

# A. W. PETERSON BUILDING

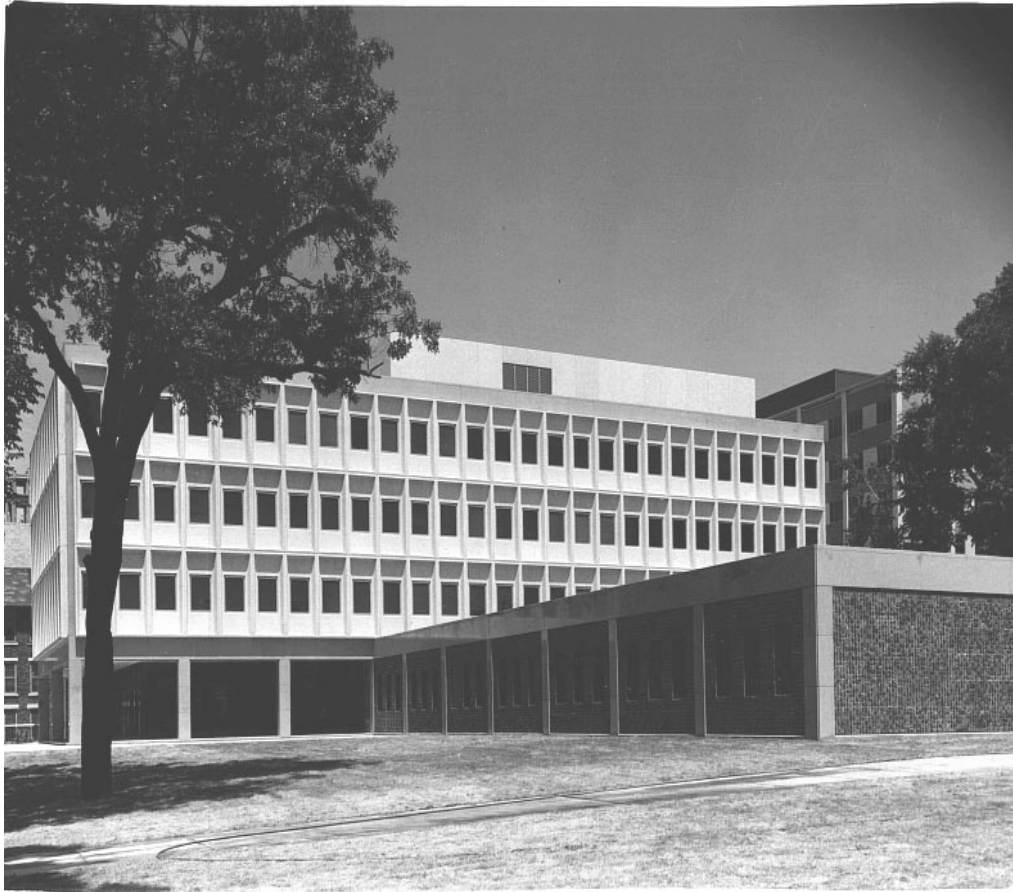


Fig. 1. The A. W. Peterson Building, 1964. [series 9/2, Peterson Building, ns-261]

*Built in 1963 to provide consolidated quarters for the University's scattered administrative offices, the Peterson Building is named for Alfred Walter Peterson, a lifelong manager (1924-1966) for the University who died just before retirement in 1965.*

In late 1958, business manager A. W. Peterson informed president Elvehjem that the first unit of the proposed administration building had been approved by the state for the 1961-63 biennium, and suggested the appointment of a building committee, to be headed by Mr. Neil Cafferty. At this time the administration of the University was housed principally in the old stone building at State and Park Streets, with departments in twelve other buildings, from Bascom Hall to old wood frame residences around lower campus. This scattering was bad for organization and for efficiency. A new building that would house all of administration was a badly needed solution to this scattering problem, and additionally would free up a large amount (an estimated 20,000 square feet) of academic space, mostly in Bascom hall.<sup>1</sup>

The state appointed architects Frelich, Angus & Associates of Janesville to the administration building project in September 1960. By this time analysis sketches had yielded an estimated cost of \$1.5 million. In December 1960, the state building commission approved financing of \$1.8 million for

the project. The building committee and the architects agreed on a site on Murray Street, near University Avenue. This site was central to the University as its expansion was planned, and the University owned most of the land on which the building would stand, in fact many of the old houses on this property were being used as housing for administration.<sup>2</sup>

By March 1962, the architects had completed preliminary plans for the administration building. It had an estimated cost of \$1.9 million. The regents approved the preliminary plans as presented by dean Wendt and the state architect Karel Yasko. The plans were for a four story tower section with a basement and one story wing to the south. The regents discussed parking for the building, and the plan of building the structure in two phases, the first phase a four story unit, with a one story extension, and a later phase two section that would be a tower extension toward University Avenue. The final plans for the administration building were approved by the regents on November 9, 1962. The planned exterior had now been altered so that it matched the recently erected Van Vleck Hall, with its "egg crate" pre-cast concrete panels. It was reiterated that this was only the first unit of the building, and that a tower section (of perhaps fifteen stories) would be built at a later date.<sup>3</sup>

Bids were opened on December 11, 1962, and construction contracts were let by the regents on January 23, 1963. The general contractor was J. H. Findorff and Son for \$885,111. Total contracted costs were \$2.2 million. The entire cost, including the \$340,000 for land and utility extensions was paid for by a bond issue arranged by the state Agencies Building Corporation. Estimated completion was April 1, 1964. Construction began immediately, although the purchase of land was not completed until February 8, 1963, when condemnation awards were made for the three final parcels.<sup>4</sup>

In March, 1963 after the building was begun, the University Faculty Credit Union successfully petitioned the state to be housed in the new building, after agreeing to pay the cost of adding the required space onto the building about \$31,000. By May the building was emerging from the ground. In July 1963, the contractor informed the University that the supplier of concrete panels could not deliver because of a wildcat strike, and that a delay of unknown length would ensue. On April 1, 1964 exactly on the date originally targeted, the University inspected and accepted the basement and all four floors of the building. The budget had also been met. There was in March, 1964, an unexpended balance of \$96,800 in the contingency account which was used to acquire for parking purposes the home and lot at 433 Murray Street, a small boarding house occupied by professor Helen C. White and others. In early May 1964 the administrative occupants of the old administration building began to move from the old building to the new one. Space at the University was so tight that several departments (student loans and student housing among them) began to move into the old building, even though it was scheduled for demolition in less than a year.<sup>5</sup>

The grand opening and open house at the new administration building was held on June 12, 1964. The new work space of the three hundred employees of the bursar, admissions, registrar, personnel, and business manager's offices was shown off. Problems surfaced within a week when the air-conditioning unit failed to cool the building and leaked condensate water through the ceiling of the 4th floor. These problems and others were solved in the next two years. The building was reinforced concrete, a 'L' shaped basement and first floor section 160 by 190 feet, with three upper floors over the north wing. This tower is 70 by 160 feet. The high traffic areas, the lobby, the registrar, and student records are in the low section, while the tower contains offices and conference rooms.<sup>6</sup>

In the next year an extraordinary sequence of events took place. In August 1965, Alfred Walter Peterson, the University business manager who had begun his career at the University in 1924 as an assistant accountant announced his retirement as of July 1, 1966. At a testimonial dinner on October 22, 1965, president Fred thoroughly recounted the career of the great administrator. The following day, October 23, 1965 at the University homecoming game at camp Randall, A. W. Peterson suffered a heart attack, and died at 66. Three years later, after various suggestion to honor the well loved

Peterson, the regents voted on June 14, 1968 to rename the new administration building "the Alfred Walter Peterson Office Building".<sup>7</sup>

The Peterson Building continues to house most of the University Administration functions, but the plans to expand the building have never been realized, mostly due to the introduction of computers in record keeping which dramatically reduces space needs for record storage. These computers caused their own problems, since the buildings air-conditioning had to be remodelled to handle the cooling load of the computers. Some University business functions which can find no space in Peterson are housed outside the Peterson building in nearby buildings in the 700 block of University Avenue.<sup>8</sup>

- 1) Peterson to Elvehjem, November 24, 1958, series 4/0/3 box 180; Elvehjem to Cafferty, Gallistel Luberg, Trump and White, November 25, 1958, series 24/9/2 box 11;
- 2) Sites to Peterson, August 31, 1961, series 24/9/2/ box 13. *Regent's Minutes*, December 9, 1960, February 8, 1963.
- 3) *Regent's Minutes*, March 6, 1962, April 6, 1962, November 9, 1962;
- 4) *Regent's Minutes*, November 9, 1962, December 11, 1962, February 8, 1963 ;
- 5) *Regent's Minutes*, April 5, 1963. *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 10, 1963; *Capital Times*, May 25, 1964, March 31, 1965;
- 6) Open House announcement, series 4/0/3 box 180.
- 7) *Regent's Minutes*, June 14, 1968; State of Wisconsin Joint Resolution, 131. Peterson biographical file, University Archives.
- 8) *Regent's Minutes*, December 9, 1966.