

# Oregon Historic Site Form

Humboldt School  
4915 Gantenbein Ave  
Portland, Multnomah County

## LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME

address: <u>4915 N Gantenbein Ave</u> <input type="checkbox"/> apprx. addr	historic name: <u>Humboldt School</u>
<u>Portland</u> <input type="checkbox"/> vcnty <u>Multnomah County</u>	current/ other names: <u>Humboldt Elementary School</u>
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: <u>Building</u> height (# stories): <u>1</u>	total # eligible resources: <u>0</u> total # ineligible resources: <u>4</u>
elig. evaluation: <u>not eligible/non-contributing</u>	NR status: _____ NR date listed: _____ (indiv listed only; see Grouping for hist dist)
primary constr date: <u>1959</u> (c.) <input type="checkbox"/> secondary date: <u>1990</u> (c.) <input type="checkbox"/> (optional--use for major addns)	orig use comments: _____
primary orig use: <u>School</u>	prim style comments: _____
secondary orig use: _____	sec style comments: _____
primary style: <u>Northwest Regional</u>	siding comments: _____
secondary style: <u>International</u>	architect: <u>Max Williams &amp; Robert Martin</u>
primary siding: <u>Standard Brick</u>	builder: _____
secondary siding: _____	
plan type: <u>School (General)</u>	
comments/notes:	

## GROUPINGS / ASSOCIATIONS

survey project name or other grouping name	<u>PPS Historic Building Assessment 2009</u>	<u>Survey &amp; Inventory Project</u>
farmstead/cluster name:	external site #: <u>164</u> (ID# used in city/agency database)	

## SHPO INFO FOR THIS PROPERTY

NR date listed: \_\_\_\_\_  
ILS survey date: 6/19/2009  
RLS survey date: 6/19/2009  
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

Situated in the Humboldt neighborhood of northeast Portland, Humboldt School is located at 4915 N Gantenbein Avenue. The school occupies the north portion of its 3.05-acre campus. The primary entrance to the campus is from the east on N. Gantenbein Avenue. In addition to the main school building (164a), the campus also features two portable classroom buildings (164b,c) and a covered playshed (164d). Oriented on an east-west axis, the wood frame structure is clad with a brick veneer. The single story building rests on a poured concrete foundation. Fenestration consists of grouped metal frame windows.

### Architectural Description

Situated in the Humboldt neighborhood of northeast Portland, Humboldt School is located at 4915 N Gantenbein Avenue. Development in the vicinity of the school consists of a mixture of single family residence, larger multi-family residential buildings, and commercial buildings.

The school occupies the northeast portion of the 3.05-acre campus. The primary entrance to the campus is from the east on N. Gantenbein Avenue. In addition to the main school building, the campus also features two portable classroom buildings and a covered playshed. Asphalt covered play areas are located on the southwest side of the campus.

Humboldt School features an L-shaped finger plan. Oriented on an east-west axis, the main school building is wood frame with a brick veneer constructed in the Northwest Regional style. The building is covered by a gable roof that cantilevers approximately twenty feet from the building to provide a covered entry. The single story building rests on a poured concrete foundation. Fenestration consists of grouped metal frame windows.

Glass entry doors provide access to a double height lobby. From the lobby double loaded corridors extend west and south to provide access to the school facilities. A multi-purpose room, located immediately adjacent to the lobby, serves as the primary gathering space for the building. The concrete block walls of the multi-purpose room are exposed. Glulamined arches support the ceiling. Linoleum tiles cover the corridor and classroom halls. Fluorescent light fixtures are affixed to the acoustic tiles that cover the ceiling.

The classrooms are rectangular. Built-in wooden cabinetry on the interior walls provides additional acoustic barriers between the classrooms. The slope of the gable roof, supported by beams running east-west, is visible in the classrooms. Tubular fluorescent light fixtures are suspended from the classroom ceilings.

### Alterations/Integrity

There have been moderate alterations to the school building and grounds since its construction in 1959. In 1965 and 1980, classrooms were added to the west wing of the building. The new wings were built to seamlessly connect with the original roof and corridor configuration. In 1966, the building was extended to the south to provide additional classroom space. In 1990 a computer center was added to the south side of the building as well as a library to the north elevation. Despite the numerous alterations, the building retains its integrity with interior finishes, cantilevered entry, gable roof, and central circulation spine intact.

## HISTORY

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

### Statement of Significance

Built in 1959, Humboldt 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 the 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 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 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).

In response to the growing population of North Portland, the district acquired land on N. Gantenbein Street for \$95,135.00. Named for the adjacent street, the district employed the relatively unknown architects Max Williams and Robert Martin to design the \$287,790.54 facility (Snyder; Portland Chronology Binder). Classrooms were added to the west wing of the building in 1965 and again in 1980. The new wings were built to seamlessly connect with the original roof and corridor configuration. In 1966, the building was extended to the south to provide additional classrooms. In 1990 the computer center was added to the south side of the building. At this time the library was added to the north elevation (Humboldt Facility Profile).

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Although Humboldt Elementary School retains its integrity with its floor plan and many exterior and interior finishes intact, it is not recommended as eligible for the NRHP. The school was built during the PPS program of post-war construction but archival research does not indicate that it influenced the design of other schools buildings, the curriculum, or future planning for the schools, therefore, it is not eligible for the NRHP under Criterion A. The architects Max Williams and Robert Martin were not well known designers in the city of Portland. In comparison with other schools built in Portland during the post war period, the plan, utilization of materials, and massing is a simpler and not as strong an example of the finger plan type school, therefore Humboldt Elementary School is not eligible for the NRHP under 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

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.

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.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Portland Public Schools Chronology Binder*.

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

Sanborn Map Company  
1924-1928, 1908-Dec. 1950 Sanborn Maps, Multnomah County Public Library, Portland, Oregon. Available at:  
<https://catalog.multcolib.org/validate?url=http%3A%2F%2F0-sanborn.umi.com.catalog.multcolib.org%3A80%2F>. Accessed June 16, 2009.

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



East elevation facing west



North elevation facing west



East elevation facing northwest



South elevation facing northwest



South elevation

**Humboldt School  
Exterior Photos  
ENTRIX 2009**



Corridor facing west



Classroom facing east



Gymnasium facing north



Library reading nook facing north

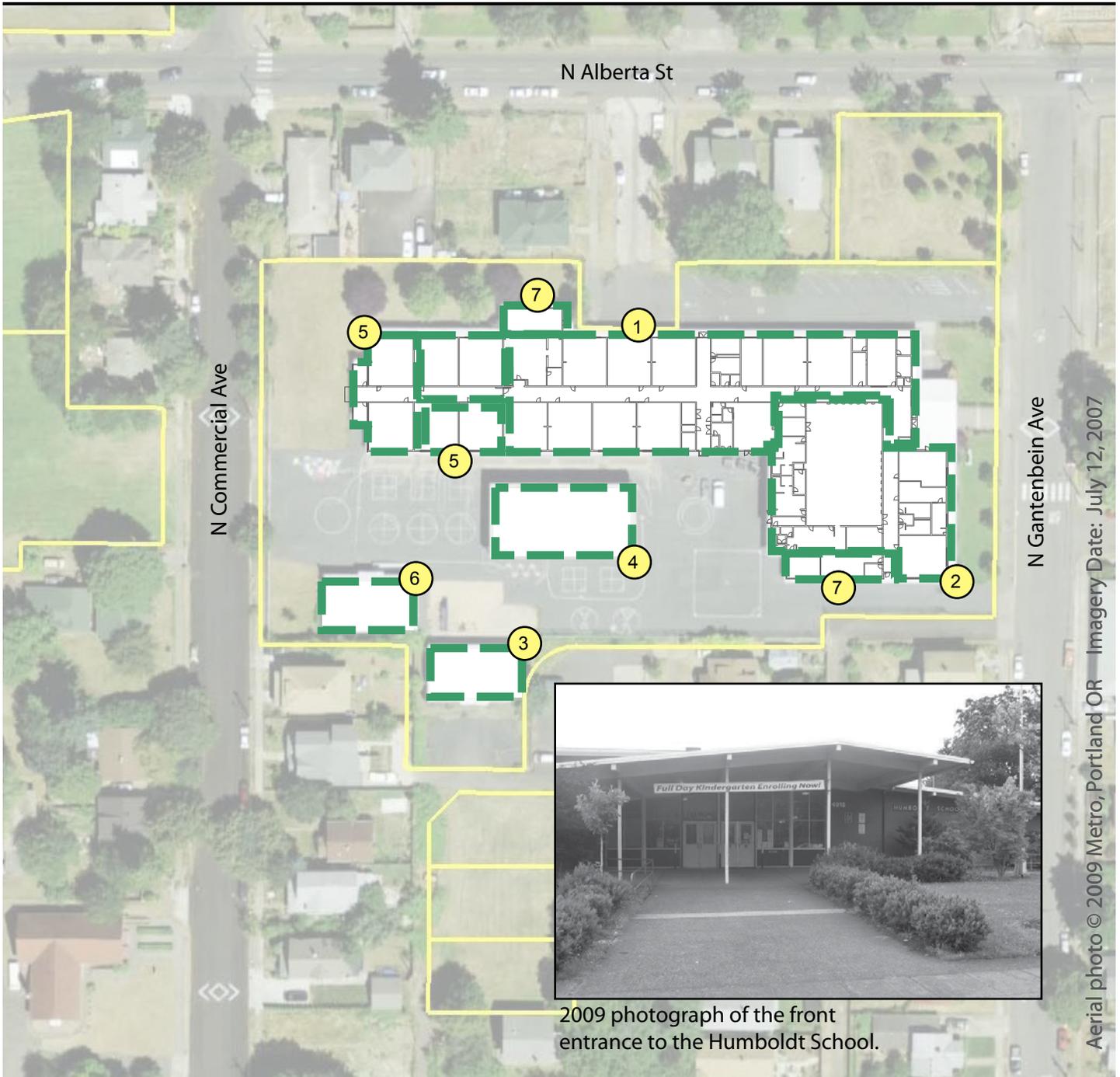


Classroom built-in facing west

# Humboldt School

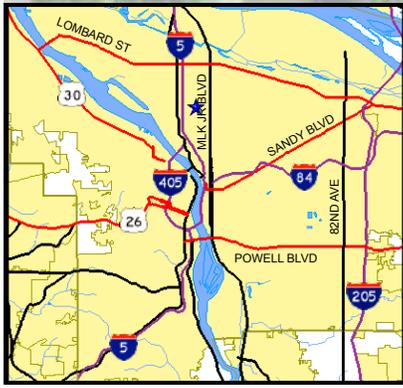
4915 N Gantenbein Ave, Portland OR, 97217

[View Site in Google Maps](#)



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

2009 photograph of the front entrance to the Humboldt School.



### Historical Significance and Building Integrity

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



### Building Periods

1. Original Building (164A), 1959
2. Addition (164A), 1966
3. Bldg (164B), 1966
4. Bldg (164D), 1977
5. Addition (164A), 1980
6. Bldg (164C), 1987
7. Addition (164A), 1990