

United States Department of Interior
National Park Service



OMB No. 10024-0018

479

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 Vernon County Normal School

other names/site number Vernon County Teachers College/Vernon County Historical Society Museum

2. Location

street & number 410 South Center Avenue

city or town Viroqua

state Wisconsin code WI county Vernon

N/A not for publication

N/A vicinity

code 123 zip code 54665

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

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 official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Vernon County Normal School

County Vernon

Wisconsin

Name of Property

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:)*Barbara Weptt*

7-26-11

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**
(check as many boxes as
as apply)☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal**Category of Property**
(Check only one box)☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ structure
☐ site
☐ object**Number of Resources within Property**
(Do not include previously listed resources
in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
1	0 buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	0 total

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

N/A

**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)
RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum**7. Description****Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN
MOVEMENTS/Prairie School**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

roof CERAMIC TILE

other LIMESTONE

Narrative Description

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

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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Vernon County Normal School
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

Description:

The Vernon County Normal School is a freestanding, exceptionally intact building constructed to house Vernon County's teachers training school. The building was built in the Prairie School style in 1919 to a design supplied by the La Crosse, Wisconsin architectural firm of Parkinson & Dockendorff. The firm is noted for its numerous excellent school buildings in Wisconsin and other states that were built between 1902 and 1952. This rectilinear plan building measures 76.33-feet-long by 55.33-feet-deep and it is three-stories-tall. The first story is a raised basement story with poured concrete foundation walls that partially enclose the basement story and which are visible above grade as a very short concrete plinth. The exterior walls that rest on this plinth are faced in a dark red brick veneer over hollow building tile and these walls are supported by a steel framework that is encased in masonry. The building's exterior walls are sheltered by the wide overhanging boxed eaves of the building's hipped roof, whose slopes are clad in Spanish tiles, and these walls also exhibit Sullivan-esque style terra cotta ornamentation in spots. Limestone trim is also in evidence and is used for the belt and stringcourses that serve as the sills for the building's windows and also to ornament the entrance door openings. The building retains almost all of its original windows, which, for the most part, consist of one-over-one-light double hung wood sash; the ones in the second and third stories have transoms as well. The interior of the school building is almost completely intact as well and it features stair halls at either end of the building that are floored in terrazzo and walled with Tennessee marble wainscot with plaster above. Corridor floors are also of terrazzo and here, too, the walls have marble wainscot with plaster above. In addition, the room layout of each floor is still intact and so are such features of these rooms as their original plaster walls and ceilings, their original maple doors, their original hardwood window and door trim, their original hardwood floors, and some of their original ceiling light fixtures.

The Vernon County Normal School is located in the city of Viroqua, the county seat of Vernon County.¹ The school's two-lot parcel is in an architecturally significant, predominantly late nineteenth-early twentieth century residential neighborhood that is located immediately to the east of the historic downtown commercial district of the city. The school is set back on a corner parcel that forms the northeast corner of a block whose north side is the east-west-running E. South Street, whose east side is the north-south running S. Center Avenue, and whose west side is the north-south-running S. Main Street.² Main Street is the principal north-south thoroughfare in Viroqua and the city's historic business district is arrayed along much of its length, while Center Avenue, which is located just one block to the east, is still primarily a residential street in the vicinity of the school. When the

¹ The population of Viroqua was 4335 in 2000.

² The south side of this block was originally the east-west running E. Oak St. but this block-long section of this street has now been vacated and has been incorporated within the Vernon Memorial Hospital complex.

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school was built, this entire block was residential in character as were the surrounding blocks. Today, a modern one-story Contemporary Style office building that faces onto S. Main St. is located behind the school. It occupies the northwest corner of the block while the entire south half of the block, as well as the entire city block located to the south of it, is now given over to the modern buildings that comprise the Vernon Memorial Hospital Complex.³ In addition, the residences that were once located in the block across S. Center Avenue from the school have been demolished and the land has been turned into parking lots that serve the hospital.

Before the school was constructed, the land on which it sits was built up several feet above the original grade level of the parcel to allow rain and melt water to drain away from all four sides of the building. As a result, the land slopes gently downward and away from the school, and the north, south and east slopes of the parcel are landscaped with mature trees and mown lawn. Most of the parcel on the west (rear) side of the school building consists of a parking lot and it is surfaced in asphalt. In addition, the South Street and Center Avenue sides of this parcel are both edged by concrete sidewalks, mown grass parkways, and concrete gutters, and straight concrete walkways extend from the Center Avenue sidewalk up to the two original main entrances of the school.

Exterior

Because the Vernon County Normal School is still in such original condition today, a detailed description of the building published in the local Viroqua newspaper when it was first opened to the public is still a faithful guide to the building and excerpts from this article will be included in the description that follows when appropriate.

East-Facing Principal Facade

The 76.3-foot-wide principal façade of this building faces east towards S. Center Avenue. It is symmetrical in design and it has a three-part composition that consists of two slightly projecting full-height bays that contain the building's two main staircases. These bays flank the much wider central portion of the facade. Each of the two projecting bays is treated as a very large column, the first story acting as the pedestal and the upper two stories as the column shaft. The lowest part of the first story of each of these bays acts as the base of the pedestal and it consists of two thick courses of dressed limestone that crown a brick-clad lower portion. Inset into the first story of each of these two bays is one of the principal entrances to the school and these identical entrances are each reached by ascending a flight of three concrete steps that is flanked by brick wing walls, each of which is topped

³ Parkinson & Dockendorff designed the original building of this hospital complex. It was built next to (south of) the school in 1920 but it is no longer extant, having been replaced by more modern buildings in recent years.

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with a thick slab of dressed limestone. These squared door openings are recessed into the wall surface and each contains a pair of original two-light wood main entrance doors. Simple, flat, thin limestone pilasters flank both pairs of doors and these pilasters each have a limestone capital that consists of scrolled bracket that has Sullivanesque ornament incised into its surface. These capitals support a pulvinated limestone frieze that has a dentil and egg design and this frieze spans the full width of the door opening. Surrounding the entire opening is a narrow band of brick that has head blocks at the two upper corners that consist of square tiles that also display a Sullivanesque design. Located on the wall surface above the door opening is an almost equally wide limestone plaque into which the words "COUNTY NORMAL" have been incised. A limestone cornice that has a narrower denticulated and pulvinated limestone frieze placed just below it completes the first story.

The second and third stories of these two projecting end bays comprise the column's shaft. This portion of these bays consists of two broad, flat, two-story-tall brick pilasters that are placed on either side of two inset two-story-tall bays that each contain windows that light the stair halls inside. These window bays are separated from each other by a third, much narrower, centered, two-story-tall brick pilaster strip. The two broad pilasters both have capitals that consist of large rectangular terra cotta tiles that bear Sullivanesque style designs and identical tiles cover the spandrels that separate the second and third story windows in the window bays.⁴ The windows themselves consist of a single tall, narrow six-light casement window in the second story of each bay and an equally narrow but taller four-over-four-light double hung window in the third story, the latter of which is also crowned by a two-light transom window.

The wider central portion of this facade is four bays wide. This portion has a raised basement story above which are two taller main stories. The first story consists of four rectangular window openings that each have a limestone sill and contain three four-over-one-light double hung wood sash windows.⁵ A belt course comprised of soldier course bricks spans the wall surface above these windows and it acts as the base on which a limestone belt course that acts as the sills of the second story windows rests. The second story also consists of four rectangular window openings that all share the limestone belt course as a sill. Each of these openings contains three one-over-one-light double hung wood sash windows that are each crowned by a four-light transom. Placed immediately below the third story window openings above is another thin limestone stringcourse that spans the full width of this portion of the facade. It too acts as a sill for each of this story's four rectangular window openings, which also contains three one-over-one-light double hung wood sash windows that are each

⁴ The two outermost pilasters on these bays are actually corner pilasters and their ornamentation turns the corner and is continued on the south and north side elevations of the building.

⁵ Historic photos of the school show that all of the school's basement story windows originally had a four-over-one-light design but the upper sashes of these windows were changed to a single light at a later date.

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crowned by a four-light transom, the difference here being that the transoms have segmental arch heads rather than the squared ones found in the second story.⁶ In addition, three large rectangular terra cotta tiles that bear Sullivanese style designs that are identical to the ones that decorate the capitals of the pilaster strips found on the end bays are placed at the tops of the spandrels that are located between the third story window groups on this portion of the façade. There is also a small brick and limestone chimney placed high up on the east-facing slope of the tiled main roof.

