

# THE AUSTIN & JOLLEY SCHOOLS MID-CENTURY SCHOOLHOUSES IN VERMILLION, SD

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for

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# INTRODUCTION

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In May 2021, voters approved a \$26 million bond to construct a new elementary school in Vermillion, South Dakota to replace the aging Austin and Jolley Schools. Originally constructed in 1954-55, these schools served the community for seventy years before permanently closing in May 2024.

In the fall of 2024, the Vermillion Historic Preservation Commission, with grant funding from the State Historic Preservation Office, initiated a project to document these historic school buildings. Included in this document is information pertaining to the history of public education and school buildings in Vermillion, as well as information specific to the histories of the Austin School and the Jolley School buildings. Photographs and drawings illustrate the histories and conditions of each school.

The Austin School is now occupied by the Boys & Girls Club of Vermillion. When this project began in the fall of 2024, the Jolley School was extant but plans had been made to demolish the building and to redevelop the land for housing and a park. The photos for this project were taken in October and November 2024. Demolition on Jolley began in April 2025, and at the time of this final report, the school has been reduced to a pile of rubble and is being cleared away so that the redevelopment of the site can begin.

The author wants to thank the City of Vermillion staff for assistance in gaining access to each school for this project. Special thanks goes to staff who assisted with obtaining interior photos of Jolley School – there was no electricity in the building at the time and staff carried floodlights from room to room to create enough lighting to obtain the photos included in this report. Without their assistance, these photos would not have happened.



## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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### *A Brief History of Public Education in America*

The origins of public schooling in America date to the settlements established by English colonists along the Atlantic coast in the 17th century. While the earliest schools were privately funded “subscription schools,” education was highly valued and soon communities were encouraged to establish public schools. In 1642, the Massachusetts Bay Colony required that children be taught to read and write, and in 1647, an added provision required communities to provide schools for public education.<sup>1</sup>

Public schools became increasingly common as the nation grew, in part due to federal legislation that required that states wishing to join the union to set aside land for the development of schools and in part due to the beginnings of the Common School Movement in the 1830s. This movement began in Massachusetts under legislator/reformer Horace Mann, considered to be America’s first strong advocate for public education. He envisioned education as “available to all children, free of charge, and funded by the state.”<sup>2</sup> The goal of his movement was “to use public funding to build schools in every community that would teach citizens how to participate in democracy and embed nonsectarian moral values in students.”<sup>3</sup>

The Common School concept quickly expanded education from reading, writing, and arithmetic to include grammar, geography, and history among other subjects. It continued to evolve over the decades with enhanced coursework and supplemental activities. Among these were art, music, and science, as well as various sports. Schools expanded to include vocational education and activities in the early twentieth century.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, public schools were more common in urban areas than rural areas, eventually spreading from the Northeast to other parts of the country as more states accepted responsibility for providing universal education and embedded this principal in their constitutions. It was not until the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, that public elementary schools became available to all children in most parts of the country. In 1830, only 55% of children age five to fourteen were enrolled in public schools; by 1870, that

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Graziano et al. “A History of Public Education and the Assembly of Services,” (Bellweather.org/Beta, 2022)(accessed March 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Center on Education Policy, “History and Evolution of Public Education in the U.S.,” (Washington, DC: The George Washington University, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Graziano.

number had risen to nearly 80%.<sup>4</sup> High school attendance was not commonplace until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1910, just 14% of Americans had completed a high school education. The number steadily increased over the decades and by 2017, 90% of Americans had high school diplomas.<sup>5</sup>

The process of establishing local public schools was itself an exercise in community building. Coming together to build schoolhouses, hire teachers, and collect taxes to run the schools helped forge a sense of community and made people invested in their communities. Once established, public schools often became community centers where people came together for meetings, entertainment and social activities, and in small or rural communities, the schoolhouse was often the only public building suitable for community activities.<sup>6</sup>

The Common School Movement set the standards for the systematized and expansive approach that continues to define our approach to public education in the twenty-first century.<sup>7</sup>

### *A Brief History of Public Education in South Dakota*

The earliest schools in South Dakota were “subscription” schools, private schools supported by donations. During the winter of 1859-60, there was one such school in Vermillion. In the spring of 1860, a three-month session was conducted at Bon Homme, in what is believed to be the first schoolhouse in the Territory. The first permanent schoolhouse, however, was constructed in Vermillion during the fall of 1864 (more on the old log schoolhouse in the next section). By the mid-1860s, private schools served half of the potential school population.<sup>8</sup>

The public school system in Dakota Territory had its beginnings with the appointment of James S. Foster as the Territorial Superintendent of Public Education in 1864. Foster brought to the office “a wealth of experience gained in school work before his arrival on the Dakota frontier, as well as a zealous devotion to the ideals of education, as part of a New England heritage.”<sup>9</sup> Under his direction, the number of school districts increased with the influx of new settlers and public education had a strong foothold in what was to become the state of South Dakota.

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<sup>4</sup> Johann N. Neem, *Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 177.

<sup>5</sup> “High School Completion Rate is Highest in U.S History,” (U.S. Census Bureau, December 14, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Center on Education Policy.

<sup>7</sup> Graziano.

<sup>8</sup> Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota* [3<sup>rd</sup> Edition] (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 102.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



## *A Brief History of Public Education and Schools in Vermillion*

Early settlers in Vermillion valued education and took steps to provide for their children as soon as they built their homes. A subscription school was taught by Dr. Franklin Caulkins during the summer of 1860 and in early 1862, a short session was taught by John W. Boyle prior to his relocation to Yankton. In 1862-63, Anne H. Hoyt taught school in an old log building near the ravine on the bluff. Mrs. Mahlon S. Gore took over the teaching responsibilities the following year; classes were held in the same log building, which also served as her home. During the summer of 1864, Professor M. Buckley taught classes in another vacant building in town.<sup>10</sup>

By this time, plans were being formulated to construct a separate building for the use as a school in Vermillion. In November 1864, the first permanent school building in Dakota Territory was built. Located at the bottom of Ravine Hill, it was a small building (approximately 15x20 feet) constructed with cottonwood logs. Labor was provided by soldiers stationed in town under the direction of Captain Nelson A. Miner of Company A, First Dakota Cavalry and the logs were donated by Peter Jordan. The building was used as the school from the winter of 1864-65 until early 1872, when a larger school was built. In addition to its use as the school, the log building served as a place for community activities and occasionally for church services and events. Among the teachers who taught in this log building were John L. Jolley, a leading citizen of Vermillion for many years, and Rachel Ross, who became the wife of Horace Austin, also a prominent citizen in the community.<sup>11</sup>



The Log Schoolhouse, Vermillion (photo courtesy of Clay County Historical Society)

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<sup>10</sup> Herbert S. Schell, *Clay County: Chapters Out of the Past* (Vermillion, SD: The Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce, 1985), 150.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 150-152; Donna Gross and Fern Kaufman, *The Last of the Clay County Country Schools 1999-2023* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), (Vermillion, SD: Clay County Historic Preservation Commission, 2023), 10.

When the log school opened for classes in 1864, it was a subscription school where parents paid a rate of \$2.50 per pupil. The school first appeared in the official report of James S. Foster in December 1865. By December 1866, Vermillion had become Public School District No. 5 but much of the financial support still came from subscriptions. The number of students enrolled continued to grow. As early as 1869, discussions began about building a new school and by late 1873, a new schoolhouse was ready for use. It was located on the bluff, east of the corner of Bloomingdale and what is now known as Church Street.<sup>12</sup>

Vermillion became an independent school district, still called District No. 5, when the city was incorporated by the legislature in early 1877. The schoolhouse underwent substantial alterations in 1882, when it was moved 40 feet to the east and sat on a new basement foundation, the interior layout was reconfigured to accommodate the increasing enrollment, and the exterior of the building was clad with brick. These changes allowed for full instruction through the eighth grade. For a number of years, the University served as a preparatory school for students above eighth grade. The ninth grade was added to the public school curriculum in 1888 and a complete four-year high school course of study was adopted in 1906, just as the University was phasing out their preparatory school.<sup>13</sup>

Steadily increasing enrollments required additional classroom space for the school district. In 1889, the enrollment was 226 students; by 1896 the number had grown to over 400. Plans were made for the construction of another school building, to be used as a grade school, on West Main Street; it was originally called the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward School, later called the West Side School. The other school became known as the Central building, which housed grades seven and eight in addition to the high school. In the fall of 1902, additional classroom space became available when the first phase of the East Side School (also a grade school) located on South University Street, was completed. The basement, two additional rooms on the second floor and the bell tower were completed the following year.<sup>14</sup>



The West Side School, renamed Rachel Austin School in 1925  
(photo courtesy of Clay County Historic Society)

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<sup>12</sup> Schell, *Clay County*, 152.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-161.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.



The East Side School, renamed Jolley School in 1925  
(photo courtesy of Clay County Historic Society)

By 1911, the Central building was no longer sufficient space. A special election in February approved a bond measure for the construction of a new building. A larger, brick building was built east of the old structure, which was torn down. While the new building was being built, classes were held in the old Benedictine Sisters convent building. The enrollments continued to grow as Vermillion grew and in September 1921, voters approved the expenditure of \$150,000 to make improvements to schools in town. This amount covered the addition of a wing on the high school building, as well as additions to the West Side and East Side schools.<sup>15</sup>

In 1925, the two grade schools were renamed. The West Side School became the Rachel Austin School and the East Side School became the Jolley School. The first was named for Rachel Ross Austin, the second for Colonel John L. Jolley – both had been teachers at the old log schoolhouse in the 1860s. In addition to her love of young people, Mrs. Austin was one of the founders of Vermillion's First Baptist Church, active in the W.C.T.U, a member of the school board, and a local philanthropist. Colonel Jolley was an attorney who represented Vermillion in the state legislature, served in the U.S. Senate, served as the mayor of Vermillion, and was among the local citizens who were instrumental in securing the State University for Vermillion.<sup>16</sup>

Vermillion continued to grow, and with it, the school enrollments. The period following World War II saw significant increases in the number of students in the school district. By the early 1950s, not only the need for additional classrooms was obvious, but also the desire to have new and modern school facilities. On April 1, 1952 voters were asked to decide on the approval of ten-year school bonds for \$240,000 for the construction of the first unit of a new Austin School. The issue was defeated 759 to 617 votes.<sup>17</sup> Less than two

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>16</sup> "Designations of East Side and West Side Will be Replaced by Names Chosen by Parent-Teachers," in the *Dakota Republican*, December 10, 1925.

<sup>17</sup> "Voters Turn Down New School Bond by Decisive Margin," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk*, April 3, 1952.

years later, the voters were again asked to approve the bond measure for \$240,000. On February 9, 1954 the measure was passed with 898 votes in favor and 233 votes against. Although the dollar amount approved remained the same as the earlier election, the plans varied somewhat. The approved measure would use \$220,000 for the construction of the new Austin School and \$115,000 for a new classroom unit at the existing Jolley School. Total funding would include the bonds plus \$52,000 from the current school district building fund and another \$43,000 from anticipated building fund income [the building fund came from a five-mill levy which was set by the board in accordance with state law to generate monies to be used only for building purposes]. At the time of the election, there were 484 students enrolled at the Austin and Jolley schools and the growth rate indicated that enrollments would be 646 by the 1957-58 school year.<sup>18</sup>

The new Austin School was to be located on the site of Austin Park, which had been donated to the city by the Austin family. Ownership of the park was transferred to the school district with the approval of the last remaining Austin family heir, Mrs. A.H. Whittemore. The new school was to include nine classrooms, a kindergarten room, and auxiliary spaces. The new Jolley classroom unit was to be located on the south end of the block occupied by the existing Jolley School and was to include five classrooms and a kindergarten room; the existing Jolley building would continue to be used. [Details about each school are located in a later section in this report.]

As more students enrolled in the Vermillion schools, further changes were necessary. A new high school was constructed on East Main Street in 1965. A new junior high school – known as the Middle School – was constructed on a site west of the fairgrounds in 1972. Several additions were made to both the Austin and Jolley Schools over the years.

By 2021, it was decided that a new elementary school was needed to replace the aging Austin and Jolley schools. Voters approved a \$26 million bond to build a new school, which opened in the fall of 2024. It is located adjacent to the Middle School.

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<sup>18</sup> “Coming School Election” in the *Vermillion Plain Talk*, January 21, 1954; “School Board Acts on Plans for Buildings,” February 25, 1954.

# SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE

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## *Early Schoolhouses*

The evolution of the American schoolhouse is reflective of several things – the growth of communities and demand for education, the shifting economy over time, the development of education philosophy and the role the schoolhouse itself contributes to successful education, standardization of schools and curriculums, and the evolution of architectural styles and building materials.

The earliest schoolhouses were often small, one-room buildings constructed with whatever local building materials were available. They tended to be vernacular in style, focused instead on simply providing a space where students would gather for learning. With time and the growth of communities and funding, schools became larger, were often designed with education in mind, used materials that were more substantial and intended to be permanent, and displayed architectural stylistic features.

On the Great Plains, the schools of the early settlements were usually small, one or two-room buildings usually constructed of local building materials, including in some cases, sod or log construction. As the availability of materials such as dimensional lumber, shingles, flooring and siding, panel doors, and sash windows became available, wood-framed schools with pre-fabricated architectural elements became the norm. Eventually the use of more permanent materials such as brick and stone, especially for larger schools, became widespread. The use of concrete block was seen in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>19</sup>

Stylistically, the earliest schools in South Dakota were vernacular. Planbooks with school designs were available throughout the country, but school construction in the state was not characterized by high styles or progressive design. With time, architectural styles such as Queen Anne, Romanesque, and Italianate were adopted as local craftsmanship and availability of materials grew.

Efforts to standardize school construction began with education reformers in the eastern U.S. in the 1830s. The earliest recorded effort to standardize school buildings in Dakota Territory was in 1885, when Day County set standards for schools in that county. The form that was adopted was common to early schoolhouses throughout the state. The first statewide efforts to standardize schoolhouses came in 1907, when the legislature adopted specific standards for construction. Those standards were revised, first in 1915 and again in

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<sup>19</sup> Mark Elliot and Melissa Dirr, *Schools in South Dakota: An Educational Development* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, n.d.), 5.

1919. In the 1920s, standardization plans in the state reformed the schoolhouse in an effort to further modernize the building to meet educational needs.<sup>20</sup>

Efforts to consolidate schools in Dakota Territory began in 1883, but didn't gain momentum until, in 1913, the state legislature encouraged it through financial incentives. Consolidated schools required larger buildings with more classrooms, sometimes with gymnasiums and auditoriums. Plans for the "modern" standardized school became available in the 1920s. These plans illustrated the evolution of space needs and new designs to meet the need. To further the evolution of schoolhouse plans, the movements to develop high schools and middle schools became widespread. The Great Depression's federal relief programs in the 1930s and early 1940s, resulted in the construction of several large "modern" schools (as well as gymnasium and auditorium additions to existing schools) across the country, including a number in South Dakota. Whether funded through the PWA or the WPA, the designs embraced the modern standards for school construction, although there was some allowance for architectural stylistic influences.<sup>21</sup>

Early schools in Vermillion followed these trends. As mentioned, the first schoolhouse was the log building located in the ravine. Until the Austin and Jolley Schools of the 1950s, school buildings in Vermillion were two-story (plus basement and attic spaces), masonry buildings, with classrooms on each floor; auxiliary spaces were located in basements and wing additions to the buildings. Architectural detailing was minimal but reflected stylistic trends at the times they were constructed.

