Oregon Historic Site Form

Wilson High School
1151 Vermont St
Portland, Multnomah County

LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME

address: **1151 SW Vermont St** ☐ apprx. addrs

Portland ☐ vcnty **Multnomah County**

historic name: **Wilson High School**

current/ other names: **Woodrow Wilson High 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: ____

primary constr date: **1954** (c.) ☐ secondary date: **1960** (c.) ☐
(optional--use for major addns)

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

primary orig use: **School**

secondary orig use: ____

orig use comments: ____

primary style: **International**

secondary style: ____

prim style comments: ____

sec style comments: ____

primary siding: **Concrete: Other/Undefined**

secondary siding: **Standard Brick**

siding comments: ____

plan type: **School (General)**

architect: **Edmundson & Kochendoerfer**

builder: **Hoffman, W. Burns**

comments/notes: **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 #: 126
(ID# used in city/agency database)

SHPO INFO FOR THIS PROPERTY

NR date listed: ____ ____

ILS survey date: **6/26/2009**

RLS survey date: **6/26/2009**

Gen File date: ____

106 Project(s)

West elevation

ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

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

Description Summary

Woodrow Wilson High School is located 1151 SW Vermont Street in the Hillsdale Neighborhood of southwest Portland. The 26 acre campus includes the original high school building (1953, 126A). The two story, International Style school building is a U-shaped finger plan with the gymnasium, auditorium, and music wing all differentiated from the main classroom sections of the school by different massing, building materials, heights, and overall shapes. The classroom sections of the building were constructed of "lifted" concrete slabs and the auditorium, gymnasium, and music wing were constructed using the more conventional tilt slab concrete. Most of the main classrooms lie behind a glazed curtain wall and the second floor library is cantilevered over the first floor.

Architectural Description

Wilson High School is situated in the Hillsdale neighborhood of southwest Portland. The campus occupies an expansive 26 acre rectangular shaped parcel that is positioned between SW Vermont Street to the south, SW Capitol Highway and SW Burlingame Avenue to the north, Mary Rieke School to the west, and a residential development to the east. Development in the surrounding area consists primarily of single family residences built between 1950 and 1990 (www.portlandmaps.com). Playing fields as well as a football field and track are located to the west of the high school. A fence-enclosed outdoor pool is also situated to the west of the gymnasium. The pool is owned by Portland Parks and Recreation.

The finger plan school's main entrance is situated on the west elevation. The school is approached via a parking lot located just off SW Vermont Street. Additional surface parking is situated to the east and north sides of the school.

Two types of exterior sheathing are present on the school. Most classroom spaces feature a curtain wall composed of three part plate glass windows with an opaque panel below. The bottom plate is typically a functional hopper window. The remaining sections of the school – the auditorium, gymnasium, and music rooms are sheathed with face bricks laid in an all stretcher bond.

The main entrance to the school overlooks broad athletic fields that sprawl to the west of the school. The topography descends from the school down to these facilities. The main entrance, consisting of two sets of double doors, is recessed into the building and sheltered by classrooms above that are supported by two columns. The west elevation also features a one story extension that houses administrative offices located immediately beside the main entry. This elevation also exhibits a cantilevered bay on the second floor which creates additional space for the library. The gymnasium also projects from this side of the high school. It is largely unfenestrated.

The main classroom "fingers" extend to the east forming a grassy courtyard with a central concrete planting bed. Due to changes in the site's topography, these two sections of the school rise three stories. The music wing projects northward from the south finger and is differentiated from the other classrooms by its lack of windows, its projected volume, and by a series of round columns that support it. Between the two fingers is a one story projection that houses the school cafeteria. The exterior of the cafeteria is entirely glazed with plate glass windows.

The south side of the high school is dominated by the auditorium. A curtain wall of windows projects from the south side of the auditorium, but this component of the building is otherwise unfenestrated. The function of this section of the school is communicated by its angular-shaped walls and double-height volume.

The interior double-loaded corridors of the school form a U-shaped plan with the special function spaces such as the auditorium, gymnasium, administration wing, and music rooms extending outwards from the main corridor. The locker-lined corridors feature 12" by 12" tile floors with the main corridor exhibiting exposed brick walls. Several classrooms also feature exposed brick walls. The classrooms and corridors are illuminated by tubular fluorescent lighting and classrooms are generally square shaped and exhibit acoustic ceiling tiles. The stairs feature polished metal stairs with closed strings and curved metal balusters.

Alterations/Integrity

Wilson High School has not been extensively modified and retains much of its original historical integrity. The lone addition to the building consisted of a classroom addition to the north finger in 1960. The addition is barely discernable as it used similar materials and construction methods. A slender brick wall, visible on the interior and exterior of the building represents the former extent of the original finger. Its exterior face is now left exposed in the classrooms. Classrooms have been extended or re-fitted to reflect changes in instructional priorities but these modifications are minor and do not diminish the building's most important character-defining features. The school therefore retains its integrity of design, association, location, setting, materials, feeling, and workmanship.

HISTORY

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

Significance Statement

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 had 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 new construction of over fifty schools between 1945 and 1970.

For the new building program, PPS adopted the call of architects and school planners across the country for new types of schools. Nationally known architects including Richard Neutra, the Walter Gropius led 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, glass block, 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 and the period revivals that were popular in the 1920s. 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 that included sinks, slots for bulky rolls of paper, and coat storage. Many buildings incorporated interior courtyards which facilitated access to the outdoors and expanded the opportunities for passive ventilation and daylighting.

In the aftermath of World War II, residential development in southwest Portland boomed as new, more suburban neighborhoods sprung up on the periphery of Portland's city limits. In 1949, PPS acquired the former Fulton Park Dairy property in the Hillsdale neighborhood for $63,927.32 just north of SW Vermont for the new Wilson High School as well as an elementary school that would occupy another lot further to the west (Mary Rieke Elementary) (Oregonian 4-12-1953; PPS Chronology Binder). Due to the rapid increase in high school age students, PPS needed to act quickly as it retained architects Edmundson and Kochendoerfer to develop an architectural and structural design that would meet the needs of the district.

A native of Oregon, Donald Edmundson graduated from Salem High School before attending North Pacific Evangelistic School and classes at the University of Oregon Extension School. In the mid-1920s Edmundson gained experience in the office of Houghtaling & Dougan, the architects of Washington High School. During World War II he worked for the Vancouver Housing Authority. From 1943-1953 Edmundson worked independently until he formed a partnership with Neil R. Kochendoerfer. The firm added Evan Kennedy, as engineer to the partnership Edmundson, Kochendoerfer & Kennedy in 1962. Edmundson is listed as the sole architect of Clinton Kelly School, Columbia School, and an addition to Cleveland High School. With Neil Kochendoerfer he designed Wilson High School. During Kennedy's tenure, the firm designed the gymnasium addition for Cleveland High School. Other important projects designed by the firm were Morgan's Alley and O'Bryant Park in Portland and hospitals in the Dalles, Hood River, and Pendleton, Oregon (Ritz 2003: 122).

For Wilson High School, the architectural firm of Edmundson and Kochendoerfer and builder W. Burns Hoffman employed the first use of lift-slab construction in the Northwest region. Pioneered in Texas, this form of construction was rapidly gaining popularity in California and around the U.S. The economical means of building eliminated the need for extensive formwork by instead pouring each slab on the ground and lifting them, beginning with top floor, into place. The use of the steel frame to support the concrete slabs of the roof and floors enabled the architects to approach the exterior as a curtain wall. In addition to extensive glazing, the school featured porcelain glazed steel panels hung between the steel supporting columns (Oregon Journal 01-01-1956). Wilson remains one of the only post-war high schools that exhibit a near complete curtain wall composed of glass as well as a cantilevered second floor space. The unique design and construction of the school, which cost $3.237 million dollars, drew structural engineers, "building men, and school architects from many parts of the country" (Oregon Journal 01-01-1956). The school design was also published in the Architectural Record in 1953 (Architectural Record 1953: 48-3).

