

WENDT LIBRARY



Fig. 1. The Wendt Library, from Randall Street, July 1976. [Photo courtesy of Enid Simon]

Built to house the cramped and scattered libraries of the College of Engineering, and other physical sciences, the Wendt Library was opened in April 1976. It is named for long time engineering Dean Kurt F. Wendt.

The Engineering and Physical Science Library was the last stand alone library built by the University, in a sequence that saw the construction of Memorial Library (1959), Steenbock library (1968), and Middleton Medical library (1970). The huge construction and enrollment boom in the 1960s coupled with a disinclination to allow significant departmental libraries (which ran counter to the centralist library theory accepted at the University) resulted in an extreme need for a science and engineering library.

In 1969 the engineering Library was distributed between the third floor of the Mechanical Engineering building and storage in garages and rented space around the fringes of campus. Agitation had begun in 1966 for new facilities, or at least more operating hours. Pleas from professor L. G. Zweifel the engineering librarian, called the facilities "extremely poor", and pointed out that there were only 16 reader stations in the entire library, "a ridiculous figure for a college of this size." Engineering Dean Wendt (also a member of the University Campus Planning Committee) responded with a strong plea to chancellor Young for action on the engineering library. Went told Young: "Our present library, long inadequate, is rapidly becoming hopeless." Clearly new facilities were needed. Preliminary planning went on during the late 1960s, under a committee composed mainly of engineering faculty, since the first phase of the physical sciences library was assumed to be dedicated to engineering. Much early planning was based on the experi-



Fig. 2. The Wendt Library rises at the corner of Randall and Dayton streets, October 25, 1974. Buildings in the background are Union South and Hi-Ray Hall. [Photo courtesy of Enid Simon]

ence gained from the Steenbock library facility.¹

The state building commission authorized advanced planning and selected architects Weiler and Strang of Madison for the project in the fall of 1970. Planning meetings began in October 1970. The site was from the first assumed to be the corner of Randall and Dayton Streets, to the south of Union South. By November 1970 a basic plan was developed by the architects, the library staff (including professor Zweifel, Louis Kaplan and Enid Simon), the Union staff (Ted Crabb), and representatives of the state. This plan included a second phase to be built toward the southeast at a later date.²

During December 1970 the state representative, Mr. Walker Patton, unilaterally reduced the working budget of the project by 12 per cent. This was in an effort to reduce the University's total building program to a level likely to receive approval from the legislature and governor. The building committee began to modify the plan based on this new budget. Trim levels on the interior were the main modifications. By April 1971 a concept and budget report was ready for the Engineering and Physical Sciences Library. The budget was \$3.49 million. Estimated construction was to be completed by spring 1974. Then as a result of the state budget crunch, the regents declined to request the project as part of the 1971-1973 construction biennium. They did however recommend more planning and the purchase of the land at the Dayton and Randall Streets site. This ensured that the project would be high on the priority list for the following biennium. In January 1973 the state building commission approved the \$3.8 million budget for the library for inclusion in the 1973-1975 state building program.³

In March 1973 governor Lucey as a member of the state building commission, cast a tie-breaking vote that deleted the library from the building program. After further investigation was made, it became clear to the governor that the program would be well under the \$55 million limit, and Lucey switched his vote and the commission reversed itself and included the library in its recommended list of projects. At their April 1974 meeting the commission denied approval to the project, pending a resubmission at the next meeting. At the May 1974 meeting the building commission approved the regents request to bid and construct the library at a cost of \$3.84 million.⁴

Ground-breaking was held on September 4, 1974. Construction contracts were formally awarded on September 6, 1974. The general contractor was Gilbert Builders of Verona for \$1.98 million. The total contracted costs were \$3.84 million. All funds were state trust funds.⁵

Remarkably after years of delay in the project, construction took 25 months, six months less than



Fig. 3. Wendt library, February, 1997. Randall Street in foreground. [Del Brown Photo, AP-74]

the schedule. Coupled with a moving operation into the building that also went faster than expected the library was open for service on April 5, 1976. A formal dedication ceremony, featuring Engineering dean Robert Marshall, chancellor Edwin Young, and emeritus Dean Wendt, was held on October 8, 1976. In September 1976 the regents had voted to name the new library after Kurt Frank Wendt.⁶

Kurt Wendt graduated from the University in 1927, and served on the engineering faculty for 44 years, including 18 as dean. Dean Wendt served as Wisconsin's representative to the Big Ten during the 1950s. He retired in May 1971, but continued to serve the University on the planning Committee. Dean Wendt died on June 9, 1982.⁷

The Wendt Library is on four levels in a roughly triangular shape. The lowest level is below grade and contains the reserve room, the bindery, storage and offices. It is also larger than the upper levels, since it was design to extend under the unbuilt phase II section of the library. On level two are the main entrances, from a plaza shared with Union south, the general collection, the circulation desk, offices and conference rooms. The third level holds more of the general collection, reading areas, offices and the film collection. Closed stacks and offices are on the fourth floor. The building is sheathed in face brick. Because of the advent of computers and the electronic storage of technical journals and other material, it is unlikely that phase II will ever need to be constructed.

The engineering library at last had a permanent and suitable home after its migration from Science Hall (1888-1900) to the old engineering building on Bascom Hill (1900-1939), to the Mechanical Engineering Building (1939-1976).

1) Zweifel to Wendt, December 26, 1967, Zweifel to Wendt et al. Appendix "B", Wendt to Atwell, December 12, 1969, Wendt to Young, October 3, 1969, Resolution adopted by Polygon, October 1969, Resolution adopted by Student Chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers, December 3, 1969, Wendt to Young, January 1970, series 24/9/2-1 box 15.

2) May to Lorenz, September 28, 1970, series 24/9/2-1 box 20; Project meeting minutes, meetings #1 - #8, October 13 - December 7, 1970, series 24/9/2-1 box 20.

3) Orr to Erich, December 14, 1970, series 24/9/2-1 box 20; Concept and Budget Report - Engineering and Physical Sciences Library, April 1971, Edsall to Fred June 24, 1971, series 24/9/2-1 box 20; *Regent's Minutes*, October 6, 1972, Attachment 1, January 22, 1973, exhibit A.

4) *Regent's Minutes*, April 6, 1973, May 10, 1974, June 7, 1974; *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 17, 1973.

5) *Regent's Minutes*, September 6, 1974, exhibit A.

6) *Wisconsin Engineer*, October 1976, pp. 13-20; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, November 1976, p. 13.

7) Wendt biographical File, University Archives.