

PICNIC POINT BATH HOUSE



Fig. 1. Picnic Point change house 1994. One story, men's and women's dressing rooms and bathrooms: ready to go, never used. [Author Photo, AP-49]

This little building represents the only known example of a failure of the University's elaborate system of checks and balances that ensures that new buildings are needed, useful, and well built.

The 1965 public outcry over the plan that would have located a new crew house at the Willows Beach, north of the Elm Drive dorms, engendered a political compromise that led the University to establish a more permanent swimming facility at Picnic Point.

In June 1966 the University requested the state for permission to build a changing house and other swimming facilities on Picnic Point at a cost of \$75,000 to be funded through athletic department revolving funds. As part of this request, the University pointed out that the relocation of the crew house had required dropping the swimming facility originally planned as part of the crew house. When the regents approved the preparation of plans in June 1966, they specified that no provision would be made for vehicular access to the site. Madison architects Kaeser and McLeod were selected in November 1966. Kaeser designed a low swooping building that nestles into the wooded site in a very unobtrusive way. Some minor objection about despoiling Picnic Point were aired.¹

In May 1967 the regents approved the plans. Later that month the decision was made to abandon the idea of a septic system, and a fully sewered connection was designed at an added cost of \$26,000. The building design was simplified to reduce its cost. By late June 1967 the project was ready for bids. Construction contracts were let March 4, 1968, to Gilbert Construction of Verona. Total cost was \$75,000, paid from the athletic department's revolving fund. The building is wedge shaped, approximately 30 by 70 feet. The exterior is sheathed in rough stone.²

The swimming beach and the new change house were never used. Increased algae pollution in Mendota, lack of roads and parking, simply made it too inconvenient, and the beach and change house has stood idle and unused for 25 years. Periodic plans are examined to restart the project but none have borne fruit.

1) *Regent's Minutes*, June 10, 1966, September 9, 1966, May 5, 1967; Request for State Building Commission Action, June 13, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 7; Culbertson to Kaeser and McLeod, November 16, 1966, Osterbrock to Fleming, July 11, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 10. *Capital Times*, June 21, 1966.

2) *Regent's Minutes*, May 5, 1967, January 12, 1968, March 15, 1968 schedule L; Orr to Edsall, May 23, 1967, planning meeting minutes, January 27, 1967, series 24/9/3 box 10; Lorenz to Building Commission, November 1, 1967, series 40/1/7-1 box 33.

3) *Wisconsin State Journal*, July 21, 1994.