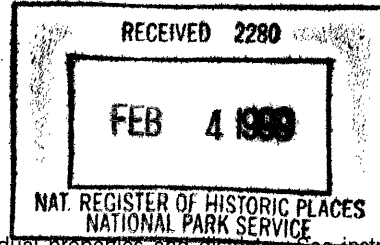


**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**



274

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 South Junior High School  
other names/site number 32 GF 2757

**2. Location**

street & number 1224 Walnut Street n/a  not for publication  
city or town Grand Forks n/a  vicinity  
state North Dakota code ND county Grand Forks code 035 zip code 58201

**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.)

Samuel J. Wagner, SHPO Date 1/28/99  
Signature of certifying official/Title  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**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
  - removed from the National Register
  - other, (explain):

Elson H. Beall 3/5/99

Coar Keeper

---

**5. Classification**

---

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private  
 public-local  
 public-State  
 public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building(s)  
 district  
 site  
 structure  
 object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

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

n/a

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

n/a

---

**6. Function or Use**

---

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: school

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

---

**7. Description**

---

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY  
REVIVALS: Late Gothic Revival: Collegiate  
Gothic

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
walls BRICK  
roof OTHER (composition flat roofing)  
other

**Narrative Description**

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

(see continuation sheet)

---

## 8. Statement of Significance

---

### Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

### Criteria Considerations

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

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.

### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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### Bibliography

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

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION

ARCHITECTURE

### Period of Significance

1931 - 1948

### Significant Dates

1932 (completion of original section)

1956 (completion of west wing)

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

### Cultural Affiliation

n/a

### Architect/Builder

Theodore B. Wells, architect, 1932 and 1956

Thorvaldson-Johnson, contractors, 1932

#### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- other
- name of repository:

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property less than one**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 14 647060 5307870 2 \_\_\_\_\_  
zone easting northing zone easting northing**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property)

Lots 19 through 34, Block 1, Lincoln Park View Addition to City of Grand Forks, North Dakota.

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected)

The boundaries of the nominated area coincide with the legal boundaries for the property.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

---

name/title Clayton B. Fraser, Principal  
organization FRASERdesign date 31 May 1998  
street & number P.O. Box 6025 telephone 970.669.7969  
city or town Loveland state Colorado zip code 80537

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps**A **USGS map** (7½ or 15 minute series) indicating the property's locationA **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 MDI Limited Partnership No. 38  
street & number 1600 University Avenue, Suite 212 telephone 612.646.7848  
city or town St. Paul state Minnesota zip code 55104**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 Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

section number 7 page 1

 SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL Grand Forks County, North Dakota

South Junior High School is situated within the mildly urban setting of the eastern North Dakota city of Grand Forks. The building lies in an early 20th century residential neighborhood several blocks south of Grand Forks' central business district. The nearby buildings are primarily single-family dwellings, one or two stories in height, with modestly scaled architecture and conventional residential landscaping. South Junior High is loosely surrounded by other public and parochial school buildings of varying vintages. Three blocks north is Roosevelt School, a three-story, foursquare brick block erected in 1909-1910 by the Grand Forks Independent School District No. 1 (which built South Junior High and all of Grand Forks' existing public schools). Five blocks west is Lewis & Clark Elementary School, an undistinguished brick structure built in 1953. Five blocks east was the Lincoln Elementary School (1948), which, like South Junior High, was damaged during the flood of April 1997. Two church-owned schools—Holy Family and Immanuel—are located six blocks south and west of South. Five blocks beyond these to the south is Viking Elementary School, built in 1957.

South Junior High is situated on the north side of 13th Avenue between Walnut and Cottonwood Streets. Encompassing the entire southern quarter of an elongated block, the property has frontage along the three streets. The building originally faced Walnut Street, with an open playground behind [see *Figure 4*]; an addition in 1956 extended its length along 13th Avenue, covering the playground and changing what was once a side wall into a secondary facade. The school is set back from the concrete sidewalks on three sides, giving it a more imposing countenance and integrating it with the front-lawn setbacks of its residential neighbors. Between the sidewalk and the school is a small grass lawn; evergreen shrubs are planted formally at the building's corners and alongside the south and west entrances. Large deciduous trees are aligned in the grassed parkways on three sides. The school is accessed by two massively framed entrances on the original east side, one on the south side and one on the west. The requisite flagpole stands in the parkway in front of the east facade.

Designed in 1931 by Grand Forks architect Theodore B. Wells for the school district, South Junior High School was originally configured as a two-story (with partial basement), U-shaped structure, 208'0" wide by 120'0" deep, with a rear light court. Supported by masonry exterior bearing walls, reinforced concrete interior columns, and pan-type roof and floor slabs over gypsum-encased steel beams, the building was classed as a fireproof structure.

The defining elements of the original building are essentially intact today. The roof is flat, covered with composition roofing and lined with brick parapets all around. Exterior walls are sheathed with wire-brushed red brick, produced by the Twin City Brick Company of Minneapolis and laid in a common bond. The bricks are laid in a basketweave pattern in the spandrel panels between the first- and second-floor windows. They form decorative diamond patterns in the panels on either end of the facade. A cast stone watertable, which also forms the continu-

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section number 7 page 2

**SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL** Grand Forks County, North Dakota

ous sill for the first-floor windows, extends around the building's perimeter. Two similarly shaped beltcourses line the parapets. The windows on the facade and sidewalls are evenly spaced in banks between brick pilasters. Although the original casement and fixed-sash windows have been replaced with the present aluminum frames, the original openings remain unchanged. The west side of the building features the same fenestration pattern, brickwork and belt coursing as the facade and south sides. As the nominal rear of the building, the north side presents a series of blank brick walls. The only part of the exterior that breaks the pattern of the facade, and this only slightly, is the gymnasium that flanks the light court. Here a single row of windows (more recently infilled with bricks) lined the walls on the west side. A raised basement is situated at ground level in the rear light court. This features plain brick walls, minor fenestration and a flat roof punctuated by a tall brick chimney for the furnace boilers.

The school derives its architectural distinction from its symmetrical, Collegiate Gothic facade. The central, two-story bank of windows on the facade is flanked on both sides by massive two-story entrances with ornamental surrounds. Each entrance features a double-leaf doorway with transom framed on both sides by brick/concrete engaged columns, which also frame the second-floor window. On the second floor above the entrance is a large, fixed-sash window with segmental-arched head. And above that is a Gothic battlement made up of cast stone shafts and pinnacles with basketweave brick infill panels. Both the first-floor doorway and the second-floor window feature splayed surrounds made up of cast stone blocks. Effectively framing the facade, these twin entrance towers constitute defining elements for the building. They contain the school's most distinctive features—high-relief, romanticized figures of school children, a boy and a girl on each tower, reading *Treasure Island* and *Little Women* respectively.

Though not a high-style interpretation of the Collegiate Gothic style, Wells' design for South Junior High reflected the school's relatively late date and the modest means of his client. Collegiate Gothic was an offshoot of the Late Gothic Revival style, which had found widespread popularity for ecclesiastical, educational and some commercial buildings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. First introduced to America on the campus of Bryn Mawr, Collegiate Gothic soon found its voice at ivy league schools such as Princeton, where President Woodrow Wilson in 1902 commented, "Gothic architecture has added a thousand years to the history of the university, and has pointed every man's imagination to the earliest traditions of learning in the English-speaking race." The ascendance of Collegiate Gothic coincided with a rapid expansion of college campuses that occurred after the turn of the century, making it the style of choice among campus architects throughout the country.

Although its popularity was beginning to wane by the 1930s, Collegiate Gothic still received use for public buildings such as South Junior High. Wells limited his stylistic references on this building to the formal symmetry of the facade and vertically proportioned entrance towers. Gothic features include the archivolted second-floor windows over the entrances, splayed door-

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

section number 7 page 3

**SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL** Grand Forks County, North Dakota

way surrounds, projecting cast stone blocks, wrought iron sconces, angled pinnacles and Gothic-lettered school name plate at the parapet.

South Junior High was a point of pride for the city. Soon before its opening in September 1932, the school was described in detail by the *Grand Forks Herald*:

The building has two stories above the basement. Two wings extend from the rear of the building, one housing the gymnasium and the other, classrooms... In addition to 17 classrooms, the building includes a large gymnasium to be used for physical education classes and as an auditorium for plays and other programs; an assembly room for various class programs and to be used as a study hall, an office and a cafeteria.

There are two front entrances to the school. The general office is situated on the first floor and includes a waiting room, bookroom, and the private office of the principal. The assembly room, also on the first floor, will be used for Parent-Teachers association meetings, programs, dramatics, motion pictures and lectures. Weekly programs for each grade are planned for the assembly.

Eight of the 17 classrooms have been assigned to no particular subject, but are suitable for all the academic studies. In addition, there are especially equipped classrooms for music, geography, general science, lectures, food classes, sewing classes, art, commercial subjects and manual training.

The gymnasium is about 50 by 70 feet in size, large enough for basketball games and other activities. Portable seats are stored under the stage and will be set up when the gym is used for programs. The room has a stage along one side, and a balcony on the other side. Seating capacity is estimated at approximately 800. Under the gymnasium, the basement houses shower rooms for boys and for girls, as well as offices for the physical education instructors. The cafeteria, which will be used for P.T.A. meetings and will provide a luncheon for pupils in the winter season, also is in the basement.

An outstanding feature of the school is the domestic science department. The kitchen will be equipped with electric stoves, while adjoining is a model dining room in which girls will learn serving. Also in this unit of the building is the sewing room. Tool cases and lumber racks have been installed in the large classroom to be used by the manual training department. Halls are lined with lockers for approximately 600 pupils. The lockers are built into the wall, and each will be equipped with combination locks and will be used by two children. South Junior High school has an electric clock system, operated from a master clock in the main office, which also operates the system of signal bells.<sup>1</sup>

Wells had designed the school for future expansion by extending the original hallways west of the existing building. As it happened, he designed the expansion as well, in 1956 as principal of Wells, Denbrook & Associates. Almost doubling the building's footprint, the new wing followed the lines and materials of the existing school almost exactly, with only minor differences in the entrances and fenestration patterns. The 1956 wing measures 140'0" by 139'0". Like the original building, it has two stories, flat roof and concrete/brick/steel structural system. The

<sup>1</sup>"Convenience and Modern Design Mark New School," *Grand Forks Herald*, 21 August 1932.

