

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in 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 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. 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 Vernon School

other names/site number Vernon Schoolhouse

2. Location

street & number 26849 South Street not for publication n/a
city or town Vernon vicinity n/a
state Iowa code IA county Van Buren code 177 zip code 52565

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.)

Rowell J. Loke Signature of certifying official July 18, 2002 Date
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

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 commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is: Charles H. Beall 9/12/02

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

Jar Signature of Keeper 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

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>3</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

N/A

DOI/NPS NRHP Registration Form
Vernon School
Van Buren County, Iowa

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6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>Education</u>	Sub: <u>School</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>Commerce/Trade</u>	Sub: <u>Professional</u>
<u>Domestic</u>	<u>Single Dwelling</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Italianate

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>STONE/Sandstone</u>
roof	<u>ASPHALT</u>
walls	<u>BRICK</u>
other	<u>WOOD/weatherboard</u>

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

8. Statement of Significance

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

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

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1868-1952

Significant Dates 1868

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
n/a

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder Cass, Riley

Vernon School

Van Buren County, Iowa

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

___ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

___ previously listed in the National Register

___ previously determined eligible by the National Register

___ designated a National Historic Landmark

___ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

___ Other State agency

___ Federal agency

___ Local government

___ University

___ Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.5 acre

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>15</u>	<u>E596580</u>	<u>N4508240</u>	3	___	___
2	___	___	___	4	___	___
	___ See continuation sheet.					

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

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

DOI/NPS NRHP Registration Form

Vernon School
Van Buren County, Iowa

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Paula Mohr, Architectural Historian e-mail address pam3v@virginia.edu

organization _____ date March 13, 2002

street & number 1701 Rosser Avenue, #1 telephone (434) 244-5627

city or town Charlottesville state Virginia zip code 22903

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

Property Owner

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

name Wendell and Elizabeth Mohr

street & number 26849 South Street telephone (319) 592-3427

city or town Keosauqua state Iowa zip code 52565

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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VERNON SCHOOL
VAN BUREN COUNTY, IA

Section number 7 Page 1

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION:

The Vernon School is a two-story brick building sitting on a hill overlooking the unincorporated town of Vernon and the Des Moines River. The building in plan is composed of a rectangular block approximately 42 feet x 32 feet which contains two classrooms and the second floor classroom/gymnasium. A smaller block approximately 32 feet by 12 feet is attached to the north side of the building and contains the first and second story vestibules as well as the staircase to the basement. Access to the building is made by climbing wood steps attached to the north elevation and passing through the one entrance in the building. The roof is composed of two intersecting gable roofs. A two-level belltower surmounts the building. The building retains a high degree of integrity with only minor and reversible modifications having been made. Contributing structures associated with this building are the two wood privies located northeast of the school.

The building sits on a sandstone foundation approximately 3.5 feet high. Four openings in the foundation provide light and ventilation to the basement located in the small block. The brick walls are laid in 1 to 7 common bond. Lintels and sills are painted sandstone as is the arched lintel over the only entrance. This entrance is located on the facade (north elevation) and has a pair of 4-paneled doors. The arched tympanum over the door was originally filled with a fanlight but has been replaced with vertical beadboard. Windows are double hung sash with 9 lights over 6 lights and are set into wood architraves. The window opening to the right of the main entrance and one on the west elevation of the small block are filled with wood beaded board. A wood cornice with paired Italianate wood brackets located above the second story windows runs all the way around the building. The gable ends on the east, north and west elevations are pedimented with horizontal and raking cornices. A single round window with fixed glass is symmetrically located in each of the pediments.

The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. Two brick chimneys are located at the east and west ends of the ridge over the large block. The belltower, located over the ridge of the smaller block, is covered with horizontal wood weatherboard and vertical corner boards. Each elevation of the tower has an arched opening (with hinged shutters) on the first level and false louvered shutters on the second level. A decorative balcony is located in front of each of the four opening on the first level balconies. These balconies have a molded rail, two circles cut out of the front panel, a single circle cut out of the side panels and no floor. The upper and lower levels of the tower are separated by a deep cornice with a rounded arch that mimics the arch over the main entrance below. Single Italianate brackets are positioned under this cornice at the corners of the tower. The uppermost cornice is flat, as is the roof of the tower. Just under the top cornice is an applied scalloped trim board.

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VERNON SCHOOL
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Entrance into the building is directly into the first floor vestibule. At the west end of the vestibule is the staircase to the second floor and the entrance to the basement. On the south wall is a door to each of the two classrooms. The walls of the vestibule are plaster on brick with a 37" high wainscot composed of painted vertical beadboard with a cap. The ceiling is covered with beadboard as well and the floor is wood. The window architraves are molded and slightly splayed. Two rows of horizontal boards are mounted on the north and east walls and probably were outfitted with coat hooks.

The smaller classroom is finished with plaster on brick on the north, east and south walls. The west wall is plaster on lath. Wainscoting around the perimeter of the room is identical to that in the vestibule. The ceiling is plaster and the floor is wood. A wood burning cast iron stove is located near the east exterior wall. The west wall has a small pass through opening for communication with the large classroom.

The walls of the large classroom are plaster on brick with wainscoting with the exception of the east wall which is plaster on lath. Wainscoting identical to the other spaces runs around the perimeter of the room. The ceiling is drywall and the floor is wood. A slate chalkboard is mounted to the north wall. The east wall has a wood chalkboard approximately 12 feet long with the remainder of the wall covered with a slate chalkboard. A wood burning cast iron stove is located near the west exterior wall. A Doric cast iron column with square plinth is located approximately 12 feet from the west wall and 14.5 feet from the south wall.

Access to the second floor is made by climbing the staircase located in the vestibule. The stairs ascend in a westerly direction, then turns to the north and finally curves back to the east. The wainscoting in the vestibule continues uninterrupted up the staircase. The staircase has a walnut newel post and a solid balustrade made of vertical beadboard topped with a walnut handrail.

The second story vestibule is similar to that below. The walls are plaster on brick with the same wainscot used throughout the interior. This space also has two rows of horizontal boards are mounted on the north, east and south walls and probably were outfitted with coat hooks. The floor is wood. The ceiling is beadboard and has a square hatch into the attic.

A single door in the south wall of the vestibule leads to the large room. This space, originally used as a classroom and later a gymnasium, has been renovated into an apartment. The four walls of this space are plaster on brick with the wainscot of vertical board and cap. The ceiling is drywall. Regular width wood flooring survives in half of the room. Circa 1970, the present owners added drywall partition walls to create bedrooms in the northwest and northeast corners of this space. These bedrooms are full height. The space between these two bedrooms

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VERNON SCHOOL
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has been divided into two levels. A kitchen, bathroom, closet, hall are located on the lower level. The balcony level contains the master bedroom.

The attic is unfinished with exposed brick walls and roof structure. The floor is plywood. A ladder located immediately under the bell tower provides access to a hatch that leads to this structure. The bell tower contains the original bell which was made by Meneely & Kimberly in Troy, New York is dated 1875. The yoke of the bell is mounted directly to the framing for the hatch.

An unfinished basement with dirt floor is located under the vestibule only. The remainder of the building has a shallow crawl space accessible through a hole in the load-bearing wall on the south side of the basement space.

