

University of Wyoming Campus, Library
(University of Wyoming Campus, Aven Nelson Memorial Building)
University of Wyoming Campus
East of Ninth Street and North of Ivinson Avenue
Laramie
Albany County
Wyoming

HABS No. WY-116-A

HABS
WYO
1-LARAM,
3A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

**Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287**

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING CAMPUS, LIBRARY
(University of Wyoming Campus, Aven Nelson Memorial Building)

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: East of Ninth Street and north of Ivinson Avenue on the University of Wyoming campus, in the City of Laramie, Albany County, Wyoming.

USGS Laramie, Wyoming Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
Zone 13, 451100m E, 4573450m N

Present Owner: University of Wyoming

Present Use: The building houses the following University departments and offices: Botany Department, Rocky Mountain Herbarium (regional botanical specimen collection), and Wilhelm G. Solheim Mycological Herbarium.

Significance: The University of Wyoming Library, erected in 1923, is historically important for its former role as the main repository for the institution's book collection, as its primary student research facility, and as the home of the Law School and several academic departments during the formative years of the University. It contributed directly to the advancement of academic quality of the University for 35 years. The building is also an important example of American university architecture, which reflects established ideals of formalism, historicism, and functionalism. It is a noteworthy example of monumental public architecture expressive of the Neo-Classical and Renaissance Revival styles, and represents the work of a prominent local architect (Wilbur A. Hitchcock) who produced numerous designs for buildings in Laramie, both on and off the campus.

Historian: Jason D. Marmor, Mariah Associates, Inc., 605 Skyline Drive, Laramie, Wyoming 82070.

II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Historical Context

The Aven Nelson Memorial Building on the University of Wyoming (UW) campus in Laramie represents the institution's first original building specifically erected to house its book collection. It served in this capacity as the Library building for a 35 year span, from 1923 to 1958. The structure was the fourteenth building erected on the campus, and it is now the seventh oldest extant building. It also represents the first large improvement on the UW campus made possible by oil royalties, an important source of income which enabled the University to greatly expand its physical facilities beginning in the early 1920s.

The University of Wyoming was founded in 1886, and initially occupied a solitary building erected between 1887 and 1890. For the next 36 years, University Hall, or Old Main as it came to be called, housed the University library as well as classrooms, laboratories, administrative offices, an auditorium, and, from 1892 to 1902, the Rocky Mountain Herbarium (a regional botanical specimen collection assembled by professor Aven Nelson). The library was initially installed on the second floor of the north wing of Old Main. The library began with a donation from Henry Clay of approximately 300 books, only a fraction of which were suitable for collegiate use. Aven Nelson, one of the original seven member faculty, served as the University's first librarian, and catalogued its books in a notebook (Clough 1965:29). By 1891, the collection had grown to 2,100 volumes, and Professor Justus Soule took over the duty of librarian and established use of the Dewey decimal classification system (Clough 1965:42). As of 1898, another of UW's pioneer faculty, Dr. Grace Hebard, assumed the duties of librarian (Clough 1965:59).

By 1903, the library consisted of 16,000 bound volumes as well as several thousand unbound bulletins and reports on scientific and agricultural subjects (University of Wyoming 1903:32-33). In 1905, the book collection had grown enough to require its partial relocation to the basement of Old Main due to the increased weight placed on the floors of that building (Clough 1965:70). By 1913, the collection had almost doubled in size with over 30,000 bound volumes occupying the first floor and basement of the north wing of Old Main (University of Wyoming 1913:29). In 1914, University President Clyde A. Duniway declared the need for a separate library building to house the steadily growing library, which exceeded 35,000 volumes. He outlined the unsatisfactory conditions in Old Main, where the valuable collection "has had to be kept in rooms totally inadequate, very inconvenient, and often dangerous. In the same building there are laboratories which must use gas and electric power with constant danger of conflagration. The lack of modern electrical installation constitutes a menace to the library as well as to other departments accommodated in the main building. Just as soon as possible a separate library building of fireproof construction should be obtained" (University of Wyoming 1914a:33, 1914b:29). The following year Duniway emphatically restated his plea for a new Library building:

In the first place, the University needs a Library building. A collection of books numbering over 36,000 volumes is housed in quarters hardly sufficient for one-third of that amount. Crowds of students frequently line the walls of the small reading room because there are not seats enough at the tables for their accommodation. The Liberal Arts building [Old Main], in which the library is located, is not fire-proof, so that the valuable collection of books is in constant danger of destruction (University of Wyoming 1915:14).

In 1916, the book collection totaled over 37,000 volumes (University of Wyoming 1916a:39). President Duniway repeated his urgent recommendation for a new library facility capable of further expansion to keep pace with the anticipated continued growth of the institution, and suggested that plans for such a building be selected on the basis of an architectural competition. Recognizing the possibility that funding might not allow immediate realization of such plans, Duniway argued that these preliminary steps would facilitate the process. The Board of Trustees agreed, and a competition for the design of a new University library was arranged. The plans were to be judged in anonymity at the semiannual Board meeting in December 1916 (University of Wyoming 1916b:32-33).

In the meantime, the library housed in Old Main continued to grow. In 1917, the collection encompassed over 39,000 bound volumes; the following year another 2,000 volumes were added (University of Wyoming 1917a:37, 1918a:25). Temporary relief for the congestion in the library was afforded in 1917 by the construction of a mezzanine floor, which provided a 24 x 30 foot reading room and more than doubled the previous space for patrons (University of Wyoming 1916b:32, 1917b:3).

The results of the design competition for a new Library building were presented in the President's Report of 1917. The winning entry was submitted by Wilbur A. Hitchcock, Assistant Professor of Engineering at UW. The entry by William Dubois, whose earlier works (e.g., Merica and Hoyt Halls) already stood on the campus, was judged in second place. An alternative design by Rock Springs, Wyoming, architect Daniel D. Spani placed third in the contest (University of Wyoming 1917b:14). However, as the University anticipated the effects of American involvement in the First World War, including reduced enrollment, as well as inflated costs for materials and labor, large construction projects on the University campus were postponed, including the proposed new Library building (University of Wyoming 1917b:14).

President Duniway left the University before his hopes for a new Library building could be realized; he was replaced by Aven Nelson, formerly Professor of Botany and a member of the original (1887) faculty. Addressing the University's building needs, Nelson acknowledged the priority of erecting a new Library building, but suggested that it be deferred until a modern new heating plant could first be built to replace the original, inadequate plant (erected in 1893). In making this recommendation, Nelson relied upon the

advice of Professor Elmer G. Hoeffler of the College of Engineering, who asserted that the old power plant would be overtaxed if another large building were added (University of Wyoming 1918b:35).

In 1919, the collection had expanded to over 43,000 volumes (University of Wyoming 1919a:22). With the world war finally over, President Nelson in his 1919 annual report reassessed the institution's building needs. With regard to the library, he acknowledged the disappointment felt by students and faculty over the long delay in proceeding with construction of the proposed new building. Listing the necessary attributes of a new library building, including fireproof construction, large size to allow future expansion, and an aesthetic quality of "quiet, substantial elegance" appropriate to such an important edifice, Nelson projected a cost of one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand dollars--a significant sum at the time (University of Wyoming 1919b:16). A greater obstacle than cost, however, was the unfulfilled need to construct a new central power plant to generate sufficient steam heat for all present and future campus buildings (University of Wyoming 1919b:15). The Library was only one of several major building projects which were postponed until more funding could be secured: a new Gymnasium Armory, an additional dorm unit (addition to Hoyt Hall), an Engineering Building, and a greenhouse (University of Wyoming 1920b:18-19).

The book collection in Old Main numbered approximately 45,000 volumes in 1920 (University of Wyoming 1920a:21). In his 1920 report to the Board of Trustees, President Nelson made an impassioned plea for immediate action with respect to UW's critical building needs, including a new library. Citing the same concerns for utility and safety of the valuable collection (estimated to be worth \$300,000 at the time) as well as the need for a facility in keeping with the rigorous demands of a fast growing and competitive university, Nelson stated the obvious solution: "The erection of a library ought to go forward at once" (University of Wyoming 1920b:36; Clough 1965:107).

The State Legislature responded favorably to Nelson's plea for action and passed legislation which allocated revenues derived from the state's growing oil industry towards capital improvements on the University. The new Library was to be funded by new income generated under the Oil and Gas Leasing Act of 1920. This Act provided states with 37.5% of royalties paid by oil companies for production from leased federal lands. The 1921 State Legislature heeded the University's request for increased support by providing 10% of the first two million dollars from royalties in any one year, up to \$375,000, for the University building fund, after which 5% was to go into the permanent University fund (Clough 1965:108). With the promise of increased funding from oil royalties, President Nelson in 1921 requested that \$200,000 be allocated for construction of a library building, and placed it third in priority to a heating plant and women's dormitory unit (University of Wyoming 1921b:5).

Buoyed by the 1921 State Legislature's provision of a significant share of oil royalty revenues for a University building program, a grateful President Nelson outlined a schedule to expedite erection of the new Library. Final plans were to be submitted to the Board for its quarterly meeting in March of 1922, bids for construction were to be reviewed by the Board in a special meeting in late April, and ground was to be broken in early June. The new Library was to be completed by July 1, 1923, and occupied by the first of September (University of Wyoming 1922:12-13). Nelson considered a new library building to be a milestone in the physical development of the campus: "No other building in recent years compares with it in its academic significance and possibly years will elapse before an undertaking equal in importance will come before the Board of Trustees" (University of Wyoming 1922:14).

To refine the Library design, Professor Hitchcock requested a leave of absence from his University duties in order to study distant examples of library architecture. The University librarian, Miss Reba Davis, took an active interest and role in the design process and was permitted to accompany Hitchcock to aid in determining the most modern and efficient interior arrangement for the new building. President Nelson recommended that the Board of Trustees authorize leaves of absence and travel expenses to expedite completion of the Library plans. Hitchcock also requested that the Board consider the handling of compensation for his architectural services, either by his appointment as salaried University Architect, or by payment of a percentage fee (University of Wyoming 1922:9-10, 17).

Hitchcock's deliberate approach to design was responsible for the ultimate success of the new Library. He recognized the special problems inherent in buildings of this type, and his method of careful field study of successful examples of institutional libraries was recognized by experts as an essential prerequisite to designing such structures (Klauder and Wise 1929:70). Such preliminary investigation highlighted the fundamental difference between a public library and a university library - the former adapted primarily to circulation and the latter adapted primarily to study. Furthermore, the special needs and problems of a university or college library, such as the capability for housing an expanding collection, and availability of internal study space, were important design criteria which Hitchcock apparently took heed of (Klauder and Wise 1929:70).

Hitchcock's ultimate design reflected an understanding of the fundamental importance of the institutional library, which has been called "the intellectual central power plant of the college or university" (Klauder and Wise 1929:70). The plans he drafted depicted a monumental, rectangular, three story building combining elements of the Neo-Classical Revival and the Second Renaissance Revival Styles (Whiffen 1992:154, 167). These stylistic motifs were commonly applied to college architecture, conveying qualities of formality, tradition, and permanence. As described by authorities on the subject of college architecture, "the classic dignity of symmetrical motifs [characteristic of formal styles including Classical and Renaissance] has a stateliness and repose enhanced by a nearly

uniform skyline, by a repetition of parts, an exact spacing of windows, an emphasis of horizontal lines and the level bases or terraces upon which in most cases buildings in this style are set" (Klauder and Wise 1929:44). Hitchcock's design embodied all of these elements. The building also repeated the Neo-Classical imagery expressed by two nearby campus buildings, the Normal School Building, and the Agriculture Building.

In addition to and more important than its visual symbolism, the new building would provide completely modern facilities adapted to the unique needs of a library, including fireproof construction, air filtration for dust control, a well-lighted reading room, and plentiful stack shelving space for the ever-growing book collection.

With respect to the location of the new Library, President Nelson suggested that it be placed in the area directly south of the Agriculture Building, near the western edge of the campus. He acknowledged that this location would be contrary to the common placement of such facilities in a more central location on the college campus, but argued that it would be close to the three main avenues of approach to the campus, namely University Avenue, the corner of Ninth Street and Iverson Avenue, and Tenth Street. In addition, the proposed location would be close to the existing instructional buildings. Nelson suggested that the new Library be faced to the south rather than the west, placing it perpendicular to nearby Old Main and the Agriculture Building, the chief advantage being that it would open onto the open landscaped area comprising the southwestern corner of campus which was dedicated to remain as parkland (University of Wyoming 1922:15). As is evident today, President Nelson's suggestions were explicitly followed (Figure 1).

The building contract was awarded to J.A. Johnson, a general contractor from Casper, Wyoming, and construction commenced in the summer of 1922 (University of Wyoming 1924a; *Laramie Daily Boomerang* 1923). The cornerstone, which bore the inscription "Reading Maketh A Full Man" (borrowed from Francis Bacon's Essays [No. 50], "Of Studies"), was laid amid commencement festivities on June 14, 1922, where the event was lauded as "the culmination of eight years of hopes" (Clough 1965:112328). By August 1923, construction was virtually finished, with workmen applying the final cosmetic touches on the building and cleaning up around the site (*Laramie Daily Boomerang* 1923).

The completed building provided modern and spacious accommodations for the library and several academic departments including English, history, ancient languages, and the School of Law with its own specialized library. The structure contained three floors, including a semisubterranean basement, and two floors above, denoted as first and second. In plan, it was generally rectangular, but consisted of a main east-west oriented rectangular core (approximately 86.5 feet long by 66 feet wide), with protruding wings at the east and west ends of the building. These end wings are about 27 feet wide and 79 feet long. The building was of fully fireproof construction, with a steel frame, concrete footings and basement walls, and brick walls with stone trim (Bowes and Hart 1950:77, 79).

