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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

SEP 19 1989

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Crow Island School

other names/site number NA

2. Location

street & number 1112 Willow Road

not for publication

city, town Winnetka

vicinity

state Illinois

code IL

county Cook

code 031

zip code 60093

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	0 Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
NA

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official  
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

Date

9-13-89

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Patrick Andrews

10/27/89

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Education / School

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Education / School

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Modern movement / International Style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick, limestone

wood

roof asphalt

other steel, terra cotta

glass

**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

Crow Island School is located on the southwest corner of Willow Road and Glendale Avenue (originally Linwood Road), Winnetka, Cook County, Illinois. The building is a flat roofed, one story, common brick and redwood, multi-windowed, steel frame structure that incorporates the functionalism, simplicity, and flexible planning of the International Style. Designed by the firms of Eliel and Eero Saarinen and Perkins, Wheeler & Will under the direction of progressive educator Carleton W. Washburne, then Superintendent of Winnetka Public Schools, it has served as a public grammar school and preschool since it opened in 1940. This early example of the winged school building has excellent integrity in terms of its setting, design, materials, workmanship, and function as a child-oriented environment. The school faces north on its original site, with Crow Island Woods on the west border and landscaped grounds that serve as an extension of the school.

The site for the school was chosen because it bordered Crow Island Woods, an area which would provide teachers with an ideal place for art and nature studies. Crow Island School architect, Larry Perkins, observed that, "the real boundary of the classroom is the edge of the woods." The design of the site is a product of its functional use as a school. It was originally unusable swamp, part of the Skokie Marsh, located near a high spot, "Crow Island," where birds found refuge. Reclaimed by using landfill excavated from two local WPA projects--the track depression for the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad in downtown Winnetka and the Skokie Lagoons Project--the ground was raised five feet. The building rests on spikes and pads sunk to the level of solid ground.

## 8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D    NHL Criteria: 1, 2, and 4

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Architecture

1940

1940

Education

1955

NHL Theme: XVI-U Architecture: International

Cultural Affiliation

XXVII: Education

B: Elementary, Intermediate, Secondary

6: Objectives, Curricula, Methodology

Significant Person

Washburne, Carleton Wolsey, 1889-1968

Architect/Builder

Saarinens, Eliel and Eero

Perkins, Wheeler, and Will

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Crow Island School meets Criteria B and C and Criteria Consideration G for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Since its opening in September of 1940, Crow Island School has had a profound and lasting effect on both school architecture and educational philosophy as embodied in the tenets of Winnetka Public Schools Superintendent, 1919-1943, Carleton Washburne, a national and international leader in the field of progressive education. Appearing between the general building hiatus in the 1930's caused by the Great Depression and the subsequent dearth of building during World War II, Crow Island School served as a model of a modern progressive school for the building boom that accompanied the baby boom after the war. The reputation of architects Eliel and Eero Saarinen gave the school great credibility as well as great design. The energy of Perkins, Wheeler and Will, later Perkins and Will, spread the design throughout the country with their many school commissions. The national reputation of Carleton Washburne focused attention on the only school built under his direction during the twenty-four years he was superintendent in Winnetka. Crow Island School has been featured in prestigious architectural and educational journals over the years, has won awards and/or recognition in both fields, has been included in textbooks on progressive education and pertinent architectural surveys, and has influenced the educational approach and architectural design of many schools nationwide and even internationally. Just as the building itself is a marriage of form and function, so its impact has been a product of both its architectural and educational merits. At the time it was built in 1940, the initial design was understood to be important in both these areas. Crow Island School has continued to serve as a landmark to educators and architects alike for close to fifty years, and deserves an official designation as such.

See continuation sheet

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

- Bach, Ira J., Chicago's Famous Buildings. Chicago: Univ of Chicago Pr., 1980
- Benjamin, Susan S., Architectural Album: Chicago's North Shore. Evanston, IL.: Junior League of Evanston, 1988.
- Carbol, Betty Williams. The Making of a Special Place: A History of Crow Island School, Winnetka, Illinois. Evanston, IL.: Advanced Reproductions, 1980.
- "Carleton Washburne." Parents Magazine, vol 12, May 1937, p. 98.
- Christ-Janer, Albert. Eliel Saarinen, Finnish-American Architect and Educator. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1979.
- "Crow Island Elementary School." School Management, vol. 15:8, August 1971, p.32-33.

See continuation sheet

### 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
- Specify repository:  
Crow Island School; Winnetka Historical Museum; Winnetka Public Library

## 10. Geographical Data

Acres of property 5 Acres

### UTM References

A 1 6 4 4 0 3 6 0 4 6 6 1 1 6 0  
Zone Easting Northing

C 1 6 4 4 0 4 9 0 4 6 6 0 9 4 0

B 1 6 4 4 0 5 0 0 4 6 6 1 1 6 0  
Zone Easting Northing

D 1 6 4 4 0 3 6 0 4 6 6 0 9 2 0

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

Crow Island School, 1112 Willow Road, Winnetka, (REI #05020303001) consists of lots 48 through 70 of the Alles' Sunset Subdivision of the N.E. quarter of the S.W. quarter of Section 20-42-13 recorded July 2, 1926 (Doc. #9237144) in the East half of the Southwest quarter, Section 20, Township 42, Range 13, East of the third principle meridian in Cook County, Illinois.

See continuation sheet

### Boundary Justification

The Crow Island School grounds bordered by streets on the north, south, and east, and Crow Island Woods on the west have historically been considered the boundaries of the school.

See continuation sheet

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Janice E. Tubergen

organization Crow Island 50th Anniversary Committee date July 15, 1989

street & number 278 Ridge Avenue telephone (312) 441-6712, 446-7736

city or town Winnetka state Illinois zip code 60093

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The grounds were professionally landscaped with now mature trees and shrubbery. Robert Everly, a park superintendent, and John McFadzean, a playground director, from the neighboring community of Glencoe were consulted to lay out an ideal plan for the planting, lawns, and playgrounds to create a park-like setting that has changed very little over the years. The main entry to the school is separated from Willow Road by a large triangular area of grass and the circle driveway approached from a lane off Glendale Avenue. Paved and stone walkways connect the various playgrounds around the building. Each classroom has a courtyard area. Shallow stone steps and a low stone wall lead from the playground area near the north west wing to the sidewalk on Willow Road, where the low wall continues along the sidewalk curving back to the northeast corner of the wing. Open air space for classrooms is provided by an original open stone circle on the east side of the southeast wing. A four-tiered stone semi-circle between the northwest and southwest wings and a brick paved patio on the east side of the southwest wing, both added in 1955, provide more open air space. An outdoor stage near the semicircle was removed when the addition went on in 1955. Separated from surrounding residential areas by berming and trees along the south border and back half of the east border, Crow Island is a neighborhood school within walking distance for most students.

