

**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 determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Columbian School

other names/site number Columbian Elementary School; 5BN381

**2. Location**

street & number 1026 West Sixth Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Las Animas [N/A] vicinity

state Colorado code CO county Bent code 011 zip code 81054-1614

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] 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 [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally. ( [ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ( [ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- entered in the National Register  
[ ] See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
[ ] See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register
- other, explain  
[ ] See continuation sheet.

Columbian School  
Name of Property

Bent County, Colorado  
County/State

**5. Classification**

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

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

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

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	Total

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

N/A

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

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Function**

(Enter categories from instructions)

School

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Not in use

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	Stone
	Concrete
walls	Brick
roof	Asphalt
other	Terra cotta

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Columbian School  
Name of Property

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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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Education

### Periods of Significance

1917-1954

### Significant Dates

1936

### Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Foote, F.W.

Mowbray, W.F.

Nelson, Nels T.

Larson, James

DeMordaunt, Walter

## Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### 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

# \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Colorado Historical Society

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Columbian School  
Name of Property

Bent County, Colorado  
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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 2.0

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

- |    |      |         |          |                            |
|----|------|---------|----------|----------------------------|
| 1. | 13   | 655329  | 4214517  | (NAD27)                    |
|    | Zone | Easting | Northing |                            |
| 2. |      |         |          |                            |
|    | Zone | Easting | Northing |                            |
| 3. |      |         |          |                            |
|    | Zone | Easting | Northing |                            |
| 4. |      |         |          |                            |
|    | Zone | Easting | Northing | [ ] See continuation sheet |

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Pamela S. Gilbert  
organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 10/1/2003  
street & number 7133 Rd JJ telephone 719-456-0664  
city or town Las Animas state CO zip code 81054

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

### Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Las Animas School District No. Re-1  
street & number 1214 Thompson Boulevard telephone 719-456-0161  
city or town Las Animas state CO zip code 81054-1599

**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. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**National Register of Historic Places  
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Columbian School

Bent County, Colorado

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**DESCRIPTION**

The Columbian School occupies the east half of the double-block bordered by Poplar and Grove avenues on the west and east, and by Fifth and Sixth streets on the north and south. The school is sited on a corner set back from the intersection of Sixth Street and Grove Avenue. A low chain link fence running along the sidewalk separates the walk from the lawn and the building. Evenly-spaced trees follow the inside of the fence line along the south and east edges of the property. The north side of the property contains a small parking lot and a small storage shed. The west side of the school fronts the former band cottage and kindergarten rooms, field play area and equipment, and tennis courts. This latter area to the west is outside the nomination boundaries.

The original plan of the one-story 1917 school consists of a single row of classrooms arranged around three sides of an interior courtyard. The fourth (north) side of the court is enclosed by the gymnasium. The courtyard is sod-covered and a steel flagpole stands in the middle. The symmetry of the plan was altered with the construction of the 1936 two-story addition at the northeast corner of the school, adjoining both the classroom wing and the east wall of the gymnasium. The 1917 school is constructed of load-bearing unreinforced brick masonry walls with a wood frame roof structure. The exterior is finished with glazed, dark brown, face brick base with buff colored, iron spot, face brick forming the body of the building. The face brick was manufactured in the dry-press process. The brick is laid in a variation of Flemish bond.

The 1936 addition is also of load-bearing exterior brick but structural steel framing is employed for the floor and roof structure. The base courses are of dark brown with buff body brick laid in a variation of Flemish bond and extensive patterned brickwork.

The 1917 portion of the building is topped with an asphalt shingled gable roof with exposed rafter ends. Curvilinear cross gables accent the east, south and west elevations. Terra cotta forms the coping and the quatrefoils around the louvered ventilators in the upper gables. Terra cotta is also used for ornamentation on the 1936 addition.

The majority of the windows in the original 1917 portion of the building are wood frame, six-over-one double-hung sash. Most of the windows are grouped in bays of five with concrete lug sills. Windows in the 1936 addition are of wood frame in a variety of glazing patterns.

The symmetrical south elevation is divided into three major sections by a central curvilinear gable and flanking gables with wide overhanging eaves supported by brackets with curved knee braces. The end gabled sections each contain a double door and a semicircular transom with vertical lights. The entries are accessed from one-step concrete stoops and each is flanked by pilasters which terminate in sloping concrete capitals slightly higher than the apex of the transom. The entries are protected by narrow pent roofs, with exposed rafter ends, which extend just past the pilasters. The remainder of the gable ends are each filled with a triple window surmounted by a pent roof. The central section of the south elevation contains two, five-window bays, each sheltered by a pent roof. Metal leader heads and downspouts drain the roof valleys.

The west elevation of the 1917 portion of the building is symmetrical in design. The sweep of the long gable roof is broken by two curvilinear gables which match the pattern of the south elevation but are of shorter width. The elevation is divided into six bays by short pilasters which rise the height of the water table before flaring back plum with the wall. The wall below each dormer contains a five-window bay and pent roof. Two more five-window bays occupy the central portion of the elevation. A single

