

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Multiple Property Documentation Form**

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

☒ New Submission ☐ Amended Submission

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**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

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**Public School Buildings of Washington, D. C., 1862-1960.**

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**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

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(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

**The Development of Public Education in the District of Columbia, 1804-1960.**

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**C. Form Prepared by**

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name/title: **Tanya Edwards Beauchamp / architectural historian (Incorporates in part "Public School Buildings of the District of Columbia, 1804-1930," prepared in 1988 by Antoinette E. Lee, historian for District of Columbia Public Schools)**

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state: **Virginia**

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**D. Certification**

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. ( ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature and title of certifying official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Public School Buildings of Washington, D. C., 1862-1960**

**District of Columbia**

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**Table of Contents for Written Narrative**

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

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**STATEMENT OF HISTORIC CONTEXT**

**INTRODUCTION**

The history of public education in the District of Columbia follows the course of the city's growth itself. When the first organization to oversee public education was set up in 1804, the city had become home to the federal government only four years earlier in 1800. The settlement was sparse and represented only a shadow of the city that it became a century later. As the city developed and confidence in its future became more certain, the school system reflected this new found security. By the early twentieth century the school system had become a significant institution in the life of the city. Its importance is reflected in the substantial buildings that were constructed over the comparatively short period of its development.

In reviewing the history of the school system throughout this period, two historical themes are evident. The most important is the separation of the races into separate schools, a practice that endured in the District until the Supreme Court of the United States outlawed separate educational facilities in 1954. The allocation of funds between the white and the black schools was a serious point of contention that affected the location, design, and funding for each group's schools. The first jurisdiction in the country to desegregate its schools, the D. C. Public Schools drew national attention and scrutiny. The policy of racial separation can be seen in the surviving schools, built as "colored schools." Many District residents recall their attendance at a racially segregated school. Former black schools are regarded today both as a source of pride and as a reminder of past injustices.

The second historical theme is the separation of the sexes. During the early phase of the system's development, schools were exclusively male or female. A limited form of separation of the sexes endured well into the 20th century. Its vestiges can be seen in separate boys' and girls' entrances in many school buildings.

The role of the United States Congress in the affairs of the District of Columbia set its school buildings apart from those in other urban centers where funding was provided by the localities. Frequently, the District of Columbia school system thought itself in a neglected position because Congress was more likely to respond to constituencies possessing the vote rather than to the residents of the District who were disenfranchised. In the mid-1860s for example, the city leaders appealed to the U. S. Congress for increased financial support for the public schools, citing the greater support accorded public education in new states and in the territories. The school system rose above these limitations and produced buildings that observers in other cities and other nations admired. The admiration was mutual. D. C. Public Schools

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administrators also participated in inspection tours in order to study schools in other cities, which inspired them to apply lessons learned to District schools.

The school construction program reflected the growth of the city's population. National emergencies caused upswings in population numbers, as did the natural growth of the federal bureaucracy in response to the nation's need for federal government services. In the early years of the city, small frame buildings and adapted structures served as the location for classes. During the Civil War, the city embarked upon an ambitious plan to erect modern school houses in each school district to create a system of free public schools in Washington which would be unsurpassed in the nation. Seven innovative, architecturally distinctive buildings designed by German-born architect Adolf Cluss were completed between 1864 and 1875.

Under the commission system of municipal government, the Engineer Commissioner and his staff in the Office of the Building Inspector designed dozens of eight to twelve room red brick schoolhouses close to population centers. When a school became overcrowded, the customary response was to construct a new school building on an adjacent lot or within a few blocks of the older school. In other instances, small annexes were appended to the original buildings. By the early twentieth century, the city's architects experimented with expansible school building designs. Many buildings were designed as a complete whole, but were constructed in sections as the population of the surrounding community expanded.

Aside from Congressional and national attention that the District's school buildings attracted, their location, design, construction, and maintenance were a concern of the communities in which they were located. Once an area in the District became settled and a sufficient number of children were present, the community's leaders organized to lobby the school board and the U. S. Congress for funds in order to construct a new school. This effort frequently was a protracted one, particularly for new black schools. Whereas the presence of a new white school was viewed as an enhancement to the real estate values in a community, the possible construction of a colored school in the same area was viewed as a threat to those values.

The surviving public schools constructed prior to 1960 represent only a portion of the total number of school buildings that were constructed during that period. Throughout the history of the school system, older schools were replaced by newer ones. Some schools were demolished when commercial functions overwhelmed the surrounding residential areas. Many of the District's older schools survived because, in the face of overcrowded conditions following the World Wars, every classroom was essential. It made little difference whether or not the classroom was in an old or a new building, except for their allocation among nearby communities

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or according to racial groups.

The surviving District school buildings bear silent testimony not only to national trends in educational theory and aesthetic tastes, but to local conditions that favored small school buildings located within blocks of one another and provided separate facilities for white and black children. This also was based on the neighborhood school policy where students walked to school, went home for lunch, and returned. There were no cafeterias or buses and few, if any, working mothers. These school buildings also reveal the efforts of citizens within a federal enclave to educate the next generation and to define the quality of life in their communities. World War II and desegregation brought about sweeping social changes and new educational approaches. Opportunities were opened up for African Americans and women of all races which changed life for everyone. Although the schools changed with the times, their focus continued to reflect the neighborhood concerns which characterized them from the beginning.

**EARLY YEARS OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, 1804-1862**

The initial legislation providing public schools for the federal city was passed on December 5, 1804.

Impressed with a sense of the inseparable connection between the education of youth and the prevalence of pure morals, with the duty of all communities to place within the reach of the poor as well as the rich the inestimable blessings of knowledge, and with the high necessity of establishing at the seat of the General Government proper seminaries of learning, the Councils do pass an act to establish and endow a permanent institution for the education of youth in the city of Washington.<sup>1</sup>

This legislation provided the legal basis for the development of a public education system that has endured to the present.

On the centennial of the founding of the District of Columbia public school system, President of the Board of Commissioners Henry B. F. MacFarland reported on the highlights of the events that implemented the 1804 legislation. The school's first board of trustees was headed by the President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson. The Board met in the Supreme Court room at the Capitol. Although the City Council provided only a meager budget of \$1,500, the Board's

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<sup>1</sup>“Enactments Relative to Schools,” *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of Public Schools*, 1846, p 28.

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objectives were ambitious. The members aspired to create a primary and secondary school system as well as a university program.<sup>2</sup> Jefferson's example of involvement in the District's public school system was followed by succeeding Presidents throughout the first half of the 19th century.

The initial intent of the public schools' governing body was to provide for the education of children whose parents were unable to pay tuition at private schools. Thus, the public schools were regarded as "charity schools." With the benefit of hindsight, the system was characterized as "defective, in educating only a portion of the youthful population, and at the same time fostering upon it the badge of poverty."<sup>3</sup> In the mid-1840s, a combined free and pay system was instituted for attendance at the public schools. However, because of the ill feelings caused by the knowledge of which pupils were free and which paid tuition, this system was replaced in 1848 by a system that was open freely to all white children in order of application. This system was described as "conducted essentially on the same principles as those in the larger towns of Massachusetts."<sup>4</sup>

Despite the high level of interest in the public schools, the system remained small and housed in makeshift quarters. As late as 1855, the school buildings were described as ill-adapted for educational purposes and deficient in space. Many of the schools were located in old market houses, fraternal halls, church basements, and other structures that had been constructed for commercial or residential functions. The environment within which teachers and pupils spent a major portion of their day was thought to cause "weariness, languor, headache, nervous irritability" and to promote the "development of pulmonary and other diseases."<sup>5</sup> The conditions of the school buildings were so inferior that the members of the board were mortified to show their schools to their counterparts from other cities.

The black schools developed in 1807 under the sponsorship of private citizens and religious groups. The schools were quartered in churches and in other buildings that had been built for

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<sup>2</sup> Henry B. F. MacFarland in "Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Public Schools in the District of Columbia," *Report of the Board of Education*, 1904-05, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> "Historical Sketch of the Public Schools of Washington," *Report of the Trustees of the Public Schools*, 1850, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the Trustees of the Public Schools*, 1855, p. 4.

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non-educational purposes. The development of black schools suffered a set-back between 1831 and 1835 in response to the Nat Turner uprising and the related "Snow Riots." The now fearful whites withdrew their support of black institutions. Relations between the whites and blacks was so bleak that, in 1835, "most of the colored schoolhouses were burned or demolished, textbooks, apparatus, and furniture destroyed."<sup>6</sup> Later, many of the black schools were revived and reinstated. In 1851, Myrtilla Minor established one of the city's first high schools for black women, located on the square bounded by 19th, 20th, N, and O Streets, N. W. In 1862, Congress provided for the creation of public schools for black students. Control over the schools was placed under a "Board of Trustees for Colored Schools for Washington and Georgetown." Oversight of the Board was delegated to the Department of the Interior. Despite Congressional actions, the funds provided for the schools were too limited to permit the establishment of a single school. In the absence of adequate funds from the public sector, the private sector continued to support black schools.

Following emancipation on January 1, 1863, new organizations in the District took up the cause of education of the black population. The National Freedman's Relief Association set up night schools to accommodate those who worked during the day. The Association also built school houses for day students. It was joined by other relief organizations, many of which originated in New England.

The Civil War brought disruption to the public schools. The federal government appropriated several of the buildings for hospital purposes, forcing the school system to seek out alternative spaces. Ironically, the new spaces were regarded as superior to those usurped for wartime use.<sup>7</sup> Even in a time of upheaval, the future of the school system appeared brighter than before the war. The city council levied a new tax of five cents on the hundred dollars, "to be set apart for the erection of school buildings."<sup>8</sup> These funds allowed the Trustees of the public schools to contemplate for the first time the construction of substantial school buildings.

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**A SENSE OF PERMANENCY, 1864-1874**

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<sup>6</sup> Winfield S. Montgomery, "Historical Sketch of Education for the Colored Race in the District of Columbia, 1807-1905," *Report of the Board of Education*, 1904-05, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> *Annual Report of the Trustees of Public Schools*, 1862, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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The post-Civil War era was marked by the construction of a distinctive group of major school buildings, unlike anything that had been built previously in Washington. This new physical presence was accompanied by the restructuring of the schools to create a graded system, high schools, and a normal school. The Superintendent presided over the system. During this period, the school system inaugurated the "Washington policy of relatively small buildings [for the lower grades] convenient to the school population, but tributary to ...large buildings."<sup>9</sup> The small size of the school building was the result of the modest and widely scattered population of the District of Columbia. When the population became more dense, the small elementary school had become entrenched in the sympathies of the local citizenry.

The completion of the Wallach School in 1864 signaled the "dawn of a new era" in the history of the school system. Located at Seventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, S. E., the Wallach School was designed by the firm of Cluss and Kammerhueber. Ten rectangular classrooms accommodated 600 pupils. A large hall was located on the third floor. The high ceilings, brick decoration, and disguised ductwork and plumbing made the building a novelty in the city. The Board of Trustees commended the architects for their care in preparing the plans and for their vigilant superintendence.<sup>10</sup>

During the dedication ceremony for the Wallach School, Mayor Richard Wallach, the school's namesake, lauded the "symmetrical and beautiful structure" that marked the "commencement of a new era of school-house architecture in our midst."<sup>11</sup> The appearance of the school was considered to have an educational function as well. As Dr. F. S. Walsh of the Sub-board of Trustees for the Third District noted, "it is our duty to educate the taste while imparting other instruction; and when we remember how many of our early tastes and impressions were formed in the school-house and surroundings, we cannot do wrong in having it as attractive as possible."<sup>12</sup>

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The success of the Wallach School was followed in 1869 with the completion of the Franklin

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<sup>9</sup> "Report of the Supervising Principals," *Report of the Board of Education*, 1904-05.

<sup>10</sup> *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools*, 1865, p.17

<sup>11</sup> "Dedication of the Wallach School Building," *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools*, 1865, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.



