### **National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form**



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1. Nam	ie				
historic Des	Peres School				
and/or common					
2. Loca	ation				
street & number	6307 Michigan		-	not for publication	_
city, town	t louis	vicinity of	congressional district	3rd-Hon. Richard G	ephardt
	ssouri code	29 county	St. Louis City	code 570	•
	sification				•
Category  district building(s) structure site object	Ownership public private both Public Acquisition in process being considered	Status  occupied unoccupied _X work in progress Accessible _X yes: restricted yes: unrestricted	Present Use agriculture commercial educational entertainment government industrial	museum park private residence religious scientific transportation	
4 0	N/A	no	military	X other: social s	ervice
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street & number	7420 Virginia Aver	nue	5221 South Broadway St. Louis, MO 6311	,	-
city, town	St. Louis	vicinity of	state	MO 63116	
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courthouse, regi	stry of deeds, etc. St. Lo	ouis City Hall			_
street & number	Market Stree	et at Tucker Boule	vard		
city, town St	. Louis		state	MO 63103	=
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	State Historical Su	rvey nas ans pr			-
			am, Missouri Depart	te <u>county</u> local ment of Natural	<u>-</u>
depository for si	A STATE OF THE STA	ces, P. O. Box 176			<del>-</del>
city, town Jef	ferson City,		state	MO 65102	_

#### 

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

7. Description

Des Peres School, a two-story, red brick building standing at the southwest corner of Michigan and Iron Streets in the Carondelet neighborhood of south St. Louis was designed for the School Board in 1873 by architect Frederick W. Raeder. (In its first year of use, Room 4 was designated for Susan Blow's historic kindergarten, see Section 8.) The four room building was enlarged and renovated by the school system in 1897, then altered by a later owner, Cook's Market, in 1960. (See Site Plan.)

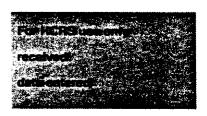
The Board of Education's first plan to meet the growing number of primary pupils in Carondelet was to expand the nearby Blow School. When this proved unfeasible, the Board decided to build a new four room school and purchased a 200 by 118 foot site in the fashionable residential area along Michigan Avenue for \$4,300. The building contract for Raeder's sixty-one by forty-five foot plan was awarded to Woods and Barnes at a bid of \$13,715.2

style, the Des Peres School faces Designed in a simplified Italianate east and looks down toward the Mississippi River from a natural crest in the topography. The crisp, red brick walls contrast strikingly with the rusticated stone foundation and dressed stone belt course separating the basement and first floor levels. A projecting three-bay pavilion dominates the facade rising to a gable peak and is embellished by a raking, bracketed cornice (Photo #1). Brick corbelling, a wheel window in the attic story and a stone plaque over the entrance are further decorative features in this balanced utilitarian design. The segmentally arched doorway and long, narrow windows are inset slightly and punctuated by flat, stone sills now painted red. The number and spacing of these openings indicate the ample ventilation and light which were the standard for St. Louis classrooms after Superintendent Divoll's building plan reforms of 1857. Although given relatively free reign regarding outward appearance, School Board architects were asked to conform to a plan adopted by Boston in 1848 which placed all classrooms in the corners of the building thus securing light and air from two sides of the room. 3

Frederick William Raeder was a German-born and educated architect and engineer. He first came to the United States in the 1850's and put his talents to work on New York's Crystal Palace. Arriving in St. Louis in 1867, he worked both as a construction engineer for the railroads and as an architect. He designed several churches, the Episcopal Orphans House, the Century Building and Peper's Tobacco Factory (now known as Raeder Place) in Laclede's Landing. During his three year office as architect for the St. Louis Board of Education, he drew plans for Peabody and Henry Ames Schools as well as for Des Peres. The Peabody School is three stories high and much more ornate in style than the Des Peres School, but the two designs share seven-bay facades with central projecting pavilions. A

In 1897, the School Board added a rear addition to the building. Following closely the original style and materials, they added four more rooms to the structure increasing its size to eighty by ninety-four feet. (Photo #2) A connecting

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corridor contained two iron and slate stairways and opened at the first level onto entrance porches at the north and south. At the same time, the old furnaces were removed and a new indirect steam heating system installed. Bathrooms were built in the basement and new floors laid. The total cost of additions and renovations was \$21,900.5

The expanded Des Peres School building continued to function as a school until 1935. In 1947, Roy Tarter bought the property for \$98,000 and converted it into a community center. The old kindergarten room became the Kindergarten Grill. In 1960, after the property had been rezoned for commercial use, it was bought by Cook's Market, Inc. Urged not to demolish the old school because of its historical significance, Cook's used the building as a warehouse and office. The one-story, "modern" brick shopping facility added to the south side of the building at a cost of \$75,000 detracts from the symmetry of the front elevation and dominates the view looking east. (Photos #1 and #3) At present the front entrance and some of the windows are bricked over, but it is hoped that the Carondelet Historical Society's plan to buy or lease the building and restore it can be put into effect.

### F O O T N O T E S

<sup>1</sup>St. Louis Board of Public Schools, <u>Official Proceedings</u>, vol. 1, 26 August 1873, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup>St. Louis Board of Public Schools, <u>Official Proceedings</u>, vol. 1, 10 September 1872 and 12 November 1872; Board of Directors of St. Louis Public Schools, <u>44th</u> Annual Report (St. Louis: 1897-98), pp. 228.

<sup>3</sup>St. Louis Board of Public Schools, <u>Official Proceedings</u>, vol. 1, 14 May 1872; William Hyde and Howard L. Conard, eds., <u>Encyclopedia of the History of St. Louis</u>, 6 vols. (St. Louis: The Southern History Co., 1899), 4: 2014.

<sup>4</sup>Carolyn Hewes Toft and Osmund Overby, <u>The Saint Louis Old Post Office</u> (St. Louis: Landmarks Association of St. Louis, <u>Inc.</u>, 1979), p. 40; John Albury Bryan, "Outstanding Architects in St. Louis between 1804-1904," <u>Missouri Historical Review</u> 28 (January, 1934): 88.

<sup>5</sup>Board of Directors of St. Louis Public Schools, <u>44th Annual Report</u>, pp. 157, 161 and 228; <u>45th Annual Report</u>, 1898-99, p. 255.

6"Building Used for First Kindergarten in 1873 Has Survived Many Changes," 13 May 1964.

<sup>7</sup>St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 12 October 1960.

### 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric agriculture architecture art commerce communications		landscape architectur law literature military music t philosophy politics/government	re religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1873	Builder/Architect Fre	derick W. Raeder	

#### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Des Peres School is significant as the site of the first successful public kindergarten in the United States. Built in 1873 as a simple, four-room primary school, Des Peres' first year enrollment included forty-two students in an experimental kindergarten class which through the initiative of St. Louisans Susan Blow and William T. Harris became the model copied throughout the country.

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), a German educator, is credited as the originator of the kindergarten concept which utilized a series of twenty "gifts and occupations" to introduce young children to the arts and sciences. Because of its focus on creativity and understanding rather than acquired factual information, Froebel's pedagogical techniques proved transferable to children of other nationalities. Susan Blow first encountered Froebel's teachings on a family visit to Europe in 1870. Intrigued by German kindergarten classes and having a mind capable of grasping the theory behind the method, she brought back to St. Louis several of his "gifts" (Photo #4) little realizing that this would soon become her lifework. Like other wealthy young ladies in this period, Susan had no professional training but, unlike most of her peers, she possessed a fine education acquired from tutors, private schools and her own extensive reading. (Denton Snider later remarked that by her social set, Susan was considered "too bookish, displaying too much erudition for a woman." )

As the eldest child of Henry T. Blow, a wealthy merchant and statesman, Susan's knowledge and religious upbringing were the products of family tradition. Prior to her role in the kindergarten movement, she did church work and tutored her siblings. When Henry Blow became United States Minister to Brazil in 1869, Susan quickly mastered Portuguese and served as her father's private secretary. Her decision to direct a kindergarten in St. Louis grew from a brief experience with substitute teaching and a Christian belief that her learning would one day serve some useful purpose.

William T. Harris, then Superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools, embraced her idea enthusiastically. Harris saw Froebel's play-school as a possible solution to education for the urban indigent classes. A study of 1868 revealed that in the over-crowded, working-class neighborhoods of the city, children attended school an average of three years only, a period too brief to countermand the "vice-filled" atmosphere of roving street gangs and saloons. Children did not begin first grade until age seven; by age ten, they dropped out either through lack of interest or a need to work and help support the family. Realizing that the traditional processes of socialization had broken down in the urban environment and believing that it was the duty of the educator to meet all of the needs of the community, Harris campaigned to bring the "slum child" the moral and social benefits of schooling at a younger age. He felt that five years of good influence on the child would make a lasting impression.

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In 1871, Harris induced the School Board to form a committee to study playschools, and in 1872 to accept Susan Blow's offer to direct gratuitously a kindergarten class. The experiment was delayed a year to woincide with the opening of Des Peres School and to give Miss Blow time to receive further training from Maria Kraus Bolte, a Froebel-trained teacher working in New York. In September of 1873, Miss Blow directed the first experimental class along with Miss Timberlake (a paid teacher) and two assistants. (Photo #5) Forty-two children enrolled and the program was considered a large success, overcoming arguments that children so young would be unwilling to learn and would attend infrequently or that kindergarten pupils would later be unfit for primary work. Nine of the former kindergartners were found to be leading their primary classes the following year.

The School Board continued to support and enlarge the experiment in the following years, adding two new classes in 1874. While Blow and Harris carefully recorded and analyzed the results knowing that their work would serve as a model for other cities should the kindergarten prove successful in St. Louis, the press publicized and explained the novel idea to city residents. After visiting the classroom, a <u>St. Louis Republican</u> reporter of 1875 wrote, "Literally it is a children garden, and the purpose is to direct the child's mind under six years of age into preliminary grooves of order, cleanliness, obedience, a desire for information and to combine with these the most prominent idea of object teaching". 10

In 1876, there were twelve public kindergartens in St. Louis and Miss Blow prepared and funded a Kindergarten Exhibit for the Philadelphia Centennial Celebration. (Photo #6) The St. Louis Board of Education received an award "for excellence of work and for the establishment of kindergartens as a part of the public school system." In 1878, there were forty-one kindergartens and by 1880 the Board of Education voted to open kindergartens in all white schools as soon as space could be provided. The program was extended to black schools beginning in 1883. By 1889, the number of pupils had grown from the original 42 to 6,843; by 1905, the number was 10,644. 12

Despite the steady rise in number of classes and growing acceptance by the public, the kindergarten was not without problems in its early years. Its greatest obstacle was cost, a difficulty surmounted by Harris' plan to have fewer paid teachers and more volunteer assistants. In 1876, there were one hundred unpaid assistants—largely young ladies of the "better classes". Some volunteered out of a missionary zeal and fervent belief in the socially regenerative effects of Froebel's method; others were seeking professional training, planning to make kindergarten teaching a career.

Aside from directing the kindergarten classes, Miss Blow taught teachers and assistants in the theory and practical application of Froebel's method. The teacher

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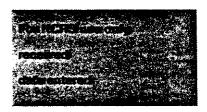
training classes met in the afternoons and on Saturday mornings with sometimes as many as two hundred ladies attending. The Board of Education conferred teaching diplomas on her graduates. Believing firmly that a kindergarten teacher must be constantly broadening her intellectual horizons, she introduced her students to Shakespeare, Dante, Emerson and the Greek classics as well as Froebel. In her eleven years of service to the St. Louis Kindergarten, Miss Blow considered her teacher training her most important contribution. Her assessment was correct. A significant number of her early pupils went on to form kindergarten programs elsewhere in the country. Laura Fisher headed the Kindergarten Normal School in Boston; Caroline Hart directed a training school in Baltimore; Harriet Niel introduced literature and psychology into the Washington, D.C. program; and Cynthia Dozier was Superintendent of the New York Kindergarten Association. Elizabeth Harrison of the Chicago Kindergarten College was also influenced by Blow's teaching methods. 13

Harris and Blow began the kindergarten experiment as a measure to save poor children from the unhealthy "street education" which they received early in the urban environment. For some children it was their only point of contact with the social amenities—neatness, politeness, pride in oneself and one's work being stressed. The manual skills and dexterity which the "gifts and occupations" developed where considered an aid to later industrial occupations. Additionally, the early manipulation of concrete objects meant faster learning in the primary grades expecially in arithmetic and science. The educators soon found the kindergarten to be equally advantageous for more priviledged children, saving them from "over-indulgence" and "providing moral discipline." Twenty-five years after its introduction the Board wrote: "No other part of the public school system has acquired a firmer hold on the good will and affection of our people and none has done more educational good to the children and homes." 14

Harris and Blow continued their dedication to the kindergarten cause long after their vanguard efforts in St. Louis. In 1888, Harris returned to Missouri as U. S. Commissioner of Education to found the St. Louis Kindergarten Association. Later, his position as an international educator and writer enabled him to promote the pre-school values on a much wider scale. After a ten year struggle with illness, Susan Blow lectured extensively and wrote five books and numerous papers on Froebel's method including one for the Paris Exposition of 1900. She headed the conservative faction of the International Kindergarten Union founded in 1892 and taught at the Teacher's College of Columbia University from 1905 to 1908. Always modest of her own part in the movement, to teachers, mothers and the 190,000 children enrolled in kindergartens twenty-five years after her first St. Louis class, she had become its acknowledged leader. A full-length portrait in the Capital Building at Jefferson City pays tribute to her significant contribution to Missouri and United States history. 15

Since 1935, Des Peres School building has functioned as offices for the War Price Administration, a community center, a restaurant and a grocery warehouse. In the mid-1940's, the Susan Blow Kindergarten Memorial Association placed a

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commemorative plaque and a six by ten foot portrait of Susan Blow in the old kindergarten room! The Carondelet Historical Society is presently negotiating to lease or buy the building. A permanent committee of the Society, the Susan E. Blow Foundation, would like to restore the old kindergarten classroom to its 1873 state and maintain it as a museum. Funds are being solicitied nationwide for such a project. 17

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Bruno Hanschmann, <u>The Kindergarten System</u>, trans. by Fanny Frank (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1897), p. 145; Edward Wiebe, <u>Paradise of Childhood</u> (New York: Milton Bradley Co., 1896), pp. 10-59, passim.

<sup>2</sup>Froebel founded the first kindergarten in Blankenburg, Germany, in 1840. His theories were carried across the Atlantic by German immigrants who, after 1850, began to sponsor German-speaking, private play-schools in their new country. In the 1860's, several private <u>Klein Kinder Schulen</u> in St. Louis preceded Miss Blow's historic 1873 class. The Schools Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Margaret Hilliker, "Life and Work of Susan Blow," (Paper for St. Louis Public Schools under Parsons-Blewett Memorial Fund, 1952-53), p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>Henry T. Blow helped found the first Presbyterian church as well as provide funds for the first public school building in Carondelet. John A. Bryan, "The Blow Family of St. Louis," (Paper for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial - United States Department of the Interior Park Service, 1948), pp. 24-26, and 35.

<sup>5</sup>Lizzie Lee Kirk, "A Bibliography of Materials by and about Susan Elizabeth Blow," (Paper for the St. Louis Public Library, 1961), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>In a letter to William T. Harris, she later recalled her feelings leading up to that decision: "All this time I was conscious of two things -- an irresistible impulse to action and a hunger for something which might seem worthwhile doing. I suppose I had the feeling the Catholics call Vocation..." See Harris Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>7</sup>Selwyn K. Troen, <u>The Public and the Schools</u> (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1975), pp. 100-02.

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<sup>8</sup>St. Louis Board of Public Schools, <u>Official Proceedings</u>, vol. 1, 12 March 1872; Hilliker, pp. 13-18.

<sup>9</sup>Children showed development of physical strength and grace from the exercises and improved habits of neatness, but Miss Blow felt that the strongest claim for the kindergarten was "the happiness it produced." <u>20th Annual Report</u> (1872-73), pp. 194-99; Hilliker, p. 23.

10St. Louis Republican, 28 February 1875.

11Board of Directors of St. Louis Public Schools, <u>22nd Annual Report</u> (St. Louis: 1875-76), p. 88.

12St. Louis Board of Education, "Facts Concerning 100 Years of Progress in the Public Schools of St. Louis 1838-1938," <u>Public School Messenger</u> 35 (January, 1938): 61 and 69.

1322nd Annual Report, pp. 87-89; Hilliker, pp. 29, 47-53 and 87-88.

<sup>14</sup>44th Annual Report (1897-98), p. 126.

<sup>15</sup>Hilliker, pp. 185-195; Troen, p. 114; Bryan, pp. 3-6.

16"Monuments and Memorials," <u>Missouri Historical Review</u> 40 (January, 1946): 286; <u>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</u>, 3 February 1957, 12 October 1960, 13 May 1964 and 18 August 1977.

17A conversation on December 4, 1980, with Robert Voorhees, Vice President of the Carondelet Historical Society reveals that sufficient funds have been raised to purchase the old school building. When restored it will house the permanent headquarters for the Society as well as the recreated kindergarten room, museum and library of Miss Blow's writings.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached.

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12.	State Hi	storic Pres	ervation	Office	er Certification
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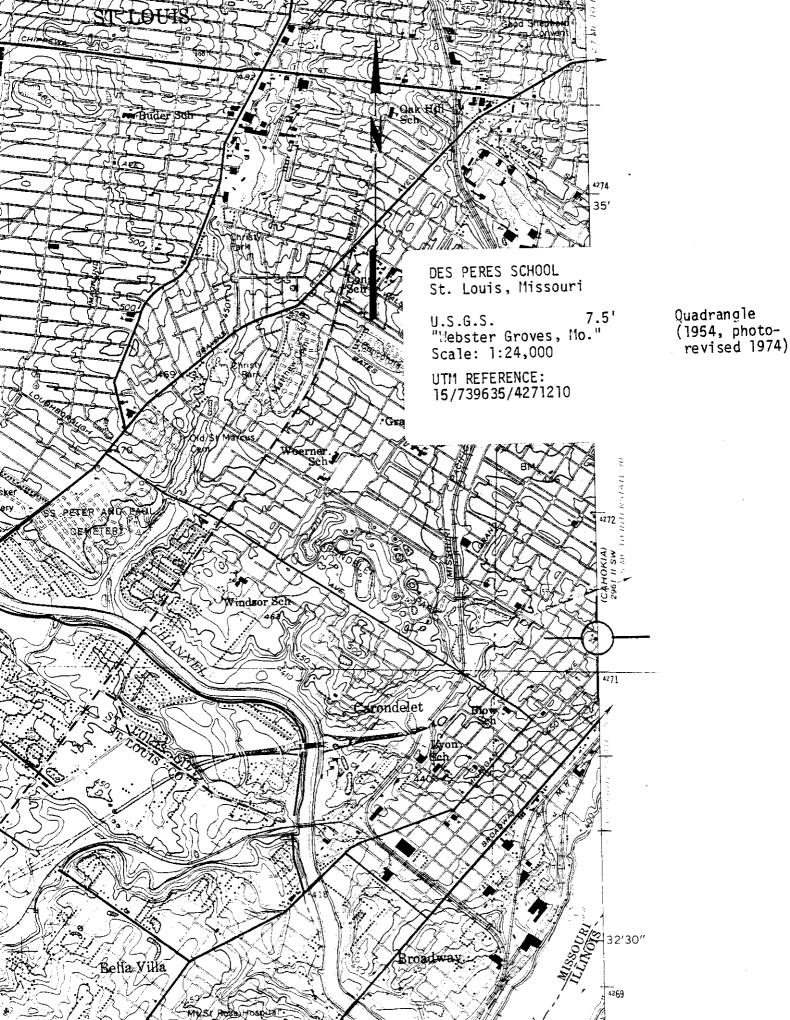
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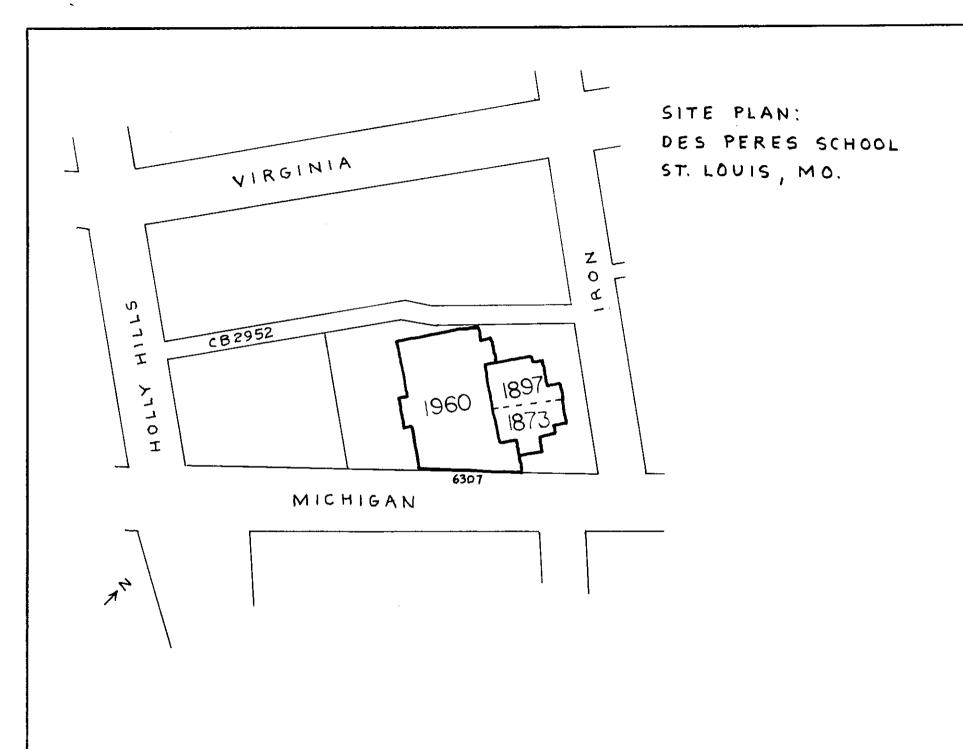
2. James M. Denny, Section Chief, Nominations-Survey and State Contact Person Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Program P.O. Box 176 Jefferson City

