



Image: *Mills Open Air School, Oregonian, c. 1919. Oregon Historical Society collection #1874*

Oregon State-Level Documentation
Prepared and submitted by Minor Planning & Design

511 SE 60th Avenue, Portland OR
July 26, 2024

I. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The subject property is located at 511 SE 60th Avenue, in southeast Portland, Oregon (also noted as 501-899 SE 60th Ave).¹ The property is a corner lot, with street-facing frontage along SE Stark Street on its north edge and along SE 60th on its east edge, a total of .8 acre. A small chamfer at the street intersection of the site was dedicated to the right-of-way to provide a wider turning radius. Legally the site is simply referred to as SECTION 06 1S 2E, TL 7300. Other addresses for the current building on the site include 81 E. 60th St. or Avenue, and 85 E. 60th St. The address of the school was noted as 81 E. 60th in 1918 and 1927 permits, and 85 E. 60th in a 1927 permit.²

The site slopes down from east to west along SE Stark Street, and has a 6' wide concrete sidewalk separated from the curb by a 4' planting strip along both street frontages. A temporary chain-link fence has been placed along both street frontages, inside of the right-of-way. Trees and overgrown shrubs partially hide the facades from the street.

The site is developed with two buildings, one 4,460 sq. ft. and the smaller at 1,175 sq ft.³ The primary building is situated at the north end of the site and has a capital-letter E form in plan, with three wings extending south from the primary volume, which is a bar fronting SE Stark Street. All wings of the building are one story with cross-gabled roofs, but a basement level is exposed especially on the west end of the northern façade, where it is another full story in height below the primary floor level. The roof is asphalt shingle, and overhangs are very minimal at gable ends, but extend a bit longer at sides. The second building is simply a further extension of the western wing, repeating the roof shape and details but freestanding and separated from the end of the primary building's south façade.

The front (east) façade of the building has two overlapping gables, both with eave returns, near the north end, and a long side-gabled bar extending south. Wall surfaces are red brick, with a small concrete base visible beneath a brick soldier course. The double-door entry is located underneath the smaller gable, within a deep coffered wood arch with keystone detail. A large fanlight window fills the archway above the doors. The surround for the arched opening is painted wood panel. The larger gable end has a vertical slot vent opening, and a large tripartite window below it made up of multipane wood windows. The south side of the elevation has a series of vertical slot windows below and a bank of continuous multipane wood windows, two vertically and nine across at the top of the wall, plus one additional "column" next to the entry gable. See photos 1, 2, and 3 and historic image 6.

Moving to the south side of the building, there are three repeating end-gable façades that make up this elevation, two that are brick at either end and the third, in the center, which is an open wood shed (photo 5). The brick wings are exact matches of each other, with the repeating gable-end motif of the slot vent and a large bank of multipane windows, five across and three vertically except in the center column, which has a window and a door. Each single window is three over three panes and operates by pivoting on its horizontal axis. In various places, brick has been painted or spray-painted with graffiti. More recently, windows have been boarded up (visible in July 2024 photos but not October 2023 photos).

¹ Municipal street addresses typically assign the shorter street as the front of a property, but in this case 60th Street is the (front) address and has been so historically.

² Historic plumbing permits, No. 7967 (1918), 76709 (1927), and 72760 (1927) accessed via PortlandMaps website.

³ Multnomah County tax assessor's website

The freestanding building south of the west wing is about 10' south of the primary building. It repeats the window patterns of the primary building, with a bank of nine columns of windows facing east. The south end of the freestanding building has five columns of windows, with no center door. The north end has only a single door, with no windows in the brick wall. It has a second door on the west side, with a covered landing and stair extending south.

Within the courtyard, the same sizes and alignment of pivoting windows and doors are used in every wall (see photos 4, 6, and 7). The center shed structure has vertical wood gable-end infill and is held on a series of heavy wood posts. It attaches to the primary building's roof at the north, where it has a cross-gabled roof meeting the center ridge line of the east-west bar volume. There is also a small roof between the west wing and the shed roof.

The west side of the building is almost the same as the east side, except that the gable-end over the arched doors is pulled out to form a true roof over a landing, held on large decorative wood posts. The landing is the top of a run of metal stairs extending down to the north. There are also two smaller multipane windows in the larger gable end, rather than the tripartite window on the east façade (see photos 8a and 8b).

The north side of the building faces SE Stark with a mostly symmetrical façade. A single brick chimney is visible at the center of the roof on this side. The façade is bracketed by two similar cross-gabled bays, with a long wall between them. The windows are almost all wood six-over-six double-hungs at the upper, brick part of the wall. In the concrete basement wall, windows are single wood 6-pane windows. See historic image 7 and photos 9, 10, and 11.

The interiors have not been noticeably reconfigured since they were constructed, except at bathroom/shower rooms, although most surfaces have been replaced at ceilings and floors. Starting from the primary bar corridor, extending east-west across the building, the woodwork is all dark-stained. Simple trim surrounds each opening, and a wainscot band divides the painted wall surfaces. There is also a very simple wood baseboard (see photos 12 and 17b).

The rooms along the north side of the corridor include a large open room at northeast corner, with large banks of original wood windows at east and north, simple wood wainscot trim, wall-mounted heating units, and blackboards on two sides. A series of smaller rooms accessed from the corridor are the kitchen, offices, a stair going down to basement level, and individual toilet rooms (see photos 13, 16, and 17a).

Finally, the basement level is at the north end of the building. A small stair leads down, and there is an unfinished "crawl space" area to the south where the floor is dirt with concrete footings, and a more finished section at the north, full height with concrete floors. Walls here appear to be mostly brick or clay tile, with rectangular wood columns. Ceilings are mostly exposed wood rafters above, with exposed piping (see photos 18a and 18b).

Changes over time to the exterior of the building include:

- Replacement of the exterior stair at the west side of the building, from the original wood stair to a metal stair, supported on metal posts (2001, as permitted under 01-155021-000-00-CO),
- Construction of a gabled wood and metal open-sided shed between the two original classroom wings (present by 1950, as dashed in on Sanborn map);

- Removal of the center raised deck and steps at the south side of the building (unknown date: perhaps also when the shed was constructed);
- Asphaltting of almost all of the site surface except for the north “lawn” between the building and Stark Street (unknown date, appears to have occurred between 1960 and 1975 based on aerial photos on PortlandMaps); and
- Alterations of railings and light fixtures at all sides.

Changes to the interior include

- Vinyl or asbestos tile has been laid over the wood floors, or replaced them.
- Ceilings are covered by lowered ceiling tile with linear fluorescent light fixtures,
- Original showers and bathroom fixtures have been replaced by smaller toilet rooms, and
- Kitchen appliances and surfaces have been replaced.

Lead paint and asbestos have been identified in the building.

SITE and BUILDING HISTORY

SITE HISTORY PRIOR TO CONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDING

The land area that is now Portland, part of the general lower Columbia and Willamette valley, was densely populated by Native American communities prior to contact with European explorers and trappers. The primary groups in the area were primarily Upper Chinookan speakers including the Clackamas and Multnomah peoples. Successive waves of Old World diseases introduced by Europeans decimated these Native peoples during the 1780s to 1850s. Starting in 1818, Britain and the U.S. had a joint occupation treaty in the Oregon Territory, which stretched from California to Alaska and east to Wyoming. American Oregon Trail pioneers began to come to the area to settle by the early 1840s, pushing out Native tribes. The Federal government enacted the Donation Land Claim (DLC) act of 1850, which laid out a grid over the western territories and deeded parcels, in various configurations, to (white, male) individuals, up to 320 acres, and couples, up to 640 acres, as long as the claimants would live on and farm the land. Many of the remaining Portland-area Native Americans were relocated to reservations such as the Grand Ronde Reservation, established in 1857.

The Willamette Survey of 1851 was the first survey to be carried out west of the Rocky Mountains, and “[t]he story of SE Stark Street is the story of how the Oregon Territory was surveyed. An early surveying method in 19th century America was done in a grid-like fashion, with a starting point from which radiated a north-south “meridian” and an east-west “base line.”⁴ Stark Street on the east side of the Willamette River was the original base line for the survey and was called Baseline or Base line road until it was renamed Stark Street.⁵

⁴Amy C. Mills, “A Cultural History of the Neighborhoods Along the I-205 Light Rail Project,” Portland: Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet), 2007, 16.

⁵ Ibid.

The site of the school was part of a donation land claim (DLC) given to Perry Prettyman, DLC 37, and the northeast corner of the site is approximately the northeast corner of Prettyman's claim (see image 1).⁶ The Mount Tabor community, growing as a farming center, was then separate and distinct from Portland. The volcanic cinder cone of Mt. Tabor was named after Mt. Tabor, Israel. Both streetcar connections and the new Morrison Bridge over the Willamette River spurred increasing connections from the community to larger population centers throughout the 1880s.

According to an *Oregonian* article in 1953, the present school is the fourth to stand on the site. The first school was described as a two-room log cabin, "on the old ox trail that passed where S.E. 60th and Stark street is now located."⁷ A two-story schoolhouse, plus basement, was constructed on the site, possibly in 1880, by the Mount Tabor School board, District No. 5.⁸ The 1901 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows a good-sized school with two floors plus basement (see image #2), located almost in the exact center of the site. There were a total of eight rooms as well as a library within the earlier schoolhouse, and the school was renovated before start of the 1902 school year, with stairs replaced on the interior.⁹

In the early morning of January 10, 1911, the Mt. Tabor School on the site burned, a total loss of \$8000 as reported by the *Oregon Journal* newspaper.¹⁰ The school had only recently become part of the Portland school district, when Mount Tabor was annexed into the city in 1905.¹¹

In April 1918, the entire site was surveyed. There were no remains noted of the old Mt. Tabor School, but some medium to large fir trees and maples were clustered in the center of the site, as well as a 16" diameter Chestnut tree that must have been near the old building.¹²

TUBERCULOSIS AND THE OPEN-AIR MOVEMENT

Tuberculosis has been a scourge across the world, including in Oregon, for hundreds of years. Untold numbers of people in the state over time developed active tuberculosis disease, and thousands tried to recuperate in one of the state's public sanitoriums. Unfortunately, many of these Oregonians, or maybe even most, died of the disease, because until the 1950s tuberculosis had no cure.¹³ In 1902, the Portland Sanitarium was constructed with 35 beds at SE 60th Ave and Belmont, less than a block south of the school site.¹⁴ The hospital "practiced the miasma theory of disease that called for generally passive treatments focused on exposure to fresh air."¹⁵ Mount Tabor was considered a healthful, rural location, with clean fresh air.

⁶ Roadway widths were later taken equally out of abutting claim areas, so P. Prettyman's claim extended to what is now the center of SE Stark and the center of SE 60th Ave.

⁷ "Schools Wait Dedication," *Oregonian*, October 4, 1953, 32.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Mt. Tabor School Renovated —List of Teachers," *Oregon Journal*, September 9, 1902, 2.

¹⁰ "Tabor School is Destroyed; Loss is \$8000," *Oregon Journal*, January 10, 1911, 10.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² D. W. Taylor, "Survey of school site," survey no. 27830, April 1918. [Accessed via Multnomah SAIL website].

¹³ "White Plague," Oregon Public Broadcasting article/intro to Oregon Experience program, <https://www.opb.org/television/programs/oregon-experience/article/white-plague/> May 17, 2010.

¹⁴ Note that both sanitarium and sanitorium are considered correct spellings.

¹⁵ John Tess & Rob Mawson, "Portland Sanitarium Nurses Quarters," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, NRIS# SG100001275, 2017, 14.

In 1917 to 1918, earlier movements to prevent (or cure) tuberculosis, sometimes called the white plague, gained additional public momentum with the deadly Spanish flu epidemic. The Fresh Air or open air movement, as a strong public health and prevention effort, mandated that better ventilation was the key to preventing disease.¹⁶

The open-air movement in schools in particular was first launched in Germany in 1904, near Berlin. There the first *Waldschule für kränkliche Kinder* (or "forest school for sickly children") was opened under Dr. Bernhard Bendix, a leading German pediatrician, and Hermann Neufert, a Berlin school inspector.¹⁷

In 1913, it was reported in the *Oregonian* newspaper that the Irvington school (1320 NE Brazee St.) was to "conduct an experiment" to build an open-air facility, to be designed by F.A. Naramore, the in-house architect for PPS.¹⁸ Classrooms were to be designed to allow for a cross-current of air, allowed in via large walls of windows that would remain open in all seasons. Another article two years later indicated that at least one classroom on this model had been built at Irvington, and that the Irvington PTA was in favor of increasing the number of rooms "so that only two grades need occupy the same open-air room."¹⁹ While an open-air environment was thought to be healthful for children in particular, the value of fresh air was specifically seen as preventing disease.

