

Former Umatilla Project Headquarters Buildings
Hermiston
Umatilla County
Oregon

HABS No. OR-173

HABS
OR-173

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Columbia Cascades Support Office
Department of the Interior
909 First Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98104

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FORMER UMATILLA PROJECT HEADQUARTERS BUILDINGS

HABS No. OR-173

Location: Hermiston, Umatilla County, Oregon

Date of Construction: ca. 1918

Builder: United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR)

Architect: Edward A. Miller (Office Building)

Present Owner: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Present Use: Hermiston Irrigation District Headquarters

Significance: The former Umatilla Project Headquarters is located in Hermiston, Oregon. The four remaining buildings were formerly associated with construction of the Umatilla Project. The office is one of only a few remaining in U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's ownership dating from the agency's early construction period. These structures are significant at the state level for their association with the development of the irrigated agricultural economy that strongly influenced the historic development of the local area. Additionally, the office building is significant as a largely intact example of historic architecture reflecting elements of the Italian Renaissance and Prairie styles.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) owns an office building and two outbuildings in Hermiston, Oregon (*Figure 1*). The office was built by the USBR in about 1918, but it has been occupied and maintained by the Hermiston Irrigation District (HID) since about 1926. The outbuildings are a garage/shop that may have originally been used as a horse barn and a concrete structure of uncertain original function. The outbuildings were constructed between 1910 and 1922. The HID wishes to replace the garage/shop, which no longer meets their needs and is in a deteriorated state.

CURRENT (2000) DESCRIPTION

The three buildings are located in Hermiston, Oregon, on the northern one-half of Block 47. These are the office, located near the west end of the property (lot 4, extending into lots 3 and 5), the small concrete structure, about 15 feet to the rear and slightly west of the office's southwest corner, and the garage/shop, located at the extreme east end of the property at the back of lot 10. A 1922 Sanborn Map shows these three buildings, as well as two structures that have been previously removed (*Figure 2*).

A row of mature black walnut trees lines the property frontage along Hurlburt Street and were probably planted as part of an overall city streetscape planting rather than to specifically beautify the USBR property. Some additional trees are on the lot, only a few of which are mature, and evergreen shrubs are planted at the northeast and northwest (front) corners of the office. All mature plantings appear to be spatially associated with the street curb or the office. No landscaping features are associated with the two outbuildings.

Headquarters Office: The office building consists of a two-story central rectangular section (35 ft N/S by 39 ft E/W) and a rectangular single story extension (13 ft N/S by 32-foot E/W) on the north facade that is part of the original design (*Figures 4 and 5*). There is an unfinished full daylight basement under the office. A two-story, poured concrete vault is attached to the rear (south) elevation near the east corner. The interior of the vault is accessible from the basement, and the first and second floors. The roof is flat with a built-up waterproof surface. The cornice line features deeply overhanging eaves, an unornamented straight parapet, and a central brick chimney. The office is wood-frame construction with stucco cladding. The poured concrete foundation rises slightly above the ground surface creating a low water table around the structure. Most windows are wood sash double-hung, and are original to the building. One original window on the rear (south) elevation has been removed and replaced by a small rectangular metal sash casement window. The remaining space of the opening has been filled in by wood frame and stucco. Several rectangular wood sash casement windows, some boarded over, are located at the daylight basement level. The concrete vault has no windows. Simple wood stringcourses join the windows of the upper two stories at the sill level.

