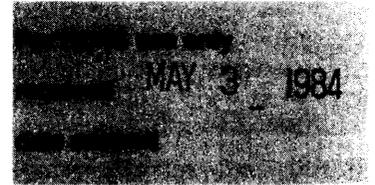


**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

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



**1. Name**

historic (OLD) MERCED COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

and/or common COUNTY LIBRARY BUILDING

**2. Location**

street & number 2125 "M" Street N/A not for publication

city, town Merced N/A vicinity of congressional district 15

state California code 06 county Merced code 047

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<u>N/A</u> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<u>N/A</u> occupied	<u>N/A</u> agriculture	<u>N/A</u> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>N/A</u> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<u>N/A</u> commercial	<u>N/A</u> park
<u>N/A</u> structure	<u>N/A</u> both	<u>N/A</u> work in progress	<u>N/A</u> educational	<u>N/A</u> private residence
<u>N/A</u> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<u>N/A</u> entertainment	<u>N/A</u> religious
<u>N/A</u> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<u>N/A</u> yes: restricted	<u>N/A</u> government	<u>N/A</u> scientific
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<u>N/A</u> industrial	<u>N/A</u> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u> no	<u>N/A</u> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: storage/workshop

**4. Owner of Property**

name MERCED COUNTY

street & number 2222 "M" Street

city, town Merced N/A vicinity of state California 95340

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Merced County Administration Building

street & number 2222 "M" Street

city, town Merced state California 95340

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Historic Resources has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_ yes  no

date October 10, 1977 N/A  
\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Merced County Chamber of Commerce  
(Works of Anita Strickland Historian)

city, town Merced state California 95340

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<u>N/A</u> excellent	<u>N/A</u> deteriorated	<u>N/A</u> unaltered	<u>X</u> original site	
<u>N/A</u> good	<u>N/A</u> ruins	<u>X</u> altered	<u>N/A</u> moved	date <u>N/A</u>
<u>X</u> fair	<u>N/A</u> unexposed			

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

Merced County High School is a large two story 1897 Richardsonian Romanesque institutional building with stucco over the original red brick. It is located east of the 1875 courthouse in the city's courthouse square. The original appearance of the building has been altered by the removal of the upper portion of the central wooden tower around 1903, and the addition of stucco over the original brick in 1956. The interior was remodeled for library use circa 1921 and for county offices in 1953. Although integrity has been compromised somewhat, the building still retains its commanding presence in the city's major historic public space, and conveys a strong sense of its original historic character.

This building as originally designed was a fine example of Richardsonian Romanesque style. Although not completely true to the style (this building is brick and wood rather than rock with a coursed ashlar finish) the original building did include the following stylistic characteristics; broad hipped roof with cross gables, tower, transomed windows arranged in ribbon-like fashion, round arched entry with return at impost level, eaves close to the walls, short and squat chimney, and brackets. However, the removal of the wooden tower, plastering of the once exposed brick, and a new color scheme give the building a rather "Mission Style" appearance. Removal of the plaster to expose the brick would probably cause more damage than has already been done. While restoration of the building has been discussed by the applicants, no commitments have been made at this time.

The building is situated on the eastern side of Court House Park, an area which originally included four landscaped blocks. Approximately half of the original park is still maintained as such, however, subsequent public buildings have encroached from the north, west and east sides of the park.

This approximately 66 by 83 foot building is a two-storied plus basement brick structure which rises to a height of about 48 feet. California redwood was used for the roof structure which is a combination of gable and hipped shapes and is "U" in plan with a tower in the center of the "U". The main transverse ridge of the roof runs from north to south with a gable on each end - gables facing north and south.

The visual center of the facade is the round arched entry. Steps lead up to the main level and through the arch. Inside the portico there are two large oak doors with a half-circle window above the entry. The recessed arch springs from an elevated base supported by short engaged columns now covered with stucco. Between the second and third floor windows there are three spandrel panels half the height of each window; these give the feeling, along with the ribbon windows, of unity; although the wall between the windows is flat and space between the windows of second and third floor gives the feeling of long columns. Above the first floor windows there is a heavy water table which runs horizontally around the entire building.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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**CONTINUATION SHEET**    DESCRIPTION    ITEM NUMBER    7    PAGE    1

Above the main entry porch there is a short tower, all that remains of a taller tower removed circa 1899-1903. According to Mr. "Bill" Bedesen, this tower was torn down when someone determined that it was dangerous. Part of the original tower ornamentation was reused in the construction of the present shorter tower. From the east the square and massive tower can be seen with overhanging eaves and a heavy cornice line. The second floor has a balcony which is located above the main entrance. The balcony is trimmed with a spindled wooden balustrade. Rising just above the balustrade are two four over four round arch windows. In the tower there are five arched openings. The tower is topped with a four-sided balustrade with octagonal domed columns on each of the four corners.

On the north and south sides, the gables are decorated by a pair of finals at the corner of the gable roof. A large arched window is located in the gable, divided into a large number of small panels. Under the gable on each side is a double row of three windows identical to the windows on the front of the building. At the ground level, there are two windows and a door on each side. The windows are the same as the ground level windows in front. At the back of the building, there is a large chimney. On each side of the chimney, there are two double-width windows (double the width of the side and front windows) at the second and third floors. At the ground level, there is a six-pane window under the outside row of windows and a small door under the inside row of windows. There are corner insets on each side at the rear of the building. In each inset, there is a double-width window, facing the rear at the third floor level. Under the double-width windows there is a loading door on the north side between the ground and second floor levels. On the south side, there is a double glass door which is not original.

Originally, there was a barn west of the rear of the building for the storage of students' wagons and carriages. This barn no longer exists, and the date of demolition is unknown but was after 1926.

Interior: The basement floor is divided into one large room, (originally chemistry and physics labs), several other small rooms and a boiler room. The second floor main entrance is reached from "M" Street by walking up a short flight of steps and passing under the arched opening. The main floor originally was divided into classrooms, library and principal's office. The principal's office has restrooms and what appears to be some of the original cabinetry. To the left there is another pair of offices or small classrooms. Straight ahead is the original school library. On the second floor there is the original gymnasium which has a platform and additional classrooms. There are restrooms in the building. A dumbwaiter connected all three floors and appears to have been added after the County Library moved in 1910. Although worn, the dumbwaiter is still in place and the works are in the attic. The heavy floor joists appear to be fir or some similar species. The ceilings and walls are all coved plaster and are in need of repair. Wood mouldings and doors, probably beautiful at one time, have for the most part been painted many times.

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET    DESCRIPTION    ITEM NUMBER    7    PAGE    2

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The banisters are made of oak and still look rather elegant. According to Mr. "Bill" Bedesen, the building was originally heated by some sort of forced air system. There is now only one set of stairs leading from the main floor to the basement although there was a second stair on the south side of the building that also led to the basement. There is an entrance to the basement on the outside on the north side of the front of the building. Sometime in its past this building survived a fire, the evidence of which can be seen on floor-joists in the large room on the main floor.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<u>N/A</u> prehistoric	<u>N/A</u> archeology-prehistoric	<u>N/A</u> community planning	<u>N/A</u> landscape architecture	<u>N/A</u> religion
<u>N/A</u> 1400-1499	<u>N/A</u> archeology-historic	<u>N/A</u> conservation	<u>N/A</u> law	<u>N/A</u> science
<u>N/A</u> 1500-1599	<u>N/A</u> agriculture	<u>N/A</u> economics	<u>N/A</u> literature	<u>N/A</u> sculpture
<u>N/A</u> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<u>N/A</u> military	<u>N/A</u> social/
<u>N/A</u> 1700-1799	<u>N/A</u> art	<u>N/A</u> engineering	<u>N/A</u> music	humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<u>N/A</u> commerce	<u>N/A</u> exploration/settlement	<u>N/A</u> philosophy	<u>N/A</u> theater
<u>N/A</u> 1900-	<u>N/A</u> communications	<u>N/A</u> industry	<u>N/A</u> politics/government	<u>N/A</u> transportation
		<u>N/A</u> invention		<u>N/A</u> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1897                      **Builder/Architect** Architect: Louis Stanwood Stone  
 Builder: John Miller

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

This building was the first building specifically designed and constructed as a high school in Merced County, and as such marks a cultural transition in Merced County. It also served as an early home of the Merced County Library and other civic/governmental offices (see below). This building was and still is a major visual city landmark. The original building exhibited a style of design, not common in Merced and may have been the only example of Richardsonian Romanesque in the community. The building appearance was altered from the original by the removal of its bell tower, plastering of the brick and other remodeling projects. Although the plastering and tower have changed the architectural character somewhat, the building still remains a notable example of historic civic architecture in the city of Merced.

Mr. "Bill" Bedesen (graduating class of 1903 and retired Merced County Surveyor who was responsible for the remodeling of 1953) stated in a Merced Sun Star newspaper interview: "Before that high school, the first in this county, was built, anyone who wanted an education beyond the eighth grade had to go to a private academy - and at about \$20 per term, too."

Louise Norvell, who taught history at Merced High School and later became Vice Principal and Dean of Girls, authored the "History of the School" in the 1949-50 edition of Bear Facts (student handbook). An excerpt of Ms. Norvell's history follows:

The Merced Union High School was established in 1895 as the Merced County High School. It was housed in the old Academy building which was located on the present site of the LeConte School. The faculty consisted of the Principal, Mr. Jefferson Elmore, and his wife. The enrollment was 64.

In the second year a third member was added to the faculty, Mr. Fred Koch, who had just been graduated from the University of California, and in January of that year - 1897 - the school moved into its new building in Court House Park, the structure which is now occupied by the County Library. The school remained there until 1920. . .

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheets  
Item 9, pages 1 and 2 of 2

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property .32 acre

Quadrangle name Merced, California

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

1	0	7	2	3	1	8	5	4	1	3	1	6	7	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

E 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet  
Item 10, page 1 of 1

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

state N/A code county N/A code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dr. Wayne Pirtle, Chairman, Save the Old Library Committee

organization Merced Art League

date April 14, 1983

street & number 551 West Main Street

telephone (209) 384-0686

city or town Merced

state California 95340

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Marion Mitchell-Silver*

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

date 4/17/84

For HCERS use only

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

*J. Albrecht*  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 5-31-84

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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CONTINUATION SHEET SIGNIFICANCE ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

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After two years Mr. Elmore resigned to accept a professorship. . . at Stanford University and Mr. Koch became principal. During Mr. Koch's regime of three years athletic activities came into their own. Football teams were organized. Field days were held. Games were exchanged with neighboring towns. Merced participated in the big field meets at Fresno and joined in organizing the San Joaquin Valley Athletic League of which it held the first presidency and through which it won its first championship silver trophy in 1899.

It was in this era that the school motto was chosen, the school song was written, the first yells were composed, and it was decided that the school colors should be orange and black.

Mr. Koch resigned to become a teacher in Lowell High School and later principal of Galileo High School in San Francisco. . .

In 1915, due very largely to the efforts of the late principal, Mr. Sanderson, a Union High School district was created consisting of thirty-six elementary school districts which contributed students to this school. The control of the school passed from the County Board of Education to a Board of Trustees and the Merced County High School became the Merced Union High School. Not a great while later a system of free transportation for students in this area was inaugurated. . .

The first class to graduate - the class of 1898 - numbered twenty-three students.  
..

This building was a key building in the early Merced County civic center. Education and cultural life centered in and around this building for over 85 years. It served not only as the high school building but was where some early cultural events such as lectures and recitals for the public were held.

In the complex of county structures clustered around Court House Park, "The Old Library" is the only original building other than the Courthouse still in existence, the stone county jail building having been removed about 1967. Built in 1897, the building served as the first designated High School building for Merced County. From 1921 to 1976 it served as the County Library according to Ms. Angie Hopkins (Merced County Library staff). The building also provided office space over the years for the Superior Court Judges' chambers, the Merced Veteran's Office, the Merced County switchboard, the Merced Schools' Library, the California Highway Patrol Office, part of the Merced County Welfare Office (about 1953), and the Merced County Parks and Recreation Department (moved in 1959).

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According to George W. Clark's History of Merced County, "The Merced County Library was opened in 1910 in a cottage on the corner of 18th and Canal ("L" Street). In 1912 the library was moved to the Shaffer Building on the corner of 17th and "N" Streets. When Merced High School moved from its outgrown building on the corner of 22nd and "M" Streets to its new high school plant on "G" Street, between 18th and 20th Streets, some alterations were made in the building to prepare it for library use. The library moved into the building in 1921. The Merced County Library served 24 branches in Merced and Mariposa Counties. It had a circulation in 1970 of more than 327,463 books, magazines and phonograph records. It had a juvenile department and a reference department where one could secure information on a valley-wide basis."

George Clark's history goes further to state: "For many years the County Library was used to store and service the books used in the county schools which were later transferred to the County Schools library. . . Audio visual materials used in the county schools were also housed in an adjoining structure before both were transferred in 1970 to the present Merced County Department of Education when the County Board of Education purchased the Galen Clark School and all the County School facilities were moved to that location."

The Architect for the Merced High School building was Louis S. Stone of San Francisco. Sometime prior to 1903 Stone formed a partnership with Henry O. Smith and together they practiced architecture for several years at various Market Street addresses in San Francisco. According to the American Art Annual (Vol. 7, 1910) Louis Stone was a member of the American Institute of Architects in Oakland.

One of the later accomplishments of Louis Stone was to author "Economics in Modernization" in the January 1933 issue of Architectural Forum magazine. Some of the buildings he designed were in San Francisco at the following locations: Green near Scott for Bancroft, Green near Scott for Middleton, Scott near Union for Bates, Clay near Laurel for Stanford; other schools were Elmhurst Junior High School in Oakland, Richmond High School in Richmond and Analy High School in Sebastapol. The Builder, according to the January 16, 1896 edition of the Sun Star, who turned in the low bid of \$12,790.00, was John Miller; the heating and ventilating bid was by a firm named Morgan for \$805.33. W.H. McElroy was selected to oversee the construction. C.A. Galvin contracted to do the cornice work.

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CONTINUATION SHEET      REFERENCES      ITEM NUMBER      9      PAGE      1

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1. Merced County Department of Public Works, Preliminary Report, Old Merced County Library Building, January 30, 1978.
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3. Atlas of the Dos Palos Colony - California, Reprinted by Dos Palos Historical Society, 1982, Dos Palos, California.
4. Building Review, Vol. 20, #4, (1921), 44-45.
5. California Architect and Building News, Vol. 12, #11, (November 20, 1891), 131.
6. California Architect and Building News, Vol. 17, #4, (April 20, 1896), 47.
7. California Architect and Building News, Vol. 18, #4, (April 20, 1897), 47.
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9. Clark, George W., History of Merced County, 1955.
10. Merced County Department of Education, (Minutes of Board Meetings), (May 25, 1895 through April 29, 1899).
11. Merced Sun, (March 19, 1896).
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14. Merced Sun, (May 14, 1896).
15. Merced Sun, (October 29, 1896).
16. Merced Sun, (November 26, 1896).
17. Merced Sun, (December 17, 1896).
18. Merced Sun, (January 16, 1896).
19. Merced Sun, (January 14, 1897).

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CONTINUATION SHEET    REFERENCES    ITEM NUMBER 9    PAGE 2

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20. Merced Sun, (January 21, 1897)
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23. Norvell, Louise, "History of the School" in Bear Facts, (Merced Union High School District Student Handbook), Vol. 2, (1949-50).
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25. Bedesen, William "Bill", Merced County Surveyor, (retired).
26. Cochran, Doris, Merced County Librarian, (retired 1983).
27. Hopkins, Angie, Merced County Library Staff.
28. Merced County Historical Society.
29. Stoddard, Minette, Merced County Librarian, (deceased 1983).
30. Strickland, Anita, Historical Analyst for Merced County Chamber of Commerce.

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31. Elliot & Moore, History of Merced County, Elliot & Moore, (1881).
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

CONTINUATION SHEET

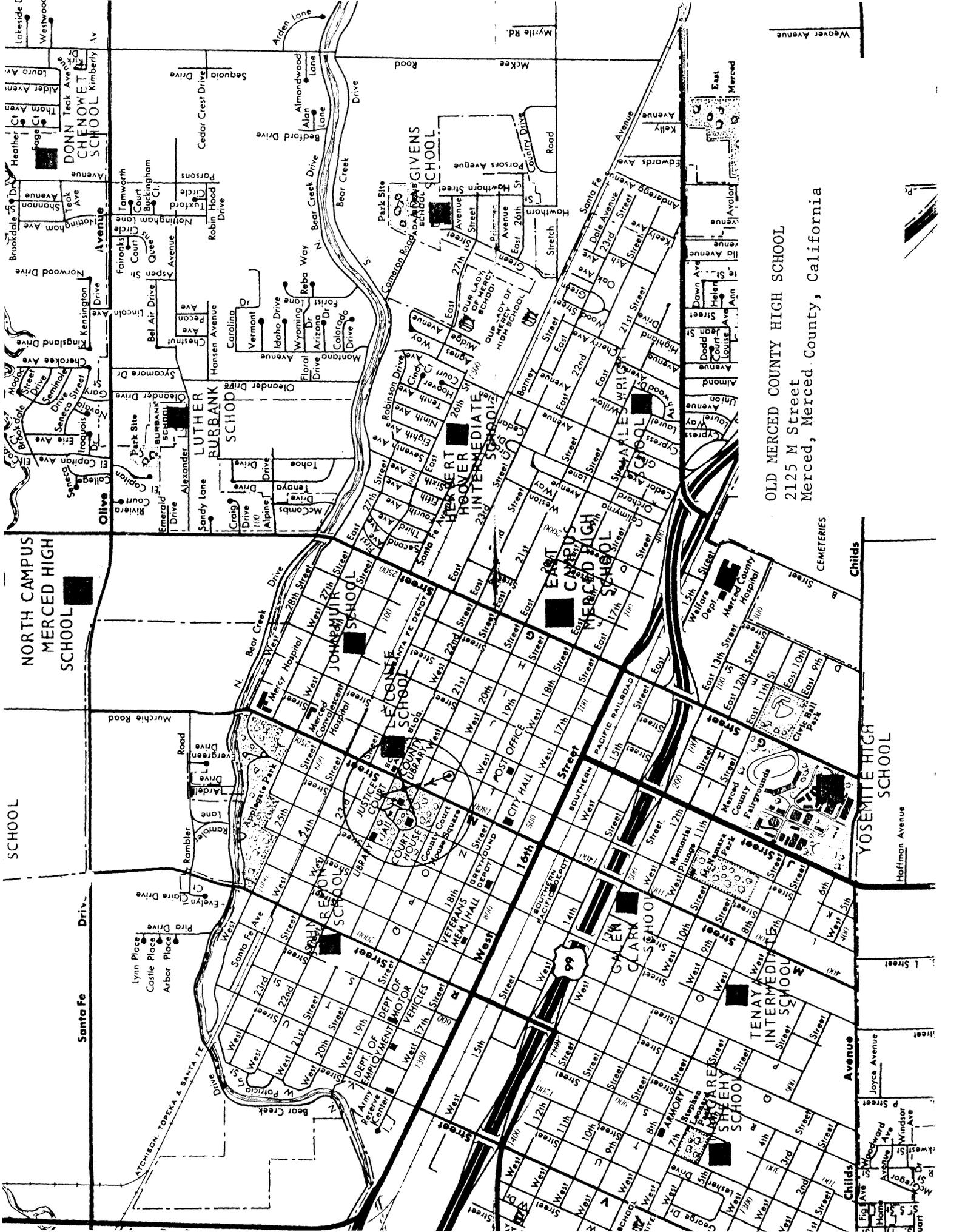
ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

The nominated property occupies a portion Eastern half of the Northwest Corner of the Courthouse Square, Section 19 Township 7 south, Range 14 east, Merced County, California as per plat recorded in Book 2, of Maps, page 12.

On February 27, 1873 the Contract and Finance Company deeded Court House Square to Merced County as a site for a "Court House, Jail and other public buildings which may be erected." On April 14, 1897 the Merced County Board of Supervisors deeded 2 and 7/10 acres of the Court House Square to the County Board of Education of Merced County for the purpose of erecting Merced County High School (which later became Merced County Library).

Both the Court House built in 1875 and the high school building built in 1897 are still standing. The high school, however, is not presently occupied. The high school building is situated on the eastern side of Court House Park, an area which originally included four landscaped blocks. Over half of the original park is still maintained as such, however, subsequent public buildings have encroached from all but the east side of the high school building.

The boundaries of the nominated property are drawn as a 110' x 125' rectangle of convenience which encompasses the historical resource and its immediate setting as shown on accompanying sketch map.



NORTH CAMPUS  
MERCED HIGH  
SCHOOL

LUTHER  
BURBANK  
SCHOOL

JOHN MUIR  
SCHOOL

LE CONTE  
SCHOOL

HOOPER  
INTERMEDIATE  
SCHOOL

EAST CAMPUS  
MERCED HIGH  
SCHOOL

YOSEMITE HIGH  
SCHOOL

OLD MERCED COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL  
2125 M Street  
Merced, Merced County, California



OLD MERCED COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL  
2125 M Street  
Merced, Merced County, California

Boundary map showing location in courthouse square

