

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Date listed 09/10/2009  
NRIS No. 09000707  
**Oregon SHPO**

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name Memorial Coliseum

Other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number 1401 N. Wheeler Avenue/ 300 N. Winning Street  not for publication

city of town Portland  vicinity

State Oregon code OR county Multnomah code 051 zip code 97227

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

  
Signature of certifying official/Deputy SHPO

7.21.09  
Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Non-Contributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: sports facility

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: sports facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: International Style

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: GLASS; METAL: aluminum;

WOOD: plywood

roof: SYNTHETIC

other:

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1960

**Significant Dates**

1960

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

A. William Rouzie; David Pugh Sr.; W. Jack

Gilstrap; other SOM architects;

Hoffman Construction Company, contractor

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: Multnomah County Library

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** approx. 7.24 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>10</u>	<u>525894</u>	<u>5041939</u>	3	<u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>	4	<u></u>	<u></u>	<u></u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Kristen Minor  
organization Peter Meijer Architect PC date April 21, 2009; rev. July 2009  
street & number 710 NE 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue, Suite 200 telephone (503) 517-0283  
city or town Portland state Oregon zip code 97232

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps:** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs:** Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

name City of Portland, Spectator Facilities/ Office of Management & Finance (David Logsdon, Facilities Mgr.)  
street & number 1120 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Room 1250 telephone (503) 823-6958  
city or town Portland state Oregon zip code 97204

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## DESCRIPTION

### SUMMARY

The Memorial Coliseum is a multi-purpose arena located in urban Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon. The street address is 1401 N. Wheeler Avenue, sometimes also listed as 300 N. Winning Street or 300 N. Winning Way, in Portland, Oregon. When completed in 1960, the Coliseum was not only a technological feat of engineering and operation unrivaled by any other large civic structure in the Pacific Northwest, but it was also a fully-articulated example of International-Style Modernism. The building retains its original design, materials, workmanship, and location. Though its surroundings have been altered to some extent, the building's setting is still highly urban and the building retains its original feeling and relationship to nearby geographic features such as the Willamette River. The Coliseum is under City of Portland ownership and continues many, though not all, of its associations with various local and regional events and sports teams. The building is the only large-scale public glass-walled structure of its time in the Pacific Northwest. It is therefore nominated under National Register criterion C for architectural significance. The Coliseum is notable for its advanced construction technology, but is not being nominated for its engineering significance. Because of the overall focus of the International Style on technology and the expressive use of structural materials, the engineering of the building is the underpinning for its stunning architectural form.

### SETTING

The Memorial Coliseum is located on the east bank of the Willamette River, which bisects the city of Portland into east and west sections. Its square building footprint is oriented with one side parallel to the Broadway Bridge, just north of the site, and another side parallel to N. Interstate Avenue, which follows the river (see Photo 01). Its sides are almost exactly oriented to northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest. The Coliseum is part of a larger 30-acre area known as the Rose Quarter, which also includes the Rose Garden Arena, built in 1995, four parking garages, corporate offices, and several restaurants. The nominated area consists of the above-grade building as well as its entry pavilion and the two sunken plazas on either side of the entry, and immediately surrounding area, approximately 7.24 acres in all.

The irregularly-shaped, large-scale parcels in the immediate vicinity of the Coliseum are the result of both the area's industrial history as well as the result of connecting bridgehead locations to street layouts. NE Broadway, for instance, continues from the Broadway Bridge in a northeasterly direction for about three blocks before swerving to join the more regularized and topographically oriented grid (see Figure 9). The I-5 freeway runs past the Rose Quarter in a north-south direction immediately to the east. Portland's typical 200' block street grid, for the most part, begins east of the freeway. However, prior to the start of construction on the Coliseum, a street-grid layout and a number of buildings on a smaller scale were demolished on the site. The active rail lines and industrial complexes along the river's edge, as well as Interstate Avenue paralleling the river, form the Rose Quarter's western edge.

The southern edge of the Rose Quarter is demarcated by the Steel Bridge, which carries multimodal traffic such as light rail as it connects east and west Portland. The Convention Center, with its twin glass spires, is located several blocks to the east. The overall neighborhood is dominated by transportation infrastructure such as the Interstate Avenue corridor, bridges, and the I-5 freeway; by industrial shipping infrastructure along the waterfront; and by large-scale development which is not particularly conducive to pedestrian activity.

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The Memorial Coliseum's immediate surroundings on its northeastern and southeastern sides have been altered since it was constructed. Its entry plaza has been enlarged and connected to an exterior space of its neighbor, the 1995 Rose Garden Arena (see Photo 03). Parking areas originally surrounded the Coliseum on its north, east, and south; the "disgracefully tiny entrance plaza - all that could be rescued, evidently, from the traffic engineers"<sup>1</sup> initially was not much larger than the entry canopy itself (see Figure 5). Today a road, N. Winning Way, cuts east-west through the Rose Quarter just north of the Coliseum and creates a triangular entry area in front of the building. The edges of this area are landscaped and terraced, and the remainder - including the original entry pavilion area - is paved in concrete or concrete pavers and furnished with decorative steel light poles (see Photo 04). The structured and surface parking originally on the north and east sides of the Memorial Coliseum has, for the most part, been replaced by more open space, either paved or landscaped (see Figures 5 and 8). Parking garages now occur to the southeast, to the northeast, and a pair directly north of the building.

The site slopes up from the river towards the northeast, so the building's entry plaza occurs on the high end of the site. The entry level floor is at least 30 feet above N. Interstate Avenue along the building's southwest edge, allowing for prominent views of the building as well as opportunities from within to see out over Portland's cityscape and the Willamette River.

### EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The Memorial Coliseum is a flat-roofed square "box," measuring 360 linear feet per side, and 80 to 100 feet in height. The Coliseum's form in plan is not clearly evident as a perfect square from the exterior, because it is so large that the sides recede from the viewer in perspective. Each facade is a long, dark, pristine rectangle capped by an abstracted white strip. Materials used on the exterior are limited to glass and aluminum walls, plywood fascia, concrete basement-level walls, and a light-colored single-ply roof surface. The other prominent feature of the building, most noticeable when the building is lit from within, is the oval, concrete seating bowl which is free-standing within the walls. Although an interior feature, the seating bowl is visible from every exterior vantage point due to the building's transparency. Including the below-grade Exhibition Hall, the building is 197,000 square feet in size (see Figures 2 and 3).

The four walls are made of modular 3.5' by 9' glass panels, each one framed with anodized aluminum. A single wall has 6 panels vertically and 96 horizontally, for a total of 576 panels. Larger scale modularity of the wall plane is created by a subtle increase in width of every fourth vertical joint between panels. These correspond to the locations of the laminated wood interior mullions. Horizontally, the lowest row of glass panels is separated from the five above by an aluminum band of about a foot in height. The glass portion of each facade is 50 feet tall, with a white acrylic-overlaid plywood fascia, 22 feet high, above it. A narrow white band of the same material holds the bottom edge of each glass wall (see Photo 05). The glass utilized in the Coliseum has a grey tint, which was a relative newcomer to the tinted-glass spectrums commercially available in 1959/1960. Green tints were conventional and readily available by the early 1950s, and various bronze tints were becoming more available as well.<sup>2</sup> Various tints in glass were used in order to minimize heat gain within a building without reducing the light transmission in the visible spectrum.

At the northwest side of the building, parallel to the Broadway Bridge, the ground is bermed up to meet the concrete walls of the lower-level spaces, which are recessed inwards by a few feet from the glass wall above. This concrete

<sup>1</sup> Allan Temko, Allan. "Portland's Great Hall of Glass," *Architectural Forum* 114 (April 1961), 111.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Wigginton, *Glass in Architecture* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 89-99

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base is typically in the shadow of the glass wall cantilevering out above it, and enables the glass box above to gain a visual sense of almost floating above the ground. The bermed earth serves, too, to reinforce the building's monumentality and remove it from any direct connection with the surrounding streets and sidewalks. A large service opening cut into the berm allows direct access from the building to a small parking lot at this side. The concrete seating bowl visible through the glass walls is higher at the sides and dips down in the middle at this facade (see Photo 02).

Moving clockwise around the building, the entry facade faces northeast, away from the river. At this side, there is one smaller-scale feature, which is centrally located on the building's northeast face: a thin, curving canopy set against - but not touching - the abstract, rectilinear form of the building. The canopy sits on an entry plaza, which also serves as the roof for the 52,650 square foot Exposition Hall below. The wood-framed roof of the canopy, which is supported by four tapered concrete columns, curves up gently and covers a portion of the larger entry plaza area. To the east across the plaza are the larger Rose Garden Arena and an associated parking structure. The entry facade has multiple pairs of glass doors that span the central third of the building. On either side of the entry doors, a sunken plaza one level below allows for daylight into the meeting rooms and Exhibit Hall, located directly under the entry plaza. Both of these lower-level plazas contain a Veteran's Memorial wall, which is a black granite memorial with etched names of Portlanders who died in military service. A blue-tiled fountain is at one lower plaza, and a central raised planter is in the center of the other one (see Photo 06).

The "service" side of the building is the southeast facade. The building here fronts a large parking area and parking structure, and the base level of the building includes multiple service bays for the deliveries, specialized equipment, and other items which must be set up and taken down with each various event (see Photo 07).

Finally, at the southwest facade, the building faces Interstate Avenue. The building is at its tallest here, sitting up above the street grade with a commanding view of the river. Like the northwest side of the building, the ground is bermed up to meet the concrete lower-level walls here, and the bermed area is planted with trees and ground cover. The concrete bowl inside can be seen on its longer arc, swooping up in the middle and down as it approaches the giant interior columns at each corner (see Photo 08).

### Structural System

The Coliseum's weight is supported by four cruciform-shaped, 70-foot high reinforced concrete columns, 240 feet apart in one direction and 270 feet in the other (see Photo 10). The cross-shaped columns rest on footings which are each 40 feet square and 5 feet deep, below the arena floor. At the points where the columns support the steelwork above, there are "steel hemispheres, the first such ever believed used in this type of construction. They look like halves of giant ball bearings and are about 10 inches across."<sup>3</sup> These half-round bearing points enable the entire structure to move under force, such as strong winds or earth movements. Four massive cantilevered steel trusses rest on the columns, crossing at the columns, and tapering as they extend outward from the columns to form a 360-foot square (see Figure 6). A network of secondary steel trusses then fills in the huge roof area to support the waterproofing layers of the roof itself. The wind forces on the great glass walls are received by 85-foot tall vertical laminated wood mullions on the interior of the walls.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Sullivan, "Thursday Events to Open Coliseum Doors," *The Oregonian*, November 2, 1960 (staff writer Ann Sullivan)

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### INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The interior of the Coliseum is dramatically different from most arenas, due to its expansive glass walls which allow for views out (see Photo 11). Spectators can sit in the seating bowl and simultaneously view the arena floor and the weather outside. At night, the upper rows of seats afford a spectacular view of Portland. However, the Coliseum was designed to be able to black out the 80,000 square feet of window area by "the largest continuous curtain in the United States."<sup>4</sup> This curtain, specifically designed with and for the building by the architects, Skidmore Owings & Merrill, travels upward on lifting wires and is hidden in slots behind the last rows of seats. The black, fireproof curtain was manufactured in 15 sections and zips together. Because of the concrete bowl design, the windows could remain uncovered to let in natural light to the concourse area between the walls and the seating. Unfortunately, at this time the curtain remains in place; the curtain and the system that allows it to travel up and down needs maintenance work and repairs. Current photos taken from inside the arena therefore do not show the effect of the light coming in above the seating bowl (see Photos 12 and 14).

The concrete seating bowl, with 9,000 permanently installed padded theater-type seats initially, is formed in stepped terraces. Seats were replaced in 1978 to increase the total seating capacity in the arena from 12,666 (including portable seating) to 17,000. From the underside of the seating bowl, a series of concrete beams supported on posts radiate from the center of the oval, supporting the saw-toothed tiers of the bowl as it rises (see Photos 09 and 12; Figure 4). The top edge of the oval is not a horizontal line, but forms an undulating arc higher along the northeast (entry facade) and southwest sides of the building and lower at the other two sides. The result is particularly sculptural as well as providing excellent visibility for spectators.

The Coliseum was designed around a multipurpose arena, 120' by 248' and 80' tall. The roof structure above is hidden from view by a suspended ceiling, except in the very center of the roof, where one can look up into a square opening to view the open network of steel trusses. From the main entry level, one enters the seating bowl at mid-level, and the main arena floor is sunken one level down. The arena floor itself is proportionally longer than the seating oval, and oriented along a northwest-southeast axis (see Photos 13 and 14). Within the main arena space, the building was designed to accommodate various types of events in relatively quick succession. Hockey or on-ice shows, for example, can be scheduled the day following a convention or basketball game. Thousands of feet of pipes laid within the arena floor work to either freeze a half-inch thick layer of ice, or to warm it so it may be scraped away.

Surrounding the main floor on the lower level are eight meeting and banquet rooms, each of which features different wood paneling provided by the local timber industry. The rooms vary in size from capacity of 120 to 1,200 persons. Each room is named for the company that provided the paneling and displays a bronze plaque identifying the wood used in the room.<sup>5</sup> Finishes in these basement rooms include carpeting on the floors and suspended acoustical tile

<sup>4</sup> Goodrich Jr., Hollis, designer and editor. *Memorial Coliseum and Exhibit Hall*. (Portland, OR: Oregonian Publishing Co., 1961;) produced by Agency Lithograph.

<sup>5</sup> A November 2, 1960 article in the Oregonian catalogued the timber companies and their installations in the Coliseum as follows. The Pope & Talbot, Inc. Room (capacity 170) was finished in Douglas Fir tongue-and-groove panels; the US Plywood Corp. Room (cap. 370) was paneled with Palamino Samara plywood; the Weyerhaeuser Room (cap. 320) had tongue-and-groove hemlock panels; the Dwyer Lumber & Plywood Co. Room (cap. 120) had Noble Fir panels; the Simpson Logging Co. Room (cap. 220) was finished in birch plywood; the International Paper Co. Room (cap. 180) had red birch plywood; and the assembly room, sponsored by Georgia Pacific Co. (cap. 1100) was paneled with honeytone oak plywood. The Memorial Room and Chapel (cap. 240) was sponsored by Georgia



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ceilings. Walls have either various types of panelized or slats of wood, with some areas of painted wallboard finish. While some of the meeting rooms have decorative sconces or even chandeliers in one case, most are lit by recessed fluorescent strips (see Photo 15). A bare concrete hallway allows for access to the rooms, to the arena floor, to mechanical spaces such as the boiler room and kitchen, and to a few office spaces. The Exhibition Hall, a similarly-finished but much larger below-ground room, is entered by walking directly underneath the arena entry doors in a northeasterly direction (see Figure 3). None of these below-ground spaces contributes directly to the architectural qualities of the Coliseum, excepting of course the arena floor itself, a part of the larger glass volume of the building.

### ALTERATIONS

Few alterations to the building have been made. The northern memorial courtyard area was developed, with center fountain and bench seating, in 1962. The architects were Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, of Portland. The pool is 10 feet square, with three centrally-located fountains, and tiled with glass mosaic tile. The memorial wall with black granite facing had already been installed in this court area, along the northeastern edge of the plaza space. Three new benches were added with the pool installation. Presumably the granite memorial wall at the southern memorial plaza was installed at the time the building was completed, but it is not clear when the planter occupying the center of that area was constructed.

The architects did produce several concepts for adding meeting rooms and exhibit space in 1975, but these ideas were never carried out.<sup>6</sup> Seating was replaced in the arena in 1978 in order to increase capacity. A seismic and accessibility upgrade was made to the building in 1993. At that time, automatic sliding doors were installed, as well as handicapped-accessible toilets and new stair railings. The seismic upgrades involved reinforcing some steel beams, adding bracing for pipes and ducts, thickening and reinforcing concrete at the underside of the seating bowl where supported by columns, and thickening certain concrete walls at the arena level. The engineers doing this work were Moffatt, Nichol & Bonney, Inc. of Portland - the same firm involved in the building's initial design. Principal improvements to the building made since 1995 are limited to the replacement of the roof fascia and the installation of new portable seating.

The area immediately surrounding the building has been redeveloped over time, most dramatically in 1995 with the construction of the Rose Garden Arena, the parking garages in the Rose Quarter, and the development of the larger entry plaza area serving the Rose Garden and the Coliseum.

### Conclusion

The Memorial Coliseum is nominated to the National Register for its significant architectural value under Criterion C. The only other comparable International Style, glass-walled arena on the West Coast of the United States, in Oakland, California, has been significantly altered. Memorial Coliseum is exceptionally important as a unique application of International Style to an unexpected building type. International Style architecture is hardly rare - in fact reproductions of the style in corporate office towers are ubiquitous in cities across the United States. Yet the

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Pacific, the Willamette Valley Lumber Co., Santiam Lumber Co., and Cascade Plywood Corporation and was paneled in cherry plywood.

<sup>6</sup> SRI International, *The Portland Memorial Coliseum and Civic Stadium Needs Assessment Final Report* (Menlo Park, CA: SRI International for the Metropolitan Coliseum-Stadium Task Force, 1978).

Memorial Coliseum  
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon  
County and State

NPS Form 10-900-a

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

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abstract qualities of the International Style used here, for a large-scale public structure, provide grandeur and dignity to a commemorative building. Far from aggrandizing the power of a private corporation, the building provides a public face for Portland's shared aspirations in recreation and culture. Its flexible-use historic functions in this category are essentially the same as its current functions, so it retains most of its original associations. Though the surroundings of the Coliseum have been altered, its relationship to its site, especially at its most visible side facing the Willamette River, has not been changed. Some minor deterioration of building components has occurred over time. However, no additions or significant alterations of the building itself have been made. The building retains its original design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and location. The period of significance for the Memorial Coliseum is 1960, the date when construction of the building was completed. The building's advanced engineering allows it to provide a spatial experience unlike that in any other recreational venue on the West Coast. Its architectural qualities therefore provide the building with enduring historic value.

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### INTRODUCTION

Memorial Coliseum is significant under National Register Criterion C for being the only Oregon and West Coast arena structure north of the San Francisco Bay Area to be constructed with full glass walls. Its transparency makes it unique among large-scale public structures, and as such the building provides an accessible and distinctive spatial experience of the International Style of modern architecture for the region. No other stadium or recreational facility in the region used curtainwall technology, in which glass walls are hung from the overall structure. The period of significance for the building is its date of completion, 1960. The Memorial Coliseum was constructed with an innovative structural system in which the building's entire weight is carried by four cruciform concrete columns, leaving the arena free of any interior supports. This system allows for the building's four walls to be constructed entirely of glass, providing spectators with the unusual ability to simultaneously watch an event and see out. The transparency of the walls also enables the curving, sculptural seating bowl inside to be visible from the outside, highlighting the contrasts between the two forms and their materials. This dynamic is one of the building's most character-defining and unique features. The Coliseum was designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, an internationally recognized architectural firm responsible for the design of buildings around the world, including several already listed in the National Register.

### THE INTERNATIONAL STYLE IN THE UNITED STATES

The term "International Style" originally was applied to a 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibition of art and architecture by the curators, Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip C. Johnson. Hitchcock and Johnson provided a definition of this emerging style, based on three characteristics: "emphasis upon volume - space enclosed by thin planes or surfaces as opposed to the suggestion of mass and solidity; regularity as opposed to symmetry or other kinds of obvious balance; and lastly, dependence upon the intrinsic elegance of materials, technical perfection, and fine proportions, as opposed to applied ornament."<sup>1</sup>

The utopian vision of International-Style modernism replaced almost every preceding architectural design theory with a new, contrasting one. For instance, where earlier buildings had been composed with a strong, often masonry base, Modernism sought an opposite response: a visually transparent base. Other hallmarks of the style include the celebration of "industrial" materials such as concrete, glass, and steel, the use of strong horizontals such as windows in long bands and expressed concrete planes, and the use of abstract, geometric forms. Designs were seen as transcending their local contexts, climates, and architectural traditions.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who led the famous Bauhaus school in pre-World War II Germany on the heels of Walter Gropius, was one of the leading figures of the European Modern Movement who came to work in the United States starting in the late 1930s. Other architects in this group included Alvar Aalto, Eero Saarinen, and Gropius. In contrast to many of the somewhat organic or expressive structures designed by his contemporaries, Mies van der Rohe worked exclusively in a rectilinear idiom, using strict modules, steel and glass materials, and a close attention to detailing. The modern curtainwall was a direct development of Miesian design ideas, and a young firm out of

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<sup>1</sup> Hitchcock, Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip C. Johnson, Philip C., "The International Style," (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966 (with a new foreword and appendix by Henry-Russell Hitchcock, originally copyrighted 1932), 145-147.

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Chicago was poised to take this post-and-lintel, glass skin philosophy and make it their own.<sup>2</sup> In 1936, Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel A. Owings formed an architectural partnership, joined in 1939 by John O. Merrill, Sr., to become Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, or SOM.<sup>3</sup>

SOM had come into national prominence with their architectural work in the Modernist style by about 1952, when their iconic office building, the Lever House, was constructed in New York City. Lever House, now listed in the National Register, "elegantly set the type for the famous American screen, or curtainwall, of the 1950s."<sup>4</sup> It is the glass curtainwall, used over a steel (typically high-rise) "skeleton," which defines SOM's best-known work and contribution to architecture. Other well-known SOM buildings in the United States include the Inland Steel building in Chicago, designed in 1954-55 and completed in 1958, the Crown Zellerbach in San Francisco, completed in 1960, and the Air Force Academy outside Colorado Springs, completed in 1962.

### Emergence of International Style in the Local and Regional Context

After World War I, the economy of the Pacific Northwest tilted towards manufacturing. Industrial buildings and even engineering projects became a source of architectural inspiration. Architectural precursors to International Style Modernism in the United States included Art Moderne, or Streamlined, designs of the late 1920s and 1930s, which often used "ribbon" windows in a horizontal emphasis. In her book *Oregon Style*, Rosalind Clark explains how "Oregon's Art Moderne buildings date from about 1936; most were built in the early 1940s. The Portland Bottling Company Building, with its curved windows, rounded corners, and smooth surface is a particularly fine example."<sup>5</sup> Transparency was the favorite motif in the early-modern styles such as Moderne, Art Deco or Mechano Deco, and "Depression Modern."<sup>6</sup> Portland architect Richard Sundeleaf's Francis and Hopkins Motors Building (1947) was, like the Equitable Building by Pietro Belluschi, one of the city's first glass boxes.<sup>7</sup> The Equitable is regarded as the first office building in the International Style to be constructed in the United States.

While most of the first Modernist buildings that appeared in the Pacific Northwest region in the late 1940s and early 1950s were residential, the modern style began to appear in other, more public buildings. Due to the expansion of suburban living in the period after the war, many architects ". . . initiated their careers with suburban residential projects and other suburban building types such as churches, libraries, schools and clinics."<sup>8</sup> Schools, in particular, were opportunities for innovative modern or International-Style modern designs. Awareness of a more regional style of modernism was growing, however, especially in the Pacific Northwest and the coastal California regions. In 1954 and 1955 a number of articles appeared in the national architectural press discussing regionalism as a valid direction in modern architecture.<sup>9</sup> In the Pacific Northwest, regionalism typically meant the use of indigenous wood

<sup>2</sup> A curtainwall is an exterior wall which is hung from the building structure, rather than one which helps to bear the weight of the building loads.

<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock, Henry Russell, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill with text by Ernst Danz and introduction to; by Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, 1950-1962*. (London: The Architectural Press, 1963), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent Scully, Vincent. *American Architecture and Urbanism*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 186.

<sup>5</sup> Rosalind Clark, *Oregon Style, Architecture from 1840 to the 1950's* (Portland, OR: Professional Book Center, Inc. by the City of Albany, 1983), 195.

<sup>6</sup> Gideon Bosker and Lena Lencek, *Frozen Music: A History of Portland Architecture*. (Portland, OR: Western Imprints, 1985), 136-151.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>8</sup> Ochsner, Jeffrey Karl. Ochsner, *Shaping Seattle architecture; a historical guide to the architects*. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with AIA Seattle, 1994), xxxiii.

<sup>9</sup> Ochsner, Jeffrey Karl. *Shaping Seattle architecture; a historical guide to the architects*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with AIA Seattle, 1994., xxxiii.

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rather than steel and concrete, and often a pitched roof form in recognition of the wet climate. Because the Northwest style was rooted in a small-scale, residential building type, its vocabulary could not always be adapted to other building types.<sup>10</sup> Larger projects tended towards the more universal design tenets of the International Style, although many Portland- and Seattle-area architects worked to provide a regional flavor. The use of wood was "even considered for the primary structure in Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's Memorial Coliseum but steel won out due to lower cost."<sup>11</sup>

### Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in the Local and Regional Context

In the Pacific Northwest and specifically in Portland during the urban growth decades from the 1950s well into the 1980s, SOM had a powerful presence. In 1952 they acquired the Portland office of Pietro Belluschi, and began to add to the city's skyline a number of rectilinear corporate office towers in the International Style, such as the Standard Plaza (1963), and the Georgia Pacific Building (1971). In the San Francisco region and in Seattle, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill were also involved in office buildings such as the Norton building, completed in 1959 in Seattle. The fact that SOM wanted to staff a permanent office in the smaller city of Portland can be attributed partly to the national prominence of Belluschi's Equitable Building in downtown Portland, completed in 1948 and listed in the National Register in 1975.<sup>12</sup> According to that National Register nomination, the Equitable Building is significant for being the first office block in the International Style to be erected in the United States, and much architectural design attention and interest was focused on Portland as a result during the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>13</sup>

SOM also contributed to the shaping of Portland through their planning work, although office towers and headquarter buildings were the vast majority of SOM's commissions. Such projects as the South Auditorium Renewal Project in SW Portland (1963) impacted the city by bringing popular modern urban redevelopment ideas into a local context. The South Auditorium project "launched the eminent firm on a brilliant career as the 'roto-tiller' of the city's exhausted urban zones."<sup>14</sup> Ideas transforming cities all over the United States included large-parcel redevelopment, the development of freeways, and the replacement of run-down, single-family housing with multi-family housing types.<sup>15</sup>

SOM's architects were not interested in pursuing a regional aesthetic in Portland, even though the firm had inherited Belluschi's office and collaborated with Belluschi on several Oregon projects, including the Marion County Courthouse in Salem and the Tucker-Maxon Oral School in Portland.<sup>16</sup> Rather, they were focused on the

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Vaughan, editor, and Virginia Guest Ferriday, assoc. ed., *Space, Style and Structure: Building in Northwest America* (Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society, 1974), 628.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> SOM's first office was in Chicago. Offices in Oak Ridge, TN (for the development of the entire town for the wartime Manhattan Project) and New York City followed, and finally the two west coast offices in opened; San Francisco in 1946 and in Portland opened in the early 1950's. The SOM office in Portland closed in 1990. See Richard Ellison Ritz, *Architects of Oregon, A Biographical Dictionary of Architects Deceased- 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Portland, OR: Lair Hill Publishing, 2002), p. 195 and 302. See also SOM, *Architecture of...*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> D. W. Powers, "Equitable Building" National Register of Historic Places Registration nomination, on file with the U. S. Department of Interior, National Parks Service. Listed 3/30/1976. Sec. 8 p. 1

<sup>14</sup> Bosker, Gideon and Lencek, Lena. *Frozen Music: A History of Portland Architecture*. Portland, OR: Western Imprints, 1985., 210.

<sup>15</sup> The losses of historic buildings across the United States ultimately led to the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

<sup>16</sup> Ritz, Richard Ellison. *Architects of Oregon, A Biographical Dictionary of Architects Deceased- 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Portland, OR: Lair Hill Publishing, 2002.92.

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development of structural and curtainwall technology, especially as applied to corporate projects. Still, the final design for the Memorial Coliseum by SOM's Portland office included two versions; one with a timber roof structure; the other in steel. It was the decision of the contractor, Hoffman Construction Company, to build the roof structure out of steel.

### MEMORIAL COLISEUM HISTORY

Historically, the east side of Portland developed later than the west, due to the east bank of the Willamette River presenting more difficult conditions for early traders. The swampy land did not easily allow for river transport. East Portland's commercial development began in earnest after a railway system was constructed along the east bank by the Oregon Central Railroad Company in 1870. Development occurred in town clusters, such as the historic city of Albina, just north of the current Rose Quarter area, and the city of East Portland, in the area south of Burnside.<sup>17</sup> These developments were linked by rail lines, and as bridges were built across the river the east side continued to grow.<sup>18</sup> These three communities were consolidated by 1891. Most of the close-in areas on the east side of Portland became industrial districts. In the 1950s, Portland's growth, along with the change in transportation patterns brought about by the automobile, prompted city leaders to push for new types of development on the east side.

Civic and business leaders of Portland in the early 1950s became convinced that Portland required a suitable venue for the many conventions, sports events, and exhibitions that might be lured to the City. The *Oregonian* newspaper listed the Auditorium, the "old Armory building - obsolescent and partly condemned," and the Lincoln High School gymnasium as being the only centers available for sports shows at that time in the city.<sup>19</sup> With the loss of the old Hippodrome to fire in 1951, Portland had no ice rink.<sup>20</sup> The partially-covered Multnomah Stadium, later known as Civic Stadium (now PGE Park) had been built by the Multnomah Athletic Club in 1925-1926 but its uses were limited.<sup>21</sup> Portland wanted the status of having a national-caliber sports, entertainment, and conference center, and also wanted the tourism that such a center would bring.

In 1954 voters passed an \$8 million bond to approve the construction of a multipurpose arena. The site recommended by the architects and by the "Exposition-Recreation" Commission was on the west side of Portland, in an urban renewal district, but the site ultimately chosen was on the east side. East-side proponents got an initiative on the ballot in May 1956 requiring that the building be located on the east side of the Willamette River, and the issue was passed by 303 votes out of some 135,000 cast.<sup>22</sup> The battle lasted until May 1958 when another initiative - this time to restrict the site to Delta Park in North Portland - failed to pass. The advantages of the "Broadway-Steel" site, which prevailed in the end, included its dramatic setting and high level of visibility. In 1950, Harbor Drive, or US

<sup>17</sup> Portland, City of; Bureau of Planning. *Adopted Design Guidelines: East Portland/ Grand Avenue Historic Design Zone, A National Historic District*, adopted 06/01/1994, p. 25-27.

<sup>18</sup> The first bridge constructed was the Morrison Bridge, 1887, later replaced in 1958. The Hawthorne Bridge and the Burnside Bridge followed in 1891 and 1892, respectively. The Broadway Bridge was built in 1913.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Hauser, "A New Coliseum: Modern Exposition Center to Seat 10,000 to 15,000 Pressing City Need," *The Oregonian* 20 December 20, 1953, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> The Portland Hippodrome, built in 1916, was located at NW 22<sup>nd</sup> and Marshall. It was an indoor ice rink home to various professional hockey teams over time. See [http://www.portlandbuckaroos.com/the\\_arenas.shtml](http://www.portlandbuckaroos.com/the_arenas.shtml)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.pgepark.com/stadium/history/>

<sup>22</sup> Correspondence from Mr. Lloyd T. Keefe, Portland Planning Director, to Mr. Frank Tobie, Spokane, Washington, dated December 12, 1956. On file at City of Portland Archives (SPARC).

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99W, crossed the Steel Bridge from downtown and continued north on Interstate Avenue just past the site. This was Portland's first freeway and remained the only north-south highway for over 10 years.

Like the west-side site originally proposed, the Broadway-Steel site was deemed eligible for Federal urban renewal funds due to "predominantly substandard buildings on the site."<sup>23</sup> These buildings and their 200-foot block street grid were cleared to make way for the Coliseum (Figure 10). More than 450 homes and dozens of businesses were razed, without apparent opposition. This may have been in large part because the residents of this area were primarily African-American, a group that lacked political or economic power at this time. A 1957 *Oregonian* article interviewed a number of the residents of the area, most of whom were minorities. When asked where her family was going to move, one woman answered ". . . it's hard with five kids. And until now I didn't know there were so many places Negroes can't live."<sup>24</sup> Even the NAACP president interviewed for the article, Mr. Phil Reynolds, was quoted as being in favor of the site clearance. "This will help break up the Negro ghetto," he told the reporter.<sup>25</sup> As an illustration of the broader aspirations of Modernist planners and architects, large-scale land clearance was thought to be the way to create urban renewal. The mid-century ideology was that only by removing older development and boldly reworking broad swaths of the urban environment could the problems of the past, such as crime, urban decay, and poverty, be resolved.

The Coliseum was designed in 1957-59 in the Portland office of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill. Initially, the lead designer of the Coliseum was Myron Goldsmith, who in the late 1950s worked primarily out of SOM's San Francisco office. Although SOM's website credits Goldsmith with the design, Goldsmith himself attributes the final design to others. In a 1986 interview, Goldsmith explains that he had proposed a circular, concrete design which did not sit well with Portlanders.<sup>26</sup> His design, Goldsmith said, ". . . was rejected in favor of the scheme that they did" (It is not clear who "they" might have been, however). Goldsmith adds that later, he ". . . tried again and this time succeeded."<sup>27</sup> Goldsmith was referring to the Oakland Alameda County Coliseum (1964-68).<sup>28</sup> The circular coliseum building constructed in Oakland only five years later is essentially the design Goldsmith proposed initially for Portland, but it still shows some striking similarities to the final incarnation of the Portland Memorial Coliseum. The seating bowl is freestanding within the walls, which are entirely glazed. The form of the building is a geometrically "pure" shape in plan (a circle, rather than a square as in Portland). These similarities indicate that Goldsmith's initial design for Portland's Coliseum must have influenced the final building design. Another reason to believe that Goldsmith had some imprint on the final design of Portland's Memorial Coliseum is that Goldsmith had worked extensively with Mies van der Rohe prior to joining SOM. Portland's Coliseum shows many attributes in common with much of Mies's work, including the flat-roof structural technology and all-glass walls. Yet Mies developed his ideas with others, perhaps most significantly with Goldsmith. Myron Goldsmith was trained both as an architect and

<sup>23</sup> Correspondence from Mr. Lloyd T. Keefe, Portland Planning Director, to Mr. Carvel C. Linden, Chairman of Exposition-Recreation Commission, dated November 13, 1956. On file at City of Portland Archives (SPARC).

<sup>24</sup> Gerry Pratt, "Long-Time Residents of E-R Site Reluctant to Leave; Others See Merit in Clearance," *The Oregonian* 7 April 1957, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The San Francisco critic Allan Temko wrote in his 1961 article, "Portland's Great Hall of Glass," about the Coliseum that the lumber industry in Portland "demanded a wooden structure as a showcase for their wares." See Allan Temko, "Portland's Great Hall of Glass." *Architectural Forum* 114 (April 1961), 110.

<sup>27</sup> Oral History Project of Chicago Architects, compiled by. *Oral history of Myron Goldsmith, interviewed by Betty J. Blum.*

<sup>28</sup> SOM's website [www.SOM.com/content.cfm/myron\\_goldsmith\\_5](http://www.SOM.com/content.cfm/myron_goldsmith_5) describes this structure as "a pair of gigantic circular concrete bowls, one for basketball and hockey with a striking suspended roof structure, the other open to the sky for baseball."

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an engineer, and the "two-way gridded roof structure of the 50 x 50 House, which Goldsmith developed, was at the root of all Mies's two-way gridded roof structures from the Convention Hall to the New National gallery for Berlin."<sup>29</sup>

After Myron Goldsmith's concrete design was rejected and Goldsmith returned to SOM's San Francisco office, the Portland office produced two variations of a new, rectilinear building. A number of architects and engineers were involved in this new design direction. Among the architects working on the Coliseum in the Portland SOM office was A. William Rouzie, who had collaborated with Walter Netsch on SOM's U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Mr. Rouzie recalled that Portland's powerful timber industry had actually produced their own arena design - a building entirely of wood, with a domed structure. According to Mr. Rouzie, when SOM designers caught wind of this design, they thought it would be too enclosed, and also had concerns with flammability. Senior design partner Gordon Bunshaft came to Portland from SOM's New York office and Walter Netsch came from Chicago to take part in design strategy meetings with Bill Rouzie and with John Merrill Jr., SOM partner and Portland's initial office manager. The idea of creating a transparent building was agreed on, given the spectacular views afforded by the site.<sup>30</sup> David Pugh Sr. took over management of the Portland office and was involved during early design of the project. Mr. Pugh said of the building, "We wanted it to be open and friendly, and, with those views, to be able to see the city. There was nothing like it that had ever been done."<sup>31</sup>

SOM architects worked with Portland-based structural engineers Moffatt, Nichol & Taylor, who had designed Reser Coliseum (1950) on the campus of Oregon State University and were just finishing a design for a new bridge over the Willamette River in Portland, the Morrison Bridge (1958). In the Portland SOM office, other architects such as John Hinchliff and Lewis Crutcher contributed to the Coliseum design as it continued to evolve through 1958.<sup>32</sup> Louis Andre Lamoreux Jr. was the project manager, and W. Jack Gilstrap was the designer of the huge moveable curtain.<sup>33</sup> Ned Kirschbaum also worked on the Coliseum's design from its beginnings in late 1957, when the SOM Portland office was awarded the commission for the building. Mr. Kirschbaum recalled working on a design featuring a wood delta-truss roof under another SOM architect, Chuck Wiley, who was on loan from the San Francisco office; but Mr. Kirschbaum did not have any knowledge of the domed wood structure alluded to by Bill Rouzie.<sup>34</sup> Mr. Kirschbaum was primarily responsible for getting the sight lines and angles correct in the seating bowl.

By 1959 two similar designs were presented to the building's contractor, Hoffman Construction Company. One design would enable the Coliseum's roof construction to be entirely of steel, while the other scheme had the roof made of timber. Mr. Rouzie said that the wood design came out to be more expensive, since it had to be sprinklered using a totally separate water source from the rest of the building. In the end, when it became evident that the steel structure was the more cost-effective choice, SOM tried to provide some additional involvement for the timber industry. "We gave them as much as we could," explained Bill Rouzie.<sup>35</sup> The design included wood framing in the entry canopy, and also included large-scale laminated wood mullions in the curtainwall.

<sup>29</sup> Phyllis Lambert, "Mies and His Colleagues," from larger compilation volume: Phyllis Lambert, editor, *Mies in America*, (New York: Whitney Museum of Modern Art, and Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2001), 574.

<sup>30</sup> Personal recollections of William Rouzie in conversation with William Rouzie and Kristen Minor, April 15, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Randy Gragg, "A curtain call for Memorial Coliseum," *The Oregonian* February 18, 2001, F4.

<sup>32</sup> Ritz, *Architects of Oregon*, p. 92 and 181.

<sup>33</sup> various correspondence is on file at City of Portland Archives (SPARC) signed by "L. A. Lamoreux, project manager." Both William Rouzie and Ned Kirschbaum recall the curtain being designed by W. Jack Gilstrap.

<sup>34</sup> Personal recollections of Ned Kirschbaum in conversation with Kristen Minor, April 28, 2009. A delta-truss is formed when two truss sections are joined at the bottom member and each are angled away from each other, forming a triangular shape in cross-section.

<sup>35</sup> Personal recollections of William Rouzie in conversation with William Rouzie and Kristen Minor, April 15, 2009.



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While the building was, during design and construction, referred to as the Exposition-Recreation Center, it was intended from the beginning as a tribute to veterans. In 1961 it was formally dedicated to the "advancement of cultural opportunities for the community and to the memory of our veterans of all wars who made the supreme sacrifice." In a memo to Exposition-Recreation Commissioners, James A. Larpenteur, chairman, listed possible names being floated for the new building in tribute to veterans. Several of the names included the term "glass," and the memo concludes with a wry note about this: "Certain lumber people have indicated that if we cannot heal wounds by using the title 'Timber ----,' then there is nothing objectionable to the word 'Glass' since it does not supplant Wood, but it complimentary and supplementary to it."<sup>36</sup> The title "Memorial Coliseum" was agreed on as a dignified and simple name for the new building.

After World War II, the City of Portland had maintained a billboard in the downtown Park Blocks, which listed the names of Oregonians killed in WWII and in the Korean War. By as early as 1948 there were various attempts to have this billboard removed, but the City did not do so until Memorial Coliseum was dedicated.<sup>37</sup> The Coliseum building included a room inside which was to be a "quiet shrine to the gallant servicemen who did not return from the wars."<sup>38</sup> An honor roll book listing the war dead from Oregon was to be housed in the meditation room, with a page turned every day.<sup>39</sup> A memorial fountain and two black granite memorial walls, located in the courtyards at the lower arena level of the building, were also constructed at a later time. Initially, the outdoor "War Memorial Court" was planted with lawn.<sup>40</sup> The Exposition-Recreation Commission had approved \$250,000 for memorial facilities at the Coliseum (not including the building itself, a "living memorial").<sup>41</sup> However, the Federated Veterans Council charged that the memorial facilities were less than promised to voters. Veterans' groups ended up donating flagpoles which stood for some 30 years at the Coliseum. In 2002 the City of Portland replaced these with new flagpoles.<sup>42</sup>

The Portland-metro area was home to 815,745 residents, according to the 1960 census, but the Coliseum could now host events that brought large numbers of visitors to Portland from outside the City. The impact of the Coliseum on the City could be felt in many ways. Not only was there a positive economic impact on various tourism industries within Portland, but also the overall status of the City and Oregon was enhanced by having a location for hometown teams and events of regional - and even occasionally national - importance.

The Coliseum provided a venue for a huge variety of events. It has been the home of various Portland sports teams, such as the Buckaroos of the Western Hockey League, the Winter Hawks of the revamped Western Hockey League, and the Portland Trail Blazers of the National Basketball Association. It succeeded in drawing regional and national sporting events to Portland, such as the 1965 NCAA Men's Division I basketball finals. Three NBA championship series have been played, at least partially, in the Coliseum. In 1977, the Portland Trail Blazers won the NBA championship. The Olympic athlete and star distance runner Steve Prefontaine competed in a number of indoor track events at the Memorial Coliseum. The 1968 appearance of Evangelist Billy Graham set a record for

<sup>36</sup> Memo dated April 4, 1959 by James Larpenteur to Exposition-Recreation Commissioners (on "Fulton Transfer & Storage" company letterhead; James A. Larpenteur, Owner) on file at City of Portland Archives (SPARC).

<sup>37</sup> "E-R Center Honors Dead," *The Oregonian* January 22, 1961.

<sup>38</sup> Hollis Goodrich Jr., Hollis, designer and editor., "Memorial Coliseum and Exhibit Hall" (Portland, OR: Oregonian Publishing Co., 1961; produced by Agency Lithograph), 61.

<sup>39</sup> Portland Reporter, January 5, 1961.

<sup>40</sup> Goodrich, "Memorial Coliseum," 61.

<sup>41</sup> "E-R Center Honors Dead," *The Oregonian* January 22, 1961.

<sup>42</sup> City of Portland City Council Ordinance No. 36103, dated October 16, 2002

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number of people (26,000 in a single day) in the Coliseum. Rock concerts packed the arena for The Beatles, Elvis Presley, The Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, and many others.<sup>43</sup> The building was designed to allow the annual Portland Rose Festival Parade to move right through the building. As a highlight the 2009 Rose Festival website notes, "For the second year in a row, parade guests inside the Memorial Coliseum will be treated to natural light as the curtains are dropped to allow the view of the outside world to come inside!"<sup>44</sup> One non-sporting event that took place annually at the Memorial Coliseum during the years Bud Clark served as Portland's mayor (1984-1992) was the Mayor's Ball. Of the eight balls held at the Coliseum, one "... made the Guinness Book of World Records for the most bands under one roof in one night: eighty-eight bands on eight stages in eight hours. *Billboard Magazine* wrote a major article on the Balls and several bands were scouted and signed for national labels at the Ball."<sup>45</sup> Portland's thriving music scene became nationally known during Clark's two terms as mayor.

After construction of the Rose Garden Arena in 1995, the Portland Trail Blazers moved to the new building. However, the Coliseum continues to be home to the Winter Hawks hockey team and utilized by various conventions, high school sports events and graduations, the Portland Rose Festival, and various ice shows and concerts. Despite some lack of maintenance since the construction of the Rose Garden, the Memorial Coliseum is well-used and provides many groups with a medium-size (by current standards) venue within the City.

The building won an Honor Award from the Oregon AIA in 1961 and is listed in the City of Portland's Historic Resource Inventory as a Rank 1 (the highest ranking) resource. Its local significance is noted in the areas of architecture, development, recreation, and in the performing arts.

### Memorial Coliseum Stylistic Analysis

The Coliseum is a good illustration of the tenets of International Style architecture. The primary exterior materials are glass, concrete, acrylic-coated plywood, and aluminum. The seating bowl inside, prominent from the exterior, is concrete as well. These materials were typical of the International Style, with its focus on structural capability and engineering. The dynamic between the sculptural concrete form within the boxy glass form highlights the properties of each material - one plastic and expressive, the other planar and rigid. The composition of the exterior, as a "perfect" mathematical form in plan, with a repetitive modularity of elements in elevation, shows the typical International Style abstraction and intent to celebrate industry and machine-made processes. No decorative additions or vernacular elements of any kind mar the mathematical precision of the facades. Only the lively curves of the seating bowl within and the freestanding entry canopy provide a more fluid, human counterpoint. As was the intent of most International Style buildings, the Coliseum is removed from the typical city grid. It rejects a direct relationship with sidewalks and streets in favor of a more idealized, monumental relationship with the City as a whole and with the Willamette River below it.

<sup>43</sup> Event information from City of Portland Archives (SPARC). The American poet Allan Ginsberg wrote a poem after seeing the Beatles play in the Memorial Coliseum in 1965, entitled "Portland Coliseum."

<sup>44</sup> Portland Rose Festival website, accessed online at <http://www.rosefestival.org/events/grandfloralparade/> on May 18, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Billy Hulst, "The Mayor's Ball," from Matt Love, ed., *Citadel of the Spirit: Oregon's Sesquicentennial Anthology* (South Beach, OR, Nestucca Spit Press, 2009), 337-342.

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### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: ARENAS, COLISEUMS, AND OTHER WEST-COAST RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, CIRCA LATE 1950S - 1960S

In 1956, the City of Seattle began planning for a new sports facility as part of the Seattle World's Fair Century 21 Exposition. The Washington State Coliseum, constructed in 1961-62, is comparable to Portland's Memorial Coliseum in its size and stylistic influences of the time. Seattle architect Paul Thiry is credited with bringing the International Style to the Puget Sound region, but his work has a regional influence, sometimes termed "Northwest Contemporary" modernism.<sup>46</sup> The Washington State Coliseum (now renamed Key Arena after substantial alteration work in the mid-1990s) is a clear span concrete structure with an aluminum parabolic roof measuring 400 feet square in plan.<sup>47</sup> While the original Washington State Coliseum certainly was part of the larger Modern movement in architecture, it did not represent the idealized, abstract design that Portland's Memorial Coliseum did. The unique experience of being within the glass-walled Memorial Coliseum is unlike the experience of being within the much more enclosed (though impressively structured in its own right) Key Arena.

In Santa Monica, California, architect Welton Becket designed the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, as well as other civic, commercial, and corporate buildings in the Los Angeles area. The Auditorium, built in 1958, is a locally-designated historic structure by the City of Santa Monica. The local designation notes that the building "is an excellent example of the mid-century International Style in the City of Santa Monica . . . [it] retains many significant character-defining elements of this style, including, a grand canopy, supported by parabolic pylons, a glass curtain wall, and brise-soleil."<sup>48</sup> Yet the front facade, a glass curtainwall covered by a full concrete brise-soleil or concrete light-screen, does not provide nearly the transparency or the dissolving of boundaries between exterior and interior that the Portland Memorial Coliseum's glass-box design does. The exterior is simply not accessible to the interior, as it is in Portland's Coliseum.

One arena on the West Coast that was notable for its use of glass curtainwall was Blyth Arena, constructed in Squaw Valley California for the 1960 winter Olympics.<sup>49</sup> The arena was an ice rink, which had its south side entirely glazed to allow for a view out as well as to allow for natural light within the rink. It collapsed in 1984 due to inappropriately applied roofing insulation.<sup>50</sup> The Blyth Arena was a significantly smaller building, with traditional gable-roof form. Yet from within the arena, the transparency of that south wall might have provided a similar engagement to its setting as the Portland Memorial Coliseum does in its own more urban location.

SOM's Oakland Alameda County Coliseum, completed in 1966, consisted of a pair of buildings, an open-air stadium and an enclosed circular coliseum. The circular coliseum is the only other west coast recreational facility of this era to have been built with glass walls. The seating bowl for the Coliseum (now Oracle Arena) was designed to sit within the glass exterior walls of the structure just as Portland's Coliseum seating bowl does. The original seating bowl even had a similar undulation to its upper edge as more rows of seats raised the centers above mid-court. The

<sup>46</sup> Ochsner, Jeffrey Karl. *Shaping Seattle architecture; a historical guide to the architects*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with AIA Seattle, 1994., p. 246-251 and xxxiii.

<sup>47</sup> Seattle Department of Neighborhoods online site: [www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/preservation/historicresources.htm](http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/preservation/historicresources.htm) under Inventory # CTR004. Accessed March 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Findings to support designation of a Santa Monica local landmark, accessed online at <http://www01.smgov.net/cityclerk/council/agendas/2002/20020122/s2002012209-A-5.htm> accessed online on April 17, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Nanette Asimov, "Architect Russell Francis Stechschulte dies," *San Francisco Chronicle* 23 July 2008, accessed on-line at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/07/23/BA4V11SKUT.DTL> on May 4, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Pierluigi Serraino, *NorCalMod: Icons of Northern California Modernism* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), p. 112

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building was extensively renovated and altered in 1996, including one alteration common to many older arenas across the United States: installing many more levels of luxury seating in place of the original, rather egalitarian, seating structure.

In conclusion, a number of other large event halls, sports facilities, and arenas were built on the West Coast throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The similar-scale structures of the era were almost always designed around a fully enclosed hall or space. Further examples of arenas of this type and era include Pacific Coliseum (1967), in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in 1967, with its simple round shape; the Inglewood Forum (1967) in Inglewood, California, with its similar "cake" shape; and the 1965 Becket-designed Pauley Pavilion at UCLA, in Los Angeles. During the 1950s and 1960s, no other arena or large auditorium space on the West Coast was designed with a full glass curtainwall, with the exception of the Oakland Alameda County Coliseum.

Buildings in the International Style have not typically engendered the same emotional response as buildings in a more ornate and crafted architectural style. The abstract, precise, and "machine-like" qualities may be perceived as cold and even "ugly." Also, the explosive growth and homogeneity of development across the United States in the postwar years have created a plethora of buildings - most of which are entirely unremarkable - in the glass-and-steel idiom started by the International Style. Yet the significance of this period in our shared history and the architectural qualities of some of its best buildings may be appreciated and celebrated while still acknowledging some of modernism's shortcomings.

### CONCLUSION

The Memorial Coliseum is regionally significant under National Register Criterion C for its architectural qualities as a spatially unique example of International Style modernism in a public building. The abstract, rectilinear style was typically applied to corporate headquarters and office towers in cities all over the United States, including in Portland. Yet in the Memorial Coliseum, the style was applied to a building type without internal floor plates or levels. The "content" of the building is part of its visual expression from the outside, since its transparency creates a dual perception of the seating bowl within the larger glass form. By carrying the building's entire weight upon just four columns and using glass for all four walls, the architects created a dynamic spatial experience unlike that found in any other arena or large building in the region. The Coliseum has enabled spectators since 1960, its date of completion and its period of significance, to fully participate in this spatial experience. Unlike many arenas of its time, it has not been altered to provide more specificity of use, or more luxury seating. Visually, the Coliseum remains largely unchanged; no additions have been added over time, it remains on its original site, the exterior materials have been retained, and although its local environment has been altered, the Coliseum retains integrity to convey its historical and architectural importance. The Memorial Coliseum is a unique remaining example of International Style "curtainwall" construction in an arena, and is also historically significant as a recreation venue for the larger Portland region. The Coliseum still provides a home for a wide-variety of events; its flexible nature allows it to function in all the ways it was intended to function. The building is a truly public venue, one which allows for participation from many different segments of society and many different interests. The Coliseum represents the City of Portland's aspirations on the national stage. Its grandeur, its purity of form, and its sheer expanse of glass gave Portland great pride in this "Glass Palace."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> So referred to by the Portland Reporter, ("Ceremony Sunday to Dedicate Coliseum; Weekend Ice Skaters to Hear Organ," January 5, 1961 and by the Oregonian, (William Swing, "Coliseum's Big Opening Ends Long, Rough Road," January 2, 1961.

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### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Memorial Coliseum is bordered by N. Winning Way, N. Larrabee Avenue, N. Interstate Avenue, N. Drexler Drive, and N. Center Court Street. Specifically, the boundary includes all of Multnomah County tax lot 1N1E34AB 1200 and the northwest portion of tax lot 1N1E34AB 1100 (both located in tax map quadrant 2930). Beginning at the southwest corner of tax lot 1200, the boundary runs along the southeastern boundary of tax lot 1200 as extended into tax lot 1100 in a northeasterly direction to N. Center Court Street, then in a northern direction along N. Center Court Street to its intersection with N. Winning Way, then in a westerly direction to its intersection with tax lot 1200 to encompass an approximately 1.66 acre portion of tax lot 1100. The boundary then continues along the northern boundary of tax lot 1200 in a westerly direction along N. Winning Way, then in a southwesterly direction along N. Larrabee Avenue, then in a southeasterly direction along N. Interstate Avenue back to the point of origin.

The boundary of the nominated area is roughly shown as the thick, black line on the accompanying tax map, Figure 1, on Supplemental Documentation Page 1.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary includes the approximately 7.24 acres that contain the building and associated setting that have historically been the Memorial Coliseum and that maintains historic integrity.

Memorial Coliseum  
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., Oregon  
County and State

NPS Form 10-900-a

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

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## DOCUMENTS

1. Tax map, 1 sheet
2. Original Memorial Coliseum entry-level floor plan by SOM, circa 1959, 1 sheet.
3. Memorial Coliseum Plan, lower level, 1 sheet.
4. Circa 1959 Memorial Coliseum section through entry looking northwest, by architect; 1959 Memorial Coliseum rendering, by architect, 1 sheet.
5. Historic photograph of Memorial Coliseum structural frame and concrete columns under construction, circa 1959; Historic photograph of Memorial Coliseum entry façade, circa 1961, 1 sheet.
6. Historic photograph of Memorial Coliseum aerial view, looking northeast, circa 1960; Present aerial view of Rose Quarter with Memorial Coliseum in Center; Rose Garden Arena on right, 1 sheet.
7. Sanborn Map, 1950, showing approximate building footprint (dashed), 1 sheet.



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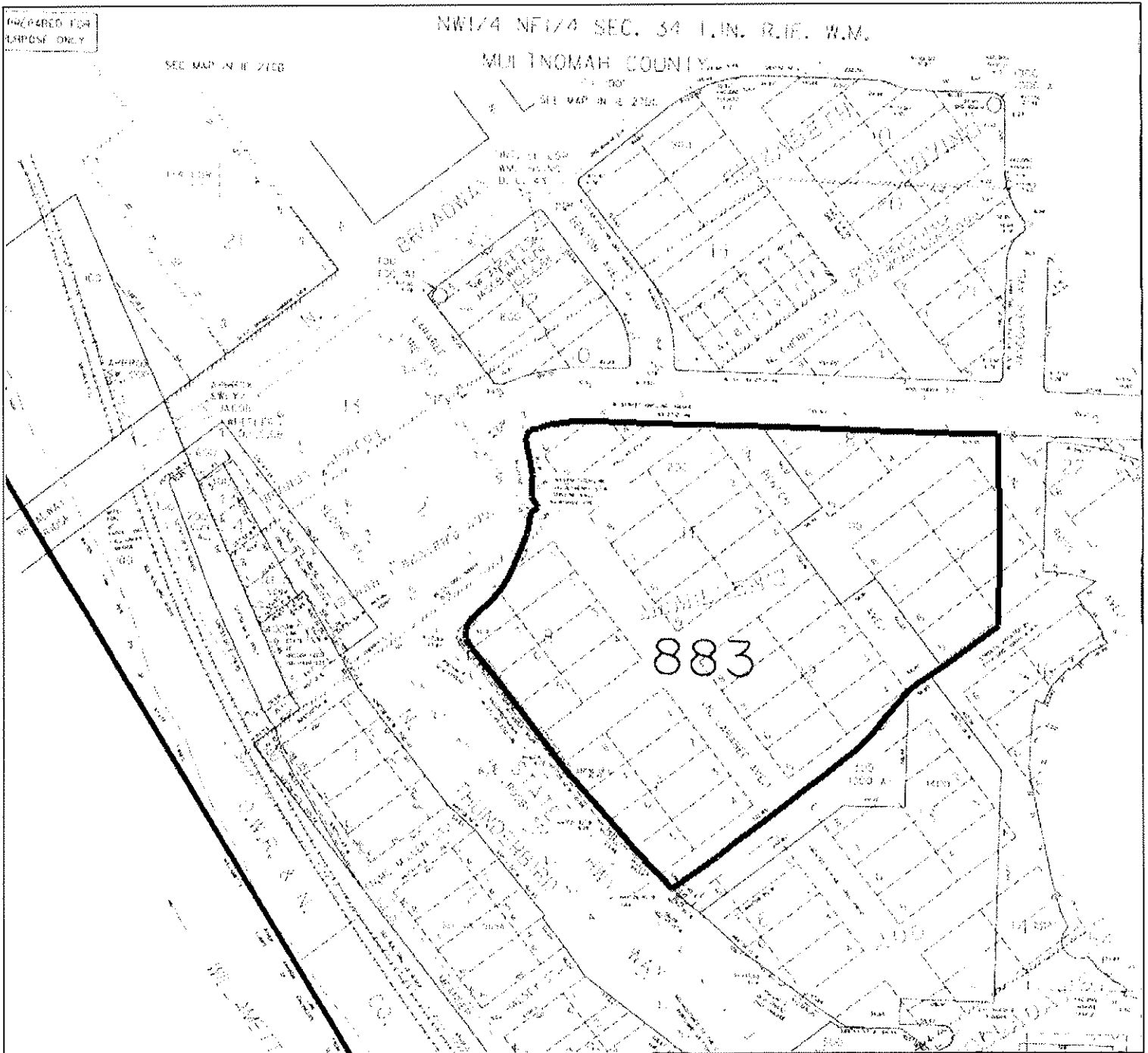


Figure 1. Tax map, T 1N, R 1E, 34AB Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon.  
Tax quadrant map 2930. Boundary of the nominated area roughly shown as thick, black line on map.

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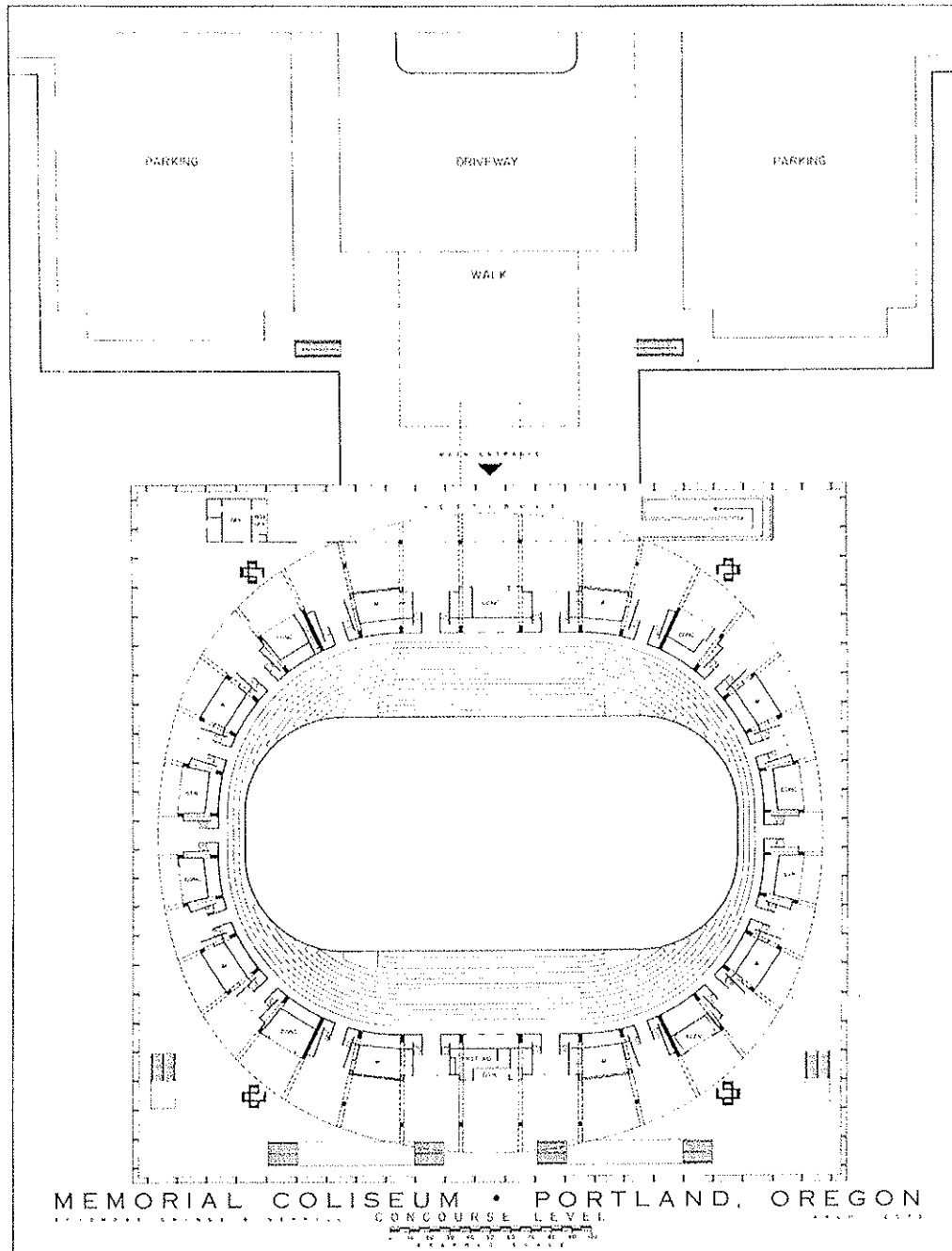


Figure 2. Memorial Coliseum Entry-Level Floor Plan.  
Drawing by SOM, approximately 1959

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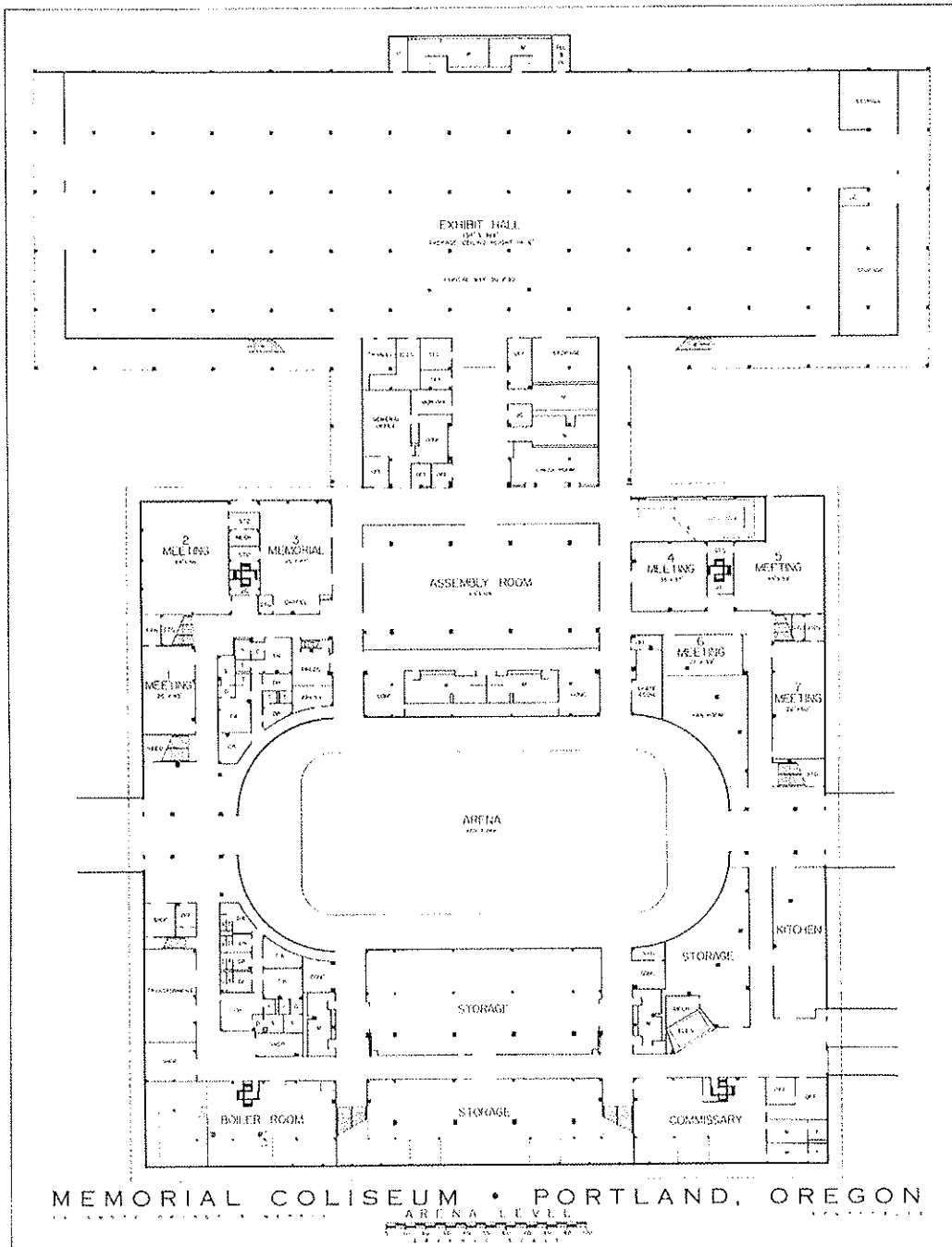


Figure 3. Memorial Coliseum Plan, Lower Level.

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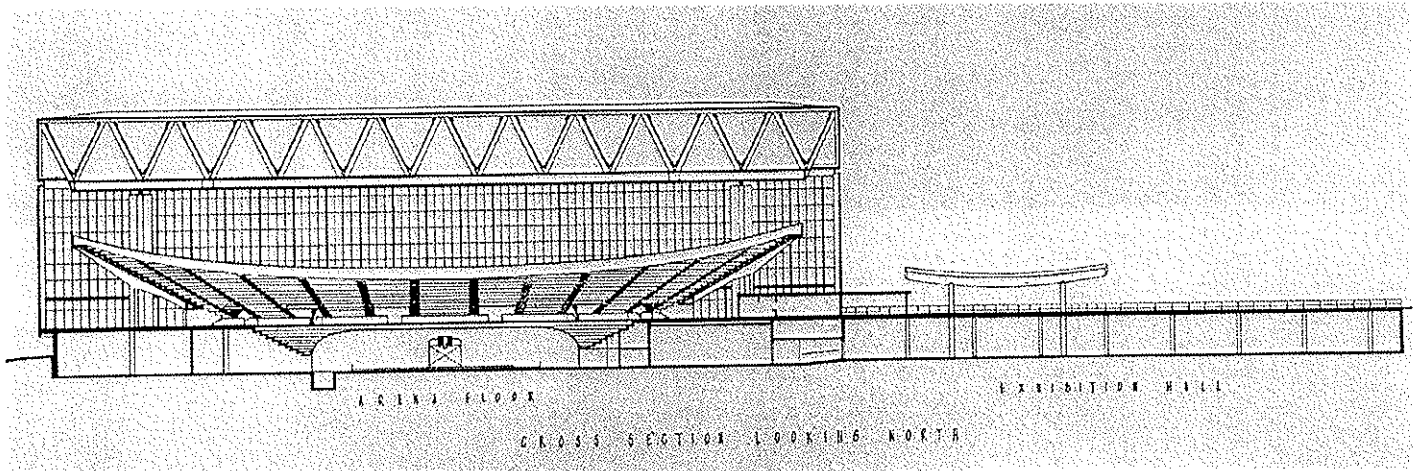


Figure 4. Memorial Coliseum section through entry looking northwest, by architect. Approximately 1959.

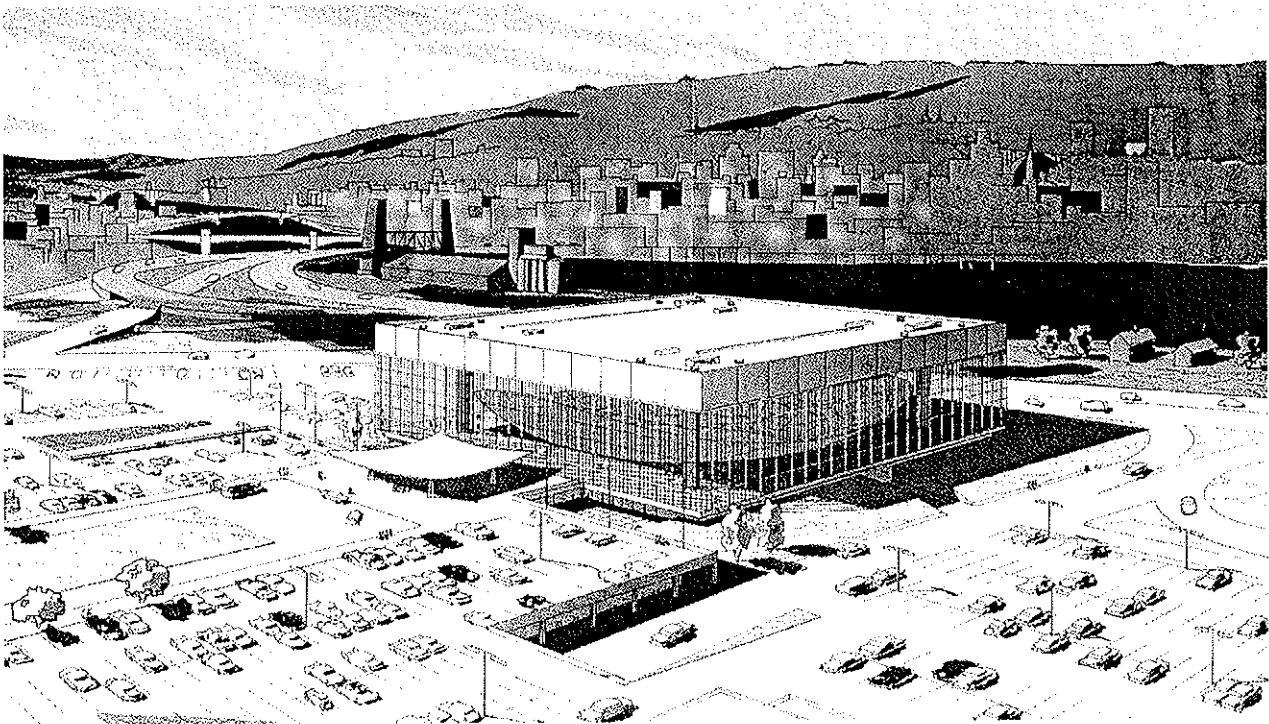


Figure 5. Memorial Coliseum rendering, by architect. Approximately 1959.

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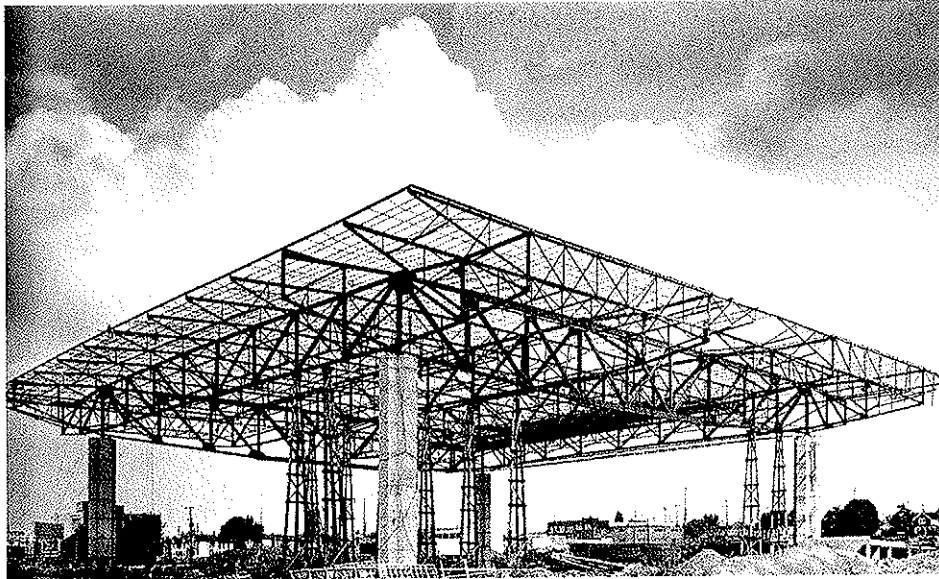


Photo: Hoffman Construction Company, circa 1959

Figure 6. Memorial Coliseum structural frame and concrete columns under construction.

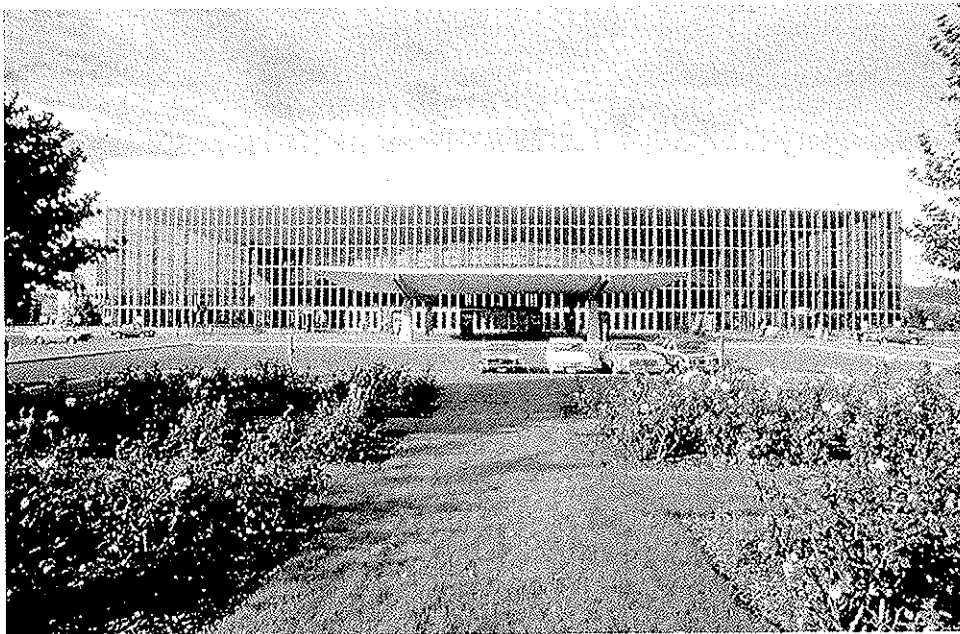


Photo: Hoffman Construction Company, circa 1961

Figure 7. Memorial Coliseum entry facade.

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Photo: City of Portland Archives, circa 1960

Figure 8. Memorial Coliseum aerial view, looking northeast.

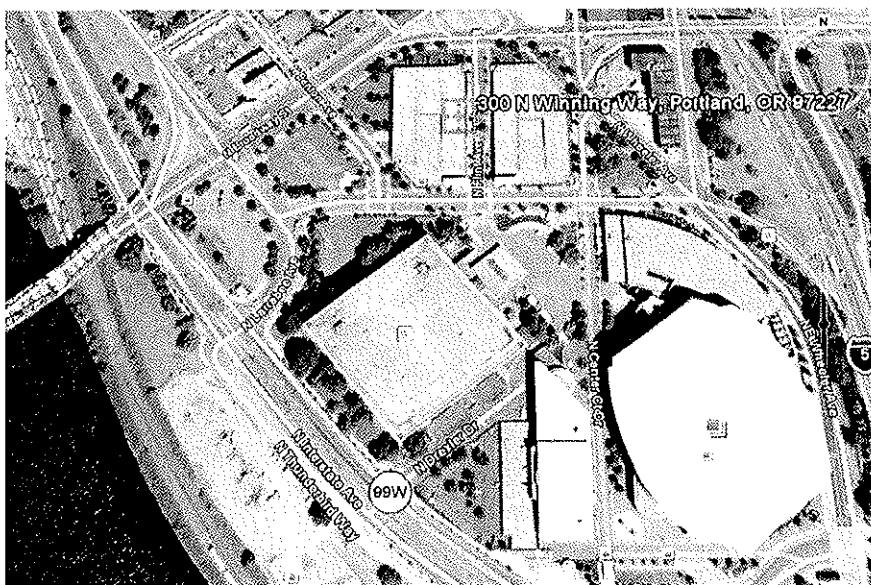


Photo: Google Earth 2009, accessed online April 8, 2009

Figure 9. Rose Quarter with Memorial Coliseum in Center; Rose Garden Arena on right.

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Figure 10. Approximate building footprint (dashed) on 1950s Sanborn Fire Insurance map.

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Section number Photographs Page 1

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### PHOTOGRAPHS

**Address:** **Memorial Coliseum**  
1401 N. Wheeler Avenue  
Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon

**Ink and Paper:** Epson Ultrachrome Inks on Epson Premium glossy paper

*The following information applies to photographs 1-12 and 14-15:*

**Photographer:** Kristen Minor, Peter Meijer Architect PC  
**Date:** Photos 2, 4, and 5: March 3, 2009  
Photos 1, 3, 6-12, 14 and 15: April 7, 2009.  
**Location of Original:** Digital, images held by nomination preparer

*The following information applies to photograph 13:*

**Photographer:** City of Portland staff  
**Date:** Easter sunrise service, 1969  
**Location of Original:** Film, City of Portland Stanley Parr Archives & Record Center (SPARC) record number 20405025, Memorial Coliseum interior A2001-005.22

- 1 of 15: Exterior view: Coliseum exterior viewed from Broadway Bridge, looking east.
- 2 of 15: Exterior view: Northwest façade of Coliseum, looking southeast.
- 3 of 15: Exterior view: Entry canopy and plaza, Rose Garden Arena in background and Coliseum on the right.
- 4 of 15: Exterior view: (partial) Northeast façade with entry canopy, looking south.
- 5 of 15: Exterior view: Curtainwall detail at exterior east corner of building.
- 6 of 15: Exterior view: Veteran's memorial wall in lower-level courtyard, looking south.
- 7 of 15: Exterior view: Southeast façade of building, looking north.
- 8 of 15: Exterior view: Southwest façade of building, looking east.
- 9 of 15: Interior view: Interior concourse view looking east towards entry.
- 10 of 15: Interior view: Interior concourse view looking south



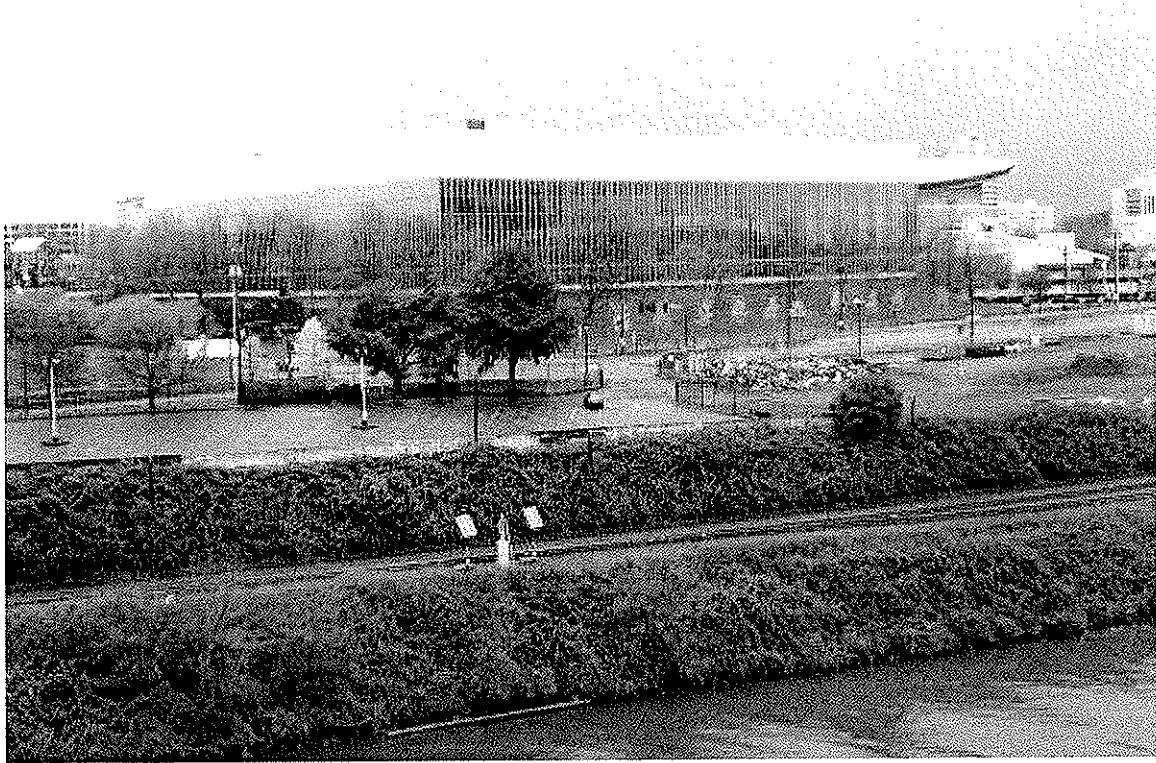
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- 11 of 15: Interior view: Interior concourse view looking west towards Broadway Bridge (Fremont Bridge in distance).
- 12 of 15: Interior view: Interior concourse view looking west.
- 13 of 15: Interior view: Arena view (1969) - looking across long axis
- 14 of 15: Interior view: Arena view- looking across short axis
- 15 of 15: Interior view: Typical basement-level meeting room (Simpson Room shown).



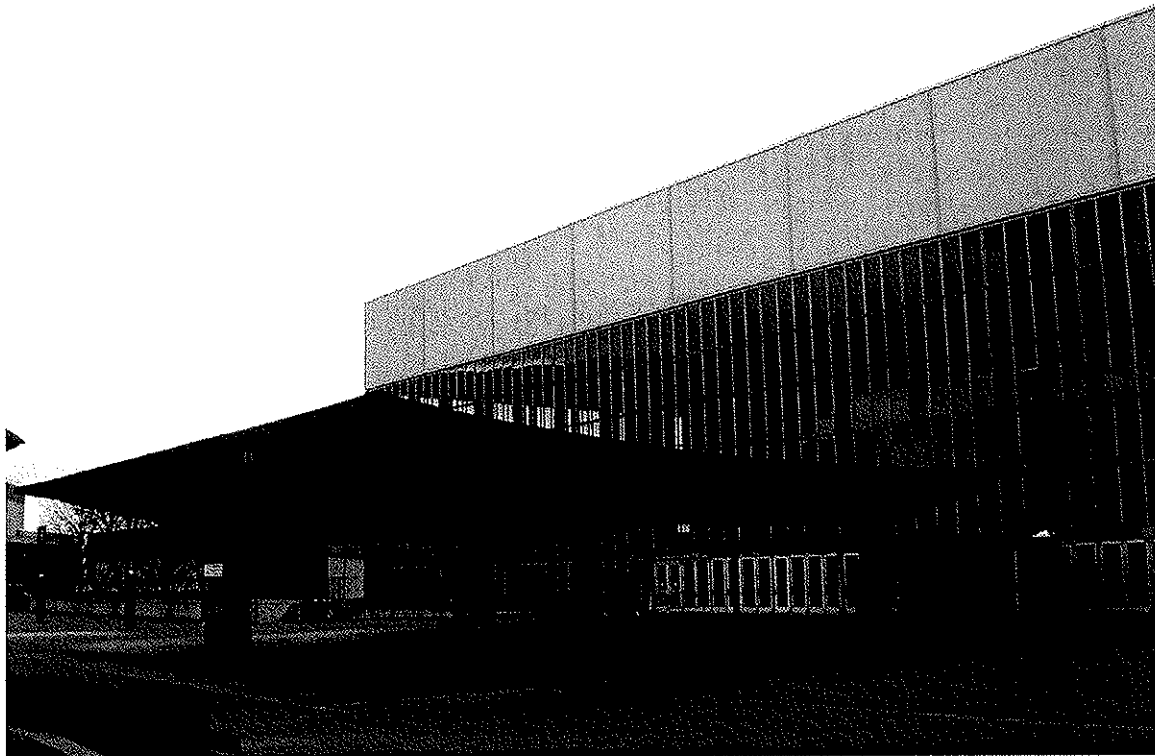
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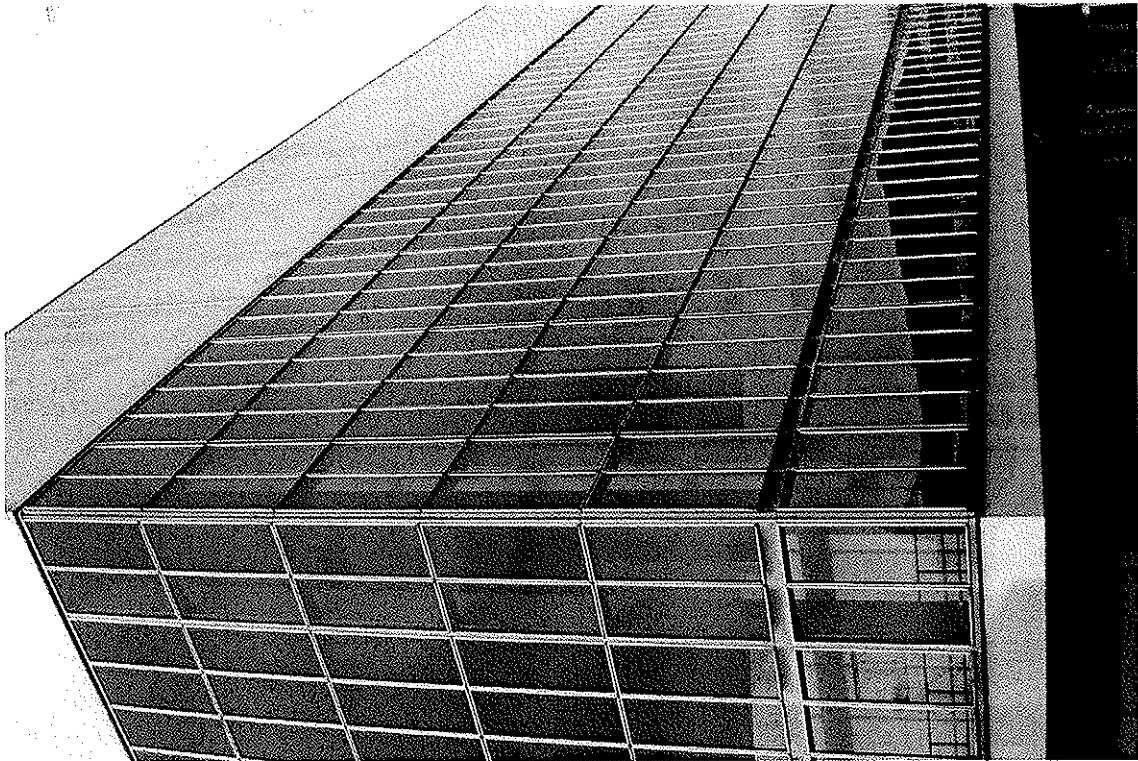
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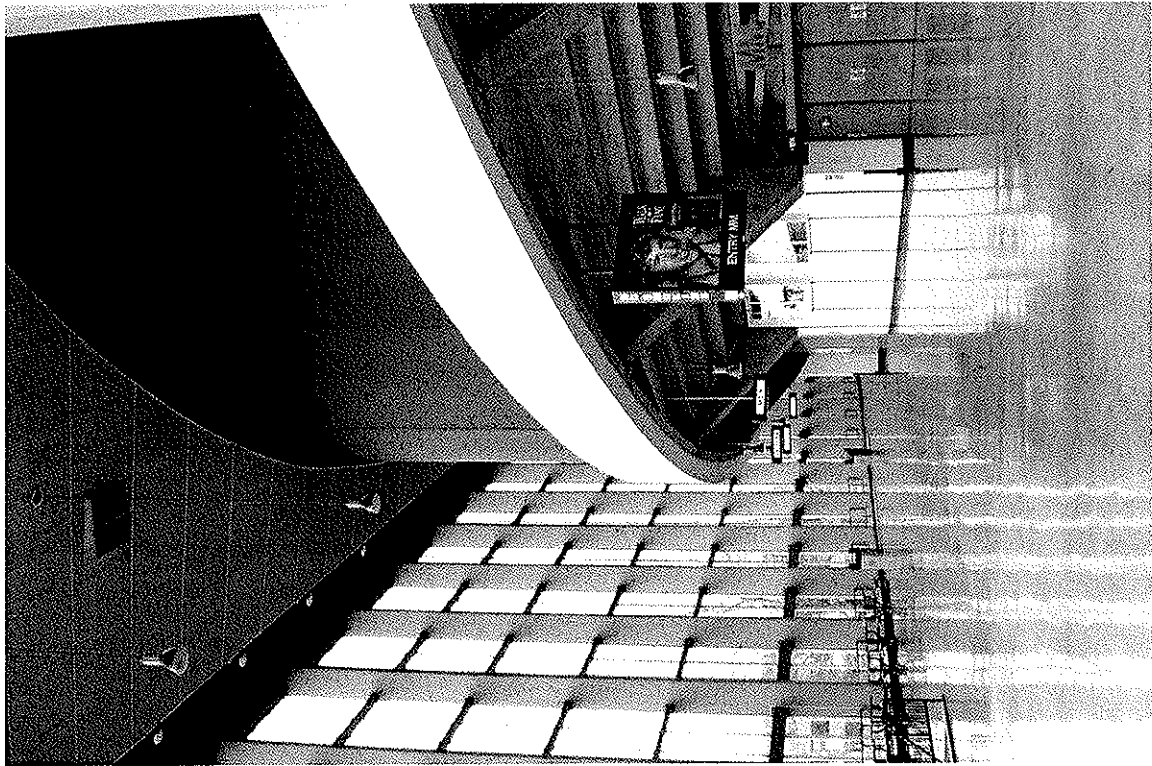
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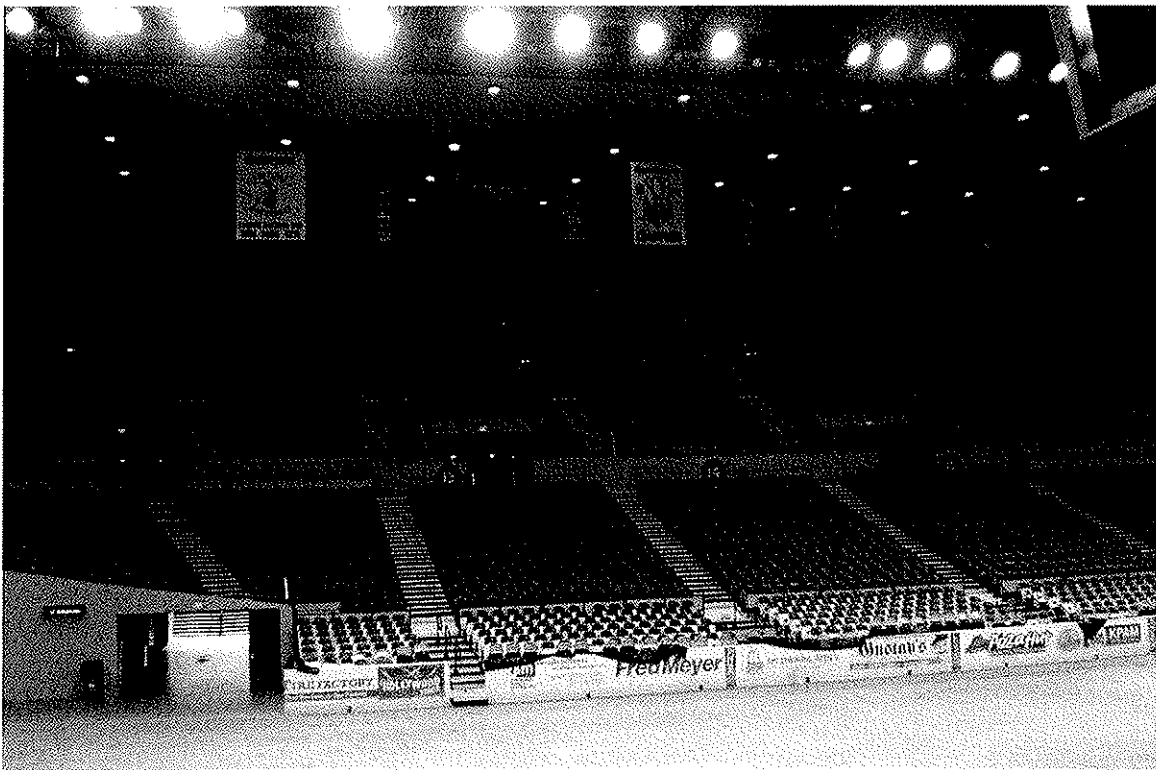
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