

FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

013-0044 Salem WNH.174

Town/City: Wenham

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Wenham Village

Photograph



Address: 5 School Street

Historic Name: Bessie Buker School

Uses: Present: Civic: Public School

Original: Civic: Public School

Date of Construction: 1953

Source: Annual Town Reports; Plaque on building

Style/Form: Colonial Revival, Contemporary

Architect/Builder: Irving W. Hersey Associates, Architects
Pitman and Brown, Contractors

Exterior Material:

Foundation: poured concrete

Wall/Trim: brick

Roof: not visible

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: None

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

South wing (1957), Cafeteria wing (post-1972)

Condition: Excellent

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 7.13 acres

Setting: Residential neighborhood developed from mid-19th through mid-20th century, one block north of Main Street (Route 1A)

Locus Map Map #s are last digits of lot #s, not street #s.



Recorded by: Stacy Spies and Wendy Frontiero

Organization: Wenham Historical Commission

Date: June 2017

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

WENHAM

5 SCHOOL STREET

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The Bessie Buker School occupies most of a large, flat parcel of land on the west side of Perkins Street, near the center of Wenham. Heterogeneous 19th and 20th century housing occupies Perkins Street in the vicinity of the school. The majority of the school parcel lies north of School Street and is rectangular in shape, with a paved driveway extending along the western and northern edges of the site. Residential properties, most of which were constructed in the mid-20th century, lie to the west and north of the site, and face Arbor Street and Bruce Lane. A small, roughly triangular section of the parcel is located along the southern side of School Street, framed by Perkins Street on the east and Ellis Avenue on the west; it contains a variety of play structures for Buker School students. Ellis Avenue is developed with mid-20th century residential properties. The Center School (1907 and 1920; see WNH.120) occupies the southwest portion of this parcel; it was historically addressed as 11 School Street.

The larger part of the parcel, bounded by Perkins and School Streets, is divided roughly into eastern and western halves by a wide paved walkway lined with regular plantings of mature, mostly deciduous trees. To the east of the path are open playing fields, maintained chiefly in turf. The Buker School occupies approximately two-thirds of the western part of the site, with the Center School standing at its westernmost edge. Mature deciduous and larch trees line the Perkins Street edge of the site. Shrubbery and ornamental trees are common foundation plantings around the Buker School building. The grounds surrounding the Buker School are maintained in turf, with paved walkways (concrete across the front; mostly asphalt on the sides and rear) surrounding the building and accessing its multiple entrances. The west and north property lines are bordered by wood stockade fences.

The Buker School consists of three main parts: a T-shaped, Original Building (1953) in the center; an L-shaped South Wing (1957); and a Cafeteria Wing to the northwest (after 1972). (See aerial view following description.) All rise one story from poured concrete foundations to brick veneer walls with modest wood cornice molding and hip roofs clad with asphalt shingles. The structure consists of steel posts and trusses. Windows typically have wood casings and concrete sills; no lintel treatment. All appear to have replacement sash.

The Original Building (1953) faces east towards Perkins Street; its façade is characterized by a pedimented center pavilion and a slender, two-stage cupola, with a twelve-bay classroom wing to either side. The five-bay pavilion has a center entrance with concrete steps, wood pilasters and entablature framing double-leaf doors and a multi-pane glazed transom, and two 15/15 windows in the outer bays. The tympanum is sheathed with flushboard. Window openings on the north and south wings of this volume contain paired windows with 9/9 double-hung sash and 9-light transoms. The wood-framed cupola has two stages: a louvered base and an upper section with 12/12 windows and chamfered corners dressed with fluted pilasters. A ball finial surmounts the copper-clad domed roof.

The perpendicular, east/west wing of the original T-shaped building contains the Perkins Auditorium and Gymnasium. The gabled pavilion on its west elevation contains a pediment similar to the main east façade, which here surmounts three double-leaf wood doors with multi-pane rectangular transoms and a single window on each end bay. Fenestration on the south elevation is similar to the east façade and includes both 15/15 windows and paired 9/9 double-hung windows with 12-light transoms.

Secondary entrances on the Original Building include a recessed center entrance on the north end of the front (north/south) block; a flush doorway in the northeast corner of the rear (Auditorium/Gymnasium) wing; utilitarian entrances in the basement on the north side of the rear wing; and a shed-roofed vestibule at the southeast corner of the rear wing. All secondary entrances on the Original Building have double-leaf doors and a multi-pane rectangular transom and are accessed by poured concrete steps.

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The L-shaped South Wing of the Buker School (1957) extends from the façade (east) elevation of the Original Building and turns westward along School Street. Its fenestration consists of large 9/9 windows, regularly arrayed and closely spaced. The South Wing contains two entrances, one on the eastern end of its south elevation and one centered in the southwest elevation. Both are detailed with recessed double-leaf wood doors and a multi-pane transom, a slightly projecting brick frame, and a small pedimented cross-gable with flushboard tympanum. The south entrance also has concrete steps.

At the northwest corner of the Buker School complex, extending northward from the Auditorium/Gymnasium Wing, is a modern Cafeteria wing (post-1972). The simple rectangular volume has five window bays on its east and west elevations, each consisting of a 2 by 2 grid of square windows topped by a pair of square transom windows; these are trimmed with thick concrete sills and a similarly wide concrete band course between the four-window grid and the transom sash. The otherwise blank north elevation features an offset, single-leaf door with two square transom lights; a wide concrete band course extends across the entire wall, above the transom windows.

Well preserved and well maintained, the Bessie Buker School is a fine example of mid-20th century school design in the area. Notable features include the use of brick as a civic building material, the center entrance pavilion and well-detailed cupola on the main façade of the Original Building, the large proportion of glass area on the elevations, the consistent design theme of the entrances, and the complementary landscape design with numerous mature trees.



- 1 Center School (see WNH.120)
- 2 Original Buker School Building: East Wing
- 3 South Wing
- 4 Cafeteria Wing
- 5 Original Buker School Building: Auditorium and Gymnasium Wing
- 6 Ball fields
- 7 Playground

Credit: Google maps edited by Jack Hauck; *Treasures of Wenham History: Schools*: p. 300.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

In 1945, the Wenham School Committee submitted a report regarding anticipated needs for schools amid the rapid growth of families in the post-World War II period. The report anticipated that Center School, constructed at 11 School Street in 1906 and expanded in 1920, would not be of sufficient size to accommodate the growing number of children projected over the following 20 years. On June 29, 1951 at a special town meeting, voters approved \$350,000 for the construction of a new primary school building to be constructed adjacent to the existing Center School. Voters approved an additional \$80,000 in January 1952. The school opened in September 1952 for kindergarten through grade six students. The building contained eight 24'x28' classrooms along a center corridor, an administrative area, and a 280-seat auditorium. The auditorium was named for George H. and Bertha M. Perkins not only in recognition of their bequest toward the auditorium, which could be used for town meetings, but also in recognition for their service to Wenham. In 1953, the school was formally named for Bessie Buker. Ms. Buker taught in Wenham schools from 1922 until 1953, at which time she became principal of the new school. Grades seven and eight were located next door at Center School. A small classroom on the second floor of Center School served as the school library.

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Within three years of its opening, the school was nearing capacity and the school committee stated that additional classrooms would be needed before September 1957. In 1956 residents voted to appropriate \$223,000 in bonds to expand the Buker School to include nine more classrooms at the south end of the T plan and move the 7th and 8th grades over from Center School. The project was completed in 1957. This expansion, however, was not quite sufficient and three portable classrooms were installed at the northwest corner of the school that same year. These portable classrooms were used until 1972, at which time they were removed. In 1999 the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades were moved to the newly-completed Miles River Middle School and the Bessie Buker School returned to its present-day use as a primary school.

Irving W. Hersey & Associates

Irving W. Hersey & Associates of Durham, New Hampshire was responsible for the design of the Bessie Buker School in 1951 and the School's expansion in 1956. The prolific partnership of Eric Huddleston (1888-1977) and Irving Hersey (1902-1982), operating as Huddleston & Hersey and Irving W. Hersey & Associates, designed more than 535 projects between the 1935 and the 1981. During the 1950s and 1960s, the firm grew to be one of the largest architectural firms in New Hampshire. Their projects include more than 200 schools in New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont, military commissions including National Guard armories and readiness centers, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and Pease Air Force Base, and extensive work at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, where Huddleston served as campus architect from 1914 to 1949. The cupola atop Huddleston & Hersey's Colonial Revival schools became a signature detail of their work. (Michaud: 23, citing MacLeod 1966.)

Huddleston was graduated from Cornell University School of Architecture in 1914 and shortly thereafter was hired as campus supervising architect and professor of architecture in the newly-created School of Architecture at the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts (which became the University of New Hampshire in 1923). Huddleston oversaw the planning, design, and construction of more than 22 buildings on campus and developed the campus master plan. Working almost exclusively in the Colonial Revival Style, "Huddleston was also responsible for the renovation of and new additions to the buildings constructed before his arrival to UNH and often transformed earlier buildings with Colonial Revival details..." "In 1928, Huddleston founded the New Hampshire Society of Architects and was instrumental in the charter of the American Institute of Architects in New Hampshire. Huddleston served as the first president for both organizations." (Michaud: 21.)

Irving Hersey studied under Huddleston and attended UNH for both his undergraduate (1925) and graduate degrees (1927). From 1928-1933, Huddleston was the head of the Chicago Technical College Department of Architecture. In 1933 Hersey returned to New Hampshire to work with Huddleston as Huddleston oversaw the New Hampshire section of the Historic American Buildings Survey. In 1935, Huddleston and Hersey created a partnership in Durham, New Hampshire. "The partnership designed at least nine public schools...between 1936 and 1942." (Michaud: 22) The partnership was dissolved in 1942 when Hersey served in the Pacific theater during World War II. After the war, "Hersey returned to Durham and reopened the firm initially without Huddleston, briefly partnering with other architects and working under the names Hersey & Pfaneuf and Hersey & Spaulding before and sometimes concurrently with its eventual name of Irving W. Hersey & Associates in the late 1940s... In 1948, Huddleston joined Hersey's firm and retired from UNH in 1949." (Michaud: 22) Huddleston retired in 1966 and in 1973 Hersey sold the practice to 20-year employee Donald Sumner who continued to use the name Hersey Associates until 1981.

Bessie Buker School within Context of Other Hersey-designed Schools

The Bessie Buker School shares typical design features with fourteen other Hersey Associates school designs in New Hampshire and Maine. Peter Michaud of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources presents the collection of sixteen in his National Register nomination of the Rollinsford Grade School,

[The buildings] share similar form and massing, architectural details, and a substantial cupola used for ventilation. The fifteen schools include... Rollinsford, NH Grade School (1936), Barrington, NH Elementary School (1938), Gilford, NH Elementary School (1939), Eliot, ME High School (1939), Hudson, NH Jr. High School (1939), Hampton, NH Academy (1940), Kingston, NH Bakie Elementary School (1941), New London, NH Central School (1941), and the Pittsfield, NH High School (1942). The use of the same basic design was continued after World War II. Under the name Hersey & Pfaneuf, the firm designs a high school for Bristol, NH (1946) that was never constructed and the Rindge, NH Memorial School (1951). As Irving W. Hersey Associates, the firm utilized the design for the Hudson, NH Alvirne High School (1950), Derry, NH Hood Memorial

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School (1951/1952), Derry, NH Grinnell Elementary School (1951-1952), and the Wenham, MA Buker Elementary School (1953). The firm also used the design for the Berwick, Maine Town Hall (1938)... (Michaud, 25)

The schools share "rectangular massing, brick exteriors, symmetrical facades, and a distinctive cupola centered on the building's roof. The buildings also share similar designed exterior doors, windows and other interior and exterior architectural details." (Michaud, 25) The Rollinsford Schools has a gabled roof but the remaining 14 have hipped roofs with a centered cross gable above the main door. The first five schools listed above are two stories with a split entry. Seven of the schools are two stories with a traditional first-floor entry. Three of the schools, including the Bessie Buker School, are one story in height. Bessie Buker School bears a very close resemblance to the 1941 Daniel J. Backie School in Kingston, NH. (See Figure 1.) As identified by Michaud, while the buildings "have variations and marked differences, they share an overall unity of design and materials that make them easily identifiable as the work of the same architectural firm." (Michaud, 25)



Figure 1. Daniel J. Backie School

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- Janes, Annette V. with the Wenham Museum. *Images of America: Wenham*. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing. 2011.
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- Masoulf, Lisa. "Mid 20th century Architecture in New Hampshire 1945-1975." Prepared for New Hampshire Employment Security. 2010. On file at New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources. Accessed December 7, 2016 via https://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/publications/documents/mid_20th_century_architecture_nh.pdf.

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SUPPLEMENTAL IMAGES



Original Building: facade (east elevation)



View N from School Street; Original Building on L.



Original Building, Auditorium/Gymnasium Wing: facade (west) elevation.



South Wing (L) and Original Building (R): facade/east elevations.

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South Wing: view SE (southwest elevation on right).



South Wing: south elevation.



Cafeteria Wing: N and W elevations.

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

Individually eligible Eligible **only** in a historic district

Contributing to a potential historic district Potential historic district

Criteria: **A** **B** **C** **D**

Criteria Considerations: **A** **B** **C** **D** **E** **F** **G**

Statement of Significance by: Stacy Spies

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

Bessie Buker School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places with under Criterion A for its association with the history of elementary education in Wenham and under Criterion C as a fully-developed mid-20th-century school design by architect Irving M. Hersey.

The Bessie Buker School is also eligible as part of a district that includes Center School, 11 School Street, (WNH.120). The two schools are eligible under Criterion A for their association with the history of elementary education in Wenham during the first half of the 20th century. The Bessie Buker School is representative of post-World War II demands on the local school system. Wenham responded to these demands with not only a larger school, but also a school that included features typical of suburban elementary school design of the time, including: single-story plan with plans for horizontal expansion that would accommodate anticipated population growth as well as a dedicated auditorium, gymnasium, and cafeteria.