

FORM B – BUILDING

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

Photograph



Locus Map (north at top)



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Preservation Consultant

Date (month / year): September 2025

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

52-199

Newburyport
West

A

AME.26

Town/City: Amesbury

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Central Business District

Address: 9 School Street

Historic Name: Amesbury Mills/Ordway School

Uses: Present: vacant

Original: school

Date of Construction: 1865

Source: *The Villager*, May 18, 1865

Style/Form: Italianate (altered)

Architect/Builder: original unknown
Woodman Architects (1981)

Exterior Material:

Foundation: brick

Wall/Trim: wood, vinyl/wood, vinyl

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
shed

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

1884 - two-story addition on north

Date? – removal of balcony on facade

1981- front entrance and staircase addition, siding

Condition: fair (due to siding and alt.)

Moved: no ☒ yes **Date:**

Acreage: 0.184 acre

Setting: town building complex near central business district

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

AMESBURY

9 SCHOOL ST.

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

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

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

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

Originally constructed in 1865, the former school building at 9 School Street is a two-story Italianate-style building which has seen many alterations over the years. The building is set on a brick foundation and is sheathed for the most part in vinyl siding that was installed in 1981. Surviving character defining elements of the Italianate style include the low pitch roof with projecting bracketed eaves, the flushboard siding on the façade, the pedimented window lintels on the first floor façade windows and the double arched window centered on the second floor of the façade. Originally this window was fronted by an additional Italianate style feature in the form of a large balcony set on ornate brackets. Prior to 1935 this balcony was removed and the pair of windows with pedimented lintels was added below, where previously there had been no windows. All of the historic window openings now contain modern 6/6 replacement sash.

When completed in 1865, the building had a rectangular plan. In 1884 the two-story addition centered on the north elevation was constructed. The addition continues the projecting bracketed cornice of the original building and is also covered in vinyl siding above a brick foundation. On the east wall of this addition wooden steps lead up to a modern door topped by four-light transom. The entrance is sheltered by a simple shed roof set on plain wooden posts.

At the northwest corner of the building closest to the street, a modern two-story addition was constructed in 1981 to house a staircase and new entrance. A flight of concrete steps with metal pipe railings leads up from the street to double metal doors. The façade of the addition is sheathed in vertical wooden boards and is punctuated by several sliding windows with a fixed window above the entrance. To the north of this there is a slightly lower curved, windowless wall sheathed in vertical siding.

The long south side elevation is five bays wide. One of the second story openings was converted to a doorway for egress and is fronted by a metal fire escape. The rear (east) elevation is three bays wide with 6/6 windows except for the pair of narrow windows centered on the second floor. A gable-roofed vestibule bulkhead provides access to the basement.

A small gable shed sheathed in novelty siding is located to the southeast of the building.

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.

On June 15, 1863 the Mills school district held a meeting and appropriated \$3,500 to purchase a lot and build a new school house.¹ The construction of the building in the Amesbury Mills School District was completed in May 1865.² *The Villager* offered the following description:

It is situated near the old school building on School street, is two stories high, and is an honor to the district, and a credit to the committee who have had the matter in charge. The first floor is divided into two rooms for the accommodation of the Primary and Intermediate schools, and in the construction and finish are every way suited to the purpose for which they are used. The second story is devoted to the accommodation of the High school and is a very fine, large, airy room, capable of accommodating 100 scholars. Connected with the High school room are two recitation rooms, and everything is arranged with an eye to the convenience of the teacher and the welfare of the scholars...the total cost of the house...when fully complete is estimated at about \$7,000.

¹ Merrill, *History of Amesbury*, 1880, p. 379.

² *The Villager*, May 18, 1865.

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In the early 1880s the decision was made to construct a new high school elsewhere in town on the "Academy lot". With the removal of the high school from School Street, various alterations were made to the building to accommodate the lower grades. An addition was constructed near the center of the north elevation to be used for an entry and cloak rooms, one dressing room for each school room. The stairs and partition walls inside were taken down and the building was divided into two rooms on each floor, making the rooms across the east and west of the building, with a central partition. The rooms were lit on three sides, well ventilated, commodious, well supplied with black boards and each room seated fifty pupils. Water was also introduced to the building for the first time. The cost of the renovations was approximately \$2,000.³

In 1901 the Amesbury School Board voted to rename three local schools to honor local personages. The school on Friend Street was renamed the Davis School in honor of James H. Davis. The Hawthorne Primary School was renamed the Dorr School in honor of Rev. Benjamin Dorr and the Amesbury Mills School was renamed the Ordway School in honor of Dr. Nehemiah Ordway (1712-1779).⁴ Dr. Ordway was a graduate of Harvard College and practiced medicine in Amesbury. From 1745 to 1750 Josiah Bartlett was his student. In 1775 he assisted Capt. Timothy Barnard to form and equip his company of Minute Men. His house stood on the lot later owned by the Catholic Church. The Ordway family also owned the land where the school was later built.

