

Rick Willenberg <rickwillenberg@icloud.com>
To: Acklin, Tim
Cc: Laura Godden; Marcus Zettler; Brad Williams
You replied to this message on 3/25/2026 12:40 PM.

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Tim: Good morning. We are interested in the current proposed historic designation for Emerson Elementary prepared by Marcus Zettler(PAL). We fully support his proposal to the HPC and have attached pictures of items that we feel support this historical designation. In the 1950s, both my wife and I attended Emerson and knew some individuals in the pictures. Also, her mom, Mrs. Cameron was a first grade teacher from the Emerson early years. We understand that no decisions will be made at the HPC Emerson tour meeting Tuesday 3/24/2026 at 5 PM. But, assume a decision will be made at the HPC monthly meeting to be scheduled Thursday 3/26/2026 at 6 PM. We would like to share details and our support for the Emerson Elementary Historic Designation by Zoom or phone 312/626-6799
Thank you, Rick and Nancie Willenberg LaCrosse residents in the Crowley addition.

Grandview-Emerson Neighborhood Association GENA's Post



Grandview-Emerson Neighborhood Association GENA

December 2, 2016 · 🌐

...GUESS! What GENA school was originally built to accommodate physically disabled students with facilities for orthopedic work???

...IT'S TRUE! Below is more of the AMAZING HISTORY of the original Ralph Waldo Emerson ORTHOPEDIC School - now known as Emerson Elementary!!!

Have you ever noticed the large painted portrait of Ralph Waldo Emerson near the center doors in Emerson Elementary (pictured here)? It was painted by local artist Margaret Anderson.

Here's a bit of history about Emerson Elementary and the story behind the artwork. In the late 1930s it was proposed to the La Crosse Board of Education that a new school should be built to better serve the community. It should be a school that would also accommodate physically disabled students, and the school would have facilities for orthopedic work.

Superintendent G.M. Wiley at the time had many community organizations working with the school board to make this a reality. The La Crosse Public Library archives listed 11 community organizations that Wiley paid tribute to at the 1940 Open House for the pioneering work they did on behalf of the new orthopedic school.

Dr. Alf Gundersen, a member of the school board at this time, expressed the hope that "crippled children will not increase in numbers in the community" and he was "hopeful that the medical professions and scientists will develop a means of making children immune from paralysis.". You see back in the 1930s and 40s there was a huge polio epidemic in the U.S. which often led to paralysis. Many students were in need of physical therapy and many were wheel chair bound.

In 1940 the School District of La Crosse opened Ralph Waldo Emerson Orthopedic School. The school serviced children needing orthopedic work as well as education instruction for the first three elementary grades. It was a one story structure, but constructed so another story could be added in the future.

A young boy at that time, Terry Witzke recalls attending Emerson Orthopedic School. He attended the primary grades with Principal Miss Oltman. He remembers the polio epidemic in La Crosse which left many children paralyzed. In fact, he recalls his mother would not let him swim in Memorial Pool because she was afraid he would acquire polio.

In 1956 a second story and an addition were added to the school which provided 12 more classrooms, a multi-purpose room, kitchen, and dining room. Nearby Washington School (located at 15th & Vine Streets (where the current UW-L Fine Arts building stands) would close, and more students would attend Emerson Elementary.

With the discovery and use of the polio vaccine in the late 1950s/60s, polio was pretty much eradicated and fewer children were left paralyzed by the disease.



In the 1930s and 40s there'd been a polio epidemic in the U.S. which often led to paralysis. Many students were in need of physical therapy, and many were wheelchair bound. The Ralph Waldo Emerson Orthopedic School was created to provide for them. (The 1952 UW-La Crosse photo below is of students Lorna Burkhalter, Staffy Loveland, Richard Kerska, and Mavis Johnson during a fire-prevention lesson.) Eventually vaccines were developed and starting in 1955 mass vaccination dramatically reduced the number of victims, such that Emerson became a regular public school. Today it faces closure along with Spence, pending the outcome of a November referendum. If passed, they would be replaced by a new school built at the site of the Hogan Administrative Center on East Avenue.

**Owing to a Polio Epidemic,
Emerson Elementary Opened in 1940 as
the Ralph Waldo Emerson ORTHOPEDIC School.
*Do You Remember Getting Vaccinated?***



 Brian Shanley · May 31, 2020 · 

A La Crosse Tribune clip from 1958. Richard Kerska was one of my teachers at WWTC and right next to him is my mom.



SOMETHING NEW IN THE STATE—La Crosse is the only city in the state giving instrumental instruction to physically handicapped pupils on the elementary school level. These 10 physically handicapped pupils of Emerson Orthopedic School, playing with other Emerson pupils, put on the old Washington School band uniforms last week to play for their PTA meeting. In the first row from the left are: Richard Kerska, Dorothy Woefel, Robert Poff, Michael Hall and Mary Lynn Halverson; in the second row, Russell Storaak, Mary Jo Burke, Jean Lueck, Shirley Leak and Kathleen Stokes.—Tribune Photo.

Eight New Schools And Additions Involve Expenditure Of \$1,734,161

Six Projects Require PWA Assistance

Eight new school buildings and additions—five for the city's extensive public educational system, one for the State Teachers' college and two for parochial institutions—totaling approximately \$1,734,161 are in varied stages of construction in La Crosse at the present time.

Only two of the projects—both additions to existing buildings in the Catholic educational system—are to be completed prior to the opening of school in September, while the others will be finished late in 1939 and early in 1940.

Six of the projects, those for the city and state, are larger and involve grants of federal, government funds under the Public Works administration. Without such assistance, which represents 45 per cent of the total cost, it is doubtful if the city and state would have undertaken the extensive building program at this time.

City School Projects

The city projects include the new Longfellow Junior high school at 300 and Danton streets, Hillview combination kindergarten and elementary school immediately east of the Inter-State Fair grounds, Roosevelt school addition at Wood and Hayes streets, Logan high school addition at Logan and Arvon streets, and Vocational school addition at 4th and Vine streets—a total of \$1,200,000. Of this amount the PWA has contributed about \$384,810.

The new training school at 18th and State streets for the La Crosse State Teachers college will cost about \$125,000 when completed. The PWA share of this total is approximately \$104,250.

The other projects are a \$75,000 addition to Aquinas high school at 12th and Common avenue and a \$25,000 addition to Holy Trinity school at 12th and First avenues.

The Aquinas and Holy Trinity projects are to be completed by Aug. 31, while the college training school will not be done until about Nov. 18. The Longfellow Junior high school will be finished about Feb. 15, Roosevelt addition, Oct. 25, Hillview school, Nov. 15, and Vocational addition, Oct. 5.

Employ 324 Men

It is estimated there are about 350 men employed on the eight projects at the present time, with approximately \$30,000 per month being paid to the city and state schools. Most of the trades are represented on the projects now at the construction work program.

All six of the city and state projects were started late in 1938, just pending under the wire before the deadline set by the federal government. The first work on all six projects involved excavations for basements. The projects were started early this year.

The Longfellow Junior high school is a large two-story structure, built in a V-formation with an auditorium and gymnasium in the form of a T extending from the junction point of the main building.

The Danton street side of the building, where the basement at ground level is entirely above the level of the ground, is to be used for the Junior high division. The manual training department will be on the ground floor. Class rooms will be on the first and second floors.

On the 18th street side of the building will be the elementary department, with class rooms on all floors. The auditorium, which will have a seating capacity of about 750 persons, faces the rear of the T in the rear of the building, while the large gymnasium forms the wing of the open T. The gymnasium will have seating space so that it can be divided into two large rooms for physical education instruction purposes.

Orthopedic School

The Hillview school is rectangular in shape, with one of the long sides fronting on Campbell Road. It is to be of only one floor and will have six classrooms for both orthopedic and elementary groups.



All eight of the new La Crosse school buildings are shown in the above pictures. At the top is the Longfellow Junior high school. The second shows the Vocational school addition, left, and the Logan high school gymnasium-auditorium addition. The third row shows the Aquinas high school addition, left, and the Teachers' college training school. The fourth row shows the Hillview kindergarten-elementary school, left, and the Roosevelt school addition. At the right is the Holy Trinity school addition.

In the western end of the building there will be several other rooms devoted entirely to orthopedic work. These will include an office for the physiotherapist, a physiotherapy treatment and exercise room, massage room, hydrotherapy room with a hydrobath, and a shower bath. There also will be a large rest room.

Four of the six class rooms are to be equipped with fixtures, while each of the rooms will have orthopedic doors so that they can be divided into class and play or rest rooms. They will be a kitchen.

The Roosevelt school addition, which is of two stories, will have four classrooms, two on each floor, relieving a congested condition that has existed for some time in the main building.

The Logan high school project involves the construction of a large building housing an auditorium,

a gymnasium and five class-rooms. It is being erected immediately south of the main building. The building is to be connected. The auditorium will have a seating capacity of about 600 persons. This school project also is of two stories.

The Vocational school addition is of three stories, being approximately north and adjoining the old building. There will be offices as well as classrooms on the first floor while classrooms will be on the second and third floors. In this addition is an auditorium having a seating capacity of about 1,200 persons.

College Training School

The college training school consists of a main building for about 25 offices and classrooms, as well as two wings. The Vine street wing will house the auditorium, while the State street wing will be the gymnasium. The building has two floors, with a basement.

The Aquinas high school addition, built on the top of the old building, is of three stories. The first and second floors will house a large gymnasium, while on the third floor will be a chapel having a seating capacity of 600 persons and three classrooms. The combination auditorium-gymnasium on the present building is being reconstructed exclusively for the auditorium purposes.

The Holy Trinity addition also is of two floors, with a full basement. It has four classrooms, two on each floor.

All eight of the schools are of brick construction, although the Roosevelt addition will have a concrete main section so it will conform with the old structure. All are fire-proof.

The five city school projects as well as the college training school are under the supervision of Paul Bennett, resident engineer in charge for the PWA.

Furnish Tennessore

would be doing much to solve

the employment manager employ-

NEGROES DIE IN CHAIN