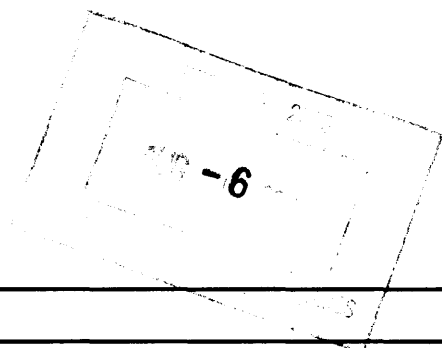


(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: Branigan Cultural Center

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 106 W. Hadley Street  
CITY OR TOWN: Las Cruces  
STATE: New Mexico CODE: NM COUNTY: Doña Ana CODE: 013 ZIP CODE: 88001  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A  
VICINITY: N/A

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  
\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of  
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  
 meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_ nationally  
\_\_\_ statewide  locally. (\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature], Acting SHPO 2 Aug 2004  
Signature of certifying official Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper  
9/15/04  
Date of Action

**5. CLASSIFICATION**

**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** Public-Local

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** Building

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	1	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	1	0 OBJECTS
	2	0 TOTAL

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** 1 (as contributing resource in the Alameda-Depot Historic District)

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** N/A

**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** EDUCATION: library; GOVERNMENT: government building (municipal building)

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** RECREATION AND CULTURE, museum and auditorium

**7. DESCRIPTION**

**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals: Pueblo (Revival)

<b>MATERIALS:</b>	<b>FOUNDATION</b>	Concrete
	<b>WALLS</b>	Stucco (over hollow tile)
	<b>ROOF</b>	Asphalt
	<b>OTHER</b>	N/A

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-11).

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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**APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

- A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

**CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS:** N/A

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** ARCHITECTURE, ART

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1935-1954

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1935

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** McGhee, Jr., Percy Ware, architect; Edward Lembke & Co., building contractor

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-12 through 8-18).

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheet 9-19).

**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS):** N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:**

- State historic preservation office (*Historic Preservation Division, Office of Cultural Affairs*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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**ACREAGE OF PROPERTY:** Less than one acre

**UTM REFERENCES**    Zone Easting    Northing  
                          13    332439    3576497

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheet 10-20)

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** (see continuation sheet 10-20)

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

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**NAME/TITLE:** Peter A. Friesen with assistance of HPD staff.

**ORGANIZATION:** New Mexico State University

**DATE:** November 2003

**STREET & NUMBER:** 1310 Pecos, #7

**TELEPHONE:** (505) 640-6016

**CITY OR TOWN:** Las Cruces

**STATE:** NM

**ZIP CODE:** 88001

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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**CONTINUATION SHEETS**

**MAPS** (see attached USGS quadrangle; Las Cruces, New Mexico)

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-21)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** N/A

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**PROPERTY OWNER**

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**NAME:** The City of Las Cruces

**STREET & NUMBER:** 500 North Water Street

**TELEPHONE:** (505)541-2155

**CITY OR TOWN:** Las Cruces

**STATE:** NM

**ZIP CODE:** 88001

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

Section 7 Page 5

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The Thomas Branigan Memorial Library is a large one-story stucco building located at 106 W. Hadley St. toward the northern end of the Las Cruces Downtown Mall. Constructed in 1935 in the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style, the building was designed by El Paso, Texas-based architect, Percy Wear McGhee, Jr. The building, which faces south and is landscaped with a variety of shrubs and trees, occupies the full width of the southern end of the block bound by Water Street on the west, Hadley Street on the south and the mall (formerly Main Street) on the east. (Main Street was redesigned as the pedestrian Las Cruces Downtown Mall in the early 1970s.) The library contains a WPA mural painted by Thomas (Tom) Calloway Lea, III. Portions of the interior of the building were remodeled in 1981, when it was converted from library use and became the Branigan Cultural Center. The exterior of the building, with the exception of the enclosing of the patio on the east side, retains a high degree of integrity in terms of location, design, materials, and workmanship. The building is well maintained and continues to serve an important cultural function and landmark for the Las Cruces community.

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The Thomas Branigan Memorial Library is located toward the northern limit of the business development that runs between Amador and Picacho avenues along Main Street, which at the time of the building's construction served as the principal commercial corridor for Las Cruces. Percy Wear McGhee, Jr designed the building in 1935 as a multipurpose building in the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style. In addition to a library and large lecture room, the complex initially included a pair of offices for municipal use that were located in a separate wing on the east side of the complex. The building, which rests on a concrete foundation and is of concrete post and beam construction, is roughly rectangular in plan and is composed of a series of cubic and rectangular volumes with flat roofs and parapets. The walls of the building are built of hollow tile. The complex is uniformly covered with white cementitious stucco, the surface of which is prominently scored and patterned with deep, wavy trowel marks (fig. 7-1).

