

File ID: 2026-01218

6/17/2026

Ordinance Listing 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) as a Landmark on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources (M26-013)

File ID: 2026-01218

Location: 5241 J Street (008-0111-001-0000), District 4

Recommendation: Conduct a public hearing and upon conclusion: pass a **Motion** recommending the City Council: 1) pass a motion determining the listing of 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) as a landmark on the Sacramento register of historic and cultural resources is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15308, which exempts actions taken to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment and where the regulatory process involves procedures for the protection of the environment; and 2) adopt an ordinance listing 5241 J Street as a landmark on the Sacramento register of historic and cultural resources.

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Presenter: Hazel Bess, Preservation Intern, (916) 808-2796, hbess@cityofsacramento.org, Community Development Department

Attachments:

- 1-Description/Analysis
- 2-Proposed Ordinance
- 3-Historic Resource Evaluation
- 4-Presentation

Description/Analysis

Issue Detail: In 2025, Preservation Sacramento and East Sacramento Preservation retained the services of Brunzell Historical, qualified architectural historians, who prepared the historic evaluation for 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) and nominated the property to the National Register of Historic Places. Concurrently, the group requested City Staff consider listing the property on the Sacramento Register. Following internal review, Preservation Staff presented a Statement of Nomination to the Preservation Director, who concluded at a public hearing on June 4, 2026, that the property appears eligible for listing in the Sacramento register pursuant to the criteria provided in Sacramento City

Code section 17.604.210.A.1. Staff has prepared a draft Ordinance (Attachment 2) which justifies listing the property on the Sacramento Register.

Policy Considerations: The City Council has found “that significant aspects of the City’s rich and diverse historic resources deserve recognition and preservation to foster an understanding of our heritage, and to promote the public health and safety and the economic and general welfare of the people of the city. The preservation and continued use of historic resources are effective tools to sustain and revitalize neighborhoods and business districts within the city, enhance the city’s economic, cultural and aesthetic standing, its identity, its livability, marketability and urban character” (Sacramento City Code section 17.604.100.A.). To this end, the city code directs the Preservation Director, to “make preliminary determinations relative to properties’ eligibility for listing on the Sacramento register” and to “initiate proceedings to nominate resources for listing on the Sacramento register” (Pursuant to City Code sections 17.604.100.C.2 and 17.604.220).

The nomination of 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) for listing as a historic landmark on the Sacramento register is consistent with Sacramento 2040 General Plan goal HCR-2.3, which provides for the identification and preservation of historical and cultural resources. General Plan policy HCR-2.3 states, “The City shall maintain and update the Sacramento register of historic and cultural resources on a regular basis, including proactively identifying and listing additional unidentified landmarks and historic districts...”

Economic Impacts: Not applicable.

Environmental Considerations:

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): The listing of 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) as a historic landmark on the Sacramento register is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15308. Section 15308 exempts from CEQA review acts that are undertaken to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment. Listing the property as a historic landmark would ensure that future development on the site would undergo preservation review, as part of the city’s site plan and design review process, prior to the granting of any entitlements, thereby protecting the historic resource, which would be considered part of the environment.

Sustainability: Not applicable.

Commission/Committee Action: On June 4, 2026, the City of Sacramento’s Preservation Director, in conformance with Section 17.604.220 of the City Code, held a public hearing, reviewed the historic analysis prepared by Brunzell Historical (Attachment 2) and concurred with a draft statement of

nomination and directed staff to prepare a draft Ordinance (Attachment 1) for review and consideration by the Preservation Commission.

Rationale for Recommendation: Listing of 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) (**Figure 1**) as a landmark on the Sacramento Register is consistent with the historic preservation chapter of the City Code (City Code, chapter 17.604) and the goals of the 2040 General Plan. Listing the nominated resource on the Sacramento register will help ensure its preservation and encourage rehabilitation consistent with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The property at 5241 J Street is a distinctive example of Sacramento School District Architectural and Engineering Commission's architecture program of the 1920s. Significant features and characteristics of this architectural style that are present on the property include its expansive property, long wings, corridors on the west with widely spaced windows, and east-or north-facing classrooms with large window openings, in addition to its use of fire-resistant materials such as brick and stucco. The property also embodies the Spanish Revival style of architecture, with a clay tile roof, textured stucco cladding, arched door openings, and main façade arcade, as well as a highly ornamented bell tower, decorative metal window grilles and balconet, and main entrance French doors. (City Code, § 17.604.210.A.1.a.iii.)

The property at 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) appears to be eligible under Criterion iv as a building designed by a master architect. The main building was designed by James Dean of Dean and Dean, a master architect who was influential in the design of Sacramento-area schools of the era as the program's primary architect. His brother Charles F. Dean designed the attached auditorium. (City Code, § 17.604.210.A.1.a.iv.)



Figure 1: 5241 J Street (El Dorado School), south and west elevations, view northeast



Figure 2: 5241 J Street (El Dorado School), east and north elevations, view southwest



Figure 3: 5241 J Street (El Dorado School), auditorium, view west

The building at 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) has integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and association.

The building retains a high degree of historic integrity of all six aspects. It remains in its original location in a neighborhood whose character remains mostly unchanged. The building has undergone limited exterior alterations since initial construction, outside of the replacement of original window materials. The façade retains its essential physical features.

The building at 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) has significant historic or architectural worth, and its designation as a landmark is reasonable, appropriate and necessary to promote, protect and further the goals and purposes of this chapter.

The building at 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) has significant historic and architectural worth. It has been well-maintained and retains a high level of integrity with regards to its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and association. 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) is a significant representation of Sacramento School District Architectural and Engineering Commission's 1920s architecture program and of Spanish Revival architecture, and is the work of a master architect.

Financial Considerations: Not applicable.

Local Business Enterprise (LBE): Not applicable.

..End

ORDINANCE NO. ____

Adopted by the Sacramento City Council

[Date Adopted]

AN ORDINANCE LISTING 5241 J STREET (EL DORADO SCHOOL) AS A LANDMARK ON THE SACRAMENTO REGISTER OF HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

BACKGROUND

- A. The city council has found “that significant aspects of the city’s rich and diverse historic resources deserve recognition and preservation to foster an understanding of our heritage, and to promote the public health and safety and the economic and general welfare of the people of the city. The preservation and continued use of historic resources are effective tools to sustain and revitalize neighborhoods and business districts within the city, enhance the city’s economic, cultural and aesthetic standing, its identity and its livability, marketability and urban character.” (Sacramento City Code, § 17.604.100.A.)
- B. To this end, the city code provides a mechanism for listing landmarks, historic districts, and contributing resources on the Sacramento register of historic and cultural resources (“Sacramento register”).
- C. On June 4th, 2026, the preservation director reviewed a statement of nomination and determined that the property at 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) (“Nominated Property”) is eligible for listing on the Sacramento register a landmark. On June 17th, 2026, the preservation commission concurred with the findings of the Preservation Director and recommended the City Council list the Nominated Property at as a landmark in the Sacramento register.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SACRAMENTO:

SECTION 1: 5241 J Street

- i. The building at 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction (Sacramento City Code, § 17.604.210.A.1.a.iii).

The building at 5241 J Street embodies the characteristics of Sacramento School District Architectural and Engineering Commission’s distinctive architecture program of the 1920s with its expansive property, long wings, corridors on the west with widely spaced windows, and east-or north-facing classrooms with large window openings, in addition to its use of fire-resistant materials such as brick and stucco. The property also

embodies the Spanish Revival style of architecture. The building typifies this style, primarily in its clay tile roof, textured stucco cladding, arched door openings, and main façade arcade. A highly ornamented bell tower, decorative metal window grilles and balconet, and main entrance French doors with decorative pilasters, sidelights, and transom also reference the Spanish Revival style. The main building was designed by James Dean of Dean and Dean, a master architect who was influential in the design of Sacramento-area schools of the era as the program's primary architect. His brother Charles F. Dean designed the attached auditorium. Therefore, the building meets criteria for listing in the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources under City Code criteria 17.604.210(A)1.a.iii.

- ii. The building at 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) represents the work of an important creative individual or master (Sacramento City Code, § 17.604.210.A.1.a.iv).

The property at 5241 J Street appears to be eligible under Criterion iv as a building designed by a master architect. The main building was designed by James Dean of Dean and Dean, a master architect who was influential in the design of Sacramento-area schools of the era as the program's primary architect. His brother Charles F. Dean designed the attached auditorium. Therefore, the building meets criteria for listing in the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources under City Code criteria 17.604.210(A)1.a.iv.

- iii. The building at 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) has integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, association and feeling. Integrity shall be judged with reference to the particular criterion or criteria specified in Sacramento City Code section 17.604.210.A.1.a. (Sacramento City Code, § 17.604.210.A.1.b).

The building at 5241 J Street retains a good degree of historic integrity of all seven aspects. It remains in its original location, in a residential neighborhood that retains many historic period buildings. The property appears to have undergone limited alterations since its period of significance beyond the replacement of windows (1921-1939), and the essential physical features that define the property's character, including its form, roof material and configuration, textured stucco cladding, fenestration patterns, and overall composition remain intact and identifiable. As such, its feeling and association remain unaltered.

