

HISTORIC PROPERTY INVENTORY FORM

State of Washington, Department of Community Development
Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
111 West 21st Avenue, KL-11
Olympia, WA 98504 (206) 753-4011

IDENTIFICATION SECTION

Field Site No. 34-721 OAHF No. _____ Date Recorded 10/16/85
Site Name Historic Town Square
Common Sylvester Park
Field Recorder Shanna Stevenson/Tom Costantini
Owner's Name State of Washington
Address General Administration Building
City/State/Zip Code Olympia, WA 98504

LOCATION SECTION

Address Bounded by 7th, Legion, Capitol Way & S. Washington
City/Town/County/Zip Code Olympia/Thurston/98501
Twp 18N Range 2W Section 14 ¼ Section SW ¼ ¼ Section SE
Tax No./Parcel No. 78501600000 Acreage 1.2
Quadrangle or map name Tumwater scale: 1:24,000
UTM References Zone 10 Easting 507640 Northing 5209730
Plat/Block/Lot Block 16, Sylvester Plat
Supplemental Map(s) _____

Status

- Survey/Inventory
- National Register
- State Register
- Determined Eligible
- Determined Not Eligible
- Other (HABS, HAER, NHL)
- Local Designation

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography Neg. No. 26-35A
(Roll No. & Frame No.)
View of from northwest
Date 10/16/85

Classification District Site Building Structure Object Number of contributing resources: _____
District Status NR SR LR INV
Contributing Non-Contributing
District/Thematic Nomination Name Downtown Olympia MRA

1 site, including historic landscaping elements, historic park furniture (i.e. commemorative benches), and historic small scale markers.

DESCRIPTION SECTION

Materials & Features/Structural Types

Building Type Park
Plan Rectangular
Structural System n/a
No. of Stories n/a

Cladding (Exterior Wall Surfaces) n/a

- Log
- Horizontal Wood Siding
 - Rustic/Drop
 - Clapboard
- Wood Shingle
- Board and Batten
- Vertical Board
- Asbestos/Asphalt
- Brick
- Stone
- Stucco
- Terra Cotta
- Concrete/Concrete Block
- Vinyl/Aluminum Siding
- Metal (specify) _____
- Other (specify) _____

Roof Type n/a

- Gable Hip
- Flat Pyramidal
- Monitor Other (specify) _____
- Gambrel
- Shed

Roof Material n/a

- Wood Shingle
- Wood Shake
- Composition
- Slate
- Tar/Built-Up
- Tile
- Metal (specify) _____
- Other (specify) _____
- Not visible

Foundation n/a

- Log Concrete
- Post & Pier Block
- Stone Poured
- Brick Other (specify) _____
- Not visible

noncontributing resources: 1 structure (nonhistoric bandstand)

Park also includes miscellany of nonhistoric park furniture and lighting.

Integrity (Include detailed description in Description of Physical Appearance)

	Intact	Slight	Moderate	Extensive
Changes to plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes to windows	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes to original cladding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes to interior	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

High Styles/Forms (check one or more of the following) n/a

- Greek Revival
- Gothic Revival
- Italianate
- Second Empire
- Romanesque Revival
- Stick Style
- Queen Anne
- Shingle Style
- Colonial Revival
- Beaux Arts/Neoclassical
- Chicago/Commercial Style
- American Foursquare
- Mission Revival
- Spanish Colonial Revival/Mediterranean
- Tudor Revival
- Craftsman/Arts & Crafts
- Bungalow
- Prairie Style
- Art Deco/Art Moderne
- Rustic Style
- International Style
- Northwest Style
- Commercial Vernacular
- Residential Vernacular (see below)
- Other (specify) _____

Vernacular House Types n/a

- Gable front
- Gable front and wing
- Side gable
- Cross gable
- Pyramidal/Hipped
- Other (specify) _____

MAY 6 1987

JUN 17 1987

NARRATIVE SECTION

Study Unit Themes (check one or more of the following)

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Politics / Government / Law |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture / Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment / Recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> Science & Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Heritage (specify) _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Movements / Organizations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Health / Medicine | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Planning / Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing / Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Study Unit Sub-Theme(s) (specify) _____ |

Statement of Significance landscaped

Date of Construction 1850 1893

Architect/Engineer/Builder Unknown

Level of significance: state

Period of Significance: 1850 - 1937

In the opinion of the surveyor, this property appears to meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places

In the opinion of the surveyor, this property is located in a potential historic district (National and/or local).

Sylvester Park, the town square of Olympia, is a historically significant landscape closely associated with the civic life of the city from its earliest years. The square was included in the original plat of the city in 1850 and donated by the town's founder, Edmund Sylvester. Since then, the square has been the focal point of development in downtown and has served for generations as a public meeting place, a park, and a backdrop for the significant events of community life. Despite some changes in park amenities over the years, the square has retained its original location, its size and its configuration since the city was platted and includes plantings and markers from the historic period.

The Olympia town square began as Block 16 on Edmund Sylvester's 1850 plat of Olympia and has been retained by the community as a public square since then. The square became the hub of Olympia as the town grew up around it but its inception reflected Sylvester's own New England background. Sylvester had come to the Oregon Territory in 1843 via Cape Horn from his native Maine. He first settled on Chamber's Prairie east of Olympia. Sylvester's partner under Oregon law, Levi Lathrop Smith, built a small cabin near Budd Inlet and named the settlement Smithfield. However, Smith was in ill health and died in 1848 and Sylvester inherited the townsite upon his death. Sylvester, who had followed the gold rush to California in 1849, returned in 1850. An Oregon surveyor laid out the town for Sylvester that year and Sylvester donated land for the Masonic Hall, schools, and capital grounds as well as the town square.

The square was much like a New England town commons during its early years and even served as a grazing spot for livestock. During the Indian wars of 1856, a wooden blockhouse large enough to house the entire village was built on the square. The structure was later used as a jail before it was dismantled. In 1861, when the location of the Thurston County seat was being contested, the people of Olympia donated the square as a site for a courthouse to

Description of Physical Appearance

Sylvester Park occupies a full, square city block in the center of downtown Olympia, measuring about 230 feet on all four sides and ringed by several of Olympia's historic buildings. The park features tall maple and beech shade trees (many dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries) as well as cedar trees, low bushes, and hedges planted on the perimeter. The grassy square features well-kept lawns, diagonal paths (covered with concrete in the 1970's), several historic markers and memorials from the period of significance, and a noncontributing 1976 gazebo on the site of the 19th century original. The square is surrounded on its perimeter by concrete sidewalks and bordered by the streets of Capitol Way (on the west), Legion Way (north), Washington Street (east), and Seventh Avenue (south).

The park is the historic town square of Olympia (all of Block 16) and retains today the shape and size of the square as platted by town founder Edmund Sylvester in 1850. Many of the trees date from the late 19th and early 20th centuries when the park was first landscaped, and many of the markers and memorials date from the early 20th century when the park served as the front yard of the state capitol. Beside the trees, historic amenities in the park include a granite statue of Governor John Rogers at the east central side of the park, erected through the efforts of the state's school children in 1905. Rogers was instrumental in enacting the "Barefoot Schoolboy Law" which equalized funding for public education. Other markers in the park include the sandstone boulder with bronze plaque installed by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1913 in the northwest corner of the park to commemorate the "End of the Oregon Trail;" the Women's Christian Temperance Union marble fountains at the center of the park, installed in 1914, one of which is dedicated to Emma Page; a sandstone bench made by the Disabled American Veterans after World War I; and a marble marker commemorating Edmund Sylvester as the founder of Olympia near the center of the park. Near Capital Way on the west side is a small oval bronze marker installed by the City of Olympia in recent years designating the park a city landmark.

Major Bibliographic References

Stevenson, Shanna, Olympiana, Historical Vignettes of Olympia, State Capital Museum, 1982.

HISTORIC PROPERTY INVENTORY FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

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Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
111 W. 21st Ave. KL-11
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(206) 753-5010

Site No.: 34-721

Site Name:

Historic
Common

Town Square
Sylvester Park

Date: 10/16/85

Statement of Significance: (continued)

counter a similar offer of land and lumber by Tumwater. An election settled the matter, but the title to the land was given to the county under the condition it remain a park, so no courthouse was ever built and in 1870 the town bought the square back.

Later, a Victorian courthouse was constructed across the street in the early 1890s and the park, officially named Sylvester Park in 1893, served as the foregrounds for the monumental building. To complement its role as a courthouse square, the park was formally landscaped in 1893 with a Victorian gazebo and fish pond (neither of which remained) and the entire park was encircled with a decorative wrought iron fence. The park also featured crushed clamshell walkways at the turn of the century. The park became the setting for civic celebrations and speech-making. Some of the Victorian character did not survive intact past the 1920s; the bandstand was torn down in 1928 and the fish pond was filled in after World War II.

Throughout its history, the square has been the site of many city gatherings including Fourth of July celebrations, May festivals, Memorial Day services, band concerts, and dances. Between 1901 and 1927 when the state capital was housed across Washington Street in the old courthouse, the park evolved from a courthouse square to a capitol square. Deeded intact to the state in 1901, the square was known as Capital Plaza and many dignitaries including William Jennings Bryan, Teddy Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Franklin Roosevelt as well as governors and legislators spoke to crowds in the park. In the years as a state capitol park as well as town square, several monuments were erected which stand today, including the tribute to Governor John Rogers, memorials to war veterans, and commemorations of local heroes including Emma Page, Edmund Sylvester, and the pioneers of the Oregon Trail. After the state capitol was moved to the south in the late 1920s, the park was renamed Sylvester Park in honor of the city's founder and the donor of the square.

The park was superficially altered a number of times after World War II. In later years the park was a miniature golf course and headquarters for the Olympia City Centennial in 1950 when a log cabin was built there. The park was also the site of a gala Bicentennial Fourth of July for the city in 1976. The gazebo now in the park was a gift to the city for the 1976 Bicentennial. The park was recently recognized as a locally important historic site by the Olympia Heritage Commission and a small bronze plaque recognizes that designation.

Despite alterations of park amenities throughout the years, the park has retained its identity and original configuration as a town square and meeting place and retains landscaping and memorials from the historic period. In addition, much of the vegetation, plants, and trees are original plantings. Moreover, the park's continual relationship to the city and state as a public gathering point and its reflection of the original plan of the city far outweigh the evolving park structures which have been placed and removed from the park over the years.

Because of the park's direct link with the founding of Olympia, one of the state's earliest and most important settlements, and because of its close association with the state capitol between 1901 and 1928, the park has statewide significance. It is one of the few examples of the New England tradition of town planning transplanted to the Puget Sound region which has survived.

Description: (continued)

The park has evolved in appearance over the years with concrete on the pathways (some of which follow historic paths), some new park furniture (including wooden benches and metal light standards) and the gazebo. The gazebo is in the southwest section of the park and is constructed on an octagonal concrete pad, and is constructed of a wooden platform with wood balustrade and circular hipped roof with cedar shakes. But the park retains its original function as a town square and includes sufficient plant and commemorative materials from the historic period, as well as the original shape and size, to convey its historic associations.

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