

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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OHP NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name University High School  
other names/site number Merritt College

### 2. Location

street & number 5714 Martin Luther King Jr. Way (formerly Grove St.)  not for publication  
city, town Oakland  vicinity  
state California code CA county Alameda code 001 zip code 94609

### 3. Classification

<b>Ownership of Property</b> <input type="checkbox"/> private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local <input type="checkbox"/> public-State <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<b>Category of Property</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) <input type="checkbox"/> district <input type="checkbox"/> site <input type="checkbox"/> structure <input type="checkbox"/> object	<b>Number of Resources within Property</b> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Contributing</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Noncontributing</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><u>2</u></td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><u>2</u></td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">Total</td> </tr> </table>	Contributing	Noncontributing	<u>2</u>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<u>2</u>	_____		Total
Contributing	Noncontributing													
<u>2</u>	_____													
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<u>2</u>	_____													
	Total													

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official *Stacy R. King* Date Aug 29, 1992  
 California Office of Historic Preservation  
 State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. Entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet. *Gregory M. Sapsley* 10/2/92

determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

*for* Signature of the Keeper Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

VACANT

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

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walls stucco

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concrete

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roof terra cotta

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other wood

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

University High School is a mostly two-story, 114-room school building plus detached gymnasium, located on a 9-acre parcel one city block deep by three blocks long. The main classroom and auditorium building is of reinforced concrete construction, Spanish Colonial in style, with exterior walls of tan-colored stucco, red tile roofs, and terra cotta trim. Its 650'-long quasi-symmetrical facade is set back about 65' from the street. The gym, behind the main building, is about 100' x 115', two stories high, reinforced concrete, utilitarian-moderne in appearance. Roughly the east half of the site, behind the main building and around the gym, is level open space, historically school yards and sports fields and at various times occupied by portable school buildings.

Major character-defining elements of the exterior include the long arcaded expanse of the front facade, the contrasting bell tower and gabled auditorium at the north end, the tile roofs with narrow eaves, the large arched windows on the ground floor and smaller rectangular casement above, six monumental entrances embellished with pilasters and arches and cornices, and spacious outdoor study courts wrapped within the building. The interior is distinguished by well equipped classrooms along long, well-lit, mostly single-loaded corridors, large and elaborate library and auditorium, and much original woodwork.

Main building:

The main building is an expansive, loosely rectangular two story structure about 750' long by 200' deep, with most of its architectural elaboration concentrated on the west facade (the two-block-long front of the building) and north side (the auditorium wing). It is stucco-surfaced, with low-pitched red tile gable and hip roofs. Its general composition resembles a California mission, with a gabled assembly structure and bell tower at one end of a long arcade, with a series of inner rooms and courtyards. The courtyards produce a rough figure 8 plan inside. The auditorium and tower at the north end are balanced by the (original) science and (added) shop wings at the south end. The center (classroom) part of the facade is nearly symmetrical, with an ornate central entry and two end entrances, each ornamented somewhat differently, linked by long tile-roofed sections of nine bays each. Each bay has a wide 36-light segmental-arched window on the first floor and a smaller multi-paned rectangular awning type window on the second floor. Plain pilasters with urn-shaped capitals at second floor sill level separate the bays.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
Education  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1922-42  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

Dickey, Charles W. (architect)  
Littlefield, R.W. (builder)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

University High School appears eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, Architecture, as representing a distinctive type, period, and method of construction. It was designed in 1922 by Charles W. Dickey, an important regional architect, and retains most of its architectural integrity. It is a particularly fine and rare surviving example of early 20th century California school architecture, modeled on the California missions and designed to reflect the local setting and climate and the prestige of the laboratory school it housed. Few similar buildings have survived, due to changes in building codes and fashions in school architecture. Used by a series of schools from 1923 to 1983, the campus is also important in Oakland educational and social history, successively as a widely respected progressive high school, an early community college, and the birthplace of the Black Panther Party, ethnic studies, and the Chicano muralist movement.

Construction on University High School was begun in May 1922 under building permit 69600 for a 2-story reinforced concrete school, and completed in August 1923 at a cost variously reported as \$518,569 and \$541,716. The architect was Charles W. Dickey, then Supervising Architect for the Oakland public schools, and the builder was R.W. Littlefield. In 1926-27 a detached gymnasium was built at the rear, and a manual arts wing was added to the south end of the main building. Building permit records give the cost for the gym as \$103,000 (permit A23190) and the builder as J.E. Branagh, and \$37,516 for the shop wing (A22552, E.T. Leiter & Son, builder). The final phase of construction on the existing buildings took place in 1939, when the gym and the shop wing, both of hollow tile, were rebuilt in reinforced concrete and "earthquake resistive" frame construction respectively. Permits for the 1926 and 1939 work name only "Buildings and Grounds Department, Board of Education" as architect. Other permits on file are for removing plaster ornamentation in 1958, and moving numerous portable buildings onto the site in 1958, 1962, and 1976. (In this nomination, the shop wing is considered part of the main building, to which it is internally connected, and the gym is considered a second building on the site. Both these additions are considered contributing, as they were intrinsic to University High's function as an educational institution, and were constructed within its period of significance.)

See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2 University High School, Oakland, Alameda Co., CA

The science wing at the south end is about 40' wide and projects about 20' forward from the main facade. It has a tiled hip roof. On its north side is a small tile-roofed second floor oriel window. Off center on the front of this wing is an entry framed by pilasters and a heavy molded cornice, with a flight of about 10 concrete steps with metal railings. The small window above the entry was originally tied to the cornice by terra cotta ornament, and there were more elaborate columns and capitals.

The main entrance, at the center of the facade, has an interrupted segmental arched parapet above the roofline, pilasters and a shell-shaped niche at second story level, and a molded cornice, keystone, arched recess, and paired pilasters framing the doors. There are wide concrete steps with metal railings. This entry opens into the main front corridor directly opposite the library.

The auditorium and its ornate entrance dominate the north end of the building. The auditorium has a front-facing gable end, its peak higher than the rest of the roofs. The center of the auditorium facade projects slightly, and the tile roof with its narrow eaves is notched correspondingly. In the projecting section a two-story slightly recessed arch frames the cornices, pilasters, upper niche, and deeply recessed door opening. Turned wood trim survives at the doorway. The tower, south of this section, has a two-story base containing another less elaborate entry under a small arched window with balcony. The belfry, eight-sided with arches, pilasters, and a tiled low pyramid roof, stands 56' high according to Sanborn maps and is visible from all sides of the building. Small narrow recessed windows, both arched and rectangular, flank the auditorium and tower entrances.

Plans and early photos show that all the entrances had much more ornament originally, with freestanding Corinthian columns at the center and auditorium entrances at both first and second floor level, terra cotta finials in the center broken pediment and on the tower, and other objects in the niches and around openings. These were removed, presumably as earthquake hazards, in 1958 (Permit B76351, "remove plaster work on three entrances... paint entire outside of building") and perhaps at other times.

The two-story north facade (auditorium and art wing, toward 58th Street) is also a major design face, with three entrances and large multi-paned windows. At the west end of this facade is a side entrance to the auditorium, with a stucco shield and decorated segmental arched recess over the door. Five tall 32-light rectangular windows with quarter-round corner details open into the auditorium. As in front, pilasters with urn-shaped caps separate the window bays, and dentils line the narrow eaves. Toward the rear a tall hip-roofed wing contains the backstage entrance to the auditorium and the fly loft. A one-story flat-roofed wing behind this and extending north is the entrance and foyer to the rear north-south corridor and art wing. It has an arch and a stepped parapet over the entry doors, and tile coping on the roof. It is of wood-frame construction but has the same stucco surfaces as the rest of the building.

The south facade (the science wing, toward Aileen Street) is also stucco, with two stories of rectangular multi-paned windows, dentil trim, narrow eaves, and red tile roof. A south ell at the back of the building connects this wing with the one-story, rectangular shop addition paralleling the science wing along the south

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3 University High School, Oakland, Alameda Co., CA

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edge of the property. This addition is wood frame, stucco clad, described by Sanborn maps as of "earthquake resistive construction." It is about 60 x 155', with large windows, skylights, low-pitched roof, and no ornament except for buttress-like pilasters between the windows on the south side. It is a 1939 "reconstruction" of a 1926-27 hollow tile addition, which had the same footprint as the present addition, and resembled the north foyer in appearance, with tile coping and a flat roof.

