

Oregon Historic Site Form

Astor School
5601 Yale St
Portland, Multnomah County

LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME

address: 5601 N Yale St apprx. addr

Portland vcnty Multnomah County

Optional Information
assoc addresses:
(former addresses, intersections, etc.)

location descr:
(remote sites)

historic name: Astor School

current/
other names: Astor Elementary School, Portsmouth Primary School

block nbr: _____ lot nbr: _____ tax lot nbr: _____

township: _____ range: _____ section: _____ 1/4: _____

zip: _____

PROPERTY CHARACTERISTICS

resource type: Building height (# stories): 1

elig. evaluation: eligible/contributing

primary constr date: 1949 (c.) secondary date: 1957 (c.)
(optional--use for major addns)

primary orig use: School

secondary orig use: _____

primary style: International

secondary style: Northwest Regional

primary siding: Vertical Board

secondary siding: _____

plan type: School (General)

total # eligible resources: 1 total # ineligible resources: 1

NR status: _____
NR date listed: _____ (indiv listed only; see Grouping for hist dist)

orig use comments: _____

prim style comments: _____

sec style comments: _____

siding comments: Board and Batten siding

architect: William Henry Jones

builder: _____

comments/notes: _____

GROUPINGS / ASSOCIATIONS

survey project name or other grouping name: PPS Historic Building Assessment 2009 Survey & Inventory Project

farmstead/cluster name: _____ external site #: 136
(ID# used in city/agency database)

SHPO INFO FOR THIS PROPERTY

NR date listed: _____

ILS survey date: 6/25/2009

RLS survey date: 6/25/2009

Gen File date: _____

106 Project(s)



Front elevation, looking northwest

ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

(Include expanded description of the building/property, setting, significant landscape features, outbuildings, and alterations)

Description Summary

Situated in the residential neighborhood of University Park in North Portland, the Astor Elementary School is located at 5601 North Yale Street. Built in 1949, the Northwest Regional style school building (136A, B) is situated on a four-acre grass and asphalt-covered campus. Directly northeast of the school is an asphalt-covered playground with a covered play shed (136C). The building is a one-story with a wood frame. The building is covered with vertical board and batten siding. The H-shaped plan provides facilities for classrooms, a gymnasium, a library, a multi-purpose room and an administrative office.

Architectural Description

Situated in the residential neighborhood of University Park in North Portland, the Astor School is located at 5601 North Yale Street. Built in 1949, the International and Northwest Regional style school building (136A, B) is situated on a four-acre, grass and asphalt-covered campus. The asphalt-covered playground, with a covered play shed (136C), is directly northeast of the school.

Astor Elementary School features an H-shaped version of the finger plan. The H-shaped mass of the school is oriented on a north-south axis and rests on a poured concrete foundation. The wood frame building is clad with vertical board and batten siding. Shallow pitched gable roofs cover the two parallel wings of the single story building. The finger plan facilitates direct access to the playground and other outdoor spaces from the classrooms. Fenestration consists of vertical three light metal frame hinged windows. Single and double-leaf metal doors are found on all the elevations.

The interior layout of the school consists of a modified H-shaped plan with the main hallway running north-south on the front and rear wing. The narrow double-loaded corridors retain their original configuration. Finishes consist of concrete walls, tubular fluorescent lights suspended from low acoustic tile ceilings, linoleum floors, and wooden classroom doors.

The classrooms are primarily rectangular. Interior finishes include linoleum tile floors and unpainted wood framing and molding. The room's standard features include book cases and cabinets, sinks, and counters. Tubular fluorescent light fixtures are suspended from an acoustic tile clad ceiling. Windows are metal framed fixed pane and hopper openings.

The library is a spacious carpeted open room divided into several work and study areas with wooden book shelves, chairs, and desks.

The high bay multi-purpose room and the gymnasium are located in the rear wing of the school building. The multi-purpose room includes a cafeteria, a kitchen, and a stage for auditorium presentations. The room contains folding tables and benches that recess into the walls. Interior finishes in the room include tiled floors and wood doors. The gymnasium retains its original configuration and height, with a high bay ceiling supported by wood beams suspended fluorescent lights and concrete block walls.

The building is heated by steam boilers located in the boiler room in the front wing. The clay tiles on one of the walls of the boiler room are exposed. Grilles set in the wall provide heat and cool air throughout the school. Cool air is pushed through the building's vents by compressor-powered fans.

Alterations/Integrity

Astor School retains a moderate degree of integrity. The primary alteration is the construction of the 1958 classroom addition to the north of the original wing. An addition of four classrooms was also added to the east of the original building. The materials and designs of these additional classrooms are compatible with the original building. The hallways, classrooms, multi-purpose room, and gymnasium retain their original building materials and features. The minimal modifications to the exterior cladding, roof lines, and fenestration maintain the distinctive exterior and interior features.

HISTORY

(Chronological, descriptive history of the property from its construction through at least the historic period [preferably to the present])

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Statement of Significance

In response to growth in North Portland, Portland Public Schools acquired the land at 5601 North Yale Street between 1948 and 1949 for \$58,891.00. Astor Elementary was one of the first schools constructed during a period of modernization and new construction initiated by Portland Public Schools (PPS) after World War II. In 1945, the citizens of Portland approved a ballot measure that provided \$5,000,000 over five years to construct, improve, and rehabilitate its public school buildings (Portland Public Schools 1945: 2). The ballot measure enabled PPS to respond to the explosive growth in school-age children that occurred in the city as a result of the arrival of defense plant workers and their families, as well as the deferred maintenance arising from the lack of funds during the depression (Portland Public Schools 1945: 2-3). Beginning with this initial bond measure, PPS embarked on an effort to improve its school facilities through renovations, additions, and the construction of over fifty new schools between 1945 and 1970.

For the new building program, PPS schools adopted the call of architects and school planners across the country for new types of schools. Nationally known architects including Richard Neutra, Walter Gropius and the Architects Collective, and the Perkins Will architectural firm promoted new school types that reflected both evolving educational practices and design philosophies (Ogata 2008: 567-568; Perkins and Cocking 1949: 238-246). Emphasizing the need for economy and rapid construction, the designers adopted new materials that were standardized and mass produced including steel, plywood, and aluminum. In many buildings, architects achieved flexibility through the building's structure by employing non-load-bearing partitions walls and zoned ventilation and heating systems. Folding walls and moveable cabinets provided additional flexibility intended to enable teachers to rearrange rooms based on lesson plan and activities (Ogata 2008: 568).

Although many of the architects for schools in Portland continued to design their schools to be extensible, designers turned away from the two-story schools with centralized massing popularized by Naramore and Jones. Instead many architects adopted the principles of the Modern movement and its regional variant, the Northwest Regional style, choosing to express functional areas through massing and materials to create innovative forms (McMath 1974: 628). Classrooms featured extensive built-ins including sinks, slots for bulky rolls of paper, and coat storage. Many buildings featured interior courtyards which facilitated access to the outdoors and expanded the opportunities for passive ventilation and daylighting, a hallmark of the Northwest style.

Little information is available on the career of the architect of Astor Elementary School, William Henry Jones. He served as the Director of Plant Inspection and Planning for Portland Public Schools from 1947-1950. In this capacity Jones was involved with the early planning of the massive program of construction and modernization implemented by the district in the mid-twentieth century. In addition to Astor Elementary School, Sitton Elementary, Chief Joseph Elementary, and Ball Elementary Schools, William Henry Jones is also listed as the architect of the Cleveland Field house and additions to the Capitol Hill school (Portland Chronology Binder).

The architects of the 1958 addition, Wick & Hilgers, were major architects in the Portland area during the mid-twentieth century. Founded by two graduates of the University of Oregon's School of Architecture, Clarence Wick and Albert Hilgers, the firm was responsible for the design of many public facilities in the Northwest. In addition to working with a number of private architectural firms including the office of Herman Brookman, Clarence Wick gained additional design experience from working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Hilgers, a native of Portland who attended Benson Polytechnic School, worked for a number of Northwest architects before serving as the Resident Engineer for the Public Works Administration from 1937-1939. He subsequently worked as an architect on the Bonneville Project in 1940 and 1941. In 1941 Hilgers entered into partnership with Wick and Gerald Scott. During this period Wick and Hilgers also worked together at the Housing Authority of Portland. At the Housing Authority Wick served as Director of Development for from 1941- 1945 and Hilgers worked as an assistant director of development from 1943-1944. In 1945 the architectural practice was reestablished as the firm of Wick and Hilgers. The firm's first large commission was as the architects of record for the Portland Chamber of Commerce Visitors Information Center designed by John Yeon (1945). The firm was also responsible for the design of the School of Music (1949), Commonwealth Hall (1951) at the University of Oregon, and the Wolverson Memorial Pool at the Oregon College of Education (1955). In their work for the Portland schools the firm designed Applegate Elementary School and additions to the Astor, Chief Joseph, and Faubion schools (Ritz 2002 424-425, 178-179).

A good example of the finger plan type school that retains its integrity with its floor plan and many exterior and interior finishes intact, Astor Elementary School is recommended as eligible for the NRHP. The school was built in response to the residential development in North Portland during the PPS program of post-war construction and is eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A. Although responsible for the design of several Portland schools, archival research does not indicate the architect was considered a master in the Portland area. Nor is the 1958 addition considered a significant design by the firm of Wick and Hilgers. However, the building is a good example of the use of finger plan schools to facilitate rapid construction of the new buildings after World War II. The building's low pitched gable roofs, courtyard, and board and batten siding are all characteristic elements of the Northwest Regional style, and therefore the building is eligible for the NRHP under Criterion C.

RESEARCH INFORMATION

(Check all of the basic sources consulted and cite specific important sources)

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Title Records | <input type="checkbox"/> Census Records | <input type="checkbox"/> Property Tax Records | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Histories |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sanborn Maps | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Biographical Sources | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SHPO Files | <input type="checkbox"/> Interviews |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obituaries | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Newspapers | <input type="checkbox"/> State Archives | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Historic Photographs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> City Directories | <input type="checkbox"/> Building Permits | <input type="checkbox"/> State Library | |

Local Library: Multnomah County Library University Library: Portland State University Library

Historical Society: Oregon Historical Society Other Repository: PPS Archives

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Bibliography: Bibliography

McMath, George. "A Regional Style Comes to the City." In *Space, Style and Structure: Buildings in Northwest America*. Ed. Thomas Vaughan, 467-499. Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1974.

_____. "The Wood Tradition Expands." In *Space, Style and Structure: Buildings in Northwest America*. Ed. Thomas Vaughan, 628-647. Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1974.

Ogata, Amy F. "Building for Learning in Postwar American Elementary Schools." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 67, no. 4, December 2008: 562-591.

Perkins, Lawrence B and Walter D. Cocking. *Schools*. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1949.

Portland Public Schools. *Repairing, Rehabilitating and Modernizing the School Plant*. Portland: Portland Public Schools. Office of the Superintendent, 1945.

_____. *Portland Public Schools Chronology Binder*.

_____. *Astor Elementary School. Facility Profile*.

_____. *Astor Elementary School. Facility Plan*.

Ritz, Richard. E. *Architects of Oregon. A Biographical Dictionary of Architects Deceased – 19th and 20th Centuries*. Portland: Lair Hill Publishing, 2003.



