

# Oregon Historic Site Form

Sellwood School  
8300 15th Ave  
Portland, Multnomah County

## LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME

address: 8300 SE 15th Ave  apprx. addr

historic name: Sellwood School

Portland  vcnty Multnomah County

current/  
other names: Sellwood Middle 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): 2

total # eligible resources: 0 total # ineligible resources: 2

elig. evaluation: not eligible/non-contributing

NR status: \_\_\_\_\_

primary constr date: 1914 (c.)  secondary date: 1925 (c.)

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

(optional--use for major addns)

primary orig use: School

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

secondary orig use: \_\_\_\_\_

primary style: Tudor Revival

prim style comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

primary siding: Stucco

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

secondary siding: Cast Stone

architect: Naramore, Floyd A.

plan type: School (General)

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

comments/notes: HRI Rank III.

## GROUPINGS / ASSOCIATIONS

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

farmstead/cluster name: \_\_\_\_\_ external site #: 283  
(ID# used in city/agency database)

## SHPO INFO FOR THIS PROPERTY

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

ILS survey date: 6/24/2009

RLS survey date: 6/24/2009

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

**106 Project(s)**



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## ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

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

### Summary

Sellwood School is located at 8300 SE 15th Avenue in the Sellwood neighborhood of southeast Portland. The 4.75-acre campus includes a primary building (283A) and a connected annex (283B) surrounded by asphalt covered parking and play areas. The reinforced concrete structure, covered in white stucco, rests on a poured concrete foundation. A flat roof covers the irregular shaped mass of the building. The fenestration consists of a mixture of original multi-light wood frame and grouped metal frame windows. Designed in the Art Deco style, the poured concrete is molded to create a water table, belt course, and parapet cap. The concrete also forms the pilasters, capped by gilded figures of eagles, which flank the entries to the building. Below the belt courses, bands of floral inscribed squares outlined in projecting concrete ribbons provide additional horizontal divisions to the two story structure.

### Architectural Description

Sellwood Middle School is located at 8300 SE 15th Avenue in the Sellwood neighborhood of southeast Portland. Development in the surrounding area consists primarily of single family residences built between 1900 and 1950 (Sanborn Maps 1924-1928, Sanborn Map 1908-1950 updated). The school building is situated at the north portion of a 4.75-acre, rectangular parcel. An asphalt covered parking area is located at the southwest side of the campus. Recreational facilities consist of two grass covered playgrounds on the southeast side of the parcel.

The reinforced concrete structure, covered in white stucco, rests on a poured concrete foundation. A flat roof covers the irregular shaped mass of the building. The main mass of the primary school building is L-shaped. An enclosed walkway links the original building to the east wing. The fenestration consists of a mixture of original multi-light wood frame and grouped metal frame windows. Designed in the Art Deco style, the poured concrete structure is molded to create a water table, belt course, and parapet cap. The concrete also forms the pilasters, capped by gilded figures of eagles, which flank the entries to the building. Below the belt courses, bands of floral inscribed squares outlined in projecting concrete ribbons provide additional horizontal divisions.

The main classroom building is organized around a modified U-shaped double loaded corridor. The majority of classrooms are located on the north and west sides of the building with administrative and shared facilities located at the center and east side of the building. The media center, located in the space that originally served as the auditorium, occupies the central portion of the east side of the main floor. The cafeteria, boiler, and additional classrooms are located in the daylight basement. Flooring throughout the building consists of a mixture of 12"x12" tiles, concrete, carpet, and hardwood with wood baseboards. Tubular fluorescent fixtures are suspended from an acoustic tile clad ceiling. The doors are a mixture of replacement wood veneer and steel.

Added to the building in 1960, a connection to the gymnasium, music and band rooms, and additional classrooms in the east wing is provided through a corridor that extends past the 3 classrooms located in the northeast side of the L. An enclosed walkway connects the 1960 wing with the 1987 gymnasium annex. The shed roofs of the walkway are covered with standing seam metal panels. The 3 classroom addition is single story with a low pitched gable roof. Fenestration consists of groups of aluminum frame windows. The gymnasium wing is covered with concrete panels. The gymnasium space is double height with minimal openings or fenestration.

The majority of the classrooms are rectangular. Daylight is provided by windows on the exterior wall. Many classrooms feature original woodwork including built-in cabinetry, flooring, blackboards, and window surrounds. Tubular fluorescent light fixtures are suspended from the acoustic tile ceiling.

The boilers that provide heat for the building are located in the basement. Heat is conducted through ducts to the individual classrooms where the air is brought in through a wire grill.

### Alterations

Sellwood School has evolved dramatically since the construction of its first building unit in 1914. In 1925 the building was expanded to encompass a rectangular plan. Kitchen facilities were added at the east side of the cafeteria in 1956. To accommodate the growing numbers of school children in the neighborhood, the two classroom wing was attached to the northeast side of the building in 1960. Many of the windows were replaced in 1983. The gymnasium annex was constructed in 1987. Although the wing is also clad in concrete and embellished with Art Deco style medallions, the addition is nearly equal in size to the original building. The concrete walls with minimal openings now overwhelm the design, materials, and setting of the original campus.

There have also been substantial changes to the interior of the school. A remodel to the interior in 1975 was intended to facilitate the use of the building as a middle school. This resulted in the conversion of the double height auditorium for use as a media center (Oregonian 12/02/1975). In a 1990 remodel, the stage was converted to be used as a computer training lab. The interior of the main building was also remodeled at this time resulting in the installation of partition walls in the corridors and changes to the office. Due to the extensive changes to the building including window replacement, two major additions, modified corridors, and overall loss of interior finishes Sellwood School no longer retains its integrity.

## 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

The current Sellwood School replaced an 1887 building that had been expanded several times and by 1923 was described by the Oregonian newspaper as "a sort of installment plan school, erected at several intervals without any particular regard for the future and without any particular study of the education needs of the sector it serves" (Oregonian 06-14-1923)(Portland Chronology Binder).

With the construction of the first unit in 1914 and completion of the second unit in 1925, Sellwood 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 program 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 between 1908 and 1932.

Similar to Sellwood School, these new school buildings were often constructed of brick and concrete and were one or two stories in height. 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). The buildings also contained more differentiated and increasingly specialized instructional spaces such as libraries, gymnasiums, science rooms, music rooms, as well as assembly spaces (Powers and Corning 1937: 182). In the extensible school like Sellwood, many of these specialized facilities were added as enrollment grew and funds became available.

Sellwood School is unusual for its Art Deco style details, the architectural details of the new schools were largely encompassed by the Classical Revival, Colonial Revival, and Collegiate Gothic styles. These architectural revivals were viewed as inspirational and appropriate for educational settings (Betelle 1919: 28; Sibley 1923: 66; Patton 1967: 1-8).

The architect of the first unit of Sellwood 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 School which would continue 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 (Steinbrueck; 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 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 2002: 293).

In the early 1920s the district began plans for a new building. Records indicate that the original unit by Naramore was incorporated into the new units built in 1925 (PPS Chronology Binder). Although the plan for the new school encountered initial resistance from community members who questioned the need to demolish the 1887 building (Oregonian 06/14/1923), by 1925 the Oregonian reported that the new building was nearly complete (Oregonian 08/31/1925). The expanded building was constructed for \$300,000. The new school was formally dedicated on November 18, 1926 in a ceremony attended by the Superintendent and members of the School Board. The Oregonian newspaper declared the school, developed to conform to the platoon system, "the city's newest and finest" (Oregonian 11/19/1926). The Art Deco style employed for the new facility was well suited to the poured concrete construction.

To accommodate the growing numbers of school children in the neighborhood, the two classroom wing was attached to the northeast side of the building in 1960. To facilitate the use of the building as a middle school, the building was remodeled in 1975 (Oregon 12/02/1975). The gymnasium annex was constructed in 1987 (Sellwood School Facility Plan, Sellwood School Facility Profile).

Although designed by J.A. Naramore, one of Portland's more prominent architects and associated with a noteworthy architectural firm and several events related to the growth of the Portland school district, as well as a good example of the Art Deco style, Sellwood School does not retain a level of historical integrity commensurate with other Portland schools constructed of similar styles during the same period, and is therefore not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). While elements of the Art Deco style are discernable on the building, several alterations have diminished the building's integrity of materials, design, and feeling. These alterations include the removal of windows and two large additions that overwhelm the original footprint of the school. In addition, door replacements, modification of significant spaces including the auditorium, and changes to corridors have significantly altered the major interior features. Due to the loss of integrity, Sellwood School is not eligible under either

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NRHP Criteria A, B, or 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

### Bibliography: Bibliography

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- Oregonian. "Mayor Lane and the Schools." 10-31-1906.
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- Patton, Glenn. "American Collegiate Gothic: A Phase of University Architectural Development." Journal of Higher Education. Vol. 38, No. 1 (January, 1967).
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<https://catalog.multcolib.org/validate?url=http%3A%2F%2F0-sanborn.umi.com.catalog.multcolib.org%3A80%2F>. Accessed June 16, 2009.
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North elevation facing south



South elevation facing northeast



East elevation



West elevation annex



North and east elevation 1960 addition



Sliding door that connects cafeterias



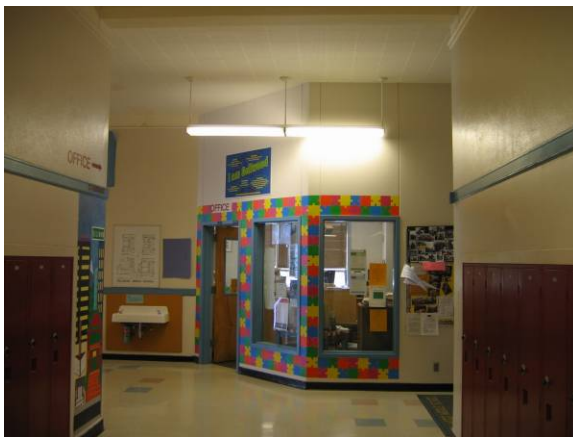
Classroom showing original built-ins



Gymnasium/Auditorium



Corridor in east wing



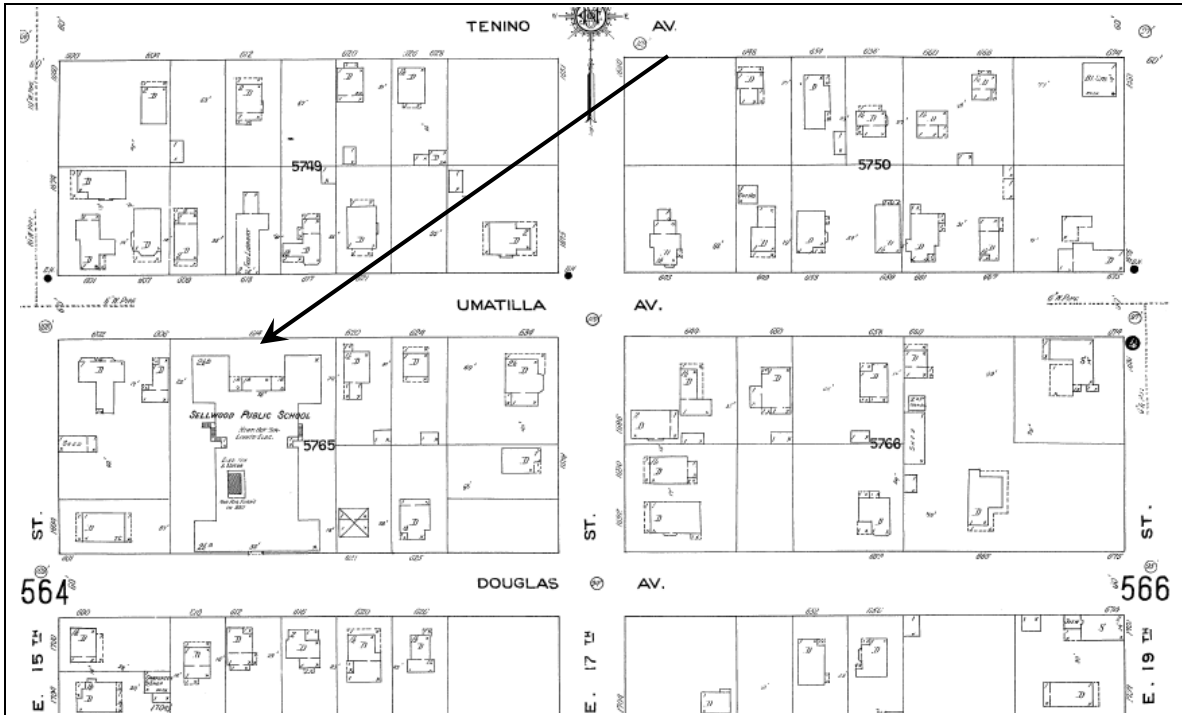
Corridor showing walls added during office remodel

**Sellwood School  
Interior Photos  
ENTRIX 2009**



ENTRIX

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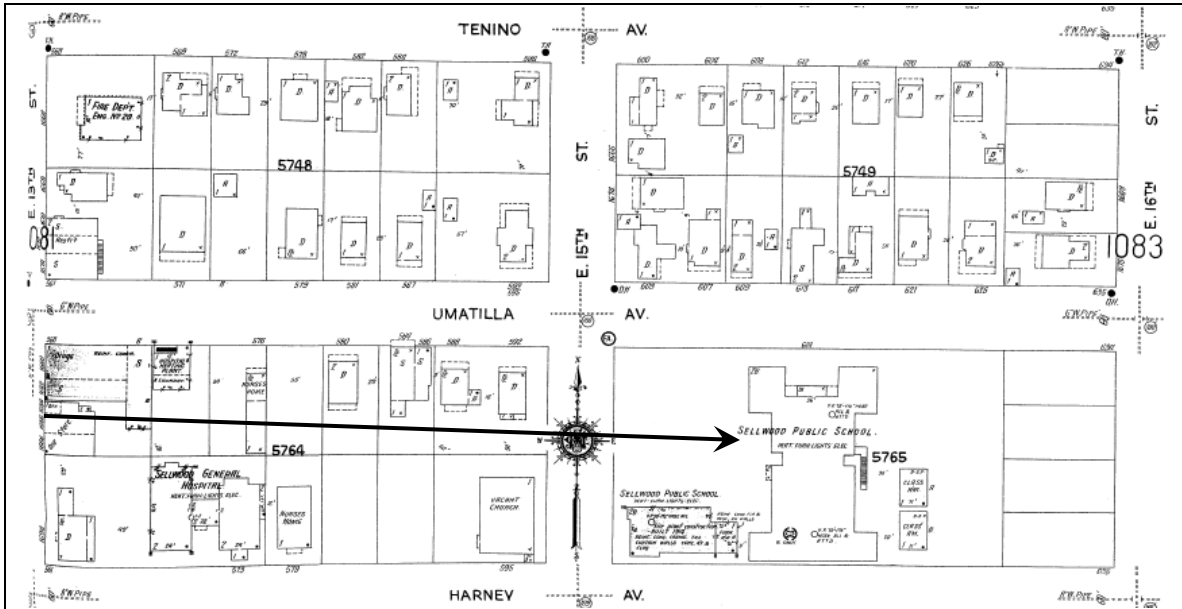


1908-1909, Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Sellwood, Oregon, Map 565. Arrow points to the old Sellwood Public School prior to its replacement by a new school.



ENTRIX

Down to Earth. Down to Business.™



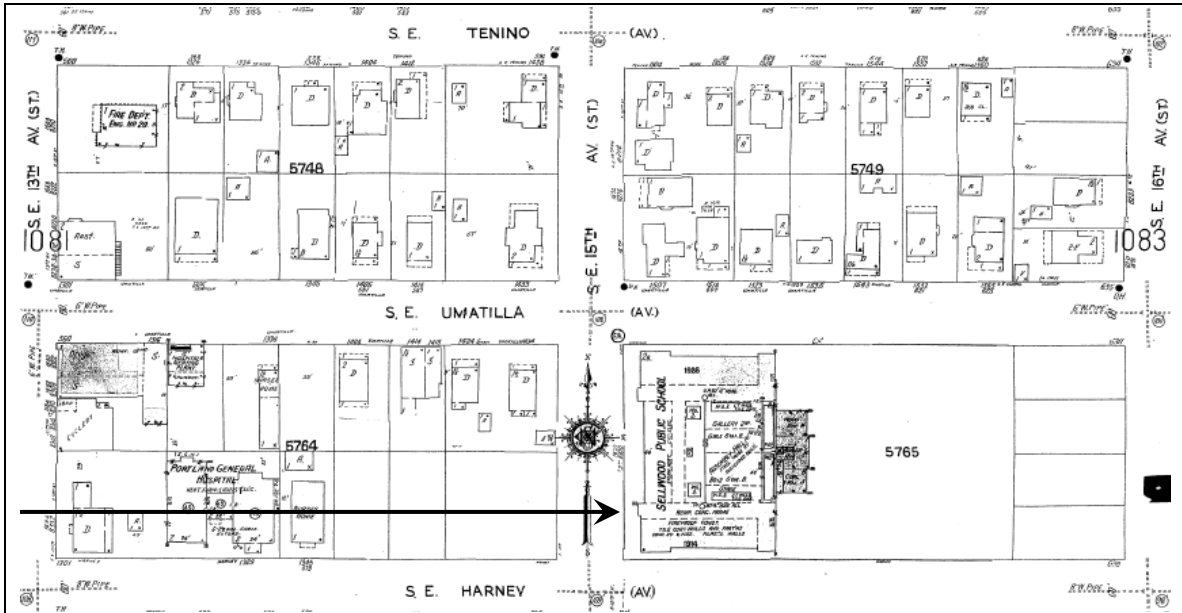
Updated to 1924-1928, Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Portland, Oregon, Map 1082. Arrow points to the old Sellwood Public School prior to its removal and replacement by a newer building.





# ENTRIX

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Updated to 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Portland, Oregon, Map 1082.  
Arrow points to Sellwood Public School. Note building location change and removal of houses that once occupied the site.

# Sellwood School

8300 SE 15th Ave, Portland OR, 97202

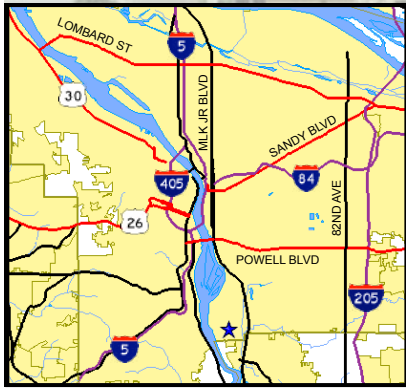
[View Site in Google Maps](#)






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

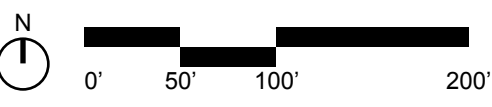


2009 photograph of entrance into the Sellwood School.



### Historical Significance and Building Integrity

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



### Building Periods

1. Original Building (283A), 1913
2. Addition (283A), 1925
3. Addition (283A), 1952
4. Addition (283A), 1960
5. Addition (283B), 1987