

Beverly Vista School
200 South Elm Drive
Beverly Hills
Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CA-2704

HABS
CAL
19-BEVH,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

**Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107**

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BEVERLY VISTA SCHOOL

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HABS NO. CA-2704

Location: 200 South Elm Drive. Property consists of a full city block bounded by Charleville Boulevard on the north, Gregory Way on the south, South Rexford Drive on the east, and South Elm Drive on the west.

Beverly Vista School,
Beverly Hills,
Los Angeles County,
California 90212

Beverly Hills, California 7.5-minute USGS Quadrangle,
Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) Coordinates:
Building A: Zone 11, Easting 371960, Northing 3769420
Building B: Zone 11, Easting 371990, Northing 3769420
Building D: Zone 11, Easting 371920, Northing 3769420

Present Owner: Beverly Hills Unified School District (BHUSD or District)
255 South Laskey Drive
Beverly Hills, CA 90212

Original Use: Public Elementary School

Present Use: Elementary School, however, Buildings A, B, D are vacant

Significance:

At Beverly Vista, the Administration Building (Building A), the Auditorium/Manual Arts Building (Building B) and the Primary Building (Building C) are fine examples of public school design. The first building to be erected on the campus, Building A, was designed by architect Francis J. Catton in the Italian Romanesque Revival style. Incorporating the distinguishing characteristics of this architectural idiom such as brick exterior walls, a tiled roof, an extensive and unifying use of arches as a decorative motif, and a tower which is reminiscent of ecclesiastical Romanesque precedents, the subsequent buildings, Buildings B and D, designed by the Los Angeles architectural

firm of Gable and Wyant make Beverly Vista a noteworthy example of its property type. Gable and Wyant were particularly known for their work in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, as for example, in their design for Hangar 1 (1929) at the Los Angeles International Airport; Beverly Vista illustrates their facility with a different but related architectural vocabulary. The use of the Romanesque Revival style also represents a distinctly traditional choice of architectural imagery. While all of the other schools in the district showcase the Spanish style, that eventually became integral to the mythology of southern California, Beverly Vista suggests a more urban approach to school design and contains the three oldest extant public school buildings constructed by the District in Beverly Hills.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection:

Building A: 1924

Building B: 1925 (west end); 1927 (east end)

Building D: 1926

2. Architect:

Building A: Francis J. Catton

Buildings B (west end): Gable and Wyant

Building B (east end): Gable and Wyant

Building D: Gable and Wyant

3. Original and subsequent owners:

Beverly Hills Unified School District, 255 South Laskey Drive, Beverly Hills, California 90212.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

Builder(s): Unknown

Building A: Contractor: Carpenter Brothers

Buildings B (west end): - Contractor: Thomas H. Reed

Building B (east end) - Contractor: Hewitt, Miller & Shirey

Building D - Contractor: Morthland Construction Company

Suppliers: Radiators manufactured by Dunham Company of Chicago, IL and electrical cabinets provided by Zinsco Electric of Los Angeles, CA. All other suppliers are unknown.

5. Original plans and construction:

Original plans for the school could not be located during research investigation. However, blueprint copies of the original plans exist and are on file at the Beverly Hills Unified School District offices, 255 South Laskey Drive, Beverly Hills, California 90212.

6. Alterations and additions:

Buildings A, B, and D at Beverly Vista School are substantially intact. Alterations include: replacement of most windows within the original openings, addition of a stair tower to the north elevation of Building B, and bridges at the second story level which connect one buildings to another. These changes were made over the last 30 years. Earthquake damage suffered as a result of the 1994 Northridge event has mostly been repaired and is not visible on the exterior of the buildings.

