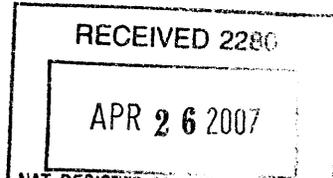


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



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

1. Name of Property

historic name Taft Junior High School

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 2901 NW 23rd Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Oklahoma City [N/A] vicinity

state Oklahoma code OK county Oklahoma code 109 zip code 73107

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Signature of certifying official/Title State Historic Preservation Officer Date April 24, 2007

Oklahoma Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
determined eligible for the National Register
determined not eligible for the National Register
removed from the National Register
other, explain

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 6.5.07

Taft Junior High School  
Name of Property

Oklahoma County, Oklahoma  
County/State

### 5. Classification

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

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

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

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

#### Number of Resources within Property (Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	Total

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

N/A

#### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

### 6. Function or Use

#### Historic Function (Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: school

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

EDUCATION: school

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### 7. Description

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

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

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#### Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>CONCRETE</u>
walls	<u>BRICK</u>
	<u>TERRA COTTA</u>
roof	<u>ASPHALT</u>
other	<u></u>

#### Narrative Description

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

Taft Junior High School  
Name of Property

Oklahoma County, Oklahoma  
County/State

### 8. Statement of Significance

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

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

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

Property is:

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

**Narrative Statement of Significance**  
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Periods of Significance**  
1931-1940  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**  
1931; 1940  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person(s)**  
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).  
N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**  
N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**  
Layton Hicks & Forsyth, architects  
Lambert Construction Company, builder

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

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

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:  
Oklahoma Historical Society/SHPO  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Taft Junior High School  
Name of Property

Oklahoma County, Oklahoma  
County/State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 5

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1.     14     630050     392856  
      Zone    Easting     Northing

2.           Zone    Easting     Northing

3.           Zone    Easting     Northing

4.           Zone    Easting     Northing           [ ] See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

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

**Boundary Justification**

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

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jason Harris, graduate student & Jim Gabbert, architectural historian, OK/SHPO  
organization University of Central Oklahoma date 12/06  
street & number 100 N. University Dr. telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Edmond state OK zip code 73034

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

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

**Photographs**

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

**Additional Items**

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

**Property Owner**

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

name Independent School District 89  
street & number 900 N. Klein Avenue telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Oklahoma City state OK zip code 73106

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

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

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Taft Junior High School  
Oklahoma County, Oklahoma

Section number 7 Page 1

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**DESCRIPTION**

Taft Junior High School is a two story, yellow brick, Art Deco style school building located on the northwest corner of NW 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and May Avenue. The main part of the building faces southeast; wings go to the north and west, parallel with the respective streets. The building is sited on a large lot; to the north is Taft football stadium (not part of this nomination), to the west are three "temporary" classroom buildings and a tennis court that separate the school from the residential neighborhood known as Denison Park, and to the south and east are commercial buildings. The front lawn of the school is landscaped with trees and shrubs, a large flagpole, and numerous sidewalks. The building is brick, with cast stone and terra cotta accents. The school was completed in 1931, with additions made in 1940. Windows were replaced in the 1980s.

The main body of the building is the most ornately decorated on the exterior, and on the interior houses the offices, library, gymnasium, auditorium, and some classrooms. The wings house classrooms on both floors, while the northeast wing also houses the kitchen and cafeteria in a partial basement.

The most striking feature of the building is the entry, which is centered in the main section of the building. (photo #1, #2) A stepped tower rises above the roofline. The main entry doors are set in a stepped surround of terra cotta. There are three doors, wooden, with brass kicker plates and brass pulls. The windows of the doors are divided into long and short rectangles with multiple muntins. Above each door is a tall, rectangular, fixed light clerestory. The terra cotta surround is stepped in four times; each panel is fluted and acts as a stylized Corinthian column having a smooth base and a stylized acanthus leaf capital. The vertical sections of the surround has three decorative motifs – the innermost is punctuated with rosettes, the middle section has stylized egg and dart, and the outer section has interwoven chevrons. The fourth horizontal section, supported by the outermost "column" of the surround acts as the base of the name plaque. In a script similar to an elongated stencil are the words "WM HOWARD TAFT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL" flanked by panels of stylized acanthus leaf and sunbursts. Above the name plaque, corresponding to the second floor, are six narrow window openings. Each window is now a three part, bronze anodized aluminum unit. Originally, the wood windows were narrow 1/1. Above each window, acting as a tall (5') lintel, is a terra cotta panel of stylized acanthus plant. (photo #2)

The main body of the building is not axially symmetrical; to the east of the entry the wall corresponding to the library bumps out in relation to the wall west of the entry. (photo #4) To the west of the entry is a single light standard affixed to the wall below a single terra cotta panel. Flanking the entry are pilasters that step back as they rise in verticality. A cap of terra cotta with a nautilus design marks each level; the first level coincides with the top of the second floor windows, the next level is above the "lintels" of the second floor, the next is just above the parapet wall of the main body of the building, and the final level terminates three feet above that. At this point, the tower narrows. It rises to a height of fifteen feet above the parapet of the main body. It is capped with a band of terra cotta with a lightning bolt motif and stylized winged bird pinnacles. A set of four narrow windows with plain sills and lintels is located on each side of the tower.

East and west of the central entry tower are four bays of windows. The first floor windows are paired while the second floor are triples. All are replacement, bronze anodized aluminum. The windows are stepped back from the wall face by two rows of brick with the brick surround capped with a stylized scroll, rosette and chevron. The first floor mullions are also capped with a the same design. A belt of smooth, cream colored terra cotta acts as sills for the first floor windows. The second floor windows have now lintels. Large, terra cotta spandrel panels are located between the windows to the west of

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Taft Junior High School  
Oklahoma County, Oklahoma

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the entry and act as lintels for the library windows east of the entry. Each panel represents in words and *bas relief* the disciplines of education and citizenship. There are eight panels in total, each measuring ten feet by four feet. Each panel has a border of smooth terra cotta at the base, a stylized scroll and drape on the sides, and chevrons on the top. From the west, the panels depict "Agriculture," "Commerce," "Engineering," "Industry," "History," "The Arts," "Science," and "Education." (photo #13)

The four bays of the library bump-out are separated by pilasters whose capitals extend above the wall of the bump-out. These capitals are terra cotta and match the stylized motif of the tower. The coping on the entire façade is also terra cotta. The top of the coping is smooth and unadorned. Below this is a course of molded terra cotta.

At the east and west ends of the main body of the school, the walls step out. The western section has no windows, but is marked by decorative brickwork and the stepped pilaster arrangement of the entry. From the ground up, there is a terra cotta water table supported on a row of soldier bond. Five rows of corbels, the outermost and the center are of soldier bond, the remaining two are headers, rise vertically and separate the wall face into five panels. The soldier corbels bisect diamond brick patterns. Above the string corbels is a panels of checkerboard corbels and two bands of glazed brick in soldier course that extend as pinnacles above the wall coping, defining a stylized broken pediment of volutes and acanthus leaves. The easternmost section has three individual windows on the first floor that are divided by two header course corbels. Above the windows the brick pattern consists of three diamonds stacked atop each other.

The east wing, with its primary façade facing east has, at its southern end, a similar bumped-out section. It features the same water table and pilaster configuration. Between the pilasters, there are five vertical bands of corbelled brick, each one brick in width. The outer and middle rows are in soldier bond while row 2 and 4 are headers. Between each corbel are panels of brick set diagonally. Around the soldier bond corbels, though, there are soldier courses that flare out at the base and at the top, giving the appearance of a stylized arrow. Carrying upward from the two header bond corbels are terra cotta bricks that extend above the coping as pinnacles and set off a stylized broken pediment consisting of acanthus leaves and stylized volutes. The balance of the east façade consists of ten bays on three floors (this wing sits on a partial basement). (See photo #6)

Each bay is defined by a wide corbelled pilaster that extends above the cornice. The pilasters rest on the water table, which on this wing separates the ground floor from the first floor. Each bay has two windows, separated by thin pilasters that also extend up through the cornice. The windows are single, replacement units. The spandrel panels between the first and second floor and the second floor and the cornice have a course of chevron bond brick, flanked by two rows of soldier bond, centered above each window unit. The ground floor windows are unadorned except for simple, cast stone lug sills. At the fourth bay from the south, and entry into the ground level is sheltered by a flat roof awning supported on steel pipe piers atop brick wing walls. This shelter is not original, but of unknown construction date. The entry doors are newer, solid panel steel fire doors.

The north wall (photo #7) of this wing has a single, offset entry with double doors. A set of eight steps flanked by squared wing walls leads to the door. Brick pilasters with simple, cast stone caps and a terra cotta lintel surround the doors. Centered above the door, between the first and second floor, is a single window with a cast stone lug sill. This window lights the stairway at this end of the building. Stepped back from this wall is the wall of the 1940 classroom addition. Its north end has three single, unadorned windows on the first floor and four on the second. Metal air vents are located below each first floor window. The west wall of this wing is of red brick. There are two sets of windows on each

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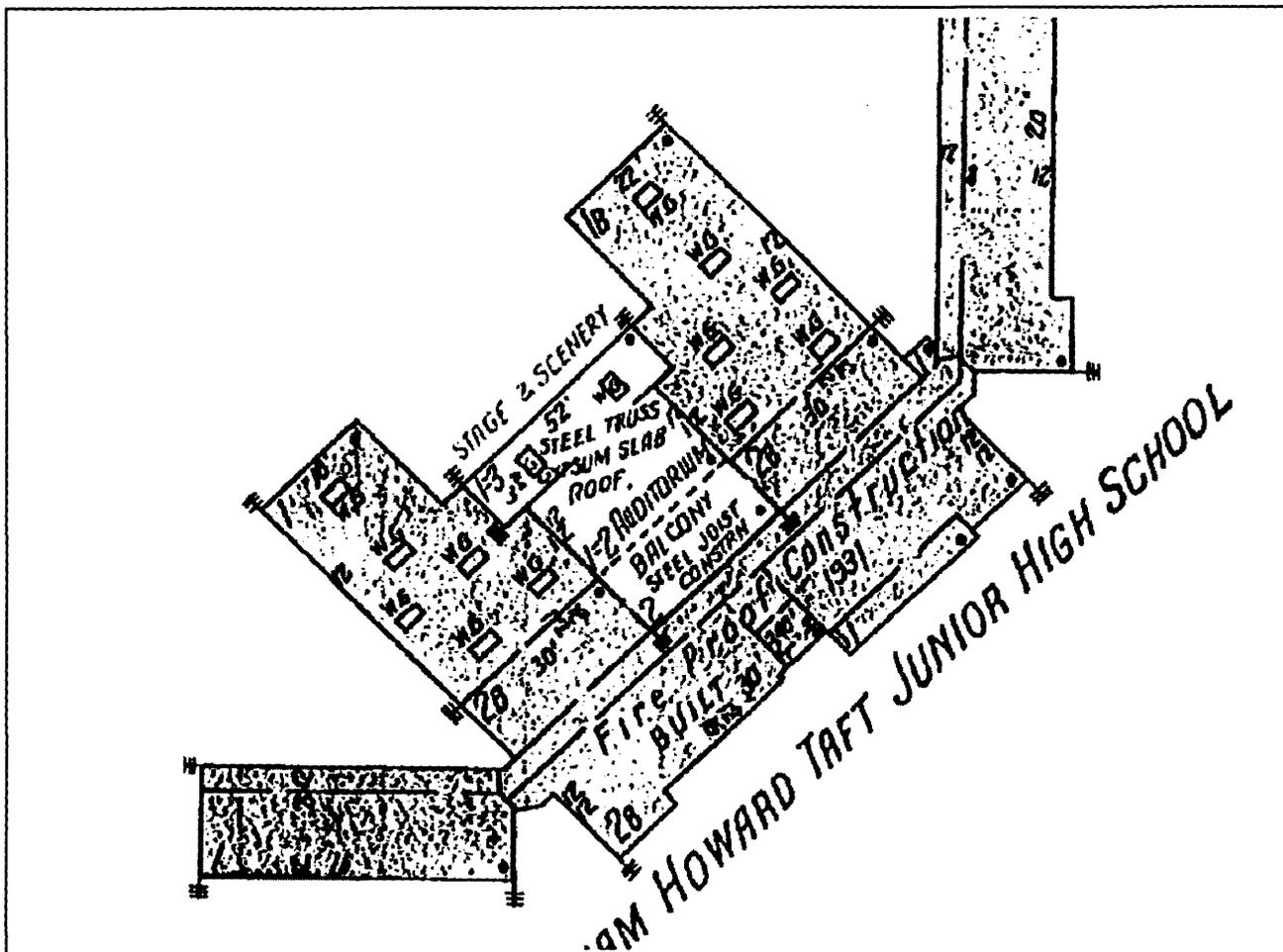
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floor; the second floor has two sets of five windows and the first floor has a set of five and a set of seven.