The varying levels of the component parts of the plan give the single-story complex a multi-storied appearance. This effect is accentuated by the volume that define the library's stack room, which rises from the central mass of the complex, and by an ornamental bell tower, which is the tallest element in the architectural composition. These centrally positioned vertical elements in the design visually divide the complex into its three main programmatic components: a west wing containing a large public lecture room; a central block containing the library's entrance, delivery room, stack room and reading areas; and an east wing containing the Children's Reading Room, the library work spaces, lavatory and the municipal offices (photo 2)(fig. 7-1).

The principal façade (south elevation) of the complex faces Hadley Street and contains the main entrance to the library. A broad walled and landscaped courtyard that runs between them unifies this elevation, which also consists of the south walls of the projecting wings containing the lecture room on the west and the city offices on the east. The courtyard contains a variety of shrubs and trees adapted to the local arid climate including large individual specimens of Italian Cypress, Crepe Myrtle and Mimosa (photo 3). A pathway,

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

Section 7 Page 6

originally designed in flagstone but now covered in brick, leads from an entrance located toward the center of the courtyard wall to the center of the courtyard. Here an octagonal fountain, designed by the architect but not included in the cost of the project and, therefore never constructed, was to have been located. From the fountain location the path splits in two, with one walk leading a short distance to the main entrance of the library. The other half of the path winds west to the entrance and ticket lobby for the lecture room, which are contained in a smaller rectangular volume that projects from the south wall of the lecture room. A small *portal* (or porch) that is roofed with exposed *latillas* (sapling poles) covers the entrance to the lecture room (photos 5 and 6). A much broader *portal* extends across the west half of the north side of the courtyard and defines the entrance to the library's foyer, or delivery room. This *portal* also features exposed *latillas* resting on *vigas* that, in turn, rest on a square beam that is supported by six pine columns. In keeping with the characteristic elements of the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style, the columns have capitals formed from double-ended carved wood corbels. Originally the floor of the portal was covered in 12x12 inch red tile pavers (photo 7).

The vertically positioned metal casement windows that are employed in the south elevation of the complex vary in size. Small rectangular windows are positioned in the south wall of the lobby of the lecture room and similarly sized windows appear in the minor volume containing the janitor's closet, which projects from the elevation adjacent to the west end of the main *portal*. Two more windows of similar dimension are used in the base of the bell tower (now concealed by the foliage of the Italian Cypress planted next to it). Larger windows are used under the entrance portal, with two positioned to the west of the entry and one to the east (photo 7). The south wall of the Children's Reading Room contains three additional leaded-glass windows that feature simple stained glass compositions derived from children's fables (photo 8). The windows in the complex are uniformly protected by wrought iron grates and they are all deeply recessed into the walls of their respective elevations. They also share the common characteristic of having stuccoed sills that do not project from the surrounding wall. The largest windows in the complex have lintels composed of round wood beams that project noticeably from each side of the window into the stucco of the wall. Windows of similar design and dimension are used on the east elevations of the building. In the case of the windows in the south wall of the Children's Reading Room, a single wood lintel runs across the top of the three openings (photo 9). The most elaborate window in the south elevation of the complex is that positioned in the south wall of the office wing. Here, the architect chose to accentuate the Spanish Colonial roots of the Spanish-Pueblo Revival design by placing a prominent molded stucco hood over the window (photo 10). The stucco hood is supported by a grille of long, turned wooden spindles set into a base that projects prominently from the wall of the elevation and is further accentuated by a row of molded decorative tiles roughly based on Mesoamerican designs (photo 11). Similarly designed window surrounds are featured in McGhee's design for the nearby Doña Ana County Courthouse, which was constructed in 1937.

The east elevation is a secondary façade facing Main Street that provides access to the office wing. The city offices were designed to be approached from Main Street across a small rectangular and low-walled patio that was covered on its western half by a *portal* supported on four wood columns. The design of this *portal* was similar in design to those found on the south elevation, and it sheltered the entrance to the office wing

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

Section 7 Page 7

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positioned at its south end. The original patio adjacent to this elevation has been enclosed and the *portal* brought forward to the eastern end of the building's footprint (photo 12). The number of columns supporting the portal was reduced to three during this alteration and the doorway into the office wing was repositioned so that it now faces east.

The north elevation of the complex faces a parking area that extends from Main Street to Water Street. This elevation, which is noticeably more utilitarian in design, is dominated by two large cubic volumes that define the library's stack room and the stage area of the lecture room (photo 13). The north wall of the stack room is prominently punctuated by five tall, narrow metal casement windows that stand in marked contrast to the three pairs of rectangular casement windows placed in a horizontal orientation on the east and west ends of this elevation (photo 15). Both pairs of this window-type on the west end of the north elevation have been removed and the space they originally occupied, which is still delineated by a slight recess into the plane of the elevation, has been stuccoed over. A high walled service court containing elements of the buildings updated mechanical system has been constructed along the west end of this elevation in a manner that complements the interplay of cubic and rectangular volumes that were incorporated into the original design.

The west elevation consists of the west wall of the service court mentioned above and the west walls of the lecture room and ticket lobby (photo 15). Two concrete staircases are positioned at the north end of the elevation; one staircase leads up to the stage in the lecture room and projects from the elevation, while the other, which runs parallel with the elevation, descends to the boiler room (photo 16). In profile this elevation resembles a traditional Colonial New Mexican mission or church. The stage at the north end of the lecture room is indicated by a lift of the roofline. This portion of the elevation extends above the flat roof of the seating area in the lecture room in manner similar to the transverse clerestories typically found over the transepts or sanctuaries of traditional New Mexican churches. However, no clerestory windows are employed in the design (photo 17). This association with traditional ecclesiastical architecture is further emphasized through the application of four prominent vertical buttresses that extend approximately one foot from the plane of the elevation and assist in defining the seating area of the lecture room (photo 17). Three vertically positioned metal casement windows provided light into the seating area, one window between each buttress. A buttress is also formed at the south end of this elevation by a slight projection of the south wall of the lecture room lobby. A small vertically oriented casement window, identical to two others found on the south elevation of the lobby, illuminates the interior of the ticket booth. Two buttresses similar in design to those found on the west wall of the lecture room are also located on the room's east wall.

The design of the complex is unified by decorative details in the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style. Notable elements include a window opening with a wood grille in the wall that supports the small *portal* over the entrance to the lobby of the lecture room, and non-structural *viga* projections that have been applied near the rooflines of many of the buildings volumes (photo 18). Four arched openings also lend decorative character to the sides of the bell tower (photo 190). And, in the north corner of the east elevation of the lecture room, a series of steps capped with flagstones transition from the lower roofline of the auditorium to the roof over the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 8

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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stage. At this location, a large clay vessel that serves as a chimney pot for the flue extending from the basement boiler room (photo 20). According to the original blueprints and early photographs, a decorative Pueblo-style ladder was positioned against the roof over the stage. Another ladder was placed against the east side of the stack room (fig. 8-2).

## Interior

Originally the three components of the complex – library, lecture room and office wing – were physically separated from one another in the interior (fig. 7-1). The library area consisted of the delivery room, or foyer, which was entered from the *portal* in the courtyard. To the right of the foyer, a large square room was reserved as the Children's Reading Room. To the left was the Adult Reading Room, a larger rectangular space to which a smaller rectangular Periodicals Room was attached. The focus of the foyer was a broad circulation desk that extended across the north side of the room between the adult's and children's reading areas. Immediately behind the circulation desk was a large square room devoted to the closed book stacks. Vertically this space was divided into lower and upper sections composed of metal bookcases and gratings. A metal staircase positioned along the east wall of the lower stack room led to the upper level where metal grating provided a walking surface between the book cases. Natural light diffused into the room and through the levels of the book stacks through five long vertical windows in the north wall. The base of the bell tower served as the cloakroom. The Librarian's Office with a small vault, a Work Room, and a Lavatory were positioned to the right of the stacks and behind the Children's Reading Room. A door in the east wall of the Work Room opened onto the portal and patio adjacent to Main Street.

Natural illumination of the interior was provided by the windows in the Stack Room, large casement windows located in the Adult Reading Room and the Periodicals Room and by five smaller windows with stained-glass panels in the Children's Reading Room. Additionally a large rectangular skylight with stained-glass panels featuring geometric designs was positioned in the ceiling of the Delivery Room above the Circulation Desk. Light from the skylight assisted in illuminating a large mural, painted by Tom Lea remains positioned on a broad horizontal band of wall separating the Delivery Room from the Stack Room (photo 21). This expanse of wall continues to be supported on a massive square wood beam and square wood columns with double-ended corbel-style capitals. The mural is visually divided into three components. The central panel of the mural depicts monks, conquistadors and Native Americans. Two end panels feature decorative cartouches carrying text that honors the Spanish Franciscans who first brought books to the region and Gaspar de Villagra who authored New Mexico's first epic poem, *La Historia de Nueva Mexico* (photos 22 and 23). The original semi-indirect, hanging light fixtures have been replaced by florescent fixtures that are mounted flush with the ceiling.

The concrete floors in the library were uniformly covered with linoleum tile and the walls were covered in rough plaster. The ceiling was originally clad in Nu-Wood tile panels arranged in herringbone (Delivery Room), basket-weave (Adult Reading Room) two square (Children's Reading Room) and square (Periodical



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

Section 7 Page 9

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Room) patterns that blended with the tone of the bookcases lining the reading rooms walls, and the wood vigas, columns and joists found elsewhere in the interior (photo 24). Additional details executed in rough plaster, such as the window surrounds in the reading rooms and the buttresses supporting the vigas, completed the Spanish-Pueblo Revival decoration of the library interior.

The interior of the large rectangular Lecture Room, like the library, was finished with rough plaster walls that were accentuated by buttresses positioned on both sides of the opening between the lobby and Lecture Room, as well as beside the stage (photo 25). This element, the forward edge of which curved gently into the Lecture Room, was surmounted by a semi-circular proscenium (photo 26). The edge of the stage was defined by a prominent lip of molded convex stucco. A short flight of stairs on the west side of the stage descends to the floor of the Lecture Room. A small dressing room is located on the east side of the stage.

The floor of the Lecture Room originally sloped toward the stage. The ceiling of the room was clad in the same Nu-Wood tiles used in the library, however, a special basket-weave pattern composed of 12x12 inch and 12/24 inch tiles was used. A wainscoting that extended from the floor to the bottom level of the windows was also executed in Nu-Wood. In this instance, however, the material was milled into planks that were vertically aligned around the perimeter of the Lecture Room. Two 10-inch wide bands of painted stencil decoration in Native American designs were also employed in the room; one band ran just above the wainscoting and another was positioned immediately below the ceiling. Eight V-shaped, rough plaster wall sconces on the east and west walls of the room and two more against its rear wall provided artificial illumination. According to the architect's specifications, but like the courtyard fountain not included in the cost of the contract, three banks of seats were planned for the room; the two banks against the walls were to have four seats in each of 18 rows, while the center bank was to have ten seats in each of 16 rows for a total capacity of 264 persons. The lobby and ticket booth for the Lecture Room, located at the south end of the room, feature a ceiling composed of *vigas* and *latillas*. The ticket booth occupies the western quarter of the lobby area.

Unlike the Library and Lecture Room, the interior of the municipal offices was much less elaborate. Both walls and ceilings in the two large square rooms that filled the wing were covered in rough plaster. The concrete floors were covered with hardwood flooring. The outer office, which was accessed from the *portal* and patio on Main Street, was initially divided into halves separated by a counter that ran the full width of the room between the north and south walls. Doors located in both halves of the divided outer office led into the inner office. The inner office had a door in the northeast corner of its east wall, which led to a small lavatory, washroom and closet.

### Interior-Alterations

Redesign of the library complex in 1981 for use as a community cultural center necessitated a number of significant interior alterations to the 1935 plan (fig. 7-2). The most significant of these changes involved the creation of openings between the library, the lecture room and the office wing so that the interior no longer

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 10

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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appears as three separate spaces. The original bookcases that once lined the walls of the reading rooms have been removed. The enclosure of the former patio adjacent to Main Street has created two new office spaces. Demolition of the counter formerly in the outer office and the wall between it and the inner office has resulted in a large rectangular room that is now used for storage of the center's permanent collections.

The Stack Room has also been divided into two separate spaces at its lower level, an office and a gift shop. The upper level of the stacks is still accessed, however, by the original metal staircase and the area continues to serve in a secure storage capacity.

Partition walls of wood and glass have been constructed to define the former children's and adult reading rooms as galleries so that the flow that formerly existed between these two areas of the library is visually impeded. More significantly, the impressive circulation desk that once separated the Delivery Room from the Stack Room has been removed and a replacement desk has been installed along the opposite wall near the main entrance. The floor of the delivery room has been covered in Saltillo tile and the adjacent gallery spaces have been carpeted. The original Nu-Wood ceiling surfaces have been covered by acoustical tile. The cloakroom in the base of the bell tower and the janitor's closet opposite it have been converted into lavatories. The windows in the former Children's Reading Room, the Delivery Room and the Adult Reading Room have been covered over in a reversible manner in order to increase the wall space and control the light in the galleries.

In the Lecture Room, the most significant changes, in addition to the creation of an opening between it and the former Adult Reading Room, have included the elimination of the slope in the floor, replacement of the staircase from the floor of the room to the stage with an ADA compliant ramp, removal of the Nu-Wood wainscoting, the stenciled decorative borders and the wall sconces, and introduction of a new dropped, acoustical tile ceiling.

Despite interior alterations necessary to transform the library into a community center, the exterior of the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library retains a high degree of its original integrity of design, materials, and workmanship, and is a noteworthy example of the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style. The soaring bell tower and its prominence as one of the only unaltered buildings along former Main Street have elevated the building as a landmark of old Las Cruces.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 11

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

Figure 7-1 Plan, as built (image inverted for purposes of comparison, north at bottom).

