

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR 5/29/09

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 an 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 Mitchell, James, School

other names/site number Mitchell Elementary / Site # PU5243

2. Location

street & number 2410 South Battery Street

not for publication

city or town Little Rock

vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Pulaski code 119 zip code 72206

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 for 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.)

Calder Marches 2/29/09

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

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 the 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

Mitchell, James, School
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

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

Contributing Noncontributing

1	2	buildings
<hr/>		sites
<hr/>		structures
<hr/>		objects
1	2	Total

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

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

One

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/School

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/Prairie School

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Classical Revival

MODERN MOVEMENT/Functionalism

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

TERRA COTTA

roof ASPHALT

other

Narrative Description

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

Mitchell, James, School
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B.** removed from its original location.
- C.** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- 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.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

LOCAL

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

Period of Significance

1908-1959

Significant Dates

1908, 1910, 1915, 1952

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

N/A

Architect/Builder

ARCHITECTS: THOMPSON, CHARLES L.;
HARDING, THOMAS, JR.; MCANINCH & MAHNER
BUILDERS: STEWART, JAMES; JOHNSON, J. D.;
BROCK, J. D.

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 file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Little Rock School District Archives; Old State House Museum

Mitchell, James, School
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.5 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 564569 3842900
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
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 Van Zbinden, National Register Historian and Kwendeche, AIA
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 17 February 2009
street & number 323 Center Street, Tower Building 1600 telephone (501) 324-9880
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72201

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

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

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name Mitchell Elementary, LLC.
street & number P. O. Box 164119 telephone _____
city or town Little Rock state Arkansas zip code 72216

Paperwork Reduction Act 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 listing. 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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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Summary

The James Mitchell School was completed in 1908. Designed by Charles Thompson and Thomas Harding, Jr., the current school is the grandest example of Neoclassical or Classical Revival architecture in a school in Little Rock. Thomas Harding, Jr.'s 1915 addition is a handsome if simplified form, building on a tradition of Charles Thompson designs. The school was used until 2004 when the Little Rock School District began an asbestos removal program. Upon completion of the project the school board decided to sell the property rather than reopen the school.

Three attached additions to the school include a 1910 four-room addition by Charles Thompson, the 1915 four-room, Neoclassical frontispiece by Thomas Harding, Jr. and a rear addition made by the firm McAninch & Mahnker in 1952 that included a cafeteria as well as classroom space. To address growing school populations, two detached buildings were added to the site outside of the period of significance. In 1987, a second four-room building, designed by Roark, Perkins, & Kennedy, was added to the southeast of the school ground and in 1991 a one room brick addition designed by Brooks Jackson was included on the southwest side.

Elaboration

James Mitchell School was built on Little Rock's West End to meet the needs of a rapidly growing neighborhood. The expansion of the streetcar network to, what was then called West End, allowed for the creation of a series of neighborhoods for Little Rock's white, middle-class. James Mitchell was located at the southern end of H. A. Bowman's elite, Oak Terrace Addition. Built partially on McCarthy's Addition and Oak Terrace Additions the site for the school is over two acres.

Bowman's addition, platted July 1897, was unique in placing requirements on home size, cost, and setbacks. One of the more unique features of the addition was a public flower garden and lawn in the middle of Battery Street. Lots along Battery facing the flower garden were large, some 100 feet by 250 feet. Though the northern portion was unique later re-plats of the addition provided for a more uniform, i.e. urban, model in the southern half of the addition with lot sizes of 50 by 140 feet.¹

When the school board purchased Block 10 of the McCarthy Addition there were already homes on the site.² The land in the block sloped gently toward the southwest with the highest part being the corner at 24th and Battery streets. James Mitchell School was built with the intention of creating an additional white elementary school on the west end.

¹ Sandra Taylor Smith and Anne Wagner Speed, *Little Rock's Central High School Neighborhood Historic District* (Little Rock: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 1999), 8.

² Little Rock School District, *Board Minutes, Book D*, June 22, 1908, 475.

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This would meet the needs of the growing district around the West End Park as well as relieve the pressure on Rightsell School to the northeast and Robert E. Lee School to the west. Though both Rightsell and Robert E. Lee were new schools, built in 1906-07, by 1908 they were already reaching or at capacity.

In May 1908, the Little Rock School Board selected Charles Thompson's design for a four-room school house.³ The school faced north onto West 24th Street and was a simple, brick two-story design. As with the majority of Charles Thompson's designs the school is eclectic. If one had to apply a style to the building, the symmetrical frontispiece with its slate roof, exposed rafters tails, strong horizontal banding, and shaped pediment speak strongly to the Prairie School. Though, the depth of the eaves and the height of the roof more closely relate to the Craftsman style.

The only windows on the front façade were in the basement and in the central bay of the façade. There were no windows placed on the north or south elevations to light the classrooms. Instead Thompson designed a raised panel intended to look like a window and lintel. It is unknown if this decision was made for economy or because Thompson knew of future plans for addition. The classrooms were lit by double hung windows on the east and west facades. The original classroom windows were double-hung, six-over-two windows that sat on limestone sills and were topped with limestone lintels. At the rear, or south, of the school there was a secondary entrance and entrance lobby. It is clear though, from the design that this was not intended to be a primary entrance to the school.

The interior organization was based on a central hall and stair with two rooms on the first and two rooms on the second floors. Boys and girls toilets were on the east side of the basement level and the boiler and fuel storage were on the west side of the school where the slope of the hill allowed for a basement level entry door.

Neighborhood growth necessitated an addition to the school in 1910. Charles Thompson was again selected to design this four room addition.⁴ Thompson produced a modification of his 1908 design. The new east and west elevations matched the original building in proportion, scale, and architectural design.

