

ISSUES 3|4 • 2009



Saving the Hartline School

By Jerry Dormaier, Hartline School Preservation Association



Historic Hartline School in 1926 and now. It is currently listed on the Washington Heritage Register.

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EARL MORRISON

RURAL EASTERN WASHINGTON IS A VAST STRETCH OF WHEAT FIELDS, ROLLING HILLS AND OPEN SKY. The small towns sprinkled throughout are tightly knit communities with deep roots in the land that has nourished their families for generations. Hartline is one of those places: A small town center on Highway 2 serving farms and ranches in surrounding Grant County. At first glance, it looks like a dozen other towns with grain elevators dominating the skyline. But as you approach from the west, an impressive brick building, the “heart of Hartline,” comes into view.

Hartline School, constructed in 1922, is as solid as the community: A two-story building with brick masonry on a concrete foundation, hardwood flooring and finished-fir woodwork, and a large iron bell out front. When new, its 29,000 square feet encompassed 12 spacious classrooms separated by a large central corridor, a 300-seat auditorium with movie projection booth, library, gymnasium and cafeteria. The T-shaped Colonial Revival style structure is embellished with a multi-colored brick façade and multi-paned windows and balanced around a central portico supported by two sets of Doric columns. Since graduating its first senior class in 1923, it has provided both a welcoming place for students of the area to attend classes and a comfortable meeting place for the surrounding communities. Four generations of Hartline residents have learned how to read and attended school dances in this elegant building.

But in the spring and summer of 2009, the Hartline School faced possible demolition, thanks to a series of events that started with the building suffering minor flood damage in November 2005. The Coulee-Hartline School District decided to build a new school in neighboring Coulee City and in December

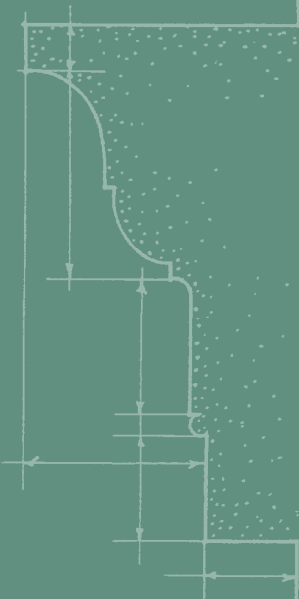
2008 the Hartline School was vacated after nearly 90 years of continuous use. In March 2009, the school district declared the building surplus, and a month later they offered it to the Port of Hartline for town residents to use. In a letter, the school district stipulated, “If the Port declines all offers, the board will put the property on the market for public sale; if no buyers by this fall, the district will demolish the school building.”

But for some Hartline residents, demolition was not an option. “Almost ninety years ago, leaders of this community had the vision and determination to build one of the finest buildings between Spokane and Wenatchee,” says Jerry Dormaier, chair of the Hartline School Preservation Association (HSPA). “I would be shirking my responsibility were I not to honor their vision and do whatever I can to try to breathe new life into an amazing edifice.”

Dormaier is not alone. A group of Hartline residents, landowners, and Hartline School alumni formed the HSPA to fight the School District’s proposal to demolish the venerable building. The group’s goals include preserving and finding new uses for the historic school structure, such as a center for community activities. Shortly after hearing news of the offer, the HSPA sprang into action. They facilitated building tours and inspections to determine whether the building had any structural problems. They mobilized supporters to aid the Port of Hartline in a purchase plan. They recruited community and alumni support with a petition drive, e-mail campaign, and website (www.heartofhartline.com). They researched

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*Above left: Downtown Mount Vernon.
For full story, see page 6.*





Grand front entry and students.

potential funding sources, rediscovered the building's architects (Frederick Westcott and Howard Gifford), and located assistance for historic preservation issues. They helped research and submit a nomination to the DAHP to place the Hartline School on the Washington Heritage Register and the National Register of Historic Places. Despite the group's efforts, the fate of the building remained uncertain throughout the summer months and into September.

The Port of Hartline asked for an extension on the purchase ultimatum in order to assess the community's response and determine the best course of action. The Port Commissioners, HSPA, and supporters all worked under intense pressure to resolve the issue within the short time frame allotted by the School District. Survey letters were sent and responses tallied by the Port. Informal and formal community meetings were held. The HSPA requested help and information from state and local historic preservation professionals. Finally, on September 8th, the Port Commissioners voted to accept the School District's offer. Dozens of jubilant supporters—and a few detractors—attended the meeting to voice their support.

Additional good news arrived on November 5th, when the ACHP unanimously voted to list the Hartline School on the Washington Heritage Register and forward the nomination to the National Park Service for final review and listing by the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. Several HSPA members attended this meeting at the Spokane Public Library, and proudly accepted the certificate of recognition of the Hartline School listing on the Washington Heritage Register.

