

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

RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION

Current building name: McArthur Court

Historic building name: McArthur Court, Mac Court, The Pit, McArthur Amphitheater, The Basketball Pavilion, The Igloo

Building address: 1601 University Street

Ranking: Primary

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Architectural style classification: Half Modern

Building plan (footprint shape): Rectangular

Number of stories: 4

Foundation material(s): Concrete

Primary exterior wall material: Stucco

Secondary exterior wall material: Corrugated Metal

Roof configuration/type: Vaulted

Primary roof material: Metal

Primary window type: Horizontal-pivot sash

Primary window material: Steel

Decorative features and materials: Blind arches, string course, buttresses, and diamond panels atop corners

Landscape features: Located on the University Street Axis with sidewalks, stairs and foundation plantings (virtually nonexistent except for a few shrubs: Spirea, Mock Orange and Weigela)

Associated resources: Howe Field, Howe Field Gate and Soldier's Memorial (by O.B. Dawson), University Street Axis, and connected to Esslinger Hall via the Athletic Department Offices

Comments:

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Date of construction: 1928

Architect: Lawrence and Holford

Builder/Contractor: A.J. Pajunen

Moved? (yes/no): No Date of move(s): N/A

Description/dates of major additions/alterations: 1937: new roof ; 1954: Athletic Department Addition (Lawrence, Tucker and Wallman) connects McArthur Court to Esslinger Hall; 1955: addition of exterior trusses, corner stair towers and concrete exit balconies as fire escapes; 1966: renovations to the roof and stucco exterior; 1996: new metal roof changes from curved to gabled profile and a seating and court remodel (Soderstrom Architects).

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS & SIGNIFICANCE

Architectural style classification: Half Modern

Building plan (footprint shape): Rectangular or function(s): Basketball Arena

Current use(s) or function(s): Basketball Arena/ performing arts venue

Area(s) of significance: Education, Architecture

Period of significance: 1928-1956

Statement of Significance (use continuation sheet if necessary):

McArthur Court was named after Clifton N. "Pat" McArthur, who was the first president of the ASUO, first editor of the school newspaper, the student director of athletics, and Speaker of the Oregon legislature and Representative to Congress. Clifton has been called the "Father of Oregon Athletics." It was designed in the Half Modern style by Ellis Lawrence, with a rectangular footprint and a concrete foundation. The four story building has an exterior stucco application and a vaulted metal roof. It also uses the Lamella technique of vaulting that originated in Holland, of which it is the first example in the Northwest, and possibly the West Coast (replaced in 1996). It was utilized in order to cut costs and span 109' using 10' lengths of 2" x 12" lumber. It was originally intended to seat 6,000 spectators, but seating grew to 10,000 by 1955, when the addition of side balconies, exterior trusses, and corner stair towers helped to expand the facility, altering the original exterior. On the new exterior, one can see blind arches, a string course, buttresses, and diamond panels atop corners. A second expansion in the 1970s added end balconies. The Howe Field Gate to the south was designed by renowned blacksmith O.B. Dawson in 1937, who also designed Dads' Gates and the interior Knight Library Gates.

McArthur Court is touted as the oldest on-campus basketball arena in the country. On January 14, 1927 the U of O Ducks, then the Webfoots, played the Willamette University Bearcats in the first game held at McArthur Court with the UO Webfoots taking a 38-10 win. In those days the arena was known as the Igloo, it held 6,000 fans and had no upper balconies. Mac Court was the home of the Tall Firs, an Oregon team that in 1939 won the first-ever NCAA national championship game. In a 2002 interview with John Dick, one of the members of the Tall Firs, he reminisced about the notorious fan support at basketball games. According to Mr. Dick, "From the beginning Mac Court had plenty of noise. In terms of crowd support, I don't think it was terribly different than it is now. If you tried to yell something to one of your teammates at the height of the action, you couldn't hear. It was as deafening then as it is now." The building was completely paid for by a self-imposed student fee, and in 1932 after the final payment was made, students burned the Mac Court mortgage in a public ceremony. Not only has the court continued to be the home of the Ducks basketball teams to this day, but it has also been the site of many important community and state events over the years. Musicians from the likes of Stravinsky and Vagner to Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong to the Grateful Dead have performed there. Jack Dempsey has fought there. In 1946, then basketball coach Howard Hobson brought Charles Patterson to McArthur Court to play for the Ducks, who became the first African American to play basketball in the Northern Division of the Pacific Coast Conference. Until 2011, when Matt Knight Arena was built, McArthur Court was the central performing arts and athletics venue for not only the campus community, but for the entire city of Eugene and Lane County. This is reflected in the many nicknames that the building has acquired over the years, including "The White Elephant", "The Igloo", "Mac Court" and "The Pit". The center court is currently used by PE and REC and the basement level continues to house Athletics uses associated with Softball and Tennis.

On the whole, the building has retained a good amount of integrity and has been kept in good condition. Despite the alterations, consisting of a new roof in 1937, the addition of rollaway bleachers in 1949, the addition of metal corner stair towers in the 1950's, and a renovation of the roof in 1996, McArthur Court is a relatively unchanged landmark on campus. It is a significant resource that is individually eligible to be listed in the National Register. It is ranked as a primary campus resource for its good integrity and high significance due to its association with significant events and its distinctive architecture. When compared to all other extant primary-ranked campus buildings, McArthur Court's connection to Ellis Lawrence's campus plan and architectural quality is of lesser significance, while its connection to significant events is stronger. The most notable physical characteristic directly tied to association with events is the interior large volume court space.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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

Primary source materials, McArthur Court architectural drawings located in the UO Planning & Facilities Services hanging files.

Pennington, John W. "The Eskimo Ice House." Lane County Historian (Fall 1987): 62-4.

"75th anniversary: A friendly fortress: Mac Court will always feel like home to Ducks." Eugene, OR, The Register Guard, 15 January, 2002, 1A.

Teague, E. H. (2004, Oct. 10). McArthur Court. The Architecture of the University of Oregon. Retrieved Mar. 1, 2006, from <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/architecture/oregon/>

Shellenbarger, Michael and Lakin, Kimberly, Ellis Lawrence building survey. Salem, OR: State Historic Preservation Office, 1989.

RECORDING INFORMATION

Researched: Dustin Welch and Andrea Blaser, Winter 2006

Recorded: Susan Johnson and University Planning Office, Summer 2006 (updated June 2007)

Photo number or name:

PHOTOGRAPH



SITE PLAN

