Oregon Historic Site Record

LOCATION AND PROPERTY NAME

address:	306 SW 2nd St	**historic name:**	Central School
	Milton Freewater, Umatilla County (97862)	**current/other names:**	Central Middle School
assoc addresses:		**block/lot/tax lot:**	
location descr:		**twnshp/rng/sect/qtr sect:**	5N 35E 1

PROPERTY CHARACTERISTICS

resource type:	Building	**height (stories):**	3.0	**total elig resources:**	2	**total inelig resources:**	1
elig evaluation:	eligible/contributing			**NR Status:**	Individually Listed		
prim constr date:	c.1909	**second date:**		**date indiv listed:**	10/20/2010		

primary orig use:	School	**orig use comments:**	
second orig use:	EDUCATION: General		
primary style:	Late 19th/20th Period Revivals: Other	**prim style comments:**	
secondary style:	Romanesque	**sec style comments:**	
primary siding:	Brick:Other/Undefined	**siding comments:**	
secondary siding:			
plan type:	Central Blk w/Proj Bays	**architect:**	Finkenbinder, Charles E.
		builder:	Williams, Earl A.

comments/notes:

Contributing school bell on concrete base and non-contributing storage container on west side (rear) of building.

GROUPINGS / ASSOCIATIONS

Not associated with any surveys or groupings.

SHPO INFORMATION FOR THIS PROPERTY

NR date listed:	10/20/2010	**106 Project(s):**	None
ILS survey date:		**Special Assess Project(s):**	None
RLS survey date:		**Federal Tax Project(s):**	None

ARCHITECTURAL / PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

(Includes expanded description of the building/property, setting, significant landscape features, outbuildings and alterations)

Summary Paragraph Constructed between 1909 and 1910, Central School is located at 306 S.W. 2nd Street, in the center of the rural community of Milton-Freewater, Umatilla County, Oregon. A mixture of twentieth-century Revival styles, the rectangular, two-story, brick building with a concrete foundation, daylight basement, and hipped roof communicates its scholarly function through the seamless incorporation of Classical, Renaissance, and Romanesque design elements. The central block of the main building is broken by a projecting full-height, centered pedimented entry on the east elevation and large rectangular bay on the west. The concrete stem wall that runs the perimeter of the entire building is punctuated at regular intervals by window openings, and is capped by a horizontal concrete header. The masonry walls are composed of alternating red and black bricks that create the impression of a woven surface. The brick pattern is interrupted by concrete quoins on the building's corners and regularly placed windows with concrete sills. Rectangular windows have concrete lintels, while the arched windows located at the entry points feature a vertical-brick surround. A classical cornice with a wide frieze and dentils adorns the wall and overhanging hipped roof. The east façade is dominated by a projecting entry featuring an archway composed of two projecting rectangular block plinths, each supporting one Tuscan-style column and a rusticated arch. Within the arch is a recessed entry space leading to the front doors. A front-facing gable is centered over the entry bay. Less ornate and un-recessed, arched, entries are located on the north and south sides. Modern mechanical equipment, a non-contributing storage container, and the contributing original bronze school bell are set along the west exterior wall. The 18,954 square-foot interior consists of an office, ten classrooms, and utility areas organized around a central hallway running from north to south, with a stair on either end, and centered on the original grand entry on the first floor. Interior finishes are painted wood, mostly fir, including original flooring, molding, wainscot, chalk boards and trays, and doors. Alterations to the building include window replacement, dropped ceilings in the classrooms, removal of two hipped-roof dormers and four chimneys above the roof line, the construction of an elevator in the space formerly occupied by the main entrance and central stair, and the installation of composition polymer tile, carpet, fluorescent lights, and other non-historic surfaces. Setting Central School is located in Milton-Freewater, Umatilla County, Oregon, a rural community of approximately 6,000 residents, noted for its wheat fields, vineyards, and fruit orchards. The school stands in a largely residential neighborhood on a 5.14-acre site between DeHaven Street, S.W. 2nd, Elizabeth Street, and vacated Queen Anne St. at its original location in the very heart of the community. The original 1910 school now shares this site with a gymnasium, playfield, and other classroom buildings dating from 1951 through 1984. The immediate area of the school is surrounded by a paved area without landscaping. Modern mechanical equipment, a non-contributing storage container, and the contributing original bronze school bell that is set on a concrete plinth lie along the west exterior wall. A 1950s single-story classroom building lies to the south and is adjoined to Central School with a breezeway. A 1984 addition to this building lies to the west. McLoughlin Union High School is located to the north of Central School between the vacated Queen Anne Street and SW 1st Avenue. Building: Plan and Layout Central School consists of a central block measuring approximately 42'x 95' with two full-height projecting bays. The first bay faces east and houses the former main entry and is approximately 3' x 29'. The second bay extends west and houses classrooms on each of the floors. It measures 27' x 83.' By breaking the lines of the massive, main structure the architect has created a building with interesting contours, recesses, and roof lines, avoiding a basic box-shaped school building. Walls The building rests on a poured-concrete slab foundation laid 5 feet below grade, from which a 18-inch thick unreinforced-concrete stem wall extends 8 feet. Window openings interrupt the wall at regular intervals to provide daylight to basement classrooms - four windows on either side of the entrance bay of the east façade, eight windows distributed in a pattern of three-three-two-three along the west foundation, and seven windows, three on one side and four on the other, on the north and south entries. Foundation wall window openings at the southwest corner in the furnace area appear to have been filled with concrete between the piers and a coal chute installed at an early after construction date . The foundation walls are capped by a horizontal concrete header, approximately 1' high for the circumference of the building, with the exception of the east entrance bay, where the solid concrete footings are lower (approximately 3' high), and terminate on either side of the east archway in projecting rectangular block plinths. The masonry walls are composed of both red and black bricks arranged in an intriguing pattern of alternating long red bricks and short black ones to create an overall design reminiscent of a woven surface. The bricks are aligned in straight rows vertically and horizontally except in the case of arched window openings where the brick follows the contour of the arch for several courses to create a subtle but distinctive "eyebrow" for each window. Concrete quoins define the corners of the walls as decorative reinforcement for the brick. Concrete is also employed to create sills and lintels for the windows. These concrete horizontal elements, arranged in wider bands above the window and narrow sills below further support the masonry walls and visually link the separate parts of the facade with their asymmetrical window arrangements. The exterior walls terminate in a painted-wood frieze with dentils under a broad over-hanging roof. The exterior brick wall and decorative elements are supported by a balloon-frame wood structure. The main entry on the east façade is centered in a projecting bay and features a cast-concrete arch, shaped to imitate rusticated stone arches as popularized by the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The wide arch rests on two concrete, Tuscan-style columns on plinths. The east entrance is filled in with a plywood wall and fitted with a utility door, which replaced the original recessed double entry doors in order to accommodate an elevator. Two stairs leading up to the open entry bay were removed when the opening was altered. Centered above the arch is a small concrete medallion that may once have served to support a flagpole. Moving up the wall, a horizontal belt course decorated with a rope and egg-and-dart pattern runs the width of the bay between the floors, and above this is placed a large recessed

cast-concrete sign that reads "Central School" in capital letters. The bay terminates in a classical pediment with raking cornices, dentil moldings, and a decorative escutcheon in bas relief on its face. The sculpture is of painted wood, except for the Renaissance-style escutcheon, which appears to be painted cast concrete. Two other smooth-cast-concrete arched entries are found on the north and south facades of the school and are not recessed. The doorway at the south entry includes an exterior modern outdoor breezeway that connects the original building just above the concrete arch to an adjacent 1951-58 school building. Windows and Doors The original, irregular fenestration pattern is maintained throughout the building; although, many of the original wood-frame windows were replaced with smaller aluminum windows. Each classroom, as originally designed, has two exterior walls of windows, one with a row of four large rectangular triple-hung windows, and the adjacent exterior wall featuring a row of four, smaller, four-mulled windows set above the chalkboard. Almost all triple-hung windows were replaced with modern metal, double-hung sash windows and the upper arch or top sash areas covered with painted plywood in the 1970s. The original four-mulled double-hung windows are preserved and some are visible in portions of the basement foundation wall, but most are covered with plywood in an effort to conserve energy. Above the double doors at the north and south entrances are transoms with large curved lunettes, now filled with painted plywood, which probably were originally glass lunettes intended to provide light to the interior hall and stairways. It is not apparent whether the original glass above the doors was removed or simply covered over. The entry doors are all modern fire-proof metal replacements. The east entry door was replaced by an elevator and a modern metal single entry door in 1992. Despite the removal of the wood doors and windows, the original openings are still apparent and the original design intent is well-communicated. Roof The wooden roof features a light and elegant cross-gabled wood-frame hipped roof with a dormer/belfry at its peak on the east facade. The original cedar shake roof also included two additional wood hipped-roof dormers with two small windows, each facing east. These dormers flanked the central cross-gabled roof that forms the pediment of the east façade. They were removed when the concrete “slate” roof was installed in the late 1920s. Four large brick chimney tops (two on either side of the roof's center ridge on the east slope and two on the west slope) were removed in 2008 when an asphalt shingle roof was installed. The third dormer, once serving as a belfry and, open on three sides beneath a low hipped roof, is now boarded-up with painted wood. The original cast-bronze bell was relocated to the southwest outside corner of the school where it is displayed on a concrete plinth, suspended in its cast iron swing. Interior Access into the school is through one of three original entries, on the south and north ends of the building and on the east side. The east-side entry was designed as the main entry. From the east-entry bay one originally stepped through recessed double doors, with two square windows and a fanlight above, into a spacious hallway with a 14' –wide wooden staircase that led to the first-floor central hallway that runs north-south through the entire length of the building. This space was once lit by large windows above each of the three entryway doors, but is now lit with fluorescent light fixtures, suspended from the original 13-14' plaster ceiling. The ceiling is punctuated by a network of electrical conduit and sprinkler system pipes. The main north-south hallway terminates at each end in a split-level, enclosed wooden staircase with the wooden stairs covered with modern rubber/plastic flooring. The stair down leads to the ground-level entry and basement, and has a single wood rail. The modern double-door entries on either end open to a 6'x14' landing, with ceilings formed by the enclosed staircase and landing above. The entries originally featured wood-double doors and arched windows in the tympanum above. The stair to the second floor is more ornate and has a decorative square wood newel post and two wood railings that are stabilized with modern metal brackets and a wood kick board. The walls of the stairwell and landings retain their original 4’ high close-grain fir wainscot, trim, and lathe-and-plaster walls. Entering the building from the north or south doors, one may descend six stairs to the basement-level hallway. On this level the floor is a polished-concrete slab and a single north-south hallway bisects the building. This hallway is fitted with modern metal fire doors at either end and the ceiling of the hall has been dropped to 7’. A new wall was constructed on the east side of the hall, narrowing the original 14’ span to 7’. The ceiling is fitted with acoustical tile and fluorescent lights. The original large round air ducts hang below the ceiling to serve the furnace and airflow system, as do the grated openings at the top of the walls. The west- hall wall is plastered brick. Originally an unfinished area, two classroom spaces now occupy the east side of the basement. Each is entered through modern wooden entry doors, and both were originally lit by four large windows along one wall and three smaller ones above the chalkboard wall. These windows are now boarded, leaving only the lower half of three four-mulled original windows exposed in each room. The elevator, installed to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, is located between the classrooms in the middle of the east wall. The associated sloping ramp along the east wall has a wood floor and modern drywall framing with handrails along its entire length, about 14'. Four approximately 4' x 10' brick walls are located to the left and right of the central hallway between the classrooms and in the furnace and "air" rooms. These are the base of the four brick chimneys whose walls rise up through the building and once projected from the roof. The original boiler was coal-fired, and there are two former coal chutes located at the southwest corner of the building, which is now the custodian's office. Next to this office on the west side of the hall is the furnace room, the "air room," a custodial storage room, and the now windowless boys' and girls' restrooms. The only restrooms for the building were always located here, but the rooms were modernized with fiberglass wall paneling, metal stalls, and modern sinks, etc. The first floor includes four classrooms, one in each corner of the building with the entry halls running between, except on the west side where the space between classrooms was utilized as a cloakroom and storage space. Today it is used for storage and houses lockers. The original wainscot, door trim, and hardware are all still present throughout the hall; although, two built-in storage spaces on either side the entry on the east wall have been removed and covered. Lockers line the wall on either side. Each of the four main classrooms on this floor and the floor above are identical in size. They are each reported to measure 25' x 31' and afford 775 square feet of floor space. Each was provided with a "wardrobe area of the walk¬through type" across the back end of each room, but these spaces are now used as supply closets. Inside the classroom the space retains nearly all of the original wainscot, molding, chalk boards and trays, etc; although, much of the fir woodwork is now painted instead of stained. Visible at the top and bottom of the back wall of each classroom are the metal grates for the original air circulation system housed in the brick chimneys that form part of the interior wall of each classroom. The original fir flooring of these rooms has been covered with composition polymer tile in the classrooms and carpeting in the halls to reduce noise levels. The most dramatic change to these classrooms is the new dropped ceilings with fluorescent lighting that reduced the ceiling height from 13.’ Between the first and second floors on the north side is a small 12’ x 14’ room originally used as the principal’s office. On the second floor, the four-classroom plan is retained and the level of integrity is similar in the hall and classrooms. A small room, previously used as a fifth classroom, is located in the middle of the hallway's east side, and now serves as the staff lounge and elevator entry. On the opposite side of the hallway is an opening to a historic fire escape that currently houses lockers and a closet. At the northwest corner of the top floor is a narrow staircase - the only stair balustrade in the school with the original stained-wood finish. This elegant turned balustrade includes the distinctive paneled and wooden baluster posts with bowl tops. This stairway provides access to a storage room, known as the “Crow’s Nest,” which has been used in the past as an office. Built-in shelving is located on the east and west walls. From this room the attic is accessed through a ceiling-mounted access door. Alterations The alterations to Central School in the 100 years of its use includes the removal and replacement of many exterior windows and doors; the boarding up of most window openings; removal of two dormers and four chimney tops; new roofing, installation of new heating, cooling, plumbing, electrical, and sprinkler systems; and modification of the main entry to accommodate an elevator. New interior floor coverings were installed throughout, and both bathrooms have been completely remodeled. A single window opening on the upper west side was enlarged into a fire escape door at one time. The fire escape has since been removed. New walls have been added in the classroom spaces in the basement. These alterations are respectful of the building's integrity, and aside from the addition of the elevator and chimney removal, have not significantly distorted the original structure. The original design intent is still apparent, including the original fenestration pattern and east façade entry. No structural additions have been added to the building.

HISTORY

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

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph Central School is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its local significance under Criterion A, Education. In 1909 School District 31 proposed a plan to build two new brick schools, one each for the towns of Milton and Freewater, to meet the increasing demands of a booming population. Expansion during this period continued, and Grove School was opened five years later in 1915. Of the three buildings, Central School is the best representation of the growing educational needs and aspirations of the community in the first decades of the twentieth century. Central was the largest of the three schools and retains the most integrity. It was also notably the only facility in the area that provided a free public high-school education. The period of significance begins in 1910, the date that the school was completed, and extends through 1921 when Central School ceased to serve as the community high school, replaced by the larger, Art Deco-style McLoughlin Union High School. Narrative Statement of Significance Central School is significant as the community’s first public high school and for its association with the development of education in the towns of Milton and Freewater. Between the establishment of the town plat in 1872 and the construction of Central and Freewater Schools in 1910, the twin cities of Milton and Freewater experienced phenomenal population growth. After being opened to Euro-American settlement in 1860 many rushed into the Walla Walla Valley to homestead or were lured by the prospect of gold in nearby Idaho. Soon these small towns grew from just a few farms and log cabins into a fully-fledged community. Settlement and Growth in Milton and Freewater When Central School was completed In 1910, the citizens of Milton and Freewater could look back 50 years to a time before the towns existed, when the empty hills were grazed by wild ponies that fed on the bunch grass growing luxuriantly on the hillsides, watered by the Walla Walla River as it flowed down from the nearby Blue Mountains to the valley below. Peaceful and beautiful as this area appeared to be - after the Whitman Incident of 1847 and the ensuing Cayuse War, even the Oregon Trail was rerouted to avoid the region and the area was essentially closed to settlement. While conflict discouraged Euro-American settlement until the 1860s. Once established the communities of Milton and Freewater grew quickly as more residents came to call the Walla Walla Valley home. W.S Frasier and his family arrived from Texas by wagon train in 1867 and filed a homestead claim in 1868 in the area of present-day Milton-Freewater. Sensing an economic opportunity, Frazier laid out a small town in 1872. A year later, an application for a post office was made by general consent in the name of Milton by W.A. Cowl. A quickly increasing population prompted Mr. Cowl to donate a portion of his land for a two-story wooden school to serve the entire community - a Central School as it was called. Built in 1879, it quickly became too small and a larger Central School was built in 1888 on the same site. Eight years after the town plat was filed, the 1880 Census recorded 544 persons in Milton and total of 1,037 residents in the general area. In 1886 the town Board of Trustees incorporated the growing town under the name of Milton City, named after Milton, New York, by postmaster W.A. Cowl, who originally hailed from there. Two years later the small town was recorded by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company as having a flour and grist mill, livery, general store, and other businesses and residences centered mostly along Main Street with other buildings along one of the other four recorded streets. A wooden flume, constructed around 1882 to bring

water from the Walla Walla River, ran through the center of town. By 1890 Milton had grown substantially. Most of the residences along Main Street had moved to other parts of town and citizens had more shopping options. Along Main Street one could find two liveries and a saddlery, cobbler, candy factory, tin shop, hardware store, druggist, printer, barber, tobacco shop, bank, and a large two-story public hall. Businesses off Main Street included a seller of farm implements, the flour mill, and the Milton Foundry and Machine Company. The unincorporated town of Freewater sprang up just to the west during the same period, so named because residents were provided free water to settle there. Growth in Milton was fueled by a number of factors. The area had been closed to settlement ever since the Cayuse War, and when it was finally opened up in 1860 there were many who rushed in to homestead or were lured by the prospect of gold in nearby Idaho. Those who stayed in the valley were not gold seekers however, but farmers and ranchers who found the area well suited to raising livestock and the long growing season, mild climate, and fertile soil an excellent environment for the raising a wide variety cereal grains, vegetables, and fruits. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, immigrants continued to arrive in search of land to settle and raise a family. There was a good living to be made from farming in one of the richest agricultural areas in the nation, which was advertised as "the bread basket of the world" by some. Subsequently land values soared. In 1900 Milton had 804 residents. Ten years later the town boasted another 476 persons and a total of 2,998 residents lived in the area. Growing industry fueled this expansion. By 1909 agricultural produce was finding its way to markets around the world thanks to three transcontinental rail lines serving the area and connecting Milton with Spokane, Portland, Puget Sound, and beyond. Milton and Freewater had grown together by this time, but each had its own city hall and post office. Milton, the larger of the two, had an opera house, passenger train station, college and three churches. Available services included water, sewer, and electricity. Warehouses, mills, and small factories were scattered in and around the two communities. Observing the exponential growth, people frequently remarked in 1909 that in the brief span of one man's life the two towns had sprung up as if by magic, seemingly overnight, and had now become a community of almost 3,000. A real estate advertisement in the Milton Eagle newspaper in 1909 blithely predicted that "a million people" will be arriving in the valley looking for land to purchase. The sentiment was shared by many. Residents in 1909 were optimistic about the prospects for the both towns' future, as well they should have been, given the exponential growth they had witnessed in their own lifetimes. The Need for More Schools in Milton and Freewater By 1909 continued growth had led to school overcrowding, and it was clear to the school board that additional space would be needed to accommodate anticipated growth. In April 1909 the Board presented the voters of School District 31 with a $35,000 levy to build two new brick schools, one in Milton and one in Freewater. That same year, the Methodist Episcopal Church sought to establish a college in Milton to address the need for higher education facilities. The public school levy passed, thanks to a recognized pressing need and a community electorate that was feeling the euphoria of unparalleled prosperity. However, the investment residents made in their community was not necessarily unique. Even the smallest communities vied with each other to build the most impressive public facilities they could afford as an expression of civic pride and to attract more residents. For example, the 500 citizens of the nearby town of Prescott, WA built a school (designed by Charles Finkenbinder) valued at $54,000 in 1918. On January 7, 1909, the School District Board of Directors gave notice to the residents of Milton and Freewater that the $35,000 levy had been passed and that that bonds would be offered for sale to bona fide residents of the district. These bonds would have an interest rate not to exceed 5 percent per annum with interest payable semi-annually. As funds were being raised, plans for construction progressed. Bids for both schools were to be received by February 1, 1909. The new brick Central School was to be constructed on the same site donated by W.A. Cowl for the first Central School. By the middle of March, architect C. E. Finkenbinder of Walla Walla, Washington, had been chosen for the project, after careful deliberation through February and a final selection process in March, when Finkenbinder's proposal to build a brick school on the site of the current school was selected. . Finkenbinder also drew plans for Freewater School which was to be built simultaneously and served as the architect for Columbia College, which began construction around the same time. The building is now the Milton-Freewater City Hall. Under Finkenbinder's direction, Central School was to be one of the most modern schools in the state with spacious halls and roomy stairways. There would be four large classrooms on each of two floors, and a basement that would house the forced-hot-air, coal-fueled boiler located in the southwest corner of the basement. The original 7' tall, forced-air fan shipped from a company in New York is still in place in the "air room," with its 3/5 horse power motor preserved, but no longer in use. This "state of the art" heating system was much praised for its efficiency in 1910. Fresh air was brought in to the "air room" on the west side of the basement and then heated by hot water pipes from the coal-fired furnace. The heated air was then blown by the fan through an elaborate duct system with individual controls for each duct, still in use, serving eight classrooms above as well as the basement. Two finely appointed restrooms, one for each sex, and two apartments, that could be converted to classroom use if needed, occupied the basement. The cost was estimated to be between $20,000 and $25,000. Bids for construction were to be received by noon on June 9, 1909 at the office of George Miller, clerk pro tem of the school district. Bids would also be received at the same time for the smaller four-room school house in Freewater. Earl Williams of Milton, Oregon was the successful bidder at $31,533, coming in at $1,333 below the next lowest bid. By the second week in July, construction on the two schools had started. Freewater, the smaller of the two schools, progressed somewhat more rapidly than Central. Eight bricklayers and concrete men and six carpenters worked to complete the basements. It was planned that when all the brick work was completed, more carpenters would be put on the job. As work progressed on the new buildings, the school year started in the old school buildings on Labor Day. Twelve instructors had positions already, but it was expected that two more would be hired when the new buildings were completed. As part of the staffing decisions, the first two male teachers to ever work for the district were hired. While construction on the two schools continued, the school board was looking forward to the future. Beginning in June of 1909, discussions centered on whether the city should have a public high school. According to the Oregon School Code of 1878, public high schools were required in cities with more than 1000 students. Although the concept of free high schools in Oregon was highly controversial in the 1870s-80s, attitudes had changed by 1909 when Central School was constructed. By this time the idea had not only been widely accepted, but communities were eager to have the prestige of a free public high school as a way of attracting new residents to town. By 1910 there were more than 126 free public high schools in Oregon, despite the lack of a law requiring them in smaller communities. Public high schools had already been established for over two decades in nearby communities, Walla Walla (1889) , Pendleton (1879) and Baker City (1889). In the small town of Milton, with fewer than 1000 students between the ages of four and twenty, no public high school was required by law. Yet Milton boasted a private school, Milton Academy (est. 1886), and later Columbia Junior College was established in 1901. The institution offered high school education for which tuition had to be paid. After some public discussion in September 1909, it was decided that the first four grades would be offered at Grove and the new Freewater Schools. The first through twelfth grades would be taught at Central, brining free high school education to the community for the first time. By November, the buildings were all but completed, but costs had overrun initial estimates. Another $8,850 was needed to finish up work at Freewater School and to complete Central School's basement bathrooms, floors, plaster, and woodwork, and to provide for future maintenance costs. A meeting was held the first week of December, and a compromise $5,000 levy was approved. Still, over $3,000 short, it was decided that if the rest of the funds could not be secured, the schools would open uncompleted. On February 18, 1910, the Milton Eagle proudly announced that the new school was finished and ready for occupancy. The paper boasted, "seldom can be seen a finer school edifice than the one which now graces the grounds of District No. 31, and of which all Milton and the country surrounding can be proved ... a building of which their grandchildren may well be proud … it is built to last, only the best and most permanent materials being used in its construction." At the time the building was touted as one of the most modern schools in the State of Oregon and was described in great detail in the local paper. The printed description noted that the building was "entered from 3 main thoroughfares [doorways] all opening into a large hall 14 feet wide and extending the full length of the building. There are eight [class] rooms, all of uniform size and appearance, with ceilings 13 feet high. Each room has a capacity of 60 pupils. On the landing may be found the office of Principal I. E. Young. This room is 12 x 14 feet. Each room has a closet for the teacher's needs, a place to keep chalk and other sundries, and a cloak and lunch room fitted with hooks, shelves, etc. Every room is wired for electric lights and 'can be thus lighted at anytime.' Electric buttons connect each apartment with the basement for signal purposes in furnishing heat, etc. The basement is composed of two large and light apartments, which can readily be converted into classrooms when necessary. The foundation and basement of the building are comprised of solid concrete, 18 inches thick, the walls being built of brick with plaster inside." The article praised builder E. A . Williams for constructing "a model of beauty and substantiality," and painting contractor, W. H. Bailey, for his "special pains" in selecting colors for the walls that were easy on the eye. The writer stated that the wall colors were "one of the best features of the building." Also noted were the "artistic and convenient arrangement of the rooms," "practically perfect sanitary condition of the structure," sound dampening floors, fire resistant construction, and heating system. A short three years later in 1913, yet more classroom space was needed and again a levy was put to voters and approved. In 1915 the two room, wood-frame Grove School was replaced by a brick six-classroom school house and another four classrooms were added to the Freewater School at the same time. Both continued to serve as grade schools. As those children aged, the high school population grew, and in response six years later the large two-story, Art-Deco style McLoughlin Union High School was built in 1921, just north of Central School. School construction and expansion then ceased for 30 years until the postwar period. Freewater School was demolished in 2008. In 2010, Grove School, not designed by Finkenbinder, was determined ineligible for listing by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office due to the number of modern alterations. Of the public schools constructed between 1910 and 1915 , only Central School retains sufficient historic integrity to physically convey the growth of School District 31 and the towns of Milton and Freewater during the early-twentieth century. Work History of the Architect While little biographical history of Charles Edward Finkenbinder is available, his work is evident in schools and public buildings throughout the Walla Walla Valley region. A resident of nearby Walla Walla, WA, Finkenbinder was in many ways the ideal candidate for the job of architect for Central and Freewater Schools. He was young, 30 years of age, and apparently just getting started in his career at the time. Born May 27, 1879 in West Pennsborough, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, he grew up on the family farm and was likely comfortable working with the farmers and ranchers of Milton with whom he shared his farming background. Like those who had immigrated to Milton, he moved west looking for work. At the age of 17, Finkenbinder appears in the Iowa State Census records in Battle Creek, Iowa, and later in the U.S. Census of 1900 in t Jamestown City, Kansas where he was living alone. There he met and married Neva Ethel Wake on September 27, 1902, when he was 23 and she was 20. While little is known about Finkenbinder's formal education, it is clear that he had acquired some technical training in engineering and draftsmanship. By 1906 the couple had found their way to Walla Walla, WA, where Charles ran in 1906 as the Socialist Party candidate for county surveyor. In the 1907 Walla Walla City Directory, he is listed as the secretary-treasurer for the Walla Walla Outdoor Advertising Company, and his wife is identified as a telephone operator. In 1908 he is listed for the first time in the Walla Walla City Directory as an architect with an office at 507 W. Main St., and later at 306 Denny Building on Alder Street, downtown. In the next three years Finkenbinder completed several commissions, most notably several area schools. During his years in Walla Walla as an architect, Finkenbinder designed schools for many of the small farming communities in the area. In doing so, he successfully met the needs and wishes of the communities he worked for. A local Prescott newspaper noted in regards to that town's new school that, "Architect Finkenbinder planned according to the wishes of the board and the people." While he was responsive to the needs of the citizenry,