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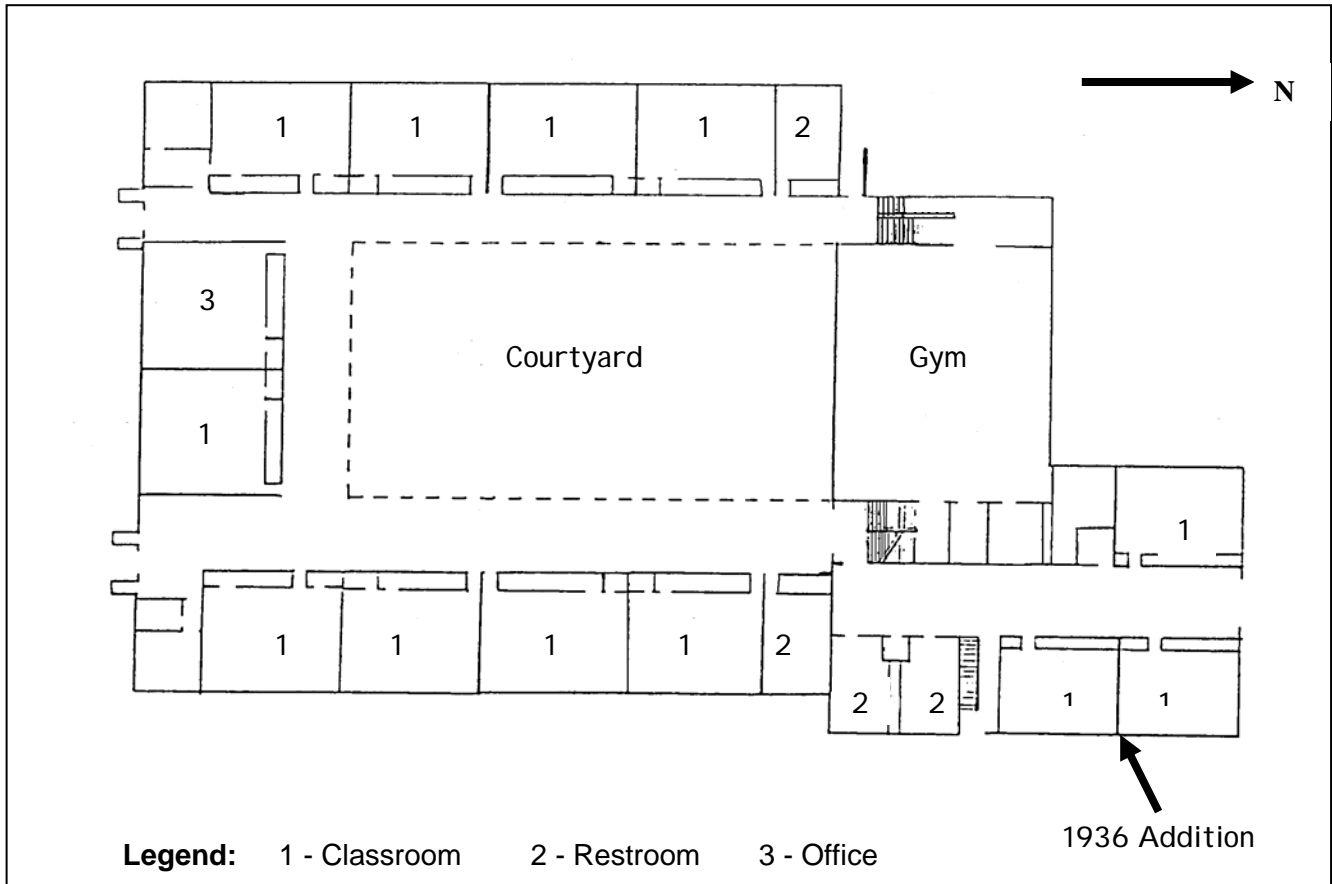
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Columbian School

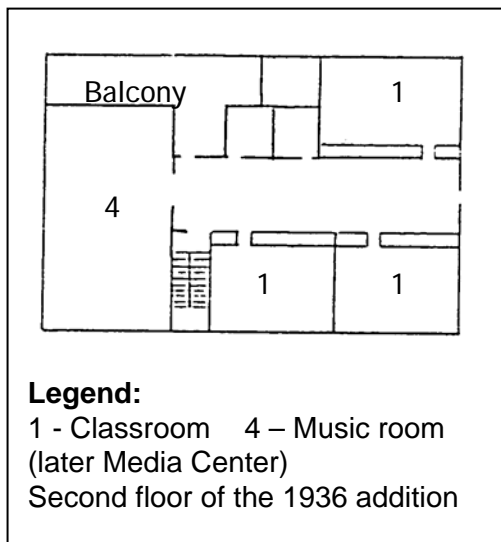
Bent County, Colorado

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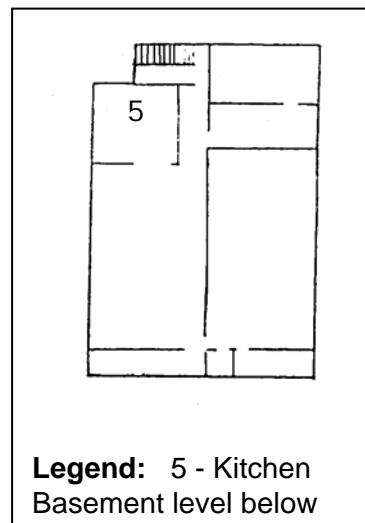
### First-Floor Plan (not to scale)



### Second-Floor Plan (not to scale)



### Basement Floor Plan (not to scale)



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window occupies the southern-most bay. A similar window once occupied the northern bay, though the opening is now infilled with brick.

The 1917 portion of the east elevation is a mirror image of the west elevation. The flat-roofed asymmetrical east elevation of the two-story 1936 addition consists of four major divisions defined by stepped pilasters. The double-door entry is accessed from a short concrete stoop. The divided transom is infilled with wood panels. The second-story of the entry bay contains a tall triple window with a three-light segmental arch transom. The spandrel contains three recessed brick panels with zigzag borders. The entry surround consists of flanking stepped pilasters which frame the slightly projecting wall which terminates in a curvilinear cap, the center portion of which rises above the flat primary parapet to form a mission parapet. The face of the entry surround is ornamented by a regular pattern of stepped diamond ornaments each formed by five tan-colored header bricks.

The southern-most division consists of two six-over-one first-story windows and three, paired, eight-light second-story sash with multi-light semicircular transoms. The spandrels consist of flat circular panels formed by brick rowlocks. The windows have rowlock sills and the second-story has triple rowlock arches. It appears that an original first-story window is now infilled with stucco.

The two northern-most divisions are identical and are separated by a wall panel in a simplified version of that used as the entry surround. Fenestration consists of five-window bays on both the first and second stories. The bays have rowlock sills and projecting segmental arch rowlock crowns above each window.

The addition's flat parapet is topped by two courses of corbeled brick. The corbeling forms pendantlike panels above the center window in each of the bays. The panels may have been intended to suggest Mission style canale waterspouts. The parapet rises in a slight segmental arch above the curvilinear panel separating the two north bays. The upper portion of the gymnasium's curvilinear gable parapet is visible above the flat roof of the school addition.

The symmetrical north elevation of the 1936 addition contains an entry bay and parapet detailing which duplicates that of the east elevation. The second-story triple window above the entry has been modified to contain an egress door which accesses a steel fire escape. The remainder of the elevation is without fenestration. The areas between the entry bay and the corner pilasters are each filled with three vertical panels of yellow brick divided horizontally by circular buff brick panels and topped with rowlock semicircular arches.

The west wall of the addition mirrors the east elevation, though its intersection with the gymnasium results in a significant truncation. The southern bay contains only two windows on the second story and the first story contains two short six-light windows.

The north elevation of the gymnasium contains four bays. The western-most bay consists of a grade-level pedestrian entrance and two narrow upper-level windows. The entry has a wide dark brown brick surround. The other three bays are identical and equally spaced across the elevation. The lower-level of each bay contains a pair of double-hung windows for the raised basement. The upper-level contains multi-light steel frame windows. Each bay has a wide dark brown brick surround. The spandrels are formed of brown brick panels with buff and brown brick frames.

The west wall of the gymnasium contains two, tall and narrow multi-light steel frame windows with semicircular arches. The curvilinear gable parapet matches the mission dormers found throughout the

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1917 building. A square, brick chimney rises from the north corner of the parapet. A large bell on a rocker stand occupies the ridge behind the west parapet.

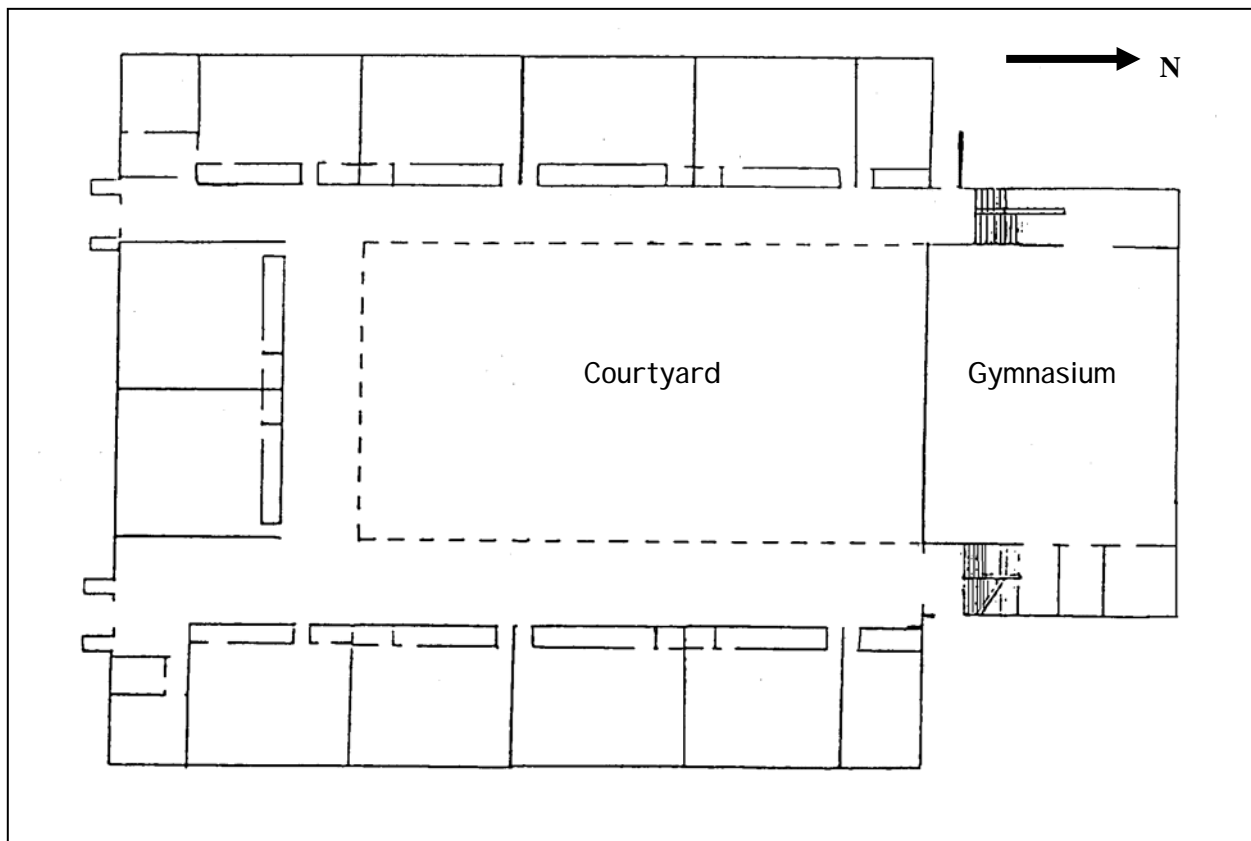
The north elevation of the west classroom wing is without fenestration, though there is visible evidence that an original window opening was later infilled with brick.

The classroom wings open onto the interior courtyard through an arcaded walk. Each classroom individually accesses the arcade. Doors at the north open into the gymnasium and the 1936 addition. The south elevation of the gymnasium mirrors the north in design.

The interior of the 1917 portion of the school contains nine classrooms opening into small foyers and then onto the arcaded courtyard walkway. The 1936 addition contains three first-floor classrooms and restrooms. The second floor contains three additional classrooms, a media center, and a balcony overlooking the gymnasium. The interior walls throughout the school are plastered and the floors are hardwood.

**Alterations to the Building**

The most significant alteration to the Columbian School was the completion of the 1936 two-story addition constructed at the northeast corner of the original school building. The addition required no demolition of the original building. The new construction covers the north elevation of the east classroom wing, the east wall of the gymnasium, and a small portion of the gym's north wall.

**First-Floor Plan – Pre 1931 (not to scale)**



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In general, the Columbian School has experienced only minor interior changes through the years. About 1988, the restrooms were updated and a kitchen and lunchroom below the gym replaced the former shop space. Adjoining space was converted for music and special use rooms. New wiring was installed and carpet was added to the gym along with partitions for office use.

The Columbian School retains a high degree of integrity related to its historical and architectural significance. The 1936 addition was compatible with the original design. The addition attained historical and architectural significance in its own right.

A small gable-roofed, plywood sided, storage shed stands northwest of the gymnasium. The building dates to 2001 is considered noncontributing.

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## SIGNIFICANCE

The Columbian School is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for its important association with the educational development of several generations of Las Animas area children. Beginning in 1917 and continuing through 2003, the building served as one of the community's two elementary schools. The 1936 addition expanded the school's capacity and its educational mission with the inclusion of junior high classes. The period of significance begins with the school's opening in 1917 and continues until 1954, ending at a date fifty-years-of-age in keeping with National Register criteria.

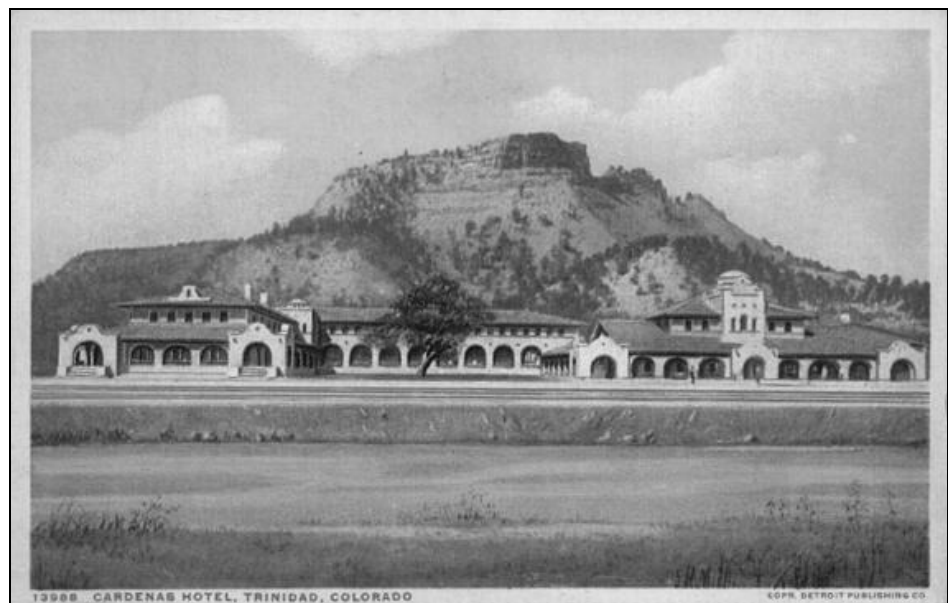
The school is also eligible under Criterion C for its architectural significance. The building is a good local example of the Mission style as adapted to a school. In addition to its use of such character defining elements as the curvilinear gables and parapets, and the arcaded walkway, the school is particularly noteworthy for its use of an interior courtyard. This classic Hispano building plan is rarely seen in school buildings, particularly in those built well into the twentieth century. The school exhibits a high degree of integrity related to its original design, materials and workmanship. The 1936 Mission style addition only minimally impacts the original building. The addition is architecturally significant in its own right as an additional interpretation of the style in a more modern educational facility.

## Mission Style Architecture

The numerous Spanish missions constructed throughout California between 1769 and 1823 provided the inspiration for a new architectural style that emerged at the end of the 19th century. The "California Building," constructed in 1893 at the World's Colombian Exposition in Chicago, first introduced the style to a national audience. By 1900, Mission style, also referred to as Mission Revival, rapidly spread eastward from California. Fueling its popularity across the American southwest was the use of the style for Santa Fe and Southern Pacific railroad depots and associated hotels.

While a few early examples appeared in the 1890s, most Mission style architecture in Colorado dates to between 1900 and 1930. This style was so popular that many structures constructed much earlier were remodeled to include Mission elements.

The Mission style is most easily recognized by the curvilinear-shaped gable parapets or the low parapet walls rising above a flat roofline. The style is also characterized by smooth stuccoed or plastered walls usually devoid of ornamentation. More elaborate examples



The Fred Harvey Company built the 1903 Cardenas Hotel in Trinidad, Colorado, to service the passengers of the Santa Fe Railway. The excellent example of the Mission style no longer exists. (Source: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society)

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may include terra cotta ornamentation. Roof or wall dormers are common. In later examples, brick exterior walls are more common than stucco.

The roof is usually gently pitched, either hipped or gabled, with clay tile roofing. Eaves are often widely overhanging with exposed rafter ends. Gable eaves are often bracketed. Roof drainage may be provided by traditional canales (waterspouts) that pierce the walls.

Semicircular arched openings form windows, entries and arcades. Typically, windows are double-hung rectangular.

Occasionally fixed lights are used in a quatrefoil. A small round window or ornament may appear in the center of the gable. Towers and iron balconies are found on larger buildings.

The Mission style has very little decorative detailing, in contrast to the more ornate Spanish Colonial Revival style. Generally, the only surface ornamentation on a Mission building is a plain string course that outlines windows or arches.

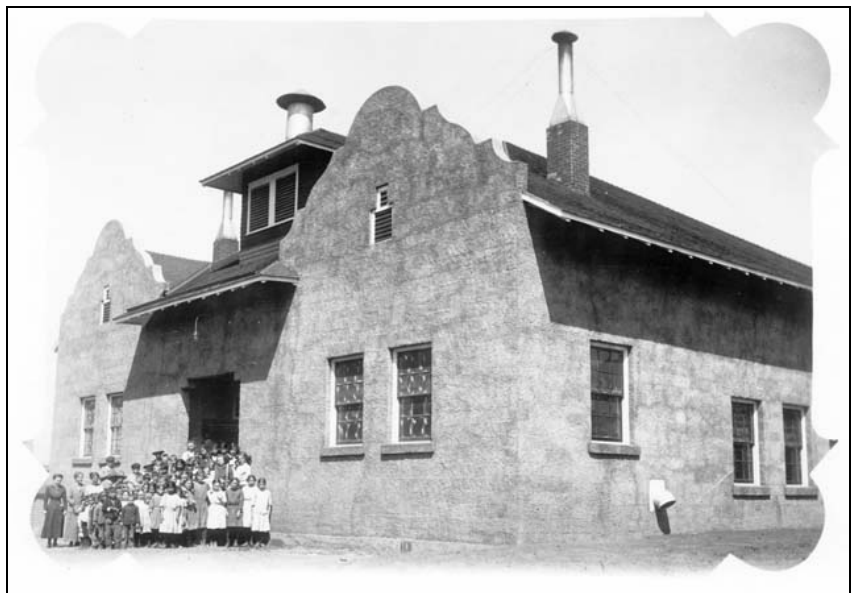
The curvilinear-shaped roofline distinguishes the Mission from the similar Mediterranean style.

In plan, Mission style buildings are usually rectangular, though irregular plans are common on larger examples or those containing towers. A complex of buildings may be joined by means of connected arcades to form an interior courtyard. This plan is suggestive of the traditional Hispano plaza in which a series of connected rooms forms an enclosed courtyard. The rooms are often accessible only through individual doorways off the interior court.

One of the few Mission style complexes in the state utilizing a plaza plan is the National Register-listed Alamosa County



The National Register-listed Alamosa County Courthouse exhibits a U-shaped plan with arcaded walkways similar to that in the Columbian School. The Works Progress Administration built the courthouse complex in 1937. (Source: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society)



Teachers stand with their pupils in front of the Mission style elementary school in Morley, Colorado, about 1910. The rectangular plan school exhibits the characteristic curvilinear gable parapets and a stucco wall treatment. The building is no longer extant. (Source: Welborn collection, Stephen Hart Library, Colorado Historical Society)

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Courthouse in the city of Alamosa. Like the Columbian School, the courthouse exhibits brick exterior walls, gable roofs with curvilinear gable parapets and an arcaded walkway around the courtyard. The courthouse also employees pent roofs over many of its first-story windows. Built in 1937 as a Works Progress Administration project, the Alamosa County courthouse is two decades older than the Columbian School.

The Mission style was used on numerous school buildings in Colorado. The Morley School in Las Animas County combined curvilinear gable parapets and either stucco or adobe wall construction. A photograph taken about 1910 shows the building with a hipped roof and a half-hipped central dormer. Too little of the building is visible to determine the floor plan with certainty, however, it appears to be rectangular. The building is no longer extant.

Another early example of a Mission style school is the Byers-Alameda School in Denver's National Register South Side / Baker Historic District. The 1902 two-story brick building utilizes curvilinear gable parapets on each elevation with patterned brickwork. Denver architects Gove and Walsh designed the building in a rectangular plan.

The Alma, Colorado, community took advantage of depression-era funding from the Public Works Administration (PWA) to fund the construction of additions to its 1925 State Register-listed school. Denver architect Frank Frewen continued the Hispano/Mediterranean inspired elements found in the original school in the design of the flanking additions through the use of stucco finish, decorative tile, and end towers. Lacking in the design are curvilinear gables or parapets. While elements of the Mission style are present, the building exhibits more design elements found in the locally-defined Mediterranean Revival style.



The 1902 Byers-Alameda School exhibits the distinctive curvilinear gable parapets that characterize the Mission style. Unlike the Columbian School, the Byers-Alameda uses the rectangular plan typical of school designs of the early twentieth century. (Source: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society)



The 1936 additions to the Alma School continued the Hispano/Mediterranean elements found in the original center section. (Source: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society)

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The 1937 Smiley Junior High School in Durango, Colorado, exhibits the Mission style on its street elevations. Mission parapets are used on the theater wing, at the corners of the three-story classroom section, and on the east and south elevation entry bays. Stepped pilasters provide additional animation to these elevations. Colorado Springs architect Charles Thomas designed the PWA-funded project which was listed on the National Register in 2002.



The Columbian School exhibits most of the character-defining elements of the Mission style in Colorado. These include such elements as the curvilinear gable parapets, arcaded walkway and gable eave brackets.

Charles Thomas utilized the Mission style in the design of the brick Smiley Junior High School in Durango. The style is most strongly expressed in the forward projecting theater wing. (Source: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society)

The Columbian stands up well in comparison to other important Mission style school buildings in Colorado. The school is particularly noteworthy for its use of an interior courtyard. This classic Hispano building plan is rarely seen in school buildings built well into the twentieth century. The school exhibits a high degree of integrity related to its original design, materials and workmanship. The 1936 Mission style addition only minimally impacts the original building. The addition is architecturally significant in its own right as an alternative and somewhat later interpretation of the style.

The designer of the 1936 addition, was Pueblo, Colorado, architect Walter DeMordaunt. DeMordaunt was a prolific architect during the period 1926 to 1962. Educated in Salt Lake City at the University of Utah, he followed graduation with a short apprenticeship in Butte, Montana. He came to Pueblo about 1920 and served as an associate in the office of architect William H. Stickney. DeMordaunt established his own firm in 1926. Over the next four decades, DeMordaunt and his four- to six-person staff generated hundreds of designs, many of which were constructed. His work is mostly found in Pueblo, but other Colorado examples may be found in Grand Junction, Meeker, Salida, Cañon City, Lamar, and of course, Las Animas.



Walter DeMordaunt's most ambitious Mediterranean style building is the Pueblo Y.W.C.A. Completed in 1936. The building exhibits the clay tile roofing, arcaded walk and bracketed eaves typical of the style. (Source: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society)

DeMordaunt designed numerous school and college buildings. His credited works include several adobe buildings for the Pueblo Community College, the Carlile and Bessemer schools in Pueblo, the central portion of Pueblo's Pleasant View High School, the Lincoln School in La Junta and unnamed schools in Buena Vista, Eads, Hooper, Meeker, Mosca, Ouray, Pinon, Ridgway, San Luis, and

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Sheridan Lake. The firm also designed additions to numerous schools. In addition to the Columbian School, projects include additions to the Park School in Fowler, Avondale School, the Boone High School, the gymnasium in Walsh, and numerous school projects in the city of Pueblo.

Several DeMordaunt buildings have received historic designation. These include National Register-listed Lincoln School, the Pueblo Y.W.C.A. Building, *Star Journal* Model Home, and McClelland Orphanage, and the U.S. Post Office in Lamar. The Art Deco style Chaffee County Courthouse in Salida is listed in the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties.

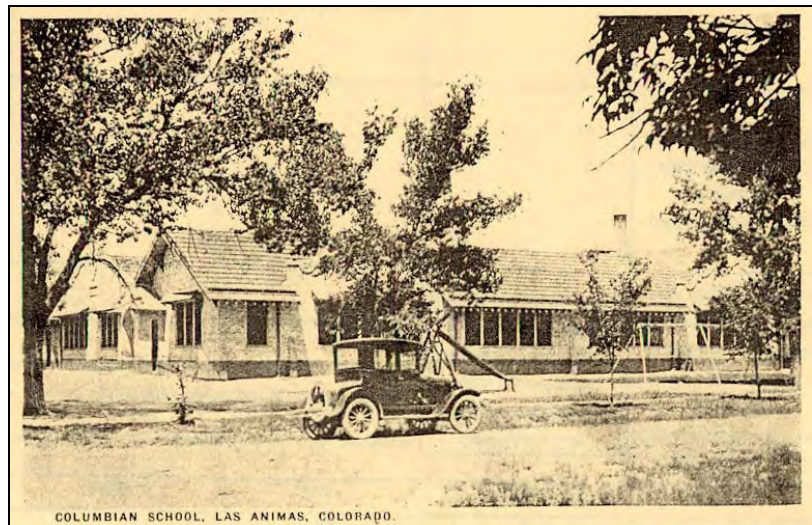
DeMordaunt worked in a both revival and modern styles. One of his best known and most widely viewed buildings is the 1936 Pueblo home of the Young Women's Christian Association. The building exhibits clay tile roofing, an arcaded walk and bracketed eaves. Its lack of curvilinear gables and parapets and its irregular plan positions it in the locally defined style of Mediterranean Revival.

The Columbian School addition was only the first in a series of Las Animas projects recorded in the DeMordaunt records. In 1928 his office designed a new building for the First Presbyterian Church as well as alterations to the existing building. In 1937-38 DeMordaunt designed an addition to the Bent County High School. Another 1937 project is described as "Columbian School Auditorium – Las Animas." As the school building has no auditorium, this project appears to have remained uncompleted. The records for 1939 include a project entitled "Las Animas School, alterations to old building." The extent of this project is unknown.

## Columbian School History

The Las Animas community constructed its first school building in 1876. The original Columbian School opened in 1887. A second elementary school, Fry, was constructed in 1903 to serve students in grades 1-8 from the eastern half of Las Animas. Fry was replaced by Memorial School in the mid-1940s.

A 1916 structural assessment of the original Columbian School building pronounced the facility unsafe for continued student use. At a June 2, 1916, election, the citizens of Las Animas authorized the issuance of \$50,000 in bonds to finance the construction and furnishing of a new Columbian School, to include a gymnasium.



Columbian School as it appeared in a postcard view about 1917.

F.W. Foote and W.F. Mowbray are credited with the design and construction of the 1916 school along with Nels Nelson and his brother-in-law Larson. Nelson and Larson were well known at the time for their design and construction of stone buildings in Las Animas and Cripple Creek and at the naval hospital at Fort Lyon. Nelson came originally from Sweden where his family worked in the construction

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The 8<sup>th</sup> grade class of 1931 posed for its picture in the Columbian School courtyard. Bow tie-wearing Curtis Wain Gates is seated in the third row at the far right.



Mrs. Knox's third-grade class of 1939 sat for its class picture inside their Columbian School classroom.

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industry. After working as a contractor, stonecutter and mason in the eastern U.S., he moved to Colorado and served as a building contractor in Cripple Creek during the 1890's gold rush. He later transferred his business to Las Animas. He worked with his two brothers and two brothers-in-law, all of whom he brought from Sweden to assist in the building boom. In addition to the Columbian School, Nelson built the Bent County High School, the stone commercial buildings on the east side of the intersection of U.S. Highway 50 and Sixth Street, and two of the most stately homes on Sixth Street. Nelson completed the new Columbian School in 1917.

In March 1931, Las Animas voters approved a \$35,000 bond issue to fund the erection of an addition to Columbian School. The expansion, completed in 1936, provided additional classrooms and a music room. At that time, students who graduated from eighth grade at Columbian moved on to the Bent County High School. The addition accommodated a junior high program for grades seven and eight while K-6 students used the courtyard area as neighborhood school. This arrangement continued from 1946 to 1967. On January 22, 1962, the school board voted to place all seventh and eighth grade students from consolidated rural schools in the Columbian Junior High program. After a new high school was built in 1967, the seventh and eighth grades were moved to the former high school building. The school board considered the national trend of including ninth grade in junior high or middle school, but decided to retain the tradition of eighth grade graduation.

The Columbian gymnasium served as the lunchroom from 1917 until the about 1991. Many children walked home for lunch and those from the rural areas usually brought lunch pails. On March 3, 1936, the school board voted to allow the Works Progress Administration to serve hot lunches prepared on equipment already available at the school. The board decided not to enlarge the school facilities for the lunch program.

The school lunch program was just one of the many relief and social betterment programs initiated by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as part of the depression-era administration of Franklin Roosevelt. In a speech given in the late 1930s, Ellen S. Woodward, WPA assistant administrator, noted that "in the past year and a half 80,000,000 hot well-balanced meals have been served at the rate of 500,000 daily in 10,000 schools throughout the country." The program aided students while employing WPA workers. On March 31, 1937, the projects employed nearly 12,000 needy economic heads of families nationwide.

The school lunch program required sponsorship by a tax-supported public body. Local boards of education usually were the official sponsors, but many civic organizations and individual patrons often provided valuable assistance by cooperating unofficially.

Woodward further reported that the school lunch projects were originally intended to serve only children from families on relief, but experience taught that growing children needed a hot mid-day meal irrespective of their financial condition. It was found that many children from homes where there was an adequate supply of certain kinds of food were not receiving the proper kind of diet. For many children who were required to leave home early in the morning and travel long distances after school hours to reach their homes, the WPA lunch constituted the only hot meal of the day. In an even greater number of cases, children come to school with either no breakfast at all or a meager one at best. Many communities served a hot lunch to all interested school children.

Speaking specifically about Colorado, Woodward noted that before the institution of the WPA projects, many children in certain sections of the state were reported to be bringing for lunch a piece of corn bread with molasses or a cold pancake. The common kind of meat found in the children's lunches—when there was meat—was salt pork. In many of the rural districts the lunches which were brought, were



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frozen or half-frozen by noon. Even after the establishment of the WPA project, an effort was made to have each child in certain Colorado communities bring his or her own bread from home to supplement the hot dishes. This had to be discontinued because the bread that the children brought was often unfit to eat, being dirty, dry and even moldy.

At its peak, the Columbian School drew students from a 165 square mile area. Enrollment averaged around 330 students. In the 1930s, the faculty consisted of eleven to sixteen teachers for grades one through eight.

Special holiday programs brought the entire community to Columbian. Annual Christmas programs were always well attended. One May Day celebration included community participation in a festival in the courtyard that including wrapping the May Pole and the crowning of a May Day Queen. In recent years Cinco de Mayo festivities and Heritage Day celebrations featured food from different cultures, folk and native dancing, weaving, pottery, and pioneer soap making.

A number of prominent persons figure among the graduates of Columbian School. Llewellyn E. Thompson graduated in 1918 and went on to finish his secondary education at the nearby Bent County High School. In 1926 he received a degree from the University of Colorado and then joined the diplomatic corps. He rose steadily through the ranks and eventually served as United States ambassador to the Soviet Union in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations.

