

Old Ideas in a New Bottle

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During a visit to northern Wisconsin this past Spring, I was surprised to meet a number of people who did not know that the Law School building completed in 1893 had been destroyed to make way for the 1963 addition. This news saddened them, but they did not punish me as its bearer, perhaps because my empathy to their disappointment was genuine.

It is true that I never knew the old building, and I have been told that it was filled with chilly drafts and vicious bats and that its brownstones were merely a thin facade over a crumbling brick structure.

Such rumors are unconvincing. In our faculty-staff lounge are two photographs of that lovely pile, with its tower, peaked corners, and protective gargoyles. Also on the wall is a 1907 print of Bascom Mall and Lake Mendota, rescued recently from a basement closet, which shows the 1893 building in all its majesty.

An image of the old building hovers close to my consciousness, and breaks through at least once a week, like the memory of a lost love—one I never met! If the building had survived a few years, the preservation movement would have rescued and preserved it in an innovative way now commonly seen in historic buildings in Wisconsin and around the nation. A quarter of a century has now passed since the old building died, and an opportunity may be at hand which should be used to make amends.

The possibility arises from practical problems rather than any increase in aesthetic sensibilities. Our current building was designed to accommodate 650 students, but our enrollment is just short of 900. During the years of rapid growth in law school population throughout the U.S., the faculty in 1970 placed a cap on enrollment. Since then, we have targeted each entry class at 285 students. This decision, which was highly controversial, is now seen as a responsible balancing of demand with available resources to meet the requirements of a quality education.

But squeezing 900 students into where 650 were intended became less tenable each year as the Law Library steadily grew. Space had been taken from areas of planned growth in the library in order to accommodate students, faculty, and staff. As the library expanded, it became inevitable that we would need additional space.

One option would be to go to a new site and inhabit an entirely new building. Twice this possibility has been raised and twice the faculty has resisted the lure of an alternative location. The basic reason for our reluctance is that the closeness to colleagues in the humanities and social sciences is an integral part of the role of the Law School as a national leader in interdisciplinary studies.

But can the Law School expand without encroaching on the beautiful open space of Bascom Mall? At first, this



seemed impossible. During the past two years, however, the staff of the campus Department of Planning conceived a brilliant solution. The Law School's courtyard, which is not usable during the winter, would become an atrium, with two new floors and a transparent roof, for all year use. At a later time, Professor John Kidwell, the Chair of our Building Committee who has had a major leadership role in this project, will provide you with more details of our planning.

At present, the proposal for an addition to the Law School has finally reached the top priority list of the Madison campus, albeit at the bottom of that list. We are now able to take seriously the possibility that we will have our first significant building change in 25 years.

My hope is that we will use the occasion to gain not only the space required for our mission, but also to restore to the building a sense of the public duty we fulfill by educating men and women to the responsibilities as lawyers and judges. Just as the architecture of a legislative assembly or a court should reflect and influence the awareness of the awesome duties undertaken there, a law school should provide an environment which enhances the students understanding and commitment to a legal profession which is charged with defending the public's welfare and liberty.