South-Facing Side Elevation

The 55.3-foot-wide south-facing side elevation is asymmetrical in design and it has a three-part composition. The extreme right-hand (east) end of this elevation consists of the south side of the corner pilaster described above. This pilaster is also treated as a column whose first story consists of a tall pedestal that is crowned by a limestone cornice. It is placed at the same height as the one on the main façade and it too has a capital that consists of a large rectangular terra cotta tile that bears a Sullivanese style design identical to the ones found on the main façade. The rest of the elevation consists of two equal width wall surfaces that flank a projecting center bay. Continuations of the limestone and brick belt course and the limestone stringcourse described on the main façade serve to demarcate the second story from the first and the second story from the third on this elevation.

The left hand (west) wall surface of this elevation is two-bays-wide and the first story of both of these bays contains a single rectangular window opening that contains a four-over-one-light double hung wood sash window. The second story of each of these bays also contains a single rectangular window opening that has the limestone belt course as a sill, but in this case each opening contains a single one-over-one-light double hung wood sash window that is crowned with a four-light transom. The limestone string course spans the width of the wall surface above the second story windows and the third story of these two bays each contains a smaller four-over-one-light double hung wood sash window whose upper sash has a segmental-arched head.

The projecting center bay of this elevation has essentially the same design as the two end bays on the main façade with its first story being the pedestal that supports the two upper stories, which are treated as a column. The principal difference is that instead of an entrance door, the first story of this bay contains two single rectangular window openings that each contain a four-over-one-light double hung wood sash window. The other difference is that here the second and third story windows in the two window bays above are somewhat wider than the ones found on the main façade. The windows are equal in size, with the second story windows both being one-over-one-light double hung wood sash that are crowned with four-light transoms. The two third story windows are identical except that their

⁶ Modern metal frame storm windows now cover all of the building's windows.

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four-light transoms have segmental arched heads. Otherwise, the two flanking pilasters are the same and sport the same large rectangular Sullivanesque style terra cotta tiles found on the main façade, and identical tiles also ornament the spandrels between the second and third story windows.

Finally, the right-hand (east) portion of this elevation is identical in width to the left hand portion; the only difference between them being that its wall surface has no openings of any kind.

West-Facing Rear Elevation

The 76.3-foot-wide rear elevation of this building faces west, it is almost symmetrical in design, and it too has a three-part composition that consists of two equal-width side portions that flank a wider central portion.

The right-hand (south) portion of this elevation is one bay wide and its windows are placed towards the left-hand side of this portion. The first story of the bay contains a single window opening having a limestone sill and this opening contains a narrow two-over-one-light double hung wood sash window. The second story of this bay also contains a single rectangular window opening that has the limestone belt course as a sill, but in this case the opening contains a single equally narrow one-over-one-light double hung wood sash window that is crowned with a four-light transom. There are no openings in the third story.

The wider central portion of this elevation is three bays wide and this portion is treated as having a raised basement story above which are two taller main stories. The first story consists of three rectangular window openings that each has a limestone sill. The left-hand (north) bay contains three four-over-four-light double hung wood sash windows, the middle bay contains three one-over-one-light double hung wood sash windows, and the right-hand bay, which also originally held three double hung wood sash windows, now contains the main entrance to the museum, which consists of a single light entrance door flanked by full height one-light windows on either side. A belt course of soldier course bricks spans the wall surface above these windows and it acts as the base on which a limestone belt course that acts as the sills of the second story windows. The second story consists of three rectangular window openings that all share the limestone belt course as a sill and each of these openings contains three one-over-one-light double hung wood sash windows that are each crowned by a five-light transom.⁷ Placed immediately below the third story window openings above is another thin limestone stringcourse that spans the full width of this portion of the façade. It too acts as a sill for each of this story's three rectangular window openings. Each contains three one-over-one-light

⁷ All the windows in this portion of the elevation are wider than the corresponding windows on the center portion of the main façade.

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double hung wood sash windows that are each crowned by a five-light transom that has a segmental arch head. On this elevation, however, the three third story window groups are slightly taller than those on the main façade and as a result the wall surface around them has been allowed to break the cornice line of the main roof above them. In addition, two large rectangular terra cotta tiles that bear Sullivanesque style designs and are identical to the ones that decorate the capitals of the pilaster strips found on the end bays on the main façade are placed at the tops of the spandrels located between the third story window groups on this portion of the elevation. A small brick and limestone chimney is placed high up on the east-facing slope of the tiled main roof.

The left-hand (north) portion of this elevation is also one bay wide. The first story of the bay contains no openings. The second story contains a single rectangular window opening that has the limestone belt course as a sill and this opening contains a single narrow one-over-one-light double hung wood sash window that is crowned with a four-light transom. There are also no openings in the third story. In addition, a four-story-tall brick chimney that serves the basement level boiler is attached to the wall and it projects upward through the roof cornice and covers the right-hand part of this portion of the elevation.

North-Facing Side Elevation

Like the corresponding south-facing side elevation, the 53.33-foot-wide north-facing side elevation is asymmetrical in design, it has a three-part composition, and it is almost identical in design. The extreme left-hand (east) end of this elevation consists of the north side of the corner pilaster described above. It is also treated as a column whose first story consists of a tall pedestal that is crowned by a limestone cornice that is placed at the same height as the one on the main façade and it too has a capital that consists of a large rectangular terra cotta tile that bears a Sullivanesque style design identical to the ones found on the main façade. The rest of this elevation consists of two equal width wall surfaces that flank a projecting center bay and continuations of the limestone and brick belt course and the limestone string course described previously serve to demarcate the second story from the first and the second story from the third on this elevation as well.

The right hand (west) wall surface of this elevation is two-bays-wide and the first story of both of these bays contains a single rectangular opening. The one on the left (east) contains a four-over-four-light double hung wood sash window, while the one on the right contains a two-light wood entrance door that serves the landing of a staircase that accesses the basement level boiler room. The second story of the left hand bay contains a single rectangular window opening that has the limestone belt course as a sill; it also contains a single one-over-one-light double hung wood sash window that is crowned with a four-light transom. There is no opening in the right hand bay of this story, however.

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The limestone string course spans the width of the wall surface above the second story window on this elevation and the third story of these two bays each contains a one-over-one-light double hung wood sash window that is crowned by a four-light transom that has a segmental-arched head.

The projecting center bay of this elevation is identical to the one on the south-facing side elevation and so is the left-hand (east) portion of this elevation, which also has no openings of any kind on its wall surfaces.

Interior

The original interior configuration of the Vernon County Normal School building is still intact, as are all of the non-movable features of the interior. Offices and classrooms were located on each of the building's three stories and there was a third story auditorium. These stories were accessed by main staircases that are located at the north and south ends of the building. Students accessed the building from the outside by using the two principal entrances that faced east towards Center Avenue. An article written at the building's opening detailed the interior finishes and construction:

Partitions are of tile; halls and stairways of beautiful terrazzo with wainscoting of Tennessee marble, with steel handrails, wide and lofty; wooden floors are all of maple laid upon concrete, and great steel supports and girders coated with plaster of Paris—all these unite in a construction scheme as nearly fireproof and otherwise indestructible as human ingenuity can conjure forth.⁸

First Story

The first or lower level of the school was originally given over primarily to utilities and to those teaching rooms that required the use of either machinery or kitchen devices, such as stoves and sinks, rooms such as the ones devoted to the manual arts and to domestic science:

On the first floor is a finely furnished domestic science room, offices for County Superintendent George E. Sanford and County Agricultural Agent Paul F. Graf, small rooms for miscellaneous purposes, and the real heart of the building—the heating plant. It is a marvel of modern efficiency—twin Kewaunee boilers and the Johnson regulating system whereby through the aid of thermostats in every room a certain degree of temperature may be maintained throughout the entire building at all times, and the humidity kept ever at the proper point by the introduction of steam into the stream of pure fresh air which the giant electrically

⁸ "Fine New Home of Vernon's Normal School." *Vernon County Censor*, September 17, 1919, p. 1 (illustrated).

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operated blower shoots from the basement into each room, thence into the attic and out at the eaves. ...

Hot and cold and shower baths deserve special mention—the domestic science room also having the convenience of hot water. This is operated during the mild weather of spring and fall by a small heating system. Bubbler drinking fountains are found on all floors. ...

A deal of earnest thought looking to the small conveniences has been put into this temple of learning. The dirt banks cut back so that ice will not accumulate in winter. Beneath the concrete driveway at the rear are coal and ash rooms reached through manholes, a fine convenience. As you enter, you step upon a metal foot cleaner that is sunk flush with the concrete floor—it is not kicked out of place. ... All of the edges of the halls and stairways are round—not square dirt collectors.⁹

One enters this story from the main Center Avenue entrances, passes over the still intact sunken metal foot cleaners, and then descends one or the other flights of stairs to the lower level. These staircases both have terrazzo floors and steps, grey marble wainscoting covers the lower portion of the walls, and the remainder of the walls as well as the ceiling are plastered. Solid plaster-covered balustrades that have molded, varnished hardwood handrails lead down to small halls located at the base of either staircase. The floors of these halls are covered in terrazzo and the walls and ceilings in these rooms, as well as in this story's other rooms, are plastered. One passes through the hall at the south end of this story into the former manual arts room. It retains its elaborate built-in cabinetry and shelving, some of which is protected by doors that consist of clear glass lights that are held in place by leaded glass came, and is now the museum's office. Other original features of this room include the large blackboard that covers most of the north end of the room and the original light fixtures that still hang from the ceiling.

