

CITY OF MUSKEGON

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

MEETING

February 3, 2026 @ 4:00 PM
MUSKEGON CITY HALL, ROOM 204
933 TERRACE STREET, MUSKEGON, MI 49440

- CALL TO ORDER:**
- ROLL CALL:**
- APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**
 - A. Approval of the minutes of the January 6, 2026 regular meeting.**
Planning
- OLD BUSINESS:**
 - A. 2025 CLG Annual Report** Planning
- NEW BUSINESS:**
 - A. Case 2026-02: 1604 Peck** Planning
- ANY OTHER BUSINESS:**
 - A. Discussion on HDC Motions** Planning
 - B. Froebel School National Register Nomination Form Review** Planning
- PUBLIC COMMENT:**
- ADJOURNMENT:**

AMERICAN DISABILITY ACT POLICY FOR ACCESS TO OPEN MEETINGS OF THE CITY OF MUSKEGON AND ANY OF ITS COMMITTEES OR SUBCOMMITTEES

To give comment on a live-streamed meeting the city will provide a call-in telephone number to the public to be able to call and give comment. For a public meeting that is not live-streamed, and which a citizen would like to watch and give comment, they must contact the City Clerk's Office with at least a two-business day notice. The participant will then receive a zoom link which will allow them to watch live and give comment. Contact information is below. For more details, please

visit: www.shorelinecity.com

The City of Muskegon will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired and audio tapes of printed materials being considered at the meeting, to individuals with disabilities who want to attend the meeting with twenty-four (24) hours' notice to the City of Muskegon. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact the City of Muskegon by writing or by calling the following:

Ann Marie Meisch, MMC. City Clerk. 933 Terrace St. Muskegon, MI 49440. (231)724-6705.
clerk@shorelinecity.com



Agenda Item Review Form

Muskegon Historic District Commission

Approval of the minutes of the January 6, 2026 regular meeting.	Description of Work:
Applicant:	District:
Current Use:	Date of Construction:
Discussion: The draft minutes will be shared prior to the meeting.	
Standards:	
Deliberation: I move that the HDC (approve/deny) the minutes of the January 6, 2026 regular meeting.	



Agenda Item Review Form

Muskegon Historic District Commission

2025 CLG Annual Report	Description of Work:
Applicant:	District:
Current Use:	Date of Construction:
Discussion: This item was initially discussed at the January 6, 2026 meeting. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) requires that all Certified Local Government (CLG) communities submit an annual report to be in good standing and remain eligible for grant funding and technical assistance activities. SHPO has created a template for CLG communities to follow when completing their annual report. City staff will review the report template with the HDC as well as the previous year's annual report and a summary of comments received from Historic District Commissioners since the last meeting.	
Standards:	
Deliberation:	



Agenda Item Review Form

Muskegon Historic District Commission

Case 2026-02: 1604 Peck	Description of Work: Rear Porch Redesign
Applicant: David Ruck	District: Clinton-Peck
Current Use: Residential	Date of Construction: 1/1/1908
Discussion: The applicant is seeking approval to replace the paneling on the enclosed rear porch with cedar shake, replace the aluminum jalousie windows with custom-built period-appropriate windows, replace the metal posts with new porch columns, and update the trim to match the trim on the rest of the house. The components of the proposed porch design is shown in the attached renderings.	
Standards: See attached <i>Window, Door, and Exterior Woodwork Standards and Guidelines, Residing and Trim Cladding Guidelines, and Porch and Deck Standards and Guidelines.</i>	
Deliberation: I move that the HDC (approve/deny) the request to replace the paneling on the enclosed rear porch with cedar shake, replace the aluminum jalousie windows with custom-built period-appropriate windows, replace the metal posts with new porch columns, and update the trim to match the trim on the rest of the house.	



View of house from Peck Street, looking northeast.



View of rear porch from E. Forest Avenue, looking northwest.



View of rear porch from E. Forest Avenue, looking north.



Rendering of proposed changes to rear porch.



Alternative rendering for rear porch showing potential replacement columns.

CITY OF MUSKEGON
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
WINDOW, DOOR, AND EXTERIOR WOODWORK
STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

(Adopted December 6, 1994 - Effective January 1, 1995)

General

These guidelines pertain only to proposed changes to the structure and do not affect existing construction.

These guidelines are primarily directed toward the front and side elevations of the structure. Greater variances and more leniency may be extended toward proposed changes to the rear elevation of the building by the Commission. All desired or proposed changes should be referred to the Historic District Commission for consideration. Extenuating circumstances, the effect upon the architecture of the particular structure together with the general effect upon the surrounding structures, variables in architectural design, or the effect upon usage and viability of the structure could dictate a variance from these guidelines.

No exterior doors, windows, or exterior woodwork shall be altered, removed, relocated, or added without Historic District Commission approval.

Existing exterior window or door casings, sills, and caps shall not be altered from the original design or appearance. Damaged or deteriorated wood shall be repaired as a first course of action. When repair is not possible, elements shall be replaced with matching wood members. Damaged or deteriorated wood elements may be replaced or covered with formed aluminum or vinyl, subject to Commission approval and provided that the original profile of the woodwork is not altered or changed.

Primary Windows

Existing damaged or deteriorating window frames and sash shall be repaired as a first course of action. When repair is not possible, elements shall be replaced with matching wood members. Metal or vinyl replacement windows may be acceptable provided they match the original windows in design and type and that they consist of or are painted an appropriate color. Bare metal finishes generally will not be acceptable.

The size of glass lites and muntin arrangements shall not be altered without Commission approval. Special glazing, such as stained or leaded art glass, shall not be removed without Commission approval. Unusual decorative windows such as Palladian windows, oriels, bays, Gothic arch or segment tops, etc. shall not be removed or altered.

Storm Windows

Wood storm and screen windows are the most appropriate for use in the historic district. Other types of storm, screen, or combination windows will be approved provided that the new storm window mullions align with the mullions of the primary windows. Blind stop storm and screen windows (where such windows are placed inside the existing window frames rather than affixed to the exterior of the frames) are preferable and may be required in some instances. Bare metal storm and screen windows must be painted to match or complement the trim. Interior storm windows may be acceptable as long as they do not detract from the appearance of the primary windows. Care should be taken, however, when using interior storm windows because condensation tends to form on the inside surface of the primary window and could cause damage to the wood and paint if not properly ventilated.

Primary Doors

Every effort should be made to preserve or repair the original doors where damage has occurred. When repair is not possible, a new wood door may be used. Such new door shall match the original in detail and finish.

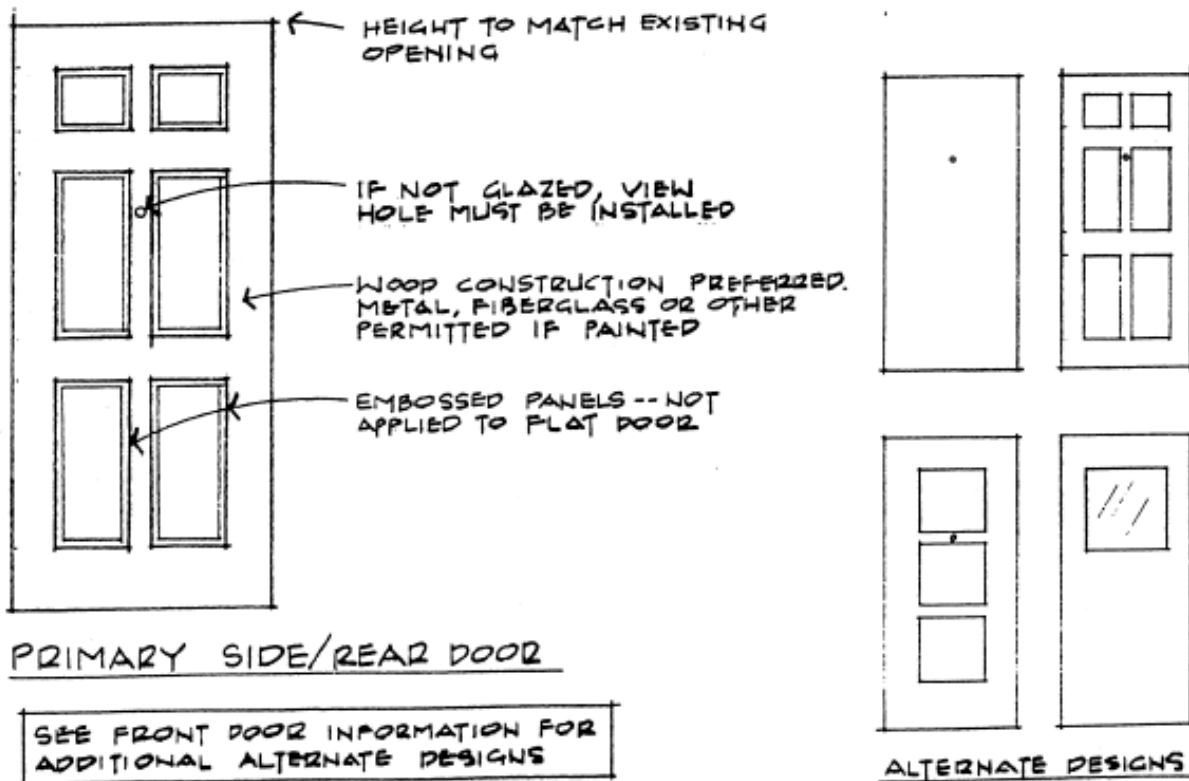
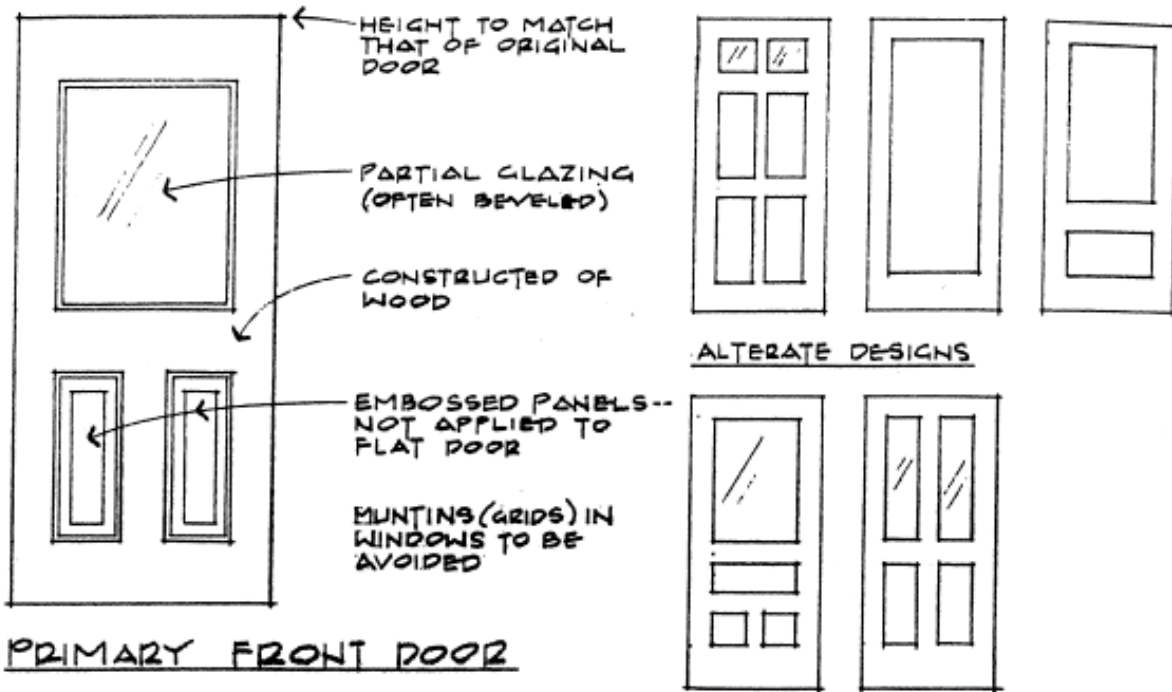
The Commission may approve new wood doors that may slightly differ from the original in cases where replicating the original may not be feasible, as long as such doors generally conform to the ones illustrated on the attached sheet. Under certain circumstances, the Commission may approve doors made of material other than wood provided they conform to the same design requirements.

Storm Doors

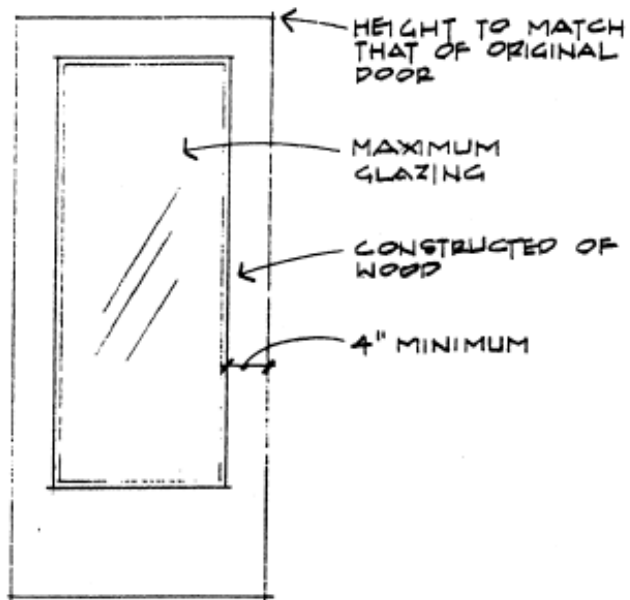
Wooden storm and screen doors are preferred and will generally be the required option especially on the front of the structure. Aluminum or metal storm and screen doors may be used so long as they are not mill finished or anodized aluminum. Baked enamel or other applicable paints or finishes will be acceptable. In general, storm and screen doors shall conform to those illustrated on the attached sheet. The door stiles and rails should be a minimum of 4" wide and one lite doors, where practical, are preferred in order not to detract from the existing primary door. Jalousie doors are not acceptable for use as storm doors in the historic districts. Ornamental iron work safety doors are also generally inappropriate in the historic districts.

Exterior Woodwork

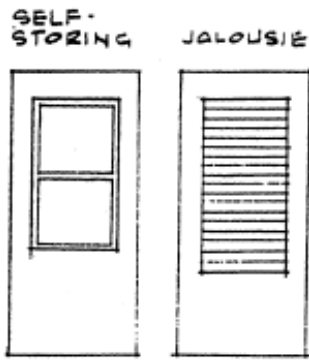
Existing decorative woodwork such as railings, moldings, eave, and gable cornice trim, tracery, columns, observatories, scrolls, bargeboards, lattice, and other carved or sawn wood ornament shall not be removed or altered without Commission approval. Existing deteriorated ornamental woodwork shall not be removed but shall be repaired or replaced with matching materials where possible.



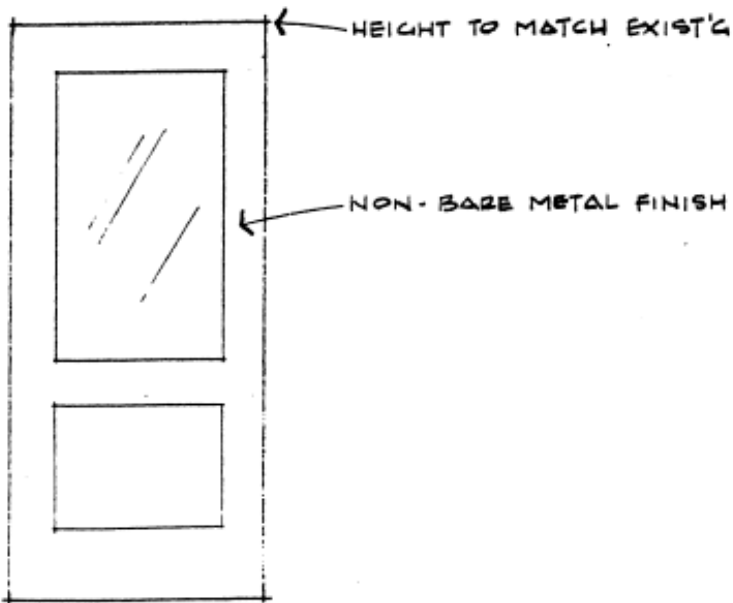
GRAPHICS COURTESY CITY OF KALAMAZOO



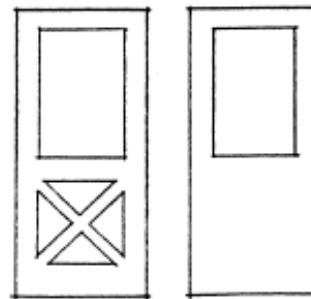
FRONT STORM DOOR



NOT PERMITTED



SIDE/REAR STORM DOOR



GRAPHICS COURTESY CITY OF KALAMAZOO

CITY OF MUSKEGON
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
RESIDING AND TRIM CLADDING GUIDELINES

(Adopted December 6, 1994 - Effective January 1, 1995)

General

The Muskegon Historic District Commission does not endorse the residing of structures within the Historic Districts. It is the policy of this Commission that the original fabric of the building should be repaired or replaced where necessary with the original building material.

In cases where the repair or replacement with like materials is impractical or where it can be demonstrated that the original materials will no longer hold paint or that the original materials are so badly deteriorated that they can no longer be reasonably repaired, the residing standards below shall strictly be adhered to.

Definitions

For the purpose of this statement, the terms “residing materials” and “trim cladding” shall be understood to encompass the use of any residing materials such as aluminum, vinyl, steel, hardboard, wood, masonry, or molded urethane which is designed to replace or cover all, or any part, of an exterior wall, trim work or other building element or a structure within a designated historic district.

Purpose

The Commission shall review all Applications for Certificates of Appropriateness proposing the installation of residing materials or trim cladding as individual cases. Each application shall be decided on its own merit. No person should interpret any Commission approval for residing or trim cladding as being precedent setting. Unrestricted use of residing materials or trim cladding will not be allowed.

In any case where residing materials or trim cladding are proposed for use by a property owner or siding contractor, the property owner shall be required to submit a signed letter stating in detail the intent and scope of the proposed residing or trim cladding installation. Such a letter is to also include the identification of any deterioration or problems occurring relative to the existing siding or exterior building fabric. If known, the cause and extent of this deterioration must be clearly stated.

The following conditions of installation shall be met by all proposals for residing or trim cladding:

1. All existing deterioration shall be made structurally sound and its causes, insofar as possible, shall be corrected prior to the installation of residing materials or trim cladding.

2. Any installation of residing materials shall simulate the appearance of the original building material that it is intended to cover. This simulation shall take into account the size, shape or profile, texture, and linear direction of the original building material.

a. The residing material shall be similar in appearance and dimension to the original siding. The exposure to the weather of the new siding shall range within one inch of the nominal dimension of the original siding. The Historic District Commission shall have the authority to waive this requirement in the event that they believe a different design or dimension siding would be more appropriate to the architectural character of the Historic District.

b. Generally, wood grain textures are not approved by the Commission. However, the appropriateness of a specific siding texture shall be determined on an individual case basis.

3. Any installation of trim cladding shall adhere to the following guidelines for the treatment for architectural trim elements.

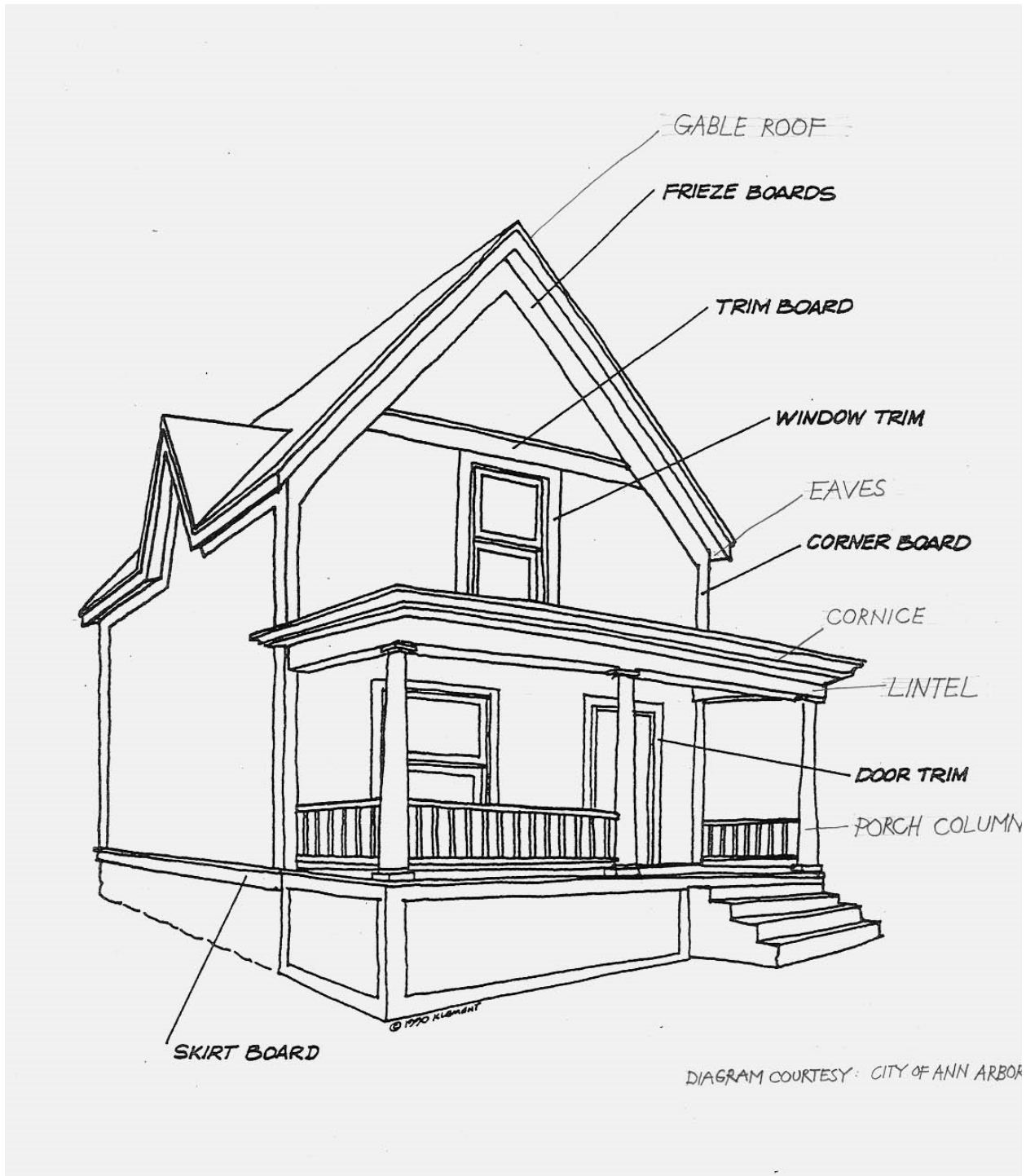
a. Existing cornice or building trim elements shall not be covered or replaced without Commission approval. Commission approval will depend upon how closely the trim cladding or new trim elements duplicate the appearance of the existing building trim elements.

b. The wall siding material shall not extend over the existing trim members such as window and door trim, sills, facias, soffits, frieze members and boards, brackets, aprons, corner boards, trim boards, skirt boards, or any other characteristic moldings or architectural features (see attached illustration).

c. If the above mentioned trim members are to be clad, they shall be covered with custom formed cladding which shall closely approximate the shapes and contours of the existing moldings or trim. Distinctive or unusual trim or architectural elements shall not be clad without prior consideration and Commission approval.

d. No building trim elements or architectural features are to be removed or altered to facilitate the installation of the new siding or trim cladding without approval of the Historic District Commission.

e. In most cases the soffit cladding material shall run parallel and not perpendicular to the plane of the wall.



CITY OF MUSKEGON
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
PORCH AND DECK STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

(Adopted December 6, 1994 - Effective January 1, 1995)

Covered Porches

Newly constructed covered porches shall be decked with tongue and groove decking and painted to complement or contrast the house (unless the construction involves the rebuilding of a missing original porch where documentable evidence shows a different method of decking). Ventilation under the porch deck is necessary to prevent excessive moisture from causing deterioration to the porch members. Therefore, the porch skirt shall be detailed in a similar manner to that shown on the attached decking detail illustration. In some cases, composite decking materials may be permitted for use on covered porches.

Freestanding or Attached Decks (Uncovered Porches)

Placement and design of all decks shall be approved by the Commission. Decks should be located in unobtrusive locations and shall feature one of the edge details featured on the attached decking detail illustration. Decking boards shall consist of 5/4" thick pressure treated decking or square-edged fir decking and appropriately finished. In some cases, composite decking materials may be permitted for use on uncovered porches.

Handrails and Guardrails

Existing original handrails and guardrails shall not be removed without the approval of the Commission. Deteriorated rails shall be repaired as a first course of action. When replacement is necessary, the original details shall be replicated. In cases where height or spacing is required to be modified to meet code requirements, the Commission will carefully review the options to determine the most appropriate method to accomplish this requirement. In cases where handrails or guardrails are new (including those for new decks), the design shall generally conform to the railing and balustrade detail illustrated on the attached sketches.

New guardrails in the historic districts shall conform to the minimum guardrail height in the most recent edition of the building code.

PORCH OR DECK FLOOR HEIGHT FROM FINISHED GROUND GRADE	MINIMUM GUARDRAIL HEIGHT
0" - 30"	0"
≥ 30"	36"

New guardrails on commercial buildings shall conform to the minimum guardrail height for commercial buildings as defined in the most recent edition of the building code.

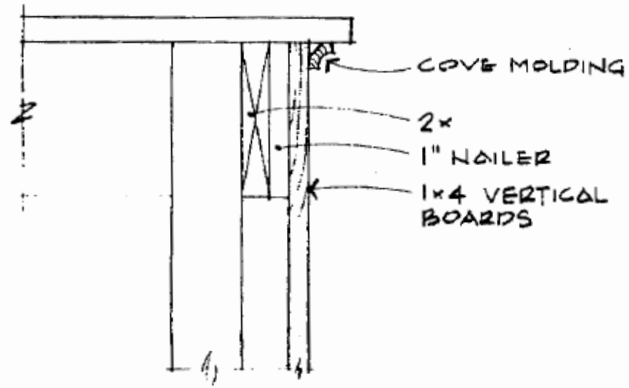
In all cases, if an original guardrail was higher than the minimum height as listed above, then the original height applies.

Porch Enclosure

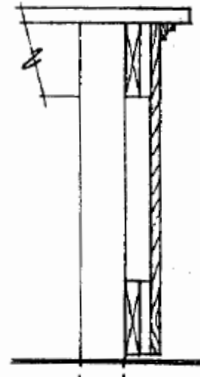
Existing screen or open porches shall not be enclosed with framing or windows without approval by the Commission. Generally, when an open or screened porch is enclosed, the enclosure materials or windows should preserve the appearance of a porch in order to maintain the original design and to avoid the visual effect of a boxed-in appendage. This can often be accomplished with full length windows and exterior screens which would extend from within a few inches off the floor or base of the existing porch opening thus maintaining the effect of a screened in porch or solarium. On most full length porches, building up a half-wall at the base and enclosing it with short windows would not be in keeping with the original design of the house and would detract from the overall appearance. Each request for a porch enclosure will be carefully analyzed by the Commission, taking into consideration the practical and intended usage of the area and the overall visual effect upon the house.

Paint

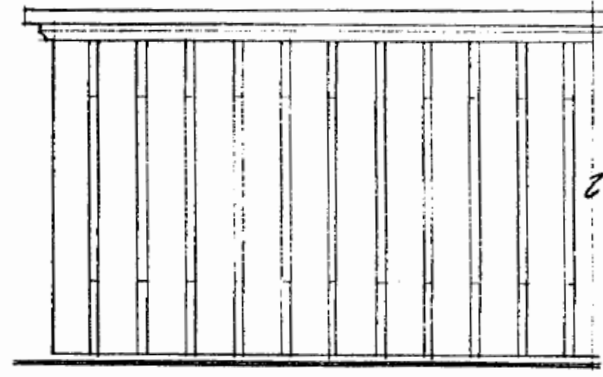
All exposed deck or porch wood shall be painted to complement or contrast the existing structure. Pressure treated wood shall be painted no later than one year after installation.