Each of the four wings has its own playground area and equipment located near the end of the wing. The playgrounds at the end of the southeast wing and on the east side of the kindergarten wing have examples of the first jungle gym, a forerunner in functional recreational equipment, designed by Winnetkan Theodore Hinton. Saarinen designed the hexagonal sandbox for the northwest wing, now the preschool playground. Between the school and its south border are a large paved game area and a grass playing field. Some playground equipment and landscaping has been updated or replaced, partial chain link fences surround some of the equipment in the preschool and kindergarten (northeast wing) playgrounds, and the playground for the 1955 wing was added, but overall the original layout and landscaping has remained intact.

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The four classroom wings are organized around a central building containing the common rooms of the school. The central building is rectangular in plan with its length extending east-west on the site. The north elevation of the central block is divided vertically into two zones. The eastern zone is one half the length of the western zone and contains the main entrance to the building.

The main entrance is set under an overhang between the chimney on the west and the kindergarten wing on the east. On the west side are three sets of sky-blue doors with three glass panels, transoms, and child-height hardware. The east side is balanced by a high, narrow band of windows set in large blocks of stack bond Indiana limestone with a limestone bench along the bottom. Entrance is gained from the excavated circular drive-up by a flight of seven broad, shallow steps, heated for safety in winter. The bright blue doors like the other whimsical touches in the school are meant to appeal to youngsters, drawing them inward. Other examples of these "whimsical" touches include Eliel Saarinen's off-center metal clock on the chimney, the 23 sculptural animal tiles in glazed ceramic designed by Lily Swann Saarinen which dot the exterior of the building, and the later addition of a fanciful welded crow sculpture located in front of the northeast corner of the preschool school wing.

A fifty foot tall, four foot wide, and twenty-five foot deep chimney comprises the strong vertical element of the building and divides the north face into two zones. Spiring above the flat roof, the chimney has a grid pattern of 24 five-foot squares formed by lines of recessed bricks on its east face. The horizontal lines of the gridwork wrap around the front to form bands on the north face of the chimney where an off-center metal clock extends over the west edge near the top. The gridwork pattern continues for one square on the west side of the chimney, after which are the metal rungs to climb to the top. The chimney is the most identifiable element of the school, almost like a fifth wing extended vertically.

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The western zone of the north facade of the core building is divided horizontally into three sections. The lowest section contains the raised basement with eight evenly spaced windows at the ground level. The fenestration of the first floor is a band of industrial steel windows with brown frames. The band is interrupted three times, once in the center of the zone by a broad brick pier, and by two other piers approximately six feet to either side of the center one. Each pier is approximately three feet wide. The highest section of the facade is set far back from the lower two. The extra height of this section is required to house the auditorium and play room. A band of windows runs along the west half of this section. The northwest wing, presently the preschool wing attaches perpendicularly to the core building at the west end of the the front facade.

The east side of this preschool wing facing the circle drive is fronted by a low brick wall with a cast concrete planter and seven shallow steps on the north end. Behind these is a raised asphalt area partially covered by a deep, exposed concrete beam overhang. The overhang is supported on the south by the core building and on the north end by two slender steel columns and an extended brick wall. There are four separate sets of evenly spaced, blue double doors set about six inches out from the wall. Each has glass panels, transoms, and side panels. This covered area gives the preschool wing a practical entrance and play area as well as adding texture and depth to the building. More contrasting texture is added by the brown-stained, vertical redwood panelling which covers this face. The supporting brick wall on the north end shields this area from Willow Road and is decorated with 20 evenly spaced glass bricks that allow more light into the sheltered space.

The west side of the preschool wing is a spine with four separate classroom units attached to it. These units are shaped like backwards "L's" with the narrower bottom running parallel to the spine of the building and the top jutting out. Each extended area has a glass panelled, transomed door in the southeast corner and bands of four-tiered windows extending across the south face and across the west face to within three feet of the northwest corner. The north wall of each ell is windowless, affording a private courtyard area for each classroom. The fenestration on the lower part of the ell parallel to the spine consists of a band of two-tiered windows and a separate, narrow, lavatory window close to the windowless wall of the adjoining classroom. A brick lattice covers this window.

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The entire southeast wing of the school consists of this same arrangement of a spine with four classroom units attached to the west face and mirror image units attached to the east face. On the south end of this wing is a set of double doors, with glass panels and transoms, which are flanked by narrow windows with brick latticing. The wing perpendicularly abuts the core building on the southeast corner.

The west side of the southwest wing of the building, added in 1955, is also arranged in the same fashion with five classrooms adjoining the spine. The windowless wall on the north side of the ell extends out about two feet and supports an overhang over the west facing windows. An eight inch vertical redwood coursing above the window meets the overhang. The fenestration on the lower part of the ell, parallel to the spine, consists of a band of three-tiered windows all the way across with no lavatory window. One mirror image classroom is on the southeast end of the wing. The rest of the east face of the wing consists of a wall of windows with single solid brown doors at either end. This windowed area has a slight overhang and an eleven foot wide brick patio in front of it. The doors at the south end of the wing are like those on the south end of the southeast wing. This wing joins the original core building along the west side and is perpendicular to the south face. A set of double doors is found also at the north end of the wing.

The south elevation, or back, of the core building like the front is divided vertically into two zones. It is taller than the wings to accommodate the playroom and auditorium in the school. The east zone is windowless with a double set of solid doors in the center. Separating the two zones in the middle of the back wall is a raised brick floorplan of the building approximately five feet high and to scale. The west zone which comprises about half of the building face has a band of windows at the top and evenly spaced windows at the bottom for the basement, or lower level. A greenhouse window and entrance to the basement, both added in 1975, are in the center of this zone.

The northeast or kindergarten wing is approximately half the length of the other two original wings and is rectangular in shape. It is attached perpendicularly to the middle of the core building's east end and extends northward. The south half of the east end of the core building is a wall of windows with a driveway access to the lower level underneath.



