

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
WAR MEMORIAL GYM
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

31 March 2016

WAR MEMORIAL GYM

INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Significance has been drafted following archival research, interviews with people familiar with the building's beginnings and long history, site analysis and direct observation of the building.

This statement of significance will assist in the weighing of options for its future.

Background

Student fundraising began immediately following the cessation of World War II for a memorial "To the men and women of our University and our province who gave their lives for freedom this building is dedicated by the students and friends of the University of British Columbia".

Sports facilities that doubled as memorials to the war dead are not uncommon, with memorial arenas still functioning as major facilities in many towns throughout British Columbia. What is unusual about the War Memorial Gym is that the building has an actual dedicated space for the university's Remembrance Day ceremonies, an indoor public ceremonial space that is in contrast to the open-air park with prominent cenotaph that is found in most towns and cities.

The building is remembered for its pioneering fundraising. The student-led initiative was in keeping with earlier efforts to build sporting and social facilities on campus, but the fundraising for the War Memorial Gym was innovative for featuring financing by the student society to raise the required construction costs.

Throughout its history, the development of the UBC campus was influenced by wider social, political, and intellectual currents, but never more so than with its embrace of modernism following the Second World War, with the conscious support of then-President Norman MacKenzie (1944-1962).

The expansion of departments and degrees, and the growth of the student population following that war created a demand for student residences, additional classrooms and laboratory infrastructure at the same time that the Modernist aesthetic was in ascendancy. The post-war faculty grew more cosmopolitan, mirroring Canadian society's welcome of European populations after the war, and contributed to a new openness and thinking on the campus. New





building on the campus was actively promoted to be in the Modernist idiom by the first director of the School of Architecture (created in 1946), Frederic Lasserre.

As a building style characterized by the simplification of form, restrained ornamentation, and initially a more open relationship with an uncluttered landscape, Modernism reflected the move to the more open, less traditional era after the war. Given that there was relatively little substantial building before the Second World War, the campus is physically dominated by Modernist buildings. Most of these buildings are situated within the Edwardian landscape as set out in the 1914 Sharp & Thompson plan with its stately layout of broad malls and boulevards.

The War Memorial Gym was designed by the successor firm of Sharp & Thompson: Thompson Berwick & Pratt. TB&P subsequently designed many of the university's landmark Modernist buildings including the Buchanan Building. The Memorial Gym is also important for its association with Frederic Lasserre, whose name is listed in the title block of some of the drawings for the Gym, and who went on to design the Frederic Wood Theatre and the Frederic Lasserre Building in his Modernist vocabulary.

The building has been altered over the decades since its construction to accommodate changes needs and context. Examples of such changes include: the entry sequence, altered to remove the long promenade bridge to University Boulevard in response to campus alterations; the Memorial Hall mezzanine space, glassed-in as it became busy as the Athletic Offices, and changes to the lower floor cafeteria and recreational spaces in response to evolving usage.

Changes of facility use have in some cases altered the use or role of original design elements: Remembrance Day services are now held in the Gym space rather than the Memorial Hall, and the stone faced memorial plinth outside of the Memorial Window (facing north) – presumably a base for a memorial sculpture – remains a low-profile base without sculpture.



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Description

The War Memorial Gym is the glass and concrete building prominently sited north of University Boulevard and west of Wesbrook Mall at The University of British Columbia Vancouver Campus. The building is comprised of two flat-roofed parts: the large boxy gym enclosure, and the smaller Memorial Hall section with the building's entry.

Heritage Value

Designed in the late 1940s under the close scrutiny of the student body, contributions from the UBC School of Architecture director Frederic Lasserre, and support of then-President Norman MacKenzie, the War Memorial Gym is significant for being a conscious symbol of UBC's expanding and modernizing culture in the years immediately following World War II.

The building is historically important for being built in part as the University's memorial to the men and women who gave their lives in the two world wars, and for its function as the site for the University's Remembrance Day ceremonies. The Memorial Hall's extensive glass walls express the historic public role of this part of the building – an indoor public space designed specifically for a ceremony more typically found in an outdoor setting.

The War Memorial Gym is of great aesthetic value as an excellent example of avant-garde Modernist architectural design that sought to express in its building form the functions within, and reflect modern thought, daring and optimism in the immediate aftermath of the constricting war effort. Cast-in-place concrete, steel and glass are used to express the dynamic interplay of spaces and uses, spatially and visually relating the Memorial Hall, the gym floor and the extensive raked seating surrounding the floor.

The War Memorial Gym is symbolically important for its internally logical geometry that resulted in a bold siting on the original campus athletic field away from the road network, a leading move in the development of the Modernist campus that broke free of the original campus plan.

The Gym is valued for its history as a place of many university,





regional and national sporting events, its ongoing role as a key sporting venue and home of the Kinesiology Department and Athletic Office.

The building is of cultural and historical value as a centre of University life over more than 60 years, a setting for a variety of non-sport ceremonies, social functions, gatherings and concerts.

The War Memorial Gym is significant for being the result of a province-wide, student-organized funding effort, an important example of many such student initiatives that include the earlier 1929 Gymnasium, the campus playing fields and stadium in the 1930s, and Brock Hall in 1940.



