

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received FEB 14 1985  
date entered MAR 14 1985

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

**1. Name**

historic Main Hall, La Crosse State Normal School

and/or common Main Hall

**2. Location**

street & number 1724 State St., University of Wisconsin-La Crosse — not for publication

city, town La Crosse — 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 State of Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin System

street & number 1930 Monroe Street

city, town Madison — vicinity of state Wisconsin 53706

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds, La Crosse County Courthouse

street & number North Fourth 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 1984  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state WI 53706

# 7. Description

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

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

Main Hall, the impressive centerpiece of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus, is an imposing red brick structure, approximately 200 feet square, trimmed in handsome buff-colored limestone. Located on the predominantly residential east side of the Mississippi River community of La Crosse, the three story building was designed by the Milwaukee architectural firm of Van Ryn and De Gelleke and completed in 1908-09.<sup>1</sup>

A stylized Renaissance Revival design, the expansive, flat-roofed structure faces upon State Street, set well back behind a finely landscaped lawn. The major (southern) facade of the building features an ornate central entry pavillion, four stories in height and capped by a simple gabled parapet. Flanking the central entry at each end of the building are projecting end bays. Resting on a concrete foundation faced with soft, red sandstone, the building features a rusticated first floor area detailed with alternating bands of brick and buff-colored cut limestone. A continuous stone belt course forms a heavy lintel above the tall ground floor windows, while the two windows placed on either side of the main entry feature ornamental stone keystones.

Above the main entrance is a stylized segmental arch hood molding with a large keystone and decorative stone tracery. Directly to the right of the sidelit entry is the building's prominent date stone noting the year 1908. Window openings in the central tower are all framed in stone with stylized pediments above the third story openings and fourth story openings enclosed with carved wood panels. The second and third story windows of the main block are grouped in threes and feature simple cut stone sills with slight upturns at the ends. While the windows of the second story have no visible lintels, the upper story openings are detailed with thin, cutstone label moldings and oversized keystones mimicing the ground floor entry. The projecting end bays feature window units divided by brick piers, each of which in turn supports a highly decorative entablature.

The roofline of the building is marked by a simple stone cornice above which rises a brick parapet wall decorated with geometric patterns and low gables. The strong symetry and richness of detail achieved by the design presents a bold architectural statement to visitors at the school.

The building's east elevation follows the same general fenestration pattern as the major facade, with a central entrance flanked by highly decorative, slightly projecting end bays. On this elevation however, the entrance projection is only three stories in height. Limestone rustication and a red sandstone foundation course are still visible at the ground floor level and each bay still supports a detailed brick gable. All windows feature slender stone sills. The second story openings contain no visible lintels and a continuous belt course caps the first floor windows. Simple trabeated lintels mark the third floor. Ongoing new construction to the east of the building has greatly reduced the visual prominence of this elevation to the rest of campus.

At the northeast corner of the building a three story stairwell addition of modern design (c. 1976-1977) is now visible, replacing what had originally been the

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location of the building's boiler house razed circa 1950. The remainder of the rear of the building is rather simple in form with brick segmental arch openings defining the original gymnasium area on the interior. A simple metal cornice is visible at the roofline above a course of corbeled bricks.

On the west elevation, which opens onto a pedestrian mall, is visible a similar central entrance bay as seen on the eastern and southern facades. Three stories in height with decorative stone detailing, the projection is flanked on the right by a slightly projecting end bay, and on the left by an unusual polygonal bay. Detailed in cut stone with a heavy cornice above the third floor, the five-sided bay features notched corner details.

Alterations to the exterior of the building have included the addition of the rear firestairs and the replacement of all original wooden sash with modern bronzed metal sash.