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School at Thirteenth and K Streets, N. W., opposite Franklin Square. Cluss and Kammerhueber designed it in pressed brick with Ohio sandstone, terra cotta, and iron trim. In 1871, Adolf Cluss designed the red brick Seaton School at Second and I Streets, N. W. for male students. At its dedication, J. Ormond Wilson, Superintendent of public schools, remarked that Seaton was evidence of the school system's determination to make its public schools "worthy of the Capital of the Great Republic."<sup>13</sup> Another notable school building of this period was the Jefferson School, also designed by Cluss, at Sixth and D Streets, S. W.

The Congressional provision for black students of 1862 was followed by additional legislation that provided for a fairer distribution of funds. The first public schoolhouse for black students was a frame structure built in 1865 at Second and C Street, S. E.<sup>14</sup> This modest beginning was followed by the construction of several substantial school buildings for black students. In 1867, the brick John F. Cook School was built at Fourth and O Streets, N. W. In the following year, the brick Stevens School was erected at Twenty-first and K Streets, N. W. The crowning glory of the black schools of this period was the Sumner School, constructed 1871-72, after designs prepared by Cluss. The Sumner School was fashioned of pressed brick and grey Ohio sandstone in the "spirit of a modernized Norman style."<sup>15</sup> Coincident with the construction of the Sumner School was the completion of the Lincoln School at Second and C Streets, S. E. And the Lovejoy School at Twelfth and D Streets, N. E.

In the county of Washington, small one-room and two-room frame buildings were constructed along major thoroughfares that cut through the rural landscape. These schools served the many freedmen who were employed on small trucking and dairy farms and who lived close to work. Typically, an acre or half-acre of land was sufficient for each school.

The black high school developed during this period. In 1870, a preparatory high school was created for advanced students in the various grammar schools. At first it was located in a church basement. Later, it was housed in existing schools. The first graduation of a black high school class was held at the Charles Sumner School in 1877.

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**TOWARD A MODERN SCHOOL SYSTEM, 1874-1900**

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<sup>13</sup> J. Ormond Wilson, "Introductory Remarks at the Dedication of the Seaton Public School Building," *Report of the Board of Trustees of the City of Washington*, 1871, p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> Winfield S. Montgomery, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>15</sup> *Annual Report of the Board of Public Schools*, 1965, p. 17.

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The year 1874 was an important one for the District and for the city's school system. In that year, the territorial form of government was abolished and replaced with a temporary board of commissioners. This board oversaw the phasing out of the old system and the development of a permanent system of municipal government. The Organic Act of June 11, 1878, provided for the city to be governed by three District Commissioners, one of which was the Engineer Commissioner, a member of the Army Corps of Engineers. The Engineer Commissioner was responsible for the construction of public works and public buildings in the District, including school buildings.

Also in 1874, the separate school systems were merged into a single entity, bringing together the four governing boards of the schools of Washington City, Georgetown, Washington County, and the black schools of Washington. The schools operated under a single board composed of both white and black members. However, the black schools continued to function under an independent black superintendent and the white schools under a white superintendent. Three years later, in 1878, Congress passed legislation making permanent the commission form of government. In the process, however, much of the authority of the school trustees was passed to the commissioners.

The pioneering achievements of the previous decade encouraged euphoric expectations for the future on the part of the school system's Board of Trustees. In its 1875-76 report, the Board reported that the District could

....boast a number of school buildings so convenient in location and so well adapted to their purpose in nearly all conceivable particulars, as to win the admiring commendation of judicious visitors familiar with the most renowned buildings of like nature. Some of the oldest and most refined European nations do not disdain to copy them. Ample acknowledgment of the superiority of these buildings was made during the Centennial year.<sup>16</sup>

The Board, however, reported that there were not enough of these admirable schools to meet the needs of the growing population.

The building program of the last quarter of the nineteenth century was not as publicized as that of

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the previous decade, although the District continued to seek out innovative designs for its schools. This search now was conducted under the auspices of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia and, more specifically, the Engineer Commissioner and his deputies. In 1879, the

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<sup>16</sup> *Report of the Board of Trustees of Public Schools in the District of Columbia, 1875-76*, p. 3.

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Commissioners advertised for designs for a public school house. The premium was awarded to P. J. Lauritzen, a Washington architect.<sup>17</sup>

By 1878 the position of Inspector of Buildings was created and placed under the supervision of the Engineer Commissioner. The title of the position was derived from the responsibility for developing and enforcing building regulations. The Building Inspector additionally supervised the design and construction of new municipal public buildings as well as repairs to existing ones. The consolidation of local public buildings under a single management entity provided for a consistent design procurement process. Throughout the 1880s and much of the 1890s, the Building Inspector and his staff prepared the designs and specifications for public school buildings in the District of Columbia. During the 1880s, architect John B. Brady designed many of the school buildings under the supervision of Building Inspector Thomas B. Entwistle.

The steps involved in obtaining a school building commenced with the acquisition of a site. This step often was a difficult one because of conflicting demands of residents in the community in which the school was to be located. Once the site was acquired, the Office of the Building Inspector prepared architectural plans and specifications and submitted them to the District Commissioners for approval. During this period, Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark was associated with municipal architecture as both a designer and as an inspector of designs. He frequently signed his name to the drawings, indicating that he either had designed the buildings or that the drawings had passed his inspection. Construction bids were solicited and the lowest bidder received the contract. The Building Inspector's staff supervised the construction of the building. When completed, the District Commissioners approved the name for the school.

Many of the school building designs produced by the Office of the Building Inspector during this period called for red brick and generally were designed in the Romanesque Revival style. In form and detail, they bespoke simplicity, efficiency, and durability. When completed, they blended in with the buildings of the surrounding community. The buildings were elaborated with picturesque elements, such as towers with conical roofs and finials. While some buildings were arranged with asymmetrical massing, most were designed with balanced massing, usually a central pavilion flanked by identical sections. They were embellished with brick pilasters and

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string courses, moulded brick and belt courses, pressed metal cornices, and terra cotta trim. Brick corbelling at the cornice and stone trim around the windows provided other avenues for varying the facade treatment. Successful designs were replicated and were used for both white

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<sup>17</sup> *Minutes, Exclusive of Orders and Letters, of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, July 1, 1878 to April 1, 1893*, p. 151.

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and black schools. The floor plan followed a fairly predictable pattern of four rooms with adjoining cloakrooms on each floor arranged around a central hallway and play areas in the basement.

The typical two-story, eight-room school buildings dotted the urban landscape of the District, providing for small facilities evenly placed every few blocks and serving a limited population of children. By the 1880s, the eight-room schoolhouse had become so entrenched in school building design that it was defended vigorously on many grounds. Its advantages included the efficiency of heating and ventilating and the economy of size in sections of the city where land was expensive. Its two staircases, one for boys and the other for girls, were located to facilitate escape in the event of fire or panic. Larger 12-room schools required heavier walls and more expensive heating apparatus. In 1889 the common red brick school building was described as a result of “years of study” in the field of schoolhouse architecture.

In 1881-82, the first high school building for white students, Washington High School, was constructed after designs by Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark. It was a large, three-story red brick building, but it provided limited space for athletics and social organizations. The white high school originated with a separate high school for girls, founded in 1876, and one for boys, founded in the following year. In the new school building, the two schools merged into Washington High School. In 1892-93, when adjunct high schools were created in order to meet the rising demand, Washington High School was renamed Central High School.

Some of the design elements of the typical red brick schoolhouse of the 1880s and 1890s were applied to the new M Street High School for black students designed in 1890 and completed in 1891. The exterior was elaborated with familiar elements, such as stone strips and corbelled brick at the cornice. However, the M Street High School building was designed on a scale that far exceeded the usual small elementary schools and featured Colonial Revival details and terra cotta trim in the gables.

The construction of the M Street High School building represented a significant advance from the makeshift accommodations previously provided black high school students. However, the building’s facilities paled by comparison with the Classical Revival style Western High School building (renamed the Ellington School of the Arts in 1974) completed in 1898 for white students in the western section of the city.

By the late 1890s, the familiar red brick school building came to characterize the building type in the city. Its unfashionable simplicity, once lauded for its excellence, was out-of-step with changing aesthetic standards. In 1897, the *Evening Star* voiced the opinion that the “great red

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brick boxes...are unattractive if not positively ugly” and were “mere boxes of brick without any pretensions to beauty.”<sup>18</sup> In response to this criticism, city and school officials sought ways to improve the quality of design.

Following the example of the federal government which opened a select number of federal government building projects to competition, the decision was made to invite private architects to prepare designs for school buildings under the supervision of the Office of the Building Inspector. The Hayes School at Fifth and K Streets, N. E., designed by Washington architect Charles E. Burden and completed in 1897, is one of the earliest buildings to be designed under this new system. Another early school building of this new system for design procurement was the William Benning Webb School, designed in 1899 by Glenn Brown and completed in 1901. While the exterior treatments of these schools were significantly different from those of previous school buildings, the plans were the same. Thus these early buildings designed by private architects can be regarded as transitional buildings, bridging two eras of school house design.

**PLANNING FOR THE TWENTIETH CENTURY PUBLIC SCHOOL--1900-1910**

The 20th century public school in the District of Columbia served a broader range of educational purposes than that of the previous century. The audience was more diverse, necessitating a separation of distinct groups of students into junior high schools. Programs were offered in Americanization, industrial education, and business education. Facilities were provided for dental and medical clinics, home gardening, and school banks. The diverse audience and educational programs affected the design of school buildings in the District of Columbia.

In 1900 the U. S. Congress enacted legislation that returned complete authority of the public schools to the Board of Education. The law also abolished a separate and independent superintendent of the black schools and placed both groups of schools under a single superintendent. One of the two assistant superintendents, under the superintendent, was in charge of white schools and the other of black schools. Thus, the autonomy enjoyed by the black school system was abridged.

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In 1900 the entire school system was divided into eleven divisions. Divisions 1 through 6 included white schools in the City of Washington. Representing the County of Washington, Divisions 7 and 8 included both black and white schools. Divisions 9 through 11 embraced

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<sup>18</sup> *Evening Star*, July 8, 1897.

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black schools in the City of Washington.

During the first decade of the 20th century, private architects frequently were hired to provide designs for public school buildings. The well-known firms and practitioners involved in this work included Marsh & Peter, Appleton P. Clark, Jr., Leon Dessez, Robert Stead, Waddy B. Wood, and Glenn Brown. As a group, the school buildings of this period differed from those designed by the Building Inspector because they exhibited a greater variety in styles and building materials.

The school buildings designed during this period reflected national advances in the technology of ventilation, heating, and lighting. No longer containing only classrooms, auditoria, and playrooms, high schools were now "temples of education" that included large gymnasia, swimming pools, lunchrooms, laboratories, and armories. Their design had become a science, involving consideration of the building plan, site, relationship to sun, entrances, cloakrooms, playgrounds, and sanitary facilities. Schools became an important building type discussed in architectural journals. During the first decade of the 20th century, palatial schools, featuring large gymnasia and auditoria, were constructed in New York City, St. Louis, and Chicago.

The "Organic Law of 1906" clarified authority for the District of Columbia Public Schools and addressed certain needs of the school system. The 1906 Act set out the responsibilities of the Board of Education, the District Commissioner, and the U. S. Congress and delegated executive authority to the Superintendent of Schools. Similar authority was delegated to the assistant superintendent of the black schools, under the direction of the superintendent. The act also provided for professional standards and salaries for teachers. An important provision of the 1906 Act was the appointment of a commission to study the buildings of the system. Composed of Superintendent of Schools William E. Chancellor, Supervising Architect of the Treasury James Knox Taylor, and Engineer Commissioner Jay J. Morrow, the Schoolhouse Commission made its report in 1908. The report covered recommendations for abandonment of old schools and the construction of new ones. Based on its inspection of schools in other cities ranging from New York City to Muskegon, Michigan, the Schoolhouse Commission suggested improvements to the interior layout for the new facilities.