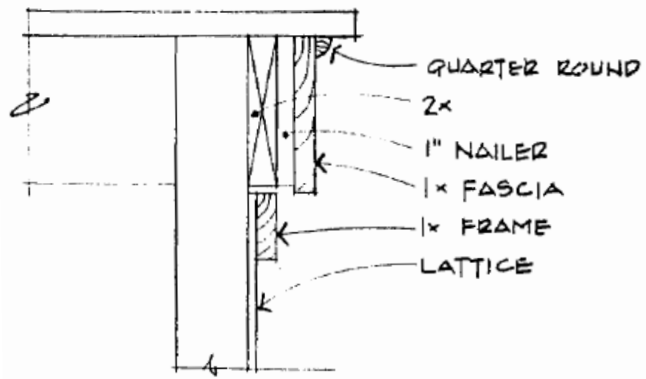
VERTICAL BOARDS



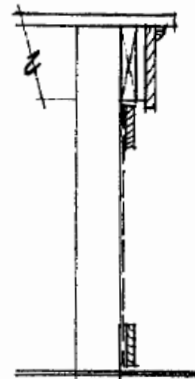
SECTION



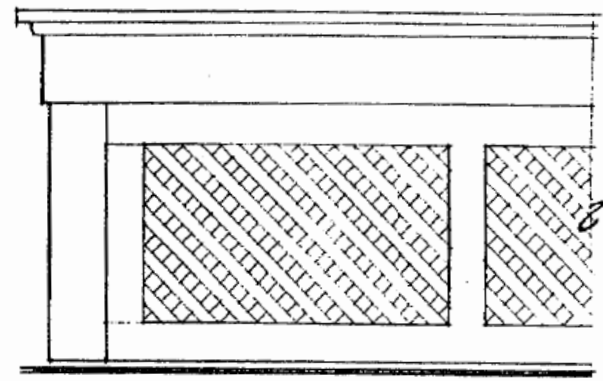
ELEVATION



LATTICE



SECTION

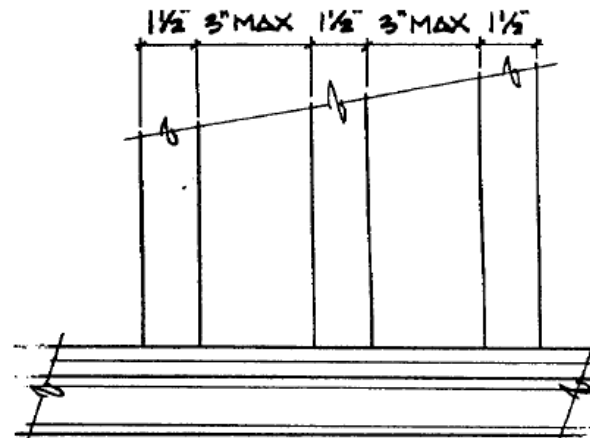
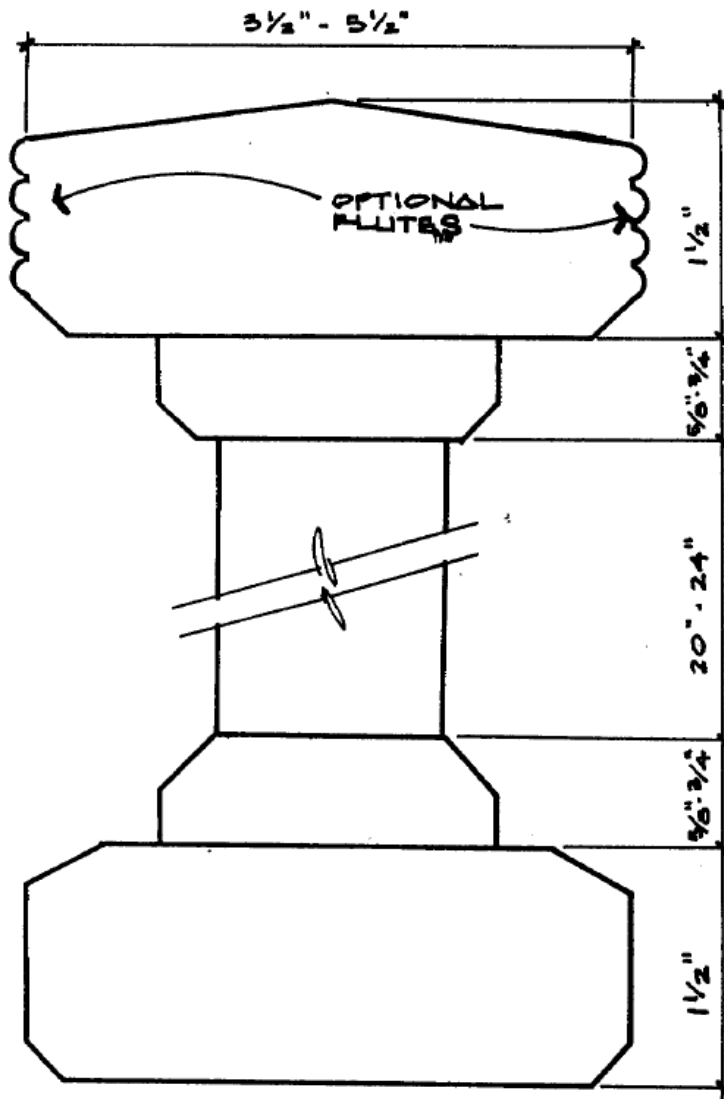


ELEVATION

DECKING DETAILS

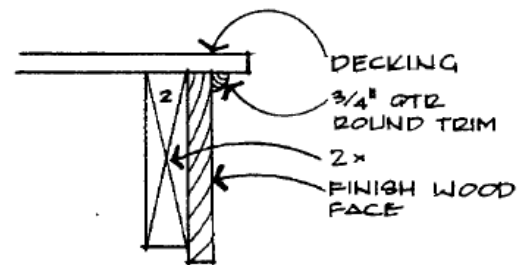
GRAPHICS COURTESY CITY OF KALAMAZOO

DETAIL OF SAMPLE
BALUSTRADE CONSTRUCTION

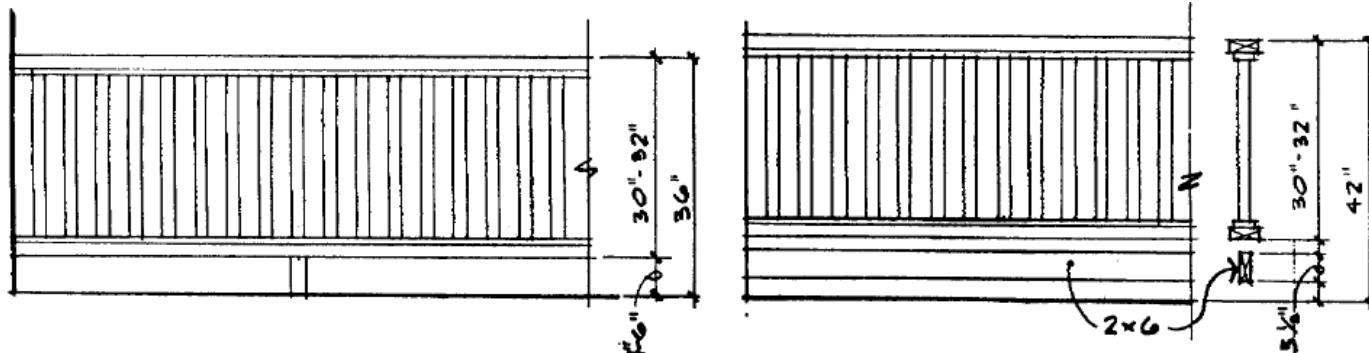


SPACING OF BALUSTERS

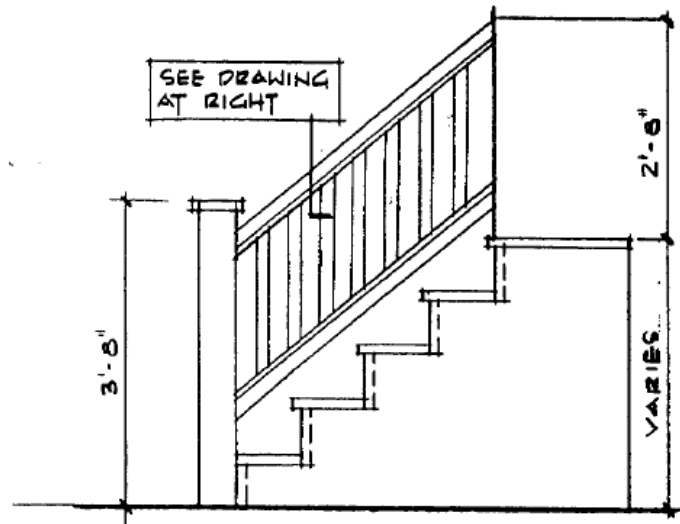
WIDTH x 3 = CENTER-TO-CENTER SPACING



EDGE DETAIL



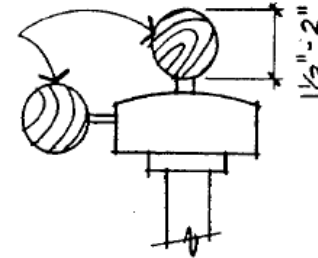
MINIMUM RAIL HEIGHT REQUIREMENTS ARE 24"-30" DEPENDING ON DECK HEIGHT FROM GROUND LEVEL
 IF A GREATER HEIGHT IS RECOMMENDED FOR SAFETY REASONS (WHERE THE RAIL IS NEW OR REBUILT),
 THE ABOVE CONSTRUCTION METHODS MAY BE ACCEPTABLE (PLEASE SEE ATTACHED TEXT FOR DETAILS)



"GRASPABLE" HANDRAIL
 (1 1/2" - 2" CROSS
 SECTIONAL DIMENSION)

BOUNDED CORNERS

HANDRAIL CAP



SAMPLE
RAILING DETAILS (NEW RAILS)

GRAPHICS COURTESY CITY OF KALAMAZOO



Agenda Item Review Form

Muskegon Historic District Commission

Discussion on HDC Motions	Description of Work:
Applicant:	District:
Current Use:	Date of Construction:
Discussion: It was suggested that staff review the process of creating final motions for cases heard at meetings. This topic was last reviewed in 2018, and only one current HDC member was on the board at that time. More information will be shared at the meeting.	
Standards:	
Deliberation:	



Agenda Item Review Form

Muskegon Historic District Commission

Froebel School National Register Nomination Form Review	Description of Work:
Applicant:	District:
Current Use:	Date of Construction:
Discussion: Staff was notified that Pinnacle Construction Group, involved with the pending renovation of Froebel School at 417 Jackson Avenue, is pursuing National Register of Historic Places designation for the school building. The nomination form (attached) will be presented to the State Historic Preservation Review Board on March 6, 2026, and as a Certified Local Government, the HDC is tasked with reviewing the nomination form and providing any comments to the State Historic Preservation Office.	
Standards:	
Deliberation:	

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Froebel School

Other names/site number: Froebel Alternative School

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 417 Jackson Avenue

City or town: Muskegon State: Michigan County: Muskegon

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	

Froebel School
Name of Property

Muskegon County, MI
County and State

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<hr/>	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
<hr/>	
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Froebel School
 Name of Property

Muskegon County, MI
 County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

Public – Local

Public – State

Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

District

Site

Structure

Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Froebel School
Name of Property

Muskegon County, MI
County and State

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Terra Cotta, Ceramic Tile

Froebel School
Name of Property

Muskegon County, MI
County and State

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Froebel School is located at 417 Jackson Avenue, Muskegon, Muskegon County, Michigan. The school sits on a 7.20-acre site in the Jackson Hill neighborhood in the northern section of the city. It consists of three extant buildings: the approximately 39,400-square-foot Spanish Revival school building, constructed in 1930; the approximately 960-square-foot boiler house built sometime between 1973 and 1981; and a small wooden shed built sometime between 2017 and 2018. All three buildings sit on a plateau in the northwest corner of the property. A large fallow field occupies the east half of the property, and the entire site falls away steeply toward the south. The school building is two stories with an extensive basement. It originally had three north-south wings connected by an east-west main hallway at the north end, forming a roughly E-shaped footprint. An addition at the south end of the building, constructed in 1971, unified the three wings creating a figure-eight plan with two internal courtyards. It is primarily a brick building with extensive terra cotta and ceramic tile ornamentation, primarily on the north-facing facade. It generally features a flat membrane roof behind a parapet throughout, but some ceramic tile detailing is utilized along the north rooflines. The 1971 addition was utilized as a gymnasium and is also brick and has a flat roof but is otherwise devoid of the extensive architectural detailing that is present on the original building. Despite having sat vacant since 2003 and sustaining some water damage and vandalism, the school building retains many character-defining features and has historic integrity.

Narrative Description

Setting and Environment

The Froebel School is located at 417 Jackson Avenue, Muskegon, Muskegon County, Michigan. It is located in the Jackson Hill neighborhood of Muskegon, approximately one-half mile northeast of the commercial core of the city. The property faces north and is bounded to the west by Wood Street, to the north by Jackson Avenue, to the east by Marshall Street and to the south by Sumner Avenue. It sits in a predominantly residential area, with modest single-family homes situated across Wood and Marshall Streets and Jackson Avenue. A small church directly faces the school to the north across Jackson Avenue, and another church occupies the southeast corner of Jackson and Marshall Street. Smith-Ryerson Park, part of the City of Muskegon Park District, sits across Sumner Avenue to the south.

Froebel School
Name of Property

Muskegon County, MI
County and State

The school property is approximately 7.20 acres, of which the main school building and outbuildings occupy the northwest portion. The school itself sits approximately ninety-five feet off of Jackson Avenue and Wood Street. Directly to the southwest of the school is a parking lot, approximately thirty-two feet east of Wood Street and approximately one hundred and thirty feet in the east-west direction and one hundred and eighty feet in the north-south direction. A boiler house sits approximately twenty feet off of the southeast corner of the school building and a small, wooden shed sits approximately twenty feet off of the east wall of the school building. The west and north yards of the school are predominantly grass with localized concrete walks connecting the building entries to the street-side sidewalks. A twenty-foot perimeter of pavement, beginning at the parking lot, wraps the south and east sides of the school building. The remainder of the site is undeveloped.

The site varies in elevation. The extant buildings along with the parking lot sit on a “plateau” of relatively flat ground clustered in the northwest corner. To the east and south of this plateau the grade falls off quickly approximately four feet to another area of relatively flat ground. The area south of the school is lawn that is still maintained, while the large field to the east has been left to grow wild grasses. The southern sixty to seventy feet of the property falls off sharply such that Sumner Avenue to the south sits between sixteen and twenty feet below the lower “plateau” elevation. The elevation continues to decline to the south toward Ryerson Creek. This slope is heavily wooded, creating a visual barrier between the property and Smith-Ryerson Park to the south. Ryerson Creek, just south of the park, flows in a generally east-west course and connects to Muskegon Lake on the west.

The school property is generally in a state of disrepair and neglect. The grass yards to the west and north of the school building are mowed and in decent condition but the grass on the remainder of the property is unkempt and thoroughly overgrown. The parking lot and the other paving around the buildings is in poor condition with frequent areas of failure and vegetative growth coming through. Plants have been permitted to propagate along the south and east elevations of the school building, the south and east elevations of the boiler house and all around the woodshed building. The wild plants include Black Locust trees, Virginia Creeper vines and numerous other tree and shrub species. The ravine on the south side of the property is heavily wooded. The western courtyard is particularly overgrown, with dense vegetation and trees that have been permitted to grow through broken windows into the school building.

