

MEMORIAL LIBRARY



Fig. 1. West front of Memorial Library, 1977. The modern interpretation of the classical style is evident in the symmetrical central bay with end sections, the column-like effect between banks of windows. Langdon Street is in foreground. [series 25/1 folder #2, x25-2862]

The University library, after a century in poor facilities, now has suitable quarters in Memorial library. Construction of Memorial library began in 1950. Major additions were erected in 1973 and 1988.

By the late 1940s the University's library was in miserable condition. It was sharing a building with the State Historical Society, in facilities that had not been expanded since 1914. A library that was designed for a student enrollment of 1,848 was in 1949 trying to serve 18,000. Professors were designing classes to avoid use of the library. Material was scattered around the campus, and was physically deteriorating, due to inadequate storage facilities. Quonset huts were used for reserved books and reading rooms. At a time when best practice suggested that a university library should be able to seat 20 per cent of the student body, Wisconsin could seat about 8 per cent. The 1949 Board of Visitors called the need for a library "overwhelmingly critical."¹

In 1945 the legislature appropriated \$8 million for university construction. Except for \$600,000 specified for a dairy building, the appropriation was unassigned. Unfortunately, the plans for the new library, although begun in 1945 by state architect Roger Kirchhoff and the library construction committee, were not ready. This delay was apparently a combination of factors, but especially conditions in the state architect's office. The delay cost the library project its place at the head of the University's priority list, and the 1945 appropriation was largely spent on other projects, engineering and the dairy building, whose plans were finished. The state architect was responsible for selecting and overseeing a private architect for a state building project. In the case of the Memorial Library, Mr. Kirchhoff selected himself. He was relatively inexperienced in large building design, and slow by nature. He also had no staff to aid with the huge project. In 1949, Kirchhoff hired the Milwaukee firm of Phillips and Eble. They served mainly as a detail and drafting staff for Kirchhoff, although Richard Phillip was involved in the exterior design.²

The effort to obtain additional funding for a university library was begun in 1949 by President E. B. Fred. Fred lobbied intensely for the library before the governor, the legislature and the Joint Finance Committee. Governor Oscar Rennebohm's \$25 million state construction project went



Fig. 2. 1977, the Memorial Library's 1974 addition, from corner of State and Lake Streets. [series 25/1 folder #2, jf-67]

through a series of political ups and downs during the summer of 1949, but with support from the governor, veteran's groups, a sympathetic press, and constant pressure from the University, the construction bill was signed into law by the governor on August 3, 1949. The bill included \$5.9 million for the library. A senator told a Cardinal reporter "without President Fred, the library was a dead duck." Later Oscar Rennebohm said: "President Fred said that I was sympathetic. Well, when a man comes to see you every day, you either get tired or sympathetic."³

The money was now available, but plans still were not. The plans for the library were not completed until late 1949. The Library Building Committee gave final approval to the plans on December 7, 1949 and the regents followed suit in March 1950. Bids were received June 28, 1950; and contracts let July 15, 1950. The general construction contract went to the Gus Newberg Construction Company of Chicago for \$2.28 million. Utilities were an additional \$823,425. Contracts for bookstack construction, furniture and architectural fees were deferred pending alterations in the design. The regents were pleased that the bids were below appropriations.⁴

Groundbreaking took place on July 24, 1950, with speeches by E. B. Fred and governor Rennebohm. Hundreds of students and state citizens helped turn the first earth. The state's biggest building project since the state capitol building in 1917 was underway at last. The principal work done in the rest of 1950 was the completion of the enormous excavation. The building was intended to take between two and three years to build.⁵

Steel erection began in late 1950, and was halted in February 1951 due to steel shortages and delivery problems. By early March steel was again arriving and progress resumed. On March 16 1951, thirty tons of the temporarily riveted steel framework was struck by the boom of a crane and collapsed onto the ground. No one was injured but time was lost. The cornerstone ceremony was held on June 25, 1951. The governor's pen that signed the appropriation, and other curiosities were placed in the time capsule behind the cornerstone. Construction proceeded without more difficulty, the stonework on the exterior began to be placed the first week in May 1951. Furnishings and finishing took the winter of 1952 and spring of 1953.⁶

On July 27, 1953 the transfer of books from the old library in the historical library building began. The ceremonial first book was the rare Coverdale bible, and was carried by Professor Emeritus

Fig. 3. Memorial Library, 1988 addition in progress, from Lake and State Streets.

L. C. Burke, who as a student in 1900 had carried the first book from the old Library building on Bascom Hill to the historical library building. Because of the old and unreliable elevators in the old building, an outside book elevator was erected on Park Street. The job of transferring 600,000 books to the new building, while keeping the library in operation took the rest of July and August. The first books were circulated from the new library in September 1953. The new library building was open to the student body in the fall semester of 1953. It was an 'L' shaped building with the long side (250 feet) along Langdon Street from Lake Street to the lower campus, and the shorter leg (230 feet) from Langdon to State Street. It was four full stories with a partial fifth floor, and eleven book-stack levels. The exterior was sheathed in Bedford limestone, except the "temporary" outer walls along Lake Street which were faced with brick. The main entrance was on the west side facing the old library building with other entrances on State and Langdon Streets. There was seating for 2,200 students in the enormous (40 by 240 feet) reading rooms, and space for 1.2 million books in the stacks. One hundred small faculty studies occupied the fifth floor. Three hundred fifty study carrels were placed in the stacks. A plaque dedicating the library to the men and women who served the armed forces in WW II, was placed in the main entrance. The official dedication of the library took place on February 1, 1953, in the memorial union theatre with a main address by alumnus Howard Mumford Jones.⁷

