

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name South High School

other names/site number Denver South High School / 5DV.2092

## 2. Location

street & number 1700 East Louisiana Avenue  not for publication

city or town Denver  vicinity

state Colorado county Denver zip code 80210

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.  
In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:  
\_\_\_ national    \_\_\_ statewide    **X** local

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title State Historic Preservation Officer Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
	3	structures
		objects
1	3	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION / School

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EDUCATION / School

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals

Italian Renaissance

Romanesque Revival

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foundation: Stone/Concrete

walls: Brick

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roof: Tile

other: Terra Cotta (details)

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## **Narrative Description**

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### **Summary Paragraph**

South High School sits on the south side of East Louisiana Avenue between South Franklin and South Race Street, across East Louisiana Avenue from Washington Park. The school grounds, including parking lots and athletic facilities, occupy a large parcel of two combined lots bounded by South Franklin Street on the west, East Louisiana Avenue on the north, South Race Street on the east, and Interstate 25 on the south; however, the resource boundary excludes most non-contributing structures, objects, or other features constructed outside the period of significance. The school was constructed in 1925 and 1926 and was designed by the prolific Denver architecture firm of William E. Fisher and Arthur A. Fisher (Fisher and Fisher). South High was one of four high schools built in Denver in the 1920s to meet growing enrollment as the city grew "up and out." All were named for the quadrant of the city they served, and all are understood today to be significant for the architectural distinction they brought to the cityscape and for their contribution to the aesthetic and civic values that were so formative in Denver during the City Beautiful period. Fisher and Fisher, in tandem with the young sculptor Robert Garrison, produced a building that was itself a work of art, with masonry details and terra cotta sculptural elements that still invite curious minds to explore and contemplate their meaning. It is a red brick building constructed of a mixture of wirecut and smooth brick, with blond brick accents, terra cotta trim and terra cotta sculptural embellishments, with a red tile roof and a clock tower that sits on the east side of the main building, rising behind the primary façade. Two additions, a classroom addition and a storage addition, were designed by Charles Gordon Lee and completed in 1963 and both generally match the exterior design of the 1926 building. A third addition, completed in 1989 and outside the period of significance, contains a gymnasium and other athletic facilities. It was designed by MCB Architects of Denver.

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### **Narrative Description**

South High School (Photo 1) is arguably one of the most architecturally elegant buildings of the late City Beautiful period in Denver. Sometimes categorized as Romanesque Revival style, it lacks the heaviness of Romanesque Revival and may more properly be considered a remarkable example of the Italian Renaissance style, with some Romanesque elements that show the influence of Lombard Architecture, also known as First Romanesque<sup>1</sup>, which dates to pre-medieval and medieval periods in Italy. The building reflects the efforts of educators, architects, artists, and many other of Denver's citizens to create an environment that high school students would find enriching and enlightening. The following narrative begins with a general description, a brief discussion of landscape and brick masonry, and then is organized by façade, beginning with the primary façade (west) and proceeding clockwise around the building, noting additions and alterations as we go.

### **General Architectural Description**

South High School can be generally described as a west-facing, steel-frame building clad in multi-colored brick (predominantly red), with a stone, concrete, and concrete block foundation and elaborate terra cotta sculptural ornament embellishing primary and north entrances, as well as spaces on the interior. The roof is clad in red tile, and a clock tower rises above the roof ridge near the northeast end of the building. Windows are generally multi-pane steel frame casements and are sometimes arched in larger rooms or over secondary entrances, while classrooms generally have

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<sup>1</sup> See [Romanesque architecture - New World Encyclopedia](#); Kostof pp. 314-320.

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double hung wood windows. Windows are paired or grouped in three or four, depending on the façade upon which they are placed. Doors are generally double steel security doors, although the doors on the primary entrance have recently been replaced with doors that are more compatible with the school's historic appearance.

The building is roughly an H-plan, with courtyards on the north and south sides. Gross dimensions are approximately 578 ft NS by 370 ft EW. Most of the original part of the school is two to four stories in height, with a clock tower that rises high above the topmost roof ridge line. A 1963 addition extends southward from the southwest wing, and matches the original building in most respects, although the foundation of the addition is concrete amalgam, which mimics the granite foundation of the 1926 building. A second 1963 addition is attached on the east side of the building, and it, too was designed to match the original building, even repurposing three east-facing arched gymnasium windows from the same location on the original façade.<sup>2</sup> Also notably, the 1963 additions employ the same distinctive brick bonding pattern as the 1926 building.

A later gymnasium addition, completed in 1989, extends from the southeast wing of the building. It rests on a concrete block foundation and, while designed to be compatible with the historic school, contains key differences: It has a simplified look and feel, with inset arches instead of windows on the gymnasium, and simple, single-pane windows on the connecting corridor to the school. The brick is stretcher bond, and trim and details are distinguishable as modern.

#### **South High School's Brick Masonry (Photos 2-4)**

The exterior of South High School is comprised of intricate polychromatic brick masonry, which gives some insight into the level of craft involved in the mason's work in the 1920s. It is generally monk's bond (a variation of Flemish bond), but with an unmortared joint that serves to give the impression of a double-length brick (Photo 2). This move was possibly intended to give the illusion of Roman Brick, which fits with the building's stylistic grounding in the First Romanesque or Lombard period, and was clearly intended, as shown by the detail drawing from the original blueprints (Figure 1). Details include a wide variety of bonds and patterns: stacked header courses are common in spandrels with color patterns often repeating; multi-colored bricks provide horizontal accents, often with sawtooth courses, leaning soldier courses, and decorative compositions and belt courses; medallions with a variety of marquetry-like patterns dot the arches, and medallions featuring the Star of David are present on the north and east facades and in the north courtyard (Photo 3). The scalloped cornice on the four-story central mass of the building is present on the sides and gable ends (Photo 4). This element is repeated on the clock tower and is said to be directly inspired by the Basilica Sant'Ambrogio in Milan, Italy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Denver Post*, "Two Additions at South to get First Use this Year," September 4, 1963, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Noel and Wharton, p. 144.

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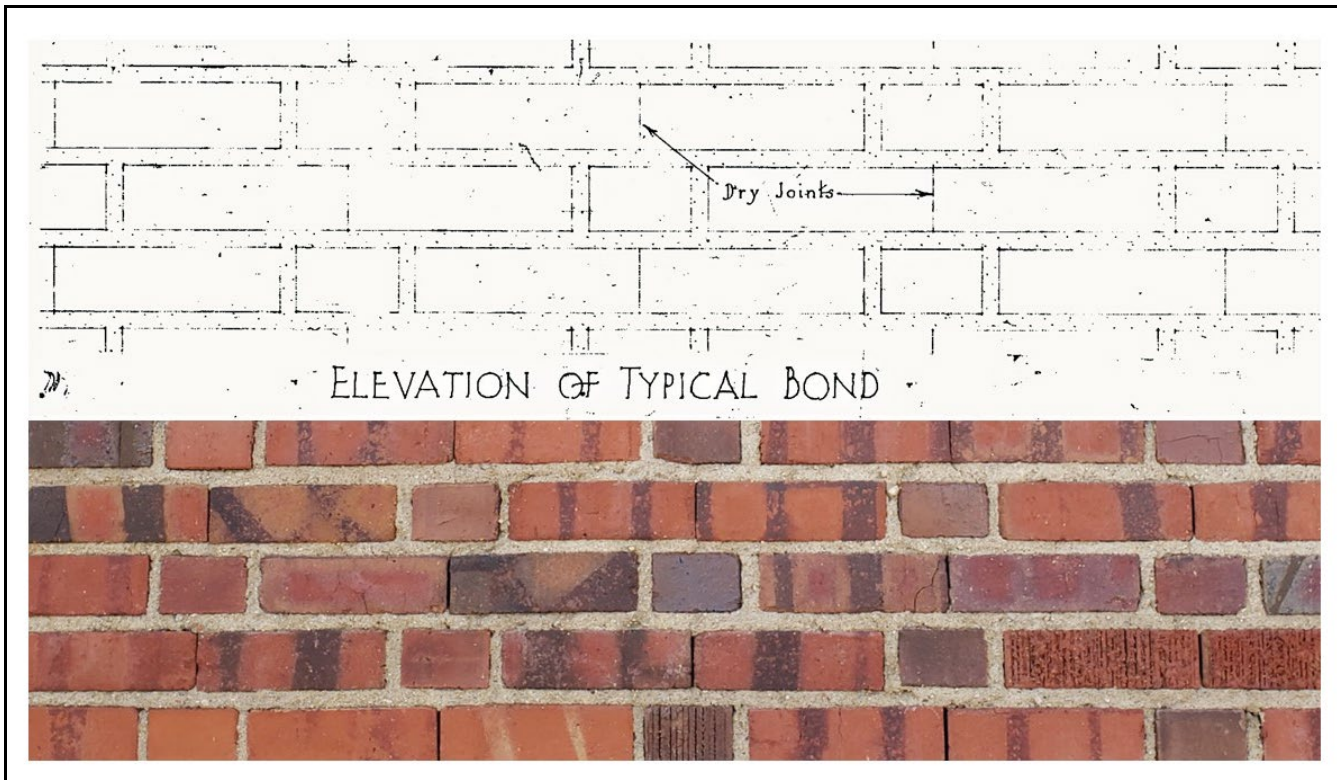


Figure 1. Fisher and Fisher detail drawing of typical brick bond, and photograph of same. Source: Drawing from the South High Alumni and Friends (SHAFI) collection; Photograph by Corbett AHS, Inc.

### West (Primary) Façade (Photos 1; 5-10)

The west façade appears generally symmetrical, with a front-gabled west-facing center and wings extending north and south, although the south wing is considerably longer than the north because it contains the 1963 south addition. The school's main entrance is centered on the gabled mass, which is four stories high (see Photo 1). The entrance is composed of an elaborate and heavily ornamented arched three-story surround holding a recessed row of five wood doors, which sit at the top of a short flight of five steps. Doors and transoms are glazed with "bottle bottom" glass. Above the surround, the fourth floor is distinguished by a five-bay loggia with arched windows recessed within.

Ornamentation at this façade includes two elaborate friezes at the entrance (Photo 5). One, entitled "Faculty Row" shows teachers flanking the seated principal, all in medieval garb. The second frieze, recessed above the doors, is called "Animal Spirits," and shows "animal-like" behavior, such as gum chewing and rubber band shooting. Decorative "candy cane" pilasters, said to be inspired by the interior duomo of a cathedral in Siena, Italy, flank the surround, and are topped with winged gargoyles guarding scholars' heads, with beleaguered teachers holding up the works, in a composition meant to capture the spirit of final exams (Photo 6). Other ornamentation includes elaborate banding, medallions, and depictions of chimera. At the roof peak, watching over all of it from atop the scalloped cornice, is "Gertie Gargoyle," a gryphon who purportedly scans the horizon for truants (see Photo 4). Also present are elaborate ornamental iron lighting fixtures flanking the entrance.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Guindon, p. 2-3.

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Flanking wings (northwest wing and southwest wing) are three stories in height, with paired arched windows on the second floor. A small ell on the north end of the northwest wing projects to the west and contains a small, roofed platform or niche that has been used as a platform for photo-posing or orator's platform, although it may have been meant to hold a statue that was never put in place (Photo 7). The west face of the projection is solid and contains no windows but has three arched stacked-header panels that connect the elevation to the building's fenestration. Vent louvers and a round decorative iron medallion are also present near the upper part of the wall (Photo 8).

The southwest wing has a small rectangular bay projecting to the west from which the 1963 addition connects (Photo 9). The 1963 addition stretches about 130 feet to the south of this point and has a vestibule and west-facing door on the south end, which opens onto the concrete landing (Photo 10).

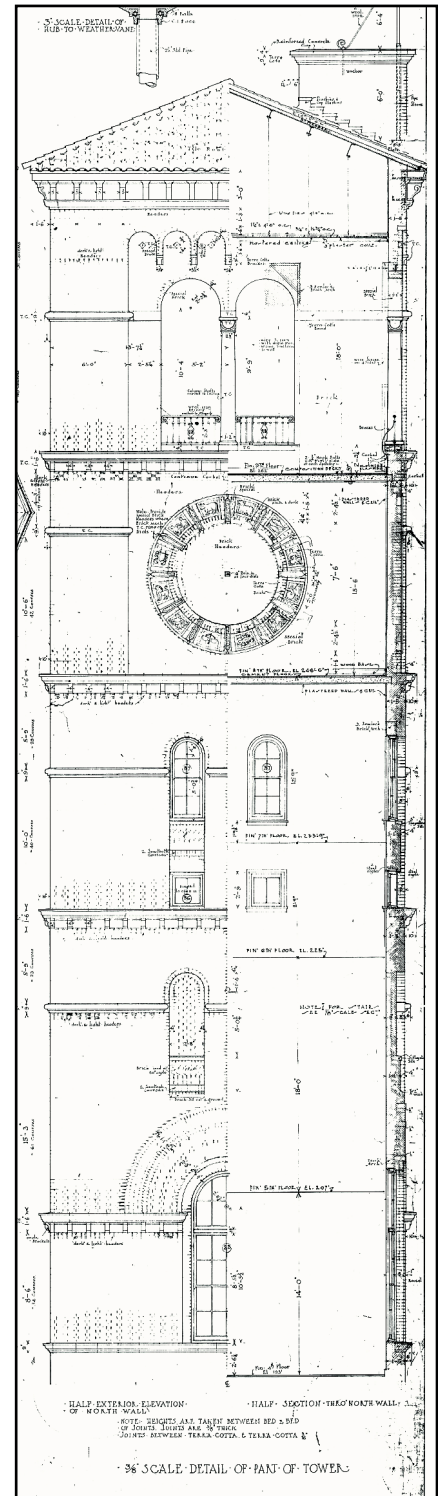
### North Façade (Photos 11-17)

The north façade (Photo 11) faces East Louisiana Avenue and contains two north-facing entrances between which sits the north courtyard, originally a bicycle rack area which has been repurposed as a parking lot. As with the main entrance, the northwest entrance features an elaborate, ornamented surround with an arched hood topped with a pediment, supported by granite columns topped with chimera-decorated capitals (Photo 12). A frieze above the door shows young scholars on their way to school on winged steeds. The walkway leading to the door is brick laid in a herringbone pattern. The northeast entrance (Photo 13) has an ornamental arched surround filled with stacked header infill above the double doors.

The north courtyard (Photos 14-15) was once gated and is partially enclosed by brick walls supporting iron fencing, with brick piers flanking the entrance drive. Four terra cotta gargoyles guard the parking lot from their perches on the fence (Photos 16-17).

### The Clock Tower (Photos 18-22)

The Clock Tower (Photos 18-19) is nestled into the southeast corner of the north courtyard and is most visible from the north and east sides of the building. At nine levels high and rising more than 50 feet above the roof line, it features an open viewing deck at its top and below it on all four sides, working clocks with terra cotta castings of the signs of the zodiac in place of numerals (Photo 20). Believed to be patterned on the tower of the Basilica of Santa Maria at Cosmedin, Italy, it is divided into horizontal segments by terra cotta cornices, with pairs of arched windows and inset arched brick-filled panels providing a continuous vertical logic.



**Figure 2. Fisher and Fisher drawing of Clock Tower (Source: SHAFI collections)**

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The spacing between cornices varies, as does floor height within the tower (Figure 2). The top of the tower is open and offers astounding 360-degree views of the city and the foothills and mountains to the west (Photos 21-22).

### **East Façade (Photos 23-26)**

The east façade faces an athletic field and tennis courts that lie outside the resource boundary along Race Street. It overlooks the east parking lot. Like the west façade, it is basically comprised of a four-story center gable mass, with projecting wings that are two stories at the northeast wing (Photo 23) and three stories at the southeast wing, with the ground floor partially below grade. Notably, the southeast wing, which contained the original Boy's Gym, has few windows but features inset arches and contrasting bonding patterns in the brick masonry that continue the rhythm of the building's fenestration (Photo 25). Forward of the center gable are the original Girl's Gym, which has a hipped roof and is two stories in height, and forward of that is the 1963 second Girl's Auxiliary Gym, which has three round arch multi-light windows that were salvaged from the original Girl's Gym in 1963 (Photo 24). Projecting to the south from the southeast wing on the east side of the building is the gymnasium addition, completed in 1989 (Photo 26).

### **South Façade (Photos 27-31)**

The simplest and least publicly visible façade is the south side of the school. Featuring a courtyard (Photo 27; see also Supplemental Historic Photo 6) defined by the southwest and southeast wings that originally opened onto the athletic fields below the school, the gymnasium addition now blocks the view in and out of the courtyard, which previously was a primary feature of the south façade (Photos 28-30). This addition has a poured concrete block foundation and is constructed of red brick with white brick and concrete details and has a walk-out subterranean entrance on the south (Photos 28-29). Unlike the distinctive brick bonding patterns found on the rest of the building, the gymnasium addition has a simple stretcher bond pattern. The roof is flat with hipped and gable projections and holds a solar panel array that was put in place sometime after 2010.<sup>5</sup> The primary entrance to the Gymnasium foyer faces west and is comprised of three sets of double doors, the center of which has a projecting arched surround (Photo 30).

To the west of the gym, the south end of the 1963 addition has a stack of three windows that light the southwest stairwell, with projecting vestibule opening to the west, on the ground level (Photo 31).

### **Notable interior features (Photos 32-53)**

Upon entering the school at the main entrance, students are greeted by **two murals**, painted in 1935 by Allen Tupper True, on the north and south walls of the foyer. Measuring approximately 8 ft by 14 ft, these are painted on canvas with egg tempera paint, and each depicts important aspects of student life at South High School. The north mural (Photo 32) shows a Goddess figure, lyre in hand, watching over students and teachers as they take part in music and art classes, while the south mural (Photo 33) shows a bearded male God figure as he supervises teachers and students of science and geography. The (apparent) deities observe serenely, or perhaps imperiously, seated in front of the pediments of Greek temples, as seagulls fly overhead and students are absorbed in visual art, music, chemistry, and geography.

Each mural bears two panels of unattributed poetry: The left side of the "Goddess" mural shows students intently watching their instructor as he paints. The associated painted panel reads, **LOVELY APPARITIONS SHALL VISIT US THE PROGENY IMMORTAL OF PAINTING SCULPTURE AND RAPT POESY AND ARTS THO UNIMAGINED YET TO BE**. The other panels are equally

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<sup>5</sup> Verified with Google Earth aerial views.

