Statement of Significance

The Peter MacKinnon Building, formerly named the College Building, is a highly significant heritage building at the University of Saskatchewan, constructed between 1910 and 1913. It is the centrepiece of a collection of original stone buildings located around 'The Bowl', a large courtyard that forms the heart of the campus. The Canadian Register of Historic Places has called this group of buildings “the finest collection of Collegiate Gothic university buildings in Canada.” The MacKinnon Building was one of the first five buildings commissioned by the new university in 1909 and put out to tender in the spring of 1910. Designed by the architectural firm of David Brown and Hugh Vallance of Montreal, the MacKinnon...
Building was the first on campus to begin construction, but not the first to be finished, opening in May 1913.

The MacKinnon Building has heritage value as an excellent example of Collegiate Gothic architecture. The exterior of the building maintains a high degree of integrity. Although the newer Administration Building partially obscures its east side, the front elevation of the MacKinnon Building, which faces The Bowl, is very well preserved. The interior of the MacKinnon Building, aside from its corridors and public spaces, has undergone many changes since its construction. In 1997, the MacKinnon building was condemned due to structural failure, and was extensively renovated and restored between late 2003 and 2005. During these renovations, the partitions between rooms were removed, but the public spaces of the building - the main corridors, the principal staircases, and Convocation Hall - were restored in place and retain a high degree of commemorative integrity.

The MacKinnon Building also has heritage value in its status as the first College of Agriculture at a Canadian university. Although the MacKinnon Building initially accommodated all academic disciplines at the university, its lecture halls, classrooms, laboratories and offices were designed primarily to house the College of Agriculture. Previously, formal agricultural education in Canada had been conducted at agricultural colleges with only nominal connections to universities. The University of Saskatchewan was the first in Canada to establish an agricultural college on its main campus. Understanding the importance of agriculture to the development of the province, the University of Saskatchewan gave the College of Agriculture a professional status equal to the more traditional colleges, such as the Liberal Arts and Sciences, Medicine, and Law.
The MacKinnon Building was designated a Provincial Heritage Property on November 24, 1982 and a National Historic site in February 2001.

Note: The MacKinnon Building is configured with floors numbered Ground Floor, First Floor, and Second Floor. This report follows the same convention.

2. Character - Defining Elements

2.1 Materials

The MacKinnon Building was constructed of high quality materials, most of which remain in an excellent state of commemorative integrity (Figures 2 & 3). Its exterior was built largely of the locally-sourced dolomitic limestone commonly referred to as 'greystone'. The base of the building is supported by granite of a light grey color with black flecks. The building's arches, architraves, crenellation, quoining and other stone ornamentation are all fashioned out of Bedford or Indiana limestone. (For further information on building stones used at the U of S, refer to ‘Appendix: Stone’.) The roof of the MacKinnon Building is clad in slate tile with copper flashing, gutters and downspouts.

Portions of the original exterior stone walls are now enclosed within the Administration Building, which was added to the east of the MacKinnon Building. Some of the enclosed stone shows white residue or efflorescence as shown in Figure 4. Aside from this, the building’s stone is in excellent commemorative condition.

Figure 2. Corner made of limestone with greystone on either side, on a base course of granite.

Figure 3. Slate tile roofing.

Figure 4. Stone with efflorescence.

Figure 5. L to R: Steel window frame and fixture with oak sill.

Figure 6. Bronze window hardware in the MacKinnon Building’s Convocation Hall.
The public spaces on the interior of the MacKinnon Building, such as its corridors, stairwells and the lecture theatre called Convocation Hall, have been preserved and restored. Among the building’s interior features are arched doors and door surrounds of stained quarter sawn oak, with bronze and steel hardware. Some oak baseboards remain while some have been replaced in kind. Window frames are steel and in many cases windows retain the original panes of glass. In some cases, new aluminum-framed windows have been added to the interior side of original window openings for increased thermal performance. Some windows have bronze hardware and oak surrounds. Figure 5 shows a steel-framed window, with an oak surround and bronze hardware.

