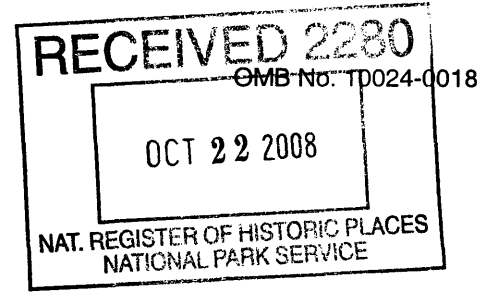


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



1148

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction 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 Douglass School

other names/site number Douglas School, Lawton Douglass School, Douglass Learning Center

2. Location

street & number 102 East Gore Boulevard [N/A] not for publication

city or town Lawton [N/A] vicinity

state Oklahoma code OK county Comanche code 031 zip code 73501

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 State Historic Preservation Officer Date 10-20-08

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:

- Entered in the National Register
determined eligible for the National Register
determined not eligible for the National Register
removed from the National Register
other, explain

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 11/25/2008

Douglass School
Name of Property

Comanche County, Oklahoma
County/State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	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)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS
MODERN

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE/BRICK
walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT
other _____

Narrative Description

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

Douglass School
Name of Property

Comanche County, Oklahoma
County/State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- 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):

- 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)

EDUCATION

ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK

Periods of Significance

1931-1966

Significant Dates

1931

1943

1951

1954

1958

Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Noftsgger and Lawrence, architects

Chapman Construction Company, builder

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Oklahoma Historical Society

Douglass School
Name of Property

Comanche County, Oklahoma
County/State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5 Acres MOL

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

- | | | | | |
|----|------|---------|----------|------------------------------|
| 1. | 14 | 556400 | 3829720 | (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.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian, for Oklahoma Centennial Commission
organization Architectural Resources & Community Heritage Consulting date June 2008
street & number 346 County Road 1230 telephone 405-459-6200
city or town Pocasset state OK zip code 73079

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 Lawton Public Schools, Barry Beauchamp, Superintendent of Schools
street & number PO Box 1009 telephone _____
city or town Lawton state OK zip code 73502-1009

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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National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

Douglass School
Comanche County
Oklahoma

Section number 7 Page 1

DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Douglass School, located in Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma, served for thirty-five years as the separate primary and secondary school for the Lawton School District. The school was expanded multiple times, reflecting the growth of the black community in Lawton, as well as changes in curriculum, between 1931 and 1966. The first section of the school was built in 1931 with the construction being partially funded by a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Over the next eight years, the school was expanded by the addition of a large, rectangular gymnasium and two small, one-story, rectangular additions. The gymnasium was centrally attached to the rear of the original rectangular building. The small one-story wings were attached to the rear sides of the gymnasium with the south wing being slightly larger than the north wing.

In about 1943, a time when Lawton was booming due to the massive war-time surge at nearby Fort Sill, another addition provided a small section of classrooms on the south side of the Rosenwald building. Eight years later, eight more classrooms, connected to the east side of the 1943 addition, were added to the building. Just three years later, in 1954, another four-room addition was made to the building, extending the perpendicular wing of the building even farther to the east. In 1958, the last major additions occurred at the school. Consisting primarily of a new auditorium, gymnasium and cafeteria, the 1958 addition also included shop improvements, a band room, a music room and additional classrooms. These additions all occurred on the backside of the building, off of the 1930s gymnasium. Notably, among other improvements, the 1958 work also included a new, flat-roofed addition that was erected in front of the original Rosenwald-funded, pedimented, brick entry.

The pre-1958 additions blended well with the original building, including a continuation of relative height, rows of ribbon windows and construction materials. The 1958 additions, however, reflected a more Modern approach, including flat roofs and narrow rows of windows along the upper walls. The most notable alteration to the building in 1958 was the front addition which covered much of the original entry. It was largely due to this addition that the building was determined not eligible for the National Register as part of the 1992 "Reconnaissance Level Survey of Certain Portions of Lawton, Oklahoma." However, the original pediment remains intact and visible above the flat-roofed entry and, although diminishing the historic integrity of the original building's design, all of the additions reflect the school's development over the period of significance. That the school continued to evolve from its original ten-room building is a critical factor in understanding the school's importance to the local community. The building overall retains its historic integrity and ably conveys its significance as Lawton's historically black school.

The polychromatic brick building is generally one-story in height, except for two taller sections on the rear. The 1958 auditorium, located towards the north, is about one-and-one-half stories in height. The 1958 gymnasium is two-stories in height with rows of windows along the upper wall. The 1958 auditorium and gymnasium are also distinguished by their membrane roofs which have a hipped shape. The majority of the other pre-1958 sections of the building have asphalt-clad, hipped roofs. The 1930s gymnasium roof is side gabled and the remaining 1958 sections have flat roofs. The doors in the building are nonhistoric, metal slab with predominately large rectangular lights. The tall double

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Douglass School
Comanche County
Oklahoma

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windows in the pre-1951 portions of the building have been replaced with typical, five-pane, aluminum windows with an operable bottom pane and opaque upper panes. The ribbon windows in the 1951-1954 additions are older, multi-paned, metal windows which also have an operable lower section and two opaque upper sections. The opaque upper sections retain the four-pane division of the other sections of window. The windows in the 1958 front addition are six-over-six, metal, hung. The windows in the other 1958 sections of the building are two-over-two, metal, hung. All of the windows, which are predominately paired in the original section and ribbon in the other sections, have continuous, concrete sills. The windows do not have headers as they are all located just below the building's eaves.

The building has been most noticeably altered by the replacement of doors and some windows. Some of the remaining historic windows have also been modified by the addition of opaque materials to their upper sections. These changes are not uncommon to schools that are still in use and, notably, only the windows in the wings off the 1930s gymnasium have been obscured. Because the window dimensions have not been modified and the overall fenestration pattern remains clearly evident, these alterations have not destroyed the ability of the building to convey its significance. The multiple additions to the building all occurred within the property's period of significance and, thus, do not have a negative impact on the building's historic integrity. Other minor changes have occurred to the individual components of the building but, overall, the building retains a good degree of integrity and clearly communicates its historic role in education in the community.

The Douglass School is located along a main thoroughfare in Lawton, Gore Boulevard. The school is located on the east side of town. In general, the area on the north side of Gore Boulevard and east of the railroad tracks was historically occupied by Lawton's black residents. On the south side of Gore, the area was historically industrial in character. Although the Douglass Junior-Senior School was closed in 1966 to facilitate integration of the Lawton public school system, the building continued to operate as a predominately black elementary school. The building remains in use at the present time as an elementary school under the modern appellation of the Douglass Learning Center.

The school is situated upon a block of land by itself. To the immediate north and east of the school is a residential area. The south side of the school is bordered by the four-lane Gore Boulevard. The block across the street to the west of the school contains a large playground area enclosed by a chain link fence. The school building occupies the majority of the block. The remainder of the block is largely black-topped with a small grassy area on the south side. The grassy strip is enclosed by a chain link fence as it is adjacent to Gore Boulevard. Located within this area is a modern playground area. On the northeast edge of this area, there is a concrete basketball court that is separated from the adjacent parking lot by a short, chain link fence. The remainder of the area behind the school, consisting of the north two-thirds of roughly the east one-third of the block, is a large, black-topped, parking lot. The north side of the school abuts almost up to the road with the ground around the building mainly covered with gravel, although there is a wide concrete sidewalk extending north from a central enclosed corridor between the 1930s gymnasium and the 1958 additions.