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rhapsodic about their areas of endeavor (see photos). The music tableau shows two young men playing violins while another sits playing a cello. Two attentive classmates are seated on the ground, while behind them all, a silhouetted figure dances in the clouds. The poem reads: **ECHOES OF THE HUMAN WORLD AND MUSIC ITSELF THE ECHO OF THE HEART AND ALL THAT TEMPER OR IMPROVES MANS LIFE.**

Across the foyer, the male deity oversees the sciences. To his right, a group of students gather around a laboratory table, spellbound by the experiment their teacher conducts. Behind them, silhouettes of factory buildings, smokestacks, and airplanes depict the practical applications of their scientific endeavors. Their poem reads: **BEFORE SCIENCE THE BARRIERS OF FEAR AND SUPERSTITION VANISH AND THE MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE UNFOLD.** To the male deity's left, geography students gather around a globe as their instructor (the only female instructor of the three depicted) points out countries and continents. A brig (ship) with sails furled is shown in the clouds behind them, implying the history of global exploration. Their poem reads: **THE LIVES OF MEN THE CUSTOMS OF PEOPLES THE PAGEANTRY OF NATIONS CHART THE COURSE OF TOMORROW.**

The interior of the school still maintains most of its **original flooring**, with terrazzo tile generally lining the floors in the hallways. This breaks cleanly where the 1963 addition joins in the southwest wing, and linoleum tile is the floor material in the addition (Photo 34). On the fourth floor, the green checkerboard linoleum that was laid in the original teacher's lunchroom is still present in the classrooms that now occupy that space (Photo 35; see also Supplemental Historic Photo 17).

The fourth floor of the school holds the lunchroom (Photo 36), a large, open room that extends the full width of the center mass of the building. It has five pairs of round-arch windows facing north and south on either side of the room, and the cafeteria kitchen is located on the east side of the room. Also on the fourth floor is access to the **loggia** (Photo 37), an exterior space which faces west above the exterior entry surround. The loggia is accessed by a series of doors that lead from three classrooms that occupy what was once the teacher's lounge/lunchroom space. It consists of five arched openings of graduating heights that follow the gable line of the roof just above it. Columns are striped with multi-colored brick, and at the top of the ceiling are pairs of lion heads, male and female, the male chewing on a bone and the lioness chewing on what may be a corn cob (Photos 38a and 38b).

The **auditorium** (Photos 39-40) is comprised of a stage, orchestra-level seating, and a mezzanine or balcony, at the rear of which a small room containing technical equipment (for lighting and sound control) is present. The stage features a squared proscenium arch and has a wood stage floor and a curved downstage apron (Photo 41). An orchestra pit, accessible from the stage by a short staircase and defined by a wood floor, lies at the base of the stage at the house floor level and is separated from the orchestra-level house seating by a simple iron balustrade (Photo 42). The auditorium walls are generally plaster and feature arched panels with inset fabric acoustic panels above a brick wainscot. The wainscot runs level, countering the rake of the auditorium floor, and ranges from about 4 ft in height at the rear of the house to about 8 ft in height where it meets the stage. Plaster sculptural details are a hallmark of the auditorium and include pilasters with elaborate brackets as well as twin tableaus on the proscenium arch entitled "The Protection of the Tree of Knowledge" by Robert Garrison, showing two teachers guarding the Tree of Knowledge (Photo 43). Round-arch doorways lead from the house to backstage (Photo 44). The backstage walls have been painted by the students with the names of the school's productions, giving insight into the history of the department and the pride and investment the students have had in their theatrical activities over the years (Photo 45).



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On the south side of the auditorium, **Senior Hallway** is a calming and well-lit space that opens out onto the south courtyard (Photo 46). Five ceiling-height multilight arched windows and two purple-painted steel doors are present along the south wall. Over the years, this hallway has been used as a study or meet-up space by students, and in the school's early days was even the site of student banquets (See Supplemental Historic Photos 24-25).

The school **library** is located on the second and third floors in the center of the west side of the building, with the two levels connected by a purpose-building stairway. Windows face west to the mountains, and the third-floor library has a round arched window. Both rooms have terra cotta sculptures of birds by Robert Garrison, with an Owl for wisdom, a Rooster for early risers, a Penguin for department, and a Parrot for rote memory (Photos 47-48).

The basement of the school holds the **museum** space of the South High Alumni and Friends, Inc. (SHAFI) (Photo 49). It holds rich collections of school literature and paraphernalia from the decades of the schools' existence, including a nearly full set of student newspapers, yearbooks, photographs, and costumes. An office space on the north end of the museum houses SHAFI's membership-associated activities. The space at one time served as the rifle range of the JROTC (see Supplemental Historic Photo 26)<sup>6</sup>.

SHAFI also maintains an exhibit space in the **clock tower**, and in the 1990s raised the funds to restore the clock's function, restoring the mechanism that runs the clock (Photo 50).

Notable at the school is the extent to which space has been set aside to honor veterans of military service. Present in the hallway outside the auditorium is a large brass plaque that honors South High School alumni who died in the Second World War. It carries the inscription, "What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us. What we have done for others and the world, remains and is immortal – Albert Pike." (Photo 51) Also present is a second plaque honoring South High School alum Keith L. Ware, recipient of the Medal of Honor (Photo 52). Also notable, but much more hidden, is the gallery in the hallway outside the JROTC faculty offices, which honors South's alumni who served in the military (Photo 53).

### **Landscape (Photos 54-61)**

The landscape surrounding the school is primarily a wide lawn on the west side of the building (Photo 54), and outside the resource boundary on the west side is the main parking lot. Two other parking lots are present as well, both inside the resource boundary: the east parking lot (Photo 55) is a rough oval shape and is accessible from a driveway located on East Louisiana Avenue near High Street. The north parking lot, which was in the school's early days a bicycle parking area, is located between the northwest and northeast wings (see Photo 15). Concrete walkways define the resource boundary on the south and west sides (Photos 56-58; see also Sketch Map), and a wide (15-18 ft) concrete walkway leads from the west parking lot to the main entrance of the building on the west side (Photo 59). Other walkways within the resource boundary form triangular patterns, cutting at 45-degree angles from the walkways that connect to the building at right angles. A roughly triangular landing connects the gymnasium entrance and the southwest wing of the school building and contains three raised square planters (see noncontributing object, below), one of which contains a mature honey locust tree (Photo 60). The grounds are well landscaped with mature trees and shrubbery and some

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<sup>6</sup> Supplemental Historic Photo 26 shows girls practicing target shooting in the rifle range, probably sometime in the early 1940s. The 1943 South High School yearbook shows a similar photo of a girl's rifle club shooting in this space. These young women were not members of the JROTC, which did not accept female members until 1970 (although a few girls were "honorary members" of the JROTC beginning in 1946), but would have been allowed to use the rifle range.

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distinctive trees are present; the Denver Forestry list of Champion and Notable Trees includes several at South High School, including Yellow Buckeye, Ginko Biloba, European Larch, Japanese Pagodatree and an English Oak (Photo 61).<sup>7</sup>

### **Non-Contributing Structures and Objects (Photos 60; 62-63)**

Three non-contributing structures are present within the NRHP boundary:

- **The Learning Garden** (Photo 62; Sketch Map NC-A) sits in the northeast corner of the NRHP boundary, on the east side of the entrance to the east parking lot. It is comprised of a series of curved concrete raised planting beds resting on a rectangular concrete slab. A seating area covered by canvas “sails” mounted on a steel frame structure is also present. An educational project that teaches gardening skills and sustainability, the Learning Garden is maintained by the students in the Special Education program. It is of recent construction (2018) and is outside the period of significance.
- **Three 15 ft by 15 ft raised planters** (see Photo 60; Sketch Map NC-B) are located at the entrance to the 1989 Gymnasium addition and were built along with the addition. These are made of concrete and fit within a grid pattern inscribed in the concrete entrance area outside the main entrance to the gymnasium.
- **A freestanding rectangular brick enclosure** (Photo 63; Sketch Map NC-C) is present at the north end of the east side of the building. It measures approximately 58 ft N-S by 22 ft E-W and was constructed in 2017 or 2018. It sits in an asphalt-paved yard partially fenced in chain link and appears to house mechanical equipment associated with the school’s HVAC system.

### **Integrity**

South High School maintains excellent historic integrity, despite additions and alterations. The integrity of location and setting are intact, with the surrounding area comprised of Washington Park and residential streets. Views of the building from all surrounding streets strongly emphasize the historic 1926 building and the 1963 additions. The high school’s outstanding integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling allow the building to convey its history as a gem in Denver’s City Beautiful crown, and few non-historic alterations are identifiable or visible from most vantage points. Perhaps most importantly, the character-defining brick masonry and terra cotta friezes and other ornamentation have seen almost no alteration. South High School is still an important visual reminder of the City Beautiful period in Denver’s history and evokes its place in history as one of Denver’s four “directional” schools and their place in the movement for progressive education. As such, it retains its integrity of association.

Minor alterations include the removal of the cover over the entry to the north parking lot, which was doubtless done to accommodate delivery trucks and service vehicles, and this may be an historic alteration. Most doors have been replaced with steel doors over time; however, the main entrance doors were recently (in 2020) replaced with doors that are very close to a faithful reproduction of the original doors. Although some windows on the 1926 building have been replaced, the majority appear to be original and are in good condition.

The Gymnasium addition, completed in 1989, included some interior alterations of the original school, most of which did not affect integrity to any great extent.

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<sup>7</sup> Denver Forestry, “Denver Champion and Notable Trees, past and present” [Champion Tree Registry Master List 2008 - Denver Only.xls \(denvergov.org\)](#)



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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.)

Property is:

- 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.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Art

Education

**Period of Significance**

1926 – 1972 (Criterion A)

1926 (Criterion C)

1963 (Criterion C)

1934 (Criterion C)

**Significant Dates**

1926

1934

1963

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

William E. Fisher / Arthur A. Fisher

Dunn and Gibson Construction Company

Charles Gordon Lee

MCB Architects (non-contributing addition)

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### Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

Denver South High School is significant under Criterion C at the local level in the areas of Architecture and Art, and under Criterion A at the local level in the area of Education, with a period of significance that extends from 1926 (the year the building first began to serve students) until 1972 (fifty years before the current date). Significant dates include 1926 (the year the school was completed), 1934 (the year the murals were funded and installed) and 1963 (the year construction was completed on the south and east additions). Designed by the architectural firm of William E. Fisher and Arthur A. Fisher, the building is an outstanding example of First Romanesque/Italian Renaissance Revival style architecture and is a testament to the City Beautiful movement's imprint on the City of Denver in the 1920s. Additionally, the 1963 additions were designed by notable mid-twentieth century modernist architect Charles Gordon Lee. The building also features lively and whimsical sculptural friezes and other details on the exterior and the interior that are the work of Robert Garrison, whose sculptures adorn many buildings of the period in the City and County of Denver, as well as two interior murals by the muralist Allen Tupper True. Further, South High School is one of the four "directional" schools, constructed in Denver from 1911 to 1926. These four (North, South, East, and West High Schools) are all iconic evidence of the commitment on the part of Denver's citizenry to the idea of schools as temples of learning and to ideas and methods in education that were born in the Progressive Era. South High School has evolved and grown with Denver, and although its early decades saw a predominately white, European-American student body, it is now one of the most ethnically and racially diverse schools in Denver. In 1991, South High School was designated a historic landmark by the City and County of Denver (Ordinance 785, October 29, 1991).

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

#### Criterion A: Education

South High School is significant under **Criterion A in the area of Education** as one of the four "directional" high schools in Denver and was constructed soon after the Progressive Era (1890-1919), at a time when school design and construction embodied the newfound ideals and values in education that progressive ideas had borne. These included the idea that classrooms could better fit student's needs if approached wholistically. Emphasis on music and the arts, science, home economics, and physical education became accepted parts of high school education in the 1920s, and state-of-the-art schools like South High School included these spaces and fostered these activities, such as well-appointed auditoriums, libraries, science labs, cooking and shop classrooms, and gymnasiums. Although North High School was constructed in 1911, South, West and East High Schools are products of a strong push by leaders in education in the City and County of Denver to bring advancements in education to Denver's youth and to ease overcrowding in the city's schools as enrollment grew in the 1920s.

#### Criterion C: Art

South High School is significant under **Criterion C in the area of Art**, for its two murals by Allen Tupper True, painted in 1934. True's works adorn the rotunda of the State Capitol Building, the Voorhees Memorial, and the Mountain States Telephone Company building, just to name a few. As he did in South High School, he often worked with William and Arthur Fisher, and he is commonly understood to be one of the most important muralists of the twentieth century

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American West. His murals are present in or on many NRHP designated buildings and structures, including the Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Building (2005, 5DV.522), the Greek Amphitheater and the Voorhees Memorial Arch in the Civic Center Historic District (1974, 5DV.161), and the Colorado National Bank Building (2010, 5DV.524).

Additionally, the school is significant under **Criterion C in the area of Art** for its works by sculptor Robert Ernest Garrison, whose architectural ornamentation can be found on many of Denver's important 1920s buildings. Known for his later work at Rockefeller Center in New York, and on the Boston Methodist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Garrison's sculptural ornament makes an important contribution to Denver's architecture in the 1920s and particularly to works by Fisher and Fisher. It is to a great extent because of the works of Garrison and True that South High School is recognized as an important example of Denver's City Beautiful cultural landscape.

### **Criterion C: Architecture**

South High School is significant under **Criterion C in the area of Architecture** as a distinctive example of Italian Renaissance/First Romanesque Revival architecture. It displays character defining features that are anchored in Italian examples of First Romanesque architectural precedent, including brick bonding techniques that mimic Roman brick, a clock tower inspired by the Basilica Santa Maria Cosmedin, and a sawtooth cornice and front façade loggia that can be understood to be a tribute to the Basilica San'Ambrogio in Milan. Like the other directional high schools, its architecture is distinctive and clearly a product of the revival styles embraced in the City Beautiful period.

The school is further significant under **Criterion C in the area of Architecture** as the work of master architects William E. and Arthur A. Fisher. With a design inspired by Italy's First Romanesque period and also categorizable as Renaissance Revival style, the school is recognized as one of the most artistically intriguing of the high schools constructed in Denver.<sup>8</sup> Further, it was designed and built at a time when the Fishers were receiving national recognition for their work and abilities, as indicated by William E. Fisher's election to the board of directors of the American Institute of Architects in 1923.<sup>9</sup> The Fisher brothers' collaboration with Robert Garrison at South High School is unique among their other collaborations for its evocation of medieval architecture combined with whimsical elements designed to amuse and delight students. See Table 1 for a list of works completed by the Fishers in Colorado (as both Fisher & Brother and Fisher & Fisher) listed to the NRHP.

Additionally, South has further significance under **Criterion C in the area of Architecture** for the 1963 additions by architect Charles Gordon Lee. Unusual in Lee's oeuvre, these additions do not carry his usual modernist stamp, but were designed to fit as seamlessly into the existing building's design vocabularies as it was possible for Lee to make them. A student of Frank Lloyd Wright's, Lee is more often recognized for work that falls into the mid-century modern style, such as the Administration Building at Rocky Mountain National Park and St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Lakewood. The 1963 south and east additions to South High School are evidence that Lee was able to conform his designs to fit historic contexts in a way that only a master architect could. See Table 2 for a list of Lee's attributed works in Colorado.

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<sup>8</sup> Noel and Norgren, p. 160

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**Table 1: NRHP-Listed Fisher & Fisher Works in Colorado**

Work and Location	Year	Site No.	NRIS
Country Club Historic District (multiple contributing resources, primarily private residences and the Clubhouse remodel)	1907-1926	5DV.167	NRIS.79000579, NRIS.85002587
Railway Exchange Building 1715 Champa Street, Denver	1910	5DV.526	NRIS.97001213, NRIS.97001216
Denver City Tramway Building 1100 14 <sup>th</sup> Street, Denver	1911	5DV.140	NRIS.78000854
A.C. Foster Building, 912 16 <sup>th</sup> Street, Denver	1911	5DV.142	NRIS.78000846
Multiple buildings at the Jewish Consumptive Relief Society, 6401 W. Colfax Ave, Lakewood, including Isaac Solomon Synagogue, Max D. Neuster Rehabilitation Building, Power House, Security Building, and TriBoro Dining Hall	1911-1936	5JF.178	NRIS.80000905
McPhee & McGinnity Building, 2301 Blake Street, Denver	1913	5DV.1490	NRIS.84000816
Lorraine Lodge/Charles Boettcher Summer Home, 900 Colorow Road, Golden	1916	5JF.323	NRIS.84000858
U.S. National Bank/Guaranty Bank, 817 17 <sup>th</sup> Street, Denver	1920	5DV.843.16	NRIS.94000264
Voorhies Memorial Civic Center West, Colfax & 15 <sup>th</sup> Street, Denver	1921	5DV.161.13	Contributing to Civic Center Historic District, NRIS.12001017, NRIS.74002348
Tower of Memories, Crown Hill Cemetery, 8500 W. 29 <sup>th</sup> Avenue, Lakewood	1926	5JF.467	NRIS.87001725
Ideal Building, 821 17 <sup>th</sup> Street, Denver	1927	5DV.125	NRIS.77000367
Lawrence C. Phipps House, 3400 Belcaro Drive, Denver	1932	5DV.168	NRIS.75000505

**Table 2: Charles Gordon Lee Works in Colorado**

Work and Location	Year	Status
Beaver Meadows Visitor Center/Rocky Mountain National Park Admin Bldg (5LR.9947)	1965-66	NRHP Listed NRIS.01000069
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 9200 W 10 <sup>th</sup> Avenue, Lakewood	1957	Not Listed
Knapp Elementary School, Denver (5DV.8059)	1956	Not Listed

<sup>9</sup> *Denver Post*, "Denver Architect Named Director of American Institute." May 19, 1923, p. 9.

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Denison Elementary School, Denver (5DV.8049)	1960	Not Listed
Goldrick Elementary School, Denver	1952	Not Listed
Johnson Elementary School, Denver	1952	Not Listed
Philips Elementary School, Denver	1952	Not Listed
Barrett Elementary School, Denver	1960	Not Listed
Carson Elementary School, Denver	1952	Not Listed

**Developmental history/additional historic context information**

South High School, today known officially as Denver South High School, was designed by the architecture firm of Fisher and Fisher and constructed by Dunn and Gibson Construction Company from 1924 to 1926. It was first occupied by students in January of 1926. The building was the new school for the students of South Side High School, which was located in the old Grant School on South Pearl Street and Colorado Avenue (Figure 3). Grant School, so-named because it was in the Grant subdivision, was constructed in 1890 in Arapahoe County’s District 7 and initially served the elementary students of South Denver. In 1893, a high school component was added, although enrollment was low compared to other high schools in the city. In 1902, with the creation of the City and County of Denver, Grant School became part of School District #1 and housed both junior high and high school students. Called South Side High School and sometimes Grant High School, the high school was limited to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, and in 1905 the 11<sup>th</sup> grade was added followed by 12<sup>th</sup> grade in 1907. At that time it had 54 students and 3 faculty, and in 1908 the school graduated 6

students. But this number would soon change.<sup>10</sup>

By 1919, the graduation rate at South Side High School was up to 71 students. That year, ninth grade was shifted to the junior high school, now officially known as Grant Junior High School, and South Side High became the first three-year high school in the city. John J. Cory was appointed principal, and the following year Jesse Newlon was appointed Superintendent of Denver Public Schools. It was Newlon, perhaps more than any other, who understood the need to bring education into the twentieth century and was able to rally the support to pay for it.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 3. South Side high School / Grant School. Source: SHAFI archives**

<sup>10</sup> Brief Histories of Denver Public Schools, compiled for the Administrative Offices of the Denver Public Schools, 1957, pp. 342-345; Goodstein, pp 123; 145, 252.

