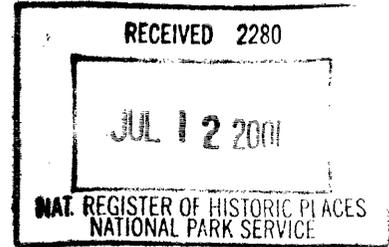


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations 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 "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any 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 Ross Point School 215C
other names/site number S-402

2. Location

street & number CR 448 near intersection of Rt. 62 not for publication N/A
city or town Laurel vicinity X
state Delaware code DE county Sussex code 005 zip code 19966

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally.
(___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Diana R. Huff, SHPO Date June 28, 2001
Signature of certifying official Date

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 commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

=====
4. National Park Service Certification
=====

I, hereby certify that this 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 8-17-01

for

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

=====
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

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

=====
6. Function or Use
=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Education Sub: School

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Work In Progress Sub: Community Center

=====
7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete
roof asphalt
walls cedar shingles

other brick chimney

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

=====
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.)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a 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
Architecture
Ethnic Heritage: Black

Period of Significance 1922-1950

Significant Dates 1922

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation Ethnic Heritage: Black

Architect/Builder Guilbert and Betelle, architects

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

=====
9. Major Bibliographical References
=====

(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: Sussex County Engineering Department

=====
10. Geographical Data
=====

Acreage of Property 3.4 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone Easting	Northing	Zone Easting	Northing
1	<u>18</u>	<u>460424</u>	<u>4267439</u>	
2	___	___	___	___

___ 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 Brian Page, Preservation Planner
organization Sussex County Engineering Department date November 1999
street & number 2 The Circle telephone 302-855-7816
city or town Georgetown state DE zip code 19947

=====
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 the SHPO or FPO.)
name Mrs. Phyllis Robinson for the Ross Point Improvement Club
street & number 1179 Lochmeath Way telephone 302-697-7769
city or town Dover state DE zip code 19901

=====
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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Physical Description

The Ross Point School 215C stands near the intersection of County Route 62 and County Road 448, near a sinuous long-right turn in the road, in a small thicket of white pine, lying between four farm fields, adjacent to a tax ditch and a natural depression in the ground. It is a rectangular, one-story wood frame building with a hipped roof and cedar shingle siding. The cornice of the school is flat and white and was constructed with heavy, thick boards planed to hold the overall colonial revival theme. There is a small, triangular ventilation dormer on the southwest side of the roof, resting above the most striking architectural feature, six massive nine-over-nine double hung sash windows.

The six windows are set in the façade (southeast elevation) at a forty-five degree angle to the natural flow of sunlight. The portico of the building is next to the windows and marked by plain, rectangular columns that support a triangular colonial revival arch. A concrete slab supports the columns, with three steps ascending to the door. There is a small six-over-six double hung sash window just west of the portico, giving the building a total of eight bays. The entrance of the school is a plain white door with raised paneling, and a three-over-three window configuration at the top.

The northeast elevation of the building has three six-over-six windows, and is covered in cedar shingle siding. There are two small, metal vents protruding from the roof, and a larger vent in the middle.

The rear of the building (northwest elevation) is asymmetrical in arrangement. It is completely covered with cedar shingle siding, and in opposition to the front, has a small lean-to on the far side. This lean-to has a rear entrance that is now covered over with a sheet of plywood. There are two six-over-six double hung sash windows on the addition, one facing directly north and the other on other side of the rear entrance. Next to the rear entrance and along the westside of the lean-to rests a brickwork chimney that is corbelled at the top, with side vents and a solid cap covering the terra cotta lined flue. The base of the chimney is wide and rests on a concrete slab at the foundation line.

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The southwest elevation of the building is unadorned with no windows, and is completely covered with cedar shingle siding.

Fifty feet away from the northwest side of the building, there is a steel jungle gym, and small lines that demarcate the playground area. The jungle gym was set in place in 1922, with the building of the school, and contributes to atmosphere, and feeling of an early school. There are two large trees on the school property, and a small open field that moves out to Route 62, and lies across the street from St. John's African Methodist Episcopal Church on one side, and a long line of pine trees along the other side.

Integrity

Changes have occurred since the construction of Ross Point School. Though some of the structural members were burned, and the windowpanes broken in a racially motivated attack circa 1987, the attack did not significantly alter the exterior of the building. The rear door was lost in the attack and subsequently a makeshift, plywood door was placed over the opening.

The interior of the building, while still painted in the original color, and still bearing a child's writing in chalk on the blackboard, has changed. Just after the fire at the school, two of the joists that hold up the main part of the floor collapsed. This caused the rest of the floor to settle approximately one foot below the walls, in an interesting way that makes the walls look suspended in mid-air. The plaster ceiling has two holes each three feet in diameter.

These changes have not significantly impacted the importance, style or feeling of this locally important building.

