



CITY OF LA CROSSE HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Historic Landmark Nomination Form

1. What is the historic name of the Landmark or Landmark District?

ST. FRANCIS SCHOOL OF NURSING

2. What is the current name of the Landmark or Landmark District?(If applicable)

PROFESSIONAL ARTS BUILDING

3. Property Address: 615 10TH STREET SOUTH

4. OWNERSHIP

- a. Owner(s): FRANCISCAN SKEMP MEDICAL CENTER INC.
- b. Street: 700 WEST AVENUE SOUTH
- c. City, State, Zip Code: LA CROSSE, WI 54601 Phone: (608)791-9888
- d. Email: _____ Parcel ID#: 17-30055-071

5. NOMINATED BY (If different):

- a. Name: PRESERVATION ALLIANCE OF LA CROSSE (PAL)
- b. Street: 1353 CALEDONIA STREET
- c. City, State, Zip Code: LA CROSSE, WI 54603 Phone: (608)784-1976
- d. Email: preservationalliance@gmail.com

6. CLASSIFICATION AND USE (Check all that apply):

Proposed Designation (choose one)

 Landmark District

X Landmark

If it is a Landmark, choose a category (definitions can be found on the instructions page)

X Historic Structure

 Historic Site

 Historic Object

Present Use

 Agriculture

 Industrial

 Religious

 Commercial

 Military

 Scientific

 Educational

 Museum

 Transportation

 Entertainment

 Park

 Government

 Private Residence(s) X Other HEALTHCARE

Condition:

☐ Excellent ☐ Deteriorated
☒ Good ☐ Ruins
☐ Fair ☐ Other

Has the property been nominated previously? ☐ Yes ☒ No

When? _____

What was the outcome? _____

Is the proposed Landmark or District on the National Register? ☐ Yes ☒ No

When? _____

7. SIGNIFICANCE:

Section 20.90 of the *Municipal Code of Ordinances* lists 4 criteria that a district, site, structure or object may be designated under.

Please check one or more of the listed criteria that apply to this Property:

☒ Associated with events or person(s) who have made a significant contribution to the history, heritage, or culture of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin, or the United States.

☐ It embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style or method of construction or of indigenous material or craftsmanship.

☒ It is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual work is significant in the development of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin, or the United States.

☐ It exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, or community.

8. HISTORIC OVERVIEW/ANALYSIS (See attached instructions for analysis outline):

Please attach the analysis as a separate document containing the following sections:

A. Existing Physical Description

- a. Write a physical description of the nominated property or district in its current state.
- b. If it has been altered over time, indicate the date(s) and nature of the alterations.
- c. Include additional information as applicable.

B. Narrative History

- a. Provide a complete narrative history of the district, structure, site, or object.
- b. If known, include the year it was built, the architecture style, and the name of the architect or builder.
- c. Include references to source material that are listed in the bibliography.

C. Additional Information

- a. Include any additional information that helps support the claim of criteria (Section 7) made in this document; or is otherwise deemed useful for the purposes of evaluation.

D. Bibliography

- a. Include a list of all sources consulted.
- b. Include copies of relevant source materials with the nomination form.

9. PHOTOGRAPHS:

Include photos, as applicable, of the nominated district, structure, site, or object as follows:

A. Current photographs

- a. Exterior photographs are required.
- b. Interior photographs if available and relevant to its historic significance.

B. Historic photographs

- a. Interior and exterior if available.

Each photograph must be labeled with the street address of the building(s) and the month and year the photograph was taken.

Designation of property will require affixing a plaque to said property and that the plaque will be the sole property of the City of La Crosse. Signature of the property owner assures the Heritage Preservation Commission that designation and installation of a plaque are supported.

Signature of Property Owner

Date

Marcus J. Zeller - PRESIDENT, PRESERVATION
Signature of Nominator ALLIANCE OF LACROSSE (PAL)

1-12-2026
Date

When completed, submit application to the City of La Crosse Planning Department, 400 La Crosse Street, La Crosse WI.

PLEASE NOTE: It is the responsibility of the nominator to provide the Heritage Preservation Commission and its Staff with information sufficient to fairly evaluate the nomination. **Incomplete nomination forms will not be accepted. A fee, in the amount stated in the Schedule of Fees and Licenses table in Section 25.01 of the Municipal Code, must be included.**

A. Property Description:

By Marcus Zettler, Preservation Architect
On behalf of the Preservation Alliance
of La Crosse

Property Overview:

Current Name: Professional Arts Building
Historic Name: St. Francis School of Nursing
Address: 613 10th Street South, La Crosse,
Wisconsin

Building Description:

The Professional Arts Building is a five-story structure with a basement constructed out of multi-wythe, reddish-brown brick bearing walls with limestone trimmings. The Wisconsin Historical Society lists the style as “Neo-Classical/ Beaux Arts” which references earlier styles of architecture that, in their own time, reference the architecture of ancient Rome and Greece. The structure is sited on the west half of the block bounded by Market Street to the south, Ferry Street to the north, 10th Street to the west and 11th Street to the east. The front of the building faces west (10th) and stretches the entire length of the block. The former gymnasium wing faces north along Ferry Street and occupies roughly half of the block. The former Bishop’s House (local historic landmark) is located at the northeast quadrant of the block and the St. Ann’s Building is being demolished while this nomination was being written is immediately to the east of the building. The building is set back a few feet from the property line on the west and has a steeply bermed lawn rising from the sidewalk to just below the first-floor level. Historic photos show that there was once a grand set of steps leading up to the main entrance, centered on

the facade. There were retaining walls flanking this exterior stair running along 10th Street.

The footprint of the building appears to be largely unchanged since it was completed in 1942. The massing of the building is shaped like an “L” with the main leg on 10th Street and the smaller leg to the north along Ferry Street. The north leg is a single-story that is double height to accommodate a gymnasium. The detailing is restrained, but well proportioned. There is a continuous band of limestone running around the building at the first-floor window sills, another at the second-floor window sills and a third band at the fifth-floor window heads. The parapet above this band has a smaller stone coping. The brickwork is very refined, being laid in a running bond pattern with a row of headers every sixth course. There are two rows of soldier courses on the building, one below the fifth-floor header band and a second one below the coping at the parapet. The building has a Greek Cross motif in the masonry and, at one time, in art glass above the front doors. Over time this symbol has become a universal sign of medical aid and compassion. There are only two significant changes to the exterior of the building. The first is the original steel double-hung windows have been replaced with modern aluminum units. The current windows are out of character with the structure. The second is a rear addition completed in the early 1970s which added a new elevator and rear entry. The roof for most of the building is flat and not visible from the public way. The only area that differs is the grand stair and elevator shaft that has a hipped roof. This roof is visible from 11th Street, but not from the front of the building.