<sup>11</sup> Goodstein, p. 235-241

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Denver voters passed a school bond package in October 1922, and it included 2.4 million to build East, West, and South High Schools. It could be said the bond package was largely fueled by Newlon's own sweat, he worked so hard to pass it,<sup>12</sup> but the high school students at South Side were decidedly strong supporters. In the September 20<sup>th</sup> edition of the school newspaper, *The Aeronaut*, the rallying cry went out: "Pupils of South, prove your right to a new building and let every Rebel account for a voter and keep our school where she rightfully belongs, at the head of the community."<sup>13</sup> That year, South Side High School graduated 181 students, and the need for a new building was becoming urgent.

With North High School, constructed in 1911, these would become known as the "directional" schools, or the "cardinal direction" schools (Figure 4). Each replaced an earlier high school of the same, or almost the same, name: East Side High School (originally known as Denver High School) was located at 19<sup>th</sup> and Stout Streets; West Side High School was at West 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Fox Street (it became Baker Junior High School, which was replaced in 1957); and South Side High School (noted above) became Grant Junior High School.<sup>14</sup> While they were not stylistically uniform, they were, along



**Figure 4. The Directional High Schools. Photographs from the Denver Public Library Digital collections.**

<sup>12</sup> Goodstein, p. 240-243.

<sup>13</sup> *The Aeronaut*, Sept 20, 1922, p. 1  
Goodstein, p. 88-93; 253-256.



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with North High School at W. 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Speer Boulevard, all built in revivalist styles grounded in historic precedent. In addition to South High, North High School, which opened in 1911, was designed in the Beaux Arts style by David Dryden, the architect for Denver Public Schools, East High School, designed in the English Jacobean Revival style by George H. Williamson, who was himself a graduate of the old East Side High School, opened in 1925 and like South features a clock tower, although East's clock has numerals. West High School was designed in the Collegiate Gothic style by W. Harry Edwards, and opened the same year as South, in 1926.

The new South High School, along with its directional fellows, reflected a Transcendentalist ideal that influenced progressive education and was widely accepted by the 1920s. It held that schools should be more than just utilitarian buildings containing classrooms where young scholars stood to recite memorized facts, but should stand for ideals of civic beauty and be community gathering places, hosting neighborhood meetings, as well as cultural and athletic/sports events.<sup>15</sup> The concept of schools as "temples of learning" or "temples of education" traces to nineteenth century school reformers such as educator and designer Henry Barnard, who promoted Greek Revival style in schools, utilizing architectural symbolism to convey the idea that schools should hold an elevated status within their communities. Barnard, who would become the United States' first Commissioner of Education (1867-1870), advocated that schools should be central to their towns, alongside churches, and should, like churches, uphold morality and nourish the communities they served.<sup>16</sup> He wrote: "Every schoolhouse should be a temple, consecrated in prayer to the physical, intellectual, and moral culture of every child in the community, and be associated in every heart with the earliest and strongest impressions of truth, patriotism, and religion."<sup>17</sup>

The idea that educational institutions can function as sacred space in a secular context is vividly evident in the 1926 South High School building. The architects clearly tied both form and style to early sacred architecture by grounding their design in basilicas from the First Romanesque period, which is generally understood to be the tenth century to the beginning of the eleventh century.<sup>18</sup> In particular, Fisher and Fisher invoked the basilicas Santa Maria Cosmedin in Rome (built in the 8<sup>th</sup> century), the bell tower of which is the model for South's clock tower, and Sant'Ambrogio in Milan, which is the source for South's front façade loggia, the scalloped cornice, and possibly even some of the brickwork (Figure 5). The architectural grounding in the basilicas can even be seen in the brick bonding, in which a dry joint in the Monk's Bond brick pattern allows two standard bricks to mimic a Roman brick (see Figure 1).

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<sup>15</sup> Goodstein, 254

<sup>16</sup> MacMullen, pp. 137-138.

<sup>17</sup> Barnard, *School Architecture*, quoted in Rothfork, p. 178.

<sup>18</sup> See [Romanesque architecture - New World Encyclopedia](#); Kostof pp. 314-320.



**Figure 5. The Basilica Santa Maria Cosmedin in Rome (L). Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=60479722>; and the Basilica Sant'Ambrogio in Milan (R). Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=39178126>.**

The school's architecture also reflects ideas formed during the Progressive Education movement, emphasizing the belief that curricula should educate the whole student, and not focus on rote memorization of facts.<sup>19</sup> These theories found expression in the new school's science laboratory classrooms, athletic facilities (it had both a Girls' Gym and a Boy's Gym) a music conservatory (removed in 1963 for the south addition), and an auditorium. The booklet distributed at the school's dedication, on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1926, shows how both of these trains of thought dovetailed, not just at South, but at East and West high schools as well:

In unison with the other new high schools, South High speaks the last word in school architecture. Like the others, it masses together under one roof, modern classrooms, gymnasiums, vocational departments, shops, laboratories, rest rooms, lunch rooms, rooms designed for extra-curricular activities, beautiful libraries, and magnificent auditorium. In common with the other new schools, it typifies the fact that the American people have listened to the interpreters of the public schools. In common with the others, it symbolizes the new mysticism that erects its temples to humanity itself; for the cathedral of the twentieth century is evidently a temple of learning.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Encyclopedia.com. [The 1920s Education: Overview | Encyclopedia.com](https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/encyclopedia/entry/the-1920s-education-overview)

<sup>20</sup> "The Dedication of South High School, Denver Colorado" March 25, 1926.



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Like its companion directional high schools, South High School was more than a state-of-the-art example of a pedagogical structure. It was a product of the city that built it, which meant it was a product of the City Beautiful Movement as it found expression in Denver. Born of a belief that cities, and especially civic architecture, should elevate and inspire, the City Beautiful movement came out of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The “White City” designed by Daniel Burnham with Frederick Law Olmstead, Sr., would come to be understood as a starting point for the infusion of rational, classical, beauty into America’s cities. Its effects could be seen in Chicago, Cleveland, and Kansas City. For Denver, which had in a handful of decades gone from a few shacks by a river confluence to a gritty and constantly expanding grid of streets and industry, the City Beautiful idea took hold and lasted well beyond its national heyday, influencing the city’s development even into the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>21</sup>

Mayor Robert Speer took office in 1904 and soon sponsored a charter for civic beautification. The effects included sandstone sidewalks, streetlamps, street cleaning, and storm and sanitary sewers. But Speer’s greatest legacy was the trifecta of efforts that embody the City Beautiful dream: the Civic Center, the heart of Denver’s City Beautiful landscapes; the Parks and Parkways system, which provided open nature-inspired spaces around which public buildings like libraries and schools were built; and the Denver Mountain Parks system.<sup>22</sup> By the 1920s, Denver had shining examples of architectural style and form, in civic and private contexts. Neoclassical and Colonial Revival styles offered elegance and grace to the cityscapes, and to the mansions that lined the parkways, even as pattern book Craftsman bungalows were increasingly standard in middle class housing.

Many historically important architects earned their stripes in and left their stamp on the City Beautiful cityscapes of Denver, including such luminaries as Frank Edbrooke, Jacques Benedict, and William Norman Bowman. But few firms had such an impact on the City Beautiful as Fisher and Fisher, who in December of 1922 were awarded the contract to design South High School. With sculptor Robert E. Garrison, they would create a building that historians recognize to be “perhaps the most artistically intriguing of all [Denver’s] public schools.”<sup>23</sup>

### **William E. Fisher and Arthur A. Fisher, Architects**

The firm of William E. Fisher and Arthur A. Fisher, Architects, was one of the most prolific and possibly the most influential firm in Denver’s City Beautiful period and, as Arthur carried on the firm after William’s death in 1937, for many years after. The Fisher brothers’ historic significance is widely recognized: of the more than 100 remaining buildings designed by William and/or Arthur Fisher, at least twenty are listed on the National Register, and many others have State or Local designation.<sup>24</sup> Canadian immigrants, the brothers came to Denver as children in 1885, when William was fourteen and Arthur was seven. Their father, Allen Fisher, served as secretary-treasurer and later president of the Western Mercantile Association, a credit and collection agency. He must have instilled a strong managerial sense in his sons, for their firm would be known not only for its strong and beautiful designs, but also as a prominent and well-run business.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Noel and Norgren, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Noel and Norgren, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Noel and Norgren, p. 160

<sup>24</sup> OAHF biographical sketch, William E. Fisher and Arthur A. Fisher.

<sup>25</sup> Noel and Norgren, p. 198-200.

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William E. Fisher began his career in architecture as a young man in 1890, when he was hired by the firm of Balcomb and Rice as a draftsman. Balcomb and Rice largely focused on residential architecture, producing some of Denver's most notable Queen Anne style homes. He studied briefly in New York with architect C. Powell Karr, and then William E. Fisher hung out his own shingle in 1892, still mostly focusing on residential commissions. Although he was only in his twenties, his versatility and diligence gained him the respect of some prominent Denver citizens. Among his work from this period is the Denver Landmarked Iliff House (aka the Ormleigh House) at 2145 S. Adams Street, which he designed in 1899 and which was added to the list of landmarked Fisher designs in 2018. In 1901 Fisher went into practice with Daniel Huntington, another young architect—and undoubtedly a friend—with whom he had worked at Balcomb and Rice. Their short, five-year business partnership produced some notable residences in Denver, including and perhaps especially the Beaux-Arts style Frank Smith Mansion (Denver Landmark No. 22) at 1801 York Street.<sup>26</sup> Daniel Huntington left Denver for Seattle in 1905, and William Fisher was once again on his own.

In 1907, William Fisher's younger brother, Arthur Addison Fisher, joined him in practice as William E. Fisher and Brother. In 1910, the firm became William E. Fisher and Arthur A. Fisher, Architects (aka Fisher and Fisher). Arthur Fisher had returned to Denver in 1905 after studying at the Beaux-Arts Atelier Barber in New York and apprenticing in the office of architects Donn Barber and Benjamin Morris. Barber and Morris were noted for clear, rational, but often elaborate Neoclassical and Beaux-Arts designs. Although many of these qualities are evident in William E. Fisher's early work, Arthur brought an embrace of Mediterranean influences to the firm, which became hallmarks of Fisher and Fisher's work after the brothers formed their partnership.<sup>27</sup> These influences were especially evident in the Fisher brothers' work during the City Beautiful period, during which time South High School was designed and constructed. The Ecole des Beaux Arts tradition of collaboration between architects, sculptors, and muralists is clearly evident in Fisher and Fisher's work, although Allen True's murals in the entry foyer were not painted until almost a decade after the school opened. In particular, the firm's frequent collaboration with sculptor Robert Garrison made its work some of the most recognizable and outstanding examples of civic and commercial City Beautiful architecture.

William E. Fisher, whose belief in quality housing for the middle class led him to head the Architects Small House Service Bureau, a "pro bono" project of the American Institute of Architects (AIA),<sup>28</sup> devoted a great deal of his time and energy to his AIA activities in the 1920s and was elected to the AIA board of directors in 1923. Arthur Fisher's refined Mediterranean aesthetic can be traced to his travels in Italy and surrounding countries.<sup>29</sup> These travels were likely in or about 1913, the year he applied for a passport for travel abroad for himself and his wife, Florence. South High School exhibits this influence, most notably in comparisons to the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan and the Basilica de Santa Maria Cosmedin in Rome, which is believed to have inspired the school's clock tower (see Figure 5).<sup>30</sup> Indeed, South High School and another Fisher and Fisher building completed that same year, the B'nai B'rith hospital at Colorado Boulevard, both show indelible ties to this historic precedent (Figure 6). In keeping with City Beautiful aesthetics, both 1926 buildings

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<sup>26</sup> Noel and Wharton, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> Noel and Norgren, p. 199.

<sup>28</sup> More information about the Architects Small House Service Bureau can be found in Dolores Hayden's *Building Suburbia*.

<sup>29</sup> Noel and Norgren, 198.

<sup>30</sup> [Denver South High School » School History \(dpsk12.org\)](https://www.dpsk12.org); Goodstein, p. 255-256.; Noel and Wharton, p. 144.

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share details such as elaborate terra cotta surrounds at the entryways, intriguing masonry elements, tile roofs, and graceful arched porticos.



**Figure 6. The B'nai Brith building, Fisher and Fisher 1926. Source: Denver Public Library Digital Collections.**

Compare South High School with a sampling of other works by Fisher and Fisher from the same period, and it becomes even clearer why the firm is considered to be one of the most important to the built landscapes of Denver in the City Beautiful period. Morey Middle School (1921) one of the first school commissions completed by the firm, is also designed in the Italian Renaissance style and incorporates murals and sculptural elements (as with South, these are by Robert Garrison). The Neoclassical Voorhees Memorial at the Civic Center (1921) exhibits the careful symmetry and monumental presence that makes it the ideal smaller companion to Marean and Norton's 1919 Greek Amphitheater, with murals by Allen True and sculptures by Robert Garrison. The Midland Savings Bank (1926) in downtown Denver shows, if not identical masonry to South, an arresting and unusual methods of bonding and polychrome brick, and again, a sculptural terra cotta frieze by Garrison (the frieze was removed in 1964 but parts of it are collected at the Denver Botanic Gardens. In short, in concert with Robert Garrison and (perhaps less often, but still often) Allen True, the Fishers turned their European and Classical inspirations into a brand, and Denver's City Beautiful era was all the richer for it.

The firm of William E. Fisher and Arthur A. Fisher, Architects, continued to inform and influence the cityscape for only about another decade after the construction of South High School. With the Great Depression, most construction halted,

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and the firm's workload plunged. The Fisher family also had more than its share of tragedy: in 1933, William E. Fisher's wife, Clara, drowned in Washington Park's Smith Lake, presumably a suicide, and in 1937 William E. Fisher also committed suicide. Arthur Fisher continued the firm's work, along with his nephew, William and Clara's son, Alan Fisher, as partner. Fisher and Fisher would continue their important work, designing, among other notable works, Country Club Gardens (1940) and (with Burnham Hoyt) the Denver Public Library (1955).

### **Robert E. Garrison**

Sculptor Robert Garrison was a young man when he formed a professional association with the Fisher brothers. His work appears or appeared on many of their most notable works, including the Voorhees Memorial at the Civic Center, the Midland Savings building, the Ideal Building, and the B'nai B'rith building. But in Denver, some of his best-known work was the whimsical architectural embellishment found on South High School.

Born in Fort Dodge, Iowa, in 1895, Robert Eugene Garrison was the third son of photographer Fred A. Garrison and Anna Timms Garrison. His mother passed when he was only five, and his father soon remarried. Robert went on to study at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art in Philadelphia, and studied with Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor of Mount Rushmore, serving for four years as Borglum's chief assistant. Garrison served in the military in World War I and in 1919 he came to Denver where, although he was only about 24, he accepted the post of Director at the Denver Academy of Applied Art. He later served on the faculty of the University of Denver.

Garrison immediately made his mark in the young city. He married Catherine Cranmer, daughter of pioneer rancher W. W. H. Cranmer and sister of future Denver Parks manager George Cranmer, who is best known for spearheading the construction of the Red Rocks Amphitheater. The two had a daughter, Jane, in 1921. Garrison quickly became one of the most celebrated artists in Denver. A 1925 *Denver Post* article called him "Denver's senior sculptor" (he was thirty), and went on to say,

The word of Garrison is of value because of his own efforts and achievements, and because he learned the technic [sic] of his art from no less a master than Gutzon Borglum, and has been described by George William Eggers, director of Denver's Art Association, as "a young sculptor who has gone beyond his master" (*Denver Post*, February 9, 1925, p. 2).

Garrison's work was not confined to Denver; in 1929 he produced the exterior sculptural art for the Boston Avenue Methodist Church, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, considered to be one of the finest examples of ecclesiastical Art Deco design in the United States, and a designated National Historic Landmark. By 1930 he had moved on to New York City where he produced, among his other commissions, three sculptural panels on the RKO Building at Rockefeller Center in 1932. Entitled "Morning, Present, Evening," these figures are noted to have set the stage for Art Deco artworks at Rockefeller Center.<sup>31</sup> In 1936 his wife, who had returned to Denver with their daughter a few years earlier, filed for divorce. Garrison stayed in New York and continued to sculpt, but the belt-tightening effect of the Great Depression and the architectural drift away from ornament doubtless affected his livelihood. The 1940 US Federal Census shows him working for the WPA,

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<sup>31</sup> Rockefeller Center: Art and History. <https://www.rockefellercenter.com/art/morning-present-evening/>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

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and later, when the US entered World War II, Garrison enlisted again. He died on November 1, 1943, in New York City of heart disease.<sup>32</sup>

That Garrison's nearly decade-long relationship with Fisher and Fisher, beginning with the seal sculptures at the Voorhees Memorial, was a fruitful one is evident on many of the firm's buildings from the 1920s. He sculpted terra cotta friezes and architectural elements on and within some of the firm's best-known buildings, including Morey Middle School at 14<sup>th</sup> and Washington, the Ideal Building (821 17<sup>th</sup> Street), the Midland Savings Building (444 Glenarm Street), and the B'nai B'rith Building at National Jewish Hospital, at Colorado Boulevard and East Colfax Avenue. His work for other venues shows figures that were often outsized and monumental, such as the male and female athletes on the University of Denver's Hilltop Stadium (demolished 1971), and one seated figure for the Daly Memorial at Fairmount Cemetery that was over eight feet in height. One proposed effort, two figures straddling each portal of the Moffat Tunnel, was to have been 125-150 feet high, but was never executed.<sup>33</sup> While he is best known for his Art Deco works, his sculptural embellishments at South High seem less bound by stylistic convention, depicting cartoon-like Medieval characters, buffoonish chimera, animals, and gargoyles.

A 1925 article about Garrison in the *Denver Post* noted that the sculptor made it a point to know the "psychology of both his subjects, the model and the viewer."<sup>34</sup> His ability to understand the often-irreverent mindsets of high school students is evident in, for instance, the frieze above the west-facing main entrance, entitled "Faculty Row," (Figure 7) depicts anxious, whispering teachers, dressed in Medieval robes and flanking a seated headmaster figure, meant to be the principal--and in fact, the figure does bear some resemblance to John J. Cory, South's principal at the time the new school was built (Figure 8). Above, at the corners of the fourth-floor loggia, beleaguered scholars strain to hold up cushion capitals upon which winged lions loom over the heads of students, ready to devour them, in a tableau meant to depict final exams (Figure 9). On a north-facing entrance, toga-clad students ride winged horses to school (the winged Pegasus is a theme Garrison also employed on the RKO building in New York, seven years later). Most significant to the school spirit, perhaps, is "Gertie Gargoyle," who perches on the roof peak, her feathered minions sitting beside her taloned feet, watching for truants trying to sneak away from the school grounds (Figure 10). Inside the school, the theme continues into the library, where birds perch at the ceiling: and owl for wisdom, a rooster for the early riser, a penguin for deportment, and a parrot for rote recitation (Figure 11).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Some accounts give his cause of death as an accident, but his death certificate indicates otherwise. See New York City Department of Records & Information Services; New York City, New York; New York City Death Certificates; Borough: Bronx; Year: 1943 (Ancestry.com)

<sup>33</sup> Kenney, Andrew. "Why the hell didn't Colorado build this giant naked man to guard the Moffat Tunnel?" The Denverite, March 14, 2017. <https://denverite.com/2017/03/14/didnt-anyone-build-giant-naked-man-guard-moffat-tunnel/>.

