

*UW—Madison's Campus Voices' mission is to capture, present, and preserve some of the strongest historical stories and memories of UW—Madison through the people who lived them. Campus Voices, a project of the UW—Madison Oral History Program, consists of presenting extant archival material in 21<sup>st</sup> century formats, such as a podcast, mini-movie, and iTunes album.*

*Our story begins in the closing years of World War II. Military actions overseas were coming to an end, and while the world had suffered devastating losses, the domestic economy had been revived by government investment in wartime industry. As young veterans began returning home, enrollment in universities across the nation began to rise, and in 1944, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, also known as the G.I. Bill of Rights.*

*University education, once a privilege reserved for the rich, had been defined under the Act as a right entitled to any eligible veteran who chose that path. The initial hope was to delay millions of young men's entrance into the workforce and avoid a flooding of the job market. Indirectly, the bill brought about drastic changes in the character of American Universities.*

*While the national narrative hardly ends here, this is where our local story begins. At a large public University like UW Madison, the enrollment increases were already cause for concern by 1943, when then university president Clarence Dykstra called for the creation of a post-war planning commission to address the issue. By 1947, 23,000 students attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison—11,000 of them were veterans. This massive influx demanded increasingly creative solutions in order to meet the new student's needs.*

There were two concerns then: where were we going to find the instructional space for these people, and most of them being older, many of them were married students so we had to find housing accommodations for them. This included almost every available space we could think of in the community. We went so far as to go North to Baraboo where we took advantage of the facilities that had been available to the workers at the ammunition plant up there, and created a little community of our own called Badger Village.

*On December 7, 1945, the first student veteran moved in to the former industrial complex. However, it wasn't until 1946 that a portion of the Village was officially signed over to UW. Badger Village was initially conceived as an off-campus school to provide first-year classes such as English, mathematics, languages, and Economics along with onsite housing. However, due to great demand, it soon became a commuter village for veteran students of all ages.*

Then we had a choice of going into an attic somewhere in Madison with two little kids -- a firetrap of a house -- or to Badger Village. There was no choice. We went to Badger Village in a hurry, and were very glad to get there.

I think I would describe it as a strange domesticated army base. I was thinking about this and what did it look like to me, and that's about as near as I can come, and then as you get closer, and as you get inside, they all seemed like a house of cards. A very fragile kind of impermanent feeling about these little quarters that we were in. It was roomy enough, but very fragile, I thought. Not slated long for this world.

Well we were just happy to be by ourselves. And it was very rudimentary, it was just two rooms, in like a converted barracks, it had been a barracks for people who worked in the Badger Ordnance Plant. Anyway we thought it was going to be fun. They did a nice job on converting those, they were two rooms. One room was part kitchen, part dining room, and part living room. Everything was new, like they had a new hide-a-bed, a new kitchen table and chairs, a little apartment-sized stove; not a refrigerator, it was an ice box, [...] and then the bathroom facilities were down the hall.

We had trouble getting enough buses. We had only two city-type buses built by Ford, they were Ford transit buses, and the rest was a collection of dilapidated school buses and ex-army buses that we were lucky to keep going. I remember one particular bus bouncing along down East Washington Ave. one night bounced right off of its chassis. The body seemed to go in one direction, the chassis in another. However, we were pretty resourceful. Even though the bus looked like it fell apart, we had it back together and running again.

One evening we were coming back from the University and the bus was 14 below zero, and the bus stopped in Middleton and refused to run. So then we all got out and hitchhiked back up to Baraboo. And I thought some more about how nice it would be to be back in Washington. I hadn't had that hard a time even in the Army.

We had one severe winter in 47 and 48. There was a big storm in early December. It partially melted and refroze in mid-December, and never really melted until March or April. So always the walking was treacherous, even though they tried to use salt and sand, the driving was very bad, and the walking was almost impossible. Now, the highways themselves were okay, because they were taken care of.-The village itself in that year was an ice, place of torture, I guess. In the same measure that the winters were cold, the summers were very hot because there was no circulation of air, and the bedroom had little tiny windows. We had to have a fan blowing directly on us all the time for any air at all.

Everybody was in the same boat.

Yeah, that's I think what made it enjoyable. Nobody had any money, and you counted your pennies at the end of the month. There was a general store right on the grounds, and we'd go to that. I think they called it the commissary, I don't know if that was the right term. And then in the summer they provided grounds and land for us to have a garden.

And they plowed it for us. It was about 40 feet by 60.

So we thought it was pretty much fun. I don't know if I'd want to do it again, but at the time we thought it was not too bad.

