

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

762

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: Starkweather School

Other names/site number: NA

Name of related multiple property listing:  
NA

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

### 2. Location

Street & number: 550 North Holbrook Street

City or town: Plymouth 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Not For Publication:  Vicinity: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

Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>MI SHPO</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property <u>   </u> meets <u>   </u> 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:)

Patrick Andrews  
Signature of the Keeper

11/7/2016  
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

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>          </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 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education/School  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Work In Progress  
Domestic/Multiple Dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late Gothic Revival

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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

Starkweather School is one of many schools designed by Detroit architects Malcomson & Higginbotham between 1890 and 1930. Built in 1927, it is the only school from its era still standing in its entirety in Plymouth, Michigan. The school was built as the first ward school located outside the central portion of the city. In accordance with educational philosophy introduced in the first years of the twentieth century, it was built as an educational, recreational and social focal point of its residential neighborhood. The school building is built on an I-plan footprint and is Collegiate Gothic in style. Set back from the streets on the north and west sides, the building breaks the traditional rhythm of surrounding front porches and gains further visual impact due to its size. It was designed with a Community Room (social room-gymnasium with stage), twelve classrooms, a kindergarten room, and a library. The original Community Room was redesigned as classroom space when a cafeteria and gymnasium addition was constructed in 1961. Significant exterior features include the masonry work, particularly chimneys and the decorative west façade. Significant interior features include terrazzo and linoleum floors in the corridors, plastered walls, wood floors and trims in the classrooms, and decorative art tiles from Flint Faience & Tile Company in the vestibules and kindergarten classroom.

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#### Narrative Description



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Starkweather School was built in 1927 and opened to students on September 6 of that year. Per the original drawings, designed by the Detroit firm of Malcomson & Higginbotham, the two-story, twelve-classroom building is of the Collegiate Gothic style popular for early twentieth-century educational institutions. Per the *Plymouth Mail* newspaper of March 4, 1927, general contractors were Talbot & Meier, the heating and plumbing contractor was W. J. Phillips (Royal Oak) and the electrical contractor was Corbett Electrical (Plymouth). The school was in use as a neighborhood elementary school (early references refer to it as a ward school) for several decades, and it was later used by the school district as an adult education center. It closed in June, 2013.

Although Plymouth had one-room schoolhouses as early as 1829, and a union school was built in 1840, the community had only a trio of larger schools – Plymouth High School [built 1884, rebuilt after a 1916 fire], Central Grade School [1924] and Starkweather – until 1950. Central, located adjacent to the high school building near Plymouth's downtown area, was partially demolished to enlarge the high school, now in use as a community recreation center with numerous additions and renovations. Starkweather remains the only true representative of early twentieth-school architecture in the city.

Starkweather School sits in the residential neighborhood now called Old Village, an area of Plymouth first settled in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Starkweather family and other early settlers. By 1901 it was well built up with Victorian homes including Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne ones in addition to ones built earlier in the area's development. The first ward school in Plymouth, Starkweather School served the neighborhood as it continued to grow through the 1940s. The neighborhood is still intact, and older homes surround Starkweather's site. One of the city's historic churches sits directly across Spring Street from the school's parking lot and a small fire station faces the school's west façade across Holbrook Street.

On the site, the building sits back from the street to create a green space on the north and west sides. Early photos indicate there were a number of trees on the site that have since disappeared and that a playground was eventually located along the full west side of the building. There is a small parking lot at the rear of the building, and beyond the edge of the lot, the site drops off dramatically to playing fields below. The building stands on a one and a quarter acre site and contains 27,000 square feet.

The two-story school has walls finished in a red/brown brick blend in common bond, with a course of headers between each five courses of stretchers, and with limestone trim. The building's front façade faces west and is architecturally more detailed than the other facades. A stone beltcourse below the first-story windows is repeated below the cornice line/parapet and gives the structure a horizontal rhythm. Prominent first-story bay windows at the north and south ends of the front are delineated in limestone and create a contrast with red brick decorative squares in the raised parapet in those end sections. These brick squares are outlined in limestone, and each features a center lozenge form also in limestone. Although the original doors have been replaced, corbelled, arched limestone surrounds still highlight the building's two original entries.

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The symmetrical façade is enhanced with two graceful limestone-trimmed red brick chimneys – each with a low rectangular brick base, limestone-trimmed center section with narrow recessed arched openings separated by piers with sloping caps, and recessed limestone-capped upper section – that crown the hip roof and provide a level of detail and creativity to the building that commands attention. The masonry on the building remains in good condition with minimal alterations or repairs.

The tall hip roof, with its shallow projecting hip-roof sections at each end of the front façade and also one at the north end of the back side, increases the mass of the building, making it appear much larger than it really is. Originally, the roof was clad in slate, but the slate has long since been replaced with gray asphalt shingle. Original copper gutters have also been replaced with coated copper gutters but two original, large copper conductor heads are still in place with partial downspouts, adjacent to the entry areas.

Originally the building front displayed banks of tall double-hung nine-over-nine windows – five side-by-side in the two center bays and five in each bay window in the bay above each – with metal spandrel panels, with raised center panels, between the center bays' upper and lower tiers of windows. The side and rear facades also contained more of these windows, in groups of up to five. These have been replaced with much smaller vinyl windows set into exterior insulated finishing system (EIFS) panels that infill the original openings (Figure 1). This has dramatically altered the look of all facades, but particularly the west and east façades, creating a more massive and opaque feeling rather than the transparent feel of the original fenestration. These large window openings with limestone surrounds were a significant feature of the building's design and the most appropriate rehabilitation treatment would be to remove the current windows and EIFS and reintroduce full-sized windows and spandrel panels (on the west façade) to match the original. This is the developer's intent in adapting the school for reuse as an apartment building.

Trim on the north and south façades mimics the limestone trim at the cornice and base on the west façade. The window openings are also surrounded by limestone trim. Again, large original windows have been replaced with smaller windows and EIFS panels. One original window has been removed and replaced with a door on each elevation.

The rear, or east, façade is much simpler in its design: limestone window sills and horizontal band limestone trim on a plain, stepped chimney in the center of the rear façade over the boiler are the only significant details. Original windows have been replaced with smaller vinyl windows with EIFS infill.

Two additions have been built on the east (back) side of the building, one a simple, single-story flat-roof red brick garage at the northeast corner and the other a larger, Modern-design gymnasium and cafeteria addition in the southeast corner. This 1961 addition, designed by Detroit architects Gould, Moss & Joseph, Inc., is also of one-story height, but with a low clerestory atop the window-less red brick base that contained windows, now mostly replaced with EIFS panels. This low hip-roof addition currently provides the nondescript main entrance to the school. The different hue red brick color differs from the original building, but the pattern of five stretcher courses to each course of headers is repeated. The brick on the addition's east

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façade has a repeating checkerboard pattern in which every other stretcher in every second course of the five rows of stretchers between header courses is raised.

The interior of the building features many original materials. Original corridor floors are finished in rust-colored sheet linoleum inset amid integral cream-colored coved terrazzo bases and border. The upper portion of the bases has been painted over to match the walls. A long, ramped corridor at the south end of the first floor is an original feature of the building. Walls are plastered with Keene cement wainscoting topped by an oak trim board. A painted picture rail is located high on the first-floor walls and terminates in a cove at the ceiling. The ceiling is of suspended 1x1 metal ceiling panels on the first floor and 2x4 acoustical lay-in ceiling panels on the second floor. Some stained wood and glass classroom doors are still in place, but many have been replaced with a variety of doors in a variety of materials – wood-and-glass, metal or wood.

Classroom floors are carpeted, with original wood floors beneath. Each classroom has a wall with a blackboard with stained oak trim and another wall with coat and storage areas with bulletin boards either side. The storage areas originally had doors, but they have been removed over time. Window walls have wood window stools with heating units below the windows. A few original teacher closets with stained wood doors are still in place. Walls are plastered, and stained oak trim is used for baseboards, cornices at lay-in ceilings and door surrounds. Ceilings are of 2x4 acoustical lay-in ceiling panels. The wood trims in these rooms are the most significant features remaining with minimal alteration. The large room originally used as the Community Room has been altered for use as a traditional classroom. Other than a higher ceiling, all unique features, including a stage seen on original plans, have been removed.

The kindergarten classroom's decorative features are unique to this area reserved for the youngest learners, although the carpet over linoleum floors and plastered wall surfaces are mundane. Stained oak is used as baseboard and window stools much as it is in other classrooms, but it extends to use as a bench beneath the windows along the west wall. There are also two (now) door-less built-in cabinets, a feature found in none of the other classrooms. Oak is used as surrounds for doors, chalkboards, and combination cork/white boards as in other classrooms, but stands out as the material for a mantel over a decorative fireplace. (When kindergarten programs were added to school curricula in the early twentieth century, attempts were made to surround the little charges with homelike features such as fireplaces, sandboxes and even fish ponds to foster a sense of comfort and encourage play.) The fireplace surround is faced with Flint Faience tile in a field of green. In a row over the fireplace opening are inset 6x6-inch tiles depicting individual animals in the company's distinctive, vivid glazes. A hearth is also formed of green tiles, and decorative firebrick lines the interior walls of the gas fireplace. A drinking fountain alcove is faced on three walls and floor with the same green Flint Faience tiles and features a decorative grouping of tiles ornamented with sinuous fish glazed in appropriately aquatic blue glazes. The wood and ceramic tile features are in excellent condition with little or no alteration.