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Figure 1: Froebel School façade and west wing, 1931. View from Northwest corner. Source: Lakeshore Museum Center

Froebel School; 1930, 1971; Frank S. Forster, Architect; Strom Construction Company, Builder; 1 Contributing Building

The Froebel School is a two-story building and is roughly square, approximately two hundred and sixteen feet in the north-south direction and two hundred and three feet in the east-west direction. When constructed, the building featured a traditional school arrangement with a main east-west corridor that served the main entries in the northwest and northeast corners and the auditorium centered on the north wall between the entrances. This main corridor served three wings that stretched south with the eastern and western wings containing classrooms on both sides and the center wing containing the gymnasium, forming an overall E-shaped footprint. This arrangement was repeated on the second floor, with the main corridor feeding the outside classroom wings but with no access to the center wing as the gymnasium was two stories tall. This floor plan was modified in 1971 when a new gymnasium and support spaces were built on the south side of the building, connecting the interior walls of the two outer wings with the south

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wall of the original gymnasium, forming a new “figure-eight” floor plan with two internal courtyards. The original gymnasium remained and was converted into a machine shop for vocational education. The second-floor plan remained as-is and did not connect to any of the new spaces. The photo key for this nomination illustrates present-day floorplans.

The structural system of the school building is a mix of wood, steel and concrete spanning between load bearing walls. Exposed steel beams in the basement span from masonry bearing wall to bearing wall and support a poured-in-place concrete floor system. Localized concrete columns exist but are not the default condition. The second floor is comprised of wood joists spanning from the exterior walls to the load bearing corridor walls. The space between the joists is filled solid with a cementitious compound. The roof structure is complex and diverse; the roof of the original structure is a built-up tar and gravel system on a wood deck. This deck sits on wood joists spanning between wood stud framing that creates a plenum space between the roof and the second-floor ceiling. The second-floor ceiling presents as concrete above and plaster below but is assumed to be constructed similarly to the floor systems and then capped with concrete. The roof of the 1971 addition is metal deck on a steel structure.

Exterior

The exterior of the building is almost exclusively brick. The original 1930 building is faced in a heavily textured dark greyish brown brick laid in an American common bond atop a poured concrete foundation. The brickwork is highly ornamented and detailed with special attention paid to the top of the walls. The detailing varies slightly, with the most attention paid to the two entry pavilions on the north elevation, but throughout the original 1930 building alternating dog-tooth brick courses are complemented with soldier and rowlock courses and alternating ceramic tile in square and diamond shapes beneath the parapet (Photo 0011). The newer brick on the 1971 gymnasium addition is a significantly different, much redder brick laid in a running bond. The brickwork here is also much simpler, with the only detailing being a large band of six rows of soldier coursing, which is continuous around the gymnasium addition above the first story level. In general, the brick is in exceedingly good condition for its age, with the only areas of failure on the original building being some settlement cracking above the northeast entry and some staining where dirty water has shed from window sills. The brick on the gymnasium is also in good condition, although bricks at the unsupported exterior corners of the soldier course band have begun to fall off. It is unclear whether this damage is a result of settlement of the unsupported overhang condition or from water infiltration and freeze-thaw cycles.

The brickwork is complemented on the original building with large amounts of intricate terra cotta detailing (Photos 0001 and 0002). A terra cotta parapet cap runs continuously around the original building, broken only at locations where tower elements rise above the parapet. These towers have their own terra cotta decoration, which forms a cornice of arched coving and supports the clay tile roofing above. The terra cotta parapet caps are in outstanding condition, showing no noticeable evidence of crazing or failure. Terra cotta tile also enumerates the windows. The large arched windows on the north façade feature terra cotta sills and complete terra cotta molding surrounds that cover the jambs and the arched head of the opening. These

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arched windows also feature a rectangular terra cotta ornamental panel set into the brick above them. The remainder of the windows on the original building feature plain terra cotta sills, but the window jambs and heads are brick. In general, these terra cotta sills are in worse condition than the parapet cap, with substantial areas of chipping. The most impressive portion of the terra cotta detailing is in the Spanish and Moorish surrounds around the northeast and northwest building entries, detailed below. This detailing is largely in good condition, with localized areas of damage near the ground.

The north elevation contains the primary entries for the building and features the most complex fenestration and ornamentation. The façade is symmetrical, with a flat roofed, central block containing the auditorium bracketed by a narrow hipped-roof tower, a wider pavilion segment with both upper and lower shed roofs containing a main entry, and the blind, pedimented end of the classroom wing to each side. Outboard, the ends of the classroom wings contain a recessed panel of brick with three tall blind arches within. These are topped by a frieze of double-course dogtooth brick. A terra cotta cartouche is centered above. The roofline consists of a gabled parapet decorated with a cornice of brick consisting of decorative square and diamond tiles divided by soldier course brick. The entries at the northwest and northeast corners are comprised of twin sets of double doors each beneath an arching transom above, set within a decorative rectangular terra cotta surround. In all cases the doors are more modern replacements but the multilight glass transoms remain, although with several broken panes and significant weathering to the frames and muntins. The terra cotta doorway surround is framed by a cable molding with small corner blocks. The two arches are supported by three engaged Corinthian columns, each shaft etched with diamond patterns. The arches are formed by a series of blocks forming a foliated scroll. A terra cotta rosette is centered between the two arches. The door surround is topped by a decorative terra cotta cornice, which spans the entire width of the entry pavilion, above which is a low shed roof clad in Mission tiles, with copper flashing. Above the entry doors on the recessed upper pavilion wall are a run of three smaller arched windows that would have brought light into the corridor above. The pavilion is topped by corbelled brick cornice beneath a Mission tile gabled roof, surrounded by copper flashing (Photo 0011).

Inboard of the entry pavilions, a tower element projects forward slightly. Each tower contains a tall, slightly recessed blind arch panel of brick which contains a single tall window at the first story level. Above the arch panel, decorative brickwork consisting of four courses of dogtooth brick are divided by decorative square and diamond tiles divided by soldier course brick. This complex brickwork is topped by a narrow, small, centered window opening, centered beneath the hipped roof above, which is covered in Mission tile (Photo 0010). The central block contains five tall arched windows evenly spaced, which illuminate the auditorium. A rectangular terra cotta panel tops each arched window. The dogtooth brick and tile pattern on the towers continues across the entire central block. All windows on the north elevation are covered, both interior and exterior, with painted plywood coverings. It is not known whether any of the original windows are extant within.

The east elevation of the school building is highly regular, with rectangular openings marching down the elevation with little to no variation (Photo 0007). The window sills are terra cotta and

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described above. There is no detailing at the window heads, just a continuation of the brick bond patterning supported by a steel lintel. According to historic photos, the original windows on side elevations were large six-over-six double hung windows. The window openings have been boarded over from the exterior, but some replacement windows that do not fill the entire opening are visible from the interior. Consequently, it is assumed that none of the original windows on the east elevation are extant. A double course of dogtooth brick extends the length of this elevation just above the second story windows. Beneath the roofline, a brick cornice is accented by a regular arrangement of square and diamond shaped colored tiles. On the first story, two secondary entrances are present, each located at the approximate one-third and two-third points of the elevation (Photo 0008). Both doors are single replacement doors with an arched transom that has been boarded over. Each brick entry projects slightly from the face of the wall and contains a compound archway that leads to the door within. The entry is topped by a shallow gable covered in Mission tile. Just north of center, the east elevation also includes a wide projecting bay at the location of the kindergarten room that contains seven rectangular window openings. The bay extends up to, but terminates at, the second story windows. It has the same matching terra cotta roof cap, but otherwise lacks adornment.

The south elevation is a combination of the south facing walls of the outer classroom wings connected since 1971 by the Gymnasium addition (Photos 0005 and 0006). The west wing of the original building features three two-story blind arches set into the brickwork as well as a single window opening on the second floor and a secondary entrance door on the first floor. The window is boarded up, and the door has been replaced. The original west wing no longer reads as a discrete element, as a brick canopy was constructed along with the 1971 Gymnasium addition that overlaps the original structure. The east wing of the original building is identical to the west except that there are three windows located on the second floor of the east wing where the blind arches occur on the west wing. There is no brick detailing on the first floor. The gymnasium addition does not have any windows, and only features three hollow metal entry doors, two of which face south and the third facing east.

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Figure 2: Froebel School west wing, 1930. Taken from southwest corner of school building. Source: Lakeshore Museum Center

The west elevation is very similar to the east, with a series of regular rectangular window openings on both floors that brought light into the classrooms on these wings (Photos 0003 and 0005). The windows and their surrounds are identical to those on the east elevation. The majority of these windows have also been boarded over from the interior and exterior, but there are some exposed replacement windows on the west elevation that do not fill the entire rough opening. It is unknown at this time if any of the original windows are extant. As on the east elevation, a double course of dogtooth brick extends the length of this elevation just above the second story windows. Beneath the roofline, the brick cornice is accented by a regular arrangement of square and diamond shaped colored tiles.

The west elevation features a point of entry, centered on the façade and slightly projecting from the wall face, with a stepped brick pier to each side (Photo 0004). The decoration surrounding this entry is a combination of the high-style detailing found on the façade entries and the simpler brick compound archway. Within the archway, the door itself is a double door with an arched transom above, but the door has been replaced with a modern metal door and the transom has been boarded up. The doorway is topped by a brick corbel table. The wall and pier steps back between the first and second stories via shallow Mission tile roofs. At the second story, the outer pier corners are supported by engaged terra cotta columns with a cable molding, with Corinthian style capitals. Slightly recessed, a paired arched window opening is centered above the entry,

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with foliate arch designs supported by piers embossed with a zig zag motif. The entry is surmounted with a very shallow terra cotta pediment rising above the roof cap. The original E shaped footprint created two three-sided interior courtyard, which were fully enclosed with the 1971 addition. Within the east and west wings, both courtyards feature rectangular windows that would have brought light into the classrooms, restrooms, and other support spaces that faced the courtyards. The openings facing the courtyards vary wildly and were clearly designed to maximize light for the interior spaces and not with an eye for architectural symmetry, with more emphasis on bands of windows than the singular punched openings visible on the public facing elevations. The window detailing is similar to that on the east and west facades with terra cotta sills and head and jambs. Of particular note are the window openings on the 1931 gymnasium wing which was converted to the machine shop and separates the two courtyards. The windows openings here are double-height and included some recessed brick detailing that is unique on the building. All of the courtyard windows, similar to the rest of the building, are either boarded over or are replacement windows that do not fit the rough opening. The only exception to this are the machine shop windows, which have been fitted with replacement windows that do fit the rough opening.

The primary roof material is a low-slope rubber membrane that lies over both the wood and metal decked sections, hidden behind the perimeter brick parapet. This membrane is in poor condition, with tears and gaps. Flat roofs are punctuated by circular metal ventilators throughout. No roofing insulation exists. As an essential part of the Spanish Colonial Revival architectural treatment, decorative roofs of Mission tile cover the entry pavilions at the northwest and northeast corners of the building, two hipped roof towers which rise beside these entries, and also cover three secondary building entries; one on the west and two on the east elevation. The tiles are varied in color, with most ranging from a dark to light red but with a smattering of yellow, brown or copper patina-colored tiles mixed in. These tiled roofs are in fair condition, with some localized areas of broken tiles that require replacement. Barely visible from the street, a brick, flat-roofed cupola extends approximately ten feet above the parapet, slightly east of the centerline of the building, just south of the auditorium. It has eight openings, two per side, with tall, narrow operable metal louvers within. Just to the southeast of the cupola and extending up from the east mechanical courtyard is a square-plan brick chimney that extends approximately forty feet above the parapet.

Interior

The building features an extensive basement that extends under the original sections of the building and housed the boiler as well as adjoining service rooms. Branching off of these service rooms are a network of service tunnels, terminating in large metal dampers, that connected to a system of fans that moved cool air from the basement up into the remainder of the building and out the cupola.

Primary public entries at the northwest and northeast corners lead to interior vestibules. The vestibules are separated from interior circulation and stairwell spaces by twin interior bulkheads, topped by arched transoms. Flooring in these circulation spaces is comprised of large

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checkerboard floor tiles (Photos 0012, 0022 and 0023). The first floor includes five primary spaces, each of which occupies a wing of the building: two classroom wings, the auditorium, the machine shop (original gymnasium), and the 1971 gymnasium. The two classroom wings run north-south with single-loaded corridors connecting the classrooms along the exterior walls of the buildings. Taken as a whole, the corridors and adjoining classrooms retain much, if not all, of their historic integrity, with the original plaster walls, wood doors, associated sidelights and transoms, and wood trim all extant. The historic chalk boards, built-in cabinetry, shelving and other classroom elements all remain (First floor typical: Photos 0015 and 0016, Second floor typical: 0029, 0030 and 0031). While the exterior windows have been boarded over or given replacement windows that don't fill the whole opening, the interior inspection reveals historic window trim and sills remain. The plaster ceilings also remain, although they have been covered with acoustic grid ceilings in the corridors and some of the classrooms. The floors have largely been covered with carpet or other flooring materials, and the condition of the floors beneath is not known.

An article in the *Muskegon Chronicle* in 1930 described various special features of the kindergarten room designed for the youngest learners to have a more home-like environment, which still exist today. Situated in the east classroom wing of the building, the kindergarten features a large bay window to draw extra light into the room. The inside of this bay contains a wrap-around wooden bench beneath the windows (Photos 0019 and 0020). Centered within the bay is a shallow tile pool, originally used as a fish pond. Most tiles are unadorned, but a few tiles with images of children in what appear to be traditional Dutch clothing and wooden shoes are present on each side. The south wall contains a reading nook with low wooden benches beside a small, slightly elevated stage (Photo 0017). The west wall of the kindergarten includes built in bookcases and a small tile-and-brick fireplace (Photos 0018 and 0021). The mantel above the fireplace depicts relief images of what appear to be two classical goddesses and two men in medieval attire bracketing a shield. All of these features remain today and are in remarkably good condition.

