

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Emerson, Ralph Waldo, School

other names/site number Gary High School

2. Location

street & number 716 East 7th Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town Gary N/A vicinity

state Indiana code IN county Lake code 089 zip code 46402

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ralph R. Ketch 4/26/95  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, School  
Name of Property

Lake Co., IN  
County and State

**5. Classification**

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

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

N/A

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

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: School

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: School

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th/EARLY 20th CENTURY REVIVALS:

Jacobethan Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other STONE: Limestone

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, School

Name of Property

Lake Co., IN

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1908

Significant Dates

1908

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Wirt, William Albert

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Ittner, William Butts

Gerhard, E.C.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Gary Public Library, Indiana Room

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, School  
Name of Property

Lake Co., IN  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property 5 AC. +

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1, 6	4, 7, 2, 7, 0, 0	4, 6, 0, 5, 1, 0, 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Dharathula Millender, Chair/Laura Bandy, Chair/Suzanne Fischer, DHPA Intern  
 organization Emerson School Restoration Project date 30 November 1993  
 street & number 2409 West 5th Avenue telephone 219/882-6873 or 949-5817  
 city or town Gary state IN zip code 46404

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Gary Community School Corporation  
 street & number 620 East Tenth Place telephone 219/886-6522  
 city or town Gary state IN zip code 46402

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Emerson, Ralph Waldo, School Lake Co., IN

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Architectural Description

Emerson School is a three-story brick building, roughly rectangular in shape, constructed in 1908. Most of the building has no particular architectural style, but the main entry and some of the details are Jacobethan Revival. The school is situated on a sloping lot, about six feet higher than street level at the front foundation. Several shallow flights of steps on a broad sidewalk lead to the main entrance. The lawns are shaded with large trees, and ornamental brick walls extend from the building's front corners toward the street. The brick is laid in Flemish bond. On the ground floor only, header courses occur in every fifth row.

The front elevation is symmetrical and contains nine large bays. The center and two end bays project from the front and sides of the building, giving the effect of towers. The towers have flat roofs with small semicircular projections centered on each side of a parapet, while the rest of the front has a side-gable roof. The gables extend above the flat roofs and have large cornices. The wall surface is decorated with false half-timbering. Paired, multi-paned windows are centered under the gables. The windows are framed with half-timbers. Four large, decorated chimneys are placed toward the gable ends and near the cross-gable.

The main entrance extends from the front of the building to form a cross-gable. The upper two stories have chamfered corners. An elaborate, shaped and stepped parapet crowns the roof line. The third story has limestone quoins and a belt course separating it from the second story. The first story has brick quoins and a brick-and-limestone balustrade separating it from the second story.

A limestone water table runs along the entire front and sides of the building, as does a belt course separating the second and third stories.

The main entrance has a classical door surround with Ionic columns supporting a full entablature and balustrade. The words "EMERSON SCHOOL" are carved into the frieze. The doors are double metal fire doors with small vertical safety-glass panes. Above the doors is a semicircular transom with square panes. Channeled limestone voussoirs radiate from the doors and transom. On either side of the door are metal-framed awning windows of three panes.



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The second story has tall windows consisting of six awning windows in each of the chamfered corners. The central bay has three ranks of eight awning windows. Over the window is an elaborate scrollwork pediment with oval cutout in the center.

The third story has a paired awning window with eight panes. The stepped parapet is edged in limestone. The corners and center of the parapet are topped with ball finials.

All of the windows in the building are currently metal framed, but were originally framed in wood. Most of the windows on the front and side elevations are banks of 15-25 awning or hopper (on the ground floor) windows with simple limestone or brick lintels and sills.

Both of the side elevations are alike. They are five-ranked with entrance doors placed asymmetrically toward the front of the building. The square end bays on each side project from the building as described for the front elevation. The side entrances are double metal fire doors with four-pane transoms. The door surrounds are limestone architrave molding with a frieze and cornice. The date "1908" is carved in the frieze. A limestone water table runs along the sides and extends around the corners to the rear elevation, but stops at the edge of the corner bays. Brick quoins appear on all building corners on the second floor only.

The rear elevation is symmetrical. Again, the square corner bays project from the building. There are no windows on the rear of these bays. Twin end-gable sections separated by a parapeted section extend past the projecting corner bays. Small, shed-roofed entryways on each wing contain two doors. These end-gable wings contain gymnasias on the ground floor and the second/third floor. The center portion contains band rooms on the second and third floors, and a boiler room on the ground floor. A fire escape in the center section leads down from the second and third floors. The windows in the rear elevation are a combination of sash, awning, sliding, and glass block; they are placed more-or-less evenly on the building.

The interior contains classrooms around the front and side perimeters on all three floors. The center area houses a fan room, boiler room, swimming pool, dressing rooms, cafeteria, and kitchen on the first floor, and an auditorium, band rooms, and gymnasias on the combined second/third floor. The gable roof at the front houses a fourth level containing a music room and attic space.

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Interior walls are either painted brick or plaster. Flooring is wood, terrazzo, or linoleum. Marble wainscoting decorates some of the entry halls. The interior doors are wood and glass. Some have transoms and sidelights.

Emerson School retains a high degree of integrity, both interior and exterior. In its current function as a visual and performing arts high school, some of the rooms have been remodeled. The interior wooden cabinets and fixtures remain, as do the exposed brick walls and terrazzo floors.

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**Statement of Significance**

Emerson School is significant under Criterion A in the areas of education and social history, and under Criterion B for its association with educator William A. Wirt. In the area of education, Emerson School was the first of the five Gary schools designed by architect William Butts Ittner to be built specifically to utilize the Platoon System, a famous educational innovation first instituted in Gary. Students were divided into two groups; one to study academic subjects, the other to study vocational and cultural subjects. The groups switched activities during the day, ensuring that all students would study both kinds of subjects and the classrooms would be in use the whole time. This system was the forerunner of our present high school curriculum. Emerson is also significant in the area of social history for its role in the planned company town of Gary, where it was used to assimilate immigrant children and adults into American society, and to instill those values deemed important by community leaders. Finally, it is significant for its association with William A. Wirt, Superintendent of Schools in Gary. Wirt developed the Platoon System in Gary, and introduced it into schools nationwide. Emerson was designed according to Wirt's instructions and included special rooms for recreational and vocational classes. It was the first public school in Indiana to have an indoor swimming pool.

In 1907, William Wirt was hired to become the first Superintendent of Schools in the new planned community of Gary, created by U.S. Steel. Wirt believed that urban influences could be harmful to weak-willed youth, leading them to crime and vice. His schools would train children to resist temptation by instilling the values formerly taught by church, home, and the farm. One of his theories was that children should be trained to be useful members of society, while giving them the freedom to choose activities that suited their needs. To this end, he instituted what he called the Work-Study-Play plan, also known as the Platoon, or Gary System. Emerson School was the first of five schools designed expressly to utilize this system.

The Gary system was intended for children in junior high and high school. The students were divided into two groups. While one group studied math, English, reading, and history, the other group would use the wood and metal shops, gymnasium, and auditorium. This plan would keep both classrooms and special study rooms in use all day (at that time, students remained in one room for all of their studies). Since Gary was growing rapidly during this period, the platoon system helped alleviate some of the overcrowding in the schools by



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utilizing space that normally would be vacant for much of the day. The school day ran from 8:15 to 4:15, but the teachers had a 20% shorter day than the students. Special teachers taught some of the vocational classes, allowing regular teachers to work shorter hours. The school day also allowed time for private music lessons, religious training, and visits to the Y.M.C.A.

Word of Wirt's new system spread, and in 1914, he was hired as a part-time consultant to institute his program in the New York City schools. By 1930, over 200 cities were using Wirt's system. Detroit alone had 110 of its city schools on the platoon system in 1928.

Wirt envisioned Emerson School as a total learning environment. He worked with architect William Butts Ittner, the foremost school architect of the time, to design a building that would house all of the activities Wirt thought necessary for students' development. The physical layout of the school on its lot emphasized Wirt's philosophy that the school should be separated from the city by a park-like lawn in front and by playgrounds and athletic fields at the side and rear. Ittner designed four other schools in Gary: Froebel High (1912), Horace Mann (1926), Roosevelt (1928), and Lew Wallace (1931), all of which are still standing. Prior to his death in 1936, Ittner had designed over 500 schools throughout the country. His schools were convenient, solidly-constructed, artistically-designed, sanitary, and had excellent lighting, heating, and ventilation systems. His buildings cost two-thirds less than comparable schools.