Floors of the two west front entrance vestibules of the building are of quarry tile. The vestibules' walls are of brick with decorative Flint Faience tiles in a large pattern on the wall and used individually as plinth tiles at the edges of the door frames. Vestibule ceilings are plastered, and

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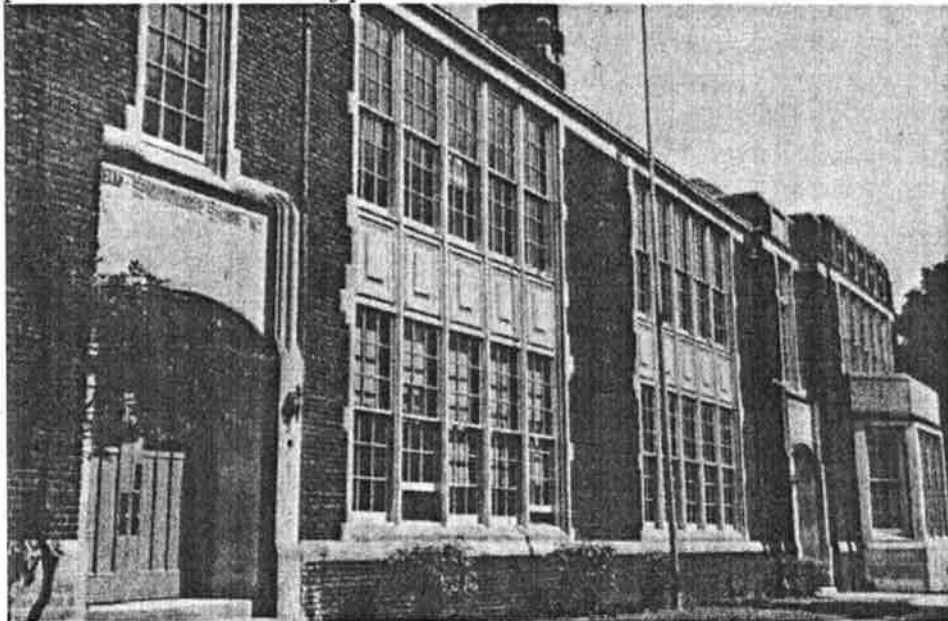
the original wood doors remain in place on the interior of the vestibules. Except for the exterior doors, these spaces are very true to their original design and finish materials.

Floors in the 1961 addition are 1x1 vinyl composition tile and carpet. Walls are of plaster and gypsum board, depending on when they were added to break up the space. Ceilings are of 2x4 acoustical lay-in panels.

The garage addition (date unknown) has painted concrete block and brick walls and a concrete floor, and the underside of the roof structure creates the ceiling. There is a large overhead door on the north wall.

**Figure 1 Early photos of Starkweather School – Plymouth, Michigan**

Photo from Samuel Hudson's book, *The Story of Plymouth, Michigan: A Midwest Microcosm*, published in 1976. *Date of photo is unknown*



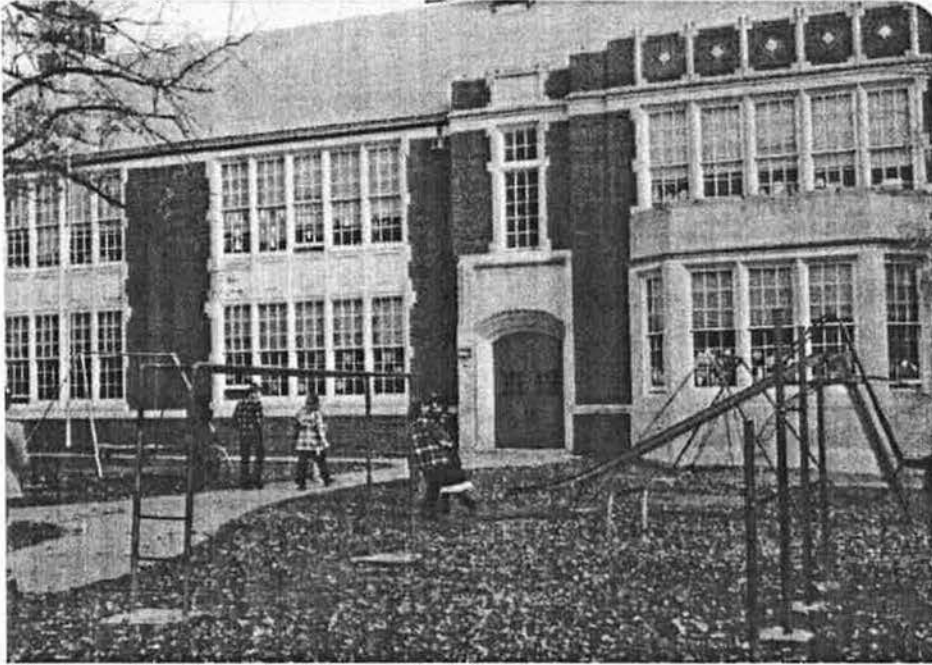


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Starkweather School - Plymouth, Michigan  
*West Façade in the 1970's*

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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.
-



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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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE  
COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT  
EDUCATION

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1927  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Significant Dates**

1927  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Malcomson & Higginbotham (Architects)  
Talbot & Meier (Contractors)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**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.)

Starkweather School, built in 1927, is significant under Criteria A (Education) in the local context of Plymouth, Michigan, as the first ward school in the community, the result of a concerted effort of north side residents – led by the scion of a founding family – to dissuade the school district from continuing to locate all the city’s schools at one central site. The school is also significant under Criteria A (Community Planning and Development) as an integral part of a neighborhood that traces its roots from the location of Plymouth’s first railroad station and allied industrial development in the 1870s, through the development of a commercial district, to fledgling automobile-related industries in the first quarter of the twentieth century. To a cohesive neighborhood of modest homes built during successive waves of settlement, Starkweather School brought a safe, nearby educational environment for the neighborhood’s primary students and provided a space for social activity. Starkweather School is also locally significant under Criteria C as the only example in Plymouth of the public school work of Detroit architects Malcomson & Higginbotham, a firm whose position as consulting architects for Detroit Public

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Schools from 1895 to 1923 gave them great depth of experience designing school buildings for a variety of specialized functions and, often, for very large student populations. Although the firm's Detroit projects included buildings holding as many as fifty or 100 classrooms, Starkweather School, with its twelve classrooms, is a pleasing "neighborhood-size" version of the restrained Collegiate Gothic style the firm had perfected for its larger big-city school designs. The building is also notable under criterion C for containing highly intact examples of Arts-and-Crafts-period tilework by the Flint-Michigan-based Flint Faience & Tile Company, which produced its tiles from 1922 to 1933.

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

***History of Plymouth, Michigan and its "Old Village" area***

The 1825 completion of the Erie Canal opened the Michigan Territory to rapid settlement. The earliest landholders of what would become Plymouth arrived soon after the canal's opening and included A. B. Markham, Timothy Lyon, Luther Lincoln and William Starkweather. Although Lincoln is sometimes noted as the first settler, a 1954 Bureau of Land Management record search found that Starkweather, his wife Keziah and infant son Oscar were the first settlers within the limits of the modern-day city; their second son, George Anson Starkweather, was known as "the first white child born in Plymouth, Michigan." Their first residence (at the corner of modern-day Main Street and Ann Arbor Trail), a simple tree limb-and-bark shack assembled in March, 1825, was soon replaced by a log cabin.

Settlement centered upon a traditional New England town square. Markham built the settlement's first mill on the Middle Rouge River in 1826; the river's power made saw and grist mills the first wave of industrial growth. In February 1827 area residents met to choose an official name; honoring their New England roots, they chose Plymouth and, in April, territorial governor Lewis Cass approved the name. The township area included current Northville – split off in 1898 – and an area known as South Plymouth that would become Canton Township.

William Starkweather continued to buy and sell land, including parcels in what would become Nankin (Westland) and Livonia townships. In 1831 he purchased eighty acres in an area beyond the settlement growing up near the square. John Kellogg moved to the area from New York in 1832 and, in 1835, purchased most of William's land in the central settlement. The Starkweathers moved to a new home on William's recently acquired property between the square and the river. A few other homes were built in the area in the 1830s and 1840s.

By 1837 Plymouth boasted a church, five stores, a bank and three taverns. William Starkweather died in 1844, his wife Keziah died two years later, and son George inherited the land holdings surrounding the family home. He pursued a legal career, was appointed to the state legislature in 1854, and became a local merchant when, in 1861, he partnered with R. G. Hall to open a general store opposite Kellogg Park (as the square was named in honor of the early settler). The partnership dissolved by 1870 but, in the meantime, George had married and was considering business interests elsewhere. George is credited with "convincing the railroad to run track through Plymouth," although, to date, no record has surfaced of what incentive he might have

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offered. In 1866 surveys and grading began in preparation for laying the Detroit & Howell Railroad tracks through the sparsely populated enclave beyond Plymouth's central settlement. (The area acquired the name "North Village" when the village of Plymouth was incorporated in 1867.) The railroad became a reality, and a station opened in 1871. Envisioning the railroad spurring development in the area, George built a two-story Italianate brick commercial building at the corner of Oak and Liberty streets to house a dry goods store, which he would operate until 1901.

After living over the store with his family for four years, George moved to a spacious new home across the street. He encouraged others to establish businesses near his; eventually two blocks of Liberty were lined with commercial enterprises. Railroad access attracted businesses that required moving large quantities of goods: suppliers of lumber, coal and other bulk goods located near the tracks. Passenger traffic brought the need for hotels and restaurants, with them came more new jobs, and the railroad itself employed many residents (as many as 100 by 1916). Among Plymouth's other employers in the 1880s was a manufacturer of iron windmills. Clarence Hamilton, who manufactured a wooden air rifle, took a prototype metal air gun to the company. The Plymouth Iron Windmill Company agreed to manufacture the guns and gave them as premiums with windmill sales. By 1895 the premiums were so popular that the company ceased windmill production. The gun, a real pip – a "daisy" in the parlance of the day – provided the company's new name, Daisy Manufacturing Company, and Plymouth was soon known as the "air rifle capital of the world." Nor was Daisy the only toy gun producer: in 1887 Markham Manufacturing switched from making wooden tanks to manufacturing wooden air guns. By 1890 Markham sales were impacted by Daisy's introduction, and the company countered with its own sheet metal gun. In 1916 Daisy bought out owner William Markham's interests.

When the railroad station opened in 1871, Plymouth was a village of 975 residents, including many farmers; in 1897 its population reached 1,300. The *Old Village Historic District Study Report* (the Old Village name was recognized by the city of Plymouth in 1971 to describe the area earlier known as North Village), compiled in 1996, notes residential construction in North Village between the Civil War and the turn of the century approached 100 structures. These were primarily homes suited to narrow suburban lots, comfortable working-class homes for residents employed by the railroad and its allied businesses, Liberty Street stores and banks, and Daisy Manufacturing's nearby plant. In 1899 the Detroit, Plymouth & Northville Electric Railway established an interurban route connecting Northville, Plymouth, and other nearby outposts between Ann Arbor and Detroit, making commuting to work in Detroit with its rapidly growing industrial base an option for Plymouth residents.

Detroit's growing automobile industry touched Plymouth, too, as travel between the two communities became easier. In 1903 Daisy President Charles Bennett traveled to Detroit to visit his tailor and there encountered Alexander Malcomson, a highly successful coal merchant seeking investors in a motorcar company started by a young inventor named Henry Ford. As the story goes, a drive in a prototype car convinced Bennett not only to order an automobile from the fledgling company, but to become one of the original investors in Ford Motor Company. Although Malcomson's offer was based on cash plus use of Daisy facilities to manufacture car



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components, the company's board vetoed shared production space, and Bennett's stake was wholly in capital.

Automobile manufacture in the early twentieth century was still a fairly small-scale industry, one entrepreneurs found attractive. Area businessmen, including George Starkweather's son-in-law, Louis Hillmer (married to Mary Kezia Starkweather), negotiated with Alter Motor Car Company owners in Detroit to locate the company's factory in Plymouth. Designed by Clarence Alter of Manitowoc, Wisconsin, the car was to be built of components manufactured by small firms and shipped by rail to an assembly plant. Management and backers agreed to terms, a factory was built at North Village's western edge, and the first Alter was produced in 1914. The car, an alternative to Ford's ubiquitous Model T, was a success: at peak production, the plant assembled twenty-five cars a day and employed 100 area residents. But by 1916 the car fell victim to its success: although 1,000 Alter automobiles were on the road already, Alter could not meet the rising demand for its product and, instead of taking steps to expand production, dissolved the company in early 1917. Plymouth, poised to play a part in the Automotive Age, needed a manufacturer equal to the challenges of mass production.

In *Recasting the Machine Age: Henry Ford's Village Industries*, Howard Segal notes that when Ford considered sites for component factories in small communities near Detroit, he preferred familiar locations with access to water, a potential power source. His acquaintance with Bennett and Daisy, as well as Plymouth's location near the Rouge, informed Ford's purchase of the Wilcox and Phoenix mill sites, early milling sites both within walking distance from North Village. Buildings were designed by Ford's favored architect, Albert Kahn, and the Phoenix plant (producing voltage regulators) and Wilcox plant (taps and other manufacturing tools) opened in 1922 and 1923, respectively. Forward thinking showed not only in modern, multi-windowed buildings, but in the Phoenix plant's employment of a women-only workforce. For unmarried or widowed women, Phoenix presented a golden opportunity: Ford took the unprecedented step of paying female workers the same generous \$5-a-day wage the company paid its male employees.

From its late-1800s population of 1,300, Plymouth had grown to a village of 2,857 in 1920 and continued to grow rapidly: population per the 1930 Federal Census was 4,484. The railroad had brought industry to the village as well as passenger traffic, and eighteen daily passenger trains chugged through the North Village station by 1916. Rail service surpassed the interurban (which discontinued service in the mid-1920s) as convenient transportation, but then was itself supplanted by the next wave in transportation innovation. As the automobile loomed large in southeastern Michigan's future, the village began to pave streets in the first decades of the twentieth century. By the 1930s Plymouth had largely shed its agrarian past to become a modern community with well-established connections to larger regional industries; in 1932 community electors approved a change to the form of municipal government and Plymouth adopted a city charter. (We are much indebted to books by local historians for the bulk of the above information - *The Story of Plymouth, Michigan: A Midwest Microcosm* by Samuel Hudson, *Plymouth in Vintage Postcards* and *Plymouth's First Century: Innovators and Industry* by Elizabeth Kelly Kerstens, *Legendary Local of Plymouth* by Leis Dauzet-Miller - and to online histories of various Plymouth companies and the Starkweather family blog. In addition to the Howard Segal



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book mentioned above, background on Henry Ford and his village industries concept was also found in *Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company, and a Century of Progress* by Douglas Brinkley.)

### ***Public Schools in Plymouth, Michigan***

Plymouth's earliest settlers, many from New England stock, held a traditional New England belief in the value of education. In 1827, two years after the first pioneers had arrived, a one-room schoolhouse was built on Baseline Road (after 1898, this would be located in the newly formed township of Northville). The Geer one-room schoolhouse was built in Plymouth Township in 1829, and the area would eventually support nine rural schools. The first village school was opened in a log structure in 1830; in 1840 the school moved to a frame structure on land east of Kellogg Park donated by William Bradner. In 1884 the School Board paid a contractor to remove the older structure and hired Detroit architect John V. Smith to design a brick union school building to house grade school and high school students. The district's school-age population continued to increase, and the school was remodeled to enlarge its capacity.

The remodeled school burned to the ground in 1916 and was replaced with a large building. The district briefly considered replacing the old school with two buildings, one at the established Church Street site, another on the north side of town, but took no action on a north-side school. (Nor had it in 1872, when T. T. Lyon pointed to the north side housing boom since the Civil War and suggested establishing a ward school to better accommodate students in that area.) By the 1922/23 school year, Plymouth's student population numbered 944, and the School Board decided crowding at the district's single building could best be remedied by the building of a grade school. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, North Village had added another seventy homes, and residents were once again hopeful that their neighborhood would be provided with a school. Citing the convenience of paired buildings sharing a heating plant and recreational facilities, however, the Board once more settled on building at the central location: Central Grade School was built adjacent to the existing high school building.

By 1926 overcrowding was again already a problem, and an additional elementary building the identified solution. Previous School Boards had failed to recognize the need for a neighborhood school for their area, but this time North Village residents were determined to make their voices heard. Karl Starkweather took on the role of standard bearer for the effort. Née Karl Hillmer, with his mother, Mary Kezia, having been George Starkweather's daughter, who had married Louis Hillmer, Karl knew well his grandfather's tales of early Plymouth, North Village, and the family's role in the area's development. Attuned to his family heritage, Karl legally changed his surname to Starkweather in 1924. He and fellow north-sider Russell Wingard composed a handbill arguing for a neighborhood school, obtained financial support from area residents and approached the local newspaper editor to print the flyers. When the editor refused to take the job, Karl had the flyer printed in nearby Farmington, and enlisted Wingard and a volunteer force to distribute the 2,000 handbills. With an incendiary touch, the handbill stated that "Plymouth did not shoot off all its fireworks on the Fourth," that some were sure to be had at the annual School Board meeting on July 12, and that all were welcome to attend and learn more. Starkweather offered to drive interested citizens to the meeting in his Model T and stated that he and Wingard

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saw to it that the meeting was packed – the end result was, “we got our school.” (Again, we are indebted to local historians, Elizabeth Kelly Kerstens and Samuel Hudson for much of the information above; Hudson’s book, *Tenth Largest: Plymouth-Canton School District 1830-1986*, was also helpful.)