### *Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Schools*

School buildings following World War II were dramatically different from previous generations of schoolhouses. They reflected shifts in educational philosophy, trends toward Modern architecture, the advancement of new building materials and construction methods, and the need for rapid construction. They were a part of the shift in major cultural trends of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The new, modern trends in school buildings emphasized functionality and practicality, while addressing Progressive teaching methods that demanded flexible, multi-functional spaces. Schools needed to accommodate the ever-expanding list of activities offered within their spaces. Increasingly, schools needed to provide space for cafeterias, physical education and sports, specialized facilities for sciences and arts, vocational education, and social and community activities. At the elementary level, perhaps one of the most widespread additions to schools built during the 1950s was the creation of specialized kindergarten classrooms.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 12-15.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 17-20, 22-23, 29-31.

The minimalism of the Modern movement was a good fit for mid- century school construction. Many of the key features of the International Style also characterize mid- century school design, including the use of a structural skeleton frame covered by a thin, non-structural skin; minimal ornamentation; balance without symmetry; flat roofs; long ribbon windows; exterior fenestration that reflected interior function; and interior partitions that allowed flexibility in room layout. The majority of new schools were one-story, sometimes with a number of wings, built into wide-open spaces located in newly developing residential neighborhoods. Clean lines marked with long rows of windows, frequently topped with glass block, were standard. Designs often incorporated outdoor spaces within the school, such as courtyards, and covered exterior walkways that provided exterior access to classrooms.<sup>22</sup>

This shift in school design was evident in South Dakota as well. In 1949, prominent South Dakota architect Harold Spitznagel was asked to design a new elementary school in Belle Fourche. This one-story, brick school was designed with a double-loaded corridor of classrooms that had long rows of exterior windows topped with glass block; the roof was essentially flat (with a slight slope for drainage). Auxiliary space was provided in a perpendicular wing. The key features of this school design became a standard for design throughout the state in the 1950s.<sup>23</sup> Other architectural firms altered this design somewhat, modifying it for different needs and conditions in different communities.

One such firm was Hugill, Blatherwick & Fritzel of Sioux Falls. They designed the mid-century Austin and Jolley Schools in Vermillion. Information about each school can be found in the following sections.

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<sup>22</sup> William w. Caudill, *Toward Better School Design* (New York: F.W. Dodge Corporation, 1954), 16-17.

<sup>23</sup> Michelle L. Dennis, *Post-World War II Architecture in South Dakota* (Pierre, SD: State Historic Preservation Office, 2007), 35.



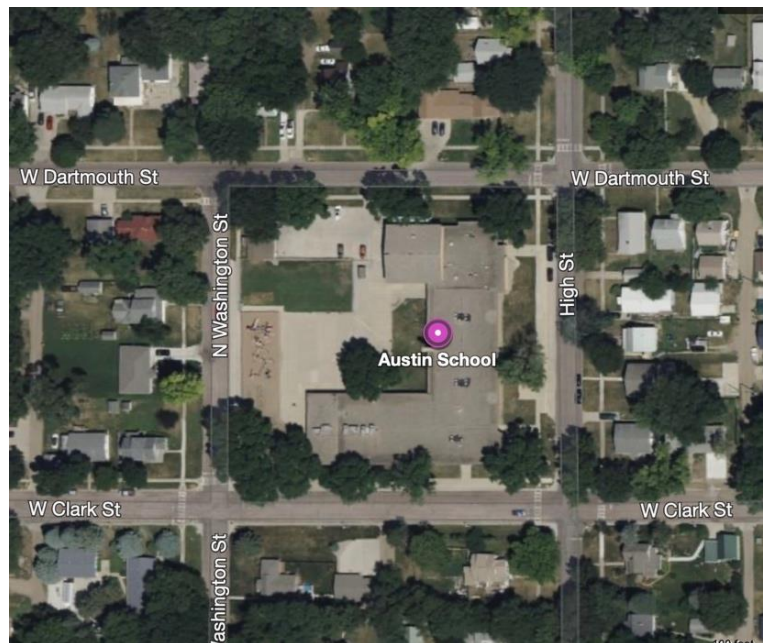


# THE RACHEL R. AUSTIN SCHOOL

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## *Setting and Environment*

The Austin School is located at 300 High Street in Vermillion, SD. It occupies the block bounded by High Street on the east, N. Washington Street on the west, W. Dartmouth Street on the north, and W. Clark Street on the south. It occupies Block 56 of Snyder's Addition. The block is located in a residential neighborhood north of the downtown commercial core and west of the University of South Dakota. The land was, at one time, part of the Austin Park. The neighborhood has many mature trees, paved streets, and houses set along the streets with a uniform set-back. Older houses are primarily located to the east and south of the school, newer housing to the west, and a mix of older and newer on the north side. The school property itself has large trees at each corner of the block, a row of trees along the Clark Street side of the property, and a large tree located at the southeast corner of the open courtyard area formed when the wings of the school intersect. A paved parking area, set between the sidewalk and High Street, is located along the front elevation of the school; a secondary paved area (for teachers and staff) is situated at the west end of the gymnasium and is accessed via a driveway from Dartmouth Street. A playground and courtyard (partially paved) are located on the western portion of the block behind the school building; it is enclosed with chain-link fencing.



Aerial photograph of Austin School

## *General Characteristics and Descriptions*

The following is a description of the school building and grounds as they existed in the fall of 2024.

Austin School is a one-story building comprised of three volumes. The main volume of the school sits on a north-south axis and is situated on the eastern portion of the block parallel to High Street. A classroom wing on the south side of the school extends along W. Clark Street perpendicular to the main volume of the building. The gymnasium is situated on the north side of the building, extending west from the main volume along W. Dartmouth Street. The height of the gymnasium extends above the rest of the building due to the height of the interior space. The overall shape is a slightly offset “U” shape, with a longer “leg” on the south wing.

The original portions of the building are clad with a yellow brick, with variations in tone where some of the bricks are a light brown; the additions to the building are also clad with brick, although with a greater variation in color and tone. Yellow brick was popular in the 1950s as a more “modern and fresh” appearance than the early red and brown bricks often used for school buildings. The building sits on a concrete foundation.

The roof of the classroom wings is flat (with a slight slope for drainage); the roof over the gymnasium is a low-pitch gable. The roof over the classroom wings has wide overhanging eaves, painted dark reddish-brown and capped with a metal coping along the top edge. A tall chimney stack extends above the roof on the west side of the main volume. It serves the boiler located in a small basement beneath the center portion of the building.

Entrances are located at both the south and north ends of the main wing, facing east to High Street. Secondary entries are located on the south side of this main volume adjacent to the kindergarten room, on the west side of the main volume of the building near the gymnasium, at the west end of the south wing of the school, and on the west side of the gymnasium. Doors are contemporary metal security doors in single, paired or triple configurations; most have some version of sidelights and transoms.

Long rows of windows set in aluminum framing and topped with glass block are located along the front (east) elevation of the main volume of the building, as well as along portions of the west side of this wing and along portions of the south side of that classroom wing. Windows along the north wall of the south classroom wing, as well as four windows on the south elevation of that wing, are single double-hung aluminum windows dating to period of the addition’s construction. A bank of glass block windows along the upper portion of the north wall of the gymnasium provides natural light to the interior of that space.

Located at the southeast corner of the school, where the main volume and the south classroom wing meet, is a projecting polygonal room, which originally served as the kindergarten room. It is characterized by six pairs of windows set in aluminum frames; half

of the windows have operable “hopper” sashes that open inward in the lower portions of windows.

Currently, there is a mobile unit sitting along the north elevation of the gymnasium. It is clad with metal, has three aluminum slider windows on the north side of the unit, and two doors accessed by sets of wooden steps. The area around the wheels is sheathed with aluminum skirting.

The interior features include the following. Most of the walls are painted masonry; exceptions include rooms that were additions on the south wing where a brick wall that was originally an exterior wall was left as brick and not painted. The ceilings of the classrooms and auxiliary spaces are acoustic drop ceilings. Most of the floors are covered with carpeting. Lighting is primarily large florescent panels. Shades over the lower portions of the classroom windows provide some control over the natural light from the long rows of windows; the glass block over the windows is intact. Most of the classrooms have long blackboards or whiteboards, corkboards, built in shelving units and some storage. Doorways to each classroom are recessed into an entry-way from the corridors and consist of heavy wooden doors flanked by a sidelight window set in metal frames.

The corridors have double-leaf fire doors located at the ends of the hallways. Drinking fountains are located within small recesses in the corridors. The restrooms have tile floors; the lower portion of the walls is ceramic tile and the upper portion is painted masonry.

The walls of the gymnasium/auditorium include portions of painted masonry and wallboard, as well as colored ceramic tiles. The upper portion of the north wall is glass block. The ceiling is an acoustic drop ceiling with florescent lighting and the vents for the ventilation system. The floor is covered with what appears to a vinyl on which the markings for a basketball court exist; there are basketball hoops at each end (west and east) of the gymnasium. A raised stage area is located on the south side of the space. The floor of the stage is wood, which extends over the top of a concrete block apron wall. Five concrete steps to the stage level from the main floor are located behind the edge of the apron wall, which extends beyond the edge of the stage, and the wall of the room. Originally the stage was open and recessed southward within the gymnasium/auditorium space and practice rooms were located on each side of the stage (west and east ends); the opening for the stage area has been enclosed with wallboard and the space, as well as the practice rooms, is being used for storage. Only the frontmost portion of the stage, the apron wall and the steps, all of which extend into the gymnasium space are visible. Situated on the east end of the gymnasium are locker rooms, a kitchen, and additional storage space.

### *Character-Defining Features*

The Austin School typifies school architecture of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. A number of features that clearly define this architecture are present on this school. These character-defining features include:

- Low, one-story massing with a main volume and subordinate wings
- A flat roof (or with a very slight slope for drainage)
- Wide, overhanging eaves
- Long rows of windows in aluminum framing
- Windows topped with glass block
- Exterior walls clad with a light-colored brick
- A kindergarten room located at or near a corner of the school that can be accessed by its own exterior entrance
- A sense of “Modernist” architecture with clean lines and no ornamentation

### *Developmental History of the School*

The original West Side School (originally called the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward School and later renamed the Rachel R. Austin School in 1925), located on West Main Street, was constructed in 1889. By 1950, the school could no longer accommodate the increasing enrollments of students. Vermillion voters were asked to approve a ten-year bond for \$240,000 for the construction of the first unit of a new Austin School. The original plans, designed by the architectural firm of Hugill, Blatherwick & Fritzel of Sioux Falls, called for a two-story building of which the first story’s construction would be covered by this bond. The voters defeated the issue.

The issue was again put before the voters in February 1954. This time, the measure passed. The dollar amount of the bond was to be the same as before (\$240,000) but only \$220,000 would be used to construct the new Austin School [the remainder plus additional funding from the school district’s building fund would pay for construction of a new unit at the Jolley School]. Plans by Hugill, Blatherwick & Fritzel were revised, embracing the mid-century design trends, and the new school was to be only one-story with nine classrooms, a kindergarten room, a gymnasium/auditorium (labeled as “All Purpose Room” on the earliest architectural drawings), and auxiliary spaces.

Following the election, steps were taken to transfer the Austin Park property to the school district and the new architectural plans were approved. Advertisement for construction bids went out in July and contracts were let in August. Gray Construction of Watertown served as the general contractor for both the Austin and Jolley School projects, while the electrical

contract went to Baumgartner Electric Company of Sioux Falls.<sup>24</sup> Work on the projects began immediately.

Prior to groundbreaking, 32 trees were removed from the lot on which the school was to be built. Excavation began soon after. Newspaper reports in September indicated that work was progressing quickly as footings and foundations were being installed, walls were to go up soon as bricklaying was to begin in October. Gray Construction hoped to have both buildings enclosed before winter weather set in and were still on target to have both schools open by September 1955.<sup>25</sup> With record enrollments, classes began in the new schools that fall.

Vermillion continued to grow and so too did the number of students in the district. Before long, there was a need to start expanding the new schools. A new bond measure was approved in December 1956. The work at the Austin School was to include three additional classrooms; work was to be completed by the end of summer 1958. The addition was designed by Hugill, Blatherwick, Fritzel & Kroeger (the architectural firm had grown). The general contractor was Fred Jones and Sons of Yankton; the contract for plumbing and heating went to George Wentz Inc. of Lincoln, NE and the electrical contract went to Elliott Electric of Vermillion.<sup>26</sup> These three classrooms were the beginning of the south classroom wing; all three classrooms were on the south side of a corridor that ran west from the kindergarten room.

More classroom additions and remodeling occurred over the years. In December 1985, it was decided that new classrooms for art and music, two new bathrooms, and additional space for office, workroom, and storage would be added to Austin School in 1986. This addition was located at the northeast corner of the building. The architect for the project was the firm of Rysavy Hartman Associates of Sioux Falls. The contractor for the project was the Hadece Construction Co. of Hartington, NE. The addition was completed by September 1986.<sup>27</sup>

In 1998, four more classrooms and two restrooms were added to Austin School. The DLR Group from Omaha served as the designers for the work, which expanded the south wing of the school. One of the restrooms and one of the classrooms were added to the west end of the existing wing. The other three classrooms and second restroom were built across from these rooms, on the north side of what then became a central corridor and essentially doubling the width of that wing of the school.

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<sup>24</sup> "Work Starts This Week on New Buildings," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (August 2, 1954).

<sup>25</sup> "Rush Work on 2 New Grade School Units," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (September 23, 1954).

<sup>26</sup> "Contracts Are Awarded for School Units," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (April 11, 1957).

<sup>27</sup> "Student Arrive to New Additions," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (September 10, 1986).

In 2001, the final addition to the school was made when two more classrooms were added to the west end of the south wing of the school, one of each side of the corridor. The DLR Group was again responsible for the design of the project.

The final classes were held during the 2023-24 school year, with all classes moving to the new elementary school in the fall of 2024. Since that time, Austin School has been the home of the Boys & Girls Club of Vermillion.

### *Historic Integrity, Condition, and National Register Eligibility of the School*

Integrity and condition of a historic building are important considerations in documenting historic buildings. Integrity pertains to the ability of a property to convey its historic significance, grounded in an understanding of its physical features and how they relate to its historic context. Using the standards set forth by the National Register of Historic Places, there are seven aspects of integrity: materials, design, feeling, association, location, workmanship, and setting. Condition, on the other hand, is an assessment of the property's physical state of repair and is usually classified as poor, fair, good, or excellent.

In all seven aspects of integrity, the Austin School retains a very high degree of historic integrity. It is located in its original location. The setting continues to be a school located within a residential neighborhood. It clearly conveys its original design and subsequent additions, as well as most of the historic materials used to build the school. All of the character-defining features associated with school architecture from this period are intact. In retaining the original designs and materials, the historic workmanship is also retained. Integrity is also high in the areas of feeling and association.

Austin School is also in excellent condition. While there may be minor things requiring repairs, it appears to be in an excellent state of repair at this time.

The school should be considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

### *Drawings and Photographs*

The photographs in this report were taken in October and November of 2024. Included are images that are representative of the building as it currently stands.

