

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: specialty store
Commerce/Trade: department store
Commerce/Trade: restaurant
Domestic: multiple dwelling

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: other

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Other: Two-Part Commercial block with
Victorian influence

Materials
(enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
walls Brick
roof Asphalt
other Concrete (foundation on addition)
Metal (ceiling)

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The 1892 Union Block¹ is a prominent two-part commercial block that has undergone major changes to the principal facade and has been expanded at the back. A 1929 expansion² doubled the first level store space. Later dramatic changes in 1984 included the installation of an aluminum frontage and removing the large tin cornice.³ Most recent developments have partially restored the front to the historic look. The interior has not been greatly altered over the years. However, some remodeling occurred in 1919, 1929, and 1989-90.

The Union Block is centrally located among the row of business buildings on the east side of Main Street's chief business block. Its two stories rise above the 1917 movie theater to the North and the 1914 modern-looking J. C. Knudson building to the South. A row of tall second-story windows and mullions visually dominate the front brick facade. Above each of these original sash windows is an eight-pane transom, a sandstone lintel, and stepped brickwork. The two center windows also have shell motifs above the lintels.

The 1984 removal of the original tin cornice changed the skyline of the building.⁴ This large embellished cornice spanned the width of the building and descended one-sixth of the way down the facade to the tops of upper-level windows. It was gabled at its center and had many pressed metal details.⁵ When efforts were made to restore the principal facade in 1989, a 1984 aluminum facing was taken off the second story revealing the original windows and also the rough mortar joints where the tin cornice had covered them.⁶ Presently a narrow strip of tin caps the building.

X See continuation sheet

¹ "New Brick Block", The Brigham City Bugler, June 4, 1892, p. 1, col. 2. The Brigham City Bugler, November 19, 1892.

² "Construction Manager Inspects J. C. Penney Building Here Monday", The Box Elder News, July 23, 1929, p. 1, col. 4.

³ "Penney Store Boasts New Look, In and Out", The Box Elder News, November 17, 1984, p. 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Compton Photograph, July 30, 1918. Negative available at U.S.U. Special Collections, Logan, Utah.

⁶ "Restoration 'Labor of Love' Says Returned BC Resident", Box Elder News Journal, August 2, 1989.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
___ nationally ___ statewide X locally

Applicable National Register Criteria X A ___ B ___ C ___ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

Period of Significance

1892-1929

Significant Dates

1892, 1929

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown for construction date of 1892-93. Petersen, Royes J., contractor, for 1929 addition

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Constructed in 1892, the Union Block is significant as one of the major commercial buildings erected in Brigham City during a period of significant growth in the community. That period has been documented in the historic context "Private Commercial and Industrial Growth, 1880s-1930s," which is part of the multiple property submittal of "Historic Resources of Brigham City." The Union Block is one of approximately 15 commercial buildings from that period that are still standing and are eligible for National Register designation. It was one of the first commercial buildings constructed in the town after the Mormon Church-sponsored Co-op began to wane in the 1880s. The Co-op was a vigorous, well-managed economic and social cooperative that dominated the local economy from 1864 until 1878. As the Co-op declined, local Mormon church leaders lifted the proscription against private enterprises, opening the way for local entrepreneurs, such as the Knudsons who had this building constructed. The original use of the building for a fruit and produce business is also significant because fruit growing has been vital to the local economy. Though altered on the exterior over the years, the building has recently been restored to much of its original appearance.

The early history of Brigham City is closely tied to the Mormon church. The town was established by Mormon settlers in the early 1850s, and its first few decades of growth were closely linked to church goals and programs. Most significant was the cooperative experiment, which reached a level of success in Brigham City unmatched by any of the scores of other Mormon communities that attempted church-based cooperatives. A series of natural disasters and other unfortunate events in 1878 damaged the viability of the Brigham City Co-op to the point that local church leaders lifted their sanction against private businesses, which had been seen as challengers to the cooperative ideal. The Co-op continued in operation until 1895, but its influence in the local economy declined.

After the Co-op's closure, small private businesses were established, and the cooperative industries were taken over and run privately, usually by former workers or supervisors of those Co-op departments. The Union Block was one of the first large commercial buildings erected to house a previously existing and successful business, and one completely separate and apart from the Co-op.

The growth in private enterprise in the community is indicated by the number of business establishments listed in state gazetteers from the late nineteenth and

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The facade's appearance at the first floor looks like a 1912 photograph,⁷ but is actually the result of a 1959 remodeling. The open-looking, glazed storefront of 1912 was replaced in June of 1959 by another set of large plate-glass window which were bordered at the sides and top by a continuous section of enameled metal panels.⁸ The main difference between the 1912 and 1959 storefronts is the position of the doors. The 1959 remodeling placed two sets of doors at the center of the building rather than the separate entrance at each end which had existed since the 1892-93 construction. The original 1892-93 storefront also had much smaller windows bordered by much molding.⁹

A large rear expansion was added to the building in 1929 to accommodate the J.C. Penney Company. The addition was 65 feet long and included a mezzanine, maple floors, and an office. Also included in the remodeling was the installation of a new pressed metal ceiling. Besides the addition of handicapped restrooms near the back and a slight change in the rear entrance in 1989, no other major changes have taken place inside the first floor since this time.

The second floor interior of the east side, which housed offices by 1900,¹⁰ has not been significantly changed. It has high ceilings, doors and transoms, grained molding and the original partitioning. A 1919 remodeling converted these office spaces into apartments and also made apartments in the west side of the upper level. Maple flooring was installed in living rooms and bedrooms on both sides, and a plaster flooring called Diato was used in the halls, kitchens, and bathrooms in the west side.¹¹

In summary, the interior of the Union Block has maintained remarkable historic integrity while the exterior front facade has undergone remodeling throughout the years, the most extensive taking place in 1984. However, this principal facade has some degree of historic integrity and will recapture most of it when the replacement cornice is installed.

⁷ The Box Elder News, Peach Day Edition, September 12, 1912, p. 8.

⁸ "J.C. Penney Co. Gets New Face, Doors, Interior", Box Elder News, June 19, 1959, p. 10.

⁹ Alma Compton, photograph of east side of Main Street about 1910. Glass negative at U.S.U. Special Collections, Logan, Utah.

¹⁰ Sanborn-Perris Map Company. Map of Brigham City, Box Elder County, October 1907, sheet #3.

¹¹ "Knudson Apartments", The Box Elder Journal, June 13, 1919, p. 2.

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early twentieth centuries. The 1879-80 gazetteer noted that, "There are many industries in operation in Brigham City, all of which are conducted on the co-operative plan." By 1888, however, 43 private enterprises were listed, and little mention was made of the Co-op. In 1900 over 175 businesses were listed in the gazetteer, and by 1928 there were over 350.¹² The central business district was the commercial center for both Brigham City and the surrounding communities. The emergence of this commercial hub during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a significant phase in the development of the town. The types of businesses established in Brigham City were typical of any small town--mercantile stores, banks, restaurants and saloons, clothing shops, hotels, theaters, and so forth.

Construction of the Union Block was a joint effort by two prominent Brigham City businessmen -- Robert K. Wilson, the only saloon keeper in Brigham City,¹³ and Charles W. Knudson, fruit grower and financier.¹⁴ In 1892, Knudson owned the adjoining land south of the one-story frame Wilson Saloon and was ready to expand his business operations in Brigham City. He convinced Wilson to go in with him in the construction of this substantial brick building to suit both of their needs. Wilson would relocate his saloon to the north half of the first story of this building, and Knudson would occupy the south half. In June of 1892 the frame saloon had been demolished and construction on the new building had begun. Locally produced brick were used for this two-story \$10,000 structure.¹⁵ By September most of the exterior work on the building was completed and the galvanized metal cornice bearing the name of the building, "Union Block," was in place.¹⁶ By November the building was "nearing completion" and was apparently finished soon after.¹⁷

Wilson moved into his part of the building by November 1892,¹⁸ and the Knudson Brothers opened their produce business in the other part of the building by June 1893.¹⁹ There were offices on the second floor of the building, according to the 1900 Sanborn Maps. The 1907 Sanborn Maps show that the saloon was still operating, but the Knudson Brothers produce business had moved out of the south half of the building and a drug store had replaced them. Though the Knudsons apparently discontinued their retail business on Main Street at this time, their wholesale

¹²Gazetteer of Utah, 1879-80, 1888, 1900, 1928. Available in Utah State Historical Society Library.

¹³Advertisement: "The City of Homes . . ." Brigham City Bugler, November 18, 1893, p. 3.