⁹ "Fine New Home Of Vernon's Normal School." *Vernon County Censor*, September 17, 1919, p. 1 (illustrated).

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Vernon County Normal School
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Second Story

The second story of the school originally was given over primarily to practice teaching rooms, the largest of which served as a model school. These rooms and the men's and women's and boys' and girls' rest rooms are all located off of a broad corridor that bisects this story from north to south.

On the second floor is the model school, presided over by Miss Phoebe Gross of LaFarge [WI]—this being a new creation for the school. This room has a capacity of forty youngsters, four grades of ten each, and the pupils take the regular course, surrounded by as nearly ideal conditions as is humanly possible. The training students thus have the opportunity of studying and becoming familiar with the workings of a model school and carry this ideal out into their work in future teaching years. ...

Three little recitation rooms for the model school pupils, two for the training school, and a sick room furnished in white enamel fittings complete the second floor.¹⁰

Climbing either of the two staircases brings one to the central corridor that serves the rooms that are located on either side of it. To access this corridor, one first passes through a large opening. This opening contains a pair of one-light entrance doors that are enframed by twelve-light sidelights, the clear lights of which are held in place by lead comes, and by multi-light transoms above, the lights of which consist of prism glass and which are also held in place by lead comes; all of these elements being enframed in varnished hardwood. The corridor's floor is terrazzo, the lower portion of its walls is clad in marble wainscot, while the upper portion of its walls is plastered, as is the coved ceiling. Original light fixtures still hang from the corridor ceiling and the doors that open into the classrooms on either side of the corridor are original. The doors are of solid varnished maple and have one panel placed below a large single clear light. The classrooms themselves all have floors that of narrow hardwood tongue and groove boards, and all of the doors and windows in these rooms retain their original varnished wood trim sets. Also intact are the varnished wood picture rails that encircle each room, their original varnished built-in book shelves and drawer units, and their original slate blackboards, although most of the latter have now been covered over with corkboard panels. The bathrooms on this story have terrazzo floors, marble wainscot, and plastered walls and ceilings, and the stalls compartments in these rooms are also made of marble slabs.

¹⁰ "Fine New Home Of Vernon's Normal School." *Vernon County Censor*, September 17, 1919, p. 1 (illustrated).

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Third Story

The third story of the school originally was given over primarily to two practice teaching rooms and to the assembly room, the largest room in the school. In addition, a library was located off one end of the assembly room and the principal's office was located off the other end.

The western half of the third floor is given over to the spacious main assembly room of the training school—a magnificent view of the country towards West Prairie being observed from its wide windows. Indirect lighting fixtures of dull bronze with clusters of candles at the sides improve its appearance by day and its use by night. A fine Brambach baby grand piano adorns the front and in the rear is an alcove with library inbuilt. ... Above the blackboards of Pennsylvania slate runs an oak picture molding, and in the assembly room are bulletin boards of cork dust composition. Two recitation rooms and offices for Principal A. E. Smith and his faculty complete this floor.¹¹

Upon ascending either staircase to the third story, one turns and enters the assembly room by passing through a large opening. This opening contains a pair of one-light entrance doors that are enframed by twelve-light sidelights, the clear lights of which are held in place by lead comes, and by multi-light transoms above, the lights of which consist of prism glass and which are also held in place by lead comes; all of these elements being enframed in varnished hardwood. The assembly room itself has a hardwood floor of narrow tongue-and-grove boards. A varnished oak chair rail, a varnished oak plate rail, and a varnished oak picture molding encircle the plastered walls. Blackboards and composition board are attached to some of the wall surfaces, as are original electric multi-light wall sconces, and additional original light fixtures hang from the ceiling as well. The ceiling itself is plastered and three large plastered over beams divide this ceiling into four large panels. The only change that has affected this room has been the closing off of that portion of the south wall that was originally open and provided the principal entrance to the library alcove.¹² The shelving in the library alcove is intact; its shelves now hold part of the Vernon County Historical Society's book collection.

The fitting out of this story's other rooms is identical in treatment to the rooms on the second story and they are equally intact.

¹¹ "Fine New Home Of Vernon's Normal School." *Vernon County Censor*, September 17, 1919, p. 1 (illustrated). The piano is no longer in place.

¹² This closing off was affected by putting up a wall of plastic paneling across the opening. This was not intended to be permanent, and it can be easily removed and assembly room returned to its original configuration.

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Integrity

The only changes that have been made to the exterior of the school over the years have been limited to the replacement of the original upper sash of most of the first story windows, the replacement of the windows in one of the first story window groups on the rear elevation with a new door and side lights, and the covering of the soffits of the overhanging eaves with aluminum. Otherwise, the exterior of the building is as designed originally and is in excellent condition. The same is true for the interior of the school. The only changes that have affected the interior have been the closing off of the north wall of the library alcove on the third story and the replacement of the original ceiling lights in the second and third stories with more modern fluorescent lighting fixtures. Otherwise, this part of the building displays exceptional integrity and it too is as originally designed and is also in excellent condition today.

Vernon County Normal School
Name of Property

County Vernon
County and State

Wisconsin

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.)

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education
Architecture

Period of Significance

1919-1971

Significant Dates

1919

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Parkinson & Dockendorff

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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Vernon County Normal School
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Significance:

The Vernon County Normal School is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its local significance under National Register (NR) Criterion C (Architecture), and National Register Criterion A (History). Research designed to assess the school's potential for eligibility under Criterion C was undertaken using the NR significance area of Architecture, a theme also identified in the State of Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP). This research centered on evaluating the school by utilizing the Prairie School Style subsection of the Architectural Styles study unit of the CRMP.¹³ The results of this research are detailed below and demonstrate that the Vernon County Normal School is locally significant under NR Criterion C, both as an excellent, highly intact Prairie School style normal school building, and as an excellent example of the work of its designers, the firm of Parkinson & Dockendorff. In addition, research designed to assess the school's potential for eligibility under Criterion A was also undertaken using the NR significance area of Education, this being a theme that is also identified in the State of Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP). This research centered on evaluating the school by utilizing the Normal Schools and State Teachers Colleges subsection of the Education study unit of the CRMP.¹⁴ The results of this research are detailed below and demonstrate that the Vernon County Normal School is also locally significant under NR Criterion A as an excellent, exceptionally intact example of the normal school educational system.

The Vernon County Normal School was built in the city of Viroqua in 1919 to provide an enlarged and permanent home for Vernon County's normal school, which had previously been housed in that city's high school building (non-extant). The new 1919 school was designed in the Prairie School style by the noted La Crosse, Wisconsin architectural firm of Parkinson & Dockendorff, who were well known specialists in school design, and it represented the latest thinking in buildings that were purposely designed to house training courses for elementary school teachers. Once completed, the school continued to be used for its original purpose until 1971, when the state's county normal school program ended. Consequently, the period of significance for Education extends from 1919, when the building was opened, to 1971, when teaching activities in the school ceased.¹⁵ Since that time, the building has been the home and the museum of the Vernon County Historical Society and, while the museum's collections now fill the building, the building itself is remarkably intact and it is in

¹³ Wyatt, Barbara (ed.). *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin* (3 vols.). Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Division of Historic Preservation, 1986, Vol. 2, (Architecture) pp. 2-21 to 2-22.

¹⁴ Ibid, Vol. 3, (Education), pp. 4-1 to 4-15.

¹⁵ While the end of the period of significance exceeds the 50 year typical cut off date, the selected date encompasses the building's continued historic use, most of which occurred within the historic period.

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Vernon County Normal School
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excellent, original condition. Indeed, if the museum collections were removed, the building would be virtually identical to the one that opened for the first time in 1919.

Education

The Vernon County Normal School is believed to be eligible for listing in the NRHP at the local level of significance in the area of Education because it is one of the finest and most intact of the buildings that once housed Wisconsin's thirty-two county normal schools. The County Normal School program was begun in 1899 to fill the growing need in the state for qualified teachers who could staff the state's rural schools and it continued to produce teachers until 1971, when the state ceased funding the program. The Vernon County Normal School is the physical embodiment of this program and of the commitment that the citizens of Vernon County made to educate its rural children during this important period of growth. The Vernon County Normal School was built specifically for this purpose and it is an excellent representative example of this specialized educational resource type.

