

**Historic Property**  KGY Radio Station (Information Only)  
**Inventory Report for**  1240 Washington St NE, Olympia, WA 98501

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**LOCATION SECTION**

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**Historic Name:**  KGY Radio Station (Information Only) **Field Site No.:**  3443  
**Common Name:** **OAHP No.:**  
**Property Address:**  1240 Washington St NE, Olympia, WA 98501  
**Comments:**  OLYMPIA-MODERN

**County** **Township/Range/EW** **Section** **1/4 Sec** **1/4 1/4 Sec** **Quadrangle**  
  T18R02W   TUMWATER

**UTM Reference**

**Zone:**  10 **Spatial Type:**  Point **Acquisition Code:**  TopoZone.com  
**Sequence:**  10 **Easting:**  507435 **Northing:**  5211521

**Tax No./Parcel No.** **Plat/Block/Lot**  
 91001400000  First Class Tidelands

**Supplemental Map(s)** **Acreage**

**IDENTIFICATION SECTION**

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**Field Recorder:**  ss--updated **Date Recorded:**  4/15/2006 **Survey Name:**  OLYMPIA-MODERN

**Owner's Name:** **Owner Address:** **City/State/Zip:**  
 KGY Corporation  1240 Washington Street NE  Olympia, WA 98501

**Classification:**  Building **Resource Status** **Comments**

**Within a District?**  No **Survey/Inventory**  
**Contributing?**  Local Register  OHR-05-05

**National Register Nomination:**

**Local District:**

**National Register District/Thematic Nomination Name:**

**DESCRIPTION SECTION**

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**Historic Use:**  Commerce/Trade - Business

**Current Use:**  Commerce/Trade - Business

**Plan:**  Rectangle **No. of Stories:**  1

**Structural System:**  Balloon Frame

**Changes to plan:**  Slight

**Changes to original cladding:**  Intact

**Changes to windows:**  Intact

**Changes to interior:**  Intact

**Changes to other:**

**Other (specify):**

**Cladding**  Vertical - Boards

**Style**  Modern - Contemporary

**Roof Material**  Asphalt / Composition

**Foundation**  Post & Pier

**Form/Type**  Commercial

**Roof Type**  Gable - Side Gable

## NARRATIVE SECTION

### Study Unit

### Other

Communications

Architecture/Landscape Architecture

Date Of Construction: 1960, 1976

Architect: Bennett, Stacey (Robert Wohleb Assoc)

Builder: A. J. Phillips

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 mystique of radio beckoned Father Sebastian Ruth of St. Martin's College very early. He received his first license under the call "7CM" in 1914 after taking a qualifying test in Seattle. Two years later, Fr. Sebastian applied for a "Y" license often given to college facilities after further technical training and received the "7Y5" call at the 450 meter wavelength in 1916.

Fr. Sebastian broadcast from his tiny but mighty transmitter of five watts for the next five years as a telegraph station. In the summer of 1921, he began experiments in voice transmission to join a select few other northwest broadcasters.

The apparatus for this first monumental voice broadcast was strictly 'home brew' in radio parlance. Remains from other transmitters, homemade condensers of tinfoil and paper or sheet copper, and cold cream jar rectifiers went into the work. The transmitter was a two-tube model and spare tubes from the army and navy and telephone company amplifier circuits rounded out the technology. The station almost unbelievably was heard in 23 states, Canada and Hawaii with its only five watts. This was possible because of the dearth of stations and electrical interference. After a few experimental efforts, a real program was first aired in September, 1921. By January, 1922 Thurston County listeners could look forward to regular programs on Sunday, Tuesday and Friday evenings from 8:30 to 9:30, a schedule that Fr. Sebastian was to keep during the 11 years of KGY's residence at St. Martin's.

The first home of the transmitter was in a small eight by ten feet "Wireless" shack and that excluded most live performances. A downtown music store donated the first recordings and turntable. A number of other record companies also contributed records as did students and the entire 1200 record library of the college was at his disposal. Local residents were soon tuning in on homemade crystal sets and students rigged receivers from their bedspring coils to tune into the revolutionary broadcasts.

Squeezed into the confines of this first "studio" came performers such as Ralph Kater of the Olympia Fire Department, a Tacoma harpist, saxophone players from the college orchestra and a "native Hawaiian performer from Ft. Lewis." The little station attracted so much attention in fact that the Federal Radio Inspector in Seattle instructed Sebastian to quit broadcasting until the proper license could be procured. On April 4, 1922 the license came through with the call "KGY", a full-time permit under the wave length of 360 meters, the 110th to be issued in the United States. On April 18, KGY broadcast for the first time with improved equipment.

Until 1930 Fr. Sebastian manned the station solo with the help of a few students. In that year he was joined by Mr. & Mrs. Phil Fryer. For the next two years they enjoyed a flurry of music, both live and recorded, until May 8, 1932 when the station broadcast its last from the St. Martin's campus under pressure to increase its hours of broadcasting and the demand for commercial stations. Fr. Sebastian continued his amateur radio broadcasting of 7Y5 until his death in 1958 and he was a charter member of the Quarter Century Wireless Association. One of the most interesting of his long distance conversation episodes on 7YS were his interceptions of station XGOY operated by the Board of Formation of the Republic of China. During 1942, Fr. Sebastian intercepted and forwarded over sixty messages to anxious families of Catholic and Protestant missionaries who were marooned in China by advancing Japanese armies. Grateful letters poured in to Fr. Sebastian from all over the U.S. from the missionary families. Fr. Sebastian's mercy mission was brought to an abrupt end in November, 1942 when the U.S. Office of Censorship forbade him to continue his interceptions because of wartime precautions. Fr. Sebastian received multiple honors from radio organizations for pioneer work in broadcasting and wireless transmission, the Father of KGY.

The little station moved from the log cabin on the St. Martin's campus to the Capital Park Building at 11th & Capitol Way in 1932. The station resumed broadcasting with a more powerful and up to date transmitter on May 28, 1932 under the ownership of Archie Taft, who also owned KOL in Seattle. The station followed a rather erratic schedule as it shared airtime with a Seattle frequency. Weekdays the hours alternated from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and 6 p.m. to midnight. Saturday was a long affair with airtime from 6 a.m. to midnight and only one announcer through it all. Radio rules dictated that each recording be preceded by an announcement that it was recorded, an effort hardly needed according to Earl Thoms who worked at the station from 1933 to 1935 because of the scratches in the 78 rpm records.

Most of the programming was from the turntable on equipment from KGY's big sister KOL in the 1930s. One live program was the forenoon "Market Basket" when all three of the staff—Ricky Bras, station manager, Kathy McArdle and Thoms performed. Listeners would try to guess how many beans were in a jar when it was shaken on the air and win the market basket of the day.

The station received national recognition in 1937 when the Christian Science Monitor cited it as one of the oldest of U.S. radio stations. The station was in the forefront of news reporting said the article and furthermore, "All commercial programs are carefully scrutinized and no hard liquor advertisements are accepted." The station had updated its transmitter in 1936 and operated on a frequency of 1210. Bill Taft, son of Archie Taft, managed the station until 1939.

### THE OLSEN YEARS

1939 marked the beginning of the era in which KGY blossomed into the vital community service and part of the way of life in Thurston County. In that year Tom Olsen purchased the station and began his nearly 40 year management of KGY. A native of Olympia, Tom Olsen had a broad background in the media arts. A sports reporter for the Seattle Star newspaper, he had managed Fox Theaters around the country and was manager for a Warner Brothers theater Aberdeen before buying KGY.

#### THE 1940'S AND 1950'S

The station continued on at the Capitol Park location until the completion of new facilities in the Rockway-Leland Building at State & Washington in Olympia in 1941. The second floor headquarters were specially designed with acoustically perfect studios, a reception room, sales room and engineering location. The horizontal four wire system at the Capitol Park was replaced by a vertical 150 foot tower on the roof of the building. With a new transmitter and tower, KGY began broadcasting on the 1240 frequency. In the 1940's KGY programming adhered closely to the Mutual Network format of fifteen minute segments interspersed with KGY's continuing emphasis on local news. Thurston County shared the war years with the rest of the nation over KGY. Censorship was strict and no ad libbing was permitted. Teletype brought unprecedented immediacy to such events as the bombing of Pearl Harbor, VJ Day, Roosevelt's fireside chats and his death in 1945. Residents heard the news instantaneously over the radio and their thoughts and reactions were duly noted by KGY's news staff. Live broadcasts from the studios included church programs, school musical performances and concerts.

#### THE 1960'S AND 1970'S

The 1960's were a time of change for the station. The construction of their new studio at 1240 North Washington Street was completed in August, 1960 when the station left its Rockway-Leland location. The waterfront siting made it one of the most uniquely situated stations in the country. The design by Stacey Bennett incorporated the latest technology and aesthetic standards into the waterside structure. The station changed power from 250 to 1000 watts and the new 200 foot tower outsized the 150 foot Rockway-Leland setup. The tradition began by Fr. Sebastian of "Where the Cedars Meet the Sea" came to life when the Olsens planted cedars at their new seaside location. Not only did the locale of the station change but its programming was also evolving with the times. With the new thrust of rock 'n roll music of the Seattle stations and the new competition of another radio station in Olympia, KGY re-evaluated its segmented programming approach.