³ Ibid., May 30, 1908, 473. Charles Thompson was one of Little Rock's and Arkansas's most distinguished architects. Self taught with a voracious desire to keep learning and growing as an architect, Thompson's work shows an extensive knowledge of architectural style. Thompson was not a groundbreaker when it came to plan and form but as a self taught architect his work was meticulous and beautiful; though very often eclectic. See F. Hampton Roy, *Charles L. Thompson and Associates, Arkansas Architects, 1885-1938* Ed. by Ralph J. Megna (Little Rock, AR: August House, 1982) and Jean Sizemore, Sandra Taylor Smith and Mary D. Thomas, "Charles L. Thompson Design Collection Thematic Resources" (NR Listed 12/22/1982, NRIS 64000032) on file at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

⁴ Little Rock School District, *Board Minutes, Book E*, May 3, 1910, 12-3.

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The new southern elevation matched closely the northern facing elevation of the school. A facsimile of the front entry was placed facing south, the only difference being the number and style of fenestrations and the pediment. The horizontal banding was maintained as were the faux windows, east and west roof dormers, and basement fenestration.

Within two years of the Thompson four-room addition the school was again overcrowded. Reminiscent of modern educational practice, the school district purchased a number of portable buildings, two of which were placed at James Mitchell. A third classroom was furnished in the basement. By 1915, the situation was no longer tenable. A group of parents from James Mitchell petitioned the school board for new school facilities noting that the classrooms in the basement and "cottages" were simply insufficient.⁵

Thomas Harding, Jr. was selected as the architect for the new four-room annex.⁶ Thomas Harding, Jr., the son of a prolific and well respected Little Rock architect, began working in Charles Thompson's office in 1898. He was only fourteen at the time, yet he showed an aptitude for understanding architectural design and form. Harding was an excellent draftsman and formalized his training through correspondence courses and intense study of architecture. As his skills advanced he was increasingly recognized within the community as an architect of some skill. He began to receive commissions outside of the Thompson office. Thompson biographer, F. Hampton Roy states that it was Harding's work on the Pulaski Heights Fire Station in 1915 that marked the beginning of his work in commercial buildings and ultimately secured a partnership in the firm with Thompson.⁷ Little mention has been made of the James Mitchell School and the superb skill Harding showed in designing this Neoclassical work. The building shows an understanding of the proportions and massing of Neoclassicism, especially French Neoclassicism, that exceeds the Colonial Revival forms of Thompson. It is perhaps this school, more than the Pulaski Heights Fire Station, which proved Harding a capable architect and a worthy partner in Thompson's firm.

Harding's new four-classroom addition was dramatically different from the original Thompson design. Construction began on the Neoclassical addition in 1915 and was completed in 1916 at a cost of \$21,470 dollars. The central bay features a shallow portico dominated by a full height colonnade. This Tuscan order colonnade features four half columns with fluted shafts. The entablature at the top is made of terra cotta and true to the Tuscan order lacks any decoration save the name of the school engraved into the tile. Above the main entrance is a pediment whose entablature serves as a second floor balcony.

⁵ Ibid., March 27, 1915, 427. The portable buildings were frame with lapped siding and were purchased from a company in Seattle, WA. See Ibid., 331.

⁶ Ibid., July 3, 1915, 522.

⁷ Roy, 29, 65.

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The work shows a detailed understanding of classical proportion and yet is restrained in decoration. This is not surprising given Harding's close work with Thompson. Beginning in approximately 1904, Thompson began an intense period of design in the classical forms. The majority of his designs were Colonial Revival with strong Adam and Georgian influences. However, Harding's work on the James Mitchell School echoes Thompson's earlier work on the Little Rock City Hall (1907, NR listed 10/18/1979) and Terminal Hotel (1905, NR listed 11/17/1978).⁸

Growth of the neighborhood slowed as lots were filled and the growth of the city accelerated in Pulaski Heights to the northwest. By 1952 however, it was necessary to have a cafeteria at the school. This cafeteria addition was built directly south of the school. It connected at the first floor and basement levels of the 1910 addition. Designed by the Little Rock firm McAninch & Mahnker, the style is Functionalist with an understated International style influence. Classroom space was included on the second floor of the addition and the kitchen and cafeteria were on the first floor.

The school underwent an extensive renovation in 1979. This renovation, planned by the architecture firm of Wilkins Griffin Sims, replaced mechanical and environmental equipment as well as resulting in the replacement of all the windows in the 1908-1915 structure.

After the integration of Little Rock's elementary schools in the middle 1970s and the inception of a bussing program, the school continued to serve primarily as a neighborhood school. Mitchell remained a neighborhood school until 1987 when following the annexation of a portion of the Pulaski County Special School District in 1987 the school saw an increase in bussed students. Space was needed to accommodate bussed students. To meet these needs, the school added a four classroom addition on the southeast side of the school grounds. This non-contributing structure was designed by Roark, Perkins & Kennedy and is a modern school building design constructed of brick and concrete. A one-room building was added to the site in 1991. This non-contributing, one-room building was designed by architect Brooks Jackson.

Harding's 1915 Addition

The Little Rock School Board selected Thomas Harding, Jr., as architect and superintendent of construction. Construction began in July 1915. The construction firm of J. D. Johnson won the contract with a low bid of \$21,470 dollars.⁹

⁸ The building actually shows surprising similarity to John Howard's, Neoclassical, North Little Rock City Hall (1914-15, NR listed 8/6/1975).

⁹ Little Rock School Board, *Book E*, July 1, 1915, 520.

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North Elevation/Front

The north elevation is the frontispiece of the school and faces West 24th Street. It is an addition to the original 1908 school. This is the purest form of Neoclassical architecture in the Little Rock School District. The façade takes on the classical form of base, shaft, and capital. The base is a brushed concrete foundation without any fenestrations. A brick and terra cotta shaft rises to an entablature with an undecorated frieze. Above the cornice is a terra cotta topped pediment.

Harding's design is heavily influenced by French Baroque and Renaissance, one can also see the simplified forms of English Palladianism. The result is the mixing of styles in the Neoclassical. The prominent bay of this façade is the central bay. Four engaged, half columns rise the full two-story height of the façade. One might call the decoration of the bay Roman Tuscan; the decoration is dependant upon the moldings more so than carved relief. However, the columns are fluted as in the Greek Doric and are topped with a massive entablature in the style of Greek architecture. Unlike pure Greek Doric though the columns have bases and the frieze is undecorated terra cotta with only the name of the school inscribed.

The main entry is centered on the façade. A simple stair, very much in the form of the Greek stylobate, rises to multi-paned double doors. A six-light transom tops the doors and a simple architrave trim accentuates the entry. Between the first and second and third and fourth columns are French windows. It is unknown what these windows were originally. They are now stationary, one-over, one-over-one.

Between the columns on the second floor the stationary, one-over-one, French windows look out onto small balconettes. These are adorned with decorative iron handrails and form a pseudo-pediment for the windows below. Above the main entrance is a small balcony. Like the balconettes, it is adorned with a decorative iron handrail. The floor of the balcony is terra cotta in the form of a Roman Tuscan cornice, replete with wash, ovolo, corona, and astragal. The floor is supported by two consoles decorated with acanthus leaves and bead work. Behind the balcony is a three part French window, each part one-over-one, stationary. With its proportion and location the balcony serves as a grand pediment to the main entry.

A massive entablature rests atop the columns. The molding of the architrave and cornice are the only decoration, though James Mitchell School is engraved in the frieze. Above the cornice rises the terra cotta pediment. This bright, white pediment calls to mind the attic story of great works of European Neoclassicism, like the Brandenburg Gate. It accentuates the height of the building, making it seem taller.

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The east and west bays of the frontispiece are symmetrically balanced. The first floor classroom windows rest on a terra cotta sill directly on top of the concrete foundation. A five-part window, its height and width provides ample light into the interior of the school. The current windows are stationary, one-over-one.

The windows are topped with a terra cotta lintel and the wall above is decorated with a brick and terra cotta panel. The simple inset panel is set off by a border of header bricks and soldier bricks. The terra cotta panel is decorated with a carved relief of flowers and fruits. The second floor classroom windows are exactly like the first in scale and form. Stationary, one-over-one windows sit on terra cotta sills. The height of the window is carried to the bottom of the architrave. On the east and west bays of the façade the entablature of the central bay is continued around the structure. The difference being that the architrave is in terra cotta while the frieze is a common brick. The cornice seems out of proportion with the middle bay but this is result of a trick of the eyes. In the middle bay, the bottom astragal and the wash of the cornice are lost against the white terra cotta; against the brick they stand out and the cornice appears larger. A simple brick pediment rises above the cornice and is topped with a terra cotta capstone.

East Elevation/Side

The highest elevation of the school ground is near the corner of West 24th Street and Battery Street. The site slopes downward toward the west and southwest. To achieve symmetry Harding altered the proportion of the east elevation. This is most notable in the secondary entrance. This secondary entrance is part of the first of two bays on the east elevation. The doorstead has brushed concrete surrounds. The original double, ten-light doors open into a stairwell. The doors are topped with a six-light transom. Above this secondary doorway is a two-part window. The stationary window is one-over-one-over-one.

The second bay of the elevation, to the north, sits on a concrete foundation. The foundation level is fenestrated with two casement windows that are boarded. Above the concrete base is a scaled version of the north façade. Four-part, stationary, one-over-one windows rest atop terra cotta sills and the wall between the first and second floor windows is interrupted by a simple inset panel decorated with a carved relief of flowers and fruits. The second floor windows, like the first, are four-part, stationary, one-over-one with terra cotta mullions. As on the frontispiece, the second floor windows rise directly to the architrave of the entablature. Above the entablature the brick pediment is topped by terra cotta capstones.

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West Elevation/Side

Above the base or foundation the west elevation matches the east elevation in proportion and scale. To maintain symmetry and account for a change in elevation of the site, Harding extended the height of the foundation and increased the height of the transom above the secondary window. He also placed a set of stairs ascending to the secondary entrance. With these exceptions the east and west elevations are the same.

Southern Elevation/ Rear

Harding's 1915 addition does not have a true southern elevation as it was attached to the north façade of the original 1908 Thompson building. However, the addition was longer and there are two approximately five-foot-long southern faces on the east and west sides of the 1915 addition. These elevations are the same on both sides. The concrete foundation rises to a plain brick wall. The fenestrations have concrete sills and lintels. Both the first and second floor windows are stationary, one-over-one windows. The entablature wraps around to the southern side with the architrave terminating just below the eave of the original building. The pediment terminates in the mansard roof of the original building.

Thompson's 1908 Building

Charles Thompson's design was unanimously selected June 5, 1908. W. R. Stewart was selected as the contractor. M. B. Sanders won the plumbing and heating contracts and Treadway Electric secured the electrical work. The building was to be built of pressed brick. Thompson reported the work complete on December 1, 1908, at a cost of \$19,727.70.¹⁰

Due to the construction of the Thompson 1910 addition to the south and the Harding 1915 addition to the north there is nothing remaining of the original northern façade and southern elevation of the building. Now squeezed in the middle of the two additions, all that remains of the original building are the eastern and western elevations.

¹⁰ Little Rock School Board, *Board Minutes, Book D*, 474, 485, 530, 532.

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East Elevation/Side

Charles Thompson's original 1908 building was completed in the Prairie style (see previous discussion section 7, page 2). The only fenestrations for the classrooms were on the east and west elevations. The concrete foundation is fenestrated with four casement windows. These windows provided light to the boys and girls bathrooms originally located in the east side of the basement. Thompson lit the classrooms with a ribbon of windows, five, sitting on limestone sills with a hidden, metal strap lintel. The original six-over-two, double-hung windows were replaced in 1979 with stationary, one-over-one windows.

Between the windows Thompson ran a brick band from the front of the building. Described in the plans as "brick course $\frac{3}{4}$ inch relief," the design was simply a variation of the common bond pattern with stretchers extended three-quarters of an inch every five rows. The four extended rows of stretchers become a strong horizontal feature of the building. Above the band course is another ribbon of windows like the first.

While it was originally a hipped roof, the current mansard roof helps to maintain a horizontal profile by shortening the height of the building. Open eaves and exposed rafter tails help give the building a Craftsman feel. The attic is ventilated by a hipped-roof dormer centered on the elevation.

