

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Perry School

Centerville vicinity, Franklin County, FK0549, Listed 01/03/2011

Nomination by Jennifer Mitchell

Photographs by Jennifer Mitchell, March 2010



Overall view of 1941 school building



J. E. Wilson Gymtorium, 1963

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

historic name Perry School

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 2266 Laurel Mill-Centerville Road

☐ not for publication N/A

city or town Centerville (Louisburg mailing address)

☒ vicinity

state North Carolina

code NC

county Franklin

code 069

zip code 27549

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Perry School
Name of Property

Franklin County, North Carolina
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
4	0	buildings
1	0	sites
1	0	structures
4	0	objects
10	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Modern Movement

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls WOOD/Weatherboard

BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other

Narrative Description

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

Perry School
Name of Property

Franklin County, North Carolina
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property

☒ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1941-1968

Significant Dates

1941

1949

1952

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Davis, Marion Stuart (Architect)

Holloway-Reeves (Architect)

Holloway, Weber, and Reeves (Architect)

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☐ Local Government

☐ University

☒ Other

Name of repository:

North Carolina State Archives

Perry School
Name of Property

Franklin County, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 14.7 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	17	758560	4008960
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	17	758560	4008740

3	17	758320	4008620
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	17	758320	4008640

☒ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jennifer Martin Mitchell
organization MdM Historical Consulting, Inc. date September 1, 2010
street & number Post Office Box 1399 telephone 919/368-1602
city or town Durham state NC zip code 27702

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

Photographs

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

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name Perry's School Alumni (Attn.: Tommy Perry)
street & number P.O. Box 105 telephone 919-727-0033
city or town Louisburg state NC zip code 27549

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

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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Perry School
Franklin County, NC

Description

Perry School is located on the south side of Laurel Mill-Centerville Road (SR 1436) 1.4 miles northwest of the Centerville community in Franklin County, North Carolina. Centerville is a small incorporated community of approximately 100 people that lies twelve miles to the northeast of Louisburg, the seat of Franklin County. The school's setting is rural with modest residences, small farms, and a church occupying adjacent nearly flat to gently rolling terrain. A cemetery is immediately east of the school property.

The Perry School complex includes four buildings, one site, and one structure, and four objects: a one-story frame school dating to 1941; a one-story, gable-roofed detached concrete block rear wing constructed behind the original building in 1949; a low-slung, U-shaped, one-story, brick high school built in 1952; the roughly rectangular, gable-roofed brick gymtorium erected in 1963; the baseball field and its home plate fencing south of the high school, and the two sets of paired brick pillars at the school's circular drive entrances erected by two graduating classes. This school complex occupies a 14.7-acre tract that is nearly rectangular, except for an elongated strip of land that extends from the parcel's southwest corner. The buildings sit on a mostly level and well-tended lawn dotted with a few plantings including small dogwood trees positioned in front of the 1941 school building and a large oak that anchors the west end of the 1952 building. The 1941 building faces west and occupies the northeast corner of the parcel; an open breezeway separates the building from the 1949 concrete block wing that stands on the rear (or east side) of the original building. The 1952 building faces northwest and is to the south of the original building and southeast of the gymtorium, which stands west and south of the 1941 school. A circular asphalt driveway whose two entrances are marked by two sets of brick pillars—one set erected by the class of 1957 and the other by the class of 1960—extends from the south side of Laurel Mill-Centerville Road and forms a loop around the gymtorium while providing access to the front elevations of the 1941 building and the 1952 building.

Perry School

1941

Contributing Building

Exterior

The one-story frame Colonial Revival-style Perry School was built in 1941 to serve African American children living in the northeastern portion of Franklin County. The roughly rectangular and side-gabled building features intersecting and slightly projecting gables with returns that project from the façade at each end. The building rests on a brick foundation and is divided roughly in half by a brick firewall that intersects the building from west to east. The southernmost front-gabled block extends to the rear a single

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Perry School
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bay to create a small ell that projects from the southern end of the rear elevation. Throughout the building, narrow brick stove flues pierce the asphalt-shingle-covered gable roof.

The school's façade is composed of the side-gabled block interrupted by the brick firewall and the flanking projecting front-gabled blocks with corner posts and returns at each end. Two pair of original slender wood posts with collars and simple caps support the Colonial Revival-inspired, front-gabled porticos with molded returns. The porticos, which display round wooden vents just below the gable peak, shelter six-light wood transoms that surmount double-leaf replacement synthetic-material doors. The north portico is located near the center of the side-gabled block. Three rows of brick steps lead to a concrete floor forward of the front door. The entrance is set within a wall of stretcher bond brick that is approximately three courses wider than the portico on each side. The narrower south portico marks the entrance to the cafeteria/auditorium located in the center of the south front gabled block. A modern handicap ramp built of pressure-treated wood provides access to this entrance. All of the 9/9 double-hung sash on the façade are paired and original: six pairs pierce the façade north of the main entrance and five pairs are located south of the entrance.

The north elevation consists of a recessed entrance bay containing a double door with crowning transom identical to those on the façade. A set of seven brick stairs framed by two-tiered brick knee walls topped with concrete lead to a stoop framed by metal-pipe railings.

The rear (or east) elevation displays six pairs of the 9/9 double-hung sash and a single partially-boarded window north of the brick fire wall. Three pairs of this sash occupy the rear elevation south of the fire wall, north of the ell. A single 6/6 double-hung sash pierces the north-facing wall of the ell.

The south elevation consists of a series of windows and an off-center entrance. Four 9/9 double-hung sash are located west of this elevation's entrance. A gabled hood with triangular brackets shelters the door and transom that are identical to those on the façade and north elevation. A flat-roofed, corrugated metal covering supported by metal posts shelters the approach to this entrance and connects to a lower breezeway constructed of the same material. A single, small 6/6 double-hung sash pierces this elevation just east of the entrance.

Interior

Perry School contains six classrooms, a restroom for males and females, and a large space that served as the auditorium and cafeteria. The interior retains its original finishes including plaster walls, five-panel wooden doors with crowning operable painted transoms, wood floors, and crown molding. Acoustical tiles cover the ceilings throughout the building.

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Just inside the main door is an entrance hall that is eight feet wide and twenty-four feet long. It contains only a small wall radiator. This entrance hall intersects with the main lateral corridor that runs roughly north to south from the north end entrance to the doorway leading to the auditorium. On the east side of the corridor opposite the entrance hall are two restrooms that were installed in 1969 in a space that formerly served as a classroom. The rectangular classrooms that flank each side of the corridor measure approximately thirty feet by forty feet and share common features including original blackboards, coat racks installed on the walls, and hanging banks of fluorescent lights. The middle classroom on the east side of the corridor was used for special needs students and contains a small unisex restroom.

Near the middle of the corridor, a thick metal double-leaf door provides access through the brick firewall into the southern half of the building. A double-leaf wooden door topped with a six-light transom leads to the large space originally used for the auditorium and cafeteria. This room contains the same types of finishes seen in the classrooms. A raised wooden stage that was added in the 1960s is recessed in an alcove in the east end of the room. A small dressing room with doors on both the south (stage) side and west side is located in the northeast corner, just off the stage. A series of support posts run in a north-south direction across the room.