In 1905 various alterations were made to the Ordway School. The building was raised three feet and a basement was constructed with a cement floor and toilets for both boys and girls. A new furnace was installed. On the north elevation, a small elevated main entrance vestibule was constructed, capped by a hip roof with doors on both the east and west sides. Inside the stairway leading to the upper floors was reconstructed.⁵

By 1930 there were various calls to close the Ordway School which then accommodated 128 students in five grades. In 1934 the Ordway School yard was drained by twelve men funded by the Emergency Relief Administration (E.R.A.) that provided federal assistance during the Depression years.

At some point (prior to 1935) the second story balcony on the front façade was removed.⁶ The Ordway School ceased being used for educational purposes in June 1960. It served a variety of uses in the years that followed including a supply and repair depot for the school department maintenance department, Community Action Council, and food bank.

In 1981 the building was renovated and an addition for a new entrance and stairwell was constructed according to designs by Jonathan Woodman Architects of Newburyport. In November 1981 a ribbon cutting was held to celebrate the two year renovation of the building for a Senior Center, funded by a \$325,000 HUD grant. More recently it was used by the Fire Station and Emergency Center. It is no longer occupied due to several issues including active roof leaks and has been condemned by the Building Department.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Amesbury Daily News, various dates.
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Massachusetts Historical Commission. Inventory form for 9 School Street, 1981.
Merrill, Joseph. *History of Amesbury*. Haverhill: Press of F.P. Stiles, 1880.
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Newburyport Daily News, various dates.
Sanborn Insurance Maps, Amesbury, 1889, 1894, 1899, 1904, 1909, 1918, 1930, 1945.
Town of Amesbury, Annual Reports.
Villager, The, various dates.

³ Town of Amesbury Annual Reports 1883 and 1884.

⁴ *Amesbury Daily News*, May 16 & 17, 1901.

⁵ Amesbury Town Report, 1905, p. 7.

⁶ *Newburyport Daily News*, Feb. 16, 1935.

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North elevation



North elevation – 1884 addition at center and 1981 addition at right

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Looking southwest at 1884 addition



Looking SW at rear (east) and north sides

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Rear elevation



South and east (rear) elevations

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West (façade) and south elevations



Shed at southeast corner

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THE VILLAGER.

THURSDAY, MAY 18th., 1865.

NEW SCHOOL HOUSE. A new and beautiful school house has recently been completed for the accommodation of the scholars in the Amesbury Mills School District. It is situated near the old school building on School street, is two stories high, and is an honor to the district, and a credit to the committee who have had the matter in charge. The first floor is divided into two rooms for the accommodation of the Primary and Intermediate schools, and in the construction and finish are every way suited to the purpose for which they are used. The second story is devoted to the accommodation of the High school and is a very fine, large, airy room, capable of accommodating 100 scholars. Connected with the High school room are two recitation rooms, and everything is arranged with an eye to the convenience of the teacher and the welfare of the scholars. The grounds about the building have been properly graded, drained, and fenced, and the total cost of the house,—which is of wood, with a cellar under the whole building,—when fully complete is estimated at about \$7000.

