

EAGLE HEIGHTS



Fig. 1. Eagle Heights from the air 1997. [Del Brown photo jf-73]

Built in six stages (1956 through 1966) Eagle Heights provides housing for married students at low rental rates. Residents have access to community buildings, gardens and other cooperative ventures.

Even before WW II the need for improved housing for graduate students at the University was recognized. In 1939 President Fred appointed a committee to investigate housing conditions for graduate students. This committee recommended construction of housing projects by the University, the city of Madison, or the federal P.W.A. The outbreak of WW II eliminated any possibility of action at that time. In April 1946, the regents approved a 120 unit housing married student project, but high bids and higher priority projects caused them to postpone the project. At the end of WW II, the need for married student housing grew dramatically. There were increases in the numbers of graduate students enrolled in classes, teaching and research positions; in addition the large amounts of temporary housing for married students at Truax Field and Badger Village were closed.¹

The regents began to investigate sites for housing developments in the fall of 1954. They hired Madison architectural consultants Weiler and Strang to investigate three sites: the Pharmaceutical Gardens in Eagle Heights (donated to the University by the Brittingham Foundation in 1951), the Spring Street neighborhood at the foot of Monroe Street east of Camp Randall, and the southeast corner of University Avenue and Midvale Boulevard. By February 1955 the regents had decided on the Pharmaceutical Garden (later called Eagle Heights) site for 100 units of married student housing. In its favor the Eagle Heights site had a large amount of expansion room, and was already owned by the University. The entire Eagle Heights area had been traded by the regents to E. J. Young when Picnic Point was purchased by the University. In 1951 the Brittingham foundation purchased the 28 acre Eagle Heights from the Young estate and donated it to the University.²

Final plans were approved by the regents on July 14, 1956. The plans were based on the

existing married housing units on Harvey Street. In October 1956 contracts were awarded for the construction of 100 housing units of married student housing in the total amount of \$892,000. Financing for the project came not from the state but from the federal government who provided a loan through the College Housing Program of the Housing and Home Finance Agency. The general contractor was J. H. Findorff with a contract for \$514,000. Work progressed throughout the winter of 1956, with all footings completed by mid-November. Despite a year of very treacherous construction weather, the first families moved into the Eagle Heights apartments the week of September 1, 1957, though the rest of the units, sidewalks and roads were not finished until October 1. There were nine buildings in the 100 group: two, 25 by 101 feet, with eight units each, and seven, 25 by 151 feet, with 12 units each. They were wood frame faced with brick, with hipped roofs of asphalt shingles.³

Acknowledging the enormous pent-up demand for married student housing, plans for the 200 group were well underway by December 1956. The design was almost identical to the 100 group; nine buildings located just north of the first group. Financing was also handled by the Housing and Home Finance Agency; total cost was not to exceed \$850,000. Contracts for this group were let on December 14, 1957 in the total amount of \$865,000. The \$15,000 over the federal loan came from the Residence Halls Fund. The general contractor was Marshall Erdman of Madison at \$442,800. Erdman began in late October 1957, just weeks after the first group was occupied. The construction of this group went smoothly, and was completed in time for occupancy in the fall of 1958.⁴

With the general success of the apartments in Eagle Heights, and the existence of a substantial waiting list of students wishing to move in, the regents raised their sights. Phase III consisted of 400 units in twenty six buildings. The Gausewitz and Cashin plans were used for this third building phase also, with a slightly different distribution of apartment sizes in the 36 buildings that made up the 300-600 groups. Preliminary plans and locations for the 300-600 groups were approved in December 1957, just as the 200 group was beginning construction. The general contractors were J. P. Cullen and Don Ganser and Associates. The \$3.6 million cost was financed through the Housing and Home Finance Agency and sources arranged by the Wisconsin Building Corporation (WUBC). At some point in 1958 or early 1959 the development of the project came to include a school. This school was to provide kindergarten, first and second grades, for Eagle Heights children in a \$100,000 one story building, and would be run by the school of Education. After bids came in at well over the \$100,000 target, the school was dropped. The 300-600 groups were ready for occupancy by the fall of 1959. Rates were set at \$72 for a single bedroom unit and \$85 for a two bedroom.⁵

Even this very large increase in married student housing was insufficient to the demand, and the new apartments quickly filled. Another phase of construction was planned. Preliminary plans for the 700 group were approved by the regents January 5, 1962. There were to be 114 apartments in the new phase. Because of their experience with the previous projects, the planners eliminated single bedroom apartments from the 700 group. The estimated cost of the group was \$1.2 million. The plans were Eagle Height's first departure from Gausewitz and Cashin's original design and are by Eugene Wasserman of Sheboygan. The new building has a distinctive pattern that became known as the 'snowflake' design which provided a sheltered center to each building for weather protection and children's play space. Construction contracts were awarded in October 1962, with the general contract going to John O. Dahl for \$721,276. The project was briefly delayed in the spring of 1962 by political maneuvering by members of the state Building Commission. The 700 group was finished and occupied by the fall of 1963.⁶

The regents requested preliminary plans for the 800 group in September 1963. This group would include another 114 apartments in the same 'snowflake' style of the 700's. Projected cost was \$1.4 million. Plans and specifications were approved in December 1963. Contracts were not awarded until May 1964, when the general contract went to John Dahl for \$755,300. Funding was entirely

through loans arranged by the WUBC. All 114 apartments in the 800 group were two bedroom. By the fall of 1965 everything but landscaping was complete and residents moved in. The final cost was \$1.48 million. The 800 group brought the total married student apartments to 876. Because the Eagle Heights real estate was starting to seriously fill up, the University began to consider building high-rise apartment buildings near the base of Picnic Point for married students. They also discussed increasing the rate of construction to finish 150 apartments per year for seven years.⁷

However, there was enough room to build another conventional group. The 900 group was approved in October 1965 at a projected cost of \$ 3.84 million. This group again used Wasserman's snowflake design although some rectangular buildings were added also. The project was scaled back from 300 apartments to 246. Contracts were awarded in June 1966 with John Dahl getting the general contract for \$1.78 million. This project was completed and ready for occupancy by fall 1967.⁸

Except for the Eagle Heights community building, first proposed in 1966, and finally built in 1970 by Dyson Construction at a cost of \$300,000, the completion of the 900 group brought the Eagle Heights Community to its final configuration. The community center building provides recreational for Eagle Heights residents as well as a grocery cooperative and child care.⁹

No new construction is planned at Eagle Heights. In 1988 the regents approved a twenty year plan to renovate all the 1110 apartments in the complex at a cost of about \$20 million. This is about 35% more than the estimated \$13 million spent to build them originally. The project is scheduled to take until about the year 2000. These repairs were needed to overcome wear and tear, as well as faults in original design and construction. Costs were to be funded by increased rents. This plan was strenuously resisted by members of the Eagle Heights Assembly, who proposed a rent strike against the 24% increase. This action was abandoned within a few weeks. Current rents are from \$333 to \$723 per month. As with all University owned housing the Eagle Heights units are self-amortizing; that is construction loans and maintenance funds are paid off with rental income.¹⁰

Most residents have a high opinion about life in the Eagle Heights community. The relatively low rents, the community spirit and the unparalleled physical surroundings (including the lake, thick woods, Indian mounds, community garden plots, and orchards) make the community of 3000-4000 a very pleasant place to live.¹¹

1) Teicher and Jenkins: *A History of Housing at the University of Wisconsin*, p. 54; Regent's Minutes, December 8, 1956.

2) *Regent's Minutes*, January 13, 1951, September 25, 1954, February 12, 1955; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, February, 1951 p. 17.

3) *Regent's Minutes*, June 14, 1956, July 14, 1956, October 6, 1956; Plans held by University physical plant.

4) *Regent's Minutes*, March 9, 1957, October 17, 1957, December 14, 1957.

5) This would be the last time the WUBC would fund a University building project since the state changed the way in which the University could borrow money. Henceforth loans would be through the Wisconsin State Agencies Building Corporation; *Regent's Minutes*, June 20, 1957, December 14, 1957, May 9, 1959, June 17, 1958, September 20, 1958, February 7, 1959, March 7, 1959.

6) *Regent's Minutes* July 20, 1961, January 5, 1962, May 4, 1962, August 14, 1962, October 1962, March 6, 1964; *Daily Cardinal*, May 4, 1962, May 5, 1962, June 21, 1962; plans in the plans room of the department of the physical plant.

7) *Regent's Minutes*, September 6, 1963, December 6, 1963, May 8, 1964; *Wisconsin State Journal*, August 4, 1990 p. 8B.

8) *Regent's Minutes*, September 24, 1965, February 4, 1966, March 4, 1966, May 6, 1966, June 10, 1966.

9) *Regent's Minutes*, September 19, 1969, June 13, 1969, October 17, 1969, May 10, 1970.

10) *Regent's Minutes*, February 5, 1988; *Wisconsin State Journal*, August 4, 1990, March 22, 1991.

11) *Badger Herald*, November 30-December 3, 1972; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, April 1954, p. 8, November 1972 p. 31.