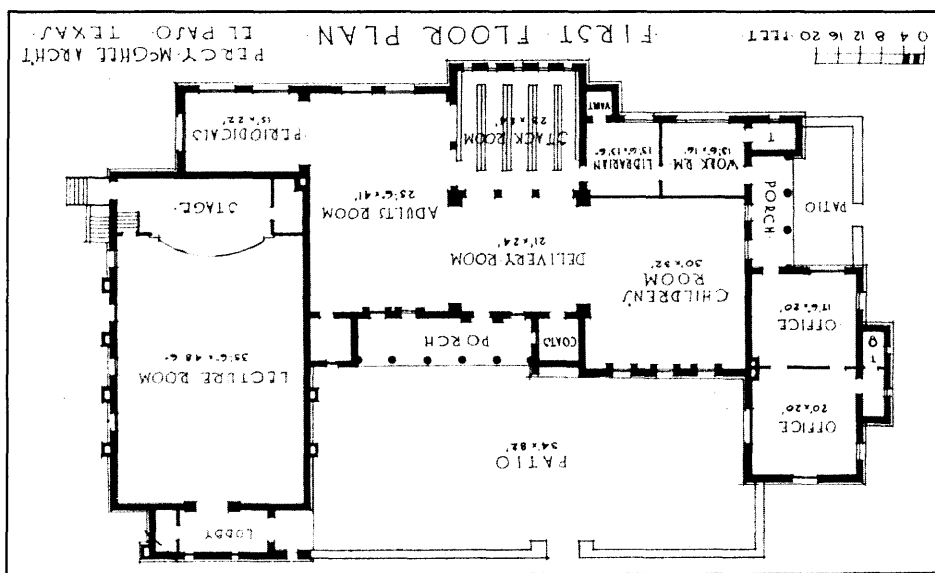
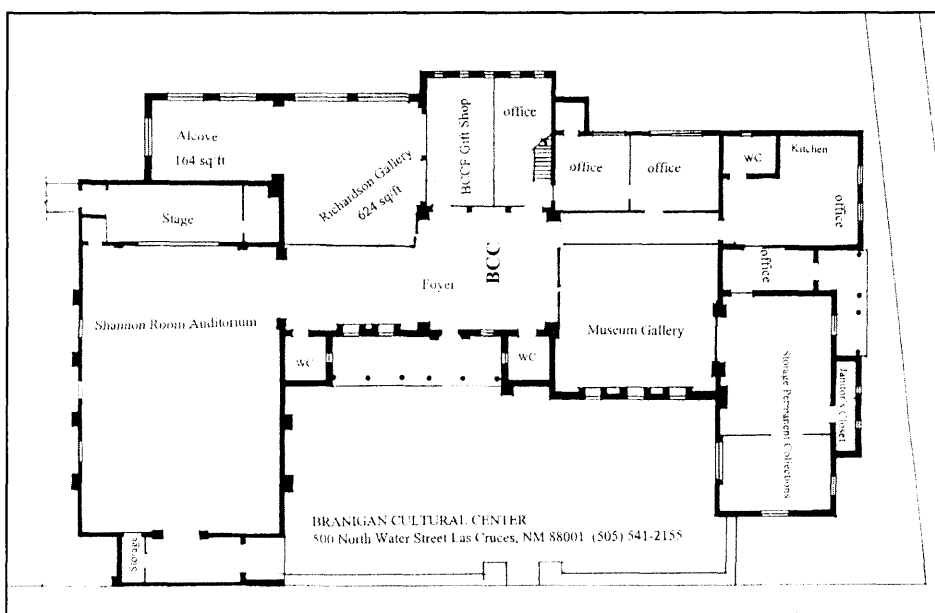


Figure 7-2 Plan, current conditions (north at bottom).



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

Section 8 Page 12

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The Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, erected in 1935 in Las Cruces, New Mexico, was the only privately funded library construction project carried out in the state during the Depression. It meets Criterion C: Architecture, at the local level of significance, as an excellent regional example of a small library building in the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style that was designed by noted El Paso, Texas, architect, Percy Wear McGhee, Jr. Additionally, the building is significant for the mural in its foyer painted by El Paso artist, Thomas Lea, which is listed as a contributing resource in this nomination.

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### Origin of Library

The Thomas Branigan Memorial Library was built through the bequest of Alice Montgomery Branigan. The wife of Captain Thomas Branigan, a Scotsman, Civil War veteran and colorful New Mexico pioneer and business leader, Alice Branigan was notable in her own right as a key player in the New Mexico Federation of Women's Clubs (fig. 8-1). Elected president of Federation's Fourth District in 1927, Branigan helped the Las Cruces Women's Improvements Association (WIA) advance local efforts that had begun in the early 1900s to provide the community with a library. The Las Cruces Library Club, which had organized a rudimentary library in 1906 in Room 26 of the city's Don Bernardo Hotel in hopes of obtaining a Carnegie grant to construct a free public facility, never succeeded in achieving this goal. With Branigan's assistance during the 1920s, the WIA organized a series of fund raising efforts – one of which included the raffle of a prize Holstein bull – to purchase books and organize a subscription library that was first located in the Farm Bureau's Temple of Agriculture and ultimately the WIA's club house.

Alice Branigan and the other women who worked to create a public library in Las Cruces were part of the national women's movement, based on local women's clubs that became a national federated association in 1889. These clubs shared a common interest in improving the lives of both women and society. In 1896, the federation began to focus its work on helping society through the establishment of public libraries and many clubs began their efforts by forming subscription or traveling libraries. By 1914 the women's club movement had influenced the founding of fifty percent of the libraries in America. By 1933 that number had grown to seventy-five percent.