<sup>34</sup> *Denver Post*, October 4, 1925, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Noel and Wharton, p. 144; Goodstein, 1986, p. 3.



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Figure 7. "Faculty Row" frieze above the west entrance to South High School. Photograph by Corbett AHS, Inc.



Figure 8. Compare the headmaster in the frieze (L) with South's principal in 1926, John J. Cory (R). Sources: Corbett AHS, Inc. and SHAFI collections.





Figure 9. "Final Exams," west façade. Source: Corbett AHS, Inc.



Figure 10. "Gertie Gargoyle" on the roof peak, west façade. Source: Corbett AHS, Inc.



Figure 11. (L-R) the Owl, Rooster, Penguin, and Parrot, whose jobs are to supervise students in South High's Library. Source: Corbett AHS, Inc.

South High is one of the most elaborate collections of Robert Garrison's work. It is notably crafted to target its young audience; its whimsy aims to entertain and support the high school students as they identify and empathize with their terra

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cotta counterparts. The medieval garb of the figures and the grotesque chimeras fit comfortably with Fisher and Fisher's Lombardi/First Romanesque stylistic influence, which makes South so distinctive among Denver's cardinal direction high schools.

### **Early Days at South**

The City and County of Denver issued a building permit on June 30, 1924, for the new high school building on East Louisiana that was estimated to cost 816,000.<sup>36</sup> South High School's cornerstone was laid on October 31, 1924, and with 800 students enrolled the following year, move-in day could not come soon enough. South's students eagerly anticipated the new building, with the staff of *The Aeronaut* listing out the anticipated features (and perhaps exaggerating the hardships of the overcrowded school they were leaving). As well, the article demonstrates how early twentieth century progressive education ideals were expressed in concrete terms. Along with a photo of the architects' rendering (Figure 12), they wrote:<sup>37</sup>

The New South High School is expected to be completed in September 1925, if all goes well. It is to be located opposite [the] southeast corner of Washington Park, between Franklin and Race Streets, and between Louisiana and Florida Avenues.

After years of vain hoping, our dreams of a new South seem to be nearing realization. The advantages to be afforded in the new building prove it to have been well worth waiting for. We Rebels who have been risking our lives day after day in an attempt to reach our various classes find the fact that we are soon to have plenty of room, hard to realize.

The new building will be situated on the high part of its new site, in the northeast corner. From the windows facing the west our future Rebels will have an inspiring view of the mountains. In front of the building will be a continuation of the boulevard coming from Washington Park, which will circle through the site and connect with the University Boulevard to the South-east. In the rear of the building South's future championship teams will be trained for there will be an athletic field large enough to accommodate the activities of football baseball, volleyball, track, tennis, etc.

The building itself will be modern in every respect, of fire-proof construction, brick walls, and a tile roof. It will accommodate 1,500 or 1,600 pupils, and will contain twenty-nine regular classrooms, besides the rooms for the various departments. The science rooms will include a lecture room and two laboratories for physics, a lecture room and a laboratory for chemistry, and two rooms for natural sciences. Two typewriting rooms and two bookkeeping rooms will be included in the commercial department. The home economics department will have one room for clothing, one for millinery, and one for foods. There will be four shops—for wood work, machine work, printing, and mechanical drawing. Future Rebels will not lack instruction in the fine arts, as there are to be three art rooms, a large music room for chorus work, and a large music classroom. There will also be a press room for future member of the Aeronaut staff.

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<sup>36</sup> "Building Permits since Jan 1 Smash Previous Records," *Denver Post*, July 1, 1924, page 14.

<sup>37</sup> See Supplemental Historic Photographs, attached to this document.

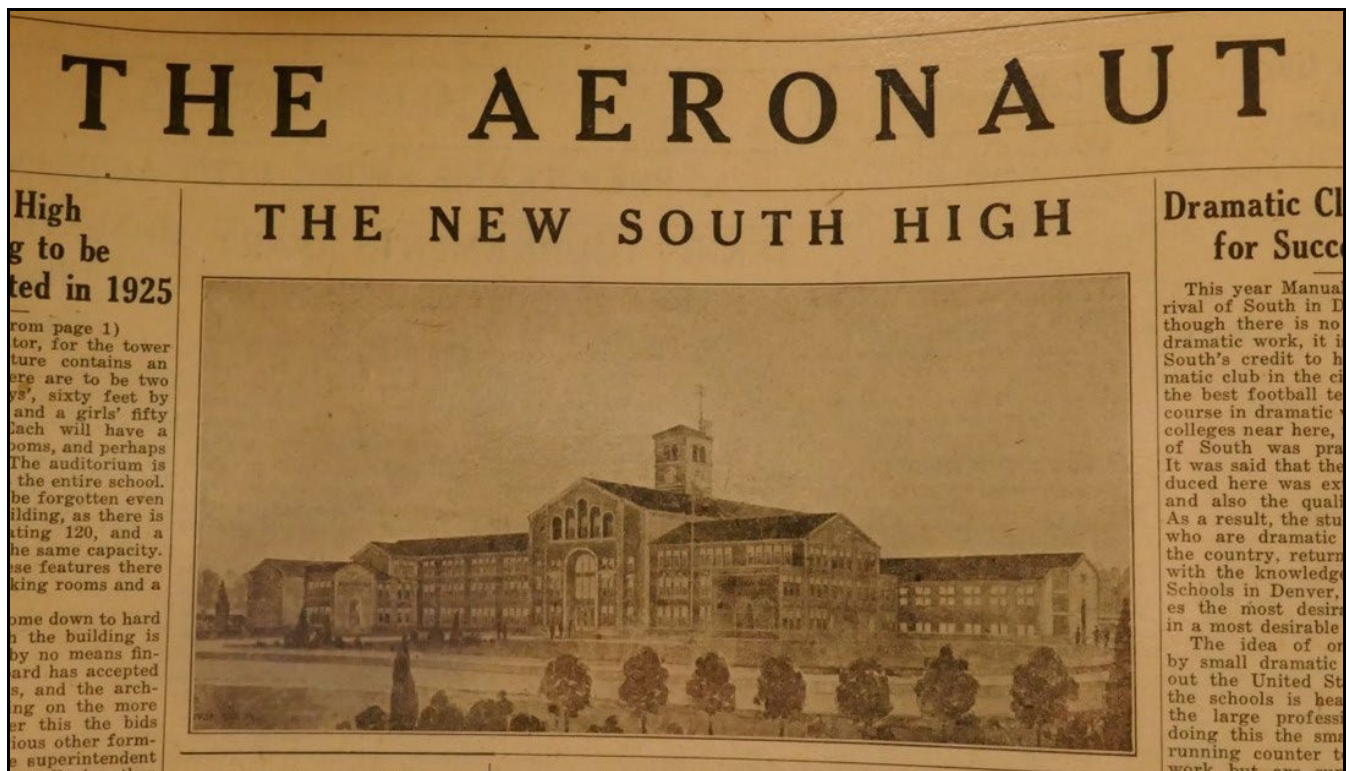


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Rebels will no longer dream through their fourth hour classes with enticing odors of foods floating up from the regions below, for our new lunchroom is the be on the top floor. Teachers are to have a lunchroom of their own. We will also be the proud possessors of an elevator, for the tower shown in the picture contains an elevator shaft. There are to be two gymnasiums—a boy's, sixty feet by one hundred feet, and a girls' fifty by eighty feet. Each will have a lock and shower rooms, and perhaps a swimming pool. The auditorium is large enough to seat the entire school.

Studying will not be forgotten even in this wonderful building, as there is to be a library seating 120, and a study hall of about the same capacity. In addition to all these features there are to be public speaking rooms and a clinic.<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 12. The October 12, 1923, edition of *The Aeronaut*. Source: SHAFI collections. For historic photographs of the classrooms and features referred to in the article, see Supplemental Historic Photographs, attached to this document.**

The school was built on schedule. In fact, good weather in the winter of 1925 allowed the builders, the Dunn and Gibson Construction Company, to be well ahead of schedule; a March 22, 1925, article in the *Denver Post* quoted Fisher and Fisher, who oversaw construction, as saying they foresaw no trouble in meeting the December 1 target for completion.<sup>39</sup> The architects had chosen their contractors well: Charles J. Dunn, the senior partner, had been building in Denver since at least 1892, and his younger partner, John T. Gibson, was the son of a notable early Denver builder and himself a

<sup>38</sup> *The Aeronaut*, October 12, 1923, pp. 1; 4.

<sup>39</sup> "South High Nears the Half-Way Mark" *Denver Post*, March 22, 1925, p. 66.

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contractor and brick mason.<sup>40</sup> Charles J. Dunn was known for the construction of the J. K. Mullen Home for the Aged (1911), and following their work at South High School, he and Gibson would go on to build such local architectural gems as Loretto Heights' Pancratia Hall (1928) and the stately Mary Reed house (1928) in the Country Club district.

On January 25, 1926, students filed the 1.2 miles from their old school at S. Grant and Colorado Ave to the new school, some carrying file boxes of books and other materials (Figure 13). That year, the yearbook, entitled "the Aeronaut Joins the Circus" was dedicated to DPS Superintendent Jesse Newlon, the man who had made it possible. A section entitled, "Under the Big Top" was devoted to captionless photographs of the new school, its classrooms, and interior spaces. The yearbook and subsequent yearbooks of the 1920s give glimpses of early student life, including extracurricular activities such as the JROTC Cadets; the Aeronaut (newspaper) staff, sports, music, drama, and dances (See Supplemental Historic Photographs, attached).



**Figure 13. Moving-out day at South Side High (top left) and moving-in day at South High School (top right and bottom), January 26, 1926. Sources: SHAFI collections.**

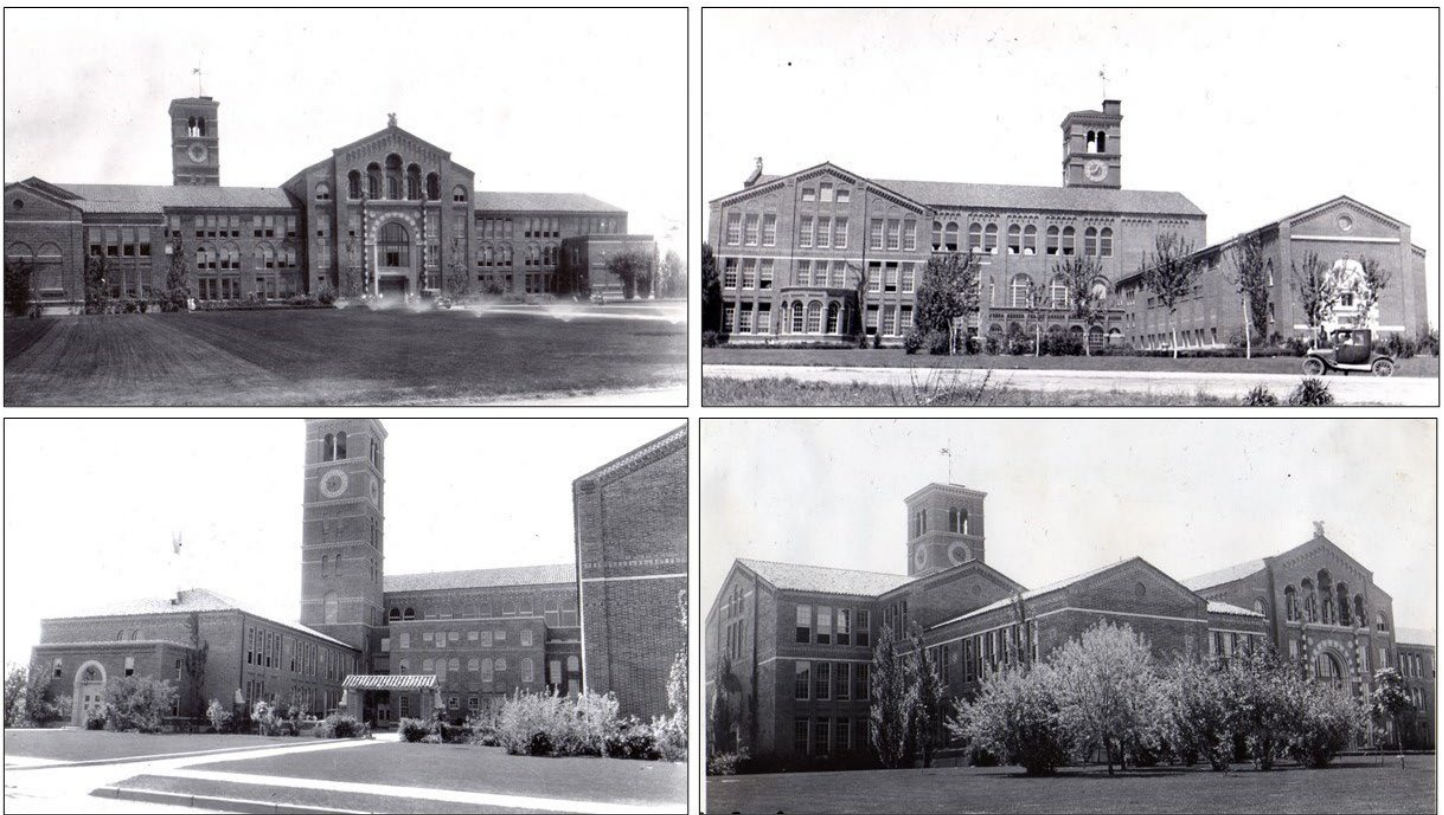
<sup>40</sup> Gibson is shown in the 1922 Denver City Directory as a "brick contractor"; however, the extent to which his skill as a mason is directly evident in the monk's bond brickwork at South High School was not revealed by research.



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Early photos of the school show that little landscaping had taken place on moving day, but it was not long until the grounds around the school had been planted. Although research did not reveal his original design for South High's landscape, M. Walter Pesman, the landscape architect for Denver Public Schools, was doubtless the designer for the grounds.<sup>41</sup> Pesman, a Dutch immigrant, had come to Colorado in 1907, graduating from Colorado State University (then called the Colorado Agricultural and Mechanic's College) in 1910. He practiced with Saco Reink DeBoer from 1919 to 1924, and afterwards was the driving force behind a landscape improvement initiative for the Denver Public Schools. He completed landscape designs for at least thirty public schools during his tenure with DPS.<sup>42</sup> In a 1928 article for the American School Board Journal entitled "Landscape Development of School Grounds," Pesman articulated the ideas and theory behind his school designs, as well as the interplay between the architecture of the building and the landscape. It is not at all difficult to see from the photographs (Figure 14) how these ideas played out at South High, not only in the overall site plan but in the ways Pesman's and the Fishers' designs work in concert.



**Figure 14. M. Walter Pesman's landscape design for South High School, as implemented. Photo dates are unknown but they were likely taken within a few years of the school's completion. Note the expansive lawn and oval vehicular access to the main entrance on the west-facing side (upper left); the row of young trees on the south side of the school that would screen the school's view of the City Ditch and athletic fields below (upper right), the groupings of trees at the northwest corner of the building (lower right), and the smaller shrubs and plantings closer to the building and the entrance to the north courtyard along the Louisiana Avenue, on the building's north side (lower left). Source: SHAFI collections.**

<sup>41</sup> Because research attempts to find Pesman's landscape design for South were unsuccessful, the area of significance under Criterion C does not include landscape design. In the event future research reveals more substantial information about Pesman's work at South High School, this area of significance should be re-evaluated.

<sup>42</sup> "Michiel Walter Pesman" The Cultural Landscapes Foundation, <https://www.tclf.org/pioneer/michiel-walter-pesman>.

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Pesman wrote:

In placing a new building sufficient lawn space is left in front to show its architectural beauty to the observer passing on the street. This leaves the main bulk of the playground facing the opposite side of the building. Naturally the gymnasium will be placed on this side. Whenever possible we prefer to orientate the building in such a way as not to shade the playground. This prolongs the season of usefulness of the grounds to a marked extent. This playground is left intact except for planting along its edges. The main landscaping features are thus found in front of the building and on the two sides. Whenever possible a piece of ground is set aside in a convenient corner for the use of school gardens.

One of the first things considered in the general layout is the matter of walks and drives. They must be direct, of ample width, and serviceable during all sorts of weather ... The connections between the main entrances and leading to the street of necessity form the boundaries of the lawn areas. If planned carefully, they should obviate any desire to cross the lawns at other places.<sup>43</sup>

Notable in the early photographs as well as a 1948 aerial photograph of the school are walkways hugging the building and leading away from it to the streets and sidewalks (Figure 15). The 1948 aerial photograph also shows a large ovoid driveway that provided vehicular access to the main entrance and a north-south walkway leading from the southeast wing (the Boy's Gym) to the athletic fields to the south of the school. Pesman would certainly have considered the school's proximity to the City Ditch, which for the first few decades of the school's existence ran through Washington Park and north to City Park. Constructed in 1867, the waterway was open as it ran through and alongside the grounds of South High School and Washington Park. The ditch carried irrigation water to parks and communities along it and, long after Pesman's design, would have served the Victory Gardens planted by the Washington Park community members on the South High School grounds during World War II. The 1948 aerial shows the ditch running next to a graded road, which was then known as Buchtel Parkway.<sup>44</sup> In 1956, torrential rains caused the City Ditch to overflow at South High, creating a "lake" on the athletic field below the school.<sup>45</sup> As the planning for the 1957 All-City Stadium was underway, the school district addressed the problem of future flooding by sending the ditch underground on the school grounds, running the irrigation water through a 48-inch pipe.<sup>46</sup> Although research did not reveal when the west parking lot was constructed and the ovoid vehicular driveway replaced with a concrete walkway, the change had taken place by 1957, as shown in the aerial photo in Figure 15.

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<sup>43</sup> Pesman, "Landscape Development of School Grounds," p. 49.

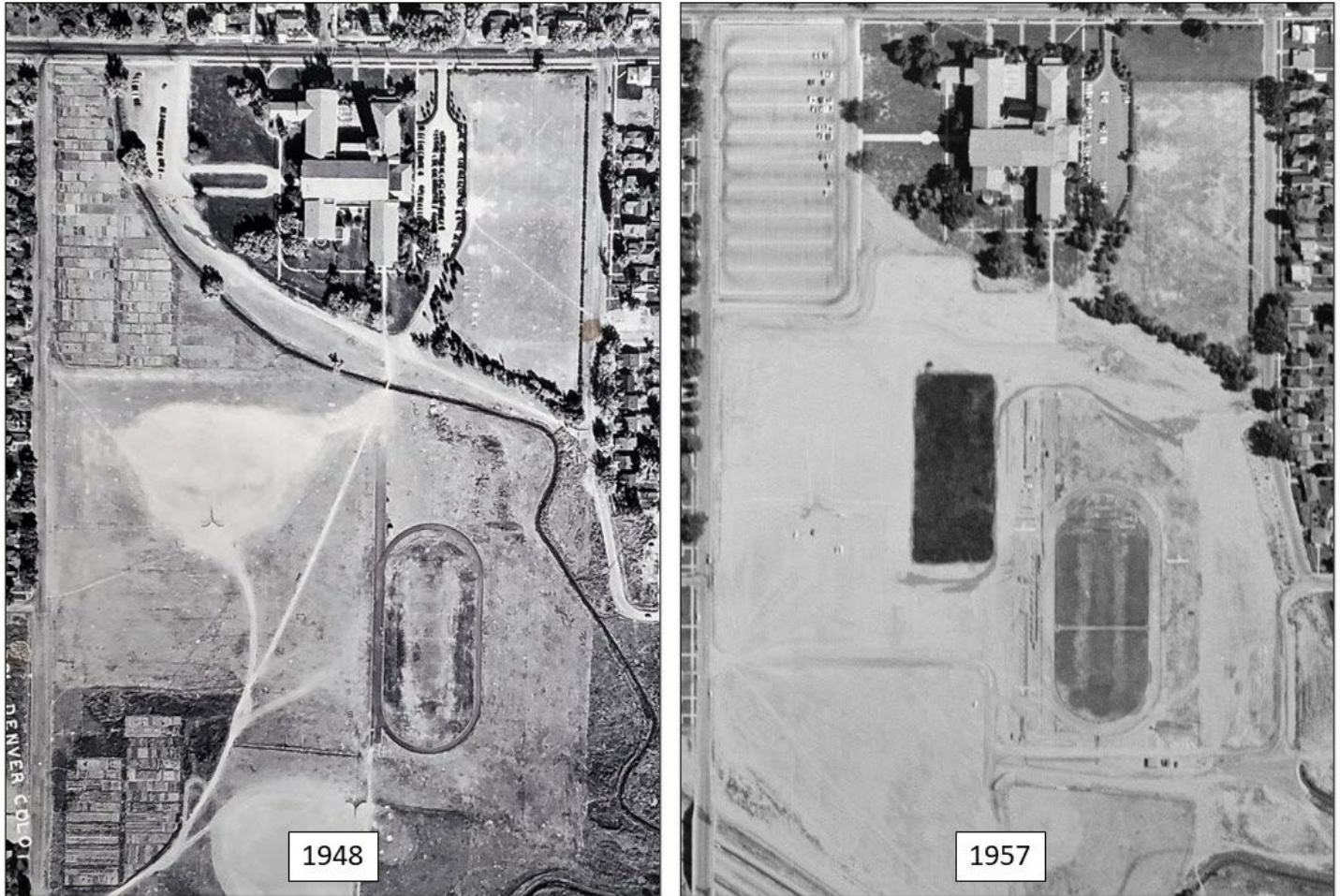
<sup>44</sup> 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Denver, Volume 5, Sheet 1022-1023

<sup>45</sup> "Sewer Project Urged for South High Area," *Denver Post*, August 3, 1956, p 3.

<sup>46</sup> "South High Field Plan OK", *Denver Post*, September 20, 1956, p. 2.

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**Figure 15. 1948 aerial photograph, left, showing the City Ditch's proximity to South High School. Note the WWII-era Victory Gardens in the upper and lower left. These served the surrounding Washington Park neighborhood during and after the war and were irrigated by the City Ditch (Source: SHAFI collections). On the right is a 1957 aerial showing the school and grounds after the City Ditch had been re-engineered to run underground. The All-City Stadium, which was constructed that year, appears to be a work in progress (Source: Historicaerials.com).**

### **Allen Tupper True**

In 1934 the school's artistic environment was further enhanced when, funded by the federal New Deal program, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), muralist Allen True painted the two murals that flank the foyer at the main entry of the school.<sup>47</sup> Widely recognized today as one of the most important artists of the twentieth century American West, Allen Tupper True was a product of Colorado. He was born in 1881 in Colorado Springs and, after living in Texas and Mexico, his family moved to Denver, where he attended Manual Training High School, graduating in 1899. His mother, Margaret Allen Tupper True, was strongly influential in education in Denver and served as head of the DPS District 1 School Board from 1906 to 1908.<sup>48</sup> After a year at the University of Denver, young Allen decided that he would pursue a career in art, and he enrolled as a student at the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington, DC, although he soon moved to the prestigious

<sup>47</sup> Simmons, Simmons, and Anstey, p. 8; *Denver Post*, June 3, 1934, p. 24.

<sup>48</sup> Goodstein, p. 172-173



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Howard Pyle School in Wilmington, Delaware to study illustration. Under the tutelage of Pyle, and with the encouragement and fellowship of classmates such as N. C. Wyeth, True began his career in magazine illustration and established himself as an illustrator and fine artist. He assisted British muralist Frank Brangwyn in London with murals for the Panama-Pacific Exposition from 1913 to 1915, traveling to San Francisco to install them, and it was his work with Brangwyn that enabled him to have genuine success as a muralist in his own right.

True's first mural job was for Anne Evans, daughter of Governor John Evans, in 1912 (she would remain a supporter and patron of his work).<sup>49</sup> In 1917 True was awarded a commission to paint eight murals for the Wyoming State Capitol Building. This was his first big murals commission, and the beginning of his recognition as a master muralist.<sup>50</sup> He would produce murals for the Missouri State Capitol building (1922-1925) and the Colorado State Capitol building (1934-1940), the Denver Public Library (1912-1913), and many, many others.<sup>51</sup> His relationship with Fisher and Fisher extended beyond the murals he painted to adorn their buildings and other works, such as the Colorado National Bank Building (1925-1933) and the Voorhees Memorial (1920). In 1928, Arthur Fisher designed a home in Littleton, south of Denver, for True, his wife, Emma, and their children.<sup>52</sup> True and his wife divorced in 1934, shortly before he painted the murals at South High School.<sup>53</sup> In a letter to Frank Brangwyn he noted that the divorce "rather messed the whole picture" but that he intended to keep on painting murals, which were at the time mostly funded by the Works Progress Administration, a federal New Deal program that provided artists with work. True told Brangwyn that mural work was "practically nonexistent except for work under government supervision ... I did quite a bit of work under this set-up for a big psychiatric hospital, a high school and other public building in Denver—in short, just carried on."<sup>54</sup>

True does not appear to have written much else about the murals at South.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, they have been considered an important part of his works in Denver. In September of 1992, an effort to restore the murals was undertaken by the South High Alumni, spearheaded by Donald McIntosh, chairman of the South High School Historic Committee. The group obtained an assessment of the murals' condition and a quote for restoration from the Western Center for the Conservation of Fine Arts (WCCFA).<sup>56</sup> Although both murals were noted to have cracking, it is unclear if the cracks were repaired (they are still visible but appear stable). The assessment also noted that the murals were in need of cleaning, which appears to have been done at some point afterwards.

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<sup>49</sup> True and Kirby, p. 98-99.

<sup>50</sup> True and Kirby pp. 236-238.

<sup>51</sup> True and Kirby, pp 455-457,

<sup>52</sup> True and Kirby, p. 282-283.

<sup>53</sup> Allen and Emma True's divorce is discussed at length in True and Kirby's *Allen True: An American Artist*.

<sup>54</sup> True and Kirby, p. 335.

<sup>55</sup> This should not be interpreted to mean that further research would be fruitless. True's biographers, his daughter Jere True and granddaughter Victoria Tupper Kirby, relied heavily on his letters and other papers, and they discuss the South murals very little. Further research into True's papers, which are collected at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, might reveal more. It is possible that he was distracted by the dissolution of his marriage and was just trying to get through the days.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Carmen F. Bria, Jr., Chief Conservator, to Mr. Donald McIntosh, September 29, 1992. Letter in the collections of South High Alumni and Friends, Inc.

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### **South High in the post-World War II years**

By the late 1950s, with baby boomers descending en masse on the schools, overcrowding once again became a serious issue. In 1959-60 the number of students at South was at a peak, and classroom space was far short of what was needed. In 1961, Superintendent Kenneth Oberholzer told the School Board that boundaries should be redrawn, and noted that South was the most strained, with a student body of 2,415 students filling the school, which had an estimated capacity of 1,920 students.<sup>57</sup> Subsequently many students found themselves attending new high schools farther from the city center, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. In September of 1962, the School Board approved funding for construction of an 18-classroom addition (Figure 16) and an auxiliary Girl's Gym, and the district hired noted school architect Charles Gordon Lee to design them.



**Figure 16. South addition to the high school, designed by Charles Gordon Lee and completed in 1963. Source: SHAFI collections.  
Charles Gordon Lee**

The architect Charles Gordon Lee was a member in the Colorado Chapter of the AIA and the Denver Planning Board. Lee was born in 1918 in Hutchinson, Kansas. He received his degree in architecture in 1940 from the University of Pennsylvania, and from 1941 to 1942 studied with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin East. He served as a Captain in the Air Force during the Second World War, and returned to study further with Wright in 1946, at Taliesin West. Unlike Taliesin

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apprentices who made a career of working with and for Wright, Lee set out to become a master architect in his own right and came to Denver in 1948. He worked with G. M. Musick and, after briefly returning to military service, he opened his own practice in 1952. Lee often worked in association with Taliesin Associated Architects, helping the organization with projects like the Mission 66 Beaver Meadows Visitor Center at Rocky Mountain National Park. He became known for his work on school buildings (he completed nine schools for Denver Public Schools between 1951 and 1967), usually employing a clear, modernist vision in his designs. He is known for St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Knapp Elementary School, Denison Elementary School, Capitol Mortuary Office Building, and several chapels for the Mortuary. As well, Lee designed many residences, schools, and churches.<sup>58</sup>

While the majority of Lee's oeuvre is clearly modernist, it is notable that, for the 1963 addition to South High School, his design was meant to fit as seamlessly with the 1926 Fisher and Fisher building as he could have made it. From the concrete amalgam foundation, meant to mimic the original's stone foundation, to the brick bonding pattern that is identical to the original building's, the addition is, at least on the exterior, difficult to distinguish from the original, although the east addition is somewhat simplified and easier to perceive from a distance as an addition. This is counter to Lee's boxy, modernist, 1957 design for a gymnasium addition to the Beaux-Arts Style North High School. While North's addition is far more detached than is South's, it is very clearly not temporally or stylistically related to the original building.

Unfortunately, Lee's time was not as long as it might have been. In 1966, only a few years after the completion of South High School's addition, Charles Gordon Lee took his own life at age 48, leaving his wife, Polly, to raise their two children, who were 14 and 11 at the time.

### **Life and Social Change at South High School**

As with the rest of society, South High experienced some "growing pains" as the country addressed racial inequality in the later part of the twentieth century. From 1920, the *Aeronaut* was the name of the school newspaper and yearbook and was considered an important mascot and icon for South's students (Although South's sports teams were always "The Rebels," a name that was consistent, in its way, with the other directional schools: North's teams were the Vikings, West's were the Cowboys, and East's were the Angels). The fanciful, adventurous aeronaut was a fitting symbol, as the idea of air travel in the 1920s was enough to capture youthful imaginations and allow them to feel as if the age of flight belonged to them. However, as air travel became more accessible, with commercial flights and airports crossing and dotting the country in the early 1930s, it became less intriguing. In 1931, a second student newspaper, *The Confederate*, began to be published alongside *The Aeronaut*,<sup>59</sup> and within a couple of years the paper had transitioned to be called solely *The Confederate*, reflecting an imagined "southern" affiliation due to its geographic position among the directional high schools.<sup>60</sup> Although the yearbook did not, at first, follow suit—it had a variety of names and themes, changing yearly—by the 1950s it was consistently entitled "Johnny Reb" and the school's mascot was a profile of a Confederate soldier.

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<sup>57</sup> *Denver Post*, June 1, 1961, p.3.

<sup>58</sup> Christman, p. 39; 44.

<sup>59</sup> "Students of South Will Publish Two Papers," *Denver Post*, September 20, 1931, p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> "Times Have Changed and So Must the Mascot," *The Gargoyle*, September 19, 2019.

<https://denversouthgargoyle.com/2825/showcase/the-times-have-changed-and-so-must-the-mascot/>



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Likely because non-white students at South were very few, the Confederate iconography raised no known red flags among students or faculty for most of the mid-twentieth century. It was not until the non-white demographic of South's student body had increased considerably due to busing in the 1970s that students and teachers began to question the iconographic affiliation with the southern confederacy and its racist associations. In 1980, the school's first African-American principal, Harold Scott, proposed changing the team name to the Penguins, but was unsuccessful in his attempts to convince the school board. In 2009, the school began to use "Gertie Gargoyle" as a mascot, and the student newspaper became *The Gargoyle* (although the team name, the Rebels, was retained). It was not until 2021, after a vote of the student body, that a new mascot and team name was chosen. South High School is now the home of the Ravens (Figure 17).



**Figure 17. The new logo and mascot of South High School, as of 2021. Photograph by Corbett AHS, Inc., 5/27/2022.**

Other changes have taken place as well. Today, the school is the location of a magnet program for English Language Acquisition (ELA), serving students who have recently immigrated to the United States. This program was the subject of a 2017 book by author Helen Thorpe, *The Newcomers*. Acting as an anchor in the face of change, the South High School Alumni and Friends, Inc. prove that respect for the school's history is strong, even in the face of welcome progress.

South's alumni are proud and take very seriously the preservation of the school's history. In the basement of the school, in the former JROTC rifle range, SHAFI curates and maintains a museum of items donated over the years by alumni (Figure 18). Although hidden, it holds answers to the school's past for any student who cares to visit.



**Figure 18. The JROTC rifle range in a photo taken in the 1940s (above) and the same room today as it serves at the South High Alumni and Friends, Inc. Museum (below). Sources: SHAFI collections and Corbett AHS, Inc.**

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Pesman, M. Walter, "Landscape Development of School Grounds," in *The American School Board Journal*, February, 1928. Vol 56, No. 2, p. 47-49; 137.

Rockefeller Center: Art and History. <https://www.rockefellercenter.com/art/morning-present-evening/>.

South High School / Denver South High School  
Name of Property

Denver, Colorado  
County and State

Rothfork, John. 1977. Transcendentalism and Henry Barnard's "School Architecture. The Journal of General Education, Fall 1977, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 173-187.

Simmons, Thomas H. and R. Laurie Simmons, with Mary Therese Anstey. Top Down and Bottoms Up Intervention—The Great Depression, Federal Relief Programs, and World War II, 1930-45. Historic Context produced for Discover Denver. 2016. [Historic Context: 1930 to 1945: Tops Down and Bottoms Up Intervention | Discover Denver](#).

South High School newspapers and yearbooks, photographs and document collections contained in the collection of South High Alumni and Friends, Inc. (SHAFI), as cited in captions and footnotes.

Thorpe, Helen. 2017. *The Newcomers: Finding Refuge, Friendship, and Hope in America*. New York: Scribner.

True, Jere and Victoria Tupper Kirby. 2009. *Allen Tupper True: An American Artist*. San Francisco: Canyon Leap Press and Bozeman: Museum of the Rockies/Montana State University.

Zimmer, Amy. "The Murals of Allen True." *Colorado Virtual Library*, October 21, 2019.

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_



**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property**    10.7 (within NRHP Boundary)

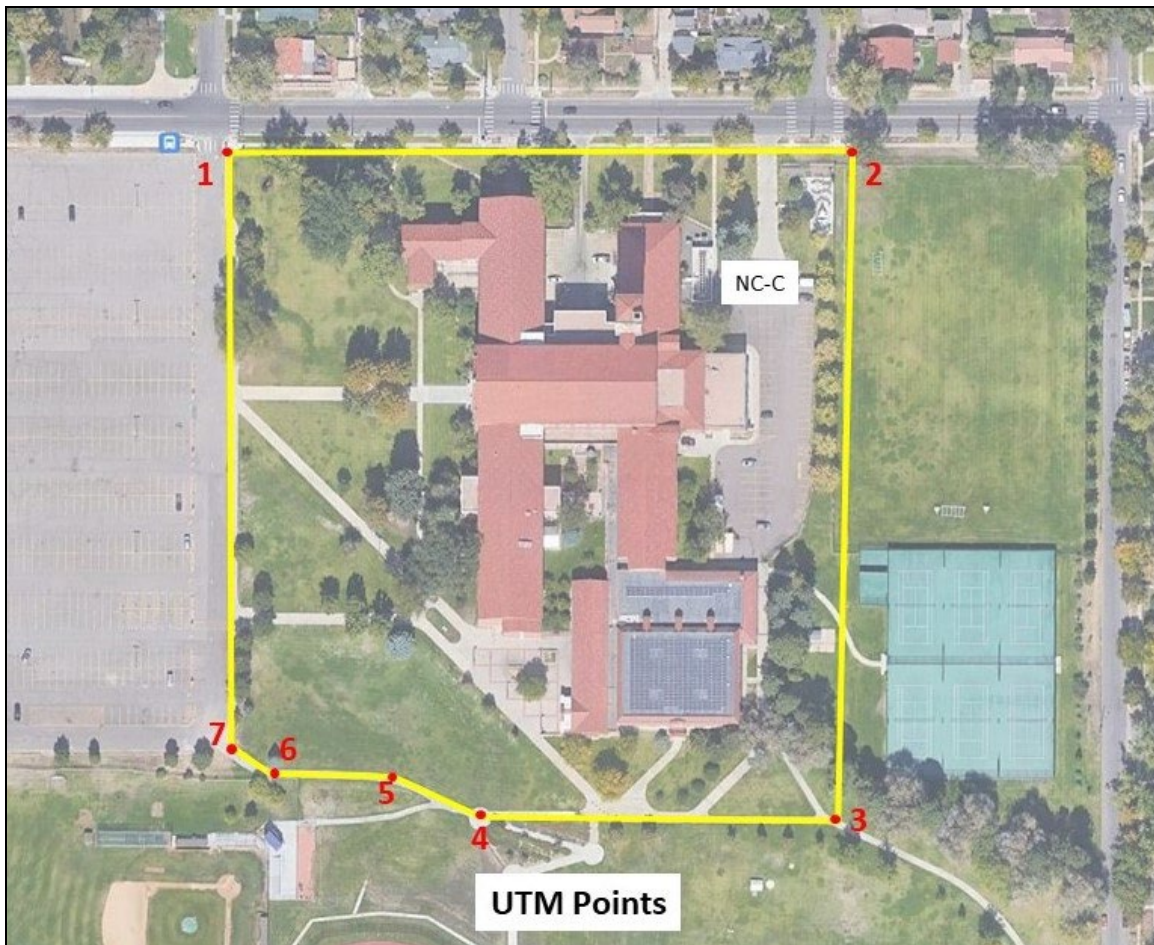
**UTM References**

Datum:

**NAD 1927** \_\_\_\_\_ or **NAD 1983**  \_\_\_\_\_

(Insert additional UTM references as needed.)

