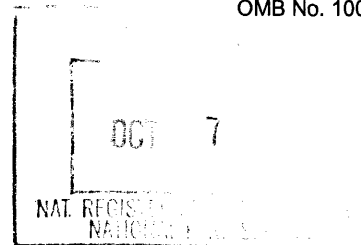


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



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

1. Name of Property

historic name Chain Bridge Road School

other names _____

2. Location

street & number 2820 Chain Bridge Road

☐ not for publication

city or town Washington, DC

☐ vicinity

state District of Columbia code DC county _____ code 001 zip code 20016

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).

Eric M. Buchanan, DC SHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

10/27/03
Date

DC Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby, certify that 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 of the Keeper

Date of Action

Patrick Anderson

12/9/2003

Chain Bridge Road School
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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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	
	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C.: 1864-1960

**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)

NOT IN USE/Vacant

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation masonry

walls stucco

roof Standing seam metal

other

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

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

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

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

Previous documentation on files (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

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture, Education,

Period of Significance

1923-41

Significant Dates

1923

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation**Architect/Builder**

Albert Harris, Municipal Architect

Chain Bridge Road School
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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 21,780 square feet

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1 8	3 1 8 2 4 8	4 3 1 0 7 9 9	3						
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing			
2				4						

☐ 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 Laura Trieschmann, Architectural Historian
Organization EHT Traceries date 02/22/02
street & number 1121 5th Street, NW telephone 393-1199
city or town Washington, D.C. state _____ zip code 20001

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- X 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

- X Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name H. Gabriel Murphy, Trustee, et al
street & number 2762 Chain Bridge Road telephone _____
city or town Washington, D.C. state _____ zip code 20016

Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et. seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Description Summary:

The Chain Bridge Road School is a two-story masonry structure, set in the rural landscape of northwest Washington, D.C. The building was constructed in 1923 and designed in a Colonial Revival style. It is a rectangular block set upon a solid masonry foundation and clad in stucco. A shallow-pitched hipped roof, clad in standing seam metal, covers the building. A narrow bedmolding of wood and a boxed cornice of metal mark the deep overhang of the roof. A single interior brick chimney projects from the northern slope of the roof and a metal exhaust hood pierces the southern slope.

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General Description:

Site:

The Chain Bridge Road School is located at 2820 Chain Bridge Road in northwest Washington, D.C. (Square 1425, Lot 814). The present school is sited on property originally improved by an 1865 school building, within a 21,780 square foot school yard. The structure is set to the west of the road on a plateau, overlooking a bend in Chain Bridge Road as it travels southward. Entry is presently gained from a short gravel drive located at the northeast corner of the property. A tall, late-20th-century vertical board fence with modern metal fencing on the opposite site surrounds the drive, while the metal chain-link fence continues around the property. The sloping site is naturally landscaped with trees, while the front yard of the property is grassed. A tennis court, constructed in the second half of the 20th century and not historically associated with the school, is located to the immediate west of the school. Directly opposite the school to the east is the 56-acre National Park where once stood Battery Kemble, a Civil War battery built to defend the strategically located Chain Bridge and the District of Columbia. Although diminished by surrounding residential developments dating to the second quarter of the 20th century, the rural nature and feel of the immediate site remains intact.

Exterior:

The primary facade, facing south, is symmetrically divided into seven bays with the main entry located on center. The entry, articulated with its high-style Colonial Revival-style surround, is deeply recessed within the plane of the wall, with five-paneled soffits on each side of the double-leaf wood doors. The surround is composed of Tuscan pilasters and square posts that support the arched pediment. The pediment has a boxed architrave with molding and bedmolding along the slightly overhanging soffit of the cornice. The encircling cornice of the enclosed pediment has an ogee molding and flush tympanum with raking along the edges. The roof of the pediment is clad in a single sheet of metal. The molded stringcourse that encircles the building extends from the architrave of the pediment. Clad in metal, the stringcourse has a bedmolding with bottom beading, square profile, and slightly projecting cap with rounded molding. Flanking the central entry to each side are four equally spaced openings, each holding

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a 6/6 double-hung, wood sash window. The windows, set slightly within the plane of the wall, have bracketed upper sashes and wide surrounds of wood. A quadrant bead surrounds the opening where it meets the stucco finish of the structure. The straight masonry sills are clad in stucco.

The second story of the facade features a tripartite window on center, located above the entry, with single 6/6 windows flanking it. The larger central portion of the tri-partite opening has a 6/6 double-hung window flanked by 3/3 double-hung windows, each with brackets on the upper sash. All of the openings have applied wood surrounds with a large interior bead and narrow wood sills. The openings abut the bedmolding that surrounds the structure under the overhanging eaves of the roof.

The three-bay deep east and west side elevations of the building are identical in fenestration pattern and ornamentation. Three single, 6/6 double-hung, wood sash windows pierce the first story. Like the openings on the primary facade, the windows on the side elevations are set slightly within the plane of the wall. Each has bracketed upper sashes, wide surrounds of wood, and straight masonry sills clad in stucco. A quadrant bead surrounds the opening where it meets the stucco finish of the structure. Above the stringcourse, five banded 12/12 double-hung windows mark the second stories of the side elevations, providing vast amounts of nature light to the classrooms. Set within the plane of the wall, the opening has a shared narrow wooden sill, molded mullions with interior beading, and bracketed upper sashes. The bedmolding under the roof acts as a continuous lintel.

The rear elevation is nine bays wide with a central entry. The openings are asymmetrically spaced with five window openings to the east of the entry and three to the west. The narrow entry, capped by a six-light fixed transom, holds a wooden door with screened storm door. The window bay to the immediate east of the entry has been filled and parged with stucco, although the surrounds and sill appear to be intact. The remaining openings on the first story of the north elevation each hold 6/6 double-hung, wood sash windows set behind metal security wires. Each opening has a straight masonry sill clad in stucco, bracketed upper sashes, wide surrounds of wood, and an interior quadrant bead.

The second story of the north elevation features seven large unequally spaced window openings. The central opening, set directly above the now-infilled window of the first story, is set lower to abut the stringcourse that encircles the building. The placement of the opening suggests it illuminates the landing of a central stair. The opening is more ornate, surrounded by wide wood casings with interior beading and topped by a projecting boxed lintel hood. The flanking openings have square-edged surrounds, narrow wood sills, and abut the bedmolding under the overhanging eaves of the roof. Each of the openings holds a 9/9 double-hung wood sash window with bracketed upper sashes.

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Interior:

The interior of the building was not accessible. The records of the District of Columbia School Board, however, provide a picture of the building's appearance, layout, and use during the 1920s and 1930s.¹ Unlike the new larger school buildings located in the City of Washington and Georgetown, the Chain Bridge Road School did not open with modern facilities. Located in a rural setting, the one-room 1865 Chain Bridge Road schoolhouse was exchanged for a new building with more space, better ventilation, and light.² When the new building opened in 1923, it was heated by a coal-fired furnace with radiators, but did not have either electricity or indoor plumbing. Water was obtained from a freestanding pump in the schoolyard that pumped city water, and there was an outhouse in the schoolyard.³ The opening year, a special request to the School Board was made for illumination by oil lamps. Five years later, the building was finally electrified.⁴

The interior of the two-story building consisted of two rooms on each floor linked with a central stair hall. James Branch, a former student of the school, remembers that during his time at the Chain Bridge Road School, from 1936 to 1941, the first floor was used for the manual industrial training classes and as a playroom.⁵ The second floor was an all-purpose room, where lunch was served. A kitchen and cloakroom were located on this floor. The single classroom, which housed all students, was located on the southeast side of the building.

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¹ Public Schools of the District of Columbia, *Membership Report*, 1920, 1922-1923, 1925-1931, 1936-1938. Archives of the D.C. Public Schools, Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, Washington, D.C.

² Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Report of the Board of Education to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 1904-5", (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906), p. 173.

³ Telephone Interview between former Chain Bridge Road School student James Branch and Judith H. Lanius, February 11, 2002.

⁴ *Minutes of the Board of Education, D.C. 1900-1987*, Chain Bridge Road School, December 19, 1923 and January 18, 1928.

⁵ The school records refer to the first floor as a basement.

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Summary Statement of Significance:

The Chain Bridge Road School at 2820 Chain Bridge Road, N.W. was built in 1923 to serve African American public school students living in northwest Washington, D.C. and surrounding neighborhoods in Maryland. The Colonial Revival-style school structure replaced a one-room, wood frame school that was erected on the property in 1865 for the African Americans who had settled around Battery Kemble, a strategic military installation established in 1861 to protect Chain Bridge. The original school was one of the inaugural structures erected in Washington County after the 1862 enactment of legislation calling for the establishment of public schools for African American children. On the same site, fifty-eight years later, the second Chain Bridge Road School was constructed under the direction of the Municipal Architect's Office as part of a District-wide modernization program, replacing the overcrowded and dilapidated 1865 schoolhouse. The small, two-story, stucco-clad schoolhouse, designed in the Colonial Revival Style by Municipal Architect Albert Harris, served the surrounding community until it was closed by the school system in January 1941. The period of significance for the Chain Bridge Road School extends from its date of construction in 1923 until the school's closing in 1941.

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Resource History and Historic Context:

Chain Bridge Road and the Palisades Neighborhood

The Chain Bridge Road School at 2820 Chain Bridge Road is located in the hills above the Potomac River. Still without sidewalks, the colonial-era road bisects the Palisades, a neighborhood in the northwest sector of Washington, D.C. The Palisades is bounded by the Potomac River on the south and west, the D.C.-Maryland line on the northwest, MacArthur Boulevard on the east as far south as Reservoir Road; from there it is bounded by Reservoir and Foxhall Roads back to MacArthur Boulevard then to the river.

