

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 21st century formats, such as a podcast, mini-movie, and iTunes album.

The following 12 oral histories are compiled from our collections in the University Archives. In 1990, the archives, in conjunction with WHA radio conducted interviews with former residents of Badger Village for use in a radio program profiling the community. Many of the clips included here come from this project; some were conducted and recorded entirely by the residents themselves. Most of the stories you will hear describe the Badger Village experience fondly—some do not. Regardless, they provide us with a glimpse of the postwar years on the UW Campus, and give voice to the student experience of what Tom Brokaw called “the Greatest Generation.”

I’m Kristen Schumacher, current junior in the undergraduate history department here at UW—Madison, and a member of the Campus Voices staff. I’ll be leading the narration today.

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. Here’s Art Hove:

Hove: The biggest concern of the University following WWII was to find the means to accommodate all the veterans who were returning to the campus and who were having access to the University through the GI Bill. So the enrollment, which had been severely curtailed by the fact of the men, and later women, going off to war, was suddenly exploding. 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.

While other temporary housing facilities, such as the trailer homes at Truax, were established for single veterans, Badger Village was purchased specifically to meet the needs of the new married student population. Before the war, 500 married male students had been enrolled at UW; by 1948, there were almost 4,000. Amidst a general housing shortage in the city, even small apartments were difficult to find—let alone homes suitable for young families—as Phyllis Young describes:

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.

The project itself was born out of collaboration between the university and the federal government, allowing for the redesignation of wartime facilities for academic use, as Theodore Zillman here describes:

Badger Village was the housing complex put together during WWII to take care of the munitions workers who were then employed across the road in the Badger Ordnance Works, and there I think the chief thing they did was to make powder for the war effort. When the war was suddenly at an end, the need for powder was reduced drastically, and so Uncle Sam found itself with these Badger Village lean-tos—oh, I shouldn't say lean-tos—it was not the best of housing as you can imagine.

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. At the outset, no buses were provided to shuttle the students back and forth. The first community transportation was a defunct school bus purchased by the residents themselves in 1946.

Life at Badger was, overall, quite Spartan. The cost of an apartment was between \$17.50 and \$26.50, and the buses ran at a cost of 25 cents. On a G.I. salary of \$80 a month, the cost of living was affordable, but it didn't buy much. Here Phyllis Young shares her first impressions of the housing at Badger Village:

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 did not feel isolated...not at all. In fact I felt almost too surrounded. It was very crowded feeling to me and very busy. Mostly women. In the daytime, the men all climbed into the old rickety buses and off they went. But we were comfortably housed and very good from that point of view.

Here is Doris Mohr, another Badger Village wife, describing the accommodations and daily life.

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, but we didn't have to empty a pan, because they drilled a hole in the floor and the water just dripped right down through the floor onto the ground. And then there was a bedroom, and they provided bunk beds and wardrobes. But we brought our own double bed from home, so we had that and didn't use the bunk bed. And then the bathroom facilities were down the hall. And the ladies had their bathrooms and showers and the men had theirs, and so it was a community facility. And then there was also a laundry room, and I thought that was pretty great because we had all brand new washing machines—and they were not automatic washing machines. They were washing machines with wringers. And no dryers, of course. In nice weather we could hang our clothes outside, and in bad weather they had a separate room where you could hang your laundry inside.

Here, Marjorie Johnson describes some of the daily difficulties brought on by these accommodations.

Another source of entertainment, or ingenuity was required, was cooking because there was one transformer in Badger that was always defective, it was always going off. And there'd be a flicker of the light and we'd say "uh-oh, there it goes," and sure enough—all the electricity would go off. At night when we were supposed to have a meal, the only thing to be done was to open a can of Franco-American spaghetti or baked beans, or something that was on the shelf, put it on the coal stove in a pot—the coal stove came in very handy—and then we would light some candles and...we'd sit and have a candlelight meal, so to speak.