Curtis Wain Gates also graduated from the Columbian School in the early 1930s. He was born in Lamar, Colorado, on July 2, 1916, and was raised in Las Animas where his father, Dan Gates, homesteaded and eventually became the county sheriff. The family lived on the ground floor of the jail where his mother, Nellie Sneed Gates, cooked meals for the prisoners.

Little is now known of Curtis Gates' adolescence. He graduated from Columbian School and then went on to the Bent County High School where he played saxophone in the band. He later attended Colorado College in Colorado Springs, studying medicine. Discovering an aptitude for singing and songwriting, he left college and headed for Los Angeles to try his luck in the music business. He soon became a staff singer for NBC radio.

Gates sang briefly with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and then joined the orchestra of Shep Fields. It was during this period that Gates adopted the stage name of Ken Curtis. He enlisted in the army infantry in 1942 and served in the Pacific until being discharged in 1945. He picked up his singing career again doing guest spots on radio and the stage, and soon found himself cast as a singing cowboy. In 1945 and 1946, Curtis made eight "western action musical" films for Columbia Pictures. By 1947 his Columbia contract had ended and the singing cowboy era had begun to wane. For the next few years he worked mainly in radio on programs such as *Hollywood Barn Dance* and *All Star Western Theater*. He later joined the western signing group the Sons of the Pioneers as its lead singer.

When Ken Curtis returned to films in 1955 it was as a member of film director John Ford's stock company. Curtis had just married Ford's daughter. In 1959, Curtis also began making television appearances. His first role was on *Gunsmoke* and he quickly followed that with multiple appearances on *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Gunsmoke*, *Perry Mason*, *Rawhide* and *Wagon Train*.

Ken Curtis played a character named Festus Hagggen on the December 8, 1962, episode of *Gunsmoke* entitled "Us Hagggens." The character caught on and he was brought back for a second appearance. When Dennis Weaver left *Gunsmoke* and brought an end to his famous portrayal of Chester, Ken Curtis soon began to fill the gap as a regular. Audience reaction to Festus was largely positive. He

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continued to play the role for eleven years until 1975 when *Gunsmoke* ended its twenty-year run. The program still holds the record for longest running scripted series on television.

Other Columbian School graduates include author Winona Davidson-Graham and Colorado State Representative Oakley Wade. But the real importance of Columbian School is not in the occasional celebrity who may be counted among the alumni. Rather, the school's historical importance is embedded in its role as the building where thousands of Las Animas children received their education, established friendships, entertained their families, and graduated to take their place as members of the community. Generations of Las Animas youth attended the Columbian School and it stands as the physical reminder of that important community history.

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA****VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The boundaries are defined by on the north edge of the sidewalk along the south side of 5th Street; on the east by the east edge of the sidewalk on the west side of Grove Avenue; on the south by the south edge of the sidewalk along north side of 6th Street; and on the west by a straight line joining the north and south boundaries at a distance of 15 ft. from the west wall of the school building. This land is contained within Blocks 74 and 87, Las Animas, Bent County, Colorado.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundaries include the Columbian School building and the remaining unaltered land directly associated with the school during its period of significance. The 1947 Band Cottage is excluded due to the building's extensive alterations.

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## PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-13:

Name of Property: Columbian School  
 Location: Bent County, CO  
 Photographer: Mabel Hansen  
 Date of Photographs: April 2004  
 Local of Negatives: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation  
 Colorado Historical Society, 1300 Broadway, Denver, CO 80203

Photo No.	Photographic Information
1	South elevation; view to the northwest.
2	South elevation; view to the north.
3	East elevation; view to the northwest.
4	East elevation of the 1931 addition; view to the northwest.
5	East and north elevations of the 1931 addition; view to the southwest.
6	North elevations of the 1931 addition and the 1917 gym; view to the south.
7	North elevation of gym and west elevation of 1931 addition; view to the southeast.
8	West elevation of gymnasium; view to the east.
9	West and south elevations; view to the northeast.
10	Interior courtyard; view to the north.
11	Interior courtyard; view to the southwest.
12	Courtyard arcade; view to the south.
13	Gymnasium interior; view to the east.

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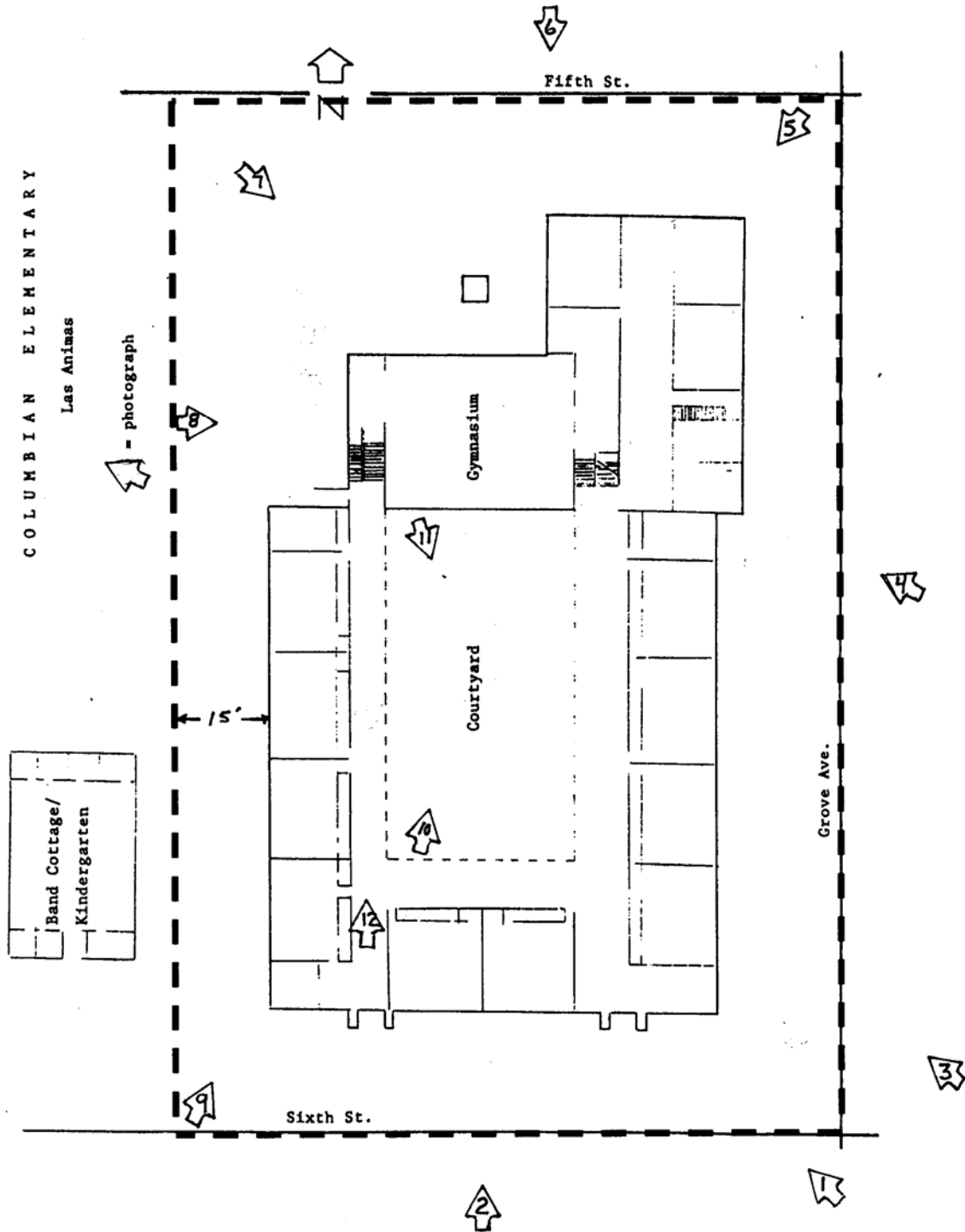
Bent County, Colorado

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## SITE PLAN AND PHOTOGRAPH VIEWS

— — — Approximate Nomination Boundary



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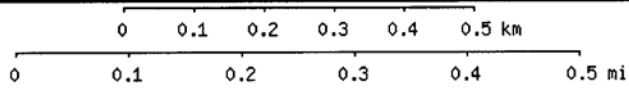
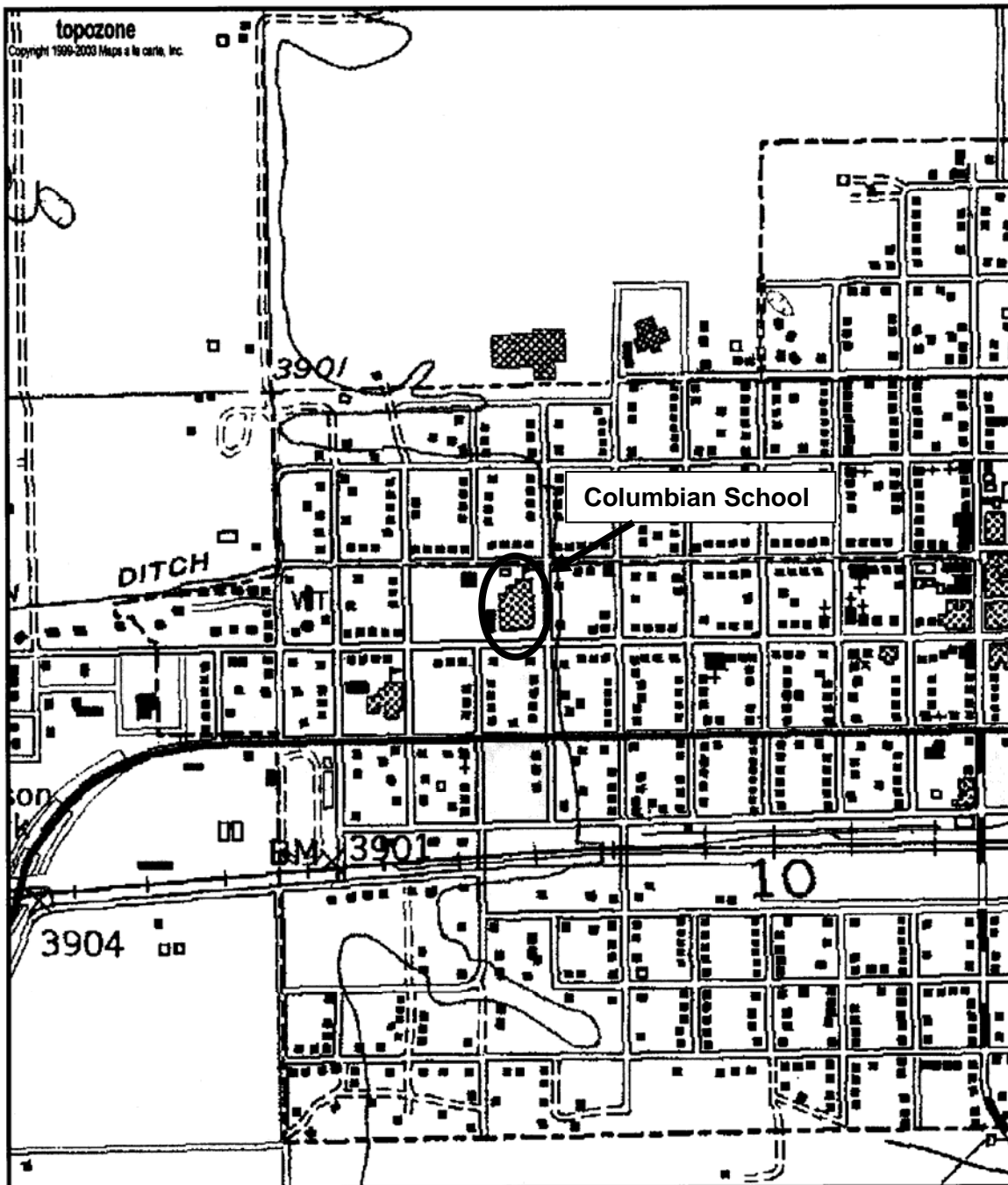
Bent County, Colorado

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**USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP**  
Las Animas Quadrangle, Colorado  
7.5 Minute Series (enlarged)

UTM: Zone 13 / 655329E / 4214517N (NAD27)  
PLSS: 6<sup>th</sup> PM, T23S, R52W, Sec. 10 SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>  
SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>  
Elevation: 3,900 feet  
Site Number: 5BN.381



Map center is UTM 13 655313E 4214523N (NAD27)  
**Las Animas** quadrangle  
Projection is UTM Zone 13 NAD83 Datum

\*M  
M=8.942  
G=1.092