



March 31, 2016

Mr. Martin Goldstein, Chair  
Landmark Preservation Commission  
Community Planning and Development  
Wellington Webb Municipal Office Building  
201 West Colfax Ave., Dept. 205  
Denver, Colorado 80202

Dear Mr. Goldstein,

Thank you for the opportunity to present this application for historic designation of the Emily Griffith Opportunity School site. What you have before you is a culmination of years of thoughtful dialogue with a broad spectrum of stakeholders with varied interests. As we prepare for the sale of the site, we are seeking to create a designation that honors the legacy of Emily Griffith and the countless contributions she made to the field of education, the City of Denver and the State of Colorado. Moreover, we recognize that it is important to establish a set of design guidelines that provide greater certainty and clarity for potential developers as they determine how this prominent square city block can continue to be a catalyst for future opportunity.

Denver Public Schools acquired this parcel of land in 1874. Since that time, various buildings have been designed, erected, demolished and still others expanded and adapted in an effort to meet the ever-changing needs of the programs. By 2012, the Emily Griffith Technical College academic program needs had outgrown the ability of the existing buildings to keep up with the needs to effectively deliver adult education. Operationally, maintenance costs of the buildings had reached levels that necessitated a relocation of the programs. These moves also allowed for growth in enrollment and the ability to offer state of the art environments to better prepare students. Because of our responsibility to ensure the fiscal stability of the District, the sale of this valued asset is now needed to allow the greatest opportunity to meet the needs of the students and families served by DPS, and provide appropriate financial stewardship to the taxpayers of Denver.

Pursuant to Landmark Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 30, Revised Municipal Code, 1967, the DPS Board of Education adopted Policy FB which established an internal process to identify our schools which are architecturally and/or historically significant public buildings. It further intends to:


- facilitate the long-term preservation of the District's most architecturally and/or historically significant schools through the retention of the historic exterior materials and features as much as practicable;
- meet the Board's ongoing responsibility to meet educational requirements within available resources; and
- provide flexibility for future generations to construct new facilities and to modify existing facilities to meet educational requirements.

To evaluate the Emily Griffith Opportunity School site, DPS established a Historic Evaluation Committee in 2013 that included representatives from Historic Denver, Inc., Denver Landmark Commission and History Colorado. We also commissioned SlaterPaull Architects to prepare a Historic Structure Assessment, codifying the history and current condition of the site in great detail. This 312 page document was fundamental to the work of determining the components of the site identified as most significant for their historical associations, architecture and geography, as well as their relevance and eligibility for historic designation or preservation. The committee further recommended that DPS move forward with a local designation for the buildings located along the western side of the campus on Welton Street prior to marketing the property for sale.

Having established the historic and preservation priorities, in 2014 DPS formed the Emily Griffith Sale Advisory Committee. Stakeholder participation included downtown Denver leadership, Union Station experience, City of Denver, real estate development community, historic community, City Council, and those familiar with DPS capital needs. The charge of the committee was to help inform the goals and criteria for the sale process for the site. The committee used interest based discussions to explore the highest and best uses of the property in downtown, the ability for DPS to obtain reasonable value in a sale, preservation considerations for the redevelopment of the site, and the recommended sale process to employ to increase the possibility of a successful sale meeting the defined goals and criteria. The outcome of this collaborative process was unanimous: 1) redevelopment opportunities were encouraged that meet the goals of DPS and our ability to serve students, and 2) consideration of the community's future wishes for uses of the site, contributing to a successful development that furthers the goals for usage of this block in downtown Denver. This recommendation was used by DPS to inform both this designation application and our current RFP for the sale and redevelopment of the property.

Each step of the process leading to this historic designation application and design guidelines has been carefully considered. Having the support of the historic community, as evidenced by Historic Denver being a co-applicant, is a testament to the importance that has been placed on this historic school property. The willingness of the civic, business and development communities to engage and provide input on how to balance the goals of the school district and the interests of the broader community has been invaluable. On behalf of the Board of Education and the 91,000 students currently served by DPS, we thank you for your consideration of this process and the resulting application, as we seek to utilize all available resources to ensure that ***Every Child Succeeds***.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David Suppes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" and last name "Suppes" clearly legible.

David Suppes  
Chief Operating Officer

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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## DENVER LANDMARK PRESERVATION COMMISSION APPLICATION FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION: EMILY GRIFFITH OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL

### **Building Identification**

#### **1. Name of Property:**

- i. **Historic Name:**
  - a. Longfellow School (1882 to May 1916; building demolished 1956)
  - b. Opportunity School (May 1916 to March 1934)
  - c. Emily Griffith Opportunity School (1934 through 2014)
- ii. **Current Name:** Emily Griffith Technical College

#### **2. Location:**

- i. **Address:** 1250 Welton St. Denver, CO 80204
- ii. **Legal Description:** Lots 1 through 32 inclusive and all of the vacated alley adjacent, Block 170, East Denver (Boyd's) Subdivision. Legal description of additional parameters for portions of designated area is included in Addendums.

#### **3. Owner Information**

- i. **Name:** Owner: Denver Public Schools (School District No. 1)
- ii. **Address:** 1860 Lincoln Street Denver, CO 80203
- iii. **Phone:** 720-423-3200
- iv. **Email:** [info@dpsk12.org](mailto:info@dpsk12.org)

#### **4. Applicant Information**

- i. **Name:** David Suppes, COO, Denver Public Schools
- ii. **Address:** 1860 Lincoln Street Denver, CO 80203
- iii. **Phone:** 720.423.3200
- iv. **Email:** [info@dpsk12.org](mailto:info@dpsk12.org)
  
- v. **Name:** Annie Levinsky, Executive Director, Historic Denver
- vi. **Address:** 1420 Ogden Street Suite 202. Denver CO 80218
- vii. **Phone:** 303.534.5288
- viii. **Email:** [alevinsky@historicdenver.org](mailto:alevinsky@historicdenver.org)

#### **5. General Data:**

- i. **Date of Construction and Major Additions/Alterations – Main Contributing Building:**
  - a. Original Building: 1926, a.k.a 1250 Welton St.(SW corner of block, facing Welton St.)  
Approximate lot size and acreage: 96 ft. x123 ft.  
Architect: E. Floyd Redding  
Builder: F.H. Cowell  
Original Use: Educational facility  
Present Use: Vacant  
Source of Information: *Emily Griffith Technical College Historic Structure Assessment – September 2013 – SlaterPaull Architects*
  - b. 1947 Addition (Midblock on Welton St.)  
Approximate lot size and acreage: 125 ft. x 330 ft.

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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Architect: W. Gordon Jamieson

Builder:

- General Work: Mead and Mount Construction Company
- Plumbing & HVAC: McCarty-Johnson Plumbing & Heating Company

Original Use: Educational Facility

Present Use: Vacant

Source of Information: *Emily Griffith Technical College Historic Structure Assessment – September 2013 – SlaterPaull Architects*

c. 1956 Addition (NW corner of block, facing Welton St.)

Approximate lot size and acreage: 125 ft. x 330 ft.

Architect: W. Gordon Jamieson

Builder: Mead and Mount Construction Company

Original Use: Educational Facility

Present Use: Vacant

Source of Information: *Emily Griffith Technical College Historic Structure Assessment – September 2013 – SlaterPaull Architects*

ii. **Number, Type, and Date of Construction of Outbuildings/Accessory Structures:**

- a. Number: Five contiguous outbuildings. The buildings share one street address: 1261 Glenarm Place  
Source of Information: Denver Property Taxation and Assessment System
- b. Type:
- 1951 Welding Shop (E. side of block, facing Welton St.)
    - Red brick and steel structure
    - Approximate lot size and acreage: 86 ft x 61 ft
    - Architect: W. Gordon Jamieson
    - Builder: J & K Construction Company
    - Original Use: Welding Shop
    - Present Use: Vacant
  - 1955 Body Shop (SE corner of block, facing Glenarm Place)
    - Red brick and steel structure
    - Approximate lot size and acreage: 68 ft by 150 ft
    - Architect: W. Gordon Jamieson and Richard B. Williams
    - Builder:
      - General Contractor: A.A. and E.B. Jones Company
      - Mechanical Work: McCarthy Johnson
      - Electrical Work: Sturgeon Electric
    - Original Use: Aircraft and Automotive Shops
    - Present Use: Vacant
  - 1978 Auto Shop (Midblock, facing Glenarm Place)
    - Red brick and steel structure
    - Architect: Ramon F. Martinez
    - Builder: Langfur Construction Corporation
    - Original Use: Automotive Shops
    - Present Use: Vacant
  - 1941 Shop (Midblock, facing Glenarm Place)
    - Red brick and steel structure
    - Approximate lot size and acreage: 100 ft by 125 ft

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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- Architect: W. Gordon Jamieson and R. Ewing Stiffler
- Builder: Dutton Kindall & Hunt
- Original Use: Shops
- Present Use: Vacant
- 1956 KRMA Studio (NE corner, facing Glenarm Place):
  - Red brick and steel structure
  - Approximate lot size and acreage: 100 ft by 125 ft
  - Architect: W. Gordon Jamieson and Richard B. Williams
  - Builder: Unknown
  - Original Use: KRMA Studios and Classrooms
  - Historic Uses: DPS TV Studios and Classrooms
  - Present Use: Vacant

Source of Information: *Emily Griffith Technical College Historic Structure Assessment (HSA)*, September 2013, SlaterPaull Architects

iii. **Approximate lot size and acreage:**

- a. Lot Size: 106,400 Square Feet
- b. Acreage: 2.44 Acres

Source of Information: Denver Property Taxation and Assessment System

iv. **Zone District:** D-C UO-1

- a. Emily Griffith Opportunity School's campus is partially in the State Capitol View Plane

v. **Original Owner:** Denver Public Schools

vi. **Original Use:** Educational Facility Source of Information: DPS Archives

vii. **Present Use:** Vacant (Educational until vacated in 2014)

viii. **Previous field documentation:**

- a. Date: 1983-84  
Surveyor: Barbara Norgren and Ron Emrich
- b. Date: 1993 and 2003  
Surveyor: Front Range Research Associates
- c. Date: 2013  
Surveyor: *Emily Griffith Technical College HSA*, SlaterPaull Architects

ix. **National Register Status and date**

- a. Date: 1984  
Welton Street Building determined eligible for listing on the National Register; Glenarm Place Shops determined not eligible for National Register listing in survey report by Norgren and Emrich.
- b. Date: 1999  
Entire site determined eligible for National Register listing by Colorado State Historic Preservation Office.
- c. Date: 2003  
Field confirmation of National Register eligibility by Front Range Research

1926 Building  
3-Stories above  
raised basement

1926 Garden  
1-Story above  
grade

1947 Building  
3-Stories  
above raised  
basement

1956 Garden  
1-Story above  
grade

1956 Building  
3-Stories above  
raised basement

One-Story  
Vestibule

WELTON STREET  
(80' PUBLIC R.O.W.)

400'

125'

141'

400'

1951 Welding  
Shop Building

1954 Body Shop  
Building

1978 Auto Shop  
Building

1941 Shop Building

1956 KRMA  
Building

TRUE NORTH

DOWNTOWN NORTH

100' 200' 250'

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

## 6. Statement of Significance

### i. **Category 1: History**

#### a. **Have direct association with the historical development of the city, state, and nation**

Emily Griffith Opportunity School (originally Opportunity School) has played a central role in the development of the Denver and Colorado, having served more than 1.5 million students of all ages, races and incomes. Since its founding in 1916 the school has provided diverse students with skills that not only offered opportunities for self-improvement and economic mobility, but skills that literally helped build Denver's infrastructure, establish new industries and entice employers to the Denver region. The site between 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> on Welton was the school's original home, where it expanded and served the community for 98 years, spanning the period from the school's opening in 1916 to its move from the site in 2014. The Emily Griffith Opportunity School has contributed greatly to the infrastructure of the city by training workers in construction trades, supporting military readiness and industries during World War I and II, retraining veterans after World War II, and facilitating the growth of local and regional industries. The school's publicly funded automobile repair training and beauty school programs are recognized as early innovators in their fields. Through forward-thinking government and industry partnerships, the Opportunity School helped Denver to build and maintain a skilled workforce, and to attract employers to the region. In addition to technical training provided by the school, the school's language and citizenship classes helped Denver residents to lift themselves out of poverty and find success in American life. The school's novel approach of providing public education to non-traditional students at all hours of the day, and using a flexible and open-ended education approach, has been a national and international model for vocational and continuous education.

