

DEC - 8 1987

MONTANA HISTORICAL/ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY #33 (ADDENDUM TO BOZEMAN MRA)

HISTORIC NAME: Gallatin County High School
ADDRESS: 404 W. Main
LEGAL BOUNDARY: Tracy's, Blk D, All Lots
OWNER'S NAME: School District #7
OWNER ADDRESS: Box 520, Bozeman, MT
SPECIFIC DATE: 1901-1902
ARCHITECT: George Hancock
BUILDER: Unknown
ORIGINAL OWNER: Gallatin County High School
ORIGINAL USE: high school
PRESENT USE: middle school
UTM REFERENCE: 12/496750/5058150
ACREAGE: less than one
U.S.G.S. QUAD: Bozeman, 1953



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Applicable Criteria: A and C
Areas of Significance: education, architecture
Number of Contributing Properties: 1

The eastern portion of the Gallatin County High School building is historically significant as the only remaining school in Bozeman that dates from before the Great Depression, when WPA funding was used to replace, or, in this case, add on to, the several school buildings that had been built around the turn of the century or earlier. Despite the enclosure of most windows with insulating material and removal (or covering) of the original sash, the building is nevertheless an architectural monument of major importance in the city. Romanesque style elements were combined with a classical building form - a main block with flanking pedimented pavilions - for an impressive effect. The building was erected in 1902 after passage of the "County Free High School" measure, which provided for free high school level education throughout Gallatin County. It is therefore of regional significance.

Nelson Story donated the limestone foundation of the building, which may have been designed by George Hancock. Hancock, an architect from Fargo, North Dakota, had set up a branch office in Bozeman in 1890 to design several monumental buildings here, including the Bozeman Hotel at 321 E. Main and St. James Episcopal Church at 9 W. Olive (see Inventory #14). The latter, like this building, also employs Romanesque style features. (Previous research done in 1983 attributing the High School design to Hancock has yet to be confirmed). In 1914, Fred Willson designed a remodeling of the building, and a Classical addition on the rear (south side).

In 1936-7, a major addition that doubled the size of the Gallatin County High School building was built using WPA funding. This High School addition was one of the four, federally financed public schools building projects undertaken in Bozeman during the Great Depression. The presence of Zales Ecton, a U.S. Senator from Bozeman in the 1930's, may have influenced the considerable flow of money to the city. Another influence may have been a powerful group of Bozeman businessmen which had formed to promote the city's interests. Prominent names such as Graff, Kenyon, and Chambers dominated the group.

This addition to the west of the original 1902 school is one of the most impressive structures in Bozeman, and is one of three outstanding examples of the Art Deco style in

the city. The addition was designed by Fred F. Willson, and is prominently located on West Main Street, across the street from another large Art Deco style building which was also designed by Willson, the Gallatin County Courthouse (see Inventory #1). The building was renamed the Willson School following the death of architect Fred Willson in 1956.

The Willson School is dominated by a large, rounded, projecting pavilion, which is actually a feature related to the Streamline Moderne style, rather than Art Deco which is the overall style of the building. Fred Willson designed almost every architect-designed building in the city during his career which spanned from 1910 to 1956. Among them were all four WPA-funded schools in the 1930's. While the other three are identical in appearance, this one is unique in design, though similar to the others in conception.

A 1942 Chamber of Commerce brochure described the four new schools as "...modern teaching units, providing for each classroom an additional project room where the students carry on handwork, build and exhibit displays, and otherwise train their hands to carry out the plans their heads conceive. Each of the schools is also provided with a combination gymnasium-auditorium."

According to Joe Uhlrich and family, the school, which was carried through by the group of Bozeman businessmen mentioned above (the same group which sponsored the Baxter Hotel), was intended to have been built after the Nelson Story mansion was demolished. The mansion stood on the west end of the lot now occupied by the school playground, and was an example of the High Victorian Gothic style of national significance. Since it was clear that Bozeman citizens would never vote for a new school addition if it entailed demolition of the beloved local landmark, the school addition was deliberately built around the mansion as is still evident today. In this way it could later be claimed that the large masonry house blocked important classroom light, thus providing justification for demolishing it. The plan was successful, for the new Gallatin County High School addition and the Nelson Story mansion stood side by side for only one year, before Fred Willson was hired to supervise demolition of the mansion.

The total architectural and historical significance of this building - including the 1936-7 addition - clearly overrides the significant detractor of the enclosed windows of the 1901-2 main section.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Gallatin County High School building, now the Willson Middle School, is composed of four main sections: the 1902 Romanesque/Classical Revival, original high school building with its large ca.1914 addition, and the attached 1937 Art Deco High School with its large gymnasium. All of these buildings and additions abut one another and are connected by open hallways. Because these four sections all function as one today, they must be considered as a single building with a number of significant, component parts.

The primary facade of the 1902 school faces West Main Street. This brick building is set on a high, cut sandstone foundation. The central entrance, with its sandstone surround, has been infilled and the steps have been removed. The overall organization of the facade is symmetrical. The central projecting bay is two-and-one half stories high with a pedimented dormer with a fan light in the tympanum set in the center of the hipped roof. Window openings are rectangular on the first floor, arched on the second, and square in the half-story. Flanking wings with brick corner pilasters and pedimented roofs are set back slightly from the central bay. The window openings of this building have been infilled with modern materials and tiny hopper units installed.

The 1914 Classical Revival addition to the south is a symmetrically organized brick building with a central arched entrance on the south facade. Stepped, small style light windows mark the ascension of the interior stairs to either side of the entrance. Most of the other windows of this addition have also been infilled with wooden panels painted white.

The facade of the 1937 school on Main Street is also symmetrical with a projecting three-story center bay with curved two-story wings flanked by three bays of two stories to either side. The main entrance is inset and marked by a large bank of windows on the second level and a smaller, curved top bank of windows on the third. The windows of the curved wings are horizontal metal sash, 6-light units set in pairs. In the eastern and western bays, the 6-light metal windows with hopper windows at the bottom are set singly.

The large poured concrete gymnasium was completed shortly after the Art Deco school building at the southwest corner of the lot. This gymnasium is also a contributing part of this complex school building.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Historic Bozeman Brochure

Fred Willson Job List: 1913, Job #122; "High School - Gallatin County".

Bozeman Chamber of Commerce brochure, 1942, p.4

Fred Willson Job List: 1936, Job # 3618 - "Gallatin County High School - Bozeman".

Fred Willson Job List: 1937, Job # 3725 - "Demolition Story Residence - Gallatin County High School".

Joe Uhlrich and family, Bozeman, MT interview, January 20, 1986

FORM PREPARED BY: James R. McDonald, P.C. (1983-84); Matthew Cohen (1985-86 revision); Patricia Bick (1987 revision), State Historic Preservation Office, 225 No. Roberts, Helena, Montana 59620 (406) 444-7715

