

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

For NPS use only

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

received MAY 15 1985

date entered JUN 19

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

**1. Name**

historic Omro High School and Annex and the Webster Manual Training School.

and/or common Omro Middle School

**2. Location**

street & number 515 S. Webster Street (for all three buildings) not for publication

city, town Omro vicinity of

state Wisconsin code 55 county Winnebago code 139

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

**4. Owner of Property**

name Allan E. Beatty and Richard A. Flintrop

street & number 3631 Shangri-La Rd.

city, town Oshkosh, WI vicinity of state Wisconsin, 54901

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Winnebago County Register of Deeds

street & number P. O. Box 2808

city, town Oshkosh state Wisconsin, 54903

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1973  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state WI 53706

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## 7. Description

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<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		

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

The Omro Middle School is three buildings connected to each other by a direct on-grade connecting link and a bridge. The three buildings are identified as the High School, the Webster Building, and the gymnasium building, which is locally referred to as the "Annex". The buildings are located on a 1.6 acre site in the heart of Omro, which has a population of approximately 2700 people. The site is fairly flat and gradually slopes into a recreation field to the south. The site is clear with a few older trees, most notably a towering, broad, magnificent oak which is located in the northeast corner in front of the High School. The immediate neighborhood is older residential and the Main Street business district is a few short blocks to the north.

#### The High School    (#1)

The High School building combines several architectural styles, particularly Romanesque Revival and Italianate. The building is rectangular in plan with a single extended tower slightly recessed from the main east wall of the building. To the south of the tower and including the tower is the main building constructed in 1893. The portion north of the tower was added in 1909. The center portion of the west wall was altered in 1934, when the passageway connecting the High School and the Annex was constructed. The building rises two stories above grade with a raised basement. Its total added configuration shows a main entrance under the tower and main bays to the north and the south each with a four window motif. The second floor bays have banded windows with an encompassing arch in a style related to commercial Queen Anne.

The building rests on a hewn limestone foundation rising to the first floor. The limestone is laid in running bond and is also used as an accented lintel over windows, as window sills, and as Romanesque arches over entryways. The remaining walls are brick with areas articulated with decorative corbeling and patterns. The gables display arched corbel tables representing a blend of Romanesque elements. The tower carries a hipped roof over Romanesque arches, a relieving arch and a bull's eye window, in descending order.

The interior of the basement consists of locker rooms, toilets, offices and central stairway. The first floor contains five classrooms, the central hallway and stair, and miscellaneous coat rooms and corridors. The second floor is a duplicate of the first except with one additional classroom. Interior rooms have hardwood floors, painted lath and plaster walls, and, in some cases, pressed tin ceilings. There have been interior changes over the years, including the removal of an interior wall to create a library out of two classrooms, major alterations to the basement, and major alterations to the central stair and the north end of the original building, when the north addition was constructed in 1909.

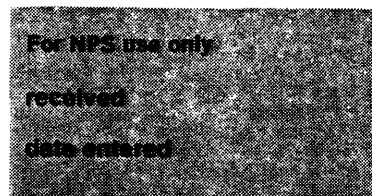
#### The Webster Building    (#2)

The Webster Building is located to the south of the High School and is connected by a bridge between the second floor hallways. The bridge, built between 1906 and 1910, has arched windows on both the east and west sides. The Webster Building itself, built in 1906, is rectangular in plan, rising three stories to a steeply pitched hip roof. The building is also a blend of Romanesque styles.

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There is a single story entry with Classical pilasters on the east, which was added on in 1910, and another located under the bridge on the north. The fenestration is achieved in the brick exterior by very uniform arched, corbeled window openings containing wooden double hung four-section windows and arched glass on the second floor, representing the Romanesque style, and more simple rectangular windows on the ground and first floors. A number of windows have been altered, including the windows covered by the eastern entrance, two windows cut down for fire escape doorways on the second floor of the east facade, several windows covered partially by the boiler room addition on the south facade, and a window cut down and partially filled in to create a doorway in the northern corner of the west facade.

A large chimney assembly pierces the roof on the south side as does a shed dormer. The east and west hip roof planes are pierced with conventional decorator brick dormers with parapet gables. A boiler room ground floor addition protrudes on the south side and shows slightly above grade.

The interior ground floor contains three classrooms and a central hallway and stair. The first floor contains four classrooms, the second floor three classrooms and office and storage space. The attic houses a gymnasium. The central stairway is rather ornate with spindles and newels and hardwood treads and risers. Interior rooms contain primarily hardwood floors, lath and plaster walls, and some brick walls. The interior has been altered with the addition of a fire wall constructed in the central hallways.

The Annex (#3)

The Annex was built in 1934 and is situated directly west of the High School. It is considered a contributing addition as it is connected to the High School by a two story corridor. It contains a gymnasium and ticket, stage, and office areas. Its rectangular two-story facades are simple in detail and of limestone construction.

# 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1893-1934	(Period of Significance)			<input type="checkbox"/> invention
				<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** #1: 1893 & 1909 #2: 1906, #3: 1934  
**Builder/Architect** #1: Fred Root; #2: A. D. Conover; #3: Edward Tough

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Omro Middle School consists of three interconnected buildings: the High School (#1), the Webster Manual Training School (#2), and a gymnasium locally referred to as the "Annex" (#3). The buildings' significance falls into two categories: architecture and education. They derive educational significance from the unique role they played as school buildings in a community with an 1890 population of approximately 2000 and an 1980 population of approximately 2700. The only other public building in Omro of equal prominence until 1938 was City Hall, constructed in 1893. The architectural significance of the High School and the Webster Building relates also to their unique status: the two buildings are Omro's only institutional examples of provincial adaptations of the Romanesque style. The Webster Building has added educational significance due to its leadership role in the development of vocational education in Wisconsin.

The High School

The first of four major construction dates, 1893, saw the completion of Omro's now oldest standing school house. It was to house all grades in a two-story, four department building. The new school was the pride of the town and was backed by over 90 percent of the voters.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after its opening the attraction of the new building caused the high school attendance to almost double in the first year of operation.<sup>3</sup> This was a noteworthy increase in a period when compulsory attendance was not particularly popular and high school attendance was usually poor in many Wisconsin communities.

By Christmastime, 1909, an addition to the High School was completed which nearly doubled its size. Some of the townspeople had opposed the addition feeling that too much money had been spent on school facilities in the last sixteen years. Their suggestion was to bar the tuition children from the grades, rather than to build the high school addition. However, the majority concern for education was best reflected by the Omro Herald editorial:

The Omro High School is on the accredited list of high schools and ranks as one of the very best in the state. It must be kept there. A's children, B's children and C's children must be educated. They must be provided with ample and sanitary rooms and the best of teachers. The matter of cost is a secondary consideration. Omro has sent out into the business world many young men and women who are a credit to our high school. These things appeal to our wise judgment and careful action. Don't make a mistake and let spite prejudice influence your action.<sup>4</sup>

Fred G. Root designed and coordinated the building of the 1909 addition.<sup>5</sup> Root settled in Omro in around 1878. Having learned the details of casket making, he started the Omro Casket factory. He subsequently learned drafting and furniture making. Step by step he prepared himself to be an architect-contractor and built many fine homes in Oshkosh and Omro and several public buildings, including Omro's City Hall.<sup>6</sup>

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Omro Journal  
Omro Herald

Coleman J. Gadbow, "The Schools of Omro, Wisconsin", (Master's Thesis, Lawrence College)  
(see Footnotes page)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1.6

Quadrangle name Omro, WI

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	6	3	6	1	5	0	4	8	7	7	0	7	0
Zone		Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

C 

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D 

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G 

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H 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The North Twenty-four (24) rods and Nine (9) links of Lot Forty (40), South of Fox River, according to PLAT OF OUTLOTS, in the Village of Omro, and now in the Second Ward, City of Omro.

### 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 Allan Beatty, owner

organization Second Century Renovations date December 30, 1984

street & number 3631 Shangri-La Rd. telephone 414-235-3380

city or town Oshkosh state WI, 54901

# 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 *Jeffrey L. Dean*

title DIRECTOR OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION date APRIL 25, 1985

### For NPS use only

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

Entered in the  
National Register

*for Melissa Byers* date 6-19-85  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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date entered

Omro Middle School, Omro, Winnebago County, WI  
Continuation sheet

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It is quite probable that Root was the designer-builder of the 1893 High School. Unfortunately, there is very little information available about the 1893 construction. A thorough search through the community's newspaper, the Historical Society's Archives, and local sources reveals little information. For example, there is a passing reference in an Omro Journal story about the start of the new fall term that classes were held in the new building.

The speculation that Root was the designer-builder of the 1893 portion of the High School is based on the following: 1) he was one of two persons selected by the school district to oversee the building's construction; 2) he was a prominent local builder, having the City Hall contract the same year; and 3) he built the 1909 addition which replicates the original structure's exterior features almost exactly and he had only one week to prepare his bid.

This building, along with the other two, was in use as a high school until 1964 and as a middle school until 1983.

The High School building's architectural significance derives from its unique local status as an institutional example of provincial adaptations of the Romanesque Revival style.

The Webster Manual Training School

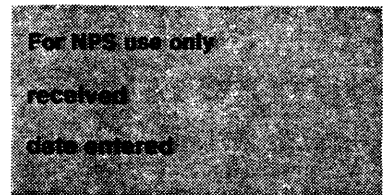
Manual training was very young in Wisconsin when the Webster Manual Training School opened its doors in 1906. The School was a synthesis of community and private interest. The school district was given the responsibility to staff and maintain it. The administration, however, was controlled by a separate board of trustees, consisting of private citizens and two school board members. This was a significant move in educational administration and a move also taken by the State of Wisconsin in 1917, when the Legislature decided to remove vocational administration from the purview of the State Superintendent of Schools.<sup>7</sup>

The Webster curriculum was divided under two headings: manual training and domestic arts. Initially the school had a teacher for each area.<sup>8</sup> A full twelve year course in manual training and domestic arts was offered, although the primary grades' work in paper cutting, clay modeling and weaving was also offered in other school districts simply as art projects. Omro students did not begin use of the Webster facilities until the 6th grade.<sup>9</sup>

While boys took some domestic arts classes and girls got some manual training, the students were steered in traditional sex role directions. The purpose of the Webster program was to graduate girls, for example, who were "firmly grounded in the art of homemaking".<sup>10</sup> Girls received more shop training during World War II when there was a shortage of skilled labor.

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The Webster building was arranged by topic. On the ground floor was the machine shop, mill room, forge room, dry kiln and lumber storage. The first floor contained the drawing room, the work bench room, the lathe, and the recitation room. The second floor housed the sewing room, home nursing, a kitchen, a dining room, a bedroom, and an art room.<sup>11</sup>

The curriculum in manual training concentrated on woodworking and mechanical drawing until 1941 when electricity, welding and sheet-metal work were added.<sup>12</sup> The domestic arts courses were mainly in sewing, cooking and home design.<sup>13</sup>

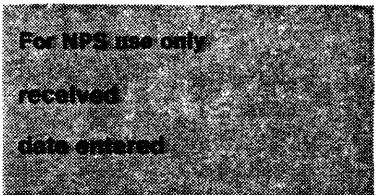
Hiram Webster and James Stout were the key people in the creation of the school. Webster was quite possibly the most significant benefactor to Omro education. Webster came to Oshkosh from Hampton, New York, where he had taught school, in 1847. He subsequently moved to Omro where he purchased a sawmill. He served on the town, village, and county boards and was elected to two terms in the Wisconsin Legislature, 1878-82. Having served as Town Superintendent of Common Schools for Omro, Webster introduced legislation to encourage the teaching of practical skills in the schools. Webster died in 1884 and provided in his will that the surplus of his estate be used for a building to educate young people in the domestic and useful arts.<sup>14</sup> Webster was definitely a pioneer in the field of vocational education as the first manual training school in the United States was not built until 1880 and the first building constructed for manual training in Wisconsin was the Stout Training School in Menominee in 1891, by the well-known James H. Stout.<sup>15</sup>

Stout was a national leader in the field of vocational education. University of Wisconsin President Charles Adams credited Stout with starting and financing the best manual training school in the country.<sup>16</sup> Stout came to Omro in 1902 to advise Webster's executors how to establish a manual training school.<sup>17</sup>

The Webster Building was designed by Allan D. Conover. Conover was the University of Wisconsin-Madison's first professor of civil and mechanical engineering and was also an architect associated for many years with Porter and H. C. Koch. Conover was recognized as a specialist in public buildings, including state and county institutions. His firm, Conover and Porter, had designed some 30 schools when it dissolved in 1899. Conover also trained several young men who became important architects themselves, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvan Small and Louis Claude.<sup>18</sup>

The ANNEX

By 1934, the school district decided the gymnasium on the top floor of the Webster Building was no longer adequate for the increased physical training and athletics which followed World War I.<sup>19</sup> The district had hoped to obtain \$11,000, one-third the project's cost, from the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, but the application was denied. As a result the district's electors approved borrowing the additional money during the depths of the Depression, when local taxpayers could ill afford additional taxation. The community recognized the need to put its residents to work. Retired persons still living in Omro recall being hired for this project.

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A limestone gymnasium with a stage at one end was the result. Besides fulfilling school needs the Annex served community purposes such as weekend showings of movies by the Businessmen's Association.<sup>20</sup> Connected by a major two-story passageway, the Annex is considered an important, contributing addition to the main High School Building.

The Annex's architect was Edward Tough who served as Wisconsin's state architect from 1910-1913, and then established a solo practice where he specialized in churches and schools.<sup>21</sup> Among Tough's better known public buildings are several in the Madison area including Pres House, Dudgeon School, and the former Madison Business College building.<sup>22</sup>

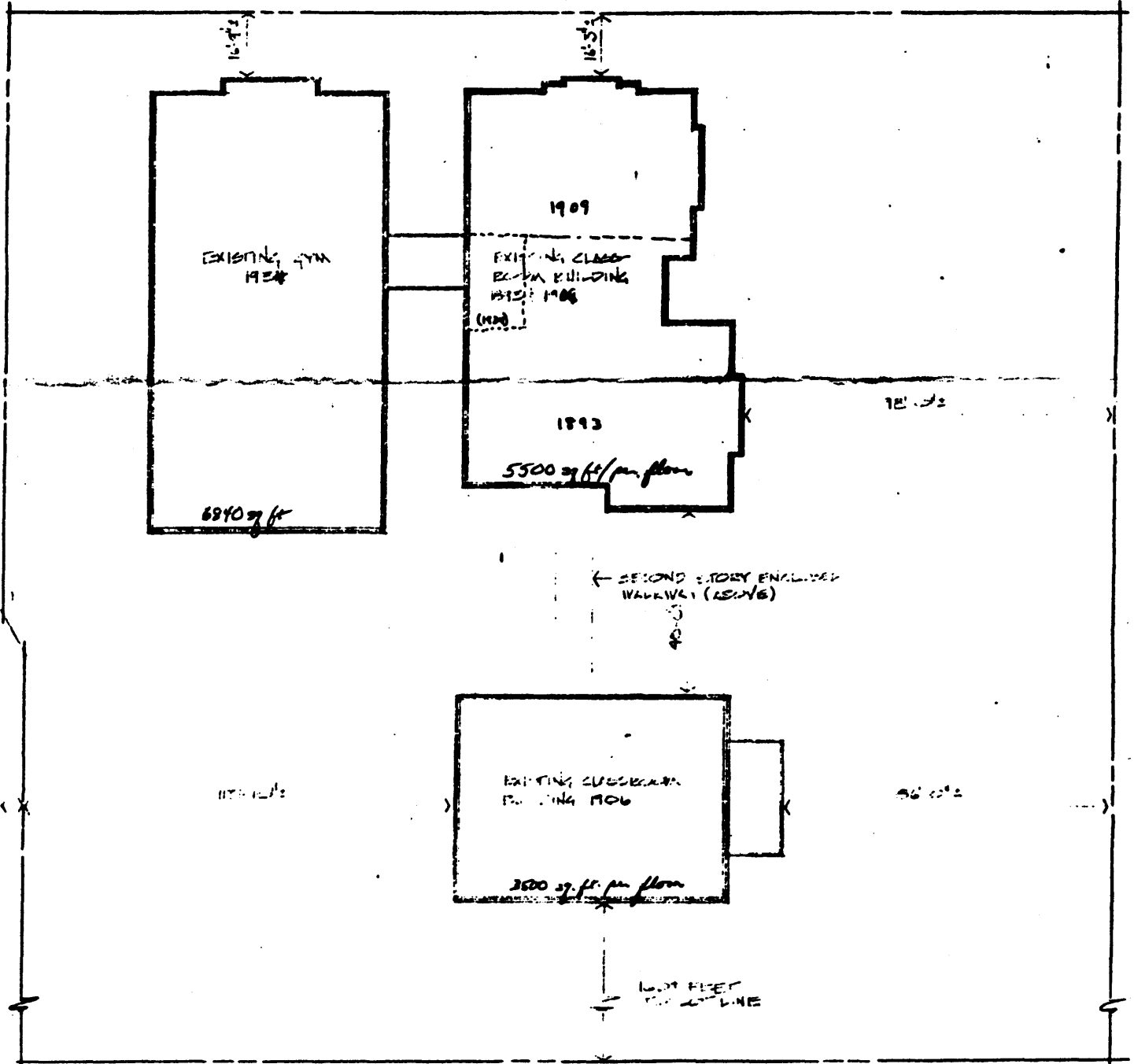
## Footnotes:

- 1 Omro Journal, July 7, 1892, p. 1.
- 2 Ibid., p. 1.
- 3 Coleman J. Gadbow, "The Schools of Omro, Wisconsin", (Master's thesis, Lawrence College, Appleton, WI, May 1943), p. 38.
- 4 Omro Herald, May 8, 1909, p. 4.
- 5 Frank Root, son of Fred Root, in a personal conversation on February 20, 1984.
- 6 Omro Herald, April 17, 1930, p. 1.
- 7 Edward A. Fitzpatrick, Wisconsin's Educational Horizon, Vol III, No. 4, (Madison, WI: State Board of Education, 1921), p. 16.
- 8 Omro Journal, September 13, 1906.
- 9 Gadbow, op. cit., p. 63.
- 10 Ibid., p. 64.
- 11 Ibid., p. 64.
- 12 Ibid., p. 63.
- 13 Omro Journal, September 9, 1906 and February 7, 1907, and Gadbow, op. cit., p. 62-64.
- 14 Gadbow, op. cit., p. 39.
- 15 Ibid., p. 36.
- 16 Omro Journal, August 28, 1902, p. 1.
- 17 Ibid., p. 1.
- 18 Milo Quaife, Wisconsin: Its History and Its People, p. 570-571; Aiken and Proctor, Wisconsin Men of Progress, p. 578-579; and Wisconsin State Journal, May 24, 1929.
- 19 Gadbow, op. cit., p. 42.
- 20 Archie Daggett, personal conversation, February 21, 1984. (Daggett has lived in Omro for over 35 years.)
- 21 Wisconsin State Journal, January 13, 1970.
- 22 Rosalind Tough, in a personal letter, April 27, 1984. (She is E. Tough's daughter.)



IV. LARABEE ST.

JEFFERSON AVE.



E. DOTT ST.



SITE PLAN 1/4" = 1'-0"

Omro High School & Annex and Webster Manual Training School  
Omro Wisconsin