#### c. **Have direct and substantial association with a person or group of persons who had influence on society**



*Emily Griffith  
Undated photo  
Source: Colorado  
Historical Society*

A 1932 survey for the American Association for Adult Education quoted the students at the Emily Griffith Opportunity School, stating that "the [Opportunity] School is Miss Griffith and Miss Griffith is the School."<sup>1</sup> Born in 1868 in Cincinnati, Ohio, Emily Griffith had a modest upbringing as the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. A teacher with an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education, she began her career on the Nebraska frontier, where she was exposed to immigrant farmers who struggled with English and lacked basic skills to be successful. After moving to Denver in the mid-1890s, Ms. Griffith taught at Central School and 24<sup>th</sup> Street School, two schools that served an indigent, working class and immigrant population. Emily's response to her students was to reach out and help her students, and institute night classes for their parents and families.

Emily Griffith used her political and business connections developed as a state education administrator to build support for an alternative public school geared toward adults and young people seeking specific skills and education to improve their work prospects and to help them find success in American society. She

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<sup>1</sup> Swift, "What is this Opportunity School?," 74.



## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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*1926 Opportunity School*

*Photo, c. 1927*

*Source: Denver Public Library*

believed that the public school system should provide all residents with opportunities to learn and improve themselves. Her drive and dedication to bettering the livelihood of all residents led to Denver Public Schools' support for the creation of the Opportunity School in 1916. Serving as principal and visionary behind the school from 1916 until her retirement on December 12, 1933, she led the school from its initial opening to regular enrollment of 10,000, with dozens of programs and options available to students of all ages and races, day and night. Emily Griffith also emphasized a holistic approach to education, requiring her faculty to provide guidance and emotional support to help students succeed. Her belief that all students should be nurtured and respected, and allowed to choose their educational path, was novel at the time.

Although the school started in the unused Longfellow School in 1916, Griffith envisioned the school encompassing a full city block with a variety of learning and training opportunities available to all who wanted to learn. She led the effort to build the 1926 school at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Welton, and had plans drawn up to expand the school across the entire Welton face of the block. Emily Griffith forged partnerships with business, industry, government, community institutions and political leaders to build support, obtain funding and expand programs at the Opportunity School. Her vision to expand the school along Welton Street eventually happened, albeit after she retired as principal of the school.



*Photo of the stained glass window  
dedicated to Emily Griffith in the  
Colorado State Capitol*

By the time of her retirement in 1933, the school had gained national and international renown, and had graduated over 135,000 students of every age, and of both genders, of every social position and of various races and nationalities. Her Opportunity School served as a role model for similar institutions around the country. Griffith's school, and others like it, had a significant impact on the economic development, well-being and social consciousness of Denver and other cities. On March 14, 1934, the Opportunity School was renamed Emily Griffith Opportunity School in her honor. Her ability to maneuver within the city's political, business, and social spheres, coupled with the impact of the Opportunity School established Emily Griffith as one of Denver's most cherished legacies. As such, she was honored with a stained glass portrait in the Colorado State Capitol in 1975, and remains one of the best known and most respected women in Colorado history.



# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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## ii. **Category 2: Architecture**

### a. **Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or type**

The original building and additions have a simplicity and modernity to their design that foretells the school's function as a place of both disciplined learning and progress. The 1926 School, designed by E. Floyd Redding, is an excellent local example of a Renaissance Revival influenced school building, with Beaux Art embellishments. Renaissance Revival influences are seen in the building's simple brick massing and formalistic composition, including ground floor piano noble with pronounced string course separating it from upper floors, full height pilasters and strong terra cotta cornice. The Beaux Art embellishments are found in the flat architrave entry with large side cartouches, and the fanciful arched antefixes above the roof line. The building's construction as the Opportunity School is evidenced by the "O" engraved in the entry cartouches, and the torches of learning engraved in the rooftop antefixes. The terra cotta cornice wraps around to the high profile alley facade next to 12<sup>th</sup> St.



*1947 Addition, with 1926 School in Background, Photo 1949  
Source: Denver Public Library*

The 1947 and 1956 additions are important local examples of the International Style, designed with a formal composition and brick materials to blend with their 1926 forebearer. Designed by local architect W. Gordon Jamieson as a single addition to complete the Welton Street blockface, the construction was completed in two phases. The first part of the addition, immediately adjacent to the 1926 schoolhouse was completed in 1946. The second construction phase extended the International style design to 13<sup>th</sup> Street. The strong horizontal window bands with shallow planar relief, the building's lack of ornamentation, horizontality emphasized on the ground and 4th floors with continuous contrasting lintels, and strong vertical circulation towers are all representative of the International Style. This style was popular for educational buildings in Denver and the U.S. after World War II. The 1946 design for the Emily Griffith Opportunity School, with the words "Achievement" and "Opportunity" carved over the entry doors, represent an excellent local example of an educational building completed in the International Style. The 1926 building, with its 1946/57 addition, is the most recognizable structure associated with the Emily Griffith Opportunity School, and has the strongest association with the school's history.

## iii. **Category 3: Geography**

### a. **Have a prominent location or be an established, familiar, and orienting visual feature of the contemporary city**

The convergence of Denver's diagonal downtown street grid and the city's cardinal street grid creates a visually distinct location just off of Colfax Avenue at 12<sup>th</sup> and Welton Streets. The school is prominently located adjacent to W. Colfax Avenue on a major east-west artery and entry into downtown. The school has greeted commuters and travelers driving into downtown Denver on West Colfax Avenue since the school's opening in 1916, and became more prominent with the construction of the new school building at 12<sup>th</sup> and Welton Streets in 1926.

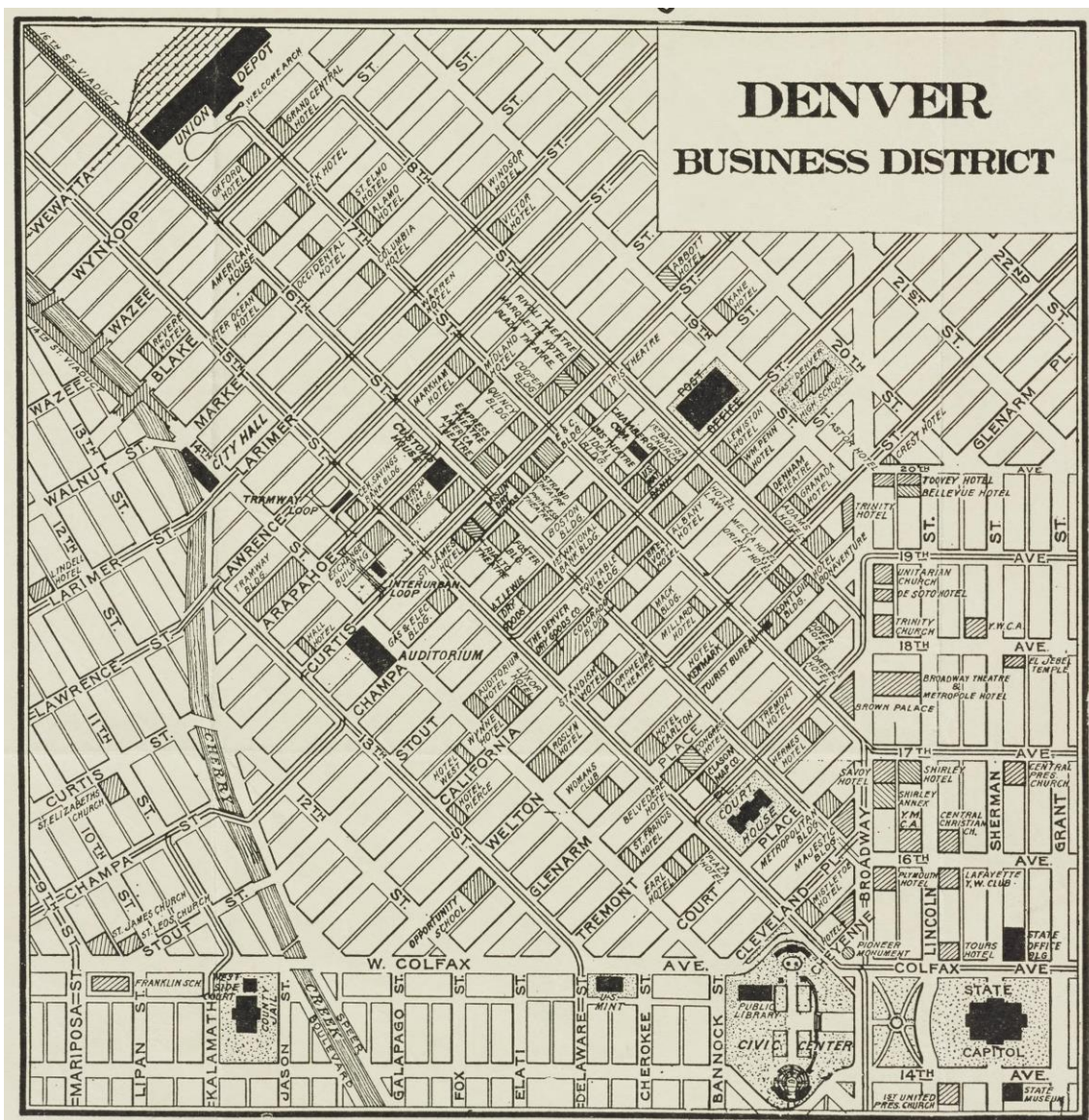
## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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The school has historically been located on or in close proximity to streetcar lines as well as city streets. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Cherokee, Colfax and Aurora street car lines all ran within close proximity to the school. As automobiles became more affordable, the school's location on Colfax Avenue became more important. By the 1950s, Colfax Avenue was designated as US 40, a major east-west coast to coast highway crossing the Rocky Mountains, and passing over the Continental Divide at Berthoud Pass before descending into Denver and the front range. The school's location is noted on early road and highway maps of Denver, such as Clasons ca. 1922 Guide Map of Denver, reinforcing its role as an established, familiar and orienting visual feature.

The location is also important as the site of a Denver public school since 1882, when the Longfellow School opened. This public school was located approximately where the 1956 school addition is now situated. The location of a public school at this location would have been well-known by the Denver community, with significant comings and goings by students and faculty over the decades. This was most likely reinforced by the fact that Denver Public School's Administration building was located just a couple blocks away on 14<sup>th</sup> Street. As the surrounding area around the Opportunity School transitioned from a more residential area as shown on the 1926 Sanborn map to a more commercial area on the edge of downtown, the one certainty throughout the decades was the Emily Griffith Opportunity School. As one of the few remaining historic school buildings in or around downtown Denver, the Emily Griffith Opportunity School remains an important established, familiar and orienting visual landmark for the community.