With the advent of the Great Depression, the WIA's goal of establishing a free public facility in Las Cruces might have been made possible by the New Deal's Works Progress Administration, which carried out eleven major library construction projects in the state. However, the bequest of close to \$2 million that was made to the City of Las Cruces upon Alice Branigan's death in 1932 eliminated any need for the exceptional form of public assistance that the New Deal carried performed in other New Mexican communities. Out of the total Branigan bequest, \$35,000 was reserved for the building and furnishing of a free public library and an additional \$10,000 was earmarked for the purchase of books. Branigan's generosity also allowed the WIA to

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 13

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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pay off the mortgage on its clubhouse and allowed her, posthumously, to succeed in her goal of improving life in the Las Cruces community.

### Percy Wear McGhee, Jr., (1889-1971)

The architectural commission for the new library was awarded to Percy Wear McGhee, Jr., (1889-1971). Son of a former mayor of El Paso, Texas, McGhee earned a degree in architecture from Texas A&M University in 1910. After working and continuing his studies in New York until 1913, McGhee returned to El Paso where he opened his own practice in 1915. His enlistment in the army during World War I and subsequent employment in El Paso as the City Building Inspector between 1920-29 prevented him from pursuing his architectural ambitions. In 1928, however, he made plans to leave his position with the city and reopen his architectural practice. In 1933, the death of Henry C. Trost, whose architectural firm, Trost & Trost, dominated the profession regionally, elevated McGhee's prominence and improved his ability to compete for a number of major university and civic commissions. His design for the Branigan Memorial Library is one of his more notable early works. Other early commissions include the Gymnasium (1930), Kent Hall (1929), Foster Hall (1930) and the Home Economics Building (1936) at New Mexico State University.

The Branigan Library, which was envisioned as a multi-purpose complex that would include a large public auditorium and rental office wing, responded to a significant shift in the architectural philosophy associated with public library projects that emerged in the United States during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to extending the tradition, firmly established by the Carnegie Library construction program, which required public library buildings to "express the best architectural tradition of the region which can stand the test of time," McGhee's design for the library incorporated many of the interior programmatic principles promoted by the American Library Association (ALA)<sup>1</sup>. These included requirements that the interior of the building be organized in a manner that benefited both the staff and patrons. As noted by the ALA's committee on architecture shortly after the Branigan Library was erected, "as innocent a mistake as a poorly located light plug may cause a generation of workers annoyance and inefficiency."

Chief among the concerns of modern library designers was the interior regulation of light and sound. Recognizing the benefits large volumes of natural interior light provided to readers, significant efforts were made to incorporate expansive windows – preferably with a northern orientation – into the classical and increasingly popular, traditional regional architectural styles favored by the public. Sound engineering principles and the use of newly emerging sound proofing materials, such as acoustic plaster and tiles, were given a priority in interior library design. At the same time, an increasingly analytical approach to library design allowed library boards and their architects to more accurately gauge the demands that time, community population growth and the resulting growth of a library's book collection would impose upon the operating life

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<sup>1</sup> A.L.A. Committee of Library Architecture and Building Planning. Small Public Library Buildings. American Library Association, Chicago, 1939: 14.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 14

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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of a building. Estimates based on the current and future population growth in a community, for example, allowed the ALA to recommend not only the linear board feet of shelving a library would require over a twenty year period, but also to estimate the cost of construction per volume housed.

McGhee demonstrated his understanding of these principles in the design of the Branigan Library by spatially dividing the complex into distinct units that, while architecturally unified on the exterior, were physically separated from each other on the interior. The auditorium, or lecture room as it was called in the plan, adjoined the library on its west side, but because it had a separate entrance from the library, could operate independently from the library. The same principle was employed in the design of the municipal office wing – initially planned as offices for the city mayor, town manager and clerk – which had a separate entrance on Main Street.

The library itself was made the central unit of the complex with a substantial and attractive walled courtyard in front of its main entrance (fig 8-2). Internally the space was organized so that the adult and children's reading areas were physically separated by the foyer, called the Delivery Room in the plans, and the circulation desk. This important element of the library's furnishings was placed opposite the entrance to the foyer and in front of the large, double-tiered book stack room, which allowed the librarian and staff to monitor activity throughout the building. Illumination, modified by Venetian blinds, was provided by large metal casement windows in the adult reading room, Periodicals Room and in the stack room, all of which were located on the advantageous north side of the building. The portal that extended across the south façade of the library provided additional shielding from direct sunlight for the windows on the exposed side of the building, while stained glass panels in south-facing windows in the Children's Reading Room performed a similar function. A large rectangular skylight covered with an art glass panel, provided additional natural illumination just above the Circulation Desk. For artificial light, McGhee specified semi-indirect electric fixtures. Sound was regulated throughout the building through the use of rough plaster wall surfaces and wooden bookcases around the perimeters of the reading rooms. Extensive use of Nu-Wood ceiling tiles in all of the public areas of the library also positively impacted the acoustical qualities of the interior, as it did in the interior of the lecture room where it was employed as both ceiling covering and wainscoting.

McGhee folded the various programs for the component parts of the building – library, auditorium, office building – into a harmoniously organized exterior architectural composition that fully exploited the popularity of the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style. This important regional architectural development had gained tremendous momentum during the 1930s as a result of both the accelerated construction projects made possible by the New Deal and public appreciation for a building style that personified the unique historical and cultural components of New Mexico. In McGhee's design, the traditional components of the style – stucco walls, exposed timbers, buttresses, and battered and softened exterior wall and roofline profiles – were fully employed. McGhee also chose to incorporate a more typically Spanish Colonial hooded and grilled window surround into the south elevation of the wing where the mayor's office was located and, as a result, warranted

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 15

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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an additional degree of ornamentation. This design element presaged the others he would employ in his most prominent local work, the Doña Ana County Courthouse, which was constructed in 1938 (fig. 8-3).

### Thomas Lea (1907-2001)

As the design for the library was being carried out an important private commission was awarded to El Paso artist Thomas Lea (1907-2001), for a substantial interior mural. Lea, who was then living in Santa Fe, had gained attention as one of a number of regional artists who had been given similar commissions by the WPA. His design for the Branigan mural, which was to be prominently located above the Circulation Desk, focused on the contribution made by Spanish Franciscans, who are credited with introducing books to the region. The mural, which has a central figurative panel surrounded by text-bearing cartouches, also honors the contribution of New Mexico's first poet, Don Gaspar de Villagra, and his epic work, *La Historia de Nueva Mexico*, which was published in 1610.

National recognition of McGhee's design for the Branigan Library followed soon after its dedication on November 7, 1935. In 1939, the ALA Committee on Library Architecture and Building Planning choose to feature McGhee's design as one of 24 noteworthy commissions in its publication, *Small Public Library Buildings*. The Branigan Library was the only building selected to represent new library architecture in the Southwest and Rocky Mountain regions.<sup>2</sup>

In 1979, the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library was relocated to a newly constructed and larger building of the same name. In 1981 the library was adapted for reuse as the Brannigan Cultural Center. This effort necessitated a number of interior modifications many of which have changed the interior plan established by McGhee in 1935. The interior, however, continues to exhibit a majority of the Spanish-Pueblo Revival decorative details McGhee planned for it. The Thomas Lea mural also continues to be the focal point of the foyer area. The strength of McGhee's architectural design for the complex, however, is attested by the fact that exterior alterations to the design have been relatively minor during the intervening 68 years. Most significant of these changes has been the enclosure of the patio on the east side of the building and the relocation of the associated portal that indicated the entrance to the municipal office wing. Ongoing use of the building as a cultural center, museum and art gallery space by the community of Las Cruces, continues to honor both the vision of the architect, Percy McGhee and the original intentions of the library's principal patron, Alice Montgomery Branigan.

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<sup>2</sup> Of the 24 library buildings identified in the ALA publication, to date, only the Waban Branch Library in Newton, Massachusetts has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 16

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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**Figure 8-1** Alice Montgomery Branigan, Thomas Branigan Memorial Library





United States Department of the Interior  
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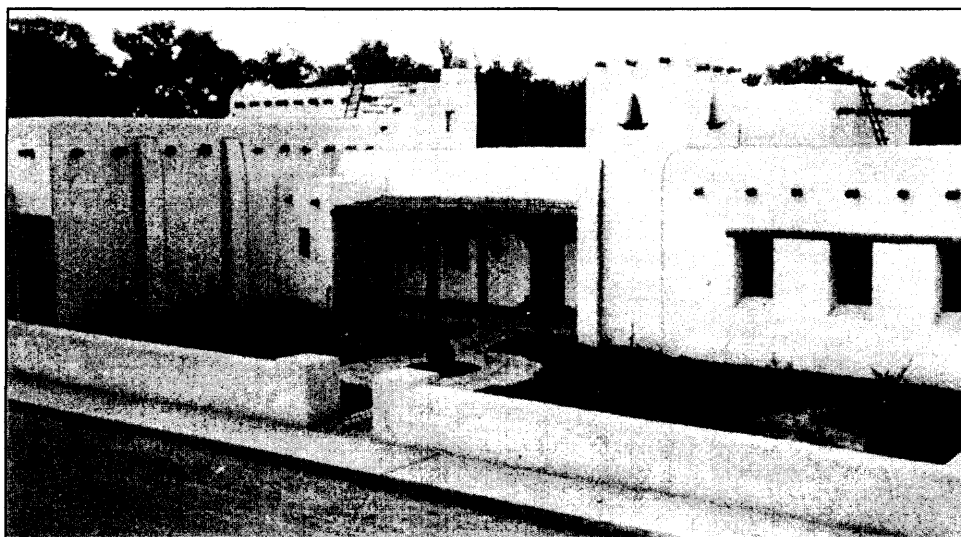
## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 17

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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**Figure 8-2** Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, exterior, south elevation, ca. 1937. American Library Association.



