

# Oregon Historic Site Form

Metropolitan Learning Center  
2033 Glisan St  
Portland, Multnomah County

## LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME

address: 2033 NW Glisan St ☐ apprx. addr

historic name: Metropolitan Learning Center

Portland ☐ vcnty Multnomah County

current/  
other names: Couch School

### Optional Information

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

location descr:  
(remote sites)

block nbr: \_\_\_\_\_ lot nbr: \_\_\_\_\_ tax lot nbr: \_\_\_\_\_

township: \_\_\_\_\_ range: \_\_\_\_\_ section: \_\_\_\_\_ 1/4: \_\_\_\_\_

zip: \_\_\_\_\_

## PROPERTY CHARACTERISTICS

resource type: Building height (# stories): 3

total # eligible resources: 1 total # ineligible resources: 0

elig. evaluation: eligible/significant

NR status: Listed in Historic District

primary constr date: 1914 (c.) ☐ secondary date: 1977 (c.) ☐  
(optional--use for major addns)

NR date listed: \_\_\_\_\_ (indiv listed only; see  
Grouping for hist dist)

primary orig use: School

orig use comments: \_\_\_\_\_

secondary orig use: Education-Related

primary style: Late Gothic Revival

prim style comments: Collegiate Gothic

secondary style: \_\_\_\_\_

sec style comments: \_\_\_\_\_

primary siding: Standard Brick

siding comments: \_\_\_\_\_

secondary siding: Glazed Terra-Cotta

plan type: School (General)

architect: Naramore, F A

builder: \_\_\_\_\_

comments/notes: NRHP listed (within Alphabet Historic District - Contributing Resource), HRI Rank II.

## GROUPINGS / ASSOCIATIONS

survey project  
name or other  
grouping name PPS Historic Building Assessment 2009

Survey & Inventory Project

farmstead/cluster name: \_\_\_\_\_

external site #: 154

(ID# used in city/agency database)

## SHPO INFO FOR THIS PROPERTY

NR date listed: \_\_\_\_\_ NHD

ILS survey date: 6/22/2009

RLS survey date: 6/22/2009

Gen File date: \_\_\_\_\_

**106 Project(s)**



East elevation front entry

## ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

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

### Description Summary

The Metropolitan Learning Center is situated in a residential and commercial neighborhood in the northwest Portland and was formerly designated the Couch Elementary School. The building is located at 2033 NW Glisan Street and faces an asphalt-covered playground, with a city park to the east and a school parking lot to the west. Hoyt and Glisan Streets border the school to the north and south respectively. The three story building is covered by a flat roof. The rectangular mass of the reinforced concrete structure is covered with brick veneer. Built in 1914, the Tudor Revival style building features glazed terra cotta decorative elements. The facilities include classrooms, a gymnasium, an auditorium, and an indoor pool.

### Architectural Description

The Metropolitan Learning Center is situated in a residential and commercial neighborhood in the northwest Portland and was formerly entitled the Couch Elementary School. The building is located at 2033 NW Glisan Street and faces an asphalt-covered playground with a city park to the east and a school parking lot to the west. Hoyt and Glisan Streets border the school to the north and south respectively.

The school is oriented on an north-south axis. The three story building is covered by a flat roof. The rectangular mass of the reinforced concrete structure sits on a concrete foundation. The brick cladding is ornamented with glazed terra cotta elements in the Tudor Revival style consisting of Tudor arches around the entrances, relief panels above the entrances, and decorative panels inset into the parapet. A Cavetto cornice further defines the parapet.

The fenestration consists primarily of symmetrically placed metal frame replacement windows with a horizontal sliding opening at the bottom of each window. Divided into three horizontal sections, the upper section of each window has been blocked off, with louver vents inserted in the upper corners. Other windows consist of three pairs of original, wood frame 15-over-15 light windows on the stairwell landings on the east and west sides of the building. Other original fenestration includes the eight-over-eight pane wood frame windows in the gymnasium and multi-light wood windows above the entrance doors.

