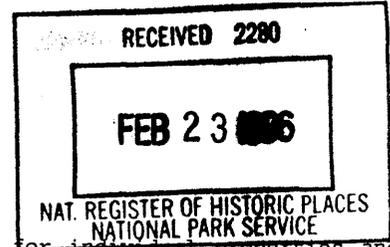


United States Department of Interior  
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name District School No. 1

other names/site number Wilson School

2. Location

street & number W5720 U.S. Hwy. 14-61 N/A not for publication

city or town Town of Shelby N/A vicinity

state Wisconsin code WI county La Crosse code 063 zip code 54601

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    nationally    statewide X locally. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official/Title  
State Historic Preservation Officer-WI

2/19/96  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

District School No. 1  
Name of Property

La Crosse, Wisconsin  
County and State

**4. National Park Service Certification**

- I hereby certify that the property is:
- entered in the National Register.  
— See continuation sheet.
  - determined eligible for the National Register.  
— See continuation sheet.
  - determined not eligible for the National Register.  
— See continuation sheet.
  - removed from the National Register.
  - other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Edson A. Beall Date of Action 3/21/96

Entered in the National Register

**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 listed resources within the count)

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

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register  
N/A

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)  
Education/ School

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)  
Vacant/Not In Use

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)  
Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movement

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)  
foundation concrete  
walls brick  
roof metal  
other concrete  
wood

**Narrative Description**

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

District School No. 1  
Name of Property

La Crosse, Wisconsin  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

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

Areas of Significance  
(Enter categories from  
instructions)

A Property is associated with events  
that have made a significant  
contribution to the broad patterns of  
our history.

Architecture  
Education  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B Property is associated with the lives  
of persons significant in our past.

Period of Significance

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.

1917-1944  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

D Property has yielded, or is likely to  
yield, information important in  
prehistory or history.

Significant Dates

1917  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Significant Person  
(Complete if Criterion B is  
marked above)

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

A owned by a religious institution or  
used for religious purposes.

Cultural Affiliation

B removed from its original location.

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

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

Architect/Builder

E a reconstructed building, object, or  
structure.

unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age achieved  
significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

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

District School No. 1  
Name of Property

La Crosse, Wisconsin  
County and State

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

Primary location of additional data:  
 State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State Agency  
 Federal Agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository:  
UW-La Crosse, Area Research Center

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>1/5</u>	<u>6/4/5/7/4/5</u>	<u>4/8/4/6/4/4/0</u>	3	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>
	Zone Easting		Northing		Zone Easting								Northing
2	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>
	Zone Easting		Northing		Zone Easting								Northing

\_\_\_\_\_ see continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Christina Slattery, Architectural Historian  
organization U.S. West Research, Inc. date 29 August 1994  
street & number 421 Main Street, Suite 306 telephone 608/782-3338  
city or town La Crosse state Wisconsin zip code 54601

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

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

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section   7   Page   1  

District School No. 1, Town of Shelby,  
La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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**Section 7: Architectural Description**

The District School No. 1, also known as the Wilson School, is located in the Town of Shelby, just on the north side of U.S. Highway 14-61 in La Crosse County, Wisconsin. The building is situated about twenty feet north of the highway. To the west of the schoolhouse, a dirt and gravel road leads to a residence about two hundred feet behind (north) of the schoolhouse. There is an outline of a dirt road to the east of the building that was the original driveway for the school. The landscape surrounding the schoolhouse exhibits a number of mature trees around the building. On the main facade there is a large juniper tree which covers the southeastern corner of the building. The grounds also exhibit a septic tank off of the north corner of the building and an abandoned well about thirteen feet from the northeast elevation of the building. The District School No. 1 is an excellent example of a brick one-room schoolhouse in La Crosse County. The historic integrity of the building remains high and the building is of local architectural and historical significance.

