

Historic Property Old Capitol
Inventory Report for 600 Washington Street SE Olympia, Thurston, 98501

LOCATION SECTION

Historic Name: Old Capitol **Field Site No.:** 901
Common Name: (#34-901) **OAHF No.:**
Property Address: 600 Washington Street SE Olympia, Thurston, 98501
Comments: OLYMPIA/OLYWOMEN

County **Township/Range/EW Section** **1/4 Sec** **1/4 1/4 Sec** **Quadrangle**
Thurston T18R02W 14 SW TUMWATER

UTM Reference

Zone: 10 **Spatial Type:** Point **Acquisition Code:** TopoZone.com
Sequence: 0 **Eastings:** 507740 **Northing:** 5209735

Tax No./Parcel No. **Plat/Block/Lot**
78502600000 Sylvester's Blk 26

Supplemental Map(s) **Acreage**
City of Olympia Planning Department 1.43

IDENTIFICATION SECTION

Field Recorder: Shanna Stevenson **Date Recorded:** 7/1/1997 **Survey Name:** OLYMPIA

Owner's Name: Washington General Administration **Owner Address:** PO Box 41019 **City/State/Zip:** Olympia, WA 98504

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

Within a District? Yes Survey/Inventory

Contributing? National Register
State Register
Local Register

National Register Nomination: OLD CAPITOL BUILDING

Local District:

National Register District/Thematic Nomination Name: OLYMPIA DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

DESCRIPTION SECTION

Historic Use: Government - Capitol
Current Use: Government - Government Office

Plan: H-Shape **No. of Stories:**

Structural System: Stone - Uncut

Changes to plan: Moderate **Changes to interior:** Extensive
Changes to original cladding: Intact **Changes to other:**
Changes to windows: Slight **Other (specify):**

Cladding Stone **Foundation** Stone
Style Queen Anne - Richardsonian Romanesque **Form/Type**
Roof Material Metal **Roof Type** Hip

NARRATIVE SECTION

Study Unit

Other

Date Of Construction: 1891

Architecture/Landscape Architecture

Architect: Willis Ritchie

Politics/Government/Law

Builder:

Engineer:

Property appears to meet criteria for the National Register of Historic Places:

Yes

Property is located in a historic district (National and/or local):

No

Property potentially contributes to a historic district (National and/or local):

Statement of Significance

After dividing Washington Territory into legislative and judicial districts, Territorial Governor Isaac I. Stevens called an election for January 20, 1854, and fixed the date for the meeting of the first legislature for February 27, 1854. This first session convened above Olympia's Gold Bar Restaurant between Second and Third Streets. This legislature ratified the selection of Olympia as the seat of government and drew up a code of laws. The second legislature met in December, 1854, in the Masonic Hall, located at the corner of Capitol Way and Eighth. This session considered the proposition of erecting a building for general governmental purposes. Simultaneously, Edmond Sylvester, founder of Olympia, donated to the territory a 12-acre tract on Capitol Hill for use as the capitol site. The third session, also meeting in the Masonic Hall, directed that a permanent capitol be constructed. The fourth session first met there on December 1, 1856. This pioneer Capitol was located on the present Capitol campus between the Legislative and Insurance Buildings. It was a two story wood frame building, 40 feet by 80 feet, styled like a New England colonial church with a small tower but without a steeple. The pioneer Capitol had a portico in front with pillars supporting a balcony above. The House of Representatives met on the second floor, the Council (predecessor to the State Senate) met on the first. This building was still in use at the advent of statehood and the constitutional convention of 1889. In August, 1890, Thurston County Commissioners placed a bond issue on the ballot providing funds for a new courthouse. In March, 1891, the measure passed, and by July, barges were unloading construction materials for the courthouse at Olympia's Percival Dock. The following fall, Thurston County officials moved into their new building, construction costs totaling \$125,000. In 1893, foundations for a new State Capitol were laid on the present campus, but the depression halted work and there were no bids on further construction. Still needing a new Capitol to replace their cramped and stuffy quarters, the legislature, in 1901, upon the advisement of Populist Governor John R. Rogers, appropriated \$350,000 for the purchase of the Thurston County Courthouse, which thus became Washington's second permanent Capitol. The cost of adding an annex amounted to \$500,000. The architect for both original wings and annex was Willis Ritchie, a noted Northwest practitioner. Ritchie (1865-1931) was a 40-year resident of Spokane, having first moved to Seattle and the Northwest in 1889. Born in Van Wert County, Ohio, Ritchie studied architecture, then moved to Winfield, Kansas. While in that state, he designed the federal building in Wichita. His three years of practice in Seattle were prolific, with the King, Whatcom, Jefferson, Clark and Thurston County Courthouses credited to him in that period, as well as the soldiers' home in Orting. In his 34 years as an architect, Ritchie also accomplished much east of the Cascades including the Spokane County Courthouse and the old Spokane City Hall, and Old Hays and the Science Halls at the University of Idaho, Moscow, plus many homes in Spokane. His Jefferson and Spokane County Courthouses have been entered in the National Register. Having designed the original courthouse, Ritchie was asked by the State Capitol Commission to plan the annex. The Commission, chaired by Governor Rogers, suggested ideas to Ritchie who incorporated them in his final drawings. The Old Capitol Building is a characteristic example of Nineteenth Century American Romanesque architecture. Ritchie applied many of the important technical innovations of that century, a part of America's burgeoning industrialization, including steel framing and elevators. The Capitol was supposed to be ready for the 1903 legislative session. Many people including the legislators, were disappointed that the legislative annex was not complete in time. The Secretary of State hurriedly prepared the Olympia armory for the emergency. This proved to be a great embarrassment to Olympia, as the community was ridiculed by the newspapers of other cities. This fiasco raised for the last time talk of moving the state capitol elsewhere. The contractor, Goss Construction Company, was blamed for the situation. Goss cited labor troubles and lack of metal framing as the reasons for delay. The local Washington-Standard criticized Goss for his late orders of material and frittering away good weather; its editors suspected him of gouging the state, holding the Capitol hostage for other construction contracts. When the Capitol was ready for the 1905 session, politicians and some observers said it could serve the needs of the state for 50 years and would be a source of pride replacing the frontier Capitol which was becoming an increasing embarrassment. The skeptical Standard, however, dismissed immediately the idea that the Capitol could absorb growth. Its editor wondered if the abandoned Capitol Hill plans should not have been pursued instead. As it was, the Capitol was certainly an improvement. For the first time, there was room for spectators. This factor, combined with better ventilation than the frontier Capitol (an inducement to physical health and mental power), prompted the Olympia Washington Standard of January 13, 1905, to note that these changes were conducive to "honest legislation" and to keeping the legislator "fair in his dealings". The Old Capitol Building was dedicated January 11, 1905, before a joint session in the House of Representatives at the inauguration of Governor Albert Mead. Nevertheless, as some had predicted, the building soon proved too small to house state government. The legislature was better off for space than it had been, but room for desks was still limited. Thus, considering the growth of the state (and the corresponding growth in representation and the executive offices), the legislature reauthorized plans to build a larger Capitol on the Hill in 1911. In 1919 it appropriated the first funds for the project. Only ten years after Washington State purchased the courthouse, the legislature resolved to replace it entirely. Following a nationwide design contest among architects, construction of the present Capitol commenced in 1923. It was completed in 1928 and cost seven million dollars. Most state agencies remained in the Old Capitol Building until 1919. The legislature stayed in the Old Capitol until 1928 when the members of both houses marched in procession from the old building to the present one. Architecturally, the present Capitol is similar to the nation's Capitol in Washington, D. The exterior is Wilkeson sandstone and Index granite. Inside, the spacious halls are Gray Alaska marble. The dome rises 287 feet from the base, encircled by 20 foot Corinthian columns, and topped by a lantern electrically illuminated from within. Tuscan columns four feet in diameter and 25 feet high surround the building. The main portico includes eight Corinthian columns over 30 feet high. On the interior, the rotunda is 185 feet from floor to domed ceiling with a chandelier which stands 50 feet above a bronze reproduction of the state embedded in the floor. The Old Capitol Building is a significant witness to Washington State history, including the successful assassination in 1917 of Industrial Insurance Commissioner E. W. Olson by an enraged logger disappointed in the amount of his work-related injury compensation. Most important, 23 years of legislation came out of this building. Of foremost

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significance in this work was the adoption of political reforms, including direct primaries for state and local officials and an advisory primary for U. Senators in 1907; women suffrage in 1910; and the adoption of the initiative, referendum, and recall in 1912. The last three of these were achieved following extended agitation by the State Grange and the Federation of Labor. The second decade of the century saw the labor union movement waxing. A conservative legislature passed anti-labor laws but they were repealed by a referendum in 1916. A criminal syndicalism bill, in January 1919, during the height of the Red Scare and aimed at the International Workers of the World, made it a crime to advocate or practice violence or terrorism in working for social or political reforms. The poorly designed bill was a contributing cause to the Seattle General Strike of February 6, 1919. Other important legislation came out of the Old Capitol Building including: the creation of the State Board of Vocational Education, 1919; the teachers' retirement fund, 1913; Department of Agriculture, 1913; the Department of Conservation, 1921; the Department of Fisheries and Game, 1921, the Department of Labor and Industries, 1921; the State Highway Board, 1905; and the voters pamphlet, 1912. The Old Capitol Building is the only surviving structure in Washington to have formerly served as the seat of state government. As such, it physically represents an important period of growth and transition in government that preceded the present condition of stability. The Old Capitol was the site of the vote for Women's Suffrage in Washington in 1910. First women state legislators Frances C. Axtell from Whatcom County and Nena J. Croake, from Pierce County in 1912 served in this building. Many women were also employed by the state. Josephine Corliss Preston first woman State Superintendent of Schools served while this was the Capitol Building.

