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Tacoma's Historic Schools: An Architectural Primer

March 2010

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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, 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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Project management by: Sharon Winters, Historic Tacoma
Research conducted by: Caroline Swope, Ph.D., Kingstree Studios
Kelly Smith, Historic Tacoma research intern
(Savannah College of Art and Design)

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Table of Contents

Early 20th Century Schools	1
Stadium High School	2
Washington Elementary	3
McKinley Hill Elementary	4
Central Elementary School (Central Administration)	5
Lincoln Park High School (Lincoln High School)	6
Architect and Style Guide <i>Frederick Henry Heath</i> <i>Collegiate Gothic Revival Architecture</i>	7
Middle School Development	8
Captain Robert Gray Middle School & Barlow Annex	9
Franklin Benjamin Gault Middle School	10
Morton M. McCarver Middle School (McCarver Elementary School)	11
James P. Stewart Middle School	12
Jason Lee Middle School	13
Post - WWII Schools	14
Hoyt Elementary School	15
Henry Hunt Middle School	16
Architect and Style Guide <i>Robert Billsbrough Price</i> <i>Modern Architectural Styles</i>	17

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

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

Early 20th Century Schools

At 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



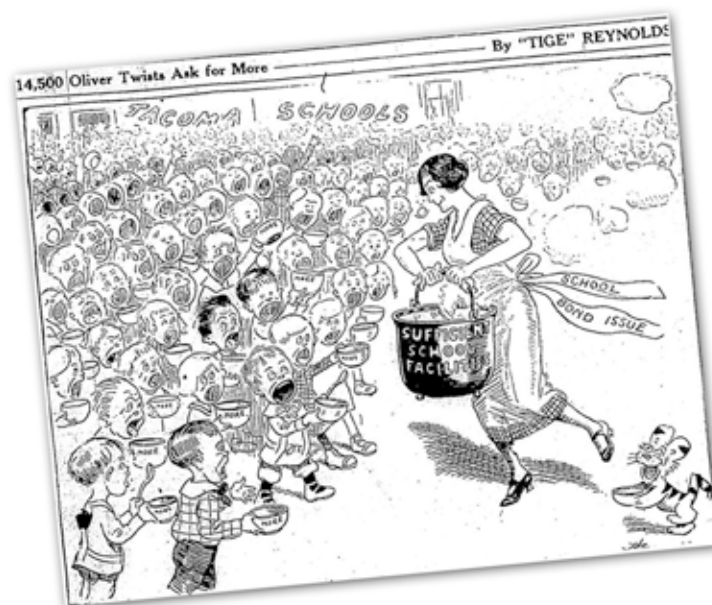
Frederick Henry Heath served as architect for the Tacoma School District from 1902 through 1920. Born April 15, 1861, in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, his family moved to Minnesota when he was a child. After high school he worked in construction and eventually secured a position with Warren H. Hayes, a local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

The 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.

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 of 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 substyle. 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 substyle.



Jason Lee Middle School

602 North Sprague Street
1924 Roland E. Borhek, architect
Photo: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio Collection, 1940, #2237.

This 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.



Hoyt Elementary School

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

Hoyt 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.

Built 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)*.