

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

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Richard B. Harrison School

Selma, Johnston County, JT1253, Listed 12/26/2012

Nomination by Jennifer Martin Mitchell

Photographs by Jennifer Martin Mitchell, January 2012



Agricultural Building and Bricklaying Shop (left)
and Elementary School Classroom Building (right)



Gymnasium and Classroom Building

**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 Richard B. Harrison School
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 605 West Noble Street and 405 South Brevard Street N/A not for publication
city or town Selma N/A vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Johnston code 101 zip code 27576

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
 determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 4 | 0 | buildings |
| 1 | 0 | sites |
| 0 | 0 | structures |
| 0 | 0 | objects |
| 5 | 0 | Total |

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility

SOCIAL/meeting hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

CONCRETE

roof ASPHALT

other _____

Narrative Description

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

R. B. Harrison School
Name of Property

Johnston County, North Carolina
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
EDUCATION
ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1953-1970

Significant Dates

1953
1955
1956
1965

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Hook, W. W. (Architect)
McGee, Harry Kirk (Architect)
Skinner, B. Atwood (Architect)

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

North Carolina State Archives

R. B. Harrison School
Name of Property

Johnston County, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 6.84 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 17 745580 3935880
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jennifer Martin Mitchell
organization MdM Historical Consulting, Inc. date August 22, 2012
street & number Post Office Box 1399 telephone 919/368-1602
city or town Durham state NC zip code 27702

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

Photographs

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

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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

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

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Johnston County, NC

Narrative Description

Richard B. Harrison School occupies three parcels—on West Noble Street and on South Brevard Street—on the west side of the town of Selma in Johnston County, North Carolina. The school sits on 6.84 acres in a historically African American residential area. The site contains an agricultural building constructed in 1953 with a 1965 bricklaying shop addition; a gymnasium and classroom building built in 1955; and the 1956 elementary school classroom building. A baseball field from ca. 1950 and a mid-twentieth-century concrete block pump house also occupy the parcels. The gymnasium and classroom building is used for community basketball games and to house a Head Start preschool, while the elementary school building remains unoccupied. The Richard B. Harrison Alumni Association owns the agricultural building and bricklaying shop and uses it as its headquarters and meeting space. The site occupied by Harrison School served as the hub for African American public education from the late nineteenth century into the 1980s. Three additional buildings devoted to education once stood on the parcels. In 1880, a two-room school, which is no longer extant, was built at the south side of the parcel. Later, an early twentieth-century frame school that had served white students was moved to the site and functioned until it burned on February 4, 1933. It was replaced by a three-story, brick building constructed in 1935 with New Deal funding. In 1948, that building received a ten-room addition. The 1935 school and its addition were demolished in 1995.

The school property is bounded on the northeast by West Noble and West Watson Streets; on the northwest by South Brevard Street; on the southwest by West Preston Street; and on the southeast by South Green and South Smithfield Streets. For the purposes of the property description, northeast will be referred to as north; northwest as west; southwest as south; and southeast as east. The property consists of three parcels: the Town of Selma owns two parcels that contain the 1955 and 1956 buildings, while the 1953/1965 building stands on a parcel under the ownership of the Richard B. Harrison Alumni Association. An additional parcel just north of the elementary school building and fronting West Noble Street once contained the 1935 three-story, brick school building, which was demolished in 1995. Until recently that parcel contained a grassy area; a monument to the 1935 building composed of a granite base topped by a historic school bell; and a parking lot. Since the March 2012 photo (Photo #1) was taken, temporary buildings have been constructed on the parcel. This parcel is not included in this nomination.

Agricultural Building and Bricklaying Shop
1953; 1965
Contributing Building

The one-story, long rectangular, brick-veneer building on a concrete slab foundation is oriented with its gable roof running north-south. It stands on the west end of the nominated parcels and southwest of the site of the 1935/1948 school building that was demolished in 1995. Wide overhanging eaves with beadboard

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soffits extend the length of the east and west elevations, while a molded fascia crowns each gable end of the asphalt shingle roof. Two brick chimney flues protrude from the interior of the west roof slope near the building's north end. The northern two-thirds of the building is the original portion built in 1953 as the agricultural education building; the southern third dates to 1965 and originally served as space to teach masonry skills to students. Original metal awning windows remain throughout and are set in groups of three or four. Windows on the north gable end have four horizontal lights in each, while others have three horizontal lights. Two windows on the west elevation and one on the north elevation have two horizontal lights. All windows rest on concrete painted sills. Two metal replacement doors—both in the 1953 section—pierce the west elevation. The southernmost of these doors fills a portion of what was originally a larger bay, but that was later infilled with brick. A half-glazed metal door to the bricklaying shop is located on the south end of the east elevation and a single-leaf metal door is located near the north end of the east elevation. An original garage bay with a replacement synthetic door pierces the east side of the south gable end.

The interior consists of three large rooms of different sizes where agricultural and industrial arts classes took place. Some interior walls are unpainted and painted concrete block, while others are sheetrock; the floor is poured concrete; and the ceiling is an open truss type with wood beams and round steel posts. Some original interior doors remain; most are five-panel types. A large meeting room occupies the majority of the 1953 portion. A small storage room, an office, and a restroom are located at the north end of this meeting space. A wood ladder to the immediate east of the storage room leads to a door to a loft used for storage. A small hallway leads from the northeast corner of the meeting room to a classroom that occupies the north end of the original building; a door on the east wall of the hallway leads to the exterior. The classroom floors are concrete and covered in linoleum tiles. Modern fluorescent lights are installed on the sheetrock ceiling. An original chalkboard remains on the east wall. Another hallway leads from the large meeting space into the 1965 bricklaying shop, which contains a single open room. This room also has the wood truss ceilings and metal posts. A divided-light and paneled wood door on the east end of the room's north wall leads to a small office. Double-leaf, five-panel wood doors on the west end of the north wall lead to a storage room. A replacement door above the double doors leads to an enclosed loft used for storage.

Elementary School Classroom Building 1956

Contributing Building

W. W. Hook and B. Atwood Skinner, Architects

Situated immediately south of the site where the main 1935 school building stood, the classroom building is a long, one-story, rectangular, red brick veneer building topped by a low gable roof with wide overhanging eaves graced with unusual concrete rafter tails on the long side elevations. Like the agriculture building and

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bricklaying shop, it is oriented with its shorter ends facing north and south. Its defining characteristic is the twenty-seven bays on the west and east elevations that are filled with banks of metal-frame windows that top a continuous brick sill. Many windows retain their glass and others have lost their panes, but plywood has been placed on the inner side of each window to protect the interior. At the north end of both side elevations, a smaller, two-light, metal-frame window pierces the wall; these single windows illuminate the restrooms on each side of the corridor at the north end of the building. An original metal door with a west side blind sidelight pierces the north gable end, which is devoid of windows. The east and west end walls of the north end project slightly beyond the east and west elevations carrying the roof. The north gable end displays a horizontal ghost mark of an open canopy that connected the elementary classroom building to the 1948 rear wing of the 1935 school building. The canopy was removed when the earlier buildings were demolished. A recessed entry is centered on the south gable end. A single-leaf wood door and a sidelight and transom that have been covered with plywood compose this rear entry. Like the opposite end, the east and west end walls of this elevation extend slightly beyond the east and west elevations. An area on the south side of the building that is nearly square in shape is enclosed by a chain link fence. It is likely that this area once contained playground equipment.

The well-preserved interior follows a central corridor plan with three classrooms on each side. Concrete rafters from the exterior continue to the building's interior where they remain exposed. The rafters intersect at the interior roof ridge in the corridor. Small paired hopper windows are positioned on the upper corridor walls to provide for the circulation of air between the corridor and the classrooms. Walls throughout are concrete block. In the corridor, three rows of concrete block above the hopper windows are topped with brick that extends to the ceiling. Doors throughout are wood and tile floors remain intact throughout. Restrooms at the north end of each side of the corridor have ceramic tile over the lower portions of their concrete block walls.

Gymnasium and Classroom Building

1955; renovated in 2009

Contributing Building

W. W. Hook and B. Atwood Skinner, Architects

The gymnasium rests on a concrete slab foundation and faces east toward South Green Street. The asphalt-shingled gable roof of the tall brick veneer gym is oriented east-west with a one-story, low-gabled-roofed, brick classroom wing extending north at a right angle from the east end of the gym's north elevation. The south end of the gym's façade includes a one-story, flat-roofed entrance vestibule with brick side walls. It shelters a pair of metal doors. On the north end of the gym's façade, a projecting, flat-roofed entrance vestibule contains three modern metal doors. This entrance is recessed beneath projecting eaves with concrete rafter tails. A wide blank brick bay to the south of this entrance is framed by full-height,

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projecting brick walls set at a right angle to the facade. On its north and south elevations, the gym displays seven fixed, metal-framed, nine-light replacement windows positioned on the upper wall. The windows are set in bays divided by full-height brick pilasters that support the building's projecting eaves. A one-story, flat-roofed locker room wing occupies the rear or west gable end of the gym. On both its north and south elevations, double, modern metal doors with transoms are set in a recessed entry. Six, fixed, metal-framed, six- and eight-light replacement windows pierce the west elevation of the locker room addition. The wide expanse of the west elevation of the gym is interrupted on the north and south ends by large, metal, louvered vents positioned near the top of the wall.

The gym's interior consists of a large basketball court with a new wood floor that dates to 2009 that replaced the original water damaged wood floor. The portion of the original floor with an "H" at the center has been preserved and hangs on the east wall. The gym's steel trusses remain intact below the ceiling sheathed in synthetic panels. Walls are painted brick, and doors throughout—except those leading to the exterior—are modern wood with a single window in each. A small office, a storage room, and entrance vestibules are located on the east end of the gym, while the renovated male and female locker rooms and two custodial closets are on the west end. Modern metal pull-out type bleachers line the north and south walls.

The three-classroom wing is attached to the east end of the gym's north elevation. It is a one-story, rectangular, red brick-veneer building topped by a low gable roof with wide overhanging eaves graced with concrete rafter tails on the long side elevations. Like the agricultural building and bricklaying shop, it is oriented with its shorter ends facing north and south. Its gable end walls extend slightly beyond the east and west elevations, in a fashion identical to the elementary school classroom building. The west half of the north façade projects forward and an entrance canopy with three metal-pole vertical supports is situated at the intersection of this projection's east wall and the building's north wall. The canopy shelters a double-leaf metal door with transoms. The west elevation displays eighteen bays containing replacement windows consisting of large one-over-one windows that completely fill the space formerly occupied by the original metal-frame windows; a continuous brick sill extends below the windows. South of the bank of windows and positioned on the south side of the projecting end wall, is a deeply-recessed entry composed of double-leaf metal doors with transoms. Nine windows identical to those on the west elevation pierce the east elevation; the south end of this elevation contains two rectangular fixed lights. Just to the south is a bay sheathed in vinyl siding and flanked by projecting brick walls.

The interior of the classroom wing follows a corridor plan with two classrooms on the west side of the corridor and one classroom on the east side of the corridor. Near the mid-point of the corridor, full-height concrete block walls project toward the center of the corridor. Ghost marks on the floor indicate that these walls once extended farther toward the middle of the corridor and that there might have been a door in this

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dividing wall. On the east side of the corridor at the south end of the classroom wing are restrooms, a supply closet, and an office. The walls of the classroom wing's interior are concrete block, floors are modern tile, ceilings are dropped acoustical tile, and doors are metal.

Pump House
Ca. 1955
Contributing Building

A small, one-story, gable-front, concrete block building stands southwest of (behind) the gym facing east. It has a metal door, concrete slab foundation, and synthetic siding in its gable ends.

Baseball field
Ca. 1950
Contributing Site

A baseball diamond with a dirt infield and grass outfield that is contained by chain link fence is located south of the gym.

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Summary

The mid-twentieth-century campus of Richard B. Harrison School in Selma, North Carolina, meets National Register of Historic Places Criterion A in the areas of education, black ethnic heritage, and social history and Criterion C for architecture as a locally significant example of modernism as applied to a public school campus. Although the main historic 1935/1948 school building was demolished in 1995, the property retains the agricultural education building and bricklaying shop (1953; expanded 1965); the gymnasium and its attached classroom wing (1955; renovated 2009), the elementary classroom building (1956), and a mid-twentieth-century baseball field. The complex chronicles the advancement of African American education in Selma in the mid-twentieth-century in the context of a segregated school system. What remains are three buildings from the 1950s and 1960s that best represent the significance of Harrison School as an important pre-integration African American school and evoke the period in Johnston County when schools for African Americans fought to receive funding, materials, and buildings comparable to those afforded white schools. These buildings date to the period when *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* found separate schools for whites and African Americans unconstitutional, a landmark case that signaled the beginning of a long period of defiance by white school boards across the South. *Brown* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed segregation, required school systems to integrate, something that did not happen in Johnston County until 1970. Richard B. Harrison School holds significance on the local level for the period 1953 to 1970, the year county schools finally integrated. Through its exceptional importance as an African American educational institution, Richard B. Harrison satisfies Criteria Consideration G for properties less than fifty years of age or that achieved significance within the past fifty years.

Historical Background

According to a history prepared by the Harrison School Alumni Association, a two-room school for African American children was built in 1880 to the rear of the present Harrison School complex. W. S. King and Roberta Bunn taught children up through sixth grade in the building. Sometime in the early twentieth century, a weatherboard frame building known as the pay school, which had served white children in Selma, was moved from north of the railroad tracks on North Waddell Street to the Harrison School site south of the tracks and was used as the school for African Americans. The 1933 Sanborn Map Company map shows the two-story, elongated building labeled "Selma Graded School (Colored)" facing northeast toward Watson Street on a portion of the site where the baseball diamond is currently located. W. S. King served as principal and teachers were his wife, Laura King, Florence Whitley, and Savannah Winston. In 1933, apparently just after the Sanborn map was printed, the school building burned and was replaced in 1935 by a three-story, brick building constructed by the Civil Works Administration and the Emergency Relief Administration of North Carolina. The building containing,

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among other rooms, an auditorium, library, and twenty classrooms, addressed West Noble Street and stood just northwest of the former weatherboard school that burned in 1933. With the completion of the new building, African American schools, both elementary and high school, in the northern portion of the county were consolidated at Harrison School, named for African American actor Richard Berry Harrison (1864-1935) who appeared in the highly-popular Broadway play *The Green Pastures* and who taught drama classes at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro. *Time* magazine featured Harrison on its cover on March 4, 1935, just ten days before his death. J. W. McLean began serving as principal of Harrison School in 1928.¹

In the late 1930s, state officials lauded the progress made by Johnston County in regard to its African American schools. In a study of the state's white and African American schools published in 1937 by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, project director W. F. Credle singled out the county for its program of consolidation of elementary and high schools. He credited the county's school transportation system—Johnston County employed more buses for white and African American students than any other county in the mid-1930s—and “the splendid buildings furnished by the county” in creating good schools for African Americans. He concluded “it is hoped that all counties in North Carolina, with large colored populations, can follow the lead of Johnston.”²

Martin Luther (M. L.) Wilson became principal of the Harrison School in 1943 and would serve in that capacity until 1969.³ His wife, Mildred Wilson, taught at Harrison School for twenty-four years beginning in 1944 and retiring in 1972.⁴

By the end of World War II, the county's schools were becoming overcrowded and many of the buildings had deteriorated. At a joint meeting of the Johnston County Board of Commissioners and the Johnston County School Board on December 27, 1946, it was reported that all of the county's sixty-one school buildings, including instructional buildings, teacherages, principal's and janitor's homes, and maintenance buildings had, because of the war, received no repairs or improvements since 1940, except to patch leaky roofs and to repair heating and cooling equipment. At the meeting, recommendations for capital improvements from W. F. Credle, who had conducted a survey of the county's school buildings following the war, were detailed and listed Selma Colored School, as Harrison School was identified in

¹ “A Brief History of Richard B. Harrison School,” in the Harrison School Alumni history room, Selma, N. C.; Steven Otfinoski, *African Americans in the Performing Arts* (New York: Facts on File, 2003), 93-94; *Time* Magazine website, www.time.com/covers, accessed March 3, 2012.

² North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, *Study of Local School Units in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1937), 86, 188.

³ “Harrison Principal Wilson to Retire,” *The Smithfield Herald*, May 15, 1970.

⁴ “Mildred Wilson, 66, Retired School Teacher (obituary),” *The Smithfield Herald*, June 19, 1979.

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the board minutes, as the most in need of attention. Credle recommended that ten rooms be added to the 1935 school building in order to ease overcrowding.⁵

Not only were state officials urging expansion of the school, local officials appealed to the county board of education to add classroom space at Harrison School. At its April 18, 1947, meeting, the board reported receiving a letter from Harrison principal M. L. Wilson, “stating the inadequacy of the present building at Selma and a request that [an] addition be made to their present building at the earliest possible moment.”⁶ At its next meeting held on May 26, the board reported that it had “already begun with heavy repairs and will secure plans and be ready to let contracts for additions to the Selma Colored School.”⁷ At its July 10, 1947, meeting, “it was ordered by the board that plans be made at the earliest possible moment for the additions proposed as Selma Negro School...and further that Mr. W. W. Hook and Associates, of Charlotte, be retained as architects for [this] project.”⁸ Hook, son of noted architect C. C. Hook, practiced with his father until the elder Hook’s untimely death in 1938. W. W. Hook continued the firm until his own death in 1963.⁹

From the fall of 1947 into the late winter of the following year, plans for the new addition at Harrison School went forward. At its September 10, 1947, meeting, the board instructed Hook to proceed with plans according to his preliminary sketches for a lunchroom space in the proposed classroom building. At the January 9, 1948, meeting, the board instructed the architect to proceed to advertise for bids to construct the addition. The following month, the school board awarded the contract to construct the addition to Rogers Construction.¹⁰ The addition to the 1935 building containing ten classrooms and a cafeteria was completed in 1948.¹¹

In 1949, a total of fifty million dollars in legislative appropriations and voter-approved bonds was made available for school construction leading to the building of hundreds of classroom buildings and support structures on campuses across North Carolina.¹²

⁵ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, December 27, 1946, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁶ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, April 18, 1947, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁷ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, May 26, 1947, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁸ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, July 10, 1947, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁹ Michelle Ann Michael, “Charles Christian Hook (1870-1938)” on website, North Carolina Builders and Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000211>, North Carolina State University, accessed March 3, 2012.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, September 10, 1947, State Archives, Raleigh; Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, January 9, 1948, State Archives, Raleigh; Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, February 20, 1948, State Archives, Raleigh.

¹¹ “Selma is First Negro School in Johnston to get Lunchroom,” *The Smithfield Herald*, January 8, 1952.

¹² Marvin R. A. Johnson and Boyce M. Johnson, “School Building in North Carolina,” *Southern Architect*, October 1954, 11.

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As the physical plant at Harrison School expanded, its enrollment grew. At its August 11, 1950, meeting, the school board ordered students from the Kenly Negro School to transfer to Harrison School because the Kenly building was “not safe for children to be in during strong winds.” The board further declared “with the completion of the new wing of the Selma building, there will be ample room to take care of these pupils.”¹³ For the 1950-1951 school year, principal Wilson reported thirty-three graduates and a total of 236 students enrolled.¹⁴

In 1950 a committee of the school board assessed the status and conditions of African American schools in the county. At this time, elementary schools in Johnston County other than the one at Harrison School included Clayton, Four Oaks, Princeton, Short Journey, and Smithfield. High schools were located in Clayton, Smithfield, and at Harrison School. As a result of its assessment of the county’s African American schools, the committee noted a lack of gymnasiums at county schools and recommended that during the next building program, these be built on campuses. The committee also “strongly urged that additions to present school plants now contemplated but not under construction be designed as one-story structures.”¹⁵

In the early 1950s, Harrison School offered a variety of classes for its high school students. The principal’s report for the 1950-1951 school year included a list of courses taught. Students were offered English, general math, algebra, geometry, citizenship, world and American history, economics, sociology, general science, biology, chemistry, health, home economics and physical education, although the campus did not include a gymnasium. Students could also participate in the school newspaper and student government.¹⁶ The report for 1951-1952 noted that in addition to classes offered the previous year, instruction in business, typing, bookkeeping, shorthand, and French I and II were available.¹⁷ By the 1952-1953 school year, students could enroll in driver education.¹⁸

¹³ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, August 11, 1950, State Archives, Raleigh.

¹⁴ High School Principal’s Annual Report, Richard B. Harrison School, 1950-1951, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principal’s Annual Reports, 1950-1955, Hertford-Johnston. State Archives, Raleigh.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, August 11, 1950, State Archives, Raleigh.

¹⁶ High School Principal’s Annual Report, Richard B. Harrison School, 1950-1951, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principal’s Annual Reports, 1950-1955, Hertford-Johnston. State Archives, Raleigh.

¹⁷ High School Principal’s Annual Report, Richard B. Harrison School, 1951-1952, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principal’s Annual Reports, 1950-1955, Hertford-Johnston. State Archives, Raleigh.

¹⁸ High School Principal’s Annual Report, Richard B. Harrison School, 1952-1953, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principal’s Annual Reports, 1950-1955, Hertford-Johnston. State Archives, Raleigh.

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In 1953, the one-story, agricultural building and bricklaying shop building was constructed southwest of the 1935 building. For the 1952-1953 school year, principal Wilson reported twenty-seven graduates and 233 students enrolled.¹⁹

At its January 6, 1954, meeting, the board received a report by Marvin R. A. Johnson of the Division of School Planning of the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction who had visited every school in the county in November 1953 in order to assess their conditions. For Harrison School, the report recommended a physical education building, two or three additional classrooms, and central heat for the agricultural building. Because the board had passed a resolution to issue bonds for school construction in August 1953, a strategy for the new buildings proceeded.²⁰ At a special meeting on January 12, 1954, the board laid out a plan for a two-phased construction campaign across the county. The board gave priority to the Harrison School project, placing it in the first phase of construction. They directed architect W. W. Hook and his associate B. Atwood Skinner to proceed with plans for three classrooms and a physical education building at the Harrison School. The estimated cost was \$100,000 using state money and county bond money.²¹

Plans for the new building at the Harrison School were approved at the May 11, 1954, board meeting, but there was no progress toward construction over the summer and into the fall.²² At the board's October 4, 1954, meeting, the county school superintendent, E. S. Simpson reported that the Harrison School project was a high priority and would begin soon.²³ Finally, at its December 16, 1954, meeting, the board chose the contractors for the Harrison School: Rogers Construction Company of Smithfield.²⁴ The gym, along with its three-classroom wing, was completed by the second half of 1955.²⁵

In his annual report to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction dated June 6, 1955, principal Wilson reported that Harrison School continued to operate as a union school, serving grades one through twelve, with 274 students enrolled. He also reported thirty-eight graduates. Other African American

¹⁹ High School Principal's Annual Report, Richard B. Harrison School, 1952-1953, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principal's Annual Reports, 1950-1955. State Archives, Raleigh.

²⁰ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, January 6, 1954, State Archives, Raleigh;

²¹ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, January 12, 1954, State Archives, Raleigh.

²² Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, May 11, 1954, State Archives, Raleigh.

²³ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, October 4, 1954, State Archives, Raleigh.

²⁴ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, December 16, 1954, State Archives, Raleigh.

²⁵ High School Principal's Annual Report, Richard B. Harrison School, 1954-1955, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principal's Annual Reports, 1950-1955. State Archives, Raleigh.

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schools in Johnston County at this time were W. M. Cooper High School in Clayton and Johnston County Training School in Smithfield.²⁶

In May 1956, Marvin R. A. Johnson, who was now a consultant from the North Carolina State Board of Education, provided an assessment of the buildings at Harrison School. His findings were presented at the May 7, 1956, meeting of the county school board. In his report, which was in the form of a letter, he stated that the facilities were in good condition, but

since this school is already quite large, it may be desirable not to build anymore here at all, but to provide for more classrooms elsewhere. If it is decided by the county board that such a procedure would not be feasible, it might be possible to build a minimum number of new rooms at the present site to take care of immediate needs. It is not recommended that a three-story addition be considered, but it is suggested that a one-story building or at most, two stories, be used. Since new construction consumes some of the limited playground, it may be well for the school board to study the needs for playground space, and to acquire more if possible.

Following Johnson's report, the superintendent recommended that a five- or six-room addition be made at Harrison School and that the architect study the plan and layout as the feasibility of this addition.²⁷

In his annual report for the school year ending in the summer of 1956, principal Wilson reported forty-six graduates and 305 students enrolled. He also reported that the school grounds were graded and "beautified" and that [side]walks were laid.²⁸

At the July 2, 1956, county school board meeting a letter from the Selma School Committee was presented concerning a proposed six-room classroom building at Harrison School. The letter, signed by C. C. DuBose, a member of the committee, recommended that the building be eight rooms, not six. DuBose stated that during the previous ten years the school grew from a twenty-five-teacher school to one with forty-five teachers. The letter affirmed that if the trend continued, the six-room addition would prove inadequate the first year it is put into service. The committee also recommended an addition to

²⁶ High School Principal's Annual Report, Richard B. Harrison School, 1954-1955, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principal's Annual Reports, 1950-1955. State Archives, Raleigh.

²⁷ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, May 7, 1956, State Archives, Raleigh.

²⁸ High School Principal's Annual Report, Richard B. Harrison School, 1955-1956, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principal's Annual Reports, 1956-1960. State Archives, Raleigh.

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accommodate band instruction. The school's band was well equipped, but lacked adequate instruction space, according to DuBose. The board voted to take no action on the matter because of a lack of funds and because the plans for the new building were already completed.²⁹

At the August 7, 1956, board meeting, architect W. W. Hook and his associate B. Atwood Skinner, architects for the new six-classroom elementary building, presented bids for the Harrison School project. East Carolina Construction was general contractor, J. J. Barnes of Angier was chosen for the electric, heating, and plumbing work.³⁰ In his annual report for the 1956-1957 school year, principal Wilson reported that the "completion of elementary school rooms during the year has released needed classrooms for high school use."³¹

At the June 2, 1959, county school board meeting, a request signed by the five members of the Selma School Committee was read. They asked that a program of "Trades and Industries" be added to the curriculum of Harrison School for the 1959-1960 school year. The board voted to look into the matter. At that same meeting, one of the projects recommended by the school board was a new shop for industrial arts and building and trades.³²

Principal Wilson's annual report to the State Department of Public Instruction for the school year that began September 6, 1962 and ended June 4, 1963 provides a glimpse of the typical day for students at Richard B. Harrison School. The day ran from 8:30 to 3:25 and included six instructional periods of fifty minutes each. Subjects taught included English, biology, chemistry, physics, and algebra. Other courses of study included band, agriculture, and physical education. Extra curricular activities included choral club, three major sports (football, baseball, and basketball), student council, National Honor Society, school newspaper, New Farmers of America, and New Homemakers of America.³³

During the early 1960s, as the pupil population expanded at Harrison School, the lack of space became a critical issue. On April 1, 1963 principal Wilson appeared before the county school board to report on the urgent building needs at Harrison School. He reported that the library, which was contained in the 1935 building, was inadequate in size and design. It had been built twenty-eight years before, but since

²⁹ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, July 2, 1956, State Archives, Raleigh.

³⁰ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, August 7, 1956, State Archives, Raleigh.

³¹ High School Principal's Annual Report, Richard B. Harrison School, 1956-1957, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principal's Annual Reports, 1956-1960. State Archives, Raleigh.

³² Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, June 2, 1959, State Archives, Raleigh.

³³ High School Preliminary Report, 1962-1963, Richard B. Harrison School, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principals' Annual and Preliminary Reports, Johnston County, 1962-1963. State Archives, Raleigh.

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that time the school population had increased by over one hundred percent. He asked the school board to either expand the library or build a new one. He also requested a “health suite” with a room each for boys and girls and a nurse’s office. At the time, the school used a rollaway bed, which was moved to wherever it was needed. The lack of a school nurse’s office had become critical, according to the principal, “during the recent influenza epidemic when dozens of pupils became ill at school each day.” Finally, principal Wilson asked for a storage room for “audio visual equipment, books, and instructional supplies.”³⁴ The school board took no action on any of these matters.

On August 11, 1964, just four months before a one hundred million dollar bond referendum for school construction was approved, principal Wilson and both white and African American representatives from the Smithfield and Selma schools met with the county school board to discuss building needs at schools in those communities. Wilson reiterated the need for a better library, but reported that “the most urgent need was for the expansion of the vocational education program through the addition of trade and industries, carpentry and bricklaying.” He also reported a need for “three or four more additional classrooms to make better provision for music, health, and other activities.”³⁵ In his principal’s report for 1964-1965, Wilson noted that in regard to the library “such space is present to a limited extent. Correction of this deficiency is imminent.”³⁶

The next day, on August 12, 1964 the “Program of New School Construction and Improvement of Present Facilities Adopted by the Johnston County Board of Education,” was unveiled at the school board meeting. Among the projects listed were Harrison School’s additional classrooms, expansion of library facilities, and a shop for trade and industry, specifically bricklaying.³⁷

At its November 4, 1964, meeting, the school board instructed architect Harry Kirk McGee to prepare preliminary plans for the addition to the agricultural building at Harrison School. McGee presented his plans for a 41 x 46 foot addition to house masonry classes. The architect stated that the addition would be 1,800 square feet and “that the present heating plant and lines are adequate with the use of two unit heaters.” The minutes for this meeting indicate that the State had allotted a masonry teacher who would begin work effective January 1, 1965.³⁸ The board approved the plan and the addition was completed in

³⁴ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, April 1, 1963, State Archives, Raleigh.

³⁵ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, August 11, 1963, State Archives, Raleigh.

³⁶ High School Preliminary Report, 1964-1965, Richard B. Harrison School, Selma, North Carolina, Department of Public Instruction, Division of Instructional Services, Supervision and Curriculum Section, High School Principals’ Annual and Preliminary Reports, Johnston County, 1964-1965. State Archives, Raleigh.

³⁷ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, August 12, 1963, State Archives, Raleigh.

³⁸ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, November 4, 1964, State Archives, Raleigh.

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1965. The classroom building was never built, but the county did provide two temporary classroom buildings in late 1965.

In 1965, Harrison School enrolled 1,194 students in grades one through twelve with forty-four teachers and was the largest African American school in the county. The only other union school for African Americans was Forest Hills School in Four Oaks, which enrolled 446 students with eighteen teachers.³⁹

On January 19, 1966, principal Wilson appeared before the school board to report “several emergency situations” at Harrison School. The most urgent needs, according to Wilson, were for a classroom for the music teacher who at the time was teaching classes in the lobby of the gymnasium and for a classroom for the math teacher “who is now teaching wherever a classroom is available.” The board “unanimously approved that a double mobile classroom purchased from Usry’s Inc. at the price of \$10,300 plus sales tax, to relieve the classroom shortage.”⁴⁰

During the 1967-1968 school year, classes in secretarial office practice, business communication, and business mathematics were added to the curriculum. Within the general curriculum, algebra, geometry, biology, physics, history, sociology, economics, and French were taught. Vocational classes included agriculture, which enrolled sixty-seven students, home economics, which enrolled 129 students, and carpentry and bricklaying, which enrolled fifty-six students. Male students could play football, basketball, and baseball; there were no sports, except cheerleading, for girls. Other extracurricular activities included chorus, student government, honor society, Beta club, newspaper, and dramatics.⁴¹

The last high school graduation at Harrison School occurred in 1969. During the 1969-1970 school year, Harrison School enrolled grades one through nine. In 1970, the year the county’s schools were desegregated. Harrison School served grades seven through nine. In 1974, the ninth grade was moved to Smithfield-Selma Senior High School. Harrison School closed in 1987.⁴²

Today, the classroom wing of the gymnasium houses a Head Start preschool, while the gym is used for local sporting events. The Richard B. Harrison High School Alumni Association owns the agriculture

³⁹ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, April 13, 1965, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, January 19, 1966, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁴¹ High School Principal’s Annual Report, 1967-1968, Richard B. Harrison School, Department of Public Instruction, Program Services Area, High School Principals’ Annual and Preliminary Reports, Johnston County, 1967-1968. State Archives, Raleigh.

⁴² “Alumni Hoping to Preserve More Than Fond Memories of Selma’s Harrison School,” *The Smithfield Herald*, July 3, 1987.

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building and bricklaying shop and uses it for alumni events and to house memorabilia associated with the school. The Elementary School Classroom building remains vacant, but in sound condition.

Education/Black Ethnic Heritage/Social History Context

Public elementary education became available to African Americans in the South during the early twentieth century largely because of campaigns by African Americans and Northern philanthropists, most famously the Rosenwald Fund, started in 1917 by Julius Rosenwald, president and later chairman of Sears, Roebuck and Company. By the time the fund ceased operations in 1932, it had built 813 schools in North Carolina, including ten it had helped finance in Johnston County; none was located in Selma.⁴³

Despite this movement toward universal education for African American school children, during the late 1920s all school systems in the state maintained separate educational facilities for white and African American students. Throughout the state, campaigns for equalization—in materials and facilities—were waged by parents, clergy, and students.⁴⁴ In the early 1940s, spending for the education of African Americans increased statewide, somewhat, but it did not approach the per capita funding for white students, so that “separate but equal” remained inherently unequal.⁴⁵

In 1940, Johnston County was home to a large number of African American school-age children. The census for that year indicates that twenty-two percent of the county’s five to nineteen year olds were African American.⁴⁶

School construction and improvement received a big boost in 1949 with the first issuance of bonds for the construction and repair of schools by the North Carolina General Assembly. Each county’s grant was based on student population in 1947-1948 and funds were deducted for administration and expenses. In

⁴³ Thomas W. Hanchett, “Saving the South’s Rosenwald Schools,” www.rosenwaldplans.org. Accessed February 24, 2012.

⁴⁴ Sarah Caroline Thuesen, “Classes of Citizenship: The Culture and Politics of Black Public Education in North Carolina, 1919-1960” (Ph.D dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2003), 248.

⁴⁵ Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1992), 166.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940. Population Volume II: Characteristics of the Population, Part 5: New York-Oregon* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), Page 312,

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total, fifty million dollars was awarded to county and city school systems statewide.⁴⁷ The state legislature would allocate more money for school construction in 1953 and in 1961.⁴⁸

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, dismantled the legal basis for racial segregation in schools and other public facilities. However, many Southern school districts, including Johnston County, adopted a state court-approved approach of “freedom of choice” as a way to avoid desegregation. Freedom of choice did not require integration, but instead turned control of enrollment and the student assignment over to local school boards. Even after a 1955 United States Supreme Court order that required school systems to desegregate in a timely manner so as to comply with *Brown*, states, including North Carolina, pushed for voluntary desegregation. In 1956, North Carolina’s Pearsall Plan, as it came to be known, was instituted statewide as a way for parents of school children to legally ignore the Supreme Court orders of 1954 and 1955. This amendment to the state constitution allowed parents to withdraw their children from schools where children of another race attended and provided them with state grants to pay tuitions at private schools.⁴⁹ The Johnston County Board of Education approved the Pearsall Plan at its August 23, 1956, board meeting.⁵⁰

As a result of the delay tactics employed by state and local governments, only 2.3 percent of African American students were attending majority white schools in the South ten years after *Brown*.⁵¹ In May 1964, the *New York Times* reported that in North Carolina, the state with the highest population of African American students in its public education system—about 30 percent of the total school population—only .537 percent attended desegregated schools.⁵²

When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 became law, it tied compliance with *Brown* to local governments’ access to federal money, including money for local school funding. On March 4, 1965, the Johnston County School Board passed its “Plan of Compliance”, a blueprint for meeting the stipulations set forth in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A statement by Dr. Ralph Moody, Deputy Attorney General of North Carolina, was read at the meeting as a warning to counties that they must comply with the Act. In it, he

⁴⁷ Survey Committee Organization, etc. 1949-1950, in the Records of the North Carolina Board of Education, Teacher Allotment and General Control Division, General Correspondence, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁴⁸ “Plans Ordered by Hodges to Speed Up N.C. School Building Program,” *The Durham Sun*, August 15, 1955; “Editorial by Governor Terry Sanford for Southern Architect,” August 30, 1962, *Southern Architect*, September, 1962, 18.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina*, 170.

⁵⁰ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, August 23, 1956, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁵¹ McDonough, Molly, “Making Brown Real: A North Carolina Family Fought Threats and Intimidation After Suing to Integrate Schools,” *American Bar Association Journal*, April 1, 2004. www.abjournal.com/magazine/making_brown_real/.

⁵² Katherine Paige Ohale, “The Strange Career of Freedom of Choice: the Story of the Johnston County, North Carolina Schools” (Honors Essay, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007), 32-33.

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states that the Attorney General of the United States under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 “can institute legal proceedings to force the desegregation of any school or school system and this is true whether the school unit receives Federal funds or not.” He continued that “neither the state board of education nor the county and city boards of education asked for this situation, but they must live with it and they will have to work with such clay as is handed to them. No form of token compliance, clever schemes, chicanery or subtle or sophisticated plans of avoidance—no matter how crafty or cunning—will in the end prevail. No devices or plans whether ‘ingenious or ingenuous’ will constitute any legal defense to the mandate of this Federal statute.”⁵³

The Plan of Compliance that was to be implemented for the 1965-1966 school year was one of many freedom of choice plans enacted in counties across the state. In accordance with federal mandate, Johnston County submitted the plan to the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in Washington, D.C. Under Johnston County’s plan, after April 15, 1965, students whose parents had indicated no preference for a particular school through the use of the school board-created “pupil assignment preference form,” would be assigned to the school that “the board of education believed to be in the best interest and welfare of the child, with consideration given to school facilities and teacher allotments.” The board assured that they would assign students without regard to race, color, or national origin, but reserved the right to perform this duty in a manner preventing overcrowding or facilities and overloading of teachers.⁵⁴

In a letter dated May 20, 1965, Francis Keppel, U. S. Commissioner of Education for HEW, cited the plan as lacking “the provisions which would be necessary to find it adequate” to comply with Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁵⁵ One of HEW’s main complaints was that freedom of choice plans like the one in Johnston County placed the burden to integrate on African American students, who could face intimidation and violence if they attempted to attend a white school.⁵⁶

After HEW rejected its first freedom of choice plan, the county school board devised a new plan and presented it at its June 23, 1965, meeting. Under it, if the first choice could not be honored, the child would attend the school closest to his or her home. The board also made provision for advertising through legal notices and principal and teachers would distribute the choice forms. The new plan was sent to HEW for its review.⁵⁷

⁵³ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, March 4, 1965, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, March 4, 1965, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁵⁵ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, May 15, 1965, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁵⁶ Ohale, 43.

⁵⁷ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, June 23, 1965, State Archives, Raleigh.

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The *Smithfield Herald* reported the integration of the Johnston County schools on September 1, 1965. Despite the freedom of choice plan and the local press's announcement, Johnston County schools remained almost completely segregated by race. For the 1966-1967 school year, only 230 African American students requested transfer to white schools during the application period that ran from April 1 to April 30.⁵⁸

At the June 7, 1967, school board meeting, a letter from Harold B. Williams, Acting Assistant Commissioner for the Equal Education Opportunities Program with HEW was presented. Addressed to E. S. Simpson, Superintendent of the Johnston County Schools, the letter states that "your [school] system is making relatively little progress in desegregating its schools." Williams went on to say that the county's plan for desegregating its schools "cannot be accepted as an adequate basis for the continued eligibility of your school system for participation in federally assisted programs." As a result of this rebuke, the school board extended the period during which parents could choose schools for their children.⁵⁹

The extension of the choice period and the response it garnered was not adequate to satisfy the federal government and in August of 1967, the superintendent received a letter from the Equal Educational Opportunities Program of HEW informing him that the department was recommending a hearing on the issue before a federal examiner.⁶⁰ At its meeting on November 15, 1967, Johnston County school board member Dr. Donnie Jones Jr., in reaction to the HEW's threat of a hearing, stated that "the county does not have a dual school system" and he assured his fellow members that the board would prevail. The minutes for the meeting recorded that he went on to say that the county's plan "is the American way and that he was ready to fight the matter all the way to the Supreme Court."⁶¹

The school board traveled to Washington, D. C. on December 13, 1967, for the federal hearing, which occurred on December 14 and 15. Perhaps the most compelling testimony came from Mrs. Charles Cole, who lived near Bentonville. She testified that she and her family had been intimidated after they attempted to send their children to the white school in Four Oaks. She stated that a cross had been burned in her driveway and that three white men visited her home to discourage her from integrating the school. She added that on one or more occasions her children had been labeled with a racial slur by white pupils. Meanwhile at the hearing, board members and Superintendent Simpson defended the choice plan implemented by the county stating that the board had received no complaints relative to the

⁵⁸ Ohale, 38-39.

⁵⁹ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, June 7, 1967, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, September 5, 1967, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁶¹ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, November 15, 1967, State Archives, Raleigh.

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plan and that all requests for assignment had been approved. The hearing examiner promised a ruling no later than February 20, 1968.⁶²

The outcome from the HEW hearing was presented at the March 18, 1968, school board meeting. The school board attorney revealed that the board had lost the hearing and that the HEW ruled that Johnston County was “maintaining and operating a school system which subjects persons to discrimination on the ground of race or color under programs or activities receiving or potentially receiving classes of Federal financial assistance administered by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.” The HEW, as a result, notified the county that it terminate federal financial assistance.⁶³

In March 1968, the county school board came up with a plan to comply with the Civil Rights Act. The plan included closing grades ten through twelve for the 1969-1970 school year in schools where the student population was predominantly African American. In the 1970-1971 school year, the board would eliminate any remaining elementary schools that had a predominantly African American population. Finally, the board agreed to open three or more junior high schools to serve all students in the attendance area. The board amended the compliance plan to close eighth and ninth grade schools with predominantly African American populations and to assign teachers across racial lines.⁶⁴

On September 8, 1970, Johnston County schools were finally desegregated. Superintendent Simpson selected African American principals to head formerly all-white schools including Q. K. Wall, who helped open the new Smithfield-Selma Senior High School as an assistant principal in 1969. He went on to serve as Harrison School’s principal from 1970 to 1975. Smithfield-Selma Senior High School merged six high schools, including Harrison School, but in doing so attempted to incorporate the former schools’ cultures. The new school took one color from each of the six schools when deciding its school colors.⁶⁵

Architecture Context

The historic buildings at the Harrison School campus represent the forward-thinking modernist movement of the 1950s and early 1960s as applied to public school campuses in North Carolina. The buildings at Harrison School represent not only a dramatic shift in style and form for school building that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, but also a boom period in school construction. This escalation in building occurred statewide beginning in the early 1950s as a result of the North Carolina General

⁶² Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, January 3, 1968, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁶³ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, March 18, 1968, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁶⁴ Minutes of the Johnston County School Board, April 1, 1968, State Archives, Raleigh.

⁶⁵ Ohale, 56.

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Assembly's creation of the School Plant Construction, Improvement, and Repair Fund in 1949. Under this bill, the state legislature authorized the issuance of the first state bonds to be used for school construction, an action that led to a significant wave of school construction during the decade that followed. This legislation sought to settle the debt owed to the counties by the state for school construction and improvement, because it was "a statutory duty of the State to provide funds for the operation of the public schools...upon a uniform basis."⁶⁶ On June 24, 1949, the State Board of Education established rules under which the fund operated. Among other regulations, the board stipulated that money allocated to counties could not be used to build additions to structurally unsafe schools. The board also directed that "there shall be a just and equitable expenditure of funds within the counties as between the races."⁶⁷ As a result of the 1949 bonds, counties across North Carolina built a new generation of modern schools for African Americans, complete with the amenities that white schools already had, such as indoor plumbing and rooms dedicated to specialized use.

Following the initial bond approval in 1949, the State Board of Education took a proactive role in school construction and design. In October of that year, it announced a joint effort with the North Carolina State College School of Design to hold a workshop at the campus for architects focused on the upcoming statewide school-building campaign. The board announced that Ernest J. Kump Jr., a leading modernist architect from California, and Alonzo Harriman, a school architect from New England, would participate in the three-day workshop.⁶⁸ The State Board of Education and School of Design sponsored a second workshop, called the Institute of School Planning, in December 1950, with William W. Caudill, an architect from Texas Agricultural & Mechanical College, and Harriman serving as speakers. Douglas Haskell, editor of *Architectural Forum*, and John Lyon Reid, a prominent school architect from California, also appeared on the program.⁶⁹ At these workshops, architects were encouraged to use glass for improved natural lighting, reduce ornamentation, and integrate the landscape, site, and building, principles that formed the foundation of modernism.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *State of North Carolina Session Laws and Resolutions, 1949*, Chapter 1020, pages 1155-1159.

⁶⁷ "School Plant Construction Rules and Regulations," in the Records of North Carolina Board of Education, Teacher Allotment and General Control Division, General Correspondence, 1949-1955, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁶⁸ "School Jobs Get Approval," newspaper article dated October 7, 1949, in the Records of the North Carolina Board of Education, Teacher Allotment and General Control Division, Miscellaneous Records, 1949-1950, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁶⁹ Letter from John L. Cameron, Director of the Division of Schoolhouse Planning and Surveys, to Mr. J. E. Hunter, Department of Public Instruction, dated November 22, 1950, in the Records of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Division of Schoolhouse Planning, Correspondence of the Director, 1949-1950, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁷⁰ David Black, "Early Modern Architecture in Raleigh Associated with the Faculty of the North Carolina State University School of Design, Raleigh North Carolina," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1994, E-16.

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The move toward modernism in school design was a national trend, helped along in North Carolina by the students and faculty from the School of Design at North Carolina State College, which was established in 1948 with Henry Kamphoefner as its first dean. Not only did the School of Design participate in the Institute of School Planning workshops held in 1949 and 1950, but in 1949, Edward “Terry” Waugh, of the School of Design, became supervisor of the state’s Office of School House Planning, thereby reinforcing the architecture school’s connection to educational building design in North Carolina.⁷¹

The buildings at Harrison School exemplify the modernist idiom as applied to school buildings, a movement that was occurring across the state and which resulted in the construction of scores of similar buildings in the mid-twentieth century. The one-story, brick, low-slung, low-pitched-gable-roofed buildings followed the post-World War II trend of integrating the building into the setting’s flat terrain, while their large windows encouraged natural light to fill the classrooms, something that many educators felt encouraged the learning process. In North Carolina, gymnasium design received less attention than classroom buildings so that most frequently gyms built in the 1950s emulated the overall massing of academic buildings and were simple rectangular brick buildings with flat or gable roofs. Less frequently, simple barrel-roofed gyms were built on local school campuses in the state.

