

PRIMATE CENTER



Fig. 1. Primate Center, 1993, from Orchard and Capitol Court. [Author Photo, AP-45]

The primate center was built in 1962 with grant money from the National Institutes of Health. It houses research labs and offices and provides interdisciplinary primate research facilities.

In June of 1961 the regents accepted a grant of \$1.29 million from the National Institute of Health (NIH) for the construction of a Wisconsin Primate Center. The stated purpose was "to provide an optimum environment wherein resident and visiting scientists, representing a breadth of disciplines, may actively pursue research ... on rhesus monkeys". A supplementary grant provided \$367,000 for operating expenses for June 1961 through May 1962. Within broad limits, the center would be open to any Midwestern scientist who desired to use the facility. It would be directed by Dr. Harry Harlow and guided by the committee of the Graduate School under dean John Willard.¹

These grants were mainly due to the work of professor Harry Harlow, who was the founder and director of the primate research program at the University. Harlow's research results had attracted national attention, and were a principal reason that the University was chosen by the NIH as a regional site. At the same (June 1961) meeting the regents approved a site for the Regional Primate Center, directly west of the existing primate Laboratory on Coyne Court. It was stipulated that the cost of the land at this

site would be borne by the NIH grant. In September the regents approved the seeking of other outside funding to cover expenses not allowed by the NIH grant, such as utility extensions, and site demolition.²

In July 1961 the state building commission approved the preparation of preliminary plans. 1961 was taken up with planning the facility, mostly by Dr. Harlow and the architects of Herbst, Jacoby & Herbst of Milwaukee. In January 1962, the negotiations for the land were completed, but cost \$93,500, including razing instead of the appraised \$65,000. This extra expense required some reductions in the building plan to stay within the budget set by the grant.³

The preliminary plans were approved by the regents in March 1962. At that time, the construction schedule called for construction to begin in September 1962 and to be completed in November 1963. The regents were also informed at this time that off campus facilities for a primate holding, might be necessary. The regents approved final plans for the Primate Center on July 13, 1962. Construction contracts were let on September 14, 1962, with the general contract going to the Siesel Construction Company of Milwaukee for \$389,000. Total costs including construction, land and utilities was \$1.217 million, the exact amount of the NIH grant. Construction began immediately.⁴

The formal opening of the Primate Center took place on April 27, 1964. The building is a basement and four story 120 by 40 foot windowless research tower, flanked on the north and west by a 60 by 60 foot basement and two story administrative wing. Construction is of reinforced concrete with brick sheathing, and precast panels on the two story section. The research section contains mainly animal cages, laboratories, nurseries, and a few offices.⁵

In 1966, with mounting problems in the areas of animal housing, research, and office space, Dr. Harlow began planning a \$1.2 million addition to the Primate Center, which would extend from the north side of the research tower section onto land then used by some businesses and the Headquarters of the Wisconsin State Selective Service System. This scheme failed because of a lack of funding. Years later, the University did buy the property occupied by the Selective Service, and remodel the building to be used as the Primate Annex. The proximity of these buildings led to a strange incident in January 1970, when radical activist Karleton Armstrong in an attempt to bomb the draft board, mistook the Primate Center for the Selective Service office (which had removed it's identifying sign as a precaution) and firebombed the Primate Center. Damage was minimal, and confined to an office on the first floor.

Well known users of the Primate Lab, besides Dr. Harlow, include Dr. Konrad Akerty of the anatomy department, and Dr. Harry A. Waisman, whose research on mental retardation eventually led to the construction of the Waisman Center on west campus. The center still regularly hosts visiting scholars in primate research.

1) *Regent's Minutes*, September 9-10, 1960, June 5-6, 1961, exhibit A-1, July 20, 1961, exhibit B; *Daily Cardinal*, June 16, 1961.

2) *Regent's Minutes*, June 5-6, 1961.

3) Dietrich to Dorman, November 24, 1961, Peterson to Eyestone, January 11, 1962, Sites to Yamamoto, February 2, 1962, Primate Center outline specification, Herbst Jacoby& Herbst, February 21, 1962, series 24/9/2 box 13.

4) *Regent's Minutes*, March 9, 1962, July 13, 1962, September 14, 1962; *Daily Cardinal*, July 19, 1962.

5) Photo caption, NS-2508. Plans in physical plant plans room.