Perry School Wing

1949

Contributing Building

Exterior

The one-story, concrete block, gabled-roofed building was added to the east side of the original building in 1949 to accommodate a growing student population in the wake of school consolidation. The six-room building sits at a right angle and to the rear of the 1941 building, but separated by an open breezeway covered with a gable roof that extends from the main building. Three interior brick stove flues project from the gable roof.

The west elevation, which is closest to the earlier building, is topped with a stepped parapet capped with terra cotta coping. A double-leaf wooden partially-glazed paneled door is centered on this gable end between a pair of 9/9 double-hung wooden sash that pierces the exterior wall to the north and a single 9/9 double-hung wooden sash to the south. A rectangular vent marks the gable end just above the gable roof that shelters the breezeway.

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Perry School
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The north elevation displays six bays just below a row of exposed rafter tails. Five bays contain paired 9/9 double-hung wooden sash; the easternmost bay is also paired, but is missing its wooden sashes. A single 9/9 double-hung wooden sash occupies the west end of the elevation.

The east elevation faces the neighboring cemetery and contains a centered double-leaf door, which matches the west end door, under a gabled roof porch supported by square posts. A small, concrete block boiler utility room with a large concrete block flue projecting from a flat roof and a door on its south elevation occupies the north corner of the wing. This gable end displays a wooden vent identical to the one on the west gable end.

The south elevation is identical in the number of bays that pierce the exterior wall of the north elevation. Three pairs of 9/9 double-hung wooden sash occupy the eastern most bays, while the enlarged bays on the western half have been stripped of their windows or doors.

A rectangular concrete block foundation extends from the west end of this elevation; from late 1949 until circa 1995 the lunchroom stood on this foundation.

Interior

A central corridor extends from west to east through the building. Interior walls are concrete block and portions of the dropped synthetic ceiling are missing or have fallen. Three classrooms flank each side of the corridor; five-panel wooden doors with operable transoms provide access to some classrooms, while others have wide entrances that lack doors. Three fixed sash windows that are hinged at the bottom pierce the walls of the central corridor. The interior has been subjected to vandalism and neglect. As a result of the latter, water damage has occurred due to a portion of the roof collapsing.

High School Building

1952

Contributing Building

Holloway-Reeves, Architects

Exterior

The one-story, roughly U-shaped brick veneer building displays a flat roof on its front block and shed roofs on its pair of rear wings. Large banks of windows illuminate the classrooms on the front, northwest facing block and on the two symmetrical classroom wings that extend from the rear of the main block.

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The elongated front block contains three classrooms on its eastern side and administrative offices on the western end; the front wing has two roof heights so that the roof above the classrooms is slightly elevated above the roof of the administrative rooms. All windows are framed with brick header sills and wide painted concrete lintels. The five sets of windows that front the classrooms on the façade are grouped in threes and fours and are metal-framed and sheltered by the building's slightly overhanging flat roof. Small, metal-framed windows in two groups of four front the administrative rooms. A small angled side wing at the western end contains the school's main entrance consisting of double, fully-glazed metal doors; identical doors are found on the south side of the wing. The building's flat roof, which is supported by metal poles, extends outward along the forty foot length of the façade of this wing to shelter a scored concrete pad forward of the entrance and four metal-framed bays that lack windows. A large, tall brick flue extends upward from the wing's flat roof. The west elevation of the angled front west wing features an attached, windowless seventeen feet by fifteen feet utility room.

A flat metal-roofed covered walkway leads from the 1949 wing of the 1941 building to a set of double doors on the high school's east elevation. On the high school's east elevation, these metal doors are located between the building's front block and the east rear classroom wing. The doors provide access to the main west-east corridor at the center of the building.

The south (or rear elevation) of the front block that extends between the rear wings displays four sets of triple windows set high on the wall. A rear entrance with double metal doors is to the east of the windows.

The eastern rear wing and western rear wing are one room deep and each contains three classrooms. These wings are identical with doors on their west elevations and banks of metal-framed windows on the east elevations. The windowed elevation on each wing is characterized by four banks of five windows set between projecting brick firewalls. A shed roof tops both wings. A row of clerestory windows extends beneath the fascia on the higher side of each shed roof. On the west side of the rear wings, seven metal poles support a flat roofed open porch that extends along the seventy foot length of these elevations to shelter three metal classroom doors. The south elevation of both wings lacks windows or doors.

Interior

The high school building contains a west-east corridor that runs along the rear (or south) side of the classrooms on the front block. Classrooms in the rear wings are accessible from the exterior only; a restroom is located at the north end of each classroom wing.

The interior of the high school building has deteriorated significantly because of vandalism and a failing roof and broken windows that have allowed in the natural elements. The classrooms display concrete block

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walls, wood ceilings, and linoleum tile floors. Doors throughout the building are metal or wood, single-leaf types. Hanging fluorescent light fixtures remain in place in many classrooms. The classrooms in the rear wings are better preserved than those in the front block and retain original chalkboards, some wall-mounted coat racks, and even a few student desks.

J. E. Wilson Gymtorium

1963

Contributing Building

Holloway-Reeves, Architects

The gymtorium was built to accommodate physical education activities, as well as musical and dramatic performances. The prominent brick building stands north and west of the high school building. It has a rectangular form with a front gable roof with exposed purlin ends and a flat-roofed block on its east and north elevations. The gymtorium was named for James E. Wilson who served as Perry School principal from 1933 until the school closed in 1968.

The front (or north) elevation features a one-story flat roofed entrance vestibule that spans the majority of the north elevation of the gymtorium's main core. The north elevation of the vestibule contains four centered and recessed metal doors topped with transoms. A small ticket office window to the left (or east) of the entrance faces west.

A flat-roofed appendage in three parts that contains a stage flanked by male and female locker rooms/dressing rooms dominates the east elevation. The center of this block extends upward nearly the height of the gable roof overhang of the building's core. The flanking dressing rooms are lower—just one-story in height. A double door topped by a metal hood is centered on this elevation. A small opening that provides access to a crawl space is positioned beneath the door. A bank of three frosted windows pierces the upper exterior wall of each of the locker rooms/dressing rooms. Metal strap bars cover each set of windows.

The rear (or south) elevation of the main portion of the gymtorium features a series of four metal doors sheltered by a flat hood supported by two metal poles. No other doors or windows pierce this side of the building.

The west elevation features recessed vertical strips between five banks of metal-framed windows—identical to those found on the high school building—positioned along the upper third of this elevation and barely shaded by the gable's overhang. The west side of the flat-roofed entrance vestibule features two, recessed, metal-framed windows shielded by metal strap bars and positioned above flat aprons.

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Interior

The gymnasium features concrete block walls and concrete and tile floors. Just inside the entrance vestibule is the concession stand to the east; a large rectangular opening that pierces the east wall allowed patrons to place their orders. Offices and a janitor's closet are located on the west side of the entrance vestibule.

The interior of the main space is dominated by the regulation-size basketball court. Although the original wood floor had to be removed recently due to water damage, this space retains all other original finishes, including the wood deck ceiling, open metal truss, hanging pendant lights, goals with hoops, scoreboard, and fold-out wooden bleachers. Opposite the bleachers and centered on the east wall beneath the scoreboard is the recessed stage with a wooden floor. The men's locker room/dressing room is on the north side of the stage and is accessible from the main gym floor and a set of stairs on the north side of the stage. The women's locker room/dressing room is on the south side of the stage and accessible in the same manner. Each locker room/dressing room contains an open room once filled with lockers as well as toilet and shower areas.

A utility room is just south of the women's locker room/dressing room.

Baseball Field ca. 1950 Contributing Site

A baseball field is located just south-southwest of the 1952 building. The field is covered with tall grass and the bases are not visible.

Home Plate Fencing Ca. 1950 Contributing Structure

A tall wooden-pole structure located behind home plate stands at the north end of the baseball field. The wire fencing stretched between the poles remains intact.

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Perry School
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Brick Pillars

1957

Contributing Objects (2)

A pair of brick pillars marks the easternmost entrance to the school complex from Laurel Mill-Centerville Road. Each pillar is not more than four feet tall and has a flat granite cap topping the brick base laid in common bond. A marble plaque that reads “class of 1957” is embedded in the north side of the easternmost pillar; the westernmost pillar lacks a plaque.

Brick Pillars

1960

Contributing Objects (2)

A pair of brick pillars nearly identical to those to the east marks the westernmost entrance to the school complex from Laurel Mill-Centerville Road. Each pillar is not more than four feet tall and has a flat granite cap topping the brick base laid in common bond. A marble plaque that reads “class of 1960” is embedded in the north side of easternmost pillar.

Integrity Statement

Perry School is one of a few remaining Jim Crow-era schools in Franklin County. Its significance as a rare artifact of the pre-integration era in rural North Carolina is bolstered by the lack of major alterations to the campus buildings. The school was abandoned by the county upon integration of its education system and it has remained relatively unused for over three decades. Because of this lack of consistent use, some of the buildings on the Perry School campus have deteriorated or been subject to vandalism. The 1949 concrete block wing has experienced water damage from a failing roof on the building’s north side. Several large bays on the south elevation remain open to the elements. Despite this deterioration, the 1949 wing is not beyond repair. Furthermore, this building retains enough integrity to convey its importance in the role of the consolidation of African American schools in Franklin County in the late 1940s.

While the roof of the 1952 high school building remains sound overall, the building has lost much of its window glass due to vandalism. Despite its condition, the building retains requisite integrity to convey its significance as an example of a modernist building resulting from the statewide school-building campaign of the early 1950s. This campaign allowed for the erection of up-to-date facilities designed by professional architects. Across the state, even in rural places like the Centerville community of Franklin County, edifices like the 1952 high school building at Perry School represented professional architecture’s far-reaching influence on school design. In addition, the building is a testament to rural African American

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families, teachers, and administrators, who, through the petitioning of their local, all-white school boards, sought to create a better setting for the educational advancement of their children.

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Perry School
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Section 8 (continued)

Significant Dates

1963
1968

Summary

Perry School meets National Register of Historic Places Criterion A in the areas of education, black ethnic heritage, and social history, as well as Criterion C in the area of architecture. The school, made up of four buildings spanning the construction period 1941 to 1963, an athletic field with fencing, and brick gate posts erected by two graduating classes, stands in rural northeast Franklin County, North Carolina, approximately twelve miles northeast of the county seat of Louisburg. In 1941, the county built the campus's frame Colonial Revival-style school using funds from the Public Works Administration (PWA), part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, to serve African American children after a fire destroyed the Rosenwald School built on the site in 1928. Like many schools constructed with relief funds during the Great Depression, the building's style and form draw heavily from plans issued by the Rosenwald Fund, in this case the Nashville Plan for a six-teacher school with auditorium. M. Stuart Davis, of Louisburg, served as the supervising architect and the National Youth Administration (NYA), another New Deal program, supplied a portion of the labor. In 1949, in response to an increased student population resulting from consolidation, the county school system constructed a concrete block rear detached wing containing six classrooms. The school plant expanded again in 1952, with the completion of a modernist-influenced, one-story, brick high school building designed by the firm of Holloway, Weber, and Reeves of Raleigh. In 1963, after years of urging on the part of Perry School parents, a gymtorium, also designed by Holloway-Reeves, was completed. In 1968, as the result of a landmark lawsuit against it by a local minister, the Franklin County School Board integrated its schools and closed Perry School and all other African American schools in the county. In 2006, the Franklin County Board of Education sold the building to its current owners, the Perry's School Alumni. Perry School played a significant role in the history of African American education in Franklin County from 1941, its date of construction, until 1968, when it ceased operation. It holds significance in the area of social history, as one of a few intact Jim Crow-era schools in Franklin County and for its role in the integration of local schools in the late 1960s. Architecturally, Perry School is a significant example of the styles and forms adapted to school construction in the middle three decades of the twentieth century. With its classically-inspired porticos, corner pilasters, and molded gable returns, the 1941 building epitomizes the Colonial Revival idiom as applied to institutional buildings, while the modernist 1952 high school building follows the mid-twentieth-century trend of constructing one-level, low-slung, site-specific brick schools based on the designs of professional regional architects. The high school, constructed as a result of a bond-funded construction campaign, represents not only the philosophies and characteristics of

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institutional modernism, but also the successful petitioning of all-white school boards, by African American families, teachers, and administrators seeking to improve the environment for learning. The 1963 gymnasium is not significant for its architecture. Perry School meets Criterion Consideration G as a property that achieved significance within the last fifty years. Its ending date for significance, 1968, coincides with the end of segregation in Franklin County and the closing of Perry School.

History of Perry School

It is likely that the site of Perry School has been the location of a school since the late nineteenth century. In 1884, Joshua and Betty Perry sold a “parcel of land...adjoining the lands of the colored church known as [Perrys] Chapel and the land of Mary D. Alston” to the Public School Committee of District 27 for fifteen dollars. It remains unknown if a school was built on the site following the 1884 purchase, but in 1928, the Rosenwald Fund helped finance the construction of a three-teacher-type school on the same site. This building, known as Copeland-Perry School, served the community for just over a decade until it burned.¹

Even before the 1939 fire that destroyed Copeland-Perry School, people in the community were concerned about the deteriorating condition of the building.² In 1932, Franklin County applied for funding from the state-administered Public School Work Relief Project to improve Copeland-Perry School and its grounds. The county requested money so that the school could be repainted, its stairs repaired, a well dug, the site graded and terraced to relieve poor drainage, a driveway built, downspouts and underground drainage constructed, and the grounds cleared of trash. In all, the county requested \$182 for the work. On November 23, 1932, Fred W. Morrison, who was the State Director of Relief, approved the application.³

The next year, in a request to State School Superintendent A. T. Allen dated July 17, 1933, E. L. Best, Superintendent of the Franklin County Schools, asked for funding from the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works for the construction of six schools. Best requested \$10,000 for a six-room, brick building for Perry School. He also asked for funding to assist in the construction of three other

¹ Franklin County Deed Book 64, page 399, dated April 18, 1884, Franklin County Register of Deeds, Louisburg, N.C.; Thomas W. Hanchett, “The Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 65 (October 1988), 433.

² Some confusion exists as to the date of the fire that destroyed the Copeland-Perry School. Franklin County School Board minutes for May 1, 1950 indicate that the fire occurred in March 1939. However, a June 1939 memo from the school board to the county commissioners refers to the poor condition of the 1928 building.

³ This application notes that the Copeland-Perry School was constructed in 1928. Public School Work Relief Project, Applications, dated November 23, 1932, in the Records of the Public School Work Relief Projects, 1932-1934, Miscellaneous Records, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

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African American schools in Franklin County: Mitchells, Cedar Street, and Haywood. The state denied the request.⁴

At its June 15, 1939 meeting, the chairperson of the county Board of Education agreed to send a memorandum to the Franklin County Board of Commissioners with a plea for a new building for Perry School. According to the memo, "this school is growing and is now housed in a building that is uncomfortable and unsanitary and those of you who have examined the building will agree with me that it would be impossible to repair and remodel this building." The commissioners did not grant the request.⁵

On October 2, 1939, after a fire destroyed the school, Rev. Henry Alston of the Perry's Chapel Baptist Church brought a delegation from the community to a meeting of the Franklin County School Board to request a new building. By this time, Perry School had enrolled 183 students, 136 at the elementary level and the remainder in high school. After the fire, classes were held at Reverend Alston's church. At the meeting, the superintendent of the local Works Progress Administration (WPA) office reported that it might be possible to have the National Youth Administration (NYA) construct a new building if the county commissioners would furnish a portion of the funds. The school board chair told Reverend Alston and his group that the board was aware of the need for a new building and that one would be erected as soon as the commissioners allocated the money.⁶

Throughout the 1939-1940 school year, students from Perry School continued to attend classes at the neighboring Perry's Chapel Baptist Church. In 1940 in response to a State Board of Education Plant Operations Division survey, Principal James Wilson reported that "the building burned at the beginning of the 7th school month...Have been holding school in the church."⁷

In March 1940, the school board, attempting to rebuild the school, asked the superintendent of the WPA "to investigate the cost and advisability of using concrete blocks and a WPA or NYA project in the construction of this building." Although the suggestion of concrete block likely came in reaction to the earlier fire and because of its low cost, the material was eventually rejected, likely because of the opinion of W. F. Credle, the director of the state's Office of Schoolhouse Planning. In a letter dated November 29,

⁴ Locally, sometime in the 1930s, the name Copeland had been dropped and the school was simply referred to as Perry School or sometimes Perrys School. E. L. Best to A. T. Allen, letter dated July 17, 1933, in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, 1932-1933, Miscellaneous Records, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁵ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, June 15, 1939, Franklin County Schools, Louisburg, N.C.

⁶ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, October 2, 1939, Franklin County Schools, Louisburg, N.C.

⁷ Report for Perry's School, State Board of Education Operations Division Plant and Sanitation Survey Reports, 1940, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

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1939 to architect James. W. Hopper, of Leaksville, Credle, in response to Hopper's request to use cement tile block for a school, remarked that "in view of our past experiences with the cement blocks...I am of the rather fixed and firm opinion that all of us would do well to stick with our time tested materials in the construction of school buildings."⁸

At the August 5, 1940 meeting of the county school board, it was reported that W. F. Credle had advised the board that "with slight modifications, he thinks the plan prepared by Mr. M. S. Davis in 1938 for PWA (Public Works Administration) project No. 1456 could be used for the proposed building at Perrys." It was also presented that M. Stuart Davis, a Louisburg architect, offered that "under the existing circumstances," likely meaning the recent fire, he would complete the plans and specifications for one-half of his usual charge. The board agreed to use the plan and accepted Davis's offer of one-and-a-half percent of the cost of the building for preparation of the plans and specifications and two percent for the supervision of the construction. The board instructed Davis to "prepare the plans as early as feasible."⁹

The PWA, which provided loans and grants to municipal, county, and state governments for the building of schools, as well as the repair and improvement of existing school buildings, frequently adapted Rosenwald Fund plans for buildings it helped fund. The plan for Perry School closely resembles the Rosenwald Fund Nashville Plan for a six-teacher school with auditorium. For county-level projects such as the Perry School, the local government initiated and planned the project then applied for funding from the PWA. In the 1933-1934 school year alone, North Carolina spent over one million dollars for PWA elementary and secondary schools for African Americans.¹⁰

The oldest building on the Perry School campus is the only New Deal school for African Americans remaining in the county. Before the completion of Perry School in the fall of 1941, various New Deal programs provided construction and improvement services to Franklin County schools. The Civil Works Administration (CWA) spent nearly eighteen hundred dollars building and remodeling privies at white and African American schools throughout the county in the 1930s. The local government contributed a portion of the nineteen hundred dollars it cost when the CWA and Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) added a room to Mitchell School in 1938. The CWA also funded a malaria control project at Edward Best

⁸ W. F. Credle to Mr. James W. Hopper, November 29, 1939, letter in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence file, July 1939-June 1940, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁹ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, August 5, 1940, Franklin County Schools, Louisburg, N.C.

¹⁰ Robert C. Weaver, "The Public Works Administration School Building-Aid Program and Separate Negro Schools," *Journal of Negro Education* 7 (July 1938): 367, 370; Thomas W. Hanchett, "Saving the South's Rosenwald Schools" website, www.rosenwaldplans.org.

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School.¹¹ During the period 1933 to 1939, the PWA carried out two school-building projects: construction of the Justice School and an addition to the Bunn School, at a total cost of \$65,000.¹²

In August 1940, the school board instructed E. H. Malone, attorney to the board, and W. R. Mills to “take such steps as may be necessary to secure deed to the land of the [Perrys] School.” That fall, the Franklin County Board of Education purchased land near the one-acre parcel where Copeland-Perry School had stood in preparation for the construction of a new school. In October 1940, Annie and E. B. Person sold 2.8 acres to the board. The next month, the board purchased 1.2 acres from Ella and T. C. Williams¹³

Throughout late 1940 and early 1941, references to the construction of Perry School appear in the Franklin County School Board minutes. In November 1940, the school board instructed the superintendent of schools to purchase “rough and sized lumber for the Perry School building as early as may be feasible” because of the continuing rise in the price of lumber. In February 1941, the board “decided to follow the suggestions of Mr. M. S. Davis and plaster the walls of the Perry School building as outlined in the plans and specifications.” In March 1941, the board awarded the wiring contract for the building to Mr. Kelly White whose bid for the project totaled \$185. That same month, the board approved #2 grade gum flooring. The following month the board instructed the superintendent to install “drop cords for lights in Perry School, and defer more expensive fixtures until a later date.” The new building, which was completed in the fall of 1941 and dedicated on October 26, 1941, accommodated grades one through eleven. By 1946, the twelfth grade had been added.¹⁴

On June 7, 1948, the Franklin County School Board issued a resolution to consolidate Nib Thomas Colored School and Long Grove Colored School with Perry School. The next year, a concrete block detached wing was added to the campus in order to accommodate the increased enrollment. The addition housed high school students.¹⁵

¹¹ J. S. Kirk, Walter A. Cutter, and Thomas W. Morse, eds., *Emergency Relief in North Carolina. A Record of the Development and Activities of the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration, 1932-1935* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1936), 479-480.