### **Historical Significance Criterion A - Education**

Starkweather School is significant in the area of education as it represents an important evolution in the history of the Plymouth Public School system, the establishment for the first time of a neighborhood school separate from the district’s previous centrally located buildings. Michigan’s state Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1859 to 1864, John Gregory, proposed ward schools – schools serving specific wards or neighborhoods – to solve overcrowding in the state’s union schools: removing primary grades from all-grades union buildings made classrooms available for grammar and high school students. In addition, neighborhood schools for the lower grades meant shorter, safer walks to school for the youngest students. By 1865 only a few Michigan communities had adopted the concept. But following the Civil War many of the state’s communities entered into periods of rapid growth spurred by railroad and ensuing industrial development. As a result new residential development spread out from the old centers of town forming residential neighborhoods in previously vacant parts of town. As a result a growing number of communities built ward schools. Accordingly, as the population of Plymouth’s north end increased between the Civil War and the turn of the century, the neighborhood school concept resonated with North Village residents, even as the school system continued to embrace using only the long-time central site near Kellogg Park.

State Superintendent Gregory suggested establishing separate schools for younger students once a district’s student population reached 500. With Plymouth’s 1922/23 student count at 944, the district was long overdue for a decentralized system that would better serve all parts of the village. The very railroad tracks that brought residents and commerce to North Village also made its residents feel isolated from, and forgotten by, the rest of the village. The long-time insistence upon centrally located schools seemed like another case of neglect by their fellow citizens beyond the tracks. And the tracks themselves were viewed as a safety hazard for Plymouth’s youngest students crossing them to reach the central school site.

When Karl Starkweather, Russell Wingard and others stepped up the crusade for north side representation in school locations, they came well-versed on ward schools across the state. The handbill distributed in the summer of 1923 pointed out that Allegan, in southwest Michigan, had the same population as Plymouth and already had four ward schools; Plymouth was clearly far behind the times. Midland, which the handbill characterized as “a little upstart town some 20 miles west of Bay City,” had six schools widely spread across four separate neighborhoods. While conceding that Midland was fifty percent larger than Plymouth, the handbill continued that the city to the east would not then or ever be in a position to grow as fast as Plymouth would; surely this town would surpass Midland in size within the space of a year or two.

Finally moved by the growing controversy, the School Board did elect to move forward on constructing a building for the north side, and Plymouth’s school system, however belatedly, had adopted a more modern decentralized model, one that would remain unchanged until the next

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new school was constructed in 1950. But Starkweather School formed a bridge to the neighborhood's past, as well. The area's newest public building was erected upon a site with a mostly forgotten tradition as a public space: consultants researching the *Old Village Historic District Study Report* discovered that the property at Spring and Holbrook Streets had been deeded by Henry Holbrook and William Bradner "to the public" in 1837 for a public square. The square or park was never developed, but there is no question that the neighborhood elementary school built on its site almost a century later enhanced the lives of its neighborhood even more than the park would have.

The name chosen for the school was just as fitting. William Starkweather was among those who built Plymouth out of the wilderness of the Michigan Territory, and members of succeeding generations contributed to the village of Plymouth, especially to North Village. They all championed learning: George taught briefly at one of Plymouth's early schools, his daughter Blanche taught in the Plymouth Public Schools system, and her nephew Karl was one of several North Village residents who took the crusade for a neighborhood school to Plymouth Public Schools' administration. Many residents took up the banner over the years, but Karl was fortunate to be of the generation that saw North Village's fight for school representation won at last. They got their school!

Starkweather School also preserves a trace of an educational reform introduced around the turn of the century – dedicated spaces for kindergarten learning. Earlier schools often set aside a regular classroom for their littlest learners; by the 1910s and 1920s, school educators and their architects had embraced the concept of comfortable, age-appropriate kindergarten environments. Homey elements, like Starkweather's tile-faced fireplace, were popular. Architects often included built-in window seating, an alternative to standard desks and a means for the young children to have as much exposure to healthy natural light as possible. In keeping with a "protected" environment, kindergarten rooms often had access to their own amenities such as drinking fountains or restrooms. Many older schools, as educational philosophy and building use changed over the years, removed, covered up or otherwise altered these charming features; Starkweather School is fortunate that these features are intact and well-preserved.

#### **Historical Significance Criterion A – Community Development**

Plymouth's north side, as detailed above, had early advantages, first in its proximity to the Middle Rouge to power early mills that produced lumber and grain to house and feed the growing settlement in all parts of the township. With railway access came other entrepreneurial and employment opportunities, from railroad employment and related service jobs to banks and shops that served the growing neighborhood known as North Village, to employment in automobile manufacturing enterprises that took advantage of rail transport.

People moved to the North Village in waves, first in the post-Civil War years. In the early years of the twentieth century, residing in North Village meant walkable proximity to new automobile industry jobs in addition to established opportunities for railroad, mercantile, banking or air rifle manufacturing jobs. As Plymouth's population continued to increase, employment advantages and available lots attracted more new residents.



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By the mid-1920s the area offered, in addition to passenger rail service, banks, restaurants, a dry goods store, a grocery store, a greenhouse, a drug store and a barber shop. Three churches were also located in the area. What the area did not have was a school, and the lack was sorely felt, as evidenced by the residents' strong support of the campaign to bring a neighborhood elementary school to the north side of Plymouth.

When Starkweather School opened in 1927, the building provided more than education for North Village children. Early twentieth-century educational philosophy espoused the belief that school buildings, which represented a large outlay of community funds, should provide their surrounding neighborhoods with services beyond childhood education. Accordingly, school boards and their architects began to include community rooms – multi-purpose social center/gymnasium spaces – into designs for public schools. Starkweather School no longer has a stage in the community room at the south end of its first floor, but this was the space that was used for meetings and activities that welcomed adults into the school after class hours. A space for non-denominational community functions, the school added another public gathering place to those provided by the area's churches. All these facets of the new school building, in addition to the prospect of educating elementary-age children close to home, brought additional value to living in North Village. As the overall population of Plymouth rose rapidly between 1920 and 1930, a comfortable neighborhood that offered most of life's necessities close at hand and promised a family's young children could walk to school in safety every day was an attractive and stable option that attracted prospective residents.

As one of the largest non-industrial structures in North Village, the school also added beauty to the area with its restrained Collegiate Gothic architecture. It stood within its neighborhood of small and mid-size homes and provided a large and pleasant green space, its deep front lawn a contrast to the smaller surrounding lots on Spring and Holbrook Streets. The large parcel on which the school was located also provided recreation space beyond the slope at its rear elevation. In a sense, the open, accessible space harkened back to the function of the park proposed for the site in Plymouth's earliest days.

Starkweather School represents a distinctive point in North Village history when the local Ford industries were new, residents had fought and won their battle with the School Board to provide education on a neighborhood level, and life was stable within the self-contained enclave. Now the Ford plants sit boarded up, the economy has refused to remain stable in the almost ninety years since the school first opened, and the school is currently empty. Overall, however, the North Village/Old Village area remains surprisingly unchanged. Walking the streets through the neighborhood, one finds remarkably little housing stock has been lost. The Liberty Street business district has few or no vacancies. Once EIFS infill panels are removed and windows replaced to reintroduce the delicate rhythm of horizontal ribbons of glass, the school will regain the integrity of its original design and hold its place in the fabric of this intimate neighborhood. Mindful preservation to allow for viable reuse is to be desired; viewing the 1871 train station a few blocks to the north and west of Starkweather School, transformed beneath layers of vinyl siding, one glimpses an undesirable alternative.

### **Historical Significance Criterion C - Architectural Significance**

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Starkweather School is significant under Criteria C in the local context as the only example in Plymouth of the public school architecture of Malcomson & Higginbotham, a well-respected Detroit architectural firm with extensive experience with school architecture. While not a key example of the firm's vast amount of public school design work in the Detroit/southeast Michigan area during the early twentieth-century period, it is a representative example illustrating the firm's characteristic quality of design.

The firm of Malcomson & Higginbotham, in its twenty-eight-year association with the Detroit Public Schools, bridged the gap from Romanesque-influenced styles of the late 1800s to Collegiate Gothic, which gained ascendancy in school design in the first quarter of the twentieth century. By 1927, when Starkweather School was designed and built, the firm had a practiced hand at interpreting Collegiate Gothic. In a style that could be given over to elaborate tracery, pointed arches and heraldic motifs, Malcomson & Higginbotham's best designs displayed a quiet restraint. Horizontal bands of large windows lightened facades in delicate rhythm, immediately attracting notice. Only then do the details begin to come into focus – a subtle suggestion of crenellation at a parapet, understated stone beltcourses that emphasize the horizontal and ground the building's multi-story massing to the earth on which it sits, broad compound arches delineating doorways. Because the firm was often tasked with designing huge schools – up to fifty or 100 classrooms – for Detroit's burgeoning student population, a stripped-down Collegiate Gothic may have evolved as an economy measure, or perhaps applying High Gothic ornament to such large buildings might have produced visual overstimulation. At any rate, the formula developed for Detroit's big-city schools, when applied to a twelve-classroom neighborhood school, produced a charming effect, a right-sized school that did not unduly overwhelm its neighborhood, subtly suggesting a "cathedral of learning." Although Malcomson & Higginbotham's stylized Collegiate Gothic was applied to both flat-roofed and hip-roofed buildings, the hip roofs lend a slightly more historical feeling to buildings, and chimney stacks that suggest something of Olde England are a pleasing adjunct; Starkweather's chimneys toward the north and south extensions are period details that surprise and delight. [See Figure 2 for examples of hip- and flat-roofed Collegiate Gothic buildings designed by Malcomson & Higginbotham.]

Preserving Starkweather School will maintain not only the fabric of the neighborhood and the sole extant example of relatively unaltered early twentieth century school architecture in the city of Plymouth, but also preserve the existence of Malcomson & Higginbotham work in the city and their work beyond the borders of Detroit. Prior to 1963, an early example of William G. Higginbotham's work still stood – his 1889 Plymouth village hall, with heavy round arches and fanciful turreted extension on the streetside façade. Remodeled in 1934 into the city hall (Plymouth rechartered from village to city in 1932), including murals painted by a local artist, the hall would stand only another twenty-nine years. In 1963, the city had procured federal funding to support building a new city hall, and a May 9, 1963 *Detroit Free Press* article quoted the chairman of the City Plan Commission on concern about losing the seventy-four-year-old building: *For my part, they can tear it down tomorrow and I'll shed no tears over Old City Hall.* The mayor, quoted May 12 the same year, in a *Detroit News* article, responded similarly: *The most important consideration is whether the preservation of city hall will in any way jeopardize the \$225,000 federal grant already approved for construction of the new building.*



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A number of buildings in Southeast Michigan, and in particular schools, designed by Malcomson & Higginbotham have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places, representing a cohesive body of work by a very prolific architectural firm. Starkweather School is a fine, small example of this work.

***Malcomson & Higginbotham, Architects***

William G. Malcomson, born 1853 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, immigrated to Detroit with his family in 1857. His earliest training was with Toronto architect Henry Langley, and he is noted as construction supervisor of that architect's 1876 Erie Street United Church in Ridgeway, Ontario. He worked for early Detroit architect Joseph E. Sparks in 1875-1878, and is credited as sole architect on two churches and a commercial block in Ridgeway between 1878 and 1880. Malcomson started his own office in Detroit in 1885, and early commissions included Cass Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church in Romanesque Revival style and a number of engine and hook-and-ladder houses for the Detroit Fire Department, typically Queen Anne in style, as well as an 1889 village hall for Plymouth, Michigan. His architectural career spanned six decades until his death in 1937.

William E. Higginbotham, born in Detroit in 1858, was educated in Detroit's public schools and began his architectural training at age 19 in the office of early Detroit architect J. V. Smith in 1877. He became a partner in William Malcomson's practice in 1890, although "Malcomson & Higginbotham" was the consulting firm of record for the 1888 Grace Hospital in Detroit and design architect for a series of late-1880s Detroit Fire Department structures. The firm's name changed as partners joined and left its employ, but the title Malcomson & Higginbotham was the longest iteration, lasting beyond Higginbotham's death in 1923. (Higginbotham's name was retained until 1937, when it was removed after William Malcomson's death.)

In 1895 Malcomson & Higginbotham's work was recognized for its quality and the firm was retained as consulting architects to the Detroit Public Schools. As the turn of the century neared, the role of school buildings in lives of students and of communities was changing; educators began to envision schools going beyond rote learning and recitation rooms. Urban populations swelled as the country went from an agrarian society to one that depended more and more on industry. Our country's largest cities faced huge increases in student populations and an urgent need to house them. By the 1890s, educational journals espoused appointing school board-approved architects to efficiently manage accelerated design and construction programs. Spared the cost in time and money of sending each building to bid and the ability to have designs in hand before funds were appropriated meant moving through the process more quickly. When Detroit Public Schools appointed Malcomson & Higginbotham consulting architects for the district, Detroit joined other leading Midwest cities contemplating architects as managers of construction: Augustus Bauer awarded the title of Architect to the Board of Chicago Schools in 1881; Frank Seymour Barnum appointed Superintendent of Buildings for the Cleveland Board of Education in 1895; William B. Ittner appointed Commissioner of School Buildings in St. Louis in 1897.

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One of Malcomson & Higginbotham's most high-visibility designs for the district was Central High School, opened in 1896, and now known as Wayne State University's "Old Main." Although the firm was designing additions and other schools in their first years as Board-appointed architects, Central was Romanesque school architecture writ large; taking up most of its urban block, the building was designed to house a huge population (103 classrooms for 1,600 students) and facilitate student movement with innovative twenty-four-foot-wide hallways, which, the architects showed (with students-per-minute traffic studies), would reduce crowding and lessen time required between classes.

Malcomson & Higginbotham's body of work for Detroit Public Schools continued to meet challenges that came with the evolving industrial city: burgeoning population (in 1907 Detroit's three high schools served 110 students, but were hardly adequate for 700 students just two years later); adding technical courses (by 1915, fully two-thirds of the country's automobiles and their components were assembled in Detroit area factories, building demand for qualified workers); and devising rooms to hold new classifications of students, from the youngest learners in age-appropriate kindergarten rooms to disabled students added to public school populations as the new century progressed. As Detroit Public Schools' annual report for the 1923/1924 school year noted, modern secondary schools added auditoriums, gymnasiums, laboratories and shops for vocational education, art rooms, kindergartens, and libraries throughout the 1910s and were still evolving in the 1920s with specialized work rooms, lunch rooms to serve students spending longer days at school, libraries, and specialized educational facilities for disabled students. Malcomson & Higginbotham met the challenges with buildings such as 1918's Nellie Leland School for Handicapped Children, one of the earliest schools for disabled students in the state, designed with wheelchair ramps and other features to facilitate access; 1922's Cass Technical High School, lauded, upon its opening, by the *Detroit News* as not only the most fully equipped high school in Michigan, but also one of the country's largest, accommodating 4,400 students with fifty classrooms and specialized work areas; and the 1924 Detroit Day School for the Deaf, which included half-size classrooms for work with small groups and was built with extensive soundproofing. Malcomson & Higginbotham also developed a plan – known as the Brady Plan for the 1921 elementary school first built using the design – for a modest initial building that would accommodate phased additions as student populations and sufficient funding allowed. Many of the city's subsequent schools utilized the plan. (Although Brady Elementary was NRHP-nominated, the vacant building was heavily scrapped while it sat vacant during the course of the nomination process, and ultimately razed.)

Because of their long involvement with school design, Malcomson & Higginbotham worked through a variety of architectural styles, from Queen Anne, Romanesque and various "Victorian" styles for their early schools, and adopted more popular styles as public taste evolved; post-1910s, the majority of their schools expressed Collegiate Gothic details, some understated, and others, like the 1924 Central High School, replete with pointed Gothic arches, stone tracery, school name in English Script and ornately decorative chimney stacks. The firm's school designs made frequent use of ceramic art tiles, from Detroit's Pewabic Pottery or Flint Faience & Tile Company (1921-1933; see the end of this section for more on Flint Faience & Tile Company). Colorful designs were often used for interior wall detailing and around fireplaces that lent a homey feel to kindergarten rooms, but the virtually identical Levi Barbour (1921) and Harry B.

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Hutchins (1922) intermediate schools incorporate colorful tile work over their exterior entranceways, as well.

It is often noted that Malcomson & Higginbotham designed seventy-five percent of Detroit's public schools between 1895 and 1923. As a more specific example, the schools section in *The History of the City of Detroit and Wayne County, Michigan: 1701 to 1907*, published when the firm had completed twelve years as district-appointed architects, details all forty schools and ten additions built from Malcomson & Higginbotham designs in that period. The section refers to their schools as modern temples of education, each with its own distinct and individual character and, moreover, that none possesses "...that forbidding aspect which marks alike the prison and the school of the old type and which has such a depressing effect on children with fine natures."

Although best known for school architecture, Malcomson & Higginbotham also did much residential work that is also notable and includes Queen Anne homes in Wyandotte and the 1895 David MacKenzie House, as well as the 1908 Henry and Clara Ford House in Italian Renaissance style. The firm also designed Starkweather Hall and additions to Welch Hall, the two oldest remaining buildings at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti. The firm designed libraries in Detroit, Ann Arbor and Howell, Michigan, a 1913 Elks temple in Flint, and commercial blocks in Detroit and Ann Arbor, as well as a number of churches, starting with Malcomson's early designs in Ontario, and public school buildings in Flint, Ann Arbor, and Plymouth among other places.

An extended list of Malcomson & Higginbotham designs, with dates, National Register of Historic Places and Michigan State Historic Sites listings, as known, appears below.

