

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
GEOGRAPHY BUILDING
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

22 AUGUST 2017

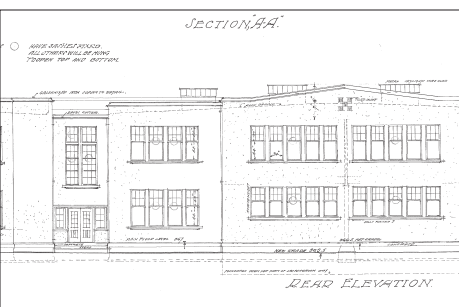


Left Math Building; Right: Math Annex

CONTENTS

CHRONOLOGY	3
INTRODUCTION	4
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE GEOGRAPHY BUILDING	8

CHRONOLOGY



1923 Drawings prepared by the Public Works Department for the construction of the Semi-permanent Buildings on the new UBC campus on Point Grey near Vancouver, including the Applied Science Building (now the Geography Building).



1924-5 Construction of the Geography Building (originally the Applied Science Building), part of the Semi-permanent Buildings on campus alongside the permanent Chemistry Building (originally the Science Building, completed in 1923) and the Main Library (now the centre section of the Barber Learning Centre, completed in 1925).



1927 Semi-permanent Building cluster:
 Front left: Math Annex (originally the Agriculture Building)
 Centre right: Math Building (originally the Arts Building)
 Far right: Old Auditorium (originally Auditorium)
Far left: Geography Building (originally the Applied Science Building)
 (Out of picture frame, on right: Administration Building)
 (Out of picture frame on left: Powerhouse and Old Fire Hall)



1966 Geography Building (originally the Applied Science Building) forming part of established block of semi-permanent buildings. Behind (to the south) is the Leonard S.Klinck Building, originally built in 1948 as the new Applied Science Building.



1973 Geography Building as an established presence on West Mall with traditional planting and vine-covered exterior walls.



2017 Geography Building – East Facade, displaying 2013-2014 additions and alterations, including a new exterior paint scheme using colour heritage palette, as part of a major retrofit, including drainage upgrade, interior repairs, and landscape improvements.



Geography Building, West Mall entrance

INTRODUCTION

NOMENCLATURE

The Geography Building was originally the Applied Science Building.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Geography Building, completed in 1925, is among the earliest of buildings on campus, and part of the cluster termed the Semi-permanent Buildings in the blocks between Main and West Malls, and Memorial and Agricultural Roads. The Semi-permanent cluster was conceived as temporary academic space, to be replaced in relatively short order with buildings of stature equal to the Science Building (now Chemistry Building) and the Main Library (now the centre block of the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre) when provincial funds were forthcoming. Designed in 1923 by the province's Department of Public Works, the buildings are lacking expensive stone detailing and lofty arch-work that characterized the permanent buildings designed by the campus architects Sharp & Thompson, and which were completed in the same first years of the campus. That the replacement of the Semi-permanent buildings – including the Geography Building – did not come to pass is an important reflection not only on the university's history of capital funding, but also the enduring value of these well-constructed and serviceable buildings.

SITING

Along with the building now called the Math Annex, the Geography Building helped form the presence of Agricultural Road, the southern boundary of Library Garden, which historically and currently serves as the central open space on campus, incorporating a section of Main Mall. With the Old Auditorium Building, the Geography Building defines the western edge of the early campus along West Mall.

Geography Building

Math Annex



The Geography Building is an integral component to the early layout of the university as an ordered, open place for unencumbered thought. Early westward-looking images of the building and other buildings of the Semi-permanent cluster memorably show the backdrop of first and second growth coastal forest, illustrating one key early conception of the campus as a place set in its splendid isolation of a forest clearing.

The campus has changed around the Geography Building in the 94 years since its construction. From the 1920s through to the 1980s, the Geography Building was a stable, substantial fixture on West Mall as the street became lined with a collection of newer buildings, even more temporary structures, including relocated army huts re-purposed as classroom, laboratory and academic office spaces following World War II, and the annexes of the 1960s and '70s for a similar variety of uses.