By the early 1920s, three Portland public schools were operating under a partnership with the University of Oregon in its course for public health nurses.²⁰ Buckman, Couch, and the Mills Open-Air School were the schools where, in the zeal for scientific measurement and methodology of the time, young students were not only weighed and inspected, but sometimes deemed physically or dentally "perfect," or not.²¹ An early article about the students admitted to the A. L. Mills school explained that "eight of the 40 first enrolled had defective sight. These have been corrected and there have also been several operations for adenoids and tonsils."²² The school was part of a broader effort to improve public health and welfare, and the public-private partnerships that enabled extra funding for such operations were often supported by charitable drives, such as the Christmas and Easter Seal campaigns.²³

CONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDING

The A. L. Mills Open-Air School was opened in 1919, after being proposed by the Oregon Tuberculosis Association. The school was not intended for any students with active tuberculosis. It was designed to

¹⁶ Emily Beyda, "The Fascinating History of Building Ventilation, Air Flow and Public Health," in *Built: the Bluebeam blog*, <https://blog.bluebeam.com/air-ventilation-and-public-health/>, undated.

¹⁷ Sarah Pruitt, "When Fears of Tuberculosis Drove an Open-Air School Movement," *History website*, www.history.com/news/school-outside-tuberculosis. July 30, 2020.

¹⁸ "Open Air School Ordered," *Oregonian*, August 13, 1913, 1. Note that the present, existing Irvington School was not constructed until 1932, so the previous school including open-air component was replaced.

¹⁹ "Plans Made to Greet Women at Every State," *Oregonian*, April 4, 1915, 11.

²⁰ *Oregonian*, June 17, 1923, 52.

²¹ Ibid. Also see "Health Show Given in Buckman School," *Oregonian*, January 22, 1922, 18.

²² "Children Become Healthy in Mills Open Air School," *Oregonian*, April 20, 1919, 5.

²³ "Seal Sales Net \$38,000," *Oregonian*, January 23, 1921, 16.

serve “low vitality” children, as these students were thought to be susceptible to tuberculosis. The expense of some of the staff, including a nurse and “matron,” and the kitchen supplies for serving hot lunches and milk, were to be covered by the association, with PPS providing the building expenses and standard teacher salaries.

The school was designed in a residential-scale simplified Georgian revival style, with red-brick walls and large banks of pivoting multi-pane windows. The architect, F. A. Naramore, often worked in a Mediterranean style, or a somewhat “stripped” Classical revival style or Georgian style. This last style is a subset of Colonial Revival style in which red brick was commonly used, as well as bilateral symmetry, multipane windows, roofs with minimal overhangs and eave returns, and white terra cotta or painted wood accents. Naramore’s design for the Shattuck School (now part of Portland State University), for instance, shows most of these characteristics and features.

The plan provided two large classrooms, each of which could provide space for 25 students on cots or at desks. An adjoining wardrobe room was for storage of each student’s school-furnished woolen robes and booties.²⁴ There were boys and girls’ bathrooms and a nurse’s office where children showered, were weighed, and dressed each morning.²⁵ A kitchen and dining room rounded out the series of rooms along SW Stark Street. An open deck area between the identical classrooms at the south side was for playing or napping. Boiler, fuel, janitor, and storage rooms were located in the basement level. A direct low-pressure steam system provided heat to the building. The building cost \$32,500.00 to construct, and another \$3,000.00 for furniture and equipment.²⁶

The Mills School represents the only open air school ever built by PPS. Some individual classrooms in other schools were created to accommodate the open air concept, but Naramore’s full-school design was admired and discussed in national publications.²⁷ Though an open shed was constructed between the two classrooms, the building retains a flexible and aesthetically pleasing layout, well-designed inside and out. It remains architecturally significant under National Register criterion C, with very good integrity, and is also significant under National Register criterion A, potentially under a health and medicine theme if not education.

LATER USES OF THE BUILDING

By the late 1940s, around half of the student population of the Mills Open-Air school was made up of children with heart conditions.²⁸ The Portland school board decided in 1949 to close the school, and move the 51 students then enrolled to another location so that the open-air school building could be used as overflow for the crowded Mount Tabor school.²⁹

²⁴ As described in a local newspaper article, the “regular Eskimo garments designed for open air schools are a little too heavy for the mild Oregon climate,” so a blanket-weight robe was designed for the A. L. Mills students instead: “Substitute Costumes Patterned After Bathrobe Suggested; Class Schedule Adopted,” *Oregon Journal*, February 2, 1919, 15.

²⁵ Everson, 33.

²⁶ George Everson, 33.

²⁷ Entrix, 2009, 3-12. See, for example, T. B. Kidner, “Fresh Air Schools,” *The Public Health Nurse*, Vol. XV No. 1, January 1923, 465-469.

²⁸ “School Board Delays Vote on Moving Mills Pupils,” *Oregonian*, July 29, 1949, 8.

²⁹ Ibid.

In 1949, the building became known as the Mt. Tabor Annex, housing the first three primary grades at Tabor Elementary. It operated as such until 1973.³⁰ Managed by the Parks Department but still in PPS ownership, the building then became the location of a community arts program, the Theatre Workshop, from 1977 or 1978 until about 1990.³¹ The passage of Measure 5, dramatically limiting state tax revenues, in 1990 spelled closure for many arts and community programs run by government entities, including the Tabor Annex programs, the Firehouse Theater, and many others.³²

In 1991, according to the permit records, the French American School initiated some minor plumbing improvements while studying a potential move from the west side, where light-rail improvements were about to impact its campus there.³³ However, it appears that the school never moved to the Mt. Tabor building. The City of Portland took over the site as part of a land swap with Multnomah County in 1994.³⁴ Building code appeals were filed in 1994 to allow the building to operate, with a few physical changes, as a daycare. The YMCA leased it for this purpose from that time until 2019.³⁵ It was transferred to the Portland Housing Bureau's management in 2016.³⁶ It has been vacant since 2019.

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOL

- A. **Floyd Archibald Naramore**, the architect, was hired by Portland Public Schools as their in-house design expert in 1912.³⁷ Naramore graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1907 and came to Portland in 1909.³⁸ During the period Naramore was employed by PPS, 1912-1919, he designed at least 16 schools, almost all of which were fireproof masonry construction.³⁹
- B. **Abbott L. Mills**, the school's original namesake, was the President of the First National Bank of Portland and the Vice President of the Lewis and Clark Exposition of 1905.⁴⁰ Mills, originally from Brooklyn, moved to Portland after his graduation from Harvard. He was the President of the Portland Gas Company for 17 years, served in the Oregon House of Representatives (as speaker in 1905), and was also a philanthropist and community activist.⁴¹ The 1991 historic survey record of the Mills family house says:

Mills was also one of the organizers of the Portland open air sanitarium for consumptives and was the first president, a position he held at the time of his death. He was author of the bill... [that] appropriated funds for the organization of the Oregon State Tuberculosis sanitarium.

³⁰ City Club of Portland, "City Club of Portland Bulletin vol.55, No. 21," October 25, 1974, 109.

³¹ For example, "My Fair Lady," *Portland Observer*, October 26, 1983.

³² Barnes C. Ellis, "48 PARKS BUREAU JOBS MAY BE ELIMINATED," *Oregonian*, January 19, 1991, B04.

³³ Historic plumbing permits, No. 114257, accessed via PortlandMaps website.

³⁴ Ordinance 188102, November 17, 2016

³⁵ City Council Ordinance 183186, September 16, 2009; and Ordinance 188102, November 17, 2016.

³⁶ Lucas Manfield, "Y Not," *Willamette Week*, January 18, 2023, 7.

³⁷ Entrix, 3-10.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ HRI form, City of Portland, for "733 NW Twentieth Avenue," c.1984.

⁴¹ Donovan & Assoc., Prohaska & Assoc., Oregon Inventory of Historic Places, "Abbott Mills House," 1991.

Oregon therefore became the first state on the Pacific coast to take up the fight against the white plague.⁴²

II. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Oregon Journal, various dates

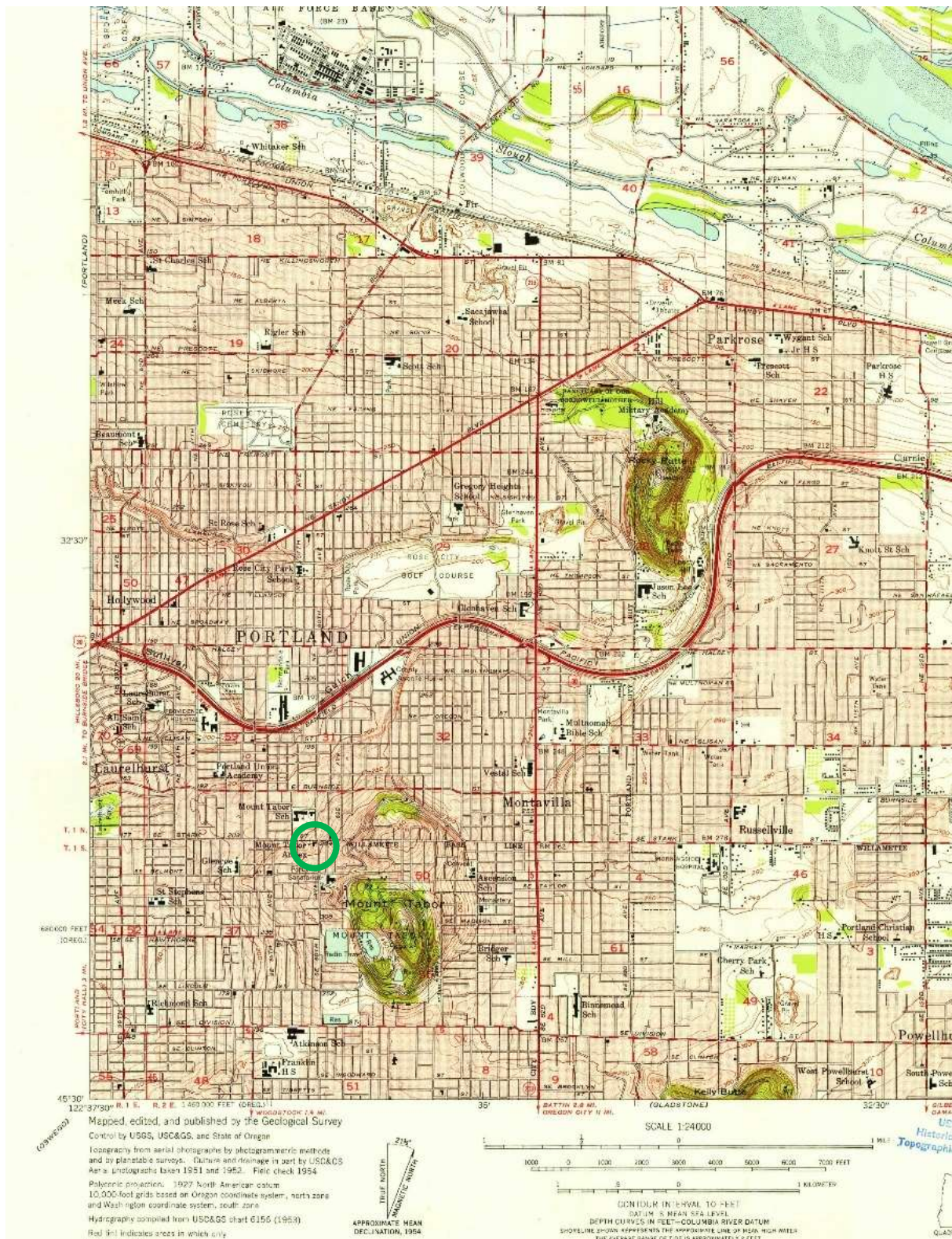
The Oregonian, various dates

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Ritz, Richard E., *Architects of Oregon: A Biographical Dictionary of Architects Deceased—19th and 20th Centuries*. Portland, Oregon: Lair Hill Publishing, 2002.