Southwest elevation front entry



West and north elevations



Southwest elevation front entry



West elevation



South and east elevations

**Astor School
Exterior Photos
ENTRIX, 2009**



Classroom



Side entry door with glass block side lights



Multi-Purpose Room



Library

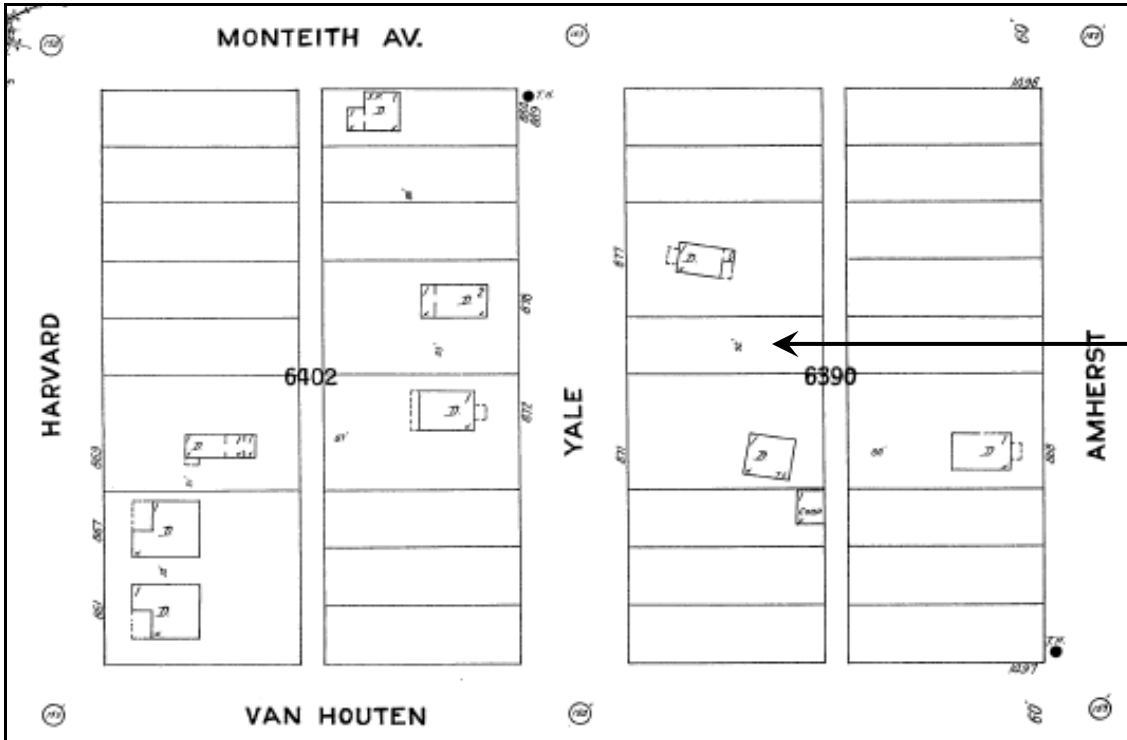


Windows between classroom and corridor



ENTRIX

Down to Earth. Down to Business.™

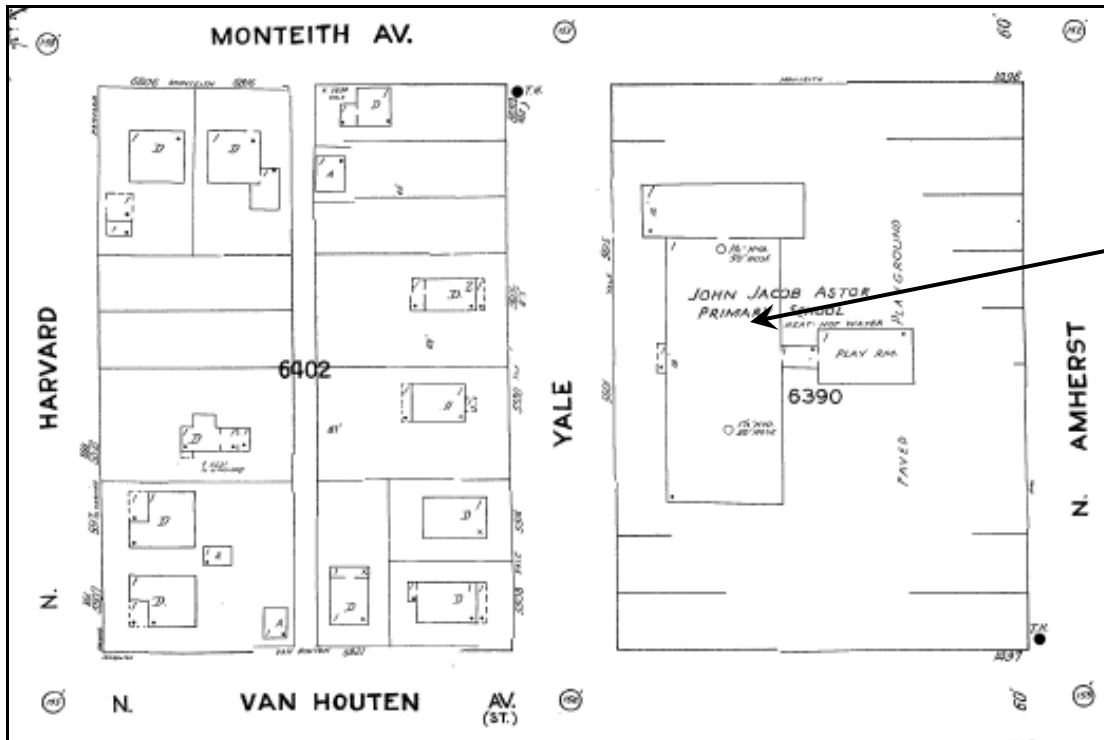


1924-1928 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Portland, Oregon, Map 371. Arrow points to future location of John Jacob Astor Primary School.



ENTRIX

Down to Earth. Down to Business.™



Updated to 1950, Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Portland, Oregon, Map 371.
Arrow points to John Jacob Astor Primary School. Note removal of houses and alleyway on the property.

Astor School

5601 N Yale St, Portland OR, 97203

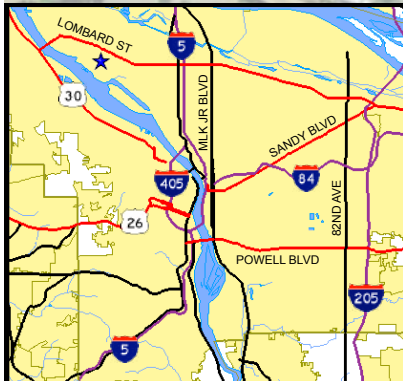
[View Site in Google Maps](#)






Astor School, south elevation, 2009



Aerial photo © 2009 Metro, Portland OR Imagery Date: July 12, 2007



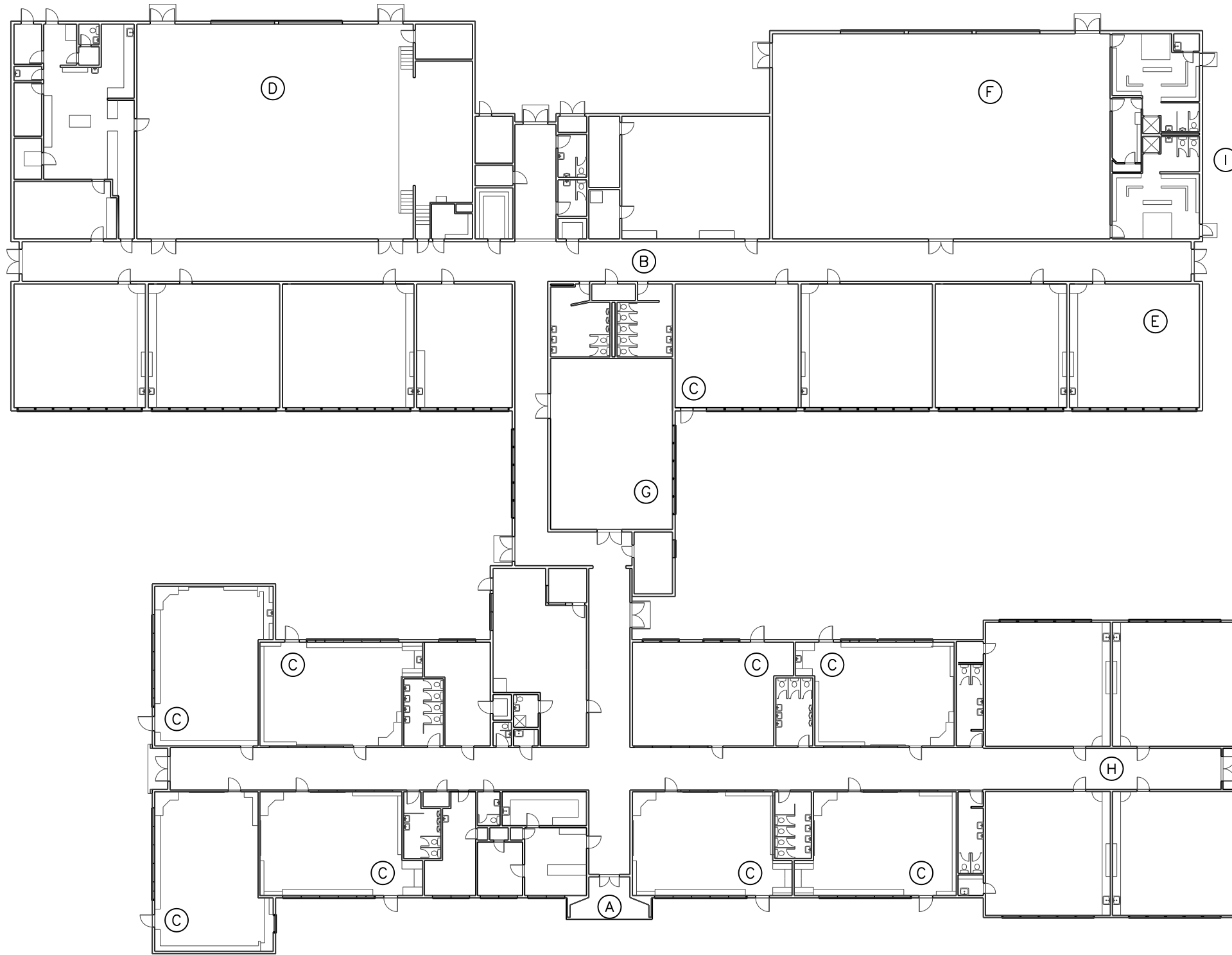
Historical Significance and Building Integrity