Army Huts along West Mall, 1947



Left: West Mall Annex, constructed 1969
Right: Ponderosa Annex, constructed 1971

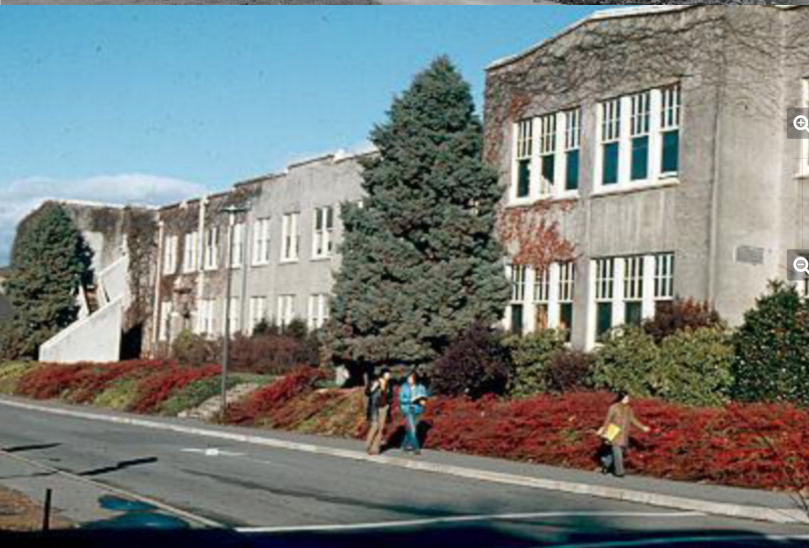
DESIGN

The design of the Semi-permanent cluster, including the Geography Building, was the work of the provincial Department of Public Works, the branch of the provincial government given the task of building the provincial infrastructure. The department replaced the Lands and Works Department in 1908 with the enactment of the Department of Public Works Act (SBC 1908, c. 41). Its mandate included construction and maintenance of government offices and buildings, public highways, bridges, wharves, river-bank protection, and maintenance of ferry and steamboat services. In 1947 the work of the department was divided into district offices, an Architect's Branch, Accounting Branch, Engineering Branch, and Equipment Branch. The department was also responsible for boiler inspection and electrical energy inspection.

The design of each building is notable for restrained detailing in vaguely Gothic-inspired details then popular in the English-speaking world for institutions of higher learning, and which refer to the grander nearby permanent buildings – the Main Library and the Science Building (as they were originally called). Minor flourishes around arched main exterior doors and porches come across as buildings with supporting roles in sympathy with the loftier permanent structures.

MATERIALS

The material palette of the building is typical for the Semi-permanent cluster: rough-cast stucco cladding, ganged or paired wood window openings with stucco jamb and head reveals and a projecting wood sill (perhaps flashed from the beginning), double-hung wood sash, and slightly ornamented roof parapet silhouettes, and lightly ornamented doorways, usually inset within arched openings in the building face.



Left Top: Applied Science Building (now Geography Building) behind Agriculture Building (now Math Annex), 1927 (UBC 1.1/706)
 Middle: East Facade, 1948 (UB 24.1/115)
 Bottom: West Mall facade from the south, c. 1970s (UBC 41.1/1558-1)
 Right Top: Newly constructed Applied Science Building (now Geography Building) (UBC 1.1/685)
 Middle: Lecture Room, 1932 (UBC 1.1/1738)
 Bottom: East Facade, with vine-covered wing including Lecture Room, c. 1970s (UBC 41.1/1558-2)



Geography Building east facade, 2017

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE GEOGRAPHY BUILDING

DESCRIPTION

The Geography Building is the simple stuccoed two-storey building on West Mall in the block of academic buildings between Agricultural Road and Memorial Road, and West and Main Malls. The building is situated immediately west of the Math Building and Math Annex.

VALUES

As one of the very earliest buildings on campus, the Geography Building is valued for its siting and grounds, its provisional stature (it is one of the group of early buildings termed the Semi-permanent Buildings), and its enduring presence (together with the Math Building, Math Annex, Old Administration Building and Auditorium) – all of which contribute to the building being a physical encounter with the early UBC campus and, by extension, its foundational culture at the heart of the ever-developing campus.

The Geography Building is a significant component of the early campus, featured in early photographic imagery that portray the campus as a manicured ideal place of open perspective set in a forest clearing. As part of those seminal cultural images of the university, the Geography Building is a key component to the university's cultural identity.

A whiff of the early 20th Century character can be seen in the foundation planting around the building and the terraces both east and west of the building that helped negotiate level ground for simple structures within the general slope down from Main Mall to West Mall.

Designed and built in two years, the building is valuable as an example of the standard work of the 1920s by the province's Department of Public Works, the provincial department charged with building infrastructure throughout the province. The economy of the form and detailing convey the modest financial circumstances surrounding the university's beginnings. The building's public department design is evidence of the university being a fundamentally provincial initiative, subject to the financial constraints of the provincial budget.

The provisional nature of the building (it was part of the Semi-permanent cluster) is an important example of the ad-hoc development of the early campus as funds and resources could be obtained – a practice most famously illustrated by the re-purposing of army huts for use as classrooms, offices and laboratories in the 1940s. That the building changed from being space for the Applied Sciences indicates both the institutional history of making-do as the campus grew and required more academic space, and the burgeoning Applied Science curriculum since 1925.

The Geography Building is valuable as a physical record of the campus as it was first built. The simply-planned and detailed durable wood frame construction has provided serviceable economical classrooms, offices and lecture hall in a traditional collegiate atmosphere for almost 100 years. The later, grander constructions around them only serve to underscore the modest beginnings of the university as seen in these buildings.

The building is also important as a record of re-purposing over decades, with its physical modifications being evidence of the university's culture of re-use of their physical plant.

That the building remains a strong presence on West Mall is an important marker of the development of the campus at its centre, and of West Mall in particular. The mall has gone from being lined with temporary and/or insubstantial structures to the address of significant buildings of central importance to the campus.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

Site

- Spatial arrangement of the Semi-permanent Buildings
- Foundation planting
- Vines trained over entrances and up stucco walls
- Address on West Mall
- Terraces east and west of the building

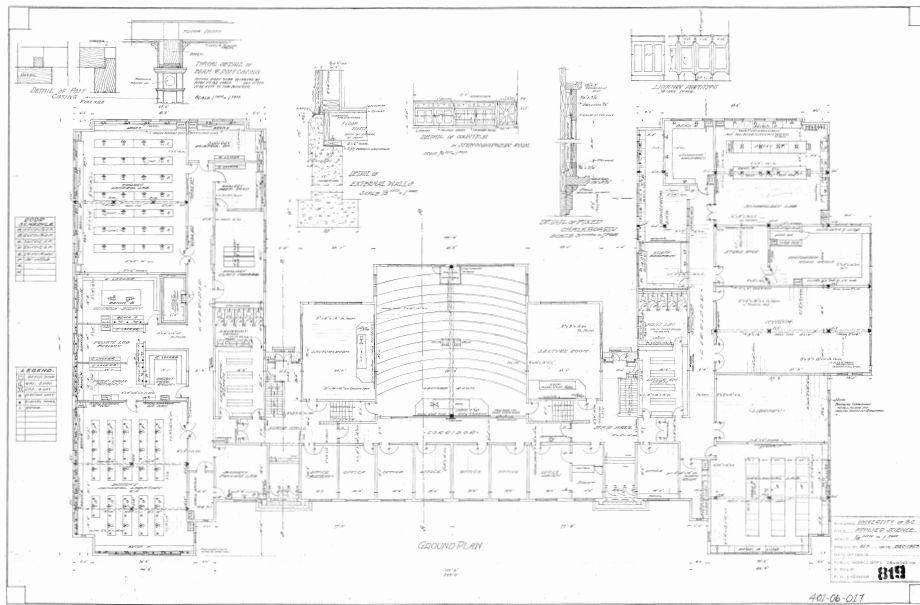


Building

- Intangible: Present and past names of the building, and reference to it being part of the Semi-permanent Building cluster
- Wood frame construction
- Symmetrical horizontal form with central axis perpendicular to West Mall axis
- Main Entrance facing West Mall
- Simple decorative flourishes of building entrances
 - Minor decorative work above arched openings



- Stepped faux-buttressing
- Shallow flat-arched openings
- Glazed wood doors, and transom lites
- Shallow covered porches
- Stucco cladding with cavity (created by metal lath over strapping)
- Original wood windows
- Remnants of the original building form
- Parapet with lightly crenellated form, and its metal flashing
- Rain water scuppers, leader boxes, leaders
- Remnants of original interior spaces and finishes
- Generic naturally-lit classrooms and offices



Top: South facade
Middle: East Facade central bay
Bottom: Southeast corner

Right:
Top: Main Floor Plan, 1925
Bottom: Elevations, section, 1925

