

# RECONNAISSANCE & INTENSIVE LEVEL HISTORIC SURVEY FOR THE TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT, 2009



FIRST GRADE STUDENTS AT MCKINLEY SCHOOL, 1926  
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# PROJECT BACKGROUND

This project focuses on twenty-four historic schools within the Tacoma Public School District. The school district elected to conduct a historic resource inventory of selected pre-1960 schools in anticipation of major capital facilities projects. Some schools have been previously surveyed at the reconnaissance level as part of neighborhood historic resource inventories conducted by the city. Many of Tacoma's earliest schools were surveyed in the city's Community Cultural Resource Survey around 1980. This inventory represents the first phase of a larger project, *Preserving Tacoma's Historic Schools*, designed by Historic Tacoma with the support of the Tacoma School District. Remaining phases include publication and distribution of the inventory in multiple formats, design and delivery of educational content to students, as well as public programming to increase awareness and explore rehabilitation alternatives with the community and policy makers.

This inventory was undertaken by Caroline T. Swope of Kingstree Studios. Ms. Swope is a qualified architectural historian as defined in the Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61. She holds a Ph.D. in American art and architecture and a Masters Degree in historic preservation, with 15 years of professional experience in architectural history and historic preservation. She is listed as an architectural historian on the consultants' roster on file with the State of Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation in Olympia, Washington.

The final product, delivered to the Tacoma School District is:

One original paper Summary Report, 2009 & one DVD with the Summary Report

One set, original black and white, single-sided paper copies of the individual Historic Property Inventory Forms, bound & one DVD with the Historic Property Inventory Forms including a photofile of linked photos

## Scope of Work

Project scope included conducting a reconnaissance level history building survey of 24 pre-1960 schools, selected by the school district, as listed below. This survey excludes three school already listed on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places: Stadium High School, Lincoln High School, and Washington Elementary. After the reconnaissance level survey was complete the consultant made a list ranking schools in three different divisions, based on meeting criteria for historic registers. The district reviewed this list and selected thirteen of the most highly ranked schools for an intensive survey, which would provide the detailed information needed for any future historic nominations.

Schools included in the survey (listed in alphabetical order):

Arlington Elementary School (1924)  
Baker Middle School (1954)  
Central Administration (originally Central Elementary School) (1912)  
DeLong Elementary School (1953)  
Downing Elementary School (1948)  
Fawcett Elementary School (1949)  
Fern Hill Elementary School (1911)  
Gault Middle School (1925)  
Geiger Elementary School (1949)  
Grant Elementary School (1919)  
Gray Middle School (1924) & Barlow Annex (1910)  
Hunt Middle School (1958)  
Hoyt Elementary School (1958)  
Jason Lee Intermediate School (1924)  
Lowell Elementary School (1950)  
Mann Elementary School (1952)  
Lyon Elementary School (1924)  
McCarver Elementary School (originally McCarver Middle School) (1925)  
McKinley Elementary School (1908)  
Oakland Alternative School (originally Oakland Elementary School) (1912)  
Park Avenue Elementary School (1949)  
Stewart Middle School (1924)  
Whitman Elementary School (1951)

The district elected not to include the following historic schools in this project, since they are currently placed on various historic registers: Lincoln High School (Tacoma Register of Historic Places, Stadium High School (National Register District and Tacoma Register of Historic Places) and Washington Elementary School (National Register of Historic Places and Tacoma Register of Historic Places).

### **Prior Survey Activity**

Since 1979 the City of Tacoma Historic Preservation Office has conducted a number of reconnaissance level surveys. The following neighborhoods have been surveyed, and the majority of them have been entered into the Washington State Historic Property Inventory database.

1. Central Business District (1981, updated 2003)
2. North End (1981)
3. North East (1979)
4. Port Industrial Area (1981, updated 2003)
5. Central area (1981)

6. South Tacoma (1981, updated in 2005 and 2006)
7. South End (1981, updated 1997, 2005 and 2006)
8. West End, Ruston and Point Defiance (1981)
9. East Side (1981)
10. North Slope (2003, overlaps CBD and N End Survey areas)
11. Hilltop (1993, updated 2004, overlaps Central and CBD areas)

Other areas are currently in the process of being inventoried for potential historic districts.

1. Whitman Area, with the South End
2. West Slope Neighborhood
3. Wedge Neighborhood (within Central)

Files for inventoried and registered properties were obtained from the City of Tacoma Historic Preservation Office and reviewed before the site visits. Due to the age of many of the prior surveys, no post-World War II era schools had been evaluated.

### **Research Objectives**

This project has several objectives:

- To document the twenty-four historic schools listed by the district.
- To review previous surveys of Tacoma, where some of these structures may have been inventoried.
- To provide an outline of Tacoma's public educational architecture, both in terms of styles, architects, and broader development trends where possible.
- To provide information to help the school district evaluate historical and architectural significance of historic school buildings.

### **Project Methodology, School Rankings, Historic Registry Considerations**

The majority of the properties were visited between March 21<sup>st</sup> and April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Return trips to some sites were made at later dates to accommodate a need for additional photography or clarification of building locations and details.

After the initial reconnaissance survey was completed the schools were preliminarily evaluated based on their ability to meet listing criteria for the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. Buildings nominated to the Tacoma Historic Register must be at least 50 years old or older and retain integrity of design, setting, materials and association that convey their significance. The six criteria used to evaluate historic structures in Tacoma are:

Criteria A: Associated with broad patterns of our history,  
Criteria B: Associated with significant local historical figures,  
Criteria C: Embodies distinctive characteristic of an architectural type/form,  
Criteria D: Has or may yield pre-historical information (not a factor in this survey),  
Criteria E: Is a part of or adjacent to an existing or proposed historic district (only a factor with Jason Lee and its proximity to the North Slope Historic District).  
Criteria F: Is a visual landmark in the neighborhood or city (by their very nature, each school meets this criteria, so it was not used for a sorting mechanism)

A ranking system of high, medium and low priority was devised to help the district clearly identify the broad differences between various school buildings. While not perfect, this system does allow for a comparative approach. Buildings that have strong integrity, were constructed by significant architects, and possess strong architectural features were ranked higher than structures with compromised integrity or less architectural presence. The list is as follows:

### **Rank I (High Priority)**

Central Administration (1912)  
Gault Middle School (1925)  
Gray Middle School (1924) & Barlow Annex (1910)  
Hoyt Elementary School (1957)  
Hunt Middle School (1958)  
Jason Lee Middle School (1924)  
McCarver Elementary School (1925)  
McKinley Elementary School (1908)  
Oakland Alternative School (1912)  
Stewart Middle School (1924)  
Wainwright Elementary School (1924)<sup>1</sup>

### **Rank II (Middle Priority)**

Arlington Elementary School (1924)  
Fern Hill Elementary School (1911)  
Geiger Elementary School (1948)  
Lowell Elementary School (1950)  
Lyon Elementary School (1924)  
Park Avenue Elementary School (1949)  
Whitman Elementary School (1951)

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<sup>1</sup> Wainwright Elementary is located within the boundaries of Fircrest, and thus would not be eligible for the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. The district might want to consider listing it (and any of the other Rank I schools) on the Washington State Heritage Register.

### **Rank III (Low Priority or Non-Eligible)**

Baker Middle School (1954)  
DeLong Elementary School (1953)  
Downing Elementary School (1948)  
Fawcett Elementary School (1949)  
Grant Elementary School (1919)  
Mann Elementary School (1952)

The eleven schools selected for Rank I listing are exceptional in meeting criteria A, B, C and F. These buildings exemplify changing social values, were designed by significant architectural firms, and are strong examples of various architectural styles that maintain substantial architectural integrity. The seven schools selected for Rank II listing often meet multiple criteria as well, but often at a lower threshold than Rank I schools. The six schools listed for Rank III either meet the lowest threshold for register status or may be deemed ineligible due to intensive remodeling which has removed substantial historic character (Mann Elementary for example). Two schools were difficult to place in rankings, and both were eventually placed in a Rank II category: Fern Hill Elementary and Arlington Elementary.

Fern Hill is a historically significant school that was part of a massive remodeling and expansion in 2005. The building was saved for reuse instead of being demolished in part due to strong community activism. The site is rather small, which impacted how the district accommodated the historic building while introducing required program components. While the new building additions made efforts to complement the historic fabric, the new construction overwhelms the historic building. The original entrance has been relocated, and the new construction is so similar to the historic structure that it may be difficult for the lay person to distinguish what is truly historic and what is new. There is some variance of thought between preservation professionals and commissions on how to best address circumstances like these. The commission's interpretation of preservation standards may impact their interest in accepting Fern Hill to a historic register, particularly if it is an individual nomination, rather than a group nomination.

Arlington Elementary was challenging to categorize for a different reason. The current structure retains most of its historic massing, but the original entryway and windows have been changed. In its current state, these factors and the large 1954 addition that dominates the site, make the building ineligible for the register. However, enough vintage fabric remains that the historic building could be part of a rehabilitation project where the 1954 addition is removed, the historic building is renovated and a sympathetic addition provides additional program needs. Arlington is one of the few vernacular buildings extant in the district, and one a handful of one-story pre-WWII schools. The district should consider evaluating the feasibility of working with this historic structure.

Typical tax advantages for working with historic properties are based on payment of property taxes, and thus school districts aren't in a position to use most preservation incentives. However, in March of 2009 the Tacoma Municipal Code (13.06.640) was revised to provide zoning assistance for historic properties. The code allows for a conditional use permit for the reuse of a historic structure for uses that otherwise might not be allowed by underlying zoning. The district should review this policy with the appropriate city representatives, for it might prove useful for surplus historic schools. If the district intends to sell historic properties as viable buildings (and not take a reduced price for land value only) than having a building on the local historic register would allow potential buyers to consider broader zoning applications, and could be a considerable incentive.

After meeting with a sub-committee of the school board and presenting the preliminary list, the board selected fifteen individual properties for a more intensive survey. The survey relied heavily on primary source documents from period newspapers. Pierce County Tax Assessor Records and the Tacoma Public Library's On-Line Building Index were searched for all buildings. Intensive survey methodology included a full search of Tacoma Public Library records, and photographic records at Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle and the Washington State Historical Society. Construction dates used for schools in this inventory may differ by a year or two from dates on file with the school district. A consistent dating system was used for all schools. Primary newspaper articles (when available) were researched to provide the year that construction started for each school. This often leads to a year or two difference between the districts dates (which may be based on the year the school opened for use.) In cases where this information was not available, the school districts dates were used. Another possible discrepancy in naming between existing literature and this report is the listing of Heath or Heath & Gove for the architect of record. Heath served as the district architect during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The documented dates for his employment vary, but he seems to have started as early as 1902, and ended his association with the district around 1920. Heath had a number of partners during this time, and without letters of record it is not always possible to determine which projects he completed solo and which were completed under the banner of his firm. Heath was partner in the firm Heath & Twitchell from 1908 until 1910, then he creates the firm of Heath & Gove around 1910, which becomes Heath, Gove & Bell around 1914. At times the architect listed on some school projects is Heath, other times it is Heath & Gove. This decision was made based on library documents, but they may not necessarily correlate with how the school district lists architect of record.

# TACOMA SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT FROM 1900-1960

Historically, school buildings were not viewed as architecture, at least not notable architecture. Important educational buildings were colleges and universities, not public school systems. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century public school systems, and by extension the buildings that contained these systems, became more prominent for a number of reasons.

While national trends are evident in educational architectural styles, these trends are subjected to very localized interpretations. In most countries schools are directly allotted federal funds for construction, the United States is one of only a few countries (including Israel and Germany) where almost all funds come from either local or state agencies.<sup>2</sup> As a result there are more local variations, and the influence of regional architects is quite evident. In Tacoma, Fredrick Heath served as school district architect from 1902 until 1920, and the vast majority of his buildings have Gothic Revival detailing. This was not atypical for the time. Most public school buildings, if they were architect designed, usually employed either Classical Revival or Gothic Revival detailing. Classical revival was strongly associated with ancient knowledge and the humanities, while Gothic was usually favored by those looking to forge connections with the great medieval universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The Tacoma School District clearly favored Gothic designs, and this must have been an institutional preference since Frederick Heath worked in a number of historical revival styles for other projects.

## Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century American schools were viewed with strong overtones of patriotic pride. At the opening of the new Central Elementary School in 1912 George Williamson, president of the Tacoma School Board proclaimed that “The school house is the first lien of fortifications of the nation, and as the cost of education increases the cost of the penitentiary and asylum must decrease.” ... and... “This building we ... dedicate will add another stone to the bulwarks of free government.”<sup>3</sup>

The Tacoma school system, like many urban school systems in America, was heavily influenced by a massive influx of immigrants before World War I. While earlier immigrant groups had primarily settled along the eastern seaboard and were from Irish, German, Scottish and English heritage, new immigrant groups were primarily eastern or southern European. Between the end of the Civil War and the start of World War I more than 31 million immigrants came to the United States.<sup>4</sup> By

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<sup>2</sup> Educational Facilities Laboratories. The Cost of a Schoolhouse. New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories, 1960, pg. 7.

<sup>3</sup> n.a. “1,500 See Central School Exercises.” Tacoma Daily Ledger. November 23, 1912 pg. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Power, Ed. The Transit of Learning. Sherman Oaks, California: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc. 1979.

1900 half the population of the United States were either foreign-born, or the children of foreign-born parents.<sup>5</sup>

Governmental and religious agencies struggled with the best way to integrate ethnic groups into American society. Many of the newly arrived immigrants were from rural areas and not familiar with urban life. Confusion on how to use urban services, the role of sanitation, and a growing concern over communicable diseases (including Tuberculosis) led many to believe that schools were the logical place to prevent potential problems. In 1913 the National Conference on Immigration and Americanization promoted three key issues of immigration assimilation: literacy, learning democratic values, and health and hygiene. Schools were viewed as the most logical tool for introducing these values to the growing American population.

A number of programs previously unheard of for most school systems were nationally introduced during this time, and the Tacoma School District closely followed national trends. Concern with hygiene and health helped support the introduction of nurses, health care facilities, showers and home-economic departments (usually added at the middle school level). Programs were introduced to keep children occupied after school, and were thought to help reduce juvenile delinquency. Playgrounds and summer school (which was originally introduced more to keep children busy than for the remedial education it now offers) were also thought to help relieve delinquent tendencies. Schools became neighborhood social centers and a number of after-hours programs were available, including programs for adults. Cafeterias were thought to help promote an "American diet" and providing lunches on-site became increasingly common. Previously students had walked home for lunch, or brought home-packed lunches with them. This interest in integrating new ethnic populations continued through the 1920s, and culminated with the National Educational Association creating a Department of Immigrant Education in 1921.<sup>6</sup>

The tremendous expansion in social services greatly impacted building designs. School structures previously had provided three main types of space; primarily classroom, an auditorium and/or gymnasium and one or two rooms for administrative functions. Expanded services required specialized types of rooms, additional recreational activities, larger libraries, lunchrooms and their support areas and substantially increased the need for administrative and support rooms. In 1911 Tacoma residents passed a \$690,000 bond issue that provided for the construction of Lincoln High School, Central, Fern Hill, Franklin and McKinley Elementary Schools. The construction of Central School in 1912 included an open-air room, designed for use by students with Tuberculosis. The room was open on three sides, and it was thought that exposure to fresh air would help cure or at least temper the disease's effects.

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<sup>5</sup> Karier, Clarence J. The Individual, Society, and Education: A History of American Educational Ideas. Second Edition (1986). Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967, pg. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Carlson, Robert A. The Quest for Conformity: Americanization Through Education. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975, pg. 128.

An interlocking intellectual component of this age was the “Progressive Era” which lasted from approximately 1890-1920. While the scope of this social movement is beyond the parameters of this study, there was a substantial educational reform movement associated with the movement. The movement was in part a response to dramatic industrial development and unprecedented urban growth. In 1900 approximately 40% of Americans lived in urban areas; by 1920 the majority of Americans were living in urbanized areas.<sup>7</sup> Two major goals of progressive education in this time period were to create a humanitarian disposition for education that was more responsive to children and integrating the school more closely with the immediate community.

The advent of World War I in many cases encouraged mandatory citizenship classes for students, and often removed German from foreign language departments. A major impact of the war was surprisingly in the realm of physical education. A third of men drafted for service were rejected or tested as unfit, thus concerns over physical fitness and sports increased dramatically.<sup>8</sup> Schools built after this era often have larger and more numerous physical education spaces. World War I also brought significant changes to Tacoma and its environs, with the establishment of Camp Lewis (now Fort Lewis) in 1917. Located only a few miles south of the city, the post had 37,000 soldiers stationed by the end of the year, making it the largest military post in the United States at that time. Regional population also increased with the opening of the Panama Canal three years earlier. Businesses and industries associated with the Port of Tacoma also grew, and as the population increased, Tacoma’s school district needed to find ways to accommodate new students and changing educational philosophies.

Interest in vocational training (which had started earlier in the century) increased during this period. Some of the more highly paid trades in the United States were in plumbing, electrical work, bricklaying and carpentry. Compulsory child education had necessitated a decline in the ancient apprentice system, and schools, and the request of parents and trade unions began to introduce vocational education. While scholars argue that the introduction of vocational training never did fully prepare workers for the marketplace, it did have the effect of predisposing educators and public leaders to think that education was a cure for economic problems, and placed growing emphasis on tangible economic results in contrast to the classics and liberal arts based learning of prior generations.<sup>9</sup> Vocational education was first introduced in the St. Louis school system in 1880.<sup>10</sup> But before the 1900s there was little support for public education that would train students for specific jobs, so why did it arise now? A major component was concern over U.S.

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<sup>7</sup> Rury, John L. Education and Social Change: Themes in the History of American Schooling. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002, pg. 136.

<sup>8</sup> Educational Facilities Laboratories, pg 26.

<sup>9</sup> Spring, Joel. The American School: From the Puritans to No Child Left Behind. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008, pg. 233.

<sup>10</sup> Spring, pg. 265

position within world markets. Of particular worry was Germany, which was feared for its economic activities and admired for its schools, which had a trade component. A 1905 report from the National Association of Manufacturers suggested copying their method.<sup>11</sup> In 1917 the Smith-Hughes Vocational Act passed Congress and provided vocational funding. Thus a strong national interest emerged.

Several factors contributed to the development and growth of the intermediary (middle or junior high) school during the early 20th century. Vocational training was one of the main reasons listed for separating out middle grades from elementary and high schools. There is some indication that the first intermediate schools were started pre-1900, but the data is limited. California was at the forefront of the movement. The first Junior High School was formed in Berkeley in 1910 and another followed shortly thereafter in Los Angeles, in 1911.<sup>12</sup> By the start of World War I there were more than 122 intermediate schools in the United States. While numerous secondary sources indicate that Jason Lee (constructed in 1924-25) was the first middle school in Washington State, the 1920 volume The Junior High School by Thomas Briggs lists six junior highs operating in Washington State.<sup>13</sup> This discrepancy may be a matter of semantics, since Jason Lee may have been the first new construction in the state for a middle school.

By the late nineteen-teens the Tacoma school system was showing the stress of rapid growth, and the district was attempting to serve 14,211 students in 16 aging schools. Part of the increase was due to the rapid development of war industries in the city and the ensuing population growth. By 1920 the district had an enrollment of 18,203 students, a 22% increase in the student population in just five short years.<sup>14</sup> The district examined various ways to address the growing student population and in 1920 the school board debated between three possible educational models, each having its own impact on future school construction. The first model was to continue with the current high school system, which held four grades. The second model was to adopt a 6-6 plan, with grades one through six in elementary schools, and grades seven through twelve in high schools. The final plan, and the one eventually adopted was the 6-3-3 plan, which fostered the addition of middle schools to hold seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.<sup>15</sup>

In 1923 the district added twenty-four new classrooms to help relieve congestion, but it soon became clear that a larger, more substantial building program was necessary. The same year Tacoma voters authorized an intermediate

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<sup>11</sup> Spring, pg. 265.

<sup>12</sup> Spring, pg. 239 and Briggs, Thomas H. The Junior High School. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920, pg. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Briggs, pg. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Pratt, Mary C. "Historical and Architectural Overview of the Schools of Tacoma, Washington." Unpublished manuscript. 2005.

<sup>15</sup> n.a. "City's Schools Will be Finest." Tacoma Daily Ledger. June 29, 1924. pg A-4.

school building program at a then unheard of cost of 2.4 million dollars.<sup>16</sup> The goal of the program was to transition Tacoma from the old grade school-high school program (called the 8-4 plan) to a more modern grade school-intermediate school-high school program known as the 6-3-3 plan due to the number of grades in each division. At the time of the bond Tacoma had two high schools (Stadium and Lincoln) and fourteen grade schools serving the entire city.

Local architect Roland E. Borhek was originally employed by the district to design all six intermediate schools. Borhek's travel around the country to visit other comparable schools was highlighted in the press. The idea was that Borhek would be paid to design a school prototype for construction on all six sites. The design would be flexible, and accommodate changes for smaller schools, with the ability to add on as enrollment increased. Jason Lee and Stewart were designed to be the largest of the two new schools, and the other smaller intermediate schools were planned with the possibility of future enlargement bringing them to a comparable size. The bond provided funds for additions to several elementary schools and the resources to build six new intermediate schools- Jason Lee, James P. Stewart, Morton M. McCarver, Captain Robert Gray, Allan C. Mason, and Franklin B. Gault. Jason Lee was the first of the intermediate buildings erected while Stewart was the second, and McCarver was the third. Gray, Mason and Gault all opened on the same day. Borhek's designs for Jason Lee and Stewart cost significantly more than his estimates. The district had him redesign the plans to reduce costs, and there was a disagreement over Borhek's additional fees. The tension over increased fees eventually led to his dismissal by the district. Other architects furnished plans for the remaining four middle schools.



**Tacoma Daily Ledger Cartoon, April 29 1923, Celebrating the School Bond Passage**

<sup>16</sup> This would be roughly equivalent to a 400,000 million dollar investment when calculated against 2008 dollars using a relative share of the GDP. This tracks the importance of past projects against available labor and materials. ([www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com))

Local residents considered the building program a fantastic success. The Tacoma Daily Ledger trumpeted the end of the campaign on March 7, 1926 with the title "School Opening to Mark Close of Big Problem." According to the press the school cost estimates were off by only \$25,000 (about 1% of the budget), which was mostly related to new equipment needs. From the start of the building campaign planning until its completion, Tacoma had an additional 1,910 students enroll in its schools. To help keep construction costs within budgets, and to increase size of some of the schools under construction, classrooms were clustered around auditoriums- thus eliminating additional interior corridors in some of the schools.

During the Great Depression no additional schools were constructed, although concern over inadequate facilities were raised by parents. Some of Tacoma's oldest elementary schools were showing increasing wear. Portable buildings were added as the need arose, and this trend continued for several decades. Federal PWA funds established 140 adult education classes. Nursery schools were also started under this program at Arlington and Fern Hill and were tasked with the job of increasing the health of young children, establishing "right habits," in addition to helping parents with modern child-care techniques.<sup>17</sup>

In 1938 the Tacoma School Board voted to change the terminology of intermediate schools to the more universally accepted junior high. The names were later changed again and the schools are all now referred to as "middle schools." Middle schools served as anchors for the community activities, in part due to their large auditoriums and vocational shops. During the late years of WWII and in the immediate post-war era, students had access to the school basement and gymnasium as part of an after hour recreational center program. The program was run in cooperation with the Metropolitan Park District starting in 1944. Teenage centers and athletic centers for boys were funded by the school district in the winter. During March of 1946 more than 4,000 youths took part in games and dances at Fern Hill, Oakland, Mason, McCarver. Gymnasiums were open at Gray, Jason Lee, McCarver, Mason, Stewart, and Gault. More than 2,000 young men participated in these programs. A planned closing of the school's recreational center in 1946 led to a student protest, which succeeded in keeping the program open for a while longer.

## **Post-World War II**

The greatest challenge facing American educational systems in the post-World War II era was a dramatically increasing student population combined with rapid suburban growth. At the same time, older urban school enrollments were declining as more affluent families moved to the suburbs. Tacoma, with the rapid growth of its port and the nearby Ft. Lewis Army base, was a part of this national trend. Race became a major issue in urban school districts. Affluent white families fled crowded urban cores, and migration to suburban areas started before the war was barely over. The exodus from downtown was fueled by public policies that stimulated road building combined with inexpensive gasoline and personal

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<sup>17</sup> n.a. "Many Students in School Here." Tacoma Daily Ledger. May 29, 1934. n.p.

transportation. Between 1940 and 1960 America's suburban population grew by 27 million people, more than two times the increase in central cities.<sup>18</sup>

The pressure of growing school enrollment was so severe, that in 1955 editors at *Architectural Forum* worried that every 15 minutes enough babies were born to fill another classroom.<sup>19</sup> Enrollment numbers at the national level do indeed support this concern. Public U.S. school systems had 25.1 million students enrolled in 1949-50. By 1959-60 the number had reached almost 36 million, and peaked in 1971 at 46 million. The shortage of classrooms forced school systems to consider a number of solutions, including portables, split sessions, and temporary buildings. Tacoma followed all of these trends. Tacoma's student population increased from 22,157 in 1950 to 29,778 in 1956, a 26% jump in enrollment.<sup>20</sup>

The school board began to prepare a new building campaign to address overcrowding in aged elementary schools and the new construction needed in growing suburbs. Local architect E. T. Mock was hired to create a needs assessment in 1944. Outside forces also dictated replacement of older schools. The April 13, 1949 earthquake damaged a number of vintage school buildings, and a student was killed by falling bricks while fleeing Lowell Elementary. Both Lowell and Whitman schools were demolished and replaced by new structures. While the district needed to still construct multi-story masonry buildings in heavily populated areas, safety concerns and increasing material costs prompted a close examination of one-story schools. Cost, more so than in any previous era, became one of the single greatest factors in new school construction. Hoyt Elementary and Hunt Middle Schools epitomize the preferred construction techniques of this era.



**Damage at the original Lowell Elementary following the 1949 earthquake.  
Richards Studio Collection, Tacoma Public Library D-41862-6**

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<sup>18</sup> Rury, pg. 184.

<sup>19</sup> Ogata, Amy F. "Building for Learning in Postwar American Elementary Schools." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Vol. 67, Num., 4 December 2008, pg. 562.

<sup>20</sup> Pratt, n.p.

Architects and school boards alike rejected the traditional historical revival styled Gothic and Classical buildings from prior generations. While part of this was certainly due to changing architectural fashion, the high cost of masonry construction and added architectural embellishments may have also contributed to this disdain for past forms. Officials were quick to state that “Our heritage is not a style of architecture. .... (it) is a spirit of going ahead.”<sup>21</sup> Pre-war schools were accused of being designed for the pride of the community and not necessarily for the education of the students.

Quick, cheap and flexible school construction was the promoted ideal. Non-load bearing walls allowed additions as needed, and one-story schools also helped reduce material costs. The National Council on School House Construction suggested one story, single loaded corridors, which more easily accommodated additions.<sup>22</sup> Outdoor corridors were also popular for their ability to further reduce costs. It was preferable to leave end walls free from mechanical systems, thus making future additions less costly. Single story buildings were also considered safer for fire evacuation, and did not require the same floor space dedicated to circulation.<sup>23</sup> With a new focus on clustering schoolrooms in pods to break up the forbidding masses of former schoolhouses, schools plans spread out upon the landscape. With a focus on light, air, and direct access to the outdoors there was the added benefit, which was a reduced fire hazard for the new types of design (and cheaper construction that didn’t need to be fire-proof, or address exit paths for multiple story buildings).<sup>24</sup> Educational professionals loudly proclaimed: “Multi-story school buildings will belong to the ages. The one-story building for all purposes will become the accepted type.”<sup>25</sup> These new designed worked best in suburban areas where large tracts of land could still be obtained relatively cheaply.

Changes in educational philosophy first began to impact elementary school design in the 1930s. One of the most famous new schools in the country was Crow Island in Winnetka, Illinois. Built in 1940 the school showcased the radical use of exterior doors for each classroom to provide outside access. Francis Presler, one of the teachers at the school, remarked that “The building must not be too beautiful, lest it be a place for children to keep and not one for them to use.”<sup>26</sup> The idea that elementary school should be designed to be child focused- not adult focused- grew in the following decades. Due to the Great Depression and the following world war, this educational philosophy saw its most significant manifestations after World War II.

During the rise of the cold war American schools were increasingly linked to policy needs of the federal government. Particular emphasis was placed on math

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<sup>21</sup> Perkins, Lawrence B. and Walter D. Cocking. Schools. New York: Reinhold, 1949, pg. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Perkins, pg. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Educational Facilities Laboratories, pg. 33.

<sup>24</sup> Educational Facilities Laboratories, pg. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Perkins, pg. 246.

<sup>26</sup> Herbert, Elizabeth and Anne Meek. Children, Learning & School Design: A First National Invitational Conference for Architects and Educators. Winnetka, Illinois: Winnetka Public Schools, 1992, pg. 59.

and science instruction, which would help American's compete in the weapon's race. Schools were also used as social programs for indoctrinating the strengths of democratic capitalism and the weaknesses of communism. They increasingly were used as fallout shelters. About twenty-five percent of the U.S. population attended school, thus fallout shelters became common in large elementary schools constructed during the 1960s.

In 1960 the median cost per a square foot for new school construction varied by region. The north-east with its high land and labor costs averaged \$17.81. This was followed by the mid-west at \$14.91, the west at \$14.64, and the south at \$13.70. The Tacoma School District benefited from its relationship with the Douglas Fir Plywood Association (now the Engineered Wood Association). Eager to expand their market reach, and looking to develop relationships in the rapidly growing educational building sector, the Douglas Fir Plywood Association used new school construction projects and even the addition of portable classrooms as part of a broader marketing campaign. The construction of the 1957 Hoyt Elementary School (a satellite to Washington Elementary) and the 1958 Hunt Junior High provided the perfect opportunity to promote new products.

Hoyt Elementary School was designed as a satellite, built when plans for an addition to Washington Elementary proved too costly and time consuming for the rapidly growing school population. The four-room primary school was designed to serve 100 first, second, and third graders. Newspaper reports noted that use of standardized components simplified the job and kept costs at a minimum. Price achieved flexibility in the design by making each classroom, including the roof, an integral unit. This allowed for any number of room combinations to fit specific building needs. Classrooms were covered with dome-shaped, one-piece plywood roofs fabricated from three layers of fir glue laminated plywood. Concern over the new roof forms was substantial, and the Tacoma building inspector required the testing of full-scale dome mock-ups to the point of destruction.

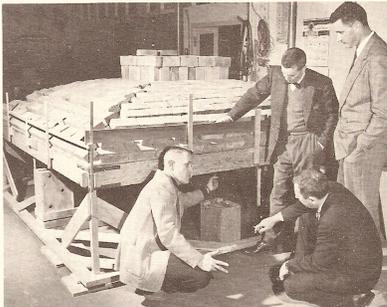
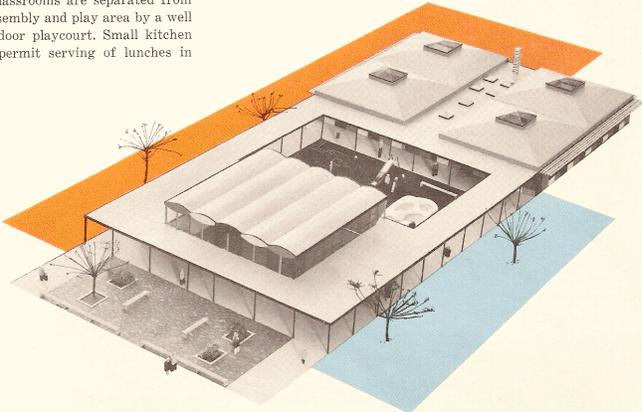
The Douglas Fir Plywood Association paid architect and engineering fees for the project. The association also underwrote all research costs on the design and supervised the assembly of the roof domes. The Hoyt School was the first to utilize the plan, which offered a tremendous amount of flexibility and cost savings from standardization. Each classroom, including the roof, was an integral unit. The building was well publicized, and received a Merit Award from the South West Washington Chapter of the AIA (1962), and the "Nation's School of the Month Award" from the National School Association (1964). Additional press was received through exhibits, including the American Association of School Administrators' Architectural Exhibit of 1963 (Atlantic City, New Jersey), the AIA Committee of Schools and Educational Facilities Exhibition of Contemporary School Buildings in 1963 where Price was one of fifteen firms invited to participate (at the Octagon in Washington, DC). International exposure came through a number of sources, including a scale model of the school showcased at an architectural exhibition in Moscow (USSR) in 1959 and photos of the school in Julius Hoffman's German

publication of *Wood in Modern Architecture* (1966?). The Douglas Fir Plywood Associational also heavily promoted the design through their magazine, *The Timberman*, where it was featured on the January 1957 cover and their publicized research project “Schools of the Future.”<sup>27</sup>

PRACTICAL APPLICATION . . . . .

This classroom roof structure was conceived as a plywood approach to the traditional spherical dome-shape, previously attempted only in heavy materials. For the purpose of testing the inherent structural advantages of this domical plywood roof, a working model, one-third full size was constructed and thoroughly tested at the Douglas Fir Plywood Engineering Research Laboratory. Concrete bricks were placed on the roof structure until the uniformly distributed load reached 98 pounds per square foot, almost three times the normal roof design load. As the load was increased, deflection readings were taken across the domical structure along the critical axis of two roof quadrants. Readings indicated that deflection at maximum test loading was well within the allowable at all points.

After completion of exhaustive structural tests, stressed skin plywood roof vaults have been approved for use in a four classroom, elementary school in Tacoma, Washington. Designed for a residential lot, a truly fresh approach has been offered by architect Robert Billsbrough Price, in his concept of a neighborhood school. Classrooms are separated from the interior assembly and play area by a well integrated outdoor playcourt. Small kitchen facilities will permit serving of lunches in classrooms.


**Advertising brochure for the Douglas Fir Plywood Association, showcasing Hoyt Elementary and its flexible design system, 1957.**

<sup>27</sup> Additional publicity: film strips by the American Association of School Administrators featuring Hoyt in 1963, cover of the 1957 *School Executive* (focusing on roof design), and a write-up on structural design with plywood in the August 1958 edition of *Architectural Forum*.

Built on Highland Hill in 1958, an area of West Tacoma that saw rapid development post-World War II, Henry Frank Hunt Middle School was specifically designed to address the expanding population of Tacoma as it moved away from the historic inner core and out into newly planned suburbs. The structure did not have the typical acreage restraints of the district's more urbanized schools, but it did have tight budget restrictions and a need for rapid construction. The gymnasium had arched stressed-skin plywood panel vaults on glue-lam beams. Six of the sixteen foot glue-laminated arches covered the 98x72 foot building. The design for the vaults was unusual and Tacoma school board officials required structural tests before allowing their construction. The Douglas Fir Plywood Association tested a prototype panel, which held 7,300 pounds of bricks for a load of 120 psf across the span, more than four times the specified design load. Period newspapers lauded the building as an example of "highly individualized wood and plywood design." Considerable attention was devoted to the building cost, a low \$11.54 per square foot, which included sales tax, paving, equipment and fees.<sup>28</sup> (Total budget was \$850,000). Roofing material cost was estimated at \$1.10 per square foot. Bids came in 15% below estimates. While comparative numbers have been difficult to locate, statistics from the Educational Facilities Laboratory in 1960 indicate that the median cost per square foot of schools in the west was \$14.64. Hunt's cost of \$11.54 represented an amazing 21% reduction in expenses. Costs were also saved by eliminating many of the interior corridors, which were replaced by open courtyards (some accented with pools of water) and covered exterior corridors. The elimination of interior hallways also helped remove the monotony of long corridors.



**Construction of Hunt Middle School gymnasium in 1957, photograph ordered by the Douglas Fir Plywood Association. Tacoma Public Library D107683-2**

<sup>28</sup> By comparison, Woodrow Wilson High School, also constructed in 1958, cost \$16.46 a square foot.

In September of 1958 more than 100 school officials from all over the United States descended on Tacoma to examine the widely publicized school. Members of the National Council on Schoolhouse Construction, which had been meeting in Seattle, drove down to Tacoma for tours of the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company, Woodlam, Inc., the Douglas Fir Plywood Association, and the Puget Sound Plywood Company. The conference members represented districts expected to spend more than two billion dollars in new school construction in the next year.

National publicity for Hunt included: a citation and visit by the American Association of School Administrators (1958), the School Building Architectural Exhibit, by the National Council on School House Construction (1961), School Buildings Architectural Exhibit sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators, which was shown at regional conventions in San Francisco, St. Louis, and Philadelphia (1961). A filmstrip produced by the American Association of School Administrators featured Hunt in 1961. The building was showcased in several print publications including the Washington State School Director's Newsletter of 1961, *Architectural Record's* "Building Types Study of Schools" (1960), the British publication of *Modern American Schools* by the Contractor's Record and Municipal Engineering (1961) and a German publication that also featured Hoyt, *Wood in Modern Architecture* by Julius Hoffman (1966?). Additionally, construction photographs were ordered by the Douglas Fir Plywood Association, and American Lumberman (Chicago) for their own advertising materials.

Magnet schools, a product of desegregation, were created to support voluntary integration. In Tacoma concerns with the increasingly black population at McCarver (which served as both an elementary school and a middle school) led to the 1968 decision to transition the facility into an elementary school, which then became the first magnet school in the United States. Students from the former Central Elementary (soon to be utilized as an administrative building) transferred to the site. Junior high students attending McCarver were transferred to other schools in the district. The decision to alter school district resources was made to eliminate de facto segregation. After closure of the middle school these students were bused to other middle schools in the district.

Increasing interest to the preservation and revitalization of Tacoma's historic schools has grown since the 1990s. When an advisory committee recommended razing the old Fern Hill Elementary and replacing it with a middle school in 1991, a vocal group of East Side residents spoke in favor of retaining a neighborhood school that children could walk to. Another school recommended for demolition was Jason Lee. Neighborhood supporters for that school protested, saying the school was a historic landmark. Valerie Sivinski, the City of Tacoma's preservation officer at the time, went on record in front of the school board and asked that they reconsider potential plans to demolish the building. Both of these buildings have since undergone award-winning rehabilitation projects, which kept the key historic features of the buildings. Other highly publicized and award winning historic revitalization projects have been Stadium and Lincoln High Schools. Parent interest was

instrumental in placing Washington Elementary on the local historic register. In 2005 the Tacoma Landmarks Preservation Commission gave a preservation award to the Fern Hill Elementary School and supporters of the school that were instrumental in preserving the building instead of demolishing it for a new structure. These projects, in addition to documented concern with the fate of Gault and Gray/Barlow, indicate a strong interest by the school board's constituents in maintaining the city's historic schools.



**Entry at Jason Lee Middle School emphasizing the values of "Truth" and "Justice." The heading above another set of doors reads "Wisdom is Better Than Rubies." Similar prompts are found on Stewart Middle School and were likely selected to help integrate immigrant children into American society.**

# APPENDIX A

## ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Following is a descriptive listing of the most common architectural styles used by the Tacoma School District. While not every surveyed school sports one of these stylistic monikers, the majority of schools fall under one of these stylistic categories.

### **American Renaissance Revival**

This term is sometimes used to describe a national variation of Italian Renaissance Revival that was common in the United States from about 1890-1930. The style loosely adapted designs and building massing from Renaissance palazzi. Common details are rectangular or square plans, low pitched hipped roofs, use of masonry or stucco, a stringcourse dividing floors (sometimes quite elaborately detailed), massive cornice, dentils or block modillions, a recessed entry, a raised basement, and full length windows. The style is most frequently seen in commercial and public buildings. Its massive proportions usually preclude it from all but the most expansive residential structures.

Examples: Fern Hill and McKinley

### **Classical Revival**

Classical Revival architecture, in the form of Greek Revival was one of the first national styles in the United States, and was common on the east coast from 1818 until right before the Civil War. Classical revivals focused on Greco-Roman design elements. Slender columns (Doric, Tuscan, Ionic, Corinthian or Composite orders), classical pediments, entablatures, Palladian windows and other details are used to classify this style. The style has been popular both in Europe and the United States for hundreds of years, and is used for commercial, institutional and residential designs alike. The ornateness of the applied ornament usually is dictated by budget and building size. The grander forms of the style, when applied to monumental buildings, are often referred to as Beaux-Arts. This academic style was originally taught at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and influenced American architecture from 1880-1920. A flat roof, raised first story, grand entrances, classical details, and symmetry are some of the most typical design elements for the Beaux-Arts substyle.

Examples: Lyon, Stewart and Wainwright

### **Collegiate Gothic Revival**

Gothic Revival is one of a number of historical revival styles that became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both abroad and in the United States. It was a common style for church and public school construction in Tacoma until the end of the 1920s.

The original Gothic style developed in the late 1100s in the region surrounding Paris, France. The style, while used for a number of building types, became associated with ecclesiastical architecture, in part due to the numerous new cathedrals built during this time, and soon spread to other countries. The style, which emphasized vertical massing, masonry construction, and heavily sculpted façades, and prominent use of stained glass (in ecclesiastical forms), eventually lost favor to the newly emerging Italian Renaissance style by 1500.

Interest in Gothic forms revived during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and continued through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are a number of reasons for the style's revival. In an era of nation building, many European countries were searching for an architectural style they could claim as their own, a native style not Roman or Italian influenced. The newly formed nation of Germany, and the much older countries of France, and England all claimed Gothic as a native architectural style. Additionally, there was a substantial aesthetic movement in Britain, started by the Pre-Raphaelites, which longed to return to the simpler and more religious lives believed to have been typical during the Gothic era. This group of artists and designers focused on the rich colors, heavily patterned forms, and abundant detail found in earlier art. Architectural critics and designers associated with the movement were uncomfortable with Neo-Classicism's pagan origins and also rejected the mechanization and standardization of contemporary society. Gothic forms were praised for their focus on nature, their association with the guild societies which traditionally created them, and the relationship between the workers and God. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic Revival began to transform with grander, more detailed examples, and was increasingly used for collegiate and ecclesiastical construction. This was due in part to the significance some placed on Gothic architecture as a perfect melding between religious and creative values.

American Collegiate Gothic is predominately an early 20<sup>th</sup> century style. The primary difference between general Gothic Revival and Collegiate Gothic Revival is one of massing. Collegiate Gothic buildings are typically rectangular in plan, and frequently have flat rooflines. The multiple spired towers, heavily sculpted façades, and irregular massing more common with religious versions of the Gothic style are missing. Architects and clients specifically selected the Collegiate Gothic for its direct connotations with the two most renowned academic institutions in the world, Oxford and Cambridge. The style was commonly used by school districts during this time, and a pictorial review of larger public schools built during the 1910s shows that Collegiate Gothic is one of the most common styles, with Beaux Arts/Neo-Classical Revival a distant second followed by a few Mission Revival examples, mostly centered in California.<sup>29</sup> Occasionally one finds Gothic Revival details mixed with Classical or Tudor Revival detailing.

Jacobean is an imprecise term that is used to describe early 17<sup>th</sup> century English architecture. Classical design elements (columns, pediments, arches) were combined with stepped northern European gables, and Gothic detailing (particularly

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<sup>29</sup> Briggs.

tracery windows and leaded glass). The style is very uncommon in the United States and is most typically used by the upper-classes for estate houses. Jacobean Revival is often considered a subtype of Gothic or Tudor Revival and had a limited popularity from around 1895-1920.

Examples: Central, Gault, Gray, Jason Lee, and McCarver

## **Modern**

Many modern styles were heavily influenced by new building technologies and the rising cost of materials, which necessitated a change in traditional building patterns. The use of poured concrete, concrete block, expansive window walls, engineered wood products (including plywood) and new plastics were common components of this style.

Many architects in Tacoma focused on the International Style, which tried to break with the past by rejecting all historical ornament, and often historical forms as well. The International Style was named after an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1931. This exhibit showcased works by well-known European architects Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius. The style was praised for its ability to move beyond slavishly copying previous architectural forms, and instead “emulating the great styles of the past in their essence without imitating their surface.” The design details that increasingly surfaced with this style were flat roofs and glass or brick walls without ornament. Another modern substyle is Neo-Expressionist, which can be identified by massive sculptural shapes, lack of symmetry and a direct connection with the immediate landscape. In many cases examples of this style failed to move beyond planning and model stages, and could be more fanciful than pragmatic.

Examples: Baker, Central (1967 addition) DeLong, Downing, Grant (1955 remodel), Hoyt, Hunt, Lowell, Park Avenue, and Whitman schools

## **Vernacular**

The term vernacular is a Latin derivative meaning “native, indigenous.” It is often used to describe speech patterns and dialects, but architectural historians use it to describe common building forms, or folk architecture as well. Many vernacular buildings are those built from pattern books that were passed from builder to builder. These structures often feature simple forms. Some may have distinct architectural styles, but are still considered “folk” architecture. There is no real time period for the vernacular style. It is among the earliest architectural forms, predates architects, and is still being constructed today.

Many elementary schools, and in some localities small high schools, were simple brick and stone constructions with very few architectural details. Roofs were

typically hipped and façades sported rows of large arched or flat-topped windows to provide light. Buildings were symmetrical. These structures are so simple that many consider them “style-less.” The schools were often rectangular in plan and utilized bays of classrooms, usually in blocks of two or four, a design that was heavily promoted by the Tacoma Schools’ Architect Frederick Heath. Illustrations of this type are ubiquitous in period publications.

Examples: Arlington (1924 school) and Barlow Annex

# APPENDIX B

## INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL BIOGRAPHIES

### **Central Elementary School (Currently Central Administration), 1912, Frederick Heath**

The original Central School, built in 1883, was located at South 11<sup>th</sup> and G Streets, the site of the current Bates Vocational Institute. A rise in the city's population necessitated a new elementary school building, and the new Central Elementary School was planned in 1912. The cornerstone for the brick, sandstone and terracotta building was laid on November 22, 1912. The school, widely reported by the local press as being "among the best of its kind in the West, if not the nation," had a four story main building with an eight-story tower. The main section of the building housed twenty-four schoolrooms but was designed to accommodate a twelve room expansion at a later date. The building was the largest school in the city and reported to be one of the largest in the west. It was sited to take advantage of territorial views of Mt. Rainier, the port, and Tacoma. Designed by the firm of Heath and Gove (Heath served as the Tacoma School District Architect at this time) the building was considered modern in every possible way, and was called a "house of glass" for the remarkable amount of glazing which provided tremendous interior light. Heath, who worked in a number of revival styles, selected Gothic Revival for this structure. The press made several observations that the style was English Gothic, the same as used for the campuses of Cambridge and Oxford. No expense was spared in creating Tacoma's own institution for enlightenment. The building had an estimated cost of \$185,000, which would be worth approximately \$71,464,677.08 in today's dollars.

The sub-basement had a driveway that opened onto 7<sup>th</sup> Street. This provided access to a garage and a storage area for school desks and supplies in addition to a mechanic's office and heating plant. The next floor (at times referred to the "basement" even though it was above grade) provided space for four playrooms, one each for large and small girls and boys. This arrangement at this level, which opened directly into the u-shaped enclosed courtyard in the back, was reported as a long-desired feature by parents who were concerned about older and younger children placed together in the same play-groups. This floor originally held a large domestic science department, and was equipped with a modern laundry, a model bedroom, a pantry, cold storage cupboards and a cooling closet. This area was to benefit those girls not going beyond eighth grade. The tremendous influx of immigrants in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century led to expanded domestic science departments as schools were tasked with teaching young females how to cook "American" meals, and address hygienic concerns. A woodworking workshop for boys was also on this level.

The arrangement of the top floors was less publicized, but appeared to have large departmental rooms and classrooms with roll-up partitions. When all partitions

were lifted, the created area could seat 400 students for an assembly. The school library and a teachers parlor were also located on this floor. All classrooms were connected by telephone to the principal's office, a modern marvel at the time.

Period reports vary as to the location of the district doctors, dentists, and nurses. Some newspaper articles indicate these staff members were housed in the tower, while other articles indicate that the top floor provided office space for this staff division. Also on the top floor was a special open-air room, developed for students with Tuberculosis. While not finished at the same time as the rest of the school, this room was designed to be open on all sides (period newspapers indicate that the windows may have stayed open year round, and that the room faced south) and was intended to provide fresh air for the sick children. This feature, which was common in Chicago and eastern cities, was a modern technique for working with sickly students. Outdoor study and recitation periods were broken up with breathing exercises and physical activity. The use of open-air school was first documented in Charlottenburg, Germany, in 1904. The eight-story tower contained the offices of the school board, the superintendent, secretary and space for Central's principal. Office space for the district's architect, Frederick Henry Heath, was also included in the upper portion of the tower. The amazing modern technologies showcased in the building, combined with the sheer size of the structure led a period newspaper to proudly proclaim: "One of the Finest Public School Buildings in America... Central Has No Superior."

The bell from the old Central School (cast in 1883) was hung in the bell tower. The bell was cast by J.H. Lister, father of Alfred Lister (president of the school board) and Governor Ernest Lister. J. H. Lister owned the first foundry in Tacoma. David Lister, J.H.'s brother, was a member of the Tacoma Board of Education.

During World War II the courtyard of Central was a staging place for the war-time steel drive. Row after row of steel cans were flattened into a more compact, transportable form by a steam roller, loaned by the public works department. The war-time drive was popular with the students, who delightedly picket up the cans after flattening. More than 166,110 pounds of steel was collected in Tacoma, and sent to San Francisco for recycling. The 1949 earthquake, which damaged several school buildings to the point they were razed, barely impacted Central at all. The newspaper did report that on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of the tower, the entire curriculum library (all 12,000 volumes) flew off the shelves and onto the floor.



**Central Elementary School circa 1920, Tacoma Public Library BU-11306**

In 1967 a multi-story addition, designed by Tacoma architect Robert A. Parker, was added off the administrative tower to provide additional space for business offices, computers, and instructional resource storage. Two floors of the tower were remodeled at this time as well. As administrative needs for the district increased, and the number of school-aged children living downtown decreased, Central School increasingly became an administrative center. By 1968 the school serviced 165 students, and primarily occupied the third floor of the building. The rest of the building was used for administrative offices. The decision to move the remaining students to the reorganized McCarver School was made, starting with the 1969-70 academic year.

### **Fern Hill Elementary School, 1911, Heath & Gove**

The first Fern Hill School was built in 1880 on a two-acre plot donated by settler G. W. Byrd. The current building is the third building on the site, which started as a four-room brick unit designed by the architectural firm of Heath & Gove in 1911. The building was designed so additional units could be added to enlarge the structure. In 1919 a sixteen-room addition was completed by the general contracting firm the Knoell Brothers. The architect for this addition is not listed in period accounts.

In 1925 a large addition was completed. The two-story section had four additional classrooms and a basement, while the one-story section held an assembly hall, teachers' rooms, a stage, dressing rooms and a kitchen. This addition was part of the 2.4 million dollar bond that added 6 middle schools and paid for additions and renovations on several elementary schools approved by Tacoma voters in 1923. A 1955 bond paid for an addition in 1957, which added another twelve classrooms and a new kitchen. The architect for this was Nelson J. Morrison, and the general contractor was Norman Strom.

The community was exceptionally proud of this school, and plans to tear down the vintage building met with intense opposition during the mid-1990s. The neighborhood packed community meetings and encouraged school officials to remodel the vintage building which anchors one of Tacoma's historic neighborhoods. The school board listened, and in 2005 the building was renovated and substantial additions were completed. The original 1888 school bell was placed in a new tower at this time. BLRB Architects was the firm responsible for the remodel, and Babbit Newman served as the general contractor. In 2005 the Tacoma Landmarks Commission gave a preservation award to Fern Hill Elementary School and Friends for keeping the historic building instead of demolishing it.



**Fern Hill Elementary School in  
1928, Tacoma Public Library BU-  
11312**

### **Gault Middle School, 1925, Hill & Mock**

The Franklin B. Gault Middle School was named after the man who served as superintendent of Tacoma Schools from 1888-1892. Gault, a native of Ohio, received a B.S. from Cornell in 1877 and a Masters in 1897. In 1901 he earned a doctorate from the University of Wooster. He served as superintendent of city schools for Tama, Iowa from 1877-81, Mason City, Iowa from 1881-83, Pueblo, Colorado from 1883-1888, and Tacoma from 1888-1892. He then organized the

University of Idaho, serving as its first president from 1892-1898 and reorganized Whitworth College as its president from 1899-1906 and last served as president of the University of South Dakota from 1906-1913.

In 1923 Tacoma voters authorized an intermediate school building program at a cost of more than \$2.4 million dollars. The goal of the program was to transition Tacoma from the old grade school-high school program (the 8-4 plan) to a more modern grade school-intermediate-high school plan known as the 6-3-3 due to the number of grades in each division. The program provided funds for additions to several elementary schools and build six new schools, Jason Lee, James P. Stewart, Morton M. McCarver, Captain Robert Gray, Allan C. Mason, and Franklin B. Gault. Gault was the last of the six to be constructed. Gault was one of three new middle schools (which included Gray and Mason) that opened on the same day in February 1926.

Architect Roland E. Borhek was originally hired by the school district to design both Gault and Mason schools, but was removed after disputes concerning massive cost increases at Jason Lee and Stewart Middle Schools. After his dismissal the architectural firm of Hill & Mock was hired to design both Mason and Gault, and the specifications for the two were practically the same. It featured boys' and girls' gymnasiums, 13 instruction rooms, administrative offices, lunchrooms and accessory rooms. A hand painted stage curtain with an image of Mt. Tacoma (Rainier) rising from a tree dotted plain was one of the customized interior pieces.

Builder Dolph Jones produced the winning bid for construction of the 1943 addition but withdrew his offer shortly after it was accepted, explaining that he had bid too low on the project. Federal funds helped pay for the addition with the stipulation that the school would be used for two-shift classes.

During the early 1980s the Tacoma School District entered a joint venture with the city of Tacoma and the Metropolitan Park District to build a swimming pool at Gault. The pool is reserved for the use of Gault students during school hours and is operated by the park district for community use at other times.

An advisory committee recommended razing the current building and replacing it with a middle school in 1991. A vocal group of East Side residents spoke in favor of retaining a neighborhood school that children could walk to. In 2006 school superintendent Charlie Milligan recommended closing Gault and moving its students to McIlvaigh. This decision was based in part on declining enrollments. Community members expressed concern over the potential school closing. Some had intentionally purchased a home within walking distance of the school, and had hoped to see it renovated like Lincoln and Stadium.



**Gault Middle School in 1940  
Tacoma Public Library A9320-4**

### **Gray Middle School & Barlow Annex**

The nineteen-room Edison School opened in 1892, and was named for the neighborhood where it was located. Edison changed its name to South Tacoma in 1896 when the area was annexed to Tacoma a few years after the Northern Pacific Railway opened its mechanical shops at this location. In 1910 a twelve-room annex was added to Edison, which helped the building serve a growing student population. Tacoma's second high school was briefly located here in 1911, due to overcrowding at Stadium High. The Edison Annex housed the school, and the name was changed to Barlow High School to honor O. W. Barlow. The site served as a high school until 1914 with the opening of Lincoln High. The brick building was one of four Tacoma schools severely damaged in the April 1949 earthquake. Edison, Whitman, Willard and Lowell were all condemned as unsafe. Edison was demolished, and the Barlow Annex is all that remains.

### **Gray Middle School, 1924, E. J. Bresemann**

Gray was named for Captain Robert Gray, a naval officer and explorer, and is one of three schools in the state named in his honor. In May of 1792 he sailed his ship into the river he named Columbia. This school's name was selected in a Tacoma Daily Ledger naming contest. The original back curtain in the school's auditorium was painted to show Gray's ship anchored in Discovery Bay, and was showcased at the formal dedication of the school.

Built in 1924, the school was designed to hold 650 students, with the ability for additional units to house another 350 students if future expansion was desired. One of the highly publicized features of the new school was the large auditorium, designed to hold a thousand students, with additional capacity expansion provided by the ability to add a balcony at a later date. Two separate gymnasiums were built,

one for boys and a second for girls. In 1949 two new classrooms were added, a music room and a new library.

An eleven-room addition, designed by the architectural firm of Steifert, Forbes, and Berry, was completed in 1964. The unit connects the 1924 Gray Junior High with the 1910 Barlow Annex (which served as an elementary school at that time). The addition includes 7,000 square feet of recreational space under the structure. The elevated two-story unit originally had three science labs, three language labs, three general classrooms, and storage space.



**Gray Middle School in  
1926, Tacoma Public  
Library BU-11425**

### **Hoyt Elementary School, 1957, Robert B. Price**

Hoyt Elementary School, constructed in 1957, is affiliated with Washington Elementary in Tacoma's Proctor Neighborhood. The school was a satellite, built when plans for an addition to Washington proved too costly and time consuming for the rapidly growing school population. The four-room primary school was designed to serve 100 first, second, and third graders. Newspaper reports noted that use of standardized components simplified the job and kept costs at a minimum. Price achieved flexibility in the design by making each classroom, including the roof, an integral unit. This allowed for any number of room combinations to fit specific building needs. Classrooms were covered with dome-shaped, one-piece plywood roofs fabricated from three layers of fir glue laminated plywood. Domes were then sprayed with a polyethylene-vinyl coating similar to the "cocoon" created on Navy ships after WWII to preserve equipment. Each roof had a centered skylight, which filled classroom interiors with natural light. The domes were given a colorful painted finish in the late spring of 1959.

Concern over the new roof forms was substantial, and the Tacoma building inspector required the testing of full-scale dome mock-ups to the point of destruction. The main roof had W shaped plywood sections bolted together. The roofs were coated with an epoxied vinyl surface to withstand both moisture and sun. The product, Ren-Coat was developed by R. I Stevenson Company of Seattle and was marketed by Ren Plastics, Inc. of Lansing, Michigan.



**Hoyt Elementary  
School in 1961,  
Tacoma Public Library,  
C132475**

Tacoman Robert Billsbrough Price was one of six nationally-known architects selected by the Douglas Fir Plywood Association (now the Engineered Wood Association) to create designs. The Tacoma School District benefited from this arrangement because the Douglas Fir Plywood Association paid architect and engineering fees for the project. The association also underwrote all research costs on the design and supervised the assembly of the roof domes. The Hoyt School was the first utilization of the plan, which offered a tremendous amount of flexibility and cost savings from standardization. Each classroom, including the roof, was an integral unit. Architects from California and the East coast asked for construction details. The building was well publicized, and received a Merit Award from the South West Washington Chapter of the AIA (1962), and the “Nation’s School of the Month Award” from the National School Association (1964). Additional press was received through exhibits, including the American Association of School Administrators’ Architectural Exhibit of 1963 (Atlantic City, New Jersey), the AIA Committee of Schools and Educational Facilities Exhibition of Contemporary School Buildings in 1963 where Price was one of fifteen firms invited to participate (at the Octagon in Washington, DC). International exposure came through a number of sources, including a scale model of the school showcased at an architectural

exhibition in Moscow (USSR) in 1959 and photos of the school in Julius Hoffman's German publication of *Wood in Modern Architecture* (1966). The American Plywood Association also heavily promoted the design through their magazine, *The Timberman*, where it was featured on the January 1957 cover and their publicized research project "Schools of the Future."<sup>30</sup>

The school was named in honor of Nell Hoyt. Ms. Hoyt was president of the first state convention of the Mothers' Congress and Parent – Teachers' association, which was held in Tacoma in 1911. Ms. Hoyt served as Washington State's delegate to the second international convention of Mother's Congress and Parent – Teachers' Association in Washington, D.C., in 1911. She is widely known as the force behind the national pre-school movement, which was started here in Tacoma. Her husband was Elwell Hoyt, a druggist who served on the Tacoma School Board from 1912-1918.

### **Hunt Middle School, 1958, Robert B. Price**

Built on Highland Hill in 1958, an area of West Tacoma that saw rapid development post-World War II, Henry Frank Hunt Middle School was specifically designed to address the expanding population of Tacoma as it moved away from the historic inner core, and out into newly planned suburbs. The building was designed by Tacoma architect Robert Billsbrough Price, who was known for his relationship with the American Plywood Association. Named for Henry F. Hunt, principal of Stadium High School for sixteen years, and then district assistant superintendent for nine years, the new school was originally designed to house 700 students, in thirty-one "teaching stations." Price praised the school officials who "thought and dreamed along with me."

The structure did not have the typical acreage restraints of the district's more urbanized schools, but it did have tight budget restrictions and a need for rapid construction. While most of Tacoma's original wooden school buildings were replaced with more durable masonry construction in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a need for quick and inexpensive construction helped shift building preferences back to wood.

The plywood industry benefited from two aspects of post-World War II school construction, the need for rapid construction techniques, and a requirement to keep construction costs low. While plywood clearly excelled on both these fronts, it first had to overcome decades of educational building practices, which promoted multi-story masonry construction. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, small, outdated wooden schools were being replaced by larger, masonry structures. The reasons for the change were two-fold. First, many urban schools were looking for buildings that required less maintenance, and masonry buildings were seen as a

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<sup>30</sup> Additional publicity: film strips by the American Association of School Administrators featuring Hoyt in 1963, cover of the 1957 School Executive (focusing on roof design), and a write-up on structural design with plywood in the August 1958 edition of Architectural Forum.

more desirable long term solution to the challenge of building maintenance. Secondly, the constant threat of fire, and loss of life, was enough to coax school boards to consider more costly masonry construction. Property values in heavily urbanized areas dictated multi-story construction. A concern for rapid fire evacuation plans in large and often crowded urban schools was a serious matter debated by many school boards. However, the 1949 earthquake, where one of the most publicized deaths was that of young Lowell Elementary School student Marvin Klegman, emphasized a rising concern regarding brick school construction. Several brick school buildings were damaged beyond repair, and other students were hurt from flying debris. While the bias towards masonry still existed, school boards were interested in hearing about other alternatives, particularly those that were deemed more cost-effective.

The expansion of suburban areas post-World War II, fueled in part by inexpensive land, helped reintroduce the one story school building, which immediately assuaged fears of tightly packed children frantically searching for fire escapes. However, school boards were notoriously conservative, and unlikely to embrace new building materials. As part of a broader marketing campaign, the American Plywood Association hired architects to introduce and promote plywood products to the public. Robert Billsbrough Price had a life-long relationship with the American Plywood Association and was one of six architects hired by the organization to regularly create designs featuring their products. Price designed six schools in Tacoma that showcased plywood construction, and at least five more schools in surrounding districts.

The design of the new school was unusual, and locals weren't entirely sure what they thought of the campus, particularly the domed "cafetorium," which was criticized by some as looking like a P.T. Barnum circus tent, not only because of its shape, but the orange, blue and gray coloring of its laminated beams. The new gymnasium's utilitarian design was compared to Old MacDonald's farm due to the shed like arches topping the structure.

The "cafetorium," as the circular lunchroom and auditorium was called, was an unusual saucer shaped dome cresting the hill above the main campus. The plywood dome covers a 144 foot span with 20 bays formed from huge, curved, 7" by 26" glue-laminated beams. Roof costs for this structure were estimated at 15 cents per square foot. The "cafetorium" was heated separately from the rest of the building, and could be used for community projects. The main block of classrooms were constructed from 1/2" plywood. Large quantities of Texture One-Eleven (T 1-11) were used for exterior and interior paneling. The gymnasium had arched stressed-skin plywood panel vaults on glue-lam beams. Six of the 16 foot glue-laminated arches covered the 98x72 foot building. The design for the vaults was unusual and Tacoma school board officials required structural tests before allowing their construction. The Douglas Fir Plywood Association tested a prototype panel, which held 7,300 pounds of bricks for a load of 120 psf across the span, more than

four times the specified design load. The vaults were fabricated by Peter Bilder of Panel-Bild Systems in Edmonds, Washington.



**Hunt Middle School  
circa 1959, Tacoma  
Public Library,  
A120358-76**

While the design merits may have been questioned by the community, period newspapers lauded the building as an example of “highly individualized wood and plywood design.” Considerable attention was devoted to the building cost, a low \$11.54 per square foot, which included sales tax, paving, equipment and fees.<sup>31</sup> (Total budget was \$850,000). Roofing material cost was estimated at \$1.10 per square foot. Bids came in 15% below estimates. While comparative numbers have been difficult to locate, statistics from the Educational Facilities Laboratory in 1960 indicate that the median cost per square foot of schools in the west was \$14.64. Hunt’s cost of \$11.54 represented an amazing 21% reduction in costs. Costs were saved by eliminating many of the interior corridors, which were replaced by open courtyards (some accented with pools of water) and covered exterior corridors. The elimination of interior hallways also helped remove the monotony of long corridors. Dimensions were so carefully selected that there was very little supply waste on the construction site. Price bragged that there wasn’t “an extra piece of plywood lumber in the building – the contractor didn’t have enough left over to build a good fire.” The savings from using plywood construction were trumpeted loudly by the Douglas Fir Plywood Association.

In September of 1958 more than 100 school officials from all over the United States descended on Tacoma to examine the widely publicized school. Members of the National Council on Schoolhouse Construction, which had been meeting in

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<sup>31</sup> By comparison, Woodrow Wilson High School, also constructed in 1958, cost \$16.46 square foot.

Seattle, drove down to Tacoma for a tour of the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company, Woodlam, Inc., the Douglas Fir Plywood Association, and the Puget Sound Plywood Company. The conference members represented districts expected to spend more than two billion dollars in new school construction in the next year.

National publicity for Hunt included: a citation and visit by the American Association of School Administrators (1958), the School Building Architectural Exhibit, by the National Council on School House Construction (1961), School Buildings Architectural Exhibit sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators, which was shown at regional conventions in San Francisco, St. Louis, and Philadelphia (1961). A filmstrip produced by the American Association of School Administrators featured Hunt in 1961. The building was showcased in several print publications including the Washington State School Director's Newsletter of 1961, *Architectural Record's* "Building Types Study of Schools" (1960), the British publication of *Modern American Schools* by the Contractor's Record and Municipal Engineering (1961) and a German publication that also featured Hoyt, *Wood in Modern Architecture* by Julius Hoffman (1966?). Additionally, construction photographs were ordered by the Douglas Fir Plywood Association, and American Lumberman (Chicago) for their own advertising materials.

### **Jason Lee Middle School, 1924, Roland E. Borhek**

Called West Intermediate School during the planning stages, the final name of Jason Lee was selected after deliberating between a number of names, including Woodrow Wilson. Jason Lee was a New York based Methodist-Episcopal missionary who served in Oregon Territory from 1834 until 1845. Lee primarily served as a missionary to Native Americans but was very active in creating territorial schools. He helped to create the petition for a territorial government and was founder of Willamette University. He also established the first school in Oregon and the first school in Pierce County. The Tacoma school is one of three schools named after Lee in the state.

Jason Lee perhaps more so than any other school in this study served as a city anchor by providing space for numerous non-school related functions. This seems to be due to a number of factors; the site's central location, located between the North End and Hilltop, and the size of the school's auditorium, which could seat more than 1,000 people. In 1927 the school, along with Lincoln High School, provided space for a Tacoma Religious Week Program. In 1932 more than 1,000 people filled the auditorium to listen to the National Girl Scout Association president speak. During the 1940s the school hosted Norwegian crown prince Olav and crown princess Artha and Minnesota Governor Harold E. Stassen, the youngest American governor, who was a political celebrity at that time.

Jason Lee was built on the old campus site of the College of Puget Sound. There are reports that it might be the first true middle school in Washington State, although these have not yet been substantiated. The school was designed by

Roland E. Borhek, architect of Tacoma's Rialto Theatre. Borhek was originally hired to design all six of the new intermediate schools, but massive cost over-runs on construction costs created a rift between Borhek and the school district and he was dismissed in 1924. Only two of the original middle schools, Stewart and Lee were designed by him. The other four schools were designed by other architects. While different historical details are used to ornament Lee and Stewart Middle Schools, the two are clearly the most formally designed and ornate of the six schools. In 1927 Borhek received an award from the Washington State Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for his design of Jason Lee.

Jason Lee was designed to accommodate approximately 1,200 students, and was the largest of the six original intermediate schools. When it opened it held 7-9<sup>th</sup> grades, including the entire freshman class of Stadium High. This helped relieve congestion at Stadium and several elementary schools. Period reports indicate that classes were segregated by gender, which might explain why there were two gymnasiums and two study halls in the original plan. In addition to dozens of classrooms, the interior of the school had a number of vocational training rooms, which was in keeping with contemporary thoughts regarding intermediary school training. There was a model housekeeping suite, which held a girls' rest room, dining room, small kitchen and a bath. Two sewing rooms, a fitting room, lecture room, three art rooms and domestic science rooms rounded out the area used by the female students. Male students made use of the manual training shops, which included a machine shop, tool room, and carpenter shop (these were located in the north wing of the building.) A key feature of the original building was the large two-tiered auditorium, which seated 1,350.



