

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **Franklin, Benjamin, Public School #36**  
other names/site number **098-296-05594**

2. Location

street & number **2801 North Capitol Avenue** N/A not for publication  
city or town **Indianapolis** N/A vicinity  
state **Indiana** code **IN** county **Marion** code **097** zip code **46208**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 36CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title  
**Indiana Department of Natural Resources**  
State or Federal agency and bureau

Date **1.30.03**

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the 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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**Edson H. Beall**

**3/26/03**

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)		
		Contributing	Noncontributing	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building	1	0	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	0	0	sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	0	0	structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0	objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	1	0	Total

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

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

Public School Buildings in Indianapolis Built

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: School

WORK IN PROGRESS

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions)

19th & 20th c. REVIVALS: Romanesque  
 MODERN:

foundation STONE

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other WOOD

CONCRETE

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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.)

Property is:

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1896-1952

**Significant Dates**

1896

1905

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Scherrer, Adolf

Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than 1 acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	16	571860	4406670	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Margaret Warminski, Architectural Historian  
 organization Cincinnati Preservation Association date 08-13-2002  
 street & number 342 West 4th Street telephone 513/ 721-4506  
 city or town Cincinnati state OH zip code 45202

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Franklin School Apartments, LLC  
 street & number 2445 North Meridian Street telephone 317/  
 city or town Indianapolis state IN zip code 46208

**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. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Benjamin Franklin Public School #36  
Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana

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**7. Statement of Description**

Benjamin Franklin Public School #36 (site number 0594), also known as P.S. #36, is a Romanesque Revival brick school building of cubical massing, built in 1896 (photos 1, 2). At the rear is a two-story addition built in 1959, in functional modern style (photos 9, 10). The nomination includes only the school building and adjacent playground and parking lot; no outbuildings are present.

The school building is located at the northeast corner of North Capitol Avenue and West Twenty-Eighth Street in northwest Indianapolis. It is part of a residential neighborhood that was developed for the most part in the 1910s and 1920s. Opposite the school is a line of frame bungalow and American Foursquare dwellings (photo 25). To the south, across West Twenty-Eighth Street, is a small c. 1950-1960 supermarket. Adjoining the school building on the north is a small playground, surrounded by a chain-link fence. To the east of the playground is a paved parking lot, with an alley leading to North Kenwood Avenue.

The 1896 building rises two-and-a-half-stories above a raised basement and is crowned by a hipped roof with extended eaves. The main facade, which faces west, contains six bays arranged in symmetry (photo, 1, 2). It is dominated by a three-story central tower with hipped roof (photos 1, 5). The north and south elevations contain 10 bays irregularly arranged in groups of three and four (photos 6, 11). Crowning the south wall are a gabled wall dormer, placed off center, and a hipped roof dormer (photo 7). Centered above the north wall is a large hipped dormer framed by narrow brick chimneys with stone caps (photo 6).

The main entrance to the school is contained in a segmentally arched vestibule at the base of the central tower (photo 3). Centered above, in the second story, is a large, fully arched, triple window (photo 4). A steel I-beam extends across the window at the base of the arch. Below the window is a blind recess, rectangular in shape, that formerly contained a tablet inscribed with the original name of the school. Above the window is a stone tablet bearing the inscription, "Franklin School No. 36"; the tablet, which rests on the surface of the wall, was added in 1903 (photo 5). Each face of the square tower contains a trio of narrow, rectangular windows. A brick corbel table completes the

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composition. Originally rising to a pyramid, the tower roof was truncated at an unknown date.

The school building rests on a foundation of rock-faced limestone ashlar. The walls are unpainted red brick laid in common bond; some small areas of mortar are missing. Smooth-faced limestone lintels and sills grace the facade bays. A stepped brick corbel table encircles the building (photos 5, 6). The central section of the south elevation exhibits a simpler pattern (coursed rather than stepped) and appears to have been rebuilt (photo 7).

The window openings contain white vinyl thermal sashes c. 1980, most of which contain double-hung 1/1 units with fixed transoms. Some windows at the side elevations are relatively small and are set in spandrels above blind panels (photo 8). (While these may at first glance appear to have been enclosed with brick, archival photographs indicate they were built in this manner.) Splayed, three-course brick jack arches surmount the basement windows, which have been infilled with brick and concrete block. All of the windows at the third story have been boarded over (photo 5).

The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The original box gutters were replaced with hanging gutters, with part of the original copper left in place. Shed-roofed dormers project from the north and south roof slopes, and tall brick chimneys rise from the roof surface (photos 6, 11). Directly north of the school building stands a tall brick smokestack (photo 11).

The building's interior plan is common to both the first and second floors. A short, broad flight of steps leads from the entry vestibule to a large common space, nearly square in form, which is surrounded on all sides by classrooms (photo 12). Adjoining the north and south classrooms are narrow coatrooms, lined with hooks, with doorways connecting to the classrooms (photo 18). Windows at the far walls have been converted to fire doors. At the second floor, modern double fire doors lead to the rear addition.

At the front and rear of the common space are open, two-run staircases. These feature square iron newels; open balustrades with lattice-like, geometrical metalwork; and oak treads (photos 13, 14).

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Classrooms, which vary in configuration, surround the common area. At each corner of building are large rooms, nearly square, with two walls full of windows. Centered on the north and south sides of the building are narrow, rectangular rooms, some of which may originally have served as offices (photo 16). All classrooms exhibit high ceilings and large windows. Most retain slate chalkboards, with wood moldings, on one or more walls (photos 17, 19). In the north rooms, washrooms have been installed along the far wall. The second-floor room retains a porcelain pedestal sink of the early 20th century, while the first-floor room features modern fixtures.

The interior of the original school building features plaster walls and varnished tongue-and-groove oak floors (photo 17). A few floorboards are missing in the second-floor common space, and some classroom floors have been covered with wall-to-wall carpeting. Most hallway and classroom ceilings are covered with corrugated metal; some metal ceilings are in sound condition, while others are badly rusted (photo 19). Dropped ceilings have been installed in some rooms. Suspended fluorescent light fixtures are in use throughout the building. Cast-iron radiators provide heat. Minor water damage, in the form of fallen plaster and buckling of floors, is evident in some classrooms.

The school building retains a full complement of original oak millwork, with clear finish. Door and window surrounds are simple and flat, with mitered corners. The hallways and classrooms feature six-panel unglazed doors with flat, round, wooden knobs. Above the doors are large, square, single-light transoms. Some of the classroom entrances are framed by large, double-hung windows, which provide additional light (photo 15).

The west staircase rises to the third floor, which appears to have been unoccupied for many years. Small, enclosed spaces that once housed classrooms are in evidence around the perimeter of the room, and the walls are lined with coat hooks. The central section of the room currently houses mechanical equipment. Open to the roof, it is unfinished, with roof boards visible (photo 20).

The basement of the school building contains a series of interconnected rooms with painted brick walls, segmentally arched doorways and resilient-tile flooring. One of the basement rooms was utilized as classroom space. It features a pressed-tin ceiling and exposed stone walls. The small, rectangular windows are boarded (photo 21).

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Adjoining the school building on the east is a 1959 addition of restrained modern design, which faces east. It stands two stories high with a flat roof and features small, double-hung "ribbon" windows in cleanly cut openings. New metal sashes have been installed. The recessed main entrance contains three sets of double-leaf metal doors. The walls are laid in light-colored brick veneer (photos 9, 10). The rear (east) entrance of the original Franklin School building was obscured by the 1959 addition and is no longer visible.

The interior of the rear addition is characterized by utilitarian design and durable, fire-resistant modern surfaces. It features cinderblock walls, resilient tile floors and acoustical tile ceilings, as well as metal staircases with terrazzo treads (photo 22). Classrooms are spacious, with low ceilings. One of the most distinctive is a former home economics room with 1950s-style kitchen sinks and wood cupboards arrayed around the perimeter (photo 23). The addition also includes a combination auditorium/gymnasium with stage and center court, and locker rooms at the rear (photo 24).



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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Summary

Benjamin Franklin Public School #36 meets Criterion C for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places as established in the "Public School Buildings in Indianapolis Built Before 1940" Multiple Properties Documentation Form. It is a notable, well-preserved and locally uncommon public elementary school building in the Romanesque Revival style, distinguished by façade tower, arched entrance and brick cornice. As one of the few surviving 19th-century schools in Indianapolis, it is a rare surviving example of a once-common building type. The building is notable for its unusual interior plan, with classrooms arrayed around a central common space.

The school building is also significant for its association with Adolf Scherrer, a prominent and prolific Indianapolis architect of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Scherrer designed several highly visible public edifices in the Hoosier State, including a series of Indianapolis school buildings. In 1919 Scherrer and his son, architect Anton Scherrer, devised a standard plan for Indianapolis public schools. This plan standardized new construction and integrated several new construction and educational developments.

