

# memorandum

date September 27, 2016

to Mr. Ells Freeman, Superintendent of Public Works, City of Hermosa Beach

from Margarita Jerabek, Associate Principal, Director of Historic Resources; Amanda Kainer, M.S., Senior Architectural Historian, ESA PCR

subject Exterior Paint Analysis for the Community Center (Pier Avenue School)

Dear Mr. Freeman:

On August 25, 2016, ESA PCR's Senior Architectural Historian, Amanda Kainer, M.S., conducted an analysis of the paint finishes on the exterior and window frames of the Community Center (Pier Avenue School). Oversight was provided by Margarita Jerabek, Ph.D., Director of Historic Resources. The members of ESA PCR's Historic Resources Practice Group meet and exceed the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards in history and architectural history. Below is a summary of the building's construction history and occupancy, description of the methodology used to conduct the paint analysis, and a summary of results and recommendations.

## **Historical Overview of Community Center (Pier Avenue School)**

Designed in the WPA Moderne style, the Community Center (Pier Avenue School) was constructed of reinforced board form concrete in 1935 as an elementary school. The building was designed by master architect Samuel E. Lunden and was built to replace the original Pier Avenue School, built in 1911, that was destroyed by the 1933 Long Beach earthquake. Resulting from the Long Beach earthquake, standards for school construction were upgraded. Older schools had been constructed of unreinforced masonry and, therefore, suffered the worst damage. Shortly after the earthquake, the California legislature took major steps to regulate school construction and the State Legislature passed what came to be known as the Field Act that required earthquake-resistant design and construction for all public schools, kindergarten through community college. Therefore, the majority of schools destroyed by the Long Beach earthquake were replaced by concrete and steel WPA/PWA style buildings. As exhibited in the design of the Community Center (Pier Avenue School), its WPA Moderne style design is a mix of classicism, Art Deco, and streamlining articulated in reinforced concrete.

Following the 1974 to 1975 school year, the school was closed due to declining enrollment and would later be reopened by the City as a community center. The City has subsequently adapted the Community Center (Pier Avenue School) into a theater space and community center.

It appears the Community Center (Pier Avenue School) has undergone a number of painting campaigns. Historic photographs of the Community Center (Pier Avenue School), included in Attachment A, were essential to determining the original paint scheme. While there appear to be no historic photographs of the building during

the 1930s, the architect's rendering of the building was published in a March 28, 1935 issue of the *Hermosa Beach Review*. This black and white rendering depicts the building as painted in one, light color articulated with recessed bands encircling the elevations. The article describes the exterior as, "The exterior walls of the entire group of buildings will be of reinforced concrete treated with horizontal bands in a simple, modern and straightforward manner, with ornamental features only at the entrances and touches of scraffito<sup>1</sup> color decoration at important points on the Auditorium."<sup>2</sup> Due to the building's WPA Moderne style, the original design intent was for natural light to "enliven" the architecture, making the building "live" as the light changed throughout the day and in different weather conditions. This is a Neoclassical Revival/Beaux-Arts design concept that was incorporated into the WPA Moderne style. As such, a light, classical paint color would have covered the building letting light play on the elevations to create shadows and dramatic effects.

The earliest known photograph of the Community Center (Pier Avenue School) uncovered by ESA PCR is dated 1950-1951. Taken 15 years after the 1935 rendering, this black and white photograph still shows the building was painted one light color with decorative stenciling adorning the upper auditorium elevations. Other historic photographs identified also illustrate the building was painted in one color. Historic photographs from the 1970s show the building was painted in a warm peach color.

## **Methodology and Analysis**

ESA PCR analyzed paint finishes on the reinforced concrete exterior and wood window frames on several locations of the Community Center (Pier Avenue School) that were accessible without ladders. Paint analysis was performed onsite using the sanding method: 220-grit sandpaper was used to gently expose the various layers of paint on the wood window surrounds. After the layers of paint were identified, the colors were compared to paint chip samples in the Benjamin Moore Color Preview fan deck. Photographs of paint analysis conducted onsite are provided in Attachment B. To confirm the results, paint samples were removed from various areas of window trim and exterior and the same method was later used, offsite, on samples collected onsite. Also, ESA PCR reviewed archival information stored at the Hermosa Beach Historical Society including historical photographs, school yearbooks and newspaper articles, to further analyze the original paint scheme, as described in the section above.

