



RICHARD GRUBB & ASSOCIATES
Historic Architecture • Archaeology • Historical Research

259 Prospect Plains Road | Building D | Cranbury, New Jersey 08512 | 609-655-0692 | rgaincorporated.com

July 28, 2020

Debra Sopronyi, QPA
Borough Administrator/Clerk
Borough of Hightstown
156 Bank Street
Hightstown, NJ 08520

Re: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, 230 Mercer Street (Block 60, Lot 16), Borough of Hightstown, Mercer County, New Jersey (HPO Project #19-2807)

Dear Ms. Sopronyi:

Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. (RGA) has completed an Intensive-level historic architectural survey for proposed facility improvements to 230 Mercer Street on Block 60, Lot 16 in the Borough of Hightstown, Mercer County, New Jersey. The borough proposes interior renovations to the 1894 former Mercer Street School building on the property and a rear addition to the building, as well as the construction of additional parking areas to the rear of the property (Attachment 1: Project Documents). The existing rear stair section is proposed to be removed to create space for a larger addition that will include an elevator and restrooms. The plans call for alterations to the two primary floors of the building and the refitting of the building to serve as borough offices. On the primary floors, the built-in desk, cloakrooms, and storage rooms in the center hall are proposed for removal. The plans for the first floor call for the creation of a council room in the northeast classroom and meeting rooms in the west and south classrooms. A new half-turn or dog-leg stair system is proposed to be inserted in the location of the current copy room, using the south office as a halfpace landing. Similarly, the second floor plans propose to reconfigure the existing classrooms for smaller offices for borough staff. The two-leaf entrance at the northwest end of the center hall is proposed to be removed on both floor levels, instead connecting directly into the proposed rear addition.

In December 2019, the Borough of Hightstown submitted proposed project plans to the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office (NJHPO) for review and comment. Upon review, the NJHPO issued a review letter dated January 31, 2020 (HPO-A2020-182) indicating that the plans as proposed were not in conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties – Rehabilitation due to the substantial reconfiguration of interior spaces including the removal of interior walls, and the introduction of a large rear addition on the building. Additional information was requested to determine the current National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility of the Mercer Street School. The NJHPO requested the completion of an Intensive-level architectural survey form for the building, including a thorough evaluation of the school under NRHP Criteria A, B, and C, including exterior and interior photographs of the building.

As per the January 31, 2020 review letter, the scope of the Intensive-level historic architectural survey was limited to the former Mercer Street School. An intensive-level architecture survey form was prepared for the Mercer Street School in order to determine if the resource is eligible for listing in the NRHP (Attachment 2: Architectural Survey Form). As a result of the survey, the Mercer Street School was recommended not

eligible for listing in the NRHP. The building exhibits elements of the Colonial Revival style with some Queen Anne style details but is not an exceptional example of its type or architecturally noteworthy. The school was designed by New Brunswick architect George K. Parsell, a relatively obscure architect whose primary commissions were New Jersey Hall at Rutgers University and the Highland Park School. Research for the current project could not identify a single documentary reference to Parsell's association with the Mercer Street School, leaving a small plaque at the building's south corner as the sole surviving tie to Parsell. The school was constructed during a period of transition in school architecture just prior to the Progressive Era in education which introduced larger multi-classroom schoolhouses, then called "consolidated schools" because they resulted in the closing of nearby one-room schools. The introduction of this new type of school building is one reason the design for Parsell's Mercer Street School was not used as a prototype for other schools. Furthermore, alterations to the interior have undermined the building's ability to convey a sense of its original design. As the building is not eligible for listing in the NRHP, it was determined that the proposed project will have no effect on historic resources.

The Borough of Hightstown will receive funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) after flooding related to Hurricane Irene damaged the existing borough offices in 2011. The Borough will use a portion of these funds for the renovation and expansion of their future offices at 230 Mercer Street. As such, the proposed project will be subject to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), as amended, and its implementing regulations (36 CFR § 800). This Intensive-level historic architectural survey meets the requirements of Section 106. Under Section 106, project impacts to historic architectural and archaeological resources must be considered. Accordingly, archaeological and historical resources listed in the New Jersey Register (NJR) and/or the NRHP or eligible for listing in the NRHP must be identified in order to determine if the project will have an effect on such resources. In a review letter dated September 12, 2019 (HPO I2019-099), the NJHPO noted that archaeological survey would not be necessary for this part of the scope given the limited nature of the ADA upgrades.

Seth Hinshaw, the Principal Investigator, meets the professional qualifications standards of 36 CFR 61 set forth by the National Park Service (Attachment 3: Qualifications of the Principal Investigator). Mr. Hinshaw authored the report, conducted background research, and authored the intensive-level architectural survey form. Patricia McEachen produced the report graphics and Catherine Smyrski edited the report.

Developmental History of the Mercer Street School

In the mid-nineteenth century, the East Windsor Township school board constructed school houses throughout the township. One of these schools was a two-story building then known as the Hightstown Academy, built just southwest of the emerging village of Hightstown, which was located at the intersection of a stage coach route and the Camden and Amboy Railroad. The Academy, built in 1841, stood immediately behind today's Mercer Street School and provided a single classroom on each floor. Increasing enrollment precipitated additions in 1859 and 1894 (Stults 2019:5-6). The Academy was the sole public school in Hightstown during the existence of the Hightstown school board, which was separate from the East Windsor school board from 1853 to 1894. Increasing structural problems at the Academy led to the decision to replace it in 1894, the same year in which the Hightstown and East Windsor school boards merged.

The Mercer Street School was built in the fall of 1894 and opened in January 1895. It was built closer to Mercer Street than the Academy in order to provide a larger recreational area behind the schoolhouse. Architect George K. Parsell designed the building with a center hall on the two primary floors, connecting

four classrooms with cloakrooms to two offices located in tower at the front of the building. Daniel Whitlock of New Brunswick won the contract to build the building. The cost of the building was \$12,000. During construction, architect Parsell simplified portions of the plans to save money, and a newspaper article stated that most of the planned decorative elements were omitted from the building (*Hightstown Gazette*, 3 January 1895). The building remained in use as a school for 44 years.

George K. Parsell (1853-1933) was an architect practicing primarily in Middlesex County. His home was located in Highland Park, but his offices were located on George Street in New Brunswick. Parsell began his practice in the 1880s, beginning with his own house and then two commissions that were well-received at the time – the Highland Park School (1886) and New Jersey Hall on the Rutgers campus (1889, listed in the NRHP in 1975). His design for the Mercer Street School took place in the middle of his career. Afterwards, some of his key commissions included the Waldron Factory in Highland Park (1896), the Highland Park Fire Station (1902), and the New Brunswick Free Public Library (1903). His commissions were primarily in the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles.

Increasing student population led to the construction of additional schools in Hightstown. The school board completed few renovations at the Mercer Street School, one of which being the installation of restrooms in the basement to replace the former freestanding privies in the rear of the lot. The school board also purchased a small vacant parcel of land to increase the size of the play area. The final classes were removed to other schools in 1939.

In 1941, the Hightstown Masons purchased the building and used it as their lodge until 1981. Early in their ownership, the Masons removed the original cupola, and the bell was stored at a Masonic-owned local business until the early twenty-first century. The north and east classrooms were merged on the two primary levels to provide a lodge room upstairs and a banquet room and kitchen on the first floor. The final use of the building was a day care center operated by the YMCA (1981 to 2018). The YMCA completed some interior renovations, including the reconfiguration of the first floor, the removal of the girls' stair system, and the sealing of the old girls' rear entrance. To meet fire codes, the boys' stair was fireproofed, including the installation of the two-leaf entrances on the two primary floor levels between the stairs and the center hall. The building was used primarily as a child care center, although the large upstairs room was used briefly as a fitness center. The restrooms in the tower were installed during the years when the fitness room was in operation. In 2018, the Borough of Hightstown purchased the property for use as new borough offices after its old offices were damaged by Hurricane Irene (2011). The borough is completing plans to make additional alterations to the building and the construction of a rear wing.

Mercer Street School

The Mercer Street School, built in 1894, is an example of a Colonial Revival style school building with Queen Anne elements, designed by architect George K. Parsell and built by Daniel Whitlock of New Brunswick. The building's design reflects a transitional period in school architecture between the one-room schools of the nineteenth century and the larger multi-room (consolidated) schools of the twentieth century. Several aspects of design point to changes in education in the final years of the nineteenth century, including the large windows that provided plenty of natural light while also enhancing ventilation, the cloakrooms for each classroom, and the lack of platforms at the front of each classroom. These changes were associated with increasing specialization and professionalization of teachers, which prepared students for the challenges of life in the twentieth century and which foreshadowed the Progressive Era in education.

An intensive-level historic architectural survey form for the Mercer Street School, including individual

building descriptions, historical development, and assessments of significance, integrity, and NRHP eligibility, was conducted in accordance with the NJHPO's *Guidelines for Architectural Survey* and has been compiled on the NJHPO Survey Form located in Attachment 2 (Splain 1999). As a result of the Intensive-level historic architectural survey, the Mercer Street School was recommended not eligible for listing on the NRHP.

Built in 1894-1895, the Mercer Street School is an example of a Multiple-Room schoolhouse representing the transition period between the one-room schoolhouses that dominated the nineteenth century and the larger consolidated schoolhouses introduced during the Progressive Era in education. In urban areas, multi-room schools emerged earlier in the nineteenth century, with a nearby example being the Higbee Street School in Trenton, and some design elements of these buildings began to appear in rural schools near the end of the century. These schools have some common characteristics that indicate the period's approach to design. These schoolhouses were designed with large windows that provided ample light and also provided better ventilation. In order to alleviate what was then called "stale air," which was thought to spread illness among the students, the lower sash of windows could be raised to admit fresh air and the upper sash lowered to (theoretically) remove the stale air. Another exterior feature found in the Higbee Street School and the Mercer Street School was the arrangement of entrances, with a primary entrance on the front of the building and separate girls' and boys' entrances on the rear; the interiors of the two buildings were designed with separate boys' and girls' stairs as well. A feature of the interior was the presence of cloakrooms. Although earlier in the century, schools usually provided separate cloakrooms for the boys and girls, the Mercer Street School has a cloakroom for each classroom; it is possible that the classroom and cloakroom combinations were originally separated by sex. The later consolidated high school buildings represented a further step in school design, in which students rotated among classrooms where they were taught by specialized teachers who taught a single subject.

The original design of the Mercer Street School reflects an important shift in the field of education. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, one-room schools used what was called the Lancasterian system, in which materials were available for students of different ages but students were in the same schoolroom. When younger students had problems, older students could help the younger students as the teacher working with students at the front of the classroom. In the late nineteenth century, a shift took place involving increased specialization of teachers that eliminated this collaborative approach to education. The new system, called "graded schools" at the time, provided separate rooms for students of the same age rather than having an eight-year range in ages of students in the classroom. Teaching was becoming more professional, with annual teachers' "institutes" held in summers to prepare teachers for their narrowing focus in the classroom. The Mercer Street School was an early graded school outside of a city in New Jersey.

The schoolhouse's architect, George K. Parsell, had a limited architectural career in central New Jersey. The limited attention in the past to Parsell's architectural career has focused on his design for New Jersey Hall and scattered references to other commissions, but with no mention of his design of the Mercer Street School. If the small plaque had not been attached onto the south corner of the building, its architect would have likely remained anonymous. Parsell's design, which was simplified during construction to reduce cost, represented a mixture of the Colonial Revival and Queen Anne styles; these were styles most associated with Parsell's other commissions.

The Mercer Street School was built during a time of transition between the one-room school houses of the nineteenth century and the consolidated school buildings of the Progressive Era in education. Its design reflects a shift that was taking place nationwide in public education. Whereas teachers formerly needed to be able to instruct students from a wide range of ages and in all fields of study, teachers now narrowed their

individual professional focus either on the educational needs of students of a given age/grade or focused on a single subject (language, science, history, etc.). To accommodate these changes architecturally, new school houses were designed with multiple interior rooms. The transitional period began after new legislation passed in 1867 and 1871 re-defined "public schools" by making attendance compulsory and increasing the school year to 180 days. The transitional period ended with the introduction of consolidated school buildings circa 1900.

The Mercer Street School is not significant as a well-preserved example of its type to individually qualify for listing in the NRHP under Criteria A or C. Although only a limited number of schools constructed during the period of transition have been evaluated for their eligibility, one that stands out is the Church Street School in Long Branch (SR 5/27/1999, NRHP 6/28/1999). That school was completed with more stylistic features than the Mercer Street School, and it retains a greater proportion of its architectural character than the Mercer Street School although its condition is not as good. The Mercer Street School was designed by architect George K. Parsell, who had a limited practice, and in other references to his work the school has not been mentioned as among his important commissions. Furthermore, the integrity of the Mercer Street School suffers from alterations. The primary exterior alteration is the removal of the cupola, which was a character-defining feature of the original design as one of the most noticeable decorative features. The changes to the interior such as the removal of the girls' stairs and the alterations to the interior layout (removal of some cloakrooms, insertion of the large desk on the first floor, and merging of classrooms) have collectively undermined the design and materials of the school, with a corresponding impact on the feeling of being in an eight-room school. Other changes are incremental but together represent further lessening of the building's integrity, including replacement of the doors and windows, removal of one chimney, and removal of the girls' stairs and rear entrance. The insertion of the rest rooms on both floor levels and the installation of the kitchen suite could be considered reversible; however, they represent additional lessening of the building's integrity.

Due to a lack of sufficient architectural significance and integrity, the Mercer Street School is not recommended eligible for listing in the NRHP.

Conclusions

The scope of the Intensive-level historic architectural survey was limited to the property at 230 Mercer Street in the Borough of Hightstown. As a result of the survey, the Mercer Street School was recommended not eligible for listing in the NRHP. As a result of this finding, the proposed project will have no effect on historic resources.

Please call me at 609-655-0692, ext. 392 or via email at shinshaw@rgaincorporated.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Seth Hinshaw
Senior Historian
Encl.

Sources

Central New Jersey Home News [New Brunswick, New Jersey]

1929 Big Enrollment at Bible School in Hightstown. 9 July:2.

1933 George K. Parsell Obituary. 28 December:2.

Daily Times [New Brunswick, New Jersey]

1894 Architect Injured [Parsell]. 6 October:1.

Evarts & Stewart

1875 Combination Atlas Map of Mercer County, New Jersey, Compiled, Drawn, and Published From Personal Examinations and Surveys. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Freehold Transcript and Monmouth Inquirer [Freehold, New Jersey]

1922 Hightstown Schools. 8 September: 2.

1923 Hightstown Schools. 10 August:9.

Hightstown Gazette

1895 Our New Public School. 3 January.

Matawan Journal [Matawan, New Jersey]

1895 For a Graded School. 12 January:1.

Musial Group P.A.

2019 Hightstown Municipal Building and Police HQ, plans dated 15 November.

Orr, John W.

1998 *Reflections From the Shrine*. Hightstown, New Jersey.

Philadelphia Inquirer [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania]

1914 Nine Hurt When Train Strikes School Wagon. 6 November:11.

Sanborn Map Company

n.d. Hightstown Fire Insurance Map. New York City, New York.

Stults, Cappy

2019 "Borough Hall to Occupy Old Schoolhouse," *Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society News*, Summer 2019. Hightstown, New Jersey.

Trenton Evening Times

1921 Hightstown. 7 November:13.

Woodward, E.M. and John F. Hageman

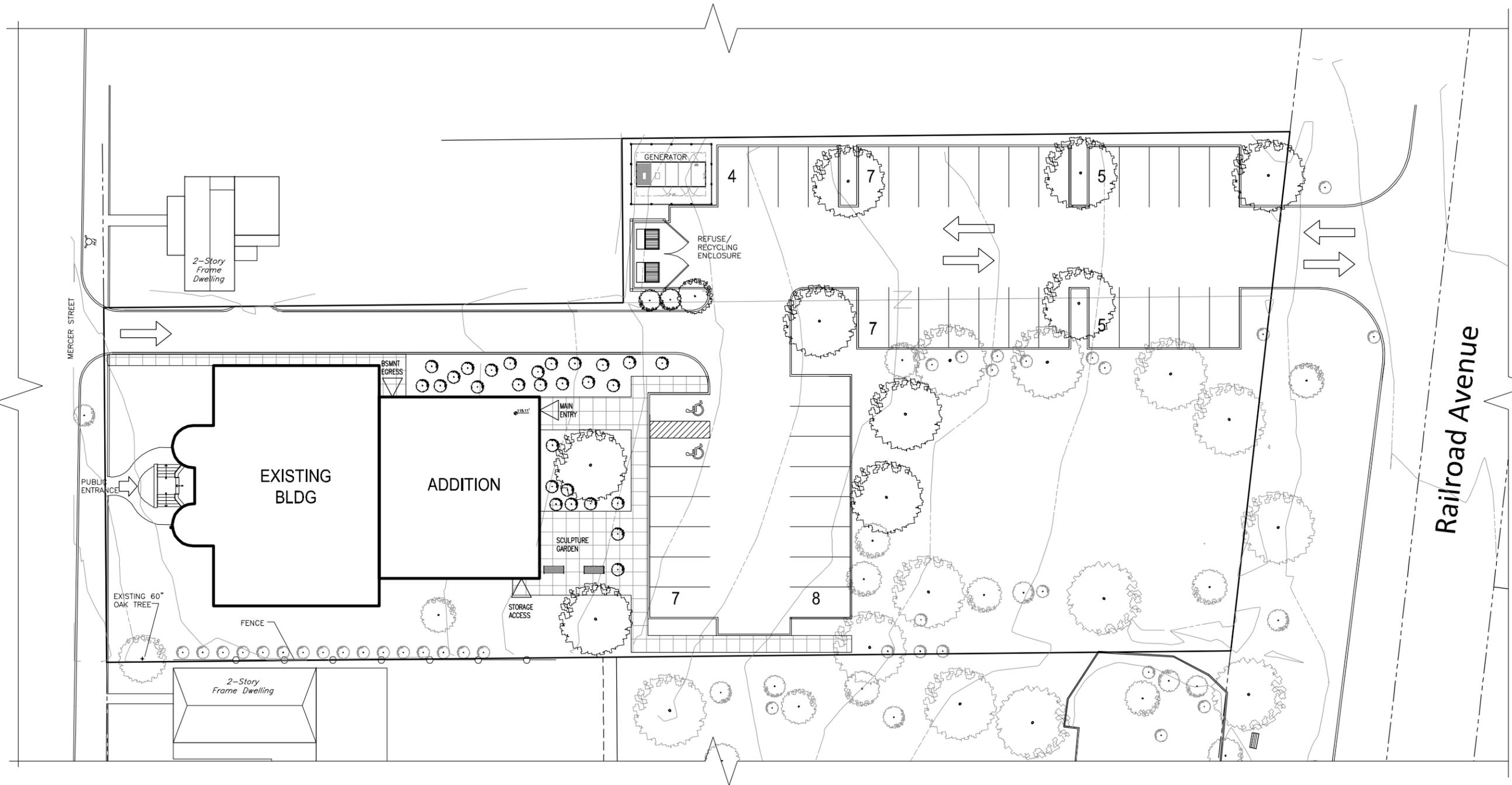
1883 *History of Burlington and Mercer counties, New Jersey: with biographical sketches of many of their pioneers and prominent men*. Everts & Peck, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Attachment 1:

Project Documents

Mercer Street

Railroad Avenue



SCHEMATIC SITE PLAN
 SCALE: 1/32" = 1'-0"



OPTION 7
 39 PARKING SPACES PROVIDED

Ref: 118719_Sitebase.dwg / SK27A

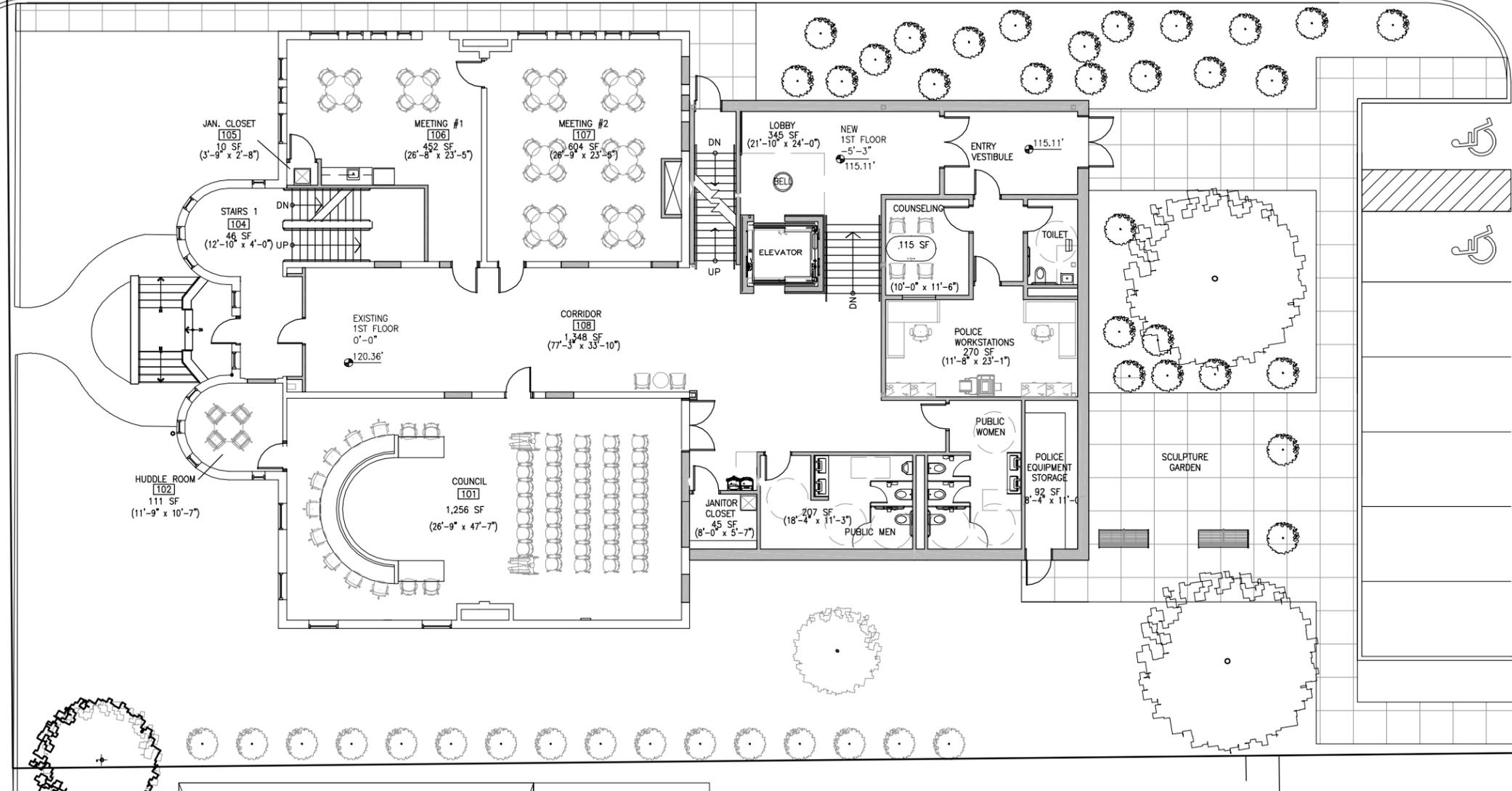
**HIGHTSTOWN MUNICIPAL
 COMPLEX**
 230 Mercer Street
 Hightstown, NJ 08520

16 MARCH 2020
 Project # 118719.01

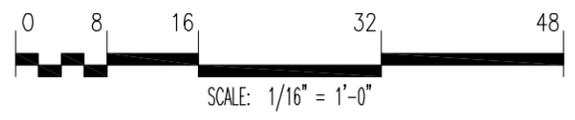
SK-27a-R1
THE MUSIAL GROUP ARCHITECTURE

191 Mill Lane Mountainside, NJ 07092 p. 908.232.2860 f. 908.232.2845

Frame Dwelling

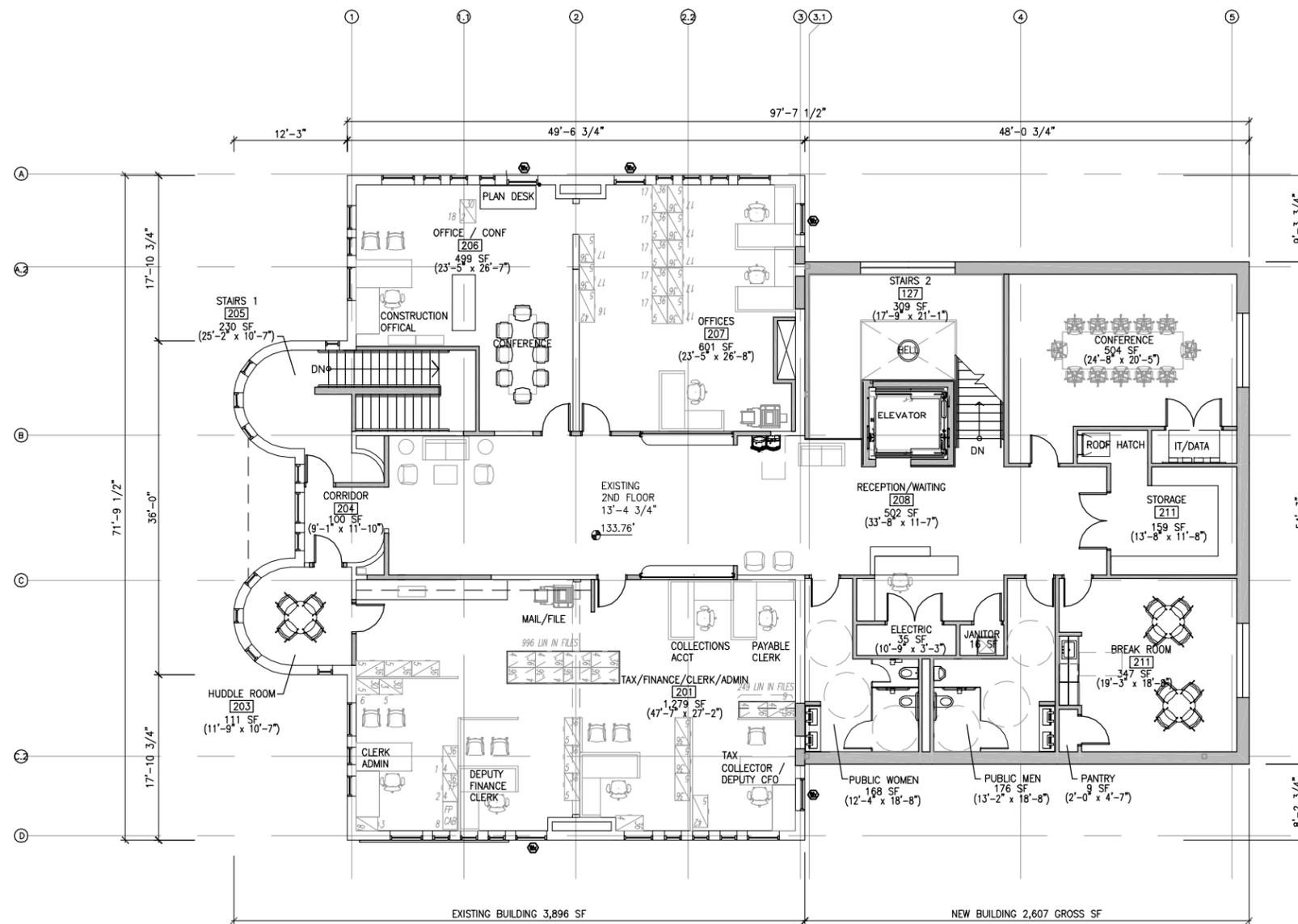


SCHEMATIC FIRST FLOOR PLAN
 SCALE: 1/16" = 1'-0"

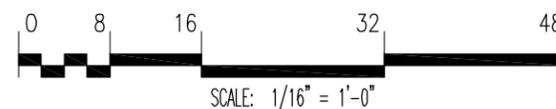


Ref: 118719_1stFlrPlan_Base.dwg / SK27B
HIGHTSTOWN MUNICIPAL COMPLEX
 230 Mercer Street
 Hightstown, NJ 08520

16 MARCH 2020
 Project # 118719.01
SK-27b-R1
THE MUSIAL GROUP ARCHITECTURE
 191 Mill Lane Mountainside, NJ 07092 p. 908.232.2860 f. 908.232.2845



SCHEMATIC SECOND FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: 1/16" = 1'-0"

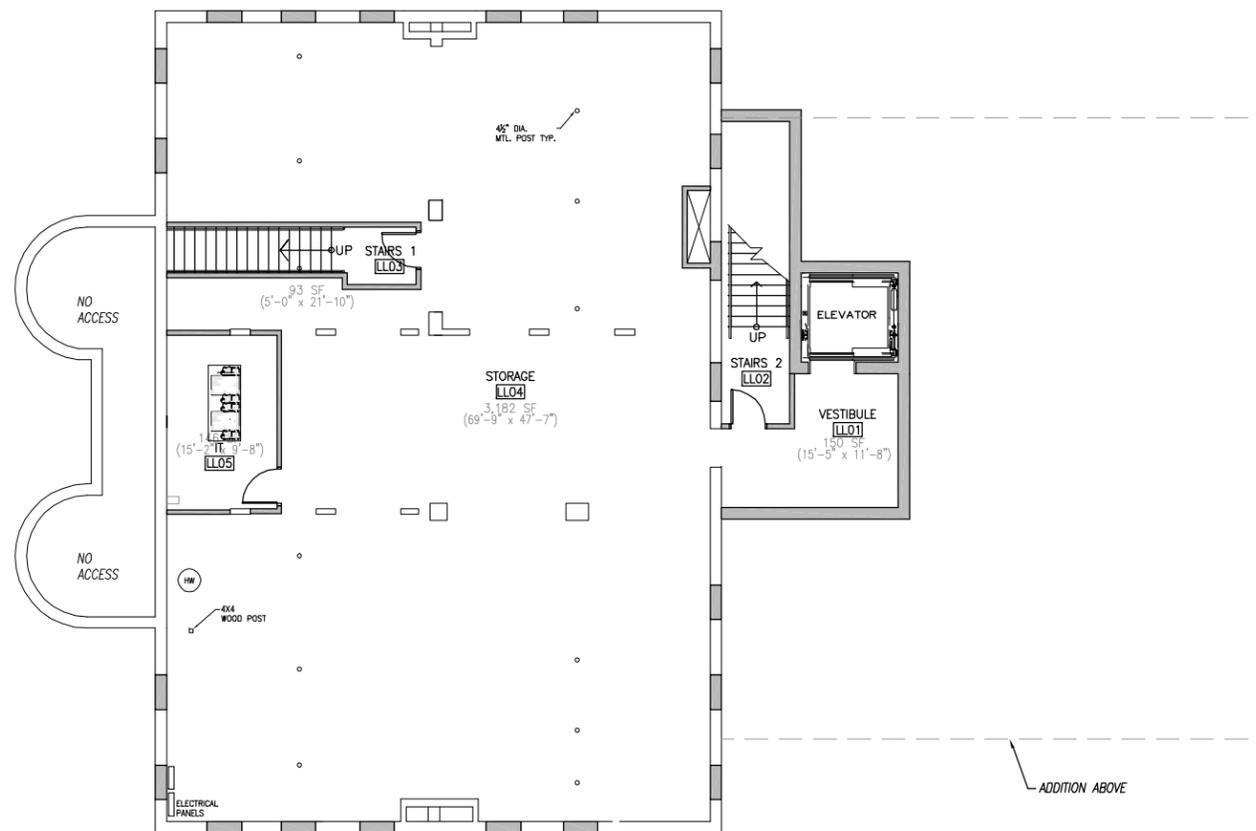


Ref: 118719_2ndFlrPlan_Base.dwg / SK27C

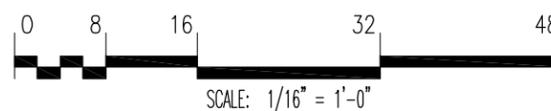
**HIGHTSTOWN MUNICIPAL
COMPLEX**
230 Mercer Street
Hightstown, NJ 08520

16 MARCH 2020
Project # 118719.01

SK-27c-R1
THE MUSIAL GROUP ARCHITECTURE
191 Mill Lane Mountainside, NJ 07092 p. 908.232.2860 f. 908.232.2845



SCHEMATIC LOWER FLOOR PLAN
 SCALE: 1/16" = 1'-0"



Ref: 118719_BasementFlrPlan_Base.dwg / SK-27D

**HIGHTSTOWN MUNICIPAL
 COMPLEX**
 230 Mercer Street
 Hightstown, NJ 08520

16 MARCH 2020
 Project # 118719.00

SK-27d-R1

THE MUSIAL GROUP ARCHITECTURE
 191 Mill Lane Mountainside, NJ 07092 p. 908.232.2860 f. 908.232.2845

Attachment 2:

Architectural Survey Form

BASE SURVEY FORM

Historic Sites #:

Property Name: Mercer Street School

Street Address: *Street #:* 230 *(Low)* *(High)* *Apartment #:* _____ *(Low)* *(High)*

Prefix: _____ *Street Name:* Mercer *Suffix:* _____ *Type:* ST

County(s): Mercer **Zip Code:** 08520

Municipality(s): Borough of Hightstown **Block(s):** 60

Local Place Name(s): _____ **Lot(s):** 16, 17

Ownership: Public **USGS Quad(s):** Hightstown, NJ

Description:

The Mercer Street Schoolhouse is a two-story, seven-bay building built in 1894 with some Queen Anne style detailing but presenting an overall Colonial Revival appearance (Plates 1-12). It faces southeast onto Mercer Street. The main block of the schoolhouse has a hipped roof and two extended towers on its main (southeast) elevation, plus a stair section on its rear (northwest) elevation. The main block has the overall dimensions of 75 by 55 feet. Its hipped roof is clad with asphalt shingles; the short ridge originally featured a cupola that no longer survives. The eaves of the schoolhouse were altered when the original interior gutter system was sealed, leaving a molded cornice extending over a frieze board. A decorative interior brick chimney, now parged, is located along the northeast wall (Plate 7); a similar chimney along the southwest elevation has been reduced below the roofline. On the rear elevation, a hipped roof dormer has widely overhanging eaves and a louver on its primary face; it is located just above the ridge of the stair tower section (Plate 8).

See Building/Element Attachment

Registration and Status Dates:	National Historic Landmark: _____	SHPO Opinion: _____
	National Register: _____	Local Designation: _____
	New Jersey Register: _____	Other Designation: _____
	Determination of Eligibility: _____	Other Designation Date: _____

Photograph:



Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

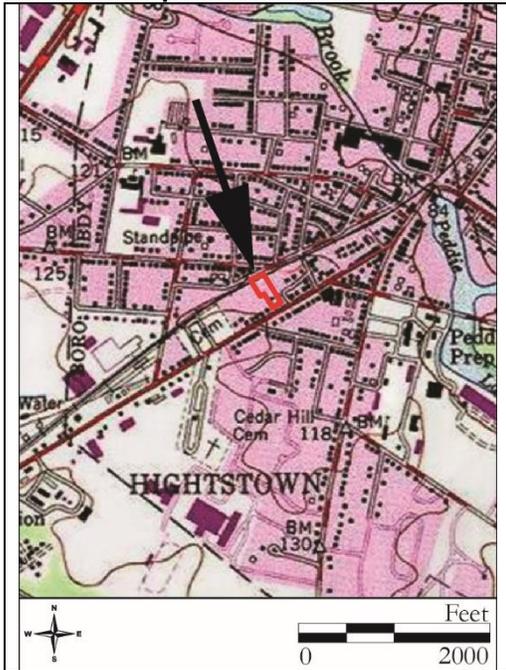
Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

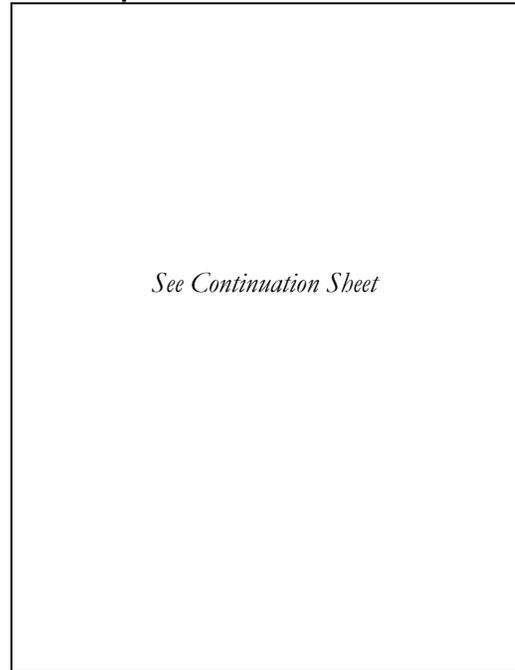
BASE SURVEY FORM

Historic Sites #:

Location Map:



Site Map:



Bibliography/Sources:

See Continuation Sheet

Additional Information:

More Research Needed?

Yes No

INTENSIVE LEVEL USE ONLY

Attachments

Included: 1 Building Landscape Farm
 Bridge Industry

Within Historic District?

Yes No

Historic District Name: _____

Status: Key-Contributing Contributing Non-Contributing

Associated Archaeological Site/Deposit?

Yes No

(Known or potential Sites – if yes, please describe briefly)

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

BUILDING/ELEMENT ATTACHMENT

Historic Sites #:

BUILDING STRUCTURE OBJECT

Common Name: 230 Mercer Street

Historic Name: Mercer Street School

Present Use: No Activity

Historic Use: Institutional Activity, Educational Activity

Construction Date: 1894

Source: Datestone

Alteration Date(s): Circa 1985

Source: Cappy Stoltz, personal communication

Designer: George K. Parsell

Physical Condition: Good

Builder: Daniel Whitlock

Remaining Historic Fabric: Medium

Style: Colonial Revival

Form: Center Hall

Stories: 2

Type: N/A

Bays: 7

Roof Finish Materials: Asphalt Shingle

Exterior Finish Materials Brick, Running Bond

Exterior Description:

The walls of the schoolhouse are brick, laid in common bond with only a few headers, including a header course below the frieze and one atop the stone foundation. Narrow platbands extend along the window sills of the first and second floors. A small number of bricks feature glazed headers, particularly when the headers are visible at the corners. Windows are replacement units, with three primary sizes. The larger windows on the main elevation consist of a fixed two-light transom over a double hung two-over-two sash unit, with these sashes occupying the location of the original four-over-four windows. The smaller windows on the main elevation are replacement one-over-one units. On the rear (northwest) elevation, most window sashes have been removed to make way for glass block infill. Windows have a stone sill, and first floor and basement windows have a splayed brick lintel. The schoolhouse has a semi-coursed stone foundation with three-over-three basement windows that are mostly original though many are sealed (Plate 12).

See Continuation Sheet

Interior Description:

See Continuation Sheet

Setting:

The schoolhouse is located three blocks southwest of the center of Hightstown, on the northwest side of Mercer Street (State Route 33). The parcel extends northwest from the street to the former railroad right-of-way. A sidewalk along the road separates the front lawn of the property from the street. The property drive leads along the southwest boundary of the property and also serves the neighboring property to the southwest. The drive leads to a paved parking lot behind the schoolhouse. A chain-link fence lines the rear of the parking lot and encloses a grass playground extending back to the railroad right-of-way.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

ELIGIBILITY WORKSHEET

Historic Sites #:

History:

See Continuation Sheet

Significance:

See Continuation Sheet

**Eligibility for New Jersey
and National Registers:**

Yes

No

**National
Register Criteria:**

A

B

C

D

Level of Significance

Local

State

National

Justification of Eligibility/Ineligibility:

See Continuation Sheet

For Historic Districts Only:

Property Count: Key Contributing: _____ Contributing: _____ Non Contributing: _____

For Individual Properties Only:

List the completed attachments related to the property's significance:

Building/Element Attachment

Narrative Boundary Description:

N/A

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

Exterior Description, continued from Building/Element Attachment:

The main (southeast) elevation features a symmetrical appearance, with a centered entrance bay flanked by the towers and two bays of windows between the towers and the corners (Plate 2). A datestone at the east corner simply reads "1894" (Plate 6). The entrance bay is mostly frame and painted white to stand out among the remainder of the dark red brick elevation. The second floor of the entrance bay features an upper entablature-like extended eave with the only gutter on the whole building. Below the extended eave is a frieze area with three expressed horizontal rectangles. A modified Palladian window occupies the bulk of the second floor of the entrance bay; in the center is an arched headed window with a center muntin in the sash, extending downward from an undersized keystone (Plate 4). The center portion of the window consists of a fixed arched sash over a double hung two-over-two sash window. Flanking this center window is a set of smaller one-over-one windows, which feature decorative wood paneling above and below. The first floor of the entrance bay features a shallow porch that has been simplified from its original appearance; the porch roof was built with an entablature supported by square Roman Doric pilasters at the ends. The porch shades the main entrance, which was designed with one of the typical Colonial Revival entrance assemblies. A full-length oversized transom is partitioned by two pilasters that also separate the door from its sidelights. The door is currently a metal unit with nine inset lights held by a doorlite rim. A small three-pane sidelight was "ganged" with the door when the original two-leaf entrance was removed. The main sidelights are actually six-over-six double hung sash units, replacing the original 12-over-12 sidelights. Separate sets of flagstone steps curve downward from the entrance to the front lawn between curved brick walls with an iron railing.

The towers, which mirror each other, have the footprint of an elongated D. The conical roof sits on a concave frieze that originally featured plaster garlands. Below this frieze is a brick band consisting of a herring bone pattern in the center, flanked by header courses above and below (Plate 5). Each tower has three narrow windows, currently with a fixed upper sash over a double hung one-over-one sash. The platbands of the main block of the building wrap around the towers as well. Like the main block of the building, the towers have a stone foundation.

The southwest and northeast end walls are similar in appearance. Below the frieze board, the second floor features metal slab doors accessing a metal fire escape system leading to the ground. Some of these doors have been sealed. On the southwest elevation near the south corner, mostly obscured by the fire escape, is a metal plate reading "George K. Parsell, Architect" (Plate 11). Windows include the larger and smaller units mentioned above, mostly aligned over the basement windows.

The rear (northwest) elevation features the glass block windows and sealed doors near the outer corners (Plate 8). On either side of the stair tower section, smaller windows are located between larger windows on each floor level. Metal landings for the sealed doors access stairs leading down to the rear parking lot.

The stair tower section is a two-story brick section centered on the rear of the main block of the building. Its shallow-pitched gabled roof is clad with asphalt shingles and features cornice returns. The brick walls were constructed primarily with stretchers, with a platband extending along the rear elevation through the sill of the first floor windows. Window placement on the primary or gabled end is symmetrical, although the windows are not aligned horizontally. The narrow side walls of the section feature a multi-light window on the second floor over a protruding, arched-headed entrance. The entrance on the left (the northeast elevation of the stair tower section) was the girls' rear entrance; no longer in use, the entrance has been sealed with T-111 siding. The boys' rear entrance (southwest elevation of the stair tower section) is more intact (Plate 10). The protruding brick arch creates a deep paneled architrave. A half-circle tympanum originally said "Boys Entrance," which is minimally readable; below the tympanum is the remnant of a dentil course. The door was replaced circa 1990; it is a metal slab door with nine inset lights held by a doorlite rim and operated by a metal handgrasp.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

Interior Description from Building/Element Attachment:

The interior of the schoolhouse consists of two primary floors and a partially finished basement. Each interior level consists of a center hall flanked by rooms on either side. The interior layout has been altered over the years as the building has been modernized to meet needs of the time.

First Floor

The first floor was partially reconfigured in at least two campaigns in the twentieth century; its original appearance was similar to the current second floor plan (Plates 13 to 22). Today the first floor has a modified center hall plan, with classrooms flanking the center hall and offices in the towers. Common first floor features include an acoustical tile ceiling, plastered walls with wainscoting, and tile over narrow hardwood floor. Windows (as mentioned) are either replacement one-over-one units or replacement glass block units. Doors are mostly flush metal doors with brass or nickel knobs; two original doors built with five cross-panels survive on the first floor. Boxed-in radiators are located along the outer walls of the floor level.

The center hall occupies the center of the floor level and extends from the stair tower section to the main entrance at the front of the building (Plates 13 and 14). Unlike other first floor areas, it is carpeted. A two-leaf entrance consisting of metal slab doors with a single inset light accesses the northwest end of the center hall; this set of doors was installed circa 1985 to separate the stairs from the center hall. Original cloakrooms along either side of the center hall constrict its width to the northwest; they have no ceiling in order to allow ambient light from above. Similar cloakrooms along the southeast end of the center hall have been replaced by a smaller storage room on the northeast side and a reception area with a low wall on the southwest side. Metal slab doors with a vertical inset light over the nickel knob access the classrooms on either side of the center hall. Proceeding along the center hall through an oversized uncased opening, an interior vestibule accesses the offices in the towers and the entrance on the main elevation.

The southwest side of the center hall contains a mostly intact classroom in the west corner and a reduced classroom in the south corner. The west classroom retains its original size as well as its cloakroom (Plates 15 to 17). A flush metal door on the northwest elevation (no longer operable) near the west corner provides exterior access, and a flush veneered door with an inset light on the southeast wall near the south corner of the room accesses the other classroom. Blackboards were located along the southeast and northeast walls. On the northwest wall, an original five cross-paneled door accesses a cloakroom partitioned from the center hall. The cloakroom is a narrow room with coat hooks on the walls and storage shelves in the far end.

The south classroom has been reduced by inserted partition walls that create two small rooms along its northeast wall (Plate 18). A flush metal door on the southwest wall near the west corner was installed as an emergency exit. Along the partition wall with the west classroom, a return air shaft with a decorative metal register delivered air back to the furnace (Plate 17). The small rooms partitioned from the volume of the south classroom are a restroom in the east corner and a copy room, which is accessed from the desk in the center hall.

The northeast side of the center hall contains one large classroom and a late twentieth-century office suite partitioned off the southeast end (Plates 19 and 20). Originally, two classrooms occupied this portion of the building, but the rooms were merged when the Masonic lodge created a banquet room and kitchen here. The current classroom has a tile ceiling, plastered walls with a beadboard wainscoting, and narrow hardwood flooring. On the northwest wall, a metal slab door near the north corner provides the only exterior access. On the southwest wall, an original five cross-paneled door with a brass knob and door plate accesses the cloakroom, a narrow space partitioned from the center hall with coat hooks on the plastered walls leading to an original batten door in the far end that accessed a shallow

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

Interior Description from Building/Element Attachment, continued:

storage cabinet (the door is operated by a metal knob and cast iron rim lock). The southeast wall of the classroom features a cased opening and a window facing into the office in the east corner. The office suite consists of three modern rooms: a staff kitchen flanked by a staff toilet and the office with the interior window.

The two offices in the towers have an elongated D-shaped footprint and are accessed from the southeast end of the center hall (Plate 21). The northeast office is painted beige, while the southeast office is painted white. Both rooms have a plastered ceiling and walls, beadboard wainscoting, and carpeted floors. A ledge on the northwest wall of the southeast office indicates that a small blackboard was originally located here (like the one surviving in place on the second floor).

The stair tower on the rear elevation contains the dog-leg stair system in the west corner and a locker room in the north corner (Plate 22). Originally, the existing stairs were the boy's stairs, and the locker room occupies the original location of the girls' stairs. A hall runs between the lower string of the stairs and the main block of the building. The spaces have a plastered ceiling and walls, wainscoting, and a tile floor. Boxed in radiators are located along the southeast wall of the hall. A five cross-paneled door with a brass knob and door plate accesses the stairs to the basement; the door is original to the building. A metal slab door accesses the locker room in the north corner (where the girls' stairs were originally located), and a metal slab door with an inset light accesses the stairs to the second floor. The stairs are described with the second floor below.

Second Floor

The second floor consists of a center hall with classrooms on either side, rooms in the towers along the southeast elevation, and a locker room in the stair tower section (Plates 23 to 33). Common features of the second floor include an acoustical tile ceiling, plastered walls with wainscoting, and a tile floor. The ceiling tile was installed over baffle grates in the ceiling that helped to ventilate the rooms by removing heated air during warm days. All windows are late twentieth-century replacement one-over-one units with modern sash locks or glass block windows on the rear elevation, with a single original window discussed below. Doors on the second floor include some original batten units accessing storage areas, a mid-twentieth-century louver door accessing a storage area, and flush metal doors dating to the mid- to late twentieth century (some with inset lights). Most modern doors feature knobs made of nickel. The classrooms retain vestigial chalk ledges indicating the original location of blackboards. Finally, decorative iron registers were returns for the heating system; original radiators along the outer walls that delivered heated air in the winter months are mostly boxed in.

The center hall extends through the center of the second floor between cloakrooms, from the stair tower to the front of the building (Plates 23 to 27). The walls feature wainscoting that rises to a height of seven feet with a piece of crown molding as a capital. This oversized wainscoting was originally the interior wall of the cloakrooms, exposed where one cloakroom has been removed, and the wainscoting is interrupted in various areas, indicating where doors have been moved (Plate 25). The doors are flush metal units with a vertical inset light above the brass knob operating a mortise lock. The floor of the center hall includes an area of narrow hardwood laid perpendicular to the partition where an original cloakroom has been removed and diagonal flooring occupying the remainder of the floor. An open archway in a convex wall to the southeast leads into a small waiting area between the rooms in the towers. The sides of the archway include four beaded arrises, one of which retains its original conical spear point finial. The tripartite Palladian-like window here is the only original window in the building. The sashes retain their original glass panes, and the sides of the stiles were plowed and bored to accommodate ropes that formerly accessed the vestigial pulleys found above on either side. Original sash locks survive to lock the sashes (Plate 27).

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

Interior Description from Building/Element Attachment, continued:

The center hall is the location of three cloakroom/storage areas, each without a ceiling to permit ambient light from above (Plate 26). The long, narrow cloakrooms flank each other near the northwest end of the hall. A modern slab door with a brass knob accesses the one off the center hall (northeast side), opening into an area with coat hooks along the long side walls, including a vertical beadboard wall to the northeast and a plastered wall to the southwest. A batten door operated by a cast metal knob and a cast iron rim lock secures a closet in the end of the room. The opposite cloakroom is accessed from the west classroom, and its interior is described there. A reduced storage room in the southeast corner of the center hall is accessed from the northwest classroom and is described with that room.

Two classrooms (west and south) are located on the southwest side of the center hall. These two rooms retain their original sizes. They have a tile ceiling with fluorescent lights, plastered walls with wainscoting, and a tile floor. On the southwest wall, flush metal doors access the fire escape system. The west classroom (Plate 28) has a five cross paneled door that accesses the cloakroom partitioned from the center hall; this room has the features mentioned earlier (hooks along the walls and a batten door in the end accessing a storage area). The south classroom has the same general appearance as the west classroom. Its primary blackboard was located along the partition wall, and its current door opens in the original location of the access to the now-removed cloakroom. A five cross-paneled door on the southeast wall leads into the second floor office.

The northeast classroom occupies the space on the northeast side of the center hall; it was originally two rooms, and remnants of that partition wall survive (Plate 29). A blackboard survives on the southwest wall, but it is now located where the door to the cloakroom was originally located. Materials are the same as found in other classrooms. A flush metal door on the northeast elevation leads to the fire escape system. A mid-twentieth-century louver door operated by a brass knob accesses the former cloakroom partitioned from the center hall (Plate 30); the room retains the characteristics mentioned earlier for the cloakrooms, including a batten door at the end operated by a cast iron rim lock that has lost its knob.

Two rooms with an elongated D-shaped footprint are located in the towers. The southern room was last used as the second floor office (Plate 31). This room retains much of its original character, with triple hung sash windows located over the wainscoting that wraps around the curved southeastern side and a small vestigial blackboard on the northwest wall. The floor in this office is carpeted. The north room was converted into restrooms but retains its overall historic materials.

The stair tower originally contained separate dog-leg stair systems for the boys and girls (Plates 32 and 33). The risers and treads are now covered, but the inner railing is supported by original vertical boards with voids imitating vertical arrows. At the pace landing, two original newels feature inset trefoil and quatrefoil decoration below a pyramidal cap. The girls' stairs have been removed, and the second floor room occupying their space is a carpeted room last used for lockers. The space between the original sets of stairs has a window facing northwest between beaded arrises featuring round arrowhead finials. The floor of this central area is tile, and a pair of flush metal doors (installed circa 1985) opens into the second floor's center hall.

Basement

The basement level consists of a grouping of unfinished spaces created by partitions installed circa 1925 when interior toilets were installed to replace the original freestanding privies behind the school building (Plate 34). The basement level was originally a primarily freespan space; the inserted partitions include a center beadboard wall and some terra cotta block walls in the northeast half.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

Interior Description from Building/Element Attachment, continued:

The basement is accessed primarily from the stair tower and secondarily from a bulkhead on the northwest elevation. Common features found throughout the level include exposed joists with cross-bracing above, plastered stone foundation walls, and a concrete floor. Original three-over-three basement windows on the exterior walls retain their original sash locks. Two rows of brick piers with pillows are located below the walls of the center halls on the two upper floors. Iron posts support two steel I-beams running along the center of the joists for additional support. Most doors are batten units, some with diagonal Z-bracing, but the doors connecting the main portion of the building with the stair tower are two-ply doors with vertical beadboard on the inside.

The southwest half of the basement served as the boys' restroom area. This half of the basement is divided into three spaces in the main block of the schoolhouse plus a storage room below the stairs in the stair tower. The west space includes the beadboard wall to the northeast where an area of shelving for supplies is located. The southeastern end of this half of the basement includes a small room where remnants of urinals survive plus a much larger storage space to the south.

The northeast half of the basement was the girls' restroom area. This area was initially divided when the terra cotta partition walls were installed, and later the walls were shifted to accommodate the building's mechanical systems. Today a hall runs between the beadboard wall bisecting the basement level and the terra cotta wall to the northeast. The long, narrow room in the north corner of the basement has a very small door on its southeast wall and is essentially an empty and inaccessible storage space. The furnace room today occupies the center of this half of the basement. The large freestanding room in the east corner of the basement includes two storage spaces with block walls: one on the northeast wall and along the beadboard partition wall to the southwest.

History:

The Mercer Street Schoolhouse was built in 1894-1895 to replace an earlier Academy at the same location. Architect George K. Parsell designed the schoolhouse to provide eight classrooms on two levels, and the building remained in use as a school for 44 years. In 1941, the Hightstown Masons purchased the building and used it as their lodge until 1981. The final use of the building was a day care center operated by the YMCA. Plans are currently being completed to use the building for borough offices.

An earlier school building known as the Academy stood on the property for half a century (Figures 1 to 3). Hightstown originally emerged around a tavern and blacksmith shop owned in the eighteenth century by John Hight (Woodward and Hageman 1883: 767). Hightstown remained a small stagecoach village until the arrival of the Camden and Amboy Railroad, which prompted an expansion in all directions. As it became the economic center of East Windsor Township, additional lots were laid out along the emerging road system. The Academy was constructed in 1841 as a two-story building with a single classroom on each floor (Stults 2019:5-6). It stood on land owned by John C. Ward, whose property included much of the southern part of today's Hightstown. In 1843, Ward sold the original lot 5 to the Hightstown school board and the following year (1844) he sold the school board the adjacent lot 6 (Mercer County Deeds [hereinafter MCD] 1843: F-368; 1844: G-61). These two parcels form today's Lot 16, the larger of the two parcels documented in this survey form. The spire of the Academy was constructed to house a bell, and in 1852 local resident Peter Bilyeu paid to have the bell cast in New York City (Stults 2019:6). The bell arrived the following year (1853), the same year that Hightstown was established as a borough (Woodward and Hageman 1883:767). Increasing population resulted in the addition of two classrooms in 1859 and a second addition in 1884.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

History, continued:

Structural concerns led to the decision to replace the Academy. In 1893, a large area of ceiling plaster fell onto the school desks one evening. This accident caused parents to fear for the safety of their children, although no one was in the building at the time of the accident. The school board decided to build a new schoolhouse (the current building). The board contracted with George K. Parsell, a New Brunswick architect, to design the schoolhouse. During construction, the Academy was sold to three different people, two of whom moved their parts of the building away but allowed these sections to be used for classes when the fall semester opened until the new schoolhouse was complete (Orr 1998: 140-141). At the end of the 1893-1894 school year, the Hightstown school district merged with the East Windsor school district. The combined school board decided to discontinue some one-room schools and to replace the Academy with a larger schoolhouse (Orr 1998: 141).

The Mercer Street Schoolhouse was built in the fall of 1894 and opened in January 1895 (Figures 4 to 7). It was built closer to Mercer Street than the Academy in order to provide a larger recreational area behind the schoolhouse. The 1852 bell was retained and was placed in the cupola of the new schoolhouse. Parsell produced a proposed sketch of the schoolhouse (Figure 4). Daniel Whitlock of New Brunswick won the contract to build the building. The cost of the building was \$12,000. During construction, architect Parsell simplified portions of the plans to save money, and a newspaper article stated that most of the planned decorative elements were omitted from the building (*Hightstown Gazette*, 3 January 1895).

George K. Parsell (1853-1933) was an architect practicing primarily in Middlesex County. His home was located in Highland Park, but his offices were located on George Street in New Brunswick. Parsell was not included in the Philadelphia Architects and Builders database, and his obituary did not outline his architectural career (*Central New Jersey Home News*, 28 December 1933:2). Parsell began his practice in the 1880s, beginning with his own house and then two commissions that were well-received at the time – the Highland Park School (1886) and New Jersey Hall on the Rutgers campus (1889, listed in the National Register of Historic Places [NRHP] in 1975). His design for the Mercer Street School took place in the middle of his career. During its construction, he was badly injured while supervising work at a New Brunswick bank, when a heavy tile fell and hit him on the head (*Daily Times*, 6 October 1894:1). Afterwards, some of his key commissions included the Waldron Factory in Highland Park (1896), the Highland Park Fire Station (1902), and the New Brunswick Free Public Library (1903). His commissions were primarily in the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles.

The Mercer Street School opened on January 7, 1895. One week earlier, on New Year's Eve, the school board opened the schoolhouse to the general public. That day, two men from the Matawan school district visited because their voters had just approved the shift from one-room schools to a graded school, and they wanted to be better informed about how to accommodate the changes in education (*Matawan Journal*, 12 January 1895:1). Another newspaper reporter noted the eight classrooms, each with large blackboards and a cloakroom (*Hightstown Gazette*, 3 January 1895).

Scattered newspaper articles provide some context for the students' experience in the Mercer Street School. In the early years, school wagons delivered students; these horse-drawn wagons had two long rows of six seats (see Figure 5). The wagon servicing Perrineville was hit by a train in 1914 while bringing students to the Mercer Street School, injuring nine children (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 November 1914:11).

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

History, continued:

An ongoing problem was the increasing number of students. In 1913, the upper classes were removed to the new Stockton Street School, alleviating the pressure at that time (Stoltz 2018:8). By 1922, however, the Mercer Street School was so over-crowded that the school board rented two rooms in Hightstown for additional classrooms; attendance had increased by 60 percent in the past 10 years (*Freehold Transcript and Monmouth Inquirer*, 8 September 1922:9). During the 1920s, the building was used both as a polling place and for summer Bible school (*Trenton Evening Times*, 7 November 1921:13; *Central New Jersey Home News*, 9 July 1929:2). In 1921, the school board purchased a small lot to increase the size of the rear playground; this is the current Lot 16 (see Site Plan) (MCD 1921: 483-307). Finally, an article in 1923 provides interesting information about the salaries of the teachers. At that time, the school district paid its female principal \$3,000; its sole male teacher \$1,550; and its 15 female teachers received salaries ranging from a high of \$1,750 to a low of \$1,200. Remarkably, five female teachers were paid the same as the male teacher, and one was paid more (*Freehold Transcript and Monmouth Inquirer*, 10 August 1923:9). One change to the schoolhouse took place likely in the 1920s when the basement was refitted for restrooms, replacing the former freestanding privies; otherwise the building retained its original appearance until the final classes were relocated elsewhere in 1939.

In 1941, the Free & Accepted Masons purchased the schoolhouse to use as their lodge, and they used the building for 40 years. The school board auctioned the property on September 6, 1941. Two parties placed bids: the Free & Accepted Masonic Lodge and the Hightstown House Wrecking Company. The Masonic lodge was founded in 1856 and had met in a building at the center of Hightstown; it was looking for better facilities. The House Wrecking Company was interested in purchasing the property to harvest the brick for use in other projects. A local legend states that during the bidding the two parties explained their interest, and the owner of the wrecking company, a Mason himself, withdrew from contention. The Free & Accepted Masons purchased the property for \$2,665 (Stultz 2019:8; MCD 1942:840-108). Early in their ownership, the Masons removed the original cupola, and the 1852 bell was stored at a Masonic-owned local business until the early twenty-first century. The north and east classrooms were merged on the two primary levels to provide a lodge room upstairs and a banquet room and kitchen on the first floor. In 1979, the Masons were preparing to purchase the Grange Hall for its use, and when they had the property surveyed, they realized that the deed of 1942 accidentally left out today's Lot 16. The lodge brought the fact to the attention of the school board, and in 1980 the school board conveyed this parcel to the lodge (MCD 1980:2139-66). After the Masonic lodge conveyed the property to the YMCA, it moved to the Grange building.

The YMCA owned the schoolhouse from 1981 to 2018. The Masonic lodge sold the two lots to the Hightstown-East Windsor YMCA for \$1,000 (MCD 1981:2170-943). The YMCA completed some interior renovations, including the reconfiguration of the first floor, the removal of the girls' stair system, and the sealing of the old girls' rear entrance. To meet fire codes, the boys' stair was fireproofed, including the installation of the two-leaf entrances on the two primary floor levels between the stairs and the center hall. The building was used primarily as a child care center, although the large upstairs room was used briefly as a fitness center. The restrooms in the tower were installed during the years when the fitness room was in operation. In 2018, the Borough of Hightstown purchased the property for use as new borough offices after its old offices were damaged by Hurricane Irene (2011). The borough is completing plans to make additional alterations to the building and the construction of a rear wing.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

Significance:

Built in 1894-1895, the Mercer Street School is an example of a Multiple-Room schoolhouse representing the transition period between the one-room schoolhouses that dominated the nineteenth century and the larger consolidated schoolhouses introduced during the Progressive Era in education. In urban areas, multi-room schools emerged earlier in the nineteenth century, with a nearby example being the Higbee Street School in Trenton, and some design elements of these buildings began to appear in rural schools near the end of the century. These schools have some common characteristics that indicate the period's approach to design. These schoolhouses were designed with large windows that provided ample light and also provided better ventilation. In order to alleviate what was then called "stale air," which was thought to spread illness among the students, the lower sash of windows could be raised to admit fresh air and the upper sash lowered to (theoretically) remove the stale air. Another exterior feature found in the Higbee Street School and the Mercer Street School was the arrangement of entrances, with a primary entrance on the front of the building and separate girls' and boys' entrances on the rear; the interiors of the two buildings were designed with separate boys' and girls' stairs as well. A feature of the interior was the presence of cloakrooms. Although earlier in the century, schools usually provided separate cloakrooms for the boys and girls, the Mercer Street School has a cloakroom for each classroom; it is possible that the classroom and cloakroom combinations were originally separated by sex. The later consolidated high school buildings represented a further step in school design, in which students rotated among classrooms where they were taught by specialized teachers who taught a single subject.

The original design of the Mercer Street School reflects an important shift in the field of education. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, one-room schools used what was called the Lancastrian system, in which materials were available for students of different ages but students were in the same schoolroom. When younger students had problems, older students could help the younger students as the teacher working with students at the front of the classroom. In the late nineteenth century, a shift took place involving increased specialization of teachers that eliminated this collaborative approach to education. The new system, called "graded schools" at the time, provided separate rooms for students of the same age rather than having an eight-year range in ages of students in the classroom. Teaching was becoming more professional, with annual teachers' "institutes" held in summers to prepare teachers for their narrowing focus in the classroom. The Mercer Street School was an early graded school outside of a city in New Jersey.

The schoolhouse's architect, George K. Parsell, had a limited architectural career in central New Jersey. The limited attention in the past to Parsell's architectural career has focused on his design for New Jersey Hall and scattered references to other commissions, but with no mention of his design of the Mercer Street School. If the small plaque had not been attached onto the south corner of the building, its architect would have likely remained anonymous. Parsell's design, which was simplified during construction to reduce cost, represented a mixture of the Colonial Revival and Queen Anne styles; these were styles most associated with Parsell's other commissions.

Justification of Eligibility/Ineligibility:

The Mercer Street School was built during a time of transition between the one-room schoolhouses of the nineteenth century and the consolidated school buildings of the Progressive Era in education. Its design reflects a shift that was taking place nationwide in public education. Whereas teachers formerly needed to be able to instruct students from a wide range of ages and in all fields of study, teachers now narrowed their individual professional focus either on the educational needs of students of a given age/grade or focused on a single subject (language, science, history, etc.). To accommodate these changes architecturally, new school houses were designed with multiple interior rooms. The transitional period began after new legislation passed in 1867 and 1871 re-defined "public schools" by making attendance compulsory and increasing the school year to 180 days. The transitional period ended with the introduction of consolidated school buildings circa 1900.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

Justification of Eligibility/Ineligibility, continued:

The Mercer Street School is not significant as a well-preserved example of its type to individually qualify for listing in the NRHP under Criteria A or C. Although only a limited number of schools constructed during the period of transition have been evaluated for their eligibility, one that stands out is the Church Street School in Long Branch (SR 5/27/1999, NRHP 6/28/1999). That school was completed with more stylistic features than the Mercer Street School, and it retains a greater proportion of its architectural character than the Mercer Street School although its condition is not as good. The Mercer Street School was designed by architect George K. Parsell, who had a limited practice, and in other references to his work the school has not been mentioned as among his important commissions. Furthermore, the integrity of the Mercer Street School suffers from alterations. The primary exterior alteration is the removal of the cupola, which was a character-defining feature of the original design as one of the most noticeable decorative features. The changes to the interior such as the removal of the girls' stairs and the alterations to the interior layout (removal of some cloakrooms, insertion of the large desk on the first floor, and merging of classrooms) have collectively undermined the design and materials of the school, with a corresponding impact on the feeling of being in an eight-room school. Other changes are incremental but together represent further lessening of the building's integrity, including replacement of the doors and windows, removal of one chimney, and removal of the girls' stairs and rear entrance. The insertion of the rest rooms on both floor levels and the installation of the kitchen suite could be considered reversible; however, they represent additional lessening of the building's integrity.

Due to a lack of sufficient architectural significance and integrity, the Mercer Street School is not recommended eligible for listing in the NRHP.

Bibliography:

Central New Jersey Home News [New Brunswick, New Jersey]

1929 Big Enrollment at Bible School in Hightstown. 9 July:2.

1933 George K. Parsell Obituary. 28 December:2.

Daily Times [New Brunswick, New Jersey]

1894 Architect Injured [Parsell]. 6 October:1.

Evarts & Stewart

1875 Combination Atlas Map of Mercer County, New Jersey, Compiled, Drawn, and Published From Personal Examinations and Surveys. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Freehold Transcript and Monmouth Inquirer [Freehold, New Jersey]

1922 Hightstown Schools. 8 September: 2.

1923 Hightstown Schools. 10 August:9.

Hightstown Gazette

1895 Our New Public School. 3 January.

Matawan Journal [Matawan, New Jersey]

1895 For a Graded School. 12 January:1.

Musial Group P.A.

2019 Hightstown Municipal Building and Police HQ, plans dated 15 November.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

Bibliography, continued:

Orr, John W.

1998 *Reflections From the Shrine*. Hightstown, New Jersey.

Philadelphia Inquirer [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania]

1914 Nine Hurt When Train Strikes School Wagon. 6 November:11.

Sanborn Map Company

n.d. Hightstown Fire Insurance Map. New York City, New York.

Stults, Cappy

2019 "Borough Hall to Occupy Old Schoolhouse," *Hightstown East Windsor Historical Society News*, Summer 2019.
Hightstown, New Jersey.

Trenton Evening Times

1921 Hightstown. 7 November:13.

Woodward, E.M. and John F. Hageman

1883 *History of Burlington and Mercer counties, New Jersey: with biographical sketches of many of their pioneers and prominent men*.
Everts & Peck, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

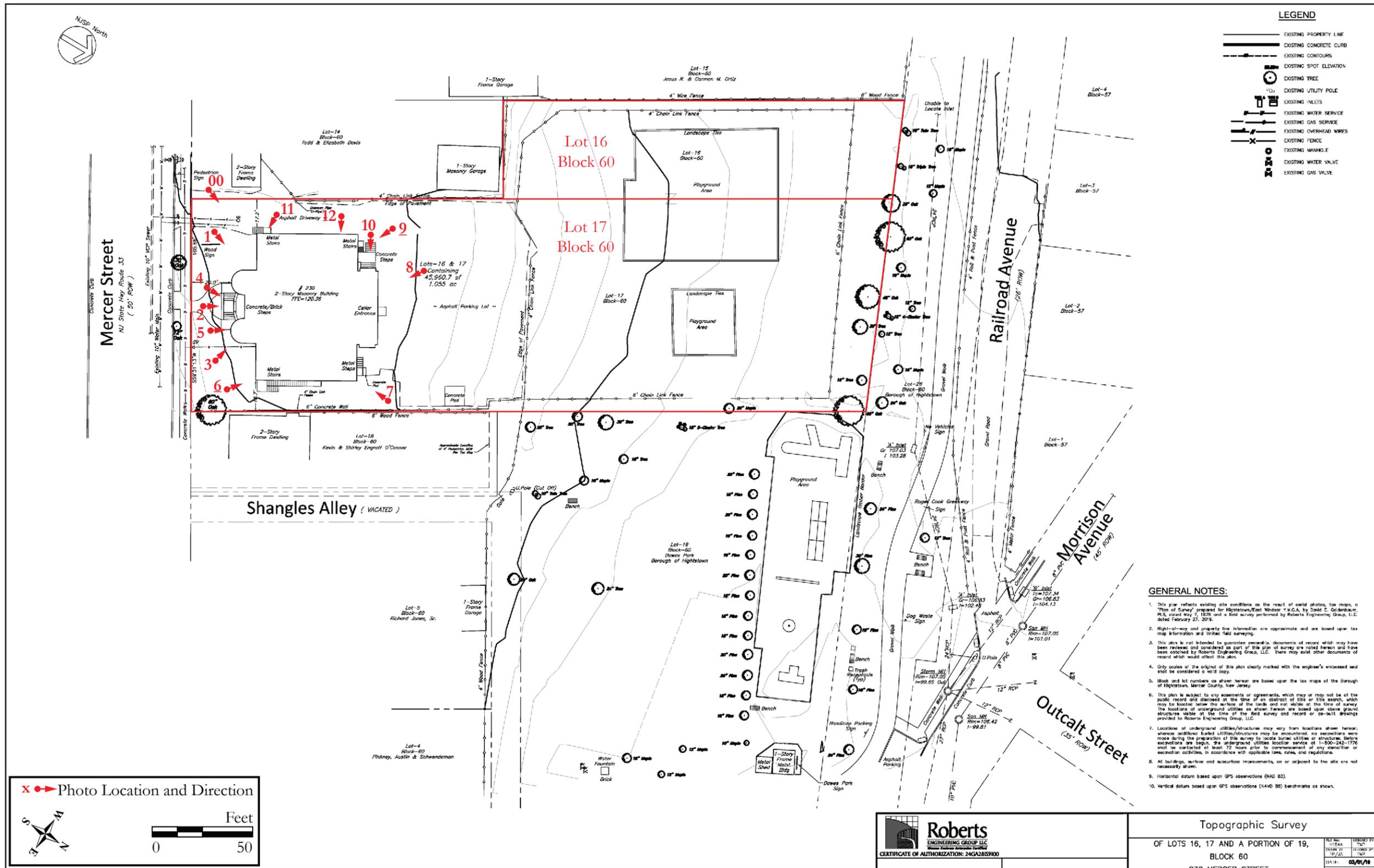
Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Date: July 2020

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

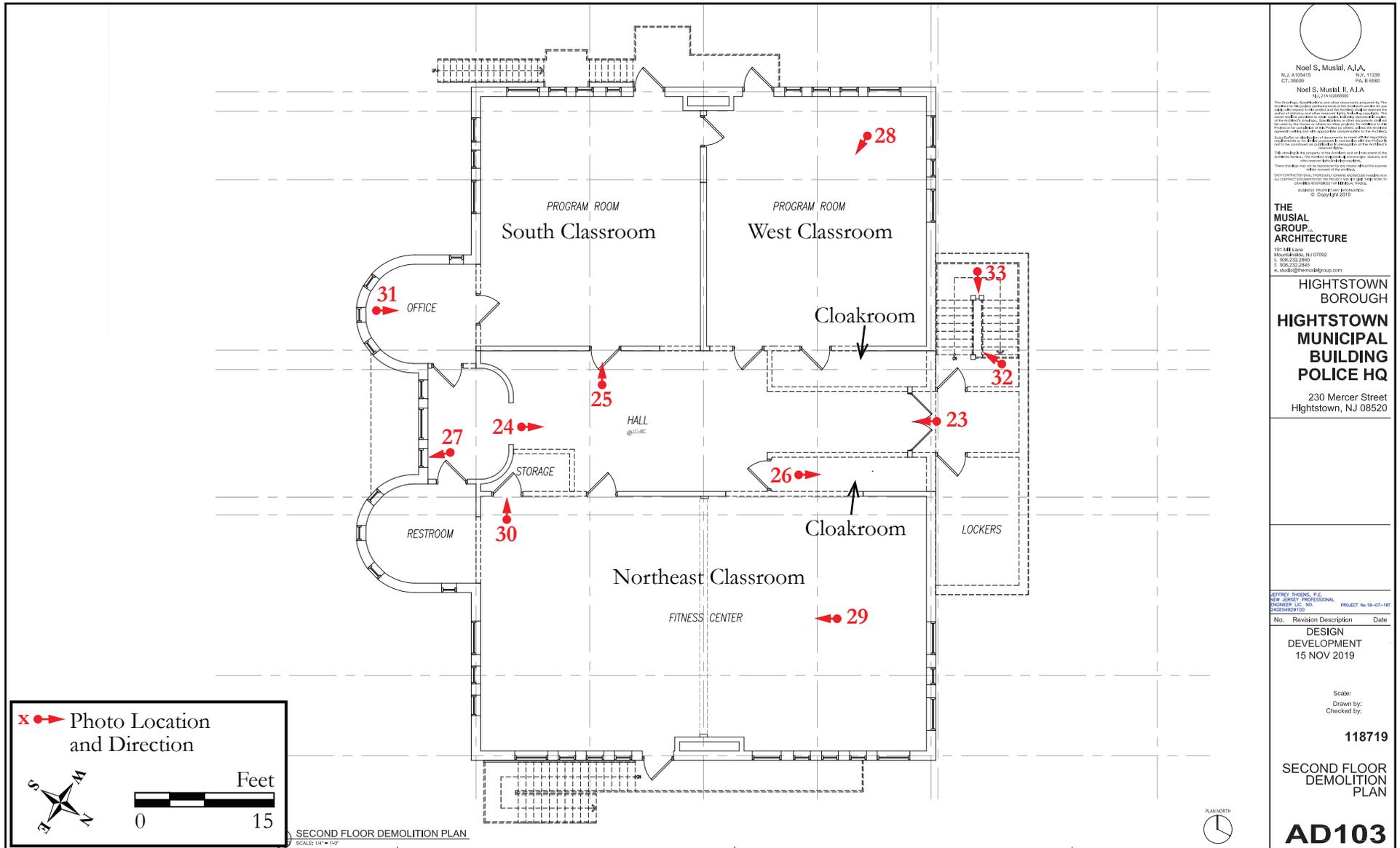
CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Floor Plan – Second Floor.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School

Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw

Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

Date: July 2020

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

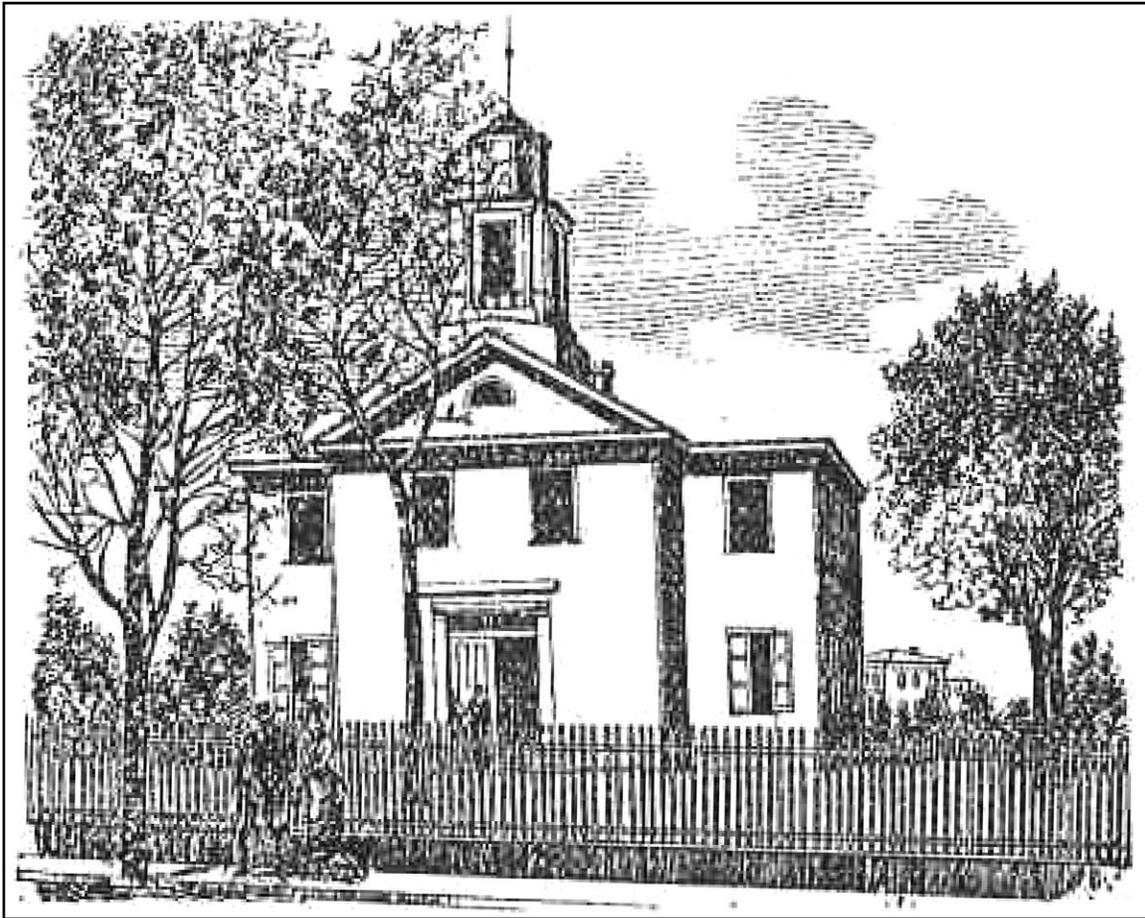


Figure 1: 1879 illustration of the Hightstown Academy (Stoltz 2019).

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School
Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw Date: July 2020
Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

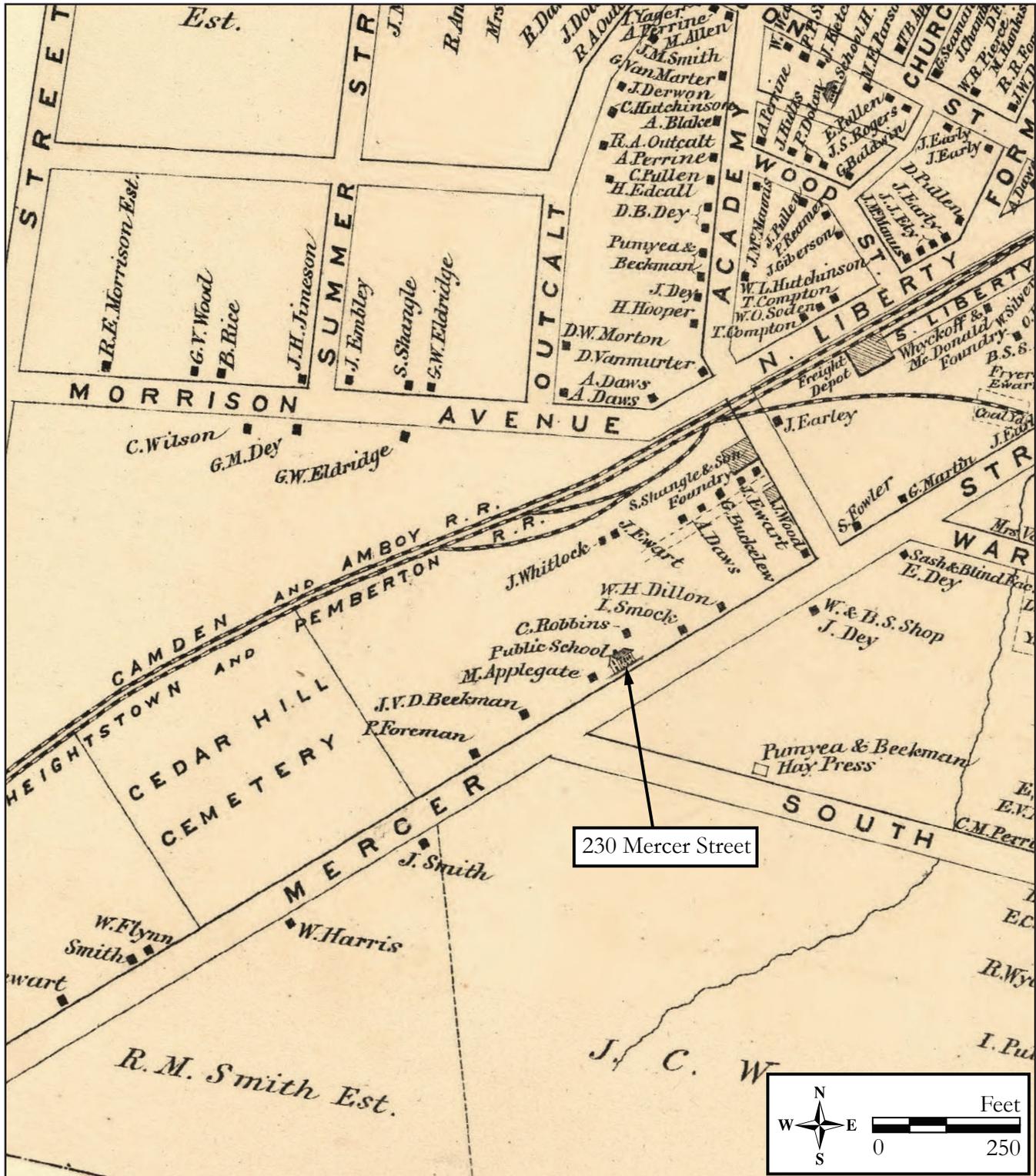


Figure 2: 1875 Evarts & Stewart, *Combination Atlas Map of Mercer County, New Jersey, Compiled, Drawn, and Published From Personal Examinations and Surveys.*

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School
Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw Date: July 2020
Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

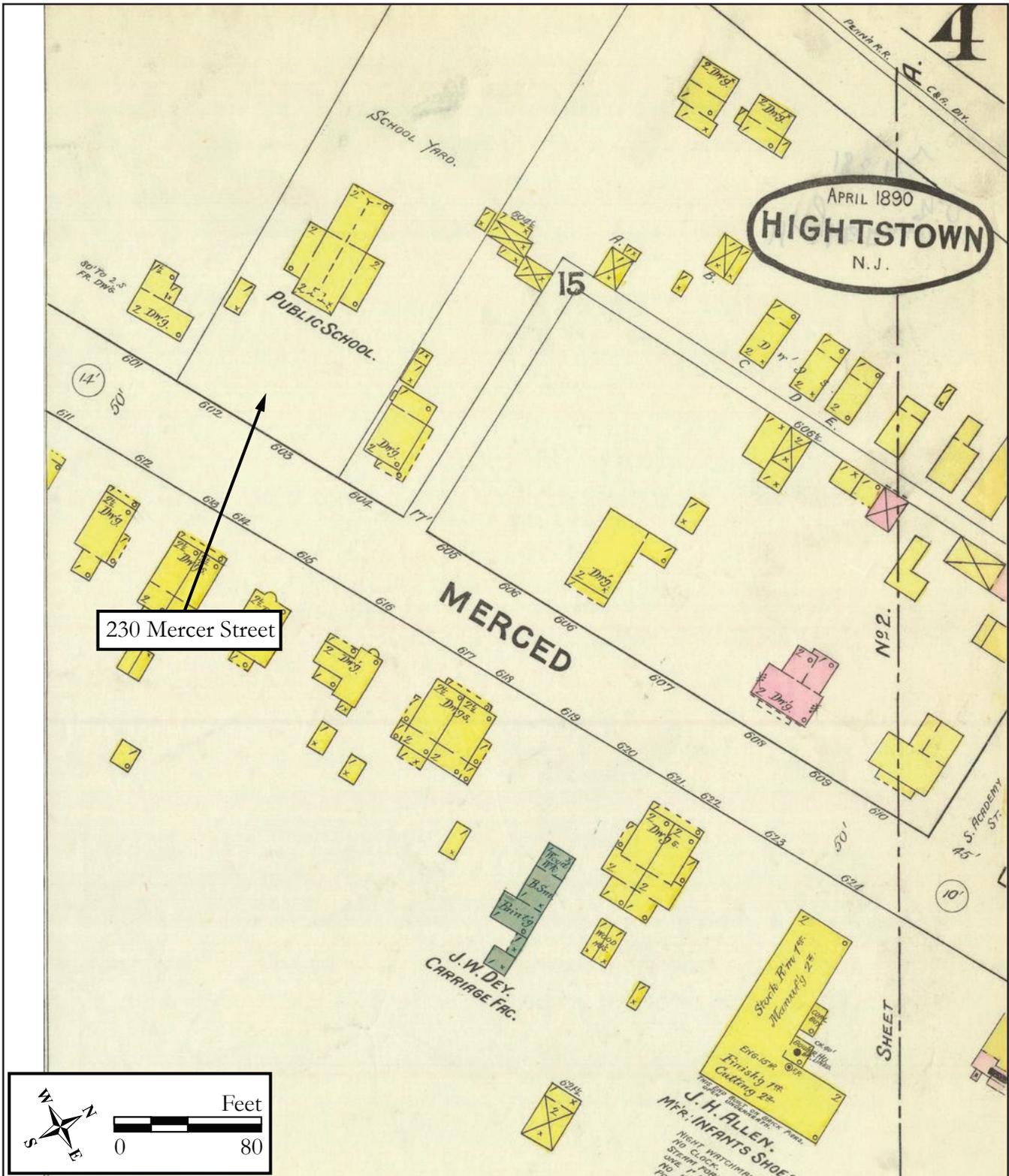


Figure 3: 1890 Sanborn Map Company, Hightstown Fire Insurance Map.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Figure 4: Original sketch of the schoolhouse drawn by architect George K. Parsell (Hightstown Historical Society).

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School
Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw Date: July 2020
Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Figure 5: Early twentieth-century photograph of the schoolhouse with horse wagons standing along Mercer Street (Hightstown Historical Society).

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School
Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw Date: July 2020
Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Figure 6: Early twentieth-century postcard image of the schoolhouse (Hightstown Historical Society).

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School
Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw Date: July 2020
Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Figure 7: 1902 Sanborn Map Company, Hightstown Fire Insurance Map.

Survey Name: Intensive-level Historic Architectural Survey, Mercer Street School
Surveyor: Seth Hinshaw Date: July 2020
Organization: Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



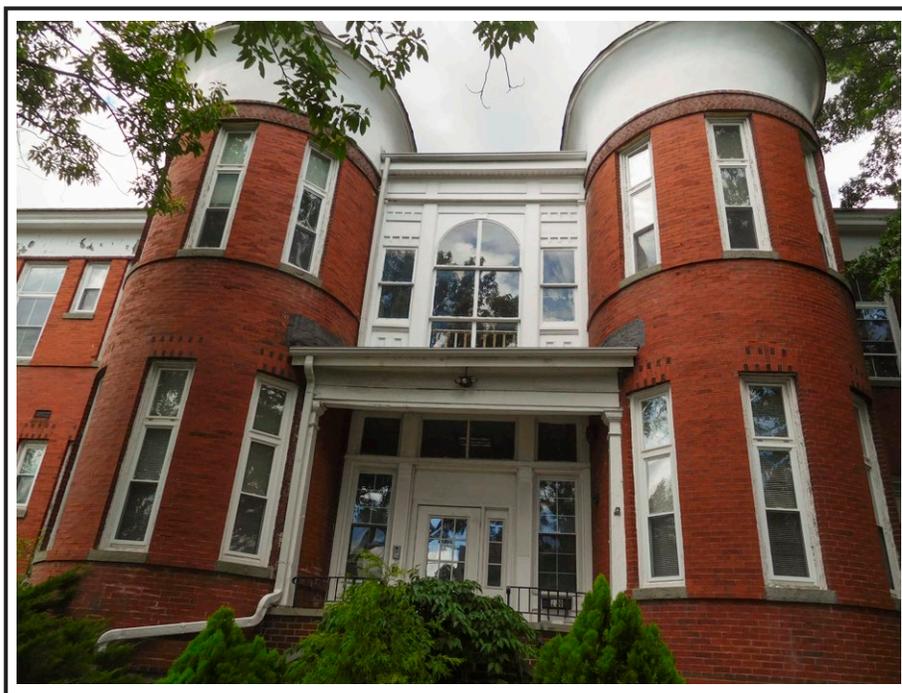
Main elevation of the schoolhouse near the south corner.

Plate: 1

Photo view:
North

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020



Center of main elevation of the schoolhouse.

Plate: 2

Photo view:
Northwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



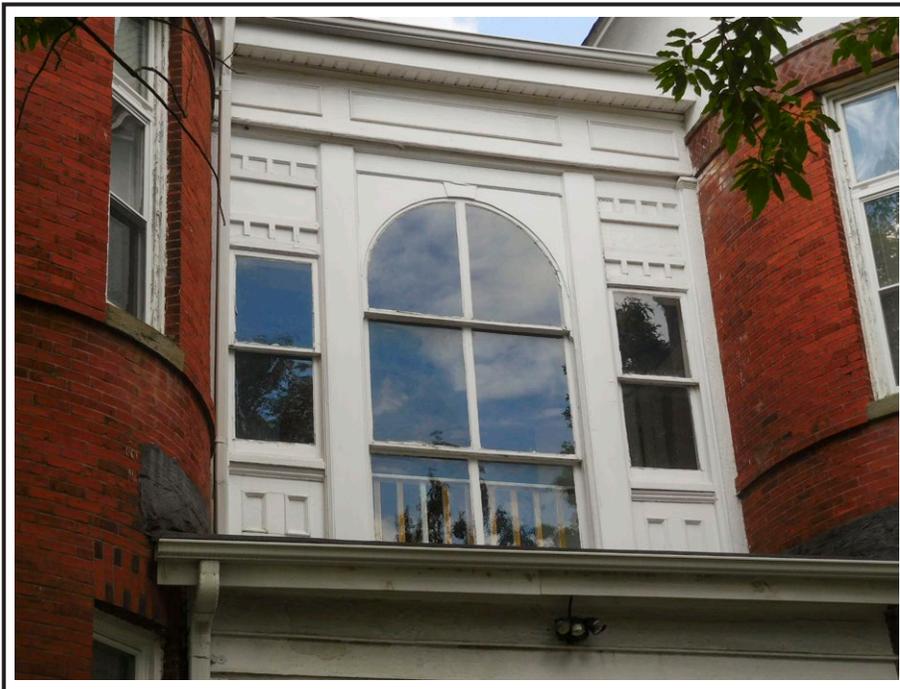
Main elevation of schoolhouse.

Plate: 3

Photo view: West

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020



Detail of the Palladian-like window in the center of the main elevation of the schoolhouse.

Plate: 4

Photo view:
Northwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

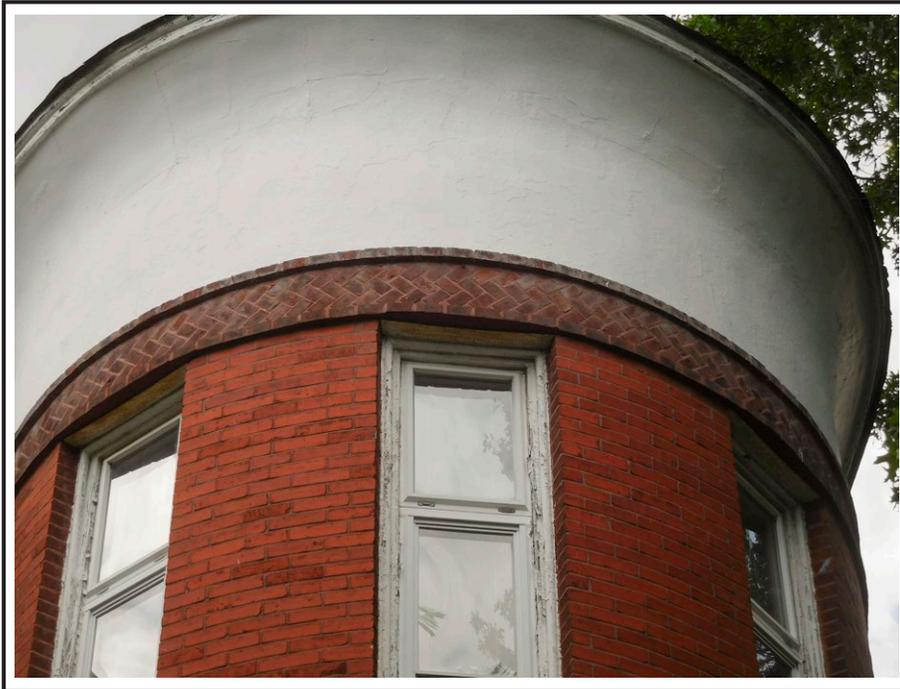


Plate: 5

Photo view:
Northwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Detail of the concave frieze area of the front towers.



Plate: 6

Photo view: West

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Detail of the datestone, found on the main elevation near the east corner.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 7

Photo view:
South

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Northeast elevation of schoolhouse (left) and rear (right), showing the sealed girls' entrance on the stair tower section.



Plate: 8

Photo view:
Southeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Rear (northwest) elevation of schoolhouse, with the stair tower section in the foreground.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 9
Photo view: East
Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw
Date: June 30,
2020

West corner of schoolhouse, with the original boys' entrance into the stair tower section (left) and the southwest elevation of the main block (right).

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 10

Photo view:
Northeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Boys' entrance into the stair tower section.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Metal plaque on southwest wall of schoolhouse with name of architect (George K. Parsell).

Plate: 11

Photo view:
North

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020



Original basement window on southwest elevation of schoolhouse.

Plate: 12

Photo view:
Northeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

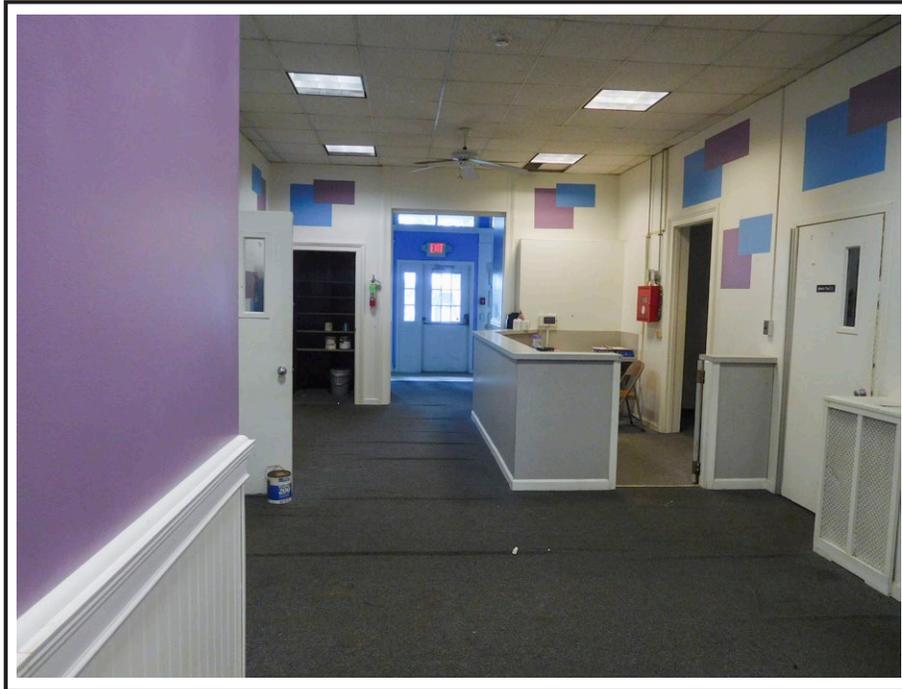


Plate: 13

Photo view:
Southeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

First floor, center hall, as viewed from the doors off the stair tower.

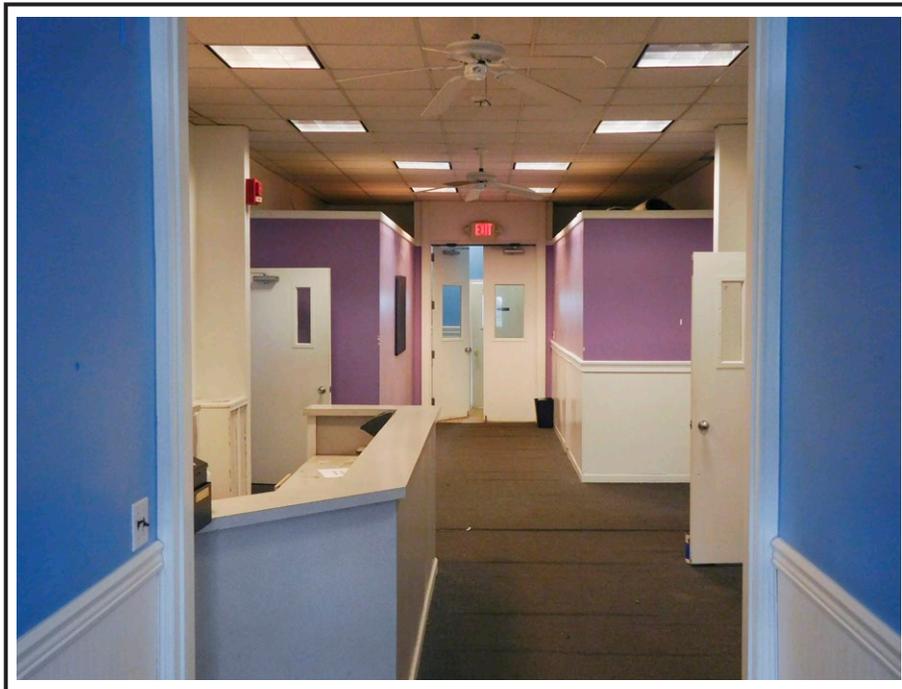


Plate: 14

Photo view:
Northwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Center hall, first floor, as viewed from the main entrance.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 15

Photo view: West

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

West classroom, first floor, as viewed from the door off the center hall.



Plate: 16

Photo view: East

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

West classroom, first floor, facing towards the door to the cloakroom (left) and the door to the center hall (right).

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 17

Photo view:
Southeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Decorative grate for the air return in the west classroom.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 18

Photo view:
South

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

South classroom, first floor, as viewed from the entrance off the center hall.



Plate: 19

Photo view:
Southeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Northeast classroom, first floor, facing towards the office suite in the southeast end..

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

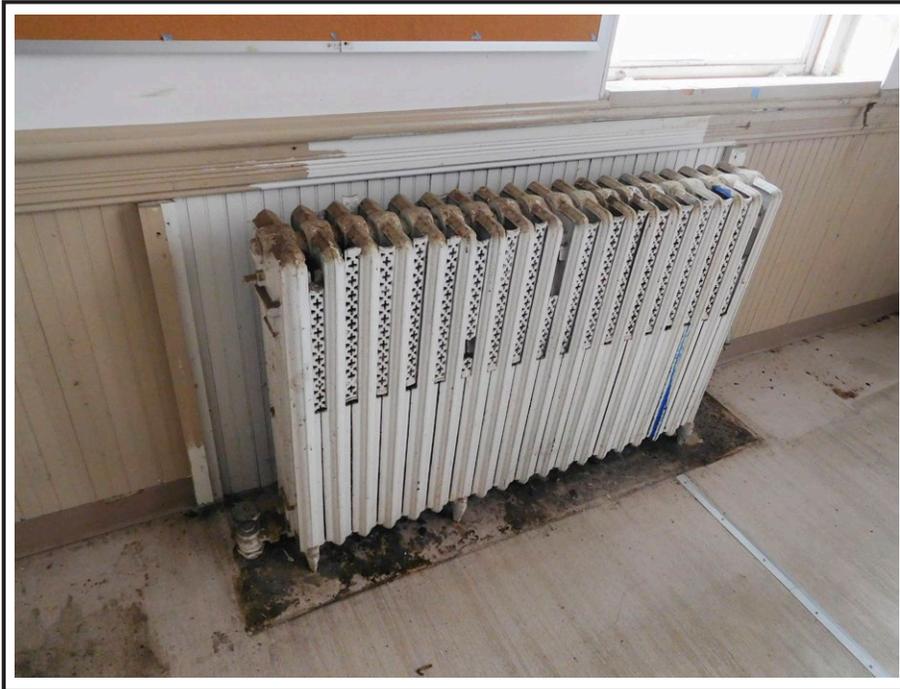


Plate: 20

Photo view:
Northwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Original radiator in the northeast classroom, first floor, located along the northeast wall.



Plate: 21

Photo view: East

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

North office on first floor, as viewed from the entrance.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

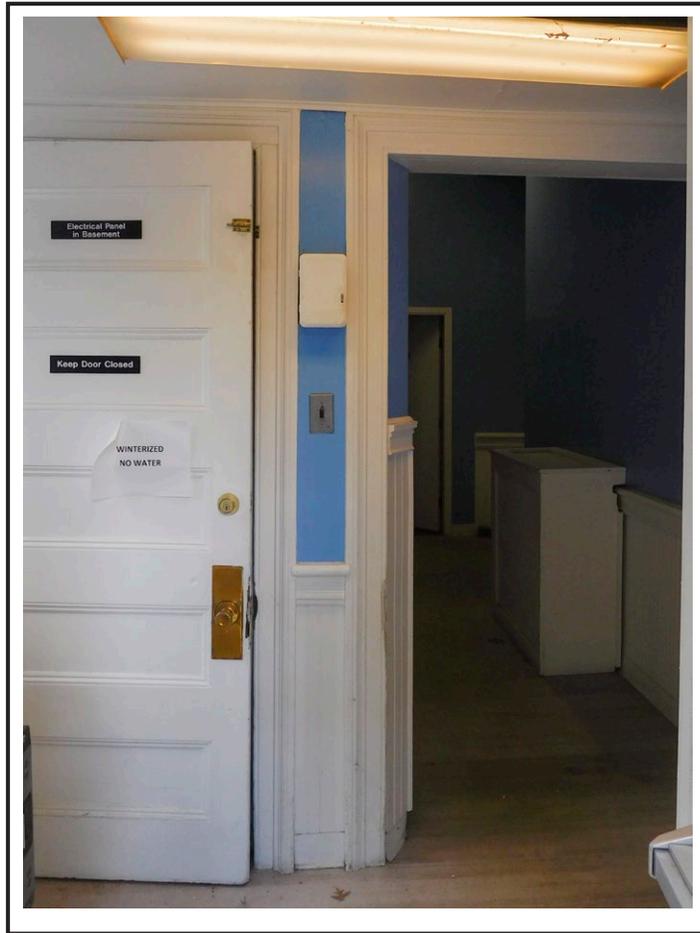


Plate: 22

Photo view:
Northeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Interior of stair tower section, as viewed from the rear entrance.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

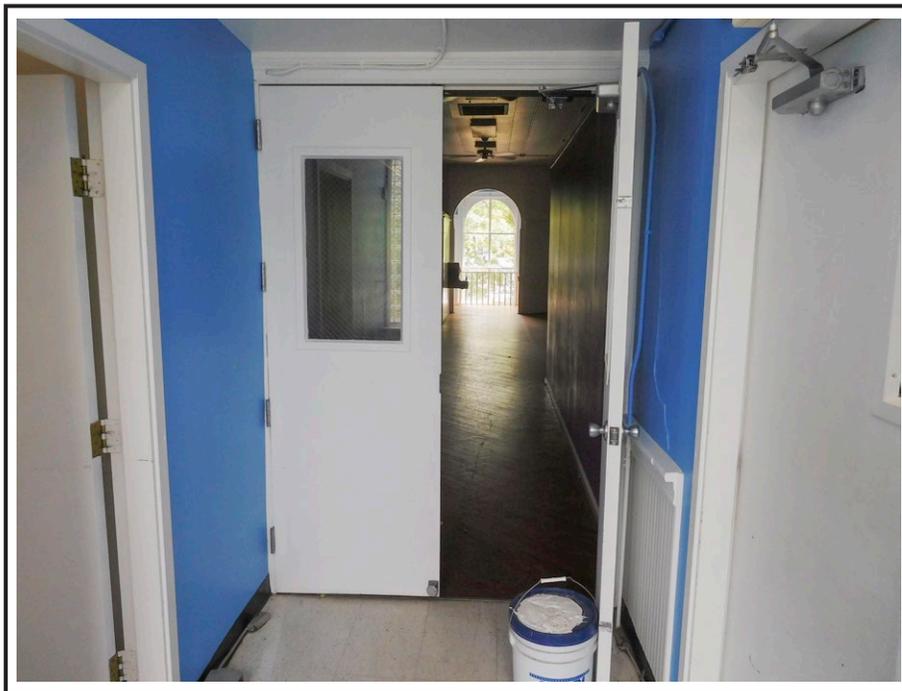


Plate: 23

Photo view:
Southeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Two-leaf entrance to the second floor center hall from the stair tower.

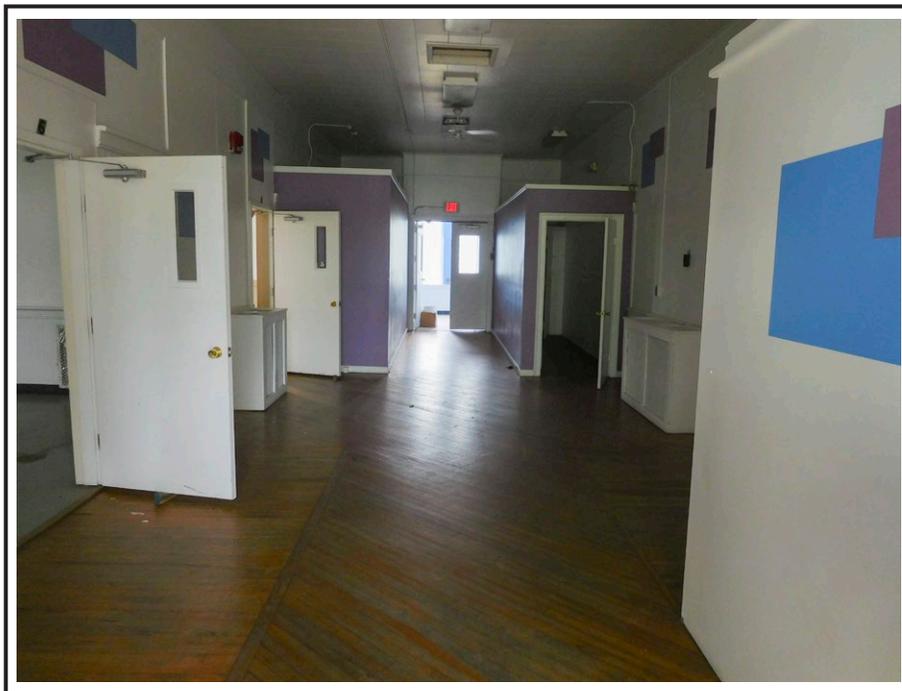


Plate: 24

Photo view:
Northwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Second floor center hall, as viewed from the southeast end.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 25

Photo view:
Southwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Detail of the southwest wall of the center hall, second floor, showing the elevated wainscoting that was originally found inside a cloakroom.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 26

Photo view:
Northwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Cloakroom in north corner of second floor center hall, viewed from the entrance.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 27

Photo view:
Southeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Original sash lock on Palladian-like window at southeast end of second floor center hall.



Plate: 28

Photo view: East

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

West classroom, second floor, facing the doors to the cloakroom and the center hall.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

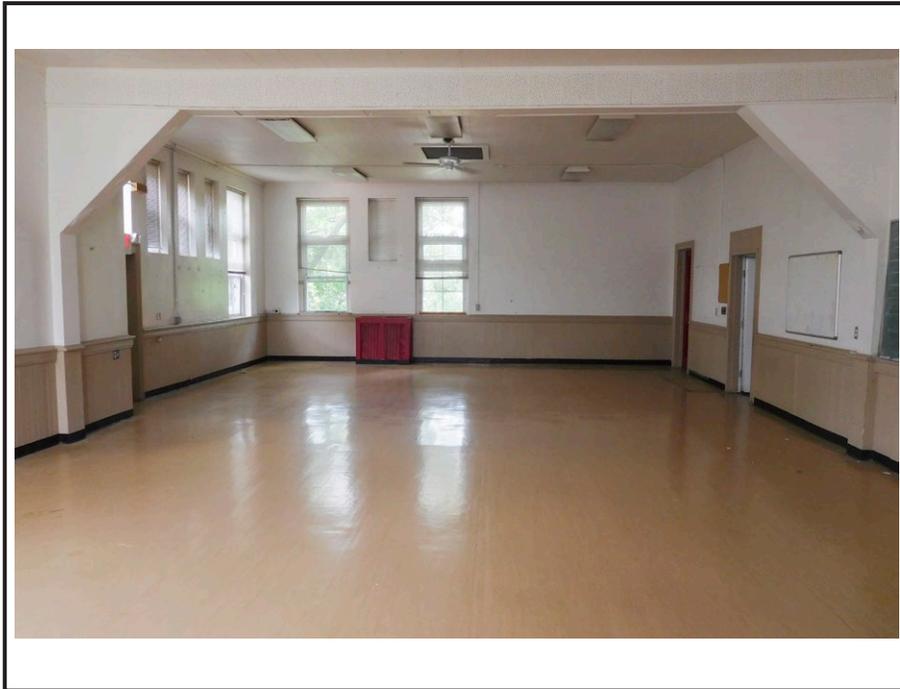


Plate: 29

Photo view:
Southeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Northeast classroom, second floor.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:

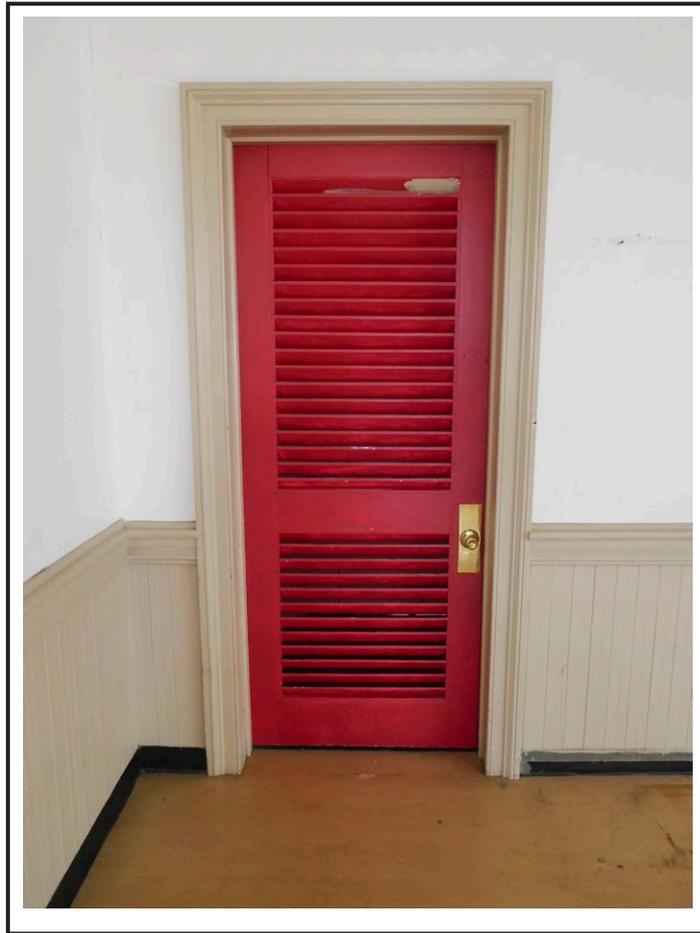


Plate: 30

Photo view:
Southwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Louver door in the northeast classroom accessing the storage room.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



South office, second floor, showing the small blackboard and the door to the south classroom.

Plate: 31

Photo view:
Northwest

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020



Railing and banister of stairs with the jigsaw cutouts in the shape of an arrow.

Plate: 32

Photo view:
South

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 33

Photo view:
Northeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

Newels with trefoil and quatrefoil decorations on stair landing.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Historic Sites #:



Plate: 34

Photo view:
Northeast

Photographer:
Seth Hinshaw

Date: June 30,
2020

West room in basement, facing towards the open shelving along the center wall.

Attachment 3:

Qualifications of the Principal Investigator



CULTURAL
RESOURCE
CONSULTANTS

RGA

SETH B. HINSHAW
SENIOR HISTORIAN (36 CFR 61)

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE:

With this firm:

2015-Present

With other firms: 14

Wise Preservation

Planning LLC: 14

EDUCATION:

MS 2001

University of

Pennsylvania,

Historic Preservation

MA 1991

University of North

Carolina-Greensboro

History

BA 1988

University of North

Carolina-Greensboro

American History

PROFESSIONAL

TRAINING:

Cultural Resource

Essentials Planning

Program, PHMC

Harrisburg, PA, 2009

Certificate in Community

Planning, Pennsylvania

Municipal Planning

Education Institute, 2008

PROFESSIONAL

ORGANIZATIONS:

Friends Historical

Association, Board

Member

Chester County Historic

Preservation Network,

Board Member

Professional Experience Summary:

Seth B. Hinshaw provides professional historic resource protection planning and cultural resource management to local governments, land planners, developers, attorneys, engineers, and individuals throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. Mr. Hinshaw's experience includes historical research and writing, historic resource surveys, historic structure reports, National Register nominations, conservation easement inspections, and subdivision/land development review. Mr. Hinshaw exceeds the qualifications set forth in the Secretary of Interior's Standards for an Historian and Architectural Historian [36 CFR 61].

Representative Project Experience:

National Register / National Historic Landmark Nominations: Southeastern Pennsylvania with associated projects primarily in Mid-Atlantic region.

Since 1991, Seth Hinshaw has successfully drafted or co-drafted 21 National Register and National Historic Landmark nominations (see list on page 2). Before joining RGA, Mr. Hinshaw worked for a leading preparer of National Register nominations in Pennsylvania that documented nearly 3,000 resources. He has also been involved in various capacities in dozens of other National Register projects, including expansions of historic district boundaries, initial evaluations, re-evaluations, updating resource inventories, site interpretation, and adaptive reuse. Projects include National Historic Landmark listings of properties associated with artists N.C. Wyeth and son Andrew Wyeth (Chadds Ford, Pa.) and the Wiley-Cloud House, a plank house constructed in the mid-eighteenth century.

Erie County Historic Resource Survey: Erie County, Pennsylvania

Co-managed comprehensive architectural survey of 31,470 pre-1940 resources in preparation for a county-wide preservation plan. Project involved 37 municipalities and the City of Erie, Pennsylvania's 4th largest city. All resources were classified by architectural significance (National Register criteria) with specific recommendations for 543 listed or potential National Register-eligible properties. All survey information was recorded using the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) Access Database and mapped. The survey evaluated 25 National Register-listed, -eligible and potential historic districts. The resulting documentation was also placed on a website developed specifically by Mr. Hinshaw for Preservation Erie (www.eriebuildings.info).

Historic Resource Surveys: Southeastern Pennsylvania

Conducted reconnaissance, comprehensive, and intensive level historic architectural surveys for municipalities including Radnor, East Bradford, Upper Uwchlan Townships, and Boroughs of Thornburg and Schrenksville, containing thousands of historic properties. Tasks included site analysis, photography, mapping, architectural documentation, property research, historic district evaluation, public presentations, survey form design and completion, and recommendations.

Successful National Register Nominations Prepared by Hinshaw:***National Historic Landmarks***

- Andrew Wyeth Studio National Historic Landmark, Chadds Ford Twp., Delaware Co., PA. (listed 9/30/2014)*
Note: Studio and Kuerner Farm below are now combined into the Andrew Wyeth Studio and the Kuerner Farm Historic District.
- Kuerner Farm (National Historic Landmark), Chadds Ford Twp., Delaware Co., PA. (listed 6/23/2011)*
- N.C. Wyeth House & Studio (National Historic Landmark), Chadds Ford Twp., Del. Co., PA. (1997)*

Historic Districts

- Nantmeal Village Historic District, East Nantmeal Twp., Chester Co., PA. (listed 8/2014)
- Glenmoore Historic District, Wallace Twp., Chester Co., PA. (listed 3/18/2011)
- Oxford Historic District, Oxford Borough, Chester Co., PA. (2007)
- Thornton Historic District, Thornbury Twp., Delaware Co., PA. (2006)
- Fetters Mill Village Historic District, Lower Moreland Twp., Montgomery Co. (2006)

Boundary Increase

- Eagles Mere Historic District Boundary Increase and Additional Documentation, Eagles Mere Borough and Shrewsbury Twp., Sullivan Co., PA. (listed 7/2013)

Religious Properties

- Mt. Zion AME Church, Tredyffrin Township, Chester Co., PA. (listed 1/27/2015)
- Chester Heights Camp Meeting, Chester Heights, Delaware Co., PA. (2001)
- Concord Hicksite Friends Meeting House, Belmont Co., OH (2004)
- Caernarvon Presbyterian Church, Churchtown, Lancaster Co., PA. (2016)
- Perkasie Park Camp Meeting, Perkasie Borough, Montgomery Co., PA. (Nominated 2016)

Individual Resource Nominations

- Wiley / Cloud House, Kennett Twp., Chester Co., PA. (listed 9/4/2012)
- Sharpless Homestead, Birmingham Twp., Chester Co., PA. (listed 12/15/2011)
- Michael Heller Homestead, Lower Saucon Twp., Northampton Co., PA. (listed 2010)
- Lutz-Franklin Schoolhouse, Lower Saucon Twp., Northampton Co., PA. (2008)
- Ellis Williams House, E. Goshen Twp., Chester Co., PA. (2004)
- Garrett House and Farm, Willistown Twp., Chester Co., PA. (2003)

*With, or in association with, the Brandywine Conservancy, Inc.