

WEEKS HALL



Fig. 1. Weeks Hall, April 1981. Meteorology is on the left of the picture, the Charter Street Heating Plant in the upper right, Rust and Bowman houses in the lower foreground. The light colored 'L' shaped section of Weeks Hall on the right end of the building is the phase II addition. [photo courtesy of Robert H. Dott, department of geology]

Weeks Hall for Geology and Geophysics was built in two stages in 1972 and 1979, with multimillion dollar gifts from alumnus Lewis Weeks and state matching funds.

Geology was the last of the major science departments to obtain a facility of its own. This was not for want of trying. As one of the original occupants of Science Hall, geology began a serious attempt to leave it in 1966. The problem with that building was the same thing that has saved it, namely that so many walls are load-bearing that the interior cannot easily be remodelled into the large open areas needed by modern science facilities. Besides the inadequate space in Science Hall, the department had expanded into several equally poor rental locations along University Avenue, and taken over the Brittingham mansion on the far west side of Madison.

Although the University placed the geology project high on the priority list, the initial project floundered. Financing depended heavily on federal funding, which although it had been flowing freely throughout the post-Sputnik era, was beginning to dry up in the Nixon Vietnam funding crunches. The state was unwilling to put up the required funding alone.¹

The department of Geology and Geophysics, with some advance notice of gift funds to become available, requested a grant from the National Science Foundation for planning and design of a new building. This grant, in the amount of \$500,000 was granted in June 1970. In April 1971 the regents were told by president Weaver that alumnus Lewis G. Weeks (a 1917 geology graduate who had become extremely wealthy finding oil deposits on commission for the Australian government) had pledged a gift of \$1.5 million to be used for the construction of a new building for the department of geology and Geophysics. This gift was contingent on additional funding from the state of \$1.85 million, and \$500,000 in federal grant money (the federal money already obtained). At the same meeting the regents approved as the site of the new building the corner of West Dayton, and North Charter, immediately east of the Earth and Space Science Building. During 1971 a building program statement was developed, defining the new building and its funding.²

During the spring of 1971 two major issues had to be resolved. The first was whether to have two buildings at the site (one for instruction and another for research). The decision to combine the two was apparently made without too much difficulty, now that funding seemed to be available for a large building. The new building was to hold everything but the lower division instruction and the geology museum, which would remain in Science Hall (due to budget constraints).³

The second problem was the desire of the Geology department to include in the building (at the cost of some research space) a specialized library facility. The University was at that time considering planning an Engineering and Physical Sciences Library (eventually the Wendt Library), and it was not obvious that the Geology department could justify a separate departmental library. This question was eventually decided in favor of a Geology branch library, both because of the uncertainty about the physical sciences library project, and the size and importance of the Geology research library.⁴

In June 1971 the regents presented the project to the state building commission, who approved the project at a projected budget of \$3.8 million, and authorized the state matching funds required by the Weeks gift. The University asked the state to assign an architect for the project in June 1971. The state responded by selecting the Madison firm of Graven, Kenney and Iverson. Because of the sharp escalation of building costs several features had to be deleted from the building, and were relegated to a possible future expansion.⁵

In May 1972 bids for the project were opened, and a short legal wrangle ensued between the University, who wanted to award the contracts, and the Attorney General's office, who argued that because Mr. Week's entire gift had not yet been received the money was not legally available and the contracts could not be signed. Mr. Weeks and the University altered the conditions of the gift's delivery to satisfy the state. With this difficulty out of the way, the construction contracts were confirmed on September 8, 1972. The general contractor was J. H. Findorff for \$1.99 million. Total contracted costs were \$3.85 million, of which \$1.8 million was state money, and the remaining \$2 million the Weeks gift and the federal grant. Ground-breaking took place in the last week of August 1972. Construction proceeded without serious incident and the building was dedicated on October 18, 1974, with speeches by Mr. Weeks, Dr. Clark, chancellor Young, and president Weaver.⁶

