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7. Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

Roosevelt School is located at 921 9th Street on the north side of the street. The property is in between Roosevelt Avenue to the east and Northwestern Avenue to the west in northwest Ames, Iowa. The nominated property is specifically 2.5 acres in size and consists of the original school (construction was begun in 1923, with the first classes held in January 1924) and a 1968 addition and the area of the original grassy field/playground area on the north side of the school building and extending east to Roosevelt Avenue. The property consists of Lots 9-12 of Block 26 of the College Park Addition 2nd North and Lots 1-8 and the east half of Lot 9 of Block 2 of Bairds Addition. The property was expanded after the period of significance (i.e., after 1959) to include what had formerly been house lots to the southeast and west sides; however, these portions of the current school property are not included within the nominated National Register boundary because they were not historically part of the school property. The neighborhood surrounding the school property consists of dwellings built mainly in the 1920s to the 1950s and may constitute a National Register-eligible historic district as yet undefined.¹ Roosevelt School was the anchor of this neighborhood. Current floor plans of the school (showing last use in 2005) for the basement, first floor, and second floor show a continuity of function and configuration with the original 1923 plans.² Classroom configuration on all floors of the original building remains largely unaltered. In 1968, a two-story gymnasium and classroom building was built on the north wall of the north wing of the original school building. In 1996, sloped metal roofs were added to both the original building and the 1968 addition. Other updates and alterations over the years have been confined mostly to exterior doors and windows and interior restrooms and electrical and ventilation systems. The Ames Board of Education closed Roosevelt School in 2005. The nominated property consists of the school building, including the original building and the gymnasium addition counted as a single contributing building, and the grassy lawn and playground area historically associated with the school counted as a single contributing site.

School Exterior

The site of Roosevelt School contains activity fields, a large playground area, and hard-surfaced parking areas. A significant number of mature trees exist, particularly at the perimeter of the site. At the time it was constructed, Roosevelt School was on the outskirts of the developed areas of Ames. The neighborhood grew around the school, with the school serving as both an attraction for residential development and as an anchor for the neighborhood as it expanded. As a result, the building is surrounded by bungalows and other small houses most having been constructed in the 1920s through the 1950s. In fact, during the period of significance for this property from 1924 to 1959, there were dwellings occupying the same block on the east and west sides of the school building and in close proximity to that building. Some of these dwellings were demolished by the 1980s and into the 1990s, with the school district adding these lots to the Roosevelt School property for additional outdoor activity areas and paved parking lots. By the time of the school's closing in 2005, the school property had expanded into all but the extreme west and northwestern lots of this block.

Roosevelt School faces south to 9th Street and is set back 52 feet from the south property line. The building is centered on lots 10, 11, and 12 of Block 26 of the College Park Addition 2nd North. The shape of the building plan is roughly an inverted letter T, wider than it is tall, with the cross bar being the front of the building. The building is a maximum of 144 feet wide by 93 feet deep. It is built of a reinforced-concrete frame structure with exterior masonry bearing walls above grade and resting on reinforced-concrete walls below grade. The basement level is partially above grade, with two full floors above. In 1996, a metal pitched roof was added over the flat roof of the original school building rising above but set back slightly from the original pedimented roofline. The original stepped and shaped pediment remains intact although metal capping now covers the original white stone coping on the pediment. A similar metal roof was also added over the roof of

1 William C. Page, *Historical and Architectural Resources of Ames, Iowa, Reconnaissance Survey, Volume II* (Report prepared for Department of Planning and Housing, City of Ames, Iowa, 1992).

2 Kimball, Bailie & Cowgill, Architects, Ames, *Plans for Second Ward School for the Board of Education, Ames, Iowa* (Ames Community School District, Ames, Iowa, 1923); Benjamin Design Collaborative, P.C., "Roosevelt Elementary School Facilities Planning & Management Plans" (Ames Community School District, Ames, Iowa, 2008).

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the 1968 addition at the same time.

The exterior walls consist of a polychrome brick veneer laid in a running bond, with simple relief and decorative detail produced by brick panels formed by rowlock borders and diamond patterns within the borders in the larger panels. The façade also features two projecting bays that flank the monumental front entry, with the door centered on the façade and featuring a white stone cornice overhang and scrolled console brackets. A white stone cornice is around the base of the pediment, which further features the school name and emblem centered over the front entry and made of white stone low-relief panels. A cornerstone inscribed with “1923” is at the southeast corner of the façade. The windows sills and water table band are made of white stone. Bands of windows extend across the inset section of the façade, with the projecting ells being “blind” and lacking windows. The other sides of the building also feature bands of windows on the first and second floors. Four outside entry doors include: the main entry door in the central bay of the south façade; two rear access doors on either side of the north wing; and one on the east side of the gymnasium addition.

As noted above, the only modifications to the exterior of the original school building have consisted of: the 1968 gymnasium addition to the north side of the north wing of the building; the replacement and partial infill of the windows as part of an energy conservation effort in the late twentieth century; the replacement and partial infill of the front entry doors as part of this same effort; and the addition of a metal roof to the original flat roof in 1996. Although not in keeping with the overall character of the building, the window and door modifications do not appear to have been invasive to the building’s masonry fabric. The windows could be restored to their original appearance using windows and doors compatible with the historic material and style of the original windows and doors. The 1968 gymnasium is not considered a major detraction from the overall integrity of the building because it was built of similar materials and in a design that was compatible with the original building design but still distinguishable as a later addition to the building.³ Furthermore, the addition is set back from the sides so that it is not visible from the front view of the property and does not obscure much of the historic building. Because it is an attached addition, the gymnasium addition is not counted as a separate building.

School Interior

Inside the main entry door of the south-side central bay is a vestibule, enclosed by a partition of glass and wood, through which one accesses the first floor hallway. A memorial to kindergarten student Steven Lofgren by artist Christian Petersen was located to the side of this entry but was removed from the school in 2005 for safekeeping and is currently housed in the Christian Petersen Art Museum at Iowa State University. Lofgren was killed crossing the street on his way to school in 1956. Because the bas-relief is not currently in Roosevelt School, it is not counted as a contributing resource, but it could be considered a contributing object if it is returned to the school.

Two other original doorways are located on the north side on either side of the north wing. The original interior partitions are a combination of structural tile and gypsum block clad with plaster. Classroom configuration on all floors of the original building remains largely unaltered. Furthermore, current floor plans of the school (showing room use in 2005) for the basement, first floor, and second floor show a continuity of function and configuration with the original 1923 plans. The original play rooms on the ground floor were last used as an art classroom and a daycare space. The original function of the play rooms was displaced when the gymnasium, or multi-purpose center, was added to the building in 1968.

³ For example, the gymnasium building is clad with a lighter, more orange-colored brick than the dark reds of the original building’s bricks. The addition also features shorter rows of windows than on the main building.

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The original basement plan had the boys' and girls' playrooms on either side of the basement flanking the plenum chamber and an east-west corridor and a boiler room, coal bin, fan room and two storerooms in the north wing of the basement.

The internal ventilation system was served by a fan in the basement, which provided supply and return air to each classroom through a series of masonry shafts extending vertically through the building and making use of the plenum chamber, which is an enclosed space that runs lengthwise underneath the main core of the building. The plenum chamber contained air pressure inside that was greater than that of the outside atmosphere and helped force air upward through the ducts and helped stem incoming cold drafts. The heating system was a coal-fired system that was later upgraded, with the original coal bin built over by the 1968 gymnasium addition. The original heating system included a boiler, pipes, and radiators.

The first floor plan featured eight classrooms, with the two rooms on the west side of the main core having a folding door partition that allowed for a larger open auditorium space as needed. Also on the first floor was an office at the north end of the entry hall, boys' and girls' toilets on either side of the north-south hallway but entered from the east-west hallway, and an entry vestibule at the main door. Each classroom had coat rooms, blackboards, and a bank of windows on one side.

The second floor plan was the same basic plan as the first floor having eight classrooms and two toilets, but had two offices instead of one, with the second office located above the first-floor vestibule.

There is some attic space above the second floor ceiling that provided head room for maintenance workers on catwalks to service the pipes that led to the radiators on the second floor. The attic space was ventilated with roof vents, which would have helped keep the building cooler in warm weather. The attic also provided access to the roof.

By 2005, the interior use of the original building showed the basement-level playrooms being used for an art room and child care center; custodial and boiler rooms, a music & tradebooks room, a band room, a kitchen, storage room, and the gymnasium. The first floor had the kindergarten through third grade classrooms, with the kindergarten room occupying the two west classrooms where the original folding door partition was now removed. Also on the first floor were the boys' and girls' restrooms in their original locations, a custodial closet, the guidance office, the principal, nurse and general offices, and copy and work rooms. The second floor held the classrooms for grades four through six, the boys' and girls' restrooms, a speech room, resource and Extended Learning Program (ELP) rooms, an office, lounge, and lounge bathroom, the media office, and the media center. One of the second-floor classrooms was also partitioned into two smaller rooms.⁴

Interior remodeling projects completed throughout the building's life removed a number of the ventilation shafts in order to increase classroom size and also included removal of the offices at the north ends of the north-south hallways on the first and second floors to provide access to the 1968 addition. Toilet rooms were also remodeled to update fixtures and provide handicapped accessibility. Some of the interior doors and frames were replaced to provide fire-rated corridors, and suspended acoustical ceilings and updated lighting were added to most of the classrooms.

Original interior details that remain intact include: much of the original varnished woodwork and door surrounds, some original wood-paneled doors and brass hardware, the glass and wood entry vestibule partition, the metal and wood stair rails, and some classroom details such as coat hooks and woodwork.

Gymnasium Addition

An addition, designed by Architects Rudi and DeKovic, of Ames, Iowa, was constructed in 1968, providing a music classroom, a gymnasium/cafeteria, media center, and administrative, conference, and support spaces.⁵ The addition contains 10,625 gross square feet and was constructed using exterior masonry bearing walls, a precast concrete floor structure,

⁴ Benjamin Design Collaborative, P.C.

⁵ Norman Rudi and Charles William DeKovic Jr. formed a partnership under the firm name of "Architects Rudi and DeKovic" in 1966, with offices at 400 Lechner Building in Ames ("Business News," *Ames Daily Tribune*, January 21, 1966). Several other newspaper articles all consistently spell DeKovic's name with a capital "K," but other sources tend to spell it without the K capitalized. The 1968 blueprints simply list the firm's entire name in all capital letters.

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interior masonry bearing walls, and a steel bar joist and metal deck roof structure. This addition extended the original north wing 82 feet to the north. Architecturally, the building takes its cues from the original building's massing and material but is recognizable as newer construction in the lighter color of the brick and the shorter bands of windows.

At the north end of the addition is the multi-purpose room, or gymnasium, 40 feet wide and two stories high. Its floor level is in the basement. Exterior walls are concrete block with exterior brick veneer. Interior bearing walls are concrete block. These bearing walls support the structural system of the first and second floors and the roof, which consists of pre-stressed reinforced-concrete double Ts spanning between the bearing walls. Interior non-bearing walls are partitions of metal studs with gypsum board finish. The basement rooms and the multi-purpose room do not have a suspended ceiling. Other rooms and corridors have suspended ceilings of acoustical tile. Windows are lacking in the multi-purpose room and the north stairwell. The media room, or library, has a few small windows on its north wall, but is lit mainly by skylights.

The basement of the addition also housed the gym office and storage rooms, girls' and boys' restrooms, a kitchen, and an instrumental music room, reflecting the needs of an expanding school curriculum. The first floor of the addition included the upper level of the gymnasium, the principal's office, the nurse's office, a general office, two storage rooms, a workroom, and a toilet. The second floor of the addition housed the media center over the gymnasium level, a library workroom, audiovisual room, two conference rooms, a lounge, and a toilet.

Integrity Statement

The Roosevelt School retains sufficient integrity under all seven of the aspects of integrity for consideration of National Register eligibility. Specifically, this property is the location of the original Roosevelt School and retains the configuration of the original school property, with the building sited in the southwest corner of the parcel and the playground and open space still along the north side of the parcel, albeit with modern playground equipment installed. The only modern intrusions on the original school property include: the 1968 addition to the rear of the school building, which reduced the playground area somewhat, and the construction of paved parking lots along the west side of the building and playground to accommodate changing modes of transportation in the modern era. The original school building has seen some modification in the modern era, primarily in the replacement/partial infill of the windows and exterior doors, the addition of a metal low-pitched gabled roof to the original flat roof, and the construction of the 1968 gymnasium addition. However, the window and door replacements did not impact the surrounding masonry structure or stone sills of the original openings and could be restored with windows and doors compatible with the originals. Likewise, the metal roof was set back from the façade and only partially obscures the original pediment of the building and does not appear to have involved the removal of original material from that pediment. The 1968 addition was designed to be compatible with the materials and design of the original building and only physically impacted the north side of the north wing of the original building. In general, the school building retains its original brickwork and white stone details and still presents a sufficient sense of time and place of the 1920s-50s era of public education. It also retains the feeling and association of this property as a historic school building even though it currently sits vacant and unused.