

The Evolution of Landscape Form on the Agricultural Campus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison 1866-1955

By Catherine Dammann

In 2003, the University of Wisconsin-Madison was one of twenty-four higher educational institutions to receive a Campus Heritage Grant from the Los Angeles-based Getty Foundation. This funding provided the impetus of a comprehensive cultural landscape study of the 900-acre campus site, which is located along the shore of Lake Mendota. The entire Madison campus includes over 250 acres of natural areas, ancient earthworks built by Native American societies, a series of historic scenic drives, and remnants of historic campus planning and landscape eras. The University Farm and Agricultural College have served as the locations for many of these significant landscapes. My study focuses on the Agricultural Campus, which at its most expansive period covered over 600 acres of the western campus.

Since 1866, the cultural landscape of the University's Agricultural Campus has significantly changed from a romantic expression of winding carriage roads bordered by majestic American elms and linden trees, with sweeping lawns dotted with ornamental gardens and Norman-inspired farm buildings surrounded by experimental plots and pastures, to a landscape that is increasingly urban. By nature and definition, agriculture implies a strong relationship to the land. As the University of Wisconsin-Madison has continually redefined itself within the framework of a modern urban setting, the importance of this relationship has diminished on the Agricultural Campus. While the presence of previous aesthetic styles is obscured today, some historic cultural landscape remnants remain. They tell the story of the significant landscape history associated with the small University Farm and its subsequent evolution and rise to prominence and influence as a world-renowned agricultural college and research institution.

The emotional power of the landscape is illustrated in the changing tastes and redefinition of landscape aesthetic movements that have occurred over the last one hundred and fifty years on the Agricultural Campus. Both the nature-inspired Romantic landscape of the nineteenth century, followed by the architecturally centered City Beautiful movement of the early twentieth century, embraced the landscape. These two aesthetics intermingled on the University of Wisconsin campus until the late 1940s, when the separation of the aesthetic landscape and architecture coincided with the modern post-war building boom. The modern era, which resulted in the greatest expansion of buildings and infrastructure in the University's history, also marks the time when historic context was devalued or completely disregarded. The loss of gardens, experimental fields, orchards, and pastoral farm character resulted as general University land-use pressures eroded much of the land associated with the Agricultural College.

As the University expands into the future, defining cultural landscape significance on the Agricultural Campus will be an important first step in maintaining a connection to the historical past, while simultaneously providing context and meaning for the landscape of the future. My thesis explores the evolution of landscape form on the Agricultural Campus, defines major eras of development within such a historical context, identifies significant cultural landscape remnants, and provides management guidelines for future growth and restoration.