
HISTORIC STRUCTURE ASSESSMENT

**EDGAR KESNER
MEMORIAL BUILDING**

E. 9th Street and D Street
Salida, Chaffee County, Colorado 81201



Figure 1. Kesner Building, 1922.

*Funded by Colorado Historical Society State Historical Fund Project No. 2002-HA-041 and
Chaffee County School District RE32J*

**CENTRAL COLORADO PRESERVATION PARTNERS
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SALIDA, CO 81201
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND / PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of this project is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the condition and preservation needs of the Edgar Kesner Memorial Building to allow Chaffee County School District RE-32-J to make informed decisions about its continued use.

This report was prepared by Central Colorado Preservation Partners, Inc., with Gary W. Higgins as preservation architect and Jackie W. Powell as preservation planner. Structural engineering was provided by Monroe and Newell Engineers. Historical information was provided by Front Range Research Associates, in conjunction with their 2003 nomination of the property to the State Register of Historic Places.

Cash match for State Historical Fund grant 2002-HA-041 was provided by the School District.

1.2 BUILDING LOCATION

LOCATION

Kesner Memorial Building, also known as Kesner Junior High School, is located at East 9th Street and C Street in Salida, Chaffee County, Colorado. Geographically, it is in Township 49N, Range 9E, Section 5 of the Salida East, Colorado quad map. The UTM reference is Zone 13, Easting 413259, and Northing 4264595.

The nominated area consists only of the building footprint.

