



Rincon Consultants, Inc.

449 15th Street, Suite 303
Oakland, California 94612

510 834 4455

info@rinconconsultants.com
www.rinconconsultants.com

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Project No: 22-12878

Amelia Schwartz
City of Chehalis, Department of Community Development
1321 South Market Boulevard
Chehalis, Washington 98532
Via email: aschwartz@ci.chehalis.wa.us

**Subject: R.E. Bennett School Chehalis City Register Nomination
233 South Market Boulevard, Chehalis, Washington 98532**

Dear Ms. Schwartz:

This memorandum presents a nomination of the R.E. Bennett School located at 233 South Market Boulevard (APN 004236001000) for listing in the Chehalis City Register. Michael McCowan retained Rincon Consultants, Inc. (Rincon) to assist in the preparation of the nomination in support of the local permitting process for the redevelopment of the building. The project applicant is also pursuing incentives provided by the Federal Historic Tax Credits and the State Special Property Tax Valuation. We are in the process of preparing a nomination for the property for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as well as a Part 1 Historic Preservation Certification Application (HPCA) for the Federal Historic Tax Credit program.

As presented in this nomination, the property at 233 South Market Boulevard, known as R.E. Bennett School, is recommended eligible for listing in the Chehalis City Register under Criterion A for its association with the broad pattern of educational development in Chehalis. It is also recommended eligible for listing under Criterion B for being an excellent example of Mediterranean Revival architecture, and Criteria C and D for being a notable example of the work of Chehalis-based architect Jack deForest Griffin and for being a reflection of the special elements of the city's architectural history.

This memorandum was written by Rincon Architectural Historian JulieAnn Murphy, MSHP, and Architectural Historian James Williams, MA. Rincon Architectural History Program Manager Steven Treffers, MHP provided oversight. Rincon Principal Shannon Carmack, B.A. provided QA/QC review. Ms. Carmack, Mr. Treffers, Ms. Murphy, and Mr. Williams all meet and exceed the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards for architectural history and history.

Regulatory Framework

City of Chehalis Historic Preservation Ordinance

The City of Chehalis adopted a historic preservation ordinance to support the recognition, perpetuation, and continued use of buildings, sites, and districts of historical significance within the city in the interest of civic pride and the prosperity of general welfare of the city's inhabitants. The ordinance provides for the establishment of an historic commission and guidance for designating properties to the local register. The criteria for determining designation in the city register are as follows:



Any building, site, or district may be designated for inclusion in the city register if it has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or nation, is at least 50 years of age, or is of lesser age and has exceptional importance, and:

- a. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local, state, or national history;
- b. Embodies the distinctive architectural characteristics of a type, period, style, or method of design or construction or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;
- c. Is an outstanding work of a designer, builder, or architect who has made a substantial contribution to the art;
- d. Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the city's cultural, special, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, or architectural history;
- e. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in national, state, or local history;
- f. Has yielded or may be likely to yield important archaeological information;
- g. Is a building removed from its original location but which is significant primarily for architectural value or which is the only surviving structure significantly associated with a historic person or event;
- h. Is a cemetery, which derives its primary significance from age, distinctive design features, or association with historic events, people, or cultural patterns;
- i. Is a reconstructed building that has been executed in a historically accurate manner, within a suitable environment on the original building site and which is congruent with the city's history; or
- j. Is a creative and unique example of formal architecture and design created by persons not formally trained in the architectural or design professions, and which does not fit into formal architectural or historical categories. [Ord. 508B, 1993.]

Physical Description

Overview Site/Setting

R.E. Bennett School is located at 233 South Market Boulevard in Chehalis (Figure 1). Constructed in 1928 with additions completed in 1936 and 1952, the three-story school building fronts South Market Boulevard, filling the entire frontage between Southwest Second and Southwest Third streets. The building's primary (east) elevation faces South Market Boulevard. The area west of the building is comprised of a large grass field and two modular classroom buildings installed in the 1980s. Cascade School is situated on an adjacent property, located across the field to the west. R.E. Bennett School is located southeast of downtown Chehalis. The area surrounding R.E. Bennett School is a residential neighborhood characterized by single-family houses that largely date to the early to mid-20th century.

Figure 1 R.E. Bennett School, East and North Elevations, Facing South

Exterior

R.E. Bennett School is a former public school building constructed in the Mediterranean Revival style. Although there is asymmetry in its plan, the building occupies a relatively compact and generally rectangular footprint. The building consists of three principal sections, built in three phases between 1928 and 1952: the original school building, the gymnasium, and the cafeteria addition. For clarity, the following architectural description addresses each section of the building separately.

Original School Building

Constructed in 1928, the original school building is the easternmost section of the building. It is roughly rectangular in plan with a northwest to southeast aspect. This section of the building consists of three stories, including a partially below-grade first floor. While the roof on this part of the building is generally flat with a straight parapet, the front-central portion is capped with a side-gabled roof flanked by two bell tower features with pyramidal roofs. Flat portions of the roof are clad in rolled composition sheeting, and the flat and pyramidal roof forms feature asphalt shingles. A stucco exterior envelops the concrete structural system.

The Mediterranean Revival influence is most evident on the east-facing front elevation of the original school building. A pair of bell tower features divide the symmetrical façade into three roughly equal sections. At the ground level, either tower is punctuated by an arched entryway with an articulated surround, that includes a terra cotta arch (Figure 2). Flanking the entries, paired pedestals support

Figure 2 East-Elevation Entryway, Facing West



ornamental metal lamps. Glazed double doors open beneath a multi-pane arched transom. A story above each entrance is a Paladin window consisting of slightly recessed wood, multi-paned sashes. A series of four columns, each with a spiraled shaft, bracket the window assembly and separate the arches from one another. A full story above the Paladin window is an arched aperture suggestive of a belfry opening. Elsewhere, windows occur in series of five. On the second floor, the central focal window is a series five recessed, arched openings of equal size (Figure 3). The stuccoed surround includes a heavy sill with ornamental brackets, terra cotta columns, and relief sculpture depicting torches. Directly above the windows, non-original signage features metal lettering reading “R.E. BENNET SCHOOL.” The remaining windows are rectangular and occur in series of five on all three stories. The sashes of these windows are non-original metal, with one-over-one panes.

Figure 3 East-Elevation Focal Window, Facing West



Additional architectural detailing includes a simple cornice between the first and second floors, ornamental brickwork facing along the upper reach of the parapet, and beveled corners on the third-floor level of the towers. At either end of the façade a panel with relief sculpture depicts elements that include an open book, globe, and torches. A repetitive geometrical design forms a rectangular border around the depiction on either panel.

Many features of the main façade recur on the south elevation, facing Southwest 3rd Street. Most of the exterior is taken up by the familiar series of five rectangular windows. The far south end of the elevation repeats several stylized elements of the main elevation. These include a similar arched entrance with double doors and arched transom and a Paladin window, all essentially identical to those described above (Figure 4). Notable differences include a straight external staircase approaching the doorway, likely non original doors, and a shaped parapet above the entry. While the entry here is flanked by pedestals, as on the main façade, the metal ornamental lamp on left has been detached from its mount.

Figure 4 South-Elevation Entrance, Facing North



Along Southwest 2nd Street, the north elevation of the original portion of the school building is comparatively restrained (Figure 5). A series of five rectangular windows, similar to those found elsewhere on the building, punctuate all three floors. In addition, the simple cornice and parapet brickwork continue from the main elevation.

The rear of this section of the building is even sparser. Where it is not obscured by additions, the west elevation is characterized by almost uninterrupted expanses of stucco, and at one location, horizontal wood-plank siding. A notable exception occurs along Southwest 2nd street, where a rear-facing ground-level entrance is sheltered by a broad pent overhang. The door here is of heavy wood construction with a small eye-level window. To the right of the entrance, a wood-slat screen separates a small utility area. South of the entrance is a series of three utility doors, one single, the others doubled. All three doors are of similar wood-panel construction. On the opposing end, a ribbon of three one-over-one windows punctuate the third floor.

Figure 5 Overview of North and West Elevations of 1928 Building, Facing East



Gymnasium

Attached to the west end of the original portion of the school building is the gymnasium, an addition constructed in 1936 (Figure 6). The addition centers on the high-ceilinged section containing the athletic courts. The relatively lower-profile wings contain locker rooms along Southwest 2nd Street and a foyer along Southwest 3rd Street. Rectangular in plan, the gymnasium sits on a concrete foundation. Its roof is divided into three parts, corresponding to the main interior spaces of the addition. The athletic courts are sheltered by a bowstring-truss roof concealed by a modestly shaped parapet and presumed to be clad in rolled composition sheeting. This roof form is flanked by two flat-roof sections, both concealed by a straight parapet and presumably clad in rolled composition sheeting. The Gymnasium's

exterior walls are uniformly stuccoed, though the stucco on the taller portion of the building is non-original, obscuring a formerly exposed brick exterior.

Figure 6 South and West Elevations of the Gymnasium, Facing North



Facing Southwest 3rd Street, the south elevation features the gymnasium's main exterior entrances, which directly access the foyer. From the public right-of-way access is made via a broad set of three concrete steps. The concrete porch terminates on the north at the cafeteria addition exterior and on the south at a board-formed-concrete wing wall. Supported by two slender round metal poles, the flat porch roof shelters the entry a pair of doorways of essentially identical construction. Modeled on the formal entrances of the 1928 construction, both doorways are characterized by an arched aperture, solid wood double doors and an arched, multi-pane transom light. The wood surround is articulated with spiral columns, while the transom light features turned spindles spacing its four panes. That the porch roof covers a portion of the arched door surround suggests it is not original to the building. To the left of the entrance, the wall recedes slightly and is punctuated by a single six-over-six double-hung wood-sash window with a simple stuccoed sill. The straight parapet concealing the foyer's roof is adorned by a band of brick-veneer ornament echoing that found on the original portion of the building. Above this, austere metal coping lines the upper reach of the wall. The south-facing exterior of the athletic courts is visible beyond the foyer. Here the stuccoed wall culminates in a shaped parapet corresponding to the bowed roof form. Simple metal or plastic coping edges the parapet.

The opposing north elevation features the former locker rooms. Doors open from either end of the elevation and feature a door of undetermined type at the east and solid wood double doors at the west end. Between the entrances, a series of six equally spaced six-over-six double-hung wood-sash window, similar to those found on the south, face Southwest 2nd Street. Each has a simple stuccoed sill. Similar to the southeast elevation, the taller shaped parapet concealing the arched roof form is visible beyond

the lower-profile locker room parapet. While the parapets on this elevation lack the minimal ornament of opposing wall.

The rear-facing west elevation is comparatively austere. Its stuccoed exterior is relieved only by a series of foundation vents and two additional vents placed near the upper end of the wall. Owing to the variations in the roof's height, the central section of this wall is substantially taller than the ends. The gymnasium does not have an exposed east elevation.

Cafeteria Addition

Constructed in 1952 as the music room, the cafeteria addition is located near the rear of the building, along Southwest 3rd Street (Figure 7). It adjoins the Gymnasium to the northwest and the original building to the northeast. The one-story addition has a compact, rectangular plan and a concrete foundation. The addition's flat roof is obscured by a hipped visor with asphalt shingles and moderate boxed eaves. Structural concrete block apparent throughout the exterior. The addition includes no exterior entrance.

The south elevation faces Southwest 3rd Street. Evenly spaced across the clerestory level there are three slightly recessed multi-pane metal-sash windows with heavy concrete sills. There are, in addition, five floor-level vents.

The east elevation extends from the addition's junction with the original building. Essentially featureless, most of the wall is obscured by the adjacent solid balustrade of the 1928 building. A diagonal feature fills what would otherwise be a few inches of space between the balustrade and the addition's exterior. The west elevation faces the Gymnasium's porch. Aside from a single floor-level vent, the wall lacks openings or other features. The entire north side of the addition abuts the gymnasium.

Figure 7 South Elevation of Cafeteria Addition, with Portions of 1928 Building and Gymnasium, Facing Northwest





Significance

Development of Chehalis

The City of Chehalis is located in southwestern Washington in the valleys of the Chehalis and Newaukum Rivers.¹ The area was originally inhabited by Upper Chehalis Indians and the Taidnapam band of Cowlitz Indians, who appeared to have used the area primarily as a trade route with the Yakama Indians on the east side of the Cascades.²

Chehalis began to be developed in 1850 when a 640-acre land claim was staked by Schuyler and Eliza Saunders. The family built a farm and in 1859 they established the first post office in the community, named Saundersville, but locally known as Saunders' Bottom for its marshy condition and near impassible terrain. The Saunders divorced in 1859, and Eliza retained the northern part of their claim, while the southern portion was sold to Obadiah and Margaret McFadden. In 1863 McFadden built a corduroy road through Saunderson's Bottom, thereby improving transportation. He took over the post office in 1870 and changed the name to Chehalis.³

In 1864, William West, his wife Elizabeth, son Robert, and son-in-law John Dobson became the second outside residents of Saundersville. West became integral in the development of Chehalis.⁴ After establishing his own farm, he helped get the Northern Pacific Railroad to build a station in Chehalis. He then invested in a joint stock company to build the town's first warehouse, organized the first school district, and served the community in a number of official positions.⁵ The most transformative improvement arrived in Chehalis 1873 when the Northern Pacific Railroad opened, after West was able to persuade them to build through Chehalis instead of the neighboring settlement of Claquato.⁶

Having the rail connect to Puget Sound and the Columbia River opened markets for Chehalis residents. The city's importance began to grow because of its rail access and in 1874 the county seat moved from Claquato to Chehalis. That same year Chehalis constructed a courthouse. As the town grew, Eliza Saunders plotted land around present-day Main Street and the rail line and businesses began to flourish. The city was incorporated in 1883, and development continued with the opening of several businesses including a sash and door factory, the *Chehalis Nugget* newspaper, the Superior Coal Mine, a tin shop, sawmills, and a brickyard.

In 1892, two fires burned the original downtown area. In the years prior to the fires, the Chehalis Land and Timber Company had developed a number of lots along Market Street, north of the town's original core and became the new downtown following the fire and development continued. Between 1850 and 1950, the economy of Chehalis was closely linked to three industries: timber and wood products, agriculture and food processing, and minerals.⁷ By the turn of the century, Chehalis's population had

¹ Chehalis Downton Historic District Nomination, NR Registration #97001407

² Chehalis – Thumbnail History, [https://www.historylink.org/file/8645#:~:text=In%201870%2C%20McFadden%20took%20over,Northern%20Pacific%20Railroad%20\(NPRR\),](https://www.historylink.org/file/8645#:~:text=In%201870%2C%20McFadden%20took%20over,Northern%20Pacific%20Railroad%20(NPRR),) accessed June 2022.

³ The state legislature officially recognized the name change to Chehalis in 1879.

⁴ Blomdahl, George H. "Swamp made Chehalis place to avoid in 1850s," *The Daily Chronicle*, Bicentennial Addition July 1976.

⁵ Chehalis – Thumbnail History, [https://www.historylink.org/file/8645#:~:text=In%201870%2C%20McFadden%20took%20over,Northern%20Pacific%20Railroad%20\(NPRR\),](https://www.historylink.org/file/8645#:~:text=In%201870%2C%20McFadden%20took%20over,Northern%20Pacific%20Railroad%20(NPRR),) accessed June 2022.

⁶ History of Chehalis Washington. https://www.ci.chehalis.wa.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/Chehalis%20History%20on-line_0.pdf, accessed June 2022.

