

North Hall: 1900-2014

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A Building with a History

Imagine a building constructed during the signing of the treaty ending the Spanish-American War some 35 years after the Civil War ended. Picture newly-elected U.S. President William McKinley standing with Theodore Roosevelt at his side. The Wright brothers were testing airplanes and Henry Ford was building automobiles. Air conditioning was a “newfangled” invention, and fortune seekers by the thousands were rushing up to Alaska to make their fortune in gold nuggets. Spanish flu patients were treated here at North Hall in 1918 when it was the Homeopathic Hospital (Townsend). The building stood stoically through the two World Wars and the Korean War. It suffered several fire-bombings during the Vietnam anti-war activism (*Annual Review 1969-1970*). And, it “stood the watch” through the Cold War and the U.S.-Soviet “space race”: Michigan midshipmen on summer cruise were aboard the ship that picked up astronauts returning from the Gemini IV “spacewalk” mission (*Annual Review of Command History 1966*). North Hall served her country honorably and ably for 114 years.

For nearly twelve decades this stately building proudly served the community in various capacities. Located at 1105 North University Avenue in Ann Arbor, Michigan, it was set slightly back from the street. The Museum Annex (Fishery) and the Ruthven Museum of Natural History were located on its west side. The U.S. flag distinctly flew in front of the quarter deck. One could see the bus stop on North University Avenue from the front door. Delivery trucks could drive right up to the front door on the quarter-circle drive. Exiting the building on the east (the fire exit) took one to the Life Sciences Building, the Dental School, and the Palmer Structure. On the pavement, along the way, lay the large Block ‘M’ where the NROTC drill team sometimes mustered. It was a commanding location for a stately building.

1900-1922: The Homeopathic Hospital of the University of Michigan

Ann Arbor gave the University of Michigan title to five acres of land to build the Homeopathic Medical College of the University in September 1899. Construction commenced in November (Donnelly, IV, part VIII, p. 1695). According to handwritten minutes from the medical faculty meeting in November 1900, formal opening exercises for the new hospital were to take place December 6-8 (*Homeopathic Medical School Minutes 1878*).

The new hospital had 48,467 square feet and a 140-bed capacity. There were six wards and 20 private rooms. It cost \$80,306.50 to build (Donnelly 1695).

The front of the building measured 200 feet long with granite, gray brick, and red roof tiles, according to then-President of the Michigan Homeopathic Society Royal S. Copeland (Copeland 55). Dr. Copeland goes on to explain that, even though the building had a basement and a sub-basement, none of it was underground due to the unique manner by which it was set into the hill. This allowed more natural light and air to pass through the five-story building. It was set on

five acres of lawn and shaded by huge oak trees with an old apple orchard behind the building. The hospital was located on the city's streetcar line (Copeland 56).

A ward for children was built in 1918 just south of the Homeopathic Hospital. Later the building transitioned to Health Service. It became the Museum Annex in 1940 (Shaw 1012). Also near the hospital was the former residence of Judge William Fletcher. The residence was originally used as the nurses' residence. Shaw adds that later the nurses resided in the hospital itself (1012), but it is unclear whether this is a reference to the Homeopathic Hospital or the main hospital.

Over the years, visitors to North Hall mentioned military barracks having been located behind the building during World War I. Some evidence of this was found in the Bentley Historical Library records about the Homeopathic Hospital. Glass negative plates from the University of Michigan Buildings and Grounds show the building in the background behind trees, off to the right rear. A long, rectangular building in the foreground appears to have ten vertical windows separated by a door. Some military paraphernalia is scattered around the building (U-M Buildings and Grounds 43). One scene displays a Model A or Model T Ford automobile parked at the end of the building (44). Nine men in uniform stand in front of the barracks (20), and another scene reveals the barracks under construction or repair (18). In yet another angle we see about 28 people near the building, and there appears to be snow on the ground, but the trees are in full leaf, so it may be grass or vegetation, or perhaps an early Michigan snowfall (45). A slightly different angle shows equipment covered by a tarp in the yard (20). The slides are not dated.

1926: The South Department Hospital

On April 24, 1922, a letter from a D. W. Springer to a Dr. Love in the Medical School minutes noted that the Board of Regents of the University of Michigan officially closed the Homeopathic Hospital, transferring out 84 in-patients and seven boarding patients (Springer).

No mention was found in the records to determine how the building was utilized for the next few years, but by May 1926, the old Homeopathic Hospital was designated by the Regents as "The South Department Hospital" (Donnelly 1695).

1940: The Navy Reserve Officers' Training Corps

Little information is available about the building's history from 1926 to 1940. The interested reader is encouraged to uncover facts about the history of the ROTC program itself, however, beginning with the Act of 1817, which established a professorship of military science at the University of Michigan (Shaw, 1356-1367).

By 1940, the building was no longer a hospital. From that time forward, it held the Navy Reserve Officers' Training Corps, and for a lesser time the Red Cross, the Audio-Visual Education Center, and the University Extension Service (Donnelly, 1696). The records also indicate that, from 1949-1951, Army and Air Force ROTC resided within the building but moved out in 1951 and were temporarily located elsewhere on campus (Donnelly 1696). A great number of

students signed up for Air Force ROTC during the Korean War, and facilities at North Hall, including the rifle range, were “badly strained,” so that AFROTC moved to the Temporary Classroom building during this time (Shaw 1364). Shaw also mentions a photograph laboratory in North Hall at the time of the move (1364).

The President’s Report for 1956-1957 for the University of Michigan gives information about “Air Science,” “Military Science,” and “Naval Science.” “Naval Science” had a staff of eight officers, two chief petty officers, one Marine master sergeant, one yeoman first class, one fire control technician first class, and one gunner’s mate first class” (343). [Author’s note: The 2014 unit staff included six officers, a master sergeant, and four civilians.] U-M authorized four Naval Reserve units: research, electronics, a naval security group, and a Naval Reserve officers’ school unit (*President’s Report* 343).

North Hall has housed the Department of Naval Science since 1940. For some years, there are annual records from the commanding officer of the year’s activities. Some copies of these reports can be found in department files today, beginning in 1960. These reports often give a running account – sometimes quite detailed, as in the Vietnam years -- of events in North Hall.

Navy Day 1961 was celebrated by the NROTC Unit. The mayors of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti officially proclaimed October 27, 1961, as Navy Day. Local radio stations marked the day with interviews, spot announcements, and music. And at 1200 noon, October 27, 1961, the University of Michigan Carillon presented a special Navy Day concert (*Annual Review 1961*).

In January 1962, the midshipman wardroom was set up in the west wing of the second floor: “Plaques, pictures and insignia of various naval commands, aviation squadrons, and ships [were] used in the decoration of the lounge” (*Annual Review, 1962*).

In 1962 and 1963, professors from the Japanese National Defense College visited the University, hosted by NROTC. Also in 1963, there was mention of an eight-foot model of the Polaris submarine ETHAN ALLEN on display in the building. Forty-three NROTC seniors were commissioned that academic year. In 1964, the CO and XO “commenced regular candidate interviews for entrance into the NROTC Program in Fall” (*Annual Review 1962, 1963*).

By 1965, the U.S. and the Soviet Union were engaged in a space race. In early June, Gemini IV took the second manned space flight in NASA’s project Gemini. Astronauts James McDivitt and Edward White circled the earth 66 times in four days, and White completed the first space “walk” by an American. When the Gemini IV landed in the Pacific May 30, 1965, Michigan midshipmen, detached to the USS WASP for summer cruise, were aboard to assist in the pick-up (*Annual Review 1966*).

In the later 1960’s, amidst anti-war sentiment surrounding the U.S. military presence in Vietnam, there began to be pressure to ban ROTC from campus or at least take away university credit for ROTC courses. ROTC curriculum was carefully examined, and revision continued throughout this time (*Annual Review 1969-70*).

1965 was a time of political and civil unrest. Protests against the war in Vietnam, with anti-war seminars, rallies, and speeches were the background against which President Lyndon Baines Johnson announced he would not seek reelection. Martin Luther King, Jr. was slain in April in Memphis. Robert Kennedy was killed in June. And at the Democratic National Convention, in Chicago, Mayor John Daley requested police quash anti-war protests. The country saw violence erupt on national television. Richard M. Nixon was elected president in November 1969 and began secretly bombing Cambodia without congressional knowledge or public support.

It was in this milieu that North Hall was car-bombed in June 1969 (*Ann Arbor News* – “Bombing”). Someone set a bomb under the gas tank of a staff car parked a car just under the front window of the former CO’s office. It shattered 60 windows in North Hall and started a fire. Car parts shot over the top to the back of the building, and windows in the nearby Dental School were also broken. People two miles away felt the blast. The explosion happened on a Sunday afternoon when classes and students were away, so no one was injured (“Bombing”).

The climate around the country – and Ann Arbor – was decidedly anti-military at this time. North Hall, home of the Reserve Officer Training Corps, symbolized the military. *The NROTC Combined Command History Annual Review of 1969-1970* notes class disruptions by anti-war demonstrators on September 17 and 19, 1969. On September 22-23, a sit-in demonstration was staged at North Hall by anti-war protestors. On October 15, two classes were disrupted by demonstrators, but “no physical damage [was] incurred” (*Annual Review 1969-70*).

According to the *1969-1970 Review*, the curriculum revision was completed. One result was that the University changed the title of the program at North Hall from “Naval Reserve Officers’ Training Corps” to “Navy Officer Education Program”. In February, demonstrators broke into North Hall and did “considerable damage” to breakable items (*Annual Review, 1969-70*). On May 5, there was an unsuccessful attempt made to fire-bomb North Hall, causing just minor damage to the outside of the building. Two days later, North Hall was occupied by students protesting the Kent State University killings. And, on May 27, the Gay Liberation Front and Women’s Liberation Movement jointly demonstrated in front of North Hall. On June 23, people threw rocks, breaking windows in Navy-controlled areas. The University responded by making structural changes to protect North Hall: replacing glass with Plexiglas, installing wire screens, and replacing all locks (*Annual Review 1969-70*).

In July 1970, Navy property stolen from North Hall in May was recovered. On July 9, the College of LSA formally decided to deny academic credit for NROTC courses beginning in the Fall of 1971. A bit of departmental rancor might be detected in the statement found in the commander’s annual report that year: “Other colleges within the University did not take similar action” (*Annual Review 1969*).

On November 1, 1970, an NROTC official government vehicle was fire-bombed. Damage was approximately \$800 (*Annual Review 1969*).

The years leading up to the fall of 1981 appear to have been relatively uneventful. In September 1981, U-M played the U.S. Naval Academy in football, and Michigan won 21-16 (*Annual Review 1981*). ADM Tom Hayward, Chief of Naval Operations and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, attended the game, preceded by a press conference in the Kalamazoo Room of the Michigan League (*Ann Arbor News*, "Sir").

In 1990, the NROTC Scholarship Program began to include applicants for a four-year nursing degree and commission in the Navy Nurse Corps (Department, 1990). In 2000, the NROTC Class of 1945 held its 55th reunion.

Although the third floor of North Hall showcased quaint offices and interesting nooks and crannies, it was the sub-basement that held the fascination of the community for many years. A dark, dank, unlighted space with bumpy, unfinished floors, this area provided the perfect setting for a haunted house. Although the precise date is unknown at which the ROTC units began using this space to create the haunted houses, it was truly a community favorite. Thousands of people routinely stood in line for blocks to be frightened. An annual fundraiser for local charities, people were still asking about it in 2014. An email from Captain Mike Owens in mid-October 2004 pointed out that using the sub-basement as "special amusement facilities" violated fire code because it had no sprinkler system. Jointly, CAPT Owens, the Fire Inspector, and U-M Risk Management sounded the official death knell for the haunted house that year (Owens).

In June 2005, the unit tied up the climbing ropes behind North Hall, used by Marine-option midshipmen to build upper-body strength, so that the general public would not get hurt using them (Koettters). In 2006, a sidewalk was put in linking the front door and the walk to Palmer Commons so students would no longer have to walk through grass and mud (Brigger).

On Halloween weekend 2010, the NROTC Class of 1945 held its 65th reunion in North Hall.

Around 2010, the commanding officer and executive officer (CAPT Rick Vanden Heuvel and CDR Tim Gavin) installed flag holders on the front steps so the four service banners could be flown. In 2011, an underground sprinkler system went in to keep the front lawn green.

On May 2, 2014, the NROTC commissioned its last class (15) in North Hall. Approximately 2,222 officers had been commissioned there since 1940. Additional men were trained there during World War II, including in the V-12 Program, but were not commissioned.

In the second week of May, 2014, all three branches of Officer Education Programs vacated the building to relocate in Chemistry, bringing to an end approximately 114 years of North Hall history, 74 of which were in service of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

Within the Walls of North Hall

In the hallway outside the former NROTC commanding officer's office at North Hall were displayed a series of photos of each every commanding officer the United States Navy sent to North Hall to train officers since 1940. Limitations of time and space preclude a complete listing and history here of each of these accomplished and honorable gentlemen. The reader is encouraged to view *the University of Michigan Faculty History Project* for more complete information. *The Project* documents faculty members who have been associated with the University since 1837, including professors of military, aeronautical, and naval science. That information can be found at: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/faculty-history/>.

Although an Army ROTC Unit had been in existence at the University of Michigan since 1917, its exact location during the early years is unknown. However, a plaque commemorating military service in 1917 was displayed on the walls of North Hall for decades and declares:

**The undergraduates and professors of the University of Michigan who as members of the 7th and 8th Divisions, First Battalion of the Michigan Naval Militia were called into the active service of their country within a few hours of the declaration of war in 1917. They gave up or postponed their studies, and offered their services, and lives if necessary, to defend freedom, liberty, and the institutions of this great country, such as the University of Michigan, their alma mater. Presented this 50th anniversary by their comrades:
April 1967.**

Although each naval officer cannot be documented here, there is space for the first and last Professors of Naval Science in North Hall.

The very first commanding officer to train officers in North Hall was Captain Lyal Ament Davidson. Captain Davidson was born in 1886 in Muscatine, Iowa. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1910 and commissioned in 1912. He served active-duty in the Navy during this time and received his master's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Columbia University in 1917 (*Faculty History Project*). He served aboard the *New Hampshire* at the invasion of Vera Cruz in 1914 and the *Kansas* also during World War I (Arlington). Prior to commanding NROTC-University of Michigan, he had been in command of the U.S.S. *Omaha* (*Faculty History Project*).

Captain Davidson reported to NROTC-University of Michigan in July 1940 and had an enrollment of 110 students. Seventeen months later, Pearl Harbor was attacked. On December 9, 1941, the *Ann Arbor* newspaper ran a story with the title, "Students rush ROTC Offices" (*Ann Arbor News*, "Students Rush"). According to the story, more than one hundred students appeared at Captain Davidson's office in North Hall, inquiring on how they could "sign up" to fight ("Students"). On December 8 and 9, 1941, fifty applications were filed for entry into the naval reserve ("Students").

Captain Davidson served as commanding officer in North Hall only until December 1941. Promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral in November 1941, he received his war orders in December. He became Commander of Cruiser Division Eight, Atlantic Fleet, from 1942-1944 (Jacobs) and received the Navy Distinguished Service Medal for his actions during the occupation of French Morocco November 7-8, 1942 (*Military Times Hall of Valor*). Next, he served as Commander of Task Force 86 from July-October 1944. Following that, he served in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations as a member of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee 1945-1946. He retired as Vice Admiral June 1946. Decorations included two Distinguished Service Medals and two Legions of Merit. Vice Admiral Davidson passed away and was buried with full military honors in Arlington Cemetery in 1950 (Arlington).

The last USN commanding officer to serve in North Hall was Captain Joseph H. Evans. Captain Evans assumed command of the University of Michigan's Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps in July 2013. Immediately prior to assuming command here, he commanded Training Air Wing TWO in Kingsville, Texas. Captain Evans has over 3400 flight hours and 575 carrier landings. His personal decorations include the Legion of Merit, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal (three awards), the Air Medal with Combat "V" (one individual, three Strike/Flight), the Joint Service Commendation Medal, the Navy Commendation Medal (five awards), the Navy Achievement Medal (three awards) as well as various unit, service and campaign awards.

At the time of writing, a decommissioning ceremony for historic North Hall was scheduled for the morning of Friday, July 11, 2014, and demolition was planned for November. In North Hall's place was to be built a life sciences building. The Officer Education Program was relocated in the Chemistry building in May 2014. The staff at that time included Captain Joseph H. Evans, Commander Scott Howell, Captain Brian Kerg (USMC), Lieutenant Victoria Throckmorton, Lieutenant Daniel Bellomo, Lieutenant Patrick Love, Master Sergeant Lonnie Flores, Ms. Cynthia Mannery, Mr. Nick Wickstrom, Mr. Michael Lane, and Ms. Camilla Roper.

Any history of North Hall would be incomplete without mentioning the tunnel between North Hall and the Museum Annex. In the basement of North Hall, a narrow tunnel led over to the Museum Annex. Although no other part of North Hall (except the foundation) was underground, this tunnel was not visible from outside the buildings. The door accessing the tunnel was smaller than other doors in the building and frequently locked. On several occasions when it was not, the author and others explored the tunnel and followed it over into the Museum Annex. The tunnel itself was very humid, and partially filled with furniture and other items. No definitive references were found in the literature to explain the existence or purpose of this tunnel, but there were some oblique references to a tunnel (Shaw 1012) connecting the hospital with the nurses' residence and other buildings. The language used was unclear as to which hospitals and buildings were being referenced, and the reader is invited to pursue this on his or her own.

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