Under the advice of a radio consultant, a modern radio format was introduced in which a variety of music was played and announcers became "disc jockeys" the personalities of the air, no longer only faceless voices. The music selections were primed to the time of day and bright commentary and promotions marked the new plan. The place of radio as an advertising and information medium became firmly established and the science of analyzing and reaching audiences marked the new technique of radio programming. Instead of split schedules, announcers now had their own time, style and following. The 1970s brought the programming format to adult contemporary music with an increased emphasis on local news and events. Although the station dabbled in rock 'n roll in the early 1960s the more mellow format fits in with its listening audience.

A new transmitter was added to the station in 1977 when the studio expanded over the water. The station began 24 hour broadcasting in 1979 although its power remained at 250 watts at night. That same year the station dropped its Mutual network affiliation and has continued on the Associated Press Network.

#### THE 1980s

Throughout the 1980s the station continued to participate in local promotions including the very popular "Key Hunt" during Lakefair. The station received the award from the Washington State Broadcaster's Association for the best scheduled newscast in 1987. During the mid-1980s Barbara Olsen Kerry took over the management and sole ownership of the station from her mother, Theresa Olsen. Mrs. Kerry died in 2006.

#### THE 1990s

KGY established an FM station in October of 1992, KGY FM 96.9 with a classic rock format. The broadcast tower was at Maxwell Hill near McCleary. They offered local programming from AM from 6:00 to 10:00 a.m. and then music was broadcast via satellite from Dallas, Texas. The music came from the satellite to the AM station on the port then to St. Peter Hospital's microwave transmitter which sent the signal sent to the McCleary tower for the FM broadcast. The AM station focused on adult contemporary music as well as news and information. In 1992, long time announcer Dick Pust was named a finalist for National Radio Personality of the year, the Marconi Award, sponsored by the National Association of Broadcasters.

KGY decided to restructure in 1995 to re-establish its identity as the "source for local news," making all of the on-air personalities news and information broadcasters. The station concentrated its efforts in offering remote broadcasting from community events including local high school and college sports events. Dick Pust was honored by the station for 40 years of service at KGY in 1999.

#### THE 21st CENTURY

Dick Pust was named Washington State Association of Broadcaster's Broadcaster of the Year in October 2001. As of 2006, Mr. Pust's program is the longest running radio show in the state at 39 years of broadcasts.

#### **Description of Physical Appearance**

The building was designed by architect Robert Wohleb and Associates including Stacey Bennett and built by Philips Construction in what was called an "ultra modern" design at the time.

KGY studios is a two story wooden structure set entirely on pilings located at the northern end of the port peninsula in Olympia. The building has a wide-gable roofline. A wide, low, pitched wood canopy extends over a covered, wood-plank walkway leading to the south side main entry. This is reached by a flight of wooden steps. The wide eaves also shelter the deck which encircles the second floor of the building and originally the first floor of the building. The entry has floor-to-ceiling glass windows flanking the entry on the west side of the front façade. The entry has large windows over the entry. All of these windows are separated by narrow wood mullions. The entry has double door on one-half of which are the letters "KGY". The entry is offset slightly to the west. The building is clad with vertical siding.

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On the south façade are two banks of small, horizontal sliding windows which are framed with plain boards. A newer window of the same design has been cut in this façade between the original windows. The north side roof is a shorter gable than the south side. A second floor deck with a low railing wraps around the north side and east and west sides of the building. A wooden stairway connects the two levels on the east side. The first floor deck was originally in the same configuration but was enclosed in 1976 in a design by Bennett, Johnson, Selenes and Smith. A walkway with a low railing similar to the second level still extends around the building on the first level. The north façade has an expanse of large rectangular windows which are separated by wooden strips. There are entries on both the first and second floors from the deck. The railings are narrow wooden pieces with widely spaced support pieces.

Also on the site is the transmission tower, a 204 foot metal structure build concurrently with the new station in 1960. The height of the tower is related to the frequency of the station. There is also a satellite dish as well as a smaller gable-roofed outbuilding to the east of the main structure.

**Major  
Bibliographic  
References**

Stevenson, Shanna, "60 Years of Radio" 1982.  
KGY History Files  
"Work on New KGY Building Starts at Port Next Week," Olympia News, January 28, 1960, pg. 1.  
"KGY New Home" The Olympia News, August 4, 1960.

**PHOTOS**

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**View of** South Façade  
**taken** 5/9/2003  
**Photography Neg. No. (Roll No./Frame No.):**

**Comments:**



**View of**  
**taken**  
**Photography Neg. No. (Roll No./Frame No.):**

**Comments:**