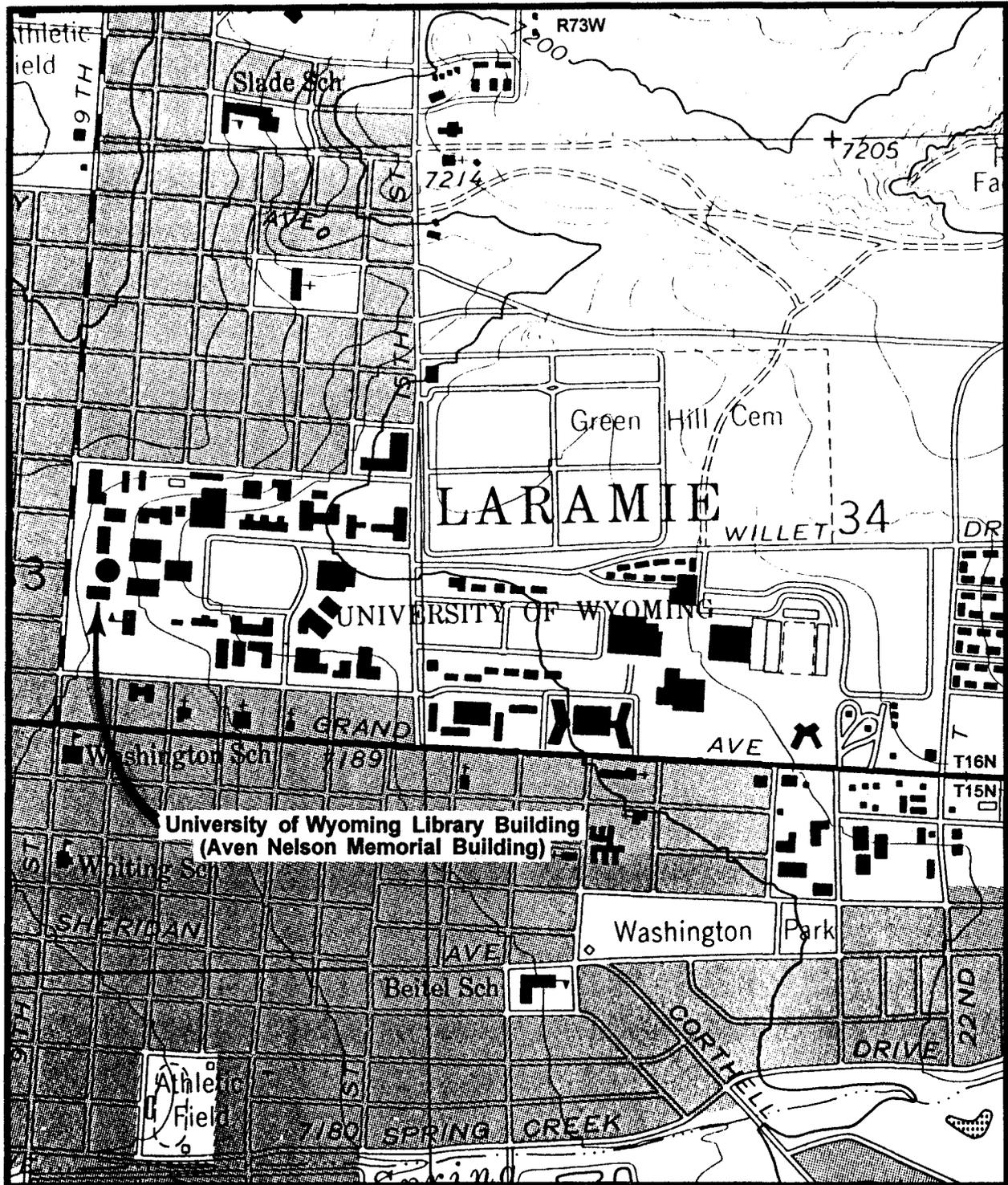


Figure 1 Location of the University of Wyoming Library Building (Aven Nelson Memorial Building), on the University of Wyoming Campus, Laramie, Albany County, Wyoming.

The central portion of the basement level contained the south (main) and north entrances, inside which were vestibules and corridors leading to book stacks, document storage, and restrooms. The west end of the basement contained four English classrooms and two offices; the east end provided space for staff, shipping and storage, and workrooms used by the library staff. The basement level also contained a room to house the ventilating and air filtration machinery. A third outside entry to the building was located in the center of the west side, facing Ninth Street. No entry was provided on the east end of the building. The first floor served as the main library space and contained stack and bibliography areas, and an approximately 86.5 foot long x 34 foot wide reading room with a two story ceiling, occupying the southern half of the central portion of the building. Banks of windows on the south facade of the building provided more than ample sunlight for interior daytime illumination of the reading room. Hitchcock had originally planned to locate the reading room on the north side of the building, where indirect natural illumination would be adequate, but he was overruled by the Board of Trustees, who believed the south side would be better (Clinton Hitchcock, personal communication, March 24, 1994). The west end of the first floor contained a room for the accession catalog, a stairwell, and librarian's offices and workrooms. The east end wing contained a periodicals area, a stairwell to access the upper floor, and in the northwestern corner, a solitary history classroom. The second, or uppermost, floor was partially taken up by the vertical continuation of the reading room ceiling. The remainder of this floor was divided into rooms for the Law School, including three law lecture rooms, a law library, and debate room, along with the "Wyoming" (later Hebard) Room and a faculty room (Hitchcock 1922). An elevator in the northwestern portion of the building served all three floors.

The interior finish of the library building was tastefully executed. It featured "beautifully beamed ceilings [finished] in ornamental plaster," and was equipped with the finest and most modern book stacks and furniture (University of Wyoming 1923a:22). The oak trim was described as "a beautiful silver-gray," produced by rubbing white lead into the grain of the wood followed by polishing. The reading room, in particular, was the object of praise, being called "a striking feature that lends inexpressible charm to the whole." Its high ceiling and "springy battleship linoleum" floor, along with its custom designed hanging lamps manufactured in Denver, contributed to the beauty and utility of the room (*Laramie Republican-Boomerang* 1924a). Fluted pilasters at intervals around the reading room's interior walls continued the classical motif on the building's exterior. The special tables and reference cases to furnish the library were designed by Hitchcock to harmonize with the building's architectural symbolism; the tables included legs resembling miniature Classical columns (Hitchcock 1923). Six tier stacks for the book collection were provided by Sned and Company, of Jersey City, New Jersey (Davis 1924:424; Sned and Company 1923).

Under the guidance of librarian Davis, the transfer of approximately 55,000 books and other materials was swiftly accomplished with the aid of students. Departmental libraries

dispersed in various buildings on campus were relocated to the new main Library. The move, which took only a few days, was described as "a triumph of efficiency" (Clough 1965:119; Davis 1924:423-424). At the same time, the Law School and other departments made the transition into the new building. Soon after its completion, the modern new Library building was hailed as "a fitting memorial of the administration of Dr. Aven Nelson" (University of Wyoming 1925:9).

