

ELM DRIVE DORMS



Fig. 1. Elm Drive Dorms c. 1959. Current names, left to right: Goodnight, Friedrich, Elm Drive Commons, Bradley. Elm Drive is at the extreme right. [Series 8/8 ns-1699]

Erected in 1959 as undergraduate dormitories, the Elm Drive Dorms were converted to other uses as dorm occupancy declined in the 1970s. They now comprise one dormitory, the Friedrich Center of the Extension, Food Research Center, and Communicative Disorders.

The Elm Drive dorms were built during the burst of undergraduate housing construction in the mid 1950s. The University planned for thousands of dorm rooms at sites at Chadbourne Hall, to the south and west of the Kronshage units, and to the east of Tripp Hall. The Holt dorms to the south of Kronshage were the first finished (fall 1958) but the dorms west of Elm Drive had been in the planning stage since the fall of 1957. The regents approved the site for the dorms west of Elm Drive, consisting of three or four four-story dormitories and a two story dining hall and kitchen facility, the dorms to house up to 1000 men. Authority was granted for the preparation of plans.¹

This site had been allocated as dormitory space on campus master plans for years, and was reaffirmed as a suitable location by a study in June 1957. Funding for the project came through the Wisconsin University Building Corporation (WUBC), with help from the Federal HHFA. By April 1958 the funding was available and final plans were approved. Estimated cost was \$3.5 million.²

In June of 1958, a little over a year since the first studies of the project, construction contracts were awarded; the general contractor was J. H. Findorff & Son for \$1.78 million. The scope of the project had been reduced to three dorms to house 812 students. Construction began in late June

1958. By the fall of 1959 the dorms known as Elm Drive A, B, and C, were open and occupied, A by women and B and C by men. A formal dedication was held on April 10, 1960. Initially they had been intended as men's dorms, but the cancellation of a women's dorm project near Liz Waters, and delays in the construction of the new Chadbourne Hall made the modification necessary. It had already been demonstrated in the Holt dorms, opened the previous year that men and women students could successfully share a commons.³

Although the group was never given a formal name, the regents did assign names to the individual houses in the dorms: William Bleyer, Charles Cool, James Elsom, Louis Kahlenburg, Wakeline McNeel, Daniel Mead, Adam Millar, James Phillips, J. F. A. Pyre, Oliver Rundell, and William Steve. The dorms were commonly called the Elm Drive Dorms.⁴

The three dorms were virtually identical 'T' shaped units with the stem pointed toward Lake Mendota. They were 184 feet wide east to west and 120 feet north to south. They were a basement and four stories of concrete block sheathed with brick. They held 250 students each in double rooms. The two story with basement commons building was 139 feet square, in the same style as the dorms, and contained kitchen facilities, dining rooms, recreational space and a residence halls store.⁵

They were immediately popular with students as were all the lakeshore dorms. However their use as housing lasted less than twenty years. As the 1960s wore on and the growing pressure from students to relax the rules regarding where and how undergraduates could live began to take effect, the dorms began to empty, and since small dorms are easier to close than large ones, the dwindling enrollment in the dorms led the Division of Housing in 1970 to close Elm Drive B and C.⁶

Elm Drive A stayed open as a dorm and remains so today [1994]. The other three buildings were immediately modified for other purposes. Elm Drive B became part of the University Extension program to provide rooms and office space for continuing education programs, and was known as the University Bay Center. In 1972 the department of Communication Disorders moved from rented quarters on University Avenue to new offices and labs in part of Elm Drive C. Also in 1972 the Elm Drive Commons became the home of the Food Research Institute which had been housed for years in cramped offices in bacteriology; the Elm Drive A residents take their meals at Holt Commons. In 1973 the Water Resources Center, founded in 1965 moved into Elm Drive C.⁷

Along with new tenants, the buildings acquired new names. In August 1973 the regents named Elm Drive C after the recently deceased Scott Goodnight, long time dean of men. In February 1976, the regents renamed Elm Drive A after the late professor Harold Bradley. Elm Drive B was already known as the University Bay Center but was officially named the Friedrich Center after ex regent and labor leader Jacob F. Friedrich. There are 75 hotel type rooms at Friedrich, each made from several original dorm rooms, quality food service and several large conference rooms.⁸

The Elm Drive Dorms were the last low rise dorms built on campus; the same year they opened (1959) new Chadbourne Hall also opened and demonstrated the wave of the future in University Housing. Elm Drive was also the end of undergraduate housing development in the Mendota Lakeshore area, the proposed site of student housing since 1908. The switch to high rise housing would necessitate a radical rethinking of the location of new student housing.

1) Teicher and Jenkins, *A History of University Housing*, p. 61-64; *Regent's Minutes*, September 1957;

2) *Regent's Minutes*, June 20, 1957, September 7, 1957, April 10, 1958;

3) *Regent's Minutes*, June 17, 1958, September 7, 1957; *Daily Cardinal*, February 19, 1959. *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, November 1959 p. 14. Teicher and Jenkins, *A History of University Housing*, p. 63.

4) *Regent's Minutes*, April 11, 1959.

5) Plans in the plans room of the physical plant.

6) *Daily Cardinal*, Aug 7, 1970.

7) University directories; *Regent's Minutes*, July 15, 1983, December 7, 1973, July 14, 1972; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, October 1965 p. 6.

8) *Regent's Minutes*, August 3, 1973, February 6, 1976, February 8, 1980,