

Educating DeKalb: Midcentury Elementary Schools in DeKalb County

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Photo courtesy DeKalb History Center

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Introduction and Methodology

Throughout DeKalb County, it appears again and again: the low, linear form with a continuous bank of awning windows and a façade of red or beige brick, often accented with stone or cast concrete. Nearly 100 schools in the county fit this general profile, and they were all constructed within a 20-year period. Many of these schools are in remarkably close proximity to one another, and most are found within a planned subdivision. This report will demonstrate that the tremendous population growth DeKalb County experienced in the mid-twentieth century necessitated a complete overhaul of the school system, including a massive building program that continued at a breakneck pace through the 1950s and 1960s. The case studies highlighted will show that the International style was universally employed in an effort to promote an image of modernity and efficiency, and that the elementary school was often an integral component in midcentury residential subdivisions that, as a whole, were designed around those same ideals.

This report covers only elementary schools within the DeKalb County School System; those that are City of Atlanta or City of Decatur schools are not included. Additionally, I chose to focus on schools constructed between 1950-1970 inside the Perimeter (I-285). Even though this is a somewhat arbitrary physical boundary since no Perimeter existed when most of these schools were built,¹ it helped me focus my efforts when faced with a staggering number of schools. The schools surveyed include those built both as white and African American facilities, as segregation was still in effect in DeKalb County up until the end of the 1960s. I conducted windshield surveys of all 44

¹ I-285 opened in 1968.

schools and chose ten case studies that represent an accurate cross-section of the county in terms of uses, conditions, and years of construction. The Appendix includes a spreadsheet with information on all 44 schools, including dates of construction, dates of closure or demolition (if applicable), original intended race, original enrollment numbers, and architects (if known). Developer's plat maps were not available for most of the case studies, due to issues at the courthouse such as incorrect placement or damaged original files.

Two essential sources of information were the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the DeKalb History Center. HPD has a publication put out by the DeKalb County School System in 1972 entitled *A Quarter Century of Education in DeKalb School System: 1947-1972*, which surveys 25 years of progress in the system and includes detailed information on Jim Cherry's tenure as Superintendent of Schools, the financing plan for new school construction, and the county's overarching plan for school improvement in terms of facilities, academics, nutrition, and more. HPD also has "history notebooks" that were kept on 29 of the 44 schools, as well as on other schools that were not surveyed for this report. These notebooks were obtained from the DeKalb County School System several years ago, before they moved to new headquarters. The notebooks were the brainchild of Jim Cherry and intended to tell the story of the school's progress year by year – the principal would write the background history of the school, cover its statistics when it opened, and then write an update at the end of each school year. Some notebooks are much more extensive than others (some are nothing more than one boilerplate page with filled-in answers), but all in all they proved to be a valuable source of information, especially for facts such as

architects and construction costs. Additionally, the DeKalb History Center has a file on almost every school in the county, many of which contain valuable documents, photographs, and in a few cases, floor plans or architect's renderings.

The intent of this report is to foster an appreciation of these unique midcentury schools, many of which are threatened with demolition or inappropriate renovation. Some have already been lost. It is only by understanding the context in which these resources exist that we can fully appreciate their contribution to our history at both the local and national level, and their lasting impact on the built environment.

From Cow Pastures to Ranch Houses

Prior to World War II, DeKalb County was mostly rural. A small portion of the City of Atlanta extends into western DeKalb County, and development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had taken place in neighborhoods such as Kirkwood and East Lake, which were served by a streetcar line from downtown Atlanta extending through Decatur, Clarkston, and out to Stone Mountain.² Decatur, the county seat, had been an urban population center as far back as the early 1800s, and there were a handful of other concentrated population centers, such as in the small towns of Lithonia, Clarkston, and Avondale Estates. Dairy farms, other forms of agriculture, and the quarrying industry (near Stone Mountain and Lithonia) dominated the rest of the county.³ The abundant natural resources and large swaths of open land provided excellent

² Reed, Mary Beth, Patrick Sullivan, W. Matthew Tankersley, Sara Gale, and Mary Hammock. *Historic Streetcar Systems in Georgia*. Atlanta, Ga.: New South Associates for the Georgia Department of Transportation, Jan. 31, 2012. PDF. 54, 69.

³ *Single-Family Residential Development: DeKalb County, Georgia 1945-1970*. Georgia State University, Spring 2010 Case Studies in Historic Preservation class, Apr. 2010. PDF. 21-22.

conditions for dairy farming in particular, and by 1939, 200 dairies were operating in DeKalb County.⁴

In the 1940s, things began to change dramatically. The combination of several forces led to a population explosion in DeKalb County. Scott Candler, who served as the county's sole commissioner from 1936-1955, actively worked to improve DeKalb's infrastructure by building new roads and improving existing ones, increasing the availability of utilities, implementing biweekly residential garbage service, and overseeing the development of the county's first water treatment facility.⁵ These infrastructure improvements laid the groundwork that allowed Candler to recruit new industries, which in turn attracted new residents.

With the end of World War II, DeKalb County experienced exponential population growth as part of the nationwide "baby boom." The birth rate soared through the late 1940s and into the 1960s, leading to a nationwide housing shortage. The impact was certainly felt in DeKalb County, where proximity to Atlanta and a surplus of cheap land, with owners willing to sell, fed a demand. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (often referred to as the G.I. Bill) made the American dream accessible to returning members of the armed forces, many of whom were able to purchase a home for the first time. With the baby boom, a majority of new households in DeKalb County included young children – children who would soon need to attend school. Seemingly overnight, former dairy farms became residential subdivisions that adhered to Federal Housing Administration minimum requirements for loan eligibility, as well as "desirable standards" recommended by the agency. These desirable standards included characteristics such as

⁴ Ibid. 22.

⁵ Ibid. 24-25.

adaptation of subdivision features to the natural topography, curvilinear streets, elimination of sharp corners, and large lot sizes.⁶ DeKalb County has one of the largest concentrations in the state of midcentury subdivision development – nearly 13,000 such subdivisions were created, with the ranch house as the predominant house type.⁷

The phenomenon of “white flight” – white families leaving inner city neighborhoods for the suburbs as black families moved into formerly all-white enclaves – can explain some of DeKalb County’s growth, but not all or even most of it. White flight did not really take off in the Atlanta area until the middle to late 1960s (following the Civil Rights Movement, the Fair Housing Act, and federally mandated school desegregation), by which time DeKalb’s rapid growth was already well established.

Although it is true that most of the newcomers to DeKalb County in the 1950s were white, the explanation lies more in the greater social mobility of middle class whites faced with a postwar housing shortage, combined with institutionalized segregation in which many new subdivisions employed racially restrictive covenants that limited residents to either white or black. Additionally, in the 1960s, Census data shows that a majority of DeKalb’s new residents came from outside the Atlanta metropolitan area rather than within it.⁸

“Our Children Cannot Wait”

The amended Georgia Constitution of 1945 established the basis for free public schools with financing provided via taxation. This legislative change provided the basis

⁶ Ames, David L., and Linda Flint McClelland. *National Register Bulletin, Historic Residential Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places*. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002. <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/suburbs/index.htm>. Accessed Oct. 24, 2013.

⁷ *Single-Family Residential Development: DeKalb County, Georgia 1945-1970*, op. cit. 69.

⁸ *Ibid.* 52-53.

for DeKalb County Schools to expand in accordance with the county's population growth. When Jim Cherry became Superintendent of DeKalb County Schools in 1948, the rural but growing county had 23 elementary schools for white students, eight high schools for white students, and 17 schools for African American students. To hear Cherry and his contemporaries tell it, the school system was in a sorry state. This had not always been in the case. In 1916, the Georgia Department of Education reported that the DeKalb County school system was a model in education, noting, "We find here... certainly a well organized school system. The same cannot be said of many Georgia counties as yet."⁹ Of course, in 1916, the demand on the school system was low, with a rural, widely dispersed population. As the county's population grew, however, the school system had difficulty keeping up. In 1946, over 9,000 children were enrolled in DeKalb County schools, and the first baby boomers would soon be reaching school age. County officials could see the coming storm of population growth, but they had no way to guess just how dramatic that growth would actually be. Enrollment for the 1947-1948 school year was projected at 11,000, a figure called "record breaking" by a local news reporter.¹⁰ Actual enrollment for that school year was 11,056, and in ten years, enrollment would triple to 33,694.¹¹

In the late 1940s, the DeKalb County school system was nearing a crisis point, with "schools [that] were beset with problems related to inequitable educational opportunities, inadequate services, disparity in taxation, a lack of uniform policies" and

⁹ Horne, Sydney B. *A Quarter Century of Education in DeKalb School System: 1947-1972*. DeKalb County Schools, 1972. DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. ii.

¹⁰ Ibid. 3.

¹¹ Ibid. 174.

leaders who were “confused by the new problems and demands.”¹² Following a Grand Jury investigation into the condition of DeKalb County schools in February 1946, the county hired a consultant to “work with the physical and financial setup of the school system” and “serve as a liaison between the Superintendent and the Board of Education.”¹³ That consultant was Jim Cherry, then an employee of the Georgia Department of Education.

During 1946 and 1947, Cherry conducted a complete survey of DeKalb County schools and analyzed the needs of the school system. On March 20, 1947, Cherry presented his findings to the Board of Education. Based on the findings, the board set out to create standardized policies and procedures for the entire school system. The foundation from which the board agreed to operate was the premise that each child, regardless of background, was entitled to a decent education. Thus, “the individual pupil was the justification for the teachers, the principal and the supervisors; the justification for the bus drivers, the maintenance personnel, the dishwashers and other supporting personnel.”¹⁴ Once the board had acceptance of this premise from stakeholders at all levels, it was much easier to reorganize administration, staffing, and purchasing at the county level, because “this early concept...served as the basis for confidence.”¹⁵

Cherry’s influence was felt quickly. In 1947, he tried to resign from his duties as a temporary consultant, and the *DeKalb New Era* newspaper was besieged with letters from citizens begging Cherry to stay. Amid a brewing financial and political scandal with the current Superintendent and Board of Education, Cherry announced his candidacy for

¹² Ibid. iii.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Superintendent in 1948 and was elected. Immediately, he made it clear that under his leadership, the DeKalb County school system would not fall victim to political infighting: “He could tolerate no political interference in the system and no criticism of the central office or the school personnel who had done efficient work in the best interests of the school system.”¹⁶ In 1951, Charles Davidson, Chairman of the DeKalb County Board of Education, remarked of Cherry, “[He] has within four years lifted our schools from a state of despair and an unbalanced budget to a feeling of enthusiasm and sound financial status.”¹⁷

Superintendent Cherry saw that DeKalb County was growing at an unprecedented pace, and that a massive, highly organized building and hiring program would need to be undertaken to provide for the education of all the new children in the county. As is evident in his work with school system personnel of all levels, Cherry understood the importance of having buy-in from those who are most affected by financial and organizational changes. It is probably for this reason that he penned the influential editorial “Our Children Cannot Wait,” telling citizens that “[t]he people of Georgia want no more pit toilets, ill-lighted classrooms and old-fashioned stoves in their schools. They will not stand for fire-trap buildings.”¹⁸ In another editorial, Cherry further stressed the point:

The education program must not be static; it must be individualized and dynamic if the individual is to be fitted to fill an efficient place as a citizen

¹⁶ Ibid. 6.

¹⁷ DeKalb County Schools Collection, DeKalb History Center.

¹⁸ Horne, *op. cit.* 32.

under the free enterprise system and the American way of life. Adequate public education for each child is the only insurance we can purchase for the future of free men.¹⁹

This sentiment favoring entitlement to a decent education is reminiscent of the Progressive era of the early twentieth century, and found a clear fit within a county that had been rural and agrarian but was becoming industrialized and suburban in a very short amount of time. Along these same lines of growth, the provision of an adequate education was closely tied with business development in DeKalb County. As an *Atlanta Constitution* editorial writer opined, “From the purely selfish standpoint of their own future, businessmen have a major stake in our public schools.”²⁰

For a majority of DeKalb County children, regardless of race, this represented the first time they attended school in a facility equipped with modern conveniences such as heating and running water. The use of the International style, therefore, was not merely an aesthetic choice used to represent an ideal of modernity, but a practical one as well, as these buildings could easily accommodate the physical hallmarks of modernity – climate control, a dedicated and efficient kitchen space, telephone service, and indoor plumbing. Another practical aspect of the International style was its cost-effectiveness: “The style’s clean lines, lack of ornament, and emphasis on modern materials and technology enabled schools to be built quickly and less expensively than traditional wood-frame or masonry

¹⁹ Cherry, Jim. “The DeKalb School Story.” *DeKalb New Era* [Decatur, Ga.] No date; assumed mid-1950s. In “Chronology of Knollwood School” notebook, DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Undated.

²⁰ “Catfishin', Educatin'? Both Are Challenging.” *Atlanta Constitution*. Mar. 11, 1954. In *A Quarter Century of Education in DeKalb School System: 1947-1972*. 46.

buildings.”²¹ This is not to say that aesthetic concerns did not factor at all in school construction; in fact, such matters played an important role in winning the confidence of citizens: “[I]n adopting the International Style, the State School Building Authority made an aesthetic break from previous generations of small, inadequate schools. The state relied on the International Style, which appeared new and forward looking, to build a statewide system of schools that it hoped would embody the future of education in Georgia.”²²

Funding for the new schools came from multiple sources. One of Jim Cherry’s first tasks as Superintendent was to oversee reform of the tax structure in DeKalb County in accordance with the 1945 Georgia Constitution, so that property taxes would be levied on a system-wide basis, rather than the previous arrangement where taxes were levied by eight separate districts within the DeKalb County School System. With the old system, disparities in taxes from one district to another were “largely responsible for inequities in services provided within the local districts.”²³ The county contracted with a survey team to undertake a countywide tax reevaluation of all property. This new, uniform tax structure was an incentive to builders and helped spur rapid residential development in the county.²⁴

In 1949, the state legislature under Governor Herman Talmadge passed the Minimum Foundation Program of Education, a “long-awaited source of funding from the

²¹ Moffson, Steven. *Equalization Schools in Georgia’s African-American Communities, 1951-1970*. Sept. 20, 2010. Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division. PDF. 12-13.

²² Ibid. 13.

²³ Horne, op. cit. 9.

²⁴ Ibid. 10.

State to finance school operations.”²⁵ Although DeKalb County was growing, Cherry was well aware that the tax base was, at that time, insufficient to finance school improvement on its own and that he must look to the state for capital outlay. The Minimum Foundation Program would be this source. Originally passed with the intent of “providing a qualified and professionally trained teacher for each boy and girl, a well designed and properly equipped classroom, safe and adequate transportation and sufficient instructional materials and facilities,”²⁶ within a few years the Minimum Foundation Program had also become “the primary means for the state to convince the federal courts of the validity of the ‘separate, but equal’ doctrine.”²⁷ As school systems in Georgia constructed new African American schools that appeared altogether as modern and efficient as new white schools, they pushed back on the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and maintained segregation within these “equalization schools.”

When the Minimum Foundation Program was passed, it provided Georgia with 30 million dollars in funding. Still, in 1952, Cherry advocated for an additional five million dollars in funding – and was successful in receiving it. Cherry was also instrumental in the establishment of the Georgia School Building Authority, which was set up to control state funds for capital outlay purposes.²⁸

In the early 1950s, an estimated 50 new homes were being built in DeKalb County weekly, leading to 75 new children in DeKalb’s schools each Monday morning.²⁹ At the beginning of the 1952-1953 school year, the Board of Education called for a

²⁵ Ibid. 27.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Moffson, op. cit. 39.

²⁸ Horne, op. cit. 31.

²⁹ Ibid. 32.

\$3,300,000 bond issue for new buildings, which drew an overwhelming ten to one majority vote. These funds, in addition to \$2,500,000 in state funds, provided for a building program of 400 new classrooms in the county.³⁰ In 1953, foreseeing the continued growth of the county, the Board of Education recommended a 20% tax increase to keep up with DeKalb's educational needs. The DeKalb County Grand Jury supported this recommendation, and taxes were increased accordingly.³¹

As the county's population continued to grow at a rapid pace, the school system once again found itself financially strapped at the start of the 1956-1957 school year. In October 1956, the Board of Education won approval of an \$11,000,000 bond issue for a four-year building program.³² This pattern would repeat throughout the 1960s as well, with the school system barely managing to stay ahead of the county's population growth and meet the needs of students. Throughout the 1960s, the school system faced problems such as textbook shortages and the opening of new schools before they were truly ready for occupancy, all in an effort to accommodate a student population that showed no sign of slowing down.

The DeKalb Model: The Neighborhood School

The midcentury schools in DeKalb County were not built in a "one-off" fashion, with each school being conceived, funded, and built as an individual project. Instead, there was a coordinated, over-arching plan in place under Jim Cherry, still evident today in the way these schools incorporate into the planned neighborhoods of which they are a part. For a period of time during the 1950s and 1960s, memos and official publications of

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. 40.

the DeKalb County school system bear the slogan, “The school cannot live apart from the community.” This core value permeated the school construction program during that time. It is evident that the many new DeKalb County citizens took great pride in these schools, as they did in their brand new ranch houses in newly laid-out subdivisions.

Driving through DeKalb County today, it can be surprising to see that many midcentury schools are in very close proximity to one another. However, this placement was intentional, not only to accommodate the very large population of young children, but to facilitate inclusivity of planned subdivisions (Figure H-1). Official DeKalb County school system publications from the 1950s and 1960s that delineate attendance zones for new schools specifically state that transportation by bus will not be provided, because the zone of attendance is a one-mile radius (often encompassing a single planned subdivision). The obvious intent was that most students would walk to school. Columbia Elementary is one example of such an attendance zone (Figure H-2). Additionally, DeKalb County did not implement middle school until the 1970s, so elementary school went through grade seven, meaning that students stayed in schools within their own neighborhoods for a longer period of time. These intentional design factors reflect the suburban idealism of the time, the concept that all a nuclear family needed could be found in or within close proximity to their Olmstedian neighborhood of modern, efficient ranch houses.

The placement of schools also reflects the racial segregation of the era in which they were built. Cherry supported an adequate education in modern, well-equipped facilities for all children, regardless of race, and put considerable effort into ensuring that DeKalb County’s schools for African Americans met those standards. At the same time,

he, like many other white leaders of the time, was very invested in maintaining separation of the races. The schools built for African American students during Cherry's tenure fit the profile of equalization schools as identified by the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources: "brick-faced, concrete-block structure[s], roofed with steel, asphalt, and gravel, partitioned with pastel-shaded concrete-block walls, and floored with concrete."³³ In August 1954, in the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the *Decatur News* published excerpts from a speech given by Cherry at the groundbreaking of the new Lithonia Elementary and High School for Negroes, under the headline, "Cherry Stresses Validity of 'Separate and Equal Schools.'" Cherry stated that "[t]he accomplishments of the DeKalb County Board of Education in the past several years in equalizing, improving and expanding school facilities and services for Negro children give validity to the 'equal and separate schools' argument," adding that "[a]ny interruption of our plans to provide for our Negro children an adequate educational opportunity will come at the hand of Negroes."³⁴

In the 1950s and into the 1960s, DeKalb County's African American population was small and concentrated in a few parts of the county, mainly in the relatively higher-density areas of Decatur, Clarkston, Lithonia, Stone Mountain, and Scottdale. There were also small but longstanding African American communities at Mount Zion (near the Oak Grove area) and Mount Moriah (near the present-day site of the Target shopping center at North Druid Hills Road and Briarcliff Road). Near Brookhaven, the Lynwood Park

³³ Moffson, op. cit. 9.

³⁴ "Cherry Stresses Validity of 'Equal and Separate' Schools." *Decatur News* [Decatur, Ga.] Aug. 5, 1954.

subdivision was developed in the 1930s specifically for African Americans.³⁵ According to the 1950 Census, DeKalb County's African American population was 9% of the total.³⁶ That number remained consistent throughout the decade of the 1950s, with African Americans accounting for 8.6% of the population in 1960.³⁷ By 1970, the African American population had increased, but still made up only 13.7% of the total.³⁸ It may seem odd that there were 17 schools for African American students prior to Jim Cherry's tenure as Superintendent, since the African American population was comparably so much smaller than the white population, but those existing schools were small and dilapidated, often one- or two-room schoolhouses located in remote parts of the county where students had to travel as far as five miles from their homes to attend. Some schools were held in church or lodge buildings rather than in separate, dedicated facilities.³⁹

Looking at the historical data, DeKalb's midcentury school building program took place in two "waves" – one occurring from the early 1950s through 1958, and the other taking off in the early 1960s. Although the overall form and design of the schools in both periods is essentially the same, there are enough distinct differences to constitute breaking the schools into two separate categories. Architecturally, the earlier schools tend to use red brick and more windows, whereas the later schools favor beige brick and fewer

³⁵ *Single-Family Residential Development: DeKalb County, Georgia 1945-1970*, op. cit. 42, 53, 78.

³⁶ Social Explorer - Census 1950 Race Only Set. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau via Social Explorer. Excel spreadsheet.

³⁷ Social Explorer - Census 1960 Race Only Set. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau via Social Explorer. Excel spreadsheet.

³⁸ Social Explorer - Census 1970 Race Only Set. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau via Social Explorer. Excel spreadsheet.

³⁹ Harris, Narvie J., and Dee Taylor. *African-American Education in DeKalb County: From the Collection of Narvie J. Harris*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 1999. Print. 21.

windows. The earlier schools are almost universally placed in the center of subdivisions, whereas the later schools, while still placed in or near subdivisions, have a greater number of examples placed along arterial roads or at the entrance to a subdivision rather than in its center. Finally, more of the later schools are found outside the Perimeter, reflecting the growing trend of families moving farther and farther from central population areas.

National Register Significance

DeKalb County's midcentury schools are significant under National Register Criterion C as excellent examples of the International style tailored for use in educational facilities. As the case studies below will illustrate, most of these schools retain their historic character-defining features and are still being used in their original capacity. Although many of the schools have had renovations and additions over the years, most have been done sensitively and were added to the rear of the building, where they do not obstruct the main façade or dramatically alter the surrounding landscape. The schools all feature a low, linear profile of one story with a flat roof, awning windows, and brick veneer construction. The brick used in older (1950s) schools tends to be red, whereas beige brick was used more in later (1960s) schools. Most schools make ample use of concrete as a complementary building material, either in the form of structural elements such as supports, pilasters, and overhangs, or in decorative cast components such as planters or window surrounds. Some use stone (granite or marble) or tile as an additional building material, again both in practical and decorative ways. The school buildings blend seamlessly with the surrounding landscape, and feature trees, shrubs, and hardscape

features such as benches, walkways, and retaining walls. Playgrounds, athletic fields, and other recreational facilities are well integrated into the overall plan of the school property.

Midcentury schools in DeKalb County are also significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of community planning. Just as the ranch house and curvilinear suburban subdivision are indicative of a particular aesthetic and focus, so too are midcentury schools, as integral components of these subdivisions. They represent postwar optimism, a time of economic growth, use of new technologies, and adaptability to a rapidly growing baby boomer population. These schools serve as community anchors, and often the magnitude of their role is only felt after they have been closed or shifted to a new use, as will be demonstrated in the case studies below.

Additionally, the African American equalization schools in DeKalb County are significant in the area of black ethnic heritage as important social landmarks for African American communities. When these schools were built, they symbolized a new era of progress and modernity for the communities they served. According to Narvie Harris, longtime DeKalb County Schools employee and Jeanes Supervisor⁴⁰ in charge of African American education:

⁴⁰ From the New Georgia Encyclopedia: “Anna T. Jeanes was a Philadelphia Quaker philanthropist who sought to improve community and school conditions for rural African Americans. In 1907 she donated \$1 million for the creation of a fund to hire black teachers as supervisors in African American schools and to improve black communities. ... The program in Georgia began with six Jeanes teachers in 1908 and eventually grew to fifty-three by 1939. Known as Jeanes Supervisors, a name upon which they insisted, the teachers encouraged the Division of Negro Education in Georgia to hire more African American educators. The Supervisors improved school buildings and grounds, organized clubs to develop African American communities, and sought to enrich local cultural and social life.”

Students and faculties occupied in new edifices was truly a historic occasion for black students in DeKalb. Pupils were fascinated with flush toilets; they were often found flushing the water to hear and see this new thing. Cafeterias were in all buildings. Fluorescent lights, venetian blinds, tiled floors, teachers' lounge, and principal's office were in all schools. This was truly a new day.⁴¹

In DeKalb County, as in the rest of the state, African Americans embraced these new schools. The schools became more than just educational facilities, but centers of community life, through the provision of extracurricular activities such as sports and academic clubs. Football games, theater productions, and other special presentations were community events, and the schools also provided adult education classes such as home economics and interior decorating, meaning that the entire community, not just school-age children, benefited from the new facilities. When federally mandated desegregation occurred in 1968, many of these community anchors closed their doors, and with this process came a loss of community cohesion.⁴²

Case Studies

The following ten schools were chosen as case studies because they represent a variety of current uses, conditions, and years of construction. The case studies are ordered chronologically, from oldest to newest.

⁴¹ Harris, op. cit. 78.

⁴² Moffson, op. cit. 23-24, 29.

Jim Cherry Elementary, 3007 Hermance Drive, Atlanta, GA 30319

Year of construction: 1950 | Architect: Gregson and Ellis (Wilfred J. Gregson)

Jim Cherry Elementary was one of the earliest schools built under the leadership of the Superintendent whose name it bears. Cherry apparently did not want to have a school named after him, but residents of Brookhaven petitioned the Board of Education to commemorate him in this way.⁴³ Designed by Wilfred J. Gregson of Gregson and Ellis Architects, the school is an early example of the International style in education. According to the architect, the “highly functional modern design [was] acclaimed by the school personnel as an advance in educational facilities.”⁴⁴ An editorial in the *North Dekalb Record* newspaper echoed this opinion, stating that the school was “a symbol of DeKalb County’s new progress.”⁴⁵

Jim Cherry Elementary opened in September 1950. The land on which the school was built had been donated by Oglethorpe University. Because of this fact, the school does not conform exactly to the description of a neighborhood school, as it sits directly on a relatively busy street and is adjacent to the university campus. Intermittent ranch house development did take place near the school, although not in the form of a large planned subdivision. In recent years, the built environment near the school has changed radically due to the demolition of many older homes, construction of inappropriate infill that does not match the scale or character of the existing neighborhood, and new commercial development associated with the City of Brookhaven. Today, the Jim Cherry Elementary building is the campus of DeKalb PATH Academy, a charter school serving

⁴³ DeKalb County Schools Collection, DeKalb History Center. Undated document.

⁴⁴ Gregson, Wilfred J. “The Jim Cherry School.” *American School Board Journal* (1952).

⁴⁵ DeKalb County Schools Collection, DeKalb History Center. Undated document.

immigrant, refugee, and local children in grades five through eight. Jim Cherry Elementary closed in 1975 after much “indecision about phasing out the school.”⁴⁶

As one of the earliest schools in DeKalb County Schools’ twenty-year building boom, Jim Cherry Elementary represents a transition away from older forms of school construction and toward widespread comfort with and adoption of the International style. The building features a central two-story mass (not necessitated by the topography of the site) flanked by two long wings. Arguably, it conforms to the three-part-with-wings school type defined by HPD,⁴⁷ although the overall form and style has considerable deviation from this older, WPA-era building type (Figure H-3). The orientation of the building is at a slight angle to the street, which is unusual for DeKalb County’s midcentury schools (Figure 1). It features the use of glass block as a building material, used copiously on the main façade above small awning windows (Figure 2). This is in contrast to later schools, which often feature tall awning windows that cover a large vertical area of the façade. Glass block was a building material used in the Art Deco movement, and Jim Cherry Elementary definitely hearkens to that earlier era.

On the second story of the central block, there is a unique feature not found on other schools: awning windows that project from the façade and wrap the building corners, resulting in a minimal mullion at the corner and creating a panoramic view from inside (Figures 3 and 4). The roof of the one-story portion is not completely flat, although it appears that way if viewed from the front; it is actually a butterfly roof, which can be

⁴⁶ “Jim Cherry School: School’s Philosophy,” DeKalb County Schools Collection, DeKalb History Center. 1975.

⁴⁷ *School Types in Georgia*. Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division. PDF.
http://georgiashpo.org/sites/uploads/hpd/pdf/school_types.pdf.

seen if viewed from the side (Figure 5). The front lawn of the school is much larger than that of many other schools and has several mature trees; it is also obviously intended as a functional space used daily by students, rather than existing mainly for aesthetic purposes, as is the case in many later schools (Figure 6). There is a very small parking lot in front of this expansive lawn, and it abuts the street directly with only a low curb in between (Figure 7). The terrain is completely flat. A paved walkway goes up to the main entrance, which is flanked by small rectangular windows and accented with other geometric design elements (Figure 8). As is usually the case with midcentury schools, a flagpole is situated prominently near the main entrance.

Lynwood Park School, 3360 Osborne Road, Atlanta, GA 30319

Year of construction: 1955 | Architect: Gregson and Associates

Lynwood Park School was built as an African American equalization school – a phenomenon in Georgia that came about in response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. In an era of institutionalized separation of the races, midcentury subdivisions in DeKalb County were built for either whites or blacks, and the Lynwood Park neighborhood was one such example. Development in Lynwood Park began in the 1930s, and much of the original housing stock was of the American Small House type. Ranch houses, particularly the compact ranch subtype, were also represented as development continued in the postwar period. Since the 1990s, Lynwood Park has undergone significant gentrification, and as of this writing, much if not most of the original housing stock has been demolished (and replaced by inappropriate infill) or is under immediate threat of demolition.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Single-Family Residential Development: DeKalb County, Georgia 1945-1970*, op. cit. 78.

The first Lynwood Park School was built in 1942, on land donated by J. C. Lynn from the estate of early Lynwood Park resident Minnie Lee Cates. This small three-room building stood on Mae Avenue, and served grades one through seven. In 1949, the present school site was purchased and deeded to the Board of Education, and a nine-room school was erected as the Lynwood Park High and Elementary School; it was the first high school for African Americans in the area.⁴⁹ Prior to this purchase, Jim Cherry and the Board of Education had intended to send students in Lynwood Park to a new black high school in Chamblee, but neighborhood residents banded together and purchased the property so that Lynwood Park children could go to school in their own neighborhood.⁵⁰

In 1954, as part of DeKalb County Schools' building program and in order to demonstrate that the county could provide "separate and equal" school facilities for African Americans, the school system added seven classrooms, a library, and a lunchroom, and also undertook a complete overhaul of the mechanical systems of the school. Gregson and Ellis Architects, who had designed Jim Cherry Elementary, were employed on this major renovation project.⁵¹ The building was vacated for two years while this renovation was underway, and classes were held in nearby churches.⁵² In 1959, additional laboratory rooms were added; in 1962, a gymnasium was added; and in 1963, four high school classrooms and two elementary classrooms were added. Gregson and Associates was the firm on these three projects.⁵³ Today, the building that housed

⁴⁹ "Chronology of Lynwood Park School," DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Undated.

⁵⁰ Holmes, Victoria M. *Stories of Lynwood Park*. Diss. Georgia State University, 2008. 346-347.

⁵¹ "Chronology of Lynwood Park School," op. cit.

⁵² Holmes, op. cit. 353.

⁵³ "Chronology of Lynwood Park School," op. cit.

Lynwood Park School is used as the Lynwood Park Recreation Center. In the wake of federally mandated school desegregation in Georgia, Lynwood Park School was closed abruptly early in the 1967-1968 school year, and students were transferred to Jim Cherry Elementary and Cross Keys High.⁵⁴

The architecture of Lynwood Park School includes some elements of the International style, but overall the building has very minimal ornamentation in comparison with white schools of the same era – possibly a reflection of the white architects’ and school board members’ perceptions of what African American students “deserved” in a school. Certainly, the school was functional, and Lynwood Park residents who attended the school remember it fondly, especially when contrasted with the neighborhood’s earlier school.⁵⁵ Architecturally, however, it is a simple red brick building (Figure 9). The only ornamental detail is a small scalloped overhang above a side door (Figure 10). The original awning windows on the front façade have been replaced at some point in the building’s history, although they remain on other sides (Figure 11). A low knee wall at the front of the building might have originally been a planter and later covered with concrete, or it might have been built with concrete on top originally and intended for use as a bench (Figure 12). Lynwood Park School’s simplicity, however, should not be seen as indicating a lack of historical significance. In fact, much of the building’s significance lies in that very simplicity; the school is an excellent embodiment of the characteristics of African American equalization schools in Georgia. Although no longer used as a school, the Lynwood Park School building is an important physical reminder of this long-standing community’s segregated past, and is one of an

⁵⁴ Holmes, op. cit. 379.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 367-370.

ever-dwindling number of historic structures that remain in a neighborhood being transformed by demolition and erasure of the past.

Robert Shaw Elementary, 385 Glendale Road, Scottdale, GA 30079

Year of construction: 1955 | Architect: Bothwell and Nash

Robert Shaw Elementary was another African American equalization school. It opened in 1955 in the existing African American community of Scottdale, just east of Decatur. Robert Shaw Elementary was built concurrently with Hamilton High School, located across the street. Unlike white schools,⁵⁶ African American elementary and high schools were often built adjacent to one another, or even located in the same building, possibly representative of a desire on the part of whites to “contain” the African American presence to as small an area as possible.

By the 1950s, Scottdale was a long established community of mostly African American workers employed at the nearby Scottdale Cotton Mills, founded in the late nineteenth century by George Washington Scott, an early DeKalb County businessman and the benefactor of Agnes Scott College. Additionally, in the 1950s and 1960s, the City of Decatur pressured African American residents to relocate to Scottdale from downtown Decatur, increasing the existing population in this community.⁵⁷ Thus, in addition to being an African American equalization school, Robert Shaw Elementary is similar to Lynwood Park School in the fact that it was built within an existing neighborhood rather than as part of a newly planned subdivision. The building is on a main thoroughfare (this being a relative term in small Scottdale) and the surrounding structures are a mix of

⁵⁶ An exception is Woodward Elementary and Cross Keys High.

⁵⁷ *Single-Family Residential Development: DeKalb County, Georgia 1945-1970*, op. cit. 42.

residential and commercial, unlike the all-residential landscape surrounding most other midcentury schools in DeKalb County, including Lynwood Park.

Robert Shaw, the school's namesake, was "a devoted and outstanding [African American] citizen of the Scottdale community" who "made several major contributions to...the cause of education."⁵⁸ Shaw acquired and donated the nearly 11 acres on which the school was built.⁵⁹ He was also a catalyst in bringing running water and electric lighting to Scottdale.⁶⁰

As an extension of the Talmadge administration's Minimum Foundation Program of Education, DeKalb County Schools under the leadership of Jim Cherry sought to consolidate many of the existing African American schools, and ultimately 17 schools were consolidated into eight new or fully renovated facilities. The six schools that were consolidated into Robert Shaw were Clarkston (Figure H-4), Mount Moriah, Mount Zion, Piney Grove, Bethlehem, and Avondale (Figure H-5).⁶¹ These older schools typically had few materials other than a pot-bellied stove in the center of one room.⁶²

Shaw donated the land for the new school in 1951, and construction began in 1954. The school opened in 1955, welcoming 741 students. 1955 was DeKalb County's first "boom year" in school construction and opening, evidenced by the fact that Robert Shaw Elementary was dedicated on December 11, 1955 in a mass dedication along with 12 other schools; a total of six of the 13 schools were African American equalization schools (including Lynwood Park).

⁵⁸ "Chronology of Robert Shaw School," DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. 1965.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Harris, *op. cit.* 50.

After being open for only 14 years, Robert Shaw Elementary closed in 1969 following court-ordered desegregation of DeKalb County schools. In 1998, it was reopened as the Robert Shaw Theme School, a public school serving the Scottdale area with an emphasis on rigorous academics.

Robert Shaw Elementary is simple in comparison with many of the white schools, but it has more of the hallmark elements of the International style than Lynwood Park, probably because it was new construction in 1954-1955, rather than a series of major renovations to an existing structure. The school is set far back from the street and has two levels of terraced parking (Figure 13). Shrubs, trees, a stairway, and a retaining wall separate the two levels. A row of evenly spaced crape myrtles is planted just in front of the school; these trees are a recent addition, but they complement the previously existing landscaping and are appropriate to the building style and the emphasis on nature found in the landscape design of these schools (Figures 14 and 15). The red brick building is a perfect case study in the International style in education, with long, unbroken courses of awning windows surrounded by cast concrete and topped with a flat roof (Figure 16). The main entryway features terracotta floor tile, projecting cast concrete supports, and a flat overhang (Figure 17). Distinctive metal letters, now partially obscured by trees, spell the school name on the otherwise unornamented roof cornice (Figure 18). The overall plan of the school is a “U” shape with a central courtyard in the back of the building (Figure H-6).

The adjacent Hamilton High School is now used as a community center. Together, Robert Shaw Elementary and Hamilton High represent a specific moment in time for African American education in DeKalb County – a short period of only 14 years, but one that had a profound impact on the lives of community members. Robert Shaw Elementary

is now serving the Scottdale community again in the same use for which it was originally built.

Oak Grove Elementary, 1857 Oak Grove Road, Atlanta, GA 30345

Year of construction: 1958 | Architect: Bothwell and Nash

The location of Oak Grove Elementary, built as a school for white children, was based on a school and community that had existed historically in the area. Located in a part of DeKalb County long characterized by neighbors who lived miles apart from one another on family farms, in the nineteenth century the Oak Grove area was a small, rural population center and gathering place, mainly because of Oak Grove United Methodist Church. In 1836, the first Oak Grove School was a small log cabin located across the street from the present Oak Grove Elementary; this building also housed the early congregation of Oak Grove United Methodist.⁶³ In 1880, the first Oak Grove United Methodist Church building was constructed, and a one-room schoolhouse was built adjacent to the church.⁶⁴ In the early twentieth century, a new church building was constructed, and Oak Grove School moved into the old church.⁶⁵ The school operated out of this building until W.D. Thompson School opened in 1928, at which time students from the Oak Grove area began to attend that school, which was located on the corner of North Druid Hills Road and Lavista Road, where a shopping center now stands.⁶⁶

The current Oak Grove Elementary was built in 1958 to relieve overcrowding at W.D. Thompson.⁶⁷ The land on which it was built had formerly been a peach orchard.⁶⁸

⁶³ Oak Grove Elementary School Visual History Project, Marijo Culwell interview transcript, Feb. 14, 2002. DeKalb County Schools Collection, DeKalb History Center.

⁶⁴ “History of Oak Grove School,” DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. 1966.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

When the school opened, phenomenal growth was taking place in that part of DeKalb County, but it was still very much “in progress.” According to a 2002 interview with longtime Oak Grove resident and Realtor Honor Berry:

When we moved here in 1956 this was way out from Atlanta. We moved from you know Midtown Atlanta and all our friends said, why do you want to go way out there? It’s almost to Tucker. Tucker was out in the country when we moved out here. Now this is considered close in. ... When we moved into Leafmore [subdivision], Oak Grove Road went into Leafmore about two blocks off Lavista and then it was a dirt road.

...

During the early years of the 60’s we had the Cuban Crisis and we had air raid drills and the children had to know the way to walk home from school, although they rode the bus from school to home. My children were terrified to walk home because they had to walk down Oak Grove [Road] past that lake that had a live alligator in it. ... [S]ometimes that alligator got out of the water and went across the street where the condominiums are now and the only way they could get it back into the water was to put a piece of chicken on a long pole and put a string on it and they would take the chicken across the street and the alligator would follow this chicken on the pole back to the water.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Marijo Culwell interview transcript, op. cit.

⁶⁹ Honor Berry interview transcript, Apr. 26, 2002. DeKalb County Schools Collection, DeKalb History Center.

Oak Grove Elementary's most distinctive architectural feature is the tile façade on the south (front) elevation. There are three different colors of tile, arranged geometrically but asymmetrically, reminiscent of modern art (Figure 19). This portion of the building is two stories in height (although there are not two separate stories inside) and houses the cafetorium, a new room type introduced in schools of the era – a combination of a cafeteria and auditorium, designed to optimize the use of space in the school. In DeKalb's midcentury elementary schools, the cafetorium is often set apart in terms of design, ornamentation, and fenestration in comparison with the rest of the building, and Oak Grove is one of the more dramatic examples. It features a rare instance of a non-flat roof, which comes to a low point and then overhangs several banks of awning windows, flanked by tapered cast concrete supports (Figure 20). The rest of the building is red brick with long rows of awning windows (Figure 21). The main entrance to the school is a wide entry patio floored with terracotta tile, the walls are red brick, and there is a built-in planter (Figure 22). Characteristic of many neighborhood schools, the building sits slightly above its surroundings on a small hill (some schools have a more dramatic height difference), and there is a small parking lot that curves in front of the school but does not obstruct the outdoor greenspace with well-maintained plantings, benches, and a prominent flagpole (Figure 23).

Gresham Park Elementary, 1848 Vickie Lane, Atlanta, GA 30316

Year of construction: 1958 | Architect: A. Thomas Bradbury & Associates

Gresham Park Elementary is a classic example of a DeKalb County neighborhood school. The school opened in March of 1958 for white students, and is at the very center of a subdivision developed at the same time. Gresham Park Elementary was dedicated on

October 26, 1958, as part of the county's second mass dedication, this one larger than the first, with 17 schools dedicated.⁷⁰ In 1955 and 1958 together, 30 new schools had opened in DeKalb County, a number that does not include all of the schools opened in the 1950s; this serves as an accurate picture of the scale of the school system's building program and the population demands that spurred it.

The demographics of the Gresham Park neighborhood, and therefore of the school, shifted dramatically in the 1970s. When the school opened in 1958, the surrounding neighborhood was white; this remained the case throughout most of the 1960s. However, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the demographics of southeastern Atlanta underwent massive changes practically overnight. As an example of the speed of these changes, at nearby East Atlanta High School, the student body was about 70% white and 30% black in 1970; just one year later, the percentages had reversed.⁷¹ The passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968 made racially restrictive covenants illegal, and African Americans were, for the first time, able to purchase homes in previously all-white neighborhoods. In response, some white real estate agents began "blockbusting" – capitalizing on white fears of African Americans by encouraging white families to sell their homes at a loss under the threat of African Americans moving in. Thus the large-scale phenomenon of "white flight" began – white families with the socioeconomic mobility to do so left intown neighborhoods for suburban ones that had been developed during the postwar housing boom. This new phenomenon served as an impetus for continued suburban development.

⁷⁰ Horne, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Rhea, Amber. "Hip, Trendy, Funky Displacement: A Case Study in East Atlanta Gentrification." Georgia State University. April 24, 2013.

As Gresham Park's demographics shifted from a predominately white, middle-class community to a predominately black, middle-to-lower-middle class community, the school's educational program changed as well.⁷² The school added staff, including numerous specialists, as an increasing number of students were eligible to receive remedial assistance. Throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 2000s, the school was beset by numerous systemic difficulties:

Family and community factors which impact students in the school include the following: a high percentage of students from families who receive public assistance; a large percentage of students who live in single parent homes with female heads of households; many who are being raised by grandparents, aunts, or other relatives; the young age of mothers coupled with a lack of parenting skills; the failure of parents to attain a high school diploma; the lack of employment opportunities; the lack of adequate recreational facilities; and a soaring crime rate.⁷³

In 2011, Gresham Park Elementary was closed as part of a large-scale redistricting plan on the part of the school board.⁷⁴ A total of eight schools, most in southern DeKalb County, were closed. The closure of Gresham Park Elementary means

⁷² "History of Gresham Park Elementary School," DeKalb County Schools Collection, DeKalb History Center. 1996.

⁷³ "History of Gresham Park Elementary School," op. cit.

⁷⁴ Shirek, Jon. "DeKalb County School Board Votes to Close 8 Schools, Redistrict." *11 Alive*. Gannett, Mar. 8, 2011. <http://www.11alive.com/news/education/story.aspx?storyid=181446>. Accessed Oct. 13 2013.

local children no longer attend school in their own neighborhood, signifying a break from 53 years of following the model implemented by Jim Cherry. It has also resulted in an empty, lifeless building now being the centerpiece of the neighborhood. Already, the school has suffered significant vandalism (Figure 24). This neglected building was not always in such a regretful state.

Gresham Park Elementary sits on nearly ten acres of land, affording students access to large, open areas of greenspace in the middle of their neighborhood. The school's parking lot is placed to the side of the building, and a large, open lawn with mature trees and minimal landscaping is in front (Figures 25-27). In recent years, a chain-link fence was added, but it is easy to imagine how the landscape originally looked: easy access for students from the sidewalk to the open area in front of the school, continuing around to the playground and ball fields on the side that does not have the parking lot. The windows on the front façade have been replaced (and portions of the window bays infilled with concrete), possibly in an effort to conserve energy, since this side of the building is south-facing (Figure 28). The other sides of the building still have the original unbroken rows of awning windows (Figure 29).

The building has several distinctive features that set it apart from other schools built at the same time. The building's exterior is red brick with concrete accents, and granite is used to demarcate the main entrance. On the west-facing elevation just around the corner from the main entrance (and thus easily seen from the parking lot), there is a distinctive granite wall with inlaid brick in a geometric pattern (Figure 30). On a row-by-row basis, some of the brick squares protrude slightly, while others are flush with the stone – a row of protruding brick squares follows a row of flush brick squares, and so on

(Figure 31). This decorative motif was not found in any other school surveyed. The granite is easily identified by its swirling pattern as “tidal grey” granite, which was mined in nearby Lithonia.⁷⁵ Like Robert Shaw Elementary, Gresham Park uses metal letters to prominently spell out the school’s name; unlike Robert Shaw, the letters are placed atop the flat roof instead of on the cornice, so that they appear to “hover” above the school (Figure 32).

The side entrance to the one-and-a-half story cafetorium features two rounded concrete columns clad with turquoise tile, and a flat overhang with 12 circular cut-outs (Figure 33). It seems odd to have these unique decorative elements placed on a side entrance not seen or used by many people. The school has a central courtyard accessible from the greenspace at the rear of the building. It does not appear that any doors open directly onto the courtyard, although a chain-link fence and overgrown weeds prevented the ability to get close enough to determine this for sure (Figure 34). In midcentury schools, courtyards such as this one seem to be intended more as spaces to gaze into from indoors rather than actually to use; they serve a decorative, landscape architecture purpose rather than a functional purpose. The overall plan of Gresham Park Elementary is a “U” shape, with the main entrance located at one end of the shorter side of the U, and the two long wings coming off that part of the building and forming the courtyard in the middle.

Gresham Park Elementary is currently vacant and slated for partial or complete demolition (“replacement”) as part of the SPLOST IV referendum passed in November

⁷⁵ “Granite & Technology.” *Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area*. <http://arabiaalliance.org/themes/granite-technology/>. Accessed Nov. 16, 2013.

2011.⁷⁶ Other schools impacted by this referendum are Fernbank Elementary (demolition currently underway), the vacant Peachcrest Elementary, and four other schools that were not surveyed because they are located outside the Perimeter. The closure of Gresham Park Elementary has already negatively impacted the surrounding neighborhood, and the replacement of the building with a new school that is not compatible with the scale or character of this midcentury subdivision would be a further blow. An example of the visual and identity-related incongruity that result when a historic school is replaced with a new building that does not complement its surroundings can be seen in the new 4/5 Academy in the Oakhurst neighborhood of Decatur.⁷⁷ As a midcentury school, Gresham Park Elementary is solidly constructed with high-quality building materials that will not be matched by new construction. Every effort should be made to preserve the school – making sensitive renovations when necessary – and continue its use in the community, whether in education as a charter, private, or specialized school, or in another capacity, such as a community center, office space, or housing. The unique characteristics, quality of construction, and longstanding psychological impressions of a neighborhood school such as Gresham Park speak to the necessity of preservation rather than demolition.

Wadsworth Elementary, 2084 Green Forrest Drive, Decatur, GA 30032

Year of construction: 1958 | Architect: A. Thomas Bradbury & Associates

Like Gresham Park, Wadsworth Elementary is another iconic midcentury neighborhood school. It was also opened in 1958 for white students and dedicated at the October 26 mass dedication. Wadsworth opened late in the 1957-1958 school year, on

⁷⁶ “SPLOST IV Referendum.” DeKalb County School District.

<http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/splost-iv/referendum/>. Accessed Oct. 13, 2013.

⁷⁷ Rotenstein, David. “Fifth Avenue School Saga.” *History Sidebar*. Dec. 23, 2011. <http://blog.historian4hire.net/2011/12/23/fifth-avenue-school-saga/>. Accessed Oct. 13, 2013.

April 28, 1958; students attended Knollwood Elementary in temporary classrooms while waiting for their new school to be ready.⁷⁸ The school was named after “a Mr. Wadsworth who was a leader in Decatur and owned a mill near McAfee Road and Glendale Drive,” near the present site of Glendale Park.⁷⁹ Originally the school was going to be named Sherrill Avenue Elementary after the street it was to be built on, but the street name was changed to Green Forrest Drive.⁸⁰

The Eastdale subdivision has Wadsworth Elementary at its center, an easy walk for children from any location in the neighborhood. Development of the subdivision began in 1956, and the school was planned as an integral component (Figure H-7). Like Oak Grove Elementary, Wadsworth sits up on a hill. However, because the height difference from the surrounding neighborhood is much greater in Wadsworth’s case, and because the school is in the center of the neighborhood rather than on a main road, the building is the visual centerpiece of the landscape. Many subdivisions feature a school on a hill overlooking the houses; perhaps midcentury neighborhood planners did this intentionally, to reinforce the school’s literal and psychological centrality in the community. Wadsworth’s sloping green front lawn is tastefully accented with trees and shrubs, creating a warm and welcoming feel (Figures 35 and 36). There is a small drive at the front of the school, but parking is relegated to two side lots (Figures 37 and 38). The building features a unique curved front elevation, forming an elongated “C” shape with a deeply overhanging flat roof (Figure 39). The straight part of the C is covered with six bays of windows, extending about half the height of the façade; originally these would

⁷⁸ “Chronology of Wadsworth School,” DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. 1966.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

have been awning windows, but they have been replaced at some point in the building's history, and some have even been covered over (Figure 40). From the bottom of the windows to the ground there is glossy beige tile (Figure 41). The curved ends of the C feature construction of square granite blocks (Figure 39). A. Thomas Bradbury and Associates was the architecture firm on both Gresham Park and Wadsworth, which might explain both schools' prominent use of granite as a building material. Perhaps the use of stone is intended to further signify the school's prominence and permanence in the community.

The rest of the Wadsworth building is the typical red brick construction with rows of awning windows (taking up almost the entirety of the elevation on most sides) and concrete supports and pilasters. The bright red metal cornice and gutters add to the visual impact of the building. Like Gresham Park and Robert Shaw, Wadsworth has a central courtyard between two wings, giving the entire school a "U" shape (with the front wing being the elongated C, as just described). The recent placement of HVAC equipment obstructs open view of and access to the courtyard, however (Figure 42). In another A. Thomas Bradbury trademark, Wadsworth's cafetorium side entrance features a flat overhang with 12 circular cut-outs, as seen at Gresham Park (Figure 43). Unlike many of the other schools surveyed, no chain-link or other type of fencing has been added to the perimeter of the property, leaving the grounds of Wadsworth open to the neighborhood as originally intended. The playground is easily accessible for use by neighborhood children outside of school hours (Figure 44).

Like Gresham Park, Wadsworth is another school that saw dramatic changes in its student population in the 1970s as the demographics of the neighborhood shifted rapidly

from all white to nearly all black. It was closed as an elementary school in 2008, and ever since then, the building has housed Wadsworth Magnet School for High Achievers, which serves grades four through six. Admission is granted through lottery, and any academically qualified DeKalb County student is eligible to participate. Thus the school continues to serve its immediate community, as well as the larger DeKalb County community, in its original function as an educational facility, but the neighborhood dynamic and logistics have changed. When a neighborhood school closes, one option for preservation and use is to reopen the facility as a magnet, charter, or special purpose school. DeKalb County has a good track record of reusing shuttered school buildings in this way. This practice adheres to Standard 1 of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation⁸¹ and the general preservation mantra that the best use for a building is the use for which it was originally built. However, when considering a school that was built as an integral part of a planned subdivision, this repurposing does change the school's context somewhat. DeKalb's midcentury schools were specifically designed to serve the children in their neighborhoods, and in fact, school attendance zones were often limited to a one-mile radius, with the intent that most students would walk to school. Reuse as a different type of school creates dispersal of students and raises logistical concerns previously unknown.⁸² For example, conversion of the former Heritage Elementary, in Echo Woods subdivision, to the new GLOBE Academy charter school came with the need for a strategic traffic management plan. Striving for a solution, at a

⁸¹ "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation." U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/rehab/rehab_standards.htm. Accessed Oct. 23, 2013.

⁸² Roberts, Amy Childers. *Gentrification and School Choice: Where Goes the Neighborhood?* Diss. Georgia State University, 2012.

July 2013 community meeting, school officials asked neighborhood residents how things had worked when Heritage was open. The answer was, “Everybody walked.”

Columbia Elementary, 3230 Columbia Woods Drive, Decatur, GA 30032

Year of construction: 1961 | Architect: Bodin and Lamberson

Columbia Elementary opened in April 1961 for white students, toward the end of the 1960-1961 school year. It opened along with six other elementary schools, after a lull in school openings in the 1959-1960 school year. The Columbia Woods subdivision was built concurrently with the school, and features large ranch houses, split levels, and two story houses of no defined type but incorporating many typical midcentury elements, such as ornamental cast iron porch columns, starburst door escutcheons, and variegated brick. The school relieved overcrowding at Wadsworth and Toney. The fact that Wadsworth, opened only three years earlier and located less than a mile away, was already overcrowded shows just how quickly DeKalb County’s population was growing. In fact, almost all of Columbia’s initial student population came from Wadsworth: 240 students, compared with only 12 from Toney.⁸³

The plan of Columbia Elementary is an “H” shape, with the courtyard formed by the two wings located at the front of the building, unlike at Robert Shaw, Gresham Park, and Wadsworth. This centrally located courtyard (which includes a large tree at its center) provides additional greenspace that complements the lawn at the front of the school, and is accented by a breezeway connecting the two wings, covered with a distinctive and prominent zigzag canopy (Figure 45). The canopy is supported by tapered cast concrete pillars; combined with the zigzag, there is an overall effect of greater depth and height (Figure 46). There is a small circular drive in the front of the school with only

⁸³ “History, Columbia School,” DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Undated.

a few parking spaces, and in front of it is a well-kept lawn with a prominent flagpole and the school's sign and marquee (Figure 47). A parking lot flanks the east wing, and a secondary entrance located on this wing is probably the entry point for most faculty and staff (Figure 48). The front-facing portion of the western wing features distinctive, decorative brickwork and large metal lettering, much larger than on any of the other schools surveyed (Figure 49). The building is constructed of beige brick, representing a shift from the red brick preferred in 1950s schools. While it is not known if the white and blue paint colors are original to the building, their use against the beige brick makes the school visually "pop" from the surrounding landscape, while at the same time remaining an integral piece, since it was designed and built as a focal point of the neighborhood.

In 1966, Columbia built a large addition, with ten classrooms, a storage room, two restrooms, and a cooler room. This addition uses the same materials as the original structure, but appears dramatically out of scale, due in part to land that slopes dramatically at the rear of the property. The result is an addition that towers over the original school when approached from Toney Drive. The same architecture firm, Bodin and Lamberson, was responsible for both the original building and the addition.

Montgomery Elementary, 3995 Ashford-Dunwoody Road, Atlanta, GA 30319

Year of construction: 1963 | Architect: Gregson and Associates

Montgomery Elementary opened in September 1963 as a school for white students. It was designed by Gregson and Associates, the same architecture firm responsible for Jim Cherry Elementary and Lynwood Park School, as well as several other DeKalb schools. The school was named for Major J.M.C. Montgomery, an early DeKalb County settler who operated a ferry on the Chattahoochee River, served as

postmaster of the Indian village Standing Peachtree in 1825, and was the first State Senator from DeKalb County.⁸⁴

Montgomery Elementary is located on busy Ashford-Dunwoody Road (now in the recently incorporated City of Brookhaven), representing a break from the earlier trend of constructing schools as central components of planned subdivisions. Midcentury subdivisions flank either side of Ashford-Dunwoody Road in the vicinity of the school, and Montgomery was obviously built to serve the children in these neighborhoods. Although it was not possible to locate developers' plat maps for any of the nearby subdivisions, tax records for addresses in the Nancy Creek Heights subdivision show construction dates from the mid-150s to early 1960s, making it impossible to determine whether the subdivision and the school were planned concurrently. On the opposite side of Ashford-Dunwoody Road from the school, construction dates in the Ashford Forest subdivision are from the early 1950s, indicating that this neighborhood existed before the school was planned. In all the surrounding subdivisions, the original housing stock of ranches and split levels is being demolished and replaced with inappropriate infill.

Montgomery Elementary has two stories, although when viewed from the street, it appears to have only one, because the lot slopes downward in the back and the building conforms to this topography (Figure 50). The building is constructed of the beige brick characteristic of 1960s schools in DeKalb, but also features the prominent awning windows that are more typical of earlier schools (Figure 51). Due to its construction in 1962-1963, Montgomery represents a transition point between different trends in school construction – the inclusion of both newer and older design preferences. For example, the

⁸⁴ “Chronology of Montgomery Elementary School,” DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Undated.

school is much more oriented toward the automobile than some of its predecessors. A parking lot dominates much of the front of the property, with very little greenspace abutting the school (Figure 52). The greenspace that does exist is well maintained, but definitely not usable as an area for pedestrians or play (Figure 53). Montgomery's main entrance features a scalloped canopy supported by a tapered cast concrete pillar, with manicured shrubs and decorative brickwork accenting the sign advertising the school's name (Figure 54).

The school's secondary entryways (but not its main one) and the bays underneath the windows on the front façade are accented with blue glazed brick (Figures 55 and 56). At first glance, this material appears to be tile due to the glazing, but closer inspection reveals that it is actually brick glazed to have a distinctive sheen that stands apart from the beige brick on the majority of the building. Window bays are also vertically accented with recessed brickwork, and some parts of the building have distinctive brickwork along the roofline that acts as a cornice (Figure 56). Montgomery had an addition at some point, although no documentation was found showing when this took place. It appears to have happened fairly early in the school's existence, as the materials match so well as to be almost indistinguishable from the original structure. The main differences in the addition are that the windows are less prominent and there is no ornamental brickwork (Figure 57). Along one section of the addition, there are two banks of beige brick that are a slightly different color, suggesting that windows were filled in at some point (Figure 58). The area in the back of the school is wooded and natural (Figure 59), opening to a playground (Figure 60) and sloping down to a large sports field.

Montgomery Elementary is still in use as an elementary school, although the socioeconomic demographics of its student population are changing as original homes are demolished and replaced with inappropriate infill that pushes the one million dollar mark in price. Although the school's student body is definitely large enough that closure for insufficient use is not a threat, the building itself may be under threat of demolition as pressures rise in the new City of Brookhaven for "newer and better" facilities – similar to what has happened in the Oakhurst neighborhood of the City of Decatur and with the DeKalb County school Fernbank Elementary.

Henderson Mill Elementary, 2408 Henderson Mill Road, Atlanta, GA 30345

Year of construction: 1965 | Architect: Cuttino and Associates

Driving down Henderson Mill Road, it is hard to miss Henderson Mill Elementary's distinctive zigzag cantilevered roof overhanging the main entrance (Figure 61). Opened in January 1965 for white children, Henderson Mill Elementary was part of the second wave of midcentury school building in DeKalb County. The school was built to relieve overcrowding at Hawthorne, Briarlake, and Tucker. Its location was previously part of the land owned by Greenville Henderson, a prominent early DeKalb County settler.⁸⁵ Henderson operated a gristmill on a nearby creek, from which Henderson Mill Road and the school derive their names. When DeKalb County was still rural, a two-room schoolhouse stood in the vicinity of the current Henderson Mill Elementary.⁸⁶

Like Montgomery, Henderson Mill Elementary is representative of the shifting orientation of midcentury elementary schools. The school seems to have one foot in the neighborhood school model and the other in a model more focused on the automobile, to

⁸⁵ "The History of Henderson Mill School," DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Undated.

⁸⁶ McKinney, Charles D. "Henderson School Dedicated on Former Two-Room Site." *DeKalb New Era* [Decatur, Ga.] 1965.

the exclusion of neighborhood accessibility. Two residential subdivisions are adjacent to Henderson Mill Elementary, but the school itself was built facing a main thoroughfare rather than integrated into a subdivision. It is possible that this site was chosen as a matter of expediency as the county's population continued to grow exponentially. However, as automobile ownership continued to expand, it is obvious that land use planning in general was done more with this mode of transportation in mind.

The school features a beige brick façade interspersed with a pebble wall above and below the large awning windows (Figure 61). On the front elevation, some of the bricks protrude slightly, creating a distinctive three-dimensional pattern (Figure 63). Instead of a long, unbroken row of awning windows (as found at Robert Shaw, Montgomery, Wadsworth, and many others), at Henderson Mill the fenestration pattern shows an emphasis on verticality, and each window is separated into a distinct bay. These bays combine to provide a uniform bank of windows, brick, and pebble along the length of the building (Figure 64). Under the zigzag canopy, a broad concrete staircase leads up to the main entrance (Figure 65). The building is integrated into the sloped topography of the area, with one story constructed slightly below-grade (Figure 66). The slope of the land also lent itself to the creation of a natural amphitheater (Figure 67), further exemplifying the midcentury preference for blending indoor and outdoor spaces and uses.

Clifton Elementary, 3132 Clifton Church Road, Atlanta, GA 30316

Year of construction: 1967 | Architect: Cuttino and Associates

Clifton Elementary opened in 1967, another boom year for DeKalb County school openings and the year of the county's third mass dedication, this time of 13 schools. If Henderson Mill Elementary represented the beginning of a transition in school planning, design, and orientation away from the insular neighborhood model of the 1950s and early

1960s, Clifton demonstrates continued development of these changing ideas. It is located at the intersection of two major roads, Clifton Church and Gresham. Although there is a stairway from the sidewalk on Clifton Church Road to the school parking lot, there can be no mistake that the front of the site is designed for the automobile rather than pedestrians. The parking lot is expansive and takes up nearly the entire front of the property; there is virtually no greenery, aside from a few patches of grass on parking lot medians, and some shrubs and trees (including two very large junipers) planted directly against the school building on a small strip of non-paved land (Figure 68). Residential subdivisions exist in the vicinity, but Clifton is set apart from these neighborhoods, and although the short distance means it is technically possible to walk to school, the position of the building at a busy intersection is certainly a deterrent to allowing young children to walk. Across the street is the park from which Gresham Park takes its name, along with a recreation center and swimming pool (Figure 69). In this way, the school, park, recreation center, and pool make up a community hub, but one that draws from a larger area than only one planned subdivision.

Clifton was opened as a white school to relieve overcrowding at the nearby schools Meadowview and Bouldercrest. The very close proximity of both these schools to Clifton – a distance of less than a mile to Meadowview, and exactly one mile to Bouldercrest – is a testament to the continued growth of southwestern DeKalb County in the 1960s. The school was designed to house 500 students, and that number had already been surpassed on the day it opened, with an enrollment of 618. The school sits on more than 16 acres, and the grounds to the rear and side of the building are in stark contrast to the pedestrian-unfriendly asphalt landscape in front. There are wide-open fields, garden

areas, basketball courts, and expanses of land that remains wooded (Figure 70). The property is larger than most and has a unique history: it was once a part of the United States Honor Farm associated with the nearby Federal Penitentiary, “where trusted prisoners, free from a wall-in type of existence, lived and worked.”⁸⁷ Prior to the school’s existence, the land was “a thickly wooded area composed predominately of oak, hickory and pine trees plus many types of edible berries.”⁸⁸ The prisoners did not work the land on this portion of the Honor Farm, so it remained undisturbed. In 1966, Jim Cherry was able to procure the land for DeKalb County Schools after the Federal government closed the Honor Farm.

Clifton Elementary sits on a slightly sloping lot, so part of the building is one story, and when the grade drops, the other half of the building is two stories. The exterior is beige brick characteristic of 1960s construction. On all sides of the building, there is a distinctive a pattern where some of the bricks are slightly raised (Figure 71). This is similar to the brickwork at Montgomery Elementary, although in Montgomery’s case the decorative brickwork is present only on the front façade and does not include as many raised bricks. The main entrance features a short, covered breezeway and a large built-in planter (Figure 72) – it is a less “pronounced” entrance than on many of the earlier schools, and seems focused on the loading and unloading of students from vehicles. The building has far fewer windows than its predecessors of the 1950s. The front façade includes more brick than windows, in contrast with schools such as Robert Shaw, Oak Grove, Wadsworth, and Montgomery. Not only are the windows fewer in number, they

⁸⁷ “History of Clifton Elementary School,” DeKalb County Schools files, Georgia Historic Preservation Division. Undated.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

are also smaller in size (Figure 73). Evidence of concrete as a building material is more prominent, possibly in an effort to lower costs; the tall concrete stringcourse is an example (Figure 74). In earlier schools, concrete was often used as an accent or for strictly functional purposes, whereas at Clifton the ratio of concrete to brick is growing.

From a strictly aesthetic perspective, Clifton Elementary is a school that is hard to love. It is comparatively nondescript overall, with little ornamentation or distinctive features other than the brickwork; from the street, it appears pedestrian-unfriendly and has an “institutional” feel. However, Clifton’s significance lies in its place within the larger story of midcentury schools in DeKalb County. When taken in context with the 44 other elementary schools surveyed for this report, Clifton and other late 1960s schools are an important piece of the puzzle. Clifton represents the “last hurrah” of DeKalb’s school building program, built at a time when officials were desperate to complete more schools for a seemingly unending population explosion. The early optimism and excitement of the 1950s were gone, and in their place was a sense of overwhelm and, almost, defeat. The midcentury housing stock in this part of southwestern DeKalb County was already built out, with most subdivisions completed during the late 1950s and early 1960s; therefore, sites for new schools had to be found creatively, like on the property of an old prison farm. In his acquisition of the site, Jim Cherry demonstrated the same foresight and resourcefulness that had won him the position of Superintendent many years earlier.

Recommendations and Conclusion

With the closure of many schools in 2011, the recent demolition of some (e.g., Sexton Woods Elementary, Leslie J. Steele Elementary), and the slated demolition of others (e.g., Fernbank Elementary, Gresham Park Elementary), the structures that have

served DeKalb County students for over half a century are more threatened than ever. The SPLOST IV referendum, passed in November 2011, seeks to improve school conditions in DeKalb County, and while this is a laudable and necessary goal, one cannot help but fear that in too many cases, the result will be demolition or inappropriate renovation. Midcentury schools, although they are of solid construction with high-quality building materials, do pose some challenges to twenty-first century use, namely energy efficiency, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and changing building codes. Awning windows are favored since they can provide egress, although the original windows usually have to be replaced during renovation due to codes that require updating to a certain level of energy efficiency, and the original frames do not accept this thicker glass. One advantage that midcentury schools have in terms of the ADA specifically is that the majority of them are one story, or at most two stories. However, a challenge is that the latest ADA recommendations are to provide the same path for disabled and able-bodied individuals, making it difficult to incorporate elements such as ramps and lifts into existing entrances and passageways.⁸⁹

However, one needs only to look throughout the county to see examples of how these challenges are being met and overcome. Additions and renovations can be done sensitively and appropriately, as is the case at the former Forrest Hills Elementary, now a charter school called The Museum School. Adaptation to charter, magnet, and special purpose schools is a common and successful use. DeKalb also has opportunities for its closed schools that are not being realized, and for this they may do well to look to successful adaptive uses of former City of Atlanta schools. For example, Gresham Park

⁸⁹ Swichtenberg, Jason, architect and project manager, Richard Wittschiebe Hand. Telephone interview. Nov. 18, 2013.

Elementary is now vacant and quickly becoming an eyesore and a target of vandalism in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Since schools have historically been community anchors, there are other ways that the buildings could continue to serve such a function. Gresham Park has the opportunity to be repurposed as a community center where classes and activities are held for all ages, theater performances are put on by local residents, church services are held, outreach programs are headquartered... the possibilities are endless. An example of a nearby successful use in this way is the former Moreland School in Inman Park, now home to Horizon Theater and several other community organizations. Another option that DeKalb could explore is conversion of former schools to housing. Atlanta has many successful examples of such conversion: Kirkwood School, Highland School, and Home Park School, just to name a few.

It is no coincidence that the National Trust for Historic Preservation chose a school as the focus of their highly successful 2003 advertising campaign (Figure H-8). Schools help solidify community identity, and this has certainly been the case in DeKalb County over the past 50+ years, as the county grew rapidly from rural to suburban. DeKalb's midcentury schools have been a source of pride for residents and have fostered neighborhood cohesion.

Of the schools surveyed for this report, all that are still standing appear to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A Multiple Property Nomination would be appropriate for these schools. Together, they represent a notable and distinct imprint on both the physical and social landscape of the county, and they are worthy of preservation. Further research and documentation is needed, especially on the

developmental history of some of the subdivisions, but my initial research has convinced me that ample documentation exists and is simply waiting to be uncovered.

The lasting impact of DeKalb County's midcentury school construction program is still felt today and will continue to be felt for years to come. Almost 75% of DeKalb County's currently active schools were built during the period of 1950-1970. Of the 44 schools surveyed for this report, 24 (more than half) are still in use in their original function, and ten others are educational facilities in the form of charter schools, magnet schools, or special purpose schools. Only four of the schools surveyed are vacant (with two – Fernbank and Gresham Park – scheduled for demolition), and two have been demolished.

DeKalb County is at a crossroads with its midcentury school buildings, as the needs of a changing student population and shifts in educational methods necessitate adaptation of facilities built before the era of computer technology and the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, the county has a good track record of making continuous use of its midcentury assets, and has shown that these buildings can be effectively used for decades to come.

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Appendix A – Current Photographs



Figure 1: Jim Cherry Elementary is oriented at a slight angle to the street



Figure 2: Use of glass block at Jim Cherry Elementary



Figure 3: Distinctive windows at Jim Cherry Elementary



Figure 4: Distinctive windows at Jim Cherry Elementary



Figure 5: Butterfly roof at Jim Cherry Elementary



Figure 6: Jim Cherry Elementary front lawn



Figure 7: Jim Cherry Elementary parking lot



Figure 8: Jim Cherry Elementary main entrance



Figure 9: Front of Lynwood Park School



Figure 10: Scalloped overhang at Lynwood Park School



Figure 11: Awning windows at Lynwood Park School



Figure 12: Planter/bench at Lynwood Park School



Figure 13: Terraced parking at Robert Shaw Elementary



Figure 14: Landscaping in front of Robert Shaw Elementary



Figure 15: Landscaping at Robert Shaw Elementary



Figure 16: Elements of the International style at Robert Shaw Elementary



Figure 17: Robert Shaw Elementary main entrance



Figure 18: Metal lettering at Robert Shaw Elementary



Figure 19: Tile façade at Oak Grove Elementary



Figure 20: Oak Grove Elementary cafeteria



Figure 21: Red brick and awning windows at Oak Grove Elementary



Figure 22: Oak Grove Elementary main entrance



Figure 23: Oak Grove Elementary parking lot and landscaping



Figure 24: Broken windows at Gresham Park Elementary



Figure 25: Gresham Park Elementary viewed from side parking lot



Figure 26: Front of Gresham Park Elementary



Figure 27: Front lawn at Gresham Park Elementary



Figure 28: Gresham Park Elementary windows on south (front) elevation



Figure 29: Gresham Park Elementary windows on north (rear) elevation



Figure 30: Distinctive brick and granite at Gresham Park Elementary



Figure 31: Detail of brick/granite at Gresham Park Elementary



Figure 32: Metal lettering at Gresham Park Elementary



Figure 33: Flat overhang with circular cut-outs at Gresham Park Elementary



Figure 34: Gresham Park Elementary courtyard



Figure 35: Wadsworth Elementary front lawn



Figure 36: Wadsworth Elementary front lawn



Figure 37: Wadsworth Elementary side parking lot



Figure 38: Wadsworth Elementary side parking lot



Figure 39: Wadsworth Elementary's distinctive curved front elevation



Figure 40: Wadsworth Elementary's front windows have been replaced and covered over



Figure 41: Beige tile under windows at Wadsworth Elementary



Figure 42: Wadsworth Elementary courtyard



Figure 43: Flat overhang with circular cut-outs at Wadsworth Elementary



Figure 44: Wadsworth Elementary playground



Figure 45: Columbia Elementary front elevation



Figure 46: Zigzag canopy at Columbia Elementary



Figure 47: Columbia Elementary front lawn

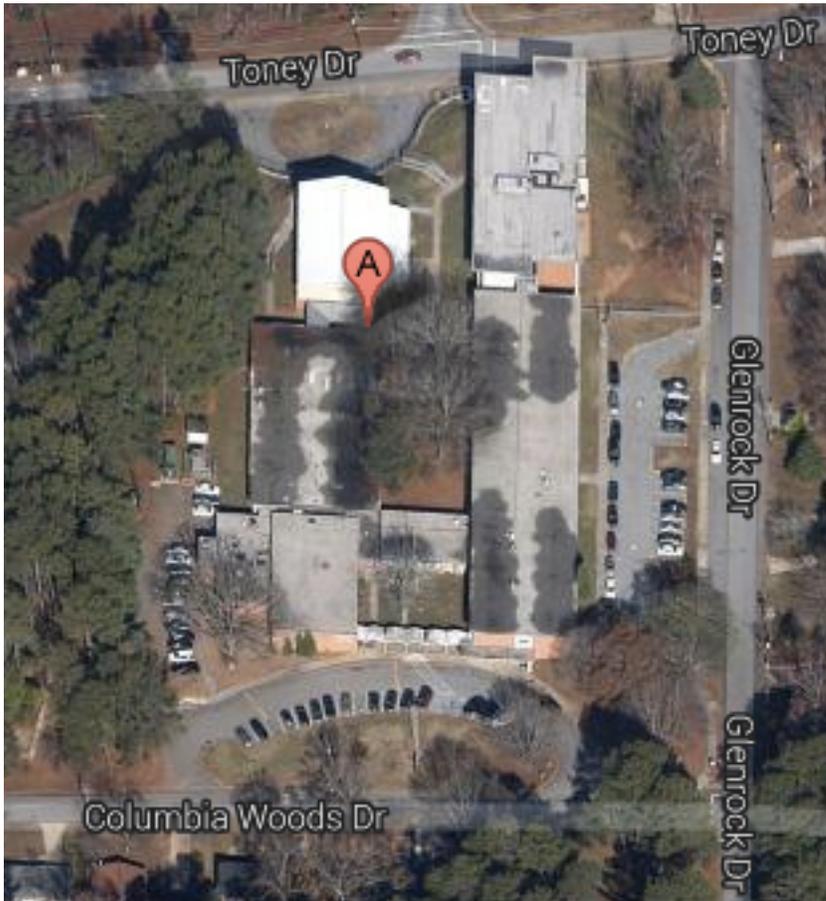


Figure 48: Google Maps aerial image showing site plan of Columbia Elementary. The main entrance faces Columbia Woods Drive.



Figure 49: Metal lettering and distinctive brickwork at Columbia Elementary



Figure 50: Montgomery Elementary: two stories conforming to the sloping terrain



Figure 51: Beige brick and awning/hopper windows at Montgomery Elementary



Figure 52: Montgomery Elementary parking lot



Figure 53: Distinctive landscaping at Montgomery Elementary



Figure 54: Montgomery Elementary main entrance



Figure 55: Use of blue glazed brick on secondary entrance at Montgomery Elementary



Figure 56: Use of blue glazed brick and distinctive brickwork at Montgomery Elementary



Figure 57: Montgomery Elementary addition



Figure 58: Brick infill on Montgomery Elementary addition



Figure 59: Montgomery Elementary grounds (rear of building)



Figure 60: Montgomery Elementary playground



Figure 61: Front of Henderson Mill Elementary, with zigzag canopy



Figure 62: Beige brick and pebble wall at Henderson Mill Elementary



Figure 63: Distinctive brickwork at Henderson Mill Elementary



Figure 64: Fenestration pattern at Henderson Mill Elementary



Figure 65: Henderson Mill main entrance



Figure 66: Sloped topography at Henderson Mill Elementary



Figure 67: Outdoor amphitheater at Henderson Mill Elementary



Figure 68: Front of Clifton Elementary, showing prominence of parking lot



Figure 69: Gresham Park recreation center and park across the street from Clifton Elementary



Figure 70: Clifton Elementary grounds



Figure 71: Distinctive brickwork at Clifton Elementary



Figure 72: Clifton Elementary main entrance



Figure 73: Fenestration pattern at Clifton Elementary



Figure 74: Concrete stringcourse at Clifton Elementary

Appendix B – Historic Photographs, Documents & Miscellaneous

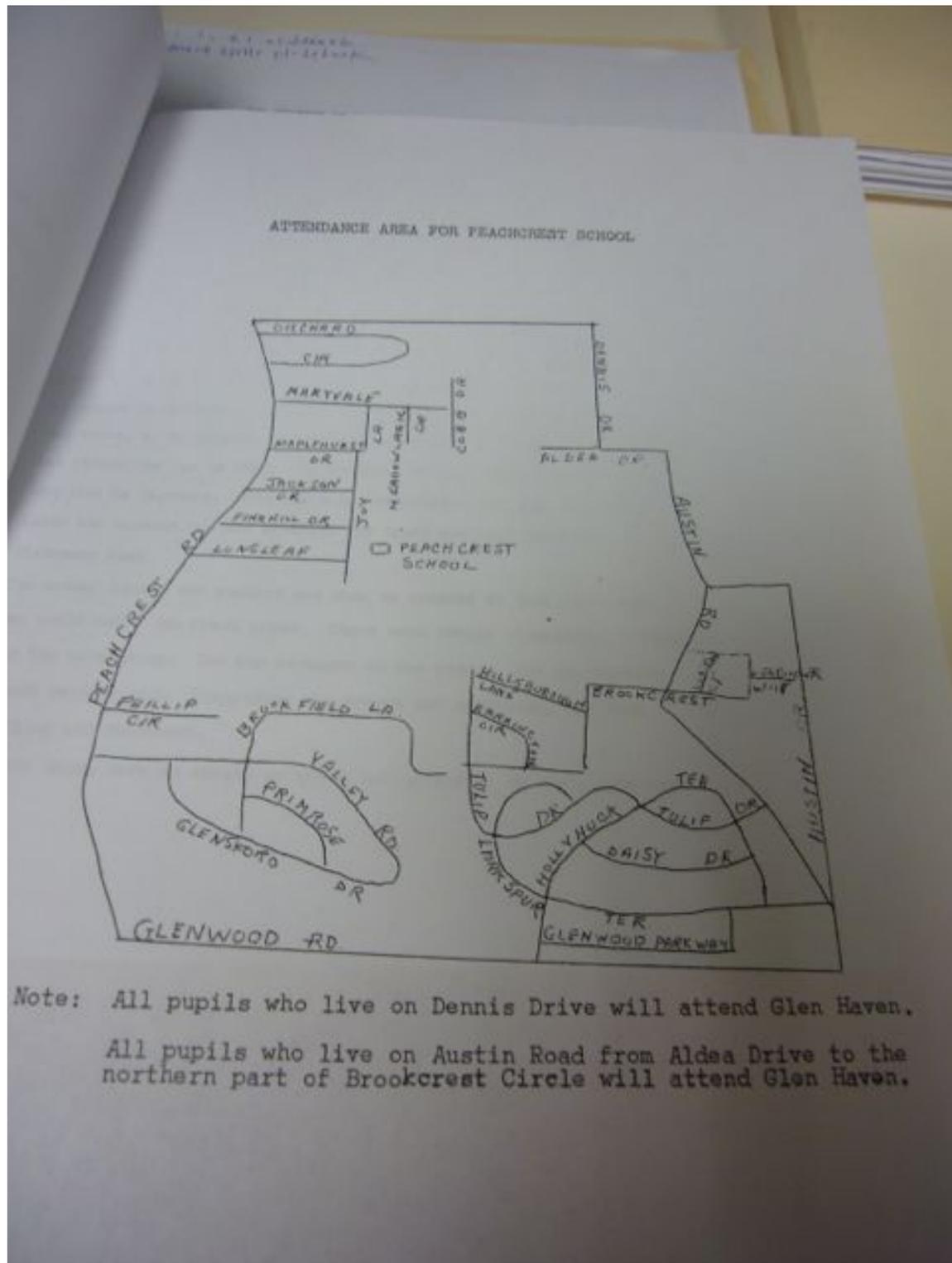


Figure H-1: Attendance area for Peachcrest Elementary, 1961. From HPD files.

March 28, 1961

Patrons of Toney School

Reference: Opening of the new Columbia School

Dear Patrons:

On February 3, 1961, you were given information concerning the construction of the new Columbia School and a map showing the attendance area for this school.

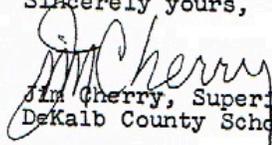
We are happy to inform you that the building will be completed within the next few days and will be ready for occupancy on Wednesday, April 5, 1961.

Pupils who live in the attendance area of the new school will report to the new Columbia School on April 5.

School buses will not serve this area since all pupils will be living within a one mile radius of the school.

You are cordially invited to visit the new school for I know you share with us happiness and pride in this new building for our boys and girls.

Sincerely yours,


Jim Cherry, Superintendent
DeKalb County Schools

JC:mlb

Figure H-2: Letter about opening of Columbia Elementary, specifying that school buses will not be provided. From HPD files.

The three-part-with-wings school type has the three-part school as the main block with one or more wings in the rear, so that the overall shape is an E, T, or U. It should be seen as more than just an expanded three-part school, however, because the wings could serve specialized uses, such as cafeterias, gyms, or auditoriums. Three-part-with-wings schools were popular in large towns and in neighborhoods of cities from the late 1920s through the 1950s.

Three-Part with Wings

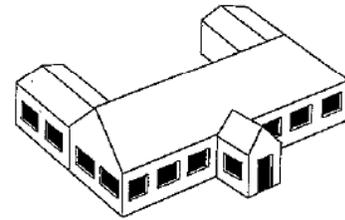
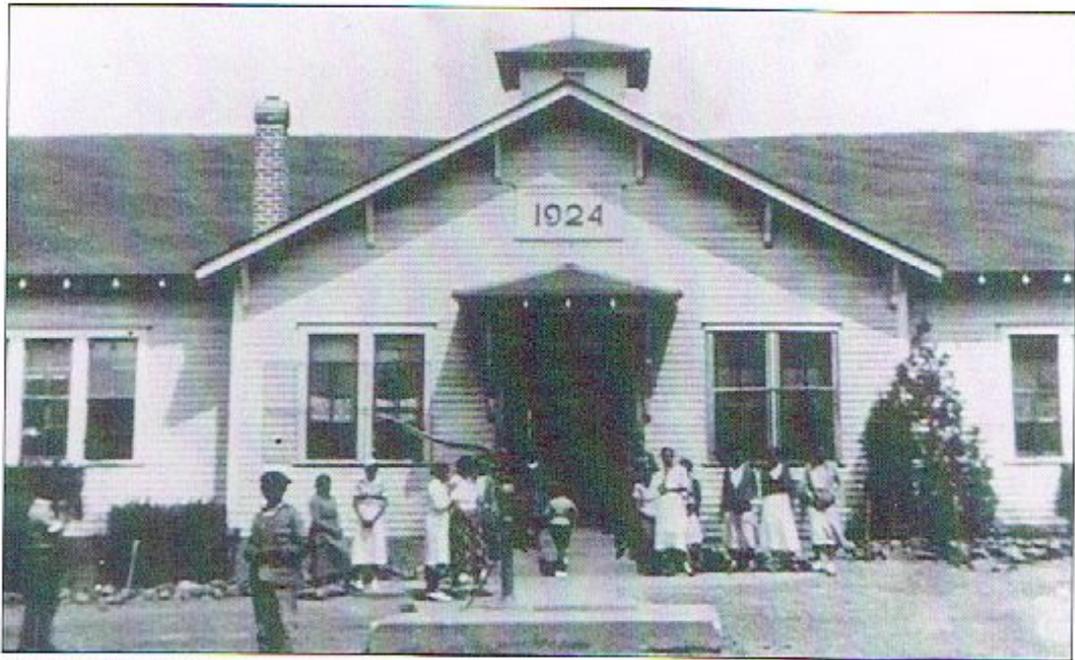


Figure H-3: Three-part-with-wings description and drawing from *School Types in Georgia*.



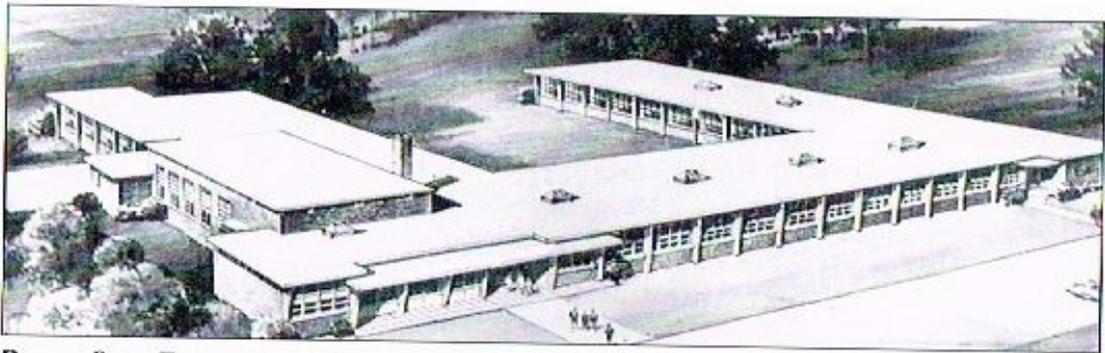
CLARKSTON SCHOOL (ONE-TEACHER SCHOOL).

Figure H-4: Old Clarkston School. Undated. From *African American Education in DeKalb County*.



AVONDALE ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL.

Figure H-5: Old Avondale School for Negroes. Undated. From *African American Education in DeKalb County*.



ROBERT SHAW ELEMENTARY.

Figure H-6: Architect's rendering of Robert Shaw Elementary. From *African American Education in DeKalb County*.



Figure H-7: Developers' plat map for Eastdale Subdivision, showing site of Wadsworth Elementary in bottom right ("Eastdale School Site"). 1957. From DeKalb County Clerk of Superior Court.



No one looks back fondly
on the time they spent in a parking garage.

When we lose a historic place, we lose a part of who we are. To learn how you can help protect places
in your community, visit NationalTrust.org or call 1-800-315-NTHP. History is in our hands.



[Insert your local organization here](#)



Figure H-8: National Trust for Historic Preservation advertisement, 2003.



Figure H-9: Architect's rendering of Coralwood Elementary, 1966. From HPD files.



Figure H-10: Historic photo of Hawthorne Elementary. Undated. From HPD files.

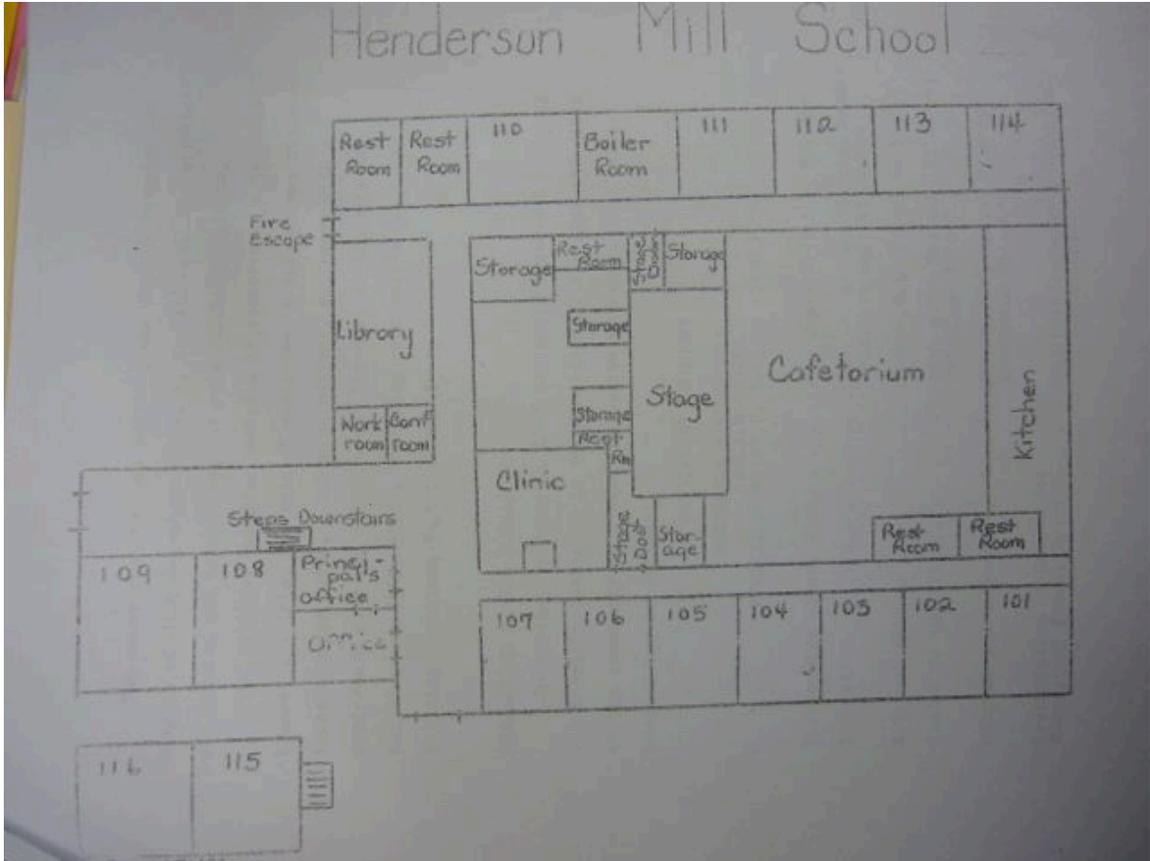


Figure H-11: Henderson Mill Elementary original floor plan. Undated. From HPD files.



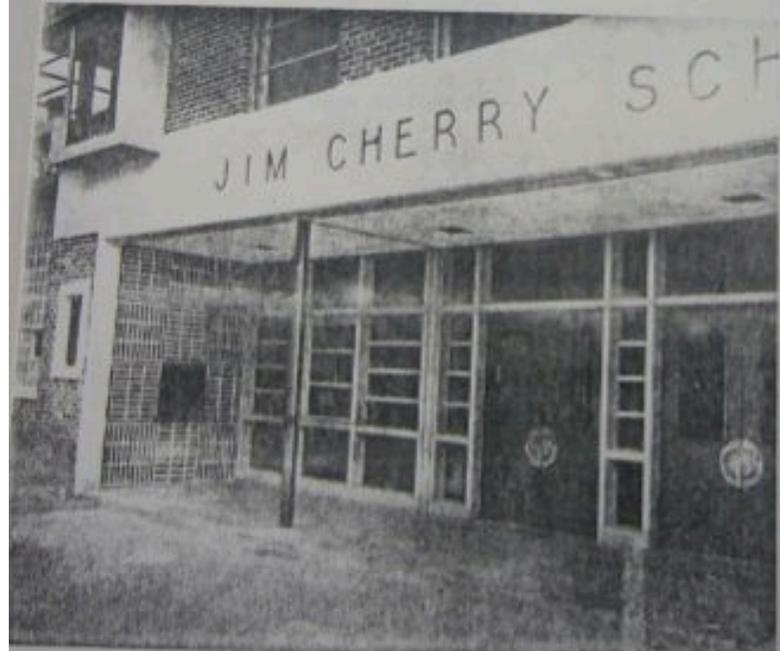
Figure H-12: Historic photo of Henderson Mill Elementary, c. 1968. From HPD files.



Exterior, Jim Cherry School, Oglethorpe, Georgia. — Gregson & Ellis, Architects, Atlanta, Georgia.

THE JIM CHERRY SCHOOL

*Wilfred J. Gregson**



The dignified main entrance is entirely functional.

The fine work done by Jim Cherry, who has been county superintendent of schools in DeKalb County, Ga., for many years, is pretty well known to Georgians. But Jim is a modest fellow. The last thing he wanted was to have a school building named after him. But, his building has been so named as the result of popular acclaim by the people of Brookhaven who presented their request in a mass petition to the county board of education. The board recognized the wishes of the people and named the new building "The Jim Cherry School." Strangely enough, all this has affected the design of the building. Let's see how!

The DeKalb County \$1,900,000 bond issue of 1949 had been validated and the last sold at a premium. The division of funds was set carefully so that the allotment for a new school (including the Jim Cherry School) should not exceed \$157,000. An architect was employed to design each building, and it was our good fortune to be entrusted with a school that was to carry the name of county superintendent.

The design competition was interesting and imposed the challenge to make the building not only functional and to use the available funds to the best advantage.

A year previous we had been engaged by architects for the Brookhaven School. Highly functional modern design had been claimed by the school personnel as an advance in educational facilities. It had also

**Editor of Gregson & Ellis, Architects, Atlanta*

Figure H-13: Historic photos of Jim Cherry Elementary and excerpt of journal article, 1952. From DeKalb History Center files.



DeKalb County School System

MONTCLAIR SCHOOL

1680 CLAIRMONT PLACE, N. E.
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30329

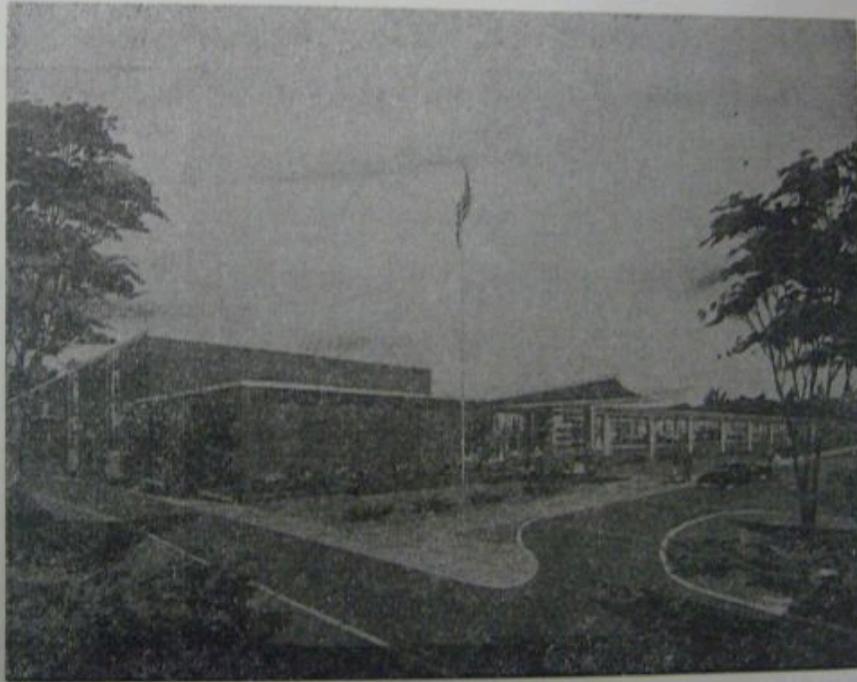


Forrest V. Sewell, Principal

Jim Cherry, Superintendent
DeKalb County Schools

**THE SCHOOL CANNOT LIVE
APART FROM THE COMMUNITY**

Figure H-14: Historic photo of Montclair Elementary on cover of program for dedication, 1967. From HPD files.



MONTGOMERY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
THE SCHOOL CANNOT LIVE APART FROM THE COMMUNITY

Figure H-15: Historic photo of Montgomery Elementary. Undated. From HPD files.



Figure H-16: Students in front of the old Oak Grove School, 1927. From DeKalb History Center files.

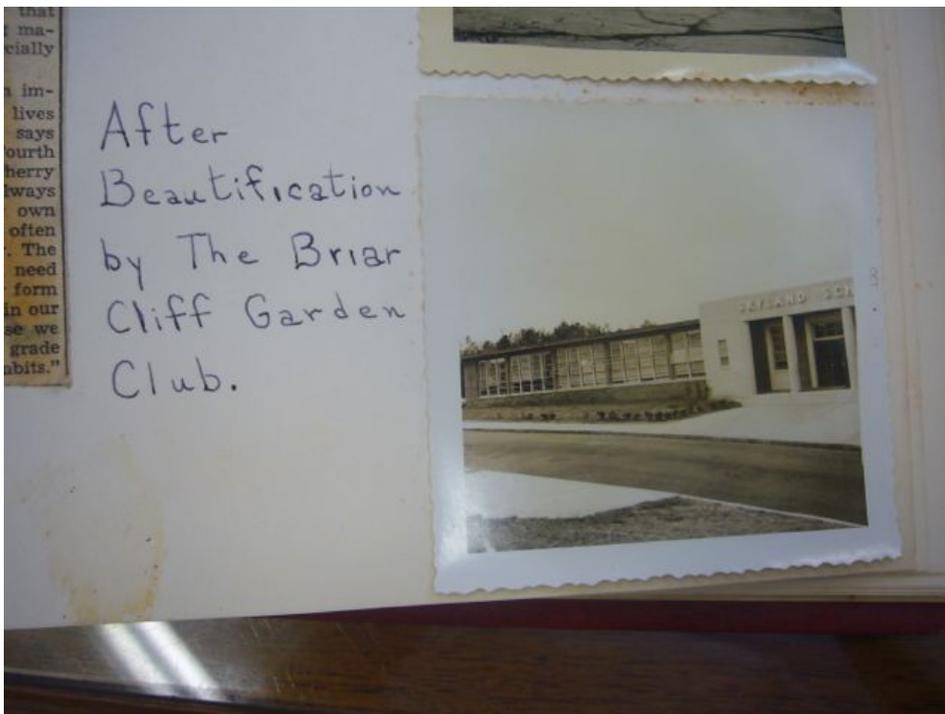


Figure H-17: Historic photo of Skyland Elementary, 1954. From Brookhaven Planning Commission scrapbook, DeKalb History Center files.

DEKALB ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS

<u>Year</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>ADA</u>	<u>First Graders</u>	<u>Eighth Graders</u>
1946-1947	10,251	8,258		
1947-1948	11,056	9,209		
1948-1949	12,397	10,274	1,600	
1949-1950	14,097	11,766	1,878	823
1950-1951	15,844	12,926	2,096	844
1951-1952	18,043	14,750	2,190	983
1952-1953	20,054	16,658	2,236	1,082
1953-1954	23,106	19,456	2,949	1,374
1954-1955	26,445	22,345	3,796	1,385
1955-1956	30,106	25,412	3,867	1,651
1956-1957	33,694	28,373	4,066	1,876
1957-1958	36,876	30,673	4,420	2,188
1958-1959	40,858	34,571	4,775	2,649
1959-1960	44,012	37,654	5,200	2,536
1960-1961	47,856	41,406	5,330	2,692
1961-1962	52,155	45,144	5,772	3,264
1962-1963	57,144	49,109	5,953	4,305
1963-1964	62,401	52,803	6,357	4,037
1964-1965	67,686	58,749	6,803	4,700
1965-1966	72,429	62,452	7,063	4,860
1966-1967	77,355	67,140	7,440	5,351
1967-1968	82,130	70,666	7,860	5,902
1968-1969	87,094	74,642	8,235	6,346
1969-1970	92,980	78,033	8,395	6,939
1970-1971	94,493	80,556	8,665	7,348
1971-1972	97,510	80,990	8,438	7,791
			7,982	7,923
				8,240

Figure H-18: DeKalb County school enrollment by year, 1947-1972. From *A Quarter Century of Education in DeKalb School System: 1947-1972*.