

Rapids School (District 18 School)  
3516 Rapids Court  
Mount Pleasant  
Racine County  
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI-336

HABS  
WIS  
51-MTPLE,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
RAPIDS SCHOOL (DISTRICT 18 SCHOOL)

HABS  
WIS  
51-MTPLE  
2-

Location: 3516 Rapids Court  
Mount Pleasant, Racine County, Wisconsin

Construction Date: 1903. Addition 1954.

Present Owner: Racine Commercial Airport

Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Rapids School is significant as a good example of a rural two room schoolhouse. It is also architecturally significant as a vernacular building blending Italianate and Prairie styles, and for its construction of cream brick, an historic material indigenous to the area. The Rapids School retains excellent integrity.

The two room schoolhouse is significant in the history of rural education in Wisconsin as a transitional building type from the more common one room schoolhouse to the fully graded school. By the turn of the century, the fully graded school had become the ideal for primary education in the United States, and soon became the norm. In terms of its architecture, the influence of the Italianate style lingered into the early twentieth century in the Racine metropolitan area. At the same time, the Prairie style was a contemporary stylistic influence when the Rapids School was built. Cream brick was manufactured in Racine County for only 75 years, from 1839 until 1914.

A Determination of Eligibility (DOE) prepared in 1989 found Rapids School eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Historian: Elizabeth L. Miller, Consultant for Wisconsin Department of Transportation Bureau of Aeronautics, Division of Transportation Assistance.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of  
Erection: 1903.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and  
Subsequent  
Owners: Classes were held in the Rapids School from 1903 until 1976. The owner was Racine County School District 18 until 1960, when District 18 became a part of the Racine Unified School District. The Racine Unified School District sold the property to Schoolhouse Shops Partnership in 1977, also known as Herrewood Associates. Space was rented to various tenants for specialized retail such as gifts, art and photography, fabrics, educational toys, antiques, and so on. The building has been vacant since February, 1990. The Racine Commercial Airport acquired the property in the summer of 1992.
4. Builders,  
Contractors,  
Suppliers: Unknown.
5. Original  
Plans: Unavailable.
6. Alterations  
and Additions: Exterior alterations to the 1903 section are almost entirely confined to blocking up window openings. On the east side, the basement windows were bricked up when the 1954 addition was built. On the first story, there are wood double hung sash replacement windows with wire glass in a 1/1 configuration in the three northernmost bays. Above, the northernmost second story window opening has been lengthened to provide an emergency exit, which opens onto a steel fire escape (also not original). The emergency exit probably dates from the 1954 addition, as the door matches the exterior doors in the addition. On the west side, the basement windows are boarded up. On the front (south), the two basement

windows are boarded up and blocked by two large planters with retaining walls constructed of railroad ties, on either side of the front steps. The main entrance (south), which originally consisted of double wood doors, now frames a single wood door with sidelights. The front (south) exterior stair and stoop of brown brick was built in 1977 to replace an earlier stair and stoop of concrete. In addition, the east chimney has been reduced almost to roof level. On the rear (north), a one story frame addition (1954) is attached. The only alteration made to the 1903 section to accommodate this addition was cutting an opening in the basement wall to provide access between the two sections. On the interior in each of the two classrooms, the original wood platform for the teacher's desk has been removed. In the basement, there is a plywood partition wall (not original) creating an extra storage room.

B. Historical Context:

1. History of Mount Pleasant:

When Richard Carpenter and Harrison Fay settled 2-1/2 miles northwest of the mouth of the Root River in the winter of 1834-35, they established one of the first settlements in Racine County. It was called the Rapids. In January 1835, William See arrived in the Rapids, and joined Fay in a claim. In February, See built a log dam and a sawmill, the first in Racine County. Two others were built at the Rapids soon after. See's sawmill was located on the east bank of the Root River, above the rapids, about 500 feet from the current Rapids School site.<sup>1</sup>

The Rapids was immediately important as part of the trail from Chicago to Green Bay because the only place in Racine County to cross the Root River was at William See's dam. As a result, the first post office in Racine County was established at the Rapids in January, 1836, and the first election of county

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<sup>1</sup>The History of Racine and Kenosha Counties, Wisconsin, (Chicago: Western Historical Society, 1879), pp. 290-91.

officers was held at the first schoolhouse there on April 4, 1837. However, by 1838, the center of government in the county had moved east to the Village of Racine. The same year, townships were created, and the Rapids was included in the Town of Mount Pleasant.<sup>2</sup>

During the late 1830s and the 1840s, commerce in the Rapids relied on sawmilling. The timber in the immediate area was quickly used up. Vast pinelands lay north and west of Racine County, and the sawmills soon followed. In 1853, Joseph A. Horlick settled in the area. He opened Horlick's Lime and Stone Company. Others followed Horlick's lead, and the community now known as Racine Rapids became the center for quarrying lime and stone in Racine County. Horlick was one of the (two) most successful quarrymen, and soon expanded into ice cutting and flour milling. Joseph retired in 1874, and his sons Alexander and George carried on the businesses. Other family members, William and James, established the Horlick Food Company in Mount Pleasant township in 1875. They would go on to invent malted milk (1887) and gain an international reputation. The Horlicks' holdings in the little community were so great that, by 1885, Racine Rapids was known as Horlicksville. The family flour mill closed by 1912. The ice company was gone by 1923. Horlicks' Lime and Stone Company closed following George's death in 1919.<sup>3</sup>

The Horlick Lime and Stone Company's greatest competition came from Conrad Fox. Fox settled in Mount Pleasant in 1857 and worked at William Beswick's lime kiln and quarry. In

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.; and Mary Carrington, A History of the Town of Mount Pleasant, (Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin: Town of Mount Pleasant, 1976), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Fanny S. Stone, Racine: Belle City of the Lakes, two volumes, (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1916), I:114 and I:165; Milo M. Quaife, Wisconsin: Its History and Its People, four volumes, (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1924), IV:443-47; and Racine City Directory, (Milwaukee: A.G. Wright, 1882, 1910, 1912, 1918, 1923).

1878, Fox opened his own quarry, and was soon competing with the Horlicks both in lime and stone, and in ice cutting. Fox Ice Company moved to Racine in 1920. Fox's Stone and Lime Company closed in 1922.<sup>4</sup>

Racine Rapids/Horlicksville flourished while the quarries operated. The community never incorporated and nearly died when the quarries were abandoned during the Depression. Following World War II, the Town of Mount Pleasant became a bedroom community for Racine. It has grown modestly since that time. The 1990 population of the Town of Mount Pleasant was 20,084, a nearly 4 percent increase since 1980.<sup>5</sup>

2. Rapids School and Elementary Education in Wisconsin:

The first schoolhouse in the Rapids was built by the spring of 1837, when the first election in Racine County was held there. Three school commissioners were elected at that time. Under their direction, Racine County was divided into two school districts. The Rapids was included in District 2. In 1852, the districts were subdivided, and Mount Pleasant and nearby Caledonia became District 18.<sup>6</sup>

Mount Pleasant and Caledonia actively supported their school district from the outset. Leading citizens, including Horlick and Fox in Racine Rapids, served on the Board of Trustees, which administered the district. In 1849, District 18 reported 25 students, averaging six weeks attendance each. In the 1850s, an increasing number of students forced the trustees to pursue funds for a new

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<sup>4</sup>Racine Journal Times, August 8, 1994 (obituary, Conrad Fox, Junior).

<sup>5</sup>Carrington, pp. 6-9; and John D. Rolling, "Appraisal Report of a Property Owned by Schoolhouse Shoppes," April, 1990, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Stone, I:179; and "School Problems in the Racine Area Were Much the Same 113 Years Ago," Racine Journal Times, December 29, 1957, p. 3.

building. Joseph Horlick spearheaded this drive. It may have been at this time that Joseph Horlick conveyed the parcel the current Rapids School is located on to District 18. In 1856, the second Rapids School was erected. It was built of stone from the local quarries by John Francis, one of the best masons in Racine County. District 18 spared no expense on the new one-room school, spending \$330 to build the school and another \$150 on furnishings. This was more than double the amount school districts were then allowed to raise through taxation.<sup>7</sup>

During the nineteenth century, education in Wisconsin evolved from sporadic efforts by local citizens holding class in their homes, to districts generally organized at the county level, subject to state regulations. The Constitution of the State of Wisconsin (1848) declared in effect that education was essential to the well-being and progress of the state. Early legislation allowed local school districts to fund themselves through limited local property taxes. This proved to be inequitable, and in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the state began to provide increasing financial support for public schools. In 1885, an act was passed providing a state tax for school purposes. As the state's financial commitment to public schools increased, the state sought greater control. In 1879, the legislature enacted the state's first compulsory attendance law, requiring all children to attend school for a certain number of days each year.<sup>8</sup>