The interior layout of the school consists of a U-shaped single loaded hallway plan with single loaded classrooms on the first and second floors. The building's ground floor/basement is dominated by a centrally located swimming pool, a lunch room and kitchen to the east, the fan and boiler room to the north, and a double height gymnasium added in 1926 to the northwest. The first floor consists of a centrally located auditorium and stage that faces the south side of the building, a media center/library to the north, and classrooms to the east and west. The second floor is used entirely for classrooms.

All of the entries on the first floor lead to the centrally located auditorium. Although the space retains some of the original terra cotta ceiling features and molding, the auditorium's original chairs, ceiling, and wall lights have been removed.

The first and second floor hallways retain their original configuration and features, including vintage tile and linoleum flooring. Metal lockers were added in the corridors. Tubular fluorescent light fixtures are suspended from the acoustic tile clad ceiling. Original wooden doors provide access to the classrooms from the hallways. The building's stairwells retain their steam radiators, veneer plaster walls, wood railings and concrete steps and tile landings.

The classrooms retain their original configurations, height, wood flooring, molding, and chalk boards. Standard features include built-in cabinetry for storing coats and supplies. Recessed in the interior walls, the cabinets provide acoustic buffers between the classrooms. The closet's wooden vertical sliding closet doors have been retained. All the rooms feature veneer plaster walls and tubular fluorescent light fixtures suspended from the acoustic tile clad ceiling.

The Media Center/library on the first floor is divided into several rooms. Finishes include an acoustic tile ceilings and fluorescent lights. A contemporary elevator provides access to all of the floors.

The gymnasium is located in the northwest corner of the ground floor. The room retains its original configuration and double height space. Finishes include a concrete ceiling, wood-frame double-hung sash windows, wood flooring, contemporary fluorescent lights, and concrete walls. A 1970's era kitchen with its original aluminum fixtures was added on the southeast corner of the ground floor.

The swimming pool is centrally located on the south side of the ground floor. Although not in use, the space retains the empty pool, vintage tile flooring, tiled and concrete columns, and concrete walls and ceiling. The men's locker room has been modified into a storage room with its original interior features removed, while the women's room is intact.

The building is heated by steam boilers located in the room behind the gymnasium. Radiators are found in the hallways and in the classrooms. Cool air is pushed through the building's vents by compressor-powered fans.

### Alterations/Integrity

The first major addition to Couch School was the construction of the gymnasium in 1926. During the late 1950s several of the interior spaces including the kindergarten, cafeteria, and swimming pool were remodeled. One of the most significant modifications to the former exterior was the replacement of most of the original wood frame windows in 1986. A year later the auditorium was significantly altered, with the removal of its original chairs, ceiling and wall lights, and covering of skylights. Other alterations during the late 1980s included renovations to the library, replacement of floor tiles, and remodels to the science room and office (MLC Facility Plan, Facility Profile).

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The former Couch School retains a fair degree of integrity. While the building's fenestration and auditorium were considerably modified, the school retains the majority of its distinctive exterior and interior architectural features. The school's brick veneer, cast stone and terra cotta ornamentation remains intact. On the first and second floors the hallways exhibit their original configuration and features, including its molding, vintage tile and linoleum floors. The building's stairwells have their original concrete steps and tile landings, wood railings, wood frame windows, and steam radiators. The classrooms also retain their original configurations, height, wood flooring, molding, cabinetry, and chalk boards.

## HISTORY

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

### Statement of Significance

Constructed in 1914, the Metropolitan Learning Center building was originally designated the Couch School. Couch School was part of a dramatic building program begun by Portland Public Schools in the early 1900s. Gradually influenced by John Dewey's Progressive Education Movement, the district responded to changing city demographics and ideas concerning school safety, sanitation, and child centered instructional methods beginning in the first decade of the 1900s (Rippa, 1997: passim; Cremin 1961: 135-153; Cubberley 1915: 283-290). By 1905, it became increasingly clear that dramatic increases in school-age children outstripped the district's existing classroom capacity and existing schools could not effectively serve areas of the city with new residential development (Cubberley 1915: 283-285, 288-290).