The auditorium sits along the north wall of the building and is separated by a double-loaded corridor running east-west from a series of restrooms and support spaces to the south. Similar to the classrooms, the auditorium retains most, if not all, of its historic character (Photos 0024 and 0026). Approximately four hundred original seats in the raked auditorium remain and appear to be in good condition. The auditorium space features a coffered plaster ceiling and what appear to be original hanging light fixtures. The five large arched windows facing the exterior to the north have been boarded over, but six smaller arched windows separating the auditorium from the corridor remain which once illuminated the interior. Similarly, three sets of arch-topped double doors remain, which connect to interior corridors. The original stage and steps leading up to doors leading to stage left and stage right all remain (Photo 0025). The stage itself is a proscenium type, with a segmental arched proscenium frame and a short stage projection. The stage is shallow, and was most likely intended for choral, instrumental or spoken word performances and not for drama. The controls for the fly system still remain, but the rigging itself has been removed. A single skylight with an operable cover sits over the stage area. Behind the stage are a number of dressing rooms and other support spaces.

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The machine shop runs north-south, connecting the auditorium hallway and the 1971 gymnasium hallway, and bifurcating the courtyards. The machine shop was originally constructed as the gymnasium and was one double-height space. Either at the same time as or following the construction of the modern gymnasium to the south, a mezzanine was added to the southern portion of the old gymnasium space and the remainder was converted into a machine shop for vocational education (Photo 0027). The mezzanine is masonry with two steel pan stairs leading up to it. Two classroom spaces, accessed from the southern hallway and separated by another hallway connecting the machine shop to the southern hallway, sit underneath the mezzanine while the area on the mezzanine has been subdivided into smaller rooms of unknown purpose. This fit out of the mezzanine space is a later modification and does not appear on contemporaneous architectural plans. Other than the mezzanine spaces, the machine shop is one large room with tall windows flanking it on both the east and west sides. The exterior walls are exposed concrete masonry blocks, befitting its original construction as a gymnasium, with a wainscot of unpainted block below the window sills and painted block above. The original wood flooring of the gymnasium appears to be extant, but the condition cannot currently be ascertained (see below). The ceiling has been treated with a direct-applied acoustic tile and the conditions behind cannot currently be ascertained.

The new gymnasium was added south of the original gymnasium in 1971, connecting the south ends of the western classroom, machine shop and eastern classroom wings. The addition is constructed of concrete masonry units load bearing walls with a steel truss system and steel deck roof (Photo 0014). It primarily consists of the gymnasium, with a single-loaded corridor and smaller support spaces such as locker rooms and a small kitchen. The gymnasium maintains most of its character, including the wood gym floors, bleacher seating, and basketball hoops, although both the gymnasium and supporting spaces were clearly built as utilitarian spaces and are devoid of any architectural detailing.

The second floor includes the space above the western and eastern classroom wings connected by a single loaded corridor, restrooms and support spaces running east-west just south of the two-story auditorium. No second-floor space exists as part of the gymnasium addition and the second floor does not connect to the mezzanine space within the machine shop, resulting in an inverted "U" shaped floor plan. The second floor is connected to the first by monumental stairs off of the entry vestibules in the northwest and northeast corners of the building, along with some simpler access stairs at the south end of each of the classroom wings. The classrooms and corridors on the second floor mirror those below and are in similar condition, although some classrooms on the second floor have had their wood flooring removed.

The general completeness of the interiors of the building are contrasted by the decades of neglect resulting in significant deterioration of most of the finishes and some of the structural elements. While the plaster walls and ceilings seem to be in decent condition in most of the building, there are localized areas caused by failed skylights or uncovered roof access hatches where water has been allowed to enter the building unchecked. In these areas, particularly the support spaces and classrooms surrounding the machine shop, the ceilings have completely collapsed and been left

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moldering on the floor. Water damage has also taken a toll on the floors on the second floor, where the wood floors in some classrooms exhibit extensive buckling. Areas of water infiltration are also evident in the steel deck, which has become exposed and rusted in some limited locations. The interior paint has failed throughout which, along with significant amounts of animal waste and debris, have left the floors impossible to survey throughout most of the building. All of the plumbing fixtures in the restrooms have been broken, either intentionally or due to neglect. Thankfully, despite these largely cosmetic failings the vast majority of the plaster, wood trim, and casework in the building appears to remain undamaged and in good condition.

Boiler House; Between 1973 and 1981; Builder Unknown; Architect Unknown; 1 Non-Contributing Building

The boiler house is a rectangular building, approximately thirty-six feet in the north-south direction and twenty-six feet in the east-west direction (Photo 0009). It sits approximately twenty-five feet off of the southeast corner of the school building. The building has a brick exterior; it is a medium orange-brown brick laid in an American common bond that does not match the brick found on either the historic school building nor the gymnasium addition. It is a flat roofed, utilitarian building with the only architectural detailing being three soldier courses of brick at the top of the walls.

The north wall has no current windows or doors, but have boarded up openings that appear to cover a single man door and a single overhead door. The west elevation features a single hollow metal man door. A large ventilation grille dominates the south elevation. The east elevation appears to be featureless, but the vegetation on the east side is so overgrown that it is impossible to verify.

The interior of this building is currently inaccessible, so the interior floor plan cannot be verified. The building is being listed as Non-Contributing due to its age. While the date cannot be conclusively verified, testimony of Muskegon city employees states its date as "late 70's." In addition, aerial photograph from March of 1973 shows no evidence of construction. Based on these facts, it is assumed that the building was constructed outside the period of significance of 1930 to 1971.

Wooden Shed; 2017 or 2018; No Architect; Builder Unknown; 1 Non-Contributing Building

A single wood-framed shed building exists on the site, approximately twenty-two feet off of the east wall of the school building and forty-eight feet north of the boiler house. It is approximately ten feet by ten feet, clad with vinyl siding with a single, boarded-over door. It has a gambrel roof shape of asphalt shingles.

The building is classified as a noncontributing resource due to its age and the poor quality of construction. It is a simple, pre-fabricated, wood shed in significant disrepair. An exact date of construction is unknown, but satellite imagery indicates it was built in either 2017 or 2018.

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Historic Integrity

Muskegon's Froebel School possesses historic integrity and continues to convey its historic and architectural significance through all seven aspects. The Froebel School retains historic integrity in terms of location and setting. With the exception of the construction of the boiler house building, no major site changes have been made since the end of the period of significance in 1971. The surrounding neighborhood is still largely residential and substantially unchanged. Wild vegetation has been allowed to grow on the property, especially on the east side of the school building between the building and the vacant field, but the large open lawns to the west and north of the building (along with the sidewalks that cross them) are largely unchanged from the 1930s era photographs.

In terms of design, materials, and workmanship the school building retains its overall massing, form, and floor plans. No changes have been made to the school building since the end of the period of significance in 1971. All of the exterior materials remain and are in good condition, including the character-defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. While the fenestration has been modified with the use of non-historic replacement windows, the original window openings remain and illustrate the intended rhythms and patterns of the facades. Special attention should be given to the terra cotta architectural detailing. This detailing is largely in good condition and is a remarkable example of the fine craftsmanship sometimes found on public buildings of this era. The form and function of the interior spaces of the school building are also largely unchanged, with the only major modification being the addition of the mezzanine inside the machine shop (original gymnasium) space. The date of this mezzanine installation is not known, but it is assumed to be after the 1971 addition was completed, meaning that although the mezzanine is not within the period of significance, it does help reflect the evolution of the space from its original purpose as a gymnasium to a vocational education space as the needs of the school changed. The classrooms of the school building all maintain their historic proportions and, in many cases, their historic materials as well. The historic wood flooring in the classrooms has suffered from water infiltration and improper repairs but the terrazzo flooring in the hallways and stairwells remains in good condition. Acoustic ceilings have been added in most of the classrooms and some of the hallways but the plaster ceiling appears to be extant above, although the plaster ceilings vary widely in condition. Most of the plaster walls and wood trim of the original building remain. Special attention should be given to the auditorium, which is almost entirely intact despite years of neglect.

In terms of feeling and association, the Froebel School property is still readily recognizable as the local school that served the neighborhood for more than fifty years, and communicates the important architectural trends and educational programs of the period in which it was constructed. Former students from decades past would clearly recognize the places where they made friends and learned new things, with all of the spaces retaining their spatial relationships and in many cases their detailing.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education

Architecture

Period of Significance

1930-1971

Significant Dates

1930

1971

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Forster, Frank S.

Malcomson & Higginbotham

McCall, Snyder & McLean

Strom Construction Co.

Landman-Andrews

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Froebel School in Muskegon is significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Education at the local level of significance. Completed in 1930, the school was developed to bring the latest progressive educational philosophies to elementary students in the Jackson Hill neighborhood. It contained specialized classrooms, including a “home-like” kindergarten room, an auditorium, gymnasium, science labs, an art room, and a branch of the public library open to both students and the wider community. Froebel School was intended as a model for future grade schools in Muskegon, but it never served that purpose. Completed at the beginning of the Great Depression, which was followed by World War II, it remains as a one-of-a-kind stylistic expression of the extensive building program undertaken by the Muskegon Board of Education that began in 1913, and was completed with the construction of Froebel School in 1930 and Angell School in 1931, extended into the early years of the Great Depression to accommodate a steadily expanding student population.

Froebel School is further significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level of significance. Between 1913 and 1926 six new schools were built in Muskegon, all but one of which exhibit design variations of the Collegiate Gothic or Italian Renaissance Revival styles. Designed by Frank S. Forster of Muskegon, with the noted Detroit, Michigan, firm of Malcomson and Higginbotham as consulting architects, Froebel is the only example of Spanish Colonial Revival educational architecture in Muskegon. The school’s striking multi-colored terra cotta tiling along the parapet walls and Mission-tile clad entry pavilions represent a distinct contrast with the design of the other school buildings constructed in this program. Further, the building interior features a number of modern innovations including its heating and air cleaning systems, a public address system, and specialized classrooms. The 1971 addition added a new gymnasium, locker rooms, improvements to the library, and more, illustrating a continued investment in the facility.

The Period of Significance begins in 1930 with the opening of the school and extends through 1971, when the building achieved its final form with the completion of the addition.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Euro-American settlement began in Muskegon in 1837, when Muskegon Township was organized as a subdivision of Ottawa County; that same year the first sawmill was built on

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Muskegon Lake.¹ By 1854 there were ten sawmills in Muskegon, where lumber was easily shipped to Chicago via lake schooners.

The timber industry in the Muskegon area reached its peak in the mid-1880s when forty-seven sawmills surrounded Muskegon Lake, with another sixteen on nearby (to the north) White Lake and the population of the city reached more than 22,000. Muskegon was “the largest and most important city on the east shore of Lake Michigan,” and became known as the “Lumber Queen of the World” for the extraordinary output of its lumber mills.² The industry reached its peak in 1887 when more than 665 million board feet were shipped to market from the city. By the turn of the twentieth century, most of the Lower Peninsula had been deforested and the industry had moved south and to the Pacific Northwest.

Lumber from Muskegon mills helped to rebuild Chicago after the city was largely destroyed by fire in 1871, and provided lumber to build many other towns and cities in the Midwest as the nation rapidly expanded following the Civil War. Sizable fortunes were realized by the men who owned the timber land and mills. One of the most successful of the Muskegon lumbermen, Charles H. Hackley (1837-1905), amassed a multi-million-dollar fortune from his mills. Unlike a number of those who left the state for greener forests once the timber was gone, a few of the lumber men, including Hackley and his business partner, Thomas Hume, chose to stay.

As in other Michigan lumber towns faced with the loss of the industry, Hackley and Hume, along with other community leaders, recognized the need to replace the jobs that would be lost when the lumber mills closed. In 1884 the Muskegon Board of Trade was organized to revitalize the city by recruiting new businesses.³ That year the group published *Muskegon and its Resources*, the first of a number of such promotional materials extolling the business-friendly advantages offered by Muskegon.

In 1893 the Board of Trade was reorganized as the Chamber of Commerce, which continued the business recruitment mission by instituting the Industrial Bonus Fund.⁴ The bonus fund was used to provide cash payments to industries that agreed to establish new factories or expand existing out-of-town operations in Muskegon. If necessary, bank loans and land subsidies were offered as additional incentives. Several substantial industries were attracted to the city, including the Central Paper Company, the Amazon Knitting Company, the Shaw-Walker Furniture Company, Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company, the Continental Motors Corporation, and the Campbell, Wyatt and Cannon Foundry. These and other companies drawn to the city created a diversified

¹ The beginning of commercial lumbering on the west side of Michigan followed the formation of the industry in the Saginaw Valley to the east in the early 1830s.

² R. L. Polk & Co., “Muskegon,” *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1891-1892*, 1171.

³ “Board of Trade Organized,” *Muskegon Weekly Chronicle*, February 15, 1884.

⁴ “How it Will be Handled,” *Muskegon Weekly Chronicle*, May 11, 1893.

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industrial economy that provided thousands of jobs to Muskegon residents for much of the twentieth century.⁵

The successful efforts to attract industry and business created an economically healthy city that developed and matured over the next several decades. The success of the Chamber's activities can be measured in the number of new companies operating in the city, the growth of those companies, and the number of workers employed. Another measure is the steady growth of population in the city and, correspondently, in the schools. After an initial drop during the series of banking panics of the 1890s and the end of the timber industry, Muskegon's population grew from 20,818 in 1900 to reach a peak population of more than 48,000 in 1950. A good measure of the industrial growth in the city is due to the expansion of the automobile industry in Michigan, generally, and the production of war materiel during World War II. The steady increase in the number of workers resulted in substantial growth of the student population, which presented the Board of Education with the never-ending problem of providing more classrooms.

A Brief History of Muskegon Schools

The history of Muskegon schools reflects the steady growth of the community from the pioneering days of the lumbering era through its transformation into an industrial city following the destruction of the pine forests and the closing of the lumber mills.

The first school in Muskegon was held in a private home through the winter of 1848. In 1849, a small two-room school building was funded by a private subscription of \$300, which served as a combined school, public hall, and church for a number of years. In 1862, a Union School was constructed on Webster Avenue; with a larger Central School replacing it on the site in 1875.⁶ In the late 1860s, the Board of Education began to build "ward" schools to accommodate the student population in the city's expanding neighborhoods. As described in *An Honor and an Ornament: Public School Buildings in Michigan*, the ward school type was developed during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and provided school buildings specifically for younger children that were located within a short and safe walking distance from the children's residential neighborhoods. This document states that "as a neighborhood school, the ward schools' proximity to a family's home was advertised as a desirable community feature."⁷

Muskegon's ward schools were housed in simple one-story, two-room frame buildings, which were typical of the time.⁸ The only exception was the more elaborate Second Ward School (later the Third Ward School due to boundary changes) built in 1872, which was an Italianate style

⁵ Alice Prescott Kyes, "Muskegon's Modern Industrial Growth . . .," *Romance of Muskegon, Michigan 1937 Centennial Year, Muskegon Chronicle*, 154.