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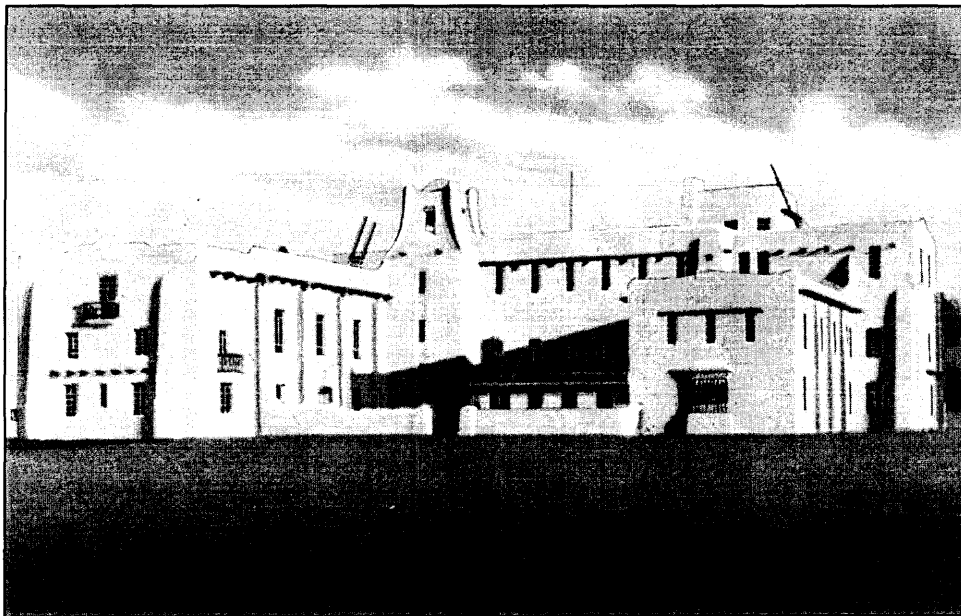
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 18

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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**Figure 8-3** Doña Ana County Courthouse, Photo: Ballard/Curteich-Chicago



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 19

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 20

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

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### Verbal Boundary Description

Block 8, precinct 3, Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico.

### Boundary Justification

This is the original property boundary assigned to the library complex in 1935. There have been no changes in the property boundaries since that date.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library  
Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

Section      Photo      Page 21

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## Photographs

*The following information pertains to all photographs unless otherwise noted:*

Thomas Branigan Memorial Library

Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico

Photographer: James Hare

Location of Negatives: NM State Historic Preservation Office (HPD)

Date of Photographs: October 2003

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|----------------|--|
| Photo 1 of 26  | South elevation (principal façade). Camera facing northeast.                                       |
| Photo 2 of 26  | South elevation and entrance to Lecture Room. Camera facing northwest.                             |
| Photo 3 of 26  | Courtyard landscaping. Camera facing northwest.  |
| Photo 4 of 26  | Entrance to Lecture Room. Camera facing northwest.   |
| Photo 5 of 26  | Entrance to Lecture Room and <i>portal</i> detail. Camera facing north.                            |
| Photo 6 of 26  | Main <i>portal</i> and Bell Tower. Camera facing northeast.  |
| Photo 7 of 26  | Detail, window under main <i>portal</i> . Camera facing north.                                     |
| Photo 8 of 26  | Detail, window with art glass panel, Children's Reading Room. Camera facing north.                 |
| Photo 9 of 26  | Windows in south elevation, Children's Reading Room. Camera facing northeast.                      |
| Photo 10 of 26 | Grilled window with stucco hood, Office Wing. Camera facing north                                  |
| Photo 11 of 26 | Detail, decorative tiles beneath grilled window, Office Wing. Camera facing northwest              |
| Photo 12 of 26 | East elevation with altered <i>portal</i> . Camera facing northwest                                |
| Photo 13 of 26 | North elevation. Camera facing southeast.  |
| Photo 14 of 26 | North elevation, Stack Room. Camera facing southwest.  |
| Photo 15 of 26 | West elevation. Camera facing northeast.   |
| Photo 16 of 26 | West elevation, staircases. Camera facing northeast  |
| Photo 17 of 26 | West elevation. Camera facing northeast.   |
| Photo 18 of 26 | Detail, decorative <i>vigas</i> on west elevation of Office Wing. Camera facing north.             |
| Photo 19 of 26 | Detail, Bell Tower. Camera facing northeast.   |
| Photo 20 of 26 | Detail, entrance portal with flagstone "steps" and chimney pot above. Camera facing northwest.     |
| Photo 21 of 26 | Interior view, Delivery Room (foyer) with Tom Lea mural. Camera facing northeast.                  |
| Photo 22 of 26 | Interior detail, central panel, Tom Lea mural. Camera facing north.                                |
| Photo 23 of 26 | Interior detail, right cartouche, Tom Lea mural. Camera facing north.                              |
| Photo 24 of 26 | Interior detail, Delivery Room (foyer) looking toward Children's Reading Room. Camera facing east. |
| Photo 25 of 26 | Interior detail, stucco buttress adjacent to stage in Lecture Room. Camera facing north            |
| Photo 26 of 26 | Interior, Lecture Room stage and proscenium. Camera facing north.                                  |