

SLICHTER HALL



Fig. 1. Slichter Hall c. 1950. [Series 26/1 Slichter Hall, ns-1732]

Built in 1946 Slichter Hall provided permanent dormitory space for a greatly increased post WW II student body. It is named for Professor Charles Sumner Slichter, a long time and much beloved professor of mathematics, and initiator of the dormitory house-fellow system.

Well before the end of WW II, the university's department of housing knew that they might be in for a rough time. The enrollment at the university 6,615 in 1944-45, tripled in two years to 18,598 in 1947-48. At the same time, the Division of Residence Halls, was providing living and dining quarters for thousands of military personnel, attending the training classes held at the university. In addition to these duties, the Division of Residence Halls was actively planning permanent student housing for the post war period.

Director of Residence Halls Donald Halverson proposed to president E. B. Fred in 1944 that the university build three new dormitories, as soon as materials became available. Of the three projects only one was completed, the west addition to the Van Hise units. Halverson argued that even if the dormitory had to be financed with the entire assets of the division, it would still be a sound investment. Some of this confidence came from the fact that never had any amortization payment been missed by the division since its inception in 1926, even in the lean depression years. The earliest halls, Adams and Tripp, were nearly paid off. These evidences that their business practice was sound made the argument to build more halls more compelling.¹

During early 1946, the division of residence halls consulted with the state architect Roger Kirchhoff, to plan the new dormitory. They collected suggestions from the house-fellows and residents of the Van Hise and newer Kronshage dormitories. By late summer of 1946, the plans were ready. The regents approved the plans and authorized the contracts. The contractor was the George A. Fuller Company of Chicago. Fuller took the job on a cost plus fee basis, the first time the university had employed this contracting scheme. The estimated cost was \$554,843, and Fuller's fee was \$27,742. This is a fee of less than 5 per cent, reflecting the low return on investment current at that

time. With the additional costs of utilities, fees, and landscaping, the estimates came to \$700,000.²

The regents authorized the Wisconsin University Building Corporation (WUBC), to borrow a maximum of \$750,000 from the state annuity board, the WUBC's usual source of funds, at 3%. This money was to be used for the west addition to the Van Hise Dormitory, to be amortized in 28 years. Tripp and Adams halls were used as collateral.

Ground was broken in the fall of 1946, in the hope that the dormitory could be finished in time for the fall semester of 1947. This very aggressive schedule was nearly though not quite met. Severe weather in the winter of 1946, the contractor's simultaneous work on University Houses, and post-war material shortages caused minor slippage, all the while business manager A. W. Peterson nipping at the contractor's heels. By November of 1947, after the job was supposed to be done, the house-fellows and some residents were living in the old sheep barn, previously used as the short course dorm, while the contractors finished up the first floor intended for use as the offices of the division of residence halls, who were then located in Chadbourne Hall. The regents authorized another \$50,000 for the project to cover material overruns.³

In November 1946, six weeks after his death, the regents voted to name the new dormitory after Charles Sumner Slichter (1864-1946). Slichter joined the U.W. mathematics faculty in 1886, became dean of the graduate school in 1920, and was deeply involved in the development of the university dormitory system, serving as a pivotal member of the original housing committee. He is widely credited with having originated the U.W. house-fellow system. An enduring interest of Slichter's was the acquisition and hanging in each residence hall of a portrait of the person for whom the house is named. He believed that the students would be aided and influenced by the effects of the portraits. It is therefore especially appropriate that Slichter Hall, unique among university buildings, bears in stone above the front entrance a carved likeness of its namesake.

The finished building was four stories and a basement, shaped like a '[' with the short wings projecting to the east, of brick construction with concrete floors. The exterior sheathing was lannon stone, the material first used in Liz Waters, and in the short course dorms. The classic Madison sandstone last used in the Kronshage dorms was no longer available. The building was divided into four houses, Bierman, Gavin, Goldberg, and Luedke, first through fourth floors respectively. These were all university men who died in WW II. There were 50 double rooms, with interiors designed by Leon Pescheret, the interior designer who had done the memorial union, and Liz Waters. The rooms were identical, thereby eliminating the extra trouble of assigning more desirable corner rooms in the older style dorms. Capacity was 200 students and four house fellows.⁴

In 1962 an addition was built to Slichter, which filled in the east area between the wings. This one floor, flat roofed addition was designed by Graven, Kenney, and Iverson, Madison architects. It contained additional office space for residence halls.⁵

Like all the lake-shore dormitories, Slichter hall is a highly desirable place to live and is constantly filled. In 1952 in preparation for the demolition of old Chadbourne Hall, Slichter was assigned as a hall for women students. As part of the Van Hise group it is without dining facilities, students taking their board at the Van Hise (later Carson Gulley) commons.

1) *A History of Housing at the University of Wisconsin*, Teicher and Jenkins, 1987.

2) *Regents Minutes*, August 15, 1946, p. 11.

3) *Daily Cardinal*, November 26, 1947, p. 5, April 17, 1947, January 25, 1947, September 28, 1946, p. 1, November 26, 1947; Collinson to Peterson, February 21, 1947, Peterson to Collinson February 18, 1947, series 24/1/1 box 214, Residence Halls-Construction folder; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, May 1947, p. 12, November 1947, p. 5,

4) Burns to Schmelzer, May 15, 1947, series 24/1/1 box 214, Residence Halls-Construction folder; *Regent's Minutes*, September 14, 1946, August 15, 1946, September 14, 1946, October 30, 1946, November 23, 1946, November 15, 1947, April 11, 1952.

5) *Regent's Minutes*, May 6, 1962; Peterson to Culbertson, April 9, 1962, Smith to Wendt, September 20, 1961, series 24/9/2 box 13.