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Introduction

On a fall day in September 1953, students at Southern Illinois University began to arrive on campus for the start of a new semester. Anthony Hall, named for Susan B. Anthony, had stood for over forty years as the only girls’ dormitory on campus.¹ That semester, the excited commotion of new and returning students could be heard at the gates of Woody Hall, purposely built over the previous spring and summer to house 422 female students.² Despite the multiple building projects undertaken by the university that year, including Woody Hall, the university’s administration estimated that the university could only house 17% of the university’s burgeoning population in university-owned lodging.³

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale (SIUC), is unique in the Illinois public university system. Founded in 1869, it remained little more than a quiet teaching college in an oft-forgotten part of the state for many decades. The modern history of SIUC began with the appointment of Delyte Morris as SIUC President in 1948. Over his long tenure, SIUC grew from under 3,000 students to well over 20,000.⁴ Such a massive change led to a dramatic expansion and overhaul of every part of SIUC, including housing. Before Morris’s appointment, on-campus housing consisted of little more than a few small barracks and one women’s-only dorm. The massive increases in student population over the next three decades forced the university and surrounding community to accommodate the expansion of housing for thousands of students. The subsequent decline in enrollment in the 1990s forced the university and town to reckon with the consequences.

³ Pulley, Residence Halls, 9.
⁴ Enrollment counting at SIUC can be a tricky subject. Detailed accounts exist only for recent decades. Both modern and older records are the subject of debate and controversy, and sources can conflict. This article will use Betty Mitchell’s enrollment record in Southern Illinois University, A Pictorial History (St. Louis, MO: G. Bradley, 1993), unless otherwise stated.
This work describes the evolution of the relationship between SIUC’s housing administration and the off-campus community, centered on the need for student housing. The student population’s rapid growth from the 1940s to the 1970s often had unintended consequences for university administrators, students, and local landlords. Problems with affordability, overcrowding, and the rights of students, tenants, and renters were common points of contention for all involved. As the expected continued increases in student enrollment failed to materialize in the 1980s, a new set of problems emerged. The outdated living quarters on-campus became hard to fill and often caused students to desire to move off-campus. These different sets of problems for student housing at a time of dramatic increase and decrease in student population demonstrate the need for strong cooperation between the university, students, and their local community if all are to thrive as partners.

**Historiography**

The history of SIUC’s modern period exists in a limited albeit detailed capacity. Unfortunately, emphasis on university housing issues is often mentioned only in passing. Former SIUC professor Robert A. Harper’s *The University That Shouldn’t Have Happened, But Did* is an essential contribution to the history of SIUC.\(^5\) Published in 1998, it offers a complete account of the changes that occurred during Morris’s leadership. The volume provides one of the best housing historical accounts at SIUC, and it remains today a relevant read by the faculty of the university’s History program.

Betty Mitchell’s book *Southern Illinois University, A Pictorial History*, surveys through its photographic essays many of the university’s main changes from the late 1800s to the early 1990s.\(^6\) Bearing witness to the change in SIUC’s housing, photographs offer direct and compelling evidence of the campus under construction. Commissioned by the university administration and published in 1993, Mitchell’s work is a mainstay of SIU history. Perhaps more significant than Mitchell’s book was the vast research which remained unpublished; another of Mitchell’s projects—a more detailed and complete account of SIUC’s history—was never completed. In the preface to his own book, Harper acknowledges that a large amount of his cited work comes from the interviews Mitchell conducted with university faculty and staff. In total, Mitchell conducted over one hundred interviews over a period of two years.

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Other significant sources for the period under review include *The Ordeal of Southern Illinois University* by George Kimball Plochmann, former faculty in the philosophy department, and *Delyte Morris of SIU*, also written by Betty Mitchell. Additionally, Eli Lentz’s work *Seventy-Five Years in Retrospect: Southern Illinois University*, James Necker’s monograph *The Building of a Department: Chemistry at Southern Illinois University*, *The Other Illinois* by Baker Brownell, and *Retrospect at a Tenth Anniversary: Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville* by David Butler. Each of these works on the history of SIUC adds a unique perspective to the historiography of SIUC and a vast wealth of information on multiple themes and issues on the growth of the university.

There remains a lack of attention to the issue of housing at SIUC. Fortunately, there is a wealth of documented sources on housing needs across the country, including student housing. Sources on housing emerged in relation to the expansion of the Federal Government under President Lyndon B. Johnson in his newly created social welfare programs. A flurry of research directed by organizations such as the Department of Urban Housing and Development has left a paper trail of housing information dating back to the mid-1960s. Most of SIUC’s detailed housing records include important enrollment statistics since 1965. Sources on public housing are essential as many students over the years have chosen to live off-campus, no matter the state of university housing. In these cases, information about housing options in a university’s local community can reveal much about housing options on-campus by way of implication—occasionally, such reports can even contain detailed information about the state and availability of the university’s housing spaces. SIU’s situation was no exception. A field market analysis of the Carbondale area performed by the Federal Housing Administration showed that as of 1967, 9,825 dormitory spaces existed at SIU, of which “about 5,000” were privately owned. The report also noted that “about 8,100” of these spaces were added after 1960. Such statistics make it clear that, as the university grew, so did the local community. They also show how decisions and changes in the local community affected the university and vice-versa.

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8 Eli Gilbert Lentz, *Seventy-Five Years in Retrospect, from Normal School to Teachers College to University, Southern Illinois University, 1874-1949* (Carbondale: University Editorial Board, Southern Illinois University, 1955).
Other forms of documents, such as housing surveys, architectural programs, and trustee meeting minutes, provide an invaluable look into the decision-making processes that shaped SIUC housing policies. For example, the architectural report “A Residence Halls Program for Southern Illinois University,” prepared in May 1953 under the direction of Charles Pulley and the firm of Perkins & Will, sought to study the housing situation at SIUC. This report provides much insight into a crucial point in both SIU’s development and President Morris’s tenure—SIUC’s initial on-campus housing developments.

Lastly, the voices of former SIUC students provide human agency to this story by connecting institutional processes to their everyday lives. Students’ voices come through articles published by the student newspaper The Daily Egyptian, which has run without interruption since the 1920s. In other cases, the voices of students, faculty, and staff arise from interviews conducted by Betty Mitchell, all of which offer essential first-hand accounts. More recent interviews with former students offer some of the most personal information. The stories of these former students weaved together anecdotes and other experiences, illustrating how they were affected by the decisions, policies, and procedures created by SIUS Housing Administration as it exists today. For these students and all students who have resided in SIUC’s dorms and apartments, a discussion of housing is more than meeting minutes and executive reports—it is a discussion about the places they called home during some of the most formative and memorable years of their lives.

Origins of the Housing Administration

The story of housing at SIU is inextricably connected to student enrollment patterns. For the 1879-80 academic year, ten years after the chartering of the university and five years after its first year of operation, enrollment stood at just 264 students. Initially designed to be only a simple teaching college, SIU was then known as Southern Illinois Normal University. For the fall of 1922, enrollment had increased to 1,011 students. Many buildings forming the heart of the campus, collectively known as “Old Campus,” had been built. These buildings include Old Main (built 1887, burned 1969), Altgeld Castle (b. 1896), Wheeler Library (b. 1904), the Allyn Building (b. 1908), Anthony Hall (b. 1913), and Shryock Auditorium (b. 1918). In 1948, when Delyte Morris was selected to serve as SIUS’s President, university enrollment stood at just 3,013 students.

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13 A “Normal” university or college was the standard designation (still used in rare instances today) for any two-year institution designed to train teachers and other educators. SINU (Southern Illinois Normal University) renamed to SIU in 1947.

With the introduction of the G.I. Bill for Education and ensuing post-war prosperity, SIUC experienced the equivalent of a renaissance under Morris’s leadership. The existing curriculum was reformed while the university offerings adapted entirely new programs. The campus itself was revitalized and massively expanded. By 1953, student enrollment was predicted to reach at least 9,000 students by the end of the decade.\(^{15}\) This prediction proved remarkably accurate—during the 1960-61 academic year, enrollment peaked at 9,028 students. An examination of residential mobility and migration over the 1948-52 period conducted in 1954 by Richard Robinson, an MA student at SIU, summed up the earliest housing situation of the university. Robinson’s report concludes that “Carbondale [did] not compare with other Southern Illinois’s cities … It is evident that the influence of the university and the stable employment by the Illinois Central Railroad [made] Carbondale a stable locality in the midst of out-migration elsewhere in Southern Illinois.”\(^{16}\) Accounts such as Robinson’s suggest that SIUC’s population growth was here to stay. From the earliest period, administrators recognized that such an expansion required administrative and structural changes and the rapid construction of new student housing.

Such an expansion proved to be a difficult task. In 1953, university-owned housing consisted of two permanent residential buildings: Anthony Hall, a small Victorian-style brick building (subsequently converted to a men’s dormitory after Woody Hall’s construction), and the newly constructed Woody Hall. Anthony Hall held 122 male students, and Woody Hall housed 422 female students.\(^{17}\) Alternative housing options operated by the university were grossly inadequate: nine World War II surplus barracks purchased from Camp Ellis\(^{18}\) for the use of 184 men, 105 temporary apartment spaces located on the nearby Chautaugua Street Housing Unit for the benefit of married students, and 95 apartment units situated 10 miles east of campus in the Southern Hills Housing Project.\(^{19}\)


\(^{17}\) Southern Illinois University Board of Trustee, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees* (1952), 113.

