

THE ARCHIVIST'S CORNER

Looking Backward and Forward

Remarks for the Dedication of the New West Wing of Weeks Hall on May 6, 2005

R.H. Dott, Jr.

The 1960s was a time of unprecedented growth in academia. Our introductory geology course had 2000 students in 1964 and 18 new faculty members were added within that decade. We were scattered in no less than six different locations across the city. Lewis Cline launched an appeal to the university administration for a new building, but it fell on deaf ears for several years. Finally in the late sixties, we submitted a proposal to NSF for a research building, but because of budget stringencies caused by the Vietnam War, we got only a paltry \$500,000 in 1970, not nearly enough. Luckily, Lewis Weeks came to our rescue with a very generous gift of \$3 million and we then began planning.

Let me draw some comparisons. By 1970, our faculty numbered 22, would rise to a high of 24 around 1980, and is today at 21 plus many more, vital supporting staff members than we had before. We had approximately 80 undergraduate majors then and about 60 now. Graduate students also numbered about 80, rose to a high of 120 in the eighties, and now is about 70. Two memorable milestones occurred while I was chairman when in 1975 exactly 50% of the incoming new graduate students were women. At that same time, Mary Anderson became our first woman faculty member. We now have five women and I believe that at 20% we are among the highest percentages for geology departments in the nation.

During our last year in Science Hall, I asked myself if we would miss that charming old place after 86 years (of course its charm would decline considerably when we left). In 1920 English Professor Pyre, who coincidentally was the father of geology alumnus Gus Pyre, had declared that Science Hall was "The largest, most useful, most expensive, and easily the ugliest building that the university had acquired." But we loved it—up to a point.

Some things that I knew we would miss included:

- Our proximity to the Rathskellar and Union Terrace
- The annual pool to pick the date that ice would go out of Lake Mendota
- Sliding on cafeteria trays down Big Bascom Hill on January nights

- Sliding down the old fire escape tube (which got sealed before we left)

- Coffee breaks with 50 people crowded into the narrow basement hallway (These died away even in spite of our lovely Cline Lounge in Weeks Hall, but Friday beer seminars have partly made up for that loss of collegiality.)

Some obvious advantages of the move would be:

- Bringing everyone together under one roof
- New, modern laboratories
- No pounding steam pipes in the winter (but at least we could open the windows in Science Hall unlike Weeks)
- Being farther from "tear gas center" of the then-recent days of campus unrest

The Building Committee members were Dave Clark (chairman), Lou Maher, and Bull Bailey, who were especially excited when moving day arrived in August 1974. The contract for the actual move went to an inexperienced low bidder. What was scheduled to take one week actually took four! The company woefully underestimated the number and weight of our rock cabinets.

Just a few days before the move began, I succeeded Dave Clark as Departmental Chairman. Although he had done a fine job of briefing me, inevitably unforeseeable difficulties arose in addition to the protracted moving process itself. There were unexpected frenzied reactions of some to the stress of change. Some feared that togetherness might constrain their former freedoms of action and several were irate over trivial things perceived to be unsatisfactory about their new spaces, most of which were exactly as they had specified a few years earlier. Of two faculty located in semi-isolation in the north wing, one hated it and the other loved it. One faculty member wanted more phones in spite of the fact that in Science Hall we had



Clark Johnson addresses alumni and guests at the dedication.

shared lines. Dave said "He should have a phone sewn to his ear." Cell phones came 30 years too late. One typist objected to being put into a lovely new stenographic room with two other women, so she put up a folding screen between.

Here are some more comparisons:

- Science Hall—cost \$360,000 in 1888
- Weeks Hall—phase I—cost \$3.6 million in 1974
- Phase II—cost \$2 million in 1980
- Phase III just completed—cost \$5 million in 2005

The new West Wing has increased our space by 30% and provides several state-of-the art new laboratories as well as many new offices and a significant expansion of our fine library. It also provides parity, at last, in number of women's and men's restrooms. It is very unfortunate that we could not afford the planned expansion of the museum at this time, but we hope that this can be accomplished soon. Needless to say, several new instruments have also been added, including a new mass spectrometer and an ion microprobe of which there are but a handful in the entire world. A new electron scanning microscope is in our near future as well (installed March, 2006). All of these are rather intimidating to an old fossil like me, but they produce remarkable data, which allows investigations never dreamed of in my day.

