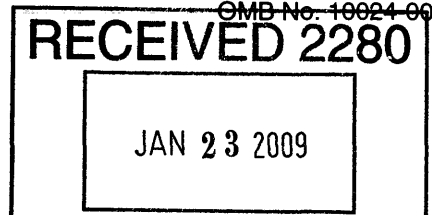


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

073



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instructions in 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 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 Huston Elementary School

other names/site number Huston Center

2. Location

street & number 304 Vinnedge [N/A] not for publication

city or town Blackwell [N/A] vicinity

state Oklahoma code OK county Kay code 071 zip code 74631

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title: Bob Klackner, State Historic Preservation Officer; Date: 1-20-09

State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- [X] 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 [ ] See continuation sheet.
[ ] other, explain [ ] See continuation sheet.

Signature of the Keeper: Edson H. Beall; Date of Action: 3.4.09

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**5. Classification**

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

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

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	3	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	3	Total

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

N/A

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

0

**6. Function or Use**

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

EDUCATION: school

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

EDUCATION: school

**7. Description**

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

Modern Movement

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	CONCRETE
walls	BRICK
roof	ASPHALT
other	

**Narrative Description**

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

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

### Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION

ARCHITECTURE

### Periods of Significance

1949-1957

### Significant Dates

1949

1955

1956

### Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Caudill and Rowlett, architects

Hoke Construction Company, builder

John J. McAnaw Jr. Construction Company,  
builder

J. J. Reardon Construction Company, builder

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

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

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

# \_\_\_\_\_

- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

# \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Oklahoma Historical Society

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreage of Property** 6 Acres MOL

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1.     14     652880     4072370     (NAD27)  
      Zone    Easting     Northing

2.  
      Zone    Easting     Northing

3.  
      Zone    Easting     Northing

4.  
      Zone    Easting     Northing                    [N/A] 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.)

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian, for Preservation Oklahoma

organization Architectural Resources & Community Heritage Consulting date September 2008

street & number 346 County Road 1230 telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Pocasset state OK zip code 73079

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### Additional Documentation

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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)

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### Property Owner

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

name Blackwell Public Schools, Mrs. Lesa Ward, Superintendent

street & number 201 East Blackwell telephone 580-363-2570

city or town Blackwell state OK zip code 74631

**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 range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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**DESCRIPTION**

**Summary:**

The Huston Elementary School was one of four elementary schools designed in the late 1940s through mid-1950s by the architectural firm of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates in Blackwell, Kay County, Oklahoma.<sup>1</sup> Although planned at the same time as Blackwell's Washington Elementary School, the Huston Elementary School was the first Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates' school completed, primarily because a tornado destroyed the previous elementary school building that served the south side of the community. Construction on the Huston Elementary School began in May 1949 and was finished by October of the same year. Two additions in the mid-1950s completed the building to its current form. The Huston Elementary School was designed in the Modern style, utilizing a finger plan which was popular at the time. A finger plan basically consisted of wings, usually set parallel to each other, and connected by a corridor system. The plan, developed in the late 1930s, was in vogue for various reasons, including the ease of which additions could be seamlessly added to the school plant.

The one-story, brick Huston Elementary School now consists of three identical, rectangular, shed-roofed sections connected by a central, flat-roofed, metal, open-air corridor. As constructed in 1949, the building consisted of only one and three-fourths wings. In 1955, the original north wing was extended to the same length as the south (front) wing. In 1956, construction began on a third wing, equal in length to the original south wings, on the north side of the school. The additions were anticipated when the building was originally designed and all occurred during the period of development for Blackwell's elementary schools as planned by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates

On the west side of the connecting, open-air corridor towards the south end, there is an original, flat-roof, rectangular, brick, all-purpose room. Currently, the all-purpose room has several slab doors and no windows. The educational wings have rows of metal windows below the connecting awning. The ribbon windows consist of sets of three-light, rectangular, metal, pivot windows. The restroom windows in the south and middle educational wings have smaller, square, fixed sidelights to flank the larger, rectangular windows, as well as frosted panes of glass. The multiple exterior doors throughout the building are wood slab with a few replacement metal slab doors. Original decorative details include a metal screen in front of the west side of the south wing, ribbon windows and contrasting brown trim.

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<sup>1</sup> Caudill and Rowlett formed their firm in 1946, naming it after themselves. In 1948, Wallie E. Scott Jr. became a partner in the firm, resulting in the new name of Caudill, Rowlett and Scott. However, Scott did not have a license to practice architecture in Oklahoma when the first Blackwell schools were constructed so his name was not included on the construction plaque or early references to the Huston Elementary School. With other partners joining the firm as early as 1949, the name of the firm became simply Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates. It remained so named until the late 1950s when the firm began to do business under the acronym CRS which it continued to use for several decades.

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Off the northwest side of the original corridor, and also connected via an open-air walkway, is a large, concrete, subterranean multi-purpose room and storm shelter that was added in about 1985. Due to the connection to the historic building via the same means that connect the other elements of the building together, the storm shelter is not considered a separate resource from the school building. As an addition, the storm shelter is differentiated from the historic construction by its contrasting construction material and its location towards the backside of the building.

To the west of the school, on the otherwise grassy site, there is a playground area. The modern playground is not counted separately because of the ubiquitous nature of it. The school from its earliest days would have had a playground area. Although now containing nonhistoric equipment, the playground area does not interfere with the ability of the school to convey its significance. However, the area also does not contribute to the historic significance of the school; as such, the playground is not included in the resource count.

There are three small buildings that require consideration as separate resources within this nomination. This includes a small, noncontributing, free-standing, metal building located on the north side of the walkway connecting the storm shelter to the school. Between the south and middle wing of the historic school, there are two noncontributing, small, asbestos-sided, side-gabled, portable classrooms with wood entry porches. The nonhistoric buildings do not interfere with the school's ability to convey its significance as the construction is readily distinguishable due to different materials and relative placement.

The Huston Elementary School has been in use as an elementary school since its construction in 1949-1950. However, the Blackwell Public Schools has begun construction on a new consolidated elementary school which will cause the mid-twentieth-century schools, including Huston, to be put into a new use or vacated. Similar to the previous generation of Blackwell schools, the mid-twentieth-century schools are considered outdated, particularly in terms of securing the students in a manner now required to avoid possible hazards and intruders. Because the fate of the buildings is uncertain, the Blackwell mid-twentieth-century schools are considered threatened historic resources. The buildings were included on Preservation Oklahoma Incorporated's 2007 Most Endangered Properties list.

The setting of the building remains much as it was historically. Located in the southwest part of town, the Huston Elementary School was constructed largely to accommodate the post-World War II growth of the community. The school is situated in a residential area on a long rectangular stretch of land. While the streets in the area are generally straight north-south and east-west, the blocks in the housing development are noticeably longer than in older residential areas. The housing in the neighborhood encompassing the school generally date to the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. A tornado in 1949 touched down in this general area, destroying many buildings including the earlier school building in the vicinity. Another tornado in 1955 caused some damage but was not as destructive to this section of town.

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Overall, the area appears to have maintained its original middle- to upper-middle-class feel with the school building, homes and lawns being well-maintained and in use.

**Exterior Description:**

The Huston Elementary School is a brick, multi-wing, one-story, Modern style building with a concrete foundation. The roof is a combination of flat and shed. The covering of the flat roof is not visible but the shed roof sections are clad with asphalt shingles. Originally, the roof had an aluminum coating that served as an insulator, as well as added to the attractiveness of the building. The basic shape of the building is a large E with a small rectangular block off the vertical member towards the bottom. Typical of mid-twentieth-century architecture, the building is minimally ornamented and its form is clearly related to its function. On the east side of the building, there are three linear educational wings that are spaced at an equal distance. The educational wings are just one room deep with entries located only on one side. Each wing includes a series of five rooms and, on the west side near the connecting corridor, a boys and girls restroom. All of the rooms are accessed from the outside via the open-air corridor which also connects the building's components together. The corridor is sheltered by a flat roof supported by round metal supports. Off to the side towards the south is a rectangular block. This block is the all-purpose room, intended to accommodate school and after-school activities.

The relatively plain building was designed to not only provide ample amounts of natural light but to also take advantage of the prevailing winds to adequately ventilate the building. As such, the school features rows of windows on both the north and south sides. The windows in the educational wings consist of three-pane, metal, pivot units. The all-purpose room had combination metal, pivot and fixed, full-height windows on the south side and the three-pane, metal, pivot windows on the north. Additionally, the shed roofs along each of the education wings had a continuous clerestory band of louvers on the south side. The louvers which covered glass panels and were part of the natural lighting and ventilation systems have been completely covered. Large mechanical units have been systematically located in front of the shed roofs on the flat corridor roof as well. However, the basic pattern of the original ventilation and lighting openings are still evident.

Although the three educational wings are similar, there are subtle differences between each one which sets them apart. As such, each wing will be described separately with emphasis placed on the most distinguishing feature, the fenestration pattern. The all-purpose room is a unique element which will be described before the educational wings. Notably, the open-air corridor connects all of the elements together, creating a unified, single building. The corridor has a wide, concrete floor (see photographs 1, 5 and 7). The flat corridor roof is supported by equally-placed round supports. The underside of the corridor roof is clad with painted wood panels with square lights and small vents. The vents were part of the buildings ventilation system, while the lights were necessary for after-school activities. Period photographs taken by Julius Shulman showing adults square dancing were taken in the corridor, rather

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than inside the building. The trim on the corridor roof, as well as the support members, are metal. Along both outside edges of the corridor roof is a decorative opening which allows more light, as well as aided the flow of air, onto the corridor. The connecting corridor has been extended along the northwest side to join the contemporary storm shelter with the historic school. Notably, the nonhistoric portion of the corridor is narrower than the original, sheltered by a metal flat roof, has square supports rather than circular and does not have open edges along both sides of the roof.

The all-purpose room is a rectangular block located off the west side of the front portion of the open-air corridor. Relatively plain, the all-purpose room was constructed of matching brick with a concrete foundation and flat roof. Originally, the all-purpose room featured a full-height row of windows over the west three-fourths of the south wall. The windows have been covered with metal panels and there is a single, nonhistoric, metal, slab door on the far west corner. It is not known if the windows remain in place under the metal panels. The door is sheltered by a narrow, flat, metal roof. On the east elevation, there is a single, metal, slab door with a diamond-shaped light. The door is located towards the south corner of the east elevation, under the open-air corridor. The brown door has matching opaque sidelights on both sides. The north elevation has a narrow row of windows along the upper wall. As on the front, the back row of windows have been covered with brown metal panels. Below the windows, extending the length of the elevation is a horizontal metal pipe. At the west corner of the north elevation, the pipe turns downward to extend to the ground. The west elevation of the all-purpose room is devoid of openings. The west elevation, however, features a wide, brick, end wall, exterior chimney. The chimney appears to have been capped off with concrete.