¹² Dallas Halverstadt, Information for the PWA Regional Office, to State Board of Education, “Schools Erected by Public Works Administration, State of North Carolina, 1933-1939., no date, in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence file, July 1939-1940, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

¹³ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, August 5, 1949, Franklin County Schools, Louisburg, N.C.; Franklin County Deed Book 375, page 160, dated October 11, 1940; Franklin County Deed Book 375, page 160, October 11, 1940, Franklin County Register of Deeds, Louisburg, N.C.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, November 4, 1940, February 3, 1941, March 3, 1941, and April 7, 1941, Franklin County Schools, Louisburg, N.C.; “Bits and Pieces of Perry’s School, Centerville, North Carolina,” page 2.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, June 7, 1948, Franklin County Schools, Louisburg, N.C.

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Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Franklin County School Board consolidated African American schools, despite protest from some families. At a special meeting of the school board on January 13, 1950, a committee from the office of Dr. N. C. Newbold, Director of Negro Education for the state, weighed in on the status of African American schools in Franklin County and offered recommendations as to the consolidation plan. Firstly, the committee identified all of the buildings on each campus and reported the following at Perry School: “frame building with seven classrooms and auditorium; cinder block building with six classrooms, and frame building containing a cafeteria (old).” The final building cited was a small weatherboard frame structure likely dating to the period when the Copeland-Perry Rosenwald School occupied this campus. The cafeteria, which is identified as a lunch room in a circa 1940 photograph, stood where the west end of the 1952 high school building now stands and was demolished in preparation for the construction of that building. After providing an inventory of the school plants, Dr. Newbold’s committee recommended that several schools be consolidated at Perry School and that a modern building be constructed that contained twenty or more classrooms, a library, teacher’s restroom, science laboratory, auditorium, or gymnasium, cafeteria, and space for vocational and agricultural studies, and home economics. The committee also recommended that the new building include running water, sanitary facilities, and central heat, modern amenities not present at Perry School in 1950. In all, Newbold’s office laid out plans for three consolidated union schools and two consolidated elementary schools for African American children in Franklin County.¹⁶

In late March 1950, the school board, in preparation for the consolidation at Perry School, approved the use of \$120,000 in state funds for the construction of a modern ten-classroom building; the same amount of state funds, plus \$1,000 in local funds, would be used to build a comparable building at Gethsemane Colored School in Bunn.¹⁷ The State Board of Education approved the plan for constructing new facilities for four African American schools, including Perry School and Gethsemane, and informed the county school board that the new buildings had to be equipped with running water, indoor toilets, and central heat. At that same board meeting, a resolution passed to sell at auction the original one acre lot that had contained the Copeland-Perry Rosenwald School since that parcel was no longer being used.¹⁸

In November 1950, John Holloway and William Weber, representing the Raleigh architectural firm of Holloway, Weber, and Reeves, appeared before the school board to present plans for a new building at the Gethsemane Colored School in Bunn. After the board approved the preliminary drawings and instructed the firm to prepare working drawings, Weber proposed to provide the board with a duplicate set of plans for use in the proposed classroom building at Perry School. The board unanimously approved employing

¹⁶ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, January 13, 1950.

¹⁷ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, March 28, 1950.

¹⁸ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, May 1, 1950.

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Holloway, Weber, and Reeves to design the Perry School building for the sum of three percent of the contractor's bid.¹⁹

John Holloway (1923-2005), William Weber (1921-1963), and Ralph Reeves (1920-1984) formed their architectural practice in Raleigh in 1948. Holloway, a Raleigh native, and Reeves, from Brunswick, Georgia, graduated from North Carolina State University's architecture program in the 1940s. Holloway, Weber, and Reeves became one of the state's largest firms designing residential, industrial, and institutional buildings, many in the modernist idiom. By the summer of 1952, around the same time the high school building at Perry School was completed, Holloway and Reeves had formed their own firm and continued designing residences, schools, churches, hospitals, commercial and government buildings. One of their most notable commissions is their collaboration with Edward Durell Stone on the North Carolina Legislative Building, completed in 1963.²⁰

In late 1950, Mr. Cameron and Mr. Duff of the state's Schoolhouse Planning Board visited Perry School in order to make a recommendation as to the location of the new building. They advised that it be placed on the west side of the original schoolhouse facing what was then known as Centerville Highway. They also recommended that the county purchase an additional six acres at the school site. The school board approved the recommendations and in early 1951, the county purchased land from Ella Burt Williams, Olive and R. T. Gupton, trustees of Perry's Chapel Baptist Church, and trustees of the nearby Level Traveler Masonic Lodge No. 583 for \$125 per acre. With these purchases, the Perry School campus grew to 11.75 acres.²¹ By July 1952, the new building had been completed.²²

By the mid-1950s, Perry School was one of six African American schools in Franklin County.²³ The 1954-1955 annual principal's report for the school cited 127 students enrolled in the high school alone. The principal also mentioned that recent improvements to the school included grading the grounds, sowing grass, and planting shrubbery. Playground equipment had been purchased as well.²⁴

¹⁹ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, November 6, 1950.

²⁰ Triangle Modernist Houses website, <http://www.trianglemodernisthouses.com>; John Holloway appeared before the Franklin County School Board in July 1952 representing the firm Holloway and Reeves, Architects.

²¹ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, January 2, 1951; Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, February 5, 1951; Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, March 5, 1951.

²² Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, July 7, 1952.

²³ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, July 2, 1956.

²⁴ High School Principals' Annual Reports, Franklin-Graham Counties, 1950-1955, in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principals' Annual Reports, 1950-1955, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

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By the end of the 1950s, the student population at Perry School had increased considerably. In 1959, 196 students enrolled in the high school.²⁵ As enrollment increased, the need for improved facilities became more apparent. In December 1959, a committee from Perry School appeared before the school board inquiring how long it would be before the school board would be able to build a gymnasium and to ask if no immediate plans were in the works to build a gym, could the Perry School students use the nearby Gold Sand gymnasium when the white students of that school were not using it. The board responded that it was possible for construction to begin in the next two years. Satisfied with the board's answer, one of the committee persons from Perry School withdrew the request to use the Gold Sand gym.²⁶

In 1961, six schools served African American children in Franklin County: Riverside School; Cedar Street School; Mapleville School; Gethsemane School; and Youngsville School. Franklinton, which administered its own schools, had B. F. Person as its African American high school. Nine schools in the county served white students. At Perry School there were twenty-three elementary level teachers and six high school teachers.²⁷ The principal's report noted 197 students enrolled at the beginning of the 1960-1961 school year and 163 by the end of year. He reported classrooms, and space for a library, science instruction, lunchroom, and foreign language instruction were inadequate.²⁸

It would not be until its January 2, 1961 meeting, that the school board would consider a new gymnasium for Perry School. After discussing funding for capital improvement for the 1961-1962 school year, it was agreed that no action would be taken until the funding was available.²⁹ The cost for constructing the gym, estimated at \$81,000, was included in the budget presented at the March 6, 1961 school board meeting. At that same meeting, consideration was given to providing a lunchroom, agriculture building, and central heat at Perry School. The board agreed to request capital improvement funding from the county commissioners.³⁰ At its June 5 meeting, the board hired Holloway-Reeves for architectural services for the erection of a gymnasium at Perry School.³¹ At around the same time the firm designed the gym, it also designed Louisburg High School.³² On October 9, 1961, the board met at Perry School to determine the

²⁵ High School Principals' Annual Reports, Franklin-Gaston Counties, 1955-1960, in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principals' Annual Reports, 1955-1960, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

²⁶ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, December 7, 1959.