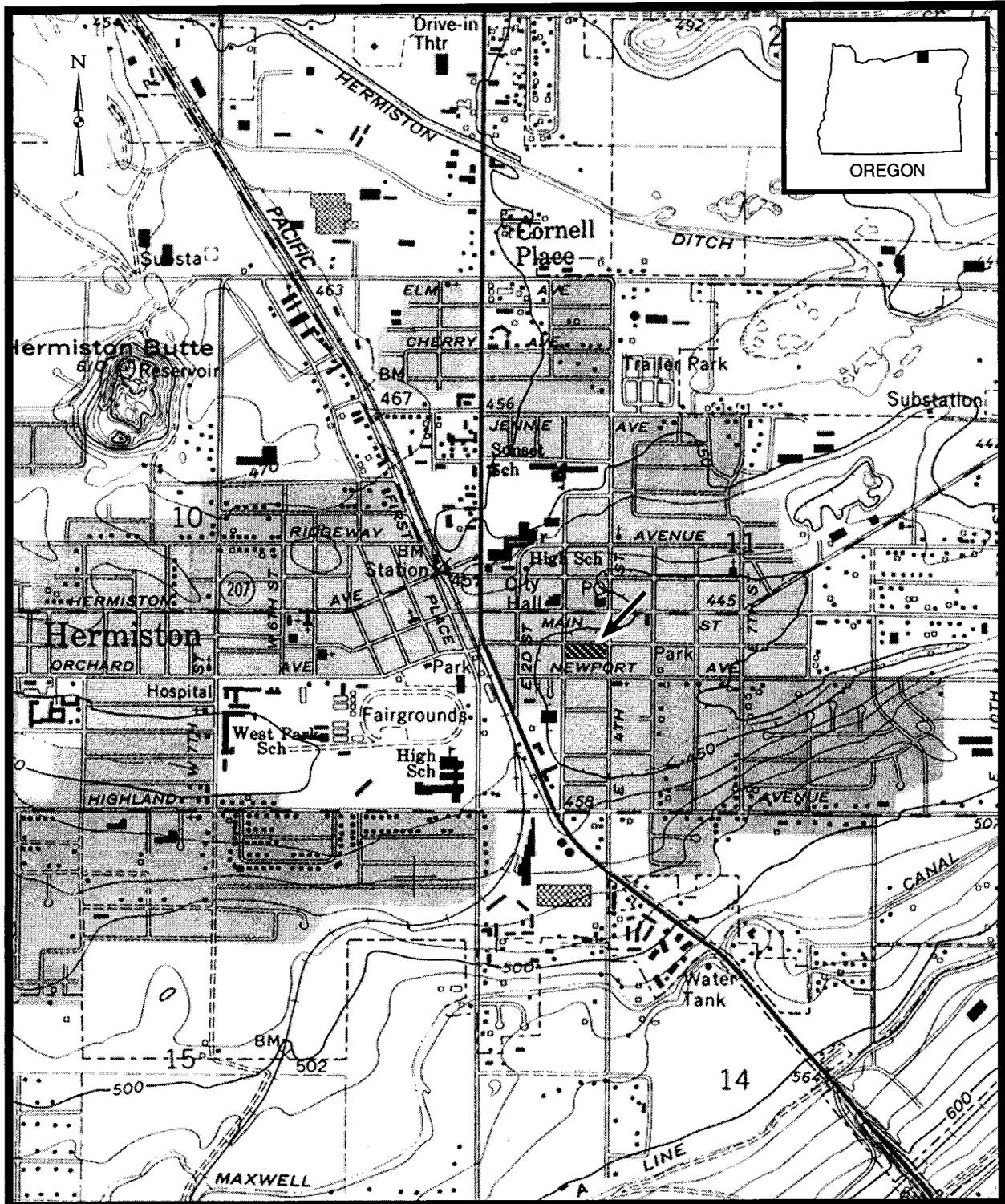


Figure 1: Location of the former Umatilla Project Headquarters.

