

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/School

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/School

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH-EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Italian Renaissance

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Blanche Kelso Bruce Elementary School is a red brick former public school building located in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of northwest Washington, D.C at the southeast corner of Sherman Avenue and Kenyon Street, NW. The school consists of three parts with the original 1898 two-story, raised basement red brick building occupying the central block, a 1927 classroom wing connected to it on the west, and a recently constructed (2013) gymnasium abutting the original block on the east. The 1898 school, designed by private architect William M. Poindexter, is an Italian Renaissance-style structure with stone and pressed metal trim accenting the red brick walls. The eight-classroom interior followed the city's conventional elementary school model, with four classrooms on each floor arranged around a central corridor.

The 1927 addition is a sizeable, three-story, red-brick, gable-roofed wing designed in a Colonial Revival style and connected to the original building by a two-story connector hyphen. This addition was designed by municipal architect Albert L. Harris and is reflective of Harris' designs from that period for the city's extensible schools. It was intended at that time, but never executed, that a future Colonial Revival-style addition in keeping with the 1927 wing would replace the 1898 school building.

The gym, completed in the summer of 2013, is a boxy, two-story structure clad with light red brick on the front, featuring a bank of windows at the upper level, and covered by a flat roof. A large roll-up door opens into a parking area that connects to the surface parking at the rear. The wing is set back from the original block on the façade and is architecturally unremarkable and stylistically non-descript. At the rear, the addition projects beyond the plane of the original building block which it abuts.

The school is set upon a slight berm above the sidewalk level with elevations along both Sherman and Kenyon Streets. A grassy lawn is found along the north front and east side of the building, while the rear provides parking. A blacktop area that used to occupy the east side of the school building is now covered by the gymnasium wing.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Narrative Description

Exterior Description:

The Bruce School today comprises three parts: the original 1898 school at the center, a 1927 classroom wing connected to this main block on the west, and a 2013 gymnasium connected to it on the east. The original block faces north to Kenyon Street, while the 1927 wing has elevations extending along both Kenyon Street and Sherman Avenue on the north and west sides. The 1927 addition is clearly differentiated from the original block both stylistically and through its use of a lighter colored brick. The 2013 gym is similarly set apart physically and architecturally from the main block. It is a box-like structure, set back from the façade with no distinguishing architectural features.

The main block of the Bruce School, designed in a Renaissance Revival style, is a two-story, three-part structure set upon a raised basement. It features brick walls laid in 7-course American bond, and is covered with a low hipped roof, obscured by a brick parapet above and behind the building's projecting metal cornice. The building is defined by its three-part façade with slightly projecting pedimented pavilion on-center, its wood and metal trim, and its Classical detailing such as Ionic entrance columns, Greek frieze board with metopes and triglyphs, and acroteria at the roof. All of the windows are throughout the school are wood replacements, but were made to match the originals in configuration and profile.

The north (front) elevation faces Kenyon Street and is divided into three parts consisting of the central pedimented pavilion and two flanking side wings. The central pavilion, projecting slightly from the side wings, constitutes the building's primary entrance. A wide opening with Scamozzi Ionic columns *in antis* framing the opening leads to a pair of double replacement doors set deep behind the wall of the façade. The two terra cotta columns support a stone frieze inscribed with "BRUCE SCHOOL" in a rectangular recessed panel on the frieze. This entry is surmounted by three pairs of narrow casement windows located above the frieze and separated from it by a broad wood cornice. This entire entry including the opening and windows above is, in turn, framed by Giant order brick pilasters set atop raised brick bases, and capped by a Greek Doric cornice with a frieze of alternating metopes and triglyphs capped by a projecting cornice. The triglyphs are of pressed metal and fully articulated with fluting, dentils and mutules, while the metopes (more implied than actual) are simply of brick forming the rear wall of the frieze. The projecting cornice capping this central entry surround features a flag pole on center.

To either side of this central entry, yet still within the central pavilion, are single windows at the basement and first floor levels, both covered with security grates. The upper floor of the central projecting pavilion has five, single windows with three on-center and two to either side. The entire pavilion is capped by a Doric pediment with a metope and triglyph frieze like that above the entry door, but larger, and a projecting metal cornice and raking cornice. Acroteria sit atop a parapet wall at the corners of the pediment.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

The wings of the main block are two bays wide and articulated by two equally spaced single windows set deeply into the brick walls and featuring brick surrounds. These 1/1 wood Queen Anne-style sash with a large central panes and narrow side and corner lights are replacements, but match the historic ones. A recessed brick panel breaks the wall surface between the upper-level windows and the cornice. The entire composition is tied together horizontally by a molded brick water table, pressed metal cornice with mutules, and pressed metal coping at the parapet. Terra cotta acroteria culminate at the corners of the parapet roof above the building's cornice line.

The south (rear) elevation of the main block faces south to the school parking lot, and like the front elevation, is divided into three parts consisting of a central projecting pavilion of three bays flanked on either side by a two-bay wings. Here, however, the architectural articulation is significantly reduced. The central pavilion has its entry on-center with a simple double-wide opening framed by moulded brick trim. Three casement windows surmount the opening and are separated from it by a recessed brick panel. The entry opening and windows are framed by double-height brick pilasters capped by a projecting cornice. Narrow casement windows are located to either side of this entry at the first floor level, while five bays of single openings with casements extend across the upper level. Three of these are clustered over the central entry, while the flanking ones are aligned over the entry bay. This central pavilion is capped by a pediment, set atop a brick parapet which is itself set upon a broad and projecting cornice. The cornice is separated from the upper floor windows by a recessed brick panel. Like on the façade, acroteria are located at the corners of the parapet wall of the central pavilion.

The side wings have two bays of single Queen Anne-style replacement sash windows with pressed brick or terracotta hood molds and sills. A recessed brick panel separates the upper floor windows from the projecting cornice, while the cornice is then capped by a brick parapet wall.

The entire red brick composition is tied together horizontally by a brick water table, pressed metal cornice, and pressed metal coping at the parapet with pressed metal acroteria at each corner.

The east and west elevations, historically exposed and facing neighboring rowhouses on the east and Sherman Avenue on the west were similarly articulated. They were divided into three parts consisting of a two-bay-wide central projecting pavilion and two-bay-wide side wings. Each bay was articulated by single windows with pressed brick or terracotta surround. Both elevations were capped by a projecting cornice, surmounted by a brick parapet wall with pressed metal acroteria at each corner.

