

Oregon Historic Site Form

Gray School
5505 23rd Ave
Portland, Multnomah County

LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME

address: 5505 SW 23rd Ave apprx. addr

historic name: Gray School

Portland vcnty Multnomah County

current/
other names: Robert Gray 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): 1

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

elig. evaluation: eligible/contributing

NR status: _____

primary constr date: 1952 (c.) secondary date: _____ (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: International

prim style comments: _____

secondary style: _____

sec style comments: _____

primary siding: Standard Brick

siding comments: _____

secondary siding: _____

plan type: School (General)

architect: Freeman, Hayslip & Tuft

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 #: 158
(ID# used in city/agency database)

SHPO INFO FOR THIS PROPERTY

NR date listed: _____

ILS survey date: 7/10/2009

RLS survey date: 7/10/2009

Gen File date: _____

106 Project(s)



Principal Entrance, looking west.

ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

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

Description Summary

Situated in the Hillsdale neighborhood of southwest Portland, Robert Gray Middle School is located at 5505 SW 23rd Avenue. Facilities on the 13.23-acre campus include the primary school building (158A) and a covered playshed (158B). The finger type plan school building exhibits some characteristics of the International style. The wings that comprise the U-shaped building are covered by a mixture of moderately pitched gable and flat roofs. The school is set into the crest of a hill with an upper rectangular wing that faces SW 23rd Avenue. The basement level consists of two rectangular wings joined by a crawl space. Cladding for the wood frame structure consists of a mixture of brick veneer, concrete, and horizontal board siding. The school facilities include classrooms, a gymnasium, a cafeteria, media center/library, home economics, music room, and an administrative office.

Architectural Description

Situated in the Hillsdale neighborhood of southwest Portland, Gray Middle School is located at 5505 SW 23rd Avenue. Development in the surrounding neighborhood consists primarily of large residential lots set amidst the hills of southwest Portland. Grass covered playfields are located to the north and west of the school. An asphalt-covered play area is located to the south of the school building. The primary entry to the campus is from SW 23rd Avenue.

The school is approached from the east side and rests on a poured concrete foundation. The gable and flat roofs are covered by composition roofing material. Brick veneer is the primary siding, with horizontal boards located below the gable ends of the building. Fenestration consists of a mixture of metal and wood frame windows. The primary unit of fenestration for the classrooms consists of an upper panel of glass block with an operable hopper below. The finger-type building plan exhibits some characteristics of the International style, most notably the flat roofs, glass block, and use of massing to express the varied functions of the building.

A projecting flat roof provides a cover for the principal entry into the school. A panel of variegated stone to the north provides additional decoration for the entry. The entry lobby is illuminated by the windows that surround the pair of aluminum doors. The walls of the lobby feature a mixture of variegated stone and wood paneling. The corridor walls are covered with ceramic tile.

A double loaded corridor extends north and south from the lobby and features walls covered with ceramic tile. The school is divided into two parallel wings. The primary classroom areas are located in the upper story of the east wing, the public spaces are located in the central portion of the U-shaped plan, and additional classrooms are housed in the finger that occupies the lower slope of the campus. The corridors feature a ceramic tile wainscot, 12" x 12" linoleum tiles, metal lockers, and tubular fluorescent light fixtures affixed to an acoustic tile ceiling.

Wood doors with center lights provide entry to the classrooms. The classrooms are primarily rectangular. Standard features include wooden book cases, cabinets and closets, sinks, and tubular fluorescent light fixtures suspended from acoustic tile clad ceilings. Heat is provided by console units beneath the windows.

The common spaces of the school are centrally located in the south wing. The double height gymnasium features a composition-based ceiling with suspended fluorescent lights. Seating consists of folding wooden bleachers. The original wood flooring is intact. The walls of both the gymnasium and the cafeteria are covered with square cementitious panels. The ceiling of the cafeteria is supported by painted glulam beams. A stage at the north end of the room facilitates the use of the space as an auditorium.

Alterations/Integrity

The primary alterations to Gray School occurred during the 1980s when several classrooms were remodeled and a covered playshed was added to the south side of the campus. Despite these modest changes, Gray School retains its integrity as the plan, massing, cladding, roof forms, and finishes remain largely unaltered.

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 growing development in the southwest areas of the city, Portland Public Schools acquired the parcel at 5505 SW 23rd Street for \$25,938.97 in 1948. Named in honor of the explorer Captain Robert Gray, the school was constructed for \$850,466.62 in 1951 (Sydney 1979: 239; PPS Chronology Binder). Gray School was 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 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 schools adopted the call of architects and school planners across the country for new types of schools. Nationally known architects including Richard Neutra, 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 partition 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).

The architects of Gray School, the Portland firm of Freeman, Hayslip & Tuft, had significant experience in the design of schools and other public buildings in Oregon. A native of Kansas, Claude Freeman attended Oregon State College from 1908 to 1910. He subsequently worked with Frank Clark, an architect in Ashland, Oregon. In 1922, Freeman established a practice in Portland where he specialized in the design of schools. In 1942, Freeman established a partnership with Sydney B. Hayslip that was renamed several times, including Freeman, Hayslip & Tuft as other partners were brought into the practice. Sydney B. Hayslip practiced architecture for over forty years in Portland after attending the University of Oregon School of Architecture. He worked for several prominent Northwest architecture firms including that of the former district architect for PPS, Floyd A. Naramore, before entering into practice with Freeman. Stewart Tuft, a graduate of the School of Architecture at the University of Oregon worked for several architects and the Housing Authority of Portland before joining the firm in 1948. Freeman was recognized throughout Oregon as a specialist in school design (Ritz 2003: 137,169,395).

The Robert Gray School is associated with the expansion of Portland's southwest neighborhoods in the early 1950s and the emerging educational philosophies and planning of the period, and is therefore eligible under NRHP Criterion A. The building displays a horizontal finger plan and decentralized planning that was common in schools of the period and also exhibits the extensive use of glass block to illuminate classrooms. The building has some elements of the International style including its flat roof, variation in massing and materials, and use of mass produced materials which make the building a good example of the finger type school. It is also associated with a noteworthy architectural firm. Given these associations, the Robert Gray School is eligible under NRHP 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

Bibliography: Bibliography

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.

_____. Robert Gray Middle School. Facility Plan.

_____. Robert Gray Middle School. Facility Profile.

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

Snyder, Eugene E. *Portland Names and Neighborhoods. Their Historic Origins*. Portland: Binford & Mort Publishing; 1st edition 1979.



East elevation of main building (158A).



Courtyard, showing newer brick and former sheltered play area on west elevation (158A).



East elevation of main building (158A).



Play shed (158B), looking northwest.



East elevation, main building, looking southwest (158A).



Gymnasium located at south end of school(158A).



Typical classroom showing use of glass block (158A).



Cafeteria (158A).



Typical corridor (158A).

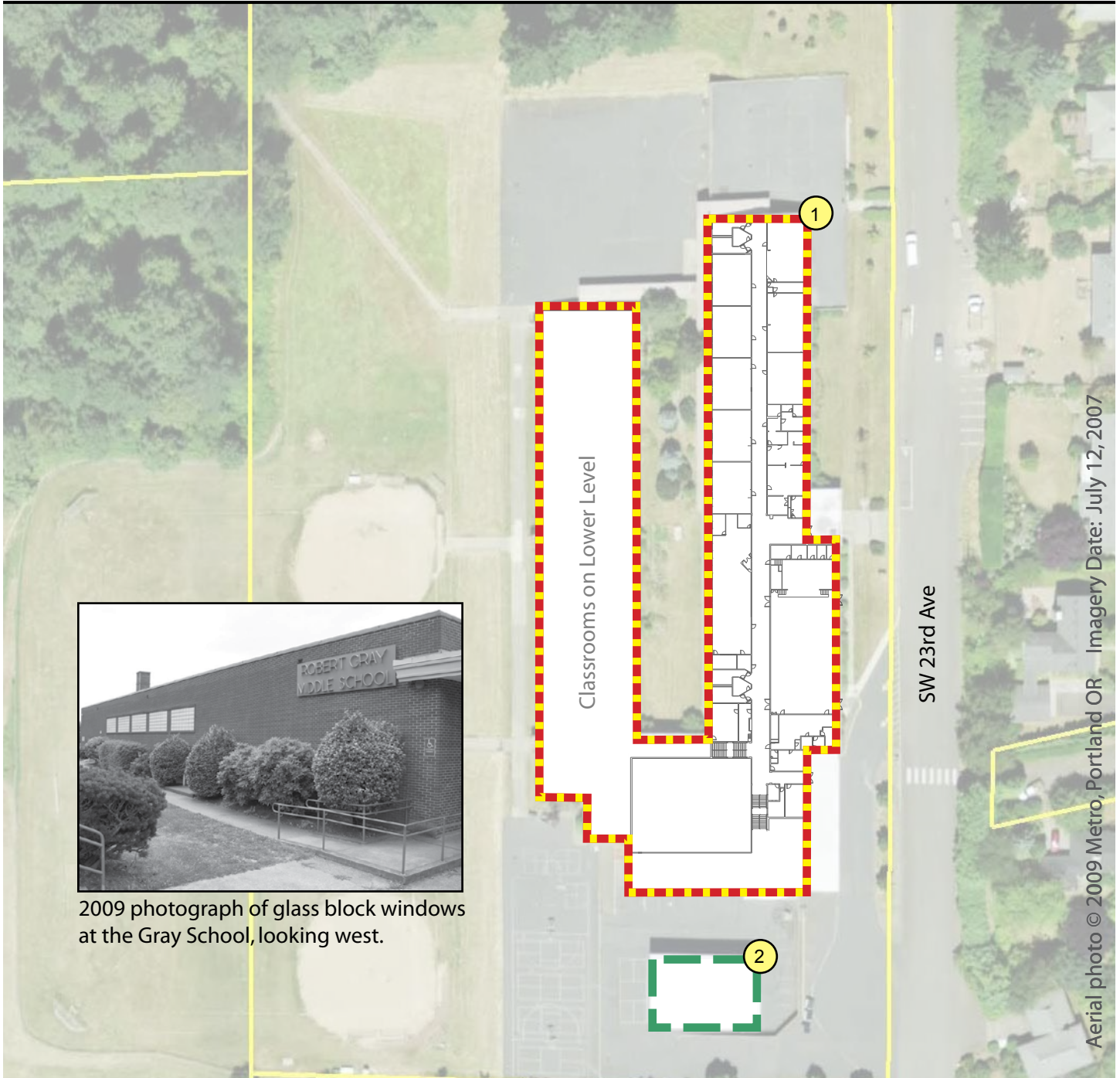


Use of stone in main lobby (158A).

Gray School

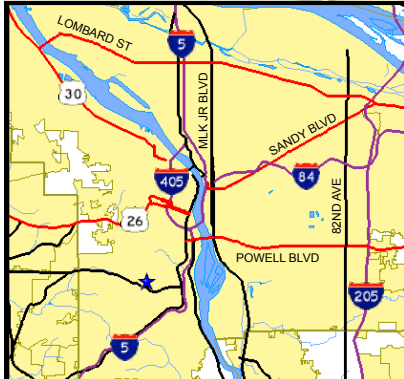
5505 SW 23rd Ave, Portland OR, 97201

[View Site in Google Maps](#)






2009 photograph of glass block windows at the Gray School, looking west.

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 (158A), 1951
2. Playshed (158B), 1984