From the beginning, there was a great disparity between rural and city schools. In

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<sup>7</sup>"School Problems in the Racine Area Were Much the Same 113 Years Ago"; and "School House Built in 1857 to Be Torn Down," Racine Daily Journal, June 22, 1903, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>Barbara L. Wyatt, editor, Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, three volumes, (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986), III:1-2; and Conrad E. Patzer, Public Education in Wisconsin, (Madison, Wisconsin: no publisher, 1924), pp. v-vii.

the rural areas, children were widely scattered, and the tax base was lower than in the cities. The state's first solution to this was to bring the schools to the students. This led to the construction of one room schoolhouses all over the state. However, by the time of the Civil War, educators were advocating "graded" schools. This system, in its ideal form, was organized much along the same lines as first through eighth grade today. Educators argued that one-room schoolhouses were a disservice both to teachers and students. They believed that the demands on one-room schoolhouse teachers to teach all grades were too great, requiring extraordinary knowledge. In addition, the teacher would never have enough time to prepare thoroughly, or to spend enough time with each grade. While one group was being instructed, the others were kept busy with various tasks. In a graded school, a teacher would handle only one or two grades. The teacher would have more time to prepare lessons, and would be able to include all the students in the class in almost every lesson. The children, grouped by age, would get more individual attention.<sup>9</sup>

The graded school movement gained strength throughout the late nineteenth century. The state first tried to bring about graded schools in rural areas through legislation permitting voluntary consolidation. By consolidating, rural districts would be able to pool their students and resources, enabling them to build better facilities and divide the children into at least two grades. This was bringing the students to the school, a reversal of the earlier solution. However, legislation permitting voluntary consolidation was ineffective. In 1901, the legislature passed an act which provided special state aid to schools with more than one room. The state also made available plans for remodeling existing one-room schoolhouses. This marked the virtual end to the rural one-room

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<sup>9</sup>Patzer, pp. 201 and 362.

schoolhouse. All over the state, one-rooms were converted to two-rooms or more.<sup>10</sup>

To qualify for special state aid, District 18 chose to build a new schoolhouse, rather than subdivide the old. As a measure of their continued high level of support, the School Board committed \$5,000 to the construction of a new school, probably on the site of the 1857 structure. The new Rapids School was built of brick, and opened in the fall of 1903.<sup>11</sup>

In 1954, a large addition was built to the rear of the 1903 structure. District 18 became a part of the Racine Unified School District in 1960. Classes were held in Rapids School until 1976. The building was sold in 1977, housing retail shops until February 1990. Rapids School has been vacant since then, awaiting relocation or demolition as part of the runway expansion of the nearby Racine Commercial Airport at John H. Batten Field.<sup>12</sup>

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Information:

#### 1. Architectural Character:

Rapids School is of architectural merit as a good example of a transitional school building type, the two-room schoolhouse; as a good local example of masonry vernacular showing the influence of the Italianate and Prairie styles; and for its use of an historic local indigenous material, cream brick. Rapids School retains excellent integrity.

#### 2. Condition of Fabric: Good.

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<sup>10</sup>Wyatt, III:2-9; and Patzer, pp. 119-20.

<sup>11</sup>"School House Built in 1857 to be Torn Down."

<sup>12</sup>Carrington, pp. 20-21; and Rolling, p. 5.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Summary:

1. Overall Dimensions:

The 1903 section measures 25 feet (east-west) by 50 feet. The rectangular plan consists of 3 bays east-west, and 5 bays north-south. The 1954 section is ell-shaped and measures 40 feet (north-south) by 60 feet along the larger end, and by 43 feet along the shorter end.

2. Foundations:

The 1903 section has a raised basement of cream brick in common bond on top of concrete block. The concrete block is below ground. The 1954 addition has a concrete block foundation.

3. Walls:

The 1903 section is of load-bearing cream brick in common bond, two stories tall on a raised basement. The exterior wall is enriched with two rows of projecting stretchers joining the limestone windows sills to form two stringcourses. There is also a plain wood cornice. The 1954 addition is a one-story frame structure clad with weatherboard.

4. Structural System and Framing:

The 1903 section is of load-bearing brick construction. The floor joists are 2" by 12" set 16" on center, running east-west. The 1954 addition is of frame construction on a concrete block foundation, and has a poured concrete floor.

5. Porches and Stoops:

On the front (south) of the 1903 section there is an exterior brick stairway and stoop with wood railings. This replaced a previous rail-less concrete stair and stoop in 1977. There is a small concrete stoop at each of the northeast and northwest doors on the 1954 addition.

6. Chimneys:

There were originally two identical brick chimneys on the 1903 section, rising on the east and west slopes of the hip roof. The east chimney has been reduced to just above

the roofline, and capped. The west chimney stack is enriched with a stringcourse of two rows of projecting stretchers and a corbelled chimney cap. There is a tall chimney of concrete block on the south end of the 1954 addition.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways

and Doors: The main entrance is centrally placed on the front (south) of the 1903 section. It consists of a flush wood door with sidelights, surmounted by a twelve-light transom. The transom is original; the flush door and sidelights replaced the original double wood doors. The flush door has a 9-light fixed window in the upper half. The main entrance is framed with brick pilasters. The pilasters are enriched with brick corbelling and a limestone cap suggesting a capital. There is a flush wood door with a boarded up transom at the second story on the east side in the northernmost bay, opening onto a steel fire escape. The door is of vertical wood panels, and matches two of the three exterior doors on the 1954 addition, suggesting it also dates from 1954. To install this emergency exit door, the original wood 9/9 double hung sash window was removed and the opening lengthened. On the 1954 addition there is a wood door on each of the east and west ends of the north side. Another wood door opens out on the east side. Two of these doors are of vertical panels; the other is plain.

b. Windows: In the 1903 section, there are three bays of windows on the front (south), and five bays on each of the east and west sides. All the windows in this section were originally identical wood double hung sash in a 9/9 configuration. All but three have been retained. The sills are limestone. In the basement and on the first floor, the lintels are flat brick arches. At the second story, the plain wood cornice forms the lintel. The north side has no windows. Across the north side of the 1954 addition there are four rows of rectangular wood single pane windows. The bottom ones are awnings; the ones above are

fixed. The two top rows continue above the northeast and northwest doors. On the south side of the section of the addition that projects west, there are four wood 1/1 double hung sash.

8. Roof:

a. Shape and Covering:

The 1903 section has a hip roof of wood decking clad with asphalt shingles. The 1954 addition has two flat roofs built up with tar and gravel. The roof level over the classroom is higher than the rest of the addition.

b. Cornice and Eaves:

The 1903 section has a plain wood cornice and wide eaves. The eaves of the 1954 addition are also deep.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

a. Describe Floors:

In the 1903 section, the floor plan is the nearly the same on the first and second floors. The north 34' of each floor is a full-width classroom (25'). The south end consists of a central single width hall, flanked by a staircase (west) and two small rooms (east). The north room opens into the classroom; the south room, probably a cloak room, opens into the hall. On the first floor, the main entrance opens out from the hall. On the second floor, there is a small closet over the north end of the staircase. In the second floor classroom, there is a door opening onto the fire escape at the north end of the east wall. In the basement there is a narrow corridor running east-west giving access to two rest rooms. Through a door in the north wall of this corridor, a second corridor dog-legs around a boiler room and leads to a stair into the rear addition. In the 1954 addition, the north 25' is a full-width classroom (60'). There is a moveable partition in the center of the room which can be used to divide it into two. Southwest of the classroom is a small room (18' x 15')

which probably served as the principal's office. East of the principal's office is an ell-shaped corridor wrapping around the small furnace room (8' x 15'). In the addition, there are doors leading out from the corridor and from each of the east and west ends of the north wall of the classroom.

2. Stairways: The staircase in the southwest corner of the 1903 section is a wood closed rail half turn with landings. The wood treads have been covered with linoleum. There is a straight concrete stair leading from the basement into the 1954 addition.
3. Flooring: There is maple flooring in the 1903 classrooms and in the second floor hall and closets. Originally, there was a raised wooden platform for the teacher's desk at the north end of the classroom. There is sheet vinyl in the first floor hall and closets. In the basement and in the 1954 addition, the floor is poured concrete. Carpeting covers the concrete in the 1954 classroom and principal's office.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finishes: In the 1903 section, the walls are plaster on lath, except in the basement. There, the exterior walls are painted concrete block, and the interior walls are either painted brick or gypsum board (not original). There is a pressed tin wainscot capped with a wood molding below the window sills in the second floor classroom. There are built-in wooden cabinets in the first floor classroom under the window sills on the east and west walls. There is also a built-in bookcase on the south wall. In the second floor classroom, the small room in the southeast corner has built in cabinets and bookcases. There is evidence of blackboards on the north and south walls in both classrooms. There is a pressed tin cornice and ceiling in each classroom. The ceilings are plaster and lath in the rest of the 1903 section. The first floor ceiling height is 11'. On the second floor, the ceiling height 10'. In the 1954 addition, the walls are finished with painted sheetrock, and the ceilings are acoustical tile.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways

and Doors: In the 1903 section, the doorway into each classroom is extra wide. The door for this opening is missing on the first floor, and has been replaced with a modern infill panel inset with a plain flush wood door on the second floor. Several of the doors on the smaller rooms are missing. The remaining ones are five panel wood doors. In the basement, there are two panel wood doors. In the 1954 section, the doors are light wood with three panels in each: glass in the upper two, and a vent in the bottom.

b. Windows: All the windows in the 1903 section are wood double hung sash. In the 1954 addition, there is a mix of wood fixed, awning and double hung sash.

6. Decorative  
Features and  
Trim:

On the first and second floors in the 1903 section, all the door and window surrounds are painted wood with a classical motif. At the base on either side is a plinth, then a fluted pilaster and finally a cornice. The window lighting the staircase has a wood balustrade across it, with turned balusters. Each floor also has a simple 4" wood baseboard. The door surrounds in the basement are plain wood, painted white. In the 1954 addition, the door and surrounds are plain light wood with a natural finish. The windows have no surrounds.

7. Hardware:

The original doors in the 1903 section all have round metal knobs with a decorative rectangular plate, and a modern cylindrical dead bolt above. The window hardware is metal, and plain. The hardware in the 1954 addition is also metal, and plain. In both sections, the exterior doors have metal panic hardware.

8. Mechanical Equipment:

a. Heating  
and Venti-  
lation:

In the 1903 section there is a c.1940 Waterbury forced air furnace converted from coal to fuel oil. In both classrooms there are two vents in the north wall, and one vent rising from the floor in the northeast corner. Above the doorway into each classroom are two small rectangular openings for ventilation into the hall. The first floor classroom also has a paddle ceiling fan. There are no heat vents in the halls. There are three heat vents in the interior wall of the boiler room in the basement. The 1954 addition has two Lennox oil-fired forced air furnaces. There is one heat vent in principal's office, in the hall, and on either end of the classroom.

b. Lighting: There is 200-amp electrical service on circuit breakers in the 1903 section. All the fixtures are hanging fluorescent tubes (probably dating from 1954). The 1954 addition has 100-amp electrical service on circuit breakers, and hanging fluorescent lights.

c. Plumbing: In the 1903 section, there is a 30-gallon electric water heater. There are two rest rooms in the basement with a total of five toilets, a urinal and two sinks. There is one porcelain drinking fountain in the first floor hall. The plumbing in the 1954 addition is connected to the 1903 section and consists only of one drinking fountain in the corridor.

D. Site:

1. General  
Setting and  
Orientation:

The Rapids School faces south on Rapids Court, a dead-end street just northwest of the intersection of Rapids Drive and North Green Bay Road, and is set back 150' from the street. There is an asphalt parking lot and driveway to the south and on both sides of the 1903 section. There is a second paved area north of the 1954 addition that served as a basketball court when the building was used as

a school. On either side of the steps leading up to the main entrance, there is a planter made of railroad ties, dating from 1977. The rest of the 1.3 acre parcel is overgrown grass and mature trees. The Racine Commercial Airport lies north of the parcel, across North Green Bay Road. South and west of the parcel is a commercial area, facing Rapids Road. To the east is an old house on a large lot; North Green Bay Road is beyond.

### PART III. SOURCES OF PROJECT INFORMATION

The Rapids School is located in what is now the runway approach for the Racine Commercial Airport at John Batten Field. Plans call for either the relocation and rehabilitation of the schoolhouse, or failing that, its demolition. This historical documentation was completed by Elizabeth L. Miller, Historic Preservation Consultant, in July, 1993. It is one portion of the historical and architectural recording of the Rapids School prepared for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Division of Transportation Assistance, Bureau of Aeronautics. Photodocumentation, consisting of 10 large format photos, prepared by Paskus Photographers, is also included. The historical and architectural documentation conforms to the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey, U.S. Department of Interior.