Character-defining Elements

Tangible

- Siting back from streets near the major entrance to the campus
- Building volumes expressing different interior functions
- Open plan, including close spatial and visual connection between Memorial Hall and gymnasium floor
- Board-formed concrete structure, including seating
- Exposed steel structure at gym windows
- Concealed roof steel truss structures
- Cantilevered flat roof forms
- Strong window/wall differentiation
- Steel windows; floor-to-ceiling window walls, walls of original glass block
- Stairwell walls of original corrugated glass
- Original portions of interior finishing of memorial hall/foyer, including terrazzo flooring and plaster walls and ceilings
- Gym floor structure
- Elements of war memorial: dedication wording, Memorial Window, and plaques
- Original portions and elements of exterior entry suspended stairs and walkways

Intangible

- Remembrance Day ceremonies
- Sporting events
- Ceremonies, social functions and gatherings

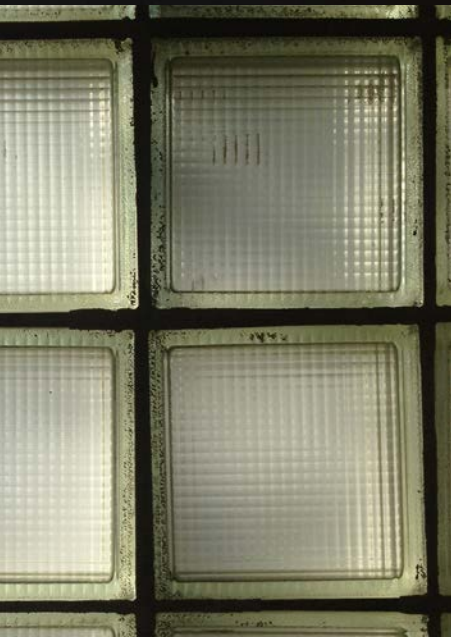


Top: Memorial Hall, with the Memorial Window
 Upper: Gym from entry point
 Lower: Staircase corrugated glass
 Bottom: Gym floor from seating

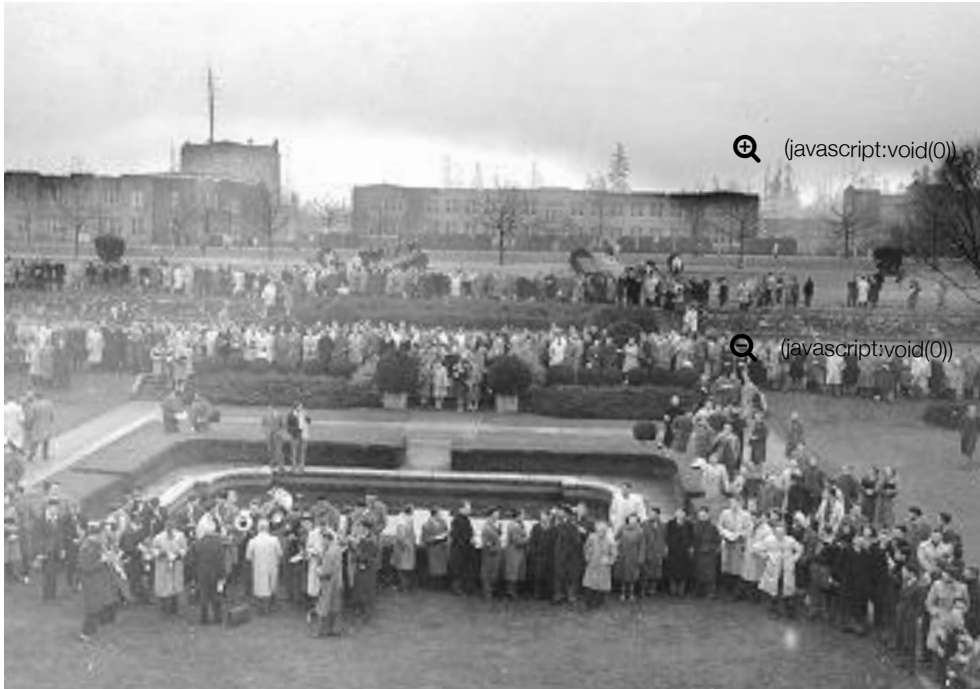
WAR MEMORIAL GYM



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| Left | Top: | Aerial photograph (UBC Archives) |
| | Bottom: | Procession with President Norman MacKenzie |
| Middle | Top: | Gym north wall |
| | Middle: | Memorial Hall west window |
| | Bottom: | Glass block wall, change room areas |
| Right | Top: | Gym north wall (UBC Archives) |
| | Middle: | 1950s View from University Boulevard (UBC Archives) |
| | Bottom: | Dedication ceremony (UBC Archives) |



WAR MEMORIAL GYM



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| Left | Top: | Student fundraising (UBC Archives) |
| | Bottom: | Student fundraising (UBC Archives) |
| Middle | Top: | Gym exit stair hall |
| | Middle: | Memorial Hall west window |
| | Bottom: | Gym from seating |
| Right | Top: | Gym used for student registration days (UBC Archives) |
| | Bottom: | Billy Graham event (UBC Archives) |





IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Scope

This assessment has been based on discussions at the February 2nd meeting convened by C+CP and future use report prepared by Conrad Boychuck of CEI Architecture.

At the February 2nd meeting options for the re-purposing of the War Memorial Gym building were discussed as part of these program and planning issues:

- Adaptive re-use in the revitalized northwest corner of Westbrook and University Boulevard
- Re-use as home for the Kinesiology Department
- Accommodating Recreational program needs

1. ADAPTIVE RE-USE AT WESBROOK AND UNIVERSITY BOULEVARD

1.1

Altering the War Memorial Gym so as to allow for its adaptive re-use in the revitalized corner of Westbrook and University Boulevard would be an important way of conserving its values. Adaptive re-use of the building, rather than its destruction, is the preferred strategy.

1.2

The building's north, east and south facades have a tripartite composition with radically different window-to-wall ratios at the ground level than the areas above it. The distinct separation of the facades at ground level from areas above can allow for changes to the fenestration and door placement at or near present grade that would not necessarily compromise the overall aesthetic composition.

At the lower level, the relationship between the 3 material expressions of the exterior – glazing at top, concrete with punched windows middle, and separate lower band at the lower level – can be preserved while serving to support new vitality around the building. Adding more light and transparency into lowest level could be done by adding glazing to the lowest section of the exterior wall composition (below the concrete band). A lower of grade at the building to the lowest floor level could also facilitate a more active use and accessibility to the lowest level without compromise to the building's heritage values.

Per the University Boulevard Design Guidelines, a small retail/commercial presence at the northwest corner could possibly be integrated into the stair well structure at grade. Options 1 and 2 of CEI Report.

2. IMPACT ON CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS AND HERITAGE VALUES

2.1

CEI has identified that the building can meet programming goals of the University if a few major changes to the building are made:

- lower a portion of the lowest floor level in order to have sufficient headroom for Fitness Centre activities
- raising the gym floor level in order to further accommodate sufficient headroom below
- Removal of the raked seating in order to have sufficient floor space and headroom for recreational indoor court use, and to accommodate raised gym floor level.

2.2

The following tangible character-defining elements are protected by the alterations anticipated by the CEI options:

- Siting back from streets near the major entrance to the campus are not altered
- Building volumes expressing different interior functions is maintained
- Open plan, including close spatial and visual connection between Memorial Hall and gymnasium floor is maintained or even enhanced by the proposed raising of the gym floor
- Exposed steel structure at gym windows can be retained
- Concealed roof steel truss structures can be retained
- Cantilevered flat roof forms can be retained
- Strong window/wall differentiation can be retained
- Steel windows; floor-to-ceiling window walls, walls of original glass block all can be retained
- Stairwell walls of original corrugated glass can be retained; replication of missing glass walls is not precluded, and can possibly be carried out
- Original portions of interior finishing of memorial hall/foyer, including terrazzo flooring and plaster walls and ceilings all can, with care, be retained
- Elements of war memorial: dedication wording, Memorial Window, and plaques can all be retained
- Original portions and elements of exterior entry suspended stairs and walkways can remain

The following tangible character-defining elements would be affected by the alterations:

- Board-formed concrete seating – removal
 Commentary: The removal of the board-formed seating element still leaves much of the board-formed concrete exterior walls intact, and accessible for their scientific and aesthetic values

- Original portions of interior finishing of memorial hall/foyer, including terrazzo flooring and plaster walls and ceilings – removal or alteration

Commentary: The removal or alterations to these surfaces should be carefully minimized, since their physical qualities are a significant aspect of the value of the Memorial Hall. Where finishes are necessarily compromised, their qualities should be replicated following *Standards and Guidelines for Historic Places in Canada*. Lighting fixtures should be sourced to closely match the physical appearance and lighting quality of the original fixtures.

- Gym floor structure – removal

Commentary: The gym floor structure is of scientific interest for its sprung quality, and likely its various materials. These physical qualities can be recorded upon dismantling of the floor structure, and the flooring could be assessed for re-use on the new gym floor surface.

2.3

The Intangible character-defining elements needn't be lost. The options noted in the CEI report do not appear to necessarily impact the functioning of the Memorial Hall as a solemn space to remember the war dead. Raising the gym floor level even makes for a more seamless connection between the gym space – where the Remembrance Day ceremonies now take place – and the Memorial Hall, where the plaques to the dead and the inscription honoring the dead are located.

3. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The heritage values of the War Memorial Gym can be substantially conserved with the alterations to the building as envisioned in the CEI report, whether the Option 1 or 2 is followed. The values being lost are mostly the scientific values associated with the a portion of the board-formed concrete structure and gym floor structure. The building can accommodate exterior changes at the ground level in the service of the revitalization of the area of the campus at the northwest corner of the intersection of Wesbrook and University Boulevard without an appreciable loss of heritage value.

Furthermore, the proposed changes to the building can be seen as very positive heritage conservation, by facilitating the continued use and viability of the historic building with its high symbolic values for today's University community.



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