In the area of new building design, the Schoolhouse Commission envisioned the consolidation of small facilities into much larger ones, typically four-to-eight room schools scattered around the

city replaced by larger 16-to-24 room schools similar to those found in New York City, St. Louis, and Philadelphia. In fact, the commission singled out the new school buildings in St. Louis, designed by school architect William B. Ittner, for praise as among the finest in the nation.

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However, District of Columbia residents rejected these recommendations because they would require children to travel longer distances to get to school. The reaction also may have been due to a desire to avoid the appearance of teeming masses of students at any single school. In addition, the continued increase in school enrollment precluded attempts to abandon all older buildings.

Aside from the size and distribution of buildings, the Schoolhouse Commission recommended the construction of additional small manual training schools similar to the B. B. French School and for each elementary and high school to be provided with playgrounds, assembly rooms, and gymnasias. In order to maintain a high quality of school facilities, the commission recommended that a school architect be appointed and that a schoolhouse commission be made permanent. By 1906 the divisions of the school system had been adjusted to include up to 15 schools arranged geographically. Division 1 through 9 were assigned to white schools, while Divisions 10 to 13 were assigned to the black schools. Later this classification would be simplified as Division 1 for white and Division 2 for black schools. The assignment of white and black schools to separate divisions continued up to the integration of the school system in 1954 when new jurisdictions were established.

In 1909 the U. S. Congress reorganized the Engineer Commissioner's building department. Under the supervision of the Engineer Commissioner, the position of Municipal Architect was created, the major responsibility of which was the preparation of plans for and the supervision of the construction of all municipal buildings. Under the Municipal Architect, six new assistants oversaw repairs and a new system of regular inspection for sanitary conditions and fire safety. The formation of the Municipal Architect's Office mirrored the creation of city architecture offices in other urban areas.

**PUBLIC SCHOOL DESIGN IN THE CITY BEAUTIFUL ERA**

At the inception of the Municipal Architect's Office, its first chief, Snowden Ashford, expressed uncertainty as to whether or not Congress intended that any of the design work for municipal buildings could be contracted to architects in private practice. As it turned out, private architects participated in the municipal design process according to the workload of the Municipal Architect's Office. When the construction program had been administered by the Building

Inspector's Office in the first decade of the century, about half of the work had been contracted out to private architects. In 1910, with the creation of the Commission of Fine Arts, the District Commissioners asked that the new review body pass on the designs for new public school

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buildings in the District as well as other municipal buildings.

During the following two decades, the design of public school buildings in the District of Columbia was dominated by the two Municipal Architects: Snowden Ashford who served until 1921 and his successor, Albert L. Harris, who served until his death in 1933. Born in 1866, Ashford had been engaged on major public building projects during the early years of his career. He was employed on federal government structures under Alfred B. Mullett, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, and under John L. Smithmeyer, co-architect of the Library of Congress building. In 1895, Ashford became Assistant Inspector of Buildings in the Office of the Building Inspector. In 1901 he succeeded John Brady to become Inspector of Buildings and, in 1909, was appointed Municipal Architect. Ashford's successor, Albert L. Harris, previously had worked for the Washington architectural firm of Hornblower & Marshall. During the 1920s he was allied with Washington architect Arthur B. Heaton on the design of new buildings for George Washington University.

The Municipal Architects were well-known figures in the city's architectural circles and they supervised a design staff. While private architects continued to be involved in the design work associated with public schools, their design preferences were subservient to those of the Municipal Architect. Snowden Ashford preferred the Gothic and Elizabethan styles for public school buildings, while Albert L. Harris preferred the Renaissance and Colonial Revival styles. The members of the Commission of Fine Arts was committed to the City Beautiful aesthetic of the McMillan Commission and hoped to use their influence to extend it to all public buildings in the city including schoolhouses. They opposed Ashford's use of the Elizabethan and Gothic styles, commenting in 1911--

In the opinion of the Commission the general aspect of the District of Columbia would be improved if some uniform style of school architecture could be adopted and adhered to...The adoption of a style for each class of public buildings would not in any way prevent originality in adapting a specific building to its particular needs; and, in Washington where the architecture is of so heterogeneous a nature, similarity in public buildings would add much to the impressiveness of the city.<sup>19</sup>

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Rejecting Ashford's Elizabethan design for Miner Normal School the Commission clarified their position--

We believe that we should follow the traditions established by the early architecture in

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from Col. Wm. W. Harts, Sec'y & Executive Officer, Commission of Fine Arts, to Cuno H. Rudolph, President, D. C. Commissioners, 15 Feb 1911.



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this capital, which adhered to classical traditions while exhibiting great freedom in adaptation to varying practical requirements, ranging from simple brick structures (such as the Octagon) to the White House itself. The architecture of today should be evolved from the architecture of those times, adhering to the same classical traditions, with equal freedom of expression in the practical solution of every problem.<sup>20</sup>

During this period, the design of buildings covered the range of Renaissance, Elizabethan, Collegiate Gothic, and Colonial-Revival styles popular in other building types. The Collegiate Gothic style, as exemplified by the 1916 Cardozo High School (formerly Central High School), the Dunbar High School (demolished), and the 1923 Eastern High School, was considered especially appropriate for the larger school building. The style was "scholastic" in character and provided a large amount of window surface and a relatively small proportion devoted to wall surface.<sup>21</sup> School buildings were constructed of brick of various hues, sometimes laid in a Flemish bond, with stone, terra cotta, and pebble dash trim. The floor plan for many of the elementary school buildings was similar to that of the late 19th century, made up of four classrooms with adjoining cloakrooms on each floor.

By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the 12-room elementary school had become more common--six rooms on each floor and an auditorium/gymnasium in the basement that also could be used by the community. In subsequent years, the auditorium/gymnasium was moved into the first floor level and appended to the rear of the school. In the District of Columbia, a concern for economy dictated the combined functions of this single room. In most elementary schools in other cities, separate assembly halls and gymnasias were provided.

The new plan provided for kindergarten classes and for increased flexibility in the allocation of classroom space. The floor plans reflected expanded functions for the public schools. Schools assisted students with developing skills useful in adult life, such as homemaking skills and military training, and thus provided special accommodations for these programs. School

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building design addressed the education of younger students and the use of school facilities by the general public. The siting of schools allowed for playground space outdoors to support vigorous physical exercise that complemented classroom instruction. By 1911, the Board of Education discussed the possibility of schools with from 16-20 rooms as a "proper size for a city

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 8 November 1916

<sup>21</sup> James O. Betelle, "Architectural Styles as Applied to School Buildings," *American School Board Journal*, Vol. 58, April 1919, p. 28.

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as large as this one.”

The formation of the Municipal Architect’s Office under Snowden Ashford’s leadership was not greeted with unanimous enthusiasm by the Board of Education. In 1910, an effort was made to create the position of “school architect,” independent of Ashford’s organization. Designs would be procured by the submission of competitive plans from three architects to the Superintendent of Schools. This proposal was never adopted.

During the early 20th century, the black school facilities improved, but remained in highly segregated locations and reflected the location of much of the black population. The proposed site of the new Dunbar High School on the Howard University grounds or on First Street provoked protests from black residents who viewed the Howard site as too far from the center of the black residential areas. As the black and white population shifted throughout the city, black schools were converted into white schools.

**MEETING THE POST-WAR SCHOOL CRISIS--1919-1930**

World War I drew the attention of the city and building industry away from civilian construction projects at the same time that it caused a large increase in the city’s population. The consequent greater number of school-age children and the slowdown of the school construction program resulted in greatly overcrowded facilities.

After the war, the school construction program accelerated rapidly, producing a workload of crisis proportions. In order to facilitate the work, several private architectural firms were contracted with in 1921 to design elementary schools. The Municipal Architect’s office took on the task of designing new junior high schools. The American Institute of Architects praised Municipal Architect Albert L. Harris for his plans for Washington’s public school buildings and for his willingness to parcel out a portion of his work to private architects.

While Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford preferred the Elizabethan and Collegiate Gothic styles for school buildings, Harris favored the Colonial Revival style and worked closely with the Commission of Fine Arts. The style was popular for school buildings around the country,

particularly those on the East Coast with English-colonial traditions. Some architects were partial to the style because they believed that it held an irresistible charm and possessed an eternal rather than a momentary quality. The style was thought to command the attention of laymen on whose support the maintenance of the school depended. It also bespoke a domestic

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character that made school as comfortable as the home.<sup>22</sup>

Experiments with extensible structures marked private school building design in the District in the 1920's. The increasing city population required new school buildings, but not necessarily the largest accommodations immediately. Extensible buildings were designed as a complete composition, but were built in sections as funds became available and the surround school population demanded additional space. The extensible building addressed the problem occasioned by additions appended to earlier school buildings. In previous periods, separate buildings were constructed adjacent to older buildings, such as the Langston-Slater complex, or new additions were designed in an identical style as the original building (Harris, Wheatley, and Petworth). In other instances, compatible but not identical additions were appended to the original building (Brookland).

An example of an extensible building, the Smothers School, initially consisted of one wing. When it was expanded, a central pavilion and equally balanced second wing were added. Another example is the Key School. When first built, Key was only one story high. When an addition to Key was built, a second story was constructed. Some expansible schools were never completed. Powell and Oyster schools consist of one wing and central pavilion; the second wing on the other side of the central pavilion never was built.

The extensible buildings of the 1920's fall into three groups; the Renaissance-style rectangular block (Smothers, Kingsman, Cook), the Colonial Revival style rectangular block (Janney, Barnard), and the U-shaped courtyard (Murch). The plan for the Renaissance and the Colonial Revival styles usually called for a 16-room school with a gymnasium and assembly hall arranged in the shape of a T. The gymnasium/auditorium was located in the stem. A central portion contained the main entrance, library, teachers' room, principal's office, and first aid rooms was flanked by two wings of eight classrooms each. The alternative U-shaped courtyard plan provided for the central portion and gymnasium/auditorium at the bottom and classroom wings on either side. Even though this plan required a larger land area, the advantages of this plan included the provision of an elementary school of no more than two stories.

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By the early 1920s, members of Congress involved with the public schools urged that larger school buildings be constructed in order to replace the small schoolhouses scattered around the city. The multi-million dollar Five-Year Building Program was formulated in the mid-1920's to

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<sup>22</sup> Ernest Sibley, "Why I Prefer the Colonial Style," *School Board Journal*, Vol. 66, January 1923, p. 66.

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provide funds and a schedule for a multi-building construction program. The purpose of the program was to "provide in the District of Columbia a program of schoolhouse construction which shall exemplify the best in schoolhouse planning, schoolhouse construction, and education accommodations."

Through the Five-Year Building Program, these new schools replaced part-time and oversized classes, rented structures, portables, and other undesirable facilities that had accumulated since the war. These new school buildings were constructed in areas of the District undergoing development in the 1920's. As part of the program, Municipal Architect Harris abandoned permanently the eight-room, pin-wheel type of building. The typical school building contained 16 to 20 classrooms.

**PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

The Great Depression interrupted the Five-Year Building Program. Funds to complete projects already underway or to initiate new projects were not readily available. At the same time the New Deal programs of the Roosevelt Administration brought large numbers of workers to the District, greatly increasing the school population and the urgent need for new schools. Construction of Taft Junior High School, designed by Harris in 1929, was delayed until 1932 when split funding was appropriated only to begin the project. The funds necessary to complete the school were not appropriated until the following year. Although the contract for construction of Stoddert Elementary School was awarded and construction begun in 1931, the contractor was forced by financial difficulties to stop work at 58% completion the following year. Work was then completed by the bonding company. In spite of these problems 27 new schools were completed during the 1930s.

Albert L. Harris died in February of 1933. The Commission of Fine Arts noted in its report to Congress the following year that by working with this very able architect it had had the opportunity to establish consistently high standards for the design of municipal buildings in the District of Columbia, including schoolhouses, fire and police stations, and gasoline service stations.

The so-called Georgian style is flexible in its uses and gives the maximum of light and air. At the same time it is consonant with the architectural style used almost invariably during colonial days and even down to the 1860s in Maryland and Virginia. As a result of this decision the District buildings are simple, commodious, and of good proportion.

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So satisfactory is this type of architecture that it is being used throughout the country around Washington for schoolhouses, churches, banks, and residences. Appropriateness, dignity, simplicity, and permanence have thus been gained. Differences in use has given sufficient individuality to the structures.<sup>23</sup>

The work of the Office of the Municipal Architect was at first carried on after Harris' death by a group of consultant architects who had been involved in the earlier designs. In 1934 Nathan C. Wyeth (1870-1963), one of this group, succeeded Harris as municipal architect. Wyeth had studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris (1890-1899). He began a distinguished career which included both public and private practice in 1899 as a designer in the Washington office of Carrère and Hastings. Here he worked on the designs for the 'old' Senate and House Office Buildings. In 1900 he joined the Office of the Supervising Architect in the Treasury Department and in 1904-05 was chief designer for the Architect of the Capitol where he again worked on the designs of the Senate and House office buildings. In 1905 he entered private practice here, working until 1908 in association with architect William Paul Cresson. His work included many prestigious private homes, the Battleship Maine Monument in Arlington Cemetery, the Tidal Basin Bridge, Key Bridge, the Old Emergency Hospital, and Columbia Hospital. During World War I he entered military service, designing hospitals for the Office of the Surgeon General. Health problems resulting from his war service forced him to stop working. After recovering his health he again entered private practice (1924-34), this time with architect Francis P. Sullivan. He served as municipal architect from 1934 until his retirement in 1946.<sup>24</sup>

Wyeth's school buildings included Coolidge (1934-37) and Wilson (1932-35) High Schools, Banneker (1939) and Jefferson (1939-40) Junior High Schools and Lafayette (1931, addition 1938) and Patterson (1945) Elementary Schools. As Municipal Architect, Wyeth designed the Municipal Building, Municipal Court, Police Court, Juvenile Court, Recorder of Deeds Building, the District of Columbia Armory, and a number of fire houses. He continued the close association with the Commission of Fine Arts that Harris had begun. His designs for schools favored the Colonial Revival style. His fine sense of proportion, massing, and siting evidenced his Beaux Arts training, although detail and vocabulary were streamlined in deference to

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municipal budget constraints, changing times and the influence of Moderne aesthetics.

Theodore Roosevelt (1932), Anacostia (1935), Woodrow Wilson (1935), and Calvin Coolidge (1940) high schools were built during this period. Roosevelt, designed by Harris, replaced the

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<sup>23</sup> Report of the Commission of Fine Arts, July 1, 1929, to December 31, 1934, pp. 79-80.

<sup>24</sup> Commission of Fine Arts, Sixteenth Street Architecture, Vol. 2, 1988, pp. 182-6.

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old Business High School. All were constructed for white students. Seven junior high schools, including Paul (1930), Deal (1931), Eliot (1931), Browne (1932), Taft (1933), Banneker (1939), and Jefferson (1940), were completed. Only Browne and Banneker were for black students. Sixteen junior high school additions were completed. The George-Deen Act of 1936 appropriated funds nationally for vocational education including instruction in trades and industries, home economics, agriculture, teacher-training and distributive education. Intended to relieve Depression-related unemployment, vocational schools were raised to the level of junior high schools and then, during World War II, to vocational high schools. Phelps Vocational School was built in 1934; Burdick (Dennison) and Chamberlain, in 1939. Only Phelps was for black students.

All of these schools were designed in the Colonial Revival style established by Harris and approved by the Commission of Fine Arts. Gradually stylistic refinement fell to economic constraint at the insistence of Congress. Friction grew between the Commission and Congress over the expense of erecting cupolas on schoolhouses and that of adapting each school design to the unique variety of site requirements presented by differences in grade, street alignment, and other factors. After Congress demanded that the approved cupola design for Wilson High School be eliminated, the Commission commented that "buildings may be designed without cupolas; but arbitrarily to strike a cupola off approved plans is detrimental to the architectural effect and a constant affront to those citizens who have to live near a mutilated building."<sup>25</sup> When finally constructed in 1935, a clock tower had replaced the cupola of the approved design.

Overcrowding continued to be a problem throughout the 1930s. As had happened during World War I, older buildings which had been slated for demolition were kept in service to meet the escalating need for classrooms. Portable buildings and swing shifts remained an unfortunate aspect of the District of Columbia Public Schools experience. The Schoolhouse Replacement Act of 1939 authorized replacement of 34 old 8-room schools with 14 large new elementary schools. The advent of World War II in 1941 halted this project, leaving many of the earlier problems unresolved. Eliot Junior High School, completed in 1931, received its first addition in 1935. Portable classrooms placed on the site in that year were still in place when World War II began. Kramer Junior High School was under construction when the war began in 1941.

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Although urgently needed, occupancy was delayed as possible use of the school to house a government agency was debated. Finally, in 1943, the War Production Board ruled that the new building could be used as a school. Priorities of the war effort were evident in the omission of metal tips for chairs and showers. Kramer was over-crowded and on swing shifts from the very

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

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beginning. This situation was not relieved until 1948. Construction of the Davis Elementary School was halted in 1942 due to the war. It was resumed in 1944 and completed in 1946. The first wartime project to be completed, Davis was a modern building with large bright classrooms, air-cooling systems, an indoor playground, and a green-tiled corridor. An eight-room addition, including an auditorium and gymnasium, was added in 1948.

Davis and Patterson were similar in plan to Albert Harris' 1928 prototypical extensible Langdon Elementary School. It could be built as a single one or two story rectangular building and expanded with a second story, an addition reflecting the original wing and a connector with central entrance and assembly room beyond and was repeated many times before the onset of war halted school construction. The Adelaide Davis School, begun in 1944 and completed in 1946 followed this plan, but its Moderne style with glass block corner windows, streamlined detail, flat roof and exposed architectural concrete adapted from John Earley designs were new. The Patterson School, with similar facade design, went further, violating the established two-story-only standard for elementary schools.

Although the system of school governance established by the Organic Act of 1906 remained in force for sixty years, it received constant criticism. Conflicts between the Congress, the Commissioners, the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and the citizens of the District of Columbia persisted throughout this period. The need for an autonomous school system responsive to the educational goals of the community was balanced against the need for a fiscally responsible, centralized administration of city services. Congressional interference was often politically motivated and was particularly difficult to accept. In the years from 1926 to 1936 support for an elected school board grew. The Federation of Citizens' Association was among those groups lobbying for an elected Board.<sup>26</sup>

The Prettyman bill of 1935 and the Blanton Amendment of 1936 proposed placing control of the Board completely in the hands of the Commissioners. African Americans, under the leadership of board member Charles Houston, strongly opposed this plan. Houston, dean of the Howard University Law School and mentor of the coming generation of civil rights lawyers, argued that

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the Commissioners would not give African Americans the same consideration to which they were accustomed under the existing system with proportionate representation on the Board of Education.

There is not a single colored citizen in a position of major responsibility under the direct

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<sup>26</sup> Steven J. Diner, *The Governance of Education in the District of Columbia: An Historical Analysis of Current Issues*, 1982.

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control of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia....Personally I am opposed to segregation because a minority group never has full equality of opportunity under a segregated system. But our Washington school system as now set up represents the nearest approach to equality of opportunity which this Country has seen and serves as a model for segregated systems the country over.<sup>27</sup>

In 1938 Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Advisory Commission on Education issued a report which criticized Congressional control and recommended that an elected Board be established. In the absence of Home Rule, this recommendation could not be implemented. On June 25, 1941 Roosevelt, under threat of a nationwide March on Washington organized by the NAACP and others, signed an Executive Order on Fair Employment Practices eliminating discrimination in all federal offices, agencies, and plants with federal contracts. An adroit politician, Superintendent Frank Ballou capably managed the schools during the stormy period (1922-1943) in which he held office. He was succeeded by his assistant, Robert L. Haycock, who retired in 1946. During World War II all factions united behind the war effort, ending their controversies for the duration.

**POST-WAR MODERNISM**

The population of Washington, D. C. increased from 663,000 in 1940 to 938,000 in 1945. Little had been done during the war to ease the inevitable overcrowding of schools. As had been the case during and after World War I, split sessions and temporary classrooms furnished stop-gap solutions as long-needed renovation and new construction were deferred. As the war neared its end, construction of schools to accommodate demographic changes became an urgent priority. The Office of the Municipal Architect responded to the crisis with a series of elementary schools which combined the Moderne vocabulary of the transitional Davis and Patterson Schools with a new plan based upon the functional aesthetics of the International School. Harris' 1928 prototypical extensible Colonial Revival design for the Langdon Elementary School had been

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repeated many times before the onset of war halted school construction. It was much admired by the community, the Board of Education and the Commission of Fine Arts. The Adelaide Davis School, begun in 1944 and completed in 1946, followed this plan but its moderne style with glass block corner windows, streamlined detail, flat roof and exposed architectural concrete adapted from John Earley designs were new. The Patterson School, with similar facade design, went further, violating the established 2-story-only standard for elementary schools.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23-4.



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In 1945 Wyeth completed drawings for the Neval H. Thomas, Anita J. Turner, and Lucy D. Slowe schools. Drawings for the George H. Richardson School were completed in early 1946. The Thomas and Turner Schools were completed and occupied in 1946; the Richardson and Slowe Schools, in 1948. These schools represented a further break from the pre-war Colonial Revival designs. Beaux-Arts symmetry was abandoned in favor of form-follows-function aesthetics with massing of geometrical elements expressing stairtowers, classrooms and assembly rooms on the exterior. The Moderne vocabulary of the Davis and Patterson Schools was retained and developed. Siting was parallel rather than perpendicular to the street, with only a narrow planting strip separating the building from the street. The original entrance, functional rather than ceremonial, would now remain in place with additions made at either end of the original building. This had the advantage of maximizing playground space and allowing the building to accommodate itself to the natural grade changes of the site. These school buildings were now all three stories high. Changes in footprint and siting in part reflected the Act of 1942 which created a Board of Recreation and provided for joint use of school buildings, grounds and recreation areas by the Board of Recreation and the Board of Education.

In October, 1941, the Commission of Fine Arts had approved Wyeth's "conservative modern" design for Kelly Miller Junior High School. Developed from a 1936 plan, the facades were formal in concept but developed with a modern vocabulary similar to that he would use the new elementary schools. This transitional design included a monumental central entrance leading directly into an auditorium which could be used for public functions. Classrooms were at either side, grouped around central open courts, and boys' and girls' gyms were located at the rear. The building was sited close to the street, maximizing open space for athletics at the rear. The function of each interior space was expressed volumetrically on the exterior of the building, massed to create design interest. Classroom bays were framed in architectural concrete, although individual windows were still separated by spandrel panels suggesting the treatment of fenestration in Colonial Revival design. Construction of Kelly Miller was delayed by the war, and only completed in 1949.

The complex and sophisticated design for the John Philip Sousa Junior High School, approved by the Commission of Fine Arts in 1946, followed the direction of the elementary schools with

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Moderne vocabulary and massing of volumetric elements expressing function. Classrooms are expressed on the exterior with single bays uninterrupted with spandrel panels and are included in a single L-shaped classroom block separated from auditorium and gym by the main entrance. Constructed along Ely Place and 37th Street, opposite the Fort Dupont park, the design allowed a large area for athletic fields in the rear. Since the site was considerably lower than the surrounding neighborhood, the scale of the 42-room building was greatly reduced, complementing the park setting. Construction of Sousa was completed in 1950.