In the corridors and stairwells, walls are finished in a glazed terracotta tile made to resemble stone. Floors are finished in slate and clay tile (Figure 7). Stair cases have steel stringers, cast iron risers, slate treads and painted steel and cast iron balusters with oak handrails (Figures 8 & 9). The slate stair treads are original and have been worn down from years of use (Figure 9). Throughout the building, original fixtures such as cast iron radiators and steel standpipes have been maintained (Figure 10).

Convocation Hall is a large ceremonial assembly space forming the centrepiece of the MacKinnon Building. All of the wood and steel windows in Convocation Hall are original. Original plaster walls including its two arcaded aisles, have been restored. A large skylight was uncovered during the renovation work and was re-established. Minor changes have been made to the stage, ceiling, and floors. The lighting fixtures are not original, but are remnants of a later renovation. The balcony level in Convocation Hall has an original oak baluster, seating pews and floor. These original wooden features are shown in Figure 11.
2.2 Form

The MacKinnon Building is E-shaped in plan, and two and a half storeys in height, with hipped roofs. It has a finished basement and an unoccupied attic space. Its long front elevation faces west onto the bowl, and is symmetrical in composition (Figure 12). The narrow floor plan and relatively low overall height of the MacKinnon Building are character-defining elements. These characteristics are typical of early buildings at the University of Saskatchewan and reflect the 1909 Campus Plan. Its two and a half storey height is in keeping with the other buildings on campus built around the same time. Between 1985 and 1987, the Administration Building (Weins and Johnstone Architects), was built as an addition to the MacKinnon Building. This changed the form of the MacKinnon Building, but a discussion of the addition is outside of the scope of this report.

Figure 12. Front and rear elevations of the MacKinnon Building by Montreal Architects David R. Brown and Hugh Vallance show the long, low massing that came to define campus buildings. Retrieved from Facilities Management Division Asset Record System, File A-B-6T.

Figure 13. Oriel windows adorn the facade of the MacKinnon Building.
2.3 Style

Collegiate Gothic was the architectural style adopted by the University of Saskatchewan during its early stages of development, prior to the Second World War. Collegiate Gothic was a branch of the Gothic Revival movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries, which sought to re-establish principles of mediaeval art and architecture. The Collegiate Gothic style was used to associate newer North American universities with the history and traditions of their ancient European predecessors.

Several elements define the Collegiate Gothic style employed on the MacKinnon Building and are character-defining elements. The building's front façade is symmetrical in composition. The main entrance forms the central element in the design, marked by a pedimented bay and a row of three large oriel windows in the second floor (Figures 12 & 13). Statuary niches, visible in Figure 14, flank the central oriel window. Figure 15 shows the main entry, recessed within a shallow vault and featuring an arched oak door. The use of the arch, particularly the pointed or gothic arch, is a typical feature of the Collegiate Gothic style. The roofline features a crenelated parapet (Figure 14), another common feature of Collegiate Gothic buildings. Quoining – the visual emphasis of the exterior corners of the stone walls - is visible in Figure 17.

Carved stone ornamentation is an important feature of the Collegiate Gothic style. Walter Murray, the university's first president, requested the depiction of local fauna, such as gophers, ducks, and prairie chickens, in the carved stonework (Figure 18 & 19). However, the stone masons brought in from eastern Canada to carry out this work were unfamiliar with these animals. They expressed their frustration in the scenes they chose to depict; one gargoyle is seen wielding a mason's hammer in one hand and a prairie chicken in the other, with a pained look on his face (Figure 19). Some of the depictions of Saskatchewan creatures, such as the gopher, are inaccurately rendered. Other more standard decorative motifs include acorns, oak leaves and ivy.

Figure 14. Crenellations along the roofline and an oriel window and statuary niche on the left.

Figure 15. The MacKinnon Building's principle entry recessed within an arch, featuring an arched door.

Figure 16. Stone corbels and string course.