VICINITY MAP

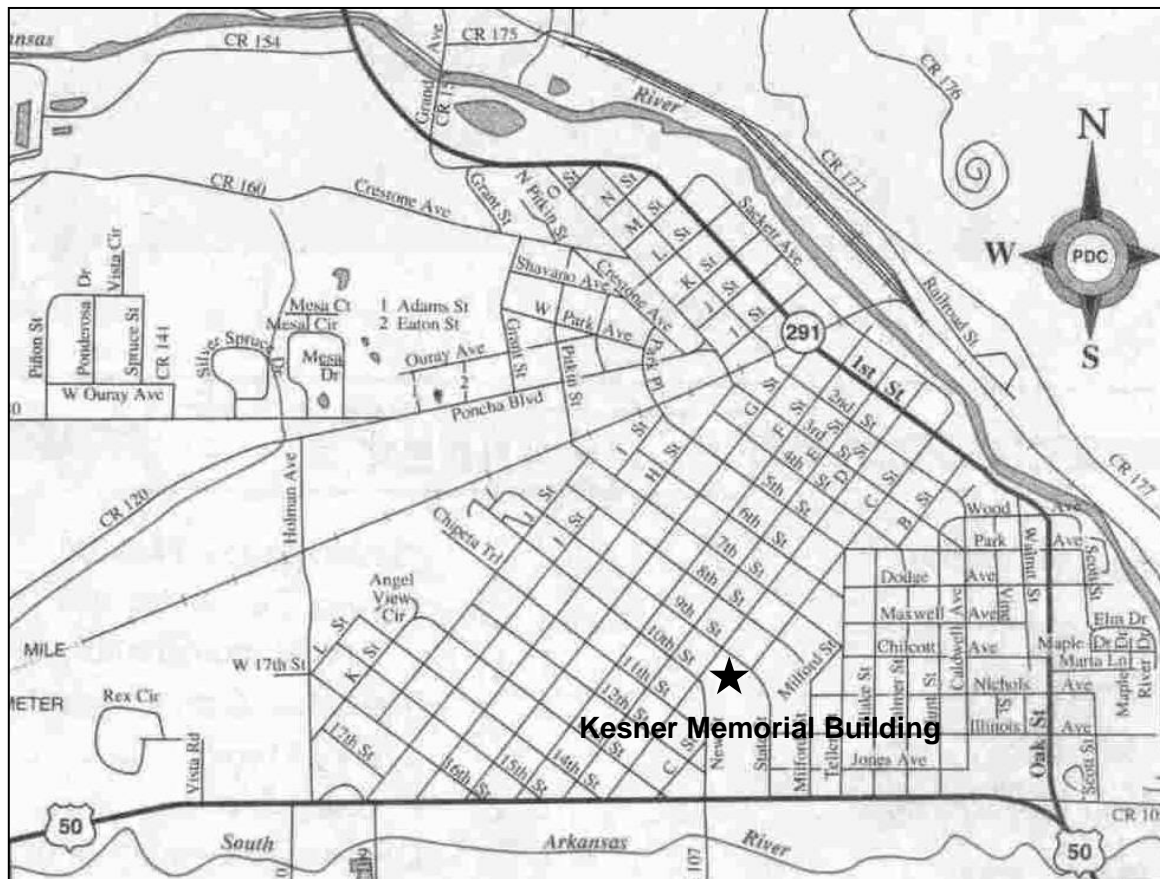


Figure 2. Vicinity Map. Not to scale.