### Architectural Development

#### School architecture in the late 19th century.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, experts in school design stressed the importance of good lighting, ventilation and high-quality materials. School buildings, they proclaimed, should combine beauty and utility; they should be attractively designed but not ostentatious, with no wasted space; they should be sanitary and easy to clean and maintain.

Let the school building, then, be solidly constructed, thoroughly fireproof, abundantly lighted, with adequate, straight halls and ample stairways, having sunshine and access for the outer air in every room besides abundant forced ventilation; let it be cheerful and attractive without and within, well placed and supplied with adequate playgrounds and pleasant surroundings, and it will not

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only be a source of pride, but a blessing to the community, as well as a credit to its designer. (A.D.F. Hamlin, "Consideration in School House Design," in *Modern School Houses* [The Swetland Publishing Company, 1910, 1915], p. 11)

Good lighting was critical for learning. Architects recommended banks of large windows, several feet above the floor. To reduce glare, light should come over the left shoulder or from the back. To prevent shadows, single-pane glass was preferred. Heavy transom bars were to be avoided since they cast shadows (Hamlin, p. 8).

Free movement of air was advocated to reduce concentrations of noxious substances and odors, and eliminate close, stuffy conditions. Ideally the window-surface of schoolrooms should be at least one-fifth the size of the floor surface. Transoms over doors were recommended, and, for cross-ventilation, "inside sash in the walls, between halls and rooms" (See Warren Richard Briggs, F.A.I.A., *Modern American School Buildings* [John Wiley & Sons, 1899], p. 346.). "This will insure, by opening the outside windows, a free circulation of air through the rooms and halls in warm weather, and a complete flushing of the rooms at any time it may be required" (ibid., p. 12).

Surfaces should be durable and easy to clean. Light-colored plaster and varnished wainscoting, or glazed brick or tile were favored wall treatments; for ceilings, metal, light-colored hardwood, or a system of Portland cement over fireproof floor tiles (Briggs, pp. 338, 339). Woodwork should be of simple design, with a natural finish. Picture-molding made it easier to hang maps and charts (ibid.).

Proper schoolroom layout aided classroom management. A slightly oblong shape was preferred, with the teacher's desk at one end. One ample door should be provided near the teacher's end of the room: wide enough for "two files" of children to pass in or out, under the teacher's "eye and full control" (See Hamlin, p. 10). Cloakrooms should include a window at one end, with two doors opening into the classroom and none into the hallway (ibid.).

For reasons of safety and efficiency, architects advised against central staircases. Because they were centered above basement furnaces or boilers, they could be death traps in case of fire. Instead, designers recommended placing staircases against outside walls, situated so students could move in and out and up and down without disturbing others.

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Twin stairs were preferred, "so that in case of fire or accident two independent and isolated exits are available" (Briggs, p. 114). Stairs were to be built of high-quality materials, and fireproof; closed construction was preferred. They should contain at least "one broad platform or landing in the height of any one story" (ibid.), well lit by direct light, with windows at least four feet off the floor (ibid.).

Safety-conscious architects recommended against placing the assembly hall on the top floor, while others thought these were acceptable for occasional use. Boilers and furnaces were to be located in fireproof rooms.

The design of Franklin School reflects progressive trends in school design during the late 19th century, as school buildings incorporated technological advances such as electric light, indoor plumbing and mechanical ventilation. The building's interior layout, finishes and details reflect "modern" school buildings of the 1890s and early 1900s. Characteristic features include twin metal staircases placed against outer walls, grouped single-pane sashes, metal ceilings, operable transoms and interior windows, and simple millwork with clear finish. The school featured the first wood shop in an Indianapolis elementary school, and the principal's office boasted the first electric light north of Fall Creek.

**Indianapolis school buildings.** The first school buildings constructed in the capital city were primarily one- and two-room structures: one-story units designed to accommodate the later addition of a second story. None is known to survive in its original form. As the school-age population expanded in the 1860s and 1870s, larger, more permanent structures appeared: two- and three-story brick and frame edifices of vertical massing.

In 1880 school standards were upgraded. Frame buildings were abandoned in favor of more durable, fire-resistant masonry. Three-story designs fell from favor, also because of fire-safety concerns. The new standards called for 12-room, graded-school buildings with ample light and good ventilation. To assure optimal lighting, corner sites were preferred, preferably bounded on three sides by streets and alleys.

"Architects incorporated educators' new ideas about lighting and ventilation into these often cubical massed buildings. Central furnaces with ducting for fresh air, large banks of double-hung windows, even electrical wiring for artificial light or piping for natural gas lights were part of these new schools" (Paul C. Diebold, "Indiana's Public Common and

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High Schools, 1816-1946" [National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1999], p. F 19). Interiors also reflected standard plans. "A large entry arch with double doors led into a true internal corridor which led to four to eight rooms.... The entry foyer might actually contain a staircase leading to the raised main level, or a split stair leading down to a raised basement level and up to a main level" (Diebold, *ibid.*).

The elementary schools built in Indianapolis in the late 19th century, such as Franklin School, are vertically oriented, massed-plan buildings, rising two or two-and-a-half-stories above a raised basement. Facades are symmetrical. Central towers are common features. Window openings typically are segmentally arched, or flat with limestone headers. Extant schools span the period from 1872 to 1899.

Most school buildings of the early 20th century followed the same cubical form as their counterparts of the late 1800s, albeit with flatter, more symmetrical facades, and classical garb. By the 1910s, however, a new silhouette emerged: more horizontal in form, with flat roofs and banks of large windows. "Schools of the 'teens and twenties were less vertical in plan, tending to have a central entry pavilion and wings extending away on either side. Windows filled entire walls of these later schools" (Diebold, p. F 19). This same basic form, updated with Art Deco/Moderne detailing, would remain popular for the next three decades.

In the "baby boom" years after World War II, Indianapolis' school population again increased rapidly, giving rise to another wave of school construction and expansion. The rear addition of Franklin School exemplifies the decidedly modern buildings constructed in the 1950s, which were horizontal in orientation, with flat roofs, planar facades and ribbon windows.

Some of the oldest extant public school buildings in Indianapolis exemplify the Italianate style. Among them is the Oliver P. Morton School #29 (site 1275), an 1890 edifice designed by Louis Gibson. A Romanesque Revival addition was completed in 1893. The Morton School was rated "Outstanding" by the Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory, indicating that it is potentially eligible for listing in the National Register.

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Three Romanesque Revival schools, including Franklin School, have been identified. The John Greenleaf Whittier School #33, built in 1893, is listed in the National Register. Additions from 1902 and 1926 were designed by Vonnegut & Bohn. James Russell Lowell School #51 (site number 0862), built in 1900, was rated "Outstanding" by the Site and Structures Inventory. The original building was designed by architect T.A. Winteroud; a Neoclassical Revival addition was added in 1913 and a modern addition in 1955. Brookside School #54 (site 1044) is a Romanesque Revival work of 1910 enlarged in 20th Century Functional style; it received a rating of "Notable" by the inventory, indicating a resource of above-average importance. Schools #51 and #54 are slated for demolition; after they are demolished, Franklin School will be Indianapolis' sole remaining public school building in the Romanesque Revival style.

At the turn of the 20th century, classical revival styles came to prominence for public buildings in Indianapolis, including schools. William Watson Woolen School #45 is a Beaux Arts edifice built in 1898 and enlarged in 1913. It is the work of Vonnegut & Bohn, one of the city's leading architectural firms of the late 19th and early 20th century. The firm also designed George W. Sloan School #41 (site 0444), a Neoclassical Revival structure of 1897 with additions in 1903 and 1914. Another classically styled work is James A. Garfield School #35 (site 2707), built in 1908 and 1910. John McCormick School #30 (site 1461), built 1924, is a Neoclassical Revival building designed by Elmer Dunlap. All four buildings are ranked "Outstanding."

During the early 20th century Period Revival styles also found favor with school architects. Three schools rated "Outstanding" represent the Tudor Revival style: Florence Fay School #21 (site 1987), a 1913 work of Herbert Bass; Robert Dale Owen School #12 (2634), designed by Robert P. Daggett in 1916; and Eleanor A. Skillen School #34 (2774) (1914; R.F. Dagget & Company). Riverside School #44 (site 1448), built in 1921 and 1936, exemplifies the Jacobethan Revival mode. It was rated "Notable" by the inventory.

Several public school buildings are contributing elements of Indianapolis historic districts. These include the William A. Bell School #60 (site 008 30) in the Meridian Park Historic District, and the Calvin Fletcher School #8 (site 111 520) in the Fletcher Place Historic District.