The 1940 addition to the east wing does not continue to the juncture of the main block of the school. At this juncture is an entry, canted into the corner. It features a set of fifteen steps with curved wing walls. The double doors are flanked by plain pilasters and capped with a terra cotta spandrel panel. Above the spandrel is a single, narrow window. (photo #8)

The east side of the main block of the school has a single level of full size windows in the same configuration as the east wing. The ground level windows are  $\frac{1}{4}$  size and light the boiler and mechanical rooms. (photo #8) The north face of the main block is more utilitarian, with blocked-in windows in pairs across its face. The second floor is stepped well back from the first. The fly gallery rises above the level of the second floor, and at the northeast corner of the fly gallery a chimney stack protrudes. The fly gallery has three vertical bands of corbelled brick centered on its narrow sides. The chimney has three bands of corbelled glazed brick on each face that extend just above the coping and below about three feet.

The gymnasium and locker rooms were added in the 1940 addition and are not reflected in the plan shown below.



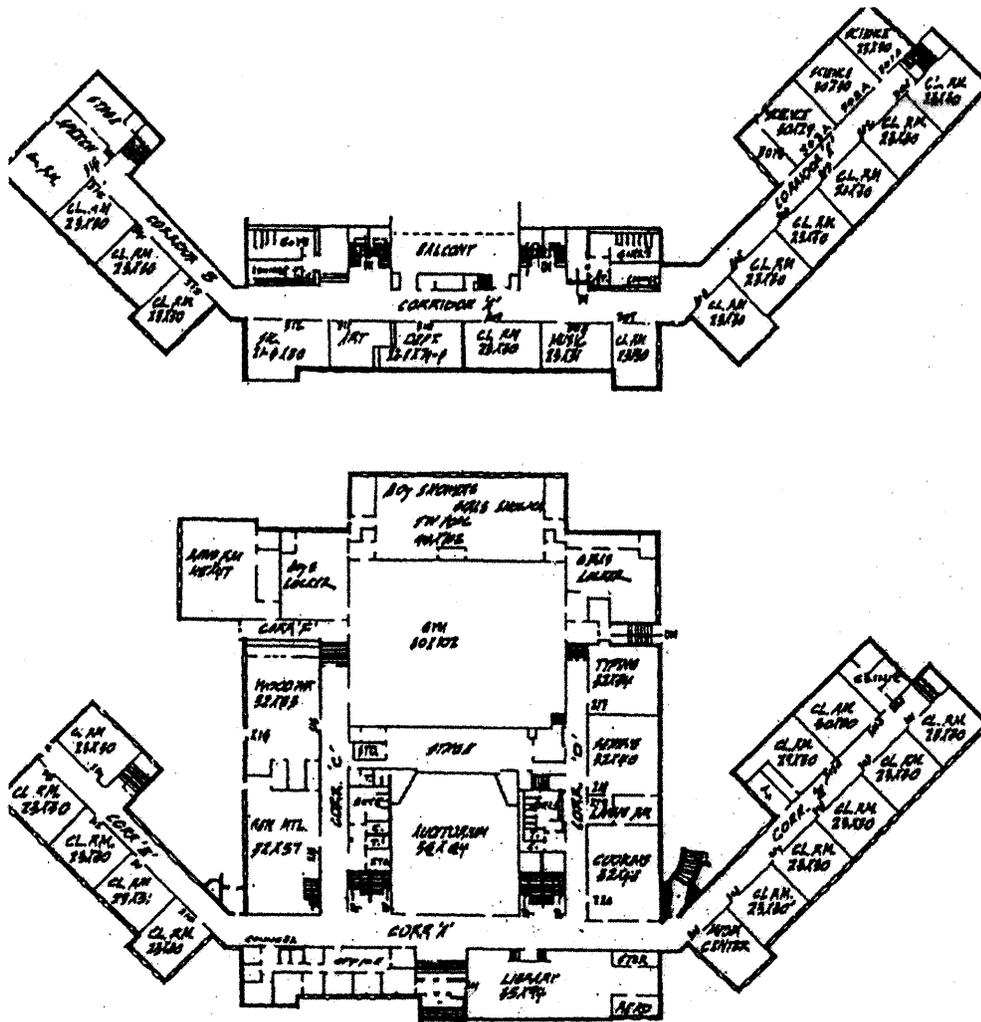
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The west wing of the building is similar to the east wing, but has no ground floor, The rear entry, at the juncture of the wing and main block of the building is at grade level. (photo #9) The 1940 addition, on the east or rear side wall of the wing, has two sets of paired windows on the first floor and a single, tall window mid-floor, corresponding to the staircase. The west end wall has a central entry similar to other secondary entries on the rear. A pair of windows is located above this entry, and four windows are offset on the second floor. Four windows on each side of the entry on the first floor, and four more offset on the second floor have been bricked-in with matching buff brick. The outlines of the openings and the cast stone sills are still visible. The south face of the west wing has six bays of two windows each. The configuration and detail is identical to that of the east face of the east wing. (photo #10, #11)



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In the front of the building is a flagpole set in a round flowerbed. The flagpole is a contributing object. West of the building are three gabled, metal buildings that serve as additional classroom space. These long, low buildings are directly north of a tennis court of unknown age. The three buildings and the tennis court are noncontributing due to age. (photo #12)

**Alterations**

The primary alteration made to the building is the replacement of the original wood windows with bronze anodized aluminum windows. In 1940, additions were made to the classroom wings and the rear of the main block. These restored the original plans for the building that were curtailed due to lack of funding in the initial bond request. Later, some of the windows at the rear of the main block and on the west side of the west wing were bricked in. Some of these changes are historic. While the alteration of the windows is distracting, it does not really impede the building's ability to convey its architectural significance. The stylistic design of the building relies primarily on forms, shape, and ornament. These remain intact. Taft Junior High School retains excellent integrity of location, setting, feeling, association, and workmanship. Its design is strong, and the change in the materials of the windows has minimal impact.

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**SIGNIFICANCE**

Taft Junior High is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, as the best example of an Art Deco school in the Oklahoma City metro area and the Oklahoma City Public School's System. The other Art Deco schools in the area were WPA projects and as such contain watered down elements and motifs of Art Deco elements. The physical setting of the school, its orientation and layout, reflect new thoughts in school design. Taft has maintained its character and appearance with little change for over seventy years. Its architects, Layton, Smith & Forsyth designed more than 100 public, educational, and commercial buildings and is widely described as the major designer of territorial and early statehood and one of most important and influential architects in all of Oklahoma's history

**Historical Background****Oklahoma City**

The construction of Taft Junior High was due, in part, to the pace and pattern of physical growth and expansion in Oklahoma City. It was constructed under the new junior high plan, helping to bridge the gap between childhood and adolescence. The city and its resident's desire for high-quality public education helped to spur bond issues to finance expanded educational facilities. The rapid growth of Oklahoma City and its inhabitants made possible the construction of one the best example of an Art Deco style junior high.

From April 1889 through May 1890, Oklahoma City was without an authorized school system, but not without schools. The new residents of the city quickly set to work providing education for their children. Within weeks of the land run schools were operating in tents and as groups across the municipality. By the fall of 1889 several subscription schools were in operation.

"A common description of western towns is that they 'sprang up overnight.' In the case of Oklahoma City, the literal truth is that it came into being between noon and sunset of April 22, 1889...ten thousand settlers...camped by nightfall over the wide expanse east and west of the Santa Fe's single-track boxcar station, where land had been set aside for a townsite."<sup>1</sup>

The boundaries of the townsite were established two months after the opening, "at Seventh Street on the north, Walker Street to the east, Seventh Street to the south and the Santa Fe Railway on the west."<sup>2</sup> In the 1890s, growth continued at a steady pace. With the development of a streetcar system in 1902, rapid growth expanded the city and its residents to the west and north. Oklahoma statehood in 1907, relocation of the capitol from Guthrie in 1910, and Oklahoma City's role as a crossroads for the railways paved the way for its "...vigorous growth as the trade center of an expanding new territory. In...twenty years, the population grew from 10,037 to 66,498, and it had become by far the state's largest city...As the state capital, Oklahoma City attracted thousands of state employees, many of whom remained after their political employment ceased. And with the development of the state's natural resources of oil, coal, and metals, the city became a financial and manufacturing center as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Workers of the Writers Program of the Works Project Administration, A Guide to the Sooner State, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 182-183. (hereafter WPA)

<sup>2</sup> Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, *Intensive Level Survey of Central Park, Jefferson Park, and Paseo Neighborhoods in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*, 1994, 20. (hereafter SHPO 1994)

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Stimulated by the World War I boom, Oklahoma City's population in 1920 was 91,295."<sup>3</sup>

This rate of growth continued throughout the 1920s. Population grew "by over one-hundred percent in ten years," and the value of building permits issued "increased...from about five million dollars in 1920 to eight million dollars in 1924."<sup>4</sup> After World War I economic activity intensified. The expanding petroleum industry allowed the state's economy to diversify, breaking the bonds with agriculture and greatly benefiting Oklahoma City. "Manufacturing became less bound up with agriculture and expanded into new fields, and in the late 1920's, a gusher field was developed on the east side, within the city limits. As Oklahoma City grew industrially, it added new iron and steel plants, factories for making furniture, clothing, and electrical equipment. Various large utility companies, brokerage houses, and commission concerns also established their headquarters downtown."<sup>5</sup>

As new businesses and industries located themselves in Oklahoma City, the city continued its expansion. "In terms of geographical area, the city covered 15.6 square miles in 1910, 17.2 square miles by 1920, and by 1930 it had grown to 25.2 square miles."<sup>6</sup> The direction of residential growth away from the city center was not strictly concentric, but had a northward and westward pattern. The location of the North Canadian River to the south helped to push expansion in these directions. "The flooding of the North Canadian had disastrous consequences for city development in the early years on the south side, especially the disastrous flood of 1923."<sup>7</sup>

## Public Schools

The establishment of the territorial government by the Organic Act of May, 1890, provided a means for developing a public school system. Mr. and Mrs. Arthur North, of Boston, are credited with establishing the first school under a tent with seventy students.<sup>8</sup> Many of the early subscription schools closed with the implementation of a public school system. A code of laws for the new school system was compiled by President T. H. Thatcher of the Territorial Normal School of Oklahoma, in Edmond, and submitted to the territorial legislature. This code was adopted and the new school system organized accordingly. Initially classes were held in rented buildings.

Schools in Oklahoma during the territorial period and early statehood were limited to what could be assembled and determined by parents, and school terms were generally only three months long. "The first schoolhouses were of material locally available, and varied from comfortable log buildings to cold frame buildings of native lumber, or even to sod houses in a few districts. Some schools were held in small residences that farmers had abandoned when they "proved up" on their farms and moved back to their homes in 'the states.' Home-built furniture was meager and crude. Blackboards were homemade and usually poor."<sup>9</sup> However, the focus of this effort was important in the eyes of Oklahoma's early residents. "The local schoolhouses soon became the community center, providing a place for school programs open to the public, literary societies, box suppers, singing schools, Sunday

<sup>3</sup> WPA, 182-183.

<sup>4</sup> SHPO1994, 20.

<sup>5</sup> WPA, 182-183.

<sup>6</sup> WPA, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Howard Merideth and George Shirk, "Oklahoma City: Growth and Reconstruction, 1889-1939,"

*Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Volume 55, Fall 1977, 293.

<sup>8</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, April 23, 1939,.

<sup>9</sup> WPA, 80.

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schools, and preaching.”<sup>10</sup>

“Public schools first opened in the fall of 1890 but they were severely underfunded. In 1890 Congress appropriated \$50,000 to be used for all the schools in the Oklahoma Territory...That first year some 700 student were taught by 20 teachers.” That sum of \$50,000 dollars was thinly distributed and served as the basis of Oklahoma’s school financing for its many widely dispersed districts.<sup>11</sup> In 1893, the first school bond election was held in Oklahoma City and \$45,000 was approved by voters for the construction of four ward schools. “In 1894 Congress helped public education in Oklahoma City by giving it a plot of land known as the Military Reservation. The money that was derived in 1896 from selling the lots carved out of what was called Military Hill was used to build the first two schools, Washington and Emerson. Funds raised by a bond issue of \$45,000 built three additional buildings – Jefferson, Lincoln, and Garfield – so that each ward would have its own elementary school, and there was a segregated school for all black children in town. The high school building opened in 1896 and would be used until 1937, when it burned (for a time it served as the temporary capitol of the state.) By 1898 some 2,000 students were being served in the Oklahoma public schools. None of these early schools remain standing.”<sup>12</sup>

During the 1910s and 1920s student population growth matched the city’s growth. By 1920 there were over 17,000 school aged children in Oklahoma City and schools followed the new suburbs, with construction in every sector of the city. In 1921 the number increased to 20,700.<sup>13</sup> In a February 27, 1922 Board of Education Meeting, it was observed that “Next fall, if there is an additional no thousand children, there will be no place to house them.”<sup>14</sup> The 1923 school census reported a population of 26,202.<sup>15</sup> The city government clearly recognized the increasing problem faced by the public school system. Their efforts were manifested when a “committee from the City Planning Commission and Mr. George E. Kessler, City Planning expert and designer of the Lincoln Boulevard parkway near the capitol, came before the Board with a map of development of Oklahoma City. The map was presented to the Board with the request that these outlines be taken into consideration in making plans for school sites and additions to school sites for playground purposes.”<sup>16</sup>

On April 25<sup>th</sup> 1922, a bond issue for improvements to the school system in the amount of \$1,900,000 was passed by a vote of 5,636 to 3,706. Oklahoma City School District voters also raised the mill levy on taxable property for school financing from five to fifteen mills by a vote of 6,457 to 2,898.<sup>17</sup> Further improvements for public education followed. In 1923, important state legislation benefited the public schools, including “one giving free textbooks to all pupils in the first eight grades and...one giving state

<sup>10</sup> WPA, 80.