- iv. The building at 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) has significant historic or architectural worth, and its designation as a landmark is reasonable, appropriate and necessary to promote, protect and further the goals and purposes of Sacramento City Code, chapter 17.604. (Sacramento City Code, § 17.604.210.A.1.c).

The building at 5241 J Street has significant historic and architectural worth. It has been well-maintained and retains a good level of integrity regarding its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and association. 5241 J Street is a significant

representation of Sacramento School District Architectural and Engineering Commission's 1920s architecture program and of Spanish Revival architecture, and is the work of a master architect.

- v. The city council has considered the factors in Sacramento City Code section 17.604.210.A.2 and finds none of them applicable to the listing of 5241 J Street.

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Exhibit A: Significant Features and Characteristics

EXHIBIT A



Figure 1: 5241 J Street, south and west elevations, view northeast



Figure 2: 5241 J Street, east and north elevations, view southwest



Figure 3: 5241 J Street, auditorium, view west

5241 J Street

Significant Features and Characteristics for 5241 J Street (El Dorado School) include:

- Clay tile roof
- Ornamental grilles
- Heavily textured stucco cladding
- Decorative campanile
- Main façade arcade
- Arched doorways
- Irregular plan with long classroom wings
- Large north-and east-facing classroom windows
- Widely spaced west-facing windows

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Name of Property

County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: school

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: school

Name of Property

County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

Spanish Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: tile, stucco, concrete

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

El Dorado School is located on 4.83 acres in Sacramento's East Sacramento neighborhood east of downtown Sacramento and west of the California State University Sacramento campus. The El Dorado School campus, located at 5241 J Street, is bounded by J Street to the south, 53rd Street to the east, and residential properties to the north and west. Vehicle access to the campus is via 53rd Street, which leads to the main parking lot on the northeast corner of campus. The L-shaped main building (1921 – 1930) is set back from J Street, near the south end of the parcel. There is an auditorium (1939) to the southeast that is connected to the main volume by a curved hyphen and additions (1940s) at the east and north elevations of the auditorium. There is a freestanding cafeteria building (1950s) adjacent to the east elevation of the main building and a non-historic temporary freestanding classroom building (1990s) near the eastern property boundary along 53rd Street. The two freestanding noncontributing buildings post-date the period of significance. The property retains all aspects of historic integrity.

Narrative Description

Name of Property

County and State

El Dorado Elementary School, also known as A. Warren McClaskey Adult Center is at 5241 J Street in Sacramento's East Sacramento residential neighborhood, northwest of California State University Sacramento. The 4.83-acre property occupies a half block, northwest of the intersection of J and 53rd streets. The L-shaped main building, constructed between 1921 and 1930, is set back approximately 125 feet from J Street, near the south end of the parcel; an auditorium (1939) to the southeast is connected to the main volume by a curved hyphen. There are 1940s additions at the east and north elevations of the auditorium. A 1950s freestanding cafeteria building is located adjacent to the east elevation of the main building. There is also a non-historic temporary freestanding 1990s classroom building near the eastern property boundary along 53rd Street. The property is slightly higher in elevation than the street; a set of concrete steps leads from the sidewalk in front of the building to a wide concrete path accessing the main entrance on the south façade of the original building. The area between the buildings and the street is landscaped with mature trees, shrubs, and lawn.

The L-plan main building features the front-gabled two-story original wing (1921) oriented north-south and a side-gabled one-story wing (1922) projecting from its west elevation. The building has a medium-pitch clay tile roof with minimal eaves and decorative vents on the gable ends. An arched campanile with a clay tile roof projects from the east side of the roof on the two-story wing. The building is clad in heavily textured hand-troweled stucco. Primary fenestration on the main building consists of replacement multi-light aluminum-frame windows in the original openings on the west elevation, and in non-original openings on the east elevation. Research has not revealed a specific date for window replacement. The multiple-light aluminum product utilized suggests an installation date between about 1970 and 2000. Most original multi-light wood-frame transoms have been preserved. A few casement windows on the east elevation have been boarded up.

The main entrance to the original wing is left of center and recessed within an arched opening. It is fitted with a set of wood-frame French doors with slanted sidelights and a multi-light transom. There are decorative turned wood pilasters flanking the doors. The entrance is accessed by two wide concrete steps. A painted metal sign to the right of the entrance bears the street address. There are two windows on the main façade, a small window to the right is covered by a decorative metal grille, and a larger window above the main entrance is fitted with an ornamental metal balconet. The single-story west wing projects from the south end of the two-story wing. An arcade, supported by six heavy square pillars, runs along the length of its south elevation. There are three classroom entrances within the arcade, which has an at-grade concrete floor. Entrances are fitted with wood doors, with wood-frame multiple-light transoms. The west end of the building has a small round window and a large multiple-light rectangular door-window assemblage, a replacement from between 1970 and 2000 for what was originally four narrow wooden French doors with transoms. Three large window assemblages at the rear (north) of the west wing, including a projecting bay window on its west end, are fitted with metal replacement windows from an unknown date between 1970 and 2000.

An addition projecting from the north end of the two-story volume's west elevation, constructed about 1930 based on comparing US Department of Agriculture Aerials from 1928 and 1937, is

Name of Property

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one-story and rectangular in plan with a flat roof. There is a non-historic temporary building clad in vertical-groove plywood at the north end of the original wing; it holds accessible bathrooms. Concrete ramps with metal handrails provide access to the bathroom addition as well as to an entrance on the north elevation of the original building. The ramps are partially sheltered by a flat corrugated metal roof supported by square metal posts.

A curved hyphen connects the original 1921 building to the 1939 auditorium to the southeast of the main building and the late 1940s east wing. The double-height auditorium is rectangular in plan with a medium-pitch gabled clay tile roof. It has minimal eaves and circular louvered metal vents on the gable ends. It is clad in textured stucco. There is a partial-width entry portico on the west elevation, which has a clay-tile shed roof supported by a chamfered square pillar adorned with impost molding. Two arched openings provide access to the portico, which shelters the two main entrances to the auditorium. The wide entrances are fitted with partially glazed paneled wood double doors. A projecting single-story volume on the south elevation has a shed clay-tile roof. An entrance to this volume is fitted with double paneled wood doors and accessed by a set of wide concrete steps with a simple metal balustrade. Fenestration consists of original steel casement windows and tall windows fitted with metal replacement sash windows from an unknown date between 1970 and 2000.

A single-story addition is connected to the north elevation of the auditorium. It is rectangular in plan with a flat roof. Its western end, constructed between 1940 and 1946, is clad in textured stucco and has large window assemblages. Its eastern end was constructed as an indoor playground between 1948 and 1949. It is lower in height than the western volume and has narrow bands of windows. It is clad in a combination of spray-on stucco and pressboard panels.

Another single-story addition on the east elevation of the auditorium, also dating from 1948-1949, has a flat roof, wood frame construction, and is clad in pressboard panels with wood framing and a concrete foundation. Fenestration consists of fixed aluminum-frame windows. A carport projects from the east elevation of the addition. It has a low-pitch gable roof supported by round metal posts.

A free-standing cafeteria building from the late 1950s is located east of the original building and north of the late 1940s additions. The cafeteria building is rectangular in plan with a low-pitch shed roof. It is clad in textured stucco with a concrete foundation. Two entrances on the east elevation are fitted with partially glazed wood doors with sidelights and transom; they are accessed by wide sets of concrete steps with a simple metal balustrade. The entrance right of center can also be accessed by a concrete ramp with a simple metal balustrade. An additional entrance on the south elevation is fitted with a simple metal door. Fenestration consists of tall steel-casement windows on the west elevation.

Additions to the auditorium, the freestanding cafeteria building, and temporary classroom building at the southeast corner of the parcel were constructed after 1940, outside the period of significance. They do not share the Spanish Revival architectural features of the main building and auditorium. The auditorium additions and noncontributing resources do not adversely affect

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the integrity of the original building because they are subordinate to the original in size and massing and do not obscure the main elevations, nor were any character-defining features demolished during their construction.

Interior

While some of the building's interior fabric has been altered outside the period of significance, many of the original features have been retained. The wide hallways, offices, and classrooms in the 1921-1930 main wing retain their original layout and spatial arrangement. Both floors of main wing corridors are defined by high ceilings and tall windows. The main entrance to the first floor is fitted with character defining multiple-light glazed double doors with sidelights and transom and leads straight into the main hallway and administrative office. The first and second floors of the main wing are almost identical in design. The hallways at the south end of the original volume have walls of alternating wide and narrow hollow clay tile and concrete floors. The concrete flooring on the first floor is waxed and polished. Original paneled wood doors lead to offices and classrooms, and transom windows between classrooms and the hallway retain original multiple-light wood casements. There are exposed concrete beams at the ceiling of the first floor. Staircases on the north and south ends of the main wing have wide concrete steps. The railing consists of a curved plaster wall with wood trim on top and thin wood handrails. The carved wood newel post on the first floor of the south staircase features a carved Warren McClaskey Adult Center school emblem that reads "success, desire, support," added in the 1970s. Walls at the north end of the hallway, a section of the building that was constructed slightly later, are plastered. The hallways are lit by fluorescent light fixtures added at an unknown date between the mid-1950s (when fluorescent lighting began to be widely adopted in schools) and about 2008 (when LED lights began to gain popularity in educational settings).

Classrooms are on the east side of the hallway on both floors and lack character-defining interior features despite retention of some historic fabric. Classrooms have narrow storage/cubby areas on their north and south ends with tall windows on the east wall and radiators below them. Most classrooms exhibit textured drywall, vinyl flooring, and either textured drywall ceilings or acoustic ceiling tiles. Simple painted wood wainscoting, paneled wood doors, and wood transoms opening onto the hallway are original features that have been retained. The original fenestration pattern consisted of loosely spaced, tall, narrow window openings fitted with multiple-light wood sash. They have been replaced with wide openings fitted with metal replacement windows from an unknown date between 1970 and 2000.

The 1939 auditorium is east of the main building. The auditorium has rounded corners and door openings, a tall ceiling with acoustic ceiling tiles and recessed fluorescent lighting, and hardwood flooring. The original stage is at the east end of the auditorium. The two main entrances on the west end of the auditorium are fitted with wood double doors with round windows and brass handles. Tall windows line the south wall and there is an original mural depicting Coronado's search for gold on the west wall.

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Janitor's closets, storage rooms, administrative offices, bathrooms, and the basement do not exhibit character-defining features. The basement is a utilitarian space that contains the original boilers.

Integrity

Despite some alterations, El Dorado School retains all aspects of historic integrity and therefore conveys its identity as a historic school.

Location

El Dorado School has not been moved and retains integrity of location.

Design

El Dorado School's design is expressed through its Spanish Revival architecture, with exterior character-defining features that include clay tile roof, ornamental grilles, heavily textured stucco cladding, decorative campanile, main façade arcade, and arched doorways. It also expresses the pedagogical theory of its period of construction through functional design features chosen to maximize air and light in classrooms: an irregular plan with long classroom wings, large north- and east-facing classroom windows, wood-frame transoms between hallways and classrooms, an arcade that functions as a corridor, and wide hallways with widely spaced west-facing windows. Although original windows have been replaced in the classrooms, the ratio of window to wall has been retained, as have transoms leading to the corridors, allowing the building to express the original design function of the fenestration. Interior character-defining features include original hollow clay tile walls in the 1921 section of the building, concrete floors, exposed concrete beams, and staircases in main building corridors. The auditorium also features character-defining interior elements including its curving corners and openings, original stage, and a mural commissioned by the parents' club just after the auditorium was constructed. Therefore, the building retains integrity of design despite alterations to some windows.

Setting

The residential and institutional neighborhood surrounding the school has retained many historic period buildings as well as the overall single-family residential character present during the school's period of significance. El Dorado School therefore retains integrity of setting.

Materials

El Dorado School's clay tile roof, some of its multiple-light windows, hollow clay tile walls, concrete floors, and stucco cladding date from the period of significance. They express both this unique building's Spanish Revival architecture and the larger architectural program of the school district during the period of significance. The school thus conveys its historic identity through its materials despite alterations to classroom windows.

Workmanship

El Dorado School's workmanship dates from the period of significance, most notably the heavily textured, hand-troweled stucco on the main building. The school thus conveys its historic identity through its workmanship.

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Feeling

El Dorado School strongly evokes the feeling of an early-twentieth century school building since its physical features from the period of significance convey its historic character. It retains integrity of feeling despite some alterations.

Association

El Dorado School retains sufficient original physical features to convey its historic association with 1920s school design. It therefore retains integrity of association.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Name of Property

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1921-1939

Significant Dates

1921

1930

1939

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Dean, James S.

W. C. Duncan & Company

Dean, Charles F.

Barnett, Earl (architect/muralist)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

El Dorado School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. El Dorado School is significant as a building that embodies the characteristics of Sacramento School District Architectural and Engineering Commission's distinctive architecture program of the 1920s as well as of the Spanish Revival style of architecture. The main building was designed by James Dean of Dean and Dean, a master architect who was influential in the design of Sacramento-area schools of the era as the program's primary architect. His brother Charles F. Dean designed the attached auditorium. The period of significance is 1921 to 1939, from construction to completion of the auditorium connected to the main building.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Sacramento and School District Development

The Nisenan, a branch of the Maidu people, occupied the area near the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers before the arrival of Europeans. The Spanish explored but did not settle in the region, and the first permanent non-native resident was John Sutter, a Swiss immigrant who arrived in 1839. Sutter's Fort became a way station for immigrants travelling overland to California in the 1840s. When Sutter's employees discovered gold near the end of the decade, Sam Brannan and other speculators laid out Sacramento east of Sutter's Fort near the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers, and it became the gateway to California's gold fields. Its influence was confirmed in 1854, when Sacramento became the permanent state capital. Completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1869 further established Sacramento as a hub for commerce. As the nineteenth century progressed, agriculture began to overtake mineral extraction as the most important economic pursuit in the Sacramento Valley.¹

Sacramento's first public school was established in 1854, by which time 500 children were attending Sacramento public and private schools. A high school, the second in California, opened in 1856. By 1891, there were over 4,000 children enrolled in local public schools and Sacramento had thirteen public schools. The very first public schools met in small houses or other existing buildings. As Sacramento became more settled and prosperous, purpose-built schools were constructed. Architectural styles varied and materials included wood-frame and brick construction. All but the smallest late nineteenth century Sacramento school buildings were two or three stories with compact, often square, plans and minimal outdoor space.²

¹ "Sacramento Bird's Eye View," The Daily Record-Union and Weekly Union, 1890s.

²; *Sacramento Daily Union*, 6 October 1881, 3 col.1; Sanborn Insurance Maps, Sacramento, California, 1895; Steven M. Avella, *Sacramento, Indomitable City* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 49, 58; Richard C. Rogers, *The First 100 Years of the Sacramento City Schools, 1854 – 1954*, California Retired Teachers Association, State Capital Division, c1991, 10.

Name of Property

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Early development was concentrated near the waterfront; the State Capitol on Tenth Street and the rail yards to the northwest stimulated West End development during the nineteenth century. Commercial activity was concentrated at the western end of K Street and to the north near the rail yards. Establishment of streetcar service allowed residential development to push eastward along the streetcar lines beginning in the 1870s. During the nineteenth century, many residences were east of the Capitol in the “Homes District” as well as mixed with businesses along K Street. As Sacramento’s population grew around the turn of the century, K Street became a commercial area and residences were pushed out. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, development densified the West End with multi-story retail, office, hotel, and apartment buildings replacing smaller nineteenth century buildings. The Homes District to the east, meanwhile, became a middle-class enclave. Sacramento’s population growth was stimulated as new levees lessened flood danger and streetcars were electrified, and by 1910, the city had nearly 45,000 residents.³

In 1911, annexation of areas east and south of the original Sacramento grid added 6,000 acres of land and further boosted population. Existing schools in annexed areas were added to the Sacramento School District, increasing its number of schools by fifty percent. William Land School and Washington School, which were built using the same plans and included innovations like covered “roof garden” exercise areas and branch libraries, were built between 1914 and 1916. Sacramento School District also created its first junior college, located at first on the high school campus; additional schools needed to serve the growing population were postponed by US entry into World War I in 1917.⁴

In 1919, Sacramentans passed a bond issue to fund a district-wide program of school construction in the 1920s that ultimately produced a new junior college and high school as well as six elementary school buildings. School development took place within the context of the strong economy of the 1920s, which fueled a broader boom in Sacramento. In addition to the program of school construction, Sacramento’s built environment was reshaped in the 1920s by development of Memorial Auditorium, a new hospital, commercial and lodge buildings, churches, and new residential neighborhoods.⁵

The onset of the Great Depression in 1930 halted most construction and began an era of hardship for Sacramento. Population growth continued, however, and school construction was a bright spot. The 1934 passage of the Field Act by the California legislature codified seismic standards for California schools, consolidating the shift toward low-slung school buildings that had been underway for two decades. Small additions were made to many Sacramento schools throughout the 1930s. A second high school was developed in 1933, and in 1937 a replacement elementary school as well as several new college buildings were completed. In 1939, a \$650,000 building program that included new construction at both high schools, the junior college, and four

³ Environmental Science Associates, “Historical Resource Impact Analysis Report, Sacramento Entertainment and Sports Complex,” prepared by JRP Historical Consulting, October 2013, 13.

⁴ William Burg, *Midtown, Sacramento: The Creative Soul of a City* (Charleston: The History Press, 2014); Rogers, c1991, 28; *Sacramento Bee*, January 25, 1939, 25.

⁵); Rogers, c1991, 40-41.