The interior of the building has been extensively remodeled in recent years. While the basic floor plan still consists of a wide, double-loaded corridor encircling a central, 600 seat auditorium space, all of the original classroom and office spaces have been completely modernized. The Eau Claire architectural firm of Ozolins D'Jock Architects Ltd. was responsible for the wide-sweeping renovation efforts carried out in 1975-1976.<sup>1</sup> The rear portion of the building which originally housed gymnasium and locker room facilities has been carved up into small offices. Light courts which were originally found at each corner of the central auditorium have been infilled to create additional office area. The only remaining features of the original interior detailing are the handsome wood and iron staircases located at the main, east and west entrances to the building and a large decorative plaster frieze found at the main entrance.

<sup>1</sup>. Architectural plans on file with UW-La Crosse Physical Facilities Office.

# 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1908–1909 <sup>1</sup> **Builder/Architect** H. Van Ryn and G. De Gelleke <sup>1</sup>

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)** Period of significance: 1909–1935.

Main Hall on the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus is significant for its continuing role as the central focus of higher education in the La Crosse area. The building is also locally significant for its bold architectural styling, the work of prominent Milwaukee architects H. Van Ryn and Gerritt De Gelleke.

### Education

Main Hall, the first building built on the campus of the La Crosse State Normal School, is the patriarch of the present day University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus. It is the one building among the many which now make up the university campus that reflects the school's early twentieth century origins. Since its completion in 1909, the Main Building has stood witness as the small local school became a State Teachers College (1926), a State University (1964), and finally a member of the statewide University of Wisconsin system (1971). The teachers trained in its classrooms and the many graduates who have passed through its doors have had a lasting impact on the region.

Joining with "Old Mains" at other University of Wisconsin campuses, the Main Hall building at UW-La Crosse stands as a symbol of the important role played by higher education in the development and growth of Wisconsin.

### Historical background:

La Crosse began its attempts to secure a normal school facility for the community in the late 19th century. In 1893, the state legislature provided for the construction of two additional normal schools in the state to complement the five already in operation at Platteville, Whitewater, Oshkosh, River Falls and Milwaukee. Local sponsorship committees were formed and extensive negotiations were carried out between the community and the state board of normal school regents. In the end however, the communities of Stevens Point and Superior were chosen over La Crosse. <sup>2</sup>

In 1905, city officials, local businessmen and prominent citizens once again set about to secure the location of a normal school in the community. Thanks to the continuous efforts of Progressive State Senator Thomas Morris and local citizens groups the legislature was eventually convinced of the appropriateness of locating a new normal in the growing commercial center of La Crosse, and immediately directed the Board of Regents to begin the process of establishing a school within the city. <sup>3</sup>

Aided by a substantial \$15,000 contribution from the La Crosse city council, a sandy tract of land was quickly purchased in the southeastern part of the city known as the Metzger and Funk addition as a site for the new school, and construction of the Main building began in 1908. <sup>4</sup> Designed by the well respected Milwaukee architectural firm of Van Ryn and De Gelleke, the Main Hall was substantially completed

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Gilkey, George R., The First Seventy Years: A History of the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse, 1909-1979.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property two acres

Quadrangle name La Crosse, WI-Minn.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

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 Zone Easting Northing

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 3,4,5,6,7 and 12,13,14,15 of Block 13; Metzger and Funks Addition, City of Lacrosse. (see enclosed site map).

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

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Paul R. Lusignan, Acting Architectural Historian

organization State Historical Society of Wisconsin date November 1984

street & number 816 State Street telephone (608) 262-4772

city or town Madison state Wisconsin 53706

# 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 DIRECTOR OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION date JAN. 22, 1985

### For NPS use only

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

Entered in the  
National Register

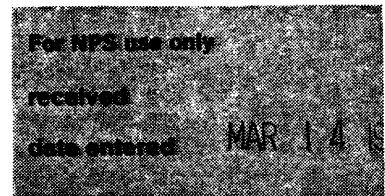
date 3-14-85

*for Helene Byer*  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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by the fall of 1909 in time for the school's opening session in September of that year.<sup>4</sup> Three stories high and about 200 feet square, the red brick building stood nearly alone, towering over the surrounding sand flats. Praised as "the finest building in the city", "a model of modern construction", and "a magnificent structure", the building had cost a total of \$260,000 to complete.<sup>5</sup>

The Main Hall housed all indoor educational activities at the school for a period of almost 11 years. (The 1920 Physical Education Building was the second campus building to be constructed.) Contained in the imposing facility were classrooms, a gymnasium with a circling track, a training school, faculty and administration offices, a kitchen, a kindergarten, a lunchroom, heating plant and library.<sup>6</sup> Central to the building plan was a large 600+ seat auditorium lit by four distinctive light courts and featuring a coffered ceiling. (Still intact but modernized.)

The presence of the normal school in the community was without a doubt a cultural and fiscal boon to the area. Not only was the facility a fine addition to the educational programs in the region, but the continual influx of faculty, students and staff personnel into the area provided a substantial commercial boost to the local economy. A local editorial in the La Crosse Tribune only a week after the official opening of the school noted that, "within the La Crosse community, the presence of an institution of higher learning financed by the state signals an important new element in the local economy."<sup>7</sup>

For nearly 75 years, Main Hall has continued to serve as an important element in the local community; a major academic facility, a bustling administrative center, and a prized symbol of higher education in the region.

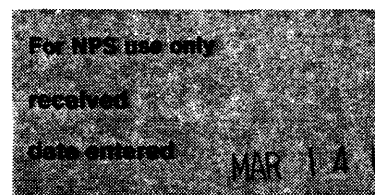
Architecture

Designed in 1903 by the prominent Milwaukee architectural firm of Henry Van Ryn and Gerritt De Gelleke,<sup>8</sup> the Main Building at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse was quickly heralded by local and state officials as one of the finest buildings erected in the city and a model of modern institutional design. Among the largest of the "Old Main" buildings built for normal schools in the state, the La Crosse Main was a rich addition to the architectural building stock of the Mississippi River community. The building's striking contrast of deep red brick with brightly-colored limestone, along with its rich geometric detailing, clearly marked the facility as one of the most striking examples of early twentieth century design in the region.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the design firm of Van Ryn and De Gelleke established a fine reputation in the state for their institutional designs. Well known for their work on educational facilities in the Milwaukee area, where the firm was responsible for the majority of school buildings built between 1912 and 1925, the firm was also responsible for normal school buildings at Oshkosh, Platteville, River Falls and Stevens Point.<sup>9</sup> A total of eight Van Ryn &

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De Gelleke designed buildings are currently listed or in the process of being listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The 1908 design for the La Crosse Main building is a stylistic blend of classic Renaissance Revival forms which create a striking example of turn of the century eclectic design. The Lacrosse Main clearly represents one of the finest institutional designs carried out in the city. The only other turn of the century institutional designs of comparable scale and ornateness are the 1902 St. Rose Church and 1892 Vitterbo College properties, both of less dramatic presence.

Footnotes:

- 1) Plans and drawings in the possession of the Office of Facilities Planning on the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus. Dated 1908.
- 2) Gilkey, George R., The First Seventy Years: A History of the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse, 1909-1979. (La Crosse: UW-La Crosse Foundation, 1981). pp.10-11.
- 3) Ibid., pp 12-13.
- 4) Ibid., pp 12-13.
- 5) Ibid., pp 13-15.
- 6) Bulletin of the State Normal School La Crosse. vol 1, no.1, 1909. pp. 1-8.
- 7) Gilkey, G.R., op. cit., p. 205.
- 8) Original plans and drawings (see above).
- 9) Site files on record at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Historic Preservation Division.



- 1 Main Hall
- 2 Wittich Hall
- 3 Power House
- 4 Wing Comm. Ctr.
- 5 Cartwright Center
- 6 Mitchell Hall
- 7 Morris Hall
- 8 Dormitories

