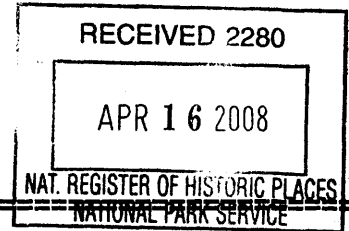


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Slossfield Community Center

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1901 25th Court North not for publication N/A
city or town Birmingham vicinity N/A
state Alabama code AL county Jefferson code 073 zip code 35204

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

JR W. White 4/11/08
Signature of certifying official Date

Alabama 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 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
- 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): _____

[Signature] _____
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Edson H. Ball 5.29.08
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

USDI/NPS Registration Form

Property Name Slossfield Community Center Historic District
County and State Jefferson County, Alabama

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check only one box.)

Category of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

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

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

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

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>4</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>4</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: HEALTH CARE
SOCIAL
EDUCATION
RECREATION/CULTURE

Sub: Hospital
Civic
School
Sports Facility
Auditorium

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions) N/A (vacant)

Cat: WORK IN PROGRESS Sub: _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete
roof _____
walls concrete
other tar and gravel

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheet/s.)

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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Community Planning and Development

Ethnic Heritage: African American

Architecture

Period of Significance 1936 - 1954

Significant Dates N/A

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Van Keuren, E. B.

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other state agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository
UAB Medical Archives; Bham. Public Library;

USDI/NPS Registration Form

Property Name Slossfield Community Center

County and State Jefferson County, Alabama

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.02 acres

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

	Zone Easting	Northing	Zone Easting	Northing
1	16	516160	3711580	3711550
2	16	516280	3711620	3711510

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 Pamela Sterne King, Historic Preservation Consultant and Christy Anderson (AHC Reviewer)

organization PSKing Associates date 12-15-2005

street & number 3307 Altaloma Way telephone 205-823-1679

city or town Birmingham state Alabama zip code _____

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Birmingham

street & number 710 20th Street North telephone 205-254-2000

city or town Birmingham state Al zip code 35203

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Name of Property: Slossfield Community Center
County and State: Jefferson County, Alabama

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Narrative Description

The Slossfield Community Center consists of four buildings built as a planned campus, c. 1936 – 1939. The level site is rectangular, with a sidewalk around the perimeter of the campus, an internal sidewalk system linking the buildings, grassed areas as well as a number of shade trees, and a narrow paved drive between the buildings. Also remaining is an original cast iron drinking fountain and flagpole.

The campus occupies an entire block between 25th Court North and 26th Avenue North in a residential neighborhood in an industrial part of Birmingham, Alabama. The campus is bounded on all four sides by public streets. It is bounded to the east by 20th Street North and to the west by 19th Street North. On the west side of Interstate 65, which now runs along a north/south axis through a right-of-way on the west side of 19th Street North, is the Acipco-Finley neighborhood, which includes the important American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO) plant and company town, c. 1910-1930. North and east of the campus is a working class African American neighborhood, which includes the 1946 Lewis Elementary School, one story bungalows and unusual brick double tenant houses, and a c. 1960 library. South of the campus are trucking companies and light industrial operations, which are sited along the major east-west thoroughfare for the neighborhood, Finlay Avenue, only one block away.

The campus consists of four very similar, but slightly differentiated, Art Deco style buildings. Designed by prominent Birmingham architect, E. B. Van Keuren, each building is a cast-in-place concrete structure with a flat roof, concrete foundation, multi-paned steel windows, plastered interior walls and ceilings, and wood floors. However, they all have one or more unique feature and each structure has an Art Deco style frieze that is subtly distinct from the others. Taken as a whole, they blend exceptionally well into a lively, but well-integrated, complex. The streets, sewers, and engineering work done were done by the City of Birmingham. Labor was funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the National Youth Administration (NYA), two programs of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal.

The first two buildings constructed were the Administration Building (Inv. # 1) and Education Building (Inv. # 2), which were begun in 1936 and completed the following year. The Administration Building (Inv. # 1) is rectangular, with dimensions of 72' x 51'. It is organized around an east-west main hall, and there are two main entrances into the central lobby, as well as an exit from each end of the corridor. The west exit is attached to the corridor that connects to the Medical Building (Inv. # 3). There is a unique concrete porch guardrail around an open porch, three concrete steps leading to the porch, and rounded concrete canopies over the entrance doors.

Although much larger than the Administration Building, the Education Building (Inv. # 2) is also rectangular. It is a one story "I" shaped building situated at the eastern edge of the campus. Each end of the building widens to about 72'. There are three main entrances, including one at each end of the central interior corridor, and a third one in the center of the east façade, which abuts the perimeter sidewalk. Along the roof line, at entrance ways and, to a lesser extent, around window openings are geometric patterned friezes formed from reversing triangles, which creates a chevron appearance. There is also a continuous water table formed in the concrete façade. According to Chris Engel, an architect with Goodwyn, Mills & Cawood who surveyed the complex in 2004, the Education Building's "formwork is extraordinary, with careful attention to detail all around the building. It is quite difficult to locate any mis-alignments [sic] in the formed details of the building façade. In addition, a water table consistently meets [the] entrance stoops logically and intentionally."¹ Original multi-paned steel windows remain throughout, and there is a concrete foundation.

¹ Engel, Chris. "Historic Structures Assessment for Slossfield Historic Building Complex," 2004.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 2

Name of Property: Slossfield Community Center
County and State: Jefferson County, Alabama

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In 1937, construction began on the Medical and Recreation buildings (Inv. #s 3,4) and they were completed about one and one half years later. The Medical Building (Inv. # 3), consisting of one story with a full basement, is a "T" shaped building. Its 104' x 144' dimension is organized around two intersecting central corridors. There are three main entrances located in the center of the north, south, and west wings, while the east wing attaches to an enclosed corridor, built c. 1960s, leading to the adjacent Administration Building. Like the Administration Building, the Medical Building includes Art Deco details that are more horizontal than those on the Education (Inv. # 2) or Recreation (Inv. # 4) buildings. It also has unique multi-paned windows that are rounded around each corner, and there is "triple bullnose" detailing that wraps the entire façade near the roof line. The interior is organized around intersecting corridors with a large public space in the center. It also retains its original mosaic tile floors.²

The 1937 – 1939 Recreation Building (Inv. # 4) was the last building in the complex to be completed. It is rectangular and, with dimensions of 114' x 86', it is the largest building on the campus, due to the inclusion of an interior gymnasium/auditorium. This oversized space has an approximately 25' ceiling height, which is masked by a single story perimeter skirt. Its geometric details are very similar to those on the Education Building except they are "oversized," in an "attempt to minimize the scale of this structure relative to the others." In addition, these details are located only on key entry and public areas, with "simplicity of detail" across the large masses of the building.³ Although the original wood gymnasium floor is essentially gone, the raised wood performance stage remains intact.

The Slossfield Community Center remains exceptionally intact with no significant alterations. Although it has been vacant since the 1980s and has suffered some minor deterioration, a 2004 Historic Buildings Survey concluded that the well-built concrete structures are quite sound. Plans are to completely renovate the campus for multiple community uses.

Archaeological Component

Although there has been no systematic archaeological survey of the site, it is probable that there are sub-surface remains.

² Ibid., p. 12.

³ Ibid.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Name of Property: Slossfield Community Center
County and State: Jefferson County, Alabama

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Inventory

1. Administration Building. 1901 25th Court North. (1936- 1937; c. 1960s).
One story, rectangular, Art Deco style, cast-in-place concrete building with a flat roof and a cantilevered roof slab. There are recessed wings that flank the central portion of the building. This building has a unique concrete porch guardrail, open porch with three concrete steps, and rounded concrete canopies over the entrance doors. There are also multi-paned steel windows and a concrete foundation.
2. Education Building. 1901 25th Court North. (1936 - 1937).
One story, Art Deco style, "I" shaped, cast-in-place concrete building with a flat roof. Along the roof line, and at entrances, there are highly stylized geometric patterned friezes formed with reversing triangles that create a chevron appearance. There are three main entrances, including the east (main) entrance, which is recessed into a slightly projecting squared entrance bay in the middle of the façade. There are also multi-paned steel windows throughout, a continuous water table, and a concrete foundation.
3. Medical Building. 1901 25th Court North. (1937 - 1939; c. 1960s).
One story, with full basement, Art Deco style, "T" shaped, cast-in-place concrete building with a flat roof. There are three main entrances in the central raised bay, one each for the north, south, and west wings. The east wing attaches to the adjacent Administration Building (Inv. # 4) by way of a concrete block corridor that was constructed c. 1960s. There are unique rounded corner windows, horizontal "triple bullnose" detailing that wraps the building at the roof line, multi-paned steel windows, and a concrete foundation. Three exterior concrete steps with a concrete cheek wall lead onto a concrete landing.
4. Recreation Building. 1901 25th Court North. (1937 - 1939).
One story, rectangular, Art Deco style, cast-in-place concrete building with a flat roof. This building includes an interior gymnasium/ auditorium with 25' walls, so that this portion of the building is higher than the remaining one story portion; its height is masked by a one story perimeter skirt. The geometric details are very similar to those on the Education Building (Inv. # 1), but they are "oversized" on the entrances and somewhat smaller and simpler along the rest of the roof line. There are also multi-paned steel windows, framed by a concrete beltcourse, and a concrete foundation.

This is the largest building in the complex.

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Section 8 Page 4

Name of Property: Slossfield Community Center
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Statement of Significance

Community Planning and Development

The Slossfield Community Center Historic District is significant under Criterion A, Community Planning and Development, as a physical exhibition of a state-of-the-art, award-winning, planned community center for African Americans in Birmingham, Alabama built from 1936 to 1939. The project was initiated by the African American workers at the American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO), at that time the largest producer of cast iron in the country, who began its fundraising, and petitioned their employer to participate. The company, which had been pioneered by John Eagan, an industrialist who was determined to integrate the Christian Golden Rule into his company, agreed to match the workers' funds. Workers and company then applied to the federal government's New Deal programs for additional assistance. As a result, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the National Youth Administration (NYA) provided the labor. The City of Birmingham provided engineering services, built the streets, sewers, and infrastructure, and prominent architect, E. B. Van Keuren, designed the buildings.

In 1940, the project, which included Administration, Education, Medical and Recreation buildings, won the prestigious National Harvester Award as the best community center of its kind for African Americans in the country. It was hailed nationally, and throughout the South, as a model for addressing the educational, cultural, recreational, and medical needs of working class African Americans who, at that time, were systematically shut out of most quality services. This center, staffed completely by African Americans but supervised by white Jefferson County staff, was viewed by many as a way of reducing the rate of disease (particularly venereal disease and tuberculosis) and poverty through education and clinical service, and as a way to teach blacks social skills considered by many as "appropriate."

It remained in use as a community center until 1954.

Ethnic Heritage

The Slossfield Community Center Historic District is significant under Criterion A, Ethnic Heritage, for its documentation of a community center complex (1936 - 1939) built partially by, and exclusively for, Jefferson County, Alabama's underserved African American population. The center, including administrative, educational, medical, and recreational facilities, was initiated by African American workers of the American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO) to address the many problems of blacks in Jefferson County. Upon completion, the community center employed an all black medical staff, teachers, and other professionals, although the medical clinic staff was supervised by a white Jefferson County doctor. Until c. 1949, the center bustled with a variety of quality medical, educational and social programs but, that year, many of them - including all of the medical clinics - closed. However, the center continued to offer some programs to the community until 1954, when it closed.

Architecture

The Slossfield Community Center Historic District is significant under Criterion C, Architecture, for its outstanding 1936 -1939 Art Deco style buildings designed by prominent Birmingham architect, E. B. Van Keuren. The buildings are grand and impressive, with well designed Art Deco style friezes on each building, and are integrated into a campus setting by sidewalks and landscaping. Together, the four buildings are tangible representations of a phase of the work of Van Keuren, who designed many prominent buildings in Birmingham including churches, residences, and schools.

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Name of Property: Slossfield Community Center
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Historical Narrative

The Slossfield Community Center was conceived and developed in accordance with the Christian vision and ideals of a benevolent industrialist, John J. Eagan. Eagan was born in 1870 in Griffin, Georgia and, though he and his widowed mother initially were relatively poor, he inherited a fortune from his uncle. In 1905, the American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO) was incorporated with John Eagan as its president, a post he held until his death on March 30, 1924.⁴ The plant covered 36 acres on a 250-acre site in north Birmingham that was home to a number of industrial plants and facilities and working class neighborhoods.⁵ By the 1920s, ACIPCO was the largest "exclusive" manufacturer of cast iron culvert pipe in the world.⁶

A devout Christian, Eagan was convinced that capitalism and social justice could coexist in the United States, and, as a result, he instituted ground-breaking programs at ACIPCO to insure pension programs, insurance, and other benefits for all workers – black and white. Even more cutting edge were his profit sharing programs, which allowed all workers to participate in ownership of the company.⁷

Eagan's commitment to this Christian ethic was made permanent upon his death. According to his will, the company would be obligated to continue these programs in perpetuity.⁸ Under the terms of a codicil to the will, all of the common stock which he held in the corporation was turned into a trust fund to be used in supplementing wages so that employees might have a living wage and educate their children. At the time of his death, there were 1,085 shares of common stock in the corporation. In addition, he stipulated that a pension fund be made available in amounts corresponding to the worker's length of service, and that employees be able to purchase preferred stock on advantageous terms.⁹

After Eagan's death, however, it was up to his widow, Susan Baum Young Eagan, to see the same business vision he had seen. Because the company was incorporated in the state of Georgia, she had the legal option of ending her husband's enlightened programs, selling the company, and living the life of a rich widow. According to biographers and newspaper accounts, she never considered taking that option but, instead, instituted her husband's philosophy and programs.¹⁰

Four years after his death, the Montgomery Advertiser published an insightful article about Eagan's legacy called "Employes [sic] of Great Industrial Plan Have Voice in Management and Share in Company's Profits." It lauded Eagan (and by inference his wife) for his approach to business saying, "For the purpose of giving to each employe [sic] and official complete data on carrying out the Eagan plan of employes' ownership and industrial representation, a booklet was prepared embodying practically every feature of the activities of Acipco. The

4 Chaplin, Lois Trigg, "John J. Eagan: The Golden Rule for Life and Business," Birmingham, Al: American Cast Iron Pipe Company, 2003.

5 Montgomery Advertiser, "Employes of Great Industrial Plant Have Voice in Management and Share in Company's Profits," 3-15-28.

6 Ibid.

7 Trigg, p.

8 Ibid.

9 Montgomery Advertiser, "Employes [sic] of Great Industrial Plant Have Voice in Management and Share in Company's Benefits," 3-15-28.

10 Ibid.

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Name of Property: Slossfield Community Center
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introduction to this book carries the following paragraphs: 'By the terms of his will, John J. Eagan put this responsibility squarely up to us. Because he believed that industry should operate on a basis of mutual service to the producer and consumer of a commodity, he made the shop men and the managers joint owners of the plant.'¹¹

"Industrial leaders of vision and wisdom," the paper surmised in a rambling tribute to Eagan, "are beginning to understand not only that workers' participation in earning is a righteous thing, but that it is profitable in the long run in stabilizing industry in obtaining maximum production through making the condition of contentment more general and assuring to every workman, that he contributes service and devotion and efficiency, to that degree he will share in the profits of the organization to which he belongs. He was one of the newer instruments through whom the ancient unrest of the laborer and the misunderstanding of the capitalists are to be reconciled. The vision he saw can not be destroyed and that principle is infinitely larger than the flesh that houses it."¹²

"Putting humanity into business, or giving a heart to a corporation," the Advertiser wrote, "perhaps best tells the main objective in the life of John Joseph Eagan. His policy while living and the tenor of his will warrant the assertion that he did not consider the making of dollars the chief aim in life."¹³

Upon Eagan's death, then Vice President and Works Manager, W. D. Moore, became president of the company.¹⁴ Between 1928 and 1935, he funded and organized a variety of programs for ACIPCO workers including baseball teams, band activities, YMCAs, cultural programs, as well as provided a meeting place for Christian organizations, speakers, and activities. One program in particular, the Community Chest, began in 1928 for its white and black workers as a way to provide educational, medical, and social services to workers. While Southern custom and law prescribed that black and white services be separated, Moore – like Eagan before him – determined that, although separate, they would be equal.¹⁵

When the Community Chest began, ACIPCO was enormously prosperous and had won national and international prestige for its many scientific inventions and innovative industrial practices. By 1935, however, the nation's economy had tanked. Some black ACIPCO workers decided that, while the Community Chest and ACIPCO programs were superior to services most Jefferson County blacks had access to, they were aggrieved by the general desolate conditions around them. According to studies, the rate of tuberculosis, venereal disease, and complications from poor prenatal care was triple and quadruple the rate for the county's white community. Such harsh realities not only mortgaged the future for African Americans themselves, but it was widely understood amongst the city's industrialists that such conditions also threatened their own ability to have healthy work forces.¹⁶

¹¹ Montgomery Advertiser, 3-15-28.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. Moore was an engineer who had invented the Mono-Cat (Sand Spur) centrifugal method of making pipe, which was attributed with having propelled ACIPCO into its rank as the number one producer of cast iron pipe in the world.

¹⁵ ACIPCO News,

¹⁶ Ibid.

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Name of Property: Slossfield Community Center
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In 1935, concerned ACIPCO black workers approached W. D. Moore with a proposal to fund a community center for the county's African American population. Moore liked the idea and agreed to the match any funds the workers raised with company money. At the same time, they approached the federal government's innovative New Deal programs to build the facility. The government agreed. 17

At the same time, the City of Birmingham agreed to officially sponsor the project, pay the architect's design and construction supervisor fees, provide its 200' by 400' site and all necessary engineering, street, and sewer work for the project. Street work included grading, slagging, and finishing six miles of streets (some 38 blocks) and filling low areas with surplus dirt, and the sewer work including laying 2500 feet of 7' in diameter concrete storm sewers. With money, labor, and infrastructure in hand, the company approached architect E. B. Van Keuren to design the buildings.¹⁸ As Art Deco was popular and somewhat *chic* during the 1930s and 1940s, he chose to build sturdy, concrete buildings with stylish Art Deco details.

Upon completion, the campus would include an Administration Building, Education Building, Medical Building, and Recreation Building. The entire complex would be owned debt free by the City of Birmingham and the school would be a part of the city's school system. All recreation, athletics, manual training, and domestic science were organized under the city's Park and Recreation Board and the Works Progress Administration and National Youth Administration Projects.¹⁹

Other important contributors to the project were the Julius Rosenwald Fund, which contributed \$20,000 for the training of personnel and the purchase of equipment for the Medical Center, the State of Alabama Health Department, U. S. Public Health Department, the National Children's Bureau of the Labor Department, the Jefferson County Public Schools, and the Jefferson County Health Department, specifically including the Division of Child Hygiene and Public Health Nursing.²⁰

According to an unpublished history of the Slossfield Community Center by Mary R. McCarl, one time president of the Jefferson County Medical Society (the only county medical society open to black physicians at that time), W. D. Moore was ultimately responsible for seeing the project through. The three primary objectives of the Center, she wrote, were: "1) "to provide a first class athletic field in one of the industrial areas of Birmingham to be used exclusively by Negroes. 2) To develop a definite method or plan of treatment for the numerous blighted areas of the Birmingham District, most of which are occupied by Negroes who constitute a large percentage of the low income group of the city. 3) to develop a model community center in one of these typical blighted areas with suitable facilities and equipment to carry on a constructive program among Negroes in the general fields of education, recreation and health, all of which are considered essential to an improvement of the living standards and physical condition of these people."²¹

17 McCarl.

18 Ibid.

19 Letter to Dr. Martha M. Eliot, U. S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau probably from W. D. Moore, May 5, 1939.

20 Mary McCarl, "Doctor Tom Boulware and the Slossfield Center: Training Black Physicians in Obstetrics in a Segregated Society, Birmingham, Alabama, 1941-1948," p. 4.

21 McCarl, p. 1.

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Section 8 Page 8

Name of Property: Slossfield Community Center
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An article in the November 1937 edition of ACIPCO News concurred, saying, "The purpose of the training center is to provide educational, medical, and recreational facilities for the Negro youths in this community. It is the first institution of its kind in the State, and one of the first in the nation."²²

Not only was it to be the first, but its services were desperately needed to address the acute medical and social problems of blacks in and around the Slossfield neighborhood. A 1936 study by the Jefferson County Health Department revealed that twenty-two of the City of Birmingham's fifty-two census tracts were "blighted" and, of these, the "Sloss-Field" neighborhood was the worst. People lived there with no storm sewers or drainage systems, no public water, and no indoor plumbing or running water.²³

That same year, however, work began on the Administration Building (Inv. # 1) and, soon afterwards, the Education Building (Inv. # 2) broke ground. The Administration Building was designed as the smallest building and was fitted entirely with office spaces, although several medical clinics operated there until the Medical Building could be finished. Clinics included afternoon medical services for children, maternity classes, as well as instruction in hygiene and cleanliness. ²⁴

The Education Building consisted mainly of large open classrooms, with plenty of sunlight, where a multitude of classes were to be taught, including domestic arts for girls, technical classes for boys, and basic reading, writing, and arithmetic for everyone. Classes were available both day and night.²⁵

In November 1937, opening ceremonies celebrated the formal opening of the Center's first two buildings. According to the ACIPCO newsletter, "The joyful crowd which gathered to witness the opening found its way through every room of the building while the Acipco Brass Band was playing several numbers." Speakers noted that daytime classes included "three kindergarten classes, one class in home-making, consisting of sewing, cooking, laundering; and N. Y. A. and W. P. A. classes doing regular academic work with adults. In addition, a whole range of sports and cultural activities was planned including band, boxing, wrestling, basketball, community sings, outdoor games, and 'quiet in-door games'. The Night School including "one W. P. A. class doing regular academic work, one class in home-making, one class in domestic service, two classes in sewing, and one class in shop mathematics and blue print reading."²⁶

By June 1938, construction was about half complete on the Medical (Inv. #) and Recreation (Inv. # 4) Buildings. Unfortunately, by the time they were completed in 1939, the Jefferson County Health Department had published a new study based on a survey of health conditions and posted more dismal findings for Slossfield and other African American neighborhoods. "Negro maternal and neonatal mortality rates," it said, "have continued high for the County and particularly high for the Slossfield area." In 1938, it revealed, there had been 725 live births, 43

²² ACIPCO News, 1936.

²² ACIPCO News, November 1937, p. 13.

²³ Information located at the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Lister Hill Medical Library.

²⁴ *Ibid*, June 1938.

²⁵ ACIPCO News, 1936.

²⁶ ACIPCO News, November 1937.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Name of Property: Slossfield Community Center
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stillbirths, and 44 neonatal deaths in the Slossfield area, and in the first eight months of 1939, there were 517 live births and 24 stillbirths, and 22 neonatal deaths. Moreover, 14 Negro women had died during childbirth during the same period of time.²⁷

The Slossfield Medical Clinic, the report concluded, should be sufficient to service some 65% - 70% of the County's Negro maternity patients totaling about 500 per year. To accomplish that, the Clinic was going to need one part-time white obstetrician at \$25 per month, one white part-time pediatrician as needed at \$5 per case, one Negro full time "junior consultant" at \$3,000 per year, 6-10 local black physicians part time at \$10 per case or a maximum of 40 per month, one Negro nurse full time for \$1,500 per year, two black staff delivery nurses full time at \$920 per year, and one black night clerk full time for \$900 per year.²⁸

By July 1939, the Medical Building (Inv. # 3) and Recreation Building (Inv. # 4) were complete. At that point, the Center's medical services moved out of their temporary quarters in the Administration Building and into the new Medical Building. The new building included a maternity clinic, tuberculosis clinic complete with X-ray equipment, venereal clinic (which was the first of its kind in the South), and a dental care program.²⁹

The Recreation Building (Inv. # 4) included a combination auditorium-gymnasium, social hall, kitchen and conference rooms, most of which remains intact. The Recreation Building was, by far, the largest of the four buildings. It was fitted with a first class gymnasium, which also served as an auditorium for staging productions and musicals, many with a Christian theme.³⁰ Both the Education and Recreation facilities were used exclusively by the National Youth Administration and supervised entirely by African Americans. According to a 1940 article in Alabama Social Welfare magazine, the recreational programs, in particular, were responsible for lowering the county's juvenile delinquency rates in "some areas as much as seventy-six percent."³¹

The medical facilities were especially noteworthy in the attempt – however racially biased and self serving – to improve the health and quality of life of the Birmingham District's poor black citizens. Doctors and nurses were directed by Dr. Walter Maddux, an African American physician, who was under the supervision of white doctors at the Jefferson County Health Department. There was no charge to patients, who had to be low income, "underprivileged" black citizens. The plan called for the medical center to develop as an educational center for the "Negro doctors and nurses in Alabama, and other Southern states, in order that they might study the type of work being done and better fit themselves to do a similar work in the localities where they are serving."³²

Throughout the next several years, the Center continued to add numerous programs and services. In the fall of 1939, a wood working shop opened for boys in the Education Building, where young black men could "equip

27 "A Proposal to Provide Medical, Nursing, and Hospital Care for Maternity Patients and Children at Slossfield Health Center for Negroes in Jefferson County, Alabama," 1939.

28 Ibid.

29 Acipco News, July 1939.

30 Ibid., October 1942, p. 14.

31 Alabama Social Welfare, September 1940.

32 Ibid, p. 5.

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themselves with knowledge necessary to find a place in life, where they may become self-supporting." Moreover, part time employment was offered to students through the National Youth Administration, by which county youths from 18 to 25 could get 60 hours of practical experience. A Boys Club also opened in April that year to "provide a bridge over which Negro youths might travel to higher and more noble positions in the social, economic and intellectual world . . . and working cooperatively with all mankind to assure that abundant life to which all people have a common right," according to the ACIPCO News.³³

By January 1940, the Center included an Arts and Crafts program to teach students how to make useful articles from materials that "might be considered of no value." Other, more specific, programs included book binding, spatter printing, methods of simple weaving, mask making, bone carving and designing. By then, there was also a Boys Club, Progressive Art Club, and frequent Bible classes.³⁴

Later that year, the Slossfield Community Center won the coveted International Harvester Company award as the best facility of its kind in the country. Its progressive programming and social ideals, according to the award, addressed both the particular problems of blacks in the segregated South, but at the same time, answered the problem of industrialists who were losing their workers to chronic medical and social malaise.³⁵

A headline in The Birmingham News headline read, "Slossfield Center Given High Honor." "Birmingham's Slossfield Community Center has done more for its residents," the article read, "than any other Negro community in America during the last year and will receive a \$1000 International motor truck as a reward." The article highlighted the center's medical and educational programs such as maternal care, child health, tuberculosis, venereal disease, dentistry, gynecology, minor surgery and general medicine. Furthermore, it was the "unanimous choice" of the judges who had to choose from 86 entries including 33 community centers, 33 schools, 8 agricultural projects, 6 churches, and 6 health centers. ³⁶

A few months after the center won its award, it opened the Ministerial School of Religion under the auspices of ACIPCO and Miles College, an African American school. Subjects included church organization, sermon preparation, pastoral duties, organization and development of church auxiliaries, Sunday School work, Bible study "with explanations," English and "lay activities."³⁷

By then, Slossfield boasted a fully staffed and stocked library and a nursery school program. The June 1942 issue of ACIPCO News reported that it had 2,425 books on its shelves, an adult membership roll of 709, and a juvenile membership of 1,023. The Center was also in the process of adding monthly adult literacy and study clubs and a juvenile reading club. The "typically modern" facility included books and periodicals on religion, philosophy, ethics, sociology, government, philology, natural science, physics, useful arts, health, agriculture, juvenile and adult fiction, clothing, literature, poetry, essays and history. Reference books were also available.³⁸

