

CAMP RANDALL STADIUM



Fig. 1. The modern configuration c. 1990. Shown are the 77,000 seat stadium with new upper west deck, the 1930s field house, the 1954 memorial shell, and the 1988 McClain facility. The street in the foreground is Breese Terrace. [series 9/10, Camp Randall, jf-45]

The first field at camp Randall was in the northeast corner, and was used from about 1893 to 1914. The current stadium was built sections at a time beginning in 1915, with major additions in 1924, 1940, 1950, 1957, and 1964.

In the earliest days of the State of Wisconsin the 50 acre site bounded by University Avenue, Breese Terrace, Monroe and North Randall Streets, was owned by the State Agricultural Society. The early state fairs were held there with the race track and fairgrounds in the approximate location of the modern stadium's football field. With the outbreak of the Civil War the Agricultural Society offered the property to the state as a training center for troops. By May 1, 1861 soldiers began to move in. The camp was named for Alexander W. Randall, the state's first wartime governor. The first winter saw 9,000 troops quartered at Camp Randall, and eventually 70,000 of the state's 91,327 troops trained there at one time or another. In 1862, 1400 sick and wounded Confederate troops captured at Island 10 in the Mississippi and at Shiloh were held at Camp Randall. Many of these southern soldiers died of their wounds and are buried in a cemetery on Madison's west side in an area known as "soldier's rest", the northernmost confederate cemetery in the United States. There was then a plan made for the land to be platted and sold for building lots, but the outrage of the war veterans against this "sordid sacrilege" led the state legislature to purchase the property from the owners, a group of Madison businessmen led by R. M. Bashford, for \$25,000 on April 29, 1893. In his testimony before the legislative committee regarding the property General Lucius Fairchild is reported to have said: "Gentlemen there is the property; the university needs it; the price is cheap; if you don't buy it, I will." The legislature then presented the property to the university. In 1913 the memorial park was defined by the legislature to include the 6.5 acre parcel at the east entrance of the camp. The memorial park section is still under the control of the university. The memorial arch was built by the state in 1911 at a cost of about \$25,000 and the cannons were mounted in 1913. Soldiers were again quartered and trained at Camp Randall during WW I, and the WAVES in WW II trained



Fig. 2. c. 1924 aerial photo of Camp Randall from the north. The Camp Randall polygon is bounded by Randall Street on the left, Monroe Street (diagonal at upper left), Breese Terrace on the right and University on the bottom. The horizontal street nearest the bottom of the picture is Linden Drive. The new stadium is under construction at the upper right, the oval from the old field is still visible near the intersection of Randall and Dayton Streets. [photo album series 0/6 vol. 18, p.108]

there.¹

Shortly after it was acquired by the university Camp Randall was put to use for athletics, at first only for track and field events, since baseball and football games were still being played on the lower campus between State and Langdon Streets. Even some Big 9 (later Big 10) games were held on the lower campus, with spectators lining up in buggies on Langdon Street. The increasing attendance and the associated dangers (there were reports of baseballs entering street cars) at these athletic events caused the university to build a stadium at the northeast corner of Camp Randall the site of the old fairgrounds (see Fig. 3.) A soldier's veteran groups wrote a petition to the regents that the name always remain Camp Randall, complaining that no-one would consider renaming Bunker Hill "Bunker Field". Their request was granted and only the occasional visiting sportscaster refers to 'Randall Field' and is quickly corrected. This stadium was first used in 1895 when the Badgers defeated the Gophers of Minnesota 6-0. The bleachers were wooden and with the heavy use (capacity was about 3000) were difficult to maintain. The grandstand section had rooms underneath it for lockers, toilets and showers. In the fall of 1914 the entire bleacher section on the north side of the field was condemned as unsafe for use. They were torn down and the practice began of renting temporary bleacher seating for the east, west and north sides of the field. Although the total seating capacity of the stadium was about 3,000 the Daily Cardinal reports that as many as 15,000 attended games, standing in crowds surrounding the field. Peabody, athletic director George W. Ehler and the regents began planning the stadium in 1908 about the time the old stadium was becoming unsafe. Petitions to the legislature for funds were not answered until 1915 when the state granted \$20,000 of a \$40,000 request for a new stadium. The work of preparing the site for the new stadium was begun in mid-1915. Work was slow due to hard weather, and war related material problems. The hope that



Fig. 3. 1910 The original stadium at Camp Randall. The intersection in the foreground is Randall (left to right) and Johnson Streets. University Avenue is in the extreme upper right. The camera is looking west toward Breese Terrace. The grandstand is at the left. The bleachers on the right were condemned. [series 9/10 Camp Randall, x25-1872]



Fig. 4. The stadium dorms on the east side of the stadium c. 1950. [series 9/10 Camp Randall, jf-46]

the new stadium would be available in the 1916 season slipped away. Then something happened.²

The homecoming game against Minnesota on November 20, 1915 was attended by a reported 15,000 spectators. A large percentage of these fans were crowded into the rented and recently erected temporary bleachers. About a minute into the second quarter of the game, a loud cracking sound was heard from the vicinity of the west bleachers and three one-hundred foot sections of bleachers containing 1,800 people collapsed. Surprisingly there were almost no serious injuries, although there were a quantity of minor ones, and rumors of students near death. The game was only interrupted for about fifteen minutes, after which the Badgers were beaten 21-0. Famed sportswriter Ring Lardner was at the game and wrote a typically breathless article for the Cardinal in which he reported: "They was about 1,000 or maybe five thousand people in one of the cheering stands and all of a sudden it caved in somewhere and all the people was thrown on the ground. Some of 'em was hurt pretty bad too..." An inquiry into the accident by the state and university architects and engineers exonerated almost everybody, placing the bulk of the blame on ground recently saturated by rain and subjected to a freeze-thaw cycle. The stakes at the front of the bleachers began to move forward under their load until some rear supports pulled out and gave way, thus allowing the structure to collapse. President Van Hise told the Cardinal "We have been afraid something like this might happen ever since a stand gave way in Chicago ... we have been for years urging a concrete stadium at Camp Randall, but it was just cut out of the bill offered on the floor of the senate. Today's accident shows how imperative is the need." The 1915 legislature's \$20,000 appropriation, the accident, and \$2300 in donations from alumni and students accelerated the construction of the new stadium.³

The plan placed the new field just east of a forty foot hill that sloped away from Breese Terrace near Monroe Street. The new concrete bleachers would be built directly into the east side of that hill. Since there would be no space under the west stands it was assumed that locker rooms and facilities would wait until the construction of an east grandstand which was not an explicit part of the original plan. It was estimated that the hillside capacity was 10,000 seats, not all that were needed but all that could be afforded. The new stadium was ready for use in time for the opening home game of 1917. The top row (of 40) was twenty feet below Breese Terrace. The seats stretched 400 feet

along the hill.

The first game played at the new field was October 6, 1917 against Beloit, with the Badgers winning 34-0, attendance was reported at 2000. The stadium was not officially dedicated until November 3, 1917 at homecoming against Minnesota. The Badgers won in front of 10,000 fans at the new stadium. The legislature of 1917 had appropriated another \$10,000. Because only 7500 of the hillside seats were finished in time for the start of the season, and partly to provide dressing facilities, the grandstand section was moved from the south side of the old field (the section on the left in fig. 3) to the east side of the new field, adding another 3000 seats. The ground on the east side of the field was fill and several years were thought to be needed for it to stabilize before it would be safe to build concrete seats upon. This configuration of 7500 concrete hillside seats and 3000 old wooden seats from the old field was used and added to piecemeal (in 1921 4000 concrete seats were added for \$24,872) for about seven years.⁴

On June 8, 1922 after a rain-soaked fraternity game at the field, a student living on Breese Terrace called the fire department and reported seeing flames at Camp Randall. By the time the fire department arrived the old wood grandstand was engulfed in flames, and far beyond saving. No certain cause of the blaze was ever determined, it was variously blamed on arson, a cigarette, town kids, et. al. Ironically the building had been sold the previous day to a salvage man. Thus passed the last remnants of the old stadium where played the earliest greats of the Badger football program, fabled "kangaroo" kicker Pat O'Dea⁵, J. F. A. "Sunny" Pyre, "Norsky" Larsen and other members of the conference champion teams of 1901 and 1912.⁶

In July of 1923 work was under way on concrete bleachers for the east side of the field that would add 5000 more seats to the stadium (Arthur Peabody's design). The temporary north bleachers were replaced with concrete in 1923 also. By 1924 the capacity of the stadium was listed as 33,000. For the next fifteen years the bowl-shaped stadium grew bit by bit as money became available from the legislature or from gate receipts. In 1940 an addition was built that completed the original bowl. It now wrapped around the field on three sides, with the field house filling in the south end, which had originally been left open to alleviate the ventilation problems that early stadia of this type exhibited. It had a capacity of 45,000 and utilized some temporary bleachers on the northwest and southwest corners.

An interesting aspect of the Camp Randall stadium was the inclusion of the stadium dormitories. In the period around 1940 housing for students and military personnel was a distinct problem in Madison, and the regents sought innovative ways to alleviate the problem. The '1940' addition (designed by the state Bureau of Engineering) which was actually begun November 1938, added 7500 seats on the east side and built the dormitory under the east side seats. The outside wall was sheathed with Madison sandstone (for which a local quarry had to be temporarily reopened), and in addition to the dormitory for 150 men, there were boxing and wrestling quarters, and a rifle range. The work on the 1940 addition to the stadium was done by the WPA (Works Progress Administration) a depression era federal program. The dormitories were named the Schreiner and Baumann houses after two UW students who were killed at Okinawa. These dorms were occupied initially by naval trainees. After the war the dorms were home to 157 student veterans. The stadium dorms did not have kitchen facilities and so were cheaper than the regular dorms (\$145-160/year in 1950). As dormitories they always operated at a loss because of various factors mostly regarding scale and poor utilization of space. In 1951 the regents announced their decision to close the stadium dorms, and suggested that the next dorms built on campus should be named for Schreiner and Baumann. In 1954 the rooms were converted to offices for the extension department. Later they became offices for the athletic and military departments.⁷

In 1950 plans (by Ebling, Plunkett & Keyman of Milwaukee) were announced to expand the

stadium to hold 50,000 using revenue from athletic events. The expansion was done by raising the bleachers in the north end to the same height as the main east and west sections, and by replacing the temporary seats with permanent ones. The C. B. Fritz Co. was awarded the contract, and began work in May 1950. The total cost of this expansion was \$568,000. Complaints had been made about spectators getting splinters from the old wood seats. The work was delayed because of postwar material shortages and a severe winter in 1950. The job was not completed until September of 1951. Even with the expansion Camp Randall stadium was one of the smallest in the Big 10.⁸

Attendance at the newly enlarged stadium averaged over 50,000 during the seasons of 1952 and 1953. Calls for further expansion were immediately raised. In 1954 the regents authorized a study of methods for adding seats. Three methods were investigated: building more rows on top of the existing seats, filling in the south end of bowl behind the field house, and lowering the field; that is going up, going out or going down. In 1957 the regents announced that they would lower the field by ten feet, thereby adding 10,000 new seats and many of them between the goal lines. This would eliminate the running track which had always surrounded the field, but the newly built Memorial practice building and plans for a new gymnasium eliminated this drawback. The work was begun in mid November of 1957, with a projected cost of \$482,000. By July 1958 the expansion was in the finishing stages. The capacity had risen to 63710. The area between the bleachers and the field was blacktopped during this expansion.⁹

The stadium proved adequate through the late 1950s and early 1960s, but a few successful seasons boosted attendance again and in 1964 the regents decided to expand again. This time they decided to go up. The plan (by Osborne Engineering of Cleveland OH) was to add a second deck on the west side of the stadium, and to include a two story press box, which would free up more seats in the bleachers. This addition was completed in time for the 1965 season and brought the stadium to its current [1993] capacity of 75,935. The promise of the Barry Alvarez era, the 1993 Rose Bowl season, and the stampede in the overcrowded student sections at the Michigan game of that year, raised questions about the size and safety of the stadium. There may be additional enlargements in the future, probably by adding seats at the south end near the field house.¹⁰

- 1) *The Story of Camp Randall*, 1953, Taylor, Archives Subject folder (Camp Randall #1); *Wisconsin Engineer*, February 1960, p. 47; *Nomination Papers for National Register of Historic Places*, Historic Preservation Offices, State Historical Society Library; *Daily Cardinal*, December 16, 1914, p. 1
- 2) *Daily Cardinal*, November 15, 1894, October 30, 1894, December 16, 1914; *Regent's Report*, 1911-1912, p. 239, 1910-1911, p. 280; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, December 1914;
- 3) *Daily Cardinal*, November 22, 1915, p. 1&5;
- 4) *Daily Cardinal*, December 16, 1914, p. 1; September 26, 1917, November 20, 1915; *Regent's Reports* 1914-1916, p. 24,250, 1918-1920, p. 215, 1916-1917, p. 273; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, December 1914. Badger, 1917, p. 202.
- 5) O'Dea was from Australia and his phenomenal drop-kicking ability made him the toast of the university for four years (1896-1899). He disappeared and was presumed to have been killed in WW I. In 1934, He reappeared living under an assumed name on the west coast, explaining that the publicity of his football hero days had made his attempts at a normal life as a lawyer unbearable. He returned to Madison for a brief visit in the 1934.
- 6) *Capital Times*, June 9, 1922 p. 1, *The Badger*, 1924, p. 392; *Daily Cardinal*, November 20, 1915;
- 7) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, March 1950 p. 24, July 1940, p. 354; Lee Burns to Don Halverson, series 24/1/1 box 158, folder 10; *Daily Cardinal*, September 27, 1940, June 22, 1951; *University Catalog*, 1950-1952 p. 18.
- 8) *The Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, March 1950, p. 24, July 1951; *Daily Cardinal*, October 7, 1950, October 28, 1950, April 28, 1951, July 26, 1951.
- 9) *Regent's Minutes*, May 11, 1957; *Daily Cardinal*, November 9, 1954, November 15, 1957, July 22, 1958; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, October 1957, p. 28, June 1954, p. 10, September 1958 p. 7;
- 10) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, May 1964, p. 25; *Daily Cardinal*, December 10, 1964.