

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Emerson School

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 111 South Grand Ave.

n/a  not for publication

city, town Bozeman

n/a  vicinity

state Montana code MT county Gallatin

code 031 zip code 59715

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
1	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
Historic Resources of Bozeman, Montana

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official *Maurel Shero*

Date June 27, 1990

State or Federal agency and bureau MT SHPO

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Entered in the National Register

*Andrew Byrum*

8/10/90

*fa*  
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

=====  
6. Function or Use  
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Historic: **School**

Current : **School**  
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7. Description  
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Architectural Classification: **Neo-Gothic Revival**

Materials: foundation: **concrete** roof: **metal sheeting**  
walls: **brick** other: **limestone**

Describe present and historic physical appearance. (See continuation sheet.)

Emerson School is located on a two-block-square site bounded by Grand Ave. and Fourth St. and Babcock St. and Olive St. situated directly north of the early 20th century homes of the Bon Ton Historic District. To the northwest across Babcock St. is the Willson Middle School (1939) and the original Gallatin County High School (1902), both of which are listed in the National Register.

Emerson School is a two-story brick building, which was designed to house elementary and junior high school grades and is currently being used as a K-4th grade elementary school. The original portion of the building has a square floor plan, concrete foundation, a flat built-up roof with a smaller gable roof located directly in the center. The smokestack has been cut down considerably after the conversion of the furnace from burning coal and wood to natural gas. In 1939, a two-story wing was constructed on the west elevation of the school to house the manual arts and domestic science classrooms. This addition is highly compatible with the original building in terms of design as well as use of materials.

The exterior walls of the school are of raked, earth toned brick set in common bond. The walls are relieved by regularly placed large windows with limestone sills. Carved limestone was also used as coping for the slightly crenelated parapet, for belt courses at the second floor and first floor sill levels, and for decorative detailing and quoining surrounding the segmental arched entrances. The doorways and windows are all set within deep reveals. The windows throughout the building were replaced during the mid-1980s with anodized aluminum units that partially block the original openings and do not correspond with the sash pattern of the historic windows. The original windows were double hung, six-over-six or four-over-four units. The alteration to the windows is the only major architectural change that has occurred to the Emerson School. The level of decorative detailing exhibited on the exterior of the school helps to minimize the impact of the window replacement.

The main entrances to the school are especially noteworthy. The primary entrance on the east elevation facing Grand Ave. protrudes slightly from the building and is composed of three doorways finished with carved limestone architraves marking each of the three sets of double wooden doorways. The name "Emerson" is inscribed in a stone panel set above the central archway. A carved stone shield with "1918" is set in the center of the parapet on the front facade above "Emerson" and is fitted with a flag pole holder. The north entrance features decorative detailing similar to

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**Emerson School**

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the primary entrances, and a multi-light fanlight is set above the double wooden doors.

Original building plans drawn by architect Fred Willson for the Emerson School show a square floor plan that accommodates a central auditorium, which is surrounded by classrooms and office space, and a sunken gymnasium. The school has a full basement, containing a boiler heating system, separate storage rooms for coal, wood and ashes. The first floor entrance foyer is located to the east and the sunken gymnasium is located to the west. The first floor also contains the superintendent's office, the school board meeting room, an office and two classrooms. The entire east wing, built in 1939, was originally designed as a manual arts training facility. This collection of rooms includes a concrete room, a lumber storage room, a saw room, a finishing room, and a drafting room. There is also a spacious manual training classroom for group lessons located on the south side of the building.

On the second story there are fifteen more classrooms, including a music room and an art room. All of the classrooms contained enclosed coat closets. The principal's office was also located on this floor as well as the teachers' lounge. Directly above the 1939 manual arts wing located on the first floor, Willson designed a home economics wing. This included a sewing room, a dining room, a bedroom, and a kitchen. Directly over the entrance foyer, he located the main assembly hall which has now been converted to the school library.

The entrance foyer on the east side retains a high degree of architectural integrity. The original quarter-sawn oak doors fitted with push plates remain in place, and above each door is a transom with four vertically divided lights set within a segmental arch opening. The interior walls are covered with buff brick to the level of the interior door transoms, and this brick veneer continues around the doors and windows and is capped with a soldier course. The upper portions of the walls are finished with plaster and a plaster cornice encircles the room. A small window with a decorative iron grill work was used as a ticket office for public events staged in the Emerson auditorium.