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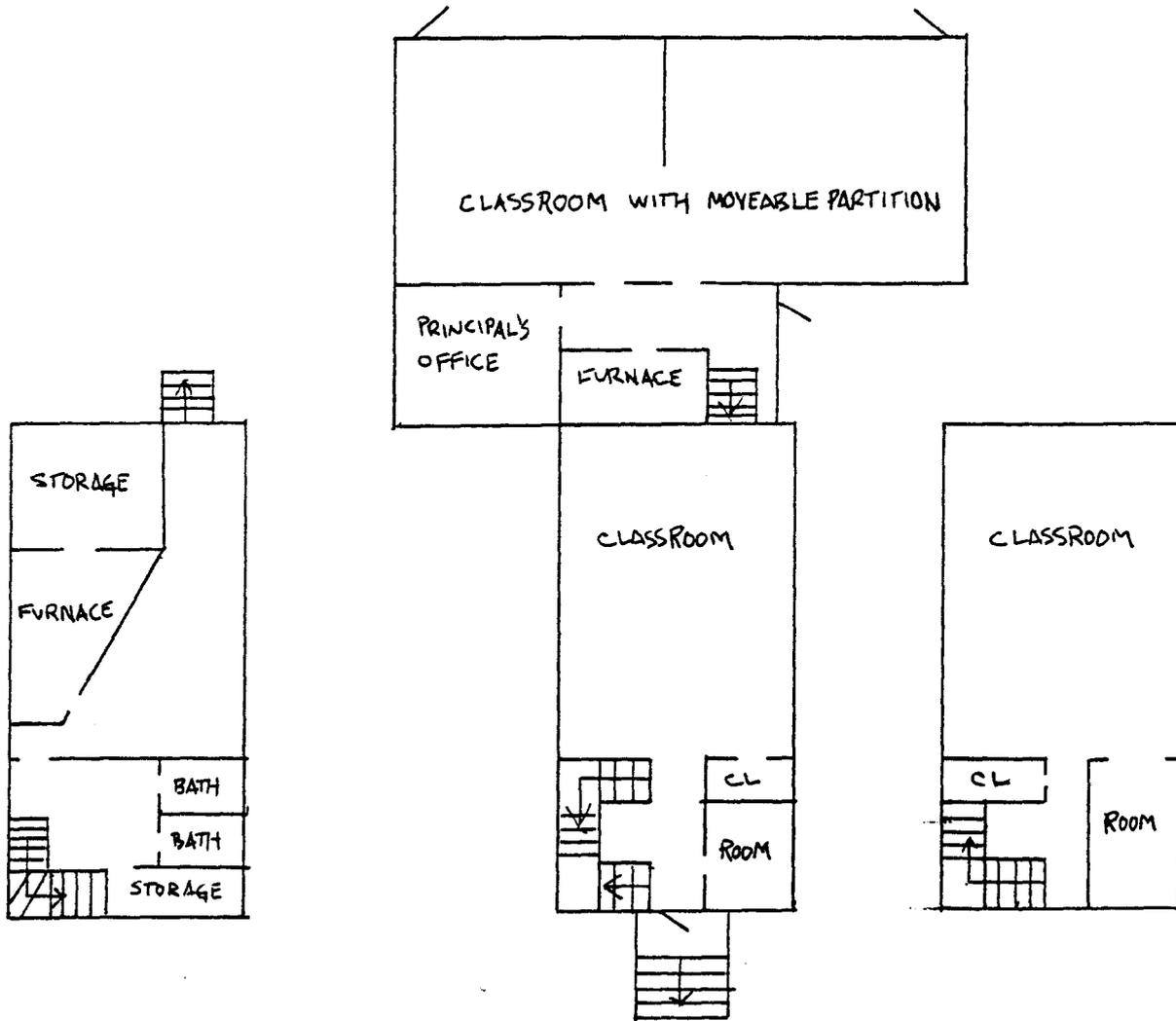
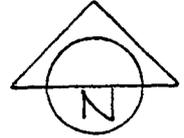
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Prepared by: Elizabeth L. Miller  
Historic Preservation Consultant  
July, 1993

SKETCH FLOOR PLANS



BASEMENT

FIRST FLOOR

SECOND FLOOR

SCALE 1" = 20'