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

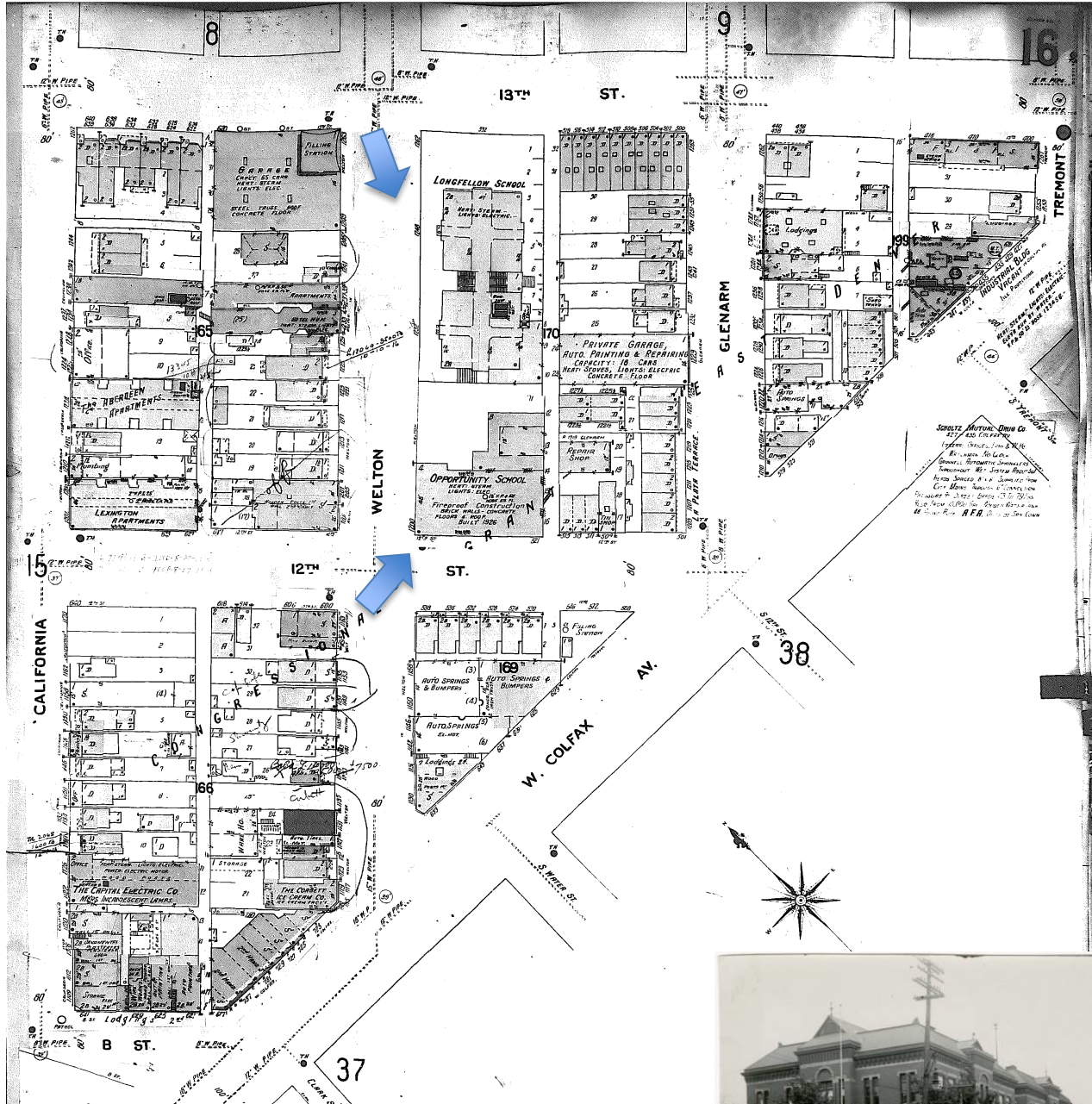


*1922 Classon's Guide Map of Denver*

*This map shows the school campus in 1922, consisting of the Longfellow School at Welton and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets.*



# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION



1925 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

This map shows the school campus in 1925, consisting of the Longfellow School at Welton and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets and the new school building on 12<sup>th</sup> and Welton. Interestingly enough, the 1925 Sanborn map shows the new Opportunity School building's construction date as 1926, indicating that the building was likely nearing completion at the time the map was published in late 1925.



Old Longfellow School, Original Location of the Opportunity School when it opened in 1916, 13<sup>th</sup> and Welton, looking south. Photo c. 1927. Source: Denver Public Library

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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## 7. Architectural Description

### a. **Concisely describe the structure and its surrounds. Include building size, shape, # stories, materials, style and site terrain.**

The Emily Griffith Opportunity School site encompasses a full block in downtown Denver. Its location is bounded by Welton and Glenarm Place on the northwest and southeast, and 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets on the northeast and southwest. For the purposes of description within this designation, Welton Street is interpreted as running north-south, referred to as downtown north. The site appears primarily flat, although the site elevation rises six feet from its lowest point at 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Glenarm Place to its highest at 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Glenarm Place. Buildings extend up to the front of the lots, abutting wide sidewalks on Glenarm Place and Welton Street, and narrower sidewalks on the numbered streets. These modern sidewalks have low curbs, and modern light fixtures, with intermittent trees in grates on the Welton Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Street sides. A paved alley runs east to west through the block. Some buildings or portions of buildings extend back to the alley edge; others do not, providing paved surfaces for parking and access to shops and buildings from the alley side.

The four-story rectangular building along Welton Street consists of three construction periods. The earliest construction is located on the south end of the block and was constructed in 1926. Subsequent additions in 1947 and 1956 filled in the Welton Street side of the block. All phases of the building along Welton St. consist of red brick with light colored terra cotta embellishment along the belt course and parapet, as well as at the window openings. The building (including additions) has a flat roof and the first level is partially below grade.

The simple ornamentation and symmetrical organization of the 1926 building reflects Renaissance Revival influences. These stylistic influences are seen in the building's simple brick massing and formalistic composition, including ground floor piano noble with pronounced string course separating it from upper floors, full height pilasters and strong terra cotta cornice. Beaux Art embellishments are found in the flat architrave entry with large side cartouches, and the fanciful arched antefixes above the roof line. The post-World War II classroom additions, constructed in 1947 and 1956, represent International Style influences. The building's strong horizontal window bands with shallow planar relief, the lack of façade ornamentation, the continuous contrasting lintels on the ground and 4th floors, and strong vertical circulation towers are characteristic of the International Style.

The one and two story vocational shops located along Glenarm Place are also rectangular and faced with red brick, but these buildings include minimal concrete trim in lieu of terra cotta. They are primarily one- and two-story structures representing mid-20th century industrial construction with International Style influences. These accessory structures, although not without architectural merit, are simpler examples than their higher style cousins on the Welton Street side of the block. While some of these buildings also were designed by Jamieson, they were added in a more haphazard fashion as needs arose over the course of several decades. All of these buildings as they appear today were constructed following the death of Ms. Griffith. Additional information on each building below:

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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## 1926 Building a.k.a 1250 Welton St.(SW corner of block,facing Welton St.):

Building size: 33,245 sf

Shape: Rectangular with long side of rectangle along 12<sup>th</sup> Street and primary entry on short side of rectangle along Welton Street

Stories: 4 stories with 3.5 stories above grade; entry on Welton St. raised

Materials: Brick load bearing walls with interior structural frame; terra cotta details;

Style: Renaissance Revival with Beaux Art embellishments

Site Terrain: Relatively flat

Source of Information: 6-25-25 Building Permit, Architectural Inventory Form, Survey of Denver Public Schools, Denver Landmark Preservation

## 1947 Addition (Midblock on Welton Street)

Building size: 45,935 sf

Shape: Largely Rectangular

Stories: 4 stories with 3.5 stories above grade; entry on Welton St. at grade

Materials: Cast-in-place reinforced concrete frame with exterior brick walls; terra cotta details; steel windows

Style: International Style

Site Terrain: Relatively flat

Source of Information: 6-25-25 Building Permit, Architectural Inventory Form, Survey of Denver Public Schools, Denver Landmark Preservation; Denver Post (12-1-49)

## 1956 Addition (NW Corner of Block facing Welton Street)

Building size: 57,527 sf

Shape: Largely Rectangular

Stories: 4 stories with 3.5 stories above grade; entry on Welton St. at grade

Materials: Cast-in-place reinforced concrete frame with exterior brick walls; terra cotta details; steel windows

Style: International Style

Site Terrain: Relatively flat

Source of Information: 6-25-25 Building Permit, Architectural Inventory Form, Survey of Denver Public Schools, Denver Landmark Preservation; Denver Post (12-1-49);

Source of Information: Denver Post: Empire Magazine, "40 Years of Opportunity" (1956)

## Glenarm Place Shops/Accessory Buildings:

1941 shop:

12,558 sf, rectangular, 1 story, brick and concrete, International Style.

1951 garage:

4,887 sf, rectangular, 1 story, brick and concrete, International Style.

1954 shop:

10,755 sf, rectangular, 1 story, brick and concrete, International Style.

1956 KRMA studio:

23,340 sf, rectangular, 2 story, brick and concrete, International Style.

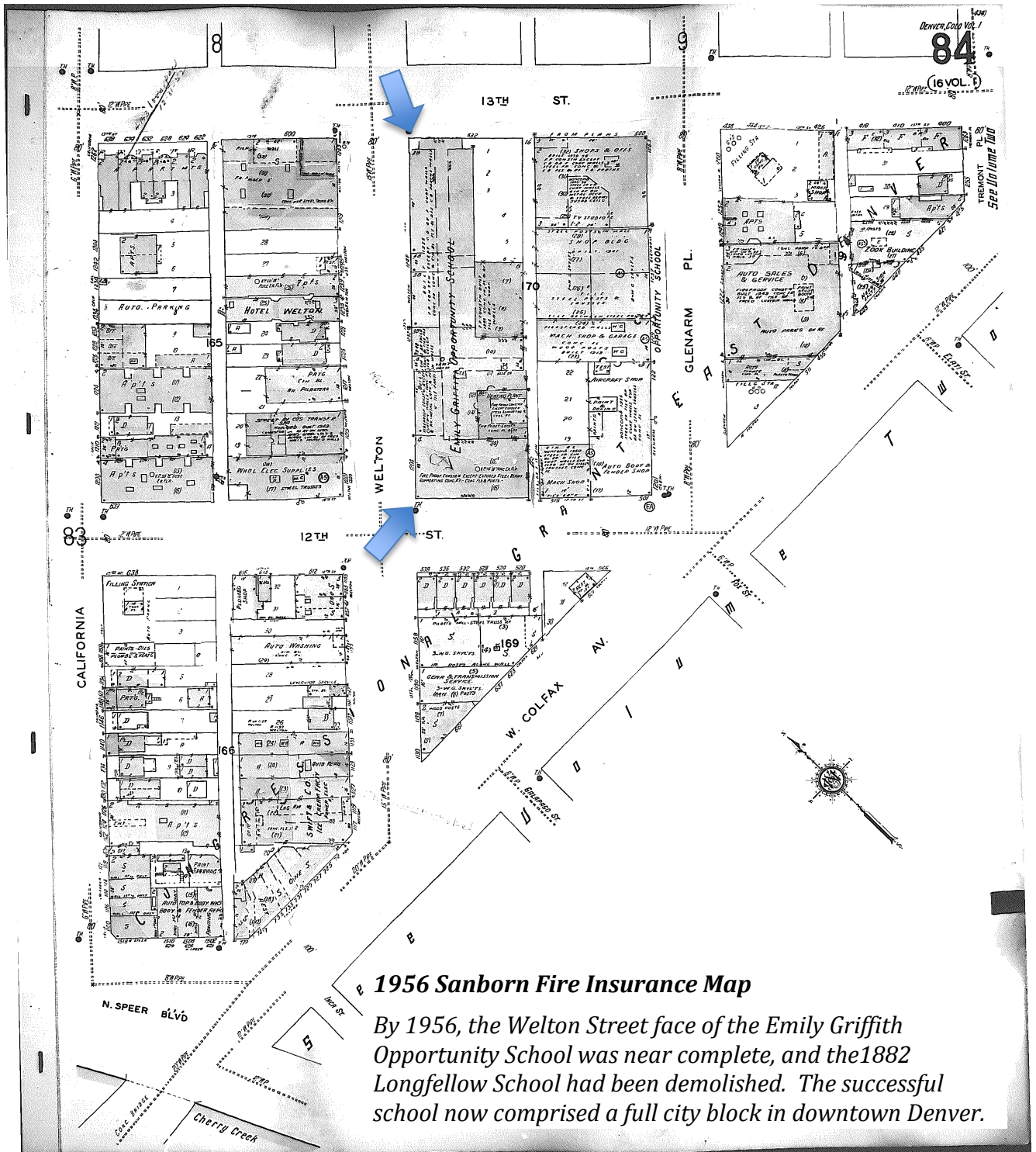
1978 auto shop:

8,918 sf, rectangular, 1 story, brick and concrete, International Style.



# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

Source of Information: Denver Post: Empire Magazine, "40 Years of Opportunity" (1956), Architectural Inventory Form, p. 3, 5; Survey of Denver Public Schools, p. 17; Denver Post, 2-1-42; Denver Landmark Preservation; Source of Information: 7-30-41 and 1-27-50 Building Permits



## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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- b. Architectural description including mention of major features, uncommon or unique design features, ancillary structures, and important landscape or site features. Also describe interior spaces with extraordinary design features (if any). Refer to Addendum A for current photos of the buildings and site.**

1926 Building:

The 1926 Building is a 4-level (3 story on full raised basement) red brick schoolhouse designed by E. Floyd Redding. The building is rectangular-shaped, with the short leg of the “L” facing Welton Street and its long side elevation fronting 12<sup>th</sup> Street. The building’s first level is partially set below grade with terra cotta belt course above and concrete lip at bottom. The enframed first level serves as the “piano noble” of the building’s otherwise modest Italian Renaissance Revival and Beaux-Arts styling. Vertical pilasters delineate the building’s middle or shaft, with a strong entablature at roof parapet creating the building’s top. The schoolhouse is finished with multi-hued red brick and creamy glazed terra cotta trim. The pilasters terminate at arched tops with inset panels of terra cotta torches and terra cotta coping.

The decorated brick and terra cotta pilasters divide the west and south façades of the 1926 Building into three broad bays each. The brick pilasters extend from the sill course of the first story windows to support the terra cotta entablature. The pilasters have terra cotta bases and capitals, as well as some decorative brickwork. Just below the second story is a continuous terra cotta belt course, serving as sills for the second story windows above.



*Terra Cotta Torch,  
for Knowledge*

The central entrance on Welton (west) Street is enframed within the façade’s central bay. Entry columns and stairs protrude forward onto the sidewalk, welcoming students inside. The projecting entrance pavilion and stair tower has brick pilasters with terra cotta base, supporting a prominent terra cotta entablature and cornice. Each pilaster has a terra cotta cartouche inscribed “O,” for Opportunity. The main entry contains a group of four non-original painted metal slab doors in metal frames, with covered transom above. Concrete steps lead to the raised entry.

The upper levels of the entry bay feature a triple window with six-light windows with shared terra cotta sill on the fourth story. Triple windows with three non-historic double-hung sashes and a continuous terra cotta sill are found on the other two stories above the entrance. The entry opening has a covered transom and four non-historic slab doors with small rectangular lights. The two outer bays on the west facade feature four levels of stacked double-hung window groupings with continuous terra cotta sills. Rectangular brick detailing decorates the wall surfaces between the upper level window groupings. The building’s concrete base serves as sills for the building’s lower level windows which are located at street level to allow natural light into the classrooms.



*Terra cotta  
cartouche  
inscribed "O," for  
Opportunity*

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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With the exception of an ornamented entry bay, the details on the west (Welton) façade largely continue across the longer 12<sup>th</sup> Street (south) elevation. The terra cotta coping continues on the south façade, with simplified terra cotta banding below the cornice. The exception to this is the projecting central bay, defined by three decorated brick pilasters supporting a full terra cotta entablature. This entablature features antefixes that have terra cotta torch ornaments, and a continuous projecting cornice. These pilasters enframe two sets of window trios on the upper floor levels. The frieze is brick with terra cotta insets. The two flanking bays feature two sets of double-hung window trios at each floor level with continuous terra cotta sills, similar to the Welton Street façade.

On the far west end of the south elevation of the school, white non-historic signage placed between the second and third story windows reads “EMILY GRIFFITH OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL.” Covering the terra cotta trim along the roof above the sign is a modern illuminated scrolling message sign.

The east alley wall continues the terra cotta coping on the south façade, while the belt course above the basement level terminates after rounding the alley corner. The alley elevation features original paired industrial multi-light windows with terra cotta sills and steel lintels. The building’s north wall extends east of the 1946 addition, and features many of the same details as the alley elevation. A tapered glazed structural tile smoke stack projects behind the building on top of a one-story boiler room. An original steel fire escape provides egress from the upper levels to grade in the alley.

### 1947 and 1956 Additions:

The 1947 and 1956 additions on Welton Street were designed in the International Style by W. Gordon Jamieson. They were originally intended for simultaneous construction as a single addition prior to World War II. Due to budget and

material constraints during the war, construction was delayed and the two sections were added separately to save money and continue use of the then-adjacent Longfellow School during construction of the 1947 addition.

The addition begins where the terra cotta coping along the roof of the 1926 building ends on Welton Street, and extends just north of the three windows beyond the entrance pavilion marked with the word “ACHIEVEMENT” above the main public entry doors. The complete demolition of the Longfellow School and construction of the second addition began in 1955 and was completed in 1956 to celebrate the school’s 40th Anniversary. “OPPORTUNITY” is engraved above the entrance on the 1956 addition.

The front façade wall of the post-World War II additions recesses in a couple feet from the 1926 façade, providing subtle differentiation and



*Photo showing construction of the first addition designed by Jamieson. This concrete-frame and brick clad addition was completed in 1947. Photo ca. 1946. Source: Denver Public Library*

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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deference to the original school building. The modern addition's brick and terra cotta materials were intended to harmonize with the 1926 school house, and to provide an integrated design. The floor levels of the addition match up with the original building, and the terra cotta belt course above the basement level ties into the original building's belt course and provides continuity across the building's Welton Street face. A modern stair tower projects in front of the façade at each part of the addition, extending above the roof cornice, to provide vertical relief to the horizontally-oriented walls. The additions features pairs of 6/1 steel sash windows with a few exceptions.

Narrow terra cotta trim runs along the parapet as weathertight coping for the 1947/1956 additions. The raised basement (1<sup>st</sup> level) is clad with terra cotta that surrounds paired, multi-light steel windows. The basement windows south of the 1956 entry are vertically-oriented steel 3/1 hung windows; the basement windows become smaller and change to horizontal orientation with vertical mullions as the grade rises north of the "OPPORTUNITY" entry. The main story on the west elevation of the 1947 and 1956 additions has a continuous terra cotta belt course just below the second story level, along the window sills. A horizontal emphasized terra cotta band fully enframes the fourth level window ribbons, and features stepped terra cotta detailing.

The raised stair tower pavilions feature enframed terra cotta surrounds at the first floor with modern entablature consisting of Greek key and stepped terra cotta detailing. Curved and fluted terra cotta details enframe the trio of recessed at-grade non-historic doors, with original divided light transom above. Rising from the base is a three level abstracted terra cotta column with stepped terra cotta paneling and trim. The terra cotta columns enframe the upper level window pairs which are offset from the building's other windows. Horizontal terra cotta banding meets the building's roofline, as the brick tower then extends several additional feet upward.

An ancillary stair tower and entry bay is inset on the far northern end of the Welton Street façade. A modern double door with original multi-light transom is recessed into the brick wall enframed by a curved terra cotta surround. A large concrete awning protects students entering and leaving the building. Two steel windows are offset above the entrance's shelter at the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> levels. A belt course containing three terra cotta stripes demarcates the secondary entry bay below the cornice, and then wraps the corner. This simple terra cotta banding extends across the north 13<sup>th</sup> Street building face, providing the only ornamentation for this secondary wall. The name "EMILY GRIFFITH" is engraved in the top band, "OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL" is engraved in the middle band, and the schools motto, "FOR ALL WHO WISH TO LEARN" is engraved in the bottom terra cotta band.

A one-story glass enclosed vestibule with flat roof projects from the east end of the north building wall. The vestibule's long projecting concrete cornice doubles as an awning, and announces the paired-door entry on the vestibule's east end. The west side of the stair tower features three rows of large steel multi-light steel sash window pairs, allowing light to flood the narrow stairway.



## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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The continuous alley-facing east elevation of the 1947 and 1956 building runs along an alleyway with parking between the schoolhouse and the shops. The pattern of horizontally-oriented steel casement window ribbons continues across this brick elevation. The common alley face has continuous terra cotta bands that run above the 4<sup>th</sup> level windows. Terra cotta windowsills continue along the 2<sup>nd</sup> (main) and 3<sup>rd</sup> levels of the building.

### Glenarm Place Accessory Buildings:

The vocational shops and accessory buildings on Glenarm Place are considered ancillary to the main education building (and its additions) along Welton St. While the Glenarm Place buildings are stylistically simpler than the Welton Street building and additions, all of these buildings share architectural vocabulary. Similar to the Welton Street building and additions, the Glenarm place buildings are constructed of red brick, and convey a strong horizontal emphasis through flat roofs, concrete coping, continuous awnings and window banding. Given that these are accessory structures to the main school buildings, the detailing is simpler, and concrete and metal are the preferred accent materials.

The shops and accessory buildings are situated along Glenarm Place, with the exception of the 1951 Welding Shop Building between the 1954 Body Shop Building and the 1926 Schoolhouse building on 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Shops are clad with red brick. The 1951 and 1954 buildings have concrete coping and trim, while the 1941 building has terra cotta coping and trim. The 1978 building has no coping or trim.

The ground floor level of the 1951 brick Welding Shop features an off-center wooden garage door with adjacent modern hollow metal man door, together covered by a cast concrete awning. The door set is flanked by one small steel sash window with concrete sill on the west and two small rectangular steel sash windows on the east. A row of rectangular steel casement windows punched into the brick second floor features a continuous projecting concrete sill and lintel line.

The adjacent 1954 Body Shop Building is situated at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Glenarm Place, with a design that closely corresponds to the 1951 Welding Shop. On the ground floor along 12<sup>th</sup> Street, a similar pairing of garage door and man door with cast concrete awning are centered on the brick façade. A second garage door is cut into the building's far western end. Three small steel sash windows with concrete sill punctuate the first floor. A row of punched steel casement windows with continuous concrete sill and lintel extend across the upper level, and are covered by a long steel canopy. The longer Glenarm Place façade features similar punched steel sash windows with concrete sill on the first floor, with a long continuous band of paired metal sash windows above separated by metal mullions and covered with an expansive metal awning. The window band is broken by a two-story garage bay with a modern metal roll up door. A deeply recessed man door is also punched into the brick façade at ground level.

The 1978 Auto Shop Building is a double height brick building; the modern shop replaced an earlier 1919 building at this location. The offset garage door and inset man-door are the only two openings on the ground floor. A grouping of three multi-light windows are framed within a severely projecting corbeled brick

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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element which also served as a sill. The blank northern half of the façade is broken by a single vertical aluminum multi-light window with brick sill on the upper level.

The long single-level 1941 brick Shop Building is punctuated with a series of single and paired steel casement windows interrupted by three man doors spread over the façade. The northern end of the building features a wooden garage door with divided light transom above. A ribbon of three metal sash windows lies on the far north end of the building. All windows feature terra cotta sills, and the windows and man doors are all covered by modern slanted metal awnings. The building is capped with terra cotta coping.

The KRMA Building, constructed in 1955, is a two-story brick building at the corner of Glenarm Place and 13<sup>th</sup> Street, with integrated stair tower, bands of modern horizontal windows, A stacked bond brick base, and concrete coping. A column of small punched rectangular windows with concrete lintels and sills decorates the south end of the Glenarm Place elevation. Two ribbons of metal multi-light windows extend across the façade, creating a strong horizontal emphasis. Deep awnings cover both window rows, which also have a continuous concrete sill. A man door, accessed by concrete steps, lies under the long first-floor awning on the far south end. A pair of metal multi-light doors with single-light transom and deep metal awning announce the building's main entry on the north end of the Glenarm Place façade.