Sets of architectural drawings for Austin School are on file at the Vermillion School District. The drawings include the original plans and plans for subsequent additions. Partial sets of

these plans are also available in the Special Collections at the University of South Dakota. Included here are drawings that illustrate the development of the building over time.

Digital copies of the drawings and photographs were saved to a USB drive and presented, as part of this project, to the Vermillion Historic Preservation Commission in May 2025.



Austin School, front (east) elevation looking from south to north (October 2024)





Austin School, front (east) elevation from north to south (October 2024)



Austin School, from northeast corner looking southwest. The 1986 addition is in the foreground, the gymnasium is taller section behind it (October 2024)





Austin School gymnasium from the northwest corner (October 2024)



Austin School gymnasium from the southwest (October 2024)



Austin School rear (west) elevation; gymnasium on the left, original classroom wing in the center, south classroom wing addition on the right, play areas in foreground (October 2024)



Austin School, south elevation from southwest (October 2024)





Austin School, south elevation from southeast, kindergarten room in the foreground (October 2024)



Austin School, kindergarten room on southeast corner of building (October 2024)



Austin School, front (east) elevation showing row of classroom windows with glass block (October 2024)



Austin School, kindergarten room (November 2024)





Austin School, interior of classroom (November 2024)



Austin School, interior of classroom (November 2024)



Austin School, north wall of gymnasium (November 2024)



Austin School, stage area with wall enclosure (November 2024)

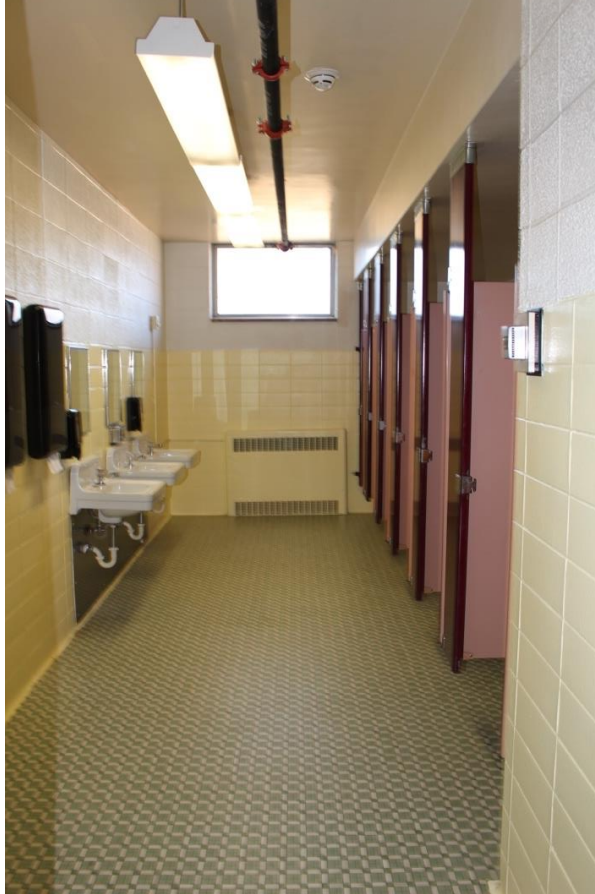


Austin School, close-up of stage, apron and steps (November 2024)



Austin School, kitchen (November 2024)





Austin School, restroom (November 2024)





Austin School, corridor and alcove with water fountain (November 2024)



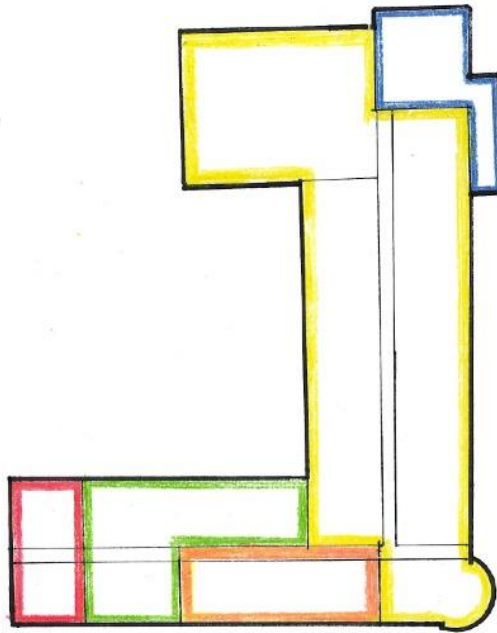
Austin School, entryway and office in the 1986 addition (November 2024)








Austin School, recessed alcove with doors to classroom (November 2024)

## AUSTIN SCHOOL

Drawing illustrating the development history of the building



-  Original 1955 portion of the school
-  1958 Addition
-  1986 Addition
-  1998 Addition
-  2001 Addition

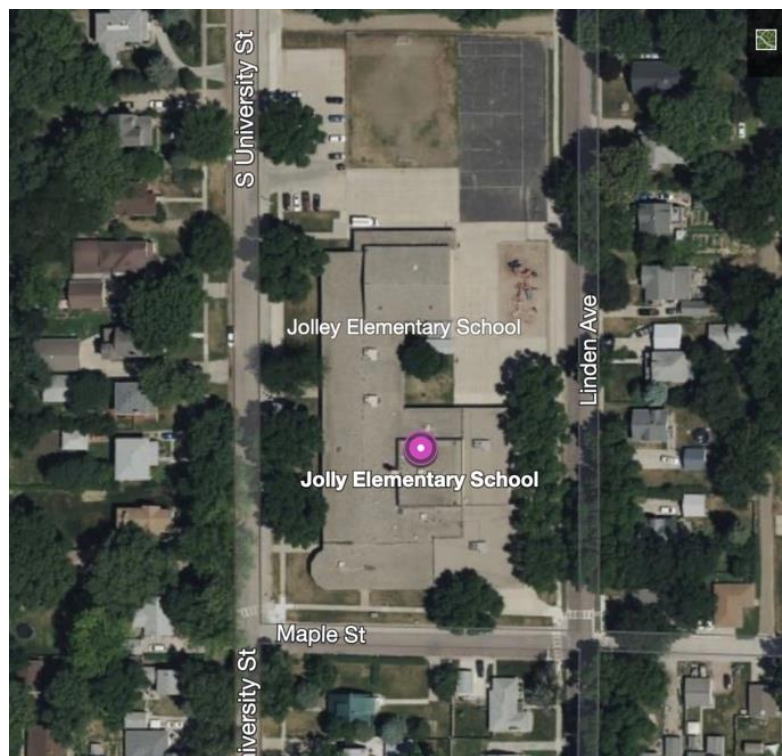


# JOLLEY SCHOOL

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## *Setting and Environment*

The Jolley School was located at 224 S. University Street in Vermillion, SD. It occupied a block in the center of the Jolley Historic District (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2022) and was bounded by S. University Street on the west, Linden Avenue on the east, and Maple Street on the south. The historic district is primarily a residential neighborhood situated east of the downtown commercial core of the city and a few blocks south of the University of South Dakota. The block on which the school stood is surrounded by houses dating primarily to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The neighborhood has tree-lined paved streets; a number of mature trees are located on the school grounds. A playground/playing fields was located on the north side of the school; paved play areas with basketball hoops were located on the east side of the building. Parking areas for teachers and staff was located north of the gymnasium and west of the play fields. The school yard was fenced with chain link fencing around the play areas and along the east boundary along Linden Avenue.



Aerial photo of Jolley School

## *General Characteristics and Descriptions*

The following is a description of the school building and grounds as they existed in November 2024 (but written in past tense as the school has been demolished at the final writing of this report).

The Jolley School was a one-story building comprised of several sections. The main elevation of the school faced west to S. University Street. The gymnasium/auditorium was located at the north end of the building; the locker rooms were located in a smaller portion of the gymnasium along the north side of the gym beneath the bank of glass blocks. The kindergarten room projected from the southwest corner of the building where the main volume of the building intersected with the south wing that paralleled Maple Street. Subsequent additions to the school had “filled in” the spaces on the east side of the building.

The original portions of the building were clad with a yellow brick, with variations in tone where some of the bricks are a light brown; the additions to the building were also clad with brick, although with a greater variation in color and tone. Yellow brick was popular in the 1950s as a more “modern and fresh” appearance than the early red and brown bricks often used for school buildings. The building sat on a concrete foundation.

The roofs of the classroom wings were flat (with a slight slope for drainage); the roof over the gymnasium was a low-pitch gable. The roof over the classroom wings had wide overhanging eaves, painted dark reddish-brown and capped with a metal coping along the top edge. A tall chimney stack extended above the roof on the east side of the main volume. It served the boiler located in a small basement beneath the center portion of the building.

Long rows of windows set in aluminum framing and topped with glass block were located along the front (west) elevation of the main volume of the building, the rear (east) portions of the main classroom portion of the building, and along portions of the south elevation of the classroom wing along Maple Street; the remainder of the windows along Maple Street are designed to resemble the glass blocks over the windows, but the material was a synthetic rigid vinyl rather than glass. Windows in the newer additions consisted of fixed upper panes with operable “hopper” sashes below them; all were set in aluminum frames. A bank of glass block windows along the upper portion of the north wall of the gymnasium provided natural light to the interior of that space.

There were several entrances to the building. The original entrance was located on the front (west) side of the building, recessed into the area just north of the kindergarten room. With the first major addition to the building in 1958, the main entry shifted to a location further to the north, also on the west elevation. It was recessed into a small alcove which created a vestibule between the outer and inner doors. Both were two sets of double doors with contemporary metal security doors as outer doors and wooden doors as inner doors. There was also an entrance at the south elevation just east of the kindergarten room (providing

access directly to the kindergarten), entrances from both the east and west sides of the gymnasium, and three ADA entrances (with concrete ramps and metal railings) on the east side of the building with the most recent additions to the building. The exterior doors were contemporary, metal security doors.

Located at the southwest corner of the school, where the main volume and the south classroom wing met, was a projecting polygonal room, which originally served as the kindergarten room. It was characterized by six pairs of windows set in aluminum frames; half of the windows had operable "hopper" sashes that opened inward in the lower portions of windows.

There were two small single-car garages, sitting side by side, adjacent to the south side of the gymnasium. Each had a standard roll up door, which faced Linden Avenue.

The interior features include the following. The walls were primarily painted masonry and wallboard; glazed ceramic tiles were found on portions of restroom and kitchen walls. In some cases, brick walls that were originally exterior walls became interior walls as additional classrooms were added; some had been painted, some had not been painted. The ceilings of the classrooms and auxiliary spaces were acoustic tile drop ceilings. Most of the floors were covered with carpeting; the restrooms had tile floors. Lighting was primarily large florescent panels. Shades over the lower portions of the classroom windows provided some control over the natural light from the long rows of windows; the glass block over the windows was intact. Most of the classrooms had long blackboards or whiteboards, corkboards, built-in shelving units and some storage. Doorways to classrooms were recessed into an entryway from the corridors and consisted of heavy wooden doors flanked by a sidelight window set in metal frames. The corridors had double-leaf fire doors located at the ends of the hallways. Drinking fountains were located within small recesses in the corridors.

The walls of the gymnasium/auditorium included portions of painted masonry and wallboard. The upper portion of the north wall was glass block. The ceiling was an acoustic ceiling paneling with florescent lighting and the vents for the ventilation system. The floor was covered with what appeared to be a vinyl on which the markings for a basketball court existed; there were basketball hoops at each end (west and east) of the gymnasium. A raised stage area was located on the south side of the space. The floor of the stage was wood and the stage projected outwards into the gymnasium space. The area beneath the stage was storage accessed by doors beneath the front edge of the stage. The stage was accessed via stairs located behind the side walls; practice rooms were located at the east end of the stage while a dressing room was located near the stairs on the west end. The curtains for the stage were extant. Locker rooms were accessed through doorways in the north wall and were located in the smaller section of building attached to the north wall of the gymnasium. A kitchen was also located in this section of the building, in the northwest corner.

## *Character-Defining Features*

The Jolley School typified school architecture of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. A number of features that clearly define this architecture were present on this school. These character-defining features included:

- Low, one-story massing with a main volume and subordinate wings
- A flat roof (or with a very slight slope for drainage)
- Wide, overhanging eaves
- Long rows of windows in aluminum framing
- Windows topped with glass block
- Exterior walls clad with a light-colored brick
- A kindergarten room located at or near a corner of the school that can be accessed by its own exterior entrance
- A sense of “Modernist” architecture with clean lines and no ornamentation

## *Developmental History of the School*

The first Jolley School (originally called the East Side School) was constructed in 1902 (first phase) and 1903 (second phase). It was located on the north end of the lot on which the 1950s Jolley School sat. It was a two-story building on a raised basement and it had a bell tower. By 1950, the population of Vermillion was growing and enrollments at the schools were increasing. The elementary schools could no longer accommodate the growing numbers of students. Vermillion voters were asked to approve a ten-year bond for \$240,000 for the construction of the first unit of a new Austin School. The original plans, designed by the architectural firm of Hugill, Blatherwick & Fritz of Sioux Falls, called for a two-story building, to be located on the site of Austin Park in west Vermillion. The voters defeated the issue.

Enrollments continued to increase. The issue was again put before the voters in February 1954. This time, the measure passed. The dollar amount of the bond was to be the same as before (\$240,000) but only \$220,000 would be used to construct the new Austin School. The remainder, plus additional funding from the school district’s building fund, would pay for construction of a new unit at the Jolley School. This new unit was also designed by Hugill,



Blatherwick & Fritzel of Sioux Falls. Embracing the mid-century design trends, the new Jolley unit was to be one-story with five classrooms plus a kindergarten room. It would be located at the south end of the block on which the original Jolley School was located and the older school would continue to be used for classes.<sup>28</sup>

Because both the new unit of the Jolley School and the new Austin School were to be constructed at the same time, it was decided to have one general contractor for both projects. The contract went to Gray Construction Company of Watertown; Baumgartner Electric Company of Sioux Falls served as the electric contractor. Work began on the schools in August of 1954.<sup>29</sup> Both schools were ready for the beginning of the 1955-56 school year as enrollments reached the highest number yet.

Vermillion continued to grow and so too did the number of students in the district. Before long, there was a need to start expanding the new schools. A new bond measure was approved in December 1956. The plans called for nine new classrooms, the gymnasium/auditorium, and auxiliary spaces for the new Jolley School with all work to be completed by the end of summer 1958. The addition was designed by Hugill, Blatherwick, Fritzel & Kroeger (the architectural firm had grown). The general contractor was Fred Jones and Sons of Yankton; the contract for plumbing and heating went to George Wentz Inc. of Lincoln, NE and the electrical contract went to Elliott Electric of Vermillion.<sup>30</sup> Of interesting note, prior to approval for this addition by the State Board of Education, the Vermillion School District was required to demolish the original 1903 Jolley School building to make way for required outdoor play space adjacent to the proposed gymnasium addition to the 1955 unit. At that point in time, the old building was used for administrative offices which were relocated to other buildings in town.

Two subsequent additions were made as the needs arose over the years. In 1986, plans were made for an addition to be built on the east side of the existing school. It was designed to provide additional classroom space, a large media room, and additional restrooms. This addition was designed by the firm of Rysavy Hartman Associates of Sioux Falls. The addition was completed by the beginning of the school year in 1986. The final addition, which wrapped around the southeast corner of the building, occurred in 2007. This addition provided for eight additional classrooms and was designed by the TSP architectural firm of Sioux Falls.