*By its very nature, Badger was a unique community comprised of families with similar situations, experiences, and backgrounds. The pervasive feeling of community developed out of these common bonds, but also by democratic design. At its inception, Badger Village was intended to be much more than simple university housing—it was meant to be a microcosm of American government and society.*

*The village included an operating community center, post office, community council, police force, and an elected president. Alongside these civic operations, Badger also contained a shopping center, barber shop, drug store, and primary school. Of course, diversions and entertainment were also important parts of the student experience.*

Another aspect of the lifestyle at Badger, the basketball court served as a dance hall. And there were occasional dances and parties-- village wide parties-- that were held there. And on Sundays, that facility was used for church services where Catholic and the assistant from the parish in Saulk City used to come out and say Mass in the gym. And I think that there were Protestant services in the gym. So, in a sense it was a real community. All aspects of the lifestyle. All aspects of what you want in life really were provided right there at Badger Village. It was a truly a village.

*Women and men experienced Badger Village very differently. While the men recall the academic woes, the women spent most of their daily lives in the village, caring for children and managing the household.*

*The Badger Village wives were typically highly educated, often holding college degrees themselves; they were young mothers who rarely found opportunities to leave the village, and many were civically involved. Speakers, support groups, women's organizations, and social activities that included discussions of contemporary issues sprang up as vital parts of life at Badger, and wives played an active role.*

So, we went into Madison, got this training for several weeks, and read the material. We came back and sat at a long table and put out a call, anybody wanting to talk great books come. And we began talking Greek culture and all this. And the women began pounding fists, looking across the table. They'll say well, you know, people who could really do this would be blah blah. And the other one says, you haven't been in my shoes, you haven't been spit on. And suddenly this debutante type was just shook up. They would turn pale. They would confront each other. But they all stuck it out and listened. And it was mind boggling to both sides of these women from both sides of the tracks, in an old fashioned way of saying it.

*Residents were also visited by campaigning politicians, such as the socialist party leader Norman Thomas, George Nelson, and of course, Joe McCarthy. Two of the women in our*

*interviews recalled Senator McCarthy's visit, though the accounts differed greatly. Phyllis Young recalled seeing McCarthy, and viewing his talk quite favorably, enough so that she even voted for him—which she later came to regret. Peggy Baime, well, this is how Peggy recalled it.*

And McCarthy came out and he was talking along and then the veterans would be hollering elect this so-and-so. Finally he hollered out, isn't there a republican in the place? He just got shook up about that one.

*The courses and programs available at the university had been designed to provide an enriching experience for young students from well-to-do families. But, as we've discussed before, the G.I. Bill had brought about a demographic shift in the student population.*

Well, the veterans who had had to postpone their education anywhere from 3-5 years were anxious to get their education, and they didn't want anything to interrupt that. They were very serious. The university installed a 12 week summer semester so they could go right through and not lose any time. They could take a full semester's work in the summer. And this, a lot of students did that. Students, a number of the veterans, who might not have been able to go to the university before WWII because of the depression, were now able to go to school, and they had working experience, and were serious, and they put forth considerable effort. This was not a "Rah-Rah" campus at this time.

*When the ordnance works reopened as an arsenal for democracy, official university affiliation with Badger Village ceased in 1952.*

The university intended, when they opened Badger, that it would remain open perhaps three or four years until the peak of enrollment had passed and building in Madison caught up. However, building in Madison didn't catch up that fast, and the enrollment didn't slow down that quickly. Furthermore, living at Badger was very inexpensive. Many of the veterans paid only 18 dollars a month rent, and the maximum was 26.50, and you couldn't touch that in Madison. And while admittedly there were some hardships in living there, once you got used to it, it was pretty reasonable. And as the social activities and recreational activities increased, it became a reasonably attractive place to live. You could raise a garden right across the other side of the high way where the ordnance plant allowed us to plant gardens, and so it was a pretty reasonable thing. And students decided, we don't want to move until we finish our careers; our academic work. And of course the manager of the bus operation started in as a freshman and finished with a law degree and a bachelor's in economics. And he lived the entire time there, and there were another of other students whose graduate work took longer, and they all stayed. Students were still living there in 1951 when the Korean War required that the Ordnance Plant be opened to produce powder. At that point the federal government decided that they wanted to take back the housing. So we had to terminate our lease in 1951, with the agreement that students could remain who were there until they moved out or finished their careers, whichever happened last.

*If you would like to find out more about our Campus Voices collection and hear more stories like this from the University Archives, please visit our website at [archives.library.wisc.edu/oral-history/campusvoices](http://archives.library.wisc.edu/oral-history/campusvoices).*

*I would also like to thank the Brittingham Fund. Their generosity allows us to share these fascinating histories with the campus community and preserve the voices of our past. Thank you.*