⁴² Ibid.

III. USGS MAP

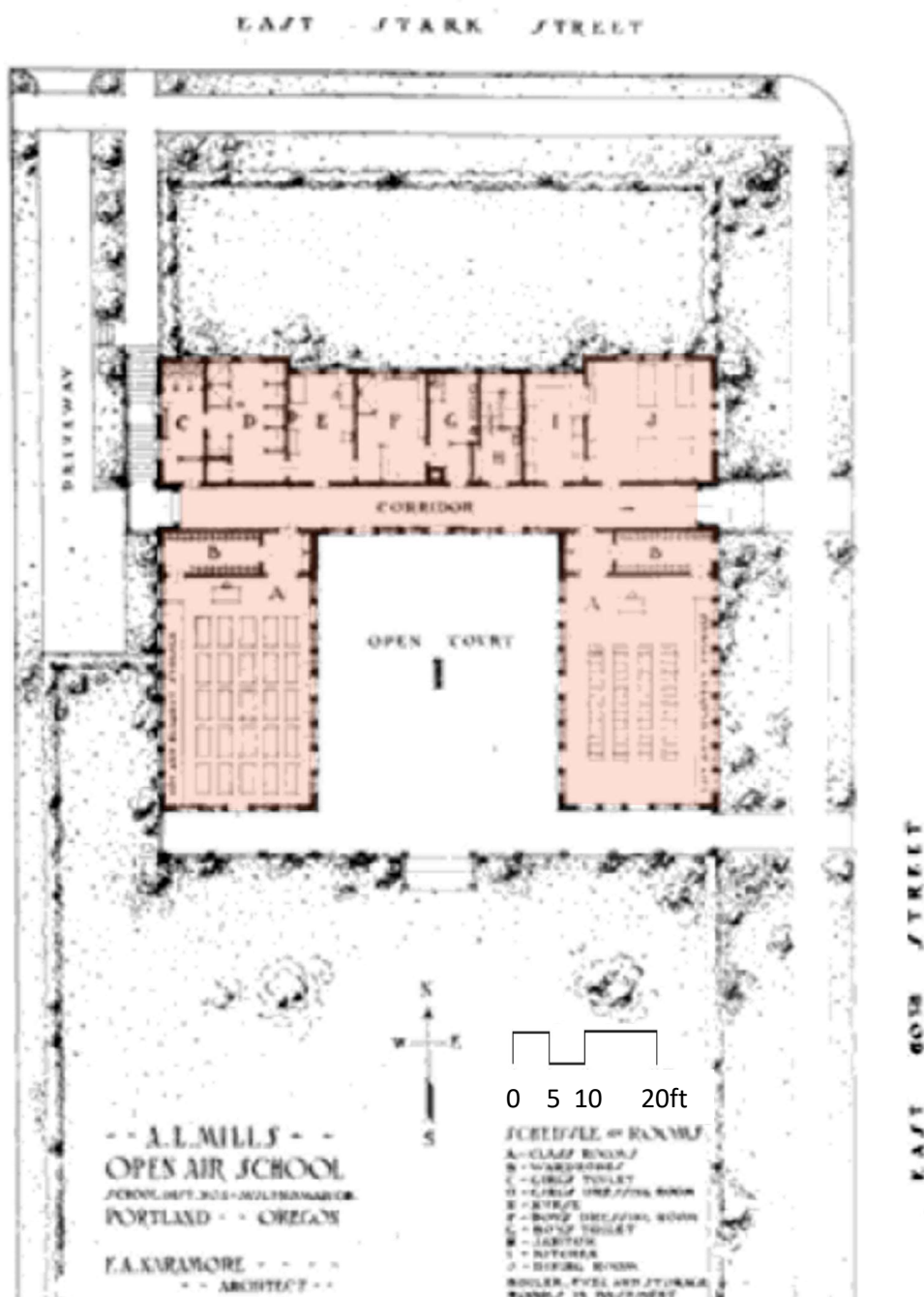


Partial USGS topo map, Mount Tabor Quadrangle, 1954, with site circled in green.

IV. SCALED SITE PLAN



V. SCALED BUILDING PLAN



Ground Floor Plan: 1918 or 1919 by F. A. Naramore. Note that there have been minor wall placement changes within some of the rooms along the north, but the plan is still otherwise as originally designed.

VI. PHOTOGRAPHS

Photos were all taken by Kate Piper, PHB, on October 2, 2023, unless noted otherwise.



Photo 1: Looking SW at east side/ front of building, along SE 60th Ave (K. Minor, July 18 2024)



Photo 2: Looking west at east side/ front of building, along SE 60th Ave (K. Minor, July 18 2024)



Photo 3: Looking west at entry doors (east façade)



Photo 4: Looking northwest at east façade of southwest wing (K. Minor, July 18 2024)



Photo 5: Looking north at the south side of building



Photo 6: Looking northeast at the south and west elevations facing the courtyard



Photo 7: Looking NW, courtyard detail



Photos 8a and 8b: Looking east and southeast at the west side of the building.