⁶ "Muskegon Schools Rank Among Best in Nation," *Muskegon Chronicle*, June 22, 1957.

⁷ Roy Strickland and ICON Architecture, *An Honor and an Ornament: Public School Buildings in Michigan*, Lansing: State Historic Preservation Office, Michigan Historical Center, Michigan Department of History, Arts, and Libraries. September 2003, 10.

⁸ C.H. Yates, "Ward School Among Earliest," *Muskegon Chronicle*, 2 April 1960.

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two-story, four-room brick building on a raised stone foundation.⁹ This building was used as the high school from 1883 to 1893 and as the County Normal School for a period of time beginning in 1915. It was eventually demolished in 1929.

The 1877-1878 *Superintendent's Report to the Board of Education* noted there were 5,260 school age children in the city, and further that the five ward schools, which served the younger children, were overcrowded.¹⁰ Between 1880 and 1890, the city's population more than doubled, from 11,282 to 22,702.¹¹ Muskegon, like many other growing cities in Michigan in this period, began to consider constructing larger elementary schools. This was also the period in which kindergarten began to be integrated into the primary school curriculum. *An Honor and an Ornament: Public School Buildings in Michigan* describes elementary schools as

...evol[ing] from ward schools and usually defined as a school for children up to grades six or eight... In the early twentieth century, kindergartens became a new feature of elementary schools. The kindergarten room was typically on the first floor near an entrance, with a fireplace to create a more home-like atmosphere. In some elementary schools, the kindergarten room walls were semi-rounded to allow more light and fresh air into the room. Elementary schools continued the ward schools' role as the neighborhood school. The community regularly used the building and grounds for political, social, and recreational purposes.¹²

From 1883 to 1900, the Board of Education had five grade schools constructed to replace overcrowded and deteriorating buildings: Nelson, Ransom Street (renamed McLaughlin in 1891), Pillsbury, Froebel, and Bunker schools. The new buildings were brick, two-story structures on a raised basement with large attic spaces, and featured Italianate detailing. Each had eight rooms, and most were later expanded into the attic or basement levels to provide more classroom space.¹³

When the school year began in 1884, Muskegon included kindergarten as part of the curriculum, locating classes in three school buildings: Nelson, Central, and Apple.¹⁴ Initially, five one-story brick cottages to specifically house kindergartens were constructed in 1890 on the lots of Nelson, McLaughlin, Angell, Froebel, and Pillsbury schools. Each building had large bay windows and contained two rooms, separated by folding doors to allow for flexibility.¹⁵ As the next generation of elementary school buildings replaced the late nineteenth century ward schools, kindergarten

⁹ Photography Collection, Lakeshore Museum Center Archives, <https://5091.sydneyplus.com/>

¹⁰ "Superintendent's Report of Muskegon Public Schools 1877-78," *Muskegon Weekly Chronicle*.

¹¹ "Muskegon, Michigan, Historical Population, United States Decennial Census, *Wikipedia*.

¹² Strickland, *An Honor and an Ornament*, 10.

¹³ Photography Collection, Lakeshore Museum Center Archives.

¹⁴ "Some Facts About Our Kindergartens," *Muskegon Chronicle*, July 6, 1885.

¹⁵ "Five Kindergarten Buildings," *Muskegon Chronicle*, July 8, 1890.

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classes were incorporated into the new buildings in rooms specifically designed for that purpose. The individual kindergarten buildings were eventually demolished.

In December 1890, the Central School on Webster Avenue was destroyed by fire.¹⁶ Due to bonding obligations for other school buildings, the Board of Education had difficulty funding the construction of a new high school. In 1891, Charles Hackley proposed that if the city would vote to issue bonds valued at \$75,000 at 5 percent interest for a period of thirty years to construct a new school, he would buy them and donate \$75,000 to the Board of Education to be held in trust; interest from the bonds were to be held in an endowment to support the recently completed Hackley Library, also a gift to the school board.¹⁷ The bond issue passed overwhelmingly: 370-4.¹⁸

Hackley High School was constructed on the Webster Avenue site in 1892 and stands today after serving as the Hackley School (1892-1926), the Central Junior High School (1926-1934), the Muskegon Community College (1934-1967), and administrative offices for the Muskegon school system (1967-2020). As of 2025, the building at 349 West Webster Avenue is vacant and awaiting redevelopment.

By the time of his death in 1905, Charles Hackley's personal gifts to the city were extensive. Since he was particularly interested in education, having served on the Board of Education from 1877 to 1905, the last thirteen years as its president, the Muskegon public school system benefited handsomely from his generosity. His gifts included the Hackley School (1892); the Hackley Manual Training School (1897) and its subsequent additions, the first such school in Michigan; the Hackley gymnasium (1902); the Hackley Athletic Field (1907); and the Hackley Library (1890).

In a 1920 article in the *Elementary School Journal*, then-Superintendent Paul C. Stetson estimated the total value of the Julia E. Hackley Educational Fund to be \$3 million, including previous endowments given by Hackley to the Board of Education.¹⁹ In his 1905 will, Hackley left his wife Julia half of the residuary estate. Half of which she was free to dispose of as she wished, the other half to be given to the Board of Education as the fund noted above.²⁰ This endowment helped to fund the construction or expansion of schools into the twentieth century. At the time of the construction of Froebel School in 1930, the Hackley Fund provided more than 12 percent of the school budget.

¹⁶ "The Central School Building Totally Wiped Out by Fire," *Muskegon Weekly Chronicle*.

¹⁷ "Charles H. Hackley Comes to the Front Again," *Muskegon Weekly Chronicle*.

¹⁸ "Four in the Negative," *Muskegon Weekly Chronicle*, May 7, 1891.

¹⁹ Paul C. Stetson, "Selling a Building Campaign," *Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 7 (1920), 530-536, www.jstor.org/stable/993921

²⁰ "Millions More for Muskegon in Charles H. Hackley's Will," *Muskegon Chronicle*, February 15, 1905.

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The First Froebel School and Fredrich Froebel

The two-room First Ward School built c. 1871 was replaced in 1887 by the first Froebel School, located at Little Chief (later Marquette) and Wood Streets in the Jackson Hill neighborhood, northeast of the commercial center of the growing city, to address problems of overcrowding. The two-story brick building on a raised basement contained eight rooms, and was designed to seat 280 students. By the following September the school census reported 374 students enrolled; and by 1929, the last year of operation, enrollment reached 550.²¹ The Board of Education chose to name the school for Friedrich Froebel, a German educator, because he was an international leader among educators and his kindergarten system for young pupils had been adopted in many schools systems, including Muskegon.²² In 1890 a separate kindergarten building was erected near the school.²³

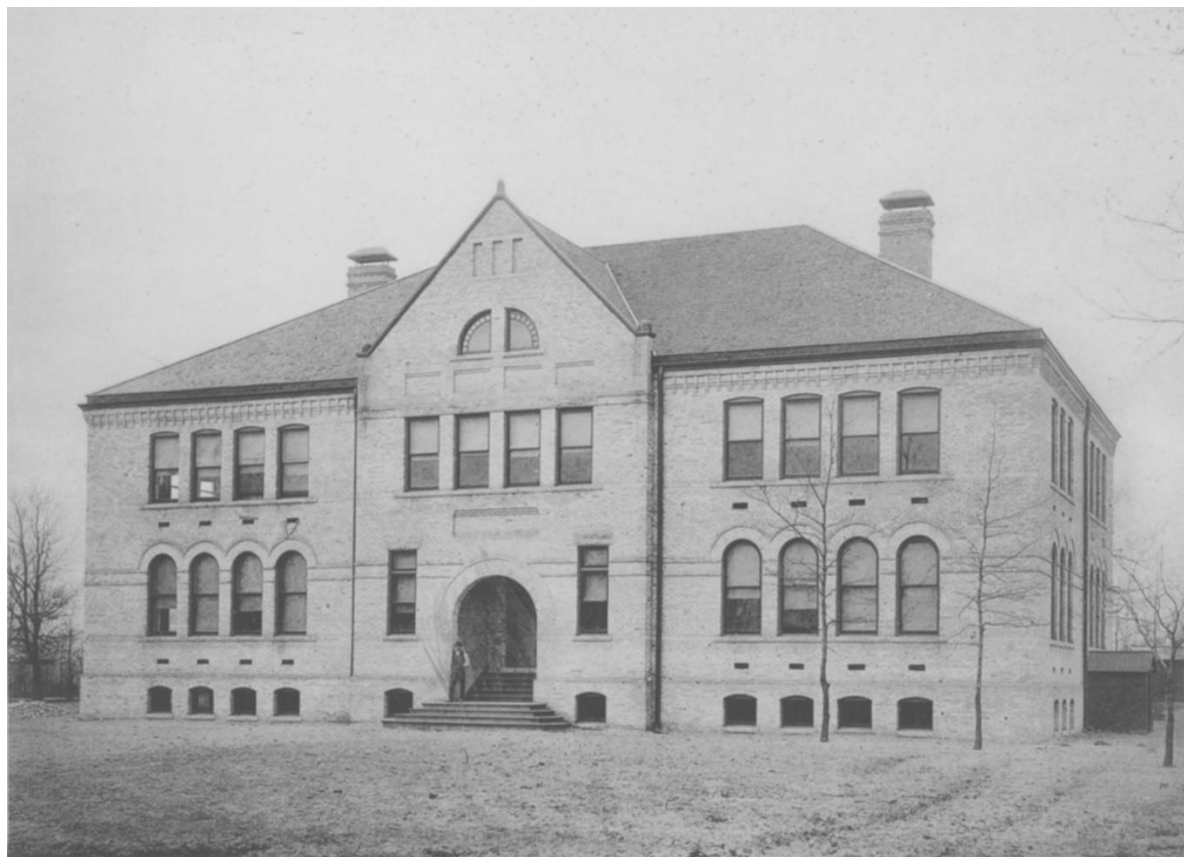


Figure 3: The first Froebel School of 1887. Date unknown. Source: Hackley Public Library Flickr

²¹ "Number of Pupils Enrolled," *Muskegon Weekly Chronicle*, August 13, 1888; "New Plans Increase Size," *Muskegon Chronicle*, September 10, 1929.

²² "The School Board [chooses name for new school]," *Muskegon Chronicle*, March 3, 1888.

²³ "The Kindergarten Buildings," *Muskegon Chronicle*, July 8, 1890.

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Froebel (1782-1852) invented the concept of kindergarten. Froebel believed that play is the highest expression of human development, and that learning through the observation of nature and play helped children to understand the world through direct experience. He designed play materials such as geometric building blocks, and pattern activity blocks known as *Froebel Gifts*. In 1837 he opened a “play and activity” institute in Bad Blankenburg, in what is now the state of Saxony-Anhalt, in central Germany. Later, women trained by Froebel opened kindergartens throughout Europe and eventually in the United States.

The first kindergarten in the United States, founded in Watertown, Wisconsin, by Margarethe Schurz in 1856, was taught in German.²⁴ In 1867 kindergarten was introduced in Michigan when the German American Seminary of Detroit brought a teacher from Germany to conduct a kindergarten.²⁵ Private kindergartens that charged tuition began to develop around the state in the 1870s. As the value of kindergarten for all children became generally recognized, free kindergartens subsidized by donation were established, often meeting in settlement houses or churches. Added to their curriculum starting in 1884, Muskegon claims the title as having the first kindergartens in Michigan.²⁶

The New Froebel School

America, during the early twentieth century, was growing dramatically and in the midst of a progressive movement. “Progressives,” as proponents called themselves, worked to make American society a better and safer place in which to live. This wide-reaching movement roughly spanned from the 1890s until the Great Depression, impacting American politics and business, but also social and educational improvement.²⁷ This was an intense period of school district growth and new construction, and progressive ideals were incorporated into the latest school designs in both rural and urban environments. This was reflected in both the design of the buildings themselves, and the ways in which they were utilized. *An Honor and an Ornament* notes that progressive reforms:

resulted in the improved quality of rural education and facilities, increased use of public school grounds and buildings by the entire community for a wide variety of functions, and mandated expanded curricula offerings that necessitated special

²⁴ C. Mackenzie, “Free Kindergartens,” *Proceedings of The National Conference of Charities and Correction*, (July 1886), Social Welfare History Project, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/n/ncosw/ach8650.1886.001/18?view=image&size=100>

²⁵ “First Establishment of the Kindergarten in Detroit,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 11, 1870.

²⁶ “Romance of Muskegon: Muskegon Schools Outstanding in State Since Momentous Year of 1875,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, April 2, 1937, 13; it is likely Muskegon was the first public school system to add kindergarten, excluding private or paid kindergartens.

²⁷ “Progressive Era to New Era: 1900-1929: Overview.” Library of Congress. No date. <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/progressive-era-to-new-era-1900-1929/overview/>

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rooms and facilities, such as science laboratories, kindergartens, and manual training rooms, not seen before in school buildings.²⁸

Health and safety concerns also factored prominently in new school design. Studies showed students experienced the least eye strain when light entered over the shoulder of seated pupils. New classrooms were designed to be well illuminated by large windows on a single wall, and corner rooms typically had a blind wall to control such lighting. Floorplans were also revised to allow for quick, logical exits after a series of tragic school fires in a number of states. *An Honor and an Ornament* notes that "...timely exits from buildings during a fire or other emergency resulted in straightforward corridors and placement of stairways at the perimeter of buildings by the early twentieth century, rather than in the more common central location of the nineteenth century."²⁹

By the 1920s, these new reforms had wholly remade the design of a modern school building, creating a recognizable typology that differed from its predecessors. This manifested in several basic building forms that could be modified or added on to based on the needs of the curriculum, community, or specific land parcel. One of the most common forms of schools during this period was an "alphabet" plan. *An Honor and an Ornament* states that

the most popular plans were "H", "I", "T" and "C". The plan, usually found in a two or three story building, has a central lateral corridor connected to the front entrance by a short hall. The distinguishing feature of the plan is its symmetrical layout in the shape of a letter of the alphabet. Alphabet plan buildings exhibit many different architectural styles, including both classically inspired and more picturesque styles.³⁰

This was the landscape of school design after the turn of the twentieth century, as Muskegon's student population continued to increase due to the steady growth of the city, as well as the establishment of compulsory attendance requirements and rigid enforcement of truancy laws. The Board of Education struggled with how to deal with overcrowding in existing buildings, while planning for new schools. Classrooms were created in basements or attics by enlarging windows to provide for light and circulation, and rooms were leased temporarily in non-school buildings.

The decision was made to build a new generation of up-to-date schools featuring the latest progressive amenities. Between 1913 and 1926, four new elementary schools were built: Nims in 1913, Vanderlaan in 1915, Moon in 1921, and Nelson in 1926, as well as Bunker Junior High School in 1922. A central campus was created on property owned by the board near the Hackley Manual Training School, gymnasium, stadium, and the existing high school. A new senior high school was built in 1925, and the old high school became a junior high school, with all buildings heated by a central plant. These buildings were all designed in variations of the Collegiate Gothic style. Despite the financial crash of 1929 and the resulting Great Depression two new schools,

²⁸ Strickland, *An Honor and an Ornament*, 4.

²⁹ Strickland, *An Honor and an Ornament*, 5.

³⁰ Strickland, *An Honor and an Ornament*, 18.

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Froebel (1930) and Angell (1932) were constructed, and additions were made to Nims and Bunker Schools. Froebel School was funded by a \$300,000 bond passed in May 1929, and Angell School was funded by a \$400,000 bond passed December 23, 1930.³¹

The Board of Education had discussed the replacement of Froebel School as early as 1924 due to complaints of overcrowding and inadequate facilities in the 1887 building, but for various reasons, including paying down existing debt, the bond to fund the new school was not put to a public vote until May 1929.

Once the bond issue passed, Muskegon architect Frank S. Forster was commissioned as the project architect, with Malcomson & Higginbotham of Detroit as consulting architects.³² The engineering firm of McColl, Snyder & McLean of Detroit, which was selected to draw plans and specifications for the heating, plumbing, and wiring systems, had often partnered with Malcomson & Higginbotham in their work for the Detroit Board of Education. The Strom Construction Company of Muskegon was chosen as the general contractor, a company that had built at least two other Muskegon school buildings earlier in the 1920s.

In July 1929, the Board of Education issued a request for bids on the buildings located on the site of the future Froebel School with the provision they be removed. Ten bids were initially accepted, netting the board \$9,172, fifteen were rejected and the request for bids would be reissued with the expectation of receiving a total of \$10,000.³³ Plans and specifications were completed by September and bids were requested. Because the economy was slow, William Malcomson predicted that costs would be lower than expected since contractors would be eager for the work. The Board of Education decided to increase the size of the building from a capacity of 600 to 750 due to increasing enrollment.³⁴ A November 9, 1929, article in the *Muskegon Chronicle* described many of the planned features of the new Froebel building in detail.

The new Froebel School illustrates and embodies the progressive education trends of early twentieth-century Michigan, and offered, in the words of the *Muskegon Chronicle*, the “Final Word in Schools.”³⁵ The February 8, 1930, issue of the *Muskegon Chronicle* featured the architect’s drawing of the new Froebel, as well as an article describing the modern wonders of the building’s as construction was underway. Following the principles of Frederich Froebel and the trend of the period, the interior was designed to create a homelike atmosphere to minimize the usual institutional feeling of a school building. the *Chronicle* noted:

³¹ “Froebel Bond Issue Carries,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, May 21, 1929; “Bond Issue for School Voted by Tax Payers,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, December 23, 1930, .

³² Malcomson & Higginbotham was long the chief architectural firm for Detroit Public Schools, which was, in the early and mid-twentieth centuries, one of the prominent public school systems in the country. Malcomson & Higginbotham also designed schools for other districts across the state and had developed special expertise in educational design.

³³ “Buildings Sold by School Board,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, August 16, 1929.

³⁴ “Expects Low Bids on Froebel School,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, October 10, 1929.

³⁵ “Froebel Building is to be Final Word in Schools,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, February 8, 1930.

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The outstanding feature of the building, from the view of school officials, is the studied homelike atmosphere through the whole interior... This new trend is most noticeable in the kindergarten. Colors to be used in finishing the large room will be harmonious. Drapes will be placed around windows and furniture, as far as possible, will follow the home-like motif. A tiny stage will stand at one end of the room, and a miniature aquarium will be maintained.³⁶

Other unique features of the building included wiring for radio to each room, electrical outlets in the classrooms, a medical clinic, and a gymnasium and a separate auditorium with a projection booth for films, the only school to feature a separate auditorium and gymnasium in the district besides the central school campus. Instead of a manual training department, the building featured a large classroom where students were offered a variety of activities, including shop work, drawing, painting, weaving or pottery.

The Froebel library was designed to operate as a combined school and community library. It replaced an early branch of the Hackley Library that had been located in a storefront on Jackson Avenue since the mid-1920s. A separate entrance allowed use of the library, as well as the auditorium, by the public after school hours. A library branch with separate public access was also included in the Nims School addition, also designed by Frank S. Forster and completed the same year. Children's branch libraries had previously been established in Froebel, Nims, Vanderlaan, Angel, and Moon schools in 1922, but for students only.³⁷ Including branch libraries open to both adults and children in the neighborhood school resulted in increased circulation and carried through the idea that a school was also a community's space.³⁸

An open-air department, consisting of two rooms and a kitchenette was located on the second floor for the benefit of undernourished and tubercular children. One room was a regular classroom, and the other was open to fresh air year-round and furnished with cots to allow periods of rest.

Mechanical innovations included a new type of heating system developed by McCall, Snyder, and McLean that was standard for Detroit schools. Radiators were placed in tunnels under the corridors that branched into various rooms where ducts brought heat through vents covered with grillwork through window sills and walls. An air washing machine worked in combination with the heating system to clean dust from the air.³⁹

³⁶ "Froebel Building is to be Final Word in Schools," *Muskegon Chronicle*, February 8, 1930.

³⁷ "Branch Libraries Will Be Created," *Muskegon Chronicle*, September 6, 1922.

³⁸ "Book Circulation Increase Steady at Public Library," *Muskegon Chronicle*, January 1, 1931.

³⁹ "Froebel School is to be Final Word in Design," *Muskegon Chronicle*, November 8, 1929.

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The described features illustrate that the new Froebel School was a notable example of the period's progressive ideals. The building's E-shaped footprint, created by classrooms and the auditorium in a C shape with a center gymnasium wing, created a floorplan that allowed straightforward access and egress, and generous, controlled light to enter each classroom. Separate gymnasium and auditorium allowed for maximum efficiency in the use of each space, and articulates a subtype of the alphabet plan known as the "platoon plan."⁴⁰ Modern features, including exceptional planning and design for the youngest learners, brought these features to a working class city neighborhood. Incorporation of a modern branch library with an after-school-hours entrance offered a public benefit to neighbors in the community. In short, constructed in 1930, Froebel's design is the result of more than thirty years of school design reform and improvement.

Completed at a cost of about \$350,000, Froebel School opened to students when classes began in September 1930. The formal dedication of the building, held on September 17, was attended by five thousand people, who toured the building following the program.⁴¹ Music and speeches taking place in the auditorium were broadcast via the school radio system to an overflow crowd in the gymnasium. Dr. John Vanderlaan, president of the Board of Education, formally presented the building to trustee M.E.A. Aamodt, representing the Froebel District.

Landscaping of the grounds was completed in mid-October, with more than forty varieties and species of trees and shrubs planted, and a concrete driveway and sidewalks installed.⁴²

In 1936 the Board of Education gave the Muskegon Parks Department the two-acre site of the old Froebel School, which had been demolished, in exchange for playground space near the Buffton School grounds. The site, about one block north of the present Froebel School, became the M.E.A. Aamodt Park in 1939, in memory of Martin E. A. Aamodt, who had died about that time. Aamodt operated a grocery store on Jackson Street in the Jackson Hill neighborhood for many years, had been an active trustee of the Board of Education since 1925, and had been instrumental in converting the site of the old Froebel School into a park.⁴³

The Spanish Colonial Revival Froebel School of 1930, and the Angell School of 1932 in a restrained Art Deco treatment, represented the last of the schools built under a district-wide modernization program begun in the 1910s. Opportunities for additional new schools and school improvements came up in the late 1930s using Federal Public Work Administration grants matched by local funds, but voters turned these initiatives down in the midst of the Great Depression. In 1952 the Board of Education appointed a citizens advisory committee which surveyed each of the school buildings and studied data and trends provided by the district and the city about how to improve educational facilities in the city. The final report of that committee on

⁴⁰ Strickland, *An Honor and an Ornament*, 18.

⁴¹ "Froebel Building Viewed by 5,000 at Dedication Rites," *Muskegon Chronicle*, September 25, 1930.

⁴² "Landscaping Adds to Attractiveness of Froebel School," *Muskegon Chronicle*, October 17, 1930.

⁴³ "Would Rename Old Froebel Site as Aamodt Park," *Muskegon Chronicle*, May 17, 1939.

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December 15, 1952, argued for the total replacement of five “obsolete” grade school buildings and improvements or additions to many others. New buildings, wings or additions constructed as part of a school building program initiated later that decade embody building forms and architectural styles common to the mid-twentieth century, wholly different from Froebel and its siblings.⁴⁴

Jessie S. Albert

For more than thirty years before, during, and after the new school opened, Froebel was guided by principal Jessie S. Albert. Albert came to Muskegon with her husband, Lynn B. Albert in 1913. They lived on Sumner Street in the Jackson Hill neighborhood and which runs along the southern edge of the Froebel School property. Lynn Albert taught at Central Junior High School and Jessie Albert became principal of the nearby Froebel School, a position she held for thirty-four years.

Albert believed that the school should be a community center and noted that one of the outstanding characteristics of Jackson Hill was the loyalty of its residents for their district, as well as for their school.⁴⁵ Her long career at Froebel echoed that loyalty through her positive influence on the more than three thousand students who attended while she was the principal.

As the largely Scandinavian neighborhood began to change ethnically, tensions arose. As noted in a history of Jackson Hill, changes were handled harmoniously and “a large share of the credit went to the Froebel School and to Mrs. Albert, whose influence as an educator was felt in many phases of the civic life of the Hill.”⁴⁶

Along with the North End Civic Association, Albert led the campaign to build the new Froebel school to replace the overcrowded existing building. When Aamodt Park was in a neglected state following the Depression, Albert suggested that the Association take care of the park and make it a fitting memorial to Aamodt, as well as a memorial to hundreds of others, whose lesser-known but good lives contributed to the development of Jackson Hill.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ “Muskegon Schools Rank Among Best in Nation,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, June 22, 1957; “Citizens Advisory Report on School Needs Here,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, December 15, 1952; Froebel School, twenty-two years old at the time, was not proposed for replacement. Regarding Froebel, the committee recommended exploring creating additional spaces to accommodate constant community use of the building, including a general-purpose room and a kitchen. Minor interior changes may have taken place as a result of the report, but the building was not expanded at this time.

⁴⁵ Euphemia Lundborg Bedgood, “Jackson Hill Area: A Historical Sketch,” 22. <https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~muskegoncounty/genealogy/News/JacksonHill/Article.htm>

⁴⁶ Bedgood, “Jackson Hill Area,” 22.

⁴⁷ Bedgood, “Jackson Hill Area,” 25.

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When Albert retired in 1947, Jackson Hill showed its appreciation for her years of dedication, honoring her with a neighborhood parade, a gift of money, and a portrait painted by local artist Victor Casenelli, which was hung in the school.⁴⁸

Under Albert's leadership, the new Froebel School was a center of neighborhood activity from the time it opened. The Board of Education voted to fund evening school classes in the building on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Americanization classes taught by Albert would be tuition free, but other credit classes would require a small fee. Due to the many requests to rent the Froebel auditorium, the board set a rate schedule; however, the North End Civic Association was charged only the cost of janitor service.

Albert co-organized one of the first Parent-Teacher Associations in Muskegon. Under her guidance the Froebel PTA provided material and moral support not only to the school, but also to the Jackson Hill neighborhood. During the Depression years, the *Muskegon Chronicle* regularly reported PTA-sponsored community parties at Froebel, which featured a wide variety of entertainment: lectures, plays, movies, musical performances, and dancing. The parties, which sometimes drew up to four hundred people, were used to inform the community about fundraising efforts for various projects related to the students. Money raised from the parties supported the welfare fund that helped Froebel families in need.⁴⁹ The PTA frequently sponsored meetings in cooperation with the North End Civic Association relative to local political issues.

Froebel School was an important community meeting center beyond its education purposes. It was the polling place for the third precinct, free Baby Clinics were held there weekly, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) District Basketball League games were played in the gymnasium, the Froebel Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops met there, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Girls League met there, the PTA met there, other city schools without an auditorium presented plays and programs there, the American Red Cross taught knitting classes, and the Little Theater, Muskegon's local amateur theater group, offered its regular season of plays there beginning in 1940.

Froebel continued as a center of neighborhood activity until it closed, with an active PTA, free Baby Clinics, dental clinics, sporting events, neighborhood clean-up projects, the Head Start program, and as the long-time polling place for the third precinct.

In April 1970 the Board of Education began a program to expand or redesign space to update facilities in certain schools. Landman-Andrews, a local architectural firm, was selected to design improvements for Froebel School, which included an addition containing a new gymnasium, with folding bleachers, locker rooms, equipment storage, and an office. This addition was constructed within the open space formed by the E-shape of the building with minimal impact on the original design. Some interior spaces of the original building were remodeled to expand the library area, to provide office space for staff, and to create a teachers' lounge.

⁴⁸ "Community to Pay Tribute to Mrs. Jessie Albert, Retires Froebel School Principal, Lover of Children," *Muskegon Chronicle*, November 28, 1947.

⁴⁹ "No Froebel Child to be Poorly Clad," *Muskegon Chronicle*, October 31, 1930.

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The construction site was the focus of regular picketing in protest of the all-white work force, described in the *Muskegon Chronicle* as a continuation of long-term dissent between the neighborhood and the Board of Education regarding segregation.⁵⁰ Angell and Froebel Schools had the highest percentage of African American students in the city's seventeen schools, which the neighborhood unsuccessfully worked to remedy by increasing integration in the other schools.

Froebel School continued to serve the Jackson Hill neighborhood until 1986, when it was closed by the Board of Education. As part of the city's urban renewal efforts, between 1971 to 1976, 225 houses were demolished in Jackson Hill and few new houses were built, resulting in a greatly reduced student population. The decline in the student population continued into the 1980s. A school that in the mid-1960s had six hundred students and a staff of fifty-five had less than one hundred students and just four teachers in 1986.⁵¹

Following its use as an elementary school, Froebel housed an alternative education program, and also offered teen pregnancy classes until it was closed in 2003. It has remained vacant since that time.

Architectural Significance

Froebel School is significant as the only school building in Muskegon designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. Froebel's striking multi-colored terra cotta tiling along the parapet walls and clay tile covered entrance pavilions represent a distinct contrast with the variations of the Collegiate Gothic style of other school buildings constructed during the same period in the city.