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Statement of Significance

The Ross Point School 215C is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its importance as a center of rural African-American education in Delaware. In addition, the building is eligible for nomination under Criterion C as an example of one style of Colonial Revival school, built by Guilbert & Betelle and funded by Pierre S. du Pont, during the early 1920's. Constructed in 1922 for \$6366.70, Ross Point School is locally significant as an example of a rural, African-American school in Delaware. The building was used as school until September 24, 1964 when it was officially consolidated into the Laurel Special School District. The Ross Point School is a local landmark that carries significance as part of the reform movement to improve the conditions under which African-Americans were educated in Delaware, and is a testament to the sacrifices of the local people to improve the quality of their education.

Historical Significance

By the 1896 Supreme Court Decision of *Plessy versus Ferguson*, Delaware had segregated schools in place for close to seventy years. In 1829 the passage of the "An Act of Free Schools" put an end to the practice of occasionally admitting black students to white schools. After this act was passed, the ability of African Americans to procure a good education rested with the church.

Although, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Quakers and social groups such as the African School Society, made a profound impact on education during the first half of the nineteenth century, by the end of the Civil War there were only seven African American Schools in Delaware. The Beer's Atlas, shows that in 1860 there were over 5700 African Americans in Sussex County, both free and slaves, but by 1868 there were only two black schools and, ten years later, in 1878, only four black schools had been established. By 1890 there were twenty-eight colored schools in Sussex County. In comparison, by 1866 there were 143 white schools.

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From March 1, 1865 until February 17, 1871 Delaware's Governor, Gove Salisbury, a Sussex County democrat, refused to ratify the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the constitution. He and Thomas Bayard, "led the charge against what they called `Negro Domination' claiming that the Democratic Party was the White Man's Party." While Delaware's only Quaker governor, John Hunn, overturned this ruling and passed these amendments in 1901, this did little to change public opinion on educating blacks. Farmers very rarely supported education for white or black children in Sussex County. Their protests to education were in part due to higher taxes, and to keep African American and white children out of the classroom and in the field. As late as 1937, the school boards had the choice of starting school a week early, "to permit the children to assist in picking the strawberry crop."

At the turn of the century it was generally agreed that Delaware's public education system was in need of a "significant overhauling." Public support for education was not viewed favorably, and though teachers were better educated and the number of schools gradually increased, racism, fear and contempt for African American education was common. By 1897 there were close to thirty African American Schools in Sussex County; that same year the Delaware Legislature heard arguments on an act to provide free public education.

While the State legislature listened to the arguments that would decide the fate of African American education for the next sixty years, most white educators still held the idea of "Negro education" in contempt. The Sussex County Teachers Institute, a white teacher's professional organization, held its twenty third annual conference from December seventh through the tenth in 1897. The program consisted of lectures from a professor from Delaware College, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Each evening the teachers enjoyed entertainment. On Wednesday evening, December seventh, the teachers listed to the Presbyterian Orchestra play songs including, "Corps de Garde March," a waltz, "The Yeoman of the Guard," and a Schottish, "All Coons Look Alike To Me." The following day Miss Gertrude and the Ariel Ladies Sextette preformed "Suwanee River." This

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example illustrates the deep-rooted contempt for African Americans entering the educational arena.

In 1898, the State Legislature passed the "School Laws for Free Public Schools of the State of Delaware." This legislation gave formal government approval to the "separate but equal" philosophy in education. In addition, it offered limited financial support to African American education, for hiring teachers, buying books and supplies. It was in this tumultuous social and political context that the Ross Point School was created.

In 1884 St. Johns African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded a short distance from Hitchens Crossroads. This church was founded and built by former slaves and the descendants of slaves working at the local sawmill, or on tenant farms, and living some distance away. It is almost certain that a school was in place on the property by December 3, 1892, when Charles M. Oney, Joshua T. Harmon, Henry West William Hovington, George Harmon, George H. Harmon and Joseph S. West formally incorporated the church.

The first evidence of a school at Ross Point is listed in the 1910, "Report to the State Board of Education." Charles West was the teacher of the small one room school, that year there were 56 students. The Old Ross Point School" stayed in use until 1922.

In 1918, the wealthy philanthropist Pierre S. du Pont founded the Service Citizens of Delaware to bring attention to problems and reform the state educational system. Du Pont, a wealthy chemist running a very successful family empire, donated over \$1.5 million to found the organization. By the end of 1918 du Pont had spent nearly \$1 million dollars improving the Delaware State College in Newark and over half a million dollars on his Alma Matter, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The following year his philanthropy, spread to the rest of Delaware.

Du Pont was so embarrassed by the conditions of schools in Delaware that he, "collected newspaper clippings, which criticized the poor school systems in the state." In 1918, the Service Citizens hired Joseph Odell as director, with an overriding mission to assimilate women, blacks and immigrants into public life in America.

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In 1919, one year after the great influenza epidemic and the end of World War I, du Pont and the Service Citizens initiated a project to rebuild all of the public schools in Delaware. During that year, school attendance plummeted to an average of 90 days for a majority of African American children. Du Pont commissioned the Service Citizens to study the conditions of all the schools in the state. The Service Citizens hired George Stayer, F.W. Hart and N.L. Englehardt to survey all of the existing buildings and to rate their physical conditions. Their pivotal study launched the rebuilding campaign.

On December 19, 1922, the State School Board of Education purchased the school and 3.4 acres of land at Ross Point for \$1.00 from John P. Neilds of Wilmington, Delaware. That June the board of education built the "New Ross Point School" using du Pont's charitable contributions for a total cost of \$6,366.70. From 1922 on, the state board of education administered the school and provided teachers for the facility. In 1922, there were 25 students at Ross Point, and most of them had to walk to school an average distance of 1.5 miles.

Throughout the Great Depression, Ross Point School remained open. In 1939, Ross Point is listed in the records of the schools that could receive surplus commodities. Each school approved for commodities received butter, jelly, flour, rice, rolled oats, beans, corn meal, apples, grapefruit juice, prunes, raisins and oranges. The instructional booklet included recipes for providing the children with a hot, nutritious lunch, and dessert. In 1940, 22 children at Ross Point were receiving surplus commodities for lunch.

In 1954, segregation ended. Up to this time, the people of Ross Point were enjoyed the benefits of having an unconsolidated school. Almost every year, Ross Point received new books from the Department of Education when most African American Schools received the discarded items from the white schools. That was why Ms. Cora Norwood-Selby, a teacher at Ross Point from 1941-1964, and the Trustees did not want Ross Point subsumed into the Laurel Special school district. They opposed integration for nearly ten years. They wanted their children to have the new books, and the very best education possible, which they felt could be provided in the existing environment, one that nurtured their values and understood their needs. Also, the teacher and the trustees were well aware of the hostility directed toward the new students

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arriving at white schools and wanted to protect their children, keep them away from the violence caused by desegregation.

Ross Point School 215 C closed its doors forever on September 24, 1964. From that time on, the children of the school were bused into the Laurel Special School District. Ms. Cora Norwood-Selby, the last teacher at Ross Point, was transferred to Laurel where she taught for over thirty years.

The building was a considered a surplus property of the State of Delaware for 17 years. In 1980, Pierre S. du Pont, IV, Delaware's Governor, approved a bill allowing the Department of Administrative Services to sell the Ross Point School for \$1.00 to the Ross Point Improvement Club. It has remained in their possession ever since.

Architectural Significance

Designed by the architect James Oscar Betelle of the firm Guilbert and Betelle, Ross Point School 215C is a scientifically engineered building designed to meet the needs of students. Every detail, from the land it is situated on to ventilation was taken into consideration during the design of the school building. James Betelle built the majority of the African American schools in Delaware this way. His designs, some similar to Ross Point, pepper the Delaware landscape; they are sprinkled from Claymont to Selbyville. His scrupulous attention to detail, while not unique, reflects an attention to the comfort of students that was never before taken into account and was considered very progressive.

The building sits at a forty-five degree angle that allows the sun to enter the six main windows and strike students over the left shoulder. The desks were ergonomically designed to incorporate ease, and to make sure that the seat was, 2/7th the height of each pupil. The shades were incorporated into the design to control the amount of sunlight that entered the room at any given time. The windows were designed to allow the teacher to open them from the top, or bottom extending outwards in a natural motion to increase ventilation in the building.

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The heater for the school was jacketed to prevent any students from being burned. And the desks were lined up in a way to allow the teacher to manipulate students attention, from one main board on one east side of the room, to another board at the back of the room.

In addition to these features, Ross Point also had indoor toilets that were separated between boys and girls, a playground, and a basement for coal storage. A small kitchenette was attached to one side of the interior and was used to prepare the children's lunch.

This modest rural schoolhouse symbolizes a progressive movement to scientifically control education and the environment in which education takes places to achieve a higher level of intellectual competence from students. Ross Point typifies this movement, in its plain, but graceful colonial revival design, and the numerous advances in sanitation, hygiene, safety, and comfort for the students. Ross Point was a beacon that pointed the direction toward a better, more equitable education for countless generations of African Americans. Its very design was made to assist students in the quest to learn. For this community, many of them former students and teachers, Ross Point represents a symbol of hope and the fulfillment of the promise of the empowering effect of a good education.

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Comprehensive Planning

Zone: Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp
Period: 1880-1940+/-: Urbanization and Early Suburbanization
Theme: Education, African American
Property Type: School

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Verbal Boundary Description

The Ross Point School 215C is bounded by County Road 448 on the south, and County Road 62 to the west, with the other two sides running along adjoining property lines.

Boundary Justification

This is all the property historically associated with the Ross Point School 215C.