The south educational wing consists of five rooms with separate restrooms on the west end. The south elevation of the wing is part of the "front" of the building, along with the all-purpose room. Extending past both ends of the educational wing is the open-air, flat-roofed corridor. Beginning on the east end of the wing, there is a row of five three-part windows; then two side-by-side, metal, slab doors with flanking five-light sidelights, some of which have been obscured; then twelve sets of windows; then another set of side-by-side doors; then another row of twelve sets of windows; then a single door with a covered sidelight; then a short section of brick wall; then a single door; then two sets of standard windows flanked on both sides by smaller fixed windows; then a single door. On the east elevation of the south educational wing, there is a lone, double, off-center, full-height, fixed, metal window. Along the north side of the south educational wing is a recessed band of thirty-six, three-part, metal, pivot windows. The west elevation features a single, metal, slab door adjacent to a floor-to-ceiling, six-part, metal window with smaller sidelights on both sides. The lower portion of the window is filled with a small mechanical unit. To the north of the window, level with the second pane from the top, is the brass construction plaque. The plaque reads "HUSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL/Board of Education/Clair M. Brock - President/Karl B. Drowatzky/Glenn W. Stewart/Louis S. Howard/L.A. Burkhalter/J. Arthur Herron - Superintendent/ 1949/Caudill & Rowlett Hoke Construction CO/Architects Contractor."



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The middle educational wing is parallel to the south (front) educational wing with enough space between the wings to allow the prevailing winds to access both wings equally. The space between the south and middle wing now contains two portable buildings. Minimizing the impact of the buildings on the historic school, the portable buildings are located towards the northwest side of the grassy area near the corner created by the corridor and middle wing. As such, the buildings are not readily visible from the front of the historic building. The one-story, side-gabled buildings are identical with the fenestration pattern arranged in a mirror image. The buildings were constructed fairly recently and are in excellent condition. The composition board buildings have a cinder block foundation and an asphalt-clad roof. The front of the buildings features a triple, aluminum, one-over-one, hung window and a single, metal, slab door with a single rectangular light. The buildings share a wood partial porch. The porch has two sets of stairs that correspond to the single front entries. Additionally, off the west side of the wood porch, there is a ramp that provides access to both buildings. There are no openings on the sides of the buildings. The back elevations feature a triple, one-over-one, hung, aluminum window and a single, metal, slab door with a rectangular light. The back doors have simple concrete steps with mechanical units located nearby. Due to insufficient age, the buildings are considered as two noncontributing resources within this nomination.

As originally designed and constructed, the middle educational wing was only about three-fourths the length of the front wing. In response to escalating enrollment, as anticipated when the school was built, the wing was "finished" to the length of the north wing in 1955. The period two-room addition is subtly discernible in the slightly different brickwork and fenestration pattern. As with the south wing, the middle educational wing includes a total of five rooms plus the restrooms on the west side. The school office, as indicated by various signs on the brick walls, is located in the rooms on the east end of the middle wing in the 1955 addition. The fenestration pattern consists of five three-part, metal, pivot windows; adjacent to the windows is a narrow, floor-to-ceiling, metal, sidelight; then a narrow, projecting, brick wall; then, in a recessed opening, there are two single, metal, slab doors divided by a short wall; then another narrow, projecting, brick wall; then six three-part windows; then a short, flush, expanse of brick wall; then five three-part windows adjacent to a covered full-height sidelight; then a single slab door; then another single slab door; then twelve three-part windows adjacent to a covered, full-height sidelight; then a single slab door; then a short expanse of brick wall; then a single slab door; then two three-part windows, each with flanking smaller sidelights; and finally, a single slab door. Centrally located below the windows in the west portion of the middle wing is a long, white, ceramic, water faucet. The east elevation has no openings, just nonoriginal lettering which spells out "Huston Center." On the north side, the 1955 addition features a wide section of brick wall, then a recessed row of fourteen three-part metal windows. A narrow brick wall separates the addition from the longer, also recessed, row of twenty-two, three-part windows in the original section of the middle wing. The west elevation of the middle wing has a single metal door adjacent to a three-part window. The upper two panes of the windows are opaque and the bottom pane is filled with louvers. To the south of the window, slightly off-center is a single, metal, protruding vent pipe.

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As to be expected, the north educational wing, added completely in 1956-1957, is similar in design and materials to the addition to the middle educational wing. One visible difference between the two wings is the bike rack area located off the east side of the north wing. The bike racks are obscured from the adjacent street by two short brick walls that match the walls of the school. The bike rack area is likely an historic element as this type of amenity was intrinsic to the design of the school; initial accounts indicate the bike area would be not constructed but the plans did include areas such as this. Other amenities include bars set into the concrete of the sidewalks for children to clean the dirt and mud off their shoes. Like the other educational wings, the north wing includes five classrooms. On the east end, there are five three-part windows next to a full-height six-light sidelight. A narrow, projecting, brick wall separates the window sidelight from the adjacent, inset, double entry. The entry consists of two single, metal, slab doors separated by a matching brown wall. On the other side of the narrow projecting entry wall, are twelve three-part windows flanked by full-height sidelights. Another recessed double entry is off-set by projecting brick walls. West of the middle entry is another set of twelve three-part windows and flanking full-height sidelights. A narrow projecting brick wall separates the windows from a single metal entry. West of this, are the restrooms. Unlike on the other wings, the single, metal, slab restrooms doors are separated by a single row of windows along the upper wall. Slightly off-center between the bathroom doors on the brick wall is a long, ceramic, water faucet. On the far west edge of the south elevation is a double set of metal, slab doors. Similar to the middle educational wing, there are no openings on the east elevation of the north wing. The north elevation features a recessed band of three-pane windows that extends nearly the length of the elevation. Visible on the north side, the restroom portion of the north elevation is set back; however, there are no openings on either the north or west walls of this part of the building.

Extending off the open-air corridor in front of the north educational wing is the metal walkway that leads to the subterranean, concrete storm shelter. The storm shelter was added in 1985 and was apparently a district-wide endeavor as two of the other mid-twentieth-century elementary schools have similar shelters. The flat-roofed, metal walkway connecting the storm shelter to the school is supported by square, metal supports that have been painted brown to match the trim of the historic portion of the school. The north and south elevations of the square storm shelter are buried nearly to the top. The east and west elevations feature deeply recessed, double, metal, slab doors with small lights. The concrete walls extending along the recessed entry porch are stepped to provide additional protection to those seeking shelter inside. A three-foot chain link fence prevents access to the flat top of the storm shelter. Because the storm shelter is connected to the school in the same way that the various elements of the historic school plant is connected, and the fact that that was part of the design intent when the school was conceived, the storm shelter is not considered a separate resource from the school.

To the northeast of the storm shelter, on the north side of the connecting walkway, is a small, noncontributing, metal, portable building. The metal building has a low-pitched, front-gabled, metal

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roof. The building has double, metal doors on the south elevation. There is a single, small, opaque window high on the wall of the east and west elevations. The north elevation has two window openings in a similar position. The building is noncontributing because it is a post-1985 addition to the school plant.

Southwest of the storm shelter is a large grassy area. Towards the southwest portion of this area, almost directly west of the all-purpose section of the school, is the school playground. The playground features a sand-covered area in the larger grassy section of the lot. The equipment in the playground is of fairly recent vintage as it is bright colored, metal and plastic, combination slide and climbing equipment. There are various concrete sidewalks around the playground, connecting it to the school building. The remainder of the school site is open and grass covered.

**Alterations/Additions:**

The Huston Elementary School has undergone some modification. The most notable changes are the covering of the louvers above the flat awnings in the educational wings and the covering of the windows and addition of a door in the historic all-purpose room. While these areas are inoperable for their intended function as part of the school's ventilation and natural lighting systems, the original pattern of openings remains evident. Other changes to the building include the covering of some of the full-height sidelights at the entries. Again, the sidelights are not completely obliterated so the original fenestration pattern remains readable.

The planning of an addition to the Huston Elementary School began to occur within five years of the building's construction. This first small addition, constructed entirely in 1955, added two classrooms to the east end of what is now the middle educational wing. The following year, construction was started on a matching, third educational wing. The additions were both designed by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates with the first one built by the John J. McAnaw Junior Construction Company and the second one by the J.J. Reardon Construction Company. Both of the additions continued the evolution of the school as originally anticipated and designed by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates. Therefore, the 1950s additions have gained significance of their own and are not considered detrimental to the building's ability to convey its significance.

The 1985 construction of a storm shelter/multi-purpose room does not adversely impact the integrity of the historic school. Although the storm shelter is connected to the historic portion of the school, the newer construction is located at a distance to the other portions of the building and is distinguishable by the use of different construction materials. The connecting walkway is metal and the storm shelter is concrete.

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The addition of the two portable buildings between the south and middle educational wings also does not substantially alter the ability of the building to convey its significance. The noncontributing, No Distinctive style buildings are not connected to the historic school plant itself. Further, they are distinguishable as separate entities by their different construction material and functional design. Located towards the west side of the open area between the south and middle educational wings, the buildings are not readily visible from the front or back of the school building and do not significantly change the relationship between the north and middle educational wings. As such, although noncontributing resources within this nomination, the buildings are not considered a major detriment to the building's historic integrity.

Overall, the Huston Elementary School retains the characteristics of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association sufficiently to convey the building's role in educational developments in Blackwell in the late 1940s and 1950s. The building was the first step in improving the local schools during a period of exceptional growth. While modifications to the building have diminished its ability to fully convey its architectural significance as a precedent setting school design that achieved national recognition, the school retains sufficient integrity to convey its local significance as an early, striking example of mid-twentieth-century educational architecture.

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**SIGNIFICANCE**

The Huston Elementary School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with mid-twentieth-century improvements in educational facilities in Blackwell, Kay County, Oklahoma. The school was the first educational building completed as part of a fifteen year plan developed by the architectural firm of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates for the elementary schools in Blackwell. Due to two natural disasters which destroyed three earlier elementary school buildings, the fifteen year plan took only ten years to implement. As the first tangible element that was put into use as part of this plan, the Huston Elementary School initiated a new phase of education in Blackwell. The additions to the school in the mid-1950s continued to reflect the increasing demand upon education in the community as the post-World War II Baby Boomer generation reached school-age in unprecedented numbers.

The school is also eligible under Criterion C as an excellent example of mid-twentieth-century Modern style school design. The firm of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates achieved nationwide acclaim in school design in the 1950s and early 1960s. The Huston Elementary School was a critical element in that rise as one of the first two schools to achieve widespread notoriety. However, due to changes to some of the innovative design elements of the school, such as the obscuring of the louvers along the educational wings clerestories which allowed the school to take advantage of the "solar light" and prevailing winds, the school is nominated at only the local level for its architectural significance. The Modern style design of the building was an obvious step in a new direction as compared to the earlier school buildings in the community. Due to the pioneering design, the school remains a readily recognizable mid-twentieth-century architectural landmark in Blackwell.

The period of significance for the school extends from 1949 to 1957. Although planned for almost two years in advance, the period of significance begins with the actual construction of the original building in 1949. The period is extended to 1957 to include both the 1955 and 1956 additions to the school. The 1956 addition was not completed and put into service until 1957. Additionally, this period reflects the unfolding of the eventual ten-year plan of elementary school development in Blackwell by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates.

**HISTORIC BACKGROUND**

The community of Blackwell was founded in 1893 by a group of businessmen from Winfield, Kansas. The new town was named after Colonel A.J. Blackwell, an adopted Cherokee Indian on whose property the original townsite was located on. In 1893, the town lacked rail connections "...and had few natural advantages except an excellent agricultural territory." Within ten years, the town enjoyed transportation facilities linking it to the larger area and an abundant water supply. The largest industry at the time was the 300-barrel-capacity flour mill. This was augmented by a steam laundry, a machine shop and a brick

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plant. The central business district included twenty-eight, mainly one-story, buildings, although there were also one each two-, three- and five-story buildings.<sup>2</sup>

While agriculture remained a dominant factor in the town's development through much of the twentieth century, other natural advantages subsequently developed that also contributed significantly to Blackwell's growth. Blackwell's agricultural-based prosperity was first augmented in 1901 by the discovery of natural gas. In the late 1910s, the discovery of oil provided another major economic stimulus. Various related industries were soon blossoming in the town. In 1916, the Blackwell Zinc Company, a subsidiary of the American Metal Company Limited, was established. By the mid-1930s, other industrial concerns thriving in the area included the Globe Oil and Refining Company, the Hazel Atlas Glass Company, the Cushing Refining and Gasoline Refinery, the Blackwell Brick Company, the Acme Foundry, the Turvey Packing Company, the Blackwell Cheese Company and the Blackwell Mill and Elevator Company. With the city economically thriving, services within the community also reached new heights. In addition to the two rail lines operated by the Santa Fe and Frisco Railway companies in the 1930s, Blackwell was served by paved highways and a municipal airport. As such, residents could be a passenger on one of the seven trains or the ten buses that passed through the community on a daily basis or reach "...any point..." via special plane.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike many other Oklahoma communities, Blackwell did not experience a "mushroom growth." Instead, due to the "...steady increase in agricultural wealth and the location of...growing industries," the town enjoyed "...a gradual and lasting growth and prosperity." This continued to be true through the 1940s and 1950s as many of the same industries operating in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s continued to function and even expanded their local facilities. By 1954, the Blackwell Zinc Company ranked as the community's number one industry with nine hundred employees drawing a yearly payroll of \$4 million. Other major industrial concerns included the Hazel-Atlas Glass plant which employed over 180 persons and had an annual payroll of almost \$800,000. The Acme Foundry and Machine Company held its own as "...one of the city's fastest-growing industries..." with 130 workers and a \$450,000 payroll. The Turvey Packing Company, at the time the state's largest independent meat packer, was also notable. In addition to employing 75 persons that "...pump(ed) a total of more than \$251,000 into local trade channels..." the packing plant materially boosted the agricultural prowess of the area by expending \$3 million for hogs and cattle produced in the area. New industries also continued to locate in the community. In the mid-1950s, the Cities Services Oil Company employed thirty-five persons who earned a total of about \$105,000 a year working at the Ambrose Gasoline Plant located two miles northwest of Blackwell.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Daily Oklahoman, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), 27 September 1936. See also "Blackwell," n.d., (available Vertical Files, Research Library, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 27 September 1936 and 8 August 1954.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 8 August 1954.

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In terms of population, Blackwell, along with Kay County as a whole, continued to grow every decade of the first half of the twentieth century, except for the trying decade of the 1930s. At the time of Oklahoma's statehood in 1907, Blackwell's population stood at 2,644. Within three years, the number of residents had jumped to 3,266, nearly a twenty-four percent increase. More than doubling over the next decade, Blackwell's population numbered 7,174 in 1920, a 119.6 percent increase. Much slower than in the previous decade, only 2,347 new residents moved to Blackwell between 1920 and 1930, bringing the 1930 population to 9,521. Declining by just about a thousand residents, the years of the Great Depression brought Blackwell's population down to 8,537. Although not reaching its pre-depression heights, the 1940s resulted in a boost in citizens residing in Blackwell to bring the total number of residents to 9,199. Although one of the smallest increases in Blackwell's history, the 1950s brought a gain of 389 Blackwellians to a final 1960 population of 9,588.<sup>5</sup>

As part of its prosperous growth, the town initiated a number of community-oriented developments following the end of World War II. Some of the more visible projects included the 1949 development of a "pioneering" 100-home veterans housing project and the construction of the "...finest swimming pool in the southwest" which cost a staggering \$200,000 by itself. On a smaller scale, other community-sponsored undertakings included increases to the municipally-owned power plant facilities, the acquisition of two blocks of land for new Kay County Free Fair facilities, expansion of the sanitary and sewer system, the purchase of new fire equipment and the construction of a new year-round youth center. Blackwell's educational system also received a major, cutting-edge boost during this time of economic well-being and development.<sup>6</sup>

### **HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE**

As a fundamental community entity, Blackwell opened its first school in September 1893. At that time, fifty-two students attended school in a small frame building. The school system continued to rapidly develop from that point with corresponding increases in students and betterment of facilities. However, the number of school-age population, defined as children age 6 years to 21 years, in Blackwell peaked in 1927 at 3,265. The number of school-age children then began to drop from there over the following years so that by 1936 it numbered 2,600. Blackwell students attended ten public schools at that time, including a new \$225,000 high school completed the previous year. The old high school continued in service as "...a modern junior high."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Institute of Community Development, University of Oklahoma, "Blackwell, Oklahoma, A General Plan of Study," 1960. Available Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 27 September 1936 and 5 February 1948.

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Blackwell's school-age population continued to decline until a low of 2,016 was reached in 1944. At that time, the available school facilities in Blackwell consisted of eight school buildings, an administration building and miscellaneous facilities including a stadium and warehouse. The eight school buildings included two secondary schools, the high school building constructed in 1935 and the junior high which was housed in the former high school building erected in 1911. The remaining six schools were elementary schools ranging in age from forty-plus to ten-plus years old. Specifically, the six schools were the Washington School, constructed in 1900; the Lincoln School, built in 1911; the Park and Riverside schools, both erected in 1917; the Blackwell Heights School, apparently Blackwell's separate school that was built in 1923; and, the South Main School that was put together from "old buildings moved to the site" in 1930.

Faced with increasing concerns about the adequacy of school facilities and an upward trend in school-age population, the Blackwell School Board began considering plans to improve the school buildings shortly after the end of World War II, focusing first on the elementary schools. Although "...a topic of discussion for several years..." it was not until March 1947 that the school board took definitive action. Spurring this was the "Recent instances of falling plaster in classrooms at Washington School..." which "endangered" students. In response, the board selected the Oklahoma City architectural firm of Hudgins, Ball and Thompson to design a new building to replace the oldest Blackwell school then in use, Washington School. Due to an extra levy voted in previous elections for several years, the board had available a sum of \$110,000 for the new building. However, although the most obvious activity was the planning of a new school building, the school board was reportedly more "...interested in a city-wide school building program."<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, the board's action of engaging Hudgins, Ball and Thompson was not without controversy. It should also be noted that Hudgins, Ball and Thompson, later simply called HTB, was a notable firm in Oklahoma architectural circles. The hiring of Hudgins, Ball and Thompson in March 1947 was one of the last actions of the existing school board which was slated for replacement following the April 1947 election. The action was further "...made especially bitter because...in taking this step, the board refused the services of an architect who is considered by Oklahoma architects and the Oklahoma University school of architects as one of the two outstanding men in the U.S. in modern and progressive school design and planning." Although not specifically named, presumably the desired firm was the one eventually engaged, Caudill and Rowlett of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and College Station, Texas.<sup>9</sup>

The new Blackwell School Board, installed following the April 1, 1947, election, was headed by Dr. Phillip Risser. Somewhat confusingly, Dr. Phillip Risser replaced the previous member representing the "outlying" area, Paul Risser. The outlying area was the portion of the school district that fell outside the

<sup>8</sup> The Blackwell (Oklahoma) Journal-Tribune, 12 March 1947.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



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Blackwell city limits. Among their first actions at a special meeting called by Dr. Risser in mid-May 1947, the new board discussed plans concerning "...the school survey and building program, as to cost and contract agreements." In late June 1947, the board authorized Dr. Risser to engage the services of Caudill and Rowlett. Clearly proclaiming their intent, the board stated that they were "...convinced that the firm of Caudill and Rowlett was the best possible choice for architects in the planning and establishment of the best educational facilities in this part of the country."<sup>10</sup>

Importantly, the board-authorized contract included the provision that the architectural firm's six percent fee would be reduced by the cost of a survey of local educational facilities. The survey was to be conducted by the University of Oklahoma's Bureau of Educational Research and would identify what the city required "...in the way of modern educational facilities." As such, it was required that the survey be completed before the architect's undertook any of their activities.<sup>11</sup>

The contractual services provided by the firm of Caudill and Rowell also included four major professional activities: programming, basic design, working drawings and supervision. The programming component consisted of conferences with the board and survey committee "...to analyze the requirements and conditions of the building program." As part of this element, "An outline of the general program will be drawn up and diagram studies to establish solution to the problems of plan organization, structure and design will be made." The basic design component then involved "...the development of the basic drawings following the solutions established under programming and the completion in detail of the general program recommendations on construction, materials and equipment." As indicated by its name, the working drawings phase consisted of "...preparation of all necessary architectural and engineering specifications and details and the drafting forms of the proposal." The final service provided by the firm involved taking bids and advising the board on which ones to accept. Additionally, the firm as represented by Bill Caudill agreed to prepare the contracts after the bids were accepted, prepare supplementary detail drawings, check shop drawings, prepare models and shops and supervise construction. The last component also included "...counseling...the contractors on the proper execution of the work called for in the contract documents."<sup>12</sup>

According to the local newspaper, at the time Caudill and Rowlett received the initial contract for the Blackwell schools, they had more than \$2 million worth of "...contract construction in the process of completion in Oklahoma." Caudill, a graduate of Central High School in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma A. & M. College in Stillwater and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was acclaimed in the Blackwell newspaper as "...a well-known author in the architectural field." Caudill's "Spaces for Teaching" received national recognition "...as the best source of its kind..." at the

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 16 May 1947 and 25 June 1947.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 25 June 1947.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 25 June 1947.