**Jason Lee Middle School, 1925,  
Tacoma Public Library, A-965**

In 1988 there was concern that the metal pins anchoring brick veneer to the concrete structure might not sustain an earthquake. In 2001 the structure underwent a 27 million dollar remodeling project which gutted most of the interior and removed the entire back wall of the building for an addition. The two interior courtyards were also filled in during this time. While some preservationists were critical of this method, period newspaper articles indicate that the building had gone through numerous interior modifications through the years. In 1968 a new gym and

industrial arts complex were added, which necessitated the reworking of the original industrial arts rooms located in the main building. During the 1968 the auditorium underwent a remodel which dropped the ceiling and covered much of the original plasterwork with wood paneling and new trim. A major focus point of the 2001 remodel was restoring the original auditorium design, including replacing missing plasterwork.

### **Lyon Elementary School, 1924, Hill & Mock**

The original Mary Lyon School was a one-room portable at South 46<sup>th</sup> and A streets in September of 1909. The school was named for Mary Lyon, who started Mount Holyoke Woman's College in Massachusetts in 1837, and served as president until her death in 1849.

The current building was constructed in 1924, and was designed by the architectural firm of Hill & Mock. This firm was also responsible for the Madison School, which was built at the same time as Lyon, and is almost identical. Both schools had six classrooms, a combination playroom and auditorium, with principal and teachers' rooms. Both were described as tile construction with a cement stucco finish. An addition designed by the architectural firm of Mock and Morrison was approved in 1948. The addition, which more than doubled the size of the original school, had six-classrooms and also included a combined assembly-lunchroom. The architectural firm of Mock and Morrison was responsible for the design.



**Lyon Elementary School, 1924,  
Tacoma Public Library, BU-  
11326**

## **McCarver Elementary School, 1925, Hill & Mock**

Erected on the grounds of the original Logan Grade School, McCarver served as an intermediary school when it first opened. The architectural firm of Hill & Mock designed the building, which was to accommodate about 900 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. In 1938, with the closure of Lincoln Elementary, McCarver offered a mixture of both elementary and middle school courses. Since 1968 it has served as an elementary school. In 1964 plans were proposed to convert the junior high into an advanced high school that ran for 14 hours a day, 11 months a year. Part of the proposal was to also change the school's name to "John F. Kennedy Memorial High School," as a tribute to the assassinated president. Students would stay enrolled at their home schools and would only attend the new high school for a portion of each day. The proposal was never implemented.

The school was named for Morton Mathew McCarver, a native of Kentucky. McCarver was an early pioneer, farmer, goldminer and politician. He was elected to the Oregon legislature in 1844 and to the California legislature in the 1860s. In 1868 he bought the Carr claim in Tacoma and the next year built the first clapboard house in what was to become Tacoma.

The building was designed with twenty-two classrooms, and two gymnasiums. The basement level had a lunchroom, printing laboratory, a classroom, two bicycle and locker rooms, heating plant and building mechanical rooms. The main floor housed a large auditorium, two gymnasiums, locker rooms, shower rooms, three sewing rooms, carpentry shop, mechanical drawing room, library, principal's office, public office and classrooms. The top floor accommodated a music room, two commercial rooms, sheet metal shop, art room, electrical shop, conference rooms, two science laboratories, five classrooms and teacher's rest rooms. The Washington State Chapter of the American Institute of Architects awarded McCarver an honorable mention in its city-wide building survey.



**McCarver Middle School,  
1925, Tacoma Public Library,  
A-853**

During the late years of WWII and in the immediate post-war era, students had access to the school basement and gymnasium as part of an after hour recreational center program. The program was run in cooperation with the Metropolitan Park District starting in 1944. Teenage centers and athletic centers for boys were funded by the school district in the winter, and the park district funded summer playgrounds, beaches and recreational facilities at Salishan and Lincoln Heights housing projects. During March of 1946 more than 4,000 youths took part in games and dances at Fern Hill, Oakland, Mason, McCarver. Gymnasiums were open at Gray, Jason Lee, McCarver, Mason, Stewart, and Gault. More than 2,000 young men participated in these programs. A planned closing of the school's recreational center in 1946 led to a student protest, which succeeded in keeping the program open for a while longer.

In 1961 plans were made for an auxiliary unit to serve elementary students. A new nine-room building located to the south of the main building was opened in 1962. The unit designed by the architectural firm of Worthen, Wing, Seifert & Forbes housed kindergarten, first, second and third grade students in addition to additional office space and a multi-purpose room. The Northwest Division of the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People attempted to block construction of the primary unit on the grounds of the school, claiming it would lead to a segregated school. They did not succeed, but in following years the district did change resource allotment to address growing concerns over self-segregated schools. In 1968 the decision was made for McCarver to transition into an elementary school. Students from the former Central Elementary (which was then being used for an administrative building) also transferred to the site. Junior high students attending McCarver were transferred to other schools in the district. The decision to alter school district resources was made to eliminate de facto segregation. The majority of students attending McCarver Middle School were black. After closure of the middle school these students were bused to other middle schools in the district.

### **McKinley Elementary, 1908, Frederick Heath**

The first McKinley School opened in 1906 at East H and Columbia Streets, and was named for William McKinley, the 25<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, who was assassinated in 1901. The present school was constructed in 1908. Almost no primary source material has been found documenting the school.

Architect John Sutton was retained by the school board to design the 1957-58 addition. The modern wing wrapped around the front and one side of the main building, providing seven additional classrooms, a new entry area, administrative offices, and an all-purpose room. The classroom extension on the north end was built on raised stilts, providing play area for children. Translucent panels on the roof provided light to interior corridor and portions of the classrooms.



**McKinley Elementary School, no date, Tacoma Public Library, BU-11336**

In 1999 Tacoma artists Jim Robbins and Bob Henry painted an exterior mural on the south wall of the school. The two artists worked closely with McKinley students, the Eastside Neighborhood Council, the Safe Streets Campaign, and community activist Julie Martinez. The painting highlights the theme of diversity, featuring Mt. Rainier, a heart-shaped globe, and a face divided into quarters with each piece showcasing different ethnic features. In 2005 the school district considered closing McKinley and sending students to Gault. Parents fought hard against the potential closure and were successful in keeping the school open.

### **Oakland Elementary School, 1912, Heath & Gove**

The original Oakland School was constructed in 1899. The current building, designed by the architectural firm of Heath & Gove, was constructed in 1912 near the site of the original building. Its Tudor-Gothic (or Jacobean) design was described by the local press as a mixture of “English Gothic and Early Classicals.” Period newspapers mention a slate roof on the structure, which would have represented a substantial investment by the school board, although no sign of the original roofing material is currently visible. The original building had twelve rooms. Chalmers and Person served as the project contractors. A 1958 addition included an all-purpose room, four classrooms, the principal’s office, a faculty workroom and a first-aid room. The addition was designed by Tacoma architect Silas E. Nelsen and was built by Graham General Contractors.



**Oakland Elementary, 1928, Tacoma Public Library, BU-10265**

## **Stewart Middle School, 1924, Roland Borhek**

Stewart Middle School was named for James P. Stewart, who served as Tacoma's first teacher from 1869-1870. He farmed hops in the Puyallup Valley and was the first mayor of Puyallup. He also was an organizer of the Pacific National Bank of Tacoma and elected to the territorial legislature in 1886. This is one of three schools in the state named for him.

In 1923 Tacoma voters authorized an intermediate school building program at a cost of more than \$2.4 million dollars. The goal was to transition Tacoma from the old grade school-high school program (the 8-4 plan) to a more modern grade school-intermediate-high school plan known as the 6-3-3 due to the number of grades in each division. The program provided funds for additions to several elementary schools and built six new schools, Jason Lee, James P. Stewart, Morton M. McCarver, Captain Robert Gray, Allan C. Mason, and Franklin B. Gault. Stewart was the second of these schools to open.



**Stewart Middle School, 1926,  
Tacoma Public Library, BU-  
10249**

A 1964 addition designed by the architectural firm of Liddle & Jones added six classrooms, an arts room, a crafts room, a multipurpose room, storage space, and a teachers' conference room. An addition in 1974 provided space for an industrial arts program.

## **Wainwright Elementary School, 1924, Shaw & Shaw**

The main section of the current building, designed by the architectural firm Shaw and Shaw, was constructed in 1924 by T. Holberg. In 1948 an addition on the left portion of the building included four new classrooms and a lunch assembly room. The architectural firm of Mock and Morrison designed the addition, while Steiro & Hansen served as the general contractors. The building, originally named Regents Park, was renamed to honor General Jonathan Wainwright at this time. Wainwright, native of Walla Walla, was a World War II hero who served in the Pacific. He assumed command of American forces in the Philippines in 1942, when General MacArthur left for Australia. Wainwright was taken captive by the Japanese that same year, and remained a prisoner of war until mid-1945.

In 1955 the district proposed another addition with outside corridors as part of a larger construction plan, which included a twelve-room addition. Exterior corridors were popular in post-World War II construction for helping to control increasingly high building costs. Parents were not happy with the plan, and more than 150 people protested the design at a school board meeting. Community requests included attaching the new addition to the original building, interior corridors, inside restrooms, an interior playroom, and brick facing to match the original structure instead of concrete block. All of these requests countered the addition's first design, as presented by architect Lyle Swedberg. Swedberg's original plan, while keeping with design trends of the time, was clearly was not popular with parents and neighbors. Community activists claimed the design was no better than replacing temporary portables with permanent portables. The school board seemed surprised by the intense concerns raised at the meeting, and were quick to point out that were a dozen other school districts in the region with exterior corridor buildings. However, the board acquiesced to neighborhood concerns. The new twelve-room addition was finished in 1958, and provided additional classroom space and a playroom in one wing that could be locked off from the rest of the building, providing an area for community use. Modern amenities included individual thermostats in each room and plexi-glass "window walls."



**Wainwright Elementary School, 1924,  
Tacoma Public Library, BU-11350**

# APPENDIX C

## ARCHITECT BIOGRAPHIES

### **Roland E. Borhek**

Born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Borhek studied at Lehigh University in Bethlehem before moving to Boston to work for the firm of A. Warren Gould. Borhek served as chief draftsman and followed Gould to Seattle in 1905. While in Seattle, Borhek assisted in the design of the American Savings Bank and the Empire buildings. These buildings were the second and third reinforced concrete structures in the United States. By 1908 Borhek took a position with the Tacoma firm of Heath & Twitchell and by 1910 had opened his own firm. He served as president of the Tacoma Society of Architects for a decade and was vice-president of the Washington State chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1926. Borhek was originally hired to create designs for all six of Tacoma's original middle schools. However, Jason Lee and Stewart cost significantly more than his estimates, and period sources indicate that the tension over increased fees eventually led to his dismissal by the district. Other architects furnished plans for the remaining four middle schools.

Notable works: the Puget Sound Bank Building (1912), Rialto Theatre (1918), and the Tacoma Motors Company (1919), Stewart Middle School (1924), and Jason Lee Middle School (1924, possibly the first middle school in Washington State).

### **Emanuel J. Bresemann**

Born in Spanaway, Washington, Emanuel J. Bresemann worked in Everett for the Robinson Manufacturing Company and then the Everett Sash Company. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century he enrolled in a correspondence architecture class taught by Tacoma architect, Ambrose J. Russell. In 1905 Bresemann moved to California and studied architecture at the Humboldt Technical School of San Francisco. After graduation he formed a partnership with fellow student Morien Eugene Durfee (Bresemann & Durfee). The firm operated in Seattle for about four years, and then relocated to British Columbia for the following four years. Bresemann returned to Tacoma in 1916 and worked with the firm of Heath, Gove and Bell for a short time before opening his own practice.

Notable works: Weyerhaeuser School in Eatonville, Steilacoom School (1916), McMillin School (1924, National Register) in Puyallup, Gray Middle School (1924), Waller Road School in Puyallup (1935), Orting Grade School (1929), Deiringer School in Sumner (1928, National Register), Tumwater Grade School (1937). In Tacoma he was responsible for a number of different buildings, including the Manly-Thompson Ford Agency (1918), and St. John's Lutheran Church (Luther Memorial Church) (1909), and Xavier Hall at Pacific Lutheran University (1936).

## **Frederick Heath (Heath & Gove, Heath, Gove, & Bell)**

Frederick Heath served as the official school architect for Tacoma from 1902 through 1920. Heath formed a number of partnerships: Spaulding, Russell & Heath, Russell & Heath, Heath & Twitchell, Heath & Gove, Heath, Gove & Bell. Through these various firms, Heath was responsible for a number of significant buildings in Tacoma and, completed more than 600 projects. Design work was far reaching and varied from private residences, commercial buildings, and fraternal lodges, to churches, hospitals and school buildings.

Frederick Henry Heath, principal of the firm, was born April 15, 1861, in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. As a child his family moved to Caledonia, Minnesota. After high school Heath moved to Minneapolis and worked for a newspaper. Unhappy with his choice of professions, Heath decided to work in the construction industry instead. He eventually secured a position with Warren H. Hayes, a local architect. Heath spent twelve years in Hayes' employment, ten of which he served as chief draftsman. Heath moved to Tacoma in the late 1800s, searching for a climate more suitable for his wife's health. By 1896 he opened his own architectural office and in 1901 he became principal in the firm of Spaulding, Russell & Heath. After the departure of Spaulding in 1901, the firm became Russell & Heath, but by 1903 Heath had decided to work on his own again. During this time Heath was appointed as architect for the Tacoma School District. While Heath worked individually for most of his later career, he did form the short-lived firm of Heath & Twitchell from 1908 to 1910. Lither Twitchell was a former colleague who had worked with Heath under Warren Hayes in Minneapolis.

Heath spent considerable time developing what he called the "Unit School" which he felt helped resourcefully address growing school populations and the need for constant building additions. The basic plan was to use a two-story design with a daylight basement and classrooms flanking a central corridor. The school was a four-classroom module, with two units per a floor. Adding a second module created an eight-classroom design, and so on with additional expansions. Fern Hill Elementary was designed using this plan, and additions followed this model as well. The Unit School seems to be indicative of a broader national approach that shows up in school literature at this time. Heath may have been better read on this subject than his contemporaries, or may have reached the same basic design independently.

Heath received a patent for a hollow wall tile in 1917. Period newspapers reported the tiles as costing less than brick, equal in strength, and weighing 42% less. The federal government purchased Heath's tile for all the buildings at the Rockwell Aviation Field and Navy Buildings in San Diego. Heath continued to work until the time of his death in 1953. He was 91 years old.

George Gove arrived in Tacoma in 1908. Period newspaper accounts indicate that he had studied in Europe briefly, but additional information on his early

career has been elusive. Although he collaborated with Heath for many years, Gove was also a respected architect in his own right. He was responsible for a number of buildings at the Western State Hospital in Steilacoom and two academic buildings at the University of Washington, Seattle, Communications Hall and Thomson Hall. Gove had a strong interest in professional development and served on the Washington Board of Examiners for Architects and was a founder of the Tacoma Society of Architects. Gove also aided architectural students and sponsored several sketching and design competitions. The American Institute of Architects honored him with a national citation for his work in 1949. He died less than a decade later, in 1956.

The final partner of the Heath, Gove & Bell firm was Herbert Bell, a Tacoma native. Bell studied architecture at the National Academy of Design in New York and started working with Heath & Gove upon his return to Tacoma. He was promoted to partner in 1914.

Notable works: McKinley Elementary (1908), Barlow Annex (1910), Oakland School (1912), Lincoln High (1913); the Swiss (1913); Trinity Methodist Church (1915); First Methodist Church (1916, demolished); Paradise Inn (1917) at Mt. Rainier; Central School (1912), Bethany Presbyterian (1924); Toby Jones Home (1924); First Baptist Church (1925); and 6th Avenue Baptist Church (1925).

Frederick Heath was responsible for a number of buildings either independent of the firm or with his earlier partner, George Gove, including St. Patrick's Catholic Church, First Church of Christ Scientist, Central School, Washington Elementary and the Rhodes Department Store.

### **Hill & Mock (Mock & Morrison)**

Irwin H. Hill was a University of Illinois graduate, originally associated with Tacoma architect George W. Bullard. Ernest Thornton Mock also worked for George W. Bullard, starting as a draftsman. Mock, a Tacoma native, attended Bryant and Emerson schools, and graduated from the Tacoma High School when it was located on the current Central Administration site. Mock's father, Charles Wesley Mock, arrived in Tacoma in 1881 and served as clerk for the school district.

Hill and Mock formed an architectural firm, which lasted from 1918 until 1923. Shortly after Hill's death in 1928 the firm became Mock and Morrison, and in later years was reorganized as just Morrison Architects. The firm designed several dozen buildings, but specialized in school construction.

Nelson John Morrison, a Tacoma native and graduate of Stadium High School, attended the University of California and the University of Pennsylvania, where he received his Bachelors in architecture. He was the first president elected (1954) of the South Western Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He served as mayor of Fircrest from 1945-52.

Notable works: Fife High School (1919), Lakeview School (1921, demolished), Central School Puyallup (1923, demolished), Meeker School Puyallup (1923), Mary Lyon Elementary School (1924), Madison Elementary School (1924), McCarver Middle School (1925), Gault Middle School (1925), Puyallup High School (1927), Clover Park Middle School (1928).

### **Robert Billsbrough Price**

A Tacoma native, Robert Billsbrough Price attended Stadium High School before beginning his architectural training at the University of Washington. His education was interrupted by World War II and after serving in the United States Navy he returned to the University of Washington and earned a Bachelor's degree in Architecture in 1946. He then earned a Masters of Architecture degree from MIT in 1948. He returned to Tacoma and worked with architect James C. Gardiner before opening his own practice in 1949. In 1956, the firm was featured in Progressive Architecture magazine- the youngest firm at that time featured in the magazine. Price was one of the most prolific architects in the Tacoma region from the 1950s until the 1970s.

Price won fifty-nine national, regional and local awards for design excellence. His ability to keep project costs manageable while designing flexible building types that could easily accept the additions so common in post-WWII era construction are hallmarks of his work. He was one of six architects selected nationally to work with the American Plywood Association and was recognized for his innovative use of engineered wood. This collaboration culminated with the award winning design of Hoyt Elementary School (1957). The Tacoma Fire Station Number 17 (1955) and his own architectural office (1963) also won awards. He earned a certificate of Merit from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development for the architectural design of two Tacoma housing authority projects in 1967. Other projects were featured in a variety of magazines including Sunset, House and Garden, and Architectural Record. He designed a variety of building types, but specialized in educational projects. In 1966, became the first architect in Tacoma to be honored by induction into the AIA College of Fellows.

Notable works: Baker Middle School (1954), Curtis Junior High School in University Place (1957); Hoyt Elementary School (1957), Hunt Middle School (1958), Mount Tahoma High School (1961); Sherman Elementary School (1954); Aberdeen Senior High School (c 1960); Puyallup Jr. High School (c. 1959); Temple Beth El (1968), Olson Physical Education Building at Pacific Lutheran University (1969).

## **Shaw & Shaw**

Brothers Frederic and Stanley T. Shaw moved from Michigan to Tacoma in 1895, as one of the areas pioneer families. Their father was Rev. Robert P. Shaw, in interim minister during the organization of Immanuel Presbyterian. Frederic Shaw started as a draftsman for Frederick Heath in 1904. He later worked for a number of architects, including C.A. Darmer and Seattle architect James Teague. While employed by the City of Tacoma Engineer's Office, Frederic designed Engine House No. 4 at 220 East 26<sup>th</sup> Street. After WWI the brothers started their architectural firm, which lasted until 1929.

Notable works: Wainwright School (1924), Dash Point Elementary (1924), Muscek Building (1924), Tacoma Gospel Tabernacle (1923), First United Presbyterian (1922), and Goodwill Industries (1930).

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|    | A             | B                                    | C       | D   | E                         | F                            | H  | I   | K                      | L   | N  |
|----|---------------|--------------------------------------|---------|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|---|------------------------|---|--|
| 1  | Survey Site # | Name                                 | Ranking | Historic Name   | Date                      | Additio n                    | Architect  | Builder/Contractor  | Neighborhood           | Address   | Style                                      |
| 2  | 1             | Arlington Elementary School          | 2       |   | 1924                      | 1954                         | Hill & Mock (1924)   | Dolph Jones (1924)  | Arlington              | 3002 S. 72nd St., 98409                               | Vernacular/Modern                          |
| 3  | 15            | Baker Middle School                  | 3       | John S. Baker Junior High School  | 1954                      | 1963, 1969, 1979             | Perros & Robert Price (1954)                                   |   | South Tacoma/Fern Hill | 8320 S. 1 St., 98408                                  | Modern                                     |
| 4  | 22            | Central Administration Building      | 1       | Central Elementary School   | 1912                      | 1967                         | Frederick Heath (Heath & Gove) (1912) Robert A. Parker (1967)  | F.H. Goss, cont. (1912)   |                        | 601 S. 8th St., 98405 & 708 S. G St. (Annex)          | Collegiate Gothic                          |
| 5  | 2             | DeLong Elementary School             | 3       |   | 1953                      | 1958, 1963, 1986             |  |   | West End               | 4901 S. 14th St., 98405                               | Modern                                     |
| 6  | 3             | Downing Elementary School            | 3       | Mont Downing Elementary School  | 1948                      | 1953, 1973, 1990             | Lea, Pearson & Richards (1948)                                 | John H. Anderson, G.C. (1948)   |                        | 2502 N. Orchard St., 98406                            | Modern                                     |
| 7  | 4             | Fawcett Elementary School            | 3       | Angelo V. Fawcett Elementary School   | 1949                      | 1957, 1987                   | Heath, Gove & Bell (1949)                                      | E. Goetling and Son, cont. (1949)   | Eastside               | 126 E. 60th St., 98404                                | Vernacular                                 |
| 8  | 5             | Fern Hill Elementary School          | 2       |   | 1911                      | 1919, 1925, 1955, 2005       | Heath & Gove (1911); Hill & Mock (1925) BLRB (2005)            | O.F. Larson, contr. (1911); Knoell Bros. Contr. (1919); E.M. Anderson, contr. (1925) Babbit Newman (2005) | South End/Fern Hill    | 8442 S. Park Ave., 98444                              | American Renaissance                       |
| 9  | 17            | Gault Middle School                  | 1       | Franklin Benjamin Gault Intermediate School, Gault Junior High School                                       | 1925                      | 1942, 1952, 1973, 1979, 1982 | Hill & Mock (1925); Mock & Morrison (1942)                     | Siero & Hansen (1925) Dolf Jones, contr. (?) (1943)   | McKinley Hill          | 1115 E. Division Ln., 98404                           | Collegiate Gothic                          |
| 10 | 6             | Getger Elementary School             | 2       |   | 1948                      | 1952, 1953                   | Marsall Perrow (1948)  |   |                        | 621 S. Jackson Ave., 98465                            | International Style                        |
| 11 | 7             | Grant Center for the Expressive Arts | 3       | Grant Elementary School   | 1919                      | 1955, 1967                   | Heath, Gove & Bell (1919)                                      | Dawson & Dahlberg Cont. (1919)  | North End              | 1018 N. Prospect St., 98406                           | Gothic(?)/Modern                           |
| 12 | 24            | Gray Middle School and Barlow Annex  | 1       | Captain Robert Gray Junior High School, Gray Intermediate School and Edison Annex, Barlow High School       | 1910 (Barlow) 1924 (Gray) | 1963                         | Frederick Heath (Barlow) E.J. Bresemann (Gray)                 | Jarl & Lasker (Gray)  | South End              | 3102 S. 59th (Barlow) 3109 S. 60th St., (Gray), 98422 | Gray- Collegiate Gothic Barlow- Vernacular |
| 13 | 19            | Hovt Elementary School               | 1       | Hovt Primary School   | 1957                      |                              | Robert Billsbrough Price & Douglas Fir Plywood Association     | Standard Construction Co., contr. (1957)  | North End              | 2708 N. Union St., 98407                              | Neo-Expressionism                          |
| 14 | 20            | Hunt Middle School                   | 1       | Henry F. Hunt Junior High West Intermediate School, Jason Lee Intermediate                                  | 1957                      | 1967, 1974, 1980             | Robert Billsbrough Price (1958)                                | Standard Construction Co., contr. (1958)  | Highland Hill          | 6501 S. 10th St., 98465                               | Neo-Formalism                              |
| 15 | 23            | Jason Lee Middle School              | 1       |   | 1924                      | 2001                         | Roland E. Borhek (1924) Merritt+Pardini (2001)                 | O.F. Larson (1924) Absher Construction Co. (2001)   | North End              | 602 N. Sprague St., 98403                             | Collegiate Gothic                          |
| 16 | 8             | Lowell Elementary School             | 2       |   | 1950                      | 1961                         | Lance, McGuire & Muri (1950)                                   | Bonnel Construction Co. (1950) Rome Company (1961)  | North End              | 810 N. 13th St., 98403                                | International Style                        |
| 17 | 9             | Lyon Elementary School               | 2       | Mary Lyon Elementary School   | 1924                      | 1948, 1967                   | Hill & Mock (1924) McGuire & Muri (1967)                       | Dolph Jones (1924) E. G. Walker (1948)  |                        | 101 E. 46th St., 98404                                | Classical Revival                          |
| 18 | 10            | Mann Elementary School               | 3       | Horace Mann Elementary School   | 1952                      | 1968, 2003                   |  |   | South End              | 5211 S. K St., 98408                                  | Modern(?) / Contemporary                   |
| 19 | 11            | McCarver Elementary School           | 1       | Morton M. McCarver Intermediate School, McCarver Junior High School   | 1925                      | 1961                         | Hill & Mock (1925) Worthen, Wing, Serfert & Forbs (1961)       | Bachelor & Wallin, contr. (1925)  | Hilltop                | 2111 S. J St., 98405                                  | Collegiate Gothic                          |
| 20 | 12            | McKinley Elementary School           | 1       | McKinley Hill Elementary School   | 1908                      | 1957, 2002                   | Frederick Heath (1908) John Sutton (1957)                      | A.S. Black (1908) Warner Construction Co. (1957-58)   | Eastside McKinley Hill | 3720 McKinley Ave., 98404                             | American Renaissance                       |
| 21 | 21            | Oakland Alternative High School      | 1       | Oakland Elementary  | 1912                      | 1957                         | Heath & Gove (1912) Silas E. Nelsen (1957)                     | Chalmers & Person, contr. (1912) Graham General Contractors (1957)  | Oakland Madrona        | 3319 S. Adams St., 98409                              | Jacobean                                   |
| 22 | 18            | Park Avenue School                   | 2       |   | 1949                      |                              | Reuger & Reuger (1949)   |   |                        | 6701 S. Park Ave., 98408                              | International Style                        |
| 23 | 16            | Stewart Middle School                | 1       | South Central Intermediate School James P. Stewart Intermediate School, James P. Stewart Junior High School | 1924                      | 1963, 1973                   | Roland Borhek (1924)   |   |                        | 5010 Pacific Ave., 98408                              | Classical Revival                          |
| 24 | 13            | Wainwright Elementary School         | 1       | Regents Park, Fircrest School   | 1924                      | 1948, 1956, 1970             | Shaw & Shaw (1924) Mock & Morrison (1948) Lyle Swalberg (1958) | T. Holmberg (1924) Siero & Hanson (1948)  | Fircrest               | 130 Alameda Ave., 98466                               | Classical Revival                          |
| 25 | 14            | Whitman Elementary School            | 2       |   | 1951                      | 2003                         | Lea, Pearson & Richards (1951)                                 | Standard Construction Co., contr.   |                        | 1120 S. 39th St., 98418                               | Modern                                     |



# Tacoma's Historic Schools: An Architectural Primer

March 2010

HISTORIC  
TACOMA

# Historic Tacoma's Preserving Tacoma's Historic Schools Project

Tacoma is home to a number of architecturally and culturally significant schools, each one a powerful presence and anchor in its neighborhood. In 2008, Historic Tacoma initiated discussions with Tacoma Public Schools on the need to document and preserve the District's historic schools. The District agreed to fund an historic resource inventory as well as nomination of the most significant structures to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, thus acknowledging the buildings' value and the District's long term commitment to their preservation.

## The project has involved:

- A comprehensive citywide inventory of 24 schools dating from 1908 to 1958 owned by Tacoma Public Schools. The inventory was conducted by architectural historian Caroline Swope, Ph.D., Kingstree Studios. Documentation has been supplied to the City of Tacoma and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.
- This publication, also available in a pdf version at [www.historictacoma.net](http://www.historictacoma.net), highlighting a selection of significant historic schools, representative architectural styles, and architects. Funding was provided by the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Washington.
- Nomination of the most significant historic public schools to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places, anticipated for fall 2010. This action will protect and preserve the architectural character of these buildings for future generations.

## Acknowledgements

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Cover: McKinley Middle School, 1st Grade Class, 1926.

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, A1686-1.

## About Historic Tacoma:

*Historic Tacoma is a private, not-for-profit grassroots organization dedicated to preserving Tacoma's architectural legacy through education and advocacy. Historic Tacoma advocates for the thoughtful preservation and rehabilitation of historic structures, sites, and neighborhoods, while urging policy makers, developers and citizens to consider the value and unique qualities of historic structures.*  
[www.historictacoma.net](http://www.historictacoma.net)

**HISTORIC**  
 **TACOMA**



Oakland Elementary School, 1928.  
Photo: Tacoma Public Library,  
Marvin D. Boland Collection, BU-10265.

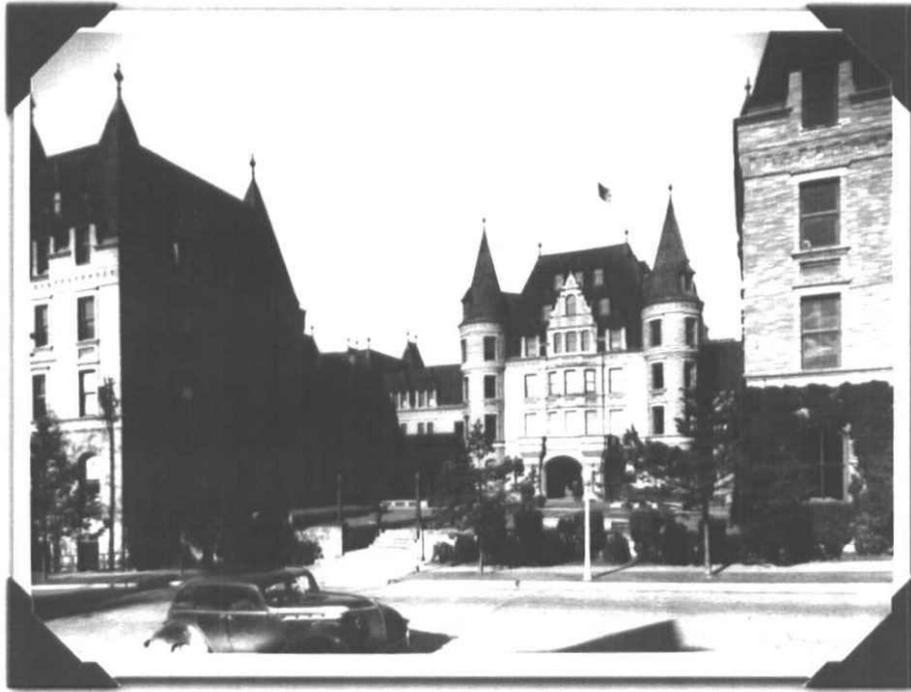
## Early 20th Century Schools

**A**t the opening of Central Elementary School in 1912 the president of the Tacoma School Board proclaimed "The school house is the first line of fortifications of the nation, and as the cost of education increases the cost of the penitentiary and asylum must decrease." ... and... "This building we ... dedicate will add another stone to the bulwarks of free government."

The Tacoma school system, like many urban school systems in America, was influenced by a massive influx of immigrants before World War I. While earlier immigrant groups had primarily settled along the eastern seaboard and were from western European heritage, new immigrant groups were primarily eastern or southern European. By 1900 half the population of the United States were either foreign-born or the children of foreign-born parents. Governmental and religious agencies struggled with the best ways to integrate ethnic groups. Many of the newly arrived immigrants were from rural areas and not familiar with urban life. Confusion on how to use urban services, the role of sanitation, and a growing concern over communicable diseases (including Tuberculosis) led many to believe that schools were the logical place to prevent potential problems. In 1913 the National Conference on Immigration and Americanization promoted three key issues of immigration assimilation: literacy, learning democratic values, and health and hygiene. Schools were viewed as the most logical tool for introducing these values.

A number of programs previously unheard of were nationally introduced during this time, and the Tacoma School District closely followed national trends. Concern with hygiene and health helped support the introduction of nurses, health care facilities, showers and home-economic departments (usually added at the middle school level). Programs were introduced to keep children occupied after school to help reduce juvenile delinquency. Playgrounds and summer school were also thought to help relieve delinquent tendencies. Schools became neighborhood social centers and a number of after-hours programs were available, including programs for adults. Cafeterias promoted an "American diet" and providing lunches on-site became increasingly common. Previously, students had walked home for lunch or brought home-packed lunches with them.

The tremendous expansion in social services impacted building designs. School structures previously had provided three main types of space: classroom, an auditorium and/or gymnasium and one or two rooms for administrative functions. Expanded services required specialized types of rooms, additional recreational activities, larger libraries, lunchrooms and their support areas and substantially increased the need for administrative and support rooms. In 1911 Tacoma residents passed a \$690,000 bond issue that provided for the construction of Lincoln High School, Central, Fern Hill, Franklin and McKinley Elementary Schools.



## Stadium High School

111 North E Street

1891 Hewitt & Hewitt, architects

*Tacoma Register of Historic Places* Contributing building in the Stadium Seminary National Register District

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, 1948, #23994

One of Tacoma's most notable landmarks, Stadium High School was originally constructed to serve as a luxury hotel for the Northern Pacific Railroad and the Tacoma Land Company in 1891. However, building was halted during the financial crisis of 1893 and the unfinished structure became a storage facility. In 1898 a fire gutted much of the structure, and the Northern Pacific Railroad began to dismantle the structure, reusing more than 40,000 bricks to construct train stations in Montana and Idaho. The Tacoma School District, looking for a site for a new high school, decided that the structure would suit their purpose and purchased what was left of the structure in 1904. The redesign and later renovations were handled by school architect, Frederick Heath. The school officially opened in 1906.

Adjacent to the school is the Stadium Bowl, located in what was once known as "Old Woman's Gulch." Designed by Frederick Heath in 1909, the original bowl provided gathering space for more than 30,000 spectators. As Tacoma's largest gathering place, Stadium Bowl provided space for a number of community events, including speeches by Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Warren G. Harding.

Stadium's uncommon French Chateau styled architecture dominates the city's skyline with its multiple turrets. The building served as a filming location for the 1999 movie "10 Things I Hate About You." The building's architectural presence has endeared it to generations of Tacomans and has served as an ambassador for the significance of the city's historic school buildings. Stadium High underwent a massive renovation during the early part of the 21st century. The successful remodel earned several awards including an American Institution of Architects Northwest & Pacific Region Award of Merit in 2000 and the Valerie Sivinski Award for Outstanding Achievement in Historic Rehabilitation in 2007.



## Washington Elementary School

3701 North 26th Street

1906 Frederick Heath, architect

*Tacoma Register of Historic Places*   *Washington State Heritage Register*   *National Register of Historic Places*

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Marvin D. Boland Collection, 1928, BU-11351

Washington Elementary School was built to serve the growing population of the city in what was then called the “West End.” The site was specifically selected due to its proximity to the Point Defiance Trolley that ran along 26th Street. The original building was a two-room wood structure, built in 1900. By 1905 the school-age population had grown to the point where the school district engaged Frederick Heath, school architect, to design the current structure.

Heath focused considerable energy on developing the “Unit School,” an expandable plan promoted for its efficiency in school construction at the turn of the century. While not necessarily the originator of the design, Heath did promote it extensively. The basic plan was a unit system with classrooms facing a central corridor, with windows at the end of each corridor, which could be removed for future additions. The standardized interior plan allowed a reduction in future expansion costs of up to 25% according to Heath. Washington Elementary was the first of the unit schools designed by Heath. While the modular design controlled room layout, it was assumed that each school would have different construction materials and exterior designs, thus exteriors would remain unique.

As the neighborhood’s population continued to grow, Washington Elementary grew as well, with a Heath addition in 1909. A second addition was planned in 1917, but World War I soon halted plans beyond mechanical and electrical upgrades. The restrictive size of the small building site soon became apparent and in 1946 the district was holding kindergarten and some fourth grade classes in the basement of nearby Mason Methodist Church and the McCormick Library. The district eventually decided to address the site constraint problem by constructing a satellite school a few blocks away in 1957. The new primary school was named in honor of Nellie Hoyt a pivotal figure in local and national educational reform.



## McKinley Hill Elementary School

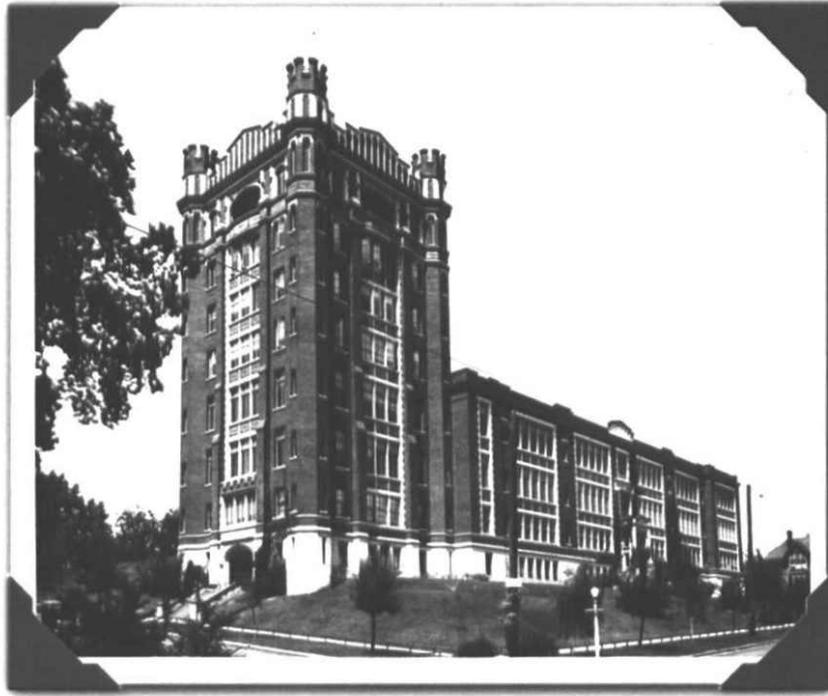
3720 McKinley Avenue

1908 Frederick Heath, architect

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Marvin D. Boland Collection, 1928, BU-11336.

The first McKinley School opened in 1906 at East H and Columbia Streets, and was named for William McKinley, the 25th president of the United States, who was assassinated in 1901. The present school was constructed in 1908. Almost no primary source material has been found documenting the school. McKinley Elementary is the best example of the American Renaissance style in the school district. This style is a variation of the Italian Renaissance Revival that was common in the United States from about 1890-1930. The style loosely adapted designs and building massing from Renaissance palazzi. Common details are rectangular or square plans, low pitched hipped roofs, use of masonry or stucco, a stringcourse dividing floors (sometimes quite elaborately detailed), massive cornice, dentils or block modillions, a recessed entry, a raised basement, and full-length windows. The style is most frequently seen in commercial and public buildings. Its massive proportions usually preclude it from use in all but the most expansive residential structures.

Architect John Sutton designed the 1957-58 addition that wraps around the front and one side of the main building, providing seven additional classrooms, a new entry area, administrative offices, and an all-purpose room. The classroom extension on the north end was built on raised stilts, providing play area for children. Translucent panels on the roof provided light to interior corridor and portions of the classrooms. In 1999 Tacoma artists Jim Robbins and Bob Henry painted an exterior mural on the south wall of the school. The two artists worked closely with McKinley students, the Eastside Neighborhood Council, and the Safe Streets Campaign. The painting highlights the theme of diversity, featuring Mt. Rainier, a heart-shaped globe, and a face divided into quarters with each piece showcasing different ethnic features. In 2005 the school district considered closing McKinley and sending students to Gault. Parents fought hard against the potential closure and were successful in keeping the school open.



## Central Elementary School

(Central Administration) 601 South 8th Street  
1912 Frederick Heath, architect

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, circa 1948, #15976.

The original Central School, built in 1883, was located at South 11th and G Streets. A rise in the city's population necessitated a new elementary school building. The new Central School was the largest school in the city and reported to be one of the largest in the West. The main floor held four playrooms, one each for large and small girls and boys, which opened directly into the courtyard in the back. This floor originally held a large domestic science department, and was equipped with a modern laundry, a model bedroom, a pantry, cold storage cupboards and a cooling closet. A woodworking workshop for boys was also on this level. The top floors held classrooms with roll-up partitions that could form a seating area for 400. All classrooms were connected by telephone to the principal's office, a modern marvel at the time. Also on the top floor was a special open-air room, developed for students with Tuberculosis. This room was designed to be open on all sides and was intended to provide fresh air for the sick children. The eight-story tower contained school board administrative offices, space for Central's principal and for the district's architect, Frederick Henry Heath. The modern technologies showcased in the building, combined with the sheer size of the structure led a period newspaper to proudly proclaim: "One of the Finest Public School Buildings in America... Central Has No Superior." No expense was spared: the building had an estimated cost of \$185,000, which would be worth approximately \$71,500,000 in today's dollars.

In 1967 a multi-story addition, designed by Tacoma architect Robert A. Parker, was added off the administrative tower. As administrative needs for the district increased, and the number of school-aged children living downtown decreased, Central Elementary increasingly became an administrative center. The decision to move the remaining students to the reorganized McCarver School was made with the 1969-70 academic year.



## Lincoln Park High School

(Lincoln High School) 701 South 37th Street

1913 Frederick Heath, architect

*Tacoma Register of Historic Places*

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Marvin D. Boland Collection, circa 1920, BU-11363

Only a few years after the opening of Stadium High School the Tacoma School Board began plans for a high school on the South Side of Tacoma. Construction started in 1913. The design of Lincoln was in part influenced by Eaton College, a boys' school in England. Eaton, built in 1440, is Gothic-styled with the typical masonry, buttresses, lancet arched windows and crenellations found in structures of this period. A revival of Gothic style in the late 19th and 20th centuries reintroduced these design details to the American public, and a number of educational buildings constructed during this time copied the style. Lincoln with its unusual L-shaped plan and extending front section uses many of these elements, and indeed creates a stately form that dominates the neighborhood. A statue of President Lincoln, the school's namesake, was erected on top of the building in 1918. Designed by local artist Alonzo Victor Lewis, funding for the statue was uncertain at first, and it took more than four years for the community to raise the funds necessary to complete the structure.

Like many of Tacoma's schools from the early 1900s, Lincoln received notable acclaim from local press, which trumped the structure as another fine addition to Tacoma's notable educational buildings. The building was a sizable investment by the community and cost more than \$500,000 at the time of construction. When calculated using a Gross Domestic Product indicator, this would be equivalent to spending \$185,000,000 on the structure today.

Equally prominent is the Lincoln Bowl, which was started in the 1930s, but not completed until after World War II. The large stadium was designed to hold between 8,000 and 10,000 spectators. Like the school, the bowl served host to a number of community functions, including an Elvis Presley concert in 1957.

# Architect and Style Guide

## *Collegiate Gothic Revival*

Gothic Revival was a common style for church and public school construction in Tacoma until the end of the 1920s. The original Gothic style developed in the late 1100s in the region surrounding Paris, France. The style, while used for a number of building types, became associated with ecclesiastical architecture, in part due to the numerous new cathedrals built during this time, and soon spread to other countries. The style emphasized vertical massing, masonry construction, heavily sculpted façades, and prominent use of stained glass (in ecclesiastical forms), eventually lost favor to the newly emerging Italian Renaissance style by 1500.

Interest in Gothic forms revived during the late 18th century, and continued through the late 19th century. American Collegiate Gothic is predominately an early 20th century style. Collegiate Gothic buildings are typically rectangular in plan, and frequently have flat rooflines. The multiple spired towers, heavily sculpted façades, and irregular massing more common with religious versions of the Gothic style are missing. Architects and clients specifically selected the Collegiate Gothic for its direct connotations with the two most renowned academic institutions in the world, Oxford and Cambridge. The style was commonly used by school districts during this time. Occasionally one finds Gothic Revival details mixed with Tudor Revival detailing, which creates a sub-style known as Jacobean. Oakland Alternative School is an example of this substyle.

Examples: *Central Elementary School, Gault Middle School, Gray Middle School, Jason Lee Middle School, and McCarver Middle School (Elementary School)*

## *Frederick Henry Heath*



Frederick Henry Heath served as architect for the Tacoma School District from 1902 through 1920. Born April 15, 1861, in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, his family moved to Minnesota when he was a child. After high school he worked in construction and eventually secured a position with Warren H. Hayes, a local architect.

Heath moved to Tacoma in the late 1800s and by 1896 had opened his own architectural office. Heath formed a number of partnerships: Spaulding, Russell & Heath; Russell & Heath; Heath & Twitchell; Heath & Gove; and Heath, Gove & Bell. Through these various firms he was responsible for a number of significant buildings in Tacoma. Design work varied from private residences, commercial buildings, and fraternal lodges, to churches, hospitals and school buildings.

Heath developed what he called the "Unit School" to resourcefully address growing school populations and the need for constant building additions. The basic plan was a two-story design with a daylight basement and classrooms flanking a central corridor. The school was a four-classroom module, with two units per floor. Adding a second module created an eight-classroom design, and so on with additional expansions. The Unit School seems to be indicative of a broader national approach evident in school literature at this time. Heath may have been better read on this subject than his contemporaries, or may have reached the same basic design independently.

Notable works: *McKinley Elementary (1908); Barlow Annex (1910); Oakland School (1912); Lincoln High (1913); the Swiss (1913); Trinity Methodist Church (1915); Paradise Inn (1917) at Mt. Rainier; Central School (1912); Bethany Presbyterian (1924); Toby Jones Home (1924); First Baptist Church (1925); and 6th Avenue Baptist Church (1925).*

Frederick Heath was responsible for a number of buildings either independent of the firm or with his earlier partner George Gove, including St. Patrick's Catholic Church, First Church of Christ Scientist, Central Elementary School, Washington Elementary and the Rhodes Department Store.



Newspaper cartoon showing the need for more schools in Tacoma, 1923. Tacoma Daily Ledger, April 29, 1923, Front Page

## Middle School Development

World War I brought significant changes to Tacoma, with the establishment of Fort Lewis in 1917. Located only a few miles south of the city, the post had 37,000 soldiers stationed by the end of the year, making it the largest military post in the United States at that time. Tacoma's population also increased with the opening of the Panama Canal three years earlier, which substantially increased business and industries associated with the Port of Tacoma. As the population increased, Tacoma's school district needed to find ways to accommodate new students and changing educational philosophies.

By the early 1900s the Tacoma school system was showing the stress of rapid growth, and the district had 14,211 students in 16 aging schools. By 1920 enrollment was 18,203 students, a 22% increase in just five short years. The district examined various ways to address the growing student population and in 1920 the school board debated between three possible educational models, each having its own impact on future school construction. The first model was to continue with the current high school system, which held four grades. The second model was to adopt a 6-6 plan, with grades one through six in elementary schools, and grades seven through twelve in high schools. The final plan, and the one eventually adopted was the 6-3-3 plan, which fostered the addition of middle schools to hold seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.

In 1923 Tacoma voters authorized an intermediate school building program at a then unheard of cost of 2.4 million dollars. The goal was to transition Tacoma from the old grade school - high school program (the 8-4 plan) to a more modern grade school - intermediate school - high school program (the 6-3-3 plan). At the time of the bond Tacoma had two high schools, Stadium and Lincoln, and fourteen grade schools serving the entire city. The bond provided funds for additions to several elementary schools and the resources to build six new intermediate schools - Jason Lee, James P. Stewart, Morton M. McCarver, Captain Robert Gray, Allan C. Mason, and Franklin B. Gault. Jason Lee was the first of the intermediate buildings erected while Stewart was the second, and McCarver was the third. Gray, Mason and Gault all opened on the same day. Five of the original six schools still stand. From the start of the building campaign planning until its completion, Tacoma had an additional 1,910 students enrolled. To keep construction costs within budgets, while increasing the size of some of the schools, classrooms were clustered around auditoriums - eliminating additional interior corridors in some of the schools.



## Captain Robert Gray Middle School & Barlow Annex

3109 South 60th Street

1910 (Barlow) Frederick Heath, architect

1924 (Gray) E. J. Bresseman, architect

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, 1940, #7928.

The nineteen-room Edison School, named for the surrounding neighborhood, opened in 1892. Edison changed its name to South Tacoma in 1896 when the area was annexed to Tacoma after the Northern Pacific Railway opened mechanical shops at this location. In 1910 a twelve-room annex (Barlow) was added to Edison, which helped the building serve a growing student population. Tacoma's second high school was briefly located here in 1911, due to overcrowding at Stadium High. The site served as a high school until 1914 when Lincoln High opened. Edison was one of four Tacoma schools severely damaged in the April 1949 earthquake. Edison, Whitman, Willard and Lowell were all condemned as unsafe. Edison was demolished, and the Barlow Annex is all that remains. The original Lowell and Whitman Elementary Schools were also demolished as a result of the earthquake.

Gray Middle School was named for Captain Robert Gray, a naval officer and explorer who sailed his ship up the Columbia River in 1791. This school's name was selected in a Tacoma Daily Ledger naming contest. Built in 1924, the school was designed to hold 650 students, with the ability for additional units to house another 350 students if future expansion was desired. One of the highly publicized features was the large auditorium, designed to hold a thousand students, with additional expansion capacity provided by the ability to add a balcony at a later date. Two separate gymnasiums were built, one for boys and a second for girls.

An eleven-room addition, designed by the architectural firm of Steifert, Forbes, and Berry, was completed in 1964. The unit connects the 1924 Gray Junior High with the 1910 Barlow Annex (which served as an elementary school at that time). The addition includes 7,000 square feet of recreational space under the structure. The elevated two-story unit originally had three science labs, three language labs, three general classrooms, and storage space.



## Franklin Benjamin Gault Middle School

1115 East Division Lane  
1925 Hill & Mock, architects

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, 1940, #2239.

**T**he Franklin B. Gault Middle School was named to honor the superintendent of Tacoma Schools from 1888-1892. Gault then organized the University of Idaho, serving as its first president from 1892-1898 and reorganized Whitworth College as its president from 1899-1906 and last served as president of the University of South Dakota from 1906-1913.

In 1923 Tacoma voters authorized an intermediate school building program for six new schools, Jason Lee, James P. Stewart, Morton M. McCarver, Captain Robert Gray, Allan C. Mason, and Franklin B. Gault. Gault was the last of the six to be constructed. Architect Roland E. Borhek was originally hired by the school district to design both Gault and Mason schools, but was removed after disputes concerning massive cost increases at Jason Lee and Stewart Middle Schools. After his dismissal the architectural firm of Hill & Mock was hired to design both Mason and Gault, and the specifications for the two were practically the same. Gault featured boys' and girls' gymnasiums, 13 instruction rooms, administrative offices, lunchrooms and accessory rooms.

During the early 1980s the Tacoma School District entered a joint venture with the city of Tacoma and the Metropolitan Park District to build a swimming pool at Gault. The pool is reserved for the use of Gault students during school hours and is operated by the park district for community use at other times. An advisory committee recommended razing the current building and replacing it with a middle school in 1991. A vocal group of East Side residents spoke in favor of retaining a neighborhood school that children could walk to. In 2006 school superintendent Charlie Milligan recommended closing Gault and moving its students to McIlvaigh. This decision was based in part on declining enrollments. Community members expressed concern over the potential school closing. Some had intentionally purchased homes within walking distance of the school, and had hoped to see it renovated like Lincoln and Stadium High Schools.



## Morton M. McCarver Middle School

(McCarver Elementary School) 2111 South J Street  
1925 Hill & Mock, architects

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, 1925, #27865.

**M**McCarver served as an intermediate school when it first opened. The architectural firm of Hill & Mock designed the building, which was to accommodate about 900 7th, 8th and 9th grade students. The school was named for Morton Mathew McCarver, a native of Kentucky. McCarver was an early pioneer, farmer, goldminer and politician. He was elected to the Oregon legislature in 1844 and to the California legislature in the 1860s. In 1868 he bought the Carr claim in Tacoma and the next year built the first clapboard house in what was to become Tacoma.

The basement level of the school had a lunchroom, printing laboratory, a classroom, two bicycle and locker rooms, heating plant and building mechanical rooms. The main floor housed a large auditorium, two gymnasiums, locker rooms, shower rooms, three sewing rooms, carpentry shop, mechanical drawing room, library, principal's office, public office and classrooms. The top floor accommodated a music room, two commercial rooms, sheet metal shop, art room, electrical shop, conference rooms, two science laboratories, five classrooms and teacher rest rooms. The Washington State Chapter of the American Institute of Architects awarded McCarver an honorable mention in its city-wide building survey of 1927.

In 1962 an auxiliary unit was built to serve elementary students. The building, designed by the architectural firm of Worthen, Wing, Seifert & Forbes, housed kindergarten, first, second and third grade students and a multi-purpose room. The Northwest Division of the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People attempted to block construction of the unit, claiming it would lead to a segregated school. They did not succeed, but in following years the district changed the resource allotment to address growing concerns over self-segregated schools. In 1968 the decision was made for McCarver to transition into an elementary school. Students from the former Central Elementary transferred to the site and junior high students attending McCarver were transferred to other schools in the district.



## James P. Stewart Middle School

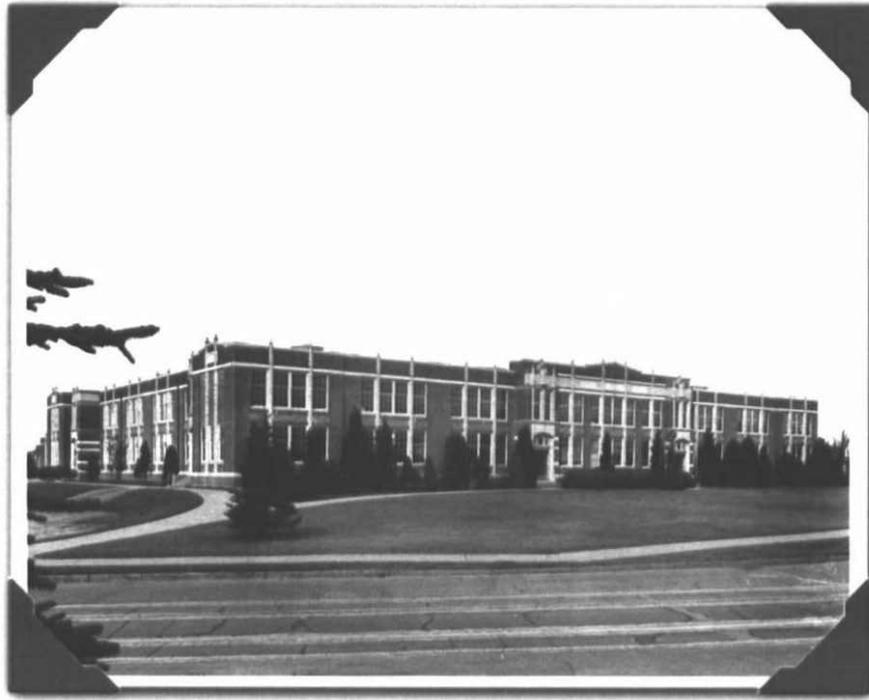
5010 Pacific Avenue  
1924 Roland Borhek, architect

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, 1925, #10483.

Stewart Middle School was named for James P. Stewart, Tacoma's first teacher from 1869-1870. He farmed hops in the Puyallup Valley and was the first mayor of Puyallup. Stewart also organized the Pacific National Bank of Tacoma and was elected to the territorial legislature in 1886.

In 1923 Tacoma voters authorized an intermediate school building program at a cost of more than \$2.4 million dollars. The program provided funds for additions to several elementary schools and built six new schools, Jason Lee, James P. Stewart, Morton M. McCarver, Captain Robert Gray, Allan C. Mason, and Franklin B. Gault. Stewart was the second of these schools to open. A 1964 addition designed by the architectural firm of Liddle & Jones added six classrooms, an arts room, a crafts room, a multipurpose room, storage space, and a teachers' conference room. An addition in 1974 provided space for an industrial arts program.

Stewart is the school district's best example of the Classical Revival style, representing the Beaux-Arts subtype. Classical Revival architecture was one of the first national styles and was common on the east coast from 1818 until right before the Civil War. Classical revivals focused on Greco-Roman design elements. Slender columns, classical pediments, entablatures, Palladian windows and other details are used to classify this style. The style has been popular both in Europe and the United States for hundreds of years, and is used for commercial, institutional and residential designs. The more ornate applied ornament usually is dictated by budget and building size. The grander forms of the style, when applied to monumental buildings, are often referred to as Beaux-Arts. This academic style was originally taught at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and influenced American architecture from 1880-1920. A flat roof, raised first story, grand entrances, classical details, and symmetry are some common design elements for the Beaux-Arts subtype.



## Jason Lee Middle School

602 North Sprague Street

1924 Roland E. Borhek, architect

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, 1940, #2237.

**T**his school was named to honor Jason Lee, a New York Methodist-Episcopal missionary who served in Oregon Territory from 1834 until 1845. Lee was active in creating territorial schools, and founded Willamette University. He also established the first schools in Oregon and in Pierce County.

Jason Lee Middle School was designed by Roland E. Borhek, architect of Tacoma's Rialto Theatre. Borhek was hired to design all six of the new intermediate schools, but cost over-runs led to his dismissal in 1924, having designed only two of the original middle schools, Stewart and Jason Lee. In 1927 Borhek received an award from the Washington State Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for the design of Jason Lee. Jason Lee served as a city anchor by providing space for numerous non-school related functions, due to the site's central location and the size of the school's two-tiered auditorium, which seated more than 1,000 people.

The school originally held 7th-9th grades and the entire freshman class of Stadium High. There was a model housekeeping suite, sewing rooms, a fitting room, three art rooms and domestic science rooms for female students. Male students made use of the manual training shops, which included a machine shop, tool room, and carpenter shop. In 2001 the structure underwent a 27 million dollar remodeling project, which gutted most of the interior and removed the entire back wall of the building for an addition. The two interior courtyards were also filled in during this time. While some were critical of this method, period newspaper articles indicate that the building had gone through numerous interior modifications through the years, including a 1968 remodel of the auditorium that dropped the ceiling and covered much of the original plasterwork with wood paneling and new trim. A major focus point of the 2001 remodel was restoration of the original auditorium design, including replacement of missing plasterwork.



Construction of the "Cafetorium"  
at Hunt Middle School, 1957.  
Photo: Tacoma Public Library,  
Richards Studio Collection, 1957, #25588.

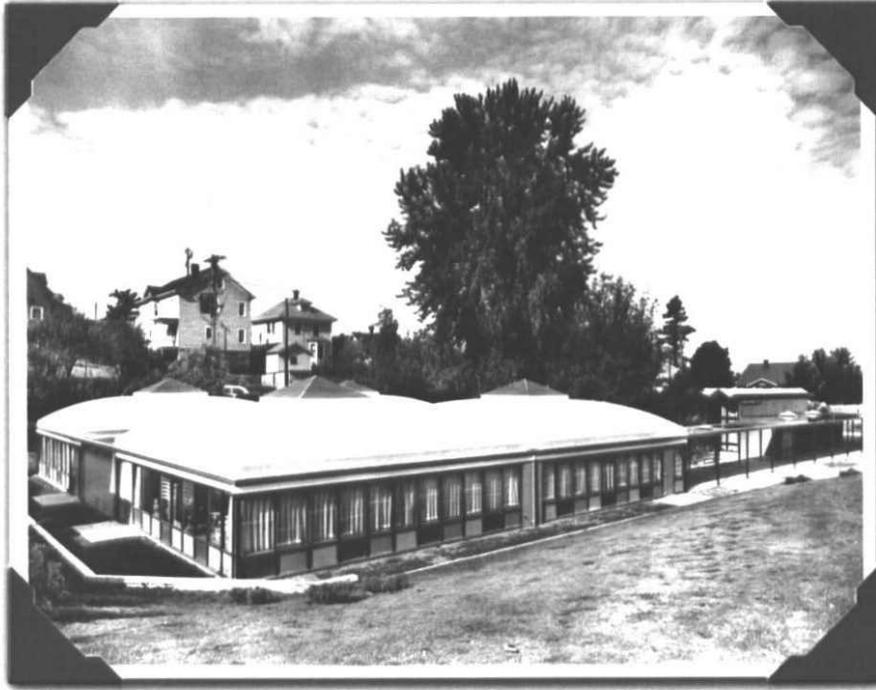
## Post-WWII Schools

The greatest challenge facing American educational systems in the post-World War II era was a dramatically increasing student population and rapid suburban growth. At the same time, older urban school enrollments were declining. Tacoma, with the rapid growth of its port and the nearby Ft. Lewis Army base, was a part of this national trend. The exodus from downtown was fueled by public policies that stimulated road building combined with inexpensive gasoline and personal transportation. Between 1940 and 1960 America's suburban population grew by 27 million people, more than two times the increase in central cities.

The pressure of growing school enrollment was so severe that in 1955 editors at *Architectural Forum* worried that every 15 minutes enough babies were born to fill another classroom. The shortage of classrooms forced school systems to consider a number of solutions, including portables and split sessions. Tacoma's enrollment numbers mirror the national trend with the student population increasing from 22,157 in 1950 to 29,778 in 1956, a 26% jump in enrollment. The school board began to prepare a new building campaign to address overcrowding in aged elementary schools and the new construction needed in growing suburbs. Outside forces also dictated replacement of older schools. The April 13, 1949 earthquake damaged a number of vintage school buildings. Both Lowell and Whitman schools were demolished and replaced by new structures. Cost, more so than in any previous era, became one of the single greatest factors in new school construction.

Architects and school boards rejected traditional historical revival styles from prior generations. While part of this was due to changing architectural fashion, the high cost of masonry construction and added architectural embellishments also contributed to the disdain of past styles. Quick, cheap and flexible school construction was the ideal. The National Council on School House Construction suggested one-story, single loaded (classrooms on one side) corridors, which more easily accommodated additions. Outdoor corridors were popular for their ability to further reduce costs. Single-story buildings were considered safer for fire evacuation, and did not require the same floor space dedicated to circulation. With a focus on light, air, and direct access to the outdoors, there were the added benefits of a reduced fire hazard for the new types of design and cheaper construction that didn't need to be fire-proof, or address the complex exit plans of multi-story buildings. These new designs worked best in suburban areas where large tracts of land could still be obtained at reasonable cost. Hoyt Elementary and Hunt Middle Schools epitomize the preferred construction techniques of this era.

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## Hoyt Elementary School

2708 North Union Street  
 1957 Robert Billsbrough Price, architect  
 Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, 1959, #27020

**H**oyt Elementary School, constructed in 1957, is affiliated with Washington Elementary in Tacoma's Proctor neighborhood. Hoyt is a satellite, built when plans for an addition to Washington proved too costly and time consuming. The four-room primary school was designed to serve 100 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders.

Tacoman Robert Billsbrough Price was one of six nationally-known architects selected by the Douglas Fir Plywood Association (now the Engineered Wood Association) to create architectural plans to showcase their products. The Tacoma School District benefited from this arrangement because the Douglas Fir Plywood Association paid architect and engineering fees for Hoyt. Hoyt was the first utilization of the plan, which offered a tremendous amount of flexibility and cost savings from standardization. Each classroom, including the skylight roof, was an integral unit.

The building was well publicized, and received a Merit Award from the South West Washington Chapter of the AIA (1962), and the "Nation's School of the Month Award" from the National School Association (1964). Additional press was received through exhibits, including the American Association of School Administrators' Architectural Exhibit of 1963 (Atlantic City, New Jersey), the AIA Committee of Schools and Educational Facilities Exhibition of Contemporary School Buildings in 1963 where Price was one of fifteen firms invited to participate. International exposure came through a number of sources, including a scale model of the school showcased at an architectural exhibition in Moscow (USSR) in 1959. The American Plywood Association also heavily promoted the design through their publicized research project "Schools of the Future."

The school was named in honor of Nell Hoyt. Ms. Hoyt was president of the first state convention of the Mothers' Congress and Parent-Teachers' association, which was held in Tacoma in 1911. She is widely known as the force behind the national pre-school movement, which was started here in Tacoma. Her husband was Elwell Hoyt, a druggist who served on the Tacoma School Board from 1912-1918.



## Henry F. Hunt Middle School

6501 South 10th Street

1957 Robert Billsbrough Price, architect

Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, circa 1959, #26461.

**B**uilt on Highland Hill in 1958, an area of West Tacoma that saw rapid development post-World War II, Hunt Middle School was designed to address Tacoma's population as it moved away from the historic inner core and out into new suburbs. The structure did not have the typical acreage constraints of urban schools, but it did have tight budget restrictions and a need for rapid construction.

Named for Henry F. Hunt, principal of Stadium High School for sixteen years, and district assistant superintendent for nine years, the new school housed 700 students, in 31 "teaching stations." The design was unusual, and local residents weren't entirely sure what they thought of the campus, particularly the domed "cafetorium," which was criticized by some as looking like a P.T. Barnum circus tent, not only because of its shape, but also the orange, blue and gray coloring of its laminated beams. The new gymnasium's utilitarian design was compared to Old MacDonald's farm due to the shed like arches topping the structure.

While the design merits may have been questioned by the community, period newspapers lauded the building as an example of "highly individualized wood and plywood design." Considerable attention was devoted to the building cost, a \$11.54 per square foot. In 1960 the median cost per square foot for schools construction in the west was \$14.64. Hunt's cost of \$11.54 was a 21% reduction. Costs were reduced by eliminating many of the interior corridors, which were replaced by open courtyards (some accented with pools of water) and covered exterior corridors.

National publicity for Hunt included a citation and visit by the American Association of School Administrators (1958), the School Building Architectural Exhibit by the National Council on School House Construction (1961), School Buildings Architectural Exhibit sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators, which was shown at regional conventions in San Francisco, St. Louis, and Philadelphia (1961).

# Architect and Style Guide

## Modern Architectural Styles

Many modern styles were heavily influenced by new building technologies and the rising cost of materials, which necessitated a change in traditional building patterns. The use of poured concrete, concrete block, expansive window walls, engineered wood products (including plywood) and new plastics were common components of this style.

Many architects in Tacoma focused on the International Style, which tried to break with the past by rejecting all historical ornament, and often historical forms as well. The International Style was named after an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1931. This exhibit showcased works by well-known European architects Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius. The style was praised for its ability to move beyond slavishly copying previous architectural forms, and instead “emulating the great styles of the past in their essence without imitating their surface.” The design details that increasingly surfaced with this style were flat roofs and glass or brick walls without ornament. Another modern substyle is Neo-Expressionist, which can be identified by massive sculptural shapes, lack of symmetry and a direct connection with the immediate landscape. Hoyt Elementary is an example of this substyle. Neo-Formalism was a modern substyle which focused on the formal design issues of proportion and scale with highly stylized classical columns. The 1967 addition to Central Elementary School and portions of Hunt Middle School showcase this substyle.

Examples: *Central Elementary School (1967 addition)*, *DeLong Elementary School*, *Downing Elementary School*, *Hoyt Elementary School*, *Hunt Middle School*, *Lowell Elementary School*, *Park Avenue Elementary School*, and *Whitman Elementary School*

## Robert Billsbrough Price



A Tacoma native, Robert Billsbrough Price attended Stadium High School before enrolling at the University of Washington. He then earned a Masters of Architecture degree from MIT in 1948. Price returned to Tacoma and opened his own practice in 1949. In 1956 the firm

was featured in *Progressive Architecture Magazine* - the youngest firm featured at that time. Price was one of the most prolific architects in the Tacoma region from the 1950s until the 1970s.

Price won fifty-nine national, regional and local awards for design excellence. His ability to keep project costs manageable while designing flexible building types that could easily accept the additions are hallmarks of his work. He was one of six architects selected nationally to work with the American Plywood Association and was recognized for his innovative use of engineered wood. This collaboration culminated with the award winning design of Hoyt Elementary School (1957). The Tacoma Fire Station Number 17 (1955) and his own architectural office (1963) also won awards. He earned a certificate of Merit from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the design of two Tacoma Housing Authority projects in 1967. Other projects were featured in a variety of magazines including *Sunset*, *House and Garden*, and *Architectural Record*. In 1966 he became the first architect in Tacoma to be honored by induction into the AIA College of Fellows.

Notable works: *Baker Middle School (1954)*; *Curtis Junior High School in University Place (1957)*; *Hoyt Elementary School (1957)*; *Hunt Middle School (1958)*; *Mount Tahoma High School (1961)*; *Sherman Elementary School (1954)*; *Aberdeen Senior High School (c. 1960)*; *Puyallup Jr. High School (c. 1959)*; *Temple Beth El (1968)*; *Olson Physical Education Building at Pacific Lutheran University (1969)*.

Courtesy of Knights of Pythias



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