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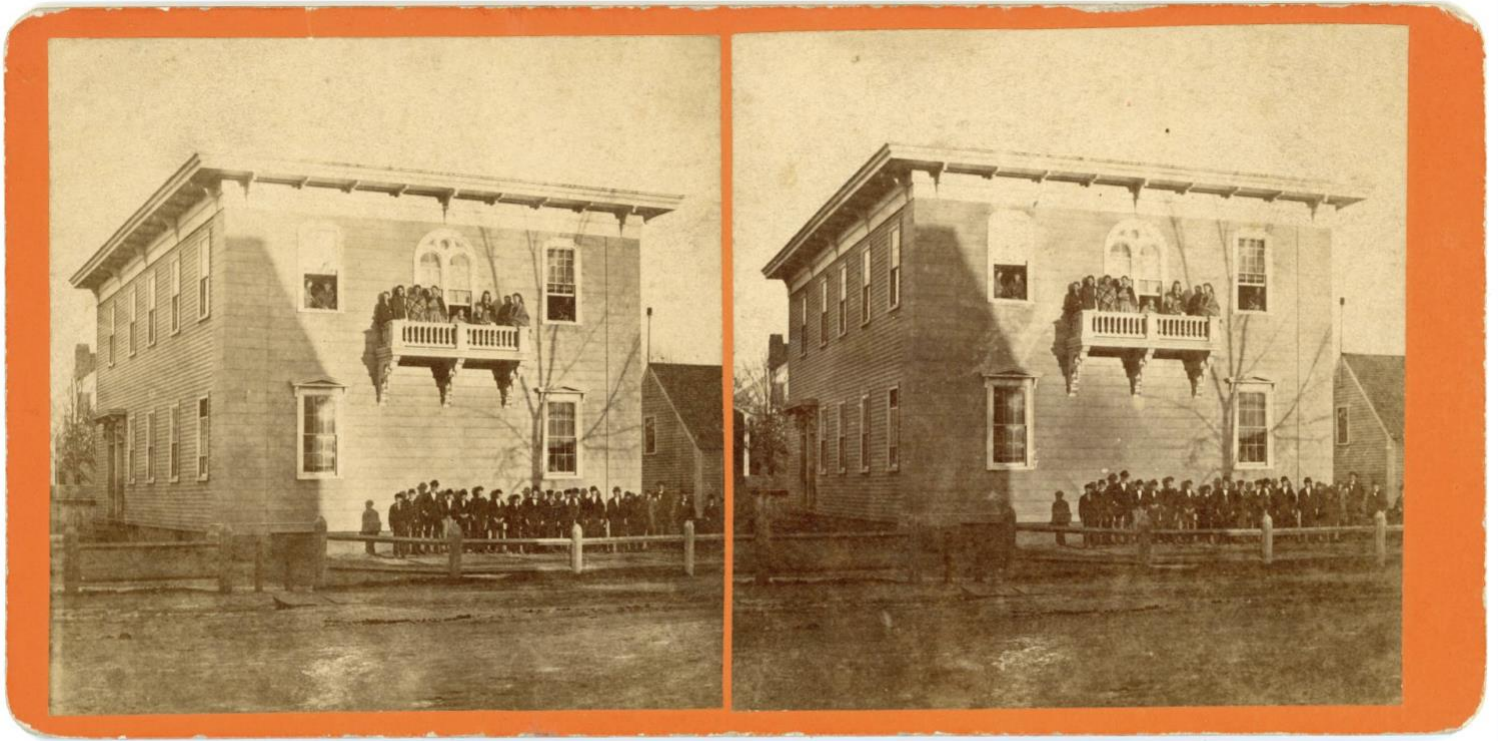
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Undated stereoscope of High School, between 1865 and 1883

"View Ordway Public School," *Digital Amesbury*, accessed September 25, 2025, <https://amesburylocalhistory.omeka.net/items/show/116>.

NEWBURYPORT DAILY NEWS, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1935

NOT SO LONG AGO IN AMESBURY

Reproductions of Old Photographs--No. 6

AMESBURY HIGH SCHOOL, 1875.

Amesbury Feb 16 Believe it or not boys and girls but the building shown above served as Amesbury's High school in 1875 and more than that, it is still in use as the present Ordway grade school on School street --but you will have to look rather closely to recognize the resemblance.

The balcony on which students are perhaps sunning themselves at recess time was lately removed per order of the school committee members of which claimed it to be unsafe and no doubt it was.

The School street building served as Amesbury's High school while in similar institution serving Salisbury was the present Whittier school on Prospect street later a grade school then a manual arts adjunct to the High school and now returned to its former status as a grade building. The late Frank Savage called the dean of Amesbury schools, was principal there for years.

"Old-timers" who attended the School street building can remember a man named Miller who was teaching there about 1872 and who was popular remaining for a number of years. George Rowell of Ridgemere recalls being his pupil and also remembers a Mr Bliss who followed him and who remained only one year, as he did not appear to get along so well with the pupils.

Frank McIntosh taught successfully at the school for a number of years. Clarence S. Morse present school attendance officer, and agent of the department of public health, was a pupil under him.

