Byron" and "Humphrey, George".