After several well-publicized school fires elsewhere in the United States, calls for a more fundamental change in the building stock of the district began as early as 1906 when Mayor Lane called for the construction of new "fireproof" school buildings (Oregonian, 10-31-1906). In 1910, various city neighborhood "advancement clubs" joined forces to discuss the unfit school buildings in their respective neighborhoods (Oregonian 07-31-1910). Soon after this meeting, on August 16, 1910, the Portland City Council enacted a requirement that all schools constructed after January 1, 1911 would have to be of fire proof construction (Powers and Corning 1937: 183). By 1914, in the first joint meeting between Portland city officials, Multnomah County Commissioners, and the school board, officials agreed to work with building code officials to encourage the use of fireproof construction and to implement fire safety measures in all existing and future schools (Oregonian, 03-31-1914).

In 1908, Portland Public Schools created the Bureau of Properties in an effort to centralize the management of the district's various properties (Powers and Corning 1937: 182). Within this office, the District architect took on a more formalized role in the design and maintenance of school facilities. Two of the most influential district architects during this period included Floyd Naramore and George Jones who designed a majority of the schools from 1908 to 1932.

The two story brick Couch school building was an early example of the new "fireproof" buildings. To speed the construction of the new schools and to anticipate later growth in the neighborhood, these new buildings were often constructed in units sometimes referred to as extensible schools (Powers and Corning 1937: 182). Couch School, along with Shattuck School, was designed so a third story might be added as enrollment grew (Oregonian 03-08-1914). The buildings also contained more differentiated and increasingly specialized instructional spaces such as libraries, gymnasiums, science rooms, music rooms, and assembly spaces (Powers and Corning 1937: 182). At the request of the School Board Director, the Couch School also included a swimming pool. Two of its classrooms were constructed in a way so they could be adapted for use as open-air rooms (Oregonian. 03-08-1914).

The architect of Couch School, Floyd Archibald Naramore, was adept in the requirements of school design from his tenure as architect and superintendent of school properties for Portland Public Schools. A native of Illinois, Naramore attended the University of Wisconsin and graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1907. Naramore's first employment after his arrival in Portland in 1909 was as an engineer for the Northwest Bridge Works. In 1912, Naramore began his tenure at Portland Public Schools which continued until 1919. During this period, Naramore designed 16 schools for the district including the Kennedy School, which gained notoriety as a single story response to the issue of fire safety in American public schools (Evening Telegram 11-03-1915).

Naramore's success with Portland Public Schools led to a similar position in Seattle, where he designed many of the city's most renowned schools. Architect Victor Steinbrueck credits Naramore for producing the best quality Motor Age architecture in the Puget Sound area (Vaughan and Feriday; Space Style and Structure, 1974: 508). Naramore subsequently founded several private architectural partnerships in the Seattle area. The best known firm, Naramore, Bain, Brady & Johansen (or NBB&J) had early success designing large World War II building projects. In the last half century, the firm grew into one of the largest architectural practices in the world (Ritz 2003: 293).

The Tudor Revival details employed by Naramore were appropriate to its architectural setting. Like the Classical Revival, Colonial Revival, and Collegiate Gothic styles utilized on other school buildings throughout Portland, the style was viewed as inspirational and appropriate for educational settings (Betelle 1919: 28; Sibley 1923: 66; Patton 1967: 1-8).

Designed to be expanded overtime, the Metropolitan Learning Center/ Couch School has evolved following the plan developed by Naramore. The school property was acquired for \$142,083 in 1913 and the original building was constructed in 1914 for \$177,391 (PPS School Chronology Binder). The school expanded in 1926 to include a gymnasium. During the late 1950s several of the interior spaces including the kindergarten, cafeteria, and swimming pool were remodeled. One of the most significant modifications to the exterior was the replacement of most of the original wood frame windows in 1986. A year later the auditorium was significantly altered with the removal of its original chairs, ceiling, and wall lights. Other alterations during the late 1980s included renovations to the library, replacement of floor tiles, and remodels to the science room and office (MLC Facility Plan, Facility Profile).

