

PHILLIS WHEATLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
2300 Dumaine Street
New Orleans
Orleans Parish
Louisiana

HABS LA-1453
HABS LA-1453

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PHILLIS WHEATLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

HABS No. LA-1453

Location: 2300 Dumaine Street, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana

Present Owner: Orleans Parish School Board

Present Use: Vacated elementary school

Significance: The Phillis Wheatley Elementary School located at 2300 Dumaine Street, New Orleans, exemplified International Style educational buildings in the state of Louisiana. Built between 1953 and 1955, the campus consisted of a cantilevered classroom building and a one-story cafeteria. Architect Charles Colbert's innovative design provided access to natural light and ventilation as well as providing a sheltered playspace below. In addition, the school was part of the 1950s building campaign undertaken by the Orleans Parish School Board to modernize area schools.

Phillis Wheatley Elementary School's classroom building hovered above the surrounding buildings of the historic Faubourg Tremé. The cantilevered design and window walls of the classroom building allowed natural light to flood the building's twenty-two classrooms. Single-loaded corridors also permitted natural ventilation on the breezeways. Steel Pratt trusses atop concrete piers comprised the support system of the classroom building. The design received a 1955 *Progressive Architecture* award and was exhibited by the US State Department in both Berlin and Moscow during the Cold War.

The Orleans Parish School Board's 1950s building campaign worked to alleviate overcrowding in densely populated neighborhoods, provide schools in growing areas, and update the existing schools. By 1960, the School Board had built thirty modern schools and renovated eighteen. The schools of this generation differ sharply in design and appearance from earlier generations. The new designs featured International Style elements and materials such as glass and steel. Architects also favored breezeways rather than double loaded corridors to increase natural light and ventilation.

Project Information: Following Hurricane Katrina, the Orleans Parish School Board and the Recovery School District, an agency within the State of Louisiana Department of Education, requested funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to demolish the Phillis Wheatley Elementary School in New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana. The Federal Emergency

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Management Agency determined that demolition would constitute an adverse effect to the school, a property determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Federal Emergency Management Agency agreed to mitigate these effects by documenting the campus in accordance with the *Memorandum of Agreement Among the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer, the Louisiana Governor's Office on Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Louisiana Department of Education through its Recovery School District Regarding Phillis Wheatley Elementary School executed February 18, 2011.*

Researched and written by the staff of R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc. on behalf of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Construction

The Orleans Parish School Board began acquiring lots in the historic New Orleans neighborhood of Faubourg Tremé in 1953 in order to construct an elementary school for the children of the nearby Lafitte Housing Development, a segregation-era government-funded complex for African American. On June 19, 1953, the School Board accepted architect Charles R. Colbert's design for Lafitte Elementary Project No. 11.¹ Later that year, the Board renamed the project in honor of Phillis Wheatley, a colonial-era African American poet.² Keller Construction Company began constructing the school in late 1954 and finished in 1955.³ Phillis Wheatley Elementary School opened its doors to students on January 30, 1956.⁴

2. Original & Subsequent Owners

The Orleans Parish School Board opened the Wheatley School to students in 1956.⁵ The Recovery School District of Louisiana, a state school district within the Louisiana Department of Education, assumed management of the Wheatley School as well as other schools in the city following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Since that time, the Orleans Parish School Board and the Recovery School District have worked together to administer the property. The Orleans Parish School Board owns the school buildings and continues to own the site.⁶

3. Architect

Charles Colbert began working for the Orleans Parish School Board in 1949 and was appointed Supervising Architect for the Board effective March 1, 1951, where he served until 1953.⁷ Colbert replaced Edgar Angelo Christy, a fixture in the New Orleans architectural community and Chief Designer of more than forty Orleans Parish School Board schools.⁸ The

¹ Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), Minutes of the June 19, 1953, OPSB meeting. Book 34, 585. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

² OPSB, Minutes of the September 28, 1953, OPSB meeting. Book 35, 145. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

³ "\$112,500 to Buy Books Approved," *Times-Picayune*, November 9, 1954, 23, accessed May 24, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁴ "Two Additional Schools Opened," *Times-Picayune*, January 31, 1956, 18, accessed May 24, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁵ *Ibid*, 18.

⁶ Recovery School District, "Frequently Asked Questions," accessed May 25, 2011, <http://www.rsdl.net/InfoGlance/FAQs.aspx>.

⁷ "Views on Sundry Topics- 'School Board Economy'," *Times-Picayune*, February 22, 1951, 10, accessed May 24, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁸ FEMA Environmental/Historic Preservation (EHP) Program, *Historic Context Statement for New Orleans' Public Schools*, 9 December 2009, p. 28-29. Context required by the Secondary Programmatic Agreement Regarding

selection marked the Orleans Parish School Board's embrace of modern architecture and a new era of schools in the New Orleans area.

Charles Ralph Colbert was born June 23, 1921, in Dow, Oklahoma.⁹ He graduated from the University of Texas, Houston, with a bachelor's degree in Architecture in 1943 and enlisted in the U.S. Navy the same year. While in the service, Colbert continued his studies at the University of Michigan in the field of naval architecture. He earned a Master's of Architecture from Columbia University in 1947.¹⁰ Following graduation, Colbert took a job in New Orleans as an instructor at Tulane University's School of Architecture.

When he began teaching at Tulane University in 1947, Colbert focused on modern architecture and its applications. Colbert left Tulane to accept a position with the Orleans Parish School Board in 1949. With Colbert's guidance, the Orleans Parish School Board began constructing modern schools and created a comprehensive program for school construction. The program employed numerous New Orleans-area architects who specialized in modern architecture. In all, Orleans Parish School Board built thirty schools constructed between 1950 and 1959.

Colbert abided by the Louis Sullivan adage "form ever follows function," popularly abbreviated to "form follows function." For Colbert, this tenet permeated each of his designs and influenced his teaching style. Salvatore Moschella, a former student and employee of Colbert's, remembered his former mentor as "unbending about what people called Modern Art. He firmly believed that form follows function... [and] that every building should make a statement."¹¹

Colbert wrote that his design processes started by asking the function of the building. "Analytical perception is the first act of design....Necessity dominates the inception of design thought.... Progressive arrangement follows when the right questions have been asked."¹² To Colbert, "Form lies within a thing while shape is only its outward appearance."¹³ This emphasis on shape and design is evident in his body of work. Often, the exterior of his designs included modern structural principles and materials. For example, several of his designs, including the Wheatley School, utilized ribbon windows and cantilevered stories to emphasize the horizontal nature of the structure.

Colbert designed schools for the Orleans Parish School Board both as Supervising Architect and after leaving the position for private practice in April 1953.¹⁴ In addition to his work designing schools, Colbert's private practice also encompassed residential structures, office

Implementation of School Facilities, Master Plan for Orleans Parish, New Orleans, Louisiana, dated August 17, 2009.

⁹ American Institute of Architects (AIA), *The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects*, s.v. "Colbert, Charles R.," 1970, accessed May 31, 2011, <http://www.aia.org/about/history>.

¹⁰ AIA, *The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects*, s.v. "Colbert, Charles R.," 1962, accessed May 31, 2011, <http://www.aia.org/about/history>.

¹¹ Sal Moschella, e-mail message to Kelly Sellers Wittie, May 28, 2011.

¹² Charles Colbert, *Idea: The Shaping Force* (Metairie, Louisiana: Pendaya Publications, Inc., 1987), 17, 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴ "New Orleans Proposes a Pied Piper Answer to the High Cost of City Schools: Junk the Neighborhood School," *Architectural Forum* 98 (April 1953), 135.

buildings, motels, and urban planning.¹⁵ His designs favored steel, concrete, and glass resulting in light structures, free from heavy ornamentation. Even while he worked in private practice, Colbert continued to teach, accepting positions as Dean of the Division of Architecture at A&M College of Texas and the prestigious School of Architecture at Columbia University in the early 1960s.¹⁶ He was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1961. In 2007, the Louisiana chapter of the American Institute of Architects recognized his life's work with a Medal of Honor Award.¹⁷ Colbert died the same year.¹⁸

Work with the Orleans Parish School Board

School architecture interested Colbert as an architect, urban planner, professor, and parent. Speaking in 1959, Colbert outlined his criticisms of earlier eras of school construction and the impact of schools on a child's education:

“Our educational system has developed without full knowledge of the effect of environmental association because of the structures it has begotten... The architect and educator are responsible for providing the schools today with the proper environment- an environment in which each child can develop mentally, emotionally and spiritually to his fullest capacity.... Schools, and especially the classroom, should be a “fun place” where studying may be work, but it will be enjoyable work.”¹⁹

In 1949, the Orleans Parish School Board planned to construct its first school since before American entry into World War II. The project was sorely needed due to overcrowding and the deplorable physical condition of New Orleans schools.²⁰ Orleans Parish School Board architect Edgar A. Christy designed a school similar to the forty he had overseen during his pre-WWII decades of service to the Orleans Parish School Board and the City of New Orleans. Colbert made the front page of the local paper when he critiqued the project as “another granite instrument in the form of a building.”²¹ Colbert went further stating “until the people of New Orleans wake up to the fact that the old style school building with its dreary atmosphere is not adequate for modern education, we will not have modern buildings.”²² Colbert continued later

¹⁵ AIA, *Historical Directory* 1962.

¹⁶ AIA, *Historical Directory* 1962..

¹⁷ Carolyn Hewes Toft, “Board Statement on the Deville Motor Hotel (San Luis Apartments)”, on behalf of the Landmarks Association of St. Louis, Inc., March 18, 2008, accessed July 13, 2011, www.landmarks-stl.org/news/board_statement_on_the_de_ville/.

¹⁸ “Charles Colbert,” *Albuquerque Journal*, February 16, 2007, accessed July 7, 2011, http://obits.abqjournal.com/obits/print_obit/171799.

¹⁹ Charles Colbert, “Today’s Criteria of Design for School Buildings” (paper presented to the American Institute of Steel Construction, Birmingham, 1959) in *18 Talks*, Charles Colbert (1969), 119.

²⁰ Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction, *A Planning & Building Program for New Orleans’ Schools* (1952), 1. Second Annual Report of the Office of Planning & Construction. Charles R. Colbert, Architect/Planner.

²¹ “New Orleans Said Building ‘Monuments Not Schools’,” *Times-Picayune New Orleans States Item*, April 3, 1949, pg. 1, accessed May 24, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

²² *Times-Picayune New Orleans States-Item*, “‘Monuments Not Schools’”, 1.

that month when he offered the design assistance of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects to the Orleans Parish School Board for the new school.

Colbert's harsh words struck a chord with School Board member Jacqueline McCullough and the Orleans Parish School Board accepted the chapter's offer. Colbert left Tulane shortly thereafter to accept a position with the Orleans Parish School Board. In his new position, Colbert oversaw the Orleans Parish public schools and related structures. His responsibilities increased when New Orleans voters authorized a new tax to fund school construction. The Orleans Parish School Board created the Office of Planning & Construction in 1951, appointed Colbert Supervising architect, and formally requested an in-depth study of existing conditions of extant buildings as well as plans for future growth.²³

Colbert designed four schools total for the Orleans Parish School Board. Once in private practice, he worked independently on Wheatley School and Alfred Lawless High School. As Supervising Architect of the Office of Planning & Construction, Colbert collaborated with Sol Rosenthal on the design of Hoffman Elementary and McDonogh No. 36. Rosenthal, a New Orleans native and Supervising Architect of the Housing Authority of New Orleans since 1939, served as consulting architect for school boards of West Feliciana, Jefferson, and Vernon Parishes; as a lecturer at Tulane University; and later designed the building for the criminally insane for the Louisiana State Hospital at Jackson.²⁴ He also designed the Calliope and Lafitte Housing Projects in New Orleans, the latter of which served as home to many of the students who attended Wheatley School.²⁵

The John W. Hoffman Elementary School was Colbert's first work for the Orleans Parish School Board and his first collaboration with Sol Rosenthal. They chose a finger school plan- a series of rectangular buildings connected by breezeways. Completed in 1953, awning windows formed the second story walls, a feature which allowed occupants to enjoy natural ventilation, since air conditioning was not yet available in Orleans Parish School Board schools. Dramatically slanted roofs formed the most prominent architectural element. The sloped roofs diminished the sun's effects on the campus and stopped water from pooling on the roof. This element caused the some school board members to refer to the buildings as "cowsheds."²⁶ Although not a collaboration, Colbert's last design for the Orleans Parish School Board, Alfred Lawless High School (1959), also featured a finger school design.

Other Notable Designs

Charles Colbert's private practice expanded following the design of Wheatley Elementary School and included offices, showrooms, residences, motels, and urban planning efforts such as his 1960 study for the development of Lake Charles, Louisiana.²⁷ In 1959,

²³ *Times-Picayune*, "'School Board Economy'", 10.

²⁴ AIA, *The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects*, s.v. "Rosenthal, Sol," 1956, accessed May 31, 2011, <http://www.aia.org/about/history>.; "Jefferson Sets Schools Survey," *The Times-Picayune*, November 9, 1956, 21, accessed July 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

²⁵ AIA, *Historical Directory*, 1956.; AIA, *Historical Directory* 1962.

²⁶ Colbert, *Idea*, 79.

²⁷ AIA, *Historical Directory* 1962.

Colbert received an American Institute of Architects Honor Award for the design of the Diaz-Simon Pediatric Clinic formerly located at 1523 Antonine Street, New Orleans.²⁸ Colbert chose to elevate the first story so that the waiting room was even with a large oak tree outside to mimic the feeling of a treehouse. He hoped this effect would lessen the terror and trepidation many children experience with pediatrician appointments. The elevated design maximized space in the small lot and allowed a setback from the street.

In 1961, Colbert designed the Henry Simon residence on Octavia Street in New Orleans for a pediatrician and his young family. Glass hallways connect four small buildings that encase all living functions creating a series of exterior private courtyards. The buildings' roofs mimic huts, with a pyramidal shape on wide bases. A brick fence surrounds the house to ensure the residents' privacy. Colbert won an American Institute of Architects Merit Award in 1961 for the design of the house.

In 1966, Colbert designed the Olivetti Building on Canal Street, a showplace for the Olivetti-Underwood Typewriter Company. Adriano Olivetti, Chairman of the company, favored bold, innovative designs for the company's devices as well as their structures.²⁹ Olivetti worked with famed International Style master Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret) on plans for the company's headquarters in the 1930s, although nothing came of the designs.³⁰ Colbert's work in New Orleans served as a showroom for the company's office products. Glass panels lighten the boxy design and allow street traffic a view of the front showroom as well an expansive view of Canal Street. Colbert preferred translucent walls stating, "the protective enclosure and thermal control of buildings sheathed in transparent materials has allowed building occupants almost complete visual access to the world of nature just outside."³¹ Unlike some Colbert designs which lack all ornamentation, dramatic thin piping decorate the exterior.

Associates

Charles Colbert designed Wheatley School and supervised the overall engineering. Mark Lowrey and Salvatore Moschella served as associated architects for the design of Wheatley School. Mark Perrin Lowrey was born in 1923 in Marks, Mississippi. He attended the University of Mississippi³² and the Naval Academy at Annapolis before graduating from Tulane University in 1951 with a degree in Architecture. Lowrey received a Fulbright Scholarship and spent a year studying at the Institute D'Urbanisme in Paris before returning to New Orleans. He worked as Colbert's design associate from 1953 to 1956 and became a partner in Colbert's firm which was rechristened Colbert & Lowrey. Lowrey stayed with the firm after Colbert left to resume teaching. His principal works included Ruppel Elementary School and the Milne Home

²⁸ AIA, "Honor Awards, 1949-1959", 2008, accessed July 14, 2011, http://aiawebdev2.aia.org/about2_template.cfm?pagename=library_honorawards_49_59.

²⁹ "Olivetti: A story of innovation and growth", accessed July 11, 2011, www.olivetti.nu/history.htm.

³⁰ Nicholas Fox Weber, *Le Corbusier: A Life* (New York: Borzoi Book, Random House, 2008), 359, accessed July 11, 2011, www.books.google.com.

³¹ Colbert, *Idea*, 97.

³² The University of Mississippi is more popularly known as Ole Miss.

for Girls, both in New Orleans.³³ Lowrey became a public figure while serving as President of the Vieux Carré Property Owners Association during the Riverfront Expressway controversy of the late 1960s.

Colbert taught Salvatore Moschella at Tulane University. After graduating, Moschella took a job with Colbert before starting his own practice.³⁴ While working for Colbert, he drafted the Wheatley School presentation drawings in 1954. Frances Fort also was listed as an associate in the 1955 *Progressive Architecture* spread about the Wheatley School.³⁵ Ms. Fort attended Tulane University during WWII and later worked as a researcher for the Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning and Construction.³⁶

In addition to his architectural staff, Charles Colbert also had assistance in designing the Wheatley School from several local engineers. B.M. Dornblatt & Associates of New Orleans provided structural engineering consulting. Notable projects completed by Dornblatt & Associates include the proposed Riverfront Expressway, the City Park Avenue Underpass, and a development plan for the city of Leakesville, Louisiana.³⁷ Edward Carlton Guillot, Jr., and R. Y. Cheatham were electrical and structural engineers, respectively. The firm of Guillot & Cheatham worked with Colbert and Lowrey again in 1954 on the design of the Motel deVille on Tulane Avenue.³⁸ Guillot later served as electrical engineer for the new *Times-Picayune* newsplant in 1965 as part of the firm Guillot, Sullivan, & Vogt.³⁹

4. Builder & Suppliers

On April 26, 1954, the Orleans Parish School Board awarded the contract to demolish the buildings on Square 295 in order to clear the block for the Wheatley School to Crescent City Demolishing & Lumber Company. The company's bid of \$2,559.00 was the lowest of the two bids received.⁴⁰ On November 8, 1954, the Orleans Parish School Board accepted Keller Construction Company's bid to construct the Wheatley School, beating out eight other

³³ AIA 1962:433; AIA 1970:559;

³⁴ Interview with Sal Moschella by Kelly Sellers Wittie, R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc., May 12, 2011.

³⁵ "These Designs Win Honors for Orleans Architects," *Times-Picayune*, January 23, 1956, Section 5, page 1, accessed July 12, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/; Francine Stock, "New Orleans:: Most Progressive Architecture Awards:: 1955," 2010, accessed July 12, 2011, http://www.regional-modernism.com/2010/07/phillis-wheatley-elementary-school_14.html.

³⁶ "Parents Oppose Conversion Plan," *Times-Picayune*, December 4, 1952, 25. Accessed August 25, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/; "Schools to Open Thursday for Over 103,000 Pupils," *Times-Picayune*, September 1, 1952, 1,3. Accessed August 25, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/; Tulane University, *Jambalaya* (New Orleans), 1943, 50.

³⁷ "Consultants Oppose Tunnel Along Quarter," *Times-Picayune*, August 5, 1965, 1, 3. Accessed August 25, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/; "Pradel 'Error' Is Challenged," *Times-Picayune*, August 12, 1965, 5. Accessed August 25, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

³⁸ "150 Unit Motel Building is Set," *Times-Picayune*, February 11, 1954, 3. Accessed August 26, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/; "Million-Dollar Project to Occupy Entire Block on Tulane Ave.," *Times-Picayune*, February 11, 1954, 1. Accessed August 26, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

³⁹ "New Multi-Million Dollar Structure Will Rise," *Times-Picayune*, May 12, 1965, 1. Accessed August 26, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁴⁰ OPSB, Minutes of the April 26, 1954, OPSB meeting, Book 35, 415. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

construction firms who bid on the project. The \$519,050 price included fencing, covering the site in asphalt, installing separate emergency measures, and floor finishes.⁴¹ Under the management of Charles Keller, Jr., Keller Construction Company completed several public projects in 1950s New Orleans including repairs to Warren Easton High School, installation of sewers in Algiers, and construction of administrative buildings at the base of the Greater New Orleans Bridge.⁴²

Eight companies submitted bids to provide furniture and kitchen wares for Phillis Wheatley Elementary School. School Products Company; F.F. Hansell & Brother; Rowley Company, Inc.; Grunewald Music Company; and F.T. Woods Hill supplied the low bids in five categories including student desks, secretarial desks, and aluminum chairs.⁴³ Loubatt Glassware & Cork Company of New Orleans provided most of the kitchen and cafeteria utensils and dishes for the Wheatley School and Moton Elementary School cafeterias.⁴⁴ Bourgeois Ruhlman and J.S. Waterman & Company provided additional kitchen/cafeteria utensils.⁴⁵

5. Site History

Historic Faubourg Tremé

The historic Faubourg Tremé is one of the oldest areas of the city and the historic home of New Orleans' free persons of color population, a group of people of African descent who lived outside the bonds of slavery. Free persons of color constituted a small but influential portion of the city's population and enjoyed some but not all of the privileges afforded to white residents. Many free persons purchased lots and built homes in the Faubourg Tremé once the City of New Orleans acquired the land although free persons of color lived along the Bayou Road as early as 1726. By 1830, the free persons of color population in New Orleans numbered nearly 12,000.⁴⁶ Notarial and conveyance records indicate that eighty percent of lots in the present-day Faubourg Tremé were at one time in their histories owned by free persons of color.⁴⁷ The Tremé has been the home of musical legends such as Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet, and

⁴¹ OPSB, Minutes of the November 8, 1954, OPSB meeting, Book 36, 131. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁴² "Officers Named for United Fund," *Times-Picayune*, December 29, 1954, 14.; "Easton Repairs Contract is Let," *Times-Picayune*, May 8, 1952, 8, accessed May 25, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/; "Algiers Sewer Bids Accepted," *Times-Picayune*, March 15, 1956, 11, accessed May 25, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/; "\$519,000 Bid Is Accepted for Two Bridge Buildings," *Times-Picayune*, April 16, 1957, 18, accessed 25 May 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁴³ OPSB, Minutes of the October 24, 1955, OPSB meeting, Book 37, 6. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁴⁴ Moton Elementary School was constructed in 1955 to educate the children of the Desire Housing Project.

⁴⁵ OPSB, Minutes of the November 14, 1955, OPSB meeting, Book 37, 39. OPSB, Minutes of the December 19, 1955, OPSB meeting, Book 37, 88. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁴⁶ Sally Kittredge Evans, "Free Persons of Color," in *New Orleans Architecture Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs*, by Samuel Wilson, Jr. and compiled with Roulhac Toledano, Sally Kittredge Evans, and Mary Louise Christovich, Pelican Publishing Company, Gretna, Louisiana, 1996, 25.

⁴⁷ Roulhac Toledano and Mary Louise Christovich, *New Orleans Architecture Volume VI: Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 2003), 85.

Buddy Boldon as well as modern masters such as the Rebirth Brass Band, Kermit Ruffins, and Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews.⁴⁸ Noted for its architecture, the neighborhood houses a collection of creole cottages, ornamented shotguns, and ornate townhouses. Large portions of the Tremé have been demolished in the mid-twentieth century for urban renewal projects such as the Lafitte Housing Development, the Wheatley School, Louis Armstrong Park/Congo Square, and the elevated Interstate 10.

The Faubourg Tremé acquired its name from Claude Joseph Tremé, a native of Sauvignon, France, who began selling lots of the area in 1798.⁴⁹ Historic development of the area began as the Company of the Indies and, later, the French and Spanish crowns granted concessions along the road leading from the Mississippi River to Bayou St. John.⁵⁰ The Bayou Road was an important commerce route for the city and a desirable locale. Slowly, the larger concessions gave way to smaller lots and a larger resident population.

Claude Tremé acquired a portion of the area that now bears his name in 1794 as a purchase of his new wife’s grandmother’s property. Tremé immigrated to New Orleans from Sauvignon, France, sometime before 1783. His career in hatmaking was interrupted in 1787 when he was accused, convicted, and incarcerated for shooting a slave. Tremé resumed his occupation upon his release ca. 1793 and asked permission to marry Julie Moreau in March of that year. The newlyweds bought the Moreau plantation on August 6, 1794 and moved into the house on the left side of the Bayou Road.⁵¹ The move was particularly advantageous because the Spanish governor Baron de Carondelet began construction of a canal nearby from Bayou St. John into the city that year. The canal increased trade in the area and warehouses sprung up along the banks.⁵²

When purchased, the Moreau plantation included several active tile and brick factories. Tremé focused his energies instead on the subdivision and subsequent sale of his land holdings. He laid out streets both parallel and perpendicular to the Bayou Road and began to sell lots through private purchases and public sales. His buyers included French and Spanish residents, recent immigrants, and many free persons of color. Tremé sold the faubourg that bears his name in 1810 to the City of New Orleans for \$40,000.⁵³ Jacques Tanessee surveyed and laid out the area on behalf of the city in 1812.⁵⁴

The building stock of the Faubourg Tremé primarily consists of one-story residences with larger homes and businesses along major boulevards such as Orleans Avenue. Buildings range from small creole cottages built in the early nineteenth century to late nineteenth century two-story galleried homes and later Craftsman-style shotguns. the Wheatley School was addressed 2300 Dumaine Street, New Orleans, Louisiana. The campus was within both the Tremé local

⁴⁸ Tulane/Xavier Center for Bioenvironmental Research, “Notable Residents”, 2008, accessed July 26, 2011, <http://cbr.tulane.edu/livingcultures/index.html>.

⁴⁹ Toledano and Christovich, *Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, 15.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, xi.

⁵¹ Toledano and Christovich, *Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, 13.

⁵² *Ibid*, 60.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 15-16.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 17.

historic district and the Esplanade Ridge National Register Historic District but did not contribute to either due to its construction date.⁵⁵ The distinctive International Style architecture and cantilevered design sharply contrast the surrounding nineteenth century wooden buildings.

Site Acquisition

The tract of land today framed by St. Ann, North Miro, North Tonti and Dumaine streets in the Faubourg Tremé was part of a land-concession granted to the Lebreton family in 1758. The Lebreton family, one of the most distinguished and wealthy families in the French colony during the eighteenth century, dispersed much of their landholdings soon after the initial concession.⁵⁶ From the Lebretons, the land passed into the hands of Don Andres Almonester y Rojas.⁵⁷ Almonester, originally a resident of Andalusia, Spain became a Louisiana public official, entrepreneur and landowner, who established his regional notariety shortly after his arrival to the colony in 1769. Almonester, a man of extensive wealth and property, was responsible for the construction of many of New Orleans' architectural landmarks, including the St. Louis Cathedral.

Joseph Cultia acquired the tract of land from Almonester in 1781. Five years later, Antonio Ramis purchased the land from Cultia. On November 16, 1805 and January 20, 1806, Francois Lebreton Dourgenois purchased the property from Ramis as two separate plots, returning the property to its original family of ownership.⁵⁸ Francois' son Louis Gatien Lebreton-Dourgenois inherited the property as part of his father's estate. In turn, Louis passed it to his daughter Marie Louise Josephine Estelle, the wife of Joseph Volant Labarre, and his son Louis Joseph Lebreton-Dourgenois.⁵⁹ Louis Joseph sold his portion of the property to Sam Oakey; however, the property once again became part of the Lebreton-Labarre family holdings, when Oakey sold the land to Mrs. J.V. Labarre in 1844.⁶⁰

Owners subdivided the area and sold individual lots following the Labarre acquisition. Historic records indicate the block had been formally plotted by 1858 when the City of New Orleans sold a creole cottage on North Miro Street at public auction.⁶¹ In 1862, the City auctioned a large, two-story brick residence with outbuildings at the corner of North Miro and St. Ann Streets.⁶² By 1883, the block included twenty-five individual lots, twenty-four of which

⁵⁵ Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, "Esplanade Ridge National Register Historic District nomination", 1980, accessed 26 July 2011,

http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/nationalregister/nhl/searchlistings.asp?search_type=historicname. Full nomination available in the files of the Louisiana Department of Historic Preservation, Office of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, State of Louisiana, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁵⁶ Stanley Arthur, *Old Families of Louisiana* (Baltimore: Firebird Press, 1999), 37.

⁵⁷ Toledano and Christovich, *Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, 48.

⁵⁸ Toledano and Christovich, *Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, 48.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 49.

⁶⁰ P.P Labarre, From Sam Oakey to Mrs. J.J. Labarre, 2 Nov. 1844, Instrument Number 101.

⁶¹ Alexander Castaing, October 16, 1858, Plan Book 45, folio 49. Clerk of Civil District Court, Notarial Archives Division, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶² Alexander Castaing, February 21, 1862, Plan Book 52, folio 43. Clerk of Civil District Court, Notarial Archives Division, New Orleans, Louisiana.

contained some form of residence.⁶³ It remained predominantly residential up until the 1950s, when the Orleans Parish School Board acquired the block; shotguns and double-shotguns occupied the majority of the twenty-seven lots.⁶⁴ The surrounding city squares shared similar architectural character. The corner lots on Dumaine Street at North Tonti and North Miro Streets served as the only consistent sites of commercial enterprises on the block, hosting restaurants and/or stores. Shops first noted as commercial in late nineteenth century insurance maps were listed as a liquor store and a grocery in the 1945 city directory.⁶⁵

The Orleans Parish School Board built the Wheatley School to serve the children who lived in the nearby Lafitte Housing Development.⁶⁶ New Orleans was one of the first cities chosen for housing projects under the Housing Act of 1937, also known as the Wagner Act, a piece of legislation that gave city agencies subsidies to provide housing for low-income families. Bounded by Orleans Avenue, Claiborne Avenue, St. Louis Street, and North Galvez Street, the Housing Authority of New Orleans built the development between 1939 and 1941 as the African American counterpart to the whites-only Iberville Housing Development, located at the corner of Iberville and Basin Streets. The development encompassed sixteen city blocks with 896 units in seventy-seven low-rise brick buildings.⁶⁷

The Orleans Parish School Board struggled to construct an elementary school to serve the Lafitte development due to the high cost of land. In 1952, Colbert, writing as Supervising Architect of the Office of Planning & Construction, recommended building two elementary schools in the area.⁶⁸ At least one school was absolutely necessary, however, because “schools are enormously overcrowded and prior to the renovations of 1952, unsafe and obsolete.”⁶⁹ Children who lived in the Lafitte area were split between two schools to accommodate the large population but the effort did little to combat the problem. Recognizing the need, the Office of Planning & Construction commissioned a site acquisition study in the area but exorbitant land costs spooked the Orleans Parish School Board and delayed construction.⁷⁰

⁶³ E. Robinson, *Robinson's Atlas of the City of New Orleans, Louisiana*, (New York: E. Robinson: 1883), accessed July 5, 2010, www.noatrialarchives.org/robinson/index.htm.

⁶⁴ *Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map*, 1940. (Sanborn Fire Insurance Co., 1940), Certified Copy provided by EDR, Inc.

⁶⁵ *Polk City Directory of New Orleans, 1945-1946*. (New Orleans: R.L. Polk & Co, 1946), 90. Available through Ancestry.com, *U.S. City Directories*, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010, www.ancestry.com.

⁶⁶ OPSB, Minutes of the September 28, 1953, OPSB meeting, Book 35, 145. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.; OPSB, Minutes of the July 22, 1953, OPSB meeting, Book 35, 53. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁶⁷ US Risk Management, *Section 106 Review and Documentation, Lafitte Housing Development 2102 Lafitte Street New Orleans* (2007), 4-5, accessed July 8, 2011, <http://www.hano.org/Documents/No%20Graphics%20Lafitte%20106.pdf>. Draft report for the Housing Authority of New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana.; Louisiana Landmarks Society, “Lafitte Housing Development (Tremé, 1939-41)”, accessed July 18, 2011, www.louisianalandmarks.org.

⁶⁸ Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction, *Planning and Building Program*, 45.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 38.

Finally able to follow the Office of Planning & Construction's recommendations, the Orleans Parish School Board began to acquire lots in the block bounded by North Miro, Dumaine, St. Anne, and North Tonti Streets in October 1953. Most lots had been purchased by the spring of 1954. The Orleans Parish School Board's fears about the cost of land acquisition were justified- The Orleans Parish School Board paid more than \$268,000 for the roughly 2.2 acre site (more than \$122,000 per acre).⁷¹ To compare, the Orleans Parish School Board paid \$300,000 for a 90.2 acre site in eastern New Orleans (approximately \$3,325 per acre).⁷²

7. Name of School

Phillis Wheatley was the first published African American poet and the namesake of the Wheatley School.⁷³ She is also the namesake of the Phillis Wheatley Club, a benevolent organization that founded the sanitarium that became the Flint-Goodridge Hospital in New Orleans. Historians estimate that the majority of schools named for African Americans in the early decades of the twentieth century were named for Phillis Wheatley.⁷⁴

Phillis Wheatley was born in West Africa around 1753, and arrived in Boston in 1761 aboard the slave ship *Phillis*.⁷⁵ John Wheatley, a wealthy merchant, purchased the child as a companion for his wife, Susanna. By all accounts, the Wheatleys provided adequate care for Phillis and allowed their daughter to teach her to read and write.⁷⁶ Phillis' interest in language led her to study religion and poetry.⁷⁷ The Wheatleys encouraged Phillis to write and introduced her work to several prominent New England religious leaders.

In 1773, Phillis Wheatley published *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in London to critical and social acclaim.⁷⁸ Although widely successful and internationally praised, her personal life began a downward spiral in the years following the publication of *Poems*. John Wheatley freed Phillis around the time of her book's publication although she remained close to the family. However, by 1778, all four members of the Wheatley family had died.⁷⁹ That same year, Phillis married John Peters, a Boston grocer.⁸⁰ In 1784, authorities threw Peters in debtors prison. Financially struggling and ill, Wheatley and the couple's son died that December. John Peters sold much of Phillis Wheatley's writings in the following years. Her work received

⁷¹ Conveyance records, various. Available in the office of the Orleans Parish Assessor, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁷² Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction, *Planning and Building Program*, 45.; "New Orleans Proposes a Pied Piper Answer to the High Cost of City Schools: Junk the Neighborhood School," *Architectural Forum*, April 1953, page 174.

⁷³ *Times-Picayune*, "Modern School", 46.; OPSB, Minutes of the September 28, 1953, OPSB meeting, Book 35, 145. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁷⁴ Robert Meyer, Jr., *Names Over New Orleans Public Schools* (New Orleans: Namesake Press, 1975), 213.

⁷⁵ Meyer, *Names*, 211.; Robin Santos Doak, *Phillis Wheatley: Slave and Poet* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Compass Point Books, 2006), 15, accessed 3 June 2011, www.books.google.com.

⁷⁶ Meyer, *Names*, 212.; Doak, *Phillis Wheatley*, 21.

⁷⁷ Doak, *Phillis Wheatley*, 33.

⁷⁸ Meyer, *Names*, 212.

⁷⁹ Meyer, *Names*, 213.; Doak, *Phillis Wheatley*, 78.

⁸⁰ Doak, *Phillis Wheatley*, 79.

renewed recognition during the abolitionist movement and was widely republished in the anti-slavery newspaper *The Liberator*.⁸¹

In New Orleans, Phillis Wheatley's name became the moniker of an African American aid society. Members of the Phillis Wheatley Club, a daughter of the National Association of Colored Women, sought to improve the lives of African Americans nationwide. In New Orleans, the organization opened the Phillis Wheatley Sanitarium and Training School for Negro Nurses. The endeavor was a financial failure and risked closure before New Orleans University took possession and added the school to its medical training facility. This medical education center was a precursor to the famed Flint-Goodridge Hospital of Dillard University.⁸²

8. As-Built Description

The Orleans Parish School Board voted 3-2 to accept Charles Colbert's design of the "Lafitte Elementary Project No. 11" on June 19, 1953.⁸³ A month later, the Board rejected a petition from Tremé residents to consider moving the school from Square 295 to a nearby strip of City-owned land adjacent to the Lafitte Housing Development.⁸⁴ Colbert appealed to the Orleans Parish School Board that fall to allow a 5% cost increase to the accepted bid to compensate for the added cost of elevating the building. Colbert initially planned to put the cafeteria under the classroom building but this would require additional fire-proofing thereby increasing costs. Eliminating rooms on the ground floor saved money, but still cost more than a traditional one-story building. The Orleans Parish School Board accepted the 5% increase in exchange for Colbert's assurances that glare from the windows could be eliminated.⁸⁵ The final cost of building the Wheatley School including construction costs, furniture, fees, site acquisition, and miscellaneous expenditures totaled \$937,020.00.⁸⁶

When opened in January 1956, the Wheatley School consisted of an elevated classroom building and a one-story cafeteria building (HABS No. LA-1453-A) on one city block measuring approximately 2.2 acres. The small lot necessitated innovative design considerations to provide adequate playspace for the 770 students the school was projected to hold in a given school year. Colbert cantilevered the classroom building more than 10' off the ground; this

⁸¹ Ibid, 90.

⁸² "Medicine: Negro Health," *Time Magazine*, April 8, 1940, accessed June 3, 2011, www.time.com/time/magazine/; "The History of Flint-Goodridge Hospital of Dillard University." *Journal of the National Medical Association* 61 (November 1969), 534, accessed June 3, 2011, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2611800/>; Mary Church Terrell, "The Progress of Colored Women" (an address delivered before the National American Woman's Suffrage Association at the Columbia Theater, Washington D.C. 18 February 1898), 10-11, accessed 3 June 2011, <http://antislavery.eserver.org/legacies/the-progress-of-colored-women/the-progress-of-colored-women.pdf>.

⁸³ OPSB, Minutes of the June 19, 1953, OPSB meeting, Book 34, 585. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁸⁴ OPSB, Minutes of the July 22, 1953, OPSB meeting, Book 35, 53. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁸⁵ OPSB, Minutes of the April 26, 1954, OPSB meeting, Book 35, 404-05. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁸⁶ OPSB, Minutes of the September 13, 1954, OPSB meeting, Book 36, 48. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

innovation created a shaded play area beneath the main structure. Exposed steel trusses provided support for the cantilevered design and allowed natural light and ventilation to the interior of the structure.

The design of the Wheatley School, as well as other Orleans Parish School Board schools built in the 1950s, broke with earlier generations of New Orleans schools, favoring modernist, International Style elements and materials. Common characteristics of International Style include the use of materials such as glass, steel, and concrete; a sense of balance; utilization of mass produced elements; and a rejection of ornamentation. Colbert employed the ideas of the International Style to expand classrooms beyond the constraints of the walls, thus bringing the larger surrounding world into the schoolroom. The elevated design and curtain walls allowed children to see the surrounding neighborhood from every classroom. This design feature was consistent with Colbert's belief that schools had to be more than containers, and instead provide "an environment where each child can develop mentally, emotionally and spiritually to his fullest capacity."⁸⁷

The classroom building contained twenty-two classrooms for kindergarten through sixth grades. The Orleans Parish School Board established the maximum capacity of thirty-five students for each classroom, bringing the total number of projected students for the Wheatley School to 770; the number was raised to 820 students by the time of the school's dedication on April 15, 1956.⁸⁸ Restrooms were located in the center of the school on both the ground floor and level with the classrooms. Extra bathroom facilities were included in the designated kindergarten classrooms and in the cafeteria building (HABS No. LA-1453-A).

The cafeteria building (HABS No. LA-1453-A) housed administrative offices, a clinic, a teacher's lounge, and a lobby. A large cafeteria with kitchen occupied the majority of the structure; the room doubled as an auditorium. Colbert included an outdoor eating space off the southeastern wall of the building. Breezeways connected the campus buildings. A small playground was adjacent to the breezeways along the southeastern campus perimeter.

9. Alterations

The Orleans Parish School Board building campaign helped to alleviate over-crowding in the City's schools but did not permanently correct the condition. In 1959, Superintendent James F. Redmond announced that Parish school enrollment had increased by 38,000 students between 1946 and 1959, and he forecasted additional enrollment moving forward. The Orleans Parish School Board installed ninety-four portable classrooms at city schools to temporarily fix the

⁸⁷ Charles Colbert, *18 Talks*, (New Orleans:1969), 117-19. Colbert produced as assemblage of unedited speeches in January 1969. These writings expressed his ideas and beliefs about architecture and urban planning.

⁸⁸ Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction, *Planning and Building Program*, 16.; *Times-Picayune*, "Modern School,"46.

over-crowding problem.⁸⁹ Enrollment at the Wheatley School already stood at fifty students over projected capacity by the time the school was dedicated.⁹⁰

The enrollment surge coincided with nationwide revision of fire safety codes. A fire ripped through Our Lady of the Angels (built ca. 1910) school in Chicago on December 1, 1958, killing three nuns and ninety-two students. Horrific images of the carnage shocked the world and prompted sweeping fire reforms. The fire was especially appalling since the school had passed a mandatory fire inspection only a few weeks before. National Fire Codes changed shortly after the blaze to require kindergarten and first grade classes to be located on the ground floor to ease escape in case of disaster.⁹¹ The Orleans Parish School Board installed two modular buildings on the Wheatley School campus at the corner of St. Ann and North Miro Streets to accommodate the necessary extra classrooms created by the school's burgeoning population and the new fire codes. The buildings were removed following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

As is the case in most urban areas, school vandalism posed particular challenges for the Orleans Parish School Board. The glass walls of the Wheatley School made the elevated classroom building an easy target for vandalism and burglary. On November 23, 1961, police charged two teens with simple burglary after they broke a window and entered the building.⁹² By 1970, the Orleans Parish School Board reported that school vandalism had become a problem across Orleans Parish. Repeated repairs were costly and inefficient leading the Orleans Parish School Board to replace the broken glass with stronger materials to prevent breakage.⁹³ The Orleans Parish School Board replaced broken glass with tinted acrylic glass or opaque panels, giving the building a discordant appearance, dramatically different from the design principles crafted by Colbert.

Although designed as an elementary school, the Wheatley School did not contain a library when opened. In 1953, the Office of Planning & Construction prepared an architectural program for the proposed the Wheatley School and recommended using libraries and multi-purpose rooms as classrooms to reduce costs.⁹⁴ Opening day and dedication descriptions of the school do not describe a library. Between 1956 and 1969, the Orleans Parish School Board

⁸⁹ "Redmond Cites 38,000 Increase," *Times-Picayune*, December 20, 1959, 18, accessed July 21, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁹⁰ "Modern School Dedicated in N.O.," *Times-Picayune*, April 16, 1956, 46, accessed July 21, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁹¹ "DISASTERS: The Chicago School Fire," *TIME Magazine*, December 15, 1958, accessed July 27, 2011, www.time.com/time/; FEMA EHP, *Historic Context*, 30.; "Historic Phillis Wheatley Elementary School Torn Down in Tremé," *Times-Picayune*, June 17, 2011, accessed July 27, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁹² "Teen-Agers Face Burglary Charges," *Times-Picayune*, November 24, 1961, 21, accessed July 21, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁹³ Ira Harkey III, "Officials Take Harder Line Toward School Vandalism," *New Orleans States-Item*, June 1, 1973, 23. Available in the vertical files of the City Archives & Special Collections, New Orleans Public Library.

⁹⁴ OPSB, Minutes of the September 13, 1954, OPSB meeting. Book 36, 45. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

expanded the cafeteria building (LA-1453-A) and absorbed the clinic space into the library.⁹⁵ It is possible the Orleans Parish School Board added the library at the Wheatley School when the downtown Orleans Parish School Board library was demolished to make way for the Mississippi River Bridge (now the Crescent City Connection) which was completed in 1958.⁹⁶

Repairs to update the school occurred as funds became available. In 1981, the Orleans Parish School Board began removing asbestos from its schools per an Environmental Protection Agency mandate. In the 1950s and 1960s, builders used asbestos extensively in schools as climate and noise insulation. Asbestos also was used as a fireproofing agent. The Orleans Parish School Board began removing asbestos from the Wheatley School in the summer of 1983. Workers sealed off inaccessible areas of asbestos with a rubber-based paint.⁹⁷

Orleans Parish School Board built the Wheatley School before air conditioning was a standard feature in schools. When built, classrooms included small heaters along the walls but relied on natural ventilation to cool the students. Teachers at the Wheatley School complained of excessive heat and glare in a 1970 study.⁹⁸ A school profile in 1983 reported similar concerns.⁹⁹ The Orleans Parish School Board installed ceiling fans in 1986 to increase air flow.¹⁰⁰

B. Historical Context

1. The Orleans Parish School Boards 1950s building campaign

The Orleans Parish School Board building efforts of the 1950s sought to correct the overcrowding of New Orleans schools, provide schools in newly populated areas of the city, and update the existing structures' inadequacies. Reformer Jacqueline McCullough¹⁰¹ teamed with modernist architect and Tulane University professor Charles Colbert in 1948 and embarked on a campaign to fund the construction of new schools in the City, giving eighty speeches on the topic in only sixty days.¹⁰² Their energies were rewarded in 1949 when taxpayers passed an increase providing nearly \$30 million for school construction. In all, the Orleans Parish School Board built thirty modern schools and renovated eighteen others in the 1950s. Charles Colbert

⁹⁵ *Times-Picayune*, "Modern School Dedicated," April 16, 1956.; *DIXIE*, August 17, 1969, 11, accessed August 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁹⁶ OPSB, Minutes of the October 25, 1954, OPSB meeting, Book 36, 103. Available in the records of the OPSB in the Louisiana & Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

⁹⁷ McKendall, Rhonda, "Jefferson, Orleans lead race to clean up school asbestos," *Times-Picayune States-Item*, July 22, 1983, 13, accessed August 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

⁹⁸ *A Self-Evaluation*, October 1970, 96. The OPSB polled teachers in all OPSB schools about facility conditions, teaching practices, and future plans.

⁹⁹ *Phillis Wheatley Elementary School Profile*, 1983-84:1.

¹⁰⁰ Advertisement for Proposal, *Times-Picayune States-Item*, August 13, 1986, F-13, accessed August 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

¹⁰¹ McCullough remarried in 1950 and changed her last name to Leonhard. All remaining references in this document will be "Leonhard."

¹⁰² *Architectural Forum*, "New Orleans Proposes," 135.

spearheaded the construction and wrote the comprehensive plan for future Orleans Parish School Board building endeavors.

Edgar Angelo Christy served as architect to the Orleans Parish School Board from 1911 until 1951.¹⁰³ Christy personally designed or supervised the design of more than forty school buildings. His works typically featured a raised basement with wide hallways. Many of his schools remain today, and they are recognizable by certain design hallmarks: many are box-shaped, and include a first-floor entry that faces the school auditorium. Extant examples of Christy's work include the Eleanor McMain School (1931) on Claiborne Avenue, Charles J. Colton School (1928) in the Faubourg Marigny, and Warren Easton Senior High School (1913) addressed 3019 Canal Street.¹⁰⁴

The Orleans Parish School Board asked Christy to design the first of the new schools funded by the 1949 tax increase. Christy's design met with fierce opposition from Orleans Parish School Board member Jacqueline Leonhard and members of the community. Leonhard declared the school "old-fashioned" and requested a more modern design. Others in the community balked as well. Tulane University architecture professor Charles Colbert was one of the most outspoken critics of Christy's latest design. Colbert labeled all Orleans Parish School Board schools "outmoded" and volunteered the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects to help design the proposed new school in Gentilly.¹⁰⁵

Christy resigned in 1951 and the Orleans Parish School Board installed Colbert as Orleans Parish School Board Supervising Architect of the Office of Planning & Construction. Colbert hired the New Orleans firms of Curtis & Davis; Goldstein, Parham & Labouisse; and, Freret & Wolf as associated architects to take over the McDonogh No. 39 project. Completed in 1951, the school is a "finger school", a series of corridors strung together with covered breezeways. This design allowed for natural light on at least two sides of each classroom. Buoyed by the success of McDonogh No. 39, the Orleans Parish School Board initiated a larger, more comprehensive building campaign funded by the 1949 tax increase.

Due to the pressing facility needs of Orleans Parish students, the Orleans Parish School Board created the Office of Planning and Construction in 1951. The new office undertook the colossal task managing the recently authorized monies with identified individual school facility needs as well as gaps in adequate district coverage. Of the eighty-nine school buildings in operation, only one school met the standards of the state Board of Health and Fire Marshal.¹⁰⁶ The Office of Planning & Construction needed to chart a path for the Orleans Parish School Board to head off a crisis of the size and proportion faced in 1951, with respect to increased

¹⁰³ FEMA EHP, *Historic Context*, 49.; "Christy Burial Services Today," *Times-Picayune*, August 5, 1959, 5, accessed September 27, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

¹⁰⁴ FEMA EHP, *Historic Context*, 50.

¹⁰⁵ "Architects Offer Help on School," *Times-Picayune*, April 22, 1949, 39, accessed June 1, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

¹⁰⁶ Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction, *Planning and Building Program*, 2.; Richard Forstall, ed., "Population of Louisiana Counties by Decennial Census: 1960 to 2000", (2000), accessed July 9, 2011, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>; TIME, "Mrs. Four-to-One."; *Architectural Forum*, "New Orleans Proposes," 130.

enrollment and outdated, even dangerous, classrooms. This path had to include a schedule for renovations and new construction as well as prepare for population growth and shift.

A study of previous Orleans Parish School Board building efforts found that the immediate needs had been met with little emphasis on future growth. Existing schools were located in formerly residential areas that were now commercial. In addition, new neighborhoods were left without schools. Many of these new residential areas were situated closer to Lake Pontchartrain, away from the Mississippi River. From 1926 to 1934, a large scale project along the lakeshore pumped fill soil from the lake bottom for the creation of new land for the city. A series of bulkheads off of the lakeshore created the new lakefront area. This land project added 2,000 acres of land to the city from the Jefferson Parish/Orleans Parish line to a point approximately two miles east of the Industrial Canal. New Orleans found itself in the 1930s with literally more land than it had in the previous century.¹⁰⁷

The school construction boom was not unique to New Orleans. According to the *Progressive Architecture* Business Forecast of 1957, school building design accounted for more business to the average American architecture firm than any other type of building.¹⁰⁸ After World War II, communities across the United States witnessed a common phenomenon as returning soldiers with new families and flush with money from the GI Bill increased demand for new homes. Neighborhoods quickly sprang up around many urban areas. The model for the rapid suburbanization of previously rural areas came from the Levittown development in New York. Soon other similar developments grew around the United States, including in New Orleans. These developments included Gentilly, Lakeview, and Pontchartrain Park, among others.

A post-World War II “baby boom” fueled suburbanization across the United States and in New Orleans. More than 75 million babies were born in the United States between 1946 and 1964.¹⁰⁹ In addition to the national trend, local growth trends affected the population surge in New Orleans. The population of Orleans Parish grew from 494,537 residents in 1940 to 627,525 by 1960- an increase of nearly 133,000 people.¹¹⁰ This wave further overwhelmed the antiquated physical plant of the Orleans Parish School Board and promised to continue flooding schools for decades to come. Harland Bartholomew and Associates of St. Louis, a prominent city planning firm, summed up these problems by observing:

“Many factors complicate school planning. In common with other cities, New Orleans has had a large increase in births in recent years and the impact of this upon the schools is just beginning... The number and distribution of public schools necessarily must be considered in relation to the large Catholic school system. New Orleans public schools are quite old. Many exceed fifty years of

¹⁰⁷ Richard Campanella, *Time and Place in New Orleans: Past Geographies in the Present Day*, (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 2002), 57.

¹⁰⁸ “Progressive Architecture Fourth Annual Design Awards Program,” *Progressive Architecture*, January 1957: 87.

¹⁰⁹ Rusty L. Monhollon, editor, *Baby Boom: People and Perspectives*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Company, 2010) pg. xiii, Google Books, accessed August 9, 2011, www.books.google.com.

¹¹⁰ Richard Forstall, ed., “Population of Louisiana Counties by Decennial Census: 1960 to 2000”, (2000), accessed July 9, 2011, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

age. The public schools have not kept pace with the growth of the city. An accumulated backlog of construction is now supplemented by new needs caused by the increased population and high births.”¹¹¹

New Orleans faced the added burden of building segregated schools. The Supreme Court’s decision in Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896 cemented the policy of racial segregation by maintaining a distinction between races and therefore allowing separate facilities. The so-called “separate but equal” opinion delivered by Justice Henry Billings Brown established a legal foundation for segregated school facilities in New Orleans and across the country.¹¹² New Orleans schools remained separate but largely unequal throughout the first half of the twentieth century, despite petitions from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) demanding better treatment for African American students.¹¹³

On April 30, 1951, the Office of Planning & Construction began developing a plan to correct these problems and others as well as present an organized way forward. Released in 1952, *A Planning and Building Program for New Orleans’ Schools* (Program), addressed the efficient utilization of Orleans Parish School Board resources; geographic balance; and correction of immediate problems.¹¹⁴ The Program recommended redrafting attendance districts based on current population distribution within New Orleans as well as proposed public works projects such as the Pontchartrain Expressway and Simon Bolivar Boulevard.¹¹⁵ In spite of nationwide and local rumblings about school integration, the Orleans Parish School Board continued planning and construction activities for segregated facilities.

According to the Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction study, the state of public schools in New Orleans was “deplorable” by 1952.¹¹⁶ Uneven distribution of funds due to segregation and population shifts left some schools half empty while others had to platoon school days (a system where a portion of enrolled students exclusively attended morning classes while others attended only in the afternoon) to accommodate the number of enrolled students.¹¹⁷ Only one school met the standards of the state Board of Health and Fire Marshal.¹¹⁸ The study set forth a program of construction, renovation, and reassignment to ensure a suitable learning environment for all students.

¹¹¹ Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction, *Planning & Building Program*, 2.

¹¹² Plessy v. Ferguson 16 US 537 (1896).; Cowen Institute, *New Orleans Public Schools History: A Brief Overview*, 2010, accessed December 3, 2010, www.tulane.edu.

¹¹³ Mary Lee Muller, “New Orleans Public School Desegregation,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 17 (Winter 1976), 60.

¹¹⁴ Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction, *Planning & Building Program*, 3.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 26.

¹¹⁶ Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction, *Planning & Building Program*, 2.

¹¹⁷ A program of “platooning” was implemented by the OPSB to accommodate high enrollment at some schools designated for African Americans.

¹¹⁸ TIME 1953 1; *Architectural Forum*, “New Orleans Proposes,” 135.

2. General Architectural Character of the 1950s Orleans Parish Public Schools

In all, the Orleans Parish School Board built thirty new schools and renovated eighteen others in the 1950s.¹¹⁹ These schools differed sharply from the previous generation of New Orleans schools. Orleans Parish School Board member Jacqueline Leonhard and architect Charles Colbert both felt modern schools would better suit the evolving educational needs of students. The Office of Planning & Construction hired local professional architects to design the new schools, a break with the Christy era. The Office of Planning & Construction selected designs from the numerous offerings submitted by local architects, an avant-garde group that eschewed earlier New Orleans' architecture styles in favor of modern architecture.¹²⁰ Like many young architects of the time, military service in Europe during World War II provided an introduction to the International Style. The International Style easily lent itself to large public structures such as hospitals and school through its simplistic verticality, emphasized by the use of glass and steel.

Many of the Orleans Parish public schools of this generation are “finger schools”, a series of buildings connected by breezeways. The design worked well in New Orleans because it maximized light while still allowing natural ventilation. It was also an advantage to the Orleans Parish School Board because breezeways were less expensive to build. Cantilevered stories produced a similar effect and were used to varying degrees at other 1950s schools such as Francis Gregory Junior High, a school designed by the New Orleans firm of Burk, LeBreton, and Lamantia.

The Orleans Parish School Board buildings of this era vary widely in their campus acreage. The overall campaign needed to address crowded schools in heavily populated areas of the city such as the Faubourg Tremé while also providing new schools to New Orleans' budding suburban areas closer to Lake Pontchartrain. The Wheatley School (1954) campus measured approximately 2.2 acres while the William C.C. Claiborne Elementary School (1954) campus in Gentilly Woods was more than double that size (approximately 5.3 acres). Urban land also cost significantly more, reducing the amount the Orleans Parish School Board could afford to spend on the buildings.

3. Legacy of the Orleans Parish School Board 1950s Building Campaign

Ultimately, population shifts alleviated the city's school overcrowding problems, not the 1950s building campaign. The population of New Orleans soared in the mid-twentieth century and peaked in 1960 at 627,525 residents. By 1980, however, the population of New Orleans was only 557,028 and enrollment in Orleans Parish School Board schools was closer to the number of students when the program began in 1952 than when it ended in 1959.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ FEMA EHP, *Historic Context*, 29.; “Index to Building Plans,” City Archives & Special Collections, New Orleans Public Library, 2009, accessed August 9, 2011, <http://www.nutrias.org/~nopl/plans/planlist.htm>.

¹²⁰ John C. Ferguson, “The Architecture of Education: The Public School Buildings of New Orleans,” in *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans 1841-1991*, Donald DeVore and Joseph Logsden (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1991) 338.

¹²¹ Richard Forstall, ed., “Population of Louisiana Counties by Decennial Census: 1960 to 2000”, (2000), accessed July 9, 2011, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>; Orleans Parish School Board Office of Planning & Construction,

Superintendent James Redmond reported increased enrollment in 1959 with similar projections for the following school term. The Orleans Parish School Board installed ninety-four portable classrooms in schools around the city to help. Redmond's predictions were based on projections of the city's overall population including relocation and resident births. The population of New Orleans fell by more than 36,000 residents between 1960 and 1970. Despite the loss, Orleans Parish School Board enrollment climbed to an estimated 113,000 students, more than double the number enrolled when the Orleans Parish School Board embarked on the building campaign. Student enrollment soon declined, down to approximately 85,000 students in 1980, more than 28,000 students less than 1970.

Many of the schools constructed during the Orleans Parish School Board 1950s building campaign have been demolished in recent years. Several suffered damage as a result of Hurricane Katrina which ravaged the lower-lying areas of New Orleans in 2005; these were exactly the same neighborhoods that witnessed post-WWII expansion and settlement. Most Orleans Parish schools now are under the direction of the Recovery School District of Louisiana. The Orleans Parish School Board and Recovery School District demolished the Wheatley School in June 2011 to clear the block for a new school.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character Of Phillis Wheatley Elementary School

Designed by one of New Orleans' preeminent mid-century modern architects, the Wheatley School exemplified International Style school architecture in the state. Architect Charles Colbert's elevated design allowed for natural light and ventilation while providing a shaded playspace below. The design won a Progressive Architecture Award in 1955; represented the United States in the education category at the 1957 Vienna, Austria, Trade Fair; and was selected for exhibition at the 1958 fifth Congress of the Union Internationale des Architectes hosted in Moscow.¹²² Neglect, vandalism, and unsympathetic repairs degraded the building's appearance prior to demolition.

2. Condition of Phillis Wheatley Elementary School

Following a building site and feasibility study in 2010, the Recovery School District decided it was more cost efficient to demolish the subject building and build a new facility on the

Planning & Building Program, 3.; "Redmond Cites 38,000 Increase," *Times-Picayune*, December 20, 1959, 18, accessed July 21, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

¹²² UIA, "23 Congresses Since 1948," 2008, accessed September 27, 2011, <http://www.uia-architectes.org/texte/england/Menu-6/2-19481999.html>.; "Local Design in Moscow Exhibit," *Times-Picayune*, June 15, 1958, 91, accessed September 27, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.; "These Designs Win Honors for Orleans Architects," *Times-Picayune*, January 23, 1956, Section 5, page 1, accessed July 12, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

existing site.¹²³ Conservative estimates placed the cost of Adaptive Reuse at nearly \$1 million more than new construction.¹²⁴ In addition, neighborhood residents strongly advocated for a new school on-site. The Recovery School District concluded new construction was a more viable alternative than Adaptive Reuse and demolished the Wheatley School in June 2011.¹²⁵

The exterior of the elevated classroom building of the Wheatley School was in poor condition due to unsympathetic repairs before Hurricane Katrina and neglect since the 2005 storm. The 2010 Feasibility Study by Holly and Smith Architects found that nearly all bathroom fixtures had been removed, most of the windows had been replaced, remaining windows and window replacements were broken, and several of the trusses rusted where exposed. In addition, the building's interior walls and floors were damaged by exposure and water due to the broken windows. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimated three feet of water stood on the Wheatley School campus in the weeks following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.¹²⁶

B. Description of the Exterior of the Classroom Building of Phillis Wheatley Elementary School

1. Overall Dimensions

The elevated classroom building extended from St. Ann Street to Dumaine Street along North Tonti Street. The classroom level measured 303'-0" x 120'-02"-06" including the roof overhangs and was elevated 10'-05" off the ground. The building underside measured 303'-0" x 117'-02"-02". The building measured 21'-09"-02" from ground to roof.

2. Foundations

Twenty concrete piers and four steel braces supported the elevated classroom building. Each concrete pier was generally ovoid and measured 8'-01" in length and bowed out from a 1'-0" flat edge to 1'-02"-04". The steel braces fronted Dumaine and St. Ann Streets. Each was 17'-06" wide with an "X" internal support. The steel beams were 0'-06" wide. The "X" struts were 0'-04" wide. All piers were 10'-05" tall from the ground to the underside of the building.

3. Walls

The glass and steel skin of the Wheatley School starkly contrasted the surrounding wood framed residences. Floor-to-ceiling ribbon windows framed the length of the North Tonti and North Miro Street façades. These panels alternated patterns of two- and three- pieces per sash. Steel supports occurred every nine lights.

¹²³ FEMA et al., *Memorandum of Agreement Among the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Louisiana Department of Education Through Its Recovery School District Regarding the Phillis Wheatley Elementary School 2300 Dumaine St., New Orleans, Orleans Parish, LA* (2011), 24.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 24.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 24.

¹²⁶ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Hurricane Katrina Flood Maps- September 3, 2005," accessed May 27, 2011, <http://www.katrina.noaa.gov/maps/maps.html>.

As-built, the Dumaine Street façade featured floor-to-ceiling panel glass sashes flanking harlequin patterned opaque panels. This pattern was reflected on the Dumaine Street elevation of the cafeteria building (HABS No. LA-1453-A). The glass panels allowed views of the truss structural supports. In contrast, the St. Ann Street elevation lacked the opaque diamond-decorated panels, allowing full views of the truss supports and staircase.

Opaque panels stretched 6'-06" from the floor of the breezeway. Above the longer panels were smaller glass panels approximately two feet high. Each was 2'-10"-03" wide. These measurements were reflected in the classroom doors and vents. The opaque breezeway panels limited internal distractions and provided a space for classroom chalkboard and storage.

4. Framing

The exposed structural truss system of Colbert's design epitomized International Style, providing a striking appearance devoid of ornamentation. Steel Pratt trusses atop concrete piers comprised the support system of the classroom building of the Wheatley School. Each truss was 11'-5" high and 103'-4.5" long. At 0'-08", the bottom chords were two inches wider than the top chords and truss supports. Secondary steel joists between trusses supported the horizontal roof membrane.¹²⁷ Using trusses allowed for cost efficient shop fabrication and simple assembly reducing on-site construction time and further reducing costs.¹²⁸

C. Description of the Interior of the Classroom Building of Phillis Wheatley Elementary School

1. Interior Floor Plan

The classroom building featured twenty-two classrooms with doors to the interior breezeways. Twenty of the classrooms measured 26'-09"-04" x 34'-10"-0". As built, two kindergarten classrooms looked over Dumaine Street each with a small anteroom. Each kindergarten class measured 26'-10"-0" x 26'-1"-4". Each anteroom measured 26'-10"-0" x 22'-0"-0" and contained a small restroom. The remaining classes shared restrooms in the center of the school or in the cafeteria building (HABS No. LA-1453-A).

2. Interior Flooring

The base floor consisted of 0'-06" deep double tongue and groove wood decking spanned between trusses.¹²⁹ Each classroom had a 0'-09" x 0'-09" linoleum tile floor. The breezeways had concrete walkways.

3. Interior Finishes

Each classroom featured 1'-0" x 1'-0" vinyl ceiling tiles. The upper grade level classrooms included cabinets and shelves opposite the class walls. Each also contained a

¹²⁷ Colbert, *Idea*, 74.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 74.

¹²⁹ Colbert, *Idea*, 74.

chalkboard and corkboard. The cabinets and shelving of the larger kindergarten rooms faced the breezeways. The exterior harlequin patterned panels obscured the classrooms from view. Eight metal panels formed the side walls of each classroom. Each classroom received a small coat rack, built-in cabinets, and a clock. Teachers personalized the classrooms to their grade level and lesson plans.

D. Campus of Phillis Wheatley Elementary School

1. General Site Description

The Wheatley School campus featured a flat and open terrain in keeping with its role as an elementary school. Grass, concrete, and asphalt covered the ground. Some trees, both oaks and palms, existed on the northeast portion of the campus. The cantilevered classroom building spanned from St. Ann Street to Dumaine Street along North Tonti Street. Breezeways connected the classroom building to the cafeteria near the corner of Dumaine and North Miro Streets. The Orleans Parish School Board installed modular classrooms to comply with federal codes and alleviate overcrowding. These structures were located at the corner of St. Ann and North Miro Streets and were removed following Hurricane Katrina. The site included a small play yard with slides and jungle gyms partially beneath the southeast corner of the classroom building. Basketball courts bordered St. Ann Street between the classroom building and the modular classrooms.

2. Playground

The play yard occupied a small portion of the campus partially covered by the southeast corner of the classroom building. The yard included two metal jungle gyms and two metal slides. The playground was not included in Colbert's presentation drawings and is not visible in the newspaper account of the school's opening.¹³⁰

3. Playspace

The cantilevered design of the classroom building provided a sheltered playspace beneath for students. This area was covered in concrete which encouraged water run-off. Painted designs on the concrete indicated children played hopscotch, four square, and other play yard games. Tile panels containing numbers were installed in the northeast courtyard.

Sheltered outdoor space also provided a place for outside classroom space. Physical Education instructors taught class beneath the classroom building in the early 1970s to keep children in classrooms from getting distracted.¹³¹ Colbert's original presentation drawings

¹³⁰ Charles Colbert, original presentation drawings- Aerial view, April 3, 1954.; "Two Additional Schools Opened," *Times-Picayune*, January 31, 1956, 18, accessed May 24, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

¹³¹ Interview with Stella Reese, Faubourg Tremé community member and former teacher at Phillis Wheatley Elementary School (1972-1974), by Kelly Sellers Wittie, R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc., June 22, 2011.

included two tennis courts and one basketball court between the classroom building and North Miro Street.¹³² Prior to demolition, two basketball courts occupied the space.

4. Modular Buildings

The Orleans Parish School Board installed modular buildings at the corner of North Miro St. Ann Streets ca. 1960. A 1958 tragedy at a Chicago elementary school led to nationwide fire safety checks and regulations, including mandating that kindergarten and first-grade classrooms be on the ground floor.¹³³ Contemporaneously, the student population of Orleans Parish School Board schools continued to rise. In 1959, the Orleans Parish School Board distributed 94 portable classrooms to schools around New Orleans to alleviate over-crowding.¹³⁴ The Recovery School District removed two modular classrooms from the campus following Hurricane Katrina.

5. Campus Life

Architect Charles Colbert intended the glass walls of the elevated classroom building to engage students with their surroundings. However, neighborhood and campus interactions often proved distracting for students. In the 1970s, physical education classes were held beneath the elevated classroom building to prevent other students from observing. The windows also permitted the neighborhood to monitor school activities. One teacher remembers the unique open design led to a feeling of educating “in a fishbowl.”¹³⁵

Teachers and students entering Phillis Wheatley Elementary School in 1956 faced new educational challenges brought about by the social changes of the mid-twentieth century. The curriculum emphasized the importance of citizenship and democracy and the “conflicting philosophy” of communism.¹³⁶ These lessons were in addition to more basic courses such as reading, science, mathematics, legible writing, speaking, and listening. The Orleans Parish School Board limited formal art and music classes to junior and senior high schools although informal programs in younger grades occurred. Students at the school viewed murals painted by local artist Leonard Flettrich soon after the school opened.¹³⁷ In 1966, the School hosted a reading by acclaimed African American Broadway star Hilda Simms.¹³⁸ This “total education program,” a plan to embrace a well-rounded education, included

¹³² Colbert, Aerial view.

¹³³ FEMA EHP, *Historic Context*, 30.; Adam Groves, “Our Lady of the Angels School Fire: 50 Years Later”, accessed July 21, 2011, www.fireengineering.com.

¹³⁴ “Redmond Cites 38,000 Increase”, *Times-Picayune*, December 20, 1959, 18, accessed July 21, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

¹³⁵ Interview with Stella Reese, Faubourg Tremé community member and former teacher at Phillis Wheatley Elementary School (1972-1974), by Kelly Sellers Wittie, R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc., June 22, 2011.

¹³⁶ State Department of Education of Louisiana, Bulletin No. 887 One Hundred Ninth Annual Report for the Session 1957-1958, State Department of Education of Louisiana, 1958, 8, accessed October 27, 2011, <http://www2.state.lib.la.us/doeafsr/1957-1958.pdf>.

¹³⁷ “Flettrich Paintings Will be Shown”, *Times-Picayune*, November 26, 1961, 2-7, accessed August 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

¹³⁸ “Reading Given by Miss Simms”, *Times-Picayune*, September 9, 1966, 17, accessed August 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

instruction in physical education, nutrition, health, and, in later grades, home economics and vocational training, to “provide the kind of living experiences needed for developing sounder democratic citizenship.”¹³⁹

In later years, students participated in athletics, music, spelling bees, economic lessons, and tutoring sessions.¹⁴⁰ Campus activities often flowed into the neighborhood. In 1975, the Wheatley School instituted a Carnival Ball to accompany the school’s annual Mardi Gras parade.¹⁴¹ The parade started at the Wheatley School, traveled the area, and returned to the school. Students stepped to the rhythms of the Bell High School Band while tossing beads to observers.

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¹³⁹ State Department of Education of Louisiana, Bulletin No. 887 One Hundred Ninth Annual Report for the Session 1957-1958, State Department of Education of Louisiana, 1958, 6, 8, 54, 93, accessed October 27, 2011, <http://www2.state.lib.la.us/doesr/1957-1958.pdf>; “Citizen Council Pleas denied,” *Times-Picayune*, May 13, 1958, 6, accessed October 27, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

¹⁴⁰ DIXIE, August 17, 1969, accessed August 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/; Lynne Jensen, “Buddy System Gives Kids an Edge,” *East New Orleans Picayune*, March 20, 1988, accessed August 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/; “SCHOOLS Wheatley Elementary,” *Times-Picayune*, May 12, 1988, accessed August 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

¹⁴¹ “Wheatley School Ball Planned,” *Times-Picayune*, February 11, 1977, 4, accessed August 8, 2011, www.nola.com/t-p/.

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C. Sources for Additional Research

A June 2, 2011, search of the Louisiana Division/City Archives and Special Collections of the New Orleans Public Library revealed that the Phillis Wheatley Elementary School vertical file and the 1952 Office of Planning & Construction *Building Plan* were missing. The vertical files of the New Orleans Public Library contain mailings, news clippings, invitations, and letters related to the individual subjects. The archives of *The Times-Picayune*, which are now available through an online subscription service, substituted for the missing materials. If located, the file may contain additional resources. Microfilm copies of *The Times-Picayune* are available at both the New Orleans Public Library and the East Bank Regional Jefferson Parish Public Library.

Federal Emergency Management Agency personnel copied the Office of Planning & Construction *Building Program* while conducting their own research. A digital copy was provided to R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc. for use in this narrative.

The blueprints and as-builts of the Wheatley School have not been located. Charles Colbert's house in Metairie, Louisiana, flooded in late August 2005. The records of Mark P. Lowery, Colbert's former partner, are available in the collection of the Southeastern Architectural Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

Following the unprecedented damage caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Recovery School District proposed to demolish the Wheatley School addressed 2300 Dumaine Street, New Orleans, Louisiana, utilizing funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This project falls within the larger Master Plan implemented by the Recovery School District and Orleans Parish School Board in 2008 to repair and/or replace damaged schools to accommodate the modern educational needs of Orleans Parish. In order to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR Part 800), the Federal Emergency Management Agency executed the *Secondary Programmatic Agreement Among Federal Emergency Management Agency, State of Louisiana Division of Administration Office of Community Development, Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Louisiana Department of Education, Through Its Recovery School District, and Orleans Parish School Board Regarding Implementation of School Facilities Master Plan for Orleans Parish New Orleans, Louisiana* (2PA). As part of the 2PA, historic properties that will be significantly renovated or replaced will be documented by digital and/or large format photography and an accompanying narrative history.

In June 2008, the Federal Emergency Management Agency determined the Wheatley School to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for the school's association with the mid-twentieth century building campaign of the Orleans Parish School Board. The Federal Emergency Management Agency also determined the school to be eligible for listing under Criterion C as a preeminent example of International Style architecture in New Orleans.¹⁴² SHPO concurred with this assessment on July 21, 2008.¹⁴³ In 2009, SHPO agreed that demolition of the school constituted an adverse effect to historic properties.¹⁴⁴ In consultation with SHPO, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and numerous consulting parties, the Federal Emergency Management Agency developed a memorandum of agreement to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse effects caused by the demolition of the Wheatley School.

Parties interested in the Section 106 process recommended the Recovery School District evaluate alternatives to demolition of the school. In 2010, the Recovery School District retained Holly and Smith Architects of Hammond, Louisiana, to complete a building and site feasibility study on the Wheatley School campus to determine if portions of the existing classroom building

¹⁴² Victoria D. Byrd, "Determination of Eligibility- Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School," June 5, 2008, 2.. Determination conducted for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

¹⁴³ FEMA, *Wheatley MOA*, 2.

¹⁴⁴ FEMA, *Wheatley MOA*, 2.

could be renovated and used as a modern education facility.¹⁴⁵ The renovated portions and any new design would have to meet the Recovery School District Education Specifications as well as state and federal guidelines. The Recovery School District also directed Holly and Smith Architects to conduct a massing study to determine if the current Educational Specifications could be met with a new school on the campus. Following this study, the Recovery School District decided it was more cost efficient to build a new facility on the existing site stating “the Adaptive Reuse concept draws resources away from the pool of funds available to support other projects...as a result of projected increased costs compared with new construction.”¹⁴⁶ Conservative estimates placed the cost of Adaptive Reuse at nearly \$1 million more than new construction.¹⁴⁷ In addition, neighborhood residents strongly advocated for a new school on-site. The Recovery School District concluded new construction was a more viable alternative than Adaptive Reuse.¹⁴⁸ The Recovery School District demolished the Wheatley School in June 2011.

In April 2011, R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc. commenced Historic American Building Survey Level I documentation of the Wheatley School campus on behalf of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This recordation conformed to the Scope of Work provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and was performed under the supervision of RCG&A, Inc. personnel who meet and exceed the Secretary of the Interior’s *Professional Qualification Standards for History and Architectural History* (48FR44716).

The full recordation package consists of large format photographs and negatives, measured drawings, and a historical narrative. This narrative presents a general overview of the development of the Faubourg Tremé, the school’s place within the larger school building campaign of the Orleans Parish School Board, and the architectural significance of the campus.

¹⁴⁵ Holly & Smith, *Feasibility Study*, 1.

¹⁴⁶ FEMA, *Wheatley MOA*, 24.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 24.

Appendix A
Headings

Building Name and HABS Number

Location

Present Owner

Present Use

Significance

I. Historical Information

A. Physical History

1. Date of Construction
2. Original and Subsequent Owners
3. Architect
 - a. Work with the Orleans Parish School Board
 - b. Other Notable Designs
 - c. Associates
4. Builder & Suppliers
5. Site History
 - a. Historic Faubourg Tremé
 - b. Acquisition
6. Name of School
7. As-Built Description
8. Alterations

B. Historical Context

1. The Orleans Parish School Board 1950s Building Campaign
2. General Architectural Character of the 1950s Orleans Parish Public Schools
3. Legacy of the Orleans Parish School Board 1950s Building Campaign

II. Architectural Information

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character of Phillis Wheatley Elementary School
2. Condition of Phillis Wheatley Elementary School

B. Description of Exterior of Classroom Building

1. Overall Dimensions
2. Foundations
3. Walls
4. Framing

C. Description of Interior of Classroom Building

1. Interior Floor Plan
2. Interior Flooring
3. Interior Finishes

D. Site

1. General Site Description

2. Playground
3. Playspace
4. Modular Buildings
5. Campus Life

III. Sources

- A. Primary and/or Unpublished Sources
- B. Secondary and/or Published Sources
- C. Sources for Additional Research

IV. Project Information

Appendix B
Figures and Tables



Colbert utilized trusses for framing. Utilizing structural elements as decoration is a hallmark of the International Style.

April 2011. Photograph by Terry Greene.



Exterior staircase facing St. Ann Street.
April 2011. Photograph by Terry Greene.



The OPSB replaced broken windows with plastic or panels.
April 2011. Photograph by Terry Greene.

Pages 44-46 were removed and placed in the field notes for this survey because of copyright concerns.

PHILLIS WHEATLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Acquisition of Block 295			
Street Number	Street Name	Date of Sale	Price
Corner of Dumaine	At Miro	August 26, 1954	\$30,000
2306	Dumaine	January 21, 1954	\$6,250
2310	Dumaine	December 2, 1953	\$10,000
2312-14	Dumaine	January 26, 1954	\$10,500
2322-24	Dumaine	October 30, 1954	\$8,300
2326-30	Dumaine	January 18, 1954	\$9,500
2332	Dumaine	June 18, 1954	Not listed
2336	Dumaine	November 17, 1954	\$11,100
2320	Dumaine (with r.o.w)	February 9, 1954	\$21,500
815-17	N. Miro	October 7, 1953	\$4,700
821	N. Miro	October 7, 1953	\$9,800
825-25	N. Miro	September 14, 1953	\$11,300
827-29	N. Miro	May 5, 1954	\$8,000
814-16	N. Tonti	February 17, 1954	\$14,000
822-34	N. Tonti	June 4, 1954	\$8,000
826-28	N. Tonti	June 18, 1954	\$20,000
830	N. Tonti	June, 4 1954	\$9,500
818-20	N.Tonti	March 36, 1954	\$9,000
2311-13	St. Ann	December 29, 1954	\$7,200
2315	St. Ann	November 12, 1953	\$5,700
2317	St. Ann	October 20, 1953	\$3,450
2319-21	St. Ann	January 21, 1954	\$6,000
2323-25	St. Ann	January 13, 1954	\$6,000
2327-29	St. Ann	December 22, 1953	\$7,500
2335-37	St. Ann	November 3, 1953	\$12,000
42301-03 & 2305-09	St. Ann	April 5, 1954	\$11,050
Lot 2	St. Ann	October 30, 1953	\$8,250
Total:			\$268,600 +

PHILLIS WHEATLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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SCHOOLS BUILT BY THE OPSB DURING THE 1950s BUILDING CAMPAIGN			
Name	Type of School	Date of Construction	Architect
John W. Hoffman	Elementary	1951	Charles Colbert, Sol Rosenthal
McDonogh No. 39	Elementary	1951	Curtis & Davis with Freret & Wolf and Goldstein, Parham, & Labouisse
Edward Hynes	Elementary	1952	Favrot & Reed
Stuart R. Bradley	Elementary	1952	Ricciuti Associates with Herbert Benson
Thomy Lafon	Elementary	1952	Curtis & Davis
Alice M. Harte	Elementary	1953	August Perez & Associates
McDonogh No. 40	Elementary	1953	Stouffle & Finger
Carter G. Woodson	Middle	1954	Favrot & Reed with Mathes & Bergman
Edward Phillips	Elementary	1954	Jules K. de la Vergne & Associates
Jean Baptiste de Bienville	Elementary	1954	William R. Burk & Associates
McDonogh No. 36	Elementary	1954	Charles Colbert, Sol Rosenthal
William C.C. Claiborne	Elementary	1954	Dreyfous, Seiferth, & Gilbert
Phillis Wheatley	Elementary	1954-55	Charles Colbert
Robert R. Moten	Elementary	1955	Claude Hooten
Jefferson Davis	Elementary	1956	Jones, Roessle, & Von Osthoff
E.D. White	Elementary	1956	Edward M.Y. Tsoi
Joseph A. Hardin	Elementary	1956	Ricciuti Associates
Ray Abrams	Elementary	1956	August Perez & Associates
Murray Henderson	Elementary	1957	Warren J. Nolan
Derham	Middle	1957	Ricciuti Associates
Helen S. Edwards	Elementary	1957	Curtis & Davis
James W. Johnson	Elementary	1957	Nolan, Norman, & Nolan
Joseph Kohn	Junior High	1957	Freret & Wolf
Lakeview	Elementary	1957	Favrot, Reed, Mathes, & Bergman
Carver	Middle Extension & High School	1958	Curtis & Davis

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SCHOOLS BUILT BY THE OPSB DURING THE 1950s BUILDING CAMPAIGN			
Name	Type of School	Date of Construction	Architect
Jean Gordon	Elementary	1958	Edward B. Silverstein & Associates
L.B. Landry	High	1958	Dreyfous, Seiferth, & Gilbert
Alfred Lawless	High	1959	Charles Colbert with Lowery, Hess, & Boudreaux
Francis W. Gregory	Junior High	1959	Burk, LeBreton, & Lamantia