Walter Williams Hook and Benjamin Atwood Skinner (1923-1996) served as architects for the elementary school classroom building and the gymnasium and classroom building. W. W. Hook, born in 1902, was the son of prominent Charlotte architect Charles C. Hook. He studied architecture at Columbia University from 1921 to 1923. He joined his father’s firm in 1924 and upon the elder Hook’s death in 1938, W. W. Hook took over the firm, becoming well known for designing hospitals and public buildings across North Carolina. Hook died in 1963.⁷² B. Atwood Skinner, who served as the supervising architect for Richard B. Harrison School, was born in Rock Hill, South Carolina and grew up in Charlotte. After serving in World War II, he graduated from North Carolina State College and took a job in W. W. Hook’s office in Charlotte. During his time with Hook, he lived in Wilson so that he could oversee the many projects the firm had in eastern North Carolina. When it came time to set up his own practice in the late 1950s, he chose Wilson for the location because of his fondness for the town.⁷³

⁷¹ Black, E-16.

⁷² “Walter W. Hook,” *Southern Architect*, January 1958, 24; Michelle Ann Michael, “Charles Christian Hook,” *North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, Copyright & Digital Scholarship Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, www.ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu, accessed August 15, 2012.

⁷³ Benjamin Atwood Skinner III (son of Benjamin Atwood Skinner), Interview with the Author, August 16, 2012; 1940 United States Federal Census, www.ancestry.com, accessed August 15, 2012.

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Among his commissions was the 1961 Patelos House and his own house, both modernist dwellings in Wilson.⁷⁴ The firm he established still operates in Wilson as Skinner, Lamm, Hood & Highsmith, PA.⁷⁵

During the period when Harrison School was constructed, architects took great interest in school design, in part because it allowed them to showcase modernism. In an article in the October 1954 edition of *Southern Architect*, Marvin R. A. Johnson, AIA and educator Boyce M. Morrison commented that, "Unless architects accept the opportunity which they now have to make each school a school designed and suited to one particular site and location and to specific purposes, he misses an opportunity for developing a deeper and more sincere appreciation of architecture by the lay public."⁷⁶ In his 1954 work, *Toward Better School Design*, architect William W. Caudill noted that during this period, "the battle between 'contemporary' and 'traditional' was won. The public not only began to accept 'modern,' but to demand it. So the architects had no choice but to try to produce logical schools."⁷⁷ Caudill declared that the light-filled, modern school created the most positive, comfortable learning environment for the pupil.⁷⁸ Johnson, Morrison, Caudill, and architectural critics of the period urged architects to stay apprised of improvements in materials, design, and building methods in school design and to create architecture that could be appreciated by the general public.

Richard B. Harrison School is the only historic white or African American school complex in the town of Selma. Schools elsewhere in the county include mid-twentieth-century buildings. Clayton High School's earliest surviving classroom building dates to 1955, as does the gymnasium and an industrial arts building. The 1955 classroom building received an addition in 1963, the same year another classroom and a lunchroom were added. Other buildings were added in 1966, including a classroom building, and in 1972, the year a masonry shop was completed. More additions were made in 1977 and in 1998, a two-story, U-shaped wing and a media center were built. A new gym was built in 2003 and a thirty-classroom was added to the sprawling campus in 2006. Although the Clayton High School includes mid-twentieth-century buildings, they have been obscured with large additions.

The Johnston County Training School, a high school for African Americans on Massey Street in Smithfield, includes a long, low, rectangular brick classroom building constructed in 1963. Like the buildings at Harrison School, it displays banks of metal-sash windows on its long side elevations.

⁷⁴ "Miscellaneous Wilson," Triangle Modernist Houses, www.trianglemodernisthouses.com, accessed August 15, 2012.

⁷⁵ "Skinner, Lamm, Hood, & Highsmith, PA," Survey of North Carolina Architecture Firms, North Carolina State Libraries, www.lib.ncsu/specialcollections, accessed August 15, 2012.

⁷⁶ Marvin R. A. Johnson and Boyce M. Morrison, "School Building in North Carolina," *Southern Architect*, October 1954, 14.

⁷⁷ William W. Caudill, *Toward Better School Design* (New York: F. W. Dodge Corporation, 1954), 16.

⁷⁸ Caudill, 13.

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Modernism in Selma is seen exclusively in institutional or commercial buildings and two examples stand in the downtown. The 1963 United States Post Office at 308 North Raiford Street is a one-story brick building with a flat roof. Full-height concrete posts support a sheltering full-width structure that forms a brise soleil at the center of the façade. Plate glass windows and the fully-glazed door on the façade are metal framed. The Branch Banking and Trust Company at 212 North Raiford Street dates to around 1968 and is a low-slung, one-story, modernist brick building with a flat roof and a wide masonry paneled cornice that overhangs the remainder of the building.

Richard B. Harrison School, composed of three buildings from the mid twentieth-century, is the most complete educational complex that portrays the pre-integration period in Johnston County. The school, which remains the focus of much pride among its past administrators, teachers, parents, and students, reflects the struggle of segregated African American schools as their supporters rallied the local school board for adequate buildings to accommodate swelling student populations during the post-World War II baby boom. The school also reflects the adaptation of modernism to institutional buildings during a period when the idiom was gaining attention statewide because of the School of Design at North Carolina State College in Raleigh. The architecture school and its graduates influenced the appearance, materials, and siting of school buildings through their close association with the State Board of Education. Across North Carolina hundreds of school buildings from the 1950s and 1960s, like those at Harrison School, show the influence of the School of Design and the modernism it espoused during this period.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property contains 6.84 acres, a portion of the parcel historically associated with Richard B. Harrison School. The nominated acreage is composed of three parcels: a 0.5-acre lot (PIN No. 261517-00-7738) containing the elementary classroom building; a 0.5-acre lot (PIN No. 261517-00-6830) containing the agriculture building and its bricklaying shop addition; and a 5.84-acre lot (PIN 261517-00-8673) containing the gymnasium and its classroom wing as well as the pump house and athletic field to the south of the buildings.

Boundary Justification

The three nominated parcels include the three remaining historic buildings, the pump house, the tennis court, and the baseball field historically associated with Richard B. Harrison School. An adjoining parcel that contained the 1935/1948 school building is excluded as the building no longer stands and the property has had temporary buildings constructed on it.