

HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY FORM
University of Oregon Cultural Resources Survey
Eugene, Lane County, Oregon
Summer 2006, Updated 2025

RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION

Current building name: Erb Memorial Union (the EMU)
Historic building name: Donald M. Erb Memorial Student Union, Student Union, Building 23
Building address: 1222 East 13th Ave.
Ranking: Secondary

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Architectural style classification: International Modernism (1950)
Building plan (footprint shape): Irregular
Number of stories: 3
Foundation material(s): Concrete
Primary exterior wall material: Brick
Secondary exterior wall material: Cut Stone and Concrete
Roof configuration/type: Flat
Primary roof material: BUR (Built Up Roofing)
Primary window type: Fixed wood frame with 8 and 12 lights and steel single-pane casement
Primary window material: Wood
Decorative features and materials: Marble at main entrance, stained glass over entry, brick and travertine fireplace
Landscape features: "Free speech" Amphitheater with Many Nations flags. "Fishbowl" patio with curved brick wall. The Douglas Fir "Moon Tree" grew from a seed that was among four fir seeds carries to the moon aboard Apollo XIV in 1971 by Astronaut Stuart Roosa. In 1978 the seedling was planted where Willamette Hall now stands; it was transplanted in 1987 to accommodate construction of the additions to the Science complex.

Associated resources: Amphitheater Green, EMU Green, 13th Ave Axis, University Street Axis, Straub Hall Green
Comments: The original portion of the EMU is a brick building with many different types of wooden and metal framed windows. In 1963, the university created a free speech platform outside the EMU. In 1986, the free speech zone was expanded to the Amphitheater outside the student union. In 1998, the Amphitheater was redesigned to enhance this purpose.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Date of construction: 1950
Architect: H. Abbott Lawrence, Tucker, & Walman
Builder/Contractor: Ross B. Hammond Company of Portland
Moved? (yes/no): No Date of move(s): N/A
Description/dates of major additions/alterations: 1954 electronic chimes installed (as a gift from classes of 1943, 1953, and alumni leaders); Northwest Addition 1962; East Addition 1972; interior renovation (Fishbowl)1980; Ballroom alterations 1986; Amphitheater (1998) by Landscape Architects Cameron McCarthy Gilbert & Scheibe; interior remodels between 1951-2005; glass replacements 1980; bowling alley conversion 1986; reroofing 1987, 1992, and 1995; brick paving 1986; tunnel addition 1990; Child Care and Development Center remodel 1996; Amphitheater and Food Service renovation, 1998; Craft Center expansion and Women's Center expansion 2004; Large addition replaced the 1972 East Addition, 2016 by SERA.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS & SIGNIFICANCE

Original use(s) or function(s): Campus center, student lounges

Current use(s) or function(s): Campus center, student lounges and offices

Area(s) of significance: Education; Student Activism, Architecture

Period of significance: 1950

Statement of Significance (use continuation sheet if necessary):

Though construction of the Erb Memorial Union ended in 1950, plans, developments, and budgeting for the building started as early as 1924. There was a renewed vigor and interest in 1944 and in 1946 preliminary building plans were developed by the architectural firm of Ellis Lawrence, Tucker, and Walman. The original design was actually by Ellis Lawrence, but he passed away before the design process was completed. It was finished by his son, H. Abbott Lawrence, and the building lost much of the monumental character of the original design but still maintained its large massing. It is a reinforced concrete building with a brick veneer that covers one-third of a block in the "Heart of Campus." Construction began in 1949 and finished in 1950. Named after an ex-university president, Donald M. Erb, the student union held a cafeteria, soda bar, clubs, offices, bowling alleys, and room for dances. The second floor of the north wing is an exact replica of the Knight Library's original browsing room. It was built with intention to move some collections to this secondary browsing room to free up space in the library.