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**Adolf Scherrer.** Adolf Scherrer, designer of Benjamin Franklin Public School #36, was one of the leading architects of Indianapolis during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "Mr. Scherrer, a resident of Indianapolis fifty-two years, observed the growth of the city and had a prominent part in planning buildings erected during that time" (*Indianapolis Star*, February 14, 1925, p. 1).

Scherrer was born in Switzerland in 1847. He received his early education in common schools, then studied at universities in Vienna and Budapest. In 1870 he emigrated to the United States, settling first in New York. He relocated to the Midwest, spending two years in Chicago, and arrived in Indianapolis in 1873. His first job was as a draftsman in the office of Edwin May, "one of the leading architects of Indianapolis of that day" (*ibid.*), who was drafting plans for the Indiana State House. Upon his employer's death, Scherrer "took up the work and carried it to completion. His name is inscribed on state records as supervising architect for the structure" (*ibid.*).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries Scherrer designed many important public buildings in Indianapolis. These included the 34th Street and Boulevard Place entrance to Crown Hill Cemetery, in the Gothic Revival style (1885); the Old Pathology Building (1896) at Central State Hospital, and many additions to the hospital; and the Elks Club. He also received at least two high-profile commissions for the German-American community: the Independent Turnverein Building (1913) and the Maennerchor Building (demolished), built for "instruction about and appreciation of the great German composers" (David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Brown, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* [Indiana University Press, 1994], p. 1212). Scherrer's body of work demonstrates that he was proficient in late-19th-century Revival styles as well as the innovative Prairie Style of the early 20th century.

Scherrer designed a series of Indianapolis Public School buildings in the 1890s, including P.S. #36, William McKinley Public School #39, the original Thomas D. Gregg School #15 (1896) and Nicholas McCarty Public School #48 (demolished). School #48, built in 1889, was characteristic of Scherrer's IPS designs. Like Franklin School, it presented a truncated hipped roof, an encircling brick cornice, and a central tower (roof removed) with paired, arched windows and arched vestibule. The segmentally arched windows contained 6/6 panes. A series of additions extended outward from the rear. Scherrer also served as supervising architect for Manual Training High School, built in 1895. In 1919,

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Scherrer and his son Anton (1878-1960), devised a standard plan for IPS buildings, incorporating the latest technological advancements and progressive ideas in education.

Scherrer served on the city's Board of Public Works (ibid.) from 1893 to 1895, during the administration of Mayor J.L. Sullivan. The Board was charged with hiring the engineer who designed the city's first comprehensive sewer system. Scherrer was a member of the Indianapolis Architect's Association and a fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

In 1877 Scherrer married Emma Anaeshaensel. The couple had two sons, Herman and Anton. Both became well-known architects in Indianapolis, working first with their father and later on their own (ibid.). Scherrer retired from active practice in 1919, following a debilitating stroke. He died in 1925.

**Romanesque Revival style in Indianapolis.** Franklin School exemplifies the Romanesque Revival style, which was popular in Indianapolis from the late 1880s to c. 1910. It was used extensively for commercial buildings and the occasional residence, as well as a series of public school buildings.

The most salient elements of the Romanesque style and its nineteenth-century counterpart are the round arch and the heavy masonry facades. Romanesque Revival buildings tend to have massive hipped roofs, many with wall gables and conical or pyramidal-roof towers or belfries, they are generally ponderous and fortress-like, conveying an atmosphere of defiance. ("Center Township, Marion County Interim Report," p. xxvii)

Perhaps the best-known Romanesque Revival work in the capital city is Indianapolis Union Station (1886-1888; 1913-1914), a landmark edifice distinguished by a square corner clock tower and a barrel-vaulted central waiting room with stained-glass wheel windows at each end. Another excellent representation of the style is the Blacherne Apartments on North Meridian Street. One of the city's earliest apartment buildings, it is a soaring seven-story brick edifice framed by semi-cylindrical towers. Hallmarks of the style include the boldly arched entrance, rock-faced stone lintels and rich foliate carving. Franklin School illustrates the influence of the Romanesque Revival style in its solid, weighty character, and arched entry portal and tower window.

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### Historical Development

**Indianapolis Public Schools.** Indianapolis was founded as the capital of Indiana in 1821. For the first two decades, growth was slow. In the 1840s the city became a major railroad hub, and rapid residential, commercial and industrial development followed. In 1850 the town had 8,091 residents. By 1870, as the nation recovered from the Civil War, this total had swelled to 48,244: an increase of 159 percent.

The first schools in Indianapolis, as in many other Midwestern cities, were private academies. In the winter of 1846-1847, the first city charter included a provision for the establishment of taxpayer-supported common schools. Following a vigorous debate, the matter was put before the voters the following spring, and passed by a wide majority. Over the next decade public education gained a tenuous foothold in the capital city. "The spirit of progress was awake, but the road for advance was not clearly defined" (Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis* [The Lewis Publishing Company, 1910], p. 269).

For many years the Indianapolis schools struggled with inadequate funding. "Indiana's burgeoning cities could build schools, but could not hire teachers via taxes to staff them" (Diebold, p. E 4). School construction consumed most of the system's limited resources, and schools were forced to charge tuition so teachers could be paid. (See Dunn, p. 270.) The first "free" school in the city opened its doors in 1853, for a brief two-month period (Glory June Grieff and Suzanne T. Rollins, "Public School Buildings in Indianapolis Built Before 1940" [National Register Multiple Properties Documentation Form, 1995], p. E 2). In the same year the city's first high school opened, housed in the old Marion County Seminary (*ibid.*, p. E 3).

In the 1850s, the city continued to struggle with school funding. The Indianapolis schools--strapped for funds--remained closed from 1858 to 1860 (*ibid.*, p. E 4). After the schools reopened, the school board, despite ongoing fiscal problems due to limited taxation, embarked on a building program to alleviate overcrowded conditions. In 1863 the city was divided into nine wards, each with its own school. To remove the schools from party politics, in 1871 the governing of the Indianapolis public schools was placed in the hands of an elected independent body called the Board of School Commissioners.



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By 1884 Indianapolis had 28 elementary schools and two high schools (ibid., p. E 7). Twelve additional buildings were constructed between 1889 and 1893 to house the growing student population; these included the original, two-room P.S. #36 (ibid., p. E 8). An increase in the city tax rate in 1896 made it easier to fund construction. During the late 1890s several more buildings--including the rebuilt P.S. #36--were constructed. In 1897 the Legislature passed a compulsory education law requiring all children ages 6 to 14 to attend public or private schools. This gave impetus to school construction throughout the state.

The first years of the 20th century saw a boom in school construction in Indianapolis. During this time the Board replaced some of its oldest buildings with new facilities. Part of the impetus for the building program may have come from improved technology such as electricity and indoor plumbing, and from new educational trends such as physical education, manual training and domestic science. In 1919 the Board commissioned Adolf and Anton Scherrer to develop a plan of standardization for new school construction. This plan focused on coordinating the many changes and improvements, particularly indoor plumbing, that had developed since the 1890s (ibid., p. E 10). The "standard" school building was to have 16 classrooms when completed, but the design of the building enabled them to be built in units of 4, 8 or 12. Although the plan called for each school to have a combination auditorium/gymnasium, in practice these were often added after the fact. The buildings were also to be fireproof.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s few new school buildings were built in Indianapolis except those for which financial arrangements were made prior to the downturn. Portable "colony" units were used to start new schools and aid crowded older ones. Because more students recognized the value of a high school diploma in tough economic times, high-school enrollment jumped 33 percent during this decade: by 1935 29 percent of students attended secondary school.

The "baby boom" of the post-World War II era swelled school populations throughout the country. Newspaper stories of the late 1950s decried overcrowded conditions and called for construction of new schools. (See, for example, "Need for 3,300 more classrooms in 1957-59 predicted," *Indianapolis News*, September 10, 1956, p. 11 C5.) Indiana rose to the challenge and by 1957 ranked 13th nationwide in school construction

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(*Star*, September 14, 1957, p. 1 C 5). In Indianapolis, new schools were built, and many existing ones, such as Franklin, received sizeable additions.

In the last three decades of the 20th century, urban sprawl and inner-city population decline led to the closure or consolidation of many central-city schools. Many schools such as Franklin were vacated, demolished or converted to new uses.

**Benjamin Franklin Public School # 36.** The late 19th century was an era of expansive growth for Indianapolis. Between 1870 and 1890 the city's population more than doubled, climbing from 48,244 to 105,436. (See United States Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930.) New railroads attracted industry, and the discovery of natural gas nearby enhanced prosperity. The expansion of industry and commerce boosted the demand for land in and near the city. With few physical barriers to halt its growth, the city expanded in all directions. "The city grew in area through a series of annexations that encompassed most of Center Township and beyond. Much of this vacant land became residential districts. By 1900 the city had grown to 27.21 square miles" (Encyclopedia of Indianapolis).

Franklin School, the first public school in Indianapolis built north of Fall Creek, is an expression of this outward expansion of the city during this period of unprecedented growth and prosperity.

In December of 1891, a committee of citizens came to the school board meeting to emphasize the necessity of a school building north of Fall Creek. The matter was referred to the Committee on Buildings and Grounds and nothing more was heard of it until the Superintendent's Annual Report given 15 February 1892. (Samuel A. Roberson & Associates, "Indianapolis Public Schools Thematic Resources" [National Register nomination], p. 14)

Superintendent L.H. Jones recommended that a lot be purchased in the area

"as it is quite certain that the population will drift that way with great rapidity in the next few years." Within a month the board advertised for suitable land and purchased a 200 x 265' lot on the northeast corner of Tennessee (now Capitol) and

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20th Street (now 27th Street). M.M. Cotton contracted to build a one-room "cottage school building" for \$1,471 and classes began that fall. (Ibid.)

The new schoolhouse offered only the first and second grades, presided over by teacher Eleanor Wells. In 1894 the school was expanded to four rooms (*Star*, February 15, 1936, p. 12).

By February of 1894, the board's Committee on Buildings and Grounds recommended that a four-room building, which could readily be enlarged to eight rooms, be built on the site. The board began negotiations with Adolf Scherrer to design this and three other buildings: P.S. #15, P.S. #39, and an addition to P.S. #23. The board had difficulty deciding what size school should be built at the site, and at one point Scherrer was asked to design a 12-room building. They finally settled on an eight-room design that could be enlarged to 12 rooms at a later date. Before contracts were let, they also decided to include an assembly room in the attic story. Scherrer's design was submitted on February 20<sup>th</sup> (ibid.).

In March 1894 the board sought bids from contractors to construct the school, and in April the contract was awarded to William Kallan upon a bid of \$22,257. The specifications did not include slate blackboards, which were added later. Construction began in the spring of 1895 and was completed a year later (ibid.). Upon its completion, the new P.S. #36 contained eight classrooms, principal's and nurse's offices, an attic assembly room, a full basement, a kitchen and dining area, and a wood shop--the first built in a grade school (Grieff and Rollins, p. E 16). For a time, the principal's office boasted the only electric light north of Fall Creek (Roberson, p. 15). Because of fire-safety concerns, and because the space was needed for classrooms, the attic assembly room was not used for that purpose after 1900. "P.S. #36 was officially named for Benjamin Franklin in January, 1903, after a petition from patrons of the school was presented to the board" (ibid.).

An 1898 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Indianapolis depicts the school soon after its completion. It is indicated as a cubical brick building with fire-resistant roof, 40 feet "to [the] eaves" with a 60-foot tower. A furnace provided heat, and the building was lighted with gas. A small, one-story house stood at the northeast corner of the lot, facing North

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Kenwood Avenue. The map also indicates that the surrounding neighborhood was still sparsely developed, with many vacant lots.

Over the next two decades, the building expanded along with the neighborhood. A "third story" was added c. 1905, during the tenure of principal Ida Geary. Ms. Geary later recalled that during her tenure, the building housed eleven classrooms of about forty pupils each. (The basement classroom may have been added around this time.) In the 1910s two portable buildings were added to accommodate the third and fourth grades, with 16 classrooms in all (*Star*, op.cit.). The crowded conditions in P.S. #36 were ultimately relieved by construction of P.S. #60 at 33rd and Pennsylvania, nine blocks away (Roberson, p. 15).

Franklin School celebrated its 40th anniversary in 1936. A newspaper story covering the event stated: "Many who have gained wide prominence in various walks of life received their first schooling in No. 36" (*Star*, op.cit.). The article also noted that 25 of the pupils then in attendance had parents or grandparents who were students in the same building. During its first four decades the school had 11 principals, with Jessie Smith serving the longest: from 1909 to 1922 (*ibid.*)

A 1915 Sanborn map, revised to 1950, depicts the school at its 50-year mark. A "tubular fire escape," since removed, adjoined the southeast corner. The frame house was gone, and the school's property now extended northward along North Kenwood Avenue. The neighborhood was solidly built with one- and two-story dwellings and "flats." In 1959 a large addition was appended to the rear of the school to accommodate increased enrollment.

In 1980, faced with a declining student population, the Indianapolis Public Schools adopted a plan for consolidation and closure of schools. This plan was fought by community groups, and some residents filed suit to keep local schools open (*Star*, July 2, 1980, p. 17 c. 4). Despite their efforts, Franklin School, along with ten other neighborhood schools, closed its doors that summer (*News*, July 2, 1980, p. 49 c. 4). Alternate uses were sought for the redundant school buildings, which were sold to private owners (*News*, July 2, 1980, p. 49 c. 1). Franklin School was converted to a community center. The present owner is currently renovating the building for senior citizen housing, taking advantage of the historic preservation tax incentives.

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**Integrity**

The overall design of Benjamin Franklin Public School #36 meets the registration requirements for two- or more room consolidated rural and urban schools, retaining its integrity of design. The overall massing, form, traffic-flow and opening patterns of the 1890s building have remained intact. It retains its original vertical emphasis, with a tower rising above the hipped roofline, and an encircling cornice. Most window openings remain open and unboarded and contain sashes that fill the original openings, thus preserving the original rhythm of the facade. The rear addition does not overwhelm or engulf the original building; it is placed unobtrusively at the rear of the building and does not cover any of the primary facades. Interiors retain their original circulation patterns and volumes. Evidence of educational use such as chalkboards and coatrooms remains intact. Original woodwork, doors and flooring remain in place throughout. While the school, like all existing 19th-century schools in Indianapolis, has been altered over time, the alterations do not overwhelm or engulf the original building.

In sum, the school exhibits a high degree of historic integrity under all its aspects; it retains nearly all of the physical features that made up its character and appearance during its period of significance.

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

This property is located within the corporate limits of Indianapolis, at the northeast corner of North Capitol Avenue and 28th Street. It occupies Lots 49, 50 and 52 of Burton and Campbell's Park Place Subdivision. Please refer to map with boundary line drawn.

**Boundary Justification**

This boundary contains all the property presently associated with the school. It includes sufficient acreage to enclose the school building while excluding areas of different use.

Indianapolis West quadrangle



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**12. Additional Documentation**

**Photograph Key**

Name: Benjamin Franklin Public School #36 (same for all photographs)

Location: 2801 North Capitol Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana (same for all photographs)

Photographer: Margaret Warminski (same for all photographs)

Date: February 2002

Location of negatives: Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology (same for all photographs)

Description, direction: View of main (west) façade, looking east.

Photo 1

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: Main façade, looking southeast.

Photo 2

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: Main entrance, looking east.

Photo 3

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: Arched window, second story, façade tower.

Photo 4

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: Façade tower, looking east.

Photo 5

Date: February 2002

Description, direction: South façade, partial view of main façade. 1959 addition at right.  
Looking northeast.

Photo 6

Date: February 2002

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Description, direction: Dormer and chimneys, south elevation. Looking north.  
Photo 7

Date: February 2002  
Description, direction: Windows, south elevation. Looking north.  
Photo 8

Date: February 2002  
Description, direction: Main (east) façade of 1959 addition, located at rear of building.  
Looking northwest.  
Photo 9

Date: July 2002  
Description, direction: Rear (west) elevation of 1959 addition, looking south.  
Photo 10

Date: July 2002  
Description, direction: North elevation, with adjacent smokestack; partial view of original  
east elevation. 1959 addition at left. Looking southwest.  
Photo 11

Date: February 2002  
Description, direction: Common area, first floor. Looking southwest toward main  
entrance.  
Photo 12

Date: February 2002  
Description, direction: East staircase, looking east.  
Photo 13

Date: July 2002  
Description, direction: Detail view of metal balustrade, east staircase. Looking west.  
Photo 14

Date: February 2002

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Description, direction: Classroom entrance, first floor, with transom and flanking double-hung windows.

Photo 15

Date: February 2002

Description, direction: Typical small classroom, first floor. Looking southeast.

Photo 16

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: Typical corner classroom, second floor. Looking southeast.

Photo 17

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: Typical cloakroom, second floor.

Photo 18

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: Corner classroom, second floor. Metal ceiling is visible above suspended-ceiling grid.

Photo 19

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: View of third floor. Looking east.

Photo 20

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: Basement classroom, with exposed foundation wall and pressed-tin ceiling.

Photo 21

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: West corridor, 1959 addition. Looking east.

Photo 22

Date: July 2002

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Description, direction: Former home economics classroom, 1959 addition.  
Photo 23

Date: July 2002

Description, direction: Auditorium/gymnasium, 1959 addition. Looking southwest.  
Photo 24

Date: February 2002

Description, direction: Streetscape view of west side of 2800 block North Capitol  
Avenue. School property is located at right. Looking northwest.  
Photo 25