



The Hill Farms Story

THE HISTORY of the development of the University Hill Farms, a part of the University of Wisconsin's land holdings for more than half a century, is a tale of adventure in modern community planning.

The Hill Farms, a tract of over 600 acres on Madison's west side, is being developed by the University of Wisconsin for residential and commercial purposes. Originally, the site was given over to the University's College of Agriculture for experimental purposes. But as the Madison city limits began to creep westward, southward, and eventually, to surround the Hill Farms, two things became obvious: the cost to the City of Madison to extend municipal services to those residents living around and beyond the Hill Farms property would be staggering, and if the University decided to acquire property adjacent to the site for additional research and experimentation, the cost would be equally as prohibitive. In addition, agricultural researchers at the University pointed out that the Hill Farms land did not offer the variety of soil types necessary for extended research. Thus, it became increasingly apparent that some sort of change was necessary.

In 1953, the Legislature authorized the University to assume responsibility for the sale of the Hill Farms.

It was further agreed that the money realized from the sale would be used to purchase larger and more adequate farm sites away from the Madison metropolitan area. (Subsequent developments led to the purchase of the Arlington Farm, the University of Wisconsin's new agricultural research center located in the northeast corner of Dane County and in Columbia County.)

Shortly after the Legislature had given its sanction to the project, the University of Wisconsin Regents appointed an Agricultural Lands Committee, headed by former Gov. Oscar Rennebohm, to determine the manner in which the University would proceed in the orderly disposal of its Hill Farms property. At first, it was assumed that the land would be parceled off in wholesale quantities, but further analyses soon revealed that the University would realize a much greater return from the property if it would proceed with the development on its own. In 1955, the Regents approved the preparation of a master plan for the entire Hill Farms, and further approved the special committee's recommendation that the University should develop and sell the lots.

On the following pages, we present the story of that development.