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

section number 7 page 4

**SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL** Grand Forks County, North Dakota

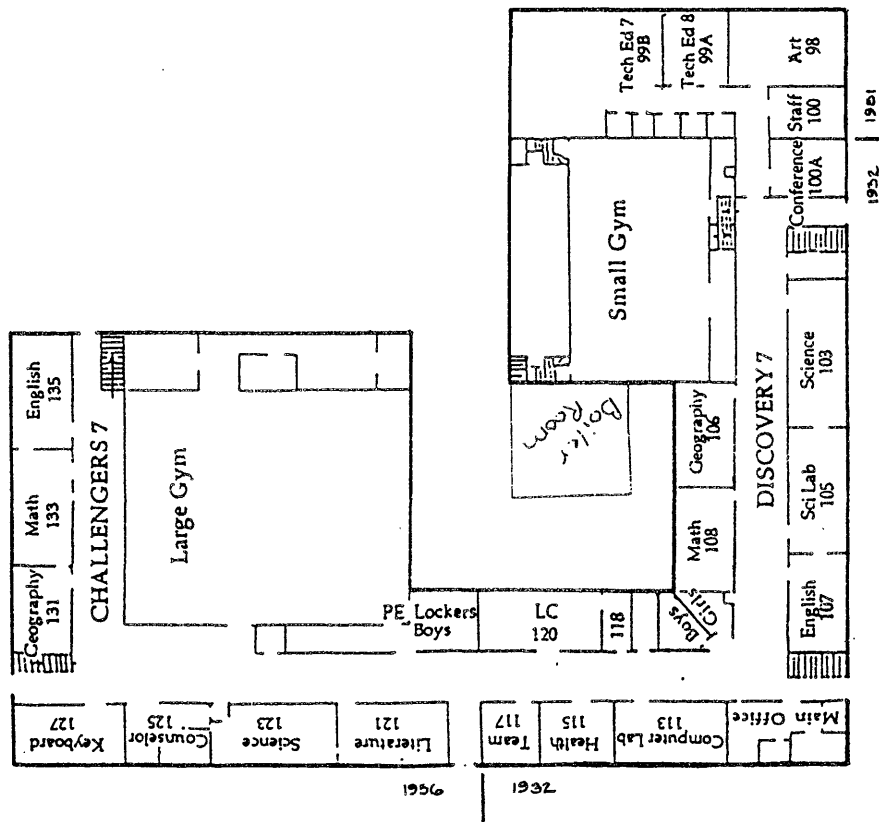


Figure 1. First floor plan.

addition's exterior essentially duplicates the proportions, fenestration and even the entrance towers of the original building. The towers are somewhat simplified (without the reading children sculptures), and glass block over horizontal-sliding sash is used in the window openings, but the overall visual impression is of a single, unified building.

Since the completion of the addition in 1956, South Junior High School has undergone several other alterations, most involving renovations to the interior spaces. In 1964 the interiors of the science and home economics classrooms on the second floor of the original building were rehabilitated to update the work counters and

mechanical system. More interior renovations were made in 1976, and five years later a one-story, 54'0" by 119'0" wing was added onto the north wall of the original building to house art, shop and drafting facilities. Other interior rehabilitation was undertaken in 1993-1995. With most of this work involving interior finishes, the building's spatial organization has remained largely unchanged. The school is today organized internally as it always has been, with classrooms, offices and other spaces aligned linearly along double-loaded hallways [see Figures 1 and 2]. The interior finishes are generally uniform throughout the original and later sections of the building, with painted plaster or concrete block walls, terrazzo, wood or vinyl-asbestos tile floors and acoustical tile grids hung from the original plaster ceilings.

The most traumatic event for the building occurred in April 18-19, 1997, when the Red River flooded Grand Forks and South Junior High was inundated by about four feet of water. Damage



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SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL Grand Forks County, North Dakota

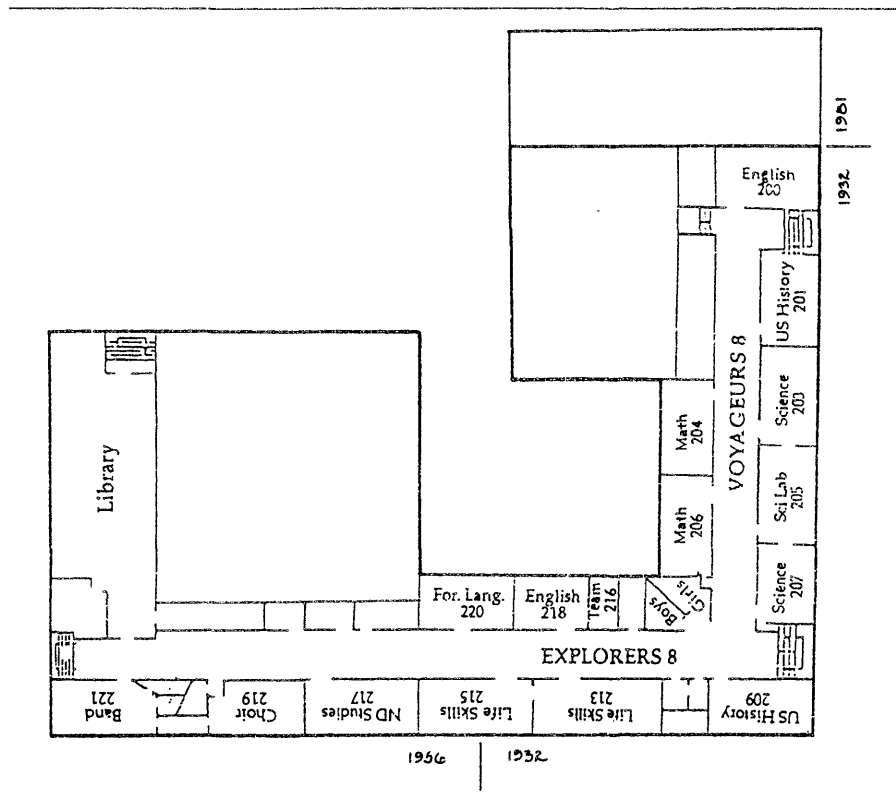


Figure 2. Second floor plan.

to the first-floor finishes during the flood were exacerbated by subsequent demolition by the school district. Today many of the first-floor classrooms and hallways, especially those in the original building, have been seriously disfigured. Despite these alterations, South Junior High School maintains a high degree of integrity of design, workmanship, location, setting, materials, feeling and association. The building is an important landmark for the city and a visual anchor for the residential neighborhood in which it stands. It is one of the most distinguished examples of Depression-era public architecture in Grand Forks.

**United States Department of the Interior  
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**National Register of Historic Places  
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section number 8 page 6

**SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL** Grand Forks County, North Dakota

**B**uilt in 1931-1932, South Junior High School in Grand Forks is a locally prominent landmark that derives its significance from two principal areas: education and architecture. The property is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A for its integral role in the development of the Grand Forks school system. Intended to serve the growing south side of Grand Forks, South Junior High is the only school erected by the city's school district between 1918 and 1948. It thus represents the most important capital investment made by the school district during the inter-war period: a carefully considered and artfully executed addition to the city's network of public schools. Since its completion, the school has functioned for some 65 years as a cornerstone in Grand Forks' educational system. As "the Home of the Spartans," it has developed a loyal following among its faculty and alumni and strong support among its neighbors.

South Junior High School is also eligible under Criterion C for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a period and style of construction. Designed by prominent Grand Forks architect Theodore B. Wells, the building exemplifies the Collegiate Gothic style, an architectural idiom that was especially well-suited for educational structures. Grand Forks' public schools have all been products of their time. This includes the first frame building erected in 1874 (since demolished), the Romanesque and Italianate Central, Belmont and Wilder schools of the 1880s and 1890s (all since demolished), the Classical Revival Washington, Roosevelt and Central High Schools of the early 20th century (all still extant), and even the moderne brick boxes built in the 1950s and 1960s. South Junior High is unlike any other public school in Grand Forks in its use of the Collegiate Gothic style. Its classically derived facade distinguishes it among Grand Forks' schools and among the city's Depression-era public buildings.

The school has undergone substantial alterations since its completion in 1932. The greatest change occurred in 1956, with an addition that almost doubled its size. This alteration is mitigated, however, by the fact that it had been planned in 1931 with the original design of the building; it was executed by Theodore Wells, the original architect; and it closely matches the original building in scale, materials and details. The 1956 addition is thus a planned extension of the original structure, which illustrates the continually expanding nature of school buildings in Grand Forks. The 1981 addition is less organically derived than the 1956 wing, but current plans are to demolish it with the building's upcoming rehabilitation. The more recent demolition of first-floor finishes in the wake of the 1997 flood has seriously damaged the building's interior, but this is considered to be temporary in nature and will be rectified when the building is rehabilitated. Despite these changes, the building has retained a relatively high degree of architectural integrity. For decades a local landmark, South Junior High represents an important aspect of Grand Forks history. As such it deserves to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

section number 8 page 7

**SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL** Grand Forks County, North Dakota

**G**rand Forks in 1870 was just a wide spot in the road, described by one chronicler as "only one small log house, covered with dirt and bark, where 'camped,' not dwelt, the half-breeds who were employed to carry the monthly mails between St. Paul and Fort Garry."<sup>2</sup> Situated along the Red River and the stage road between St. Paul and Winnipeg, the camp soon coalesced into an informal collection of cabins and outbuildings. In the summer of 1871 John Stewart built the settlement's first lodging house. By the following fall two small schools were in session, operated by rival factions. A year later the two groups had apparently merged, and in 1874—one year before the Town of Grand Forks was platted—the citizenry constructed a 12-foot-by-18-foot building to house the 14-member student body.

From this formative step, the history of Grand Forks' school system has been characterized by incremental expansion paced to match the growth of the city. In 1880 the original one-room schoolhouse was replaced by a two-room, two-story frame building located on the site of the present county courthouse. This greatly expanded facility was expected to serve the town's educational needs for the foreseeable future, which, as it turned out, lasted less than a year. As the new schoolhouse was under construction, the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railroad (later part of the Great Northern) extended tracks across the Red River into town, forming Grand Forks' first rail link. The railroad brought with it a dramatic expansion of the town's economy and its population. With the number of residents burgeoning to over 1,700 and new businesses opening daily, the town's physical and social infrastructure developed rapidly. In February 1881 Grand Forks was incorporated as a city. The schoolhouse built the year before had already become obsolete.

So had the school board itself. As part of the county school system during the 1870s, the Grand Forks school had functioned under the aegis of the county school board. The city's rapid growth, however, substantially changed the relationship between its urban school and the county's network of one-room schoolhouses. In March 1881 the Grand Forks Independent School District #1 was formed under Territorial law, formally separating the Grand Forks City school from the Grand Forks County school system. Members of the newly appointed school board immediately began arguing among themselves about organizational matters and the legitimacy of the newly formed district. After a letter from Territorial Attorney General George Wilson confirmed the district's validity, the school board sponsored the first public election of its members in June. One of the first items of business for the newly elected board that summer was the imminent need for a new school building.

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<sup>2</sup>Quoted in D. Jerome Tweton, *Grand Forks: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, Virginia: The Donning Company, 1986), 10.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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**SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL** Grand Forks County, North Dakota

The county board had purchased property on Fourth Street for a school the year before, and the new city board authorized a \$20,000 bond issue to fund construction of a substantial brick building here. Work on the new facility began that summer and concluded in February 1882 for a cost of some \$26,000. Called simply the Grand Forks Public School (later renamed Central School), the brick structure featured a massive two-story block on a raised foundation with a symmetrical facade dominated by a four-story central tower. Classrooms were situated in each of the corners of the first and second floors; Principal E.J. Phillips occupied a makeshift apartment in the basement. Described as one of the finest schools in Dakota Territory, the facility was "an elegant, commodious, and substantial building, heated throughout by steam, and fitted up with the latest improvements in school structures and equipped with the best of modern appliances for school work."<sup>3</sup>

At the school board's request, Phillips initiated courses in German, drawing, writing and book-keeping in addition to the standard curriculum. He was paid \$80 per month, the teachers \$40. Despite their efforts, attendance was sporadic, typically swelling in late fall after the harvest and dropping again during spring planting. The dropout rate among high schoolers sometimes approached 100 percent, as many of the students left early, ironically, to become teachers themselves. Grand Forks' first graduating class in 1887 consisted of two girls.

**F**or a brief time the Fourth Street building served as Grand Forks' only school, housing all primary and secondary grades. But it too was quickly overcome by the city's growth, part of the First Dakota Boom that had begun in 1879. Late in 1882, less than a year after the school's completion, the *Grand Forks Herald* reported overcrowded classrooms. To help alleviate this, the school board erected a second building, the Belmont School, eight blocks south on Belmont Road. Completed in the fall of 1883, this single-story brick structure provided two additional classrooms.

Even with this second school, the district struggled to keep up with the city's thriving population during the 1880s and 1890s, as the Northern Pacific and Manitoba railroads brought carloads of emigrants into the Red River Valley. In 1887, for instance, 874 school-age children lived in Grand Forks; over 1,100 lived in the city the following year. Those that attended school in the city were then housed in only ten available classrooms (two for the high school). These were often severely overcrowded. To accommodate its expanding enrollment, the school board added onto Belmont in 1893 and Central in 1898. The board also built another new facility, the Wilder School, in 1891. Named after William Leo Wilder, who had served on the school board in the 1880s, this single-story brick building housed elementary classes.

<sup>3</sup>W.L. Dudley, *City of Grand Forks Illustrated* (Grand Forks: Herald Printers and Binders, 1897), 15.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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**SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL** Grand Forks County, North Dakota

In 1900 the population of Grand Forks was 8,600, almost twice that of a decade before. The Grand Forks Public School District then employed 39 teachers in three school buildings with a capacity of 1,750 students and an enrollment of 1,694. Since 1892 the district had engaged student teachers on a shared-cost basis from the University of North Dakota. The district's curriculum differed little from that of other schools in the state, with a standard line-up of classes from kindergarten (at Belmont) through high school (at Central). At the turn of the century, the city's population again surged as part of Dakota's Second Boom, prompting the school board to begin building anew. The Winship School, completed in 1903, was the district's fourth facility. Additionally, a second floor was added onto the Wilder School in 1905, and a fifth school—Washington—was built in 1907.<sup>4</sup> Despite this construction, however, the schools were still overflowing with children.

In its capital improvements the district was employing two traditional strategies: it was scattering the schools throughout the metropolitan area to accommodate physical growth patterns, and it was funding the buildings' construction through bonded indebtedness. Beginning with the Fourth Street school and including virtually every new building, the school board had issued bonds to finance the construction. These bonds were typically authorized by the board, voted by popular elections, purchased by financial institutions, and repaid from tax levies.

The district used \$30,000 worth of bonds to pay for construction of its sixth school building—Roosevelt—in 1909. Indicative of population trends, most of the schools to this point had been built in the northern part of the city. Roosevelt represented a marked departure from this in that it was built some six blocks south of Belmont School, then the southernmost facility in the system. This placement reflected a change in the physical growth of Grand Forks, as new, primarily residential additions such as Presbyterian (1902), Willmar's (1909), Lincoln Park View (1914) and Lincoln Park View Second (1916) began stretching the city's limits south and west.

Soon after Roosevelt was opened in 1910, the board began debating what to do with the Central School, which was again overcrowded. Board members first resolved to build another addition onto the existing building, then reversed themselves by opting to construct an all-new structure on a different site. Though delayed by a series of legal battles, the new Central School was completed in the spring of 1918 for a cost of \$214,000. With this the Grand Forks schools had seemingly caught up with the city's population at last. Droughts, poor wheat markets and falling land prices depressed the agriculture-based economy in the region after World War I, stalling Grand Forks' economic expansion and population growth through the 1920s.

<sup>4</sup>Winship School was named for *Herald* editor George B. Winship, longtime supporter of Grand Forks' schools who had served on the board in 1883-1884. Washington School was listed individually on the National Register in 1991.

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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**SOUTH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL** Grand Forks County, North Dakota

The school district undertook no more schools during this period, with a new auditorium at Central the only major construction of note during the decade. By 1930, however, the district was again feeling the pressure of increasing enrollment.<sup>5</sup> The strain was especially acute at Roosevelt School, which was receiving the brunt of enrollment from the city's expanding south side. "The South side of the City of Grand Forks and especially the territory adjacent to Roosevelt School is rapidly growing and it is imperative that some means be adopted to relieve the present congestion and provide for the future," stated a citizens' petition to the school board in June 1930. "At the present rate of increase it will be necessary in the very near future to hold different shifts to accommodate all of the pupils." Superintendent of Schools John West responded by showing the board a series of maps illustrating the distribution and enrollment of the city's public schools. West suggested that the board consider selection of an architect and construction of a new facility, "in view of the fact that there is a general feeling that a building program is in the offing." But he urged caution. "I am of the opinion that we should proceed cautiously and accurately," he counseled. "A written mistake may be erased and corrected; a mistake in brick and mortar stands as a monument to inefficiency for years."<sup>6</sup>

The decision whether to build a new school was made by the end of the year. The new structure would house a junior high school—grades seven through nine—to provide space in Roosevelt for the lower elementary grades. Where the proposed building would be located and who would design it remained undecided, however, when the school board met in January 1931. That month board members resolved that the architect should be local. They then selected Grand Forks architect Theodore Wells to design the proposed structure.

Wells was an obvious choice for the school board. Born in Grand Forks in 1889, Theodore Burfield Wells received a degree in civil engineering at the University of North Dakota in 1912. He worked as a draftsman for five years before being inducted into the army at Minot in September 1917. Wells was stationed in France as an engineer during World War I and remained in Paris after the war to study at an atelier of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1919. After working again as a draftsman in the United States, Wells in 1924 briefly formed a partnership—Helleberg & Wells in Kearney, Nebraska—before opening his own architec-

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<sup>5</sup>The district then employed some 110 teachers in seven schools with an enrollment of over 3,400 students. "School System Built Up With Growth of the City," *Grand Forks Herald*, 26 June 1929.

<sup>6</sup>Grand Forks Public School District Number 1, Board Minutes, Vol. 4, 519-520. Located at Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

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tural practice in Grand Forks in the fall of 1924. Here he designed commercial and institutional buildings, including several dormitories, fraternity and sorority houses for the university, the Trades Building for the School for the Deaf at Devils Lake, a gymnasium and dormitory for the Mayville Normal School, and elementary schools at Gilby, Warwick and Thompson, North Dakota, and Overton, Nebraska. In the six years prior to 1931, Wells had delineated buildings aggregating some \$2 million in construction costs. His Beaux Arts training suited him well for these types of commissions, in which design formality and classical ornamentation were applied to medium-scale structures.

Within days of executing a contract with the school board, Wells took on a partner, Charles L. Ellis. Schooled and apprenticed in Illinois, Ellis was a professor of architectural engineering at the University of North Dakota. The partnership had nothing to do with the proposed Grand Forks school—Wells could manage that on his own—but was intended to bolster the firm's proposal to the North Dakota Capitol Commission for the new state capitol building.<sup>7</sup> Wells himself designed the junior high school. In April 1931 he first presented preliminary floor plans for the building to the school board.

**W**ith the architect's estimate of costs in hand, the school board soon authorized a bond issue to fund construction and began promoting a \$200,000 bond issue to the voting public. The severely depressed economy in 1931 made a bond issue more difficult to sell to voters than previous issues had been, but the school board put a positive spin on the situation. "A more favorable bond market exists at the present time than has existed for the past years," the board stated in a promotional pamphlet. "School construction at this time is desirable because it gives employment to many jobless men. Institutions may never again see a time in which they can build so much for so little money. Therefore to hasten the construction of buildings now is both an economical and public spirited thing to do."<sup>8</sup>

To muster support for the proposed building, the *Herald* published a rendering of the school by P.L. Kilpatrick of Wells' office [see *Figure 3*]. "The latest in architectural design and equipment will be combined in the new junior high school which Grand Forks will build if the city's voters

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<sup>7</sup>Wells & Ellis were not selected to supervise construction of the new capitol and, in fact, were never seriously considered by the capitol commission for the job. Another Grand Forks architect, Joseph Bell DeRemer, received the contract for this after a closely contested competition in 1931. Eighteen years DeRemer's junior, Wells practiced in the elder architect's shadow throughout much of his career.

