

Nihon Go Gakko (Japanese Language School)  
1715 S. Tacoma Avenue  
Tacoma  
Pierce County  
Washington

**HABS No. WA-209**

HABS  
WASH  
27-TACO,  
12-

**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

HABS  
WASH  
37-TACO,  
12-

**Nihon Go Gakko (Japanese Language School)**  
**HABS No. WA-209**

**Location:** 1715 South Tacoma Avenue, between 19th and 17th Streets  
Tacoma, Pierce County, Washington 98402

**UTM Coordinates:** 10-542260-5232640

**Legal Description:** Lots 6, 7 and 8, Block 1711, Map of New Tacoma, Washington Territory, According to Plat Filed for Record February 3, 1875 in the Office of the County Auditor, in Pierce County, Washington.

**Present Owner:** The University of Washington, Seattle

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Historic Use:** School

**Construction Dates:** 1922 and 1926

**Architect:** Heath and Gove, architects of the original building  
Designer of the 1926 addition, unknown

**Builder:** N. H. Hylen, contractor for the original school  
R. M. Grant, contractor for the 1926 addition

**Significance:** Tacoma's Nihon Go Gakko was the second of over four dozen Japanese Language Schools constructed by Japanese immigrant communities in the Pacific states of Washington, Oregon and California. Currently only the school buildings in Tacoma and Seattle remain. Built in 1922 by *issei*, the first generation Japanese immigrants, the Tacoma school provided formal education in Japanese language, cultural traditions, and supplementary English classes for the *nisei*, the American-born, second generation. For nearly thirty years the Nihon Go Gakko facility also served as a daycare and community center for Tacoma's Japanese-Americans. As a school it was closely associated with community leaders, Kuni and Masato Yamasaki, teachers who had directed the school beginning in 1911.

In the spring of 1942 the Japanese Language School was selected to serve as an official "Civil Control Center" for the registration, and subsequent forced evacuation of Japanese-Americans living in Tacoma. After World War II the school briefly served as a center and hostel for members of the community who returned to the city. As the only remaining secular Japanese-American community center in Tacoma it is a reminder of what was once a vibrant Japantown, and a poignant symbol of the Japanese immigrant's struggle for education, recognition, and assimilation into American society.

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**Report Date:** April 4, 1995

**Significant Exterior Features:**

- Urban site with topography sloping down from primary facade
- Five species of trees and shrubs, planted with stock from Japan
- Wood frame with concrete foundation
- Two and three story massing
- Cross-gable roof form
- Rustic wood siding with corner boards
- Wood shingle roofing, partial coverage
- Multi-light, double-hung wood windows
- Palladian window above projecting, gable-roofed entry vestibule

**Significant Interior Features:**

- Upper floor with auditorium space with raised stage
- Six classrooms at the Middle Floor and Basement
- Painted plaster over lath walls and ceiling
- Stained fir flooring, chair rail, base and trim
- Stained fir tongue and groove wainscoting
- Multi-panel, stained fir doors, some with glass panels and glazed transom windows
- Wood-framed, slate blackboards
- Original attached, wood school desks, and cabinets (not extant)
- Original stem-mounted, incandescent globe light fixtures (not extant)

## Historic Context

### Japanese Immigration and Settlement in Washington State and Tacoma

Japanese immigrants' participation in the American economy and its social, cultural and political life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are part of a larger pattern of relocation, settlement and assimilation similar to that of many ethnic groups. Japanese-Americans' struggle with the change in their culture, language and economic status are typical of an immigrant's heroic story. However, West-coast Japanese-Americans are unique in their confrontation with anti-alien land laws racial discrimination which culminated in their internment and forced evacuation during World War II. The Tacoma Japanese Language School is closely associated with the pattern and the unique history of the City's ethnic community.

Washington State's first Japanese settlers arrived in 1834, when three fishermen were washed ashore at Cape Flattery in 1834. However, considerable Japanese immigration did not begin in the late 1870s. In 1880 there were estimated only 140 Japanese living in the U.S. By 1900, 24,326 Japanese immigrants has passed through the Ports of Entry in Seattle, Portland, Tacoma and San Francisco according to census documents<sup>1</sup>. Japanese workmen, seeking economic opportunities and relief from poor economic conditions in their homeland, were brought to the U.S. to lay railroad tracks, and work in sawmills, mines, and canneries.

The Pacific coast states received the greatest number. California served as the adopted home to the largest number of Japanese laborers, followed by Washington State. Because of different geographic and economic conditions, early Japanese settlements Washington, in contrast to those in California, were predominately urban in character. They concentrated in the two Puget Sound cities, Seattle and Tacoma, as suggested by the census statistics of those of Japanese ancestry<sup>2</sup>:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Total in WA State</u>	<u>Total in Seattle</u>	<u>Total in Tacoma</u>
1880	NA	NA	NA
1890	2,039	NA	500+/-
1900	5,617	2,990	627
1910	12,929	6,127	1,018
1920	17,382	7,874	1,212
1930	17,837	8,448	1,306

Japanese settlement patterns throughout the American West were shaped by a variety of national and state immigration acts. The earliest laws effecting Japanese immigrants were federal acts which eliminated Chinese immigration, and those which allowed for imported labor from both Japan and Hawaii in the 1880s. These resulted in an influx of Japanese, primarily of men with labor and farming skills. However, in 1907-1908, the so-called "Gentlemen's Agreement" between the U.S. and Japanese governments prohibited further emigration by men from Japan. Parents, wives and children of those who had already immigrated were allowed to leave and settle in America.

<sup>1</sup> Daniels, et. al., p. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Schmidt, p. 52 and 101. Watanabe, p. 4 and 6 cites a 1917 report which noted 40 to 50 Japanese living in Tacoma as early as 1886, with over 500 Japanese residents by 1891, p. 4 - 6.

The demographic composition of American Japanese communities shifted as a result with a decrease in the number of single men and an increase in the number of Japanese families with children. In 1910 there were 4,502 American-born Japanese; by 1920 this number had increased to 29,672.

The children of immigrants, second generation Japanese-Americans, are known as *nisei*, in contrast to the first generation of immigrants, the *issei*. These two generations were treated differently by federal and state laws effecting immigration and discrimination. In 1913 California passed its Alien Land law. Similar discriminatory laws were passed in twelve other states including Washington. These state laws restricted land ownership to citizens, a status which was provided only the *nisei* by virtue of their birthplace. In 1921 and 1923 the Washington State legislature prohibited not only land ownership but also the use of land through share-cropping, leasing or renting by non-citizen aliens; this was extended further in 1937 to include crop contracts, even between family members. As a result of these laws, economic rewards for hard work, savings, and investment were restricted. Some Japanese families emigrated from the Pacific states to those that allowed land ownership. Others may have focused their economic efforts on urban activities which relied less heavily on land ownership or use. Statistics suggest that many remaining Japanese-American farmers became tenants and laborers again, but working on land they previously owned.

In 1922 the federal Cable Act made aliens of American women who married Asians, and eliminated citizenship to Asians who married American citizens. National discrimination against Japanese included a 1924 federal immigration law, which used the category of "aliens ineligible to citizenship" to exclude all Asians. This racially-based immigration policy further disenfranchised Japanese-Americans and weakened their political base. It excluded entire ethnic communities from assimilation into the American "melting pot." For Japanese-Americans the resulting sense of separateness from the majority culture may have been exacerbated by differences in cultural traditions and language, particularly for the *issei*. Some suggest that it may have served to galvanize the efforts of their children, the *nisei*, as evidenced by the formation of political associations such as the Japanese American Citizens League.

The historic significance of early Japanese-American settlement in Washington State and its community activities are embodied in churches and structures associated with ethnic and political organizations. Similar to many immigrant groups, Japanese-Americans made efforts to overcome language barriers between inter-generation family members, and to maintain ethnic pride and a connection to the old homeland. Tacoma's Japanese Language School, the Nihon Go Gakko, was one result of these efforts. It also played a unique role in the community's efforts to assimilate its youth into the English-speaking culture of their adopted home. Because of the tragic treatment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, many other early historic resources have been lost.

The economic presence of Japanese immigrants in Washington state has been associated with late-nineteenth century lumber mills and canneries, and with twentieth century agriculture and commercial enterprises. Other recognized historic resources in the state which were associated with early immigration and Japanese settlement are the Japanese districts in Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Auburn. Properties associated with the immigrants' early economic contributions include mining sites, such as the coal mines in Roslyn; railroad tracks, bridges and camp towns; lumber mills and sawmills in Mukilteo, Enumclaw, Eatonville, National, Port Blakley and a small, Japanese-owned sawmill in Kent; the Pacific States Lumber Company/Seleck Historic District; and the canneries and oyster beds of Puget Sound. Some of these sites or properties still exist, but most of the early structures have deteriorated or have been removed.

Farmhouses, barns and greenhouses of Japanese farmers near Wapato, Spokane, the White River Valley, Puyallup, South Park, Georgetown, Bellevue, and on Vashon and Bainbridge Islands are closely associated with Japanese immigrants' involvement in agriculture until 1942. Extant buildings include barns and residents on Bainbridge Island, a Growers Association Plant and hothouses in Auburn, and a fruit and vegetable processing plant on Vashon Island.

Small businesses, hotels, restaurants, retail stores and markets are another significant historic resource type; extant examples in Tacoma include the Hotels Goodwin and Grand, and the 15th Street Hand Laundry. The Tacoma Buddhist Church (1931) and the Japanese Methodist Church (1929) are remaining examples of Japanese religious buildings in Tacoma.

Buildings which embody cultural and political themes in the State include the Japanese Language Schools in Seattle and Tacoma, the Seattle office of The Courier, the first all-English daily paper for Japanese-Americans and the house of its publisher, James Yoshinori Sakamoto; and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce Hall at the Seattle Yacht Club, which is associated with the 1930 establishment of the Japanese American Citizens League. Properties associated with World War II include the Tacoma Nihon Go Gakko and the Western Washington Fairgrounds, Puyallup, which served as internment centers.<sup>3</sup>

The Tacoma Language School building is one of the few remaining resources in the state associated with a secular, public community life. It was once part of a vibrant ethnic neighborhood which surrounded it. Tacoma's Japantown, or *Nihon Machi*, was located just outside of the city's central business district which lay to its north. The western boundary of Japantown's fine "upper town" has been described as Tacoma Avenue, on which the school is located. Its other edges have been described as one block south of the school (S. 19th Street), four blocks north (S. 11th Street), and three blocks east (Pacific Avenue). Its "lower town," located further to the east near the City Waterway. This was a separate area, characterized as being established and controlled by gangsters and hooligans. By 1930 there were 1,306 Japanese-Americans in Tacoma; approximately 930 or 71% of them lived in the tight urban area between 11th and 19th Streets, Pacific and Tacoma Avenues.<sup>4</sup>

Tacoma's Japantown began to develop in the 1890s, and was most active between 1900 and 1920. It then "began a slow decline . . . culminating in the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. . . the decline of this community of people had a severe impact on the physical form of the area in which they had lived. Once vacated, many of the structures that served the city's Japanese-Americans as homes, businesses or community centers were left without maintenance or saw redevelopment that masked their histories."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The lists of historic resource types is provided in Dubrow, pg. 73 - 83.

<sup>4</sup> Morrison, p. 30. Also described in The 35th Year Reunion Book, 1977, non-paginated.

<sup>5</sup> Morrison, p. 2. The physical fabric of Tacoma's Japantown was made up by single family residences, apartments, small hotels, stores, restaurants, markets and laundries. In historic photos these buildings appear vernacular in character, typically two and three-story frame and brick-clad structures. Their varied forms contrast with the relative uniformity of the multi-story brick warehouses which make up what is now the Union Station Warehouse Historic District. This district was officially recognized for its architectural character and its contribution to the city's history by placement on the National Register in 1979.

### Education Goals of the Japanese Language Schools

In the late-nineteenth century the imperial Japanese government recognized the difficulty facing emigrants families in maintaining cultural links and loyalty to their native land. The government and Japanese educators developed curriculum goals to reinforce the connection between immigrants and Japan. These goals included a moral components from the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education affirming Confucian virtues, loyalty, and obedience to the state. Japanese-American educators began to organize in San Francisco in 1909 to further develop these curriculum goals.<sup>6</sup>

Japanese-American educators, community leaders and parents recognized the dilemmas of Japanese-American families within which separate generations spoke a different language. They also saw the difficult, shifting allegiances *issei* and *nisei* had with Japan and America. This moral dilemma had not occurred for the earliest immigrants who intended to return to their native land. However, efforts towards assimilation, citizenship, and economic opportunity, coupled with racist immigration policies, placed Japanese-Americans in a dangerous equivocating position, both in their own community and families, and within the larger context of society.

Tacoma's Nihon Go Gakko is one of an estimated 60 language schools established by Japanese communities in the western states during the first two decades of the twentieth century to address these dilemmas.<sup>7</sup> The very first Tacoma Language School opened in May 21, 1911 with nine pupils at 411 South 15th Street.<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Kuni Yamasaki moved from Seattle to Tacoma to serve as its first teacher. By 1913 enrollment had risen to twenty seven students. By 1914 the number had gradually increased, and the school was relocated to a small, wood frame cottage at 510 South 15th Street. Twenty five students attended kindergarten daycare in the three room, converted home; the house also served as the residence of Kuni and Masato Yamasaki. By this time Mr. Yamasaki had joined his wife to serve as an instructor and the school's director.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ichioka, p. 196 - 203.

<sup>7</sup> Japanese Language Schools were most popular from the early 1920s until World War II. Sources on the number of schools cite varying numbers. Peterson noted 54 Japanese schools in California around 1920, p. 65. Kitano estimated more than 10,000 Los Angeles children were enrolled in them in 1939, p. 27. Krafft cites 24 similar schools in Washington State of which the Tacoma school was the third constructed and one of two remaining: "The first Nihon Go Gakko was begun in Seattle in 1902. This school is still in operation and its 1913 classroom building was entered on the National Register in 1982," p. 8. Ito also cites 22 schools in Oregon, and 48 in Canada as of 1911, and lists 24 schools in Washington state located in the following towns: Auburn, Alderton, Bellevue, Sunnysdale, White River, Tacoma, Hollywood, Fife, Firwood, Sumner, Olympia, National, Eatonville, South Park, Toppenish, Wapato, Winslow; two in Yakima; and Greenlake, Arden, and Seattle in the city of Seattle, p. 599 - 603.

<sup>8</sup> Magden, non-paginated.

<sup>9</sup> Neither of the original school buildings currently remains.

Creation of the school was financed by the Language School Support Committee of the Tacoma *Nihonjinkai* (Japanese Association), and by donations from the Japanese Consulate. In 1912 it was apparent that the student population would continue to grow. Because of internal turmoil within the sponsoring organization, purchase of a site for a new school was delayed until 1922.

The Support Committee organized a group of "friendly whites" who incorporated under the name Tacoma Preschool, or *Yochiyen*, and eventually purchased the new school site, which consisted of seven city lots on Tacoma Avenue, for \$1,600 in 1921.<sup>10</sup> Construction of the building was funded by the entire Japanese community. Other schools were sponsored by church groups, but this facility was distinct as a secular center with support from members of Buddhist and Christian congregations, a wide variety of business, political and community leaders, and numerous individuals. Funds or goods to assist in the school's construction were donated by over 95 individuals, and many organizations, including the Tacoma Japan Club, the Support Committee and the Japanese consulate. The building construction, by local contractor N. H. Hylen started in September 1921, and was estimated to have cost between \$8,000 and \$8,500.<sup>11</sup>

The school was viewed as a community facility due to its use as well as its funding sources. Daycare functions continued along with after-school and Saturday instruction. Traditional Japanese crafts, calligraphy, song and literature classes were taught in addition to Japanese and English language courses. Classes in religious liturgy or dogma were not provided. The building, constructed with a main auditorium with stage, accommodated presentations and performances. The school sponsored plays, oratory contests, sports events, festivals, and daytime field trips for children during the summer and on Saturdays.

In contrast to the two nearby Japanese churches, the Tacoma Japanese Association or the Japanese Citizen League, the school served a wide constituency. One former alumni recalled that, "'the school. . . coalesced the city's Japanese community (and) transcended every other Japanese organization in Tacoma. Whether you went to a Methodist church or a Buddhist church, you went to the language school. The language school brought everyone together.'"<sup>12</sup>

### The Building's Original Architect

The Tacoma architecture firm of Heath and Gove designed the original building.<sup>13</sup> Frederick Heath began his practice in 1898 in Tacoma, and became well known as the designer of Tacoma Public Schools. He was appointed the architect for the Public School system in 1904, and designed 17 school structures including two recognized landmarks -- the Tacoma Land Company Hotel re-designed as Stadium High School (1904, additions in 1912, 1916-17) and Lincoln High School (1920).

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<sup>10</sup> Morrison p. 10 - 12.

<sup>11</sup> Tacoma Daily Ledger, July 7, 1921, p. B5.

<sup>12</sup> Tacoma News Tribune, August 10, 1992, quoting Joe Kosai at the 1977 reunion of Tacoma's Japanese-American community, p. B1.

<sup>13</sup> Tacoma Daily Ledger, July 7, 1921, p. B5.

Other Tacoma projects designed by Heath included the Rhodes Department Store (1902-03, 1907 and 1911), the Stone-Fisher Building (1904-05), the Knights of Pythias Building (1906-1907, also a designated City landmark), the Puget Sound National Bank (1909-1912), the National Realty Building and Swiss Hall (1913). Outside of Tacoma is his notable Paradise Inn at Mount Rainier National Park (1917, additions 1922 and 1926).<sup>14</sup>

Heath's designs suggest his wide range of abilities with eclectic historic styles. By comparison to his other school designs and commercial work, the original Japanese Language School appears to be a very simple, vernacular structure. There are no available records to identify the architect of the 1926 addition, but its design appears to be consistent with Heath's original design. According to construction drawings dating from 1926 the construction of the building addition, titled the *Yochiyen* (or kindergarten) Building/Japanese Language School, was attributed R. M. Grant.

#### Association with Kuni and Masato Yamasaki

The Tacoma Japanese Language School is strongly associated with its original teacher, Kuni Yamasaki, and her husband, Masato Yamasaki, who served as the school's original director. Together the two led the institution and taught in its classrooms for over 30 years.

Kuni Yamasaki was born in Wakamatsu City (Aizuwamatsu City) in Fukushima Prefecture, Japan, in 1872. She had graduated from Aizu Women's Domestic Arts School, Aizu Girls' High School and Fukushima Prefectural Teachers' Training School, and subsequently taught in public schools beginning in 1899. She also taught at the Fukushima Prefecture School of Literature, from 1903 to 1906, and at a local girls school of art. In 1909 she emigrated to Seattle to be with her husband, Masato.

Masato Yamasaki, was born in 1874, also in Aizuwamatsu City in Fukushima Prefecture. He graduated in Literature from the Tokyo School in 1902, and Waseda University, and taught at the Fukushima Teachers' Training School until 1907 when he emigrated to Seattle. He lived and worked in Seattle until 1912 when he moved with his wife to Tacoma. Mr. Yamasaki served as the schools' director and as the secretary to the Tacoma Japanese Association.<sup>15</sup>

The Yamasakis were dedicated to the Language School from its inception and were recognized as leaders in the community.<sup>16</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century time few Japanese

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14 Morrison, p. 13 - 17.

15 Ito, p. 600 - 601

16 The Yamasakis were joined by other teachers who were recognized by the community. According to Ronald E. Magden other instructors included elementary school teachers Yoshino Asada, Chiyoki Nimori, Miyoko Okada, Teruko Kono, Kiniko Kumasaka, Fujie Shinyama, Kiyoko Haneda and Eiko Kosai in addition to Kuni Yamasaki. The nursery school was taught by T. K. Enari, Kiyo Haneda, Asa Ikeda, Hana Nakamura, Mura Otsuka, Fumie Oyanagi, Shigeyo Tsuchimochi, Kisa and Mitsue Wakabayashi, and Electa Snyder (in and after 1925). High school teachers included Kikoku Fujii, Torayo Miyoshi, Minoru Tagawa, Inko Kuroda, Shinzaburo Kato, Satoko Yamasaki and Shigeru Sakamoto. Substitute teachers included Matsue Yamane, Misue Morikawa, Aiko Konzo and Chiyoko Kawagoe. The music

immigrants were educated beyond the middle school level in Japan. The Yamasakis were well known for their education at high level institutions, and highly regarded for the knowledge and status this education provided. Mrs. Yamasaki's social position was further enhanced as she was born into a family with samurai ancestry.

Mr. Yamasaki's role in the community was recognized both locally and in Japan. In 1938-1939 the Northwest Liaison Japanese Association sent delegates, including Masato Yamasaki of Tacoma and Yasutaro Miyazawa of Seattle, to China to visit and observe the Japanese Imperial Army. In 1940 Masato Yamasaki was commended by the Japanese Foreign Ministry during a celebration of the 2600th anniversary of the Japanese Calendar.<sup>17</sup> The Yamasakis' educational efforts, in particular their Saturday English Language courses, were observed by teachers from Seattle and California. Teachers also came from Japan to work in the school. Their efforts resulted in recognized success:

"Mr. and Mrs. Yamasaki dealt with Japanese language education for Nisei using 'Japanese spirit' as their motto. They advised that Nisei come to language school on the way from public school, and they taught two hours every day. They invited four or five other teachers, too, and all worked together. . . As a result, in 1920 and after, the student enrollment (of the Nihon Go Gakko) did not fall below two hundred. Nisei who studied here could speak such excellent Japanese wherever they went, that many times people from Japan could not tell that they had been born in America."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to their civic responsibilities and work in the Nihon Go Gakko the Yamasakis raised three children -- an oldest son, Shuji, and two daughters, Tetsu and Yoshi. The family resided in a small residential suite in the school from 1922 to 1942. During the internment, between 1941 and 1945, the Yamasaki family was separated. Mr. Yamasaki was the first Japanese-American leader in Tacoma to be removed from his home and detained by the FBI in December of 1941. He was sent initially to a detention camp in Roseburg, Idaho, but was later interned with Prisoners of War in a Missoula, Montana camp. He died in the Missoula camp on March 4, 1943 after a long illness. Mrs. Yamasaki was evacuated in 1942 with her children to a camp in Salt Lake, Utah. She returned to Tacoma after the war and died on April 16, 1946. The couple's two daughters relocated to Japan after the war.

The Yamasakis were honored in a memorial service at the Tacoma Buddhist Church during the Japanese-American community's first post-war reunion, which was held in August 1977, and at subsequent reunions in 1983 and 1992.

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teacher, after 1927, was Shisui Miyashita. From Magden, Furusato, Appendix No. 2, non-paginated.

<sup>17</sup> Ito, p. 926 - 928.

<sup>18</sup> Ito, quoting James S. Masugi of Tacoma, p. 601 - 602.

### The Internment and Evacuation

The internment and forced evacuation of the Japanese Americans are considered tragedies of America's twentieth century political history. Wartime removal and incarceration of Tacoma's Japanese Americans by Executive Order is a central event in the history of the community, and is closely linked to the Japanese Language School. Because the school was recognized as the center of Japanese-American activities in Tacoma the building was selected to serve as the Civil Control Center for registration in the spring of 1941. (In addition it was used as a temporary residence to families who returned to Tacoma in late 1945 and early 1946.) The internment and evacuation forced the closure of the school as a cultural institution, and led to deterioration of the building. This tragic event adds a poignant layer over the school's earlier significance as the positive embodiment of a unique immigrant culture.

Fear of and hostility against Japanese-Americans grew in the late 1930s and early 1940s due to Japan's aggression in Asia, and America's alliance with Japan's enemy, Russia. The National Japanese American Citizens' League recommended that *nisei* express their loyalty to the U.S. through investment in Defense Bonds and enlistment in military service. Local community members responded to this call with pledges and public declarations of loyalty to their adopted land.

Japanese-Americans were extremely alarmed by the December 7, 1941 attack by the Japanese Imperial Army on Pearl Harbor. This devastating event followed several decades of increased discrimination and anti-Japanese immigration and land ownership policies in the U.S. The bombing of Pearl Harbor spread panic and fear across American, and especially in the West. Anything "Japanese" was linked to the treacherous act of the Imperial Japanese military.

In Tacoma the Japanese-American response to was immediate, public, and overtly patriotic. An advertisement in the local newspaper stated that "American-Japanese Citizens League and the American-Japanese parents generation are supporting America . . . its policies and the defense program."<sup>19</sup>

Despite these and similar efforts by Japanese-American community to declare its loyalty to the United States, the federal government arrested a predetermined number of "enemy aliens" after war was declared in early December, 1941. (Masato Yamasaki was one of the community leaders who was taken at this time to an internment camp.) Contraband – including radios, cameras, weapons, binoculars – was ordered surrendered by all "enemy" aliens in the western states. In January, 1942 a series of orders establishing military exclusion zones were issued by the Attorney General; the first of these was Military Zone 1. This zone consisted of the entire west coast, including all of Washington state west of the Cascade Mountains.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Tacoma News Tribune, December 13, 1941, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> In the East and Midwest the exclusion zones were much smaller, often limited to the area within 1,000' feet of a dam site, airport or military installation.

In February 1942 enemy aliens in the designated zones were restricted by curfews and travel limits. In March 1942 President Roosevelt created the War Relocation Authority (WRA). The WRA was charged with implementing a program of evacuating restricted persons from military zones. That same month travel and curfew restrictions were extended to all Japanese Americans, regardless of citizenship, and voluntary evacuation was prohibited.

To those outside of Tacoma's Japanese community its behavior appeared stoic. The established press described the evacuation as "cheerful" and the participants as "resilient." Officials in charge of the operation were quoted as praising the Japanese: " 'It's a neat job, they made it easy for us. When they saw it was inevitable, they went ahead and cleaned up the mess for us.' "21

By June of 1942 removal was completed of an estimated 100,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, including 30,000 children, from Military Zone 1. In Tacoma the internment and evacuation resulted in non-voluntary relocation of over 1,200 *issei* and *nisei* under Order 67.<sup>22</sup> The speed of the evacuation forced Japanese-Americans to give away or sell their possessions at severely reduced value; their property and savings were confiscated.

Camp conditions were desperate due to overcrowding, poor shelter and hygiene, limited food and medical service, and the separation of families. Schools were organized, and *nisei* children continued to take classes in American-styled schools.

Japanese traditions and the use of Japanese language were not permitted. The skills of those who attended Tacoma's Japanese Language School were recognized, however, by the U.S. military which recruited a number of alumni to serve in the Military Intelligence, Radio Services, and other strategic services. Students from the Tacoma school were considered by many to be the best Japanese speakers and interpreters.<sup>23</sup>

After the war, restrictions against Japanese-Americans were revoked in September of 1945. The relocation centers and internment camps were closed in early 1946. Many evacuees, who had been interned for three and a half years, returned home to face hostile or racist attacks and a total loss of property and assets. An estimated 122, or 10% of the City's former residents, returned to Tacoma. Although there are few records of overt hostility or discrimination in that city, returnees to nearby Eatonville and other agricultural towns in Puget Sound were forced out of their original home communities.

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21 Tacoma News Tribune, May 20, 1942, p. 1.

22 Tacoma News Tribune, May 15, 1942, p. 1, cites a figure of registration of 874 Japanese evacuees. Another article in the Tacoma News Tribune, May 14, 1942, p. 1 and 13, noted a figure of 1,000 by the completion of the internment process which was described as "proceeding quickly." The same paper on May 13, 1942, p. 1 and 8, cited a total of 1,300 interned Japanese-Americans from the Tacoma area. 188 of these were students in Tacoma Public schools and nine in colleges in the city.

23 Pacific Citizen, December 25, 1948, p. 28. Also, The News Tribune, December 13, 1994, p. D1.

Regardless of their reception, the returning Japanese-Americans were displaced and faced economic devastation because of the internment.

The Japanese American community suffered incalculable economic loss as a direct result of wartime internment. They lost property, businesses, jobs and savings. The economic gains of half a century of work by the immigrant generation were wiped out. After the war the Japanese American community had to start up the economic ladder from the bottom rung again. The immigrant generation (the *issei*) already nearing retirement age in 1945 had to begin their lives over again. Many ended their working lives just as they had begun, as day laborers. The psychological losses were perhaps greater than the economic ones, particularly for the second generation of Japanese Americans (*nisei*) who as citizens believed in the American democratic system. Internment essentially subverted their faith in the system.<sup>24</sup>

For children educated before the war at the Language School, the lessons of the internment were particularly poignant. "The *nisei* were formally socialized in an education system that promoted the ideals of a democratic society for all citizens. The actual experience of Japanese-Americans, though, was marked by hostility, prejudice and discrimination."<sup>25</sup> A more positive view, offered nearly 50 years after the end of the war, suggests that this chapter in the history of Tacoma's Japanese-Americans, is one of triumph over adversity and intolerance.<sup>26</sup>

#### History of the School Since World War II

The Language School building has remained vacant for most of the last fifty years. In 1945 and 1946 it was used as a hostel for Japanese-American families returning to Tacoma after the war. However, many former residents did not return to the city.<sup>27</sup>

In an attempt to keep the building within the ownership of the community, the property was purchased by the Kawasaki family in the late 1940s. There were some efforts by a community organization, the *Nikkeijin Kai*, to restart Japanese language classes in the 1958 but few *sansei*, or third generation Japanese-Americans, were interested in lessons, and these efforts were not realized. During the 1970s the building was rented, and karate classes were held on the upper floor.

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<sup>24</sup> Dubrow, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Hirabayashi, *The Impact of Incarceration on the Education of Nisei Schoolchildren*, in Daniels, et al, p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with historian Ronald E. Magden in December 1994.

<sup>27</sup> According to Schmidt, p. 55, Tacoma's Japanese population attained a size of only 596 in 1960 - a figure comparable to the 1900 figure of 606.

The building remained in the private ownership of Leo and Teddy Kawasaki until 1986 when a local developer attempted to renovate the building. The developer, Loren Ezell, purchased the property on contract for adaptive reuse as a commercial or multi-family residential property. He had the building locally designated as a landmark and placed on the National Historic Register to recognize its historic significance, and assure that federal investment tax credits would be available for its redevelopment. However his redevelopment efforts were unsuccessful, and the ownership of the building returned to the previous owners, the Kawasakis.

In 1993 the property was sold to the University of Washington to become part of its 46-acre Tacoma Campus. In 1993 the University unsuccessfully sought potential tenants for the building, and undertook an effort to study the scope and cost of rehabilitation. A subsequent study, sponsored by the City of Tacoma's Landmarks Preservation Commission, suggested that rehabilitation could be feasible, but only with a viable non-profit organization acting as the developer. Such a group has not been found, and no funding has been identified for the building's rehabilitation. Current plans are to demolish the Japanese Language School building and develop its site as a memorial garden.

Positive associations with the Tacoma Nihon Go Gakko are evidenced by the number of alumni attending reunions which have been held in the city. In 1977, the 35th Year Reunion was held, initiated and sponsored by former students. The mayor proclaimed August 13, 1977 as Tacoma Japanese Language School Reunion Day, and over 503 people, including 250 from outside Washington, attended the three-day celebration. The 41st Year After Wartime Evacuation Reunion was held in 1983. In August of 1992, the 50th Reunion of the school was held. At each of these gatherings the legacy of the language school was recognized by presentations, celebrations and shared memories.

## Architectural Description

### The Original Site

The site of the school was originally a seven-lot sloping parcel, fronting onto South Tacoma Avenue between 17th and 19th Streets, 175' wide and 120' deep. (The current site is comprised of six lots and is 150' wide.) A 20-foot wide, unpaved alley, known as "Court E," is located to the rear. The alley is approximately 30 feet below the street grade.

Records indicate that when the building was constructed the block in which it stood was more urban in character than it appears currently. Although the Language School was a free-standing building, the block also included other wood-frame, multi-story structures. Further north masonry buildings characterized Tacoma's Japantown and its downtown.

The wood-frame Language School building was constructed approximately 17 feet from a paved sidewalk along Tacoma Avenue South. Due to the steeply sloping grade, front access was provided via a wood-framed walk which bridged from a concrete retaining wall to the building entry. Due to its steep site the building appeared to be a single-story structure on Tacoma Avenue.

### The Original Building

Original design documents for the Japanese Language School are not available, but early photographs show a simply detailed, wood-frame structure characteristic of Northwest vernacular architecture. The original building was a two-story, 39 to 46 foot wide by 65 foot long structure. A cross-gable roof form was characterized by a main east-west gable roof facing the street, and wide projecting gables facing the north and south sides. (The south gable was slightly lower than the main ridge.) Exterior features included drop or rustic wood siding and corner boards, and wide, plain barge boards and simple, carved knee braces on the gable ends.

Windows were double hung in single and grouped compositions with multiple lites in a 3:3, 3:6 or 6:6 pattern. Typically the windows were trimmed in a simple manner with an apron and a projecting head; side rails on the sash are dropped. At the front facade, facing onto Tacoma Avenue, a shed-roof was supported by carved knee braces, and sheltered the off-center entry door. Above, in the main roof gable a Palladian window assembly introduced natural light to one end of the main assembly room.

The two-story floor plan accommodated a five-room suite of living quarters for the school's director and his family, and a large, 13.5 foot tall assembly room at the upper floor or Tacoma Avenue level. On the north side of the assembly room stairs connected to the attic, which may have been used for storage, and down to the middle floor. This level originally contained three classrooms, an office and two toilet rooms.

Two original brick masonry chimney flues. A notation calling for a "new" gas outlet on the drawings for an addition in 1926 suggests the original presence of gas unit heaters. The drawings also and historic photographs show that an exit door originally existed at the east end of the middle level.

### The 1926 Addition

In 1926 the school was expanded with a major, 1,660 sq. ft. addition on the east which extended the building length by 36 feet. New construction included two classrooms and two toilet rooms with showers at a basement level which was constructed of 8" concrete walls. Two new classrooms were also added at the middle level where a single classroom, office and two toilet rooms had been provided originally. The instructional classroom spaces varied in size between 680 sq. ft. and 780 sq. ft. and accommodated the school's growing number of students.

An alumnus who attended the school from 1926 through 1937 recalled that twelve different class levels were accommodated in the school with two grades typically taught simultaneously in one classroom. Classes included language, history, Japanese culture, English and Japanese language. Other endeavors included oratorical contests, school picnics and annual programs which included performance, spot activities and summer field trips. An estimated total of over 1,000 students attended the school in the 1920s. It also served as a daycare kindergarten with an English-speaking American teacher, Mrs. Electa Snyder, to prepare children for English-speaking public school.<sup>28</sup>

At the upper floor the assembly hall was extended to the east, and a raised 3' high, 21' deep stage was constructed. The original living quarters for the Yamasaki family on the south side of the floor were expanded with the addition of a bedroom. This space currently suggests use as a restroom with showers. (This room which may have been inserted after the school was closed.)

A wood framed fire escape was added to the east end of the building. Exiting was also provided at the north side of the basement from a projecting, gable-roofed porch with double doors. Photographs show the existence of a small play area and basketball court on the northeast corner of the site. Exterior athletic activities were indicated also by the note calling for galvanized iron pipe guards to be placed over the windows of the north-facing basement classroom.

The design of the 1926 addition appears to have been very consistent with the architectural vocabulary of the original building. The building structure continued to consist of wood framing with 2x6 trussed rafters, 2x14 joists and 8x8 posts. The main east-west gable massing was extended with only a slight increase in height. However, the roof gable was extended on the south side to cover the wider dimension of the building on that site. The result was an asymmetrical appearance.

Exterior finishes continued to be painted rustic wood siding, wood corner boards, and wood shingle roofing. Notes indicate that several original, grouped windows may have been relocated; others were noted "to match that of existing." Two relatively low brick chimneys were added to exhaust the gas furnace; these were noted with a cap detail, "same as existing."

Interior elements were also indicated as "same as present." These consisted of stained fir flooring, lath and painted plaster walls, and fir chair rail, dado, crown mold, door casing and base trim. Slate blackboards in the classrooms were framed with fir with burlap-covered wood exhibit strips at the top. Throughout the building doors were stained fir, five-panel type with glass panels and glazed transom windows above those to classrooms. Chain-suspended, glass globe incandescent light fixtures provided illumination. At the front of the stage a sheet metal footlight trough was detailed below removable cover boards.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview on-site with former student, Yoshi Sugiyama, in October 1994.

### Changes to the Building Since 1926

Photographs which date from ca. 1930 show the existence of a two-story garage which was attached to the north side of the building, adjacent to the sidewalk and Tacoma Avenue. Remains of the garage roof flashing appear outlined on the building's north facade. These suggest it was a flat-roofed, two-story mass. The floor plans to the 1926 addition show a recessed entry to the building placed asymmetrically on the south side of the west facade. This location is consistent in photographs dating from the mid-1930s.

Changes to the Japanese Language School from the late 1940s to the early 1980s appear to have been minimal. At some time after the late-1930s the entry porch was redesigned. The present one, is a symmetrically placed, gable-roofed porch which projects forward from the building facade centered below the central Palladian windows and the ridge of the main roof gable.

Subsequent changes to the building have occurred due to the ill-fated attempt at redevelopment in the early 1980s by a local developer, Loren Ezell.<sup>29</sup> The building also suffers from neglect, delayed maintenance and vandalism. Physical remnants indicate that the wood-frame fire escape on the east end, and two-story garage and exit porch on the north side had been removed. Until the late 1980s some of the original school furniture remained, including attached, built-in bench-type desks.<sup>30</sup> Around this time some of the roofing was replaced with wood shingles which appear consistent with the original building roofing material except for the entry porch on the west end which is roofed with composition shingles.

In 1986, a number of storage boxes were discovered in the basement by Mr. Ezell. These were opened and a number of the textual artifacts were deposited at the University of Washington Archives in Seattle and the Washington State Historical Museum in Tacoma.

Until the last several years the building, which had remained virtually empty for almost 50 years, remained relatively intact. Currently the original furniture and all plumbing fixtures have been removed. Some of the plaster and lath has been stripped over piping in walls, suggesting an effort to identify or replace the plumbing. Most of the original light fixtures have been removed or broken. Demolition at the basement level appears to have included removal of partition walls between the two classrooms. (This space is physically inaccessible as the bottom stair landing has been removed.) Mechanical and electrical systems in the building have been partially dismantled. No utilities are not connected.

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<sup>29</sup> At this time the building was listed in both the Tacoma Register of Historic Places and the National Register in anticipation of Investment Tax Credit financing. These designations received very little community support for the building's preservation. Dubrow, p. 52 - 53, suggests that this may be due to residual impacts of World War II treatment: "Internment dislocated Tacoma's Japanese American community and created ambivalence among survivors about any government action that even remotely might be construed as a 'taking' of resources away from community members."

<sup>30</sup> The Tacoma Register of Historic Places Nomination Form noted, "One classroom retains original cast iron desks in place. Slate blackboards, fixed bookcases and cabinets remain in place for the most part." p. 7.2.

Although the accessible windows and doors have been locked and some covered with plywood, most of the original window and door glazing has been broken. Remaining interior features include fir tongue and groove wainscot, wood trim, panel doors and slate blackboards. All but one of the original ceiling-hung, stem-mounted globe type light fixtures have been broken. Despite the current owner's efforts to secure the building, the continued presence of illegal homeless habitation is indicated by considerable debris, graffiti and non-original furniture.

#### The Current Site

The site of the Japanese Language School is characterized by several unusual species of trees located within the shallow, 17-foot front setback on Tacoma Avenue. These include a clump of bamboo, several large cherry trees, a Fatsia Japonica, a Japanese Pine and a Ginko tree. (A Japanese plum tree has been removed.) The size of the trees indicates they were planted when the building was an active school. According to alumni of the school these trees, were brought as seedlings from Japan where they were considered sacred plants associated with Emperor Hiroshito.<sup>31</sup> The landscaping remains an expressive reminder of Japanese cultural traditions which were brought by immigrants to America.

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<sup>31</sup> The importance of the landscape material was raised by a number of alumni of the school during a December 14, 1994 meeting at the Fircrest home of Leo and Teddy Kawasaki. Attendees included alumni Tadaye Kawasaki, Ted Tamaki, Hiroshi Nakagawara, Yaeko Nakano, and Yoshiko Sugiyama, historians Ronald Magden and Susan Morrison, and Susan Boyle.

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Figure 18. Basement Plan Sketch, Boyle • Wagoner Architects, Seattle, October 1994.

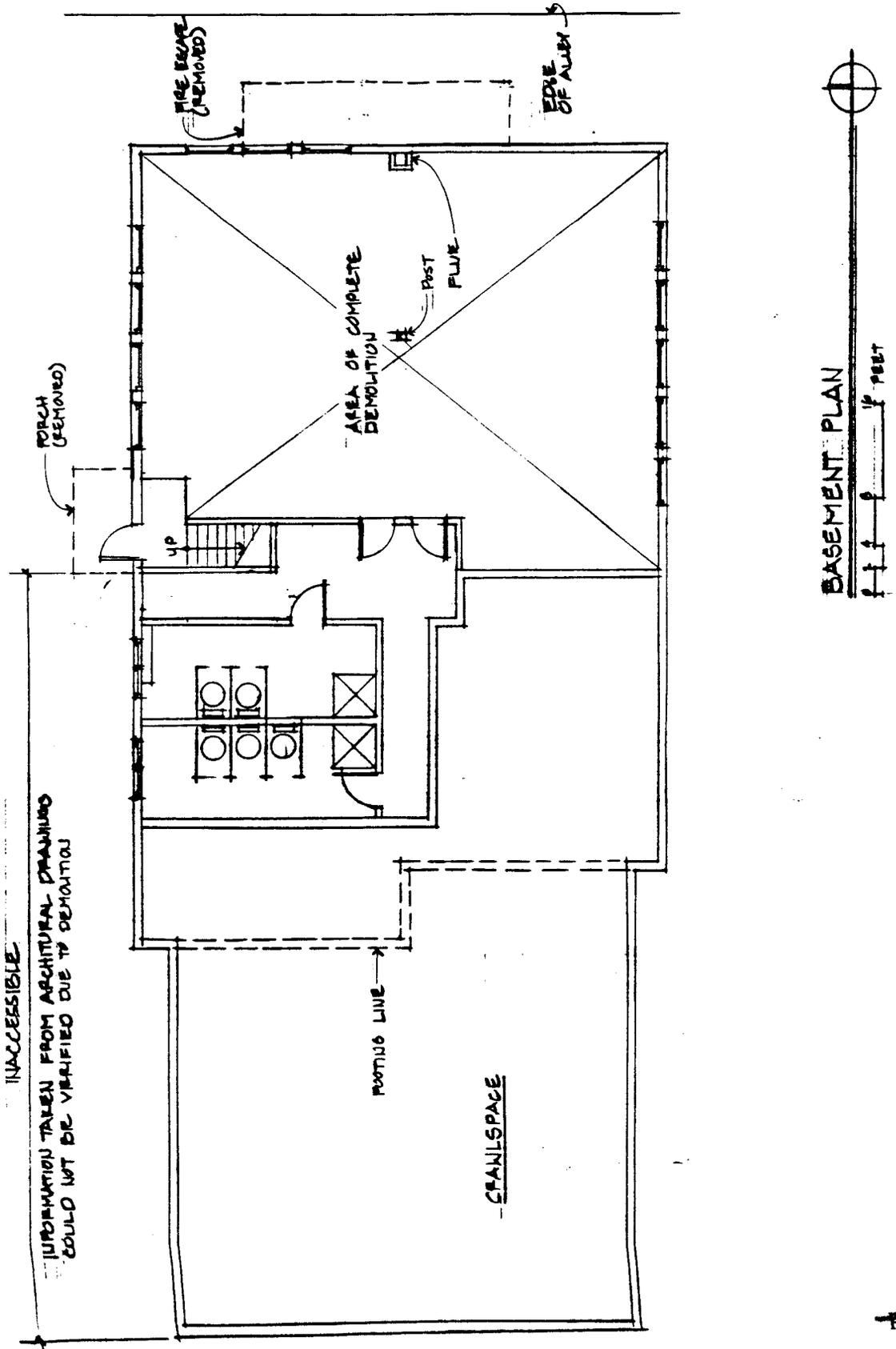


Figure 19. Middle Level Floor Plan Sketch, Boyle • Wagoner Architects, Seattle, October 1994.

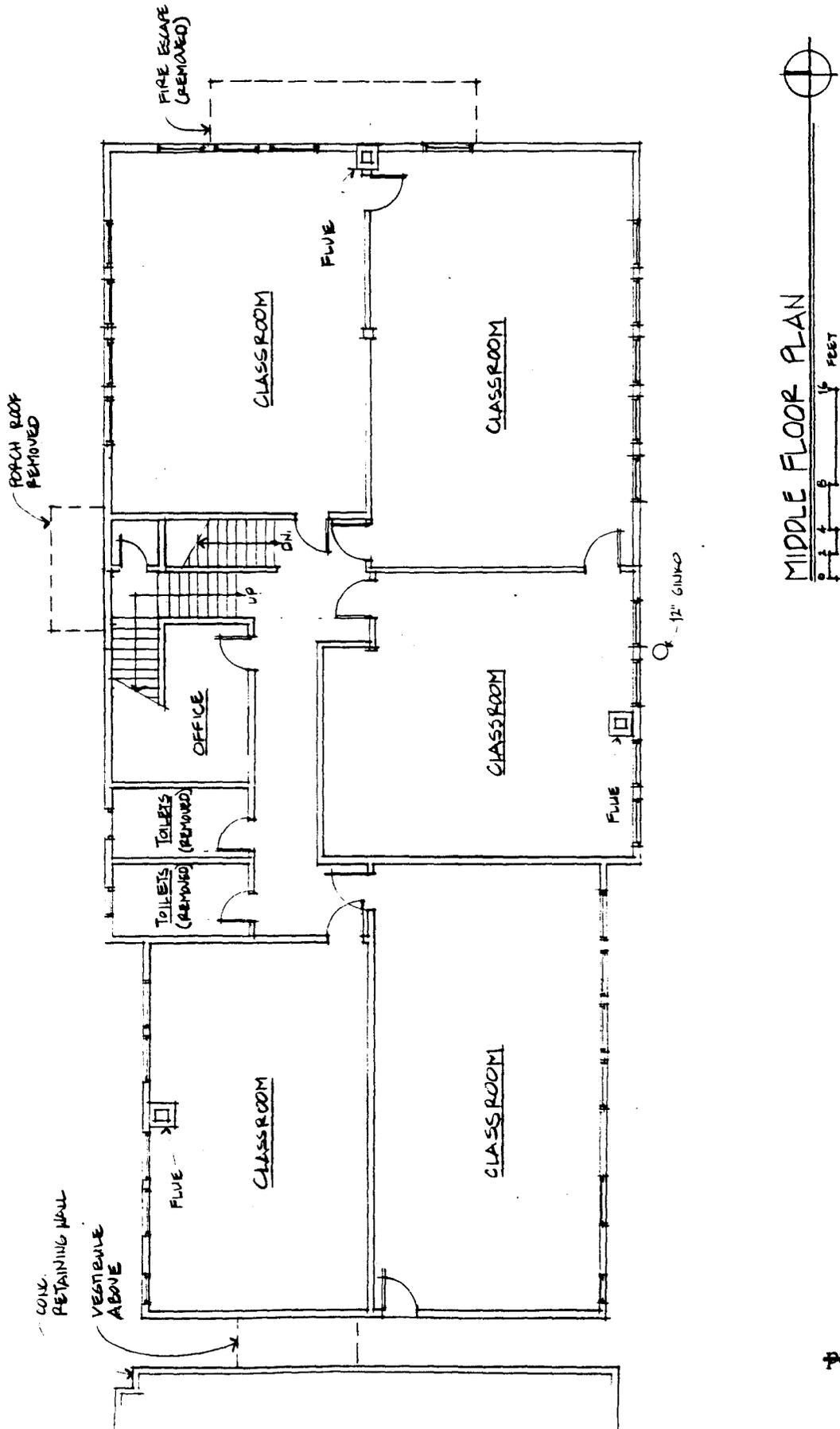


Figure 20. Upper Level Floor Plan Sketch, Boyle • Wagoner Architects, Seattle, October 1994.