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elementary schools—including El Dorado School—was funded by a combination of federal Public Works Administration (PWA) grants and local bond money. The program was created under President Franklin D. Roosevelt as an initiative to help revitalize the US economy during the Great Depression, and operated from 1933 to 1943, providing grant funding to municipal and state entities, which were required to provide matching funds.⁶

The entry of the US into World War II in 1941 prompted the establishment or reactivation of three military bases in Sacramento County. The bases stimulated suburban commercial and residential development and drew new residents to the area. It also signaled a shift from an economy built on agriculture and the railroad to one in which military bases and government offices were the biggest local employers. As California's population exploded during and after World War II, state government grew, and the City of Sacramento expanded far outside its original boundaries into former agricultural areas. Between 1946 and 1955, twenty-seven annexations added ten square miles to Sacramento's urban footprint. The shift toward the personal automobile in the postwar period facilitated this trend, making commutes outside the traditional street grid feasible. The expansion in land mass and population required an ambitious new program of school construction. Completion of the Elvas Freeway (Business 80) in 1955, US 50/99 in 1961, and Interstates 5 and 80 in the late 1960s further encouraged development in Sacramento County's rural areas. The 1960s and 1970s saw more substantial annexations, after which growth slowed without stopping. In the 1970s, many historic school buildings were abandoned in order to comply with the Field Act's seismic standards. Some were converted to non-classroom uses, while many others were demolished and replaced with new buildings. Enrollment dropped in the 1980s, and some campuses were closed. By 2013, the City of Sacramento encompassed nearly 100 square miles.⁷

East Sacramento Neighborhood

East Sacramento is bounded by the American River to the north, Watt Avenue to the east, Folsom Boulevard to the south, and Alhambra Boulevard to the west. The area was devoted to agriculture until the late nineteenth century. Development began in the 1890s around the Sacramento Electric Power and Light Company streetcar line. The streetcar, which operated from 1870 to 1947, connected the area to downtown Sacramento, allowing suburban East Sacramento to prosper. In 1911, the neighborhood was officially annexed as part of the City of Sacramento. East Sacramento was home to many professionals and had the reputation of being a fashionable neighborhood. In the 1920s, East Sacramento continued to expand into surrounding agricultural land, flourishing as a desirable neighborhood into the postwar period. Local and family-run businesses began to be established after World War II. In 1949, the State of California purchased around 200 acres of peach farms in the neighborhood to establish a new college. Construction of Sacramento State College in 1951 spurred additional residential and

⁶ *Sacramento Bee*, October 25, 1944, 6; Avella, 2003, 80, 90-92; Sue Norwood, "150 Year History," Sacramento City Unified School District, unpublished manuscript, 2004.

⁷ City of Sacramento, General Plan Technical Background Report, Prepared by Ascent Environmental, August 2014, 81-82, 94, 113; County of Sacramento, County History, 2018, accessed 28 November 2018, <http://www.saccounty.net/Government/Pages/CountyHistory.aspx>; Norwood, 2004.

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commercial development in the area. The college continued to expand in the 1960s and in 1972, the school officially became part of the California State University system.⁸

El Dorado School

El Dorado School started as a single-classroom school and began expanding in 1918. In 1920, East Sacramento residents petitioned the Sacramento Board of Education to purchase a new location for the school, even offering to buy school bonds to fund construction, and were told that they needed to wait for the report of the Architectural Commission. By September 1920, the Board of Education had acquired the J Street property and had accepted preliminary plans from Hemmings-Petersen-Hudnutt. The Spanish Revival school was designed by James S. Dean (later of Dean and Dean architects) like the other schools in Sacramento's 1920s building program. The two-story central wing, which included administration and several classrooms, would be constructed immediately. The original plans included additions that would be constructed as needed. W. C. Duncan & Company won the contract and began building El Dorado School in 1921. The second school in the district-wide construction program, it was completed in late summer. The Spanish Revival building consisted of a two-story rectangular plan volume with heavily textured stucco cladding, tile roof, an ornamental campanile, and light-blue wood window frames. It had a reinforced concrete frame, hollow clay tile walls, and a tile roof. The new El Dorado School opened for use in the fall of 1921, with landscaping completed in September.⁹

East Sacramento was growing quickly during the early 1920s, spurring expansion of El Dorado School. At the start of the 1922-1923 school year, attendance was strong despite the fact that many children missed school to help their parents pick crops in the early fall during this era. A new teacher had been hired, and there were already plans for a three-room addition. In October 1922, the Board of Education let the contract for the addition to Sacramento contractor William Purcell. Although research has not revealed plans or historic photos, this project apparently constructed the one-story side-gabled west wing with its main façade arcade. The cost of the work was just under \$30,000. By 1928, El Dorado School also had a single-story addition at the north end of the original two-story 1921 building. A long rectangular volume parallel to the original building was apparently a temporary "bungalow"¹⁰ classroom building since it had been demolished by 1950.¹¹

As the number of pupils continued to grow, construction projects were undertaken on Sacramento schools every few years, and a four-room addition was made to El Dorado School in

⁸ City of Sacramento, "East Sacramento Community Plan," Mar. 22, 2024; Lee M. A. Simpson, *Images of America: East Sacramento*, 2004; Ronald M. Coleman, "History of the Sacramento State Campus," Sacramento State, Accessed Jan. 15, 2024.

⁹ *Sacramento Union*, "Site Urged for El Dorado School," May 6, 1920, 8; *Sacramento Bee*, "Building Operations Take Upward Trend," Feb. 12, 1921, 13.

¹⁰ "Bungalow" is described in Webster's Dictionary as a one-story house with a low-pitch roof and is usually used to connote a Craftsman style residence. During this era, the school district referred to temporary classroom buildings as bungalows even though they do not embody the typical use of the word.

¹¹ Georgia E. Gilpin, *Sacramento Union*, El Dorado school is growing fast, September 6, 1922; "Construction will Be Started Shortly on School Contracts," October 21, 1922.

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1930, one of seven building projects for the school district that year. The second story on the mid-1920s addition to the rear of the original two-story wing as well as the flat-roofed northwest addition appear to have been constructed in 1930. Although early additions were built by different contractors, they conformed to the original plans developed by James S. Dean and exhibit the harmonious appearance of original construction. By 1937, the school building consisted of the two-story wing, the 1922 west wing, and a flat-roofed one-story northwest addition. A long rectangular volume east of the primary building has since been demolished as has a single-story volume at the north end of the original building.¹²

By 1938, plans were underway to construct an auditorium and more new classrooms; the project would be jointly funded by a bond issue and a PWA grant, with local funds accounting for slightly more than half of the expense. The Board of Education contracted Charles F. Dean of Dean and Dean to design the project (James Dean had left the practice for a position as City Manager), and H. W. Robertson was the contractor for the addition. The El Dorado Parent Teacher Association funded a mural of the search for El Dorado in the auditorium in 1939. The mural was designed by Dean and Dean architect Earl Barnett, who was also a muralist.¹³

In 1974, El Dorado School closed. In 1977, six schools in Sacramento were sold, including El Dorado School. The school was purchased by the Sacramento Association for the Retarded and the A. Warren McClaskey Adult Center was established. The adult education school was named after a former Sacramento City Unified District adult education director, Alfred Warren McClaskey Jr. (1922-1976), whose wife, Merilynn Mable McClaskey (1921-1997), was Sacramento's first occupational therapist. By the 1980s, the school had approximately 300 students from the ages of 18 to 80. The school aimed to teach adults with special needs how to gain more independence. In the 1970s and 1980s, Charles Gilbert (1925-2006) was the principal for the A. Warren McClaskey Adult Center and an administrative specialist for the Sacramento City Unified School District. He was a pioneer in special education programs, inspired by teaching his crew members to read and write when he was deployed in the Navy. Gilbert taught at one middle school before transitioning to special education at Hiram Johnson High School in the 1950s. He returned to San Francisco State University for his master's degree in special education before becoming the first principal of McClaskey Adult Center, retiring in 1985. In the 1980s and 1990s, Richard Pierce was the program coordinator and a teacher at the school. In 2025, the McClaskey Adult Center is still in operation at the school.¹⁴

¹² *Sacramento Bee*, "Major Building Jobs Are Varied," July 5, 1930.

¹³ *Sacramento Bee*, July 11, 1938, 4; National Archives, "Records of the Public Works Administration," Guide to Federal Records, Accessed Feb. 2, 2025, <https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/135.html>; *Sacramento Union*, Mar. 3, 1940, 25.

¹⁴ James Bow, "Parents Hit Closure of El Dorado," *Sacramento Bee*, Oct. 22, 1974, 18; *Sacramento Bee*, "Six City Schools May Be Sold," Nov. 30, 1977, 19; *Sacramento Bee*, "McClaskey," Jan. 7, 1976, 27; *Sacramento Bee*, "Coming Up," Nov. 29, 1978, 29; *Sacramento Union*, "Mrs. A. Warren McClaskey," Feb. 17, 1954, 14; Sue Boylan, "A Place to Learn and Grow," *Sacramento Bee*, Dec. 8, 1983, 116; ; *Sacramento Bee*, "People," Oct. 15, 1992, 36; Paula Thorpe, "Occupational Therapist Took Joy in Work," *Sacramento Bee*, Mar. 15, 1997, 21; Maija-Liisa Young, "Charles Gilbert, A Pioneer in Special Education," *Sacramento Bee*, Mar. 17, 2006, B5.