An excellent overview of the history of Wisconsin's teachers colleges and its normal schools is contained in the Normal Schools and State Teachers Colleges study unit of the Education theme section of the CRMP. Consequently, the historical background given here will deal primarily with the history of Vernon County's normal school.

The first settler in what is now the city of Viroqua was Moses Decker, who came in 1846 and built the first building in the new settlement in that year. Decker initially chose this site because it lay on the route of an old Indian trail leading to La Crosse, the general route of this trail being roughly identical in Viroqua to that of the present day USH-14, which in Viroqua is also known as North and South Main Street. In 1850, Decker platted the future village and built a building that served the settlement as its first schoolhouse, meeting house, and courthouse. In the same year Rufus Dunlap also arrived and built a two-wing log building that became the first store and the first hotel in the settlement. In 1852, Viroqua was designated the county seat of Vernon County by popular vote and it is still the county seat today. This act brought still more settlers to the settlement and with them came more new stores and other places of business. By the spring of 1866, the population had increased to the point where the settlement was incorporated as a village.¹⁶

Growth was slow but steady until the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad built a new track from Sparta south to the village of Viroqua in 1879. The coming of the railroad gave the agricultural

¹⁶ Vernon County Historical Society. *Vernon County Heritage*. Viroqua: Vernon County Historical Society, 1994, pp. 95-102.

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region surrounding Viroqua a means of shipping its surplus to markets and its effect on Viroqua was instantaneous. In the same year, the first lumber yard in the city was begun and, in 1880, a new and much larger courthouse building (the present one, NRHP 1-8-80) was constructed. By 1884, Viroqua was a thriving village, and the following year it was incorporated as a city.

Growth followed quickly, in large part because of Viroqua's position as the county seat and as the principal transshipping point for the products of the surrounding area's numerous and highly successful tobacco growers. This growth was reflected in the new buildings that began to be constructed in the business district of the community and in the city's new high school (non-extant). But, while children in the city of Viroqua were taught in modern schools by trained teachers, conditions were less favorable for children in many parts of rural Vernon County. For them, one or two-room ungraded schools were the norm and finding qualified teachers to staff them and the rest of the state's ungraded schools had become a state-wide problem by the end of the nineteenth century. The state's response was to create a completely new group of state-subsidized schools that would train teachers who would then staff Wisconsin's ungraded schools.

In 1899, the legislature passed an act authorizing the establishment of two county training schools for teachers. The act declared that the county board in any county in which a state normal school was not located could appropriate money for the organization, equipment, and maintenance of a county training school for teachers of the common schools. It provided for a county training school board to be composed of the county superintendent of schools and two other members to be appointed by the county board of supervisors for a period of three years. The state superintendent of schools was directed to give such information and assistance as he might deem necessary in the organization and maintenance of such schools, and special state aid was provided for them.¹⁷

The first two county training schools were established at Wausau (Marathon County) and Menomonie (Dunn County) in 1899 with the state paying one-half of the cost actually expended up to \$1250.00 per year. In 1905, the legislature increased the amount of state aid available to two-thirds of the amount actually expended for maintenance up to \$3500.00 per year and stated that twelve additional county schools could be established. This number was increased to twenty schools in 1907 and Vernon County was one of the counties that chose to establish a training school in that year.

The Vernon County Teachers Training School was established in November 1906, in answer to the growing demand for county school teachers with training, as well as for a teachers' school

¹⁷ Wyatt, Barbara (ed.). Op. Cit. Vol. 3, (Education), p. 4-9.

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which students might attend for a reasonable length of time after having definitely decided to become teachers. The first year of its existence there was an average attendance of forty-seven students. The present year there were enrolled sixty-seven student teachers, and it was necessary to refuse admission to thirty others, because of lack of accommodations, and other reasons. Every graduate of the first year is a teacher at the present time.

The Training School is located on the second floor of the Viroqua High School building, where there are well-aired and well lighted rooms, which, however, the school has already outgrown.¹⁸

By 1917, the need for more adequate quarters for the Normal School, that had been noted as early as 1909, had become so acute that the county board finally decided to take action.

From the opening of the county board session there was an apparent feeling on the part of the members that the need of a county training school building could no longer be ignored, and the oftener supervisors visited the cramped and inconvenient quarters now occupied the stronger became the conviction. Report of the late visiting committee who inspected schools in other counties added weight in favor of the proposition. Out of the committee recommendations grew a vote on the proposition to build, the amount recommended being \$30,000, to be swelled by \$3,000 state aid. The vote on building stood 18 to 14.¹⁹

This action of the county board received immediate support from the local newspaper.

The Censor believes practically every member of the board realized the desirability of having a suitable place to house the training school, and that the negative votes were cast because of a desire to avert the outlay at a time when building materials and labor are so high.²⁰

The same article then noted that the board's vote meant that the County would issue bonds for \$30,000 to cover the cost of construction and it further noted that the board had unanimously directed that the new building be built in the county seat of Viroqua.

¹⁸ "History of Vernon County Normal." *Vernon County Broadcaster*, March 1, 1945. This history of the Normal School up to 1945 also includes excerpts from an earlier April, 1909 Viroqua newspaper article on the same subject and this quote is from that earlier article.

¹⁹ "Doings of Vernon County Board." *Vernon County Censor*, November 28, 1917, p. 1.

²⁰ Ibid. The board's action was taken just as the United States entered World War I, and the subsequent diversion of men and materials to the war effort was especially hard on the building industry.

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Vernon County Normal School
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Once the decision to build the new school had been made, the county board wasted no time in securing a site and a design.

The County Training School committee is doing things right from the bat, having so soon made a survey of other institutions, purchased a site and have plans for the new county institution well developed. The committee, accompanied by Professor Smith and Architect Parkinson, were at Grand Rapids, Appleton, Kaukauna, Watertown, and Columbus. They are attempting to benefit by information gleaned from these places.

On Tuesday, the committee located the new building, securing the old Nathan Coe residence corner in the second ward, embracing 8x10 rods of land, an ideal spot, centrally located, with good surroundings. The price paid is \$2200, certainly a bargain, all things considered. The committee is in the city today perfecting arrangements for construction.²¹

That architect Albert E. Parkinson was selected to accompany the committee is not surprising given the fact that his firm, Parkinson & Dockendorff, was a well known specialist in school design. The firm was located in the city of La Crosse, which is just 34 miles northwest of Viroqua. In addition, by 1917, this firm had designed at least three buildings in the city's downtown business district: the First National Bank of Viroqua building, built in 1908 (101 S. Main St.); the Mrs. B. F. Ferguson building, also built in 1908 (105 S. Main St.); and the Christ H. Ostrem Building, built in 1914 (201-203 S. Main St.), all of which are now located in the NRHP-listed Viroqua Downtown Historic District. At any rate, Parkinson's opinions were clearly persuasive because, by February of 1918, the County was advertising for construction bids for the new school, with plans produced by Parkinson's firm.²²

The Parkinson & Dockendorff design that the building committee had decided on proved to be more expensive than the amount the board had first approved, as the cost of building materials and labor soared after the country's entrance into World War I. Consequently, in 1918, the board authorized the expenditure of an additional \$25,000 for the school, making a total of \$55,000. With this amount in hand, construction began. Material and labor shortages hampered construction, but, by the start of the school year in September of 1919, the new school was ready for its first students. Not surprisingly, the local newspapers were full of praise.

²¹ "Found a Desirable Site." *Vernon County Censor*, December 12, 1917, p. 1. "Prof. Smith" was August E. Smith, the principal of the Vernon County Training School.

²² "Ask Building Proposals." *Vernon County Censor*, February 16, 1918, p. 8.

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When the doors of the County Normal Training School opened last Monday morning for the thirteenth year of its establishment it was not with the largest membership, but under most auspicious conditions regarding opportunity and splendor, and the surroundings are delightfully ideal and prospects for obtaining future equipment for useful futures, rare. ... With present difficulties of obtaining responsible builders the training school committee labored under many perplexities, but brought forth a structure that is most pleasing and creditable.²³

The new Vernon County Training School was an instant success despite the fact that its first class contained no young men due to wartime conscription. The training course taught in the new school building was the same as the one taught previously, that is it was a one-year course. The entrance requirements for prospective teachers included being over 16 and being in possession of a high school diploma. Tuition was free. In addition to the regular course work, the students had available to them a "model" or "laboratory" school taught by a special teacher in a room in the building's second story. This model school contained an average of forty children divided into four grades and it served to prepare the students for the actual conditions found in the rural schools they were to staff.

According to the CRMP, the names of the County Training Schools were all changed by the state legislature to County Rural Normal Schools in 1923 and by 1924 there were 32 such schools in the state. The one-year course continued to be the basic offering of these schools until 1937.

