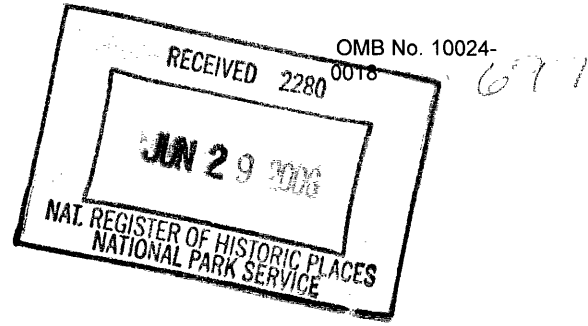


(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bridgeforth High School

other names/site number Bridgeforth School; Greater Richland Creek Missionary Baptist General Association; Central Building

2. Location

street & number 1095 Bledsoe Road

NA not for publication

city or town Pulaski

NA vicinity

state TN code TN county Giles code 055 zip code 38478

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 for 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.)

Robert L. Hays
Signature of certifying official/Title

6/20/06
Date

D-SHPO, Tennessee Historical Commission
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.
 - See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other,

(explain:)

for
Elson W. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

8.9.06

Bridgeforth High School
Name of Property

Giles County, Tennessee
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
4	1	structures
0	0	objects
5	1	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

n/a

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone
walls brick
roof asphalt
other wood; vinyl

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

(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** moved from its original location.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Education
- Ethnic History: black
- Politics and Government

Period of Significance

1936-1950

Significant Dates

1936—Construction of original Bridgeforth High School
1950—Grades 1-6 added; high school moves to annex; name changes to Bridgeforth School

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

McKissack and McKissack, architect
Jackson Taylor, builder

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State Agency
 - Federal Agency
 - Local Government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Center for Historic Preservation
Middle Tennessee State University

Bridgeforth High School
Name of Property

Giles County, Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre. Pulaski 59 NE

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>16</u>	<u>497597</u>	<u>3896423</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

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 Elizabeth H. Moore, Research Fellow
organization MTSU Center for Historic Preservation date November 9, 2005
street & number Box 80 telephone 615-898-2947
city or town Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37132

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 Greater Richland Creek Missionary Baptist General Association, attn: Dr. Jeff Williams or Rev. A.L. Hayes
street & number 1095 Bledsoe Road telephone 931-363-7245
city or town Pulaski state TN zip code 38478

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 listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

7. Physical Description

The 1936-1937 Bridgeforth High School is located along Bledsoe Road one block east of Highway 31 in the northern section of Pulaski (population approximately 8,000), the county seat of Giles County, Tennessee. Set back from the commercial strip along Highway 31, the school is part of a larger school complex that includes the 1936-1937 school, a 1959 school building that is now the Bridgeforth Middle School, athletic fields, and ancillary buildings. Four stone piers at the entrances to the school are contributing objects. The school complex is isolated from the commercial strip by Bledsoe Road and from the surrounding residential area by trees outlining the property. Designed by the historically black Nashville architectural firm of McKissack and McKissack, the building was built by Jackson Taylor of Pulaski under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The one story Colonial Revival brick T-plan school building contains classroom spaces in the front and an auditorium on the rear wing. Pedimented entrances on the main façade, a stone foundation, the asphalt shingle cross gable roof, and multiple light windows are character-defining features of the exterior of the building. Although there have been some changes such as vinyl under the eaves and on the rear and interior modifications, the school retains its overall historic architectural integrity.

The front, or west, façade of the building is composed of five bays. Entrances to the building lie in the second and fourth bays and each contain a single four-panel door with a fanlight set into the door. The original recessed entrances that once contained fifteen-light double doors, twenty-four-light transoms, and five-light sidelights have been bricked in and replaced with these modern doors. A small gabled portico supported by rounded, plain-capital wood columns projects over each entrance. A set of cement steps leads up to each door with metal handrails on either side. A rough-cut stone wall projects from the foundation on both sides of each entrance. The end bays on the main façade each contain two original sets of triple nine-over-nine, double-hung wood windows. Although the original windows remain in place, as a result of the dropping of the interior ceiling, a rectangular panel of vertical vinyl siding covers the top two rows of window panes on each window. The central bay contains three sets of triple windows that are identical to the windows in the end bays. Underneath the central set of windows is the original plaque that reads, "USA 1936-1937 WPA." A vinyl cornice stretches the length of the façade and the windows on this façade are covered with metal storm windows.

The north and south façades of the classroom wing are identical and each contains a round wood vent in the gable end. The cornice returns, a typical Colonial Revival detail, are the only other decorative features on these facades.

The rear, or east, façade of the classroom wing is divided into two identical sections interrupted by the auditorium wing. Two original sets of triple nine-over-nine, double-hung wood windows lie at the outside of each section. A set of double nine-over-nine, double-hung wood windows sits on the inside of these sections toward the auditorium wing. Like the windows on the west façade, a

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

rectangular wood panel covers the top two rows of window panes on each window of this façade. On the southern section of this east façade, two of the windows in the central set and the set of double windows have been boarded. At the northern end of this façade, the set of double windows has been painted to obstruct the view into the bathroom. A wood door is located at the inside corner of each section of this façade. Original decorative wood knee brackets support the entrance portico covering both of these doors. A vinyl cornice stretches the length of each section.

The auditorium wing projects east from the rear of the classroom wing. The roof is higher to accommodate a higher ceiling for the auditorium. The south façade of this wing contains five original evenly spaced nine-over-nine, double-hung wood windows. A nine-light transom tops each window and metal storm windows cover all of the windows of this façade. The wall is faced with brick except at the east end where vinyl siding wraps around the corner from the gable end, a result of the mid-1980s removal of a 1948-1950 annex at the rear of the auditorium. The north façade of the auditorium wing is identical to the south façade, except the westernmost bay contains a door. An asphalt-shingle entrance portico shelters this door and the door on the east façade of the classroom wing. A barrier-free ramp provides access to these doors. Metal storm windows cover each original window on this façade except the nine-light transom over the door. The gable end, or east façade, of the auditorium wing is covered in vinyl siding as a result of the removal of the annex. This façade contains a set of modern double doors at each end. Wood steps lead up to each of these doors.

The interior of the classroom wing has been altered from its original form. It originally contained three large classrooms, a science room, a library, and a home economics room. The interior has now been divided into several smaller classrooms and a pastor's office, leaving few original materials visible. The ceilings have been dropped and the floors covered with carpet and linoleum. The walls are covered with vertical wood boards and are lined with a wood baseboard. The arrangement of classrooms and offices follows an irregular pattern and all of the doors are modern.

The interior of the auditorium retains the highest degree of integrity. It is entered from the classroom wing through three sets of modern double doors. The auditorium is a single room with hardwood floors, vertical board wainscot, horizontal board walls, and a wood board ceiling. A small storage closet has been added between the two southernmost double-door entrances. Three sections of church pews divided by two aisles are now attached to the floor. At the front of the room between the double doors leading to the exterior is a slightly raised platform used as a choir loft that was likely added during the conversion of this space to a sanctuary. A wood rail surrounds the platform. Modern fans have been added and dropped from the ceiling. Although some changes have been made in the conversion of the space to a church sanctuary, the addition of the pews, choir loft, and dropped ceiling are reversible alterations. The original wall and ceiling materials, proportions, and rectangular shape of the space remain intact.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

At the front, two driveways lead into the complex on each side of the nominated building. The Class of 1949 donated four stone piers, one on each side of both driveways at their entrances. This historic entrance is a contributing structure to the property. Directly behind the building, a 1948-1950 high school annex once sat on the concrete surface now used for parking. This addition was attached to the rear, or east, façade of the auditorium wing and contained ten classrooms, a library, a cafeteria, a gymnasium, a builders' trade shop, and a principal's office. This 1948-1950 addition was removed in the mid-1980s and resulted in the vinyl siding of the rear facade of the auditorium.

The Greater Richland Creek Missionary Baptist General Association now occupies the building. The classroom wing is used as office and classroom space and the auditorium has been converted to a sanctuary.

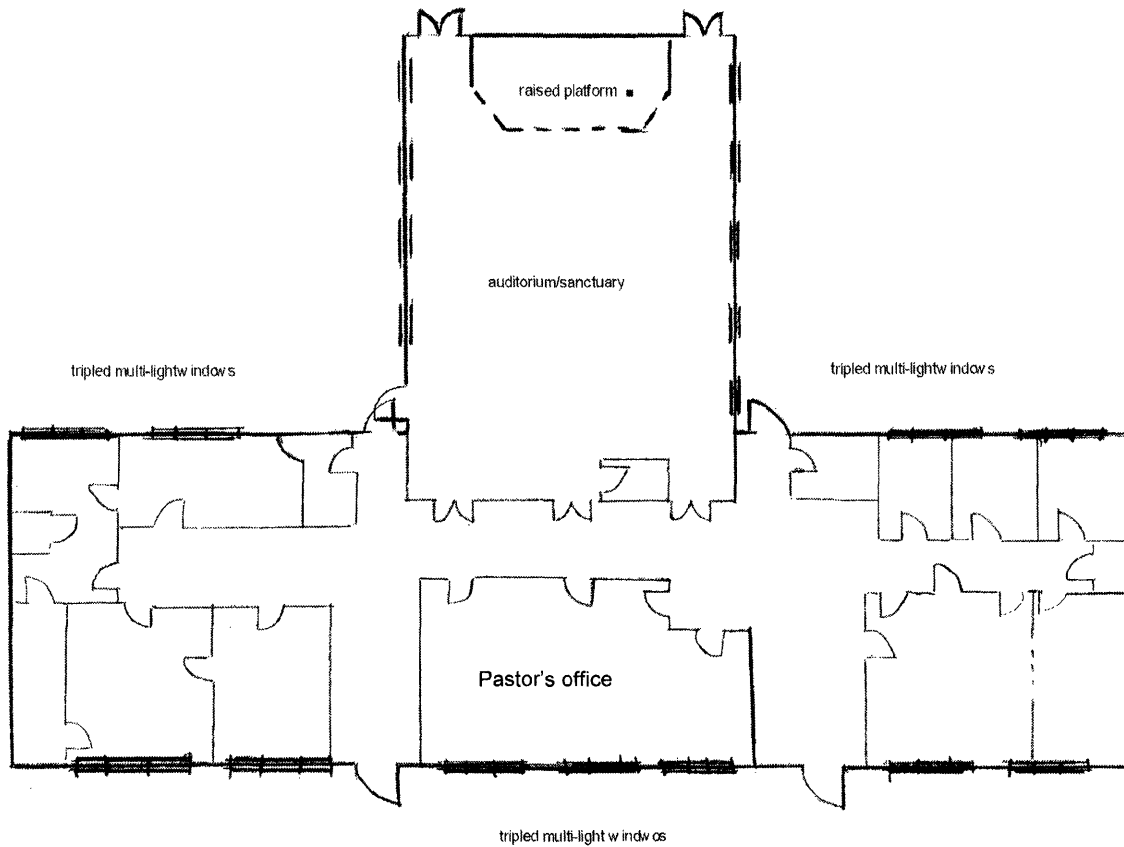
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

Sketch plan, not to scale



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number

8

Page

5

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

8. Statement of Significance

The 1936-1937 Bridgeforth High School building is being nominated to the National Register under Criterion A for its local significance in politics and government and ethnic heritage as it relates to education. The building stands as a representation of the African American struggle for education under Jim Crow segregation and as the first county-operated public high school for African American students in Giles County. It also represents the New Deal efforts of the 1930s to provide employment opportunities for architects and builders during the Depression era through school construction projects. Now owned by a religious institution, it falls under Criteria Consideration A. This resource is important to the history of Pulaski as it represents different phases of Pulaski's history from Reconstruction, Jim Crow segregation, and the New Deal era. The period of significance ranges from the 1936 construction of the Bridgeforth High School to the 1950 opening of the high school annex when the original building ceased operation exclusively as a high school and the name changed to Bridgeforth School.

The 1936-1937 Bridgeforth High School served African American students from across Giles County from its opening in the spring of 1937 until the integration of the Giles County school system in 1965. It opened as Bridgeforth High School for grades nine through twelve and added grades seven and eight in the 1938-1939 school year. In 1950, it became Bridgeforth School for grades one through twelve, and then Bridgeforth Elementary School for grades one through eight with the construction of the 1959 Bridgeforth High School. With the integration of the Giles County schools in 1965, the 1936-1937 Bridgeforth School closed and the 1959 school became the integrated Pulaski Junior High School. At that time, the classroom wing of the 1936-1937 building became offices for the Giles County Agricultural Extension Agency and the Farm Home Administration, while the no longer extant 1948-1950 annex at the rear of the auditorium became the Special Education School. The 1936-1937 structure has served as the Greater Richland Creek Missionary Baptist General Association since 1989. The 1959 building continues in use as the Bridgeforth Middle School after regaining the name Bridgeforth in 1978.

During and following the Civil War, blacks across the South went to great efforts to establish a system of education for their children. They received aid from northern missionary societies and freedman's aid societies, but it was the determination of the former slaves that allowed these schools to exist. The location of a Union "contraband camp" in Pulaski allowed for the operation of a black school by setting aside a certain percentage of an individual's pay to assist in education. Educational efforts continued after the close of the war with the help of the Freedman's Bureau. The Bureau oversaw the black school system until 1867 when the state established a public school system for all races. Giles County saw considerable school building activity prior to 1900 in the form of rural church/school buildings.¹

¹ Margarette Jordan Savage, *Finding Our Past: History of Black Education in Giles County, 1920-1970* (Fayetteville: Horton Printing, 1986), 7-8.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

In 1889, the City of Pulaski erected a two-story building for African American students. This building, no longer standing, was located near Fort Hill at the corner of what is now North 3rd Street and McLean Street. The Pulaski City School, under the operation of the City Board of Education, originally served grades one through ten, later adding an eleventh grade, and required a tuition fee of \$0.50 to \$1.00 from students living outside of the city. This school served as the only African American school in Pulaski until around 1900 when J.T. Bridgeforth, who later became the first principal of Bridgeforth High School, established the first black public school operated by the county in Pulaski. During its earliest years the school operated in the basement of the old Campbell Church and then in the Big Harper Church on McGrew Street in Pulaski. In 1911, the county purchased an existing building for the school, no longer extant, at what is now Highway 31A and Ragsdale Lane just southeast of the present Bridgeforth High School. At this time, the school was renamed Broadview for its location at the top of a hill. This school offered grades one through eleven, lacking a full high school education.²

The first full high school education in Pulaski was offered during the 1931-1932 school year when the county's Broadview School merged with Pulaski City School under the principalship of J.T. Bridgeforth and added a twelfth grade to its curriculum. With the merger, the operation of Broadview School was transferred from the County Board of Education to the City Board of Education. This school continued to require a tuition fee from students living outside of the City of Pulaski.³

As principal of the newly merged school, Bridgeforth immediately began pushing for the construction of a new building better suited to the students' needs. In 1936, in an effort to consolidate schools across the county, the operation of Broadview School was transferred from the city back to the Giles County Board of Education and the tuition fee was eliminated. As more students began taking advantage of the first free public high school in the county, Bridgeforth's plans for a new school were approved in order to accommodate the increased student body. The new school was named Bridgeforth High School and opened on March 19, 1937 for the completion of the 1936-1937 school year.⁴

Bridgeforth School was built at a time of economic crisis across the county, but efforts to alleviate these hardships resulted in great support for the improvement of public schools. During the nationwide Depression of the 1930s and 1940s, federal funds were readily available for the construction of public buildings, roads, parks, and other projects that put a wide variety of people to work. As a significant community building, schools were common recipients of federal aid. One

² Ibid, 13, 15.

³ "Bridgeforth High School opened in 1937, closed in 1965," *Giles Free Press* (1 Aug 1985), B-1.

⁴ Savage, 28, 30.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

significant feature of these federal programs is that the New Deal programs did provide aid to the African American communities, as seen in the building of schools such as Bridgeforth.

Although the Depression "officially" began in 1929, the South had suffered a depressed economy since the decimation of the cotton crop during the late 1910s and 1920s by the boll weevil. The South lagged behind other regions in the country in areas of per capita income, education, industry, health, etc. since Reconstruction (1865-1877). County and city governments were not immune to the economic hardships. With citizens not able to pay their taxes, the public coffers were low. Like the citizens it served, the local governments needed relief and received much-needed assistance from federal programs designed to stimulate the economy and provide employment. President Herbert Hoover's administration began the Depression-era initiatives that were greatly expanded under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. The South, especially the local governments, became a target for President Roosevelt's New Deal package, as it became known.

The WPA began February 15, 1934 as the Civil Works Emergency Relief Act and then became the WPA in 1935.⁵ This program was by far the best known and one of the most controversial of Roosevelt's many new programs. It gave work to over eight million people including construction workers, architects, artists, and writers. During its first three years of existence, the WPA spent seventy million dollars on projects while also providing workers for the building projects of other federal agencies. The projects were sponsored by local, state, or federal agencies that contributed a percentage of the cost of the project. Tennessee was ahead of most states in this respect with sponsors providing almost thirty-two percent of the total costs while the national average was approximately seventeen percent.⁶ The WPA was criticized as a waste of taxpayers' money; however, others defended the program because it provided people with income that stimulated the economy, and gave people a sense of pride and hope.

In Pulaski, the WPA provided funds for the building of the 1936-1937 brick high school that served African American students throughout Giles County. The T-shaped, Colonial Revival-styled school was a common plan built throughout the country for both white and black students and when built represented the latest in modern school building. Although the forms and stylistic elements of black schools were similar to white schools, they were more restrained and were often constructed with cheaper materials and with fewer amenities. The New Deal school buildings followed the efforts of the progressive school reform movement of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Influenced by the Rosenwald Fund, Peabody College Professor Fletcher B. Dresslar, and

⁵ The WPA underwent several transitions during its few years of operation. After July 1, 1939 it became the Works Projects Administration and then it was transferred to the Federal Works Agency (FWA), which ended in 1942.

⁶ Carroll Van West, *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape: A Guidebook* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 19-22; "Works Progress Administration (WPA) Projects in Georgia," *Selections from Hargrett*, Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, University of Georgia <<http://www.libs.uga.edu/hargrett/selections/wpa/index.html>>.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

the Tennessee Department of Education, this movement sought to standardize school buildings to increase the quality of the learning environment. Reformers focused on issues such as light, heat, ventilation, and hygiene. The resultant buildings often followed a T-, H-, L-, or I-shaped plan to maximize the quality of these concerns. After 1920 an increasing number of black high schools were being built across the South and many turned toward a vocational curriculum in addition to basic academic courses. These schools marked a significant increase in opportunities for black students, but this wave of school building construction, for both blacks and whites, during the progressive movement came to a halt with the onset of the Depression in 1929. A second wave of building began with the establishment of the New Deal relief programs, such as the WPA, in the 1930s.

The schools built during the New Deal period derived their form from the earlier progressive school movement, as seen in the T-shaped plan of the Bridgeforth School. The New Deal relief programs provided an opportunity to reinvigorate these efforts through a return to these models and concerns such as light, circulation, and hygiene. Although a variety of styles such as Classical Revival and PWA Modern were employed on the school buildings, like Bridgeforth, many exhibited the familiar Colonial Revival style.⁷ This is partly due to the availability of materials such as brick and wood, but more importantly the Colonial Revival image was considered a symbol of stability during this time of economic upheaval. Both black and white schools were built in this style, but schools for African American students were often scaled-down from their white counterparts. The New Deal designs were simple and functional in design and their impact has been felt across the country for decades through their continued use as school buildings.

The designs for Bridgeforth School were prepared in 1936 by the Nashville architectural firm McKissack and McKissack. Natives of Giles County, Moses III and Calvin McKissack were among the first architects in the state of Tennessee to be registered under the new licensing law in 1912. They learned their trade from their father Gabriel Moses McKissack and their grandfather Moses McKissack. As a slave, Moses McKissack worked as a master builder under the direction of his owner, William McKissack, one of America's first contractors. Moses III and Calvin established the first black professional architectural firm in Tennessee in 1922. The firm designed numerous schools, college buildings, churches, and residences across Middle Tennessee and Bridgeforth School stands as an example of their work.⁸ During a time when many architecture firms were facing financial difficulties, the New Deal period was particularly important to the McKissack and McKissack firm. They were forced to lay off many of their workers, but the WPA provided them with several projects, such as the Bridgeforth school, that allowed them to stay in business.⁹ Bridgeforth High School was built with WPA funds under contractor Jackson Taylor and, except for

⁷ West, 96-98; Fletcher B. Dresslar, *American School Buildings* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925).

⁸ McKissack & McKissack, *Building to Bring Change* <www.mckissack.com> 12 July 2005.

⁹ Philip Thomason and James Draeger, "McKissack and McKissack Buildings in Nashville (1908-1930) Thematic Resources," *National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Nomination*, 1984, page 5.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

the water and sewer lines, the structure was complete by late 1936. Major floods in Kentucky at the end of that year prompted the completion of those lines in order to house refugees from the floods. Initially designed to house three teachers, the school opened in March of 1937.¹⁰

Bridgeforth School is significant as an example of both post-Reconstruction strides in African American education and as a representation of the New Deal efforts of the 1930s. The operations and conditions of Bridgeforth School under the constraints of Jim Crow segregation also contribute to its significance as the only public black high school in Giles County at that time. Although several rural schools existed around Giles County during the first half of the twentieth century, few students continued their education to the high school level. This can be attributed to both the lack of transportation, making Bridgeforth School inaccessible to many students, and to the need for agricultural laborers throughout the county. As a result, those students who did attend Bridgeforth School and their families went to great lengths to do so. Some of this could also be said about rural white students also, but it was particularly true for the African American community. They took great pride in Bridgeforth's existence as the county's only public black high school. When opened in 1937, it had three teachers and sixty-eight students from throughout the county. Classes included English, music, mathematics, biology, science, literature, and history. In comparison to the one black school offering a high school education, in 1936 there were ten white schools throughout the county that went through the high school level. In Pulaski there were two white schools, one six-teacher school with grades one through eight and one nineteen-teacher school for grades one through twelve.¹¹

Following the building activity of the New Deal period, the most substantial gains in black education occurred in the post-World War II period. During this time, many black families began moving out of the rural areas of Giles County and into Pulaski. This increased the accessibility of the school to a greater number of high-school aged children. Many of the rural schools closed in efforts to consolidate the county's school system. Furthermore, school bus transportation was extended to black children in 1945. Two buses began running in the northern and southern parts of the county while small funds were also provided to teachers to transport students in their own cars.¹²

From the opening of the school in 1937 until the 1950 opening of the high school annex, the original 1936-1937 Bridgeforth building served exclusively as a secondary school. During this time, Bridgeforth emphasized an academic curricular model over the vocational component gaining in popularity among black schools across the South. The introduction of vocational

¹⁰ Savage, 30.

¹¹ U.S. Office of Education, *State of Tennessee: County Educational Maps, 1935-1936/prepared by United States Office of Education in Cooperation with State Department of Education in Connection with Study of Local School Units* (Nashville: Tennessee State Department of Education, 1936).

¹² Savage, 42-43.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 10

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

courses was intended to train African American children for the work force of the segregated south. Bridgeforth's emphasis on an academic curriculum and its maintenance of strong academic courses after the introduction of a vocational component to its curriculum in later years prepared students not only for this work force, but also for a college education and for professions such as teachers, ministers, and doctors. These opportunities were particularly important with the approach of the Civil Rights movement and integration.

In 1950, the city and county schools were consolidated and grades one through six were added to the Bridgeforth program.¹³ In anticipation of this increase in enrollment and considerable overcrowding, an annex was begun in 1948 with ten classrooms, a library, a cafeteria, a gymnasium, a builders' trade shop, and a principal's office. Sponsored by post-war veterans' benefits under the direction of H.H. Sims, a builders' trade teacher at Bridgeforth, the project provided substantial on-the-job training for minority veterans.¹⁴ The new annex, completed in 1950, housed the high school students while the primary grades were located in the original portion of the building.

At that time the name of the school changed from Bridgeforth High School to Bridgeforth School and the curriculum expanded to included French, business education, general builders trade, social science, algebra, geometry, physical education, vocational home economics and vocational agriculture in addition to the courses initially offered at Bridgeforth.¹⁵ Although removed in the mid-1980s, this annex greatly expanded the activities and opportunities of Bridgeforth School with the addition of a strong vocational component.

The 1936-1937 building and 1948-1950 annex served as the only black high school until 1958-59 when a new and larger school was built on the property behind the old school. With the opening of the new high school, the earlier Bridgeforth School became Bridgeforth Elementary School for grades one through eight. This investment in African American education by Giles County was in response to the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education decision in 1954 that ruled that separate was inherently unequal. Giles County, like other school districts throughout the South, upgraded their long-ignored black educational facilities to try and halt integration.

The 1959 Bridgeforth school building represents this widespread effort to prevent black and white children from attending the same schools by making the facilities equal. Schools for both races during this time were built in a modern style characterized by their low, stretching forms with long bands of windows. The modern school movement focused on the function of the buildings by emphasizing fluidity, versatility, convertibility, and expansibility of space. The low, horizontal forms allowed for later additions that would not disrupt the overall appearance of the building, as

¹³ The 1931-32 merger under the city school system was a single effort, rather than countywide consolidation.

¹⁴ Savage, 42.

¹⁵ "Bridgeforth High School Opened in 1937, closed in 1965," B-1.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

exemplified by the 1959 Bridgeforth building and additions.¹⁶ The use of these forms in black schools built after the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education decision shows an attempt by the school board to validate the doctrine of “separate but equal” by making black facilities equal to those of whites, like the white Pulaski Elementary School built in 1952. White school officials saw this as their last chance to maintain the racial structure of the school system.

However, this attempt only forestalled the inevitable. With the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Giles County school system was faced with the threat of losing federal financial assistance by continuing as a segregated school system. On May 10, 1965, after considerable discussion and three extensive meetings assessing their options, the Giles County School Board voted unanimously to integrate its schools beginning the following school year. Under their plan, five black elementary schools across the county closed, including Bridgeforth Elementary. Pulaski was to maintain four schools administered by the Giles County Board of Education, Pulaski Elementary School East for grades one through three, West Hill Elementary for grades four through six, Pulaski Junior High for grades seven through nine, and Giles County High for all high school grades. Bridgeforth High School became Pulaski Junior High under this plan. The desegregation of Giles County’s schools produced mixed feelings within the African American community, but all former Bridgeforth students took great pride in the education they had received.¹⁷

Throughout its operation as Bridgeforth High School, the 1936-1937 building played an integral role in the development of the black community. The availability of a full high school education provided substantial opportunities for black students to either continue on for a college education or to excel in a particular profession. Throughout the years, the academic curriculum remained strong at Bridgeforth offering courses in English, math, history, physical education, science, sociology, geography, economics, French, band, choral music, and civics. The curriculum also gained a strong vocational component around 1950 with courses in home economics, agriculture, builders’ trades, general business, typing, short hand, and bookkeeping.¹⁸

In addition to the academic and vocational instruction received at Bridgeforth, extracurricular activities greatly enhanced the education of its students. Students, teachers, parents, and the community took great pride in the athletic events at Bridgeforth. Students in the high school and later in the elementary school played sports such as football and basketball, competing with black schools across Middle Tennessee. Music also provided a great outlet for student involvement through the presence of a marching band and chorus group. Other activities and clubs included the Drama Club, New Home Makers, New Farmers of America, Y-Teen, the Banking Club, the Trade and Industrial Club, the National Honor Society, and the Book Club.¹⁹ These educational

¹⁶ William W. Caudill, *Toward Better School Design* (New York: F.W. Dodge Corporation, 1954), 136-139.

¹⁷ Savage, 60-62.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

and extracurricular opportunities allowed black students to compete with their white counterparts and produced leaders not only within the black community but also in Pulaski and other parts of the country.

In 1976 the county enlarged the Pulaski Junior High building and in 1978 they renamed it Bridgeforth Middle School to reflect its early roots. At this time, the middle school included grades five through eight. Now sixth, seventh, and eighth graders attend the school, which received two more modernizations in 1991 and 2000-2001. The Greater Richland Creek Missionary Baptist General Association purchased the 1936-1937 building in 1989 and continues to use the building today. The removal of the 1948-1950 annex returned the building to its original form as Bridgeforth High School and the extant building represents its role as the first African American county public high school.

A Tennessee Historical Marker has been placed just south of the 1936-1937 Bridgeforth High School (outside the boundaries of the nominated property).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 13

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

9. Major Bibliographical References

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 14

Bridgeforth High School
Giles County, TN

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries for the nominated property are shown on the accompanying Giles County, Tennessee tax map as parcel number 48.01 on Giles County tax map 86.

Boundary Justification

The nominated boundaries include the extant historic property associated with the 1936-1937 Bridgeforth School and represent the current legal boundaries of the Greater Richland Creek Missionary Baptist General Association.