33 Ibid., April 1939.

34 Ibid., January 1940.

35 Birmingham News, July 1940.

36 Ibid.

37 ACIPCO News, June 1942, p. 16.

38 Ibid.

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The Nursery School – 25 years before President Lyndon Johnson’s federally-funded Head Start Program – sought to “provide the child with necessities that the home cannot reach or afford. Children, according to the ACIPCO News, were “trained to learn by doing . . . which is the first step in education. Only children of low-income families whose parents are on relief are eligible. The child’s day, it continued, was divided between “routine” and “free activity.” It defined routine activity as “those in which the child is learning personal care; how to wash and dress himself and how to satisfy adequately the bodily needs of eating, sleeping and elimination. In free play the child is developing general abilities and interests. In the one, he learns self-control and in the other, self-expression.”³⁹

This remarkably full range of social progressive programming flourished until 1948 or 1949. According to Mary McCarl’s study, moreover, ACIPCO employees continued to be its principal source of financial support. The Alabama Social Welfare magazine stated even more emphatically in 1940 that “careful planning, enthusiastic participation and wise administering of funds by Negroes is the secret of this venture’s success.”⁴⁰

But, by 1949, the medical clinic had closed and its programs taken over by the new Holy Family Hospital built for blacks in Ensley. Some educational, social, and recreational programs remained operational until 1954 when the center finally closed. From the 1960s to the 1980s the center sporadically offered community services.⁴¹

A 1989 article in The Birmingham News about the history of the center noted that “the long idle” complex had become “nothing but tall weeds in what was once a well-landscaped courtyard. . . . All is desolation in what was 50 years ago the most hopeful community center for the poorest of the black neighborhoods in Birmingham.”⁴² Current plans, however, are to completely revitalize the campus and its facilities to service African Americans and whites in the surrounding neighborhoods.

³⁹ Ibid., October, 1942, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Alabama Social Welfare, September 1940.

⁴¹ Birmingham News, 6-19-89.

⁴² Ibid.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Slossfield Community Center is shown on the accompanying map entitled "Slossfield Community Center," 2005.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the Slossfield Community Center has been drawn to include every building that was constructed as part of the campus. There are not now, nor were there ever, any non-contributing buildings.

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Photographs

1. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of campus facing NW
Pamela King; 2005
2. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of Education Building (Inv. # 2)
Facing NW
Pamela King; 2005
3. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of Recreation Building (Inv. # 4)
Facing SE
Pamela King; 2005
4. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of Medical Building (Inv. # 3)
Facing SW
Pamela King; 2005
5. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of Administration Building (Inv. # 1)
Facing NE
Pamela King; 2005
6. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of interior of Recreation Building (Inv. # 4)
Facing NW
Pamela King; 2006

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7. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of interior of Recreation Building (Inv. # 4)
Facing NW
Pamela King; 2006

8. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of classroom in the Education Building (Inv. # 2)
Facing NW
Pamela King; 2006

9. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of frieze on facade of the Recreation Building (Inv. # 4)
Facing NW
Pamela King; 2006

10. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of details on facade of the Education Building (Inv. # 2)
Facing S
Pamela King; 2006

11. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of facade of the Administration Building (Inv. # 1)
Facing NW
Pamela King; 2006

12. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of facade of the Administration Building (Inv. # 1)
Facing NW
Pamela King; 2006

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13. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of south end of the Medical Building (Inv. # 3)
Facing NW
Pamela King; 2006
14. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View to an examination room in the Medical Building (Inv. # 3)
Facing SE
Pamela King; 2006
15. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of entrance to the Recreation Building (Inv. # 4)
Facing SE
Pamela King; 2006
16. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View inside a classroom in the Education Building (Inv. # 2)
Facing N
Pamela King; 2006
17. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View along interior hall in the Education Building (Inv. # 2)
Facing N
Pamela King; 2006
18. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View past the Administration Building (Inv. # 1) to the Education Building (Inv. # 2)
Facing NE
Pamela King; 2006

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19. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View past the Administration Building (Inv. # 1) to the Recreation Building (Inv. # 4)
Facing NE
Pamela King; 2006

20. Slossfield Community Center
1901 25th Court North
Birmingham, AL (Jefferson Co.) 35204
View of the projecting facade of the Administration Building (Inv. # 1)
Facing NW
Pamela King; 2006

Drawn to Scale 1" = 200'

25th Court North

↑ NORTH

2

sidewalk

sidewalk

grassed yard

4

4th Avenue North