<sup>11</sup> Bob L. Blackburn and Odie B. and Laura E. Faulk, *Oklahoma City: A Centennial Portrait*, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1988), 92. (hereafter OKC Portrait)

<sup>12</sup> OKC Portrait. & Criterion Group. *Architectural/Historical Survey of Oklahoma City’s Historic School Buildings*. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2001, 9. (hereafter School Survey)

<sup>13</sup> Roy P. Stewart, *Born Grown: An Oklahoma City History* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Fidelity Bank, National Association, 1974, 203.

<sup>14</sup> Oklahoma City Board of Education, *Minutes*, (Board of Education Clerk’s Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) dated February 27, 1922.

<sup>15</sup> Oklahoma City Board of Education, *Minutes*, (Board of Education Clerk’s Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) dated March 5, 1923.

<sup>16</sup> Oklahoma City Board of Education, *Minutes*, (Board of Education Clerk’s Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) dated March 6, 1922.

<sup>17</sup> Oklahoma City Board of Education, *Minutes*, (Board of Education Clerk’s Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) dated April 26, 1923.

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aid to all public schools.”<sup>18</sup> In addition, school districts voted to lengthen terms. An article in *The Daily Oklahoman* titled “Schools Vote Longer Terms” announced that “More than twice as many Oklahoma County children will have the advantage of nine-months school terms this year as had that opportunity last year.”<sup>19</sup>

The Board of Education was compelled to pass a resolution to hire the architectural firm of Layton, Smith & Forsyth to work on a contingency basis on construction documents for the school work financed bond issue because it was contested.<sup>20</sup> The suit, *Board of Education v Woodworth, et al.*, was tried in district court, where an injunction was granted against the issuance of the bond. The case was appealed to the Oklahoma Supreme Court, which reversed the decision and dismissed the case on March 13, 1923.

As the city continued its rapid growth the importance of having a good public school system also grew. The period from 1919 to 1924 was an exciting time for Oklahoma City’s public schools. Student population growth, coupled with progressive ideas about education paved the way for great progress within the system. In 1916 J.A. Whiteford became head of the city schools and under his administration junior highs were established to bridge the gap between childhood and later adolescence. Within Oklahoma City six junior highs were constructed between 1920 and 1931. An essay written in 1924 addressing Oklahoma’s junior high schools highlighted some important steps: “In 1916 the Oklahoma City Board of Education first proposed a bond issue to establish junior high schools. This first bond issue failed, to be followed by another in 1919. This bond issue for \$1 million dollars for the construction of three junior highs, Webster, Capitol Hill and Classen, passed. These schools opened in 1920. Even at that date the junior high school throughout the country was still in its infancy and the number of cities as large as Oklahoma City with such a type of organization was very small.”<sup>21</sup>

“By 1922, the original three buildings had become over-crowded and it became necessary to provide for an expansion of the junior high school program. Again the Board of Education and the community as a whole expressed themselves as favoring separate buildings for a junior high type of organization by voting the money to erect the Harding and Roosevelt Junior High Schools. At this time, Classen was changed to a senior high school.”<sup>22</sup> In December of 1929 voters again decided to expand the junior high system by adding two additional buildings, Taft and Jackson Junior Highs, as well as other construction projects with \$2,150,000 in bonds.

Twenty six bids were received for the construction of Taft Junior High. The board’s hopes of completing the new unit within a \$235,000 dollar budget were slim.<sup>23</sup> In an effort to reduce cost the gymnasium and swimming pool were slated to be eliminated, however, final construction included these two assets. The firm of Layton, Smith & Forsyth was chosen as architect. Solomon Layton designed more than 100 public, educational, and commercial buildings and is widely described as the

<sup>18</sup> Edwin C. McRynolds, Alice Marriot, and Estelle Faulconer, *Oklahoma: The Story of its Past and Present*, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 294.

<sup>19</sup> *The Daily Oklahoman*, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1923, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Oklahoma City Board of Education, *Minutes*, (Board of Education Clerk’s Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) dated April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1923.

<sup>21</sup> Oklahoma City Board of Education, “Opportunities for Junior High School Boys and Girls,” (Oklahoma City Board of Education, 1924), 4. (hereafter OJHS)

<sup>22</sup> OJHS, 4

<sup>23</sup> *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1930, 11.