In 1937 the state legislature raised requirements for teachers of Wisconsin providing that all teachers have two years of training beyond high school. The course of study for county normals was revised and the Vernon County Normal School was placed on a two-year course basis to meet this new standard. ... Student teachers who complete two years work at the county normal may transfer credits to a State Teachers College and receive a degree in elementary education with two more years of study.²⁴

That the need for the kind of rural elementary school teachers that Vernon County Normal School produced was still needed can be seen in the 1945 newspaper article quoted above. It was also noted that in that year there were 150 school districts in Vernon County with 137 one room schools, eight state graded schools, and six high schools. In 1955, the school name was changed once again to the Vernon County Teachers College, but the two-year course continued. In 1965, however, the model school portion of its curriculum was discontinued and was replaced by a teacher cadet program in area

²³ "Fine New Home Of Vernon's Normal School." *Vernon County Censor*, September 17, 1919, p. 1 (illustrated).

²⁴ Lund, Otto. "History of Vernon County Normal." *Vernon County Broadcaster*, March 1, 1945 (illustrated).

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schools. Finally, the steady decline in the numbers of the state's rural schools over the years, the rise of consolidated school districts, and the continually upgraded educational standards that members of the teaching profession were expected to meet all spelled the end of the county normal school system.

The era of the two-year teacher training school came to an end when the State Legislature voted no funding for county colleges for the 1971-72 school year, and also that only degree teachers would be licensed after 1972.²⁵

As a result, the school closed and on October 29, 1971, its contents were sold at auction. That the school played an important part in the history of education in Vernon County is beyond dispute. An article on the school written in July of 1971 noted that as of that date:

The total graduates over the years number nearly 2000. Many of these are currently teaching in area schools. A survey taken a few years ago by the then Supt. of Viroqua Area Schools, Russell Diehl, showed that 70% of the elementary teachers at Viroqua were graduates of the Vernon County College.²⁶

After serving for a time as a county office building, the adjacent Vernon Memorial Hospital bought the former school building in 1985. Due to a change in plans, the school was sold once again in 1988, this time to the Vernon County Historical Society, which still owns it today and uses it as a museum to house its extensive collections. Fortunately, the different uses that the building has housed since it ceased to be a school had no effect on the integrity of the building, which is still in an exceptionally intact state today.

The Vernon County Normal School building is thus believed to be eligible for listing in the NRHP under National Register Criterion A in the area of Education for the role it played in educating the rural teachers of the county. It is an exceptionally intact example of the kind of building built to house county normal schools throughout Wisconsin in the first half of the twentieth century. Built in 1919, the new school building represented a substantial investment in the future on the part of Vernon County's citizens, who wanted a proper facility in which the teachers who would educate their children could be trained. In addition, the building also physically embodies important aspects of changes in rural education standards and curriculum in Wisconsin during the twentieth century.

²⁵ Krause, Dorothy. "VMH buys Normal School: A building with a long history." *Vernon County Broadcaster*, October 24, 1985. Degree teachers were the product of the four-year courses taught at the several state teachers colleges in Wisconsin.

²⁶ "VTC: Expired at Age 64?" *Vernon County Broadcaster*, July, 1971, Vol. 115, No. 27.

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Architecture

The Vernon County Normal School is also believed to be eligible for listing in the NRHP on the basis of its architectural significance at the local level as an excellent, exceptionally intact Prairie School style example of the County Normal School resource type and also as a fine representative example of the work of the highly important La Crosse, Wisconsin architectural firm of Parkinson & Dockendorff.

Albert E. Parkinson (1870-1952) was born in Spalding, England, and he eventually came to the United States and settled first in Sparta, Wisconsin, where he worked as an engineer and contractor. He later took courses in architecture as well. Bernard J. Dockendorff (1878-1952), was born in La Crosse and he completed his regular schooling in the public schools of that city. After two years of apprenticeship in the La Crosse architectural office of Stolze and Schick, Dockendorff left for Germany to study architecture, first at the Polytechnic Institute in Darmstadt from 1897-1899, and subsequently in the atelier of Prof. Ludwig Becker (1855-1940) in Mainz, from 1900-1904.²⁷ Upon returning to La Crosse, Dockendorff set up his own office and then, in 1906, he formed a partnership with Parkinson. Their practice quickly became one of the most successful in the western half of the state and it was still active in 1952, the year that both men died. During their 46 years of partnership, the two principals of the firm were licensed to practice in Wisconsin and in Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, and North Dakota, and they designed and built buildings in all of these states. They designed buildings of every type, but they were best known for their public buildings. In fact, Parkinson's obituary noted that the firm had designed some 800 public buildings by the time of his death, including churches, hospitals, and business establishments, but special mention was made of the fact that the firm was best known for the design of school buildings.²⁸ Indeed, by 1927, the firm was already so well known for this specialty that they published a book on the subject entitled *Twenty-Five Years of School House Planning*. This well-illustrated hardbound 96-page book was partly a self-promotional catalog of the firm's work in this field, of course, but it also was meant to be a primer that would give school boards and educators the benefit of the firm's considerable practical experience in the design and construction of school buildings of all types. In the introduction, the author described the firm's principals and this aspect of their firm's work in some detail.

Albert E. Parkinson and Bernard J. Dockendorff have for twenty-five years been associated under the firm name of Parkinson and Dockendorff. Almost from the beginning of this

²⁷ Ludwig Becker was trained as a stonecutter and sculptor before commencing on an architectural career. Becker was best known for the 317 churches he designed, most of which were for the Catholic Church.

²⁸ "A. E. Parkinson, Architect Here 52 years, Dies." *La Crosse Sunday Tribune*, September 21, 1952, pp. 1, 6. Obituary of Albert E. Parkinson.

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association the firm has specialized in the field of schoolhouse planning. Their unusual success is due in part to the fact that they recognized schoolhouse planning as a distinct field which required special study and a thorough knowledge of educational needs, hopes, and aspirations. The second factor was the firm itself. Mr. Parkinson was a well trained, successful contractor, a man who knew and understood the actual problems of construction. In his desire to advance he took a course in Architecture in this country which he completed with great credit. This practical knowledge has saved Wisconsin communities thousands of dollars in construction costs and has also made possible the development of a building supervision or inspection service which is not excelled by that of any other firm. Mr. Dockendorff, after two years of office work in this country, was privileged to study for a period of 6½ years in Europe. This unusual training enabled him to bring to his work a thorough understanding of design and a sense of real artistic values. Our buildings are therefore marked by simplicity and by absolute correctness from the artistic viewpoint. ...

In order to render the greatest possible service to the communities which select us for their school work, we have developed an educational service which assists us in making intelligent surveys of school needs. In order to provide this service we have employed an experienced educator, a man with nineteen years of actual school experience. For fourteen years he has acted as superintendent of schools in communities in many of which he helped develop school building programs and to carry them through. This man is competent to make a complete survey of a school system and to check surveys already made, in order to assist boards of education. He also assists local superintendents and boards of education in giving publicity to school building needs.

Our educational man checks all school plans for the details so essential to a complete school plant, details which all but experienced educators might overlook. He also keeps in close touch with the constantly developing and changing educational program, in order that our firm may be in the van of educational programs in the school building line. ...

Our firm has prospered in the past because of this service. It will continue to serve in the future, seeking at all times to make our School Buildings models in appearance, in ruggedness, and in utility.²⁹

²⁹ Neverman, Paul F. (compiler). *Twenty-Five Years of School House Planning: 1902-1927*. La Crosse: Parkinson & Dockendorff, 1927, pp. 5-7.

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That the firm's school building design program was a success was no idle boast. Accompanying this text is a "substantial but incomplete" list of the Wisconsin schools that the firm had built up until 1927 and they include: 18 high schools; four public and 10 parochial graded schools; 11 high-graded schools; five junior high schools; five special educational buildings; and five county training schools. Many of these buildings are illustrated in the book and while none of them is identical, it is clear from the pictures that up until 1927 the firm usually used very conservative Tudor Revival Style and Collegiate Gothic Style designs for their school buildings. These buildings are almost always three stories tall, with the first story being treated as a raised basement story, their windows are grouped, they have flat roofs that are hidden by parapet walls, and they are invariably clad in brick and are also usually modestly ornamented with stone, which is typically used to form the water table that separates the first story from the ones above. The greatest use of stone, however, is to be found on the slightly projecting full height bays that house the principal staircases and the main entrances on almost all of this firm's schools. The first stories of these bays almost always feature a large Tudor arch entry that is outlined in stone, while the upper stories above feature either a large single window or a group of windows that provides light to the staircase inside. These bays are then typically crowned with a shaped parapet and the degree of ornamentation displayed appears to have been largely governed by the size of the school budget.

