He [Meem] was able to introduce custom designed woodwork, ironwork, ceramics, and decoration, whose precedents could be found in historic New Mexican buildings. Blending all was adobe, real and simulated, Tight is thread through culture and visual continuity.

Richard Dober
Campus Design
INTRODUCTION

During the spring and summer of 1892, there arose on the wind-swept sand hills of Albuquerque’s East Mesa a blocky, three-story, red brick building with a massive pitched roof. Formally called “The University Main Building,” it represented a new era in New Mexico – an era of “higher education” in a state that had virtually no formal educational system at any level. The seventy-five students who started classes that fall, however, embodied the hope of many forward-thinking New Mexicans that this new institution would create an interest in education at all levels that would not only enrich the cultural environment of the territory (still considered to be a part of the “Wild West”), but would also be a springboard towards the much sought after goal of statehood.

Although statehood was still twenty years from fruition, the humble beginnings of this university on a barren piece of property two miles from New Town Albuquerque, itself a newly created place founded along the Atlantic & Pacific (later Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe) railroad line only twelve years earlier, did usher in an age of progress in both the fledgling community’s school system, but also arguably signaled a new direction in way in which the town grew, that is, towards the east, up the sand hills and eventually to the foothills of the once far-away Sandia Mountains. This dramatic change in the city’s settlement pattern was, of course, slow to develop; however, there can be little doubt that the location of the university on land previously inhabited by a few isolated homesteaders and utilized primarily by sheepherders turned the heads of Albuquerque’s citizens towards the east. The end result was unbridled residential and commercial development by end of the twentieth century.

And what of the university itself? Like the city it has grown and developed from a “one-room” schoolhouse that was academically a “university” in name only, to an institution of over 25,000 students with many departments and colleges that are well respected nationally. In addition, its campus architecture is regarded as one of the most distinctive in the country. The University of New Mexico has evolved into a place where its building style has become synonymous with the concept of regional architecture. “UNM,” as it is known
familiarly throughout the state, has become a source of pride for the citizens of New Mexico not only as an institution of higher learning, but also as an architectural treasure. As the writer-poet V. B. Price has observed,

No other major college campus in this country is so deeply rooted in indigenous American and Hispanic history, nor so intimately tied to a long-existing regional outlook and aesthetic.¹

THE TERRITORIAL UNIVERSITY: 1889 – 1912

The University of New Mexico was created on February 28, 1889 when Territorial Governor, Edmund G. Ross – the former Kansas senator whose vote kept President Andrew Johnson from being impeached some twenty years earlier – signed the Omnibus Bill which, in part, provided for three publicly funded institutions of higher learning. The three schools, to be located in the towns of Albuquerque, Las Cruces, and Socorro, were part of a plan to “modernize” the territory; however, given the sorry state of the territory’s educational system, this seemed a tall order to fill.

In fact, that portion of the Omnibus Bill calling for universities almost did not reach the governor’s desk. Its successful passage through the legislature was due to handful of individuals including Neill B. Field, Elias S. Stover, O. E. Cromwell, Ralph E. Twitchell, John R. McFie, and particularly the perseverance of an Albuquerque attorney, Bernard Rodey. Rodey, a member of the Reform Movement and serving his only term in the territorial legislature is said to have worked 48 hours without a break to insure that the bill contained the proper language that would appeal to the diverse interests of the territory’s legislators. The politics of the time, particularly the recent election of a Republican President, Benjamin Harrison, dictated that the Democrat Ross would soon be replaced by a Republican appointee, which in turn would strengthen the notorious political organization known as the Santa Fe Ring whose members were less sympathetic to matters such as higher education. As the last minute drama unfurled, Rodey successfully pushed the bill through, and with the stroke of Governor Ross’ pen, the University of New Mexico was a reality.²

Bernard Rodey, “founder” of the University

The question now became, whom would the university educate? The territory lacked any formal educational system. Most schools were traditionally church based, either Roman Catholic or a Protestant denomination, and there was an acute shortage of teachers or training institutions for teachers. Few territorial residents saw any advantages to educating their children much beyond the primary grades, and even Albuquerque had only two secondary schools. The Albuquerque Academy (founded in 1879) offered a curriculum that included classical languages, literature, philosophy, and the natural sciences – all basic foundation classes for a nineteenth century university education. This school, along with its sister institution in Santa Fe, the New West Academy, not surprisingly catered to the
more affluent Anglo merchant class who aspired to send their son or daughter to a traditional eastern school. In contrast, the Menaul School (1896) was a Presbyterian boarding school for Hispanic males who came predominantly from the northern part of the state. The challenge thus facing the new university was how to best serve this diverse group of territorial residents, many of whom had very little formal education (not to mention college preparatory classes), while at the same time trying to recruit prospective students and faculty from outside the territory.³

The question of where to locate the university had been previously solved by Rodey's enabling legislation. While differing factions in the community argued over whether the institution should be in Old Town (the site of the Spanish Villa de Alburquerque, founded 1706), or within the bustling neighborhood of Barelas near the massive Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe rail yards, or in the city limits of New Town Albuquerque, the recently founded railroad boomtown, Rodey had deliberately included language that stated the university should be located, “near the town of Albuquerque, in the County of Bernalillo, within two miles of Railroad Avenue, upon a tract of good, high and dry land, of not less than twenty acres.” Rodey further stipulated in the act that, “The said land shall be donated and conveyed, free of any cost or expense, to the Territory of New Mexico, by G. W. Meylert.”⁴

In one quick action, Rodey took local political haggling out of the siting of the university and provided the institution with enough room to grow. Although G. W. Meylert, then mayor of Albuquerque, was the official donor of the land, he had convinced a group of four landowners to deed their property to him for the purpose of giving it to the new territorial university. A newspaper account of the day described the land as, “magnificent mesa land” that “overlooks the city of the valley with its progressive people.”⁵ In fact, the “magnificent mesa land” was a rugged two-mile trek from New Town, up steeply rutted wagon tracks that passed for an extension of Railroad (now Central) Avenue. Nonetheless, this parcel of scrub brush and cactus was now the university’s new home and the task at hand was to build a suitable building in which to house its students and faculty.

Following the election of a president and secretary-treasurer, the first order of business facing UNM’s newly appointed Board of Regents on November 13, 1889 was to solicit bids for the design and construction of the university’s first building. The Board decided that the structure would be made of brick and be large enough (three stories tall plus a basement) to serve multiple needs – recitation rooms, professor’s offices,
assembly room, and chemical laboratory. On July 14, 1890, the regents selected a well-known local Albuquerque architect, Jesse M. Wheelock, to prepare final plans and specifications. Wheelock had already completed several major projects in the fledgling city including, the Commercial Club, Armijo Building, and the San Felipe Hotel.\(^6\)

Wheelock’s design for the Main Building (also known as the Administration Building, and in 1936 renamed Hodgin Hall, in honor of long-time faculty member Charles Hodgin) utilized Richardsonian Romanesque styling, a popular architectural vocabulary for public buildings in the late nineteenth century. The three-story red brick structure was set upon a foundation comprised of rustic Cerrillos sandstone, which extended one-half story above ground. The fenestration pattern consisted of rectangular first-floor windows, arched windows on the second floor, five large windows on the third floor, and half-moon shaped windows flanking the two elaborately corniced matching chimneys. A complex hipped and gabled roof was constructed using heavy bridge-like trusses, which would soon lead to the building’s architectural transformation and alter the course of the university’s architectural future. This large, imposing structure, located on the southwest corner of the campus, soon became a landmark overlooking the city. The building’s symmetry and styling was reminiscent of the many land-grant universities built throughout the Midwest at this time, and it was cited as the “finest school building in the territory.”\(^7\)

The regents appointed Elias Stover the first university president. Stover, a local businessman who was active in civic affairs, was a nonacademic, but the regents felt he was the right person to get the university up and running.\(^8\)

To handle academic affairs, the regents later appointed Hiram Hadley as vice-president of the faculty. As the new building was nearing completion, the regents decided to officially open the university to students on June 15, 1892. Since the construction of the Main Building was not yet completed. The first class of UNM students attended lectures in Perkins Hall, previous home to the Albuquerque Academy, located just east of the railroad tracks in the Huning Highland neighborhood.\(^8\) Most of these students were planning to teach in the territory’s public schools, and thus the university’s Normal Department was the first to be staffed. Because of the poor quality of secondary education in the state, most of the students enrolled had to take college preparatory classes rather than standard university level coursework. This “prep school” curriculum continued until 1896.\(^9\)

By the fall of 1892, the Main Building was open for students. Seventy-five students walked, rode horses, or were picked up in a horse-drawn wagon downtown and driven
up the rutted sand hills to the university. The all-purpose building housed an assembly room, two classrooms, and offices, which doubled as the library on the first floor; four recitation rooms and two faculty offices on the second floor; and a large room used for assemblies (and later as a girl’s gymnasium) on the third floor. The basement housed bathrooms, or “sanitaries,” lunchroom, and living quarters for the university’s custodian. A few years later, physics and chemistry labs, and a home economics department were set up in this lower floor. To help beautify the campus, 150 shade trees were planted and the twenty acres were fenced, “to keep livestock out and the students in.”

Over the next 15 years, both UNM’s enrollment and the campus physical plant grew slowly. A small, wooden sided gymnasium was built in 1895 to encourage students’ physical fitness. Ten years later, a swimming pool was added; however, since it did not have any filtering equipment, it became little more than a collection pond for the biology department’s study of aquatic species, and a supplementary source of water for fire protection. In 1897, Clarence Herrick replaced Elias Stover as president of the university. Unlike Stover, Herrick came from an academic background and under his leadership the university transitioned from a prep school to a true university. Herrick established the College of Literature and Arts (later known as Arts and Sciences) in 1899, instituted a Spanish language program to assist rural schools, established a bacteriology lab to work with the territorial board of health on tuberculosis issues, implemented a teacher training program to work with the fledgling Albuquerque Public School system, and oversaw the construction of Hadley Hall, UNM’s first science building, in early 1900.

Situated just east of the Main Building facing Railroad Avenue, Hadley Hall was designed by Edward Buxton (E. B.) Cristy, who although played a major role in developing the first phase of UNM’s distinctive Spanish-Pueblo Revival style, chose a more conventional collegiate, red brick style for Hadley Hall.

The two and one-half story building had a hipped roof with dormers topped by decorative cresting, and a projecting entrance. It contained laboratories, an herbarium, lecture rooms, and offices.
Climatological instruments were set up on the roof deck, and the basement contained a constant temperature vault. The state’s gem and mineral collection was stored there as were many other important scientific specimens. Tragically, these collections, along with the building, were destroyed by fire on May 23, 1910.13

As the university entered the twentieth century, William George Tight became UNM’s third president and his vision for campus architecture set the stage for future development – the “Pueblo on the Mesa.” A student of Pueblo Indian culture, Tight believed that their indigenous style of architecture was more harmonious with Albuquerque’s arid, southwest environment than the red brick, Romanesque structures of the Main Building and Hadley Hall. His interest and knowledge about Pueblo architecture was boosted by recently published works on prehistoric Southwestern culture by archaeologists such as Jesse Walter Fewkes, Cosmos and Victor Mindeleff who provided detailed description of ancient architecture from ancestral Hopi and Zuni sites in Arizona and New Mexico.14

It just so happened that the campus was in need of a new steam heating system and Tight saw an opportunity to build a boiler house, later called the heating plant, in the Pueblo style. Tight collaborated with the architect E. B. Cristy to design a two-level structure that incorporated several concepts of Pueblo style architecture, including a rectangular, modular form with flat roofs, random fenestration, buttresses supporting stepped walls, and portals with wooden brackets and columns.

Tight teamed again with Cristy in 1906 to design two new dormitories, each elaborately detailed in the Pueblo style. They featured buttressed walls, projecting vigas, stepped parapets, and decorative roof ladders. Named Hokona (“maiden butterfly”) and Kwataka (“man eagle”) these residences were furnished with Navajo rugs, heavy rustic furniture, electric lights, and a solar heated water system concealed on the roof by Spanish style hornos, or beehive ovens. President Tight and English teacher Ethel Hickey painted large symbols, inspired by Hopi pottery designs, on the exterior of each building.15
The president’s passion for Pueblo architectural forms arguably reached an apex in 1908 with his design and construction of a chapter house for the Yum Yum Boys, a campus social group that later became the Alpha Alpha Alpha fraternity. Named the “Estufa,” the building replicated a Pueblo kiva, or ceremonial structure.

The structure featured adobe walls, projecting vigas, and fireplace. The original entrance was through the roof, which was accessed by exterior steps. A conventional doorway through the side of the structure later replaced the roof entrance.16

Naming the “Estufa,” the building replicated a Pueblo kiva, or ceremonial structure. The Estufa

The structure featured adobe walls, projecting vigas, and fireplace. The original entrance was through the roof, which was accessed by exterior steps. A conventional doorway through the side of the structure later replaced the roof entrance.16

Tight is probably best known for the remodeling of the Main Building. Since its completion, the building had developed some serious structural flaws, most notably its inability to withstand the high winds that periodically sweep across the East Mesa. The ferocity of these winds seriously weakened the overly designed, heavy roof to point where the building’s exterior walls were in jeopardy. Many observers thought the building should be razed; however, Tight saw an opportunity to enhance his goal of creating a regionally distinctive campus architecture and suggested that the entire structure be remodeled in what today is referred to as the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style.17 During the summer of 1908, E. B. Cristy directed the removal of the pitched roof including its gables, cornices, and chimneys, and the construction of a viga-supported flat roof. The exterior brick walls were stuccoed a tan color to match the surrounding natural environment, the top of the arched windows were squared off, and buttresses were added to the structure’s corners. Porches were added to the east and west entrances, the latter becoming the new main entrance, which now faced the growing campus. In addition to the extensive remodeling project, a 500-seat auditorium, Rodey Hall, was constructed immediately adjacent to the north of the building, while new offices for the Department of Education were added to the south side.18

Renovated Main Building, later renamed Hodgin Hall

Tight is probably best known for the remodeling of the Main Building. Since its completion, the building had developed...
The dramatic renovations to the Main Building caused quite a stir among the students returning that fall. The impact of the remodeling is perhaps best expressed in an article in *U.N.M. Weekly* that read:

*The Administration Building as we used to know it, is gone. In its place stands an immense three storied pueblo [sic]. It is easily larger than anything of similar style erected in modern times and seems more pleasing to the eyes than any specimen of pueblo architecture on campus. It is almost incredible that a building of such pronounced character, could be, in so short a time so completely changed...*  

Following the lead of his predecessor and mentor, Clarence Herrick, William Tight continued to guide UNM on its path towards becoming a true university. He advocated a scholarly environment that attracted both students and faculty. He expanded the departments of philosophy, language, and science, created a School of Music in 1902 and a School of Engineering that included emphasis in civil, electrical, mechanical and mining in 1906. He also encouraged the formation of fraternities and sororities, and other academic and social clubs for engineering and drama students. Tight’s campus beautification projects were also significant.

Beginning in 1904, Tight began an annual Arbor Day tree-planting activity that eventually transplanted more than 200 ponderosa pines from the neighboring Sandia Mountains to the campus. The grove of statuesque pines now situated in the southwest corner of the campus is named in his honor. He also supervised the planting of hedges, rose bushes, honey locusts, and imported yuccas from the southern part of the territory. He created an “arbotheater” to the north of Main Building that featured a stage with amphitheater style seating that was surrounded by cottonwood trees. This beautification program, together with his advocacy of Pueblo style architecture, helped promote not only the university, but also brought attention to the history and cultural traditions of the entire territory, which played a role in the campaign for statehood.

Interest in this revival style came not only from the local community where it was endorsed by several regents and the territorial governor, but also from national architectural and construction trade magazines. Unfortunately for William Tight not everyone shared his unrestrained zeal for Pueblo style architecture. Critics called the style a “reversion to the primitive” and declared that a university building should be made of “bricks and ivy, not vigas and adobe.” This controversy over campus architecture was engulfed by the more serious charges that Tight exceeded his authority in firing two faculty members without the board’s approval and that, although divorced, he had a dalliance with a single female faculty member. The end result was Tight’s resignation on May 1, 1909, and for the time being, the end of regionalism in UNM’s campus architecture. Tight’s successor, the learned Edward D. M. Gray was not at all interested in Spanish-Pueblo Revival style architecture and rejected its continuation as the campus style. His first, and only, building project while university president was the construction of the new College of Science and Engineering Building in 1911 to replace the fire-ravaged Hadley Hall. The
new building was a one-story, non-descript masonry structure with a pitched roof, which must have looked a bit out of place sitting in the midst of the “Pueblo on the Mesa.”

**Slow But Steady Progress, 1912 – 1930**

New Mexico celebrated statehood on January 12, 1912, and a little more than two months later the UNM regents were obliged to find a new university president. With the resignation of Edward Gray, the regents turned to David Ross Boyd, a former president of the University of Oklahoma, to guide the university in the newly created forty-seventh state.

President Boyd encountered a much different Albuquerque from the rough and ready frontier railroad town founded some thirty years earlier. Its population was increasing steadily, and modern, urban features were making their appearance – streetcars, automobiles, and paved streets (including a macadam surface for the newly renamed Central Avenue from downtown to the university). Health seekers, hoping for relief from the debilitating scourge of tuberculosis, flocked to the city for its clean air. Sanatoriums sprouted up along Central between the university and downtown, and new residential subdivisions, such as University Heights, were beginning to show signs of activity.

Boyd began his tenure by establishing more stringent graduation standards and instituting a School of Business and School of Latin American Studies in 1916. A new Chemistry Building was constructed in 1917. Its style was vaguely sympathetic to Tijeras’s Spanish-Pueblo Revival style, but also displayed the lack of ornamentation popular in the Modernist movement of the day. The new president also sought to develop a comprehensive campus plan. He convinced the regents to engage the well-known Chicago architect, Walter Burley Griffen, to design one, but Griffen’s so-called “Nucleus Plan” was never implemented. Despite the rejection of the formal plan, the quadrangle concept, that is, the grouping of academically related buildings, which was put forth in plan, was informally incorporated into future planning.23

The onset of World War I significantly slowed down growth and development of the university. As part of the war effort, Battery A of the New Mexico National Guard established Camp Funston on vacant land along UNM’s eastern boundary. Temporary barracks and stables were erected, and officers were quartered in Kwataka Hall. Photographs of the time show students in uniform milling around the campus – quite a change from earlier images of male students in coats and ties.24

Land acquisition in the second decade of the twentieth century played a significant role in the university’s
subsequent development. In 1912, the state took advantage of the federal Ferguson Act, which resulted in 273,000 acres being acquired by the State Land Office on behalf of the university. Income from oil and gas leases on these properties has over the years provided substantial extra income for UNM. The physical boundaries of the university were also expanded thanks to the vision of Regent George L. Brooks. At his urging, UNM acquired 80 acres of land east of the university in 1913, including parts of what would later be the Monte Vista subdivision and Jefferson Middle School. A year later, Brooks was instrumental in obtaining an additional 227 acres north of the campus. He also had the foresight to encourage the university to buy land along Louisiana Boulevard on what seemed like relatively worthless grazing land, but some 40 years later would turn a tidy profit when UNM sold it to residential and commercial developers, as the city grew eastward towards the Sandia foothills.

Following the war, UNM continued its steady growth in enrollment; however, the state’s poor economic condition, coupled with the election of a series of governors who had little interest in higher education, resulted in minimal funding especially for new buildings and campus planning. Despite the lack of funding, a new building for home economics, Sara Reynolds Hall, was completed in 1920, and two years later a major addition was added to Hokona Hall by the regionally reknown architectural firm of Trost and Trost. Cottages were built around Kwataka Hall to increase capacity for men’s living quarters. The university’s status received a boost in 1922 when the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools gave UNM its accreditation.

By the mid-1920s, the facilities at the university were becoming overcrowded and it was clear that new buildings would have to be constructed soon to accommodate the ever-increasing student population. The administration finally pushed funding through the state legislature to build a new library (1925), biology building (Parson’s Hall, 1928), men’s dormitory (Yatoka Hall, 1928), lecture hall (1928), dining hall (1929), and gymnasium (later named after a UNM student, Hugh Carlisle, who died during WW I, 1929).

All the new buildings were designed in a Spanish-Pueblo Revival style. Although the Board of Regents did not specifically adopt this as the official campus architectural style, it was clear that they intended to follow the vision of former president William Tight. At his inauguration ceremony held at the Estufa in June of 1928, incoming president James Zimmerman reinforced this unofficial architectural policy by stating, “This architecture, so appropriate to our environment, will of itself give the University a distinct place in the educational life of America.”

President Zimmerman, a former faculty member, was a very popular university president whose public outreach program strived to improve relations between the university and the state’s
citizens. In 1927, Zimmerman convinced the well-known archaeologist, Edgar Lee Hewett, to start an Anthropology Department, which over the years has become nationally recognized, focusing on the ancient and contemporary cultures of the Southwest. By the end of the decade Zimmerman’s leadership had increased the faculty from 33 to 63 as the enrollment reached the 1,000 mark.28

The stock market crash of 1929 resulted in a devastating economic downturn for the American people. At first, the economy of New Mexico was slow to respond to this situation, in part because it had always been one of lowest per capita incomes states in the nation and had few industries or manufacturing companies.29 But by 1932 the depression began to hit hard in many New Mexico communities. Despite these hardships, the university’s building program benefited from the government’s New Deal programs producing three of the campus’s most significant structures that are valued today for their historic architectural and cultural values.

**Defining UNM’s Built Environment: 1930 – 1940**

As noted by former university architect, Van Dorn Hooker, the decade of the 1930s saw the University of New Mexico grow “from a small school with small buildings into a major institution with buildings befitting its stature.”30 The funding that fueled this building boom was derived from a combination of state appropriations, private donations, and most significantly New Deal funds.

Construction started early in the decade, using previously allocated monies, on the President’s House, a handsome Spanish-Pueblo Revival building designed by Miles Brittelle, Sr, and located in what was then the far northeast corner of the campus. In 1931, Hadley Hall II was completed to provide more space for the engineering department, and work was started on new seating and facilities for the football field (the project was not completed until 1934).31

With the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932, the federal make work programs started to swing into action, and by 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was on campus to do general landscaping work. Soon thereafter, with the help of FDR-supporters, New Mexico Senator Bronson Cutting and Governor Clyde Tingley, the university was able to secure loans and grants through the Public Works Administration (PWA) and assistance from the Civil Works Administration (CWA).

The first major project was the design and construction of a combination administration/laboratory/classroom building, named Scholes Hall in 1969 in honor of the noted historian and academic vice-president, Frances V. Scholes. Approved by the regents in 1934, the project represented the first university design contract awarded to John Gaw Meem.

John Gaw Meem, university architect

Meem, a Santa Fe architect, was instrumental in the development of the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style, and his work as the “campus architect” from 1934 to 1956 significantly defined not only the university’s place in regional architecture, but also played an important role in Meem’s own development of this design style.32
The design of Scholes Hall was influenced by plans of early Spanish mission churches in New Mexico, its twin towers being particularly reminiscent of the San Esteban del Rey church at Acoma Pueblo.

Scholes Hall, soon after completion

The second large-scale project was the Student Union building, constructed in 1937, just to the west of Scholes Hall. Built to accommodate the ever-growing student population, the Student Union provided space for a ballroom, club rooms, student government offices, student lounges and meeting rooms, along with a bookstore and cafeteria. Like Scholes Hall, the design was a classic Spanish-Pueblo Revival style with battered, stucco walls, flat roof, and decorative wooden corbals. The campus continued to expand and improve with the construction of the state health laboratory (1937), and the remodeling of existing buildings.34

In 1938, the university dedicated its new library, another John Gaw Meem design that he considered the finest building he ever designed in the Pueblo style. The tall book storage tower was designed to be the focal point of the campus and it has become an iconic symbol of the university. In addition to the classic exterior styling that was the hallmark of Meem’s designs, the interior space featured high-ceilinged reading rooms and lobby with carved beams and hand-wrought tin light fixtures. The furnishings in the reading rooms and offices were also specifically designed and hand-made for the building. In March 1938, Kenneth Adams was commissioned to paint a series of four
murals in the main lobby. These paintings were the artist’s depiction of the evolutionary development and contributions by the state’s three main cultures – Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo. While the murals have been the source of controversy among the cultural groups represented as the country’s socio-cultural awareness has changed over time, they, nonetheless, do represent excellent examples of New Deal artwork. Dorothy Hughes, the author of the book, *Pueblo on the Mesa*, which celebrated the university’s first fifty years of existence, perhaps best expressed the significance of this new edifice, later named in honor of James Zimmerman:

> The towering new building was designed and guarded in its architectural authenticity by John Gaw Meem, University Architect. Colonnaded portals, wrought iron grilles, high wood ceilings with carved vigas and savions, authentic beams and corbels, diagonal latillas, carved doors and cases, Mexican tin lighting fixtures hand-made by native craftsmen . . . – all is beautifully created in the Spanish and Indian tradition of the Southwest.

The growth of the university and its growing stature in the community continued throughout the 1930s, and with this growth and public awareness came social controversy. The low percentage of Hispanics enrolled at UNM, and ethnic make-up of fraternities and sororities on campus began to cause considerable debate in 1933, especially in the traditional Hispanic Albuquerque communities of Old Town and Barelas. President Zimmerman moved quickly to address the issue by promising to increase Hispanic enrollment and to work with the state’s public schools to better prepare their students for university studies. From 1932 to 1936, UNM increased its percentage of Hispanic students from sixteen to twenty-eight. On a brighter note, the university received its long awaited accreditation from the Association of American Universities. UNM also saw an increase in undergraduate and graduate degrees awarded, and granted its first Doctor of Philosophy (in history) in 1937.

On the eve of one of the world’s most cataclysmic events, the University of New Mexico had by 1940 weathered the Great Depression and was on the cusp of national recognition in several fields of study. As President Zimmerman expressed in a speech some ten years earlier, “The University of New Mexico has had a little over forty short years of life; it has, in truth, scarcely begun.”
UNM, like most other colleges and universities around the country, came to a virtual standstill during the first half of the 1940s. As the military draft took more and more men into the service, women became the bulk of the student population; however, enrollment declined as much as fifteen percent, as women as well as men were needed for employment in wartime industries. In addition, there were no federal funds for construction, and most construction materials were allocated towards the war effort.

There was some building activity early in the decade as three dormitories, Marron Hall, Bandelier Hall West, the Co-Op dorm were completed. Due to the shortage of materials, several prefabricated steel buildings were moved onto campus to serve as offices for the National Youth Administration (NYA) program. While the three dormitories had been designed by John Gaw Meem in the classic Spanish-Pueblo Revival style (the Co-Op dorm was even built with locally produced adobe bricks to save on construction costs), the steel buildings looked glaringly out of place and caused great concern among university administrators until Meem added a portal with wooden beams and corbals, and stucco details, which gave the new buildings some semblance of Pueblo styling – one cannot help but think that, somewhere, William G. Tight must have been smiling.

In the late 1930s, the U.S. Army Air Corps had embraced the city of Albuquerque as a prime location to train pilots. When political and military events in Europe heated up, the War Department began to build installations immediately east of the city’s new airport. Kirtland Field (later merged with Sandia Base and Manzano Base for form the present-day Kirtland Air Force Base) was officially opened in March 1941. The nearby presence of a major military installation had an impact on activities on the UNM campus as well. A U.S. Navy training program was established and many of the male students on campus were a part of that curriculum. The importance of military aviation at Kirtland Field also played a part in constructing an addition to the Engineering Building designed especially for the study of aeronautical engineering and pilot training. The university’s Physics Department and meteorology program were also involved in the training of many Army Air Corps officers.

Of particular interest was the participation of UNM Physics professor Everly John “Jack” Workman in the war effort. The National Defense Research Committee, a group created to support scientific research on war-related projects, selected Workman and his staff to team with researchers from Columbia University, Johns Hopkins University, Princeton, and the University of Michigan to develop and test a variable timing fuze, otherwise known as a proximity fuze. This top-secret project (not made public until September 1945) was, by the end of the war, a key component in stopping the lethal Nazi V-1 rocket attacks on Britain.

Workman was instrumental in acquiring more than 30,000 acres south of airport and along the foothills of the Manzano Mountains to create the New Mexico Proving Ground. The land comprised of former livestock ranches and state land held in trust for the university became home to testing facilities that played a major role in the development of this critical defensive weapon. This property was later incorporated into Department of Defense test ranges for the Air Force and Sandia National Laboratory.
In 1945, as the war effort wound down with victories in the European and Pacific theaters, students, bolstered by educational benefits from the GI Bill, began returning in droves to college campuses across the country, and UNM was no exception. Although President Zimmerman died in October of 1944, he left behind a legacy of academic improvements, particularly in the fields of Latin American studies, anthropology, biology, physics, engineering, and education that began to attract students from across the country. The university was in a prime position to take advantage of the post-war boom years.

**Creating a Modern University: 1946 – 1969**

Following the short tenure of John P. Wernette, successor to James Zimmerman, the Board of Regents appointed Thomas L. Popejoy as the ninth president of the University of New Mexico – a post he would hold for the next twenty years. The first native-born New Mexican to assume the presidency, Popejoy had been an associate professor of economics, university comptroller, and right-hand man to President Zimmerman. During President Popejoy’s long and popular term as UNM’s administrative leader, the university experienced an unprecedented period of growth, not only in enrollment, but in the development of the campus as well.

Like the city of Albuquerque that was beginning to surround it, the university grew at a tremendous rate during the late 1940s. In 1943 UNM’s student population was 1,078, however, by 1949 it had swelled to 4,795. This dramatic increase in enrollment was mirrored by a similarly notable population increase for the city. Bolstered by new jobs at Kirtland Air Force Base and Sandia National Laboratory, and an influx of former servicemen and their families who had been stationed at Kirtland during the war and now wanted to settle down in a Sun Belt community, Albuquerque experienced a tremendous growth surge in the late 1940s and 1950s.

The increase in the student population put a real strain on campus facilities. There were shortages of classroom and laboratory space, housing, both on and off campus, and even a shortage of faculty to teach classes. At the same time, the university created several new departments and colleges, including a College of Pharmacy in 1945 and in 1947 the College of Business Administration, School of Law, and department of Journalism, which attracted many new students. To meet the need for classroom space, the university acquired a number of surplus military buildings, and in 1951 constructed new classroom building, Mitchell Hall, which contained 40 classrooms seating anywhere from 20 to 150 students each.

The biggest concern for administrators was, however, housing for both students and faculty, which was exacerbated by a general housing shortage in Albuquerque. Faculty apartments were built facing Lomas Boulevard at the far north end of the main campus while UNM leased housing facilities on Kirtland Air Force Base for students to temporarily relieve the situation. The administration also immediately began planning new dormitories. The first project, completed in
1950, was the imposing, 400-bed, four-story Mesa Vista Hall. This men’s dormitory, situated on the eastern edge of the campus along Cornell Avenue, was the largest building on campus, consisting of 111,870 square feet. Constructed of fire-resistant materials, the structure featured a large dining room and kitchen facilities, several lounges and study rooms, a game room on the top floor, 20 balconies, and five patios.

President Popejoy used his considerable influence in both the state legislature and the community to secure funding for capital improvements. Construction projects included Bratton Hall for the new Law School in 1952, and new civil engineering and chemical engineering buildings located in the ever-expanding science quad near Hodgin Hall. The nation’s emphasis on science and technology education, reinforced by the increasing workload at Sandia Labs resulted in new buildings for the departments of biology, chemistry, geology, physics and astronomy, designed by the Meem architectural firm. A new gymnasium, named after legendary coach Roy Johnson, was completed in 1957. In 1959, the new student union building, the New Mexico Union or “SUB,” was opened across from Mesa Vista Hall on Cornell Drive. It enclosed 143,000 square feet and included a ballroom, bowling alley, cafeteria, and multiple student lounges and offices. The old student union was remodeled for the anthropology department.

To meet the needs of women students, UNM built Hokona Dormitory in September of 1956 in the northeast corner of the campus. The architectural firm of Meem, Zehner, Holien, and Associates designed the “new” Hokona Hall as a unique looking double-wing structure with a dining room situated in-between. It replaced the original women’s dorm of the same name, which long ago had been converted into office space. A second large men’s dormitory, Coronado Hall, was completed in 1958 on the east side of the campus.

Tom Popejoy understood the significance of the post-war education boom on UNM’s future and planning for future growth was a primary goal of his administration. Soon after assuming office, he established a Committee on University Aims and Objectives. The committee established four goals:
1. Provide students a sound general education in the liberal arts tradition;
2. Offer students a special and professional education in scholarly and technical fields;
3. Encourage faculty scholarship and research in the context of the learning process; and
4. Promote adult education and general cultural programs to enrich the lives of all New Mexicans.

To this end, the university established a Graduate Center in the community of Los Alamos to assist scientists and technicians at the National Laboratory earn their graduate degrees in biology, physics, and chemistry. UNM also encouraged faculty to pursue research grants and they were particularly successful in the early 1950s with agencies such as the Atomic Energy Commission and the National Science Foundation – again in part due to the university’s connections with Kirtland Air Force Base and Sandia National Labs.45

As the campus grew to encompass some 440 acres by 1950, Popejoy was also concerned about campus planning. In January of 1960, the Board of Regents adopted the General Development Plan produced by the architectural firm of John C. Warnecke and Associates. Dubbed the “Warnecke Plan” it became university’s official planning guide, and remained so for the next twenty-five years. The plan included a detailed analysis of not only the main campus, but also concepts for the, heretofore, undeveloped North and South campuses.46 Highlights of the plan noted that:

- Zimmerman Library should be the focal point for the campus, with all classes being held within a ten minute walk of the building;
- Related subject fields should be grouped together (the traditional quadrangle plan first suggested in the 1917 Griffen plan);
- The North Campus would include the proposed medical school and student housing;
- The South Campus would be dedicated to athletics; and
- Buildings should be no taller than two-and-one-half stories (no higher than the library tower).

The Warnecke Plan also called for a campus core to be completely pedestrian with an external loop road and park-like landscaping. The plan recommended the continuation of the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style architecture; however, curiously it called for the demolition of some generally smaller, but original, Spanish-Pueblo Revival buildings including Hodgin Hall and Sara Raynolds Hall.

As John Gaw Meem slowly cut back on the number of design projects, his partner Edward Holien picked up the slack and many of the buildings constructed in the 1950s were his work. Holien’s architectural training was in the Beaux-Arts school of design and his buildings exhibited the symmetrical and monumental features of that style. Many of his buildings, such as Johnson Gymnasium and the Fine Arts Center, were large, institutional-looking structures resulting in part from the necessary cutbacks in budgets for handcrafted features so noticeable Meem’s designs. The architectural historian, Bainbridge Bunting, described these structures as “static” and characterized them as “pure Beaux-Arts – gone adobe.”47

Entrance to Johnson Gym, prior to renovations
As the decade of the 1960s began, campus construction continued unabated with funding coming from increased student fees and profits from shrewd land deals made by President Popejoy and the Board of Regents. One notable deal involved the selling of land in what was then the city’s far northeast heights to the developer Edward Snow, who built the Snowheights subdivision, and the leasing of land to a development company owned by Winthrop Rockefeller who built the state’s first regional shopping center, Winrock.

Using these funds, the university broke ground in 1960 for a new football stadium located on the South Campus, a mile and a quarter south of Hodgin Hall. More dormitory space was created by the construction of four dormitories: Santa Clara, Oñate, Santa Ana, and Alvarado halls in the northeast corner of the campus. The Alumni Memorial Chapel, situated between Scholes Hall and the anthropology building (the former student union), was built in 1962 with funds raised from donations and a loan to the alumni association from the university. The Edward Holien-designed building replicates classic early Spanish mission church styling complete with a double bell tower and balcony over the front entrance, and detailed with Spanish-Pueblo decorative elements.

The year 1963 was significant milepost in campus construction. Work was started on the Fine Arts Center, a large building on the southeast corner of the campus, which would house faculty offices, rehearsal rooms, a library, and recital halls. The concert hall, named after Tom Popejoy, was added in 1966. The increased enrollment caused a severe strain on the university’s library facilities. To alleviate this problem the architectural firm of Ferguson, Stevens, Mallory, and Pearl was awarded the contract in 1963 to design a major addition to Meem’s masterpiece – Zimmerman Library.

Although Meem had always envisioned an addition to his original design, enlarging with this iconic piece of university architecture had to be a daunting task for lead architect George Pearl. Pearl’s masterful design called for wrapping a 97,160 square-foot addition around the tower on the building’s east facade. The addition was sympathetic but did not copy the original design. It consisted of three floors and a basement, and a new main entrance on the building’s south side, facing the heart of the campus. Although features of the original library’s magnificent interior, such as the north side reading rooms and main lobby were left virtually intact, Meem’s reading room in the building’s southwest corner was
completely remodeled to the house the extensive collection of Southwestern archival materials donated by New Mexico Senator Clinton P. Anderson – for whom the room is now named.

For many years, the university’s education department had been housed in Hodgin Hall, a building, which over time had become overcrowded and showing signs of neglect. In 1962, bids were received to design a new educational complex. The architectural firm of Flatow, Moore, Bryan, and Fairburn was selected and their design caused quite a stir on campus. In the words of former university architect, Van Dorn Hooker, “No other complex of buildings since Meem’s 1930s work has had as much impact in shaping campus buildings that followed. Certainly none created as much discussion about its design appropriateness . . .”

The complex consisted of eight buildings connected by narrow, sometimes drafty, passageways, including an administration building, faculty offices, classroom building, and facilities for home economics, industrial arts, and art education. A separate building, the Manzanita Center, operated a pre-school educational laboratory, while a unique domed structure, called The Kiva, offered classroom-auditorium space.

Unfortunately, the complex was plagued with structural problems beginning with a serious construction accident in May of 1962 in which shoring collapsed under the weight of freshly poured concrete slabs. Other issues concerned the coloring of precast concrete walls and a lack of reinforcement of the low concrete block walls that surrounded the patios and courtyards that cracked and blew down in high winds. Finally, structural problems resulted in the demolition of the Faculty Office Building in 2004.

Despite its critics, the educational complex won a number of architectural awards upon its completion in 1963. Its architectural significance was noted by the New Mexico Chapter of the American
Institute of Architects in 1964, and chosen as the “Building of the Month” for April 1967 by College and University Business. Writing in New Mexico Architecture, Bainbridge Bunting illuminated the dilemma created by the design:

*The heart of the design problem and the crux of the controversy that the buildings have raised is an old one: tradition vs. the modern – or at least what momentarily passes for the modern. The distinction of Mr. Flatow’s design . . . is that while its respects and draws inspiration from traditional architecture of this region, it also accepts modern technology without apologies. . . . [T]he design avoids crippling compromise and rises, instead, to a new and creative plane which is uniquely appropriate to the particular problems at hand.*

The construction of the educational complex resulted in a breakthrough in architectural design at UNM. It opened the door for a regional modernism that respected traditional Spanish-Pueblo styling but allowed for innovative new forms and materials. The College of Business Administration, later renamed the Robert O. Anderson School of Management, was completed in 1968. The architect, John Reed, was reportedly inspired by the design of Kwataka Hall – the university’s first men’s dorm built in 1906 – with its overhanging roof lines and extending balconies.

Max Flatow, and his architectural firm of Flatow, Moore, Bryan, and Fairburn, continued to make a contribution to the campus in the late 1960s and early 70s with the design of a greenhouse addition to the Biology Building, the design of the Marshall E. Farris Engineering Center in the southwest corner of the campus, and the Psychology Building (Logan Hall).

Following his successful design of the Zimmerman Library addition in 1965, George Pearl offered a design for an addition to the Chemistry Building (another Meem design). Pearl added more than 47,000 square feet to the original building. Pearl also submitted final drawings for a faculty offices/classroom building (later named Ortega Hall) that was built on the site of old football field. This site, once on the eastern edge of the campus, was now prime campus real estate located just south of Zimmerman Library and west of the Student Union.
To make way for the construction of the new building, the university demolished the concrete stadium building on the west side of the former football field.

The stadium building not only held many football memories for UNM alumni, but also served as a dormitory, ROTC offices, and provided space for the first law school classes in 1947. The stadium was also involved in civic functions for the City of Albuquerque. In 1956, the stadium hosted one of the city’s main events during the 250th anniversary celebration of its founding.\(^52\)

In addition to the development of the Warnecke Plan, UNM’s Board of Regents also engaged a landscape architect to prepare the first formal landscape plan to complement the building plan. In 1962, Garrett Eckbo, of the architectural firm, Eckbo, Dean, and Williams of South Pasadena, California, was commissioned to develop the plan for the main campus. Prior to this effort, landscaping the university grounds had generally been an informal task, done in a piecemeal approach with available funds.

The earliest landscaping emphasized just getting trees and other greenery to take hold on the barren, wind-swept mesa in order to provide some windbreak and shade. Beginning in the 1930s, the creation of a park-like atmosphere was attempted through the planting of large trees such as elms, cottonwoods, and pines. However, the streets that still crisscrossed the campus, together with the numerous parking lots...
tended to disrupt this attempt to create such a tranquil environment. Furthermore, with the exception of Professor Edward Castetter’s cactus garden planted on the west facade of Zimmerman Library in 1940, the plantings did not compliment the university’s Spanish-Pueblo Revival style architecture.53

Eckbo’s formal design envisioned a campus closed to vehicular traffic and his goal was to create spaces for social interaction as well as simply pathways for getting from building to building. In an article published in 1978, Eckbo described how he analyzed the campus’ existing buildings, materials, local climate and topography, together with plans for future development, to create his landscaping plan.54

Eckbo combined what the landscape student Will Moses has described as a “modernist interpretation of pastoralism” with an “urban, hardscape oriented approach.”55 The former style is embodied by grassy hillocks situated amid curvilinear paths that are shaded by tall trees, which is exemplified by the university’s “Duck Pond” directly west of Zimmerman Library and the area around Scholes Hall and the Alumni Chapel. The urban hardscape is typified by brick pavement with concrete borders, which form geometric shapes and is shaded by smaller trees in planters. Smith Plaza, completed in 1972 and located just outside the library’s south entrance is a prime example of such a space.

The area now known as Smith Plaza (named after longtime campus administrator, Sherman Smith) was always envisioned as “big space” separating the library from other campus buildings located to the south (what is now the Humanities Building).

Steps leading down from Union Plaza to Smith Plaza

However, Eckbo transformed this space from a grassy area intersected with pathways to the hardscape it is today in part because of the continuous pedestrian traffic that it had to accommodate. The architectural critic, Bainbridge Bunting, noted that its human scale and variations in elevation, paving, and plantings made it a fine example of public space. This type of landscaping is, according to Moses, reminiscent of the hard-packed, earthen plazas found in early Spanish and Pueblo villages and thus compliments UNM’s architectural style.56

Although not the focal point of this narrative, two developments on the North and South campuses during the 1960s played an important role in the history of the university and deserve at least a short mention. In 1960, the university football stadium was relocated on what was called
South Campus – a barren patch of sand hills and former city landfill about a mile south of the main campus. In 1966, University Arena – The Pit – was completed just across University Boulevard to the west. This nationally recognized basketball arena is architecturally unique for its subterranean floor and seating area.

In 1964, the Board of Regents and the state legislature approved plans for a medical school to be located on the North Campus – situated north of Lomas Boulevard on the site of the former university golf course. A grant-in-aid program from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation funded the school’s start-up costs, and monies from the National Institutes of Health as well as other sources initiated the construction of the first buildings. Having a medical school had been a long-held goal for the university in its effort to improve medical research, education, and patient care in the state.

Back on the main campus, President Popejoy retired from the university in 1968. He left behind a strong legacy that, according to his successor, Ferrel Heady, made Popejoy the “father of the state’s modern institution of higher learning.”


The Popejoy era saw a tremendous growth in the university’s enrollment and significant changes to the physical layout of the campus. This transition from a small, state-centered university to regionally, some might even say, a nationally recognized institution lay not only in the enrollment figures and number of campus buildings, but also by the politics of the student body. This became crystal clear to the university’s new president Ferrel Heady in the spring of 1970 when students erupted in campus protests over the Vietnam War and civil rights issues. For several months, student activists disrupted the normal campus routine, culminating in the disturbance on May 4th, which resulted in Governor David Cargo ordering National Guard troops onto campus to restore order. UNM students, along with students from more than 400 other colleges and universities across the country, had made their voices heard, and UNM administrators and the Board of Regents had to consider to their call for changes to academic and social policies. Life on campus, although regaining some sense of normalcy by the fall semester, would never be quite the same again.

Amid the occasional din of student protesters, professors also had to lecture over the noise of continued construction on the main campus. As former university architect Van Dorn Hooker remarked, the campus by 1972 was “one big construction yard.” The university now stretched from Central Avenue north beyond Lomas Boulevard, and from University Boulevard on the west to Girard Boulevard, with an athletic complex located a mile to the south. The entire campus encompassed more than 500 acres. Most of the through-streets that once allowed access to the campus interior had been closed off at the major arterials, or had their access severely limited, such as Yale Boulevard, which was kept open to allow access to the newly opened University Bookstore. Planning additional buildings was becoming harder and harder for university planners and architects. The limited space, together with the guidelines set forth in the Warnecke Plan, meant that innovative designs and the possible demolition of older buildings would have to be considered.

As the concept of a pedestrian-only campus was slowly evolving into reality, a major architectural casualty of this effort was the demolition of Rodey Hall, one of the campus’ earliest buildings. Constructed in
1909 as an assembly hall adjacent to the Administration Building (Hodgin Hall), Rodey Hall (named in honor Bernard S. Rodey, considered the “father of the university”) had served as an auditorium, chapel, and archaeological museum during its 60 years of existence. However, by 1971 the building had fallen into severe disrepair and was declared a fire hazard. Its demolition provided an opportunity for campus planners to extend the loop road, Redondo Drive, around the western edge of the campus and fit it together with the city’s realignment of University Boulevard.59

The demolition of Rodey Hall awakened the university community to the fact that if something were not done soon to maintain the university’s first building, Hodgin Hall, it too would meet the same fate. Spearheaded by retired English professor T. M. Pearce, who garnered the support of Campus Planner and preservation advocate, Joe McKinney, and the university’s Alumni Association, this group persuaded the Board of Regents to approve the appointment of architect Joseph D. Burwinkle, Jr. in 1975 to oversee the restoration of this campus landmark, which was later listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The project was completed in November of 1983 at a cost of more than $1.3 million, much of it coming from private donations. The restored interior and exterior has become a showplace for visitors to the university, and is home to the Alumni Association and the UNM Foundation.60

Large infill building projects during the seventies included the Humanities Building, a unique looking structure resembling the historic multi-storied homes of New Mexico’s Pueblo Indians, the bookstore, and Woodward Hall, all situated on the site of the former football field in the center of the campus. The science quad continued to be a busy construction site. The design for a new Physics Laboratory and Lecture Hall was a response to the ever-decreasing amount of space to build on the main campus. It featured an above ground lecture hall with labs below ground level, underneath the quad’s plaza. In 1978, the new Mechanical Engineering building was sited in the far southwest corner of the campus, across from historic Hodgin Hall and Tight Grove.

Understanding that Hodgin Hall was an iconic building to the community, the architect Jesse Pacheco, of the firm Pacheco and Graham, used a fenestration pattern on the new building that was sympathetic to that found on the old Administration Building. Again, however, the need for modern scientific facilities and the lack of space on campus resulted in the loss of another of the university’s original buildings – the campus heating plant, which was first building on campus designed in President Tight’s “Pueblo Style.”61
By 1975, pedestrian malls had replaced streets, along the Cornell and Terrace corridors, and a loop road, Redondo Drive, had encircled the campus. The Eckbo Plan continued to guide the university’s landscaping policy. In accordance with the plan, a pond, complete with a waterfall and pedestrian bridge was to be constructed between Zimmerman Library and Scholes Hall. Although there howls of protest over the loss of a parking lot so close to these facilities, and the fact that this new landscape feature would close access from Yale Boulevard to the classrooms in Mitchell Hall, the “Duck Pond” as it has been fondly named, has become an integral part of the campus. It is a favorite place for students to “hang out,” for weddings, and enjoyed by school children visiting the university. An historic preservation casualty of the project was the demolition of another of the campus’ early buildings, Yatoka Hall, constructed as a men’s dormitory in 1928.

The Duck Pond, soon after completion in 1976

A second major landscaping improvement was the beautification of the city water reservoir at the intersection of Redondo Drive and Yale Boulevard. George Pearl designed a irregularly shaped concrete facing for the structure and landscaped it with trees, river cobbles, and benches. When Yale Boulevard was finally closed off to all vehicular traffic, this onetime eyesore became part of a formal entryway onto campus.

In the mid-1980s the north side of the main campus, east of the President’s House and north of Zimmerman Library, was the site of new infill construction as the Social Sciences building and a business school library named after a former dean, William J. Parish, were completed. Planning was also underway for another new library – the university’s fourth – in the suddenly congested science quad. A large building would be needed to accommodate this large collection, so the architectural firm of Dean, Hunt, and Associates designed a subterranean structure above which they created an open space that brought both light into the lower level and provided a plaza-like setting for students. When completed in 1986, Centennial Library housed the collections for the physical sciences.

In 1989, the university celebrated its centennial year. UNM had come a long way from its solitary location on the city’s east mesa, with only a handful of students, most of whom were busy taking remedial high school level courses to one hundred years later when there were 28,615 students were enrolled on five campuses located throughout the state. More than 24,000 of these students
were going to school on the main campus, and 4,200 of them received degrees in 1990. UNM was considered to be one of the top 50 research institutions in the country, recognized for achievements in medicine, law, architecture, engineering, anthropology, and the study of Southwestern culture.  

As the university headed into second hundred years and closed out the millennium, its commitment to growth and preservation of its heritage were revealed in its buildings and policy. A large, new three-story classroom building, Dane Smith Hall, designed with Pueblo-style massing, fenestration, texture and color arose from lots along Roma Avenue that were once occupied by faculty homes (including one owned by former Professor Dane Smith). On the opposite side of campus, a new university bookstore was sited in a portion of Yale Park, that necessitated removing large, old elm trees and grassy areas, which caused much consternation to students and the nearby residential community. The new bookstore was, however, designed as gateway building into the campus along the Cornell Avenue corridor. On the preservation side, the 1917 Chemistry Building (listed on the National Register of Historic Places) was remodeled for use as an engineering computer pod, and the 1930s President’s House (renamed by President Richard Peck as “University House”) had its interior remodeled and updated, while maintaining its classic Spanish-Pueblo Revival style exterior. 

In 1998, amid continued new construction, remodeling, infrastructure upgrades, and long-range planning activities, the Board of Regents finally made a commitment, albeit some 90 years late, to President’s William Tight’s architectural dream of a “Pueblo on the Mesa.” On December 8th, they approved a policy adopting the “Pueblo Style” as the official university architectural style and created a committee to oversee UNM’s historic buildings. The following year, the New Mexico chapter of the American Institute of Architects designated Zimmerman Library as the state’s most noteworthy building designed in the twentieth century. 

UNM HERITAGE PRESERVATION AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM  

As the University of New Mexico enters the twenty-first century, it faces serious challenges to the preservation of its historic architecture and landscapes. The university continues to grow both in enrollment and faculty, and this, together with needs of new technology, makes more and more demands on classroom, laboratory, and office space. University planners and the Board of Regents must make difficult decisions as to the significance of UNM’s built environment. They are faced with the questions: Which buildings and open spaces are important and need to be left intact, and which ones can be replaced with more modern facilities? How will the construction of new buildings affect the visual qualities of the historic properties? Similarly, maintaining and upgrading older, historic buildings on campus – one valued and deemed important to the university’s heritage – is a challenge with regard ever-increasing costs for such budgets. 

The campus of the University of New Mexico offers a uniqueness that has been recognized by architects, historians, writers, and poets. Its historic buildings represent the legacy of one of the Southwest’s most respected regional architects, John Gaw Meem, and even the more contemporary buildings not designed by this recognized master reflect his influence and contribution to not only the
university’s campus style, but modern Southwest regionalism as well.

The University of New Mexico offers not only a quality educational experience, but also a quality experience in the more subtle meaning of place. Its buildings and landscapes offer students, faculty, and staff a variety of places in which to feel the many facets of university life – exhilaration, camaraderie, reflection, solitude. The significance of the places where these emotions take place is often not obvious, but usually subtler, even subconscious. Yet when places change, new emotions are often evoked, ones of sadness or loss – the loss of a familiar place. As such, it is critical that UNM does not lose these places; that it does not forget its heritage and the places that make the campus not only architecturally unique and interesting, but a comfortable place to be in the world.

This is the test facing the university in the new century – how to make progress but at the same time understand and respect its past.