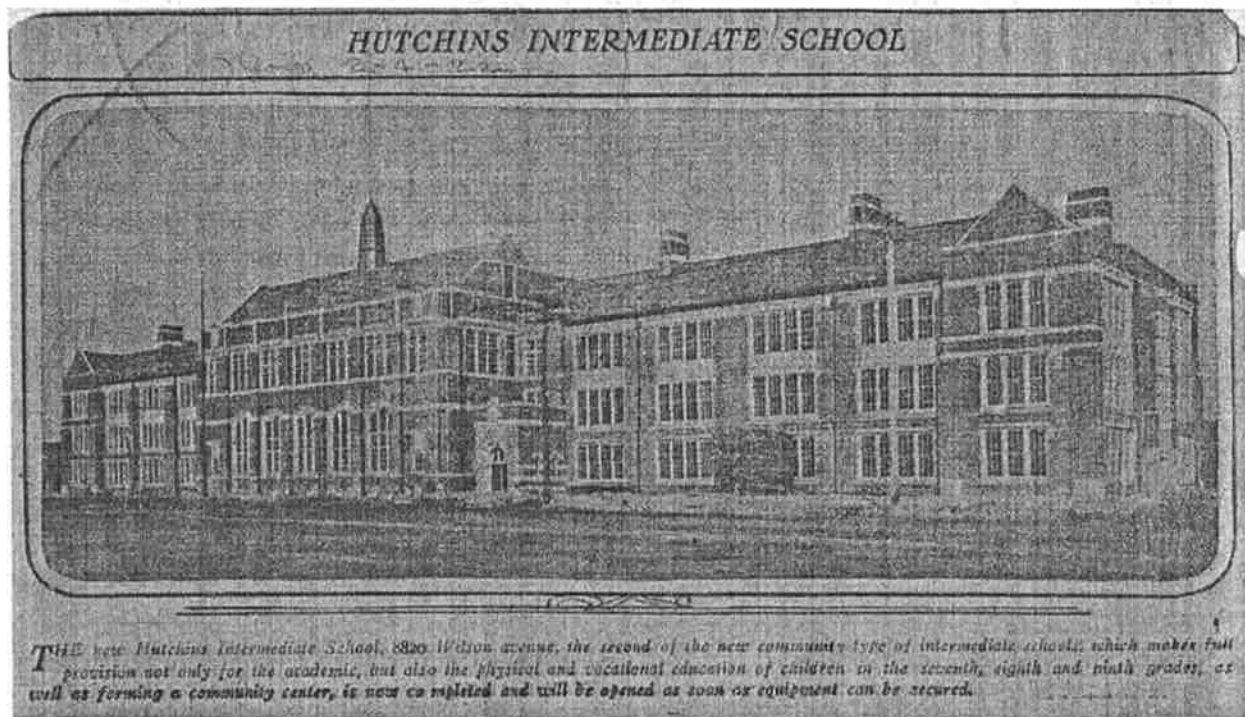
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Figure 2. Malcomson & Higginbotham, Collegiate Gothic style, hip-roof and flat-roof variations



Harry B. Hutchins Intermediate School - Detroit, Michigan, 1922  
*Detroit News, February 2, 1922*



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Franklin School - Detroit, Michigan  
*Austral Windows Catalog Number 26, 1925*

### **Malcomson and Higginbotham Designs – Selected Listing**

*[National Register of Historic Places and Michigan State Historic Site listings noted]*

Buildings located in Detroit unless otherwise noted.

**1876** - Erie Street United Church in Ridgetown, Ontario, Canada (Malcomson supervises construction for Toronto architect Henry Langley), [Canadian Heritage-designated; demolished 2008]

**1878** - Porter House Block (commercial block), Ridgetown, Ontario (credited W. G. Malcomson)

**1879** - Mount Zion Presbyterian Church, Ridgetown, Ontario (credited W. G. Malcomson)

**1880** - St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church, Ridgetown, Ontario (credited W. G. Malcomson)

**1888** - Detroit Fire Department Hook-and-Ladder House No. 5 [NRHP Dec 1997] within Eastern Market Historic District [NRHP Nov 1978 increased Feb 2007,MSHS Jul 1974 ]

**1889** - Village Hall, Plymouth (credited M. G [sic] Malcomson); Detroit Fire Department Engine House 14 (February); Detroit Fire Department Engine House 15 (December), with Hans Gehrke

**1891** - Cass Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church [NRHP Dec 1982]



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**1893** - Detroit Fire Department Engine House 16 (July), with Gehrke

**1895** - David Mackenzie House, contributing Wayne State University Buildings Historic District  
[NHRP 1978]

**1896** - Verona Apartments [NHRP Apr 1986]; George MacNichol House, Wyandotte [NHRP  
May 1984]; Central High School; (Wayne State University "Old Main), contributing WSU  
Buildings Historical District [NRHP 1978]; Our Lady of the Rosary church (built as St. Joseph's  
Episcopal) [NRHP Aug 1982]; James A. Garfield School [NRHP Jan 1984, MSHS Mar 1984];  
Starkweather Hall, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti [NRHP Apr 1977, MSHS Sep  
1972] within Eastern Michigan University Historic District [NRHP Oct 1984]

**1897** - Ford-Bacon House, Wyandotte [NRHP 1997]

**1899** - Commercial block for Thomas Craig and H. D. Smith, Ridgeway, Ontario

**1900** - East and west wing additions to E. W. Arnold's 1895 Welch Hall, Eastern Michigan  
University, Ypsilanti, contributing Eastern Michigan University Historic District [NRHP Oct  
1984]

**1901** - Detroit Fire Department Engine House 26 (June), with F.J. McGinnis; Arthur M. Parker  
House [NRHP Oct 1985]; Town hall and fire hall, Ridgeway, Ontario

**1902** - Detroit Fire Department Engine House 27 (November); Hartz Building, contributing  
Broadway Avenue Historic District [NRHP July 2004]; Church of Christ, Toronto, Canada

**1906** - Howell Carnegie Library [MSHS Mar 1997]

**1907** - Ann Arbor High School, adjoining Carnegie-grant library (designated Henry S.  
Frieze Building when acquired by University of Michigan in 1956), demolished 2007; Fannie  
Wingert School

**1908** - Duane Doty School, part of Detroit Public Schools MPS [NRHP December 2011]; Henry  
and Clara Ford House, contributing Boston- Edison Historic District [NHRP Sep 1975, MSHS  
Dec 1973]

**1913** - Elks Temple in Flint [NHRP Oct 1978, MSHS Nov 1976]; Hudson and Buhl Hospital

**1914** - Henry Ford Hospital

**1915** - Darling Block (commercial building), Ann Arbor; Northern High School; Southwestern  
High School

**1917** - Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop (adjacent to Hook and Ladder House #5) [NRHP  
Dec 1997]

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1918 - Nellie Leland School for Crippled Children [NRHP Feb 2002]

1919 - Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School

1921 - Levi Barbour Intermediate School; Southwestern High School; Courville Elementary School; Brady Elementary School [NRHP nominated, but heavily scrapped]; Flint Central High School, Flint

1922 - Duffield Elementary School; Harry B. Hutchins Intermediate School; Sidney D. Miller Middle School [NRHP Dec. 2011, MSHS Dec1986]; Cass Technical High School [NRHP Mar 2011], demolished Jul 2011; Jefferson Intermediate School [NRHP Sep 1997]

1924 - Detroit Day School for the Deaf; Central High School (part of Roosevelt group, which also included Durfee Elementary)

1926 - Chemistry Building, Michigan State University

1927 - Starkweather Elementary School, Plymouth; Lansing-Reilly Hall, University of Detroit Mercy McNichol Campus

1928 - Mosher-Jordan Halls, University of Michigan; Mary Mayo Hall, Michigan State University

1937 - Sarah L. Williams Hall, Michigan State University

### Undated

Listed without dates, additional schools constructed and added on to using Malcomson and Higginbotham designs in the firm's first 12 years as Detroit Public Schools' consulting architects.

("Model Temples of Education," *The History of the City of Detroit and Wayne County, Michigan: 1701 to 1907*)

### New schools:

Alger	Craft	Jones	Poe
Amos	Eastern High	Lyster	Preston
Bellevue	Estabrook	McGraw	Rose
Berry	Fairbanks	McKinley	Scripps
Bishop	Field	McKinstry	Sill
Campau	Franklin (old)	McMillan	Smith
Capron	Garfield (old)	Monteith	Thomas
Cary	Gillies	Moore	Van Dyke
Chandler	Goldberg	Morley	Western High
Columbian	Harris	Pingree	Wingert

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School additions:

Chaney	Hancock	Palmer	Webster
Farrand	Norvel	Russell	
Ferry	Owen	Washington	

***Flint Faience & Tile Company***

Starkweather also possesses significance under criterion C for its decorative tilework in the entry vestibules and in the kindergarten classroom in the fireplace area and drinking fountain alcove. The tile includes colorful square tiles facing the fireplace front and hearth, long and narrow decorative firebrick in the firebox itself, and larger decorative tiles displaying fish, animals, and flower forms inserted into the fireplace front and drinking fountain alcove tilework. This tilework was all the work of the Flint Faience & Tile Company.

The Flint Faience & Tile Company was a manufacturer of ceramic art tiles in Flint, Michigan, from 1921 to 1933 and a subsidiary of the A. C. Spark Plug Co. Founded by Albert Champion as the Champion Ignition Company in 1908 and bought by Buick in 1910, the company originally used ceramic insulator bodies imported from France to manufacture automobile spark plugs; after the German invasion of France in 1914, A. C. began manufacturing insulators in-house.

The components moved slowly through long tunnel kilns for firing, and it was discovered that turning the kilns off at the end of each day's production caused damage to the kilns and required non-productive time to reheat the next day. In order to limit kiln damage and make more efficient and productive use of the kilns, the company came up with the plan to produce architectural tiles when the kilns were not in use for producing spark plug insulators.

Although many decorative ceramic tile companies originated in the United States from 1876 on (the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876, with impressive displays of French faience and Chinese pottery, is often cited as an impetus), interest in the Arts and Crafts movement grew in the early years of the twentieth century. With it grew an interest in surface decoration that suggested the hand of the craftsman, and the 1920s and 1930s represented the heyday of ceramic art tiles. Although there were earlier companies in Massachusetts and New York, and a concentration of manufacturers in Cincinnati and Zanesville, Ohio, that took advantage of the Ohio Valley's rich clay deposits, some of the best-known names in American art tiles date from the years just before the turn of the twentieth century and the following two decades. Newcomb Pottery in New Orleans [1895], Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in Doylestown, Pennsylvania [1898], Van Briggles Pottery and Tile Co. in Colorado Springs [1901], Pewabic Pottery in Detroit [1903], and Batchelder Tile Company in Los Angeles [1909] were among those. With financial difficulties occasioned by the Great Depression, the resulting construction slowdown, and restrictions of the war years, most of these (and many more all over the country) had ceased manufacturing by the 1940s.

But, in the early 1920s, the field was still lucrative, and Flint Faience & Tile Company (Flint, Michigan) entered it with the consultation of ceramics engineers from Ohio State University and

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hired Carl Bergmans, a Belgian artist with extensive experience in manufacture and glazing in Zanesville plants, as the company's head designer. Historically and technically, faience (the French name for the Italian city of Faenza, which first produced such pottery in the fifteenth century) ceramics are tin-glazed, but the term came to be used by American tile manufacturers to indicate pieces with a handmade look and decorated in a rustic style. Flint Faience tiles' rusticity was typically portrayed in vivid colors, most often two or more to a single tile. Although the company's 7,000-plus stock designs were occasionally produced as carved or sculpted images, the most readily recognized tiles are those executed in raised-line style. An artist squeezed a thin clay mixture – usually colored black – from a tube to outline the design and then filled the outlined areas with colored glazes. Flint Faience artists used tubes with very small nozzles, giving their tiles a distinctive appearance.

The company chose not to advertise its products to the general public through home and women's magazines, but exclusively targeted architects and tiling contractors. Full-page ads in trade magazines noted that Flint Faience was glad to work with professionals and could supply stock designs in a choice of 150 colors or would collaborate with architects on custom designs. In their book *Flint Faience A to Z*, Margaret Carney and Ken Galvas mention that a 1931 article from the trade publication *Keramic Tile Journal* lauded Detroit architectural firm Malcomson & Higginbotham for their use of the firm's tile in their 1926 design of Reilly Hall at University of Detroit Mercy, calling it "the premiere use of Flint Faience Tile in a university," and noted that the company designed the tiles specifically for the installation in co-operation with the architects. The Flint Faience listing in the 1927/1928 edition of Sweet's Architectural Catalog includes a listing of notable architects who had used their tiles in major installation, and Malcomson & Higginbotham is listed among the likes of McKim, Mead & White, Albert Kahn and other architectural luminaries of the day.

Popular installations included stairways, floors, fireplaces and interior wall designs, as well as exterior wall décor (often as custom signs identifying buildings). Durability and ease of cleaning made tile a logical choice for commercial and institutional use, and auto dealerships, bank lobbies, movie theaters, hotels and hospitals were fitting applications; durability and imperviousness to water also made the tiles perfectly suited to use in bathrooms and for fountains, swimming pools and patios. Flint Faience tiles were often used in churches, where a number of stock religious designs might be used, or mosaics could be composed incorporating a mix of plain and patterned tiles. Many schools made use of stock designs in the company's animal or nursery story lines. When schools added dedicated kindergarten rooms beginning in the first quarter of the twentieth century, "homey" details like fireplaces and sandboxes were often added to designs; Flint Faience tiles were very popular for these features.

It is not surprising that Flint Faience & Tile Company products were well-known and in high demand in Flint and Detroit, but showrooms in New York City, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and other regional centers ensured that architects all over the country were familiar with the product lines as well. Full-page ads in trade magazines made sure that designers knew that, for example, Mr. and Mrs. Edsel Ford's meals were prepared in a Flint Faience-tiled kitchen or that the Rockefeller family swam in a Flint Faience-lined swimming pool at their estate in suburban New York's Pocantico Hills. The company's tiles were installed across the country, and could be



Starkweather School

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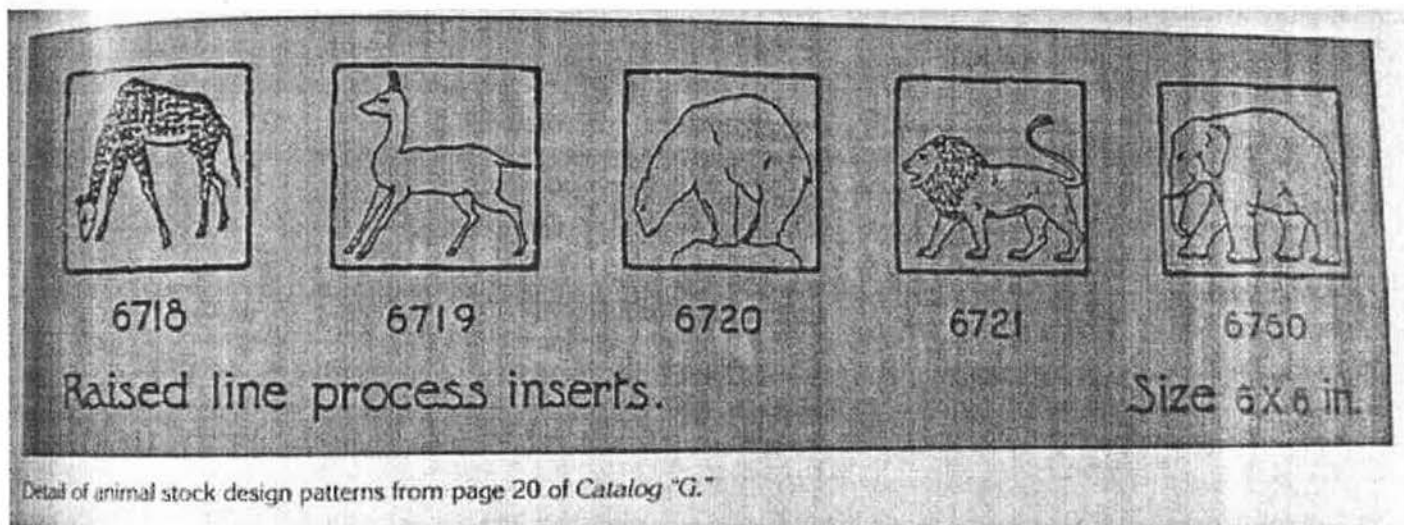
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found in the Custom House in Puerto Rico, the palace of the President of Peru, and even in the gigantic swimming pools of two floating installations – the *S.S. Manhattan* and the *S.S. Washington*.

Ultimately, the advancing automobile industry, which had created Flint Faience & Tile Company as an efficiency measure, rang its death knell. By 1933, with cars a more and more common part of everyday American life, demand for components increased, and A. C. Spark Plug Co. found it could better utilize kiln space to meet demand for spark plug insulators. Also that year, General Motors, which had acquired the company's stock from Champion's estate (he had died in 1929), felt manufacture of architectural products was simply too far removed from the goals of an automobile manufacturer, and made the decision to cease Flint Faience production completely.

No study of Michigan schools containing installations of Flint Faience & Tile Company tiles – or of decorative tilework of this kind in general – has been undertaken. Informal "surveys" over the years suggest that elementary many schools built during the 1920s and 30s around the state may have included this kind of decorative tilework in rooms for the youngest children, including tiles featuring animal and plant forms and fairy tales. One example already listed in the National Register of Historic Places is the 1938 elementary school addition to the Ontonagon School in Ontonagon County. That building's kindergarten and first-floor hallway feature installations of decorative tilework that depict water and other whimsical creatures, storybook characters, and boats. No other examples of other schools in which Flint Faience & Tile Company installations are still present are currently known to the SHPO. Other schools known to contain installations of such decorative Arts-and-Crafts tilework include the 1927-28 Fourth Ward School in Grand Haven and 1931 Central Elementary School in Hastings. What forms were responsible for the tilework for the Ontonagon, Grand Haven, and Hastings schools is not known at present. The 1920s and 30s generation of public school buildings is currently very much at risk, with many examples already demolished and more being closed and replaced with newer buildings all the time.



Starkweather School

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Above: From *Flint Faience A to Z*, an excerpt from 1926 Flint Faience & Tile Company catalog showing a selection of animal designs. Giraffe, lion and elephant images are among the designs used for the fireplace in Starkweather School's kindergarten room.

Starkweather School  
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan  
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Starkweather School

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Starkweather School  
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Wayne, Michigan  
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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: \_\_\_\_\_

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

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 1.229 acres

Starkweather School  
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan  
County and State

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: 42.378330 | Longitude: -83.458897 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 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.)