Like many of Portland's elementary schools erected during the period, the new Wilson High School featured a finger plan that effectively decentralized and segregated classroom instruction from other school functions housed in the gymnasium, auditorium, music rooms, as well as the cafeteria. The architects also changed building materials from glass to brick, varied building heights, and designed different patterns of massing to communicate the different functions of the building. Other noteworthy details offered by the "Architectural Record", aside from the lift-slab techniques, included the coordination of planning the school with a nearby park as well as the gymnasium roof construction which, through design efficiencies featured exterior walls that were ten feet lower due to the "use of two carrying trusses with long-span joists on each side" and the use of "penthouse construction around the trusses" (Architectural Record. 1953: 48-3).

The most significant alteration to the high school occurred in 1960 with the two story classroom addition that occurred on the north finger of the school. The addition is not readily identifiable on the exterior due to the use of nearly identical building materials and methods.

Given the high level of integrity and the school's unique method of construction, Wilson High School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). As a resource eligible under NRHP Criterion A, the school is associated with the post-war suburban expansion of Portland's neighborhoods and the simultaneous need for larger educational facilities to accommodate the increased numbers of high school age students. The school is also eligible under Criterion C as an excellent example of how post-war schools utilized new structural forms to erect larger, more complex schools. The school also reflects the design mastery of Edmundson and Kochendoerfer and the ability of builder W. Burns Hoffman to implement new forms of construction.

RESEARCH INFORMATION

Oregon Historic Site Form

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

☐ Title Records	☐ Census Records	☐ Property Tax Records	☑ Local Histories
☑ Sanborn Maps	☑ Biographical Sources	☑ SHPO Files	☐ Interviews
☐ Obituaries	☑ Newspapers	☐ State Archives	☑ Historic Photographs
☐ City Directories	☐ Building Permits	☐ State Library	

Local Library: Multnomah County Library
University Library: Portland State University Library
Historical Society: Oregon Historical Society
Other Repository: PPS Archives

Bibliography: Bibliography

Architectural Record. Woodrow Wilson High School. August 1953.

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.

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.

Oregon Journal. “School of ‘Firsts’: Portland’s Woodrow Wilson High School Built with New Structural Techniques.” 1-1-1956.

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.

_____. School Chronology Binder.

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

West elevation

South elevation

Entry

East elevation

West elevation

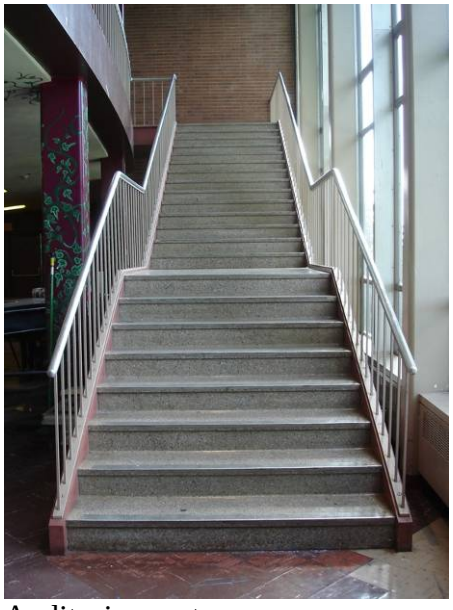
Wilson High School
Exterior Photos
ENTRIX 2009