Photo 9: Looking south at the northwest corner of the building



Photo 10: Looking south at the north façade along SE Stark St. (K. Minor, July 18 2024)



Photo 11: Looking southeast at the north facade of the building (K. Minor, July 18 2024)



Photo 12: Interior, looking southwest in the primary corridor



Photo 13: Interior, looking NW in one of the areas north of the corridor



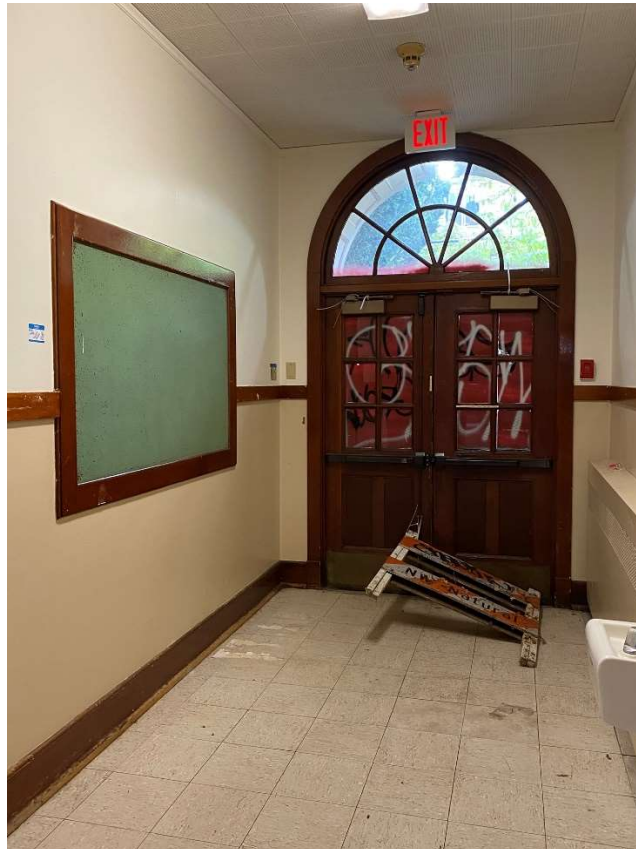
Photo 14: Interior, east classroom. Looking northwest.



Photo 15: Interior, west classroom. Looking south.



Photo 16: Interior, looking north in the kitchen



Photos 17a and 17b: Interiors, (a) looking north at basement stair, (b) looking east at entry.



Photos 18a and 18b: Interior, basement, (a) looking northeast in full-height section; (b) looking south in crawl space area.

VII. ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

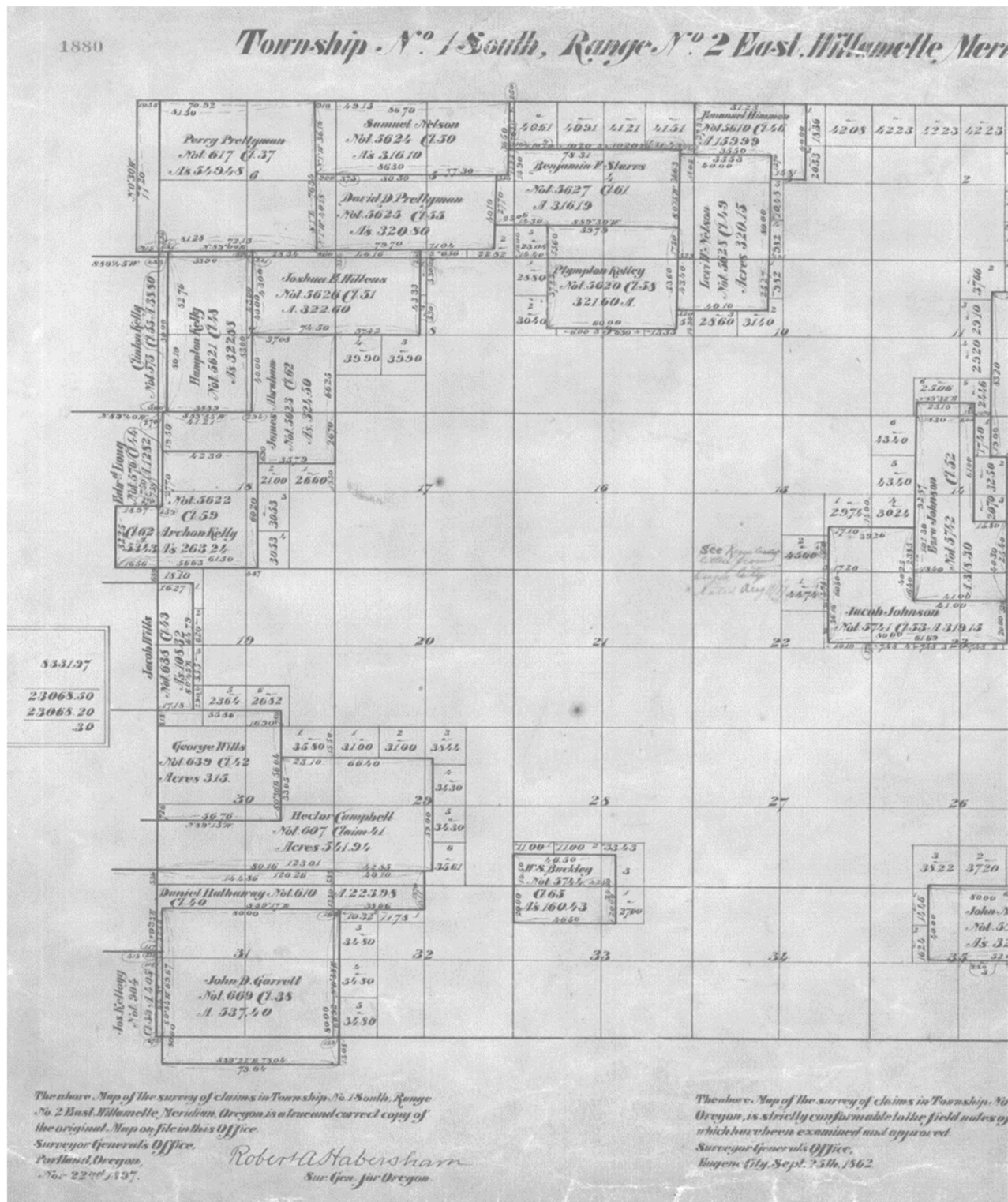


Image 1: 1854 Cadastral survey of T1S, R2E. Perry Prettyman DLC, No. 37, is in Section 6 (upper left).