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W. C. Duncan & Company

William Cluff Duncan (1895-1945) was born in San Francisco, California in 1895. In 1919, Duncan started his construction company in San Francisco with A. F. Mattock as his partner. Arthur F. Mattock (1884-1961) was born in Leicester, England and came to San Francisco in 1911. The partnership was dissolved in May 1921, and Duncan and Mattock continued with their own individual companies. Duncan continued to call his company "W. C. Duncan & Co.," and he was contracted for construction of El Dorado School in 1921.¹⁵

Notable Buildings Completed in Sacramento

El Dorado Elementary School, 1921

Newton Booth School, 1929

Other Notable Projects

Nicolaus Bridge, Yuba City, 1920

H. W. Robertson

Harry Wilson Robertson (1885-1965) was born in Eel River, California in 1885. Robertson started working for Walter W. Campbell Construction Co. in Sacramento in 1910. That same year, he married Hazel Fowler (1892-1990). In 1921, he formed his own contractor business in Sacramento. During his career, he worked on a number of schools and auditoriums in the area as well as hospitals in Colusa and Trinity Counties. He retired in 1954 after selling his business to Frederick J. Chapek. The California Almond Growers Exchange in Sacramento, completed in 1915 at the start of his career, was listed in 1985 as a California Historical Landmark.¹⁶

Notable Buildings Completed in Sacramento

California Almond Growers Exchange, 1915

Sierra School, 1923

Immaculate Conception Parish, 1930

The Capital Athletic Club, 808 O Street, 1931

Grant Union High School, 1932

Sacramento Public Library, McKinley Branch, 1936

Clunie Memorial Clubhouse, 1936

El Dorado Elementary School Auditorium, 1939

Other Notable Projects

Mt. St. Mary's Academy, Grass Valley, Nevada County, 1920

¹⁵ *San Francisco Recorder*, "Certificate of Copartnership Transacting Business Under Fictitious Name," Apr. 9, 1919, 7; *Sacramento Union*, "Suit Against Sutter County," Mar. 21, 1920, 9; *The Recorder*, "Notice of Dissolution of W. C. Duncan & Company, a Copartnership," Apr. 20, 1921, 8; *San Francisco Examiner*, "Marriage Licenses," Jun. 28, 1923, 4; *Sacramento Bee*, "13,000 Baywood Dwelling Planned," May 6, 1933, 4; Ancestry.com, "Arthur F. Mattock," Family Tree, Accessed Feb. 2, 2025; Ancestry.com, "William Cluff Duncan," Family Tree, Accessed Feb. 2, 2025; *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, "William C. Duncan," Sept. 6, 1945, 6.

¹⁶ Ancestry.com, "Harry Wilson Robertson," Family Tree, Accessed Feb. 2, 2025; California State Parks, "Historical Landmark No. 967," Office of Historic Preservation, Accessed Feb. 5, 2025, <https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/ListedResources/Detail/967>; *Sacramento Bee*, "Harry W. Robertson," Sept. 8, 1965, 43.

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Earl Barnett

Earl Rand Barnett (1902-1990) was born and raised in Sacramento, where his father worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Barnett studied architecture at the University of California and the American School in Rome. His first job was with Charles Hemmings' architectural firm in Sacramento. He was a colleague of Charles Dean and joined him when Dean started the firm Dean and Dean with his brother in 1922. He worked for them as a draftsman. Barnett worked on a number of school and churches in Sacramento, as well as hundreds of mostly brick houses. He was also a muralist with the New Deal Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). He continued to work with Dean and Dean, which later purchased by Tomich and Yee, even designing part-time into after his retirement in 1968.¹⁷

Notable Buildings Completed in Sacramento

Sacramento Memorial Auditorium, 1927 (NRHP)

Westminster Presbyterian Church, 1927 (NRHP)

Sutter Lawn and Tennis Club, 1930 (NRHP)

El Dorado School Mural, 1939

St. Philomene Catholic Church, 1948

First English Lutheran Church, 1957

Dean and Dean

Charles Francis Dean and his brother James Sommerville Dean were born in Belton Texas in 1884 and 1885. Charles F. Dean studied at Texas A&M, working for a San Antonio architect and then in Chicago after graduation. He joined California state architect George Sellon's office in 1908. James S. Dean followed his brother to Texas A&M and into architecture. He married Ruth Cook, an Iowa native. In 1912, he joined Charles in Sacramento and became an assistant at the Office of the State Architect. Charles married Alvina Laue of Sacramento in 1913. In June 1920, James became chief deputy in charge of drafting for Hemmings-Petersen-Hudnutt, the partnership that had formed to act as the Sacramento School District's Architecture Engineering Commission a few months earlier.¹⁸

The Dean brothers went into private practice in 1922, forming Dean and Dean to take over the school building program from Hemmings-Petersen-Hudnutt. Dean and Dean was given public credit for the design of the School District's building program; although the partnership did not form until after at least five of the schools were complete, James S. Dean appears to have been the principal designer for the program of district expansion. Hemmings-Petersen-Hudnutt was apparently willing to allow the new firm design credit in order to be released from an unprofitable contract. Dean and Dean was extraordinarily productive during the 1920s. In addition to taking over the school program, the firm designed high-profile Sacramento buildings including Westminster Presbyterian Church, Sacramento Memorial Auditorium, Sutter Lawn and

¹⁷ Dixie Reid, "The Love Affair is Far From Over For Memorial's Maker," *Sacramento Bee*, Feb. 17, 1986, 21; *Sacramento Bee*, "Unmasking the Medicine Man," Oct. 8, 1981, 91; *Sacramento Bee*, "Earl R. Barnett," Mar. 8, 1990, 21; Edan Milton Hughes, *Artists in California, 1786-1940*, Crocker Art Museum, 2002.

¹⁸ US Census Records, Sacramento, 1920, 1930; *Sacramento Bee*, May 10, 1920, 12.

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Tennis Club, Sutter Maternity Hospital, and an orphanage, as well as numerous architecturally significant commercial buildings. Dean and Dean also designed buildings in Marysville, Woodland, and other Sacramento Valley cities, as well as more distant locations like Seattle. At the same time, the brothers became renowned as residential designers. Dean and Dean designed dozens of houses, both modest and lavish. The National Register-listed J.C. Carly House (#06000143) in Sacramento, completed in 1922 at the start of their partnership, is significant for its architecture. In 1929, California's American Institute of Architects gave the partnership a design award for a Sacramento residence and Memorial Auditorium. The Dean and Dean design oeuvre extended across the popular revival styles of the era: Spanish, Colonial, Tudor, Romanesque, and Mediterranean. A preference for brick or stucco walls, tile roofs, and asymmetric massing is observable across their work in the disparate styles. Influence of the Arts and Crafts movement can be seen the careful landscape design for both domestic and institutional projects.

Trade publications from the 1920s described Charles Dean as the principal designer and James as the executive; James clearly had important design input for the school program. In 1930, James Dean left the practice for a position as Sacramento City Manager. He served in that capacity, at the time the most powerful position in local government, for twelve years before moving on to work as state finance director until his retirement in the 1950s. Charles Dean continued to lead the firm under the Dean and Dean name until his death in 1956, adopting new methods and styles as they emerged. Later Dean and Dean projects include Theodore Judah School completed in the late 1930s in the Streamline Moderne style and the Modernist New Helvetia Defense Housing project, on which he collaborated with other local architects in 1942.¹⁹

Notable Buildings Completed in Sacramento

Sutter Lawn and Tennis Club, 1930 (NRHP)

Sacramento Orphanage and Children's Home

Golf Club House at Land Park

J.C. Carly House, 1922 (NRHP)

Sacramento Junior College

Royal Miller House

Westminster Presbyterian Church, 1927 (NRHP)

Sacramento Memorial Auditorium, 1927 (NRHP)

Hart Store Building

Alison Ware Store Building

Hart's Cafeteria

YWCA Dean Apartments, 1929

Newton Booth School, 1929

Sutter Maternity Hospital

Sutter Club (with Stark & Flanders), 1930 (NRHP)

Theodore Judah School, 1938 (NRHP)

New Helvetia Defense Housing (with Starks & Flanders and Harry Devine, Sr.), 1942 (NRHP)

¹⁹ *Eureka Humboldt Standard*, "Ex-finance Chief James Dean Dies," 12 November 1962, 20.

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Other Notable Works

SP Hart Building, Marysville, 1927 (NRHP)

Lincoln Women's Club

Palisade Club House, Placer County

Shasta Union High School, Redding

Thomas Youell House, Seattle, 1928

Elks Club, Marysville, 1928

Sacramento School District 1920s Building Program

After the turn of the twentieth century, the Progressive Education Movement began calling for educational reform and more child-centered teaching. The thought leaders developing these new educational philosophies also began to focus on updating school design, advocating a move away from monumentalism to more modest and functional school buildings. The open-air school movement, which promoted the year-round free flow of outdoor air in classrooms, was also influential on twentieth century school design. Meanwhile, educators and parents began pushing to replace wooden schools, which were vulnerable to fire, with fire-resistant schools constructed of materials like brick and tile. In addition to ventilation, natural light became a prized element in classrooms, and school designers began to focus on providing classrooms with the highest ratio possible of window to wall. During the 1910s, building technology evolved to allow maximization of window space in walls. The massed plans of Victorian-era schools fell out of favor, replaced by irregular plans in which long one-story wings connected at right angles, often enclosing courtyards. Spread out school plans maximized classroom access to sunlight and fresh air and minimized danger from fires and earthquakes and became nearly ubiquitous in California. Schools had also become de facto community centers, and it became standard practice to include auditoriums, public branch libraries, parents club rooms, and large outdoor areas in early twentieth century schools.²⁰

In 1912, the year after Sacramento had expanded its footprint and population with annexation, Charles C. Hughes became District Superintendent, a role in which he served until his retirement in 1942. Hughes advocated for many progressive educational reforms including construction larger schools, moving students to different rooms for different types of instruction, and discouraging homework. When he was hired, Hughes was slated to preside over an already-developed plan to replace the district's older schools. US entry into World War I derailed the building program after only two new elementary schools were constructed. The Sacramento School District was in dire need of a program of modernization and expansion for its facilities by the end of the decade. After vigorous campaigning by parents and teachers and by the Sacramento Chamber of Commerce, whose members considered state-of-the-art schools a necessary condition for economic growth, Sacramento voters passed over \$3 million in school bonds by a margin of seven to one in October 1919. The district planned to use the bond funds to

²⁰ Superintendent of Public Instruction, *School Architecture in California*, California State Printing Office, 1914; Rogers, c1991, 27; Los Angeles Unified School District Historic Context Statement, 1870 to 1969, Prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. for the Los Angeles Unified School District Office of Environmental Health and Safety, March 2014, 29 – 31.

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construct two high schools and fourteen elementary schools, purchasing large new properties, when possible, to allow for the expansive playgrounds that had become a priority.²¹

The architectural program for the massive expansion of the Sacramento school system in the 1920s has traditionally been attributed to Dean and Dean, one of Sacramento's most famous early-twentieth century architectural firms. Close examination of the chronology of development points to a more complex attribution. In early 1920, the Board of Education formed an Architectural and Engineering Commission to which it delegated planning and design of the school expansion program. The partners in Hemmings-Petersen-Hudnutt, a firm established solely to work on this program, made up the membership of the Commission. Edward Charles Hemmings (1874-1924), an architect who had worked on important local buildings including the American Apartments, Sacramento Hotel, and Mohr & Yoerk Building, was chairman and the partner in charge of design. George D Hudnutt was an engineer by training and a builder who specialized in commercial construction. Jens C. Petersen (1873-1939) was an architect who had relocated to Sacramento just before formation of the Commission. James Dean came to work for the group shortly after Commission formation and was both project manager and principal designer. The Commission initiated standardized plan and design parameters for the program Petersen may have participated in preparation of design plans for the first schools that were constructed. Elmhurst, Jefferson, and Fremont were among the five schools completed by early 1922 under the aegis of the Commission.²²

Hemmings-Petersen-Hudnutt began asking to be released from the contract in March 1922, complaining that they could not make a profit at the agreed-upon percentage. According to trade publications, Hemmings had dozens of private commissions in 1922 and was also working on an ambitious expansion of North Sacramento School, which would have made the lower-paying work of the Commission less attractive. The mercurial Hemmings, who had at least six partnerships in less than two decades, frequently commented publicly on local building and architectural issues and, as chairman, was apparently the driving force behind the Commission

The Dean brothers, meanwhile, saw an opportunity to start a firm their own and felt they could profitably take over the school design program. James Dean had been designing Sacramento school buildings for the Commission as an employee for nearly two years, and a strong template had been established. The program was carefully calibrated to meet the District's practical needs and provide outstanding aesthetics on a limited budget. Elements of building plans were standardized for efficiency—often rough U-plans with an auditorium at one side—adapted as necessary to student body size and lot conditions and designed with future additions in mind. The program was heavily influenced by progressive concepts in school design. Large properties, which allowed for playgrounds, gardens, and attractive landscaping, were chosen for most of the new schools. All the buildings in the District's program featured long classroom wings separated by landscaped courtyards. Extra-tall multiple-light windows provided prized light and ventilation to students as well as a connection between indoor and outdoor spaces. Where properties allowed, classrooms, with as much wall space as possible given to windows, faced the east and

²¹ *Sacramento Independent-Leader*, Oct 19, 1919, 1.

²² *Sacramento Union*, "Jens Petersen, Architect, Dies," October 19, 1939, 1.

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corridors, with more widely spaced fenestration, to the west. Lower in height and more spread out than older school buildings, the schools in the program were designed to be safer for students in fires and earthquakes.²³

Materials were standardized: structural members were concrete and steel, exterior walls were brick or stuccoed hollow clay tile, ornamental exterior features were terra cotta, and roofs were clay tile. These elements had several virtues. They were modern, relatively low-cost, durable, low-maintenance, and fire resistant. They were also locally produced, endlessly adaptable to the creativity of architects, and ideal for expressing the romanticized Mediterranean and Spanish Revival styles of the 1920s. Small projecting volumes, variable roof height and pitch, and ornamental chimneys and towers evoked the ambience of European villages. This informal massing allowed harmonious additions to expand school buildings as needed, a crucial element of an ambitious building program in which each school was intended to be constructed in phases. Elementary schools were designed to accommodate 1,200 students; just enough of each building was constructed to meet immediate needs, with additions planned a year or two after first phase completion. Despite unique plan, style, massing, and decorative elements on each, the schools were instantly recognizable as “parts of one large program.”²⁴

By June 1922, just three months after Dean and Dean took over management, ten new schools and three additions were complete. A second bond measure was soon passed to fund more additions. A building trade publication praised the dignity, charm, poise, and site-responsiveness of the buildings in June 1922, noting with approval that the program was straightforward and logical. Local observers were effusive, using terms like “splendid.”²⁵

In 1924, another school bond was brought before the people of Sacramento. School construction could not keep pace with projected population growth and in 1925 there were still 3,500 local students attending school in obsolete or temporary buildings. Between 1920 and 1928, the Sacramento population grew by 51%, while school enrollment increased by 57% as the average child began spending more years at school. By 1930, Sacramento School District had thirty campuses.²⁶

Conclusion: Criterion C—Architecture

El Dorado School is significant at the local level in the area of Architecture. The building was designed under the aegis of the Sacramento School District’s Architectural and Engineering Commission, which was formed in 1920 to efficiently execute a district-wide building program. It was designed by master architect James Dean of Dean and Dean, who was the primary architect responsible for the Sacramento school-building program of the era. It is an excellent

²³ Wei Wu and Edward Ng, Department of Architecture, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China, “A review of the development of daylighting in schools,” *Lighting Research and Technology*, 35, 2, 2003.

²⁴ *Sacramento Bee*, 30 July 1921, 11,

²⁵ Irving F. Morrow, “Recent Work by Dean and Dean, Architects,” *Architect and Engineer*, June 1922; Andrew Hope, Caltrans, DPR 523, Coloma Community Center, December 1995; Janice C. Calpo, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, J.C. Carly House, November 8, 2005, 8:10; *Sacramento Bee*, 25 February 1924, 13.

²⁶ Sue Norwood, “150 Year History,” Sacramento City Unified School District, unpublished manuscript, 2004

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example of Sacramento School District's distinctive 1920s architecture program. The building exhibits stylistic elements of Spanish Revival architecture, a design idiom of the program. Character-defining features include a clay tile roof, strongly textured stucco cladding, arched door openings, and main façade arcade. A highly ornamented bell tower, decorative metal window grilles and balconet, and main entrance French doors with decorative pilasters, sidelights, and transom also reference the Spanish Revival style. Interior character-defining features are concentrated in the main building corridors and the auditorium; walls of handsome alternating wide and narrow hollow clay tile, open staircases with decorative newel posts, polished concrete floors, and high ceilings characterize the corridors. The auditorium has its original stage, rounded corners and door openings, and a significant original mural created by a well-known Sacramento artist and architect. The building reflects the functional elements which exemplify the broader district-wide program of the 1920s: an expansive property, long wings, corridors on the west with widely spaced windows, and east-or north-facing classrooms with large window openings designed to maximize students' exposure to the outdoors and to bring daylight and ventilation into classrooms. Stucco and brick construction were chosen for fire-resistance, as were the concrete floors and clay-tile roofs. El Dorado School exemplifies the extraordinary ability of Dean to design unique, architecturally significant buildings while meeting the strict functional and budgetary requirements of a multi-building program.

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Name of Property

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Sacramento Bee.

12 February 1921.

6 May 1933.

17 February 1954.

8 September 1965.

22 October 1974.

7 January 1976.

30 November 1977.

29 November 1978.

8 October 1981.

8 December 1983.

17 February 1986.

8 March 1990.

15 October 1992.

15 March 1997.

17 March 2006.

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6 May 1920.

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9 April 1919.

