

## Mississippi Landmark Consideration Report

prepared by  
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### ML log #:

1. Date considered by committee: Dec. 10/18, 2009
2. Name of property: Brooklyn School (South Forrest Attendance Center)
3. County: Forrest
4. Address of property:
5. Owner of property: Forrest County School District
6. National Register Status: not listed



### Property/Legal Description:

**Resource Description:** The administration building at the Brooklyn School, now known as South Forrest Attendance Center, was built in 1925 and designed by prominent Hattiesburg architect Robert E. Lee, who also designed such public landmarks as the Hattiesburg City Hall (1923) and the Collegiate Gothic façade of the Hattiesburg High School (1921), and downtown commercial buildings like the Ross Building (1907) and the Masonic Temple (1920). The Brooklyn School is a one-story, brick building topped by a cross-hipped roof of asphalt shingles, accentuated by two square towers on the façade that shelter the main entrances to the building. The towers and the gabled parapet between them provide the primary stylistic details: the low pyramidal roofs supported on shaped brackets are characteristics of the Spanish Colonial or Mediterranean style popular in the 1920s, although many of Lee's other buildings of the period reflect a more formal, Classical style.

In plan, the Brooklyn School, built later in Lee's career, conforms to school-design practices that were only just becoming standard by the mid-1920s. Earlier rural consolidated schools had typically been frame two-story buildings, but by 1920, educational leaders and architects encouraged more substantial brick buildings of one-story and with large banks of windows to allow better natural lighting for reading. In the plan of a T, the building's interior is composed of a long corridor of double-loaded classrooms with a more highly decorated auditorium in the wing off the back.

Windows are replacement 4-light and 6-light metal-framed awning types with concrete sills, while the original main entrances are filled with fixed glass to create office space in the former entrance halls. A concrete signboard centered on the façade between the two towers proclaims the name of the school, above a group of round-arched windows. On the interior, the ceiling has been dropped in the hallway to just above the doorways, hiding the original transoms, which remain in place. The multi-light transoms are still visible from the classrooms and the auditorium, however. The auditorium also features a dropped ceiling, although not as low as the hallway, and retains its original wood floors, seats, and paneled pilasters flanking the stage. Original built-in cabinets remain in at least a few of the classrooms (no access to some classrooms).

**Historical Significance:** One of seven rural consolidated schools for white children in Forrest County built in the 1920s, Brooklyn School represents the Progressive-era spirit of constant growth and development that brought about educational consolidation in Mississippi beginning in 1910. Forrest County's level of consolidation would have been considered a "super consolidation" comparable to Yazoo County's in the 1920s, when schools consolidated in the 1910s were themselves consolidated in the 1920s, leaving only a handful of rural schools, all with new and modern buildings and all accessible by bus on improved rural roads.

**Architectural Significance:** Brooklyn School's Spanish or Mediterranean style of architecture is distinctive in the rural consolidated schools of the 1920s, and although it has had alterations, including replacement windows and exterior doors and dropped ceilings on the interior, the changes are reversible and are of a much less intrusive nature than the gutting or demolition in the other six schools of the period in Forrest County. Of the seven 1920s rural consolidated schools, two (and possibly three) no longer exist; two others are still in use as schools but have had the same alterations as Brooklyn but with the added change of total interior gutting. Dixie School, comparable in architectural integrity, is a less ambitious work of architecture.

**Integrity:** Original window groupings are intact, but the sash have been replaced within the original openings. This is considered a reversible change, so that once these metal windows have reached the end of their lifespan, they can be replaced with windows more sympathetic to the original character of the building. The original main entrances, which still exist, are recessed behind a later glass wall to create a small office space of the once-open vestibule. While unsightly and unfortunate, this is also a reversible alteration. The original roofing material appears to have been diamond-pattern asbestos-cement shingles, while the current roof is asphalt shingles. Not a perfect match, asphalt shingles are nonetheless a common compromise because asbestos-cement shingles are no longer available. On the interior, the floorplan remains intact, with the main hallway serving as a double-loaded corridor with classroom doors opening onto it. Original transoms remain above the dropped ceiling, which presumably has been dropped to allow mechanicals access to the rooms, although the attic would normally serve that purpose. This is a reversible change and when it is changed, it will dramatically alter the whole feel of the building, giving it back its openness and natural light. Classroom doors appear to date to the same c.1960 remodeling that changed the windows, but are wood and until replaced again are not too out of character.

#### **Designation Intent/Property Description:**

The administration building at Brooklyn School shares its property with several secondary and annex structures, one of which is a very recent addition to the south side of the building. None of these are of architectural or historical interest at this time and should not be considered part of this designation. Priorities in future renovations should include removal of the dropped ceiling and reconstructing the original entranceways, which no doubt included multi-light doors and sidelights, under the still existing transoms.