

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received FEB 9 1987

date entered MAR 13 1987

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy

and or common The Onalaska High School Annex

2. Location

street & number 700 Wilson Avenue

not for publication

city, town Onalaska

vicinity of

state Wisconsin

code 55

county La Crosse

code 063

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name School District of Onalaska--Board of Education

street & number 612 Main Street

city, town Onalaska

vicinity of

state Wisconsin 54650

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds Office

street & number La Crosse County Courthouse 400 North 4th Street

city, town La Crosse

state Wisconsin

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wisconsin Inventory of  
Historic Places

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1986

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison

state Wisconsin

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Onalaska High School Annex building has much the same appearance presently as when it was known as the La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy. Erected in 1909 on an elevated foundation, the two-story building (three-story including the ground level which is only slightly below the surface in the front) is 110 feet long and 64 feet wide. It is constructed of brick ornamented by white stone trim. Exhibiting the simplified features characteristic of the Collegiate Gothic style of the early twentieth century, the structure is visually dominated by a projecting entrance bay flanked by stubby tower formations which are marked by a blind arcade along the facade, by ornamental panels decorated with an abstract design terminating in the segmentally arched parapets of the tower formations and by capped buttresses.

The segmentally-arched recessed entrance has carved side panels and a double door. Originally inscribed, "The La Crosse County School of Agriculture," the entrance arch and the plaque above the door presently read, "Onalaska Public Schools." Round arched pediments are located above bands of windows arranged in series of five. The original rectangular windows-remain, but the transoms or overlights have been covered. A one-story green house, 40 by 20 feet extends to the south, and is part of the original building.

The Onalaska High School Annex is situated on the crest of a gradually rising hill whose gentle slope is a lawn shaded by large mature oaks which were planted at the time of construction. Sidewalks extend in various angles from the building. The main entrance faces west and features steps with brick sidewalls on each side leading to the entry towers. The north and south entrances are similar to the facade, less richly detailed and with smaller archways, but retaining a similar fenestration pattern and twin entry towers. The north entry has steps leading to the double doors, and the south entry has only a slight elevation with a cement pad.

Two rear additions have altered the original structure. The first is a one-story classroom section added in 1958 to the north side and extending east from the north entrance. The second addition, a gymnasium, erected as a WPA project in the mid-1930's, has changed the rear or east entry. The bricks used in the class-room section match those of the original building. \*

The interior has been altered in some areas including the construction of classrooms and study cubicles in the formerly large work areas and assembly halls. Still, the large open marble staircases spanning all three floors at the main entrance remain the same. Also the leaded glass windows above the three entry doors and the mosaic tile floors at the entrances are in good condition. These floors are of small white octagonal tile bordered by similarly-shaped dark green tile. Each has the year of opening, 1909, in the center of the entry floor.

\*The two additions are considered non-contributing elements since they fall outside of the period of significance established for the property. Neither, however, significantly impacts the integrity of the overall structure.

The nomination includes: ONE Contributing Building.

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The original agricultural school property consisted of 35 acres. Presently this acreage contains new buildings including the high school, parking lots and a football and other recreational athletic fields. All those, of course, are not part of this nomination. But the tree-covered lawn at the main entrance and the areas extending around the original structure to the north and south entrances ought also to be preserved as an appropriate setting.<sup>1</sup> There is also concern among local archeologists that any large-scale disturbance of the area west of the building especially might destroy Indian mounds sites.<sup>2</sup>

1. Joan Rausch (architectural historian, La Crosse) and Joan Dolbier, co-author of a history of Onalaska) contributed the description of the building.
2. See, i.e., Wisconsin Archeologist, Volume II, No. 3, pp. 38 and 100.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
	<input type="checkbox"/> invention			

Specific dates 1909<sup>1</sup> Builder/Architect Parkinson and Dockendorff<sup>2</sup>

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)** Period of significance: 1909–1925.

The building presently designated as the "Onalaska High School Annex" has served the community as a agricultural and domestic economy school (1909–1925), as a high school (1925–1970), and as an annex to the nearby new high school (1970–present). This nomination recognizes the property's historical significance as an important facet of the regional and state-wide educational system, particularly in relationship to agricultural and domestic science studies. Conception and construction of the original school derived in part from recognition of the importance of agriculture to Wisconsin, from the Wisconsin Idea, and from concomitant notions of the College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin–Madison, that agricultural education should be extended directly to Wisconsin farmers. The fifth of eight such schools organized between 1902 and 1914, this building is the only one of its kind left.<sup>3</sup> Among the most conspicuous and best known structures in Onalaska, the school building is also nominated for its architectural significance as a fine local example of Collegiate Gothic design.

### Architectural Significance

The La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy was designed by the architectural firm of Parkinson and Dockendorff which enjoyed the reputation of one of the leading such firms in Wisconsin during the first half of the present century. Located in La Crosse, Wisconsin, this partnership specialized in designing and erecting both public and private buildings—over 800 of them—in the six-state area of Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. The firm also served as a training center for apprentice architects.

Bernard J. Dockendorff, Sr., was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1878. He received his early education in La Crosse and later studied architecture at the Polytechnical Institute in Darmstadt, Hesse, Germany. He worked in Germany for two years before returning to La Crosse in 1902 where he formed a partnership with Albert E. Parkinson. Parkinson was born in Spaulding, England. When he immigrated to the United States, he settled in Sparta, Wisconsin, where he worked as an engineer and contractor. He moved to La Crosse when he and Dockendorff established their firm. The two men died within four days of one another in September, 1952. Following their deaths the firm was dissolved.

The work of the partners was complementary. They were both educated and practical men with reputations for honesty. They employed workmen of exceptional ability and used the best materials available. Their structures were usually built of brick with concrete detail and trim and featured especially impressive and ornate entrances. The La Crosse County School of Agriculture is typical of their style of work. As an example of Collegiate Gothic design, the school is without comparison in the community and retains a high degree of design integrity, marking it as a fine example of the early 20th century Collegiate Gothic style.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Dolbier, John and Joan, From Sawmills to Sunfish, A History of Onalaska, Wisconsin, 1985, p. 191 (Copyright and printing by the authors)  
La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy, Annual Catalogs.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name La Crosse WI

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

### UTM References

A 

1	5	6	4	2	3	5	0	4	8	5	9	4	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

see attached site map.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

1. Joan Dolbier, Chairperson, La Crosse County Historic Sites Com.  
name/title 2. George R. Gilkey, Professor Emeritus, UW-La Crosse

organization 1. 9526 US Highway 16 date November 19, 1986

street & number 2. 2140 Wedgewood Drive telephone (608) 783 2068

1. Onalaska Wisconsin

city or town 2. La Crosse state Wisconsin

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Jeff Dean*

title

date JAN. 29, 1987

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 3-3-87

*J. Albrecht*  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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Among other buildings designed and erected by this partnership in the La Crosse area are the St. Francis Medical Center, St. Wenscelaus Church, the First National Bank, the YMCA (now an annex of West Wisconsin Technical Institute), Wittich Hall for Physical Education (UW-La Crosse), Aquinas and Logan High Schools, and several businesses. Two of their buildings--Wittich Hall and the W. A. Roosevelt building are on the National Register. The firm also erected the first Catholic chapel on a Big Ten campus at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.<sup>4</sup>

Significance: Agricultural Education

The Morrill Act of 1862 provided for the transfer of 240,000 acres of federal land in Wisconsin to the state. Proceeds from the sale of this land was to be used to establish agricultural and mechanical colleges. Following considerable debate, the state legislature awarded the lands in 1866 to the University of Wisconsin after rejecting the argument that Ripon College was more moral and therefore more deserving. Not until twenty-three years later was a College of Agriculture established at Madison. In the meantime, however, by 1871 there was a department of agriculture within the College of Arts. During the 1880's, this department had some internal problems and found little support among Wisconsin's farmers. But it survived to become the forerunner of one of the finest colleges of its kind in the world.<sup>5</sup>

As the Wisconsin Idea, variously stated but most commonly noted as "the boundaries of the campus are the boundaries of the state," took form, the role of the department and later the college came to be that of close association with working farmers. The organization of farmers' institutes beginning in 1885 was an enormously popular move. This institutional arrangement not only provided for gatherings with farmers throughout the state but also permitted adult farmers to enroll as university students while remaining in their home communities. The first institute drew 50,000 participants. After the establishment of the county agricultural schools, institutes were held cooperatively by the university and the county schools. They were discontinued in the 1930's. Two other efforts pioneered by agricultural leaders at the university were the Wisconsin Dairymen's Association and the Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station, the first of its kind in the United States. Above all, the College of Agriculture and its predecessor became preeminent as one of the world's great research institutions.<sup>6</sup> The county schools were able to benefit from this research by taking the results directly to the farmers in their areas.

The county agricultural schools such as the one at Onalaska were authorized by the legislature in 1901. The first one to be organized was in Dunn County in 1902, making it the first in the nation. The state offered supportive start-up funds and after 1902 provided for state aids up to two-thirds of the operating expenses.<sup>7</sup> The schools had no

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administrative or fiscal relationships with the Madison college. However they worked with the Farmers' Institutes, sometimes drew faculty from Madison graduates, and as noted benefitted from the research done there. County schools also imitated as nearly as possible various courses of study which had been developed at the university. Wisconsin was the first state in the union to authorize and organize these schools, to be followed by Minnesota and other agricultural states, altogether twenty-three by 1912.<sup>8</sup> Eventually all eight of those established in Wisconsin lost their reason for being as college and university-trained county agents, rural high school vocational agriculture courses, and the University of Wisconsin--Madison Extension Services took over the roles they had played.

However, in the meantime, for fifteen years, the agricultural and domestic science school at Onalaska played a vital role in its home community and surrounding areas. The decision to locate the school at Onalaska rather than neighboring Bangor or West Salem was a simple matter of votes. Onalaska had more supporters on the County Board at the meeting at which the decision was made. The selection occasioned an exuberant parade through the town.<sup>9</sup>

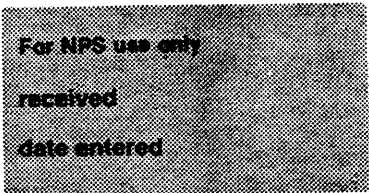
Annual catalogs of the school describe the institution as essentially a farm school. Its aim was to promote better farming and better living on the farm. It met a positive need in the educational opportunities for young men and women interested in agriculture but were unable to attend a college far from home. An effort was made in all this instruction to enable students to see the application of their studies so that they could make immediate use of their training upon returning to the farm or related industry.

The school also reached out to many local farmers to assist them in working out farm problems. Numerous inquiries went to the school from farmers asking about balancing dairy rations, spraying fruit trees, testing seed corn, constructing silos, using lime rock for soil build-up, and installing ventilating systems in barns. Instructors and students often went directly to farms to assist in such projects as planning farm buildings, silo construction, soil testing, testing butter fat content of milk, and animal judging. The La Crosse County Tuberculosis and Dairy Testing Association sponsored by the school greatly improved the dairy livestock herds of the county.

As the school matured, it expanded its offerings to include special instruction in English, Music, and Physical Education and organized extra-curricular activities to help round out its students' education. Increasing numbers of girls attended to take classes in cooking, sewing, laundrying, and dressmaking. Most of the graduates returned to the farm, taking with them the knowledge and skills to make farming more profitable and rural life more satisfactory. In addition to the formal schooling and farm visits, the school also served as a social center for young and old in the community.<sup>10</sup>

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As federal and state aids to high schools to offer courses in agriculture and domestic science became a trend, the county schools had difficulty surviving. The school at Onalaska experienced enrollment problems as early as 1918, and an optimistic report to the U.S. Commissioner of Education in that year did nothing to stay the steady decline of interest in and support of the institution. By 1925, 1320 students had attended the school. Of those only 269 graduated. Enrollments had bounced up and down throughout the fifteen years of its existence. The highest number, 157, was during the first year. That was a record for the county schools in the state. It was the judgment of the author of the 1918 report to the Commissioner of Education that the Onalaska institution needed an annual enrollment of 150 to make it viable. Still, "according to former students, there was no doubt that that the School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy enabled its graduates to become more successful farmers and homemakers."<sup>11</sup>

1. See, i.e., La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy, Fourth Annual Catalog, 1912-1913, p. 9.
2. Joan Rausch and Richard H. Zeitlin, Intensive Architectural/Historical Survey Report, 1983-1984, City of La Crosse, Wisconsin (La Crosse, Wisconsin, City Planning Department, 1984), p. 76. Two-page MS by Thomas Dockendorff, ARC, Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse.
3. The buildings at Marinette, Menomonie, Rochester, Wausau, and Wisconsin Rapids have been demolished. The one at Winnecone burned while being used as a high school. Of the complex built at Wauwatosa, one serves as an office for the county extension agent. The other units are in disrepair.
4. Rausch and Zeitlin, p. 76.
5. See, i.e., W. H. Glover, "The Agricultural College Lands in Wisconsin," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XXX (March, 1947), 261-272; Glover, "The Agricultural College Crisis of 1885," Ibid., XXXII, 17-25. Glover used the term "college" in a general sense. There was no such thing formally until 1889.
6. Vernon Carstenson, "The Origin and Development of the Wisconsin Idea," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XXXIX (Spring, 1956), 181-188 and Robert C. Nesbit, Wisconsin, A History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973, pp. 426-428. For an excellent treatment of the College of Agriculture to the mid-20's see Merle Curti and Vernon Carstenson, The University of Wisconsin, A History, 1848-1925 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974 prtg, II, 374-424.



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7. Jerome A. Baures, A Brief History of the Dunn County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy (Unpub. Masters Thesis, Wisconsin State University--La Crosse, 1967); William C. Merwin, A Brief History of the La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy (Unpub. Masters Thesis, Wisconsin State University--La Crosse, 1965); L. D. Harvey, "Report on Instruction in the Public Schools," Wisconsin Public Documents, IV (1899-1900), pp. 33 and 40; and Robert M. La Follette, "Governor's Message," Wisconsin Public Documents, I (1901-1902), p. 72.
8. See, i.e., Benjamin Davis, Agriculture Education in Public Schools University of Chicago Press, 1912), passim.
9. John and Joan Dolbier, From Sawmills to Sunfish, A History of Onalaska, Wisconsin (Copyright, John and Joan Dolbier, 1985), p. 191.
10. See, i.e., La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy, Annual Catalog, 1912-1913, pp. 14-16 and 22-23 and Merwin, p. 38.
11. Merwin, p. 39. J. L. O'Brien, Report of the Inspection of the County School of Agriculture at Onalaska, Wisconsin, to P. P. Claxton, U. S. Commissioner of Education, November 25, 1918.