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The north and south elevations of the kindergarten wing each have two evenly spaced windowed areas with the window area on the east twice as large as the window area on the west. The east elevation has an entry area in the middle flanked by a large evenly spaced window area on either side. The entry area consists of two single doors that open in opposite directions with two evenly spaced, single rectangular windows between. An overhang is supported by two extended brick walls each with three square niches facing the doors. The entry area is covered with vertical redwood panelling and the windows are covered by redwood slats. The doors open onto the paved playground area.

The west side of the kindergarten wing has a blue double door with glass panels and transom in the south corner approached by the main entry steps. Two evenly spaced window areas are north of the door. An equal area, north of the windows to the corner of the wing, is solid except for two rectangular grills, one above the other, near the northernmost window. Evenly spaced basement windows are on the south, west, and north sides of the building. The north end also has an excavated stairway to the basement. This was added in 1966 along with a curving, low brick wall which extends from the northwest corner of the wing and follows the line of the driveway. Topped with a cast concrete ledge as is the wall in front of the preschool entrance that it faces, it blends with the architecture and provides a safety feature, separating the kindergarten playyard from the busy driveway which enters the circle from a lane off Glendale Avenue.

Quiet detail pervades the brickwork in the building. Sailor coursing along the roofline, the indented gridwork on the chimney, indented patterns around the glass blocks on the extension of the north wall of the northwest wing, and soldier stack bonding at the south end of the southwest wing entryway enrich the visual texture of the building. The brick latticing over lavatory windows changes pattern on different sides of the wings. The Lily Swann Saarinen animal tiles which vary in size and shape are set with different brickwork patterns and detailing. Because of a firing error when the first tiles were made, the sculptress never finished the number of tiles originally planned. Decorative brickwork instead fills these niches.

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The many walls with steel framed windows are a dominant architectural feature. The windows are tiered rectangular panes of glass, set horizontally, with narrow metal frames painted brown. They vary in height by number of tiers and in width by number of units run together. In almost all groupings most of the windows are fixed lights. Some of the lower ones open inward and upper ones open outward for ventilation. The windows flood the school with light as do the flat skylights over the hallways and in the windowed corners of the original classrooms. The skylights have round interior openings in the original wings and in the 1955 wing hallways they have a flat, rectangular shape.

Functional design, light, and use of exposed brick and vertical wood panelling continue inside Crow Island School. Use of acoustical materials to allow interaction at a manageable noise level and interior fittings that are scaled to the children's size are key elements in the design. The architects followed the direction of the educators to insure that "everywhere children and what they do shall be the adornment of the structure." (Architectural Forum, August, 1941, p. 80)

A single classroom model was designed before any thought was given to the layout of the building. The classrooms are self-contained, backward L-shaped units with the main area of about 23 by 32 feet. The art and science alcoves, comprising the bottom of the ell, have a sink, a counter with windows over it for natural light, a gas jet for science experiments, and a washroom and drinking fountain scaled to the age of the children using them. The main area is a flexible space extending outward with two walls of windows and window benches under them for individual and smaller group projects. There were no fixed desks as was common in existing schools. The black boards and light switches are at heights appropriate for the age group in the classroom, as are the bathroom fixtures. The ceilings are low (under 9 1/2 feet) for intimacy and acoustically treated. Hidden incandescent lighting in the old wings, designed by expert Prof. Stanley McCandless of Yale University Drama School, and florescent light in the new wing add to all the natural light provided by the windows. The light colored asphalt tile over the reinforced concrete foundation also reflects light as well as absorbing sound and providing easy maintenance.

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The interior partitions are of brick or steel frame covered with vertical ponderosa pine panelling. This not only adds to the quietness of the building, but the panelling treated only with min-wax is light reflecting and easy to maintain. Children may tack their work to the surface which will swell back over tack holes when treated with warm water. The natural beauty of the wood is enhanced by use. Hidden storage cupboards along one whole panelled wall of the classroom, storage areas in the window benches on two walls, and cupboards and drawers under the art counters keep the rooms open and uncluttered for work.

Recessed lockers in the hallway replace the traditional coatroom or pegs that ate up classroom space. The vertical pine panelling for tacking up artwork, the light asphalt tile floor reflecting light from the ceiling skylights, and the acoustical treatment of the ceiling and parts of the walls make the corridors of the classroom wings a pleasant access and unified transition to the shared areas in the core building of the school. The hallway in the core building is natural brick with rounded corners and three child-high strips of wood to protect children from scrapes.

By the main entrance across from the auditorium the hallway widens to a lobby with a bank of windows facing east and a flexible space large enough for meetings and social gatherings. More of the animal sculpture ceramic tiles are found on the walls. Slender steel columns and exposed steel ceiling beams set this area off. At either end of the core building hallway, wide stairways surrounded by low brick walls, metal railings and open brick columns for light lead to facilities in the lower level of the building.

These shared or community areas in the core building originally included an auditorium, a playroom (a gymnasium encouraging "non-competitive" games), an art room, a library and school offices on the main level. The lower level contained a shop and science room, a music room, a pioneer room (patterned after an 1860's log cabin in southern Illinois), a museum, a visual education room, a bicycle room accessible from an outdoor ramp, and teacher activity areas as well as some storage. Details like the cozy fireplace in the original library and a nurse's office with a long, narrow hall the exact length needed for eye tests abound in these areas, again attesting to the functionality of the design.

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The auditorium is acoustically perfect and seats 400 students. The Saarinens designed the Kleinhans Music Hall in Buffalo, New York, shortly before working on Crow Island, and brought to the auditorium many of the acoustical, lighting, and design features that made Kleinhans "one of the works of art in contemporary design." (Christ-Janer, Eliel Saarinen, p. 92) The irregular stage, the unbalanced sides of the room, and the curved plaster ceiling bring elements of intimacy and surprise to the room. Strips of the natural brickwork in the acoustically paneled walls, light oak veneer on the curved stage wall, and varnished plywood benches add a continuity to the rest of the building as well as a functional beauty. The benches are molded to fit a child's back and graduated in size for children from small to large as they proceed up the incline to back of the auditorium.

Eero Saarinen designed the auditorium benches as well as the original bonded plywood furniture used throughout the school, a style which he later refined, with Charles Eames, into award winning adult plywood furniture. The light, economical chairs, tables, desks, and benches as well as upholstered pieces for the lobby and library were manufactured by the WPA. Lily Swann Saarinen, Eero's wife at the time, designed the bright print used in the curtains for each classroom. The classroom doors were painted either bright red, yellow, or blue, and the color was continued on any unpanelled areas in the classroom. Over the years the furniture and drapes wore out and had to be replaced. Economical, child-size furniture was now available and used for replacement. Shades and blinds replaced the curtains. Although the doors are still painted in bright colors, the strict color-coding in the classroom is no longer followed. These changes do not affect the integrity or function of the school, however these aspects of design were part of the impact of Crow Island School had on school architecture and design, and therefore deserve mention. Some of the original furnishings still exist at the school.