<sup>8</sup>"Pamphlet Emphasizes Need for Additional School Facilities in City," *Grand Forks Herald*, 26 April 1931.

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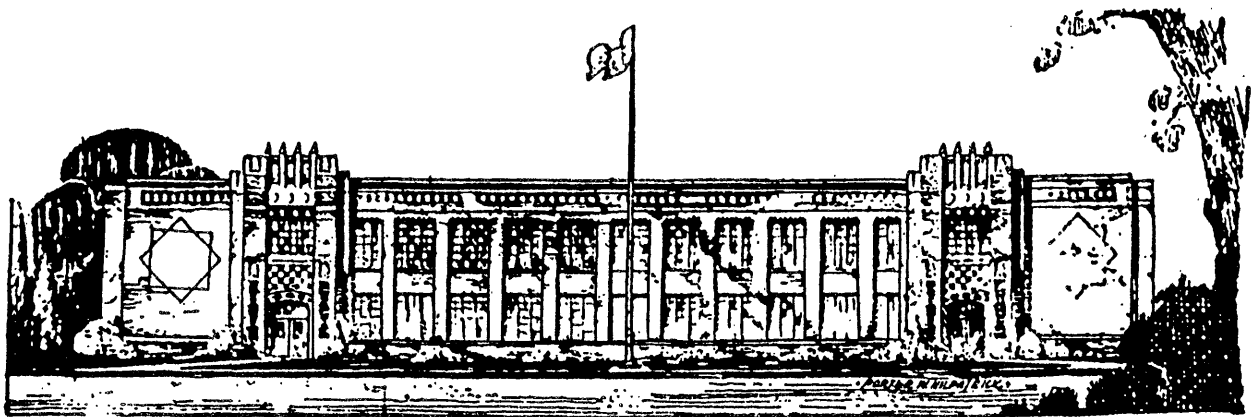


Figure 3. South Junior High School, from *Grand Forks Herald*, 10 May 1931.

authorize a \$200,000 bond issue at a special election May 28," the *Herald* reported. The newspaper described the proposed facility:

Constructed of re-inforced concrete and fireproof throughout, this building will include an adequate gymnasium and auditorium and provision for every phase of instruction, according to preliminary sketches prepared by Theodore B. Wells, architect. The building will be 200 feet wide and 120 feet deep, U-shaped, of face brick with a stone trim, and offering facilities for 600 students, Mr. Wells said. Provisions will be made for additions at the rear of the two wings.<sup>9</sup>

When the vote was taken on May 28, the bond issue passed with an overwhelming majority. "Placed unofficially at three-to-one," the *Herald* reported, "the margin supporting the project was hailed by schoolmen and city officials as an evidence of Grand Forks' desire to retain its high rating among Northwest cities for educational facilities."<sup>10</sup> In July the district sold the bonds to two local banks at a return rate of 4½ percent. At that time the school board selected a site for the new school at the northwest corner of Walnut and 13th Avenue [see *Figure 4*]. Located at the southern edge of Grand Forks' corporate limits in the Lincoln Park View Addition, the site was widely criticized as being "out at Thompson."<sup>11</sup> But the school board hoped that it would prove to be a harbinger of future southward growth for the city.

<sup>9</sup>"Proposed Junior High to Have Latest Design," *Grand Forks Herald*, 10 May 1931.

<sup>10</sup>"Bond Issue Passes by 3 to 1 Margin," *Grand Forks Herald*, 29 May 1931.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Timothy Lamb, ed., *They Came to Stay: Grand Forks, North Dakota, Centennial - 1874-1974* (Grand Forks: Grand Forks Centennial Corporation, 1974), 57.



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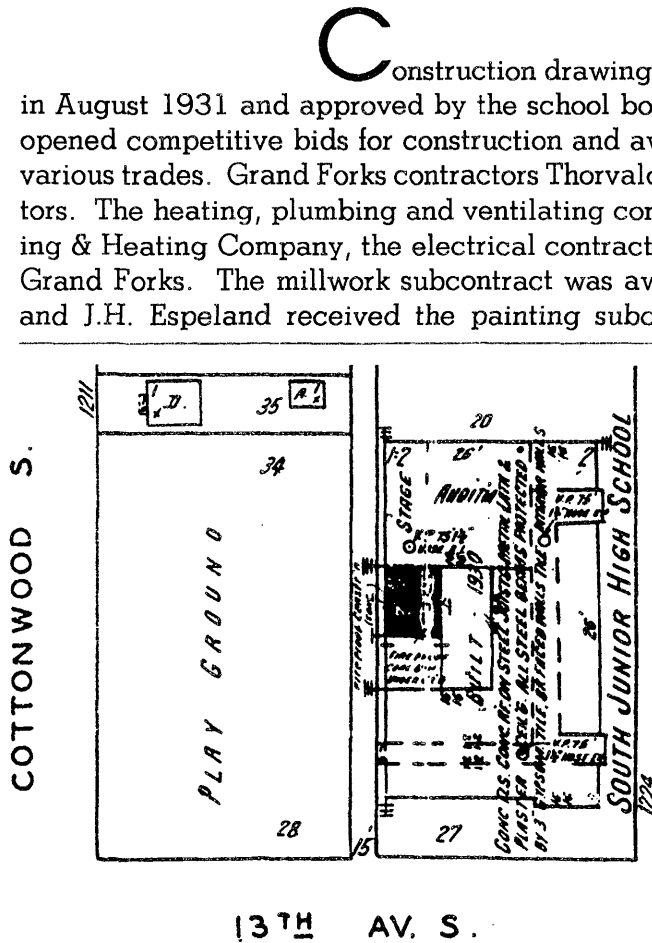


Figure 4. Site plan of South Junior High School, from Sanborn Map, 1947.

Construction drawings for the school were completed by Wells' office in August 1931 and approved by the school board on August 17. On September 1 the board opened competitive bids for construction and awarded contracts to the low bidders among the various trades. Grand Forks contractors Thorvaldson-Johnson would function as general contractors. The heating, plumbing and ventilating contract was awarded to the Northwestern Plumbing & Heating Company, the electrical contract to the Electric Construction Company, both of Grand Forks. The millwork subcontract was awarded to James Turner & Sons of Grand Forks and J.H. Espeland received the painting subcontract. A Thorvaldson-Johnson crew began excavating for the substructure within days of the contract execution.

Naming the new school proved unusually problematic for the school board. Until then the building had been called simply the "Junior High School" both in conversations and on the architect's drawings. Board members discussed several names among themselves but could not agree on any. They then solicited names from the public but did not approve any of those submitted either. The matter needed a timely solution, because the school's name was to be cast into the building parapet. Finally, for lack of a better name, the board late in September officially christened the facility South Junior High School.

Construction of South Junior High continued throughout the winter and the following spring. As the building neared completion in the summer of 1932, the school board apportioned seventh-, eighth- and ninth-grade students between the new South Junior High and the existing Central Junior High. Theodore Hanson was designated the new principal, and teachers were transferred here from other schools. Late in August the school board formally accepted the completed school. As reported by the *Herald*, "The ultimate in convenience and modern design is represented by the equipment and construction of Grand Forks' new South Junior High school, which will open September 6 for the 1932-33 term."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>"Convenience and Modern Design Mark New School," *Grand Forks Herald*, 21 August 1932.

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The school year opened unceremoniously, as Hanson and the teachers shepherded some 400 flustered students around the halls and into classrooms. The seventh- and eighth-graders (and some sixth-graders from Roosevelt) took the traditional range of classes in literature, grammar, arithmetic, geography, history, spelling and hygiene, with art, music, domestic art, science, shop and typewriting offered as elective classes. The ninth-graders took classes in English, general science, social civics, foreign languages, business training, shop, home economics, household arts, music and typewriting. According to Hanson, "Activities planned include an orchestra and glee club; athletic teams to represent the school in inter-school competition; physical education classes for all pupils; and vocational guidance, club work, programs, citizenship training and dramatics."<sup>13</sup>

**S**outh Junior High was the only new school building constructed by the district throughout the Great Depression and World War II. The post-war population boom in Grand Forks prompted the school board to undertake a massive, 20-year-long expansion of its facilities, building new schools such as Lincoln Elementary (1948), West Elementary (1949), Lewis & Clark Elementary (1953), Valley Junior High (1955), Viking Elementary (1957), Ben Franklin Elementary (1960), Carl Ben Eilson School (1960), Lake Agassiz Elementary (1960), Elroy H. Schroeder Junior High (1961), Nathan Twining Elementary (1962), J. Nelson Kelly Elementary (1966) and the Red River High School (1967). All featured the pared-back, modernist aesthetic that identified school architecture of the 1950s and 1960s. The South Junior High School was the last facility built by the district with any memorable architectural character.

In response to changes in enrollment, curriculum and interior-design aesthetics, South Junior High underwent periodic upgrades of its facilities (described in Section 7), including expansions in 1956 and 1981 and renovations of its classroom spaces. The school withstood thousands of pubescent children through its 65-year service, developing a rich tradition among its faculty and alumni. South Junior High also functioned through floods along the Red River, including major overflows in 1950, 1965 and 1966. But it was another flood in 1997 that terminated the building's usefulness as a school. That April Belmont and Lincoln Elementary Schools, South Junior High School and Central High School were all inundated by floodwaters. Repairs to the high school amounted to \$10 million. Rather than restore the others, however, the school district elected to replaced Belmont and Lincoln with the new Phoenix Elementary School and build a new South Junior High further south on 47th Avenue. The original South Junior High was sold to MetroPlains Development of St. Paul, Minnesota, which plans to adaptively reuse it to provide senior housing. Sensitively rehabilitated, South Junior High will again offer an opportunity for preservation and interpretation of this important aspect of Grand Forks history.

<sup>13</sup>"Schools Form Plan of Zoning City for Junior High Pupils," *Grand Forks Herald*, 30 May 1932.

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