SITE PLANS

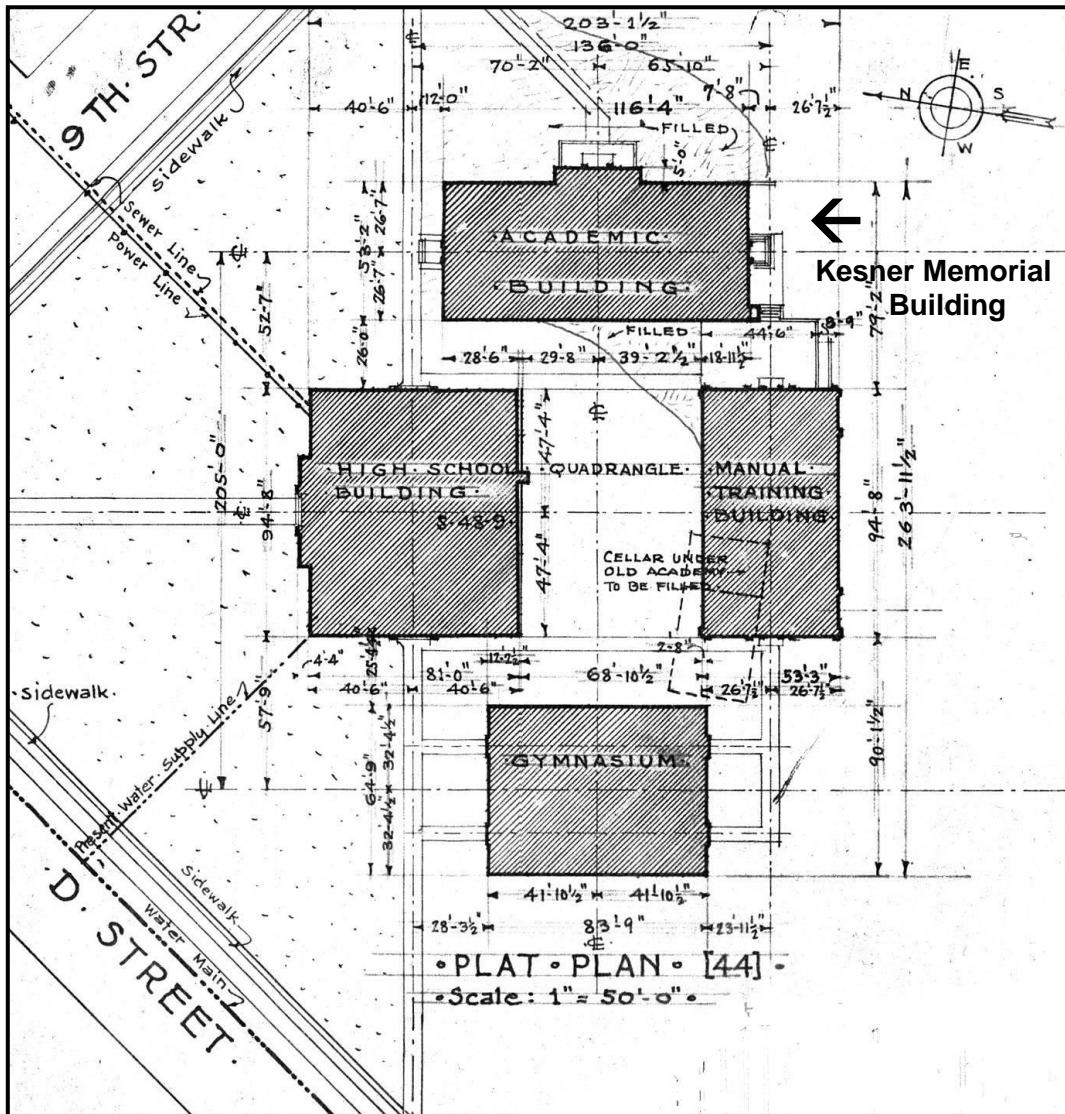


Figure 3. Architects Cooper and Desjardins prepared this plat plan for the school grounds showing the relationship of the various buildings. The Kesner Memorial Building is at the top, labeled "Academic Building." SOURCE: Cooper & Desjardins Architects, "Academic Building, Salida High School," Sheet No. AC-8, job number 281921, 1 March 1922, Pueblo, Colorado.

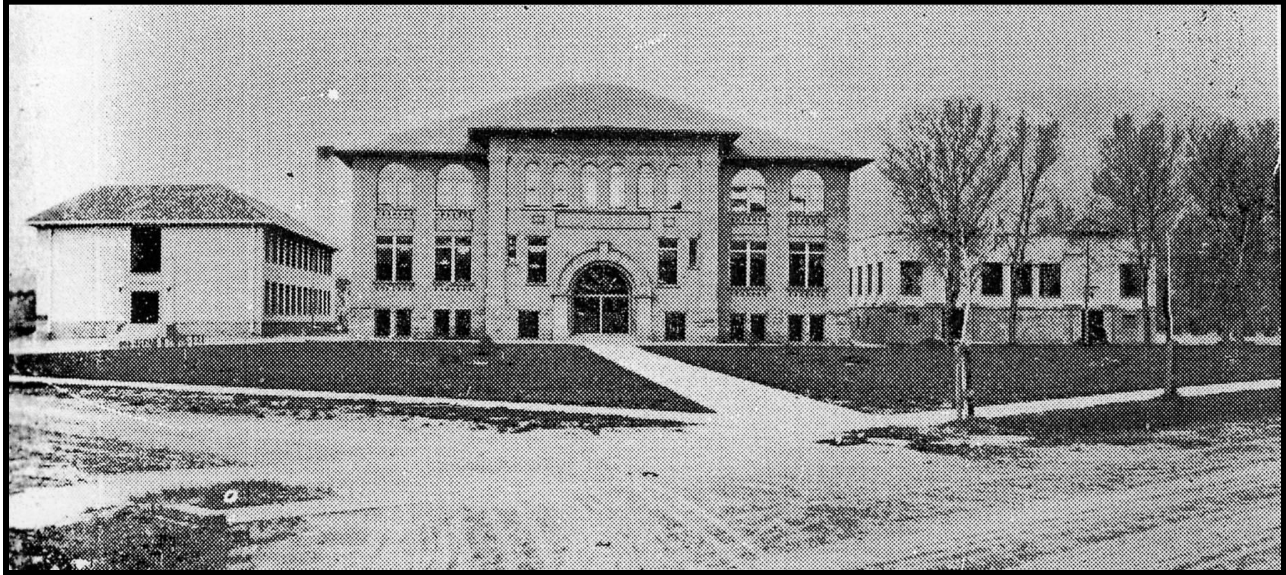


Figure 4. This 1937 view of the school grounds shows the 1910 high school building (no longer standing) flanked by the Kesner Memorial Building (left, showing north and west walls) and the gymnasium (right). SOURCE: *Le Résumé* (high school yearbook), 1937.¹

