

# **Guide to the Lawrence University Buildings, Jason Downer Commons Collection**

**Collection number: LU-ARC20-04**

University Archives  
Seeley G. Mudd Library

Lawrence University  
Appleton, Wisconsin

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## Descriptive Summary of the Collection

**Title**

Lawrence University buildings, Jason Downer Commons collection

**Inclusive dates**

1935-1989

**Collection number**

LU-ARC20-04

**Extent**

0.4 linear foot (1 box)

**Language of collection material**

Collection is in English.

**Repository**

Lawrence University. Seeley G. Mudd Library. University Archives.  
Appleton, Wisconsin 54911

**Abstract**

This collection is comprised of materials documenting the history of Jason Downer Commons, the location of food services for Lawrence University, that was built in 1968. Correspondence, newspaper clippings, programs, contracts, and photographs are included in the collection. Materials on the Alice G. Chapman Teakwood Room, located inside Jason Downer Commons, include correspondence on the transfer of the Teakwood Room to Lawrence from Milwaukee-Downer College, photographs, and newspaper and magazine articles. The collection is part of the Lawrence University Buildings Collection. Materials are arranged alphabetically by subject and type of material, then in chronological order at the file level.

## **Important Information for Researchers**

### **Access**

Collection is open for research.

### **Publication rights**

Property rights and copyright reside with Lawrence University. For permissions to reproduce or to publish, please contact the University Archivist.

### **Preferred citation**

Lawrence University Buildings, Jason Downer Commons Collection. LU-ARC20-04. University Archives, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Appleton, Wisconsin.

### **Acquisition information**

Materials on Jason Downer Commons were collected and placed in the Archives vertical file prior to 2005. The donor and source of the materials, as well as who collected them and arranged them in the vertical file is unknown. Materials on Jason Downer Commons will continue to be collected and placed in this collection by the University Archivist.

### **Processing history**

Preliminary processing was done prior to 2005, date and processor unknown. Further processing and completion of finding aid was done by Julia Stringfellow, 2009.

## Building History

Jason Downer Commons, built in 1968, served as Lawrence's main dining center until 2009. Prior to Downer, students had meals in their dormitories. Downer Commons was made possible with the merging of Milwaukee-Downer College with Lawrence in 1964. Downer Commons was named in honor of Judge Jason Downer, who served as an associate justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court from 1864-1867. He served as the president of the board of trustees for Wisconsin Female College in Fox Lake, a predecessor to Milwaukee-Downer College, from 1866-1871 and again from 1874-1878. When Downer died, he left a gift of \$65,000 to the college, and the college changed its name to Downer College.

Construction on Downer Commons began in 1967 and a dedication ceremony for the completed building was held on October 26, 1968. Walter Peterson, history professor and Alice G. Chapman librarian, gave the dedicatory address. When it opened, Downer was able to provide food service for approximately 600 people, and it contained six dining rooms. Each of the dining rooms in Downer had its own distinctive décor, offering the students a choice of environment for their dining. There were three cafeteria lines, with the third line offering lighter fare. The basement was the working center for food service.

The Alice G. Chapman Teakwood Room is located on the second floor of Downer Commons next to the Barber room. The room was built for Alice Chapman by American artist and architect Lockwood de Forest. The room in Chapman's home in Milwaukee was used as a music room, and artists, musicians, writers, and teachers from Milwaukee-Downer College were frequent visitors. After Chapman's death, the Teakwood Room was placed in Chapman Library at the Milwaukee-Downer campus in 1938. The room was used for receptions, poetry readings, chamber music, and coffee hours.

Upon the news of the merger with Lawrence, the Milwaukee-Downer community pleaded that their beloved room be moved in its entirety to preserve it. The trustees agreed to this request, and the room was carefully disassembled and stored in a warehouse until Downer Commons was built. It was reassembled in Downer during the summer of 1968. During its time at Downer, the room has hosted many Lawrence and Appleton community events.

With the opening of Warch Campus Center in September 2009, food services moved from Downer Commons to the new campus center. As of July 2009, Downer Commons and the Teakwood Room are closed for an unknown amount of time.

See also: Breunig, Charles, [A great and good work :a history of Lawrence University, 1847-1964.](#)

Schumann, Marguerite E., [Creation of a campus; a chronicle of Lawrence College buildings and the men who made them.](#)

Mayer, Roberta A., [Lockwood de Forest: furnishing the Gilded Age with a passion for India.](#)

## Chronology

- 1967 • Cornerstone of Downer Commons begins.
- 1968 • Summer, the Teakwood Room is brought to Lawrence and assembled in Downer Commons.
- 1968 • October 26, Dedication ceremony of Jason Downer Commons and Alice G. Chapman Teakwood Room.
- 1976 • Student publication, "Survival Guide to Downer" is published and runs through 1977.
- 2002 • Website "Downersucks.com" is active through 2008.
- 2009 • July, Food services is moved to the new Warch Campus Center and Downer Commons is closed for an unknown amount of time.

## **Collection Scope and Content Summary**

This collection is comprised of materials documenting the history of Jason Downer Commons, the location of food services for Lawrence University, that was built in 1968. Correspondence, newspaper clippings, programs, contracts, and photographs are included in the collection. Materials on the Alice G. Chapman Teakwood Room, located inside Jason Downer Commons, include correspondence on the transfer of the Teakwood Room to Lawrence from Milwaukee-Downer College, photographs, and newspaper and magazine articles. The collection is part of the Lawrence University Buildings Collection. Materials are arranged alphabetically by subject and type of material, then in chronological order at the file level.

## **Collection Arrangement**

The collection is arranged alphabetically by subject and type of material, then chronologically at the file level. Folder titles for contract materials are the original titles that were on the folder.

## **Related Collections**

The following collection in University Archives contains related materials:

- Lawrence University Vertical File Collection.

## **Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

### *Subjects*

Alice G. Chapman Teakwood Room (Appleton, Wis.)  
Lawrence University.  
Lawrence University Buildings.  
Lawrence University History.

### *Genres and Forms of Materials*

Clippings.  
Letters.  
Photographic prints.

## Collection Contents

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