20 April 1921.

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Name of Property _____

County and State _____

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Maps

Sanborn Insurance Maps. Sacramento, California. 1895.

Government Directories and Censuses

Polk Directory. San Francisco.

1907.

1908.

US Census Records. Sacramento, California.

1910.

1920.

1930.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: Sacramento City Unified School District

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.8

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(Enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

Latitude: 38.566318

Longitude: -121.439211

Name of Property

County and State

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

El Dorado School occupies a 4.83-acre block in Sacramento bounded by Hidden Lane to the north, 53rd Street to the east, J Street to the south, and 52nd Street to the west.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The property boundaries are the limits of the parcel as defined by the Sacramento County Assessor (APN 008-0111-001-0000) and the legal description of the parcel.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kara Brunzell & Tatyana Dunn
organization: Brunzell Historical
street & number: 1613 B Street
city or town: Napa state: CA zip code: 94559
e-mail: kara.brunzell@yahoo.com
telephone: (707) 290-2918
date: February 2025; Revised June 2025, July 2025

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Name of Property

County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property: El Dorado School
City or Vicinity: Sacramento
County: Sacramento
State: California
Photographer: Tatyana Dunn
Date Photographed: January 27, 2025

Description of Photograph(s) & number, include description of view indicating camera direction:

- 1 of 17 South elevation, camera facing north with auditorium to the right
- 2 of 17 South elevation, camera facing north
- 3 of 17 South and west elevations, camera facing northeast
- 4 of 17 Arcade, camera facing west
- 5 of 17 North and west elevations, camera facing southeast
- 6 of 17 West elevation, camera facing southeast
- 7 of 17 East and north elevations, camera facing southwest
- 8 of 17 South and east elevations, camera facing northwest
- 9 of 17 Auditorium (1939) south façade, camera facing northeast
- 10 of 17 Auditorium (1939) west façade, camera facing southeast
- 11 of 17 First floor interior, camera facing north
- 12 of 17 First floor interior, carved newel post, camera facing east
- 13 of 17 Second floor interior, camera facing south
- 14 of 17 Auditorium lobby (first floor) interior, camera facing south
- 15 of 17 Auditorium (first floor) interior, camera facing southeast
- 16 of 17 Auditorium (first floor) interior mural, camera facing northeast
- 17 of 17 Classroom 10 (second floor) interior, camera facing northeast

Name of Property

County and State

Location Map

Latitude: 38.566318, Longitude: -121.439211



Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

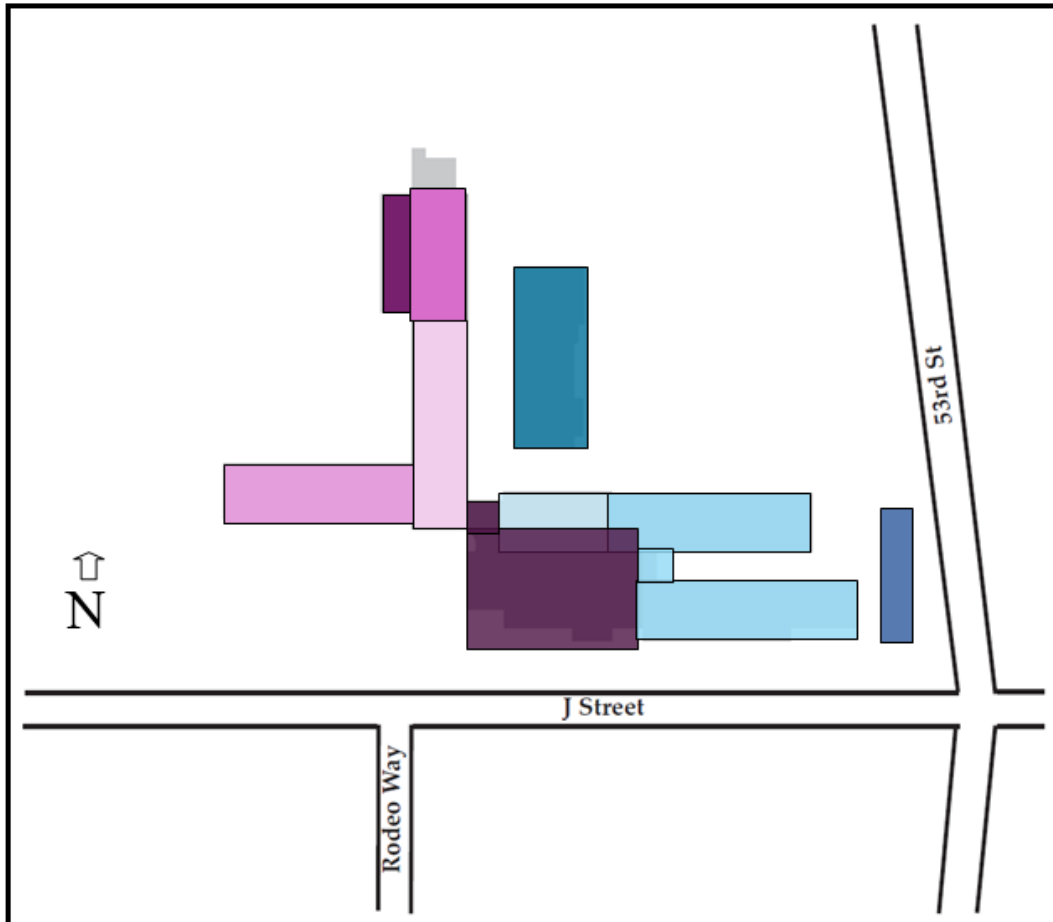
- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

Name of Property _____

County and State _____

Sketch Map



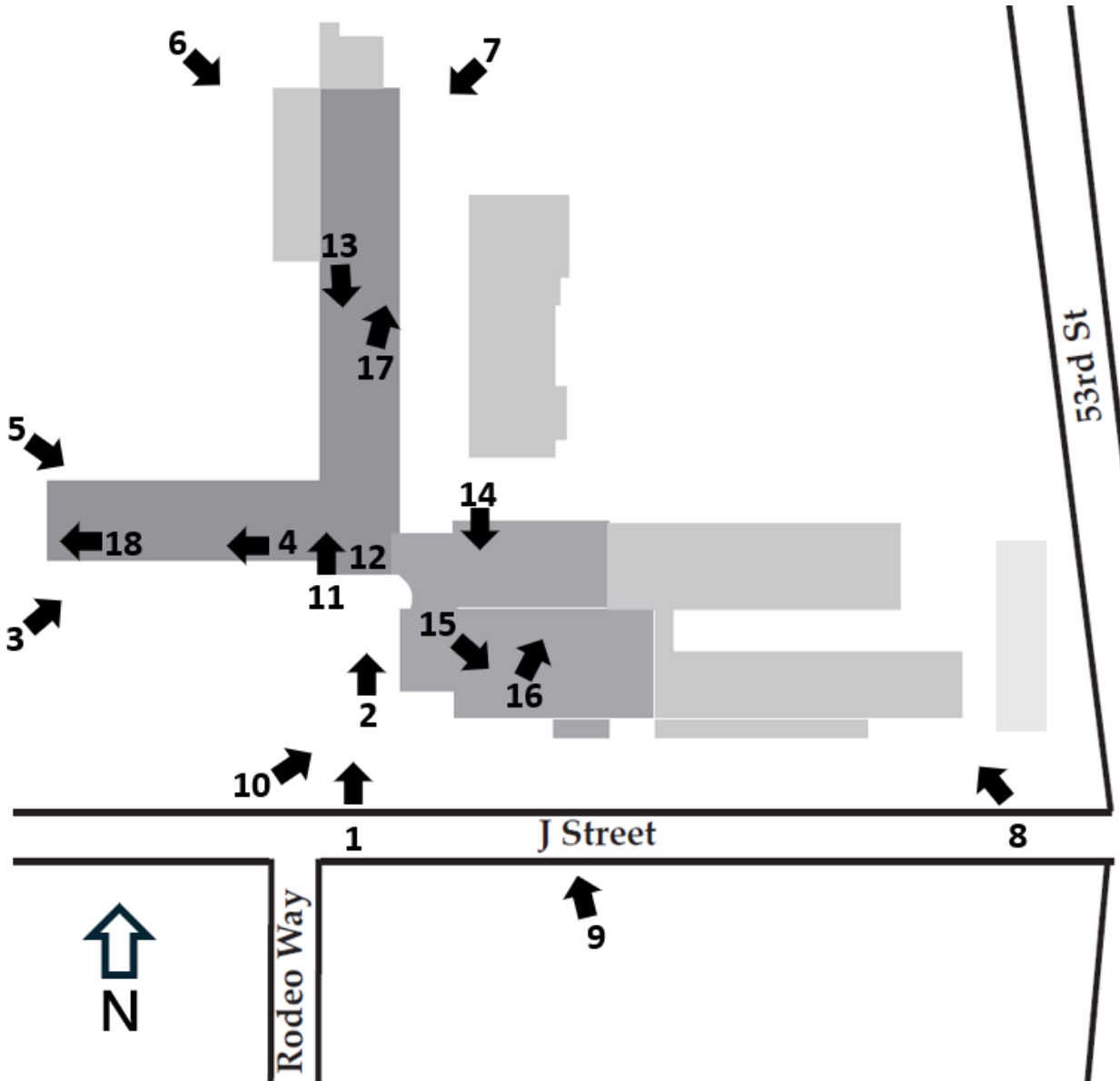
Year of Construction

Lightest pink	1921
Light pink	1922
Medium pink	1922 (first floor), 1930 (second floor)
Dark pink	1930
Dark purple	1939
Light blue	1940 – 1946
Medium blue	1948 – 1949
Dark blue	1951 – 1956
Very dark blue	1993 – 1998