Historically, this area was part of a 759-acre grant made to Colonel John Addison and William Hutchinson in 1695. The tract, which included what is today known as the neighborhood of the Palisades, was patented as *White Haven*. By the second quarter of the 18th century, William D.C. Murdock (1710-1769), Addison's son-in-law, had gained title to the property that consisted of 713 acres between today's Arizona Avenue and Chain Bridge Road to the east and south of Tenleytown and north of MacArthur Boulevard. This rural property, then located in Washington County, remained in the Murdock family throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The primary route through the area was the colonial-era thoroughfare known as Chain Bridge Road, which provided access from Tenleytown to the

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Potomac River just below Little Falls. The road derives its name from the third bridge built over the river, a chain suspension bridge erected in 1810.⁶

The population of Washington County was sparse during the first half of the 19th century. The 1840 census records a population of just 3,069 persons, with 822 of those slaves and 288 freedmen.⁷ The area we know today as Palisades originally was a rural farming community with a few scattered county ho.uses. The census records for 1850, which documents a steady population increase, indicates a limited number of "colored and mulatto" [sic] residents living within the Chain Bridge Road corridor and surrounding vicinity.⁸ Generally, they worked as laborers, while the neighboring whites were employed as planters and clerks. The 1861 *Boschke Map of Washington County* shows that the entire area of hills above the Potomac River around Chain Bridge Road was heavily forested, undeveloped land held almost entirely by two individuals. The land to the west of Chain Bridge Road represented the extensive holdings of William D.C. Murdock, while the land to the east of Chain Bridge Road was owned by W.A.J. Maddox.

The Civil War (1861-1865) had a profound effect on this area, when the federal government established Battery Kemble on the east side of Chain Bridge Road in the fall of 1861. One of several strategic military installations, Battery Kemble was designed to protect Chain Bridge and prevent the Confederate Army from accessing the City of Washington. The battery, named for Governor Kemble of Cold Spring, New York⁹, is located 387 feet above mean low level of the Potomac River. Battery Kemble was one of the many fortresses enlarged shortly after the Second Battle of Bull Run (August 28-30, 1862), a campaign that cleared the strategic table for the Confederate Army like no other victory of the Civil War. As a result of the enlarged and new fortifications, by the end of 1863, the City of Washington was the most heavily defended location in the western hemisphere with more than 900 guns, sixty-eight enclosed forts and batteries, and ninety-three unarmed batteries, and three blockhouses, linked by over thirty miles of trenches and roads. In 1865, Battery Kemble included two, 100-pound Parrott guns, a magazine, barracks building, officers' quarters, and mess house.¹⁰ Garrisons serving there included the

⁶ Chain Bridge Road is noted on historic maps from the latter part of the 19th century as "Road to Chain Bridge." Early 20th century census records document Chain Bridge Road as Little Falls Road, although this nomenclature does not appear on historic maps. The United States census records do not specifically note streets prior to 1880, making the documentation of residents along Chain Bridge Road difficult. Chain Bridge Road is not listed in the 1900 census; rather residents along this road were documented as living on Little Falls Road. Chain Bridge Road does appear in the 1910 census, but not in the 1920 census records.

⁷ 1840 Census, Washington County Schedule, p. 158. (Georgetown and Tenleytown are excluded from this schedule.)

⁸ 1850 Census, Washington County Schedule.

⁹ Governor Kemble was the former president of the West Point Foundry, which produced arms for the U.S. Army; James Dillon, "Civil War Fort Sites, Defenses of Washington," National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, 1976.

¹⁰ Battery Kemble remained active militarily until 1880. Now considered part of Fort Circle Park, Battery Kemble is one of approximately nineteen National Park Service properties in the District of Columbia that were part of the 1861-1865 "Defenses of Washington." The remains of Battery Kemble, located within the 2.79-acre Battery Kemble Park, consist today of earthworks only.

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2nd U.S. Artillery, 9th New York Artillery, and Company A of the 1st New Hampshire Heavy Artillery.¹¹

In addition to Battery Kemble, the hilltops of the Palisades were fortified by Battery Cameron at 1900 Foxhall Road; Battery Parrott at 2300 Foxhall Road; Battery Martin Scott in the 5600 block of Potomac Avenue; Battery Vermont on the south side of Little Falls Road on what is now Sibley Hospital property; and Fort Sumner at Sangamore Road and West Path Way in nearby Maryland. Palisades' historian Harold Gray also notes "there were several [forts] in Virginia, including Fort Marcy just off the George Washington Parkway, and a blockhouse on a hilltop overlooking Chain Bridge. These were called the Chain Bridge Batteries Complex."¹²

The establishment of Battery Kemble and the other fortifications in the Palisades area brought numerous federal troops to the area. These forces freely used the vast acres of timber on privately owned land for their military needs. Many of the property owners petitioned the United States Court of Claims for lost property, such as farm and household equipment, lumber, fences, livestock, and food. Among them was major landholder William D.C. Murdock, who petitioned the court for \$70,000 worth of lumber lost in 1861, but was granted just \$6,886 in 1873.¹³ The money was neither adequate compensation nor paid in a timely manner, forcing Murdock deeply into debt. His creditors sued him, forcing the sale of the real estate to satisfy financial responsibilities. This enabled many of the freed and emancipated slaves familiar with the area to purchase three- to five-acre parcels of Murdock's land at approximately \$80 an acre.¹⁴

The April 1862 emancipation of slaves owned by District citizens and the increasing number of fugitive slaves seeking refuge made Washington, D.C. an asylum for free African Americans. "By the spring of 1863, in addition to the 3,000 in Alexandria, 10,000 [African Americans] had gathered in Washington. And they continued to pour in: by 1865 some estimates put the four-year total of black newcomers at 40,000."¹⁵ Villages and temporary housing was established in the District, but ultimately did not prove sufficient to support the increasing population. Therefore, freedmen and escaped slaves frequently settled around the Civil War forts and batteries, seeking protection from the Union soldiers stationed

¹¹ Harold Gray, "Battery Kemble and Other Civil War Forts," *The Palisades News*, Washington, D.C., Volume 8, #2, November 1996, p. 8.

¹² Gray, p. 8.

¹³ An additional \$47,424 was appropriated by Congress to the heirs of Murdock in 1905.

¹⁴ Charles E. Davis, Jr. "Land Titles Tell a Story of Freedom," *Times Herald*, Washington, D.C., December 3, 1952, p. 25.

¹⁵ Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: A History of the Capital, 1800-1950*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 277.

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there. Battery Kemble was especially convenient, since it was so near the narrowest part of the Potomac River without rapids, and escaped slaves could more easily cross the river from Virginia.¹⁶

In the years immediately following the Civil War, the population along Chain Bridge Road was predominantly white, but a group of African Americans who came to the area during the war settled there, building houses on land purchased from Murdock. Many of the African American men living on Chain Bridge Road worked as laborers, farmers, butchers, and gardeners, while the women worked as domestics or laundresses. In 1875, they established a five-acre "Colored Cemetery." The cemetery, located at what is today 2616 Chain Bridge Road, was deeded by the federal government to the Union Burial Society of Georgetown for the burial of former slaves and served African Americans from the area as well as from other parts of the District and Maryland.¹⁷

In 1865, three years after the 1862 enactment of legislation calling for the establishment of public schools for African American children, a modest schoolhouse was constructed on Chain Bridge Road. Its location was strategically chosen to serve the growing African-American community around Battery Kemble. A 21,780 square foot lot on Chain Bridge Road was purchased by the School Board from the debt-ridden William D.C. Murdock for \$150, and a modest wood-frame building was constructed in 1865 for the cost of \$1,236. The one-story, front gabled building was one of the earliest African American schools in Washington County. The modest two-bay wide and three-bay-deep structure with a projecting entry was typical of the small one-room schoolhouses constructed in the middle part of the 19th century throughout Washington County. These rural schoolhouses were typically located along major thoroughfares that cut through the remote landscape. One year prior to the construction of the Chain Bridge Road School, a similar school building had been erected for white children at 4954 MacArthur Boulevard, N.W. This building, known as the Old Conduit Road School, stands today as the oldest wood-frame, one-room schoolhouse in the District of Columbia. It is listed on the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and in the National Register of Historic Places.

Historic maps, coupled with the census records, document that many of the residents in the area during the years of the Civil War continued to own property there throughout the 19th century, and into the 20th century. The community was relatively stable and by the turn of the 20th century, these property owners had improved their land by constructing modest freestanding dwellings. Although the residents continued in many of the same professions as had previous generations, both *Baist* maps and the 1920 census indicates that the number of African American families in the Palisades area continued to increase into the second decade of the 20th century. The 1865 wood frame Chain Bridge Road School

¹⁶ Arthur, G. Purves, "A History of Chain Bridge Road: Families Weave Their History into Northwest Landmarks," *Potomac Current*, Washington, D.C., Volume V, Number 21, August 24, 1972, parts I and 2, p. 4. ¹⁷ The Union Burial Society of Georgetown has always maintained the burial ground.

¹⁷ The Union Burial Society of Georgetown has always maintained the burial grounds.

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was soon overcrowded by the resulting influx of school-age African American residents. Further, the building, noted by school officials for replacement or abandonment as early as 1908, had been deemed inadequate because of its age and construction materials. Ultimately, in the early 1920s, the School Board opted to replace the wood frame building with a modern masonry structure that was specifically intended to “relieve the school congestion in the extreme northwest section” of the city.¹⁸

The area immediately around the Chain Bridge Road School was never subject to 20th-century subdivision according to the traditional grid system, nor did a single developer develop it. Plans for the subdivision of the area and the laying of new roads through the rural neighborhood were often noted on historic maps, although never implemented. However, by 1925, several of the larger properties fronting Chain Bridge Road were subdivided, creating more than twenty lots. By the late 1930s, with the increasing urbanization of Washington, D.C., many of the heirs of the original landowners, particularly African Americans, had sold their property along Chain Bridge Road. Many of the modest wood frame dwellings that were built in the mid- to late-19th century were razed in favor of modern, single-family dwellings. The majority of these new residences were set back from the road and retained the rural setting of the neighborhood.

Until its forced closing, the Chain Bridge Road School was the center of African American public education in the upper northwest sector of the city. In 1941, however, a petition promulgated by Max Stern (who in 1937 had completed the construction of a large house on the property immediately to the west) gathered support for the closing of the school based on declining enrollment and poor conditions. Despite the fact that school enrollment records and newspaper reports did not support his claims, Stern successfully persuaded the school system to close the school. In January 1941, the students were transferred to Phillips-Wormley School in Georgetown, while the teacher was transferred to the Harrison School.

Today, the area retains its rural ambience, including important elements of its past such as the winding country character of Chain Bridge Road, the green space of the Civil War fort Battery Kemble (now a National Park), important housing stock from the 19th century, the African American cemetery, and the Chain Bridge Road School.

District of Columbia Public School System¹⁹

As outlined in the National Register Multiple Property Document, “Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960,” the history of public education in the District of Columbia followed the course of the city’s growth itself. When the first organization to oversee public education was set up in 1804, the city had only been home to the federal government for four years. The settlement was sparse

¹⁸ “Chain Bridge and Smothers Schools Dedicated,” *The Washington Tribune*, Washington, D.C., December 1, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁹ Portions of this historic context are gleaned from the “Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1864-1945,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, prepared by Tanya Edwards Beauchamp, draft form September 30, 1998.

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and represented only a shadow of the city that it became a century later. As the city developed and confidence in its future became more certain, the school system reflected this new-found security. By the end of the period under study [1945], the school system had become a significant institution in the life of the city. Its importance is reflected in the substantial buildings that were constructed over the nearly 130 years of development.²⁰

The most important historical theme noted in the school building study between 1864 and 1945 "is the separation of the races into separate schools, a practice that endured in the District until the Supreme Court of the United States outlawed separate educational facilities in 1954. The allocation of funds between the white and the black schools was a serious point of contention that affected the location and design of and funding for each group's schools. The policy of racial separation can be seen in the surviving school buildings, constructed as "colored schools."²¹ Following is an abstract of Ms. Beauchamp's historic context, supplemented with some new information that has resulted from this investigation into Chain Bridge School.

Early Years of the Federal City's Public School System, 1804-1864

Legislation providing for the development of a public education system in the federal city was passed on December 5, 1804. This public education system was governed by a board of trustees, who aspired to create a primary and secondary school system as well as a university program for children whose parents were unable to pay tuition at private schools. Regarded as "charity schools," the public education system in the federal city was "defective, in educating only a portion of the youthful population, and at the same time fostering upon it the badge of poverty."²² By the mid-1840s, a combined free and pay system had been instituted at the public schools and, in 1848, the public education system was open to all white children who lived in the City of Washington. In 1842, a public school system free to white children was also established in Georgetown.

Despite the existence of a public school system, the institution was viewed as unsatisfactory because of the lack of adequate financial support and attendance. In 1857, only 2,400 out of 10,677 white children between the ages of five and eighteen in the City of Washington attended public school. Students went to one of five schoolhouses owned by the city or attended classes in leased spaces located in church basements, civic institutions, stores, and even private residences.

Within the District of Columbia, but in the outlying rural areas beyond the boundaries of the federal city, however, there were no public schools prior to the Civil War. In 1856, with the prodding of city leaders, Congress enacted legislation to establish schools for white children in Washington County, but

²⁰ Beauchamp, p.3

²¹ Beauchamp, p.3

²² "Historical Sketch of the Public Schools of Washington," *Report of the Trustees of the Public Schools*, 1850, p. 53.

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implementation of the act was delayed by taxpayer approval. It was not until 1862, with the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, that Congress enacted legislation to establish public schools for both African Americans and for white children in Washington County.²³

Under the terms of this 1862 law, ten percent of the local taxes on their property were to be set aside to finance the schools. Therefore, Congress did not allot money to the schools, believing the local taxes in Washington City and Georgetown would be sufficient to produce \$3,600 yearly. Neither city, however, kept separate records of white and black taxes; officials merely allotted what they thought was needed. The City of Washington provided \$265 in 1862 and \$410 in 1863; Georgetown granted nothing in 1862 and \$70 in 1863.²⁴ Thus, despite the legislative enactment, funding for the creation of an African American education system did not allow for the establishment of a single school building in Washington County.²⁵

The events of the Civil War (1861-1865) disrupted the efforts to establish public education for African Americans as the federal government appropriated funds, forcing the school system to seek alternative financial sources. Consequently, with the tremendous increase in the African American population, new organizations in the District undertook education of the African American population following the emancipation on January 1, 1863. For example, the National Freedman's Relief Association set up night schools to accommodate day workers. Association volunteers, having accumulated the money to hire a teacher, opened the first African American "public school" in Washington, D.C. in the Ebenezer Church, on Capitol Hill. One hundred adults and children immediately tried to enroll, but one teacher and an inexperienced assistant, unable to handle so many, had to turn some away ...²⁶

Permanent School Buildings, 1864-1874

The population of Washington, D.C. continued to grow rapidly during and after the Civil War, causing the city's boundaries to expand. A number of school buildings were constructed in the City of Washington and its suburbs in an effort to accommodate the burgeoning student population. The establishment of adequate school buildings for white students was exemplified by the completion of the Wallach School in 1864. Located at 7th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E., the Wallach School was designed by the firm of Cluss and Kammerhueber. Ten oblong classrooms accommodated six hundred pupils, with a large hall on the third floor. The high ceilings, brick decoration, and plumbing made the building a novelty in the city.²⁷ Mayor Richard Wallach, the building's namesake, lauded the

²³ William Bushong, "Old Conduit Road Schoolhouse," A Report Prepared for the National Park Service, Washington, D.C., February 1993, pp. 16-17.

²⁴ Green, p. 280.

²⁵ Beauchamp, p. 7.

²⁶ Green, p. 281.

²⁷ Beauchamp, p. 8.

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“symmetrical and beautiful structure” that marked the “commencement of a new era of schoolhouse architecture in our midst.”²⁸ The success of the Wallach School was followed in 1869 by the completion of the African American Franklin School at 13th and K Streets, N.W., across from Franklin Square. In 1871, the Seaton School at 2nd and I Streets, N.W. opened for white male students.

In June 1864, a second school law pertaining to African American children was enacted, requiring that Washington City and Georgetown pay the “same proportion of the total school funds as the number of Negro children between the ages of six and seventeen bore to the number of white children.”²⁹ Further, “to ease the financial strain, the federal courts of the District were to pay into the school fund all money accruing from fines and forfeitures, a quarter of it to the colored schools of the county, a quarter to the cities’ colored schools, and a quarter each to Washington and Georgetown white schools.”³⁰ Despite this, the city council contributed a mere \$628 of the total \$25,000 school fund in 1864-1865 to black public education.³¹

One of the first public schoolhouses for African American students in the District of Columbia was a wood frame structure built in 1865 at 2nd and C Streets, S.E. This modest beginning was followed by the construction of several substantial masonry school buildings for African American students within the original boundaries of the federal city. In 1867, the brick John F. Cook School was built at 4th and O Streets, N.W. In the following year, the Stevens School, also constructed of brick, was completed at 21st and K Streets, N.W. The crowning glory of the black schools of this period was the Sumner School, constructed in 1871-1872, to the designs of Adolph Cluss. The Sumner School was constructed of pressed brick and gray Ohio sandstone in the “spirit of a modernized Norman style.”³² Coincident with the construction of the Sumner School was the completion of the Lincoln School at 2nd and C Streets, S.E. and the (first) Lovejoy School at 12th and D Streets, N.E.³³

In Washington County, small one-room and two-room wood frame buildings were constructed along major thoroughfares that cut through the rural landscape. Typically, an acre or half-acre of land was sufficient for each school.³⁴ The Conduit Road School (1864) and the first Chain Bridge Road School (1865) are typical examples of this rural building type. Further, these two schoolhouses “reflect the added expense of duplication created by separate education of the races.”³⁵ The one-room Conduit Road School, located at 4954 MacArthur Road, was constructed as a white school. The Chain Bridge Road

²⁸ “Dedication of the Wallach School Building,” Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools, 1865, p. 54.

²⁹ Green, p. 281.

³⁰ Green, p. 281.

³¹ Green, p. 281.

³² Board of Education of the District of Columbia, “Annual Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, year ending June 30, 1965,” (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), p. 17.

³³ Beauchamp, p. 9.

³⁴ Beauchamp, pp. 9-10.

³⁵ Bushong, p. 18.

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School, sited within less than a quarter mile from the Conduit Road School, served the African American students in this rural part of the city, as well as pupils from neighboring communities in Maryland.

In 1866-1867, there were only five African American schools in the District of Columbia, with seven teachers educating 450 pupils. Remarkably, just one year later, the District was home to forty-one schools with forty-one teachers educating 2,300 African American students. The number of school buildings, teachers, and students increased steadily over the years with 5,280 African American students housed in seventy-four schoolhouse located throughout the District by 1874.³⁶

Toward a Modern School System and Schoolhouses, 1874-1900

In 1874, the District of Columbia's territorial form of government was abolished and replaced by a temporary Board of Commissioners. This board oversaw the development of a permanent system of municipal government, which included the public education system. At this time, the four governing boards for Washington City, Georgetown, Washington County, and the black schools of District of Columbia were merged into a single entity. The board oversaw the construction and maintenance of all school buildings, stating in their 1875-1876 report that there were

...a number of school buildings so convenient in location and so well adapted to their purpose in nearly all conceivable particulars, as to win the admiring commendation of jurisdiction visitors familiar with the most renowned buildings of like nature. Some of the oldest and most refined European nations do not disdain to copy them. Ample acknowledgment of the superiority of these buildings was made during the Centennial year.³⁷

The board, however, reported that there were not enough of these new schools to meet the needs of the growing population, especially that of African American students which, by 1875, had risen to 5,454 pupils with ninety teachers in seventy-six schoolhouses.³⁸

With the enactment of the Organic Act of 1878 creating a permanent commission form of government, Congress passed the authority of school construction to the Engineer Commissioner, who was the

³⁶ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Report of the Board of Trustees of Public Schools of the District of Columbia to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 1891-1892," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), p. 181.

³⁷ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Report of the Board of Trustees of Public Schools of the District of Columbia to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 1875-1876," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 3.

³⁸ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Report of the Board of Trustees of Public Schools of the District of Columbia to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 1891-1892," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), p. 181.

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highest-ranking officer of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.³⁹ At that time, the position of Inspector of Buildings was created under the supervision of the Engineer Commissioner. Throughout the 1880s and much of the 1890s, the Building Inspector and his staff prepared the designs and specifications for all new public school buildings in the District of Columbia and oversaw the repairs to existing schools.⁴⁰

Many of the school building designs produced by the Office of the Building Inspector in the latter part of the 19th century called for red brick and generally were designed in the then fashionable Romanesque Revival style. When completed, they blended in with the buildings of the surrounding community. The buildings were elaborated with picturesque elements, such as towers with conical roofs and finials. Although some buildings were arranged with asymmetrical massing, most were designed with balanced massing, usually a central pavilion flanked by identical sections. They were embellished with brick pilasters and stringcourses, molded brick and beltcourses, pressed metal cornices, and terra cotta trim. Brick corbeling at the cornice and stone trim around the windows provided other avenues for varying the facade treatment. Within city limits, successful designs were replicated for both white and black schools. The floor plans followed the fairly predictable pattern of four rooms with adjoining cloakrooms on each floor arranged around a central hallway and play area.⁴¹

The typical two-story, eight-room school buildings dotted the urban landscape of the District of Columbia, evenly placed every few blocks and serving a limited population of children. By the 1880s, the eight-room schoolhouse had become so entrenched in school building design that it was defended vigorously on many grounds. Its advantages included the efficiency of heating and ventilation, and the economy of size in sections of the city where land was expensive. Its two staircases, one for boys and the other for girls, were located to facilitate escape in the event of fire or panic. Larger twelve-room schools required heavier walls and more expensive heating apparatus.⁴²

The increasing number of African American pupils in the fourth quarter of the 19th century generated the construction of a number of new schoolhouses in the District of Columbia. The superintendent of public schools reported that there were seventy-nine schools, ninety-two teachers, and nearly 6,000 black students enrolled in the 1876-1877 school year. Many of these new school buildings were constructed of wood frame, standing just one story in height with one- to two-classrooms. By 1880, the number of schools had risen to 117 with 130 teachers and 8,080 students. Inclusive of manual training schools, there were 214 African American schools in the District of Columbia, with 230 teachers educating 12,132 students.⁴³ Although modest wood frame buildings continued to be erected for African

³⁹ Beauchamp, p. 10; Bushong, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Beauchamp, p. 11.

⁴¹ Beauchamp, p. 12.

⁴² Beauchamp, p. 12.

⁴³ *Report of the Board of Trustees of Public Schools of the District of Columbia to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 1891-1892*, p. 181.

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American students at the end of the 19th century, such as the one-story 1896 Ivy School, the majority of newer schools were constructed of brick and stood two stories in height. Wilson School at what was originally known as Central Avenue between Erie and Superior Streets, N.W. was erected in 1891. Constructed of brick, the school stood two stories in height. The interior, heated by a furnace rather than the typical stoves, contained eight rooms. Mott School, at Turnbull and 6th Streets, N.W., was originally constructed in 1871 of wood frame, but enlarged in 1882 with a brick addition. Standing two stories, Mott School maintained ten rooms.

The Report of the Board of Trustees stated that at the end of the 1889 school year, enrollment in the District of Columbia public schools had reach 35,764. This included 1,749 students in the normal and high schools, 11,516 children in the grammar schools, and 22,499 pupils in the primary schools. Of these, 13,004 were African American students. Superintendent G.F.T. Cook voiced the need for school buildings in 1886:

So very pressing are the needs of accommodation for the colored school population of Washington and Georgetown, that I cannot too often nor earnestly call your attention to it. Records of the current year show...an enrollment of more than 500 pupils in excess of that for the corresponding period of last year. Of the 10,065 pupils enrolled at that date, 9,711, embracing those in the schools from the first to the eighth grade inclusive, were accommodated in only 122 rooms. More than 5,000 pupils are accommodated in 43 rooms. This is very limited accommodation necessitates in many instances a reduction of school session, in the use of one room by two schools, to an extent very adverse to the progress of the pupils.⁴⁴

Some of the design elements of the typical red brick schoolhouse of the 1880s and 1890s were applied to the new M Street High School for black students. Designed in 1890 and completed in 1891, the exterior of the high school was elaborated with familiar elements, such as stone coursing and corbelled brick at the cornice. However, the M Street High School building was designed on a scale that far exceeded the usual small elementary schools and featured Colonial Revival details and terra cotta trim in the gables. The construction of the M Street High School represented a significant advance for the makeshift accommodations previously provided for black high school students. However, the building's facilities paled by comparison with the Classical Revival-style Western High School (renamed the Ellington School of the Arts in 1974), which was completed in 1898 for white students in the western quadrangle of the city.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Report of the Board of Trustees of Public Schools of the District of Columbia to the Honorable Commissioners, 1885-1886," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), p.104.

⁴⁵ Beauchamp, p. 13.

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Educational Programs and Building Campaigns, 1900-1954

The 20th century public school in the District of Columbia served a broader range of educational purposes than that of the previous century. In response to a growing and changing population, the audience was more diverse, necessitating a separation of distinct groups of students into junior high schools. Programs were offered in Americanization, industrial education, and business education. Facilities were provided for dental and medical clinics, home gardening, and school banks. The diverse audience and educational programs affected the design of the school buildings.⁴⁶

In 1900, the U.S. Congress enacted legislation that returned complete authority of the public schools to the Board of Education. The law also abolished a separate and independent superintendent of the black schools, combining both groups under a single superintendent. One of the two assistant superintendents was in charge of white schools and the other oversaw the black schools. Thus, the autonomy enjoyed by the black school system was abridged. Also in 1900, the entire school system was divided into eleven divisions. Divisions 1 through 6 included white schools in the City of Washington. Divisions 7 and 8 included both black and white schools in the County of Washington and Divisions 9 through 11 embraced black schools in the City of Washington.⁴⁷ By 1906, the division of the school system had been adjusted to include up to fifteen schools arranged geographically. Divisions 1 through 9 were assigned to white schools, while Divisions 10 to 13 were assigned to the black students. The assignment of white and black schools to separate divisions continued up to the integration of the school system in 1954, when new jurisdictions were established.⁴⁸

During the first decade of the 20th century, private architects frequently were hired to provide designs for public school buildings. The well-known firms and practitioners involved in this work included Marsh & Peter, Appleton P. Clark, Jr., Leon Dessez, Robert Stead, Waddy B. Wood, and Glenn Brown. As a group, the school buildings of this period differed from those designed by the Building Inspector because they exhibited a greater variety in style and building materials.⁴⁹

The school buildings designed during this period reflected national advances in the technology of ventilation, heating, and lighting. No longer containing only classrooms, auditoriums, and playrooms, high schools were now "temples of education" that included large gymnasiums, swimming pools, lunchrooms, laboratories, and armories. Their design had become a science, involving consideration of the building plan, site, and relationship to the sun, entrances, cloakrooms, playgrounds, and sanitary facilities. Schools became an important building type discussed in architectural journals. During the first

⁴⁶ Beauchamp, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Beauchamp, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Beauchamp, p. 14.

⁴⁹ Beauchamp, p. 14.

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decade of the 20th century, palatial schools featuring large gymnasiums and auditoriums were constructed in New York City, St. Louis, and Chicago.⁵⁰

The Organic Law of 1906 clarified authority for the District of Columbia Public Schools and addressed certain needs of the school system. This act set out the responsibilities of the Board of Education, the District Commissioner, and the U.S. Congress and delegated executive authority to the Superintendent of Schools. Similar authority was delegated to the assistant superintendent of the black schools, under the direction of the superintendent. The act also provided for professional standards and salaries for teachers. An important provision of the 1906 Act was the appointment of a commission to study the existing buildings of the system. Composed of Superintendent of Schools William E. Chancellor, Supervising Architect of the Treasury James Knox Taylor, and Engineer Commissioner Jay I. Marrow, the Schoolhouse Commission made its report in 1908. The report covered recommendations for abandonment of old schools and the construction of new ones. Based on its inspection of schools in other cities ranging from New York to Muskegon, Michigan, the Schoolhouse Commission suggested improvements to the interior layout of the new facilities.⁵¹

With regard to new building design, the Schoolhouse Commission envisioned the consolidation of small facilities into much larger ones, typically four-to-eight room schools scattered around the city replaced by larger 16-to-24 room schools similar to those found in New York City, St. Louis, and Philadelphia. In fact, the commission singled out the new school buildings in St. Louis, designed by school architect William B. Ittner, for praise as among the finest in the nation. However, District of Columbia residents rejected these recommendations because they would require children to travel longer distances to get to school. The reaction also may have been due to a desire to avoid the appearance of teaming masses of students at any single school. In addition, the continued increase in school enrollment precluded attempts to abandon all older buildings.⁵²

Aside from the size and distribution of buildings, the Schoolhouse Commission recommended the construction of additional small manual training schools similar to the B.B. French School and for each elementary and high school to be provided with playgrounds, assembly rooms, and gymnasium. In order to maintain a high quality of school facilities, the commission recommended that a school architect be appointed and that a schoolhouse commission be made permanent.⁵³

In 1909, the U.S. Congress reorganized the Engineer Commissioner's building department. Under the supervision of the commissioner, the position of Municipal Architect was created. The major responsibility of the Municipal Architect was to prepare the plans for and supervise the construction of all municipal buildings. Six new assistants under the Municipal Architect oversaw repairs and a new

⁵⁰ Beauchamp, pp. 14-15.

⁵¹ Beauchamp, p. 15.

⁵² Beauchamp, p. 15.

⁵³ United States Schoolhouse Commission, "Report of the Schoolhouse Commission upon a General Plan for the Consolidation of Public Schools in the District of Columbia," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1908).

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system of regular inspection for sanitary conditions and fire safety was instigated. The formation of the Municipal Architect's Office mirrored the creation of city architecture offices in other urban areas.⁵⁴

At the inception of the Municipal Architect's Office, its first chief, Snowden Ashford, expressed uncertainty as to whether or not Congress intended that any of the design work for municipal buildings could be contracted to architects in private practice. As it turned out, private architects participated in the municipal design process according to the workload of the Municipal Architect's Office. When the construction program had been administered by the Building Inspector's Office in the first decade, about half of the work had been contracted out to private architects. In 1910, with the creation of the Commission of Fine Arts, the District Commissioners asked that the new review body pass on the designs for new public school buildings in the District as well as other municipal buildings.⁵⁵

During the following two decades, the design of public school buildings in the District of Columbia was dominated by the two Municipal Architects: Snowden Ashford, who served until 1921, and Albert L. Harris, who served until his death in 1933. Ashford's appointment led to a change in the architectural style of school buildings, with the adoption of "the idea then generally prevalent that the Elizabethan style of architecture was best suited to schoolhouse conditions, by reason of the large window areas, and consequently followed this type of design almost exclusively."⁵⁶ Ashford's successor, Albert L. Harris, favored the Colonial Revival style. The style was popular in the 1920s for school buildings around the country, particularly those on the East Coast with English-Colonial traditions. Some architects were partial to the style because they believed that it held an irresistible charm and possessed an eternal rather than a momentary quality. The style was thought to command the attention of laymen on whose support the maintenance of the school depended. It also bespoke a domestic character that made school as comfortable as the home.⁵⁷

During this period of architectural expression, school designs covered the range of Renaissance, Elizabethan, Collegiate Gothic, and Colonial revival styles popular in other building types. The Collegiate Gothic style, as exemplified by the 1916 Cardozo High School (formerly Central High School), the Dunbar High School (demolished), and the 1923 Eastern High School, was considered especially appropriate for the larger school building. The style was "scholastic" in character and provided a large amount of window surface and a relatively small proportion devoted to wall surface. School buildings were constructed of brick of various hues, sometimes laid in a Flemish bond, with stone, terra cotta, and pebbledash trim. The floor plan for many of the elementary school buildings were similar to that of the late 19th century schoolhouse, made up of four classrooms with adjoining cloakrooms per floor.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Beauchamp, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Beauchamp, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Appleton P. Clark, Jr. "History of Architecture in Washington," In *Washington, Past and Present: A History*, edited by John Clagett Proctor. (New York, New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1930), p. 507.

⁵⁷ Beauchamp, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁸ Beauchamp, pp. 17.

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By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the twelve-room elementary school included six rooms on each floor with an auditorium/gymnasium in the basement/first floor that also could be used by the community. In subsequent years, the auditorium/gymnasium was moved into the first floor within a rear addition to the main block. Although separate assembly halls and gymnasiums were typically provided in elementary schools nationwide, in the District of Columbia, a concern for economy dictated the combined functions in a single room.⁵⁹

The new plan provided for kindergarten classes and for increased flexibility in the allocation of classroom space. The floor plans reflected expanded functions for the public schools. Schools assisted students with developing skills useful in adult life, such as homemaking skills and military training, and thus provided special accommodations for these programs. School building design addressed the education of younger students and the use of school facilities by the general public. The siting of schools allowed for playground space outdoors to support vigorous physical exercise that complemented classroom instruction. By 1911, the Board of Education discussed the possibility of schools with sixteen to twenty rooms as a "proper size for a city as large as this one."⁶⁰

World War I (1914-1918) drew the attention of the city and building industry away from civilian construction projects at the same time that it caused a large increase in the city's population. The consequential greater number of school-age children and the slowdown of the school construction program resulted in greatly overcrowded facilities.⁶¹ After the war, the school construction program accelerated rapidly, producing a workload of crisis proportions. In order to facilitate the work, several private architectural firms were contracted in 1921 to design elementary schools. The Municipal Architect's Office took on the task of designing new junior high schools. The American Institute of Architects praised Municipal Architect Albert L. Harris for his plans for Washington's public school buildings and for his willingness to parcel out a portion of his work to private architects.⁶²

Experiments with extensible structures marked private school building design in the District in the 1920s. The increasing city population required new school buildings, but not necessarily the largest accommodations immediately. Extensible buildings were designed as a complete composition, but were built in sections as funds became available and the surrounding school population demanded additional space. The extensible building addressed the problem occasioned by additions appended to earlier school buildings. In previous periods, separate buildings were constructed adjacent to older buildings, such as the Langston-Slater complex, or new additions were designed in an identical style as the original building (such as Harris, Wheatley, and Petworth). In other instances, compatible but not identical

⁵⁹ Beauchamp, pp. 17.

⁶⁰ Beauchamp, pp. 17-18.

⁶¹ Beauchamp, pp. 18.

⁶² Beauchamp, pp. 18.

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additions were appended to the original buildings, as in the Brookland School.⁶³ An example of an extensible building, the Smothers School, initially consisted of one wing. When it was expanded, a central pavilion and equally balanced second wing were added. Another example is the Key School. The Key School was only one story in height when first constructed, but enlarged to two stories years later. Some expansible schools were never completed, such as Powell and Oyster schools. In each case, the structures consisted of one wing and a central pavilion, with the second wing on the opposite side of the pavilion never completed.⁶⁴

The school buildings of the 1920s fall into three groups: the Renaissance-style rectangular block (Smothers, Kingsman, and Cook); the Colonial Revival-style rectangular block (Janney and Barnard; and the U-shaped courtyard (Murch). The plan for the Renaissance and the Colonial Revival styles usually called for a sixteen-room school with a gymnasium and assembly hall arranged in the shape of a T. The gymnasium/auditorium was located in the stem. A central portion contained the main entrance, library, teachers' room, principal's office, and first-aid rooms flanked by two wings of eight classrooms each. The alternative U-shaped courtyard plan provided for the central portion and the gymnasium/auditorium at the bottom and classroom wings on either side. Even though this plan required a larger land area, the advantages of it included the provision of an elementary school of no more than two stories.⁶⁵

The chief of the Bureau of Efficiency, Herbert D. Brown, prepared a detailed letter to the Senate Committee in Charge of Appropriations for the District of Columbia outlining the shortage of appropriate schoolhouses. In the letter, Brown explains that "the shortage of schoolhouse accommodations at the beginning of the fiscal year 1921. ..was without doubt the most serious that had existed in the history of Washington public schools. It was estimated that \$10,000,000 would have been required at that time to make up for this shortage, including the replacement of buildings previously recommended for abandonment."⁶⁶

The regular appropriations for 1921 and 1922 combined were deemed insufficient to construct the necessary elementary-school classrooms. In light of the inadequacy of these appropriations, additional relief was requested in the form of a supplemental appropriation to cover the cost of urgently needed school sites and buildings. Brown notes "this resulted in the inclusion in the second deficiency act, approved June 16, 1921, of buildings and grounds for the public schools amounting to \$1,544,000 and the authority to enter further into obligations on this account in the amount of \$400,000. [As a result,] thirty-six additional elementary-school classrooms and two 24-room junior high schools were provided

⁶³ Beauchamp, pp. 19.

⁶⁴ Beauchamp, pp. 19.

⁶⁵ Beauchamp, pp. 19.

⁶⁶ Herbert D. Brown, "Public School System -District of Columbia," Letter to the Senate Committee in Charge of Appropriations for the District of Columbia, January 30, 1928, p. 102.

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for, excluding 16 elementary classrooms authorized for replacement of unsuitable quarters.”⁶⁷ Of the 208 elementary school classrooms servicing the public schools by 1923, 108 rooms had been constructed since 1920. This included the replacement of the 1865 wood frame Chain Bridge Road School with a modern masonry structure designed in the early 1920s by the Office of the Municipal Architect.

After several years of study, a multi-million dollar Five-Year Building Program was formulated in 1925 to provide funds and a schedule for a multi-building construction program. The purpose of this program was to “provide in the District of Columbia a program of schoolhouse construction which shall exemplify the best in schoolhouse planning, schoolhouse construction, and education accommodations.”⁶⁸ Through the Five-year Building Program, these new schools replaced part-time and oversized classes, rented structures, portables, and other undesirable facilities that had accumulated since the war. These new school buildings were constructed in areas of the District undergoing development in the 1920s. As part of the program, Municipal Architect Harris abandoned permanently the eight-room, pinwheel type of buildings. The typical school building contained sixteen to twenty classrooms.⁶⁹ “The standard elementary school building was to accommodate a maximum of 640 pupils, in a two-story building without basement, within its twenty rooms (sixteen regular classrooms, and one room each for kindergarten, manual training, domestic art, and domestic science), auditorium-gymnasium, teachers’ rooms, and principal’s office. New buildings of less than standard size [would be] extensible. As in the past, new smaller units [would] not be constructed when extensions to existing structures provided the additional accommodations required.”⁷⁰

The impact on the number of African American schools was great, as the number of students continued to rise in the 1920s. Black school facilities improved, but remained in highly segregated locations and reflected the location of much of the black population. The proposed site of the new Dunbar High School on the Howard University grounds or on 1st Street provoked protests from black residents who viewed the Howard site as too far from the center of the black residential areas. As the black and white population shifted throughout the city, black schools were often converted into white schools.⁷¹ J.C. Wright recounts that in 1924,

There were forty-five grammar school buildings with modern facilities for teaching kindergarten, music, drawing, domestic art, domestic science, physical culture, and manual training; a school for tubercular pupils, a fresh air school, and schools of the atypical, incorrigible, and speech correction; two vocational schools, two junior high schools, one manual training school, one academic high school including a

⁶⁷ Brown, pp. 103-104.

⁶⁸ Beauchamp, pp. 19-20.

⁶⁹ Beauchamp, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Lillian G. Dabney, “This History of Schools for Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1807-1947,” A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1949, p. 132.

⁷¹ Beauchamp, p. 18.

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department of business practice with accredited courses, one normal school, 22,133 pupils, 791 officers and teachers, and over \$1,000,000 paid in salaries.⁷²

The Great Depression interrupted the Five-Year Building Program, as funds to complete projects already underway or to initiate new projects were not readily available. At the same time, the New Deal programs of the Roosevelt Administration brought large numbers of workers to the District, greatly increasing the school population and the urgent need for new schools. Construction of Taft Junior High School, designed by Harris in 1929, was delayed until 1932 when split funding was appropriated only to begin the project. The funds necessary to complete the school were not appropriated until the following year. Although the contract for construction of Stoddert Elementary School was awarded and construction began in 1931, the contractor was forced by financial difficulties to stop work with just 58% of the structure completed in 1932. The bonding company then completed work. In spite of these problems, twenty-seven new schools were completed during the 1930s.⁷³

Yet, overcrowding continued to be a problem throughout the 1930s. As had happened during World War I, older buildings that had been slated for demolition were kept in service to meet the escalating need for classrooms. Portable buildings and swing shifts remained an unfortunate aspect of the public school system experience. The advent of World War II (1941-1945) found many of the earlier problems unresolved. Eliot Junior High School, completed in 1931, received its first addition in 1935. Portable classrooms placed on the site in that year were still in place when the war began. Kramer Junior High School was under construction when the war began in 1941. Although urgently needed, occupancy was delayed as the structure's use as a government agency was debated. Finally, in 1943, the War Production Board ruled that the new building could be used as a school. Kramer was over-crowded and on swing shifts from the very beginning. This situation was not relieved until 1948. Further, construction of the Davis Elementary School was halted in 1942 due to the war. It was resumed in 1944 and completed in 1946. The first wartime project to be completed, Davis was a modern building with large bright classrooms, air-cooling systems, an indoor playground, and a green-tiled corridor. An eight-room addition, including an auditorium and gymnasium, was added in 1948.⁷⁴

Albert L. Harris died in February 1933. The Commission of Fine Arts noted in its report to Congress the following year that by working with the very able architect, it had had the opportunity to establish consistently high standards for the design of municipal buildings in the District of Columbia, including schoolhouses, fire and police stations, and gasoline service stations. The work of the Office of the Municipal Architect was carried on after Harris' death by a group of consultant architects who had been involved in the earlier designs. In 1934, Nathan C. Wyeth (1870-1963), one of this group, succeeded Harris as municipal architect. Wyeth served as municipal architect from 1934 until his retirement in

⁷² J.C. Wright, Historical Sketch written for the Liber Anni, Class of 1924 Dunbar High School, p. 2.

⁷³ Beauchamp, p. 20.

⁷⁴ Beauchamp, pp. 20-21.

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1946. Wyeth's school buildings included Woodrow Wilson (1932-1935) and Coolidge (1940) High Schools, Banneker (1939) and Jefferson (1939-1940) Junior High Schools, and Lafayette (1931, addition in 1938) and Patterson (1945) Elementary Schools. As Municipal Architect, Wyeth designed the Municipal Buildings, Municipal Court, Police Court, Juvenile Court, Recorder of Deeds Building, the District of Columbia Armory, and a number of firehouses. He continued the close association with the Commission of Fine Arts that Harris had begun. His designs for schools favored the Colonial Revival style. His fine sense of proportion, massing, and siting evidenced his Beaux Arts training, although detail and vocabulary were streamlined in deference to municipal budget constraints, changing times and the influence of Moderne aesthetics.⁷⁵

Although the system of school governance established by the Organic Act of 1906 remained in force for sixty years, it received constant criticism. Conflicts between the Congress, the Commissioners, the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and the citizens of the District of Columbia persisted throughout this period. The need for an autonomous school system responsive to the educational goals of the community was balanced against the need for a fiscally responsible, centralized administration of city services. Congressional interference was often politically motivated and was particularly difficult to accept. In the decade between 1926 and 1936, support for an elected school board grew. The Federation of Citizens Association was among those groups lobbying for an elected Board.⁷⁶

The Prettyman Bill of 1935 and the Blanton Amendment of 1936 proposed placing control of the Board completely in the hands of the Commissioners. African Americans, under the leadership of board member Charles Houston, strongly opposed this plan. Houston, dean of the Howard University Law School and mentor of the coming generation of civil rights lawyers, argued that the Commissioners would not give African Americans the same consideration to which they were accustomed under the existing system with proportionate representation on the Board of Education.

There is not a single colored citizen in a position of major responsibility under the direct control of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. ... Personally I am opposed to segregation because a minority group never has full equality of opportunity under a segregated system. But our Washington school system as now set up represents the nearest approach to equality of opportunity which this Country has seen and serves as a model for segregated systems the country over.⁷⁷

By 1947, elementary school enrollment had increased to 52,968 students, with nearly half being African American children. However, the number of buildings owned by the public school system for white

⁷⁵ Beauchamp, pp. 22.

⁷⁶ Beauchamp, 22-23.

⁷⁷ Steven J. Diner, *The Governance of Education in the District of Columbia, A Historical Analysis of Current Issues*, (Washington, D.C.: University of the District of Columbia, 1982), pp. 23-24.

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students was twice that of the black students.⁷⁸ In “the History of Schools for Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1807-1947,” Lillian G. Dabney states:

From one building owned by the District for colored elementary school pupils in 1864-1865, the present [1947] elementary school plant for colored pupils has increased to fifty-two buildings, groups into thirty-nine units. Twenty- three of these buildings were erected over fifty years ago; ten, some of which are replacements, have been erected since 1925. Between 1921 and 1942, one or more additions, in terms of classrooms and assembly hall-gymnasiums, have been made to twenty-one elementary school buildings. Nine buildings, all originally built between 1868 and 1909, recommended for replacement in 1940 are still in use. Nine elementary schoolhouses now used by colored pupils were formerly occupied by white pupils...⁷⁹

Desegregation of Public Schools, 1954-present

Despite the improvement and consolidation of Washington’s public schools, an organizational dichotomy between white and black education persisted until after the *Bolling v. Sharpe* Supreme Court decision in 1954. As a result of this court case, the District public schools opened on September 13, 1954 with a desegregation plan in operation for those students who were registering for the first time or who had moved from one part of the city to another.

By 1955, reports concerning serious educational cessation and poor standardized test scores of tenth grade students resulted in the development of an ability grouping track system for student curricular assignments, which, by 1959, had been approved by the Board of Education for the elementary, junior and senior high schools levels. The track system became the basis for a new court case, *Hobson v. Hansen*, which was decided in June 1967. In his decision, U.S. Court of Appeals Judge J. Skelly Wright held that “...ability grouping as presently practiced in the District of Columbia school system is a denial of equal opportunity to the poor and a majority of the Negroes attending school in the nation’s capital, a denial that contravenes not only guarantees of the Fifth Amendment but also the fundamental premise of the track system itself.” Thus, the court ordered that the track system be terminated.⁸⁰

In 1968, Congress enacted the District of Columbia Elected Board of Education Act, changed the number of appointed members from nine to eleven elected representatives, eight of whom represent specific city wards, with three chosen by the electorate to represent the city on an at-large basis. The act further provides that the term of office for Board members shall be four years. The first election of the

⁷⁸ Dabney, p. 128.

⁷⁹ Dabney, pp. 129-130.

⁸⁰ Richard Hurlbut, “District of Columbia Public Schools, A Brief History,” Archived at the Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, (Washington, D.C., 1981), p. 2.

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Board of Education took place on November 5, 1968, and the members of the first elected Board took office on January 27, 1969.⁸¹

The first public schools in the District opened in 1805 in two small wood frame schoolhouses with fewer than fifty white students served by an initial operating budget of \$1,500. In 2000, over 70,000 students were enrolled in 190 schools supported by an estimated budget of \$556,766,952.⁸² Throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century, the white student population was generally twice that of the African American population; however, by the latter part of the 20th century, the demographics indicate that 85% of the student population in 2000 was African American.

The Second Chain Bridge Road School

Public officials and residents continuously noted the shortage of appropriate schoolhouses, especially outside the boundaries of the original federal city. Thus, after decades of insufficient school buildings, a vigorous campaign was undertaken in the early 1920s to rectify the shortage of school buildings and the replacement of buildings previously recommended for abandonment. Yet, the regular appropriations for 1921 and 1922 combined were deemed insufficient to construct the necessary elementary school classrooms and additional relief was sought to cover the cost of urgently needed school sites and buildings. As a result, funding was provided for the construction of thirty-six additional elementary school classrooms and two 24-room junior high schools, as well as the replacement of sixteen elementary classrooms previously authorized for replacement. Simultaneous to a study that ultimately resulted in the multi-million dollar Five-Year Building Program in 1925, this appropriation campaign resulted in the construction of 108 additional classrooms between 1920 and 1923. This included the replacement of the 1865 wood-frame Chain Bridge Road School, which had been one of the sixteen elementary schools noted for replacement or abandonment as early as 1908. Still in use during the 1921 school year, the school provided education for 23 students in grades 1 through 4.

The new Chain Bridge Road School was specifically intended to “relieve the school congestion in the extreme northwest section” of the city, and ultimately provided education for non-residents.⁸³ Thus, not only was the fifty-six-year-old wood frame building deemed inadequate because of its age and construction material, but also was considered too small to properly service the African American community in the greater community.

⁸¹ Hurlbut, p. 2.

⁸² Hurlbut, p. 4.

⁸³ “Chain Bridge and Smothers Schools Dedicated,” *The Washington Tribune*, Washington, D.C., December 1, 1923, p. 1.

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Albert L. Harris. Municipal Architect

The Chain Bridge Road School was constructed in 1923, utilizing designs produced by the Municipal Architect's Office under the direction of Albert L. Harris.

Albert Lewis Harris was born in Abersychan, Wales on October 15, 1869 to Job and Harriet Harris. The Harris family immigrated to the United States in 1873, settling in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Albert Harris attended school in Pennsylvania and Virginia, graduating from Arlington Academy in 1893. He graduated from The George Washington University in 1912 with a Bachelor's of Science in architecture. Prior to his years at the university, Harris was apprenticed at the Washington office of the architectural firm of Henry Ives Cobb, of Chicago, Illinois. Additionally, he worked as chief draftsman for the architectural firm of Hornblower & Marshall of Washington, D.C. from 1900 until 1911. Harris' work during his apprenticeship with Hornblower & Marshall included the United States National Museum in Washington and the United States Custom House in Baltimore. In 1911, after the death of Hornblower, Harris was responsible for the designs of a number of prominent residences, including the Lothrop House and the residence of Hewitt Wells, and the Army and Navy Club Building.

Harris was a professor of architecture at The George Washington University from 1912 until 1933, a position he also held at Catholic University of America from 1914 to 1921. He became Municipal Architect of the City of Washington in 1921 and maintained this post until his death in 1933. As stated in the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*,

In 1925, the national congress approved the five-year building program for additional school buildings in Washington, which included the new McKinley high school, the Macfarland, Langley and Stuart junior high schools and many other municipal buildings, all of which were designed under his supervision.⁸⁴

Harris was responsible for the design of the reptile house at the National Zoo, Roosevelt High School, Charles Young Platoon School, the water tower at Fort Reno Reservoir, and a number of fire stations located throughout the District of Columbia. Harris later became associated with prominent Washington, D.C. architect, Arthur B. Heaton, in the design of new buildings for The George Washington University.

Albert L. Harris was a fellow of the American Institute of Architects and a member of the Sigma Nu and Sigma Tau fraternities and the Cosmos Club. He was intensely interested in his professional work, especially the educational activities associated with architecture. Harris was

⁸⁴ *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, Volume 24, (Clifton, New Jersey: James T. White and Company, 1984), p. 165.

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married on June 14, 1892 to Lily Elizabeth Black, and had two children, Kathryn and William Harris. He died in Washington, D.C. on February 24, 1933.⁸⁵ Following his death, the Board of Education honored Harris:

The efficient development of the school buildings of Washington is due to the splendid services rendered by Mr. Harris during the time he served as municipal architect. A high standard has been achieved, both in plan and design, with the result that the Washington school buildings are equaled by few and excelled by none. The sympathetic attitude displayed by Mr. Harris, together with sound advice, has been of great assistance to the Board of Education. The schools erected will be a lasting monument to his ability and genius.⁸⁶

Chain Bridge Road School (1923-1941)

Construction of the new school building on Chain Bridge Road was contracted by the District of Columbia Board of Education on May 22, 1923, with completion expected by October 1, 1923. The construction firm of Ennis and Hare was awarded the contract to build the new school to the designs of Municipal Architect Albert L. Harris.⁸⁷ The masonry schoolhouse was modest in scale compared to contemporaneous school buildings being constructed, yet the floor plan followed the fairly predictable pattern of classrooms with adjoining cloakrooms on each floor arranged around a central hallway and play area. This elementary school building plan was similar to that of the late 19th century schoolhouse, as was commonly the case in the early 1920s.⁸⁸

The new Chain Bridge Road School building opened on September 17, 1923, with H.E. Wilson serving as teacher and principal for thirty-four students, grades 1 through 5. The superintendent routinely reported the progress of the building's construction and its dedication to the Board of Education months after it opened:

The superintendent reported that progress in the construction of schools permitted the dedication of but two schools during this "Education Week." These are the Chain Bridge and the Smothers. The Macfarland and the Langley Junior High Schools are not yet ready for formal dedication ceremonies.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ National Cyclopedica of American Biography, p. 165.

⁸⁶ "Harris is Honored by School Board," *The Evening Star*, Washington, D.C., March 2, 1933.

⁸⁷ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia, July 1922 to June 1923, Volume 13," June 11, 1923, p.5.

⁸⁸ Beauchamp, p. 17.

⁸⁹ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia, July 1923 to June 1924, Volume 14," November 21, 1923, p. 2.

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On December 1, 1923, *The Washington Tribune* published a detailed article entitled "Chain Bridge and Smothers Schools Dedicated," reporting on the formal dedication of the new Chain Bridge Road School.

Many persons high in the official life of the public school system attended the dedicatory exercises held Thursday and Friday of last week at the Chain Bridge and Smothers schools, the two new buildings recently completed. ...The Municipal Architect, Mr. Harris, in giving up the keys, in both instances expressed the pleasure it was to him to turn over such magnificent structures to the citizens. Mr. Wilkinson, the Assistant Superintendent of Schools in his address of acceptance, told the citizens that the schools now being consecrated to the cause of education should receive the best treatment and at all times be well attended.⁹⁰

So far from downtown control, the teacher, who also served as principal and was always male, needed flexibility from year to year as to how he used the school's rooms, since the number and ages of children attending often changed. It is not uncommon to find noted in the *Annual Register of Pupils* that children attending Chain Bridge Road School starting first grade were ages 7, 9, and even 12 or that second graders were age 13.⁹¹ The school year was based upon fall and winter semesters and attrition occurred between semesters. There was always a first grade and the subsequent five grades in the 1920s and 1930s, but the school might or might not always have a sixth, seventh or eighth grade, depending upon the annual enrollment. Over the seventeen years that the school operated, its average enrollment was in the low twenties, but the ages and grade levels needing to be served at the school from year to year was unpredictable. Serving as it did a relatively rural community, the second Chain Bridge Road School consistently had the lowest enrollment of all the African American schools in the District of Columbia.⁹² The prevailing ratio within the D.C. school system was approximately one teacher per twenty students. When enrollment was high, the Chain Bridge Road teacher taught more than twenty children, ranging from as many as 32 in 1921; 34 in 1923; 39 in 1931. Only when the numbers reached the all time high of 40 students in 1925 did the school board temporarily assign a second teacher. The small student body allowed (or possibly, required) the principal of the Chain Bridge Road School to also serve as teacher. Teachers/principals included H.E. Wilson, O.R. Rogers, Jr., S.H. Popel in the 1920s and E.J. Edward and C.B. Shorter in the 1930s.⁹³

⁹⁰ "Chain Bridge and Smothers Schools Dedicated," *The Washington Tribune*, Washington, D.C., December 1, 1923, p.1.

⁹¹ "District of Columbia Public Schools Annual Register of Pupils," *Record Book*, 1903-1931, Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁹² "District of Columbia Public Schools Annual Register of Pupils," *Record Book*, 1903-1931, Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, Washington, D.C.; Public Schools of the District of Columbia, *Membership Report*, 1920, 1922-1923, 1925-1938.

⁹³ Telephone Interview between Chain Bridge Road School student James Branch and Judith Lanis, February 11, 2002.

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Consistent with the concept of the country school, all children in all grades were taught in one classroom, housed on the second floor of the southeast corner of the building. However, in various years, the teacher might utilize a second classroom, if a class activity or size demanded it. Domestic arts (the equivalent of home economics) was also taught in a second floor classroom. Although the first floor was used for manual training or industrial arts and, occasionally, as a gym, such courses depended upon the particular emphasis within the school system at the time.⁹⁴

A free lunch was provided at the school and was served in one of the two upstairs classrooms, which could also serve as an all purpose room, remembers one of the students, James Branch who attended first through fifth grade until the school closed in 1941. Mr. Branch was one of a number of non-residential African American students from Maryland, west of Chain Bridge, who attended the Chain Bridge Road School.⁹⁵ Children from Brooks Park, Glen Echo, Cabin John, and Rock Springs also attended the school.