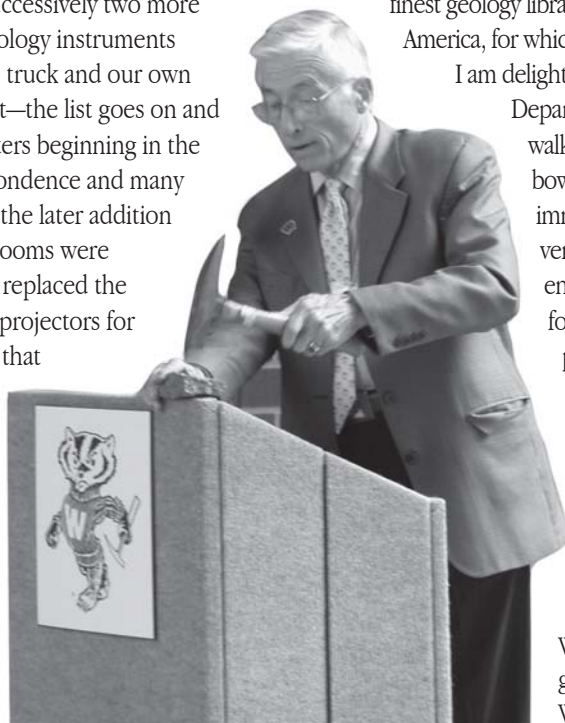
It is interesting to reflect upon the tremendous changes in the way we do things. When we left Science Hall 31 years ago, the Xerox machine was brand new. Our instruments then included the hand lens, rock hammer, brunton compass, alidade, petrographic microscope, various geophysical instruments, typewriters, and an electron probe. Personal computers and digital cameras were still in the future. After moving to Weeks, we soon added a scanning electron microscope, two mass spectrometers, successively two more probes, as well as GPS and new hydrogeology instruments beyond the venerable piezometer, a drill truck and our own fleet of vans, portable logging equipment—the list goes on and on. Since the advent of personal computers beginning in the 1980s, everyone does their own correspondence and many have mastered computer graphics. With the later addition of digital photography, our several darkrooms were dismantled and computer graphics have replaced the Leroy Set. Power Point is replacing slide projectors for all but the most backward of us. I notice that students tend to be much more facile with these things than some faculty members. Staffing has changed so that there are more skilled instrument technicians, talented computer experts to keep us all on-line, and a graphics artist who provides many of the stunning displays that you see around the building; she also designs the annual Outcrop. There are many

other supporting staff members, who are equally vital to keeping the enterprise functioning.

We geologists are better at hindcasting than forecasting, but it is clear that this department is robust with an outstanding faculty that continues to attract excellent students. It also is very successful at attracting funding to further the cause, yet I am happy to observe that teaching continues to have high priority. As we enter a nanoworld, we find ourselves with the paradox of studying smaller and smaller scales in order to address larger and larger problems. Several faculty members are taking advantage of the revolution in mineralogy and low-temperature geochemistry, which results from the realization that microbes keep the world out of chemical equilibrium for their metabolic advantage. Even sedimentologists are now interested in the microbial world. As I speak, a new geomicrobiology laboratory is under construction in the new wing. Meanwhile, the new ion microprobe, of which there are only 10 in the world, can measure isotopes all across the periodic table even from minute samples. Practically all of our specialties utilize isotopic and trace element analyses today. In addition, precision geochronology is needed by several specialties, cosmogenic exposure dating of de-glaciation is important to Quaternary geologists, and ground-penetrating radar is used by sedimentologists as well as Quaternary folks. Precise Global Positioning is being used to plot tectonic plate motions to the millimeter scale. And so on.

Our excellent, but too-small, museum attracts over 25,000 visitors per year so provides a very significant outreach function for both the Department and the University as a whole. The value of this should never be underestimated. Likewise, we have one of the finest geology libraries and librarians in North America, for which we are also blessed.

I am delighted to report that the vitality of the Department is as great as the day I first walked into Science Hall and was bowled over by the energy there. I immediately concluded that I was very lucky to be a part of this enterprise. In conclusion, "With my forty-year old rock hammer and a piece of the state rock, I hereby dedicate the new West Wing to the unrivaled spirit of our department and our tremendously loyal Alumni. (smash!) So, my friends, I say "On Wisconsin!"



With a resounding whack of steel on granite Bob Dott officially dedicates the West Wing Addition of Weeks Hall.