Crow Island School opened in 1940 with about 300 students, but by the early 1950's the baby boom made the enrollment surge and additional space a necessity. Winnetka school officials and architects visited some of the best and newest schools for ideas, but the floorplan and features of the original building had functioned so well that a new wing was planned with only a few alterations.

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The exterior of the addition is slightly different in window treatment and use of an overhang to cut down on window glare (see photos 5 and 6). The architects added four feet to one dimension of the room for more flexibility in classroom features. Inside the wing, the heights of the window seats, blackboards, and light switches were raised to scale for the fourth and fifth graders that would be using classrooms. Fluorescent lighting was used instead of incandescent. Acoustic tile rather than acoustically treated cement was used for the ceilings. Benches attached to the hallway walls close to classroom doors were introduced to give space for conferences. A meeting area with a fireplace and bank of windows similar to the lobby hallway in the original building was a feature in the new corridor. The use of the same materials inside and out as were used in the old wing make the new wing, which is attached to the west side of the core building along Crow Island Woods, virtually indistinguishable in look and feeling from the original building.

The Resource Center was built in Crow Island School's lower level in 1975. The existing library space had become inadequate for books and modern resource equipment and materials. An area of about 6,700 square feet space was available in the basement to rearrange and remodel. The design incorporated the Crow Island School concepts of flexible space, areas for group and individual activities, child-scale furnishing and equipment, use of light through larger windows in the back wall of the wing, simple, easy maintenance materials, and color and whimsical design to appeal to children. Again Perkins and Will Corporation were hired as the architects for the remodeling, and the project was directed by Bill Brubaker. The special equipment designers were Curtis and Smith Associates from Massachusetts.

In the early 1960's when school enrollment peaked, a wooden mobile classroom unit was tacked on to the end of the 1955 wing. Sited north-south along the edge of a paved play area, it minimally impacted the landscape. Later, when this was no longer needed for classroom space, it was used as a lunchroom for the few children who did not go home for lunch. The structure is now in the process of being removed, and therefore will not impact the integrity of the building.

The excellent workmanship and design of Crow Island School have worn well over time. The Lily Swann Saarinen glazed ceramic tiles on the exterior of the building have suffered some weather damage and erosion, as have some of the concrete stairs. Some floor tile has been replaced with tile similar in color and type

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to the original. The foundation has a crack in the northwest wing. The vertical pine paneling in the classrooms and the acoustical material on the ceiling have darkened with age and need to be professionally cleaned. Otherwise the school is in excellent condition and retains its overall integrity.

After almost fifty years Crow Island School is still an integral part of Winnetka's educational system. Serving about 500 students from preschool through 5th grade, the building has continued to function successfully for both students and teachers. Observing the school's 25th anniversary in 1965, American School and University recorded the comment of architect Linn Smith upon visiting Crow Island School:

"Some buildings--great buildings perhaps--mature gracefully as they grow older; others simply grow old. Crow Island has achieved a patina much as does fine silver; it has become more beautiful as it has grown older and been used by children....What is it that gives Crow Island this uniqueness? Two things probably: a great--and successful--effort was made to accommodate a specific educational philosophy; and an equally great--and successful--effort was made to create a climate, a spirit which would inspire, which would give pleasure, and which would gain the respect of children."

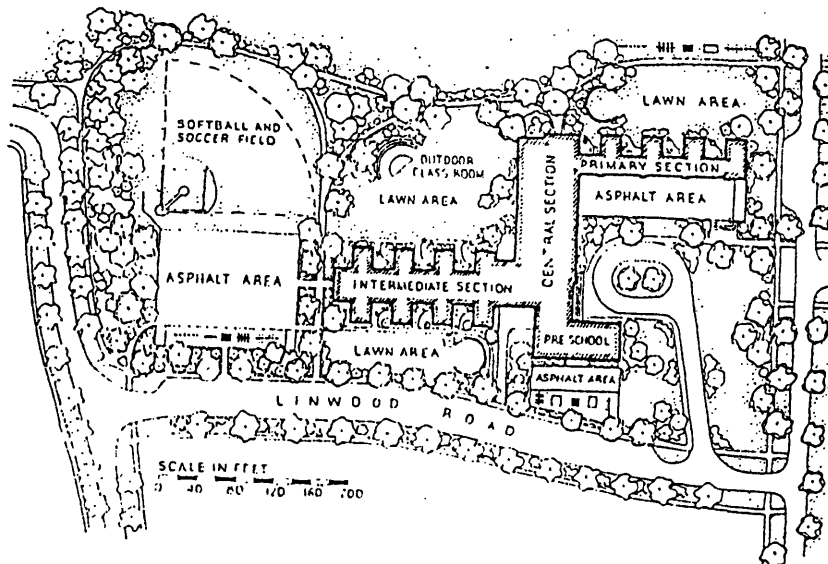
This still holds true at the end of another twenty-five years that have only served to enhance the patina of Crow Island School.

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donating them. Classrooms are free of the boring uniformity and are separated  
by small garden-like spaces.



