

STOVALL LABORATORY OF HYGIENE



Fig. 1. Hygiene lab from steps of Ag Hall, 1994.
[Author Photo, AP-29]

The State Laboratory of Hygiene was founded in 1903 to provide diagnostic services to state residents. The current building was erected in 1951.

The state hygienic laboratory was established in 1903, by the state board of health at the urging of H. L. Russell of the University, and his friend Dr. Cornelius Harper (appointed to the state board of health by governor La Follette). The state agreed to attach the laboratory to the university and to make Russell director. The university provided a basement room in the new Agriculture Hall. The state was thus availed of the existing facilities of the university, and the university gained a little income and prestige.¹

The purpose of the hygiene lab was to provide facilities and expertise in the diagnosis of diseases common in Wisconsin, as a service to state doctors. Among these diseases were typhoid, diphtheria, rabies, anthrax, and glanders. The lab also examined water and milk samples. The lab opened in October 1903, and in the first nine months examined 102 samples from around the state. Dr. Russell became dean of the college of agriculture in 1907, and gave up the directorship of the hygiene lab to Mazyck P. Ravenel. An outbreak of rabies in 1909 dramatically increased the lab's work load.

In June of 1914, the regents accepted Dr. Ravenel's resignation. Dr. W. D. Stovall, his assistant, took over the operation of the lab. Dr. Stovall was appointed director in 1918. The growth of the lab can be seen in the fact that by the 1930s tens of thousands of samples were sent annually to the lab for analysis.

In 1918 the lab was moved from Agriculture Hall to South Hall where, after medical bacteriology was moved to Science Hall, it occupied the entire top floor. When this space became insufficient in 1928, the lab was moved to Service Memorial Institute, the home of the University's medical school. When in the postwar enrollment explosion, this space was needed by the medical school, and

was again becoming restrictive to the hygiene lab, plans were begun for a separate building to house the lab. These plans were driven mainly by the vision and persistence of Dr. Stovall.

In 1949, the state legislature redefined the relationship between the board of health and the University. A coordinating and policy-making committee, comprising the president of the University, the president of the state board of health, and the dean of the medical school, was created. The regents were empowered to appoint the director and staff of the lab. In addition the state agreed to support Dr. Stovall's drive for a new building. In October 1949, state architect Roger Kirchhoff began corresponding with the University's business manager about the design of the new lab building. From the beginning, the preferred site was on the western edge of the medical school group, on the corner of Linden Drive and Henry Mall. There were already two small buildings there, the home economics practice cottage, and nursery school, but both were old frame houses that had been moved to the site, and were expendable. More importantly there was a private home located at 436 Lorch St. on the southern edge of the area planned for the hygiene lab. This caused a short-lived plan to erect a smaller building, that could be contained on the land already owned by the regents. The regents purchased this property for \$10,000 from the Schmelzer family on March 11, 1950, thereby completing the larger building site.

The architecture of the building was of considerable concern to the University, who wished that it harmonize with the buildings surrounding it. In March of 1950 the state selected Milwaukee architects Brimeyer, Grellinger & Rose. They were chosen at least in part because of their conservatism. The university's physical plant director Gallistel, wrote: "I do not believe the building should take on the character of the Johnson Wax Company Building for instance in that location. There might be such a proposal if an architect steeped in "Modernism" should get the commission."² After rejecting a few initial designs as not harmonizing enough, the regents accepted the architect's design for the new lab on July 15, 1950, suggesting that it be built of buff brick and trimmed with Bedford stone. With the exterior of the lab set, the regents had no more to do with the project. A contractor, J. P. Cullen and Son, was selected in early 1950, and the design of the interior of the new lab occupied the rest of that year. Ground was broken about April 30, 1951. There was no particular difficulty in construction, and the formal dedication was held February 8, 1953, in the 90 seat lecture hall in the new building, with speeches by Dr. Carl Neupert, director of the state board of health, president E. B. Fred, and other luminaries. Total cost was about \$1.7 million, funded from the state, the federal government, and the university. The lab moved into its new quarters in spring 1953.³

The building is a full basement and four story, concrete and steel structure, sheathed in buff brick and trimmed with Bedford limestone. The shape is rectangular with a 152 foot face on Henry Mall, and a 96 foot side on Linden Drive (see Fig. 1.). The south east corner of the rectangle was not originally filled in. This 30 foot by 91 foot four story section (designed by Torkelson and Associates) was added in 1972.⁴

The interior arrangement of the new lab had offices, conference rooms, and a library on the first floor, laboratories on the second and third floors, and animal rooms on the fourth. The 1972 addition contained cytology, bacteriology and air pollution labs, and in the basement a data processing facility. This addition brought the building to its current configuration.

On September 7, 1973, the regents formally named the building The William D. Stovall Building, in honor of the man who had been director of the hygiene lab for forty four years.

1) Paul F. Clark: *The University of Wisconsin Medical School*, p. 63; *History of the State Board of Health*, manuscript by William Foote Whyte M. D., State Historical archives series 872 loc. 3/24/D4; *Regent's Minutes*, October 5, 1903, regent's papers, September 22, 1903; Executive Committee minutes, October 5, 1903; University directories.

2) Gallistel to Peterson, March 8, 1950.

3) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, October 1952, p. 13.

4) Plans in the plans room of the physical plant.