NPS Form 10-900 (Rev. 10-90)

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property	
historic name Graymont School	
other names/site number <u>N/A</u>	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
2. Location	
street & number 300 Eighth Avenue West	not for publication <u>N/A</u>
city or town Birmingham	vicinity N/A
state <u>Alabama</u> code <u>AL</u> county <u>Jefferson</u> code <u>073</u>	zip code
3. State/Federal Agency Certification	
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as a	
Nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation star	
the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requ	
60. In my opinion, the property is meets indoes not meet the National Register Criter be considered significant in nationally statewide is locally. (In See continuation s	
	sheet for additional comments.)
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Signature of certifying official/Title	Date
Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)	
State or Federal agency and bureau	
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In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteriadditional comments.)	a. ( See continuation sheet for
Signature of commenting or other official	Date
State or Federal agency and bureau	
4. National Park Service Certification	
I, hereby certify that this property is:	
entered in the National Register.	
entered in the National Register.	4
determined eligible for the National Register.	
See continuation sheet.	······································
determined not eligible for the National Register.	
removed from the National Register.	- ( .
other (explain):	Alice Stills.
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7. Des	cription		<u></u>		<del>ge 1220 an an A</del> breach II <mark>22</mark>		
Archite	ectural Clas	sification (Enter cate	egories from inst	ructions)			<u></u>
. <u></u>	LATE 19 <sup>1H</sup>	AND EARLY 20TH	CENTURY RE	VIVALS:	Neo-Classical	Revival	_
Materi	als (Enter c	ategories from instru	uctions)				
	undation:	BRICK					<del>-</del>
	roof:	ASPHALT			<u></u>		_ ·
	walls:	BRICK					
	other:	LIMESTONE, CO	DNCRETE				_
						<u></u>	_

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

Page :
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### 8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National I	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.						
		type, period, or method of construction or represents the				
	aster or possesses high artistic values of	r represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose				
	lack individual distinction.	represents a significant and albungalshape entry whose				
	s yielded, or is likely to yield information i	mportant in prehistory or history.				
	- <u>-</u>					
Criteria Consideration	ns (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)					
	a religious institution or used for religious	purposes.				
	om its original location.					
	e or a grave.					
$\square$ D a cemetery						
	cted building, object, or structure.					
	orative property. ) years of age or achieved significance with	him the next 50 years				
	years of age of achieved significance with	ini ne past 50 years.				
Areas of Significance	(Enter categories from instructions)					
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D 1 1 00' 'C	10/0 10/0					
Period of Significance	e <u>1960-1963</u>					
Significant Dates 19	63					
Significant Person (Co	mplete if Criterion B is marked above) <u>N/A</u>	N				
	NT/A					
Cultural Affiliation _	N/A					
Architect/Builder	Spink, William Ernest, architect (1908)	McCauley, Charles H., architect (1950)				
	Lisle, E.M. & Co., builders (1908)	Moss, Charles A., architect (1994-96)				
-						
Narrative Statement of	of Significance (Explain the significance of	the property on one or more continuation sheets.)				
9. Major Bibliograp						
(Cite the books, articles	, and other sources used in preparing this form	on one or more continuation sheets.)				
Duraniana da anarantati		Deiman I continue of Additional Data				
Previous documentati	nination of individual listing (36	Primary Location of Additional Data:				
	been requested.	Other State agency				
	n the National Register	Federal agency				
·	ined eligible by the National	Local government				
Register		University				
	onal Historic Landmark	Other				
	ric American Buildings	Name of repository: Birmingham Historical Society;				
Survey #		Birmingham Public Library				
	recorded by Historic American Engineering					
Record #						

#### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property c. 4 acres

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

Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1 <u>16</u>	<u>514690</u>	<u>3708390</u>	4			
2		<u> </u>	5			
3			6			··········

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 Linda Nelson; Marjorie White, Editor	
organization Birmingham Historical Society. Also Christy Anders	son, NR Coordinator, AHC date 12-6-06
street & number One Sloss Quarters	telephone (205) 251-1880
city or town_Birmingham	state <u>Alabama</u> zip code <u>35222</u>
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 A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large ac	
Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.	
Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional	items)
Property Owner	
(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.) name Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity (M	s. Gayle Cunningham, Director)
street & number 300 Eighth Avenue West	telephone (205) 327-7500
city or town Birmingham	state <u>Alabama</u> zip code <u>35204</u>

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Section 7 Page 1

Graymont School Jefferson County, Alabama

Narrative Description:

Graymont School is a two-storey elementary school building on a full daylight basement, its primary sections consisting of (1) the original 1908 block, (2) a 1929 addition to the east with the 1950 doubling of its classroom block. The 1929/1950 wing is connected to the original building by a recessed hyphen (part of the 1929 construction) containing a stair and connecting corridors. Also part of the school complex are a 1958 gymnasium to the west, perpendicular to the main block and connected to it by a covered walkway, and a recent free-standing gable-front storage building on the east rear of the property. There is a WPA-era stone amphitheatre directly to the rear of the building (probably sited and designed by Ruby J. Pearse, who did a number of school and park projects in the City). A small frame gazebo on the rear slope above the amphitheatre was added in 1986, and the supplemental parking lot on the front of the property, close to Eighth Avenue West, was created in 1996 when the building was restored by the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity (JCCEO; see History following). All the buildings and structures are situated on a sloping grade above Eighth Avenue West in the western section of Birmingham, Alabama, on a 4-acre site (see accompanying site plan). The grounds of this sloping site have been maintained since their restoration by the JCCEO. Serving since its construction as a grammar school, Graymont was in 1963 the site of civil rights protests associated with the desegregation of Birmingham schools; as a result of changing demographics, it closed as an elementary school in 1989. It now, since its 1994-96 rehabilitation, serves the JCCEO not only as its headquarters but as the home of one of its preschool Head Start programs.

Graymont School appeared during a period of major school-building in the United States, its style typical of the generally neoclassical, symmetrical and many-windowed buildings that once held prominent positions in every American city and town. The original 1908 building was remarkably well imitated in the 1929 and 1950 additions, except that the entry bays and porches were not repeated in those later sections. Both earlier and later sections are constructed of a smooth orange-tone brick with pink grout; their parapets are flat and decorated with a substantial beaded pressed-metal cornice. Over the main entry in the 1908 building the parapet steps up slightly and is capped with a reduced section of the same cornice molding, but elsewhere the parapet is capped in limestone. Limestone also is the material of the first-floor belt course, the heavy window headers and somewhat smaller sills; on the 1929/50 addition, concrete substitutes for limestone, but this is discernible only by close inspection. Another subtle difference between the two wings is that between the fine butter-jointing of the 1908 masonry and the good but not so meticulous jointing of the 1929 and later 1950 masonry. The windows throughout the entire building are singly set 1-over-1 sash with substantial overlights; these are metal-wrapped wood replacements from the 1994-96 rehabilitation that are a closer reproduction of the original windows than the *c*. 1955 9-over-9's they replaced.

The facade of the 1908 pavilion contains ten window bays between its slightly projecting corner piers; the central entry bay contains two windows upstairs, and downstairs contains the frame of the doubledoor main entry with its sidelights and transom panel, slightly recessed behind a *loggia* porch. Fronting this is a flat-roofed projecting porch on rusticated brick corner piers, its entablature the same molded cornice that surrounds the entire facade and with the same shallow blind attic with its stone cap. Above this porch on the second level is a set of narrower windows, separated from the flanking four bays by pilasters that pierce the main cornice and are in turn capped by the smaller molding noted above. Basement windows in the 1908 pavilion do not have overlight panels but, as the ground slopes down to the east beneath the 1929/50 wing, the deeper exposure of the basement wall there allows for the higher-three-part windows seen elsewhere in the building.

### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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	<b>-</b>	Jefferson County, Alabama

The sides of the original 1908 building, consisting of central entry bays flanked by five singlewindow bays, are actually deeper than its facade is wide. Along the sides (the west side now the only one fully exposed, but historic photographs show the east side as well) there were no projecting porches; the east entry was reached by a double stair up the wall face, leading to a landing. The surviving side-entry bay on the west, closer to ground level on that side, is now altered by the attachment of the metal awning covering the walkway to the gymnasium, and below the entry landing is a segmental-arched portal leading to a basement-level entry, accessible by a ramp dating from the 1994-96 rehabilitation. Also on the west side, the second storey's two entry-bay windows are not at floor level but are dropped to a midpoint between floors, indicating their presence over the stairwell landing rather than on the classroom level.

The historic (1908) east side has been obscured after the fourth bay by the later hyphen and room additions. As noted, this 1929/50 wing is deceptively similar to the older structure on its Eighth Avenue front, visually identical to the 1908 original in terms of its style and materials, with its windows in single frames and capped by the same comice. The wing consists of ten single-window bays, separated into two groups of five by the slightest thickening of the masonry pier between the two sections; the thickening is in fact the original 1929 end pier. A slightly projecting brick pier separates this symmetrical arrangement from the east end bay, which was a 1955 addition built to provide another stair; on the facade's main floors this bay contains a pair of windows identical to the others but in a single masonry frame. On its end it is allowed to be more modern, with a central set of paired windows on both classroom floors and a ground-level entry in an otherwise blind masonry wall. The closing of the bay's ground-level entry on the basement-level facade was one of the alterations from 1994-96.

The replacement of all the original windows with 9-over-9 sash appears to have been done as part of the 1955 changes as well.<sup>1</sup>

The hyphen connecting the 1908 building to its 1929/50 wing is recessed four bays from the main facade building line, its face comprised of irregularly placed windows that obviously follow a stair line. At the rear, however, it connects with the addition seamlessly by a continuing row of windows. At the point where it joins the 1908 building, it is inset some eight or ten feet; this allows the cornice, which surrounds the older building on three sides, to wrap the corner here as it does on the west rear corner. The rear wall of the 1908 building is interrupted by a large projecting flue that rises above the roofline, but not so high as to be visible from the front.

The original interior finish materials in the 1908 and 1929 parts of the building are plastered walls and ceilings, wooden floors in the classrooms and corridors, and concrete floors in the lunch rooms and stair halls.<sup>2</sup> The 1950 extension of the east wing imitated the earlier interior finishes on a concrete frame. Floors are now all carpeted, and ceilings have been covered or lowered with acoustical tile grids. The stairs and stair halls are concrete<sup>3</sup> with rubber treads now on the steps, and the plastered half-wall railings with their curving oak handrails have been retained, now augmented with modern oak handrails on the other side. The stairwells have been enclosed for code purposes and are now separated from the corridors by gypboard partitions and fire doors. The original configuration of classrooms and corridors radiating off the central hexagonal vestibule of the 1908 main hall has been retained, although smaller office and utility divisions have been created out of the larger classrooms on both levels. A single first-floor room on the front and to the east of the entry (historically the music room) retains its original features and size, including a high dado, original 13<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>' ceiling height and original window moldings. The wall and ceiling finishes are now gypboard.

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,	Jefferson County, Alabama

Classrooms on the first floor along the rear of the hyphen (*i.e.*, to the north of the corridor) have been combined to create a library and media center; upstairs they contain the JCCEO board room and offices for other groups and programs.

The second contributing site associated with the school property is the WPA-era stone amphitheatre that lies directly to the rear of the building, separated from it by the concrete service drive that connects with the driveways to either side. Designed and sited by R.J. Pearse, the amphitheatre is built of casually mortared, locally quarried random sandstone rock, with eight rows of seats arcing around the concrete stage. The seating bowl faces generally east and originally commanded a view of the adjacent neighborhood, a view now somewhat obstructed by the *c*. 1996 storage building (see below).

The third contributing resource is the 1958 gymnasium. The original frame gymnasium was in very weak condition by the mid-1950s, and by this time it had been partially partitioned for additional classrooms and was known as "the annex". There are a number of anecdotal and news<sup>4</sup> reports of the building's shaky and uneven wood floor, and photographs show the gym to have had a low ceiling and generally cramped interior. In 1958 the old building was torn down and replaced with the present one, in dimension some 80' long and 28' wide, with its blind end on the street front and its length and entry facing the west end of the main school building. The gym is a brick-veneered, steel-framed building with clerestory windows under its long eaveline and a projecting metal canopy covering a concrete porch floor that extends across the facade to a blind ell block projection just past the entry. At the entry bay the canopy connects with a metal-frame covered walkway to the west side entry of the school building. The interior consists entirely of the oak-floored gymnasium and associated storage and locker facilities.

There are two non-contributing resources on the Graymont site, NC by virtue of their construction later than 1963. The wood-frame gazebo on the north slope of the rear yard was added in 1986 at the time of some improvements to the landscape. It is a standard open-frame, pyramidal-roofed garden shelter.

The storage building to the east rear of the main building, which partially impedes views from the amphitheatre, was built in 1996 at the time of the rehabilitation of Graymont as headquarters for the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity. This is a windowless, hip-roofed building constructed of split-face block, about 60' long and half as wide, used for vehicular and other storage.

Notes on Description of Physical Appearance

<sup>1</sup>Confirmation of the 1955 date for east end bay changes is from Charles A. Moss, architect for the 1994-96 rehabilitation, who had the advantage of architect Charles McCauley's drawings for the 1949-50 work and Felton Collier's for what was done in 1955. Photographs indicate that the original windows were still in place in May of 1955; by 1961 they had been replaced, and the assumption is made that it was all done at once, in the summer of 1955.

<sup>2</sup>These materials are found in the Schedule of Rooms in the Jefferson County Board of Equalization file for the school property, Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts. There were also occasional overlays of tile or linoleum in the lavatories and some corridors.

<sup>3</sup>The Board of Equalization notes indicate that the stair halls of the 1908 building and its 1929 wing were originally concrete; presumably "stair hall" means what we would typically call the stair well.

<sup>4</sup>"Graymont gym rundown [sic], but it's a place for bad weather play," Birmingham Post-Herald, December 5, 1956.

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Gravmont School Jefferson County, Alabama 

Statement of Significance:

Graymont School is being nominated to the National Register on the basis of Criterion A. Social History, due to its significance as the first school in Birmingham to be desegregated. The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights campaign to end racial segregation in the Birmingham public schools had begun in 1957. The Period of Significance is identified as 1960-1963. In 1960 the specific application of black children to attend Graymont was initiated by James Armstrong and ACMHR on behalf of his sons Dwight and Floyd (see History following), an effort brought to fruition in September, 1963. Historians agree that the desegregation of Birmingham schools in the fall of 1963 precipitated the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, an event hastening the passage of federal Civil Rights legislation in 1964.

Graymont School is identified in the Multiple Resource Submission "The Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, Alabama, 1933-1979" as being a conflict center, and is also cited in the group of "First Desegregated Schools" recommended for expanded nomination to the National Register. Significantly for this nomination, Graymont was the only local school where registration of black children occurred on the day the schools opened (September 4, 1963). Also significant is the fact that the disturbances surrounding the desegregation of Graymont, and Alabama Governor Wallace's activities promoting disturbance throughout the state, resulted in the Kennedy Administration's federalizing of the Alabama National Guard to end segregated public education in the state. It has been suggested (see History following) that the true significance of Birmingham's school desegregation struggles in 1963 was chiefly federal.

Although not being nominated under Criterion C, Architecture, Graymont School should be noted as one of the few early 20th-century school buildings surviving in Birmingham. These 1900-1910 school buildings were typically single symmetrical blocks in an academic neoclassical style, frequently augmented with later wing additions that may or may not conform to the original architectural style. Graymont's additions were so well integrated with the original construction that they appear to have been built all at once, even though the last addition dates to the 1950s.

The Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity (JCCEO)<sup>1</sup> uses the school complex for offices, meeting space, teacher training, and as home for a Head Start program. A loved community institution, Graymont School stands, despite demographic and physical changes, as a local landmark and headquarters for an energetic agency that continues to educate and enrich the lives of Birmingham residents.

Justification of Criteria Consideration G: Achieving significance within the past 50 years

Graymont School is nominated to the National Register with other Birmingham resources identified in the Multiple Resource Submission "The Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, Alabama 1933-1979." These resources are associated with the struggle for Civil Rights in Birmingham, Alabama, and the nation. Identified in the MPS as a Conflict Center, Graymont School is one of three Birmingham public schools that the federal judges and the local school board designated for integration in 1963, and the only one to actually register and admit black students during the first week of school in September, 1963. This small but significant step toward desegregation of public facilities in the city led directly to the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church the following week, and thereafter to passage of landmark federal civil rights legislation.

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Graymont School Jefferson County, Alabama

History of the Graymont School:

The town of Graymont was created from land holdings of Birmingham physician and gentleman farmer Joseph Riley Smith: in 1886 Dr. Smith subdivided 600 acres of his extensive farm into what later became western neighborhoods of the city of Birmingham. One tract of this subdivision was given to his daughter Lucy Smith Gray and named Graymont in honor of her and her husband.<sup>2</sup> The town extended generally between what are now Third and Eighth Streets West, and from Third Avenue West on the south up to the North Ensley carline, the looping path of which gives the old survey a kind of pediment at the top (see Kelley's 1911 map). It didn't have much of a "mont", but there *is* a gentle rise in the grade from Eighth Avenue West to the north that makes the residential blocks attractive and views of the city very pleasant and accessible.

The town built Graymont School in 1908, its sloping site extending along Eighth Avenue West between what are now Third Street and the Jasper Road. The architect was William Ernest Spink and the builder was E.M. Lisle & Co., under the supervision of town officials and their appointed school superintendent. The original block contained ten classrooms, three entries and stairs, and the lunchroom. By January of 1910 an effort to legislatively annex many of Birmingham's encircling suburbs became official, and Graymont— along with larger enclaves including Smithfield, Woodlawn, Avondale and Ensley became part of the expanded City of Birmingham on January 1, 1910; Graymont School then became part of the Birmingham City system. By the mid-1920s the school population had reached 287 children, which was manageable in the 1908 building, but several years after that there were over 650 children in school and additional classrooms were badly needed.<sup>3</sup> Playground needs had already taken over other structures not originally included on the school grounds, primary of which was a gable-front frame structure to the west, built in 1925, that was used as a gymnasium and auditorium and was connected to the main building by a covered walkway. In 1929 the second wing and connecting hyphen were built, adding six classrooms and a new lunchroom on the lower level, which occupied the east end of the new wing and had double doors that opened directly onto the playground.

Along with an increasingly large school population throughout the 1920s, another population expansion was developing in this area of the city, one that would gain increasing significance in future years and make Graymont School a crucible for social and demographic change. In 1926 the City administration amended the 1915 zoning law to include what would elsewhere be ruled unconstitutional: racial zoning categories.<sup>4</sup> Although this effectively confined 40% of the city's population to 15% of its land area<sup>5</sup>, there was no immediate crisis because most black citizens lived in mill or mine company housing in industrial zone districts. Graymont itself was zoned for white residence (A-1 and B-1), but prior to the imposition of racial zoning in 1926 there were already thirteen black families living within its boundaries.<sup>6</sup> Graymont was near the North Smithfield residential area, which was zoned for blacks (A-2 and B-2) and was also near Center Street, which later became infamously known as Dynamite Hill. Center Street, with A-1 and B-1 vacant land to either side of it from 9th Court West to 11th Avenue West, served in effect as a buffer between white and black residential blocks. Whites would not buy there because of the close proximity to A-2 and B-2 areas, and blacks were statutorily forbidden to live there and were intimidated if they tried.<sup>7</sup> Then, beginning in 1938, use of limited black-zoned land for public housing projects in Smithfield and Ensley had the effect of putting pressure on the areas remaining available to blacks for house-building. In 1938 a petition to the City's Zoning Board from a corporate landowner requested that a portion of Graymont be zoned to allow blacks to build and own homes there; this action predictably caused an uproar in Graymont,<sup>8</sup> and so no changes in residential zoning seem to have occurred at that time as a result of it.

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	Jefferson County, Alabama	

World War II brought a significant change to this state of affairs, interrupting the wary stand-off that had prevailed in matters of racial zoning in Birmingham. Area industrial companies had begun during the Depression to sell their housing to the workers or to other private owners. With the population growth accompanying a war economy and full production, however, as workers poured into the city to labor in the mines and mills, there was tremendous pressure for home-owning and home-building in residential areas for blacks and whites alike. As black citizens became better able to purchase their own homes, they were deeply frustrated by the bureaucratic and legal roadblocks that had been erected against their right to occupy residential property in areas outside their assigned zoning categories.

The long process of defeating exclusionary zoning began in 1946, prosecuted on behalf of clients by attorney Arthur Shores as counsel for the Birmingham branch of the NAACP (for details of the 1946 actions, see the NR nomination of the Center Street Historic District). This process was accompanied by much violence and destruction but with successive victories in the courts. In July of 1947 U.S. District Judge Clarence Mullins, in dismissing on technical grounds a suit protesting the City's denial of an occupancy permit to a black property owner, nonetheless stated that the "racial zoning provision was clearly unconstitutional."<sup>9</sup> This statement, while encouraging legal challenges to the zoning law, also resulted in violent defense of it; legal victories were often accompanied by social and personal destruction, and the intimidation proved effective. "Despite Judge Mullins's ruling, few blacks were inclined to venture into the fringes of white sections during the late 1940s, and the tradition of segregated neighborhoods continued."<sup>10</sup>

Students at Graymont during this period were generally oblivious to the racial conflicts waged by their parents, and life at school went on as usual. Post-War economic vitality allowed the school system to begin replacing exhausted resources, including Graymont's old gym. In 1950 the 1929 wing was doubled by architect Charles H. McCauley, who knit the two pieces together so well that it is virtually impossible to tell that there is a 20-year break in the wing's construction. The hallway was extended through to the end and the lunchroom located on the north side of it; the auditorium was moved from the 1908 building's second floor to the other side of the hall across from the lunchroom. In 1955 a final bay was added on the east end of the building, creating an additional stair, lockers and bathrooms at this end; replacement of all the original 1-over-1 sash windows with 9-over-9 sash was accomplished at the same time. Then, a bond issue of 1957 provided financing to replace the worn-out 1925 frame annex with the present gymnasium on the same site, designed by Evan Terry and completed in 1958.

Alabama's response to the desegregation of public schools mandated by the Brown *v*. Board of Education decision was to establish new statewide criteria by which local school superintendents might place students in neighborhood schools. At this time, Birmingham students most often attended schools closest to their homes (the city-wide school system owned no buses) and, as residential areas remained segregated by local ordinance until 1950, a system of dual neighborhood schools prevailed. In 1955, attorneys working for white segregationist clients drafted the Alabama Pupil Placement Act, which passed the Alabama Legislature. The Act on its face could have provided for gradual or immediate desegregation of schools state-wide, giving jurisdiction to local school officials to accomplish this task. But that was not how it worked out. Local officials used provisions of the Act to deny transfers of blacks into all-white schools. Political historian Mills Thornton III observes that "the existence of this act . . . would bedevil black efforts from the commencement of legal action in 1957 to the eventual admission of the first five black students in 1963.<sup>11</sup> George Wallace's biographer Stephan Lesher observes that "Nowhere— not in Mississippi nor in South Carolina— was a group more defiant of integration orders than the white people of Alabama. And no state had a governor more shrewdly determined to block integration. Even before John Patterson took office [in 1958], he had effectively banished the NAACP from Alabama . . . and in his first

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Graymont School Jefferson County, Alabama

year as governor, Patterson demonstrated further that his racist campaign had been built on more than mere rhetoric."<sup>12</sup> Wallace, who had lost the election to Patterson, vowed (in a quote no one can confirm but that everyone repeats) that Patterson had "outniggered" him and that he would not let that happen again. Wallace defeated Patterson in 1962 and gained his second term as Alabama's governor.

In December, 1957, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, president of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, the local civil rights organization, served as plaintiff and filed the first suit challenging Alabama's Pupil Placement Act, *Shuttlesworth v. Board of Education*, in Birmingham's federal court. In September of that year Shuttlesworth, together with his wife Ruby, had sought entry for their two daughters and two other children to the all-white Phillips High School, the school system's premier educational facility. At a well publicized hour and with two TV cameras rolling, Klansmen beat the Reverend at the front entrance to Phillips (as a lone policeman stood by), thwarting the integration effort but not the federal suit. This incident also enhanced Shuttlesworth's fame as the courageous leader of the Birmingham Movement. Television film of the beating at Phillips became some of the most off-repeated footage of the Civil Rights movement. In 1958 a local federal judge, as well as the judges of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals and later the U.S. Supreme Court, upheld the constitutionality of the state's Pupil Placement Act. When questioned about the Supreme Court defeat in a 2006 interview, Reverend Shuttlesworth replied, "But I won the next one."<sup>13</sup> The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) financed both suits.

The legal suit that ultimately desegregated the Birmingham schools began in the summer of 1960, James Armstrong serving as plaintiff on behalf of his children. His suit, Armstrong v. Board of Education, alleged that the Pupil Placement Act was unconstitutional because its effect was to perpetuate segregation in the schools. Armstrong owned his own barber shop and also served as chief of security for the ACMHR (although he is most remembered publicly as the flag-bearer in the 1964 Selma to Montgomery march). The Armstrongs lived across the street from Graymont Elementary, to which his children sought a transfer.<sup>14</sup>

The insidious influence of the Governor, in fact, was considerable and has been widely documented. Alabama historian Wayne Flynt has written that "the unethical and undemocratic rhetoric of Wallace contributed substantially to the chaos" in Birmingham, and that it "paved the way for irrational violence.<sup>18</sup> Earlier that summer, on June 11, he had dramatized his opposition to desegregation of public education in the state by standing in the schoolhouse door at Foster Auditorium on the campus of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, thereby blocking the registration of two black students as they approached the door in the company of federal marshals. In Birmingham, the Klan responded to this

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event by bombing the Center Street home of attorney Arthur Shores, who had handled the majority of the civil rights cases that originated in Birmingham. Shores' home is located a few blocks from Graymont School on what had come to be known as Dynamite Hill.

Throughout the nation, Governor Wallace had made his stand clear: he would resist integration of the schools by all possible means, most especially through his persuasive rhetoric and attention-getting antics. His inaugural address in January, 1963— "Segregation Now, Segregation Tomorrow, Segregation Forever"-- had provided the tone for the rhetoric of his second term, rhetoric that he expanded at Birmingham rallies and political gatherings, restating it to white extremist groups who wished to stop desegregation in September of 1963. Indeed these groups, together with their attorneys, had been successful at getting new state regulations drafted requiring that schools be closed if a sufficient number of parents demanded it. Signatures on petitions supporting this were delivered to the state Capitol by the thousands.<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere in the South by the onset of the 1963 school year, more than 144 school districts had been desegregated. On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, three more cities— Memphis, Charleston and Baton Rouge— also peaceably desegregated.<sup>20</sup> While politicians and parents in Huntsville and Tuskegee were ready to integrate their schools, the atmosphere in Birmingham was difficult. On September 4<sup>th</sup> police guarded the three schools that were to be desegregated, even though the high schools were not to be technically desegregated until the next day, September 5<sup>th</sup>. Despite requests from Birmingham politicians and school officials, Governor Wallace used the threat of violence as an excuse to dispatch state troopers to Birmingham to "keep order." The troopers did not interfere with local authorities the first day.

Disturbances at Graymont on the morning of September 4, 1963, were largely whipped up by Klansmen from the eastern end of town. Despite this, Dwight and Floyd Armstrong, accompanied by their father, Rev. Shuttlesworth and attorney Oscar Adams Jr., slipped into a side door of the school to register for classes. This development was captured by a Birmingham News photographer; a copy of the picture accompanies this nomination.

Journalist Diane McWhorter describes the Armstrong boys as "seasoned Movement jailbirds,"<sup>21</sup> a label that helps assuage some of the sympathetic anxiety one feels for the children upon reading about the events of these days. They had attended ACMHR meetings and marched frequently during the April and May demonstrations in downtown Birmingham. As it turned out at Graymont, "where the only actual integration took place" that day<sup>22</sup>, there was some shouting and rock-throwing but an uproar did not materialize. The Armstrong boys successfully registered, and it appeared that a potential crisis had been avoided.

But it had not. That evening, the Center Street house of attorney Arthur Shores was bombed for the second time, and a massive riot developed on Dynamite Hill, several blocks from the school. Birmingham police shot and killed a young man who was observed to have borne a strong resemblance to Reverend Shuttlesworth. Twenty-one others were injured. A thousand persons were drawn to the hill to protest the bombing. Now able to say that order could not possibly be maintained if desegregation continued, the Governor ordered the schools closed for the rest of that week. He deployed the state troopers to enforce this action.

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Over the intervening week-end, Fifth Circuit judges had rejected a school board petition to delay its desegregation plan.<sup>23</sup> The Birmingham school board subsequently announced that the schools would reopen on the following Monday, September 9, in order to comply with the federal order but also due to demands of substantial numbers of moderate white parents who wanted the schools to remain open.<sup>24</sup>

Governor Wallace, who had intervened in similar circumstances in Tuskegee, Huntsville, and Mobile in defiance of federal court orders to desegregate schools in those cities, now ordered state troopers to defy the new court orders and prevent the admittance of black students on September 9<sup>th</sup>. The Armstrong boys, together with their attorneys, would be turned away at Graymont. Al Lingo, state commander of the troopers, personally appeared on the scene to do just that, "and his subordinates did the same around the state."<sup>25</sup> Wallace biographer Stephan Lesher relates that, when the boys arrived with their father, two lawyers and the Reverend Shuttlesworth, Lingo held up his hands as they approached the school entrance. He handed one of the lawyers a copy of Wallace's order and said, "You will leave immediately." The lawyer responded that a federal court had ordered admission of the students. "Do you have a copy of that order?" Lingo asked sternly. The lawyer replied, "Would you obey the order if I had it?" "I would not," Lingo answered.<sup>26</sup>

The District judges who had been so defied by the Governor (Clarence Allgood and Seybourn Lynn in the case of Birmingham, Hobart Grooms in Huntsville, Frank Johnson in Tuskegee and Daniel Thomas in Mobile), after conferring by telephone on the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup>, enjoined the Governor from further interfering with school desegregation and using state troopers for that purpose. Avoiding service of the injunction, Governor Wallace barricaded himself in his office at the Capitol long enough to arrange for the Alabama National Guard to take over for the troopers. Completing this transfer in the early hours of the morning of September 10<sup>th</sup>, he left his office under protection of his bodyguards.

Before dawn on September 10, President John Kennedy was informed that Governor Wallace had activated the National Guard to prevent desegregation of the schools. At 7:00 a.m. he summoned the entire Alabama National Guard into federal service and ordered them back to their armories. The local police handled the situation in Birmingham and the five court-ordered students were admitted to the three schools on this date.<sup>27</sup> Fifteen other black students started attending white schools in Alabama that day. Governor Wallace responded that he could not "fight bayonets with [his] bare hands."<sup>28</sup>

With the Birmingham police present, the atmosphere at Graymont remained calm. In fact, historian Mills Thornton notes that a proposed boycott of the school after it was reopened "appeared to be more a product of parents' fears for the safety of their young than of a desire to protest integration. By the end of the week, Graymont attendance had returned to normal levels."<sup>29</sup>

However, several white supremacists had a big idea that they thought would put an end once and for all to attempts to desegregate. Diane McWhorter has provided chilling details about the attitudes and activities of some of the Klansmen who repeatedly turn up around the violence and destruction, the most egregiously cold-blooded of all being Robert Chambliss. Glenn Eskew tells us that, years later, Chambliss's niece would testify that he had said to her, after the events of September 9 and 10, "You just wait until after Sunday morning. And they will beg us to let them segregate."<sup>30</sup>

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September 15<sup>th</sup> was the first Sunday after the integration of the Birmingham schools. On that morning a bomb, planted the night before, blew a hole in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and killed four young girls who happened to be in the basement restroom when it went off just before Sunday School. Exactly contrary to what the men who planted the bomb had thought and expected, the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church horrified everyone worldwide.

Graymont School, then, is the site of one of the most significant events in Alabama civil rights history, when the Armstrong children successfully registered to attend their neighborhood school, winning the first court-ordered school desegregation case in Birmingham and accomplishing the first school desegregation to occur in the city. Graymont was also a site of the federalization of the Alabama National Guard, a development that finally put an end to the state's efforts to delay-- if not defeat-- integrated public schools in Alabama.

A Birmingham Civil Rights Institute interview with James Armstrong in April of 1995 gives us some insight into his sons' lives in their first year at Graymont:

We got in school on the 10<sup>th</sup> so we didn't have no problem. We didn't even need a lawyer that morning to go down there. So we went in there ... that morning and everybody was accepted that went into the principal's office. And from that day on I would go to school every day from about ten-to-three when school's out to see them safely at home.<sup>31</sup>

Armstrong described his own uneasiness and feeling "a heavy stomach" every time he heard a fire or police siren going by, wondering if it were going to Graymont. He also spoke of the insults and injuries Dwight and Floyd withstood, such as having their heads knocked against the drinking fountains or being threatened with baseball bats during ball games. At other times the boys were ignored:

And for 2 or 3 games of football they wouldn't throw my boy the ball. So, eventually things changed and eventually they started throwing Lloyd [Floyd] the ball. So things got better. Each day things got better.<sup>32</sup>

After 1963 there were many demographic changes throughout Birmingham, and a pattern of white abandonment of historic neighborhoods and their schools became typical. This, in combination with a general suburbanization of affluence typical of American cities in these years, resulted in a declining school population within the city limits; by 1989 student populations had declined to the point that Graymont was one of twelve schools closed by the Birmingham Board of Education in that year. Four years later when the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity (JCCEO) began rehabilitation of the buildings, most of the windows were broken out and the buildings were in sorry condition.

Rehabilitation of the building to use by the JCCEO included a replacement of the windows with new ones to more closely match the original ones; complete refurbishment of the interior spaces and changes of room configuration (though not of circulation patterns and corridors); creation of a ramp on the

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west side with handicapped access into the lower level; and new entry doors on the east end. Charles A. Moss was the architect for the rehabilitation, and Hallmark & Sons were the contractors.

Today, Graymont School continues to serve as an educational institution, providing headquarters for the JCCEO's Head Start programs, teaching and staff training and as their headquarters for county-wide operations.

#### Notes to Significance and History Narrative

<sup>1</sup>The JCCEO, to be 40 years old in 2006, is a Birmingham- and Jefferson County-sponsored organization that was created to help equalize access to economic and educational resources for black students and citizens, in the direct aftermath of Civil Rights victories and Great Society initiatives. Its present director Gayle Cunningham was named to that position in 1990, and in that year fund-raising for the creation of JCCEO's headquarters at Graymont School was begun.

<sup>2</sup> Marjorie White, from the National Register nomination for the Joseph Riley Smith Historic District, 1985. <sup>3</sup> "Graymont School takes rank with leaders of city in writing and sportsmanship," Birmingham News/Post-Herald, August 12, 1928, one of a series of Sunday articles profiling all the city's schools.

<sup>4</sup>For a general discussion of this development see Marjorie White, National Register nomination for the Center Street Historic District, 2005. For more detail see J. Mills Thornton: *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), pp. 158-161 passim. The Commission had actually discussed an effort to pass racial zoning in 1914, based on a Louisville segregation plan, but the deed was not done until 1926. See the George Ward Scrapbook of July, 1914, Volume 11, pp. 140 and 142.

<sup>5</sup>Thornton, *p*. 158.

<sup>6</sup> "Negro residents arouse Graymont," Birmingham Post, March 7, 1938, from a clipping pasted in the Municipal Scrapbook of that year, Birmingham Public Library Archives.

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of developments related to Center Street, see Marjorie White, National Register nomination of the Center Street Historic District, 2005. Blacks could in fact buy property in this area but were prohibited by zoning regulations from getting occupancy permits so they could live in what they bought. This absurd situation was the basis for legal challenges that ultimately overturned exclusionary zoning.

<sup>8</sup>Collection of clippings on this issue in the Municipal Scrapbook, see Note 6.

<sup>9</sup>Thornton, *p*, 160.

<sup>10</sup> William A. Nunnelley, Bull Connor (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), p. 36.

<sup>11</sup>Thornton, pp. 215-16.

<sup>12</sup> Stephan Lesher, George Wallace (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.), 1994, p. 143.

<sup>13</sup> Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth in an interview with Marjorie White, April 4, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> The School Board in 1961 had completed Wilkerson School in North Smithfield for black students— on the site of a bombed house, as it happens. Lincoln School was five blocks to the east of Graymont along Eighth Avenue, a relatively short walk for children in the Graymont area but certainly not in their immediate neighborhood; it is to this school that the Armstrong boys were probably zoned. Glenn T. Eskew in *But for Birmingham: The local and national movements in the Civil Rights struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) suggests (*pp.* 318-19) that there was only a "handful of white people still living in the Graymont neighborhood" by this time, but anecdotal information from local graduates and other sources suggests otherwise.

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History Notes, continued:

<sup>15</sup> Thomton, p. 220.

16 Ibid, p. 337.

<sup>17</sup> Both J. Mills Thornton and Diane McWhorter in *Carry Me Home* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001) discuss the poisonous atmosphere in the state promoted by the Governor's speech and actions. Eskew in *But for Birmingham* (see Note 14) makes the statement that, "(i)nstead of binging the populace in line with national norms..., a reactionary Wallace had bullied it back to the age of the Dixiecrats" (p. 321).

<sup>18</sup> Wayne Flynt, "The ethics of democratic persuasion and the Birmingham crisis," *The Southern Speech Journal*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1, Fall, 1969, p. 52. Dr. Flynt discusses Wallace's speeches as unethical because they relied on manipulation of his audiences through exaggeration of public support for his position, general irrationality of argument, and identification of the cause of lawful integration with groups and ideas feared and disliked by his constituents, *e.g.*, that reliable whipping boy the Communists.

<sup>19</sup> Thornton, p. 339.

<sup>20</sup> Eskew, p. 394 (new 18)

<sup>21</sup> McWhorter, p. 495.

<sup>22</sup> Thornton, p. 341.

<sup>23</sup> The Fifth Circuit's influence has been many times noted. In his keynote address on Arthur Shores Day, February 11, 2006 at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Federal Judge Horace T. Ward noted that four judges of the Fifth Circuit—Richard Rives, Elbert Tuttle, John Minor Wisdom and John R. Brown— by deciding that they would bring local judges in line, were "responsible for helping turn things around as far as Brown."

<sup>24</sup> Thornton., p. 343.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, *p.* 344. Mills Thornton's detailed description of these events is perhaps the clearest and, although he is not as bumptious as Diane McWhorter doing this, he is not immune to an appreciation of the humor of what followed between the Governor and the courts. He notes that at one point the maneuvering was not unlike a comic opera.

<sup>26</sup> Lesher, George Wallace, p. 250.

<sup>27</sup> Details of time and drama are from McWhorter, p. 506, and Thornton, pp. 344-45. Eskew says little about the details but notes that federalization of the Guard "allowed token school desegregation to occur in Birmingham" (p. 319).

28 Lesher, op. cit., p. 251.

<sup>29</sup> Thornton, p. 661, note 176.

<sup>30</sup> Eskew, p. 319. McWhorter's narrative in *Carry Me Home* is throughout, with a steady build-up of nastiness. <sup>31</sup> Interview with James Armstrong, April 10, 1995, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Oral History Project, p. 17.

p. 17. <sup>52</sup> Ibid Occasional mistakes in the text (such as the change of Floyd to "Lloyd") probably indicate a faulty transcription, but it has been written here exactly as recorded by the Civil Rights Institute project. Both of the Armstrong boys went on to distinguished academic careers and are living out of Alabama at the present time.

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#### Major Bibliographical References

All the scholarly books on the Civil Rights movement in Birmingham are available in the Tutwiler Collection and the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library. Of these, the one most helpful for the present nomination was J. Mills Thornton's detailed and heavily documented study (see below). Other sources used include Glenn D. Eskew's But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) and Diane McWhorter's Carry Me Home (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

- Thornton, J. Mills, Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham and Selma. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002.
- National Register nominations of the Center Street Historic District (2005), and the Joseph Riley Smith Historic District (1985), Marjorie White for the Birmingham Historical Society.
- Clipping files, municipal scrapbooks and Board of Equalization files in the Tutwiler Collection and Department of Archives & Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.

Personal Accounts:

- Charles A. Moss, architect for the rehabilitation of Graymont School for the ICCEO, various conversations in June and July, 2005.
- Frances Finch Orr, 1956 graduate of Graymont School and coordinator of the 2005 reunion, who steered me to a number of other alumni with good memories. Chief among these was Martha Rikard Alverson, Class of 1953, who remembered exactly how the classrooms and offices were arranged before and after the 1949-50 addition.

All other sources are acknowledged in the endnotes to the text.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The area being nominated comprises the historic school property, being the entirety of Block 61 in the North Smithfield survey, bounded on the north by Ninth Avenue West, on the east by 3<sup>nd</sup> Street West, on the south by Eighth Avenue West, and on the west by the Jasper Road and 4<sup>th</sup> Street West.

#### Justification of Boundary

The present boundaries are those historically associated with the Graymont School property, originally with the school building central in a park-like setting with broad driveways in all directions. While a number of built or landscaped additions have been made, the peripheral boundaries have remained the same.

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# Section Page 15 Graymont School Photographs Jefferson County, Alabama

#### **Description of Photographs**

- 1. Graymont School, seen across the lower parking lot from the intersection of Eighth Avenue and Third Street West, also showing the old stone Graymont boundary markers and horse fountains, from SE.
- 2. The school building from the parking lot, looking to the northwest. The original 1908 block is the one on the left of the photograph.
- 3. The facade of the building from the south, now showing the hyphen.
- 4. An oblique view across the facade of the building from near the east end, looking west.
- 5. Southeast corner of the 1908 block and its connection with the 1929 hyphen, detail.
- 6. Same area as 5 above, detail showing the careful reproduction of the original materials and craftsmanship from 1908 to 1929.
- 7. 1908 block, facade from generally south. The 1958 gymnasium is visible to the left.
- 8. Main entry porch, from south.
- 9. Facade, southwest corner and west side of 1908 block, from SW.
- 10. Facade of 1908 block and 1958 gymnasium, from SSE.
- 11. Looking along west side of 1908 block, this view showing the new ramp and covered walkway to the gymnasium.
- 12. West wall and northwest rear corner of the 1908 block, photographed from the hill behind the building.
- 13. Rear of 1908 block viewed from the amphitheater, from NE.
- 14. Oblique view along the rear of the building from the 1908 flue stack, looking east.
- 15. Rear of building across Ninth Avenue West, from NE. The storage building roof is visible behind the buses.
- 16. East end of building, from east.
- 17. Approaching the east end of the building, detail of stairs and landscaping details such as drainage alleys.
- 18. Gymnasium from the slope to the north, looking generally from NNE.
- 19. INTERIOR: Main entry hall and reception area, looking north from doorway.
- 20. Old music classroom to right of entry hall, standing in its doorway and looking generally SE.
- 21. Media center and library on the rear of the hyphen, a combination of two former classrooms, from ESE.
- 22. West stair and entry, from east.
- 23. Ground-level entry into hyphen stair, photographed from the main floor (looking generally SW).
- 24. East end stair, looking up from main floor toward front of building, from north.
- 25. Second-floor reception lobby, from south. The original school office was located behind the photographer.
- 26. Present board room, on rear of second floor, from SE (windows are along rear wall).
- 27. 1955 end-bay addition, looking into the end of the 1950 corridor, from SE.

(continued)

#### Section Page 16 Photographs

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Description of Photographs, continued:

28. Amphitheater from east, also showing the gazebo.

29. Northeast rear corner of building and storage building, from SE.

Photographs 1,4,5,7-11,14,16,17,26,28, and 29 are machine prints of color digital photographs taken by Kate St. Claire, Birmingham Historical Society, in March, 2005.

Photographs 2,3,6,12,13,15,18-25, and 27 are machine prints from black-and-white film, taken by Linda Nelson in March and April, 2005.





