

MULTIPLE RESOURCES OF GREENVILLE

BUTLER COUNTY, ALABAMA

Historic name:	Greenville Public School Complex	Owner:	Greenville Public School System
Common name:	Greenville Public School Complex		101 Butler Circle
Address:	101 Butler Circle		Greenville, Alabama 36037
Acreage:	56 acres	UTM:	A-16/535/580-3521/890
			B-16/535/370-3521/680
Verbal Boundary:	Lot 2, Block 16, 1350' x 2275'		C-16/535/320-3521/720
			D-16/535/320-3522/020

Architectural Design:

Date of Construction: 1927-1936

Architect, Builder: J. W. Cooper

Statement of Significance:

Criterion C - Architecture:

The Greenville Public School Complex is significant for two good examples (Butler County High School 1925 and Walter O. Parmer Elementary School 1927) of early 20th century school design which was nationally popularized by the ideas and writings in the early 1920s of school design expert Dr. Fletcher B. Dresslar. Dr. Dresslar's ideas were carried out by a number of architects across the country. The Greenville Schools were designed by J. W. Cooper of the Montgomery architectural firm Okel and Cooper.

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The primary Dresslar design influence that can be seen in the Butler County High School and the Walter O. Parmer Elementary School is the placement of an auditorium in the center of the building at the juncture of a pair of cross axial corridors. In Dresslar's words, "if situated in the central axis of the building, and opposite the main entrance, it (the auditorium) will give a unity and dignity to the interior." Another Dresslar feature in the Greenville Schools is the extensive use of skylights and large classroom windows none of which face south affording only the best natural light and "preventing children from writing in the shadows of their own hands."

Dresslar was a professor of Philosophy and Education at the University of Alabama thus directly influencing a number of prominent state architects including J. W. Cooper of Montgomery who designed the Greenville Schools.

Criterion A - Education:

The Greenville Public School Complex is a good local example of an early 20th century consolidated school system. It is representative of a national educational trend away from a fragmented system of small, one or two room, neighborhood schools, which varied widely in the quality of instruction, toward a more democratic standardized system for an entire city or county. The two contributing buildings are also good examples of an educational concern at that time for an improvement in not only the quality of

instruction but also the health and safety of students. Both the Butler County High School and William O. Parmer Elementary were specifically designed using the latest fireproof materials and providing maximum physical comfort with modern natural and artificial lighting, ventilation, heating systems etc.

Description:

The Greenville Public School Complex is situated on the north side of town at the end of a cul-de-sac surrounded on all sides by open land some of which is used for athletic purposes. The two contributing buildings (Parmer Elementary and old Butler County High School) were constructed in the 1920s. The complex has several noncontributing buildings including an office building c1940, several modern mobile units used as supplemental classrooms, a gymnasium building and two modern classroom structures.

The Walter O. Parmer Elementary School (1927 & 1936) is one and two-story, U-shaped, brick structure situated approximately 500 feet back from the street on a large campus-like, multi-building, school complex. The central portion of the building was designed as an auditorium with a two-story 20 foot ceiling with fanlighted arched windows at the second floor level. The auditorium section of the structure has a gable roof. On either end of the two-story auditorium is a one-story, flat roofed, brick wing forming the sides of the U-shaped structure. At the narrow end of each wing is an entry with a small, flat roofed portico supported by paired round columns. A narrow wooden cornice just below the roofline surrounds three sides of each one-story wing.

The Old Butler County High School (1925 & 1938) is a single story, Colonial Revival, brick structure. The main central block has a gable roof raised slightly higher than its flanking two-story end-wings. The central block is further embellished by a wooden cupola centered over a full height pedimented tetrahedron portico. The building is U-shaped with two end wings at the rear of the structure running perpendicular to the main center section. The interior features a U-shaped corridor system following the general layout of the building. On either side of each corridor are spacious classrooms with large metal framed windows in the outside walls. The corridors have multipaned skylights (see photo #3) and small clear story windows near the ceilings to provide maximum natural lighting.

Historical Summary:

Butler County High School (now elementary school) was constructed in 1925. An addition was made to the building in 1927. This addition was to the east wing and consisted of a hall and two classrooms. This made the U-shaped building more symmetrical, because the west wing was longer than the east wing prior to construction. During 1937 and 1938 the P.W.A. constructed a large auditorium, cafeteria and manual arts training building at the cost of \$75,000 to the high school.

The elementary school was named in honor of Walter O. Parmer a Greenville native who lived in Nashville, Tennessee and donated \$500,000 in a trust fund for Butler County Schools. The plans for the building were submitted to the Greenville School Board in 1925 by J. W. Cooper of the Okel and Cooper architectural firm in Montgomery. Construction on the school, using Cooper's plans under the direction of Dolph Owens, did not begin, however, until 1927. The completed building had nine large classrooms, a library and a large auditorium as well as office spaces. The auditorium occupies the central part of the building and has a twenty foot high ceiling that gives the central portion of the building a two story appearance. In 1936, the Public Works Administration constructed a \$9,000 classroom addition to the structure.