

Historic Property Old Thurston County Courthouse
Inventory Report for 1110 South Capitol Way Olympia, Thurston, 98501

LOCATION SECTION

Historic Name: Old Thurston County Courthouse **Field Site No.:** 888
Common Name: (#34-900) **OAHP No.:**
Property Address: 1110 South Capitol Way Olympia, Thurston, 98501
Comments: OLYMPIA

County	Township/Range/EW	Section	1/4 Sec	1/4 1/4 Sec	Quadrangle
<u>[REDACTED]</u>	<u>T18R02W</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>NW</u>		<u>TUMWATER</u>

UTM Reference

Zone: 10 **Spatial Type:** Point **Acquisition Code:** TopoZone.com
Sequence: 0 **Easting:** 507690 **Northing:** 5209150

Tax No./Parcel No. 78508300000 **Plat/Block/Lot** Sylvester Blk 83

Supplemental Map(s) **Acreage**
City of Olympia Planning Department 1.39

IDENTIFICATION SECTION

Field Recorder: Shanna Stevenson **Date Recorded:** 7/1/1997 **Survey Name:** OLYMPIA

Owner's Name: Washington General Administration **Owner Address:** PO Box 41019 **City/State/Zip:** Olympia, WA 98501

Classification: Building **Resource Status** **Comments**
Within a District? No Survey/Inventory
Contributing? National Register
State Register
Local Register

National Register Nomination: THURSTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE
Local District:
National Register District/Thematic Nomination Name:

DESCRIPTION SECTION

Historic Use: Government - Courthouse
Current Use: Government - Government Office

Plan: Rectangle **No. of Stories:** 2

Structural System: Stone - Uncut

Changes to plan: Intact **Changes to interior:** Extensive
Changes to original cladding: Unknown **Changes to other:**
Changes to windows: Intact **Other (specify):**

Cladding Stone **Foundation** Stone
Style Art Deco - Streamlined Moderne **Form/Type**
Roof Material Asphalt / Composition - Rolled **Roof Type** Unknown

NARRATIVE SECTION

Study Unit	Other	Date Of Construction: <u>1930</u>
<u>Architecture/Landscape Architecture</u>		Architect: <u>Joseph Wohleb</u>
<u>Politics/Government/Law</u>		Builder:
		Engineer:

Property appears to meet criteria for the National Register of Historic Places: No
Property is located in a historic district (National and/or local): No
Property potentially contributes to a historic district (National and/or local):

Statement of Significance The old Thurston County Courthouse in Olympia was at the center of the county's political and governmental life for nearly fifty years. It also derived a larger role from its location in the capital city, which made it the setting for the Superior Court cases in which the State of Washington was a participant. The structure is of architectural interest as the work of Joseph Wohleb, a leading residential architect of his time. The cost of construction and furnishing the courthouse, including labor, came to \$350,000. The contractor was Walter Boyer of Yakima. Much of the labor was hired through the local trades council and many of the building materials were also local in origin, most notably Tenino sandstone from the south end of the county. The completed structure was praised as follows in the September 13, 1930, issue of The Daily Olympian. "The new courthouse is a monument to the progress and prosperity of this county. Erected opposite the state capitol group it fits into the picture perfectly. In fact the new courthouse is as gracious in design and as beautiful in its lines as any of the capitol group. Joe Wohleb did a splendid job as architect and the building will long stand as a monument to him as well as the county". For almost half a century the old Thurston County Courthouse was the focus of county government. The County Commissioners conducted their business there, and thousands of citizens took out wedding licenses, filed real estate transactions in the auditor's office, and dealt with the assessor or the county treasurer. The courthouse was also a center of activity on election nights when the auditor's election crew processed voting results. As a seat of justice, the courthouse had its share of typical criminal cases, as well as some extraordinary ones. Foremost among the latter were the Baker-Berry kidnapping trial, which generated international publicity in 1938, and the Dick Gregory/Indian fishing rights case of 1966-67. Because the government of the state is located in Thurston County, the courthouse, perhaps more so than any other in Washington, has been the scene of Superior Court cases in which the state either brought suit or was sued. Some of the more notable cases in this category included: 1. Lemon V. Walgren, regarding the location of state agencies at the seat of government (1953) 2. Judge Frank Baker's hearing on the constitutionality of the state's public disclosure law (1973) 3. The Doran decision on full state funding for basic education (1977) The architect of the old Thurston County Courthouse, Joseph Wohleb (1887-1958), was a native of Waterbury, Connecticut, and came west at a young age. He studied architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, and was involved in the reconstruction of San Francisco following the earthquake and fire of 1906. He worked in Nevada until 1911, whereupon he moved north to Olympia to establish a practice. His first major public building was the Carnegie Library in downtown Olympia, completed in 1914. Other commissions included the Olympia High School (1917 version, no longer standing); Lincoln, Garfield, (demolished) and Unit #1 (demolished) of Roosevelt elementary schools in Olympia; the Tenino High School; the Irene S. Reed School in Shelton; the Olympia, Centralia, and Bremerton Elks buildings; Centralia's Armory and Municipal Building; the Bremerton City Hall; and the new Olympia Brewery in Tumwater. Two of Wohleb's more notable residence designs in Olympia were later converted to public use. The former mansion of Clarence J. Lord (1922) now houses the Washington State Capital Museum. Its contemporary and neighbor, once the home of the McCleary family, subsequently became a medical clinic and office building. Wohleb's design for the Thurston County courthouse represents a departure from his frequent use of Mission stylistic influences such as stucco and red tile roofs, a tendency perhaps originating in his student days in California. The courthouse, in its exterior organization and ornament, makes reference to the Modernistic style, although the interior decorative features usually associated with that mode are lacking. The building is nonetheless one of the few in Olympia which represent, even minimally, the Modernistic movement. In 1973, it was sold to the state to finance the construction of a new courthouse. The county vacated the building in 1978. It was renovated in 1991-1992 by Lorig and Associates.

Description of Physical Appearance The old Thurston County Courthouse, facing west on the principal thoroughfare of downtown Olympia across from the Washington State capitol, is an H-shaped building with raised basement, four-story central block surmounted by a rectangular tower, and two-story projecting wings. Landscaping and a circular drive in front of the building restored in the renovation. The structure is 184 feet 6 inches by 84 feet and contains 50,000 square feet of floor space. The basic construction material is concrete reinforced with 69 tons of steel, and the surface area is faced with 28,000 square feet of 4-inch thick sandstone. Sheet metal was originally used for roofing, ventilators, and fittings around skylights. Two of three original oak doors are still in place on the facade, flanking a newer one of metal and glass, and wooden sash and casement windows remain. Other exterior architectural elements are set-back massing to emphasize the geometric form; hard-edge angular pilasters; low relief in bands around the top of the building and the main doors and in several decorative panels; and stylized sculptures of eagles mounted at the entrance. The original interior finish of the courthouse included a paint scheme in flat-tone grays and pinks, lacquered hardwood trim, and enameled fir woodwork. All office floors, including those in the basement, were covered with heavy inlaid linoleum at a cost of \$7,500. The original furnishings were both wood and steel, costing \$50,000, and the second-floor court chambers had mahogany or mahogany-enameled furnishings. At the time the building was completed, it had the latest in telephone switchboard equipment and elevator service from the basement to the third floor. Interior features include plaster eagle sculptures in the foyer, octagonal lamp lighting fixtures, obscure glass and wooden frame office partitions, and boxed ceiling beams and pilasters with carved pendants in the courtrooms were retained in the renovation. Ornamentation is chiefly expressed in the use of Alaska marble for hallway floors, wainscoting, and stairway. The latter has a molded wooden handrail and wrought-iron balustrade. The basement and first floor of the building were formerly occupied by county offices, the second floor contained courtrooms, and the third and fourth floors housed prison cells and support facilities.

Major Bibliographic References Battersby, Martin. The Decorative Twenties. 1975
Grief, Martin. Depression Moder. 1975
Loeb, Marcia. Art Deco Designs and Motifs. 1972
Rowe, William. Original Art Deco Designs. 1973
The Daily Olympian:

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12 September 1930
13 September 1930
11 September 1930
18 September 1930
22 February 1978
Seattle Times: 11 June 1958 (Wohleb's obituary)

National Register Nomination Form written by Delbert McBride and David Nicandri

PHOTOS



View of West Facade

taken 7/1/1997

Photography Neg. No. (Roll No./Frame No.):
41-19A

Comments: