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SEP 13 1991

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL
REGISTER

1. Name of Property

historic name: Fern Avenue School

other name/site number: Fern-Greenwood School

2. Location

street & number: 1314 Fern Avenue

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Torrance

vicinity: N/A

state: CA

county: Los Angeles

code: 037

zip code: 90503

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Torrance Unified School District, 2335 Plaza del Amo,
Torrance, California, 90501 (public-local)

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	0 buildings
0	0 sites
0	0 structures
0	0 objects
1	0 Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

 See continuation sheet.

Stade R. Craze
Signature of certifying official

January 14, 1992
Date

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.

Delores Byars

2/20/92

 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 Keeper

Date
of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: Educational	Sub: School
_____	_____
Current : Educational	Sub: School
_____	_____
_____	_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification: Spanish Colonial Revival

Other Description: _____

Materials: foundation	concrete	roof	terra cotta
walls	OTHER: plaster	other	

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Fern Avenue School's nominated area comprises only the main building which is located at the southwest corner of the site. Completed in 1933, it consists of nine classrooms, administration and a kindergarten. Henry L. Gogerty is the architect on record. This structure is the oldest elementary school still in use and the only example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture for a school building in the City of Torrance.

Historic Physical Appearance:

The strength of the building's appearance lies in its simple shapes, clean lines, and unity of form. The main building is a combination of one and two-story structures, "L" shaped in plan with low ridge roofs of clay "Spanish" tile. The building is divided into three sections: the east wing includes the kindergarten, the kindergarten work area, and the play area; the south part contains the administration offices, nurse's office, and supply room; the first floor of the north part comprises the girls and boys bathrooms, janitor work room, and five classrooms; and the second floor of the north part takes in the teachers' work area, janitor, storage room, and four classrooms. The arcade on the east elevation faces north and functions as an entry way between the kindergarten and the main play area, but is included within the roofline. The building also has a basement area for storage and central heating uses.

All exterior walls are constructed with six layers of brick (14" thick) with a plaster surface. The walls show a decorative base that rises approximately two

 X See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: A and C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : N/A

Areas of Significance: Architecture
Education
Social History

Period(s) of Significance: 1932 - 1941

Significant Dates: 1932

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Gogerty, Henry L., architect

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

The Fern Avenue School is one of the most notable buildings remaining in Torrance which embodies the best architectural and historical characteristics from its time period. The School is both historically and architecturally significant under criteria "A" and "C." The main building is significant in three areas: architecture, social history and education. First, it is the oldest elementary school still in existence as well as the only example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture applied to a school building in Torrance. The main entrance of the Fern School, in particular, is significant for the excellence of its craftsmanship and detailing. Second, the school became the focal point of a debate for more local control (The City Charter movement) between local residents and the Los Angeles City School District. This debate emerged as Torrance's residential population grew from the original center of town to the west and residents demanded more local control over services. Third, the school's early student population included minority groups who were segregated from Torrance's white residents; specifically, Japanese and Hispanic families who lived to the north and west of the center of town. Two other structures in Torrance, Torrance High School (Italianate Style) and the Pacific Electric Bridge (Irving Gill) have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The period of significance is 1932 to 1941. Although the main building of the Fern School continues to be important to the community into the present, the period of significance has been ended at 1941, fifty years ago. As the oldest existing elementary school in the City of Torrance, the Fern School's main building has been recognized as a significant historic site by the Torrance Historic Resources Survey (May, 1979) and the Torrance Historical Society.

X See continuation sheet.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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: Torrance Unified School District
Los Angeles Unified School District

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: .40 acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing			Zone Easting Northing		
A	<u>11</u>	<u>376840</u>	<u>3744450</u>	B	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: Refer to enclosed scale map

See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification: The boundaries are drawn to encompass the historic resource and its immediate setting.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Michael G. Bihn, Senior Principal Planner
Michael Lappen, Planning Associate

Organization: City of Torrance Planning Department Date: March 20, 1991

Street & Number: 3031 Torrance Blvd. Telephone: (213) 618-5990

City or Town: Torrance State: CA ZIP: 90503

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feet above grade. The east elevation plans show a four-bay arcade, with round-headed arch, on the east elevation of the structure. The kindergarten play yard is elevated above street level and has cast stone posts and a decorative wrought iron railing. All exterior stairs and the arcade are flanked by decorative wrought iron railings. The entries have double doors made of 2 1/2" pine with six glass window panes and a ten glass window panes over the entry. The kindergarten entry consists of a single door made of 2 1/2" pine.

On the west elevation, the decorative main entry serves as the focal point for the structure. It is graced with cast stone columns and Corinthian capitals support the cornice and frame the doorway. Above the doorway, there is a window opening with decorative stone and metalwork. The architect has also incorporated four small stylized friezes, depicting ocean themes, above the doorway. The entrance includes cast stone steps leading to the two, 2 1/4" thick hardwood doors (6'4"x 8'6") with plate glass panels.

The fenestration is rich in variety. A mixture of windows sizes and materials were integrated into the design of the exterior facade. Each classroom has an average of five, double hung windows (3'8"x 8') with eight glass panes, wood sash and frame. The Kindergarten and other work rooms have double hung windows (2'10"x 8) with eight glass panes, wood sash and frame, for a total of three on the east and nine on the south elevations. The Administrative offices contain double swing windows (3'5"x 5') with eight glass panes, metal sash and frame. There are three such windows on the west and five on the south elevations. The facade also shows other steel windows of various sizes, including six double hung, wood sash and frame windows (3'2"x 5'6") for the bathrooms and two single swing windows (1'11"x 3') in the teachers' lounge area. One window, with six glass panes, wood sash and frame that tips inward, is located on the second floor hallway. Four windows covered with decorative wrought iron grills on the west facade. All classroom windows are supported by cast stone sills.

The roof design comprises several levels and visually ties together the separate parts of the structure with the consistency of roof slope. The highest level is over the entrance and steps downward to the second and first story levels on the north and south sides of the structure. It supports two wrought iron finials on the ridge of the highest level which frames the main entrance. Also, a square, cast stone chimney rises east of the roof ridge over the northern part of the second floor.

The interior is unified by a single hallway that is highlighted by natural light from the classrooms. The interior walls and ceilings are constructed of reinforced concrete. Each classroom has two doorways, with 1 3/4" wood panel doors, facing the hallway. Interior windows (2'4" x 3'), with six glass panes, are placed over each doorway and spaced between the doorways. The windows are designed to filter more natural light into the hallway area. The interior

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staircases exhibit wood railings. The classrooms show hardwood floors but, it is unknown whether hardwood or linoleum tile floors originally covered the hallways. The classrooms were originally designed with a cloakroom and storage areas located in the rear. Room 3 was also used as an auditorium with a stage located at the north end of the room. However, it lacked a wardrobe and storage area. The entry area, near the administration offices, has a glass display case and hanging wrought iron lamps. The administration office area includes a hardwood counter, hardwood teacher mailboxes, and a centralized intercom system in a wood cabinet.

Alterations and Present Physical Appearance:

Over the years, both the Los Angeles City and the Torrance Unified School Districts have endeavored to retain the original architectural integrity of the main building. Some changes have occurred, but the building's facade has not been significantly altered and retains its architectural integrity. In 1946 an addition was made to the north; in 1959 the school spent \$250,000 to rehabilitate and seismically upgrade the building to earthquake standards. In the 1970s the original double-hung classroom windows were replaced with aluminum windows. However, one original double-hung window remains located at the south stairway. The classroom window dimensions, and wood trim, remain as originally designed. In the 1980s the School District replaced the original exterior doors, which had deteriorated, with new ones of the same style, dimensions and materials.

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Educational and Social History:

The Fern School was constructed during a period of rapid growth in the Torrance area. The City of Torrance, incorporated in 1921, experienced a period of rapid growth in the late 1920s, spurred by its location near the Los Angeles Harbor, the result of an oil boom, and the further expansion of heavy industry (U.S. Steel's purchase of Columbia Steel). The resident population increased from 825 in 1919 to 8,000 by 1932. Likewise, the school population had increased from 150 to 1800 students and from seven to 70 teachers during the same period. By 1928, the local principals were actively recruiting new teachers and Torrance Elementary School, constructed in 1924, was using the school auditorium for classroom space and considering half-day sessions.

Prior to construction of the main building, the Fern School site was used to house the expanding elementary school population. In September 1928, the Los Angeles City School District located a temporary wood structure from El Segundo to the new site at Fern Avenue, what was then considered to be the western edge of town. The district transferred 119 students and three teachers to the new site. Called the "Fern Street Annex to Torrance Elementary School," the school initially functioned as an extension to Torrance Elementary School for first to third graders. The administration and Parent-Teachers Association remaining based at Torrance Elementary School. By 1930, however, the Fern Avenue School was on firm footing with 150 students from all elementary grades, four teachers and its own principal, Guy Holliday. The "Elementary School" PTA continued to represent both schools.

Community leaders often complained that the School District neglected Torrance. They felt that, as a "workingman's" town, the City was relegated to "second class status" and received only a 50% return on its tax contribution to the School District. Still, Torrance residents supported several district wide Bonds to purchase properties and finance construction of new school facilities for the entire School District, including Torrance. By August 1931, Torrance boosters, desiring greater local autonomy, proposed to create a city charter which would also transfer the schools into local hands. Political leaders proposing the City Charter and educational leaders supporting the School District debated their respective causes in the public forum. As a result, the School District postponed any new building project for the Fern School until a vote decided the fate of the City Charter. In April, 1932, voters rejected the City Charter and the Los Angeles City School District retained control of the Torrance schools.

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In May, 1932, the School Board authorized \$84,000 to fund the new school's construction. Henry L. Gogerty designed the new school building and the firm of George Mittry, from Los Angeles, was contracted to do the actual grading and construction work. The Torrance Herald, the local newspaper, reported that a few local firms were subcontracted to assist the building activity. Grading on the site began in June, 1932 with work taking approximately 125 days to complete. Students were moved into the new building in December 1932, with four teachers and Guy Holliday continuing as principal. Within a few months after completion, the Fern School withstood its first test when it survived, sustaining no damage, the Long Beach Earthquake of March, 1933.

In February 1933, the School District changed Torrance Elementary School and Fern School's districts. Torrance Elementary retained the older center of town while Fern School served the area north and west of older center part of town to the City's western boundary with Redondo Beach. The redrawn area brought another 149 students, originally from Torrance Elementary School (except for those 6th grade students who wished to graduate from Torrance Elementary School), to Fern Avenue, for a total of 295 students and six teachers. The next year, enrollment increased to 320, with ten teachers, and remained under 350 students until the Second World War.

Fern School's new district drew students from various ethnic groups, including families of newly arrived white refinery workers, Japanese farmers and Hispanic laborers. In 1912, the original town's master plan designated areas outside the town as "foreign quarters" or "areas for non-Caucasians." Minorities were excluded from joining most civic and community organizations. As a result of separation, Hispanic families resided in the neighborhood a mile north of the center of town called "The Pueblo" or "The Mexican Village." These residents worked for local industry and maintained their own church, market and community organizations. Likewise, the first and second generation Japanese families, who lived and worked in the strawberry fields a mile west of the center of the City, supported their own newspaper, markets, school and social organizations. Also the city was expanding further westward from the old center to accommodate new housing for white refinery workers. Newspaper reports from the 1930s and interviews with former Fern School students indicate that the different ethnic groups attended the same classes and played together without confrontation. Fern School provided students from different ethnic groups a rare chance to integrate with each other.

School principals under Los Angeles administration included Guy Holliday in 1930, Oda Vans in 1935, Lillian Billups in 1939, Mary Charlotte Weddell in 1941, Carolyn Blackmun in 1946. Albert Posner served as the first principal under the Torrance Unified School District. He was followed by Ron Henderson, Charles Crecelius, Malcolm Richland, Joe T. Brandon, Ellen Booz, Donald Credell, Daniel Kelly, Cecil Paschall, Lucille LeMieux, and Robert Scharf.

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Architectural Significance:

Architecturally, the main building is distinct from the other Torrance schools due to its use of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, which was popular among professional Californian architects in the 1920s. Torrance schools show a variety of architectural styles and the two earlier schools in Torrance proper, Torrance High School (1917, listed in the National Register of Historic Places) and Torrance Elementary School (1924, altered and presently integrated into Torrance High School) were designed in the Italianate style. Other regional schools included the Walteria School (1933, the Mission Style building was demolished) established by the Redondo Beach School District in 1925 and the Perry School (the wood building was demolished) which began in 1905 by Los Angeles County. The variety of architectural styles at this time also may indicate that the Los Angeles City School District did not subscribe to any specific architectural style in order to "elevate or instruct" students, as was the case during the 1930s with instructive frieze work seen on "Art Deco" buildings.

Compared to other commercial and institutional buildings in Torrance, the Fern School is one of the two non-residential, Spanish Colonial buildings to have retained its architectural integrity; the other being the Nativity Church (1921). The City began with an impressive architectural tradition since the firm of Olmsted and Olmsted created the original town plan and Irving Gill (noted for his striped down design with elements of the Mission style) designed the first commercial and residential structures. In Torrance, the Spanish Colonial style became a popular style for several residences, institutional and commercial buildings during the 1920s. The following non-residential buildings, which exhibit elements of the Spanish Colonial style, have been listed in the City's "Torrance Historic Resources Survey:" Torrance Women's Club (1925, altered), Torrance Memorial Hospital (1924, altered), Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Building (1928, unaltered), and the First Baptist Church (1948, altered). Unlike the Fern School, all these buildings are also located near the older center part of the City. In the 1930s, the design for Torrance's institutional buildings was done primarily in the Federal Style (The City Hall, 1936, Torrance Civic Auditorium, 1937 and Public Library, 1937).

The efficient design has also enabled the building to continue as an elementary school during the periods of rapid population growth and decline without altering its architectural integrity. Immediately following its completion the Long Beach Earthquake in 1933 presented the new school building with its most

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severe challenge to its structural integrity. The Torrance Herald reported that the building survived without any damage, compared to Torrance Elementary School which was forced to temporarily close. In 1947, administrators for the new Torrance Unified School District called the fifteen year old Fern School "one of the most modern plants in the City of Torrance." Even in the mid-1980s, the strength of the Fern School's design was further reinforced when the School District, facing declining student enrollment, decided to close the newer Greenwood School and rehabilitate the older main building. When compared to post World War II school architecture, many teachers and former students note that the Fern School provides a comfortable learning atmosphere. Its architecture give the building a permanence and stability in the neighborhood (now considered to be located in the aging center of Torrance) as older traditional single-family, worker housing is slowly being replaced by upscale homes, multiple-family residences.

Henry L. Gogerty is the architect on record. During the 1920s, he was known for his use of the Spanish Colonial Revival style with Churrigueresque ornamentation, notably the "Hollywood Playhouse" (Hollywood Palace) and the "Bane Building" in Hollywood, California.

Community Commitment:

Since 1985, the City of Torrance, the Torrance Unified School District and the Torrance Historical Society have been committed to the preservation of the Fern Avenue School's main building. City and School officials and staffs have worked closely during the application process. In February, 1990, the Board of Education began the nomination process by expressing its commitment to the preservation of the historically and architecturally significant school. The City's Planning Department staff undertook research to obtain the appropriate historical documentation for the preparation of the nomination form. This nomination form was completed with the close cooperation of Fern School's administration, teachers and parent organization. Both City and School District officials have also expressed their desires to see the school included into the National Register.

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Bibliography

(Fern Avenue School) Page 2

Major Bibliographical References
Published Sources:

Gebhard, David and Robert White. Architecture in Los Angeles, A Complete Guide. Salt Lake City, Utah: Peregrine Smith Books. 1985. (specific information on the architect)

General Petroleum Corporation. "To Torrance." The Southwestern Purchasing Agent. September 1938. On file with the Torrance Historical Society, Torrance, California.

Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles, California: Various issues from March 1932 to April 1933 on microfilm in the Torrance Public Library, Torrance, California.

Shanahan, D.F. and Charles Elliot Jr.. Historic Torrance: A Pictorial History of Torrance, California. Redondo Beach, California: Legends Press 1984.

Torrance Chamber of Commerce. General Industrial Report of Torrance California. Torrance, California: Torrance Chamber of Commerce. May 1933. On file with the Torrance Historical Society, Torrance, California.

Torrance Herald. Torrance, California: Various issues from May 1928 to August 1933. On file with the Torrance Public Library, Torrance, California.

School District Publications:

Going to School. Book #7. Torrance, California: Torrance Unified School District. 1964. On file with the Torrance Historical Society, Torrance, California.

History of Torrance, A Teacher's Resource Guide. Torrance, California: Torrance Unified School District September 1964. Document on file with the Torrance Historical Society, Torrance, California.

Registry of Teachers. Los Angeles City School District, 1909-1946. On file with the Torrance Historical Society, Torrance, California.

Planning Documentation:

Hatheway, Roger, and John Chase. "Torrance Historical Resources Survey" Torrance, California. May 1979. Document on file with the City of Torrance Planning Department, Torrance, California.

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Section number Attachment # 1 (Fern Avenue School) Page 1

There are 23 photographs with this registration form. All are of the Fern Avenue School in Torrance, California.

With the exception of photograph #1, the historic photo, all photos were taken by Michael Lappen and Steve Crecy on December 11, 1990.

Photograph #1

1. Fern Avenue School
2. Torrance, California
3. Haig and Haig
4. 1932
5. Torrance Historical Society
6. View from the corner of Fern Avenue and El Dorado Street, looking north/east at west elevation.