¹⁴"Financier and Churchman Dies," Box Elder News, March 9, 1926, p. 1.

¹⁵"New Brick Block," Brigham City Bugler, June 4, 1892, p. 1.

¹⁶"Notes of the Bugler," Brigham City Bugler, September 24, 1892, p. 4.

¹⁷Brigham City Bugler, November 19, 1892.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹"New Produce House," Brigham City Bugler, June 10, 1893.

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operation, housed in a warehouse near the train depot, continued for many more years. By 1912 Robert K. Wilson had sold out his portion of the building to the Knudson brothers--Charles W. and Jonathan C.--and the Hanson Mercantile Company had occupied the entire first floor of the building.

Other changes in occupants and modifications to the building were to follow. In a 1919 remodeling project, the second-floor office space was converted to four residential apartments of three or four rooms each, including bathrooms.²⁰ In the spring of 1929, a major addition to and remodeling of the Union Block took place to accommodate a lease with the J.C. Penney Company. The addition doubled the merchandising space on the main floor and expanded the apartment area on the upper floor. By August 1929, J.C. Penneys had moved from the west side of Main Street into the Union Block and eventually became the longest tenant of the building. They occupied the building continuously until November 1986. The building was vacant from 1986 to 1989, at which time Richard Van Dyke leased the building from current owner Ricks Knudson and opened a game room and arcade called Union Block Sports Center. This business continues in the building at present.²¹

The Knudson Brothers fruit and produce business was a major player in one of the area's most important industries--fruit growing. The establishment of the firm in 1892 coincided with the emergence of the fruit-growing industry as an important element in the economy of Brigham City and Box Elder County in the 1890s. By 1904 Brigham City was well enough known for its peach production that its annual harvest celebration, initiated that year, was called Peach Days.²²

The Knudson fruit enterprise was actually founded much earlier than the 1892 establishment of the firm by Charles W. Knudson and his brothers. Their father, William Knudsen,²³ was an early Danish convert to the Mormon Church and was one of the first nine such converts to sail from Copenhagen to the United States. He settled in Brigham City in 1854, where he was a farmer and fruit grower. His success in selling his produce expanded into a family business, which his sons continued and called Knudson Brothers. When these sons of William Knudsen returned to Brigham City after fulfilling a contract in Butte, Montana, they had made enough money to begin building homes and businesses. They built some of the largest and

²⁰"Knudson Apartments," The Box Elder Journal, June 13, 1919, p.2.

²¹ Tour of building and telephone conservation with Richard Van Dyke, current lessee of building, March 23, 1991.

²² Forsgren, Lydia Walker, History of Box Elder County (Brigham City, Utah: Box Elder County Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1937) p. 68.

²³ William Knudsen spelled his name in the traditional Danish way with the "sen" ending. When his sons opened a business in Butte, Montana, they found that they Swedes and Norwegians living in that area were reluctant to trade with them until they changed the company name to "Knudson Brothers" with the name ending common in Sweden and Norway. Most descendants of William Knudsen continued to spell their name Knudson although a few have retained the original spelling. (Taped interview with Floyd Knudson, October 11, 1972.)

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most elegant turn-of-the-century homes in the community. They also became prominent merchants and built several large business blocks on Main Street, including this one constructed for Charles W.²⁴

An astute businessman, William Knudsen was not averse to trading outside the Co-op despite the church's disapproval of such dealings. His grandson Chester said, "... Grandfather raised the vegetables and fruit, and in those days Corinne was off base for the saints. In other words, they weren't supposed to go out there, but Grandfather would send the boys out there, and they'd turn the vegetables and fruit into gold."²⁵

Another example of the Knudsons' nonconformity with the norm in the Mormon community was when Charles cooperated with the Wilson family in constructing the building so that the Wilsons could run a saloon in half the building alongside Knudson's fruit and produce business in the other half. The saloon was in the building until prohibition.²⁶

The Union Block represents a significant period of commercial development in Brigham City. Despite alterations to the building, it still conveys much of its original appearance. Plans are currently underway to replace the metal cornice that was removed in 1984.

²⁴ Interview with Perc, Floyd and Chester Knudson by John Stewart, February 8, 1973. U.S.U. Voice Library. Transcribed by Brigham City Museum-Gallery staff, March, 1989. See also, "Knudson Brothers Dissolve Partnership," Box Elder News, June 3, 1921. p.1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 38.