A second set of double doors on the south elevation leads to the central north-south hallway. The walls of the interior halls are plastered with chair rail wooden molding approximately two feet off the floor. The segmental arch motif is continued above the classroom doors and above the wide entrances to adjoining hallways. The cornice pattern of the entrance foyer is repeated throughout the first floor hallways.

Accessed by two sets of wooden double doors, the auditorium is a large, two-story volume. The original globular white leaded glass chandeliers,

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which were imported from France in 1918, remain in place. Also, the 742 laminated wooden chairs with upholstered seats and rolled hardwood arms are original to the building. The seats all fold up and each has a wire hat holder attached to its underside. The rows are set on shallow hardwood risers and the floor slopes gently toward the stage. The aisle seats feature side panels with painted cast iron monograms exhibiting the letters "EJH." The balcony seats 107 persons and is equipped with the original motion picture projection booth. There is also a platform above the balcony for a small band to sit and perform; and this is in addition to the orchestra pit just in front of the stage.

The proscenium arch is set off with Gothic blind tracery made of molded plaster. The stage is approximately 28 feet deep and 32 feet across and has a hardwood floor. A row of incandescent floor lights are recessed into the floor of the stage. Boys' and girls' dressing rooms are located in the basement down narrow spiral stairs.

The plaster walls of the auditorium are scored to represent cut stone and divided by pilasters as well as two complete Greek columns with Ionic capitals. There are four ceiling beams supported by brackets running across the auditorium as well as a half beam at the proscenium wall. Contemporary rectangular sound-proofing tiles have been mounted to the ceiling, and flush-mounted florescent lights have also been attached to the ceiling. Aside from these alterations, the original Emerson auditorium is remarkably unchanged.

A sunken gymnasium takes up nearly the entire north side of the original building. The space is spanned with steel I-beams held up by nine pillars. The original pressed-tin ceiling plates, which have a decorative embossed pattern, remain in place. The actual playing floor is also original with two rounded corners on both the east and west corners of the spectator area, which circles the court. Originally, there were also bleachers in the northwest corner. The iron hand rail is also an original and extends around the viewing area except for breaks which allow the steps which bring the players up and down from the playing area. Girls' and boys' shower and locker areas in the west end of the gym were replaced by the hot lunch kitchen, and one set of showers and lockers still exists directly beneath this area and in the basement. There have been very few alterations to the gymnasium with the one exception of the wood veneer paneling which runs between the floor of the playing court and the surrounding viewing area.

The 70-inch wide stairwells are located at the northeast and southeast corners of the auditorium. Two narrower stairways (with no turnarounds) are found at the two western corners of the building. The eastern pair of stairways both have vertical wood paneling which serves as wainscoting and which rises to the original oak hand rail. These serve simultaneously as balusters for the ascending stairway and as a protective railing. This

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taller railing (not the oak hand rail) has a decorative scroll-cut motif which can be seen around all the second floor stairways. This railing is all painted woodwork now.

The hallways of the second floor feature continuous 42-inch wainscotting, and the door frames are original with molded and painted door frames. The principle two alterations are the addition of acoustic tiles on the ceiling and flush-mounted florescent lighting. The second floor classrooms contain a number of original features. All of the classrooms have small teacher ante-rooms which historically were used for storage and small group academic work. There are a number of original built-in cabinets for bookshelf area and at least one example of leaded-glass windows on the bookshelf doors. The hardwood and softwood floors throughout the classrooms and the hallways are well preserved, although some of these areas are now covered with carpeting.

The west addition, which was built using PWA funding during the late 1930s, was built using brick that complements the original 1918 building. Completed in 1939, the windows were all located at the exact same height and with the same dimensions as those in the original building. The soldier courses were also continued across the brickwork of the new addition.

The one added feature of the PWA entrance is the limestone frieze above the doorway. The final design represents three young students, one female and two male, practicing reading, math and music. It is interesting that this was a departure from the original drawing which had the third student counting on his fingers instead of playing music. Apparently, someone saw the original drawings and expressed concern to the architect that none of the arts had been represented in this frieze so the alteration was made to reflect a broader curriculum. Underneath and set just inside the door, Willson allowed for a small vestibule just inside the outer doors, just as he had in the original building's doorways.

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8. Statement of Significance  
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: **locally**

Applicable National Register Criteria: **A, C**

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : **n/a**

Areas of Significance: **Education**

**Architecture**

Period of Significance: **1918-1940**

Significant Dates: **1918, 1939**

Significant Person(s): **n/a**

Cultural Affiliation: **n/a**

Architect/Builder: **Henry J. Hamill (builder)**

**Fred Willson (architect)**

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

(See continuation sheet.)  
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The Emerson School represents the tremendous early 20th century expansion of Bozeman, Montana, and the resultant modernization of the city facilities to meet the needs of the growing population. Located on a block that has served as the center of public educational activities since the construction of the community's first brick school in 1877, the Emerson School is the third in a succession of school buildings designed to serve the needs of elementary age students at that location. While all other school buildings in the city, which were also named after famous writers, were replaced with the financial assistance of the WPA and PWA programs during the 1930s, the Emerson School was spared because it was too new and modern at that time to warrant replacement. Instead, the Emerson School received an addition during this era to house the new manual arts and domestic science classrooms.

Emerson School is an excellent example of the Neo-Gothic Revival style, which was commonly employed in the design of early 20th century public buildings. The Gothic style limestone ornament surrounding the triple entrance on the east elevation is of special note. The integrity of the property has been faithfully maintained due to careful upkeep and maintenance of the original design and materials. The building gains additional architectural significance due to its association with Bozeman's premier architect of the early 20th Century, Fred F. Willson, who designed both the original 1918 building as well as the 1939 addition to the west.

For over 50 years, Fred F. Willson served as Bozeman's premier architect. He was responsible for the design of most of the city's major civic, commercial and residential buildings, including the Gallatin County Courthouse, the Baxter Hotel, the Ellen Theater, the Blackstone Apartments, most of the city's schools, and a number of residences for prominent citizens. Born in 1877, Fred F. Willson was the son of General Lester Willson, an early settler to Montana. He received formal architectural training at Columbia University and he returned to work in the Gallatin Valley by the late 1890s. More than any other individual, Willson had a significant impact upon the present appearance of this small southwestern Montana city.

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Historical Background

The town of Bozeman, Montana, was founded in 1864. Located at the base of the Bridger Mountains in the fertile Gallatin Valley and well watered by numerous spring creeks as well as three prominent rivers running through the valley (Gallatin, Madison and Jefferson), Bozeman was to become an important commercial supply depot for the nearby gold fields of Virginia City and Bannack. It would also become the future home of Montana State University, the state agricultural land grant college. Bozeman would in time develop into the major cultural and economic bastion of southwestern Montana.

In December of 1877, the first permanent public school was completed in Bozeman for the cost of \$15,000. This school building was built upon or very near the site of the present Emerson School and was called West Side School. It was located according to the original description "out of town, west, on a little hill." According to Dr. Merrill G. Burlingame, noted local historian and longtime professor of history at Montana State University, "an altercation arose in the columns of competing newspapers over the strength of this structure which did not die down until the building was securely trussed with strong iron rods." This two-story, L-shaped structure wrapped around a bell tower capped with an Italianate-style turret. Designed as an elementary school, it would also offer some of the county's high school courses until an officially designated high school could be built. Dr. Burlingame notes that the drop-out rate was high and that the first class of two students graduated in 1883. Due to constant repairs and complaints about safety, the original West Side School was torn down in 1892.

A new school was erected in a more central location on the two-city-block-square site. This new 16-room building was also called West Side School, but it would later be named Irving School. George Hancock was the architect who also designed such notable historic Bozeman buildings as the Bozeman Hotel and the Episcopal Church, both listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

This second school (West Side School alias Irving School) finally came to be recognized by the community of Bozeman as City High School. A much grander structure than its predecessor, it was a Romanesque two-story institution featuring a series of arched windows on the main floor, variegated brick styles, a rounded turret on the east end capped with a cone and several gables protruding from the roof. The primary entrance came up a series of stone steps through a rounded double doorway at the base of a five-story bell tower. The tower was framed by two smaller turrets attached to the east and the west wings of the school. This new high school would eventually be pressed into service as the temporary home

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of the first Montana State Agricultural College students. It was also the alma mater of Fred F. Willson, the future architect of the nominated property.

