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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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name North Church Primary School
other names/site number Church Street School

2. Location

street & number SW corner of Church & Jackson Sts. N/A not for publication
city, town Tupelo N/A vicinity
state Mississippi code MS county Lee code 081 zip code 38801

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private, public-local (checked), public-State, public-Federal
Category of Property: building(s) (checked), district, site, structure, object
Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing 0 buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total 1

Name of related multiple property listing: Historic Resources in Tupelo, MS

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 (checked) does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official: Kenneth H. P. Paul
Date: FEB. 11, 1992
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets (checked) does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. (checked) 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):

Entered in the National Register
Signature of the Keeper: Allison Byrum
Date of Action: 4/3/92

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Education: School

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Education: School

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Moderne

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls concrete

roof not visible

other N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The North Church Primary School (1936-1938) is one of the best examples of the Moderne style of architecture in Mississippi. It was designed by the Jackson, Mississippi firm of Overstreet and Town, whose work was recognized internationally. As was typical of this firm's school designs in the late 1930s, the Church Street building has a utilitarian rear elevation and the dramatic design elements are supplied on the front facade. The horizontality of the design is broken only by the vertical entry block, another common feature of Overstreet's and Town's work (Sachs 1986: 208, 218). The school retains a high degree of architectural integrity and is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C.

This two story, concrete, Moderne school building has a strong horizontal emphasis and is built into the hillside. The front facade features a curved bay with a bank of hinged windows; a round window; and a massive, square, projecting bay which contains the recessed, tripartite entrance. This bay has a reeded entryway and chamfered corners. The steps leading to this bay are flanked by buttresses displaying carvings of animal and human figures. These carvings may have been designed and/or executed by sculptor Joe Barris of the Jackson Stone Precast Company who was responsible for the carvings on at least one other Overstreet and Town school during this period (Sachs 1986: 215). There are a variety of window styles with the most common being banks of aluminum sash windows. Horizontal banding accents the front facade and portions of the side elevations. The side entrances are shaded by massive, flat overdoors with chamfered corners.

This building, which replaced an earlier school destroyed by the 1936 tornado, dominates its block. To the north of it is an athletic field. The rest of the block is generally composed of small, modest houses. New landscaping in front of the school includes raised beds containing flowers, trees and ground covering plants. The landscaping emphasizes the slope of the land as it descends from south to north.

See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
Architecture

Period of Significance
1936-1938

Significant Dates
1936-1938

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Overstreet, N. W. & Town, A. Hays
Company

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The North Church Primary School is architecturally significant to the City of Tupelo as an excellent example of the Art Moderne style as it was interpreted by the architectural firm of Overstreet and Town. It retains a high degree of integrity and has long been Tupelo's most architecturally prominent school building.

The Art Moderne style of the 1930s was largely promoted in Mississippi by Overstreet and Town. In this decade, their work evolved from a traditional emphasis with a classical vocabulary into a streamlined, modern style reminiscent of the European modernists. Their projects, which were often featured in architectural journals, conformed to the national design trends. Essentially, their style combined the more formal planning principles of Beaux Arts academicism with the modernistic architectural vocabulary of the era. Their expertise in manipulating a new building material, concrete, enabled them to maximize the aesthetic qualities of this material.

If the evolution of Overstreet and Town's modernistic style is viewed on a continuum then the North Church Primary School, in conjunction with Bailey Junior High School (1936-1937) in Jackson and Columbia High School (1937), is a significant point along this line. Town, who was the principal designer for the firm during this period, embraced streamlining and was working towards a "simplification of form and elimination of unnecessary detail." These three schools, all constructed in concrete, clearly illustrate the transition in Town's style from the "conservative-modern to the ultra-modern" with Columbia High School executed in the International Style. Town himself believed that these mid 1930s schools demonstrated improvements in his design abilities and were among his best work in the streamline mode (Sachs 1986: 218, 304).

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North Church Primary School
Tupelo, Lee County, MS

Architectural historian David Sachs notes that A. Hays Town described his design for the Church Street school as "ultra modern." Sachs also adds that the plan for the building employs "a design strategy new in the architects' repertoire forms. The rusticated banding between the windows serves to emphasize the horizontal lines of the building. The contrast between the massiveness of the entry tower with the horizontality of the classroom wings strikes a major theme in the design. This simple but dramatic formal interplay was to be found in many of the schools designed in the following few years" (Sachs 1986: 217-218).

The modern essence of the design relied not only on this progressive architectural strategy but also on the aesthetic qualities of the building material, i. e., concrete. Overstreet and Town began to use reinforced concrete as a building material because during the Depression buildings had to be constructed with few funds, but a large number of unskilled laborers. They quickly realized that the material was perfect for achieving the simplicity of form intrinsic in the architectural styles of the day.

The design of the North Church Primary School reflects the social and political ideals of its period. Designers in all fields during the 1930s were creating streamlined forms that reminded one of progress, speed and efficiency. American architects participated in this endeavor to create a style that would promote renewed hope and confidence in the future (Sachs 1986: 203-205).

Tupelo's school system was rebuilt after the 1936 tornado through financial assistance from federal relief programs. The Tupelo Separate School District engaged Overstreet and Town for three school projects. The first consisted of additions to the Milam Junior High School on Jefferson Street. The additions display such Overstreet and Town design elements as a vertical entry block accented by reeding and a curved overdoor. The second was the George Washington Carver School for black students. This was a modest brick building which utilized standard elements from the firm's design vocabulary. The final project was the North Church Primary School which, of the three, makes the most significant contribution to Tupelo's built environment. The construction of the school, which cost \$225,000, began on August 28, 1936 and was completed by the fall of 1938. The reinforced concrete building was believed to be tornado-resistant (Sachs 1986: 216-217; Daily Journal 1986: 11D).

The Mississippi statewide survey has thus far identified nine Art Moderne schools in the state. Six are known to have been designed by the firm of Overstreet and Town. Most are one or two story buildings with a strong horizontal orientation and a minimum of superficial decorative details. The more modest structures have main entrances marked by cantilevered canopies while the most sophisticated examples have an entrance contained within a tower or vertical block. A circular window appears to be a distinguishing characteristic for Overstreet's and Town's interpretations of the style.

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Continuation Sheet**

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North Church Primary School
Tupelo, Lee County, MS

The other five identified Moderne schools designed by Overstreet and Town in the late 1930s are:

- Leland High School, Leland, Washington County (c. 1935)
- Madison-Ridgeland Public School (gymnasium), Madison, Madison County
(1935-1936)
- Benoit School, Benoit, Bolivar County (1936)
- George Washington Carver School, Tupelo, Lee County (1936)
- Bailey Junior High School, Jackson, Hinds County (1937)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Sachs, David H. "The Work of Overstreet and Town." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1986.

"Schools Left in Rubble, Classes Cancelled." Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal, 5-6 April 1986, p. 11D.

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Ms. Dept. of Archives & History

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 1.7 acres

UTM References

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3	4	2	6	4	0
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3	7	9	2	4	7	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 89-K-61-11 (S 31NE-T 9-R 6) as recorded on the mini maps located in the Lee County Tax Assessor's Office

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

This lot is the lot historically associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan M. Enzweiler/Historic Preservation Consultant
organization _____ date September 30, 1991
street & number 1356 Seminole Ave. telephone (504) 834-9024
city or town Metairie state LA zip code 70005

Owner: Tupelo Municipal Separate School District
Tupelo, MS 38801



North Church Primary School

Tupelo, ^{MS}Mississippi

Susan Enzweiler

April 7, 1991

MS Dept of Archives & History

View to Northwest

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CHURCH STREET SCHOOL

North Church Primary School

Tupelo, ^{MS} Mississippi

Susan Enzweiler

April 7, 1991

MS Dept of Archives + History

View to West

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