The west façade fronts on 10th Street. The façade is almost symmetrical. The main entry

projects from the rest of the façade by a few feet acting like a large bay window. The main entry is a punched opening with a round-top arch centered in the projection. The door and transom above is a modern aluminum storefront system. There is a small vertical slit window flanking the door on each side. This is the most ornate part of the building, featuring limestone trim around the door and a pair of stylized pilasters framing the windows on each side of the door. Each of these windows has a carved limestone emblem centered above them with the inscription "AMOR VINCIT". This translates to "love conquers". An abstracted band of dentils steps from the outside pilaster rising to the underside of the second floor window sills. This framed the original sign that once read "ST FRANCIS SCHOOL OF NURSING". This sign was covered over by the current sign reading "Professional Arts Building". On the upper floors, there are three equally sized punched windows slightly recessed from the main face of the wall with two smaller windows flanking the center bay. The sides of the bay are clipped at 45 degrees and also have a small punched window opening. Originally, floors two through five all had this window configuration, but the third floor has a large louver where the middle three windows were and the smaller side windows have been replaced with louvers sized to fit the original window openings. The parapet for this part of the building is rather ornate when contrasted to the rest of the building. There is a large vertical limestone cartouche above each of the three center windows, the two spaces between these windows become pilasters and project up to the sky with limestone caps and there are three additional limestone bands giving a horizontal emphasis as the bay window projects from the

main mass of the building. The main part of the façade on each side of the center bay is nearly identical, there are five pairs of windows on each floor. The fifth floor has a stylized limestone capital between each pair of windows and there is a limestone diamond centered above the window pairs on the parapet. This middle section is book-ended by a projection on the north and the south. This projection features two bays of punched openings at each floor. These punched openings are larger, featuring a pair of windows instead of one window per opening. The parapet has similar detailing to the center bay, but only one cartouche is centered on these sections and the horizontal bands and pilasters are subordinate to the center bay. The only thing breaking the symmetry on this façade is the rectangular bay on the south end of the building. It is held back from the corner, but features two punched openings per floor and a simplified parapet.

The north façade of the building has the same materials as the west façade. There is a large five-story block on the west and a shorter one-story wing to the east. The five-story block has an entry point where it meets the one-story portion. This entry projects out from the main façade and has a rectangular opening with doors and a transom above. The limestone detailing at the top of this projection is modest. To the right are two louvers, possibly windows at some point, with three more punched window openings to the west. This façade has a random pattern for openings, but the upper three floors are all consistent with each other. There is a brick panel detail at the northwest corner of the building featuring a Greek Cross at the second floor and fifth floors. The second floor has two larger openings featuring a pair of

windows at the middle of the wall with four smaller punched openings to the left. There is a single punched opening centered on the door below. The upper floors have one larger punched opening with a pair of windows on the west with two smaller punched openings immediately to the left. This group of three windows has a simplified pilaster and cartouche detail centered above them on the parapet. There is another pair of punched openings to the left (east) of this group and a single punched opening aligning with the door and window opening below. The parapet is rather simple with two horizontal limestone bands at the corners. The one-story portion of the façade is two stories in height. It once housed a gymnasium. There are four large round-top arched openings in this façade equally spaced between brick and limestone pilasters. The façade terminates with a projecting bay that has a door near the west edge of the projection and a small, punched window centered in the mass, possibly to the basement and another opening immediately above it. The upper section of this façade has three punched openings, the center one is a window, the other two are louvers. This part of the building stops just a few feet off the wall of the Bishop's House (Sienna Hall) to the east.

The east façade is the back of the building and is the most utilitarian. The north wing of the building has a single bay of windows, centered on the façade. The main mass of the building is an 'L' shape of the first floor, but resembles an "E" shape above. The center bay on the front is mimicked with a projecting rectangular bay on the west. To the north, there is a row of punched windows on first and second floors. The façade then steps back at the upper floors. There is a single punched opening next to the

center bay, then three pairs of punched windows at each floor and a trio of punched windows as the façade meets the north projection. The center bay has had a modern addition added to it, circa 1971. The brick is similar to the main building, but has a more uniform blend. The detailing on this addition is modern. There are two punched openings in the middle of the façade on each floor, each having a pair of windows. Above and below these windows the brick appears to be laid in a header pattern instead of the running bond pattern common to the rest of the building. The parapet is capped by a minimal coping. The original penthouse with hipped roof is still visible beyond this opening. To the south of the center bay, the first and second floors are similar to the other side with a series of punched openings. Above the second floor, the façade recessed back similar to the north. There is a single punched opening next to the central bay on each floor with three pair of punched openings progressing to the south. The south wing appears to have no openings. This may be due to the fact that there was an existing orphanage immediately to the east of this part of the building.

The south façade of the building is quite small compared to the other facades. There is a rectangular projecting bay set back a few feet from the west façade. This bay has three punched window openings on each floor with a cartouche and pilaster motif similar to the west facade. This bay has more detail than many other parts of the building. The second through fourth floor windows are slightly recessed from the face of the main wall. There is an additional limestone band at the sill of the fifth-floor windows and there are horizontal limestone bands at the parapet and at the fifth-floor

window level. To the east of the bay are two punched windows at each floor. The eastern window on the second floor has been converted to a skywalk connecting to the St. Francis Hospital Building. This façade terminates with a projecting bay on the east side of the building. The first and second floors project farther than the upper floors. A single door opening without a transom opens to an exterior stair with a pair of punched windows above. The third and fourth floors have a pair of punched windows and the fifth floor has a taller pair of punched windows with round-top arches. The parapet has the familiar cartouche, pilasters and horizontal limestone bands.

The interior was not evaluated since the Heritage Preservation Commission would only be reviewing exterior changes to the building if the nomination is successful.

Overall, the historic integrity of the original building is excellent. The exterior masonry is in very good condition at most locations. The modern windows are unfortunate, but fill most of the original masonry openings. The addition, although done in a modern style, is respectful to the scale and proportions of the original building. The current owners appear to have done a good job keeping up with the exterior maintenance of the property. Very little has changed on the exterior of this building over the past eighty plus years.

B. Historical Analysis:

Building History:

To discuss the history of the building, we must first discuss the history of the nursing school at St. Francis Hospital. The entire history of St. Francis Hospital is well documented and need not be discussed in this nomination.