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1946 meeting of the American Institute of Architects in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Additionally, Caudill's research had been given international approval with the notification that the Royal Institute of British Architects considered "...his research on elementary schools the best of its type in existence." Although not as widely recognized, John Rowlett was a graduate of Texas University with degrees in architecture and education.<sup>13</sup>

In mid-October 1947, the Blackwell school board signed a contract with the Oklahoma Research Institute of the University of Oklahoma to conduct the survey of the local educational system. At the same time, it was announced the agreement with the architectural firm had been "correlated." The signing of the contract finally allowed the required survey to move forward. The delay in this action was attributed to problems in working out the details between the two firms. The survey work was to begin immediately and to be complete by October 1, 1948.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of November 1947, the study was underway with the administrative survey team visiting the various school buildings. The surveyors also met with the school board and architects. It was agreed that although new buildings were most needed at both Washington and South Main schools, the South Main School would receive priority because of worse cramped conditions and inadequate facilities. In early January 1948, another phase of the study began with a testing program administered to the local students by Dr. Henry D. Rinsland, head of the Bureau of Educational Research, and ten graduate students.<sup>15</sup>

Although the survey was not completed, the Blackwell school board began discussing possible locations for the new schools in early February 1948. At the same time, Caudill informed the board by letter that he, along with his fifth year design class, would leave for California in mid-March for a two-week inspection of schools. The west coast schools were considered to be "...the most modern of anyplace in the United States." Just days later, the Superintendent of Schools Harry Huston announced that the school-age population in Blackwell had increased 209 from the previous year to reach 2,237. The gain was partially attributable to the annexation of three rural districts, as well as "General population increases in the area." The census also enumerated pre-school age children for the first time in order to provide an idea of imminent future needs. The pre-school age count numbered an astounding 954 future students, almost one-half of Blackwell's existing student-age population.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of February 1948, long-time school Superintendent Harry Huston announced his resignation. Huston had worked at the Blackwell schools since 1915, initially as a coach and principal. Interestingly,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 25 June 1947.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 13 October 1947.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 25 November 1947 and 9 January 1947.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 3 February 1948 and 5 February 1948.

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Huston played professional baseball from 1906 through 1914, including one year with the National League's Pittsburgh Pirates. In 1930, Huston replaced A.J. Lovett as Blackwell's school superintendent. During his eighteen years as superintendent, Huston participated in the construction of the new Blackwell High School, the South Main School and the High School Athletic Field.<sup>17</sup>

Just over a week later, the school board voted to "...go ahead with plans to acquire a site for a new South Main school building to be located north and south of Russell avenue between Vinnedge and Enlow, a block west of Main street." Notably, the twenty some 100-foot long lots needed to create a six acre plot were part of a residential area. Although there were no residences on the proposed site, there were some buildings and early plans called for Russell Avenue to be closed to accommodate the new facility. At the same time, plans were announced concerning a new Washington School to be built on the same site as the existing school. Preliminary survey results provided to the architectural firm urged that both existing schools be abandoned immediately. As indicated by Caudill and Rowlett, an eight-teacher school was anticipated to replace the South Main School. Notably, due the projected growth of the area, it was recommended that the new South Main School site be a minimum of five acres. Similarly, the new Washington School would be designed as a twelve-teacher school. Due to site restrictions, however, it was proposed that only an eight-teacher school be built immediately with the building to be completed at a later date with accommodations for four additional teachers and a small auditorium.<sup>18</sup>

The final educational survey results were published in installments in the local paper beginning on March 11, 1948. The survey recommended six basic standards that Blackwell residents should strive for in developing their new educational system. These rather commonsensical standards included safe, sanitary buildings free of all fire hazards and modern service facilities that met the needs of all boys and girls. The standards also called for facilities that allowed for a sound program of health, physical education and recreation in every day, sufficient available resource materials in the school libraries as needed by students and equipment to be used by individual children but which promoted learning and participation by all. Probably the standard that was most reflective of the time was the suggestion that "All space facilities (be) planned in terms of democratic processes of teaching and with due reference to the broadening needs of the curriculum."<sup>19</sup>

The following survey installments published over the ensuing days addressed the deficiencies in the physical plant of each existing school. In doing this, a history of each was also brought to light. In the case of the South Main School, one of the more blunt findings was that "It should never have been built in the first place." This conclusion was supported by the findings that the all wood building was heated

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 29 February 1948.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 10 March 1948.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 11 March 1948.

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by gas stoves in each room, causing a considerable fire risk; the foundation had many open points; the rooms were drafty and "...impossible to heat or ventilate all parts of the room properly...; the building lacked corridors or passageways; the egress for each room was to the outside but were "...such as to invite dangerous congestion in case of the necessity of rapid emptying...; and, the building had only two toilets with "...entirely inadequate fixtures..." and, for one classroom, only accessible by going through another classroom. Additional hazards were caused by the building's location. Situated "...on a heavily traveled through highway..." the school did not provide students protection either through distance or a fence. Further, many of the students were forced to cross the highway to reach the school and the traffic noise was "...ever present in all of the classrooms." Among the more important conclusions was that the building was "...altogether too small and quite unsuited to the needs of the area which the school in this end of town must serve." The only redeeming quality of the South Main School was its large site. The building sat on the west side of 19.5 acres of school-owned land. This was "In contrast with the extremely small amounts of land at the other schools..." but all was not good news. It was further noted that the majority of the site was the high school athletic field and "...in practice only a small part of it, with a very narrow frontage, is actually used for play space by the younger children."<sup>20</sup>

Although the existing South Main School site was noted as a safety hazard due to its location on the highway, area residents lodged a protest petition to the school board's proposal to build a new school in the "Vinnedge and Enlow section." The cost of acquiring the new site, all zoned as residential, would "...run into a sizable amount of money." The petition further pointed out that "Besides the normal cost of the residential land the owners (could) add a sentimental value, bringing the total cost to a much higher figure." The petitioners called for an underpass to be built under the highway so that the existing site could be re-used. It was also noted that the underpass would facilitate use of the new municipal swimming pool located as well on the east side of the road.<sup>21</sup>

The following week, the school board received another petition, this one from residents served by the Washington School. The Washington School patrons pleaded that the school board proceed with the plans to re-build their school, particularly since site acquisition was not a consideration. In response, the board instructed Dr. Risser to contact Caudill and Rowlett to have them come to Blackwell to discuss further the Washington School. The petition signers were also invited to a special meeting with letters sent to all of the South Main School petition signatories and a representative group of Washington School petition signers.<sup>22</sup>

Unexpectedly, Dr. Risser resigned as school board president in early April 1948, although he remained on the school board. In his resignation letter, in which he refused to continue to serve even if asked, Dr.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 12 March 1948.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 17 March 1948.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 24 March 1948.

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Risser indicated his action was caused by "...the feeling of the majority of the board that my unyielding support of actions which I feel are best for our schools and our community has laid the board open to the criticism by some that the board is undiplomatic." In the short-term, board vice-president L.A. Burkhalter presided over a special meeting held April 14, 1948, at which Dr. and Mrs. Flyd (sic) Sheets were present to discuss their property located just south of the proposed Enlow and Vinnedge site for the South Main School. Although no official action was taken, there was "...considerable discussion ...concerning the Sheets' and the other proposed site." At the following regular meeting of the board in early May 1948, Karl Drowatzky was named new school board president and Harold Bryant took the vice-president position.<sup>23</sup>

The following month, Caudill previewed the firm's preliminary plans for the proposed South Main and Washington schools to the school board. Receiving the go-ahead, the final plans were anticipated to be completed by mid-September 1948. At the meeting, Caudill was careful to explain how the building plan not only met the needs of the community but also "...how completely it answered the justified criticisms of public schools (in Blackwell) by the Oklahoma University graduate school survey board last winter." However, Caudill qualified the latter statement with "...it was impossible to satisfy completely the problems which arise in school building construction but that the design presented to the board, as a result of several months research in the needs, requirements and costs of school construction, satisfies almost fully Blackwell's particular and run of the mill problems."<sup>24</sup>

The majority of the meeting was spent with Caudill addressing "...the problems confronted in the construction of a modern school setup and explain(ing) that the design of his structure was based on the ideas that architecture should facilitate learning and should be adapted to "learning by doing." As expounded upon by Caudill, the problems of school construction fell into five areas: function, light, air, sound and structure. The need for the function to meet modern educational methods was met by the "...spacious and well-equipped classrooms and contemporary outside play and study areas." The light problem, which contributed to the students' health and, eventually, to their "...absorption of school subjects...", was met by the design that provided a "...maximum amount of the right kind of light, eliminate(ed) direct sunlight from streaming into the rooms, (and) blend(ed) interior and exterior buildings materials with lighting conditions." Caudill also made the point that the design included "...a minimum of manually operated light control points." To provide the constant change of air needed for students' health and comfort, the building design featured "A thorough ventilation system..." that took advantage of the prevailing Blackwell winds. During the winter months, radiant heat would supply each room with warm air where and when it was needed and still allow for air circulation. Hot water pipes under the classroom floors would provide the radiant heat. The problem of sound was solved, or as close as possible, by "...the use of proper building materials in walls, ceilings and outside halls."

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6 April 1948, 14 April 1948 and 4 May 1948.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 4 June 1948.

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Finally, the structure met the community needs by being "...designed to use a maximum of similar and low cost materials, to provide for addition of new classrooms or reorganization of old with a minimum of cost and planning."<sup>25</sup>

Just days after Caudill presented the preliminary plan to the Blackwell School Board, J. Arthur Herron was announced as the new Blackwell superintendent. Herron came to Blackwell from Purcell, where he had also served as superintendent. At the same time, Dr. Risser submitted his complete resignation to the school board. Motivating this action was his anticipated move to Port Angeles, Washington, to accept the position of district health officer. In his resignation letter, Dr. Risser exhorted the board to "Remember, you have established kindergarten in our schools, employed one of the 10 best men in Oklahoma for educational facilities which will be of inestimable value to him, engaged the best modern school architects in the country and approved a thoroughly modern plan for Blackwell's schools to house Blackwell's children." Indicating that there was still some local unrest related to the building program, Dr. Risser also noted that "Times of change are always times of stress."<sup>26</sup>

In mid-September 1948, Caudill and Rowlett indicated that the plans for the two schools would be soon be ready for presentation. Additionally, Lew Howard was appointed to replace school board member Harold Bryant, who had resigned for business reasons the month before. In October 1948, Superintendent Herron attended a conference of northern Oklahoma administrators at which Ray L. Hamon, director of school housing of the federal department of education, was also present. Topics of discussion at the conference included new buildings, sound, heating, lighting, new equipment and the best types of assembly rooms. However, no further announcement was made concerning the Blackwell schoolhouse plans.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the lack of final plans, the Mayor of Blackwell, Ross E. Burks, issued a proclamation announcing a \$238,000 school bond election to be held November 9, 1948. The primary purpose of the bond issue was to provide for the "...purchase of school sites, to erect and equip suitable school buildings, for making repairs to existing school buildings, for school furniture and fixtures and making improvements to school site to be owned exclusively by..." the district. The local newspaper carefully noted that the bond was an opportunity for the community to have the best modern educational facilities in the state. In support of this, the newspaper stated

These proposed buildings, designed by an architect who has made careful and nationwide study of modern grammar school buildings needs, are designed on a functional architecture basis. Here Blackwell has an opportunity to lead the way in

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4 June 1948.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 6 June 1948.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 19 September 1948 and 21 October 1948.

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school-building construction on the statewide scene; although modern school buildings have recently been constructed in many Oklahoma communities, a completely functional building, with an answer to all of modern educations many needs, still remains to be built in the state. The buildings are designed,..., to make the educating process easier, healthier, more complete than ever before; designed to give Blackwell youth the education they have a right to deserve.<sup>28</sup>

In order to bolster the school bond vote, Caudill again personally came to Blackwell in early November 1948 to explain the benefits of his school design. In sum, the plan was described as "...one storied buildings with several classrooms in a row connected by a covered, open, corridor." At each end of the classroom sections would be "Rest room units." The buildings would be "...functional,..., large roomed, (and) scientifically heated and aired." To make the Modern design more palatable to voters, Caudill pointed out that school design had radically changed from the first part of the twentieth century, indeed "Their similarity seems to end with a room, a floor and something in between." The attributes of the Caudill and Rowlett plan included "front yard" space for each classroom to allow "...various outside activities vital in modern grammar school education..". With each classroom patterned on the same basic design, it was also heralded that the plan would make for "...easy construction, easy addition, (and) financial savings."<sup>29</sup>

At noon on election day, voter turnout had been light. However, officials were optimistic that voting would heat up as the day went on. At the election's end, 1,226 voters had cast ballots with the clear majority, 1,078, voting in favor of the school bond. The school board quickly set a bond sale date for the end of the month and indicated that all effort would be made to get the "...construction ball..." moving. Notably, Superintendent Herron promised to contact Caudill and Rowlett in order to "...speed completion of the building plans." As anticipated, the school building bonds went up for competitive sealed bid at the end of November 1948. The successful bidder was the First Security Company of Kansas at Wichita.<sup>30</sup>

For unknown reasons, but possibly related to the architect's busy schedule, progress on the new buildings stalled for the next several months. However, at some point during the intervening months, the board had determined the final site of the new South Main School to be in the 300 block of West Vinnedge. Additionally, the board voted in favor of re-naming the school in honor of former superintendent Harry Huston. At the end of February 1949, Superintendent Herron announced that the final plans for the schools would be available at the end of March 1949. Construction bids would then be sought at the beginning of April 1949. Although "Herron claims no credit for having secured

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 29 October 1948.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 4 November 1948 and 7 November 1948.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 10 November 1948 and 30 November 1948.

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Caudill's services....," the local newspaper again noted that "Caudill (was) nationally recognized as one of the best architects in the country who specializes entirely in school problems." Also mentioned in the newspaper were the two recent articles by Caudill published in January 1949 in national education magazines, The School Executive and School Management. Caudill's recent election to membership in the National Council on Schoolhouse Construction and to the "...important six-man committee of the American Institute of Architects' "Committee on School Planning" was also brought to local public attention.<sup>31</sup>

As predicted, at the end of March 1949, Superintendent Herron announced that Bill Caudill would be in Blackwell on April 4, 1949, to present the final plans and specifications. Although not literally blowing these plans but having a significant effect nonetheless was the March 29, 1949, tornado that swept through Blackwell in the very early hours of the morning. Damage was quickly estimated at \$300,000 and included destruction of the existing South Main School. Within days, a plan was worked out to bus the South Main students to other undamaged, local schools, primarily Park and Riverside.<sup>32</sup>

As previously planned, the architects presented the final plans for the two schools to the board on April 4, 1949. Within days, bids were called for both buildings but, for obvious reasons, construction priority was placed on completing the new Huston Elementary School. As put to the contractor, the project involved both buildings and bids were to be received by the end of the month. Bidding a low figure of \$324,556, the Hoke Construction Company of Stillwater was awarded the school building contract on April 26, 1949. Construction then was set to start immediately on the Huston Elementary School with a contracted completion date of September 1, 1949. No start date was set for the Washington School but the new building was to be finished by November 15, 1949.<sup>33</sup>

A day ahead of schedule, ground breaking ceremonies were held for both schools on Sunday, May 1, 1949, with former Superintendent Harry Huston turning the first spade of dirt at the Huston Elementary School and Washington principal, Miss Carol Cooper, doing the same at the Washington building site. Two days later, a new school board president was elected and the school board voted to hold an election on May 17, 1949, in regards to the annual 17-mill levy and a special "building fund" 5-mill levy. The building fund money was needed to purchase furniture and equipment for the new buildings, as well as repairs to the other school buildings. Both levies passed with no dissenting votes on the annual levy and only one on the building fund levy.<sup>34</sup>

At the end of May 1949, rain slowed construction work on the new buildings. Although excavation

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 25 February 1949, 27 March 1949 and 5 April 1949.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 27 March 1949, 30 March 1949, 1 April 1949 and 5 April 1949.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 6 April 1949 and 27 April 1949.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 2 May 1949, 3 May 1949 and 18 May 1949.



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work for the foundations had begun, water filled the ditches as soon as they were pumped dry. The Washington site further was described as a "...soggy quagmire..." due to the removal of all surface turf. In early June 1949, Caudill attended the school board meeting to "...discuss minor changes in construction of the buildings." In addition to "A slight change in toilet facilities..." the changes included selection of a "...slightly darker shade of brick..." as the original selection was not readily available. The board also appointed Claude Williams of Blackwell as "Clerk of the Works," or construction supervisor, for the board.<sup>35</sup>

In mid-June 1949 work resumed on the project after a two-day stoppage caused by the union carpenters refusal to cross a picket line. Ten days later, the foundation for the Huston Elementary School was nearing completion. By the end of the first week of July, the steel for the Huston Elementary School's framework was on-site and being raised. At the end of the month, school board representative Claire Brock assured the community that classrooms at the Huston Elementary School would be ready for the first day of school in the 1949-1950 year, however, the all-purpose auditorium room would not be finished. Brickwork was speeding along on the classroom wings with the underground plumbing, heating plant boiler and electric conduits and wiring all in place. The wood roof on the south wing was clad with wood and work was progressing on the original north wing. In the event "...unforeseen difficulties..." precluded the school from being readying, the board representative noted that the same system that was used the previous year to bus students to other local schools would be implemented.<sup>36</sup>

In late August, 1949, it was announced that the Huston Elementary School would be open on September 19, 1949, rather than the first day of school. Huston students would enroll at Park and Riverside and attend about two weeks of school at those locations. The rain in the early spring and delays in steel shipments were the factors blamed for the school-opening delay. The second day of September 1949, only a "...few odds and ends remain(ed) to be done to the Huston building." Among other detail jobs, this included some painting and cabinet work. Occupancy, however, was still not expected until the 19<sup>th</sup> of the month. As students were settling in during the second full week of September 1949, rain again was causing some delays but Superintendent Herron made assurances that "Every effort is being made to open Huston at the earliest date."<sup>37</sup>

Although not open to students by the September 19, 1949, deadline, the building was described in detail in the local paper. The eight room building, minus the all-purpose assembly room and restrooms, was described as U-shaped. The pastel color scheme of the rooms was noted for its contrast to the "...drab effects found in most older school buildings." Double paneling separated the rooms with at least two rooms having panel doors so the rooms could be combined. The soundproof ceilings were clad with

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 7 June 1949.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 26 July 1949.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 28 August 1949, 31 August 1949, 2 September 1949 and 12 September 1949.

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acoustical board. Two sides of each classroom were lined with cabinets. Built into the cabinets in each room were a water fountain and basin. Next to the door, each classroom also featured a large filing cabinet, requested and designed by Superintendent Herron to store some supplies and tests. Also in each room was "An electric bulletin board of panel glass..." which was to be used to record the names of students turning in "superior" work. Lit at night, the bulletin boards would allow parents too busy during the day to monitor the progress of their children.

Between the all-purpose room and the education wings was a covered play area. Featuring concrete flooring, the play area was predicted to cut down on winter illnesses caused by the children playing on damp ground. To the west of this, along the front of the building near the south wing restrooms, "A series of large angle irons which appear as vertical braces, extend from the roof of the outdoor corridor to the front walk." Already in position on the decorative irons was the school nameplate.

On the outside walks connecting the wings, students would find an overhanging roof that would protect against inclement weather. Above this was glass paneling which slanted upward from north to south. The paneling was "...designed for two purposes, to gain maximum solar lighting and ventilation." The metal louvers over the glass panels were "...set so that the sun's rays never shine directly into the classrooms from September 1 to June 1." All rooms also were equipped with an indirect lighting system, although the architect predicted that the system would be necessary only a dozen or so days a year "...because of the effectiveness of solar lighting."<sup>38</sup>

As the second month of the 1949-1950 school term unfolded, desks were being secured to runners and furniture was being moved into the building. Due to the lack of "completely modern furniture," teachers would be unable to "...take full advantage of the building's modern features...". Superintendent Herron hoped to address this shortcoming in the future.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, on Monday, October 10, 1949, 178 children enjoyed the privilege of being the first students in the newly opened Huston Elementary School. This consisted only of students in the first through sixth grades. For unrecorded reasons, the Huston Elementary School did not have a kindergarten class that first year. It should be noted that kindergarten was not a state education requirement at that time. Although initially an open house and dedicatory service was planned for late November 1949, in order to include the Washington School, this did not occur until April 1950 as the Washington School, due to various reasons, was not put into service until January 1950.<sup>40</sup>

Unexpectedly, in March 1950, the school board received word from Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 20 September 1949.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 5 October 1949.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 9 October 1949.

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Associates that the architectural firm would assume the fees for a landscape architect for both the Huston and Washington schools. Estimated at \$500, the fee was for a set of landscape development plans drawn by White and Ruff Landscape Architects of College Station, Texas. The architects indicated they wished to do this "...as an indication of our interest in making your two new schools the most beautiful and finest in the country." Tellingly, the architects also stated "We feel sure (the schools) will receive fine publicity in the future and that the landscaping will add greatly to their completeness and beauty."<sup>41</sup>

In 1950, the Huston Elementary School won an Award of Merit from the American Association of School Administrators/American Institute of Architects (AIA). However, even wider acclaim was achieved in September 1950 when Collier's magazine published an article featuring the two Blackwell schools. Titled "The Little Red Schoolhouse Goes Modern," the article, written by Walter McQuade, featured photographs by famed architectural photographer Julius Shulman. The article discussed the development of the schools with a few dramatic embellishments. Much credit was given to Dr. Philip Risser in procuring the services of Caudill and Rowlett; however, no mention is made of the earlier board's effort to hire Hudgins, Ball and Thompson or their interest in the other architectural firm of national reputation, presumably Caudill and Rowlett. Although Caudill's book Space for Teaching is briefly discussed, the 1946 AIA award and other honors Caudill received in connection with the book are not mentioned. According to the article, Dr. Risser "...had a wary appreciation of modern architecture." To "win" him over, Caudill suggested the survey by the University of Oklahoma. However, it is clear from the newspaper articles that the school board was seeking a "modern and progressive design" even before Dr. Risser was part of that body. Although the accuracy of the school board's comments when Caudill presented the design and model cannot be fully disputed, it is noteworthy that the local newspaper never picked up on the "cow shed" or "chicken coop" descriptions. Additionally, this type of school design was not entirely new. The basic design, called a finger plan, had developed in the 1930s and was popular due to the ease of which additions could be made to the schools. Further, other firms were producing similar designs. For example, as noted in the March 1949 issue of the Architectural Record, the Blackwell schools bore "...a resemblance to the Fairfax school by Bamberger and Reid."<sup>42</sup>

The article also notes that the "...one more big barrier had to be breached. Townspeople still had to vote the bond issue." While there is truth to that statement, in actuality the bond issue was almost an afterthought as the board signed the original contract with the firm in June 1947 and the final plans and specifications were slated for completion before the bond issue was even called. The article also states that Superintendent Herron arrived on the scene at the "crucial point" when the bond was at issue and that "He was not eager to take on the job of riding another bond issue through in a strange town."

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2 March 1950.

<sup>42</sup> "The Little Red Schoolhouse Goes Modern," Collier's, 9 September 1950. See also "Southwest Schools that Utilize the Prevailing Breeze," Architectural Record, 105:3 (March 1949), 130.

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However, again, the facts do not support this contention. Herron was hired in June 1948, just after Caudill had presented the preliminary plans for the buildings and nearly four months before the bond election was announced. As such, Herron had to be well aware before taking the job that it included completing the building program initiated a full year before he arrived in Blackwell. Additionally, although Caudill and Herron did make a visible effort to educate the public of the benefit of the new schools in advance of the bond vote, there are no indications that the public was overly resistant to the plans once the initial phases of the project were past. At the time of the bond election, the newspaper raises only concerns about why additional funds were needed when a building levy had been passed for several years previous. The bond also passed with an eighty-eight percent majority; surely, if there was such a controversy over the appearance of the schools, the final vote would have reflected a higher percentage of dissenting votes. Also contradictory to the story, the board had almost from the beginning intended to rebuild both the Washington and South Main schools at relatively the same time.<sup>43</sup>

The Blackwell schools continued to garner public attention. In 1951, again using Julius Shulman's photographs, the buildings were featured in a building material advertisement in Brick & Tile. The following year, they were featured in Oklahoma Teacher. In 1953, the publisher of Time announced plans to feature the schools in a color layout. The newspaper also noted that the schools had been the subject of articles in The Architectural Record, Architectural Forum, as well as in books titled Your Schools and Schools. In 1954, Caudill authored the book Toward Better School Design, included among the ninety-one case studies were various images of the Blackwell schools.<sup>44</sup>

Also in late 1954, the Blackwell school board invited the architectural firm of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates to design additional classrooms for the Huston Elementary School. The addition was necessary because, as pointed out by the board, the Huston Elementary School was not "completed" at the time of its construction and, due to the rapid growth in that section of town, the school would soon be overcrowded. The board anticipated that construction on the addition would begin in the spring and that the new work would be "...in keeping with the style of the present structure (while) incorporating any new ideas which teachers and board of education members believ(ed) feasible."<sup>45</sup>

Significantly, at the same November 1954 meeting, the school board made plans to take out a master insurance policy for all school property, except for wood structures. The "master policy" would expedite handling and payment of premiums. By the start of the New Year 1955, the board had a \$1 million policy on all the brick school buildings in Blackwell. Other policies covered school buses, the boilers at

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<sup>43</sup> "The Little Red Schoolhouse Goes Modern," Collier's, 9 September 1950.

<sup>44</sup> Susan Kline, "CRS Background," unpublished manuscript, Available Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. See also The Daily Oklahoman, 2 July 1953.

<sup>45</sup> Blackwell Journal-Tribune, 2 November 1954.

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the junior and senior high schools, the wooden annexes at Lovett Junior High and Lincoln School and the entirety of the still frame Heights School.<sup>46</sup>

Development of the Huston Elementary School addition was progressing in January 1955 with the final plans anticipated within a short time. This time, instead of Bill Caudill, the plans were presented by John Rowlett of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates. The final plans were accepted by the board at their February 7, 1955 meeting with the bids to be advertised by the middle of the month. The addition consisted of the building of two classrooms on the east end of the existing north wing. Notably, the board members "...pointed out that a third wing may be added to the school if an increase in population in the south part of the city necessitates added space." The bids were opened as planned on March 8, 1955 and the contract awarded to the John J. McAnaw Jr. Construction Company of Bartlesville. Work on the addition's foundation was underway by early May 1955.<sup>47</sup>

However, once again, Mother Nature swept through Blackwell with a destructive force. The May 25, 1955 tornado devastated eighty city blocks and left almost twenty dead with more than 150 injured. Among the casualty buildings were both the Riverside and Park schools. The damage to Riverside was quickly assessed as unrepairable but the verdict was out on the Park School until the building could be further evaluated. However, unlike in 1949 when effort was made to construct the replacement building in time for the next school term, it was quickly predicted that the grounds could be not cleared and a new consolidated building constructed by the start of the 1955-1956 term which was just three months away.<sup>48</sup>

As the clean-up began, various efforts were made by state and federal agencies to provide aid to the community. Among these was the state bill sponsored by Representative Raymond Craig and Senator Roy Grantham to direct the State Board of Affairs to sell prison-made brick at cost to the school district or city of Blackwell for use in rebuilding the school buildings. Governor Gary signed the act in June 1955. At the end of June 1955, it was announced that the school district would receive \$69,877 for wind damage through its new \$1 million master policy taken out just months before. The majority of the insurance money, \$60,000, was for the damage done to the Park and Riverside schools. The remaining almost \$10,000 was for damage at the Huston, Washington, Lovett Junior High and Blackwell High schools. The district also made an application to the federal Civil Defense Administration for monies to help rebuild the damaged buildings.<sup>49</sup>

Three construction engineers and architects inspected the two damaged schools and in written statements

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 2 November 1954 and 4 January 1955.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 4 January 1955, 8 February 1955, 16 February 1955, 8 March 1955, 3 May 1955 and 22 July 1955.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 26 May 1955 and 27 May 1955.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 2 June 1955, 7 June 1955, 13 June 1955 and 30 June 1955.

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indicated to the school board that the buildings could not be safely repaired. Because "...children are too precious to house in unsafe buildings..." the school board began to make plans for a study to determine the best way to solve the building crisis. This included looking at temporary facilities to meet the imminent need of the 1955-1956 school year. Superintendent Herron talked with church spokesmen and city officials about locating enough space to accommodate the students. Along with various churches, the city indicated that the fairgrounds buildings and pavilion would likely be available for use by the district.<sup>50</sup>

At their July 1955 meeting, the school board voted to engage the services of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates to undertake a preliminary rebuilding survey. Definite plans had to wait until the board received word concerning the Civil Defense Administration application. However, the preliminary plans would lay the ground work for the eventual required work. Plans were also made to begin salvaging usable materials from the tornado-damaged buildings as soon as the liability insurance payment was received. The work was to be undertaken by male teachers and other school personnel not busy for the summer. Items to be salvaged from the condemned buildings included heating and toilet facilities.<sup>51</sup>

In mid-July 1955, John Rowlett was a guest speaker, along with Superintendent Herron, at the local Kiwanis Club. The topic of Rowlett's lunch presentation was the current school situation. One possibility presented at the meeting, echoing the 1948 survey findings, was the consolidation of the Park and Riverside Schools. The new combined school would then be located on the existing Riverside site.<sup>52</sup>

By the third week of July 1955, construction was rapidly progressing on the pre-tornado classroom addition to the Huston Elementary School. Workers were busy putting the roof and finishing the cement flooring. Brickwork was expected to start within a few days and the entire addition to be completed by September 1, 1955. Delays in the work were attributed to the wet weather and a delay in steel shipments. The steel did not arrive on-site until July 6, 1955. Local subcontractors on the project included Powell Plumbing and Welborn Electric.<sup>53</sup>

At the end of July 1955, demolition work was underway on the damaged Riverside building. The school system anticipated selling the salvageable building materials, including brick, lumber and doors, to the highest bidder. All of the salvageable equipment, including desks, chairs and tables, from both Park and Riverside were temporarily stored in the high school gymnasium. Arrangements had also been made with both the First Methodist and First Baptist churches to hold the various classes of the displaced

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 30 June 1955 and 3 July 1955.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 5 July 1955.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 13 July 1955 and 14 July 1955.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 22 July 1955.

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schools.<sup>54</sup>

In August 1955, two partners, John Rowlett and Herbert Paseur, in the firm of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates presented a preliminary building plan to the school board. At the Riverside site, an eleven classroom building was proposed. Other elements of the building included an all-purpose room, principal's office and storage and mechanical room. The plans also contained "...a number of teaching aids and new features as suggested by a group of Blackwell teachers...". The building was expected to be complete in time for the 1956-1957 school term. Along with the immediate building plans, the board also considered the long-range plans to replace the "old" Lincoln School as suggested in the 1948 educational survey. This would require acquisition of a new site a "...considerable distance north of Lincoln..." in order to better address the needs of students living in far north Blackwell. Additionally, as part of this plan, the Washington School would require expansion to accommodate some of the former Lincoln students.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of August 1955, plans were well underway to conduct elementary classes in the borrowed facilities and construction was nearing completion on the Huston Elementary School addition. In early September 1955, the board of education decided to take a 30-day option on a seven acre site on Armory Street between Sixth and Seventh streets. The site was part of the board's building plan to address needs on the north side of town, specifically the overcrowding of the Lincoln School and the overflow of students from the former Park School. Additionally, the board identified a need to build additions on the Huston and Washington schools to address overcrowding at those schools. In order to finance these grand plans, the school board called for a bond election to be held the end of September 1955. The amount of the bond issue was set at \$288,000 with the money to be used to pay for purchasing sites, erecting new school buildings, making addition to existing school buildings, buying furniture and fixtures for the new buildings and the additional classrooms and improving the school sites.<sup>56</sup>

Moving quickly, the preliminary plans for the new Northside School were presented to the community by mid-September 1955. Also designed by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates, the new building would include six classrooms, an all-purpose room, outdoor covered play area and outdoor covered corridor. As with the other schools, specifically mentioned was the Huston Elementary School, the new Northside building was designed to be easily enlarged by either classroom additions or an entire wing. Notably, the school was not constructed as originally designed. Early conceptions of the building had the all-purpose room situated towards the back of the classroom wing. As finally constructed, the all-purpose room was located on the east side.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 31 July 1955.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 11 August 1955 and 12 August 1955.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 28 August 1955, 1 September 1955, 4 September 1955, 6 September 1955 and 8 September 1955.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 12 September 1955.

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As the date of the bond election drew closer, the school board and local newspaper worked to bring the issue to the attention of the people. The board of education emphasized that the nearly \$300,000 bond issue was only half the amount the district could legally incur but the amount was "...deemed sufficient together with existing funds to solve the elementary school housing problems." Additionally, the board noted that the plans were "...in no way new but (were) merely carrying out a long term plan initiated in 1947 and 1948." Mother Nature had just hastened the schedule of school development by about two years. Lastly, the school board pointed out that the proposed plans were a permanent solution to a pressing problem which, in the end, would save the district from spending additional funds on a short-term, temporary fix.<sup>58</sup>

With assistance from the local Parent Teacher Associations and other civic groups, the school bond issue was approved by a majority of 741 to 7. The school board immediately announced that they would advertise for bids on the new Parkside School in the next few weeks. The final plans for the combined Park and Riverside schools were expected from the architects by the end of October 1955. Planning work, including a contour map, for the new Northside School was also underway. The board anticipated that the plans and specifications for the Huston and Washington schools would be forthcoming; however, the extent of the additions would not be known until the costs of the other projects had been determined.<sup>59</sup>

In mid-October 1955, John Rowlett and Wendell Locke of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates presented the final plans and specifications for the Parkside School, as well as preliminary plans for the Huston and Washington additions. Approving the Parkside plans the same day, the school board made plans for a special meeting to be held November 15, 1955, to award the contract for the Parkside School. Correspondingly, the school bonds were put up for sale at an open auction on November 1, 1955. This method, new to the Blackwell School district, allowed the prospective buyers to "...engage in roundtable competitive bidding until a final "best bid" (was) secured." The winning bond purchasers were First National Bank and Trust Company, R.J. Edwards and Small Milburn Company, all of Oklahoma City, and Evan L. Davis of Tulsa.<sup>60</sup>

Also at the first of November 1955, the school board accepted the two classrooms at the Huston Elementary School. Acceptance of the rooms had been delayed pending approval of some final construction details. Superintendent Herron indicated that students would occupy the classrooms immediately. In other business, the board decided to change the name of the planned school previously called Northside to Herron instead. The Blackwell practice of naming schools after the Superintendent

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 23 September 1955 and 26 September 1955.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 28 September 1955.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 13 October 1955, 18 October 1955 and 2 November 1955.



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included the Lovett Junior High, named for Blackwell’s first superintendent A.J. Lovett, and Huston Elementary School. Provision for a special board meeting to study the new Herron School plans was made for the following week when the architects would be available as well.<sup>61</sup>

At their special meeting the second week of November 1955, the school board approved the preliminary plans for the new Herron School. Changes to the previously presented plans included the addition of another classroom and relocation of the 40’ by 60’ all-purpose room to the east side. The school would also have a covered play area and “...a sheltered area to unload students arriving by car.” While the basic arrangement of the building was similar to the previous-built schools, the new design also incorporated “...several advanced ideas.” Among these, and present on the Parkside School as well, was the addition of skylights. The front of the building was to be landscaped with the playground area situated to the back of the building. Renderings of both the Herron and Parkside schools were made locally available at the Sears order office. The board anticipated that the final plans would be available for the Herron School within five to six weeks. Additionally, with the expected awarding of the Parkside contract the following week, the board indicated they would then know the extent of the additions that could be made to the Huston and Washington schools. The new wings for both schools were already being drawn with the preliminary plans to be available in about three weeks.<sup>62</sup>

The Parkside School contract was awarded to the J.J. Reardon Construction Company of Enid in mid-November 1955. The low bid was in the amount of \$197,863 but two alternates, consisting of easel teacher storage units and kitchenette facilities, raised the bid to \$206,269. The company estimated the project would take 285 days which would allow the building to be complete in August 1956. The school board stated that the cost of the school was “...in line with construction done in recent years.” They also noted that the classroom cost in the new building averaged \$15,800, which was below the general estimated cost of \$20,000. According to the board, prefabricated classrooms cost \$18,000 each.<sup>63</sup>

The building permit for the new Parkside School was issued by the second week of December 1955 with work beginning on the building foundation the following week. At that time, an accounting of money received by the school district in relation to the rebuilding effort was made. While the school board spent \$5,713.12 on taking the old Riverside building down, it netted a total of \$6,367.24 from the auction of salvage materials from the building. The \$1,194.12 profit was on deposit in the district’s name at the county treasurer’s office. Notably, the school still retained both the Park building and site with no decision made for disposition of that property for several months. The district also received \$70,020.27 from insurance, as well as an additional \$78,750 from the federal Civil Defense Commission and \$38,719.99 from the annual building fund. All of this money was then supplemented by the

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 2 November 1955.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 8 November 1955.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 16 November 1955.

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\$288,000 bond issue. In late December 1955, the school district received word that the amount of federal disaster aid was to be increased by \$7,725, bringing the total amount to \$86,475.<sup>64</sup>

With "Every effort...being put forth to speed the work and to secure the best possible facilities for the money spent," the final plans and specifications for the Herron School, as well as the Huston and Washington additions, were expected within thirty to forty days. However, within days of the 1956 New Year, the board announced that bids for the Herron School and the Huston and Washington additions would be accepted within the next sixty to seventy days. Progress at the Parkside School included "virtual" completion of the foundation footings and the first payment of \$17196.91 to the Reardon Construction Company was approved by the school district.<sup>65</sup>

At a special mid-February 1956 meeting, the board of education approved the final plans and specifications for the Herron School and Washington and Huston additions. Bids were to be advertised for beginning February 23 with the bid opening to occur on March 8, 1956. The work on the building projects was to be done by early November 1956.<sup>66</sup>

A total of eight bids were made on the Herron, Huston and Washington projects. The lower bidder again was the J.J. Reardon Construction Company of Enid. The final contracted price for the construction projects was \$298,854. Notably, some of the interior finishing work and furnishings would "...have to be done as additional funds (were) available." Also, as proposed by the architect, the bicycle racks, retaining walls and the clock and bell system were not included in the final contracted price; however, conduit for the clock and bell system was included to allow for installation later of these features. Work on the Parkside building was progressing at the time with the changing season anticipated to speed work, along with the arrival of the "badly needed" steel.<sup>67</sup>

Work on the Parkside building continued to advance through May 1956. Additionally, the Reardon company was paid for materials delivered for the Herron School and the Washington and Huston additions. Through June 1956, the board was optimistic that the Parkside building would be complete in time for the opening of the 1956-1957 school year. Landscaping of the school would likely take longer and cause some inconvenience for teachers, parents and students. The Herron School and Huston and Washington additions were expected to be done by early November 1956. Although a shipment of steel boosted work at the Washington School in mid-June, both the Herron and Houston projects were delayed by the steel shortage. With the foundation work at the Huston and Herron schools nearing

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 13 December 1955, 28 December 1955 and 6 April 1956.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 13 December 1955 and 3 January 1956.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 15 February 1956.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 25 March 1956.

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completion, the delay in the steel shipments would bring work to a near halt.<sup>68</sup>

By mid-July 1956, work on the Parkside School was moving along as men laid the tile floor and painted the ceiling. A limited amount of grounds work was also underway at Parkside. The Washington School addition was progressing as well with the workers laying brick around the outside. The deadline for completion of this addition had moved to the end of November 1956. However, due to the nationwide steel strike, both the Herron and Houston projects were at a virtual standstill.<sup>69</sup>

In mid-August 1956, the district again received good news of an additional \$60,000 in federal aid for the rebuilding effort. The district also began accepting bids for the sale of the old Park School which required the winner to clear the site. As expected, the Parkside School opened to students at the beginning of the fall 1956-1957 term. A formal dedication for the building was held at the end of October 1956. Unexpectedly in mid-September 1956, Superintendent Herron resigned from his position with no published explanation. Lovett Junior High principal Leonard White was then appointed as temporary Superintendent with the appointment becoming permanent in December 1956. For unknown but obviously related reasons, the name of the Herron School was subsequently changed back to Northside.<sup>70</sup>

Although several months later than expected, both the Huston and Washington additions were complete by January 1957. Students at the Huston Elementary School assisted in moving furniture and other items into the new wing on a Friday with classes finally getting underway the following Monday. Work on the Northside School was nearing completion by early February 1957, although no definite opening date had been set due to problems with a motor in a heating unit in the east wing of the building. Due to the school's location on the east-west highway extending through town, a new type of signal light was installed in front of the building to increase the student's safety. The signal would operate only during school hours. While seeming to contradict the previous effort to relocate the Huston Elementary School off a major thoroughfare, it was noted by the University of Oklahoma's Institute of Community Development that due to the location of highways and railroads in Blackwell, "...it would be impossible to locate elementary schools so that no child would have to cross a major traffic artery on his way to and from school." Students at the Lincoln School received the good news that classes would be dismissed early on February 13, 1957, in order to move the desks and chairs into the new Northside School. Classes would then begin at Northside on Thursday, February 14, 1957.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 8 May 1956, 20 May 1956, 12 June 1956 and 17 June 1956.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 17 July 1956.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 22 August 1956, 26 August 1956, 18 September 1956, 28 October 1956, 29 October 1956, 6 November 1956 and 4 December 1956.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 13 January 1957, 4 February 1957 and 12 February 1957. See also Institute of Community Development, "Blackwell," 53.

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With the completion of the Northside School, Blackwell's elementary school building program was at a successful end. In mid-March 1957, G.V. Williams, a member of the state Education Department's Division of Instruction visited Blackwell as part of the department's accrediting of the Blackwell schools. Among other improvements, Williams "...praised (the) new schools and additions..." at the elementary schools. At the same time, the community was making plans for the dedication of the Northside School at the end of March 1957 that would highlight all the recent building developments of the school system.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to resulting in modern, attractive buildings, the ten-year elementary school building program in Blackwell enhanced the educational opportunities in the community. The new facilities were more conducive to the "modern" teaching methods and styles. The clean, colorful, carefully designed classrooms also avoided the hazards of the old buildings, including poor heating, cooling, lighting and ventilation. With the expanded sites and covered play areas, the students were able to enjoy more recreational endeavors. Further, the community itself benefited from the new facilities as school houses have long been a place of gathering, both for education-related and non-education-related events.

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The Huston Elementary School was the first elementary school constructed in Blackwell as part of what turned out to be a ten-year building program. The school is noteworthy for its design by the nationally renowned architectural firm of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates. The completion of the elementary school building program, however, did not end work at the Blackwell schools by the firm of Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates. Immediately after Northside was put into service, the firm began working on plans for the high school stadium. That same year, the school board also purchased additional land for the purpose of constructing a new high school in the next five years. Taking slightly longer than that, the Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates-designed Senior High School opened in Blackwell in 1963. The firm developed plans for non-educational buildings in Blackwell as well, including a residence and a church.

The Huston Elementary School was on the cutting-edge of educational design in terms of natural ventilation and lighting, as well as in terms of style and expression. However, the ventilation and lighting systems have been adversely affected by later modifications to the building. The louvered-covered glass panels along the clerestory of the education wings have been covered, as have the banks of windows on the all-purpose room. As such, the building is not nominated for its architectural significance as the first Oklahoma school designed by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates that was constructed.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 17 March 1957, 21 March 1957 and 28 March 1957.

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The school is considered, however, architecturally significant for its Modern design within the local context. The Modern style buildings designed by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates were clearly different from previous education buildings in the community. This type of school has been described as an "...inexpensive "dungaree" type school." In this type of school, money was not "wasted" on monumentality and expensive finishes. Instead, "...the architects have stripped them to clean essentials, made the needs of the child and the limits of a tight budget the yardstick for design." This, of course, did not mean that the schools did not incorporate some of the latest technology and amenities that were part of "modern" education. In addition to incorporating the latest innovations, the overall form of the school was precedent setting for the community. The open-air corridors replaced interior hallways, bringing not only fresh air but natural light into the students' day. The connecting, same level classrooms were larger, more efficiently heated and cooled and included ample storage, as well as individual water fountains and faucets. All in all, the mid-twentieth-century elementary schools initiated a new phase in modern architecture in Blackwell.<sup>73</sup>

It is also noteworthy that it was the clearly expressed intent of the school board, with the support of the local community, to have some of the most modern educational buildings in the country. At that time, Blackwell was riding an economic and population wave that not only resulted in new elementary schools but also modern housing and a variety of community facilities such as a city swimming pool. The community enjoyed the attention that all of these facilities brought it and worked steadily with the architectural firm to build upon their success.

The progress of improvement to the educational facilities of the community is also reflective of the times and the fastest growing segment of the population. At the beginning of the Blackwell school building program, the Baby Boomers were just reaching primary school age. By the time, the four elementary schools were completed in Blackwell in the late 1950s, pressure was mounting on the high school to accommodate this wave of students. Correspondingly, the Blackwell School Board initiated a new high school, also designed by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates, in the late 1950s with an anticipated, and accomplished, 1963 completion. Interestingly, the architectural firm's work also mirrored this shift. In its early years, Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates achieved fame for its elementary school design. Over the decade of the 1950s, the firm became increasingly involved in the design and construction of secondary schools. As the years went on, the firm turned their attention to colleges and universities, again with a considerable amount of success.

While the four elementary schools designed by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates in Blackwell are similar, each of the buildings features distinguishing elements. One notable similarity between all four is that they all utilized the "finger plan." This was probably for a variety of reasons, including the size of

<sup>73</sup> "Schools for the Southwest," Architectural Forum: The Magazine of Building, (January 1952), 145.

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the site and the anticipation for expansion; however, by 1952 Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates were also working with a compact type that featured a rectangular form with a wide, central, multipurpose area flanked on both sides with classrooms. This type of plan was used by the firm in 1952 at two Oklahoma schools, the Fairview School in Elk City and Washington School in Clinton. Additionally, the firm had developed a periscope design that placed two rows of classrooms on the same side of a corridor. This "novel" design was implemented in 1954 at the High School in Guymon with the driving force being the restricted size of the site.<sup>74</sup>

The Blackwell schools themselves reveal a progression of design, particularly between the first two and the last two buildings. However, even the schools designed at the same time have certain differences. The Huston Elementary School was initially the smaller of the two schools constructed in 1949. However, it was the first one to receive an addition, but even then, this only made the school equal in size to the Washington School. A major difference between the first two Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates building was the small auditorium found at the Washington School whereas the Huston Elementary School featured an all-purpose room that was replicated at both the later schools. The addition of the third educational wing to the Huston and Washington schools in 1956 did not substantially alter the buildings as both were designed from the outset to allow for such an occurrence. The additions did continue a general sense of similarity between the Huston and Washington schools as both schools then had an equal number of educational wings. The designs of the wings were also similar with certain elements, specifically the narrow projecting walls between the bays, which differentiate them from the original wings.

Overall, the Huston and Washington schools were an effective design. The basic form and principals of the schools were essentially duplicated in the latter two Blackwell elementary schools, as well as in other schools designed by Caudill, Rowlett, Scott and Associates during the 1950s, such as the elementary schools in Stillwater. Neither the Parkside or Northside schools have been added on to, so these schools are similar in size to the 1949 Huston and Washington schools. However, the Northside School is the smallest, with only one educational wing. As within any prototype, some improvements were made to the latter buildings to solve unforeseen design issues, as well as decrease materials requirements. While the Parkside and Northside schools cost more, this is attributable to changes in materials costs during the 1950s, rather than indicating a more expensive design. The most notable change between the initial schools and the latter buildings was the elimination of the clerestory and the integration of the classrooms, outdoor corridor and play shed under a single big roof. To compensate for some of the loss of natural light of the integrated design, both the Parkside and Northside schools feature large, bubble skylights. Visible at a distance, the skylights add a slight space-age feel to the building.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> "Two Space-Saving Schools," *Architectural Forum* (March 1952), 136-141. See also "Three Schools...Three Approaches: 2. Periscope Classrooms," *Architectural Forum* (February 1955), 139-141.

<sup>75</sup>"Southwest Schools," 147.

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The latter schools also had some unique elements which set them apart from each other and the earlier schools. At the Parkside School only, the parallel educational wings are divided into two units by the open-air corridor. The other three schools have single-piece, rectangular educational wings with the open-air corridor extending vertically along one side. The unusual design of the Parkside School allows the all-purpose room to be integrated into the overall design, rather than sitting by itself to one side as on the other schools. Also unique to the Parkside School was the large courtyard between the educational wings. The courtyard was a major design element with clear definition on all four sides. While both the Washington and Huston schools featured open space between the wings, the narrower, rectangular space is not a sufficiently commanding space to be considered courtyards.

The Northside School is set apart by the large covered play area in the center of the educational wing. While the other schools all included covered play areas, none were as big as at Northside. To provide light to the larger covered space, as well as along the east-west corridor and on the backside of the classrooms, are large skylights. The size of the play area was attributable to Northside's wider, side-gabled roof that covered the educational wing. The educational wings at both the Huston and Washington schools had fairly narrow shed roofs which limited the play area to the central open-air corridor. The Parkside School also had fairly narrow educational wings, this time topped by flat roofs. Again, as a result, the covered play area was largely restricted to the open-air corridor.

As the epitome of a Modern educational building that set the community on a new course, the Huston Elementary School merits recognition. The Modern style of the building not only augmented the educational opportunities of area students but also allowed them to attend school in buildings that stood out in the community. Gone were the inadequate, out-dated, drab schools, in their place set the latest in education-related architectural innovation.

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

West 40 feet of Lot 5 and all lots 6 through 11, Block 1, Vinnedge Addition, Blackwell, Kay County, Oklahoma.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the Huston Elementary School.

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**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

The following information pertains to all photograph numbers:

Property Name: Huston Elementary School  
County and State: Kay County, Oklahoma  
Photographer: Cynthia Savage  
Date of Photographs: 13 August 2007  
Negatives: TIFF Files

<u>Photo No.</u>	<u>Photographic Information</u>
1.	Looking NE
2.	Looking NW
3.	Looking SW
4.	Looking SE
5.	Looking E
6.	Looking NE
7.	Looking NW
8.	Looking SW

The photographs were printed on an Epson Stylus Photo R2400 printer, using Epson Ultrachrome K3 ink and Premium Presentation Paper Matte.