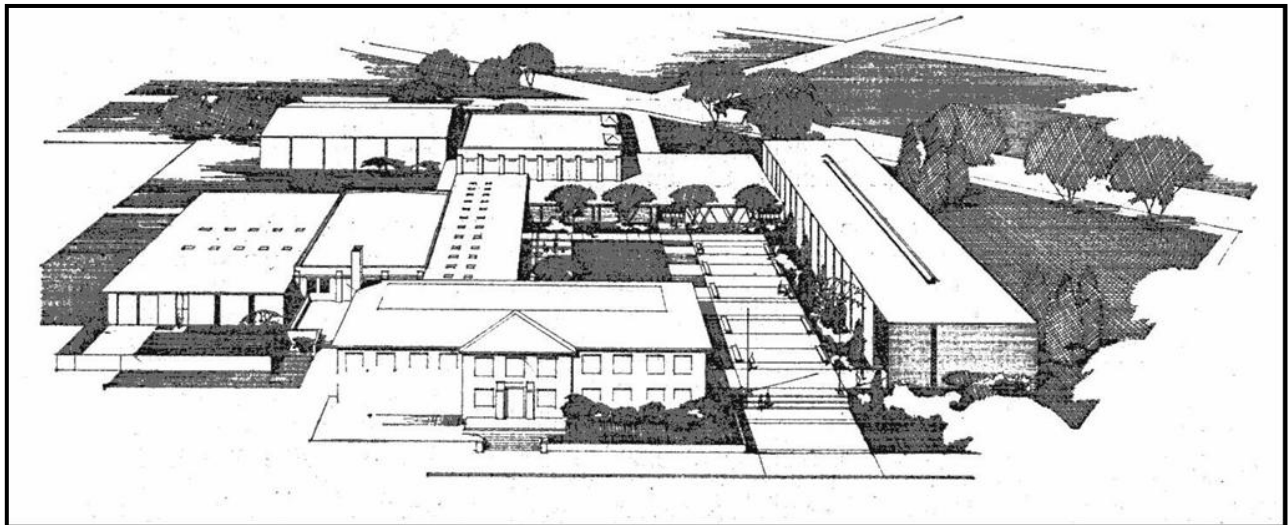


Figure 5. After the old high school burned in 1962, architects Ditzen, Rowland, Mueller & Associates of Boulder prepared this perspective drawing (view west) showing the new high school campus. The Kesner Building is in the center foreground. Melien Hall, erected in 1978, now occupies the northeast corner of the site. SOURCE: *Mountain Mail*, 25 October 1963.¹

¹ FRRA 2003



Figure 6. Kesner Memorial Building in 2003. Looking west.

2.0 HISTORY AND USE

2.1 ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND CONSTRUCTION HISTORY²

DESCRIPTION

The Edgar Kesner Memorial Building is a two-story rectangular brick building crowned by a tile roof and featuring a projecting central pavilion. The school is located in a residential neighborhood in southern Salida, the county seat of Chaffee County. The building is part of a complex of Salida High School facilities bordering a quadrangle and including historic buildings erected at the same time as the Kesner Building and modern buildings erected after the original high school building burned in 1962.³ Connecting passageways between two modern buildings of the complex are attached to the north and west (rear) walls of the Kesner Building.... South of the complex are a brick field house and open athletic fields, while a small school district office is located across Ninth Street one block northeast. Landscaping in the immediate vicinity of the building includes a terrace extending from the front wall to a concrete retaining wall with pebble dash finish, as well as small bushes planted near the foundation.

The low-pitched hipped roof of the Kesner Building has overhanging eaves with exposed rafters and is clad with regularly laid clay tiles in shades of red (the predominant color), blue, black, gray, and beige. The buff brick building includes a sandstone water table with tooled top and a raised concrete foundation with pebble dash finish. All original windows have been replaced with two-part metal frame windows and horizontal colored panels.

The symmetrical façade (east wall) has a central projecting pavilion with pyramidal hipped roof. The first and second stories of the pavilion feature three large window openings. There is a rock-faced stone lintel course at the top of the wall and the sills are brick. The first story windows have two projecting bricks at each corner that support the sills. Spandrels are ornamented with panels of stacked header brick enframed with projecting header and rowlock bricks, with square stone accents at the corners. On the first story of the pavilion, a central window (formerly the location of the main entrance) is flanked by paneled brick pilasters with stone bases and capitals featuring stone trim and diamond-shaped insets.... Above the window is a large stone plaque inscribed "1922." At the northeast corner of the pavilion is a black granite cornerstone reading "Edgar Kesner Memorial, Erected A.D. 1922." The foundation has two louvered vents. The north and south walls of the pavilion have a single-light window on each story

The wings on either side of the projecting bay feature four windows on each story, a rock-faced lintel course, spandrels with panels of brick, a rock-faced stone water table, and a raised concrete foundation with pebble dash finish. There are small vents along the foundation.

² Extracted verbatim from FRRRA 2003, including all other footnotes in this section of the document.

³ Assimilated into the complex are two other historic buildings that are more altered than the Kesner Building: a gymnasium now used as an auditorium and a manual training building.

The south wall of the building has a central bay with double door entrance. The entrance includes metal flush panel doors and a single-light transom. A rock-faced stone surround that extends from the water table elaborates the entrance. Flanking the entrance are slightly projecting pilasters rising from the foundation and extending halfway up the second story. The pilasters are concrete and brick and are divided by the stone water table. Above the entrance is a large four-part window on the second story. The spandrel between the window and entrance has stacked header brick with a diamond-shaped stone ornament at the center. Flanking the central bay are expanses of blank brick. The foundation of the building has greater exposure on the south, including garden level windows on each side of the entrance. At the west end of the south wall is a full-height brick chimney that projects outward and has a concrete cap at the top. The stone water table extends along the chimney.

The rear (west) wall of the building has a stone lintel course, stone water table, and raised foundation with pebble dash finish. The fenestration includes twelve bays of windows on both stories. The windows have brick sills and the first story windows have projecting bricks at the corners that support the sills. There are stacked panels of header brick enframed with projecting bricks in the spandrels. The third bay from the southwest corner is intersected by a one-story connecting passageway with flat roof, yellow brick walls, bands of plate glass windows, colored panels, and a flush panel door facing metal steps toward the south. The passageway leads to a modern one-story building sited on the southern edge of the courtyard behind the Kesner Memorial Building.

A two-story connecting bay intersects the north wall of the Kesner Memorial Building on the west half (toward the rear). The visible portion of the original north wall has a stone lintel course, stone water table, pebble dash foundation, and one pilaster with a stone capital. There are no windows on the north wall. The two-story corridor has a flat roof and features a column of dark-tinted glass adjacent the north wall of the Kesner Building. The corridor attaches to the 1978 Melein Hall, a modern yellow brick building located north of the Kesner Memorial Building.

ALTERATIONS

The principal alterations to the building have been the enclosing of the main entrance on the front and replacement of all the original windows. The entrance was blocked up, entrance stairs were removed, and offices were created in the lobby in 1963. The original multi-light windows were replaced in 1976. Connecting passageways (described above) were attached on the north (1978) and west (1963) leading to modern buildings added to the complex.⁴

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

The Edgar Kesner Memorial Building is significant under Criterion A, in the area of education, for its association with the history of public education in Salida. The Kesner Building is the most intact historic educational building still standing in the city, serving as a reminder of the community's longstanding commitment to public instruction. During the eighty years since its construction, the building has served as an academic facility for generations of Salida students. For many years, the building housed the school district administration office and classes for

⁴ *Salida Mountain Mail*, 25 October 1963, 5; Charles Melien, *100 Years of Spartan Spirit* (Salida: Charles Melien, 1980), 8.

both high school and junior high students. The building was operated as Salida's first separate junior high beginning in 1936 and continued to serve students in grades seven and eight until 1999. Although the building has undergone some alterations allowing it to function as an integral part of Salida High School today, it retains the essential physical features conveying its historic character. They may be described as:

- low pitched flat topped hip roof with multi-colored clay tiles;
- widely overhanging eaves with exposed rafter tails;
- symmetrical facade with projecting pavilion;
- centered entry accentuated on each side with decorative projected brick columns;
- decorative brick work with sandstone accents; and
- symmetrical fenestration pattern with large window openings. Unfortunately the existing 1970s windows detract from the richness of the facades formerly provided by the missing multi-paned windows.

HISTORY

Salida's school district organized in 1879, one year before the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad platted the town of Salida, and hired Miss Jennie Smith for a three-month term teaching twenty-five students in a rented room. In 1882 the district erected its first building, a two-room stone facility, which quickly became inadequate.⁵ Nine years later, the district constructed the H Street School (later known as Longfellow School) housing high school and grade school classes. By 1904, continued growth of the student population resulted in the purchase of ten acres of grounds and associated buildings of the Presbyterian Academy, a private institution that had operated at the corner of 9th and D streets in the southern section of the city during 1884-1904. A high school building, described as "one of the largest and best equipped high schools in this part of the State" was erected on the site in 1910.⁶

During and immediately after World War I, Salida Public School Superintendent Edgar Kesner reported overcrowding in the city's schools. Loss of teachers due to the war effort prevented the district from adding classes to relieve the situation. Elementary schools included grades one through eight, and all fed into one high school, resulting in crowded conditions for all levels of students. The city's status as a major railroad center resulted in a diverse student population, which included students of Italian, Mexican, Austrian, and German heritage. The district frequently held night schools in its buildings, offering "Americanization" classes for adults. There were also a number of small school districts in the surrounding agricultural region whose students were moving into Salida to finish their undergraduate educations.⁷

At the same time, a movement to create schools with courses specifically designed for intermediate students had achieved great popularity throughout the country. In addition to providing such junior high classes, Salida also needed facilities for manual training instruction. Concurrently, local citizens were actively calling for the construction of a gymnasium for high school athletic activities. Modern, well-ventilated and well-illuminated and fireproof facilities were desired.⁸

⁵ The school was first known as the Third Street School and later as Central School.

⁶ Longfellow School was torn down in the mid-1960s. The 1910 high school building was destroyed by fire in 1962. Melien, *100 Years of Spartan Spirit*, 2-5.

⁷ Salida Public Schools, "School Board Minutes," 1917-29, 10, 14, 32, 37, 43; and 86 Melien, *100 Years of Spartan Spirit*, 7.

⁸ Melien, *100 Years of Spartan Spirit*, 6; Salida Mail, 24 November 1921, 1.

In February 1921 Superintendent Kesner again raised the issue of the district's need for additional facilities and equipment, but the School Board deferred definite action to relieve the situation. In June, the district directed that basement rooms in two schools be prepared for classes for the following year. When school started in September, overcrowding was an immediate dilemma that even threatened the high school's accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges. Faced with these problems, the School Board⁹ responded decisively, requesting proposals from several architectural firms for new academic, manual training, and gymnasium buildings on the high school grounds. Among the architects submitting proposals for the new complex were Mountjoy and Frewen and William N. Bowman, of Denver, and Cooper and Desjardins, of Pueblo.¹⁰

Cooper and Desjardins presented drawings and ideas "that appealed favorably to the directors," who selected the firm for the project. Leo A. Desjardins was born in Fort Collins in 1885 and studied architecture at Cornell University. He spent the first half of his career in Denver, where he became the first architect in Colorado to qualify for licensing by examination. As Professor of Architecture at the Denver School of Technology, he trained others in his field. Among the buildings designed by Desjardins are the Woodruff Memorial Library in La Junta, the First National Bank of Florence, the Pagosa Springs Middle School, Denver's Oriental Theater, Skate Land in Trinidad, and the Holy Cross Abbey in Canon City. Desjardins retired in 1935 and died in Trinidad in 1967. His partner, Francis W. Cooper, was born in New York, and also graduated from Cornell University. He worked in Ohio and Wyoming before moving to Pueblo in 1881, establishing an architectural practice that lasted half a century until his death in 1934. Cooper served as president of the State Board of Examiners for Architects and was a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. He is credited with the design of a number of commercial buildings and residences in Pueblo, including the Mechanics Building and the Henkel-Duke Building, as well as Taylor Hall on the campus of Western State College.¹¹

In a special election on 27 December 1921, Salida voters approved by a margin of 121 votes a \$110,000 bond issue to finance erection of the new educational facilities. This was the last new construction funded by the school district for more than thirty years. Tragically, Superintendent Edgar Kesner died at the beginning of the building project after catching influenza. The superintendent was described as "a man of strong faith, of high ideals, and noble character." Born in Canada in 1857, he had moved to Colorado in 1886 to recover his health. He worked first in Park County, serving as principal of the Fairplay School for two years. Subsequently, he was hired as principal of Highland School in Boulder and received a degree from the University of Colorado. In 1897, Salida selected him as superintendent, a position he filled with distinction for twenty-five years. Upon his untimely death, the city's Parent-Teachers' Association requested that the new academic building be designated in his honor as the "Kesner Memorial Building."¹²

⁹ Members of the School Board at the time of construction of the building were: Walter T. Everett, president; Franklin C. Woody, secretary; William E. Crutcher; Dr. Guy W. Larimer; and R. Leander Hampson.

¹⁰ Salida Public Schools, "School Board Minutes," 1917-29, 44, 51, 55, 59, 63.

¹¹ Salida Public Schools, "School Board Minutes," 1917-29, 59; Colorado Historical Society, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Architects' Biographical Sketches, Francis W. Cooper; Richard Cherry, National Park Service Historic Preservation Certification Application, Part 1, Amherst Building, Pueblo, Colo., 13 May 1996.

¹² Salida Public Schools, "School Board Minutes," 1917-29, 65 and 69; Melien, 100 Years of Spartan Spirit, 6; *Salida Record*, 17 March 1922, 1.

On 3 June 1922, contracts for construction were awarded: Raymond G. Whitlock of Pueblo received the general contract. Johnson & Davis of Denver was awarded the heating and plumbing work, and Clarence T. Gibbon of Salida received the contract for wiring. Excavation work on the building site began immediately. The Salida Granite Corporation donated a granite cornerstone for the Kesner Building, which was laid on 19 September 1922. The P.T.A. led the cornerstone ceremonies and was credited with working for the passage of the bond issue and creating “a desire for Salida children to have the best there is in an educational way.” The program included a tribute to Superintendent Kesner, who “gave the best years of his life to the upbuilding of Salida’s school system.” Nine hundred students offered flowers in memory of the Superintendent.¹³

The \$70,000 Kesner Memorial Building’s design reflected a restrained Italian Renaissance influence in its low-pitched hipped roof with ceramic tile roofing, symmetrical façade with projecting central entrance pavilion, and elaborated doorway. The School Board requested that the architects submit suggestions for “relieving the plainness of the north end” of the building. L.A. Desjardins also volunteered to prepare plans and specifications for the future erection of enclosed corridors leading to other buildings in the complex.¹⁴

The building was completed by the opening day of school, 4 September 1923. The junior high operated originally as a component of the high school, sharing the Kesner Building, the gymnasium, and other facilities. Junior high teachers and subjects during the 1923-24 school year included Hettie M. Rogers (English), Frances Brush (history), Orphie Dickinson (science and penmanship), and Rose Ridgway (math). In addition to housing class rooms, the building also included the offices of the superintendent and other school district administrators for many years.