A small bay inset from the walls of the original building connects the 1915 addition and the original building on the north. This shallow and narrow bay is fenestrated with the replacement stationary, one-over-one windows.

West Elevation/Side

Original plans show that the west elevation was an exact match of the east elevation with the exception of the basement level. The coal storage room on the north side of the basement was accessed through a wooden panel door and a single, double-hung, six-over-six window provided light to the boiler room. The original wooden door has been replaced with a solid, metal door for security reasons. And the fenestrations on this level have been modified to allow for modern mechanical and environmental equipment.

Above the foundation the west elevation matches the east elevation exactly.

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Thompson's 1910 Addition

When Thompson was asked to design an additional four-room addition to the school in 1910 he simply modified his original design. The east and west elevations are identical to the east and west elevations of the original 1908 school. The windows here too have been replaced with stationary, one-over-one windows. The basement on the west elevation was fenestrated with four windows and had no door like the original building.

Because Thompson simply replicated his 1908 work, the southern elevation shows the style of the original northern façade and southern elevation.

South Elevation/ Rear

Thompson modified the original plans slightly on the southern elevation. Highlighting the fact that this rear entrance was a secondary entrance to the school Thompson designed a modification of his original northern entrance. Unlike the southern entrance on the original building, the 1910 southern entrance was at basement level. The portico was extended the height of the building through a pedimented dormer at top. This pediment was not shaped like the front pediment but was instead square with a square vent.

The brick band course was carried around the building, across the elevation. As with the original building, no windows were placed on the southern elevation to light the classrooms. Instead a raised brick panel gave the appearance of a window with a raised brick, false lintel on the top. The rear stairwell is lit by two sets of windows on the first and second floors. The first floor windows are two-part, stationary, one-over-one windows and the second floor are two-part, one-over-one-over-one windows.

McAninch & Mahnker's 1952 Addition

Not much is known of the firm of McAninch & Mahnker. Arthur N. McAninch was a Little Rock architect who designed a number of Collegiate Gothic and Art Deco buildings in the state. Five of McAninch's works are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The firm was chosen to design a kitchen, cafeteria, and classroom addition to the building in 1952. Their design is Functional with some International influence. It is a two story addition that, due to change in site elevation, rises only to the first floor of the 1908-1915 building. The addition is offset to the west leaving the 1910 southern entrance intact.

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East Elevation/Side

As a primarily functionalist structure little thought was given to curb appeal. The east elevation includes a new concrete truck loading and unloading dock. The unadorned brick elevation is fenestrated with stationary windows on the first and second floors. On the first floor there are seven low profile, one-by-one, sliding windows. These windows are connected by a common limestone sill that projects from the wall. A metal portico is attached to the addition above the first floor windows. This was added to provide a covered walkway from the southern entrance to the 1987 building.

The second floor is fenestrated with two sets of three windows. These windows have the same low profile as those on the first floor and are one-by-one, sliding windows. Wide brick mullions separate the windows and a limestone surround projects around the windows. This projection is reminiscent of the window ledges and shades seen in so many commercial buildings in the International style.

The elevation is topped by one row of soldier bricks topped with a limestone capstone.

South Elevation/Rear

The south elevation of the 1952 addition is not fenestrated on its lower level. A concrete foundation rises to the top of a basement level. The first floor of the addition has no windows or doors but is fenestrated with two exhaust vents.

The use of the second floor for classroom space is reflected on the exterior by the placement of a five-part window. Five stationary, one-over-one windows, separated by metal mullions provide light to a southern facing classroom. The window opening is surrounded by limestone with less relief than that on the eastern and western sides.

The elevation is topped by one row of soldier bricks topped with a limestone capstone.

West Elevation/Side

A concrete foundation designed to resemble that on the original building begins at ground level on the north end of the west elevation. As the ground drops away the foundation exposure increases in height toward the southern end of the elevation. This foundation on the west side is not fenestrated.

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The first floor of the west elevation has low profile windows in two sets, reflecting the interior plan as a space other than classroom. The northernmost set is a pair of one-by-one, sliding windows. The southern set is a grouping of six one-by-one, sliding windows. Both sets of windows have protruding limestone surrounds. Each window within the set is separated by a wide brick mullion.

The second floor classroom is revealed in the placement of a set of two three-part windows. The windows are one-over-one, stationary windows with metal mullions. The two windows are surrounded by a limestone surround. Much of this elevation is obscured by the placement of a fire escape stair that reveals a central, east-west oriented hall on the second floor of the addition.

The elevation is topped by one row of soldier bricks topped with a limestone capstone.

Non-contributing Buildings

Two buildings on the campus are considered non contributing structures. The first is a four-room building designed by the firm of Roark, Perkins, & Kennedy and built in 1987 on the southeastern corner of the campus. The building is of a linear design with a long north south axis and end facing gable-on-hip roof. The classroom entrances are oriented toward the east. A metal and wood frame structure with brick veneer, the building is designed to resemble the 1952 McAninch & Mahnker addition and the original 1908-1915 building.

Single light transoms above the doors echo the transoms above the classroom doors in the original building. The west facing classroom windows are sets of two, double-hung, one-over-one windows. The window pairs are set singly separated by a wide expanse of common bond brick and set within a border of cream colored, soldier brick. The concrete foundation of the original building and the 1952 addition is represented by a corrugated concrete brick basement level. There is no enclosed hall and the portico is this same corrugated brick. A metal portico provides a covered walkway down the east elevation of the structure to the former site of portable classrooms to the south.

The south end of the building is a common bond brick surface with no fenestrations. The roof has a shallow closed eave on the southern and western elevations. The covered walkway on the north and east elevations give the building a wide closed eave. On the southern elevation the gable-on-hip roof form is represented as a shallow hip. A W-shaped gable ornament adorns both the south and north gables.

The 1991 one-room building designed by Brooks Johnson, is a simple square structure of concrete block construction with brick veneer. The metal doorway is on the north east corner of the structure and the door jamb has an integral sidelight. There is a metal fire escape door on the southwest corner.

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The only other fenestration is on the western elevation. Two three part windows dominate the elevation. The windows are one-over-one, casement windows the bottom window being a hopper window.

Interior

The interior of the original 1908-1915 school building retains much of its original architectural detail. Original wide plank pine floors remain, so too the six horizontal panel doors. The six panel doors placed on classrooms have two glazing in their uppermost panels. The doors are topped with single pane, top-hinged transoms.

The central stair with beautiful, Charles Thompson designed, colonial revival handrail is intact. The stair features square newel posts with turned balusters. The stair rises on the east and west from floor to a mezzanine landing from that landing the stair ascends up the center to the second floor.

The original pressed tin ceilings in the common spaces of the original building remain as well.

Integrity

With the exception of the replacement of all the original windows in the 1908-1915 school the building retains good integrity. The modernization in 1979 did little to change the plan or layout of the school. The additions in 1910 and 1915 were completed by architects who had worked on and had intimate knowledge of the original 1908 structure. In every instance they made sure that the architectural continuity was retained throughout the structure.

The 1952 addition is easily identified from the east and west elevations of the school. Even from the south the 1952 addition is overwhelmed by the scale of the 1910 southern elevation. From the north one does not see any of the later additions. Certainly the placement of the 1987 school building at the southeast corner of the site obscures the view of the structure from 25th Street.

Nevertheless the school is readily recognizable as a school building of some importance. It is the best purest example of Neoclassical architecture in the Little Rock School District. Surrounded as it is in a residential neighborhood there are few commercial buildings in the neighborhood and those that are nearby are standard nineteenth century commercial buildings with little to architectural detail.

As an example of Neoclassical architecture the building still imparts to the neighborhood a sense of grandeur and emphasizes the importance of education.

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Summary

The James Mitchell School is listed as a contributing resource to the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District (NR listed 08/16/1996; 96000892). The current owners are seeking individual listing in recognition of the school's importance to its neighborhood. Indeed the school is a prominent feature in the otherwise residential neighborhood. Because of the length of its use by the Little Rock School District—in use from 1909 to 2005—the school is a better indicator of the history of education in the city of Little Rock than other schools built in the same period. As such it is being submitted for review with **local significance** under **Criterion A**.

As a neighborhood school, the building reflects the demographic and social change of the neighborhood. Opened in 1909 as a small four-room white school, by the late-1960s the school was ninety-six percent African American reflecting the demographic change in the neighborhood and the larger social issues of white flight and integration of schools. Integration plans developed in the 1970s restored some balance to the racial make-up of the school but the school remained primarily a neighborhood school until 1987. Following the annexation of a portion of the Pulaski County Special School District the school saw a greater influx of bussed students and to some degree lost its neighborhood identity. This mirrored the pattern of many other Southern cities and their schools following the Supreme Court's 1971 decision in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*.

Continued use of the school for such an extended period resulted in several additions to the school. These additions reflect the architectural needs of a changing theory and practice in education. The school was one of the first in the city to be built with integral bathrooms. However, there is no evidence that it had a cafeteria until 1952. With a central hall and staircase the three stories were not handicapped accessible, again a reflection of educational theory and practice of the early twentieth century exhibited through architecture.

The front facade of the school is Neoclassical in form, intended to impart the importance of education in the community. With its roots in Greek and Roman history the Neoclassical form is calculated to echo a modern connection to the great societies of the past and to impart a beneficial moral value. The original school—now in the middle between a 1910 and 1915 addition—is Prairie School in form. Simple and unadorned, the building reflected a desire of the school district to present an elegant, modern building at a feasible cost. The eclectic structure is also being submitted for review with **local significance** under **criterion C** as the best example of Neoclassical architecture in a school in Little Rock.

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Elaboration

Like many New South cities Little Rock grew rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century. This growth was largely the result of an influx of Midwestern and Northern capital. Much of the industrial growth of the period was based on farming or on resource extraction. Little Rock's location along the main lines of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad and the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad made it a valuable distribution point for goods to the Southwest and Midwest.

The city grew quickly toward the end of the century. Between 1880 and 1890 the population of the city doubled to 25,874. By 1900, that number had grown another 12,433 and by 1910, reached 45,941.¹¹ The availability of property in Little Rock's original city and antebellum additions meant that the physical growth of the city was marginal prior to 1880. Between 1874 and 1880, only one addition was made to the city of Little Rock. This addition was Centennial Addition added in 1877, on the west side of town. However, bolstered by new found prosperity in a country fully recovered from the depression in 1873, over twenty additions were recorded on the southwest and west sides of the city between 1883 and 1893.¹²

Like Charlotte, NC; Atlanta, GA; or Birmingham, AL, Little Rock underwent a rapid industrialization in the years after the Civil War. Charlotte's manufacturing utilized the regional cotton crops, Birmingham's capitalized on local coal reserves and Little Rock's depended on the state's agriculture and the growing timber industry. At least five cotton gins and oil mills were operating in the city by 1889. These mills had over a million dollars in yearly revenue and employed several hundred workers. One factory, the Atlas Engine Works made boilers and steam engines. Another, the Watertown Steam Engine Company, employed 75 to 100 men in the wholesale and warehousing of steam engines, iron work, and machinery repair. There were two furniture factories, one cotton press factory, cooperage and stave mills, lumber mills, manufacturers of railroad equipment, and even a wholesale candy factory.¹³ This resource driven industrialization dramatically changed Little Rock and the cities of the New South. By 1900, the town could boast of a number of civic improvements found in any proper city: street railways, paved streets, gas, water and sewer systems, electricity, and telephones.¹⁴

¹¹ F. Hampton Roy, Sr. and Charles Whitsell, Jr., *How We Lived: Little Rock as an American City* (Little Rock, AR: August House, Inc., 1984), 126. United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, Volume II, Population 1910 (Washington: GPO, 1913), 105.

¹² Wilson S. Dornblaser, "How Little Rock Grew" *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock), November 7, 1931.

¹³ Goodspeed Publishing Company, *The Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Central Arkansas* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1889; Reprint Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1978), 393-9.

¹⁴ Roy, 103, 127.

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As factories, gins, oil mills, and lumber mills were built in the city, a flood of workers arrived seeking steady wages. The old model of close contact between businessman and worker based on the centuries old, craft system broke. Increasingly the businessman and the worker split into their own social classes and neighborhoods. Thus a new organization of Southern cities began.¹⁵

James Mitchell School was built on Little Rock's West End to meet the needs of a rapidly growing neighborhood. The expansion of the streetcar network to, what was then called West End, allowed for the creation of a series of neighborhoods for Little Rock's white, middle-class. James Mitchell was located at the southern end of H. A. Bowman's elite, Oak Terrace Addition. Built partially on McCarthy's Addition and the Oak Terrace Addition the site for the school is over two acres.

Bowman's addition, platted July 1897, was unique in placing requirements on home size, cost, and setbacks. One of the more unique features of the addition was a public flower garden and lawn in the middle of Battery Street. Lots along Battery facing the flower garden were large, some 100 feet by 250 feet and some of the cities most elegant homes were built along this parkway. Though the northern portion was unique, later replats of the addition provided for a more uniform—i.e. urban—model in the southern half of the addition with lot sizes of 50 by 140 feet.¹⁶

When the school board purchased Block 10 of the McCarthy Addition there were already homes on the site.¹⁷ The neighborhood was already established as the location of choice for the new middle class. A quick examination of city directories reveals a neighborhood of state employees—stenographers, clerks, bookkeepers—office workers, and other white collar professionals.

James Mitchell School was built with the intention of creating an additional white elementary school on the west end. This would meet the needs of the growing district around the West End Park as well as relieve the pressure on Rightsell School to the northeast and Robert E. Lee School to the west. Though both Rightsell and Robert E. Lee were new schools, built in 1906-07, by 1908 they were already reaching or at capacity.

In May 1908, the Little Rock School Board selected Charles Thompson's design for a four-room school house.¹⁸ The school faced north onto West 24th Street and was a simple, brick two-story design.

¹⁵ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 53-70.

¹⁶ Sandra Taylor Smith and Anne Wagner Speed, *Little Rock's Central High School Neighborhood Historic District* (Little Rock: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 1999), 8.

¹⁷ Little Rock School District, *Board Minutes, Book D*, June 22, 1908, 475.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, May 30, 1908, 473. Charles Thompson was one of Little Rock's and Arkansas's greatest architects. Self taught with a voracious desire to keep learning and growing as an architect, Thompson's work shows an extensive knowledge of architectural style. Thompson was not a groundbreaker when it came to plan and form but as a self taught architect his work was meticulous and

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As with the majority of Charles Thompson's designs the school is eclectic. The building was a narrow two story brick and wood frame structure with a hipped roof. The classrooms were lit with large rows of windows on the east and west. The school was one of the first elementary schools in the city to be designed with integral bathrooms—on the east side of the school in the basement.¹⁹ It was an elegant, if simply decorated school building.

Though the exterior was modern Prairie style—some might say Craftsman, see section 7, page 2—the plan, with the exception of bathrooms, was nineteenth century. To some degree the school reflected the rising middle class character of the neighborhood: modern in decoration but not affluent enough to break from old traditions. Schools closer to the affluent sections of town, like Kramer, Centennial, Little Rock High School, or Rightsell were more elegant. The Richardsonian Kramer (NR listed 7/25/1977) and Centennial were imposing structures that impressed the solidity of a school district weak in the knees and gave a sense of wealth equal to the neighborhood.²⁰ Little Rock High School (East Side High School, NR listed 7/25/1977) and Rightsell (PU1857), both Colonial Revival, gave the appearance of an affluent school district designing for students with refined tastes.

The decision to name the school James Mitchell was made in June 1908. James Mitchell was president and editor-in-chief of the *Arkansas Democrat* from 1878 to his death in 1902. A Progressive reformer, Mitchell often argued for the rights of women, and immigrants. He publicly advocated for economic diversification in the state and full political, economic and social rights for African Americans.

beautiful stylistically; though very often eclectic. See F. Hampton Roy, *Charles L. Thompson and Associates, Arkansas Architects, 1885-1938* Ed. by Ralph J. Megna (Little Rock, AR: August House, 1982) and Jean Sizemore, Sandra Taylor Smith and Mary D. Thomas, "Charles L. Thompson Design Collection Thematic Resources" (NR Listed 12/22/1982, NRIS 64000032) on file at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. This paper uses Little Rock School Board in reference to the board under all its various names. See Little Rock School District, "LRSD Board of Directors," *Little Rock School District*, available online at <http://www.lrsd.org/display.cfm?id=275>, accessed 17 February 2009.

¹⁹ Robert E. Lee had sewer connected outhouses. M. W. Gibbs School, Pulaski Heights School, and Peabody School were part of a school district program in 1910s to construct integral bathrooms in schools. Pulaski Heights and Robert E. Lee were retrofitted by architect Clyde Fennell in 1913. A more substantive study of economic and social status of neighborhood versus architectural design is necessary to more fully understand this dynamic. See Little Rock School District, *Board Minutes, Book D*, September 19, 1907, 407; and *Book E*, June 28, 1913, 357.

²⁰ The Little Rock School District is one of the oldest in the state, begun in 1869. However, financial difficulties crippled the district throughout the late nineteenth century. At one point there was no money to pay a superintendent and the school board members took turns serving voluntarily in that role. It is no surprise that the school district would want to build structures that contradict the news of poor financial standing that Little Rock's citizens might see in the newspapers. See Clara B. Kennan, "Early Little Rock Public Schools." *Pulaski County Historical Review* VII, No. 4 (March 1959): 4-6. It could also be said that this was a design consideration for Harding's 1915 addition to James Mitchell. Review of the school board's minutes reveals several months where the board borrowed money to pay salaries in 1912 and 1913. There is no documented proof of their intention, but the school board built the grandest school in the system at time when they had the least money.

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Mitchell was an ardent supporter of good public education, serving on the board of the school district from 1892 to 1895.²¹

As the neighborhood grew, the school district met the additional need by hiring Charles Thompson in 1910 to construct another four rooms on the school.²² Thompson produced a modification of his 1908 design. The new east and west elevations matched the original building in proportion, scale, and architectural design. The new southern elevation matched closely the northern facing elevation of the school. A facsimile of the front entry was placed facing south, the only difference being the number and style of fenestrations and the pediment. The horizontal banding was maintained as were the faux windows on the south elevation, east and west roof dormers, and basement fenestration.

J. D. Brock won the construction contract with a low bid of \$13,243. The addition would take over 100,000 common brick and 13,000 pressed brick to construct. Thompson reported the addition complete in October 1910.²³ Within two years the school was again overcrowded. Reminiscent of modern educational practice, the school district purchased a number of portable buildings, two of which were placed at James Mitchell. A third classroom was furnished in the basement. By 1915, the situation was no longer tenable. A group of parents from James Mitchell petitioned the school board for new school facilities noting that the classrooms in the basement and "cottages" were simply insufficient.²⁴

Thomas Harding, Jr., was selected as the architect for the new four-room annex.²⁵ Thomas Harding, Jr., the son of a prolific and well respected Little Rock architect, began working in Charles Thompson's office in 1898. He was only fourteen at the time, yet he showed an aptitude for understanding architectural design and form. Harding was an excellent draftsman and formalized his training through correspondence courses and intense study of architecture. As his skills advanced he was increasingly recognized within the community as an architect of some skill. He began to receive commissions outside of the Thompson office. Thompson biographer F. Hampton Roy states that it was Harding's work on the Pulaski Heights Fire Station in 1915 that marked the beginning of his work in commercial buildings and ultimately secured a partnership in the firm with Thompson.²⁶

²¹ Frances Mitchell Ross, "James Mitchell," *Arkansas Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. Available online at <http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=27>. Accessed February 17, 2009.

²² Little Rock School District, *Board Minutes, Book E*, May 3, 1910, 12-3.

²³ *Ibid.*, June 1910, 28; July 30, 1910, 41; October 31, 1910, 78.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, March 27, 1915, 427. The portable buildings were frame with lapped siding and were purchased from a company in Seattle, WA. See *Ibid.*, 331.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, July 3, 1915, 522.

²⁶ Roy, 29, 65.

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Little mention has been made of the James Mitchell School and the superb skill Harding showed in designing this Neoclassical work. The building shows an understanding of the proportions and massing of Neoclassicism, especially French Neoclassicism, that exceeds the Colonial Revival forms of Thompson. It is perhaps this school, more than the Pulaski Heights Fire Station, which proved Harding a capable architect and a worthy partner in Thompson's firm.

Harding's new four-classroom addition was dramatically different from the original Thompson design. J. D. Johnson was the contractor who won the contract to build the addition with a bid of \$21,470. Construction began in 1915 and was completed in 1916. The work shows a detailed understanding of classical proportion and yet is restrained in decoration. This is not surprising given Harding's close work with Thompson. Beginning in approximately 1904, Thompson began an intense period of design in the classical forms. The majority of his designs were Colonial Revival with strong Adam and Georgian influences. However, Harding's work on the James Mitchell School echoes Thompson's earlier work on the Little Rock City Hall (1907, NR listed 10/18/1979) and Terminal Hotel (1905, NR listed 11/17/1978).²⁷

As with Thompson's original 1908 building, Harding's 1915 addition reflected the neighborhood's affluence, or perceived affluence. While many of the most elegant, late nineteenth and early twentieth century homes in the city could be found within a few blocks of James Mitchell School, the neighborhood that the school served was more economically diverse. In this way the building stands in counter-point to the more vernacular Queen Anne, Colonial Revival and Craftsman forms that were themselves a reaction against the dogma of classicism.²⁸ The Neoclassical design reflects the apparent socioeconomics of the neighborhood but also the perceptions of American society in general. Given Harding and Thompson's intense study of architecture, the influence of the City Beautiful Movement, Beaux Arts architecture, the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893), and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis (1904) cannot be underestimated.

The intent of the architect with this façade is to overwhelm the viewer with a sense of grandeur and power; to reflect a clearness, order, and sophistication of society. European architects of the sixteenth century fine-tuned Greek and Roman architecture to create private and civic structures that suggested power and wealth. These forms carried with them the ideals of order, authority, and civilization. It was hoped that by designing a grand and beautiful building that a civic loyalty or beneficial morality might be inspired by those who see the building.²⁹

²⁷ The building actually shows surprising similarity to John Howard's, Neoclassical, North Little Rock City Hall (1914-15, NR listed 8/6/1975).

²⁸ There are only five Queen Anne homes in the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District. Colonial Revival and Craftsman homes make up twenty-seven and forty percent of the district respectively. See Smith and Speed, 19, 20, 24. See also Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 635-40, 649-51.

²⁹ Emily Cole, ed. *The Grammar of Architecture* (New York: Metro Books, 2005), 238, 296-9.

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Growth of the neighborhood slowed during World War I. There was a second period of growth in the neighborhood from the 1920s into the early 1940s. Gradually, in reflection of the neighborhood, the school became blue collar school. By 1952, the changing needs of school operation and educational theory necessitated a cafeteria at the school.

Highlighting the importance of the school to the neighborhood, the Little Rock School District added a cafeteria and kitchen rather than choosing to tear down and build a new school as they had with Stephens Elementary (1950) or Carver Elementary (1949).³⁰ James Mitchell was still necessary and important to the neighborhood and so the addition included several new classrooms as well. But as a blue collar school, there was no longer a need to provide a completely new, modern or elegant building. The increasing movement of Little Rock's white population toward the western suburbs was driving new construction of white schools in the western portions of the city. Rather than building new white schools in the city's core, the school district invested construction funds in schools like Franklin Elementary (1949) and Jefferson Elementary (1950).

This cafeteria addition was built directly south of the school. It connected at the first floor and basement levels of the 1910 addition. Designed by the Little Rock firm McAninch & Mahnker, the style is Functionalist with an understated International style influence. Classroom space was included on the second floor of the addition and the kitchen and cafeteria were on the first floor.

Through the 1960s and into the 1970s the neighborhood transitioned yet again. As Little Rock's white population moved farther west the demographic make-up of the neighborhood became predominately African American and the white Mitchell School fell into a state of limbo. Under the integration plan mandated by the U. S. Supreme Court's *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* decision and the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals decision in *Clark v. Board of Education*, the elementary school children could attend the neighborhood school of their choice.³¹ Transportation would not be provided with the exception of students assigned to schools more than two miles from their home.

³⁰ Both Carver and Stephens were African American schools. Built in the early twentieth century they lacked adequate classroom space and modern mechanical equipment in addition to not having cafeteria space. This was in continuation of long held practice of the school district to build as little building as necessary and add/renovate later. James Mitchell was still necessary and important to the neighborhood but as a blue collar school there was no longer a need to provide a modern or elegant building. The increasing movement of Little Rock's white population toward the western suburbs was driving new construction of white schools in the western portions of the city. Rather than building new white schools in the city's core, the school district invested construction funds in schools like Franklin Elementary (1949) and Jefferson Elementary (1950).

³¹ Ben F. Johnson, III, "After 1957: Resisting Integration in Little Rock," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* Vol. LXVI, No.2 (Summer 2007), 280. *Clark v. Board of Education*, 426 F.2d 1035 (8th Circ. 1970).

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Ultimately this plan maintained the status quo and the Little Rock School District maintained separate elementary schools. As the Federal Court noted in 1971, "Little Rock has a long history of maintaining two sets of elementary schools in a single school system, deliberately operated to separate pupils in schools solely on the basis of race."³²

The integration plan for elementary schools developed for the 1971 school year in response to Federal Court rulings was determined to be inadequate. The 8th Circuit Court noted in 1972 that, "Classes in these first three grades in the western section would be nearly all white and in the eastern section nearly all black."³³ The court pointed out that if the school board was allowed to implement its integration plan as proposed grades 1 to 3 of the Mitchell School would be 96.5 percent African American.³⁴

Successful integration was completed after the closure of Centennial Elementary and Robert E. Lee Elementary and the reorganization of James Mitchell's district. The neighborhood school now served a much larger neighborhood. The school underwent an extensive renovation in 1979, primarily to enhance energy conservation. This renovation, planned by the architecture firm of Wilkins Griffin Sims, replaced mechanical and environmental equipment as well as resulting in the replacement of all the windows in the structure.

Mitchell remained a neighborhood school until 1987 when, following the annexation of a portion of the Pulaski County Special School District in 1987, the school saw an increase in bussed students. Space was needed to accommodate additional students. To meet these needs, the school added a four classroom addition on the southeast side of the school grounds. This building was designed by Roark, Perkins & Kennedy and is a modern school building design constructed of brick and concrete. A one-room building was added to the site in 1991. This concrete block, brick veneered one-room building was designed by architect Brooks Jackson.

In 2004, the Little Rock School District began renovations of the school as part of a larger effort to upgrade schools system wide. This included the removal of hazardous materials (asbestos and mold). This effort was well received by the community, including the quite active Wright Avenue Neighborhood Association (WANA). However, upon the completion of the abatement of the hazardous materials, the school district decided to halt any further work and closed the school in 2005.

³² Clark v. Board of Education, 449 F.2d 493 (8th Circ. 1971), available online at from <http://altlaw.org/v1/cases/891388>. accessed 6 February 2009.

³³ Clark v. Board of Education, 465 F.2d 1044 (8th Circ. 1972), available online at <http://altlaw.org/v1/cases/476840>. Accessed 6 February 2009.

³⁴ Ibid.

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Under pressure from the Wright Avenue Neighborhood Association, and other community organizations, the Little Rock School District decided to seek qualified developers to renovate the vacant school. Emphasis was placed on reuse of the building for educational and community-based services. Several proposals were submitted, however there was no cohesive plan or an agreed upon use. This ultimately resulted in the Little Rock School Board placing the school on the real estate market.

The Wright Avenue Neighborhood Association gained rights to purchase the James Mitchell School in 2007 and later transferred their rights to the current owner, the Mitchell Elementary, LLC. The new owners have the full support of WANA in the restoration/renovation of the James Mitchell School. The current goal is to reestablish the structure's importance in the neighborhood, and the city at large, through mixed use development including educational, cultural, and economic components.

Statement of Significance

The James Mitchell School serves as an important reminder of the place and role of the community school in Little Rock's neighborhoods. It is a valuable component of the material culture of our city's growth. As the purest example of Neoclassical architecture in a school building in Little Rock it highlights the influence that social movements like the City Beautiful Movement or Beaux Arts architecture held in early twentieth century America. Additionally, the school reveals how significant events such as the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis had on American thought and architecture.

As a neighborhood school, the building reflects the demographic and social change of the neighborhood. Continued use of the school for such an extended period resulted in several additions to the school. These additions reflect through architecture the changing theory and practice in education. The school is being nominated with **local significance** under **Criterion C** as the purest example of Neoclassical architecture in a school in Little Rock.

The James Mitchell School is listed as a contributing resource to the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District (NR listed 08/16/1996; 96000892). The current owners are seeking individual listing in recognition of the school's importance to its neighborhood. Indeed the school is a prominent feature in the otherwise residential neighborhood. Because of the length of its use by the Little Rock School District—in use from 1909 to 2005—the school is a better indicator of the history of education in the city of Little Rock than other schools built in the same period. As such it is being submitted for review with **local significance** under **Criterion A**.

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Mitchell, James, School
Name of Property

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Mitchell, James, School

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Verbal Boundary Description

Parcel 1:

Lots one (1) through twelve (12) inclusive, of Block 10 of the McCarthy's Addition to the City of Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas. Less and Except the west fourteen (14) feet of lots one (1) through six (6) inclusive.

Parcel 2:

Lots one (1), two (2), three (3), ten (10), eleven (11), and twelve (12) of Block 7 of the Oak Terrace Addition to the City of Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas.

Boundary Justification

This boundary encompasses all the land historically associated with the James Mitchell School.























