

RECEIVED 413

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

FEB 27 1995

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations 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 in 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 WELLS SCHOOL

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 4140 Collierville-Arlington Road N/A not for publication

city or town Eads vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Shelby code 157 zip code 38028

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.)

Herbert L. Hays 2/18/95
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
State of 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. 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:)

Edson H. Beall Signature of the Keeper
Entered in the National Register 3/31/95 Date of Action

Name of Property

County and 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 include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	1	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 Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: school

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Rosenwald School Plan

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE; BRICK

walls WOOD: weatherboard

roof ASPHALT SHINGLE

other METAL; CONCRETE

Narrative Description

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

See continuation sheets.

Name of Property

County and 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: N/A

- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION

ETHNIC HERITAGE: AFRICAN-AMERICAN

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1925-1945

Significant Dates

1925

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Smith, Samuel L. for Julius Rosenwald Fund

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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): N/A

- 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:

Middle Tennessee State University; Fisk University; Tennessee Department of Transportation

Wells School
Name of Property

Shelby Co., TN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

EADS 416 NW

1

1	6	2	5	8	9	1	0	3	9	0	2	5	7	0
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 Lauren Batte and Mary S. Hoffschwelle, with assistance from Holly Rine and Trina Binkley
organization MTSU Center for Historic Preservation date August 30, 1994
street & number PO Box 80, MTSU telephone 615-898-2947
city or town Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37132

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 David A. and Marian L. Nuckolls
street & number 4140 Collierville-Arlington Road telephone 615-867-9539
city or town Eads state TN zip code 38028

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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INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Wells School, Shelby County, TN

VII. DESCRIPTION

Wells School sits on the east side, facing west on the Collierville-Arlington Road in East Shelby County near the Fayette County line. Built in 1924-25 the original four room, rectangular plan, gable roofed, frame building has some minor alterations to the interior rooms but retains much of the original configuration. Partitions have been added to expand the number of rooms. Originally constructed with monies from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the building continued to serve the area as an African-American school until desegregation occurred in 1966. Some minor renovations in the 1950s added a concrete block building in the rear attached by a covered walkway to the main building.

The front or west facade has a central, recessed, entrance in the middle of three bays. This entrance is capped by a gabled portico once supported by columns. The front entrance is a set of double doors of two panels with six lights above. Five lights are set as sidelights on each side and a twelve light transom sits above. The north bay of the facade has a ribbon of five nine over nine light double hung sash windows. The south bay has four of the same windows set as two pairs. A small chimney sits in the front room on the north end. The original foundation for this building consisted of concrete piers. The foundation has since been filled in with brick and small vents for circulation.

The north elevation has one set of paired six over six double hung windows set slightly off center towards the front facade. Two rectangular vents sit in the gable end just beneath the roof. The foundation treatment continues on this elevation.

The east or rear three bay elevation has two doors, added at an unknown date but probably after 1945, set in the center. These one panel with nine lights above doors are set a slight distance apart and lead to two separate classrooms. The north bay of this elevation has a ribbon of six nine

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

over nine light windows similar to the front facade. The south bay has four of these same windows. A covered porch and steps from the two rear doors leads to a concrete block building in the back. This rectangular building (NC) with three doors served as auxiliary space for this school. It was constructed during renovation in the 1950s, and is attached only by the covered walkway, which probably dates to the same decade or the early 1960s.

The south elevation of the building is unadorned with the exception of two rectangular vents just below the roofline. An interior end chimney is visible at the peak of this gable end.

Upon entering the Wells School one is immediately impressed by the sense of place the building gives. The interior plan has changed little since its use as a school and its rooms are easily seen as classrooms and not domestic spaces. The front entrance opens to a foyer from which four doors lead to what once were the three classrooms and one community room, with one door opening to a modern bathroom. This small bath is one half of a narrow rectangular space originally designed as a cloak room and teachers area. Each of these doors are five paneled with a single movable transom light above for ventilation. The original wood floors are present in this room as they are in the rest of the building. Some rooms have carpet or linoleum over the wood floors. The 1950s renovations placed wall board in the room and several others. The 1950s paint scheme remains in this room. The doors, wood moldings and walls up to the wainscoting level are painted a grey green color. The walls above the wainscoting are white. Ceiling tiles have been added to this room.

Upon entering the square shaped foyer there is a door to the immediate left on the north wall which opens to a long rectangle-shaped classroom. The room has a wood molding at the chair rail level, and five nine over nine light windows set together as a ribbon. An enclosed coal chimney is set against the east wall of the room north of a door leading to

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

the former cloak/ teachers room. This room has been painted and carpeting added. The combination cloak room and teacher's area still retains the original beaded board and paint scheme in part of the room. The exterior wall is dominated by a pair of six over six double hung sash windows. A door which leads to the northeast classroom sits opposite the door from the front northwest classroom.

The northeast classroom has been divided in about 1980 into three distinct spaces. A storage area for a modern water heater and other items is the first portion of this space entered into from the cloak room. The northeast corner has been sectioned off into a small bedroom. A dividing wall with a door set in the middle sections these spaces from the kitchen. To the right of the door to the kitchen is a small closet beyond which on the same wall is a door to the cloak room. Beyond this door is a door with a transom window to the front foyer. The doors in the kitchen are five panel. A small wood molding runs along the walls at the chair rail level. On the east wall are three nine over nine light double hung windows next to the north rear exit.

The southeast classroom was the community room of the building. Remaining in this room are three original chalkboards and the original stage. Above the stage on the south end of the room is one chalkboard. A chalkboard on the north wall, opposite the stage, lowers and opens to the classroom on the other side. In this way students in the opposite classroom could view a production on the stage from the comfort and order of their desks. The east wall has a door in the corner leading to the outdoor addition and a bank of nine over nine light windows. The west wall has the third chalkboard, a door and two transom windows for ventilation.

The final classroom is the southwest room of the building. Remaining in this room are two original chalkboards, one on the south wall and one on the north wall. On the west wall is a door leading to the stage in the southeast classroom with one transom window set off center above this door and one transom window on the opposite end. This second transom

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

window is not above a door but is placed here to help provide for a system of continuous ventilation. A door on the south wall to the west of the chalkboard leads back to the front foyer. In this room the current owner is adding a dividing wall. The west wall has four nine over nine light double hung sash windows.

The Wells School retains much of its original character defining features such as windows, stage, chalkboards and room configuration. Its important function as center of education for rural African-Americans in Shelby County and close association with the Rosenwald Fund makes it an important architectural and historical contributor to the rural landscape of Shelby County.

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

VIII. SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

Built from 1924 to 1925, the Wells School, on the Collierville-Arlington Road near Collierville, Shelby County, Tennessee, is a locally significant property eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its role in the development of public education for African-Americans under the auspices of the Rosenwald Fund in Shelby County. It served as a physical tool of educational reform as well as a social center in the local African-American community until it ceased being a rural school in 1966. Consequently, the school has additional significance under Criterion A for its association with the ethnic heritage of Shelby County's African-Americans in the early twentieth century. It is also eligible under Criterion C as an excellent intact example of standardized school architecture and follows closely the building blueprints specified for a three teacher school, with a community room, found in the school building plans of the Julius Rosenwald Foundation.

Sears, Roebuck & Company magnate Julius Rosenwald funded his first school for Tennessee African-Americans in 1915. In 1919, Rosenwald hosted a meeting in Nashville for education reformers who wanted to establish a rural school building program. They created a Nashville office which would review requests from local communities and provide money from the Julius Rosenwald Fund (JRF) according to the number of teachers planned for each school. By the time the program closed in 1932, the Rosenwald Fund had helped to build 354 schools in Tennessee.

"The principles of black self-help and industrial education dominated the JRF school construction plan," according to historian Mary S. Hoffschwelle. (1) The schools included facilities for industrial, agricultural, and home economics instruction. Schools like Wells School offered a thorough curriculum in vocational education, focusing on industrial training for boys and home economics for girls. White officials supported these new classes, and even provided more money for supplies and equipment, because the vocational classes produced, in white eyes, a "better trained" and "more reliable" workforce and helped to keep the local African-American workforce in the local area rather than migrating to new opportunities in the urban North. This latter point was particularly a concern in Shelby County.

