

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 Canton High School

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 3380 North Liberty Street N/A not for publication

city or town Canton N/A vicinity

state Mississippi code MS county Madison code 089 zip code 39046

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 forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
State of 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 _____

Canton High School
Name of Property

Madison County, Mississippi
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.

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): N/A

- 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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education _____

Architecture _____

Period of Significance

1923-1948 _____

Significant Dates

1923 _____

1938 _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

Overstreet, N.W. (1923 building) _____

Overstreet and Town (1938 addition) _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Canton Redevelopment Authority _____

MS Department of Archives and History

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Canton High School
Canton, Madison County, Mississippi

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Architectural Description

Located on North Liberty Street in the City of Canton, the Canton High School was constructed in 1923 according to the designs of N. W. Overstreet, a prominent and prolific architect from Jackson, Mississippi. In 1938, Overstreet and his partner, Hays Town, designed a compatible and architecturally sympathetic addition to the north side of the main building. Indeed, the junction between the old and new buildings is almost indiscernible. Stylistically, the Canton High School is an eclectic academic building incorporating elements of Prairie architecture with some decorative elements of 20th century revival architecture. The original Canton High School building is embellished with some Tudor Revival detailing while minimal Art Moderne detailing is evident in the later addition.

Facing west, the two story building is constructed of brick, resting on a concrete foundation. The facade, encompassing both the original building and the later addition, stretches for almost 400 feet. Overstreet's rather austere design blends a strong sense of horizontality, which one associates with Prairie architecture, with minimal decorative treatment one finds at the natural juncture points of the building; at the parapet, the windows, and in particular, the entrances. The horizontal lines of the building are emphasized by the low lying brick parapet and the horizontal banding of windows. This strong sense of horizontality, however, is somewhat reduced by the rhythmic pattern of small stone-capped, brick buttresses which are found evenly spaced between the window casings. The buttresses provide a vertical accent. Additionally, Overstreet manipulated the surface plane of the facade, making it more interesting through the patterning of the brickwork along the walls of the parapet and introducing stone stringcourses.

The original 1923 building is basically T-shaped, a 198' x 58' rectangle with a approximate 105' x 90' rear ell. The facade features a slightly projecting central block crowned by a parapet with walls raised slightly above the parapet walls of the flanking wings. This technique helps to enliven the facade and emphasize the twin entrances which are located at either end of the central block. These entrances flank three bands of triple windows on each floor. At both entrances, the plate glass entrance doors, transoms, and sidelights are set in an elaborate surround embellished with decorative stone work and stone ornaments or cartouches. Pilasters at the extreme edges of the slightly projecting entrance bays are capped with elaborate capitals featuring Tudor arches and quatrefoils. The two innermost pilasters, located between the sidelights and the first floor entrance doors and second floor window, are small, narrow demi-octagonal supports. Entrances are capped by stone cartouches incorporating educational motifs, such as open books, scrolls, and quill pens. Stone lintels are found on all doors and windows.

Prior to the 1938 addition to the north, the north and south elevations mirrored each other, each containing a side entrance door centered at each end of the main building. These entrances were

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identical to those found on the facade. Today, only the southern entrance remains. The southern side entrance is flanked by pairs of double windows. Again, as on the facade, these windows are separated by stone-capped buttresses. The rear ell of the original building is 105' x 90' and originally served as a combination auditorium and gymnasium. The rear ell rests on a full basement. After the 1938 addition, the ell was remodeled to serve as a theater and cafeteria. Arched loggias are found on the north and south elevations of the ell between the main building and projecting sections on the northeast and southeast corners of the ell. The windows of the rear ell are simple in comparison to those found on the facade and the north and south elevations of the main block. These windows are utilitarian and are not embellished with stone ornament nor are they separated by buttresses.

The 1938 addition of the Canton High School is also T-shaped and joins the original building at the former northern side entrance. As with the original building, the dimensions of the front section or main rectangle are 198' x 58', but the rear ell on the addition is 90' x 73'. The rear ell rests below the grade of the main building, allowing for a three storied rear addition which incorporates a gymnasium with stadium seating. In contrast to the original building with its twin entrance bays, the addition features a centrally placed entrance. Here, one can see the Art Moderne detailing which Overstreet (now in partnership with Hays Town) used to differentiate between the two portions of the school. The double leaf plate glass entrance doors are set between two wide plain piers which frame an elaborate wrought iron grill. The grill contains panels with highly stylized crosses, swags, flowers, and urns. A stylized eagle produced in cast stone once rested above the entrance doors at the base of the grill while a cast stone cartouche featuring a stylized open book, still remains embedded in the patterned brickwork above the wrought iron grill. The horizontality of the building is broken only by the placement of narrow brick buttresses between the window casings. Bands of double hung sash windows, found in groupings of six, flank each side of the entrance.

On the northern elevation of the 1938 addition, a side entrance topped by a similar wrought iron grill is centrally placed in the northern end of the main wing. The northern and southern elevations of the rear ell contain symmetrically placed windows and centrally placed first story entrance doors. The eastern elevation of the rear ell contains two sets of double doors and two windows.

As one would expect, the interior of the Canton High School is utilitarian, with minimal detailing or decoration. The walls are covered in plaster while floors tend to be either concrete, ceramic tile, or wood (as in the case of the gymnasium floor). The school retains its original plan and some of its distinguishing features such as blackboards, theatre/auditorium and stage areas, gymnasium, library, bookcases, lighting devices, shelving, lockers, and dressing rooms. In all, the Canton High School retains a high degree of integrity in regard to materials, design, and craftsmanship, as well as conveying a sense of time, feeling, and place. Although abandoned as an educational facility in 1969, the building has been utilized for other purposes, namely a furniture store and a church. Today, it stands empty while the Canton Redevelopment Authority works to find an adaptive reuse for this significant building. The nomination of the Canton High School contains one contributing building.

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Statements of Significance

Criterion A - Education

The Canton High School is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A, being locally significant in the field of education. Constructed in 1923, with a subsequent addition in 1938, the Canton High School was the first high school constructed by the Canton City Board of Education. The building reflects the growth of the city of Canton in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries as well as the city's commitment to providing quality educational facilities for its citizens during the period of significance, 1923-1948.

Criterion C - Architecture

The Canton High School is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C - Architecture having statewide significance as being an outstanding example of the work of N.W. Overstreet, an prominent and prolific Mississippi architect. Additionally, the building is eligible for listing as a good example of eclectic academic architecture constructed in the first half of the 20th century. Erected in 1923 according to the designs of N.W. Overstreet, with subsequent additions by the firm of Overstreet and Town in 1938, the school building is an excellent example of an academic building incorporating the horizontality of Prairie architecture with Tudor Revival and Art Moderne detailing. The two story brick educational building reflects the application of revival architectural detailing on educational and institutional buildings constructed in the first half of the twentieth century. The school retains a high degree of integrity in regard to design, materials, and workmanship, as well as conveying a sense of time and place.