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A new prototypical design for junior high schools, developed as the war ended, featured long classroom blocks on either side of a central entrance tower. The design included strip windows defining classroom bays and its vocabulary lacked any reference to the earlier Colonial Revival schools. The Board of Education responded in dismay to the new designs, criticizing what they saw as "warehouse" character. Board member Melvin Sharpe commented that the designs would leave children with "no memory of anything except a tunnel" and urged a return to the Georgian style suitable to a Southern city. Wyeth responded that the plain but realistic designs reflected post-war building costs and material shortages. He commented diplomatically in March, 1946, "We don't want to stick to these buildings forever, but can go along for a while until we can afford it." He pointed out that he designed many Colonial and early American style schools before the war.<sup>28</sup>

On August 21, 1946, Merrel Abraham Coe (1896-1965) was appointed Municipal Architect to succeed Wyeth. Coe's architectural career had been almost entirely in the Office of the Municipal Architect, working under both Harris and Wyeth. Beginning his work there in 1923, he was appointed as Chief of the Architectural Division in 1930. A veteran of World War I, he volunteered in 1943 for service in the Civil Engineer Corps of the Navy. Stationed at Pearl Harbor, he worked rebuilding airfields and docks. Lt. Commander Coe returned to civilian life and his old job in the Office of the Municipal Architect in October 1945. Coe was a twentieth century man who had originally hoped to be an engineer. A native of Lincoln, Nebraska, and career civil servant, he did not attend the École des Beaux-Arts and had no nostalgia for Georgian or Colonial Revival historicism. He admired Paul P. Cret, architect of the Folger library and the Federal Reserve building, and is credited with moving school design toward a more functional, modern style. Designs for Montgomery, Walker-Jones, Stanton, Birney, and Nalle elementary schools, reviewed and approved by the Commission of Fine Arts in November 1946 are designed in the modern neo-classical style Coe preferred--the style in which the federal buildings of the period were designed.

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**CRISIS IN THE DUAL SCHOOL SYSTEM**

1946 was also the year in which Robert L. Haycock, Frank Ballou's long-time assistant, resigned as Superintendent. Hobart M. Corning was appointed Superintendent in his place. He served twelve years, succeeded by Carl F. Hansen in 1958. In addition to the political problems engendered by Congressional control of the schools and inevitable conflict between the Commissioners, the Board of Education and the Superintendent faced by their predecessors, Corning and Hansen served in a period of sweeping political and social change. Segregation in

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<sup>28</sup> *Evening Star*, 3/28/46.

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the schools--white schools were now grouped in Division 1 and black schools in Division 2--was finally recognized as inextricably linked with racial discrimination in employment, housing, and other areas of Washington life. The struggle for equal funding of African American schools was abandoned in favor of the total end of the dual system as Washington became a majority African American city and the national civil rights movement gained in power.

Many of the newcomers during World War II were African American and in the segregated school system, the hardships caused by the wartime halt in school construction were now disproportionately borne by their children. African Americans represented 38% of the total school population in 1941, rising to 42% in 1945. While white families increasingly chose the suburbs to raise their families in the post-war years, African Americans were limited by voluntary adherence to racially restrictive covenants and other discriminatory practices in their choice of housing. They remained in the city in the crescent-shaped area stretching on the outskirts of the downtown commercial area from the Navy Yard to Rock Creek<sup>29</sup>. The problem was exacerbated by re-location of large populations east of the Anacostia River during post-war downtown urban renewal projects. Narrow employment opportunities also contributed to the situation. The proportion of African American students in D. C. public schools rose, and by 1950 represented a majority. African American schools, always underfunded, were overcrowded while white schools were underutilized.

Construction of schools for African American students became a priority and included the majority of new schools and additions to schools built after the war. Thomas, Turner, Richardson, Slowe, Montgomery, Birney, Nalle, Walker/Jones, and River Terrace Elementary Schools fell into this group, as did Miller, Sousa, Douglass, and Terrell Junior High Schools. Spingarn Senior High School, the first new senior high school for African Americans in thirty-six years, opened in 1952. The Board of Education further attempted to remedy the situation by

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shifting school populations and finally by reassigning formerly white schools to blacks. In 1950 Central High School, once the flagship of the white schools, became the home of overcrowded, poorly equipped black Cardozo High School in the most controversial example of this policy. In their report for the 1952-53 school year the Board of Education noted that the white school population had increased by 62 while the black school population had increased by 4,116 pupils. Their remedies included the opening of Terrell, Douglas, and Spingarn and the completion of additions to Francis and Browne Junior High Schools and the Turner, Payne, and Richardson Elementary Schools. The Perry Elementary School had been opened in the old Terrell Junior

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<sup>29</sup> Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967, p. 284.

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High School building, and the Fairbrother School had been transferred to Division 2. Noyes and Bryan Elementary Schools were to be transferred to Division 2 in the fall. Teaching positions also were transferred from Division 1 to Division 2 in an attempt to meet the crisis of the failed dual school system.

**SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN A MAJORITY AFRICAN AMERICAN CITY**

The first direct assault on the District's segregated school system came in the fall of 1947 with *Carr versus Corning*, a suit brought against Superintendent Corning by the parents of Marguerite Carr, a student who had sought transfer from critically overcrowded Browne Junior High School in Division 2 to underutilized Eliot Junior High in Division 1 nearer her home. A second similar suit was filed by the Browne P.T.A. shortly thereafter, maintaining the unconstitutionality of the dual school system. When space for Browne students was found in an abandoned building, the court found the plaintiff's case was satisfied. Upon appeal in 1950, a dissenting opinion by Judge Henry Edgerton found--

Independent of objective differences between white and colored schooling, school segregation means discrimination against Negroes for two distinct reasons. (1) By preventing a dominant majority and a depressed minority from learning each other's ways, school segregation inflicts a greater economic and social handicap on the minority than on the majority. It aggravates the disadvantages of Negroes and helps to preserve their subordinate status. (2) School segregation is humiliating to Negroes....Both whites and Negroes know that enforced segregation in schools exists because the people who impose it consider colored children unfit to associate with white children.<sup>30</sup>

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In addition, the Consolidated Parents Group, founded by barber Gardner Bishop, entered upon a campaign of activist demonstration and boycott on behalf of all Browne students. Bishop allied himself with civil rights leader Charles Houston and, after Houston's death, with Howard University Law Professor James Madison Nabrit, Jr. Under Nabrit's leadership the group sought an end to segregation in the schools on the basis of Fifth Amendment protection of the right to due process in cases of unreasonable restriction of individual rights. On September 11, 1950, Bishop led a group of eleven students from inadequate facilities at forty-eight year old Shaw Junior High in Division 2 to newly completed Sousa Junior High in Division 1. When refused

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<sup>30</sup> Carr v Corning and Browne Jr. High School PTA v Magdeburger, 14 Feb 1950, 86 U. S. App. D. C., 173, 191-92.

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admission, the parents of one of these students, Spottswood Thomas Bolling, Jr., sued the Board of Education. Bolling *versus* Sharpe defended Bolling's right to attend white Eastern Senior High School in his own neighborhood rather than distant Spingarn Senior High School where he was assigned. When the court upheld the Board's segregation policy, the case was appealed, and while awaiting appeal, the Supreme Court agreed in October 1952 to hear arguments for Bolling *versus* Sharpe together with other school desegregation cases.

On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the Supreme Court's decision on these suits. Collectively known by the name of the first suit--*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*--the cases directly challenged the legitimacy of racial segregation in public education. In its celebrated ruling, the Court held that segregated schools were, by their very nature, unequal. Because segregated school systems prevented black children from gaining equal access to education, their continued existence was contrary to the Fourteenth Amendment, which provided all American citizens with equal protection under the law. The Court ruled separately on *Bolling versus Sharpe*, arguing again that racially segregated schools were contrary to the Constitution. But because the Fourteenth Amendment applied only to the states, the citizens of Washington were not guaranteed equal protection under the law. Instead, Warren held that the Fifth Amendment, which ensured due process of law for all citizens, made Eastern High's refusal to admit Bolling a violation of his constitutional rights. The Court's separate treatment of the Bolling case highlighted Washington's unique political and social character in the 1950s. Capital of the world's largest democracy, the District lacked a popularly elected government. Home of some of the nation's most affluent and powerful white families, Washington was historically also an important destination for black emigrants from the South, most of them poor people in search of a better life. The *Bolling* decision brought these contradictions to a head. As the nation's capital, Washington could not disobey the Supreme Court's will, and the leaders of the District quickly moved to dismantle the segregated schools.<sup>31</sup>

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Anticipating the Supreme Court's May 1954 decision ending segregation in public schools, Superintendent Corning held a series of 6 intercultural education conferences for school personnel and the general public. Eight days after the Court's decision Corning mapped out a plan for integration of the schools--

1. Appointments, transfers, preferments, promotions, ratings, or any other matters respecting the officers and employees of the Board shall be predicated solely upon merit and not upon race or color.

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<sup>31</sup>Gavin Taylor, "Public High Schools in Washington, D. C.: A Historical Bibliography, 1930-1960," DC Public Schools Survey, Phase II (L/A #C9829G), DC DCSHPO/Historical Society of Washington, D. C., 1998, p.1.

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2. No pupil of the public schools shall be discriminated against in any matter or in any manner respecting his or her relationship to the schools of the District of Columbia by reason of race or color.
3. Attendance of pupils residing within school boundaries, hereafter to be established, shall not be permitted at schools located beyond such boundaries, except for the most necessitous reasons or for the public convenience, and in no event for reasons related to the racial character of the school within the boundaries in which the pupil resides.
4. The Board believes that no record should be kept or maintained in respect to any pupil not enrolled in a public school on or prior to June 17, 1954, or in respect to any officer or employee not employed within the system on or prior to that date in which information is solicited or recorded relating to the color race of any such person.
5. That the maximum efficient use shall be made of all physical facilities without regard to race or color.<sup>32</sup>

The city was re-zoned and new integrated boundaries for each school level submitted to the Board of Education by July 1. Pupils from fourteen formerly black elementary schools were transferred to thirteen formerly white elementary schools. Pupils from five formerly black junior high schools were transferred to three formerly white junior high schools. An optional plan allowed pupils to remain where they were, if conditions permitted, to avoid interruption of their education. Lists of eligible teachers were merged and assigned where needed without regard to race. The difficult task of integrating the administrative and supervisory structure of the schools with dual philosophies, methods of control, teaching practices, pupil achievement measurement, and record-keeping was begun. Planning was begun for merging the Wilson Teachers College with the Miner Teachers College. In the fall of 1954 the dual segregated system was transformed into a single integrated system. The Commissioners reported to Congress that the transformation

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--the first in the country following the Supreme Court decision-- proceeded smoothly. Because Washington was both the nation's capital and the first city to desegregate its schools, it became a focus of national attention. Southern Congressmen who opposed the integration of school districts in their home states eagerly sought to prove that desegregation in Washington was a failure. In 1956, the House District Committee launched a five-month probe into the effects of desegregation on Washington's schools. Given that an avowed segregationist from Georgia led the investigation, it hardly came as a surprise that the subcommittee discovered a rise in juvenile delinquency and a drop in student achievement. The report earned sharp rebuttals from Assistant Superintendent of Schools Carl Hansen, who called the desegregation in the District a "model of

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<sup>32</sup> *Report of the Government of the District of Columbia for the Year Ended June 30, 1954.* Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1955, p. 31.

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social adjustment,” and from Knox Ellis, a professor at Howard University, who argued that integration was an example of democracy in action.<sup>33</sup>

The change-over was difficult for the first black students integrating white schools. Members of the first integrated class to graduate from formerly all-white Anacostia High School, interviewed in an oral history project as part of the contextual research supporting this nomination, reported discrimination by white students, teachers, and administrators and a complete lack of cross-cultural awareness. Black history, an important part of the curriculum in black schools, was not taught. They had no black teachers and no useful career or college counseling. Black students were handicapped in science classes because they had not had access to the same lab equipment at Douglass that their white classmates had had at Kramer. Gerald Boyd, a member of this first class, reported being forced to shave a mustache he had had since age thirteen for yearbook pictures since none of the white boys had facial hair. He was told he would not graduate unless he shaved. Writer/artist Diane Dale, Boyd’s classmate, commented that although the schools were desegregated in 1954 they were not integrated. Desegregation was a physical condition while integration was psychological.<sup>34</sup> Both Boyd and Dale attended traditionally black colleges, distinguishing themselves academically and earning advanced degrees. Both say they did not realize how much they missed in extra-curricular activities and friendships until they were in college and desegregation was no longer an issue. However, both affirm that their experience at Anacostia, while difficult, enriched their lives by opening new perspectives. John Davis, a white student in the first integrated class at Sousa, recalled three African American students in his classes, including the future first black astronaut, Fred Gregory. Davis envied Gregory’s

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scientific accomplishments at Sousa. It should be remembered that the science laboratory at Shaw included only a goldfish and a Bunsen burner in 1950 when the Shaw students had unsuccessfully sought entry to state-of-the-art Sousa.<sup>35</sup>

Black schools, with the reputation of being the best such schools in the country, had realistically prepared their students for survival and achievement in the segregated white-dominated world in which they would live. Their teachers lived in the neighborhoods and took a nurturing interest in

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<sup>33</sup> Gavin Taylor, “Public High Schools in Washington, D. C.: A Historical Bibliography, 1930-1960,” DC Public Schools Survey, Phase II (L/A #C9829G), DC DCSHPO/Historical Society of Washington, D. C., 1998, p.5.

<sup>34</sup> Diane Dale & Gerald Boyd. Oral History Interview by Karen Washburn, 09-28-98. D. C. Public Schools Survey, Phase II. DCSHPO/NPS HPF.

<sup>35</sup> John Davis. Oral History Interview by Karen Washburn, 04-13-99. D. C. Public Schools Survey, Phase II. DCSHPO/NPS HPF.

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their students in and out of school--especially the brightest students like Boyd and Dale. There was close interaction between parents and teachers. This support was lost in desegregation. Dale reports that her mother, although herself once a teacher, had little or no contact with the school. Other immediate losses in desegregation included overall white domination of administrative and supervisory positions, and reduction of the nationally prestigious Dunbar High School to the status of an ordinary neighborhood school. Pleas to continue Dunbar as a city-wide college preparatory school were denied in the interest of maintaining a position of equal treatment for both races.

In the second year of integration the Board acknowledged the problems caused by the abrupt merging of the two school systems and reported to Congress that some progress was being made toward adjustment by both students and teachers. Overcrowding and teacher shortages had worsened, however. The school population had increased by an additional 2,143 pupils and redistricting for maximum use of existing facilities had not been entirely successful. The desirability of the small neighborhood school was deeply ingrained in both white and black populations. Unfortunately, this standard could not easily be maintained after desegregation. The most over-crowded schools were in black neighborhoods; the most underutilized, in white neighborhoods. Congress funded new teaching positions and the Hart Junior High School, the Moten Elementary School, and additions to the Patterson and Draper Elementary Schools relieved the situation somewhat. In addition, seven demountable buildings were erected, increasing the capacity of the Anacostia Senior High School and the Young, Richardson, Logan, Payne, Shadd, and Keene Elementary Schools. The passage of the Teachers Salary Act of 1955 raised D. C. salaries to second among those of the eighteen largest cities in an attempt raise teacher morale. Teaching the fundamentals of education was again emphasized so that a uniform level of achievement could be reached among all students.

By the 1956-57 school year the D. C. Public Schools had put in place programs which, it was

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hoped, would improve educational opportunities for all in the desegregated school system. 135 new classroom and 34 special teachers were provided in the elementary schools. Small classes characterized by individual attention were organized for over-age pupils. Summer classes were introduced teaching remedial reading in the elementary schools and English and mathematics in the junior high schools. Psychological services were increased and hearing difficulties diagnosed. In the junior and senior high schools students were tested and grouped according to ability, achievement, and teacher recommendation. The Four Track Plan separating pupils into honors, regular college preparatory, general, and basic levels was put in place in the tenth grade. Vocational and distributive education programs were expanded. Carter G. Woodson Junior High School and the Van Ness Elementary School were opened, relieving overcrowding in the most critically impacted neighborhoods. By the opening of classes in the fall of 1957, however,



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there were still almost 6,000 pupils on part-time.

In 1958 Superintendent Corning retired and was succeeded by Associate Superintendent Carl F. Hansen. A major proponent of desegregation in 1954, Hansen had initiated the track system to remedy some of the problems resulting from school desegregation. His educational philosophy emphasized basic reading, mathematics, and communications skills, teaching intelligent behavior and making possible maximum fulfillment in adult life for each student regardless of individual ability. The LaSalle Laboratory School, opened in 1958, and Truesdale Laboratory School in an older building, provided training facilities for students of the District of Columbia Teachers' College to learn this new approach, which depended upon achieving a high level of creative, motivational teaching. Hansen achieved national recognition for his educational philosophy which became known as the Amidon Plan when fully implemented in 1960 at the new Amidon Elementary School in the southwest urban renewal area. The Board of Education described the Amidon Plan as "...dedicated to the self-fulfillment of the individual child by direct teaching of the tool subjects in a highly organized way. The school's program plans to develop intelligent behavior patterns through essential knowledge and skills. The desired end product is a well disciplined personality, interested in continuing education, capable of intelligent decisions, and governed by the highest moral principles in his actions."<sup>36</sup>

By 1959 the three-track educational program had been introduced in elementary schools. Pupils were identified as mentally retarded or slow learners at the first grade level and separated from normal students. In the fourth grade pupils who learned rapidly and thought critically were separated into an honors curriculum group. A experimental program was also initiated to identify talented but underprivileged junior high students. Hansen noted "One disturbing aspect

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in the pursuit of the objective to secure improved instruction for all children was the fact that students are frequently barred from cultural opportunities and from knowledge of or aspiration toward those living standards which accompany advanced education, not because of innate deficiencies but because of environment, socio-economic status and family background."<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, African American students were often placed in the lowest track and, once placed there, found it difficult to improve their situation. In effect, the track system perpetuated segregation and was eventually struck down in the courts.

**REORGANIZATION OF THE OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL ARCHITECT**

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<sup>36</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners, FY 1960, p.149.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.148.

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Merrel Coe retired in 1956 after thirty-one years in the Office of the Municipal Architect. During the ten years in which he served as municipal architect he was charged with designing schools for a changed world. Coping with post-war shortages of labor and materials, skyrocketing construction costs, and falling appropriations, he used the modern materials and methods of construction which architects nationwide were using. Flat-roofed reinforced concrete structures with brick-faced concrete block and glass curtain wall construction became the norm. Architectural concrete in the style of John Earley, steel awning sash grouped in classroom bays, and other new materials enriched facades. Painted concrete block walls replaced plaster on the interiors. Design was functional, placing different activities in separate building blocks easily identified on the exterior. Except for the design of Spingarn High School there was no looking back to the Colonial Revival. Coe's modern classical style was more formal than Wyeth's early 1940s Moderne style. In schools like Birney, Nalle, Simon, and Walker Jones--all completed in 1950--there is a dominantly formal entrance with bilaterally symmetrical facade composition. This work, though built with brick curtain walls, reflects the design of certain buildings in the monumental core of the city recalling the City Beautiful concept of appropriately coordinating the design of public buildings in residential areas with those downtown.

Woodson Junior High School, designed for a difficult steep site fronting on busy Minnesota Avenue adjacent to Fort Mahon Park and completed in 1956, illustrates the problems faced by Coe as he designed schools to accommodate new programs and relieve over-crowding on limited urban sites. The grade at Woodson rises from 56 on Minnesota Avenue to 90 at the rear boundary. Coe proposed stepping the building up the site with terracing and short retaining walls. The 1500-student building is designed in three linked sections with classrooms and shared public use spaces such as auditorium in a on-grade on Minnesota Avenue. Home

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economics. laboratories and shops are located in the second section, and gymnasiums and other athletic facilities at the rear facing the park. The site also contained park recreation facilities. The Commission objected strongly, commenting "...we disapprove the concentration for the new school, it is counter to all the new standards of school design...[and] unsuitable for civilized living."<sup>38</sup> Their criticism was not for Coe, but for the "stinginess" of the Board of Education in refusing to provide adequate sites. Several factors were involved including lack of funding due to the declining Federal payment, over-building east of the Anacostia as a result of downtown urban renewal, reluctance to take real estate off the tax rolls to provide sites adequate for schools, avoiding this problem by selection of sites associated with parks, and the desire to build schools in the neighborhoods which they would serve to avoid school bus transportation.

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<sup>38</sup> Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 11-17-53.

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In 1954, at the request of Congress, the Engineer Department was reorganized as the Department of Buildings and Grounds with centralized operation and maintenance of all District buildings and grounds. Engineer Archie G. Hutson, formerly Director of Construction, was named to head the new department. The Office of the Municipal Architect was abolished and Coe was designated as Supervising Architect of the Design and Engineering section under Hutson. A new cost-effective policy was adopted of contracting with private Architect-Engineers for designs, plans, and specifications formerly prepared by the Office of the Municipal Architect. Control of and responsibility for this work was still clearly with the Supervising Architect. Coe, for instance, made a trip to Philadelphia to inspect health school facilities there prior to construction of such a facility in the District of Columbia. This re-organization followed post-war practices of the federal government and other cities. The respected Office of the Municipal Architect, like that of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury which it paralleled, was obsolete.

Hutson died suddenly in 1956 and Coe announced his retirement. J. A. Blaser was named as Director of the Department of Buildings and Grounds with R. E. Guard as chief of the Office of Design and Engineering. Blaser was a civil engineer who had been employed by the Corps of Engineers for twenty years. His most recent position was as chief civilian engineer in the operations division with the Air Force Academy Construction Agency in Colorado Springs. Guard had been employed since 1934 as chief of the Design Service, Architectural Division, Veterans Administration. In this position he had been responsible for the architectural design, site planning and landscape design, structural design, estimating and color design of VA hospital construction. He had served as president of the Association of Federal Architects, a panel member of the Civil Service Review Board and a member of the Architects-Engineer Selection Board of the Veterans Administration. Guard was replaced in 1959 by R. C. Crutchfield. The

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work of the new Office of Design and Engineering which replaced that of the Municipal Architect now clearly evolved from design to contract administration, planning, inspection, and supervision. Private architects and engineers were furnished design manuals with carefully developed criteria and standards.

The Commission of Fine Arts became increasingly concerned about the quality of design resulting from the new system. Rejecting plans for a school proposed for 4th & W Streets, N. W., at their October 17, 1960 meeting, they commented that (1) a three-story building for educating elementary children was not acceptable and was contrary to accepted contemporary practice, (2) the factory-like facades of the design confirmed this, and (3) placement of such a multi-storied building on an inadequate site only twenty-five feet from an existing school building created an unacceptable student density of nearly 1900 children, contributing to slum conditions. They noted that good design should not cost more as had been demonstrated by other

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cities with similar problems. Writing to Colonel F. J. Clarke, the Engineer Commissioner of the District, the Chairman of the Commission expressed the Commission members' concern for the "mediocre quality of design," commenting that the members "cannot lower their standards for the design of public buildings in the District of Columbia beyond those generally accepted in other localities." They suggested that the design restrictions placed upon private architects by the District might "exclude the possibility of ever achieving a good design...The selection of architects on a basis of proved excellence in design also would seem to be desirable. This city is particularly deserving of excellence in design of its public buildings; certainly the basic conditions and standards set for our public building program should be no less than is necessary to achieve this end."<sup>39</sup>

Blaser retired amidst controversy in 1969. The Board of Education, echoing the concerns of the Commission of Fine Arts, had charged that the list of architects from which school contracts were awarded represented "a list of distinguished hacks" and that the required design guidelines inhibited creative design. Although Blaser denied these charges, the distribution of the design manual, including exacting sketches of how each building was to be built, was discontinued. New buildings were to be designed in consultation with the community and agency for whom they were being built. Greater efforts were made to award contracts to African American architects.<sup>40</sup>

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After Coe's retirement there was no longer an attempt to coordinate school building design with that of the city's monumental core. Sensitive to the charge of "warehouse" schools, yet striving to accommodate large student populations, private architects used contemporary residential style and other design devices at the entrances to soften the effect of large classroom blocks in small-scale neighborhoods. Fieldstone garden walls, colorful glazed tile panels, aluminum sun-screens, and at-grade entrances clearly demarcating student and public entrances were typically used. Unlike nineteenth century school design, few of these schools were consistent with the design of their residential neighborhoods which were usually older and often eclectic. The most striking exception was the Amidon Elementary School in the Southwest Urban Renewal Area. This two-story school was designed to showcase the Amidon Plan. It was completely at home in its carefully designed and planned urban renewal area and represented a brave new world in education, life style, and urban planning. One-story Sharpe Health School was built in a multi-

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<sup>39</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts; October 19, 1960. Minutes...6-14-60/12-31-60.

<sup>40</sup> Richard E. Prince, "Controversial City Building Aide to Retire," *Washington Post*, (June 19, 1969).

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school complex. Designed for total accessibility, the building sequesters disabled pupils from busy Thirteenth Street while successfully integrating indoor and outdoor, public and educational activities. Ballou High School, designed by architects McLeod & Ferrara, was applauded by the Commission of Fine Arts.<sup>41</sup> An extremely steep site bordering parkland was used to advantage to create a human scale in a very large school. The auditorium/gymnasium/armory functions are grouped in a single prominent section with a celebratory folded-slab roof, vertical facade panels and broadly welcoming glass foyer entrance. The classroom block is clearly separate, set back with subdued entrance. Courtyards for eating and studying enhance the cafeteria and library areas. The athletic fields are at the lowest level, not readily visible from the school.

**CONCLUSION**

William Syphax, first African American member of the Board of Trustees, had hoped that emancipation would mean true equality of opportunity for all members of the family of man. Although disappointed by the institution of the dual system, he worked to achieve the best possible outcome in the construction of 'separate but equal' school buildings for his race. Those extraordinary African Americans who followed--as administrators, supervisors, and especially as teachers--worked in the same spirit, achieving much with little. Public school classes for African Americans were originally typically held in abandoned Freedmen's Bureau barracks. As substantial buildings were constructed they were named for African American leaders and educators who had directly affected and improved life for their close-knit Washington

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community. Teaching was one of the most prestigious careers and many teachers were thus honored. Desegregation of the public schools in 1954 was, as Dianne Dale noted in our interview, not integration. The transition would be long and difficult. Many white families left the city or placed their children in private schools. By 1960 more than seventy per cent of the pupils in D. C. Public Schools were African American.

The earliest school-houses for white students--two modest wooden structures one-story high, twenty feet wide, and fifty feet long erected in 1806--were unnamed or referred to informally as Western and Eastern or School No. 1 & School No. 2. By 1845 such structures had been built in all four school districts of the city. The term 'school' referred to a class and not to a building, and this terminology persisted well after the construction of substantial school buildings. The original buildings were supplemented by classes held in structures not built as schools and were referred to by the name or location of the structure--such as Jefferson Stable--or the name of the

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<sup>41</sup> Report of the Commission of Fine Arts, 1 July 1958 to 30 June 1963. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1964, p.71.

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teacher or place. With the implementation of the school building program in 1862 the naming of schools became an important part of the program. The idea of public schools for rich and poor alike was new, as was the idea of social and economic advancement through education. The flagship building of the new school system was named after Benjamin Franklin, an early proponent of this view. His bust was included in the loftiest central position of the architecturally impressive facade where it could not fail to inspire even the lowliest student.

In the years that followed, the naming of schools continued to be largely inspirational in concept. The national practice of naming schools after presidents was liberally followed. After election of Lincoln, McKinley, and others of modest origin this had special meaning. Schools were also named after their neighborhoods or those who had made a special contribution to the educational program of the District of Columbia. Coming to Washington in 1862, Dartmouth graduate Nathaniel Gage taught by example, instilling by example a love of learning in students who had only known the discipline of the hickory stick. In his long career as teacher and administrator Gage introduced many innovations in the school program. After his death in 1903, students from his earliest grammar school classes organized commemorative events, including naming of a new school in his honor. His name was moved to the front of the list of those who were to receive this honor. Since Congress held sway over school funding, the basis for naming schools was sometimes political. The Analostan School, named after the native Americans who had formerly lived in that area, was renamed Grant over the objections of Superintendent of Schools Ormand Wilson.

The architecture of school buildings was alternately the work of architects in private practice, some nationally renowned, and architects who worked as city employees under the direct supervision of the Engineer Commissioner. The Architect of the Capitol and, later, the

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Commission of Fine Arts influenced the quality of school architecture as political controversy and funding disputes dominated decisions in the multi-jurisdictional system. The importance of the neighborhood school has been a persistent theme, influencing the design and location of schools. Providing a model for the nation in the national capital has also always been an objective, and in many respects was often realized. Today it is difficult to realize that universal free public education and purpose-built urban school buildings have only existed in Washington since 1862, and that, even then, a third grade education was considered sufficient for blacks, while white parents often protested vigorously against the need for an eighth grade education for their children. The struggle to establish high schools, normal schools, and other institutions, and to constantly improve the quality of education for all was a long one, earning a well-deserved reputation for the D. C. Public Schools.

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**ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES:**

(Provide description, significance, and registration requirements.)

**OUTLINE OF ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES**

**PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS OF WASHINGTON, D. C., 1862-1960:**

- I. A Model for the New Republic, 1862-1874**
- II. The Office of the Building Inspector, 1874-1897**
- III. The Architects in Private Practice, 1897-1910**
- IV. The Office of the Municipal Architect, Snowden Ashford, 1909-1921**
- V. The Office of the Municipal Architect, Albert L. Harris, 1921-1933**
- VI. The Office of the Municipal Architect, Nathan C. Wyeth, 1934-1946**
- VII. The Office of the Municipal Architect, Merril A. Coe, 1946-1954**
- VIII. The Office of Design and Engineering / Architects in Private Practice, 1954-**

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**1960**

**Name of property type: PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS OF WASHINGTON, D. C.,  
1862-1960**

**Description:** The public schools of Washington, D.C. from 1804 to 1960 were unique in the nation because they grew out of a municipal government system largely dependent upon Congressional support, and because those responsible for their construction sought to provide an example for the nation in the capital city. In some respects, the D.C. Public School System was similar to those in the Southern cities because of the policy of racial separation. In school buildings, however, the system aspired to the standards of Northern cities. The architectural styles followed national trends, although the design of Washington schools tended to be more conservative than that of other school systems. Changes in educational and social philosophy led to new teaching methods and expanded building requirements. New materials and methods of construction enabled new design approaches. The design of school buildings was closely related to residential housing design as new neighborhoods were developed farther from the urban center. The tradition of small neighborhood schools was so strongly embedded that public sentiment delayed the transition toward larger, consolidated schools. Review by the U. S. Commission of Fine Arts, beginning in 1910, related neighborhood school building design to the design of buildings in the monumental core of the National Capital. In the twentieth century the school building construction program was forced to address sudden and large population increases that necessitated experiments with school building additions and extensions. Desegregation also had a momentous impact on school building construction as the dual system was at last unified.

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**Significance:** In 1862 construction began on the first of a group of innovative, architecturally distinctive urban public schools which were to be the nucleus of a modern system of public schools. These buildings were the work of German-born architect Adolf Cluss, who had made a study of the latest in school design and had traveled to other cities in search of ideas. These schools and the system which they housed received national and international recognition. With the establishment of the commission form of government in 1874, the design and construction of school buildings was assumed by the Office of the Building Inspector. The school system and its buildings evolved through development of the innovative ideas and programs of the earlier period. By 1897 the changing needs of the schools required new architectural solutions. There was also a desire for more architecturally distinctive and current designs. The design of school buildings passed from the Office of the Building Inspector to architects in private practice. In 1909 the Office of the Municipal Architect was created. School design became the responsibility of this office and was coordinated with the design of other



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public buildings. The municipal architects were men of stature who had distinguished careers in both the public and private sectors. The design philosophy of each was distinctive and each worked within a different historic context. The U. S. Commission of Fine Arts was given design review authority over the schools in 1910. In 1954 the municipal architect's office was reorganized as the Design and Engineering section of the Department of Buildings and Grounds, with work once again contracted out to private architects working under strict control of the Engineer Commissioner. Through two World Wars, the Great Depression, desegregation, and constant battling between the Congress, the Commissioners, the Superintendent, the Board of Education, and the citizens—the school system and its buildings were recognized as among the finest in the nation. Thomas Jefferson's dream of a comprehensive public school system had been fulfilled. For both their uniqueness from and their communality with national developments, the school buildings of Washington, D.C. deserve study, appreciation, and protection.

**Registration requirements:** The following requirements must be met for one of the public school buildings of Washington, D. C. to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under this Multiple Property Documentation Form:

1. It must be a purpose-built District of Columbia public school building.
2. The building's date of construction must be within the period of significance of this Multiple Property Listing. Buildings less than 50 years old may qualify if they possess exceptional significance.
3. The building must be in its original location but not necessarily in its original use.
4. The building must retain integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The principal facades of the building must retain a majority of the character-defining

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- elements.
5. The building must retain original fabric that was present during the building's period of significance. Of primary significance are the building's materials, pattern of fenestration, decorative features, and massing. Reversible exterior alterations will not be considered to have adversely affected the building's integrity.
6. Factors that may be cited to mitigate requirements 1-4 include: significant original interior features and outstanding historical significance.
7. Properties may be eligible under Criterion A if the building conveys important information concerning the history of the development of the public school system in Washington, D. C. including the (1) evolution of public education for African Americans; (2) evolution of public education for women; (3) changing philosophies of education; (4) development of curricula, text-books, grades,

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classes, and programs including military training; (5) development of kindergarten, elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, vocational schools, health schools, and other types of public education institutions; (6) establishment of normal schools and other teacher-training programs; (7) participation of parents in the educational process; (8) administration of the public schools and the effect of federal and local politics on the schools; (9) development of Washington neighborhoods, including urban renewal projects; (10) evolution of African American life and culture; (11) changes reflecting periods of national crisis e.g. the Civil War, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II; and (12) segregation, desegregation, and integration.

8. Properties may be eligible under Criterion B if the building is associated with individuals who are significant to our past.
9. Properties may be eligible under Criterion C if the building conveys information about public school architecture (including style, form, materials, technology, or aesthetic development) in Washington or the country, or must be the work of a recognized architect, builder, craftsman, sculptor, artist or other significant to our past. Additions and temporary buildings should be considered.

**I. Property sub-type: A MODEL FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC, 1862-1874**

**Description:** The buildings designed during this period include (1) those designed by Adolf Cluss as the nucleus of the new model school system, (2) those built quickly and at less cost to meet the urgent need to educate the newly emancipated slaves, and (3) those built in rural

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Washington County along major roads.

The Cluss school buildings included Wallach School (1864), Pennsylvania Avenue, C, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Streets, S. E.; Franklin School (1869), 13<sup>th</sup> & K Streets, N. W.; Sumner School (1871), 17<sup>th</sup> & M Streets, N. W.; Seaton School (1871), I Street between 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> N. W.; Cranch School (1871), 12<sup>th</sup> & G Streets, S. E.; Jefferson School (1872), 6<sup>th</sup> & D Streets, S. W.; and Curtis School (1875), O Street west of Wisconsin Avenue, N. W. All were architecturally distinctive three-story buildings of brick masonry construction with typically pressed brick facades and limestone, terra cotta, and iron trim. These buildings incorporated clocks and bell towers. Separate entrances and separate classrooms were provided for boys and girls. An auditorium was provided in each school, usually on the third floor. A library and office were also provided. Beginning with Franklin School (1869) playgrounds were provided in the basements. Classrooms were separated from the halls by cloakrooms. Window areas were very large. Plans

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varied to provide the maximum number of corner rooms with light from two directions. Buildings contained eight to twenty classrooms accommodating sixty pupils each.

