

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys

other names/site number Seton Center, Life Center

Name of Multiple Property Listing N/A

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

2. Location

street & number 921 W. State

☐

not for publication

city or town Rockford

☐

vicinity

state Illinois

county Winnebago

zip code 61102

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: ___ **national** ___ **statewide** ___ **local**

Applicable National Register Criteria: ___ **A** ___ **B** ___ **C** ___ **D**

Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

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.)

☒	private
☐	public - Local
☐	public - State
☐	public - Federal

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

☒	building(s)
☐	district
☐	site
☐	structure
☐	object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
		site
		structure
	1	object
1	2	Total

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

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Religion – Church School

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Vacant/ Not in Use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revival
Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Limestone
walls: Brick and Limestone
roof: Asphalt
other: _____

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity).

Summary

The historic St. Thomas High School for Boys is an eclectic, red brick and limestone Gothic Revival. The 4-story building is located at 921 West State Street on the southwest edge of the central business district in Rockford IL. The old school is visually prominent not only because of its size, but also the distinctive polychrome masonry banding found on the lower part of the building.

The Gothic design of the building reflects its original use as both an educational facility and religious structure. An asymmetrical design allowed for a number of large windows to light the classrooms and provide ample light. Three double entry doors, wide hallways, and a double staircase provided easy-passage for the students. But unlike the public school counterparts in Rockford, the appearance of St. Thomas also reflects the building's dual role as a religious institution. Ecclesiastical gothic features are a part of the design. This is reflected in the overall vertical form of the building, the use of Tudor gothic arches, window tracery, and the symbolic use of the cross.

The building was constructed as the first Catholic all-boys high school in the City and served in this capacity for 33 years. Significant architectural features remain that demonstrate that use. These include the original interior staircases, wide hallways, large classrooms, and the school chapel and dining hall. Most importantly, architectural features that define this building as a good local example of Gothic Revival remain intact. These include the prominent polychrome brick and stonework, exposed trusses in the chapel and dining hall, and the castellated features of the original front entry.

The building did undergo some changes after the 1960s when it became a community center for social services. The changes included the construction of partition walls and dropped ceilings to create office space. The current owner has removed most of the temporary additions and plans to retain the remaining significant architectural features of the school. The nomination includes one contributing building (the high school), one non-contributing building (the garage), and one non-contributing object (the grotto).

Narrative Description

Setting

The school was built on the east bank of Kent Creek, and south of a large park-like area formerly called the Agricultural Society, but later known as Fairgrounds Park. The front of the original building was on the north side and faced Mulberry Street. The original address of the school was 920 Mulberry Street. Over the years, there have been street reconfigurations and demolition of neighboring buildings. A large surface parking lot was added to what would have been the backside of the building, and consequently the building's address was changed to 921 W. State St. Kilburn Ave is to the east of the school, W. State St. is to the south, Kent Creek is to the west, and Mulberry St. is the northern boundary. Mulberry St has become more of an access street in this block and turns in front of the school to run parallel to the creek (Fig. 3.)

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The general setting of the area is urban as the building is located on the near west side of Rockford's downtown area. The overall neighborhood surrounding the school is diverse and includes residential, commercial and industrial properties. In the immediate vicinity of the school there is quite a bit of undeveloped or vacant land. Northeast of the school is a two-story, manufactured-block building owned by the Salvation Army. A bit further north is Fairgrounds Park. Next to the park is an older public housing complex with 210 units. There are plans to demolish this complex and replace it with new mixed-use units. Directly west of the building, on the other side of the creek and the railroad tracks, is a large triangular shaped grass lot. On the east side are other vacant lots, with a few small-scale commercial properties in the mix. West State is primarily a commercial corridor, but lacks critical mass around the St. Thomas area due to the street configuration, the creek, and railroad tracks. There are a couple of newer government buildings just southwest of the building. These buildings have sizeable open parking lots adding to the lack of density in the area.

North Elevation

The building is constructed of structural tile, and exterior surfaces are a textured red-brown face brick and smooth-cut limestone. The building has a timber frame roof covered with architectural asphalt shingles. The overall style of the architecture is Gothic Revival, and each elevation is different.

The original front entrance was located on the elevation that faces northeast, but for the sake of simplicity will be referred to as the north elevation. This side is asymmetrical in massing and consists of seven bays. Six of the bays are on the side gable portion of the building, and the last bay is the front gabled portion, which projects out beyond the wall of the other bays.

The side gable on the front façade consists of five bays and the original front entrance. Windows found on the first three floors of each of the first four bays are in groups of three. The fifth bay abuts the entry and breaks the fenestration pattern of the first four bays with paired windows on each of the three floors, instead of three. Remaining original windows are wooden, double hung, six-over-one configuration. Most replacement windows are vinyl, one-over-one. Each window has a stone sill.

The polychrome banding, made-up of brick and stone courses, runs up to the bottom of the second-floor windows. In-between the second and third-floor windows is a band of inset stone in a cross pattern. An obelisk-shaped buttress-like engaged column divides each bay. The pilasters are topped with a stone cap and stop around the middle of the third-floor windows.

Six gabled dormers punctuate the roof of the side gable. Each dormer has a pair of double-hung, one-over-one windows. These have replaced what appear to have been casement windows in the original design. One dormer is over the entrance bay.

The entry is in the sixth bay. The entry bay has a decidedly medieval feel. It is made of limestone and projects up three and a half stories with a tower-like profile. The doorway is recessed and is a gently pointed Tudor arch design. Raised stone letters spell out "St. Thomas High School" above the door.

Historic photos show that the front doorway originally consisted of two nine-panel wooden doors. The top six panels of each door had glass inserts. The doors had simple brass hardware consisting of a handle and lock. Above the double doors was a gently arched glass transom with wood tracery, which mimicked the

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stone tracery found on the chapel window on this elevation (Fig. 10). Unfortunately, this doorway was converted to a loading dock at some point after the school vacated the building. The original doors and transom were removed and replaced with a small roll-top metal door; however, the stone surround and the entry dimensions remain unchanged.

The window fenestration on the 2nd and 3rd floor of the entry bay are similar to each other with a broader window in the middle, flanked by two narrower windows, one on each side. Currently the second-floor windows consist of a 12-lite casement, a pair of 12-lite casements, and another 12-lite casement. The last window holds an air conditioning unit. The third-floor windows consist of a 12-lite casement, a large 32-lite stationary window, and another 12-lite casement modified for a window unit.

Between the second and third floors of the entry bay is a stone band with four carved, ogee-shaped arches. This band lines up with the row of stone crosses set into the brick on the other bays. A crenellated parapet tops the entry bay, and this also has decorative details carved in the stone.

A stone turret is on the eastside corner of the entry bay. It starts just above the top line of the polychrome banding, level with the bottom of the second-floor windows. The stone turret is octagon in shape and is purely decorative. Features of the turret include a conical stone roof and a stone finial.

The front gable portion of the building makes up the seventh bay on the north side. It projects approximately 9 feet 2.5 inches in front of the side gable. The east-facing side of this projection has some decorative elements, including the ceremonial cornerstone with the build date, 1929 AD, located in the center of the wall between the second and third floors. There is also a small window at the fourth story with a quoined stone surround.

The front gable has a three-story bay with five double-hung windows on each floor, a single window on each side of the bay, and three on the bay face. The bay terminates at the third floor with a stone band and a short parapet wall with battlements. Above the bay, on the fourth floor, there is a three-part stained glass window with stone tracery. It consists of two trefoil arches topped by a trefoil shaped window. Decorative stonework and stone relief patterns surround the window. A stepped parapet sits atop the end-gable. The top peak is decorated with a raised stone relief of a cross.

East Elevation

The east elevation (oriented southeast) of the building is the school's side entrance. It is symmetrical in form. The details of this elevation effectively emphasize the verticality of the building. The first feature giving the building its sense of height is the polychrome banding around the base. The banding is above the stone foundation blocks on each elevation; however, on this end-wall, it is uninterrupted by windows and effectively draws the eye upward. The pattern consists of six alternating bands of bricks and stone. Five course-rows make up the brick bands, and the stone rows are single blocks of smooth cut limestone. The final brick band has a tapered stone cap drip-edge on top.

The side entry on this elevation is centrally located, and essentially extends three stories tall framing the side stairwell of the interior. The entry bay extends slightly from the wall face. A buttress-like detail delineates each side. These piers are stone at the base, taper in size, and transition to brick around the second-floor level. Tapered limestone capstones accentuate the dimensional and material changes of these engaged piers.

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The doorway is a pair of brown steel doors with six lites each. These are set in a recessed, compound, Tudor Arch stone door surround. The gentle point of the arched opening again leads the eye upward. The tympanum is solid stone with a raised design of an unfurling ribbon. A modern security light is mounted above the door.

Paired windows are above the door and correlate with the landings in the stairwell of each floor. All of these windows appear to be original multi-lite metal casement and stationeries. There are decorative stone inserts above the first pair of windows and above the third pair of windows. These have a crest design. The windows on the top landing are triangular at the top. A pointed stone hoodmold tops the entire entry design.

There are a couple of other architectural features on this elevation that accentuate the verticality of the building. On either side of the entry bay, are vertical buttress-like, engaged columns that hug the wall. These narrow about three-fourths of the way up and a triangular-shaped stone detail marks the size transition. Finally, this end gable elevation has a stepped parapet. In the upper peak of the gable wall is a diamond-shaped inset stone with a bird design.

South Elevation

The south side of the building (oriented southwest) is the public entrance. Like the north side, this elevation has seven bays, five on the side gable portion, an entry bay and the end gable bay. Window fenestration of the side-gable is very similar to the north elevation. Each bay and floor has windows grouped in threes, except the one closest to the entrance. Here again, the windows are in pairs on each floor. This elevation has five gabled dormers, compared to the six on the north elevation.

The entry bay again gives a subtle nod to medieval architecture but is much less ornate than the original front façade. There is a crenellated tower that forms this bay and extends past the roofline of the side-gable. There is a double steel door painted brown. The entrance surround is a Tudor arch made of brick with keystone and springers made of stone. The tympanum is simple with brick-fill using a stack bond.

There is an endwall chimney to the west of the entry bay, and it separates the side gable from the end gable. The chimney extends up to approximately the peak of the gable roof. Centered near the top of the polychrome banding on the east bay are plastic letters spelling out "Life Center," the last named used by building occupants. There are three windows on each of the four floors. The windows are mostly replacement one-over-one except for two multi-pane windows on the second floor. Again the gable end has a stepped parapet, and the round trefoil shaped window of the chapel is near the top of the wall on the fourth floor.

West Elevation

The west elevation (northwest orientation) consists of three bays. Buttress-like structures divide the bays and taper in size as they get taller, with stone caps acting as transitions for the dimensional changes. Two of these pilasters are on the edges of the façade so that there are five in all.

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The west side of the building sits on the Kent Creek bank, and there is an exposed basement level on this elevation. It appears there were windows on the lower level, but these have been filled-in and covered with concrete.

There are three windows in each bay of the first three floors. These are one-over-one. On the fourth floor, in the chapel area, each bay has shorter one-over-one windows. These are replacements. The fenestration pattern is the same as the other floors; however, the center window location in each bay is brick-filled. The brick is in a stack bond pattern. It is unknown if this was the original design, or they were filled-in.

Interior

The overall configuration of St. Thomas is an ell-plan made up of a front gable perpendicular to a side-gable. Entries are located on both the north and south side of the building where the gables meet. There is also an entry at the end of the side gable on the east side. The building is four stories tall. There is a basement level under the front gable portion. The basement is divided into two rooms. One room holds the original boiler that is no longer in use.

On the first floor the original doorway on the north side opens up to a landing, and a few steps down is a small reception area. The reception area, side gable hallway, back stairwell, and front gable portion all have large Tudor archways separating the spaces.

A wide central hallway runs down the middle of the side gable space with doors on either side that lead to the classroom spaces found on the first three floors. A typical size classroom (measured on the first floor) is about 21 x 30 feet. Most have two doors off the hallway. Although there is a mixture of classroom door types found in the building now, some original remain. These are oak, four-panel doors with a glass transom above. Hardware on the doors is simple brass backplates, knobs, and locks. The classrooms have maple floors. The walls and ceilings are metal lathe and plaster. Plaster condition in these rooms is not bad, but paint is failing. Original light fixtures are missing, and most now have hanging fluorescent fixtures. Historic photos show the use of pendant lighting with traditional schoolhouse globes. Only one original chalkboard remains in the building. The classrooms have a simple wide baseboard, presumably oak. Many baseboards are painted, and some are missing. The missing baseboards were likely removed when the space was subdivided. There are tall windows on the outer walls of the classrooms. Many of the classroom windows are the original 6-over-1 wooden windows. These provide the rooms with excellent light. Built-in benches can be found in the first-floor hallway. They have a Gothic design and look like church pews.

Now that the partition walls have been removed, the floor plan of the side gable remains very similar to when built. One exception is the restrooms. When the school was built, each floor had one restroom located on the south side of the hall and directly east of the double stairwell. It is assumed that since this was an all-boys' school that there was only a need for men's restrooms. Now the building has both a women and a men's restroom on each floor. Only the first floor appears to have retained the original men's restroom. On this floor an additional, multi-stall women's restroom has been added next to it using some of the classroom space that was there before. On the second and third floors, the original men's restroom space has been divided, and now houses men and women's restrooms as well as additional storage. It is unclear if there were originally restrooms on the fourth floor.

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The fourth floor of the side gable portion of the building held the dining hall. It has exposed truss framing. The trusses are slightly less ornate than the chapel and do not have the iron strapwork. The dining hall was also modified at one time with offices running along the north and south side. Because of this, the windows in the dormers have been replaced. Historic photos show the original windows were casement, but they are now one-over-one.

There are two staircases found in the old school, a double staircase by the south entry and a single staircase by the east entry. Both staircases are of iron construction with iron balusters and newel posts. The metal is painted brown. The staircases have a simple wooden handrail, and the stair treads are terrazzo. Decorative scrolled iron brackets can be found on the east stairwell.

Original floor plans label the rooms found in the front gable portion of the building. The first floor had three rooms: a classroom in the north end, a shorthand room behind it, and a typewriting room on the south end. Today this space is mostly open with a concrete floor. At some point in the life of the building this area was used to stage and distribute food and supplies. There is a standing freezer on the north end of the large space and a concrete ramp leads from the elevated front foyer into the room (Fig. 4).

When the building was constructed, the second floor in this portion of the building was a large open room used for study hall. Now that partition walls have been removed, it is again an open space (Fig. 5). The original hardwood floor is not in good shape, but you can still see the darkened places where the desks were attached to the floor.

Original floor plans show the 3rd floor was divided into two lab spaces, one for physics and one for chemistry. This has been altered and now is three areas with a hall running on the outside wall and some added storage closets (Fig. 6).

The old chapel is on the fourth floor of the building of this portion of the building. The chapel has a large trefoil stained glass window on the upper wall of the north side. A smaller round stained glass window is on the south wall. The chapel has windows that run along the west wall. The windows are one-over-one double hung vinyl windows, and not original. The flooring in the chapel is wood. The south end of the chapel has a short L-shaped staircase with a landing that leads to an added mezzanine projecting from the south wall. On this second level is a mechanical room in the southeast corner with a sizeable gas-fired furnace used for heating the space. This space is all that remains from a previous remodel that built offices around the room's perimeter.

The most striking architectural feature of the chapel is the ceiling and exposed framing. Large kingpost trusses form the roof framing. These are dark stained. Heavy iron straps are part of the joinery. The ceiling is also dark stained wood.

Changes to the Building and Grounds

Exterior

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A small loading dock has replaced the original front door. The wooden doors and glass transom with wooden tracery are gone, replaced by a top-roll metal door. A historic photo of the front door has been included with the nomination (Fig. 1). It does not appear that the dimensions of the opening have been changed, or the stone surround altered. The historic photo shows that there was a short flight of concrete stairs leading from the front sidewalk and another couple of steps leading to the recessed doorway. This is now a narrow drive.

The 1929 yearbook has a photo of the grounds on the front side of the school (Fig. 9). The landscaping appears formal with possibly a small fountain, shrubs, and sidewalks or paths. In other historic photos, there appeared to be a bridge that crossed over the creek and a path on the other side. All of this is no longer there.

Many windows have aluminum storms, and some of the original windows have been replaced, most notably the multi-pane casement windows of the dormers and chapel. Some of the wooden six-over-one, double-hung have been replaced by one-over-one windows. Fortunately, a little over fifty percent of the original windows remain. Additionally, the original fenestration and the size of the openings are the same as when the school was built. There is also photo documentation of the building that can be used for restoration.

A newspaper article published after construction stated the original roof was asbestos shingle. The covering that is currently on the building appears to be an asphalt architectural shingle. The north and south elevation dormers are sided with what looks like aluminum siding. It is hard to determine from historical photographs if the dormers were wood siding or shingles, but the aluminum is not original.

Historical photos also show some decorative features to the roofline that are now missing. A copula sat atop the crest of the side-gabled roof and is no longer there (Fig. 9). Crosses embellished the parapets, but today most of those are missing; only one remains.

When the school was built in 1929, it sat behind a large building known as the Colesium. At the time of construction, the Colesium was remodeled and used as a gymnasium for the boys' school. From looking at Sanborn maps, it does not look like the Colesium was attached to the new building in any way. A newspaper article from 1929 said that a walkway joined the two buildings. The Colesium was demolished in 1963 when it became structurally unsound. The area on this side of the school is now a parking lot, paved with asphalt. There is a three-stall garage that is a stand-alone building on the west side of the parking lot. It faces east. It is a newer structure and would not be considered contributing (Fig. 13).

The east side property appears to be nearly the same as when the school was built, except for the cobblestone grotto. The grotto was constructed in 1953. The space displayed a statue of the Virgin Mary. The statue is no longer there, but the grotto remains (Fig. 14). Because the period of significance for the building is 1929, the grotto is considered non-contributing. The west side of the property is bounded by Kent Creek, and the creek is a prominent feature visible from many of the windows of the building. In fact, St. Thomas was affectionately called the "Academy on Kent."

Interior

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Shortly after the school closed in 1963, the building became office space for various social service organizations. Nearly all of the interior changes are a result of subsequent uses after the school vacated. The Rockford Catholic Diocese continued to own the building, and it functioned as their Post Conciliar Center. They also operated a bookstore in the original book room of the school. Eventually, Catholic Social Services utilized the building. They were a service agency of the Rockford Catholic Diocese and served Winnebago, Boone, Stephenson, JoDaviess, and parts of Lee and Ogle. During this time, the building became known as the Seton Center. In later years, the building was renamed the Life Center and housed a variety of charity organizations.

Interior remodeling for these uses resulted in the larger spaces being broken up into smaller offices using partition walls and dropped ceilings. The offices were rooms within rooms. The partition walls were approximately eight feet tall, and there were suspended ceilings consisting of metal grillwork and acoustical panels. At some point, an elevator was added to the building. The current owner has worked to remove the partition walls and dropped ceilings.

A considerable amount of original flooring remains. There is maple hardwood in most of the classrooms and terrazzo in the common areas like stairs and hallways. The terrazzo is in decent condition. Some of the wood flooring looks to be in a salvageable state, and in other cases, there has been water damage and buckling.

The school chapel was located on the fourth floor, as was the school dining hall. The pews and alter are no longer in the chapel. Unfortunately the light fixtures are also missing. These were hanging Gothic pendants in the chapel and electroliers in the dining hall. Offices were constructed in both the chapel and dining hall. They ran around the perimeter of the space. To accommodate heating ducts, a mezzanine level was created. The floor of the mezzanine became the ceiling for the offices. Ductwork ran along the mezzanine floor around the perimeter of the room and dropped down into the offices below. A small utility room was located on this upper level (southeast corner of the chapel). The old dining hall had a similar configuration. The current owner has removed these offices and returned the 4th floor to its original open floor plan, except the south end of the chapel where the utility room is located (Fig. 7). This was kept to provide temporary heat for the space.

Integrity

Over the years, St. Thomas Catholic High School has seen changes to both the building and the grounds; however, the property does retain sufficient integrity to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It is in the same location as when it was built, an area presumably chosen for its central location and proximity to immigrant neighborhoods.

The building's overall Gothic Revival design is still apparent, as are the significant architectural features of this design. Gothic Revival elements include the stained glass windows with tracery found in the old Chapel, exposed truss work and wooden ceilings on the fourth floor, polychrome masonry, and castellated features on the original front façade.

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Even though the setting of the school has been somewhat compromised by development, the building still sits prominently upon the bank of Kent Creek. The sizeable agricultural park that the school initially faced is still a city park and can be seen from the upper floor windows.

Much of the original building materials remain, including the distinctive textured brick of the exterior, art glass windows in the chapel, and a little more than half of the original windows in other parts of the building. Additionally, workmanship is shown in both the truss work on the interior and the masonry work of the exterior.

As the current owner has dismantled the numerous makeshift offices that were added after the school vacated the building, the original feeling and sense of association is slowly being reclaimed. St. Thomas was a unique building type in the City when it was constructed as it had two distinct functions, that of education and worship. Although the exterior continued to reflect these original uses, the office partition walls and dropped ceilings robbed the structure of that association. Now that most of these have been dismantled, it is easy to visualize learning taking place in the light-filled, open classrooms and worship occurring in the inspiring chapel space.

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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.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1929

Significant Dates

1929

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)

Architect/Builder

Wybe Van der Meer – Architect

Tolmie Brothers - Builder

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations).

St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys is architecturally significant as a good local representation of early twentieth century eclectic Gothic Revival style, and therefore is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. Local architect, Wybe Jelles Van der Meer designed the building in 1929 and combined features from High Victorian, Tudor, and Collegiate Gothic to create a harmonious blend of Gothic Revival genres. One of the most distinctive exterior features is the polychrome masonry, a feature more commonly found on buildings from an earlier time period. Van der Meer's design for St. Thomas features alternating rows of red brick and smooth cut limestone, which create a distinctive banding pattern at the base of the building. Castellated features on the original front entry were attributes often used in Collegiate Gothic designs, a popular form for larger secondary schools and colleges during this time period. The exposed truss work in the chapel, steep pitched roofline, Tudor arch doorways, and stepped parapet gables give the building an English Tudor feel. The combination of Gothic Revival sub-genres created a fitting blend for this building that once served as both an educational and religious building.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Brief History of St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys

Rockford Illinois was settled in 1834 and became a chartered city in 1852. Located midway between Galena and Chicago, Rockford grew with an influx of immigrants who arrived on the stagecoach that ran between the two cities.

In the City's early years, formal education usually took place at home; however, in 1855 Illinois passed legislation requiring all communities to establish free public schools. The same year, Rev. William Lambert of the St. James Parish in Rockford started the first parochial school. The school was simple, located in a one-room frame building and staffed with lay teachers. According to the brief history found on the St. James website, the parochial school operated for nearly 20 years before closing its doors in 1876. It remained closed until 1886 when Rev. James J. Flaherty became pastor of the church and made reopening the school a priority.

In 1908, Pope Pius X determined a need for a new Diocese in Northern IL and erected the Diocese of Rockford, overseeing 12 counties and approximately 50,000 Catholics living there at the time. He named Peter James Muldoon as the first Bishop. By this time many parishes, like St. James, had established schools. In fact, of the roughly 56 parishes in the Diocese, 22 had established parochial schools.

One of Muldoon's top priorities was to help assimilate the foreign-born Catholics of the area. He immediately set about establishing parishes for Italian, Polish, and Lithuanians living in the Rockford area, and appointed Priests to the Parishes who had similar cultural and language skills. His second agenda was to establish a program for secondary education in Rockford, and within two years of being named Bishop, he established a co-education high school program. The freshman class met in improvised rooms inside the hall of St. James parochial grade school. (McDonald, 58)

The first year there were 20 freshmen. By the second year, enrollment more than doubled, and the school had already outgrown their space. To keep up with growing enrollment, the Diocese purchased a former public elementary school building on the corner of West State and Stanley Avenue. They remodeled the school and

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built an addition. By 1920, the remodeled school was no longer large enough to handle the school's student population that had grown to nearly 230. The Diocese resorted to renting clubhouse space from The Knights of Columbus as a temporary solution and with the future in mind, purchased a large property on West State Street. The property was known as the Colesium. The former roller skating rink and convention center became extra space for classes.

During the late 1920s, Bishop Muldoon began making plans to separate the boys and girls for High School education. In 1929, a new St. Thomas school for boys (the previous co-educational school was also called St. Thomas) was built on Mulberry and State Street. The same year, Bishop Muldoon High School for girls was also constructed. Architect, Wybe Jelles Van der Meer, was chosen by the Diocese to design both of the schools.

Architect – Wybe Jelles Van der Meer

Wybe J. Van der Meer was born in the province of Friesland, the Netherlands on June 18th, 1883. He traveled in his early years studying in France, Germany, and Holland. In 1907, at the age of 23, he came to the United States. He settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan and found work as a carpenter. Van der Meer later attended Chicago Technical College and completed his study in architecture. Before WWI, he spent a couple of years teaching and achieved American citizenship in 1915.

In 1920, Van der Meer came to Rockford IL to set up an architecture practice. Wybe was a man of many interests. In addition to his prolific architectural career, he played the violin, composed music, and even wrote poetry. Over the course of his career, Van der Meer designed a variety of building types including homes, schools, and hospitals; but his specialty was ecclesiastical architecture. During the 1920s, he did work for both the Archdiocese of Dubuque and the Diocese of Rockford. Van der Meer's work for the Rockford Diocese is showcased in *Catholic Churches and Institutions*, a book published in 1929, the same year St. Thomas and Muldoon were constructed. Plans outlined in the book range in style from Art Deco to Spanish Revival, but it appears that his favorite style was Gothic Revival.

The Gothic Revival Movement and St. Thomas Design

Gothic Revival is a style based on building forms used in the Middle Ages. Van der Meer's choice of a Gothic Revival design for St. Thomas was in keeping with the prevailing architectural trends for both churches and larger educational facilities at the time it was built.

Gothic Revival surfaced in Europe during the late 18th century, but seemed to gain momentum during the 19th century. Many architects championed the revival of medieval architecture, but A. W. N. Pugin, a self-taught architect and writer from Britain, was especially influential in making it the preferred style for churches. He not only advocated for Gothic design but also proclaimed it the *only* architecture suitable for the Catholic Church. In 1836, Pugin published *Contrasts*, a book that has been described by some historians as an "architectural manifesto." (Hill, *The Guardian*) In the book, Pugin offered his readers "an entire social programme, one which redefined architecture as a moral force, imbued with political and religious meaning." (Hill) Pugin followed *Contrasts* with *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, published in 1841. Here he illustrated what he considered to be the greatest assets of Gothic architecture: constructional honesty and functional ornamentation. Pugin died in 1852 at the age of 40. Although his writings went a long way to promote both the Catholic and Gothic Revival, there were many others who shared his passion. Architects continued to design in the Gothic Revival style all throughout the 19th, and well into the 20th century.

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When Van der Meer designed St. Thomas in 1929, he drew on several phases of Gothic design. As previously mentioned, one of the most striking features is the use of constructional polychromy on the exterior of the school. Constructional polychromy is when color is provided by the materials used in building as opposed to colors being applied after construction. This fits Pugin's definition of functional ornamentation. For St. Thomas, Van der Meer used alternating bands of brick and limestone to form the base of the exterior walls. Banding as a design feature was commonly used on Victorian Gothic buildings. The books, *Brick and Marble from Northern Italy* by G. E. Street and *The Stones of Venice* by John Ruskin, both helped popularize striped polychromatic brickwork. Exemplary buildings include *All Saints Margaret Street* in London, designed by William Butterfield and constructed between 1850 and 1859 and the *Westminster Cathedral* in London, designed by John Francis Bentley and constructed between 1895 and 1903.

Of the numerous plans and photos published in Van der Meer's book, *Catholic Churches and Institutions*, there is only one other building where he used this type of banding. The banding design is also unique locally. Of the handful of Rockford buildings with constructional polychrome banding, most are more modern building designs that would not be considered historic.

Historical newspaper articles described the style of St. Thomas as Tudor Gothic. The school has Tudor arches on both the exterior doorways and interior passageways. The detailing in the chapel and dining hall is also Old English style. This includes the dark wooden ceilings, exposed trusses and iron strapwork.

Tudor Revival, a sub-genre of Gothic Revival, experienced great popularity in the 1920s when St. Thomas was built. It was often used for suburban homes that were springing up in new neighborhoods and subdivisions at the time. This was true locally. Many Tudor Revival homes built in the first half of the 20th century can be found throughout Rockford's older neighborhoods. Larger, non-residential examples in Rockford are far fewer. One design that can be compared to St. Thomas is the old Children's Home located at 631 Longwood Street. Local architect, Jesse Barloga designed the 3-story building. The Children's Home was built in 1924, and like St. Thomas is constructed of red brick and stone. The style is English Tudor. Stone is used for quoined window and door surrounds on the front elevation of the building, as well as windowsills. This handsome, architect-designed Tudor building does not have the same feeling of height as St. Thomas partially because it is three stories, instead of four. The large shed dormer found on the north side of the Children's home is a wall dormer and does not add to its feeling of height like the gabled roof dormers found on St. Thomas High School.

Another design aspect that sets St. Thomas apart from the Children's home is the use of castellated features for the high school. Castellated forms were common of another Gothic Revival sub-genre, Collegiate Gothic. In the late 19th and early 20th century, American universities embraced the Gothic style for their new campus buildings. They modeled their designs after European universities like Oxford and Cambridge. Ralph Adams Cram, Princeton's supervising architect throughout the 1910s and 20s, helped promote the style in the United States.

Gothic Revival came to symbolize permanence and scholastic endeavors, but it also had practical merit. During the 1920s and 30s, schools began to have more complex space requirements. "Architecturally, the Collegiate Gothic style allowed for a variety of compositions and an adaptability and elasticity in the use of stylistic elements." (Robinson and Meade, 2681) Journals targeting educators and administrators touted the advantages of the style. In a 1919 article in *The American School Board Journal*, architect James Betelle argued that gothic designs allowed for taller, closer spaced windows than classical counterparts, and that the picturesque style was

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less restrictive in window placement. Collegiate Gothic became a popular choice not only for college campuses, but also for larger public and private elementary and secondary schools.

Rockford has several public schools that could be classified as Collegiate Gothic; however, all of them have more classical massing. Kishwaukee School is probably one of the best local examples of this modified Gothic Revival style. The school is located at 526 Caitlin St. and was designed by Peterson and Johnson Architects in 1921. It is three stories tall and like St. Thomas is constructed of brick and stone. It also has castellated features and stone detailing. Unlike St. Thomas, the front elevation of Kishwaukee is symmetrical. It has a centrally located, crenellated entry tower and a flat roof. Kishwaukee was added to Landmarks Illinois' most endangered buildings' list in 2016. The Rockford School District plans to demolish the building and replace it with a modern school.

Conclusion

St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys is a good local example of Gothic Revival style and the many forms it took over its long run of popularity. Van der Meer designed a building that would function as both a place of learning and a place of worship. From the east elevation, you see the strong ecclesiastic influence; from the south elevation, you see an institutional building. Van der Meer used ornament somewhat sparingly, saving it for the more public areas such as the Chapel and the front entrance. His use of striped banding as part of the construction ensured that the building would not get lost in the streetscape. His design still shines. Despite changes to the street configuration and the neighborhood, this Gothic Revival is still a standout.

St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.27

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

Latitude: 42.27471 Longitude: -89.10234

1	_____	_____	3	_____	_____
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude
2	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude

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

The property is bounded by W. State Street to the south, Kent Creek to the west, Mulberry Street to the north and Kilborn Street to the east.

Legal Description:

Parcel 11-22-256-004

DOCTOR DUNNS SUB BNG PT NE1/4 SEC 22-44-1 LOTS 1 THRU 6 (EXC WLY PT LOTS 5 & 6 FOR KENT CREEK FLOOD CONTROL BY 80-03- 1204) & (EXC W 60 FT E 152 FT LOT 6) ALL LOT 6 & (EXC S 85 FT) ALL LOT 11 ALSO S 1/2 VAC MULBERRY ST LYG N OF & ADJ LOTS 1 THRU 5 LOT 5

and

Parcel 11-22-256-008

DR DUNNS SUB (EXC THAT PT FOR ROW BY 88-14-1807) (EXC THAT PT TO CITY BY 06-22303) W 60 FT E 152 FT LT 6 & E1/2 LT 9 & ALL LOT 10

and

Parcel 11-22-256-009

DR DUNNS SUB (EXC THAT PT FOR ROW BY 88-14-1807) (EXC THAT PT TO CITY BY 06-22303) S 85 FT E 92 FT LOT 11

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This is the remaining area associated with the St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Pam Hein date 3/14/2018
organization _____ telephone 815-979-3241
street & number 1722 Harlem Blvd. email pamhein@sbcglobal.net
city or town Rockford state IL zip code 61103

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **GIS Location Map (Google Earth or BING)**
- **Local Location Map**
- **Site Plan**
- **Floor Plans (As Applicable)**
- **Photo Location Map** (Include for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map and insert immediately after the photo log and before the list of figures).

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys

City or Vicinity: Rockford

County: Winnebago **State:** IL

Photographer: Pam Hein

Date Photographed: September – December 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 of 15:

- 0001 1 of 15, North elevation, facing southwest
- 0002 2 of 15, North elevation front gable projection, facing northwest
- 0003 3 of 15, North elevation finial of the entrance tower turret, facing southwest
- 0004 4 of 15, East elevation, facing northwest
- 0005 5 of 15, Brick detail on east elevation, facing northwest
- 0006 6 of 15, South elevation, facing northeast
- 0007 7 of 15, West elevation, facing southeast
- 0008 8 of 15, North entrance (original) lobby, facing northeast
- 0009 9 of 15, South entrance and double staircase, facing southwest
- 0010 10 of 15, Built-in benches in hallway of first floor, facing southeast
- 0011 11 of 15, East staircase detail, facing northeast
- 0012 12 of 15, Chapel on fourth floor, facing northeast
- 0013 13 of 15, Ironwork detail on chapel truss, facing northeast
- 0014 14 of 15, Dining hall on fourth floor, facing southeast
- 0015 15 of 15, Truss detail in dining hall, facing southeast

*Photos are keyed to maps and floor plans.

Yellow numbers indicate exterior photos and are found on Fig. 3: Site map

Red numbers indicate interior photos and are found on Fig. 4 and Fig. 7: Floor Plans

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 100 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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National Park Service

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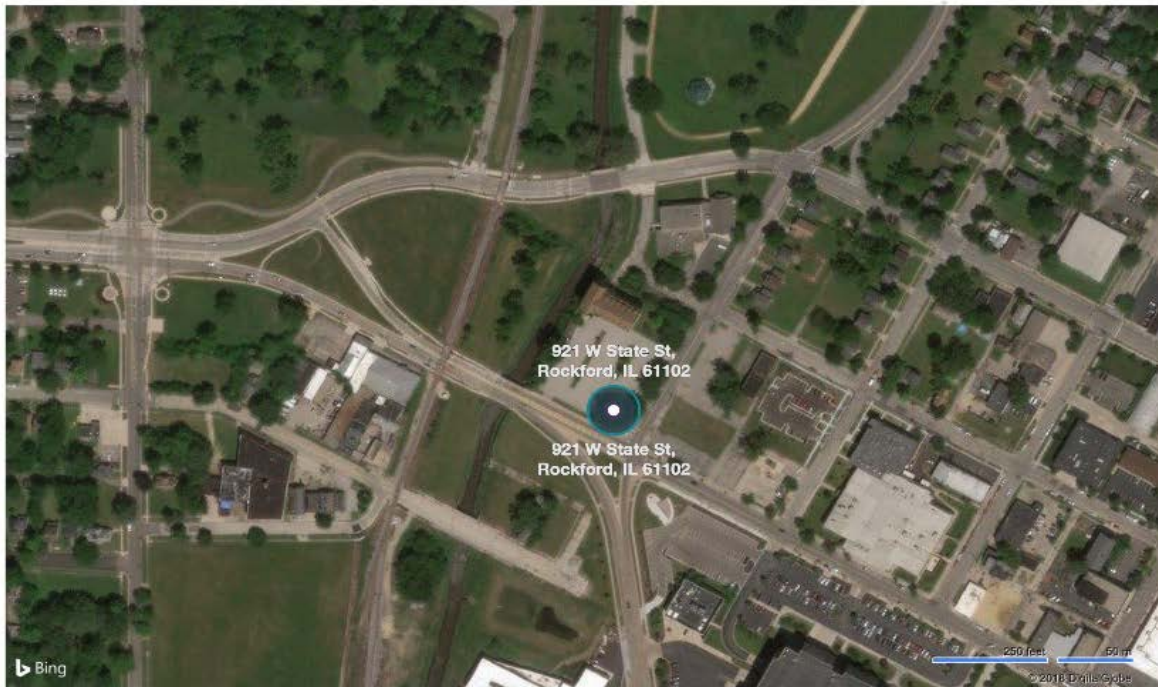
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

List of Figures

(Resize, compact, and paste images of maps and historic documents in this section. Place captions, with figure numbers above each image. Orient maps so that north is at the top of the page, all document should be inserted with the top toward the top of the page.)

Figure 1: GIS Map and Coordinates

921 W State St, Rockford, IL 61102
Location: 42.27471, -89.10234



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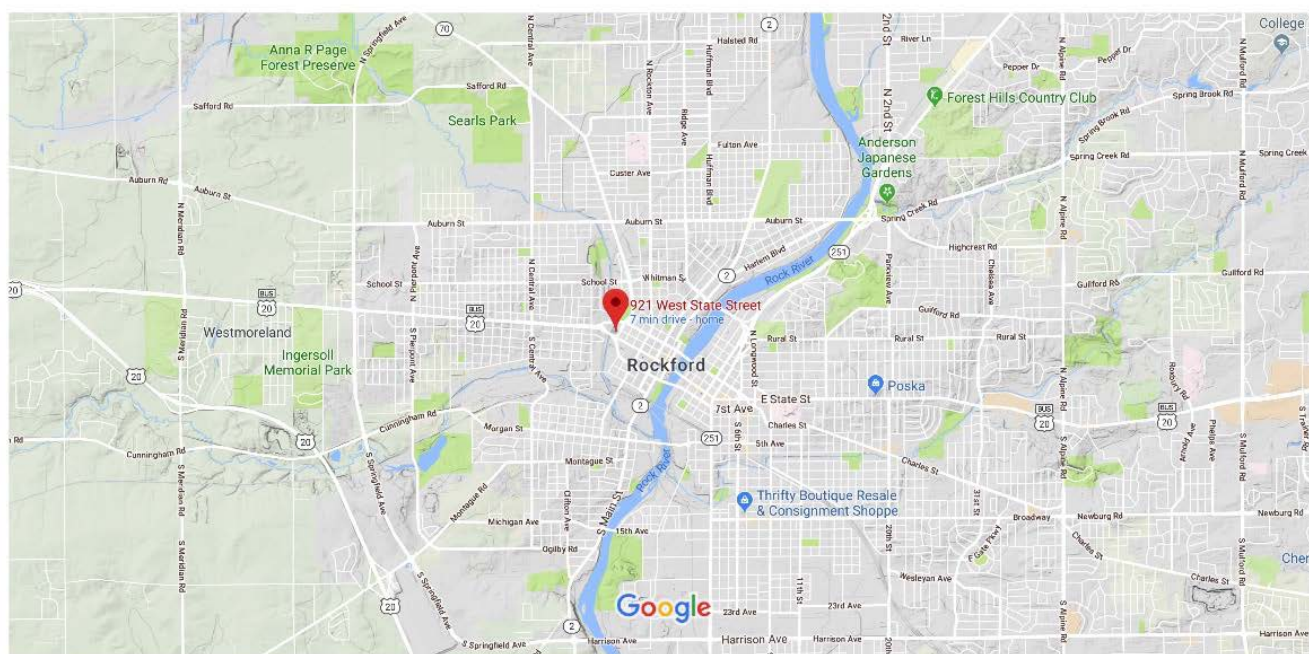
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 2: Local Location Map



921 W State St

St. Thomas Catholic School for Boys



Map data ©2018 Google

1 mi

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Figure 3: Site Map



- Yellow numbers indicate location of exterior photos and correlate with photo log.
- White labels indicate non-contributing resources on site and correlate with figure list.
- Red line indicates property boundary.

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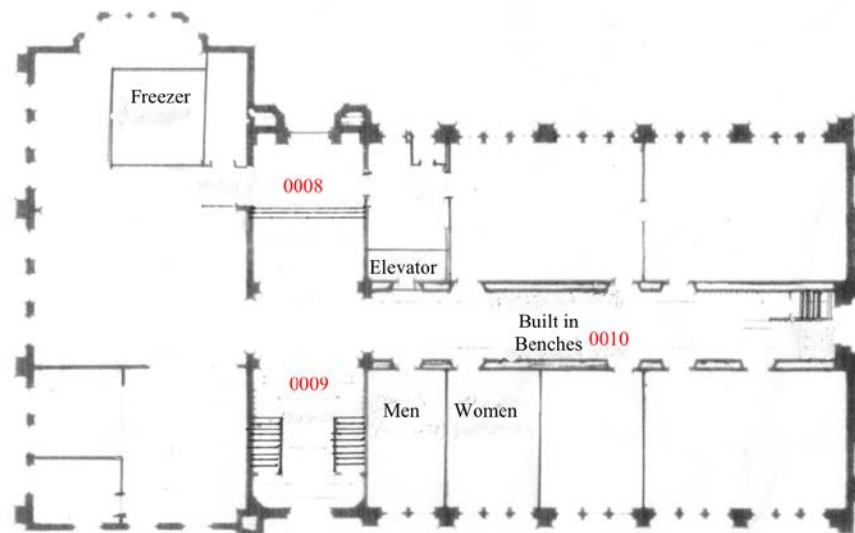
Name of Property

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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 4: First Floor



*Red numbers indicate photo locations and correlate to photo log

Figure 5: Second Floor

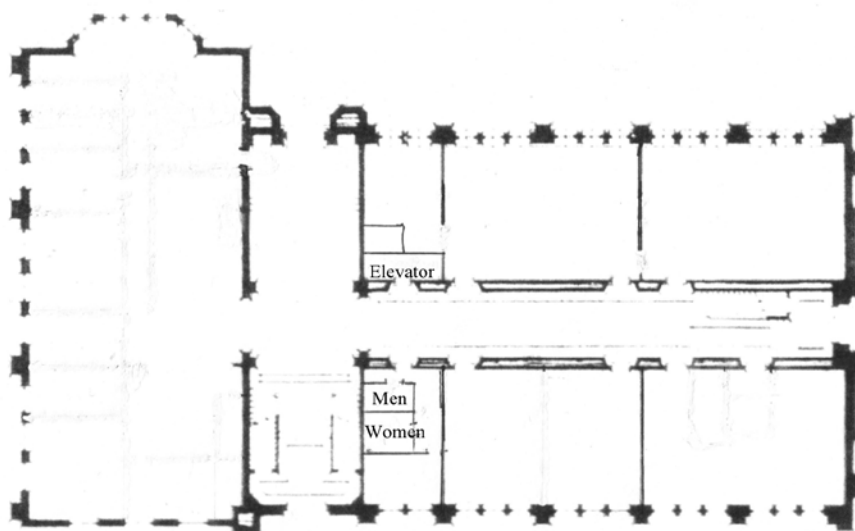


Figure 6: Third Floor

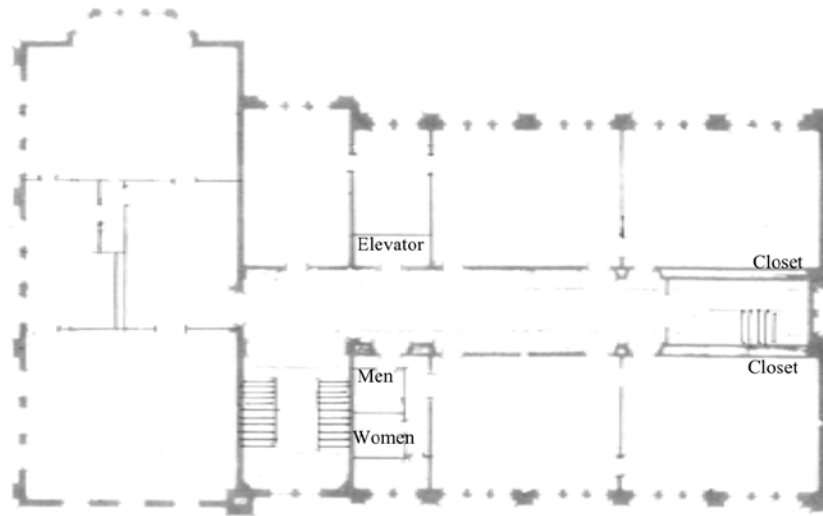
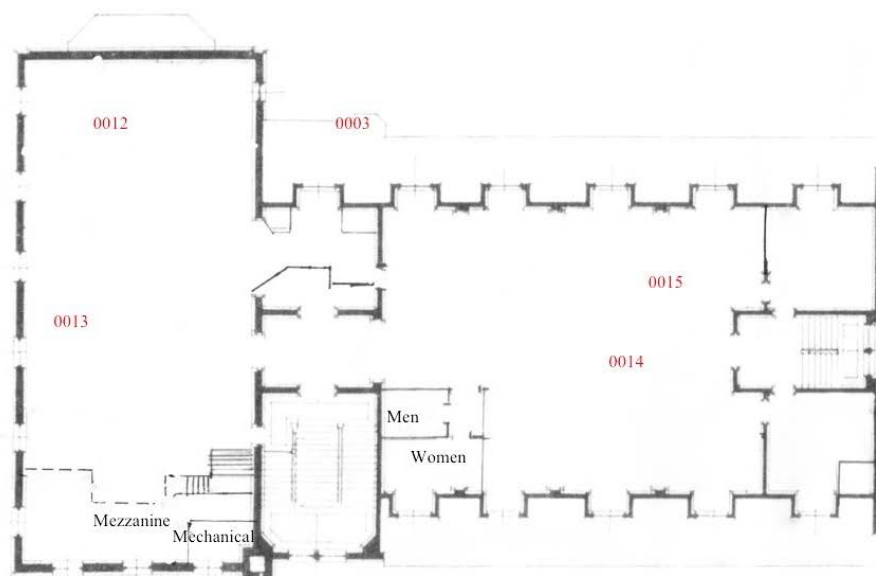


Figure 7: Fourth Floor



*Red numbers indicate photo locations and correlate to photo log

**St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys:
Illinois, Winnebago:**

Figure 8: Historic photo of the main entrance



Figure 9: Historic photo of the north facade showing landscaping



**St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys:
Illinois, Winnebago:**

Figure 10: Historic photo of the original front doorway and transom

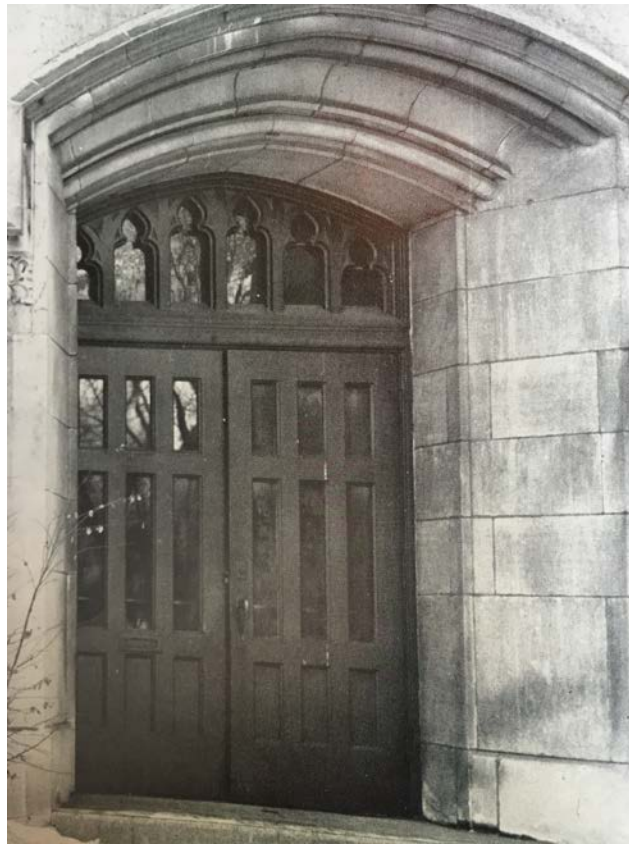


Figure 11: Historic photo of fourth floor chapel



**St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys:
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Figure 12: Historic photo of fourth floor dining hall



Figure 13: Non-contributing resource: garage



Figure 14: Non-contributing resource: grotto



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Illinois, Winnebago:

St. Thomas Catholic High School for Boys:
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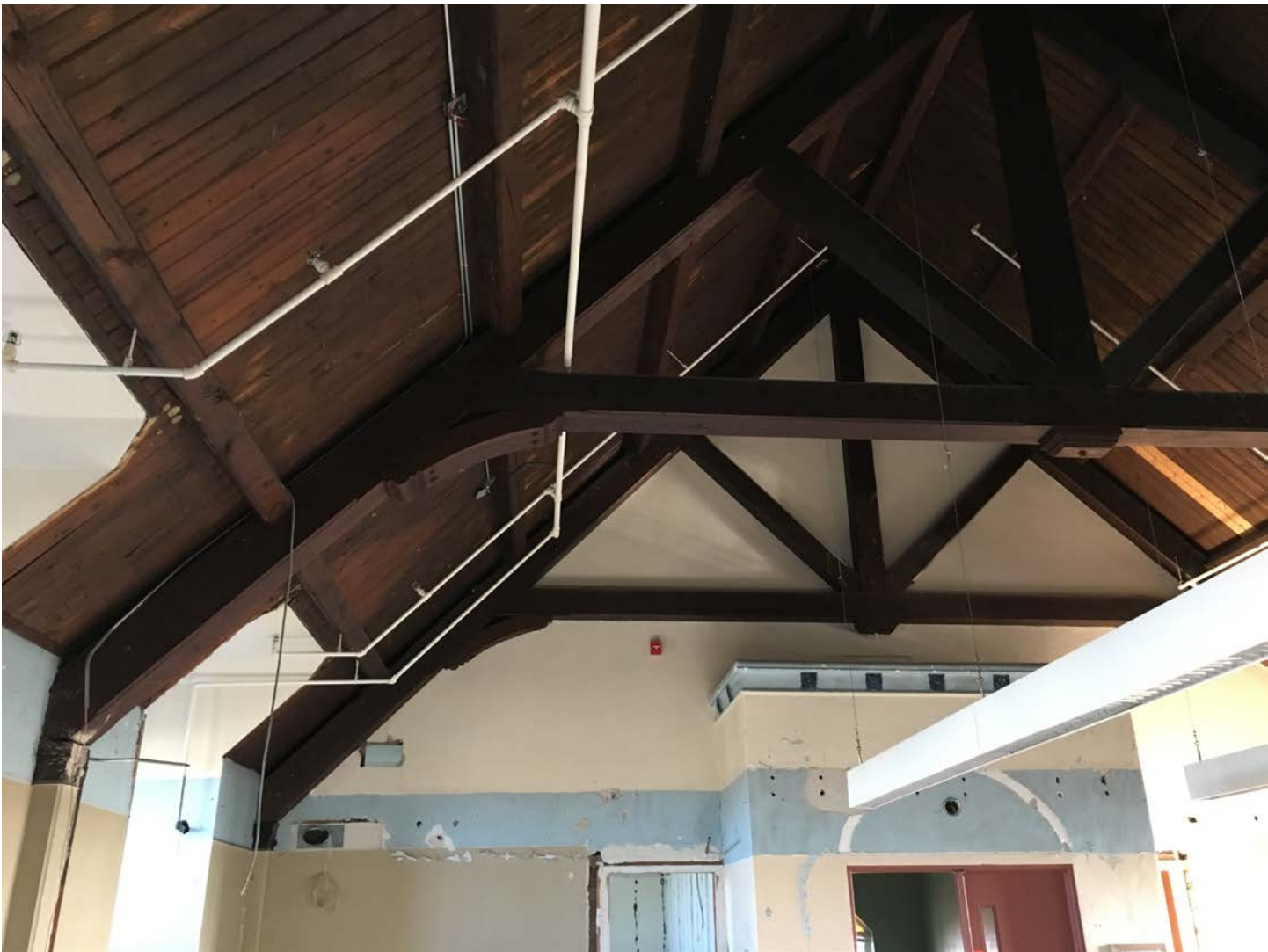
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