The Metropolitan Learning Center/ Couch Elementary School retains its integrity with moderate alterations to its plan and exterior and interior finishes. The 1914 Tudor Revival style school is recommended as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its association with progressive era public school construction in Portland (Criterion A). The school was built during the PPS program of progressive era construction and is a strong example of the principles that characterized the design of schools during this era; therefore, it is eligible for listing in the NRHP under

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Criterion A. It is a good example of the two-story style school buildings that were constructed during the early-twentieth century. The building exhibits characteristics of the Tudor Revival style as applied by Naramore to school buildings in Portland; therefore, it is also eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion C. The building is listed as a contributing resource in the Alphabet National Register Historic District.

## 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 Public Library University Library: Portland State University Library

Historical Society: Oregon Historical Society Other Repository: PPS Archives

Bibliography: Bibliography

Betelle, James O. "Architectural Styles as Applied to School Buildings." American School Board Journal. Vol. 58 (April 1919).

Cremin, Lawrence. The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957. New York: A. Knopf, 1961.

Cubberley, Ellwood Patterson. The Portland Survey: A Textbook on City School Administration Based on a Concrete Study. Yonkers-on-Hudson, NY: World Book Co., 1915.

Evening Telegram. "First Unit of New Kennedy School." 1-03-1915.

Oregonian. "Change Favored in School Buildings." 3-31-1914.

Oregonian. "Mayor Lane and the Schools." 10-31-1906.

Oregonian. "School Buildings are Called Unfit." 7-31-1910.

Oregonian "School Plans Adopted" 03-08-1914.

Patton, Glenn. "American Collegiate Gothic: A Phase of University Architectural Development." Journal of Higher Education. Vol. 38, No. 1 (January, 1967).

Portland Public Schools. Schools Chronology Binder.

\_\_\_\_\_. Metropolitan Learning Center Facility Plan.

\_\_\_\_\_. Metropolitan Learning Center Facility Profile.

Powers, Alfred and Howard McKinley Corning, History of Education in Portland. [Portland]: Work Projects Administration, 1937.

Rippa, Alexander. Education in a Free Society: An American History. New York: Longman, 1997.

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

Sibley, Ernest. "Why I Prefer the Colonial Style." School Board Journal: Vol. 66 (January 1923).

Steinbrueck, Victor. "Everyday Architecture in the Puget Sound Area." In Space, Style and Structure: Buildings in Northwest America. Ed. Thomas Vaughan, 500-517. Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1974.



East elevation front entry



South (Glisan Street) elevation



South (Glisan Street) elevation



West and south elevations



East elevation entry

**Metropolitan Learning Center (MLC)**  
**Exterior Photos**  
**ENTRIX, 2009**





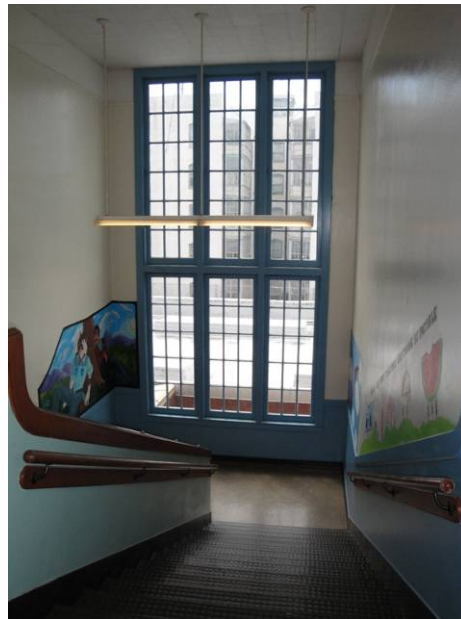
Swimming pool facing north



Auditorium facing north



Stairwell facing east



Stairwell facing east



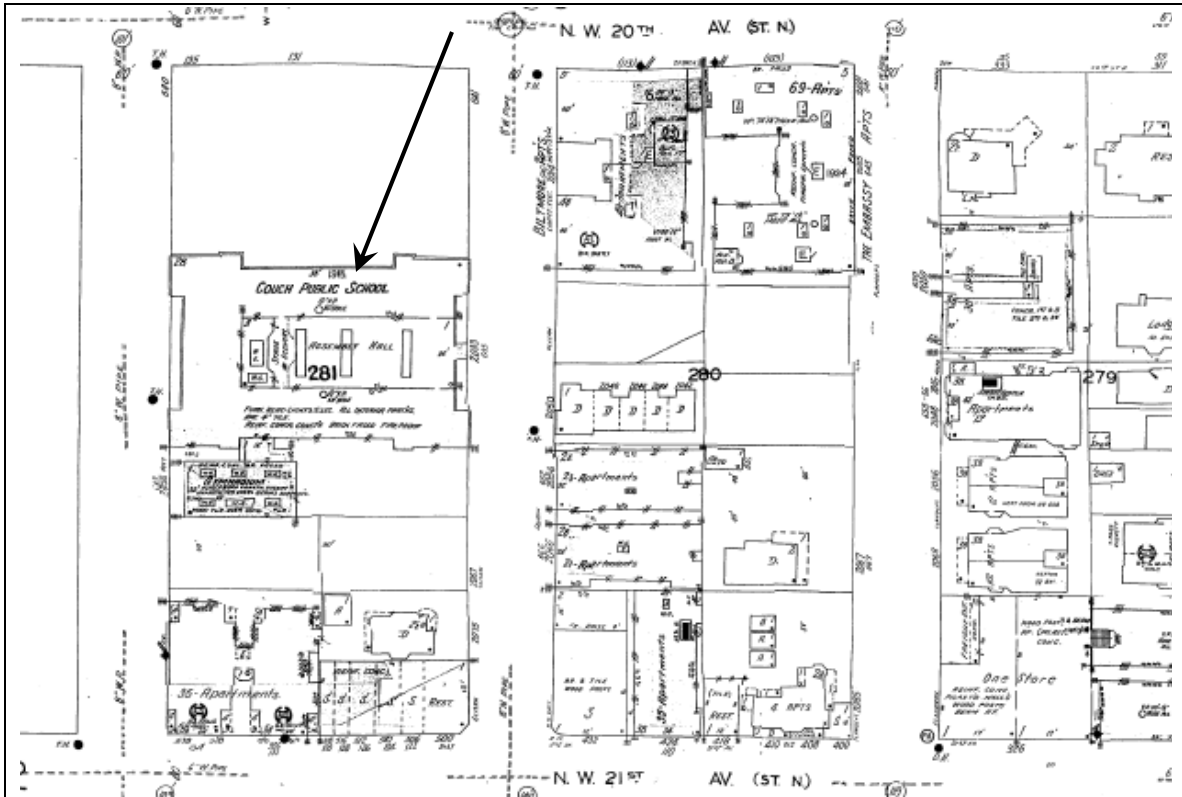
Classroom built-ins

**Metropolitan Learning Center (MLC)  
Interior Photos  
ENTRIX, 2009**



# ENTRIX

Down to Earth. Down to Business.™



1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Portland, Oregon, Map 52. Arrow points to Couch Public School (now MLC).

# Metropolitan Learning Center (MLC)

2033 NW Glisan St, Portland OR, 97209

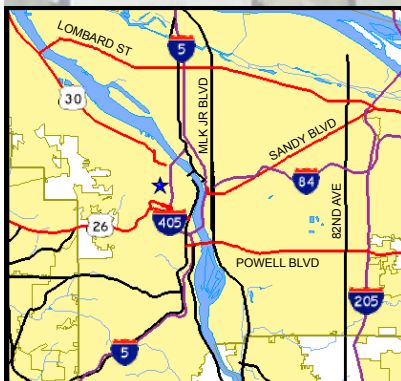
[View Site in Google Maps](#)



1914 photograph of the Couch School, looking southeast.



1914 detail photo of staircase at the Couch School, south elevation.



## Historical Significance and Building Integrity

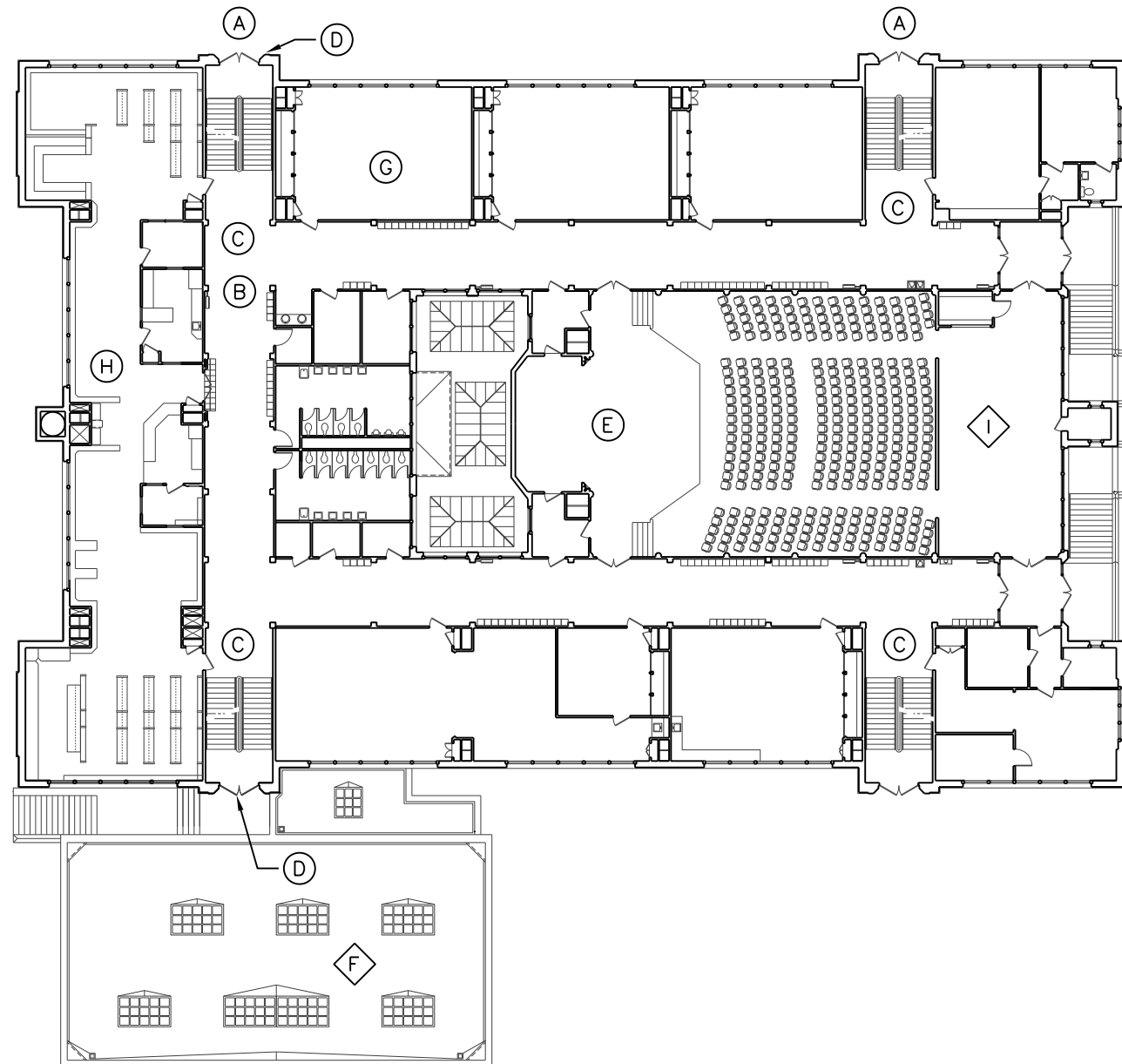
- Contrib: High Significance
- Contrib: Moderate Signif.
- Non-Contributing