B. Historical Context:

City of Beverly Hills

The first non-Native Americans to settle in the vicinity of Beverly Hills were Maria Rita Valdez and her husband Vicente Valdez, who were granted the Rancho Rodeo de las Aguas by the Mexican government of Alta California. Encompassing most of present-day Beverly Hills, the 4,500 acre ranch was used primarily for cattle ranching. Between 1854, when the Rancho was acquired by Americans Benjamin Davis ("Don Benito") Wilson and Major Henry Hancock, and 1869, the property passed through several hands, being divided into smaller parcels along the way. In 1869, a group of investors organized the De Las Aguas Land Association in attempt to found a German colony to be called Santa Maria. The venture failed, and the property reverted to agricultural uses, primarily the growing of lima beans. During the southern California land boom of 1886-1888, the then owners of the Rancho, Henry Hammel and Charles Denker, joined the real estate frenzy by subdividing another prospective townsite, "Morocco," around the Los Angeles-Santa Monica train station of the same name. This attempt was also unsuccessful.

After another failed scheme for the Rancho, this one an endeavor to recover the deeply buried oil reserves on the property, the Rodeo Land and Water Company was organized in 1906 for the purpose of founding a garden city in the portion of the Rancho north of what is now Wilshire Boulevard. Including prominent businessmen Burton Green, Henry E. Huntington, W.G. Kerckhoff, W.S. Porter, and Max Whittier, the Rodeo Land and Water Company commissioned Wilbur F. Cook to design the new community. Cook, who had honed his skills in the office of famed landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted of New York, planned a town that accommodated a range of uses. The town of Beverly Hills incorporated in 1907.

Estates for the wealthy were located furthest north with generously sized parcels for the upper middle class between Santa Monica Boulevard and Sunset Boulevard and a commercial triangle between Santa Monica and Wilshire. North of Santa Monica the roadways were graciously proportioned, curved, and lined with trees, a different species designated for each street. Model homes were built, and lots were offered for sale, to a less than overwhelming response. A degree of stimulus for development in the young town was provided by the construction of a resort hotel in the southern California tradition. Designed by Pasadena architect Elmer Grey, the Beverly Hills Hotel opened on Sunset Boulevard in 1912.

It was not until 1919, when movie actor Douglas Fairbanks converted a "hunting lodge" in Benedict Canyon for his bride, America's Sweetheart Mary Pickford, that the popularity of Beverly Hills really began. Although several prominent businessmen also made the city their home, it was the movie moguls, stars, and creative people who adopted Beverly Hills in the 1920s that gave rise to a reputation that persists until the present day. This growth in Beverly Hills occurred at the same time that the Los Angeles region in general was experiencing a phenomenal rise in population and boom in construction; over 1400 tract maps were filed with the Los Angeles County Recorder in a two year period alone in the early 1920s. By the end of the decade, the character of Beverly Hill's neighborhoods and architecture was well on its way to being established. Construction continued into the 1930s, slowed but by no means halted by the Depression.

The neighborhood in which Beverly Vista School is located, south of Wilshire and the original city limits, began to be developed as well during the 1920s and 1930s. Annexed to Beverly Hills in 1915, a year after the city incorporated, this area had remained unimproved except for some ranch buildings located near the present intersection of Robertson and Wilshire. In general, the areas east of the business district and south of Wilshire Boulevard were set aside for a more dense mix of residential uses than elsewhere in the city. The blocks immediately south of the commercial development on Wilshire Boulevard were designated for multi-family buildings. In addition, the blocks immediately surrounding the school itself were also identified as a multi-family zone, although single family homes were built further to the east and west. The single family lots in these areas were smaller than the ones north of Santa Monica Boulevard and west of Beverly Drive.

The flowering of Beverly Hills coincided with an era in architectural fashion during which revival styles, particularly those based on the Mediterranean countries, England, and Colonial America, were favored. Both single family and multi-family dwellings were designed to evoke Spanish, Italian, French, English, and American precedents. Commercial buildings also exhibited revival styling, as well as the dignified conservatism of the Renaissance Revival and the Beaux Arts traditions. During the 1930s, the up-to-date aesthetics of the Moderne and Hollywood Regency styles were introduced. Numerous public and institutional buildings were constructed in Beverly Hills during this period, all of which set a high standard of architectural quality commensurate with that of the city's residential development. Prominent and respected southern California architects provided the designs for a municipal water treatment plant (Salisbury, Bradshaw and Taylor, 1927), City Hall (Koerner and Gage with Austin and Ashley, 1931), and the Beverly Hills Post Office (Ralph Flewelling, 1933)

