



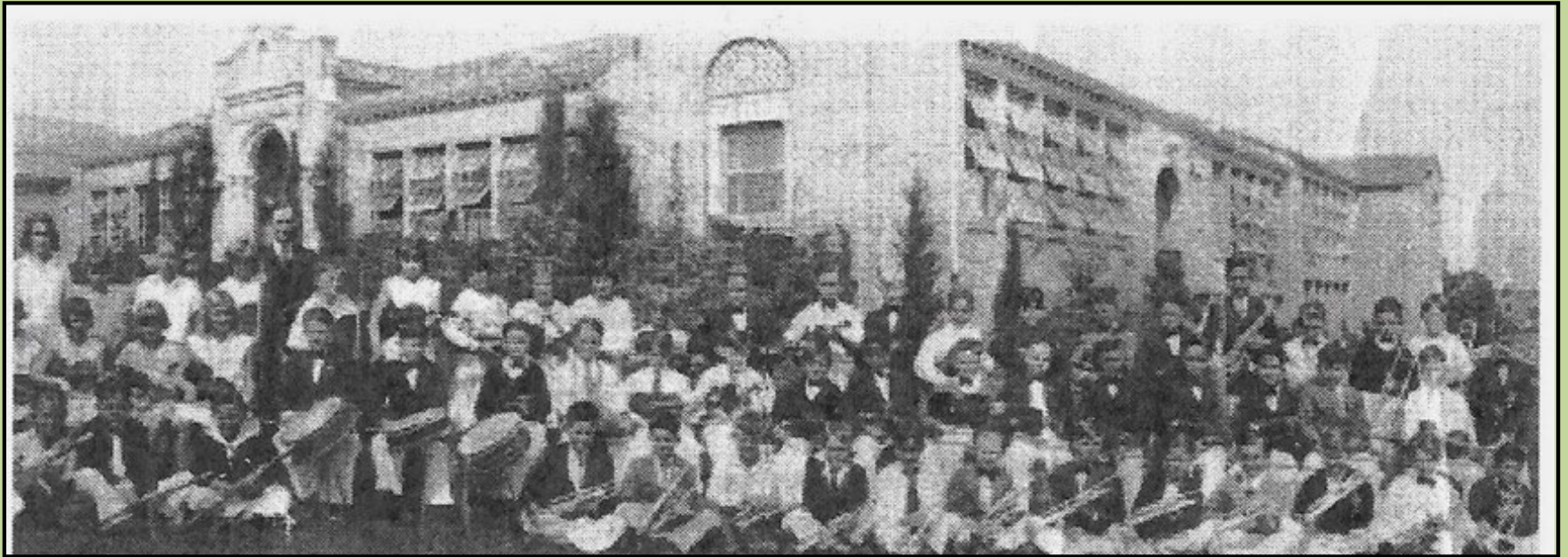
# **Review of nomination for listing Washington Elementary School to the National Register of Historic Places**

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# Introduction

- **Questions regarding the nomination of the Washington Elementary School Property to the National Register of Historic Places**

Main Building  
Washington Elementary School  
Circa 1928



Main Building  
Washington Elementary School  
Circa 1940



Main Building  
Washington Elementary School  
2024





Auditorium  
Washington Elementary School  
constructed in 1941



Sheridan Way Kindergarten Building  
Washington Elementary School  
Constructed in 1929, Moved to WES in 1953



# NR Instructions

## **National Register Bulletin 15 states:**

For a property to qualify for the National Register it **must** meet one of the National Register Criteria for Evaluation by:

Being associated with an important historic context

*and*

Retaining historic integrity of those features necessary to convey its significance.

“Historic integrity is the authenticity of a property’s historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property’s historic period.” (NRB 16A)



# NR Nomination Document

## Historic Contexts for Washington Elementary School property (WES)

Determine which historic context(s) the property represents:  
“A property MUST possess significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture when evaluated within the historic context of a relevant geographic area.”

### Chosen Criterion and Historic Contexts for WES

Criterion A: Education: The process conveying or acquiring knowledge or skills through systematic instruction, training, or study.

Criterion C: Architecture: The practical art of designing and construction buildings and structures to serve human needs. Specifically, the property is associated with Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals – Mediterranean Revival [Spanish Revival] architecture.

# NR Nomination Document

Preparation of the STATEMENT of SIGNIFICANCE for Historic Context

- **Statement of Significance per NRB 16A:** Relate the property to important themes in the history of its community. Include information about the history of the community or larger geographical area that explains the way the property is unique or representative of its theme, place, and time.
- **Per NRB 15, Section V:** “Its core premise is that resources, properties, or happenings in history do not occur in a vacuum but rather are part of larger trends or patterns.”
- **Period of Significance:** 1925 – 1957
- **Significant Dates:** Significant dates are used to note when there was *an event contributing to the buildings architectural significance*.  
1935 (Field Act repairs completed)  
1941 (Construction of the new Auditorium and Cafeteria complex)

# NR Nomination Document

## Statement of Significance

Determine the significance of the WES property under National Register Criterion A (Association with Events: Education) and Criterion C (Architecture: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Revival)

- To be considered eligible for listing under Criterion A, the WES property must be found to be associated with the process of conveying or acquiring knowledge or skills through systematic instruction, training, or study, important to the history of Ventura.
- If the property is to be considered eligible for listing under Criterion C, then the nominators must present evidence that the property is a significant example, and has sufficient integrity to be representative, of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Revival architecture associated with the construction of WES in 1925.
- Determine whether the property retains integrity. Evaluate the aspects of location, design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association that the property **MUST** retain to convey its historic significance under Criterion A and Criterion C.

# NR Nomination Document

## Narrative Statement of Significance

- Per the Narrative Statement of Significance:

The history of “Ventura City Schools” begins with the simple statement that “the number of families that moved to Ventura during the 1920s and 1930s overwhelmed the existing school system and numerous new school facilities were constructed.”

The document doesn’t include any of the early history of Ventura or the general area. There is no mention of the establishment of Mission San Buenaventura in 1796, the agricultural and ranching history, and most importantly, the facts about the discovery of oil in Ventura in 1919. By 1923, Ventura was the largest producer of crude oil in the United States. This event would lead to the population of the area increasing by 179% between 1920 and 1930.

The increase in the number of students would have forced the construction of new school buildings, and the increase in local wealth would have allowed the City of Ventura School District to construct school buildings whose architecture reflected the community’s economic boom.

# NR Nomination Document

## Narrative Statement of Significance

- The Narrative of Significance ignores the history of the multiple school districts in the Ventura area, and how they would eventually form a unified district in the 1960s with the establishment of Ventura Unified School District.
- The second paragraph of the Narrative of Significance reads “the wave of postwar residential development as the city expanded eastward required the building of many new elementary schools, as second high school campus, and Ventura Community College.”
- This second paragraph of the Narrative jumps into the history of the Ventura schools after the end of World War II in 1945. The balance of the Narrative about the history of Ventura City Schools is concerned with the design, construction, and architects of school facilities erected after 1945, four years after the last building was constructed on the WES property.
- The discussion of post-WWII school facilities that include finger-plan and cluster-plan school designs is irrelevant to the history of the WES property as it does not directly relate to the property’s contribution to Education after 1941.



# NR Nomination Document

## Narrative Statement of Significance

### History of WES

- The Main Building of Washington Elementary School was constructed in 1925-1929. It was designed by Mott Marston, an architect known for being an admirer of the work of Spanish Revival architect George Washington Smith of Santa Barbara, CA.
- After the Long Beach Earthquake of May 1933, Ventura School District hired local architect Harold E. Burket to rehabilitate Washington Elementary School (the only building on the site at that time) with structural repairs to meet the requirements of the Field Act.
- Burket teamed up with a Structural Engineer (per Field Act building permit) responsible for devising a method of encasing all elevations of the brick building with a steel wire mesh and then spraying a 4-inch layer of gunite (liquid cement) over the mesh system. Burket's rehab plans also called for the removal of approximately 65% of the exterior, character-defining features of the original Spanish Revival building as designed in 1925.

# NR Nomination Document

## Narrative Statement of Significance

### History of WES, part 2

- The Auditorium and Cafeteria building complex were constructed in 1941. The project was funded by a New Deal Program as a means of employing local workers. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) Auditorium building was designed by Burket. He designed it to complement (and be deferential to) the Main Building which still maintained some of the character-defining features of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Revival architecture from the Field Act rehab in 1935.
- The kindergarten building that had been built for the Sheridan Way School was picked up and moved to the WES campus in 1953.
- In 1957, the local firm of Fisher and Wilde was hired by VUSD to “modernize” the interior and exterior of WES. Their remodeling plans called for the removal of all the few remaining pre-Field Act architectural details, the removal of all the original wood doors and windows, and replaced the windows with metal sash windows. The main entranceway arch was turned into a rectangular feature, and large planters were removed from the entrance steps. At some point in time, character-defining red-clay barrel tile roof was removed from the Main Building.
- The Field Act was not responsible for the “modernizing” of the exterior of the Main Building in 1957. This remodel was directed by the School District, and the result was to leave the only the original massing, roof style, pattern of fenestration, and entrances of the 1929 version of the Main Building. The introduction of the new, metal frame, windows with single horizontal lights, and the new main entrance portal, presents a “re-muddled” appearance in an attempt to introduce Mid-Century Modern/International Style features to modernize its appearance (particularly on the front/west elevation.)
- The Main Building was opened for students in 1925, and the last building constructed on the property was the Auditorium and Cafeteria complex in 1941.

# NR Nomination Document

Preparation of the STATEMENT of SIGNIFICANCE for Historic Context  
(NRB 15, III.)

Why does the Period of Significance end in 1957?

WES functioned as a public elementary school, and was associated with the theme of Education until 1983.

How did the rehabilitation work undertaken to meet the requirements of the Field Act in 1935 *contribute* to the architectural significance of the Main Building when it resulted in the original brick walls being completely covered with Gunite, and removal of approximately 65% of the buildings character-defining features?

# NR nomination document

## Narrative Description (Section 7)

- Per National Register Bulletin 16A “How to Complete the National Register Registration Form”, page 27 “Guidelines for Entering Materials”
- *Enter only materials visible from the exterior of a building. Do not enter material of interior, structural, or concealed architectural features even if they are significant.*
- WES NR Section 7 page 4: Description: Materials: Principal exterior materials of the property: CONCRETE/BRICK
- There is no brick visible on any of the exterior walls of the Main Building or any of the other buildings on the property. The brick walls of the Main Building were entirely clad in gunite in 1935.
- The exterior walls of the Auditorium were constructed using poured concrete in wood forms. The “ghost marks” of the wood forms are easily visible.

# NR Nomination Document

## Criterion A: EDUCATION

The nomination states “Under Criterion A in the area of education, the property, one of the oldest extant city schools, represents the evolution of education in Ventura.”

- The nominators must present evidence as to how WES specifically played a significant role in the “evolution of education” in Ventura by conveying knowledge or skills through systematic instruction, training, or study of students at WES.
- The Field Act was a statewide mandate that affected every school building constructed before 1933 in California.
- What important facet of local education does WES represent aside from being one of many local elementary schools in Ventura built before the Field Act of 1933?
- Specifically, how were students at WES educated any differently than at other schools throughout the District, or in California as a whole, due to the Field Act?
- Specifically how is the rehabilitation of the Main Building under the Field Act considered significant in the “evolution of education” in Ventura?
- Did the 1935 Field Act rehab at WES improve the students ability to learn, or introduce new and improved teaching methods important District-wide?
- Did the Field Act rehab at WES create an improved learning environment important in the history of education in Ventura?
- If the property is to be considered eligible for listing under Criterion A, and if to meet Criterion A the nominators state that the property is important for its contribution to “the evolution of” local education – then the nominators must present evidence that the property has sufficient physical integrity to convey its significance to the historic period when Washington Elementary School was first opened to students in 1925, through to 1974 (2024-50 years).
- Nomination states “Built and expanded as a response to the rapid growth of Midtown resulting from the development of subdivisions during the 1920s, Washington Elementary School was the first school in Ventura repaired and remodeled to conform with safety standards established by the Field Act passed in the wake of the 1933 Long Beach Earthquake.”
- WES was not the only school built to meet the demand of the increase of students living in Ventura, nor was it the only school building in Ventura to be rehabbed under the requirements of the Field Act.



# NR Nomination Document

## Criterion C: Architecture

- NRB 15 states “If the property has been rehabilitated, the historic materials and significant features **must** have been preserved.” The Main Building has not retained the key exterior materials dating from the period of its historic significance of 1925.
- Nomination states: “Under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, Main Building and Auditorium embody the distinctive characteristics of the Mediterranean Revival style as applied to education buildings streamlined for the needs of earthquake safety.  
That statement may have been true in 1935, but the Main Building has not retained the few key exterior materials and character-defining features when the remaining features were removed with the remodeling of 1957.
- The Main Building lost a substantial amount of character-defining features associated with the Spanish Revival style of architecture.
- Specifically, how was the Field Act beneficial to the historic architectural features of the Main Building in 1935?
- How was the remodeling of the Main Building in 1957 beneficial to the historic architectural features of WES?

