John Mitchell Building
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Alternate Names
Soils and Dairy Building

Architect(s)
Frank J. Martin, Portnall and Stock Associated Architects, Regina and Saskatoon

Builders
Department of Public Works

Construction Dates
1949

Recognition
N/A

1. Statement of Significance
The John Mitchell Building was one of two structures at the University of Saskatchewan designed by Frank J. Martin of Portnall and Stock Architects, and built at the same time, between 1947 and 1949. Kirk Hall and the John Mitchell Building share many similarities. Constructed in yellow brick, John Mitchell was originally used for agricultural education & research, and was located among other buildings housing the College of Agriculture. The building was initially named the Soils and Dairy Building for its intended uses. It was renamed the John Mitchell Building in 1957 after a prominent faculty member and former student of the College of Agriculture. The building was used by the College of Agriculture until 1991, when the current Agriculture Building opened. In 1993 the building was adapted to house the Department of Drama.
The John Mitchell Building is designed in a simplified Collegiate Gothic style characteristic of the architecture of the University of Saskatchewan campus in the immediate post-war period. It has some heritage significance for this reason and for the commemorative integrity of its material, form and spatial configuration.

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

2. Character - Defining Elements

2.1 Materials

The exterior of the John Mitchell Building is faced in yellow brick, with Indiana limestone trim and a base of grey granite. Yellow brick was used at the time to denote agricultural buildings, such as the Virus Laboratory (now demolished) and Kirk Hall. The condition of the exterior of the John Mitchell Building is generally good; however, some of the brick is beginning to spall (Figure 1). The use of limestone for cut stone decoration and granite as a base was common at the university in this period. The limestone has some surface staining evident on the string courses (Figure 2). (For further information on building stones used at the U of S, refer to ‘Appendix: Stone’.)
Exterior doors and frames are oak (Figure 3). The primary entrance doors have been replaced, but their frames are original. Windows are single-glazed with painted rolled steel frames. Two sets of windows are provided for each opening; an interior set composed of two large panes and an exterior set with multiple divisions. Window hardware is painted steel and brass (Figure 5). Two spaces, formerly a dairy and a soils lab, but now used as drama studios, feature large windows composed of 8” glass block (Figure 6). Yellow brick, Indiana Limestone, granite and oak are character-defining materials (Figure 4). The painted steel-framed windows and glass block windows are also character-defining and are both in excellent commemorative condition.

On the interior, corridor walls feature brick as a wainscoting, with painted plaster walls and ceilings above. The interior brick is predominantly yellow, but as shown in Figure 8, corners are accentuated with red brick. Other interior materials include terrazzo flooring and window sills. The interior brick and terrazzo are in excellent commemorative condition, with the exception of a few instances where the terrazzo flooring has been replaced with vinyl composite tile (VCT). The studios now feature sprung flooring raised above the level of the corridor flooring. The original terrazzo flooring likely still exists underneath. The washrooms retain their character-defining wainscoting of blue and white glazed tile as do the surrounds for the drinking fountains in the hallways. This tile, shown in Figure 9, is in excellent commemorative condition. The walls of the north and south studios have glazed tile wainscoting that has been painted.

On the interior, doors and frames are in maple, and windows also have maple trim (Figure 10). Many rooms also feature a maple dado rail (Figure 11). The doors exist in varying states of commemorative integrity. Most appear to be original. Most of the original door hardware has been maintained; these brass knobs and hinges are character-defining elements.
The staircases (Figure 12) consist of metal risers, stringers and balustrade accompanied by an ‘alumilite’ handrail, with terrazzo treads and landings. These materials exist in good commemorative condition and are character-defining elements.

### 2.2 Form & Style

The John Mitchell Building is composed of three wings forming a C-shape in plan. The central wing is two and a half storeys in height, while the north and south wings vary between one and two storeys. The roofs are all flat. The front elevation is stepped both in plan and section, such that the central bay projects forward and is the tallest element of the composition. The north and south wings step down in section and back in plan. The arrangement is slightly asymmetrical, as illustrated in Figure 13.

Originally, the south side of the building served as a header house for three greenhouses, now demolished, that extended from that side of the building (Figure 14).

The form of the John Mitchell Building has good commemorative integrity, despite the removal of the greenhouses and the addition of a scenery workshop to the end of the south wing.

The John Mitchell Building was designed in a simplified Collegiate Gothic style. Simplified or ‘stripped’ versions of gothic and classical architectural styles were common during the 1940’s, both in Canada and internationally. In the immediate post-war period several buildings were designed with this approach at the University of Saskatchewan, including Kirk Hall and the original Griffiths Stadium.
The familiar characteristics of the Collegiate Gothic style are all present in this building, but are fewer in number and are simplified in detail compared with earlier examples of this style. Windows are rectangular rather than arched, but still feature cut stone trim on the front elevation. The exterior windows are composed of multiple panels, in keeping with earlier precedent, although notably the interior windows have larger panes. The principle entrances feature gothic arched openings, and lanterns, both illustrated in Figure 15. The roofs are flat, but their parapets still feature a crenelated profile. Cut stone string courses and scuppers add some detail to otherwise unadorned walls (Figure 16). There is cut limestone trim and quoining around each window.

Exterior elements forming part of the simplified Collegiate Gothic expression of the building, including crenelated parapets, cut stone decoration and window trim, multi-paned steel framed windows and arched entrances, are character defining.

In a few discrete instances, contemporary elements crop up in the design. The large square windows on the south side of the building, in the space originally used as the header house for the greenhouses, are reminiscent of early twentieth century factory buildings and warehouses (Figure 17). The glass block windows of the dairy (now studios) and soils lab, have a similarly modernist appearance (Figure 6).

Interior ornamentation is limited, but features several gothic motifs. Some of the interior paneled wooden doors feature a top rail shaped as a gothic arch (Figure 18). Stairs feature newel posts in the shape of a pointed arch (Figure 19). Also visible in Figure 19 are dark red bricks forming quoining at the corners of a yellow brick wainscot. The gothic motifs on the interior are character-defining elements.
2.3 Location

The John Mitchell Building was located as part of a precinct of buildings serving the College of Agriculture, which at the time included the School of Agriculture Building (now Kirk Hall), and the Field Husbandry and Crop Science (now Archaeology) Building (Figure 20). The location of the John Mitchell Building, near Kirk Hall and the current College of Agriculture, is therefore a character-defining element. Figure 21 illustrates the current context of the John Mitchell Building.

The John Mitchell Building is arranged on each of its floors around central double-loaded corridors matching the C-shaped configuration of its floor plans. At either end of the corridor in the central wing, stairs lead to the north and south wings, whose floors are set a half-storey lower than those of the central wing (Figure 22). This split level design is a character-defining element of the building’s spatial configuration.

The John Mitchell Building originally included several large laboratory spaces that were converted into studios when the building was adapted for use by the Drama Department in 1993. On the ground floor, the north and south wings each terminated in large, double-height rooms. The dairy in the north wing became the Greystone Theatre and a soils laboratory in the south wing became a 'black box' style theatre studio. Although these rooms are no longer laid out in their original configurations, their materiality has been substantially altered to configure them as performance spaces. However, their size, open floor plan and glass block windows are character-defining elements that have been maintained. Figure 23 shows the ground floor plan as it was configured originally, and Figure 24 shows the current configuration. The glass block windows on the north side of the south studio have been obscured by the addition of a corridor space (Figure 25), but still remain in place.

Figure 22. Longitudinal section through the John Mitchell Building showing split level configuration. The largest space is the Hangar Studio or former Bacteriology Lab. Retrieved from Facilities Management Division Asset Record System, File J-3-T.
Figure 23. The first floor plan of the John Mitchell Building showing original configuration and uses. Retrieved from Facilities Management Division Asset Record System, File J-7-T.

Figure 24. The first floor plan of the John Mitchell Building with the 1992 addition. Retrieved from Facilities Management Division Asset Record System, File 064-278-C.
On the first floor, a double height space at the front of the building contained a bacteriology lab. It is now known as the ‘Hangar Studio’ and is used for instruction in drama and dance. (The name ‘Hangar Studio’ likely derives from the former home of the Drama Department, the Hangar Building, which was demolished in 1994). This room has retained its high ceiling and tall windows, which are character-defining elements. Figure 22 illustrates the space in section. Figure 26 is a recent photograph.