The District School No. 1 is a Prairie School-influenced Craftsman style schoolhouse with a central square bell tower centered on its main southeast-facing facade. The schoolhouse, constructed in 1917, is a red brick one-room building with a "T" plan. It has a concrete foundation and a hipped roof covered in seamed metal roofing. The wooden eaves of the roof are enclosed. Although the building is constructed entirely in red brick, the type of brick and color of mortar varies. The highly visible front and side elevations (southeast, northeast, and southwest) are constructed of a running bond of rough brick with a red mortar, while the rear or northwest elevation is constructed out of a running bond of smooth red brick with a cream-colored mortar.

The main facade (southeast), faces U.S. Highway 14-61. This symmetrical facade has a central protruding square plan bell tower constructed of the same red brick as the facade. The bell tower reaches up beyond the height of the building's main roof and it has a hipped roof covered with metal roofing. A metal flagpole extends from the center of the bell tower's roof. Located behind the bell tower on the main roof is a double chimney. The second level of the bell tower is open on three sides with a decorative wrought iron scrollwork railing. Located on the bell tower is a stone nameplate which

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District School No. 1, Town of Shelby,  
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reads: "District School No. 1, Town of Shelby - 1917." Both above and below the stone plaque there is a thin brick beltcourse that encircles three sides of the bell tower. Below the second level opening of the bell tower are single, fixed, one-light windows on its northeast and southwest side elevations.

The main entrance to the building is through a large central doorway placed in the first story of the bell tower. In front of the main entrance there is a concrete landing. The wood entrance door is about three feet wide and displays a large single glass pane on the upper half and a panel on the lower half. The glass pane of the door is currently boarded up. On either side of the doorway is a tall, narrow, one-over-one sash window placed above a wood panel. Both of these windows have concrete exterior sills and are also currently boarded up. Located above the door and the side windows is a large, fixed, three-light glass transom.

On both sides of the bell tower, on the main facade, is a large, single, one-over-one, wood sash window. The windows feature winter storm windows with two-over-two fixed panes. Both of these windows have a fixed transom and a concrete sill. Single awning type basement windows are located below each of these windows.

The northeast side elevation, is constructed of coarse red brick with matching red mortar. Originally, there were four windows on this elevation, but only one opening remains that has not been bricked in. This is a small, narrow, two-light awning window with wood frame and concrete sill on the left (easterly) side. The ghost outlines of three other windows are present on the elevation as indicated by the newer type of brick used to block them in and their concrete sills, which remain in place. Just to the right of the center of the elevation there was a large window opening that likely contained a trio of windows identical to the similar groups still remaining on the southwest and northwest facades. On either side of the large central window were two much smaller windows. The window that was originally to the right (north) is now almost completely covered by a chimney which is not original to the building. The brick chimney, with concrete top, extends out from the building and reaches above the roof line.

The rear (northwest) elevation is divided into three equal bays by two brick

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District School No. 1, Town of Shelby,  
La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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pilasters that reach from the foundation to the roof line. The northwest elevation, in contrast to the other three elevations of the building, was constructed of a smooth red brick with cream-colored mortar. In each bay of the elevation, there is a trio of tall, one-over-one wood sash windows. Each window also has a fixed transom and a rock-faced common concrete sill. The windows display removable winter storm windows which are original to the building. In each of the two outside bays, there is a basement awning window. In the center bay there is a small metal door opening inset into the foundation for coal, the cover of which features a label reading, "Majestic."

The side (southwest) elevation, is constructed of red, coarse brick with a matching red mortar. The elevation has a group of three tall narrow windows placed just left of center. The three, one-over-one, wooden sash windows each exhibit a fixed transom and they have a common concrete sill. To the right (south) of the center window there is a smaller single one-over-one wood sash window, also with a concrete sill. To the left there was originally a window with a fixed transom that was later adapted to serve as a second means of egress from the building. Currently there is no door in place and the opening is boarded up. At the foundation line, there are three awning basement windows evenly spaced across the elevation. Near the west corner of the building a modern electric meter is attached to the wall.

The interior of the schoolhouse is divided into a vestibule, hallway, and one large classroom. As one steps inside the entrance of the building there are two sets of wooden stairs. A wide stairway of six steps on the left leads up to the hallway and on the right there is a narrower stairway leading down to the basement. The two stairs are separated by a single balustrade having handrails on either side. Both sides of the balustrade are covered in narrow vertical wainscoting about two inches wide. The vestibule also has a central hanging light fixture. At the top of the stairs to the hallway there is a small landing and a set of wooden double doors. The doors display five oblong panels and have an awning type glass transom above. The double door entry leads to a narrow hallway running northeast-southwest and spanning the width of the building. The hallway has about an eight-inch wood baseboard, wood trim around the windows and doors, plaster walls, acoustic tile ceiling, and wood floors. To the northeast, on the southeast wall, there is a wall-hung porcelain drinking fountain. On both sides of the hallway there are coat hooks attached to wooden trim about four feet high. There is a section of

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District School No. 1, Town of Shelby,  
La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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wainscoting on the northwest wall at the southwest end of the hallway. The hallway has two single windows on either side of the southeast wall. Both windows are tall and narrow with wood sash and one-over-one panes. The classroom can be entered from either of two doors placed at the ends of the northwest wall of the hallway. Both wood doors have five oblong panels and an awning type glass transom above.

The classroom now has an acoustic tile ceiling, but it still retains its original plaster walls and a wooden floor with floorboards about two-inches-wide (a strip of the floorboards is buckling across the northeast-southwest line of the room). Numerous windows on the southwest and northwest walls provide the classroom space with plenty of natural light. The northwest wall is covered by three sets of large windows and transoms and the southwest wall has a trio of windows in the center and a single window to the south, as well as an entrance door with transom above to the west. On the southwest wall there is a bulletin board beneath the smaller window to the south. The northeast wall has a chalkboard, outlined with wood trim, that runs the length of the entire wall, which was put in place after the original window openings behind it were bricked shut. There are two classroom doors on the southeast side of the room. In the center of the southeast wall there is another bulletin board, flanked on either side by built-in wood and glass cabinets. The cabinet to the east is larger, with three sections, while the cabinet to the south has only two sections. The cabinets have solid wood doors on the bottom half and glass doors in the upper portion. Obvious modern alterations to the interior of the classroom include modern lighting, a modern heating system and the replacement ceiling. There are electric baseboard heaters attached to the baseboard on all four sides of the room. Hanging from the ceiling there is exposed electrical wiring and a strip of fluorescent lights remains to the north. Above each east entry door inside the classroom there is a lighted sign which reads, "Exit."

The full basement story of the schoolhouse has concrete walls and floors and its ceiling exhibits exposed structural beams and supports. To the northeast there are three small rooms, each with a paneled wood door and a glass awning type transom. Two of these rooms were used as bathroom facilities, but no fixtures remain. These rooms and the rest of the basement are now empty, except for a modern furnace vented through the newer chimney on the northeast elevation.

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Section 8 Page 1 District School No. 1, Town of Shelby,  
La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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**Section 8: Statement of Significance**

District School No. 1, Wilson School, constructed in 1917, was the second District School No. 1 in the Town of Shelby. The brick one-room schoolhouse is locally significant under Criterion A in the context of Education. The building served as a one-room school for the town of Shelby from 1917 to 1965 when the school district was consolidated with the city of La Crosse and the school was closed. The building is also locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as one of a few surviving rural brick schoolhouses in La Crosse County. The one-room rural District School No. 1 relates to the statewide historic context "Public Primary Education: 1817 to present" as defined in *Cultural Resources Management in Wisconsin: A Manual for Historic Properties*.

Historic Background

Early on the state of Wisconsin encouraged the organization of school districts and provided tax money for their support (Wyatt Vol.3 1986, Education 2-2). In 1849, the free public school system was introduced and for the first time schools were supported entirely through public taxation (Wyatt Vol.3 1986, Education 1-2). Under the legislation, local townships were required to establish educational facilities, although there were no attendance requirements. School districts were organized, electors voted their own taxes, and the districts reported their needs to the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk then apportioned the town taxes, as well as state and county taxes, among the property owners of each district (Shelby Town Hall Files, "School Districts in Shelby," n.d., 3).

In an effort to improve school attendance, the state legislature enacted Wisconsin's first mandatory attendance law in 1879 (Wyatt, Vol.3, 1986, Education 2-8). The state legislature, understanding the importance of education's role, believed that schools could help assimilate students from various ethnic and financial backgrounds. The legislation required attendance of students from age seven to fifteen for a period of at least twelve weeks a year, however it exempted children living more than two miles from school

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Section 8 Page 2 District School No. 1, Town of Shelby,  
La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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(Wyatt, Vol.3, 1986, Education 2-8 & 2-9).

The ineffectiveness of this law prompted state officials to pass a stronger mandatory law ten years later. The "Bennett Law," of 1889, required a twelve-week annual attendance for students age seven to fourteen, required classes to be taught in English, and included a fine for parents who did not follow the guidelines (Wyatt, Vol.3, 1986, Education 2-9). The "Bennett Law" received strong opposition, primarily from parents who wished to teach their children in their native tongue and those who needed their children to work on the farm. Two years later, the "Bennett Law," was repealed and the initial 1879 law was reenacted. In 1903, the age limit of required attendance was raised to sixteen for those children who did not work (Wyatt, Vol.3, 1986, Education 2-9).

The number of rural schools in Wisconsin grew in relation to the increased number of settlements and settlers within the state. By 1923, the state of Wisconsin supported 6,475 one-room schools, largely located in rural areas (Wyatt, Vol.3, 1986, Education 2-7). A national movement to consolidate schools was initiated in 1908 when President Theodore Roosevelt formed the National Commission on Country Life to improve conditions in rural America (Gulliford, 1984, 41). The slogan for the improvement of rural life was "Better farming, better business, better living." Rural life improvements included the paving of roads and the advent of the automobile. Both of these changes would affect rural schools. Since alternative means of transportation were now available, schools were no longer required to be within walking distance of the children. On a national, state, and local level the consolidation of schools began and larger multiple classroom graded schools replaced the one-room schoolhouses (Gulliford, 1984, 41). On a regional level, by 1938, approximately 19,000 one-room schools in the Midwest had been closed as a result of consolidation (Gulliford, 1984, 44).

State measures to consolidate smaller rural schools in Wisconsin followed the example of the national consolidation movement. In 1937-1938, the number of school districts in Wisconsin reached a peak of approximately 7,777 districts. During that same time period, the number of one-room schools in Wisconsin totalled 6,181 (Wyatt, Vol.3, 1986, Education 2-9). In 1939, the state superintendent of schools in Wisconsin received authority to downsize

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Section   8   Page   3   District School No. 1, Town of Shelby,  
La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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the school system by synthesizing districts with estimated assessments of \$100,000 or less. Thus, several hundred of the smallest districts in Wisconsin were required to consolidate with larger districts (Wyatt, Vol.3, 1986, Education 2-9 and 2-10).

Education: La Crosse County

The District School No. 1, Town of Shelby, is on U.S. Highway 14-61, located in southwestern La Crosse County, just south of the city of La Crosse. The Town of Shelby is surrounded by bluffs and coulees (valleys) and lies between the Mississippi River and La Crosse city limits to the west and the town of Greenfield to the east. The town, with easy access to the Mississippi River, was chosen as a settlement by the Mormons in 1843 and twenty to thirty families made their home among the bluffs and the coulees (Bryant, 1907, 232). At the time, the population of the Mormon settlement far exceeded the nearby city of Prairie La Crosse, later known as La Crosse (Bryant, 1907, 232). Within a year the Mormons experienced problems after the death of their leader Joseph Smith and decided to abandon the settlement in the valley that would become the Town of Shelby. The Mormons returned to their original settlement at Nauvoo, Illinois.

In 1844, the first permanent settlers established themselves in the valley, but it was not until a few years later with an influx of immigrants that the Town of Shelby was established (Bryant, 1907, 232). The area became a popular settlement because of its fertile agricultural land and close association to the Mississippi River.

By 1907, La Crosse County was divided into 70 school districts and supported 70 rural school buildings (Bryant, 1907, 133-134). In 1917, the number of school districts in the county increased to 72 and supported 65 one-room schools (La Crosse County Board of Supervisors, 1918, 103).

The La Crosse County Superintendent of Schools, Emily Stromstad, reported in 1927 that 3,000 students were being taught by 104 teachers in 73 rural schools (Bryhn 1985, 178). Of the 73 rural schools in the county, 64 were one-room schools and the remaining buildings had more than one room. The report by the

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La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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County Superintendent of Schools also described the conditions of the rural schools; 66 had free text books, 54 had warm lunch equipment, 39 had playground equipment, and 41 were equipped with sanitary bubblers (Bryhn, 1985, 178). By 1939, the number of one-room schools in the county decreased to 59. These one-room schools enrolled 2,569 students and were taught by 105 teachers. By this time a majority of the rural schools had electric lights, some had sanitary facilities, over half had an organ, piano, Victrola, or radio and many had library corners (Bryhn 1985, 178).

In 1953-1954, the majority of schools in La Crosse County were still rural schools. Of the 55 schools in the county, 34 were rural schools (Bryhn, 1985, 183). By 1958-1959, the La Crosse County School Directory reported that the number of rural schools had decreased to 28, and again in 1959-1960 the number of rural schools dropped to 24 (Bryhn, 1985, 183).

In 1917, the Town of Shelby was divided into five school districts, but by 1925 the Town of Shelby had six school districts. District School No.1, also known as the Wilson School, remained open until the consolidation of the Town of Shelby schools with the city of La Crosse in 1965. What became District No. 2, Washington School, was at one time the only school in a three township area (Bryhn, 1985, 107). District School No. 2 was consolidated with the city of La Crosse in 1965 and closed as a public school in 1973 (Hill, 1980, 19). District No. 3, State Road School, was established in 1867 and consolidated with the city of La Crosse in 1965 (Hill, 1980, 17). District No. 4, Elm Grove School, was established in 1884 and remained open until 1967 (Bryhn, 1985, 108; Hill, 1980, 7). Elm Grove School District Number 4 in Shelby included parts of Districts Number 1 and 3 (Shelby Town Hall Files, n.d., 2).<sup>1</sup> District No. 5, Boulevard School, was established in 1900 and remained open until 1942 when the city of La Crosse expanded into that area (Hill, 1980, 6). District No. 6 School, Hillside School was operating as early as 1918 (Bryhn, 1985, 110).

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<sup>1</sup>District 4 boundaries included: Sections 16, 17, 20, 21, SE 1/4 of 9, W 1/2 of 15 and the West 1/2 of Section 22 (Shelby Town Hall Files, "School Districts in Shelby," u.d., 2).

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Section 8 Page 5 District School No. 1, Town of Shelby,  
La Crosse County, Wisconsin

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Education: District School No. 1

District School No. 1 is locally significant to the area of Education as a fine, largely intact, representative example of an early twentieth century rural one-room Wisconsin schoolhouse. Schools such as this and their nineteenth century predecessors played an especially important role in bringing education to children during the period when the state was still predominantly rural. They were also usually the first (and were often the only) non-sectarian public buildings constructed in many of Wisconsin's rural townships. Many brick construction schools like District No. 1 were constructed in the first decades of this century because by that time large numbers of Wisconsin's first generation of rural schools were starting to fall into disrepair. Wear and tear and the huge growth of the state's school-age population had taken their toll and many of the state's pioneer schools had become outmoded and were seriously overcrowded. The magnitude of the need for new schools made it necessary for the State of Wisconsin to become active in seeing to it that replacement schools reflected new trends in school design. The District No. 1 School is representative of the changes in design that the State of Wisconsin mandated and it is also emblematic of the programs initiated by the State during this period to bring education to children in the rural parts of the state. The period of significance extends from the year of the construction of the school through 1944, when the NPS 50-year rule takes affect.

In 1867, when the Town of Shelby inherited a portion of the town of Greenfield school system, the existing Shelby school district boundaries required readjustment.<sup>2</sup> After the boundary adjustments in 1867, School District No. 1 contained Sections 14, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, and 29 of Township 15 North and Range 7 West (Shelby Town Hall Files, "School Districts in Shelby," n.d., 1).

The first District School No. 1 was a stone building located near the present school. The *Atlas of La Crosse County* of 1906 shows a school building in Section 27, on the property of H. Jacobs, but in 1913, the only school

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<sup>2</sup>In July of 1867, the town board established District Number 2, separate from Numbers 1 and 3, already within the town lines (Shelby Town Hall Files, "School Districts in Shelby," u.d., 1). (Old Districts 2 and 5 were shared with Greenfield)

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Section 8 Page 6 District School No. 1, Town of Shelby,  
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represented for the district was located in Section 23, on the property of Edw. Roester, just west of the 1917 District School No. 1 (*Standard Atlas of La Crosse County, 1906, 13; Roth Realty Company, 1913, 9*). Pioneer settlers built the first District School No. 1 from local stone. The stones, from a local quarry, were hauled to the site by horse and wagon or sleigh. The one-room school building had enrollments of sixty to seventy students at times. Although it is not known when the original school building was built, or when it was demolished, historic photographs show that it was still in use in 1909 (Bryhn, 1985, 109). The schoolhouse became known as the Wilson School, and appeared on the 1913 atlas map under that name (Roth Realty Company, 1913, 9).

The District School No. 1 provided a central location for Mormon Coulee residents. The first schoolhouse served as the annual meeting place for the Town of Shelby for their town meetings from 2 April 1867 through 2 April 1872<sup>3</sup> (Shelby Town Hall Files, "Town Buildings and Equipment," n.d., 1). Besides serving as the meeting place for town boards, the schoolhouse was also used as a meeting place for several committees (Shelby Town Hall Files, "School Districts in Shelby," n.d., 1).

For 1867, there were no recorded taxes for District No. 1, Town of Shelby, but by 1868 the taxes for the District were \$75.06 (Shelby Town Hall Files, "School Districts in Shelby," n.d. 3). From the records of the Library Fund, a rate of \$0.10 per child was charged for library usage and the enrollment in District School No. 1 in 1892 was 64 students, increasing to 68 students in 1901 and again increasing to 83 students in 1908 (Shelby Town Hall Files, "School Districts in Shelby," n.d., 4). In 1917, the Town of Shelby collected \$300.75 in taxes for School District No. 1 (Shelby Town Hall Files, "Town of Shelby Tax Rolls," 1917).

A new District School No. 1 was constructed in 1917. The building was constructed of brick and located in Section 23 of Township 15 North and Range 7 West on the farm of C.A. Mundstock (W.W. Hixon & Co. 1930, 23). The Town of Shelby received a loan from the state for \$454.34 to help with the

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<sup>3</sup>From 1872 until 1882, the town hall meetings were held in Jacob Beckel's hop house and from that location they moved to F. Leuthe's Hall. After many failed attempts, the town of Shelby finally raised enough money and support to construct their first Town Hall in 1889.

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construction of the building (Shelby Town Hall Files, "Town of Shelby Income 1917," n.d.). The new District School No. 1 cost approximately \$5,000 to build, and at the same time District No. 4 in the Town of Holland, also in La Crosse County, was constructing a brick one-room school at about the same cost<sup>4</sup> (La Crosse County Board of Supervisors, 108). In the *La Crosse County Board of Supervisors Report for 1917-1918* the school superintendent emphasized the importance of the new one-room schools being constructed. The annual report stated:

The chief interest in the erection of these fine one-room buildings lies in the fact that only a few years back a \$5,000 country school house would have been regarded in most communities as a needless luxury and a foolish expenditure of public money. Rural communities in this county have quite generally, at least until recent years, carried the notion that any rectangular building having four walls was good enough for a school house; and in consequence of such notion the school house was frequently, is yet in too many places, the most unsuitable, if not actually the poorest building in the community (La Crosse County Board of Supervisors, 1918, 108).

