

# UNION SOUTH



Fig 1. The Randall Street entrance to Union South c. 1976. [Series 9/5, Union South, ns-3060]

*Union South was developed as a response to the movement of large numbers of students to the south and west end of campus. It was opened in 1971, and is operated by the Memorial Union. It contains game rooms, food service and hotel services.*

The concept for a second building for the Memorial Union began around the time of WW II. A massive enrollment increase, and an associated shift from a mostly L & S student body to a large engineering and medical enrollment, both located west of the original campus, were the main factors in thinking about a second location. The destruction of a student neighborhood for the erection of Humanities, and the construction of several buildings along Dayton Street, also moved large numbers of students away from the old center. The heavily used Breese Terrace cafeteria showed the practicality of an eating facility on the west end of campus.<sup>1</sup>

A preliminary building committee in the early 1960s was chaired by Porter Butts, the designer and director of the original Memorial union. This committee developed a building program for the block bounded by Randall, Johnson, Orchard and Dayton Streets, to contain Union-South and a Physical Sciences library to be built later. The constant westward and southward expansion of the campus could be served from this location. This preliminary plan was finished in February 1966, and proposed the first stage of an expandable union building to contain game rooms, lounges, and food service.<sup>2</sup>

The regents at their March 1966 meeting granted authority to prepare preliminary plans and specifications for Union South. The regents used the committee's cost estimate of \$2.7 million; they



Fig. 2. The odd shape of Union South with its central light well and opening onto a nonexistent court in the back can be seen in this aerial photo. The building is a basement and three levels of concrete faced with concrete and face brick.

The basement holds game rooms, the first floor, lounges, and assembly hall, and food service; the second floor, more food service; the third floor holds mechanical systems, some office space and fifteen guest rooms. The light well runs through the center of all three upper floors. [Series 8/1/3, ns-336]

agreed with the committee's recommendation for the Randall Street site. The money would come from student fees and from revenue from operating the facility. Only a week later, Butts wrote to planning and construction's Don Sites that the building had to be expanded from 70,000 to 80,000 square feet and the budget from \$2.2 million to \$2.7 million. Butts blames "some seemingly emergency circumstances last week" for the increases, but does not elaborate. At this time Butts is trying to keep the cost of the project down to minimize its impact on the overall Union budget. He also is not happy with the Randall Street site, but is unable to get the committee to change it.<sup>3</sup>

March also saw unresolved discussion of the purchase of the land in the block for the union and library. Butts, other committee members, and chancellor Fleming believed that the state should purchase the land. In an oral history interview Butts later said that he was peremptorily told by the University that the Memorial Union surplus would be used to buy the land. Butts states that the state was never asked to purchase the land, although this is contradicted by the minutes of one committee meeting. Butts was now faced with "his" Union having to purchase a site that he didn't think was good to start with.<sup>4</sup>

In May 1966 the state appointed architects Weiler, Strang and McMullin to the project. Planning meetings were held roughly monthly through the summer of 1967. Much of the design during this period was concerned with an elaborate system of elevated walkways and light rail transit that was being proposed for the whole campus. This system required that the entrances to Union South be above ground level. Much later the whole elevated system was discarded for cost reasons, but some related features of various buildings from the period remained in their respective plans. The planning also had to accommodate the later construction of a physical sciences library on the same block.

By October 1966 there was a clear rift in the committee: Mr. Butts believed that the new union should be a "branch-union" limited to lounge, food and possibly games space, but not a replacement for the Memorial union as a central gathering place for students; faculty and staff. He also wished that the new facility not be a major financial drain on the existing Memorial Union. Chairman Myers, and

secretary Osterheld believed that this concept had been overtaken by events (rising enrollment and campus expansion) and should be replaced by a larger and broader plan for the new union. In December 1966 the regents approved the expansion of the scope of the Union South project desired by Osterheld and Myers. Butts had lost the war and by the time of the January 1967 meeting of the building committee he had resigned. Thus the Union South building committee went on without a nationally recognized authority on the establishment operation and financing of student unions.<sup>5</sup>

The regents approved the preliminary plans in May 1968 at an estimated cost of \$3.46 million, exclusive of land cost. Final plans were approved in December 1968. Bids were first taken in February 1969, but were all rejected. Building contracts were let in March 1969. The general contract went to Nelson and Son of Racine, for \$2.08 million. Total contracted cost was \$3.63 million. The source of funds was state building corporation loans, to be retired by Memorial Union revolving funds. Construction began in May 1969.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of urgency born of budget commitments, and the burning of the Breese Terrace cafeteria, strikes, weather delays and other delays, prevented the scheduled completion in February 1971, although the lowest level, containing the game rooms, opened on February 15. Two food service areas opened in March 1971. The grand opening of the entire building took place on November 10-13, 1971. The use of the building grew slowly, about 10 per cent per year in the 1970s. The use actually conforms fairly closely to the "branch-union" envisioned by Porter Butts ten years before. The building and its intent is very different from the older, well-worn, and familiar Memorial Union, in that it is considerably quieter, less crowded and more given to study and lounging areas. The food areas are serviced by Memorial Union food service.<sup>7</sup>

1) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, June- July, 1971 p. 4; General Factors ... South side Union, Porter Butts, October 14, 1966, series, 24/9/3 box 9.

2) Building Program, February 1966, series 24/9/3 box 6.

3) *Regent's Minutes*, March 4, 1966; Butts to Sites, March 8, 1966, Orr to Maxwell, June 7, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 6. Archives Oral History, Porter Butts.

4) Archives Oral History, Porter Butts; Butts to Fleming, March 11, 1966, Fleming to Butts, March 15, 1966, Atwell to Butts, March 28, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 6. Minutes of Wisconsin South Building Committee, August 1, 1967, these minutes say "Professor Myer and Mr. Sites report that a request had been made to the State Building Commission for this purpose [land purchase]. The Commission turned down this request thus requiring the Union to pay for the land as well as the building.", Butts to Atwell, August 11, 1967, series 24/9/2-1 box 5.

5) Culbertson to Lorenz, May 2, 1966, Meetings #1-#7, Physical Science Library-Wisconsin Union South, May 18, 1966-October 5, 1966, series 24/9/3 box 6; West Side Union Building Committee Minutes, September 27, 1966, October 4, 1966, December 7, 1966, Minutes of West Side Union Building Committee, March 9, 1967, series 24/9/3 box 9; *Regent's Minutes*, December 9, 1966.

6) *Regent's Minutes*, May 17, 1968, December 6, 1968, February 14, 1969, March 14, 1969, exhibit L. *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, June - July, 1971 p. 4.

7) *Regent's Minutes*, June 12, 1970; *Daily Cardinal*, December 10, 1971, February 15, 1971, November 10, 1971, August 15, 1968; *Badger Herald*, November 8-10, 1971, January 31-February 3, 1974; *Milwaukee Journal*, February 7, 1971; *Capital Times*, November 12, 1971, February 12, 1976; *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 15, 1972; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, June - July, 1971 p. 4; Sischo to Sorenson, October 30, 1970, Orr to Germanson, January 13, 1971, Murphy to Nelson Inc., February 3, 1971, memorandum on Union South Building delays, Sorenson to Edsall, January 26, 1971, series 24/9/2-1 box 24;