The homes themselves were poorly insulated, and the harsh Wisconsin climate caused endless troubles for many residents. Here, Marjorie Johnson describes some of the hazards brought upon the residents by mother nature:

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.

The post war years are known by another name—the “Baby Boom.” At Badger, the boom was practically an explosion. Single families that came to live in the village almost without exception left with a few more members in tow. While starting a new family in the aptly nicknamed “Rabbit Village” brought many residents great joy, it was very difficult. Here, JoAnn Lampman recalls the stresses of young family life at Badger:

And, anyway we lived out there at Badger Village. Have you ever heard of anybody living out at Badger Village? Now, that was rough living. Kids these days that live there at Eagle Heights don't know what it's about. I mean, we had a coal stove for instance, in the middle of our living room. And my first son burned his arm just learning to walk out there. It was, and then the guys had to take a bus in, everyday, for thirty miles.

So, life in Badger Village sounds as though it might have been a little depressing.

It was depressing and it was rough and we had no money to speak of. Well I shouldn't say that, because he still had Navy money. Maybe we were richer then than we were for the next ten years, I don't know. It was such a grim little place, and we didn't attempt to do a lot of fixing up. I was terribly busy with being pregnant with the second and having a boy a year old. We had two just 13 months apart. So I was too busy to think about anything else.

While some residents did find Badger quite grim, as the community became more established, the university and students worked together to make life easier. By 1947a UW supported fleet of 35 buses was provided to transport residents of Badger and Truax to the campus. Here Robert Korach, the manager of the Truax bus system, explains some of the difficulties encountered in maintaining this patchwork fleet:

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.

Here, Donald Anderson tells another story regarding the difficulties in transportation.

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.

Despite these trying circumstances, most residents recall the struggles and the ingenuity they inspired with a certain fondness, as Doris Mohr explained:

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. Here's Peggy Baime describing her experiences when she first came to this new community:

I guess Badger Village was just a U-turn in my life. I was born and raised in Minneapolis, city and apartment-dwelling, but a lot of diversity. But let me tell you, when I got to Badger Village, I had a whole new meaning of that word. The impact of the people who wouldn't normally have gone to university at all was so great, because the people who were grad students were those that would have gone to university from their home towns, but the rest of the people were people who never would have dreamed of it. That diversity was absolutely fantastic. It just was an impact of honesty, tension. We shared only that we were women, most of us had children, and most of us were poor.

In the community handbook, residents were told that this was their chance to prove that democracy, the principle they had fought for, could be made a reality at home. Communal spirit and cooperation were written into the foundation of Badger Village and often predominated in social relations. Here, William Schereck recalls one such instance of this:

You make good friends, you all band together in a time of need. I had a set of ratchet wrenches that I loaned all over the place so people could adjust their stoves and heating units. One time, I entered a contest; it was a Crusade for Freedom propaganda contest. Being in sociology and psychology, I came up with some pretty good suggestions, and I won one of the three national prizes, which meant a trip to New York. By and large, I had nothing but school clothing, and I didn't have a good suit. I didn't have clothes I'd be proud to wear going to New York theater.

Word got around, though. One of the fellows who had a nice brand new pair of shoes my size let me have them. Another fellow let me have a suit. Another fellow let me have a topcoat. So when I went to New York, I looked the part of a winner.

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. The Badger Bulletin, a newspaper that reported on village matters and was produced and distributed at the site, was also available to residents. Given the fact that many of the students were also young parents, the village school was an especially valued resource. Here's Phyllis Young:

When we got to Badger Village, we had one that was in first grade; she was a 6-year old. And we had a little boy who was 8 months old by the time we arrived in Badger Village. The little girl, I think, had a very happy time, though I think a baby one year old will accept life as he finds it. And the little girl had one of the best teachers I think that any of my children have ever had. Her name was Esther Bubbly, I've remembered it all of these years, and I rarely do that. The schools again were rather temporary looking, but they had a very light, airy, lively feeling. And it was a pleasant place for children.

Of course, diversions and entertainment were also important elements of the student experience. Here former resident August Lemberger explains the opportunities for social engagement available in Badger Village:

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. We had the grocery store. We had the barber shop. In the all purpose building there was a bar area. We could buy beer. There was no hard liquor, but you could buy beer. You could sit around and chat with your neighbors. The most popular beer, because it was the cheapest beer, was Effinger. It was a little brewery in Baraboo. Effinger Brewery. And that was the most popular beer that was consumed at Badger. I'm sure it was not because of the taste, but because of the price.

As August Lemberger mentioned, dances were often held at the community center, allowing residents to relax, socialize, and enjoy the popular big band music of the day. Here, Larry Halle, manager of Badger Village from 1946-1951, describes the scene.

I think I mentioned a few minutes ago about the social life at Badger. Now, there were a number of dances held because, particularly in the winter, they were popular, and they were of the cabaret type. The veterans were old enough to drink, so they had, they liked to have a cabaret

affair, with tables and beverages available. And, I believe that one of the popular orchestras at that time was Don Voegeli's orchestra in Madison. They would come out and play for some of these dances.

Among the many events, speakers, films, and productions at Badger was a completely student-run variety show. Here's Peggy Baime, a ballet teacher and lifelong dancer, describing a particularly humorous sketch devised by the residents.

So, we had a wonderful Friday show, and I was a dancer that studied ballet all my life, so I gave exercise classes out there. One of the things we decided to do was Swan Lake with all men. So all the men showed up expecting to really lampoon and jiggle around. And I said, "It's much funnier if you are serious." So suddenly they began to really train like ballet people. I gave them a real work-out, you know. I gave them the real Swan Lake. My husband was the male dancer, and one of the smaller men was the queen—the swan queen—and we tied a rope on him so that when my husband would lift him up, the rope carried him way off stage, way out of his hands, and far, far away. But we did Swan Lake incredibly seriously; they got it right away. It just was a fantastic version of Swan Lake with these men and their tutus.

Here's August Lemberger describing a different variety of social event:

Among the things that we did do for recreation that should probably be mentioned is that we did have a lot of athletic events. We had softball leagues in the spring and summertime, we had basketball leagues in the wintertime, we played a lot of touch football out there. In fact, one of the things that we did in Building 3 at Thanksgiving time, we would get together and the 12 units on the north end, the 12 guys would play the 12 guys from the units on the south end of the building in what we called the Toilet Bowl game. It was a touch football game, and we would do that in the morning, and this may sound chauvinistic, but at the time we all had a good time doing it, the women would get together and cook turkeys and make a huge Thanksgiving dinner. They would do that cooperatively while the guys were off playing some football, and then we would have like 2 o'clock in the afternoon, after the game we got cleaned up a little bit, we would have a building Thanksgiving dinner, and it was a great way to spend a holiday. That's among the fond memories of the time, too.

Of course, these two stories are a wonderful glimpse into gender culture of the postwar years. It was a time of strict roles and expectations for men and women, and while the residents generally lived within these social boundaries, many crossed them, and sometimes, as Baime describes, poked fun at them. However, in part due to the social expectations of the time, women and men experienced Badger village very differently. While 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.

Here Peggy Baime describe her experience in leading the Badger branch of the “Great Books Club”:

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. It was just dramatic to see them, you know, confront each other. “You haven't been poor. You haven't been kicked off of the street. You husband wasn't—your uncle wasn't lynched.” It was just shaking people, it was so exciting to see them. But we stuck to the thing and say, “Do you think these kinds of issues”—we brought it back to the great books—always—to the original concept of the Socratic method. Of pulling out by questioning. “What would you have done if you would have been? Is that what you would have done? Why not?” You know, so we just pulled them out of each other. So we had people from every part of the United States. Every economic pattern, every color, creed, social, something. So you'd go out of there literally shaking, like you'd been through that part of a war, and in that sense it was fighting out the real battles on the home front.

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.

For the women, the radio played an important role in maintaining political and academic involvement. Here Marjorie Johnson explains the importance of the public radio station WHA:

I remember listening to whatever classes were offered with enormous interest, on WHA. Because we needed more intellectual stimulation, women did, in those circumstances. Although we subscribed to a lot of magazines, I didn't have a lot of time to read unless the baby was sleeping. But I could listen to the radio while I was doing my household tasks, so it was a very important element every day to me.

Here's Peggy Baime with some interesting insight on how WHA helped maintain equality in her marriage:

The other was WHA. And I tuned it in. I'm a news junkie anyway. And I was just starving for education. Just starving for it. So I turned it on and beautifully enough, the integrated liberal studies lecture series was on. So I took voluminous notes. I had colored notebooks. One for each type of lecture and just took all these notes. And my husband was taking the same courses. So when he would come home I'd say well I heard Fred Harrington today. I thought he said blah blah. So we just had real exciting, both growing. WHA was just manna from heaven, for me. And it also kept our sense of equality, as we matured. Because it wasn't him having an education and my staying home learning how to make bread or knit or something.

We'll shift our focus now to the men, who also found themselves in a unique situation—this time within the academic environment. 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. The veterans, who came from less privileged backgrounds, were accustomed to military discipline, and sought practical, career oriented training, and they felt that the pace and material of courses simply did not suit them. Here's Larry Halle.

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.

This new brand of veteran student shifted enrollment trends heavily toward the schools of business and engineering, and forever changed the curriculum and pace of the school of journalism at UW. More generally, as one interviewee suggested, the veterans brought about a challenge to the concept of in loco parentis. Interestingly, this battle against university control of student life is often attributed to the social movements of the 1960s. In Badger itself, the student attitude was very serious, and the veterans were dedicated to their studies. Here, August Lemberger describes the atmosphere during the evenings as the men returned home to study.

As I recall, we studied in our own apartments at the kitchen table. Again though, these were largely veterans in a married population, very serious about their education. So there wasn't a lot of hijinks going on in the hallways in the evening, at least not until 10 o'clock or so. And of course with the bus schedule, getting up as we did, by 10:30 we were pretty well-wrapped up anyhow. But, you would study from dinner through—people didn't play their radios too loud and disturb you that I recall. I don't recall having a problem like that. By and large, cooperative in seeing to it that the building was reasonably quiet at night. Probably the bigger deterrent to

studying was that fact that the bus ride kind of wore you down. You get home after that bus ride and unwind a bit and be kind of tired. I think your fatigue was more of a handicap to studying than the atmosphere in the building.

The studious atmosphere, just like the social life at Badger, was crafted and maintained almost entirely by the residents themselves rather than through top-down university enforcement. In fact, as the residents began to make their mark, this rugged temporary village, in its final years, became quite a desirable place to live, as Larry Halle described:

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.

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

The veteran population would continue to make sweeping changes in academia for some years, many of which remain integral parts of the University of Wisconsin experience to this day.

Perhaps the single most reiterated sentiment amongst the interviewees can be summed up as this—we had nothing, but we felt lucky. To close our story, here's Doris Mohr with her final reflections on life at Badger Village.

I don't know if I'd want to do it over again now, but it certainly was a very positive experience...I liked all the people there. I felt we were pretty lucky actually, considering the times...The rent was certainly great; it was probably about \$23 a month...It was a good experience. I just kind of feel sorry for young people today that don't have to go through an experience like that. I know most young people today want to have their house all paid for, or at least have a house, have a car, and everything that goes with it. We didn't have any of those things and still we were very happy, and it was great.

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.

I would also like to thank the Brittingham Fund, whose support has made the production of this podcast, as well as the entire Campus Voices project, possible. Their generosity allows us to share these fascinating histories with the campus community and preserve the voices of our past. Thank you.