By 2021, it was decided that a new elementary school was needed to replace the aging Austin and Jolley schools. Voters approved a \$26 million bond to build a new school, which opened in the fall of 2024. It is located adjacent to the Middle School.

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<sup>28</sup> "Coming School Election," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (January 21, 1954).

<sup>29</sup> "Work Starts This Week on New Buildings," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (August 2, 1954).

<sup>30</sup> "Contracts Are Awarded for School Units," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (April 11, 1957).

The final classes at Jolley were held during the 2023-24 school year. Plans were made for the City of Vermillion to take ownership of the property after the closing of the school. In anticipation of what to do with the property, the City Council approved an ordinance to form a new housing district with covenants in December 2023. The City's intention was to raze the school and develop the land for residential use and park space.<sup>31</sup> In January 2025, the City approved the final plat for the development of the new Jolley Addition.<sup>32</sup> At the time of this writing, the vacant school is still standing has not yet been demolished.

### *Historic Integrity, Condition, and National Register Eligibility of the School*

The Jolley School was listed as a "Contributing Resource" in the Jolley Historic District.

Despite the numerous additions to the original portions of the school, it retained a relatively high degree of historic integrity in all seven aspects of integrity. It was located in its original location. The setting continued to be a school located within a residential neighborhood. It clearly conveyed its original design and subsequent additions, as well as most of the historic materials used to build the school. All of the character-defining features associated with school architecture from this period were intact. In retaining the original designs and materials, the historic workmanship was also retained. Integrity was also high in the areas of feeling and association.

At the time that photos were taken for this project in November 2024, the condition of the school might be considered "fair." Because the school was scheduled to be demolished, little care had been taken with the building since the school vacated the premises at the end of the 2023-24 school year. This condition is reflected in the photos in this report.

### *Drawings and Photographs*

The photographs in this report were taken in November of 2024. Included are images that are representative of the building as it stood at that time.

Sets of architectural drawings for Jolley School are on file at the Vermillion School District. The drawings include the original plans and plans for subsequent additions. Partial sets of these plans are also available in the Special Collections at the University of South Dakota. Included here are drawings that illustrate the development of the building over time.

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<sup>31</sup> "Ordinance Creates Jolley Planned Development District," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (December 29, 2023).

<sup>32</sup> "City Approves Final Plat of Jolley Addition," in the *Vermillion Plain Talk* (January 24, 2025).

Digital copies of the drawings and photographs were saved to a USB drive and presented, as part of this project, to the Vermillion Historic Preservation Commission in May 2025.



Jolley School, front (west) elevation from northwest corner (November 2024)



Jolley School, front (west) elevation from southwest corner (November 2024)



Jolley School, south elevation from southeast (November 2024)





Jolley School, north elevation from northwest, taller volume is gymnasium with lower section that houses the locker rooms and kitchen (November 2024)



Jolley School, east and south elevations of the gymnasium (November 2024)





Jolley School, east elevation of the south wing (November 2024)



Jolley School, portion of 2007 addition on east side of building (November 2024)





Jolley School, east elevation of part of the 1958 addition,  
south wall of the south garage on the right (November 2024)



Jolley School, close-up of classroom windows with glass block,  
front (west) elevation of 1958 addition (November 2024)

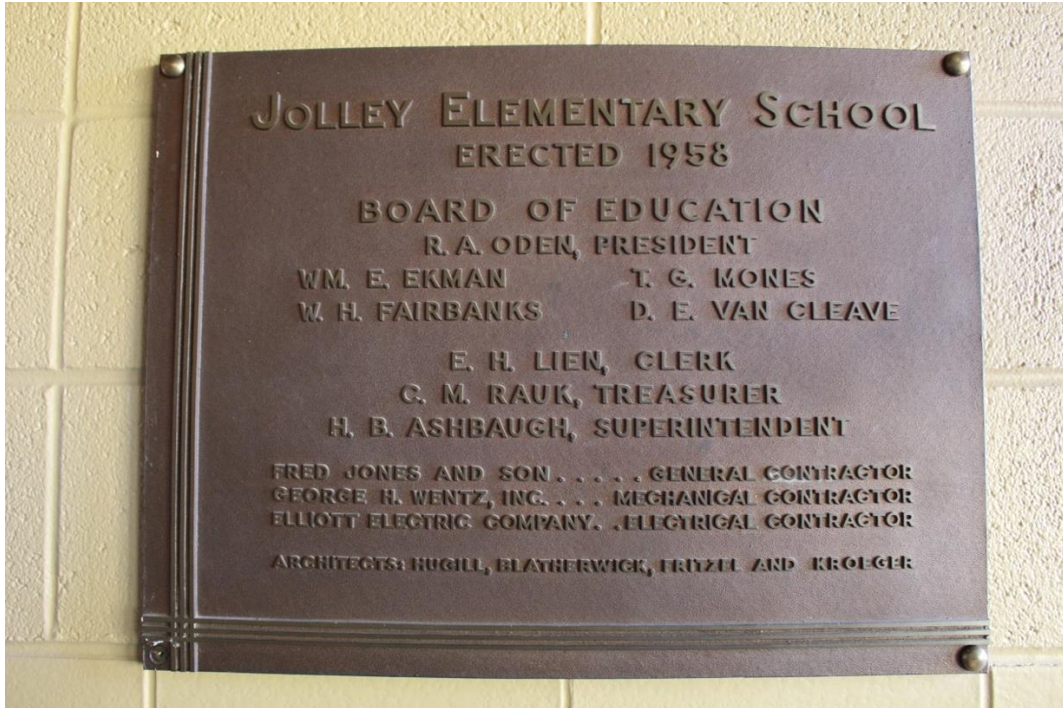


Jolley School, kindergarten room at southwest corner of building  
(November 2024)



Jolley School, main entrance, west elevation (November 2024)





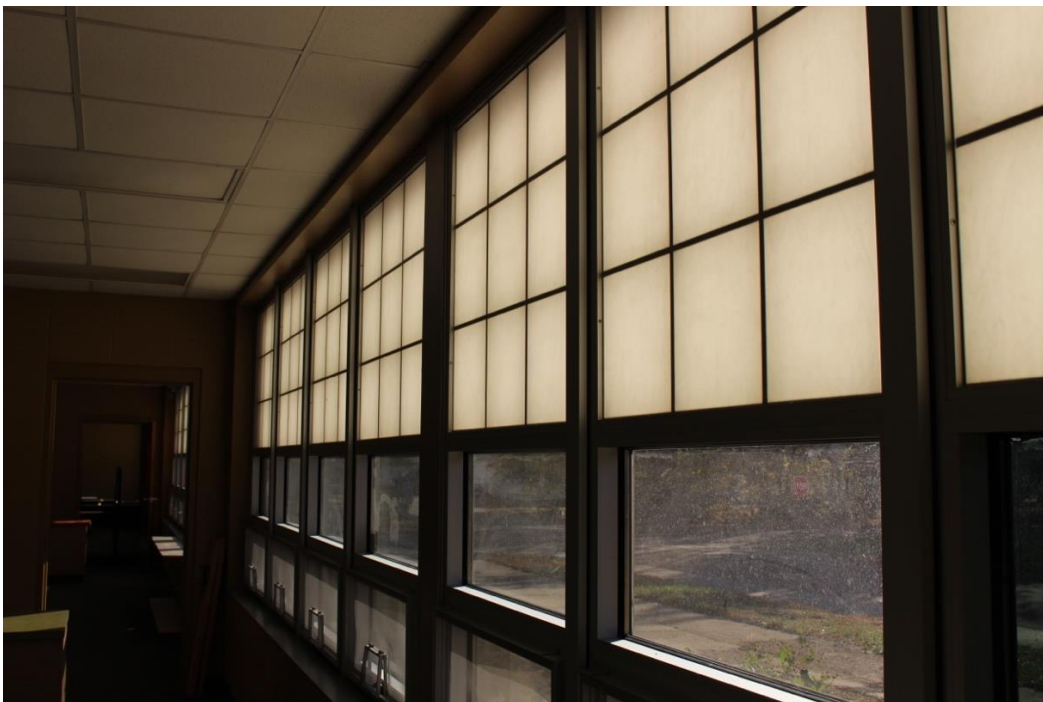
Jolley School, plaque inside main entry vestibule,  
dates to 1958 addition (November 2024)