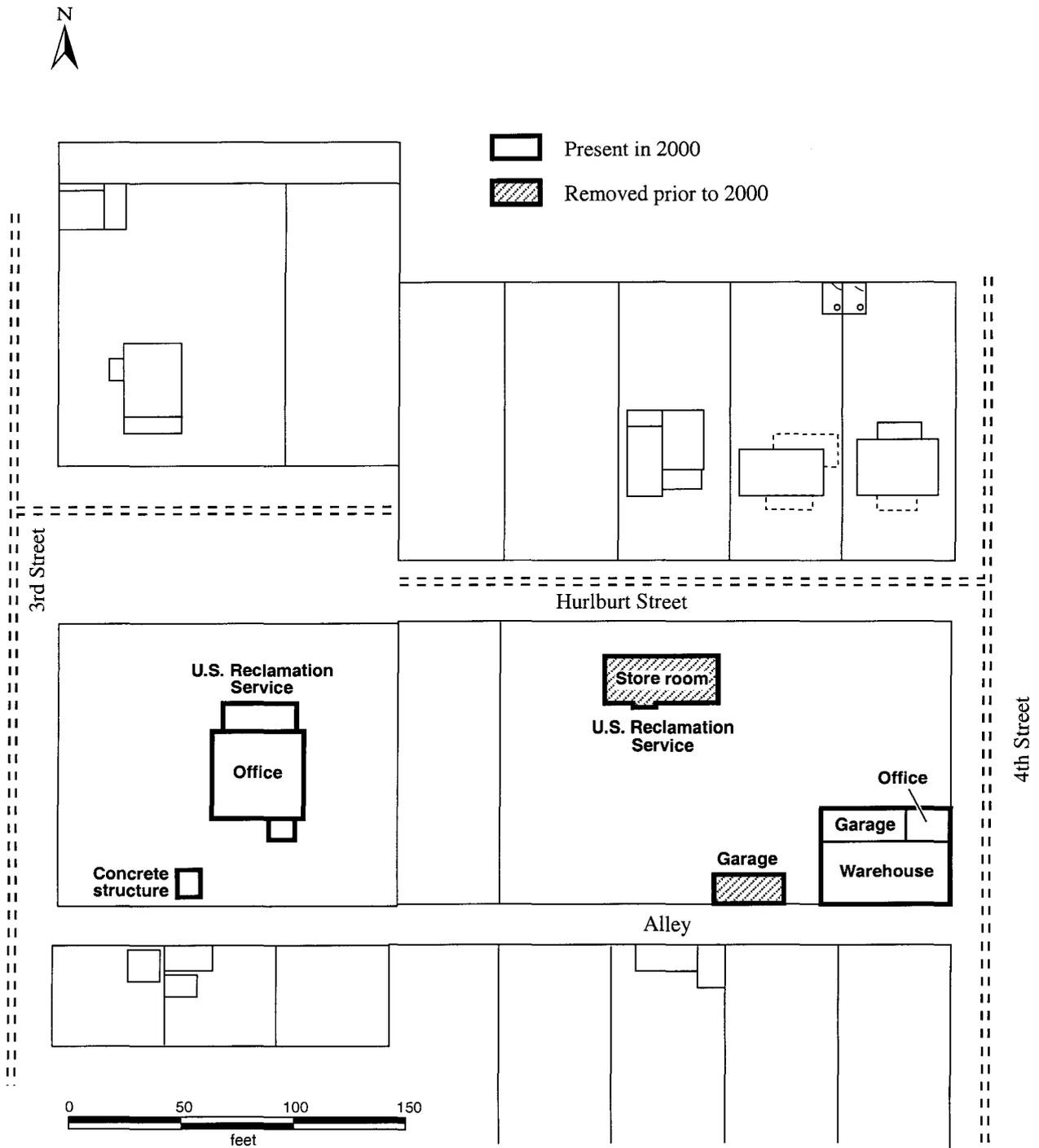


Figure 2: Current (2000) and past structures at the former Umatilla Project Headquarters (adapted from 1922 Sanborn Map, Hermiston, Oregon).

FORMER UMATILLA PROJECT HEADQUARTERS BUILDINGS

HABS No. OR-173

PAGE 5

There are three exterior entries to the first floor, with the north and west entries probably retaining their original doors, which are wood with large central windows. The hardware of these doors, however, appears to be new. Both the north and west entries are approached by poured concrete steps flanked by concrete halfwalls. The east door appears to be a mid-century replacement. It is likely that originally the west entry (off 3rd Street) was the principal public entry to the building. This conclusion is based on two historic photographs that indicate awnings on the west facing windows and a sign, "Operations and Maintenance," over the door. Today the Hurlburt Street (north) doorway is the principal public entry. There are no formal porches, but the north entry is recessed to provide some protection at the doorway. HID has built a handicap access ramp to the west door, wrapping about the southwest corner of the building. The ramp was installed without structural modification of the building and can be removed.

The interior spaces of the Hermiston office building have been modified to create the current room configuration but retain a number of original design features, including plaster walls, high ceilings, wood window and door frames, and horizontal wall and floor moldings. Rooms of the first floor include office, reception, and meeting rooms, as well as interior halls, a bathroom, and the vault room. The original wood floor surfaces of this level have been covered with carpeting. Modified walls of the first floor are made of wall board and original interior room-divider windows have been replaced with wall board. A dogleg staircase, with square wood newels and wood handrails and balusters, leading to the second floor, is an original feature. Rooms of the second floor include two office rooms, a drafting room, bathroom, and vault room. These rooms are currently used only for storage. Linoleum covers the original flooring of this level. The basement level interior is mostly open, with bathroom, storage, and the vault room on the south side. The floor is poured concrete and large wood structural beams are visible. A bare, rectangular opening in the floor indicates where the old boiler was once located. Original plumbing and electrical fixtures of the office building have been replaced, but some of the old push-button light switches remain.

Garage/Shop: This is a single story front-gabled structure with a loft and a single-story shed-roofed addition along the north side. The gabled section is approximately 50 feet in length (E/W) by 25 feet in width (N/S), and the shed-roofed portion is the same length and about 15 feet wide. These two primary components of the building are separated by an interior wood frame wall with several doors providing passage between them. The garage/shop building has no true foundation, the side-wall sill plate providing a serviceable foundation. The floor is bare dirt in some areas and wood flooring in others. Interior wall and roof framing is wood, and the exterior wall and roof sheathing is metal. The 1922 Sanborn map indicates the building was metal over wood frame, and HID believes the existing siding is probably original. Most original windows have been removed and covered over with wood or metal, and the few possibly original windows are two-over-two light fixed wood sash. The large sliding doors of the west and east ends appear to be original, based upon the hardware and style.

The interior of the shed-roofed portion of the building is divided into two rooms. To the west is an area, with a small loft, currently used for storage. To the east is a shop space, the only part of the building interior that has wood flooring. Sanborn Maps dated 1922 indicate that at that time this room was used as an office. Currently, the room contains shop benches, tables, shelving, and a former automotive service pit that has been covered with wood. It also contains a wide array of hand and electric tools, reflecting its present use as a shop. The interior of the main gabled section of the building is currently used for truck and equipment storage. A variety of piping, tools, and other items are stored in an upper loft area. Among the interior partitions of the lower portion of the building are two that were identified by former HID manager Jim Bevan as horse stalls built in the 1920s.¹ The garage/shop building is in poor condition. The wood sill has rotted from ground moisture over the lifetime of the building and rot has also affected lower portions of the walls. Portions of the roof framing and rafter sheathing are also likely rotted from exposure to moisture where the metal covering has leaked or is in disrepair.

Concrete Building: This is a single room poured concrete structure, 10 feet by 10 feet, located about 15 feet to the rear of the office. It has a concrete floor, side walls, and shallow-pitched gable roof. The building interior is accessed by a rectangular metal door on the north side. There is a metal-covered rectangular window on the south side. The concrete construction of this building indicates that it was probably meant to provide protective storage. At present, this structure is not used.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Early Irrigation in the Umatilla-Hermiston Vicinity: American settlement of the Umatilla vicinity began in 1860's, when Oregon Trail migrants settled on the rich bottomlands along the Umatilla River. The first settlers diverted water to irrigate lands along the river to water pasture and to grow hay, grain, vegetables, and fruit. By 1900, several thousand acres were irrigated near present-day Stanfield using small canals that diverted excess water from seasonal floodwaters of the Umatilla River. High ground water allowed crops in these bottomland areas to grow well into the summer. Settlement also spread onto uplands where wheat was raised using dryland farming methods. After the railroad was completed in 1883, the dryland wheat economy boomed, and the county became one of the top grain producers in the Northwest.

Early in the 20th century this successful dryland wheat economy attracted the interest of both private irrigation entrepreneurs and the Federal Government. In 1902, Congress created the U.S. Reclamation Service to implement a Federal program to construct irrigation projects in the arid

¹Bevan, Jim, personal communication, 2000.

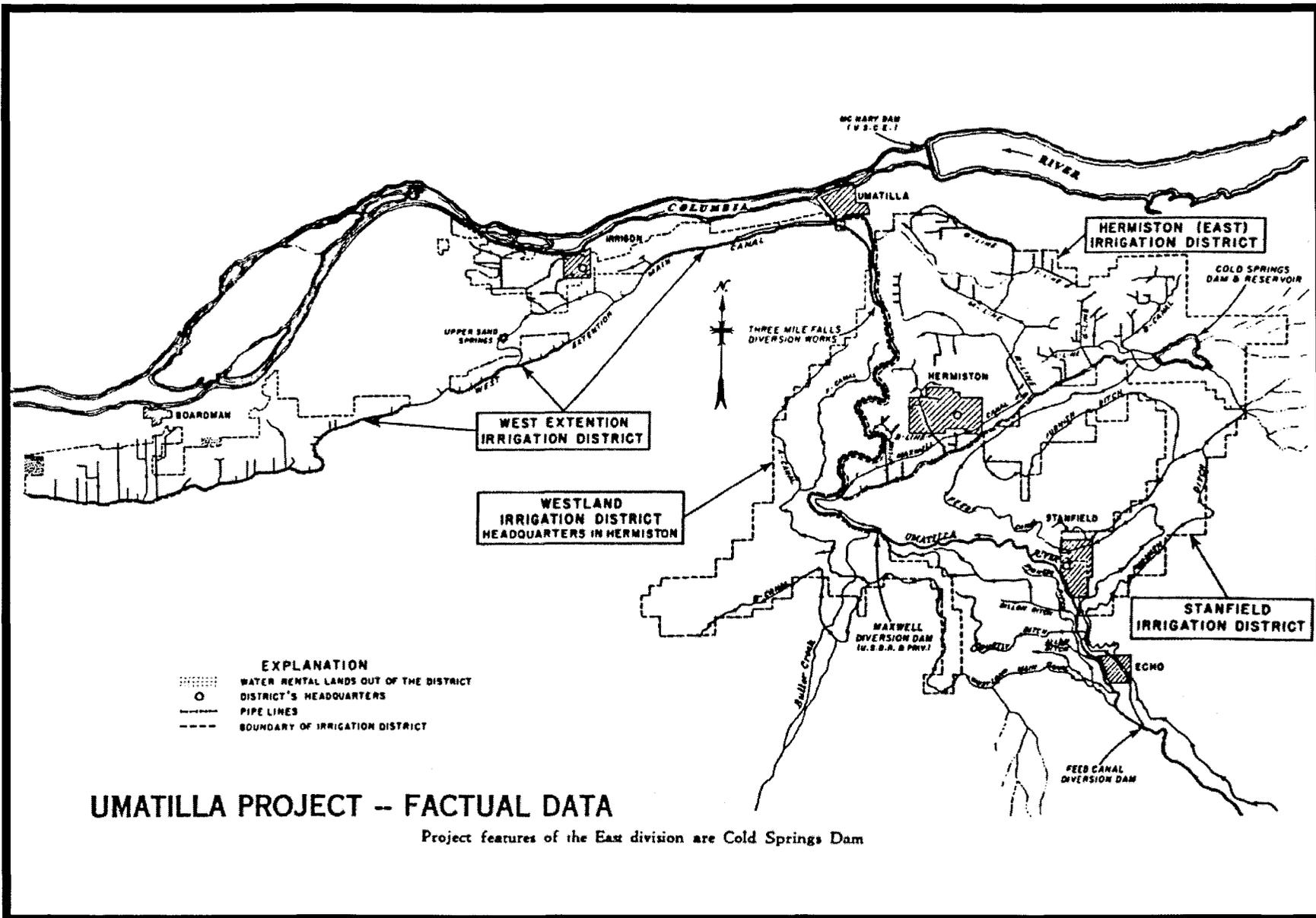


Figure 3: Principal features of the Umatilla Project.

west, since many private attempts at irrigation development failed from lack of funding and engineering expertise. The U.S. Reclamation Service was renamed the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in 1924. The acronym USBR is used throughout this report. In 1903, the USBR began to study the feasibility of building storage dams in the Stanfield vicinity to support a Federal irrigation project that would come to be called the Umatilla Project (*Figure 3*).