Turning the corner onto 13<sup>th</sup> Street, two similar rows of metal ribbon windows extend across the façade, although no awnings cover these openings. The first floor window row is broken by a garage door flanked by a man door on either side. A three story stair tower is decorated with one column of punctuated horizontally-oriented rectangular windows similar to those on the Glenarm Place façade and an end column with two upper-level vertically oriented metal casement windows with door and small window pairing below. The multi-light door features a metal sidelight. The rear elevation of this building features two levels of window ribbons, with detailing similar to the two street facades.

**c. Describe character defining features; identify the key visual aspects that make up the character of this building.**

The following character defining features are associated with the main education building (including additions) on the Welton Street block face. (The Glenarm Place facing buildings are not considered contributing to the landmark designation; therefore, the character-defining features for these structures are not called out.)

**1926 Building:**

**i. Mass, Form and Styling:**

- a.** Boxy rectangular four-story schoolhouse mass with ample windows on elevations to provide maximum natural light to classroom and learning spaces.
- b.** Flat roof and raised parapet with terra cotta coping.
- c.** Tripartite Organization: Defined base, "shaft" (middle), and "capital" (top) components of the building elevations.



# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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- d. Raised main floor as “piano noble” of Italian Renaissance and Beaux-Arts Styles influence, demarcated by a terra cotta band which extends across Welton Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and wraps the alley corner.
      - e. Schoolhouse configuration of cubic mass with ample windows on all elevations to provide maximum natural light to all interior spaces.
      - f. Brick pilasters divide each façade into three bays.
      - g. Terra cotta and brick entablature with brick and terra cotta detailing, and terra cotta torch antefixes.
  - ii. Siting and Viewsheds:
    - a. Building has continuous street edge and fronts directly onto adjacent sidewalk.
    - b. Spacing behind building on numbered streets helps to distinguish the massing of the large schoolhouse building (with additions).
    - c. The proportional three-part arrangement of building of three exposed sides is visible from Welton and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets.
  - iii. Materials: Brick exterior with terra cotta ornamentation includes:
    - a. Unpainted red brick exteriors.
    - b. Horizontal terra cotta banding that wraps the corners.
    - c. Brick pilasters with terra cotta and brick highlights.
    - d. Concrete steps and lip at building base.
  - iv. Fenestration:
    - a. Large, “punched” openings of Schoolhouse configuration in horizontal arrangement.
    - b. Double hung sashes (“grouped” in 3s and 4s per historic configuration).
    - c. Original windows surviving at 4<sup>th</sup> floor above Welton Street entry, and on east and north elevations.
    - d. Terra cotta sills.
  - v. Entry:
    - a. Projecting Welton Street facing entry pavilion accessed by concrete stairway.
    - b. Deeply recessed doorways (four) with transom above.
    - c. Prominent terra cotta entablature and cornice.
    - d. Metal and glass light fixtures on pilasters.
    - e. Cartouches each embellished with “O” for Opportunity School.

## **1946 and 1957 Addition:**

- i. Mass, Form and Styling:
  - a. Uniform rectangular four-story presentation with industrial proportions/scale, aligned with the floor plates and window ribbon bands of the 1926 building.
  - b. Front façade wall recessed in to provide slight differentiation from 1926 building.
  - c. Flat roof disguised by continuous brick parapets, 2 entry bays rise slightly above parapet line to emphasize their public destinations.
  - d. Abstracted classical elements continued from 1926 building, including defined base and “shaft” (middle), including raised main floor enframed in terra cotta and belt course below 2<sup>nd</sup> floor windows to define base; tall stair towers define shaft.

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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- e. The “capital” top is a plainly detailed masonry parapet on Welton Street. On 13<sup>th</sup> Street, the “capital” reappears as three horizontal stripes just below the parapet, topping a brick elevation entirely absent of fenestration or other ornament.
- f. Horizontal ribbon windows interrupted only by entry pavilions, flat ornamentation, strong vertical circulation towers, all characteristic of the International Style.
- g. Glassy one-story entry vestibule with cantilevered concrete canopy projecting from north building wall.
- h. Floor levels and belt correspond with the 1926 building
- i. Engraved words over entries

## ii. Siting and Viewsheds:

- a. Building has continuous street edge and fronts directly onto adjacent sidewalk.
- b. Spacing behind building on numbered street helps to distinguish the massing of the addition, and highlights the modern entry awning and glassy vestibule
- c. Continuous façade appearance across Welton Street, integrated with the 1926 building.

## iii. Materials: Brick exterior with terra cotta ornamentation:

- a. Unpainted red brick exteriors
- b. Horizontal terra cotta banding, fluted panels, enframed window details, coping and other detailing.
- c. Brick pilasters with terra cotta and brick highlights.

## iv. Fenestration:

- a. Large, “punched” openings of Schoolhouse configuration in horizontal ribbon arrangement.
- b. Double hung historic 6/1 steel sashes (“grouped” in 2s per historic configuration on Welton Street façade except on secondary stair tower on Welton St.); historic fixed steel lights at basement level north of “Opportunity School,” and 2/2 steel sash windows on east side of ancillary stair tower.
- c. Terra cotta sills.

## v. Entries:

- a. Two pronounced public entry pavilions facing Welton Street at sidewalk level, with enframed terra cotta surrounds at first floor and modern detailed entablature with raised “Opportunity” and “Achievement” lettering.
- b. Curbed and fluted terra cotta details deeply recessed door trio with original multi-light transom at two main entries
- c. Entry stair towers feature three level abstracted terra cotta columns with fluted and paneled detailing.
- d. Secondary inset entry and stair tower on far northern end of Welton Street façade, with double door and original multi-light transom, and original terra cotta surround and concrete awning.

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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- e. One-story glass divided light vestibule with cantilevered flat roof concrete cornice projecting from east end of north building wall.
- f. Projecting Welton Street facing entry pavilion accessed by concrete stairway.



*1926 Opportunity School Building,  
Photo c, late 1940s  
Source: Denver Public Library*



*1947 School Addition with 1926 School on Right,  
Photo April 1949  
Source: Denver Public Library*



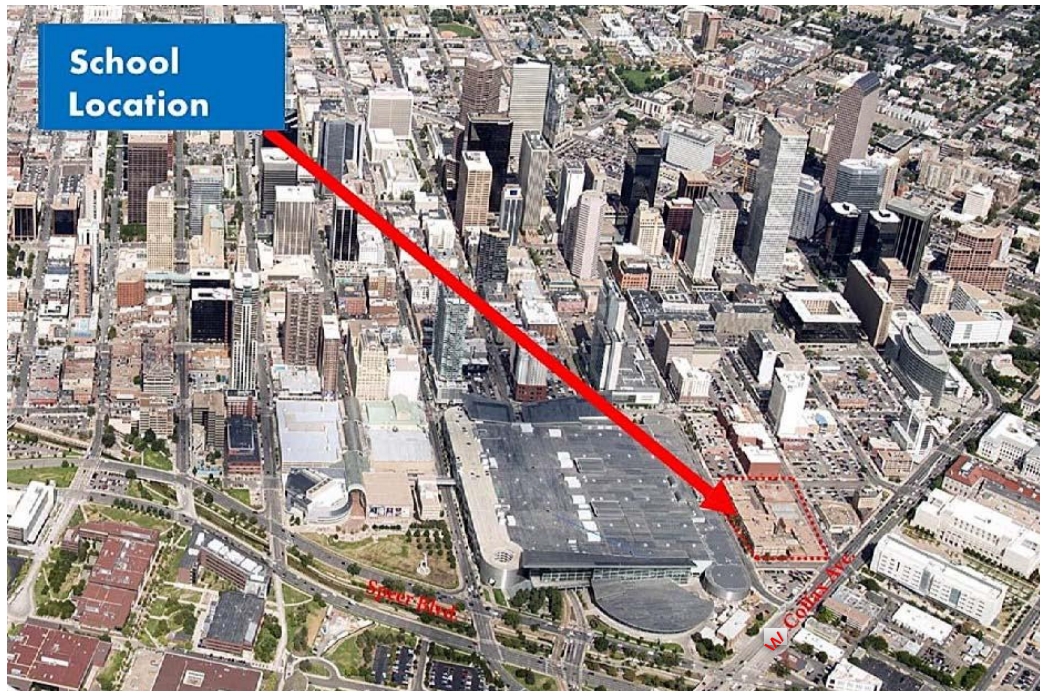
*View from 13<sup>th</sup> and Welton Street, looking south at 1956 school addition in  
forefront, with 1947 addition and the original 1926 school construction.  
Photo c. 1969  
Source: Denver Public Library*

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

**d. Describe location and setting including physical context and relationship to neighborhood and other historic structures.**

The school is situated in a prominent area in Downtown near major cultural, entertainment, civic, and commercial destinations. The building is located in the Silver Triangle downtown which is defined by Speer Boulevard, 16th Street, Colfax Avenue, and Lawrence Street and located in close proximity to the Golden Triangle, Auraria Campus, and 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall. This location is served by multiple modes of transportation and offers easy access to educational facilities, government agencies, sporting and other social events, dining and entertainment, performing arts events, museums, parks, trails, and neighborhoods. While the building is not located immediately adjacent to any locally designated properties, Civic Center Park and its associated historic civic buildings are located approximately two blocks to the southeast. Many historically designated commercial buildings are located within a five block area north and northeast of the school site in the heart of the historic downtown core. The historic working class and largely immigrant and Hispanic community of Auraria was located several blocks to the west of the school.

The convergence of Denver's diagonal downtown street grid and the city's cardinal street grid creates a visibly distinct southern corner to the site off of Colfax Avenue at 12<sup>th</sup> and Glenarm Place. Although there are many varying adjacent uses to the block today, including business and trade, social, institutional, residential, and parking services, the most prominent adjacent use is the Colorado Convention Center across Welton Street. The second most significant use of space in the area is devoted to parking. The structures on adjacent properties exhibit a mix of large, medium, and small massing resulting in an inconsistent development pattern.



*Location of Emily Griffith Opportunity School. Note the school's location on W. Colfax Avenue, on a major entry artery into downtown Denver.*

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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- e. Describe major alterations to the exterior of the structure and dates of major alterations if known. Describe any plans to alter the exterior.**

This discussion focuses on the 1926 schoolhouse, with 1946/57 addition. The most significant alternation to the 1926 portion of the building is the replacement of the original windows and doors, and covering of the transoms. Some original windows remain as noted in the character-defining features. The other major alterations to the 1926 portion of the building include the introduction of air conditioning units and signage, including a digital readout sign added to the 12<sup>th</sup> St. side of the building. Miscellaneous conduits and exterior lighting have also been added.

The 1947 and 1956 additions to the education building appear to retain their historic windows. The doors have been replaced per historic photos. But like the 1926 building the AC units, signage, security lighting and associated conduit are all non-historic alterations.

- f. Include a statement describing how the building currently conveys its historic integrity. For example does it retain its original design, materials, location, workmanship, setting, historic associations and feeling?**

The 1926 building was used by the original owner for its original intended educational purpose for nearly 90 years and has seen thousands of students come and go over the years, the building maintain a high level of historic integrity, particularly on the exterior. The 1946/57 additions also have seen little exterior change over the years. The school has integrity of design, materials, location and setting. No major changes have been made to the exterior of the buildings with the exception of the alterations listed above. The original massing, design, and brick and terra cotta materials remain very intact. Although many of the windows and doors have been replaced, the configuration, sizing and operation of the windows and doors have not changed.

The interior of the buildings have been modified incrementally over time to address changing philosophies and technologies in education. Based on the technical nature of the vocational shops, those buildings have been modified most to incorporate new technologies. Despite these interior modifications the school maintains its integrity of association with Emily Griffith and feeling as a vocational educational institution.

