The John Virginius Bennes House, located at 122 SW Marconi Avenue in the Arlington Heights neighborhood of Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, was built in 1911 as the home of Oregon architect, John Virginius Bennes. The house is two stories with a basement and approximately 4,370 square feet in size. It was the first residence constructed in the Arlington Heights neighborhood, which is adjacent and within Washington Park. The house is designed in the Prairie School style with Mediterranean influences and exhibits the strong horizontal lines emphasized by broad, low-hanging eaves, which is characteristic of the style. The residence has a rectangular plan and a low-pitched hip roof, with the ridge line perpendicular to the front lot line. It is a wood-frame building with a stucco finish, a tile roof, and a concrete foundation. The front façade includes a partially enclosed porch on the first story and a band of vertically-oriented windows under the eaves on the second floor, which further emphasizes the horizontal lines of the building. The ornamental detailing of the house is restrained and honors craftsmanship as demonstrated by the ornamental frieze beneath the upper eave, the Prairie School-style planters anchoring several corners of the building and property, and the glass-and-metal overhang above the entrance. The interior of the house features an open floor plan of large rooms, as is characteristic of most styles of the early 20th century. The foyer is dominated by a dramatic yet simple central stair case and heavily articulated molding in a geometric pattern. The house has undergone minor alterations several times since its construction, including the addition and enclosure of a back porch into a breakfast room, addition of a detached garage, conversion to forced air heating system and remodeling of the kitchen and three bathrooms. However, the residence retains the distinctive influences of the Prairie School style, as well as its Mediterranean features, and is a strong representation of the architectural work of John Virginius Bennes.

HISTORY
(Chronological, descriptive history of the property from its construction through at least the historic period - preferably to the present)

The John Virginius Bennes House, located in the Arlington Heights neighborhood of Portland, Oregon, is significant under National Register Criterion C as a remarkable example of a mix of Mediterranean and Prairie School style of architecture, which is said to be the first original American architectural style. The house embodies the Prairie Style through its strong horizontal lines, stucco finish, low pitched hip roof, and open floor plan. The house also qualifies for listing under National Register Criterion B, as it was the personal home of John Virginius Bennes, a highly regarded Oregon architect who has been credited with introducing the Prairie School style to Portland, but also designed numerous buildings in Oregon that are listed on the National Register, including the Hollywood Theater and the nearly 50 buildings and complexes in the Oregon State University National Register Historic District. Bennes designed and completed the house in 1911 and lived there until a few months prior to his death in 1943, which is the Period of Significance for the home. The John Virginius Bennes House is an excellent example of mixed Mediterranean and Prairie School style architecture, which was pioneered by famed architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Prairie School design is seen as both an architectural style and aesthetic movement. Prairie School houses, with their characteristic strong lines, boxy forms, open flowing floor plans, and relatively subdued detailing, contrasted with the Victorian style of architecture popular in late 19th and early 20th century; which focused on complex forms, numerous small rooms, and ornate detailing. As noted by Portland architectural historians William Hawkins and William Willingham, the work of Bennes and his partners was among “the most avant-garde architecture to be seen in Portland” at the time that Bennes was designing his own home: “Such radical departure in Portland, however, caused little stir, despite the great inventiveness for the period and the promising possibilities of an entirely new aesthetic.” Prairie School style buildings are relatively rare in Oregon. The Prairie School Traveler website lists 15 homes, including the John Bennes House, as exhibiting the Prairie School style in Portland, Oregon. Of such 15 homes, six are located in the southwest area of Portland. The Bennes House, along with the Aaron Maegly House, are the only two listed Prairie School style homes located in the Arlington Heights neighborhood and both were designed by Bennes, who is credited with introducing the Prairie School style to Portland. The Maegly House was completed in 1915, four years after the John Bennes House became the first home completed in Arlington Heights. The Bennes and Maegly houses are similar in structure, both showcasing the strong horizontal lines and organic focus of the Prairie School style. The two houses also have broad tiled roofs; however, the Maegly House incorporates more Mediterranean influences in its ornate and somewhat flowery frieze work and detailing. Architectural historian Gideon Bosker has noted that, “The Bennes house, which is many ways was a precursor for the more ostentatious Maegly home, revealed the architect’s desire for order and abstracted shapes.” The John Bennes House adheres more closely to the simple lines and ornamentation of traditional Prairie School Design, except for the “unusual…addition of brackets which appear to add support to the widely extended eaves.” The personal residence Bennes designed for himself within Washington Park in Portland, Oregon embodies both Bennes’ immense talent as well as his appreciation for Prairie School design. The house boldly represents the Prairie School style through its stucco exterior, low-pitched tiled roof, broad overhanging eaves, ribbons of plentiful windows, and restrained use of ornament. The interior boasts the open floor plan and dominant central chimney associated with Prairie School design, along with art glass, built-in furniture, and simple yet finely crafted woodworking and moldings. Where Bennes’ personal interpretation of the Prairie School style can be seen, in his Prairie School residences as well as other work, is the incorporation of highly articulated friezes and brackets on otherwise relatively simple volumes with a restrained expression. Construction of the Bennes House was completed in 1911 and the Bennes family lived in the home until a few months prior to his death in 1943. Bennes moved to Portland in 1906 after working on several projects in Baker, Oregon. While living in Portland, Bennes
designed numerous historically and architecturally notable buildings, many of which are listed on the National Register. Some of Bennes' most notable works include the Hotel Cornelius, the Hollywood Theater, Oregon State University buildings within the Oregon State University Historic District, Temple Beth Israel, and the A.H. Maegly House.

RESEARCH INFORMATION

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Historical Society: Other Repository:

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Books and Articles
Clark, Rosalind. Oregon Style, Architecture from 1840 to the 1950s. Professional Book Center, 1983.

Obituaries
Obituary of John V. Bennes, Oregonian (Portland, OR), November 30, 1943.
Obituary of Mrs. John V. Bennes, Oregonian (Portland, OR), April 19, 1953.


Online Publications

Other Resources
Multnomah County Tax Assessor records, microform, automated data files and card files.
Oregon Historical Society, Vertical Files.
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Portland, Oregon.

Census, 1920.