⁷ Chehalis Downton Historic District Nomination, NR Registration #97001407



grown to over 1700 people and development continued with the founding of the Chehalis Valley Creamery in 1896 and the Lewis County Cannery Association in 1915.⁸ In 1910, a new Civic Center was established when a new City Hall and public library were built at Market Boulevard between Cascade and Park Streets, and continues to be the central business district today.⁹ By this time, the city's population had nearly tripled to over 4500 people.¹⁰

In the years before the Great Depression, agriculture and industry continued to dominate the economy and included the Pacific Coast Condensed Milk Company, Palmer Lumber and Manufacturing, Shaw's Cigar Factory, Simmons Glove Factory, and the Pacific Tank and Silo Company.¹¹ In 1928, the National Fruit Canning Company bought the Lewis County Growers Cannery (National still processes vegetables today).

During the Great Depression, lumbering and agricultural product markets were weak; however, the area was able to survive because of its local agriculture. The onset of World War II and the demand for raw materials revived struggling industries.

The end of World War II marked a change in Chehalis's economy. By this time, lumber on private land was depleted and timber mills, paper mills, and saw mills closed. In 1955 the new US 99 expressway opened, connecting Chehalis to Puget Sound and Portland and helped Chehalis capitalize on its position between the metropolitan areas.¹² In 1956 Chehalis Industrial Commission formed the Chehalis Industrial Park and went to lengths to encourage businesses to lease the space in the park. In 1957 Goodyear opened its tread rubber factory in Chehalis. Today, Chehalis is home to a number of distribution facilities and is home to more than 7000 residents.¹³

Education in Chehalis

Lewis County was organized in 1854 and the organization of school districts soon followed. Thomas Newland, resident of Chehalis, served as the first county superintendent of schools. At that time, the county was organized into five school districts as follows: No. 1 Boistfort Prairie; No. 2 Claquato; No. 3 Saunder's Prairie (Chehalis); No. 4 Drew's Prairie; No. 5 Eden's Prairie (Cowlitz).¹⁴ The first Chehalis school was established on the second floor of Chehalis's first courthouse.¹⁵ Following the arrival of William West in 1864, Chehalis witnessed its first pronounced period of development and the need for more formal schools became evident. William West is credited with organizing Chehalis School District No. 3 and was one of its first directors. The first schoolhouse was built in Chehalis in 1876 at the southwest corner of State and Center Streets for a cost of \$600.¹⁶

In the following years, Chehalis's school system began to grow to respond to the expanding population. Chehalis's first all-grade school, known as East Side School, was a wood frame building built in 1889 at a

⁸ US Census 1900

⁹ https://www.ci.chehalis.wa.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/Chehalis%20History%20on-line_0.pdf

¹⁰ US Census 1910

¹¹ [https://www.historylink.org/file/8645#:~:text=In%201870%2C%20McFadden%20took%20over,Northern%20Pacific%20Railroad%20\(NPRR\).](https://www.historylink.org/file/8645#:~:text=In%201870%2C%20McFadden%20took%20over,Northern%20Pacific%20Railroad%20(NPRR).)

¹² [https://www.historylink.org/file/8645#:~:text=In%201870%2C%20McFadden%20took%20over,Northern%20Pacific%20Railroad%20\(NPRR\).](https://www.historylink.org/file/8645#:~:text=In%201870%2C%20McFadden%20took%20over,Northern%20Pacific%20Railroad%20(NPRR).)

¹³ US Census 2010

¹⁴ Bay, W.D. "Lewis County Schools," *The Coast*, Vol. XVI, November 1908

https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Coast/0LARAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=%22chehalis%22+%22east+side+school%22&pg=RA1-PA316&printsec=frontcover, accessed June 2022.

¹⁵ Blomdahl, George H. "Swamp made Chehalis place to avoid in 1850s," *The Daily Chronicle*, Bicentennial Addition July 1976.

¹⁶ <https://www.ci.chehalis.wa.us/visitors/evolution-downtown-district>

cost of \$10,000 which was raised from the sale of selling eight lots.¹⁷ The school, located downtown on Market Street, was organized with elementary school classrooms on the first level and the high school classrooms on the second floor.¹⁸ The school was moved to a lot owned by the school district on Cascade Avenue between Second and Third Streets in about 1909 (Figure 8).¹⁹ By 1922 it was known as the South Ward School, then Cascade School, and it was demolished in 1926.²⁰

Figure 8 East Side School c. 1922



Source: Lewis County Historical Museum

In 1891, Chehalis became home to the Washington State Reform School. The school was geared toward students aged 8-18 who committed crimes or who were orphaned. The school, first open to boys and girls, included a farm, workshops, living quarters and classrooms. Its curriculum included technical training. In 1907, the school was renamed Washington State Training School and in 1913 the girls were moved to a separate institution outside Chehalis called Maple Lane. The institution continues to exist today. Now known as the Green Hill School, it is operated as part of the Department of Social and Health Services.²¹

A second school building was constructed in 1894. The three-story school building, known as West Side School accommodated eight grades.²² It appears the East Side School was being used as the community's high school building by that time.²³ The student population continued to grow and in 1901, Lewis County had 106 school districts and 150 teachers.²⁴ In 1904, both the West Side School and the high school building received updates for the increasing student population, including a four-room addition to the West Side School.²⁵ In February 1910, the West Side School was destroyed in a fire and was replaced with an eight-room school.²⁶

A new Chehalis High School was opened in January 1910.²⁷ Just two years later, the school district was overwhelmed with the number of students and schools began to overcrowd and projected that additional facilities were going to need to be expanded to meet the demand.²⁸ By 1913 the district

¹⁷ "City of Chehalis: The Inland Metropolis of Western Washington," *The Daily Ledger*, January 1, 1889.

¹⁸ "The History of Lewis County, Washington," <http://files.usgwarchives.net/wa/lewis/history/lch-pt10.txt>, accessed June 2022.

¹⁹ Zander, Julie McDonald, *Images of America: Chehalis*, Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2011.

²⁰ Zander, Julie McDonald, *Images of America: Chehalis*, Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2011.

²¹ Ott, Jennifer. "Washington State Reform School Opens in Chehalis on June 10, 1891." History Link, <https://www.historylink.org/File/8647>, accessed June 2022.

²² "School Building at Chehalis Destroyed," *The Daily Ledger*, February 10, 1910.

²³ "Splendid Advantages of Chehalis as a Business Center," *The Seattle Post Intelligencer*, September 11, 1898.

²⁴ "Excellent Schools Here," *The Chehalis Bee-Nugget*, May 17, 1901.

²⁵ *The Daily Ledger*, September 18, 1904

²⁶ "School Building at Chehalis Destroyed," *The Daily Ledger*, February 10, 1910.

²⁷ "Washington State Items," *The San Juan Islander*, December 24, 1909.

²⁸ "Chehalis Schools Again Overcrowded," *The Tacoma Daily Ledger*, January 14, 1912.



employed 38 teachers and educated 1200 students between the high school and two grade school buildings.²⁹

During this time, Progressive-Era school design began to emerge as the standard, emphasizing a new type of school plant that focused on complete living. Opposite of school house design that was seen as uninviting, monotonous, and inadequate, Progressive-Era school design included an attractive exterior, recreation and gymnasium space, workshops and laboratories, and auditoriums. In addition to serving the needs of the student, it was viewed as a community space.³⁰

In 1919, the school board asked the voters to ratify a program to revise the bond system and adopt a new tax in order to purchase needed equipment and prepare for future school development noting that “every school house in the city has been crowded to the limit owing to the great attendance this year.”³¹ The school district further explained that it had reached its highest enrollment to date and that the East Side School, known as the Cascade School by this time, was in a deteriorated condition and would need to be replaced within three years.

The construction of new school buildings followed to meet the increased demand and replaced the outdated and small school buildings with Progressive-Era schools. The new Cascade School, an elementary school, opened in 1922 at the school district lot between Second Street and Third Street, in front of the old East Side School building. Shortly thereafter, the Chehalis Junior High School (later renamed R.E. Bennett School) opened in 1928 on the east side of the school district lot, fronting Market Boulevard to further alleviate overcrowding in the Chehalis schools. It is believed to be the second junior high school constructed in Washington, following a new nationwide concept in middle education.³² School districts began to consolidate in the 1930s and 1940s, and the Chehalis School District was one of the largest in Lewis County by this time.³³

On April 11, 1949, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake occurred in western Washington and was felt in an over 230,000 square-mile area, including Chehalis.³⁴ As a result of the earthquake, both Chehalis High School and the West Side School were condemned. Chehalis High School was rebuilt in 1951 and was renamed WF West High School in honor of William F. West, son of Chehalis pioneer William West, in 1953 for his many contributions to the local Chehalis schools.³⁵ By 1951 the Chehalis School District had become Chehalis School District No. 302, as it is today. In 1960, Chehalis opened a new elementary school, Olympic Elementary, for fourth and fifth grade classrooms in south Chehalis.³⁶ In 1989, the school district opened Chehalis Middle School.³⁷

The Chehalis School District closed Cascade School and RE Bennett School (Chehalis Junior High) in 2018, after the district built two new elementary schools - Orin C. Smith and James W. Lintott elementaries. Today, Lewis County is comprised of 11 school districts and Chehalis School District oversees five schools.³⁸

²⁹ Zander, Julie McDonald, *Images of America: Chehalis*, Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2011.

³⁰ Ittner, Wm B., “The School Plant in Present-Day Education,” *The Architectural Forum*, Vol. XXXVII No. 2, August 1922.

³¹ “Chehalis Needs More Schools,” *The Tacoma Daily Ledger*, October 1, 1919.

³² Lewis Regional Planning Commission, *Community Cultural Resource Survey*, November 9, 1979.

³³ “About Us,” *Centralia School District 401*, <https://www.centralia.k12.wa.us/domain/8>, accessed June 2022.

³⁴ Lange, Greg. “Earthquake Hits Puget Sound Area on April 13, 1949,” *History Link*, <https://www.historylink.org/file/2063>, accessed June 2022.

³⁵ “History of WF West,” *Chehalis District Website*, <https://chehalisschools.org/wfw/about-w-f-west/>, accessed June 2022.

³⁶ *The Daily Chronicle*, August 23, 1960.

³⁷ “About CSD,” *Chehalis School District*, <https://chehalisschools.org/about-csd/>, accessed June 2022.

³⁸ “Our Districts,” *ESD 113*, <https://www.esd113.org/about-esd-113/overview/our-districts/>, accessed June 2022.



R.E. Bennett School

Between 1909 and 1920, the site now containing Cascade and R.E. Bennett schools was acquired gradually for the eventual construction of new school facilities. Cascade School was completed at the west end of the site in 1922, per designs by the architecture firm Hill, Mock & Griffin (Figure 9).

As discussed above in *Education in Chehalis*, local authorities grew concerned about school overcrowding by the late 1910s. While construction of Cascade School may have helped to alleviate the problem, crowded conditions persisted through much of the 1920s. By 1927, to relieve crowding at Cascade School, West Side School, and Chehalis High School, the school district under Superintendent Robert E. Bennet began making plans for the construction of a new junior high school. Under the district's plan, seventh and eighth graders would be transferred from Cascade and West Side, while ninth graders would relocate from Chehalis High School. The March 18, 1927, edition of the *Chehalis Bee-Nugget* reported, "local architect" Jack deForest Griffin was "hurrying plans" for the new school. The school was to be financed by a \$130,000 bond issue, recently approved by voters. E. P. Brewster, a Chehalis contractor was selected to build the school at a cost of \$100,000. The school was completed in April 1928, with Wallace W. Kelso installed as principal.³⁹

The subject school's designation as a junior high school reflected important trends in education in the first decades of the twentieth century. American junior high schools were a product of the secondary school reorganization movement, begun by education reformers in the 1880s. At the time, most public school grade systems were configured to offer eight years of grade school followed by four years high school. Several social and intellectual factors fueled growing demand for a reorganization of this model, but overall, the movement was driven by the belief that by offering a more gradual transition to high school that was attuned to the particular developmental needs of early adolescence, school systems might stem the epidemic of drop-outs and better prepare those students who remained for citizenship, labor, and, in some cases, post-secondary education. The principals of the reorganization movement were first put into practice in 1909, when the first American junior high school was founded in Columbus, Ohio. Reorganization along the six year/three year/three year grade configuration proceeded rapidly in the 1920s, with the number of junior high schools increasing by six times between 1922 and 1928, the year the subject school was completed. Junior high schools became a fixture of American school districts by the 1930s.⁴⁰

By 1935, the district began planning, in cooperation with the Works Progress Administration (WPA), for the construction of a new gymnasium for the junior high school. The project was primarily intended to satisfy a new state mandate requiring the inclusion of physical education instruction in junior and senior high schools in order to retain accreditation. Although the gym would be used mainly for educational purposes, public uses, such as "volleyball and other purposes," would be permitted in off-hours. In a landslide referendum, voters approved a "a special levy of 7 to 8 mills" to fund the district's 55 percent

³⁹ Anonymous, n.d. "R.E. Bennett School," in Historic Property Inventory form: R.E. Bennett School, 1987; "Plans for the Junior School," *Chehalis Bee-Nugget* March 18, 1927; Archives West, "Newsfilm of Grays Harbor County, Circa 1925-1933," Archives West web site, 2012, <https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv91696>; "Washington News Items of Interest," *White Bluffs Spokesman* 20 no. 49. July 1, 1927; "Plan Dedication of New School," *Tacoma Daily Ledger* April 5, 1928; "Dedicate Junior Chehalis School," *Tacoma Daily Ledger* April 20, 1928.

⁴⁰ John H. Lounsbury, "Junior High School Education," *The High School Journal*, 43, No. 4 (Jan., 1960): 143-150; Jaana Juvonen, Vi-Nhuan Le, Tessa Kaganoff, Catherine Augustine and Louay Constant, *Focus on the Wonder Years: Challenges Facing the American Middle School* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004), 9-19.

share of the cost of building the new gym. Federal subsidies accounted for the remainder of the costs, which totaled about \$35,000.⁴¹

Figure 9 R.E. Bennett School, East and South Elevations, 1928



Source: Lewis County Historical Museum

The new gymnasium was dedicated in an October 8, 1936, ceremony attended by several leaders in local education. A contemporary news report described the gym as “modern in every respect and well equipped.” A centerpiece of its up-to-date design was the folding bleachers, which the article glowingly described as “probably the only gym features of this kind on the coast, and which conserve 1,900 square feet of space.” The steel beams supporting the roof also stood out, “exciting favorable comment from many construction experts.” The capacity was reported as 1,200 spectators. A 1939 photograph of the facility indicates the original exterior was originally painted brick, not the present stucco surface, and shows an arched doorway and two windows now obscured by the cafeteria addition (Figure 10). Bennett passed away during the year of the gymnasium’s completion. Following his death, the facility was named in his honor.⁴²

While the April 1949 earthquake led to the condemnation of West Side School and Chehalis High School, Chehalis Junior High School incurred only limited damage. For about two years, high school classes were moved into any available space in the subject building, including the cafeteria, janitor’s rooms, and foyers, were all used as makeshift classrooms. What minimal damage Bennett suffered was repaired during the summer of 1949. The campus continued to host high school classes until 1951, when a new Chehalis High School was completed.⁴³

⁴¹ “Big School Election Is Next Wednesday,” *Chehalis Bee-Nugget* September 6, 1935; “Big Majority Is Favoring Gym,” *Chehalis Bee-Nugget* September 13, 1935; “New Gymnasium Is Much Appreciated,” *Chehalis Bee-Nugget* October 9, 1936.

⁴² “New Gymnasium Is Much Appreciated,” *Chehalis Bee-Nugget* October 9, 1936; Anonymous, photographer, “P10420- R. E. Bennett (Junior High) and Gym from 3rd Street, Chehalis, WA in 1939.” Photograph, Lewis County Museum Photographic Collection; Anonymous, n.d. “R.E. Bennett School,” in Historic Property Inventory form: R.E. Bennett School, 1987.

⁴³ Anonymous, n.d. “R.E. Bennett School,” in Historic Property Inventory form: R.E. Bennett School, 1987.

Figure 10 R.E. Bennett School, West and South Elevations, 1939

Source: Lewis County Historical Museum

The subject school underwent significant changes in the 1950s. In 1952, with the opening of the rebuilt Chehalis High School, the grade system was reorganized, with ninth graders moved to the new high school and the subject school serving the fifth through eighth grades. In conjunction with the reorganization, the Chehalis Junior-Senior Parent Teachers Associate voted to approve the renaming of the subject school as R.E. Bennett Elementary School. Around the same time, a music room (the existing cafeteria) was added at the south side of the gymnasium. A wider renovation of the school took place during the 1950s and included the installation of new light fixtures and acoustic ceiling tiles, in addition to an unspecified “redecorating” of the building.⁴⁴

William Weber, who had served as principal since 1936, retired in 1970. Weber’s replacement, Garry Pierson served in the position until 1975, when Bennett was once again reorganized, this time to serve only the fourth and fifth grades. Weber and the junior high classes were relocated to Olympic School that year, and Ray Grundson was appointed principal of R.E. Bennett School.⁴⁵

In the 1970s and 1980, new upgrades to the school were undertaken. In 1978, architect James H. Hubenthal drew up plans for the renovation of Bennett School and the neighboring Cascade School. According to available plans, Hubenthal’s revisions to Bennett school building were limited to the interior and included the installation of new casework, acoustic tiles, rubber wall bases, and window sills. In or around 1985, the two extant portable classroom buildings were installed directly west of the gym. Northwest Architectural Company devised further alterations for Bennett and Cascade schools in

⁴⁴ “New Name Being Sought for Chehalis Junior High School,” *The Daily Chronicle* (Centralia, Washington) April 24, 1952; “Chehalis PTA Holds Meeting,” *The Daily Chronicle* (Centralia, Washington) April 30, 1952; “Chehalis Lists Building Work,” *The Daily Chronicle* (Centralia, Washington), August 12, 1952; Anonymous, n.d. “R.E. Bennett School,” in Historic Property Inventory form: R.E. Bennett School, 1987.

⁴⁵ Anonymous, n.d. “R.E. Bennett School,” in Historic Property Inventory form: R.E. Bennett School, 1987.



1987. Most notably, the plans called for the replacement of all or most of the school's windows. It may have been on the basis of these plans that the existing replacement windows were installed, though research for this evaluation did not confirm the windows' installation date. Although the plans called for the replacement of the sashes in the arched Palladian windows, it appears no such modification was undertaken. Other work detailed in the plans includes repair of plaster detailing and replacement of some acoustic tiles in the auditorium.⁴⁶

R.E. Bennett School continued to operate as an elementary school until 2018. That year, it and Cascade School were closed permanently.

Jack deForest Griffin

R.E. Bennett School was designed by Chehalis-based architect Jacques "Jack" deForest Griffin, who earned a reputation as one of the city's most significant architects in the 1920s. Griffin was born in Los Angeles on January 7, 1892, and graduated from the University of Santa Clara in 1912. Soon after graduation, Griffin relocated to Seattle, where he appears to have worked briefly under the architect Irwin H. Hill, before joining the firm Hewitt-Lea-Funck. By 1917, Griffin established himself in Tacoma and founded a short-lived partnership with the architect Arnott Woodroof. Woodroof left the firm the following year, and Griffin joined Hill and Ernest T. Mock to found the partnership Hill, Mock & Griffin. The firm appears to have enjoyed a robust business in Tacoma and, by the early 1920s, Griffin set up the partnership's satellite office in Chehalis. Among Hill, Mock & Griffin's projects in Chehalis was Cascade School, completed in 1922. Griffin departed the partnership in 1924 to establish an independent practice, choosing to remain in Chehalis.⁴⁷

Over the course of about a decade of work in and around Chehalis, both as a partner in Hill, Mock & Griffin and an independent architect, Griffin produced several of prominent buildings in Chehalis and beyond. Griffin's designs favored the Beaux Arts and Period Revival styles popular in the early decades of the twentieth century. Griffin's combined local commissions totaled more than one million dollars. His projects in Chehalis included St. Helens Theatre (1924), the Moose Lodge (1926), Chehalis Junior High School (R.E. Bennett School; 1927), and Boone Mortuary (1928). Projects outside Chehalis included the Fairhart Building (1924) in Morton, a gymnasium for the Boisfort School District (1924) in or near Boistfort, a Catholic church (1924) in South Bend, Eagles Lodge (1926) in Centralia, and, and St. Rose Catholic School (1927) in Longview.⁴⁸

Among Griffin's numerous Chehalis projects, the most important was his design for the Lewis County Courthouse on West Main Street. A mark of Griffin's success, the stately Beaux Arts-style courthouse was reportedly profiled in a 1926 edition of *Pacific Builder and Engineer* magazine. Completed in 1927,

⁴⁶ Lewis County Assessor, Property assessment form for Bennett School, in in Historic Property Inventory form: R.E. Bennett School, 1987; James H. Hubenthal, Renovation of Bennett and Cascade School, Chehalis School District No. 302, Chehalis Washington, 1978; Northwest Architectural Company, Window Replacement of Bennett & Cascade Schools, Chehalis School District No. 302, Chehalis Washington, 1987.