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major designer of territorial and early statehood days and one of most important and influential architects in all of Oklahoma's history.<sup>24</sup> The final contract for construction was awarded to Musgrave Construction Co. with the general contract let at \$195,352. Atlas Electric Co. was awarded the electrical contract at \$20, 279 and M. F. Fischer received the heating and plumbing contract.<sup>25</sup> In September the School Board was rushed to receive new general construction bids when the general contracting firm of Musgrave Construction failed to make bond. The buildings new targeted cost was increased to \$315,000. Lambert Construction Company was awarded the final contract in order to have the new unit completed for the 1931-1932 school year.<sup>26</sup>

As a result of the expenditure every seventh, eighth, and ninth grade pupil in Oklahoma City was housed in a building especially designed and equipped for their needs. "Each junior high school is provided with a library and library equipment, cafeteria, auditorium, gymnasium, swimming pool, clinic, and special rooms for etching of homemaking, industrial arts, fine arts, science, and other junior high school subjects."<sup>27</sup> At this time, the junior high school in this comprehensive form was an innovative building type that reflected a change in attitudes toward education. Clearly Taft Junior High offered its students these opportunities and the lives of the students within the community benefited.

Taft Junior High is eligible for the National Register because of the unique combination of its style, size, amenities, use and condition. Most of the early Oklahoma City schools were constructed in the Classical Revival or Collegiate Gothic styles of architecture. A total of seven schools were constructed in Art Deco style from 1920 through 1941 out of twenty-seven new buildings. WPA Art Deco buildings with only minimal application of the Art Deco style included in their design are those often seen during the period. There are two buildings constructed during this time that could be considered high-style Art Deco designs, Northeast High School and Taft junior High School. Taft has, throughout its years of service, retained its original appearance and character with minimal renovation. The buildings many internal and external decorative elements are in excellent shape and make Taft the best example of Art Deco within the area. The physical appearances of the building help Taft embody the distinctive characteristics of Art Deco and the period of construction. The design and construction of the school is a manifestation of one of the most vibrant periods of Oklahoma City's development and of the progressive ideas that some of its civic leaders and a majority of its voters had about education. Its primary stylistic rival, Northeast High School, is also an excellent example, but differs greatly from Taft

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Jo Nelson, The Buildings of Solomon Andrew Layton, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Historic Conservation Programs, Oklahoma Historical Society), 1.

<sup>25</sup> *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1930, 7

<sup>26</sup> *The Daily Oklahoman*, September 29, 1930, 15

<sup>27</sup> OJHS, 4.

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in its decorative interpretation. The Northeast High School building is clad in smooth limestone. Its decorative elements are more restrained, and are more geometric. It lacks the verticality of the central tower of Taft, and its monochrome exterior is more reminiscent of the PWA Deco style, a category not unfitting. Northeast high School was completed with PWA funding. Taft, with its shape, tower, and abundance of terra cotta ornament inside and out, is paramount among the schools of Oklahoma City that were constructed during the height of the Art Deco style period. Apart from its replacement windows, it holds a high degree of design integrity. Its distinction in design sets it apart from other schools, and its prominent location makes it a landmark for many people. Taft Junior High School is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, as the best surviving example of Art Deco school design in Oklahoma City.

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA****VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The SE  $\frac{1}{2}$ , SE  $\frac{1}{4}$ , SE  $\frac{1}{4}$ , SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  Section 24, Township 12 North, Range 4 West of Indian Meridian consisting of five acres roughly bounded by N. May Avenue, NW 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, N. Brookline Avenue and NW 24<sup>th</sup> Street extended.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

Corresponds to the unplatted part of land on which the school building and its immediate environs sits. Excludes Taft Stadium, a related but separate property, individually significant in its own right.

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## PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-12 except as noted:

Photographer: Jim Gabbert  
Date of Photographs: 12/06  
Negatives: tiff files at SHPO

Photo No.	Photographic Information
1	Facing Northwest, showing flagpole and main entry
2	Facing northwest, detail of main entry
3	Facing north, an oblique of main façade
4	Facing west, an oblique of main façade, showing library bump-out
5	Facing west-northwest, showing southeast corner
6	Facing southwest, showing north end and east face of east wing
7	Facing south, showing rear of main block and east wing
8	Facing south, showing entry at rear juncture of east wing and main block
9	Facing east, showing rear of main block and rear of west wing
10	Facing northeast, showing oblique of west wing
11	Facing north-northwest, showing west wing and juncture with main block
12	Facing southwest, showing temporary classroom buildings
13	Facing northwest, showing detail of terra cotta panel