he retained his own vision of the structure. His designs speak to the community with an elevated tone of elegance combined with simple, sturdy values that eschew the pompous or staid. He borrowed freely from the architectural pattern books of the day, modifying the plans to meet the needs of his clientele. In keeping with the design ethos popular at the time, he employed an eclectic mix of Classical, Renaissance, and Romanesque Revival elements in his designs. Finkenbinder also integrated into his buildings modern and innovative mechanical systems, some of them still in use 100 years later. For the yeoman farmers of the region living far from urban centers, these imposing brick and concrete structures must have seemed like ”palaces on the prairie”. Sadly, many of his "prairie palaces" are still unidentified or have been demolished. Newspaper accounts identify some of his commissions in eastern Oregon and Washington but for the most part, he shared the fate of many architects in the boom years of the West -employed, but never lauded for his accomplishments. No. record of buildings which he may have designed during his 7 year residence in Walla Walla has yet been discovered. Finkinbinder’s known commissions include: • Ferndale School, Ferndale, OR, constructed 1909; demolished in 1950s • Public School, Attalia, WA, constructed 1909; demolished at unknown date • Central School, Milton, OR, 1910; still used as school • Freewater School, Freewater, OR, 1910; demolished 2008 • Columbia College, Milton, OR, 1910; now Milton-Freewater City Hall • Elam Block Building, Milton, OR, 1910; originally a department store and now a funeral home • Vincent School, Umapine, OR, 1911; now a bronze foundry • Public School, Prescott, WA, 1912; demolished at an unknown date He may also have designed the First National Bank and the Opera House on Main St. in Milton in 1909. Finkenbinder’s numerous commissions in Milton and Freewater occurred in just a few years, four of them, all schools, were completed in 1910. The largest and perhaps most impressive of the three is Columbia College, now Milton-Freewater City Hall. Similar to his other school commissions, the building was a grand structure – a two-story brick, central-block edifice with symmetrical flanking projections at each of the four corners, regular fenestration, decorative pilasters, and a centered full-height projecting pedimented entry supported by Corinthian columns and surmounted by a bell tower on a parapet roof. The building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2003 under Criterion C as an example of Finkenbinder’s work and for Criterion A for its association with the school. Similarly Central School was a brick building designed in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Revival styles. Less ornate than Columbia College, the building did still include a centered pedimented grand entry, classical design elements, and the latest in mechanical systems. Finkenbinder also designed two nearby school buildings in Ferndale and Umapine, Oregon. Ferndale School was demolished, but Vincent School in Umapine still survives. It was in many respects a stylisticly similar to Central School when constructed in 1911; although, it was half the size. Like Central School, it is a brick-and-concrete structure with a hipped roof and a central projecting pedimented bay centered on the east façade. The entry with its brick archway and recessed double doorway is preserved, as are the original windows with their asymmetrical fenestration pattern. The basement foundation windows have covered, but the roof dormers and belfry are intact. The building housed four classrooms and an unfinished basement. A spacious hallway runs the length of the building from north to south on the west side, but the classrooms and gym additions, which were later added to the building on the west side 1920's, cover or necessitated the removal of most of the west wall. By 1914 Finkenbinder and his family evidently moved to California. His draft registration record for 1917 lists his home as Los Angeles where he is described as a self-employed architectural designer. From 1926-1942 Charles E. Finkenbinder is listed in the Los Angeles City Directory with the following occupations: architectural designer; construction superintendent for the City of Los Angeles, and construction engineer. In 1929-1930 he designed the Sylvia Park Country Club in Topanga Canyon, L.A., which featured a clubhouse and hundreds of small vacation cabins for city dwellers wanting to escape to the country for relaxation. Other California projects are as yet unknown. He continued to live in Los Angeles until his death in February 26, 1954 at the age of 74. In 1909, School District 31 embarked on an ambitious program that called for the construction of one new brick school for each of the towns of Milton and Freewater to meet the educational needs of a rapidly growing population. Plans also called for expanding the School District’s services by offering free high school education at Central School, a first in the community. While the district sought to meet a practical need, Central School was not a simple utilitarian design. Instead it was an architect-designed statement that heralded the maturation of the community and communicated the town’s hopes for a prosperous future. Under the direction of Walla Walla, WA architect, Charles Edward Finkenbinder, the building reflected the latest in school design including modern mechanical equipment and well-appointed interiors. Finkenbinder’s incorporation of Classical, Renaissance, and Romanesque design elements into the building's exterior successfully communicated the educational purpose of the facility and the aspirations of a successful and rapidly growing town. Reflecting a steadily growing student population, the old wood-frame Grove School was replaced five years later by a larger brick building and Freewater School was expanded. Of the three public schools constructed in town during this period of expansion, Central and Freewater Schools in 1910 and Grove School in 1915, only Central School still communicates its historic significance. Freewater School was demolished in 2008 and Grove School no longer retains its character-defining features, leaving Central School as the lone representation of this period.

RESEARCH INFORMATION

✔ Title Records	Census Records	✔ Property Tax Records	✔ Local Histories
✔ Sanborn Maps	✔ Biographical Sources	SHPO Files	Interviews
Obituaries	✔ Newspapers	State Archives	✔ Historic Photographs
City Directories	✔ Building Permits	State Library	

Local Library:	Milton Freewater City Library	**University Library:**	
Historical Society:	Umatilla County Historical Society	**Other Respository:**	

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