For the purposes of this nomination, the playground area on the south side of the school building and the adjacent basketball court are considered as one noncontributing site due to the recent age of the equipment. On the southwest corner of the block, there is a modern, freestanding sign which is

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Douglass School
Comanche County
Oklahoma

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considered a noncontributing object. Located in the landscape bed in the front of the building is a fairly new granite marker dedicated to the memory of the school with three decorative stepping stones in front of this. The marker and stones are also counted as one noncontributing object. The parking lot on the east side of the block is not included within the resource count due to the ubiquitous nature of the area. In all, there are a total of three noncontributing resources within the boundaries of the nomination, consisting of one noncontributing site and two noncontributing objects. None of these noncontributing resources, due to their relative size and scale, interfere with the building's ability to illustrate its historic significance.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The Douglass School is a large, complex building composed of multiple additions to an originally rectangular building. The additions are all connected and, thus, are all considered part of one building. The additions are of a similar brick construction so they are all compatible, although they do not share a single architectural style. The two styles found on the building are categorized as Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movement and Modern Movement. The original building and pre-1958 additions are simple, functional expressions of style that were minimally and functionally ornamented by ribbon windows with concrete sills, a decorative brick watertable and pedimented entries. The 1958 sections of the building clearly reflect a more Modern approach to style with their flat roofs that flare over the wall, rows of ribbon windows located high on the wall and flat-roofed, decorative concrete block porch walls. The mix of styles is not incompatible and reflects the changing trends in educational architecture between 1930 and the late 1950s.

In general, the building is predominately one-story in height. The walls are all a similar polychromatic brick. The brick is predominately red but includes black, brown and tan colored bricks as well. The brick is laid in a stretcher bond. The foundation of the building is concrete and brick. With the exception of the 1930s gymnasium, the pre-1958 sections of the building have asphalt-covered, hipped roofs. The 1930s gymnasium has a side-gabled roof with a brick gable wall. The 1958 gymnasium and auditorium have membrane roofs which echo the dominate hip shape found elsewhere on the building. The 1958 classroom sections have flat roofs with broad eaves. All of the roofs have various metal vents of multiple sizes, as well as mechanical units. There are two brick chimneys on the building. One is located on the northeast side of the original building and the other one, much larger than the first, is situated on the west side of the auditorium. The building has various entry and partial porches. Most of the porches are covered, typically with flat roofs supported on one side by triple metal poles and a brick or decorative concrete block wall on the other side.

The original section of the building was rectangular in shape (see photographs 1 and 2). This part of the building has a hipped roof with short eaves that have been clad with metal. The tall, concrete foundation on this section of the building is topped by a course of soldier bricks. The corners are then marked by square stones. The front entry, highlighted by a tall brick parapet, is centrally located. The parapet is ornamented with a metal-clad coping and a decorative brick table along the upper wall. The table has three stone accents which remain visible. At the apex of the pediment is a stone panel which reads "1931." The remainder of the original entry has been obscured by the 1958 front addition. To either side of the original entry are several paired and single windows. There are seven sets of windows on the north side with a shorter single window separating three sets of paired windows.

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Below the shorter window, at the same level as the continuous concrete sills of the other windows, is a double row of projected bricks. On the south side of the façade, there are also seven sets of windows with the north five being pairs which are evenly spaced apart. The remaining two sets of windows on the south side of the front elevation are spaced equally apart but located at a discernible distance from the other windows. The back, or west elevation of the building, exhibits a symmetrical pattern of paired and single windows. The windows were originally wood, eight-over-eight, double hung. The windows are now aluminum, five-pane with an operable lower pane and opaque upper panes. These windows are typical of replacement windows for schools. Maintaining its original fenestration pattern, the north elevation of the building had, and has, two sets of paired windows to the east of a central entry. These windows were, and are, slightly shorter than the windows on the front and back sides of the building. The paired windows now contain four-pane, aluminum windows with opaque upper panes. These windows have also been covered with wire to limit breakage. The historically inset entry is still inset and now contains double, metal, slab doors with large rectangular lights. The entry was "improved" in the 1958 work on the building and now is sheltered by a flat roof with board eaves. The porch roof is supported by a solid brick wall on the west side and triple metal poles on a large brick pier on the east. The pier has a concrete cap and a decorative row of soldier bricks that aligns with the course of soldiers bricks atop the original building's foundation. A concrete ramp has been added to the east side of the porch with both the ramp and remaining stairs having metal railings. The south elevation of the building has been completely obscured.

As the oldest portion of the school, this section has undergone the most modifications. However, the changes to the building's original design occurred within the period of significance and reflect the continuing evolution of the school. As such, the most notable alterations to the original building have gained significance of their own and do not impede the school's ability to transmit its significance. The replacement of the windows is an unfortunate side effect of continued use of the building and does not significantly impact the building's integrity as the original pattern and dimensions of the windows remain evident.

The most discernible alteration to the 1931 building was the 1958 construction of an office addition and new entry in front of the original main entry (see photograph 1). This flat-roofed addition includes small interior rooms and a new entry. The entry is partially enclosed by brick walls on the north and west sides. The west porch wall has no openings and the interior north porch wall has two, six-over-six, metal, hung windows, with continuous concrete sills. The sheltered entry has double, metal, slab doors with rectangular lights on the west side. The double transom above the doors is now opaque. To the direct south of the doors, there is a wood-framed, metal plaque which reads "DOUGLASS SCHOOL/1931-1966/B.C. Swinney, Superintendent Hugh Bish, Superintendent/W.R. Patterson, Principal Albert Johnson, Principal/"WE WILL EVER THINK OF THEE"/LION MASCOT." On the north outside wall of the addition there are two sets of triple, six-over-six, metal, hung windows. On the south outside wall of the addition, there is a single set of triple, six-over-six, metal, hung windows (see photograph 9).

The first of seven additions to the school occurred within a few years of the building's 1931 construction. The first gymnasium was centrally located on the rear of the original building and features a distinctive, side-gabled, asphalt-clad roof. As in the main portion of the building, the tall, single, likely originally wood windows have been replaced with aluminum, five-pane windows of the

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same dimensions. The east wall of the gymnasium features a brick parapet which is similar to the parapet on the front of the building. The entry on the parapet has also been obscured by a flat-roofed, connecting corridor that joins the earlier portions of the building with the 1958 additions. As part of the 1958 work on the building, the original gymnasium was converted to the school's lunchroom. By 1939, two short, brick wings with asphalt-clad, hipped roofs had been added to both the north and south sides of the gymnasium. The windows in these portions of the building have been infilled or covered. The north wing features a single entry on the west side with a metal covering. The south wing has a small enclosure located on the south side. The south wing is largely obscured by its location between the 1958 gymnasium and original building with access restricted by a chain link fence between the 1954 addition and 1958 additions.