April, 1981

(314) 751-4096

Missouri 65102





insight, and half inclined toward manual skill and dexterity.

The kindergarten gifts, twenty in number, (as used in this country) are so arranged as to develop the knowledge of solids, surfaces and lines, and the practical ability to build, to draw pictures, to entwine and to weave.\*

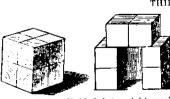
"Through the kindness of Mr. E. Steiger (24 Frankfort St., New York City) I am able to present here the following illustrations and descriptions of the several gifts.



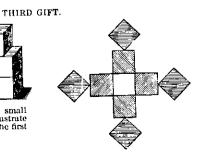
For the youngest children: Six soft Balls of various colors, Aim: to teach color (primary and secondary) and direction (right and left, up and down): to train the eye: to exercise the hands, arms and feet in various plays.



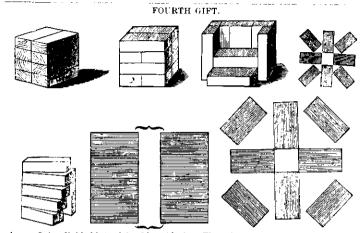
Sphere. Cube and Cylinder. Aim: to teach form: to direct the attention of the child to similarity and dissimilarity between objects. This is done by pointing out, explaining and counting the sides, corners and edges of the cube; by showing that the properties of the sphere, cylinder and cube are different on account of their difference of shape; by pointing out that the apparent form of the sphere is unchanged, from wherever viewed, but that the apparent forms of the cube and cylinder differ according to the point from which they are viewed.



Large Cube, divided into eight small cubes of equal size. Aim: to illustrate form and number; also to give the first relea of fractions.



From an examination of the "Gifts" it will be seen that the first six are used to familiarize the pupil with the various

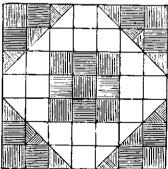


Large Cube, divided into eight oblong blocks. - The points of similarity and difference between this and the Third Gift should be indicated.

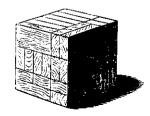
#### FIFTH GIFT.



FROEBEL'S THIRD BUILDING BOX. This is a continuation of, and complement to, the Third Gift. It consists of twenty-one whole, six half, and twelve quarter-cubes, forming altogether one large Cube.



SIXTH GIFT.



#### FROEBEL'S FOURTH BUILDING BOX.

This is a continuation of, and compliments to, the Fourth Gift. It consists of eight whole oblong blocks, three similar blocks divided lengthwise, and six breadthwise, forming altogether one large Cobe.

#### **Photo Log:**

Name of Property:	Des Peres School		
City or Vicinity:	St. Louis [Independent City]		
County: St. Louis	s [Independent City] State: MO		
Photographer:	Laura Aldenderfer (unless otherwise noted)		
Date Photographed:	Jul. 1980 (unless otherwise noted)		

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 6. E (principal) elevation of school building, facing W.
- 2 of 6. School building after 1897 addition, W and S elevations, facing NE.
- 3 of 6. S elevation of school building with modern addition, facing NW.
- 4 of 6. Illustration of Froebel's "Gifts". Photocopy from Board of Directors of St. Louis Public Schools, <u>22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report</u>, 1875-76, pp. 98-99.
- 5 of 6. Interior view of Ms. Blow's kindergarten, 1876.
- 6 of 6. E (principal) elevation of school building, 1876, facing SW.