²⁷ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, July 3, 1961.

²⁸ High School Principals' Annual Preliminary Reports, Durham-Guilford, 1960-196, in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

²⁹ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, January 2, 1961.

³⁰ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, March 6, 1961.

³¹ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, June 5, 1961.

³² Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, August 1, 1961.

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location of the gymtorium.³³ At the next month's meeting, the school board concluded that the gym would be built eighty feet west of the "old frame building at Perry's School." The board also accepted Holloway-Reeves's plans and directed Ralph Reeves to advertise bids after January 1, 1961.³⁴ In 1963, a gymtorium was added to the campus and named for James E. Wilson, a long-time principal.

After the completion of the gymtorium, Perry School operated only five more years until it was closed as a result of the integration of the Franklin County school system. In 1968, Perry School, and all other African American schools in the county, was closed and students were reassigned.³⁵ In 2006, Franklin County sold the campus to Perry's School Alumni, a non-profit organization which seeks to restore the 1941 building and use it as a community center.³⁶

Education/Black Ethnic Heritage/Social History Context

Public elementary education became available to African Americans in the South during the early twentieth century largely because of campaigns by African Americans and Northern philanthropists, most famously the Rosenwald Fund, started in 1917 by Julius Rosenwald, the head of Sears, Roebuck and Company. By the time the Fund ceased operations in 1932, it had built 813 schools in North Carolina, including fourteen it had helped finance in Franklin County.³⁷

Despite this movement toward universal education for African American school children, during the late 1920s when the Copeland-Perry Rosenwald School was built, the Franklin County school system, like all school systems in the state, maintained separate educational facilities for white and African American students. Throughout the state, campaigns for equalization—in materials and facilities—were waged by parents, clergy, and students.³⁸ African Americans appeared before the Franklin County School Board requesting improvements for their schools or new school buildings, but they lacked the legal assistance or political influence to secure funding from the local body.

In the early 1940s, spending for the education of African Americans increased statewide, somewhat, but it did not approach the per capita funding for white students, so that "separate but equal" remained inherently

³³ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, October 2, 1961.

³⁴ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, November 6, 1961.

³⁵ "Perry School," unpublished history; Warren Smith (Superintendent of the Franklin County Schools from 1963-1968), telephone conversation with the author, February 9, 2010.

³⁶ Franklin County Deed Book 1534, pages 718-719, dated March 15, 2006, Franklin County Register of Deeds, Louisburg, N.C.

³⁷ Thomas W. Hanchett, "Saving the South's Rosenwald Schools," www.rosenwaldplans.org.

³⁸ Sarah Caroline Thuesen, "Classes of Citizenship: The Culture and Politics of Black Public Education in North Carolina, 1919-1960" (Ph. D diss, University of North Carolina, 2003), 248.

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unequal.³⁹ In Franklin County in the period just before the country's entrance into World War II, schools were governed by one board but were categorized as white or "colored" and funded separately. Moreover, white schools in the county were generally housed in superior buildings and received more resources.

In 1940, the Gold Mine Township of Franklin County, where Perry School is located, was home to a large number of African American school-age children. There were 480 African American children ages 5 to 14 and another 400 young adults ages 15 to 24. It is unknown if all of the school-age children attended school in the township in which they lived, but in 1940, soon after the fire that destroyed Copeland-Perry School, the principal reported 183 students enrolled in the school. County-wide in 1940, there were 3,557 African American children under age fourteen. Another 1,664 were ages 15 to 19 years old. In addition to Perry School, seven schools served the African American population.⁴⁰

In 1949, the Franklin County school board voted to consolidate the African American schools into four union schools, or schools that accommodated both elementary and high school students. The union schools were Franklin County Training, Perry, Gethsemane, and Youngsville schools. The board maintained one elementary school. No white schools were consolidated at this time.⁴¹

School construction and improvement received a big boost in 1949 with the first issuance of bonds for the construction and repair of schools by the North Carolina General Assembly. The Franklin County net grant award under the State School Plant Construction, Improvement, and Repair Fund totaled \$475,427.27. Each county's grant was based on student population in 1947-1948 and funds were deducted for administration and expenses. In total, fifty million dollars was awarded to county and city school systems statewide.⁴² The state legislature would allocate more money for school construction in 1953 and in 1961.⁴³

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, dismantled the legal basis for racial segregation in schools and other public facilities. However, many Southern school districts, including Franklin County, adopted a court-approved approach of "freedom of choice" as a way to avoid desegregation. Freedom of choice did not require integration, but instead turned

³⁹ Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1992), 166.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940. Population, Volume II: Characteristics of the Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 308, 369; State Board of Education Operations Division Plant and Sanitation Survey Reports, 1940, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁴¹ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, October 3, 1949.

⁴² Survey Committee Organization, etc. 1949-1950, in the Records of the North Carolina Board of Education, Teacher Allotment and General Control Division, General Correspondence, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁴³ "Plans Ordered by Hodges to Speed Up N.C. School Building Program," *The Durham Sun*, August 15, 1955; "Editorial by Governor Terry Sanford for Southern Architect," August 30, 1962, *Southern Architect*, September, 1962, 18.

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control of enrollment and the student assignment over to local school boards. Even after a 1955 Supreme Court order that required school systems to deint a timely manner so as to comply with *Brown*, states, including North Carolina, pushed for voluntary desegregation. In 1956, the Pearsall Plan, as it came to be known, was instituted statewide as a way for parents of school children to legally ignore the Supreme Court orders of 1954 and 1955. This amendment to the state constitution allowed parents to withdraw their children from schools where children of another race attended and provided them with state grants to pay tuitions at private schools.⁴⁴

As a result of the delay tactics employed by state and local governments, only 2.3 percent of African American students were attending majority white schools in the South ten years after *Brown*. In Franklin County, of 3,100 African American students in the district, seventy-six chose to attend one of the county's six all-white schools in the first, second, ninth and twelfth grades during the 1965-1966 school year. The next year, only 1.5 percent of African American students signed up to attend majority white schools in the county.⁴⁵

In 1965, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund (LDF) with help from the United States Department of Justice backed Rev. Luther Coppedge of Louisburg in his suit to force the local school board to desegregate the all-white public schools of Franklin County. The case, *Harold D. Coppedge v. Franklin County Board of Education*, represented the Justice Department's first attack on freedom of choice. The department's attorneys argued that freedom of choice was an unconstitutional mechanism for desegregation. The case, named for the reverend's son who attended an all-white school in the county, claimed that freedom of choice, combined with the intimidation that greeted many African Americans who sought to enroll at white schools in Franklin County, meant that, in effect, schools were not desegregated. After their son enrolled at Edward Best High School, the Coppedge family faced a series of threats, including harrasment, drive-by shootings, poisoned wells on their farm, murdered pets, and a cross burned on their front lawn.⁴⁶

On August 18, 1967, Judge Algernon Butler ruled in *Harold D. Coppedge v. Franklin County Board of Education* that freedom of choice was an illusion and ordered the school board to come up with ways to desegrate the schools by student assignment or faculty makeup. Later that month, in an attempt to comply with Judge Butler's order, the school board, its attorneys, and other administrators gathered all the teachers, principals, and staff in the school system at the Louisburg High School auditorium to encourage faculty

⁴⁴ Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*, 170.

⁴⁵ McDonough, Molly, "Making Brown Real: A North Carolina Family Fought Threats and Intimidation After Suing to Integrate Schools," *American Bar Association Journal*, April 1, 2004. www.abjournal.com/magazine/making_brown_real/.

⁴⁶ McDonough, Molly, "Making Brown Real: A North Carolina Family Fought Threats and Intimidation After Suing to Integrate Schools," *American Bar Association Journal*, April 1, 2004. www.abjournal.com/magazine/making_brown_real/.

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members “to transfer to a school attended by students predominantly of another race other than such faculty members.” Apparently, an insufficient number of faculty voluntarily transferred because eight days later, the board convened a special meeting to cancel all teacher assignments. New assignments were made that complied with the judge’s order. Also at that meeting, the school board, following a declaration in the order that at least ten percent of African American students in the school system attend predominately white schools, reassigned a large group of students to predominantly white schools.⁴⁷

With the integration of all of Franklin County’s public schools beginning in 1968, the school board found itself with a surplus of campuses. Instead of transferring white students to modern facilities such as the one at Perry School, the board ordered that all the African American schools close. The Perry School history, written by an alumnus, notes that Perry School held its last commencement in 1968 “and became a victim of integration and consolidation.”⁴⁸

Architecture Context

The Perry School campus represents a myriad of architectural influences at work the result being two distinct design idioms: the post-Depression-era Colonial Revival style and the forward-thinking modernist movement of the 1950s and early 1960s.

The architectural form and style of the 1941 Perry School building likely resulted from several sources working in tandem, including the Rosenwald Fund, architect M. Stuart Davis, and officials at the state level. With a few exceptions, the school closely follows the Nashville Plan for a six-teacher school with auditorium issued by the Rosenwald Fund. Although it ceased operation in the late 1930s, the influence of the Rosenwald Fund and its choice of architecture continued well into the next decade. In a letter dated November 27, 1939, Ray L. Hamon, Director of the Interstate School Building Service at Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee, wrote to Clyde Erwin, North Carolina State Superintendent of Public Instruction, concerning plans for African American schools. Hamon recounted that in January 1938, the Rosenwald Fund discontinued its southern office in Nashville and turned its school building plans, specifications, and bulletins over to the Interstate School Building Service, with an appropriation to carry the service for two or three years. Hamon further informed Erwin that in late 1939, the Rosenwald Fund provided \$15,000 to continue, revise, and expand the Interstate School Building Service. He urged Erwin to “make use of our

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, August 23, 1967; Minutes of the Franklin County School Board, August 31, 1967.

⁴⁸ “Bits and Pieces of Perry’s School, Centerville, North Carolina,” unpublished history, n.d.

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plans and bulletins.” In his reply dated December 1, 1939, Erwin remarked that the Service “has been of inestimable value to us here in North Carolina. In fact, I hardly see how we could get along without it.”⁴⁹

The Franklin County School Board hired M. Stuart Davis (1877-1959) to serve as architect for the Perry School in the summer of 1940. Davis attended Trinity College, in Durham, North Carolina, and the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, but did not graduate from either institution. He learned architecture through a correspondence school. Davis established his firm in 1910 and focused on commissions for churches and schools in North Carolina. By the summer of 1940, he had earned \$75,000 from the Franklin County School Board for serving as architect on a variety of projects. Among his commissions were schools for white students at Bunn and Justice, both built with PWA funds.⁵⁰ It remains unknown as to how much influence Davis had on the ultimate appearance of Perry School or whether he served more as a supervising architect working from a plan distributed by the PWA, which had certain requirements of school building projects that it helped fund. The PWA typically chose the Colonial Revival or Classical Revival style for its buildings and directed that rural schools be sided in weatherboard.⁵¹

During the period when the 1941 Perry School was planned and built, W. F. Credle, the director of the Office of Schoolhouse Planning for North Carolina who had formerly served as the state’s director of the Rosenwald Fund, made known his firm convictions about the appearance of school buildings and environmental factors that impacted learning. Many of his philosophies reflect those espoused by the Rosenwald Fund. In a late 1939 letter to the principal of Woodleaf schools in Rowan County concerning the most efficient methods for obtaining natural light in school buildings, he offered the following suggestions: all classrooms should have east or west orientation; the window space should be at least one-fifth of the floor area; the top of the upper sash should be six inches or less below the ceiling. He concluded that “buildings amply and properly fenestrated, correctly orientated and painted...will not require much artificial light.”⁵² In early 1940, Mrs. Lillian C. Ezzell wrote to Credle requesting information on modern trends in school architecture for a lecture she was preparing. In his letter of reply dated January 19, 1940,

⁴⁹ Dr. Ray L. Hamon to Clyde A. Erwin, November 27, 1939, letter in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence, July 1939-1940, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.; Clyde A. Erwin to Dr. Ray L. Hamon, December 1, 1939, letter in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence, July 1939-1940, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁵⁰ Biographical information from the finding aid for the Marion Stuart Davis Papers, 1770-2003, at the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; M. Stuart Davis Application for the National Census of Engineering and Architectural Personnel, in the Charlotte V. Brown Collection, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University.

⁵¹ Marion Stuart Davis papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill; Carroll Van West, *Tennessee’s New Deal Landscape: A Guidebook* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2001), 98.

⁵² W. F. Credle to T. L. Patrick, November 23, 1939, in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence, July 1939-June 1940, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

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Credle remarked that “in old communities a simple form of colonial architecture can and should be used. It is possible to use a colonial design, and yet obtain a maximum amount of instructional space.”⁵³ The 1941 Perry School exemplifies the philosophies of both the Rosenwald Fund and the state’s favoritism for the Colonial Revival style. Its highly-functional interior, where a central corridor allows for the efficient movement of students between spacious classrooms, is contained by an exterior that conveys an impression of stability and refinement with its commanding twin classical porticos and molded cornice returns.

In the early 1940s, seven other African Americans schools stood in Franklin County. Gethsemane School, in Bunn, had been built in 1930 by the Rosenwald Fund and was a one-story frame building. Mitchell School, near Louisburg, dated to 1934 and included three rooms. In 1938, the WPA added one room to the building. Mitchell School no longer stands. Rocky Ford School, also demolished, was a one-story frame Rosenwald building that dated to 1927. Little Mill School dates to 1908 and was housed in a one-story frame building near Louisburg. It remains standing, but has been used as a dwelling since the 1950s. A one-story frame building constructed in 1935 near Louisburg contained the Mapleville School. It is no longer extant.⁵⁴

The high school at Perry School represents not only a dramatic shift in style and form for school building that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, but also a boom period in school construction. This escalation in building occurred statewide beginning in the early 1950s as a result of the North Carolina General Assembly’s creation of the School Plant Construction, Improvement, and Repair Fund in 1949. Under this bill, the state legislature authorized the issuance of the first state bonds to be used for school construction, an action that led to a significant wave of school construction during the decade that followed. This legislation sought to settle the debt owed to the counties by the state for school construction and improvement, because it was “a statutory duty of the State to provide funds for the operation of the public schools...upon a uniform basis.”⁵⁵ On June 24, 1949, the State Board of Education established rules under which the fund operated. Among other regulations, the board stipulated that money allocated to counties could not be used to build additions to structurally unsafe schools. The board also directed that “there shall be a just and equitable expenditure of funds within the counties as between the races.”⁵⁶ As a result of the 1949 bonds, counties across North Carolina built a new generation of modern schools for African

⁵³ W. F. Credle explores the role of state government in school construction in, “The State’s Responsibility in School Building Programs,” *Peabody Journal of Education*, Volume 23, No. 6, May 1946, pages 328-334; W. F. Credle to Lillian C. Ezzell, January 19, 1940, letter in the Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, General Correspondence, July 1939-June 1940, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁵⁴ State Board of Education Plant Operations Division Plant and Sanitation Survey Reports, 1940, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁵⁵ *State of North Carolina Session Laws and Resolutions, 1949*, Chapter 1020, pages 1155-1159.

⁵⁶ “School Plant Construction Rules and Regulations,” in the Records of North Carolina Board of Education, Teacher Allotment and General Control Division, General Correspondence, 1949-1955, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

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Americans, complete with the amenities that white schools already had, such as indoor plumbing and rooms dedicated to specialized use.

Following the initial bond approval in 1949, the State Board of Education took a proactive role in influencing school construction and design. In October of that year, it announced a joint effort with the North Carolina State College School of Design to hold a workshop at the campus for architects focused on the upcoming statewide school-building campaign. The board announced that Ernest Kump, a leading modernist from California, and Alonzo Harriman, a school architect from New England, would participate in the three-day workshop.⁵⁷ The board and School of Design sponsored a second workshop, called the Institute of School Planning, in December 1950 with William Caudill, an architect from Texas A&M College, and Harriman serving as speakers. Douglas Haskell, editor of *Architectural Forum*, and John Lyon Reid, a prominent school architect from California, also appeared on the program.⁵⁸ At these workshops, architects were encouraged to use glass for improved natural lighting, reduce ornamentation, and integrate the landscape, site, and building.⁵⁹

The move toward modernism in school design was a national trend, helped along in North Carolina by the students and faculty from the School of Design at North Carolina State College, which was established in 1948 with Henry Kamphoefner as its first dean. Not only did the School of Design participate in the Institute of School Planning workshops held in 1949 and 1950, but in 1949, Edward "Terry" Waugh, of the School of Design, became supervisor of the state's Office of School House Planning, thereby reinforcing the architecture school's connection to educational building design in North Carolina.⁶⁰ The School of Design's promotion of modernist school buildings likely proved influential to Perry School architects Ralph Reeves and John Holloway, who graduated from the newly-minted architecture department in 1948, its first year at what was then North Carolina State College.

The high school building at Perry School exemplifies the modernist idiom as applied to school buildings, the result of a movement that was occurring across the state and which resulted in the construction of scores of similar buildings in the mid-twentieth century. The one-story, brick, low-slung, flat-roofed, building followed the post-World War II trend of integrating the building into the setting's flat terrain,

⁵⁷ "School Jobs Get Approval," newspaper article dated October 7, 1949, in the Records of the North Carolina Board of Education, Teacher Allotment and General Control Division, Miscellaneous Records, 1949-1950, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁵⁸ Letter from John L. Cameron, Director of the Division of Schoolhouse Planning and Surveys, to Mr. J. E. Hunter, Department of Public Instruction, dated November 22, 1950, in the Records of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, Correspondence of the Director, 1949-1950, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁵⁹ David Black, "Early Modern Architecture in Raleigh Associated with the Faculty of the North Carolina State University School of Design, Raleigh North Carolina," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1994, E-16.

⁶⁰ Black, E-16.

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while its copious windows encouraged natural light to fill the classrooms, something that many educators felt encouraged the learning process. The high school is further associated with the modernist movement in school construction by its finger plan, where the two classroom wings extend at right angles from the building's front block.

During the period when the high school was constructed, architects took great interest in school design, in part because it allowed them to showcase modernism. In a 1954 article in *Southern Architect*, one author commented that, "Unless architects accept the opportunity which they now have to make each school a school designed and suited to one particular site and location and to specific purposes, he misses an opportunity for developing a deeper and more sincere appreciation of architecture by the lay public."⁶¹ In his 1954 work, *Toward Better School Design*, architect William W. Caudill noted that during this period, "the battle between 'contemporary' and 'traditional' was won. The public not only began to accept 'modern,' but to demand it. So the architects had no choice but to try to produce logical schools."⁶² Caudill declared that the light-filled, modern school created the most positive, comfortable learning environment for the pupil.⁶³

Despite the state's attempt to provide equal facilities through the 1949 bonds, inequalities in schools for African Americans versus whites still existed in the first years of the 1950s. By 1952, twenty-three school buildings for African Americans, which accommodated a total of eighty-nine classrooms, stood in Franklin County. For whites, there were sixteen school buildings, which held 142 classrooms. The value of African American schools in the county was \$237,830 compared to \$1,402, 256 for whites.⁶⁴

Several modernist buildings from the 1950s stand on school campuses in Franklin County. At Bunn Elementary School, formerly Gethsemane School, stands a building identical to the 1952 high school building at Perry School. Reeves-Holloway designed both buildings, which were completed the same year. The former Gethsemane School building has been altered with the enclosure of both open porches that extend along one elevation of the rear wings. These long porches have been bricked in to create interior corridors. The building has also been connected to a more modern portion of the school likely constructed in the 1990s. At Louisburg High School, the mid-twentieth-century sections—attached to the rear of the newer portions of the school—are characterized by banks of awning-type windows, a flat roof, and a red-brick exterior. Portions of the current offices of the Franklin County school system are housed in the former

⁶¹ "School Building in North Carolina," *Southern Architect*, October 1954, 14.

⁶² William W. Caudill, *Toward Better School Design* (New York: F. W. Dodge Corporation, 1954), 16.

⁶³ Caudill, 13.

⁶⁴ "Fewer Schoolhouses with Greater Value is State Trend: Capital Outlay for Buildings, Public Schools, 1951-1954," *State School Facts*: Published Monthly by the State Department of Public Instruction, July 1952, in Records of the Department of Public Instruction, Division of Negro Education, Special Subject File, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

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Riverside Union School, which was a school for African Americans built in the 1950s. That campus included portions of the old Franklin County Training School, a vocational education facility. The only building remaining from the training school is the 1951 “porch building,” which held vocational classes. The 1956 building at Riverside School is typical of the period—a low-slung, brick structure with banks of awning-type windows. Riverside School was closed when the county integrated schools in 1968. It later became Louisburg Elementary School and now serves as the administrative offices for the county school system.

The gymtorium at Perry School is among a group of gymnasiums built in the county in the 1950s and early 1960s. Physical education buildings from the period remain at Franklinton Elementary School, Edward Best Elementary School, Bunn Elementary School, and Louisburg High School. The buildings on these campuses are nearly identical to one another and are characterized by brick exteriors, banks of windows placed high on the two longer elevations, and barrel vault roofs. The Perry School gymtorium is the only gable roofed physical education building remaining from the school building boom period of the 1950s and early 1960s in the county.

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UTM References

5.	E	758360
	N	4008900

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property contains the 14.71-acre parcel historically associated with Perry School.

Boundary Justification

The 14.71-acre parcel represents the land associated with Perry School from the time of the construction of the 1941 building until the period when the school closed in 1968.