Final hearings on the purchase agreement and approval votes by the Port and the School District are underway. The Port expects all legal transactions to be completed by the end of December, and to take possession of the property in January 2010. The HSPA and the Port Commissioners are now working together (and need assistance) to create a plan for the future of the historic Hartline School, ensuring that this integral part of Hartline's history remains solid and strong for years to come.

If you have suggestions, skills, or resources relevant to this project and are able to offer assistance please contact:

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Rediscovering Architect Earl Wilson Morrison (1888–1955)

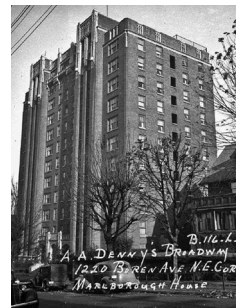
By Glenn Davis

IN THE NOVEMBER 1928 ISSUE OF *PACIFIC BUILDER AND ENGINEER*, A BIOGRAPHY OF SEATTLE ARCHITECT EARL W. MORRISON NOTED: "HE IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN ARCHITECTS, AT LEAST AS FAR AS THE GENERAL PUBLIC IS CONCERNED, IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON. Scarcely a town in the state cannot show an example of his handiwork."

His numerous, varied, and distinctive projects can be found in and near Spokane, Wenatchee, Everett, Seattle, Bellingham, Hoquiam, Alaska, Hawaii and Oregon. He designed civic buildings, schools, apartments, hotels, newspaper plants, medical buildings, houses, restaurants, offices, warehouses, auditoriums, gymnasiums, stores, automobile showrooms, service garages and defense housing—even buildings at the center of the fledgling movie industry in Seattle.

He took great pains to produce work that was "artistic," even when considering such utilitarian structures as warehouses to which most architects would respond with a "boilerplate" solution. He seemed equally intrigued with the compelling possibilities of modern building technologies and creative methods of delivering professional service, as well as collaboration.

He assembled building teams that featured outstanding professionals, including structural engineer W. H. Witt and builder Howard S. Wright during the early years of their careers. Similarly, his patrons were some of the most celebrated financiers and developers in the Pacific Northwest; LeRoy M. Backus, Colin, O. Radford, Paul N. Ford, Walter Nettleton and Loren Baldwin.



(left) The Marlborough House, ca. 1937. Puget Sound Regional Archives; (right) Gainsborough Apartments, Seattle, September 10, 1930. PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, Museum of History & Industry, Seattle; All Rights Reserved



Mt. Baker Lodge, c. 1930. Bert Huntoon Collection of the Whatcom Museum of History & Art



Rosehill High School, Mukilteo, Wash. Courtesy of Northwest Room, Everett Public Library

Many of Morrison's tower designs for residential, office, and manufacturing purposes were some of the most definitive Seattle structures of their day; 1223 Spring Street, The Gainsborough, Marlborough House, Textile Tower, Olive Tower, Grosvenor House, and Baldwin Apartments. Three of the most magnificent, the City Light Tower, the Mark Twain and the Bachelor apartment hotels remained unbuilt, victims of the Great Depression. When constructed in 1949, Morrison's Eighth Avenue (now Nettleton) Apartments was the largest apartment house west of the Mississippi.

Beyond Seattle, a sampling of his work includes an early grouping of superlative mansions along Spokane's iconic, Olmstead-designed Rockwood Boulevard. In 1924 he designed the Chelan County Courthouse to last for one hundred years. The Gothic design of the Herald building in

Bellingham, with its beautiful terra cotta trim, was said at construction to be "the most beautiful building in the Northwest."

Morrison also created the rustic Mount Baker Lodge. Designed to harmonize with nature, it was a destination resort comparable to the grand National Park lodges of the early twentieth century. Hollywood royalty were among the 11,700 guests visiting the lodge during its opening year. Sadly, after only four years of operation it was destroyed by fire in 1931.

Perhaps an even sadder aspect of Earl Morrison's legacy is one for which he was most notable and to which he devoted a great part of his attention, schools. Grade schools and junior high buildings were a specialized focus of his overall production. Most were built in rural school districts or small cities with very modest budgets. They were efficiently planned and built of elegant and durable materials to perform over an extended period, requiring only minor operational and maintenance expense. Like most of his work, they tended to be designed with a carefully considered bilateral symmetry to present an image of dignified formality.

Over the past generation, many of these unique schools have been systematically destroyed in various local school systems' version of 1950s Urban Renewal. However, many continue to live on, some as historically renovated buildings. One that still exists, although its characteristic ornamental treatment has been curiously

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