**Description of
Physical
Appearance**

The Old Capitol Building is a sizable rock-faced sandstone structure occupying an entire block in the central business district of Olympia, Washington, across from a state-owned park. It was originally designed in 1891 as the Thurston County Courthouse with a west frontage of 146 feet and a depth of 78 feet. There are two and one half stories and a daylight basement. A later annex by the same architect more than doubled the size of the structure. The original building was a complex Victorian composition in a Richardson Romanesque style with a basically rectangular plan and a high hip roof of steel shingles. In a symmetrical arrangement around the roof were eight conical turrets (in associated parries), eight dormers, and the attached hip roofs of eight abbreviated wings that projected a few feet, providing relief along the facade below. These wall projections on the long frontage were at opposite corners with a third dissimilar projection in the center. Others of the latter type were centered on the end walls. Behind the building stood an octagonal clock tower rising 150 feet above the street level. This was crowned by an octagonal spire, with a clock face in each of the eight facets on the shaft. The sandstone course work is in alternating thickness', for the most part, trimmed and ornamented by molded and cut masonry components. There are molded belt courses at the first and second floor levels, and there is a slightly overhanging cornice above a row of dentils at the eaves. The light gray sandstone structural material was quarried in Washington. In an attempt at fireproofing, no wooden framing was used below the roof. The floor joists are steel, and the spaces in between were reportedly filled by "hollow tile arches". The floors in public spaces were glazed tile laid in an ornamental pattern. The majority of the windows have double hung sashes in square headed opening spanned by thick stone lintels. These are numerous and closely spaced in vertical and horizontal rows. The second story windows of the various end wings are arcades with round headed sashes and sandstone voussoirs. A flight of 16 broad stone steps leads up to the main entrance, which is recessed behind a 20 foot semicircular arch. Two stories above, at the attic level, there was formerly a balcony recessed behind a segmental arch. There are gargoyles on the wall space above the entrance arch, and arch itself springs from impost panels carved with bas-relief grotesqueries. There were eight additional gargoyles on the tower. The basement could be entered at the north end. It contained the boiler and fuel room, ten small offices, and seven vaults. On the first floor, immediately inside the main doors, there was a spacious octagonal vestibule, still extant. This floor as a whole was divided on a north-south axis by a 12 foot wide corridor. At the north end was a suite of five rooms, and immediately to the left of the main entrance, of the north wing, were two additional rooms. The south wing had eight offices of various sizes. The second floor was reached by stairs located opposite the main entrance. These stairs opened on the second floor to another long corridor. On the south end was a courtroom plus a small judges' chambers. The north wing also contained a courtroom, judges' chambers, and a state library, 22 feet by 25 feet. Four other offices were on the north side. An octagonal space above the first floor vestibule was the records room. The third floor had several offices and four other small jury rooms. The stairway to the tower began on this floor. The changes in the original courthouse section of the Old Capitol Building have been extensive. First, fire destroyed the clock tower in 1928. In 1949, an earthquake toppled all the conical turrets with the exception of those at the front entrance, and caused severe structural damage requiring the closure of three-fourths of the third floor. Interior alterations have been almost as extensive, caused by a constant shift of state agencies in and out of the building. The basement and third floor have experienced the least alteration, but wholesale demolition and rearrangement of old walls and offices have taken place on the north end of the first floor and throughout the second. The state purchased the courthouse from Thurston County in 1901 and proceeded to build an annex (completed in 1905) whose primary function was to house the legislature. Most of the executive officers of the state were quartered in the old, or west, courthouse wing. The annex is the same height and general outline as the earlier building, and the effect is harmonious. It is a simplified, larger version borrowing most of its detailing from the original design. Whereas the courthouse is 78 feet by 146 feet, the annex is 80 feet by 200 feet, 27 feet longer on the north and south ends. The annex is also of sandstone, but of a different texture, possibly quarried at nearby Tenino. As with the courthouse section, the annex basement has a north entrance. For the first floor there are south and east entrances. Twenty three foot corridors connect the buildings branching north and south in the basement and first floor of the annex. The first floor of the annex housed several agencies. The second floor was the home of the legislature. The Senate chamber was in the north end, 36 feet by 51 feet. The House met in the south wing in a somewhat larger space. Each chamber went from the second floor to the roof, which had three 20 foot diameter domed skylights; one for each house plus one over the 50 foot square rotunda which separated the two bodies. The domes were supported on steel trusses. Both chambers had galleries with raised seats and room for 300 people. The presiding officers also had their offices on the second floor, where there were five committee rooms and one lounge. Eight committee rooms were assigned in the old building. On the courthouse first floor were the offices of governor, auditor, treasurer, and attorney general. The annex first floor contained the land commissioner, school superintendent, secretary of state, adjutant general, and the bureau of labor. The courthouse second floor held the supreme court and the state library. The basement contained heat and light generated facilities and some offices. Wood was burned to get hot water and steam, which also ran the generator. The annex featured electric lights, and ornate, wrought-iron Otis elevator large enough to accommodate a rack of cigarettes, candy and light snacks sold by the operator. The elevator was hydraulic, rising 80 feet on a large steel shaft. The annex interior has undergone even more massive modification than the original courthouse. A public works project in the 1930's cut the height of the second floor

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chambers in half, the legislature having previously moved to its present location. The second and "third" floors were partitioned and made into offices for state agencies. The sky-lights, still extant, illuminate the attic floor above the "third" story. The elevator was replaced by a more ordinary one. Still more structural changes were required as a result of an earthquake in 1949. Over 190 tones of internal steel reinforcements were required to brace both buildings. The side entrance e courthouse above the main entrance, since repaired with concrete. Otherwise, with the exception of the tower, turrets and a new roof, no other substantial exterior changes have occurred besides a blackening of the stone. The building was renovated in 1982.

**Major
Bibliographic
References**

Avery, Mary. History and Government of Washington State. 1967.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Stalwart Stone. Olympia, 1972.
The Morning Olympian, Olympia, Washington. May 15, 1891.
Washington Standard, Olympia, Washington. January 13, 1905.
National Register Nomination prepared by David Nicandri

PHOTOS



View of Northwest Corner

taken 7/1/1997

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

41-5A

Comments: