

# Oak-Elm Residence Halls

**title**

***Conversations***

**artist**

**Christian Petersen**

**Location:  
Oak-Elm Residence Halls  
South entrance courtyard**

**Material:  
Bedford limestone**

**Date:  
1947-1955**



## **About the Sculptures**

This series of sculptures was one of Petersen's last works of art produced for Iowa State. Completed in 1955, the series presents three groupings of larger than life-sized figures. The sculptures were carved from 40 tons of bedford limestone and can be found along a red brick wall that runs adjacent to the Oak-Elm dormitory. At one end, three girls are informally posed around the wall socializing and reading. The center sculpture illustrates a boy and a girl sharing a newspaper. At the other end of the wall a seated girl is consumed by thought. This work of art reflects how Petersen observed students "growing, changing, and finding themselves during their years on campus." This monumental accomplishment took Petersen eight years to carve and will grace Iowa State's campus for generations to come.

## **About the Artist**

Petersen's career advanced during a transitional stage in American sculpture when styles moved from heroic to realistic. He emigrated to America from Denmark with his family in 1894. After attending several different art schools, beginning a die-cutting career, and receiving some sculpture commissions, Petersen moved to the Midwest. There he was invited to join the Iowa Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) under the direction of Grant Wood in Iowa City. In 1934, Iowa State President Raymond Hughes offered Petersen a one-semester residency to create the fountain and bas-reliefs in the Dairy Industry Building courtyard. One semester turned into 21 years, and from 1934-1955 Petersen served as Iowa State's sculptor-in-residence. At the time, he was the only sculptor-in-residence at any college or university in the United States, for which he earned \$25 per week. Petersen created numerous works, including twelve major public art sculptures, which can be viewed throughout the campus.

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**Additional information about the Christian Petersen sculptures, other Art on Campus information sheets, and Art on Campus maps are available at the University Museums office, 290 Scheman Building, (2nd Floor) 515/294-3342, or visit us online at <http://www.museums.iastate.edu/>**

**This information sheet is intended to be used in addition to viewing the Art on Campus. At no time should this sheet be used as a substitute for experiencing the art in person!**