Funding for construction of schools for African Americans was not available until 1867-68 when the John F. Cook School, 4<sup>th</sup> & O Streets, N. W., and the Anthony Bowen School, 9<sup>th</sup> & E Streets, S. W., were built. In 1868 the three and one-half story, brick Thaddeus Stevens School, 21<sup>st</sup> & L Streets, N. W., was constructed. The building had twelve school rooms and a large assembly hall and cost three times as much to build as the first two schools. The Sumner School, designed by Adolf Cluss, was considered the flagship of the black school system.

One and two room schools were still being built on major roads in rural Washington County during this period. These buildings were typically frame construction with gable roofs and weatherboarding. Facilities were minimal. This is the type of school which preceded the new multi-classroom schools in the city. The Conduit Road Schoolhouse (1864, rebuilt 1868), 4954 MacArthur Boulevard, N. W., is the last surviving example of this type. It was built for white students. Colored students from this area attended the similar Chain Bridge Road School, now demolished.

**Significance:** German-born and trained architect/engineer Adolf Cluss was the foremost architect in Washington during this period. His clients included the Smithsonian Institution, the federal government, the city government, private individuals and developers, churches and fraternal organizations. He served as engineer-member of the Board of Public Works under Alexander Shepherd building streets and sewers and other needed civic improvements. Politically connected, he counted Presidents Grant and Garfield, General Sherman, Admiral Dahlgren, Joseph Henry, and many other prominent Americans as his personal friends. These

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schools were the nucleus of the Board of Trustees' plan to erect modern school houses in each school district to create a system of free public schools in Washington which would be unsurpassed in the nation. Each of these schools had its own purpose and character, but each shared Cluss' innovative design features for multi-class urban public schools. This was a new building type utilizing new materials and methods of construction. All were designed as well with aesthetic considerations foremost to inspire students, dignify the educational profession, elevate the free public schools to a position of prominence and respect in the community, and provide a model to the nation. In 1873 the Board of Trustees, for the first time, participated in an international exposition. A model of Franklin School, together with plans and photographs of Seaton, Wallach, Jefferson, and other buildings was sent to the World's Exposition in Vienna as part of an American educational exhibit. The exhibit also included samples of student work. A "Medal for Progress" in education and school architecture was awarded and accepted by Superintendent J. O. Wilson. This international recognition of the work of the Board of Trustees

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was richly deserved. Similar prize-winning exhibitions were made at the international expositions in Philadelphia in 1876, in Paris in 1878 and in New Orleans in 1884. In Paris the success of the exhibit was such that the French government requested it be placed in the pedagogical museum in the Palais Bourbon.

Stevens School, named for abolitionist Senator Thaddeus Stevens, was one of the first purpose-built schools for African Americans and the first providing facilities comparable to those for white students. It is the earliest surviving school of this type. It served a vibrant, developing community. Its educational programs, including night school for adults, won recognition for excellence. Overcrowding and subsequent alterations and rebuilding were a consequence of this excellence. A former teacher testified at the Landmark designation hearing that "...families sought to send their children to Stevens because of its quality of instruction, ...wherefrom the leaders of generations of colored citizens had their first instructional experience so that they could receive a solid foundation in order to make their own contribution of leadership in the civic, cultural and professional life of the City." Prominent Stevens School students included Dr. Charles Drew, pioneer of the blood bank, historian Rayford Logan, and Amy Carter, daughter of President Jimmy Carter.

**II. Property sub-type: THE OFFICE OF THE BUILDING INSPECTOR, 1874-1897.**

**Description:** The design of the schools constructed by the Office of the Building Inspector builds upon the innovational design of Adolf Cluss but, guided by Congressional budgetary constraint and oversight, these schools are distinct from their predecessors. Emphasizing simplicity, efficiency, and durability, they are small in size, most often eight-room buildings with

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four classrooms on each floor. Most of them are Romanesque in style, often are picturesque or asymmetrical in composition, and were designed to blend in with the buildings of the surrounding community, usually townhouses constructed of similar materials and designed in similar styles. The functions and floor plans common to the buildings resulted in some replication of exterior designs. They were located in the populated areas of the District, closest to the central city.

**Significance:** The Building Inspector's Office was created coincident with the inception of the commission form of municipal government for the District of Columbia. The three commissioners were appointed by the President of the United States (with the consent of the U. S. Congress) and always included an Engineer Commissioner, a member of the U. S. Corps of Engineers. Organizationally, the Building Inspector's Office was placed under the Engineer Commissioner. Although the Building Inspector's Office was an entity separate from the D. C.

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Public Schools, it responded to the requirements of the school system. During this period, the architectural plans for each school building were approved by the three commissioners and by the Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark. Some were designed by Clark, whose influence ensured design quality in an extremely jurisdictional political arena. For much of this period, Thomas B. Entwistle and his successor, John Brady, served as Building Inspector and supervised a design staff. The buildings of this period were distinctive because they followed a fairly predictable floor plan, provided for play areas in the basement, assembly areas in the hallways, and generally were built close to their residential neighbors. They were an important part of those neighborhoods, visually and socially. The small neighborhood school with teachers living within the neighborhood and maintaining a close relationship with the students and their families became an established part of Washington life. The old two-year each primary, secondary, intermediate, and grammar school designations were replaced by grades 1-8 in these schools and separate high schools and normal schools were established. Curriculum was expanded, including chemistry, physics, botany, business, manual training and home economics in high school and advanced programs of music and art in the elementary schools. The original separate Boards of Trustees for Washington, Georgetown, the County, and the colored schools were combined in a single Board of Trustees. school districts (divisions) were established, each under a supervising principal. Peabody School (1879), 5th & C Streets, N. E., the largest school of its day and the earliest extant school in this property sub-group is included in the Capitol Hill Historic District and the D. C. Inventory of Historic Sites and is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The M Street High School (1890-91), 128 M Street, N. W., one of the nation's first public high schools for African Americans, is also included in the D. C. Inventory of Historic Sites and listed individually in the National Register. The Webster School (1882) 723-29 10th Street, N. W., designed by Edward Clark, Architect of the Capitol, and one of the last remaining schools in the original downtown residential area, is included in the D. C. Inventory of

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Historic Sites.

**III. Property sub-type: THE ARCHITECTS IN PRIVATE PRACTICE, 1897-1910**

**Description:** The public school buildings designed during this period are classical in style and symmetrical in massing. As a group, they are significantly different from those designed by the Office of the Building Inspector. This property type includes buildings in the following styles: Renaissance, Italian Renaissance, Colonial Revival, Elizabethan Gothic, and Collegiate Gothic. They were built of brick in a variety of hues, from red to yellow and were trimmed in terra cotta and limestone. They tended to be located farther back from the front of the building lot. Initially, the floor plan of these buildings followed that of the earlier period with four rooms over four rooms. Later, the floor plan was expanded to include twelve-room schools, with six

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classrooms on each floor, and an auditorium/gymnasium space in the basement. The additional rooms provided for kindergarten classes and for increased flexibility in the allocation of classroom spaces.

**Significance:** The period defined by the years 1897 to 1910 paralleled that of the architectural program of the federal government when a greater involvement in the design process by architects in private practice was instituted. Nearly every major architect in private practice in Washington, D. C., during this period designed at least one school building. Several architects and firms, e. g., Appleton P. Clark, Jr. and Marsh & Peter, designed several school buildings. The participation of private architects also reflected dissatisfaction with the nearly standardized red brick buildings produced by the Building Inspector's Office and a desire on the part of municipal officials to expand the design vocabulary. However, it appears that the floor plans for most buildings designed during this period were set by the Building Inspector's Office. The contributions of the private architects were focused on the exterior. These buildings also reflect the broader functions of the public schools. School buildings now required space for kindergarten classes through specially-designed rooms and community activities through the multi-purpose space of the auditorium/gymnasium. The siting of schools provided outside playground space to support vigorous physical exercises that complemented classroom instruction. The design of schools by private architects made it possible to design schools which were consistent with the more varied, high style design of new neighborhoods. These were often suburban in nature with detached houses in landscaped settings. Construction of the Armstrong (1900-02) and McKinley (1902) Manual Training Schools and Western High School (1898) demonstrate the expanded focus of the D. C. Public Schools as the Organic Act of 1906 laid the foundation for the twentieth century school system.

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**IV. Property sub-type: The Office of the Municipal Architect, Snowden Ashford, 1909-1921**

**Description:** The buildings designed during this period include the Renaissance, Elizabethan, and Gothic style buildings favored by Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford and the private architects with whom he contracted. They are of brick and are decorated with limestone and tile. The floor plans of the elementary schools are similar to those of the earlier period. The high schools and normal schools were innovative in both design and program, following the nationally acclaimed model of St. Louis architect William B. Ittner who designed Cardozo (Central) High School, the new flagship of the white schools.

**Significance:** The formation of the Municipal Architect's Office in 1909 paralleled the creation of city architecture offices in other cities. All design and construction supervision functions were

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consolidated in a single office and removed from the building regulation functions. Snowden Ashford, who had been appointed Building Inspector in 1901, was selected as the first Municipal Architect. While private architects continued to be involved in the design work associated with public schools, their design preferences were subservient to those of the Municipal Architect. Snowden Ashford preferred the then fashionable collegiate Gothic and Elizabethan styles for public school buildings. The U. S. Commission of Fine Arts, established in 1910, took a broad view of its responsibilities and sought to extend City Beautiful aesthetics to the design of all public buildings in the national capital. Authorized to review District of Columbia school designs, the Commission opposed the Gothic and Elizabethan styles in favor of a uniform standard of school architecture based upon a traditional Colonial style. Ashford prevailed, designing Eastern (1921-23) and Dunbar High Schools (1914-16) in collegiate Gothic style. Central High School (1914-16) was designed by noted St. Louis school architect William B. Ittner also in collegiate Gothic style. Although the Wilson Normal School (1913) was designed in the collegiate Elizabethan style by Ashford over the Commission's protests, the members influenced the design of the Miner Normal School (1913), by Leon Dessez. The original Elizabethan style submission was changed to a robust Colonial Revival—one of the first in the city. During this period, the functions of the public schools expanded not only to educate students, but to assist them with developing skills useful in adult life, such as homemaking skills and military training. The O Street Vocational School (1912), supplemented the earlier Armstrong Manual Training Center (1902). At Dunbar and Central High Schools fine academic programs were developed preparing their graduates for admission to the most prestigious colleges and universities. Dunbar, succeeding the M Street High School, was known as the premier U. S. college preparatory school for African Americans and attracted students from all over the country.

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**IV. Property sub-type: The Office of the Municipal Architect, Albert L. Harris, 1921-34**

**Description.** The Renaissance and Colonial Revival buildings favored by Ashford's successor, Albert L. Harris are of red brick with limestone trim. Generally, they were larger buildings and were designed to be "extensible." Extensible buildings were designed as a complete composition, but were built in sections as funds were available and the surrounding school population demanded additional space. The extensible building addressed the problem occasioned by additions appended to earlier school buildings. In previous periods, separate buildings were constructed adjacent to older buildings, such as the Langston-Slater complex, or new additions were designed in an identical style as the original building (Harrison, Wheatley, and Petworth). In other instances, compatible but not identical additions were appended to the original building (Brookland). Harris' extensible buildings fall into three groups: the Renaissance style rectangular block (Smothers, Kingsman, Cook), the Colonial Revival style