## **8. History of the Structure and Its Associations**

- e. Describe the history of the structure and its association with important individuals, group, events or historical trends.**
- f. Describe specific historic associations, including why this structure has direct association with the individual, group, event or historical trend**

### Establishment of the Opportunity School: The Vision of Emily Griffith

The opening of the Opportunity School in 1916 was largely due to the tenacious efforts of Emily Griffith, a well-known Denver educator who advocated that public education should be available to persons of all ages to provide basic life and



## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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technical skills. Emily K. Griffith, eldest daughter of Andrew and Martha Griffith (born 1868 in Cincinnati, Ohio), first began teaching at age 14 in Nebraska after completing an eighth grade education. She taught in Nebraska for approximately 10 years, beginning in 1884. Emily Griffith was aware that many of her students' parents were unable to read or write. This is not surprising since on the 1880s Nebraska frontier, three out of five homesteaders were foreign born or first-generation Americans. During these years, Ms. Griffith became frustrated that public education was for the young, but was not helping people of all ages obtain basic life and work skills. This early experience shaped her ideas of how education should be delivered to the public.<sup>2</sup>

When Emily Griffith's family moved to Denver in 1894 or 1895, she received additional teacher training with Denver Public Schools (DPS), teaching first at Central School (Kalamath St. and W. 12<sup>th</sup> Ave in Lincoln Park) and then at the 24<sup>th</sup> Street School (24<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets, an ethnically diverse school in the Five Points area that largely served minority groups and industrial workers' families. While teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the 24<sup>th</sup> Street School, she realized that public education was not providing her students with the education they needed to obtain jobs, and that many of her students' parents and family members did not make a living wage. Believing that education was the key to improved life and job prospects, Emily Griffith began to offer her students' parents and working children in the neighborhood English and mathematics classes during lunch hour and in the evenings.<sup>3</sup>



*Emily Griffith, photo undated,  
Source: Denver Public Library*

In 1904, Emily Griffith was named Deputy State Superintendent of Schools, a position she occupied for four years. From 1910 – 1912, she served as Deputy State Superintendent of Public Institution. Housed in the State Capitol during her two turns as a state administrator, Ms. Griffith met many influential political players, educators and business leaders in Colorado. She began fine-tuning her plan to open a school to provide people of all ages the opportunity to achieve continuous education within a public school setting. She also began to gain support from civic, political and business leaders who saw that providing increased adult education opportunities would result in a more educated and skilled local workforce, and give Denver a competitive advantage attracting and maintaining industries and large employers.<sup>4</sup>

While returning to teaching in 1914, Emily Griffith accelerated her advocacy efforts to establish a full-time public school “for all who wish to learn.” She believed the solution to many of her students' struggles was to provide workforce training for families so that parents could improve their station in life and young students could focus on school work, rather than working to help support their families. A 1915 Denver Post article quoted Ms.

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<sup>2</sup> Faulker, *Touching Tomorrow: The Emily Griffith Story*, pp. 2 – 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Opportunity News*, Vol. V, No. 8

<sup>4</sup> Faulker, *Touching Tomorrow: The Emily Griffith Story*, pp. 2-19.



## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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Griffith, stating, “I want the age limit for admission lifted and classes so organized that a boy or a girl working in a bakery, store, laundry or any kind of shop, who has an hour or two to spare, may come to my school and study what he or she wants to learn to make life more useful. The same rule goes for older folks too. I already have a name for the school. It is “Opportunity”.<sup>5</sup>

She began building alliances with an assortment of social and social service institutions, including Colorado women’s clubs, the Red Cross, the Federal Naturalization Bureau, churches, and the YMCA and YWCA. Soon, Griffith’s campaign caught the attention of reporter Frances “Pinky” Wayne. Ms. Wayne’s father was James Belford, the first man elected to the House of Representatives in the state of Colorado. Pinky’s notoriety helped Ms. Griffith’s educational vision gain support from prominent business organizations, such as the Colorado Merchants and Manufacturing Association, Rotary and Kiwanis Club, and the Denver Chamber of Commerce.<sup>6</sup> Local employers such as the Gates Rubber Factory and the Denver Pacific and Burlington Railroad Shops also supported the opening of the Opportunity School, believing it would help to solve labor shortage problems, while also eliminating language barriers so that employers could communicate better with their immigrant employees.<sup>7</sup>



*Early picture of Emily Griffith at Opportunity School, photo undated, Source: Emily Griffith Technical College*

In 1916, Emily Griffith’s efforts were rewarded. On May 11, 1916, the Denver Public School board authorized the repair of the vacant Longfellow school building on Welton Street between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets to serve as an “opportunity school,” with Emily Griffith appointed principal with an annual salary of \$1,800.<sup>8</sup>

Emily’s vision to offer adult basic education for free, with classes offered both day and night, for young and old, without restrictions, attendance mandates or pre-qualifications was finally realized on September 9, 1916, when the Opportunity School first opened to the public. Expecting 200 students the first week, more than 1,400 showed up. The school’s early students

included “adults who wanted to finish eighth grade, immigrants intent upon passing citizenship tests and young people who wanted to apprentice in trades ranging from automotive mechanics to millinery, cooking and carpentry...”<sup>9</sup>

Emily Griffith was at the helm of the school from 1916 until her retirement in 1933. Her view of education was new and visionary. Her overall philosophy was to provide people of all ages and races with the chance to learn and to “get practical training in whatever line interests them,” in order to better themselves, be self-sufficient, and productive. The school’s flexibility, democratic openness, pragmatic approach, and sensitivity to individual academic needs was visionary for its time. Former criminals,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Norton, “History of Emily Griffith Opportunity School,” p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Faulkner, *Touching Tomorrow: The Emily Griffith Story*, pp. 20-26.

<sup>9</sup> Denver Post, “Emily Griffith’s Revolution in Education”

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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the mentally and physically impaired and others excluded from mainstream education were welcome, as “they are the ones we can help most,” Principal Griffith insisted. Emily Griffith would often quip that “there is at least one thing in life that a person can do well...let’s find out what it is.”<sup>10</sup>

Emily Griffith also employed ground-breaking teaching methods at her new school. Supplementing its full time staff, part-time instructors were recruited from local business and industries. Her extensive connections with business leaders and the greater community helped the school to offer classes to help students obtain needed skills for employment. She partnered with large employers, such as Denver Gas and Electric Company, to provide specific training for its workers. Ms. Griffith’s focus on providing students with workforce training was an early precursor to the community college and vocational education concepts.

Personal contact and relationships between teachers and students were also encouraged to help motivate students and give them the support they needed. Follow-up phone calls from teachers to students, and from teachers to students’ employers were customary. Principal Griffith encouraged her teachers to provide students with emotional support, as well as filling their academic needs. Each morning, Emily Griffith wrote inspirational messages, such as “You can do it,” and “Come when you can” on the school’s front chalkboard. She also understood that students needed sustenance, and transported soup from her home to the school for many years.

Over the years, Principal Griffith continued to use her political savvy and connections to obtain funding and support to expand the school’s programs and enrollment. As the Opportunity School gained success locally, news of the school also spread around the country and the world. She spoke at many national forums, and “received offers from the governments of Russia, Greece, Germany and England to...help create similar schools.”<sup>11</sup> In 1933, Emily Griffith retired, leaving behind a lasting legacy. The Opportunity School graduated 135,369 students through its various programs during Principal Griffith’s tenure at the school.<sup>12</sup>

Emily Griffith remained concerned with the plight of children and the poor throughout her life. She served on the Board of Control for the State Industrial School for Boys in the mid-1920s, and worked alongside the Kiwanis Club to establish a home for needy boys. In 1925, Griffith was invited to serve on the Board of Trustees of the Denver Foundation, Colorado’s first charitable community foundation.<sup>13</sup>

After retirement, she settled in a cabin in Pinecliffe, Colorado with her sister Florence, living a simple life and mostly avoiding publicity. On June 18, 1947, Emily Griffith and her sister Florence were murdered in their Pinecliffe cabin, bringing a remarkable life to an abrupt close. According to Denver Public Schools archives, “No motive or clues as to the murderer were ever proven. A former associate, Fred Lundy, was suspected of the killing. It was believed he might have been in love with Emily and performed a mercy killing.

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<sup>10</sup> Faulker, pp. 27-47.

<sup>11</sup> Denver Post, “Emily Griffith’s Revolution in Education”

<sup>12</sup> Faulkner, pp. 82-108.

<sup>13</sup> Faulker, pp. 86-91

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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Florence, Emily's sister, was unwell and an ever increasing burden on Emily. No one knows for sure, as Fred committed suicide a few weeks later.”

The crime remains unsolved. Emily Griffith was buried in Denver's Fairmount Cemetery along with so many other great pioneers of Denver and Colorado History.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of Emily Griffith to our city and state cannot be overstated. Over the course of her life and after her death, Ms. Griffith has been honored in recognition of the enormous impact she has had on the city through the Opportunity School as well as her contributions to Denver's social organizations. Some of her honors include:

- 1911: honorary degree of Doctor of Pedagogy from Colorado State Teachers College
- 1922: honorary degree of Master of Education from the University of Colorado, became the president of the Colorado Education Association, appointed to the Child Welfare Board, and served on the Board of Control of the State Industrial School for Boys.
- Honored by the Quota Club, the Zonta Club, the Rotary Club, and the Gyro Club
- Belonged to the PEO Sisterhood and the Altrusa Club
- 1924: nominated for the Woodrow Wilson Award
- Honorary member of the Colorado Manufacturers and Merchants Association and the Kiwanis Club
- 1931: elected Chairman of the Educational Crafts Section of the World Federation of Education
- 1932: named Woman of the year by the Business and Professional Women's Club and was awarded Denver license plate number one<sup>15</sup>
- 1976: a stained glass window was installed in the Colorado State Capitol dedicated to the memory of Emily Griffith
- February 9, 1980: declared Emily Griffith Day by Governor Richard Lamm
- 1985: Inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame
- 2000: Denver's Millennium Award for Denver's Most Useful Citizen<sup>16</sup>

## Educational and Social Trends: Increased Learning Opportunities for Denver Residents

While Griffith's campaigning and Pinky Wayne's notoriety helped generate local support for Denver Public Schools to open Denver's Opportunity School in 1916, educational and social trends in Colorado and the United States also influenced the decision to open the public opportunity school as a full-time day and evening institution of learning.

When the school opened, Colorado had been a state for just over 40 years and much of the state's population was composed of immigrants. There was also a national push to break down perceived segregated ethnic groups and to form a cohesive American society. National "Americanization Day" on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in 1915 is an example of this national push. At the same time, a major shortage in

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Elinor Bluemel, "Emily Griffith and The Opportunity School of Denver," 1954, 55-68.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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industrial laborers made it difficult for American employers to find employees to fill skilled and semi-skilled positions. Many immigrant laborers also lacked English language skills necessary to find success in their jobs. This led to employers' increased interest in supporting language education and vocational training for prospective employees.<sup>17</sup>

It is important to note that the idea of vocational and language education programs were not new to Denver and did not originate with Emily Griffith. Denver's Manual Training High School, founded in the 1890s, provided traditional educational classes for school-age children during the day, but also included courses such as forge and machine shop for boys, and sewing and cooking for girls. By 1915, DPS provided adult literacy classes in two school buildings. Other private institutions and major employers also offered courses in shorthand and bookkeeping, and vocational trades. While these efforts were noteworthy, they were somewhat piecemeal and restricted, and did not always provide students with the skills needed to obtain gainful employment.<sup>18</sup>



*Millinery Class, photo c. 1920s*  
*Source: Denver Public Library*

The Opportunity School provided a much more flexible but comprehensive approach to filling the gap for workforce and adult education than prior efforts in Denver. According to biographer Debra Faulkner, "What was new and visionary about...[the] school was that it would bring adult basic education, immigrant education, and vocational education under the public schools umbrella" and that "it would be free and open to all...offer classes both day and night, for young and old." Students were not required to embark in a traditional high school curriculum, even if they lacked a high school diploma. Students could also chose the classes they wanted to attend, rather than be required to adhere to a strict curriculum, which was a novel educational approach at the time.<sup>19</sup>

The school's early priority on providing Denver residents with the opportunity to obtain basic life and language skills, as well as technical skills to advance and find employment, is evident in its stated goals:

- i. To provide a working knowledge of many trades and industries
- ii. To offer opportunity to men and women already in mechanical, industrial, and commercial pursuits who have the ambition to become more efficient workers
- iii. To provide the fundamentals of an education for those persons who have been deprived of school advantages in youth
- iv. To give another chance to boys and girls, who for various reasons, have not fitted well into regular public schools
- v. To give people born in other countries a chance to learn English and also to prepare them for naturalization and citizenship<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> René Galindo, "The Nativistic Legacy of the Americanization Era in the Education of Mexican Immigrant Students," *Educational Studies*, 2011, pg. 329-330.

<sup>18</sup> McKeever, Forrest and McAllister, "History of the Public Schools of Denver"

<sup>19</sup> Faulker, "Touching Tomorrow: The Emily Griffith Story", p. 10-26

<sup>20</sup> Norton, "A History of Emily Griffith Opportunity School," 3.

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

The school expanded and succeeded by providing its students with a wide range of educational options. In its first year, the school's enrollment was nearly 2,500 students, focusing largely on literacy training and basic vocational topics such as typing, bookkeeping, stenography and telegraphy. English and "Americanization" classes were offered early on to help immigrants adjust to life in America. In the school's first year alone, 550 immigrants became "good Americans".<sup>21</sup> By 1917, the school offered an automobile repair course, reportedly the earliest public educational course of its kind in the U.S. The school also reportedly offered the first Beauty Parlor course in the United States, teaching personal care, manners, and ethics. The offerings soon expanded to include courses in salesmanship, dressmaking, millinery (hat design), waitressing, bricklaying, lathe operations, and wallpaper hanging. The school's premise that students would improve themselves if provided the opportunity was bearing fruit. Principal Griffith's approach of offering training courses well-matched to available jobs succeeded, as students bettered themselves by finding the career best suited to them. The enrollment grew to almost 3,000 students by the end of 1917. School hours were from 8:30 a.m. until 9:15 p.m.<sup>22</sup>

### Emily Griffith Opportunity School - Providing Critical Workforce Training for Denver:

This school's increasing focus on workforce training accelerated with the United States' 1917 entry into World War I. The War required the mass mobilization of workers to provide services and manufacture goods needed to support the wartime economy and to help the Allies win the war. The Opportunity School played a pivotal role in training the local workforce, especially because much of the available workforce had gone to fight in the war. During the war women were trained to work "men's" jobs at the school. American allies also sent adults to Denver to receive industrial training at the school. The Opportunity School received funding from the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 to train civilians to support the war effort. Soon, the Opportunity School offered training in radio communications, ambulance driving, engine maintenance and repair, drafting and first aid.<sup>23</sup>



*Opportunity School Radio Class, c. 1920s,  
Source: Denver Public Library*

As the War came to an end, a new disaster gripped the world - the 1918 Flu Pandemic. The Opportunity School played a central role in helping Colorado cope with the sudden onslaught of sick and dying people by training nurses. Most of the nurses trained at the Opportunity School were sent to Europe to attend to the soldiers. The school trained a special regiment of nurses to tend to the sick at home to reduce fatalities. The school also began teaching students the importance of hygiene in their new densely populated urban environment to help prevent another disease outbreak.<sup>24</sup>

Following the close of World War I, the male workforce returned home and employers hired them for the jobs that women had worked during the War. The Opportunity School served as the receiving station for the "Vocational Educational District, comprising Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico and

<sup>21</sup> Norton, "A History of Emily Griffith Opportunity School," 3,4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Norton, "A History of Emily Griffith Opportunity School," 3, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Billings, "The Influenza Pandemic of 1918"

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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Utah.” The receiving station served three purposes; it supported “Americanize” the immigrants who had served their adopted country, helped veterans decide on a trade that suited them, and set veterans on a permanent course that was needed to industrialize the nation.<sup>25</sup>

Even with the influx of returning veterans, the school continued to provide many educational and training opportunities for women. The jobs that many men worked often paid enough to support a family, but without much of a safety net. The Opportunity School offered women a chance to work a broader range of jobs. This training also increased the ability of widows and single mothers to work while continuing to raise their children at home and live autonomous lives.<sup>26</sup> Also, in 1929, the Opportunity School began teaching childbirth and parenting classes.<sup>27</sup>

The school’s success in the community and its pragmatic approach to education helped to protect it from increasing racial tensions in Denver during the 1910s and 1920s. In the early 1920s racial discrimination and tensions peaked as groups such as the Ku Klux Klan gained political traction in Denver and Colorado. The school’s emphasis on job training and local employers’ overall satisfaction with school graduates helped to buffer the Opportunity School from the city’s growing racial tensions. To offer some protection for students in this context the school provided its students with cards that read: “This man (woman, boy, or girl) is a student at Opportunity School, and is worthy of your respect. If he needs help, call me. Day phone, TA2014; night phone, YO1555.”<sup>28</sup>

During the mid-1920s, the Opportunity School began working more closely with employee unions. Along with fighting for better wages and working conditions for union members, unions also took steps to ensure that their members were properly trained. The Bakers’ Union, Carpenters’ Union, Plumbers’ Union, Typographical Union, and Electrical Workers’ Union all required their members to take classes at the Opportunity School. The school expanded classes for electricians, plumbers, and printing in the 1920s, as well as courses in auto repair. To accommodate its growing welding program, a shop was built for welders in 1919. During the 1920s, the school also instituted courses to train students to build homes and furnishings, and to provide services for restaurants, shopping centers, hotels, and the tourist industry. As early as 1926, the school had established extra-mural classes at the Gates Rubber Factory and the Pacific and Burlington Railroad shops. In April 1928 a press release by the Department of the Interior stated: “Denver business men look upon Opportunity School as their school from which they can get earnest employees and to which they can send employees for training.”<sup>29</sup>

The Opportunity School’s tighter cooperation with unions and employers led to greater enrollment. The school’s first new substantial building, designed by local architect E. Floyd Redding, was constructed in 1926 at the corner of Welton and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets. E. Floyd Redding was a well-known architect who designed the Hotel Boulderado in Boulder, Co. and many schools along with his father William. Another

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<sup>25</sup> Norton, “A History of Emily Griffith Opportunity School,” 4.

<sup>26</sup> Abbott et al, *Colorado*, pg. 181-190.

<sup>27</sup> Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, pg. 590-591.

<sup>28</sup> Swift and Studebaker, “What is this Opportunity School?,” 17.

<sup>29</sup> Norton, “A History of Emily Griffith Opportunity School,” 5.



## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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design of E. Floyd Redding, the El Monte Hotel in Monte Vista, Colorado, was constructed in the same year as the Opportunity's School new building.<sup>30</sup> The school's optimism during this time is reflected in the fact that the original Renaissance Revival design for the school extended along the entire Welton Street block face from 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Street. However, funding constraints allowed only the initial portion to be built at 12<sup>th</sup> and Welton Streets. The original construction included a boiler plant, and the tall rear chimney still evident on the site today. The new building led to increased teaching staff and enrollment, with over 100 teachers and 9,500 students enrolled in the 1926-27 school year.<sup>31</sup> The 1926 building provided space for a carpentry shop on the first floor, print shop and three classrooms on the second floor, chemistry and physics labs and three classrooms and a music room on the fourth floor.<sup>32</sup>



*Emily Griffith Opportunity School Shoe Repair Class, c. 1945, Source: Denver Public Library*

Denver businessmen were not the only people who sent people to the Opportunity School for training. An article by Morris M. Cleavenger from February 8, 1930, explains that four engineers from the United Soviet Socialist Republic were sent to Colorado to learn the methods of the Bureau of Reclamation, obtain American machinery to use in Russia, and recruit American engineers to come to Russia to help Russia build economic independence. These engineers attended Opportunity School to improve their understanding of spoken English. This story also attests to the school's national and international reputation at the time.<sup>33</sup>

A survey of the 1930-31 school year published by the American Association for Adult Education provides valuable insight into the Opportunity School's operations. The survey described the school's close relationship with a wide variety of employers, organized labor, and social agencies. It emphasized that the Opportunity School provided vocational guidance to help students find the career to which they are best suited. The survey found that trade and commercial classes accounted for 38 percent of the school's attendance. Welding was the largest trade course, with 80 percent of students completing the welding program finding employment in the same year. The school also offered graded and ungraded academic courses for adults who had not received a basic education, serving as an alternative high school. The survey noted that the school worked closely with the Federal Naturalization Board, helping people who had lived in America for over five years prepare for the U.S. citizenship exam.

The survey also delineated the School's role in providing and supporting social services for the community. The school's relationship with Fitzsimmons Hospital for War Veterans was designed to help veterans obtain job training, and to also obtain "moral and mental rehabilitation." The school's association with other notable agencies was also listed in the survey, including the American Red Cross, a variety

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<sup>30</sup> National Register of Historic Places, El Monte Hotel, Monte Vista, Co

<sup>31</sup> Opportunity News, Vol, V, No. 8, April 1945

<sup>32</sup> Slater Paull, Historic Structure Assessment, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Swift, Fletcher Harper and JW Studebaker. *What is this Opportunity School? A Study of the Denver tax-supported institution of that name, prepared for the American Association for Adult Education.*

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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of churches, the Social Service Bureau, the Rotary Club Boys' Work Committee, and the Employment Department of Young Women's Christian Association.<sup>34</sup>

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Opportunity School helped Denver cope with the economic crisis by "improving the skills of the employed, sustaining the morale of those unemployed, and contributing to the occupational, economic, social, intellectual and moral rehabilitation of the unemployed."<sup>35</sup> As the New Deal began to gain momentum following Franklin Delano Roosevelt's inauguration in early 1933, Emily Griffith announced her retirement on April 6, 1933.

In 1934, Paul Essert, the new principal, changed the school's name to "Emily Griffith Opportunity School" to honor the school's visionary founder. Under Essert, the school began offering classes in cooperation with the Federal Emergency Relief Act, the National Youth Administration, and the Works Progress Administration. Along with the technical training for New Deal projects, Betty Westhaver McKeen taught a pottery class that began in 1935 and other art classes soon followed. Nonetheless, enrollment dropped between 1933 and 1937, as the Great Depression deepened.<sup>36</sup>

During the late 1930s, Principal Essert "added a new businesslike approach" to the school, contrasting with Emily Griffith's more flexible approach of offering students any class they wanted. Continental Oil Company (Conoco) and the Gates Rubber Company were two businesses the school worked with beginning in the late 1930s. The classes were separated into four categories: "distributive, service, women's, and a coverall for trade apprenticeship and industry." Essert also set up an advisory committee "composed of employers, labor leaders, Essert, and the coordinator for that occupation." The committee added and removed classes as demands fluctuated and picked the instructors for the classes.<sup>37</sup> There were advantages to having the employers and labor leaders involved in picking the instructors—it created a situation where the students and teachers shared many things in common. They had the same employers, worked similar hours, had the same payday, shared the same days off, and lived in the same environment. The instructors were also familiar with the jobs they were training employees for so they could teach the values, customs, and practices employers expected in that line of work.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "A History of Emily Griffith Opportunity School," Opportunity News, April 1945

<sup>35</sup> Architectural Inventory Form, Colorado Historical Society, 2003

<sup>36</sup> Opportunity News, Vol. V, No. 8, April 1945

<sup>37</sup> "Opportunity Always Knocks Twice," *Forbes Magazine*, 150.

<sup>38</sup> Meyer, "Adapting the Immigrant to the Line," 76.

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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*Emily Griffith Opportunity School Welding Class, 1950,  
Source: Denver Public Library*

The transition to war readiness in the late 1930s turned the school's focus once again to war readiness and industrial training, and enrollment again increased. Emily Griffith Opportunity School was an empirical solution to the nation's biggest economic problem: a shortage of skilled labor and a dearth of opportunity for unskilled workers to receive training. With the impending threat of war looming again in Europe, the War Department became increasingly concerned that American industries would be drained in order to provide a modern mechanized army to support the war effort.