# NR Nomination Document

## Criterion C: Architecture, continued

- How has the Main Building retained the aesthetics of Marston's original conception and design of the building from 1929? Specifically, where are the ornamental details and original materials such as brick exterior walls, divided light wood windows, paneled wood doors, intricate molded plaster decorations and relief panels, coping, shaped parapet, modillion course, arched entrances, fluted columns, red clay barrel tiles, and other features of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Revival architecture that were on the Main Building when first constructed?
- The nomination states that the "School is eligible as a good and rare example of an educational building redesigned in response to earthquake safety concerns in the city of Ventura."  
The Main Building of WES was not re-designed in response to the state-wide mandate of the Field Act. It was rehabilitated with additional framing and structural support to better withstand an earthquake. The exterior of the building was stripped of the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Revival character-defining features so they would not present a falling hazard in the event of an earthquake.  
There are at least three other elementary schools in Ventura , which date from pre-Field Act, that have retained sufficient architectural design and features to be good representatives of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Revival architecture when applied to an educational building.

# NR Nomination Document

## Section 7 – Summary Paragraph

- Per National Register Bulletin 16A, page 28 “Narrative Description – Summary Paragraph”

*Describe the current condition of the property and indicate whether the property has historic integrity in terms of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.*

# NR Nomination Document

## Discussion of Integrity

- Design, Materials, and Workmanship: “The features specific to the Mott Marston design of the school have mostly been removed.” The Main Building now exhibits less than 95% of the architectural features that adorned the building when it was constructed in 1925. The Main Building was designed with a rich and elaborate presentation of Spanish Revival architectural features applied on building that reflected the community’s rich fortunes from the discovery of oil in 1919.
- The School District hired and instructed architect Harold E. Burket to rehab the school in 1935 to bring the building in line with the Field Act. Possibly, due to the rehab occurring during the Great Depression, Burket designed the alterations to the exterior to not only cover all the original brickwork, but also remove approximately 65% of the ornamental features situated primarily on the front elevation, and around the main building, thereby reducing the cost of the project. The School District could have made the decision to re-establish the Spanish Revival architectural detail onto the rehabbed exterior, but made the decision to go with a diminished façade going forward.
- In 1957, the School District instructed the architectural team of Fisher & Wilde to “modernize” the Main Building, and that rehabilitation project resulted in the removal of all the original wood window and doors, and the last 35% of the original decorative architectural features of the historic 1925 facade. The main, arched-entrance way into the building was stripped of its last ornamentation and “squared-up” into a Mid-Century style design using straight lines and right angles.

# NR Nomination Document

## Discussion of Integrity

- Location and Setting: The text includes this statement “the setting of the school has not changed; it has had a.....large field to the east since it was initially constructed.” The play fields to the east of the Main Building are noted as contributing to the property’s integrity, yet it is not counted as a contributing feature (site) of the property in Section 5, page 3.
- Feeling: “Feeling is a property’s expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.” The present-day exterior of the Main Building points more towards a 1950s-1960s period of time in both Architecture and Education, rather than its historic period of significance.
- Association: the physical aspects of the Main Building as presented today, do not form a direct link to the opening of the school in 1925, or the creation of the Field Act. The Auditorium was designed to exist with the Main Building as it appeared between 1935 and 1957. The Bungalow/Sheridan Way Kindergarten, unimproved since 1929/1935 building sits alone, with no visible association to the large Main Building, or large gable-front Auditorium building.



# Summary of Eligibility

- Washington Elementary School has not provided sufficient information to find it eligible for listing in the NR under Criterion A. The nomination document does not present any substance to its claim that WES is important in the “evolution of education” in Ventura.
- Under Criterion C, the buildings of Washington Elementary School have not retained sufficient aspects of physical integrity necessary to convey their architectural significance as being associated with 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revival Architecture, specifically Spanish Revival architecture. From the rehab of the Main Building in 1935, and the remodel of 1957, the Main Building has lost an overwhelming majority of the original character-defining features of its appearance in 1925. This loss has adversely affected the building’s ability to convey its historic importance in Ventura