District of Columbia students, making up the majority of the student body, came from the immediate area surrounding the school—Chain Bridge Road, Little Falls Road, Conduit Road, Canal Road, and St. Phillips Hill. Enrollment at the Chain Bridge Road School had risen to 40 students, grades 1-7 in two classrooms by 1925. The following year, although the curriculum had been extended to include 8th grades, the number of students was reduced to 25 (10 boys and 15 girls). By 1927, despite the introduction of a manual training school in the first floor of the building, the enrollment was just 24 pupils in grades 1-6. The October 1928 registration included thirteen boys and eight girls, grades 1-6. The following year, attendance included twelve boys and eight girls, grades 1- 7 with a manual arts classes and gymnasium. The use of the first floor for manual industrial arts continued well into the middle part of the 1930s. In 1935, fifteen boys and nineteen girls in grades 1-6 attended Chain Bridge Road School. Three years later, in 1938, grades 1-6 included only 21 students.⁹⁶

Befitting its rural setting, the small school had an especially large half-acre schoolyard where the children played during recess. They also had the added advantage across the road of Battery Kemble Park, which provided acres of mowed open space with a grape arbor, and a multitude of apple and cherry trees to climb and fruit to consume.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Public Schools of the District of Columbia, *Membership Report*, 1926-1931, 1936-1937.

⁹⁵ Telephone Interview between Chain Bridge Road School student James Branch and Judith Lanus, February 11, 2002.

⁹⁶ Attendance Figures, 1920-1938 for Chain Bridge Road School, archived at the Sumner School.

⁹⁷ Attendance Figures, 1920-1938 for Chain Bridge Road School, archived at the Sumner School.

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In 1923, the Chain Bridge Road Citizens' Association requested permission to hold their meetings in the new school, which was immediately viewed as a community center by local residents. In December that year, John R. Scott, president of the association, requested permission from the school board to use kerosene lamps to light the building, which was not electrified at the time it was constructed.⁹⁸ Over the next five years, the Chain Bridge Parent-Teachers Association requested that an electric current be carried into the building. In January 1928, the school board officially advised against the installation of an electric current because the "building [was] situated in the open country."⁹⁹ Further, in December 1930, Reverend James Nickens, president of the parent-teacher association, informed the school board that the drinking water at the school was unfit and requested information regarding the possibility of supplying the Chain Bridge School with water.¹⁰⁰ Two months later, in February 1931, the Assistant Engineer Commissioner forwarded the requested information, including "drawings showing the considerable distance of existing water mains from the school and the heavy expense to extend the service."¹⁰¹

The decline in the number of students attending the school, in addition to the unfit conditions, prompted Max Stem, owner of 2762 Chain Bridge Road, the property immediately adjacent to the school, to petition the school board in October 1940 on behalf of some local residents to evaluate the operation of the school. The petitioners objected to the "expense of maintaining [a] large and expensive school for seventeen pupils, including some non-resident pupils."¹⁰² Many of the parents, members of the parent-teacher association, and citizens of the community of Chain Bridge Road School objected to the closing of the school, especially in the middle of the school year.¹⁰³ Yet, on December 4, 1940, Mr. Maurer, chairman of the committee on personnel, presented the order that unanimously recommended for the "discontinued use of Chain Bridge Road School, Division 10, effective from and after January 31, 1941."¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia," 10th Meeting, December 19, 1923, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia," 13th Meeting, January 18, 1928, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia," 10th Meeting, December 3, 1930, p. 2 and 17.

¹⁰¹ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia," 14th Meeting, February 4, 1931, p. 28.

¹⁰² Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia," 7th Meeting, October 2, 1940, p. 4.

¹⁰³ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia," 9th Meeting, November 6, 1940, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia," 11th Meeting, December 4, 1940, p. 27.

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The seventeen African American students enrolled at Chain Bridge Road School at the time of its closure were transferred to Phillips-Wormley School.¹⁰⁵ The Wormley School, an African American elementary school on Prospect Street in Georgetown, was consolidated with Phillips School in 1930, and renamed the Phillips-Wormley School. The teachers at the Chain Bridge Road School at the time of its closing were sent to the Harrison Elementary School at 13th and V Streets, N.W.¹⁰⁶

Despite its closing in 1941, the Chain Bridge Road School continued to be maintained by the District of Columbia School Board. The records of the school board indicated the National Capitol Park and Planning Commission used the building as a warehouse in the 1940s and early 1950s. Slated for demolition, the building was instead auctioned by the school board in 1953.¹⁰⁷ The property was purchased by neighboring property owner, H. Gabriel Murphy. In 1964, the building, reportedly, was repaired and offered as a nursery school for Caroline Kennedy. "Mrs. Kennedy approved but, unfortunately, moved to New York... [and] the owners nevertheless started the school anyway."¹⁰⁸ The nursery school occupation was of short duration and the building, with rare exceptions, has been vacant for decades.

Conclusion

Originally located in the unpopulated far northwest section of the city, the 1923 Chain Bridge Road School at 2820 Chain Bridge Road, because of its low student use and subsequent sale into private hands, has remained remarkably intact and retains a high degree of integrity. The unaltered building, therefore, is an excellent representation of a rural elementary school, designed in a style that looks back to the 19th century schoolhouse in building form and architectural style. It was designed by the Municipal Architect's Office in the first part of the 1920s, a notable period of building replacement in the history of the school system.

The Chain Bridge Road School is an important heritage site that recognizes the African American community that settled around Battery Kemble in the middle part of the 19th century until the mid-20th century and the educational history of African Americans throughout upper northwest. Furthermore, the property documents the District of Columbia Board of Education's policy of racial segregation beginning with the 1865 construction of the Chain Bridge Road School for the African American children and the Conduit Road School one year earlier for the white children in the extreme northwest section of Washington County. The continued separation

¹⁰⁵ Telephone Interview between Chain Bridge Road School student James Branch and Judith H. Lanius, February 11, 2002.

¹⁰⁶ Board of Education of the District of Columbia, "Minutes of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia," 15th Meeting, February, 5, 1941, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ Yet, as late as 1965, the Chain Bridge School continued to be listed in the inventory by the Office of General Research, Budget, and Legislation for the Board of Education as one of the discontinued, razed, or sold school buildings once owned by the school board.

¹⁰⁸ Purves, p. 6.

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of the races, as documented by the construction of the second Chain Bridge Road School in 1923, was maintained by the Board of Education until 1954.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The Chain Bridge Road School at 2820 Chain Bridge Road is located on Lot 814 in Square 1425 in Washington D.C. The rectangular lot fronts Chain Bridge Road.+

Boundary Justification:

The school has been associated with this lot and square since the construction of the first school building on the site in 1865.

+

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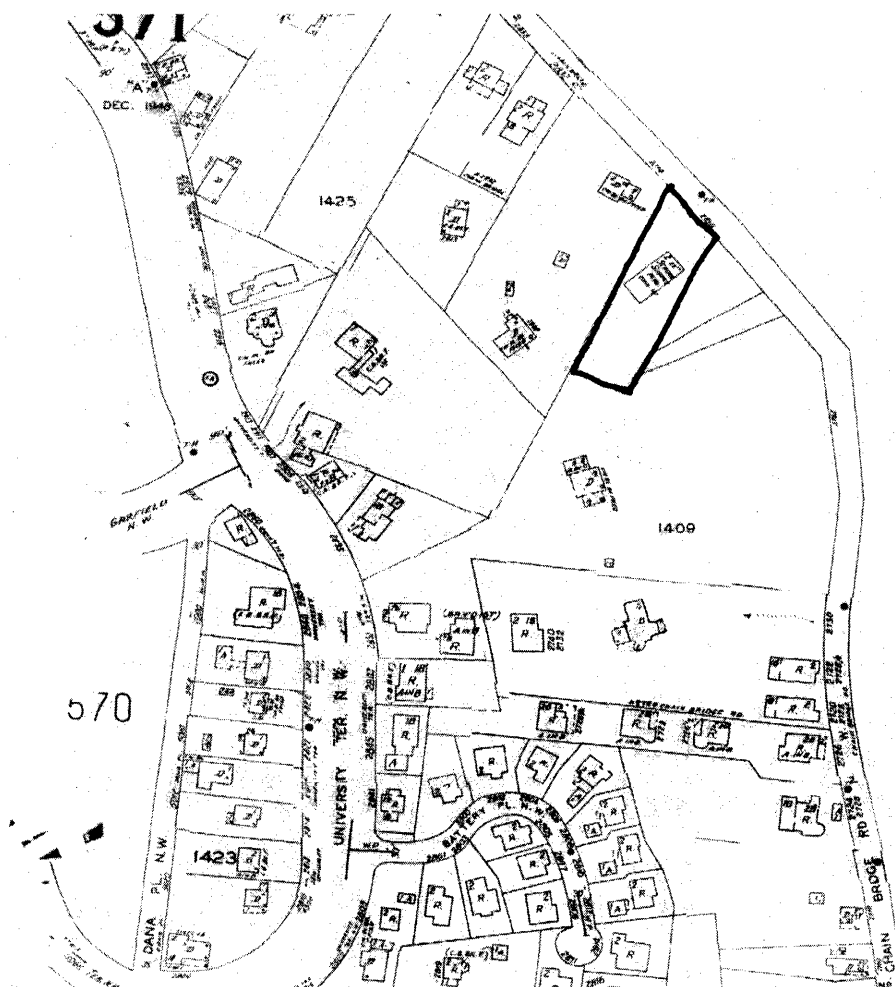
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SITE MAP



Chain Bridge Road School
2820 Chain Bridge Road
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1991