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

County educational leaders, like superintendent Charl Ormond Williams, had "an abiding commitment to rural black education" (2). By 1915, Iola Wimbs Ellis, the state's first Jeanes Fund industrial supervisory teacher, had established industrial classes in 75 of 79 Shelby County black schools. That same year, county officials, with financial support from the Julius Rosenwald Fund and the John F. Slater Fund (which supported rural and black education), established a teacher training school, the Shelby County Training School, for African-American teachers.

These early initiatives in improving African-American education received a new physical infrastructure in the immediate post-World War I years as Shelby County "embarked on what would become the largest Rosenwald-assisted building program for African-American schools in Tennessee." According to historian Hoffschwelle,

by 1922 Shelby led all southern counties in the number of Rosenwald schools built: twenty-five new buildings, each a consolidation of at least two smaller schools. Eight years later, the county's Rosenwald total had grown to fifty-nine schools, four teachers' homes, and three shop buildings out of eighty-six black schools operating in the county. (3)

Wells School was constructed from 1924-25, during the height of the Rosenwald-assisted building program. From the fall of 1922 to the summer of 1926, the JRF supported the construction of thirty-two schools in Shelby County. This new physical infrastructure, so believed the county school superintendent Sue M. Powers, had established the basis for a new educational age for Shelby County's African-Americans. Attendance had risen from 80 to 95 percent of the school-age population. "With these facilities in place, Powers had lengthened the school term to an eight-month minimum in black schools and increased their teachers' salaries. Now [in 1927] she planned to upgrade the teaching staff." Her 1927 report to the Julius Rosenwald Fund, outlining the recent achievements in Shelby County, "confirmed progressive educators expectations for school building reform: putting up consolidated schools built to modern standards and provided with appropriate vocational equipment had set off a chain reaction of improvements." (4)

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

Wells School, like many other Rosenwald schools across Tennessee, represented a new higher level of commitment by state and local officials to the education of African-Americans, although much of new commitment focused only on vocational education offerings. School boards spent more money on the local schools, making new teaching material and resources available to the students.

Rosenwald also wanted his schools to be permanent additions to public education, so the principles of industrial/vocational training and black self-help would be taught well into the future. He required that state and local government funds match his contributions as well as those of the local African-American community. In the case of the Wells School, the Rosenwald Fund donated \$900 and the African-American community raised an additional \$600. The county and state then kicked in another \$2,850, with the county providing most of the funds.

The Rosenwald reformers believed that local participation and involvement in the school's construction was imperative because it could teach the community how to improve the appearance and sanitation of its own neighborhood. According to Hoffschwelle, reformers maintained "that rural blacks would be reformed first by building their Rosenwald school, which would unite them as a community, and then by the building itself, which would inspire hard work and clean living." (5)

Indeed, the building was to be more than a place for education; it was to be the center for community life. Therefore, the Wells School has significant associations with the social history of the rural African-American community of east Shelby County during the early twentieth century. Rosenwald publications emphasized that "service to the community" was a top priority for the school building. The 1924 Community School Plans stated:

In planning the schoolhouse it should be kept in mind that the best modern school is one which is designed to serve the entire community for twelve months in the year. Hence in all larger buildings at least a room for industries and for the use of the adult members of the community is important. Wherever possible a good auditorium, large enough to seat the entire community, should be erected in connection with every community school. If there are not sufficient funds for an auditorium, two adjoining classrooms with a movable

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

partition may be made to serve this purpose. While movable partitions are not always satisfactory, they are much preferred to no assembly facilities. (6)

Wells School had a designated community room, complete with a small stage which is still extant. The adjacent room could become part of the seating for lectures, performances, and other community events by lowering the blackboard so that children and adults could view the speaker and hear the speech. The school served as a meeting place for African-American speakers on a variety of topics, from politics to race relations to the agricultural extension service. It also hosted school plays and community pageants. Wells School served rural blacks from surrounding communities like Collierville and Eads. The enrollment typically hovered around 100 students annually and the school remained opened for instruction until Shelby County schools began to integrate their system in 1966, when the building became a private residence.

The architectural significance of Wells School lies with its standardized design that follows the plans for a four teacher school drawn by Samuel L. Smith in Community School Plans, a 1924 publication of the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Smith's designs, clearly influenced by the earlier work and ideas of his mentor Fletcher B. Dresslar, rely on proportion and massing of form, enhanced by such features as the grouping of windows and recessed entries, for their architectural effect. The larger the school, the better the chance that a more formal architectural statement, usually the Colonial Revival, would be emphasized. In the case of the Wells School, a Colonial Revival-influenced portico (the original columns are not extant) and recessed entrance defines its entrance. The exterior of Wells School also exhibits a slight Craftsman-influence in its supporting roof brackets and the five-band windows, architectural characteristics found in other standardized plans by Samuel Smith.

For southern reformers, the primary purpose of school architecture was to enhance the education experience. Therefore, buildings should be functional in appearance more so than dazzling stylistic statements. Rosenwald officials prided themselves in having established the national standard for rural school architecture. O. H. Bernard, the state field agent for rural schools, bragged in 1927 that Tennessee's Rosenwald schools

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

were "attractive, well-equipped" environments that enhanced African-American "civic pride" as shown in their "better kept homes, better farms, and higher standards of living." (7)

To achieve the proper environment, proper lighting and the siting of the building were crucial. If neither were correct, Rosenwald officials would refuse to fund a rural school. O. H. Bernard, the state field officer for rural schools, visited Wells School during a field trip to the Shelby County projects in September 1925. Its east-west orientation met Rosenwald standards as did its paired bands of windows on the east and west elevations.

The Wells School in Shelby County documents the hopes and dreams of African-Americans of the mid-1920s as they took advantage of philanthropic programs to improve their quality of life in an age when segregation ruled supreme. The school remained in operation until 1966 when segregation officially ended. Wells School is a representative Shelby County artifact of the dreams of southern reformers who believed that through new, functional architectural environments education and life would be improved within the rural African-American community. In one sense, the school is like all extant Rosenwald schools in the south. It was part of a major reform effort; it served as an educational and community center for a rural black community for at least 40 years, and its unassuming architecture reflected the quiet dignity of the program and people it served. But the surviving extant remnants of this school program--the number of extant schools in Shelby County is not yet clear--are very significant artifacts of progressive school architecture, African-American education, and symbols of African-American ethnic heritage, achievement, and pride.

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Wells School, Shelby Co., TN

ENDNOTES

1. Mary S. Hoffschwelle, "Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1914-1929," Ph:d Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1993, 111.
2. Ibid., 409.
3. Ibid., 418.
4. Ibid., 432-433. Also see, Sue M. Powers, "The Rosenwald Program for Negro Schools in Shelby County, Tennessee" [1927], Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Fisk University.
5. Ibid., 112.
6. Community School Plans (Nashville: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1924), 1.
7. O. H. Bernard, "The Julius Rosenwald Fund in Tennessee," Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Fisk University, n. p.

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

IX. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Nashville: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1920.
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D Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1993.
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CFR 800 for the Proposed Improvements to State Route 385. .
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- Stitely, Thomas B. "Bridging the Gap: A History of the Rosenwald
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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

X: GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The Tax Map for this nomination has the scale 1" = 400'. This scale tax map is prepared by the Tennessee State Board of Equalization for rural areas. In the past, the Tennessee Historical Commission has used this scale map for nominations and has found that the 1" = 400' adequately meets our office needs. The Tennessee Historical Commission does not have the facilities to prepare maps to the scale preferred by the National Park Service.

The nominated boundaries are defined as plot 53 from the attached property tax map 61 from the Shelby County Tax Assessor office.

Boundary Justification

The nominated boundaries contain all of the historic property associated with the Wells School under a single ownership.

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

PHOTOGRAPHS

Wells School, Shelby County, TN

Photos by: Lauren Batte and Holly Rine
MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

Date: July 1994

Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission
Nashville, TN

East facade, facing west
1 of 18

East facade, entrance detail, facing west
2 of 18

East facade, facing northwest
3 of 18

South elevation, facing northwest
4 of 18

West elevation, facing east
5 of 18

West elevation and north elevation, facing southeast
6 of 18

Northwest classroom (kitchen), facing east
7 of 18

Northwest classroom (kitchen), facing west
8 of 18

Community room, facing southeast
9 of 18

Community room, facing southwest
10 of 18

Chalkboard, community room, facing south
11 of 18

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Wells School, Shelby County, TN

Stage steps, community room, facing south
12 of 18

Community room, with movable chalkboards, facing east
13 of 18

Southeast classroom, facing west
14 of 18

Entrance hallway, facing east
15 of 18

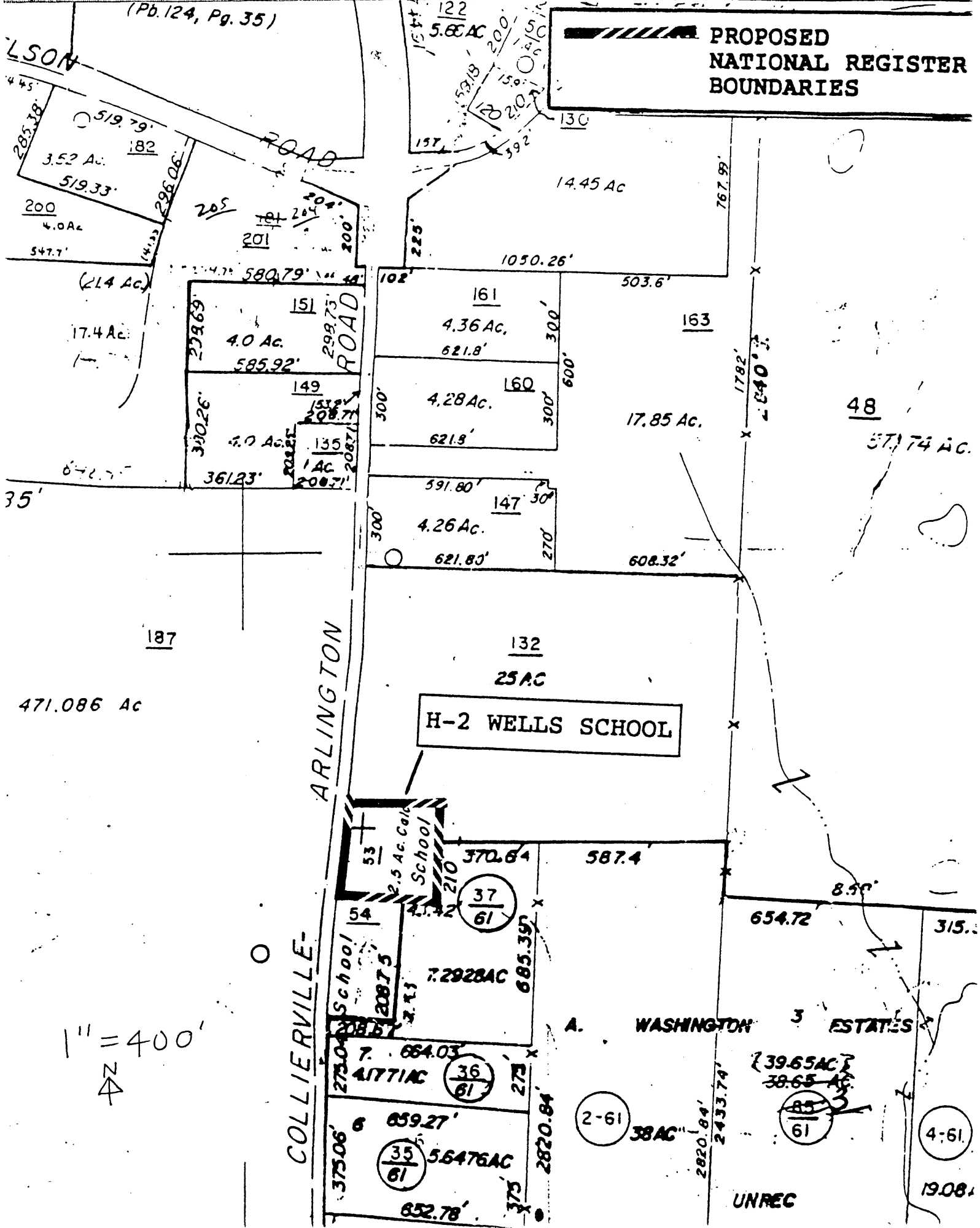
Entrance hallway, doors to classrooms, facing west
16 of 18

Northeast classroom, facing southwest
17 of 18

Outbuilding with covered walkway, facing south
18 of 18

(Pb. 124, Pg. 35)

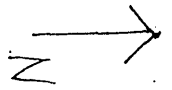
PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARIES



1" = 400'
N

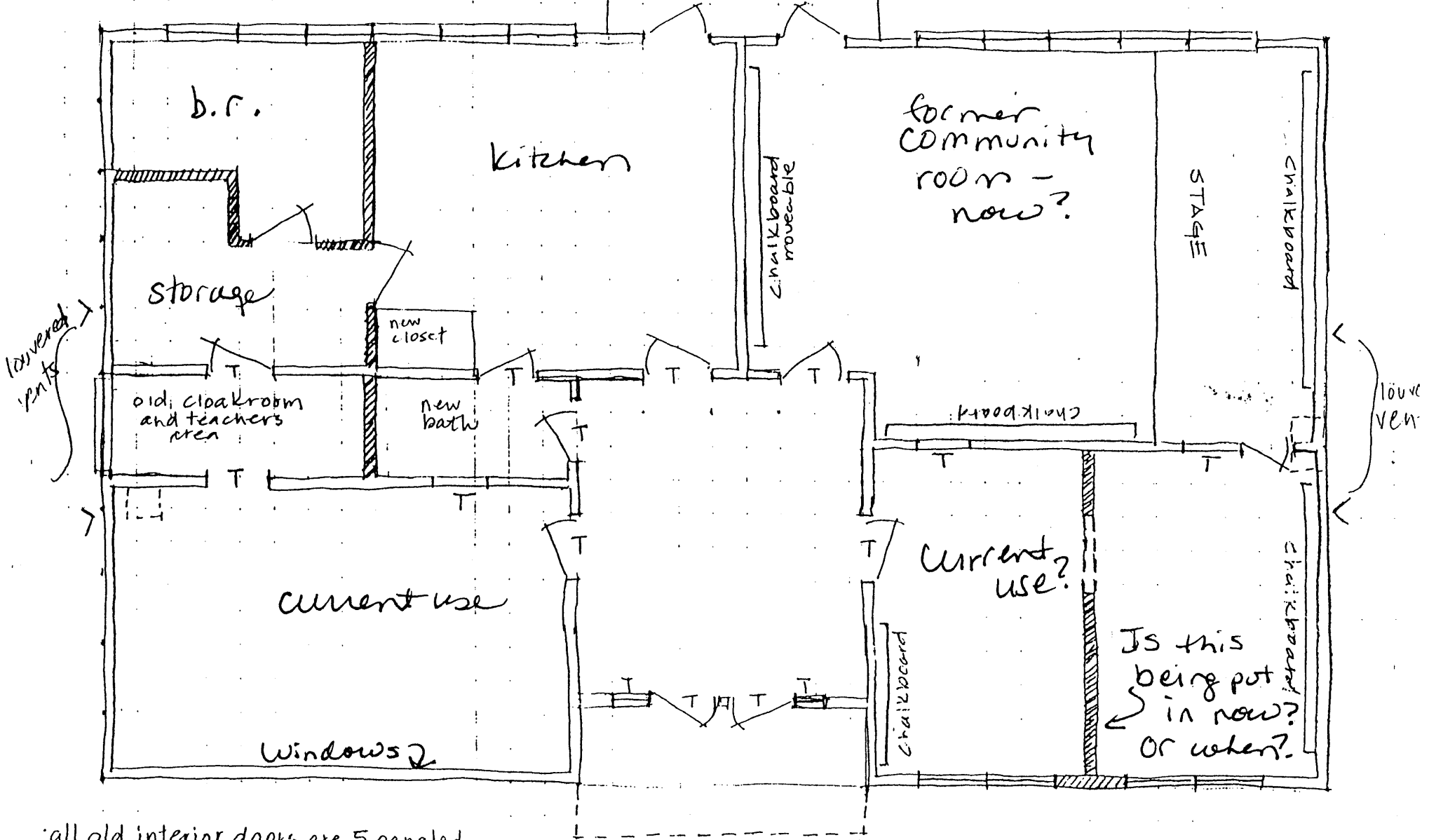
H-2 WELLS SCHOOL

UNREC

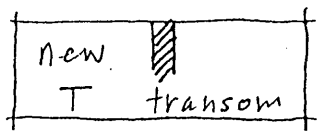


COULDER WATER

rear exterior door have lower panel and 9 window panes



- all old interior doors are 5 paneled with transom above
- original color scheme light gray above dado, medium gray below
- exposed eaves



WELLS SCHOOL