

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 Woodrow Wilson High School
other names _____

2. Location

street & number 3950 Chesapeake Street, NW ☐ not for publication
city or town Washington, D.C. ☐ vicinity
state District of Columbia code DC county _____ code 001 zip code _____

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).

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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

Woodrow Wilson High 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
<u>2</u>	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
<u>2</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Tenleytown in Washington, D.C.: Architectural and Historic Resources, 1791-1941

Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960

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)

EDUCATION/School

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVAL/Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Granite

walls Brick

roof Slate

other

Narrative Description

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

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Description Summary:

The Woodrow Wilson High School is located on triangular parcel of land in the Tenleytown neighborhood of northwest Washington, D.C. Set upon a commanding site near the city's highest point at Fort Reno, the school and its grounds are bounded by Chesapeake Street on the north, Fort Drive on the west, and the diagonally cut Nebraska Avenue on the southeast. The school consists of a five-part building complex with a central block with an open interior courtyard, and obliquely sited end wings, connected to the main block by one-story, curved arcades. The school is organized along an arc facing southeast to the school's outdoor stadium and Nebraska Avenue.

Constructed in 1934-35, with later additions, the red brick Wilson High School was designed in an Academic Colonial Revival style evoking an 18th-century Tidewater estate. The three-story central block which houses most of the school's classrooms is flanked by an auditorium to its south and the original gymnasium, now a media center, to the northeast, both connected to the main building by enclosed and arcaded walkways. Subsequent additions include a 1971 gymnasium adjoining the east side of the original gymnasium and a new (2008) aquatic center on the site of an earlier (1976) pool addition. The school's original power plant, including a substantial brick chimneystack, is located south of the auditorium wing and just west of the new aquatic center. The north wall of the power plant and the south wall of the auditorium building create a passageway entrance from Fort Drive to the new aquatic center.

The design of Woodrow Wilson High School is the product of the combined efforts of the District's Municipal Architect, a team of consulting architects, and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, which served as the primary review body. Municipal Architect Albert Harris established the basic plan, but died during the review process. Allied Architects Frederick V. Murphy, the founder of Catholic University's Department of Architecture; Edward W. Donn, Jr., formerly of Wood, Donn & Deming and a prominent Colonial Revival restoration architect; and Nathan C. Wyeth, Municipal Architect and successor to Albert Harris, were together asked to take the project to completion.

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General Description:

Woodrow Wilson High School was constructed in 1934-35 in a Colonial Revival style following the Palladian composition of a five-part symmetrical plan connecting secondary wings to a main block with one-story hyphens. The high school complex is a steel frame structure, clad in red brick, laid in a Flemish bond, and is covered with intersecting hipped roofs, clad in slate. The building composition, its proportions and the Colonial Revival detailing, including rubbed and gauged brickwork found at the

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principal entry and windows, is an academically accurate interpretation of 18th century building traditions of the Tidewater region.

The three-story main block, oriented southeast and overlooking the football stadium and track, is a massive, cube-like building set upon a raised rusticated stone foundation and surrounding an open, inner court. The building is covered with intersecting hipped roofs, adorned with a prominent cupola on-center of the front wing. The roof was originally clad in slate shingles; in 2008 the original slate shingles were replaced with plastic replicas.

The principal façade of the cube is itself divided into three parts with a projecting and pedimented central pavilion. The central pavilion is five-bays wide and is capped by a pediment. At the first story level, the center three bays comprise three, single, recessed double-leaf wood doors with multi light transom windows and wood surrounds, while the two outer bays hold single double-hung windows. The primary entry, on-center of the three features an engaged, pedimented brick surround formed by two carved Ionic pilasters supporting a segmentally arched brick pediment. The brick surround is gauged and rubbed in a decorative manner intended to highlight the entry. The entry is reached by stone, dog-leg stairs convening at a landing that extends the width of the main gable. The stairs are faced with rusticated stone, matching that of the stone base of the building. A wrought iron railing ascends with the stairs and forms a perimeter railing on the landing. The closed pediment of the gable is embellished with a raking cornice, dentil brick molding and a centrally placed, multi-pane oculus encircled by a decorative carved and rubbed brick wreath and swag. The flanking wings are both six bays long with symmetrically arranged single windows defining each bay.

The foundation is lit with multi-paned windows with stone sills and lintels. A molded brick belt course runs the entire length of the building separating the stone foundation from the brick façade. The façade fenestration is symmetrical and all windows have simple stone sills and rubbed brick surrounds and jack-arched lintels. The original windows were 15-light wood sash awnings over 15-light wood sash hoppers. They were replaced throughout the building in 1992 with 1/1 double hung windows. A second molded brick belt course wraps around the structure between the first and second floor windows reinforcing the horizontal quality of the structure. Brick quoins adorn the building's corners and a dentil brick cornice encircles the entire building.

The clock tower/steeple/cupola adorning the center of the front wing of the main block of the high school consists of a pentagonal-shaped frame drum set upon a square base and capped by a domed roof above a rectangular pinnacle. The clock is located on the front face of the drum.

The northwest elevation (original rear) extends nineteen bays long and consists of a nine-bay recessed pavilion on-center, flanked by five-bay-wide end pavilions. The two end pavilions feature single entry doors, located at the center bay, and articulated with engaged brick surrounds with segmental arched

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pediments supported by Ionic pilasters. All of the brickwork of the surround is molded and rubbed. The doors are reached by dog-leg stairs built into a rusticated stone base with a landing at the door and a wrought iron railing.

The ordered and balanced fenestration with stone sills, brick lintels and surrounds carries consistently throughout all four façades of the main block. Raised, three-story, one bay wide pedimented panels project from both the northeast and southwest façades of the central block connecting the original gymnasium and auditorium wings by hyphens.

The central and principal block of the school is connected to the end pavilions (original gymnasium and auditorium) by one-story arcaded walkways, constructed of brick and covered with gable roofs. A procession of round arched multi pane windows with fanlights extends the length of the corridors on both elevations of these arcades. Centrally located doors with arched fanlights and stone steps offer further entry into the connective walkways. On the south side of the main building, two arcades at the front and rear, connect the main building to the auditorium. On the north side, a single arcade connects the main building to the former gymnasium.

The northeast wing, originally housing the gymnasium and now serving as a media center, rises two stories high. It is set upon a raised stone base, is constructed of brick and has a hipped slate roof. The nine-bay façade of the building encompasses a central entry. The former gym was converted to a library in 1971. A contemporary brick gymnasium with a flat roof, built in 1971, extends off the northeast façade of the library. Brick detailing displayed on the main block is echoed throughout both wings.

The southern wing, houses the school's auditorium. The two-story wing sits upon a raised stone foundation and is covered with a hipped roof. The south elevation facing the school's front track is divided into five bays, with three arched door openings on-center of the façade. Five, single windows are located in the second story. The other elevations of the auditorium wing are unfenestrated brick wall surfaces.

The school's original power plant/ boiler house is located south of the auditorium wing. It is a brick building, set upon a raised stone base and covered with a hipped roof. A prominent smokestack that rises in tiered sections well above the roofline is appended to the southwest wall of the auditorium. The power plant has equally spaced single window openings on its north elevation.

Interior:

The Wilson School plan includes the central academic building housing classrooms and administrative offices, and the flanking wings, originally housing an auditorium and gymnasium. The academic

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building is laid out with double-loaded corridors extending the length of all four wings of the cube and opening onto classrooms to either side. The main entrance to the building, located in the southeast wing and facing southeast, provides three arched entry doors that open into a large entry vestibule. Directly opposite the exterior doors, three, double-wide doors lead from the large entry hall into the corridor of this southeastern wing. The entry hall is a large and gracious space with tall ceilings with plaster crown moldings, terrazzo flooring and plaster walls with framed panels above dark wood paneled wainscoting. The arched openings leading to the corridor have generous widths allowing for ample circulation and deep-set door surrounds framed by five-light transoms and paneled side walls.

The plaster walls, wood wainscoting, and terrazzo flooring carries into the corridor of the southeast wing. School offices open off of the corridor immediately opposite the principal entry. The offices have double wood and glass doors with transom lights. A bronze memorial tablet dedicated in 1950 to those Wilson students who died in battle, is located on-center of the corridor in an arched wooden panel.

The southeast wing is the principal wing and more ornately articulated by its wooden wainscoting and doors. The other three wings instead have tile wainscoting with plaster above. Classroom doors are recessed into the tiled walls and lack the full wood surrounds of those in the southeast wing. Typically, the corridors are lined with metal lockers between classrooms. Banks of half-turn, metal stairs are located in the four corners of the central block, accessing all level of the school building, while simple, straight-flight stairs lead from the central block to the arcaded hyphens. The arcaded hyphens follow the curve of the exterior and are lit on either side with expansive arched window openings. Like the corridors, the arcades have terrazzo flooring, tiled wall wainscoting and plaster walls above.

Integrity:

Woodrow Wilson High School, purpose-built as a public school in 1934-35 continues to serve as a public high school and retains a high degree of architectural integrity. Despite certain alterations such as the 1971 gymnasium addition and the 2008 aquatic center, the building's overall form and massing, and much of its character-defining exterior and interior details are intact. The building has replacement windows and doors, as well as replacement roof cladding, but it retains the original window and door openings and surrounds, as well as its original roof structure. The interior survives very much intact with few alterations.

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)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1935-1960

Significant Dates

1935; 1938

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation**Architect/Builder**Albert Harris; Nathan Wyeth; Edward W. Donn, Jr.;
Frederick Vernon Murphy**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

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

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Summary Statement of Significance:

Woodrow Wilson High School at Fort Reno in the Tenleytown neighborhood of Washington, D.C. was designed in 1932 and 1933 in the depths of the Great Depression, and opened in 1935 to serve the pressing secondary education needs of the larger community. The school is designed in a 20th-century Academic Colonial Revival style and is the product the Office of the Municipal Architect, with design recommendations provided by the Commission of Fine Arts. The School is eligible for listing in the National Register under the Multiple Property Document: *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1864-1960*. The school falls within two Associated Property Subtypes: The Office of the Municipal Architect, Albert L. Harris and The Office of the Municipal Architect, Nathan C. Wyeth.

The Woodrow Wilson School meets Criterion A with Education as the Area of Significance because it conveys important information regarding the history and development of the public school system in the District of Columbia. More specifically, the school is associated with the District of Columbia's post-World War I schoolhouse building program, which attempted to meet the urgent need for public school facilities in the District. Throughout the early decades of the 20th century, concern had grown over the poor conditions of the District of Columbia's schoolhouses. By 1920, the school system was plagued by a shortage of school buildings, obsolete facilities, and overcrowded classes throughout the city. An explosion of the school-age population of the District in the post World War I era further strained a system that was already relying on temporary classrooms and part-time shifts of students rotating through the school day.¹ The Woodrow Wilson High School was built to serve white children in the surrounding neighborhoods where the boom in housing developments and a rapidly increasing population made the overcrowding problem in the schools particularly acute. Although Congress sharply cut the District's school construction budget in the depth of the Depression, it did permit construction of Woodrow Wilson to go forward on a somewhat reduced appropriation.

The Woodrow Wilson School meets Criterion C with Architecture as the Area of Significance because it provides an excellent illustration of the Academic Colonial Revival style, especially in its wide acceptance and use for public school buildings. More specifically, Wilson High School, designed in 1932-34 and completed in 1935, exemplifies the importance of the role of the Commission of Fine Arts in the design of the District's school buildings. It also reflects the work of two of Washington, D.C.'s most noted municipal architects, Albert L. Harris and Nathan C. Wyeth.

¹ Tanya Edwards Beauchamp, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960 (Washington, D.C., 2001), E-25.

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The Period of Significance for Wilson High School extends from 1935 when the building was completed to 1960—a point fifty years prior to the present.

Resource History and Historic Context:

School Planning in the Inter-War Years:

In 1922, a Congressional committee studying the public school system of D.C. submitted a report on the city's schools that led to the establishment of a major school building program called The Five Year Building Plan. The goal of the plan was to provide funds and develop a schedule for a school construction program to alleviate overcrowding in the city's schools, generally caused by the city's growing population, and to replace and/or enlarge its older school buildings. The program specifically stipulated that it would "provide in the District of Columbia a program of schoolhouse construction which shall exemplify the best in schoolhouse planning, schoolhouse construction, and education accommodations." Despite the program's overall successes, the Great Depression interrupted the plan, and school overcrowding, exacerbated by an influx in population brought on by Roosevelt's New Deal, continued to plague the city's school system throughout the 1930s.

In Tenleytown, where Woodrow Wilson High School would be constructed, the 1920s and 1930s were a time of phenomenal growth as the former rural village was transformed into a residential neighborhood of the city. Extensive collections of single-family dwellings were built upon the newly subdivided lots and along the new-cut streets, bringing with them a significant increase in the number of school-aged children. Indeed, in 1928, the D.C. school system serving the Tenleytown area was recognized as the most crowded in the system.² In 1925, Janney Elementary School was built to relieve the overcrowding at the 1883 Tenley School, but as enrollment continued to rise, plans were made in 1928 to construct Alice Deal Middle School. While the new Janney and Deal (completed in 1931) schools accommodated the K-8 student body, Tenleytown lacked a school for its older student body. Tenleytown's high school-aged students generally attended Western High School in Georgetown. At that time, due to over-enrollment, Western High School was one of several high schools operating with double shifts.³

Despite the best intentions, the city's five-year school building program was not fully funded and only one high school (McKinley) was constructed during the initial campaign. When a second five-year program was initiated in the midst of the Great Depression, emphasis was placed on

² William E. Peake, "Schools Jammed, and Pupils Suffer," *Washington Post*, 14 October 1928, 1 as cited in EHT Traceries, "Woodrow Wilson High School and the Evolution of its Vicinity," p. #.

³ D.C. Board of Education. *Report of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia*, 1928-29 (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1929), 81.

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building large junior high schools that would serve students through 9th grade. The construction of junior high schools was seen as a way of reducing the overcrowding of both high schools as well as elementary schools. During this period, numerous junior high schools were constructed, including that of Alice Deal (opened in September 1931). At the time of its construction, it was noted that the section served by the new school “has grown in population more rapidly than any other community in Washington.”⁴

The opening of McKinley High School and Alice Deal Jr. High School along with other junior high schools was expected to ease the crowding at Western High School. However, by January 1931, students at Western High School were again on half-day schedules and the Chevy Chase Home and School Association began to spearhead a drive to construct a new high school” that would accommodate the high school students of the larger Chevy Chase area.⁵ The Board of Education clearly recognized the growing need for a high school in the area and had, by 1931, begun a study for potential sites and secured funding for the purchase of land and the development of building plans. By December 1932, the site at 41st and Chesapeake streets had been acquired and \$500,000 set aside “to start the senior high school in the Reno section.”⁶ At the same time, prior to its design and construction, the Board of Education decided to name the high school Woodrow Wilson, in honor of the 28th president of the United States.

The Board of Education decision to name the school for President Woodrow Wilson was in keeping with its naming of other recently constructed schools for Presidents William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. District schools of that period were generally named for leaders in government or education, honoring their civic achievement. Hundreds of schools across the nation were named for Woodrow Wilson, a wartime president eulogized as a president of peace for his work in creating the League of Nations.

Design and Construction of Wilson High School:

Wilson High School was designed in 1932 and 1933 and built in 1935 with the completion of the athletic field not occurring until 1938. The school was the ninth of the city’s modern high school buildings and, though it was a product of the Office of the Municipal Architect, its design was shaped by a variety of forces, including conflicting directives of Congress, and the design stipulations of the Commission of Fine Arts. The building was designed at the depth of the Depression, at a time when Congress made deep cuts in the city’s budget. Yet, those overseeing the design process, both in Congress and on the Commission of Fine Arts, argued that he

⁴ As quoted in “Woodrow Wilson High School and the Development of Its Vicinity,” EHT Traceries, October, 2008, p.16.

⁵ “Chevy Chase Group Plans School Drive,” *Washington Post*, January 25, 1931, M 22.

⁶ “New School Plans Call for \$2,918,920: \$500,000 in 1934 is Sought to Add Structure in Reno Section,” *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1932.

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building should be of an architectural quality appropriate for its commanding site in the nation's capital.

The design of Woodrow Wilson High School was begun under Municipal Architect Albert Harris, but, following his unexpected death, was continued by consulting architects Nathan C. Wyeth, Edward W. Donn, Jr., and Frederick V. Murphy, working through the Allied Architects of Washington, D.C.⁷ Nathan C. Wyeth, appointed Municipal Architect in 1934, oversaw the completion of the building's ultimate design and construction and, although Wyeth has generally been credited as the architect of the building, minutes from the Commission of Fine Arts and written testimony of Wyeth himself, indicate that the building was a product of many hands.

The Colonial Revival-style design of Wilson High School reflects both the growing influence of the Commission of Fine Arts on the design review of all of the city's public buildings, and the prevalence of the Colonial Revival movement of the time. The Commission of Fine Arts strongly favored Colonial design influences, as it explained in its Twelfth Report to Congress:

"The Commission of Fine Arts in discussions with the exceptionally able municipal architect, the late Albert Harris, realized the opportunity to adopt a general type of architecture for school and engine houses and police stations, as also gasoline service stations in the District of Columbia. The so-called Georgian style is flexible in its uses and gives the maximum of light and air. At the same time, it is consonant with the architectural style used almost invariably during colonial days and even down to the 1860s in Maryland and Virginia. As a result of this decision, the District buildings are simple, commodious, and of good proportion. So satisfactory is this type of architecture that it is being used throughout the country around Washington for schoolhouses, churches, banks, and residences. Appropriateness, dignity, simplicity and permanence have thus been gained."

The initial design for Woodrow Wilson High School was prepared by Albert Harris and submitted to the Commission of Fine Arts in 1932. At the request of Congress, in an effort to reduce building costs, the proposed plan for Wilson was modeled on the newly built and well-received Roosevelt High School that had been designed by Harris. Like Roosevelt High School, the plan for Wilson consisted of a five-part composition including a square main block connected by arcades to separate gymnasium and auditorium wings on either side, all raised above street level upon an earthen terrace. In his initial plan, Harris sited the school upon the hill, facing north to Chesapeake Street with the athletic fields located at the rear. Harris noted that he had tried to simplify the design to cut down the cost and that the building was thus designed without a tower or cupola. In both Congressional and public discussions of construction costs of school

⁷ "Architects to Consult on Reno High School," *The Washington Post*, April 9, 1933, p. 18.

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buildings, cupolas had become emblematic of costly design features. Harris had been severely criticized in Congress for putting a cupola on the Taft Junior High School.⁸

Despite the Commission's favorable view of Harris, it roundly criticized Harris's original scheme for Wilson and after site visits to both Roosevelt and the Wilson school site, demanded major revisions of the plans and repeatedly rejected subsequent submissions over a period of months. Of particular concern to the Commission was the building's siting and topography. The Commission of Fine Arts argued that the plan was not suited well to the site (a hill at the highest point in the city), and that the building should take greater advantage of its topography and the importance of Fort Drive, intended as a scenic drive connecting the Civil War forts that formed a ring around the city.

Given the extreme length of the building (555 feet) the Commission recommended the addition of a central feature such as a cupola. It also urged the use of windows on both sides of the arcades and the elimination of the auditorium fly loft, which it considered "unsightly."⁹ The architect returned later that month, but the Commission still objected to the placement of the building on a terrace "with a great flight of steps leading up to the auditorium and gymnasium" and thus deferred action pending receipt of a grading plan.¹⁰

Harris returned to the Commission the following month, showing a revised design with a cupola and reorganized placement of the gym and auditorium. The Commission remained skeptical of the overall siting plan, however, and strongly recommended the elimination of the high terrace. The Commission also suggested that the city engage a landscape architect, as noted in its minutes:

The Commission of Fine Arts, on November 18, 1932, considered further plans prepared by the Municipal Architect for the Fort Reno High School. The members again visited the site, and again were impressed by the commanding situation and by the opportunities which it affords for a fine and impressive group of buildings dominating a wide area.

The Commission were convinced that a more detailed and more comprehensive study of the problem with a view of adapting the buildings to the topography, would result in a very distinct saving in costs, combined with greater architectural impressiveness.¹¹

The District Engineer Commissioner, Major Gotwals objected to hiring a landscape architect for budgetary and time constraints, but agreed to the preparation of a topographic plan for use in the

⁸ Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, 4 October 1932, Washington, D.C.

⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, October 4, 1932, p. 4.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, October 24, 1932, p. 6.

¹¹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, November 21, 1932, Exhibit D-1.

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development of the school grounds. At its next meeting, in January 1933, CFA approved the revised design concept for Wilson, but in a letter to Major Gotwals criticized the District Engineer:

The Commission understand your urgency in getting this building under construction, and note with interest what you say about the expense that would occur from further delay. They would point out, however, that the revision of the plans as advised by the Commission has reduced the cost of the buildings by much over \$50,000...while at the same time making them more convenient and improving their appearance.¹²

The following month Albert Harris died unexpectedly, leaving the post of Municipal Architect temporarily vacant. The Municipal Architect's office turned to the Allied Architects of Washington, D.C., Inc., for assistance in designing the school. The Allied Architects was an organization of Washington architects, many of them prominent, which was formed to provide architectural services for the construction of public buildings, with some of the proceeds to be donated to the advancement of architecture. The three members of the committee of architects designated to work on the Woodrow Wilson High School were Edward W. Donn, Jr., Nathan C. Wyeth, and Professor Frederick V. Murphy, founder of Catholic University's Department of Architecture.

The Commission returned to CFA with revised plans and its consulting architects. Edward Donn pointed out that the major revisions to the plans involved re-orienting the building to face Nebraska Avenue, rather than Chesapeake Street, with the athletic field in front. Although the Commission had favored orienting the school towards Fort Drive, it approved of the change, noting that Nebraska Avenue would become "one of the great thoroughfares of the city connecting Massachusetts and Connecticut Avenues." The Commission continued to berate other aspects of the design, namely the replacement of the earlier earthen terrace with a high plinth. In addition, the Commission objected to the loss of mature trees and the location of the power plant next to Nebraska Avenue. Once again, the Commission rejected the plans, saying that "the buildings are distinctly not fitted to the site" and noted that it would be an "extravagant use of public money to produce unpleasant results." It wrote that, "The buildings should be simplified, and should depend for success on good proportions and a nice adaptation to the site. This would permit a less expensive basement, and a much better lighting for it."¹³

Two weeks later, in early May 1933, Major Gotwals submitted the consulting architects' revised design for Wilson School to the Commission for its comments. In his cover letter, Gotwals

¹² Letter from Commission of Fine Arts to District Engineer Commissioner, January 7, 1933.

¹³ Charles Moore, Chairman, to Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, 26 April 1933, Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, 21 April 1933, Washington, D.C., Exhibit C.

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emphasized the “pressing” need for the school. He wrote that the “Municipal Architect’s Office, with the collaboration of our Consulting Architects, have gone vigorously into the development of the plans... along the lines suggested by you.... It is believed that we have a satisfactory grouping and that we are still adhering to the general scheme of the Roosevelt High School in a way that will not arouse any criticism in Congress as to violent departure from standard plans. The restricted funds under which we are working forces us to eliminate every possible item of cost.”¹⁴

While noting improvements, the Commission still objected to the elevation of the central block on a plinth and the wings at a lower level, and advised bringing the main block down to the level of Chesapeake Street. It also recommended elimination of the elaborate portico, the use of sloped rather than flat roofs, and further study of the smock stack, requesting that it be integrated into the power plant building and that the top of the stack be treated in a fashion similar to that of the “new” government power plant. Later that month, the architects returned with a model, much to the delight of the Commission, and received approval for the general scheme, but made additional design recommendations. The Commission pushed for a clock tower, to create visual unity to the complex, and encouraged further study of the connecting corridors. The Commission also recommended the five-foot terrace wall along Nebraska Avenue, “with a walk inside the wall for a promenade, like so many of the walks of Rome, giving a view over the city.”¹⁵

In August 1933, the *Washington Post* printed a rendering of the proposed Woodrow Wilson High School. Yet, a full year later in July 1934, construction of Wilson High School had still not begun. Major Gotwals, Engineering Commissioner, blamed the delay upon the Commission of Fine Arts, noting “We adopted a plan and then the Fine Arts Commission decided they wanted it built in a ‘romantic setting.’ Then it took them a long time to decide what they meant by that.”¹⁶ A reduction to the approved appropriations apparently further contributed to the delay. In January 1934, two years after the design process had begun, the Wilson High School plans were approved and the detailed construction drawings were completed.¹⁷

In September 1935, Wilson High School opened. It was described in *District Teacher* magazine as being “of the most modern and up to date type of school construction” and as having “sixty-one classrooms and shops; an auditorium, a separate building for the gymnasium including rifle

¹⁴ Maj. John C. Gotwals to Charles Moore, Chairman, 5 May 1933, Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, 6 May 1933, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, May 26, 1933, p. 8.

¹⁶ “School Delay Blame Place on Art Board,” *The Washington Post*, July 10, 1934, p. 2.

¹⁷ The January 1934 architectural drawings are on file in B-2.

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range, basketball courts, locker rooms, and rest rooms; beside the business offices, cafeteria and teachers' rest rooms."¹⁸

The Woodrow Wilson High School did not come up before the Commission of Fine Arts again until its stadium was under construction in 1938. When the question of a fence around the stadium was brought to the Commission, it advised that "nothing less than a wrought iron fence would be appropriate for the location."¹⁹

In all, the design of Wilson High School reflects a conscious search of American precedent to solve the challenges of a new school. The ethic of drawing from our rich architectural heritage was current during the period, encouraged by the enthusiasm for the Colonial Williamsburg project. Asked to create a five-part plan, as at the earlier Roosevelt High, the architects solved for the sloping topography and insufficient frontage by perching the building at the top of the site and bending the plan through the use of curved hyphens, as at the 18th-century Mount Airy estate in Virginia. The play fields, which could not be hidden or merely incidental on such a prominent site, became a focal point, embraced by the dependencies. Rubbed brick was employed for an elegant, yet cost-saving effect, and the prototypes for the major doorways could probably be found in the Chesapeake region. Even the smokestack of the power plant evokes the massive end chimney at Bacon's Castle, the oldest home in Virginia. Edward Donn, then deeply engaged in restorations of 18th-century homes, may have been the most important influence on the school's design.²⁰

Wilson High School Life:

The Woodrow Wilson High School, designed to accommodate 1,500 students, opened in September 1935 with 770 junior and sophomore students drawn from a student population that previously would have attended Western or Central High School. It was constructed to serve the surrounding neighborhoods of Chevy Chase, Forest Hills, and Cleveland Park, among others, and thus reduce the severe overcrowding at Western High School. The school was formally dedicated on March 10, 1936. President Wilson's widow, Edith Bolling Galt Wilson, was the guest of honor and the ceremony was attended by some of President Wilson's friends and former students. The school mascot, the Wilson Tigers, is apparently based on that of Princeton University (the Princeton Tigers), where Woodrow Wilson earned his undergraduate degree. The University of Virginia, where Wilson attended law school for one year, presented the school with his portrait that continues to be displayed in the school today.

¹⁸ Olivia Russell, "The New Woodrow Wilson High School," *District Teacher*, December 1935, 9.

¹⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, 9 August 1938, New York City, N.Y.

²⁰ Donn was responsible for the speculative reconstruction of George Washington's birthplace and for the restoration of the home of Fielding Lewis at Kenmore, near Fredericksburg, and a number of other lesser-known projects.

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During World War II, the school was involved in war-related activities including loan drives, patriotic assemblies, Morse code classes and civil defense preparations. The school had a cadet corps and special pre-induction courses for both boys and girls were offered. The school inaugurated an annual Country Fair to raise funds for war orphans the school adopted. Over one thousand graduates served in the armed forces and 67 gave their lives.²¹ The school's war-time activities, including cadet corps training, were extensively documented by the Overseas Picture Division of the U.S. Office of War Information. Photographer Esther Bubley, took over 600 photographs, now housed at the Library of Congress, to illustrate life in an American high school and student involvement in the war effort.

In the Cold War era, bomb shelters were an element of preparedness. Initially shelters areas were selected to protect against blast shock and civil defense plans focused on evacuation. In June 1955, Wilson High School was selected to participate in a metropolitan area-wide civil defense exercise involving 15,000 persons, including President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Students filed out of the school to waiting automobiles and then returned to class. However, in 1961-62, with increasing federal government concern about the danger of radioactive fallout, the District of Columbia surveyed the adequacy of its school shelters and focused on stocking them with emergency rations sufficient for extended stays. The cadet corps, founded when the school opened, has continued to the present day; in 2008 120 cadets were enrolled in the school's JRROTC program

Woodrow Wilson High School established its athletic reputation early in its history, winning basketball, track, football, and golf championships in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1954, the year of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, several Wilson football players were on the first integrated Public High All-Stars football team which won the city championship against the favored and undefeated St. Johns parochial school.

Wilson has also maintained a strong academic tradition throughout its history. In the 1950s, eighty percent of its students continued their formal training and as of 2008, ninety percent of its students continued their formal education at two- or four-year colleges.

Woodrow Wilson High School graduates include well-known political leaders, businessmen, philanthropists, journalists, musicians and athletes. Three Members of Congress, Sen. John Warner (R-Va., 1977-2008) and Rep. Gilbert Gude (R-Md., 1967-1976), and Cliff Stearns (R-Fl., 1989-2008), graduated from Wilson and District of Columbia Mayor Adrian Fenty is also a graduate. Warren Buffett is a nationally known businessman and philanthropist who graduated from Wilson, as did the late John Hechinger Sr., who headed his family's hardware business and was prominent in the Washington, D.C., area for his civic involvement and philanthropy. Graduates who have made their name in the media include Roger Mudd, journalist, broadcaster, and winner of an Emmy award; Judith Martin (Miss

²¹ *Handbook of the Woodrow Wilson High School*, 14th ed., 7. [no date, ca. 1956]. Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, Washington, D.C.

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Manners); Frank Rich, *New York Times* drama critic and editorialist, and Derek McGinty, Washington, D.C. talk show host. Architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen graduated from Wilson and quite a few well-known musicians are among Wilson’s alumni, including Jorma Kaukonen and Jack Casady, founding members of the bands Jefferson Airplane and Hot Tuna, who are in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

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Major Bibliographical References:

“900 Parents to Inspect New Woodrow Wilson High School at Dedication Tuesday,”

“Dedicate Wilson High Today,” *The Washington Post*, March 10, 1936, p. 15.

“New High School to be Named for Woodrow Wilson,” *The Washington Post*, December 8, 1932, p. 18.

“New School Plans Call for \$2,918,920, \$500,000 in 1934 is Sought to Add Structure in Reno Section,” *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1932.

“School Stage Loft Cited as Fire Rule,” *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1932, p. 4.

“Three High School Sites in Reno Area are Being Studied,” *The Washington Post*, October 14, 1931.

“Wilson High is Dedicated before 1,500,” *The Washington Post*, March 11, 1936, p. 17.

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10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property 259,667 square feet**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

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☐ 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 Byname/title Laura Hughes, and Kim Williams, Architectural HistoriansOrganization D.C. Preservation Leaguedate 1/15/2010street & number 401 F Street, NW, Room 324telephone 202.783.5144city or town Washingtonstate DCzip 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 District of Columbiastreet & number 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue

telephone _____

city or town Washington, D.C.

state _____

zip code 20004

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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Verbal Boundary Description:

The Woodrow Wilson High School occupies Square 1840 Lot 0807; Square 1768 Lots 0806, 0807; Square 1772 Lots 0801, 0802.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries include the squares and lots occupied by the school building and its athletic fields and owned by the District of Columbia.

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PHOTOGRAPHIC LIST

The following is common to all photos:

Woodrow Wilson High School
Washington, DC
Kim Williams, photographer
December 2009
DC HPO

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Photo #1 | View looking north, showing center academic building and northeast end pavilion (original gym) over front track and field |
| Photo #2 | View looking northwest showing center academic building, south end pavilion (auditorium) and 2008 aquatic center |
| Photo #3 | View looking north, southeast elevation of academic building |
| Photo #4 | View looking north, south elevation of northeast end pavilion (original gym) |
| Photo #5 | View looking northeast, northwest elevation of rear wing of academic building |
| Photo #6 | View looking north, west elevation of connecting arcade between academic building and south end pavilion (auditorium) |
| Photo #7 | Detail of engaged door, northwest elevation of rear wing of academic building |
| Photo #8 | View looking southeast, northwest elevation of connecting arcade between academic building and northeast end pavilion (original gym) |
| Photo #9 | Interior, Principal Entrance Lobby |
| Photo #10 | Central Corridor, view looking north to northern arcade |
| Photo #11 | Typical Stair |
| Photo #12 | Rear Corridor, view looking to southwestern arcade |
| Photo #13 | View looking south down southwestern arcade |
| Photo #14 | Power plant |

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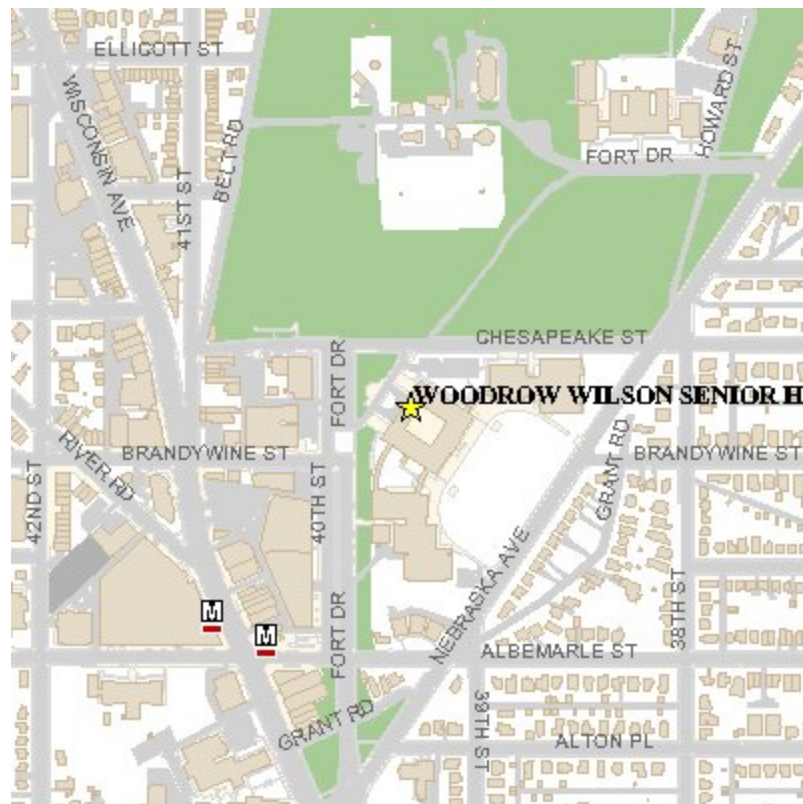
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SITE MAP



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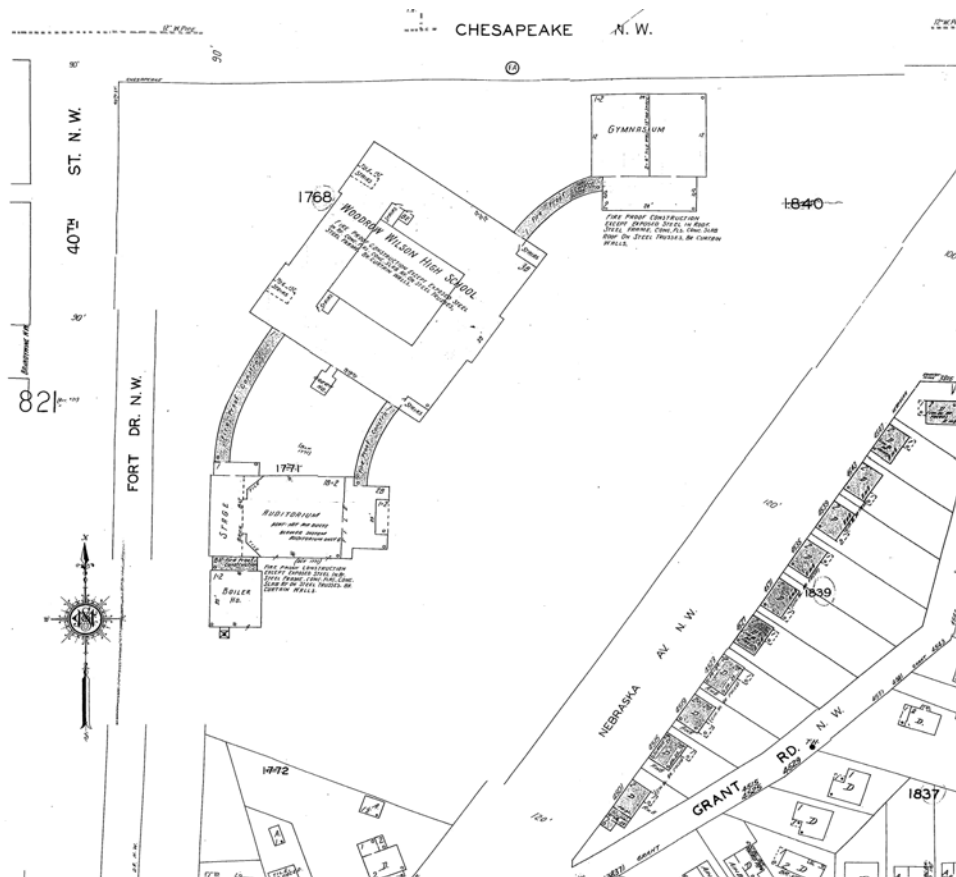
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SITE MAP



Woodrow Wilson High School
(Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1927)



*** District Government Property
NO TRESPASSING

**USAGE GUIDELINES FOR DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS TRACKS**

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) High School Tracks are available for use from Mondays through Fridays during the hours of 6:30 a.m. and 8:45 a.m., and 4:00 p.m. until dusk. Usage of these facilities outside of normal operational hours of the respective school building will be strictly prohibited without an approved Building Use Agreement.

The Building Use Agreement can be obtained from the respective school or the DCPS website (www.k12.dc.us). The Agreement must be signed by the respective High School Principal and processed by the DCPS Realty Office. A COST MAY APPLY.

First priority for usage will be given to DCPS programs and activities. Second priority will be given to non-profit groups whose activities are in support of children. Third priority will be given to non-profit organizations, or groups that are organized by the surrounding community of the respective school. Access to all tracks will be denied to all residents during approved usage by DCPS, or other sanctioned entities.























