

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

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 16). 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 Wechsler School

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 1415 30th Avenue

NA not for publication

city, town Meridian

NA vicinity

state Mississippi code MS

county Lauderdale

code 75

zip code 39301

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

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

Category of Property

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

Number of Resources within Property

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

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.

Kenneth H. P. Pool

MAY 29, 1991

Signature of certifying official
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

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:

- 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:) _____

Patrick Andrews

7/15/91

for Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Education/school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Other: community services

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Late 19 and 20th Century Revivals
Other: Italianate

foundation Brick
walls Brick
Stucco
roof Asphalt
other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Wechsler School is located on a sloping block between 14th Street, 15th Street, 30th Avenue and Martin Luther King Memorial Drive. The original two story brick building faces north on 15th Street.

Wechsler was built in 1894 with the first floor having six rooms. The second floor consists of two rooms and an auditorium. Six full-height pilasters are used across the front facade. Full-height pilasters are located on the east, west and south facades and corners of the building. On the north facade is the main entrance to the building with a segmented-arched canopy supported by large brackets (Photo 1). The windows are six-over-six, double-hung having segmental arches. The roof is a low-pitched hipped.

The building was originally heated by coal burning fireplaces. The coal house (demolished) was located southwest of the main building. On the north grounds was located a well for water. Privies were located south of the building.

In 1914, because of growth in the number of children attending the public school system, a brick annex was built south of the original building. The 1894 building was changed to steam heat and plumbing added.

The annex is two stories with a basement. A second story walkway connects the two buildings (Photo 2). The windows are six-over-six, double-hung with segmental arches. The annex has full-height brick pilasters and a brick belt course of dentil elaborations (Photo 4). The north entrance of the first and second floors are segmental arched with two-lite transoms. The double doors have six-lites and the lower-half panels. The first and second floors were used as classrooms with restrooms and boiler room located in the basement.

In 1951, a new addition was built to the east of the 1894 and

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)

Ethnic Heritage/Black

Education

Period of Significance

1894-1937

Significant Dates

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

1894 - Issac Watts/J. G. Wedgeworth

1914 - C. M. Card - City Engineer;

Hancock, Lorenzo W. and McArthur, R.D.

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

Wechsler School is locally significant to the City of Meridian in the areas of education and Black heritage. Built in 1894, it is believed to be the first brick public school built for Blacks in Mississippi with funds derived from the issuance of bonds.¹ (It was not the first brick school for Blacks in the state -- that was Union School in Natchez, built about 1872 --but Wechsler was apparently the first built with public school bonds.) Between 1921 and 1937, Wechsler was the only public school in East Central Mississippi that offered a high school diploma for black students. The period of significance for Wechsler School begins with the school's construction in 1894 and ends in 1937, when Meridian's Black high school program was transferred to the new T. J. Harris High School.

Early public education in Meridian followed the 1870 revisions of the Mississippi Constitution. In the period of 1870 to 1885 the Board of School Directors was composed of trustees from city wards appointed by the City Council. The County Superintendent of Education served as Board President and the Circuit Court Clerk as Secretary. The City Board of School Directors had authority to operate the schools of the district. The first public school in Meridian for blacks were facilities rented from St. Paul Methodist Church. In 1886 the city built Whitaker, a frame public school building for black students which no longer stands.

In January of 1888 by an act of the State Legislature and amendment to the city charter, Meridian became a Municipal Separate School District. The Board of Aldermen and Councilmen again amended the charter in March of 1888 to provide for the issuance of \$30,000.00 in bonds for public school buildings. The citizens of Meridian voted and approved the bonds to build new schools.

According to the 1894 SOUTHERN CITIES ILLUSTRATED 30 percent of the educable children of the city were of the Black race. The

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.5 acres

UTM References

A

1	6	3	39	2	0	5	3	58	2	70	0
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 Zone Easting Northing

B

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 Zone Easting Northing

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated property occupies Block 163 of the Ragsdale Survey and is 230.24' x 350'. The property is bound on the North by 15th Street, South by 14th Street, East by 30th Avenue and West by Martin Luther King Memorial Drive.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification The boundary includes the entire city block that has historically been associated with the property. This includes the 1894 and 1914 buildings, which are contributing elements, and the adjacent 1951 addition, which is a noncontributing element.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Fonda Rush, Historic Preservation Specialist
 organization Community Development Department date 7-22-88 4/91 (revised)
 street & number 601 - 24th Avenue telephone 485-1910
 city or town Meridian state MS zip code 39301

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1914 buildings. This addition included four classrooms, auditorium, stage, cafeteria, teachers rooms, showers and boiler room. The addition was designed by Krouse and Yarbrough and built by L. B. Priester and Son.

The 1894 building has had changes through the years. In the 1920's the outside was covered with stucco. The south facade currently has a fire-escape. The first floor is now an office, four classrooms and boys and girls restrooms. The main entrance is double doors with large single panes of glass and sidelights. The west elevation has entrance doors like the main north entrance (Photo 4). Tongue-in-groove wainscoating is on the lower four feet of the hall walls. One north, first floor classroom still has the two inch pine flooring visible. All other floors in the building have been covered with linoleum. Stairwells are located in the center of the south and east portions of the building. A single flush door leads to the east staircase which connects the building with the 1951 addition.

The second floor has five classrooms, office space, library, girls and boys restrooms. Tongue-in-groove wainscoating is on the lower four feet of the hall walls. The west end of the hall is sectioned off as a library (Photo 5). The east end has a staircase connecting with the second floor of the 1951 addition. Entrance into classrooms have fine-panel doors with single-lite transoms.

The 1914 annex has gone through little change except that the basement was made into classrooms in 1951. The basement area today serves as the East Central Planning and Development District Nutritional Center for senior citizens. The entrance to the basement is on the west facade.

The composite of the three buildings that combine to make Wechsler generates a harmony of architectural styles (Photo 6 & 7). The 1894 and 1914 buildings are of the same architectural style. The 1951 building is utilitarian in style and has no adverse effect on the original building. Located in the outside center of the three buildings are walkways that connect the buildings. Leading to the 1951 addition is a set of

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stairs with a covering having rolled asphalt roofing. The south end of the block is a playground with various equipment. The lower south end of the property has chain link fencing. The western side of the lot has large trees, limestone terracing and a parking lot.

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growth in numbers of students caused the Board of Aldermen and Councilmen to authorize an act for a "\$15,000.00 bond issue for the purchase of grounds and erection of school building on South Side for a white school and a building for a colored school."² The act was approved in February of 1894 and the colored school was to be located on Block 163 of the Ragsdale Survey.

The two story brick structure was named after Rabbi Judah (Jacob) Wechsler. Rabbi Wechsler was the spiritual leader of Meridian's Congregation Beth Israel from 1887-1893. The Rabbi is said to have had great interest and influence on black education in Meridian. The original building was built for students attending primary through eighth grade.

In 1914 the citizens of Meridian voted on a bond issue for improvements and additions to the city schools amounting to \$74,905.49. From this bond issue an annex was built south of the older building, plumbing and steam heat were added to the 1894 building. In the 1915-16 school year the ninth and tenth grades were added to the curriculum. 1919-20 school year the eleventh grade was added and in 1920-21 instruction in Domestic Science begun.

In 1921-22 the curriculum at Wechsler was expanded to twelve grades with six students graduating that spring. With the addition of the twelfth grade Wechsler became the only public school in east central Mississippi that granted Black students a high school diploma. Students could take classes in home economics, manual training, music, science, stenography and be involved in athletics. During the 1922-23 school year Wechsler was accredited by the State of Mississippi. This school year included the addition of classes for adults. The highest number of graduates from Wechsler reached eighty-seven in the 1935-36 school year. The period of 1921 to 1937 high school students came from all sections of Mississippi (Brookhaven, Barnett, Complete, DeKalb, Gulfport, Hattiesburg, Jackson, Kosciusko, Laurel and other communities) to attend Wechsler. Students also came from Alabama and Tennessee.

On January 17, 1867, at a meeting in Jackson, state teachers gave recommendations for normal schools for preparing black teachers

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for teaching their own race. The Constitutional Convention of 1868 adopted the recommendations which began the Normal Schools for blacks in Mississippi. During the 1879 administration of State Superintendent of Education, James A. Smith, five Summer Normals were held at Jackson, Brookhaven, Meridian, Okolona and Winona aided by the Peabody fund. By 1894, the Summer Normals were well established and the State Legislature provided additional funds. To understand the importance of the Summer Normals, we must consider the fact that the number of teachers in black schools holding a Bachelor's or Master's degree was small. To help teachers become better qualified the Normals were designed in the 1920s as a cooperative program between county school superintendents and the State Department of Education. The Meridian-State Normal for Teachers (Blacks) was moved to Wechsler in 1929 and held during June and July. The Summer Normal at Wechsler served the counties of Clarke, Jasper, Kemper, Lauderdale, Leake, Neshoba, Newton, Wayne, Winston, Scott and Smith. "Teachers with less than a high school education were required to attend the Summer Normal and renew their teaching license until sixteen acceptable units were earned for high school graduation."³ In 1929, fifty teachers graduated from the Normal at Wechsler. The Normals ended at Wechsler when the high school moved to T. J. Harris High School.

In 1937 the high school was moved from Wechsler allowing the buildings to continue to be used as an elementary and junior high school until 1971. From 1971-1983 Wechsler would serve as a public kindergarten for both black and white students. Wechsler was closed as a public school in 1983. Wechsler has served the community as a Head Start Center and presently serving as a nutritional center for senior citizens.

FOOTNOTES

¹The information combines data that appears in Wilson, Charles H., Sr., M. A. Education for Negroes In Mississippi Since 1910. (Boston: The Meado Press), p. 128 and in Wechsler. (Lauderdale County Department of Archives and History), unpaginated.

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²Dial, E. H. The Code of Laws of the City of Meridian, Mississippi. (Meridian: New Job Office), p. 38.

³Ivy, Horace Macaulay, PH.D. History of Meridian Schools 1885-1953. (Meridian: Mississippi Room Collection, Public Library), p. 126.

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Barksdale, John. "The Development of Schools for Negroes, In Meridian". Citizens of Color: Progress Report 1831-1962. Meridian: Privately printed, 1962.

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Dial, E. H. The Code of Laws of the City of Meridian, Mississippi. Meridian: New Job Office, 1903.

Forbes, C. W., ed. Southern Cities Illustrated. New Orleans: Privately printed, 1894.

Ivy, Horace Macaulay, PH.D. History of Meridian Schools 1885-1953. Mississippi Room Collection, Public Library, Meridian, Mississippi.

Lauderdale County Department of Archives and History, Meridian. Wechsler, 1932.

Lauderdale County, Mississippi. Chancery Clerk. Deed Books C, D, 6, 7, 16, 36, 41, 44, 49, 52, 987.

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Meridian, Mississippi. Proceedings Board of Aldermen, May 2, 1882 to April 23, 1890 and May 6, 1890 to December 14, 1894.

Meridian Municipal Separate School District. Board of Trustees Minutes. August 4, 1885 to July 2, 1904.

Thirty Years In Review 1923-1953 With Dr. H. M. Ivy, Superintendent, Wechsler Junior High, Mississippi Room Collection, Public Library, Meridian, Mississippi.

Turitz, Rabbi Leo E., and Evelyn Turitz. Jews In Early Mississippi. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983.

Wilson, Charles H., Sr., M. A. Education For Negroes In Mississippi Since 1910. Boston: The Meador Press, 1947.

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Wechsler School, Meridian, Lauderdale County, Mississippi
Photographs

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The following information is the same for all photographs:

- (1) Wechsler School
- (2) Meridian, Lauderdale County, Mississippi
- (3) Cindy Hopkins
- (4) May, 1988
- (5) Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Photo 1--(6) Facade (north elevation), view to south

Photo 2--(6) Walkways between 1894 and 1914 buildings, view to the west

Photo 3--(6) Windows, pilasters and belt course of the 1914 annex, view to to the southwest

Photo 4--(6) Hallway and west entrance in 1894 building (1st floor), view to the west

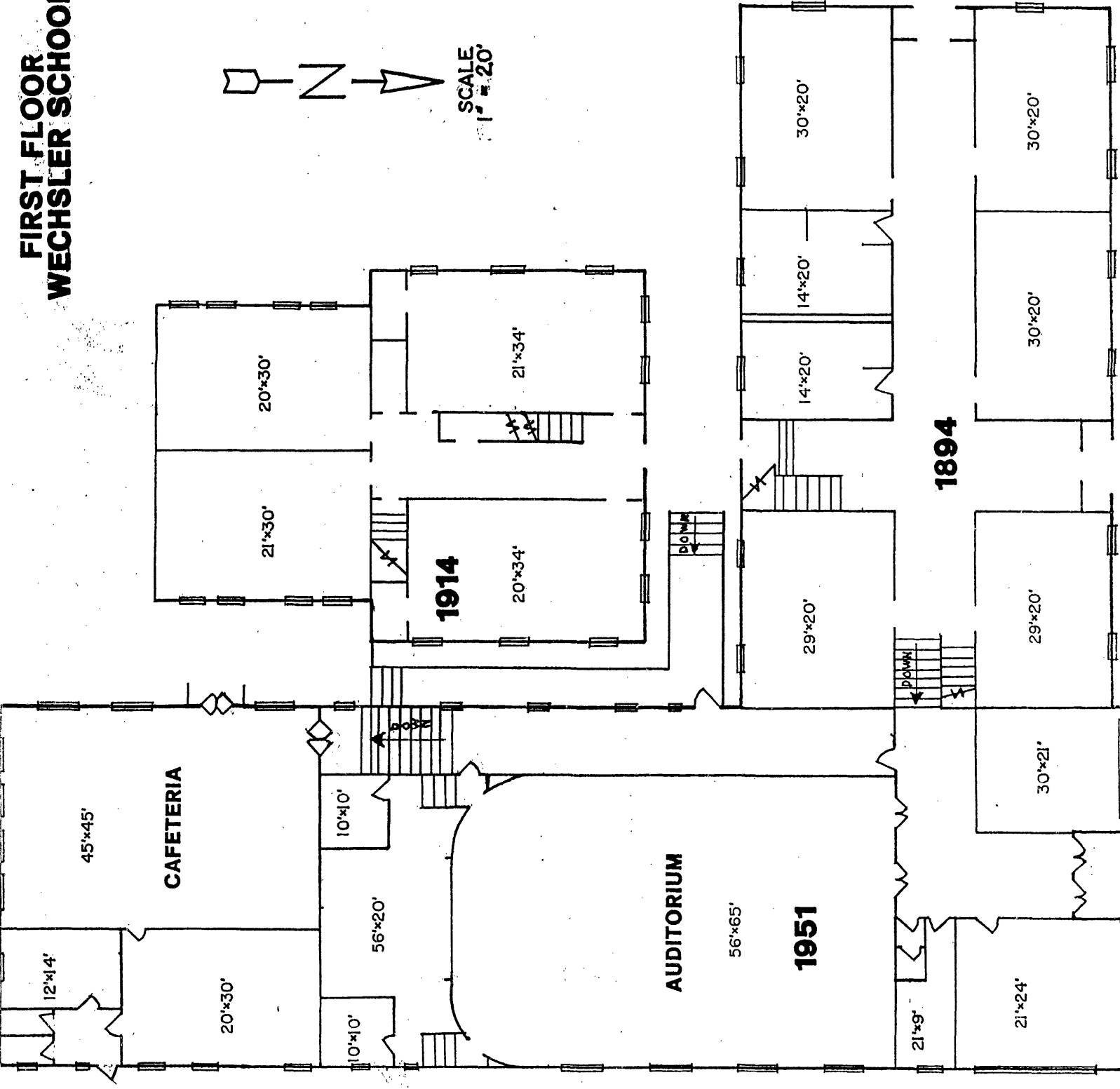
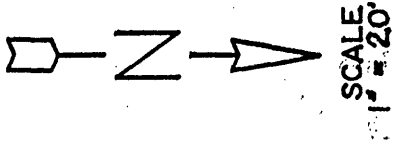
Photo 5--(6) Library 1894 building (2nd floor), view to the west

Photo 6--(6) Facade (north elevation) 1894 and 1951 Building, view to the south

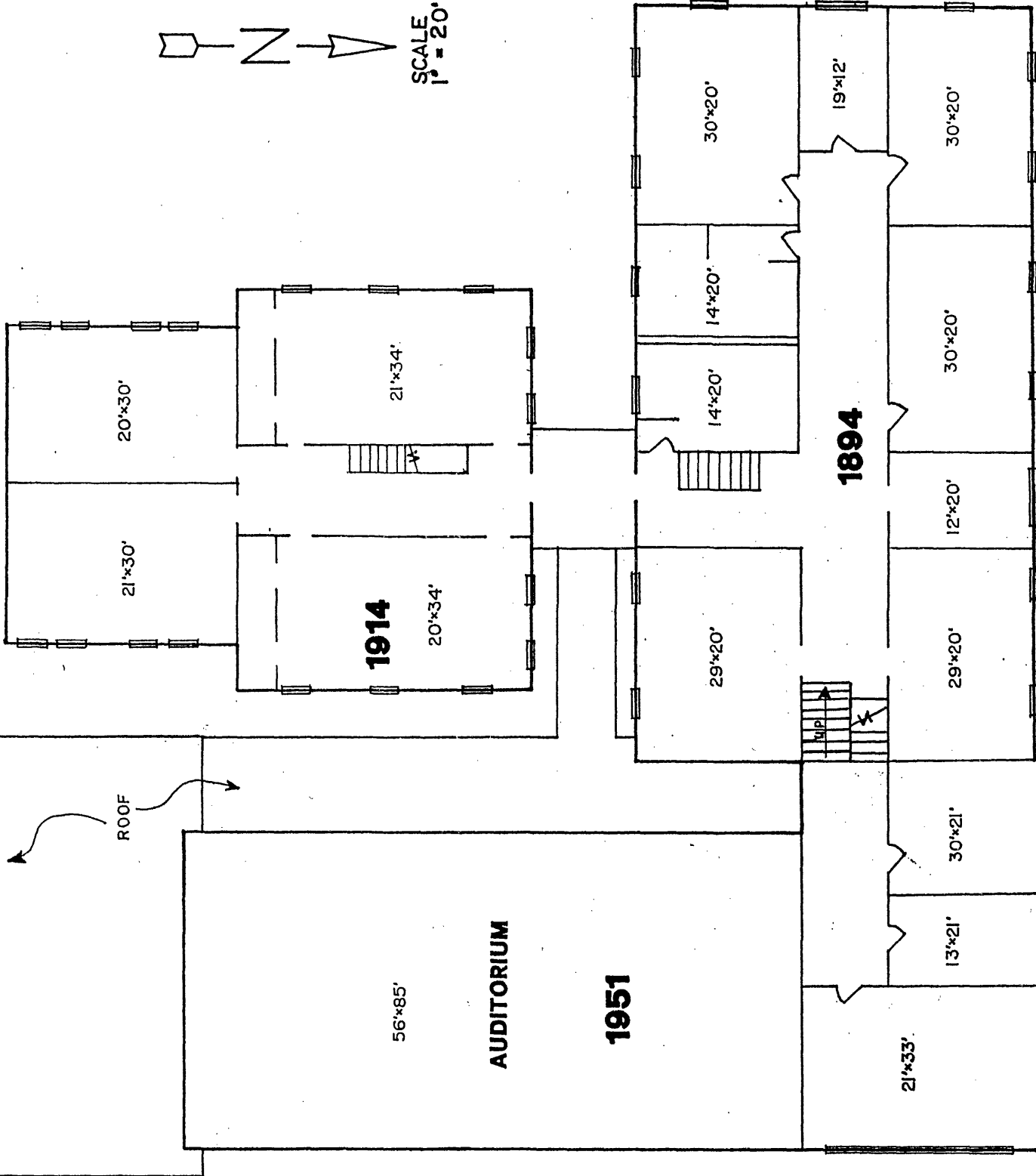
Photo 7--(7) South facade of buildings - 1894-1914-1951, view to the northeast

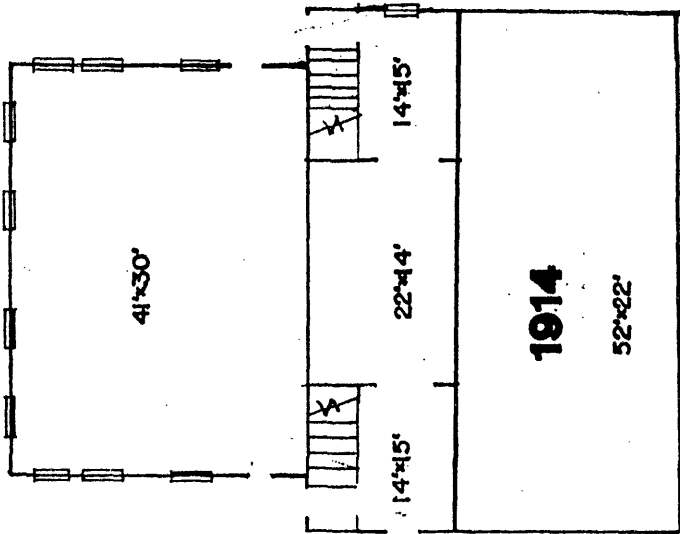
Photo 8--(6) South facade of buildings - 1894-1914, view to the northeast

FIRST FLOOR WECHSLER SCHOOL

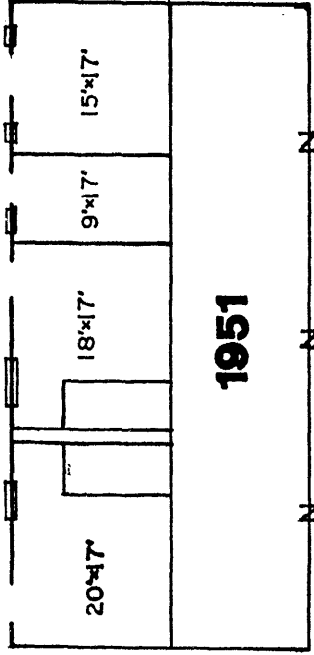


**SECOND FLOOR
WECHSLER SCHOOL**





**BASEMENT OF REAR BUILDING
WECHSLER SCHOOL**



**ROOMS UNDER CAFETERIA
WECHSLER SCHOOL**

SCALE
1" = 20'

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91000880

Date Listed: 7/15/91

Wechsler School
Property Name

Lauderdale
County

MISSISSIPPI
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.

6/1 Patrick Andrews
Signature of the Keeper

7/15/91
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 8

This nomination was amended to delete Criterion C.

The amendment was confirmed by phone with the Mississippi SHPO (7/12/91).

DISTRIBUTION:

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