The Spanish Colonial Revival style combines elements from the Spanish and Italian Renaissance, and the Spanish Colonial architecture of the New Spain colonies. The style and several subvariants were popular in the United States in the early twentieth century during a period of heightened interest in eclectic styles. The eclectic movement emphasized relatively pure copies of building traditions primarily from European countries or their western hemisphere colonies. The style's popularity exploded in the wake of the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, California, where each building was designed on a variation of the Spanish Colonial Revival theme. As proclaimed in a discussion of architecture in the 1915 Exposition's official guide book:

When the time came to design buildings for the Exposition Beautiful, it was realized, of course, that the Greek or Roman type followed by past fairs could be easily adapted to the great mesa on which the Exposition was to be built; but it was realized also, fortunately, that a new city of Old Spain not only would be in

⁵⁰ "Threat of Picketing Hangs over Froebel Project," *Muskegon Chronicle*, May 11, 1971, 25.

⁵¹ "Students, staff say their goodbyes to Froebel School," *Muskegon Chronicle*, June 12, 1986, 1 and 2.

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closer harmony with the beauties of Southern California but also would be a distinct step forward in American architecture. Architects who have visited the grounds are enthusiastic over the genuine renaissance of the glories of Spanish art and architecture which they feel will follow the San Diego Exposition. They are confident that one of the greatest aesthetic accomplishments of the Exposition will be the bringing to the world in general, and to North America in particular, a realization of the beauties of the Spanish architecture, which now, recreated, will take on new strength to last for many years to come.⁵²

It appears this effort by Exposition architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue (1869-1924) achieved the guidebook's goal. The 1920s were a decade of intense development in California and Florida, as hotels, resorts, apartment buildings, and housing developments in variations of the Spanish Colonial Revival style peaked in popularity through the 1930s. Americans became better acquainted with these sunny coastal states as fast passenger trains and the first United States highways provided the best access yet between the coasts and the interior. Although lacking the temperate climate and days of eternal sun found on the coasts, architects and visitors carried their dreams of these ideals elsewhere around the country during this period.

Characteristic features of the Spanish Colonial style are symmetrical facades, stucco walls, clay tile roofs, arched windows, ornate archways, brightly colored tiles, wrought iron railings or other metalwork, and one or more towers.⁵³ Froebel School's exterior decoration employs several, but not all, of these typical features of the style. Rows of rounded arches call to mind arcades of columns, particularly the blind arches near the entrance pavilions, and the decorative terra cotta tile archways comprising both main entries. Stepping back from the façade toward the street reveals the roof sections clad in Mission tile – not uniformly red, but instead varying red and earth shades with occasional yellow and green. This treatment carries to secondary entrances on the east and west walls which each have small subroofs covered with similar tile. From the street, the hipped roof pavilion towers on the north elevation with horizontal banding replicate the simple rectangular bell towers of Spanish missions. At either end of the north elevation, the elevated, blind ends of the east and west wings with their gabled parapet echo a highly simplified Spanish inspired parapets. The geometric colored tiles within the parapet pull one's eye upward around the entire envelope of the building. Although the outer east- and west-facing elevations lack the comprehensive adornment in their rhythmic bands of large, rectangular windows, the secondary entries on these sides each feature a simpler interpretation of Spanish Colonial Revival, echoing the façade.

One notable variation is the walls of Froebel School are not stucco, nor a concrete or similar product made to look like stucco, but durable brick. Michigan's varied climate of hot summers, cold winters, and freeze-thaw cycles in between would make this a poor place to use these materials. Instead, by using gray-tan brick instead of a red brick, the building at a distance

⁵² *The Official Guide Book of the Panama California Exposition, San Diego 1915*, 38. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.officialguideboo00pana>

⁵³ Alan Gowans, *Styles and Types of North American Architecture* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 235.

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presents a similar color scheme to the originals much further south. The building also lacks any wrought iron or other metal decoration, which is common to Spanish Colonial Revival style buildings.

The building interior generally forgoes Spanish Colonial Revival details common in more fully developed examples and instead follows standard educational designs of this period. Chief among the key stylistic details of the interior are the vestibules and the auditorium. The latter of which features arched window and door openings. The important, non-stylistic features and modern innovations include the heating and air cleaning systems, specialized classrooms, the first public address and radio system in a Muskegon city school, and a separate gymnasium and auditorium. A dedicated entrance allowed public access to the auditorium and to the school library, which was a branch of the public library, after school hours.

Frank Spencer Forster, architect

Frank Spencer Forster (1880-1933) was born in Lansing, Michigan, graduated from Cornell University, the architecture school at Yale University, and then went west where he honed his craft as an architect. Two of the best-known architects with which he was associated were Benjamin Geer McDougall of San Francisco, who designed schools, banks, municipal buildings, and office buildings, and Mathew O'Brien also of San Francisco, who specialized in theaters. Forster was likely influenced by the Spanish Colonial Revival during his time in California.

After Forster came to Muskegon in 1919 (other sources state 1917), he designed a number of buildings, among them the Strand Building in Muskegon Heights; the Muskegon County Tuberculosis Sanitarium; the Muskegon Heights Junior High School, with William B. Ittner of St. Louis as consulting architect; the Edgewood Elementary School, also in Muskegon Heights; the Muskegon Trust Company building; the armory and the city hall at Big Rapids; and the addition to Nims School, as well as a number of private residences, in a variety of residential styles popular in the 1920s.⁵⁴

He died on June 12, 1933, in Grand Rapids. His obituary the following day in the *Muskegon Chronicle* noted that he resided in Muskegon until his death. Froebel School is acknowledged as one of his local accomplishments in the obituary.⁵⁵

Malcomson and Higginbotham, consulting architects

Consulting architects on the Froebel School project was the Detroit firm of Malcomson and Higginbotham. William George Malcomson (1858-1937) and William E. Higginbotham (1859-1923) entered into an architectural partnership in 1890 that lasted for thirty-three years. The firm specialized in school architecture, and designed more than three-quarters of the public school buildings erected in Detroit prior to 1923 in various architectural styles. The firm also designed

⁵⁴ George N. Moore and James L. Smith, ed. *Historic Michigan, Vol. III*. National Historical Association, Inc., c. 1925, 162.

⁵⁵ "F. S. Forster Dies in Grand Rapids," *Muskegon Chronicle*, June 13, 1933.

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many other major buildings in Detroit, as well as educational structures at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti.

The *Public Schools of Detroit Multiple Property Documentation Form*, approved by the National Park Service in 2011, includes a detailed discussion of the architecture of Detroit Public Schools buildings from 1888-1960. Of the 183 school buildings surveyed for the project, fifty-one were designed by Malcomson and Higginbotham, or successor firm Malcomson, Higginbotham and Palmer after C.W. Palmer joined as a partner in the early 1920s. Among all schools surveyed, five were in either the Spanish Colonial Revival or related Mission Revival styles, perhaps illustrating that while the style was used in school architecture in northern climates, it was not common. Of the five in this stylistic family, only one was designed by Malcomson and Higginbotham, and much earlier than Froebel, in 1907. This suggests that the influence for the Spanish Colonial Revival architecture used at Froebel more likely came from Forster's own experiences, rather than those of the consulting architect.

Strom Construction Company, general contractor

Strom Construction Company was established by Erick H. Strom (1880-1946), a native of Vestergotland, Sweden. Strom came to the United States in 1903 and first settled in Grand Rapids. He worked for other construction companies until 1914 when he, along with Charles T. Johnson established the Strom-Johnson Construction Company in Grand Rapids.⁵⁶ The firm was awarded the contract to build the Michigan School for the Blind administration building in Lansing in 1915 and a north wing to the building in 1916.⁵⁷ In 1917 the company was awarded the contract to build an armory in Muskegon. The construction of the armory and the possibility of future work may have prompted Strom and Johnson to move the company and their families to Muskegon in 1918. In the subsequent years, the firm built an addition to the Occidental Hotel in Muskegon (1919), built Bunker Junior High School, Muskegon (1922), and Lee Street School in Grand Rapids (c. 1923); the Nelson School in Muskegon (1925). The firm also built school buildings in Rockford and Wyoming, both about thirty-five miles southeast of Muskegon.

In 1924, Strom and Johnson parted ways and the company was renamed Strom Construction Company.⁵⁸ In addition to the Froebel School in 1930, Strom also built the Richards Storage Company, Grand Rapids (c. 1924); South Division School; and the North Park School, Grand Rapids. Strom Construction Company also built the Muskegon County Tuberculosis Sanitarium (c. 1924), which was also known as the Gladys E. Forster Hospital. Gladys Forster was the wife of Froebel School's architect Frank S. Forster, who also designed the sanitarium building. Gladys Forster died of tuberculosis in 1923.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ "Hum of the Business World," *Grand Rapids Press*, December 28, 1914.

⁵⁷ "Grand Rapids Firm to Erect New Building at School for the Blind," *State Journal*, July 5, 1915.

⁵⁸ "Hum of the Business World," *Grand Rapids Press*, January 31, 1924. It is not clear why Johnson left the company.

⁵⁹ "Contract Let for Erection of New Hospital," *Monroe Evening News* (Monroe, Mich.), March 15, 1924.

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In 1941, Einar A. Strom (1908-1966), the only son of Erick and Alma (Berg) Strom, joined his father and the firm was renamed Strom and Strom Construction Company. During this partnership, the company constructed an office building for their company (1770 6th Street, non-extant); a great number of additions and renovations for many Muskegon area companies; constructed major new factory buildings; developed a significant portion of the Roosevelt Park neighborhood in southwest Muskegon (with many house models designed by Grand Rapids architect Emil G. Zillmer); remodeled existing buildings for use as housing war workers; and built a major addition to Hackley Hospital. The firm surely benefited from substantial industrial base that had been created in Muskegon, the conversion of many of those factories to production of war material, and the need to house the numerous workers and their families who came to Muskegon.

Erick Strom passed away in September 1946. Over the course of his career he had, according to the *Muskegon Chronicle*, become “one of Michigan’s leading contractors.”⁶⁰ The *Chronicle* credited Strom with the construction of the Occidental Hotel addition, the Muskegon Chronicle building, the Michigan Theater, the Nelson School, the Bunker Junior High School, Mercy Hospital, the YMCA Building, and “many of Greater Muskegon’s factories.”⁶¹

After the passing of his father, Einar Strom continued to operate the firm as Strom and Strom Construction Company, and the company continued to build and expand factories, schools, hospitals, and other buildings across West Michigan.⁶² The younger Strom was elected a director of the Michigan chapter of the Associated General Contractors in 1950.⁶³ Strom remained in Michigan for a couple years afterward but then moved to Florida. The Michigan construction company remained active for some time, but Strom left active management to others and formed a new company in Florida.⁶⁴ There he built residences for a few years, and served as mayor of Howey-in-the-Hills, northwest of Orlando, from 1953 to 1954.⁶⁵ Strom then moved from Florida to Atlanta, Georgia, and then to Columbia, South Carolina.⁶⁶ Einar Strom passed away in July 1966.⁶⁷

Through the work of both Erick and Einar Strom, the Strom Construction Company developed into “the giant of the industry in Western Michigan,” in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ “Erick Strom, Builder, Dies,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, September 24, 1946.

⁶¹ “Erick Strom, Builder, Dies.”

⁶² “Death of Einar Strom Recalls Role of His Firm in Building Community,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, June 21, 1946.”

⁶³ “Contractors Elect Strom Director,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, February 11, 1950.

⁶⁴ “Strom to Form New Building Firm in Florida,” *Muskegon Chronicle*, September 13, 1952.

⁶⁵ “Death of Einar Strom.”

⁶⁶ “Death of Einar Strom.”

⁶⁷ “Death of Einar Strom.”

⁶⁸ “Death of Einar Strom.”

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 7.20

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 43.243253 Longitude: -86.233158

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

City Of Muskegon Revised Plat Of 1903 Blks 25 & 26 Also Blk 27 Except Lots 6 & 7 Also Blk 24

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The verbal boundary description is the legal description of the site as registered with the City of Muskegon. The parcel reflects the historical parcel associated with the school building during the period of significance.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Matt Dixon, Director of Architecture
organization: Pinnacle Construction Group
street & number: 1000 Front Avenue NW
city or town: Grand Rapids state: MI zip code: 49504
e-mail: md@askourclients.com
telephone: 616-206-0336
date: January 2026

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

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Photo Log

The following information is common to all photographs

Property: Froebel School
Street: 417 Jackson Avenue
City: Muskegon
County: Muskegon
State: Michigan
Photographer: Matt Dixon
Date Taken: August 18, 2023

- 01 of 31 North Elevation, looking south
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0001
- 02 of 31 North Elevation entry detail, looking south
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0002
- 03 of 31 West Elevation, looking east
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0003
- 04 of 31 West Entry Detail, looking east
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0004
- 05 of 31 Southwest Perspective, looking northeast
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0005
- 06 of 31 South Elevation, looking north
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0006
- 07 of 31 East Elevation, looking southwest
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0007
- 08 of 31 East Entry Detail, looking northwest
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0008
- 09 of 31 Boiler House, looking southeast
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0009
- 10 of 31 Pavilion Tile Roof Detail, looking northeast
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0010
- 11 of 31 Exterior Wall Tile Detail, looking northwest
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0011

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- 12 of 31 First Floor Entryway, looking west
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0012
- 13 of 31 Typical Corridor, looking south
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0013
- 14 of 31 1971 Gymnasium, looking southwest
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0014
- 15 of 31 Typical First Floor Classroom Exterior Wall
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0015
- 16 of 31 Typical First Floor Classroom Corridor Wall
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0016
- 17 of 31 Kindergarten, looking south
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0017
- 18 of 31 Kindergarten, looking west
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0018
- 19 of 31 Kindergarten, looking east
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0019
- 20 of 31 Kindergarten Pool Detail, looking southeast
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0020
- 21 of 31 Kindergarten Fireplace Detail, looking west
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0021
- 22 of 31 First Floor Entryway, looking west
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0022
- 23 of 31 First Floor Entryway, looking north
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0023
- 24 of 31 Auditorium, looking east
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0024
- 25 of 31 Auditorium Stage, looking east
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0025
- 26 of 31 Auditorium, looking west from stage
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0026

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- 27 of 31 Gymnasium, looking south
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0027 1930
- 28 of 31 Second Floor Stairway, looking east
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0028
- 29 of 31 Typical Second Floor Classroom Demising Wall
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0029
- 30 of 31 Typical Second Floor Classroom Demising Wall
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0030
- 31 of 31 Typical Second Floor Classroom Corridor Wall
MI_Muskegon County_Froebel School_0031

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