

WISCONSIN HIGH SCHOOL



Fig. 1. Wisconsin High School c. 1915. Evident in this photo is the off-center entrance due to a reduction in size from the original plan, without relocating the entrance. [series 9/3, Wisconsin High School, x25-748]

Built in 1913 as a practice school for teachers, the Wisconsin High School was closed in 1964. It then served journalism, social work and some women's education, and was demolished in 1993.

In the period between 1875 and 1910, a series of efforts were made to provide and ensure a steady supply of good teachers for the high schools of the state of Wisconsin. Although one of the aims of the 1848 law which founded the University was "the department of the theory and practice of elementary instruction," this goal was not actively pursued until much later. A normal department was founded in the 1860s but was disbanded shortly after. In 1878 a law provided that any University graduate (in any subject), with 16 months experience at teaching was allowed an unlimited state teaching certificate. Around the turn of the century the state and University agreed that there was a need for a program devoted to the training of teachers. President C. K. Adams said in 1897 "one of the weakest points in this University up to the present time, has been its failure to give the requisite amount of theoretical and practical training in the art of imparting instruction."¹ As part of the attempts to rectify this situation, the University developed a curriculum in pedagogy for graduates who intended to teach. The state laws governing teacher certification were altered in 1907 to reflect the availability of specialized education for teachers.

It became clear that needed as part of the new curriculum was a way to give the students practical experience in teaching, while at the University, and, as a corollary consideration, a way for the department of education to test new means of teaching in a controlled environment. The 1906



Fig. 2. August 12, 1993, the Wisconsin High School is demolished to make way for the Biotechnology Center. [Author Photo, AP-9]

Board of Visitors urged the University to establish a demonstration school. President Van Hise also declared that year that a model school was needed. As a first attempt to meet this goal, the regents made arrangements with Madison area high schools to accommodate student observers.

In 1910 Charlotte Richmond the owner and operator of a private school called the Wisconsin Academy, at Gilman and State streets donated it to the University who reopened it in September 1911 as the Wisconsin High School. This temporary measure gave the University an opportunity to begin the kind of teacher instruction it envisioned. The University hired as principal Harry L. Miller, who answered to Edward Elliot, director of the course for training teachers. The Wisconsin High School was a private school, with tuition initially set at \$8 per quarter. The school was organized as a six-year school (grades seven, eight, and the four years of high school), making it a very early example of a combined junior and senior high school, reflecting some of the most progressive thinking in the field of education at the time.

The regents report of 1909-1910 contains an estimate by Van Hise of about \$150,000 to build and equip a University secondary school. In 1911 the legislature appropriated \$62,500 for the Wisconsin High School Building, about one-third the projected cost of the building at that time. In 1913 the legislature added \$45,000 to the appropriation. The University had discussed the project at length with consulting architects Laird and Cret and with University supervising architect Peabody and had plans for the building in hand shortly after the legislature acted.² The site for the building was a prominent spot on Henry Mall selected by Laird and Cret in their 1908 general plan.

The contract for the foundation was awarded to the Muskegon Construction Company for \$2783.50 on December 21, 1912. The regents accepted the bid of construction contractors The Wisconsin Construction Company for \$108,000 in April 1913.³ Construction began in July 1913. Because the appropriation for the building was not sufficient for the whole project, the regents decided to build only two-thirds of the building designed by Laird and Cret. At the same time, believing that the remaining portion of the building would be added soon, they did not redesign the section that they intended to build. The original design was a center section running north-south, nine bays (window sections) wide, with an east-west wing at each end. The reduced plan eliminated the wing on the north end, and shortened the center section from nine to seven bays (see Fig.1). The main entrance,

from Henry Mall, was centrally located on the original design, and was not relocated to the new center on the reduced plan, since when the planned completion took place, the entrance would then become centralized as planned. The planned expansion never took place, and the entrance remained offset for the life of the building.

The construction did not go entirely smoothly. The contractor suggested to architect Arthur Peabody that some money could be saved by replacing certain iron girders with concrete. Peabody agreed, made the changes on the drawings and presented them to the business manager H. C. Bumpus, who signed them without close examination. The following afternoon the concrete beams were poured, and that night the scaffolding gave way, collapsing the beams, and dumping the concrete into the basement. According to Peabody, Mr. Bumpus told him "You put one over on me. I did not know that honest steel girders had been changed to concrete." The volatile Peabody offered to quit but Van Hise talked to Bumpus and smoothed the episode over.⁴

The high school as built was a main section facing west, 44 feet by 90 feet three stories above a raised basement. On the back of the main section was the auditorium and gymnasium portion. On the south end of the main section was a wing 44 feet X 90 feet, three stories and an attic above a raised basement. The construction was a steel framework and reinforced concrete floors, skinned with buff vitreous brick (intended to harmonize with the color of the stone used in the old part of campus to the east). The visible parts of the roof were covered with red tiles. The building was occupied in September 1914, with a formal grand opening on April 1, 1915. The building contained classrooms and offices, manual arts laboratories, shower rooms and gymnasium in the basement; in the first and second stories were lecture rooms for the department of education. These lecture rooms overlooked rooms to the right and left, enabling students to witness the actual work of teaching.⁵

The Wisconsin High School was very successful in nearly every respect. The enrollment in 1915 was 250, and generally stayed at high levels. This was due to several factors, chief among which was the quality of education. The presence of University-level teachers and student teachers, coupled with some forward-thinking experiments in education, provided a high school experience that is remembered with pleasure by many graduates. The opportunity for local students (including the children of many faculty members) to attend the same school for six years provided continuity for the students and school alike.

As other methods were developed for student teaching, the importance of the Wisconsin High School to the School of Education waned. Finally in 1962, in the midst of severe space shortages, the instructional activities were merged with the old Madison Central High School, and the high school was closed and remodelled (by Law, Law, Potter and Nystrom) for use as the University's School of Journalism and the Library School.⁶ In 1972 it became the home of the School of Social Work and parts of the Women's Physical Education Department.

Its incomplete state as an architectural design and the subdivision and repeated remodelling of its interior as well as added space on campus (especially in Vilas Hall) made the building expendable and its site was selected for the new Biotechnology Center, and the old Wisconsin High School became the first of the Laird and Cret designed buildings on campus to be razed. It was demolished in August of 1993 (see Fig. 2).

1) *Regents Minutes*, January 19, 1897.

2) *Regent's Minutes*, June 18, 1912.

3) *Regents Minutes*, April 16, 1913.

4) Peabody, Arthur: *Short Resume of University Buildings*, 1934, p. 22.

5) *Regent's Report*, 1913-1914, p. 342.

6) *Regent's Minutes*, December 7, 1962.