On July 1, 1940, prior to the United States entrance into World War II, the school responded to Denver industries and began the "Defense Production Industries" program. Shortly after, the Emily Griffith Opportunity School began receiving funds from the U.S. government for the War Production Training Program. The goal of the program was to train industrial workers in the shortest time possible. The program lasted just under five years and trained 26,779 workers to manufacture products and provide services demanded by a wartime economy.<sup>39</sup>

Programs at Opportunity School also trained students around the clock to work with aircraft, metals, electronics, machines, autos, textiles, rubber, ammunition, refrigeration, highway construction, and communications. The school also taught Spanish, skills needed for farm labor, counseling, and leadership skills. These skills were all used to increase production on the home front.

The massive increase in the scope of operations of the school resulted in the 1941 construction of a new shop on Glenarm Place.<sup>40</sup> The school also established the Occupational Adjustment Center to test the aptitude of the students and guide them to occupations in demand. The School's success in training workers for industry also helped give Denver an upper hand in receiving military contracts during the wartime era. During this era, plans were made to expand the 1926 building; however, these plans were postponed until after the close of World War II because of wartime restrictions on materials and labor.<sup>41</sup>

While the school's focus shifted more directly to providing workforce ready skills in the late 1930s and 1940s, the school continued to have a strong reputation for providing opportunities for all Denver residents who wanted to learn. The halls of the school were racially integrated, especially during the evening classes. Students from all over the city came to the school, but most of the students came from the Platte River district. In 1938, the Emily Griffith Opportunity School reported 12,000 pupils, 80 percent of whom were over the age of 21. There were 104 regular courses taught by 113 full and part time teachers. In that school year the school received \$226,000 dollars of assistance from Denver's Public School System and the U.S. government.<sup>42</sup>

One of the largest contracts Denver firms won five days before the attack on Pearl Harbor was a \$56 million dollar contract to prefabricate twenty-four 300-foot-long destroyer escort ships. A news article in Emily Griffith Opportunity School Manuscript

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<sup>39</sup> Schiemann, Fred J., "Foreword," *Summary of Activities: War Production Training Department*.

<sup>40</sup> RMN 8-13-42.

<sup>41</sup> Norton, "A History of Emily Griffith Opportunity School," 6.

<sup>42</sup> Opportunity Always Knocks Twice," *Forbes Magazine*, 150.

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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Collection titled: "Welders on Denver Navy Jobs Must Be Certified at School," explains the role Opportunity School played in this naval contract approximately 950 miles from the port where the ships were assembled. The article reported that welders employed at 12 regional manufacturing firms fabricating materials for ships were required to have welder certificates from the Emily Griffith Opportunity School. The prefabricated materials were then transported to the Mare Island Navy Yard in Vallejo, California where the navy ships were assembled. Up to 140 welding students were trained at the school around the clock. The federal government supported this program by donating all the equipment and supplying a \$200,000 grant.<sup>43</sup>

Another major wartime contract Denver received was the Denver Ordnance Plant, an ammunition factory run by the Remington Arms Company. Between February 17, 1941 and October 25, 1941, 265 buildings for the Plant were constructed on land purchased by the federal government (now where the Denver Federal Center is located). The Emily Griffith Opportunity School trained construction workers to build this massive complex and also trained employees to work at the plant. The school was an important factor behind sending many other wartime contracts to Denver since it made it possible to train a reliable local workforce. One prominent complex for which the school trained workers was the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, a chemical weapons manufacturing plant, built in 1942.<sup>44</sup>



*Welton St. entry to 1947  
addition*

*Photo c. 1949*

*Source: Denver Public Library*

Some other organizations the school worked with during World War II included: Colorado's Military Bases, Brecht Candy Company, Colorado Fuel and Iron Co., Continental Airlines, Denver Equipment Company, Denver Fire and Clay Company, The Electrical Workers and Pipefitters Unions, Fitzsimons Hospital, Gates Rubber Company, Gates Tire and Battery Service, Hathaway Instrument Company, Hoover Company, Jewish Consumptives' Relief Society, Mountain States Telephone & Telegraph Company, Public Service Company of Colorado (Xcel Energy), Social Security Board, Swift and Company, Timpfe Brothers, United Airlines, United States Civil Service Commission, War Department, and War Manpower Commission.<sup>45</sup>

The shortage of wartime labor led to more training of women for jobs typically filled by men. The Gates Rubber Factory recruited hundreds of housewives into action to become "soldiers of production" to work six day, 48 hour weeks. The demands created by the War left the home front with scarce resources and labor. Emily Griffith Opportunity School assisted "in food conservation, victory gardening," and taught people to make and repair their own clothing at home which expanded "the field of homemaking."<sup>46</sup>

Following the end of the Second World War, Emily Griffith Opportunity School greatly expanded the courses it offered for the postwar economy and Cold War Activities, and to train returning soldiers in need of work. By 1946, a plan to expand the school north on Welton Street up to 13<sup>th</sup> Street was reinvigorated, albeit with a new modern

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<sup>43</sup> Abbott et al, *Colorado*, 298.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Summary of Activities: War Production Training Department.*

<sup>46</sup> Norton, "A History of Emily Griffith Opportunity School," 6.



## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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“International School” design by local architect W. Gordon Jamieson. When the first addition was constructed in 1947, 44 feet of the Longfellow School was razed to make room for the new construction while continuing to use the remaining classrooms in the school. The remainder of the Longfellow School was demolished in 1955 and the second part of Jamieson’s building was completed in 1956.



*Electronics Class*

*Photo c. 1950*

*Source: Denver Public Library*

Of Scottish origins, Jamieson received his architectural training at the Rhode Island Institute of Design and the Beaux Arts Institute of Design, eventually moving to Denver and obtaining a Colorado architectural license in 1926. He partnered with noted architect Eugene E. Groves, designing homes, public buildings and commercial structures until 1930, and then partnered with R. Ewing Stiffler for several years. Jamieson and Stiffler designed the Sedgwick County Courthouse, an Art Deco structure which bears some resemblance to Emily Griffith Opportunity School (Jamieson & Stiffler). Jamieson also designed two other International Style-influenced local schools, Palmer Elementary School (1950) and Baker Junior High School, now Denver Center for International Studies (1957). Neither of these two buildings currently have historic designation. The building was designated in the International style, a style that was popular for educational buildings in Denver and the U.S. in the first two decades after World War II.<sup>47</sup>

In this post-war era, courses trained students for work life, home life, and civic life. The school set up 108 advisory committees made up of 1,200 citizens with different expertise who determined what new courses and programs to add. Vocational and technical education was “set up after content analysis charts were prepared with operational sheets, related information sheets, and typical training jobs.” The school also sent representatives to schools, state offices and industrial plants around the United States to help set up training programs based on the Emily Griffith Opportunity School model. The Brazilian government even sent 26 vocational directors to Denver in 1948 to study this plan.<sup>48</sup>

Howard Johnson was the school Principal from 1944 to 1960. Johnson was concerned that with the school’s focus on war readiness programs during World War II, Griffith’s “philosophy had not been lost, but had not been emphasized.” Johnson began a campaign to bring Emily Griffith’s philosophy of providing opportunities “for all who wish to learn” back into the spotlight. During Johnson’s tenure, the school became very involved in training veterans utilizing the G.I. Bill (the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944). The school helped train veterans for a variety of careers and to help them integrate into society. In 1947 the school was training 849 veterans.<sup>49</sup> In 1956, Jim Case used the school to house the first studio for KRMA

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<sup>47</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Little Estate, 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, Howard L., “100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Miss Emily Griffith.”

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, “100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Miss Emily Griffith.”



# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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TV—Rocky Mountain PBS. The school also offered a variety of classes involved in broadcasting and fixing television sets.<sup>50</sup>

A 1950 article described the school as being a free “grade school, high school, trade school, college, hobby shop, vocational-guidance center, employment agency, domestic-relations bureau, and homemakers’ forum, all rolled into one.” This innovative and free institution continued to grow and train employees for a variety of jobs in the 1950s. During the modern era, the school expanded its business relationships with major regional employers, such as Martin Co., Dow Chemical, Time Inc., Sears, Great Western Sugar Co., and Shell Oil.<sup>51</sup>

As Denver became more industrialized in the 1960s and 1970s, farming, fur ranching, wireless telegraphy, and gold mining classes gave way to electronics, computer programming, missile telemetry, and IBM training.<sup>52</sup> An article from 1980 stated that the school had an enrollment of over 35,000 students annually at 130 sites throughout the community with 800 instructors offering 350 courses.<sup>53</sup>

In 2014, the college moved from its historic location at 1250 Welton Street to larger and more modern downtown facilities at 1860 Lincoln Street. Now called Emily Griffith Technical College, approximately 10,000 students are currently enrolled in a wide range of classes ranging from apprenticeship training for carpenters and electricians, to nursing assisting, event planning, cosmetology, professional baking, computer networking, automotive transmission technician, bookkeeping, real estate appraisal, adult GED and basic education, language training, and citizenship classes.<sup>54</sup>

According to the college’s current web site a wide variety of “classes are offered day and night, many with an open entry/open exit format” which would please Emily Griffith as the college continues her mission. To date, more than 1.5 million students have been educated at the Emily Griffith Opportunity School, bettering not only the lives of these students but also the city of Denver and state of Colorado. During its 100 year tenure, the Emily Griffith Opportunity School has assisted the country’s war readiness effort during two world wars; helped Denver’s economy to develop a competitive edge due to its efforts to train and supply a skilled and ready workforce; and furthered the community’s commitment to education as a mechanism for lifting people out of poverty and helping them to succeed in life.

**g. Describe other structures that have similar associations and the relationships/comparisons of this structure to these other structures.**

Emily Griffith Opportunity School is a unique institution in the City of Denver. It has occupied the same site for more than 90 years and there simply is no other institution like it. Although Denver Public Schools offers other vocational training opportunities within the district, none are located downtown and serve the downtown community to the same extent of the Emily Griffith Opportunity School.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Wood, Madelyn, “Denver’s School of Opportunity,” *Cornet Magazine*, 1950, p. 139.

<sup>52</sup> Dorthy Kostlea, “Emily’s Pupils: The Strength of a City.” Article in the Alfred P. Adamo Manuscript Collection.

<sup>53</sup> Holly Huges, “Emily Griffith: The Name for it is ‘Opportunity,’” February, 1980. Article in the Emily Griffith Opportunity School Manuscript Collection.

<sup>54</sup> Emily Griffith Technical College website.

## EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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- h. Include a statement describing the historic context for this structure. Include geographic area, time period, relevant themes and property types associated with the historic context.**

The relevant historic contexts for the landmark designation application for Emily Griffith Opportunity School are: Vocational and Continued Education; Women's History in Colorado.

The historic context for the Emily Griffith School relates to the area bounded by Welton Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Glenarm Place, and 13<sup>th</sup> Street.

Time period: 1916 – 1956 (original occupation through original build out of school facilities)

Property types: Classrooms and offices; Shop buildings: Mechanical plant; Communications training facility

# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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# EMILY GRIFFITH LANDMARK APPLICATION

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## 9. Owner Consent to Designation

I/We, the undersigned, acting as owner(s) of, the property described in this application for landmark designation do, hereby, apply for designation and give my consent to the designation of this property as an individual Denver Landmark.

I understand that this designation transfers with the title of the property should the property be sold, or if legal or beneficial title is otherwise transferred.


Owner(s): Denver Public Schools

Owner(s) Representative:  Date: 03/31/16  
(Signature)

## 10. Applicant if other than owner

Additional Applicants:

Affiliation: Historic Denver, Inc

Representative:  Date: 03/31/16  
(Signature)

The designation, and consent to designation, is based on this designation application, including the Addendums.