

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Gulfport-Harrison County Public Library

other names/site number N/A

Name of Multiple Property Listing \_\_\_\_\_

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

### 2. Location

street & number 1400 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue

☐ not for publication

city or town Gulfport

☐ vicinity

state Mississippi

county Harrison

zip code 39501

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:    national    statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria: X A    B X C    D

Kate Blant Aug 3, 2020  
Signature of certifying official/Title State Historic Preservation Officer Date

Mississippi Department of Archives and History  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

   entered in the National Register

   determined eligible for the National Register

   determined not eligible for the National Register

   removed from the National Register

   other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Gulfport-Harrison County Public Library

Harrison County, Mississippi

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## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- |                                     |                  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | private          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | public - Local   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | public - State   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | public - Federal |

### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- |                                     |             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | district    |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | site        |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | structure   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | object      |

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	buildings
	site
	structure
	object
	<b>Total</b>

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: Library

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

WORK IN PROGRESS

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: New Formalism

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: CONCRETE, GLASS, TERRACOTTA  
STUCCO

roof: CONCRETE

other:

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## Narrative Description

**Summary Paragraph** (Briefly describe the current, general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Located at 1400 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue, the Gulfport-Harrison County Library occupies a prominent site along Gulfport, Mississippi's coastal frontage, overlooking the Mississippi Sound. Constructed in 1966, the former library building serves as an excellent example of the New Formalist style. The two-story concrete-frame structure, with a partial penthouse level above, is defined by an expressive double-height concrete colonnade which wraps the entire perimeter and by its distinctive green schist aggregate concrete tile cladding. Due to the strength and simplicity of its composition, the property retains its historic integrity, despite having sustained notable damage from Hurricanes Camille and Katrina in 1969 and 2005, respectively. The property is currently undergoing rehabilitation in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, with an estimated completion date of November 2020.

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable.)

### Gulfport, Mississippi

One of two county seats of Mississippi's Harrison County, Gulfport is located along the state's southern border, fronting the Mississippi Sound. The Gulfport-Harrison County Library is situated five blocks east of 25<sup>th</sup> Ave, which serves as the primary artery of the National Register listed Gulfport Harbor Square Commercial Historic District. Although its main entry fronts 21<sup>st</sup> Ave, the library's south elevation is perhaps its most public face, fronting US Highway 90, a major coastal highway spanning from Florida to the western edge of Texas.

### Massing and Composition

Like many New Formalist buildings, the library's massing is straightforward, and its elevations are similar in composition, with variations made only to establish hierarchy and support functional requirements. Each of the building's elevations are divided into seven bays, framed by square double-height concrete columns with flared shear caps. These bays are typically defined by a central metal-framed full-length window at each level, flanked with decorative concrete tile. A stylized geometric motif resembling an oversized dentil mold defines the edge of the projecting concrete roof on all four elevations.

Along 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue, two complete bays of full-height glazing interrupt the typical elevation composition, giving hierarchy to the main entry and highlighting the building's impressive helical staircase beyond. Although most of the original glass has been lost from hurricane damage, this expanse of glass highlights a distinctive element of the original design. The original grey tinted glass used throughout the building's elevations warranted mention in early descriptions of the project and represents a response to regional climate conditions, as well as part of the overall design scheme.<sup>1</sup>

A concrete bridge spanning over a shallow koi pond provides access to the main entry and further distinguishes the west elevation. Historic photographs provide evidence of the additive nature of the existing ramp and stair attached to this bridge. Historically, the bridge extended approximately twice its current length, providing a dramatic and graceful approach to the building's main entry.

Apart from the penthouse level in the background, the building's south elevation is completely symmetrical, showcasing the building's carefully crafted details. Along this elevation, the open portions of the colonnade

<sup>1</sup> Rausche, Yolita. The Gulfport-Harrison County Public Library (1966). Yolita E. Rausche, LLC, 7 May 2008.

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are utilized for concrete planters, enhancing the building's relationship with the large lawn that fronts the site. Although hurricane damage resulted in loss of much of the original glass and some of the exterior concrete tile cladding, the south elevation's present state closely resembles its original appearance.

Except for two bays, the east elevation exhibits the typical façade composition and nearly matches the symmetry seen in the south elevation. The northernmost bay of this elevation, which historically faced into the loading dock, is infilled with a utilitarian perforated concrete block screen in line with the typical glazed opening. This material does not match any others used in the original construction and its date of installation is unknown. The other variation in the composition of the east elevation is found in the double-height glazing at the bay containing the secondary stair, which is on axis with the main stair beyond. One ground floor opening appears to have originally contained a door, as there are concrete steps transitioning from the floor level inside to the exterior grade. Along this elevation, the space between the columns and building face is paved with concrete except for the two southernmost bays, which continue the planters seen along the south elevation. Like the other elevations, the east side of the building has lost some of its decorative tile cladding and all ground floor glass, but otherwise appears to resemble its original condition. As part of the rehabilitation of the property, one bay on the east elevation will be modified to include wider sections of storefront, creating a secondary entry facing the new transit hub.

The greatest variation in the appearance of any of the building's elevations is found along its north face. Much of this difference is due to its utilitarian function and proximity to the northern property line and adjacent construction. Along this elevation, two bays are recessed at the ground floor, creating a covered loading dock. Two partially recessed bays extending to the west are clad in a contrasting ceramic tile. Like the other elevations, all of the glazing and portions of the concrete block and tile walls on the ground floor of this elevation were destroyed in the damage sustained from Hurricane Katrina.

As part of the rehabilitation process, the building has been structurally hardened to prevent future damage, requiring removal and reinstallation of the remaining exterior tile. Working closely with WJE, an internationally acclaimed material preservation firm, approximately fifty percent of the original tiles were salvaged for re-installation. The manufacturer of the original tiles remains unknown, but extensive research has led local manufacturer Jackson Precast to recreate a very close match to the original material using the same distinctive green aggregate. In order to determine the composition of the original material and inform the process of creating the replacement tile, laboratory petrographic studies were conducted. Viewed from a moderate distance, the original and reproduction material are virtually indistinguishable. The original material will be re-installed on the west and east elevations, with the replacement tile used on the remaining sides. New and salvaged original tile will be installed using a carefully designed Laticrete system that will replicate the original appearance while improving its performance and longevity. Completing the extensive rehabilitation efforts, cracks and spalling present on the expressed concrete structure will be repaired and the structure will be painted, restoring its original appearance.

### Interior Features and Finishes

While damage from Hurricane Katrina destroyed nearly all ground floor plate-glass windows and portions of exterior walls, the building's stout character-defining structure remains remarkably intact. Similarly, many ground-floor partitions and finishes were lost or damaged beyond repair, while more resilient elements remain in place. Throughout most of the building, interior columns are clad in a stylized geometric sculptural terracotta tile. The pattern used on this off-white tile bears resemblance to the staggered concrete block accent walls used in some areas of the building. Most of the original off-white tile on the columns remains intact throughout the building. In addition, select areas of staggered masonry, decorative terracotta tile walls, and buff-color stack bond brick walls remain in place.



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Damage sustained during Hurricane Katrina caused extensive buckling and irreparable damage to the terrazzo finish on the building's ground floor, while the second floor terrazzo finish remains largely intact. Throughout both floors of the building, remnants of acoustic tile ceilings in a two-foot grid are all that remain of the ceiling finishes. Historic photos show the use of this ceiling finish throughout the building, paired with large circular recessed lights.

In the northwest corner of the ground floor, the floor and ceiling are currently exposed concrete, as a result of damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. The freestanding columns in this area, along with one interior wall, are clad in a blue-green sculptural terracotta tile. One column retains most of its original tile, while the other is more heavily damaged. The tiled wall is missing some elements as well, with most of the damage concentrated at the base of the wall. Historic photos indicate that this area was used as the children's library. Original finishes included the typical suspending acoustical tile ceiling with large circular lights and dark wall-to-wall carpet.

An additional unique decorative scheme remains visible in the southeast corner of the building's second floor. In this area, unglazed terracotta tile with a porous matte finish wraps the columns and secondary interior walls and forms a border around the west wall. The center portion of the west wall is infilled with a sculptural tile in the same finish. The remaining, heavily damaged, carpet in this area is dark green and the remnants of the ceiling finish match the remainder of the building. Historic descriptions of this area reference the terracotta tile and "rugged, masculine" color scheme, noting its function as a law library, but do not state the color of the original carpet.<sup>2</sup>

Through a combination of preservation and thoughtful reconstruction, the character of the interior is being restored in compliance with the Guidelines for Rehabilitation of Interior Spaces, Features, and Finishes. The spatial arrangement of the ground floor plan will closely resemble the original, with the largest open area concentrated to the south, larger secondary spaces in the northwest corner, and service elements grouped to the east. New terrazzo flooring to match the original will be installed throughout the first floor public spaces.

Extant historic finishes, including the second floor terrazzo, will be protected during construction in compliance with Preservation Brief 18, "Rehabilitating Interiors in Historic Buildings." An extensive survey of existing and missing decorative tile has been conducted and compared with historic photographs. Upon completion of rehabilitation, the majority of the columns on both levels will remain exposed, matching the original condition. The distinctive blue-green tile found in the historic children's reading room will be replicated, while other missing tiles will be replaced with simple examples referencing the color and texture of the original material.

Pendant fixtures by Danish designer Preben Dahl, originally located in the main lobby, survived Hurricane Katrina but were removed prior to the current owner's acquisition of the building. While it appears to have been replaced at an unknown date, historic photographs and drawings also show the use of 48" round recessed lights throughout many of the original spaces. The rehabilitated building's ceilings, lighting, and infrastructure will closely follow the original design. The recessed pocket wrapping around the building's perimeter will be recreated at both levels. At the monumental stair, decorative pendant lights with a mounting style and scale similar to the originals will be installed. In addition, new 48" round recessed lights will be installed throughout the building, further restoring its character.

### Helical Stair

Adjacent to the main entry, a monumental helical concrete stair serves as one of the building's most striking interior features. Supported only at the base and upper landing, this grand stair is highlighted by the flood of natural light afforded by the neighboring double-height window opening. Prior research by Yolita Rauche, of

<sup>2</sup> Glazier, Richard. "New Library Opened to the Public." The Daily Herald, 13 July 1966.

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FEMA indicates that the design for this stair was inspired by a similar one at the Brookings Institute Center for Advanced Studies in Washington D.C.<sup>3</sup> Historic drawings call for a coved plaster detail along the stair's sweeping center support and a terrazzo finish on the treads, neither of which are present. Photographs taken after the building's grand opening, however, suggest that this detail was never constructed. In addition, the proposed terrazzo treads finish were substituted with carpet over the concrete structure. These historic photos and drawings also show the original clear acrylic railing with distinctive sleek metal posts mounted to the face of the stair and a simple metal handrail.

The missing handrails on both interior stairs will be replaced with nearly identical examples, restoring their original character. At the monumental helical stair, new carpet will be installed, completing the restoration of its original appearance. In order to maintain historic visibility while separating the private offices on the second level from the public transit center below, a segmented frameless glass partition will be placed around the perimeter of the monumental stair. A minimally visible physical separation controlling access to the second will preserve the character of the stair and surrounding lobby.

### Ground Floor Plan

Accessed from the main entrance, one bay north of the building's centerline along the west elevation, the ground floor features a largely open floor plan. Partial walls, changes in floor finish, and historical documentation provide evidence of historic spatial arrangements. Service elements are banked toward the northeast corner and vertical circulation is grouped along the building's east-west axis. Adjacent to the main entry, the monumental helical stair provides access to an open gallery overlooking the lobby below. Along the north wall of this gallery, a large expanse of undamaged decorative tile remains intact at the second floor. A second stair, located approximately in line with the helical stair, is placed against the building's east elevation. Despite its secondary nature, this stair features detailing highly evocative of its era of construction. Precast terrazzo treads with open risers supported on concrete stringers rise to the mechanical penthouse above. Buff brick walls, laid in stacked bond, surround the stair. While some treads are no longer extant, the character of this stair remains intact.

Prior to the damage sustained from Hurricane Katrina, the decorative tile wall north of the main entry extended to the ground floor, separating the entry from the children's library. Historically, the children's library occupied the northwest corner of the building, with the west wall of the library's meeting room defining its eastern edge. South of the auditorium, the circulation desk sat on axis with the two staircases. The southern portion of the building was primarily open, with vertical stacks defining smaller spaces for reading and study.

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<sup>3</sup> Rausche

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### Second Floor Plan

Like the ground floor, the second floor features a mix of open area for library stacks and smaller spaces for dedicated programmatic needs. Larger open spaces are located on the west half of the building with smaller individual spaces grouped to the east side. Historic newspaper accounts indicate that the smaller spaces in the northeast corner of the building were used for offices and administrative support.<sup>4</sup> These early descriptions of the library also note the attractive views of the Gulfport Harbor afforded by the study carrels located along the south wall at the second floor.<sup>5</sup>

The second floor sustained less hurricane damage than the ground floor, leaving more of the original layout intact. In addition, remnants of the original drop ceiling remain, providing further evidence of the spatial character documented in historic images. Water infiltration through the roof and broken windows has damaged the soft finishes on the second floor. At this level, the original terrazzo floor and most of the original decorative tile remains largely intact.

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<sup>4</sup> Glacier

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

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## 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Community Planning and Development

Architecture

### Period of Significance

1966

### Significant Dates

### Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

### Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)

### Architect/Builder

Charles Louis Proffer, architect

W.L. Easterling, contractor

Zondel Katz, interior designer

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## Statement of Significance

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations).

The Gulfport-Harrison County Library is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its local significance in the area of Community Planning and Development and under Criterion C for its statewide significance in the area of architecture. As a cultural institution demonstrating exemplary qualities of the architectural style that has come to be known as "New Formalism," the property represents significant achievements in architecture and community planning and development. Constructed in 1966, the library's progressive design was created by local architect Charles L. Proffer and commissioned by the City of Gulfport.

The library, a designated Mississippi Landmark, is presently undergoing rehabilitation for use as a transit hub and office space in connection with the adjacent Mississippi Aquarium. Seeking to restore the building's historic character, the development team is pursuing historic tax credits in tandem with this application for National Register listing. Preliminary determination of eligibility for this property was issued by the National Park Service on October 10, 2008. Since this date, this already exceptional example of an important architectural style has crossed the fifty-year threshold, furthering its case for listing on the National Register.

## Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

### Gulfport, Mississippi

Gulfport's current configuration began to take shape in 1884 when William Hardy, president of the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad, chose the present-day commercial core as the location for the terminus of the company line.<sup>6</sup> For this terminus, Hardy purchased land along the Gulf Coast from Mrs. C.M. Soria for five dollars per acre.<sup>7</sup> Bounded by the Mississippi Sound to the south and present-day 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 28<sup>th</sup> Street, and 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the east, north, and west, respectively, this plot of land included the site that would ultimately be selected for the Gulfport-Harrison County Library nearly eighty years later.<sup>8</sup> The town was officially incorporated in 1898.<sup>9</sup>

Gulfport's boom period, on the eve of the twentieth century, coincided with the arrival of Captain Joseph T. Jones, whose Bradford Construction Company took over the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad in 1895.<sup>10</sup> Jones' vision for the town led to completion of the railroad line to Jackson, significant improvements to the harbor, and the emergence of Gulfport as the largest lumber export city in the country by 1906.<sup>11</sup> By this time, Gulfport had become known as a major trade center for wood, clay, sand, cotton, and wool.<sup>12</sup> Within the first three years of the twentieth century, Gulfport became the seat of Harrison County and experienced a significant rise in construction, prompting an ordinance prohibiting the construction of any frame structures within the commercial core.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Bailey, Robert J. "Harbor Square Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Preservation Consultant, Gulfport, August 13, 1985. pg. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Preziosi, David. "Gulfport Harbor Square Commercial Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Mississippi Heritage Trust, Jackson, September 12, 2011. pg. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Grismore, James and Laura Thayer. "Gulf Gardens Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Federal Emergency Management Agency, Biloxi, July 26, 2016

<sup>9</sup> Preziosi, pg. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Bailey, pg. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Preziosi, pg. 28.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pg. 28.

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The population of Gulfport continued to grow significantly throughout the twentieth century and its built environment followed suit. By the 1930s, the depletion of yellow pine in South Mississippi effectively ended Gulfport's role in the lumber industry.<sup>14</sup> Where it had once been a major source of exports, the city emerged as a major importer of perishable fruits from South America.<sup>15</sup> Other major events contributing to the city's growth in the first quarter of the century included its establishment as an official port of entry in 1919, the conversion of the planned 1917 Mississippi Centennial Exhibition facilities into a Naval Training Station and then into a Veterans Hospital.<sup>16</sup>

After a period of decline during the Great Depression, the city's economy was once again bolstered through the increased presence of the US Navy during World War II.<sup>17</sup> While the 1950s were similarly marked by government-funded projects, including improvements to the harbor in close proximity to the subject property, the 1960s and 1970s brought on a new wave of private investment.<sup>18</sup> A major economic boom occurred during this time due to the relocation of two major fruit importers from New Orleans to Gulfport, alongside other growth in trading.<sup>19</sup>

Gulfport's location on the Gulf Coast has come with consequences as well, with significant damage sustained from several hurricanes throughout the twentieth century. Of these, Hurricanes Camille (1969) and Katrina (2005) stand out due to the extreme devastation seen in their aftermath. Despite this history of destruction, the city's commercial core has remained remarkably intact, in part due to its people's commitment to erecting distinctive, sound structures.

### Community Planning and Development

The Gulfport Harrison County Public Library is part of a significant legacy in Community Planning and Development along the Gulf Coast, including the establishment of the state of Mississippi's first public library in Biloxi in 1898 by The Kings Daughters.<sup>20</sup> The Kings Daughters, a local chapter of a charitable organization, went on to lay the groundwork for the first library in Gulfport, beginning in 1911.<sup>21</sup> By 1912, they had established a small operation under the stairs of the Gulfport City Hall.<sup>22</sup>

In 1916, the city of Gulfport received an appropriation of \$10,000 through the Andrew Carnegie Corporation to construct a new 2,800 square foot library.<sup>23</sup> Completed in 1917, this served as the city's main library until the construction of the Gulfport-Harrison County Library in 1966.<sup>24</sup> By 1947, the Gulfport Carnegie Library had merged with the Harrison County Library and constructed an additional branch, known as the "West Branch."<sup>25</sup> Within five years, the "East Branch" was constructed in the Soria City area of Gulfport. In 1964, the Mississippi legislature passed a bill that provided the legal framework for the Gulfport Carnegie-Harrison County Library to construct a new main branch in a joint city-county venture.<sup>26</sup> This legislative initiative, paired with the use of private land donated to the city for civic use, strengthens the property's significance in the area of Community Planning and Development.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pg. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Grismore, pg. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pg. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pg. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pg. 29.

<sup>20</sup> *History of Our Libraries*, Harrison County Library System, 20 Feb. 2009, [harrison.lib.ms.us/about-us/history-of-our-libraries/](http://harrison.lib.ms.us/about-us/history-of-our-libraries/).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Keeper of the National Register. Determination of Eligibility Notification, Determination of Eligibility Notification (2008).

<sup>27</sup> Keeper

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## Architecture

In a reaction against the perceived severity and restrictive nature of Modernism, the style that has become known as "New Formalism" emerged in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> This new style embraced the exploitation of modern materials, but coupled this with the use of ornament and grandeur often associated with earlier periods in architectural history. The incorporation of stylized classical motifs, proportions, and scale, has led buildings in this style to sometimes be referred to as "Neo-Palladian."<sup>29</sup>

The quality of the architectural design of the Gulfport-Harrison County Public Library provides further evidence of the community's commitment to espousing modern ideas about community planning and development. While a handful of other library buildings constructed during the same era throughout the state show elements of New Formalist design, none approach the quality seen in Gulfport. Citing the quality of the design, and forward-thinking nature of the city and county governments, George Thatcher, president of the library board of trustees, stated at the beginning of its construction that "The people of Harrison County are indebted to the Harrison County Board of Supervisors and the mayor and commissioners of Gulfport...It is important for a growing county, (to) provide for the cultural growth of its people...For decades to come, this library will serve Harrison County effectively as a cultural center."<sup>30</sup>

To execute a design expressive of the ideals espoused by the library board and local government, the group called upon local architect Charles Louis Proffer. Licensed in 1951, Proffer had become prominent by the early 1960s, and went on to design numerous public and private structures throughout the region in the following decades.<sup>31</sup> Charged with designing a building that could serve not only as a library, but as a "cultural center to raise its patrons to a greater enjoyment of and fulfillment from the knowledge of the ages," Proffer embarked on a five year study of facilities throughout the country prior to completing his design.<sup>32</sup>

While the internationally renowned designs of Minoru Yamasaki and Edward Durell Stone represent the most often cited examples of New Formalism, regional architect Charles Proffer's design for the Gulfport-Harrison County Library represents a significant example of this style. Yamasaki and Stone are regularly referenced as key progenitors of this form of architectural expression, known for its symmetry, strong projecting roof lines, expressive structure, and exuberant use of ornament.<sup>33</sup> In response to the stark material palate often associated with earlier forms of Modernism, New Formalist designs frequently incorporate elaborate screens and wall surfaces of decorative metal or concrete.<sup>34</sup>

Stone's design for the New Delhi American Embassy (1954) is often considered the watershed moment in similar expressions of this style.<sup>35</sup> Comparison of Stone's 1954 embassy design with Yamasaki's 1958 McGregor Memorial Conference Center for Wayne State University in Detroit helps to understand the architectural path which ultimately led to the creation of Proffer's work in Gulfport. Evidence of Yamasaki's structural expression and Stone's formal composition and use of ornament are apparent in Proffer's library design. Interestingly, Proffer's earlier work for the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory in nearby Ocean Springs, MS shows similar devices used in the early expression of New Formalism, providing further evidence of the style's development over time at a regional level.

<sup>28</sup> "New Formalism." Docomomo WEWA - Mid Century Modern Architects, 2020, [www.docomomo-wewa.org/styles\\_detail.php?id=27](http://www.docomomo-wewa.org/styles_detail.php?id=27).

<sup>29</sup> "New Formalism."

<sup>30</sup> "Gulfport-Harrison County Library Building Construction Underway." The Clarion Ledger, 27 June 1965, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> "Young Sikeston Native Gaining Notoriety as Gulf Coast Architect." The Sikeston Herald, 11 Feb. 1960, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Glazier

<sup>33</sup> Rausche

<sup>34</sup> Marter, J. M. The Grove Encyclopedia of American Art. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pg. 241.

<sup>35</sup> Marter, J. M., 242.

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For the Gulfport library, Proffer's design more closely follows the work of Stone, whose campus for the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany, completed two years prior, bears notable similarity. Stone's colonnades at SUNY Albany, particularly those in the Dutch and Colonial Quads, are highly similar to Proffer's design for the Gulfport Library, evidencing the prolific use of such elements to express contemporary ideas about architecture throughout the United States.

In 1966, speaking to the community's desire to embrace the highest quality in design, Charles Proffer stated, "The objective was not to design a solely regional (Southern) nor solely contemporary building...We wanted to make a building to inspire all of the arts."<sup>36</sup> This quote speaks to the desire to incorporate a somewhat playful, human touch often seen in New Formalist designs. Adherence to these principals can be seen in the incorporation of a variety of textured decorative tiles throughout the Gulfport library's exterior and interior design. On the exterior, this takes the form of a shist aggregate concrete tile, which gives the building its distinctive green color. Sculptured terracotta tiles in a variety of colors used to define distinct spaces within the library carry this motif into its interior, which was designed in partnership with local interior designer Zondel Katz.<sup>37</sup>

The sculptural terracotta tile used throughout the Gulfport-Harrison County Library is a significant interior feature closely tied to the building's identity as an important example of New Formalist architecture. A 1963 edition of "Mississippi Architect" extolling recent advancements in Mississippi's architectural oeuvre also includes an article marketing the use of cast concrete tiles as a decorative wall treatment.<sup>38</sup> While the physical makeup of the material varies slightly from what is seen in the Gulfport building, its intended use is nearly identical. Echoing many of the ideas that have come to be associated with New Formalist theory, the article states "Sculptured walls...have been a major art expression in every highly civilized society and, in fact, are an essential complement to the general austerity of contemporary architecture and design."<sup>39</sup> Such references, in a Mississippi publication including stock articles intended for nationwide distribution, highlight the building's importance at a statewide level, as well as providing a link to national trends in architectural practice.

Constructed by W.L. Easterling and formally dedicated on November 27, 1966, the Gulfport-Harrison County Library served as a highly valued cultural resource for the surrounding community for nearly four decades.<sup>40</sup> Upon the library's opening, George Thatcher stated, "This building sets a new and lofty standard of cultural excellence which I hope will be continued in future buildings, both public and private...this new library will convey that here is a people who value cultural literacy as well as economic progress."<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Charles Proffer would continue to be involved in the design of future regional civic buildings, including the Harrison County Courthouse in Gulfport and the Mississippi Coast Coliseum and Convention Center in Biloxi, both completed ca. 1977.<sup>42</sup> Despite heavy damage sustained from Hurricane Camille in 1969 and complications with subsequent repair efforts, the building remained in high esteem in the surrounding community for many years.

Following extensive damage caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the building was vacated and slated for demolition. In 2008, when the city council approved demolition of the building, local citizens formed "We the People to Save the Gulfport Library." The group successfully halted demolition and obtained landmark status

<sup>36</sup> Glazier

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Henry, William R., Jr., editor. "Cast Concrete Transformed Into Modules Of Design For Building Ornamentation." Mississippi Architect, Nov. 1963, p. 3. Preservation in Mississippi, <https://misspreservation.com/2011/04/05/mississippi-architect-nov-1963-we-build-with-confidence/>

<sup>39</sup> Henry, pg. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Glazier

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Leggett, Dott. "Wright Low Courthouse Bidder." The Daily Herald, 11 Dec. 1975, p. 1.

Bishop, Bob. "Coliseum's \$1.8 Million for Architect Fees Nearly Double Original Forecast." The Sun Herald, 1 Oct. 1977, p. 1.



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for the property through the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. After a series of setbacks, the building continued to sit vacant and exposed to the elements for over ten years. Then in 2016, plans for rehabilitation of the library as part of the Coast Transit Authority and adjacent Mississippi Aquarium emerged. Work on this project began in 2018 and is expected to be complete in early 2020. The rehabilitation will be completed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and involves the work of an internationally renowned material preservation consultant, WJE, ensuring the property's continued survival as an important and iconic resource to the Gulf Coast community.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Rausche, Yolita. *The Gulfport-Harrison County Public Library (1966)*. Yolita E. Rausche, LLC, 7 May 2008.

*History of Our Libraries*, Harrison County Library System, 20 Feb. 2009, [harrison.lib.ms.us/about-us/history-of-our-libraries/](http://harrison.lib.ms.us/about-us/history-of-our-libraries/).

"Young Sikeston Native Gaining Notoriety as Gulf Coast Architect." *The Sikeston Herald*, 11 Feb. 1960, p. 1.

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**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 #  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

**Primary location of additional data:**

☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State Agency  
☐ Federal Agency  
☐ Local Government  
☐ University  
☐ Other  
☐ Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** 047-GLF-0137.1-ML

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## 10. Geographical Data

### Acreage of Property 1.6

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84:

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1	<u>30.3685</u> Latitude	<u>-89.0837</u> Longitude	4	<u>30.3683</u> Latitude	<u>-89.0862</u> Longitude
2	<u>30.3685</u> Latitude	<u>-89.0864</u> Longitude	5	<u>30.3681</u> Latitude	<u>-89.0862</u> Longitude
3	<u>30.3683</u> Latitude	<u>-89.0864</u> Longitude	6	<u>30.3678</u> Latitude	<u>-89.0873</u> Longitude

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Lots Thirteen (13) through Nineteen (19) inclusive, and Lots Nine (9) through Twelve (12 inclusive, less the North 25 feet thereof, all in Block One Hundred Eighty-Four (184), ORIGINAL GULFPORT, in accordance with the official map or plat thereof on file and of record in the office of the Chancery Clerk of Harrison County, Mississippi; and being the same property conveyed to Harrison County, Mississippi, by the City of Gulfport by Conveyance dated July 26, 1965, recorded in the Land Deed Records in the office of the Chancery Clerk of Harrison County, Mississippi, in Book 573 at page 116.

And

Commence at the Northeast corner of lot 1, Block 184, ORIGINAL GULFPORT, as per the official map or plat thereof on file and of record in the office of the Chancery Clerk of the First Judicial District of Harrison County, Mississippi, thence proceed South 154 feet along the West margin of 20th Avenue to a POINT OF BEGINNING. From said point of beginning, proceed West 68.8 feet, thence South 136 feet, thence East 68.8 feet to the West margin of 20th Avenue, thence north along the West margin of 20th Avenue 136 feet to the point of beginning; said parcel of land being the South 21 feet of the East 68.8 feet of Lot 7; the East 68.8 feet of Lot 8; the East 18.8 feet of the North 90 feet of Lot 10 and the North 90 feet of Lot 9, all in Block 184, ORIGINAL GULFPORT, in accordance with the official map or plat thereof on file and of record in the office of the Chancery Clerk of Harrison County, Mississippi.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the entire parcel that has been associated with the property since construction of the library.

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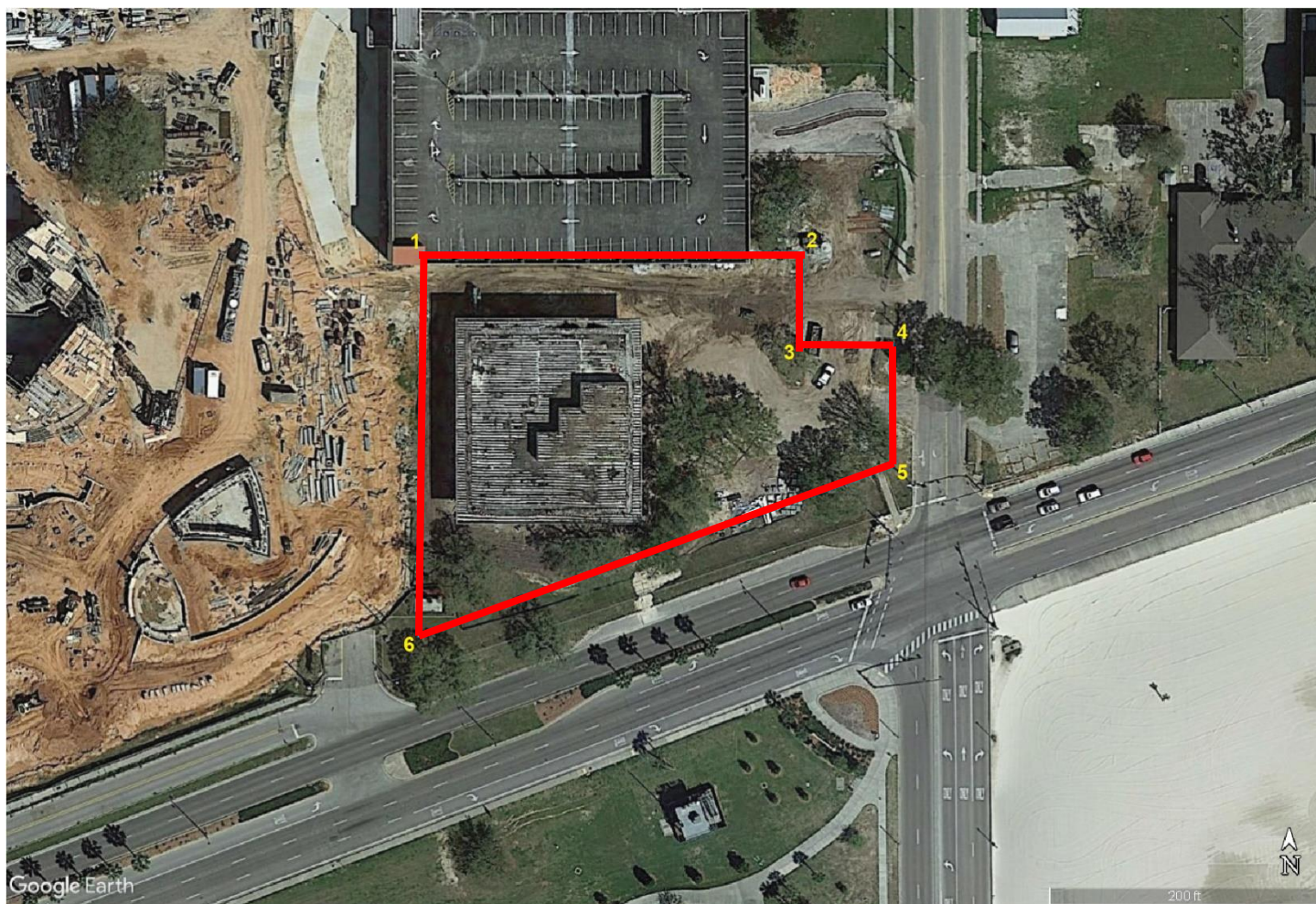
### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Greg Morrison, Associate, Architecture date August 1, 2019  
organization LRK, Inc. telephone (901)521-1440  
street & number 50 South B.B. King Blvd, Suite 600 email gmorrison@lrk.com  
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38103

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **GIS Location Map (Google Earth or BING)**





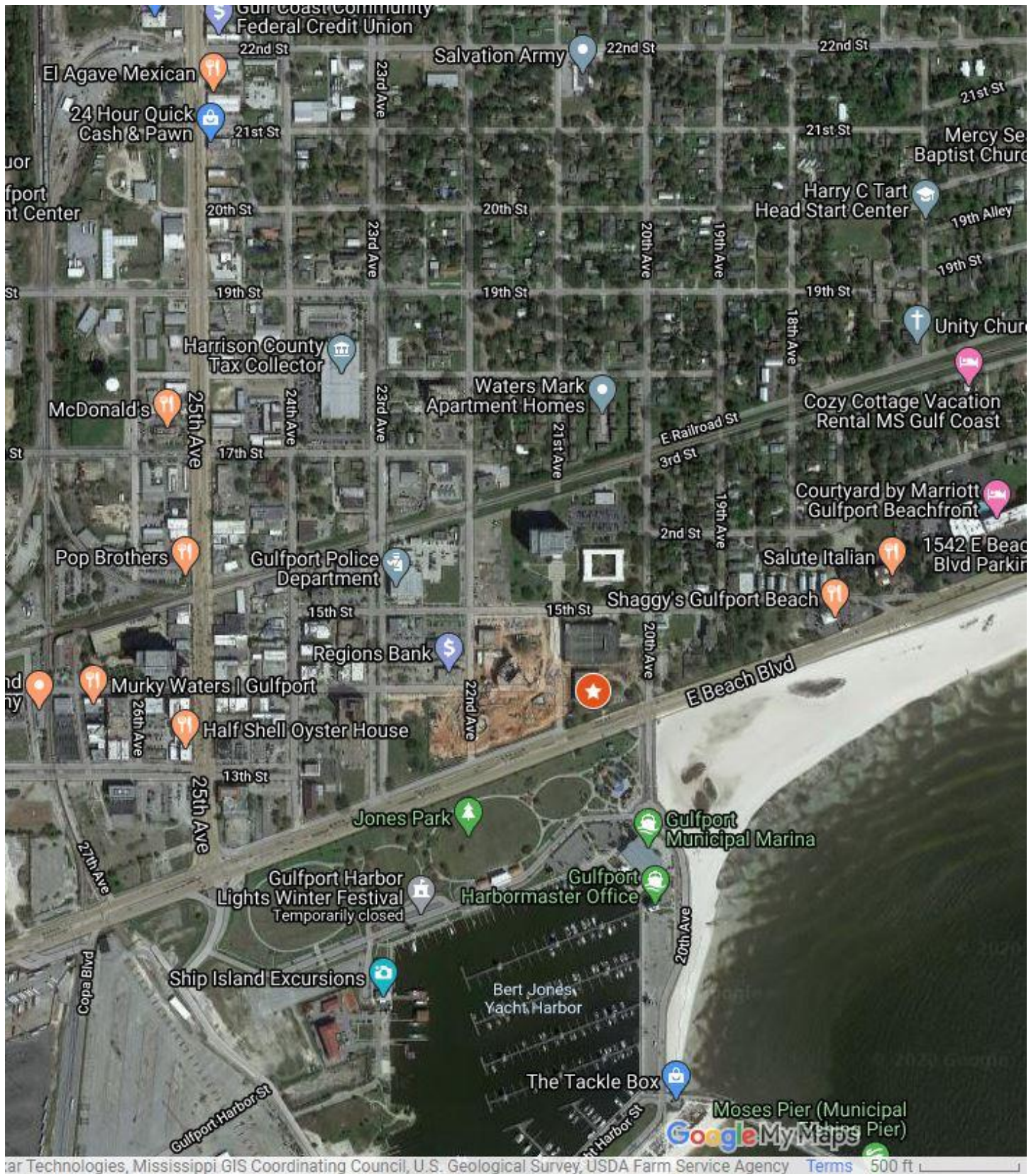
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- **Local Location Map: star in orange circle marks location**





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- **Floor Plans (See Photo Location Maps)**
- **Photo Location Map** (Underlay Plans Courtesy of Eley Guild Hardy Architects)

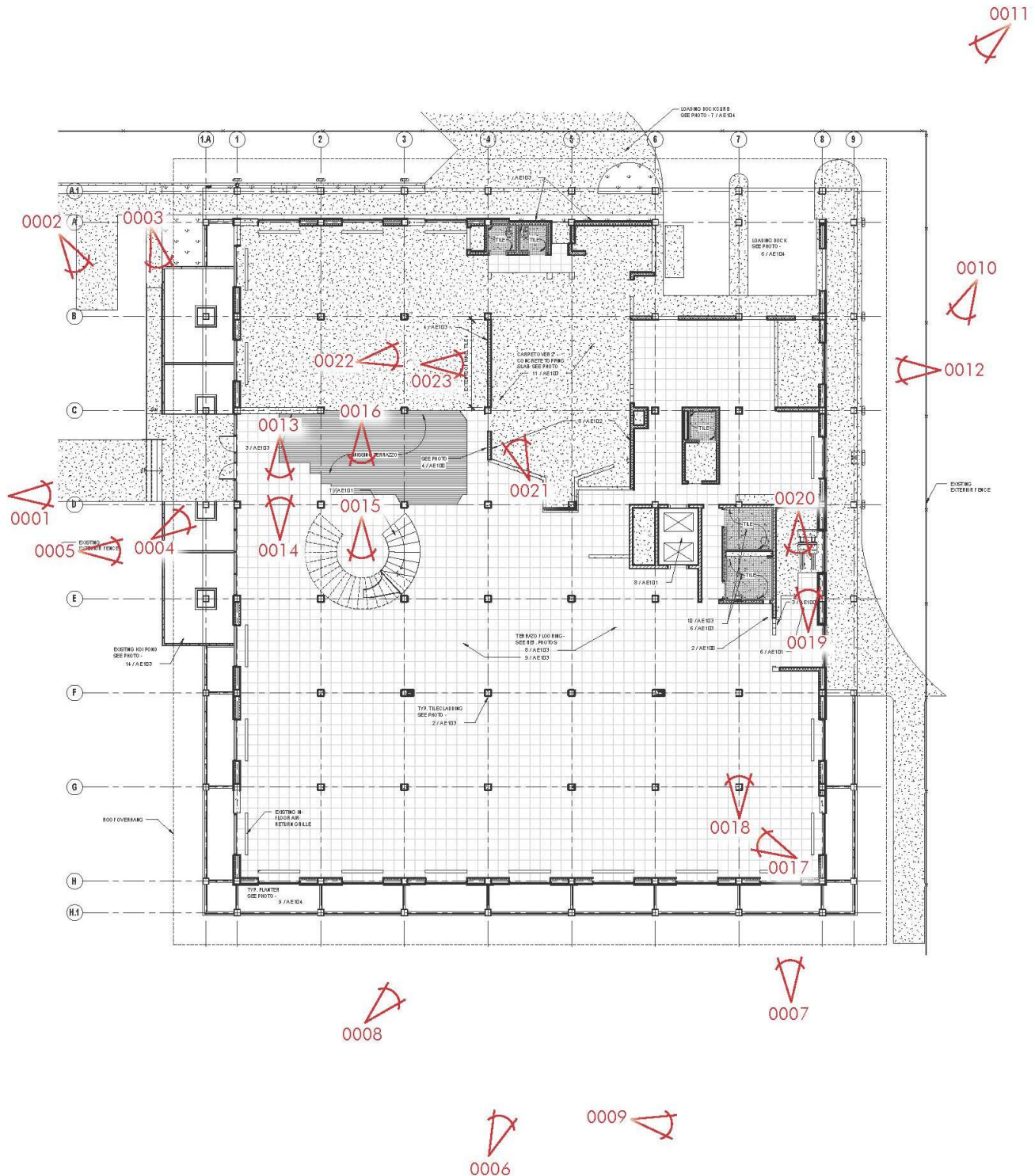


Photo Key Plan, Ground Floor



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Photo Key Plan, Ground Floor

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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs under separate cover. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and does not need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

**Name of Property:** Gulfport-Harrison County Public Library

**City or Vicinity:** Gulfport

**County:** Harrison **State:** Mississippi

**Photographer:** Eley Guild Hardy Architects

**Date Photographed:** July 02, 2020

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 of 29 exterior west elevation  
Photo 2 of 29 exterior northwest corner  
Photo 3 of 29 exterior west elevation, camera facing south  
Photo 4 of 29 exterior west elevation front entrance  
Photo 5 of 29 exterior west elevation front entrance  
Photo 6 of 29 exterior south elevation  
Photo 7 of 29 exterior southeast corner  
Photo 8 of 329 exterior detail of columns  
Photo 9 of 29 exterior view of street, facing southeast towards beach  
Photo 10 of 29 exterior east elevation  
Photo 11 of 29 exterior northeast corner  
Photo 12 of 29 exterior detail of exterior east elevation wall  
Photo 13 of 29 camera facing south, west side, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, helical staircase  
Photo 14 of 29 camera facing north, front entrance, 1<sup>st</sup> floor  
Photo 15 of 29 helical staircase  
Photo 16 of 29 looking south towards helical staircase  
Photo 17 of 29 camera facing west from southeast  
Photo 18 of 29 porous matte finish on column  
Photo 19 of 29 secondary staircase  
Photo 20 of 29 secondary staircase  
Photo 21 of 29 interior wall at center, camera facing northwest  
Photo 22 of 29 camera facing east towards tile wall at front entrance, 1<sup>st</sup> floor  
Photo 23 of 29 camera facing east towards tile wall at front entrance, 1<sup>st</sup> floor  
Photo 24 of 29 looking north towards helical staircase  
Photo 25 of 20 decorative concrete wall  
Photo 26 of 29 secondary staircase  
Photo 27 of 29 secondary staircase  
Photo 28 of 29 interior tile 2nd floor, southeast corner, camera facing north  
Photo 29 of 29 interior tile 2nd floor, southeast corner, camera facing north

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**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 listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



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