Schools in Beverly Hills

The Beverly Hills School District was organized in 1913, when the town was populated by less than fifty families. Until that time, children had been educated at a one room school in Coldwater Canyon which was associated with the Los Angeles City School District. When improvements to the school were sought by members of the Beverly Hills community in 1913 and denied by the Los Angeles Board of Education, an independent Beverly Hills Board of Education was formed. Financed by the Rodeo Land and Water Company until public funds could be raised, the Board obtained the Coldwater Canyon school property from Los Angeles. In 1914, following the approval by voters of a \$35,000 bond issue, a new school was started with the construction of a building on five acres at the corner of North Rexford Drive and Elevado Street in Beverly Hills. Eventually known as Hawthorne, the school opened in the fall of 1914 with an initial enrollment of 35 students.

A "golden age" of school building in Beverly Hills occurred in the 1920s as the community rapidly expanded with upper middle class families and the well-to-do. The first projects spearheaded by the District were the enlargement of the Hawthorne facilities and the establishment of a second campus, the Beverly Vista School on South Elm Drive at Charleville Boulevard in 1924. This was followed in short order by additions at both Hawthorne and Beverly Vista, and by the construction of a third school, El Rodeo (1927), near the western city limits on Whittier Drive, and a fourth school, now known as Horace Mann (1929), on the east side of town at Charleville and

Arnaz Drive. By 1927, voters had approved a total of \$1,215,000 in bonds over a five year period to finance the school building program. Over 3,000 students were enrolled in the four schools by 1930, with Beverly Vista responsible for the largest number, in excess of 1,000. Also, in 1927 the Los Angeles School District opened the first buildings of Beverly Hills High School to 750 students. Expanded several times over the next decade, the High School became part of the Beverly Hills district in 1935.

The talents of several well known southern California architectural firms were put to work designing the schools, including John C. Austin, Francis J. Catton, Robert F. Farquhar, Ralph C. Flewelling, Gable and Wyant, T. Beverley Keim, Roy Seldon Price, and Taylor and Taylor. Regardless of who designed the individual buildings, three unifying themes of architecture emerged to some extent at each campus: the use of Mediterranean-influenced styling, an emphasis on towers as focal points, and the incorporation of courtyards into the site planning. After the Long Beach Earthquake of 1933, and the subsequent passage of the Field Act which required earthquake resistant construction in public schools, all of the Beverly Hills schools were extensively renovated. Many of the same architects participated in these activities, as well in further additions to some of the campuses.

Both individually and collectively, the public schools of Beverly Hills represent a substantial investment in the future of the community, in terms not only of a younger generation of citizens but also of the beauty and permanency of the community. Early in its history, Beverly Hills began building its reputation for an exceptionally high standard of public education that was paralleled by a tradition of fine public building; and the public schools are evidence of both these commitments. Taken as a whole, the public schools of the Beverly Hills Unified School district comprise a thematic district which is remarkably intact. While the high school continued to grow in the 1940s and 1950s, the other schools remained as they were until the 1960s. The earliest buildings at Hawthorne were replaced, as was the original kindergarten facility, Building C, at Beverly Vista. All of the schools eventually received new buildings whose architectural styling was not totally sympathetic to the overall historic fabric. Nonetheless, Beverly Hills' public schools largely remain true to their original architectural concepts.

Beverly Vista School

Financed by a large influx into the City of upper middle class families, an ambitious school building program was realized by the Board of Education in the 1920s. As part of this building boom, Beverly Vista was the second school to be constructed, begun in 1924 and concluding in 1929 when the last of its five original buildings opened. Serving the local community, which continues to be comprised of primarily upper middle class families, Beverly Vista has offered children ages five to fourteen formal kindergarten through eighth grade classroom education for over seventy-five years. And though academic subjects were stressed, a broad and comprehensive educational program was always offered. Beverly Vista School, at this time, offered general education classes, including math; science; reading; geography; physical education, history, etc. for grades kindergarten through eighth grade.

The first building to be erected on the campus, the two-story Administration Building (Building A) was built in 1924. Within this building were the administration offices and a limited number of classrooms. The first floor configuration of the building originally contained the principal's office, small a waiting room next to the principal's office, a teachers lounge, boys and girls restrooms, staircases at both ends of the building, and five classrooms; one of them designated the kindergarten classroom. The second floor contained boys and girls restrooms and six classrooms.

Wanting to offer a greater liberal arts curriculum, the District approved the construction of Building B in 1925. Designed by the Los Angeles based architectural firm of Gable and Wyant, the facility was designated the Manual Arts Building. Within this two-story building were classrooms that offered the older students woodshop and home economics classes. Also in 1925, was the completion of the Kindergarten Building (the original Building C, demolished in 1966) which was also designed by Gable and Wyant. This building allowed for the enrollment of more kindergarten through third grade students.

With the continuing influx of middle-upper class families into the local community the District, once again, saw the need to expand the campus further. In 1926, the Primary Building (Building D) was added to the complex. This two-story building designed by Gable and Wyant was constructed primarily for classroom instruction of fourth through eighth grade students. Both the first and second floors of Building D each contained boys and girls restrooms, stairways at each end of the building, and eight classrooms.

Completion of the overall campus came in 1927 with the construction of the two-story Auditorium and Classroom structure. This structure became the east half of Building B and allowed greater expansion of school activities.

By 1930, Beverly Vista had over 1,000 students in attendance, the largest enrollment number of the district. Surrounded by a large residential area, Beverly Vista continued to have some of the largest enrollment figures in the entire school district. Even with these high enrollment numbers, Beverly Vista School provided a setting for high academic standards and expectations.

Following the Long Beach Earthquake, structural engineers Holmes and Narver oversaw the extensive seismic strengthening that was performed at Beverly Vista in 1934 and 1935. Architects Gable and Wyant were again retained by the District in 1939 to provide lunch shelters and modifications to the Auditorium stage. In 1954, C. Stanley Wyant, of Gable and Wyant, was commissioned for additional lunch shelters at Beverly Vista. Other than routine maintenance and minor upgrading of some facilities, no new construction occurred at Beverly Vista until 1966, when it was decided to demolish and replace Building C and erect a new Building E south of the Primary Building. Both of the new structures were designed by architects Albert C. Martin and Associates. In 1978, a covered dining area (Building F), depressed partially below ground level, was attached to the east end of the Primary Building. Between 1978 and 1981, many of the original wood frame windows on the older buildings were replaced in-kind. Another modification, the addition of a stair tower next to the original tower on the Manual Arts Building, was probably made around the same time.

In 1994, Beverly Vista School was damaged during the Northridge Earthquake. In April 1995, a structural evaluation of Buildings A, B, and D at Beverly Vista stated that the buildings did "not appear able to provide an adequate assurance of life safety during a major earthquake." As a result, the buildings were vacated in June 1995. Since that time, classes and school activities have been held in the three remaining buildings (Buildings C, E, and F) on the campus and in 34 portable buildings also located on the campus.

Although Beverly Vista School was the second school to be constructed by the Beverly Hills Unified District, today it contains the three oldest extant public school buildings constructed by the District in Beverly Hills. After providing continuous service and

retaining their original function for over fifty years, Buildings A, B, and D at Beverly Vista School now stand vacant.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Information:

1. Architectural Character:

Beverly Vista School is of architectural merit based on the historical and architectural integrity of its three oldest buildings, Building A, Building B, and Building D.

Designed by architect Francis J. Catton, Building A's Italian Romanesque Revival styling sets the tone for the campus design. The building incorporates the distinguishing characteristics of this architectural idiom such as symmetrical composition, brick exterior walls, a tiled roof, ornamental corbel tables, and an extensive and unifying use of arches as a decorative motif which is reminiscent of ecclesiastical Romanesque precedents. Fenestration includes two-over-two metal sash with transoms, flat heads, and raised, stone sills. Alterations to this building include replaced windows, with opaque panels in the transoms, and metal coping at the roofline.

Reflecting its varied assortment of interior spaces, the two-story with partial basement building contains an auditorium with a raised stage and balcony, classrooms, restrooms, home economics space, and a large wood shop. The non-symmetrical, Italian Romanesque Revival building is topped by tiled, front and side gable roofs and is anchored by a three story bell tower located on the northeast corner of the structure. Fenestration primarily consists of double sash windows. Building B is also distinguished by highly decorative brick work, incorporating herringbone, diamond, and semicircular patterns. Cast stone rondels adorned with shields further enhance the design. Principal alterations to Building B include the replacement of some of the windows and the addition of a brick stair tower just west of the bell tower.

Building D is very similar in design and massing to the Elm Drive elevation (west) of Building A. As with Buildings A and B, Building D has two-stories and a partial basement. The building incorporates the distinguishing

characteristics of Italian Romanesque Revival style such as multi-colored brick exterior walls, cast stone accents, a tiled roof, and an extensive and unifying use of arches as a decorative motif. Fenestration consists primarily of sash windows. Configuration of Building D's interior spaces include kitchen and dining facilities in the basement, classrooms and restrooms on the first floor, and classrooms, the faculty lounge, and storage spaces on the second floor. Alterations include the replacement of some windows with opaque transoms.

2. Condition of the Fabric:

Buildings A, B, and D at Beverly Vista School are substantially intact; retaining integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, association, and feeling. Except for the need for seismic upgrade, the historic buildings are in reasonably good condition. Earthquake damage suffered as a result of the 1994 Northridge event has mostly been repaired and is not visible on the exterior. Some interior damage, partially as a result of intrusive structural testing, was noted, particularly in the Building B tower. There is also some scattered evidence of water damage.

B. Physical Description:

Beverly Vista School is an intact elementary school that has offered kindergarten through eighth grade curriculum since it opened in 1924. Located at 200 South Elm Drive in Beverly Hills, Beverly Vista School is one of four public elementary and middle schools under the jurisdiction of the Beverly Hills Unified School District. The property consists of a full city block bounded by Charleville Boulevard on the north, Gregory Way on the south, South Rexford Drive on the east and South Elm Drive on the west. Building A faces west onto South Elm Drive. Building B faces north onto Charleville Boulevard. Building D faces east onto South Rexford Drive.

The six buildings which compose Beverly Vista School are located on the northern half of the block, separated from the sidewalk by lawns and beds of flowers and shrubs. The remainder of the block consists of playing fields, grassy at the south end and paved in the middle. Currently, the grassy field contains 34 portable buildings placed there in 1995 after vacation of Buildings A, B, and D.

Buildings A, B, and D, the oldest and most historically significant structures on campus, reflect Italian Romanesque Revival styling in their design. Building A is a rectangular shape, two-story brick building with a flat roof and symmetrical composition. The asymmetrical, two-story Building B is crowned by tiled, front and side gable roofs, and is anchored by a three-story bell tower at the northeast corner of the structure. Building D is also two-stories and is very similar in the design and ~~massing to~~ Building A.

C. Site:

1. General Setting:

The school is composed of six permanent buildings and 34 portable buildings. The three permanent buildings scheduled for HABS recordation are the Administration Building (Building A), HABS No. CA-2704-A; the Primary Building (Building D), HABS No. CA-2704-B; and the Manual Arts Building (Building B), HABS No. CA-2704-C.

2. Landscaping, Enclosures:

The three historic buildings are located on an expanse of turf (primarily fescue). Beds of flowers, shrubs, and hedges are planted underneath the first floor window sills of each building. Two, tall Italian Cypress trees anchor the main entrance into Building A along the west elevation. Grassy playing fields enclosed by chain link fencing are at the south end of the campus. A landscaped interior courtyard is created by the siting of Buildings A, B, C, and D. Tile roofed loggias connect Buildings A, B, and D to each other. Bridges, apparently constructed at the same time as Buildings C and E, in 1966, link the newer buildings with the three historic ones. Mature Jacaranda trees are planted in the school's grassy easements along Rexford Drive and Elm Drive.

Prepared by: Janet Ostashay, Director of Cultural Resources Management
Leslie Heumann, Principle Architectural Historian
PCR Services Corporation
233 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 130
Los Angeles, CA 90401

Date: December 1999

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original drawings exist. Copies of original drawings are located at the Beverly Hills Unified School District office, Beverly Hills, California. Existing drawings include:

"Auditorium & Classroom Building-Beverly Vista School, North Elevation" by Gable and Wyant for Beverly Hills School District, August 1, 1927, Sheet Number 6.

"Auditorium & Classroom Building-Beverly Vista School, East Elevation" by Gable and Wyant for Beverly Hills School District, August 1, 1927.

"Auditorium & Classroom Building-Beverly Vista School, South Elevation" by Gable and Wyant for Beverly Hills School District, August 1, 1927.

"Auditorium & Classroom Building-Beverly Vista School, Section" by Gable and Wyant for Beverly Hills Unified School District, August 1, 1927, Sheet Number 7.

"Manual Arts Building-Beverly Vista School, North Elevation" by Gable and Wyant for Beverly Hills School District, May 1925, Sheet Number 5.

"Manual Arts Building-Beverly Vista School, South Elevation" by Gable and Wyant for Beverly Hills School District, May 1925.

"Manual Arts Building-Beverly Vista School, West Elevation" by Gable and Wyant for Beverly Hills School District, May 1925.

"Manual Arts Building-Beverly Vista School, East Elevation" by Gable and Wyant for Beverly Hills School District, May 1925.

"Primary Building-Beverly Vista School, South and North Elevations" by Gable and Wyant for Beverly Hills School District, May 1925, Sheet Number 5.

B. Historic Views:

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Maps - Beverly Hills, California.

C. Interviews:

None

D. Bibliography:

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PCR Services Corporation. *Draft Beverly Vista School Environmental Impact Report*. Beverly Hills: Beverly Hills Unified School District, July 1998.

PCR Services Corporation. *Final Beverly Vista School Environmental Impact Report*. Beverly Hills: Beverly Hills Unified School District, November 1998.

Robinson, William W. *Beverly Hills: A Calendar of Events in the Making of a City*. Los Angeles: Title Guarantee and Trust Company, 1942.

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United States Department of the Interior. *National Register Bulletin 24*, "Guidelines For Local Surveys: A Basis For Preservation Planning." Washington, DC: National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division, rev, 1985.

Wagner, Walter. *Inside the Golden Getto*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1976.

Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture Since 1780 A Guide to the Styles*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993.

E. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Huntington Library: San Marino, CA

Library of Congress: Washington, DC

National Archives: Laguna Niguel, CA and Washington, DC

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Beverly Hills Unified School District (BHUSD) desires to rehabilitate, improve, and upgrade Beverly Vista School. It is proposed to demolish the closed Buildings A, B, and D, replace them with one to three new buildings, renovate Buildings C, E, and F, remove the portable buildings, and make general improvements to the site.

Buildings A, B, and D of Beverly Vista School have been determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as contributors to a thematic historic district of public schools in Beverly Hills and, by virtue of that determination, are

listed in the California Register of Historical Places. Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), demolition of historic resources, which are irreplaceable, is a significant adverse impact and would have a significant adverse effect on the integrity and thus the significance of the identified thematic historic district of Beverly Hills Public Schools and its individual components. In removing the character-defining features of the school which link it, in terms of design, to other contributors to the historic district, the integrity of the thematic district as a whole is diminished by the twenty percent of the district that Beverly Vista represents. This would be a significant adverse impact to the thematic district.

As a component of the established mitigation measures outlined in the CEQA documentation prepared for the project, HABS Level II recordation for Buildings A, B and D was required. This recordation package includes photo documentation, documentation of existing drawings, and written text. This recordation conforms with the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey guidelines set forth by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior and partially satisfies the required mitigation measures required by the project applicant (BHUSD).

Agency: Beverly Hills Unified School District

Project Name: Mitigation Measures for the Beverly Vista School Environmental Impact Report prepared for the Beverly Hills Unified School District, (November 1998).

Prepared by: Janet Ostashay, Director of Cultural Resources
Leslie Heumann, Principal Architectural Historian
PCR Services Corporation
233 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 130
Santa Monica, California 90401

Date: December 1999

CURRENT BEVERLY VISTA SCHOOL SITE PLAN:

