

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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



### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: McKinley Elementary School

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

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

### 2. Location

Street & number: 640 Plum Street

City or town: Wyandotte State: MI County: Wayne

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

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

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

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A \_\_\_ B X C \_\_\_ D

Brian Murray, SHPO 9/28/17  
Signature of certifying official/Title: Date  
MI SHPO  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

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

*For Eolson H. Beall*  
Signature of the Keeper

11-27-17  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register           

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/school

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Art Deco

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Limestone

### Narrative Description

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

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### Summary Paragraph

McKinley Elementary School is a two-story tall, multi-tone orange brick, Art Deco-style building that is located in the southeast section of the city of Wyandotte. It faces south on Plum Street between Sixth and Seventh Streets. The front of the building fills the entire block face; the school has a footprint in the shape of backwards F laying on its spine. The property is one-block wide by one-block deep; it is generally flat and there is a deep grassy lawn between the street and the building on three sides. Two asphalt parking lots are located behind the school. There is a large playground and city park on the half block north of the property. This is part of the current parcel of land but not historically associated with the school.

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### Narrative Description

McKinley School is located in the city of Wyandotte which is located in southeast Michigan about ten miles south of Detroit. The city is bounded by the Detroit River on the east, the city of Riverview on the south, the city of Lincoln Park on the north, and the city of Southgate on the west. The school is in a residential neighborhood with tree-lined streets and one- to two-story tall houses constructed in the first half of the twentieth century. The school stands out in the neighborhood as it sits on a parcel that is one-block wide by one-and-a-half blocks deep.

The grassy lawn in front of the school has two concrete walkways that lead from the city sidewalk to the two entrances located on either side of the center auditorium. There are shallow steps within the walkways near the doors. The lawn between the walkways has one tree and some shrubs. An original metal flagpole on a two-tier octagonal concrete base is located in the

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front lawn to the east of the east entrance. The pole has an urn-like base, tapers toward the top, and is capped by a sphere.

The west lawn of the building has a wide concrete walkway and stair leading from the street to the building's side entrance. A large, newer concrete ramp with a metal railing extends from the south side of the stair to the walkway. At the southeast corner of the property there is a large deciduous tree in the lawn. A wide concrete walkway and shallow steps run from the street to the east building entrance. There are additional mature deciduous trees in the northern part of the east lawn. There are asphalt paved driveways and parking lots along the north side of the building.

The multi-tone orange brick-clad front façade has a limestone clad raised foundation and has three main sections: the auditorium in the center and the east and west wings. The auditorium section is six bays wide and sits a full bay forward of the wings, which are each eight bays wide. The center auditorium has six limestone-framed openings that extend two-stories above the foundation. The four center openings are slightly wider than the two on the outside. Within each opening there are three sections of newer replacement windows separated by metal spandrel panels. Starting at the first floor there are two square glass sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above, and six square opaque panels above that. Moving up, the next section has ten square opaque panels, and the top has six square opaque panels. All of the panels are cream in color. The parapet wall is plain brick and has raised metal letters reading "McKINLEY SCHOOL" centered on the wall above the four center openings. The parapet has a limestone coping. The east and west faces of the auditorium wall that project in front of the main body of the building each have a narrow limestone-framed opening that matches the narrow two-story tall openings on the front with the same window and panel configuration.

The east and west wings of the building are nearly identical, and each has a one-story-tall projecting limestone porch entrance that abuts the central auditorium. The face of the porch has bands imitating pilasters with capitals that align with the top of the door openings. Around the door opening the limestone steps back three times, creating an architrave that frames the recessed double-door opening in the main wall of the building. The doors are newer flush metal doors with narrow lights. Above the door, a limestone panel has two sets of four vertical lines engraved in the stone centered above each door. The top of the opening has a band of grooved limestone. The large fascia panel above the door has a central panel with a stylized carving of a tree.

At the second floor above each entrance, there are three narrow window openings separated by square brick piers capped with a limestone block. The openings contain a square glass sash with small opaque panels above. A limestone band runs across the wall at the window lintel level. A tall, narrow, carved limestone panel with a stylized sunburst design fills the height of the parapet wall above the center window.

Moving westward from the west entrance, the next four bays of the facade are separated by brick piers. Each bay has a set of four windows at the first and second floors that are separated vertically by engraved black metal spandrel panels. The panels in the two center windows have

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a stylized chevron design, and the panels in the two outside windows have a vertical floral stripe design. Each set of windows has a square glass sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above, and six opaque square panels above that. Each bay has a limestone cornice running across the top that has a smooth fascia below a carved band resembling dentils that are topped by a smooth narrow band. In the center of each bay a carved limestone panel with a vertical arrow design extends the full height of the parapet wall which is capped with limestone coping.

Continuing westward on the façade the three end bays project slightly forward. Each bay contains a limestone-framed, two-story-tall masonry opening that extends from the limestone clad foundation. Each opening contains two sets of windows at the first and second floor which are separated vertically by black metal spandrel panels engraved with a chevron design. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above and six square opaque panels above that. A carved limestone medallion is centered above each opening in the parapet wall which has limestone coping. The medallions each depict a different allegorical figure. One shows a woman holding a torch and embracing what appears to be a factory, one shows a man pouring out a bucket of water or liquid, and the third shows the back of a sailor in front of a ship's wheel. These could possibly represent the shipbuilding and steel industries of Wyandotte.

The east wing of the front façade of the building is identical to the west with the exception of the one-story tall, three-sided, limestone clad bay that extends at ground level immediately east of the east entrance. This section of the building contains the kindergarten room and the corners of the bay have stylized fluted pilasters supporting a simple limestone entablature at the base of the limestone parapet wall. The front of the bay has two openings, each containing two sets of windows. The east side of the bay has one opening containing two sets of windows and the west side has one opening containing one set of windows. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above and six square opaque panels above that. The medallions at the top of the east wing wall include the back of a man working on what appears to be a wagon wheel, a figure holding a tablet with the roman numerals I through X, and a woman holding a torch and embracing what appears to be a factory.

The east elevation of the building faces Sixth Street and is eight bays wide. Beginning at the south end, the first two bays are recessed and each has a two-story blind opening that is framed in limestone extending from the limestone clad foundation. A carved limestone medallion depicting a different allegorical figure is centered above each opening in the limestone capped parapet wall. One repeats the sailor and ship's wheel from the front façade and one is a man in a sitting position. Moving north, the third bay has a one-story-tall projecting limestone porch entrance that is similar to the front façade entrances. The face of the porch has bands imitating pilasters with capitals that align with the top of the door openings. Around the door opening the limestone steps back three times, creating an architrave that frames the recessed double-door opening in the main wall of the building. Two granite steps lead to the pair of newer flush metal doors with narrow lights. Above the door, a limestone panel has two sets of four vertical lines engraved in the stone centered above each door. The limestone band at the top of the opening is engraved with vertical stripes to resemble triglyphs. The large fascia panel above the door has a central panel with a carving in a stylized tree design. Above the entrance, at the second floor,

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there are three narrow window openings separated by square brick piers capped with a limestone block. The openings contain a square glass sash with small opaque panels above. A limestone band runs across the wall at the window lintel level. A tall, narrow carved limestone panel with a stylized sunburst design fills the height of the parapet wall above the center window.

The northern five bays of the east façade are separated by brick piers. Each bay has a set of four windows at the first and second floors that are separated vertically by engraved black metal spandrel panels. The panels in the two center windows have a stylized chevron design, and the panels in the two outside windows have a vertical floral stripe design. Each set of windows has a single square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above, and six opaque square panels above that. Each bay has a limestone cornice running across the top that has a smooth fascia below a carved band resembling dentils that are topped by a smooth narrow band. In the center of each bay a carved limestone panel with a vertical arrow design extends the full height of the parapet wall which is capped with limestone coping. A one-story tall greenhouse extends from the center of the five bays. The base of the greenhouse is clad in limestone matching the building's foundation. The metal frame, glass walls, and curved roof are newer replacements.

The west elevation faces Seventh Street and is three bays wide. A newer concrete ramp with a metal railing crosses back and forth at the foundation level in front of the two southern bays. These two bays are recessed and each has a two-story tall blind opening that is framed in limestone extending from the limestone clad foundation. A carved limestone medallion depicting a different allegorical figure is centered above each opening in the limestone capped parapet wall. Moving north, a wide stone staircase with stone wingwalls and a metal railing leads to the one-story-tall projecting limestone porch entrance that is similar to the east façade entrance. The face of the porch has bands imitating pilasters with capitals that align with the top of the door openings. Around the door opening the limestone steps back three times, creating an architrave that frames the recessed double-door opening in the main wall of the building. Two granite steps lead to the pair of newer flush metal doors with narrow lights. Above the door, a limestone panel has two sets of four vertical lines engraved in the stone centered above each door. The limestone band at the top of the opening is engraved with vertical stripes to resemble triglyphs. The large fascia panel above the door has a central panel with a carving in a stylized tree design. Above the entrance, at the second floor, there are three narrow window openings separated by square brick piers capped with a limestone block. The openings contain a square glass sash with small opaque panels above. A limestone band runs across the wall the at the window lintel level. A tall, narrow, carved limestone panel with a stylized sunburst design fills the height of the parapet wall above the center window.

Set far back from the street and extending to the north, are the west elevations of the four-bay-wide, two-story-tall gymnasium with its one-story-tall wing, and the one-story-tall boiler room. The foundation wall of the gymnasium is clad in brick with a limestone water table. Three of the four bays have two sets of windows at the first and second floors. The northern bay has a newer door with transom and sidelight at the first floor and windows at the second floor. Between the floors there are tall brick panels each having narrow limestone stripes running vertically down the center each panel. Each set of first floor windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above and four square opaque panels above that. The window opening has

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a brick soldier course header. The second-floor window openings have limestone sills. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom and four square opaque panels above. A limestone band runs across the entire wall above the second-floor windows. The one-story-tall gymnasium wing has a set of two windows in the center of the wall. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above and four square opaque panels above that.

The one-story-tall boiler room is sunk into the ground so that it is shorter than the gymnasium wing. The plain brick wall has limestone coping at the top and a wide opening in the center of the west elevation that has been infilled with louvers and boards.

The building's north or rear elevation is made up of the east classroom wing, the rear of the boiler room, gymnasium and main building. Starting on the east, the north end of the classroom wing is three bays wide and has a limestone clad foundation. The central bay contains a one-story-tall projecting limestone porch entrance that is similar to the front façade entrances. The face of the porch has bands imitating pilasters with capitals that align with the top of the door openings. Around the door opening the limestone steps back three times, creating an architrave that frames the recessed double-door opening in the main wall of the building. Two granite steps lead to the pair of newer flush metal doors with narrow lights. Above the door, a limestone panel has two sets of four vertical lines engraved in the stone centered above each door. The limestone band at the top of the opening is engraved with vertical stripes to resemble triglyphs. The large fascia panel above the door has a central panel with a carving in a stylized tree design. Above the entrance, at the second floor, there are three narrow window openings separated by square brick piers capped with a limestone block. The openings contain a square glass sash with small opaque panels above. A limestone band runs across the wall at the window lintel level. The bays on either side of the entrance have no openings but each have four limestone piers embedded into the brick walls supporting an embedded limestone entablature with carved dentils at the base of the parapet wall which is capped with limestone.

Moving west a courtyard is formed between the classroom wing and the gymnasium. The north wall of the main building, as well as the west wall of the classroom wing and the east wall of the gymnasium have brick-clad foundations with a limestone water table. On the back wall of the main building there is one large window opening at the first and second floors, each contains a set of four windows. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above, and six square opaque panels above that. The west elevation of the classroom wing is five bays wide; the bays are separated by brick piers. The four northern bays are wider than the bay adjacent to the main part of the building. Each bay contains a set of four windows at the first and second floors, except the narrow southern one, which has two sets. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above, and six square opaque panels above that. The first-floor window openings have a brick soldier course lintel. There are tall brick panels between the floors that each have two thin vertical limestone stripes running down the center. A limestone cornice with dentils spans the width of each bay at the lintel lines of the second-floor windows. The cornice is missing from one bay. The parapet wall has a tall brick panel with a brick chevron pattern centered in each bay that mimics the limestone panels in the parapet of the building's façade. The east elevation of the gymnasium is framed on each end with brick piers and has four window openings separated by brick piers. Each opening



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has two sets of windows at the first and second floors. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above, and six square opaque panels above that. The first-floor window openings have a brick soldier course lintel. There are tall brick panels between the floors that each have recessed brick stripes running down the center to mimic the limestone found elsewhere. A limestone cornice with dentils runs across the entire wall at the lintel line of the second-floor windows.

The north wall of the gymnasium is roughly five bays wide and is interrupted by the boiler room and chimney. The eastern bay is framed by brick piers on each end. There are two steps creating a porch for two single entrance doors framed in limestone. The stone has one step-back and the lintel has two pairs of two vertical lines engraved above the center of each door. A shallow metal canopy extends out over the entire porch and both doors. The upper portion of the wall has no openings. A limestone band engraved with "A.D. MCKINLEY SCHOOL 1901" is located above the canopy. A limestone band with dentils at the top runs across the wall at the base of the limestone capped parapet wall between the piers. Moving west the next three bays are separated by two piers. The east set of piers are blocked by the boiler room chimney. All three bays have the lower part of the boiler room in front of them. The boiler room wall has a limestone-framed entrance door at the east end and two openings that are filled with louvers and boards. The upper part of the gymnasium wall has a large window opening in each bay that contains three sets of windows. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom, a narrow opaque panel above, and eight square opaque panels above that. A limestone cornice with dentils at the top runs across the top of each opening.

The west bay of the gymnasium's north wall has a one-story wing with a single window opening containing two sets of windows. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above and four square opaque panels above that. The second floor has no openings, a limestone band runs across the wall at the base of the limestone capped parapet wall.

The west half of the north wall of the main building has a brick clad foundation with a limestone water table, it is four bays wide, and the bays are separated by brick piers. The two eastern bays are equal width and have four sets of windows at both floors. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above, and six square opaque panels above that. The first-floor window openings have a brick soldier course lintel. There are tall brick panels between the floors that each have two thin vertical limestone stripes running down the center. A limestone cornice with dentils spans the width of each bay at the lintel lines of the second-floor windows. The parapet wall has a tall brick panel with a brick chevron pattern centered in each bay that mimics the limestone panels in the parapet of the building's façade. The central bay is wider and has no openings. The limestone water table and the limestone cornice are the only ornamentation in the bay. Moving west the next bay is narrower, the first and second floor window openings each have three sets of windows. Each set of windows has a square sash at the bottom with a narrow opaque panel above, and six square opaque panels above that. The first-floor window openings have a brick soldier course lintel. There are tall brick panels between the floors that each have two thin vertical limestone stripes running down the center. A limestone cornice with dentils spans the width of each bay at the lintel lines of the second-floor windows. The parapet wall has a tall brick panel with a chevron pattern centered in each bay that mimics

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the limestone panels in the parapet of the building's façade. The westernmost bay has no openings and the trim is limited to the limestone water table and cornice.

The interior of the building has corridors that follow the footprint of the building. The long east-west running corridor has classrooms on the south side. The shorter north-south running corridor on the east end of the building is double-loaded with classrooms. The corridors have terrazzo floors, glazed tile wainscoting with plaster walls above and acoustical tile ceilings. Some areas of the corridors have suspended acoustical tile ceilings. There are four medallions executed in the terrazzo floor in the first-floor corridor that were designed by Fred Frostic, superintendent of Wyandotte Public Schools at the time, and his daughter Gwen Frostic, who had a studio in Wyandotte at the time. The medallions are located at the bottom of four staircases that are at the center and end entrances of the building. The easternmost medallion depicts the sun surrounded by the planets in the solar system, all in the correct proportions. The medallion by the east front entrance shows the north pole star – Polaris - surrounded by constellations such as the “Big Dipper” and the months of the year written in the ring around the edge. The medallion by the west front entrance is a compass. The one at the west end stair is a map of the Great Lakes and the surrounding states and cities. There are four water fountains in the corridors with matching tile-clad niches, two on each floor. The tiles are in earth tones and include orange, yellow and shiny copper, they create a ziggurat design on the wall with a ship motif tile in the top.

All of the stair cases are metal with terrazzo treads and metal balustrades. The stair walls have glazed tile wainscoting with plaster above. The classrooms generally have vinyl tile floors, plaster walls with wood trim, and wood-framed bulletin and marker boards. Some rooms retain built-in wood cupboards. The ceilings are acoustical tile. The kindergarten room has a vinyl tile floor, an acoustical tile ceiling, plaster walls and built-in wood benches lining the perimeter walls, including the bay window. The decorative tile fireplace features tiles depicting nursery rhyme characters and animals, including Humpty Dumpty, turtles, rabbits, cats and frogs. In the center of the room there is a raised sandbox that is faced with tile and supports an aquarium.

The auditorium is a two-story tall space. It has a vinyl tile floor, plaster walls and an acoustical tile and plaster ceiling. The room retains its faux painted marble pilasters along the two side walls. The pilasters have a painted black marble base that is as tall as the doors and meet a trim band that runs around the room. Above the trim the pilasters are fluted and are a light color with painted gray veining. On the north wall, a colorful band of trim runs up each side of the pilasters and ends at a ceiling crown molding that has a triangular wave pattern. The pilaster capitals have stylized fretwork. On the south wall the painted trim is on the chamfered corners of the pilasters and there is no painted trim at the top of the wall. Deep plaster beams run across the ceiling at the pilasters. The raised wood stage at the west end of the room has a plaster proscenium arch that is a rectangular architrave and is painted to match the wood stage.

The gymnasium has a wood floor, glazed tile wainscoting on the walls with painted concrete block walls above. Acoustical panels have been applied at the top of the walls and on the ceiling.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

### Criteria Considerations

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

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

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Art

Education

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1939-1949

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1939-40

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Jensen, Charles R.

Burke, O.W. Company

Frostic, Gwendolyn

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

McKinley Elementary School is significant at the local level of significance under criteria A and C for its role in the history of the City of Wyandotte's public school system and for its architecture. The school was one of four elementary schools constructed during the district's 1923-1949 school building program so that no elementary school student would have to travel more than a half-mile. It was heralded as an excellent example of school design upon its construction and retains the design features popular in school buildings of that time. The building is executed in the Art Deco style, it retains nearly all of its original design details, including four floor mosaics designed by noted Michigan artist Gwen Frostic, whose father Fred Frostic, was superintendent of the district at the time. The period of significance for the school is 1939 to 1949, from when the building was constructed to when the design of Wyandotte School buildings moved to a significantly different modern design and aesthetics. McKinley served as an elementary school for the district until its closure in 2009.

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

Located ten miles south of Detroit, Michigan, the area that is now the city of Wyandotte was first permanently settled as the Village of Maquaqua by the Wyandots, a part of the Huron Nation Native American tribe in 1732. "Wyandot villages stretched from Georgian Bay in Canada, south along Lake Huron and Lake Erie all the way east to Niagara, New York. Starting in 1795 the Wyandot were forced from Michigan and Ohio and were relocated to Kansas and later Oklahoma." (Wyandotte Museums, "The Wyandots").

John Biddle purchased the land that would become Wyandotte in 1818 for a farm and country estate that he named "Wyandotte" (or "The Wyandotte"). He had a house constructed in 1835, and lived on the estate until 1848. In 1854 he sold his property to Eber Ward and the Eureka Iron Company. John Van Alstyne, the manager of the iron works, platted the village shortly thereafter. The Eureka Iron Company and Rolling Mills Works utilized the Detroit River to receive raw iron from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and to transport the processed iron to markets in the eastern United States. In 1864 the iron works was the first plant in the United States to commercially produce steel using the Bessemer process (Michigan Historical Commission, "America's First Bessemer Steel Mill"). The iron works closed in 1892.

In 1867, Wyandotte was incorporated as a city and John Van Alstyne was elected the first mayor. The 1870 United States Census lists the population at 2,731. In 1871, the American Shipbuilding Company opened and produced boat hulls until 1922. In 1893, John Baptiste Ford (1811-1903), one of the founders of Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, founded the Michigan

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Alkali Company in Wyandotte to take advantage of the salt discovered underground to create soda ash for the plate glass industry as well as related products such as baking soda and lye. In 1943 the company was consolidated with the JB Ford Company Glassworks and became the Wyandotte Chemical Corporation, which produced soaps and cleaners. In 1969 the company was acquired by the German chemical conglomerate BASF, and continues to work in the polyurethane chemistry industry.

A third major industry and employer in the city was the All Metal Products company, manufacturer of Wyandotte Toys, which was founded in 1920. By 1930 the company claimed to be the United States' largest manufacturer of toy guns and pistols, and their products were sold in toy stores across the country. That same year they opened a second factory in Wyandotte and the product line expanded to include metal airplanes, cars, trucks, doll carriages and tops. By 1935 the company produced some one hundred thousand toy cars a day, and consumed one thousand tons of scrap metal per month. During World War II the company manufactured rifle clips and flare guns and paper and wood toys due to the metal shortage. In the early 1950s the company shifted to plastic toy production and moved one of their factories to Ohio. In 1957 the company went out of business.

With these major industries located in Wyandotte, as well as the proximity to Detroit, the population of the city increased, as did its geographical size through four annexations. The first, in 1904, annexed an unincorporated portion of Ecorse Township that was located to the south of the original city boundaries. The following year, the Village of Bacon, located on the city's west border, was annexed. In 1922 the Village of Ford City, located on the north boundary and named for John Baptiste Ford, was annexed, including Ford School, which was built by the village in 1913. In 1924 another unincorporated section of Ecorse Township was annexed, creating the northwest quadrant of the city with a final size of 7.01 square miles. By 1930 the city's population had reached 28,368.

Like many of the communities surrounding Detroit, the city of Wyandotte experienced incredible growth in the post-World War II era. The city reached its peak population of just over 43,000 people in 1960. Since then the population has declined to just under 26,000 according to the 2010 United States Census.

### Wyandotte Public Schools

The history of the Wyandotte public school system mirrors the growth of the city. What is now Wyandotte was historically part of Ecorse Township, districts one and two. Although there is some discrepancy, it is believed that the first school constructed in what is now Wyandotte was located on Orange Street and built in 1837 ("Buildings on Third Street...", *Wyandotte Daily News*). In 1856, the "Old Brown School," that had a capacity of 123 students, was constructed on Chestnut Street for. In addition to a school the building also held the first Wyandotte City Council meeting and served as the initial meeting place for several Protestant church congregations, as they were forming. The building was sold by the district in 1887, and it had several uses, including housing the Independent Order of Odd Fellows until the IOOF sold and

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moved the building in 1910 in order to make way for a new hall on the site. That building still stands, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1869 the school district constructed Central Union, a high school, and the first class graduated in 1875. In 1886, Garfield Elementary School was erected, leading to the sale of the "Old Brown School" a year later. The Garfield school was expanded in 1896.

The first school on the site of the present McKinley Elementary School was erected in 1872 and called the Third Ward school. In 1901 the building was deemed unsafe and was replaced by a new building. That same year the school board adopted a policy to name all schools after United States presidents so the new building, designed by noted Detroit school architects Malcomson and Higginbotham, was named McKinley Elementary School. The cornerstone from the 1901 building is in the back wall of the present school building.

In 1904 the district replaced the Central Union school with a new building, Lincoln High School, which was designed by Detroit architects Van Leyen and Schilling and constructed by Burke, Smith and Nelson. It opened in 1905, and in 1922 it was converted to a junior high school when Roosevelt High School was constructed.

In 1918, Fred W. Frostic (1878-1954) became the superintendent of the Wyandotte Public Schools. He immediately advocated for a concentrated effort to expand school buildings to accommodate the rapidly increasing Wyandotte population, which went from 8,200 in 1910 to 13,851 in 1920, and doubled again to 28,368 in 1930. In 1918 the district only had three buildings in use, Garfield, Lincoln, and McKinley, which had been remodeled in 1914. Superintendent Frostic initiated a new building program for the district. Roosevelt High School was the first building constructed in 1922 and by 1928 the school had 1,800 pupils. As part of the building program the city was surveyed to determine where elementary school age children were located. The district created seven centers each with a half-mile radius, the maximum distance it was believed elementary school children should be from home.

Because of this survey, Washington Elementary School was constructed in 1929-1930 in the west side of the city. It was designed by architect B. C. Wetzel. In 1932-1933 the Garfield school was replaced with a new building that could accommodate 1,040 students. It was designed by B. C. Wetzel and constructed by O. W. Burke. Superintendent Frostic was a proponent of good school design, but also advocated that the district should not incur debt to construct its buildings. At the dedications for Washington and Garfield schools Superintendent Frostic spoke about the importance of modern school design. This philosophy was continued for the new McKinley building, which was completed in 1939 and had a façade that was very similar in appearance to the Garfield school.

In 1949 construction began on Jefferson School, an elementary school. Designed by Smith, Hinchman and Grylls the building is the first Wyandotte school building to shift to a significantly different, modern style of design and building. A March 24, 1949 *Wyandotte News Herald* article about the building, Superintendent Frostic stated, "Strikingly modern, simple in design and functional to the highest degree, the school is the latest of a long array of modern

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buildings erected for the children of the city.” Dedicated in 1950, the school contained two kindergarten rooms and could be easily doubled in size if needed in the future.

Fred Frostic retired in 1950 after a thirty-two-year career with the district. He was well respected and had one of the longest tenures of school superintendents in any major Michigan city (“Fred Frostic Resigns, *Wyandotte News Herald*). He was honored by the district in 1953 with the placement of a bronze plaque in Jefferson School, the last school built during his tenure. Under his guidance, the district grew from three schools serving nine hundred children to nine schools with six thousand pupils in 1950. In the middle of his career in 1931 an article in the August 7, 1931, issue of the *Wyandotte Daily Record* states that, “He is ranked as one of the best superintendents in the state and an authority on many subjects. The Wyandotte schools are pointed out to visiting delegates in Michigan as among the top-notchers.” He died in Ann Arbor in 1954.

Shortly after Fred Frostic’s retirement, beginning in 1952, the district undertook another expansion program. The population of Wyandotte was rapidly increasing, especially in the southwest section of the city. The first was James Madison Elementary, designed by Jahr-Anderson, located in southwest Wyandotte, and completed in 1953. In 1954 seven classrooms were added to Washington Elementary. In September 1955, Abraham Lincoln Junior High School was completed. Designed by the firm of Eberle Smith, it replaced the 1904 building. In October 1955, James Monroe Elementary was completed. It was designed by Jahr-Anderson and constructed by Barton Malow. In January 1956, William Howard Taft Elementary, designed by Bennett and Straight, was completed. In September 1956, Woodrow Wilson Junior High, designed by Swanson Associates was completed. The construction of the new buildings relieved overcrowding, allowed the shifting of students, as well as closing the 1913 Ford School that the district inherited when the Village of Ford was annexed to the city in 1922.

In 1957 the district began construction on a new administration building on the site of the old Lincoln Junior High School. The district’s offices were located in Roosevelt High School at the time, and removal to a separate building would give more space for high school use.

While the district responded rapidly to Wyandotte’s population growth, from 1960 to 1980 the United States Censuses showed that the city lost nearly ten thousand residents. This population decline continued into the twenty-first century, with the city currently having about twenty-five thousand residents. Typical of many Michigan communities this decline required the district to close schools that were older, or where there were not enough students. Today the district has four elementary schools (Monroe, Garfield, Washington, and Jefferson), one middle school (Wilson), and Roosevelt High School. Madison school has been converted to a skills center, and Taft school has been converted to The Lincoln Center, with autism and cognitive impairment, which educates students from seventeen communities.



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This page from the September 3, 1957 issue of the *Wyandotte News Herald* shows all of Wyandotte Public Schools elementary schools and the area of the city they serve. From the Bacon Memorial Library Public Schools Scrapbooks, Wyandotte (note north is to the right).

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### McKinley Elementary School

In 1937 the Wyandotte school board began exploring replacing the 1901 McKinley school building, then the oldest building in the district. It was found that the building and heating plants were inadequate, the lighting and ventilation of the building was poor, and the fire hazards were greater than they should be. However, the superintendent thought there was not a high likelihood of receiving federal aid and advised the board to acquire the land along Plum street, behind the existing school (“Small Chance for Federal Aid,” *Wyandotte Herald*).

In 1938 the school board purchased the Plum Street land and applied to the federal government for a grant-in-aid. They were successful in obtaining about a third of the cost to construct a new school building. McKinley was not the only building in the district to receive assistance from New Deal programs; Roosevelt High School received murals five murals depicting the history and industry of Wyandotte under the WPA artist program in 1941.

In the fall of 1938 the school board was challenged by the reality that they really did not have enough funds on hand to construct the new McKinley school. A special election was held in October 1938 to request that the board be allowed to transfer funds temporarily from other dedicated uses and to request a millage. The millage did not pass, but voters did approve the transfer of funds. In November 1938 the board gave final approval for construction, and work was started on the new McKinley Elementary School in late-December 1938.

McKinley Elementary School was dedicated in March 1940 with great fanfare. The school’s Parent Teacher Association hosted the evening. Anyone who had ever attended the earlier McKinley school buildings was recognized with a special badge. Tours of the new school were given, and music was provided by the high school orchestra and the McKinley School Choir. The state superintendent for public instruction, Dr. Eugene B. Elliott, gave the dedication speech and Superintendent Frostic gave a talk entitled, “The Building as an Expression of Educational Ideals.” (“Dedicate McKinley School...”, *Wyandotte Tribune*). This same article explains the school’s “latest type of photo-electric light controls, indirect lighting fixtures, and maximum glass area in windows.” The large windows and lighting system allowed the students to write without shadows and lights automatically came on when the illumination of a room dropped below twenty-five foot candles on the inside walls.

A *Wyandotte Daily News* article published in April 1940 expounded on the ways the new McKinley building was a vast improvement over the two earlier buildings. The new building had rooms for specific uses, library facilities, and health examination rooms connected to the gymnasium. “The kindergarten rooms provide a homelike surrounding for children in their first entrance into school life. These rooms are separated from the rest of the building and have their own cloak room and toilet facilities.” The wide corridors allowed better movement, including being able to evacuate the building in about two minutes. Lockers and water fountains were recessed into the corridor walls so there were no obstructions. In order to make the school as fireproof as possible terrazzo floors and tile wainscoting were used instead of wood. Gates

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could be lowered to block off parts of the school when the gymnasium or auditorium were used for evening activities.

McKinley Elementary School continued to education elementary age students and host evening community activities until 2009 when the board closed the school primarily due to population decreases in the city. The building is presently being rehabilitated for housing.



**This photograph appeared in an unknown Wyandotte newspaper on November 1, 1940 and shows the completed but not yet occupied McKinley School. From the Bacon Memorial Library Public Schools Scrapbooks, Wyandotte.**

### Michigan School Context

The style and design of McKinley Elementary School is fairly typical of public school design in Michigan in the late 1930s. Its Art Deco features include a symmetrical façade, stylized floral and geometric ornament, and parallel lines around windows and doors (Strickland, *An Honor and An Ornament*, p. 89). The interior of the building has a separate auditorium and gymnasium, a requirement of the platoon system of design. A separate kindergarten room with a bay window, fireplace and special built-in furniture; a science room with greenhouse or conservatory; library; and nurse's room were all popular and necessary components of schools constructed at the time.

Federal funds were used to construct or remodel over two hundred school buildings in Michigan during the New Deal era. In 1935 the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction stated that there had been no school building activities in Michigan since 1932 except for those that were federally funded. The Public Works Administration's allotment for Michigan was \$14,595,106 (*ibid.*, p. 43). School projects using federal funds were those found to be absolutely necessary. The projects had to replace schools destroyed by fire, or there had to be health and safety issues for a project to receive funds. The local municipality was required to match at least half the amount provided by the federal government. Federal support for school construction in Michigan continued into the 1940s (*ibid.*, p. 44).

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Carl R. Jensen

The architect of McKinley Elementary School was Carl R. Jensen (1889-1950) of Detroit. Born in Greenville, Michigan, Jensen grew up in Muskegon, Michigan, where his father was a bricklayer. In the 1910 United States Census he is listed as a self-employed draftsman living with his parents, who were both born in Denmark. In 1917 his World War I draft registration card lists him as living in Birmingham, Michigan, with his wife and two children. His occupation was listed as a partner in the contracting firm of Wirth, Burke and Smith. In a 1937 *Detroit Free Press* article about a fire at Fordson High School in Dearborn, Michigan, Carl Jensen is quoted as the architect for the building. However, the building was designed by H. C. Keough and constructed in 1928, so it is not clear if in the 1937 article if Jensen is an architect for the school district or the architect for renovations to the school. In 1939 Jensen designed the Littlefield Boulevard United Presbyterian Church in Dearborn in partnership with architect J. L. Beatty of Pittsburgh. The 1940 United States Census lists him as an architect of public schools. A July 25, 1941, *Wyandotte Herald* article states that Jensen was given permission by the school board to prepare preliminary drawings for a new public library building, however, it appears the building was never constructed. Jensen's obituary in the December 24, 1950, issue of the *Detroit Free Press*, states he was "a designer of many Detroit schools."

Gwen Frostic

Gwen Frostic (1906-2001), in partnership with her father, designed four floor mosaics executed in terrazzo in the main corridor of the school. Ms. Frostic moved to Wyandotte with her family when her father became school superintendent in 1918. Due to an illness as an infant she had minor physical impairments. She began her artistic career as a student at Roosevelt High School in Wyandotte where she created life-size posters with a band saw. She graduated from there in 1924 and attended Eastern Michigan University – her parents' alma mater – earning a teaching certificate before transferring to Western Michigan University in 1926. She returned to Wyandotte in 1927 and set up a metal shop in her parents' basement. She named her business Metalcraft and she designed and created items such as hot plates, fireplace screens and vases, including two vases for Clara Ford. In addition to her business she taught art in Dearborn and at the Detroit YMCA. When her mother died in 1935 she helped raise her younger siblings until her father remarried in 1938. With the shortage of metal, she began experimenting in creating items in plastic, including a tray that was exhibited at the 1939 New York World's Fair. During World War II she worked as a tool and die draftsman at Ford Company's Willow Run plant. With the continued metal shortage, she began experimenting with using linoleum and a printing press to create stationary and printed items. She started Presscraft Papers and operated out of a former Wyandotte grocery store. She had an apartment in the rear of the store and did commercial printing in addition to her artistic pieces which featured birds and other wildlife that she studied and sketched. In 1950, she began spending her summers and running her business in downtown Frankfort, Michigan. In 1953 she moved there permanently. In 1961 she built a house, studio, and store on forty acres outside of Frankfort on the Betsie River where she remained until her death in 2001.

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Name of Property

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### **Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Bacon Memorial Library, Wyandotte. A collection of scrapbooks on Wyandotte Schools containing newspaper articles. Volumes I-VI. c.1901 – c. 1962, unknown compiler. Including:

Becker, Marjorie. Unknown title. *Wyandotte Herald*. February 28, 1955.

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<http://www.wyandottemuseums.org/Research/LocalHistoryFacts/TheWyandots/tabid/111/Default.aspx>

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: Bacon Memorial Library, Wyandotte

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** 3.2

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 42.114605 Longitude: -83.093081

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

McKinley Elementary School  
Name of Property

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County and State

4. Latitude: Longitude:

**Or**  
**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

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

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

Beginning at a point at the northwest corner of Plum Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Street, then north along the west curb line of 6<sup>th</sup> Street to the centerline of the vacated Cherry Street Right of Way; then west along said centerline to the east curb line of 7<sup>th</sup> Street; then south along the east curb line of 7<sup>th</sup> Street to the north curb line of Plum Street; then east along the north curb line of Plum Street to the Point of the Beginning. Commonly known as 640 Plum Street in the City of Wyandotte, County of Wayne, Michigan.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

**The boundary is the south half of the present-day parcel that was associated with the school when it was constructed.**

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Kristine Kidorf  
organization: Kidorf Preservation Consulting  
street & number: 451 E. Ferry Street

McKinley Elementary School  
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Wayne County, MI  
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city or town: Detroit state: MI zip code: 48202  
e-mail kristine@kidorfpreservationconsulting.com  
telephone: 313-300-9376  
date: April 2017

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

### Photographs

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

### Photo Log



McKinley Elementary School  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Name of Property: McKinley Elementary School

City or Vicinity: Wyandotte

County: Wayne State: MI

Photographer: Kristine Kidorf

Date Photographed: March 23, 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 16. Looking northeast at front façade and west elevation.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0001

2 of 16. Looking northwest at front façade.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0002

3 of 16. Looking southwest at east and north elevations.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0003

4 of 16. Looking south at north elevation – east half of building.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0004

5 of 16. Looking south at north elevation – center section.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0005

6 of 16. Looking east at west elevation.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0006

7 of 16. Looking south at north elevation.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0007

8 of 16. Looking northeast at detail of front façade showing entrance and kindergarten room.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0008

9 of 16. Looking south at front entrance and stair, first floor.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0009

10 of 16. Looking west in auditorium.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0010

11 of 16. Detail of corridor drinking fountain.

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MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0011

12 of 16. Looking southwest in kindergarten room.

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0012

13 of 16. Detail of Gwen Frostic floor mosaic (Great Lakes).

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0013

14 of 16. Looking northwest in first floor corridor with Gwen Frostic floor mosaic (compass).

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0014

15 of 16. Detail of Gwen Frostic floor mosaic (sun).

MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0015

16 of 16. Detail of Gwen Frostic floor mosaic (constellation).

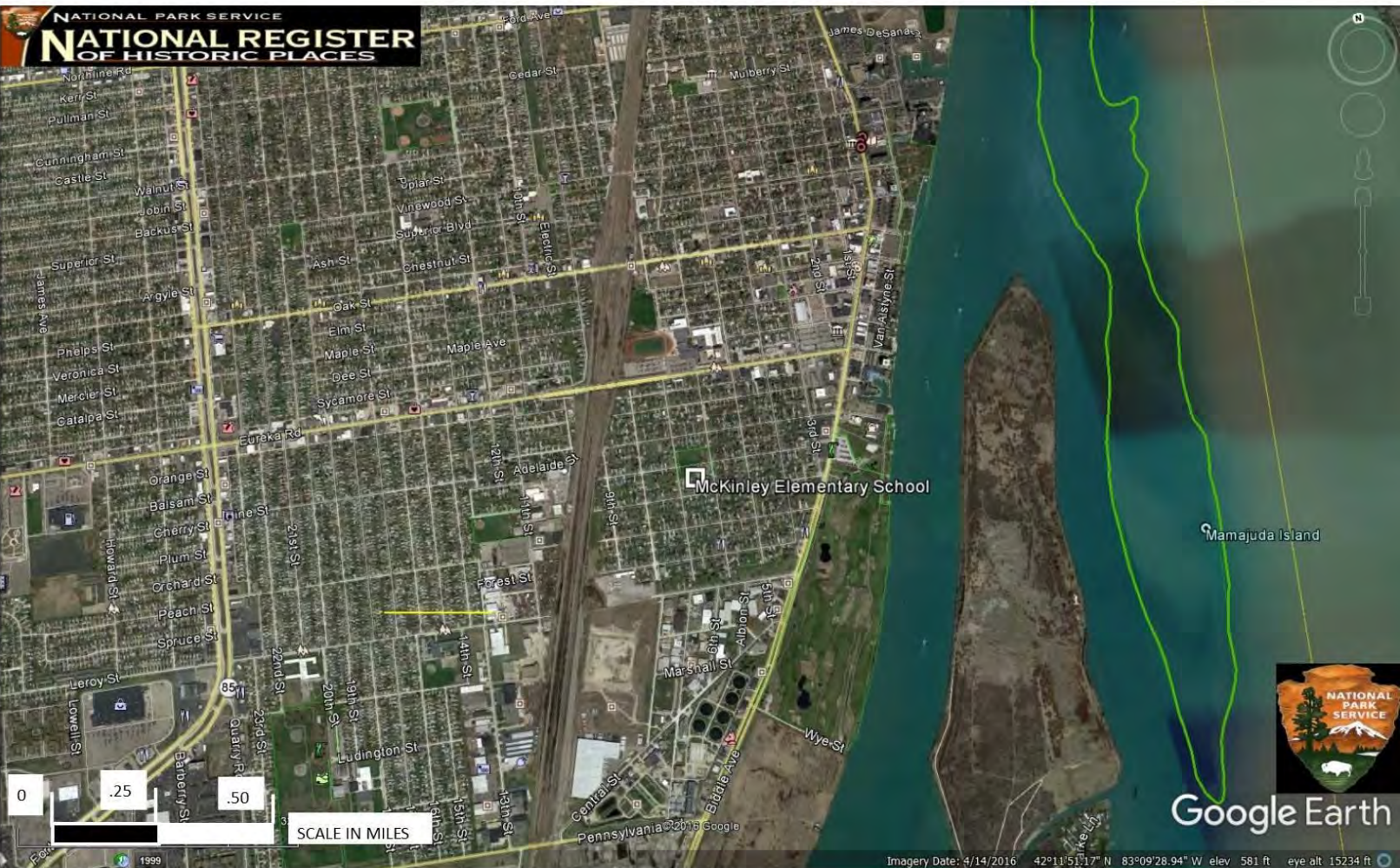
MI\_Wayne County\_McKinley Elementary School\_0016

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

**McKinley Elementary School**  
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**Wayne County, MI**  
County and State \_\_\_\_\_



McKINLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
WYANDOTTE, WAYNE COUNTY, MI  
CONTEXT MAP

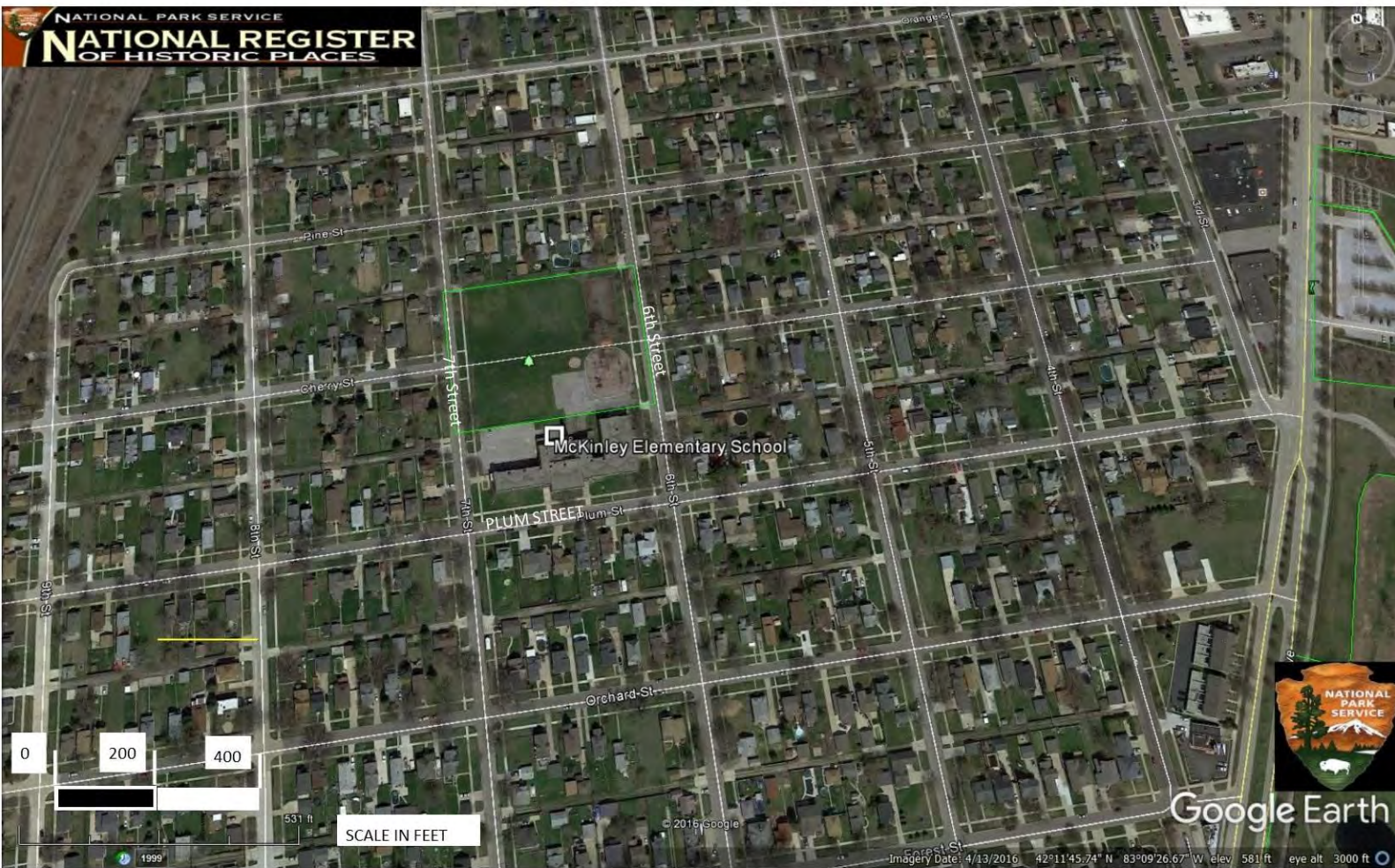


Latitude: 42.114605

Longitude: -83.093081

McKinley Elementary School \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State



Longitude: -83.093081

Latitude: 42.114605

McKINLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLE  
WYANDOTTE, WAYNE COUNTY, MI  
LARGE SCALE MAP





McKINLEY SCHOOL

NO PARKING  
IN FRONT OF  
SCHOOL  
FROM 8:00 AM TO 3:00 PM



McKINLEY SCHOOL

NO PARKING  
IN FRONT OF  
SCHOOL









A.D. MCKINLEY SCHOOL - RC







McKINLEY SCHOOL



99

99

EXIT



FIVE  
GB FIVE  
2016











NOTICE  
AUTHORIZED  
PERSONNEL ONLY

BOILER ROOM  
MACHINE ROOM

"FIRE"



SUN



★ POLE STAR

POLE STAR

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 10/13/2017      Date of Pending List: 11/16/2017 11:56:55 AM      Date of 16th Day: 11/29/2017      Date of 45th Day: 11/27/2017      Date of Weekly List: 11/30/2017

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept       Return       Reject      11/27/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria

Reviewer Edson Beall      Discipline Historian

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



RICK SNYDER  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
MICHIGAN STATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

September 28, 2017

Mr. J. Paul Loether, Keeper  
National Register of Historic Places  
Mail Stop 7228  
1849 C St, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed discs contain the true and correct copy of the nomination for the **McKinley Elementary School, Wyandotte, Wayne County, Michigan**. Disc 1 contains correspondence and the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, which includes site maps. Disc 2 contains photographs of this site. This property is being submitted for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. No written comments concerning this nomination were submitted to us prior to our forwarding this nomination to you.

Questions concerning this nomination should be addressed to Todd A. Walsh, Interim National Register Coordinator, at (517) 373-1979 or WalshT@michigan.gov.

Sincerely yours,

Brian D. Conway  
State Historic Preservation Officer

