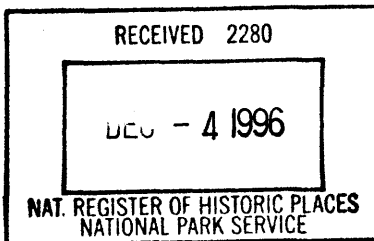


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



96-1547

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If 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 Bellevue Avenue Colored School

other names/site number Lincoln School, Old Lincoln School, Public School #14, King David Lodge No. 15 F & AM

2. Location

street & number 81 Bellevue Avenue NA  not for publication

city or town Trenton  vicinity

state New Jersey code NJ county Mercer code 021 zip code 08625

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title [Signature] Date 4/26/86  
 Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources/DSHPO  
 State of Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

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

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other. (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 1.2.97  
Edson H. Beall

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

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

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

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

N/A

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

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education/School

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture/ Masonic Lodge

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian/ Italianate

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Other/ Permastone

roof Asphalt Shingle

other

**Narrative Description**

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

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

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

**Criteria Considerations** N/A  
(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.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

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

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):** N/A

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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage/ African American  
Education

**Period of Significance**

1883-1946

**Significant Dates**

1883, 1888, 1891, 1923, 1928

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Thines, William B. (Architect)

Herron, Alfred P. (Contractor)

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Trenton Board of Education

Bellevue Avenue Colored School  
Name of Property

Mercer County, NJ  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of Property 0.34 acres

Trenton West Quad

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	8	5	1	9	4	4	0	4	4	5	2	6	0	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

3 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Meisha Hunter, Intern

organization Historic Preservation Office date February 1, 1996

street & number 501 East State Street telephone (609) 292 2023

city or town Trenton state NJ zip code 08625-0404

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

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

name Acacia Temple Building Corporation (King David Lodge No. 15)

street & number 81 Bellevue Avenue telephone (609) 695 9577

city or town Trenton state NJ zip code 08625

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

N.J. Mercer Co.  
Bellevue Avenue Colored School

### Narrative Description

The Bellevue Avenue Colored School (also known as the Old Lincoln School, Public School #14, and King David Lodge #15 F & AM) is a two-story brick Italianate building constructed in 1883 at 81 Bellevue Avenue, in the 7th Ward in the City of Trenton. The school, which remains the only building on the site, is set back approximately 27 feet from the south side of Bellevue Avenue, and is the only building on lot 62 in Block 26A.

The building consists of two principal, transverse sections characterized by matching shallow gable roofs, and they are linked by a narrow, central bay, recessed slightly from the facade plane (Figure 1). The gable ends are decorated with cornice returns whose termini were originally marked by brackets. The double gabled and flat roof, originally of slate and tin, was replaced by asphalt shingle after 1950.

The eastern section is probably the original 1883 section, since it contains the original entrance. The western section is probably the result of the 1888 addition. The eastern section features a pair of narrow windows joined by a common lintel and sill on both the first and second stories, and an oculus (now filled in) in the gable.

The western section is similarly designed, but without an entrance of its own, and it features a wide, single window in the center bay on both stories rather than the paired windows in the eastern section. The gable of the western section also contains an oculus that matches the one in the eastern gable.

The off center entranceway consists of double doors decorated with four panels, surmounted by a pediment and glass transom. During the twentieth century, the glass transom was boarded over, and painted with a sign that reads: "KING DAVID/ F&AM PHA/ LODGE NO. 15" (Figure 2). A photo dating circa 1900 shows that to the left of the front entrance, the number "14" was inscribed onto the wall, designating the building as Public School #14. A wooden fence which divided the property from the street has since been replaced by a wire mesh fence.

Historic photographs show that the surface of the building was probably laid in red (press) face brick on the facade, and common bond brick on the side elevations (Figure 3). According to the Tax Assessor records, the building rests on a stone foundation. Since the surface of the building was covered in permastone, the stone

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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N.J. Mercer Co.  
Bellevue Avenue Colored School

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foundation cannot be observed from the exterior of the building. A few basement walls do show that the foundation material was stone mixed with brick (Figure 4).

The facade is marked by symmetrical fenestration, however the number of panes and sizes of windows are irregular. Unfortunately, many of the windows have either been filled in with masonry on the exterior or boarded over from the interior. Of the thirty four windows present, 18 remain unaltered. The wood cornices and other trim were painted, but the color of the paint cannot be discerned from the circa 1900 photo. The wood casings of the windows, where they remain, have been painted white on the exterior and brown on the interior in the twentieth century. Stone sills and lintels remain in place at window openings eventhough they have been bricked up. Metal protective barriers have been placed over the windows on the first story.

Five windows are set into the wall of both stories on the building's east elevation (Figure 5). These have been filled in during the twentieth century, and four air conditioner window units inserted. On the west elevation, a surviving window in the stairwell shows the original first and second floor windows to have been quite large, measuring about 7' high and 3' wide, with four over four panes in a double hung sash (Figure 6).

Another entrance on the rear of the building consists of a steel door and security camera with a plastic overhang (Figure 7). The staircase which this entrance leads to is enclosed by a rectangular structure with three windows, and a flat roof. This flat roof does not meet the roof line of the rest of the building, nor does it duplicate the slope of the existing roof, suggesting this may have been erected after the 1883 construction date.

The compound plan of the school resulted from two phases of construction. The first portion (eastern section), completed in 1883, probably consisted of a two-story rectangular block. In 1888, an addition was made to the building, probably in the form of the western section already described. Since the permastone covering obscures the brick walls, and since no detailed floorplans have been found to date, it is impossible to distinguish the original 1883 structure from later building activity.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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N.J. Mercer Co.  
Bellevue Avenue Colored School

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Original interior room divisions and circulation patterns in the building are difficult to reconstruct. The erection of wood-panelled walls suggests that original spaces have been manipulated, and hollow core doors have been installed. Without a detailed set of floorplans, it is impossible to judge the exact measurements of these spaces.

A reporter who attended the dedication ceremonies on August 30, 1883, stated that the school contained two furnished classrooms, with two additional classrooms to accommodate future increases in pupil enrollment.<sup>1</sup> A reporter for the Daily True American who also attended the dedication wrote:

The new school building for the use of the colored children of Trenton...contains two classrooms which are provided with desks and seats for the pupils and desks on platforms for the teachers. There is a stationary washstand in[side] and a cloakroom adjacent to each room...[and] a good parlor organ in the classroom.<sup>2</sup>

The basement of the building, which currently serves as an entertainment room, originally contained the bathrooms and furnace for the building. A room on the first floor near the main entranceway may have been the original site of the principal's office. This space is now used as a kitchen. An alumnus of the school stated that four of the larger meeting spaces on the first and second floors were the original sites of classrooms.

The original floor covering in the basement was poured concrete. Original pine wood flooring for the first floor is extant in the ceilings of a few storage spaces in the basement. These floor boards measure approximately 3"x12", and may have been joined in a tongue and groove pattern (Figure 8). During the twentieth century, floors of the first and second stories were covered over in carpeting or linoleum tile.

On some walls in the basement, a few remnants of whitewashing still remain, which confirms the description of the school in the 1891 Annual Report of the City of Trenton (Figure 9). Throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> Daily State Gazette August 30, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Daily True American August 30, 1883.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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N.J. Mercer Co.  
Bellevue Ave. Colored School

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rest of the building, veneer wood paneling has been applied to almost all wall surfaces, exemplified by the second floor meeting room (Figure 10). Behind a radiator in the meeting room on the second floor, a section of wall space not covered in wood panelling still shows the original wainscoting (Figure 11).

Ceilings originally measured as high as 12 feet, but a suspended ceiling has since been installed two feet below the original ceiling. Some exposed areas reveal the original ceiling treatment to have been plaster on lath. Original light fixtures have all been replaced with modern light panels.

Observable original features include a stairwell window (filled in on the exterior), a radiator and some wainscoting behind the radiator in the second floor meeting room, and untreated pine flooring in the basement ceiling.



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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N.J. Mercer Co.  
Bellevue Avenue Colored School

## Narrative Statement of Significance

The Bellevue Avenue Colored School was built in 1883 specifically for the free public education of African American children in the City of Trenton. Built following the passage of New Jersey's School Desegregation Act in 1881 (upheld by the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1884), the construction of this school coincided with a period of heated debate about the desegregation of schools in New Jersey. Despite the fact that the 1881 law gave African American parents the right to enroll their children in white schools, the construction of the school perpetuated a racially separate school system. While the Bellevue Avenue Colored School was one of several schools constructed for African American children in New Jersey after the passage of the 1881 law, this school is perhaps one of the best documented examples of the type. From the building's association with these events, the Bellevue Avenue Colored School meets Criterion A in the areas of Education and Ethnic Heritage/African American. The period of significance extends from the date of construction in 1883 to the closing of the school in 1946.

The history of public educational facilities for African American children in Trenton began early in the nineteenth century. In 1801, white-run and white-staffed schools were organized for the instruction of African American children.<sup>3</sup> By 1809, classes for African American children were held in a two-story brick building called Jackson Hall (later known as Nightmare Hall) on Hanover Street.<sup>4</sup> In 1855, complaints about the condition of the school prompted the demolition of Jackson Hall.<sup>5</sup> For two years, classes were conducted in a rented schoolhouse on Washington Street before the erection of a new two-story brick schoolhouse on Higbee Street (later called Bellevue Avenue) in 1857.<sup>6</sup>

After fifteen years, the Higbee Street school also fell into disrepair, and, in 1872, classes were held in a rented building on

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<sup>3</sup> Washington, Jack. In Search of a Community's Past: The Black Community in Trenton, NJ 1860-1900. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990, 41.

<sup>4</sup> Washington 1990: 41.

<sup>5</sup> Washington 1990: 43.

<sup>6</sup> Washington 1990: 46.

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Bellevue Avenue Colored School

Belvidere Street while a new two-story brick school was constructed on Ringold Street.<sup>7</sup> The Higbee Street School was subsequently renovated and re-opened as the Bellevue Avenue school for white children. Meanwhile, the Ringold Street school was dedicated in March of 1872, and served the African American youth of Trenton until its closing in 1883.

The value of sending children to school was recognized in the African American community as a means of improving the economic, social, and employment opportunities for African Americans. Extant evidence indicates that African American residents in Trenton regarded education as a means to combat poverty, intolerance, and racial oppression.

A racial line separated the educational experience of African American children from their white neighbors in Trenton. Financial restraints were set up by the Board of Education in order to limit the quantity and diversity of academic instruction received by African American children in the city. The historian Howard Hughes reports that in 1842 the quarterly rates of tuition were cheaper for African American children than white children, but that these lower rates covered fewer disciplines of instruction.<sup>8</sup> In 1871, the State of New Jersey officially proclaimed a free public school system, thus eliminating fees for instruction.<sup>9</sup>

Restricted facilities severely limited the accessibility of schools in Trenton. Until the 1920's, only one school at any given time was designated as a "Colored" school. Consequently, not every African American child who wished to attend school could. Parents had to apply to the School Board for a permit for their child, and then

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<sup>7</sup> Washington 1990: 47.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, Edwin et al. A History of Trenton 1679-1929 Vol II. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929, 718. While lower rates might have been economically viable for African American parents, these lower tuition fees might have indicated lower salaries for teachers, substandard physical appearance of buildings, and inferior academic standards in comparison with the white schools. See Wright, Giles. Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Short History. Trenton: NJ Historical Commission, 1988, 52).

<sup>9</sup> Chesler, Olga ed. Historic Preservation Planning in New Jersey. Trenton: Office of New Jersey Heritage, 1984, 191.

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N.J. Mercer Co.  
Bellevue Avenue Colored School

have their child placed on a waiting list.<sup>10</sup> In addition to spatial limitations, grade advancement and enrollment were regulated by the Trenton Board of Education to restrict the academic experience of African American children. Grade advancement controls were instituted in order to restrict African American children from progressing beyond grade five (5) in their academic career.<sup>11</sup> It was not until 1890 that a proposal to offer high school instruction to African American children in Trenton was adopted.<sup>12</sup>

While a racially segregated school system existed in Trenton, not all African Americans were content with the situation. Prominent figures such as R. Henri Herbert, son of Mansfield Herbert and a respected member of the African American community in Trenton, were involved in organizing African American opposition to racially segregated schools. Indeed, the historian Jack Washington notes that Herbert "was quite instrumental in getting the New Jersey Assembly to introduce legislation that would desegregate the public schools [in the State]".<sup>13</sup>

In addition to Herbert's efforts to challenge the status quo, instances of racial friction over the segregated school system were occurring in other parts of the state, thus posing a challenge to state politicians. As a result of a racially rooted school "war" in Fair Haven, New Jersey, the Republican Senator, James Youngblood (Morris County), introduced a bill (S209) into the State Senate.<sup>14</sup> This bill, which became known as the School Desegregation Act of 1881, gave African American parents the option to enroll their children in schools previously reserved for white children.

Herbert, who was the editor of Trenton's first African American newspaper, the Sentinel, which had state wide circulation (1880-

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<sup>10</sup> Washington 1990: 49.

<sup>11</sup> Washington 1990: 47.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education September 18, 1890.

<sup>13</sup> Washington 1990: 51.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, Marion Thompson. The Education of Negroes in New Jersey. New York: Columbia University Press, 1941, 167.

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Bellevue Avenue Colored School

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1882), praised the introduction of the new bill:

Probably no measure more in accordance with the genius of Progressive American ideas, more important in its bearing upon future citizens of this State, especially those of other than white parentage, more just and equitable in its provisions, more righteous in its aim, than Senate Bill 209.<sup>15</sup>

Such esteem for the Republican bill must be connected to the Republican stance of the African American community in New Jersey. The historian Clement Price credits the Republican sympathies of African American voters to the fact that the Republican party was "the party of Lincoln and...the protector of the political rights of freedmen".<sup>16</sup>

Herbert understood the School Desegregation Act as a means to ensure equality in educational opportunities for all residents of New Jersey. Herbert stated:

It [Bill 209]...is a just recognition of the equality before the law of all our citizens...It removes the greatest bar to the enjoyment of equal opportunities of advancement by all classes. It says that in her public school system, New Jersey knows no race, no religion, no nationality, no color. All are entitled to equal participation in the benefits derived from a common fund, to which all contribute.<sup>17</sup>

While one might have expected the Desegregation Act to eliminate

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<sup>15</sup> Sentinel March 12, 1881.

<sup>16</sup> Price, Clement. Freedom Not Far Distant: A Documentary History of Afro-Americans in New Jersey. Newark: NJ Historical Society, 1980, 136.

<sup>17</sup> Sentinel March 19, 1881.

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Bellevue Avenue Colored School

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the need for separatist schools, such was not the case. After the passing of Bill 209, opposition to the erection of another African American school seems to have disappeared.<sup>18</sup>

The Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education (1882-3) document the controversial history of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School. In October 1882, the sale of the Ringold Street School to an unnamed firm from Chicago provided the impetus to construct another school for African American children in Trenton.<sup>19</sup> Superintendent Shepherd then requested that a Special Committee be established to look for a site to erect a new school building for the Colored children, which was adopted.<sup>20</sup> During the interim, Dr. Shepherd informed the Board that the basement of the Colored Church on Willow Street had been secured for the displaced children from the Ringold Street School.<sup>21</sup>

By mid-October, the Special Committee reported that two potential sites for the colored school had been found: a lot on Bellevue Avenue (\$15.00/foot) and a lot on Willow Street (\$40.00/foot). Dr. Shepherd stated that it would be impossible to purchase the Willow Street lot, since "the funds would not permit it".<sup>22</sup> Following Dr. Shepherd's comment, a motion was passed to permit the Special Committee to purchase the Bellevue Avenue lot. Despite the Board's

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<sup>18</sup> Washington 1990: 57.

<sup>19</sup> The negotiations for the sale of the Ringold Street School are recorded in the Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education (September 18, 1882 through October 5, 1882). The Superintendent reported that the unnamed Chicago firm approached him with an offer to purchase the building for \$3,000. After consultation with the Board, the Superintendent stated the Board was willing to sell the building for the original cost of the building and lot (approx. \$4,500). The sale of the Ringold Street School is recorded in the Minutes of the October 5, 1882 meeting for a total of \$4,500.

<sup>20</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education October 5, 1882.

<sup>21</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education October 5, 1882. The rent of the basement of the Colored Church on Willow Street was reported at \$12.00 per month.

<sup>22</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education October 17, 1882.

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Bellevue Avenue Colored School

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motion, the Special Committee reported in favor of the Willow Street lot at the November 9, 1882 meeting since the owner had decreased the cost per front foot from \$40.00 to \$30.00. The Minutes record much debate on the subject of the lot for the new colored school, which ended in a motion to purchase the Bellevue Avenue lot.<sup>23</sup>

The site (lots 27 to 32, presently lot 62), originally part of the estate of William McGill and Alpheus Swayze, was purchased by the Trenton Board of Education from Augustus G. Richey on November 24, 1882.<sup>24</sup> The choice of the Bellevue Avenue site triggered criticism from the African American community in Trenton. Apparently, the site was not considered easily accessible to the African American children who would attend the school.<sup>25</sup> The fact that African American children had to walk for some distance to get to school, and often pass up to half a dozen schools for white children before they reached their own school, was a long standing complaint that the Bellevue Avenue Colored School did not address.<sup>26</sup> In the Sentinel, Herbert noted the African American community's displeasure with the chosen site:

The site on Bellevue Avenue selected for the colored school house is not altogether satisfactory. The neighborhood is said to be of a character that

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<sup>23</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education November 9, 1882. A summation of the debate following the report of the Special Committee is reported in the Minutes. Mr. Ellis moved to table the matter, then suggested to open a Night School for Colored Children (lost). Mr. McGill moved that the Special Committee be instructed to purchase the Willow Street lot. Dr. Shepherd moved to amend Mr. McGill's motion by substituting the Bellevue Avenue lot, which was adopted by a vote of nine (9) to six (6). Unfortunately, no reasons other than economic factors are given as to the Superintendent's preference for the Bellevue Avenue lot.

<sup>24</sup> Mercer County Deed Book Vol. 92, pg 404. A request for an order to be drawn in favor of A.G.Richey in the amount of \$1,125 to purchase the lot on Bellevue Avenue is recorded in the Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education November 13, 1882.

<sup>25</sup> Washington 1990: 50.

<sup>26</sup> Washington 1990: 57.

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N.J. Mercer Co.  
Bellevue Avenue Colored School

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closely approaches unsavoriness, and the location is far removed from the portion of the city in which great numbers of the children live.<sup>27</sup>

What is unusual about Herbert's comment is that he expressed no dissatisfaction about the location of the Higbee Street school, which was situated on the same street as the Bellevue Avenue Colored School. Support for Herbert's claim of the unsavory nature of the Bellevue Avenue neighborhood appears in a response to a 1892 questionnaire in the Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Trenton. Responding to the questionnaire, an official acting on behalf of the school cited "an alley near the school [Ellis Alley]" as an "offensive or dangerous nuisance near the school-house".<sup>28</sup>

Following the purchase of the lot, a special meeting of the Board of Trustees was held for the purpose of submitting the plans for the new Colored school, which had been drawn up by the Trenton architect, William B. Thines.<sup>29</sup> When these plans had been examined and adopted, the Special Committee was authorized to advertize for proposals from contractors.

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<sup>27</sup> From an undated edition of the Sentinel, reproduced in Washington 1990: 57. Herbert's complaint about the undesirable location of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School merits attention. Further research into local census records would reveal concentration(s) of African American residence in Trenton, which might in turn substantiate Herbert's claim that the Bellevue Avenue Colored School was far from where the children lived.

<sup>28</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Trenton 1892: 45.

<sup>29</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education November 13, 1882. A payment of \$ 150 to William B. Thines, architect of the Bellevue Avenue School is recorded in the Minutes of August 2, 1883. Besides the Bellevue Avenue Colored School, Thines was the architect of several other public schools in Trenton (Second Ward and Sixth Ward schools) as well as the new City Hall. See Industries of New Jersey (Trenton). Philadelphia: Historical Publishing Company, 1882: 166.

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N.J. Mercer Co.  
Bellevue Avenue Colored School

Due to appropriation constraints, the Board of Education entered into a protracted bidding process, delaying the commencement of construction. The first round of bids was reported at a Special Meeting in November 1882. Since the bids were not within the limits of the appropriation, Dr. Shepherd moved that the bids be referred back to the Special Committee, which was adopted.<sup>30</sup> By December, the architect presented the alterations he had made to the design, which would lower the cost of construction and bring it within budget.<sup>31</sup> At the same meeting, the lowest bidder from the first round (Mr. Johnson) had been asked to submit another bid for the new design. Evidently, this revised bid was still too high, since the Special Committee was recommended to re-advertise for proposals.

The results of the second bid round were reported at the December 13, 1882 meeting. Eventhough the contractors divided the cost of the work between masonry and carpentry, and thus reported lower bids, the total cost of construction was still much the same at the bids in the first round.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps sensing that budget constraints might require him to adjust the design still further, Mr. Thines reported to the Board that "he had taken off everything that he could possibly take off to give a suitable building". Dr. Shepherd reminded the Board that the bids were still higher than the amount appropriated for the construction of the new school, which had to cover the costs of painting, plumbing, and insurance.<sup>33</sup> The meeting concluded with a motion to postpone the matter until spring (1883).

The issue of financing the construction of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School was raised again in January 1883. Dr. Shepherd moved

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<sup>30</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education November 24, 1882.

<sup>31</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education December 1, 1882. The alterations Thines made to the design included: shortening the building by two (2) feet, and removing the fences and stone steps.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the Board of Education December 13, 1882. The bids in the first round ranged between \$4,970 (highest) and \$4,245.75 (lowest). The bids received in the second round included \$3,860 (for masonry and carpentry), \$1,898 (carpentry only), and \$2,031 (lowest bid for masonry only).

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the Board of Education December 13, 1882. Shepherd stated that the appropriation would be \$480 short.



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an amendment that a sufficient amount to finish the Colored School be transferred from the different accounts [printing, incidentals, etc.], which was lost by a vote of eleven (11) to four (4). Clearly, few members of the Board wished to have any expenditures restricted in order to finance a school for African American children. By the end of the meeting, a motion was adopted which asked the head of each expense account to review their accounts and award any surplus monies to the construction fund for the Bellevue Avenue Colored School.<sup>34</sup>

By February, the Board had petitioned and received a grant from the Common Council for "an additional amount [\$ 800] for the erection of a two-story, two-room school house on Bellevue Avenue".<sup>35</sup> A reporter for the Daily True American confirmed not only the Common Council grant, but also the sale of the Ringold Street School, making the total funds available for the construction and furnishing of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School \$ 5,300.<sup>36</sup>

By March, the Superintendent called a Special Meeting during which he urged the Board to take action on the construction of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School as the request for additional monies had been granted for the purpose by the Common Council.<sup>37</sup> At the meeting, a motion was adopted which permitted the Special Committee to re-advertise for proposals and to change the plans (to the design) if necessary. In April, the results of the third bid round were reported to the Board. The contract for the erection of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School was then awarded to a local carpenter and builder by the name of Alfred P. Herron, whose workplace (Church near Calhoun) was located near the site of the proposed school.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Minutes of the Board of Education January 18, 1883.

<sup>35</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education February 28, 1883.

<sup>36</sup> Daily True American August 31, 1883.

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the Board of Education March 15, 1883.

<sup>38</sup> Heron's bid totaled \$ 3863. See Minutes of the Board of Education April 7, 1883. For information about Herron, see Trenton Evening Times August 30, 1883.

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If the 1881 School Desegregation Act had already passed, why was the Bellevue Avenue Colored School constructed? The 1881 School Desegregation Act did not prohibit segregated schools, it simply allowed African American parents the opportunity to enroll their children in white schools (Burr 1942: 297). The law did not deny African American parents the right to voluntarily enroll their children in separate schools, although the law did prohibit enforced segregation. At the dedication ceremonies of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School, Superintendent Shepherd stated that, "this being a Colored school, [I] hope the Colored community will avail themselves of it".<sup>39</sup>

Without overtly denying African American children access to white schools, Dr. Shepherd was clearly encouraging the black community to take advantage of the new school constructed solely for their children. Still, the African American community's acceptance of the new school was perhaps a resignation to the racially divided state of affairs in Trenton near the turn of the century. As Washington notes, "the African American community, many of whom were perhaps disillusioned, disappointed, and politically exhausted, accepted it [the Bellevue Avenue Colored School] as a foregone conclusion".<sup>40</sup>

As the appearance of the school has been altered considerably since the building's period of significance, we must rely upon contemporary descriptions to recreate what the building must have looked like at the time of construction. The interior of the school originally contained two furnished classrooms, and two other rooms that could be used for classrooms, "should increased attendance at

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<sup>39</sup> Daily True American August 31, 1883.

<sup>40</sup> Washington 1990: 57. The African American community's resistance to enrolling their children in white schools may also have been rooted in economic and social factors. Firstly, by accepting a racially desegregated school system, a few well paid jobs for African Americans would be lost. Secondly, keeping a colored school in operation was believed to be "compatible with the advancement of the race because they [African American schools] provided a measure of autonomy and self-determination". Finally, the African American community may have preferred a racially segregated school system in order to protect their children from the violence and abusive "racial indignities" which their children would have undoubtedly been exposed to while attending a white school. See Wright 1988: 52.

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any time require an extension of the seating capacity".<sup>41</sup> From this statement, it is clear that the Bellevue Avenue School was intended to accommodate African American children for many years into the future. Such long-range space planning again suggests that the intention of the School Board was to discourage African American parents from enrolling their children in white schools.

Extant records suggest that the dedication ceremonies for the Bellevue Avenue Colored School, which took place on August 30, 1883, were elaborate. Significant figures such as former Mercer County Judge James Buchanan, Superintendent Dr. Cornelius Shepherd, and Colored School Principal Spencer P. Irvin gave addresses. Prayers were offered by Reverend Charles H. Barry of the Berean Baptist Church and music was provided by an organist and a choir of African American children.<sup>42</sup> Other notable attendees included Morris H. Layton, principal of the colored school in Harrisburg, and R. Henri Herbert, editor of the Sentinel, as well as other members of the press, and white and African American visitors.<sup>43</sup>

Although the School Desegregation Act was heralded by Herbert as a measure which would guarantee "to every child the rights to which it is entitled under the Constitution of the United States and New Jersey...the right of equal educational advantages, this issue was still in question at the time the Bellevue Avenue School was being dedicated.<sup>44</sup> A reporter for the Daily True American who attended the ceremonies stated that neither Judge Buchanan nor Superintendent Shepherd wished to address or resolve the issue of mixed or separate schools.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, Dr. Shepherd did make mention of the colored school in light of the contemporary pretense of separate but equal public education:

The Board of Education of Trenton has given the colored people the same opportunities as to white children...They [African Americans] were given

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<sup>41</sup> Daily State Gazette August 30, 1883.

<sup>42</sup> Trenton Evening Times August 30, 1883.

<sup>43</sup> Daily True American August 31, 1883.

<sup>44</sup> Sentinel March 12, 1881.

<sup>45</sup> Daily True American August 31, 1883.

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teachers of the same ability and were placed on par with the other schools in every way.<sup>46</sup>

In his statements, Dr. Shepherd insinuated that the answer to the separate school issue lay in the hands of the African American children: "there is nothing that would break down prejudices sooner or surer than by showing equality [in successful competition] and when they show that, the question of mixed or separate schools will settle itself".<sup>47</sup> In his comment, Dr. Shepherd suggested that African American children were not on par intellectually with white children. Unfortunately, any opportunity for competition between African American and white children within an academic arena was negated with the perpetuation of the separatist school system.

Annual Reports of the Board of Education provide useful information regarding the salaries and raises of the instructors at the Bellevue Avenue Colored School. Principal Irvin was paid \$ 800.00 annually, and received a raise in 1891, increasing his income to \$ 1,200 annually.<sup>48</sup> Miss Ida Herbert, the sister of R. Henri Herbert, was appointed the first teacher of the school, and was paid \$ 450.00 annually.<sup>49</sup>

In a Report of the Superintendent of Trenton (1891), the table of teachers and principals salaries shows that teachers in the colored school received the same annual starting salary as teachers in the white schools, however the salary cap for colored school teachers (\$ 500) was \$ 150 less per annum than the cap for teachers in white schools (\$ 650). In addition, the principal for the colored school (\$ 1,200) had a salary cap of \$ 600 less than the cap of principals in white schools (\$ 1,800). It is interesting to note that the School Board approved paying a male African American principal more than a white female principal, but less than a white male principal.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Daily True American August 31, 1883.

<sup>47</sup> Daily True American August 31, 1883.

<sup>48</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Education 1891: 124.

<sup>49</sup> Manual of the Board of the City of Trenton 1886.

<sup>50</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Trenton 1891: 125.

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At this point in the discussion of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School, it is important to consider how the School Desegregation Act was being tested the state court system. In 1884, the New Jersey Supreme Court upheld the School Desegregation Act (Pierce vs. Burlington City, 1884). The case was presented by Rev. Jeremiah Pierce, pastor of an African American Methodist Episcopal church in Burlington City, whose children were refused admittance to a white school in the town. Proceedings began on June 13, 1883, only two months before the dedication of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School. Pierce founded his claim, that his children were unlawfully denied admittance to a white school, on the 1844 Constitution and the 1881 School Desegregation Act.

By ruling in Pierce's favor, the State Supreme Court sent a strong anti-separatist message to communities throughout New Jersey.<sup>51</sup> Despite the 1881 School Desegregation Act which permitted African American parents to enroll their children in white schools, and despite support for this legislation by the State Supreme Court in 1884, the separatist school system continued to exist in New Jersey. In fact, racially segregated schools were not abolished in the state for more than sixty years after the construction of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School.

The name of the school became a point of discussion within ten years of the building's construction. In 1891, the African American community in Trenton sought to change the name of the Bellevue Avenue Colored School, which distinguished the school from the Bellevue Avenue School for white children (located on the same street). Rather than have their children stigmatized on the basis of color, the African American community proposed the name of the Frederick Douglass School, to honor a significant African American leader. While this proposal was rejected by the School Board, the School Board did rename the building the "Lincoln School", in honor of Abraham Lincoln, the Great Emancipator.<sup>52</sup>

Extant records allow us to trace construction and maintenance activity occurring at the school. In 1888, the Bellevue Avenue

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<sup>51</sup> Price 1980: 143-150.

<sup>52</sup> Washington 1990: 58-59. Interestingly, no discussion of the name change occurs in the Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education (first mention of Lincoln School 5/4/1891).

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Colored School received an addition at the rear of the building. The cost of this addition was \$ 2,211.41, as noted in the Financial Statement of the Board of School Trustees in 1888.<sup>53</sup>

In 1891, the Annual Report of the Board of Education provided a list of needed repairs for the Lincoln School. Among the items were a request for two additional outhouses, since the two existing facilities did not meet the growing demand.<sup>54</sup> A new furnace was also requested, since "the one at present has for seven years given trouble", and only provided a moderate degree of heat on very cold days.<sup>55</sup> Other recommendations included a need to whitewash the ceilings and walls, and a need to repaint the 1883 part of the building. Repainting was suggested as a measure to preserve the wood and to "relieve the building of its present weather stained appearance".<sup>56</sup>

Over the years, the building appears to have faced more maintenance problems. The author of the 1891 Annual Report observed that "waste water pouring over the pavement from the hydrants in two rooms is a great nuisance to those passing the building [not to mention the students!]"<sup>57</sup> As a remedy, the author suggested that water be conducted from the roof to the ground by means of terra cotta

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<sup>53</sup> Annual Reports of the City Officers of the City of Trenton 1888: 31. In light of the 1881 School Desegregation Act, it is possible that the rationale behind the construction of the addition to the Lincoln School was another attempt by the Trenton Board of Education to discourage African American parents from enrolling their children in white schools.

<sup>54</sup> A request for additional outhouses was first recorded in Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education November 6, 1890.

<sup>55</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Trenton, 1891: 24.

<sup>56</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Trenton 1891: 25.

<sup>57</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Trenton 1891: 25.

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pipes, a request voiced to the Board of Education a year before.<sup>58</sup>

The Lincoln School for colored students grew as documented by the Daily True American and the Report of the Trenton School Board of Education (1902-1910). In 1893, the pupil enrollment was 172, with four teachers.<sup>59</sup> By 1910, the teaching staff increased to six. The school continued to grow during the 1922 school year, which saw 211 enrolled. Unfortunately, the Trenton School district paid little attention to the overall condition of the school, which by the district's own account under the category of "adaptability of building for present day education needs" was indicated as poor.<sup>60</sup> That the building could accommodate such a large increase in the number of students is surprising in light of the fact that the Superintendent's Annual Report for 1891 claimed that the building could only seat 148 pupils comfortably.<sup>61</sup>

The pupils enrolled in the Lincoln School were transferred to the new Lincoln School being built at Brunswick Avenue and Montgomery Streets in 1923. Subsequently, the Lincoln School on Bellevue Avenue was referred to as the Old Lincoln School. The new Lincoln School, which was described as handsome and modern, provided

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<sup>58</sup> Minutes of the Trenton Board of Education November 6, 1890. Proposals for improvements to the Bellevue Avenue Colored School appear in the Minutes of the Board of Education of the City of Trenton of November 6, 1890. These include a request for "terra cotta pipes to run water from the conductors on the roof off the yard" and a recommendation that the school be connected to the sewer in the street. Curiously, an x-mark follows both of these items, suggesting that both proposals were refused. It would appear that the drainage problem was not addressed, since this recommendation appears again in the 1892 report (Annual Report of the School Board for the City of Trenton 1892: 26).

<sup>59</sup> Daily True American April 6, 1893.

<sup>60</sup> The Building Program, Trenton Public Schools, November 1922.

<sup>61</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of Trenton 1891: 49.

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instruction in elementary and junior grades.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, the new Lincoln School also received pupils from the existing junior high school in Trenton.<sup>63</sup> As the historian Florence Higgs reports, the new Lincoln School was then commonly used for the education of African American children, regardless of which districts the children came from.<sup>64</sup>

In September 1928, the old Lincoln School was re-opened to accommodate the overflow of African American children unable to attend the new Lincoln School.<sup>65</sup> Again, by providing another facility for the education of African American children, the Trenton School Board was prolonging the segregation of the school system.<sup>66</sup>

Following the abolition of separatist or colored schools in 1947, the old Lincoln School was sold in to Linbel, Inc., an unidentified company, on April 13, 1949, for \$ 10,100 when it was determined that the building was no longer needed by the Trenton Board of Education. Linbel, Inc. then leased the building as storage space to S.P. Dunham & Company, a local department store. In 1952, the Acacia Temple Building Corporation, the Trustees to the King David Lodge, subsequently purchased the building for \$ 1.00 on March 28 of that year, and still retains ownership.

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<sup>62</sup> Higgs, Florence. Integration Problems in Certain Schools in Mercer County, New Jersey. PhDEd Thesis for NJ State Teachers College in Trenton, 1951, 13.

<sup>63</sup> While it is unclear whether the African American parents willingly withdrew their children from the junior high school and enrolled them in the new Lincoln School, or whether the School Board revoked the children's admission to the junior high school, the segregation of the public school system in Trenton was perpetuated.

<sup>64</sup> Higgs 1951: 13.

<sup>65</sup> Higgs 1951: 13.

<sup>66</sup> According to Higgs, a new wing of unspecified size was added to the old Lincoln School in 1940, but without any groundplans of the building, such a claim is difficult to confirm. See Higgs 1951: 13.



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## Geographical Data

UTM References:                   Zone 18  
  Easting 5 19 4 40  
  Northing 44 52 6 00

## Verbal Boundary Descriptions

A) As described in the November 11, 1882 deed which transferred the property from Augustus C. Richey to the Superintendent and Trustees of the Public Schools of the City of Trenton. The boundaries of the nominated Bellevue Avenue Colored School property, which contain "numbers twenty nine, thirty, and thirty one, on a map or plan of lots of Alpheus Swayze, filed in the Mercer County Clerk's Office", on a line along: "the southerly side of Bellevue Avenue, formerly Higbee Street, each twenty five feet front and ninety feet in depth, and are together bounded and described as follows: beginning at a corner of a lot now or lately owned by Eli Townsend, and running thence along the southerly side of Bellevue Avenue, formerly Higbee Street, seventy five feet, thence, southerly along line of Francis Katterson, ninety feet to a ten feet alley, thence, easterly along the northerly line of said alley seventy five feet, thence, northerly ninety feet along the westerly line of the lot now or late of Eli Townsend, to the place of beginning".<sup>67</sup>

B) Description of the property in the April 20, 1949 deed which transferred the property from the Trenton Board of Education to Linbel Incorporated. Lot numbers 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32 on a map of lots of the Estate of William McGill, deceased, filed August 9, 1866, in the Mercer County Clerk's Office, being more particularly bounded and described as follows: "Beginning at a point in the southerly side of Bellevue Avenue, formerly Higbee Street, at the northeast corner of Lot 26 on said map and running thence southerly at right angles to Bellevue Avenue along the easterly line of Lot 26 on the aforesaid map, 90 feet to a ten feet alley, thence, easterly along the northerly line of said alley, 150 feet to a point in the westerly line of lot 33 on the aforesaid map, and thence, northerly, parallel with the second course and along the westerly line of lot 33 on said map, 90 feet to the southerly line of Bellevue Avenue, 150 feet to the point and place

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<sup>67</sup> Mercer County Deed Book 134: 325.

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of beginning".<sup>68</sup>

## Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire lot historically associated with the Bellevue Avenue Colored School.

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<sup>68</sup> Mercer County Deed Book 1060: 68.

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## Additional Documentation

1. Trenton West Quadrangle (7.5 Minute Series, Topographic). United States Geographical Society (USGS) Map.
2. 13th Tax Area, Sheet No. 26. Tax Map, City of Trenton, Mercer County (February 1966).
3. Sheet #3. Insurance Maps of Trenton, New Jersey. New York: Sanborn, 1982 (update of 1955).
4. Site Map, King David Lodge No. 15, Trenton.
5. Groundplan. King David Lodge No. 15, Trenton.

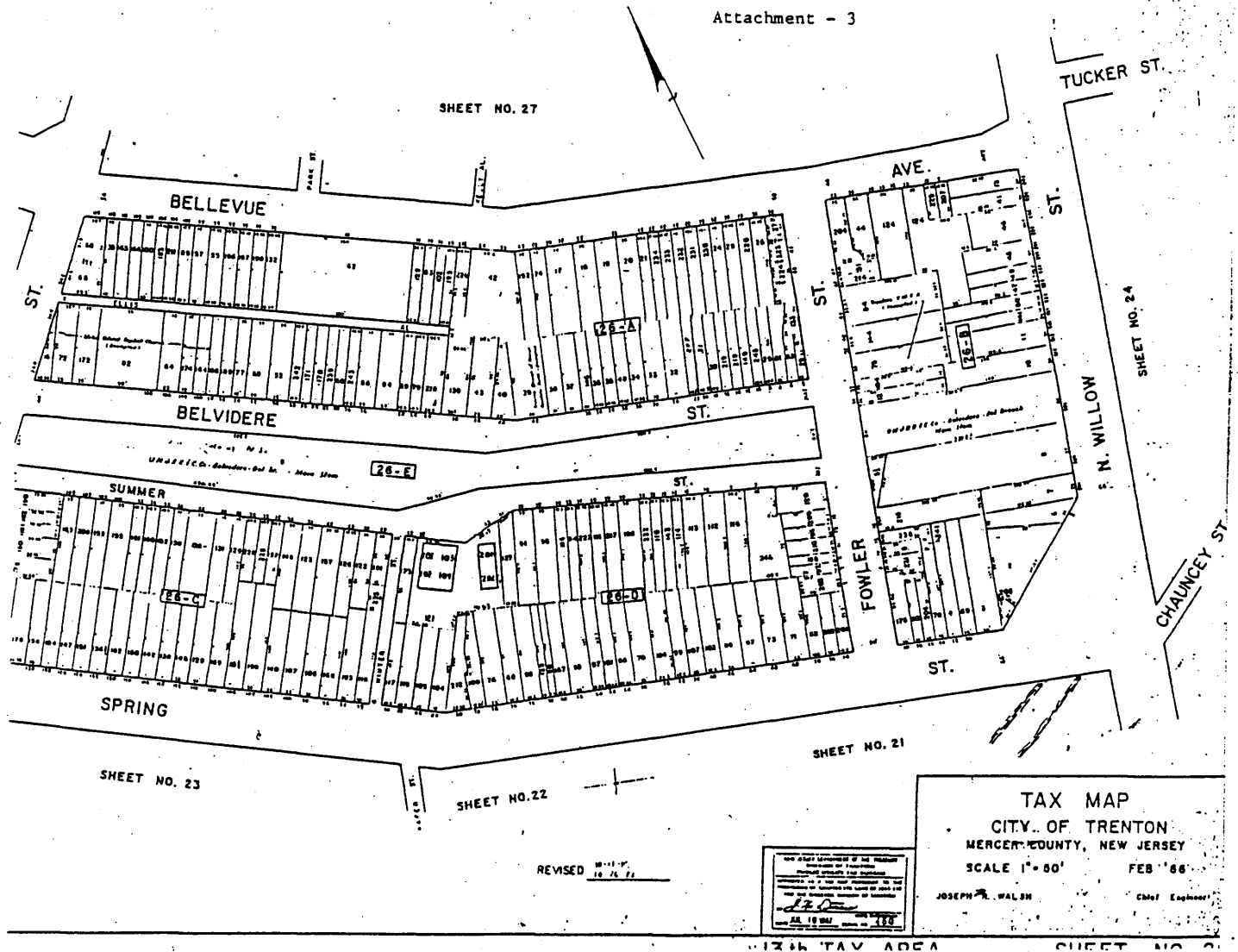
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2. 13th Tax Area. Sheet No. 26. Tax Map, City of Trenton, Mercer County (February 1966).



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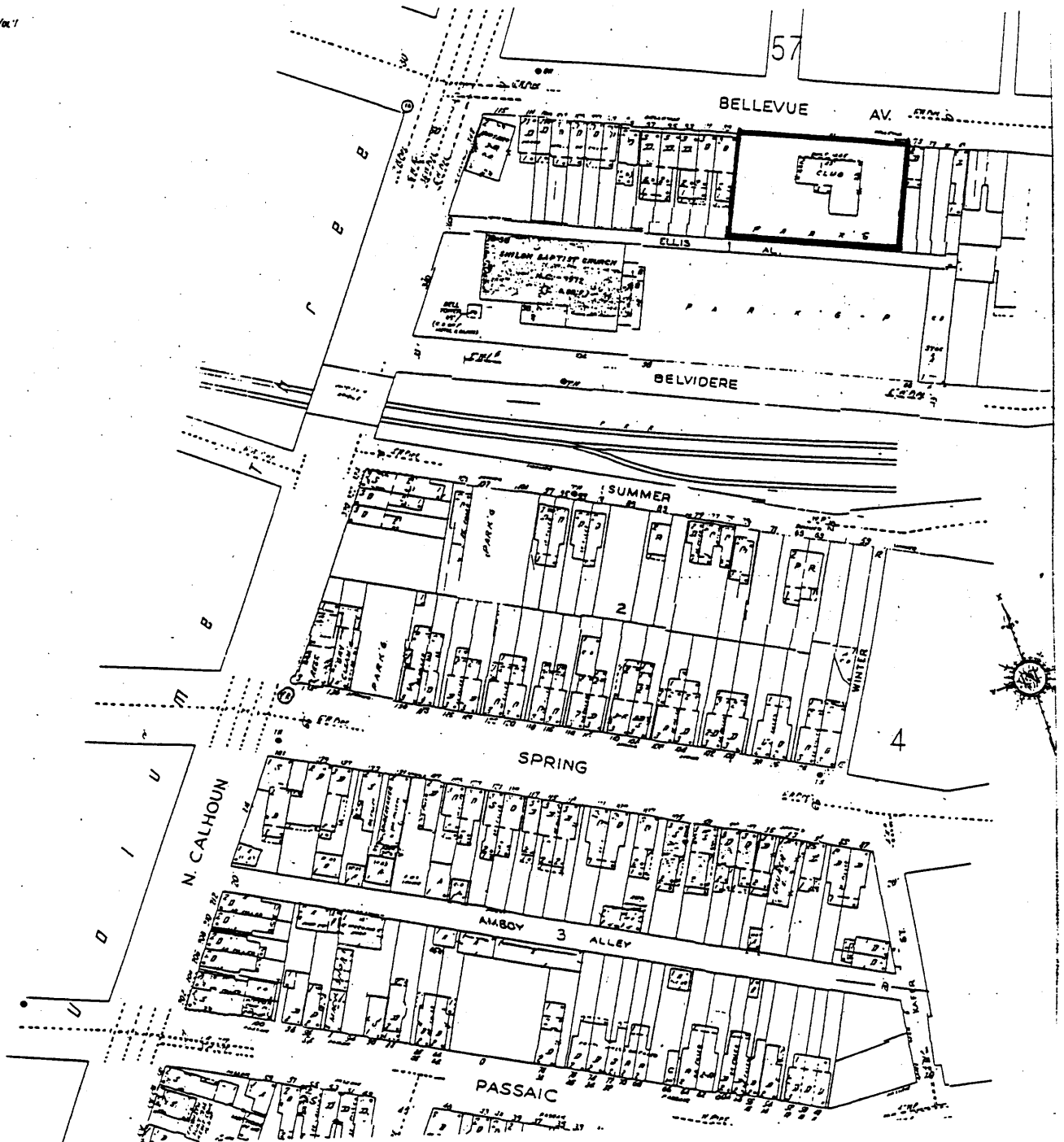
Section number 12 Page 4

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3. Sheet #3. Insurance Maps of Trenton, New Jersey. New York:  
Sanborn, 1982 (update of 1955).

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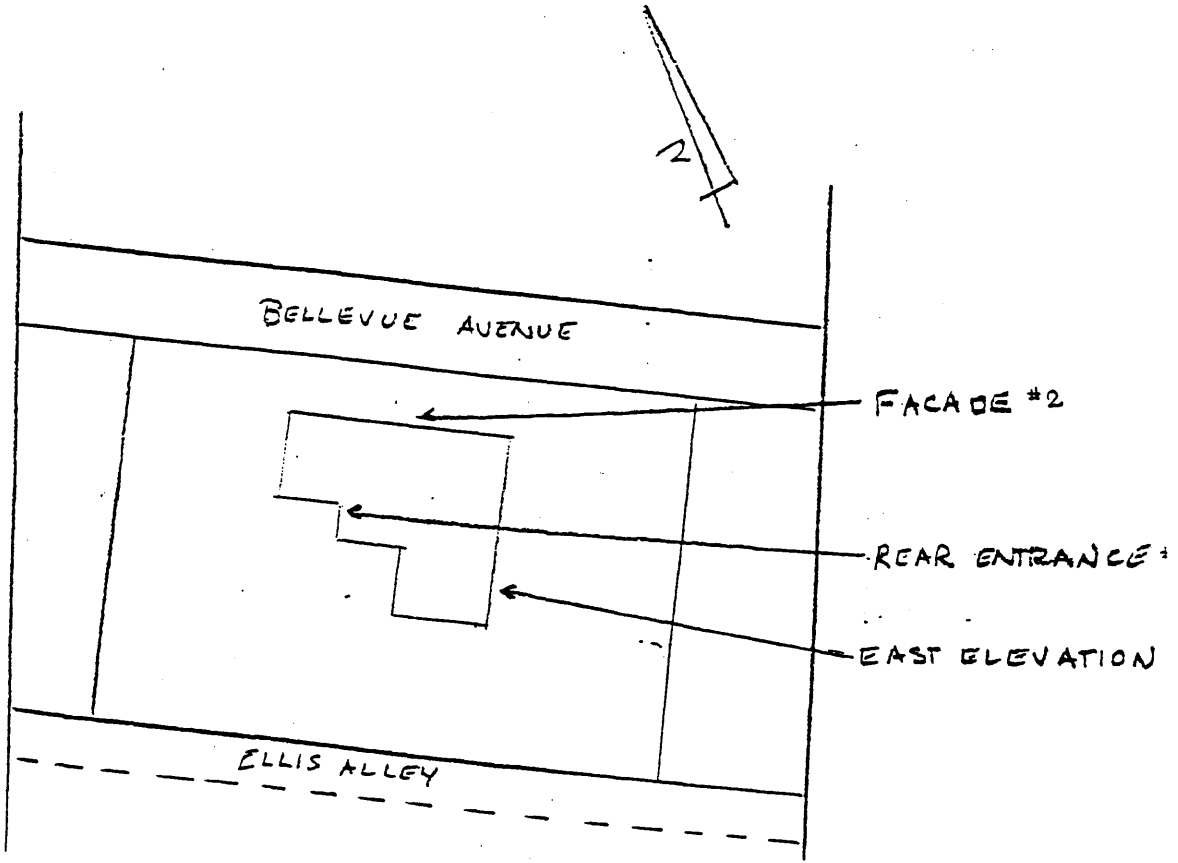
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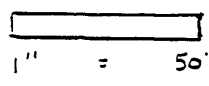
Section number 12 Page 5

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4. Site Map. King David Lodge No. 15 F & AM, Trenton.



LOT 62  
BLOCK 26A  
81 BELLEVUE AVENUE





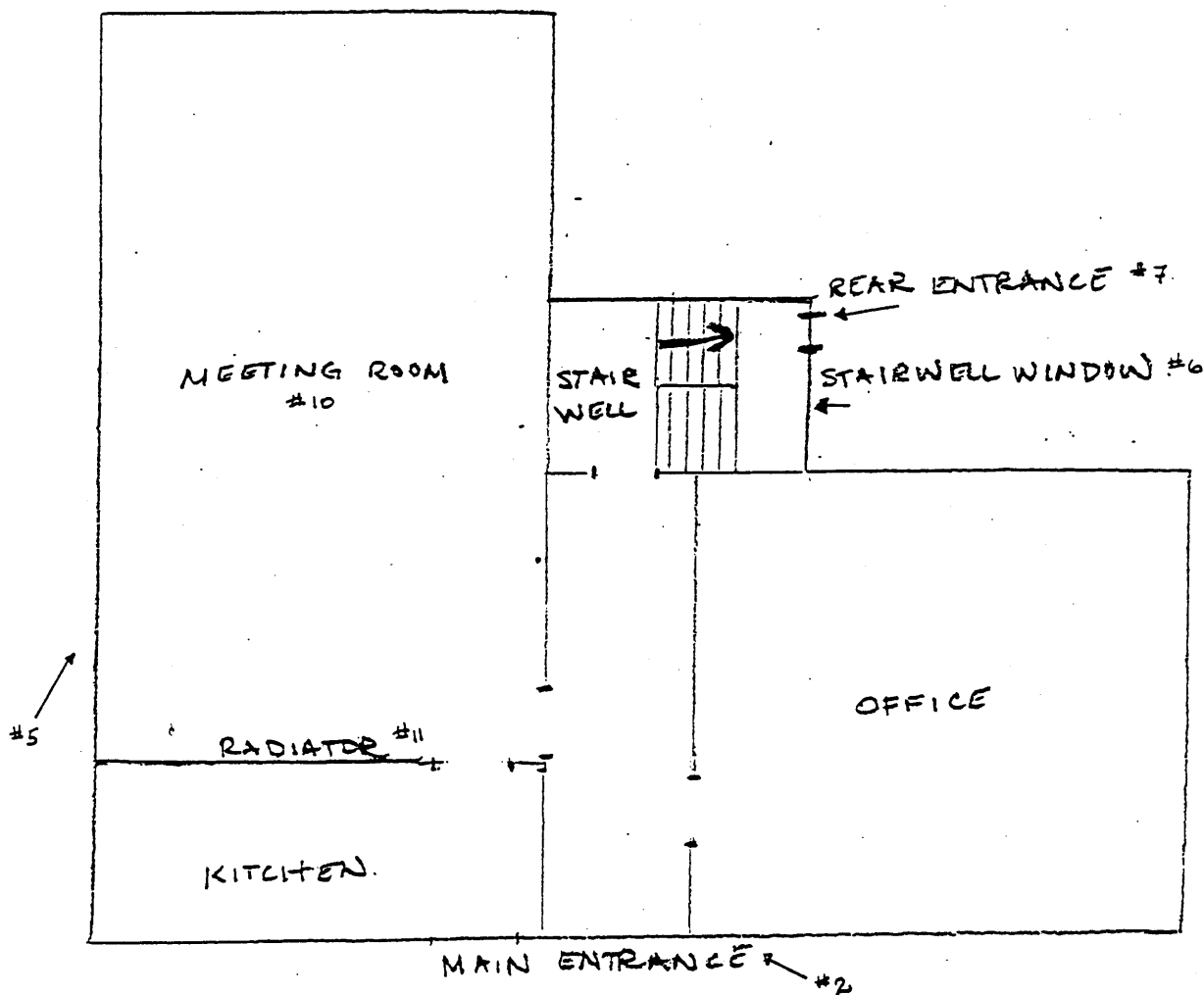
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5. Groundplan. King David Lodge No. 15. 81 Bellevue Avenue (Page 26, Lot 62).



1<sup>st</sup> FLOOR PLAN

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2. View of Facade, King David Lodge #15, 1996.
3. Dedication Ceremonies, King David Lodge #15, 1952.
4. Basement Walls, King David Lodge #15, 1996.
5. East Elevation, King David Lodge #15, 1996.
6. View of Stairwell Window (from interior), King David Lodge #15, 1996.
7. View of Rear Entrance, King David Lodge #15, 1996.
8. View of Pine Flooring, King David Lodge #15, 1996.
9. Section of Whitewashing on Basement Wall, King David Lodge #15, 1996.
10. View of 2nd Floor Meeting Room, King David Lodge #15, 1996.
11. View of Radiator, 2nd Floor Meeting Room, King David Lodge #15, 1996.