The five county training schools designed by Parkinson & Dockendorff in Wisconsin prior to 1927 were located in Antigo, Columbus, Phillips, Richland Center, and Viroqua, and while none of them is identical, they are all of brick, they are all three stories tall, and they all have rectilinear plans and slightly projecting full height entrance door/staircase bays.³⁰ As was usual with this firm, considerable thought was given to the special requirements of this particular educational resource type.

The county normal school has been accepted as a vital part of the Wisconsin educational system. Thirty-one such schools are now [1927] operating in Wisconsin and doing their part to supply trained teachers for the rural and graded schools of the state. While each school primarily serves the county in which it is located, the institution is, nevertheless, a state service school, as the training of teachers is and must always be recognized as the function of the state.

The ideal county normal school must recognize the fact that the teachers trained are to serve in rural schools. Because of this the ideal building must provide space for domestic science, manual training, and some work in agriculture. Adequate classrooms must be provided for academic work and at least one model schoolroom should be included. A few rooms must be provided for practice teaching. The ideal school must provide a suitable and adequate

³⁰ All of these schools are still extant save for the one in Columbus, which was demolished ca.1971.

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auditorium for county functions such as school board conventions, rural graduation, and teachers' institutes. With physical education required by law, it is also essential that each ideal or complete school be provided with a gymnasium. The building should also contain an adequate library, rest rooms, and office space. It should be of good yet simple design and of the best possible construction. The county normal school is without a doubt the one building in the county which will influence rural school design and construction and because of this unusual care should be exercised in its planning.³¹

The county normal schools designed by Parkinson & Dockendorff met all of these criteria. It is a testament to their designers that all five remained in service and fulfilled their original functions until 1971, the year the State of Wisconsin ceased to fund the county normal school system.

Three of the five county normal schools designed by Parkinson & Dockendorff are examples of the flat-roofed Tudor Revival/Collegiate Gothic style program described previously, these being the ones located in Antigo, Columbus (non-extant), and Richland Center. The ones in Phillips and Viroqua, however, differ in two important aspects; both of these schools are sheltered by tall Spanish tile-clad hip roofs that have wide overhanging eaves, and neither of these buildings have designs that utilize historic references. The latter aspect is especially true of the Vernon County Normal School in Viroqua, whose design incorporates elements that are associated with the Prairie School style. The Prairie School subsection of the CRMP notes that this style is characterized by its emphasis on horizontality. Horizontality was emphasized by the use of long, low hipped or gabled roofs with widely overhanging boxed eaves, grouped or banded windows, and a belt course or shelf roof between stories. Wood, stucco, and brick were typical building materials and their natural beauty was emphasized. Stylized and abstracted motifs were frequently used in leaded glass windows and interiors. Although most often used for residences the Prairie School style was also used for many other building types as well including banks, retail stores and schools.³² The Vernon County Normal School has a low hipped roof with wide, overhanging eaves and it makes use of first and second story belt courses and other means to create the sense of horizontality that is typical of buildings designed in the Prairie School style.³³ Another element that links this building's design to the Prairie School is its use of Sullivanesque Style abstract terra cotta ornamentation on the exterior of the building, it being most conspicuous on the school's projecting full height entrance door/staircase ells.

³¹ Neverman, Paul F. (compiler). Op. Cit., p. 79. Physical education was not yet a state-mandated requirement when the Vernon County Normal School was designed and built.

³² Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, 3 Vols. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986, Vol. 2, Architecture, p. 2-21.

³³ This horizontal emphasis is more muted in the Phillips example, which was designed four years later, in 1923, and has a more eclectic, somewhat less harmonious design.

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The result is a building whose discreet use of elements of the Prairie School style in its exterior design acknowledged the prevailing architectural fashions of the time but was still conservative enough to appeal to the essentially rural community it was meant to serve. The finest examples of buildings designed in the Prairie School style are those in which the style is expressed in all the exterior and interior elements. These buildings have a unity which is especially characteristic of the Prairie School style and which is found in relatively few examples not designed by the acknowledged masters of this style. More typically, local architects utilized elements of the Prairie School style in the same way they used elements of the Colonial Revival or Neo-Classical styles to create up-to-date, fashionable buildings. Buildings created in this manner vary greatly, some, such as the Vernon County Normal School, have the distinctive feel of true Prairie School examples, with others have only the details.

Thanks to its size, design, and high degree of integrity, the Vernon County Normal School is the finest example of the Prairie School style in Viroqua. It is not, however, Viroqua's only example of the style. The Architectural and Historic Inventory (AHI) maintained by the Wisconsin Historical Society's Division of Historic Preservation and Public History includes four other buildings in Viroqua that are designed in the Prairie School style. These are all single family residences and the two best examples are both the work of principals in the important La Crosse architectural firm of Bentley & Merman. This firm was especially well known for its Prairie School style work and their two Viroqua examples are the fine brick house located at 219 E. South St., which was built in 1922, and the O. E. Davis House located at 424 E. Terhune St., which was built in 1923. The other two Viroqua residences are both examples of the type mentioned above that have designs that utilize just a few elements of the style.

The Vernon County Normal School is also an excellent representative example of the County Normal School resource type. As the history of this particular school indicates, the earliest county normal schools were usually first housed in already existing school buildings and they had to make do with whatever space was available. As their curriculums matured, and as the need for their graduates increased, buildings that were built especially for this purpose were developed. The resulting resource type could be clothed in a variety of architectural styles, but its plan and design were governed largely by curriculum needs and by fiscal restraints. Because county normal schools did not require adjacent playgrounds, the land that was associated with them usually consisted of just a few lots, which meant that they could be built on relatively small urban parcels. This was a cost savings for the county and it favored a building design that was essentially more vertical than horizontal. As a result, almost all purpose-built county normal schools were either two or three stories in height and they were either square, or more often, rectilinear in plan. Externally, most of these buildings had designs that emulated other junior and senior high school buildings of the period, all of which were of fireproof

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Vernon County Normal School
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

masonry construction and featured modern up-to-date heating and ventilating systems. Internally, the layout of the county normal school was determined by the needs of the school's curriculum and a description of the needs of an ideal example of this resource type can be found on page eleven of this section.

The AHI includes five other buildings in Wisconsin that are examples of the county normal school resource type, these being the ones located in Buffalo, Green, Langlade, Price, and Richland counties. Of these, three, the examples located in Antigo (Langlade County), Philips (Price County) and Richland Center (Richland County), are also Parkinson & Dockendorff designs, while a fourth, the one in Monroe (Green County), is the work of Claude & Starck of Madison. The fifth, located in Alma (Buffalo County) is the oldest, built in 1902. All five these buildings are representative examples of the resource type that is described above, as is the Vernon County Normal School. All have now been converted to other uses and it is believed that the Vernon County Normal School is now the most intact of the inventoried examples of this resource type.

Today, the Vernon County Normal School is both the headquarters and the museum of the Vernon County Historical Society, but both its exterior and interior are still in a remarkably intact and well maintained state. Consequently, it is believed that this building is indeed eligible for listing in the NRHP on the basis of its architectural significance at the local level because it is both an excellent, exceptionally intact Prairie School style example of the County Normal School resource type and because it is also a fine representative example of the work of the architectural firm of Parkinson & Dockendorff.³⁴

³⁴ Parkinson & Dockendorff Collection. Kratt Assoc., Inc., Architects. La Crosse, WI. Parkinson & Dockendorff also designed many other types of buildings as well, including six that are contributing resources in the NRHP-listed Viroqua Downtown Historic District: the First National Bank of Viroqua building, built in 1908 (101 S. Main St.), the Mrs. B. F. Ferguson building, also built in 1908 (105 S. Main St.); the Christ H. Ostrem Building, built in 1914 (201-203 S. Main St.); the Temple Theater building, built in 1921-1922 (114-118 S. Main St.); the L. C. Boyle/Fred Eckhart & Co. Double Block, built in 1926 (119-123 S. Main St.); and the C. F. Dahl building, built in 1928 (122-124 S. Main St.).

Vernon County Normal School
Name of Property

County Vernon
County and State

Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

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

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- 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:

Vernon County Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

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

1 15 670580 4824160
 Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
 Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
 Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
 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	Timothy F. Heggland/Consultant for the Vernon County Historical Society			date	July 1, 2010
organization				telephone	608-795-2650
street & number	6391 Hillsandwood Road			zip code	53560
city or town	Mazomanie	state	WI		

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 1

Vernon County Normal School
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

Major Bibliographical References:

"Fine New Home of Vernon's Normal School." *Vernon County Censor*, September 17, 1919, p. 1 (illustrated).

La Crosse Tribune. Various issues.

Neverman, Paul F. (compiler). *Twenty-Five Years of School House Planning: 1902-1927*. La Crosse: Parkinson & Dockendorff, 1927.