Photograph #2

- 1-2. Same as above
3. Michael Lappen
4. December 11, 1990
5. City of Torrance Planning Department
6. View from the corner of Fern Avenue and El Dorado Street, looking north/east at west elevation.

Photograph #3

- 1-5. Same as above
6. View from Fern Avenue, looking south/east at west elevation.

Photograph #4

- 1-5. Same as above
6. View of east elevation, looking south/west.

Photograph #5

- 1-5. Same as above
6. View of east elevation with arcade connecting main building with north annex, looking west.

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Photograph #6

- 1-2. Same as above
- 3. Steve Crecy
- 4-5. Same as above
- 6. View of the south elevation, looking north.

Photograph #7

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. View of west elevation main entrance, with ornamentation.

Photograph #8

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. View of west elevation main entrance, detail of doorway and ornamentation

Photograph #9

- 1-2. Same as above
- 3. Michael Lappen
- 4-5. Same as above
- 6. north entry doorway, detail

Photograph #10

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. Kindergarten Play Area with cast stone columns, detail looking north.

Photograph #11

- 1-2. Same as above
- 3. Steve Crecy
- 4-5. Same as above
- 6. Detail of gate at the Kindergarten Play Area, looking north.

Photograph #12

- 1-2. Same as above
- 3. Michael Lappen
- 4-5. Same as above
- 6. West elevation window detail, with wrought iron grating.

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Photograph #13

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. West elevation window detail.

Photograph #14

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. First floor hallway, showing classroom windows and doors, looking north.

Photograph #15

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. Original fire extinguisher case with wood detail, second floor hallway.

Photograph #16

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. The northern staircase, showing detail of original bannister and wood work.

Photograph #17

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. The northern staircase, showing original double hung window with original wood frame and trimming.

Photograph #18

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. Interior view of a typical classroom, showing detail of original storage area, looking south.

Photograph #19

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. Interior view of a typical classroom showing wood floor and new windows, looking west.

Photograph #20

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. View of typical classroom with original wood floor, looking east

