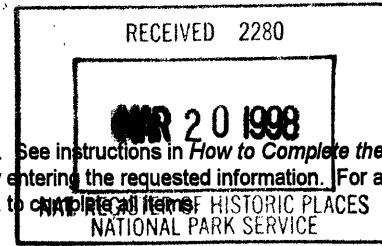


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**



This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

New Submission Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Public Schools in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each Associated Historic Context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each>)

Public Schools in Memphis, Tennessee 1918 - 1954

C. Form Prepared by

name/title	<u>Judith Johnson/Mike Fleenor</u>	date	<u>January 1996</u>
organization	<u>Division of Housing and Community Development/THC</u>	telephone	<u>901-576-7310</u>
street & number	<u>701 N. Main Street/2941 Lebanon Road</u>	city or town	<u>Memphis/Nashville</u>
city or town	<u>Memphis/Nashville</u>	state	<u>TN</u>
		zip code	<u>38107/37243-0442 or 37214</u>

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

<u>Herbert H. Keays / BCF</u>	<u>3/9/98</u>
Signature of certifying official/ Title	Date
<u>Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission</u>	
State or Federal agency and bureau	

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

<u>McL...</u>	<u>3/4/98</u>
Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action

Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

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Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Memphis Division of Community Development and Housing

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 120 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

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E. Statement of Historic Context

E-I. Public School Buildings, 1918-1954

The public school buildings built between 1918 and 1954 in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee, are an important physical record of the growth, development, and changes in education in Memphis and reflect the changing styles of academic architecture from Academic Revival styles to Modern. Following the first World War and continuing through the 1920s, Memphis schools were experiencing a period of growth and expansion. With the crash of the stock market in 1929 and the subsequent economic downturn, school construction halted in the city until the federally funded Public Works Administration (PWA) school projects of the latter part of the 1930s. The United States entry into World War II halted further construction until after the war. The racial segregation of the "separate but equal" era is reflected in the inequality between white and African-American schools.

A. History prior to 1918

From their beginnings in 1848, the free schools in Memphis encountered numerous problems that retarded their development. These problems included: municipal mismanagement of the 1850s, the Civil War in the 1860s, epidemics and municipal bankruptcy during the 1870s, a deficiency of public revenues during a period of rapid growth in both the African-American and white populations during the early 1900s, and racial segregation. The historic school buildings discussed here are a result of the determination of Memphis citizens to solve these problems and to establish and maintain a system of public education.

The power to establish and regulate public education in Tennessee was historically vested by the constitution in the state legislature. Over the course of time and under successive changes in the statutes delegating powers, the management of Memphis schools passed from political control by the Mayor and the Board of Alderman to lay control by the Board of Education to professional control by employees of the Board of Education.

Financing for local schools used a dual system of control. Raising revenue for the school system required a legislative act and could only be delegated to a county court of a chartered municipality. Although a school board corporation was designated to administer the public schools, the city council was the delegated authority to determine the amount of revenue the schools had to discharge. Classes were held in rented spaces until 1866 when the alderman agreed, for the first time, to purchase property and erect a building (Hilliard, 5). By 1868 the first brick school building, Peabody School (NR 9/17/82, Public Schools of Memphis 1902-1915), was constructed for white children in Memphis.

Until the Civil War, only white children were educated in public schools. The social reforms that followed the Civil War forced the southern school system to educate African-American children at public expense. The State of Tennessee and the City of Memphis initiated early steps to carry out this social reform, but by means of a dual system of schools.

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The inception of schools for African-Americans in Memphis began with missionaries from the North during the Civil War. John Eaton, a former Union officer, began to organize these missionary schools under the Freedman's Bureau. The governor during Reconstruction, William Brownlow, appointed John Eaton as State Superintendent of Schools. Unfortunately, in a state ravaged and bankrupt by war, there was no money to carry out any new construction plans (CA, 5/23/96). In 1867, the Memphis Board of Education appointed J. H. Barnum, who had taught in one of the missionary schools, to Superintendent of Schools for African-American students. In the beginning, schools for African-Americans were only open for five months (ten months for white students) and were funded through a combination of money from the board and private philanthropists (Hilliard, 41).

In 1868, a new school board charter was enacted allocating some local tax funds to free schools for African-American students. At the close of the school year in 1869, twenty-three teachers were employed in African-American schools. This was also the first school year that African-American students attended class for a full ten months, identical to the white schools. By 1878, Reconstruction had come to an end. The majority of the missionary schools supported by the Freedman's Bureau were closed, causing a major decrease in school enrollment. The number of students enrolled dropped from 2,193 in 1869 to 1,295 in 1872, a decrease of 898 students. The three remaining missionary schools were transferred from the Freedman's Bureau to the Memphis Board of Education (CA, 5/23/96).

In 1873, African-American citizens petitioned for African-American teachers in their schools. The Board of Education completed a third brick school building for African-Americans in 1874. Upon its completion, the Clay Street School was described as, "the finest school building for Negroes in the South and West" (CA, 5/23/96). The school was a two-story, eight room brick building that cost \$34,100 to build. B. K. Sampson, an African-American graduate of Oberlin College, was appointed principal.

Sometime after 1880, the name of the school was changed to Kortrecht School in honor of the School Board President, Judge Charles Kortrecht. Judge Kortrecht was an ardent promoter of the construction of new school buildings. Not until 1890 did the number of enrolled African-American students reach the 1869 level. The first high school class of Kortrecht School graduated five members in 1891, and by 1893 the number had increased to fifteen graduates (CA, 5/23/96). By 1908 Kortrecht School was overcrowded as the school graduated over 200 students. A decision was made to separate the high school classes from the lower grades and to move the high school to another building. In 1910, the old Peabody School, which was abandoned by white students for a new school, was converted into Kortrecht High School.

The 1919 Department of the Interior Education Bulletin, No. 50 issued a scathing report of the conditions at the Kortrecht School. It reported that the conditions there were "short of pitiable. The school building is unclean, unsafe, unsanitary, poorly arranged, badly lighted, and unsuitably located. Work must be done under the greatest of difficulties." The Bulletin implored, "Is there any way in which money--and a lot of it--can be spent more profitably for the public safety than in the moral, religious and civic education of Negro youth and youth of various other races, who are destined to become the leaders of their race?" Despite these

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substandard conditions, it remained the only African-American high school for sixteen years until Booker T. Washington High School was built in 1926 to replace Kortrecht High School (CA 5/23/96).

B. 1918 - 1954

While the large population growth and increased attendance of the early 1900s created the need for more schools, the funding for teachers' salaries remained terribly inadequate. After a four-day teachers' strike in 1918, the Board of Education requested a study of the city's school system by the United States Bureau of Education. The study found that "Memphis is much below the average of American cities in the amount she expends on the education of her children and far above the average in her financial ability to maintain her schools. Furthermore it is perfectly clear that Memphis is well able financially, in comparison, with other cities, to pay enough to make her school system the equal of any system in this country (US Bureau of Education Study, 1919)." The Study blamed the city for being totally occupied with commercial growth and the attempt to turn Memphis into a metropolis, while treating its schools as if it were a small village. Even after this scathing report, in 1923, the Memphis Board of Education reduced the number of teachers and increased the number of pupils per teacher. While the municipal reform momentarily succeeded in lowering taxes, it proved disastrous for such essentials as teachers' salaries and school's physical plants. The quality of education in the 1920s was definitely below the standards required for the complex and sophisticated industrial community the city wanted to become (Sigafos, 167).

In addition to providing facilities for an ever increasing high school population and enlarging or replacing inadequate buildings acquired through annexation, the city school board found it necessary to erect fourteen elementary and junior high schools between 1910 and 1932. The early 1920s saw the reorganization of secondary education to include the junior high system. Such buildings would relieve crowding problems from the traditional grammar school by reducing it to six grades and the newly emerging high school by reducing it to three grades.

The appeal of the education reform movement to the middle-class is evidenced by the construction of three new high schools during the 1920s, including the first one for the newly emerging African-American middle class. Two new white high schools, 1922 Northside High School (Humes) and 1925 Southside High School (Lincoln Jr. High), were both large Collegiate Gothic style schools designed by locally prominent architects George Awsumb and Charles O. Pfeil. In 1926, construction was finished on the first high school built specifically for African-Americans, Booker T. Washington High School, with its modest Classical Revival styling (rebuilt in 1992). Prior to this, the only four year secondary school for African-Americans in Memphis had been the private LeMoyné Normal Institute.

The City of Memphis expanded its boundaries by annexation six times between 1908 and 1929. The annexation of North Memphis in 1928 added Manassas School (1917) for African-American students from grades one through twelve. Two more white high schools were added by annexation, Treadwell School (1915) in the former town of Highland Heights in 1928 and Messick High School (1915) in East Buntyn in 1929.

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Another factor demanding this construction of new schools was the tremendous increase in the African-American population, their compulsory attendance at school, and their inclination to remain in school longer (Hilliard, 57). By 1920, enrollment for both whites and African-Americans reached 71 percent of the school-age population. This is especially remarkable for the African-American community, considering the economic barriers African-Americans faced at the time, and reflects both the importance of education and the sacrifices made by African-American parents to educate their children. The growth in the African-American middle-class in Memphis came despite the barriers imposed by segregation. By 1920, African-Americans constituted thirty-eight percent of the population of Memphis. Much of this population growth occurred through emigration from the surrounding countryside. Moreover, African-American sharecroppers left the Lower South in great numbers after World War I in search of industrial and service jobs in Northern cities. Many stopped in Memphis on the way north and decided to stay. In 1917, Tennessee followed the lead of several other southern states in passing an emigrant-agent code making the wholesale recruitment of black laborers to northern cities illegal.

With African-American colleges, Memphis was considered more progressive and open than many cities further South and offered economic hope to African Americans. Middle-class jobs were found in education, the ministry, medical professions, insurance, real-estate, and banking. Good paying industrial jobs were found with the railroads, the muleyards, cotton and refining, warehousing, and casket companies. African-American-owned businesses included barber shops, drug stores, candy factories, blacksmith shops, boarding houses, cemeteries, groceries, newspapers, shoemakers, funeral parlors, and hospitals.

One of the most important educational innovations proposed by educational reformers was vocational education. Vocational education provided training in practical skills for pupils who would not or could not take the four year program. In addition to traditional academic work, students took courses in manual training, domestic science, stenography, or bookkeeping. Although by the early 1900s scores of cities had established trade, industrial, and vocational programs to train white children, it was not until 1928 that the City of Memphis constructed the minimal Colonial Revival style Memphis Technical High School (retains integrity) on Poplar Avenue. Until that time, white technical students had to make due with an old 1890 facility that was formerly Christian Brother's High School. Despite the exhortations of African-American educator Booker T. Washington, there was no counterpart to train interested African-American students in industrial skills until the Kortrecht Vocational School was opened in the old Peabody School at Webster and Lea streets. This facility was immediately out of date and only offered courses in manual training and domestic science.

Funding for public education in Memphis decreased further when the Great Depression hit in 1929. The Memphis school system ran out of funds in the spring of 1932. By the spring of 1933, teachers' salaries were decreased by sixteen percent, a draconian measure considering Memphis teachers had not received a salary increase since 1928 (Sigafoos, 174). The period from 1930 to 1946 included extensive additions such as additional classrooms, cafeterias, and auditoriums to existing schools as well as the construction of six new schools, five of which were for African-Americans. This construction program was paid for by Public Works Administration (PWA) funds. The PWA, a federal relief program, offered economic relief from the economic depression affecting the country, especially in the building trades.

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Using federal money, three former county African-American all-grade schools were upgraded to high schools including Douglass High School in 1935 (replaced in 1950) and Melrose School in 1938 (retains integrity). All three were located in historically African-American communities recently annexed into the city. In North Memphis, Manassas High (now abusively altered), was rebuilt in 1935 (Hilliard, 58). The construction of three new schools reflects the lack of adequate high schools for African-American students as well as the city's recognition of the need to educate the African-American population.

More rural laborers were attracted to cities in the early 1940s by the lure of war jobs and the postwar economic boom. Fortunately, these opportunities were available to some at a time when many rural workers were being displaced by advances in agricultural machinery. The first patent for a cotton picking machine had been issued to Samuel D. Rembert and Jedediah Prescott of Memphis in 1850, but this machine was not successful. A more successful picker, invented by John and Mack Rust, was demonstrated in August, 1936. John Rust had attended an engineering conference at the Peabody Hotel in 1934 and, with hopes of gaining financing for his invention, moved to Memphis that same year and opened the Rust Cotton Picker Company. The Rust Picker is credited with having a great impact on the African-American migration to cities after the Second World War and fundamentally changing African-American life in America from a rural to an urban setting.

The architectural style for white schools was of a higher standard than for African-American schools. The austere Melrose building with hints of PWA Modern styling is a sharp contrast to the architect-designed Collegiate Gothic Northside (Humes) and Southside high schools built a decade earlier for white students. With the onset of World War II, the construction of new schools came to a halt. During the war years only additions and repairs to existing schools were realized. The reality of the "separate but equal" doctrine is that African-American schools and communities were not treated equally. To avoid large expenditures of money on African-American schools, additions were added to upgrade old buildings rather than to build new schools. "Separate but equal" refers to language used by the Supreme Court in the *Plessy Vs. Ferguson* decision of 1896. In this ruling, the court upheld a Louisiana law requiring segregated railroad facilities. The court held that, as long as the accommodations were equal, even if separate, segregation did not constitute discrimination and African Americans were not being deprived of equal protection as guaranteed in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. The decision was reversed in the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

Once desegregation began in 1954, the Board of Education chose to upgrade existing African-American schools with amenities already enjoyed by white schools such as cafeterias, auditoriums, shops, additional classrooms and gymnasiums. This movement was a way of avoiding building new integrated schools.

The additions of large, incompatible additions to African-American schools in the early 1950s reflects the continuing segregation of the public schools in Memphis, Tennessee during that time period.

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F. Associated Property Types

F-I: Name of Property Type - Public School Buildings

F-II: Description

The public school buildings constructed between 1918 and 1954 represent a distinct period of education in Memphis, Tennessee. The construction of twenty-two buildings reflects the growing emphasis on education and the increasing population of Memphis as well as the continued segregation of the races as reflected in a dual school system. The 1920s high school buildings are architect designed, three-story, red brick veneer with flat roof in a variety of plans including rectangular block, T-plans and E-plans with later additions. The white schools contained an average of 45,000 square feet while the African-American Booker T. Washington High School contained 70,000 square feet in a T-plan. The elementary schools tend to be one story, I- and E-shaped plans averaging less than 20,000 square feet. There were later rear and side additions to many elementary schools. The junior high school buildings for the whites were two-story, E-plan buildings. The African-American schools were modest one-story buildings in either T- or E-plans.

The 1930s Melrose and Manassas High Schools began as three-story, flat roof, E-shaped structures with numerous later additions designed by unknown architects. After a new high school was constructed in 1951, the original one story Colonial Revival Douglass High School building was demolished in 1959. The remaining elementary schools are one-story with E-shaped plans of Colonial Revival style.

All the buildings reveal the continuing popularity of the eclectic architectural styles in the use of Collegiate Gothic and Colonial Revival styles during the years 1918 - 1954. The Colonial Revival style is exhibited in the red brick construction porch with full pediment and fluted columns as well as pediments with vents on the façade. Collegiate Gothic refers to a revival style of Gothic detailing such as buttress, pointed or lancet arches, finials and decorative brickwork applied to institutional buildings.

The PWA Modern Style reflects the influence of the Federal Government upon the 1930s high schools through the New Deal programs of the Public Works Administration. Dominant on the high school is a sense of verticality and smooth planes. Casement windows help emphasize this treatment. The introduction of Modernism into the United States via the PWA is evidenced by Melrose High School which is the only remaining example of a PWA Modern style school building in the city.

Secondary buildings at all schools include gymnasiums, cafeterias, boiler rooms, and additional classrooms. Other features include parking lots, playing fields, and landscaped areas.

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F-III: Significance

Public school buildings built in Memphis, Tennessee from 1918 - 1954 are significant in Education under Criterion A. All public school buildings represent a moral and financial commitment by the citizens of Memphis to educate their children in a proper environment for learning. The public schools are also eligible under Criterion A for their strong association with African-American heritage since public schools were governed by the "separate but equal" doctrine of segregation and required dual physical plants. The inequality of this system is evidenced in the sheer lack of schools for African-Americans, unavailability of technical training for African-Americans, the inadequacy of African-American schools in general and the significant differences in architectural detail of the school buildings. Public school buildings in Memphis, Tennessee are also significant under Criterion C for their contribution to local architecture. This multiple property nomination considers the Collegiate Gothic, Colonial Revival, and the PWA Modern styles of architecture. In addition it considers the works of George Awsumb and Charles Pfeil, leading architects in Memphis, Tennessee. The public schools developed in Memphis in the 1930s are prime examples of public works projects built during the Great Depression.

The individual schools are assessed as to whether they are good representative examples of Academic Revival or PWA Modern styles, within their local context, and whether the integrity of the building is intact. The historic additions show use over time and if sympathetic, contribute to the structure's integrity.

Although non-historic additions have been added to the original white schools, they should not dominate the buildings nor distract from the integrity of the historic buildings. The non-historic additions will gain significance in their own right. If the changes to the buildings are modern and overwhelm the sense of time and place, the property may not be eligible for listing. A building no longer retains historic integrity if the additions fail to meet the criteria of integrity including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association.

African-American Schools will be assessed keeping in mind the separate but equal law that they were constructed under. African-American Schools may also be eligible under Criterion A for Education and African-American heritage, Criterion C for architecture, and under Criterion Exception G because of the additions that were added to avoid building new integrated schools. The alterations that are less than fifty years old reflect the attempt to provide African-Americans with services located in one area so they would remain segregated from the white population of the city. In addition, African-American schools were often used as community centers for civil rights meetings and voter registration drives.

F-IV: Registration Requirements

Public School Buildings which possess significance for Education or African-American Heritage under Criterion A and significance for architecture under Criterion C may not be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places if they no longer retain architectural and historical integrity. The integrity of a property is assessed by evaluating its design, workmanship, materials, setting, location, feeling, association,

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and how and to what degree these characteristics have been altered since the property's period of significance.

The integrity test may be more strictly applied when a school is being nominated for architectural significance under Criterion C. Some Memphis public school buildings retain a high degree of exterior integrity; some of their interiors have been modernized, and some suffer from severe neglect. Loss of integrity can result from large, non-historic additions, additions to the front of the building, major changes in windows and interior floor plans with major alterations. While some schools are individually eligible, some will be considered contributing structures in a historic district.

The architectural significance of public school buildings lies in the design of the individual buildings. To be considered eligible, the majority of the building must be intact. However, later additions can be considered as reflecting use over time and do not necessarily render the contributing building ineligible. In the case of historic African-American schools, the large, non-historic additions may be eligible under Criterion Exception G because the additions reflect segregation practices.

Schools eligible under Criterion A must possess integrity and must be directly associated with the educational reforms of the city during the stated period of significance. Not all school buildings will be eligible under Criterion A. Schools may also be eligible under Criterion A for their significance to African-American Heritage and to how the school complex reflects the segregation laws in Memphis. When there is documentation about how a school participated in the civil rights or voter registration movements and why these activities were important in Memphis, the school may be eligible for listing in the National Register.

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G. Geographical Data

The 1954 corporate limits of Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee.

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H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The multiple properties listing of public school buildings in Memphis, Tennessee, is based upon a 1988 - 1995 architectural resources inventory of the City of Memphis, conducted by Memphis Heritage, Inc., under the auspices of the Tennessee Historical Commission and the City of Memphis Division of Housing and Community Development. The inventory surveyed more than 15,000 structures. A total of thirty-six Memphis public schools constructed between 1915 and 1951 were recorded. For each property recorded, locations were noted on a Memphis City map. The buildings were inventoried on computerized forms, a site sketch was made and a black and white 35mm photograph was taken. Research was conducted and narrative architectural and historical descriptions were written. The schools were assessed for their potential eligibility as a part of the survey. Judith Johnson and Clayton Rogers conducted the survey of the Memphis public schools on a full time basis during the summer of 1993.

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