The new Library was not formally dedicated until the spring of 1924. A newspaper article a day before the event stressed the importance of the new facility to all Wyoming residents, and urged a large turnout to mark the occasion (*Laramie Republican-Boomerang* 1924a). The dedication was performed on the afternoon of Friday, March 14, in the expansive first floor reading room. Judge V.J. Tidball delivered the principal address, and brief speeches were also made by Dr. Aven Nelson, President Emeritus under whose administration construction of the Library was begun; Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard, long-time faculty member, UW historian, and former UW librarian; and Mrs. Katherine Morton, state superintendent of public instruction and Board of Trustees member. Musical performances for the dedication ceremony included a violin solo by Miss Daisy Wharton and a vocal rendition by George Edwin Knapp. The acclaimed 28 member Lyman band, under the direction of Clarence F. Gates, also played for the crowd (*Laramie Republican-Boomerang* 1924b, 1924c).

One room of the new Library was devoted to housing the Wyoming history collection, much of which had been acquired by Dr. Grace Hebard. Reba Davis, UW librarian, recommended that the room be officially designated the "Hebard Room" in honor of the distinguished professor and former librarian. Outgoing president Aven Nelson heartily endorsed the idea (University of Wyoming 1922:76). The Hebard Collection later included historical artifacts as well as books and manuscripts (Clough 1965:150-151).

For the next 35 years, the stately Library building was heavily used by the student body, which grew from 740 resident students in 1923 to approximately 4,500 in 1958 despite enrollment decreases resulting from the Great Depression and World War II, (University of Wyoming 1923b:9, 1958:393). During this same period, the book collection quadrupled in size. When the new Library opened in the fall of 1924, it boasted 55,000 bound volumes as well as pamphlets, and was growing at a rate of about 3,000 new volumes per year (University of Wyoming 1924b:25-26). By 1958, when construction of a new library was under way, the book collection had swelled to about 220,000 "carefully selected" volumes and was expanding by approximately 10,000 volumes annually (University of Wyoming 1958:56).

By the late 1940s, the University library was increasingly hampered by lack of space, as well as by an overtaxed staff (Clough 1965:257). By then, it became apparent that a new, larger, and more modern facility would be necessary. Exacerbating the situation was the allocation

of space in the building to other uses. The Law School, which was closed briefly during World War II, reopened in 1945 and took up much needed space on the top floor of the Library (Clough 1965:214, 261).

By 1950, the situation had reached a critical point, and first steps were taken to secure a new building. At that time, the library contained approximately 150,000 volumes, and the increasing postwar enrollment was putting a severe strain on study space as well as staffing. In 1950, a library planning committee was established, and like Hitchcock three decades earlier, began anew the process of examining contemporary examples of successful libraries and developing conceptual plans (Clough 1965:273). Without the assurance of funding, plans for a new library building were drafted by Frederick H. Porter and R. Walter Bradley of Cheyenne, in collaboration with the Laramie architectural team of Clinton and Eliot Hitchcock, sons of the late Wilbur Hitchcock. The projected cost of the new library was \$1,400,000 (Clough 1965:277). Temporary relief came with the completion of a new Law School building in the summer of 1953 (also designed by the Hitchcock brothers), which allowed the library to expand onto the portion of the third floor which formerly housed the Law Library (University of Wyoming 1955:45; Clough 1965:281).

Plans for a new library building continued to go forward, and in 1953, William Robertson Coe of New York provided a generous matching donation toward construction of a new library (Clough 1965:282-283). Construction on the new building finally began in 1956, and for a time the American Studies program, also endowed by Coe, was lodged in the vacated rooms in the old Library building formerly occupied by the Law School (Clough 1965:286). The William Robertson Coe Library and American Studies Building opened in the summer of 1958, and the book collection and American Studies programs were relocated across campus to the new facility, located on the corner of Thirteenth Street and Ivinson Avenue (University of Wyoming 1959:44). Like the original Library building of 1923, the new Coe Library followed years of anticipation and provided thoroughly modern facilities for student research and study.

The former Library building was remodeled in 1959-60 to modernize the structure and to render it suitable for other purposes. Architects Eliot and Clinton Hitchcock prepared the plans to guide the reconstruction of the building designed by their father some 35 years earlier (Sutherland 1993:131). Spiegelberg Lumber and Building Company of Laramie was awarded the contract to complete the renovation (source: plaque inside north entrance to Aven Nelson Building, ca. 1960). After remodeling, the building was occupied by the Botany Department, Rocky Mountain Herbarium, and the Divisions of Adult Education and Community Service. It was officially rededicated as the Aven Nelson Memorial Building in honor of Dr. Nelson's years of service to the University and to science. The Botany Department and Rocky Mountain Herbarium had been housed in the Engineering Building since 1926 (Clough 1965:291-292).

Following the tradition begun under Nelson's administration of naming campus buildings after people who made a significant contribution to the UW, the rededication of the original library building to Aven Nelson is particularly appropriate. A member of the University's original faculty and acting president from 1917 to 1922, Nelson played a key role in the campaign to secure oil royalty income which made possible the campus building program begun in the 1920s. He vigorously led the drive to erect the original library and was recognized for his efforts at the first dedication of the facility in March 1924. The building's new use as the home of the Botany Department and Rocky Mountain Herbarium, both begun and nurtured by Nelson, was further tribute to the lifelong contributions of this educational pioneer of Wyoming.

The building continues to serve as a vital research and teaching facility for the University's Botany Department. In addition to the Herbarium, it contains laboratories, classrooms, and faculty offices for the Botany Department, as well as the Wilhelm G. Solheim Mycological Herbarium. The utility of the building for botanical research and instruction will be expanded further by construction of the Botany Conservatory Addition in 1993-94.