The first addition (the north addition) was completed in 1962. It consisted of a newer and larger cafeteria with more dining seats available, the finishing of the basement and first floors, and the refurbishing of eight bowling alley lanes. The architects for this addition were H. Abbott Lawrence, Tucker, & Walman. The second addition (the east addition) completed in 1972 was the construction of what was known as the "the skylight" lounge built in the Brutalism style. Its upper floors were surrounded by glass on all sides and it had unique old growth Douglas fir wood block flooring. The architect for this addition was Colburn/Sheldon, Lutes/Amundson with James Lambert and Associates as the Landscape Architect. The Fishbowl was renovated in 1980 and the ballroom was altered in 1986. In 2016, the 1972 addition (which was in poor condition) was removed and replaced by a large new wing, which was designed by SERA and landscape architectural firm of Cameron McCarthy. This project resulted in numerous interior renovations and creation of the EMU Green. These additions and other interior alterations have significantly changed the original building and the landscape.

In 1963, the university created a free speech platform outside the EMU. In 1986, the free speech zone was expanded to the Amphitheater outside the student union. In 1998, the Amphitheater was redesigned to better serve this purpose. The Amphitheater was further enhanced in 2014 by the Many Nations Flag project, a student-led initiative which permanently installed flags for the nine federally recognized tribes of Oregon.

The class of 1912 gave the university a replica brass Oregon Seal. It was moved from its original location of the north walk of Villard Hall and rededicated at the Erb Memorial Union upon its construction completion.

The EMU's association with student activism is significant. The EMU was a catalyst for the students to approach the administration about an important student issue. As previously mentioned, planning for the EMU started as early as 1924, and this was mostly student organized. After WWII, there was renewed interest and involvement among students in this project, so much in fact that the administration became involved with the EMU. Alumni and the general public donated money for its construction. It was student initiated and the administration and community were drawn together in its realization.

The EMU holds some distinction for its designers (criterion C), its role in student activism (criterion A), and its continued function as a place where students could study or relax. The original portion of the EMU is in very good condition but has compromised integrity. There have been two large additions, both of which severely marred the original building in an irreversible manner. Also, much of the interior of this building has been remodeled many times and holds little integrity. Because of only having a fair level of integrity, the EMU is not eligible for National Register nomination. However, it is of high significance to the campus and therefore categorized as a secondary resource. For more information about the history of the Erb Memorial Union please reference "A Common Ground" by Adell McMillian (in Bibliography).

NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT

Historic Significance (check one): High Medium Low Very Low or None

Integrity (check one): Excellent Good Fair Poor

Condition (check one): Excellent Good Fair Poor

Building designation: City Landmark National Register National Historic Landmark Not listed

Preliminary National Register eligibility findings

Building is potentially eligible: Individually or As a contributing resource in a district only

If eligible individually, applicable criteria (check all that apply):

- A. Associated with significant events C. Distinctive architecturally
 B. Associated with significant persons D. Archaeologically important

If applicable, building qualifies under NR Criterion Considerations: Yes No If yes, which apply:

Building is NOT eligible: Intact but lacks distinction or Altered/loss of integrity or Not 50 years old

DOCUMENTATION

Indicate resources consulted when researching this building (check all that apply):

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> University archives | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UO Planning Office files | <input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sanborn maps | <input type="checkbox"/> Building permits | <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO files |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State Archives | <input type="checkbox"/> State Library | <input type="checkbox"/> State Historic Society |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local Historic Society | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal interviews | <input type="checkbox"/> Historic photographs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biographical encyclopedias | <input type="checkbox"/> Obituary indexes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: <u>see below</u> |

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"A Common Ground: the Erb Memorial Union from 1950-2000"

By: Adell McMillian

Published/Printed by: the University of Oregon

Copyright: 2003 by the Erb Memorial Union

"The Getty Foundation Campus Heritage Grant"

Published by: the University of Oregon

Copyright: 2005 by the University of Oregon

"Oregon Inventory of Historic Property: Ellis Lawrence Survey"

By: Ellis Lawrence

Published/Printed by the University of Oregon, Historic Preservation Program School of Architecture and Allied Arts for SHPO, Copyright: 1989

University of Oregon Campus Planning Office and Facilities Services files and building plans

RECORDING INFORMATION

Researched: Erin Pochert and Jennifer Flathman, Winter 2006

Recorded: Susan Johnson and University Planning Office, Summer 2006

Photo number or name: EMU pic

PHOTOGRAPH



SITE PLAN