Figure 17. Sandstone quoining.
The interior of the MacKinnon Building also contains Collegiate Gothic character-defining elements. The corridors feature arched oak doors and transoms, vaulted plaster ceilings and terracotta wainscot. Many of these interior character-defining stylistic elements are shown in Figure 20 and exist in excellent commemorative condition. The two main staircases are character-defining elements for the level of decorative detail incorporated into their balustrades (Figure 21). The vaulted ceiling and arcaded aisles of Convocation Hall are also character-defining elements of both style and spatial configuration.

Figure 19. A frustrated gargoyle threatens a prairie chicken with a mason's hammer.

Figure 20. Interior arched entries and transoms surrounded by a terracotta wainscot under a vault ceiling.

Figure 18. Heraldry in the form of a duck perched atop the Saskatchewan crest grounds the building in the local context.

Figure 21. Ornamented balustrade.

Figure 22. Vaulted ceiling with skylights and accompanying arches in Convocation Hall.
2.4 Location

The MacKinnon Building is located prominently, at the head of The Bowl, and at the termination of the principal axis of the 1909 Campus Plan (Figure 23). It is flanked by the Physics Building and the student residences. The location of the MacKinnon Building reflects its importance as the intended home of the College of Agriculture. Agricultural education was of critical importance to the University of Saskatchewan, and this was the first agricultural college in Canada to be established as an integral part of a university. The location of the MacKinnon Building also helps to form the outdoor spaces around it, particularly The Bowl, which were an important aspect of the 1909 Campus Plan. (Refer also to the Heritage Register report on The Bowl).

2.5 Spatial Configuration

The MacKinnon Building’s narrow interior layout and double-loaded corridors reflect common building practices at the turn of the 20th century (Figure 24). As electric lighting was still relatively new in 1909, the MacKinnon Building was designed with a large number of windows and a narrow footprint, allowing the deep penetration of natural light. Double height windows in stairwells and other public spaces are also character-defining. The skylight in Convocation Hall is another way in which the building was designed to take advantage of natural light (Figure 22). Convocation Hall is a grand, double height space with a vaulted ceiling and large balcony. The proportions of the space and its stylistic elements make it a character-defining space.

Figure 23. The location of the College Building is indicated in green on the 1909 Campus Plan by Brown and Vallance. North is to the left.

Figure 24. Original second floor plan of the MacKinnon Building revealing narrow floor plate, double loaded corridors and original uses. Retrieved from Facilities Management Division Asset Record System, File A-B-4T.
The building’s original configuration has been well preserved although some changes have been made over time. The addition of the Administration Building in 1987 had altered the flow of pedestrian traffic through the building and has enclosed some exterior walls. The basement has also seen significant change with its conversion into an underground tunnel connecting to the adjacent residences and Physics Building. The original basement windows have all been filled in, removing much of the natural light from the space.

An elevator was added to the north end of the building during the 2003-2005 restoration. The elevator shaft takes up the space of an old vault on the first and second floors. Although they are non-functioning, the vault doors (Figure 26) remain embedded in the walls. Their presence as a trace of the history of the building is a character-defining element.

2.6 Systems

The MacKinnon Building was built with a cast-in-place concrete frame, supporting concrete floor slabs and a roof structure consisting of wood decking on a system of steel beams and trusses. At the time of its construction, concrete was still a new technology and its application was not well understood. The poor design and execution of the concrete frame and floor structures revealed themselves in later years, and structural failures forced the closure of the building in 1997. Subsequently, the MacKinnon Building was extensively restored.

The building’s original structure, including its failed components, have been reinforced by a new secondary steel structure, but have been retained for commemorative purposes and are displayed throughout the building. The presidential suite contains three ‘windows’ – where aspects of the original structure have been preserved and displayed behind glass. Many more are found in the southern wing and an old electrical box is preserved in the north. Figure 27 shows a section of the original concrete structure displayed within the President’s office suite. The ceiling of the University Art Collection space has been left entirely exposed in order to leave the original ceiling and construction practices of the period visible.

The building’s corridors have retained the old fire hose carriers, which are longer functional but have been retained for commemorative purposes (Figure 28).
2.7 Use(s)

The MacKinnon Building was originally intended to house the College of Agriculture; however, initially, all of the academic functions of the university were contained within this building. Over time, it gradually became to be used primarily as an administrative office building. As early as April 1910, the floor plan included space for milk testing, butter making and cheese ripening on the ground floor. A gymnasium, several classrooms, offices for the Registrar, Dean of Agriculture, Director of Extension, and President, the original “faculty club”, laboratories, the library and quarters for the janitor were other early uses. Figures 29 and 30 are photographs of some of the building’s historic uses. Before the construction of the Murray Library in 1955, the University Library was housed in the MacKinnon Building in what currently serves as the presidential suite (Figure 29). The university’s first chemistry lab was housed in the basement.

In addition to Convocation Hall, the MacKinnon Building began its life containing both classrooms and offices, but later evolved to become primarily an administrative centre. By the 1950s, most of the original teaching facilities in the MacKinnon Building were taken over by new or expanded offices including those of the Registrar, Controller, alumni and news services, and the President’s staff. The building became known as the Administration Building.

Figure 29. The library, originally housed in the MacKinnon Building, where the presidential suite now exists, ca. 1940. Photo A-3425, retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/

Figure 30. The original chemistry lab, located in the basement of the MacKinnon Building, 1913. Photo A-2602, retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/

Figure 31. Students registering for classes in Convocation Hall, 1960. Photo A-2276, retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/

Figure 32. The University Choral Society and Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra perform in Convocation Hall, ca. 1936. Photo A-2142, retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/
Convocation Hall is an original feature of the MacKinnon Building, which was included in the design brief at the suggestion of Dean W.J. Rutherford of the College of Agriculture, in order to house farmer’s meetings. Upon its completion, this assembly space sat 600 and was also used as a venue for ceremonies. The space was also used for lectures, meetings, performances, exams, registration, and convocation ceremonies. Figures 31 and 32 show some of the various functions it has served. By 1930, the University had outgrown the hall as a venue for convocation. However, it maintained its original, broader function as a hall for meetings, concerts, lectures, and other events.

In 1979 parts of the building were declared to be unsafe due to structural problems. Most of the building was closed after the completion of the new Administration Building in 1987. Convocation Hall, however, remained in use until 1997.

In 2005 the building reopened its doors after undergoing extensive restoration and was renamed the College Building. The presidential suite was moved back to the College Building from the Administration Building where it had been residing since that building’s opening. The current boardroom was built in the original location of the chemistry lab. In addition to senior administrative offices and Convocation Hall, the MacKinnon Building became home to the Museum of Antiquities (pictured in Figure 33) and a new gallery space for the University Art Collection. These spaces were originally home to the machinery room.

2.8 Cultural & Chronological Associations

In 1913, the construction of the MacKinnon Building signified the establishment of Saskatchewan’s first university, and today it reveals issues considered important to society at that time. Its cornerstone was laid by Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, on July 29, 1910. The cornerstone is a character-defining element associating the MacKinnon Building with the national context in which it was built. Figures 34 and 35 show the cornerstone and the ceremony during which it was laid.

The MacKinnon building is notable as the first College of Agriculture to be included within a university rather than as a separate entity. Its prominent location reflected the importance of agricultural education to the university’s founders. (See Section 2.4).

The MacKinnon Building is associated with the University of Saskatchewan’s first president, Walter Murray. Murray’s office was located in the building and he had great influence over its design and construction. Murray selected the Collegiate Gothic style as an appropriate architectural expression of the ideals...
of the new university and chose Brown and Vallance to realise this vision.

The building is associated with the university’s place in some of the significant events of Canadian history. Its interior halls have a wainscoting of terra cotta tile, with a frieze on which the names of all the students, faculty and staff who fought in the First World War have been inscribed. This ‘Honour Roll’ situates the building within the international historical context of its time (Figure 36). Notably, John G. Diefenbaker, who went on to become Canada’s 13th Prime Minister, is commemorated on the banner (Figure 37). In a similar fashion, a terracotta engraving commemorates those who volunteered as nurses during the influenza pandemic of 1918 (Figure 39).

One of the volunteer nurses during the 1918 influenza outbreak was Annie Maude (Nan) McKay (BA’15), who was also the first Métis and first Aboriginal woman to graduate from the University of Saskatchewan (Figure 38). She also worked as Assistant Librarian at the University Library for 44 years (1915–59).

The third of five children, Nan was born October 10, 1892, at Fort à la Corne, Northwest Territories to an English Métis family. In 1912, she won a $200 entrance scholarship, which enabled her to attend the university. Nan took a very active part in student life at the university, working on The Sheaf student newspaper, serving as a member of the Students Representative Council’s (SRC) executive committee, as secretary of the campus YWCA and as secretary of the Literary Society. She also played ice hockey for university teams. After graduating, she served the assistant librarian at the University Library until 1959. Nan McKay died on July 27, 1986, at the age of 93.

The MacKinnon Building can further be associated with its namesake. Peter MacKinnon was the eighth president of the University of Saskatchewan, serving from 1999 to 2012. The renovation and reopening of the building was undertaken under his presidency. For this and his legacy of leadership, the building rededicated in his honour in 2012.
3. Associated Objects

A number of commemorative plaques are found on the walls of the MacKinnon Building. Inside Convocation Hall, a collection of brass plaques commemorate various people, groups and events associated with the university. The older plaques honour students and faculty who were killed during the First World War and the influenza pandemic of 1918 (Figures 40 & 41).

The ‘Convocation Moose’ hung inside Convocation Hall from 1925 until 2004 (Figure 42). The moose was a gift to the University of Saskatchewan from Dr. T.A. Patrick of Yorkton. During the renovation of the MacKinnon Building, the moose was moved to the lounge in Saskatchewan Hall.

The board room on the second floor of the MacKinnon’s Building’s south wing contains portraits of all of the past Chancellors of the University of Saskatchewan. The earliest one is of Sir Frederick Haultain (Figure 44). The collection also contains a painting of former Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker.

**Figure 40.** Top to Bottom: A plaque honouring members of the Veterinary Association who gave their lives during the First World War, a plaque remembering William George Hamilton who gave his life as a student nurse during the influenza epidemic of 1918, a plaque marking the location of the first Saskatchewan Agricultural Graduates Association.

**Figure 41.** Clockwise from top left: A plaque remembering the College of Home Economics, a plaque recognizing 100 years of the U of S Alumni Association, a plaque honouring Joseph Procter’s donation of 560 hectares to the University of Saskatchewan, a plaque designating the building as a Provincial Heritage Property.
4. Supporting Documents


Culture, Youth and Recreation Saskatchewan. (2003). * Provincial Heritage Property Information Kit for the College Building*, U of S., Saskatoon.

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


Penny, C. (2003). *Commemorative Integrity Statement College Building (Uof S) National Historic Site of Canada DRAFT STATUS.*


University of Saskatchewan. *Then and Now: Welcome to the University of Saskatchewan College Building*. Brochure.

## 5. Summary of Character - Defining Elements

**Materials**
- greystone walls
- granite base
- sandstone detailing & trim
- slate floor and roof tiles, treads and landings
- copper roof flashings
- bronze and brass hardware
- steel window frames and balustrades
- cast iron radiators and balustrades
- glazed terra cotta walls
- terracotta floor tiles
- quarter sawn oak surrounds, doors, window frames

**Form**
- narrow floor plan
- low massing

**Style**
- Collegiate Gothic
- oriel and bay windows
- stone vault at main entry
- arched doors, entries, transoms and windows
- crenellation, quoins, string courses, corbels
- statuary niches
- balustrade
- stone relief sculptures
- grotesques and gargoyles

**Location**
- termination of main axis of The Bowl

**Spatial Configuration**
- double loaded corridors
- height and skylights in Convocation Hall
- wide corridors
Systems

- steel-framed windows
- fire hose carriers

Uses

- education
- administrative
- faculty club
- library
- convocation hall (ceremonies, meetings, concerts, lectures)
- museum
- art collection

Cultural & Chronological Associations

- cornerstone laid by Sir Wilfrid Laurier
- President’s Office
- ‘honour roll’
- flu epidemic engraving
- Annie Maude (Nan) McKay
- President Peter MacKinnon