The building was altered on several occasions. Originally, we are told the upper floor comprised a single classroom over which the principal had supervision. The lower floor was divided into two classrooms, each presumably with its own teacher. One entered at the left door and ascended the stairs to the second floor, which was provided with a commodious cloak-room and an apartment used for conferences and storage. The building has since been altered, with removal of the balcony, construction of additional entrances, and subdivision into a number of classrooms.

After being graduated from Dartmouth in 1892 Forrest Brown, who has been principal of the High school here for 40 years, and identified with education in Amesbury for 43 years began his teaching career in this building. Miss Nellie F. Sargent, a town historian, was principal there for years and taught the eighth grade.

One Fourth of July in the 90's, the building caught fire, perhaps the result of a lighted squib being tossed not too accidentally into an upper-story window. However no extensive damage was caused and the boys had to resume their schooling the following September just the same. The fence which appears in the photograph, has long since vanished.

Amesbury were rolled evening, winning a Amesbury and Bunny outs, with 50 infee-roll'd two Merrimac four points league class three point 1339 to 133 Morse rolled three-string Soko, De joyed a pl Three-Man points from Joubert wh of 460 for t 143.

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North side of building showing entrance in 1883 addition
Source: Amesbury Public Library

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Ca. 1914 photo of entrance on north end of building after 1905 alterations
Source: Amesbury Public Library

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1955 photo
Source: Amesbury Public Library

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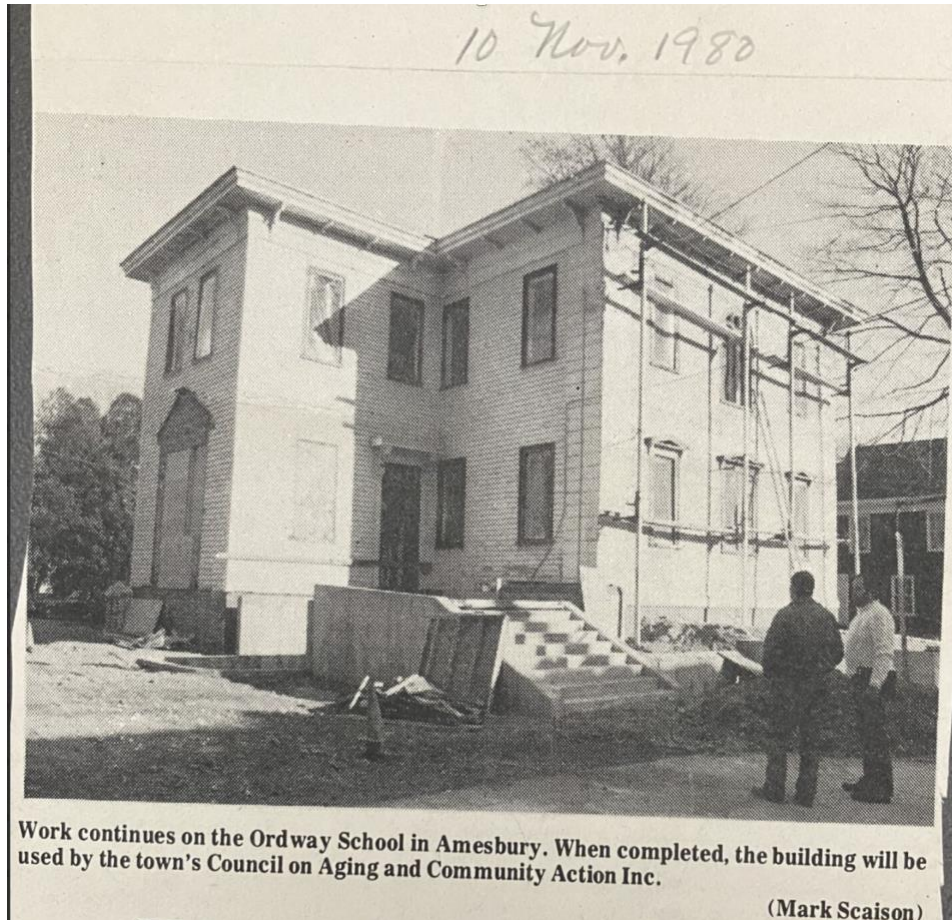
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Renovation in progress, 1980
Source: Unidentified news clipping, Nov. 10, 1980