The Emerson program tried to prepare students for real-life work. The vocational classes produced products to benefit the school. The girls' home economics class cooked and served school lunches in the cafeteria. The print shop printed Wirt's speeches and articles on the Gary system. The cabinet-making class crafted bookshelves, desks, and cupboards for the classrooms. Emerson added a forge, foundry, and machine shop in 1912, but discontinued cabinet-making and painting in 1914. In 1913, Emerson opened a public health lab where students ran water quality and other tests under the supervision of professionals.

Wirt considered the auditorium one of the most important parts of the school. Students learned public speaking and drama here, as well as having special presentations on cultural subjects. The school was also the first in the state to have an indoor swimming pool.

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Wirt controlled the Gary schools with a strong hand. He was obsessed with creating a strong work ethic, strict order, and efficiency. The School Board allowed him a free hand, as his policies corresponded to its own ideas of education. Wirt's educational practices also advanced the cause of U.S. Steel, the city's primary industry. U.S. Steel wanted a corps of workers to fill factory positions, not independent thinkers and rebels.

One of the Gary plan's intentions was rapid Americanization of immigrants. Emerson school had 66% foreign-born students (Froebel School, built in 1912, had 87% foreign-born). The predominant ethnic group in Gary came from the former Austro-Hungarian empire, containing Slav, Czech, Polish, and other south-central European peoples. Other ethnic groups were Russian empire, Italian, British Isles, German, and Scandinavian (Emerson had a higher percentage of Scandinavian and British Isles students than the other Gary schools). The school offered classes in several foreign languages, but none in English as a second language. Teachers sought to assimilate immigrants by undermining their ethnic identification. They Americanized the students' foreign names, and made them observe patriotic and religious (Protestant) holidays. Emerson School also taught night classes for adults until 10 P.M. At one time, there were more adults enrolled for night school than children for regular classes.

The Gary system exerted social control over children and adults who attended its schools. It taught American Protestant values and ideals to working-class immigrants. Night classes often prepared immigrants for citizenship. Emerson turned out a steady stream of workers for the Gary steel factories, although it did place more of an emphasis on academics than the other Gary schools, which were in more heavily Central-European immigrant neighborhoods.

William Wirt died in 1938 from a heart attack brought on by overwork. After his death, the Gary system quickly fell apart. Budget cuts and the absence of Wirt's controlling hand caused the Gary schools to lose their individuality. Although elements of the Gary system exist in secondary schools today, the system as originally conceived by Wirt ended in 1938. Today, Emerson School is a magnet school for students in the visual and performing arts.

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Bibliography

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- Cohen, Ronald D. Children of the Mill: Schooling and Society in Gary, Indiana, 1906-1960. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Cohen, Ronald D. and Raymond A. Mohl. The Paradox of Progressive Education: The Gary Plan and Urban Schooling. Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, Kennikat Press, 1979.
- Crane, George. Gary 1917-1918. Indiana Collections.
- Indiana University. Steel Maker/Steel Town. Calumet Regional Archives.
- Indianapolis News. Obituary of William Wirt. 11 March 1938.
- Indianapolis Star. Obituary of William Wirt. 12 March 1938.
- Redkey Times-Journal. Obituary of William Wirt. 17 March 1938.