## Building Periods

1. Main Building (154A), 1914
2. Gym Addition (154B), 1926

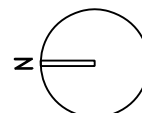




1

COUCH - MLC - 1ST FLOOR

SCALE: 1" = 30'-0"



## KEYNOTES:

- (A) THE FOUR ENTRIES TO THE 1914 SCHOOL FEATURE TERRA COTTA TUDOR ARCHES AND BAS RELIEF PANELS.
- (B) THE SCHOOL IS ORGANIZED AROUND A U-SHAPED DOUBLE LOADED CORRIDOR. THE HALLWAYS RETAIN THEIR ORIGINAL CONFIGURATION AND FEATURES, INCLUDING VINTAGE TILE AND LINOLEUM FLOORING.
- (C) STAIRCASES ARE LOCATED IN EACH CORNER OF THE BUILDING. THEY RETAIN THEIR ORIGINAL CONCRETE STEPS AND LANDING, SHEETROCK WALLS, WOODEN RAILINGS, AND STEAM RADIATORS.
- (D) THE STAIRWELL LANDINGS ON THE EAST AND WEST ELEVATION FEATURE THREE PAIRS OF ORIGINAL, WOOD FRAME, 15-OVER-15 LIGHT WINDOWS.
- (E) THE DOUBLE HEIGHT AUDITORIUM SPACE SERVES AS THE CENTRAL GATHERING POINT OF THE SCHOOL. CONSIDERABLY MODIFIED, THE AUDITORIUM'S ORIGINAL CHAIRS AND CEILING AND WALL LIGHTS HAVE BEEN REMOVED. SOME OF THE ORIGINAL TERRA COTTA CEILING FEATURES AND MOLDING HAVE BEEN RETAINED.
- (F) THE 1926 GYMNASIUM (BELOW) RETAINS ITS ORIGINAL AND FINISHES INCLUDING CONCRETE WALLS, CEILING, WOOD FLOORS, AND EIGHT-OVER-EIGHT WOOD FRAME WINDOWS.
- (G) THE CLASSROOMS RETAIN THEIR ORIGINAL CONFIGURATIONS, HEIGHT, WOOD MOLDING, AND CHALK BOARDS. STANDARD FEATURES INCLUDE STANDARD BUILT-IN CABINETRY FOR STORING COATS AND SUPPLIES.
- (H) THE MEDIA CENTER/LIBRARY ON THE FIRST FLOOR IS DIVIDED INTO SEVERAL ROOMS WITH ACOUSTIC TILE CEILINGS AND FLOURESCENT LIGHTS. A CONTEMPORARY ELEVATOR PROVIDES DIRECT ACCESS TO THE SPACE FROM ALL OF THE FLOORS.
- (I) A SWIMMING POOL, CURRENTLY UNUSED, IS LOCATED IN THE BASEMENT. THE SPACE RETAINS ITS VINTAGE TILE FLOORING, TILED AND CONCRETE COLUMNS, AND CONCRETE WALLS AND CEILING.

## GENERAL NOTES:

- (1) THE FENESTRATION ON THE FRONT AND SIDE ELEVATIONS CONSISTS PRIMARILY OF SYMMETRICALLY PLACED, METAL FRAME REPLACEMENT WINDOWS WITH A HORIZONTAL SLIDING OPENING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WINDOW.
- (2) TERRA COTTA DETAILS IN THE COLLEGIATE GOTHIC STYLE INCLUDE DECORATIVE PANELS INSET INTO A PARAPET.



COUCH - MLC - 154

2033 NW GILSAN ST 97209

PPS HISTORIC ASSESSMENT



DRAWING: ANNOTATED PLAN

DATE: Sept. 4, 2009