⁴⁷ State of Washington, Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, "Jack D. Griffin." Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation [web site], no date, <https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/research-and-technical-preservation-guidance/architect-biographies/bio-for-jack-d-griffin>; "Chehalis Gets Tacoma Architect," *Tacoma Daily Ledger* February 17, 1924.

⁴⁸ State of Washington, Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, "Jack D. Griffin." Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation [web site], no date, <https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/research-and-technical-preservation-guidance/architect-biographies/bio-for-jack-d-griffin>; "Jack DeForest Griffin: Architect that Changed Chehalis," *The Chronicle* [web site], September 5, 2014. <https://www.chronline.com/stories/jack-deforest-griffin-architect-that-changed-chehalis,80648>; "Get to Know Jack DeForest Griffin, the Architect Who Changed Chehalis," *The Chronicle* [web site], February 14, 2018. <https://www.chronline.com/stories/get-to-know-jack-deforest-griffin-the-architect-who-changed-chehalis,19440>.



the building remains as perhaps the most prominent landmark in the city and is regarded by at least one source as the “jewel of historic downtown Chehalis.”⁴⁹

Despite his success locally, Griffin relocated to his native Los Angeles in 1929. Upon his arrival, he built a Hollywood home for his niece, the film actress Bebe Daniels. Among his notable Southern California commissions were designs for the planned Eiffel Theater in Burbank, California, which boasted a radio tower modeled the property’s namesake landmark. Available sources suggest the project was never constructed, however. Griffin died in Los Angeles in 1951.⁵⁰

Eligibility Statement

R.E. Bennett School, located on South Market Boulevard, in Chehalis, Washington is historically significant under local Criterion A for its association with the broad pattern of educational development in Chehalis. Originally constructed as Chehalis Junior High School, the subject property was established to expand public school facilities in the area during a period of rapid local growth and concomitant school overcrowding. The school is believed to be the second purpose-built junior high school in Washington state. Its completion in 1928, came at the end of a period of accelerated development of junior high schools nationally. Like other junior high schools built in this era, the subject property embodied innovative approaches to the education of young adolescents that became commonplace by the mid-twentieth century.

R.E. Bennett School is also significant under local Criterion B for its distinctive architectural design. The subject property is an excellent example of a school building constructed in the Mediterranean Revival Style. The original 1928 portion of the building exemplifies the style in its overall design as well in such character-defining features as the stucco cladding, bell tower features, Paladian windows with ornamental surrounds, arched transom lights over the formal entrances, and various additional ornamental features. The Mediterranean Revival influence apparent in the 1928 building was incorporated to the gymnasium and cafeteria additions, albeit to a lesser extent. On the additions, this influence is most evident in the arched south-elevation gymnasium entryways, which echo the design of the original formal entries.

The property is also eligible for listing under local Criterion C and D. The building was designed by significant Chehalis-based architect Jack deForest Griffin. For approximately ten years, Griffin worked in Chehalis, first as a partner in the firm Hill, Mock & Griffin and later as an independent practitioner. Over this span, Griffin designed several well-regarded residential, commercial, and institutional properties, including perhaps the most architecturally significant building in downtown Chehalis, the Lewis County Courthouse. The subject building, originally designed by Griffin in 1927, exemplifies the high quality of Griffin’s best work. In light of the high quality of the building’s design and construction and Griffin’s role in its design, the subject building is recommended eligible under Criterion C as an outstanding work of a designer, builder, or architect who has made a substantial contribution to the art and under Criterion D for its reflection of special elements of the city’s architectural history.

⁴⁹ State of Washington, Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, “Jack D. Griffin.” Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation [web site], no date, <https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/research-and-technical-preservation-guidance/architect-biographies/bio-for-jack-d-griffin>; “Jack DeForest Griffin: Architect that Changed Chehalis,” *The Chronicle* [web site], September 5, 2014, <https://www.chronline.com/stories/jack-deforest-griffin-architect-that-changed-chehalis,80648>.

⁵⁰ “Jack Griffin Develops Big Hollywood Business,” *Chehalis Bee-Nugget* December 27, 1929; Galvin Preservation Associates, City of Burbank Citywide Historic Context Report September 2000, 77-78; “Jack DeForest Griffin: Architect that Changed Chehalis,” *The Chronicle* [web site], September 5, 2014, <https://www.chronline.com/stories/jack-deforest-griffin-architect-that-changed-chehalis,80648>. Accessed May 6, 2022.



Conclusion

The property at 233 South Market Boulevard, known as R.E. Bennett School, is eligible for listing in the Chehalis City Register under Criterion A for its association with the broad pattern of educational development in Chehalis. It is also eligible listing under Criterion B for being an excellent example of Mediterranean Revival architecture, and Criterion C and D for being a notable example of the work of Chehalis-based architect Jack deForest Griffin and is a reflection of the special elements of the city's architectural history.

Should you have any questions regarding this nomination, please do not hesitate to contact me at 510-834-4455 or at jmurphy@rinconconsultants.com.

Sincerely,

Rincon Consultants, Inc.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JulieAnn Murphy".

JulieAnn Murphy
Architectural Historian Project Manager

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James Williams".

James Williams
Architectural Historian

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Treffers".

Steve Treffers
Architectural Historian Program Manager

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shannon Carmack".

Shannon Carmack
Principal Cultural Resources