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Photograph #21

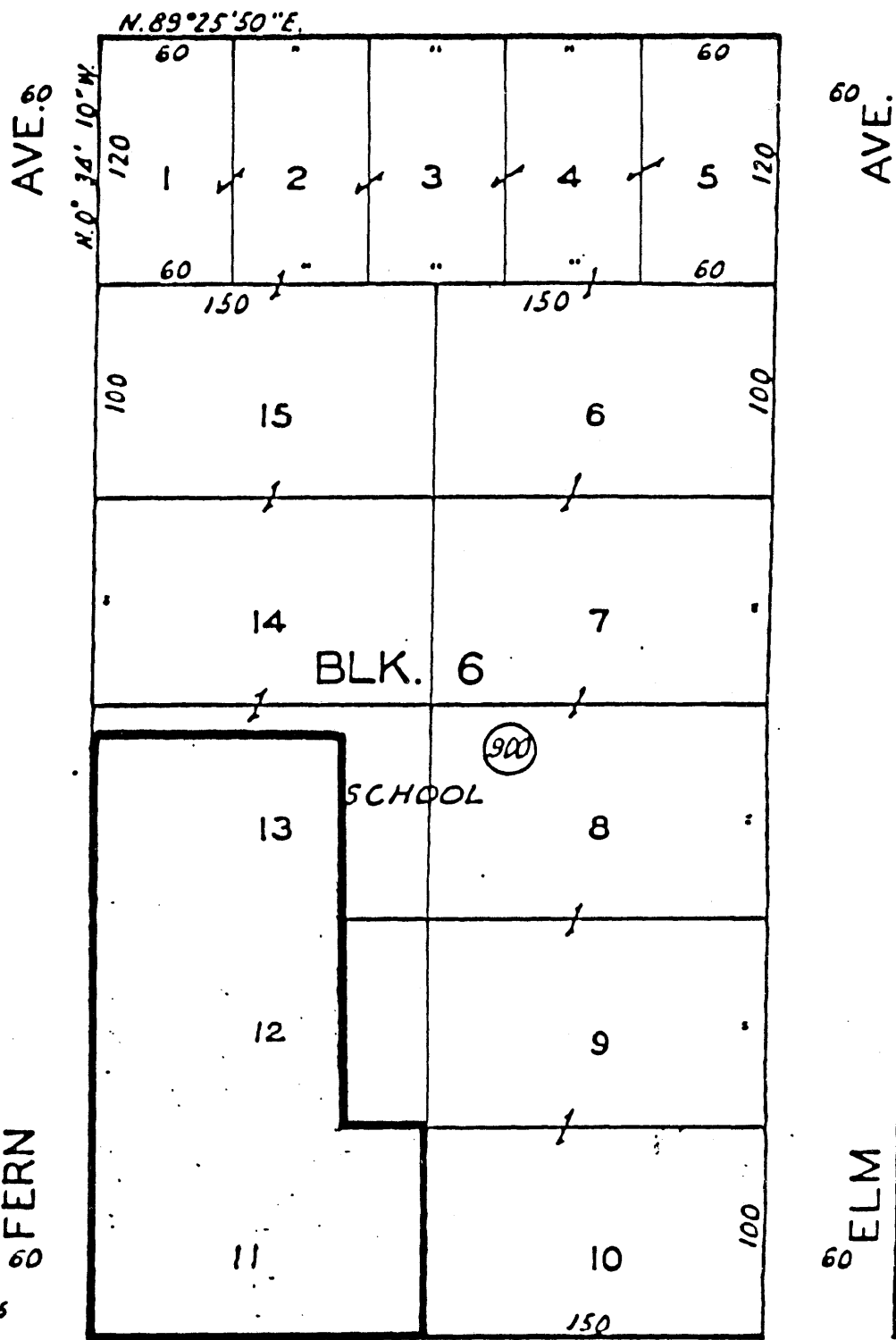
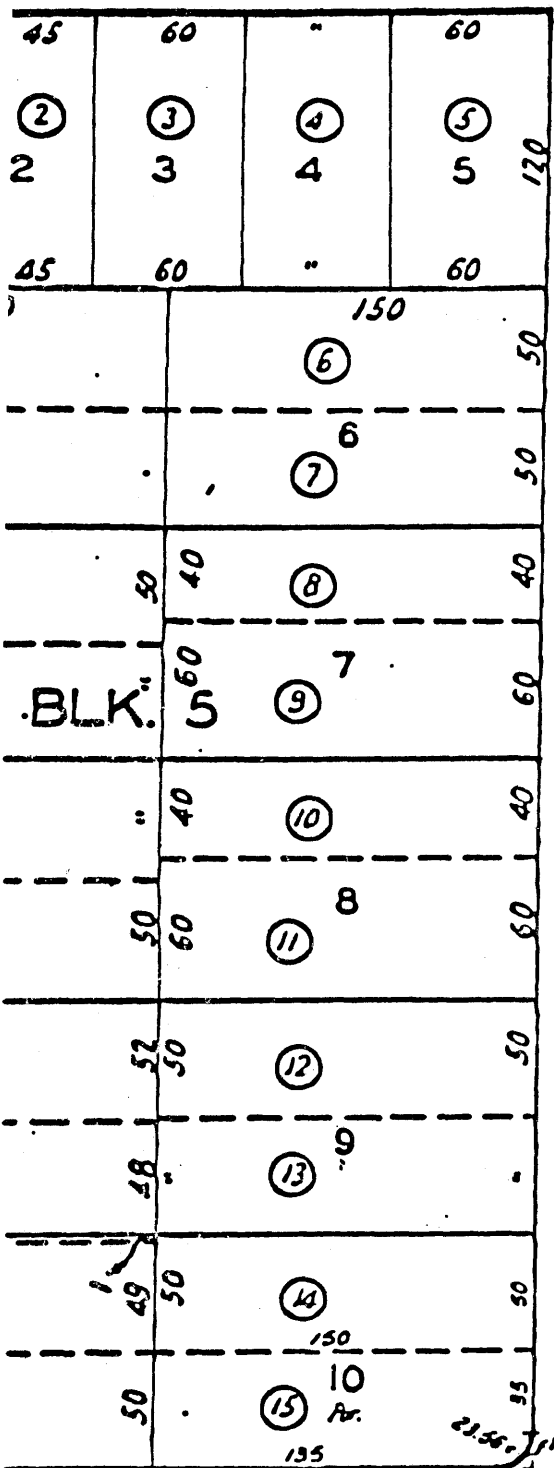
- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. View of original wood counter in the administration office.

Photograph #22

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. View of the original intercom system in the administration office.

Photograph #23

- 1-5. Same as above
- 6. View of an original classroom bench (dated late 19th century) from the Perry Elementary School (demolished), located in the main hallway.



FERN AVENUE SCHOOL
 Torrance
 California

1" : 80'



— Boundary