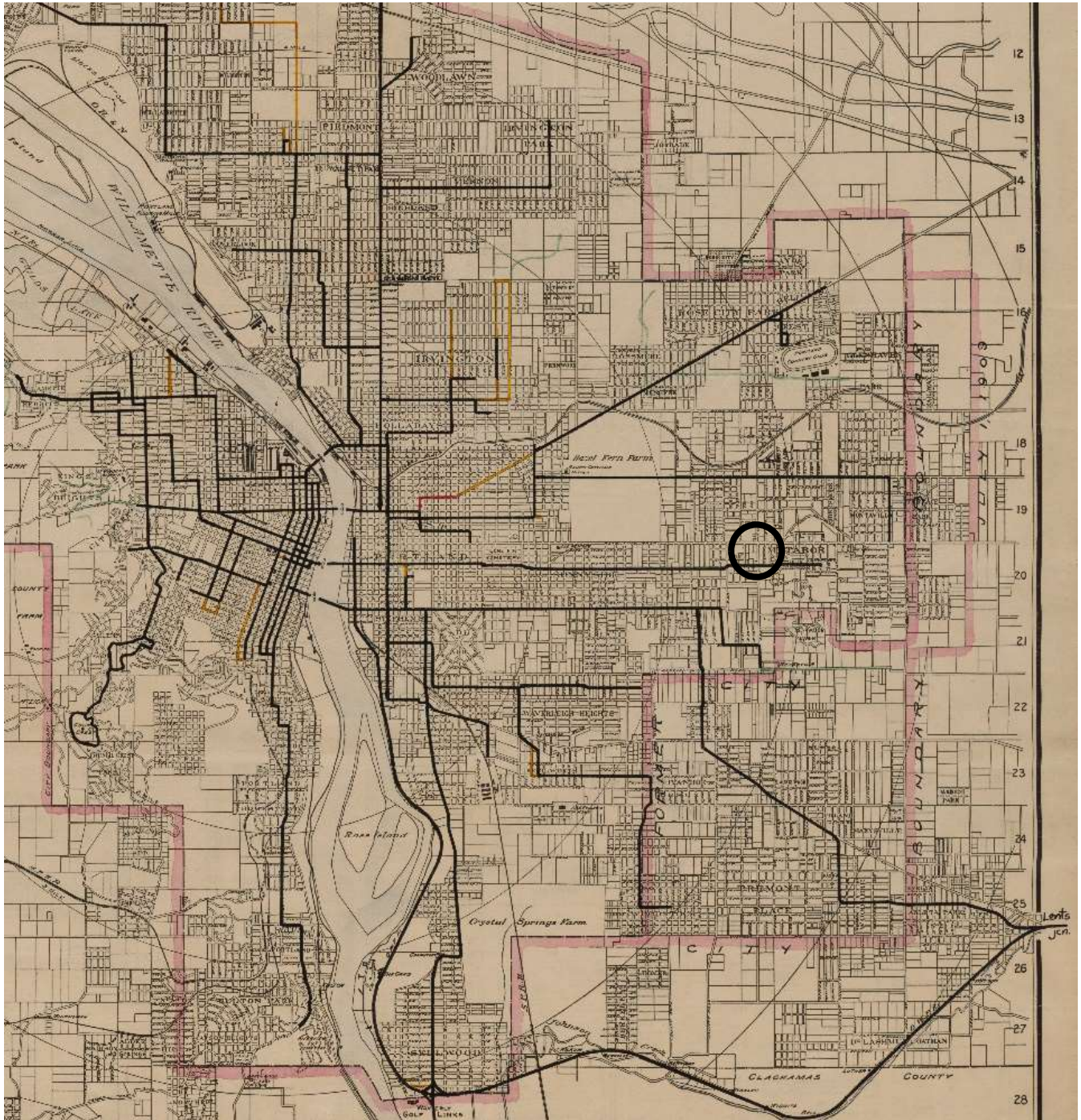


Image 2: 1908/09 Rowland and Fortner's Map of Portland and Vicinity (partial), illustrating rail lines and city boundary. Site (Open Air school not yet constructed) is circled.