<b>1</b>	<u>13S</u> Zone	<u>502788mE</u> Easting	<u>4393670mN</u> Northing	<b>5</b>	<u>13S</u> Zone	<u>502841mE</u> Easting	<u>4393463mN</u> Northing
<b>2</b>	<u>13S</u> Zone	<u>502990mE</u> Easting	<u>4393669mN</u> Northing	<b>6</b>	<u>13S</u> Zone	<u>502801mE</u> Easting	<u>4393465mN</u> Northing
<b>3</b>	<u>13S</u> Zone	<u>502989mE</u> Easting	<u>4393449mN</u> Northing	<b>7</b>	<u>13S</u> Zone	<u>502788mE</u> Easting	<u>4393472mN</u> Northing
<b>4</b>	<u>13S</u> Zone	<u>502871mE</u> Easting	<u>4393451mN</u> Northing				





South High School / Denver South High School  
Name of Property

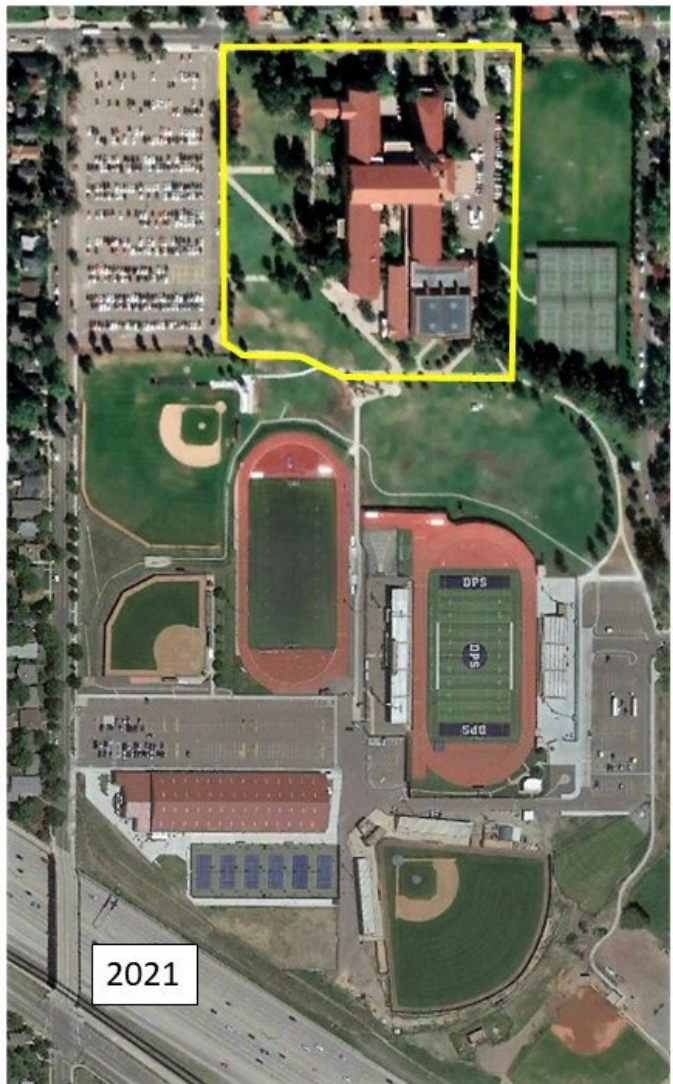
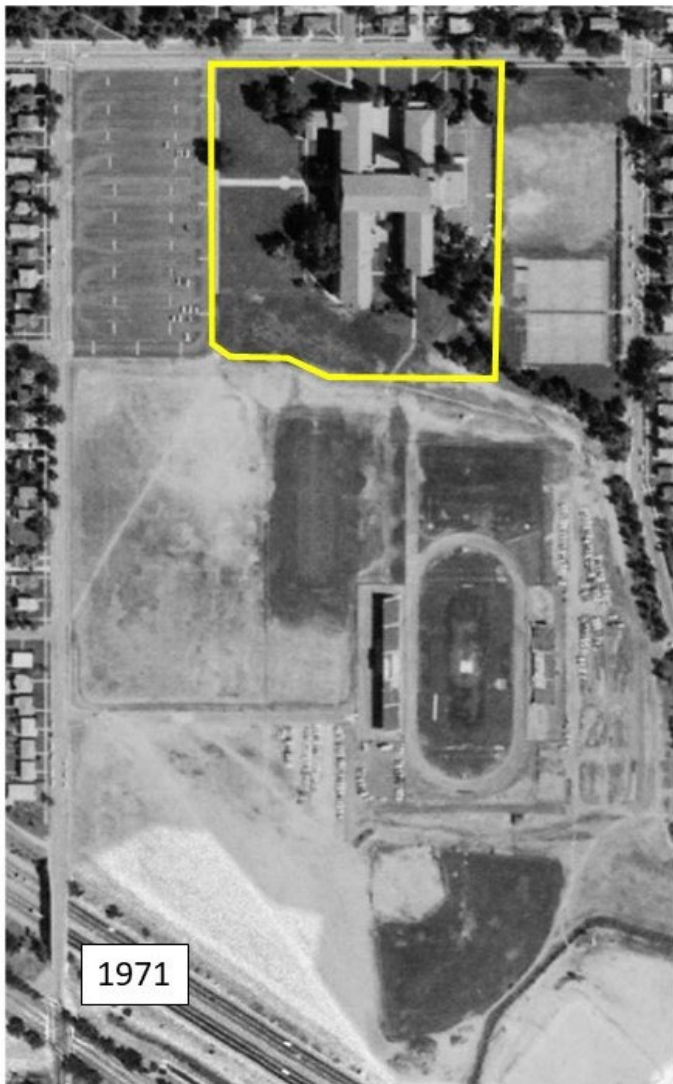
Denver, Colorado  
County and State

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

The boundary of the resource is a rough rectangle that lies in the upper middle half of the legal parcel upon which the school sits, which is the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 23, T4, R68. The boundary follows East Louisiana Avenue on the north, the east edge of the west parking lot on the west, then the south boundary follows the concrete walkway that begins at the southeast corner of the west parking lot as it curves slightly southeast, then straight east until the point at which the walkway passes the school and begins to again curve southeast. At this point the boundary takes a 90 degree turn north, meeting and following the fence line and tree alignment that bounds the west side of the tennis courts and field until it meets East Louisiana Avenue.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The resource boundary was drawn to exclude most non-contributing resources that lie within the legal parcel boundary containing South High School but were constructed outside the period of significance. The west parking lot was present by about 1957 but was not found to contribute to the historic significance of the school and was easily excluded from the resource boundary. The field to the east of the school building was also excluded as it was not found to contribute to the historic significance of the school. To the south of the resource boundary, the athletic facilities have been largely constructed or heavily remodeled since the 1990s. Aerial photographs, below, show the contrast in the athletic fields from 1971 to 2021 (roughly the period of time that has elapsed since the period of significance).



Sources: <https://www.historicaerials.com> (1971); Google Earth (2021).

South High School / Denver South High School  
Name of Property

Denver, Colorado  
County and State

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### 11. Form Prepared By

---

name/title Kathleen Corbett, Ph.D. (for the South High Alumni and Friends Association)  
organization Corbett AHS, Inc. date \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number 4659 East Amherst Avenue telephone (925) 351-7417  
city or town Denver state Colorado zip code 80222  
e-mail kcorb58@gmail.com

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### Additional Documentation

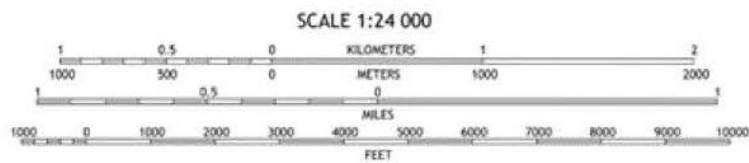
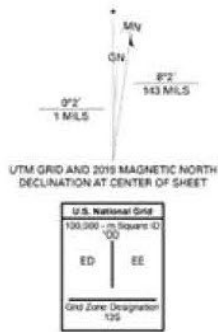
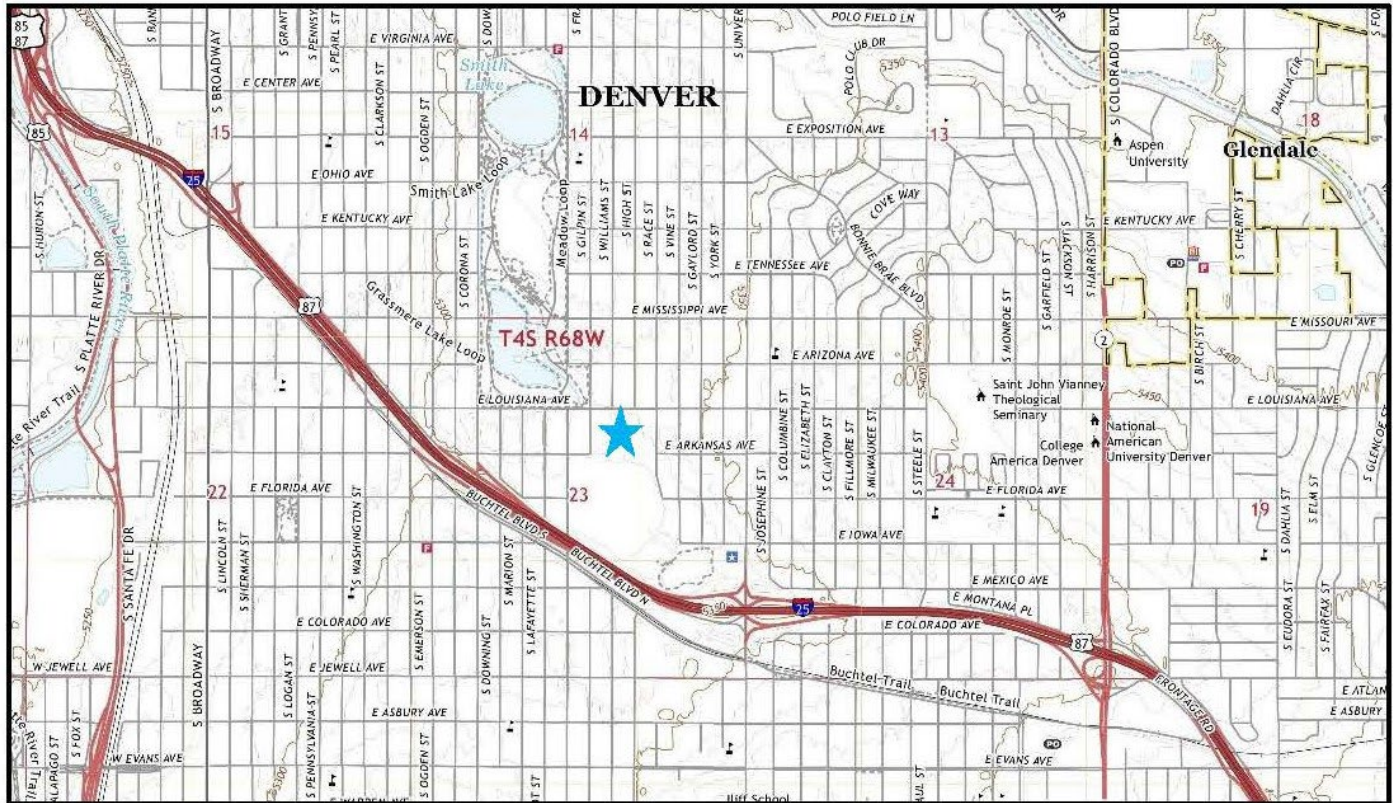
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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) or **Google Earth** map indicating the property's location.  
A **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 or FPO for any additional items)

# Maps

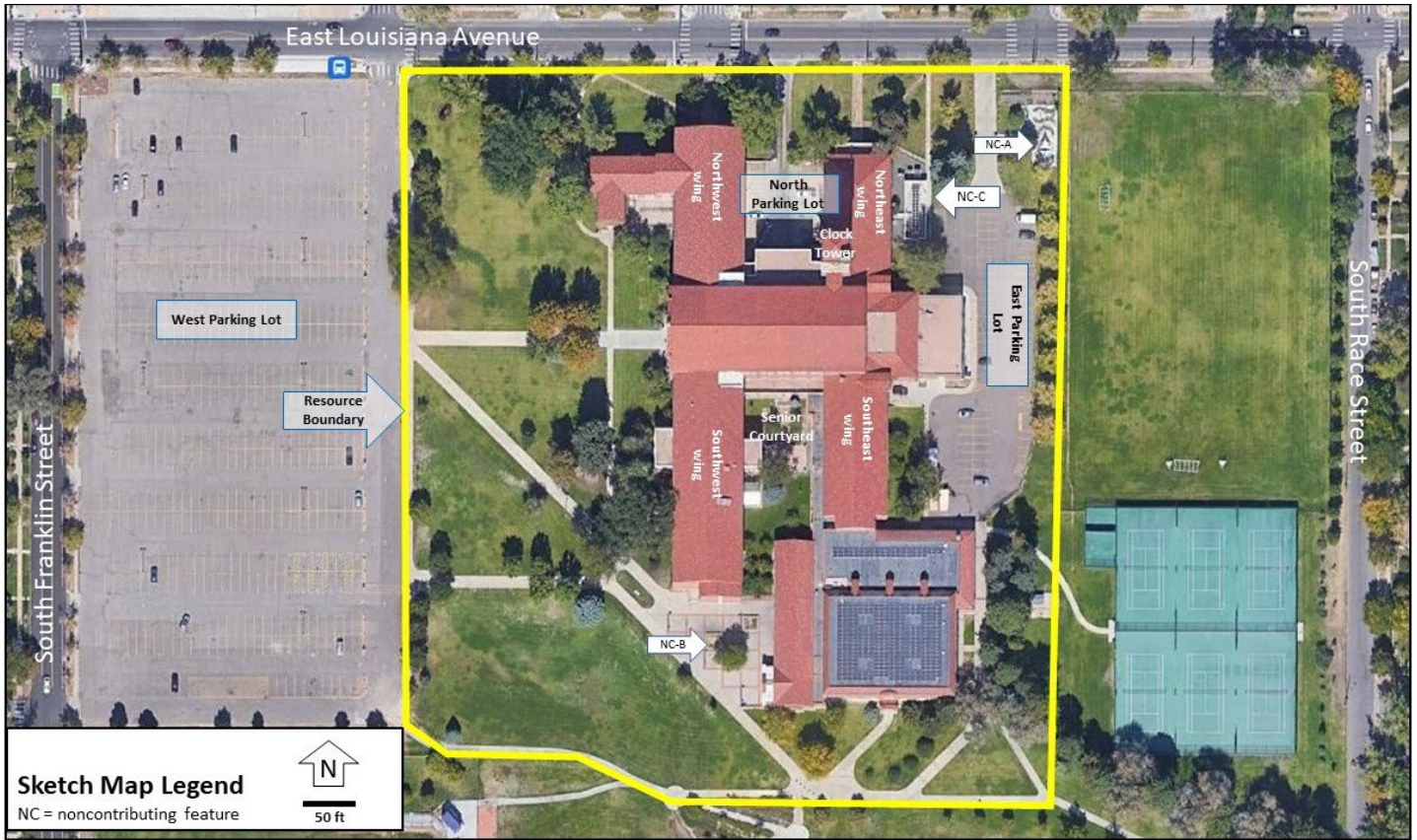
## Topographic Map



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
NORTH AMERICAN VERTICAL DATUM OF 1988  
ENGLEWOOD, CO  
2019



**Sketch Map**



South High School / Denver South High School  
Name of Property

Denver, Colorado  
County and State

**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

**5DV.2092, South High School**  
**City and County of Denver, Denver, Colorado**  
All photographs taken by Kathleen Corbett for Corbett AHS, Inc.

No.	Date	Dir. facing	Description
1	5/27/2022	ESE	South High School, west-facing side (primary façade)
2	11/10/2020	E	Detail of brickwork, west facade
3	5/27/2022	ENE	Detail of brickwork, Star of David, north facade
4	11/10/2021	NE	Primary façade and main entrance
5	5/27/2022	E	Frieze above main entrance
6	5/27/2022	E	Detail, sculptural element
7	6/16/2022	N	Niche, West façade, north wing
8	5/27/2022	SSE	Detail, West Façade, west side of north el
9	6/16/2022	NNE	South wing, west facade
10	5/27/2022	NNE	Southwest corner of the south wing (1963 addition)
11	6/16/2022	SW	Northwest entrance and west end of north façade
12	5/27/2022	S	Northwest entrance
13	5/27/2022	S	Northeast entrance
14	5/27/2022	S	North courtyard/parking lot; north façade between wings
15	6/16/2022	S	North courtyard/parking lot
16	6/16/2022	ESE	Detail: Gargoyle at north parking lot fence
17	5/27/2022	WSW	Detail: Gargoyle at north parking lot fence
18	5/27/2022	SSE	Clock tower and north parking lot
19	5/27/2022	NNW	Clock tower, east and north sides
20	5/27/2022	SSW	Detail: Clock (north side of tower)
21	6/21/2021	E	View from top story of the clock tower
22	6/21/2021	WSW	View over the rooftop to the west from the clock tower
23	5/27/2022	SSW	East façade, north wing showing clocktower
24	6/16/2022	WNW	East façade, Girl's gym and 1963 addition



South High School / Denver South High School

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Name of Property

County and State

No.	Date	Dir. facing	Description
25	6/16/2022	WSW	East façade, south wing
26	5/27/2022	SW	1989 Gym addition
27	5/27/2022	ESE	Senior Courtyard from the second story of the southwest wing
28	5/27/2022	N	South façade and south entrance of the 1989 Gym addition
29	6/16/2022	NW	South façade of the 1989 Gym addition
30	6/16/2022	E	Main entrance to the 989 Gym addition
31	6/16/2022	NE	South side of the 1963 addition and south gate to Senior Courtyard
32	5/27/2022	N	North Mural, main entrance foyer
33	5/27/2022	S	South Mural, main entrance foyer
34	5/27/2022	E	Hallway floor material at junction of 1926 building and 1963 addition
35	5/27/2022	E	Fourth floor classroom, showing original floor material
36	5/27/2022	SE	Fourth floor lunchroom
37	5/27/2022	SSW	Inside the loggia above the main entrance
38a	5/27/2022	N/A	Terra cotta lion, loggia ceiling
38b	5/27/2022	N/A	Terra cotta lion, loggia ceiling
39	6/16/2022	E	Auditorium: proscenium arch
40	6/16/2022	W	Auditorium: house from the stage
41	6/16/2022	S	Auditorium: stage, and orchestra pit
42	6/16/2022	SSE	Auditorium: stage, and orchestra pit
43	6/16/2022	N/A	Auditorium: sculpture, "Guarding the Tree of Knowledge"
44	2/12/2020	ESE	Auditorium: arched doorway to backstage, brick wainscotting
45	6/16/2022	E	Auditorium: backstage wall showing names of past productions
46	5/27/2022	ESE	Senior Hall
47	5/27/2022	N/A	Library bracket sculptures: Owl and Rooster
48	5/27/2022	N/A	Library bracket sculptures: Penguin and Parrot
49	2/12/2020	S	South High Alumni and Friends, Inc., museum
50	6/21/2021	NW	Clock tower interior, clock control mechanism
51	5/27/2022	E	Memorial plaque honoring alumni who died in WWII

South High School / Denver South High School

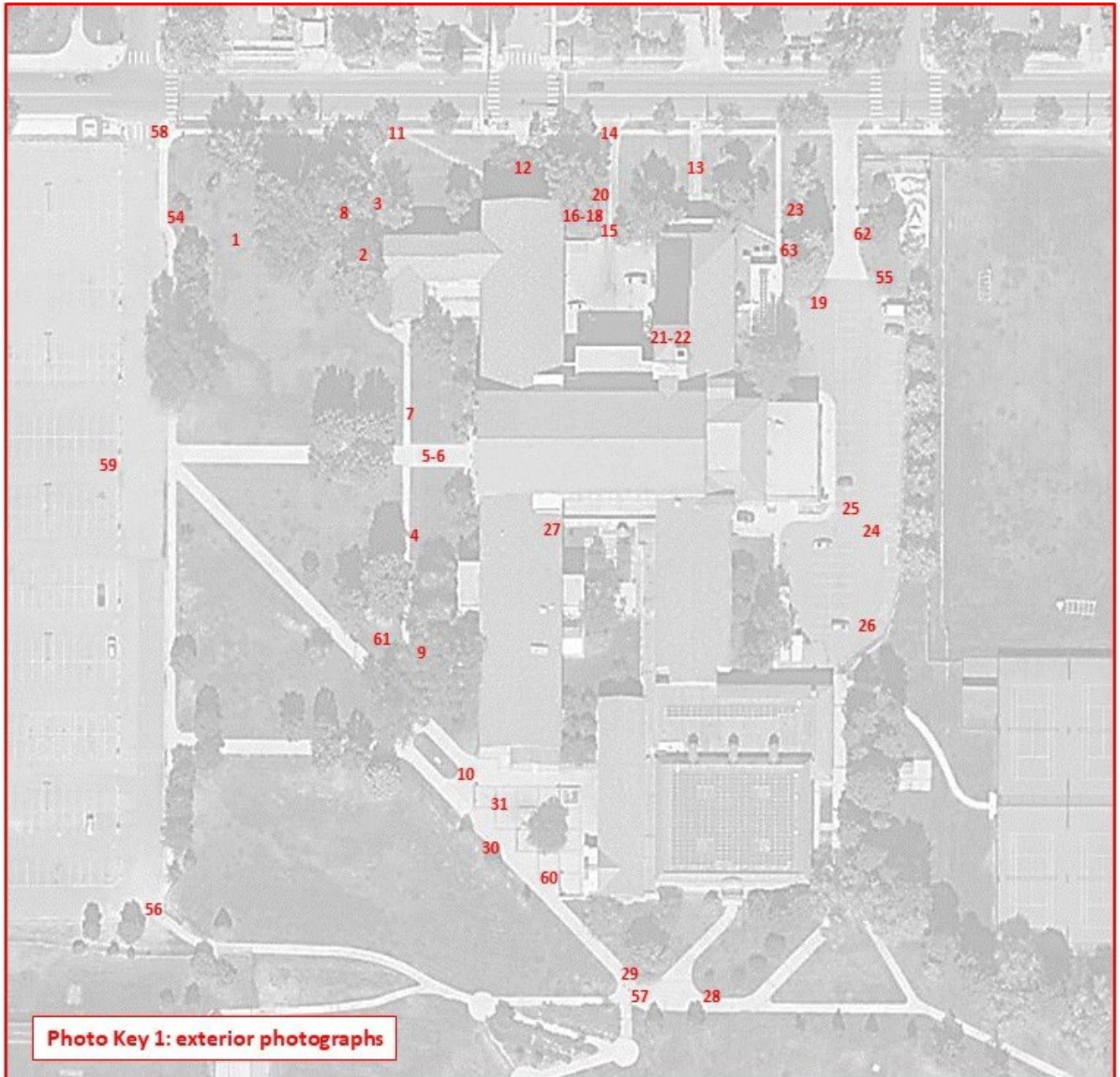
Denver, Colorado

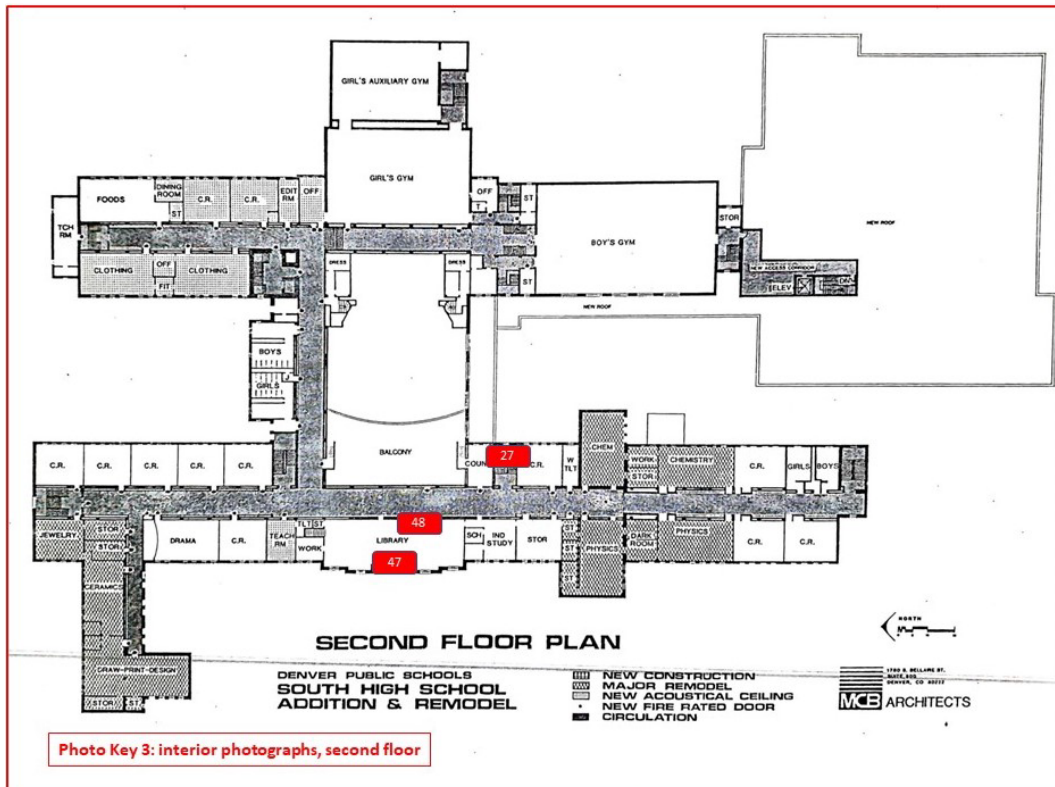
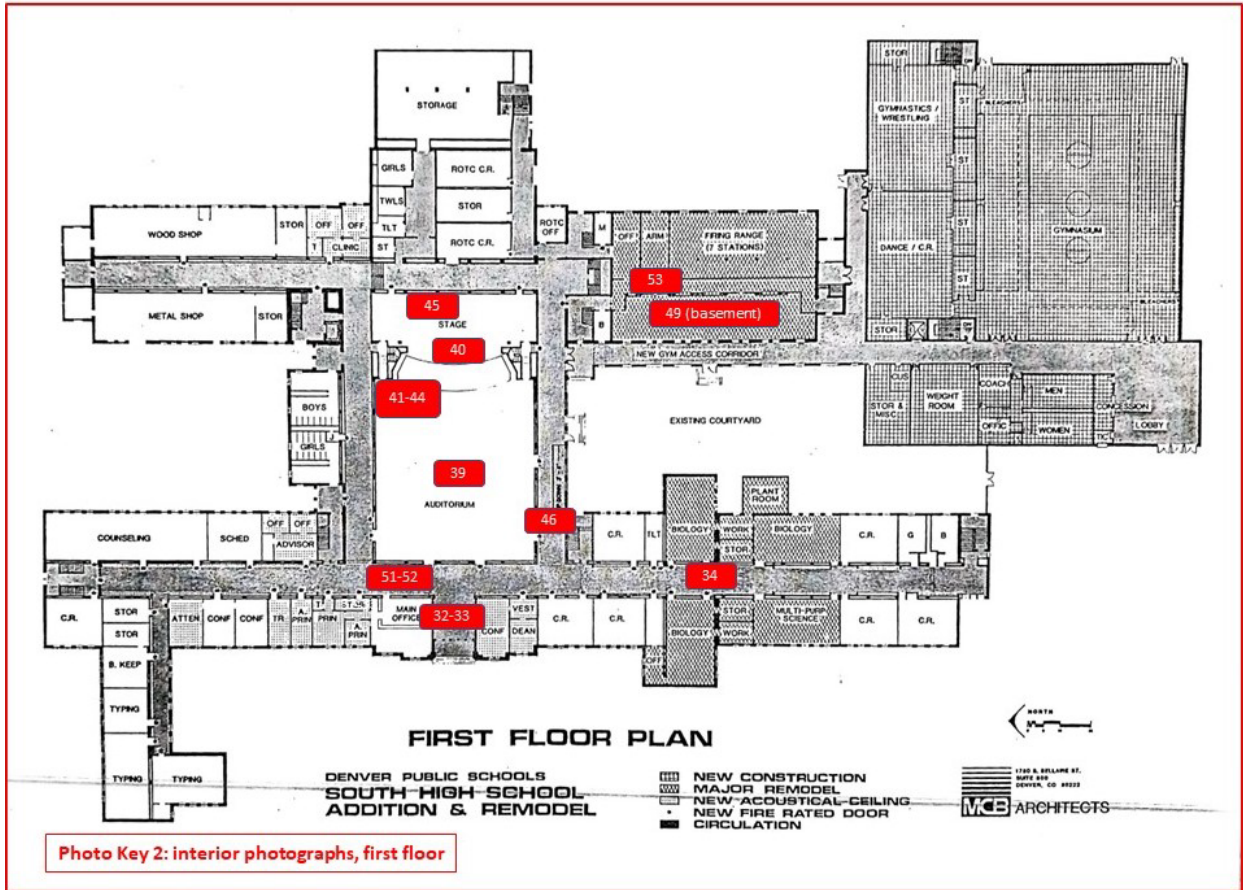
Name of Property

County and State

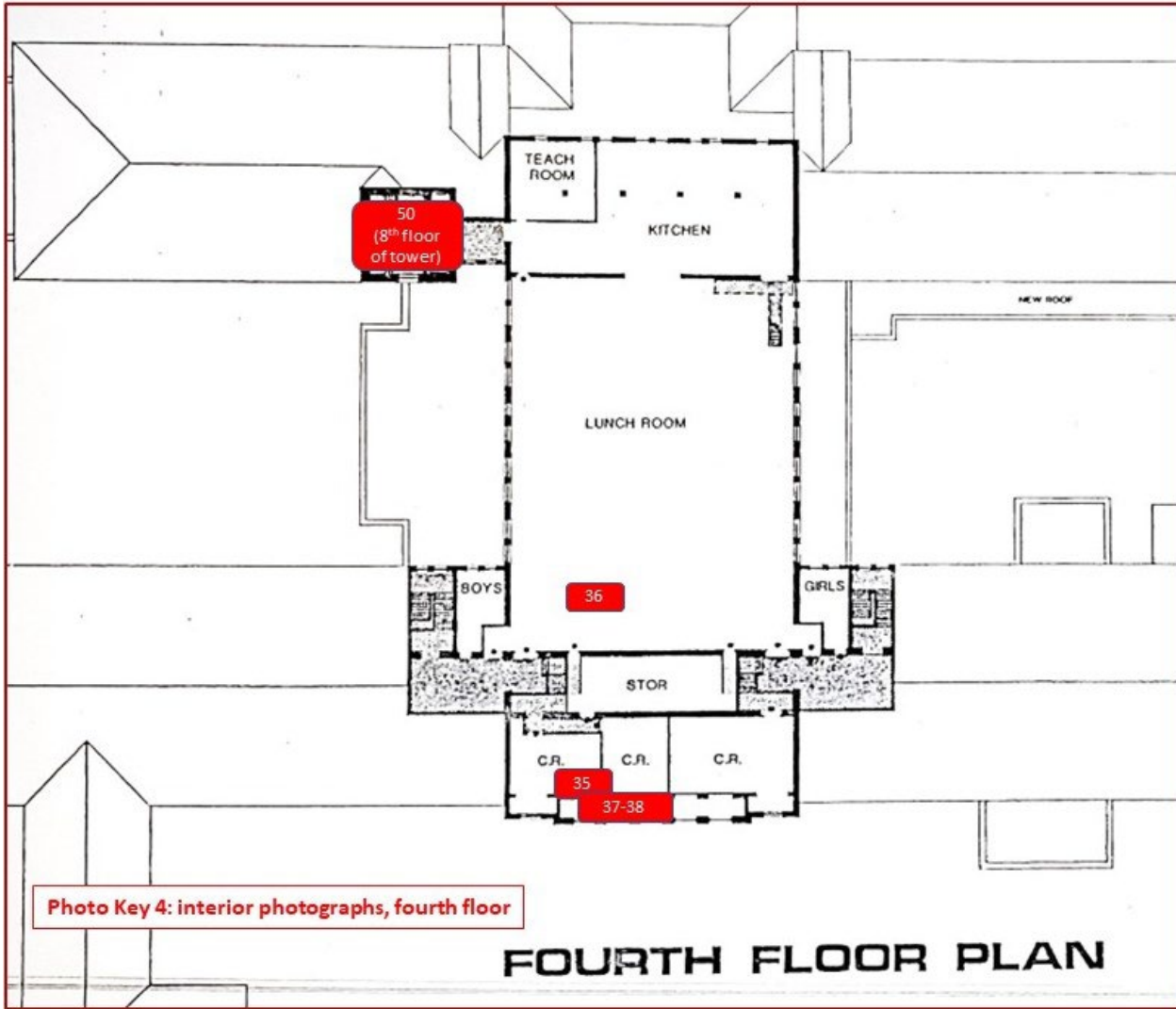
No.	Date	Dir. facing	Description
52	5/27/2022	E	Memorial plaque honoring Medal of Honor recipient, Keith L. Ware
53	6/16/2022	SE	Exhibit honoring South High's veterans, JROTC hallway
54	6/16/2022	ESE	West lawn
55	6/16/2022	S	East parking lot
56	6/16/2022	E	Walkway along southern edge of the resource boundary
57	6/16/2022	W	Walkway along the southern edge of the resource boundary
58	6/16/2022	SE	Sidewalk along the west edge of the resource boundary
59	6/16/2022	E	West side of the resource boundary, showing wide walkway to main entrance from the west parking lot
60	6/16/2022	N	Triangular landing area at the south end of the 1963 classroom addition, showing the three raised planters (noncontributing)
61	6/16/2022	ESE	English Oak tree listed on the Denver Forestry list of Champion and Notable Trees
62	5/27/2022	NE	The Learning Garden (noncontributing)
63	6/16/2022	SSE	Rectangular brick enclosure (noncontributing)

### Photograph Location Key Maps











South High School / Denver South High School

Denver, Colorado

Name of Property

County and State

<b>Supplemental Historic Photographs</b> <b>(All photographs courtesy of South High Alumni and Friends, Inc.)</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Estimated date or date range</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	1925	South High School under construction
2	1925-1926	Front façade, nearing or soon after completion
3	1925-1926	East and north facades, nearing or soon after completion
4	1925-1926	Main entrance and center of front (west) façade, nearing or soon after completion
5	1925- 1926	Center of east façade, nearing or soon after completion.
6	1926	The south side of the building, soon after completion. Note the projecting conservatory on the southwest wing to the left (demolished in 1962 for the classroom addition) and the open access to Senior Courtyard. The entrance to the Boy's gym is visible on the southeast wing, to the right.
7	1926	Senior Courtyard, entrance to Senior Hall on the south side of the building
8	1926-1930	Boys' physical education class, south of the school building
9	1926-1930	Girls' physical education class, south of the school building
10	1926-1930	Chemistry lab
11	1926-1930	Home economics (sewing) class
12	1926-1930	Interior of the conservatory on the south side of the southwest wing.
13	1926-1930	A chamber ensemble practicing
14	1926-1930	Auditorium
15	1926-1930	Students perform a play in the auditorium
16	1926-1930	The lunchroom on the 4 <sup>th</sup> floor
17	1926-1930	Looking out onto the loggia from the teacher's lunchroom
18	1926-1930	Teachers relaxing on the loggia
19	1935-1945	A formal dance in the Boy's Gym, southeast wing
20	1935-1945	The Boys' Gym
21	1926-1930	The Girls' Gym

South High School / Denver South High School

Denver, Colorado

Name of Property


County and State

<b>Supplemental Historic Photographs</b> <b>(All photographs courtesy of South High Alumni and Friends, Inc.)</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Estimated date or date range</b>	<b>Description</b>
22	1930-1935	Cadets of the JROTC practice military formation on the front lawn of the school
23	1930-1935	JROTC cadets lower the flag at the end of the day.
24	1930-1935	Boys gathering in Senior Hall
25	1930-1935	An elegant banquet in Senior Hall
26	1943	Members of the Girl's Rifle Club practice marksmanship in the JROTC rifle range in the basement of the southeast wing.
27	1963-1970	The 1963 classroom addition to the southwest wing of the school.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications 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.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**Name of Property:** SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL (5DV.2092)  
**City or Vicinity:** DENVER  
**County:** DENVER **State:** COLORADO  
**Photographer:** KATHLEEN CORBETT for Corbett AHS, Inc.  
**Dates Photographed:** 5/27/2022; 6/16/2022 (unless otherwise noted)

Photo number	Date	Direction facing	Description
			
1	5/27/2022	Facing ESE	South High School, west-facing side (primary façade)





2	11/10/2020	Facing E	Detail of brickwork, west facade
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3	5/27/2022	Facing ENE	Detail of brickwork, Star of David, north facade
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4	11/10/2021	Facing NE	Primary façade and main entrance
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5	5/27/2022	Facing E	Frieze above main entrance
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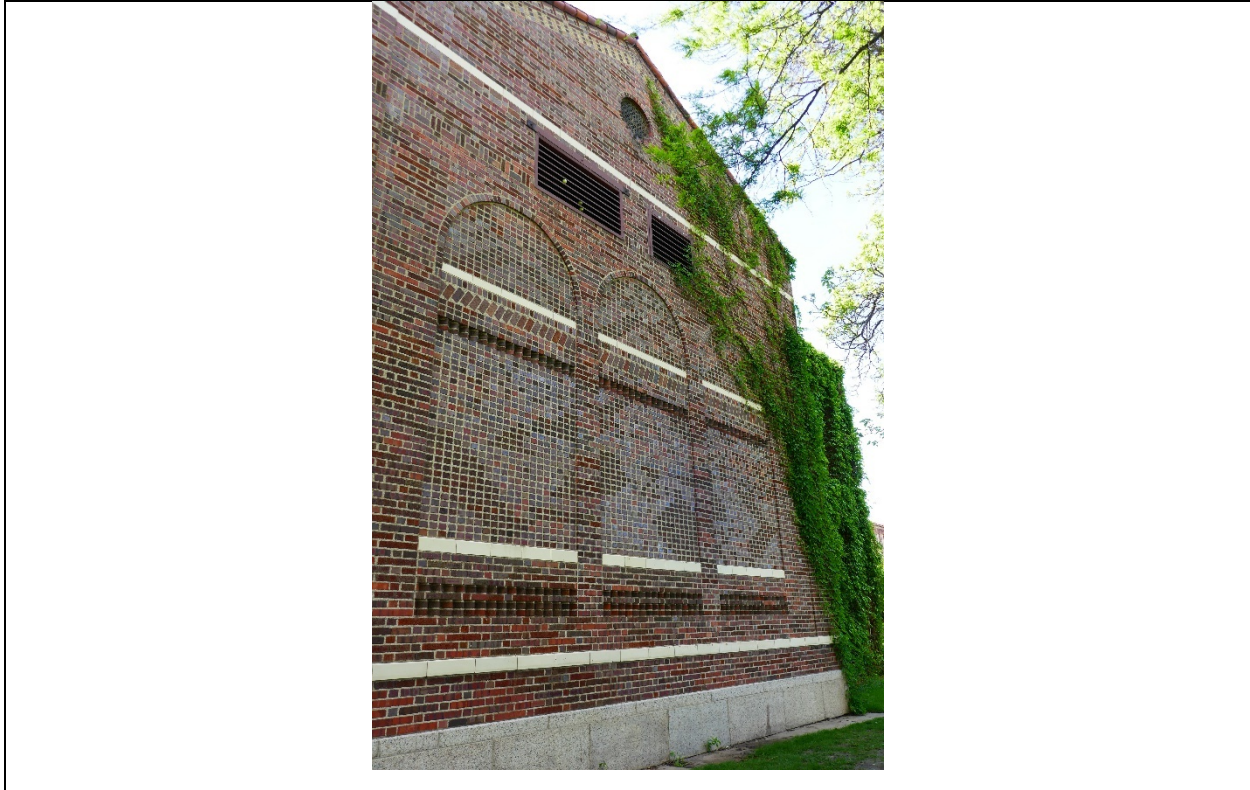


6	5/27/2022	Facing E	Detail, sculptural element
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7	6/16/2022	Facing N	Niche, West façade, north wing
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8	5/27/2022	Facing SSE	Detail, West Façade, west side of north el
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9	6/16/2022	Facing NNE	South wing, west facade
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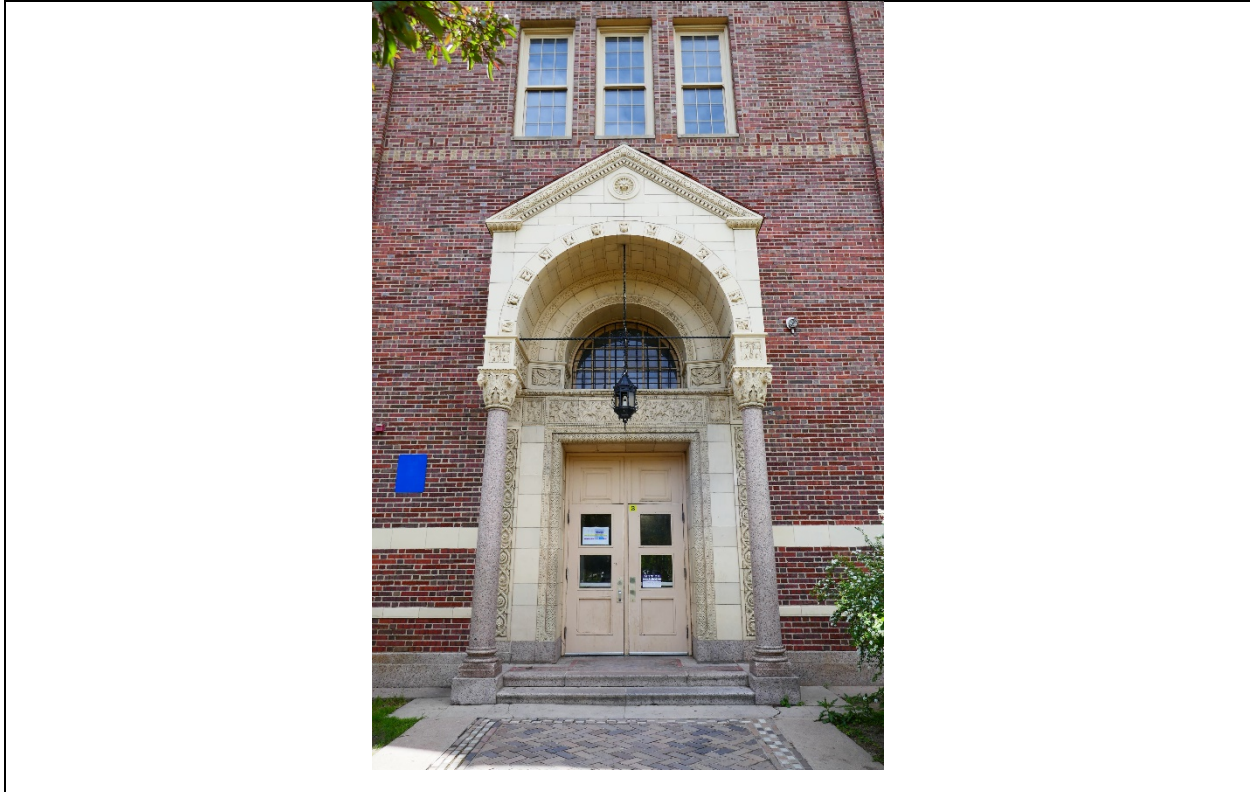


10	5/27/2022	Facing NNE	Southwest corner of the south wing (1963 add.)
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11	6/16/2022	Facing SW	NW entrance and west end of north façade
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12	5/27/2022	Facing S	Northwest entrance
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13	5/27/2022	Facing S	Northeast entrance
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14	5/27/2022	Facing S	North courtyard/parking lot; north façade between wings
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15	6/16/2022	Facing S	North courtyard/parking lot
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16	6/16/2022	Facing ESE	Detail: Gargoyle at north parking lot fence
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17	5/27/2022	Facing WSW	Detail: Gargoyle at north parking lot fence
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18	5/27/2022	Facing SSE	Clock tower and north parking lot
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19	5/27/2022	Facing SW	Clock tower, east and north sides
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20	5/27/2022	Facing SSW	Detail: Clock (north side of tower)
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21	6/21/2021	Facing E	The view east from the top story of the clock tower
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22	6/21/2021	Facing WSW	View over the rooftop to the west from the clock tower
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23	5/27/2022	Facing SSW	East façade, north wing showing clocktower
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24

6/16/2022

Facing NW

East façade, Girl's gym and 1963 addition



25

6/16/2022

Facing WSW

East façade, south wing





26

5/27/2022

Facing SW

1989 Gym addition



27

5/27/2022

Facing ESE

Senior Courtyard from the southwest wing





28	5/27/2022	Facing N	South façade and south entrance of the 1989 Gym addition
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29	6/16/2022	Facing NW	South façade of the 1989 Gym addition
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30	6/16/2022	Facing E	Main entrance to the 989 Gym addition
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31	6/16/2022	Facing NE	South façade of the 1963 addition and south gate to Senior Courtyard
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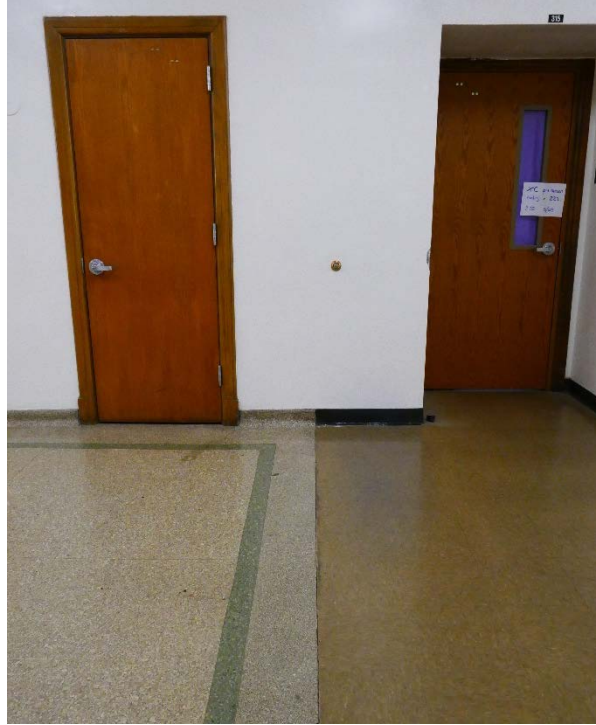




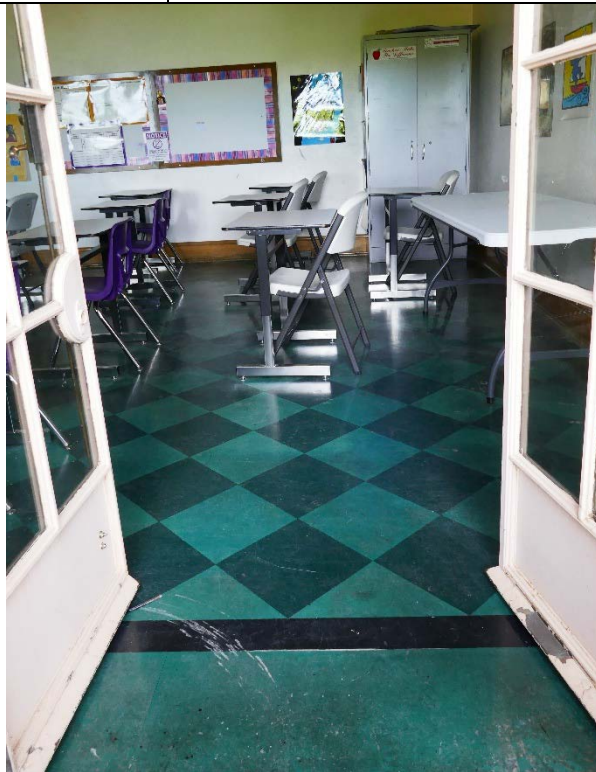
32	5/27/2022	Facing N	North Mural, main entrance foyer
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33	5/27/2022	Facing S	South Mural, main entrance foyer
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34	5/27/2022	Facing E	Hallway floor material at connection of 1926 building (L) and 1963 classroom addition (R)
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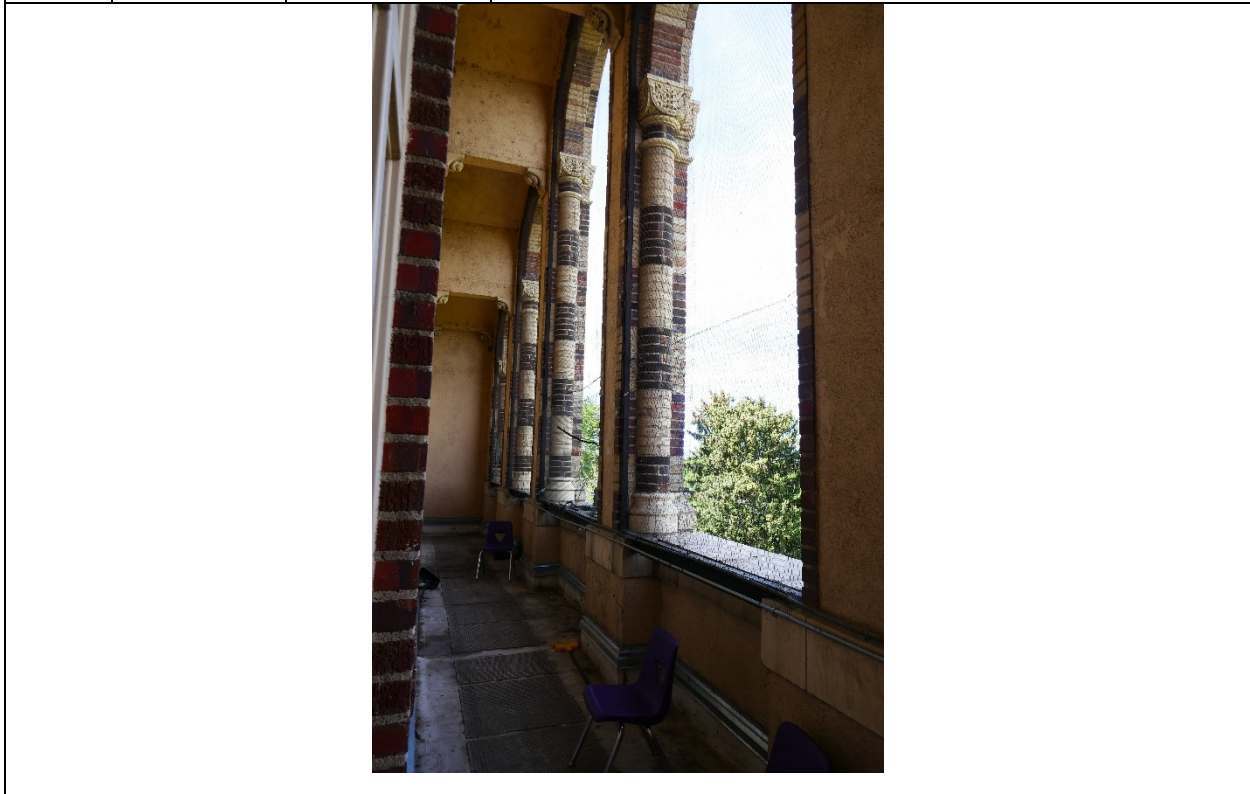


35	5/27/2022	Facing E	Fourth floor classroom, showing original floor material
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36	5/27/2022	SE	Fourth floor lunchroom
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37	5/27/2022	Facing SSW	Inside the loggia above the main entrance
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38a

5/27/2022

Facing N/A

Loggia detail: Terra cotta lion with corn cob, loggia



38b

5/27/2022

Facing N/A

Loggia detail: Terra cotta lion with bone





39

6/16/2022

Facing E

Auditorium: stage and proscenium arch



40

6/16/2022

Facing W

Auditorium: house from the stage





41	6/16/2022	Facing S	Auditorium: stage, and orchestra pit
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42	6/16/2022	Facing SSE	Auditorium: stage, and orchestra pit
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43	6/16/2022	Facing N/A	Auditorium: sculpture, "Guarding the Tree of Knowledge"
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44	2/12/2020	Facing ESE	Auditorium: arched doorway to backstage
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45	6/16/2022	Facing E	Auditorium: backstage wall with names of past productions
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46	5/27/2022	Facing ESE	Senior Hall
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47	5/27/2022	Facing N/A	Library bracket sculptures: Owl and Rooster
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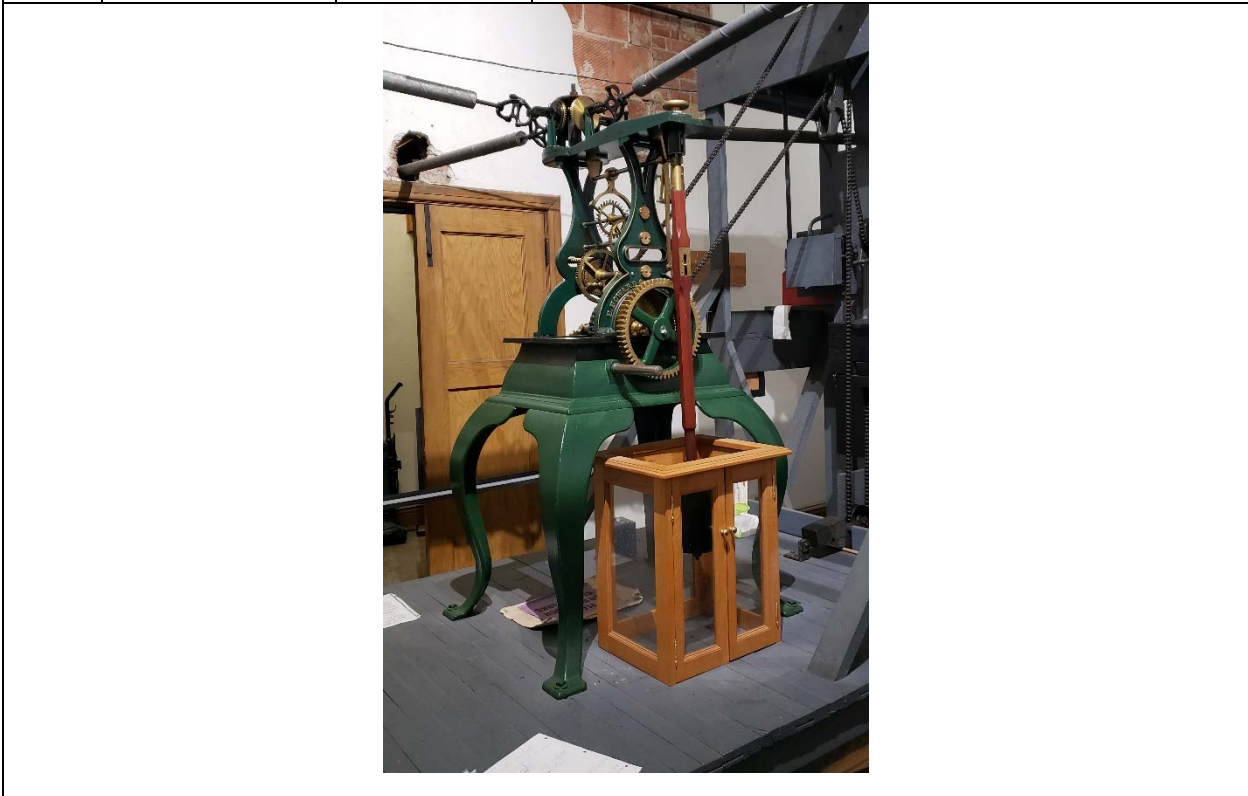


48	5/27/2022	Facing N/A	Library bracket sculptures: Penguin and Parrot
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49	2/12/2020	Facing S	Basement SE wing: SHAFI museum
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50	6/21/2021	Facing NW	Clock tower interior, clock control mechanism
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51	5/27/2022	Facing E	Memorial plaque honoring alumni who died in WWII
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52	5/27/2022	Facing E	Memorial plaque honoring Keith L. Ware
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53	6/16/2022	Facing SE	SE wing: exhibit honoring South High's veterans, JROTC hallway
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54

6/16/2022

Facing ESE

West lawn



55

6/16/2022

Facing S

East parking lot





56	6/16/2022	Facing E	Walkway along the southern edge of the resource boundary
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57	6/16/2022	Facing W	Walkway along the southern edge of the resource boundary
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58	6/16/2022	Facing SE	Sidewalk along the west edge of the resource boundary
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59	6/16/2022	Facing E	West side of the resource boundary, showing wide walkway to main entrance from the west parking lot
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60	6/16/2022	Facing N	Triangular landing area at the south end of the 1963 classroom addition, showing the three raised planters (noncontributing)
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61	6/16/2022	Facing ESE	English Oak tree listed on the Denver Forestry list of Champion and Notable Trees
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62

5/27/2022

Facing NE

The Learning Garden (noncontributing)



63

6/16/2022

Facing SSE

Rectangular brick enclosure (noncontributing)