

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DRAFT

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Oakfield High School
 other names/site number NA
 name of related multiple property listing N/A

Location

street & number 1 North Pearl Street

N/A
N/A

 not for publication
 city or town Oakfield vicinity
 state New York code NY county Genesee code 037 zip code 14125

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
 I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
 In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
 national statewide X local

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

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

Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

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

<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/apartment building

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19th & 20th Century Revivals:
Neoclassical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: concrete
walls: brick, stone

roof: asphalt
other: _____

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

Oakfield High School is located at 1 North Pearl Street near the center of the Village of Oakfield, Genesee County, New York. The building is less than one-quarter mile southwest of the Oakfield Village Hall, just a block east of NY-Route 63. Constructed in 1926-27, Oakfield High School is roughly rectangular in form and measures 145 feet from north to south and 140 feet from east to west. The school is a three-story steel and masonry building with a central auditorium and gymnasium and a raised basement designed by Rochester architect Carl Ade and constructed by Rankin Construction. The building is three stories in height, with corridors arranged around the gymnasium on the first floor and the auditorium on the floors above. It has a red brick exterior with cast stone features, a symmetrical façade, and replacement windows replicating the original steel casement windows. The primary elevation of the building faces North Pearl Street and displays the most ornate detailing found on the exterior of the building. In 1981, the school was converted into housing, and nearly every apartment is located within the footprint of previous classroom and office spaces. Other remaining spaces are the auditorium, gymnasium, and former kindergarten room. The auditorium is fully intact and, although altered, the gymnasium and kindergarten room retain features such as plaster walls and ceilings, alcoves, and built-in features. Building circulation is fully intact and retains historic metal staircases. As part of the recent renovation of the property, original woodwork, as well as historic door trim, transoms, and doors that were removed during a previous renovation were reintroduced throughout the building where appropriate, adding to its integrity.

Narrative Description

Location and Setting

Oakfield is a village in the southern part of the town of Oakfield, located in northwest Genesee County in western New York. The nearest large city is Batavia, six miles to the southeast, and sixteen miles north is the City of Medina in Orleans County. Oakfield High School occupies an irregular shaped lot at the southeast corner of North Pearl Street and Drake Street. It is set back near the center of a

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property that is roughly two and a half acres in area. Planted grass lawns and lush planting are around the building at the western and northern elevations. There is minimal landscaping along the south elevation, and a poured concrete walkway connects the west lawn to the eastern side of the building, occupied by a long oval driveway with parking along the edge and a wide grassy lawn in the middle. Mature trees are present at the western and northern edges of the property near sidewalks. The neighborhood to the east is a moderately dense residential area composed of homes dating from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, while immediately to the west is the main thoroughfare through the village, which has a mix of commercial buildings and large residences, as well as religious, public, and civic buildings.

General Description

Dedicated in 1927, the building is a three-story Neoclassical Revival style school with a brick exterior, stone features, even fenestration, and a narrow parapet obscuring a flat roof. (Photo 0001). When viewed from North Pearl Street, the building has six distinct bays with two bays slightly projecting and containing entrances. A stone course separates the first and second floors and a narrower stone course tops the third floor. Another stone band forms part of the cornice in the parapet. Fenestration is regular with continuous stone sills and replacement windows that replicate the originals. The entrances are non-historic paired metal doors set into stone entablatures with a stone panel between two single windows above the doors. The pattern is repeated on the north (rear elevation) of the building except for the entrances. A tall brick chimney is between the first two east bays and a one-story curved projecting section is at the west end of the elevation. The building sits on a concrete foundation, wrapped by a flat cast-stone belt course.

The interior circulation remains as built with historic end stairwells, some with French doors. Walls and ceilings are plaster and floors are terrazzo. Placement of classrooms remains the same, although all classrooms are renovated into apartments. The central gymnasium space has also been divided into apartments. The auditorium is largely intact and is used as common space.

Detailed Description: Exterior

The school's form is roughly rectangular with an exterior of red brick laid out in a running bond. Decorative features are primarily brick lintels, cast-stone sills, and belt courses that separate the

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floors and accentuate the cornice line. The symmetrical façade is anchored by two projecting bays that flank a recessed central portion and two recessed outer bays. Identical primary entries are located in the projecting bays on the facade beneath a portico supported by classical columns and pilasters. The entries feature stone panels above double doors, all set within stone surrounds with denticulated molding. Secondary entrances are located in the north, east, and south elevations. The north elevation has a similar classical entry while the entries on the east and south are ancillary and devoid of ornament. Although some window openings currently retain the paired or tripled sliding glass windows installed in the 1980s, the ongoing renovation project is in the process of replacing these with multi-light casements set in steel, matching the original steel windows.

Primary (west) Facade

The primary facade is six bays wide, composed of a slightly recessed two-bay center portion flanked by slightly projecting one-bay portions, and slightly recessed one-bay north and south portions. Identical entries are at grade level, both set in stone and located in the projecting bays. Each entry has a columned portico that ends at the stone beltcourse between the first and second stories. Each entry is highlighted by a decorative wrought-iron railing above the portico. Each entry portico features a plain entablature and frieze, supported by Corinthian columns and pilasters. Above the double-entry doors is an inscribed stone panel with denticulated molding. The inscription on the northernmost panel reads, "Education is a possession which cannot be taken away from men," which is credited to Epictetus.(see Figure 1.) The inscription on the southernmost panel reads, "Every addition to true knowledge is an addition to power," credited to Horace Mann. (see Figure 2.)

On the second and third floors, the projecting bays also share identical windows and ornament. The second and third floor windows are multi-light casements set in steel and are divided by a stone panel with a decorative swag. The windows are framed by decorative brick arches with keystones and stone florets above the third-floor window. The upper floors of the building are divided by a slightly projecting shallow cornice with plain molding between the first and second floors and a narrow band of cast stone between the third floor and the cornice. At the roofline, the parapeted cornice features rectangular stone panels in the projecting bays that have an open book and swag. A large central stone panel is inscribed with the name of the school.

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North Elevation

The north elevation is six bays wide and set back by one bay from the façade portion of the building. The elevation is composed of four bays of evenly spaced windows with multi-light casements set in steel and a slightly projecting entry bay to the east. All windows have decorative brick panels below the sills, some with centered stone florets. (See Figure 3.) The east end bay is a solid brick wall with a stone panel that has a decorative swag and decorative brickwork that enframes the stone panel. The entry bay is identical to the façade entries and projecting bays on the front elevation. The inscribed panel above the door has a quote from Edward Everett (see Figure 4). The portico ends at a stone beltcourse that spans the elevation. The upper floors of the building are divided by a slightly projecting shallow cornice with plain molding between the first and second floors and a narrow band of cast stone between the third floor and the cornice.

Rear (east) Elevation

The rear elevation is four bays wide. All windows are slightly recessed. An exterior chimney capped in stone rises above the roofline and is located between the first and second bay on the western portion of the elevation. The first floor features a large projecting bay with fixed-light windows and the entry toward the center of the elevation. The entry is a single, multi-paned wood door above grade with a stone lintel and is reached by a set of concrete steps with a wrought-iron railing. The upper floors of the building are divided by a slightly projecting shallow cornice with plain molding between the first and second floors and a narrow band of cast stone between the third floor and the cornice.

South elevation

The south elevation is six bays wide, composed of a slightly recessed four-bay center portion flanked by projecting bays. Two small openings in the center of the elevation have been infilled with brick on the first and second floor. The eastern projecting bay features an entry that is reached through a small, enclosed plate glass portion below a shed roof supported by wood posts on the first floor with single bays on the second and third floors. The western projecting bay features a single window on each floor; a stone panel is located to the west of the third-floor window. The upper floors of the building are divided by a slightly projecting shallow cornice with plain molding between the first and second floors and a narrow band of cast stone between the third floor and the cornice.

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Interior

The school interior consists of a partial basement and three upper floors with double-loaded corridors that lead to former classroom, office, and bathroom spaces arranged around the perimeter of the building with the gymnasium and auditorium in the center. On the ground floor, the building has two primary entries on the façade, an entry in the southeast corner, and an entry in the southwest corner. Stairwells in the northwest, northeast, and southwest corners of the building provide circulation between the interior school corridors from the first through third floors. An additional stairwell in the southeast corner of the building provides access to the basement. All stairwells feature painted metal railings, wooden handrails, metal treads, and cast-iron newel posts. Metal fire doors provide access to all but the southeast stairwell, which is accessed through double French doors with a multi-light transom on the first floor. (see Figure 5.)

The basement stairwell terminates at an east-west hallway that accesses a large former shop room that is now divided between two apartment units. This hallway also accesses a radiation shelter, as well as the boiler and former maintenance room. Basement walls are a combination of painted brick, painted concrete, or plaster. Doors are a combination of wood panel and metal. Ceilings are exposed steel frame or plaster. The first, second, and third floors of the school are nearly identical with double-loaded corridors that form a U-shape around the perimeter running north-south on the east and west ends of the building and east-west on the south side of the building. The continuous corridor provides access to apartments in former classrooms, offices, and bathrooms along the exterior side of the hallway. Apartment entries in these halls are slightly recessed with paneled metal doors. Finishes and materials predominantly reflect the early twentieth century, such as plaster walls and terrazzo floors, paneled and glazed wood doors. The former kindergarten in the west hallway on the first floor contains new apartments in the footprint of the previous space, maintaining the historic height of the ceilings, with one featuring a historic fireplace. (See Figure 6.)

A typical apartment in the former Oakfield High School retains its full-height ceiling as well as the alcoves and built-ins utilized for former cubbies. The floors contain carpeting over the original wood flooring and the walls are plaster. Exterior walls have large window bays providing ample light and ventilation. Room partitions are drywall over frame construction from the 1980s. (See Figure 7.)

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The gymnasium of the school is located on the first floor and takes up two-thirds of the center of this floor and the basement below grade. Ongoing renovations resulted in the installation of a drywall partition bisecting the gymnasium. The portion of the gymnasium to the west of the partition remains otherwise unaltered by the ongoing renovations and can be accessed by a door from the south hallway. The ceiling of this portion of the gymnasium has affixed acoustic panels and the walls are plaster. Windows on the north and south walls of the room are framed in tan brick surrounds with keystones and have been infilled with concrete block. A tan brick knee wall surrounds the rest of the room. Bleachers on the south side of the room have been covered with framing to create an office; however, the concrete bleachers remain intact beneath the framing. The office contains a wood cabinets, tables and chairs, a carpeted floor, a wood-paneled wall, and a dropped acoustical panel ceiling.

Renovations to the gymnasium space resulted in the creation of a double-loaded corridor through the portion of the gymnasium to the north of the partition. The original bleachers, while intact along the north, were covered in framing, raising the corridor to the level of the first floor. This corridor connects two former windows on either side of the building, one off each of the adjacent hallways. These windows are now open to the floor height created by the framing above the bleachers and serve as doorways. A series of aluminum doors along the south wall of the corridor provide access to storage units. Two apartment units have been installed above the bleachers along the northern wall of the corridor.

The new apartments installed in the basement and in the former gymnasium have salvaged wood panel entry doors with transom windows above. These doors, frames, and transoms were original to the building, removed in 1981, stored in the gymnasium, and are being refurbished and reinstalled where appropriate. The units retain ceilings, original wood flooring, and plaster walls where possible. New room partitions are drywall over frame construction, and modern fixtures and appliances have been installed in kitchens and bathrooms.

The auditorium of the school is located on the second floor and takes up two-thirds of the center of this floor and the third floor above. Entry doors to the auditorium are on the east, west, and south walls. All entries to the public portion of the auditorium are painted wood with wood architraves and

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keystones. All windows have painted surrounds with decorative plaster panels beneath. Infilled with concrete blocks in 1981, these windows have been restored/reopened, looking into this community space. The original stage is located at the southern end of the room with a set of two wood steps to either side leading down to the seating level. A plaster architrave with a central shield ornament wraps the stage and acts as the proscenium. Two partially glazed wood doors flank the stage, leading to the backstage area, which is currently used for storage. (see Figure 8.)

The original auditorium balcony is located on the northern end of the room and is reached through doors on its east and west walls on the third floor. It is supported by two columns with plain capitals on the second floor and an identical column in the balcony. A metal railing runs along the full length of the balcony. Beneath the balcony is a curved plaster ceiling featuring historic pendant lighting. Original metal and wood tiered seating runs from the rear of the north wall toward the stage. Some of the seating was uninstalled to utilize the auditorium floor as a basketball court prior to conversion to housing. The walls are plaster, and the remaining ceiling is plaster with carved crown molding and historic pendant lighting. The auditorium has concrete floors in the seating area with wood flooring on the stage.

Integrity

When first renovated in 1980, the management had the foresight to store historic materials (doors, auditorium seating, windows, etc.) in the auditorium to and gymnasium be refurbished and reinstalled at a later date. The most recent renovation (2022-23) reused much of the stored material. As a result, the Oakfield School maintains integrity in both form and materials, as well as location, feeling and association. The renovation of the property used historic tax credits and, with approval from the National Park Service, introduced new windows to match the original historic steel windows. As previously mentioned, the historic circulation pattern throughout the building is retained and some added partitions and a floor in a portion of the gymnasium were added but all are removable/reversible. Wherever possible, extant historic features were retained.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education

Architecture

Period of Significance

1927-1956

Significant Dates

1927, 1928, 1949, 1956

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Carl Ade (architect)

Rankin Construction (builder)

Period of Significance (justification) see section 8 summary The period of significance for Oakfield High School is 1927 to 1956, beginning with the dedication of the school and ending with its conversion to an elementary school in 1956.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary) N/A

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Oakfield High School is locally significant in Architecture under Criterion C as a representative example of twentieth-century school architecture in the Village of Oakfield. It is also significant under Criterion A in education for its association with the development of the village's public school system. Located at 1 North Pearl Street, the former high school was designed in the Neoclassical style by Carl Ade, a locally renowned Rochester-based architect, and constructed in 1925-1927 by Rankin Construction Company of Rochester. Oakfield High School also embodies the features of standardized school design during a period when New York State guidelines and federal mandates had a major influence on school design, and many design elements and safety features became uniform. After the passage of standardization laws related to the layout, interior spaces, and circulation patterns in 1904, Oakfield required a new school with modern updates to serve its student population. In addition to health and safety features such as decentralized stairwells and corridors, windows designed for maximum light, and an onsite heating and ventilation plant, the design for Oakfield High School included a large central auditorium, a cafeteria, and a gymnasium that were all standardized spaces required by law in New York State educational facilities. The placement of the auditorium in the center of the building was typical for this period. It also included other recommended spaces, such as a library and laboratory.

Oakfield High School is also locally significant under Criterion A in Education as an early twentieth-century public school constructed in response to a growing student population in the Oakfield area. From the mid- nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth, the population of the Village of Oakfield expanded as employment opportunities increased based on increasing commercial opportunities and a solid farm economy based on natural and agricultural products. Although the village board and the board of education attempted keep up with both the increasing numbers of school-aged children and modern compulsory education laws, they regularly struggled to maintain adequate school buildings. In 1927, Oakfield High School became the latest in a series of construction projects meant to provide classrooms for eligible students. A handsome and well-designed building, the school ultimately served the community for nearly half a century. The original building contained classrooms to accommodate nearly 1,000 students, including rooms designed for the instruction of the relatively new subjects of home economics, industrial arts, natural science, as well as the fine arts, music, and drama.

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The period of significance for Oakfield High School is 1927 to 1956, beginning with the dedication of the school, beginning with its use as a high school in 1949 and ending with its conversion to an elementary school in 1956. It continued as an elementary school until 1971, when it was sold for use as a used furniture store. In 1980, the building was converted to housing, which is the current function of the building; however a recent rehabilitation using preservation tax credits has enhanced its ability to illustrate its original design. The school retains its location, setting, form, and layout, and much of the historic fabric, as well as its association with the history of public education in Oakfield and with national trends of school design from the early twentieth century.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Criterion A: Education

After the conclusion of the American Revolution, lands in Western New York, including the Town of Oakfield, were marketed for settlement. In 1801, Aaron White, Erastus Wolcott, Gideon Dunham, Cristopher Kenyon, Lawrence Armstrong, and Harvey Hubble arrived in the area to establish a settlement, and the following year, they cut a road from Batavia to Oakfield. Early residents largely engaged in agricultural labor and logging, as the area hosted rich stocks of timber. In 1811, Kenyon constructed the first grist and sawmills in the area. The population of the area remained low for the first half of the nineteenth century, but the discovery of gypsum in 1825 laid the foundation for an industry that guided the evolution of Oakfield well into the future. In 1830, a post office opened along with other developments that included the opening of a carding mill by Othniel Brown in 1829, the establishment of the first store by Alfred Cary in 1833, and the organization of the first churches in the area, the First Presbyterian and the United Methodist.¹

Residents of Oakfield began educational instruction in 1817, but it took until 1828 to construct the first schoolhouse, when trustees Joseph Lin, David Warner and Samuel Fellows organized school district #11 in the Town of Elba. In October of that year, residents of the district raised thirty-six dollars to

¹ Lockwood R. Doty, *History of the Genesee country (western New York) comprising the counties of Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Chemung, Erie, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Niagara, Ontario, Orleans, Schuyler, Steuben, Wayne, Wyoming and Yates* (Chicago: J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1925), 257-269; Frederick W. Beers, *Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, N. Y., 1788-1890* (Syracuse: J. W. Vose & CO., 1890), 564-565; Mary McCullery, ed., *History of Genesee Country New York* (Interlaken, New York: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1985), 241-245; Virginia Kropf, "Oakfield society delves into history of U.S. Gypsum," *Batavia Daily News*, Dec. 3, 2016.

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build a one-room schoolhouse. Constructed by Warner, the log cabin school (not extant) measured eighteen by twenty-four feet and served the children of the community for the next two decades. The school also served religious congregations at various times, including the First Presbyterians and the United Methodists.²

During the same period, the community continued to grow around the school. Farmers from the surrounding area continued to process and market their products in Oakfield, and as the number of farmers grew, so too did the commercial activity. In 1837, the village was named Caryville in honor of Colonel Alfred Cary, a land speculator who played a large role in the development of the community. Cary purchased and auctioned a large parcel of land in the area, raising the funds to construct the Cary Seminary, a private academy, and create an endowment for its perpetuation. In 1840, the villagers laid the cornerstone for the seminary building, and the school opened in 1843. The curriculum attracted pupils from outside of Oakfield, and its first term included 136 students, ages fourteen to nineteen.³

While the Cary Seminary became the first private educational institution in Oakfield, the advancement of public education in the village also progressed during this period. In 1851, the district, which became the first school district in the Town of Oakfield, constructed a school building to replace the original one-room schoolhouse for \$800. The new school building occupied a lot adjacent to the Cary Seminary, and it served the community for the following four decades. In that time, economic growth proceeded in the area, and the population grew large enough to support the incorporation of the village, renamed Oakfield, in 1858.⁴

The public school remained in use until the 1890s, when the village school district initiated a plan to construct a school building in line with the modernizing efforts taking place across New York State, including multiple compulsory education laws. In 1891, the village voted to reorganize as a Union Free School district and elected a board of education to serve as its leadership. The board voted to raise \$5,000 for the construction of a new school building and purchased a site on Webber Avenue.

² Darlene K. Warner, *Our Little Village (The Rest of Our Glory Years)* (Oakfield: Oakfield Historical Society, 2015), 4; McCullery, ed., *History of Genesee Country New York*, 243.

³ McCullery, ed., *History of Genesee Country New York*, 241-244; Warner, *Our Little Village (The Rest of Our Glory Years)*, 25-26.

⁴ McCullery, ed., *History of Genesee Country New York*, 241-244.

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The board hired William H. Homelius to construct the new Union Free School (no longer extant), which opened in 1892.⁵

During the following decades, the growth of industry in Oakfield drove an increase in the population rate. After the invention of drywall in the late nineteenth century, the demand for gypsum increased, and gypsum extraction in the town of Oakfield accelerated. In 1902, the gypsum companies present in the area consolidated, joining the United States Gypsum Company, which continued to grow during the following decades. The new economic wealth led to the residents of the village opening new businesses such as grocery stores, hardware stores, and banks to cater to the influx of workers. In the thirty-five years following the construction of the Union Free School, the population of the village increased by a factor of nearly four, from 578 in 1890 to 2072 in 1925.⁶

By the beginning of the 1920s, the dual pressure of population growth and education mandates from New York State produced more overcrowding in the Union Free School. In the first few years of operation, attendance at the Union Free School increased and by 1905, the board of education rented space in the Cary Seminary building for overflow classes. After leasing for nineteen years, the board of education inaugurated a plan to replace the Union Free School with a modern school building. In 1924, the board purchased the Cary Seminary for \$8,000 and demolished it in order to make way for the new project.⁷

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Construction began soon after the demolition of the Cary Seminary. In order to ensure that the new school building satisfied the criteria of New York State education codes and met the need for space to accommodate the growing population, the board of education hired Carl Ade, an architect with experience in school design, to plan a new high school. After receiving ten offers, the board awarded the construction contract to Rankin Construction Company of Rochester at the price of \$219,400. On

⁵ McCullery, ed., *History of Genesee Country New York*, 241-244; Harriet J., Davis, ed. *The Oracle* (yearbook) 6, no. 1 (1926), 23.

⁶ McCullery, ed., *History of Genesee Country New York*, 248; Davis, ed. *The Oracle* (yearbook) 6, no. 1 (1926), 23; Warner, *Our Little Village*, 77-121.

⁷ Warner, *Our Little Village*, 9-10; Davis, ed. *The Oracle* (yearbook) 6, no. 1 (1926), 18-23.

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April 17, 1926, Roy C. Searls, the president of the board of education, presided over a ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone of Oakfield High School.⁸(see Figure 9.)

The project proceeded over the next year, with Rankin Construction Company performing the general contracting work. Other local contractors provided their labor as well: E. A. Keith of Randolph, New York, installed the plumbing, heating and ventilation; Wheeler-Green Co. of Rochester installed the electrical systems; Anthony Link & Sons of Rochester performed the carpentry; and Whitemore & Robbins installed the floors. The district also built a temporary building, known to the students as the Barracks (no longer extant), to hold the overflow classes that took place at the Cary Seminary during the construction process. Additional classes were held in the basements of local churches. The dedication of Oakfield High School occurred on June 10, 1927, after roughly one year of construction.⁹

The first classes took place in the new Oakfield High School during the academic year of 1927-1928. The students at the new high school found a building equipped with modern amenities and sanitation and fireproof features. The symmetrical layout of the building included decentralized staircases at each corner, decentralized entrances, wide corridors, classrooms with large window bays allowing for natural light, and a central gymnasium and auditorium. The building also had an onsite heat and ventilation plant, a library, and a laboratory.¹⁰ In addition to the standard academic requirements, the school curriculum included home economics, industrial arts, fine arts, athletics, music, and drama. Harrison Williams served as the principal from the time of its opening until 1948, when Howard Bain replaced him.¹¹

During the 1950s, due to the rise of automobile use and suburbanization, a wave of school centralizations took place throughout the United States. As early as 1947, officials in the Town of Oakfield and the bordering Town of Alabama began to consider plans for a centralized school district. By consolidating school instruction, a centralized district could offer courses in agriculture, music, art, and physical education to all students in both towns and eliminate all gaps in the provision of

⁸ Warner, *Our Little Village*, 10-13; "Oakfield Board Gave a Contract on \$219,400 Bid," *Batavia Daily News*, Jan. 16, 1926.

⁹ Warner, *Our Little Village*, 10-13; Davis, ed. *The Oracle* (yearbook) 6, no. 1 (1926), 18-19; "Oakfield School Ready April 25th," *Batavia Daily News*, April 7, 1927.

¹⁰ Davis, ed. *The Oracle* (yearbook) 6, no. 1 (1926), 25-37.

¹¹ McCullery, ed., *History of Genesee Country New York*, 243.

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kindergarten, vocational training, and full-day education. In 1949, the Oakfield-Alabama Central School District was formed, and rural school closures soon followed. High school education took place in Oakfield High School until the completion of Oakfield-Alabama Central High School on Lewiston Road in 1956. Subsequently, high school instruction ceased in Oakfield High School, and the building was used for elementary education.¹²

By the late 1960s, the school district needed a new elementary school building. As a result of centralization and population growth, the district oversaw the education of over 900 elementary school students, far more than the original capacity of the former Oakfield High School, requiring the three annexes. As maintenance of the former high school grew exceedingly costly, the district elected to build a new elementary school, also on Lewiston Road, rather than construct any additions. The new Oakfield-Alabama Primary School opened in January 1969, and the former Oakfield High School no longer served as the elementary school for the central school district. Elementary enrollment increased again in the early 1970s, and the district temporarily used the former Oakfield High School for overflow instruction. The construction of a sixteen-room addition to the Oakfield-Alabama Primary School in 1975 put an end to instruction in the former Oakfield High School.¹³

Following the relocation of elementary school programming out of Oakfield High School, the Town of Oakfield had to decide what to do with the vacant building. After weighing plans for demolition or for conversion to residential units, the town sold the building for \$40,000, and it became a used furniture and antiques store. The Darch House, as it became known, operated from 1975 to 1977. During that time, the owners rented out a portion of the space to other businesses and held events in the auditorium. One of the tenants, Children's Learning Hours, operated a nursery school on the third floor, continuing the legacy of education in the building.¹⁴

In 1977, the Darch House closed citing the financial burden of maintaining the large building. In 1980, the building was sold to another owner who had plans to convert it to senior housing, receiving a \$700,000 loan from the Farmers Home Administration for the project. Ithaca based architect William Downing was hired to plan the renovation, based on his experience in converting Ithaca High School

¹²Warner, *Our Little Village*, 21; McCullery, ed., *History of Genesee Country New York*, 243.

¹³Warner, *Our Little Village*, 15-17; Bob Emens, "Oakfield-Alabama School Plan Bared," *Rochester Democrat and Chronical*, Feb. 7, 1967.

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(1915, NR 1971) into the Dewitt Mall. The renovation of Oakfield High School resulted in approximately thirty units at the time of completion, and the building was renamed School House Manor. Apartments in School House Manor were made available to seniors aged sixty-two or older with leases adjusted for income and subject to yearly negotiations. After functioning for over four decades, School House Manor remains in operation with recently rehabilitated apartments.¹⁵

Oakfield High School is significant for its association with the development of the public school system in the Village of Oakfield and as a school building constructed using standardized school design principles of the early twentieth century. After booming population growth rendered existing schools too small to accommodate all of the students in the village, the board of education constructed the building to provide public education to the growing number of high school-aged children. The exterior of the school building remains largely unaltered from its original design, and much of the original historic fabric remains. In all, the school retains integrity dating from its construction in the late 1920s and continues to serve as a significant contribution to the built environment of the Village of Oakfield.

Criterion C: Architecture

Oakfield High School is a representative example of a school built in the Neoclassical Revival style, which emerged as a popular design for standardized educational buildings in the State of New York during the first half of the twentieth century. The style dominated public and civic architecture throughout the country in the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth century as an outgrowth of the design philosophies of architects such as Daniel Burnham and Richard Morris Hunt. Many of these architects were either educated at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris or in the offices of architects who had trained at the school, where the classical design vocabulary was encouraged for public buildings. The early phase of the style stressed the use of hipped roofs and ornate decorative elements, but as the movement progressed, academically accurate flat roofs, columns and orders prevailed. Paired windows, transomed windows, and arched windows were all employed in the style, differentiating it from earlier Greek or Early Classical Revival styles.

¹⁴ Warner, "Our Little Village," 18-20; "Nursery School Operating in Oakfield," *Batavia Daily News*, March 23, 1976.

¹⁵ Marilyn Pfalzer, "Speeds Ex-Oakfield School into Housing for Seniors," *Batavia Daily News*, Sept. 8, 1980; Warner, "Our Little Village," 20-21; Bill Wingell, "Doings at the Dewitt," *Life in the Finger Lakes*, May/June 2017.

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Designed by Rochester Architect Carl Ade, the Oakfield High School adhered to design standards mandated by New York State for school architecture and included features such as gymnasiums, auditoriums, and stairwells in the perimeter interiors. Ade frequently incorporated flat roofs and uncluttered facades with an emphasis on clean lines, decorative columns, and symmetrical composition that can be seen in the Oakfield High School. The school has a rectangular shape centered around the gymnasium and auditorium. Many design elements on the façade of Oakfield High School, including the stone details and the entry configurations, place the school within the tradition of Neoclassical architecture.¹⁶ The building featured a prominent parapet and belt courses composed of Norristone, cut cast granite manufactured in Rochester. Prominent entryways with Norristone porticos and a prominent frieze between the first and second stories emphasized the Neoclassical style, as did other Norristone details that included swags, keystones, and lozenges.

The standards that guided the design of Oakfield High School developed over several decades at the turn of the twentieth century, and, as a result, schools emerged as a distinct building typology between 1900 and 1930. Prior to this, schools were treated as extensions of the domestic sphere, an association conveyed in the term *schoolhouse*, which was replaced by *school building* in the literature, as education became affiliated with civic life instead. A variety of factors, including health and safety concerns, and the changing role of schools in local communities, spurred the formalization of standard practices into prescriptive legal regulations during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In 1904, New York State became the first state in the country to require a review of all new school building plans.¹⁷

Prior to its opening, a flattering description Oakfield High School appeared in the *Batavia Daily News*, providing the residents of the village with the details of the new project:

The building faces Pearl Street and an excellent front view of it may be obtained from anyone passing through the village on Main Street... simple, but highly pleasing, the new school is three stories in height, of pressed brick and steel construction, with Norristone trim. The building extends 145 feet on Pearl Street and 138 feet on Drake Street. The construction is such that additions can be made to it.

¹⁶ Clinton Brown Company, "High & Locust Streets Historic District Nomination," Section 5, 11-13, accessed on November 27, 2020, <https://buffaloah.com/a/DCTNRY/n/neoclass.html>.

¹⁷ Suzanne Warren, "Context Study: The Schools of New York State – Development of the School as a Building Type," New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, 1990, 104 & 192.

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Two entrances have been provided for in the front of the building, both leading to a corridor. On either side of the entrances are class rooms, there being four in the front of the building. The gymnasium is located in the center of the building on the ground or first floor, with windows facing Drake Street, and is 65 by 42 feet in size. There is much bleacher space, the seating arrangement being capable of holding 350 spectators. Access to gymnasium is provided boys and girls and separate lockers are provided close at hand. In the rear of the main floor are the kindergarten, lunch, and science rooms. The kindergarten room is so arranged that it may be divided into two sections, the plan being that one section of the large room can be at the disposal of a class, while children are at play in the kindergarten room. A fireplace has been provided here for Christmas exercises, etc., and book cases and windows of this department area [have] leaded glass with pictures of animals and scenes from the more popular children's stories.

In the domestic science room there are six tables, each of which will be equipped with four electric hot plates. There will also be an electric range as well as other modern equipment. The remainder of the lower floor is given over to locker rooms and shower rooms and the manual training department.

Eight class rooms are on the second floor, which also contains the principal's office, the clerk's office and teacher's rest room. A room for clinics is also located on this floor, the main part of which is given over to the auditorium, the seating capacity of which is 750 persons. A stage 35x24 feet in size [is] in the southern section of the auditorium and adjoining it are dressing rooms, one being on each side. As yet the stage equipment has not been ordered, A projection booth, in which will be a moving picture machine and other necessary equipment, has been placed in the rear of the balcony of the auditorium.

On the top floor, besides the auditorium, are two class rooms, five recitation rooms, a study room, a library and laboratory, equipment in which will be the same as is being installed in all of the new schools. There are also three supply or storage rooms. The high school department and eighth grade rooms are located on this floor. Metal lockers are provided for the high school students in the corridors. The lockers are so arranged that they do not extend into the corridor, but are set in the wall. The auditorium arrangement is ideal for school assembly purposes. The elementary students will assembly on the main floor and the high school students in the balcony, their respective locations being on the same floors.¹⁸

The progression of school design and standardization in the United States followed both scientific theories and lessons from experience. Over the course of the early twentieth century, guidelines first targeted student health, and then promoted more rigorous fire safety and a diversified curriculum. For

¹⁸ "Oakfield School Ready April 25th," *Batavia Daily News*, April 7, 1927.

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example, modern schools would no longer incorporate a central stair or a central corridor due to fire safety issues. All stairways were to be built outside the main walls of the building and stairs were to be at both ends of the structure as isolated exits. Concurrently, schools increasingly came to be considered public institutions that served their community by creating democratic citizens and providing public meeting space. All of these concepts impacted the shape, layout, and aesthetic composition of school buildings through such decisions as to the placement and size of windows, access, circulation patterns, and architectural style.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, school advocates promoted measures of sanitation with light and ventilation guidelines. Design standards included formulas for air exchange, classroom size, and ideal ratios for lighting based on the size of windows compared to floor area. For instance, the New York State law of 1904 required that school buildings provide thirty cubic feet of air per student per minute. A central entrance opening onto a longitudinal corridor which terminated in exits on the sides of the building was common. In this plan, classrooms that lined the corridor were unilaterally lit, while the corner rooms received light and ventilation from two sides. Such formulaic drivers of design resulted from scientific beliefs such as the “Carbon Dioxide Theory,” which attributed the spread of disease to an overabundance of expired air. The legacy of such late-Victorian theories persisted in school guidelines into the 1920s, even after their underpinnings were debunked by a greater understanding of contact contamination. Additionally, the theme of sanitation extended beyond air circulation to building materials and interior finishes. Architects promoted materials that were “durable and easy to clean.” This included wood or tile floors and smooth, painted walls with simple detailing that would not collect superfluous dust.¹⁹

Many of the design attributes included in school guidelines appeared in the original design for Oakfield High School. On the interior, durable materials, such as hardwood flooring, oak trim, and plaster walls, were used in the hallways. The school included a first-floor gymnasium and a second-floor auditorium, as well as decentralized stairwells, corridors, and entryways to provide safer conditions during a fire evacuation. All the classrooms featured large window bays with steel double-hung windows and sidelights to allow for maximum light exposure. The article in the *Batavia Daily News* cited above provides a description of the health and safety elements featured in the school:

¹⁹ Warren, “The Schools of New York State,” 119, 131, 135, 137.

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The building is heated by a low pressure steam system, together with the most modern system of ventilation as required by the State Department of Education. In addition to the usual radiators in the rooms there are heaters which draw air from outside. The air passes through the heaters and is thrown through the room at a fixed temperature, doing away with drafts and also maintaining an even temperature at all times. Included in the wardrobe fixtures in each of the rooms are openings which allow for air to be drawn out.

The building is practically fireproof. Corridor floors are terraza [sic] and all doors are fireproof. Several suggestions concerning the floors of the classrooms were considered and wood floors were decided on. This type does away with much dust. All of the wood trim in the building is oak.²⁰

Another key development in this phase of school design was the reorientation of school buildings in the public imagination as civic institutions. As public bodies gained more oversight of school construction and school buildings were used for night classes and community gatherings, the buildings developed into more than contained settings of classroom education; they became assets to their local communities. This sentiment was embedded in school floor plans and architectural styles. Large auditoriums, mandated in New York State by 1916 for schools containing over eight classrooms, served as grand public places. Architects increasingly employed the same Neoclassical aesthetics for school buildings that they used for town halls, libraries, and other civic buildings, marking the school as a “full-fledged public entity.” Prior to 1900, architects designed schools with asymmetrical plans and pitched roofs, but by 1910, they employed flat roofs and symmetrical plans like that of Oakfield High School. There was a distinct move away from complex plans and embellishments for visual effect, towards balance, symmetrical layouts, classical vocabulary, and functional economy. Usable space, practicality, and economy were equated with and emerged as the primary principles of school design.²¹

Architect Carl Ade clearly followed all required design improvements in the Oakfield High School and in his other school designs. In both style and form, Oakfield High School bears a resemblance his other schools designed during the 1920s. This building, in particular, shares many features with Waterloo High School (1928-29, NR listed 2019), a school Ade designed in Waterloo, New York. Both schools are three-story brick Neoclassical buildings with symmetrical facades and rectilinear plans.

²⁰ “Oakfield School Ready April 25th,” *Batavia Daily News*, April 7, 1927.

²¹ Warren, “The Schools of New York State,” 142, 150, 190, 223.

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Each was constructed in order to accommodate growing populations of school-aged children and comply with Progressive-era standardizations and include gymnasiums, auditoriums, and decentralized corridors and stairwells for fire safety as a result. Although Waterloo features an L-shaped plan rather than a basic rectangular plan, Ade designed each layout such that the classroom units line the perimeter. Units in both schools therefore have least one exterior wall with windows to provide plenty of light and ventilation, in accordance with theories of childhood wellbeing. Ade also included a distinct decorative element on the exterior of each school: the friezes above the main entryways of the schools feature pedagogical inscriptions, thereby announcing the significance of the school as a valuable enterprise for the public good.²²

Carl Ade (1892-1962)

Born in Rochester, New York, Carl Ade attended college at the Mechanical Institute, the precursor to the Rochester Institute of Technology. Ade graduated from the Mechanical Institute in 1910 and studied under several Rochester architects before going into business for himself at the age of twenty. In 1917, Ade joined the American Expeditionary Force as an engineer and remained in the military until 1919. During his service, Ade designed military camps in Texas, Virginia, and Puerto Rico. After returning to Rochester, Ade resumed his architectural practice, designing industrial buildings such as the Wayland Specialty Manufacturing Company Factory (1921). Ade started to specialize in the design of school buildings by adapting what he had learned from designing industrial spaces and applying that knowledge to educational buildings during the 1920s. These industrial construction methods were entirely compatible with the changes occurring in school architecture during the early twentieth century: school administrators and educators were placing an increased emphasis on natural lighting and minimizing wasted space in school buildings, concerns that industrial architects frequently encountered as well. Ade quickly develop a reputation as one of the foremost school architects in New York and many school districts hired him, citing his consistent track record of designing quality educational buildings that were less expensive than initial estimates predicted.²³

²²The inscription above the entryway of Waterloo High School reads, "Books Are The Key To Wisdom." "Waterloo High School," *National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form*, March, 2019.

²³ "Carl Ade Funeral Saturday; Architect Designed Schools," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, May 24, 1962; "Carl C. Ade of Rochester, Architect," *Livonia Gazette*, June 29, 1928; "Wayland Specialty Co. To Erect Plant Costing \$150,000 in 1921," *Corning Evening Leader*, December 20, 1920; "School Board Engages Architect," *Bolivar Breeze*, December 6, 1928.

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During his career, Carl Ade designed over 350 schools in New York State, among them the Oakfield High School, the Holley High School (1931, NR listed District 2015), the Cato-Meridian Central School (Extant, 1939), and several buildings for Alfred University, which gave Ade an honorary doctorate for his contributions to the campus. Ade designed other civic buildings as well, including the David A. Howe Memorial Library (extant, 1937) in Wellsville, New York, and the Allegany County Courthouse (extant, 1938) in Belmont, New York. In addition to his school designs and civic buildings, Carl Ade served as a consulting architecture during the construction of the Genesee Valley Trust Building (1930, NR 1976), a major landmark in the Rochester skyline and one of the city's first skyscrapers. Carl Ade died in 1962 at the age of seventy, having suffered a heart attack while on a consulting visit to a school district in Syracuse.²⁴

Rankin Construction Company

Based out of Rochester, New York, the Rankin Construction Company built Oakfield High School in 1927. The school was one of the company's many buildings constructed in western New York during the 1920s and 1930s. The company incorporated in 1922 under the leadership of John Rankin, Oscar Heech, and Frank Kurtz with a capital stock of \$100,000 and served as the general contractors for a number of school buildings throughout the region. The company earned multiple school contracts during the 1920s and erected schools in Batavia, Livonia, Rochester, and Watkins Glen. The firm also collaborated with Carl Ade on several occasions, erecting Ade-designed schools such as Oakfield High School and Waterloo High School. In addition to school construction, the Rankin Construction Company laid portions of the MacDougal-Willard Highway in 1928, one of the company's busiest years of business.²⁵

²⁴ "West Almond Native Gives Fortune For Public Use," *The Alfred Sun*, May 6, 1937; "Court House Bonds Sold to New York Firm," *The Alfred Sun*, April 29, 1937; "Carl Ade Funeral Saturday; Architect Designed Schools," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 19.

²⁵ "Certificate of Incorporation," *The Rochester Daily Record*, March 12, 1923, 5; "New School Contract Awarded for \$254,956 to Rochester Firm," *The Batavia Times*, March 17, 1928, 1; "School Building Operations Started on South Side Site," *The Batavia Daily News*, March 30, 1928, 6; "Rochester and Elmira Firms Get Glen School Contracts; Will be Done in July, 1930," *Elmira Star-Gazette*, May 24, 1939, 15; "The Romulus Local," *Ovid Gazette and Independent*, July 20, 1928, 4.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested) NPS # 44626
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Preservation Studios LLC

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _____
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary is the same as for the period of significance.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Joey Duggan, Associate Historian; edited by Karen Kennedy, Director of Architectural History

organization Preservation Studios LLC

date June 12, 2024

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city or town Buffalo

state NY

zip code 14208

e-mail jduggan@preservationstudios.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Oakfield High School

City or Vicinity: Oakfield

County: Genesee

State: New York

Photographer: Preservation Studios LLC

Date Photographed: September 2021 & May 2024.

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 0001: Oakfield High School façade
- 0002: North Elevation.
- 0003: Rear or west elevation.
- 0004: Basement corridor.
- 0005: Stair to first floor.
- 0006: First floor corridor.
- 0007: Upper floor corridor.
- 0008: Auditorium balcony.
- 0009: Apartment interior.
- 0010: Interior apartment windows.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

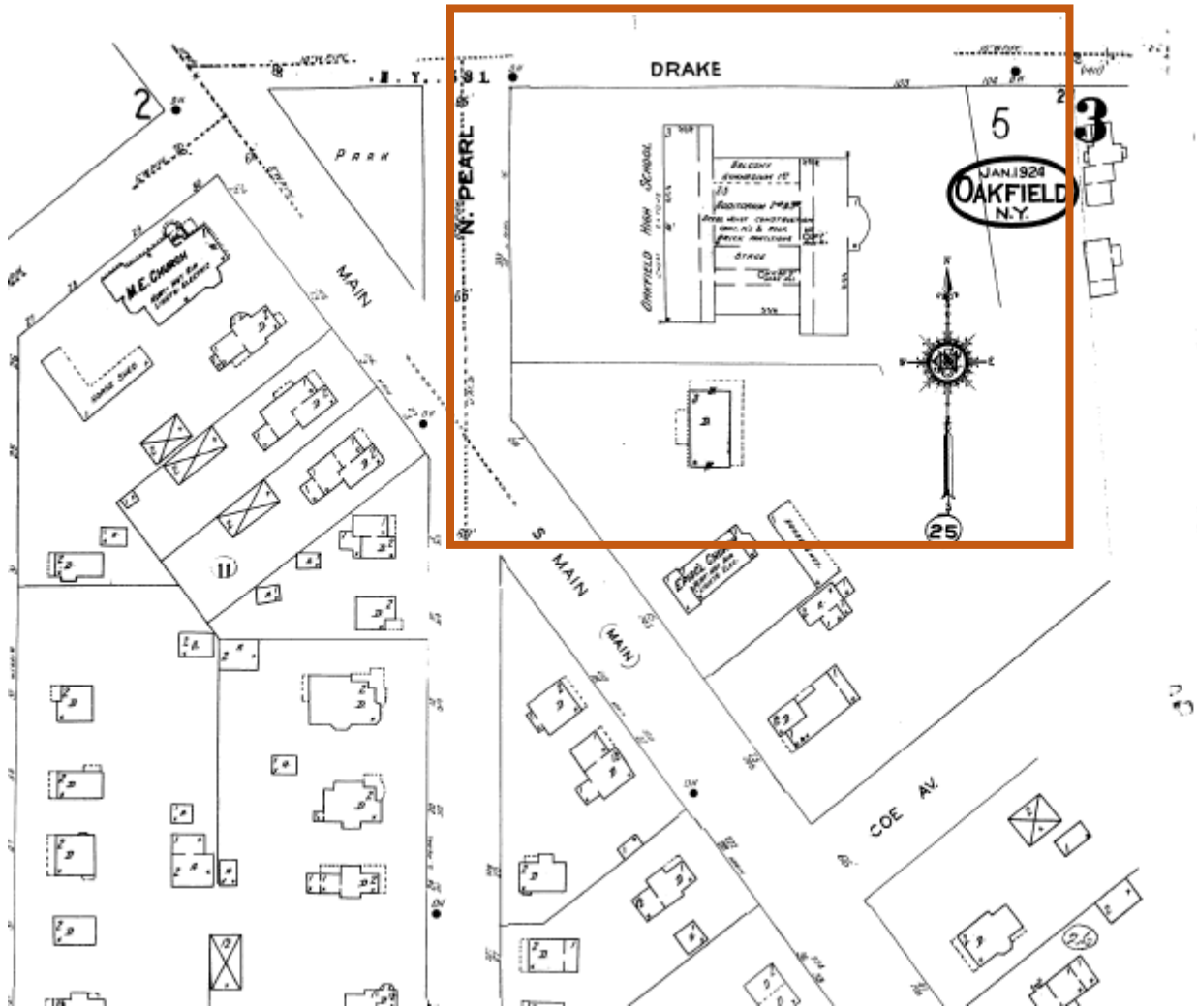
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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1924 Sanborn Insurance Company Map showing the Oakfield High School.

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Figure 1. Entrance Inscription. Site visit photograph, Preservation Studios LLC, September 9 2021.

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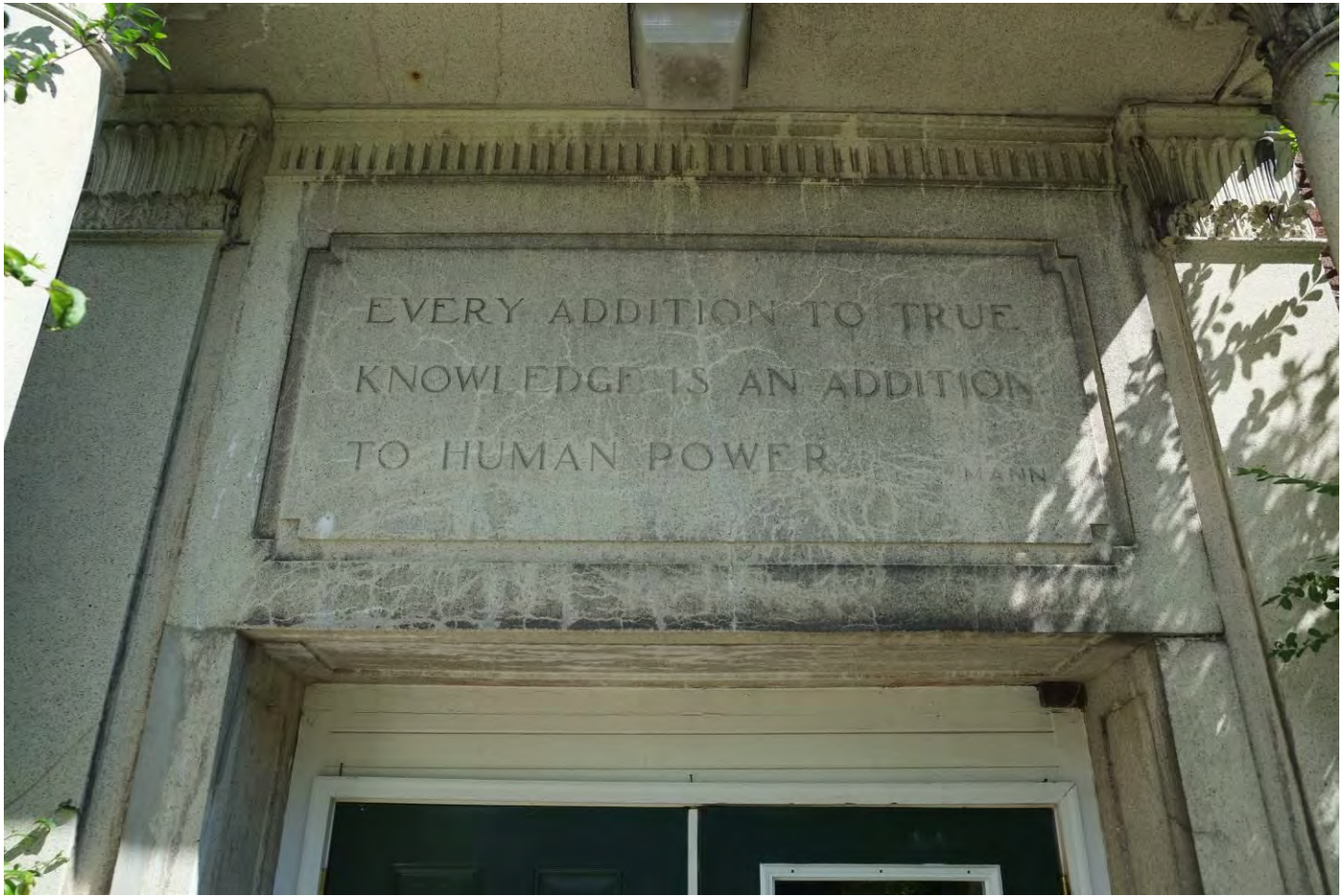


Figure 2. Entrance Inscription. Site visit photograph, Preservation Studios LLC, September 9 2021.

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Figure 3. North elevation windows. Site visit photograph, Preservation Studios LLC, September 9, 2021.

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Figure 4. North Entrance Inscription. Site visit photograph, Preservation Studios LLC, September 9 2021.

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Figure 5. Corridor, Preservation Studios LLC documentation photograph, May 7, 2024.

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Figure 6. Historic Fireplace. Site visit photograph, Preservation Studios LLC, September 9, 2021.

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Figure 7. Representative apartment interior. Site visit photograph, Preservation Studios LLC, September 9, 2021.

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Figure 8. Construction period photo of stage. Preservation Studios Documentation photograph, 2023.

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Figure 9. Cornerstone. Site visit photograph, Preservation Studios LLC, September 9, 2021.

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0001



0002

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0003



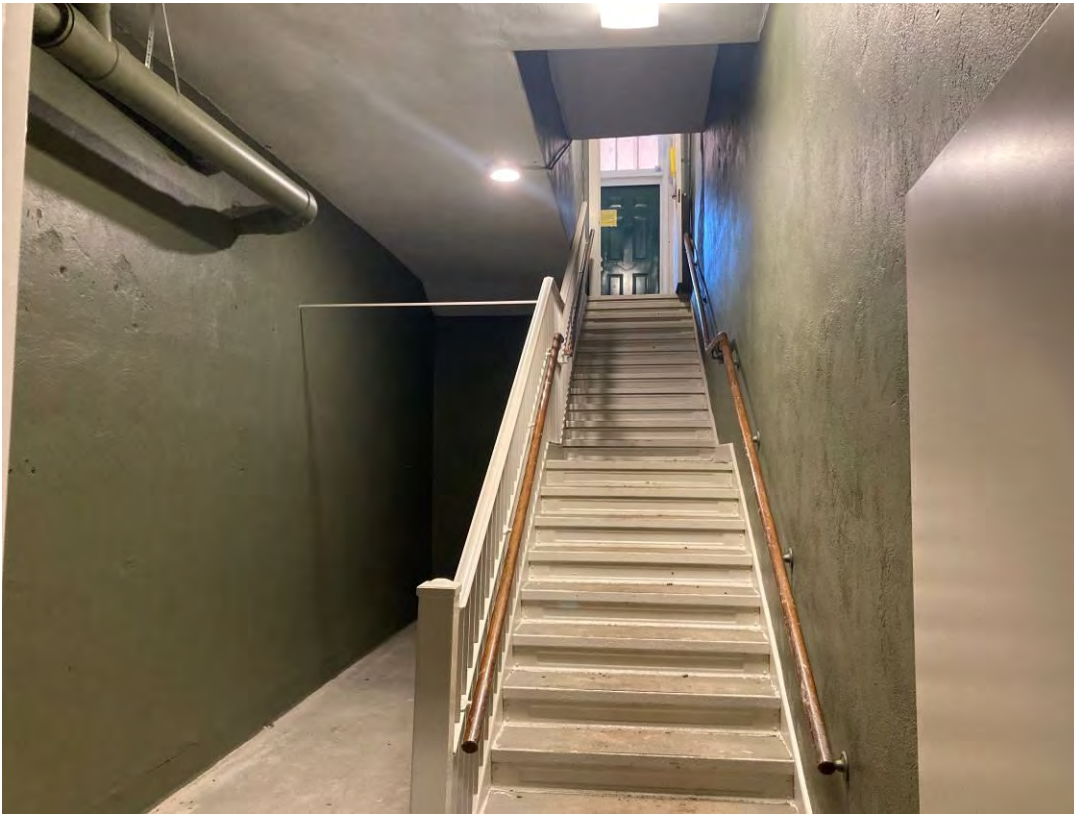
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0009

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0010