Historical Summary

Upon its completion in 1923, the Canton High School reflected the strides which the City of Canton had made in regard to providing public education for some of its citizens. Prior to the ratification of a new state constitution in 1869, the residents of Canton and surrounding Madison County had witnessed little progress in the establishment of a public school system. The majority of schools tended to be private male and female academies, such as the Sharon Female College (1836) and the Sharon Male College (1838), later known as Madison College. Both institutions were located in the small community of Sharon, approximately seven miles northeast of Canton, which was once viewed as the educational center of Madison County. The first attempt at providing a private school in Canton was the creation of the Canton Female Academy in 1836 at the corner of Liberty and Academy Streets. The Canton Male Academy followed in 1837 and by 1860, the landscape of Madison County was dotted with small private schools, such as the Kirkwood Female Academy, Roudebush Academy, the McKay School, and Midway Academy. ¹

¹Carol Lynn Mead, *The Land Between Two Rivers, Madison County, Mississippi*. Canton, Mississippi: Friends of the Madison County- Canton Public Library, 1987: pp. 75-88.

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Unfortunately, while the Mississippi legislature had tried to establish a state public school system in the 1840s, the legislators could not agree on the form the system should take. From 1840 to 1860, 125 laws were passed dealing with Mississippi's public schools, although most were "local and private" laws which dealt only with specific counties. Hence, the bills were not uniform and the public school system drifted until 1869 when the legislature established a statewide system of education, which called for the creation of a state superintendent and board of education, a county superintendent of education, a public school in each county maintained for at least four months, a common school fund, and pro rata division of school funds among school age children. The school age was set as five through 21, and a community with a population of at least 5,000 was allowed to establish a separate school district. Canton quickly established a separate school district; a notice in the *American Citizen* on August 29, 1874 announced the re-opening of "public schools of the city of Canton on Monday, the 7th of September, to continue four months." The notice was signed by school superintendent H. O. Johnson and it listed the names of the first and second grade teachers, as well as the names of both the white and black schools.²

The Constitution of 1890 made few changes in the state's educational provisions, merely defining a school month as twenty days and a school day as not less than six hours nor more than eight. By December 17, 1890, the Madison County school board had created five school districts which contained sixteen white schools and fifteen black schools. By 1897, the separate Canton City School system had erected the Canton Public School on the site of the old Female Academy at the corner of Liberty and Academy Streets. Additions were made to the building in 1906 and 1916 but these proved inadequate in reducing the overcrowded conditions, particularly since the building held grades 1 through 12 of the Canton Public School. In 1922, the Canton City School Board authorized the construction of the Canton High School on North Liberty Street, one block north of the Canton courthouse square. N. W. Overstreet, a Jackson architect, provided plans for a two story brick building containing fourteen classrooms, science laboratories, offices, auditorium/theater, basketball court, locker and dressing rooms, and offices. When completed in 1923, the Canton High School was one of the finest educational facilities in the county.³

In selecting N. W. Overstreet to design the Canton High School, the Canton City School Board turned to a man who was making a name for himself throughout Mississippi as an accomplished and talented architect. Born in 1888, Noah Webster Overstreet grew up in the small community of Eastibouchie, twelve miles north of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. In the fall of 1904, Overstreet enrolled in a one-semester mechanics course at Mississippi State University. Although he had never formally completed high school, Overstreet was asked to enroll in the regular engineering

²Ibid.

³Mead, p. 87-88, Noah Webster Overstreet, "Plans for the Addition and Remodeling of the Canton High School," Collection of Canton Redevelopment Authority, Canton, Mississippi.

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curriculum. He completed requirements for a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering in 1908.⁴

While attending Mississippi State, Overstreet was undoubtedly influenced by the number of new buildings being erected on the campus, many of which were designed by Reuben Harrison Hunt, an architect whose primary office was in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Overstreet spent a summer working in Hunt's office where he no doubt benefitted from the architect's encouragement and openness to new ideas. Subsequently, Overstreet applied for and received a scholarship to study architecture at the University of Illinois although the young student was under the impression that the scholarship was for graduate training in engineering rather than architecture. Nevertheless, Overstreet was known for his ability to draw and pursuing a career in architecture, allowed him to combine his graphic skills and engineering background. Indeed, the curriculum at Illinois was closely allied with engineering, perfectly suited to Overstreet's training. He completed the degree requirements in two years, and in 1910, stayed in Champaign-Urbana to work in the engineering firm of Joseph W. Royer.⁵

In January 1912, Overstreet returned to Jackson, Mississippi to set up his own architectural firm. Overstreet's return to Mississippi coincided with a period of rapid economic development which afforded him excellent opportunities to utilize his architectural skills. Soon, Overstreet assumed a position of leadership within the architectural community and his commissions increased. According to one account, "Overstreet's [designs] show a general stylistic continuity, this continuity is not the result of any deliberate effort to follow a particular stylistic line. Rather it was the result of an evolving straight-forward effort to fulfill the needs of communities he served. Different situations called for varying architectural response."⁶

Most of Overstreet's designs for larger schools, such as the Canton and Gulfport High Schools (both 1923) were constructed of brick which, because of its fire resistant properties, was seen as a superior building material for schools. While the brick was often left exposed, Overstreet did occasionally cover the exterior with stucco as one finds at the Inverness Consolidated School (1924). In regard to Overstreet's designs, interest and texture "is added to the facades through patterning in the brickwork, the introduction of a modest portion of cast stone or terra cotta ornament, and subtle manipulation of the surface plane." Ornamentation is usually restrained, appearing at the natural juncture points of the building such as the parapet, windows, and

⁴N. W. Overstreet: His Architectural Contribution To Our Community." *Memories of Canton 1996*, Series II, Canton Chamber of Commerce/Canton Redevelopment Authority, n.p.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

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entrances. In his school designs, Overstreet emphasizes the horizontality of the structure; his "accentuation of the rhythmic piers between the windows provides a vertical accent."⁷

The same year Overstreet provided the designs for the Canton High School, his Canton Exchange Bank (Canton Courthouse Square Historic District - NRHP) was being completed. Overstreet's private sector work often reflected the stylistic preferences of his clients, as in this case, classical motifs. While the building gives an overall impression of conservatism, appropriate for a financial institution, Overstreet's detailing is somewhat imaginative, as exemplified by the dropping scrolls on the bank's Ionic capitals. Over the course of his career, Overstreet produced more than 900 buildings across Mississippi, including schools, churches, hospitals, businesses, and courthouses. In addition, he helped create Jackson, Mississippi's modern skyline as chief architect of the Standard Life Building and as associate architect of the "stunning" Lamar Life Building.⁸

By 1938, the Canton City Board of Education recognized the need to expand the Canton High School and they again called on Webb Overstreet to supply the design. By this time, Overstreet had taken Hays Town as his partner and the firm was known as Overstreet and Town. With their addition to the Canton High School, Overstreet and Town submitted a design which blended the old and new portions of the building. Indeed, the junction between the two structures is almost indistinguishable. The subtle differences were found in the detailing around the entrances. The new addition featured more pronounced Art Moderne motifs, similar to details found on scores of WPA structures which were being erected in the 1930s, as well as other Overstreet designs.⁹

In the original 1923 building, Overstreet and Town renovated classrooms to create a new science lab and an activities room complete with stage. They remodeled and expanded other classrooms and converted some into rooms for typing and bookkeeping classes. They also remodeled the former gymnasium and changing rooms, creating a new cafeteria, kitchen, pantries, and an agricultural classroom. Overstreet and Town's 1938 addition, however, effectively doubled the size of the Canton High School, adding 11 classrooms, a new gymnasium, library and study hall, dark room, music room and recital hall, club room, clinic, principal's office, restrooms, athletic director's offices, and janitorial and storage rooms. Additionally, the new gymnasium wing incorporated stadium seating above changing rooms for both the girls and boys home and visiting basketball teams. Upon completion, the City of Canton boasted an impressive educational facility whose facade stretched 400 ft. along Liberty Street. A nearby band hall and football stadium (demolished) once completed the educational complex. The Canton High School building provided

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Mead, p. 87, N. W. Overstreet.

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the white students of the City of Canton a large, commodious, and conveniently arranged school facility.¹⁰

Through the first half of the twentieth century, most of America's school systems, particularly those in the South, were segregated and Canton's city school system was no exception. In 1954, in its ruling in Brown vs. the Board of Education, the United States Supreme Court reversed its decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson, ruling that the "separate but equal" philosophy was unconstitutional. Along with most other Southern states, Mississippi fought the attempt to desegregate its school systems. By the late 1960s and early 70s, however, the school systems in Mississippi had been integrated. In the wake of desegregation, the Canton City School Board closed the Canton High School after the fall term in 1969. In the 1970s, the school was used as a furniture store and subsequently, as a church for a local ministry. While at present, it is privately owned, the Canton Redevelopment Authority is exploring options for utilizing this historic building.

¹⁰Overstreet, "Plans."

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Bibliographical References

Mead, Carol Lynn. The Land Between Two Rivers: Madison County, Mississippi.
Canton, Mississippi: Canton-Madison County Public Library, 1987.

"Memories of Canton, 1996." n.p., Canton, Mississippi: Canton Chamber of Commerce/
Canton Redevelopment Authority, 1996.

Myers, Leslie R. "Evidence of duo's architectural legacy found all over state," *The Clarion-Ledger*, April 7, 1993.

Overstreet, Noah Webster. "Addition and Renovation of the Canton High School, 1938."
Blueprints in the hand of the Canton Redevelopment Authority.

Verbal Boundary Description

That parcel of land, comprising 4.9 acres, referred to as parcel 19B-291 in the tax maps of the City of Canton, Madison County, Mississippi, and as delineated on the accompanying tax map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary lines were drawn to include the area containing and lying immediately around the resource being nominated to the National Register, namely the former Canton High School.

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Photographs 9

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Photographs

The information contained in items #1-5 is the same for all photographs.

1. Canton High School
2. Canton, Madison County, Mississippi
3. Jeff Mansell, photographer
4. 9 May 1998
5. Negatives on file at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Photograph #1, facade, camera facing southeast

Photograph #2, facade, camera facing northeast

Photograph #3, facade, original building, camera facing southeast

Photograph #4, detail of entrance of original building, camera facing east

Photograph #5, detail of upper part of entrance bay of original building, camera facing east

Photograph #6, detail of upper part of entrance bay of original building, camera facing east

Photograph #7, facade of 1938 addition, camera facing northeast

Photograph #8, detail of entrance bay of 1938 addition, camera facing east

Photograph #9, detail of decorative grate above entrance on 1938 addition, camera facing east

Photograph #10, detail of side (south) entrance of original building, camera facing northwest

Photograph #11, east elevation of rear wing of 1938 addition, camera facing southwest

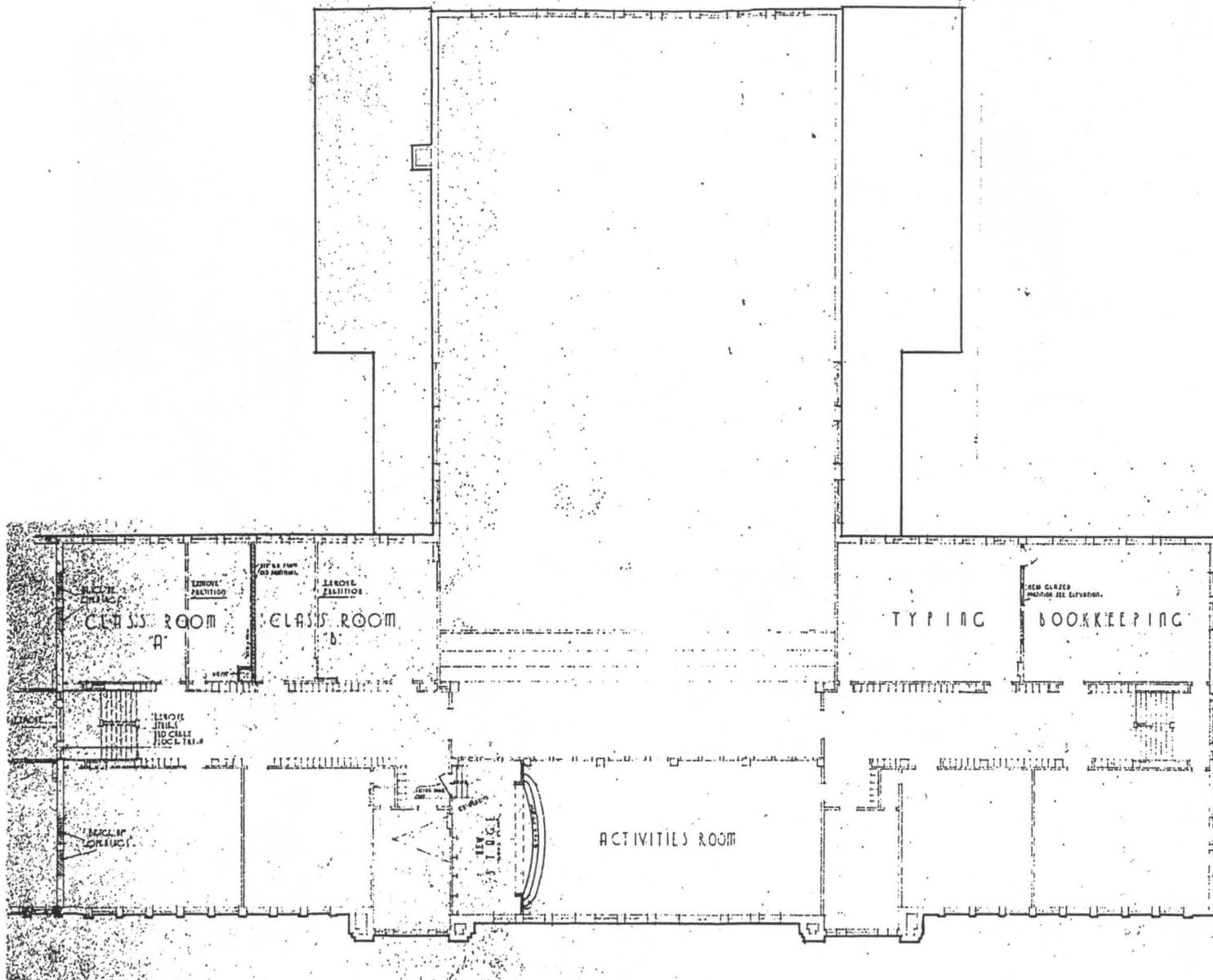
Photograph #12, side (north) elevation of rear wing, of original building, camera facing south

Photograph #13, interior view of stage area in original building, camera facing east

Photograph #14, interior view of gymnasium in 1938 addition, camera facing northeast

Photograph #15, interior view of second floor hallway, camera facing north

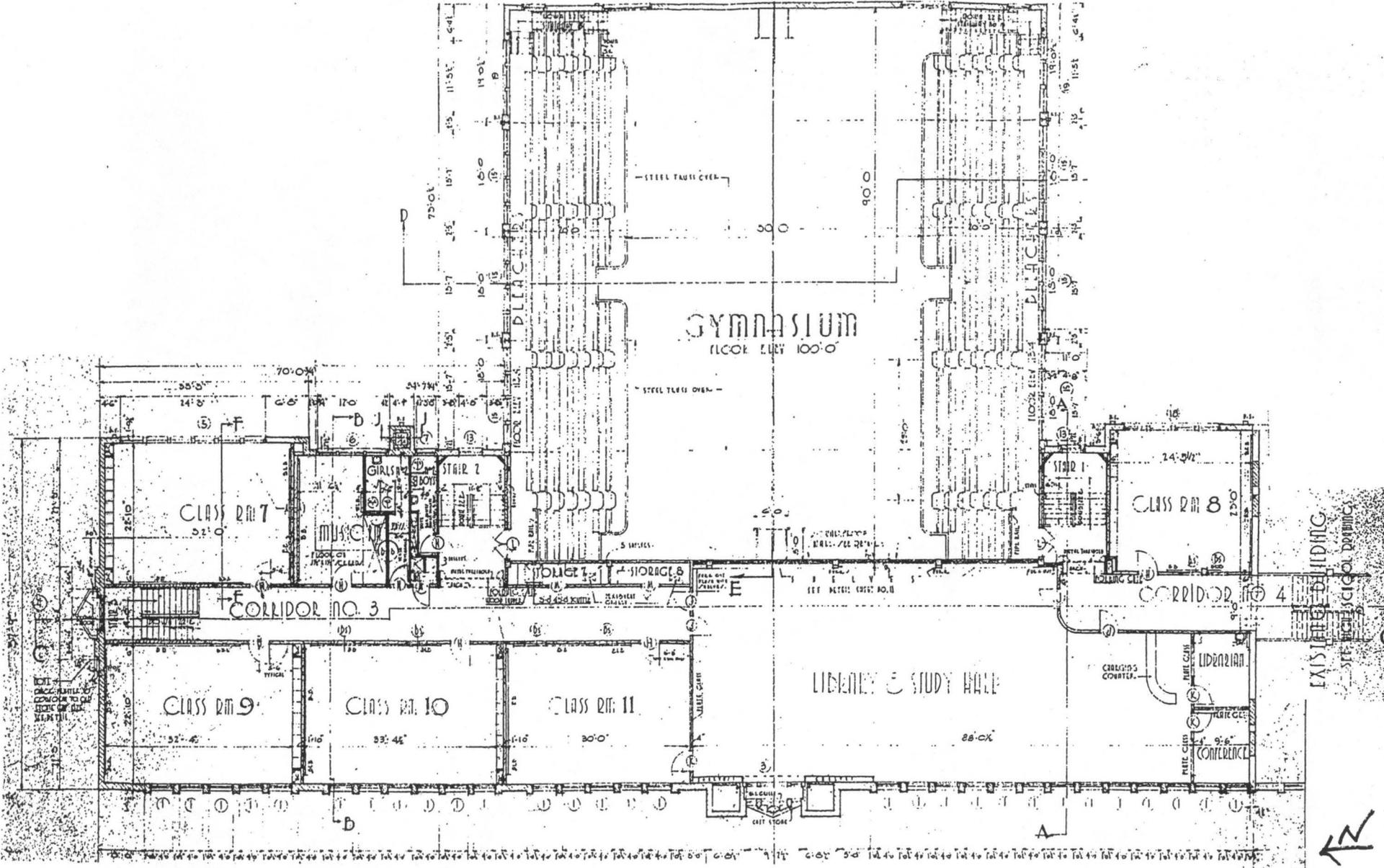
Photograph #16, interior view, second floor activities room, original building, camera facing north



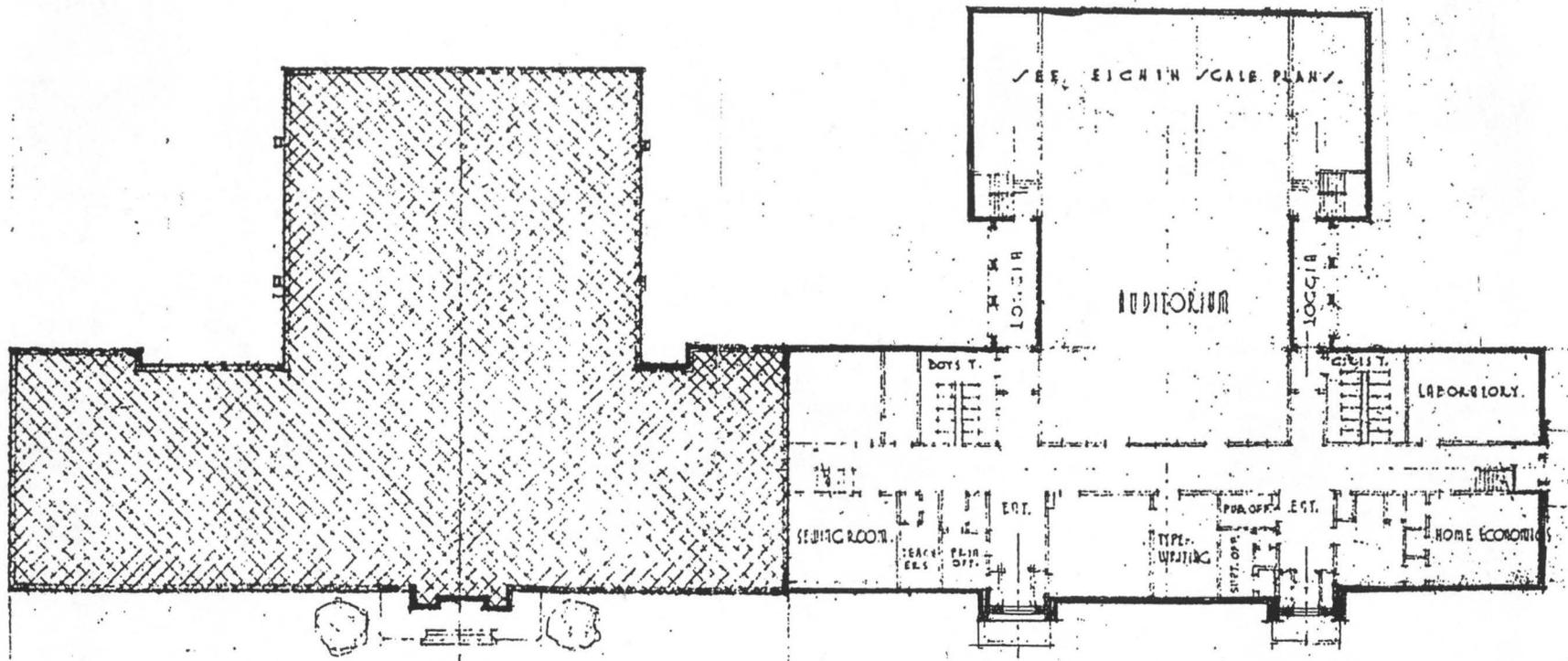
SECOND FLOOR PLAN
SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"



Canton High School
BUILDING A



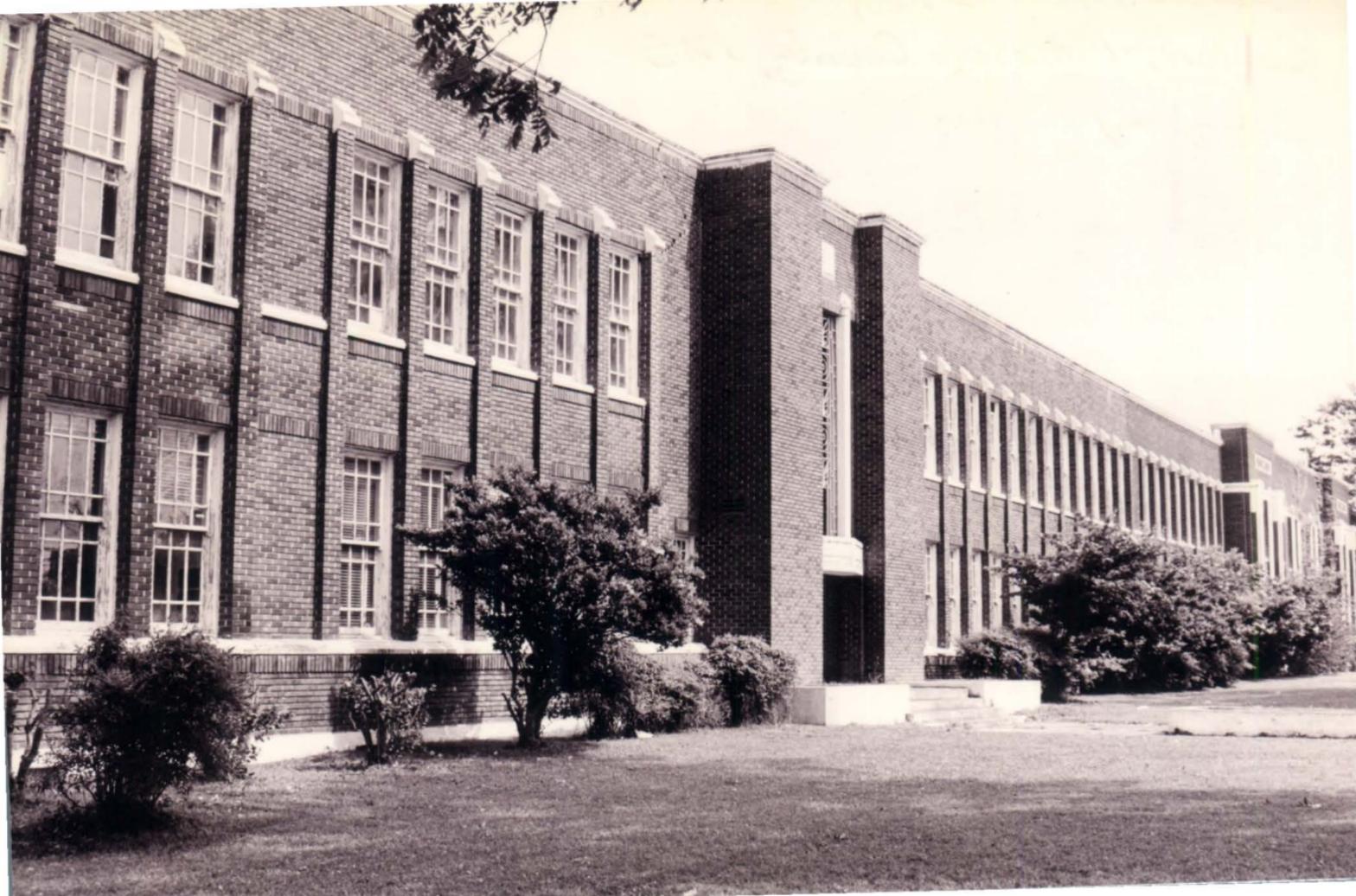
Canton High School
BUILDING B



BUILDING B

BUILDING A



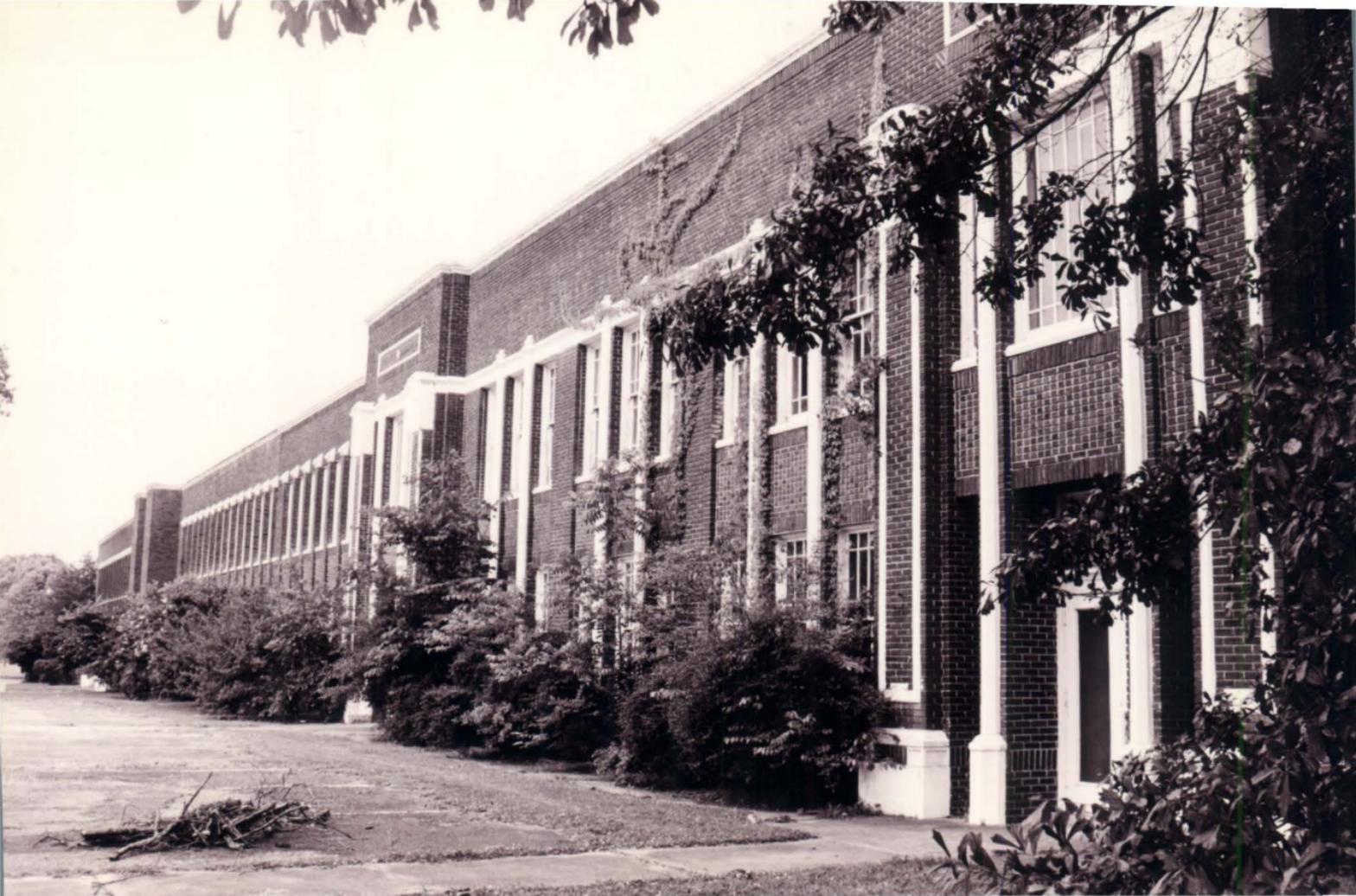


Canton High School

Canton, Madison County, MS

Photo #1

Slide



Canton High School

Canton, Madison County, MS

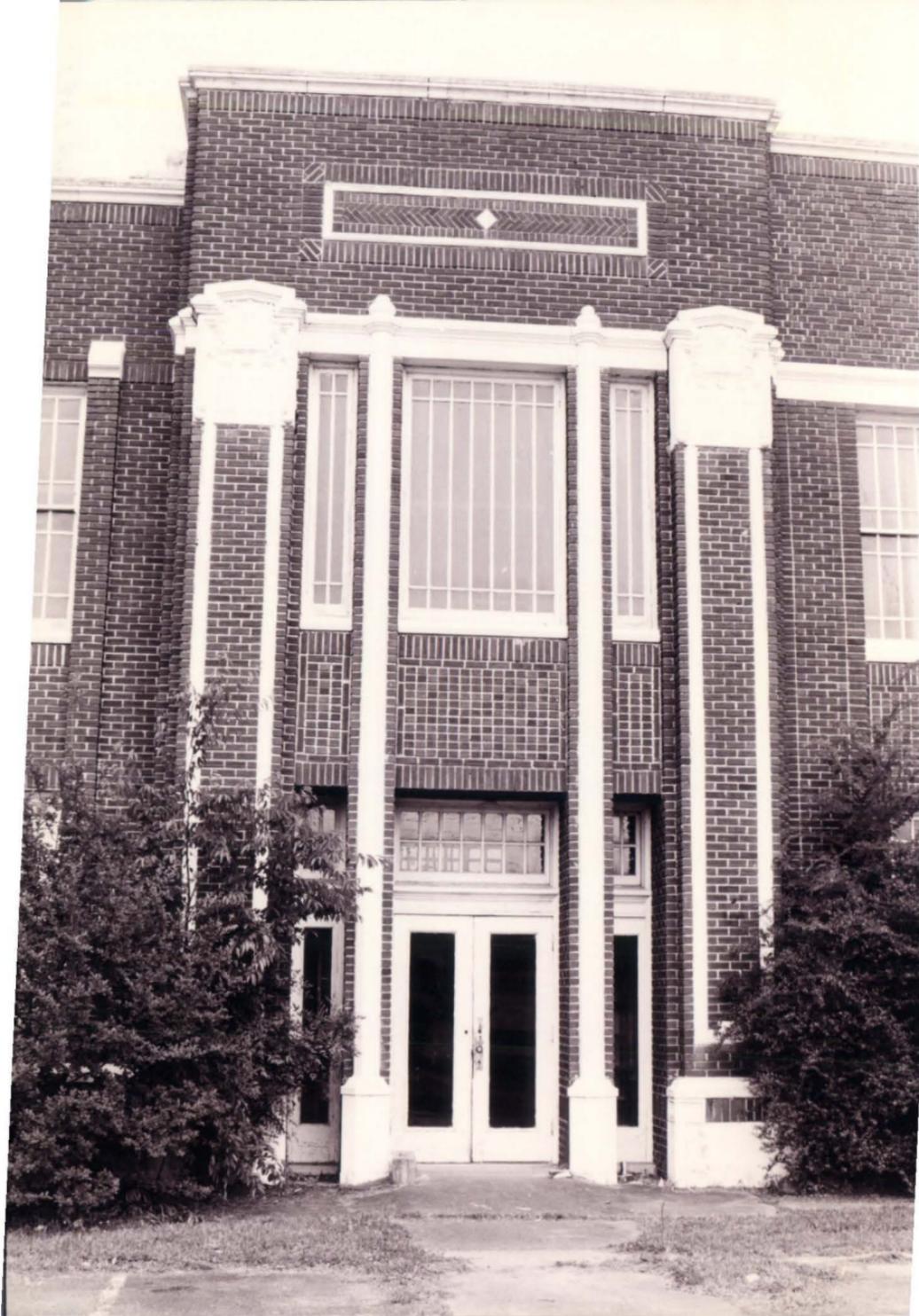
Photo #2



Canton Mist School

Canton, Madison County, MS

Plots #3



Canton 1116# 50000
Canton, MADISON County, MS

Canton,

Photo #4



Canton High School

Canton, Madison County, MS

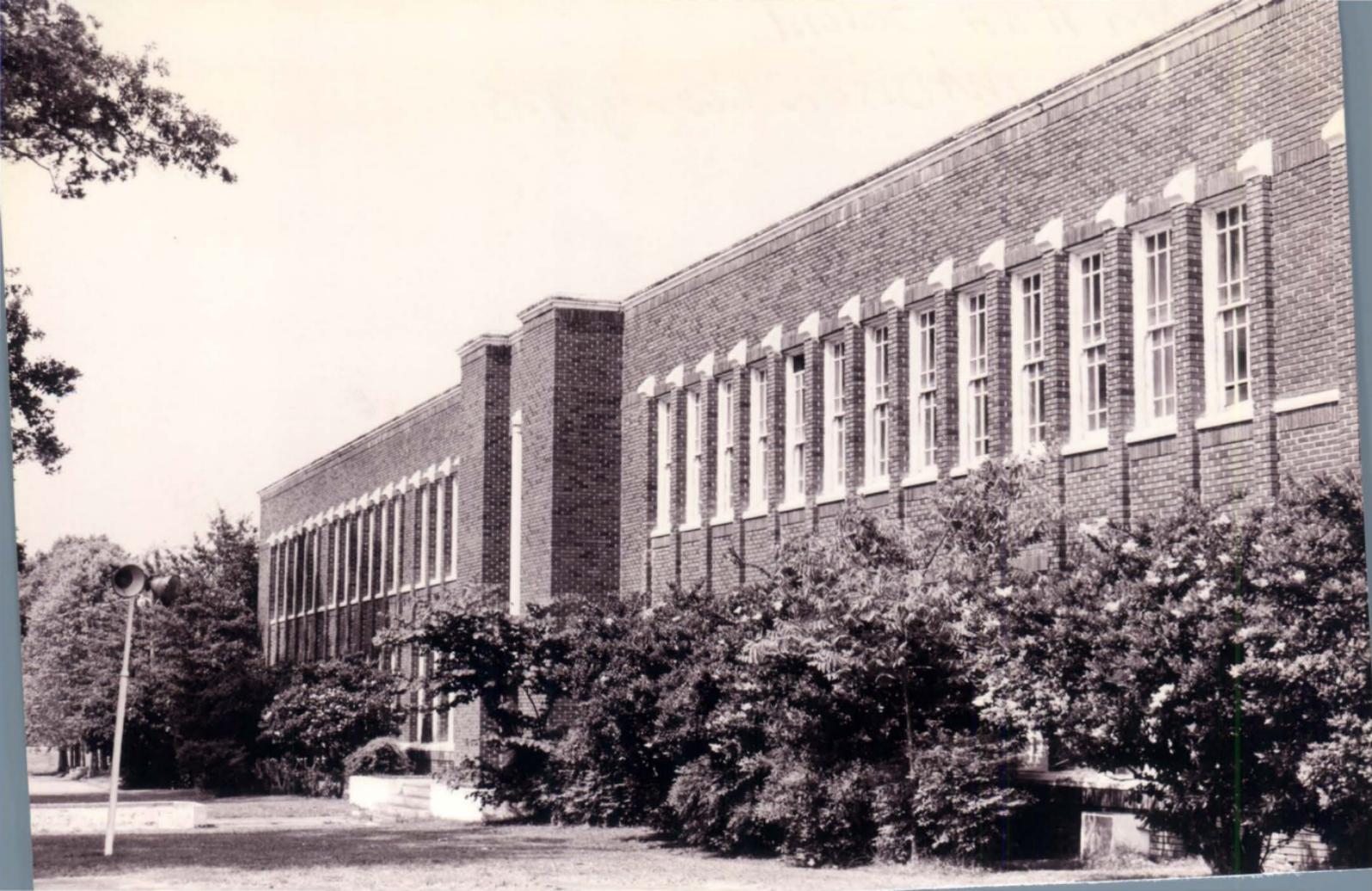
Photo 45



Canton High School

Canton, Madison County, MS

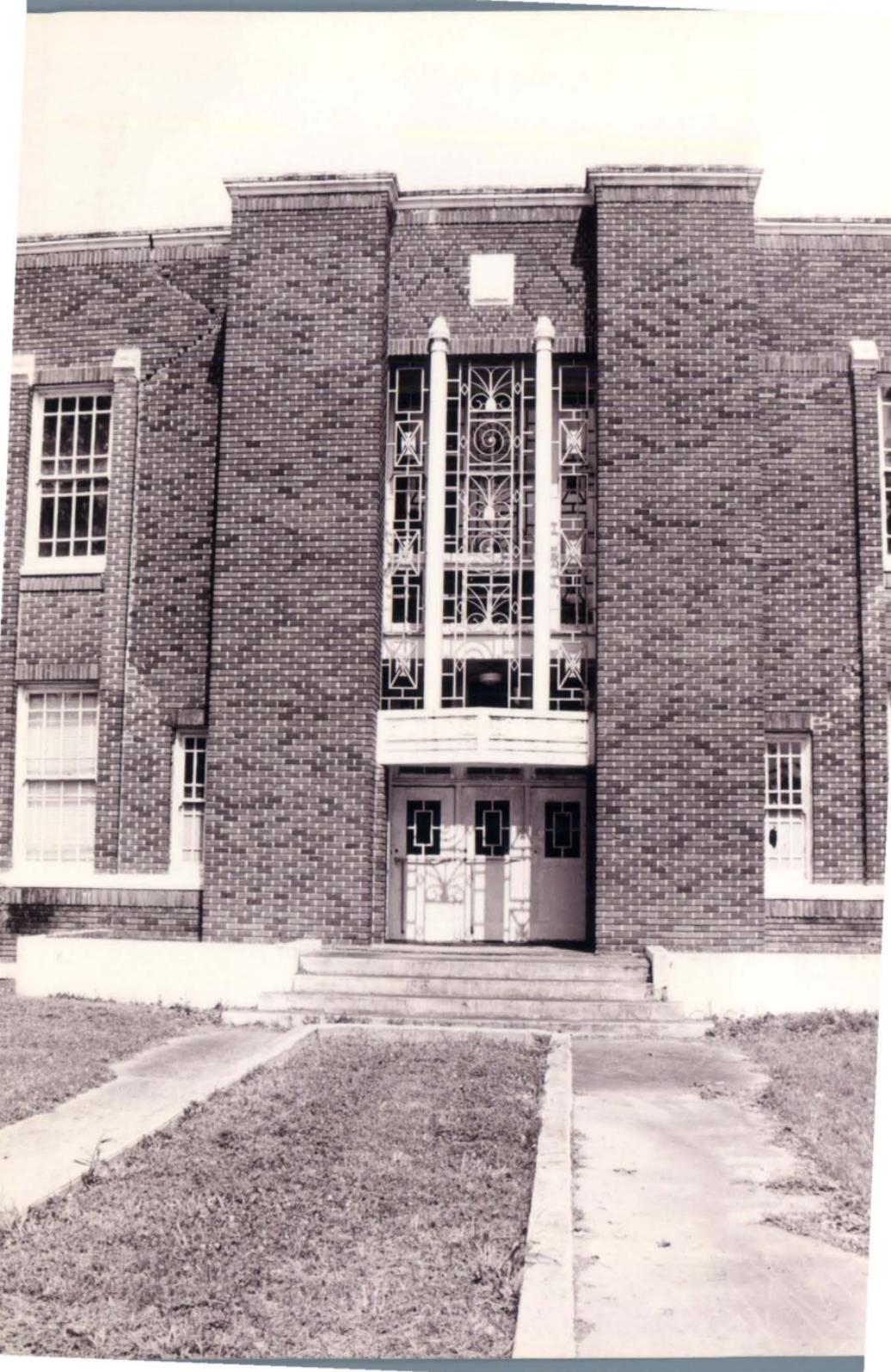
Photo #6



Canton High School

Canton, MADISON County, MS

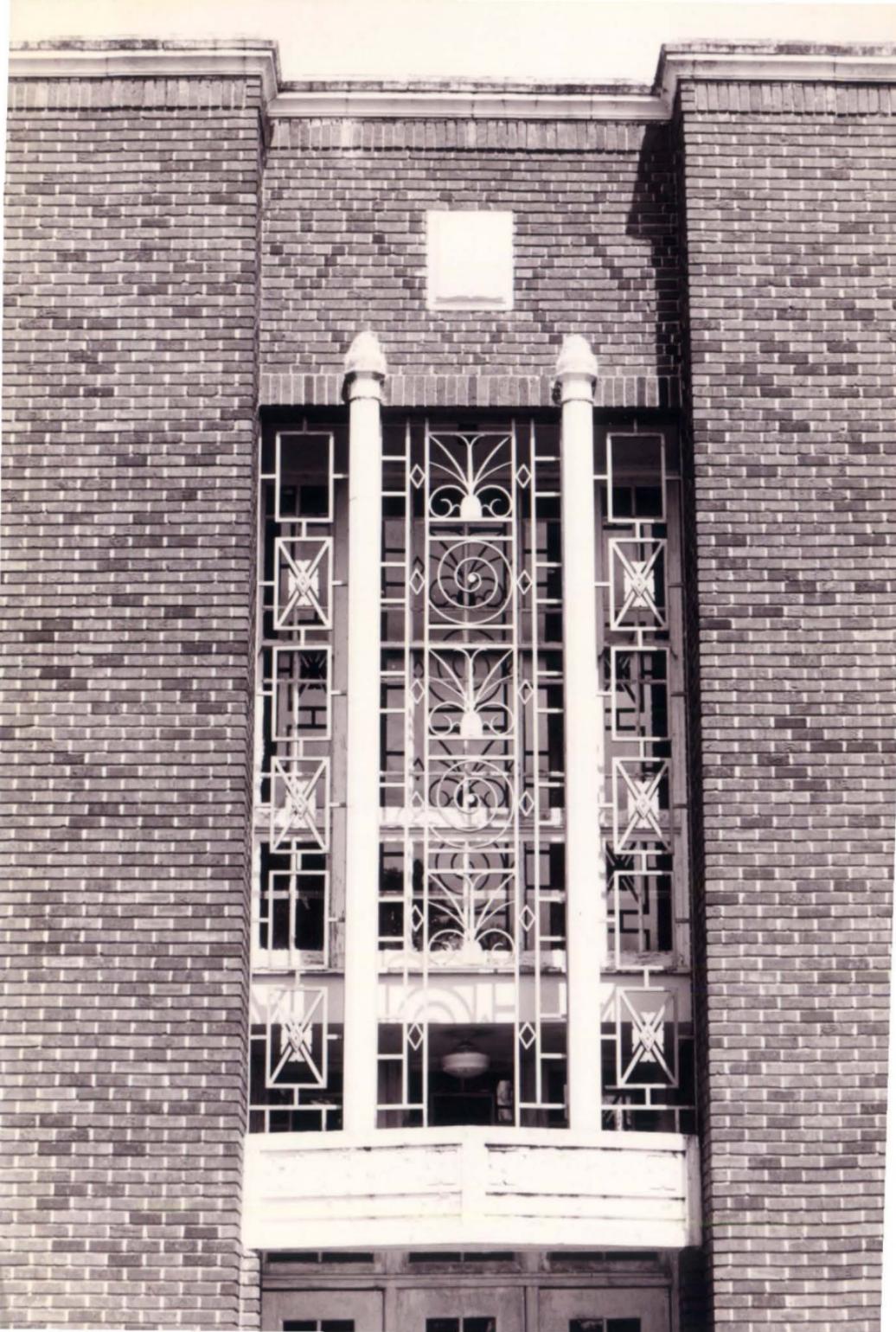
Photo #7



Canton High School

Canton, Madison County, MS

Photo '88



Canton MAH School

Canton, Madison County, MS.

Photo #9



Canton Hill School

Canton, Madison County, MS

Photo #15



Canton High School

Canton, Madison County, Miss

Photos #11



Canton High School

Canton, Madison County, MS

Photo # 12



Photo # 15

INTERIOR - STAGE AREA

CAMERA facing EAST

Canton High School

Canton, Madison County, MS

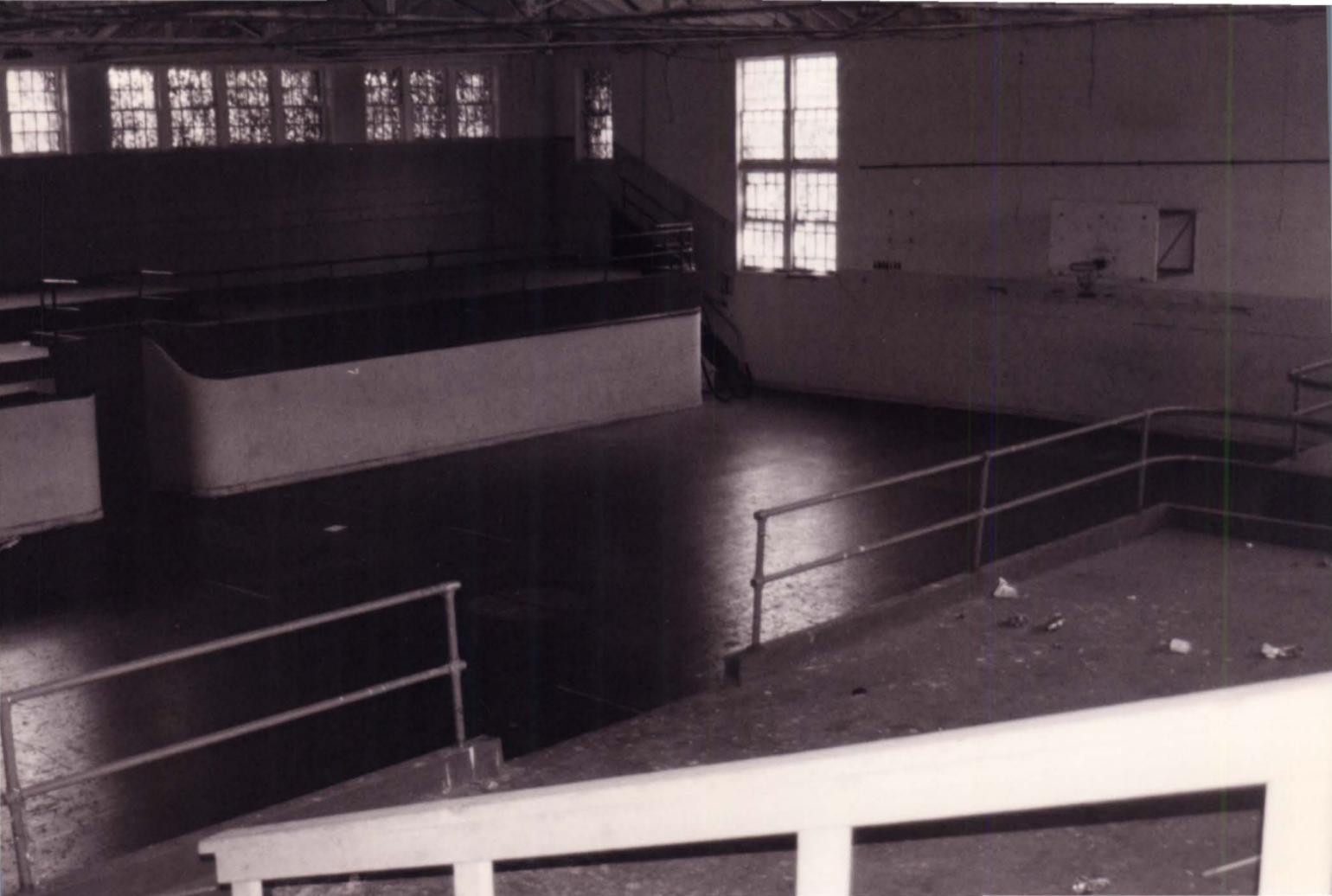


Photo # 14

Gymnasium

Camera facing North East

Canton High School

Canton, Madison County, MS



1. 1. 1. 1. 1.

Hullway & Lockers

Carroll facing South

Carroll High School

Carroll, Madison County, MS



PHOTO 14

Activities Room of Stage Area

Canton High School

Canton, MADISON County, MS