

**Historic Property** Sylvester Park/Town Square  
**Inventory Report for** 615 Southeast Washington Olympia, Thurston, 98501

**LOCATION SECTION**

**Historic Name:** Sylvester Park/Town Square **Field Site No.:** 828  
**Common Name:** (#34-721) **OAHP No.:**  
**Property Address:** 615 Southeast Washington Olympia, Thurston, 98501  
**Comments:** OLYMPIA/OLYWOMEN

County	Township/Range/EW	Section	1/4 Sec	1/4 1/4 Sec	Quadrangle
<u></u>	<u>T18R02W</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>SW</u>		<u>TUMWATER</u>

**UTM Reference**

**Zone:** 10 **Spatial Type:** Point **Acquisition Code:** TopoZone.com  
**Sequence:** 0 **Easting:** 507660 **Northing:** 5209700

**Tax No./Parcel No.** 78501600000 **Plat/Block/Lot** Sylvester Blk 16

**Supplemental Map(s)** **Acreage**  
City of Olympia Planning Department 1.57

**IDENTIFICATION SECTION**

**Field Recorder:** Shanna Stevenson **Date Recorded:** 10/16/1985 **Survey Name:** OLYMPIA

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

**Classification:** Site **Resource Status** **Comments**  
**Within a District?** Yes Survey/Inventory  
**Contributing?** Yes National Register  
State Register  
Local Register

**National Register Nomination:** TOWN SQUARE  
**Local District:**  
**National Register District/Thematic Nomination Name:** OLYMPIA DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

**DESCRIPTION SECTION**

**Historic Use:** Landscape - Park  
**Current Use:** Landscape - Park

**Plan:** Square **No. of Stories:**

**Structural System:** Unknown

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

**Cladding** **Foundation**  
**Style** **Form/Type**  
**Roof Material** **Roof Type**

**NARRATIVE SECTION**

<b>Study Unit</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Date Of Construction:</b> <u>1850</u>
<u>Architecture/Landscape Architecture</u>	<u>Women's History</u>	<b>Architect:</b>
<u>Entertainment/Recreation</u>		<b>Builder:</b>
		<b>Engineer:</b>

**Property appears to meet criteria for the National Register of Historic Places:** Yes  
**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** Sylvester Park, the town square of Olympia, was designated on the original plat of the city, donated by the town's founder, Edmund Sylvester. The square has been the focal point of development of the city and has historically provided a public meeting place for many events. The square has been closely associated with the capitalhood of the city hosting many visiting dignitaries. A number of historic markers are in the park which is a legacy of the city's New England founders. The square began as Block 16 on Edmund Sylvester's 1850 plat of Olympia and has continued at that location and size. The square became the hub of Olympia as the town grew up around it. Sylvester had come to Oregon Territory in 1843 via Cape Horn from his native Maine. He first settled on Chambers Prairie east of Olympia. Sylvester's partner under Oregon law, Levi Lathrop Smith, built a small cabin near Budd Inlet. He named the settlement Smithfield. However, Smith was in ill health and died in 1848 and Sylvester inherited the townsite upon his death. Sylvester followed the gold rush to California in 1849 but returned in 1850. An Oregon surveyor laid out the town and Sylvester donated land for the Masonic Temple, schools and capitol grounds as well as the town square. The square was much like a New England common during its early years. During the Indian Uprising of 1856, a wooden blockhouse large enough to house the entire village was built on the square. The structure was later used as a jail. In 1861 when the competition for Thurston County seat was being contested, the people of Olympia donated the square as a site for a courthouse to counter a similar offer of land and lumber by Tumwater. An election settled the matter, but the title to the land was given under the condition it remain a park, so no courthouse was built. After the Old Capitol (originally Thurston Co. Courthouse) across the street was completed in 1892, the park was first formally landscaped in 1893 with a Victorian gazebo and fish pond and the entire park was encircled with a decorative wrought iron fence. The park also featured crushed clamshell walkways. The bandstand was torn down in 1928 and the fish pond filled in after World War II. Throughout its history, the square has been the site of many city gatherings--Fourth of July celebrations, May festivals, Memorial Day services and band concerts and dances. Between 1901 and 1927 when the state capitol was housed across Washington Street from the square, the park was known as Capitol Plaza and many dignitaries including William Jennings Bryan, Teddy Roosevelt, William Howard Taft and Franklin Roosevelt spoke to crowds in the park. The city deeded the park to the State of Washington in 1901. In later years the park was a miniature golf course and headquarters for the Olympia City Centennial in 1950 when a log cabin was built there. The park was the site of a gala Bicentennial Forth of July for the city in 1976. The gazebo in the park was a gift to the city of the 1976 Bicentennial. The park was recently recognized as a locally important historic site by the Olympia Heritage Commission.

The drinking fountain in the park is dedicated to Emma Page. Emma Page graduated from the University of Illinois in 1878 in music. She came to Washington in 1893 and took up Washington Christian Temperance Union Work. She wrote widely on Temperance and on kindness to animals. She succeeded in getting a curriculum for kindness to animals in schools in the state. She was blind from an early age but wrote and spoke widely for her causes. The fountain in the park was erected by the WCTU in her memory and restored in 2000. Another marker in the park was placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1914 marking the end of the Oregon Trail. The Sacajawea Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution was organized in Olympia in 1905.

**Description of Physical Appearance** The park occupies a full city block in the center of downtown Olympia ringed by several of Olympia's historic buildings. The park features tall maple and beech shade trees, well-kept lawns, concrete paths installed in the 1970's, and a 1976 era gazebo. A statue of Governor John Rogers at the east central side of the park was erected by state school children in 1905. Rogers was instrumental while a legislator in passing the "Barefoot Schoolboy Law" which equalized funding state-wide for financing public education. Other markers in the park are the Daughters of the American Revolution End of the Oregon Trail plaque installed in 1913 at the northwest corner of the park; the Women's Christian Temperance Union fountains at the center of the park installed in 1912, one of which is dedicated to Emma Page, bench made by the Disabled American Veterans after World War II; and marker commemorating Edmund Sylvester as the founder of the Olympia near the center of the park. Near Capitol Way on the west side is a small oval bronze marker installed by the City of Olympia designating the park as a city landmark. The park has evolved in appearance over the years with new pathways, benches, and gazebo while retaining its ambiance and historic markers.

**Major Bibliographic References** Stevenson, Shanna, Olympiana, Historical Vignettes of Olympia, State Capitol Museum, 1982.  
 History and Register 1924 Daughters of the American Revolution, DAR, Lowman and Handford Co., 1924.

**PHOTOS**



**View of** Northeast Corner

**taken** 9/1/1997

**Photography Neg. No. (Roll No./Frame No.):**  
43-6

**Comments:**