

SOUTH HALL



Fig. 1. South Hall, c. 1892, at that time called Agriculture Hall. It was externally identical to North Hall. [folder 9/1-jf2]

South Hall was built in 1855, the second building of the University, at a cost of \$20,000. It was used as faculty and student living, laboratory and instructional space until the 1890s when it became the first Agriculture Hall. Since then it has served several academic departments and is now departmental offices for the College of Letters and Science.

At the time of the construction of North Hall in 1851, the Board of Regents contracted for the foundation of the second dormitory. Since South Hall was not funded for another three years, this foundation "yawned open to the elements for three Wisconsin winters without a superstructure,"¹ the regents having been assured that it was suitably protected from the weather.

Within a year of the opening of North Hall the regents were calling for more space. "In the present building no adequate provision can be made for a laboratory and other wants of the chemical department. Additional public rooms will be needed, ... the enlargement of the number of students will imperatively demand a corresponding increase of rooms for their accommodation. It is the opinion of the board, therefore, that the second dormitory building should be completed next year."² The earlier appeal to the legislature was couched in different language: "This building is intended for the uses of the Normal Department³ and the board deems it highly important to the educational interests of the State, that the superstructure should be erected during the next season and be ready for the reception of a class of Teachers early in the spring of 1852."⁴

The state allowed the University to borrow \$15,000 from the principal of its endowment fund to build the second dormitory. In the summer of 1855 contractors Bird and Larkin completed South Hall to the satisfaction of the regent's Building Committee, though the \$18,000 contract had come in at \$20,107.40. The building was externally identical to North Hall, but the interior arrangement was considerably different. The north half of the building was arranged for four public rooms, the chemical laboratory, cabinets for physical sciences, a philosophical chamber, student rooms, and a library. The entire south half of the building was to be finished "for residence, or for occupation as for studies, as may be deemed expedient."⁵

In the fall of 1855, Professor Sterling along with most of the faculty (Lathrop, Conover, Carr, Read, and Butler)⁶ and their families moved into South Hall. These families paid \$3 per week for rent and board for each family member over age five. Professor Sterling and family lived rent-free in return for personal superintendency and management of the boarding establishment. Professor and Mrs. Sterling's daughter Susan (later a faculty member) was born in South Hall in 1858. The students who lived in South Hall boarded at the table of Professor and Mrs. Sterling, and were charged the actual cost of their board not to exceed \$2 per week.

This period of the University when students and faculty lived in close proximity was generally remembered fondly by the participants. Professor James D. Butler, a professor of classics who alone among the faculty lived in South Hall throughout his entire career at Wisconsin⁷ writes: "Through my classes came William Vilas, John C. Spooner, John Muir, Levi Vilas, Dwight Treadway and both the Steins. No foresight or second sight showed me to what acmes these youths were destined to climb. So while entertaining angels unawares, I very composedly eked out their shortcomings, and detected their blunders, like those of ordinary mortals."⁸ In 1859 financial losses, and the need for classroom space, led the regents to oblige the professors to leave South Hall or buy into the establishment and provide board to such students as desired it. Within a year all the faculty except Butler had left. During this period South Hall was also a busy and crowded classroom building. The chemistry laboratory, library, literary societies, and the collections of the natural history department were housed here.

In 1856 the building finally became the home of the Normal School. The Normal Department was moved in 1870 to the Chadbourne inspired Ladies Hall. In September 1884 South Hall was turned over to the Department of Agriculture, heavily remodelled, renamed Agriculture Hall and in 1890 was the site of the development of the world-famous Babcock milk test. Never again used as a dormitory, it passed through the hands of bacteriology, biochemistry, home economics, journalism, pharmacy, and since 1904 has housed administrative offices for the College of Letters and Science. As for the style and materials of the building J. F. A. Pyre's history points out: "The taste of later decades has sometimes patronized them, while committing expensive atrocities in other materials"⁸

1) Pyre, J. F. A. *Wisconsin*, p. 76.

2) *Regent's Report*, 1852 pp. 17-8.

3) The Normal Department was the traditional name for the teaching of the theory and practice of elementary instruction. It was organized in 1856 and widely regarded as one of the University's primary functions. The name Normal is a derivative of the French term *Ecole Normale*. See Curti and Carstensen vol 1 pp. 444-445.

4) *Regent's Report*, 1850 p. 5.

5) *Regent's Report*, 1854 p. 28.

6) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine* Mar. 1904 p. 179.

7) The lower suites were more desirable than the upper, and as a result of a kind of tenure by gravity Dr. Butler made the entire trip from top to bottom in his nine years.

8) Butler, J. D. *The Early Decade of Wisconsin University*, p. 7.

9) Pyre, J. F. A. *Wisconsin*, p. 77.