In 1936, the second floor of the building was remodeled and became the official location of the junior high, which included two seventh and two eighth grade sections. In subsequent years additional sections and teachers were added. Mary Mitchell, a graduate of the University of Denver who had taught at Salida High, became the first principal of the junior high, serving until 1941. She was succeeded by George Eichman, who held the position until 1969, becoming the longest serving principal in any Salida School. When kindergartens were added to Salida’s elementary schools in the fall of 1952, sixth grade classes were moved to the junior high, where they remained until 1960. The number of students in the junior high varied from a low of 128 to more than 300, reaching a peak of 310 in 1973.¹⁵

In addition to pursuing a course of studies designed for intermediate students, junior high pupils assisted the school staff by serving as office workers, hall monitors, and librarians. Musical groups were an important part of school activities, as were athletic endeavors. A Boy Scout room was created in the basement to serve members of that organization. When the junior high became a separate department, a Kesner P.T.A. organized to provide support and assistance to the school.¹⁶

¹³ Salida Public Schools, “School Board Minutes,” 1917-29, 73 and 81; *Salida Mail*, 9 June 1922 and 22 September 1922, 1; *Salida Record*, 22 September 1922, 1.

¹⁴ Salida Public Schools, “School Board Minutes,” 1917-29, 90 and 109.

¹⁵ *Salida Mail*, 31 May 1939 and 24 August 1923; Melien, *100 Years of Spartan Spirit*, 95 and 97.

¹⁶ *Salida Mail*, 31 May 1939.

In 1962 fire destroyed the 1910 high school building. Until a new building could be completed the following year, high school classes were conducted in the Kesner Memorial Building on a split-session schedule. Junior high students studied in the building until 1999, when a new school was erected. Today, the Kesner Memorial Building serves as an integral component of the Salida High School campus. The Salida School District plans to preserve the historic building and hopes to restore the main entrance and windows in future years.

CONSTRUCTION EVOLUTION OF SCHOOL SITE

1910 Old High School

1922 Manual Training Building

1922 Gymnasium

1922 Academic Building – Salida Junior High School – Kesner Memorial Building

1962 Ditzen, Rowland, Mueller & Associates, Architects, Boulder, was hired to undertake a remodeling. A partial set of drawings exist entitled "Salida Senior and Junior High School Buildings." It appears the base contract was for the new High School, and work on Kesner was done as an additive alternate. Work included removal of main entry doors and blocking up the openings, associated partition revisions, new doors in north entry in existing openings, new connecting structure to the new music wing to the west, adding partitions to convert the northeast main floor room into 3 rooms, for the Superintendent, Secretary, and a Work and Storage space, removal of a partition from the second floor center room, east side (now Room 212), new cabinetry, chalkboards, and interior finishes. The heating system was changed from steam to hot water with significant remodeling of the boiler room. The ventilation system was revised and new fire-dampened ductwork installed in the old plenum spaces.

1976 The original multi-light windows were replaced.

1977 Nixon, Brown, Brokaw, and Bowen, Architects, Boulder were hired to design a wing to the north that connected Kesner to the new high school. This connection included a science room and laboratories, home economics room, and an accessible ramp that served both buildings. This new connection was built tight to the center west end of the Kesner Building's north wall. Kesner Building again got new entry doors in the north end and its north stair was demolished to make way for the ramp. The downspout on the Kesner north wall was removed and redesigned to discharge "on a splash block on the new roof."