2.5 Systems

The structure of the John Mitchell Building is a structural steel frame, consisting of steel joists, beams and columns on cast-in place concrete foundation walls and footings. Floors and roofs are 3” concrete slabs on steel joists. Exterior walls are non-structural and consist of 13” of brick, with a 3” layer of hollow clay tile and painted plaster. One inch of cork insulation was provided in the walls behind radiators.

The stairs leading from the basement level to the ground floor at either end of the central wing feature metal ramps that can be lowered into place over the stair treads. They were originally used to help with the moving of soils and dairy materials between floors. The ramps are still functional and exist in good commemorative condition. Figure 27 shows the ramps in the upright position.

As the building was used for research, its floor plans show several provisions that are no longer in place. These include fume cabinets, nitrogen and a centrifuge. The original plans also show that a dumbwaiter originally existed in the north wing, but this is no longer in existence.
2.6 Use(s)

The John Mitchell Building was originally named the Soils and Dairy Building after its first purpose. The building housed lecture rooms, seminar rooms and labs for education and research into the dairy and soil sciences. For the most part, the north half of the building was devoted to dairy sciences and the south half was used for soil study. The original plans, shown in Figures 23 and 24, indicate the intended uses of the rooms. Since 1993, the building has been used as the home of the Drama Department.

The dairy half of the building included two dairy labs and a physical lab located in the basement. Figures 28 and 29 show the dairy lab in use. Also in the basement were a soil vault and a dark room. The basement dairy labs are now used for costume design. On the ground floor, the two dairy labs on the west side of the central wing are now known as Studios A and B and are used for drama and dance rehearsals. The ground floor lecture room is now a design studio. The large dairy in the north wing, now the Greystone Theatre, was also used as a cheese lab and at the time of the buildings conversion was used as a smoked meat lab.

The soil science portion of the building originally included rooms for lecture, maps and references, drafting, washing and sterilization. A seminar room and a storage room that existed at the south end of the first floor have been combined into a lighting lab where students practice hanging and adjusting stage lighting. The former maps and reference room has been reclaimed as a student lounge. Office space for Student Information Systems is located in a former bacteriology lab and a lecture room. The drafting room is now used as an archival space for the drama department. On the ground floor, the large soils lab is now a black-box theatre space. Figure 30 shows this space in use as a drama performance and practice space. The former header house space is now used for storage, and the greenhouses no longer exist. Figure 31 shows the greenhouses being used. On both the ground and first floors, faculty offices are still used in this capacity.

Because the uses of the John Mitchell Building have changed substantially in their conversion from the agricultural sciences to drama, there is no heritage value in its current uses.
2.7 Cultural & Chronological Associations

The John Mitchell Building is associated with its namesake and with the College of Agriculture. John Mitchell graduated from the College of Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan in 1924 and joined the soil survey that same year. He became an instructor in the College of Agriculture in 1925 and was appointed professor and Head of the Department of Soils in 1934, positions that he held for the rest of his career. He was the first president of the Saskatchewan Agricultural Graduates Association, and was inducted into the Saskatchewan Agricultural Hall of Fame.

3. Associated Objects

A plaque mounted in the southern entrance vestibule commemorates the dedication of the building to John Mitchell (Figure 32).

Figure 31. The soils department using the greenhouses, 1962. Photo Greystone-1962, retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/

Figure 32. Plaque commemorating John Mitchell.
4. Supporting Documents


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

5. Summary of Character - Defining Elements

Materials
- yellow brick walls and wainscoting
- Indiana limestone trim and decoration
- white and blue glazed ceramic wall tile
- maple doors, frames, window surrounds and dado rails
- steel window frames
- steel and terrazzo stairs
- terrazzo flooring, and window sills
- brass fixtures

Form & Style
- asymmetrical massing
- scale
- gothic arched door rails, transoms and newel posts
- ornamented lantern
- interior and exterior quoins
- glass block windows
- windows with multiple lites
- uneven roof plane
- assymetry
- limestone string courses
- scuppers
- crenellated parapet

Location
- University of Saskatchewan
- Part of ‘Agricultural Precinct’

Spatial Configuration
- double loaded corridors
- large open lab spaces
- split level

Systems
- steel structure
- fold-up ramps

Uses
- dairy research
- milk, cream and cheese production
- soils research
- agricultural education
- laboratories

Cultural & Chronological Associations
- John Mitchell
- College of Agriculture