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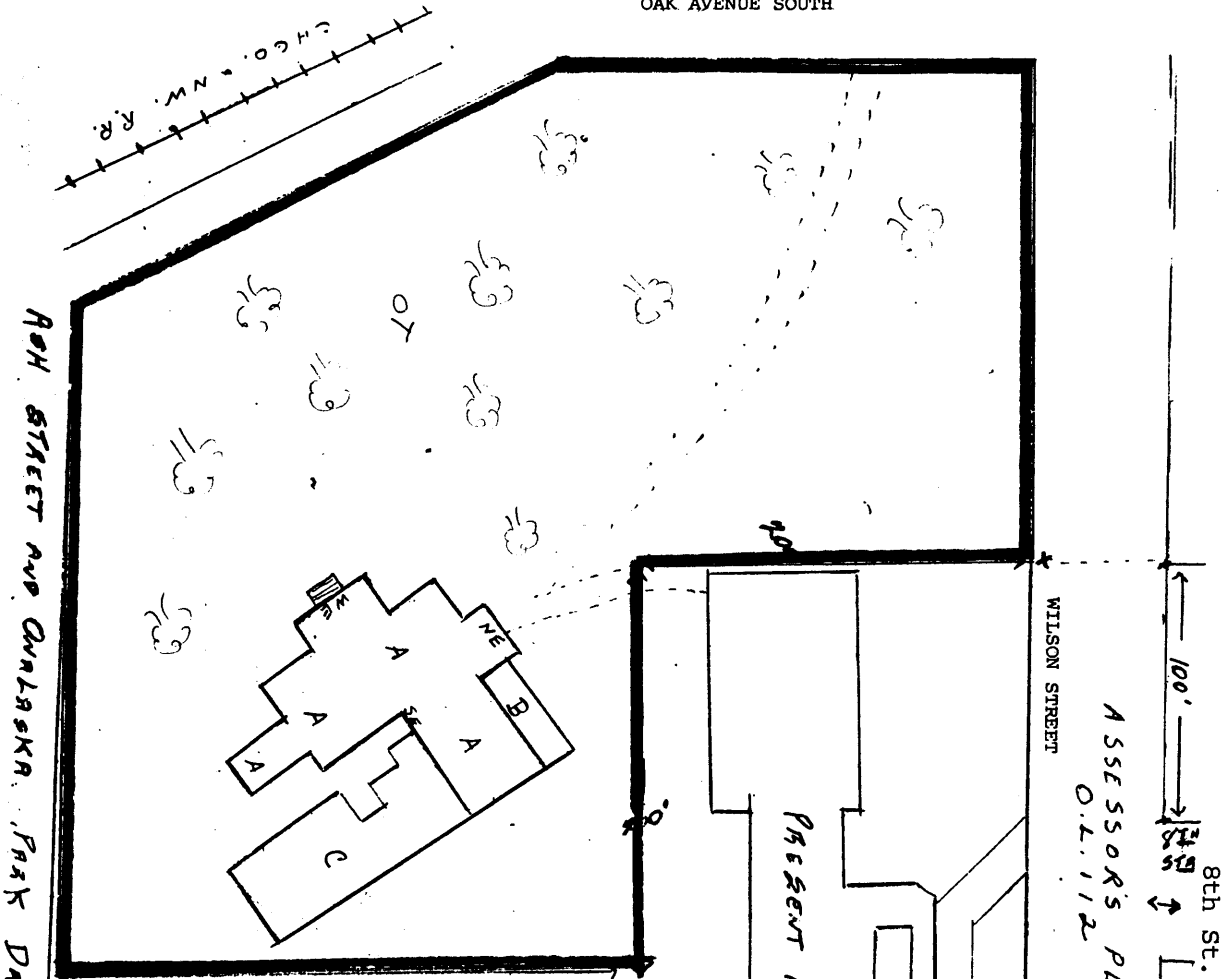
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Major Bibliographical References

- Merwin, William C., A Brief History of the La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy (Unpub. Masters Thesis, Wisconsin State University--La Crosse, 1965)
- O'Brien, J. L., Report of the Inspection of the County School of Agriculture at Onalaska, Wisconsin, to P. P. Claxton, U. S. Commissioner of Education, November 25, 1918. A typed copy of this form is in the agriculture school's collection of papers in the ARC, Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse.

OAK AVENUE SOUTH



ASSESSOR'S PLAT  
O.L. 112

100' ← 8th St. →

WILSON STREET

PRESENT HIGH SCHOOL (1970)

Gym

Music Room

*rehab field*

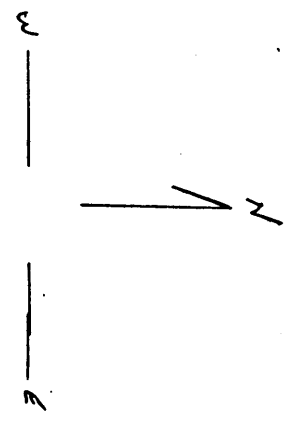
BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Portion of outlot 112 - parcel 18-967-0 shown is assessors plot

The boundary begins approximately 100 feet west of the west side of South Eighth Street where said street connects with Wilson Street. Thence the line extends 200 feet South from the south side of Wilson Street. Thence 90 degrees East for 200 feet. Thence 90 degrees South to meet Onalaska Park Drive (extension of Ash Street). The boundary continues West following Onalaska Park Drive and Ash Street to its intersection with Oak Ave. South. Continue North following Oak Ave. South to Wilson Street. Follow Wilson Street East to the point of boundary origin, thus enclosing the Agriculture School building it's surrounding landscaped grounds.

Legend

- A Original Building
- B 1958 Classroom Addition
- C 1930's Gymnasium Addition
- OT Oak Trees
- NE North Entrance
- WE West Entrance
- SE South Entrance



ASH STREET AND ONALASKA PARK DRIVE

CHGO. N.W. RR.