

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

RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION

Current building name: Robinson Theatre
Historic building name: University Theatre
Building address: 1109 Old Campus Lane
Ranking: Non-Contributing

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Architectural style classification: Utilitarian
Building plan (footprint shape): Irregular
Number of stories: One; four at the fly tower
Foundation material(s): Concrete
Primary exterior wall material: Poured concrete
Secondary exterior wall material:
Roof configuration/type: Flat
Primary roof material: Built-up roofing
Primary window type: One-over-one top pivot glazing, arranged horizontally in double sets of two
Primary window material: Metal frame
Decorative features and materials: None
Landscape features: Smoothleaf Elm (Class of 1883); Black Walnut (Class of 1894); Giant Sequoia (Class of 1880); Japanese Cedar (Class of 1879); Pinus bungeana "Lacebark Pine", in honor of Horace Robinson, 1998; California Bay Laurel, planted in the 1990s to replace original planting from class of 1898; outdoor amphitheater
Associated resources: Normal Gate (1885), Dads' Gates (1940), Dads' Gates Axis, Deady Hall Walk Axis, and Villard Hall (attached).
Comments: Renamed in 1976 after longtime faculty member Horace Robinson. Robinson Theatre was built as an attachment to the existing Villard Hall.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Date of construction: 1948-1949
Architect: Annand & Kennedy, Architects & Engineers, Portland, OR
Builder/Contractor: James & Yost Contractors
Moved? (yes/no): No Date of move(s): N/A
Description/dates of major additions/alterations: 1976 remodeled and safety deficiencies corrected, WE Group Architects & Planners, Eugene. 1994 re-roofed. 2009 update and expansion of the Miller (James F.) Theatre Complex.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS & SIGNIFICANCE

Original use(s) or function(s): Theatre

Current use(s) or function(s): Theatre

Area(s) of significance: Education, Architecture

Period of significance: 1949

Statement of Significance (use continuation sheet if necessary):

Designed by Annand & Kennedy Architects & Engineers of Portland, the University Theatre was approved by the Board of Regents in April of 1948. Many students, alumni, professors and staff voiced objections to the plan to attach such a modern structure to the historic Villard Hall, a National Historic Landmark. The then Dean of AAA, Sidney W. Little, believed the theatre addition would be an aesthetically pleasing contrast against Villard. The new theatre held an audience of 400 and opened in November of 1949. It is considered the west end of Villard Hall, not a separate building. The cost of construction was \$468,000 including the remodeling of the interior of Villard. Robinson has a one story lobby and reaches four stories at the "fly tower." Robinson has no decorative features.

The Theatre was renamed in 1976 for Horace Robinson, theater faculty member from 1932 to 1976. He is credited with consulting on the design of the theater, especially the interior.

Robinson Theatre is on the Dad's Gate Axis and near the University Hall Walk Axis. Many significant trees occupy the grounds, although many more were lost when the theatre was constructed.

Grading during construction of the Robinson Theatre stage buried the Normal Gate, a wrought iron arbor installed in 1885 by the Normal School Graduates as a memorial to themselves due to the closure of the two-year teaching certificate program in 1885. It was finally unearthed 55 years later by University of Oregon Historic Preservation Students in 2004-2005, who then had it repaired and reinstalled for Preservation Week 2005. Retired Professor Emeritus Horace Robinson came to campus during May 2005 for the rededication ceremony and gave a speech at the age of 95.

The outdoor amphitheater on the north side, planned by F.A. Cuthbert, was used by the University Theater's Summer Carnival Theater. "The grassy, semi-circular amphitheater is surrounded by an evergreen hedge and was first set up as a theater under the carnival tent in June of 1962" (Sandahl). The outdoor amphitheater is no longer extant after the 2009 Miller Theatre Complex expansion.

A long planned addition and remodel, The James F. Miller Theatre Complex, which was named after the Portland businessman who donated the \$1.5 million challenge grant, was completed in 2009. It consists of a flexible theater, equipped with movable staging and seating. It added more classrooms and lab spaces, as well as set storage and sound locks. The addition expanded Robinson Theatre to the west and east and featured safety and technological upgrades to existing facilities. The Robinson Theatre continued to retain its name and function.

The theatre is in good condition but the new addition and remodel altered Robinson's excellent integrity. Furthermore, this building does not appear to be architecturally distinctive. It is therefore unlikely to be eligible for the National Register individually or as a contributing resource. Robinson Theatre, although attached to a National Historic Landmark (Villard Hall), is not listed on the National Register with that building. With the new addition and remodel, it will only be considered a non-contributing campus resource due to its low significance and diminished (poor) integrity.

NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENTHistoric Significance (check one): High Medium Low Very Low or NoneIntegrity (check one): Excellent (current) Good Fair Poor (with addition)Condition (check one): Excellent Good Fair PoorBuilding designation: City Landmark National Register National Historic Landmark Not listedPreliminary National Register eligibility findingsBuilding 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 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

Archived Materials

Old Oregon, October 1948, p.13

UO Planning Office & Facilities Services Files:

Construction set of building plans dated 1949

Villard Hall building file

Newspapers

"Landscaping the Theatre", Oregon Daily Emerald, October 21, 1949.

"Reporter Braves Snow, Slush; Inspects Work on Villard Annex", Oregon Daily Emerald, January 5, 1949.

UO Building Records – Projects and Improvements, February 2006, Facilities Services

Sandahl, David A. and Ricardo Castro. An Architectural History of the University of Oregon. University of Oregon. September 3, 1975.

Shellenbarger, Michael. *University of Oregon Architecture: A Personal Tour*. Historic Preservation Department, 1986.

RECORDING INFORMATION

Researched: Kathryn Burk, Melissa Stoller, Winter 2006

Recorded: Susan Johnson and University Planning Office, Summer 2006

Photo number or name: Robinson Theatre

PHOTOGRAPH



SITE PLAN