The east (rear) face of the building is also clad in stucco, but unornamented. Except for the ends of the science and auditorium wings, roofs are tar and gravel and windows are smaller. Classroom windows occupy most of the second floor, while the first floor has a utilitarian mixture of windows and five plain entrances, most with double doors, to the corridor, kitchen, cafeteria, and locker rooms. Some of these utility areas have one-story flat-roofed extensions to the rear.

### Interior:

The main front entrance on the west facade opens into the center of a 400-foot-long north-south corridor, directly opposite the library which occupies the center of the building. The front wall, with the 19 large west-facing windows, forms one side of the corridor, and a single row of classrooms and offices are located on the east of the corridor. Interior walls are lath and plaster, with wood paneled wainscoting in the corridors and special areas such as the library, auditorium, and offices. There are wood window and door frames, wood moldings, and wood and linoleum flooring. Built-in furnishings in the library, science labs, and other rooms include (or included) book shelves, desks, lab tables, and blackboards (some sliding or double hung). Classrooms are mostly about 20' deep, and range in length from about 15' at the smallest to 40' for some of the labs (physics, sewing, millinery, drawing, etc.). Special rooms in the south (science) wing include an "academic lecture room" with raked seating, stage, vaulted ceiling, and projection booth, and a cooking classroom with bay-windowed "model dining room" attached. Classrooms are typically arranged in pairs, joined by a shared office/storeroom area about 9' wide. Rooms in the newer shop wing are plain, tall, with skylights and exposed rafters.

The centrally located library is approximately 70' by 30', slightly sunken below the level of the corridors, two stories in height, with elaborate close-set wooden ceiling beams running north-south. An intricate plaster surround about a foot wide accents the opening between the hall and library. Shelves line the north and south sides of the library, with rows of large multi-paned windows above. Midway down each side double doors lead to the outdoor study courts. The east end of the library has bookshelves at floor level and an upper balcony reading room with a wood-paneled railing and turned posts.

Twin stairways to the second floor flank the wide library entrance. On both levels, corridors run north-south along the front and back, and east-west down each end, with additional east-west crossings over the library and between the courtyards. The plan is basically a large figure 8. At its north end is the auditorium, at its center is the library, and its sides and south end are made up of classrooms and other specialized rooms. The hollows of the 8 enclose outdoor courts on either side of the library. The courts are subdivided by covered

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

University High School, Alameda Co., CA

passageways into quiet landscaped study courts about 70' x 40' adjoining the library, and larger informal courts (about 70' x 90') to the north and south. Classrooms, study halls, and offices generally face the inner courts, while noisier areas--corridors, cafeterias, labs--face outward to the street and schoolyard.

The kitchen, cafeteria, teachers' room, and locker rooms are located on the east side of the rear corridor, and open to the back of the building. Shop and science classrooms are at the south end. The second floor has the same basic configuration of corridors as the first floor and contains special rooms for home economics, typing, accounting, and drawing, as well as generic academic classrooms. Large windows make all of the rooms light and airy. In addition to exterior windows, most classrooms have transoms and clerestory level windows to the single-loaded, well-lit corridors.

The north wing has music and art rooms along the rear, and otherwise is entirely occupied by the auditorium and its foyer. The two-story auditorium has a raked floor, coffered ceiling, and wainscoting. It is a self-contained theater with its own entries, insulated from the rest of the school by corridors. (There is a clerestory vantage point into the theater from the second floor classroom corridor.) It seats 1300, and has a balcony with a projection booth and a stage with a fly loft. The proscenium was topped by the Latin motto of the school, hand carved by students of the California College of Arts and Crafts and presented to University High by the Senior Class of 1927 to be displayed "forever" above the stage.

### Gymnasium:

The two-story gymnasium building is located behind (east of) the main building. It was built in 1939, a complete "reconstruction" in reinforced concrete of a 1926-27 hollow tile building of the same size and shape (about 100' x 110'). Clad in stucco and trimmed with minimal moderne molding, this flat-roofed building has large rectangular windows (now boarded up) on the second story. The main gym space is divided by a folding wall, so that girls and boys could have separate gyms, or the whole could be combined for court space and bleachers. The first floor has a recessed public entrance and ticket booth on the east side, plus locker rooms, showers, and offices.

### Condition:

The buildings are presently boarded up, and deterioration has occurred due to vandalism, small fires, and the elements. Skylights have been broken, as has most of the glass in doors and window sash. Water damage has occurred under skylights and in front of previously unboarded doors and windows. Most classrooms, however, are almost intact, and damage is largely cosmetic. The building apparently sustained no damage in the Loma Prieta earthquake.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number photos Page 1

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### PHOTOGRAPHS

University High School, Oakland, Alameda County, CA

1. photographer Marvin Collins, date Jan. 1991,  
neg. at 20 Armanino Ct., Oakland CA 94618.

North end of main (west) facade, looking northeast: auditorium, bell tower, and three bays of front classroom corridor

2. photographer Marvin Collins, date Jan. 1991,  
neg. at 20 Armanino Ct., Oakland CA 94618.

North half of main (west) facade, looking NE from center entry toward auditorium

3. photographer Kenneth Rice, date April 1989,  
neg. at NOVA, 636 59th St., Oakland CA 94609.

Courtyards in center of building. View from roof of east (rear) classroom corridor, looking northwest across south court and study court. Second floor corridor at right runs across the top of the library.

4. photographer Kenneth Rice, date April 1989,  
neg. at NOVA, 636 59th St., Oakland CA 94609.

Auditorium, view from balcony looking east toward stage.

5. photographer Kenneth Rice, date April 1989,  
neg. at NOVA, 636 59th St., Oakland CA 94609.

Typical classroom off west corridor, looking south. Window faces courtyard.

6. photographer Betty Marvin, date Feb. 17, 1992,  
neg. at 2646 Claremont Av., Berkeley CA 94705.

View southeast along main facade, from auditorium to science wing. Taken from median strip under BART tracks on Martin Luther King Way.

7. photographer Betty Marvin, date Feb. 15, 1992,  
neg. at 2646 Claremont Av., Berkeley CA 94705.

South end of main (west) facade, looking southeast, showing science wing with bay window on model dining room, and part of 1-story shop wing at far right.

8. photographer Betty Marvin, date Feb. 15, 1992,  
neg. at 2646 Claremont Av., Berkeley CA 94705.

North facade (side of auditorium), looking southeast, showing fly tower and one-story entry wing to back corridor.

9. photographer Betty Marvin, date Feb. 17, 1992,  
neg. at 2646 Claremont Av., Berkeley CA 94705.

Schoolyard, gymnasium, and rear of main building, looking SW from 58th Street.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 2 University High School, Oakland, Alameda Co., CA

Organized in 1914 with 8 teachers and 87 students and originally located in the old Temescal School at 48th and Webster Streets, University High School occupied a special place in Oakland's educational system as a laboratory school for the University of California education department, modeled after Columbia University's Horace Mann School and similar schools at the University of Chicago and University of Wisconsin. It was conducted and financed jointly by the University and the Oakland Board of Education. It became noted for its high standards of student achievement, written code of behavior, innovative six-year junior-senior high school curriculum, advanced pedagogical ideas, and school spirit. By 1918 parents were reportedly taking their children out of private schools to enroll them in University High, and the school was rapidly outgrowing its facilities. A new University High School was one of the projects financed by a \$5 million bond issue passed in 1919.

The development of the Oakland school system was marked by a series of voter-approved bond issues roughly every decade from the 1890s: 1892 (\$400,000), 1904 (\$960,000), 1911 (\$2,493,000), 1919 (\$4,975,000), 1924 (\$9.6 million), 1945 (\$15 million), and 1956 (\$40 million). These projects earned Oakland a reputation as a progressive city with an excellent school system. The 1919 bond issue, which financed University High, was said at the time to be the second largest ever passed in the nation (Oakland Tribune Year Book, 1921, p.38). Each successive wave of construction, besides creating new schools on new sites, replaced old schools considered inadequate or outmoded.

The first Oakland High School opened in 1869. When it moved to a new building in 1895, its old campus became a vocational high school. A third high school, Fremont, was brought into the school system when East Oakland was annexed in 1909. The original University High opened in 1914, and the new Oakland Technical High School at 45th and Broadway in 1915. The first junior high school opened in 1912, and there were four by 1918. By 1931 the Oakland public schools numbered 76: 10 high schools, 13 junior highs, and 53 elementary schools. Few of these buildings still stand. Most of the city's existing school buildings date from after World War II. Of about 90 schools now in use, less than 20 retain significant portions of their prewar physical plant, while a few others have fragments. The oldest functioning public school buildings are McChesney Junior High (1913) and Oakland Technical High School (1914-15). Clawson (1915) and University High (1922-23) are physically fairly complete but are vacant and deteriorating.

## School Architecture in Oakland:

Oakland's 19th and early 20th century schools evolved with the city, from wood-frame Victorian buildings to monumental masonry edifices of the 1890s-1910s, open-air courtyard schools in the 1910s and 20s, and period revival and moderne variations in the 1920s and 30s. Like all civic architecture, schools were designed for both symbolic and functional concerns. By the mid-1890s the predominant concerns in school design were fire safety, sunlight and ventilation, and permanence and civic prestige. Typical characteristics were masonry construction, symmetrical composition, blocky massing, and a rectangular, U, or H plan. Styling was usually classical, though Tudor and Mission Revival were also employed. Clawson (1915) survives as an example of this massive, urban type.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 3 University High School, Oakland, Alameda Co., CA

After about 1910 fireproof school construction was typically of reinforced concrete. Lighting and ventilation were increasingly accomplished with long wings wrapping around enclosed or partly enclosed courtyards, and generous banks of opening windows. These new California schools increasingly had low profiles and sprawling plans, with functions separated along corridors and wings (the "unit plan"). They typically occupied more than a full city block; this became possible in many newly developing areas of Oakland in the 1910s and 20s. Spanish-Mission was the favorite styling, but classical motifs were also used, notably at Oakland Tech (1914-15), and other period revivals became popular in the 1920s.

Oakland employed distinguished architects for its schools. Bliss and Faville, John J. Donovan, John Galen Howard, Lewis P. Hobart, Henry Hornbostel, Louis Christian Mullgardt, Julia Morgan, William Weeks, and Charles W. Dickey all designed Oakland schools that were published in early 20th century architectural journals. Donovan, supervising architect for the Oakland Board of Education from 1912 to 1919, wrote one of the standard textbooks on school design of the 1920s, School Architecture--Principles and Practices (1921). B.J.S. Cahill's March 1915 Architect and Engineer article on "Recent School Buildings in Oakland" claimed that "No city in the West in comparison with its population has spent so much time, thought and money on its public schools.... Oakland stands better served in this respect, perhaps, than any city in the country." High schools, larger in size and fewer in number, were usually the most prestigious and architecturally distinguished buildings. This is clearly the case with Oakland's two surviving pre-Field Act high schools, Oakland Tech (1914-15, Donovan and Hornbostel) and University High School (1922-23, Charles W. Dickey).

In the 1921 Tribune Year Book, writing as Chief Architect of the Oakland Public Schools (1920-24) and looking forward to the fruits of the \$5 million 1919 bond issue, Dickey wrote, "Our California climate is a great asset and offers wonderful opportunities in the design of our schools. Here we can use open arcaded or columned porches in place of closed corridors, semi-open air class rooms, low rambling buildings with tile roofs. We can get some of the charm of the buildings of Italy, Spain, and Mexico, the progenitors of our California missions. What could be more suitable against the background of our rolling hills, dark oaks and eucalyptus than a low-lying picturesque building with walls of golden, pinkish cream and a roof of red brown tile? Surround such a building with green grass and shrubbery, and true beauty can be obtained with little expense for ornamentation or embellishment. Such is the objective of the architects designing Oakland's new schools. Economy of construction and simplicity of design are their watchwords, but the buildings will be more truly beautiful than ornate and elaborate. They will be modest, homelike and inviting, suitable to the climate and environment, and, withal, economical and inexpensive.... The open-air effects made possible by our climate have enabled us to design our buildings on a unit plan, the separate units connected by covered corridors. By this means the individual buildings are kept comparatively small and can be of inexpensive construction."

Charles W. Dickey:

Charles Dickey (1871-1942) was one of Oakland's most prominent architects from the turn of the century until 1924, when he moved to Honolulu. He was born in Alameda, but as the son of Senator Charles Henry Dickey of Honolulu spent much of his early

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 4 University High School, Oakland, Alameda Co., CA

life in the Hawaiian Islands. He was educated at Oakland High School and graduated from the Architectural Department of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the nation's first academic architecture school, in 1894. He worked briefly at the beginning of his career in the architectural offices of H.C. Kock & Company in Milwaukee and Reid Bros. in San Francisco. He returned to Hawaii to begin his mature career as a member of the firm of Ripley & Dickey, Honolulu. The designs from this period fused "... modern architecture forms to tropical conditions," according to the July 1907 Architect and Engineer of California. Financial depression in Hawaii reportedly caused Dickey to return to California, opening the office of Dickey & Reed in Oakland in 1903 (Reed later left the firm to enroll at M.I.T.). Dickey's work consistently displays the Americanized Beaux Arts roots of his training, in buildings which give equal consideration to presence and function. In addition, he had an unusual sensitivity to designing for particular purposes and particular places. University High School is characteristic of his work in both respects.

Dickey produced some of the major landmarks in both Oakland and Honolulu. He is popularly considered the creator of a uniquely "Hawaiian" style of architecture which incorporated Spanish-Mission and Asian elements, emphasized a close relationship of indoor and outdoor spaces, and is distinguished by a flared hip roof still popular in Hawaii and commonly called a "Dickey roof." Dickey's major buildings in Honolulu include the Halekulani Hotel (1926-31), Honolulu City Hall (with others, 1927), Alexander & Baldwin Building (1929), Kamehameha Girls' School (with Bertram Goodhue, 1929), and the U.S. Immigration Station Administration Building (1934). He is widely considered to have been the leading architect in Hawaii in the 1920s and 30s.

In Oakland Dickey designed the Claremont Hotel (1907), the 15-story Oakland Bank of Savings at 1200 Broadway (1907), one of the city's first skyscrapers; Kahn's Department Store (1913), the Temescal and Golden Gate branches of the Oakland Public Library, and the Pacific Gas and Electric Company building (1922). He designed about ten schools in Oakland, beginning with Longfellow in 1906, and several elsewhere in California with John J. Donovan in the 1910s. As supervising architect for the Oakland Board of Education from 1920 to 1924, he designed several of the 1919 bond issue schools and coordinated others with associated architects. Demolished Oakland buildings by Dickey include the Capwell Department Store (site of the parking structure behind City Hall), the Market Street School, the Pacific States Telephone building (at 45th and Telegraph), and the fanciful, pagoda-like Idora Park Skating Rink. He also designed the California Building for the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland, Oregon, in 1904.

Dickey designed University High School in the eclectic spirit of the time, blending a functional approach to a modern classroom building with the historical model of the California missions. The reference to San Gabriel or San Luis Rey, with the gable-roofed church and bell tower at one end of the arcades and quadrangles, was expressly chosen over classical imagery, for a California progressive school. The school's architecture directly reflects University High's prestigious place in the school system, in size (designed for 1200 students), educational facilities (outstandingly equipped science and home economics labs, classrooms, library, and auditorium), and amenities (study courts, above average concern for light and quiet).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 5 University High School, Oakland, Alameda Co., CA

## University High School:

The 1919 school bond issue was used largely to expand the junior and senior high school system, with three new high schools (McClymonds, replaced in 1953; Roosevelt, of which fragments survive; and University High), four new junior high schools, and parts of other junior highs. The new University High site was assembled from 17 residential lots and a former baseball park, in a mostly earthquake-era streetcar-suburb neighborhood. It was reported that "securing sites for school buildings has been an extremely difficult task... Under the State law all junior high and high schools must be equipped with gymnasiums and playgrounds of sufficient area for running tracks, tennis courts, handball courts, and drill grounds for the R.O.T.C. The ideal requirement for a high school is fifteen acres of ground..." (Tribune Year Book, 1921, p.38). Besides being available and relatively undeveloped, the new site was near Berkeley--convenient for student teachers. Proximity to Oakland Tech was apparently not a problem, since University High functioned as a magnet school rather than a neighborhood high school.

Groundbreaking for the new University High School took place on May 19, 1922. Leonarde Keeler, student body president, turned over the first shovel full of dirt. (The son of Berkeley poet Charles Keeler, and a future professor at Northwestern University, he was representative of the children enrolled in this "public prep school.") A year and a half after groundbreaking principal F.H. Boren described the completed work with approval in the October 1923 University High School Journal. He remarked that the building was externally of the mission type, that simplicity had been the aim of the designer, and that the beauty of the architecture was in the harmony of the proportions and color tones. As an educator, he was pleased that the lighting and ventilation of the building were in accordance with the latest developments, and the classrooms were specially arranged to give the greatest convenience to the teacher training center, as well as to the students. The library offered facilities that might serve an entire community, and the auditorium seated 1300, the entire student body.

Other local publications concurred with Boren. The San Francisco Chronicle enthused, "One of the most novel and beautiful edifices in the city's school program." The Oakland Tribune called the school "unique in organization and character." Examples of this uniqueness included the wide corridors to deaden the noise of the street, the landscaped study courtyards, and the way the design of the classrooms dovetailed with the specific educational objectives of the school. A University High School graduate, John Caffrey, recalls (1990), "The building was part of the whole design. I later taught in other schools and came to realize that the well-designed, airy classrooms and the well-equipped labs and arts and music facilities were not commonplace. All of us who went there were very lucky."

University High School owed its origin to Dr. Charles Rugh, Professor of Education at the University of California at Berkeley. The Oakland Board of Education Bulletin of 1914-15 explained that the school was "not in any sense a local school, but under the sponsorship of the Oakland Board of Education, the Superintendent of Schools, and the Supervisory force of the Oakland School Departments. The University School is open to all pupils in the city who desire to avail themselves of such advantages as it may offer." Rugh was praised a quarter-century later (Superintendent's Bulletin, Oct. 6, 1938) as "an educator of

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6 University High School, Oakland, Alameda Co., CA

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national reputation. Thousands of teachers studied with him and were influenced by his personality... a man whose whole life was devoted to an ideal."

Other faculty members and advisors in addition to Rugh were renowned educators: professor and principal Frank Boren, library scientist Elsie Boyd, Dr. George Rice, John Soelberg, and Dr. Wilford Aiken, chair of the National Progressive Education Association. Designed for an enrollment of 1200, Uni High already had 1300 students by 1925. In 1931 the junior high grades were discontinued and it became a senior high school only. By 1934 it was chosen as one of 30 schools in the entire country to take part in a national study by the Progressive Education Association. Teachers trained in this special educational atmosphere took advanced ideas with them to their new teaching posts throughout the state. The unique arrangement between the University of California at Berkeley and the Oakland school system continued for more than 30 years. Enrollment peaked at about 2000 in the late 1930s but fell off sharply during World War II, to 669 in 1946. Reportedly because of this decline in enrollment, University High School closed in the summer of 1946, after 32 years of operation.

Recent History: Community College, Politics, and Culture:

In fall 1946 the building reopened as the Merritt School of Business and the Joseph P. Laney Trade and Training Institute, postgraduate public schools which evolved into today's community colleges. From focusing on the special academic needs of advanced high school students, the campus now served the practical needs of returning veterans and other adults entering the postwar work force. The school came to be known as Merritt Junior College, Merritt College, Peralta Community College, and finally Oakland City College or Grove Street College. As a community college, the school offered a "second chance" to students who were not prepared to go directly to the University of California or another four-year school. Merritt alumni include prominent names in Bay Area public service, arts, and professions today.

If University High School achieved national recognition for its progressive curriculum and student achievement, the 1960s and early 1970s brought national attention to the campus as an epicenter of the black, feminist, and anti-war movements. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was begun by Merritt College students Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. They split off from the Afro-American Society which was led by lawyer Donald Warden who advocated a more "moderate" course of advancement through a liberal education and economic development. Ethnic studies also pioneered at this site with the founding of the Black and Chicano Studies programs in 1968-69. The Bay Area Chicano muralist movement began here, with several artists going on to achieve wider acclaim, among them Manuel Hernandez, Domingo Rivera, Andres Cisneros, David Bradford, Patricia Rodriguez, and Lem, whose work is documented in Community Murals: The People's Art, by Alan Barnett.

As a result of a 1969 seismic study applying Field Act earthquake standards to the building, the original main building was vacated about 1970. The manual arts wing continued in use until 1974. A new Merritt College, displaced to the Oakland hills, opened in 1971. The trustees of the Peralta Community College District sold the building to the Oakland Unified School District in 1980. The gymnasium, manual

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7 University High School, Oakland, Alameda Co., CA

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arts wing, and portable buildings on the rear of the site became the temporary campus of Oakland Technical High School while Tech itself was receiving seismic retrofitting. University High School was finally abandoned completely in 1983 when Oakland Technical High School reopened, and the City of Oakland assumed control from the school district. Several development schemes have been proposed for the site in succeeding years.

An unsuccessful effort by Grove Street faculty, students, and supporters to retain a North Oakland community college at the existing site led to a lawsuit by Berkeley City Council members, which "won" the creation of Berkeley-based Vista College instead. A widely shared suspicion at the time held that the seismic issue had been exploited to defuse the militancy associated with Merritt College. Merritt College still receives national mention in connection with its more recent past: the obituaries (including the New York Times) after the death of Huey Newton in 1989 detailed the genesis of the Black Panther Party at the campus; former Black Panther Party member and now Oakland educator Erika Huggins was shown in the May 1990 Esquire magazine outside the cyclone fence surrounding the building, a symbol for her of the tragic waste of an educational resource.

National Register eligibility has been claimed only for the period, 1922-1942, ending fifty years ago. However, the important events of the more recent past have been included to provide more complete documentation of the property.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2 University High School, Oakland, Alameda Co., CA

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University High School, Oakland, Alameda County, CA

Major Bibliographical References, continued:

Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey, City Planning Department, file on C.W. Dickey (lists of works, obituaries, etc.)

Oakland History Room, Oakland Main Public Library, vertical files "Oakland. Schools" (clippings, city government reports, etc.)

Oakland Tribune Year Book, 1925, passim., photos of 1919 bond issue schools.

Building condition and construction (recent studies)

Agora Architects, A Feasibility Report on the Rehabilitation of the Grove Street Center, 1980.

Culley, Peter, & Associates, Seismic Assessment of University High School, 1989.

Langenbach, Randolph, Alternative Proposal, Martin Luther King Community Plaza, 1989.

Ratcliff, Slama, Cadwalader, Architects, A Report on Seismic Investigation and Rehabilitation, Merritt College..., 1969.

Rauber, Paul, "The Case of the Languishing Landmark," Express, March 23, 1990, pp. 1, 13-21.

Existing documentation/evaluation/designation:

Brady & Associates, Inc., Martin Luther King Jr. Community Plaza Section 106 Historical Documentation, 1991.

Brokl, Robert, Oakland City Landmark nomination for University High School, September 1990.

Marsh, Diann, National Register nomination for University High School, November 1985 (MS at Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey).

Oakland City Planning Department, Preliminary Citywide Historical and Architectural Inventory, April 1986.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(see also citations in text)

Oakland schools and school architecture:

Dickey, Charles W., "Oakland's New Public Schools," The Building Review, v. 20, no. 4, October 1921, pp. 1-69.

Dickey, Charles W., and Marston Campbell, "Millions of Dollars for Schools," Oakland Tribune Year Book, 1921, pp. 38, 41.

Donovan, John J., "Problems That Have Been Solved in Oakland's New School Buildings," Architect and Engineer, March 1915.

Donovan, John J., School Architecture: Principles and Practices, New York, 1921.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Oakland City Planning Department  
1 City Hall Plaza, Oakland CA 94612

**10. Geographical Data**

Acres of property 9 acres

UTM References

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10	5	6	4	4	0	0
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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Assessor's parcel number: Book 15, Block 1281, Parcel 1, subparcels 1, 2, and 3.

Bounded by Martin Luther King Jr. Way on the west, Dover St. on the east, 58th St. on the north, and Aileen St. on the south (one block deep by three blocks long, minus NE AND SE corners in separate use and ownership)

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

This parcel has been the campus of University High School since it was constructed in 1922-26. It includes the classroom-auditorium building with shop addition, the gymnasium, and historically related outdoor areas (courtyards, athletic fields, etc.)

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Robert Brokl  
 organization North Oakland Voters' Alliance date April 22, 1992  
 street & number 636 59th Street telephone 510-655-3841  
 city or town Oakland state CA zip code 94609