

WESTERN STATE NORMAL SCHOOL, NORTH HALL
Western State Normal School Historic District
Western Michigan University, bounded by Stadium, Oliver and Davis
streets
Kalamazoo
Kalamazoo County
Michigan

HABS MI-448-B
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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WESTERN STATE NORMAL SCHOOL, NORTH HALL

HABS No. MI-448-B

Location: North Hall is located on Oakland Drive, Western Michigan University campus, Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo County, Michigan (refer to attached maps).

The coordinates for building are approximately 42.287239,-85.597572 and were obtained through Google Maps in August, 2013 using WGS 84. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Significance: North Hall (1925) is the third of the four buildings that were built on the Prospect Hill, the original campus of Western State Normal School (the present-day Western Michigan University). It was designed by the architectural firm of Turner & Thebaud. It was originally built as the school's main library, and as such, was a center of student academic life on campus until a new library was built in 1958. Architecturally, the building was originally characterized by a dramatic two-story reading room with a monumental fireplace on its north wall. The room provided dramatic views of Kalamazoo. In addition the building featured elegant interior detailing in the reading room, entry lobby and corridors, in contrast to the very restrained decoration in other east campus structures.

Description: North Hall at Western Michigan University is a three-story red brick structure with limestone trim and a shallow sloped membrane roof. It is approximately 154 feet long by 93 feet wide with a gross area of approximately 36,000 square feet. It forms the north edge of the quadrangle of buildings on Prospect Hill.

The building's style is an eclectic blend of Neoclassical and Georgian influences that reflect the other buildings in the area, along with Italian Renaissance detailing at the front entrance. The building's windows are of three types: non-original aluminum triple hung, wood double hung, and wood hopper windows.

Previous buildings built on Prospect Hill had somewhat restrained interior design, even at entrances, lobbies, and public spaces, with rooms and details that were simple and practical. However, the interior of North Hall is more elegant and refined, with richer materials and dramatic spaces.

Users originally entered the building on the south elevation into a large first floor lobby with limestone columns supporting a coffered plaster ceiling with plaster crown moldings and miniature dentils. A marble stairway leading to the second floor and basement was located at the west side of the lobby, with elegant curved wood handrails, decorative balusters, and ornamental cast iron newel posts. The lobby led to a two story reading room with a vaulted ceiling and tall windows on three sides that extended the whole

length of the north side of the building. In the center of the reading room's north wall was a massive limestone fireplace.

These spaces and details remain, but have been obscured or diminished by modifications to the building: The lobby has been partitioned to create new spaces, and the two-story reading room has received an added intermediate floor to increase floor area in the building, diminishing a once dramatic space. The lower level of this new space has been partitioned into several offices and conference spaces, leaving no sense of its original spatial character. The fireplace remains intact at this level in an office, looking oddly out of scale in the small room. The upper half level of the former reading room is now part of the second floor described below and is accessed by a stairway in the southeast corner of the space. The southwest corner of this floor appears to be relatively unchanged in plan, but spaces there have received dropped acoustical ceilings. The southeast corner of the floor is contains the library stacks, described separately below.

Dates for these modifications are not available, however, it is speculated that they occurred after the library moved out of the building in 1958.

At the second floor, the original lobby and much of its ornamental plaster still exists, however the non-original enclosure of the stairway obscures its decorative character. In addition, an acoustical lay-in ceiling covers the original coffered plaster ceiling.

The new upper level of the former reading room, created by addition of the new intermediate floor is now part of the second floor, and is accessed from the lobby. The upper level of the reading room remains as a large, mostly open space, although some partitioned spaces have been added at the west end. A plaster or drywall dropped ceiling has been installed at the west half of the space, covering some detailing and truncating the vaults over the windows. Most other interior detailing remains in this space.

As with the first floor, the southwest corner of this floor appears to retain the original plan configuration, but with non-original dropped acoustical ceilings. Here too, the southeast corner of the floor is contains the library stacks, described below.

At the basement the stairway empties into a corridor that appears to be original. To the North of the corridor is a large open room with opaque glass between the corridor and the room. This space is partitioned into offices at the west end. These spaces were not accessible during this assessment, so it is not clear if these were original or added at a later date.

Again, the southwest corner of this floor appears to retain much of its original plan configuration, but with non-original dropped acoustical ceilings. Here too, the southeast corner of the floor is contains the library stacks, described below.

The library stacks are located in the southeast corner of the building. This is a three-story space that contains a six-level self-supporting cast iron or steel library stacks system that provides shelving for books as well as a floor and stair system that is independent of the building's superstructure. It is believed that this storage system is original to the building.

History: The need for a separate school library at the school was apparent as early as 1915 when the school received an appropriation for a library, along with three other buildings. By that time university's 20,000 book collection had outgrown its home in the administration building. However the onset of World War I halted the project. In 1921 the project was again funded, and building was completed in 1925. Its Neo Classical/Georgian Style exterior is similar to previous Prospect Hill buildings, however its interior is more elegant than the other buildings, with dramatic spaces and refined finishes.

The building served as the university's library until the Waldo Library was built in 1958. It was subsequently used by the university's College of Business, and housed its finance, commercial law, marketing, academic advising, college administration functions, as well as the psychology department. After the library moved to new facilities, the building's interior was significantly modified, and the character of some of its important interior spaces was significantly diminished.

In 1990 the College of Business moved out of the building. Since then the building has been used for storage of archives and as a home to the Department of Industrial Design.

Historian: Gregory A. Jones, AIA

Project Information: In 2013-14, documentation of the Western State Normal School was sponsored by Western Michigan University and undertaken by HopkinsBurns Design Studio, Ann Arbor, Michigan, in consultation with the Historic American Building Survey, Catherine C. Lavoie, Chief. The field measurements were taken by Eugene C. Hopkins, FAIA, Principal; Gregory A. Jones, AIA; Evan Winterson Hall, Assoc. AIA; and David B. Rochlen, Assoc. AIA, and the drawings produced by David B. Rochlen, Assoc. AIA; Evan Winterson Hall, Assoc. AIA; Jessica M. Green, Assoc. AIA; and Lisa Heine. Dietrich G. Floeter took the large format photographs and Gregory A. Jones, AIA served as the project historian.