It appears the concrete exterior has been painted a variety of colors over the years. Based upon paint stratigraphy there are at least four layers of paint (listed with more recent first): purple grey, grey, warm peach, and warm white. The closest match to the warm peach is Benjamin Moore Jumel Peachtree HC-54 and Crisp Straw 2157-50. Based upon ESA PCR's experience with the paint analysis of other WPA Moderne style buildings,<sup>3</sup> we recommend the following Benjamin Moore colors: Fine China 2156-70, Ivory Tower 2157-70, White Blush OC-86, or Marble White OC-34.

Paint analysis was also conducted on the window frames. The stratigraphy window frames identify at least four layers of paint (listed with more recent first): dark grape purple, primer, purple grey, primer, grey, primer, warm peach, and brown.

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<sup>1</sup> Scraffito or sgraffito is a form of decoration made by scratching through a surface to reveal a lower layer of a contrasting color, typically done in plaster or stucco on walls, or in slip on ceramics before firing.

<sup>2</sup> "Architect's Sketch of New Pier Avenue Schools," *Hermosa Beach Review* (March 28, 1935): 1.

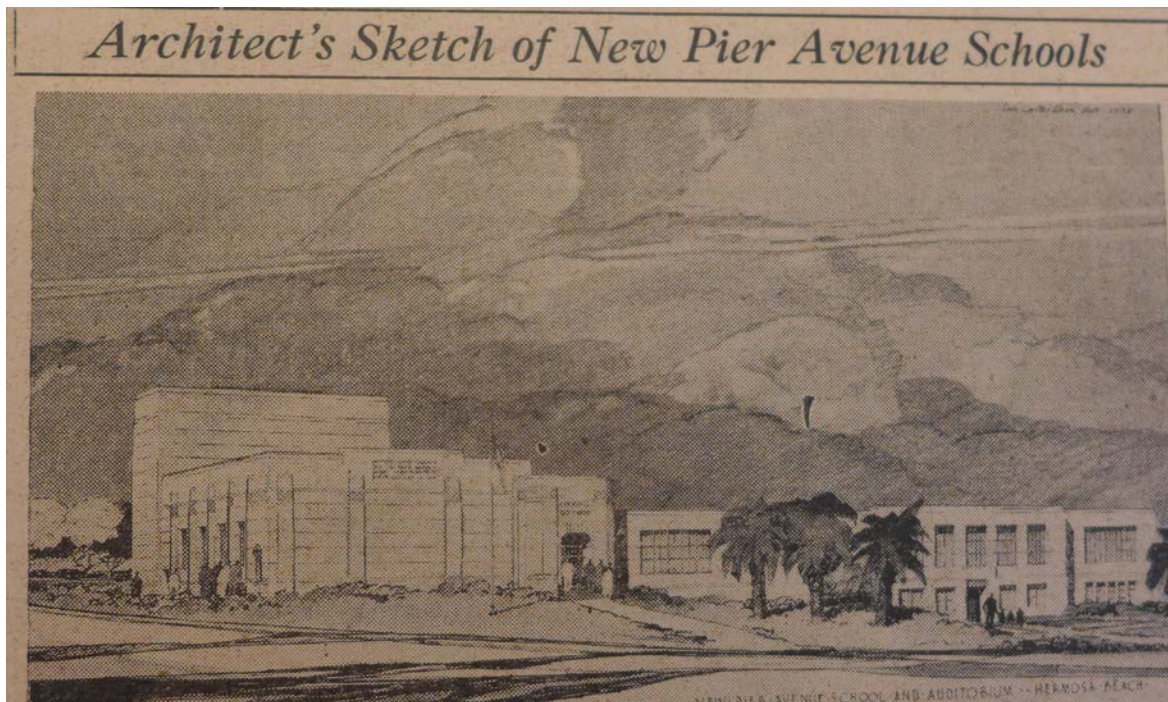
<sup>3</sup> ESA PCR conducted paint analysis on the City of Santa Monica City Hall.

Therefore, we recommend the following Benjamin Moore colors for the window frames: New Chestnut AC-6 or Richmond Gold HC-41.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, ESA PCR recommends the following Benjamin Moore paint colors for the concrete exterior: Fine China 2156-70, Ivory Tower 2157-70, White Blush OC-86, or Marble White OC-34. And the following Benjamin Moore paint colors for the wood window frames: New Chestnut AC-6 or Richmond Gold HC-41. The stenciling on the upper elevations of the auditorium should be retained. Before the paint colors are selected from the paint samples, ESA PCR recommends doing mock ups of the colors on the exterior of building to view the paint in natural light and shade.

Attachment A: Historic Photographs



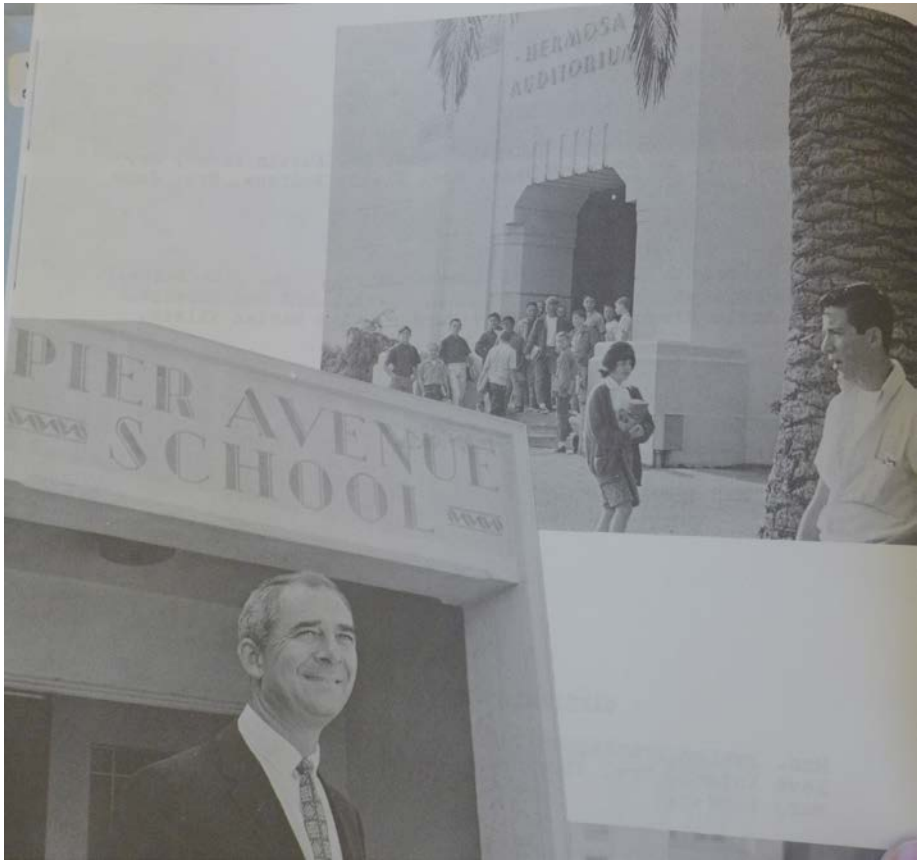
"Architect's Sketch of New Pier Avenue Schools," *Hermosa Beach Review* (March 28, 1935): 1.



1950-51 (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)



1959 Pier Avenue School Yearbook (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)



1965 Pier Avenue School Yearbook (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)



1975 Pier Avenue School Yearbook (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)



1975 Pier Avenue School Yearbook (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)



Date Unknown (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)



Circa 1970s (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)



Circa 1977 (Daily Breeze)



Date Unknown (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)





Date Unknown (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)



Date Unknown (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)



Date Unknown (Hermosa Beach Historical Society)

**Attachment B. Paint Analysis**



Window frame on west elevation of



West elevation



Primary (north) elevation



Primary (north) elevation



Rear (south) elevation