B. Biographical Sketch of the Architect

Wilbur Arthur Hitchcock, sole architect for the University of Wyoming Library building, acquired his professional training in the northern Plains region. Born in Springfield, South Dakota, in 1886, Hitchcock was later associated with the Engineering Department of UW from 1909 until his death in 1930; he also opened a private practice in Laramie in the 1920s.

Hitchcock's academic career began in South Dakota. He served as Supervisor of Manual Training at the State Normal School in Springfield, South Dakota, from 1903 to 1906. He left South Dakota in 1908 at the age of 22 seeking relief from severe allergies, and settled in Laramie, Wyoming. From 1909 to 1912 he pursued double ambitions, as both student and Instructor in Shop Work at the University of Wyoming. Hitchcock graduated from UW with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1912 and served as Instructor in Engineering at his alma mater from February 1912 to 1915. In 1915, Hitchcock left Laramie to pursue studies at the University of Colorado which in 1916 earned him a Civil Engineering degree (University of Wyoming 1917a:16; Sutherland 1993:129).

The engineering degree allowed Hitchcock to return to an advanced teaching position at UW; he rejoined the faculty as Assistant Professor of Engineering beginning in September 1916. Soon after his return, Hitchcock nearly lost his life in a fall from Old Main. In 1916, while supervising the remodeling of Old Main following removal of its tower, which had been declared unsafe, he lost his balance and fell one full story, breaking his back (Sutherland 1993:44, 129-130). Despite his injury, which required him to wear a supportive brace for the remainder of his life, Hitchcock continued to provide architectural assistance

to the University; not long after the accident he designed the Music Hall completed in 1918 (University of Wyoming 1916b:34).

At the time he designed the Library building, Hitchcock was an Associate Professor of Civil Engineering. He requested that the University Board of Trustees consider whether his design work was to be compensated by his salary, or whether he might earn a fee as an independent architect, particularly in light of his winning the open design competition for the Library building. Apparently the Trustees opted against designating Hitchcock (or anyone else) as University Architect, thereby allowing him to receive a percentage fee for his design work.

In 1921, Hitchcock sought additional architectural opportunities while maintaining ties to UW. He opened a private architectural practice in Laramie and thereafter served the dual role as private architect and "University Mechanic." The overwhelming success of his Library design elevated his stature as a talented and capable architect, and generated a greater demand for his services. In addition to producing a wide variety of designs for buildings in the Laramie area, he was contracted by UW in the 1920s to oversee development of a campus "master plan." He was also called on to design a series of major and minor institutional buildings to be funded by the welcome advent of oil royalty revenues. He is also credited with playing an instrumental role, with help from acclaimed urban architect Raymond Hood, in conceiving a distinctive unified design for campus buildings in the early 1920s.

Wilbur Hitchcock's contributions to campus architecture in the 1920s were substantial. He collaborated with noted Cheyenne architect William Dubois to design the University's Half Acre Gym, completed in 1925. He then teamed with Frederick Hutchinson Porter of Cheyenne to design the massive Engineering Building, completed in 1926. His solo works on the campus include the old stadium at Corbett Field, completed in 1926, and the Men's Residence (McWhinnie) Hall, completed in 1928. He also designed the first rooming house to be built in Fraternity Park, the Pi Beta Phi sorority house. The products of Hitchcock's talent also appeared throughout Laramie and environs. His major commissions include the Iverson Memorial Home for Women, the Laramie Boomerang Building, Nellie Isle and Whiting Schools, the Laramie High School (now the Laramie Plains Civic Center), and the Snowy Range Lodge. He designed numerous dwellings in Laramie, including the mansion for Richard Cooper, designed in 1922, a unique stylistic hybrid unlike any other in Wyoming (Starr 1992:36-37; Sutherland 1993:130-131; Wyoming Architectural Heritage Foundation 1982). Many of Hitchcock's designs, particularly those for public buildings, demonstrated his affinity and skill for employing the Gothic Revival Style (Starr 1992:60-61).

Hitchcock had prepared preliminary plans for the Albany County Courthouse in Laramie, and was involved in the planning for development of Fraternity Park east of the main UW campus when his life was cut short. While honeymooning in Los Angeles with his second

wife, Verna Johannesen Hitchcock, in 1930, the architect was fatally injured in an automobile accident (Sutherland 1993:131).

The death of Wilbur Hitchcock was a blow to the University of Wyoming and to the community of Laramie. Architect William Dubois carried Hitchcock's plans for the Albany County Courthouse to completion; this major edifice exemplifies, in an urban setting, the style he favored for the UW campus (Starr 1992:60; Albany County Historic Preservation Board 1993:n.p.).

Hitchcock left a significant legacy of public and private buildings on the University of Wyoming and throughout the Laramie area. In an area not widely recognized for its inspired architecture, these skillfully designed structures lend character and the elements of a distinctive regional style. Hitchcock's legacy also was passed through his sons W. Clinton and Eliot, who became professional architects and continued the family tradition by designing additions and remodeling projects for buildings designed by their father. The Hitchcock brothers, who operated an architectural office in Laramie, also designed noteworthy buildings in their own right, including the Law School (now Anthropology) Building, the William Robertson Coe Library (with F.H. Porter and R.W. Bradley of Cheyenne), and the acclaimed Classroom Building of the G.D. Humphrey science complex, all on the University of Wyoming campus.

C. Aven Nelson and the Rocky Mountain Herbarium

Dr. Aven Nelson, after whom the remodeled Library building was renamed, had a long and prestigious association with the University of Wyoming. Proficient in both English and biology, which he had taught at Drury College in Missouri, Nelson arrived in Laramie in 1887 to join the original faculty of seven under the administration of President John Hoyt. Nelson initially expected to teach English; however, when it was discovered that another professor had been hired to teach the subject, Nelson was asked to serve as professor of biological sciences (Clough 1965:21). Nelson also was appointed as the institution's first librarian (Clough 1965:29). To bolster his qualifications for the redefined position, Nelson was awarded a Master of Science degree from Drury College in 1890; however, he felt compelled to undertake graduate work in biology and botany. Nelson secured a leave of absence in 1891 to attend Harvard, and returned to UW a year later with a Master of Arts degree (Williams 1984:20-22). Still not contented, Nelson earned a doctorate degree in Botany from the University of Denver in 1904 (Williams 1984:123).

Nelson served as Professor of Biology at UW from 1887 to 1915, and from July 1915 to June 1917 as Professor of Botany. With the resignation of President Clyde A. Duniway, Nelson was called upon to serve as Acting President of the University, which he did for a year. He was immediately selected to remain as President, and remained in office from June 1918 to October 1922. President Nelson ably handled the weighty responsibilities of the office, and

steered the institution through the crisis period of World War I and the transition to a period of postwar prosperity. While he was President, Nelson's advocacy and vision were instrumental in securing for UW a new and prolific source of income from oil royalties to finance the immediate and future development of the campus. However, Nelson yearned for a return to academic life, and in October 1922, he was relieved of his duties as President by Arthur G. Crane. Nelson drew grateful praise for his contributions while serving as the institution's tenth president, and in December 1922, the Board of Trustees conferred upon him the title of President Emeritus (Williams 1984:220).

Nelson continued teaching at UW until 1929, but remained in Laramie to continue research and the curatorship of his lifelong project, the Rocky Mountain Herbarium. Dr. Nelson died in a Colorado Springs sanitarium on March 31, 1952, at the age of 93 (Williams 1984:322-323).

In his long life, Aven Nelson made numerous contributions to science as well as to the University and people of Wyoming. Besides his important work in assembling what became the most complete regional collection of botanical specimens, Nelson revised the taxonomy of Rocky Mountain flora and made numerous discoveries of previously unknown or misidentified plants. He also provided botanical knowledge for pragmatic purposes through frequent agricultural and horticultural bulletins useful to Wyoming's largely rural population. His distinguished career included service as national president of the Botanical Society of America, twice national president of Phi Kappa Phi, first president of the American Society of Plant Taxonomists, and three times delegate to international congresses (Clough 1965:303). In addition to his academic and administrative accomplishments at UW, Dr. Nelson applied his horticultural knowledge towards the beautification of the early campus, by directing the planting of its grounds (University of Wyoming 1916b:2).

The origins of the Rocky Mountain Herbarium date back to the early 1890s. B.C. Buffum of the UW College of Agriculture collected native plants throughout Wyoming around 1892 and provided the specimens to Dr. Nelson to classify. Nelson continued the effort by embarking in 1894 and 1895 on extensive collecting trips in the company of geologist Wilbur C. Knight. From this humble beginning, the botanical collection was first established (Clough 1965:44-45). Just before the turn of the century, after returning from a collecting expedition to Yellowstone National Park in northwestern Wyoming, Professor Nelson recommended officially naming the growing collection the "Rocky Mountain Herbarium" (Clough 1965:59).

After completion of a new Science Hall in 1902, the Botany Department and herbarium were installed on its second floor (Clough 1965:61). By 1903, the Rocky Mountain Herbarium contained about 42,000 specimens (University of Wyoming 1903:37). A decade later, the botanical collection had grown to about 76,000 specimens (University of Wyoming 1913:32). In 1917, the collection included some 88,000 specimens (University of Wyoming

1917a:39). From 1918 through 1921, the collection was listed as containing about 90,000 specimens (University of Wyoming 1918a:27, 1919a:23, 1920a:23, 1921a:24). Its growth appears to have been temporarily retarded by Dr. Nelson's hiatus from the Botany Department to serve as interim President of the University.

After Nelson's return to the Botany Department and active curatorship of the Rocky Mountain Herbarium in 1922, the collection again began to grow. As the Herbarium expanded, anxiety grew over its potential destruction from fire in the Science Hall. By 1927, it held about 110,000 sheets of specimens and was growing at a rate of about 5,000 new specimens per year. That year it was moved into the newly completed and fireproof Engineering Building, where it was lodged on the fourth floor (University of Wyoming 1927:20, 1928:23, 1960:45). It was to remain in these new quarters until 1960, when the old Library building was replaced by a newer facility and rededicated to use by the Botany Department. At the time of the move, the Herbarium contained approximately 260,000 plant specimens stored in 78 cases. The collection was permanently installed on the third floor of the Aven Nelson Memorial Building (University of Wyoming 1960:45, 1961:17).

III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

The University of Wyoming Library building was constructed between the summers of 1922 and 1923, by contractor J.A. Johnson of Casper, Wyoming. It remained essentially unchanged until 1959, when a new library building was completed. In order to adapt the vacated original Library building for use by the Botany Department, Rocky Mountain Herbarium, and other functions, a remodeling project was undertaken. Plans were drawn up in 1959 by the Laramie architectural team of W. Eliot and Clinton Hitchcock, sons of the building's original designer. The remodeling plans called for the extension of the third (actually second) floor across what was ceiling space for the two story high reading room; this would significantly increase the amount of floor space in the building. The remodeling also involved sealing of the former south (main) entry; in lieu of the doorway, a window was installed identical to others along the first floor (actually basement) level. A brick panel extending beneath the entire row of southern windows was also removed, and the windows were subsequently extended downward in length. An east side entry was added, which compensated for the loss of the south entry and allowed convenient campus access where previously there was none. An internal stairway accessing the two floors above was added to the east side of the building, symmetrically duplicating the original stairway installed inside the west end of the building. Finally, three central window panels originally incorporated into the west end of the north wall were removed (Hitchcock and Hitchcock 1959). These exterior modifications were executed skillfully, and the results are virtually

indistinguishable from the original exterior fabric of the building. The remodeling was completed in 1960. A Botany Conservatory Addition will be completed in 1994 and will consist of a semisubterranean glazed greenhouse structure extending south of the building and connected to the center of its south facade through what was the original 1923 entry.

B. Description

The University of Wyoming Library (Aven Nelson Memorial Building) is a monumental, rectangular, three story, masonry building containing 325,000 cubic feet, with a footprint measuring approximately 141 feet (east-west) by 80 feet (north-south).

The building consists of a central rectangular mass with slightly protruding end wings. These wings are more exaggerated on the southern facade, where they extend eight feet beyond the wall of the central mass, as opposed to the almost three foot extension of the end wings on the north side. Each end wing comprises about one-third the total length of the building; the indented central portion consists of approximately two-thirds the total length.

The Library (Aven Nelson Memorial) Building is symmetrically arranged and is topped by a recessed, low-pitched, hip roof. The roof is visible only from a considerable distance. Banks of identical windows are disposed along all sides of the building. The central, recessed portion of the long north and south sides is fenestrated with seven vertically oriented panels or bays of multipane windows separated by pilasters suggesting stylized Classical columns. These pilasters are ornately executed on the south wall (formerly the main facade), and, although flat-surfaced, are fluted and are capped with Ionic volutes. The first floor or basement level windows are separated from those lighting the two upper floors by a plain horizontal band of brick punctuated by the bases of the stylized ornamental columns. The north and south faces of the end wings contain three sets of vertically stacked multipane window units in triplicate, one set for each floor. The symmetrical arrangement of windows is repeated on the east and west ends of the building as well. The general massing, arrangement of elements, and fenestration of the structure are reminiscent of Renaissance Revival architecture (Whiffen 1992:154). A Neo-Classical Revival cornice completely wraps around the entire building connecting walls and roof.

The building contains three ground-level entrances. The main entrance to the building is presently located in the center of the north side. This doorway is another Neo-Classical element, consisting of two large, flat columns flanking the entrance, capped by a massive stone lintel on top of which is a triangular pediment composed of three shaped stone blocks. Within this north entrance is a small vestibule containing the bronze plaques from both the 1924 and 1960 dedications. The east and west entrances, in succession, are less ornate in design. Both are framed by massive stone door surrounds, and the east entrance is fitted with large globe lights affixed to stylized iron supports. The lintel of this doorway bears the incised inscription: "AVEN NELSON MEMORIAL BUILDING." There is no entrance

on the south side of the building. The original cornerstone, located on the southwest corner of the structure, bears the incised inscription: "Reading Maketh a Full Man" (south face), and "Library -- 1922" (east face).

In terms of structure and fabric, the building has an interior steel frame, and exterior walls of brick trimmed with dressed stone. Its foundation, footings, and basement walls are of reinforced concrete. The roof framing consists of steel trusses, ribbed lath on steel joists, and two inch concrete. The roof was originally clad with clay tile and built-up composition rolled roofing material. The clay tile has since been removed. The windows are all double-hung wood sash except in the old library reading room (south facade), where they are stationary steel sash. Exterior doors are of wood as is the interior trim; interior doors are heavy oak (Bowes and Hart 1950:79). The interior of the building was almost entirely altered in the 1959-60 remodeling. The flooring material is linoleum throughout, and the walls have been decorated in places (including the east stairwell) with bands of colored glazed tile. Modern fluorescent light fixtures have replaced all of the earlier interior lights. Glazed display cases along interior corridors, laboratory fixtures, and the special specimen storage cabinets of the Herbarium are examples of the post-1958 interior modifications to the building. However, vestiges of the former interior may still be seen, including the intact ornamental stairway railing and bleached oak trim in the west stairway. Overall, the building is in excellent, well maintained condition.

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V. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted on behalf of the University of Wyoming, in conjunction with a campus construction project partially funded by the federal Office of Surface Mining (OSM), under the Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) program. The AML project is administered by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). HABS documentation was required as mitigation of anticipated adverse impacts to the University of Wyoming Library (Aven Nelson Memorial Building) associated with construction of the Botany Conservatory Addition to the building.

The documentation was undertaken in the winter and spring of 1994 by Mariah Associates, Inc. (Mariah), of Laramie, Wyoming, in conjunction with the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (WSHPO). Jason Marmor of Mariah served as the project historian, and prepared the historical and architectural information sections. Richard Collier, WSHPO photographer, produced the architectural photographs. Mr. Marmor compiled the completed narrative and photographic documentation for submittal.