At the time of ground-breaking a letter to Dr. Clark from Mr. Weeks expressed disappointment at the elimination of certain features of the building and asks for an estimate of the cost of the deleted items. In September the University presented Weeks with detailed explanations of the reduction of the building program, and on December 15, 1972 Mr. Weeks informed the Wisconsin Foundation that he had transferred 600,000 shares of Weeks Natural Resources stock to the Foundation to be applied to

the construction of the Geology Building. This additional gift was worth an estimated one million dollars. By April 1973 this money had been budgeted toward the deleted items in phase I (about \$175,000) and the remainder toward a planned \$1.3 million phase II addition to Weeks Hall to hold the parts of the department left behind in Science Hall. In January 1974 the regents officially named the new building the "Lewis G. Weeks Hall for Geographical Sciences".⁷

After considerable scrambling for adequate financing caused by the fluctuating price of the stock gift during 1977 and 1978 the contracts for phase II (also designed by Graven and Associates) were let on August 8, 1979, with J. H. Findorff the general contractor for \$1.02 million. Total cost was \$1.56 million, with the funding coming entirely from gift funds. The ground-breaking for the Weeks Hall phase II was held on September 27, 1979. Mr. Weeks had died the March 4, 1977 but was represented by his widow.⁸

The building is a basement and four levels, containing offices, labs and seminar rooms, in a roughly triangular shape 160 by 200 feet around an open courtyard. The configuration was developed by the architects to avoid looking out onto the relatively unattractive and industrial neighborhood. Instead the building looks inward to a self-contained green space. According to faculty member Robert H. Dott, the unusual angled windows on the outside of the buildings allow light but exclude the view. The 80 by 120 foot phase II addition on the south side contains the geology museum, library space and offices. The exterior is sheathed in face brick.

The completion of phase II came in April 1981 when the geology museum was moved from Science Hall to the new space in Weeks Hall. Thus Geology ended 87 continuous years of occupancy of Science Hall, and were united under one roof for the first time since the 1920s.⁹

- 1) Geology - Geophysics at the University of Wisconsin, undated, unsigned, Young to Frautschi, August 5, 1969 and July 30, 1969, Bailey to Young, July 1, 1969, Building Program - Geology and Geophysics, August 15, 1969, Atwell to Young, October 13, 1969, Edsall to Young, February 14, 1969, series 24/9/2-1 box 14; Bailey to Young, February 7, 1969, series 24/9/2-1 box 8; Geology - Geophysics Proposal, undated, series 24/9/2-1 box 2.
- 2) *Regent's Minutes*, June 12, 1970, May 21, 1971; Gentry to Clark and Roeber, April 8, 1970, Campus Request for Regents Action, June 12, 1970, Exo to Atwell, May 29, 1970, series 24/9/2-1 box 14; Edsall to Lemon, September 15, 1970, Building Program and Analysis, May 3, 1971, Bailey to Frautschi, October 12, 1970, series 24/9/2-1 box 20.
- 3) Lemon to Weaver, May 11, 1971, Lemon to Heider, June 29, 1971, series 24/9/2-1 box 20.
- 4) Lemon to Edsall, May 11, 1971, series 24/9/2-1 box 20.
- 5) Request to State Building Commission, for June 1971 Meeting, Exo to Brown, June 28, 1971, series 24/9/2-1 box 20.
- 6) Bleck to Kopp, June 16, 1972, Weeks to Clark, September 6, 1972, series 40/1/15/1 box 6; *Regent's Minutes*, September 8, 1972 Exhibit A; Dedication Program, October 18, 1974, series 40/1/1/2-4 box 8; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, September 1974, p. 25.
- 7) Clark to Weeks, September 22, 1972, Rennebohm to Weeks, November 6, 1972, series 40/1/1/2-2 box 11; *Regent's Minutes*, January 11, 1974.
- 8) History and understanding of the Financing ... Weeks Geology Building, December 15, 1977, Summary of Meetings on Weeks Hall phase II, Clark to Young, September 26, 1978, Shain to Craddock, February 15, 1978, series 4/22/1 box 87; Agency Request for State Building Commission Action, August 1979, Invitation, from Shain, September 19, 1979, series 4/31/9-3 box 4; Rennebohm to Mrs. Lewis Weeks, September 18, 1979, series 4/22/1 box 87.
- 9) Department of Geology - Annual Report for 1981, Open House pamphlet, April 17, 1982, series 40/1/1/4-2 box 11.