

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

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **SEP 26 1986**

date entered **OCT 23 1986**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic M Street High School

and or common Perry School

**2. Location**

street & number 128 M Street, N.W. not for publication

city, town Washington vicinity of

state D.C. code 11 county D.C. code 001

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name D.C. Department of Administrative Services

street & number 613 G Street, N.W.

city, town Washington vicinity of state D.C.

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds

street & number 515 D Street, N.W.

city, town Washington state D.C.

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Building is listed on the D.C. Inventory

title of Historic Sites has this property been determined eligible? yes  no

date \_\_\_\_\_  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Historic Preservation Division  
Department of Consumer & Regulatory Affairs

city, town Washington state D.C.

# 7. Description

**Condition**

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered

altered

**Check one**

original site

moved

date \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Perry School is a red brick building generally in the Romanesque style with colonial accents. Its facade is built of "Philadelphia pressed brick" with sandstone and wood ornament. It is three stories high with basement. The building's floor plan is rectangular in shape, measuring approximately 147 feet long (along M Street, N.W.) and 80 feet wide. The facade is composed of three main sections: a central projecting pavilion with an entrance tower and two other projecting wings which extend back from the building line of the central pavilion. Each of the recessed areas between the central pavilion and the wings contains secondary entrances. Stone steps lead to a raised first floor level. At each of the main floors, the windows are 6 over 6 sash with segmental arched brick lintels except at the third floor of the central bay. Here circular arched windows mark the location of the "assembly room." The central section is covered by a variable sloped hip roof. The wings are covered with a cross roof with gables at the front and at the central pavilions of the side elevation.

Each of the entrances is decorated with a carved wooden surround of paired composite pilasters and a triangular pediment above each door. The entrance elements are reminiscent of colonial revival details. In the gables above the central entrance tower and the two wings is decorative terra cotta. At the apex of the gable above the central entrance are the letters "H" and "S," denoting High School. At the apex of the gables above the wings are terra cotta panels formed in a diaper pattern.

The vertical elements of the facade--projecting pavilions and wings, tall windows, and circular open and blind arches--are balanced by horizontal elements of a stone strip at the watertable, brick string courses tying together sandstone window sills, two rows of corbelled brick linking together the segmental arched lintels of the first two stories, stone strips tying together the spring lines of the circular arches of third floor windows, and rows of corbelled brick at the cornice line under the eaves.

The sides and rear of the building are plainer. The side elevations echo the balanced composition of the facade with a central projecting pavilion with a gabled roof. The rear of the building replicates the three part symmetrical arrangement of the main facade.

The interior of the building was arranged in the following scheme: In the basement were located a number of "playrooms" used as small gymnasia, workrooms, and dryclosets that had been "tested in the other buildings of the District and found satisfactory." The basement also included a "drill room" or armory for the marching corps. The first floor of the building contained the principal's office and reception room on either side of the vestibule leading from the main central entrance. Seven classrooms and adjoining cloakrooms were located on this floor as was a large study hall in the rear of the central section. Each of the secondary entrances led to vestibules and a hall connected to the main east-west corridor. The second floor also contained seven classrooms and a large study hall. Over the main vestibule and offices of the first floor was a library and reading room. A teachers' room was located over each of the secondary entrance vestibules. On the third floor, four classrooms were located, two in each of the wings. The classrooms in the east wing were intended for drawing lessons. Two laboratories were located at the rear of the central section. The large assembly hall is situated in the front portion of the central section and contains a stage on the south side of the room and rows of opera chairs.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1890-91 **Builder/Architect** Office of the Building Inspector

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

### Summary Statement

The original section of the Perry School was built in 1890-91 as the M Street High School. The M Street High School was one of the first high schools for black students constructed with public funds in the nation. The school represents an important benchmark in the development of education for Washington, D.C.'s black student population since 1870 when the principle of a dual system of education for the nation's capital was reaffirmed by the U.S. Congress. The Preparatory High School for Colored Youth was founded in November of 1870. Between 1870 and 1891, the institution was located in several makeshift locations. It grew and flourished and in 1890, an appropriation of \$112,000 was passed by the U.S. Congress to build a structure specifically to house the high school classes. The M Street High School produced many of the city's and the nation's black leaders. It sent an unusually large number of its graduates to the nation's leading colleges and universities in the North at a time when the black population did not enjoy equal access to quality education, especially in the South. Its teachers were unusually well educated, far beyond those of most white schools, because of limited professional opportunities for black professionals elsewhere. The M Street High School population outgrew the building and, in 1916, was replaced with the Dunbar High School on First Street Street between N and O Streets, N.W. (now demolished). After then, the building served the city's black population as a junior high school and as an elementary school, renamed the Perry School, until the integration of the school system in 1954.

### Origins

The Perry School represents the struggle for a quality education by the black population in the nation's capital. The original section of the Perry School was built as the M Street High School in 1890-91 to house the classes of the black high school students who aspired to an education beyond the grammar school level. The Preparatory High School for Colored Youth was organized in November 1870 by friends of the abolitionist movement for those who were only recently freed from slavery. The founders included William Syphax, president, and William W. A. Wormley, secretary of the Board of Trustees of Colored Schools of Washington and Georgetown. Its founding was a direct outcome of the defeat in the U.S. Congress of the bill sponsored by Senator Charles Sumner for an integrated school system in the nation's capital city. The two sides acceded to a compromise that promised equal standards and proportional representation on the governing body over the school system.

The high school was first located at the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in northwest Washington, D.C. It later moved to the Stevens School in 1871, the Charles Sumner School between 1872 and 1877, and the Myrtilla Miner School at 17th and Church Streets, N.W. between 1877 and 1891. During this formative period, the high school classes and activities were located in facilities that had been built for the lower grades.



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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 7

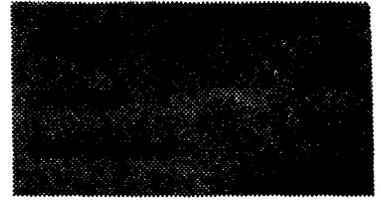
Page 2

Because it has been abandoned and has experienced several small fires, the building is in a deteriorated condition. Some of the windows are broken, leaving the building vulnerable to further damage. Many of the configurations of the rooms are intact. The assembly room contains the original stage and several rows of chairs.

In 1934, a utilitarian one story-with-basement gymnasium was added to the east side of the building. Designed generally in the colonial revival style, the gymnasium building is connected to the original structure by a narrow covered passageway.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

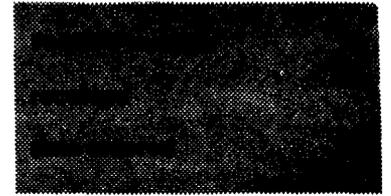
The M Street High School

The construction of a building designed to house the high school classes was made possible with a \$112,000 appropriation from the U.S. Congress. The institution was named the M Street High School when it was located at the Sumner School at 17th and M Streets, N.W. The name was retained when it was located at the intersection of M Street and New York Avenue in the northwest quadrant of the city. The plans for the school were prepared in the Office of the Building Inspector headed by Thomas Entwistle and approved by Edward Clark, Architect of the Capitol. At that time, designs for most municipal edifices in the District, including school buildings, were prepared by the Office of the Building Inspector which served as a centralized municipal design agency. Bureaucratically, the office was under the supervision of the Engineer Commissioner, a member of the U.S. Corps of Engineers, who served as one of the three District Commissioners. During the period of the 1880s and the 1890s, the designs for school buildings prepared by the Office of the Building Inspector were "approved" by Edward Clark, Architect of the Capitol, whose services at that time extended beyond the confines of the Capitol complex.

In September 1890, the bid of Peter McCartney in the amount of \$69,653 was accepted. (The site had cost \$25,000.) By September 1891, the building was completed and turned over to the District Commissioners.

At the ceremony marking the transfer of the building from the contractors to the city, it was described as "the finest school building in the city, the most thoroughly equipped without exception." The building was also proclaimed "the first colored high school ever constructed from the public funds. Other houses have been put up from private subscription, but this building was built from an appropriation made for that purpose. . ." The building was designed to house 450 students.

The M Street High School offered primarily academic and college preparatory subjects, but due to the demand of its students, added business courses at the turn of the century. Vocational education was also considered as an addition to the curriculum. Manual training and vocational education for the black population was espoused by black educator Booker T. Washington. His views ran contrary to those of W. E. B. DuBois, who saw such training as an attempt to restrict the educational and thus professional opportunities for black students. The principal of the M Street High School during the period 1901-1906, Anna J. Cooper, resisted efforts to add vocational courses to the curriculum. With the construction of the Armstrong Manual Training School just a few blocks to the north of the M Street High School in 1902, the college preparatory goals were reaffirmed for the latter institution.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

3

The M Street High School curriculum was organized around tracks. The academic and scientific tracks were college preparatory. The business track was not. The academic track required four years of English, history, and Latin; two years of mathematics; and one year of physics or chemistry. Elective courses were available in Greek, French, German, biology, political economy, and other math and science courses. The scientific track required a heavier concentration in math, science, and language courses. With its emphasis on classics, the curriculum was considered superior to that of the first two years of many American colleges and universities. Many black Washingtonians viewed the M Street High School and its successor Dunbar High School as their equivalent of the public Boston Latin School or of other of the nation's exclusive prep schools. In fact, graduate and historian Rayford W. Logan declared the M Street High School to be "one of the best high schools in the nation, colored or white, public or private."