The County School Board Supervisor continued to discuss the "changing mental attitude" of the rural communities. Communities began to realize that the schoolhouse deserved to be the best building in the community because that was where the children spent a large portion of their formative years. The report describes the District No. 1, Shelby, and the District No. 4, Holland schools as evidence of the changing rural education mentality and that the county should have "more such buildings in the near future" (La Crosse County Board of Supervisors, 108).<sup>4</sup>

To conclude, District School No. 1 is an intact and locally significant legacy of the successful effort to bring education to rural La Crosse County. The present brick construction school building (which replaced the original stone construction district school that had been built ca.1866-67) served the

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<sup>4</sup>The District No.4 School in the Town of Holland is extant. See the State Historic Society of Wisconsin Reconnaissance Inventory Card #1807-31.

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children of the Town of Shelby for almost fifty years, from 1917 until 1965, and it has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the broad patterns of the educational history of La Crosse County and the Town of Shelby because it embodies both local efforts to upgrade and modernize the first generation of rural schools in the area and it also embodies statewide efforts to bring uniform standards to this process. In addition, District School No. 1 is now one of only two remaining rural school buildings that survive in the Town of Shelby. Since most of La Crosse County's other early one and two-room school buildings have also been demolished, the few intact surviving examples of this once ubiquitous rural resource type, such as District School No. 1, are now significant reminders of this important phase of the educational history of the region.

Architecture: District School No. 1

District School No. 1, Town of Shelby, is an architecturally significant example of the mostly brick construction rural one-room second generation schoolhouses that were built in the early twentieth century as replacements for the first generation of log, wood frame, and stone construction pioneer schools that preceded them. Such schools were once a common feature of Wisconsin's rural landscape and the ones built in the first decades of this century, while small, were often modern, up-to-date facilities that were sources of considerable civic pride. Regrettably, schools from both generations are now threatened resources.

It is very likely that the design of District School No. 1 was based on a standard plan for rural schools. Standard plan books for such schools were common in the nineteenth century and continued to be popular in the early twentieth century as well (Gulliford, 1984, 166-167). In the twentieth century, however, such plan books, which had previously been mostly commercial publications, began to be issued by state and federal educators as well. A systematic study of the standard plans and guidelines that were developed by the State of Wisconsin in the early twentieth century has not yet been undertaken, but compilations of pictures and histories of the rural schools in several Wisconsin counties show that many of Wisconsin's early twentieth century schools share a number of distinctive design characteristics. These characteristics include: compact one-story square or rectilinear plans; raised

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full basement stories with poured concrete basement walls; exterior walls that are clad in brick whenever possible and which are pierced by numerous large windows; hipped main roofs with broad, over-hanging eaves; and projecting entrance vestibules that are typically centered on the main facade and crowned with belfries. All of these features are shared by District School No. 1. In addition, District School No. 1 also has the slightly Prairie School style-influenced Bungalow/Craftsman style appearance that many of the schools that incorporated some or all of these various design elements shared.

The District School No. 1 also represents its community's willingness to fund a more expensive brick replacement building. In earlier times, many rural communities in La Crosse County had not been concerned with the quality of their educational buildings, but the new District School No. 1 was an example of a shift in this mind set. This brick school depicts the pride that communities began to take in their schools and other educational facilities (La Crosse County Board of Supervisors 1918, 108). The *1917-1918 La Crosse County Board of Supervisors Annual Report* discussed this new ideal and reported:

..gradually the people are coming to realize that the building in which the children spend a great amount of time during their most impressionable age, in which they get their training, acquire habits, and form character in which all the children of the community live and have their being for the greater portion of at least eight years should be the best building in the district or community (La Crosse County Board of Supervisors, 1918, 108).

Today, however, rural schools are an endangered resource type. In 1925-1926, there were 72 rural schools in La Crosse County (Bryhn, 1985, 185), but the reconnaissance survey of La Crosse County completed in 1977 by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin found that only eleven of these original rural schools remained. Of the surviving schools, seven were constructed of brick, three were frame construction and one was constructed of stone. A windshield survey undertaken by the author in 1994 indicates that one of the Town of Holland schools identified in the survey has since been removed, but also that the 1977 survey did not include the brick District School No. 6 in the Town of

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Shelby. Therefore, the number of extant rural school buildings in La Crosse County remains at eleven.