Parkinson & Dockendorff Collection. Kratt Assoc., Inc., Architects. La Crosse, WI. This firm owns most of the surviving blueprints of the firm including those associated with the Vernon County Normal School.

Schmitt, Ronald E. *Sullivan-esque: Urban Architecture and Ornamentation*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

Vernon County Broadcaster. Various issues.

Vernon County Censor. Various issues.

Vernon County Historical Society. *Vernon County Heritage*. Viroqua: Vernon County Historical Society, 1994.

Wyatt, Barbara (Ed.). *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin* (3 vols.). Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.

Wisconsin Word Processing Format (Approved 1/92)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 10 Page 1

Vernon County Normal School
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary consists of the legal parcel for this property: Lots 1 and 4, Block 4, Weeden's Addition to the City of Viroqua.

Boundary Justification:

These boundaries enclose all the land that has historically been associated with the Vernon County Normal School.

Vernon County Normal School
Name of Property

County Vernon
County and State

Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

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

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

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

Property Owner

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

name/title	date
organization	telephone
street & number	zip code
city or town	state WI

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

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

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section photos Page 1

Vernon County Normal School
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

Items a-d are the same for photos 1 – 28.

Photo 1

- a) Vernon County Normal School
- b) Viroqua, Vernon County, WI
- c) Timothy F. Heggland, March 9, 2010
- d) Wisconsin Historical Society
- e) General View looking SE
- f) Photo 1 of 28

Photo 2

- e) East-facing Main Facade, View looking W
- f) Photo 2 of 28

Photo 3

- e) General View looking NW
- f) Photo 3 of 28

Photo 4

- e) South-facing Side Elevation, View looking N
- f) Photo 4 of 28

Photo 5

- e) General View, View looking NE
- f) Photo 5 of 28

Photo 6

- e) West-facing Rear Elevation, View looking E
- f) Photo 6 of 28

Photo 7

- e) North-facing Side Elevation, View looking S
- f) Photo 7 of 28

Photo 8

- e) General View, View looking SE
- f) Photo 8 of 28

Photo 9

- e) North Staircase Bay, View looking W
- f) Photo 9 of 28

Photo 10

- e) North Entrance Door, View looking W
- f) Photo 10 of 28

Photo 11

- e) North Entrance and Staircase Landing, View looking E
- f) Photo 11 of 28

Photo 12

- e), View looking N
- f) Photo 12 of 28

Photo 13

- e) South Hall, Basement Story, View looking NW
- f) Photo 13 of 28

Photo 14

- e) Built-in Cabinet, Manual Training Room, Basement Story,
View looking E
- f) Photo 14 of 28

Photo 15

- e) Second Story Corridor, View looking S
- f) Photo 15 of 28

Photo 16

- e) Typical Classroom Door, Second Story, View looking SE
- f) Photo 16 of 28

Photo 17

- e) Recitation Room, Second Story, View looking W
- f) Photo 17 of 28

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section photos Page 2

Vernon County Normal School
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

Photo 18

- e) Recitation Room, Second Story, View looking E
- f) Photo 18 of 28

Photo 28

- e) Principal's Office, Third Story, View looking NW
- f) Photo 28 of 28

Photo 19

- e) Entrance to Teachers Room, Second Story, View looking E
- f) Photo 19 of 28

Photo 20

- e) Floor of Entrance to Teachers Room, Second Story, View looking E
- f) Photo 20 of 28

Photo 21

- e) Model School Room, Second Story, View looking SW
- f) Photo 21 of 28

Photo 22

- e) Model School Room, Second Story, View looking E
- f) Photo 22 of 28

Photo 23

- e) Model School Room, Second Story, View looking NE
- f) Photo 23 of 28

Photo 24

- e) Second Story Stair Landing, Ascending to Third Story, View looking W
- f) Photo 24 of 28

Photo 25

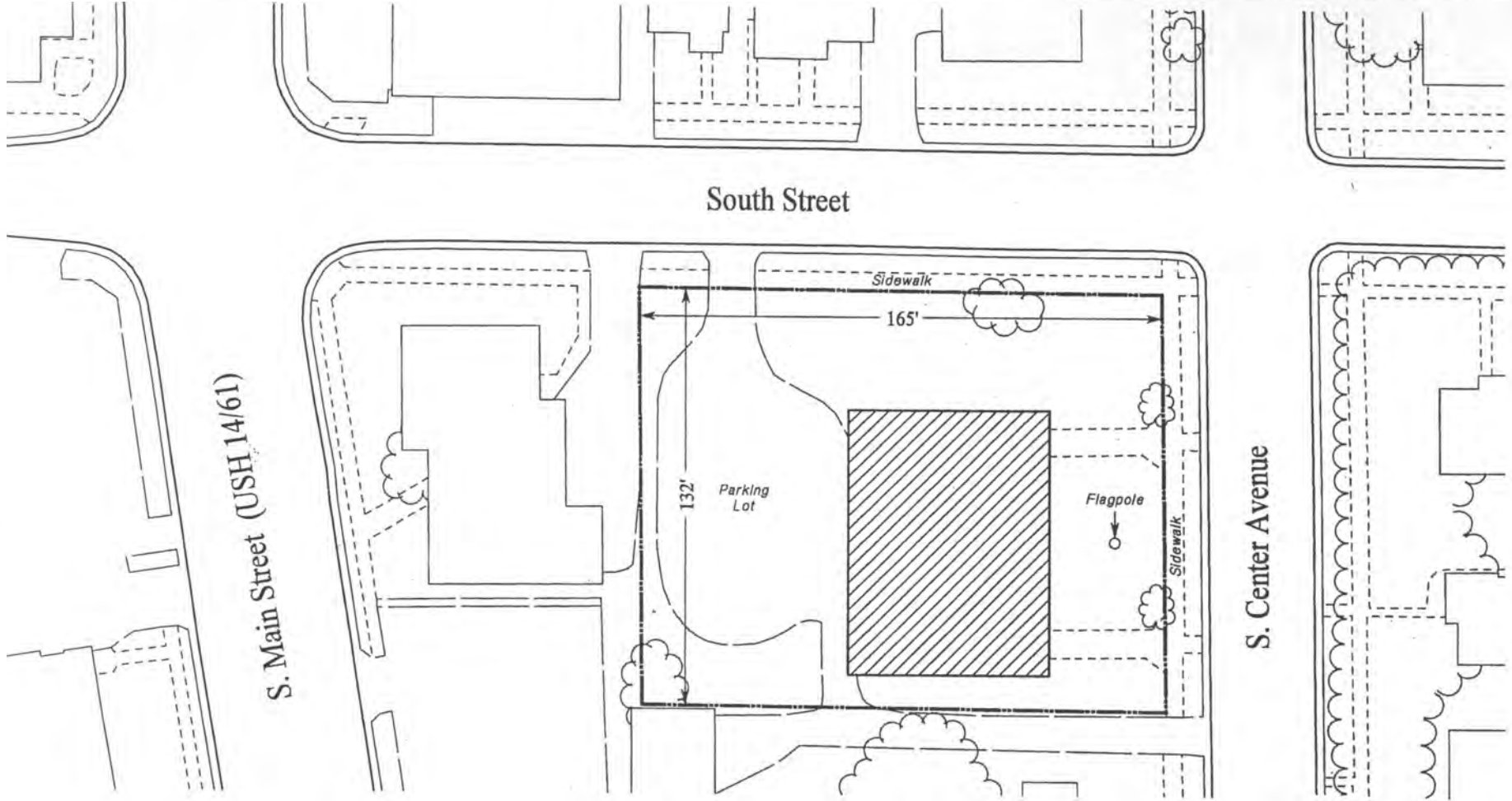
- e) Entrance to Third Story Assembly Room from South Hall, View looking SE
- f) Photo 25 of 28

Photo 26

- e) Detail of Third Story Assembly Room Ceiling, View looking SE
- f) Photo 26 of 28

Photo 27

- e) Third Story Assembly Room, View looking S
- f) Photo 27 of 28



SITE MAP #1:

Vernon County Normal School

410 S. Center Avenue
Viroqua, Vernon County, WI

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Vernon County Normal School

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: WISCONSIN, Vernon

DATE RECEIVED: 6/10/11 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 6/29/11
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 7/14/11 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 7/26/11
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 11000479

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

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

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT _____ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The Vernon County Normal School is eligible for listing in the National Register under criteria A and C as an excellent example of Prairie School architecture and as an intact representative example of normal school education in Wisconsin. The school is significant locally; its period of significance is 1919 to 1971, reflecting its date of construction and the last date it operated as a normal school. The building, now used as a local museum, has remarkable integrity and is in excellent condition. It is considered to be the most intact representative of normal school education in Wisconsin and, as such, to be exceptionally significant.

