

# FORM B – BUILDING

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

013-0044

Salem

WNH.120

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

**Town/City:** Wenham

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

## Photograph



Photo 1. West and south elevations.

**Address:** 11 School Street

**Historic Name:** Center School

**Uses:** Present: Civic: Public School

Original: Civic: Public School

**Date of Construction:** 1907

**Source:** Wenham Town Report: 1907

**Style/Form:** Classical Revival

**Architect/Builder:** E.B. Balcem (1907); Joseph D. Leland (1920)

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: Granite, cut

Wall/Trim: Wood clapboards and trim.

Roof: Asphalt shingle

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:** None

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

Rear addition (1920); handicapped access ramp and replacement window sash on 1st floor (L 20<sup>th</sup>-E 21<sup>st</sup> c)

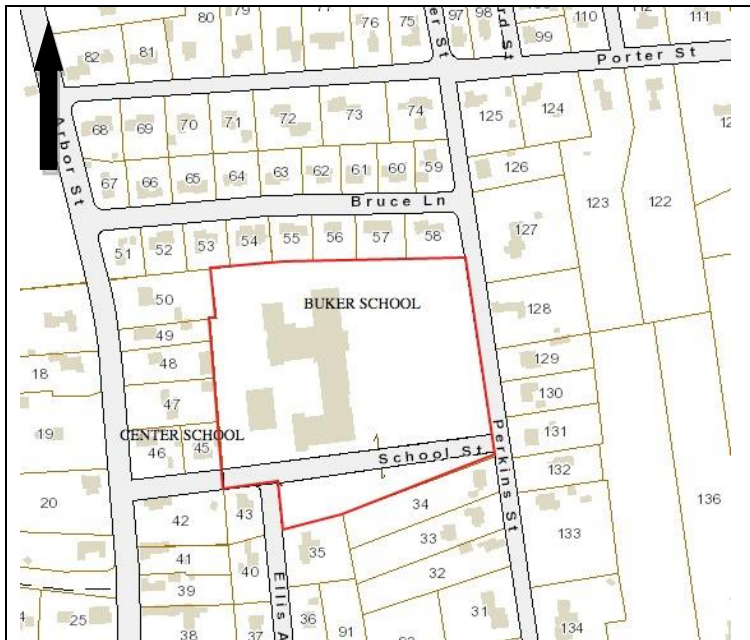
**Condition:** Excellent

**Moved:** no  yes  **Date:**

**Acreage:** 7.13 acres (with 5 School Street; Buker School)

**Setting:** Residential neighborhood developed from mid-19<sup>th</sup> through mid-20<sup>th</sup> 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

11 SCHOOL STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

WNH.120

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.*

Center School occupies the southwest corner of a large, flat parcel of land bounded by Perkins and School streets, near the center of Wenham. Heterogeneous 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century housing surrounds the property on all sides. The Center School has a generous setback from School Street that is maintained chiefly in lawn, with scattered shrubs as well as ornamental and specimen trees. A paved access road extends northward from School Street, on the west side of Center School. A utilitarian wood ramp, set parallel to the building along its east elevation, provides handicapped access to the east entrance of the building. The Buker School (see form) stands to the east and north on the parcel.

Measuring 60 feet wide (east/west) by 88 feet deep (north/south), the rectangular building rises 2 ½ stories from a raised basement and random granite ashlar foundation to a hip roof with hip roof dormers. The north and south elevations each have one center dormer; the east and west elevations each have two symmetrical dormers. A large interior chimney is centered near the south end of the building. Walls are sheathed with clapboards and trimmed with a sill board, corner pilasters, and an ornate entablature that is embellished with moldings, a dentil course and carved modillion brackets. Similar entablatures are found on the dormers and on the east and west entrances. Windows are typically 6/2 sash and grouped in sets of three (north and south elevations) and four (east and west elevations), within molded casings. Windows on the first story have prominent entablatures with a dentil course, small modillion brackets, and prominent cornice molding.

Center School was constructed in two stages: the southern portion, which included the formal entrances on the east and west elevations, was built in 1907; the portion north of the entrances was added in 1920. The symmetrical south façade, oriented towards School Street, is dominated by a cross-gabled center bay framed by pilasters. Within this bay, the first floor window is bordered by a narrow transom and sidelights and is topped with a broken scroll pediment; the second floor window has narrow sidelights and a semicircular fanlight (now filled in with a solid panel).

The asymmetrical east and west elevations have groups of four banded windows at the outer bays and an entrance bay roughly in the center with a recessed doorway and single windows to each side and above. Elaborately detailed, the entrances contain double leaf doors surmounted by a semi-circular fanlight and framed by engaged square columns supporting a decorative entablature. The west entrance also sports an engaged classical balustrade atop the entablature. The north elevation of the school building has three bays of three windows each. Windows in the outer bays are separated only by a mullion; windows in the center bay are freestanding but unified by a continuous entablature.

Well preserved and very well maintained, Center School is an outstanding example of wood-frame civic architecture in Wenham in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The design is notable for its monumental form and high style detailing, which is consistent throughout the door enframements, wall and window trim, and dormers; the composition of the cross-gabled center bay on the south façade is particularly remarkable. The continuity of the two separate segments of building construction is also distinctive. Alterations have been minimal; the most conspicuous of these is the loss of the original Ionic capitals on the wall pilasters. The building is presently occupied by school administration offices.

## 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.*

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Wenham citizens began to discuss creating a central school to consolidate the existing small school districts in Wenham. At the February 1903 town meeting, the "Committee on Enlarged and Improved School and Library Accommodations" recommended that the town build a school for primary and grammar school students near the center of the

*Continuation sheet 1*

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WNH.120

town and that the school room in town hall become a town library. In April 1903, the public voted to set aside \$5,000 for school construction. However, the motion to actually build the school was tabled until 1906. That year, the voters chose the "Perkins" site and construction began at a cost of \$17,000. The four-room, two-story building designed by architect E.B. Balcem opened for students in the fall of 1907 and the superintendent reported that "the pupils are now housed in a modern, roomy, well-heated and finely-ventilated building."

During the 1910s, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students attended Beverly Junior High School. In an effort to reduce the cost of sending students to Beverly, the decision was made to bring the 9<sup>th</sup> graders back to Center School. Coupled with a growing population over all grades, a larger building was needed. In 1920, Wenham voters chose to spend \$41,000 to expand the building. The addition was designed by Boston architect Joseph D. Leland. Leland was educated at Harvard University and began his career at the firm of Peabody and Hastings. In 1913, he created the firm of Loring and Leland, which became J. D. Leland and Company in 1919. Leland's work included new galleries for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Memorial Junior High School in Beverly, a hospital in North Adams, Massachusetts, and the Old Harbor Village Housing Project in South Boston. Leland served as President of the Boston Society of Architects and was a member of the American Institute of Architects.

The basement level of the expanded school contained the lunchroom, manual training classrooms, and the printing department. The first floor contained three classrooms and a sewing and cooking room. The second floor contained two classrooms, an assembly hall, and the principal's office. By the 1930s, approximately 140 children attended the school per year.

As the student population grew after World War II, the need for a larger school became apparent and in 1951, the Bessie Buker School was constructed next door for grades 1-6. Grades 7 and 8 remained at Center School and it became a junior high school. A library that served both schools also remained at Center School. In 1957, the Buker School was expanded and grades 7 and 8 were moved to that location. At present Center School is used for school administration offices.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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Area(s) Form No.

	WNH.120
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**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Photo 2. East and north elevations.

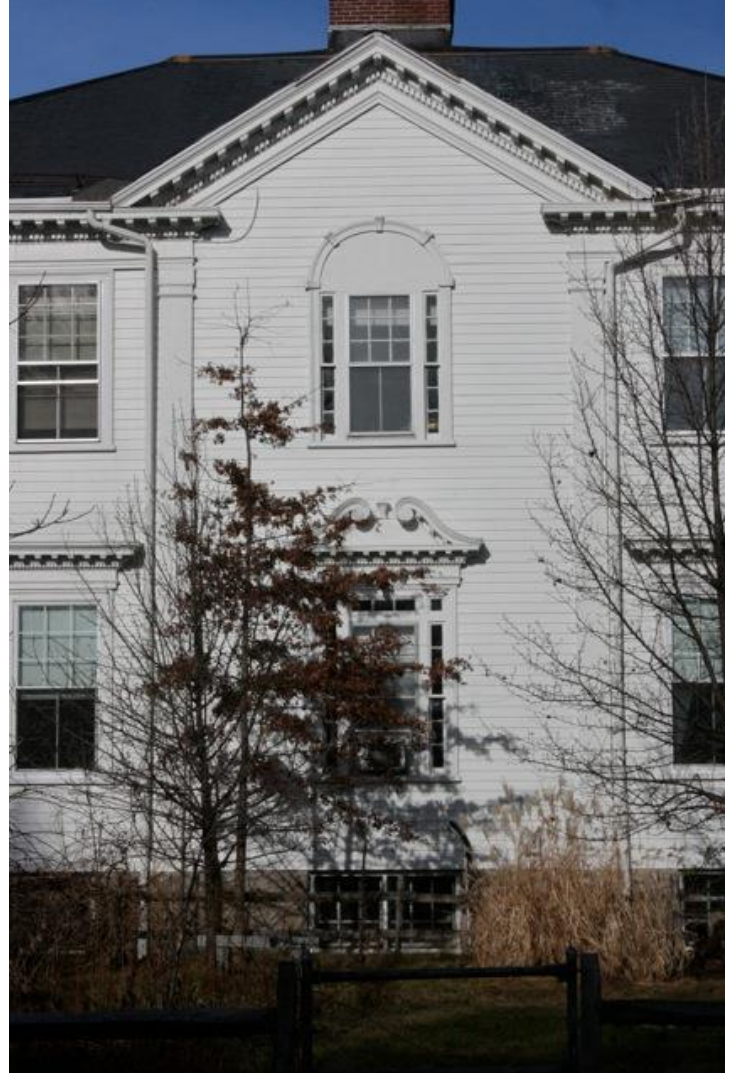


Photo 3. Detail of south elevation.



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Photo 4. Detail of west entrance bay.

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## 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.*

Center School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places with local significance under Criterion A for its associations with education in Wenham. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Wenham citizens began to discuss creating a central school to consolidate the existing small one-room school districts in Wenham. In 1903, the town voted to allocate funds to construct a central school. A site was chosen in 1906 and construction began during that year. The four-room, two-story building designed by architect E.B. Balcem cost \$17,000 and opened for students in the fall of 1907. Upon the opening of the school, the school superintendent reported that "the pupils are now housed in a modern, roomy, well-heated and finely-ventilated building."

During the 1910s, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students attended Beverly Junior High School. In an effort to reduce the cost of sending students to Beverly, the decision was made to bring the 9<sup>th</sup> graders back to Center School. Coupled with a growing population over all grades, a larger building was needed. In 1920, Wenham voters chose to spend \$41,000 to expand the building. The addition was designed by Boston architect Joseph D. Leland. Leland's work included new galleries for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Memorial Junior High School in Beverly, a hospital in North Adams, Massachusetts, and the Old Harbor Village Housing Project in South Boston.

As the student population grew after World War II, the need for a larger school became apparent and in 1951, the Bessie Buker School (WNH.174) was constructed next door for grades 1-6. Grades 7 and 8 remained at Center School and it became a junior high school. A library that served both schools also remained at Center School. In 1957, the Buker School was expanded and grades 7 and 8 were moved to that location. At present Center School is used for school administration offices.

Center School is also eligible as part of a district that includes Bessie Buker School, 5 School Street, (WNH.174). The two schools are eligible under Criterion A for their association with the history of education in Wenham during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.