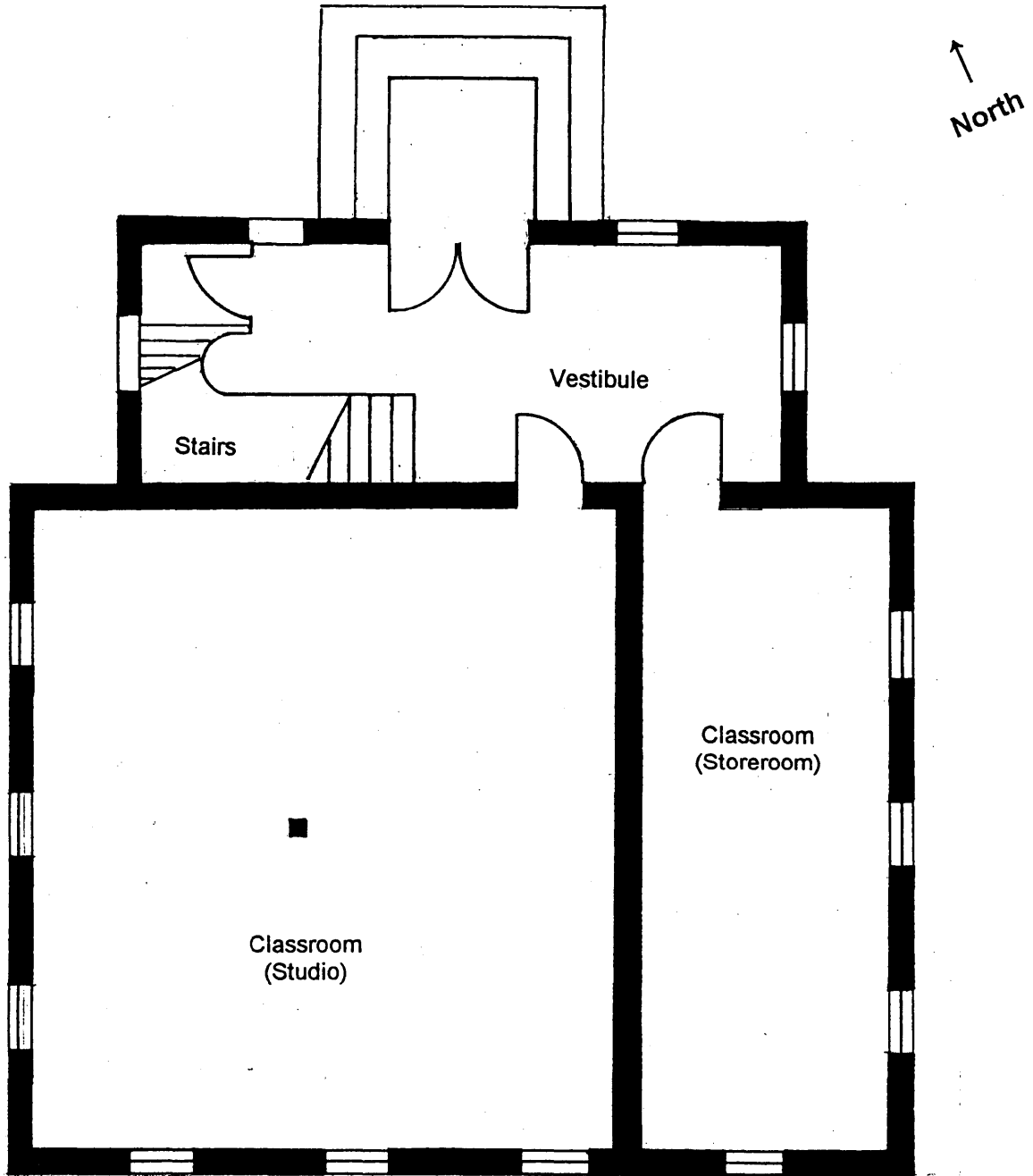
The two outdoor privies are contributing structures. These frame buildings are covered with vertical wood board and rest on concrete foundations. The roofs have wood shingles.

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VERNON SCHOOL
VAN BUREN COUNTY, IA

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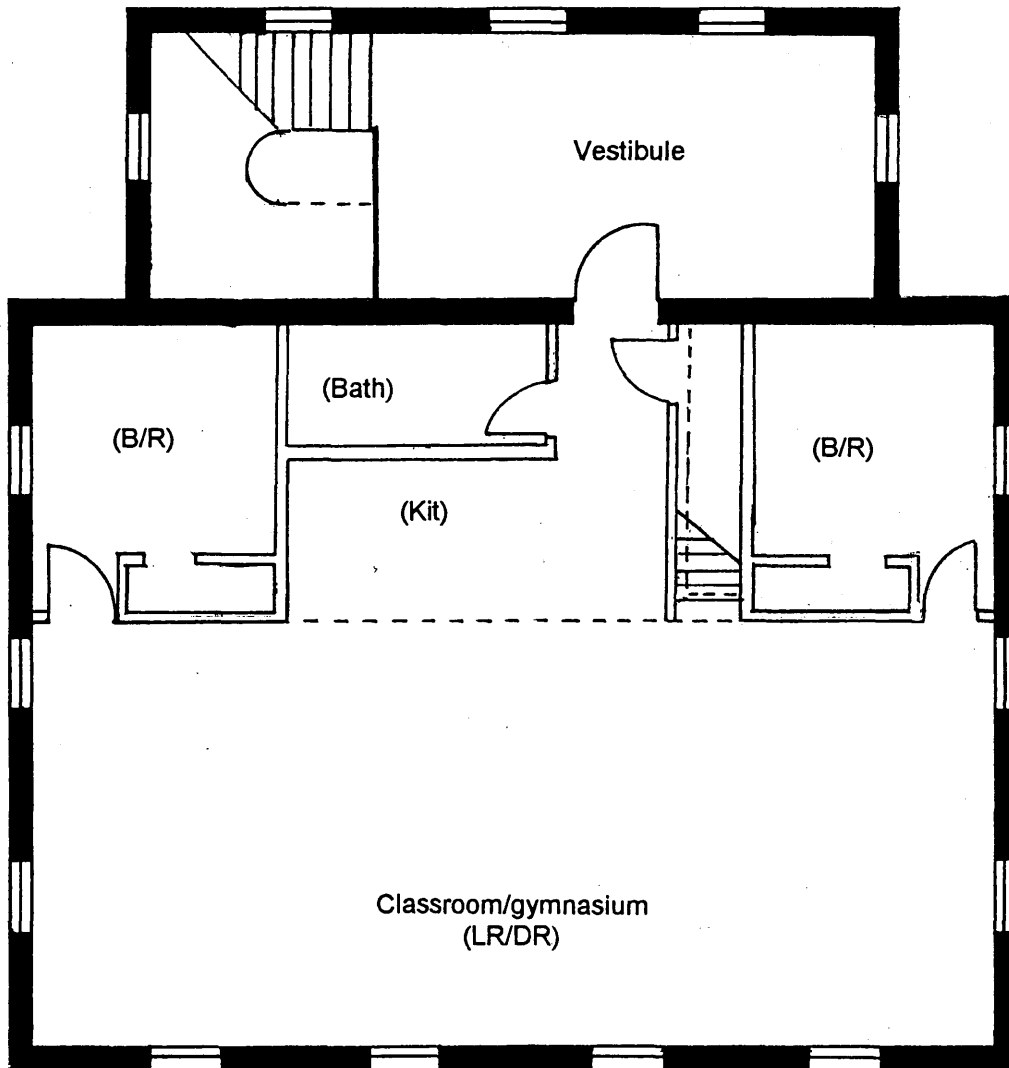
First Floor Plan (present day), Vernon School
Scale: 1/8" = 1'
(drawn by Paula Mohr)

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VERNON SCHOOL
VAN BUREN COUNTY, IA

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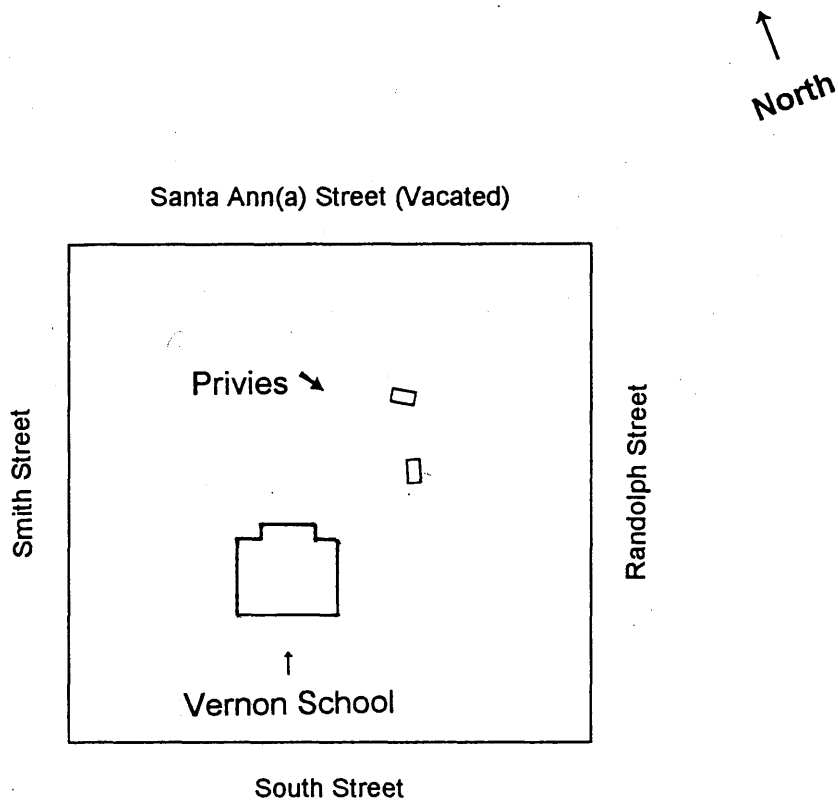
Second Floor Plan (present day), Vernon School
Scale: 1/8" = 1'
(drawn by Paula Mohr)

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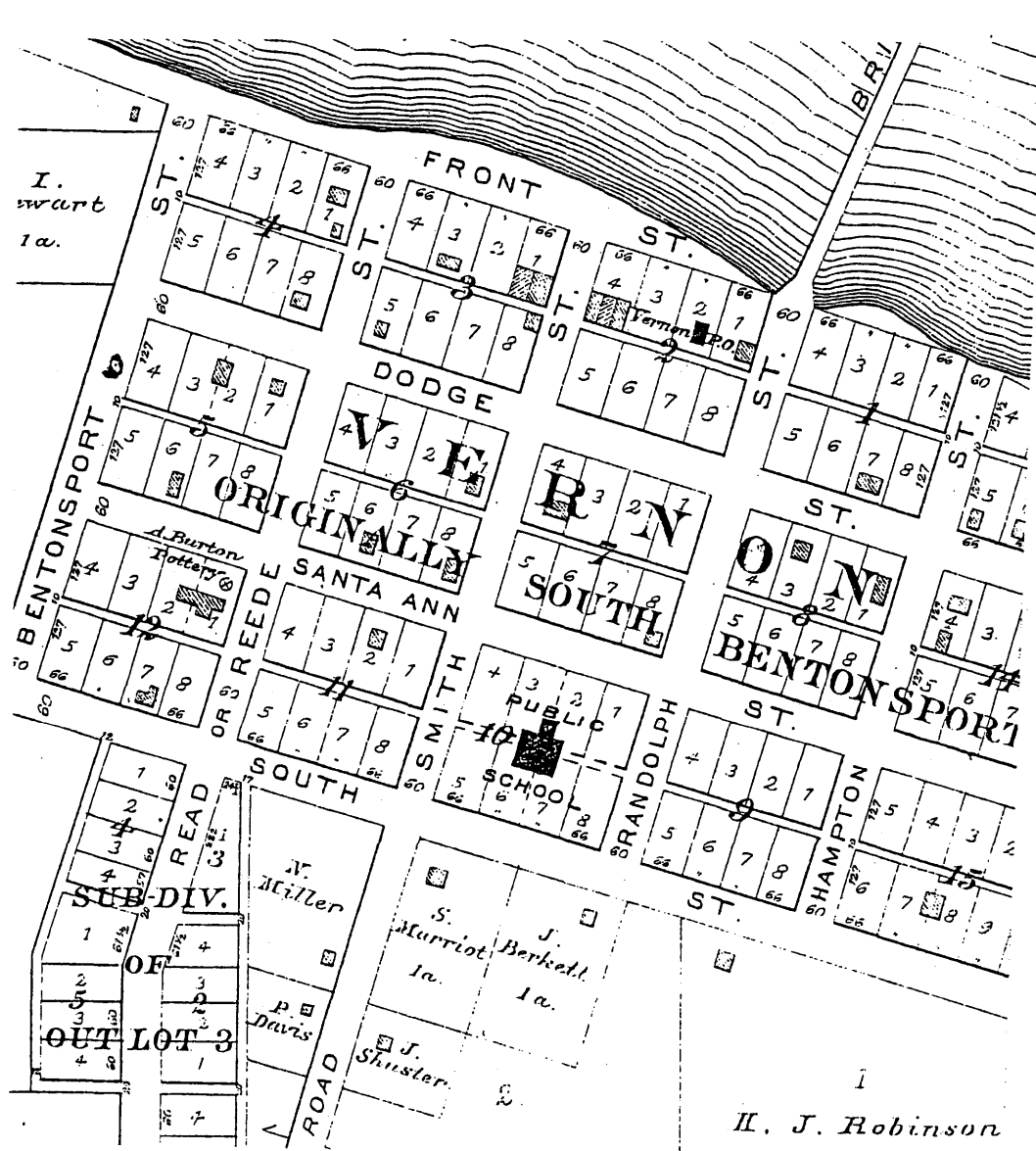
Schematic site plan of Vernon School
(drawn by Paula Mohr)

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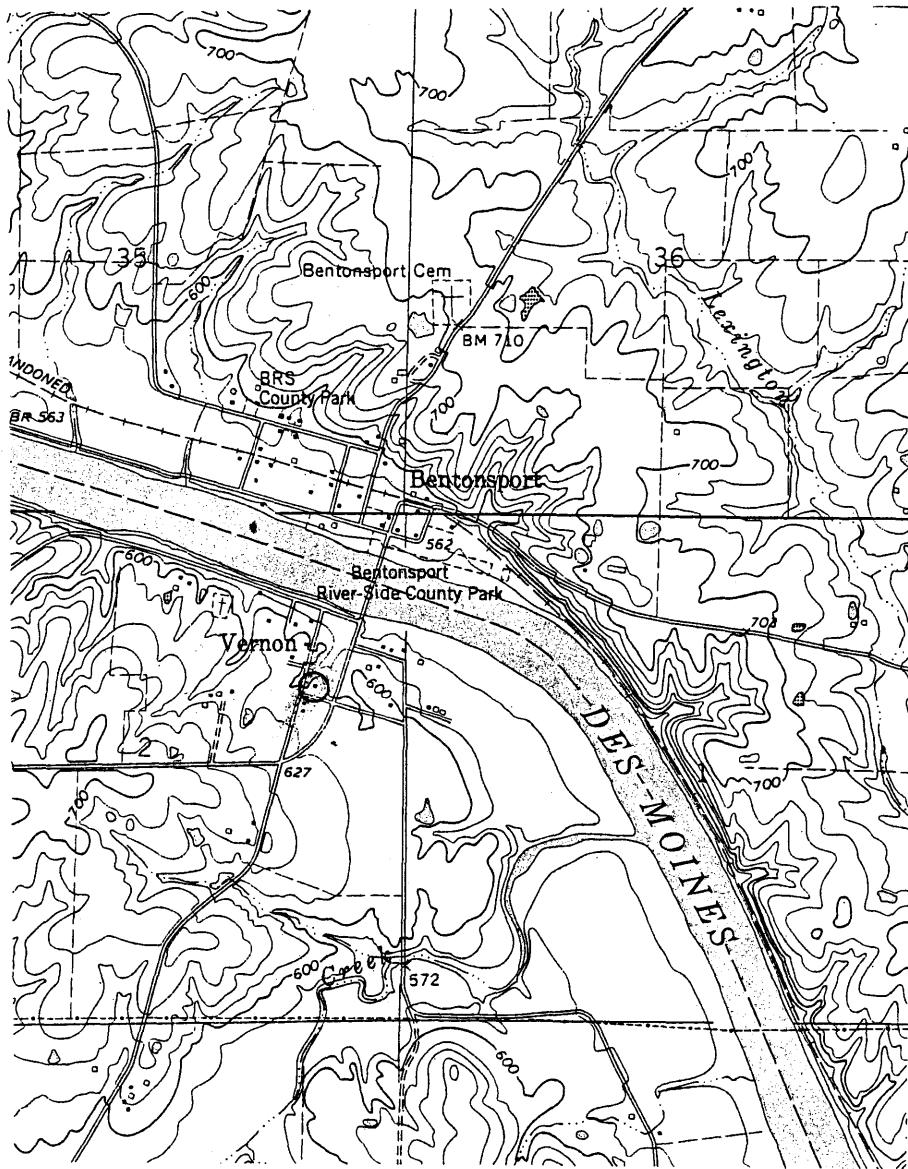
1897 Plat Map of Vernon
(Plat Book of Van Buren County, Iowa, North West Publishing Co.)

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↑
North

U.S.G.S. Map of Vernon (revised 1976)
Location of school is circled

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The Vernon School is significant under Criterion C as an outstanding example of a 19th century public school building and of the Italianate style in public architecture.

The town now known as Vernon was originally called South Bentonsport in deference to the larger town on the other side of the Des Moines River. South Bentonsport was established in 1837 but was renamed Vernon in 1852 when a post office was located in town. (*The History of Van Buren County*, 1976) By 1878, Vernon had a flour mill, woolen mill, pottery and several general stores. The construction of a public school building for the town of Vernon was representative of the eagerness of local leaders to provide educational opportunities for county residents. By 1878, Van Buren county had 89 frame schoolhouses, 17 constructed of brick, 3 of stone, and 1 log school. (*The History of Van Buren County*, 1878)

The effort to construct a public school building in Vernon began in May 1866 when residents met “for the purpose of electing officers for said Indep. Dist. Of Vernon.” The project quickly gained momentum and the following month, a committee was appointed to “select location for School House, ascertain the price at which the same can be bought; procure and report a plan or plans for School House with estimated cost.” One month later, the board approved the recommendations of the committee and authorized a member to travel to Keokuk to procure lumber, doors, window frames, and window sashes. Three other members were appointed to have a cellar excavated and a foundation constructed. In August of 1866, the board voted to levy a tax of four mills on the dollar for the building fund. Yet financial realities forced the board to decide at that same meeting to postpone construction of the new building “because of the difficulty of raising money.” Meanwhile, the board rented a building owned by the Vernon Hall Association where classes were held until the new building was ready for occupancy. For the school year 1866-67, the Vernon Independent School District reported 117 students and 4 teachers. (*District School Record*)

It was not until January 1867 that the Independent School District of Vernon acquired the land on which the school was built. Later that year, a contract for brick was approved. At the same time the board accepted “the plan of School House proposed by R. Cass” for which Cass was paid \$60. Riley Cass must have impressed the board because in April 1868 he was hired to superintend the construction of the building. (*District School Record*) Little is known about Riley Cass, however, he probably was a builder who had the necessary drafting skills to prepare plans.

Construction proceeded slowly and was funded piecemeal by the board by obtaining loans and issuing bonds. Strained financial resources resulted in a protracted construction period. As late as 1873, the board was approving labor and material expenses related to “finishing school

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house” but it is probable that classes were held in the building earlier. (*District School Record*) The building was also used for plays, lectures and other community events-- many of which were held on the second floor. Like many public schools, the building was used as a polling place through November 1984.

The building served the town of Vernon until the mid-twentieth century. By the 1950s, financial pressures on schools throughout Iowa led to the consolidation of independent schools into districts. Consolidation of the schools in Van Buren County schools began in 1957 and culminated in the creation of three school districts in 1959. (*The History of Van Buren County*, 1976) The last classes were held in the Vernon School in 1960. The building stood empty until 1969 when it was purchased by the present owner who rehabilitated it.

Although a source for the design of the building has not been identified, it is likely that the design or elements were taken from a pattern book. The intense national interest in providing educational opportunities for citizens was matched by architects and other experts who published books advising school boards on what to build. Henry Barnard, prominent educator and U.S. Commissioner of Education, was one of several authors who published school house designs in the mid-nineteenth century. In addition to providing the reader with designs that could be adapted by local builders, Barnard also established standards for schoolhouse design. He made recommendations for room arrangements, furniture and discussed all matters of health and cleanliness. In particular, Barnard advocated for large rooms which would provide “each occupant a suitable quantity of pure air, i.e. at least 150 cubic feet.” (*School Architecture*) Indeed, the ceilings in the Vernon School are 18 feet tall and were undoubtedly seen as critical in providing adequate fresh air for students.

The Italianate style popular in the United States from approximately 1840 to 1885, encompassed a broad range of architectural expression from picturesque villas to an adaptation of formal architecture from the Renaissance. While the style was most popular for domestic structures, it was also used for commercial and public buildings. Significant distinguishing characteristics found in the design of the Vernon School include the low pitch of the roof, the use of brackets and the square bell tower all of which were intended to evoke the architecture of northern Italy. The original fanlight over the entrance was reminiscent of plate tracery found in the windows of Italian medieval cathedrals.

Of the nineteenth century public school buildings in Van Buren County, the Vernon School is the only brick schoolhouse to survive (the Bentonsport Academy is extant but was built as a private school). As the most monumental and architecturally impressive building in town, the Vernon School clearly expressed the town’s aspirations to compete with Bentonsport and construct a public building which would signal the town’s progress and refinement.

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Finally, the building is significant because it retains a high level of architectural integrity. Other than the replacement of the fan light over the front door and the replacement of the roof, no other exterior changes have been made to the building. The interior has been rehabilitated in a non-intrusive and reversible manner. Most of the building maintains its original interior configuration. The insertion of partitions in the second floor space is reversible and has been done in such a way that it preserves the sense of the room's original volume.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Barnard, Henry. *School Architecture*. 1848. Intro. Jean and Robert McClintock. New York: Teachers College Press, 1970.

Bentonsport Memories. American Guide Series, 1940.

District School Record for District Township of Independent Vernon in the County of Vernon and State of Iowa. Collection of Wendell and Elizabeth Mohr.

The History of Van Buren County, Iowa. Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1878.

The History of Van Buren County, Iowa. Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1976.

"Interesting History of Vernon District School." *Record-Republican*. 16 Mar. 1944, n.p.

Photographs, late 19th century to early 20th century. Collection of Wendell and Elizabeth Mohr.

Plat Book of Van Buren County, Iowa. North West Publishing Co., 1897.

Record of the Secretary of the Vernon Independent School District; Van Buren Co., Iowa For the Period beginning July 1, 1936, and ending June 30, 19__. Collection of Wendell and Elizabeth Mohr.

Writers' Program (Work Projects Administration). *Van Buren County*. Farmington, Iowa: Thos. L. Keith, 1940.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

All of Block 10, lots 1 through 8.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

This is the area historically associated with the school and its grounds.

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Continuation Sheet**

**VERNON SCHOOL
VAN BUREN COUNTY, IA**

Section number Photo Page 14

Seven of the eight photographs included in this nomination were taken by Paula Mohr in December 2001. The historic photograph was taken from an original photograph in the collection of Wendell and Elizabeth Mohr.

1. Historic view of façade (north elevation) and east elevation looking SW.
2. Façade (north elevation) and east elevation looking SW.
3. South elevation and east elevation looking NW.
4. Detail of belltower looking SW.
5. View of large room, first floor, looking SW.
6. View of large room, second floor, looking NW.
7. View of large room, second floor, looking SE.
8. View of two privies, looking NE.