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Saskatchewan Hall

University of Saskatchewan Heritage Register
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1. Statement of Significance

Saskatchewan Hall is architecturally and historically significant for its age, Collegiate Gothic architectural style and its status as the first student residence at the University of Saskatchewan. One of the first three buildings approved by the Board of Governors in 1909, a student residence was seen as crucial to the young university. Residence halls were chosen explicitly over fraternities, as they were considered by Walter Murray, the University President, to be more democratic. Saskatchewan Hall housed both women and men from the outset; a separate wing with a capacity of 30 students was reserved for women. Saskatchewan Hall was completed for $230,000 – over double the original estimate of ‘not more than $100,000.’ However, the result was a landmark building of impressive quality, resolved to a high degree of detail. Saskatchewan Hall retains a great degree of heritage value, particularly in its exterior elements.
Note: Saskatchewan Hall is configured with floors numbered Basement, Ground Floor, First Floor, Attic. This report follows the same convention.

2. Character - Defining Elements

2.1 Materials

The characteristic combination of ‘greystone’ and sandstone forms the exterior of Saskatchewan Hall. The principle material is rough-faced greystone, while cut sandstone is used for quoins, grotesques, crenellation, door and window surrounds. At the entrances, granite forms a base course and stairs. Figure 1 illustrates these materials. (For further information on building stones used at the U of S, refer to ‘Appendix: Stone’)

The roof of Saskatchewan Hall is clad in slate, with copper eaves troughs. At the eaves, exposed wooden rafter ends provide decoration. Figure 2 illustrates the eaves detailing, and Figure 4 illustrates the slate roof tiles. The exterior doors are oak with glass lites. These are not original, but were made using the doors of Qu’Appelle Hall as a reference.
Slate is continued on the interior of the building, with slate floor tile in the entrances and stairwells. All of the slate is original save for tiles that were added to the entrances and in the basement. The slate material is of excellent commemorative integrity. No other original flooring materials remain; the ground floor now has sheet vinyl, the upper floors carpet. A 1971 renovation removed all of the original wooden flooring. Carpet was installed over a new concrete floor slab. The basement features a mixture of concrete flooring and the recent addition of ceramic and slate tiles.

Finished in a painted textured plaster, the interior walls of Saskatchewan Hall maintain little commemorative integrity, having been refinished numerous times. The original plaster ceilings have been obscured by dropped ceiling panels added to conceal newer building services.

Interior millwork features, such as fireplace mantles, door and window trim are constructed of stained quarter sawn oak as shown in Figure 5. Wooden picture moldings inside the residence rooms have been painted. The stained oak door surrounds of the residential rooms have been well maintained; however, over time as certain pieces experience wear and damage, replacements have been made. In the corridors, some original oak doors have been replaced with steel doors and frames, as a fire protective measure. A few original oak doors remain to ancillary spaces such as the stairwell to the roof or attic crawl spaces. Figure 6 illustrates an example.

In the second floor lounge, two brick fire places with oak surrounds and red terracotta tile hearths stand facing each other (Figure 7). Between them is an oak window seat, shown in Figure 8, set into the niche of an oriel window. The main floor features a much larger and more central fireplace. At least two other fireplaces in the south end of the building have been hidden under more recent wall finishes. Their general locations are apparent from the chimneys extending through the roof.

Figure 5. Quarter sawn oak on a fireplace mantle.

Figure 6. An oak door with brass hardware.

Figure 7. Oak, brick and red clay terracotta floor tile frame a fireplace.

Figure 8. An oak window seat.
Also original are the oak surrounds of many of the windows. Set into these oak surrounds are single-paned steel framed sash windows. Much of the original glass is still intact, as is the original brass hardware. In most instances, aluminum storm windows have been fitted over the original windows, as shown in Figure 9. In a few cases, the original steel-framed exterior insect screens are intact. (See Figure 10). Overall, the windows of this building have excellent commemorative integrity.

The staircases also retain excellent commemorative integrity. They are made in the same form and style as the staircases that typify other early University of Saskatchewan buildings such as the MacKinnon Building and the Physics Building. Slate treads and landings are complemented by a steel and iron balustrade and stringers finished in black paint. The steel and iron balustrade features subtle decorative details and oak hand rails. Staircases designed in this style are a unifying feature of University of Saskatchewan interiors; most staircases in early university buildings are designed in the style described here.

The washrooms on all floors feature marble stall dividers. The marble is approximately one inch thick and is also used for baseboards and backsplashes in the washrooms.

Figure 9. Aluminum framed storm windows with sliding screens have been added to the exterior.

Figure 10. A window with both screen and exterior glass intact.

Figure 11. A staircase featuring slate treads, steel and iron balustrade and oak handrail.

Figure 12. Marble as a backsplash in a Saskatchewan Hall washroom.
2.2 Form

The form of Saskatchewan Hall is important to the early Campus Plan set out by Brown and Vallance Architects. In plan, the building is shaped as a capital letter F, as illustrated in Figure 14. This shape forms exterior courtyards which were a primary goal of the 1909 campus plan. This master plan was as much a landscape plan as it was an architectural vision, and it conceived the university grounds as a series of interconnected courtyards formed by their adjacent buildings. The courtyards vary in scale from the grandeur of ‘The Bowl’ to the intimacy of the smaller courtyards behind Saskatchewan Hall. The form of Saskatchewan Hall was intended by the 1909 plan to define the shape, scale and character of The Bowl and the other outdoor courtyards such as Voyageur Place. The scale of Saskatchewan Hall is consistent with the other buildings that enclose The Bowl. At a height of three stories above ground, Saskatchewan Hall is well proportioned to the pedestrian activity that takes place around it. The landscaped courtyards around the university’s early buildings still retain their character and are in and of themselves important character-defining elements.

No deletions have been made to the form of Saskatchewan Hall, but Athabasca Hall was added to it in 1964. Figure 15 illustrates how this has extended the building footprint south and east. Despite the addition, the original form of the building is still easily discerned.
2.3 Style

Numerous character-defining elements of the Collegiate Gothic are to be found on the building’s exterior. The north and west-facing facades are the most ornamented, owing to their frontage onto The Bowl and Voyageur Place (Figures 13 & 16). The roof of Saskatchewan Hall is clad in slate tile; a material common to many Collegiate Gothic buildings at the university. Punctuating the roof is a series of dormer windows shown in Figure 17. Below the crenellated parapets that make up the roof line, a number of gothic grotesques populate the exterior. Both of these character-defining elements are visible in Figure 18. The grotesques are particular to this building, and portray aspects of student life. The figures are carved holding tennis rackets, microscopes and musical instruments. Shown in Figure 19, around the northwest entrance to the building, the arched stone entry is embellished with reliefs featuring flora and fauna such as a gophers and grape vines. A shield depicts a stylized key. The carved grotesques and reliefs all exist in excellent commemorative condition. Their contribution to the style of the building and the subject matter they portray make them important character-defining elements.
Above the northwest entrance, an oriel window overlooks Voyageur Place. (Figure 20). The oriel window is accompanied by a series of bay windows on both the north and west elevations. (Figure 21). Sandstone quoins, ornamented drainage spouts and narrow archer slits contribute to the Collegiate Gothic architectural style of the building. Carved stone arches surround the two west entrances (Figure 22). String courses, as illustrated in Figure 23, are used to accommodate the thickening of the exterior stone towards the base of the building, while adding a decorative element. Many windows also feature sandstone arches. On the north façade, a turret reaches from the ground floor to the roof, further defining the neo-gothic style of the building (Figure 24).

Notably, many of the windows on the building's east facing walls are less ornamented than those on other elevations. Only a few windows on these facades have bays, balconies or oriels. This differentiation orientates the building toward the more public outdoor spaces of The Bowl and Voyageur Place. As Figure 25 shows, the windows appear in sets of nine with large surface areas to maximize light penetration. With renovations, some of these windows have been replaced. The dining room used to feature a double-height vaulted ceiling. Renovations converted this grand space into two floors. To conceal the addition of the floor the three middle windows were covered in each set.
The interior of Saskatchewan Hall has varying levels of commemorative integrity with respect to architectural style. The ground floor has been much more compromised than the upper stories. On the upper floors, some of the original plaster work, and most original fireplaces, stairwells and window seats have been maintained to an excellent standard of commemorative integrity. However, in general, the preservation of historical character-defining elements in this building has been inconsistent. Figure 27 illustrates an example of this inconsistency.