-  Contrib: High Significance
-  Contrib: Moderate Signif.
-  Non-Contributing

Building Periods

1. Main Building (136A), 1949
2. Classroom Add. (136B), 1958
3. Covered Play Area (136C), 1977





KEYNOTES:

- (A) ENTRY TO THE 1949 SCHOOL IS FROM N. YALE STREET.
- (B) AN-H-SHAPED CORRIDOR PROVIDES CIRCULATION FOR THE SCHOOL. FINISHES CONSIST OF CONCRETE WALLS, TUBULAR FLUORESCENT LIGHTS SUSPENDED FROM LOW ACOUSTIC TILE CEILINGS, LINOLEUM FLOORS, METAL FRAMING AND MOLDING AND WOODEN CLASSROOM DOORS.
- (C) THE PARALLEL WINGS OR "FINGERS" FACILITATE DIRECT ACCESS TO THE PLAYGROUND AND OTHER OUTDOORS SPACES FROM THE CLASSROOMS.
- (D) THE MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM INCLUDES A CAFETERIA, A KITCHEN, AS WELL AS A STAGE FOR AUDITORIUM PRESENTATIONS. THE FOLDING TABLES AND BENCHES THAT RECESS INTO THE WALL ENABLE THE USE OF THE ROOM AS A CAFETERIA. INTERIOR FINISHES IN THE ROOM INCLUDE TILED FLOORS AND WOOD DOORS.
- (E) THE CLASSROOMS ARE PRIMARILY RECTANGULAR. INTERIOR FINISHES INCLUDE LINOLEUM TILE FLOORS AND UNPAINTED WOOD FRAMING AND MOLDING. STANDARD FEATURES INCLUDE BOOK CASES AND CABINETS, SINKS AND COUNTERS.
- (F) THE GYMNASIUM RETAINS ITS ORIGINAL CONFIGURATION AND HEIGHT. IT HAS A HIGH BAY CEILING SUPPORTED BY WOOD CEILING BEAMS. ILLUMINATION IS PROVIDED BY SUSPENDED FLORESCENT LIGHTS. THE WALLS ARE CONCRETE BLOCK.
- (G) THE LIBRARY IS A SPACIOUS, CARPETED, OPEN ROOM DIVIDED INTO SEVERAL WORK AND STUDY AREAS WITH WOODEN BOOK SHELVES, CHAIRS AND DESKS. THE SPACE FORMERLY SERVED AS A LARGE PLAYROOM
- (H) FOUR CLASSROOM ADDITION IN 1958
- (I) CLASSROOM, ADDITORIUM AND GYMNASIUM ADDITION IN 1958

GENERAL NOTES:

- (1) THE BUILDING IS A ONE-STORY, WOOD FRAME BUILDING WITH VERTICAL BOARD AND BATTEN SIDING.
- (2) FENESTRATION CONSISTS OF VERTICAL THREE LIGHT, METAL FRAME, HINGED WINDOWS.



ASTOR ELEMENTARY – 136

5601 N YALE ST 97203

PPS HISTORIC ASSESSMENT



DRAWING: ANNOTATED PLAN

DATE: Sept. 4, 2009

1 ASTOR ELEMENTARY – 1ST FLOOR
SCALE: 1" = 30'-0"