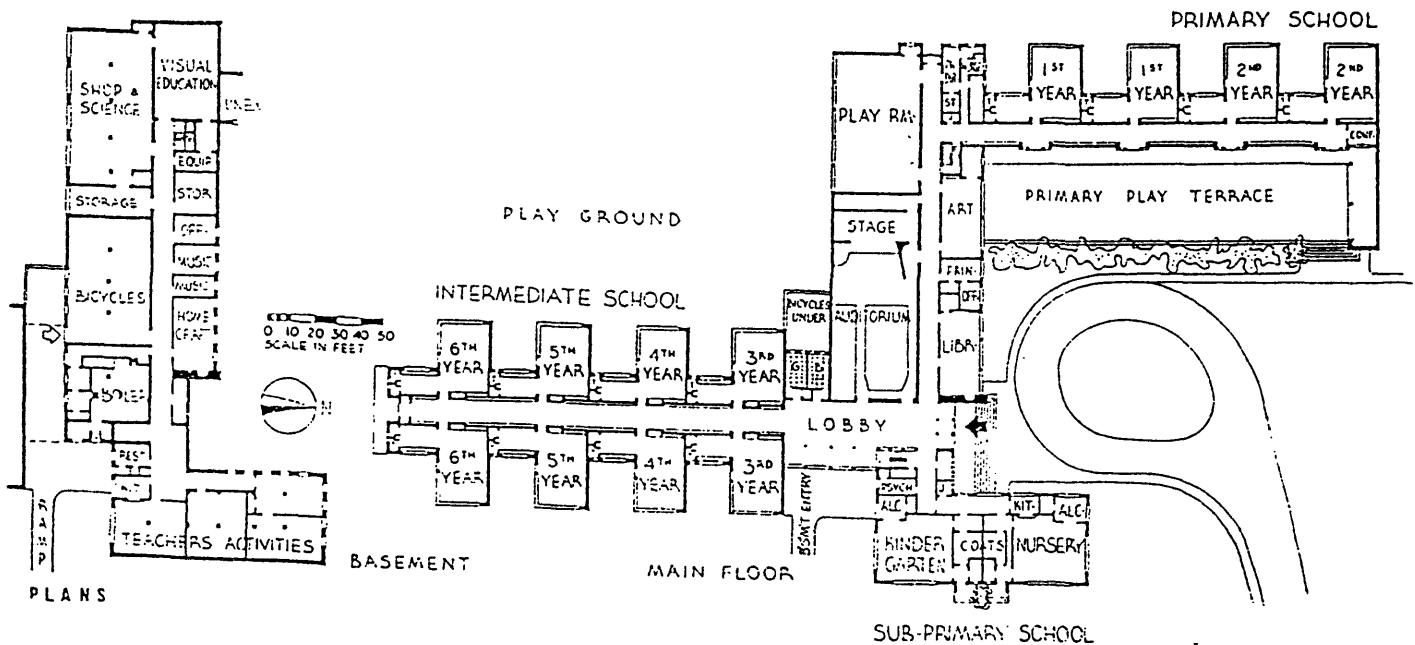
AUGUST 1941

Original 1941 lay-out of building and grounds.

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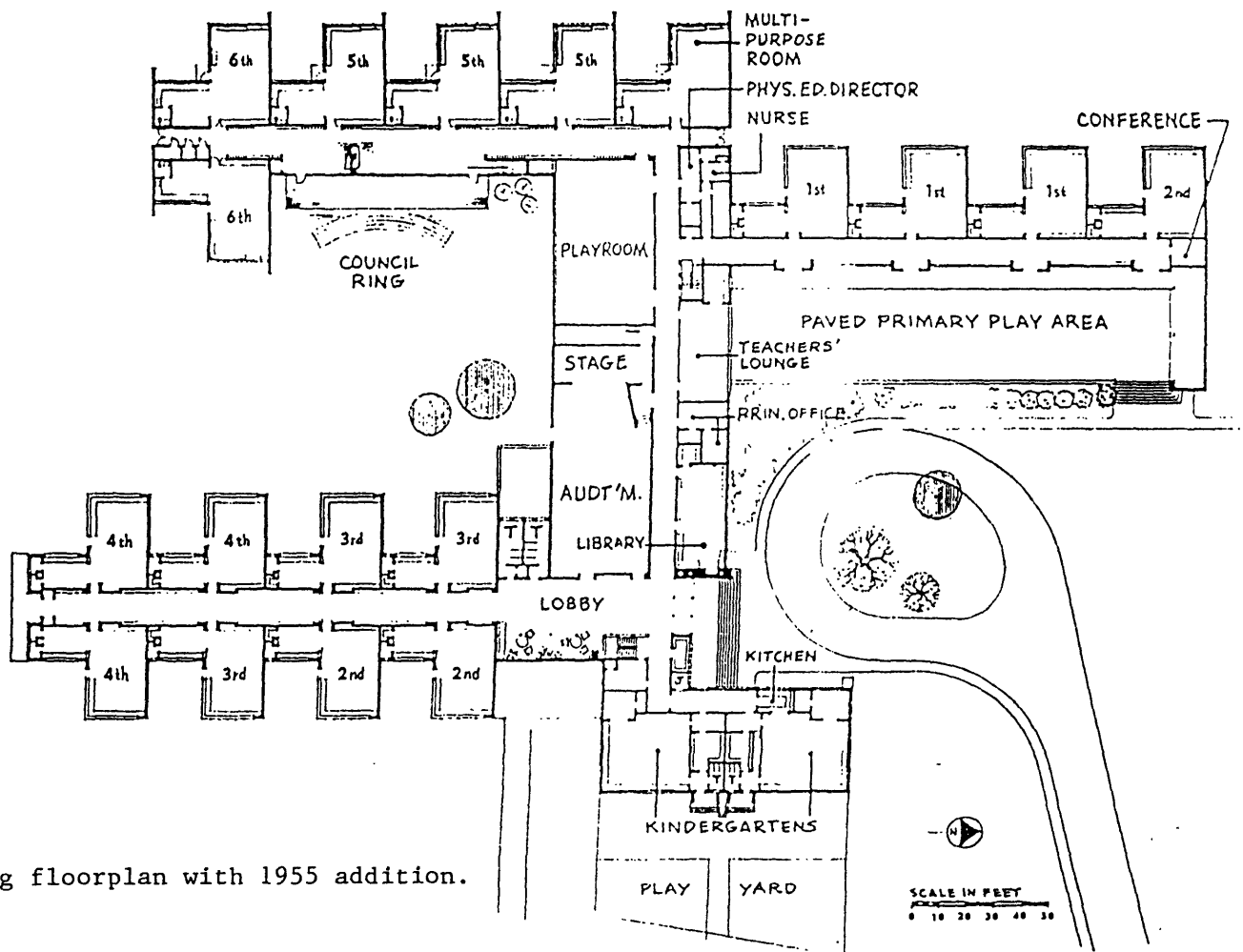
Original 1941 floorplan of building and basement.



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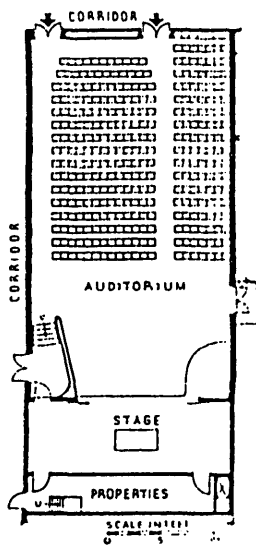
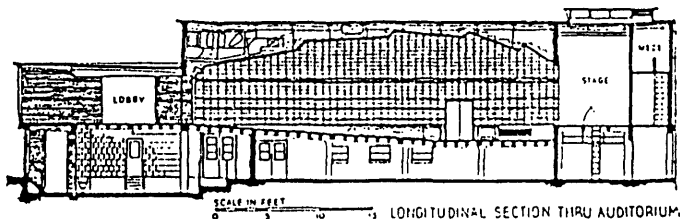


Building floorplan with 1955 addition.