Name of Property _____

County and State _____

Photo Key



Name of Property

County and State

Figure 1 El Dorado School under construction, 1921; *Sacramento Bee*

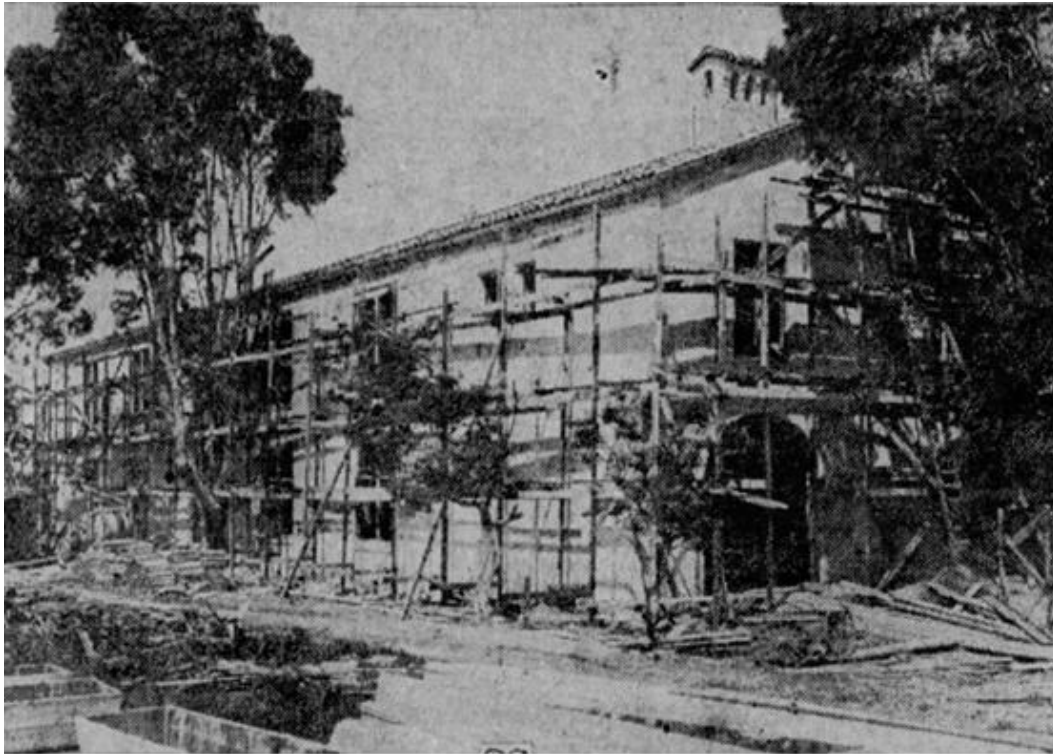


Figure 2 El Dorado School, 1922; *Architect and Engineer, California*



Name of Property

County and State

Figure 3 El Dorado School, 1930; *Bob McCabe Collection, Center for Sacramento History*



Figure 4 El Dorado School, 1940; *Weinstock Collection, Center for Sacramento History*



Name of Property

County and State

Figure 5 Sixth grade graduation class photo, 1937; *Michael T. Benning Collection, Center for Sacramento History*



Figure 6 Class photo in front of auditorium, c. 1940; *Sacramento Public Library*



Name of Property

County and State

Photo 1 South elevation, camera facing north with auditorium to the right



Photo 2 South elevation, camera facing north



Name of Property

County and State

Photo 3 South and west elevations, camera facing northeast



Photo 4 Arcade, camera facing west



Name of Property

County and State

Photo 5 North and west elevations, camera facing southeast



Photo 6 West elevation, camera facing southeast



Name of Property

County and State

Photo 7 East and north elevations, camera facing southwest



Photo 8 South and east elevations, camera facing northwest



Name of Property

County and State

Photo 9 Auditorium (1939) south façade, camera facing northeast



Photo 10 Auditorium (1939) west façade, camera facing east



Name of Property _____

County and State _____

Photo 11 First floor interior, camera facing north

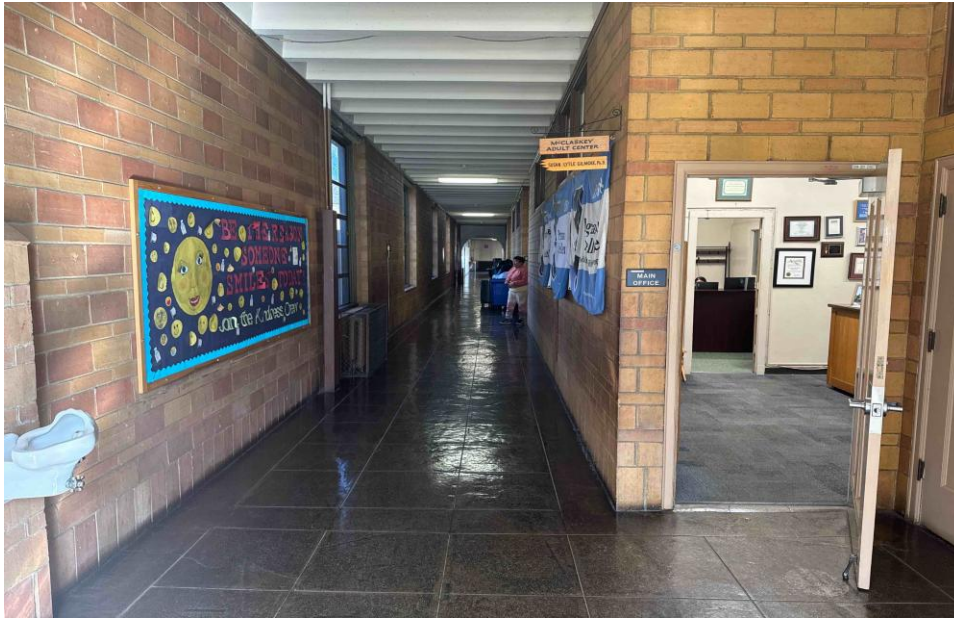


Photo 12 First floor interior, with staircase and carved newel post, camera facing east



Name of Property

County and State

Photo 13 Second floor interior, camera facing south



Photo 14 Auditorium lobby (first floor) interior, camera facing south



Name of Property

County and State

Photo 15 Auditorium (first floor) interior, camera facing southeast



Photo 16 Auditorium (first floor) interior mural, camera facing northeast



Name of Property _____

County and State _____

Photo 17 Classroom 10 (second floor) interior, camera facing northeast





Hazel Bess, Preservation Intern
Date 6/17/2026



El Dorado School Landmark Nomination

M26-013 – Preservation Commission

El Dorado School

5241 J Street

Criterion iii – *Architectural Significance*

- Spanish Revival style
- Sacramento School District Architectural and Engineering Commission's 1920s architecture program

Criterion iv – *Master Architect*

- The work of James and Charles Dean of Dean & Dean
- 1921-1939 period of significance





clay tile roof

bell tower

arcade

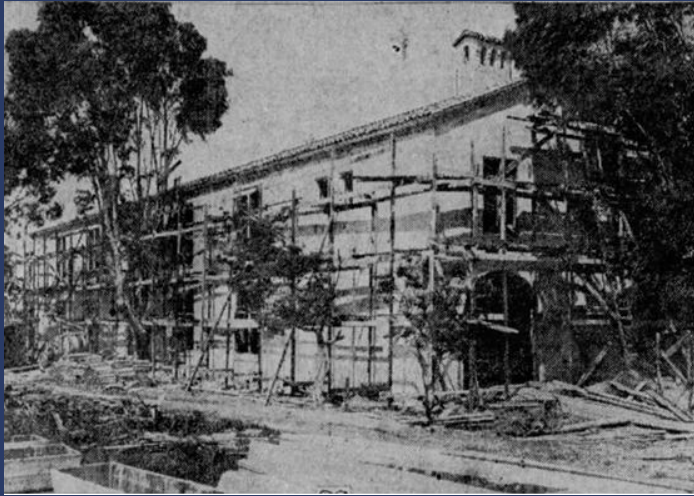
stucco cladding

arched door openings



large window openings

long wings



El Dorado School under construction, 1921;
Sacramento Bee

El Dorado School, 1922; *Architect and Engineer, California*



Thanks!

Contact us:

Hazel Bess

Preservation Intern

Community Development
Department

preservation@cityofsacramento.org

cityofsacramento.org



City of
SACRAMENTO