2.4 Location

Saskatchewan Hall is located according to the 1909 Campus Plan, illustrated in Figure 28, on the south side of The Bowl. The importance of the residence hall to the university’s planners is evident from its prominence, at the heart of the campus. Its location has also been integral to the formation of the Collegiate Gothic precinct of early university buildings ringing The Bowl. Saskatchewan Hall helps to define a north-south axis through the centre of The Bowl, terminated on the north side by the Physics Building and on the south by Voyageur Place.
2.5 Spatial Configuration

The general arrangement of Saskatchewan Hall is a series of narrow wings, with spaces arrayed off a double-loaded corridor. The floor plan is illustrated in Figure 29. This arrangement is typical of multi-unit residential construction, where all living spaces require access to windows. Narrow floor plates allow the greatest possible penetration of natural light into interior spaces. Even stairwells featured large bays of windows to allow for maximum light penetration. Figure 30 illustrates this feature.

The arrangement of rooms in Saskatchewan Hall has undergone greater transition in some areas than in others. The building was designed with student dormitory rooms arranged around a series of double loaded corridors, and with a central wing housing a dining hall. The double loaded corridor layout has...
been maintained and is illustrated in Figure 29. The dining hall was the exception to this general cellular arrangement, but has since been compromised both in plan and section. The dining hall was located in the central wing running east-west. Originally two stories in height, the dining hall wing featured a high coffered ceiling. A series of windows on either side created an expansive, light-filled space. A large fireplace was located centrally on the west wall of this grand room. Figure 31 shows the original use of the space and its open configuration. Renovations in the 1950's saw the height of the room completely altered with the addition of another floor over the dining space to provide a gymnasium. This fundamentally altered the nature of the space, dividing it vertically into two lower spaces. Figure 32 shows the gymnasium that was added over the dining hall.

Figure 31. Saskatchewan Hall dining room, ca. 1920. Photo A-2148 retrieved from http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/uofs_students/image_detail.php?image=a-2148

Figure 32. The gymnasium in Saskatchewan Hall. The roof and windows pictured here used to overlook the dining hall.
The space of the former Dining Hall has also been made more linear, by its division into a number of administrative offices arranged along a single loaded corridor. Athabasca Hall, added in 1964, is accessed through this corridor, reinforcing the conversion of the space from a gathering place to a circulation route. Figure 33 shows this reconfiguration of the former Dining Hall. For decades, the grand hearth of the Dining Hall was lost behind furred out walls. In 2010, the fireplace was rediscovered during a renovation. Although no longer functional, its material characteristics and architectural style are well maintained and in an excellent state of commemorative integrity. Figure 34 shows the hearth. Other chimneys protruding from the roof perhaps give a clue to several other hidden hearths within the building.

Student lounges in Saskatchewan Hall were provided with higher ceilings and tall windows to allow more light into these public spaces. The spacious dimensions of the student lounge and the tall windows that give it ample natural light are character-defining elements of that space. The lounge is also home to a hearth and a window seat; elements that invite gathering and define the room as a public space.

Over the years, several tunnels have been connected to the basement of Saskatchewan Hall. A first set of tunnels offered access to Marquis Hall, Place Riel and the Memorial Union Building. Another tunnel connected the eastern end of the northeast wing to the MacKinnon Building.
2.6 Systems

The original structure of Saskatchewan Hall consists of cast-in-place concrete slabs supported by concrete beams and columns. The roof rafters are wooden, and are supported by the concrete frame. The exterior walls of Saskatchewan Hall are of stone, supported on concrete foundation walls and footings. At the exterior stone walls, the concrete structure is buried within the masonry construction and is not visible, but is evident in photographs taken during construction. On the interior, a pair of concrete beams runs on either side of the central corridors, parallel to the exterior walls. This early concrete structure proved problematic, and in 1971, an extensive rehabilitation project was undertaken to reinforce it. Excessive deflection in the concrete beams was addressed by the addition of steel supporting columns at the midspan of each structural bay. An additional structural concrete slab was poured over top of the existing one both to strengthen it and to level the floors, which had sagged due to structural deflection. The exterior stone walls, although not intended as load-bearing, have likely assumed a supporting function, given the deflection visible in the interior concrete beams.

A notable structural feature is the relieving arch visible in Figure 36, supporting a stone chimney over a window overlooking the Bowl.
2.7 Use(s)

Saskatchewan Hall is historically significant as the first student residence at the University of Saskatchewan. The construction of a residence hall was considered by the early Board of Governors and by President Walter Murray to be a priority for the university. It was one of the first three buildings approved in 1909, and put out to tender in 1910. It was assigned a prominent location on the Bowl, at the heart of the new campus. The decision to build a residence rather than start a fraternity system was a conscious one; Murray and the Board believed residences were the more democratic choice. Saskatchewan Hall has been used as a residence hall continuously throughout its history. Other secondary uses have varied according to need; the dining room was decommissioned after the construction of Marquis Hall in 1964. The basement has seen many uses; it is currently home to various campus clubs and a prayer and meditation room. For many years it housed student health services.

2.8 Cultural & Chronological Associations

As the first residence at the University of Saskatchewan, this building is strongly associated with campus life for generations of students. These associations are reinforced by its central location, its human scale and the decorative carvings which celebrate its history and purpose.

3. Associated Objects

The moose head that currently adorns the student lounge in Saskatchewan Hall is an object associated with the whole university. The stuffed moose head, shown in Figure 38, was donated to the university in 1921 by Dr. T.A. Patrick of Yorkton. The President at the time, Dr. Walter Murray, decided that the moose “should be placed in Convocation Hall, directly above the front entrance.” The moose hung here from 1921 until 2005 when the MacKinnon Building was renovated, and came to be known as the ‘Convocation Moose’. The renovations required that the moose find a new home as there was no longer room for it at its historical location. Several facilities at the university offered to become home for the celebrated moose. President Peter Mackinnon chose Saskatchewan Hall due the abundance of people that would be around to ensure its safety. The moose was installed in its current location in January 2006.

Figure 37. Two female residents relax in Saskatchewan Hall. Photo A-833, retrieved from http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/uofs_students/image_detail.php?image=a-2148

Figure 38. The ‘Convocation Moose’, newly installed in its new home in the Saskatchewan Hall lounge.
4. Supporting Documents


Facilities Management Division (2011). Asset Resource Database [Data File]. Retrieved from \usask\fmddfs\files\iis\IIS_Public\ARS

G. Snell, personal communication, July 7, 2011.


5. Summary of Character - Defining Elements

Materials
- greystone walls
- cut sandstone trim and detailing
- granite base
- quarter sawn oak mantles, seating, banisters, picture moldings, doors, window frames and surrounds
- red terracotta tiles
- steel-framed windows
- brass hardware
- steel and iron balustrades
- slate treads, landings and roof tiles
- marble dividers and backsplashes
- exposed wooden rafter ends
- brick hearths

Form
- formation of exterior courtyards
- scale (3 storeys)

Style
- slate tile roof
- dormer windows
- crenellated parapet
- grotesques and stone relief sculptures
- arches (stone entries, fireplaces, windows, interior entries)
- oriel window and bay windows
- quoin in stonework at corners
- archer slits
- ornamented drainage spouts
- string courses
- turret
- coffered ceiling
Location
- original to 1909 campus plan
- north south axis

Spatial Configuration
- double loaded corridors
- hearths
- window seat
- deep window sills
- high ceilings
- tall windows

Systems
- relieving arch
- concrete structural frame
- exterior stone walls

Uses
- student residence
- dining hall
- campus clubs

Cultural & Chronological Associations
- Carved stone grotesques depicting student life