

SOUTHEAST CAMPUS RAMP



Fig. 1. The Southeast ramp from Gordon Commons, 1995. [Author Photo, AP-61]

The Southeast Parking Ramp was built in 1988 as part of a proposed housing development in that block. The unusual appearance of the parking ramp is due to the design of the later abandoned housing project.

The University acquired (with department of Residence Hall's funds) the south half of the 600 block of University Avenue between June 1961 and January 1966 as part of the expansion defined by the 1959 "Sketch plan". The original intent was to build women's undergraduate student housing on that site. But state policy generally turned against the construction of University owned housing, and the land became a parking lot.

In 1968 the University and the City of Madison jointly developed an urban renewal plan that included the 600 block of University Avenue, and the city began to buy the north half of the block. The city used their half for parking. During 1985 the city received an offer from a developer, University Residential Properties (URP), of Minneapolis Minnesota to purchase the land and develop 100 or more residential apartment units on the block. The development of the block was opened to other proposals, URP was selected in October 1986.¹

The URP plan as accepted in February 1987 called for three eight-story residential buildings containing 280 two-bedroom units on the north half and a small part of the south half of the block, with a 450 stall parking structure to be built and operated by the University. This ramp would replace and expand the 380 spaces on the block that would be lost to the apartment buildings. The University's

1977-79 capital budget had authorized \$2.9 million for the structure (at a location to be decided later), and in April 1987 was increased to by the regents to \$3.8 million because of inflation. Also in April 1987 the state approved the budget, the release of \$109,000 in planning funds, and the exchange of some real estate parcels in the block between the city and the University. By May 1987 the consulting engineers, Arnold and O'Sheridan had prepared a report on the design of the ramp. The design provided six levels of parking with main access from Lake Street and egress on the Frances Street side, consisting of 375 spaces controlled by gate for faculty and staff, 50 metered general use spaces, and 50 gate controlled conference user spaces. The regents approved the preliminary plans on December 11, 1987. The final plans were finished and approved by the state February 5, 1988.²

Bid for the project were opened June 16, 1988, and the general contract awarded to Stevens Construction Corporation in the amount of \$980,580. These bids were so favorable that the budget for the project was reduced \$465,500. Work began in the summer of 1988. In July 1989, with the project nearing completion the University officially named the structure the "Southeast Campus Ramp". The ramp went into use in the fall of 1988. The final cost was \$3.4 million.³

The structure is 225 by 122 feet of reinforced concrete, with 475 spaces on six levels. The unusually ornate appearance of the exterior design which led to the humorous appellation "Taj Ma Garage" with its brick faces and arched upper levels, was the result of an effort to integrate the design of the ramp with the design of the apartment buildings proposed for the block by the developers URP, who later bowed out of the project entirely, leaving the parking structure the only building on the block. After the development plan failed in 1990 an additional surface lot was installed by the University on the east side of the ramp, an area that was previously marked for sale to the city to accommodate the proposed apartment buildings. The original design of the ramp allowed for the later addition of three levels of parking, which with the planned construction of the nearby Kohl Center, may become necessary.⁴

1) Memorandum, 600 Block University History and Issues Narrative, Fulop to Brown, March 10, 1987, series 4/31/9-2 box 17.

2) Program Statement, March 1987, Agency Request for State Building Commission Action, April 1987, Building Commission Actions, June 24, 1987, Fulop to Austin, July 7, 1987, Draft of Final Report, Arnold and O'Sheridan, May 27, 1987, Brown to Slack, November 3, 1987, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Arnold and O'Sheridan, December 1987, series 4/31/9-2 box 17; *Wisconsin State Journal*, December 1, 1987.

3) Slack to Brown, July 14, 1988, Richner to Rice, October 17, 1988, Fulop to Austin, April 11, 1988, Memorandum, Hendricks to Barroilhet, July 31, 1989, series 4/31/9-2 box 17; *Regent's Minutes*, June 10, 1988.

4) *Regent's Minutes*, July 7, 1989; Building Commission Actions, August 8, 1989, Agency Request for State Building Commission Action, July 1989, series 4/31/9-2 box 17; The nickname was the work of longtime Madison mayor Paul Soglin.