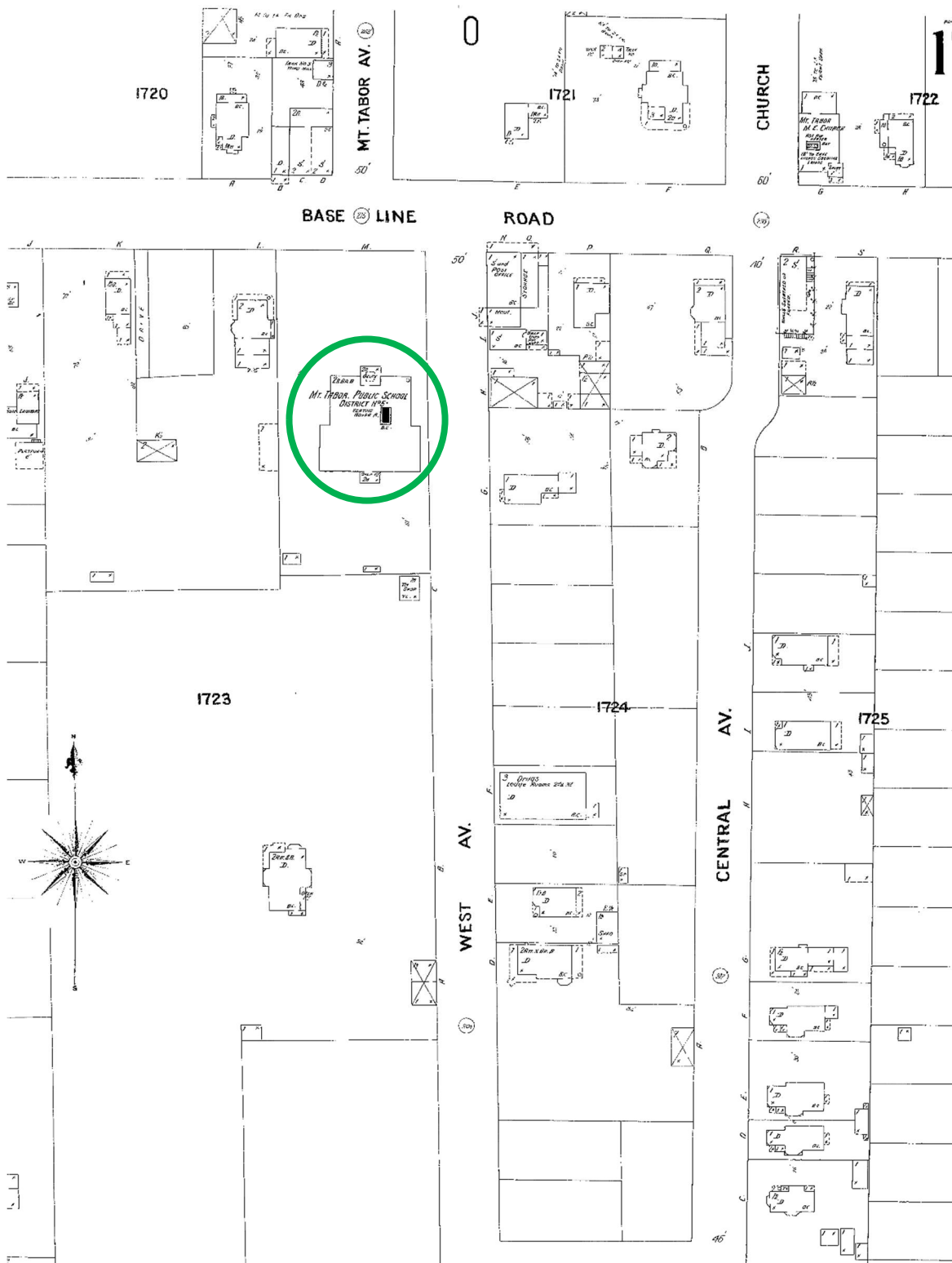


Image 3: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (partial), 1901. 1880s-era school on the site is circled.

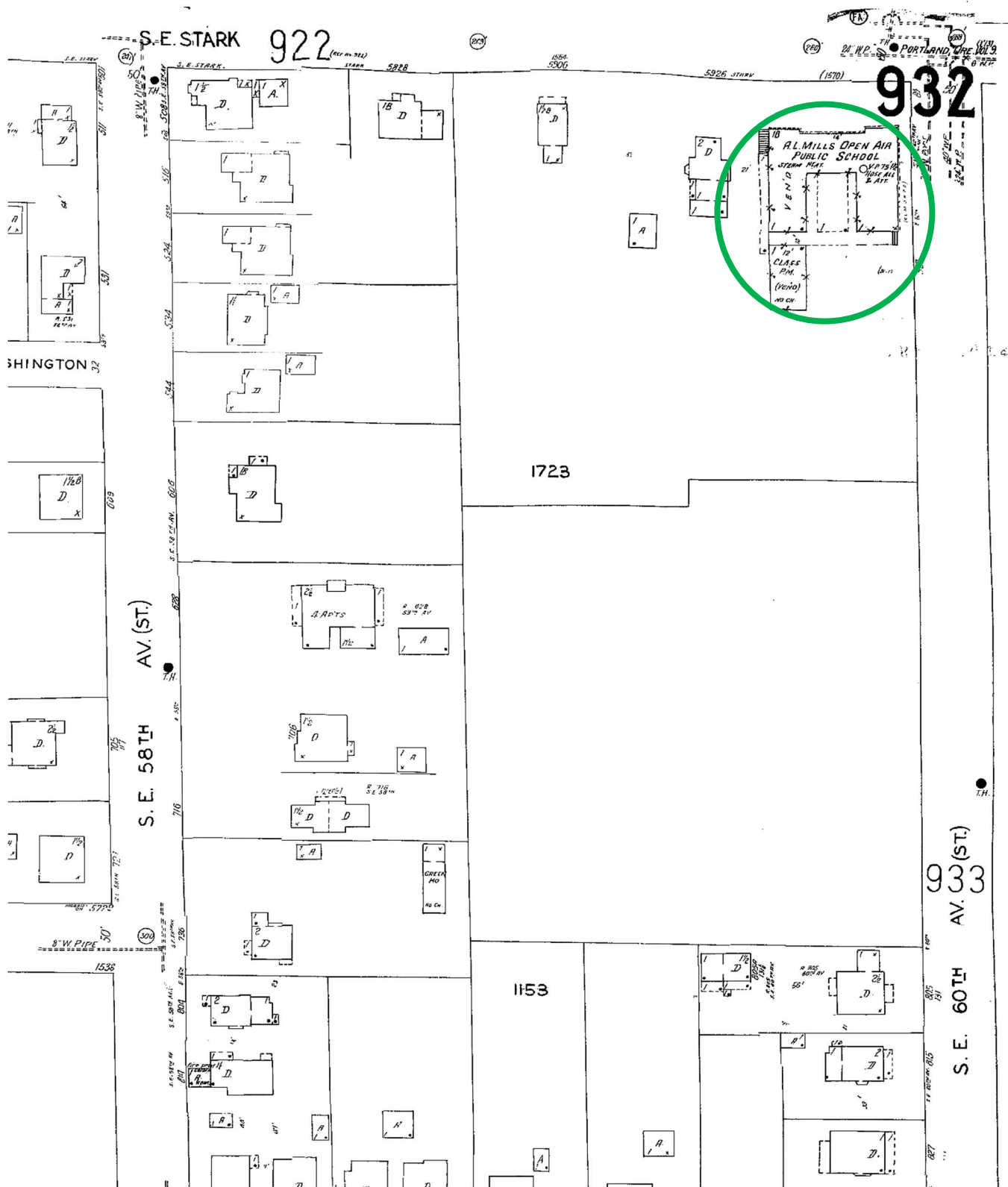


Image 4: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (partial), 1908 corrected to 1950. A. L. Mills school is circled.



Images 5a and 5b: on left, Mt. Tabor School, no date, Ben Gifford, #G14873 at OHS. On right, January 10, 1911 fire at Mt. Tabor School, *Oregonian*, collection #1845 at Oregon Historical Society (OHS).



Image 6: *East Elevation* (SE 60th Ave) by Ben Gifford, collection #1845, no date. (OHS).



Image 7: *North Elevation* (SE Stark St.) by Ben Gifford, collection #1845, no date. (OHS).



Image 8: *South side of building, between wings* by Ben Gifford, collection #1845, no date. (OHS).



Image 9: *Oregon Journal* article image compilation published November 28, 1920, p.57.



Image 10: *Interior of East wing classroom* by Ben Gifford, collection #1845, no date. (OHS).



Image 11: City of Portland Historic Resource Inventory (c. 1984 survey) image looking southwest.