

Information on **Friesen Chapel** at Jennings Lodge Campground Property in Jennings Lodge, OR

Prepared by:

Lower Columbia Research & Archaeology LLC

The Jennings Lodge Assembly Grounds Description and Significance

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WORKING DRAFT

Prepared by Melissa Darby M.A.

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Friesen Chapel

Oriented east on the western edge of the campus, the Friesen Chapel was built in 1945, and is an exceptionally fine example of Mid-Century ecclesiastical architecture built in the immediate post-war period in the United States. It is one of several churches probably designed by architect Donald Edmundson in a similar restrained Gothic mode within the Northwest Regional Style. The façade presentation is a symmetrically composed gable wall set with a central entry, large glass wall bay, topped by a steeple tower. The profile of the gable end façade is designed to suggest a pedimented eave return, though it is flush. The face of the building is an open expression and is un-busied by unnecessary eaves and shadow lines. The architect eschewed frivolous decoration, but the functional elements (windows, steeple) are fully rendered and convey an understated Gothic feeling.

The central entry features recessed double doors set with three, square shaped lights stacked at eye level above the door latch. The entry complex is overtopped by a wall of opaque and colorless patterned glazing in rows of multipanes that reach to the gable peak where the glazing rises to a pointed light and fills the gable end. A pointed headmold emphasizes the fenestration. The eight-sided cone-shaped steeple spire is set upon a squat belfry rising from a boxed tower that straddles the gable ridge. The cone is topped with a ball finial.

Natural light floods the interior from the large bay on the east, and from the north and south elevations, which have ranks of four bays; each bay contains groupings of four windows. Each window has three lights, the lower is fixed and the upper two lights are awning sashes. The building is a truncated 'T' in plan. The walls are clad with clapboards and a thin frieze. The building was constructed over a poured concrete foundation and basement. The external shape of the structure belies the interior, which takes its shape from three portal arches. The exterior walls of the building are essentially a wood framed shell that encapsulates this dramatically arched interior space; the weight of the roof and steeple is carried on the three portal arches. The arches are laminated wood structural members, i.e., 'glu-lam' or glulam arches. The shape of the arches is in an exaggerated Tudor shape with a very pointed apex achieved by a secondary brace element. The arches span a distance of 34-ft. 5-inches; in height they rise to approximately that same dimension. The repetitive gothic pattern of the arches recedes at the chancel proscenium, which is a plaster Tudor vault—the Tudor arch shape is carried through the chancel ceiling. The chancel is a stage, the floor is raised about two feet above the nave floor. Small chambers are situated on either side of the chancel stage, and are accessed by doors to the nave and doors to the chancel, as well as six-panel exit doors.

The modern history of glulam in the United States began with a company founded by emigrant Max Hanisch who founded Unit Structures in 1934, headquartered in Wisconsin. That same year, Hanisch used the technology for portal frames for a school assembly hall and gymnasium. According to the Glued Timber Association webpage, this gym was the first "modern" glulam building in North America.

The Friesen Chapel is an unusual example of the use of glulam, because this may be the first use of glulam arches in a church in Oregon. The glulams are surrounded by a traditional 2x4 lumber frame system. This means that the building does not take its external shape from the glulam portal arches; rather it is a gabled structure.

It has not been possible to identify the architect of the Friesen Chapel with certainty (Clackamas County has no records of construction at the Western Evangelical center before the 1990s). The most likely candidate is architect Donald William Edmundson. Edmundson was a religious man and had studied at the North Pacific Evangelistic Institute in Portland and was a lifelong member of the Friends Church (*Oregonian* 1991). Later he studied architecture at the

University of Oregon. In 1939, he was retained by George Fox College to make improvements to Minthorn Hall, the oldest dormitory built on campus. Minthorn Hall is on the National Register of Historic Places and is cited as a “classic illustration of adaptive use of one of the oldest private college buildings in Oregon” (Minthorn Hall National Register Nomination).

The Friesen Chapel is reported to be an “iconic design later copied by other churches,” (*Clackamas Review* 2015). Edmundson’s use of glulam arches in the Friesen Chapel is perhaps his earliest use of this technology. Edmundson was an important architect of Portland area churches and some schools through the 1940s and 1960s. A 1965 promotional brochure for his firm, Edmundson & Kochendoerfer, listed 24 churches they had designed and at least 43 schools or school facilities designed by the firm over the past 20 years. The Friesen Chapel was not listed but only a sample of projects before 1957 were included (Edmundson & Kochendoerfer 1965). The Oregon State Historic Preservation Office lists nine buildings and one public square designed by Edmundson. These include three churches: First Baptist Church of Oregon City (1943); Saint David’s Episcopal Church (1952), Portland; and Peace Lutheran Church (1959), Portland.