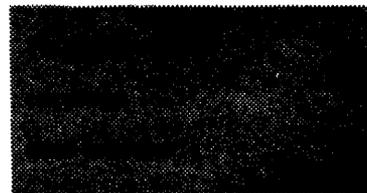
Due to the efforts of the school's principals, teachers, and the students themselves, the graduates of the M Street High School were accepted by leading colleges and universities in the Northern states, such as Amherst, Antioch, Dartmouth, Hamilton, Oberlin, and Rutgers. The graduates were able to meet the competitive standards of these schools in spite of the limitations imposed by a Southern segregated public school system. Its graduates also attended Howard University and other traditionally black colleges and universities.

From the nation's leading institutions of high learning, many graduates of the M Street High School went on to professional schools and became the nation's leading black doctors, lawyers, educators, businessmen, scholars, architects, and military leaders. Several returned to the M Street High School as teachers because Washington, D.C.'s school policy provided for equal salaries for all teachers regardless of sex or race. The relatively high salary attracted the best black educators to the school and resulted in a level of achievement among the teaching corps that outranked that of white public schools which were populated largely by graduates of normal schools and teachers colleges.

Significant individuals associated with the M Street High School included the school's first principal, Francis L. Cardozo, Sr., a graduate of Glasgow University, Scotland and a secretary of state of South Carolina during Reconstruction. A Harvard University graduate, Robert H. Terrell served as principal from 1899 to 1901. In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Terrell to a judgeship in the D.C. Municipal Court. He was the first black judge of the District of Columbia. Notable graduates included Carter G. Woodson who went on to earn a Ph.D. degree in history from Harvard University and to found the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Many members of the cadet corps served with distinction in the armed forces in World War I.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 4

Post-1916 History

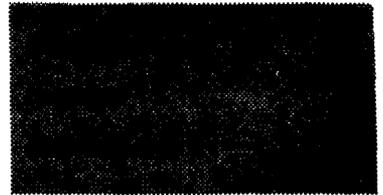
By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the school population had outgrown the 1891 building. In 1915, the building intended to house 450 students enrolled 850. The school was also deficient in athletic facilities, forcing students to hold sports activities in the streets or in vacant lots. The scientific laboratories had become obsolete and were in poor condition.

In 1916, the new Dunbar High School was completed a few blocks to the north. The old building was renamed the M Street Junior High School (later called Shaw) and served as a black junior high school from 1919 to 1928. It was later used by Cardozo High School between 1929 and 1932, served again as the M Street Junior High School (later Terrell) between 1932 and 1952, and under the name of the Perry Elementary School, served as a black elementary school starting in 1952. Two years later, in 1954, the city's school system was integrated and the Perry School was no longer a strictly black school. Today the building is abandoned.

Legacy

The Perry School is a symbol of the now defunct policy of racial segregation of Washington, D.C.'s school system. As M Street High School, it catered to the aspiring children of black parents whose employment with the federal government provided stable, albeit modest, family incomes. The generation of students who studied at the M Street High School were intent on professional careers. Because the students represented the upwardly mobile segments of the black population, the school took on an "elite" image. The elitist image became more pronounced in the successor Dunbar High School. While many alumni of the M Street High School and Dunbar High School recall the opportunities they enjoyed, comparable schools for the white student population, i.e., Western High School (now Duke Ellington School for the Performing Arts) built in 1898 and Central High School (now Cardozo High School), completed in the same year as Dunbar High School (1916), are testimony to the great disparities in facilities, grounds, architectural design, and size. With the integration of the D.C. school system in 1954, the need for an academic or "elite" school set aside for the black population evaporated. The Perry School recalls both the hardships occasioned by legislatively mandated racial segregation and the triumphs black students achieved in spite of tremendous odds.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 1

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Articles

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- "Colored High School, Contractor McCartney Completes His Work within the Specified Time." Washington Post. 11 September 1891.
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