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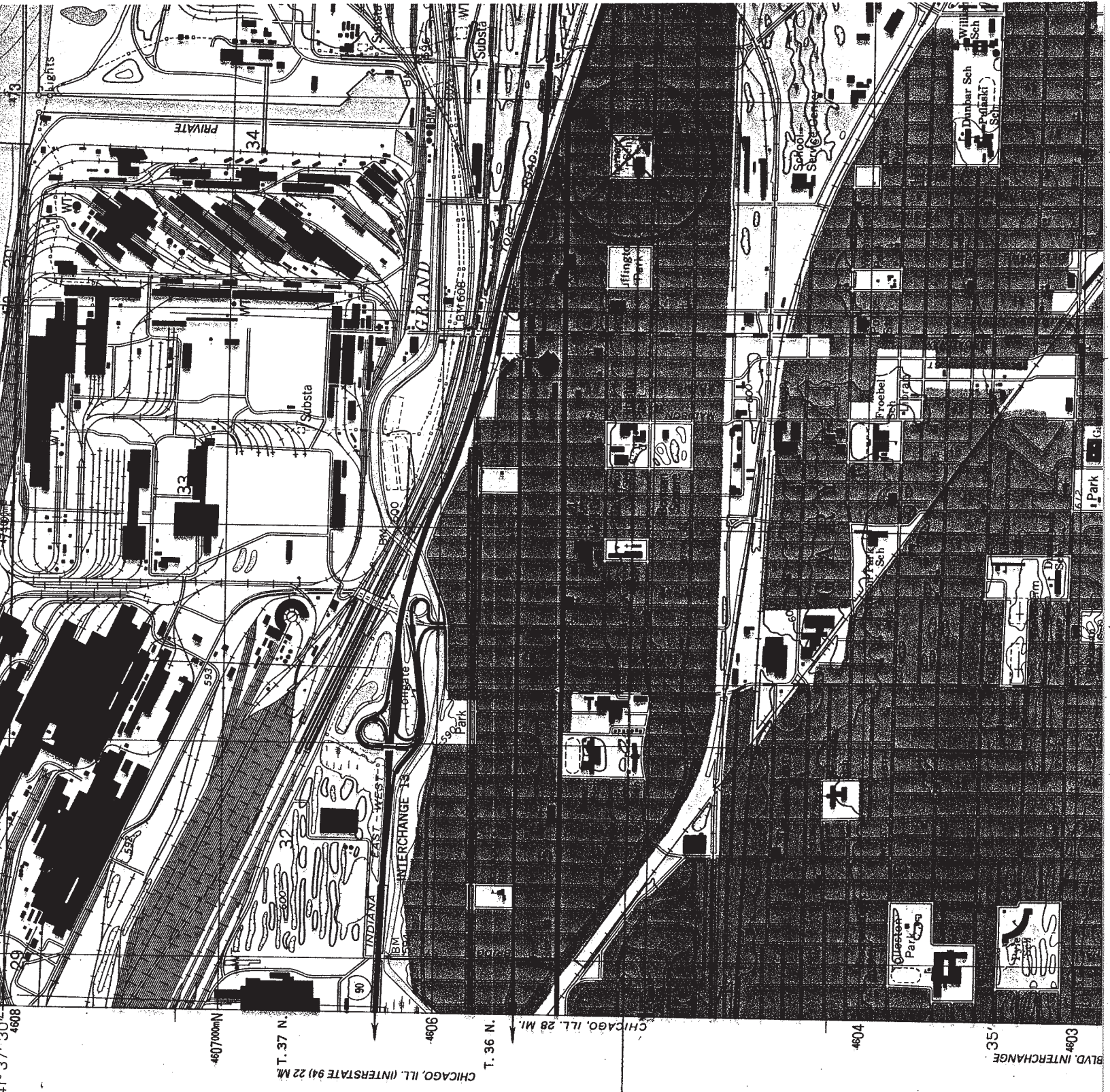
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

Beginning at a point on the northeast corner of Carolina and Seventh Streets, thence north along the right-of-way on the east side of Carolina Street to the southeast corner of Carolina and Sixth Streets; thence along the right-of-way on the south side of Sixth Street to a point ten feet east of the east side of Emerson School; thence south along a line ten feet from the school to a point on the north side of Seventh Street; thence west along the right-of-way on the north side of Seventh Street to the place of beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The boundary includes the school and its front, west, and north grounds which were part of the design of the school as an oasis in an urban setting. The boundary excludes a building that is scheduled for demolition but stands at this time on the same lot as Emerson School.





EMERSON SCHOOL

LAKE CO.

ZONE 16

E 472700

N 4605100

4608  
4607000mN  
4606  
4604  
4603  
T. 37 N.  
T. 36 N.  
CHICAGO, ILL. (INTERSTATE 94) 22 MI.  
CHICAGO, ILL. 28 MI.  
BLVD. INTERCHANGE  
35'