

University of Idaho,
YMCA Hut
(U-Hut)
Northeast corner of University Avenue and Line Street
Moscow
Latah County
Idaho

HABS No.: ID - 122 - C

HABS
ID
29-MOSC,
IC-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
COLUMBIA CASCADE SUPPORT OFFICE
National Park Service
909 First Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98104-1060

HABS
ID
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Historic American Buildings Survey
University of Idaho
YMCA Hut (U-Hut) HABS No.: ID - 122-C

Location: Northeast corner of University Avenue and Line Street, University of Idaho, Moscow, Latah County, Idaho

Present Owner: University of Idaho

Present Occupant: University of Idaho

Present Use: Jean Collette theater; studios and offices for Drama Department

Significance:

The U-Hut (although originally named YMCA Hut, the building was known by that name for a very brief period) is one of the few direct ties on the University campus to the time during World War I when the campus served as a training facility for the armed services. The U-Hut has also served as a hub of social and theater activities on campus for eighty years. Further, it is one of the last remaining frame structures either built on or moved to the campus in the period from the teens through the 1940's that still stands on the campus.

It also contains murals on the upper walls of the upper "loft" which were funded through Works Progress Administration (WPA) public art projects in the State of Idaho. They were painted in a fresco style by several University of Idaho students in the Spring of 1936. The U of I mural project was completed under the direction of longtime UI department of Art and Architecture faculty member Mary Kirkwood. Other frame buildings on the central part of the campus near the U-Hut include (with 1998 names): Women's Center/Tutoring and Academic Assistance Center, constructed in 1935; Naval Building and Satellite SUB, constructed in 1942; and Drama Annex, a former military structure moved to the campus in 1947.

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection:

Construction began in late winter, 1918; the building was dedicated on February 9, 1919.

2. Architect:

Unknown. It is likely that the National War Work Council of the YMCA used a previously prepared design for this building, which is probably similar to many structures it constructed in the United States and abroad during World War I.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners, Occupants, Uses:

The structure was constructed under the auspices of the National War Work Council of the Young Men's Christian Association. The University of Idaho provided no direct financial support for the construction of the building, although the University did agree to furnish heat, lights, and water and grant permission for sewer connection. The University's YMCA advisory board also agreed to assume the responsibility of supplemental furnishings for the building "beyond the necessities for the actual service which will be provided by the War Work Council." Originally conceived to serve the needs of servicemen in training at the University, World War I had ended by the time the structure was completed. While the YMCA used the facility, it soon became a building shared by the larger campus community. As early as the spring of 1919, the University was holding musicals and plays in the building. The 1920 *Gem of the Mountains* referred to the U-Hut as the "Chess Hound's Hangout." By 1922, the building's name had "formally" changed from the YMCA Hut to the University Hut, or U-Hut for short--an indication that by then it had become integrated into the campus as a part of the University's physical plant. [1]

Once the U-Hut became a part of the University proper, it served a variety of roles. In the 1930s it housed English Department offices, a studio for Art and Architecture, a Maintenance and Operations office and storeroom, a Dramatics office, and the frequently-used stage. [2]

One of the major changes to the building apparently came in the period between 1936 and 1938 when the campus post office moved into the structure. Indeed, so prominent was this use of the building that informally the structure gained another name: the Post Office Building. The post office remained in the structure until 1957 when it moved into the recently completed library building. [3]

In the 1940s and 1950s, in addition to the post office, the U-Hut housed Associated Students of the University of Idaho offices and the ASUI Theater, English Department offices and classrooms, an office for Buildings and Grounds, and a Math classroom--not necessarily simultaneously (usage seemed to change slightly during this period). The University's construction of a new Maintenance facility in the late 1940s freed up space for additional classroom usage and a dramatics workshop in the U-Hut. ASUI offices moved out during the 1963-64 school year with the completion of a new Student Union Building. [4]

4. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Joshua H. Vogel, who served out of Seattle as the associate secretary of the Western Department of the Bureau of Construction for the National War Work Council of the YMCA, supervised the construction. The *Argonaut* reported that "Miss C.I. Leiby of the Home Economics department will have charge of the [interior] decoration." [5]

5. Original Plans and Construction:

Our search for original building plans was unsuccessful. However, photocopies of the following historic photographs of this structure are attached to this report:

- View from the south, 1923
- View from the east, c. 1926
- View from the south, 1932
- View from the south, 1936
- Partial view of building from the south, 1960s
- Originals of all photographs are available, in the locations noted on the photocopies, at the UI Special Collections.

6. Alterations and Additions:

As noted above, the U-Hut has undergone interior renovations over the years. However, the exterior remains almost entirely in tact from the time of construction.

B. Historical Context

The United States entered World War I in April 1917. In the spring of 1918 the federal government selected the University of Idaho (along with many other campuses in the country) to provide vocational, mechanical, and engineering training to soldiers. The first vocational trainees arrived in June, and the University instructed over 200 soldiers during the summer. In October the Students' Army Training Corps (SATC) established a unit on campus. The nearly 700 SATC members who arrived that fall were divided into two groups: a collegiate section to train men as army officers, and a vocational section. By the fall of 1918 the University of Idaho resembled a military camp. The University converted fraternity houses and campus buildings into dormitories; SATC trainees constructed a large frame mess hall. But just about as quickly as the campus turned into a military institution, the armistice of November 1918 ended the war, and by December the SATC had demobilized. [6]

The YMCA had been somewhat active on the University of Idaho campus from the early 1900s. Both the campus and the city of Moscow had for some years been interested in obtaining a suitable building for a YMCA so that the organization could become more active. J.B. Rhodes, the Idaho state secretary for the YMCA noted in 1909 that "there is considerable interest" in Moscow for an active YMCA and further noted that "Lieutenant Smith and Dean [Jay Glover] Eldridge of the University are very much interested in it." Wrote the publisher of the Moscow *Star-Mirror*, "Having taken a stand for a clean, moral city, where ideal conditions must exist, where the young men of Idaho are to be educated, it now becomes the duty of Moscow to provide a healthful and proper environment for those who come here, as well as for the right kind of entertainment for our own boys." [7]

When the school year opened in 1909, the University assigned a hall in the Administration Building to YMCA use. However, those desirous of an active YMCA on campus remained dissatisfied with these inadequate facilities. [8]

During World War I the YMCA became particularly active worldwide, providing "for the spiritual, moral, social, intellectual, and physical welfare of the vast army of our own young men who were called to the colors." The organization established over 500 centers around the world to serve military personnel. Often the YMCA conducted its work out of buildings it constructed during this period, frequently calling them "YMCA huts." [9]

With the University of Idaho turned into a military training facility, Dean Eldridge and others who had long advocated an active YMCA on campus formed a University YMCA advisory board in an effort to persuade the YMCA to construct a building--or hut--on campus to serve the needs of SATC men. In the interim, the advisory board arranged with the Moscow Chamber of Commerce to use the Moscow Main Street building that formerly housed Sherfey's Bookstore to serve as a temporary YMCA quarters for the SATC. As late as mid-October 1918, however, there were no assurances that the YMCA would construct a more suitable building on the University campus. "The question of a

YMCA building can not be answered at this time,” reported the *Moscow Star-Mirror*. “The YMCA work with the SATC was not included in the 1918 budget, and the money used for it must be taken from funds which belong to other departments. However [University of Idaho] President [Ernest] Lindley and others interested in YMCA work have taken the matter up with the war work council [of the YMCA] in San Francisco, and rough plans, and an estimate of the cost of a building are being made.” [10]

In November 1918--just about the same time as the armistice--S. J. Chaney arrived on campus from California to take the position as secretary for the University's YMCA. Just prior to his arrival, the University had reached an agreement with the National War Work Council of the YMCA to construct a building on campus. The YMCA would pay the entire construction costs and would provide all essential furnishings; the University would provide heat, lights, and water while the University's YMCA advisory board agreed to provide supplementary furnishings. Although the YMCA normally sought local assistance in financing such structures, it agreed with the advisory board's recommendation that the Moscow community had already been tapped fully for the war effort: “We feel that under our particular circumstances the local community ought not to be called upon for any large contribution at the present time, and we venture to suggest to the national War Work Council, that the interests of the War Work of the YMCA in the state of Idaho will be best served by their assuming the full cost of this the sole building for the State of Idaho.” [11]

With the armistice, however, those who hoped to see a YMCA building on campus feared that it might not be built, despite the agreement with the national YMCA, now that the SATC was being demobilized. Good news, however, came in the form of a telegram from YMCA offices in New York in December 1918: “The Finance Committee has approved continuance of the present program in the University until end of college year in June. Building may be completed.” The laying of the foundation began almost immediately. [12]

At the dedicatory ceremonies for the building in February 1919, University YMCA secretary S.J. Chaney revealed why the national YMCA had decided to construct the building despite the armistice: “This building was started under war conditions, but was completed by the National War Work Council of the YMCA in view of the fact that its need would be greater in the period of reconstruction than in the period of war itself.” [13]

The *Argonaut* described the building as it appeared when it opened in February 1919:

The dedication exercises for the new \$10,000 YMCA building now being completed at the UI will be held Sunday, February 9th. President E.H. Lindley will give the address and special music will be offered.

The building is 50 feet long by 90 feet wide, one and a half stories high and bungalow in style. The construction has been rapid, as it has been only two months since the foundation was laid.

The main rooms are so constructed with double doors that they can be thrown together and offer a large place for parties and entertainments.

A lounging room occupies one end of the building, made homelike with rocking chairs, a davenport, and a built-in fireplace. This will be the general club room of the men of the University.

At the other end is the faculty room, reserved as a meeting place for the men of the faculty. The committee and study room will be furnished with books, magazines and writing material.

The lobby is to be a general place of amusement for the men, equipped with games of various sorts and pool tables.

The main auditorium is large, having seating capacity of a thousand. The main feature here is the stage which may be entered either from the main floor by steps at both sides or from the back through dressing rooms at either side.

Mr. S.J. Chaney, secretary of the YMCA, has his office on the first floor.

There is space above, off of the balcony, for two good sized rooms. One of these is occupied by students who will act as caretakers for the building.

One of the main attractions of the building will be the motion pictures. The machine is now being installed. A Victrola and piano will also be at the disposal of the men.

The building is furnished with hot and cold water, shower baths, and a drinking fountain.

All of the rooms are partially finished in paneled effect in brown and cream. [14]

Because of the stage facility, the structure from the first was used for plays, and for most of its history housed offices for the Drama Department. The Jean Collette Theater inside the building was named for the longtime professor of English and dramatics (1931-1967) who served as chair of the Drama Department from 1946-1967. [15]

The U-Hut contains murals which were funded through Works Progress Administration (WPA) public art projects in the State of Idaho, completed in the Spring of 1936.

Alf Dunn graduated in Fine Arts from the UI in 1936. He remembers that the murals in the U-Hut were undertaken in the Spring of 1936 by some of his fellow Fine Arts graduates that year.

In the 1930's, Theodore Pritchard, of the UI Art and Architecture Department, supervised the allocation of funds for Works Progress Administration (WPA) public art projects in the State of Idaho. Several projects, using limited amounts of WPA funding, were undertaken on the UI campus and in the community of Moscow. One such project was the painting of the murals in the U-Hut. WPA money probably paid for necessary supplies and perhaps offered a modest stipend to the students who undertook the work.

The U-Hut mural project was done under the direction of longtime UI Department of Art and Architecture faculty member Mary Kirkwood. Kirkwood instructed her students to copy a fresco technique from a fifteenth-century book about frescoes by Vasari, entitled, Alf believes, *True Fresco*. This presented some problems for the art students because, like using old cookbooks before cookbooks included standard measurements, the directions were difficult to decipher. Getting the right mixture of ingredients required some trial and error. The principal ingredients used for the frescoes were marble dust and water.

Frank Newton and Herb Steiniger were two of the students who painted a mural. One other student, probably Lester Walker, but possibly Don Joyce, painted the others. Alf knows Newton painted one of the murals, because there is a dog pictured in Newton's scene, and whenever Newton returns to campus, he has a sentimental attachment to the mural because of his fond memories of the dog. The dog in the mural was modeled after "Lady", Mary Kirkwood's dog.

Frank Newton went from the UI to receive a Ph.D. at the University of Iowa and became the Director of the Portland Art Museum. He was an active participant in the restoration of Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood. He now lives in Portland.

Herbert Steiniger was born in Germany. He moved to the United States with his older brother Eric and his mother. She was to become a "mail order" bride for a resident of Genesee, but when they arrived in Genesee, she did not get along with her proposed husband, so she moved to Moscow and raised her two sons, who graduated from Moscow High School and attended the UI. During the San Francisco World's Fair, Steiniger worked a sketch artist drawing visitors at the Fair. He then went to work as an art teacher at the San Quinten Penitentiary. He is still living in northern California.

Lester Walker went from the UI to receive a Ph.D. at Ohio State. He became an art historian at the University of Georgia and is an international expert on art of the Yucatan Peninsula. He is now retired and living in Athens, Georgia.

Don Joyce is color blind, which leads Alf to believe that he might not have been involved in the mural project. He graduated in Fine Arts from the UI and during World War II worked as a welder building submarines. He then went to work for Boeing as an engineer, even though he had no formal academic training in engineering. After working at Boeing, he formed his own engineering company, then went to the University of California at Santa Barbara as an engineer. While there, he was a supervisor of the move of the campus from downtown to its current oceanside location. He is still living in Santa Barbara.

Besides the U-Hut murals, a number of other WPA projects were undertaken on campus and in the community, some of them by the artists involved in the mural project. Steiniger sculpted the sea horse that decorated the fountain in front of the Ad Building for many years before being stolen by WSC (Washington State College; later changed to Washington State University) students. Joyce did a sculpture of a squirrel that was for many years in Moscow's East City Park before also being stolen. Both were made of sandstone from the steps of the University's original administration building, which burned in 1906. Joyce also did a penguin sculpture for East City Park as a WPA project.

C. Endnotes

- [1] Minutes of the YMCA Advisory Board, University of Idaho, 1 Nov. 1918 and "Dedicatory Exercises of YMCA Building, 9 Feb. 1919," both in Papers of the President's Office, UG 12, Box 14, file 517, UI Special Collections; University of Idaho *Catalog*, 1920-21; 1921-22; 1922-23, UI Special Collections. *Gem of the Mountains*, 1920, p. 18. Numerous issues of the *Argonaut* for the spring of 1919 attest to the fact that the building was being used for campus plays and other activities shortly after it was dedicated.
- [2] University of Idaho Inventory, UI Special Collections, 1932; 1934; 1936; 1938; 1940.
- [3] University of Idaho Inventory, UI Special Collections, 1956; 1958; *Gem of the Mountains*, 1958.
- [4] University of Idaho Inventory, UI Special Collections, 1943; 1947-48; 1949-50; 1956; 1958; 1962; 1964; *Gem of the Mountains*, 1964; *Argonaut*, 13 Dec. 1949.
- [5] Minutes of the YMCA Advisory Board, University of Idaho, 1 Nov. 1918, Papers of the President's Office, UG 12, Box 14, File 517, UI Special Collections; *Argonaut*, 11 Dec. 1918; 7 Feb. 1919.
- [6] Keith C. Petersen, *This Crested Hill: An Illustrated History of the University of Idaho* (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1987), pp. 167-69.
- [7] *Moscow Star-Mirror*, 26 Aug. 1909.
- [8] *Moscow Star-Mirror*, 16 Sept. 1909.
- [9] International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations to UI President E.H. Lindley, 12 Jan. 1918, Papers of the President's Office, UG 12, Box 14, File 517, UI Special Collections; *Moscow Star-Mirror*, 13 Aug. 1918.
- [10] *Moscow Star-Mirror*, 14 Oct. 1918; *Argonaut*, 6 Nov. 1918.
- [11] *Argonaut*, 30 Oct. 1918; Minutes of the YMCA Advisory Board, University of Idaho, 1 Nov. 1919, Papers of the President's Office, UG 12, Box 14, File 517, UI Special Collections.
- [12] *Argonaut*, 11 Dec. 1918.
- [13] *Argonaut*, 14 Feb. 1919; *Moscow Star-Mirror*, 14 Feb. 1919.
- [14] *Argonaut*, 7 Feb. 1919.
- [15] Judith Nielsen, "University of Idaho Campus Buildings," typescript, 1955, p. 45, UI Special Collections.

Part II. Architectural Information

A. General Statement:

Architectural character:

The architectural interest and merit is primarily its juxtaposition to the Ad Lawn and its prominent location on Line Street at University Avenue.

Condition of Site:

Condition of the building is extremely poor. It is generally considered the building has outlived its expected useful life in terms of finishes, windows, building, mechanical and structural systems.

B. Description of Exterior:

Overall dimensions:

See plans.

Foundations:

Foundations are point loaded cast in place concrete elements on subgrade foundations which vary in size, 6 to 12 inches wide.

Walls:

Walls are wood frame with horizontal Ship lap siding with flush overlapping laid flat, dimensional lumber trim, wood facia, and galvanized metal roof edge.

Structural Systems, framing:

Structural systems consist of wood frame shear wall panels between vertical posts supporting exposed composite trusses consisting of timber compression members and steel rod tension members. Ridge members are connected by steel gussets with through-bolt connectors.

Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:

Porches are cast in place concrete in poor condition joined to an unfurnished wood porch.

Chimneys:

None.

Openings:

Doorways and doors:

Doorways are wood doors with glass lights with wire glass.

Windows and shutters:

Windows are operable wood units in several configurations. Many on the main level are casement window pairs with crude hinge and latch mechanisms. clerestory units on the upper "loft" floor operate as a "hopper", or "hospital style", hinging from the bottom, with light gauge chains which serve as stops.

Roof:

Roof is mineral surface cap sheet. Interesting feature on the rake roof edge overhangs are the roof brackets which project from the composite trusses. Also interesting are the clerestory units which illuminate the upper loft level from the north and south elevations.

Shape, covering:

Low sloped gable roofs with a saddle ridge center roof section. Clerestory windows are introduced on north and south facades by way of a "monitor" roof which straddles the uppermost ridge.

C. Description of Interior:

Floor plans:

See reference plans.

Stairways:

Narrow internal wood frame stairway is surrounded by wood beadboard paneled walls with 1x4 wood trim cap.

Flooring:

Flooring is a combination of painted wood and miscellaneous carpets.

Wall and ceiling finish:

Wall finishes are a combination of wood siding which has been painted, various drywall areas, and “temporary” wood paneled walls.

Openings:

Doorways and doors:

Doors consist of horizontal five paneled doors which appear to be original. There are also doors which appear to have been replaced with solid core wood doors with natural finish and updated hardware.

Windows:

Windows are bottom hinged, single pane wood units with original hardware and original glass rectangular lites.

Decorative features and trim:

Notable features are the exposed composite truss roof system which define the loft area and add to its character and volume. They have all been painted white to match the walls. There are also painted murals on the walls in fresco style which are painted on the east and west walls of the loft area. The history of these murals is previously referenced in this report.

Mechanical equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:

Heat is delivered to the space via a mixture of old steam radiators with individual shutoff valves. Radiators are various size and style. There is no mechanical ventilation.

Remarks

A primary feature is the Colette Theatre space, which consists of a two-story volume space with molded theatre chairs on three sides, a wood floor, wood walls, everything painted flat black, with theatre lighting and general fluorescent lighting units. Also there are four incandescent lights in large bowl reflectors. There is a raised control room in the rear of the space.

Part III. Sources of Information

A. Architectural Drawings:

Our search for original architectural drawings was unsuccessful. However, there is a very limited file in Facilities Management, No. 105-G.

B. Historic Views:

Historic photographs described above; photocopies are attached.

C. Interviews:

Alfred C. Dunn. Telephone interview with Keith Peterson. February 23, 1998. Alf Dunn was a longtime professor in the Department of Art and Architecture at the University. He graduated from the University in 1936, and personally knew the student artists who created the U-Hut murals.

D. Bibliography:

- Argonaut* (University of Idaho student newspaper; specific dates provided in endnotes).
Gem of the Mountains (University of Idaho student yearbook; specific dates provided in endnotes).
Gibbs, Rafe. *Beacon for Mountain and Plain: Story of the University of Idaho*.
Moscow: University of Idaho. 1962.
Moscow Star-Mirror (specific dates provided in endnotes).
Nielsen, Judith. "University of Idaho Campus Buildings." Typescript, 1995. UI Special Collections.
Papers of the President's Office. UG 12. UI Special Collections.
Petersen, Keith C. *This Crested Hill: An Illustrated History of the University of Idaho*.
Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1987.
University of Idaho Board of Regents Minutes. Available at UI Special Collections.
University of Idaho *Catalog*. Catalogs, available at UI Special Collections, are published annually and provide campus maps that give the varying names and uses of this building over time.
University of Idaho Inventory. These were done periodically for insurance purposes and are available at UI Special Collections. Specific dates of those consulted are provided in endnotes.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

- Interviews with Frank Newton, Don Joyce, Lester Walker, and Herb Steiniger.
- Newspaper search of Moscow *Star-Mirror* and UI *Argonaut* for the Spring of 1936.