

NARRATIVE SECTION

Study Unit	Other	Date Of Construction: <u>1912</u>
<u>Architecture/Landscape Architecture</u>	<u>Women's History</u>	Architect: <u>George Gove</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 significance of the Old Olympia City Hall rests on both its architectural character and on its historical associations. The building is a well preserved example of neoclassical revival architecture as was commonly used for commercial structures around the turn of the century. Historically, the building was the seat of city government for over fifty years and the home of the city's fire department, which traces its origin back to the 1850's and which is a direct descendant of the first engine company in the state. The Old Olympia City Hall was designed by George Gove (1869-1956) of the Tacoma firm of Heath and Gove. He came to Tacoma in 1908 and, in association with Frederick Heath, was involved in many major public buildings, schools and churches, mostly in or near Tacoma. Some of these include McNeil Island penitentiary, Western State Hospital, First Baptist Church of Tacoma, and the conversion of a burnt-out hotel into Stadium High School. Gove designed Olympia's Masonic temple and high school, both of which have been demolished. The Old Olympia City Hall is the last known example of his work in the city. The history of firefighting in Olympia began in the 1850's with the formation of a hook and ladder company. In 1864 Charles E. Williams, a local merchant, organized a fund raising drive to purchase a power fire engine. Even before it came around the Horn, it became clear that Williams regarded the engine as his possession, which caused so much dissatisfaction that some members of the community built a bon fire in front of his store as a protest. The fire, which was extinguished with great ceremony, persuaded Williams to turn ownership of the engine over to the city. Thus, fire fighting became a part of city government by virtue of ownership of the new engine, the first in the Territory of Washington. For some years thereafter, the fire fighters were volunteers, but membership in the company that used the new engine carried great prestige. Called "Columbia #1" after the trade name of the engine's manufacturer, the company took their engine by boat to Seattle in the late 1860's for a Fourth of July celebration. The engine was regarded there as a great marvel and the firemen were lavishly feted. To the embarrassment of all, an inmate in the Olympia jail started a fire while the fire company was showing off its new engine in Seattle. The Columbia engine was a large hand pump with two 18-foot handles. Complimenting it was a hose 300 feet long made of leather fastened together with rivets. Olympia took their famous engine to Seattle again in 1889, this time to help contain the huge fire that destroyed most of the city. Soon after this sobering example, another company of volunteer firemen was organized, a steam-powered engine was purchased, and the city hired its first paid fireman. A formal city fire department was formed in 1902 from the various companies and their equipment. The subject building was the first permanent city hall designated expressly for city governmental purposes and served the citizens from 1912 until a new city hall was built in 1967. It is interesting to note that city offices, which were located on the second floor, were reached through an ordinary-looking door on the unadorned south façade, while the fire trucks exited from the principal façade. This suggests what an important part of municipal government was played by the fire department in the early twentieth century. The site occupied by the Old Olympia City Hall is very near the place where the city had its origins. It was on this site that the founder of Olympia, Edmond Sylvester, operated a livery stable that was the end of the line for all overland stages from Cowlitz Landing. The site continued to be used in the livery business until around the turn of the century. It was acquired in 1911 by the city for the purpose of constructing a city hall. It is currently used as a child care center.

Description of Physical Appearance The Old Olympia City Hall occupies the northwest corner of State Street and Capitol Way, a busy downtown intersection. The building is a two-story square structure of poured concrete construction, with lower wings extending to the north and west. The Capitol Way side of the main building is the principal facade, with the rest of the building having decidedly less decoration. The principal facade is broken by four overhead doors and, above each, by sets of three double-hung wood sash windows. The building, which once housed all the functions of municipal government, it now occupied only by the fire department. The overhead doors are the exits from the room where the fire trucks are kept. The roof line of the building is flat, both for the main structure and for the wings. The principal facade has a restrained neo-classical treatment with a regular pattern of piers on the street level and panel pilasters above these on the second level. Small decorative elements are found near the tops of the piers and pilasters. There is a subdued entablature under a parapet, and the window surrounds include a very restrained pediment. The other facades are much more utilitarian in appearance, although the window surrounds are the same and the regular pattern of piers and the entablature is maintained. Some windows on the south facade are recent aluminum sash, but the building is otherwise unaltered and very well maintained. Amanda Benek Smith, who presided at this building, was Olympia's first woman mayor and the first woman mayor of a capital city in the United States. She served as mayor and Commissioner of Police and Fire from 1953 to 1960. She presided over the construction of the freeway through Olympia and believed in "doing things for the little people." She died in 1996.

Major Bibliographic References Polic and Fireman's Souvenir Book, 1930
 History File at Olympia Fire Department
 State Register Nomination Written by James Vandermeer

PHOTOS



View of East Facade

taken 7/1/1997

Photography Neg. No. (Roll No./Frame No.):

41-1A

Comments: