



CITY OF LA CROSSE HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Historic Landmark Nomination Form

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

HILLVIEW ORTHOPEDIC SCHOOL

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

EMERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

3. Property Address: 2101 CAMPBELL ROAD

4. OWNERSHIP

- a. Owner(s): SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LA CROSSE
- b. Street: 807 EAST AVENUE S.
- c. City, State, Zip Code: LA CROSSE, WI 54601 Phone: (608)789-7990
- d. Email: _____ Parcel ID#: 17-20261-012

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
- Landmark

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

- Historic Structure
- Historic Site
- Historic Object

Present Use

- Agriculture
- Industrial
- Religious
- Commercial
- Military
- Scientific
- Educational
- Museum
- Transportation
- Entertainment
- Park
- Government
- Private Residence(s)
- Other _____

Condition:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> 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. Zittel - PRESIDENT, PRESERVATION
Signature of Nominator ALLIANCE OF LACROSSE (PAL)

2-9-2026
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: Emerson Elementary School
Historic Name: Hillview Orthopedic School
Address: 2101 Campbell Road, La Crosse,
Wisconsin

Building Description:

Emerson School is a two-story structure flush with grade constructed out of multi-wythe, cream colored brick bearing walls. The Wisconsin Historical Society lists the style as “Contemporary” however, there are some subtle references to the Art Deco Style. The structure is sited on an angle running southwest to northeast on the north side of Campbell Street. The school is immediately east of the track and fieldhouse for UW-La Crosse. The front of the building faces southeast (Campbell Street) and is not parallel to the street. A parking lot is located to the north of the school and a playground to the east. There is a small visitors parking lot to the south of the building next to the main entry.

The original building has a simple rectangular massing with a running southwest-northeast and features a flat roof concealed by a parapet. When the building was constructed in 1939 it was only intended to be a one-story school. A 1950s addition added a second floor to the school, done in the same style as the original construction. There are two other additions present today. A one-story box was added to the north of the building and bears no resemblance to the original architecture. It is

out of character with the rest of the school. The addition to the northeast is much larger and sympathetic to the school in scale and materials. The addition has two stories, punched openings, a secondary entry and a gymnasium on the back side facing the parking lot. The front of the original building has a balanced, but not symmetrical facade. The west side of the composition has a one-story office area with a curving modern canopy over the main entrance. The main façade is two-stories and has large groups of punched openings. These openings vary in size, but the west bay has two vertically oriented openings flanking a large horizontal opening on both the first and second floor (we will call this type ‘A’), the next bay has much longer openings (type ‘B’). There are then two smaller openings with higher sill heights (type ‘C’). There is then a type A window group followed by type B and then the next type C is modified on first floor to have a pair of entry doors surrounded by a limestone by projecting out from the façade with stylized Art Deco pilasters. On the other side of the door is a type B window group followed by a type C, a type A and another type C. This was the end of the original school building. The addition steps back a couple of feet and has a very plain façade. There are two punched openings in this mass, one on the first floor having four entry doors and a ribbon window above. The façade then steps out, flush with the original building and has two punched openings on each floor each containing a single aluminum window unit with four lites. There are some odd stripes created with green brick between the first floor window heads and second floor window sills. Today modern steel doors have replaced the original metal doors. The limestone sills are still extant at the windows, but the original

windows have been replaced with modern half-height windows. The rest of the openings have been replaced with metal infill panels. The original limestone coping may still be extant beneath the modern metal coping at the top of the walls.

The east façade faces the playground. The modern addition completely obscures the original school. The addition has two masses, the first is a two-story classroom area that lines up with the front façade of the main school. It has a re-entrant corner and a blank brick wall. The main portion of the façade has a pair of entry doors projecting from the pace of the wall, the rest of this wall is a windowless brick mass. The rear part of the addition appears to be a gym or auditorium space with punched windows high on the wall. The same cream colored brick with green brick accents are used on this façade, similar to the front.

The north façade has similar details to the south façade, but they are simplified. There are groups of windows in similar spacings to the front of the building. These window openings have the same, modern, half-height windows with metal infill panels above. The north addition has a solid façade at the base with a ribbon of windows at the clerestory. Above the windows, metal panels clad the façade up to the top of the parapet. The side walls of the addition are finished with a brown brick. This addition is out of scale and proportion with the main school. The larger, new addition on the northeast side of the building has no windows. It is a large expanse of brick wall punctuated by a single door on the west and a pair of doors on the east. The scale and detailing of this addition are more sympathetic to the original school, but

the lack of windows creates a stark difference to the older parts of the building.

The west façade has a one-story office wing projecting out from the mass of the main building. There is a single door with transom centered in the mass and a large punched opening to the south. The second-floor on the main portion of the school behind the office wing also has a punched window opening. A modern whimsical canopy spans between the one-story office wing and the main two-story portion of the building. It covers the main entry to the school. The canopy is a broad sweeping arc that is well scaled to the building composition. It stays just below the parapet line of the office wing.

The interior was not accessible at the time of this nomination. Historic photos of the interior were found and are included in the historic photos section of this nomination.

Overall, the historic integrity of the original building is good. The exterior masonry is in very good condition at most locations. The modern windows are in poor condition and are not compatible with the size of the historic masonry openings. The north addition is out of character with the main building and should be considered 'not contributing' to the overall historic structure. The northeast addition, although plain, is sympathetic in scale and material of the original school.

B. Historical Analysis:

Building History:

The Emerson Orthopedic School was dedicated on Saturday, January 20, 1940.¹ During the planning stages, the school was known as the Hillside Orthopedic School. The school was renamed to Emerson Orthopedic School (after the poet) in January 1940 just before the dedication.²

The construction of this school was part of a city-wide overhaul of the public school system. From 1938-1940 there were eight school projects under construction in the city.³ Funds from the PWA (Public Works Administration) made this building boom possible. It was designed by the architecture firm of Boyum, Schubert & Sorensen.⁴ This school was not a typical elementary school. From the beginning it was specifically designed to accommodate children with disabilities. In the late 1930s studies and analysis were being done to determine the need for the orthopedic department. The studies showed that the existing facilities were woefully inadequate. The Orthopedic Department was located on the third floor of the old Washburn School. The classroom area for children with disabilities required them to climb four flights of stairs! This department was the first of its kind in Wisconsin and is the predecessor of today's special ed. At the time of the evaluations in

1938, the La Crosse Orthopedic Department had students from nine different counties.⁵ The Orthopedic Department was integrated with what was called the "Open Window" department at Washburn School. These departments worked with children who had various disabilities and diseases. Children in the 1930s still had to fear debilitating diseases such as polio and tuberculosis. The school also worked with students recovering from surgeries, malnourishment, and nervous disorders.⁶ The oldest special school department in La Crosse was the Deaf School, established in 1887.⁷

The design for the school was unique among the educational buildings in the city. It was designed as a single-story building with no stairs. Ramps were used to change floor levels. There were grab bars located on the walls. The school consisted of the Orthopedic and Open Window wing on the southwest side of the building and the regular elementary school classrooms on the northeast. In addition to the special education classrooms, there were treatment rooms with therapy pools and resting areas. The school was constructed out of fire-resistant materials such as masonry, plaster, tile, and steel windows and doors. This creates acoustically reflective surfaces. To increase sound absorption, early acoustic ceilings were installed, probably wood-fiber tiles. Wood and other combustibles were kept to a minimum. The walls were multi-wythe solid masonry, the floor was made of concrete, hallways and

¹ "Emerson Orthopedic School Transferred to Local Board." La Crosse Tribune. Jan. 21, 1940. P1, 10

² "School Board Re-Elects Rossiter; Defines Boundaries of Districts." La Crosse Tribune. Jan. 19, 1940. P7

³ "Eight New Schools and Additions Involve Expenditure of \$1,734,161." La Crosse Tribune. July 2, 1939. P5

⁴ Steele, Fred E. "Agreement" 1938.

⁵ "State and Counties Aid Finance of Handicapped Child Training." La Crosse Tribune. Feb. 2, 1938. P1

⁶ "Special School Here Inadequate." La Crosse Tribune. Feb. 4, 1938. P1

⁷ "Deaf School is Oldest of Special Departments." La Crosse Tribune. Feb. 6, 1938. P1

treatment rooms had a ceramic tile wainscot, and the walls were mostly finished with plaster. The cost of the school was estimated to be just over \$220,000 with furnishings prior to construction.⁸ However, a December 31, 1939 Tribune article stated that the cost of the school was \$125,804. The older newspaper article included furnishings and also illustrated a much more elaborate design with the school shaped in a “V” with two equal wings. The existing school was constructed as a single long rectangular shape. The school exhibited some slight Art Deco detailing, but primarily exhibits early International Style influences. The starkness of ornament was typical of Depression Era buildings.

At the conclusion of World War II, the “baby boom” began. This increase in children required more classroom space. The School Board again turned to Schubert, Sorensen and Associates (name of the firm changed) to design a large addition to Emerson School. The expansion project was first bid in 1954. The low bid reportedly came in at \$387,376 and was rejected by the Council.⁹ The plans were revised and the second round of bidding resulted in a low bid of \$314,834.94 on February, 3, 1955. This bid was submitted by WMC, Inc. of Winona for General Contractor, R. H. Lovold for plumbing and HVAC, Meyers Equipment Co. for kitchen equipment, and Clark-Bracken, Inc. for electrical work.¹⁰ This majority of this expansion was to add a second floor to the school, covering most of the original building footprint.

⁸ “Special Departments of La Crosse Schools Training Handicapped Children Inadequate.” La Crosse Tribune, Jan. 30, 1938. P1

⁹ “Board Opens Bids on New Project Feb. 3.” La Crosse Tribune, Jan. 4, 1955. P1

¹⁰ “Board Accepts Low Bids on Emerson Job.” La Crosse Tribune, Feb. 4, 1955. P1

The Tribune article explaining the bids stated that the “Reduction in the cost of the Emerson project on the second bids was accomplished by omitting a basement lunch program facility, reducing the outside matching stone trim to a minimum and omitting the second floor matching ceramic tile in the corridor walls.”¹¹ The open house for the new addition was held at the end of February 1956.¹² The windows of the second floor closely matched the first floor and there was a one-story wing on the northeast side of the building. This addition basically doubled the classroom space in the school.

Around 1972 a new addition was constructed off of the back of the school adding a new IMC (Instructional Media Center a.k.a. library). The classroom wing located to the north of the original school also appears to be from this period. The IMC wing of the building was burned to the ground by a 17 year-old former student on January 1, 1983.¹³ The decision was made to refurbish the school in an effort to remove smoke and water damage. The IMC addition was a total loss estimated around \$500,000.¹⁴ This addition was cleared away and a new addition was created in its place. This caused a massive disruption to the school district since 345 students and 35 staff members had to be reassigned to other schools.¹⁵ The reconstruction was swift and the school reopened to students on August 30, 1983. As a result of the fire, the new library was

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Hold Open House Program for New Emerson Addition.” La Crosse Tribune, Feb. 28, 1956. P11

¹³ “Youth Admits Torching Emerson.” La Crosse Tribune, Mar. 19, 1983. P1, 16

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Fire Destroys Addition at Emerson.” La Crosse Tribune, Jan. 2, 1983. P1

the first to be computerized in the La Crosse School District.¹⁶

The school remained very popular among La Crosse residents. In the late 1980s overcrowding in the school district led to bussing children who were in the Emerson boundaries to other schools. This was met with opposition from parents and was covered in numerous Tribune articles. This doubled the size of the property. Another addition was mentioned in 1991. This appears to be the addition added to the northeast addition at the end of the school. The addition faces Crowley Park which has for many years demonstrated the great partnership between the school district and the council. The park received a major renovation in 2008 adding new play equipment, rain gardens and a gazebo that can act as an outdoor classroom.¹⁷

Student enrollment has been on a downward trajectory for the past three decades in La Crosse. Consolidations plans were discussed in the early 2020s. By 2024, the plan was to consolidate Emerson School and Spence into a new school located at the Hogan School site.¹⁸ At the time of this nomination, the Hogan School is being needlessly demolished to “make room” for a new school building on the site. It appears that Emerson’s role as an elementary school in La Crosse may be nearing an end after almost 90 years of service. It is a testament to the original design that the building can still serve its original purpose into modern times.

The building has a tremendous history with ties to the federal PWA programs. It retains much of its architectural character from the 1939 and 1955 building campaigns. The later 1972 addition is not sympathetic, but is located behind the main structure. The 1983 and 1991 additions are simple and subordinate to the main structure. It is unique among the schools of La Crosse as the first school deliberately designed to provide educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

¹⁶ “Rebuilt Emerson Awaits Students.” La Crosse Tribune, Aug. 25, 1983. P40

¹⁷ “More than a Playground.” La Crosse Tribune, Oct. 24, 2008. P1

¹⁸ “Board Looking at Long-Range Consolidation Plan, Referendum.” La Crosse Tribune, Feb. 8, 2024. PA1

C. Additional Information:

Statement of Significance:

1. *Associated with events or persons 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 Emerson Orthopedic School is significant in its function to provide an educational facility for children with disabilities. The building was well constructed and typical of the period, but the historic merit of the building is nested in its function to the community. This school housed a groundbreaking program, the precursor of today's special ed. It served not only the children of La Crosse, but of the entire region. At least nine different counties in Wisconsin sent children with special needs to this school for an education. This school had specialized treatment rooms including therapy pools and resting rooms. The layout was very logical with the orthopedic and open window functions on one side of the building and the typical elementary school on the other side. Common spaces were located in the middle. A central double-loaded corridor provided circulation throughout the building. Special design considerations were implemented such as eliminating stairs and adding grab bars to the walls. The building was situated to bring in ample natural light to classroom spaces and keep resting areas nestled to the

building's interior. Programs like this were rare in the country. It exemplified the progressive spirit of the people of La Crosse.

The second-floor addition expanded the regular elementary school functions. It was done in a sympathetic way to the original building and was designed by the same architecture firm. The 1970s addition that remains looks like an afterthought and does not contribute the significance of the structure. The two later additions are sympathetic and subordinate to the original structure, but they have a watered down appearance.

Although the original windows have been replaced, the window openings appear to be mostly unchanged. The masonry also retains a high degree of historic integrity.

2. *The structure exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, or community.*

The Emerson Orthopedic School is associated with one of the most influential public building campaigns in United States history. In 1938-1940 there were eight different school construction projects happening simultaneously in La Crosse. This wave of school construction was made possible in part by PWA funding. The La Crosse Tribune outlined the costs of active school projects in 1939. It stated

that “Eight New Schools and Additions Involve Expenditure of \$1,734,161.” The PWA was projected to provide 45% of the funds necessary.¹⁹ The PWA provided funding for much needed community improvement projects across the entire country.

constructed as substantially as the Emerson Orthopedic School can last hundreds of years if properly maintained.

A second nationwide historic event had an equally significant impact on the building. After World War II the “Baby Boom” dramatically increased the demand for classroom space. The second floor was added to Emerson in the mid-1950s as a direct result of this increase in the population. The 1950s saw a building boom for schools nationwide and La Crosse was no exception. This gives the second-floor significance even though the original structure was only a one-story building.

The later additions have much less significance to the building, but the north additions are sympathetic and reflect the ongoing modernization of the building to meet the needs of the community.

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 almost 90 years after its completion is a testament to the superior design and quality of construction. Buildings

¹⁹ “Eight New Schools and Additions Involve Expenditure of \$1,734,161.” La Crosse Tribune, July 2, 1939. P5

D. Bibliography:

Works Cited:

American Institute of Architects. "The Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect." 29 April 1947.

Erickson, Emma (Chairman), et. al. A Guidebook For the Parents of Children who attend the La Crosse Public Schools. La Crosse Board of Education, La Crosse. April 1950.

La Crosse Tribune. 30 January 1938.
 2 February 1938.
 4 February 1938.
 6 February 1938.
 13 February 1938.
 10 September 1938.
 14 September 1938.
 25 October 1938.
 2 July 1939.
 16 August 1939.
 24 August 1939.
 31 December 1939.
 14 January 1940.
 19 January 1940.
 21 January 1940.
 30 January 1940.
 8 February 1940.
 4 January 1955.
 4 February 1955.
 28 February 1955.
 2 January 1983.
 2 February 1983.
 19 March 1983.
 14 May 1983.
 25 August 1983.
 2 March 1988.
 11 March 1988.
 23 March 1988.
 14 April 1988.
 23 January 1992.
 24 October 2008.
 3 February 2024.
 8 February 2024.