Of the rural school buildings in the Town of Shelby, only two of the original six district schools are extant today (1994). District School No. 1, Wilson School, is extant; District No. 2, Washington School was replaced with a new building in 1956; District No. 3, State Road School is not extant; District No. 4, Elm Grove School, was a one-room school which was replaced with a larger two-room school in 1938; District No. 5, Boulevard School, is not extant; and District No. 6, Hillside School, is extant and has been converted into a residence (Bryhn, 1985, 111). The District School No. 1 is significant because it is the only remaining one-room rural school building in the township to retain its original configuration and integrity.

National, state, and local efforts to consolidate schools helped bring about the demise of the rural one-room school. In 1965, for instance, the city of La Crosse absorbed all of the Town of Shelby's school districts and consolidated them into its own system. District No. 1 was thus attached to the city of La Crosse school system, the school was closed, and La Crosse and Monroe Counties were put under a joint superintendent of schools (Shelby Town Hall Files, "School Districts in Shelby," n.d., 1; Bryhn, 1985, 183). Since then, the Town of Shelby's school districts have served only as divisions for school board elections and for tax collection purposes (Shelby Town Hall Files, "School Districts in Shelby," n.d., 5). The District School is currently vacant and is awaiting a new use.

In conclusion, the one-room District No. 1 schoolhouse is significant architecturally because it is an excellent representative example of the type of rural school that was built in La Crosse County early in this century. The building has brick exterior walls, large areas of windows, a hipped roof, and a main facade that is dominated by a centrally placed entrance vestibule/belltower; all of which are typical features found on many early 20th century Wisconsin rural schools. Such buildings are a highly endangered resource type today and the District School No. 1, which has a largely intact interior and displays only minor exterior alterations, is now a fine, very rare, and unusually intact example of this resource type.

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**Section 10: Geographical Data**

Verbal Boundary Description

The District School No. 1 is located in Township 15 N, Range 7 W, in Section 23 of La Crosse County. Beginning at a point 120 feet due south from the west corner of the building at the edge of Hwy. 14-61, proceed northeast along the highway to a point 161 feet due east from the west corner of the building. Then proceed northwest along the northeast property line to a point 150 feet due north of the west corner of the building. From that point proceed due west 63 feet 8 inches to the gravel driveway. Then proceed southeast to the point of origin.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the District School No. 1 and all the land that has historically been associated with the building.

District School No. 1                      La Crosse, Wisconsin  
Name of Property                                      County and State

**Property Owner**  
Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Dr. Richard and Mrs. Lisbeth Reynertson

street & number W5720 Hwy. 14-61                      telephone 608/787-1982

city or town La Crosse                      state Wisconsin                      zip code 54601

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**Photographs**

The following information applies to all photographs:

District School No. 1  
Town of Shelby  
La Crosse County, Wisconsin  
Photographer: Christina Slattery, U.S. West Research, Inc.  
Date: 9 August 1994  
Negatives located at State Historical Society of Wisconsin  
Madison, Wisconsin

Photo 1 of 9:  
Exterior, southeast elevation  
Photographer facing northwest

Photo 2 of 9:  
Exterior, southeast elevation  
Detail of entrance  
Photographer facing northwest

Photo 3 of 9:  
Exterior, northeast elevation  
Photographer facing southwest

Photo 4 of 9:  
Exterior, northeast and northwest elevations  
Photographer facing south

Photo 5 of 9:  
Exterior, northwest elevation  
Photographer facing southwest

Photo 6 of 9:  
Exterior, southwest elevation  
Photographer facing southeast

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Photo 7 of 9:  
Interior, Classroom, Built-in cabinet detail  
Photographer facing southeast

Photo 8 of 9:  
Interior, Classroom detail  
Photographer facing northwest

Photo 9 of 9:  
Interior, Basement detail  
Photographer facing northeast