\(^{18}\) A location with a unique history of its own, Camp Ellis served as a training camp for thousands of army support personnel during WWII. Recruits practiced building pontoon bridges over the nearby Spoon River, of *Anthology* fame. It served as a prison camp for German soldiers before being turned over to the Illinois National Guard in 1946 and eventually demolished.

\(^{19}\) Pulley, *Residence Halls*, 9.
Understanding such a predicament, the SIU Board of Trustees, at the behest of President Morris, contracted the Chicago architectural firm Perkins & Will to complete a redesign of SIUC’s housing under the direction of university architect Charles Pulley. The company Perkins & Will became involved in numerous large, multi-stage projects to redesign the campus. These projects included a proposal unanimously adopted by the Board of Trustees on April 26, 1956, to entirely shift the proposed home of the newly created Home Economics Program several blocks across town. The design plan created by Perkins & Will instrumentally shaped the foundation of SIUC’s housing administration up to the present day. The design plan’s preface was empathetic toward student concerns:

Residence halls for Southern Illinois University are a necessity. Student housing is the current limitation on its growth. Residence halls are also an opportunity — an opportunity to exploit the educational possibilities of group living; an opportunity to relate faculty living to student living in ways which will enhance learning experiences; an opportunity for students to experience companionship in groups small enough so that they remain persons rather than a commodity to be housed; an opportunity to teach by example some of the amenities of living and at the same time achieve money economies beyond those usually achieved in university dormitories.

The above statement of principle represents the judgment of the university staff members and the architects who participated in this study of housing for Southern Illinois University. The conflict between the dollar efficiency of bigness and the educational efficiencies of small grouping was the central theme of their many discussions. They believe that this Report, which is the product of their efforts, represents a step toward achieving both of these desirable and apparently conflicting goals [...] They feel that the unusual obligation of Southern Illinois is to teach “living” and to educate while providing low-cost shelter. The following Report is so aimed.

The report’s brief thirty-five pages, a mixture of detailed technical analysis coupled with statements like the ones seen above and scintillating

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20 Southern Illinois University of the Board of Trustees, Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1956), 154.
21 Pulley, Residence Halls, 6.
endorsement for the report’s findings, provide the best look at the state of university housing during this crucial time. The many diagrams and maps included in its pages contain fascinating examples of various alternative ways the SIUC campus could have looked today. However, the report’s optimistic plans were tempered by more sober observations, as stated in its opening paragraphs:

The problem of student housing, however, is not limited to the consideration of quantity. Practically no new structures have been made available for housing students for the past forty years. Nearly every one of the homes and fraternity houses are inadequate from the standpoint of such facilities as plumbing, wiring, study desks, and social and dining spaces. In many cases there is serious overcrowding of bath facilities, while approximately twenty per cent of the students housed in Carbondale live in homes in which there are less than six students.\(^{22}\)

The report wryly concluded by stating that “Since it [appeared] unlikely that private operators [would] produce the housing needed for increased enrollment, the University must assume responsibility for creating this needed housing.” SIUC took the report’s conclusions seriously, internalizing its findings regarding the lack of growth in private housing over the past four decades and the deplorable and often negligent quality of such accommodations. The deficiencies of available privately-owned facilities detailed in the report and its glowing endorsement of the benefits new housing structures could provide ensured that the construction of modern dormitory structures became a priority for university administrators over the coming decades.

Problems with Off-Campus Housing

While SIU’s Board of Trustees had firmly committed to a bold new vision for the university, the simple fact remained that apartments and dorms took time to fund and build. For most of this early period and well into the modern day, many of the student population resided in off-campus, privately-owned apartments. A 1953 statement from the Board of Trustees explained the university’s attitude towards privately-owned student housing by stating that:

With respect to off-campus student housing, it is the philosophy of the university that this category of housing should represent an extension of on-campus housing whereby owners, student renters and the university

cooperatively assume certain responsibilities in order that off-campus student housing may be improved continually with respect to both quantity and quality of such housing.\textsuperscript{23}

The concern displayed by university administrators for the needs of students on and off-campus continued for decades to come. Just as the issue of student safety needed to be addressed on and off-campus, so too were the concerns about housing, on and off-campus, that needed constant evaluation. While the university could not help but understand that its reputation would be at risk if it allowed students to reside in dangerous or dilapidated housing, records show that genuine humanitarian concerns were also involved.

Minutes from the same board meeting explained how the university attempted to design its policies and which offices would be in charge of their implementation. The sheer amount of documentation illustrating multiple attempts to enforce university policies also showed subsequent frustration by university officials in applying its directive. Private housing owners often took issue with university officials investigating their properties. In contrast, those same officials sought that students follow university policies off-campus. The most illuminating documentation can be found in complaint reports from tenants, property owners, and university administrators. On a complaint report filed on January 7, 1947, Mrs. Robert Gher, resident at 405 North University, noted that:

Harry Wesley Carter register [sic] late and there were only a few rooms in town left vacant. He contacted Mrs. Gher who had rented to him previously and she gave him a place to stay in a double room with five other boys. On October the 15 I visited Mrs. Gher and asked her not to place not more than five in the double rooms.

A follow-up dated January 8, stated that:

[A housing administrator] called Mrs. Gher to ask for an explanation for renting to more than five students. She gave as her explanation that one boy by the name of Bob Craig was undecided about commuting from Johnston City and she feared she would only be left with four boys.

[The housing administrator] then told her of the study that was made of the deficiency grades of the past term which showed that practically all houses with crowded conditions

\textsuperscript{23} Southern Illinois University, Student Housing Policies and Standards, December 10, 1966, University Housing Records, RG 13-16, Box 2, Special Collections Research Center, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 5. [Hereafter SCRC.SIUC.HUR].
had a large number of students who were failing in one or more subjects.

She seemed a bit irritated and stated that she would not rent at all if she could not rent to at least five at $3.00 per week each.24

Another complaint, this time captured on an internal departmental memo from Director of Housing Mabel Pulliam to Assistant to the Dean of Men Ledford Bischof, dated March 2, 1948, briefly read:

Dear Mr. Bischof:

Dr. Robert Lentz, a dentist, at 206 W. Jackson, [reported] that a student girl has been visiting the apartment of William Crocker and Marion Dwain Farris every evening. He [was] concerned about the reputation this will give his home.

I [Mr. Pulliam] have said nothing to the boys about the rule prohibiting unmarried students from occupying apartments because these rooms are in the home of Dr. Lentz, and I [Mr. Pulliam] had assumed they would have a certain amount of supervision.

Unless you wish me to assist with this, I shall leave the matter in your hands.26

A third complaint report dated September 9, intended as a copy of a letter sent to Mrs. Win Parker, living at 215 ½ West Walnut, read as follows:

Val Refett who lived in your house during the past academic year has reported that you failed to return a $25.00 damage deposit to him although you had informed him earlier that he was not responsible for any damage.

I understand that there was an altercation between you

25 The Dean of Men position is an ancestor of the modern Dean of Students position, the holder of which is still responsible for the Director of Housing and the entirety of the Housing Administration. The Dean of Student Affairs reports to the Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs, who in turn reports directly to the Chancellor of the University. The consolidation of the male and female student affairs offices is a modern evolution, yet the byzantine structure of the university’s administration dates back to the university’s earliest period.
26 Mrs. Mabel Pulliam, Complaint Memo, March 2, 1948, SCRC.SIUC.HUR, RG 13-16, Box 3, Folder 1.
and that you subsequently called the Chief of Police and informed him [sic] that Val was drunk. According to Val’s account later substantiated by the Chief of Police, Val went to the Police station and asked the chief to check this accusation of being drunk. The Chief informed us that Val had not been drinking and was certainly not drunk.

The chief of Police said that he would talk to you.27

Reports such as these are numerous, following a pattern that would remain evident well into later decades. For example, a 1946 report contained the university’s response to the concerns of a landlord accused of improper living facilities on the property.28 The report included the subsequent investigation, which revealed the complete lack of lavatory facilities. A 1947 report detailed the strategies used by a landlord attempting to charge four female students for using a hotplate.29 These reports provide some of the issues influencing housing dissatisfaction among students, involving staff and community residents.

Still, compared with the limited university-owned housing and the only semi-available fraternity housing, these cramped off-campus rooms were often the only choice for students. The scramble for available student housing began every fall semester; this became an SIUC tradition. Before the beginning of the semester, students, parents, and renters posted and read multiple ads for available housing in town. Most of these ads appeared in the student daily, The Daily Egyptian, and the local newspaper, The Southern Illinoisan.

Privately-owned off-campus housing also involved other problems. In the summer of 1959, the Department of Community Development at SIUC conducted a survey on housing in Carbondale sponsored by the City of Carbondale and the Public Housing Administration. The study provides a detailed review of available housing in the Carbondale community at that time. The survey included information on 177 city blocks and 807 dwelling units, as well as 667 other structures. The review found that many of the city’s housing units were in a poor state of repair, lacking essential safety features and basic lavatory facilities or requiring significant repairs.

Interestingly, the survey did not cite overcrowding as a significant issue. Perhaps this oversight can be explained by the fact that the survey did not include areas that SIUC indicated it would soon be adding to its

27 Mrs. Win Parker, Complaint Letter, September 9, SCRC.SIUC.HUR, RG 13-16, Box 3, Folder 1.
28 Mrs. Gertrude McMinn, Complaint Letter, December 18, 1947, SCRC.SIUC.HUR, RG 13-16, Box 3, Folder 1.
campus. Alternatively, since the survey was conducted over the summer, the issue of overcrowding reported during the school year did not appear during the summer, making this issue a seasonal phenomenon. The areas in good condition were often clustered together similarly to those in the worst conditions, likewise, concentrated in other city sections. It is plausible that prices for lodging accounted for this disparity. The median rent was estimated at $61.00 per month, while the median range was $38.00 to $71.00 per month.\(^{30}\)

Those students lucky or quick enough to obtain university-owned housing often enjoyed a degree of security and luxury at the expense of a lack of independence. They were ensured access to all necessary modern facilities and proximity to campus at a relatively affordable cost. For the 1952-53 academic year, room rates at Anthony Hall were set at $13.00 per week, while the opening rates for Woody Hall were $15.00 per week.\(^{31}\) On nearby Chautauqua Street, two-bedroom apartment monthly rates were $40.00 for students and $50.00 for faculty.\(^{32}\) In 1956 these rates increased by $2.50. Even this increase could be justified by comparison to rates for other privately-owned housing options, many of which did not offer anywhere near the same number of amenities.

Despite the urgent need for additional housing structures and the SIUC administration’s acceptance of this need, building new facilities was initially a slow process affected by budgetary constraints. It was estimated that Woody Hall alone would bring in a total of $247,650 during its first year of operation.\(^{33}\) However, the construction and operation of Woody Hall was a relatively expensive endeavor. The amenities that attracted students to university-owned housing could render future construction plans too costly. Nevertheless, the state of Illinois appropriated $1,018,832 to construct the dormitory building, leaving the university to come up with over $1,100,000.\(^{34}\) As a result, the university paid for the remainder of this fee with the sale of bonds, per a loan agreement reached with the United States Housing and Home Finance Agency—an arrangement the university repeated during many of its future construction projects.\(^{35}\) Ultimately, Woody Hall’s funding was achieved


\(^{31}\) A per-week rate was preferred to a per-month rate in university-owned housing structures owing to the fact that college semesters were, and continue to be, based on a schedule of weeks instead of months.

\(^{32}\) Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees, *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees* (1956), 176.

\(^{33}\) Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees, *Annual Report of the Board of* (1952), 113.

\(^{34}\) Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees, *Annual Report of the Board of* (1952), 111.

\(^{35}\) Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees, *Annual Report of the Board of* (1952), 66.
through a complicated process. This arrangement was approved unanimously by the Board of Trustees, two absences notwithstanding, indicating that the university had faith and optimism in its plan to expand housing.

While Woody Hall eventually paid for its own construction, in 1952, it took the university many years to completely pay off the debt it had taken on to build it. As such, any unexpected construction costs might impair the university’s budget for years to come. A joint letter from President Morris and the Board of Trustees to the supervising architect on the Woody Hall construction site, Merrick Hammond, urged him to “do whatever possible to expedite the completion of the construction.” The letter cited their common financial concerns and anxiety about the cost of such programs since “each day required for construction [was] of substantial cost to the University.”

Growth and Compromise from the 1950s to the 1960s

After Woody Hall, other university-owned dormitory structures followed in 1957. Each dormitory was part of a multi-stage building program on Thompson Point, as outlined in the Perkins & Will architectural plan. Despite the urgent need for housing, the second and final stage of the project was only completed five years later, in 1962. The complex consisted of eleven three-story buildings, each housing fifty-one two-person rooms, and six three-person rooms, for a maximum occupancy of 1,320 students. The program was slightly constricted by the fact that each building would house either men or women. Every two rooms shared a bathroom complete with modern facilities. Each building had easy access to a central dining hall building and the nearby lakefront. The eventual design of the Thompson Point area followed that outlined in the Perkins & Will plan, despite the nearly ten-year gap between the latter’s creation and the former’s completion.

For much of this period, many SIUC students found housing accommodations through their association with fraternities or sororities. In 1923, the Sigma Alpha Pi fraternity began offering rooms to twenty-five members at the house at 608 Normal Avenue. Throughout the 1920s and 30s,

37 Situated between Campus (formerly Thompson) Lake and Thompson Woods, the land which makes up the Thompson Point area were purchased by the University in 1956 from the eponymous Thompson family. President Morris’s original (since demolished) home in Carbondale was located on nearby Thompson Street, today the site of the Dorothy Morris Gardens.
Greek groups continued to lease or construct new houses for their members. Enrollment issues, the world wars, and a cautious attitude on behalf of the SIUC administration prevented the so-called “local” Greek groups from becoming nationally registered organizations until Delyte Morris’s presidency. While not a fraternity member, President Morris quickly appreciated the value they might offer to the university. President Morris found himself in the unique position of inheriting the leadership of the university at a time when the Greek groups were still in the early stages of organizing. By 1949, discussions were underway for involving the university in providing housing arrangements for various Greek organizations. The actual process of creating such housing was slow. It required that university officials obtain sufficient grants or loans, convincing Greek groups who owned houses to sell them to the university and move to university-owned structures. The more logistical issue of finding space for the new housing took many years.

The poor and often dangerous condition of Greek housing gave SIUC students and staff many reasons for insisting on university involvement. The same conditions present in community housing, discussed above, were often present in Greek housing; lack of basic facilities was a serious concern, while overcrowded basements and attics presented a serious fire hazard. After much discussion and investigation by the university and representatives of the Greek system, in June of 1956, the SIU Board of Trustees approved a plan to create university-owned housing for the Greek groups. Construction began in 1959, and Greek groups were selected for re-location on a provisional basis, giving preference to those living in the most unsafe conditions. The site selected was just across from the Thompson Point housing location and was subsequently named the Small Group Housing area.

Fifteen two-story buildings were planned, their layout and exterior generally matching that of the Thompson Point buildings. The buildings’ interiors appeared better suited to the needs of the Greek groups, with large common rooms, dormitory-style bedrooms, and kitchens. Groups allowed to move into the new buildings also had to adhere to more stringent university policies. The most controversial of the university’s requirements assigned half of each building’s forty-five spaces to first-year students. While innocent enough at first glance, the university insisted that if pledging first-year students did not fill the twenty-two spaces, the university would fill those vacancies at its discretion. The administration defended itself by arguing that this same stipulation applied to all university-owned housing, but the

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39 Many of these first houses existed on what is now university-owned property; many have since been demolished as the university expanded. Today, most of the university’s Greek groups own houses along either W. Mill St. or S. University Ave., together forming two sides of an area which includes a great deal of off-campus student housing.
consternation among students was evident. However, with few other options available, the Small Group Housing area (subsequently referred to as Greek Row) was partially completed and occupied in time for the 1959 fall semester.\(^40\) A memorial plaque outside the location dedicated on May 26, 1959, reads, “Man must belong and create if he searches for truth, for faith, and for the democratic ethic.”\(^41\)

During the 1960s, enrollment and housing plans continued to increase. In 1960, an additional dormitory housing project began at the Southern Hills apartment site, and it was completed in 1962. The Southern Hills location was a slightly smaller site consisting of a dozen two-story dormitory-type buildings. The university had intended to replace the apartment spaces, which mainly housed married or senior students, with one-to-two bedrooms per apartment, tile floors, and kitchens.\(^42\)

However, this project could not keep up with SIUC’s impressive growth. Enrollment during the 1960-61 academic year reached 9,028 students. Each year after this saw an increase of nearly 1,000 students; by the time of the 1970-71 academic year, enrollment had exploded to 23,848 students. Such a massive increase proved that earlier predictions, which had seemed optimistic then, were entirely inadequate. Once again, university-affiliated apartments filled the gap on housing. The Elizabeth Street Apartments, constructed in 1965, presented a notable exception to the usual policy of relying on privately-owned facilities. The facilities were constructed, owned, and operated directly by the university. They provided sixteen furnished apartments in a two-story structure on nearby Elizabeth Street, ostensibly for the use of married or more senior students.\(^43\)

Meanwhile, other apartment complexes continued SIUC’s tradition of working with privately owned housing to ensure adequate student living. In the coming decades, numerous sprawling complexes were built in the Carbondale area to profit from students’ desire for affordable housing free


\(^42\) The Southern Hills became well-known for its international student population as SIUC expanded its reach to a global students, a reputation carried on by the Evergreen Terrace apartments today.

from the university’s direct control. Such complexes, many of which still exist today, included Lewis Apartments, Georgetown Apartments, and Aspen Court Apartments, among others.

**Reaching the Height: SIUC at the End of the 60s**

To highlight the massive scale of Carbondale’s construction expansion over the two decades, the Federal Housing Association noted in its report of June 1, 1967, that “The nonfarm population of the Carbondale HMA totaled approximately 52,500 as of June 1, 1967, an increase of 2,100 persons (4.7 percent) annually since April 1, 1960, when the population was about 37,400.” The report also recognized an understandably significant increase in available housing spaces. According to the report, “There were 9,825 dormitory spaces at SIUC in June 1967, of which about 5,000 were privately owned, and 4,825 were university-operated.” This growth represented an increase in privately-owned housing available to students; this meant problems for university officials in attracting students to university dormitories. To solve this situation, university officials, in 1967, introduced a policy requiring new SIUC students to live in university-affiliated housing.

This growth of off-campus housing occurred against the backdrop of student and administrator concerns about the outdated and dilapidating housing. The September 23, 1967, issue of the *Daily Egyptian* ran with the headline “SIU ‘Duty-Bound’ to Clean Up Housing” and detailed a pledge by President Morris to fight slum housing and provide modernized and hygienic university-owned dormitories. A different article from the same issue, “Housing Officials Inspect Apartment, Withdraw Approval,” discussed SIUC officials’ ongoing battle with local landlords. In the article, students complained about the university’s ineffectiveness in inspecting violations of the City Housing Code. The article accused the Dean of Students, Wilbert Moulton, of relying on city officials for the lapse in qualified inspections. Tensions between university administrators, students, city officials, and local property owners became a repeated discussion cycle.

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45 Department Of Housing and Urban Development Federal Housing Administration, *Analysis of the Carbondale, 2.*


47 The university also took other steps to improve the quality of life for its students. In that same year, a portion of Grand Avenue was closed to create a tree-lined pedestrian space in front of the Wham Education Building, creating the university’s modern borders along Mill Street and S. Illinois Avenue.
In 1965, the increase in enrollment of 3,500 students combined with the continuing concerns about off-campus housing ensured that the university’s most significant housing projects got underway. That same year saw the completion of the University Park housing complex. It comprised three main elements: three four-story interconnected structures similar in design to the dormitories found on Thompson Point, dubbed The Triads, one main dining hall named Trueblood Hall, and the centerpiece of the project—a seventeen-story high-rise named Neely Hall.48 Three years later, in 1968, two more high-rise towers were added to that location; Mae Smith and Schneider Halls collectively became known as the Brush Towers.49 The combined occupancy of the towers and the Triad buildings numbered in the thousands. Added to this was Wilson Hall (now University Hall), constructed in 1967 as a privately-owned off-campus facility, and the Evergreen Terrace Apartments, thirty-eight two-story buildings constructed in 1969 specifically for students with families.

SIUC operated an impressive series of housing structures by the end of the 1960s. What had existed as a few scattered buildings in 1948 had grown from the ground up over the next two decades to house thousands of students. At that time, housing construction appeared to continue for a while. Indeed, as late as 1975, the Daily Egyptian reported that hundreds of students faced a lack of housing.50 However, after the completion of this massive building spree, housing construction halted.

**Setbacks and Stagnation in the 1970s and 1980s**

University administrators had continued to anticipate ever-increasing enrollment records, but by the mid-1970s, growth began to subside. Given the dramatic increases in population during the 1948-70 period, it stands to reason that city and university administrators optimistically projected continued growth over the next 22-year period. For example, a July 1973 report from the City of Carbondale Greater Egypt Regional Planning & Development Center

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49 The “Brush” in Brush Towers refers to Daniel Harmon Brush, one of the founders of the city of Carbondale, who gave his name to the region where the towers are located. Brush’s grave is located in downtown Carbondale’s Woodlawn Cemetery. “Notable Grave Sites,” Notable Grave Sites | Carbondale, IL (Carbondale City Government), accessed September 4, 2022, https://explorecarbondale.com/368/Notable-Grave-Sites.

illustrates this positive attitude. The report cautiously concluded that “The primary problem [lay] in the uncertainty in the growth of the University […] if the enrollment were to reach the projected 35,000 in 1980 as once planned, the economy and population of the region would increase.” However, the 1980-81 academic year did not reflect the projected growth, as total enrollment amounted to 23,236 students. The end of SIUC’s boom period was now in sight, though few recognized this fact. During the 1991-92 academic year, the student population reached its highest-ever record of 24,869 before beginning a sudden and unexpected decline.

For some, the early 1960s to early 1980s period came to be considered the golden age for SIUC. From an administrative perspective, the many new programs filled their courses to maximum capacity while providing highly successful educational results. From an enrollment perspective, the boom in student population increased economic benefits for the university and community. The increase in wealth rolled into expanding the university’s programs and campus features. From a housing perspective, all the challenging work of past decades resulted in efficient and expansive infrastructure. Many of the housing spaces it created could still be considered modern, and regular repairs and upgrades ensured that they would maintain that status for the foreseeable future.

Former students from the end of this period offer positive reviews. John Timmermann, a student at SIUC from 1979-83 and a resident of Schneider Hall tower’s fourth floor, remarked that there was “a lot of camaraderie” between residents. He had no complaints about housing administration nor the state of accommodations but instead described memories of group meals in Trueblood Hall and “MASH” (the television series) watch parties. Phil Wisczorek, a student at SIUC from 1977-83, worked as a Resident Assistant in Schneider Hall before becoming a Head Resident at Pierce Hall. He remembered having very few difficulties despite being in charge of “17 stories of boys.” He commented, “so long as you explained what you were doing and why you were doing it, they understood that it wasn’t your fault.” The change from sex-segregated to co-ed housing, accomplished in the late 1970s, was described by Wisczorek as “a smooth transition.” The transition occurred despite fears of university officials, as evidenced by a 1967 directive from Coordinator of Housing Business Services Samuel Rinella. The directive required that “All student room doors in the living unit [during social

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52 John Timmermann, interview conducted by author, December 1, 2021.
53 Phil Wisczorek, interview conducted by author, December 3, 2021.
functions] [should] remain open during the hours of visitation by members of the opposite sex."  

Kevin Curran attended SIUC from 1979-86. He lived his first two years on-campus in Bailey Hall on Thompson Point. He described his accommodations as more than adequate, similarly to Wiszorek’s opinion that Thompson Point was “something like a country club” compared to the busy life at the towers. Curran also recounted that the Housing Administration was installing air conditioning units in each of the bedrooms during his first year in the dorms. Curran remembered “plastic sheets over the windows” and “bundling up in blankets” as the fall months dragged on due to the subsequent lack of heating. The air conditioning units installed over the fall of 1979 appear to be the same in the dorms today. Each former student expressed overall satisfaction with their housing accommodations. All of them mentioned how their experiences in university housing helped them become accustomed to living away from home for the first time and achieving a newfound sense of independence. They asserted that they had never heard of a student staying in university housing longer than necessary if accommodation could be found elsewhere. For example, some students rented or purchased trailers on the outskirts of town—not uncommon for students to do at the time, though such instances are unheard of today. Students from SIUC’s local community sometimes circumvent university policy dictating that all new students have to live in university-owned housing for at least one year. They did so by claiming permanent residency in the local area.

The massive boom in affordable and modern private apartments during this time continued to affect the university’s ability to fill rooms. Discontent among the student body in the 1960s, largely an effect of the Vietnam War and other social issues, only increased students’ desire to escape university administration regulations. The largest casualty of this mass exodus was Greek Row, which saw a dramatic decrease in occupancy after the 1971-72 academic year due to a combination of these issues and the strict university guidelines which had been placed upon it since its inception. In later decades, stagnating enrollment meant a lack of funds for costly maintenance projects, which were becoming increasingly necessary as buildings approached the end

54 Rinella Field, named after Samuel Rinella, is a large green space located between the towers area and the Grand Ave. parking lot. The field today serves as a space for parties and impromptu soccer matches, and as an arena for SIUC’s quidditch team. Southern Illinois University, Procedural Directives Residence Halls 1967, January 1, 1967, SCRC.SIUC.HUR, RG 13-16, Box 2.
55 Kevin Curran, interview conducted by author, December 2, 2021.
56 This requirement, whose precedent dates back to the 1967, attempted to decrease vacancy in dormitory housing; it was lowered to one year in the early 1980s.
of their lifespans. Kristi Abba attended SIUC from 1994-99. She resided in the
Mae Smith Hall tower for her first year as a student. She described feeling
safe on-campus and that she enjoyed living in the dorms. She also pointed out
that her living quarter in the towers “was definitely dated” before adding that
“everything worked, and we never had any problems.” When asked if she had
considered staying in the towers after the first year, she concluded, “I had a
good experience, but I was ready to move out.” This remark sheds light on the
general opinion of most university housing residents, both past and present.

Conclusions

In many ways, SIUC’s housing troubles were largely due to the
university’s expansion and grand success. Spurred on by the grossly
inadequate student-housing situation in the 1960s, the subsequent decline in
enrollment by the 1990s occurred when the university needed extra funding
to maintain its extensive and expensive housing projects. In total, housing
at SIUC was close to full occupancy for little more than two decades. Over
the years, the severe lack of capital resulted in administrative cutbacks and
further dilapidated aging structures.

The path that SIU set itself upon during the 1930s and 1940s was a perfect
storm of coincidence, circumstance, and unintended consequences. By the
start of the 1990s, an entirely different university had been created. Nearly all
of the administrative decisions made over this period had the best intentions
behind them. The use of loans, grants, and bonds to build new housing and
educational structures was seen as an investment in the university’s future
during a period when such improvements were sorely needed. The optimistic
outlook of President Morris and his staff during the 1950s and 1960s seemed
to be justified by the exponential growth of the population of the university
and the surrounding community. SIU was a pioneer in terms of university
housing and many other aspects. However, the compromises and conclusions
which formed the bedrock for this growth and optimism created tensions
between the staff, students, and the local community which were never
resolved. As the university tightened its control on student housing, both the
university and the local community continued to find opposing solutions
to meet students’ needs. A feedback loop was therefore created in which
the two began competing with one another for attention and control over
the university’s students. When student enrollment began to falter, these
conditions only worsened.

University administrators had developed an ambitious expansion plan
for university housing, but it was based on the expectation that the conditions
and needs of past decades would continue to hold true. The retirement of

58 Kristi Abba, interview conducted by author, December 3, 2021.
President Morris and the replacement of much of his staff in the 1970s left the university aimless, coasting off its previous achievements. The Greek Row and Southern Hills housing sites, which are now all near completely abandoned due to a lack of students, are visible reminders of the consequences of these planning failures.

The university has had to reckon with its successes and failures in recent years. While the future seems brighter, the university must prepare to meet the needs of its students and surrounding community differently to avoid past mistakes. The voices of SIUC’s past and present offer a glimpse into the potential of this university when it embraces pioneering growth. It is the result of innovation, compromise, and in many cases, an honest desire to ensure that SIUC’s students have the best learning facilities. By listening to the voices of SIUC’s future, we can ensure that the history of those who helped make the university and who once called it home will not be remembered in vain.