RECOM./CRITERIA A & C

REVIEWER Barbara Depp

DISCIPLINE H/Stan

TELEPHONE 202-354-2252

DATE 7-26-11

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.



Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
1 of 28

312711, DSC_0053_0020

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10



Vernon County, Normal School, Vernon County, WI
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312711, DSC_0072_0029

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10



Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
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3127112.DSC_0064_0024

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10



Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
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312711, DSC_0066_0025

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10



Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
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312711. DSC0067_0026

CAMERA CO. SQUARE. 05/26/10



Vernon County, Normal School, Vernon County, WI
6c5 28

312711. DSC_0068_0027

CAMERA CO. SQUARE. 05/26/10



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312711, DSC_0070_0028

CAMERA CO, SQUARE, 05/26/10



Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI

8 25 28

312711, DSC_0054_0021

CAMERA CO., SQUARE, 05/26/10



COUNTY NORMAL

410 SO. CENTER

Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
9 25 28

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10

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COUNTY NORMAL

410 SO. CENTER

Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
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312711, DSC_0056_0022

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10



EXIT

Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
11 05 28

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10

312711, DSC_0019_0006



Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
12 25 28

312711; DSC_0039_001B

CAMERA CO, SQUARE, 05/26/10



Restroom

RESTROOM

VERNON
COUNTY

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CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10

312711, DSC_0038_0017



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14 25 28

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Vernon County, Normal School, Vernon County, WI
15 ct 28

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10

312711 - DSC00032_0015



Alumni Room
Rural Schools

E



Seat of Learning

Vernon County, Natural School, Vernon County, WI
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CAMERA CO, SQUARE, 05/26/10

312711, DSC_0021-0008



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CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10

312711, DSC_0024_0010



More All in Space

Vernon County, Normal School, Vernon County, WZ
19 CF 28

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312711, DSC_0034_0016



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312731, DSC_0027_0012



Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WZ

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312711 DSC_0028_0013

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312711. DSC_0029_0014

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10



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24 5 28

CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10

312711, DSC0018-0005



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CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10

312711 DSC_0008_0002



Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
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CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10

312711, DSC_0007_0001



Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI

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CAMERA CO. SQUARE. 05/26/10

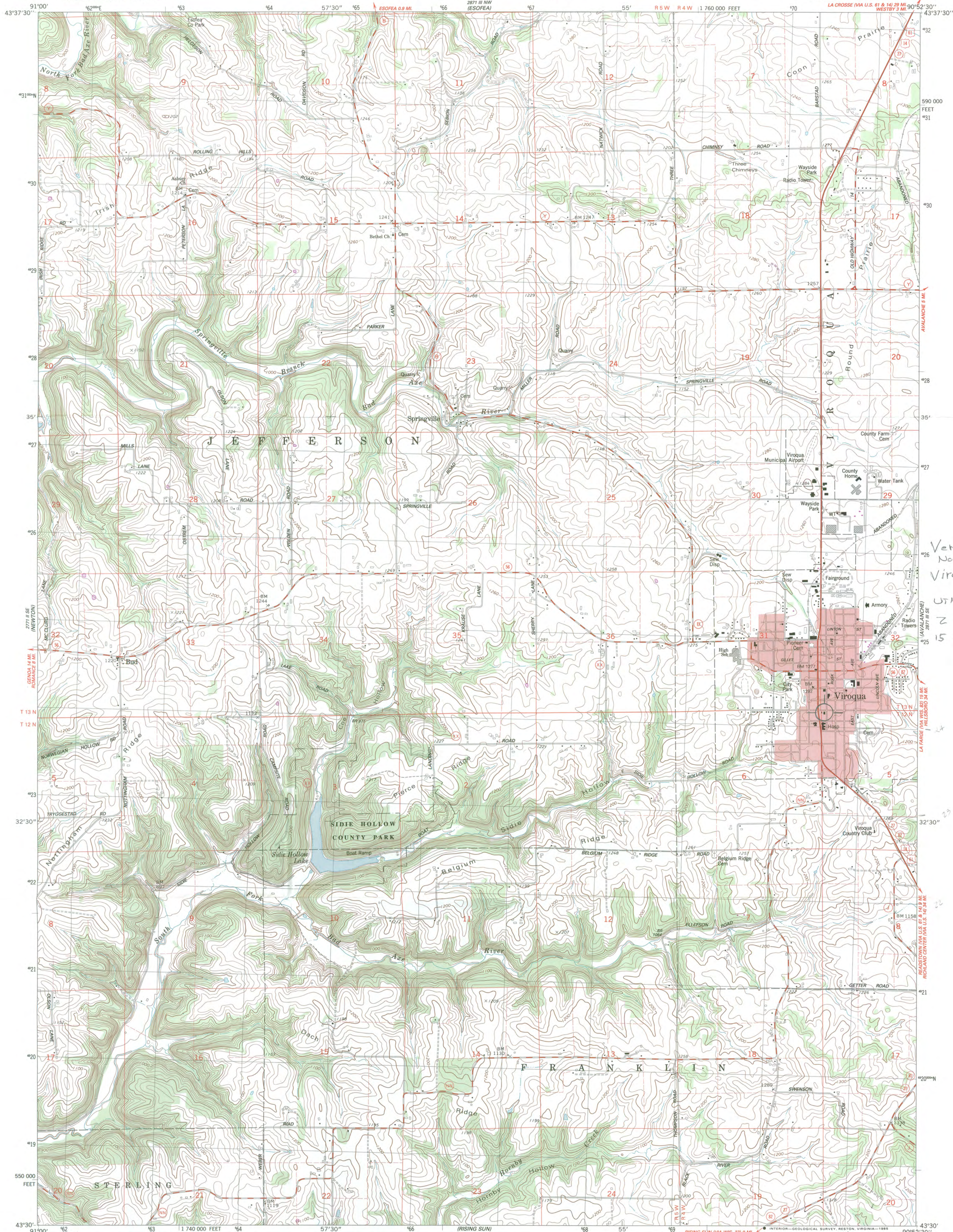
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Vernon County Normal School, Vernon County, WI
28 of 28

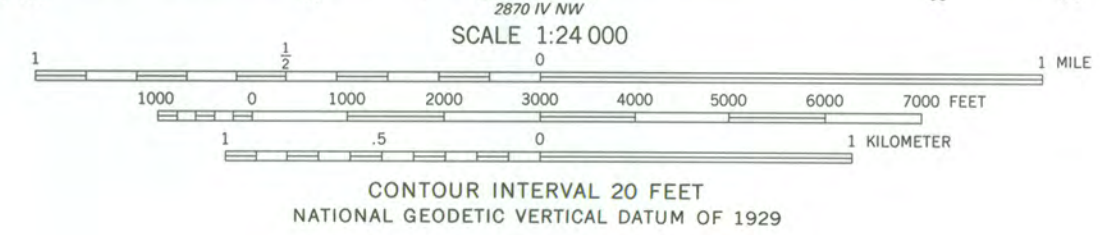
CAMERA CO. SQUARE, 05/26/10

312711 DSC_0011_0003



Vernon County
Normal School
Viroqua, Vernon Co.,
WI
UTM Coordinates
Z E N
15 670580 4824160

Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
in cooperation with the Wisconsin Division of Highways
and Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1963-64. Revised from aerial photographs taken 1981
Field checked 1982. Map edited 1983
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Wisconsin coordinate
system, south zone (Lambert conformal conic)
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 15
1927 North American Datum
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983,
move the projection lines 6 meters north and
12 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks
Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown
Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled
from aerial photographs taken 1982 and other sources
This information not field checked. Map edited 1985



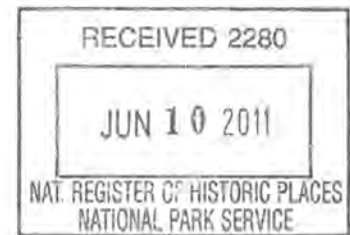
ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
AND WISCONSIN GEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY, MADISON, WISCONSIN 53706
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

VIROQUA, WIS.
SW/4 VIROQUA 15' QUADRANGLE
43090-EB-TF-024
1983
PHOTOREVISED 1985
DMA 2871 III SW-SERIES V861



TO: Keeper
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Daina Penkiunas

SUBJECT: National Register Nomination

The following materials are submitted on this 3rd day of June 2011,
for nomination of the Vernon County Normal School to the National Register of
Historic Places:

1 Original National Register of Historic Places nomination form

 Multiple Property Nomination form

28 Photograph(s)

1 Original USGS map(s)

1 Sketch map(s)/figure(s)/exhibit(s)

 Piece(s) of correspondence

1 Other CD with electronic images

COMMENTS:

 Please insure that this nomination is reviewed

 This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67

 The enclosed owner objection(s) do do not
constitute a majority of property owners.

 Other: