

LIFE SAVING STATION



Fig. 1. The Lifesaving Station 1970. The breakwater is at the left; the observation and mechanical decks cantilever towards the lake. [Series 9/2, Lifesaving Station, jf-105]

The lifesaving station at 130 E. Gilman Street was built in 1965 to replace the facilities lost when the old boathouse behind the red gym was demolished.

The planning of the alumni house in 1959 caused a kind of chain reaction in the University's building plan. The alumni house site required the demolition of the old University boathouse, which required a new crew house, and a new swimming beach at Picnic Point; and because the old boathouse had contained the lifesaving facilities for Lake Mendota swimmers and boaters a new lifesaving station needed to be sited and built as well.

In August 1965 the regents approved 130 East Gilman Street as the site of the University Lifesaving Station complete with lookout tower and boat storage. The regents were told that the department of planning and construction spent a "great deal of time" selecting the best site. Among the arguments in favor of this site were a good view of the Mendota shoreline and a large area of the lake, including the area "behind" Picnic Point, that is to the north of the point. Also in its favor was the fact that it was already owned by the University, since it is the lot containing the Knapp Graduate Center. The new lifesaving station would be located at the rear of the Knapp lot, where an existing old frame boathouse could be removed. The outing director of the Union, Gilbert Peters, raised the objection that the Gilman Street site reduced "proximate control" since it was removed from the boat piers of the

Memorial Union, where most Mendota boat traffic originated.¹

In October 1965 the state appointed architects Law, Law, Potter, and Nystrom to the project. The building program prepared by the building committee (A. F. Ahearn, J. B. Bower, and Donald Sites) was ready for the architects use. The University asked for state building commission approval in October, describing a building to cost not more than \$200,000, the amount appropriated for the purpose by the legislature.²

The final plans for the lifesaving station were approved by the regents in March 1966. In May 1966 the city of Madison granted a permit to build a breakwater at the site. After rejected bids in April 1966, and a round of cost cutting, construction contracts were awarded by the regents on July 13, 1966. The general contract went to Vogel Brothers of Madison for \$139,912. Total contracted costs were \$200,000. The source of funds was entirely the state appropriation.³

Construction was begun on July 13, 1966, to be completed by July 1967. Excavation was completed by September 9, and foundation work begun in October. By December 1966 the project was a month behind. It slipped further during the winter. In May 1967 the building was 98 per cent complete, but halted by a strike. By late summer of 1967 the building was finished and in use by the University.

The lifesaving station is a 96 by 43 foot concrete structure on four levels set into the steeply sloping bank on the lake shore. The lowest (lake) level holds the wet boat slip and storage. On the second level are a dry slip with winch, and a workshop. The third level houses the mechanical systems, and the fourth level is the observation level. The top two levels are cantilevered out toward the north (see Fig. 1). An elevator services all levels. The total height of the building is 55 feet. The grade level roof can be used as a parking space. The 6 foot wide breakwater that protects the boat slip area is 56 feet into the lake and 85 feet long. This breakwater caused some concern because of its potential for causing pollution.⁴

1) *Regent's Minutes*, August 8, 1965; Peters to Edsall, August 17, 1965, series 24/9/3 box 6.

2) Postweiler to Peterson, October 22, 1965, Agency Request for State Building Commission Action, October 4, 1965, Building Program-Lifesaving Station, series 24/9/3 box 6.

3) *Regent's Minutes*, March 4, 1966, July 13, 1966; University Life Saving Station, Law, Law, Potter & Nystrom, February 21, 1966, Orr to Jardine, March 16, 1966, Before the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, May 2, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 6; Sites to Lorenz, July 15, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 9.

4) Hasler to Edsall, December 15, 1966, Tipple to Edsall, December 22, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 9.