In 1905, the schools of Bozeman were renamed after prominent American authors. The City High School (alias West Side School) became the Irving School. This school survived thirteen more years and then was torn down in 1918, again because of structural concerns as with its predecessor. Its brick was used to fill in the foundation hole. Later that year, construction was begun on Emerson Junior High School. Emerson School was completed in 1920 for \$93,000.

Bozeman experienced a burst of population growth and a subsequent flurry of construction of new schools in the mid-1930s. The school board decided to add a primary wing (grades kindergarten through sixth grade) to Emerson School. In an obvious attempt to harmonize the new construction with the original building, Fred F. Willson was again retained as the architect. Funding was obtained through the Public Works Administration (PWA); and in 1939 the two-story brick addition was completed on the northwest corner. Willson took great care to use some parallel design principles so that there is a sense of uniformity between the original building and the primary wing.

Until 1951, the Emerson School playground was a weed-filled field. A man named Les Edens would bring his two horse-drawn mowers to the school each fall and cut the weeds. The school board decided that grass was necessary for the students, although the community apparently felt that the idea of a lawn was an unnecessary improvement and a waste of the taxpayers' money. The playground was plowed up, leveled and seeded. By the late 1970s, however, portions of the playground had sunk as the result of settling of demolition debris from the old City High School that was originally located on this part of the block. The schoolyard was refilled and replanted.



**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Burlingame, Merrill G., "Gallatin County's Heritage - A report of Progress, 1805-1976, Gallatin County Bicentennial Production, 1976.  
Jacobsen, Sharon, "Some History of Emerson," compiled for the Bozeman Centennial Celebration, 1983.  
Wessel, Veris A. " A Brief History of the Bozeman Schools," compiled for Dr. Merrill Burlingame, 1963.

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property approx. 4 acres

UTM References

A 

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

C 

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B 

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Zone Easting Northing

D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Rouse's Third Addition to the City of Bozeman, lots k-292 and K-303; and Alderson's Lots (addition to the city of Bozeman) including all of block C.

The property is bounded by S. Grand Ave. to the east, Olive St. to the south, Fourth St. to the west and Babcock St. to the north.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the lots upon which the Emerson School and playground are located.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Chris Boyd  
organization Bozeman Historic Preservation Commission date March, 1990  
street & number P.O. Box 640 telephone 406-586-3321  
city or town Bozeman state Montana zip code 59715



CITY PLAT  
**BOZEMAN**  
GALLATIN COUNTY  
**MONTANA**

1970 CENSUS 18,670

SCALE IN FEET  
0 1600 3200

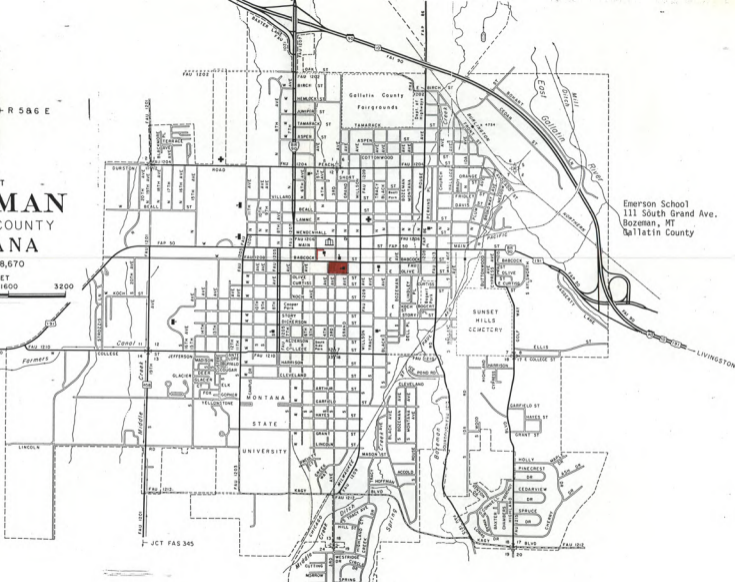
WEST  
YELLOWSTON

101

Formers

LINCOLN

JCT FAS 345



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111 South Grand Ave.  
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Gallatin County