In December 1905, Congress authorized construction of the East and West divisions. The East Division is now called the Hermiston Irrigation District (HID), and serves 9,000 to 10,000 irrigated acres on the east side of the river. The HID lands are served by direct diversion from the Umatilla River supplemented by water stored in Cold Springs Reservoir. The direct diversion is made by the Maxwell Diversion Dam, and those waters are carried to HID lands via the Maxwell Canal. Cold Springs Dam is an off-stream reservoir that stores diverted Umatilla River water transported to the reservoir through the Feed Canal.² Water stored in the reservoir is distributed throughout the HID by a system of main canals and laterals. Cold Springs Dam, the Feed Canal, and the associated distribution system were constructed by the USBR between 1906 and 1908. The Maxwell Canal was privately constructed around 1904 and purchased by the USBR soon thereafter. In 1912 the USBR constructed a new diversion dam, and in 1917 they enlarged the old Maxwell Canal.

The West Division of the Umatilla Project consists of 6,510 acres on the west side of the Umatilla River and is now operated by West Extension Irrigation District. Water to serve the West Division is diverted from the river by Three Mile Falls Diversion Dam and then transported to the service area by the West Extension Main Canal. The diversion dam was constructed in 1914, and the canal was constructed between 1913 and 1916. In 1923 Congress authorized the South Division of the Umatilla Project. The South Division consists of McKay Dam and Reservoir, which stores water to serve additional Umatilla Project lands and to provide supplemental water to the Stanfield Irrigation District and the Westland Irrigation District.³

Private irrigation developments occurred concurrent with study and construction of the initial phase of the Umatilla Project. In 1903, William Furnish established the Inland Irrigation Company, later called the Furnish Ditch Company, with the goal of irrigating 10,000 acres east of the Umatilla River near Stanfield. An insufficient water supply and porous soils limited the Furnish Ditch to actually irrigating about 4,000 acres. Furnish completed construction of a diversion dam and canal, and also a small reservoir that soon became choked with sediment and

²For additional information about Cold Springs Dam please refer to *HAER No. OR-66: Cold Springs Dam*, Stephen Emerson, 2002.

³ For additional information about McKay Dam please refer to *HAER No. OR-18: McKay Dam*, Jeffrey Hess, 1991.

FORMER UMATILLA PROJECT HEADQUARTERS BUILDINGS

HABS No. OR-173

PAGE 9

unusable. Because of insufficient storage capability, water was typically available to the Furnish lands only until mid-July. In the early 1920's, the Furnish system was purchased and thereafter operated by the water users.

The Western Land and Irrigation Company was organized in 1908 and incorporated existing small private ditches on the west side of the river. Irrigation company promoters anticipated irrigating 10,000 to 12,000 acres, but lack of stored water limited their operation to about 5,000 acres in river bottom areas where irrigation had already been established. Again, their water supply typically ended by mid-July.

In the early 1920's irrigators under both of these companies requested that Congress authorize construction of a second reservoir under the Umatilla Project to provide stored water for their use. As indicated above, in 1923 Congress approved construction of McKay Dam, with approximately 20 percent of the stored water allocated to these private irrigators. Consistent with Reclamation Act requirements, the private companies reorganized under State law; the Furnish Ditch Company became the Stanfield Irrigation District, and the Western Land and Irrigation Company became Westland Irrigation District. Both districts continue to own and operate their respective irrigation systems. Completion of the private and Federal irrigation projects brought many new residents to the area, expanding the rural community and also prompting establishment of new towns. The town of Hermiston was platted in 1904 at a location that had been a railroad siding called Maxwell. The town was replatted in 1905 and incorporated in 1907. By 1909, it was a thriving community.

The Umatilla Project Headquarters: Very little historical documentation exists about the ca. 1918 headquarters office and associated outbuildings. During the course of research, USBR staff reviewed historical reports and records located in the Regional Office in Boise, Idaho. Microfiche copies of building blueprints, as well as annual reports, called Project Histories, were found there. No related records were found in the National Archives or other USBR offices. The USBR also worked with Mrs. Virginia Roberts of Pendleton, Oregon, to conduct research at local area sources. Mrs. Roberts examined tax, insurance, directory, and title records in Hermiston and Pendleton. She reviewed title office and county records, files at the Pendleton Public Library and the Umatilla County Historical Society, and also checked the index to the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. Except for Sanborn Insurance Company maps found at the historical society, all sources failed to yield useful information about the buildings.

Information found in Project Histories and records indicate the following. In 1906 the USBR constructed a project headquarters office, warehouse, and corrals on a lot in Hermiston; this appears to have been a temporary office and is not the headquarters office under discussion. From this temporary headquarters, the USBR supervised construction of Cold Springs Dam, the Feed Canal, the East and West Division distribution systems, and the new Maxwell Diversion, as well as modifications of the Maxwell Canal. In 1909 the USBR purchased a lot, encompassing the

north half of Block 3 (later redesignated as Block 47) of the Town of Hermiston, on which to build a permanent headquarters office and ancillary buildings.⁴

A 1910 Sanborn map shows no structures on Block 47, while the 1922 Sanborn map (updated in 1932) shows five structures on the lot.⁵ Three of these buildings - the office, the garage/shop, and the concrete building - remain standing today. One building, a small shed/garage located directly west of the existing garage/shop, was torn down between 1932 and 1963. The other, a rectangular wood frame building designated as a storeroom on the Sanborn map, was torn down some time after 1963, probably in the 1970s. The poured concrete foundation of the latter building is still visible south of Hurlburt Street and northwest of the garage/shop. Reportedly, two other buildings, residential structures currently located across Hurlburt Street from the HID property, were once associated with the HQ property and were sold and relocated across the street after the mid-1950's.⁶ The 1922 Sanborn map, however, shows these buildings in place at their current locations, diminishing the likelihood that they were ever located on the USBR lot.

Blueprint drawings dated May 1914 exist for the Block 47 headquarters office and indicate that the building was designed by architect Edward A. Miller of Portland, Oregon. There is little information available on the life of Mr. Miller, although there is evidence that he was a minor player on the Portland architectural scene. His name appears in the 1928 Portland City Directory in which he is listed as an architect and structural engineer. Miller is perhaps best known as an experimenter with so-called "modern" styles of architecture that became popular during the anything-goes years of the 1920s. Two theaters that he designed, the Laurelhurst and the Alladin, both built in Portland in 1928, have been noted as examples of an influential style sometimes referred to as *Zigzag Moderne*.⁷

The architectural drawings produced by Miller illustrate two versions of the proposed USBR office structure. One undated page of drawings, labeled "preliminary sketch," is a plan for an elaborately ornamented building with Italian Renaissance style characteristics. It should also be noted that this plan reflects elements of the Prairie style, which was emerging as a prominent design style at the time this building was constructed. The design offered in the preliminary sketch features a hipped main roof, metal Mission-like roofing tiles, widely overhanging eaves,

⁴ Umatilla County Assessors Office, Warranty Deed, Book 58, Page 301, 1909.

⁵ Sanborn Insurance Company, Hermiston, Oregon, 1910 and 1922 (revised 1932).

⁶ Chuck Wilcox, personal communication, 2000.

⁷ Bosker, Gideon and Lena Lencek, *Frozen Music: A History of Portland Architecture*, Portland: Western Imprints, the Press of the Oregon Historical Society (1985): 148-149.

FORMER UMATILLA PROJECT HEADQUARTERS BUILDINGS

HABS No. OR-173

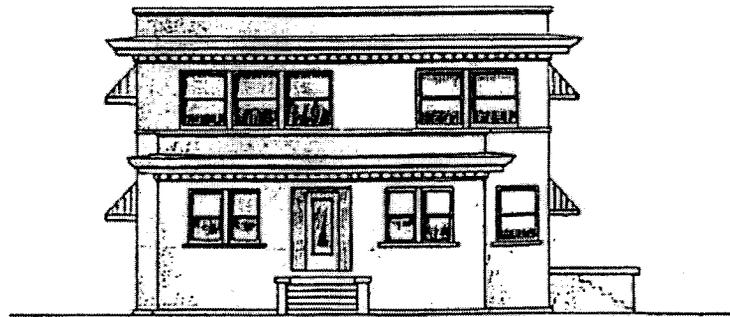
PAGE 11

lancet windows, and ornamental wood pergolas leading from the two main entrances to the street. The interior room configuration is dominated by a central hallway and stairs which accesses both the upper level and the basement. Other spaces are partitioned into rooms with specialized purposes. The vault is partially exposed outside of the rectangular footprint of the building. A subsequent set of blueprints dated May 1914 present a simplified version of the building design, retaining the scale and box-like villa appearance of the first, but employing a flat roof with plain cladding, widely overhanging eaves with a row of dentils beneath, and simple two-pane double-hung windows. The pergolas are eliminated (*Figure 4*). The interior also exhibits a less complex appearance, with fewer individual rooms. The stairs are located in the southeast corner of the building, there is no central hallway, and the vault is situated entirely within the rectangular plan footprint. Also, the interior features several counters and interior windows to facilitate dealings with the public (*Figure 5*).

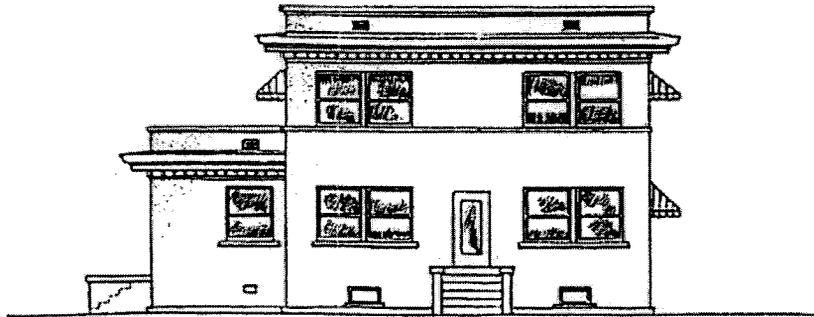
The Umatilla HQ building as actually built is even simpler than the plan illustrated in the 1914 drawing described above. The overhanging eaves lack the row of dentils and the vault is merely attached to the rear of the building instead of incorporated into the rectangular footprint of the structure. The interior stairway is built into the southeast corner of the building but is oriented east/west instead of north/south.

The first evidence that the new headquarters office had been completed is a photograph in the 1918 Umatilla Project Annual Project History. No specific record indicates when the USBR left the Block 47 Umatilla Project headquarters and the HID moved in. However, it is likely that this occurred soon after December 1926, when the USBR signed a contract with the HID in which the District became the party who operated and maintained the East Division works. After that time, the USBR's principle involvement in East Division facility operations was at McKay Dam, where a damtender was stationed.

The office building was maintained for many years by the HID with little modification. As the activities of the HID became more limited, interior space on the upper level of the building fell into disuse and was at times rented to other entities. In the 1960s, the old coal fired boiler was removed from the basement and replaced by a natural gas furnace. The first floor interior underwent a major renovation, probably in the 1970s, which altered the room configuration. Interior windows and counters were removed. A central hallway was formed by partitioning existing rooms and moving some interior doors. The modified walls can be identified from their wallboard composition and the presence of wall moldings that don't match the original. In the late 1980s a severe wind storm blew down several old trees on the HID property. Two large ponderosa pines fell onto the office building, resulting in extensive damage to the parapets, especially at the northwest corner. The damage was repaired, noticeable today only from a discoloration of the stucco.



NORTH ELEVATION.



WEST ELEVATION

Figure 4: Elevation drawings of the former Umatilla Project Headquarters office, (adapted from blue prints produced by Edward A. Miller).

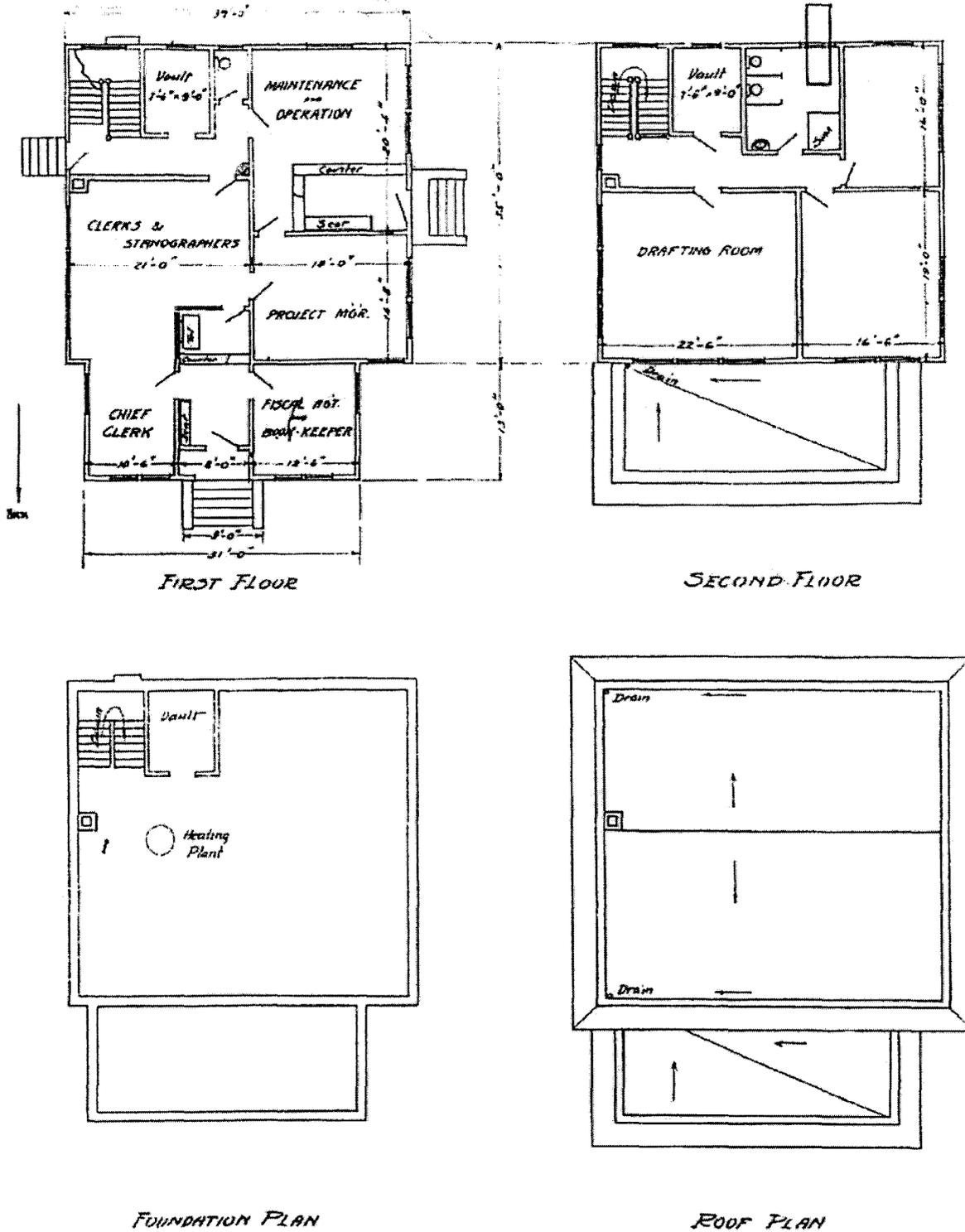


Figure 5: Plan drawings of the former Umatilla Project Headquarters office, (adapted from blue prints produced by Edward A. Miller).

FORMER UMATILLA PROJECT HEADQUARTERS BUILDINGS

HABS No. OR-173

PAGE 14

The garage/shop appears to have originally been used at least in part as a barn; the early Umatilla Project annual histories document use of horses in facilities construction and indicate that corrals were present at both headquarters locations. The 1922 (revised 1932) Sanborn map indicates that the gabled section of the building was in use as a warehouse, while the shed-roofed addition was used as an office and automobile garage. Some light is perhaps shed concerning the function of this building in a brief passage in the 1918 Umatilla Project Annual Project History: "Storehouses are maintained at Irrigon and Hermiston, Oregon . . . The Hermiston (headquarters) storehouses are used to care for cement and miscellaneous supplies for use in connection with the supplemental construction work and the operation and maintenance of the East Side." Other than this, the Annual Project Histories are silent about the USBR structures in Hermiston. Only two photographs, in the 1918 and 1920 issues, testify to the existence of the office building at all.⁸

The original function of the small concrete building is uncertain, but at other USBR offices and construction sites similar buildings were constructed as vaults for records and money or as blasting material storerooms. The fact that the office has a three-story attached vault implies that this detached structure was probably not used as a vault. Its close proximity to the office indicates that blasting powder would not have been placed there, but non-volatile material (fuses, etc.) could have been stored in this building.

PROJECT INFORMATION

In past consultations, the USBR and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office have determined several Umatilla Project features to be individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under criteria A and C. Cold Springs Dam was determined eligible for NRHP listing based in part upon it being one of the few representations of its engineering type and period still largely intact in Oregon. McKay Dam was determined NRHP eligible largely on the basis of important design and construction techniques that were first tested on that dam. However the two dams and the Feed Canal and distribution canals associated with Cold Springs Dam were also determined NRHP eligible because of their association with the Umatilla Project, which played an important role in the development of the irrigated agricultural economy that strongly influenced the early 20th century historic development of the local area. It is probable that other features of the Umatilla Project that retain historic integrity will also be determined NRHP eligible due to their association with this historic process. Since the Umatilla Project was designed and operates as a system, the Project has been determined to be a NRHP eligible linear resource or district. The features already determined individually eligible are considered contributing elements to that linear resource or district.

⁸ U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, *Annual Project History, Umatilla Project*, (1918): ii, 20; U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, *Annual Project History, Umatilla Project*, (1920): ii.

FORMER UMATILLA PROJECT HEADQUARTERS BUILDINGS

HABS No. OR-173

PAGE 15

The Block 47 headquarters buildings were built to support later phases of construction of the Umatilla Project (primarily McKay Dam) and to house USBR personnel responsible for early operation of the Project. As the HID office, it has continued to serve as the headquarters for operation of the East Division of the Project. The office building retains exterior integrity of design and material. On the basis of association with the later construction phase of the Umatilla Project and its early operation, the headquarters office building has been determined to be a contributing element to the Umatilla Project linear resource or district. The office building is also eligible as an example of early 20th century architecture reflecting elements of the Italian Renaissance style and the Prairie style.

Neither of the outbuildings are individually eligible for NRHP listing. They do not exhibit architectural merit and are not the work of an identifiable architect. However, they are associated with the headquarters office (spatially and functionally) and most likely date to the same time period. Therefore, they have been determined to be contributing elements to the larger context of the Umatilla Project, although they are not particularly informative or important elements.

HID proposes to demolish the garage/shop building and replace it with a metal-sided, Butler-type building that would serve as a full-purpose shop. The new building would be located in essentially the same location as the existing structure, except that it would be set back from the sidewalk to observe city codes that were not operative when the original building was constructed. A chain-link security fence would be placed around the building. This documentation was completed for USBR in partial mitigation for demolition of the shop building. HID will also plant vegetative screening around the new shop.⁹

Note: Mrs. Virginia Roberts of Pendleton, Oregon, completed much of the local research to collect information used in this report. Mrs. Roberts contributed her efforts at no cost to the government. Portions of the report were derived from material written by Lynne MacDonald, USBR.

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⁹ The garage/shop building was demolished in April, 2001 and the new shop was constructed shortly afterward.

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Hess, Jeffrey. *HAER No. OR-18: McKay Dam*, 1991.

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