Lot 436 except the W 146.5', lot 437 and part of lot 438 of assessor's Plymouth Plat No. 15 of that part of Bradner and Holbrook's Subdivision lying in Section 26 and of part of the W 1/2 of the NE 1/4 of Section 26, T.1S., R.8E., City of Plymouth, Wayne County, Michigan as recorded in Liber 66 of Plats, page 81, Wayne County records, being more particularly described as: Beginning at the SW corner of said lot 437, also begin at point on the E line of N. Holbrook Ave.; thence N.02°16'00"W., 166.18' along the E line of said N. Holbrook Ave. to the NW corner of said lot 437, also being a point of intersection of the E line of said N. Holbrook Ave. and the S line of E. Spring Street; thence N.87°43'01"E., 296.93' along the S line of said E. Spring Street; thence S.20°59'01"W., 10.36'; thence S.07°10'32"E., 51.03'; thence S.00°04'05"E., 108.21'; thence S.89°55'55"W., 39.00' to a point on the S line of said lot 438; thence S87°53'59"W., 7.73' along the S line of said lot 438 to the NE corner of said lot 436; thence S17°47'42"W., 50.78' to the SE corner of said lot 436; thence S87°57'43"W., 82.44' along the S line of said lot 436; thence N.02°16'00"W., 47.66' to a point on the N line of said lot 436; thence S87°53'59"W, 146.50' along the N line of said lot 436 to the point of beginning.



Starkweather School  
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan  
County and State

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)  
Entire property historically and currently associated with the building.

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### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Grace A.M. Smith, RA, LEED AP  
organization: Designsmiths  
street & number: 200 E. Division Street  
city or town: Rockford state: MI zip code: 49341  
e-mail designsmiths@hotmail.com  
telephone: 616-866-4089  
date: March 2016

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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

Name of Property: Starkweather School  
City or Vicinity: Plymouth  
County: Wayne State: Michigan  
Photographer: Grace A.M. Smith

Starkweather School  
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan  
County and State

Date Photographed: August 11, 2015 (5, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24); December 15 & 16, 2015 (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 16, 17, 21, 22).

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

- 1 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0001)  
West Elevation, camera facing east
- 2 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0002)  
West Elevation, north end, camera facing east
- 3 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0003)  
West Elevation, south end, camera facing east
- 4 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0005)  
South Elevation, camera facing northwest
- 5 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0007)  
West Elevation of SE addition, camera facing east
- 6 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0009)  
East Elevation of SE addition, camera facing northwest
- 7 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0013)  
East Elevation, south end, camera facing west
- 8 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0015)  
East & North Elevations, camera facing southwest
- 9 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0016)  
North Elevation, camera facing south
- 10 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0018)  
West & North Elevations, camera facing southeast
- 11 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0020)  
West Elevation, masonry detail, camera facing southeast
- 12 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0022)  
West Elevation, south entrance camera facing east
- 13 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0027)  
North chimney, camera facing southeast
- 14 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0028)  
Interior corridor, first floor, camera facing north
- 15 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0029)  
Interior corridor, second floor, camera facing north
- 16 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0030)  
North end of interior corridor, second floor, camera facing north
- 17 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0032)  
Interior corridor detail, second floor, camera facing north
- 18 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0034)  
Interior corridor, first floor, flooring detail, camera facing south
- 19 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0035)  
Kindergarten classroom, first floor, camera facing east
- 20 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0036)

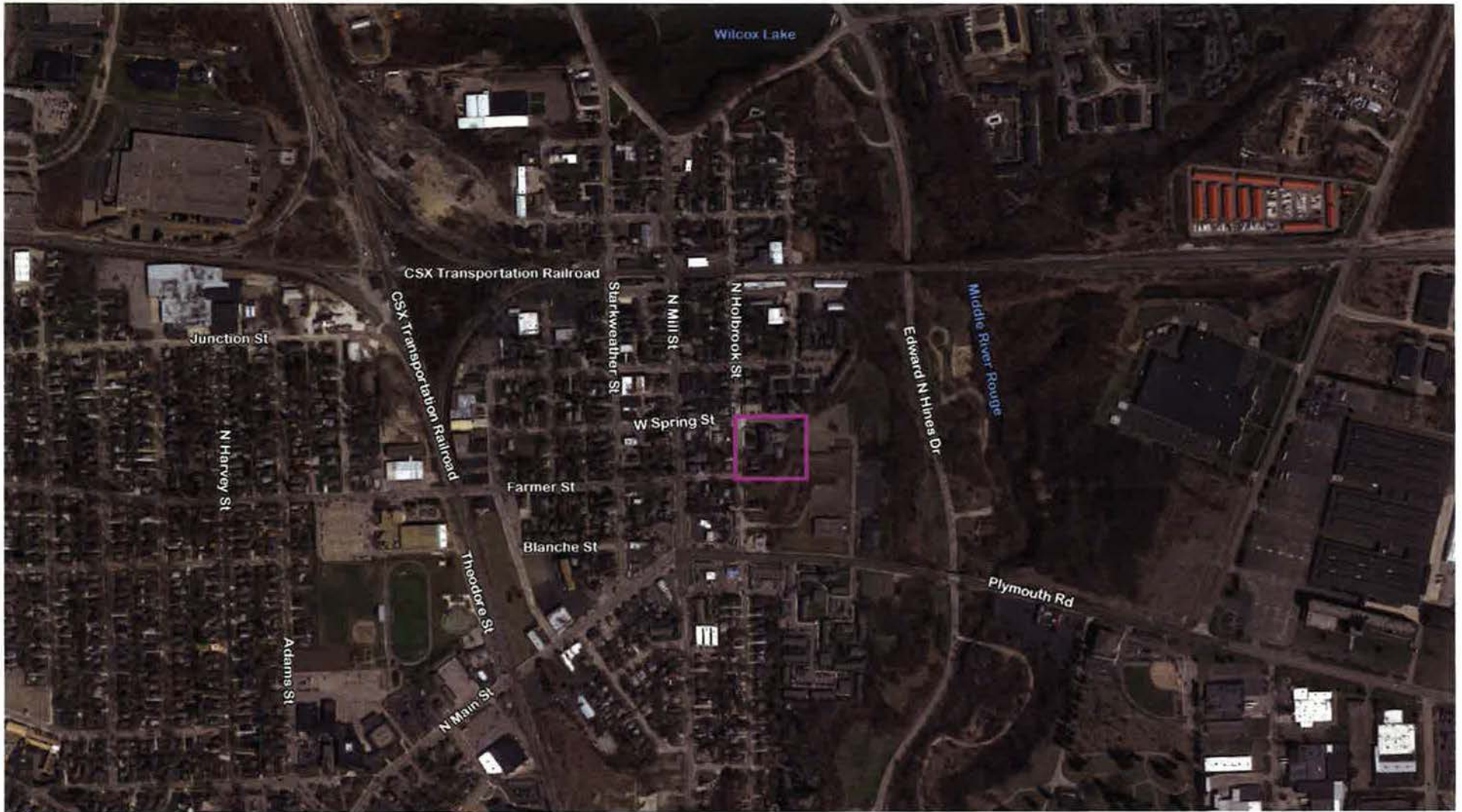
Starkweather School  
Name of Property

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- Classroom, second floor, camera facing southeast  
21 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0038)  
Kindergarten classroom, first floor, detail of built-in bench, camera facing north  
22 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0040)  
Kindergarten classroom, first floor, drinking fountain alcove, camera facing west  
23 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0041)  
Kindergarten classroom, first floor, fireplace, camera facing west  
24 of 24 (MI\_WayneCounty\_StarkweatherSchool\_0043)  
North entry vestibule, first floor, tile detail, camera facing south

**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.



**Starkweather School**  
550 North Holbrook Street, Plymouth, Wayne County, Michigan

Lat./Long.: 42.378330, -83.458897

*one inch = 500 feet*































NO  
OPEN  
PARKING  
OR  
STORAGE

NO  
PARKING

NO  
PARKING

NO  
PARKING

NO  
PARKING





A tall, cylindrical brick chimney with two horizontal white bands, located in the center of the building's facade.

A large, multi-story brick building with a dark grey roof, multiple windows with white frames, and a prominent chimney. The building has a classic industrial or institutional architectural style.

A smaller, single-story brick structure with a light-colored roof, located to the left of the main building. It appears to be an auxiliary building or a covered walkway.

A chain-link fence runs across the middle ground, separating the parking area from the building. Several blue handicapped parking signs are visible along the fence.

A red fire hydrant with two vertical red pipes, located in the foreground on the right side of the image.

A dark-colored car is partially visible on the far left edge of the image, parked in the lot.

A circular concrete manhole cover is visible in the foreground on the left side of the cracked asphalt.

















THE SPRINGFIELD SCHOOL - 1877

















24  
202  
13

201





















HIRED















UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Starkweather School  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MICHIGAN, Wayne

DATE RECEIVED: 9/23/16 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 10/21/16  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 11/07/16 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 11/08/16  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 16000762

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: Y PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 11/7/2016 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept A&C

REVIEWER Patrick Andrus

DISCIPLINE Historian

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE 11/7/2016

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.





RICK SNYDER  
GOVERNOR

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

Natl. Reg. of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
KEVIN ELSSENHEIMER  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

September 19, 2016

Mr. J. Paul Loether, Chief  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
1201 Eye Street, NW, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Loether:

Enclosed is a national register nomination form for the Starkweather School in Wayne County, Michigan. This property is being submitted for listing in the national register. No written comments concerning this nomination were submitted to us prior to our forwarding this nomination to you.

**It is our understanding that approval for the financing for this building's rehabilitation project is awaiting approval of the listing; accordingly, we request an expedited review of this nomination.**

Questions concerning this nomination should be addressed to Robert O. Christensen, national register coordinator, at 517/335-2719 or christensenr@michigan.gov.

Sincerely yours,

Brian D. Conway  
State Historic Preservation Officer