The new library, designed for a student body of 18,000 was a complete success for the university; by 1955 the use of the library had tripled from the old building. There were a few difficulties with the building, mostly related to insufficient air circulation and climate control. Kaplan blames these problems on the inexperience of architect Kirchoff and the utilities designer Robert Hattis of Chicago. These problems were exacerbated by the use of incandescent lighting in a huge building without air conditioning. But the University was no longer in President Fred's words "trying to run an eighty cow farm with a twenty stall barn". This happy state of affairs would last about seven years.⁸

By 1960 the library that had been designed to serve 18,000 was at capacity. The library committee began to formulate plans for expansion, which would occupy the southeast part of the block the library was on. This would require removal of the three small brick buildings that housed the Kollege Klub, the University Book Store, and the WSA store. At the time of the initial planning in 1960, it was intended that the addition be ready by 1972. Although substantial branch libraries were planned for medicine, engineering, and Law, the Memorial Library would be unable to adequately serve the campus without more space. Two major causes of this need were an increased proportion of graduate students who needed fixed study space with book storage, and the unexpected increase in circulation in proportion to the rise in enrollment. The library was working better than had been expected. By 1965 the problems were getting severe. The library addition was placed on the construction priority list for the 1967-1969 biennium, at fifteenth place. On January 11, 1973 construc-



tion on the addition was begun by contractors J. P. Cullen and Sons of Janesville. The design, by John J. Flad, was a four story 125 foot by 200 foot section on the corner of State and Lake Streets. Cost was \$4.7 million. It was sheathed in Bedford limestone to match the original building. Housed in the new space were the Mills Music Library, greatly expanded service areas, and four levels of bookstack, holding an additional 600,000 volumes. Scheduled for completion in 1975, the bulk of the construction was finished and opened in the fall of 1974. Much remodelling took place in the old building to improve service. This addition was designed so that it could be extended vertically at a later date.⁹

A dramatic change in library policy took place in 1970, when the stacks were opened to patrons. Previous to this time undergraduates and visitors, had to fill out a book request slip and a staff member retrieved the book from the stacks. After this change, the stacks were open to all patrons to locate their own books, or browse the collection. In May of 1979 a woman student was attacked with a fire axe in the library by a nonstudent. Although her injuries were not severe, this tragic event cause dramatic changes in the operation of the library. The building was closed to all but students, staff, and registered guests. Traffic was controlled by requiring all patrons to enter past a check point, and security was increased.¹⁰

The time for vertical expansion came in 1986 when the regents approved an eight story addition to the 1974 section to hold additional bookstacks, offices, and study areas. This project was designed by the Strang Partners of Madison, and cost \$7.3 million. Work began in July 1988. In early November 1988, when the steel framework for the elevator was erected, complaints were heard that the height of the addition would block the view of the capitol from Bascom Hall. After a month of investigations and recriminations, construction was halted by Mayor Joseph Sensenbrenner. The regents explained that building code changes between 1986 and 1988 caused the increase in height. After investigating several options for changing the design, the regents decided to remove the top floor, and increase the capacity of the remaining bookstack space by installing electric compact shelving. This addition was completed and went into service in the fall of 1990. This work brought the Memorial Library to its current configuration.

1) Cronen and Jenkins, *The University of Wisconsin*, vol. III, p. 686-690;

2) The committee consisted of: M. R. Irwin, Ricardo Quintana, Mark Ingraham, Albert Gallistel, Gilbert Doane, Louis Kaplan and Roger Kirchhoff, Minutes of the campus planning commission, series 24/1/10 box 1; E. B. Fred, Address to the faculty, October 4, 1948; Regent's Minutes, October 28, 1944 series 4/16/5 box 5; Louis Kaplan, interview with author April 2, 1994; *Regent's Minutes*, January 31, 1948, October 16, 1948, April 23, 1949;

2) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, October 1949 p. 4

3) *Daily Cardinal*, June 30, 1949, July 1, 1949, July 7, 1949, July 12, 1949, August 4, 1949, July 25, 1950; Oscar Rennebohm, The Library, A Living Memorial, an address at the dedication of the library.

4) Regent's Minutes, March 11, 1950, July 15, 1950; *Daily Cardinal*, July 18, 1950.

5) *Wisconsin State Journal*, December 1, 1988 p. 1; *The Capital Times*, July 25, 1950; *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 30, 1952. *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, October 1949, p. 4, April 1950 p. 29, October 1950, p. 22, December 1950 p. 12; *Daily Cardinal*, July 25, 1951.

6) *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 17, 1952; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, May 1951, p. 16; *Daily Cardinal*, March 2, 1951, March 17, 1951, March 20, 1951, April 28, 1951, June 26, 1951.

7) *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 14, 1953; *Daily Cardinal*, July 24, 1953; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, July 1953 p. 19; *Capital Times*, June 3, 1953, September 17, 1953; *Wisconsin State Employee*, September 1953 p. 11;

8) *Wisconsin State Journal*, January 23, 1955.

9) *Daily Cardinal*, April 28, 1965, October 4, 1960, July 28, 1967, January 19, 1973; March 5, 1965; *Regent's Minutes*, October 7, 1966; *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 12, 1968, April 17, 1971, January 11, 1973; *Badger Herald*, March 11-13, 1974;

10) *Daily Cardinal*, , May 4, 1979, May 7, 1979, May 9, 1979, July 27, 1979, August 14, 1979, Fall Registration issue, 1979;

11) *Regent's Minutes*, December 9, 1988; *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 11, 1988, November 17, 1988, December 1, 1988, December 10, 1988, December 3, 1988.