Rausch, Joan. *City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, Intensive Survey Report, Architectural and Historical Survey Report*. City of La Crosse, Wisconsin, July 1996.

Sanborn-Ferris Fire Insurance Company. New York: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. Fire Insurance Maps for La Crosse, Wisconsin. 1939, 1954, located at the La Crosse Public Library Archives.

Steele, Fred E. "Agreement". Owner-Architect. 20 October 1938.

Historic photographs, archived at University of Wisconsin - La Crosse, Murphy Library Special collections and La Crosse Public Library Archives.

Web Sources:

La Crosse Property and GIS Data:
<https://experience.arcgis.com/>,
 Web 01/20/26.

Wisconsin Historical Society.
 "Architecture and History Inventory."
 Property Record for 2101 Campbell Rd.
 AHI #238822. web, 2025.

E. Aerial Photo:

2101 Campbell Road

La Crosse, WI

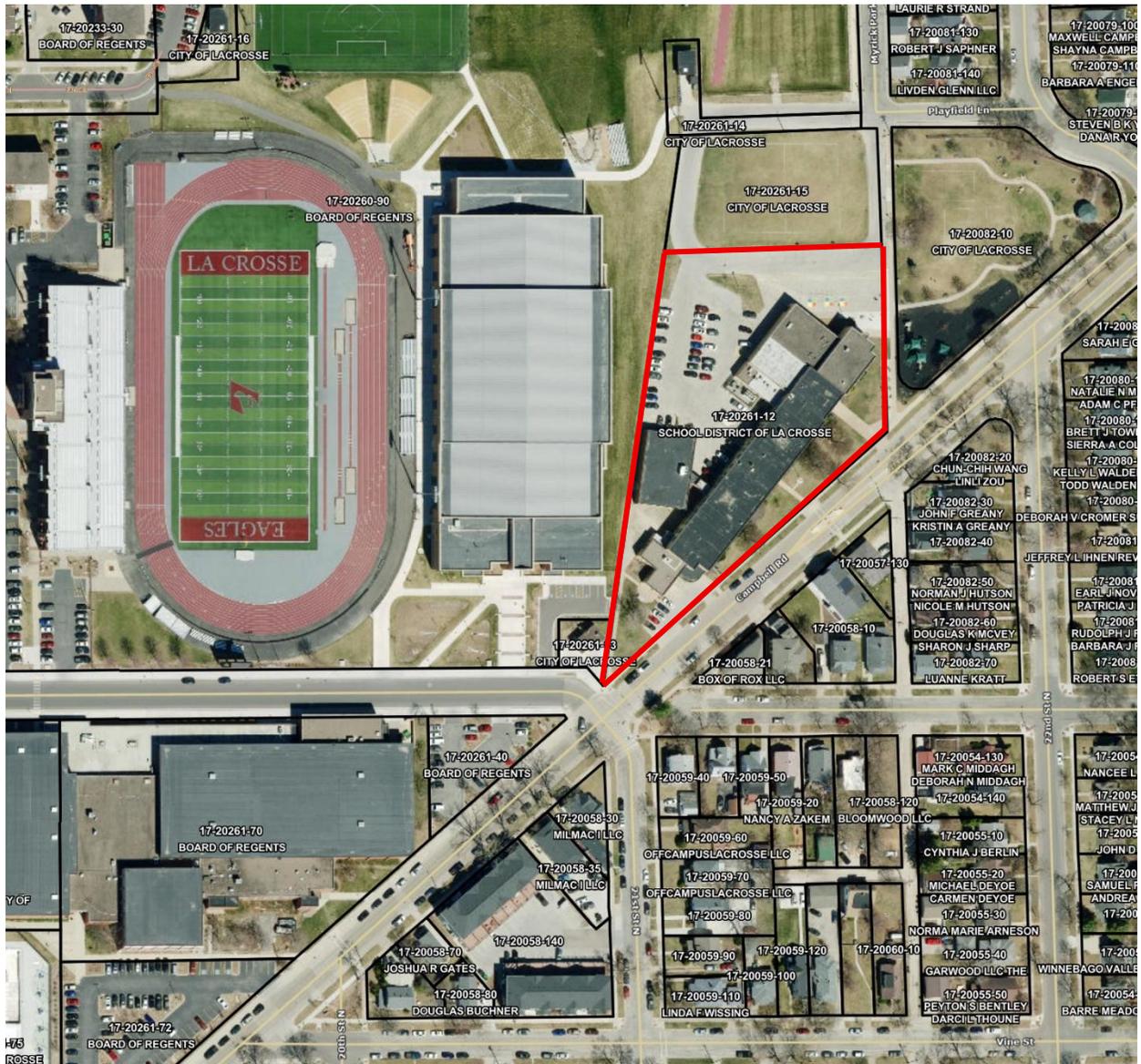


Figure 1 – 2024 aerial image of the site, County of La Crosse, WI.

F. Fire Insurance Maps:

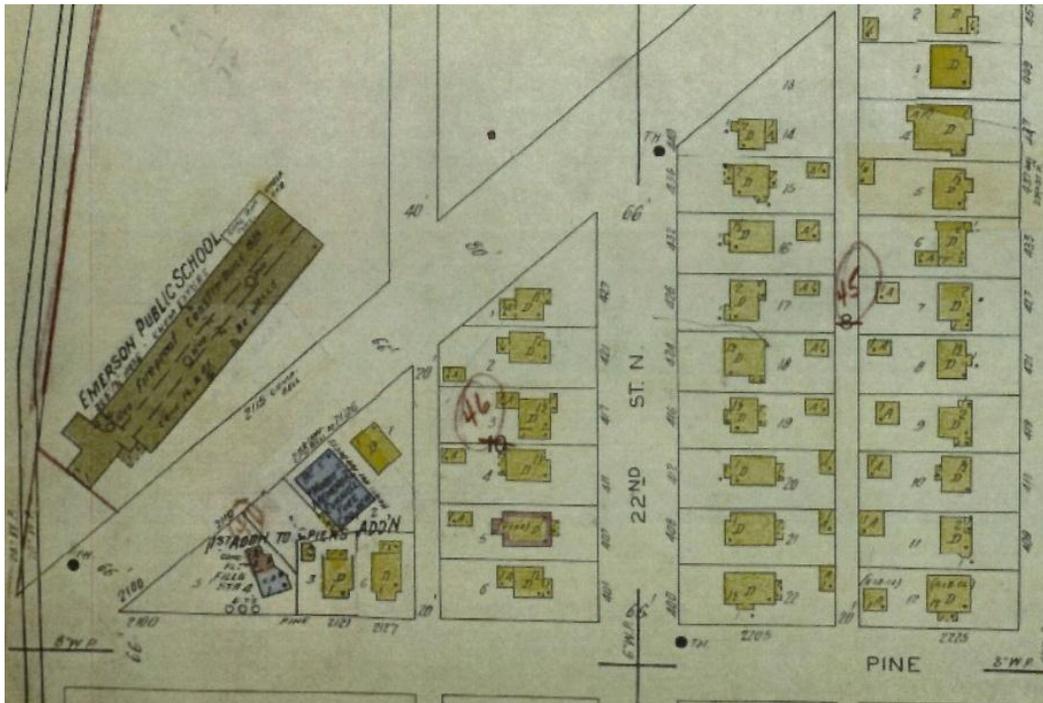


Figure 2 – 1939 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, City of La Crosse, WI. (Original configuration) Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.

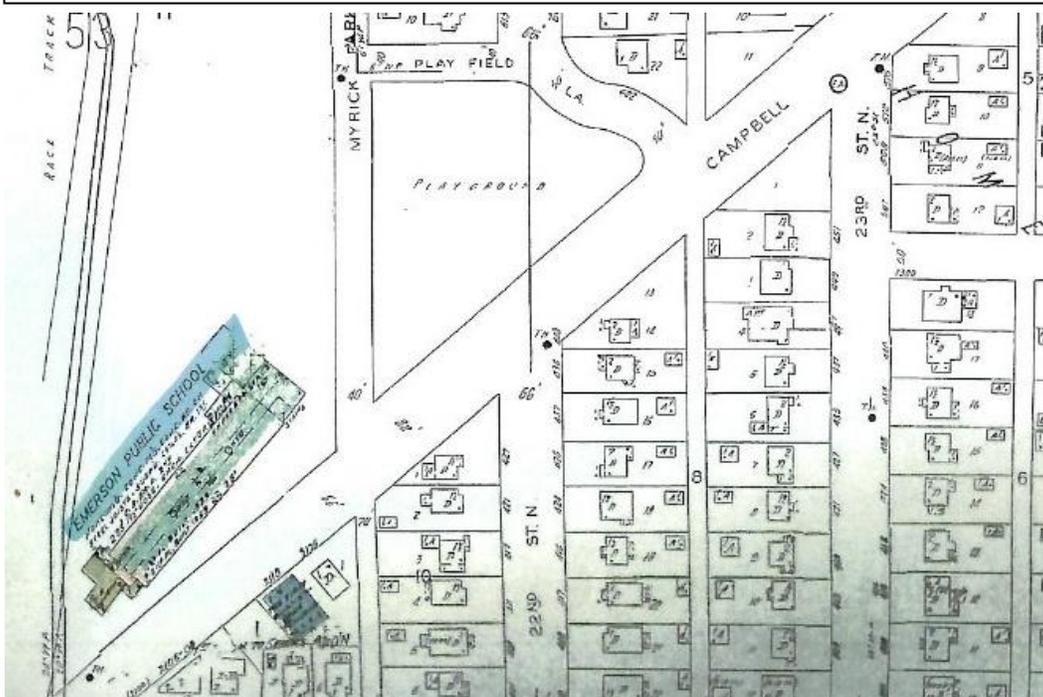


Figure 3 – 1954 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, City of La Crosse, WI. (First north addition shown) Courtesy of La Crosse Public Library Archives.

G. Historic Building Photos:



Figure 4 – View looking west from Campbell Street. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 5 – View looking northwest at Emerson Orthopedic School Ca. 1946. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 6 – Second floor construction at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1956.
Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 7 – Second floor completed at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1956.
Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.

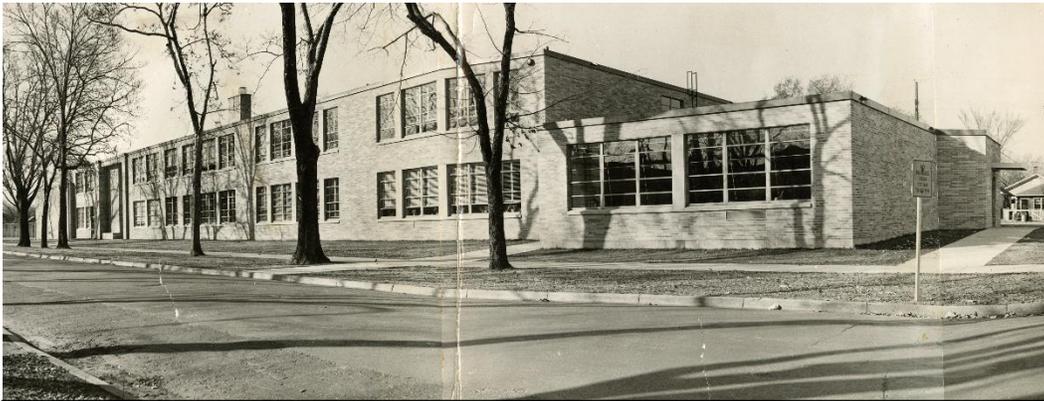


Figure 8 – Back of Emerson Orthopedic School looking southeast. Ca. 1965. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 9 – New north addition at Emerson Orthopedic School looking west. Ca. 1992. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 10 – Main entry to Emerson Orthopedic School. Date unknown. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 11 – Hubbard Hydrotherapy Tank at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 12 – Treatment room at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 13 – First floor corridor at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 14 – Entry vestibule at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.



Figure 15 – Drinking fountain at Emerson Orthopedic School. Ca. 1940. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections.

G. Current Building Photos:

by Marcus Zettler



Figure 16 – View of southeast (front) façade of Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 17 – View of center entry at southeast (front) façade of Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 18 – View of the modern main entry at the southwest corner of Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 19 – Main entry and southwest façade looking northeast at Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 20 – View of the southwest façade at Emerson School. October 2025.



Figure 21 – View of the northwest (back) façade at Emerson School. Looking south at the gym and classroom additions. October 2025.



Figure 22 – View of the northeast façade of Emerson School. February 2026.



Figure 23 – View of the original main entry at Emerson School. October 2025.