

UNIVERSITY HOUSES



Fig. 1. University Houses going up, January 6, 1948. [series 26/1, University Houses, x25-2152]

University Houses were built in response to the enormous post WW II enrollment increase. Housing for professors was very scarce. Built in 1947, funding for the faculty apartments was handled by Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF), who then presented the project to the University as a gift in 1951.

In the explosion of enrollment that more than doubled the student population from 1945 to 1947, the most obvious needs were for classroom and lab space, and student housing. These primary needs were met by temporary buildings and quonset huts, temporary housing at Truax field, Badger Ordnance works, and other emergency measures. A less obvious need was housing for the faculty which rose from 900 to 1300. Because federal money, the mainspring of wartime housing projects was aimed at student housing, funding was not available for faculty housing. The situation grew acute, with professors commuting up to fifty miles, enduring wretched quarters in Madison, and one recorded as living on a houseboat on Lake Mendota. One out of eight faculty members had no place for his family. Recruits refused to join the faculty unless housing was provided.¹

University president E. B. Fred, who had himself been a homeless professor, when he first came to Madison, was concerned that the lack of faculty housing would cripple the university, and appealed for private interests for help. No private contractors showed interest. During the summer of 1946, the directors of the Wisconsin Alumni Foundation (WARF) discussed the issues with Fred, and in July 1946 agreed to finance \$2 million worth of construction of faculty apartments on University land. The University would pay 1 percent interest on the unpaid loan, and amortize the total for fifty years. The housing project would be administered by University Houses Incorporated, a non-profit corporation operated by WARF. The regents had selected as a site a twelve acre plot between the University orchard and the village of Shorewood Hills. This land had been donated to the University by the Thomas Brittingham foundation. Late in 1946, after the state refused to allow basement apartments in the project, several more acres, and another \$500,000 were allotted for more buildings.²

University Houses Inc., directed by Boynton Butler of WARF selected architects Leonard

Schultz and Associates of New York. This firm had designed New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, as well as projects similar to the Madison's project in several other cities. The general contractor selected by the foundation was George A. Fuller of Chicago, known to the University through his construction of Slichter Hall (begun in the fall of 1946). Some grumbling was heard about out of state contractors, but Fuller employed local workmen. Groundbreaking on University Houses took place in May 1947. The first units ready for occupancy were those in the eastern section, which were assigned in April 1948. The rest were finished by spring 1949. Assignments were made on the basis of faculty rank, veteran status, and need.

There are three different types of apartment buildings: 4 type 'A' buildings which contain 2 one bedroom flats on the ends and 2 central two story three bedroom apartments, 18 type 'B' buildings each holding 4 2- bedroom 2 story apartments, 9 type 'C' buildings containing 2 one bedroom flats on the ends and 2 central two bedroom two story apartments, with utilities in the basements. Types 'A' and 'B' buildings have no basements, and have their utilities in the service building. University Houses contains 150 total residences in 32 buildings (31 apartment buildings and 1 service building). All buildings are wood frame with concrete floors and tile roofs. The apartments range in size from about 800 square feet to about 1125 square feet, all with kitchens, and access to laundry facilities. Initial rents were \$100 to \$135 per month based on size. The project was to be self amortizing, that is all loans, utilities and maintenance were to be paid from rentals and rents adjusted to meet costs. In 1961 a service building for the complex was erected at a cost of \$25,000 by contractor Home Lumber and Improvement.

In an effort to avoid the look of barracks living, each building is slightly different in exterior treatment, using brick and lannon stone sheathing, different colored roofing materials, and trim materials. The intent of the architects was to produce the effect of a subdivision of large homes instead of rows of apartment buildings. Heat for all apartments was furnished by oil-burning furnaces in five "key" buildings, avoiding any industrial looking smokestack plant. Utilities were brought in underground to improve appearance.

In October 1951 representatives of WARF appear before the board of regents and offered to give the University Houses to the University, in order that the payments on the principal mortgage could be applied to research in the natural sciences. This gift estimated at a value of \$2.75 million, was the largest gift ever presented to the University at that time. WARF's University Houses Inc. was dissolved and the University Houses were turned over to the Division of Residence Halls. In the next few years, the University made several changes: the oil furnaces were replaced with gas fired ones and some roofs were replaced. The intention of the University was that University Houses provide temporary housing for new faculty while they searched for permanent locations. During the period from its opening in 1948 through August 1953, 405 families moved through the apartments. At that time of the original residents only 14 faculty members remained who had arrived there in 1948, including professors Curt Leben and Julius Weinberg. In January 1957 the regents set a maximum time of occupancy of five years.³

1) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, March 1948, p. 20.

2) *Regent's Minutes*, July 25, 1946, November 22, 1946, January 17, 1947; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, May 1949 p. 11; *Daily Cardinal*, June 4, 1947, April 1, 1948. A (possibly) apocryphal story is told of E. B. Fred. A citizens group of Shorewood hills residents (including UW Professor Bradley) called on Fred to protest the development of an area so near their homes. Fred told the committee, gesturing to a roll of plans on his desk, that he was glad the area had been selected for housing, because he believed that the hog farm proposed for the area by the ag school would be detrimental to the neighborhood. By the end of the meeting the citizens group was in favor of the faculty housing project, and Fred had never unrolled the plans for the 'hog farm'.

3) *Regent's Minutes*, January 12, 1957, October 6, 1951, December 9, 1960; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, November 1951, p. 7.