The nursing school officially started in 1902 out of necessity. In the prior year two lay women were accepted by the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration. (The hospital had been growing steadily since its founding in 1883.) By the turn of the century, it was clear that additional nurses were needed, more than what the ranks of the sisters could provide.¹ In 1922 Sienna Hall (Bishop's Residence) was purchased from the Catholic Church and used to house nursing students and the St. Ann's Maternity Hospital, (being demolished while this nomination is being written) was completed circa 1927.² The nursing program offered a three year diploma and the demand continued to increase until the School of Nursing was constructed. The construction of this building was apparently not the first choice for St. Francis. After a late 1930s audit and subsequent ultimatum from the Wisconsin Department of Nursing required "better facilities or closing the school", St. Francis began negotiating with Dr. William Henke at Grandview Hospital for a merger. The negotiations were near completion when Dr. Henke died on May 7, 1940. The negotiations fell through.³ Plans for a new nursing school

building began shortly thereafter. The La Crosse Tribune stated that bids were received on April 17th, 1941 for a new nursing school building designed by renowned local architects Parkinson and Dockendorff. The structure would be five-stories tall, house 160 nursing students, provide classroom space, and cost approximately \$400,000.⁴ Standard Construction Co. of Minneapolis was the general Contractor, Clark-Bracken, Inc. was the electrical contractor, and Al Braunec was the heating and plumbing contractor.⁵ The newspaper article goes on to describe the building in much greater detail:

Plans for the building call for five stories and basement. The main building will be 261 by 61 feet, facing west on 10th Street, while an addition 100 feet in length, two stories high, extends eastward on Ferry Street. The main entrance will be on 10th Street with other entries on Market and Ferry Streets.

The first floor will be devoted to administration offices and classrooms and the Ferry Street addition will be used as a gymnasium. The second floor will house a large library, demonstration room, comfortable club, tea rooms and kitchenette.

The upper floors will each contain 51 rooms for dormitory purposes with a large living room where nurses may gather on each floor.

The basement will be equipped with a laundry for nurses and the balance will be

¹ Larkin, Virginia. "A Tradition of Caring." 1989. P12

² Ibid, P13

³ Lang, Sister Regine. "A Century of Health Care Ministry." 1982. P33

⁴ La Crosse Tribune. "Plan \$400,000 Nurses' School." 18 April 1941. P1

⁵ Ibid. P1

devoted to trunk storage. An underground tunnel will connect the school with St. Francis hospital and the building will be heated from the central heating plant now serving the hospital and convent. The Trane heating system will be used throughout the building.

The exterior of the new school will be constructed of brick, corresponding with that of St. Francis and St. Ann's hospitals and the building will be fire proof throughout. Two large balconies will face eastward overlooking tennis courts.

Doors and window frames will be of metal construction and the walls of the gymnasium will be of cream colored vitreous brick. With the exception of the gymnasium and girls' club rooms, which will have parquet flooring, the rest of the flooring in the building will consist of terrazzo [sic] floors with tile base. Ceilings in the gym and classrooms will have acoustical treatment.

One of the features of the school will be a call and sound system, operated from the central office whereby conversation may be carried on from all class rooms throughout the building.

The new school when completed will be one of the largest and best equipped of any nurses' institution in the country. It will have ample capacity for housing all student nurses as well as a large number of instructors.⁶

Originally, the hope was to complete the building by Christmas of the same year, but due to material shortages caused by World War II, the building was not completed until the spring of 1942.⁷ The building was formally dedicated on May 1, 1942. "His Excellency, the Rt. Rev. A. J. McGavick of the La Crosse Diocese, and the Most Rev. William R. Griffin, auxiliary bishop, dedicated and blessed the new St. Francis school of nursing."⁸

The building was constructed with a clear logical layout. As mentioned above, the basement was primarily used for storage with laundry facilities. There were small windows wells dispersed around the perimeter. The first floor had a main entry centered in the building. The entry opened onto a lobby with a grand stair wrapping an elevator on the opposite side of the entry. A central, double-loaded corridor extends to the north and south from this lobby. The corridor had ample storage areas separating the classrooms and offices from the circulation space. The classrooms and offices had ample daylighting provided by many tall windows. The building had three primary stairs, the above-mentioned grand stair and an additional stairway at the end of the north and south wings. There was a multi-user restroom by the south stair across from the Supervisor's Office and the Solarium. The north end of the building had another restroom next to a locker room that separated the main building from the Gymnasium/Auditorium. One final item to note is that there was a "Candy and Ice Cream Room" in the nursing school.

⁶ La Crosse Tribune. "Plan \$400,000 Nurses' School. 18 April 1941. P2

⁷ La Crosse Tribune. "Dedication of St. Francis School of Nursing Planned During Spring." 31 December 1941.

⁸ La Crosse Tribune. "Bishops Dedicate New St. Francis Nurses' Building." 2 May 1942. P2

The second floor was where the building began to transition from educational purposes to living quarters for the students. The corridor layout was roughly the same as first floor, but the area above the central lobby was used as a library. More social areas were on the south half of the building with a large Living Room having a fireplace, Tea Rooms, a Solarium, Kitchenette and various study spaces. The north half of the building had a large Demonstration Room and bedrooms wrapping around the northwest corner. A very interesting feature in this area is a double corridor, a public one leading to the stairs and a parallel private one opening into the bedrooms and group bathroom.

The third, fourth and fifth floors are all very similar. There was a small Living Room in the middle of the floor with a double loaded corridor of bedrooms to the north and south. There was a group bathroom at each end and a Solarium on the south end of the floor. The building stepped in one structure bay on the west side starting at the third floor. This gives the floor plan an 'E' shape. The three stairs were located in the legs of the 'E'.

The building continued to be used as a nursing school until the final class graduated in 1970.⁹ In 1967 the associated Viterbo University started a four-year Baccalaureate nursing program that replaced the three-year diploma program at St. Francis. Nursing education had advanced over the years to the point where Viterbo was already providing some of the classes, particularly science, before the full transition occurred.¹⁰

⁹ Lang, Sister Regine. "A Century of Health Care Ministry." 1982. P35

¹⁰ Larkin, Virginia. "A Tradition of Caring." 1989. P16

Almost immediately, the building began its second era. According to the city directories, the name was changed to the St. Francis Education Building in 1971. A Tribune article notes that "The Lighthouse" a drug information and advice center was reopening in the building in September 1970.¹¹ Other offices were moved into the building at various times. A number of Tribune articles make note that there was a pain relief center, mental health center, and even a dentist occupying the building through the 1970s. Over time auxiliary offices for St. Francis were also moved into the building such as a chaplain's suite, data processing and accounting to name a few.¹² With all the different uses, the building was renamed the Assisi Center in 1975.¹³ The city directories list is by its current name, the Professional Arts Building starting in 1980.

The skywalk, and rear addition with a new elevator and rear entry was designed by Carl Schubert and Associates along with renovating the building's interior circa 1971.¹⁴ This was the most intensive modification to the building's exterior up to the present time.

The building has a tremendous history and there is an excellent collection of stories by former students who went on to have successful nursing careers. The building was expertly designed and constructed and has an exceptional amount of architectural integrity remaining.

¹¹ La Crosse Tribune. "Lighthouse Reopens Friday for Drug Aid." 24 September 1970. P27

¹² Lang, Sister Regine. "A Century of Health Care Ministry." 1982. P35

¹³ Ibid. P36

¹⁴ Ibid. P36

C. Additional Information:

Statement of Significance:

1. *The structure is associated with events or person(s) who have made a significant contribution to the history, heritage, or culture of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin, or the United States.*

The St. Francis School of Nursing was an integral part of the St. Francis Hospital campus and had housed a program that had not only an impact on the City of La Crosse, but on the entire region. The school began in 1902 and was located in various buildings at St. Francis. In 1911 the school was accredited by the Wisconsin Committee on Nursing Education.¹⁵ As was mentioned earlier, housing was provided for the nursing students when the Bishop's House was purchased in 1922. When the St. Ann's building was completed in 1927 most of the first floor was dedicated to instructional space for the nursing program.¹⁶ With enrollment increasing, the fourth floor of St. Ann's Maternity Hospital was converted into student housing. In 1933 the nursing students began taking their science classes at Viterbo University.¹⁷ The program grew to the point where a new nursing school building was warranted. Thus

the St. Francis School of Nursing was completed in 1942. There were three main reasons for the construction of the school. The main reason was the ultimatum from the State of Wisconsin to provide adequate facilities for a nursing school (mentioned above), the increased demand for nurses (this was especially true in the early 1940s as World War II raged in Europe and Asia, and the closing of the other schools of nursing in La Crosse. There were once four schools of nursing in La Crosse serving the four main hospitals, St. Francis Hospital, La Crosse Lutheran Hospital, La Crosse Hospital (Gundersen), and Grandview Hospital. Lutheran Hospital started their three-year diploma nursing program in 1901 and closed with the graduating class of 1933. La Crosse Hospital opened its nursing school in 1903 and closed in 1925. Grandview had a nursing program in place by 1919 and continued until the 1930s when economic pressure forced the school to close.¹⁸ St. Francis School of Nursing became the largest of these schools and had the most longevity.

At the time the nursing school building was completed, nurses were in extremely high demand. Nursing students just a decade earlier were lucky if they found any job working in their profession. The Great Depression had reduced hospital staff, closed nursing schools and kept wages terribly low. With the outbreak of war, the

¹⁵ St. Francis Hospital Quarterly Review. "Diploma Nursing Program Terminates." June 1970. P8

¹⁶ The La Crosse Sunday Tribune. "Hospital Schools of Nursing." 30 April, 1967. P2

¹⁷ St. Francis Hospital Quarterly Review. "Diploma Nursing Program Terminates." June 1970. P9

¹⁸ The La Crosse Sunday Tribune. "Hospital Schools of Nursing." 30 April, 1967. P2

demand for healthcare, especially nurses and doctors, exploded. The United States started the U.S. Nurse Cadet Corps in 1943. This program, passed by Congress accelerated the education, paid for the nurses' schooling and provided a small monthly stipend. "The corps comprised the largest group of uniformed women to serve our country during the war and early post-war years." At the conclusion of the program in the late 1940s, the corps had graduated 124,065 nurses!¹⁹

After the war, the nursing school continued provide quality graduates both locally and regionally. In 1961 there were 63 in the graduating class. This was the largest class to graduate from the school.²⁰ In 1954 the St. Francis Nursing School gained accreditation from the National League of Nursing.²¹ During the late 1950s and 1960s the educational model for nursing began to shift. From 1963-1967 over 100 nursing schools closed nationwide and almost 70 schools closed in 1968. Wisconsin had 18 schools remaining during this period with Wausau and Eau Claire closing in 1967.²² The school continued while preparations were being made to make

the shift in educational standards.

Viterbo University had been a contributing partner to the nursing school for decades. In 1967 they began a full four-year baccalaureate program. The St. Francis School of Nursing would continue until the first class at Viterbo would be ready to graduate in 1971.²³ Western Technical College also began a nursing program in the late 1960s. These two institutions of higher learning would replace the tradition of the nursing school for the La Crosse Region. The education now shifted to more "education" versus "training" as the article stated. Medicine was becoming highly specialized with more and more technology being implemented. The school has made a lasting impact on the region and much of the spirit of the program continues on in the Viterbo School of Nursing. At the conclusion of the school, it was recorded that there were a total of 1,990 graduates.²⁴

2. *The structure is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual work is significant in the development of the City of La Crosse, the County of La Crosse, the State of Wisconsin or the United States.*

St. Francis School of Nursing was designed by La Crosse's largest and perhaps most successful architecture

¹⁹ Rindfleisch, Terry. La Crosse Tribune. "Nursing corps played key role during WWII." 11 November 2009. PC2

²⁰ St. Francis Hospital Quarterly Review. "Diploma Nursing Program Terminates." June 1970. P9

²¹ Hessel and Purcell. Franciscan Skemp Healthcare – A History. Franciscan Skemp Healthcare. La Crosse, WI. 2002. P56

²² The La Crosse Sunday Tribune. "Hospital Schools of Nursing." 30 April, 1967. P2

²³ Ibid. P2

²⁴ St. Francis Hospital Quarterly Review. "Diploma Nursing Program Terminates." June 1970. P9

firm, Parkinson and Dockendorff. This building was designed at the height of the firm's prominence. Albert E. Parkinson began his career in Sparta in the mid-1890s. Little is known about his education or any apprenticeships. Many of his early designs are finely crafted homes in western Wisconsin. It appears that he formed a partnership with Bernard J. Dockendorff in La Crosse sometime between 1901 and 1905. As the firm grew and rose to prominence, it became known for cutting edge school and church design. They became experts on the subject matter of schools so much so, that they published a book with many of their school designs. The firm was also responsible for the design of the St. Ann's Maternity Hospital and the main St. Francis Hospital Building. It was only natural that they would be the architects of the St. Francis School of Nursing. By 1940, the firm was well established, but not yet winding down at the partners advanced in years. They brought all of their decades of knowledge about school and healthcare design to this project. The result was a building that was proclaimed as wildly successful.

The spacious double-loaded corridors, will daylit spaces, clear and efficient circulation paths and egress locations were all part of the genius of Parkinson and Dockendorff. The building is still in use today and although it may not meet every modern building code, many of the concepts, layouts and construction

methods would be appropriate in construction today.

The style of the building is very abstracted and has some classical influences, but the transition to modern architecture is evident in the building's detailing. The 1940s didn't have a distinctive architectural style since most of the nation's focus was on the war effort. However, the building is very stately in its appearance and utilized good quality building materials installed with a high level of craftsmanship.

Some of the other notable works of Parkinson and Dockendorff include Aquinas High School, Berlin High School (Berlin, WI), Blessed Sacrament School, City of Viroqua Hospital (Viroqua, WI), Grandview Hospital Nurses Home, Heise Clinic (Winona, MN), Holy Cross Hospital (Merrill, WI), Kaukauna High School (Kaukauna, WI) La Crosse County Tuberculosis Hospital, La Crosse State College Phy-Ed Building, Ladysmith High School (Ladysmith, WI), Logan High School, Marathon County Home and Hospital (Wausau, WI), Merrill High School (Merrill, WI), Milwaukee Junior High School (South Milwaukee, WI), New Albin High School (New Albin, IA), Oak Forest Sanitarium (Onalaska, WI), Oconomowoc High School (Oconomowoc, WI), Prairie du Chien High School (Prairie du Chien, WI), Rivoli Theater, Skemp Clinic, and hundreds of other projects not mentioned here.

The addition added in the 1970s is very minimal and does not impact any of the street facing facades. The architecture firm Carl Schubert, formerly Boyum, Schubert and Sorensen, was the premier firm in La Crosse by the post World War II period. Parkinson and Dockendorff both passed away in 1952 which effectively ended the firm. Schubert designed many institutional buildings in the region. Their firm carried the torch that Parkinson and Dockendorff had held for many decades prior. Although the addition was designed in a modernist style, the architect designed it in a way that was very respectful to the original structure in scale, massing and materials.

This building is a significant and highly intact historic structure contributing to the cultural heritage in the Coulee Region. The fact that the building is still owned and used by the original client more than 80 years after its completion is a testament to the superior design and quality of construction. Buildings constructed as substantially as the St. Francis School of Nursing can last hundreds of years if properly maintained. It is imperative that this building is preserved since over the past two years La Crosse has seen large scale destruction of its iconic healthcare architecture. The nursing school building at Gundersen Health (Otto Merman design) was razed as well as the St. Ann's building, and the St. Francis Hospital building is in the process of demolition. These are the

other two companion buildings to the nursing school that were all designed by Parkinson and Dockendorff. One final note, the St. Francis School of Nursing Building was listed as Potentially Eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in the Architectural Intensive Survey authored by Joan Rausch in 1996.

D. Bibliography:

Works Cited:

Amor Vincent – Book 2. St Francis School of Nursing. 1943.

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18 April 1941.
22 April 1941.
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E. Aerial Photo:

615 10th Street S.

La Crosse, WI

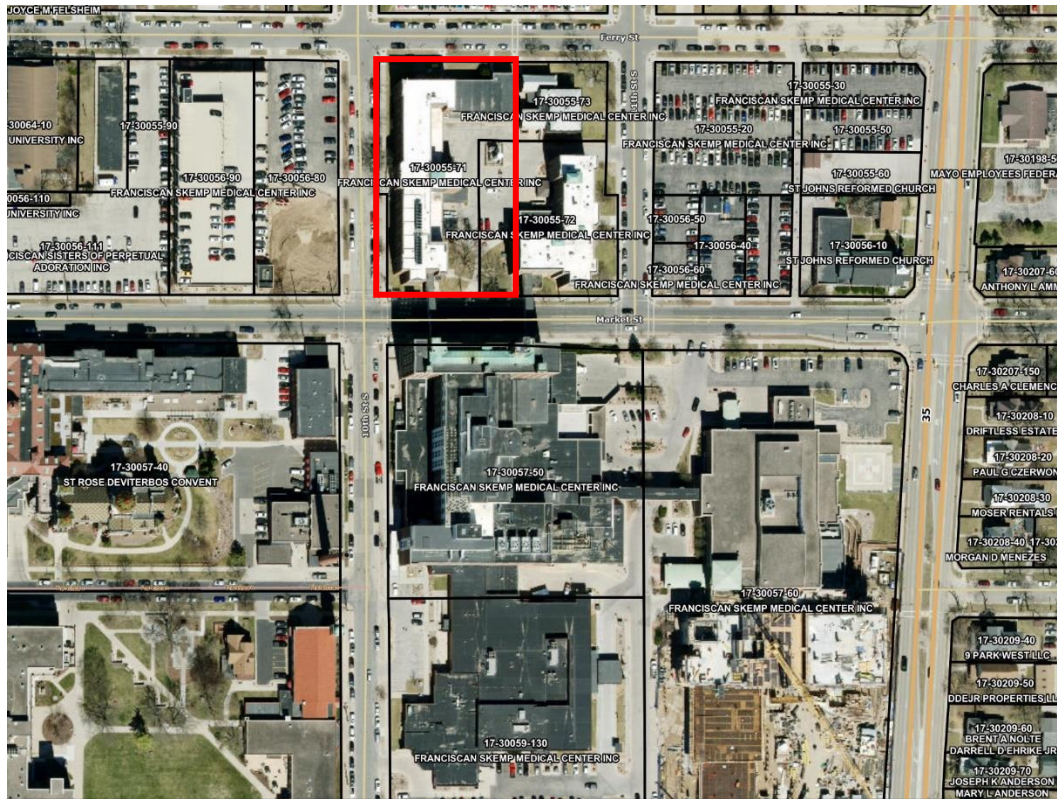


Figure 1 – 2024 aerial image of the site, County of La Crosse, WI.

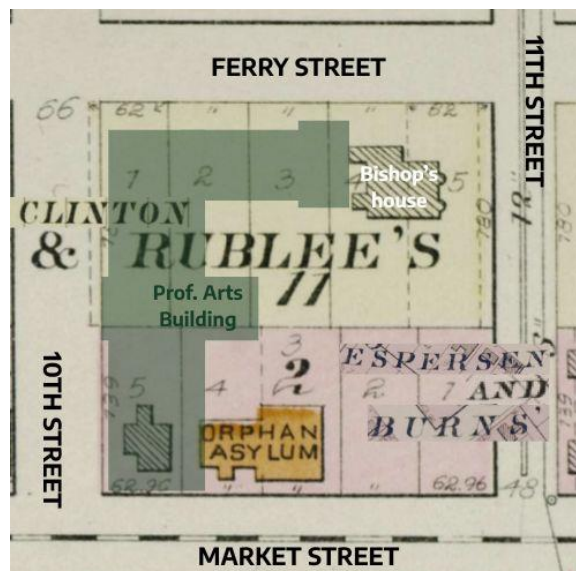


Figure 2 – Overlay of building on 1898 City Atlas.
Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.

F. Historic Building Photos & Drawings:

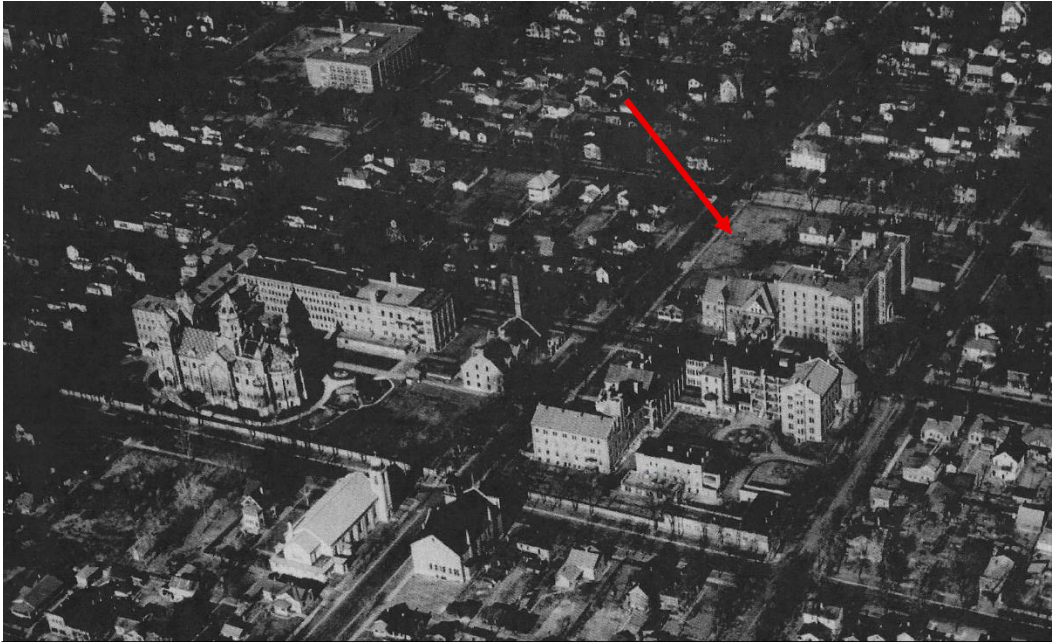


Figure 3 – Aerial view looking northwest at the St. Francis Hospital. Ca. 1931. (No nursing school building) Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.

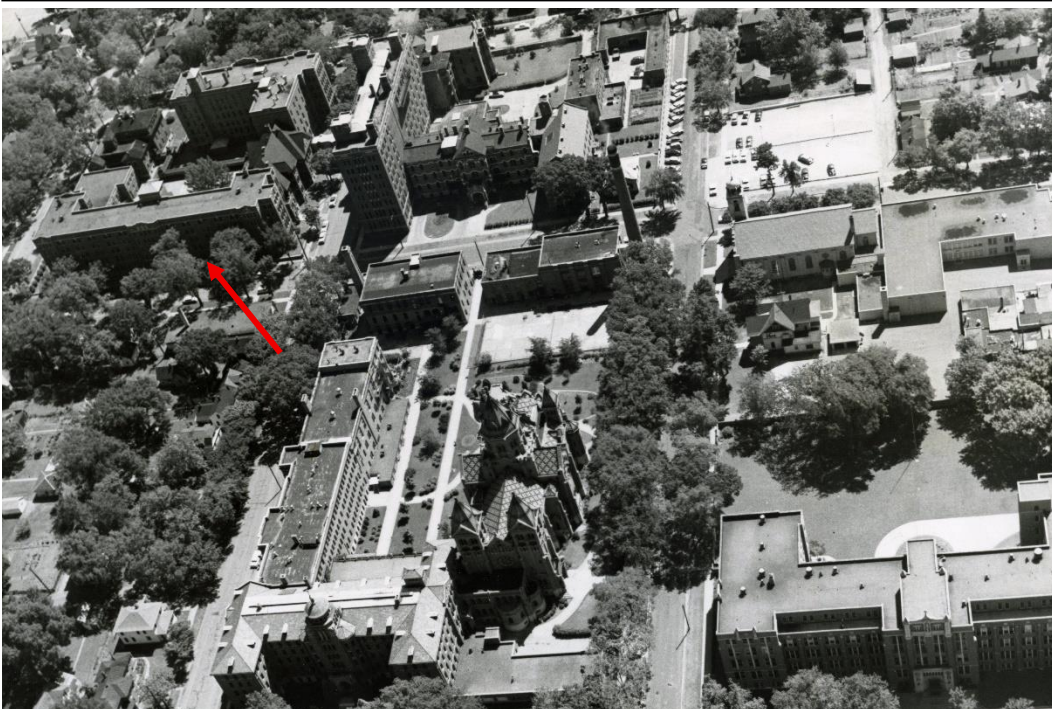


Figure 4 – Aerial view looking east at St. Francis Campus Ca. 1958. (Notice orphanage still extant) Courtesy of UW – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.

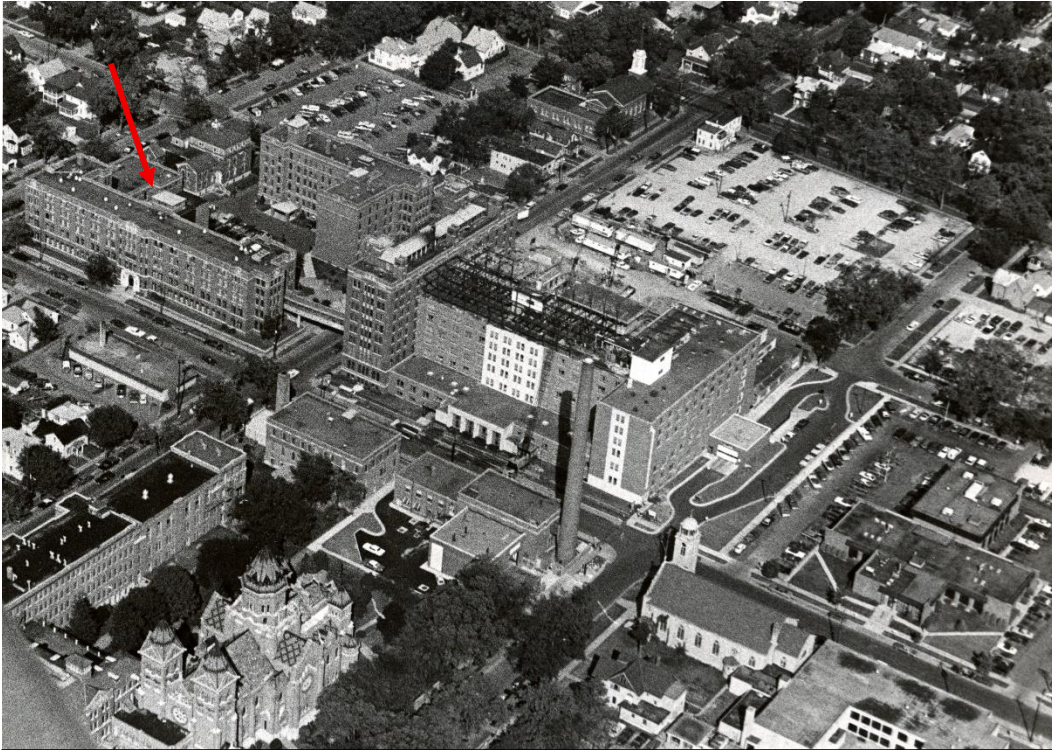


Figure 5 – Aerial view looking northeast at St. Francis Campus Ca. 1978. (Notice orphanage removed) Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.

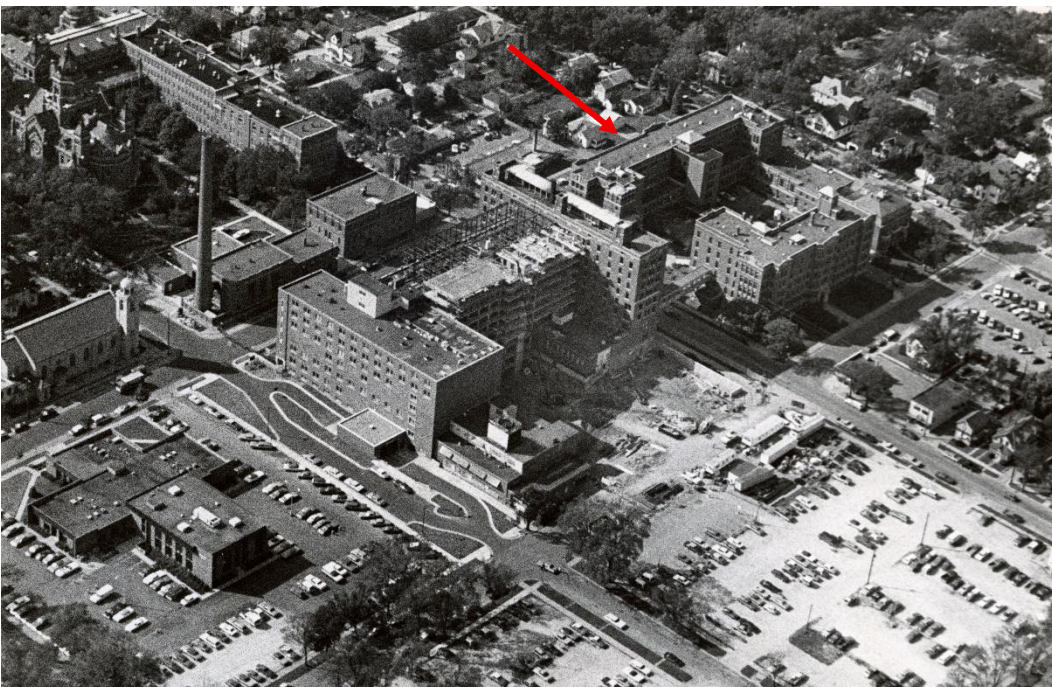


Figure 6 – Aerial view looking northwest at St. Francis Campus Ca. 1978. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 7 – View from 10th and Market Streets looking northeast at St. Francis School of Nursing Ca. 1943. Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.



Figure 8 – Class photo at front door of Nursing School Ca. 1948. Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.



Figure 9 – Original construction documents. “Front Elevation” Sheet 1. 1 April 1941.

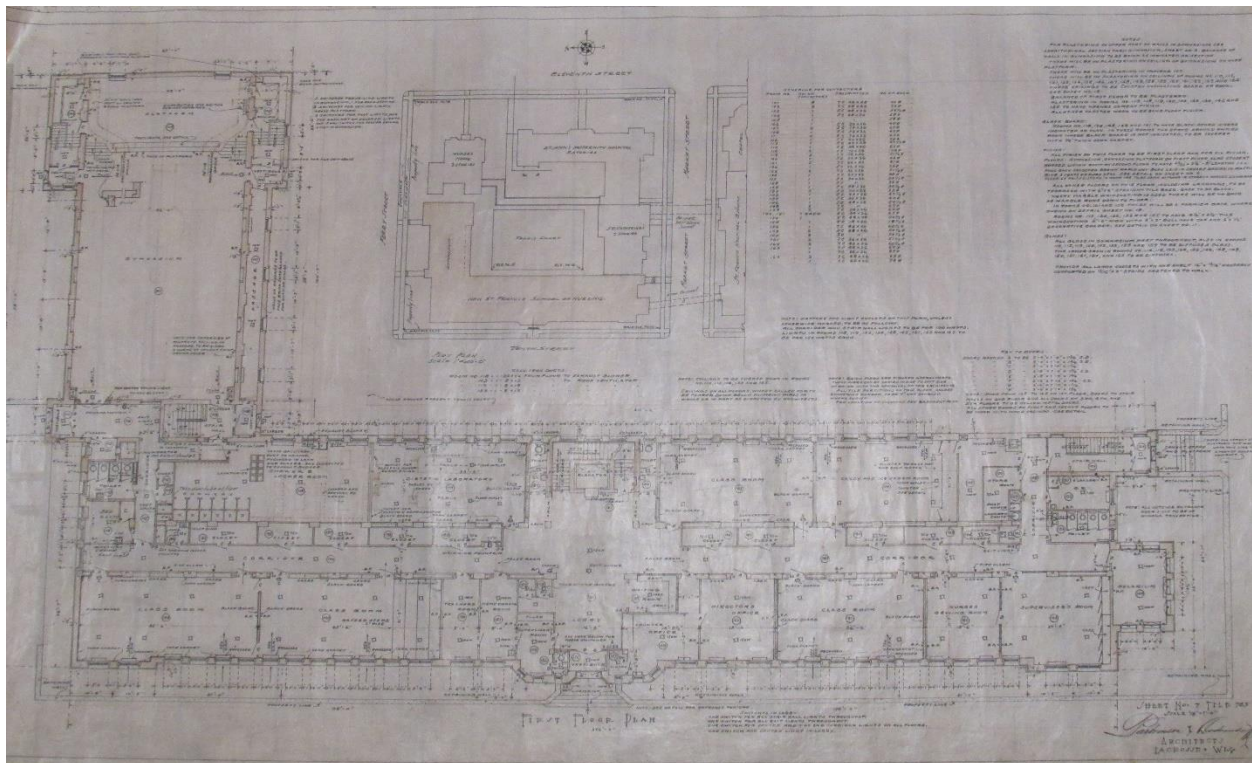


Figure 10 – Original construction documents. “First Floor Plan” & “Plot Plan” Sheet 7. 1 April 1941.

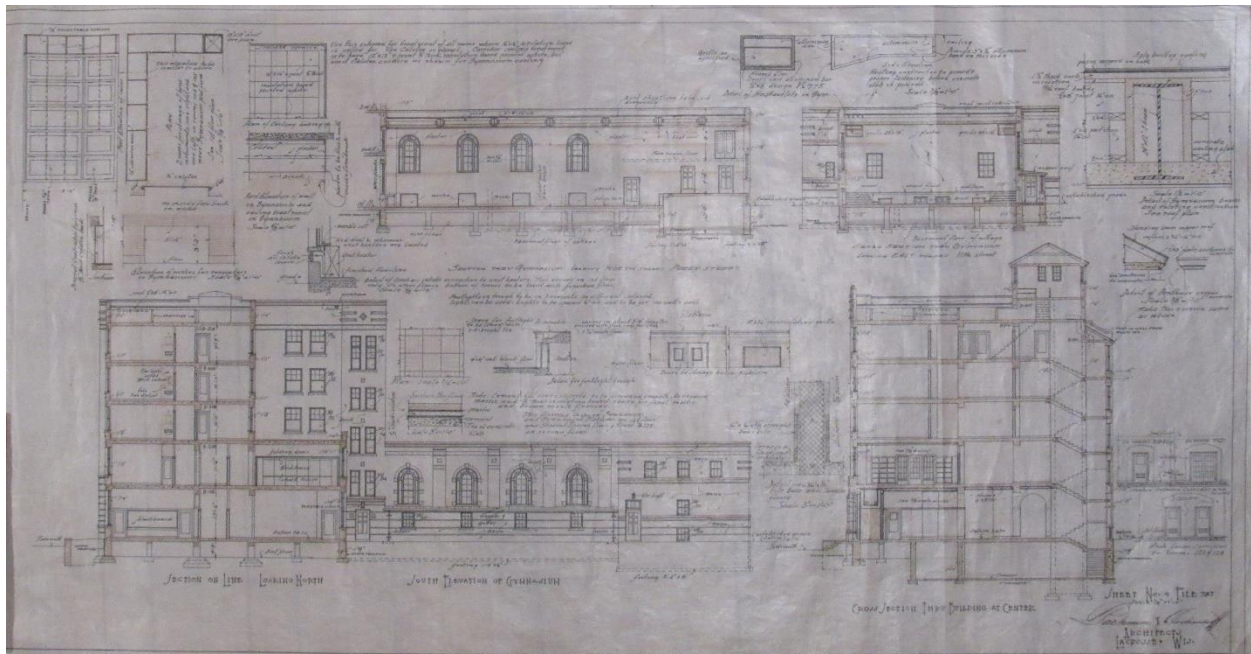


Figure 11 – Original construction documents. “Building Sections” Sheet 4. 1 April 1941.

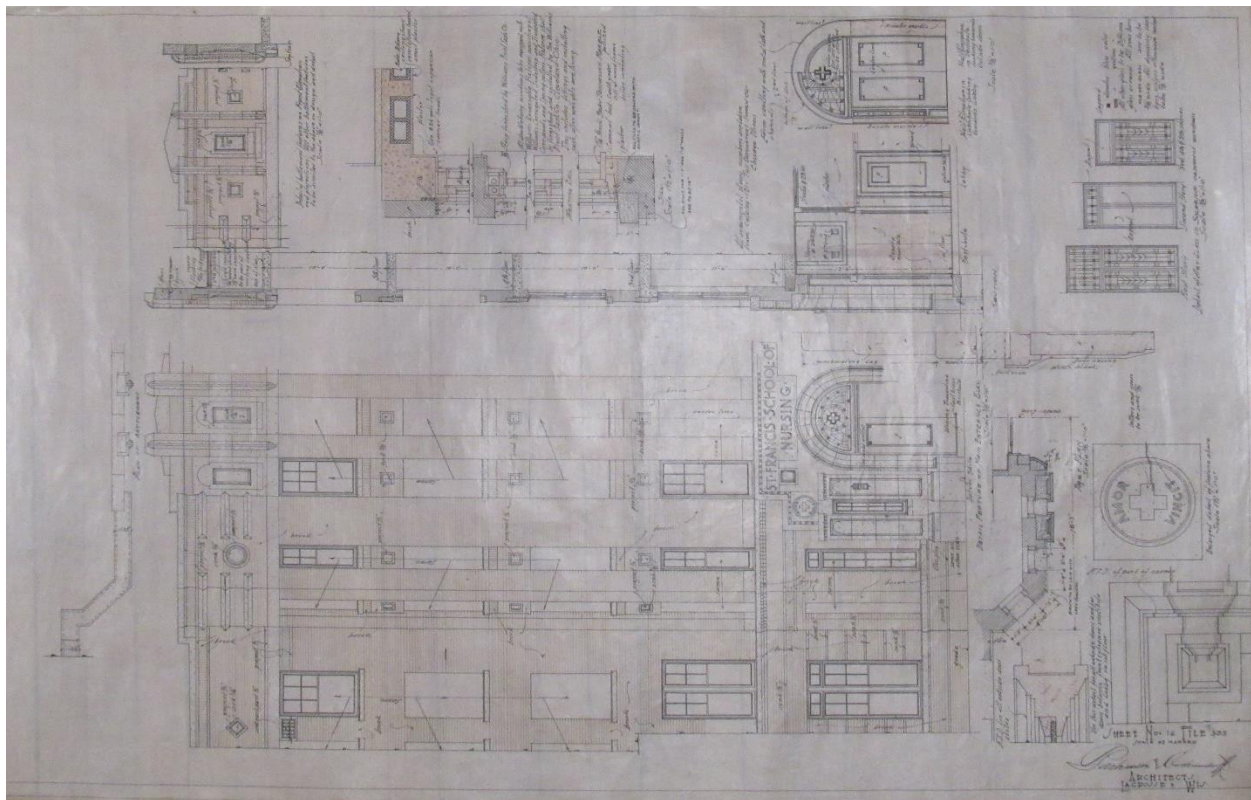


Figure 12 – Original construction documents. “Facade Details” Sheet 16. 1 April 1941.

G. Current Building Photos:

by Marc Zettler



Figure 13 – View of west (front) façade of School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 14 – Detailed view of west (front) façade of School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 15 – Detailed view of the carved limestone at School of Nursing Entry. October 2025.



Figure 16 – Detailed view of the parapet detail above the main entry at the School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 17 – View of the south façade at the School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 18 – View of the west façade at the School of Nursing. During the St. Ann's demolition. November 2025.



Figure 19 – View of the courtyard east of the School of Nursing. October 2025.



Figure 20 – View of the north façade of the School of Nursing. October 2025.