

Oregon Historic Site Form

Benson High School
546 12th Ave
Portland, Multnomah County

LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME

address: 546 NE 12th Ave apprx. addr

historic name: Benson High School

Portland vcnty Multnomah County

current/
other names: Benson Polytechnic 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): 2

total # eligible resources: 1 total # ineligible resources: 2

elig. evaluation: eligible/significant

NR status: _____

primary constr date: 1916 (c.) secondary date: 1953 (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: _____

primary style: Classical Revival: other

prim style comments: Georgian Revival main foyer

secondary style: _____

sec style comments: _____

primary siding: Standard Brick

siding comments: _____

secondary siding: Terra Cotta: Other/Undefined

architect: Naramore, Floyd A.

plan type: School (General)

builder: _____

comments/notes: HRI Rank I. Portland Historic Landmark.

GROUPINGS / ASSOCIATIONS

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

farmstead/cluster name: _____ external site #: 115
(ID# used in city/agency database)

SHPO INFO FOR THIS PROPERTY

NR date listed: _____

ILS survey date: 6/22/2009

RLS survey date: 6/22/2009

Gen File date: _____

106 Project(s)



ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

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

Description Summary

Benson High School is located at 546 NE 12th Avenue in the Kerns neighborhood of northeast Portland, Oregon. The 8.7 acre campus includes the original main classroom building (1916, 115A), north shop wing (1917, 115C), south shop wing (1918, 115D), old gymnasium (1925, 115E), auditorium (1930, 115F), aeronautics/automotive shops (1953, 115G), library science addition (1953, part of 115A), new gymnasium (1964, 115H), new library addition (1991, 115J), and the KPBS building (1992, 115K). The Classical Revival style school complex features a distinctive three part plan consisting of the main building, gymnasium wing, and auditorium wing that form the west part of the campus. These three buildings form a core group of two story brick-faced and concrete buildings that feature a balanced and symmetrical fenestration, classical revival style porticos and entryways of terra cotta, dentil cornice, brick panels, as well as bas relief panels and latticed transoms. The interior entrance of the school is also noteworthy for the survival of distinctively Georgian-Revival wood paneling and pilasters.

Architectural Description

Benson High School is situated in the Kerns neighborhood of northeast Portland. The campus occupies a densely developed 8.7 acre rectangular-shaped parcel that is positioned between NE Irving Street to the north, NE 12th Avenue to the west, NE 15th Avenue to the east, and Buckman Field which is owned by Portland Parks and Recreation. Development in the surrounding area consists primarily of offices and commercial buildings built between 1930 and 1980 (www.portlandmaps.com; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1924-1928, 1908-1950 updated). The property does not include the playing fields, track, and tennis courts to the south of the school complex. The main school building is situated at the top of terraced front courtyard that is framed to the north and south by opposing wings.

Approached from the west, the main school building is a concrete structure with a brick veneer laid in an all stretcher bond. The main school building, auditorium, and old gymnasium retain character defining features of the Classical Revival style. The exteriors of these three buildings exhibit Classical Revival porticos and entryways decorated with terra cotta surrounds, dentil cornice, brick panels, as well as bas relief panels.

The visual focus of the principal elevation is the Doric order portico consisting of four fluted Doric order columns with plain block bases and an egg-and-dart echinus. The plain frieze features a series of four panels that depict an open book, cog, and two torches. The most impressive decoration found on the portico is found immediately above the three sets of double doors. Each terra cotta panel depicts two bas relief student workers involved in various industrial arts activities. In the plain frieze of the portico reads "Benson Polytechnic School Erected ANNO Domini MCMXVI. The west elevation of the auditorium is nearly entirely sheathed with terra cotta embellished by a front balustrade with flanking staircases, four unfluted pilasters, and three double door entries with latticed transoms. The frieze features four terra cotta bas relief heads. The west elevation (front) of the original gymnasium wing did not receive as much architectural detailing as the auditorium wing; no entrances appear on the west side of the gymnasium wing.

The windows on the main classroom building consist of the original twelve-over-twelve wood sash with lambs tongue stops, while the semicircular arched windows of the gymnasium and auditorium exhibit metal casement-type windows. The rear of these three buildings was originally connected to the two shops by long enclosed brick-faced hallways. These hallways have since been integrated into more modern infill buildings that were developed in the areas between the three front units and the shops. A lightwell/courtyard still exists east of the main classroom building and the more recent infill. All of the windows on the east elevation of the main building have been replaced by metal glazed windows.

The two shops are located near the north and south property lines. To accommodate the industrial shops, the buildings are one story but with high ceilings. The exteriors of the shops consist of a regular rhythm of recessed bays between each structural column. Each of the bays exhibits a glazed fanlight. Entrances into the shops exhibit a terra cotta drip cornice, but most of the original entrances have been bricked up. A terra cotta cornice and coping are also evident on the shops. Notably, on the south elevation of the south shop wing, most of the original window openings have been bricked up and replaced by small metal windows. The wood windows on the north side of the north shop survive largely intact. Within the rear courtyard of the school, a one story, masonry, automotive shop was constructed. The fenestration generally consists of several garage doors interspersed with metal windows. At the southeast corner of the campus is an additional brick-faced building that houses channel KPBS. Attached to the rear of the old gymnasium is the new gymnasium. The new one story, double-height gymnasium lacks a fenestration and is constructed of concrete slabs and concrete columns.

The main building, auditorium, old gymnasium, and two shops originally formed an H-shaped plan. This original corridor plan has been altered when the hallways leading to the two shops were reconfigured in 1960 to accommodate more centrally located double-loaded hallways.

The interior decorative detailing of Benson High School is located in the main front entranceway. Here, Georgian Revival style woodwork consisting of wood paneling and door surrounds create a formal entry. Opposing doorways located on the north and south sides of the entry are decorated with a pedimented doorway supported by consoles. The door surrounds consist of modestly crossetted heads. The entry also features paired sets of fluted pilasters with plain bases, fleur-de-lis necks and an egg-and-dart echinus. Each of the wood paneled doors also exhibited latticed openings. A dentil cornice and a boxed beam ceiling complete the entry's composition.

The main (west) entrance into the auditorium received a similar level of decorative attention as the entry features darkly colored wood paneling, wood panel doors leading directly into the auditorium, brass grated ticket booth openings, and fluted pilasters. The auditorium itself retains its original seating and U-shaped balcony. The old gymnasium interior is also largely intact as it retains its unfinished brick walls, open trusses, and cantilevered balcony. Several of the classrooms still retain their original built-ins and some woodwork. Also, several parts of the original bare-brick wall hallways leading to the shops still survive. Although most of the shop rooms have been subdivided to accommodate new forms of industrial art instruction, these spaces remain large and full of specialized industrial arts equipment. Generally, most of the corridors and classrooms feature 12" by 12" floor tiles with the exception of shop rooms that typically have concrete floors. Most of the classroom spaces are illuminated by tubular

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fluorescent lighting. Most classroom ceilings also have acoustic tiles.

Alterations

A moderate level of alterations to the campus and school buildings is evident on the first five units of the school between 1916 and 1930. In 1953, a new aeronautics/automotive shop and a new library science addition were added. A new gymnasium was added in 1964 and a new library addition was constructed in 1991. The last major addition occurred in 1992 when the station building for KPBS was erected. Interior modifications since the first units were built included the removal of the main building's east facing windows, the modifications of the shop hallways and classrooms in 1960, and the removal of the sawtooth roof over the north shop (nd). Most of the post-1930 modifications and additions to Benson High School have occurred on ancillary elevations or secondary interior spaces and do not significantly diminish the historical integrity of the building. The building therefore retains its integrity of materials, design, workmanship, association, feeling, association, and setting.

HISTORY

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

Significance Statement

In 1869, the first high school, housed in two rooms of the former North School building in Portland, was opened (Powers and Corning 1937: 74). Despite early struggles in the development of a consistent curriculum, the high school persisted at the will of the city's residents until the Oregon School Code, adopted in 1878, officially authorized the construction of high schools in the city (Sevetson 2007: 465). The first purpose built high school in Portland was the 1883 Portland High School built on Southwest Fourteenth and Morrison. Before it was even built, the school was the subject of a serious debate among prominent citizens, including George Atkinson and Harvey Scott as to the necessity of a publicly funded high school. Despite the conflict, the 1883 "Transition Gothic" styled Portland High School established a high design standard for the city's high schools as it was prominently featured in William Thayer's "Marvels of the New West" in 1887 (Thayer 1887: 334). Future high schools in the city would be built on a similarly grand scale.

Beginning with the construction of the main building in 1916 and followed by an additional two units and two shop wings constructed between 1917 and 1930, Benson High 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, Portland Public Schools 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). The need for a school that specifically tailored to improving the skills of students with an aptitude for the industrial arts was also recognized during the early twentieth century by Superintendent Frank Rigler (Powers and Corning 1937: 180-181). Rigler recognized the key to the economic and industrial growth of Portland was a skilled and educated workforce. In 1908, the School of Trades was first opened in the old Atkinson School at 11th and Davis Streets (Powers and Corning 1937: 181). The school would be moved several times until in 1915, retired logging magnate Simon Benson donated \$100,000 towards the construction of a school specifically dedicated to the industrial arts (Powers and Corning 1937: 186).

By 1916, ground was broken on a new high school that would be named after Benson. The first two buildings included a main classroom and administration building as well as a shop building that resembled a factory with its sawtooth roof that provided sufficient light to the interior work areas of the expansive building. Consistent with the new city code first implemented in 1911, the new school was of fire-proof construction consisting of brick facing and reinforced concrete walls (Powers and Corning 1937: 183; Oregonian 03-31-1914).

In this building, students attended factory-like classrooms to study the fundamentals of electricity, metal forging and casting, woodworking, and mechanics. The size and diversity of offerings drew particular interest in Donovan's 1921 publication *School Architecture: Principles and Practices* that featured several photographic plates of the work-a-day classrooms. Like the elementary schools, Benson featured a symmetrical three-part extensible plan that would eventually come to include the main classroom and administration building (1916), an auditorium (1930), a gymnasium (1925). Connected by long hallways to the rear of this complex were expansive two shop buildings (1917 and 1918). The building was enriched with the symbolism of industry. The school district's architect for the building Floyd A. Naramore oversaw the creation and installation of terra cotta bas relief figures over the three main doorways that depicted students laboring with the implements of industry.

Floyd Archibald Naramore, was adept in the requirements of school design, particularly high schools, during 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 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 2003: 293).

Designed by Floyd.A. Naramore, a prominent Portland architect, Benson High School is an excellent example of the Classical Revival style that retains much of its integrity. The high school is also eligible under Criterion A, for its association with the rise of higher education in the 1910s under Superintendent Alderman, its association with the development of east Portland, and the dramatic expansion of industrial arts education in the city. The school's association with the philanthropy of Simon Benson, a significant early Portland industrialist, may also make it eligible for the NRHP under Criterion B. Lastly, as a school designed by Floyd A. Naramore, Benson reflects the work of a master architect and is a significant example of

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the extensible school building type. It is therefore eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. While several additions have been introduced into the campus, particularly in the spaces between the front three units and the two shop buildings, they do not preclude the eligibility of the school as each component is still readily identifiable and used for their original functions.

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

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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.

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

Thayer, William. Marvels of the New West. Norwich, CT: The Henry Hill Publishing Company, 1887.

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.



Main building (274A), south (front) and east (side) elevations, looking northwest.



Main building (274A), north (rear) elevation, looking southwest.



Main building (274A), south (front) and east (side) elevations, looking northwest.



Main building (274A), side entrance along east (side) elevation, looking north.



Main building (274A), west (side) elevation, looking northeast.



Intact corridor to shops wing



Typical classroom



Doorway and woodwork in main foyer



Auditorium (main seating area and balcony)



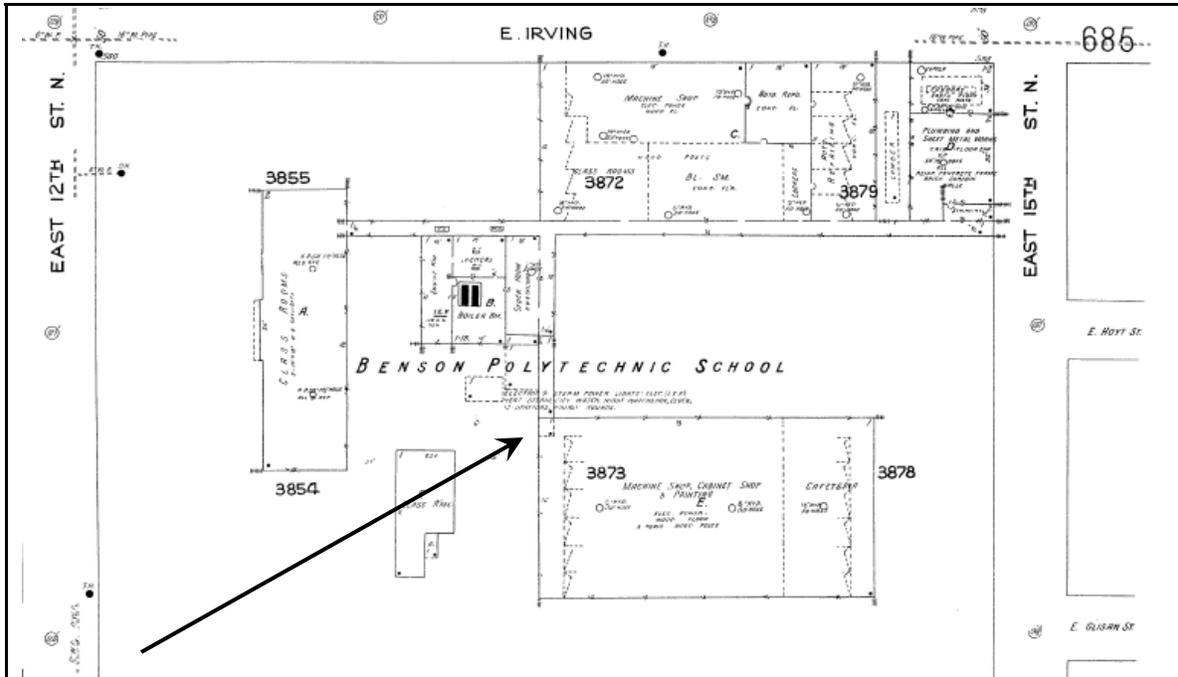
Old gymnasium building

**Benson High School
Interior Photos
ENTRIX, 2009**



ENTRIX

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1924-1928 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Portland, Oregon, Map 684. Arrow points to Benson Polytechnic School.

Benson High School

546 NE 12th Ave, Portland OR, 97232

[View Site in Google Maps](#)

Building Periods

1. Main Building (115A), 1916
2. North Shop Wing (115C), 1917
3. South Shop Wing (115D), 1918
4. Old Gymnasium (115E), 1925
5. Auditorium (115F), 1930
6. Aeronautics/ Automotive Shops (115G), 1953
7. Library Science Addition (115A), 1953
8. New Gymnasium (115H), 1964
9. New Library Addition (115J), 1991
10. KPBS (115K), 1992



Construction of Benson High School Industrial Arts Building from scaffolding of first unit, looking northeast, 1917.

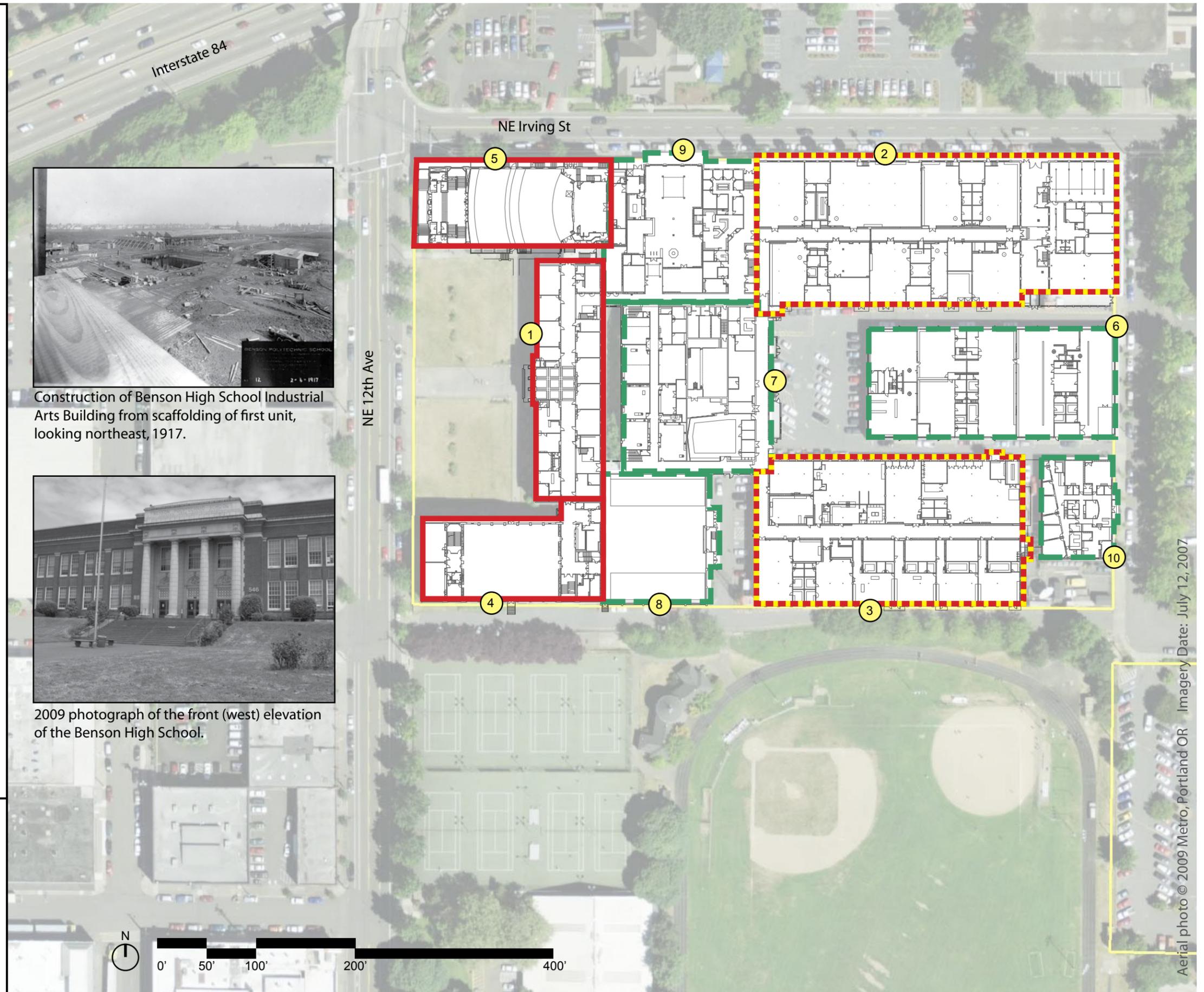


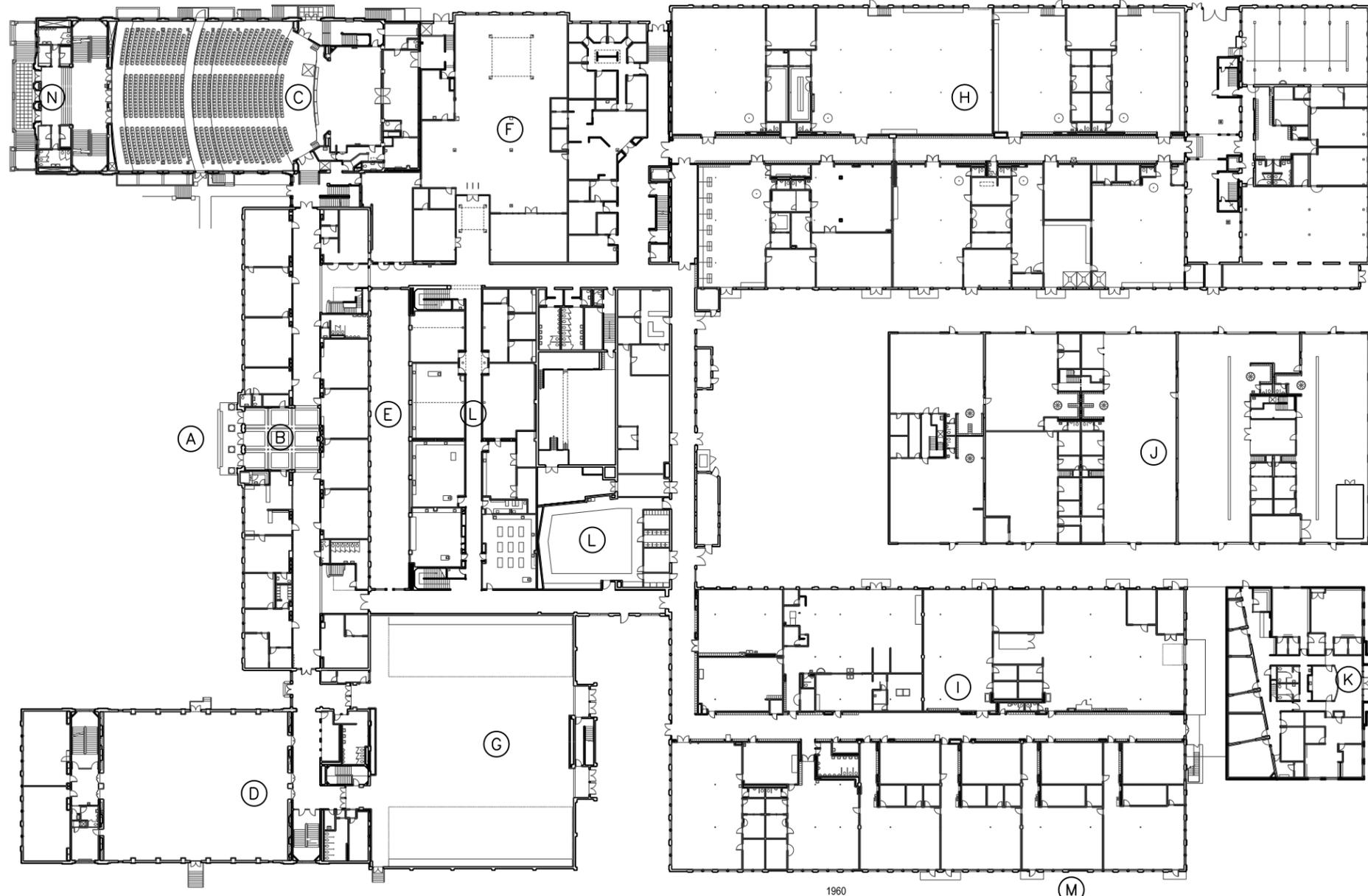
2009 photograph of the front (west) elevation of the Benson High School.



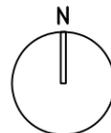
Historical Significance and Building Integrity

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





1 BENSON HIGH SCHOOL – 1ST FLOOR
SCALE: 1" = 70'-0"



KEYNOTES:

- (A) THE FRONT (WEST) ELEVATION OF THE MAIN BUILDING (1917) EXHIBITS A TERRA COTTA CLASSICAL REVIVAL PORTICO WITH FOUR FLUTED DORIC COLUMNS WITH PLAIN BLOCK BASES AND AN EGG-AND-DART ECHINUS. THE PLAIN FRIEZE FEATURES A SERIES OF FOUR PANELS THAT DEPICT AN OPEN BOOK, COG, AND TWO TORCHES TO SYMBOLIZE THE SCHOOL'S INDUSTRIAL ARTS FOCUS. ADDITIONAL SYMBOLIC DETAILING IS FOUND ABOVE EACH OF THE THREE DOUBLE DOORWAYS WHERE TWO BAS RELIEF WORKERS DEPICT VARIOUS INDUSTRIAL ARTS ACTIVITIES. ABOVE A DENTIL CORNICE OF THE PORTICO IS A PANEL THAT READS "BENSON POLYTECHNIC SCHOOL ERECTED ANNO DOMINI MCMXVI."
- (B) THE INTERIOR ENTRANCEWAY INTO THE SCHOOL EXHIBITS THE BEST SURVIVING WOODWORK OF ALL OF THE PRE-WORLD WAR II SCHOOLS IN PORTLAND. THE WALLS FEATURE GEORGIAN-REVIVAL DETAILING THAT INCLUDES DARKLY FINISHED WOOD PANELING, PAIRED ENGAGED COLUMNS WITH PLAIN BASES, FLEUR-DE-LIS NECKS AND AN EGG-AND-DART ECHINUS. DOOR SURROUNDS CONSIST OF MODESTLY CROSSETTED HEADS. DOORWAYS ON THE NORTH AND SOUTH SIDES OF THE ENTRY ALSO FEATURE A FULL PEDIMENT SUPPORTED BY TWO CONSOLES. EACH OF THE paneled doors ALSO EXHIBIT LATTICED OPENINGS. THE WORDWORK ALSO CONSISTS OF A DENTILATED CORNICE AS WELL AS A BOXED BEAM CEILING.
- (C) THE AUDITORIUM (1930) WING OF BENSON FEATURES AN EXPANSIVE SEATING AREA WITH A BALCONY AND STAGE. THE WEST ENTRANCE TO THE AUDITORIUM CONSISTS OF THREE DOUBLE DOORWAYS WITH LATTICED TRANSOMS. A BRASS TELLER WINDOW LIES ON EITHER SIDE OF THE DOORWAYS AND THE ENTIRE FOYER IS WOOD paneled WITH SIMILAR ENGAGED COLUMNS AS THOSE FOUND IN THE MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE SCHOOL.
- (D) THE OLD GYMNASIUM (1925) RETAINS ITS INTEGRITY AS IT STILL CONTAINS ITS SUSPENDED RUNNING TRACK ABOVE THE CENTRAL COURT. THE ROOF TRUSSES AND THE BRICK WALLS ARE EXPOSED.
- (E) A SMALL COURTYARD SEPARATES THE MAIN BUILDING (1917) FROM A 1991 ADDITION. ALL OF THE WINDOWS ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE MAIN BUILDING HAVE BEEN REPLACED WITH SINGLE PANE ALUMINUM WINDOWS.
- (F) IN 1991, A NEW LIBRARY AND OFFICES WERE ADDED TO THE REAR (EAST) OF THE AUDITORIUM. THE EXTERIOR FORM IS SIMILAR IN TERMS OF SIZE, SCALE AND DETAILING TO THE ADJOINING BUILDINGS AND DOES NOT VISUALLY COMPETE WITH THE EARLIER BUILDINGS.
- (G) THE NEW GYMNASIUM, CONSTRUCTED IN 1964, IS CONSTRUCTED OF PRE-CAST REINFORCED CONCRETE SLAB WALLS WITH REINFORCED CONCRETE COLUMNS. THE BUILDING VISUALLY CONTRASTS WITH THE CLASSICAL REVIVAL DETAILING OF THE EARLIER UNITS.
- (H) THE NORTH SHOP WING FOUNDRY (1917) ONCE FEATURED AN INDUSTRIAL MONITOR (OR SAWTOOTH) ROOF THAT WAS REMOVED IN THE LATE 1980S. THE INTERIOR CLASSROOM AND HALLWAY ORGANIZATION WAS ALSO RECONFIGURED IN 1958. WHILE A LONG PASSAGEWAY ONCE EXTENDED ALONG THE BUILDING'S SOUTH WALL, A NEW DOUBLE LOADED CORRIDOR WAS INTRODUCED INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE BUILDING. THE CORRIDOR WAS LARGELY REMOVED (EXCEPT FOR A SMALL PORTION TO THE REAR (EAST) SIDE OF THE BUILDING) AND INCORPORATED INTO NEW CLASSROOM SPACES.
- (I) THE SOUTH SHOP WING (1918) ALSO ONCE FEATURED A LONG INTERIOR HALLWAY THAT EXTENDED ALONG THE NORTH WALL OF THE BUILDING. A CENTRAL DOUBLE LOADED CORRIDOR WAS INTRODUCED INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE BUILDING IN 1960.
- (J) AN ADDITIONAL AUTOMOTIVE AND AVIATION SHOP BUILDING WAS CONSTRUCTED IN 1953. IT IS NOW PRINCIPALLY USED AS AN AUTOMOTIVE SHOP.
- (K) THE KPBS BUILDING (1992) IS A MASONRY BUILDING WITH A BRICK FACE AND COMBINED GABLE AND FLAT ROOF.
- (L) ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT SERIES OF ALTERATIONS OCCURRED IN 1991, WHEN A NEW LIBRARY (SEE "F"), CLASSROOM SPACE, AND A NEW MUSIC ROOM WERE INTRODUCED INTO THE SCHOOL.
- (M) IN THE 1960S, WINDOWS ALONG THIS ELEVATION WERE REPLACED WITH SMALLER SIZED ALUMINUM WINDOWS. AN ENTRANCE WAS ALSO BRICKED OVER.
- (N) MAIN ENTRANCE INTO THE AUDITORIUM FEATURES TERRA COTTA CLASSICAL REVIVAL DETAILING THAT CONSISTS OF UNFLUTED ENGAGED COLUMNS, A FRONT BALUSTRADE WITH FLANKING STAIRCASES, AND THREE DOUBLE DOOR ENTRIES WITH LATTICED TRANSOMS. THE FRIEZE FEATURES FOUR TERRA COTTA BAS RELIEF HEADS. A PLAIN PANEL LIES ABOVE A MOLDED CORNICE.

GENERAL NOTES:

- 1 THE BRICKWORK FOR THE ORIGINAL BUILDINGS (KEYNOTES B, C, D, I, AND H) WAS LAID IN AN ALL STRETCHER BOND.
- 2 MOST OF THE BUILDING RETAINS ITS TWELVE-OVER-TWELVE, SINGLE-HUNG SASH WINDOWS WITH LAMBS TONGUE STOPS.
- 3 EACH WINDOW BAY ON THE ORIGINAL BUILDINGS (KEYNOTES B, C, D, I, AND H) ARE SEPARATED BY TWO STORY BRICK COLUMNS WITH TERRA COTTA CAPITALS AND BASES.
- 4 THE ORIGINAL CORRIDORS THAT EXTENDED ALONG THE SOUTH WALL OF THE NORTH SHOP WING, NORTH WALL OF THE SOUTH SHOP WING, AND ALONG A CORRIDOR THAT ATTACHED THE NORTH TO THE SOUTH WING WERE LIT BY SEMICIRCULAR TRANSOMS AND DEFINE INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURAL BAYS.



BENSON HIGH SCHOOL – 115

546 NE 12TH AVE 97232

PPS HISTORIC ASSESSMENT



DRAWING: ANNOTATED PLAN

DATE: Sept. 4, 2009