As it is today, the two-story 1927 addition abuts the west side wall of the main block of the school, obscuring its original west side elevation, save for the front bay of windows. The addition is three-story structure that is of equal height to the two-story main block (upon a raised basement), and is connected to this original block by a hyphen, recessed from the main block. This red brick wing, built in 1927, was designed in a Colonial Revival style distinct from Italian Renaissance-style of the main block.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

The north (front) and south (rear) elevations of the addition are divided into two parts including a projecting gable-roofed pavilion and a four-bay-long wing, recessed slightly from the pavilion. The gabled pavilions are located at the west end of the addition and are dominated by double-height blind arches spanning the second and third stories with superimposed tri-partite replacement windows within them. To either side of these tri-partite windows are single windows with 12/1 replacement sash. The double-height blind arches have brick surrounds with stone keystones and imposts. The pavilion terminates with an end gable with projecting cornice returns and raking cornice of wood. The base of the pavilion is separated from the upper levels by a brick stringcourse, and has three, single windows with 12/1 replacement sash. Bowed iron balconies supported by iron brackets project from the second floor center windows.

The four-bay-long wing connects the gable end to the hyphen that in turn connects to the original block of the building. It is defined by single 12/1 replacement windows on each floor and in each bay. All of the windows have brick lintels and stone sills. A projecting cornice with modillions caps the wing.

The west elevation of the 1927 wing faces Sherman Avenue and features a secondary entrance to the school, on-center of the wall. This entry consists of a projecting one-story brick vestibule with a replacement door and sidelight recessed into it. A reeded limestone frame surrounds the entrance and encloses a blind round-arch above it, ornamented with a stone rosette *bas relief* in the tympanum of the arch. A long window bay with superimposed tri-partite windows fills the vertical bay above the entry vestibule and spans the second and third stories. The second story window opens onto a balcony that is the roof of the entry vestibule. The third story window has 12/12 replacement windows in both the central pane, with eight-light transom above. The side lights are 8/8 and the side transom lights are 4-fixed panes, also replacements. The balcony has an original wrought iron railing. On the first story, single 12/12 replacement windows are located to either side of the central entry bay (with narrow sidelights closest to the entry), while the second and third floors have no openings on the solid brick wall.

The entire addition is covered by a replacement, pressed tin intersecting gable roof.

Interior Description:

As originally constructed, the Bruce School is a standard 8-room school with four classrooms on the first and second floors. The principal entry opens directly into the original block of the school with stairs leading up to the first and second floors or down to the lower level. At the top of each run a central hall opens east and west into classrooms occupying the four corners of the building. The 1927 wing similar features a central corridor running east-west. The corridor divides the four classrooms on each level into two on the north side and two on the south side. Stairwells are found at the east and west end of each corridor. The eastern end of each corridor connects to the original structure through a hyphen.

The original classroom and corridor layout remains intact and much of the wooden door and window trim survives, though it is interrupted by dropped acoustical tile ceilings. All of the original stairs are intact.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

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 grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
EDUCATION

Period of Significance

1898-1928

Significant Dates

1898; 1927; 1928

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Poindexter, William M.
Harris, Albert L.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Bruce School was constructed in 1898 to provide a school for the growing African-American community north of Florida Avenue. The school was designed in the Italian Renaissance style by Washington architect William M. Poindexter. It is one of the earliest schools designed under the policy initiated in 1896-97 to engage private architects in the design of public school buildings. It is also among the first group of schools built to serve students in the new suburbs north of the original city boundary.

Bruce School is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C at the local level of significance under the Multiple Property Document: *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960*. The Bruce School is a purpose-built public school building; it is more than 50 years old; it is in its original location; it retains integrity; and it retains original fabric and its character-defining features. The building, designed by Washington architect William M. Poindexter is perfectly representative of the school building sub-type, "The Architects in Private Practice, 1897-1910." As described in the Multiple Property document, the city turned to private architects during this period to respond to public criticism over the design of the city's public schools and to thus improve the appearance of them. As a result, schools during this period were designed by a number of different architects and in a variety of styles, but primarily in the Renaissance, Italian Renaissance, Colonial Revival, Elizabethan Gothic, and Collegiate Gothic styles. They were built of brick in a variety of hues, from red to yellow and were trimmed in terra cotta and limestone. They also tended to be located farther back from the front of the building lot.

Bruce School merits designation under Criterion A for its associations with the city's segregated school system, particularly as an example of a segregated African-American school and as a cultural center of a largely African-American neighborhood. The property meets Criterion C as an outstanding example of a public school building designed by an architect in private practice at the end of the 19th century.

The period of significance for the property extends from 1898 when the school building was completed and opened to 1928 when the new wing of the school—built to accommodate a growing African American student body—was dedicated.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Bruce School is eligible for listing in the National Register with Architecture, Community Planning and Development and Education as its Areas of Significance. The school, designed in the Italian Renaissance style by Washington architect William M. Poindexter, is an excellent example of its style and offers exceptional architectural detail and craftsmanship. The 1927 wing, designed in the Colonial Revival style by Municipal architect Albert L. Harris, was designed to be the future western wing of a rebuilt Bruce School, a plan that was never executed.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

The extensible plan was a model devised by Municipal Architect Albert L. Harris in the mid-1920s to accommodate an ever-expanding student body. Harris designed several models that were to be implemented throughout the city as appropriate.

Resource History and Historic Context

The Bruce School was originally constructed in 1898 to serve the educational needs of the growing African-American community to the west and north of Howard University. Bruce School is one of the oldest surviving schools north of Florida Avenue—the original northern boundary of Washington City—that was constructed as part of the city’s “Colored” school system. As such, it not only documents the architectural development of Washington’s public school buildings, but is also a monument to the history of the growing African-American community north of Florida Avenue and the education of their children in Washington’s segregated school system. Many schools in the immediate vicinity of the Bruce School were originally built as “white” schools and later converted to “black” schools, while Bruce School was a purpose-built school for African American school children. As such, Bruce School was named after black educator and former U.S. Senator from Mississippi, and trustee of Howard University Blanche Kelso Bruce. Many of the other area schools—originally built for white students but later transferred into the city’s black school system—retained their original names that were named for U.S. Presidents or notable local white leaders.

In Washington’s segregated school system, black schools developed in 1807 under the sponsorship of private citizens and religious groups. The schools were quartered in churches and in other buildings that had been built for non-education purposes. The post-Civil War era was marked by the construction of a distinctive group of major school buildings, unlike anything that had been built previously in Washington. The Congressional provision for black students of 1862 was followed by additional legislation that provided for a fairer distribution of funds. The first public school house for black students was a frame structure built in 1865 at Second and C Street, S.E. This was followed by the construction of several substantial school buildings for black students, all within the city limits.

In the County of Washington, small one-room and two-room frame buildings were constructed along major thoroughfares that cut through the rural landscape. These schools served the many freedmen who were employed on small trucking and dairy farms who lived close to work. Typically, an acre or half-acre of land was sufficient for each school.

Against this backdrop, the Bruce School is particularly notable for its early date of construction with respect to its location outside the boundaries of the original City of Washington. The area north of Florida Avenue to the west of Howard University and the United States Soldiers’ Home was slowly developing into Washington, D.C.’s first suburbs. These included Mt. Pleasant (ca. 1860s), LeDroit Park (1873), Columbia Heights (1881-2), and Whitney Close (1886, now known as Park View). In addition to these subdivisions – originally populated by white families – there was a growing black population in the area north of Florida Avenue, predominantly between Georgia and Sherman Avenues. The growth in population quickly overtaxed rural Washington’s educational facilities necessitating the construction of new school buildings.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Among the first of the new school buildings constructed in the area was Monroe School, built in 1889 and named after President James Monroe. This was followed by Bruce School, constructed in 1889 one square north of the Monroe School and closer to Sherman Avenue. Other purpose-built school buildings in the Columbia Heights, Park View, Pleasant Plains, and Petworth area include Hubbard, built 1899-1900 (razed), Petworth, built 1902, Johnson, built 1895 (razed), Powell, built 1909 (razed), Park View (1916), and Raymond (1924). Other nearby purpose-built black school buildings of the period located north of Florida Avenue include Wilson Public School, built 1891, Thomas P. Morgan School, built 1902 (razed) and the Military Road School, built 1912.

The need for new school buildings was not isolated to Washington's developing suburbs. By 1894, a report of the board of school trustees to the District Commissioners identified both the need for new school buildings and the question of free text books as paramount. The question of school buildings was considered the more important as the schools both in the city and county were reported as being in a deplorably crowded condition, and in the lower grades there were over 150 half-day schools as a result. The need for new buildings impacted the black community particularly hard. According to the report, two-thirds of Washington's black children of school age attended school, predominantly at the half-day schools. In one section of the city with a large African-American population within a square mile there was no school building at all. Several other sections were reportedly slightly better off. With few black children advancing beyond the eighth grade and, even then only attending half-day schools, the school board recognized that the lack of adequate school buildings was critical.¹

By July 1897, the Superintendent of Schools decided that a new school was needed in the vicinity of Sherman Avenue, between Harvard (Irving) and Marshall (Kenyon) streets for the Columbia Heights area. In surveying the area, the available corner lots were considered unsuitable as the majority were either below or above the grade of the street necessitating a large expenditure to grade them property before a building could be erected. Due to this, the Superintendent preferred the lots on the south side of Kenyon Street which were on-grade. A water main already had been extended to Sherman Avenue allowing for an extension to Seventh (Georgia) Street without extra cost to the District. These favorable factors led the Commissioners to purchase the Kenyon property on July 27, 1897, at a cost of \$7,650. This left a sum sufficient for the extension of the sewer, approximately \$650, for a total of less than \$10,000, which permitted the erection of a \$30,000 school building, out of the \$40,000 appropriation.²

The school was one of a handful of schools being planned at this time. The eight-room Turner School located on the southeast corner of 24th and F Streets, NW, was being designed for white pupils of the fifth division; an eight-room building on sixth street between B and C streets northeast, adjoining the old Peabody annex, was being planned for white pupils of the third division, an eight-room building at Eckington was planned for white pupils of the sixth division,

¹ "New Buildings Needed: Washington's Public Schools Are Sadley Overcrowded." *The Washington Post*, Dec. 8, 1894, p. 7.

² "Purchase of a School Site." *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1897, p. 10.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

and the Lovejoy school at 12th and B streets northeast was being remodeled for black pupils of the tenth division. The decision to build schools in more remote locations rather than in more densely populated parts of the city was a result, in part, of the Congressional appropriation law that set a standard amount for school buildings without regard to the value of land, which was necessarily greater in the business and residential sections of the District. This frustrating situation was noted by the Commissioners who vowed to take it up with Congress during future appropriation requests.³

In accordance with the newly inaugurated policy of the District Commissioners to have the designs and plans of local public buildings made by architects of the city rather than executed by the Office of the Inspector of Buildings, the city hired private architect, William M. Poindexter. The change in policy was considered not only to improve school building design, but also to relieve the building inspector of a great deal of work that had consumed a good deal of time and also taken the employees away from their "legitimate duties; namely, to see that the building regulations [were] carried out." The new school was of the regulation eight-room size, but Poindexter had reportedly introduced a number of features which added to the building's convenience and improved the health conditions of the structure. By July 7, 1898, the Commissioners had also decided to name it the Bruce School in honor of the late ex-Senator Blanche K. Bruce, who had also been a member of the board of public school trustees. Construction of the building lasted into the fall of 1898.⁴

In early 1899, the District Commissioner purchased the land owned by Thomas J. Fisher & Co. adjacent to the Bruce School for 34 cents per square foot to provide a playground for the new school. The purchase was paid for out of the available balance left from the appropriations for the site and building.⁵

By the end of 1920, the Bruce School – along with most of the schools in the district's Tenth division – was suffering from a lack of classroom space. Forty-eight classes of the Tenth division had an enrollment in excess of the maximum of 40 pupils to a class. According to the report of the superintendent, the division was unusually crowded. There was a total enrollment of 4,749 pupils and a total of 104 classrooms. The school with the largest enrollment was Garrison, which also was using on portable schoolhouse. Bruce School was using two portable schoolhouses to ease its crowded conditions.⁶

Plans to expand the Bruce School began in 1925. It was part of a larger plan to construct eight new school buildings, with a total of 72 classrooms, to be completed by September 1, 1926, in time for opening of the next school year. To help rush completion of this ambitious building

³ "Will Soon Be Over: Little Ones Regretfully See the Coming End of Vacation, Schools Open in Three Weeks; Busy Secretary Falck Preparing for the Important Event; Additional Facilities." *The Evening Star*, Aug. 26, 1897, p. 1. "Real Estate Market: Architects Prepare Plans for New School-houses, Hampered by Law About Sites." *The Washington Post*, Aug. 29, 1897, p. 12.

⁴ "District Building Notes." *The Washington Post*, July 8, 1898, p. 10. "A New School Building." *The Evening Star*, July 9, 1898, Pt. 2, p. 13.

⁵ "A Bruce School Playground." *The Times*, May 5, 1899, p. 10.

⁶ "Classes Crowded in Tenth Division." *The Washington Post*, Dec. 14, 1920, p. 9.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

program assigned to Municipal Architect Albert L. Harris, nine architects and three engineers were appointed by the District Commissioners to assist Harris. Architect F. H. Brooke was assigned to assist with the eight-room addition to the Bruce School. However, by September 1926, plans for all the school buildings had been completed with the notable exception of the Bruce School—construction of which Congress made appropriation for in the 1926-1927 budget. Upon completion of the addition, it was officially dedicated on February 8, 1928. The date of the dedication exercises was intentionally chosen to coincide with “Negro History Week.”⁷

By December 1928, the Board of Education announced a new five-year building program with a recommended appropriation of \$5,750,000. The plan included the purchase of land for school sites and school playgrounds, and for the construction of buildings for elementary, junior and senior high schools. Bruce School was among the many schools identified in the plan. Even with the new addition completed just months before, the Board planned to purchase additional land adjoining Bruce and sought to erect an eight-room addition to replace the 1898 Poindexter building.⁸ This plan was never carried out.

The nearby Monroe School for white students continued to see a reduced school enrollment. An attempt in 1929 to redraw school boundaries to relieve overcrowding at nearby Park View School and sustain enrollment at Monroe School was met with stringent opposition. Fifty-seven Park View students went on strike refusing to attend Monroe. Among the causes of the diminishing enrollment and students’ refusal to attend Monroe was “the gradual encroachment of the colored population” on the Monroe School area. With a growing African-American population in part attracted to the area because of Bruce School, the ability to sustain Monroe School as a white elementary school became impractical. With the transfer of Monroe School from the white to the colored division in 1931, over-crowding at Bruce School was alleviated and the plan to replace the original 1898 school designed by Poindexter with another wing to the 1927 addition was aborted.⁹

Bruce School provided segregated education for neighborhood African Americans until the end of segregation in 1954 and continued to serve as a public elementary school until 1972 when a new Bruce-Monroe School, located on Georgia Avenue between Columbia Road and Irving Street, NW, was completed and opened. After its move to new quarters, the Bruce School building on Kenyon Street was used as school system administration offices and later housed a City-wide Learning Center. Since 2009, the building has housed the Cesar Chavez Bruce Prep Middle School, a public charter school.

⁷ “12 Named to Aid Harris with Plans for New Schools.” *The Washington Post*, Mar. 18, 1925, p. 2.; “Architect’s Report Urges Beautifying of School Grounds.” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 5, 1926, p. M4.; “Dedication Days Set for 3 Schools.” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, Oct. 29, 1927, p. 2.

⁸ “City’s Schools Get \$5,700,000 in 5-Year Plan.” *The Washington Post*, Dec. 20, 1928, p. 1.

⁹ “Park View School Rebels Fight on After Reverse.” *The Washington Post*, Oct. 3, 1929, p. 1.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Architects of the School Building

William M. Poindexter

William M. Poindexter was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1846. He served in the telegraphic corps of Confederate Army during the Civil War prior to his capture by the Union Army in 1865. Nothing is known of his education or training, but he arrived in Washington circa 1867 to work as a clerk and draftsman in the Office of the Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury. Working under A. B. Mullet, he designed several marine hospitals across the nation. In the Office of the Supervising Architect, he joined a group of men who would later become Washington's most preeminent architects in the late nineteenth century. Poindexter established his own practice in 1874, although he periodically partnered with prominent architects such as Joseph Hornblower and Paul Pelz. Most of Poindexter's work was residential and included enlarging President Grover Cleveland's house in Cleveland Park in 1887, wrapping a fanciful Victorian porch with a turret around the 1868 stone farmhouse known as Red Top for its red tile roof.

Poindexter also designed small-scale commercial buildings and several large institutional buildings including the Columbian College building at 15th and H Streets, NW (1883; demolished) and several buildings at the U.S. Soldiers Home. He was in charge of renovations and expansion of the Sherman Building, the original 1862 hospital on the Soldiers' Home grounds which had 1870s alterations and additions. Poindexter partnered with another architect, J. A. Henry Flemer to design the 1887 renovation and expansion, which included removal of the 1870s mansard roof, upper story additions, and the construction of a north wing. The enlarged building's appearance was transformed from a Second Empire style to a cohesive Richardson Romanesque style. Poindexter was also responsible for several institutional buildings in Virginia including the State Library in Richmond.

Poindexter was a founding member of the Washington Chapter of the AIA, serving as its first Vice President. He later served as President in 1889 and 1890 and also served on the national board of the AIA. Poindexter died suddenly on December 20, 1908.

Albert L. Harris¹⁰ – 1927 Addition

Albert L. Harris was born in Wales in 1869 and emigrated to America with his father Job Harris in 1873. He was in the Washington area by 1890 when he began attending the Arlington Academy. In 1900 he left without graduating in order to work for Henry Ives Cobb in Chicago for five years on residential buildings. In 1898 Harris moved to Baltimore where he worked for Wyatt & Nolting until 1900 when he relocated to Washington. He was employed by Hornblower & Marshall from 1900 until 1917, noting that he worked on the firm's two most important public commissions, the Baltimore Custom House (1908) and the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum (1901-1911) while in that office. While employed by Hornblower & Marshall Harris

¹⁰ The information on Albert Harris is gleaned from a biography of him as part of a collection of biographies on the city's municipal architects (Historic Preservation Office Files).

Blanche Kelso Bruce School

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

began receiving his formal education at George Washington University, earning a B.S. in architecture in 1912. The same year Harris was appointed assistant professor of architecture at the university; by 1915 he was a full professor, a part-time position he held until 1930. In 1924 he prepared a quadrangular plan for the university's campus and with Arthur B. Heaton also designed Stockton and Corcoran Halls.

From 1917 to 1920 Harris worked for the Navy's Bureau of Yards and Docks where he was principally employed writing specifications. He began working for the Municipal Architect's office in 1920 and was named Snowdon Ashford's successor the following year; as members of the Washington chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the two had served on a 1911 committee with Waddy B. Wood condemning bay windows as not being "in accord with the dignity of architecture which the Capital should maintain." In 1914 he served with the same men, as well as Glenn Brown, on the local AIA chapter's committee that first proposed licensing architects. Harris submitted the first application for architectural registration in the District and was the first to be registered on April 6, 1925.

Harris began his appointment as Municipal Architect in 1921. As was true with his predecessors, Washington's schools occupied a major part of the municipal architect's design output. Within a few months of his appointment, Harris signaled that Washington was to have "model buildings" for all of its schools with the design for the Rush School on the grounds of the Tubercular Hospital. In 1921 Harris brought back plans from several schools in New York "which may be incorporated into future school structures in the District." In 1925, at the beginning of a five-year building period for District schools, a joint congressional committee, critical of the architectural appearance of the District's schools led Harris to appoint nine consulting architects and three consulting engineers specifically to design new schools. The local architects he chose, both traditionalists and modernists, were all well-regarded as designers: Nathan Wyeth, Maurice F. Moore, Frederick H. Brooke, Louis Justement, Ward Brown, Waddy B. Wood, Robert F. Beresford, and the firm of Porter & Lockie. All were immediately assigned to make alterations to existing or design specific new schools, all in northwest for which substantial appropriations had already been made.

Shortly after these appointments, Harris accompanied superintendent of schools Frank W. Ballou and Ernest Greenwood, a member of the board of education, to study schools in many other cities to re-evaluate their plans and configurations; the location of gymnasiums and auditoria within them; and the viability of classrooms in basement levels. Features of the proposed revised plans for junior high schools included placing the principal's office next to entrances along with libraries; widening corridors; and, if glazed bricks were used for interior walls, to paint them light colors.

Another measure of Harris's inquiring mind, concern for good municipal design, and importance within the city government was his autumn trip in 1925 to Paris as the District's representative to the International Congress of Cities. His two-month tour of France and Italy was to study architecture, particularly municipal buildings. Thus Harris, and the District's governing institutions responded quickly to national and international movements in progressive reforms in school organization and design. Of the approximately thirty schools (including additions) that

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Harris either designed or supervised the designs of, his 1924 addition to Janney Elementary was praised as “decidedly the best as the frank expression of a modern school in a style suited for the Capital city.”

As with the majority of his school designs, Harris responded to suggestions made by the Commission of Fine Arts about the appropriateness of the Colonial Revival style for Washington’s neighborhood municipal buildings in his particularly fine firehouse at 13th and K Streets, NW. Engine 16 was monumental in scale befitting its architectural setting and the extent of its purview, its architectural details particularly well-proportioned.

The culmination of Harris’s career was his master plan for the Municipal Center at Judiciary Square that consolidated the city’s municipal functions in a large but well-ordered campus adjacent to the east end of the Federal Triangle. Harris planned two mega-structures flanking a central plaza perpendicular to Pennsylvania Avenue, this vista focused on George Hadfield’s 1818 courthouse. Their massiveness of their exteriors was controlled by central and corner pavilions while internal courtyards within the blocks provided ample light and air circulation. These blocks, as wells as Harris’s truncated pyramidal block on the west end of the campus, responded to local street patterns, the whole complex designed in imitation of the Federal Triangle.

During his tenure as Municipal Architect, Harris balanced fine-quality Colonial Revival buildings scaled and styled for Washington’s neighborhoods with appropriately urban-scaled ones for the city’s governing center adjacent to the heart of Washington’s monumental core.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

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"A Bruce School Playground," *The Times*, May 5, 1899, p. 10

"Architect's Report Urges Beautifying of School Grounds." *The Washington Post*, Sept. 5, 1926, p. M4.

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"Classes Crowded in Tenth Division," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 14, 1920, p. 9

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District Building Notes." *The Washington Post*, July 8, 1898, p. 10. "A New School Building," *The Evening Star*, July 9, 1898, Pt. 2, p. 13

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"Purchase of a School Site." *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1897, p. 10

"Real Estate Market: Architects Prepare Plans for New School-houses, Hampered by Law About Sites." *The Washington Post*, Aug. 29, 1897, p. 12

"12 Named to Aid Harris with Plans for New Schools." *The Wahington Post*, Mar. 18, 1925, p. 2.

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 # _____

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

_____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
_____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

_____ State Historic Preservation Office
_____ Other State agency
_____ Federal agency
_____ Local government
_____ University
_____ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than 1 acre (43,081 square feet)

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.929600 | Longitude: -77.025574 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Bruce School at 770 Kenyon Street occupies Lot 823 in Square 2891 in the District of Columbia.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Bruce School has occupied this lot since its original construction in 1898 and includes the school's 1927 addition (within the period of significance) along with its 2013 addition (outside of the period of significance).

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kent Boese/Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A
organization: Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A
street & number: 608 Rock Creek Church Road, NW
city or town: Washington, D.C. state: DC zip
code: 20010
e-mail: kent.boese@anc.dc.gov
telephone: 202 904-8111
date: May 2014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property: Bruce School

City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.

County: State:

Photographer: Kim Williams

Date Photographed: January 2015

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1) General view of 1898 building looking southeast at north elevation
1 of 18
- 2) General view looking west, showing north elevation of 1898 building and 1927 wing in distance.
2 of 18
- 3) View looking west showing north elevation of 1927 wing
3 of 18
- 4) View looking east showing west elevation of 1927 wing on Sherman Avenue
4 of 18
- 5) View looking east showing detail of entry pavilion on west elevation of 1927 wing
5 of 18
- 6) View looking south at north elevation of 1898 building
6 of 18
- 7) View looking skyward at pediment on north elevation of 1898 building
7 of 18
- 8) View looking east from alley at south and west elevations of 1898 building with 1927 wing in foreground
8 of 18
- 9) View looking northeast showing south elevation of 1898 building
9 of 18
- 10) View looking northwest showing south elevation of 1927 wing
10 of 18
- 11) General view looking northwest showing south elevations of 1898 building and 1927 wing
11 of 18
- 12) Detail of cornice and acroterion on south elevation of 1898 building
12 of 18

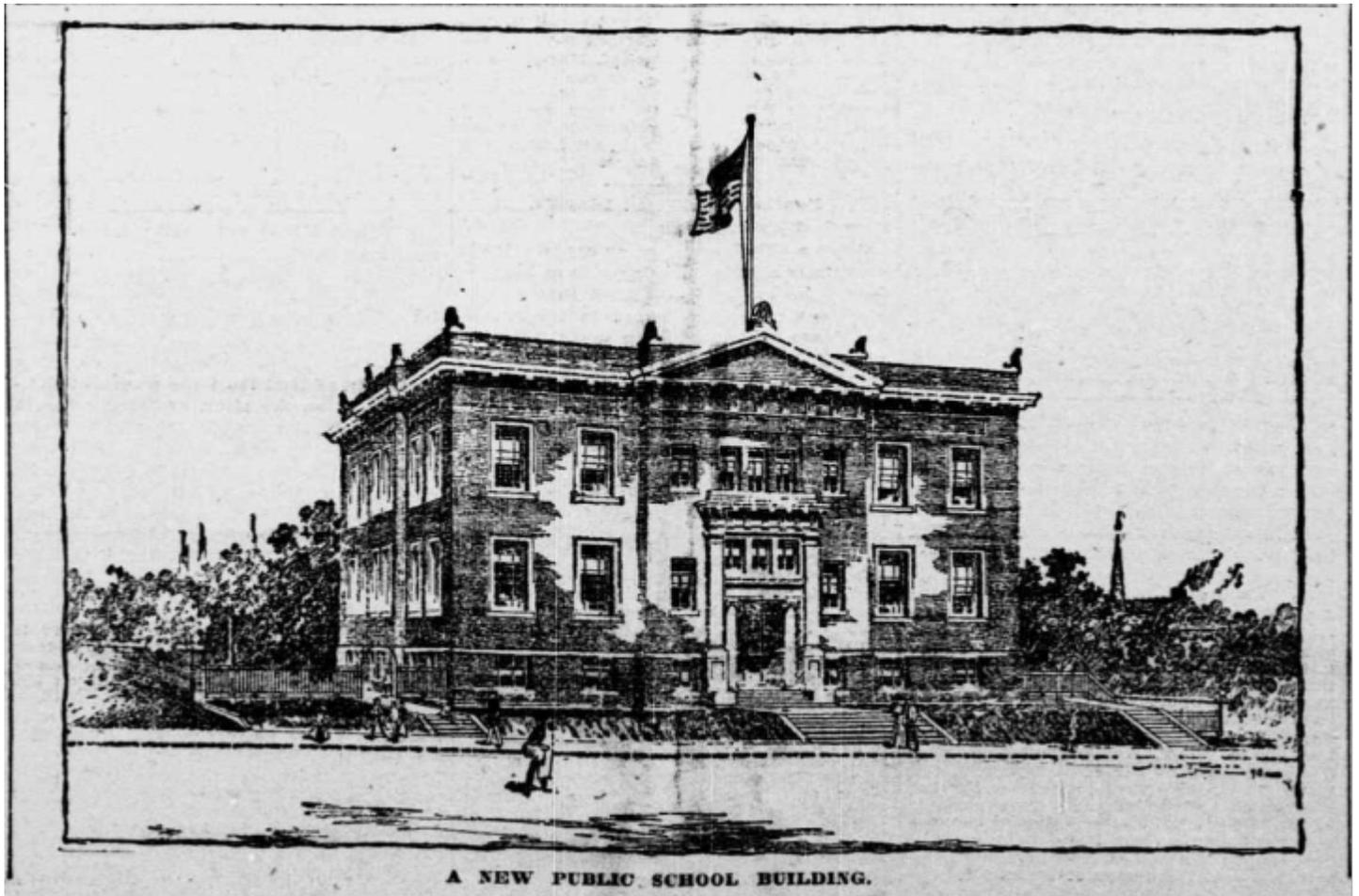
Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

- 13) Detail of front entrance on north elevation of 1898 building
13 of 18
- 14) Interior view of second floor hallway in 1898 building showing original door trim and wainscoting.
14 of 18
- 15) Interior view from third floor stair in 1927 wing looking through the tri-partite window to the west
15 of 18
- 16) Interior view of stair between 2nd and 3rd floor in 1927 wing
16 of 18
- 17) Interior view from second floor stair in 1927 wing looking through window to the west
17 of 18
- 18) Interior view looking from first floor of 1898 building to front entry door on north elevation
18 of 18

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State



Architectural Sketch of Bruce Elementary School
(From *The Evening Star*, July 9, 1898, Pt. 2, p. 13)

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State



Bruce School
FRONT ELEVATION.
SCALE 1/4" = 1 FT.

S.C.P.P.W. Architect Drawing No.
2-04-228

SPECTOR, D.C.

*Please see the drawing of the
reference is made in context
to the drawing of the
1898* W.M. POINDEXTER, ARCHITECT.
WASHINGTON, D.C.



REAR ELEVATION.
SCALE 1/4" = 1 FT.

S.C.P.P.W. Architect Drawing No.
2-04-228

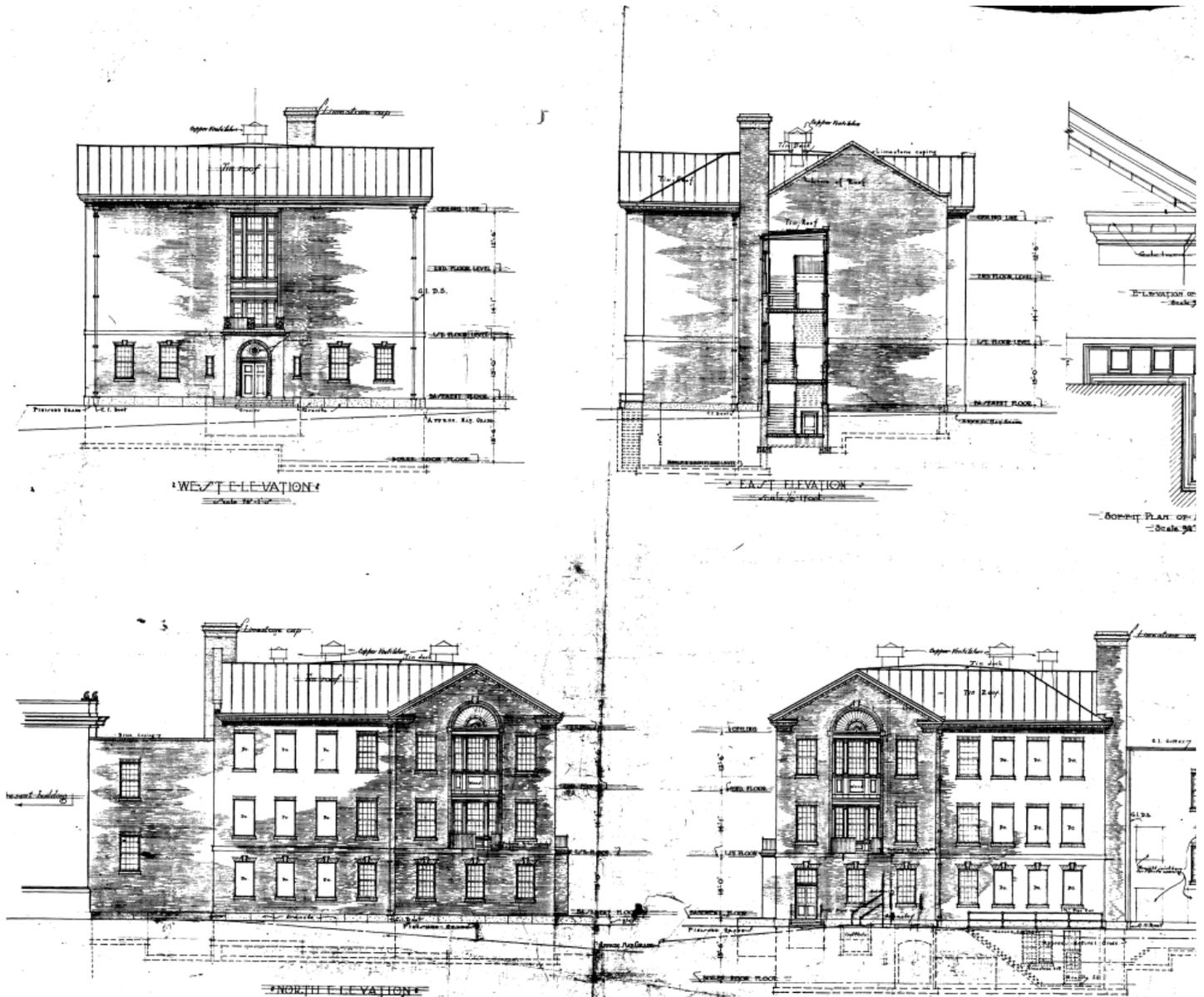
INSPECTOR, D.C.

*Please see the drawing of the
reference is made in context
to the drawing of the
1898* W.M. POINDEXTER, ARCHITECT.
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Elevational Drawings of Bruce School, 1898, William Poindexter, architect
(From D.C., Department of General Services, Reeves Center Archives)

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

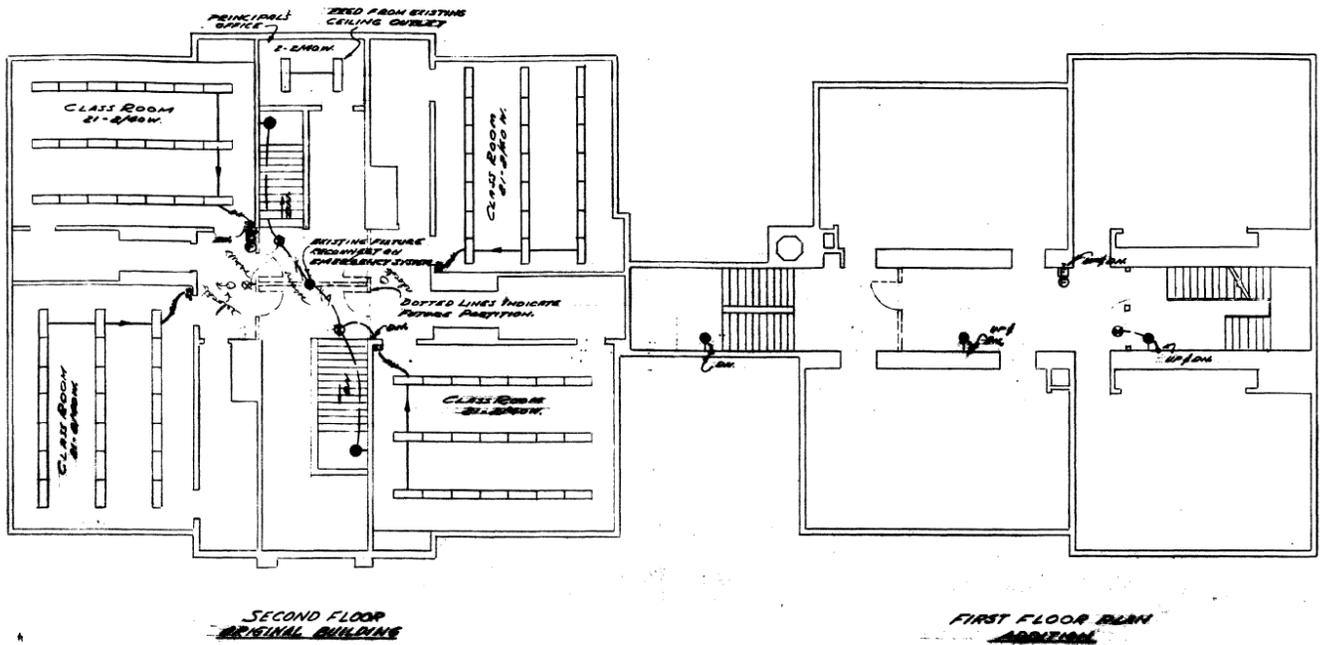
Washington, D.C.
County and State



Elevational Drawings of 1927 addition by Municipal Architect Albert L. Harris, ca. 1927.
(From D.C., Department of General Services, Reeves Center Archives)

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State



Floor plan of 1898 (second floor) and 1927 wing (first floor) with hyphen connector, 1927
(From D.C., Department of General Services, Reeves Center Archives)

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State



Historic Photograph of 1898 building, view from northeast, ca. 1900
(From Sumner School Archives)

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State



Historic photograph, view from southeast, ca. 1960
(From Sumner School Archives)

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

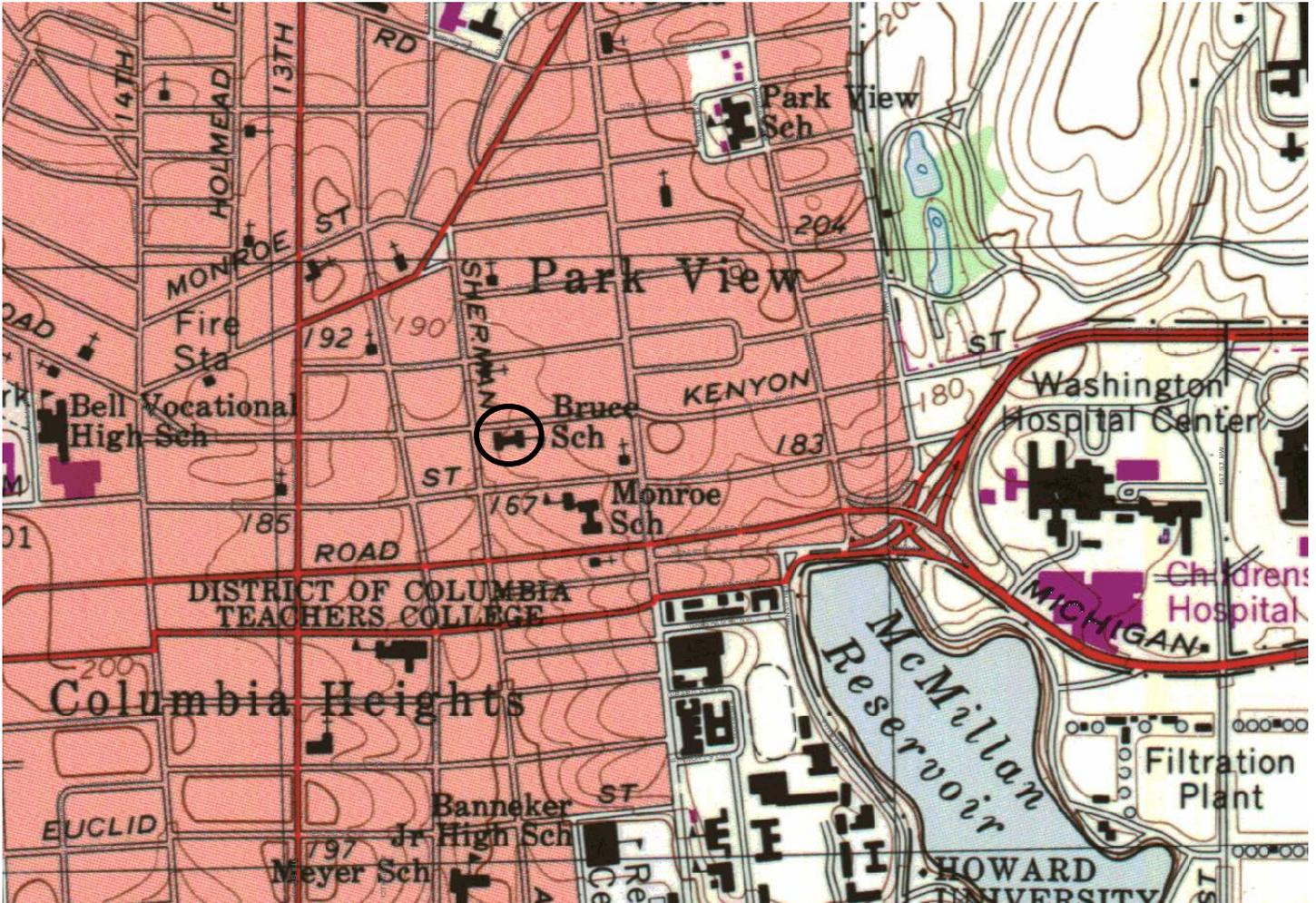
Washington, D.C.
County and State



Photograph, view from northeast, August 1987
Patricia Fisher, photographer
(From Sumner School Archives)

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

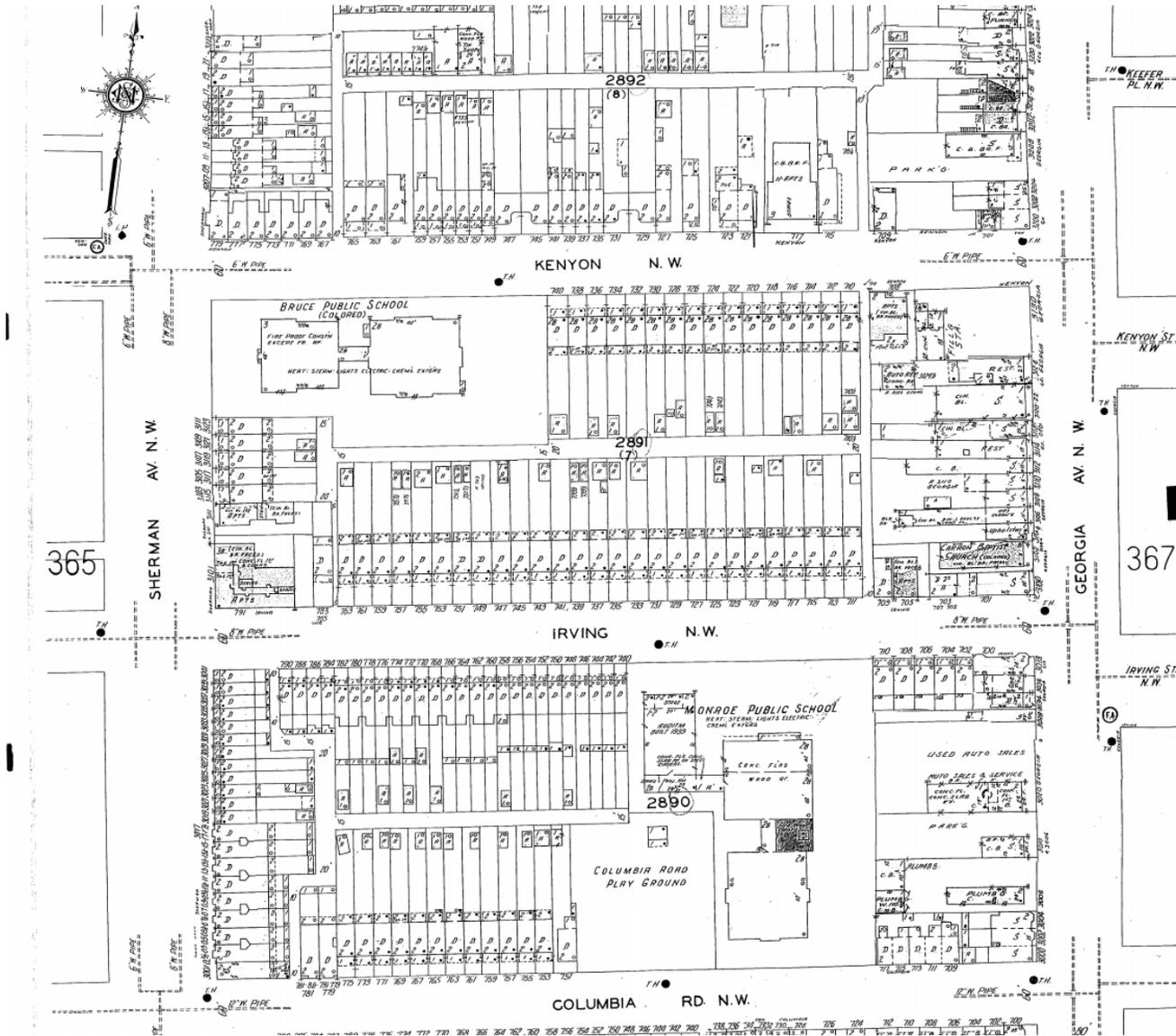
Washington, D.C.
County and State



Bruce School, 770 Kenyon Street, NW, Washington, D.C.
USGS Quad Washington West

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State



Site Plan of Bruce School 770 Kenyon Street before 2013 gymnasium wing
(From Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1998)

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State



Bruce School Site Plan Showing National Register Boundaries
(From DC GIS Map, 2014)

Blanche Kelso Bruce School
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State



Key to Photographs

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Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.