

KING HALL

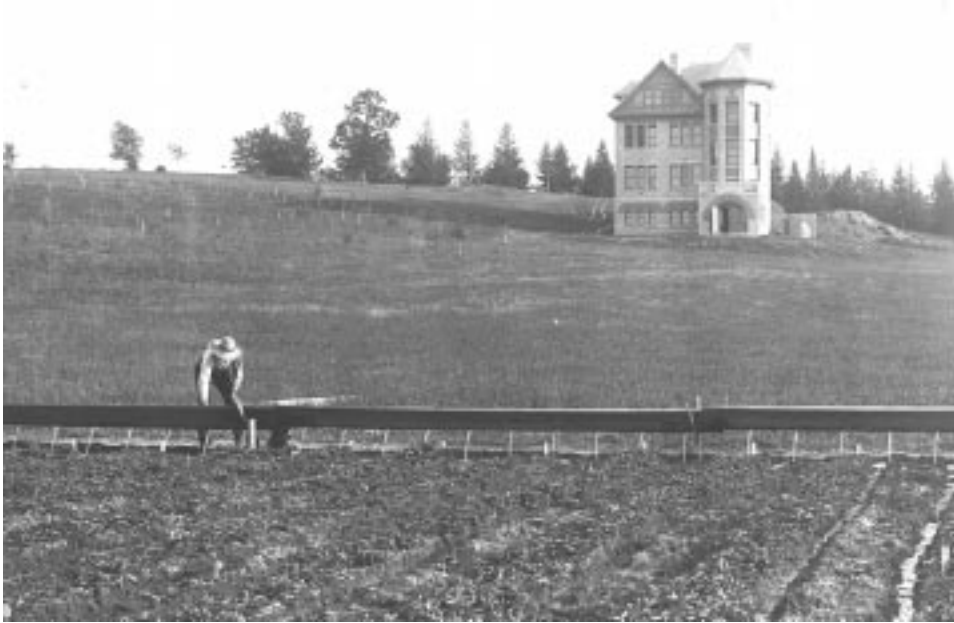


Fig. 1. A rare 1894 photo showing the Horticulture half (the east half) of King Hall from the north, before the Agricultural physics half was built. The picture was taken from about where Tripp Hall now stands. The man in the foreground is working on the irrigation troughs for a part of the experimental farm. [9/3 King Hall folder jf-16]

Erected in two sections in 1894 and 1896 King Hall originally housed horticulture and agricultural physics. It was named in 1934 for Professor Franklin Hiram King, the first professor of agricultural physics, and the developer of the round silo and modern windmill design. King Hall was heavily remodelled in 1980, and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981.

By 1893 the agricultural college under dean William Henry was on the way to enormous success. The state's farmers had been convinced, in large part by the Babcock milk test, that the university was an appropriate place for themselves and their sons to learn about farming. The legislature was convinced, by the rising enrollments, that Henry and his staff (including professor Franklin Hiram King) knew what they were doing. The legislature of 1891-1892 had appropriated \$14,200 for the purpose of erecting a horticulture building, but after dean Henry examined other such buildings and got estimates and plans, the regents brought the total to \$20,000 by voting to add \$5,800 to the appropriation from the funds of the agricultural college¹. A site had been selected the previous year "north of the dairy school building, skirting Fourth Lake".²

By June of 1893, the building's design, by Chicago's John Thompson Wilson Jennings, was done. Because the total money available was only about half of what the department believed necessary the building was designed to be built in two sections. A contractor (Lenicheck and Thwaites of Milwaukee) was engaged, and the work got on the first section began. By January of 1894 the first section was done. It came in about at the estimate of \$23,000. This was the first expandable design at the university. The central tower and east wing of King Hall was erected first (see Fig. 1.) to house the horticulture department. Within a year, as new facilities attracted more students the second section was needed.³



Fig. 2. King Hall with both wings built, showing greenhouses at back, about 1900. [9/3 King Hall folder jf-17]

The university catalog of 1893-1894 describes the new building: "It is of white select brick with trimmings of pressed brick and Wauwatosa limestone, and covers an area 46 feet by 60 feet, being three [later four, see Fig. 3] full stories in height."⁴ This first section also included the first of a set of greenhouses at the rear of the building. The structure was of slow-burn mill construction. Stylistically King Hall is Richardson Romanesque, typified by semicircular arches and polychromatic brick work. Considering the beauty of this building to the 20th century eye, it is disconcerting to read the words of the buildings planning committee: "The plans submitted by the architect give a building with no costly ornamentation. We do not believe your Board will be satisfied to construct a plainer looking building on the University grounds than this will be."⁵

The agricultural college enrollment continued to rise, as did the star of Franklin Hiram King, the world's first professor of agricultural physics. As the work of professor King and his department became more widely known, his department needed more and more space. In 1896 the regents rehired J. T. W. Jennings to finish and submit plans for the west wing of the building.

The legislature of 1894-1895 appropriated \$20,000 to finish the building by adding the agricultural physics wing to the west side. This side is remarkable for a beautiful octagonal tower on the west hip roof that was included to provide a base for King's windmill experiments (see Fig. 2). The second section was built by contractor T. C. McCarthy, and was opened in January of 1896.

Over the years the agriculture college grew up around King Hall, and a large, ungainly addition was added to the west side in 1915 to house the Soils department. The "Old Soils building" was renamed King Hall in March 1934. King Hall got a thorough interior remodeling in 1980. Although the agriculture campus was deliberately designed with less expensive materials than the eastern part of campus, we see that style and skill with materials produced works of enduring beauty and utility.

1) Minutes of the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin April 28, 1893 volume 'D' p. 204-205.

2) Regents reports June 14, 1892 Reports vol. 'C' p. 34.

3) The nomination papers for the National Register of Historic Places say that the west wing was built first. This error is probably due to Henry's description in Thwaite's history in which Henry refers to the building first of the "right" section, followed by the "left". (Thwaites p. 200); *Daily Cardinal*, October 28, 1896.

4) University of Wisconsin Catalog 1893-1894 p. 157. The building was not raised, but the attic story was later finished.

5) Report of the Agricultural Committee, July 20, 1893, regents meeting papers. They could not have foreseen the look of "plain" to come.