Jolley School, kindergarten room (November 2024)



Jolley School, classroom in original 1955 section of building (November 2024)

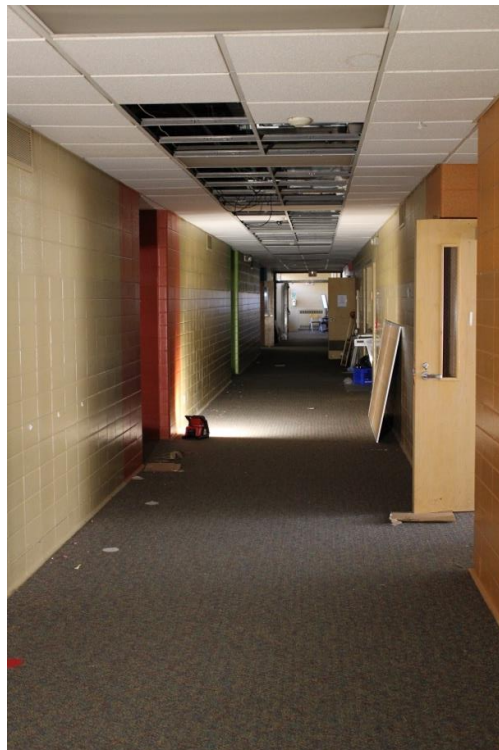


Jolley School, classroom windows with “faux” glass block upper section  
in 2007 addition (November 2024)





Jolley School, media room in 1986 addition (November 2024)



Jolley School, corridor in 1958 classroom wing (November 2024)



Jolley School, kindergarten restroom  
(November 2024)



Jolley School, restroom in 1986 addition  
(November 2024)



Jolley School, gymnasium/auditorium (November 2024)



Jolley School, north side of gymnasium with glass block windows (November 2024)





Jolley School, stage in gymnasium/auditorium (November 2024)



Jolley School, kitchen (November 2024)



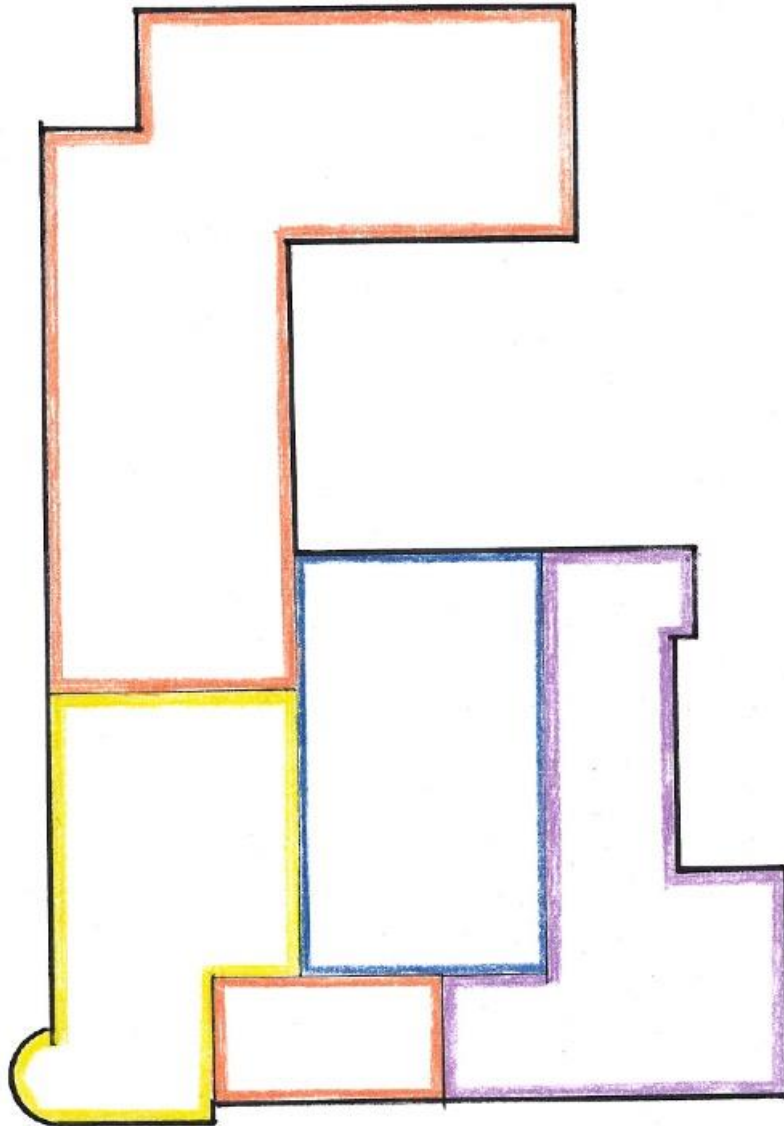
Jolley School, inside the main entrance (November 2024)







Jolley School, office space near front entrance  
(November 2024)

## JOLLEY SCHOOL

Drawing illustrating the development history of the building



-  Original 1955 section of the school
-  1958 Additions (two sections)
-  1986 Addition
-  2007 Addition



## CONCLUSIONS

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The 1950s was a period of tremendous growth for the City of Vermillion. Following World War II, towns with universities attracted GI's and their families as they pursued education through their GI benefits, and Vermillion was no exception. The influx of families pushed Vermillion's schools beyond capacity and pressured the community to find ways to accommodate the increasing enrollments.

To this end, the citizens of Vermillion met this challenge by endorsing bond efforts to generate funding to construct new schools. Two new elementary schools were constructed – the new Austin School and the new Jolley School – to replace the older grade schools located on the east side and west side of the community.

Both schools were designed by the architectural firm of Hugill, Blatherwick, & Fritzel from Sioux Falls. Construction on both occurred simultaneously and both schools opened their doors in September 1955. Less than two years later, work began to expand both of the new schools as enrollments had continued to grow. The additions were designed by the same architectural firm and construction on each school again happened simultaneously and work was completed by the fall of 1958. In both situations, the same contractors oversaw the work on both schools each time rather than different contractors for each school.

Additions were made to both schools in 1986; both were designed by the firm of Rysavy Hartman Associates of Sioux Falls and work on both schools occurred simultaneously under the direction of the same contractor. Subsequent additions to the schools were more individualized and did not follow the pattern of both schools at the same time. Classroom additions were made to Austin School in 1998 and 2001; both designed by the DLR Group from Omaha. The final addition to Jolley School was built in 2007 and was designed by the TSP architectural firm of Sioux Falls.

Both schools were excellent examples of mid-century school architecture, embracing the character-defining features associated with the shift in schools during that time period. The Jolley School had been listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a "Contributing Resource" in the Jolley Historic District. Although not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Austin School should be considered "eligible" for listing (individually or as part of a historic district).

Both schools served the community for seventy years, closing their doors for good at the end of the school year in May 2024 following the construction of a new elementary school. The Austin School now serves as home to the Boys & Girls Club of Vermillion. The Jolley School has been demolished and the land is being redeveloped for housing and a neighborhood park.



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