Entry hall

Music room

Shop area

Cafeteria



Auditorium entry

Wilson High School
Interior Photos
ENTRIX 2009

Wilson High School

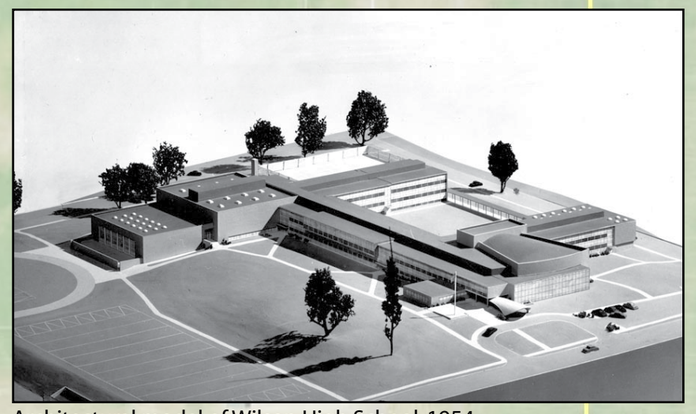
1151 SW Vermont St, Portland OR, 97219

View Site in Google Maps

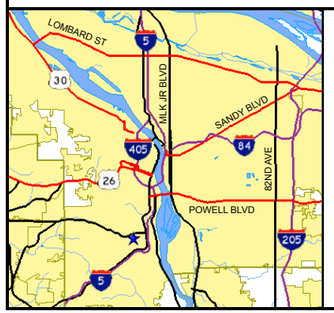
Building Periods

1. Main Building (126A), 1954

1950s photograph of Wilson High School looking northeast.

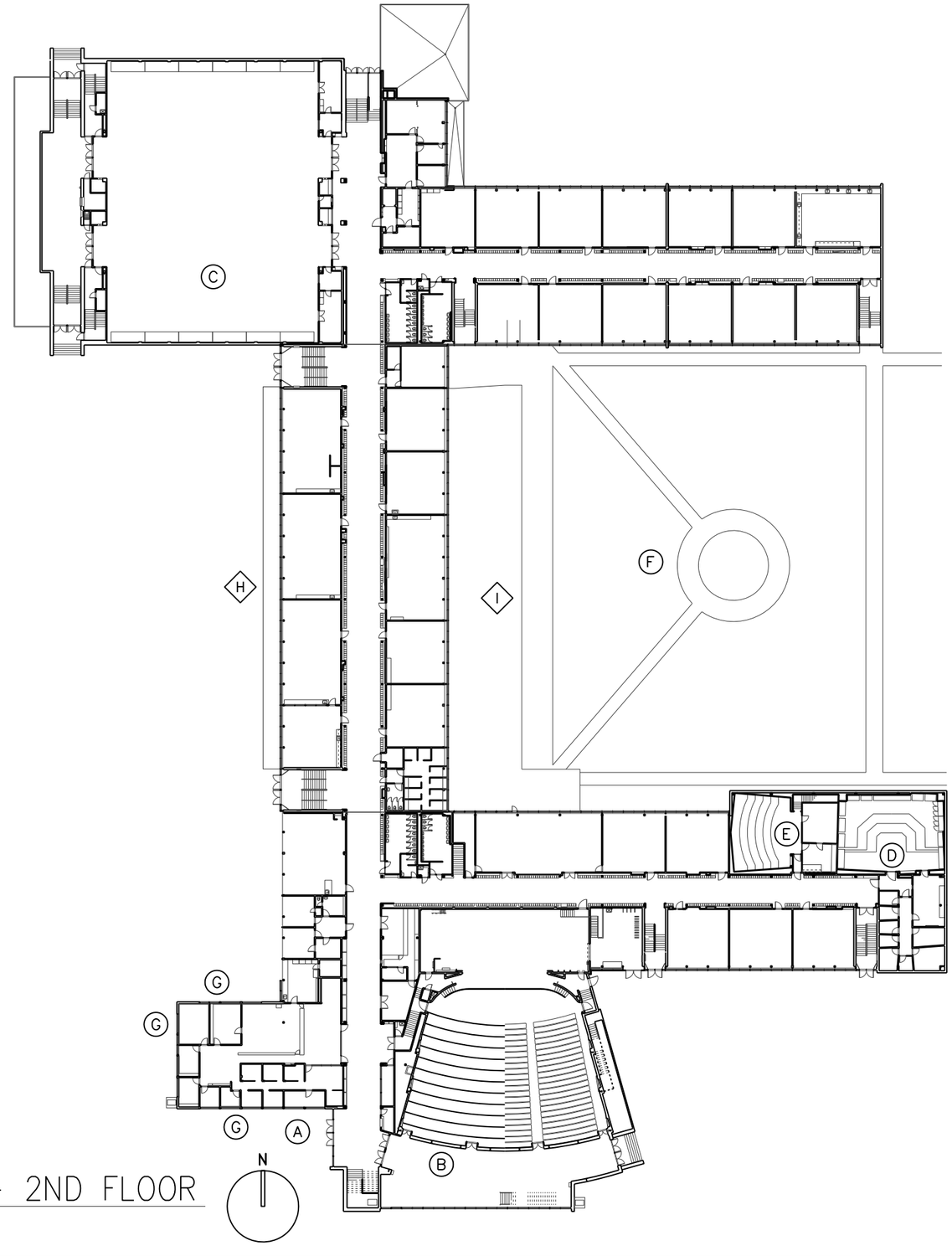


Architectural model of Wilson High School, 1954



Historical Significance and Building Integrity

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



1 WILSON HIGH SCHOOL – 2ND FLOOR

SCALE: 1" = 60'-0"

KEYNOTES:

- (A) MAIN ENTRANCE WAY - SECOND FLOOR CLASSROOMS EXTEND OVER THE MAIN ENTRANCE.
- (B) AUDITORIUM AND STAGE - STRUCTURE CONSISTS OF REINFORCED CONCRETE USING THE "TILT SLAB METHOD.
- (C) GYMNASIUM - STRUCTURE CONSISTS OF REINFORCED CONCRETE USING THE "TILT SLAB METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION."
- (D) BAND ROOM - TWO STORY SPACE.
- (E) CHORAL ROOM - TWO STORY SPACE. NO WINDOWS IN BANDROOM SECTION
- (F) GRASSY COURTYARD WITH CENTRAL CONCRETE RIMMED PLANTING BED.
- (G) HORIZONTAL RIBBON WINDOWS ARE USED ONLY ON THE ADMINISTRATION SECTION OF THE BUILDING.
- (H) LIBRARY IS CANTILEVERED OUT ABOVE FIRST FLOOR CLASSROOM
- (I) LOCATION OF CAFETERIA - FIRST FLOOR

GENERAL NOTES:

1. EXTERIOR SHEATHING CONSISTS OF A CURTAIN WALL OF SINGLE PANE PLATE GLASS WINDOWS WITH HOPPER STYLE WINDOWS. INTERIOR CONCRETE COLUMNS PROVIDE PRINCIPAL STRUCTURAL SUPPORT.
2. MUCH OF THE SCHOOL FEATURES REINFORCED CONCRETE STRUCTURAL SYSTEM, EXCEPT FOR THE GYMNASIUM AND AUDITORIUM, WAS ERECTED USING THE " LIFT SLAB" METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION. TO CREATE THE INDIVIDUAL FLOORS, VERTICAL SUPPORT WAS LARGELY CONCEALED STEEL OR REINFORCED CONCRETE COLUMNS.
3. THE LIGHTWEIGHT VERTICAL SUPPORTS WITHIN THE BUILDING ALLOW FOR LIGHT FILLED AND AIRY INTERIOR SPACES - SUCH AS THE CAFETERIA.

PPS

WILSON HIGH SCHOOL – 126

1151 SW VERMONT ST 97219

PPS HISTORIC ASSESSMENT

ENTRIX
Down to Earth. Down to Business.™

FAT PENCIL STUDIO

DRAWING: ANNOTATED PLAN

DATE: Sept. 4, 2009