

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 92000025

Date Listed: 2/24/92

Dunbar, Paul Lawrence, School  
Property Name

Lee  
County

FLORIDA  
State

Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrews  
Signature of the Keeper

2/24/92  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 8

This nomination was amended to show the period of significance as extending from 1927-1942 and to delete Criteria Consideration G.

These changes were confirmed by phone with the Florida SHPO (2/21/92).

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 18). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Dunbar, Paul Lawrence, School
other names/site number Dunbar Community School

2. Location

street & number 1857 High Street N/A not for publication
city, town Fort Myers N/A vicinity
state Florida code FL county Lee code 071 zip code 33916

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private, public-local (checked), public-State, public-Federal
Category of Property: building(s) (checked), district, site, structure, object
Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing 0, Total 1

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official: Suzanne P. Walker (deputy)
Date: 1/2/92
State or Federal agency and bureau: Florida Division of Historical Resources

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
[checked] entered in the National Register.
[ ] See continuation sheet.
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register. [ ] See continuation sheet.
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register.
[ ] other, (explain:)
Signature of the Keeper: Patrick W. Anderson
Date of Action: 2.24.92

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Education/school

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Education/school

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals/  
Mission

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls stucco

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roof asphalt

---

other

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Please see continuation sheet.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Education

Ethnic Heritage: black

Period of Significance

1927-1962

Significant Dates

1927

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

L. N. Iredell-architect

J. M. Lawton Co.-builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Please see continuation sheet.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Please see continuation sheet.

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

**Specify repository:**

Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property 1.5 (approximate)

**UTM References**

A 17 4 15 1 85 29 47 0 0 0  
 Zone Easting Northing

C \_\_\_\_\_

B \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zone Easting Northing

D \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary for Dunbar School is shown as the dotted line on the accompanying map entitled "Site Plan, Dunbar School."

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the building and immediately adjacent grounds historically associated with Dunbar School, excluding that part of the original site now occupied by new construction.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Tulie W. Taylor, Historic Sites Specialist Donald Stone, Lee County  
 organization Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation date 12-30-91 School Board  
 street & number 500 S. Bronough St. telephone (904) 487-2333  
 city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399

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DESCRIPTION

Summary

The Paul Lawrence Dunbar School, 1857 High Street in Fort Myers, Florida, is a two-story, T-shaped, Mission style building with a stucco finish. Built in 1927, it was the first high school facility for blacks in Lee County. The building has undergone few alterations and still serves its original function as a public educational facility.

Setting

The Paul Lawrence Dunbar School is located at 1857 High Street in Fort Myers, Florida. A concrete sidewalk fronts the main elevation and a paved parking area extends from the east side of the building. When Dunbar was constructed in 1927, it was surrounded by a sparsely populated black neighborhood located on the outskirts of Fort Myers. Streets were unpaved and most of the area's residents earned income from agricultural work. Today, the area around Dunbar remains a predominantly black neighborhood although it is more densely populated and is now fully encompassed by the City of Fort Myers. Additional school buildings constructed during the 1950s on adjoining acreage are excluded from this nomination.

Exterior

The Paul Lawrence Dunbar School is a two-story, T-shaped, Mission style building constructed of cement block on a reinforced concrete foundation. (Photos 1 and 2) Exterior walls are stucco on masonry and the roof is flat with parapets. The main block of the building is rectangular in shape and contains the front elevation, which faces High Street. The main entrance and the two side entrances feature small porches with curvilinear parapets similar to the parapets at the main roofline. (Photos 3, 4, and 5) The front entrance is set in a central bay which projects from the main wall of the west elevation. The first-floor entry has a single window on each side. Windows on the second floor correspond in shape and number to those on the first floor. Brickwork in a diamond pattern adorns the parapets on the main block and on the entrance porches.

The east elevation, which faces the back of the property, has a chimney and a one-story auditorium wing that projects from the middle bay. The auditorium's parapet is similar in design to the

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linear parapet on the east elevation of the main block. (Photos 6 and 7)

Interior

The interior plan of the main block consists of a rectangle with classrooms arranged down both sides of a corridor running (north and south) the length of the building on both the first and second floors. (Photo 8) A hallway runs along the south side of the auditorium wing providing access to the two classrooms that are now there.

Alterations

The only major alteration took place in 1958 when the auditorium was converted into two classrooms. The stage area was remodeled to allow for the expansion of the school library and to provide general storage space. In 1982, the wood sash windows were replaced with aluminum frame awning type windows of eighteen lights each, and twenty air conditioners were installed in twelve wall mounts and eight window mounts.

The building has been well maintained on a regular schedule and needs no renovation or repairs. It has been regularly inspected and serviced for termites, insects and rodents. The exterior and interior were painted in 1986.

Dunbar School maintains its historic integrity of design, setting, workmanship, feeling, association, materials, and location.

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary

The Paul Lawrence Dunbar School is significant under Criterion A as the first and, from 1927-1962, the only secondary school facility for black children in Lee County, Florida. Prior to the construction of Dunbar in 1927, public education for black children in Lee County was limited to grades one through ten. At Dunbar, black children could complete four years of high school. Black students from neighboring Collier and Charlotte counties, lacking their own high schools, also attended Dunbar. The building continues to serve Lee County as an adult educational facility and center for community activities.

### Historic Context

Located on the Caloosahatchee River in southwest Florida, Fort Myers was originally an outpost of the U.S. Army during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). The small fort, eighteen miles upriver from the Gulf of Mexico, was reactivated periodically until the end of the Civil War when it was abandoned permanently by federal troops. The area was sparsely settled in 1872 when the government survey of the Caloosahatchee region was completed. Under the Homestead Act of 1862, settlers were allowed to claim 160 acres of surveyed land as long as they occupied and developed it for five years.

By 1885, there were 500 people in the general vicinity of Fort Myers, twenty of whom were black. The majority of black settlers migrated to the area from sections of northeast Georgia and central South Carolina near Columbia. The lure was cheap land, which could be purchased by homesteading. While white residents dealt mostly in cattle and citrus, black farmers concentrated on cultivating vegetable crops.

Lee County was created by an act of the state legislature in May 1887 and Fort Myers was designated the county seat. The availability of inexpensive farm land continued to draw settlers to the area. By 1900, Lee County had 3,071 residents, 188 of whom were black. The majority of residents, 2,463 of them, lived in Fort Myers, though the 1900 federal census did not break them down according to race. The county's black population shared in the state's expanding economy which lasted from 1900 to the late 1920s. In 1904, the railroad arrived, connecting Fort Myers to Tampa and markets in the north. Black farmers increased their



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vegetable crops to meet the growing market demand. After 1910, blacks were employed in the seasonal tourist industry and in the lumber mills which began cutting away the region's heavy pine forests just before World War I.

The state's prosperity during the first three decades of the century peaked during the Florida Land Boom (c.1924-1926). Lee County continued to depend on tourism, cattle, citrus, and winter vegetables for income. In 1920, the county recorded a total of 9,540 residents, 937 of whom were black. Fort Myers was home to approximately one-third or 3,678 of the county's residents, of whom 845 were black. Most of the city's black citizens lived east of the main railroad tracks in an area of unpaved streets known as New Prospect.

The Florida Land Boom ended in 1926 and Fort Myers, along with the rest of Florida, experienced an economic downturn. In 1930, as the United States was slipping into the Great Depression, the total population of Lee County stood at 14,990, of which 9,082 resided in Fort Myers. The county's black population was 3,543, which included 2,450 blacks living in Fort Myers. By 1932, the Great Depression was in full force. The region's pine forests were harvested and jobs in the timber industry disappeared. Some local black farmers and landowners lost their properties to the banks during this period but survived by undertaking day labor, gardening and yard work. A few jobs were available maintaining the railroad tracks and freight yards around Fort Myers.

Like the rest of Florida, the economy of Lee County did not fully recover until after World War II. During the 1950s, large-scale real estate developments promoted the area as an attractive haven for retirees and tourists. In 1960, the county's population reached 74,225, out of which approximately 8,600 people were black. Today, it is one of the most populated counties in Florida with 335,000 residents, 22,184 of whom are black. Fort Myers is an expanding urban area of over 40,000 residents, which includes a black population of 14,536. Since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the county's black residents are represented in a broad range of jobs. Fort Myers remains at the center of the county's economy, which continues to be based on tourism and agriculture as well as some manufacturing.

Historical Significance

Three months after the state legislature created Lee County in May, 1887, the county board of public instruction held its first

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meeting. The official minutes from the school board meeting the following October reflect an interest in starting a school for colored children in Fort Myers:

"The colored people shall be encouraged to organize a school district and receive equal benefits as sub-district No. 3 in New Prospect."

Wesley Roberts, a young black man, was hired and paid twenty dollars a month to teach a three-month term to black students in grades one through six. In 1890, Miss Annie Moore, the county's first black female teacher, replaced Mr. Roberts. She was paid fifteen dollars per month for the three-month term. The following year, the local paper noted the colored school's participation in May Day activities:

"The pupils of the colored school gave an exhibition the evening of May 1st. It was composed of recitations, dialogues and singing. The selections were all of a very pure character and very fairly rendered considering it was the first time the children had appeared in public."

By 1900, the colored school was in session for five months during the year and had thirty-two students. The area's school-age population grew along with the county's prosperity during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Seventy black students attended the Fort Myers school in 1908. In 1913, a small, frame vernacular building was constructed for black students in the city's New Prospect section. Known as Williams Academy, it was the first building erected in Lee County specifically for use as a black school. In 1916, the school board hired four teachers to teach two hundred black students in grades one through ten and the school term was extended to six months.

The school board opened a second colored primary school on a farm outside of Fort Myers in 1922. In response to the growing number of black students in the county, the board voted in 1925 to build a colored high school in Fort Myers. Land was purchased at High and Blount streets in the black section of town the following year and the school building was completed in 1927 at a cost of \$99,000. The building's layout was copied from architectural plans designed by architect L.N. Iredell for a white high school built across town in 1926. This was important to the local black community because for the first time the county's black children had a school facility comparable, if not equal, to their white

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counterparts. It saved the school board money because another set of architectural plans did not have to be commissioned. The school building was financed in part by donations from the black community. Grants from the Rosenwald Fund, a private trust set up to improve negro schools in the South, assisted in the purchase of school items.

The new school was named the Paul Lawrence Dunbar School after the black poet. James Robert Dixon was the first principle of the school, which served students in grades seven through twelve. Because Charlotte and Collier counties did not have black secondary schools, it was arranged for their high school students to attend Dunbar. The commute for some out-of-town students was long, and those who wanted to participate in after-school athletics had to stay with local families during the week. In 1940, Dunbar had approximately 196 students enrolled in classes.

Over the years, Dunbar became the focal point of Lee County's black community. Its graduates, despite educational inequities, went on to make noteworthy contributions in many areas of society including medicine, education, sports, government, the military, and music. Dunbar graduates assumed leadership roles in the local black community and, after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the local community at-large.

Dunbar remained the only black high school in the three county area until 1962. At that time, a new black high school was built a mile away on Edison Avenue and the Dunbar School building became a middle school. In 1969, the school system of Lee County desegregated its schools, and white and black students began attending classes together.

The Dunbar School is significant for its role in the secondary school education of blacks in Lee, Collier, and Charlotte counties from 1927 to 1962. As the only colored high school in three counties, it allowed black students the opportunity to complete twelve grades of schooling without having to travel to other parts of the state. This provided the training for local blacks to qualify for more skilled jobs. Those who had the desire and the financial backing could enter college. Dunbar School was and still is regarded as a symbol of black progress and achievement in southwest Florida. Today Dunbar houses adult education and community service programs for Lee County. The building has undergone few alterations and maintains its historic architectural integrity.

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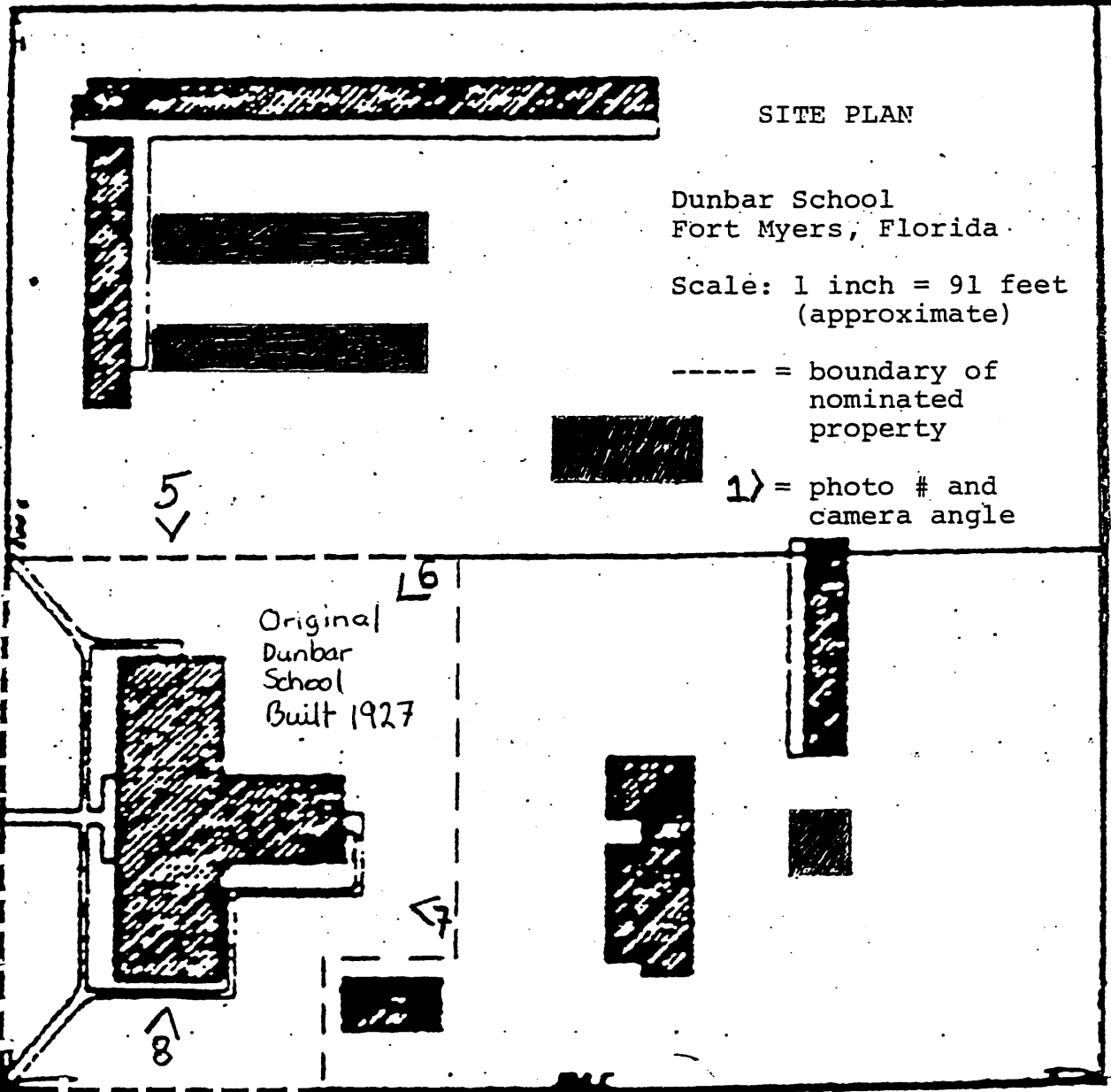
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Indian Street



SITE PLAN

Dunbar School  
Fort Myers, Florida

Scale: 1 inch = 91 feet  
(approximate)

----- = boundary of  
nominated  
property

1) = photo # and  
camera angle

Original  
Dunbar  
School  
Built 1927

High Street

Closed Road

Blount Street

crop ↑

2  
3

5

6

8

4

7

2

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PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1) Paul Lawrence Dunbar School
- 2) 1857 High Street, Fort Myers, Lee County, Florida
- 3) Dr. Donald Stone
- 4) January 1991
- 5) Lee County School Board, 2055 Central Ave., Fort Myers, Florida
- 6) Front elevation, camera facing southeast
- 7) 1

Items 1-5 are the same for all photographs.

- 6) Front elevation, camera facing northeast
- 7) 2
  
- 6) Close-up of main entrance, camera facing east
- 7) 3
  
- 6) South elevation of main block, camera facing north
- 7) 4
  
- 6) North elevation of main block, camera facing southeast
- 7) 5
  
- 6) North end of back elevation, camera facing southwest
- 7) 6
  
- 6) South end of back elevation, camera facing northwest
- 7) 7
  
- 6) View of first floor hallway of main block, camera facing north
- 7) 8