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PLAN

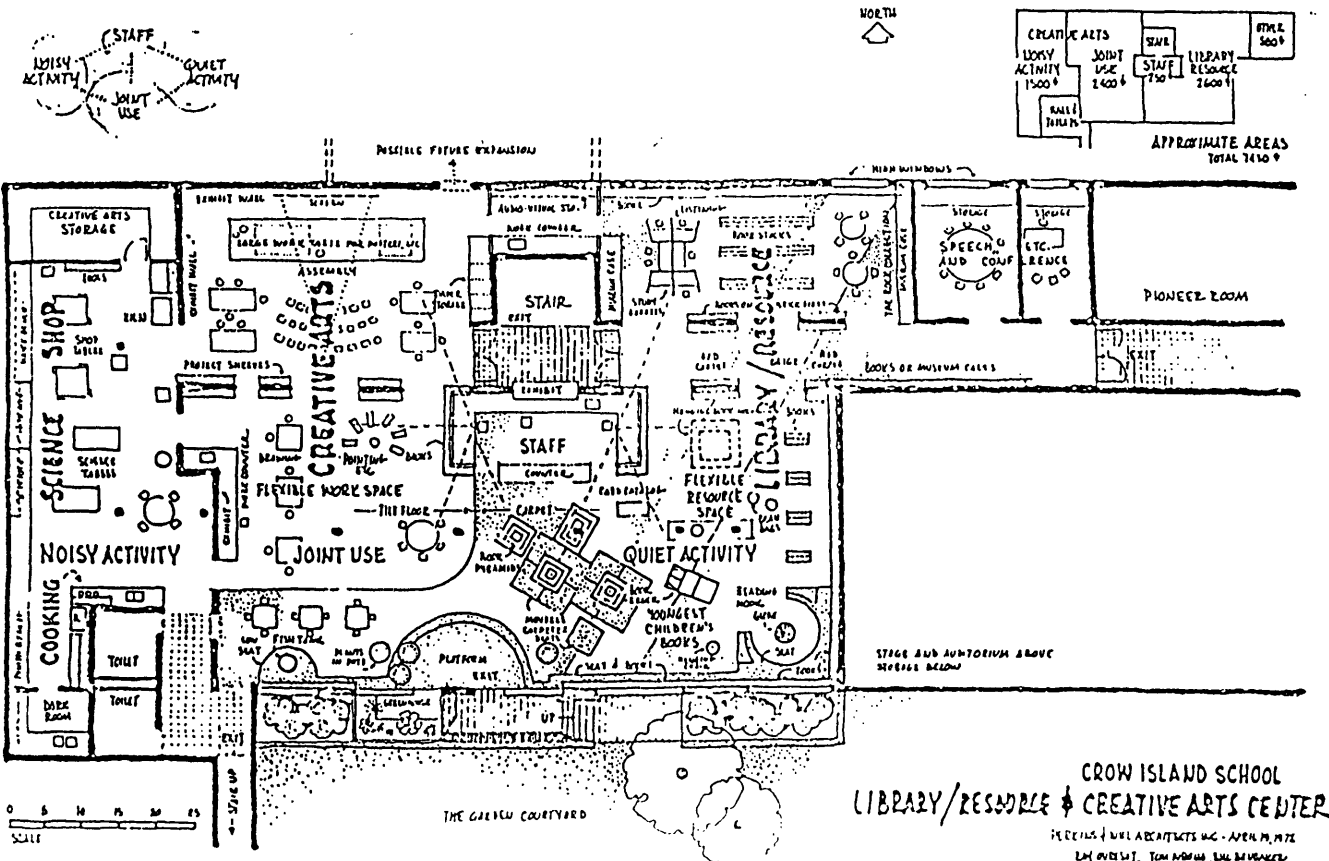
Auditorium cross-section and floor plan.

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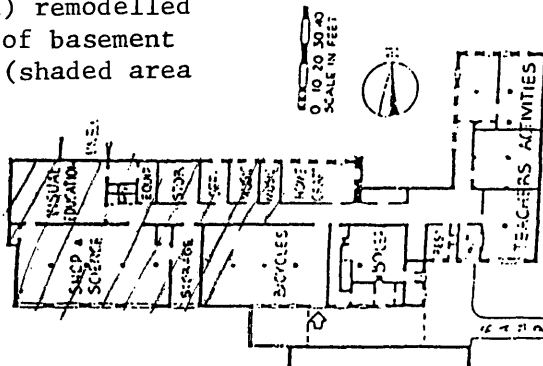
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The Resource Center (above) remodelled in 1975 from western part of basement in original core building (shaded area below).



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In 1940 Crow Island School appeared after a long vacuum in school building. The United States was just emerging from the Great Depression, and very few new schools had been built for a decade. The Progressive Education Movement which had flowered in the 1920's and developed further during the 1930's had few new schools to physically embody its philosophies. Architects and educators were ready for something new to write about. Around the time that Crow Island School was built, a handful of other educators and architects were trying similar experiments, but for the most part these were either in private country day schools or avant garde West Coast schools. Crow Island School was a public school in the staid midwest that was built for about \$287,000, a reasonable school budget that even made it necessary to cut back on some design aspects.

The architectural stature of the Saarinen's, the educational influence of Washburne, and the promotion of the design by Perkins, Wheeler, and Will focused great attention on the building in 1940 and this focus was enhanced by the fact that World War II brought on another building hiatus. By the time building of schools resumed, the style and principles of Crow Island School had been accepted and incorporated into the architectural and educational vernacular.

World War II and the subsequent "cold war" years brought about a return to traditional American values that affected education. The progressive education movement was associated with a world-wide view of child training and socialistic views of behavior that were eyed with suspicion by post-war Americans. But Crow Island School and its principles had been introduced before the war and had been well-received. Architectural Forum in its August, 1941, issue had given the school a wonderful write-up emphasizing the contributions of the educators. Also, progressive educator Carleton Washburne had left the district in 1943 to work for the U.S. government reopening schools in Italy that had been seized by the fascists. This made Crow Island School and Washburne's legacy, which came to be know as the "Winnetka Plan", more acceptable to the mainstream as a model for new schools built to accommodate the baby-booming population.

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Superintendent of Winnetka Public Schools, 1919-1943, Carleton Wolsey Washburne said of Crow Island School, "This is to be our dream school. For years we have been thinking about it. We want it to be the most functional and beautiful school in the world. We want it to crystallize in architecture the best educational practices we can evolve." (Marland and Washburne, Winnetka: The History and Significance of an Educational Experiment, p. 139) Washburne had been evolving these educational practices which reflected the progressive education movement and its "child-centeredness" almost since his own childhood. He not only incorporated them into the Winnetka school system but wrote about them extensively in books and journals until he was recognized as one of the national representatives of progressive education. Washburne's reputation and the reputation of the school system he administered contributed greatly to the impact of Crow Island School.

Born in 1889, Carleton Washburne's education was influenced by his mother's friendship with the two giants of progressive education in America, John Dewey (1859-1952) and Francis W. Parker (1837-1902). During his early years he attended the Francis Parker School in Chicago. This early grounding in progressive education prepared Washburne for his first teaching job in 1912 in rural California, for which he only needed his bachelor of arts degree from Stanford with no teaching credentials. His educational ideals blossomed at San Francisco State Normal School where from 1914 to 1919 he worked under progressive educator Frederic Burk while also pursuing his doctorate in education at the University of California at Berkeley. These ideals flowered when he became superintendent of Winnetka Public Schools in 1919, until they became the full-blown system embodied in Crow Island School.

The Encyclopedia of Education (1971) in its article on the progressive education movement underscores how quickly Washburne became an influential figure in his field:

"The public school system which best exemplified the new pedagogical approach of focusing upon the child in the educational process and giving particular attention to his needs was located in Winnetka, Ill., a Chicago suburb, where Carleton W. Washburne became superintendent in 1919. His schools became the representative progressive system of the 1920's....the Winnetka schools designed students' programs individually and acknowledged that their studies must be appropriate to their separate stages of development."

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His reputation increased not only because of his success in the Winnetka Public School System, but because he published, in the 1920's alone, over 100 articles in both national and internationally recognized educational journals. These articles discussed his methods, philosophy, and curriculum and the results he achieved in their application. He also wrote textbooks and curriculum materials.

Washburne's influence continued during the Depression times of the 1930's when with his publications like The Remakers of Mankind (1932), he gave hope to the American society who looked to education and educators to lead in reorganizing American life economically, socially and politically. He addressed the World Conference on New Education, Cheltenham, England, in 1936, and became interested in children worldwide. He continued, however, to direct most of his energies toward concrete curriculum and the methodology of teaching children. The titles of his articles published during this time period show a very practical bent. Also during this time Washburne spent his summers lecturing at colleges and universities with education programs. His influence and ideas also spread through the Graduate Teachers College of Winnetka which Washburne and the Winnetka Public Schools helped to co-sponsor.

When Crow Island School was commissioned in 1938, Carleton Washburne knew what he wanted in the only new school that would be designed while he was superintendent in Winnetka. (Although Skokie Junior High School in Winnetka was built in 1922 during his tenure, its design had already been set in 1919 when he arrived.) Crow Island School would be the culmination of Carleton Washburne's "Winnetka Plan", his progressive education system developed during the twenties and thirties while he was Superintendent of Winnetka Public Schools. With the school board behind him because of all his success as an administrator (he never went over budget), Washburne was the guiding influence in choosing the architects, insuring that they incorporated suggestions of teachers and other school personnel, and dictating aspects of the functional design.

The separated wings zoned for different grade levels with a community center, the child-scale fixtures and furniture, and the self-contained classroom with flexible space for individual activities and individual access to the outdoors all were part of Washburne's vision for a truly child-centered school. He had learned much about acoustics and sanitation from the other schools in Winnetka and generally what had and had not worked

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with his progressive education practices. This led to the wide spread use of acoustical material so that the noise of separate study groups would not interfere with learning and the inclusions of a bathroom and drinking fountain in each classroom so that there would be no lining up to use facilities. The forms and features of Crow Island School were developed around Washburne's educational framework. The American public, especially the educators, were interested to see what would develop from the framework constructed by this influential, outspoken, and sometimes controversial progressive educator.

In 1943 Washburne resigned from his position in Winnetka and accepted a commission in the army to reopen schools and universities in Italy and rid them of fascism and Fascists. He remained overseas until 1949 when he accepted an administrative position at Brooklyn College as Director of Teacher Education, where he stayed for eleven years until he retired. "By the late forties and early fifties, about the only realm in which a committed Progressive educator could find sympathetic associates was a school of education in a university, and not surprisingly a great many former school principals and school superintendents sought refuge there." (Leaders in American Education, 1971, p. 490) In 1960 he became a "distinguished professor" at Michigan State University, College of Education. Although Washburne continued to write and retain an international reputation, he never again received the prominence and influence he had enjoyed in Winnetka. He is most remembered for his twenty-four years there and his crowning achievement, Crow Island School.

By the time Eliel Saarinen (1873-1950) received the commission for Crow Island School, he already had an international reputation. In his native Finland first with the firm of Gesellius, Lindgren and Saarinen, Helingsfors, beginning in 1897, and later on his own he had won competitions to design major municipal buildings including libraries, museums, and railroad stations. In addition he designed many churches, apartment buildings and private residences. He came to the United States after winning second prize in the international competition to design the Tribune Tower in Chicago in 1922. His design powerfully influenced one of the first prize winners, Raymond Hood, as is evidenced in some of his later work, and drew praise from Louis Sullivan.

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ElieI continued to be successful in the United States, winning special recognition for his work at Cranbrook Academy for the Arts in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, for which he designed numerous buildings. Because of Cranbrook and his interest in the interior as well as exterior design of a building, ElieI was associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement in design and architecture. As a Finnish architect who opted for clean modern lines of design and natural materials, ElieI was associated with the International School. The use of natural light and interior details along with a concern for designing a building to blend with its natural setting caused him to be compared with Frank Lloyd Wright. Cranbrook also involved ElieI with the concept of a community devoted to an educational and artistic ideal, which allied him with the Progressive Movement in education. By 1938 ElieI Saarinen's reputation was established as a progressive architect whose work generated interest in the professional journals because it continually changed in appearance according to function and setting.

Eero Saarinen (1910-1961) had only recently begun to officially collaborate with his father in 1938 when they received the commission for Crow Island School. He originally had studied to be a sculptor in Paris, although he had always worked to some extent for his father. After graduating from the Yale University School of Architecture, Eero gradually became more involved in his father's firm and the Cranbrook Academy of Arts. Sculptural elements of design continued to interest him and found expression in his and Charles Eames' Organic Design Furniture for the Museum of Modern Art Competition in c.1940. The design of this furniture is reflected in the design of the plywood furniture which he created for Crow Island School, and the reputation he achieved from the competition provoked interest in the school's furnishings.

Eero's collaboration brought to his father's work a new perspective. Although ElieI was considered a progressive architect, he had his roots in the romantic traditions of an earlier century. As Eero's later work shows, he was a much more sculptural and futuristic architect than his father. Their work together at Crow Island School, coming as it did at the culmination of ElieI's career and the beginning of Eero's, is part of the unique historical placement of Crow Island School in which the culmination of the principles of progressive education were embodied in an architectural form that set the pattern for the future.



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Lawrence B. (Larry) Perkins, Todd Wheeler, and Philip Will, Jr., were a firm of young and fairly inexperienced architects in 1938 when they received the commission for Crow Island School. Larry Perkins and his associations with Winnetka as well as the architecture world were the main reason that they became collaborators on Crow Island School. Because Crow Island School was their big chance, they publicized the school as much as they could, and went on to build over 500 more schools that embodied many Crow Island School elements.

Larry Perkins was an ideal choice for the Crow Island School project. His father, Dwight Heald Perkins (1867-1941), was a well-known architect who had designed a number of schools in the Chicago area. Two of those schools happened to be in Winnetka--Skokie School (1919-1922), which was one of the first junior high school buildings in the country, and Hubbard Woods School (1915), a one-story grammar school. Both schools embodied elements such as skylights, large areas of window, and easy access to the outdoors that worked well in the Winnetka education plan and could be adapted into the Crow Island School design. The limitations of these schools such as acoustical problems due to high ceilings and surface materials, difficult or disruptive access to common areas, and insufficient restroom facilities would be corrected in the Crow Island School design. Larry Perkins was not only familiar with the design aspects of these existing schools, but also knew many of the Winnetka School Board members as well as the superintendent, Carleton Washburne.

Washburne wanted non-traditional architects to build his "dream school", but he needed architects with enough experience and stature to give the building credibility. Although Washburne knew Larry Perkins, it was not until Perkins proposed to get his friends, the Saarins, to collaborate that Washburne would even consider hiring the young firm of Perkins, Wheeler, and Will. The Saarins were persuaded to enter the project because of their interest in education and the opportunity to design a whole new kind of school from the inside out, but it was the connection with Perkins that brought Crow Island School to their attention.

Once they received the commission, Perkins, Wheeler and Will did most of the preliminary legwork for the design. At Washburne's behest they spoke to teachers and students and observed classes. Even the school janitor had valuable input into the project. A more established firm might not have had the flexibility and fresh perspective that allowed the young architects to consider all the aspects that Washburne proposed.

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Larry Perkins was also highly influenced by his father's work, and his own understanding of the educational climate in Winnetka. Again there was a culmination of the best of the past reinterpreted by an architect of the future.

Perkins, Wheeler, and Will spent their share of the profits from Crow Island School on photographs of the school taken by Hedrich Blessing. Hal Burnett, their public relations man, helped to bring the school to national attention. The firm, which shortly became known as Perkins and Will, went on to design over 500 schools, many of them schools in various parts of the country including Heathcote School (1951), an award winning school in Scarsdale, New York. All of their subsequent work was influenced by Crow Island School. In a 1987 newspaper interview, Larry Perkins affirmed, "My professional, personal identity is the Crow Island School."

In 1955 Architectural Forum said of Crow Island School, "Time and use--not only here but in many hundred later schools-- have proved out the workability of its innovations...." When Perkins and Will went to look for more recent innovations to incorporate into the wing addition in 1955, they found nothing as good as what they already had at Crow Island School. In 1955 Jack Train of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill said after 25 years, "there have been no significant advances in elementary school design since Crow Island School." In 1956 it was selected by fifty architects and scholars as twelfth among all buildings and first among all schools in the Architectural Record poll to name the most significant buildings in the past one hundred years in America.

Soon after Crow Island School opened, 10,000 visitors had toured the buildings and grounds. Almost thirty national magazines as well as numerous books and newspapers carried articles on the school. In 1944 enlargements of Crow Island School were included in an exhibition of the New Architecture of the United States that was sent to Cairo, Egypt. Schools as far away as Victoria and Tasmania, Australia have been patterned after Crow Island School.

Crow Island School received an initial award in the early 1940's from the American Institute of Architects as the school most advanced in elementary school design in the United States. So pervasive and lasting was the school's impact that in 1971 The American Institute of Architects conferred its twenty-five year award on it. The citation calls Crow Island School:

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"A landmark in design for education which demonstrates that an inspired educational philosophy can be translated into an architecture of continuing function and beauty.

In recognition of the vision and foresight of an enlightened client, the Winnetka, Illinois, Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools Carleton Washburne, and their architects Perkins, Wheeler, & Will and Eliel and Eero Saarinen, the Institute hereby honors a project that remains as viable today as when it was built."

Today there are still many visitors and much interest in Crow Island School from both the educational and architectural community. The building still fulfills its functions as a grammar school, and teachers who no longer subscribe to "progressive education" cannot help but use the flexibility of the rooms, the access to the outdoors, the child-scale features and areas to display children's work in a way that makes their teaching more "child-centered" and geared toward recognition of the individual. The pattern is the same everywhere across the country in schools inspired by Crow Island School. The educational philosophy can never be divorced from the form and function of the building. In recognizing the school's architectural merit and its contribution to the history of school architecture, it is also necessary to recognize its educational merit. Crow Island School embodies Carleton Washburne's contribution to the history of education and reflects his influence on the way in which teachers pursue their craft and relate to the children that are their students.

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### SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 89001730

Date Listed: 10/27/89

Crow Island School  
Property Name

Cook  
County

IL  
State

#### Multiple Name

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*Patrick W. Andrus*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

*10/27/89*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

#### Amended Items in Nomination:

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The nomination form for this property contains a discrepancy in the number of schools built by the architectural firm Perkins and Will. Ann Swallow of the Illinois SHPO clarified this point with the firm, and notes that sentence in section 8, page 7, paragraph 1 should be changed to "...went on to build over 500 more schools", and paragraph 2 on the following page should read "...went on to design over 500 schools..." The form is officially amended to reflect these changes.

#### DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)