

Oregon Historic Site Form

Smith Elementary School
8935 52nd St
Portland, Multnomah County

LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME

address: 8935 SW 52nd St apprx. addr

Portland vcnty Multnomah County

Optional Information
 assoc addresses:
 (former addresses, intersections, etc.)
 location descr:
 (remote sites)

historic name: Smith Elementary School

current/
 other names: _____

block nbr: _____ lot nbr: _____ tax lot nbr: _____
 township: _____ range: _____ section: _____ 1/4: _____
 zip: _____

PROPERTY CHARACTERISTICS

resource type: Building height (# stories): 1

elig. evaluation: not eligible/non-contributing

primary constr date: 1958 (c.) secondary date: _____ (c.)
 (optional--use for major addns)

primary orig use: School

secondary orig use: _____

primary style: Northwest Regional

secondary style: _____

primary siding: Standard Brick

secondary siding: _____

plan type: School (General)

total # eligible resources: 0 total # ineligible resources: 1

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

orig use comments: _____

prim style comments: _____

sec style comments: _____

siding comments: _____

architect: Payne and Scott

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 #: 188
 (ID# used in city/agency database)

SHPO INFO FOR THIS PROPERTY

NR date listed: _____

ILS survey date: 6/23/2009

RLS survey date: 6/23/2009

Gen File date: _____

106 Project(s)



ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

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

Summary Description

Smith Elementary School is situated in southwest Portland at 8935 SW 52nd Street. The 10.08-acre school campus consists of an L-shaped building (188A,B) and several playfields. The primary school building is a wood frame structure that rests on a poured concrete foundation. Cladding consists of a mixture of red brick, plywood panels, and T-1-11 siding. Gable roofs cover the two wings of the single story building. The building features elements of the Northwest Regional style including broad roof overhangs, plywood siding, and fixed windows with louvers.

Architectural Description

Smith Elementary School is situated in southwest Portland at 8935 SW 52nd Street. The 10.08-acre rectangular parcel is surrounded by a mixture of single family residences primary built between 1950 and 2000. The school campus consists of an L-shaped (188A,B) building surrounded by playfields and an asphalt covered parking area.

The school building is a wood frame structure that rests on a poured concrete foundation. Cladding consists of a mixture of red brick, plywood panels, and T-1-11 siding. Gable roofs cover the two wings of the L-shaped finger plan building. The fenestration is comprised primarily of grouped metal frame windows with louvers. The building features characteristic elements of the Northwest style including gable roofs, broad roof overhangs and plywood siding,

The primary entry to the building is from the east into a lobby. A double loaded corridor extends north-south to provide access to the main classroom wing. A second corridor extends to the west to provide access to gymnasium, cafeteria, and additional classrooms. The gymnasium features exposed brick. The cafeteria retains its original dining tables and benches that recess into the wall.

The classrooms in the east wing are primarily rectangular with built-in cabinetry lining an interior wall. The beams that support the gable roof are visible in the classrooms. Many classrooms also feature blonde wood paneling and moldings. Ventilation for the classrooms is provided either through an operable awning panel or a louvered ventilation panel. Univents provide heat for the classrooms. Tubular fluorescent light fixtures are suspended from the ceiling.

The west wing features an open floor plan. The lack of fixed walls, bright orange and yellow paint colors, and interior columns recalling a variety of architectural traditions including totems, the Doric order, and a unpeeled tree trunk is intended to support multiple, non-structured learning experiences.

Alterations

Smith Elementary School has evolved since the construction of the initial wing in 1958. The west wing was added in 1975. Its layout and interior finishes follow the trend in that period toward open schools. The gymnasium and cafeteria were also added in 1975, and the cladding matches that of the west wing. However, the interior finishes more closely resemble those found in the 1958 wing. Many of the spaces in the west wing were subdivided to provide additional classroom and offices. The cafeteria and gymnasium retain their original interior finishes. The east classroom wing exhibits a high degree of integrity with original interior finishes, exterior cladding, and windows. However, the addition of the expansive west wing with a radically different exterior cladding and interior spatial arrangements reduces the integrity of the overall campus.

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 1958, Smith Elementary 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 \$5,000,000.00 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 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, 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 popularized by Naramore and Jones. Instead many architects adopted the principles of the Modern movement and its regional variant, the Northwest 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 featured

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interior courtyards that facilitated access to the outdoors and expanded the opportunities for passive ventilation and daylighting, a hallmark of the Northwest Regional style.

In 1957 Portland Public Schools acquired the Orchid Primary School campus located at 8935 SW 52nd Street for \$22,060.00. The following year the district completed construction on the new school for \$330,560.00. The new building, named for George L. Smith - a member of the West Portland school board in the 1920s, opened in 1958 (Sydney; Portland Chronology Binder).

The architects of Smith Elementary School were well versed in the Northwest Regional style and the design of public buildings. The first wing, designed by Payne and Scott in 1957, was one of two buildings the firm worked on for Portland Public Schools. A native of Spokane, Washington, James Payne attended the University of Washington before relocating to Portland. After Payne's arrival in Portland around 1944, he worked for Van Evera Bailey, an important practitioner in the Northwest regional style, until 1947. He subsequently worked with Roi Morin until 1949 when he joined the firm of Wick, Hilgers, & Scott. In 1951, Payne obtained his architecture license and established a partnership with Gerry Scott. Scott is best known for his work with Wick, Hilgers, & Scott as the architect of record for John Yeon's Portland Visitors Information Center of 1945. The firm of Scott & Payne continued until the 1970s. Best known for his work on hospitals, Payne was the architect of Seaside Hospital, Portland Osteopathic Hospital, Redmond Hospital. In addition to work for Concordia College, Payne and Scott designed Hollyrood Elementary School and the first wing of Smith Elementary School (Ritz 2002 310).

For the second wing of Smith School, Portland Public Schools engaged John Storrs, an architect strongly associated with the establishment of the Northwest Regional style. Raised in the northeast and educated at Yale, Storrs moved to the Northwest after hearing Pietro Belluschi lecture on regional architecture. Storrs established a practice in Portland in 1950. His design for the Peter Kerr house, the Grieve house, Salishan Lodge, the Forestry Pavilion at the Oregon Centennial Exposition, and the Western Forestry Center are considered monuments of Northwest regional architecture (McMath 1974: "The Wood Tradition Expands" 632-634).

Although designed to be extensible, Smith Elementary School lacks integrity due to the additions, alterations, and resulting lack of coherent building vocabulary. 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 Payne & Scott and John Storrs both had significant ties to the development of the Northwest Regional style; however this building is not a strong example of the style or of these architects' work. The alterations to the wing designed by John Storrs have significantly altered the original character of the school. Although the school exhibits characteristic features of twentieth century school design in the Northwest Regional style, due to the lack of integrity in comparison with other schools of this period in Portland, Smith 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.

_____. "The Wood Tradition Expands" 528-647.

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.

Oregonian. "Arson Delays School Opening." 09-05-1982.

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.

_____. Chronology Binder.

_____. Smith Elementary School. Facility Plan.

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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%2F-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.



Entry facing north



East elevation and roof overhang



North elevation facing southwest



West annex



West elevation facing east



Corridor facing south



Classroom facing south



Gymnasium wall panels



Annex facing east

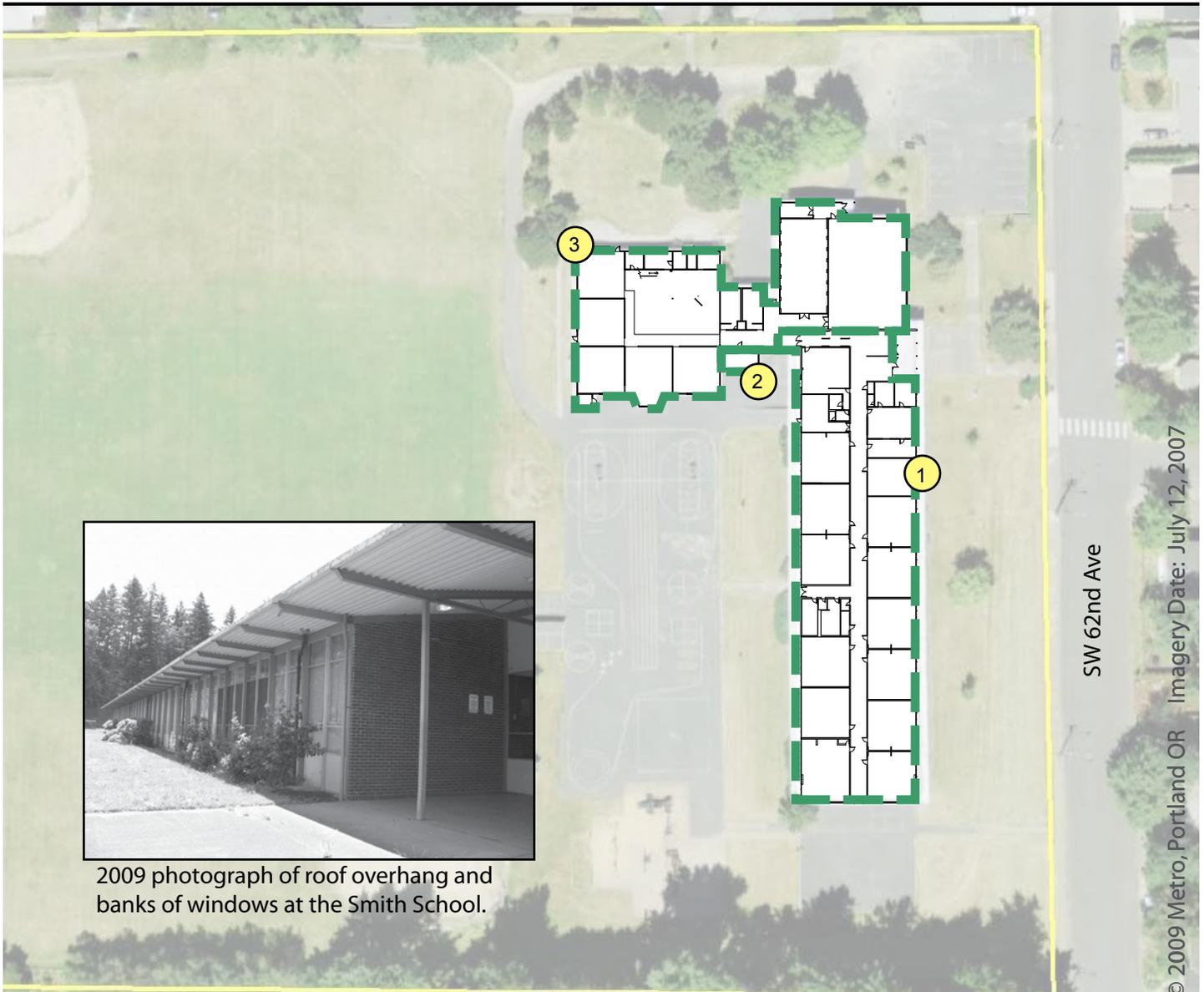


Cafeteria facing west

Smith Facility

8935 SW 52nd Ave, Portland OR, 97219

[View Site in Google Maps](#)



2009 photograph of roof overhang and banks of windows at the Smith School.

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. Original Building (188A), 1958
2. Addition (188B), 1971
3. Addition (188B), 1975