In about 1943, an addition was added to the south elevation of the original portion of the building (see photograph 2). The addition matches much of the detail of the first part of the school, including having a course of soldier bricks along the top of the tall concrete foundation and marking the corners of the addition with square stones. The window pattern was also very similar to the initial building, consisting of three sets of double windows separated by a single window. As in the 1931 part, the windows have been replaced with aluminum, five pane windows of matching dimensions. A new entry was located immediately off the original building. Now consisting of a double, metal, slab doors with rectangular lights, the entry is similar to the side entry on the north elevation of the 1931 building. Like the 1931 side entry, the connecting 1943 entry was "improved" as part of the 1958 work on the building. This includes infill around and above the door. The front gabled roof over the entry may predate the 1958 work but was modernized by the addition of a decorative concrete block wall on the south side and triple metal supports on a brick pier on the north. The large pier has a concrete coping and is wide enough to create an elevated landscape area. The stairs are concrete with a metal railing located at ground level.

The 1951 classroom addition continued the tradition of the 1943 addition by extending the school farther to the south along the façade (see photographs 3 and 4). However, unlike the earlier portions of the building, this section of building has a brick foundation. The course of soldier bricks along the lower wall and the projected band of double rows of bricks between the continuous concrete sills was continued from the other sections of the building. The square stones marking the corners of the building were also moved from foundation level to window level. The fenestration pattern also changed, giving way to banks of six windows separated by single windows. Like the other windows, the 1951 windows have continuous concrete sills. The multi-paned, metal windows consist of five sections of four-panes. As on the replacement windows in the earlier sections, the bottom window section is operable and the upper two have been made opaque to restrict the amount of natural light entering the classrooms. The fenestration pattern on both the north and south sides of the addition are corresponding. These windows are likely original to the building. Systematically located on both the south and north sides of this section of buildings, in the fourth window, are nonhistoric, window air conditioning units. Although it is hard to determine exactly where the 1951 addition terminates due to the similarity between it and the 1954 addition, it does not appear that any entries were constructed as part of the 1951 expansion.

In 1954, as the increasing Baby Boom generation continued to put pressure on local school districts, another classroom addition was undertaken at Douglass School (see photographs 4 and 5). Located

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off the 1951 addition, the 1954 addition continued the school's stretch of construction along East Gore Boulevard. The 1954 addition also continued the hipped roof of the 1951 addition and has identical window patterns and decorative detailing. Approximately two-thirds of the way east along the south wall, there is a recessed entry. The entry has double, metal, slab doors with rectangular lights and concrete stairs. To the immediate east of the door is a lone pair of double windows and then a stretch of brick wall. The east elevation of this section of the building contains only a recessed entry. The entry, consisting of double, metal, slab doors with rectangular lights, has an unusual, uncovered, concrete steps. The wide landing has stairs located off all three exposed sides with the north set of stairs being replaced with a concrete ramp. Only the ramp has metal railings. The north side of the addition is similar to the south, although there is no entry on this elevation. Corresponding to the entry on the south side are two, shorter, single windows consisting of four sections of four-panes.

In 1958, multiple additions were constructed at the school (see photographs 1, 5-8). This work included construction of a large gymnasium and an auditorium. Also at this time, various classrooms and other special interest rooms were added to the school. The entries on other portions of the building, including the primary entry, were "improved" as part of this sizable project. The 1958 additions were attached to the earlier portions of the building through a connecting corridor off the east elevation of the original gymnasium. Unlike the other parts of the building, the 1958 additions do not feature any decorative detailing along the lower wall. The new, more commodious gymnasium was located to the south of the corridor and the auditorium to the north (see photograph 5). The gymnasium and auditorium feature separate membrane roofs that are hipped in form. The two-story gymnasium has six sets of windows along the top of the east elevation. The elevation is further divided into four bays by metal downspouts. The symmetrical windows consist of triple windows in the outside bays and double sets of quadruple windows in the two center bays. The windows have continuous concrete sills. The north and south elevations have no window openings and the west elevation is not visible from other ground level vantage points. In addition to interior access, the gymnasium has two sets of double, metal, slab doors on the south elevation. The uncovered doors have concrete headers and concrete stairs with metal railings.

The 1958 auditorium is located directly north of the gymnasium (see photograph 5, 7-8). As necessitated by the function of the space, the auditorium does not have any windows. Centrally located on the north elevation of the auditorium, there is a double set of metal, slab doors with a metal landing. Off the west side of the landing is a set of concrete stairs with a metal railing. On the west side of the auditorium, there is a single, metal, slab door with an uncovered set of concrete stairs. These stairs have metal railings on both sides.

Along the east side of the 1958 gymnasium, there is a low, flat-roofed, one-story section of rooms (see photographs 5-6). This area consists of five bays. The south four bays are equal in size and each feature a set of six, two-over-two, metal, hung windows with continuous concrete sills. One window in each of the outside bays on the south side has been boarded and infilled with air conditioning units. Off the north side of the fourth bay, there is a recessed entry. The entry features double, metal, slab doors with rectangular lights and concrete stairs. To the north of the entry, there is a larger bay that features eight openings. Six of the openings feature two-over-two, metal, hung windows with a continuous concrete sill. One of the original eight windows openings has been boarded and another contains a window air conditioning unit.

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To the east of the auditorium and connected to the lower section described above, there is a taller but still one-story section (see photographs 5-7). This flat-roofed section of the building features two unequal banks of ribbon windows. As in the adjacent section, the windows are two-over-two, metal, hung. The south bank of ribbon windows includes seven window openings with the northernmost window being boarded. The larger north bank of ribbon windows consists of eight window openings with the southernmost opening being covered. In three of the windows, the lower sections of windows have been filled with window air conditioning units. On the north side of this section of building, adjacent to the dividing auditorium wall, there is only an entry, no window openings. The entry features double, metal, slab doors with a narrow, triple-pane, rectangular lights. The doors are topped by a divided, transom and flanked by sidelights. The partial porch has concrete stairs with no railings. The larger, flat-roofed porch covering is supported by a decorative concrete block wall on the west side and three full-length metal poles on the east. To the immediate south of the poles on the east side of the stairs, there is a low, long, brick enclosure with a concrete cap.

Other countable resources within the boundaries include the playground area on the south side of the school (see photographs 3 and 4). This grassy, fenced area includes various pieces of modern playground equipment scattered along the length of the area. On the northeast side of this area, there is a concrete basketball court. This area is considered a noncontributing site within this nomination because the existing features are of insufficient age to contribute to the significance of the school. Because this type of site is typically found at schools and nothing about the site significantly impairs the view of the building, the area does not adversely impact the school's historic integrity.

Located in the southeast corner of the school block, there is a modern sign which for the purposes of this nomination is considered a noncontributing object (see photograph 2). In addition to a message area, the sign prominently features the school's mascot, a Lion, and, along the top, the current name of the school "Douglass Learning Center." Below the message area, the sign again features the school mascot as well as the words "Home of the LIONS." At the bottom of the sign is the added postscript that "The sign (is) presented in honor of/Albert Johnson/Retired Deputy Superintendent/1950-1995." In addition to being an alumni of Douglass School, Mr. Johnson also served as the school's last principal. Situated away from the building, the relatively small sign does not impact the school's integrity.

In front of the 1958 front addition, there is another noncontributing object consisting of a small granite stone (see photograph 1). The stone is inscribed with the following "In memory/DOUGLASS JR-SR HIGH SCHOOL/April 29, 1966/Former Students, Staff, parents & Graduates/Quarterback Club/Mother's Lion Club/George & Ruth Willis, President/Hugh Bish, Superintendent/Albert Johnson, Principal." To the north of the inscription is a full-bodied, roaring Lion. The pinkish granite stone sits on a concrete base. In front of the stone are three, decorative, concrete, round stones which are not permanently attached. Although the date of the stone is not known, it was clearly erected after the school's closing in 1966 and is thus noncontributing due to insufficient age.

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SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The Douglass School, located in Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its historic significance as Lawton's separate primary and secondary school. The applicable areas of significance are education and black ethnic heritage. The period of significance for the property extends from the construction of the first portion of the building in 1931 through the closure of the secondary school to facilitate integration of the Lawton public school system in 1966. Throughout this period, the Douglass School served the black community of Lawton as an elementary, junior and high school. It was not the only black school in Lawton but it was the only secondary school that was available to blacks until after desegregation in the mid-1950s. While the Lawton public school system readily desegregated as required by law following the landmark decisions of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Douglass School remained the dominant educational institution for black schoolchildren in Lawton. This directly contributed to the 1966 closure of the junior and senior high school to allow for integration of the secondary system of the Lawton public schools as required by law.

To a greater degree than other school districts in Oklahoma, Lawton's public school system also reflects a federal influence of note that was particularly significant for the Douglass School. Located directly north of Lawton, Fort Sill is the sole remaining active army installation of all the posts opened on the Southern Plains during the late nineteenth century. The Lawton public school system has long provided the public educational means for the children of military personnel stationed at Fort Sill. To assist the local school system in accommodating these students, the federal government has provided monetary aid to the school district and required that the district meet federal requirements. This aid became of particular importance to the Lawton public school system just prior to World War II as the explosive growth of the post resulted in a crush of students in the Lawton schools. As the boom and federal aid continued, the Lawton schools experienced an earlier and more pressing pressure to desegregate and integrate in the 1950s and 1960s than the majority of other state schools.

The period of significance for the school extends from 1931, when the first portion of the existing school was erected, to 1966, when the secondary school was closed. Although the school continued to operate as a virtually all-black elementary school until the mid-1970s, the period of significance was not continued to that time. The 1966 closure of the junior and high school resounded more significantly with the local community than the 1974 restructuring of the elementary school. This is evidenced by the plaques and stones on the school itself, all of which note the date of 1966. The closure of the secondary school was a critical turning point because of the significant loss of control and influence over the higher education of black students by the black community. Thus, the community lost a major element of its visible identity with the closure of the secondary school. Although the elementary school continued to serve a dominant black student body, it did not possess the prestige of the high school and was also subject to a wider district influence than was wielded when the school served the minority community only.

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HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Situated in southwest Oklahoma, Lawton is located in the former Kiowa, Comanche and Apache lands. Even before the opening of these lands to non-Native American settlement in August 1901, Lawton was chosen to be the seat of the newly formed Comanche County. Allotted 320 acres for the original townsite, Lawton quickly outgrew its boundaries. Lawton's continued expansion from its incorporation in 1901 through the 1960s was due largely to its varied economic base. The city benefited from the surrounding agricultural community, various industrial and commercial concerns and the presence of Cameron State Agricultural College, but, most importantly, from Fort Sill. Established in 1869, the post was located only four miles north of the original townsite and now immediately borders the north edge of the city. Although Lawton maintained a fairly steady population throughout its first decades, it experienced small bursts of growth at various times, such as between statehood and 1910. The largest growth, however, began to occur in the 1940s when World War II created an unprecedented demand on Fort Sill and, therefore, Lawton. This era of expansion continued over the next two decades as Cold War developments kept Fort Sill at high levels of personnel.

Fort Sill was also notable in local history for its influence on racial relationships in the area. Squadrons of the 10th United States Cavalry Regiment, an African-American unit formed in 1866, were assigned to Fort Sill upon its designation. General P.H. Sheridan "...planned to have Colonel Grierson and the Tenth Cavalry build the new post." Black troops continued to be a major influence on the post for decades. In 1877, Second Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper, the first black graduate of West Point, was assigned to Troop A of the 10th Cavalry stationed at Fort Sill. Serving as the post's engineer, Lieutenant Flipper designed a drainage system for the installation which dissipated the stagnant ponds on and around post that contributed to the spread of malaria among the soldiers and residents. Known as Flipper's Ditch, portions of the drainage system are included within the Fort Sill Historic District, a National Historic Landmark composed largely of the buildings constructed by the 10th Cavalry. Although restricted by official and unofficial policies for much of the twentieth century, black soldiers remain an important component of Fort Sill's prowess through to the present day. As with the influx of troops in general, Lawton's development was influenced by these black soldiers and their families. Although the army itself was discriminatory towards blacks, the accepted presence of black troops at Fort Sill created a corresponding attitude in Lawton so that the community experienced little of the radical race relationships that occurred elsewhere in Oklahoma and the nation during the twentieth century and that were often violent and fatal for members of the black community.

In opening the nearly three million acres of former Kiowa, Comanche and Apache lands to settlement, the federal government tried a new approach. The previous Oklahoma land runs were successful, but this method incurred the problems of conflicting claims and the presence of Sooners, people who entered the area illegally, staking their claim before the race began. To avoid these problems in the newly created counties of Comanche, Caddo and Kiowa, the federal government decided to auction town lots in each of the newly designated county seats and award farm land through a lottery. Toward this end, two districts were established, with land offices at Fort Sill and another at El Reno for registration purposes. The two land offices registered 169,000 land seekers between July 11, 1901 and July 26, 1901. Of the total number of registrants, only 6,500 were drawn in each district to receive 160 acres of Oklahoma Land. These winners could file on their claims beginning August 6, 1901, the same day the lots in the county seat towns were offered at auction.

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On August 6, 1901, nearly 25,000 people were on hand in Lawton to bid on the 1200 lots to be auctioned. Following that initial swell, Lawton's population declined to 5,562 people at Oklahoma's statehood in 1907. In 1910, the population had grown to 7,788 residents, a respectable increase of 2,226. The boom in population during this three-year period is attributable to the War Department's decision to maintain Fort Sill as an army installation, rather than closing it and turning the military reservation over to the Apache prisoners-of-war as anticipated at the turn-of-the-century. The 1920 census recorded an additional 1,142 people residing in the city for a total post-World War I population of 8,930. Ten years later, the Lawton population stood at 12,121 citizens. Another 5,934 persons moved to Lawton during the 1930s, undoubtedly attracted by the multi-million dollar federal works program ongoing at Lawton and Fort Sill, creating a total of 18,055 people in Lawton at the time of the 1940 census. One of the most significant population increases occurred during the World War II decade of the 1940s. Nearly doubling the previous census count, 16,702 persons moved into the city during that period, bringing the total city population to 34,757 in 1950. The 1950s also resulted in tremendous development for the community as the city again nearly doubled in size to reach a 1960 population of 61,697, a gain of 26,940 citizens. The proximity of Fort Sill, mobilized for World War II and the ensuing Cold War, accounts for much of this population explosion. Growth continued over the next decade as the number of Lawton residents expanded by 12,773 to reach 74,470 in 1970.

From a general economic perspective, Lawton never really experienced any times of financial hardship. Within two years of the town opening, Lawton possessed three ice plants, two grain elevators and two cotton gins, among other industries. By the mid-1930s, eighteen industries operated out of Lawton and the city was a major wholesale marketing, distributing, and manufacturing center for southwest Oklahoma. The city's central business district grew from twelve city blocks in 1920 to thirty city blocks by the mid-1960s. During the Great Depression, the city's economy was bolstered by the \$4.4 million building program stated at Fort Sill in 1933. To complete the required work, it was necessary to hire several thousand men. The program continued through the 1940s with a total of \$14 million being expended. Also aiding the community during this period was the many projects undertaken by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) within the city limits and by the Civilian Conservation Corps at the nearby Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. Lawton experienced tremendous growth in the 1940s as Fort Sill mobilized for World War II. Fort Sill was not subject to post-war reductions, thereby continuing as a major economic force in Lawton. The industrial and retail base established in Lawton prior to the war expanded, allowing Lawton to service southwest Oklahoma's trade and service needs.

Since its August 1901 opening, Lawton has been a flourishing city. It experienced continuous growth from the establishment of the city through the 1970s. The presence of Fort Sill is largely responsible for the continued prosperity of the city but other factors, such as local industries and businesses, have contributed to Lawton's progress. Although the decades of the 1940s and 1950s were the most beneficial to Lawton, the earlier years were also advantageous. Without the previous years of development, the city would have been unable to handle the rapid growth of the mid-twentieth century.¹

¹ Oklahoma Historic Preservation Survey, "Reconnaissance Level Survey of a Portion of Lawton," (Available Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1992), 13-22.

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HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Education has long been one of the foundations of community development. Unfortunately, during the first half of the twentieth century, the educational opportunities for black schoolchildren were stifled by racism, a shortage of money and inadequate facilities. These conditions were allowed to persist relatively unchecked for decades by federal laws that allowed and state laws that mandated separate schools for white and black children. Although black schools in towns and cities tended to have more substantial facilities, better educated teachers and more consistent school terms than their rural counterparts, the separate schools were never accorded the resources of the majority schools as required by the law.

Despite these restrictions, the black schools were important components of the local black community and, along with churches, are typically the best remaining resource associated with the black ethnic heritage. In general, Lawton's historic black residential areas experienced the same fate as in other towns. Typically, these neighborhoods were located in relatively isolated areas of city development in proximity to industrial concerns. The areas began a marked decline after mid-century as aging housing stock and desegregation efforts made moving to other sections of town more attractive. This soon resulted in widespread demolition of historic housing in the neighborhood which suffered from the twin effects of vacancy and decay. The many empty lots and modern infill construction disrupt the continuity of the neighborhood, preventing recognition of the area's historic significance as a whole.

From Oklahoma's earliest days, African-Americans comprised a significant section of the population. In 1870, more than 6,000 blacks lived in Indian Territory. Twenty years later, the federal census recorded 18,000 African-Americans in Indian Territory and 3,000 in Oklahoma Territory. Until about 1897, Oklahoma was fairly well integrated. However, using the "separate but equal" doctrine of the 1896 United States Supreme Court decision in the case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the 1897 territorial legislature mandated racial separation of schools, juries and public facilities. Notably, the number of blacks had substantially grown to number almost 38,000 in Indian Territory and nearly 19,000 in Oklahoma Territory by the turn-of-the-century. The policy of segregation continued into statehood when the 1907 state legislature, as one of its first undertakings, enacted a "Jim Crow" law restricting use of not only schools and public facilities but also transportation. Section III, Article XIII of the Oklahoma Constitution provided for "a complete plan of separation between the white and colored races, with impartial facilities for both races." As defined by the statute, the term "white" included all non-black races.²

Significantly, separate schools in Oklahoma were legally challenged by members of the local black community early in the twentieth century. In mid-September 1905, Judge F.E. Gillette of the District Court, Comanche County, rendered a decision in support of separate schools in the case of *Dewberry vs. District No. 50*. This was "...the first decision of the kind ever given out in Oklahoma and one which

² Cynthia Savage and Jill Marsh, "Architectural/Historic Intensive Level Survey of Langston University, Langston, Oklahoma," (Available State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 1997), 14-15. See also Cynthia Savage, "Historic Context for the Julius Rosenwald Fund in Oklahoma" (Available Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, August 1997), 7.

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sets at rest any disquietude as to the intention of the law respecting separate schools." William Dewberry brought the suit against the school board of District #50 for damages in the amount of \$1,000. The case was brought up in district court on September 14, 1905 and the school district attorneys "...demurred to the petition." The court then

sustained the demurrer on the grounds that under the provisions of the separate school law (then) in force and effect in Oklahoma no colored children are permitted to attend a white school or white children to attend a colored school; that such provisions are mandatory; that the law offers equal facilities for both races and is constitutional; that it is incumbent upon the superintendent of county schools and the board of county commissioners to make provisions for school facilities for both races, and no liability exists against any school officers for prohibiting mixed schools.

The case was based on events that occurred in the fall of 1902. William Dewberry sent his son William to the school in District #50 apparently more than once that term. The child, along with another black student, was "ejected" several times from the school and "...Dewberry was arrested on complaint of the county superintendent and placed in the county jail."³

The school system in Oklahoma was designed so that members of the majority race in the school district, either African-American or white, composed the school board, which had authority over the local school district. The county then maintained a separate school for the minority students or made arrangements for their transfer to a compatible racially composed school in another district. The majority school was supported by a tax levied on all property in the district. The minority school was maintained by a tax levied on all property in the county, not to exceed one mill. A popular method of handling this situation in urban areas was for the county to construct and maintain the building and the local district to provide the furnishings and teacher for the minority school. Notably, because many counties were unable to levy sufficient funds to adequately maintain the separate schools, the state legislature increased the amount of levy from one mill to two mills in 1921. This mill levy still remained generally inadequate to construct and maintain facilities for African-American schoolchildren which at that time exceeded 36,000 students statewide.⁴

As part of Lawton's original plat, two blocks were reserved for schools. One of these blocks was supposed to be used for the separate school; however, it was decided to use the two set aside blocks for majority schools and additional land was purchased for the minority school. The first separate school in Lawton apparently opened in early 1903 as evidenced by William Dewberry's unsuccessful attempts to send his son to the white school in the fall of 1902. According to the February 1904 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, the one-teacher, one-story, frame building was located at 7 A Avenue on lot 13 of Block 1 of the Original Townsite. The name of the school was simply recorded as "Colored School." According to the March 1907 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, the school remained at this location with little change. At that time, it was noted that the building was heated by stoves and there were no lights in the school.⁵

³ The Daily Oklahoman, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), 16 September 1905.

⁴ Savage, "Rosenwald Fund Context," 7.

⁵ Lawton Golden Anniversary 1901-1951: 50 Years of Progress, (Lawton Golden Anniversary Committee, 1951), 48. See

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In 1910, the United States Census recorded 542 black residents in Lawton, equal to seven percent of the total city population. The previous statehood census in 1907 did not enumerate based on race. It was apparently around this time that the separate school moved to its second location at the northeast corner of the intersection of First Street and Gore Avenue (now Boulevard). Historic photographs of the school dated 1909 reveal a fairly substantial, weatherboard, one-story building with a hipped roof. The building was ornamented with a hipped dormer and had two inset, partial porches supported by square white columns. Above the porches were front-gabled cross gables. The windows appear to be vertical, three-over-two, hung.⁶

Although the 1912 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map did not include the North Addition in the mapped area of town, it did show the previous location of the school. In April 1912, Lot 13 of Block 1 of the Original Townsite contained only a small building at the back of the lot which was described as a supply house and numbered 7b A Avenue. The February 1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map also did not include the North Addition; however, the August 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map includes a subset of the school. Although the school had a sizeable addition off the southeast corner, the footprint appears to match the historic photograph of the school referenced above, most notably including two inset porches on the building's façade. At that time, the school was heated by stoves and had electric lights. Notably, the name of the school is recorded on the 1923 map as Douglas School (Colored). Interestingly, across the street on the north end of the block was the Barnett Chapel A.M.E. Church. Schools and churches were the backbones of all communities. Thus, the presence of both a school and church is indicative of development of a black community in that area, rather than just the isolated location of the school.⁷

Located on Block 66 of the North Addition, this section of town previous to November 1908 was restricted from settlement as part of the Indian School Lands reserved by the federal government at the turn-of-the-century. The land was opened to settlement through the efforts of United States Senator Thomas P. Gore, Lawton's blind Congressman. Covering 320 acres, the North Addition, also known as the Government or Gore addition, was a mirror image of Lawton's Original Townsite plat and included more than 1,000 residential lots. Like the Original Townsite, the lots in the North Addition were offered at auction beginning in mid-November 1908. However, a number of the lots were purchased by real estate speculators, such as the infamous Jake Hamon, and, for various reasons, development did not occur as rapidly as in the Original Townsite. Although three blocks in the new addition were reserved for school use and the federal government itself sponsored construction of a school in the addition, Block 66 was apparently not one of them. The dearth of major development likely contributed to the selection of the site for the separate school in 1909, as did the proximity of the area to the railroad tracks.⁸

By 1920, the number of African American residents in Lawton actually declined from 542 in 1910 to just 405. The exact reasons for this change is unknown. It is possibly due to post-World War I reductions at Fort Sill or due to better employment opportunities elsewhere, such as in the thriving oil boom areas

also Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Maps, "Lawton," 1904 and 1907.

⁶ "A Struggle for Equality – A Community View," (Museum of the Great Plains Exhibit Catalog, February 2003), 8.

⁷ Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Maps, "Lawton," 1912, 1918 and 1923.

⁸ The Daily Oklahoman, 15 November 1908–24 November 1908.

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in other parts of Oklahoma. Although the Ku Klux Klan was active in Lawton in the early 1920s, this does not account for the decrease of the previous decade and by about 1928, the Klan was out of favor with the majority of the community. Despite the Klan activity, by 1930, the number of African-Americans residing in Lawton nearly doubled from the previous census to equal 809.⁹

The growth of the black community in Lawton during the 1920s surely influenced the construction of a new separate school. Moving to its third and final location, the new school was located on Block 16 of the new Vernon Addition. Platted in 1930, the Vernon Addition, along with the contemporary Industrial Addition to the immediate south of Gore Boulevard, were the first additions to be located east of the railroad tracks that bordered the east side of the Original Townsite and subsequent north and south additions for decades.

Importantly, in constructing their new, brick building, the community utilized monies from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Previously, the Vernon Separate District #49, located outside the Lawton city limits in Lawton View, had received money from the Rosenwald Fund to construct a two-room, brick building in 1926. The Vernon Separate District #49 was operated by the County School Superintendent until July 1935 when the Lawton public school system took it over. The school was subsequently called Dunbar. Interestingly, the Lawton View addition was not brought into the city limits until after 1949. At that time, the area lacked water and sewer systems, making "Health conditions in the district...below average."¹⁰

Beginning in the mid-1910s, black schools in sixteen southern states received much needed financial assistance from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Created by Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, the fund's initial activity was to aid in the construction of new buildings for black schools. Although the fund did not provide all the money necessary for the construction of new buildings, it did provide sufficient money to act as an impetus for the local district to better their facilities. In Oklahoma, the Rosenwald Fund aided in the construction of 198 education-related buildings in 44 counties between 1920 and 1932. Of the 198 buildings, 176 were schoolhouses, ranging in size from 1-teacher to 22-teacher; 16 teacherages; and, 6 shops. In addition, the Rosenwald Fund also partially financed additions to buildings which had originally been built using fund monies and even aided in the rebuilding of a Rosenwald school destroyed by fire.¹¹

The second and last Rosenwald building constructed in Comanche County was the Douglass School. Receiving the grant in 1930, the building was finished after January 1931. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of January 1931 shows the Douglass School, with some new additions since the 1923 map, at its previous location at First Street and Gore Boulevard. The stone table affixed on the parapet of the building also indicates a construction date of 1931. The eight-room, brick building was constructed at a total cost of \$27,350. At the same time, a two-room shop was constructed at the school. Costing an additional \$4,885, this enlarged the building to ten rooms. The size and use of brick for the school was

⁹ "Reconnaissance Level Survey of Lawton," 16-17.

¹⁰ Cynthia Savage, "The Julius Rosenwald Fund In Oklahoma: List of Rosenwald Buildings by County," (Available Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1997), 1. See also The Daily Oklahoman, 29 May 1949.

¹¹ Savage, "Rosenwald Fund Context," 6.

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indicative of the urban setting of the school. The majority of Rosenwald buildings were for rural school districts and were predominately one- to two-room buildings constructed of weatherboard. Only six schools in Oklahoma received grants from the Rosenwald Fund for construction of shops. Of these, only the Douglass School and Dunbar Consolidated School #5 in Kingfisher County built two-room shops.

Significantly, under the leadership of W.R. Patterson who was appointed school principal in 1929, the Douglass School also received accreditation as a high school during this period. The school had been offering high school courses for a number of years but had not been accredited. Thus, in addition to the elementary grades, the new Douglass School also became the separate junior and senior high school for Lawton.¹²

The decade of the 1930s also brought a significant surge in the number of African American Lawtonians. Once again almost doubling, the number of black persons residing in Lawton in 1940 was recorded as 1,508. Among other possible influences, the designation of Fort Sill as the permanent home of the Field Artillery School in 1930 and the corresponding development on post, as well as the surge in troops in the late 1930s as war preparations escalated, undoubtedly contributed to this population boom. To accommodate the growing population, three additions were constructed at the Douglass School before 1939. This included a large gymnasium at the back of the building and two wings situated to either side of the new gymnasium. It is possible that these additions were aided by one or another of the federal New Deal-era programs operating in Lawton, as well as statewide during much of the 1930s. In 1938 alone, \$126,000 worth of work for buildings in the Lawton school district was approved by the Public Works Administration (PWA).¹³

In late 1940, it was announced that A.L. Crable, state Superintendent of Public Instruction, was sending a report to Dr. John W. Studebaker, United States Commissioner of Education, showing that the "...army expansion of Fort Sill as a military training center (would) increase the number of school pupils in Lawton by about 1,200 by the end of..." the 1940-1941 school year. The survey called for the construction of sixteen additional classrooms at the white schools and six classrooms at the black schools. It was anticipated that the federal response to the report would include government funds to aid the construction projects. In 1941, passage of the Lanham Act sought to ease the burden on communities with federal installations by providing money to the school districts. As reflected on the March 1950 update of the January 1931 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, four rooms were constructed at the Douglass School in 1943.¹⁴

As soldiers returned home following the end of World War II, pressure on local schools continued to escalate. The total black population in Lawton more than doubled to reach 3,212 in 1950. For the schools, by the late 1940s, the war-time babies were filling the available space with even greater numbers of post-war babies, commonly called the Baby Boomer generation, quickly reaching school age in unprecedented numbers. In response, schools throughout Oklahoma and the nation

¹² "History," Lawton Douglass Lions, <http://www.lawtondouglasslions.com>, retrieved 24 September 2007.

¹³ The Daily Oklahoman, 8 September 1938.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 December 1940. See also "The Federal Role in Education," United States Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>, retrieved 30 June 2008.

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experienced significant expansion in the 1950s. The Douglass School was no exception to this.

In July 1950, the citizens of Comanche County passed a \$170,000 bond issue to expand the Douglass School and replace a "...worn-out frame building..." at the Dunbar School, possibly the 1909 separate school building originally located at First Street and Gore Boulevard that was reportedly moved to the Dunbar School in 1943. To encourage city voters, the local newspaper explained that "Negro schools (were) supported by law on a countywide basis, but since both institutions (were) located within the city of Lawton and the county's Negro population (was) concentrated here, the chief voting interest must come from Lawtonians." Although the Dunbar School was in dire conditions, with the bond issue slated to replace the school's outdated outside toilets with indoor modern plumbing and provide a proper, sanitary lunchroom, the construction afforded by the bond issue was of benefit to the Douglass School by relieving the overcrowding of the lower and upper grades. In turn, this would allow introduction of "...several standard subjects and activities..." which the students were missing out on.¹⁵

With approval of the bond issue in early July, the school board hired the Oklahoma City architectural firm of Noftsger and Lawrence to prepare the plans for both projects. Although the work at the Dunbar School included construction of an auditorium, the \$170,000 bond issue was to be split almost equally between the two schools. The Douglass School plans called for an eight-room addition, with toilets, to be added to the south end of the school. The brick and tile addition would extend eastward along Gore Boulevard. Although slightly slower than originally anticipated, the new wing at the Douglass School was finished by the end of August 1951, just in time for the opening of the 1951-1952 school year. This was extremely opportune as enrollment for that year swamped the schools, including both Douglass and Dunbar.¹⁶

Despite these efforts, a statewide school facilities survey found the Lawton schools in critical need of expansion just four months later. As explained by Dr. John F. Bender, consultant on the survey, the Lawton schools were critically congested due largely to Fort Sill. Dr. Bender estimated that Lawton was in need more than twenty-five times what could be provided. On a more positive note, just months later in the spring of 1952, the Douglass School was admitted to full membership in the prestigious North Central Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges.¹⁷

One year to the month later, the Lawton schools were again prominent in the headlines as the Defense Department "...sent a number of complaints about segregation in army post schools, including the Fort Sill school, to J. Earl McGrath, federal Commissioner of Education." The army itself had desegregated in 1948 as mandated by an Executive Order issued by President Harry S. Truman. Superintendent of the Lawton schools, John Shoemaker, responded that "...any change in racial segregation practices in the Fort Sill post school would have to come from a higher level than his office." Notably, Oklahoma laws prohibited "non-segregation" in public schools and Shoemaker stated that "...any variation of the state laws concerning segregation in public schools would result in prosecution of school officials." Shoemaker also noted that the "...courses of instruction in the separate schools (were) of the same quality as those provided white students and that all Negro teachers in the Lawton system (had)

¹⁵ The Lawton (Oklahoma) Constitution, 2 July 1950 - 5 July 1950.

¹⁶ Ibid., 25 July 1950 and 9 August 1951-5 September 1951.

¹⁷ The Daily Oklahoman, 23 January 1952. See also "History," Lawton Douglass Lions.

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college degrees, many of them Master's degrees."¹⁸

With the segregation matter still pending, in January 1954, a contract was awarded to the Chapman Construction Company of Lawton for construction of four-room additions to both the Douglass and Dunbar schools. The combined cost of the additions was \$75,000 with the money to be acquired through the "...building fund levy accumulation in the Negro school accounts." The one-mill building levy for separate schools was part of the annual taxes levied on property in the county.¹⁹

Less than a month later, Defense Secretary Charles E. Wilson ordered the end of segregation on the twenty Army, Navy and Air Force installations that still maintained separate schools. Schools were given a deadline of September 1, 1955 to comply with the order. At that time, Superintendent Shoemaker indicated that "...the edict probably would mean the United States office of education would take over operation of the post school" because, in addition to the federal aid provided by the Impact Aid laws of 1950, the Lawton school system also received state aid. As such, it was required to meet state laws requiring segregation "...until state laws (were) changed." Similar to the Lanham Act of 1941, the Impact Aid laws of 1950 provided federal money to school districts congested because of an adjacent military installation.²⁰

More than a year in advance of the defense department's deadline, however, the United States Supreme Court ruled in May 1954 that segregation in public schools must end. The landmark decision arose from the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case. More than nine months later, local legislator Charles Ozmun introduced a bill that would amend the state statutes to allow any school on a military reservation to desegregate in order to conform with all federal laws and requirements. However, within a few months, the Supreme Court issued a second *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling that ordered compliance by all states with the decision that "separate but equal" had no place in public education. Thus, the state and federal laws were no longer in conflict and the Lawton public school system was required to desegregate.²¹

By early July 1955, cities across the state were making plans for desegregation. In addition to Lawton, this included school districts in Bartlesville, Sapulpa, Holdenville, Elk City and Bearden. Responding to the federal dictates, Lawton's school board made the "...decision to wipe out racial barriers" by redistricting. The new boundaries were expected prior to the August meeting of the local school board. In reality, the Lawton public school system adopted a "freedom of choice" plan. Under this arrangement, black students could attend either the school in their area or choose to attend the predominately white school.²²

By January 1956, the Lawton schools had been "desegregated." The school on post experienced no difficulties because "Half of the school's army children have lived at overseas posts. As an installation

¹⁸ Ibid., January 16, 1953.

¹⁹ Ibid., 20 January 1954.

²⁰ Ibid., 1 February 1954. See also "The Federal Role in Education."

²¹ Ibid., 25 March 1955.

²² Ibid., 7 July 1955. See also "A Struggle for Equality," 13.

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on federal land, integration is a long accepted practice.” Apparently, thirty black schoolchildren were attending school on post at that time. As described in the newspaper, “...desegregation pose(d) no immediate problem in other schools of the system” either. “Only” twenty-four black students “...elected to leave Douglass highschool (sic)...” when the “...doors of the (white) junior and senior highschools (sic) were thrown open...” at the beginning of the 1955-1956 school year. In the Lawton View Addition, no students elected to transfer from the Dunbar School to Will Rogers Elementary.²³

A more pressing problem was seen in the need for expansion of facilities at the Douglass high-elementary school. With 539 students and 24 teachers, the school was solely in need of a gymnasium-auditorium unit. However, it was noted that the addition should only be constructed “If Negro students continue(d) to be satisfied with present facilities.” If the black students were to initiate a mass exodus to other schools in the district, it was deemed “...economically unfeasible to add to the facilities.”²⁴

Although there were no overt occurrences of hostility in the Lawton schools, few black students chose to attend the predominately white schools. Gifted students with academic, music or athletic talents were recruited to attend Lawton High School. However, the students were generally isolated outside of the classroom and during school events, making the transition less than desirable. As it became apparent that the Douglass School would remain the dominant choice for black students, one last major addition project as recommended in 1956 was undertaken at the school in 1958.²⁵

To this end, the school board approved a \$550,000 bond election in March 1958. The majority of the bond money was to be expended in the construction of a new auditorium, gymnasium and cafeteria at the Douglass School. Additionally, the school would benefit from shop improvements and the opening of a band room, vocal music room and two more elementary rooms. The remaining money would be spent on four-room additions to the Taft and Jefferson elementary schools. The use of the bond money for these projects would also allow an anticipated \$450,000 in federal funds to be used for the construction of an addition to the Lawton High School. Constructed in 1954, the school was built to accommodate 1,500 students. By March 1958, over 1,515 students were taking classes in the building with an increase of 400 students anticipated for the 1958-1959 school year. Another \$63,000 in federal aid was slated for construction of an elementary school in the Pecan Grove area of town. Additional money for the elementary school would be acquired from the district’s building fund reserves. Work on the Douglass School project was award in early September 1958 to the Munger-Emmons Company of Enid with construction starting previous to the end of the month.²⁶

The Douglass School principal, John Sadberry, lauded Lawton’s interest and support in its school to the members of the Citizen’s Council on Education in late March 1958. Sadberry expressed the belief that “Lawton will continue to make satisfactory progress as long as...(they) have such an efficient board of education, superintendent and other school administers.” Sadberry also expounded on

²³ Ibid., 15 January 1956.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “A Struggle for Equality,” 13.

²⁶ The Lawton Constitution, 11 March 1958-26 March 1958.

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Douglass School. He noted that the school had a total enrollment of 666. The students were taught by twenty-three teachers, eight of whom had Masters degrees. In sum, Sadberry proclaimed "We feel that we are in a unique position to provide a high quality of education to our students, and to render many needed services to our community."²⁷

Although nominally desegregated, the Lawton school system remained under pressure to fully integrate its schools through the late 1950s and early 1960s. Through these years, the number of black residents in Lawton continued to grow. In 1960, nearly 6,000 black persons called Lawton home. This was again almost double the previous census count. The need to integrate came to a head following the 1964 passage of the Civil Rights Act which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion or national origin. In response to increased federal pressure that was directly threatening the school's federal impact aid, the Lawton school district submitted a rezoning plan in the spring of 1965 that would create a more balanced racial composition for the secondary schools.²⁸

One of the more drastic actions of the plan was the proposed phased closure of the Douglass Junior-Senior High School. Beginning with the 1965-1966 school year, students in the seventh and tenth grades at Douglass were to be integrated into the other secondary schools. The following year, the eighth and eleventh grade students would be "absorbed," and, finally during the 1967-1968 school year, the ninth and twelfth grades would be moved to the other schools. This was a significant change for the school which had served as the separate junior-senior high school from its initial construction in 1931. As events transpired with federal pressure mounting, however, the secondary school was summarily discontinued at the end of the 1965-1966 school year.²⁹

Although the closure of the Douglass Junior-Senior High School was a significant step in the integration of the Lawton public school system, the ninety-five percent black Douglass Elementary School, as well as the similarly racially-composed Dunbar Elementary School, continued to jeopardize Lawton's federal aid. For various reasons, a plan for complete desegregation was not devised until April 1973. At that time, it was proposed that the Dunbar Elementary School be closed completely. The upper grades at the Douglass School would also be moved to other schools. Restricted to grades K through 3rd, Douglass School would then cater to students of working parents who needed additional programs and extended hours. This plan was implemented in the fall of 1974.³⁰

As was typical of the period, the Douglass School was more than just the source of education for the local black schoolchildren. The school with all of its extracurricular activities was an important social and community center. In addition to the popular, highly visible athletics, the school also provided a consistent outlet for musical and other academic attainments. The school also served as a social center for the community and provided needed services and resources that would have otherwise been unavailable to individual community members.

²⁷ Ibid., 30 March 1958.

²⁸ "Struggle for Equality," 17.

²⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

³⁰ Ibid., 31-33.

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Significantly as a separate school, the Douglass School allowed the black community a certain amount of autonomy in the education of their youth. The closure of the school reduced the direct black parental and community authority over secondary education of black students in Lawton. Additionally, with integration pressure mounting on the lower grades after 1966, the power of the black community to specifically influence the predominately black elementary schools was also diminished.

The 1966 closure of the Douglass Junior-Senior High School also resulted in the termination of one of the most noticeable symbols of the black community. Secondary schools remain generally more prominent in terms of community visibility than elementary schools. This was partially due to the proliferation of elementary schools during the twentieth century as compared to the usually singular community high school. Prominent extracurricular activities available at secondary schools, such as football, basketball and band, also contributed to the dominance of high schools. These activities were, and are, often a source of immeasurable pride for the entire community. Although the Douglass School continued in operation as an elementary school, its allure was clearly diminished by the loss of the secondary school in 1966.

For more than three decades, the Douglass School fundamentally served the black community of Lawton. In addition to educating the area black students on a primary level, the school provided the only means of secondary education for black students in Lawton from 1931 until 1955. After 1955, the school remained the dominant secondary educational institution in the city for black students. The 1966 closure of the secondary school heralded the end of an era in education in Lawton. While this change did much to equalize opportunity within the overall community, it also closed one of the most highly regarded institutions associated with the black community in Lawton. The existing building, with its various additions constructed over the decades of use, merits recognition for its historic role in education in Lawton. The Douglass School is testimony to the triumph of black education from the 1930s through the mid-1960s.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All Block 16, Vernon Addition, Lawton, Oklahoma.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the Douglass School.

PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to all photograph numbers except as noted:

Photographer: Cynthia Savage
Date of Photographs: 25 December 2007
Negatives: JPEG Files