The John Herbert Phillips High School
Birmingham, Alabama

Assessment of Eligibility
for the
National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)

Thomas M. Shelby

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Introduction

The John Herbert Phillips High School is a basement and three-story Jacobethan Style school building that served as the centerpiece of the Birmingham school system from 1923 through 2001. Located between 7th and 8th Avenues North and 23rd and 24th Streets (Figure 1), Phillips High School occupies an entire city block. It was designed in 1920 by prominent Birmingham architect D.O. Whilldin, and was built in two phases: the first unit in 1923 and the second unit in 1925. Today the building is remarkably well preserved and retains much of its integrity, including both exterior and interior details. This document is a preliminary assessment of Phillips High School National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility. A brief architectural description of the school, a brief historical context, biographical information about the architect, and a summary and assessment are provided to serve as a framework for future planning and historical management strategies.

Photographic documentation and a field inspection of the building were conducted on 9 September 2005 by Thomas M. Shelby, Gene A. Ford, and John F. Lieb of the Office of Archaeological Research of the University of Alabama. They were accompanied by Marjorie White of the Birmingham Historical Society and Dr. Virginia Volker of the Birmingham Board of Education. Further photography was conducted on 14 September 2005 by John F. Lieb. Archival research was conducted by Thomas M. Shelby.

Statement of Significance

The John Herbert Phillips High School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under:

- Criterion A in the area of Education. The layout and design of the school is an example of the philosophies and tenets of the Progressive era of education in the United States. The school is also an example of the new “comprehensive” and “cosmopolitan” high schools being formulated at the time.

- Criterion A in the area of Civil Rights. In 1957, three years after the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth attempted to enroll his daughter and some other students at the all-white Phillips High School. He was beaten and nearly killed by a mob outside the entrance to the school. His wife was also stabbed and one of his daughters received a broken ankle. The school can also be considered a contributing resource for the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement Multiple Property Submission (NPS).
Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Phillips High School is an outstanding example of a Jacobethan Style educational building. With few exceptions, interior and exterior elements are intact and the school retains a high degree of integrity.

Criterion C as the work of a Master. Phillips High School was designed by prominent Birmingham architect D.O. Whilldin, who was responsible for hundreds of distinctive buildings across the state.

Description

The John Herbert Phillips High School occupies an entire city block, bounded by 7th and 8th Avenues North and 23rd and 24th Streets, fronting on 7th Avenue. It is an E-shaped building with a five part plan, consisting of a central block connected by hyphens to dependencies or wings along 7th Avenue. These dependencies extend back along 23rd and 24th Streets. To the rear, connected by a five foot by six foot concrete tunnel underneath 8th Avenue, is the Board of Education warehouse and physical plant, also designed by Whilldin and built in 1921 and 1922, respectively, in association with the high school. This warehouse, finished with characteristic Whilldin detailing such as narrow windows and yellow-buff brick, contained a garage and carpenter shop (Figure 2). Behind it was the tall brick chimney stack of the physical plant. Steam heat was provided by five 125 horsepower boilers with four force pumps. The steam and return lines ran through the tunnel to the school. Further to the north, across 8th Alley, was the coal yard for the high school.1

Phillips High School was constructed in two phases. The first unit was completed and dedicated 30 May 1923, which consisted of the front of the building and extended back to include the side entrances (Figure 3). Although built in two separate phases, the school was conceived as a whole from the beginning, unlike other schools where later additions contrast with the original structure (e.g. Robinson, Baker). This is clear from the architect’s rendering and from the plans published in 1921 (Figures 4 and 5, Appendix A and B). William B. Ittner of St. Louis was consulting architect, as he was with other Birmingham school buildings under construction at the time as he was a specialist on efficient planning.2

Standing at three stories and a basement, Phillips High School is the supreme example of Jacobethan architecture in the city. Popularly used for educational buildings during the first part of the twentieth century, the Jacobethan style was a type of Tudor Revival architecture that was derived from the English Jacobean and Elizabethan periods. Characterized by elaborate brickwork contrasted with stone trim in and around banks of rectangular windows, the style also featured multistory bay windows, arched entries with elaborate woodwork, towers or turrets, quoins, and occasionally crenellated building features.3

The façade of the building can be read as five units, with a projecting main block and two outer units connected by hyphens (Figure 6 and 7). The whole of the composition is unified horizontally by the contrasting bands of limestone against the rough textured red brick with V-pointed mortar joints. There are three entrances along each side façade. The first is immediately behind the projecting outer unit and consists of double leaf metal doors framed by a Tudor arch,
above which is a stone shield (Figure 8). The second entrance is the most visually interesting. Again framed by a Tudor arch it has been modified and consists of double leaf metal doors surmounted by a transom of vertical lights. Within the small loggia is a suspended Jacobean inspired metal light fixture (Figures 9 and 10). Above the entrance is a two-story, finely detailed, bay or oriel window (Figure 11). Between the two floors of the bay window is a band of finely carved stone panels portraying shields below drapery and set amidst a pattern of oak leaves and acorns. The bay window has three narrow piercings at its top. The third entrance is at the rear of the side facades and at the basement level. It has also been modified and consists of a single leaf metal door with concrete block infill. The small loggia is framed by a Tudor arch.

The most striking feature of the 7th Avenue, or main, façade is the central entry with its flanking towers and finely detailed bay window (Figure 12). This bay window, decorated with a band of five carved panels between the two floors, is crenellated (Figure 13). These five panels contain, from left to right, the seal of the City of Birmingham, the Alabama Great Seal, the seal of the United States, the seal of Jefferson County, and the seal of the Board of Education. Above the bay window, at the top of the parapet, is a partially enclosed canopy or hood that recalls ecclesiastical furniture, which protects an open book (Figure 14). The use of a church feature, along with the faintly reminiscent cruciform pattern of the stonework, conveys the sense of sanctity with the open book of learning. The upper portion of the two towers each contain a deep vertical channel of stone with an elongated shield, flanked by diagonally set brickwork that gives the surface a rich, textured appearance with its juxtaposition of forms and contrasting colors (Figure 15). A single horizontal band of limestone unites the two towers and the parapet in between them into a cohesive unit.

The hyphens contain three groups of four rectangular 8/4 double hung metal windows. Narrow stone mullions separate each light. Unfortunately, most of the windows in the building have been replaced, though this is not readily apparent on the exterior. The original fenestration consisted of 9/9 double hung windows. The outer structural units or projections contain one group of four 8/4 double hung metal windows flanked on either side by a single rectangular window. This grouping of windows reveals that the corner classrooms are larger than those within the hyphens. These outer units are also adorned with large stone panels above the cornice. These panels portray a shield, set below drapery and amidst oak leaves and acorns (Figure 16). Oak trees are a traditional symbol of strength. The continuous row of gargoyle figures along the cornice, which appear to represent aquatic creatures such as frogs and fish in varying degrees of amused facial expressions, gives a whimsical touch to the design. There are at least six unique gargoyles, and this pattern repeats throughout the building (Figures 17-22). The gargoyles along the cornice of the second unit face downward more so than those on the first unit. The roof drains are small box-like openings that recall the narrow gun openings often found in medieval military architecture.
Other exterior features consist of terraces along the forward side entries and, of course, the main entrance. These terraces are paved with large, green flagstones. An elaborate balustrade surrounds these terraces (Figure 23).

The flagpole, located off to one side, is original and consists of an octagonal base surrounded by a small octagonal terrace, also paved with large flagstones (Figure 24).

The main entry to the school on 7th Avenue North, accessed by the main front terrace, is within a vaulted stone loggia framed by a Tudor arch with richly molded jambs that sit on a block plinth (Figure 25). This Tudor arch has a molded hood with shields framed by medallions placed in the spandrels (Figure 26). On either side of the loggia are metal Jacobean inspired wall sconces, placed within a recessed panel. The limestone blocks in and around the loggia exhibit an interesting mixture of stone carving or finishing techniques, with some blocks vertically scored, others randomly pecked, and yet others were chisel-finished (Figure 27). Three double leaf oak doors, each with an ogee arch, provide access to a foyer (Figure 28). The original brass door stops and kick-plates are still in place (Figure 29). Above the doors is an elaborately carved label molding and tracery that forms a series of ogee arches.

Once inside the entry foyer, there is a broad flight of white marble steps, at the top of which is another series of oak doors similar to the exterior set (Figure 30). Above these doors is a recently painted mural. On either side of the entry foyer, the lower walls, wainscoting, and moldings of which are finished in blocks of white marble, is a plaster sculpture portraying a Classical scene (Figures 31-33). At the top of the steps and off to each side is a single oak door, decorated in a similar fashion as the others, with an ogee arch. The elaborate molding consists of a continuous plasterwork frieze of grapes and grape leaves.

From the entry foyer one enters the first floor corridor. Above the doors that lead back out to the entry foyer is a mural entitled “The Development of Education” (Figure 34). Directly ahead are three entrances to the auditorium, above each is a mural. The one on the left is entitled “The Discovery of Fire” (Figure 35), the one in the center “The Dawn of Civilization” (Figure 36), and the one on the right “The Birth of the Alphabet” (Figure 37). Located between the center and outer auditorium entrances are two plaster sculptures portraying Classical scenes (Figures 38 and 39).

Directly in the center of the building is the auditorium, able to seat 2,040 people (Figures 40-42). The stage and gymnasium behind it will seat a thousand more. The auditorium is arguably one of the most impressive public spaces in the City of Birmingham. The proscenium is framed by acanthus leaves executed in plaster and other motifs (Figure 43-45). The hardwood floored stage is raised, and has metal grillwork and recessed lighting along its front (Figure 46). The seats rest on hardwood floors, with the aisles and forward area covered in linoleum. The metal frame and wood seats are original, and are decorated with the letters “JHP” (Figure 47). The ceiling of the auditorium is a veritable tapestry of plasterwork, consisting of a series of
recesses with rosettes, guilloche patterns, and acanthus leaves (Figures 48 and 49). The rosettes function as receptacles for light bulbs. The balcony is accessed by three double doors on the first floor, one set of double doors on the second floor, and two sets of double doors on the third floor, as well as through a blind arched doorway on either side of the proscenium. The expansive windows that allow light into this great space are original, though the sky light is now covered.

Connecting the disparate parts of the school are two long corridors that run the full depth of the structure, and three cross-corridors. Brass room numbers and names remain above the original doors with their transoms (Figure 50). Stairwells are located along the 23rd and 24th Street sides of the building at the central entrances, which are illuminated by the windows (Figures 51 and 52). On either side of the auditorium is a double stairwell (Figure 53). These stairwells are clearly designed to handle large crowds of students. The original metal frame windows that illuminated these stairwells as well as the original handrails are still in place. A full thirty percent of the building is dedicated to corridors and stairwells. Originally the locker rooms (now converted to other uses), lunchroom, and shop classes were all lit by an extensive series of skylights, now covered. Light courts help illuminate the rest of the building’s interior (Figure 54), and a massive skylight once allowed light into the auditorium.4

The basement or ground floor, owing to the topography, was only partially used. It contains the armory, boy’s gymnasium, music room, and manual and vocational training shops, as well as the lunchroom (Figure 55, see Figures 56-58 for vintage photographs of the lunchroom, Figures 59 and 60 for vintage photographs of the vocational training classes). Below the auditorium and gym is the machinery room which still contains much of the original heating and ventilating equipment (Figure 61). On the first, second, and third floors, classrooms ring the outside of the extensive corridors. The first floor contained at least twenty four classrooms, the girl’s gymnasium (Figures 62 and 63), and additional rooms for general science as well as offices for the school staff. The second floor contained twenty classrooms with two study rooms and the library. The third floor contained seven classrooms with an additional twelve rooms for chemistry labs and home economics. Within the front tower and bay window was the “household suite” finished in white enamel paint and consisting of an entry hall, living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, bath, and closet (Figures 64 and 65). To one side was the Cooking Room (Figure 66). There is also a bookkeeping room and a bank (Figure 67). This interesting feature simulates, complete with teller windows and marble finish, an actual working bank. Many classrooms still retain utility closets and finely detailed chalk trays.5

Perhaps the most beautiful room of the building is the John Herbert Phillips Memorial Library (Figure 68), many of the books and funds for which were bequeathed to the Board of Education by the late superintendent. Located on the second floor within the front facing towers and bay window, the library was finished in Flemish oak with beautifully crafted bookmatched panels. The library, with its Jacobean ceiling with quatrefoils connected by diamonds (Figure 69), grillwork (Figure 70), fireplace and carved mantel, suspended lights, and Georgian inspired chairs at massive oak tables, reflected the eclectic and historicist styling of the period.
The fireplace (Figure 71), trimmed in white marble, has a beautiful mantle with a Latin phrase which means “To delight as well as instruct the reader”. The mantle is flanked by two finely carved owls (Figure 72), traditional symbols of wisdom, and brass grills for air circulation. The library has several minor, non-historic elements, such as suspended fluorescent lighting and several pieces of furniture. Overall, though, the library retains its historic appearance.\footnote{6}

Interestingly, it appears that Whilldin changed some aspects of the interior arrangement of the second unit (1925), as a set of plans differ slightly from those published in the dedication booklet of 1923 (Compare Appendices A and B). It appears that the original scheme for a swimming pool in the basement was abandoned, and replaced instead with a boy’s gymnasium. Other rooms, such as the Music Room and Armory, were reconfigured as well. On the first floor, behind (or north of) the girl’s gymnasium was the upper part of the boy’s gymnasium. On the second floor two study rooms were located above the boy’s gymnasium.\footnote{7}

Today, portions of the interior spaces have been modified. Linoleum tile covers the floor in most of the corridors and classrooms, and particle board walls cover the original plaster wall surfaces. Also, dropped acoustical ceilings have been added. Other sections of the building, such as the lunchroom and manual training shops have been remodeled, and stairways enclosed, often without sensitivity to the original building (Figure 73). However, many original interior elements give Phillips High School a high degree of integrity.

\textit{Historical Context}

The City of Birmingham, situated between Red Mountain and Flint Ridge in Jones Valley, was established in 1871 at the crossing of two rail lines: the South & North Alabama Railway, funded by the state to develop its mineral regions, with the recently completed Alabama & Chattanooga Railway. At this crossing, located a few miles east of the county seat of Elyton, the new city was surveyed and platted in a cleared cornfield. Named for its industrial counterpart in England, the new city was based on the grid system with spaces reserved for parks, a cemetery, churches, and the railroad reservation. The city was developed by the Elyton Land Company (later the Birmingham Realty Co.), a real estate firm which held options on 4,000 acres of land at the crossing. Envisioned as a great industrial center by John T. Milner, chief engineer for the South & North Railway, much of the early development of the city was characterized by speculative land deals and rather crude infrastructure, complete with saloons and brothels, marking Birmingham as a boomtown in every sense of the word.\footnote{8}

The key to Birmingham’s success was its mineral foundations. Recognized as early as the 1830s, the city is located in a limestone valley adjacent to iron ore rich Red Mountain, with the Warrior and Cahaba coal fields in close proximity. Also readily available was dolomite, used as flux in the iron and steel industry, and shales and clays for the brick and tile manufacturing
industries. In 1880, the first pig iron was produced at Alice Furnace No.1, ushering in the economic boom of the 1880s. During this time eleven furnace companies, including Sloss, began operation, as well as the Birmingham Rolling Mills and the Birmingham Foundry and Car Manufacturing Company. During these boom years Birmingham was nicknamed “the Magic City”. By 1890 Birmingham had a population of 50,000 and was the largest city in Alabama.9

By the turn of the century there were at least 90 towns thriving in the Birmingham district, ranging from small mining towns to larger industrial centers, such as Pratt City, Thomas, Bessemer, and Ensley. At the latter site, the largest battery of iron furnaces in the world had been completed in 1889, and by 1910 Ensley rivaled Birmingham in industrial importance. Bessemer, with its own extensive industrial operations, was not far behind in importance.10

It was during this era that the skyline of Birmingham changed dramatically with the construction of a number of modern skyscrapers in the central business district. Between 1903 and 1913 nine of these buildings were erected and soon Twentieth Street began to be referred to as Birmingham’s “Grand Canyon”. The center of this district was the intersection of 20th Street and 1st Avenue North, termed the “Heaviest corner on earth” where four skyscrapers rose on each corner. The Birmingham Terminal Station (P. Thornton Marye, Architect), completed in 1909, was considered the finest in the south. Industrial expansion continued as well, and by 1910 Birmingham produced 795 different products and millions of tons of coal, coke, and pig iron, as well as steel.11

The history of education in the city begins in October 1873, when its citizens, two years after the founding of the city, appealed for educational facilities for their children. The first school opened in a four room brick building on 1 March 1874, located on land given by the Elyton Land Company at 6th Avenue and 24th Street. It was known as the “Free School”. The school system was reorganized by the recently elected school superintendent Dr. John Herbert Phillips in 1883. The “Free School” became the “Main School” and was later renamed the Powell School, in honor of Col. James R. Powell. It opened in September 1883 with 240 students and seven teachers. Concurrently, a school for African-American children opened with 100 students and three teachers. Two months later two more schools, both for white children, opened on the city’s south and west sides.12

The Birmingham High School system was organized as part of the “Main School” in 1883. Dr. Phillips was superintendent and principal. During that first year there were sixteen boys and thirty girls enrolled, with one teacher who was assisted by the principal. There were three grades in the High School, which was the culmination of four years in the Primary department and two years in Grammar, totaling nine years of school. In 1885 the High School moved to a rented building on 3rd Avenue and 19th Street. It was the first in the state to be established as a regular co-educational high school with a separate building from the elementary grades. Typical courses of study included English, Latin, mathematics, physiology, and history. Later German and Greek were introduced. By 1886-87 courses in drawing, music, and manual
As the city of Birmingham grew so did enrollment in the school system. By 1890 the high school moved to a three story brick building at Park Avenue and 21st Street. Enrollment was 127 students. The following year the English-Commercial course was added, and in 1893 the High School became a four year program and the elementary schools became a seven year program. As the school grew more courses were added: Spanish in 1899 and mechanical drawing in 1902. Finally, the library and superintendents office was moved to city hall to allow for more classroom space.

In November 1903 the Board of Education requested the City call an election for a bond issue of $250,000 to fund a new high school building. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen agreed to this request in March of the following year, though the bonds were to be for $200,000 and were to go to the high school and two elementary schools. The vote was held 11 April 1904 and passed by an eight to one margin. In August of that year a site was purchased on the northwest corner of 7th Avenue and 24th Street. This area was the location of Colonel John T. Terry’s one story, wood frame home. In this house, Colonel Terry, a lawyer with the Elyton Land Company, helped establish the framework for Birmingham’s first public school.

By late 1904 the architects, Breeding and Whilldin, had been selected. Harry D. Breeding had been in practice for a number of years, and only recently D.O. Whilldin, who had arrived in the city just out of architectural school from Philadelphia in 1902, had joined his practice. Ground was broken for the new school in February 1905. The Birmingham High School (Figure 74) represented the city's first major investment in education. Under construction for most of 1905, it was dedicated 11 April 1906. Built at a cost of $160,000, it was one of the most expensive early building projects in the city. It was thoroughly Beaux Arts in inspiration, proportion, and detailing. In plan the building took the form of an E with a central gymnasium and auditorium.

The four story building had a primary entrance facing Twenty Fourth Street and an identical, but slightly smaller, entrance facing Seventh Avenue. These projecting two story entries, constructed of smooth ashlar, were designed as simplified Roman tripartite triumphal arches faced with four Ionic pilasters with wreath framed oculi in their attic story above each arch. They were topped by balustrades with cast bronze decorative embellishments and terra cotta detailing.

Inside, the High School had ample room for their growing enrollment. The building included the following elements:

- thirteen large session rooms, ten smaller recitation rooms, four laboratories, with two lecture rooms, three rooms for domestic science, seven for manual training and industrial work, two for drawing, two for the commercial department, one lunch room, one gymnasium having a gallery, an auditorium of 1,500 seating capacity, four rooms for the administrative department--in all fifty rooms. There were twenty-seven teachers and an enrollment of 588 pupils…
Over the next decade enrollment steadily increased, and new courses such as cooking, woodworking, forging, physical training, and machine shop work were introduced. The library also expanded its collection, and works of art were placed throughout the school. In 1911, following annexation of a number of surrounding municipalities as part of the Greater Birmingham movement, the Birmingham High School was renamed Central High School. The school continued to operate as the centerpiece of Birmingham education until the building was completely destroyed by fire on 12 February 1918.\(^{18}\)

In May of that same year a one million dollar bond issue was unanimously approved to replace the burned Central High School and to build a new high school in Woodlawn. However, the sale of the bonds was deferred and after the Armistice it was realized that those bonds could not be sold at the interest rate provided. In June 1919 another election was held, which authorized the sale of $4,500,000 in bonds for a number of civic improvements, including $2,000,000 for new grammar schools, $1,000,000 for new high schools, $500,000 for a new municipal auditorium, $500,000 for a new central fire station and new equipment, and $500,000 for a new combined city hall and library complex. Among the new schools to be built under this program were Glen Iris, Bush Hills, and the Industrial High School (later A.H. Parker), the largest high school for African-Americans in the country.

These civic improvements coincided with the arrival of the “Roaring Twenties,” which ushered in an unprecedented era of growth for the Birmingham district. With high hopes for the future, civic leaders predicted Birmingham would surpass Atlanta and New Orleans as the south’s largest metropolitan area. The city itself had a population of just over 110,000, with over 300,000 people living in the metropolitan area. Birmingham was unquestionably the leading industrial city in the South, producing millions of tons of coal, pig iron, and steel. In addition, industrial diversification resulted in over 1,600 different products being produced in the city. Rail transportation was unequalled, with nine trunk lines and ninety three passenger trains serving the city. Birmingham was poised to gain national recognition as one of the country’s leading metropolitan areas.\(^{19}\)

The largest single project funded by the bond issue was the new Central High School, to replace the one burned in 1918. Touted as Birmingham’s “million dollar school”, it was renamed in honor of Dr. John Herbert Phillips, who served as superintendent of the school system from 1883 until his death on 21 July 1921. By October of 1919 Harry B. Wheelock had been selected as architect for the new Woodlawn High School, and by January of 1920 Whilldin had been selected as architect for this centerpiece of the Birmingham school system.

The scale of the new high school was unprecedented in the state. In the 14 July 1921 issue of *The Manufacturer’s Record*, a contractor’s newspaper, when it was announced that Inglenook Construction Company had been awarded the contract for the foundations at $36,000, it was noted that plans for the first unit included a structure 330 by 150 feet, to be three stories, fireproof, with brick exterior and limestone trim, an auditorium able to seat 2,000, a gymnasium
with galleries and a swimming pool, laboratories for general science and physics, armory and manual training shops, domestic science and art rooms, a library and study hall able to accommodate 500, hospital rooms, and a cafeteria able to accommodate 500. By February 1922 the foundations were complete and the contract for the superstructure was awarded to the Foundation Company, a general contracting company out of New York with both domestic and international offices. Total amount of the contract was $456,848.

The dedication of Phillips High School on Memorial Day, 30 May 1923 was a celebrated event in Birmingham, consisting of all day festivities and ceremonies with music, presentation of the keys to the principal, and presentation of a portrait of Dr. Phillips. In the evening, remarks were made by Dr. George H. Denny of the University of Alabama, Dr. Spright Dowell of the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn), Dr. T.W. Palmer of the Alabama Technical Institute and College for Women, and Dr. H.J. Willingham of the Florence State Normal School (UNA). Finally, the dedicatory address was made by Dr. O.T. Corson of Oxford, Ohio, a close personal friend and colleague of Dr. Phillips. The new school served an area of twenty one square miles of the city of Birmingham, with Woodlawn handling students in the eastern end, and Ensley High School handling western area students. Enrollment at the time of the opening of the first unit of the high school was 2,453 students.

However, enrollment was increasing at a rate of twenty percent yearly, with an estimated 3,000 students enrolling for the following year. By the summer of 1924 plans were underway to erect the second unit to the high school. In September of that year a contract for $347,481 was awarded to O.D. Thomas and Son of Memphis, Tennessee. The second and final unit of Phillips High School was completed in December 1925.

Much of the layout of Phillips High School, designed by one of the state’s premier school architects, was also informed by the practice of William Ittner of St. Louis. Prior to his retirement from the St. Louis Board of Education in 1917, Ittner designed a number of school buildings for the city of St. Louis that received national acclaim for their functionality and utility. Following his retirement, Ittner became a consultant to a number of school boards, including Birmingham’s. He was a nationally recognized expert on the efficient design of school buildings. Some of the interior spatial arrangements may be a product of Ittner’s planned thinking. However, it should be remembered he was the consultant, not the designer.

During the milieu in which Phillips High School was built, the Progressive movement in education was at its height. Progressive education had begun in the latter part of the Nineteenth century as a humanitarian effort to apply the promise of the American life as a response to the new urban based industrial world that was becoming widespread. Essentially, it was the educational aspect of American Progressivism. In the schools, it was viewed as a way of improving the lives of individuals. Educational Progressivism had several broad objectives, the first of which was broadening curricula and the function of schools in terms of health, vocation, and quality of life. Not only could the sciences be beneficial but so could the pursuit of the arts.
The second was applying in the classroom pedagogical principles that had been derived from the latest research in psychology as well as the social sciences. The third was to tailor instruction to the different kinds and classes of children that were being incorporated into the public school systems. This educational philosophy can be seen in Phillips High School in the wide corridors, the wide array of vocational classes available, the ample lighting, the ventilation systems, the home economics, bookkeeping, and other classes that were taught, all of which was meant to enrich and develop them as well-rounded individuals. Phillips High School, in addition to Progressivism, is an example of the new “comprehensive” or “cosmopolitan” schools that were being advocated at the time, and the vocational training, much of which was federally funded, was a result of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. These “cosmopolitan” high schools emphasized a wide range of subjects and curricula not normally available to typical secondary schools. These were usually the large central high school located in an urban environment.  

Over the years enrollment at Phillips High School rose and fell, reflecting population trends in the city. During the post-World War II era the increasing use of the automobile precipitated the exodus of a large segment of the population to the growing suburbs. By 1957 enrollment was approximately 1,850 students, down from the 3,000 plus enrollment of the 1920s. Nonetheless the school kept up with the times. In 1953 a new athletic field to the east of the school was approved. Previously athletic teams (the Philippians) practiced at various locations throughout the city, and competitive events were often held at Legion Field. In 1961 a new gym was built at a cost of $290,000 across 24th Street to complement the athletic field. Designed by Birmingham architect Evan M. Terry, the modern International Style gymnasium clashed with the architectural historicism of the high school building, a typical situation found in the 1950s and 1960s when architects proclaimed the triumph of modernism. Finally, in 1966 and 1967 the school was renovated by the celebrated Birmingham firm of Warren, Knight, and Davis. This work included upgrading the vocational classrooms and technical training, such as electronics and a microwave television network. Total cost was approximately 2 million dollars. New ceilings, light fixtures, furnishings, and the replacement of wooden floors with tile were the highlights of the renovation. 

The most infamous episode in the history of Phillips High School occurred on September 9, 1957. Three years earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, had mandated the desegregation of public schools in America. A week after U.S. Marshals protected students desegregating Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, the courageous leader of the Birmingham civil rights movement and president of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), decided to pressure school officials to desegregate Birmingham schools. A few days earlier a bomb had ripped apart a recently desegregated elementary school in Nashville, Tennessee. In Birmingham, the Ku Klux Klan had sent a warning signal by terrorizing an innocent victim.

A few weeks earlier, on August 22, 1957, Reverend Shuttlesworth and several other African-American parents, all ACMHR members, had petitioned to enroll their children in
Phillips High School, Woodlawn High School, and Graymont Elementary. In 1955, the state of Alabama had passed a Pupil Placement Act which gave discretion to local superintendents to assign students to various schools. When the Birmingham Superintendent delayed action on the August petition, Reverend Shuttlesworth decided to directly confront the issue. He notified school officials that the petitioners would seek admission to Phillips on September 9.27

About mid-morning that September day, Shuttlesworth, his wife Ruby, four students (Ruby Frederika Shuttlesworth, 12; Patricia Ann Shuttlesworth, 14; Nathaniel Lee, 17; and Walter Wilson, 12) and Shuttlesworth’s fellow ACMHR officer, the Rev. J. S. Phifer, drove up to Phillips High School. The red brick citadel of white educational excellence faced the then all-white Central City Housing Project (recently demolished for today’s Hope VI town homes). As the Shuttlesworth party prepared to enter Phillips, three groups of Klansmen, armed with brass knuckles, chains, and clubs, appeared and descended on Reverend Shuttlesworth who barely escaped alive in his bashed up vehicle. His wife Ruby was stabbed in the hip and his daughter’s foot was slammed in the door as Reverend Phifer sped the car away. Birmingham police officers, under the direction of Public Safety Commissioner Bull Connor, had arrived late to break up the mob violence.28

During the melee Reverend Shuttlesworth believed that he heard the voice of God telling him not to die, but to get up as God had a job for him to do. Shuttlesworth’s miraculous survival signified to ACMHR members the intervention of the divine in their struggle for civil rights. His heroism increased his local, and national, reputation as the “South’s Fearless Freedom Fighter.” The local Movement which Shuttlesworth headed, the ACHHR, gained strength and members willing to stand up to Klan-sponsored violence in their pursuit of equal rights to education and other civil rights in Birmingham.29

The dropping of charges against the Klan suspects in the mob beating of Reverend Shuttlesworth at Phillips, as well as the eventual loss of Shuttlesworth v. Birmingham, the resulting court case, testify to the deeply entrenched segregated system in Birmingham. In 1958 when Shuttlesworth v. Birmingham came before the U.S. Supreme Court, that court upheld Alabama’s Pupil Placement Act, the state’s cornerstone to resist desegregation of its schools. Integration of Birmingham and Alabama schools would not take place until September 1963.30

In August 1963 a federal court-approved plan permitted the transfer of five African American children into three white Birmingham schools. The names of the children or the schools were released due to safety concerns. Graymont Elementary was successfully desegregated on September 4, though demonstrators were present. That evening not far from the school, the Center Street home of prominent civil rights attorney, Arthur Shores, was bombed and riots broke out. In reaction, the Birmingham school superintendent closed the schools. When the schools reopened on September 9, state troopers, under the orders of Gov. George Wallace, prevented entry of the token African American students. In response, President John Kennedy
federalized the National Guard to accomplish the desegregation of West End and Ramsay High Schools on September 10.\textsuperscript{31}

In retaliation for school integration, the Ku Klux Klan bombed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on Sunday morning, September 15, 1963. The death of four little girls here focused the attention of the world on the Birmingham and the national struggle for equal rights. (Figures 75 and 76).

The following year the desegregation of the Birmingham school system continued. That September, seven African-American students entered four area high schools (Phillips, Jones Valley, West End, and Ensley) without incident or demonstrations. On September 3, 1964 Phillips first opened its doors to three African American students (Lillie Mae Jones, 17, Minnie Lee Moore, 17, and Patricia Patton, 17.\textsuperscript{32}

From its completion in 1923, Phillips High School served for nine decades as the centerpiece of the Birmingham school system and as its primary high school. For this reason, civil rights leader, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, targeted Phillips to obtain the best education for his children. From 1964 to 2001, the high school served all eligible students in the Birmingham city system. In 2001, Phillips students transferred to the newly built Carver High School and the historic school became a professional development center. In the intervening years, it has housed several elementary schools during renovation of their premises.

Today, this magnificent historic structure, through sensitive rehabilitation, can continue to serve new students and new uses into the future while maintaining a tangible link to the past.

\textit{The Architect}\textsuperscript{33}

David Oliver Whilldin was born in Philadelphia on April 8, 1881. There he grew up, and after graduation from high school he attended the Drexel Polytechnic Institute (now Drexel University). There he probably studied engineering and graduated in 1901 with a Bachelor of Science degree. That same year he entered the University of Pennsylvania and took a special course in architecture, graduating in June 1902. Following graduation he came to Birmingham to work for the New York engineering firm of Ford, Bacon, and Davis as chief draftsman of the architectural department in their southern states division. In 1904 he entered into an architectural practice with Birmingham architect Harry D. Breeding.

During their two years of practice, Breeding and Whilldin designed several buildings. The largest and most important of these was the Birmingham High School. It is difficult to ascertain which architect was responsible for the design process. One would assume that Breeding was responsible for the design since he was the senior partner and was twenty years older than Whilldin. Whoever was responsible for the original design, it is evident that Whilldin received a good deal of the credit. The fact that the Birmingham Board of Education retained him as one of their primary architects for another two decades indicates the Board had to have been
pleased with Whilldin’s work on the high school. That Whilldin valued his work on this project is evident in the fact that he kept these drawings in his possession to the end of his life.

The completion of the Birmingham High School firmly established Whilldin’s position as a rising architect in Birmingham. In late 1906 Whilldin established his own architectural practice. Between 1906 and the Phillips High School commission in 1920, Whilldin designed numerous residential, commercial, civic, and educational buildings not only in Birmingham but also Tuscaloosa and Gadsden, some one hundred and twenty in all. Some of these projects include the Benners residence on Hanover Circle, the Avondale Masonic Lodge, the West End Carnegie Library and City Hall, the YWCA, the Hotel DeSoto, the Richmond Apartments, the Fitts residence in Tuscaloosa, the Gadsden Country Club, and several fraternity houses at the University of Alabama.

His major contribution, however, seems to have been educational buildings. The earliest school building that he designed was Elyton (1908), followed by Fairview, Baker, additions to Hemphill, Pratt City, and Ensley High School. These five schools were built for those cities’ respective school boards (Ensley and Pratt City), as they had not yet been annexed into the City of Birmingham, which occurred in 1910. For Birmingham, Whilldin designed Robinson, Cunningham, and Central Park, and possibly the Gate City schools. There were other school projects as well: Springville, Ragland, Albertville, Jasper, and Pell City. In 1917 he designed a proposed administration building for the Birmingham Board of Education, a beautiful Beaux-Arts style structure that was to have been located adjacent to Central High School (Birmingham High School became Central High School in 1911). This building was never built due to both World War I and the destruction by fire of Central High School in February 1918.

After a series of bond issues to fund new schools in the city, Whilldin received in late 1919 what was to prove one of his greatest commissions: the new Central High School. Opened in 1923, it had been renamed in honor of the late superintendent John Herbert Phillips. During the design and construction of Phillips High School, Whilldin designed numerous school buildings throughout the area. In Birmingham these included Glen Iris, Wylam, Bush Hills, Parker High School, and additions to Central Park, Elyton, and Fairview schools. Other schools included Bessemer High School and others in that city, two schools and a high school in Decatur, schools in Athens, several in Tuscaloosa, including the high school, and numerous rural schools for Jefferson and Tuscaloosa counties. Among these were Minor, Shades Cahaba, Hueytown, Bluff Park, Edgewood, and the rock schools at Pinson and Huffman.

The 1920s was a period of unrivalled prosperity for the City of Birmingham, an aspect reflected in its buildings. During this decade Whilldin designed over one hundred and twenty projects, the greatest ones are still recognized today as landmark buildings. Too numerous to list, here, they include Fire Station No. 1, his own office building, Birmingham City Hall (built 1927, burned in 1944), the Ensley, Famous, and Pantages Theatres, the Thomas Jefferson Hotel, the Henley and Aland Buildings (both department stores), Legion Field stadium, the Coca-Cola and
Buffalo Rock bottling plants, major additions and remodeling of the administration building for the Birmingham Board of Education, and the lavish Club Florentine. He also designed a number of estates in Redmont Park, Rocky Ridge, and Mountain Brook.

The 1930s was a period of hard times brought about by the Great Depression. Nevertheless, Whilldin was able to maintain his office and designed a number of buildings, albeit considerably less than the previous decade. He continued to design estates not only in Mountain Brook but also Gadsden and Tuscaloosa. His designs during this period also reflect the changing architectural styles that had become popular, such as Art Deco, Moderne, Stripped Classicism, and International Modernism. Notable projects include the underpasses at 14th, 18th, and 20th Streets, the Brown Service Funeral Company (now UAB Medical Alumni Building), Smithfield Court Housing, the F.W. Woolworth store on 3rd and 19th, and the Dr. Pepper Syrup Plant (at Pepper Place).

Whilldin continued to practice architecture until 1962, when he retired at the age of 82. Much of his work after World War II reflected the new International Modernism that had become prevalent during that period. Notable projects included schools and commercial buildings in Gadsden executed in an American version of the International Style. However, he also continued to work in traditional styles as well, one example being the Trinity Episcopal Church in Bessemer (1953). In January 1970 Whilldin passed away, leaving behind a legacy of between four and five hundred buildings in Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, and Mississippi.

Strategies and Recommendations

The John Herbert Phillips High School appears to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The building is a major component of the built environment of Birmingham’s city center, and is significant as an outstanding piece of architecture but also as one of the crowning achievements of one of Birmingham’s most important architects. It retains a high degree of integrity of both exterior and interior architectural elements. The school is also significant as an example of Progressive era education philosophy, and also for being the stage for a significant event in the Civil Rights Movement.

The following section is intended to serve as a tool for historic resource management strategies as they relate to Phillips High School. Well-maintained over the years by the Board of Education, Phillips High School has reached a point in its life where maintenance is simply not enough. Consequently, the building is currently scheduled to undergo renovation and rehabilitation to become Park Place School, a K-8 facility with enrichment programs inspired by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. This positive step by the Birmingham Board of Education will ensure that Phillips High School will stand into the 21st century as the crown jewel of the Birmingham school system.
Exterior Aspects

Aspect: The exterior of the building is in excellent condition.

Recommendations: Other than basic cleaning and touch-up work, it is recommended that the exterior architectural elements remain unmodified.

Aspect: The windows are not original and are double hung metal windows varying between 8/4 and 9/9.

Recommendations: If windows are to be replaced throughout then they should resemble the original fenestration scheme of 9/9 double hung windows. Today there is variation in the fenestration, which disorganizes the aesthetic scheme. If the windows were consistent the uniformity of the façade would be greatly enhanced.

Aspect: The flagpole is original and adds to the overall integrity of the exterior.

Recommendations: The flagpole should be retained, cleaned, and repainted. The octagonal base and paving stones should be retained and repaired as needed.

Aspect: Exterior side doors have been replaced with non-descript metal doors which detract from the overall integrity of the exterior.

Recommendations: These non-original doors should be replaced with doors that reflect the architectural style of the building (i.e. dark stained wood finish).
Aspect: The northernmost entrance loggia on the west façade has concrete block infill surrounding the metal door. Needless to say this is unsightly and detracts from the architectural merit of the building.

Recommendations: The concrete blocks and door surround should be replaced/covered with bricks that match (as best as possible) the exterior bricks.

Aspect: Exterior light fixtures are original. These Jacobean inspired metal fixtures contribute to the architectural merit of the building.

Recommendations: These exterior light fixtures should be retained and reused. In addition exterior lamps that reflect the styling of the extant fixtures should be reinstalled along the balustrade at the top of the front steps (the holes are covered by large flower pots). These lamps are visible in Figure 75.

Aspect: Exterior sidewalks and terrace paving are original.

Recommendations: These should be retained. In addition, Phillips High School can be considered a contributing resource to the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement Multiple Property Submission (NPS). An interpretive sign could explain the attempt to desegregate the Birmingham school system by Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth in 1957 and indicate the sequence of events that fateful day.
Aspect: Currently dozens of air conditioner units, rather than shrubbery, surround the building.

Recommendations: These air conditioners are unsightly. It is assumed that a main central air conditioning system(s) will be installed, thus negating the need for these smaller units. Removal of these units will allow for plantings and vastly improve the overall appearance of the school’s exterior.

**Entrance Hall**

Aspect: The front entrance to the school is arguably one of the most beautiful in all of Birmingham. The oak doors, with their ogee arch and glass, surmounted by the finely carved label molding and ogee arches with tracery, is a masterpiece of Jacobethan Revival design. The original brass doorstops and kickplates are present. It appears that several of the leaded glass window compositions have slightly separated from their respective wooden framework. It also appears that several of these units have possibly been removed.

Recommendations: These doors should be retained, refinished, and restored. The original stain of the wood would have been dark. The doorstops and kickplates should be retained and refinished.

Aspect: The entry hall to the school retains most of its integrity, including carved wooden doors, marble steps, marble wainscoting, decorative plaster crown molding, and plaster relief sculpture. The only non-original element is the steel handrails.

Recommendations: Other than repainting the walls and cleaning the marble, all aspects, except the handrails, should be retained. The modern steel handrails should be replaced with wooden handrails stained to match the doors.
**Aspect:** The second set of entry doors are similar to the first set, though they lack a transom but rather have a mural painted in the overdoor.

**Recommendations:** These doors, like the first set, should be retained, refinished, and restored.

**Interior-Ground Floor/Basement**

**Aspect:** Much of the ground floor rooms have been extensively modified, including the lunchroom. However, the machinery room with its fireproof sliding doors is relatively intact and still retains much of the original heating and ventilation equipment.

**Recommendations:** Ideally, preservation of the machinery room would be considered optimal. However, the reality is that this area, isolated in the basement, contains an extensive amount of space that could be utilized in the future. Perhaps limited preservation of selected features would be preferable.

**Interior-First Floor**

**Aspect:** The four murals along the front corridor are remarkable.

**Recommendations:** These murals should be retained and cleaned. Conservators from the Birmingham Museum of Art could assist in this area.
Aspect: The plaster relief sculptures along the wall of the front corridor, like the murals, are meant to inform and reinforce the position of the school as a center of learning in the city.

Recommendations: These sculptural reliefs should be retained. Due to their fragile nature they should be protected during construction.

Aspect: The marble wainscoting along the front corridor adds an elegant finish to the interior of the school.

Recommendations: This marble wainscoting should be retained and cleaned.

Aspect: The original, finely detailed, plaster crown molding is largely still intact and hidden above the dropped ceiling of the corridors.

Recommendations: The dropped ceiling should be removed to expose the molding. Utilities and the like can be redirected through conduits, etc. suspended from the exposed older ceiling. Lighting fixtures can also be suspended in a like manner. This approach is similar to that used at the Phoenix Lofts.
Aspect: The long counter and swing gate in the main office is original and adds to the overall integrity of the building.

Recommendations: This counter and swing gate should be retained.

Aspect: The vault in the office is intact and adds to the integrity of the office interior.

Recommendations: The vault should be retained and preserved.

Aspect: The gymnasium is relatively intact and still retains the mechanism (via chains and wheels) to open the skylight in the center of the room (now closed). Also intact are the system of pulleys and tie-offs that would have been used for the stage sets. The large metal pane windows from the light court are original.

Recommendations: The gymnasium as it stands today should be retained, including the skylight mechanism, stage system, and windows.
**Interior-Auditorium**

The auditorium ranks as one of the great public spaces in the city of Birmingham. As such, the integrity of its interior should be preserved as far as possible.

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**Aspect:** The drop acoustical tile ceiling in the auditorium is a major detraction from the historical integrity of this open space. Above it there was once a great skylight that admitted ample light into the auditorium.

**Recommendations:** This drop ceiling should be removed. It may also infringe in a negative way on the acoustics of the auditorium. The architect, D.O. Whilldin, designed a number of theaters and he clearly understood acoustical science. One theatre he designed, still extant, is said today to have perfect acoustics. In addition, the skylight should be restored, as it provided a great amount of illumination to this great space.

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**Aspect:** The hardwood floors are original. The tile floors are not.

**Recommendations:** The hardwood floors should be restored to their former finish and beauty.

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**Aspect:** The metal and wood chairs are a major contributing element to the integrity of this public space.

**Recommendations:** These original chairs, with their decorative faces along the aisles, should be retained and restored. A number of these were noted stacked in the basement where some rows and random seats have been removed.
Aspect: The plasterwork in the ceiling and ringing the proscenium to the stage are a spectacular example of the level of craftsmanship Whilldin employed.

Recommendations: This intricate plasterwork, much of it depicting rosettes, acanthus leaves, and guilloche, should be retained.

Aspect: The rosettes in the ceiling are not only decorative but also function as receptacles for light bulbs.

Recommendations: The electrical wiring should be modernized and these rosettes used again as light fixtures. This would add a wonderful touch to the preservation efforts of the auditorium.

Aspect: The recessed stage lighting is original.

Recommendations: This lighting should be retained and repaired.

Aspect: The projection room, complete with original equipment, is an interesting relic of a by-gone era.

Recommendations: This room should be retained, as it can be used for modern projection equipment.
Aspect: The large windows that allow light into the auditorium are original.

Recommendations: These windows should be retained.

Interior-Second Floor

Aspect: The John Herbert Phillips Memorial Library is the centerpiece of the school. Although some elements have changed, much of the room retains its integrity, from the Jacobean ceiling, the ornate grills, the finely carved fireplace, to the Flemish Oak bookshelves and paneling.

Recommendations: The suspended fluorescent lighting fixtures are dated and detract from the architectural merit of the room. They should be removed and replaced with suspended light fixtures that are harmonious with the room décor. Otherwise basic cleaning and refurbishment is all that is needed in the Library.

Interior-Third Floor

Aspect: The “Household Suite” or Apartment testifies to the emphasis earlier generations placed upon the home and the proper teaching of “home economics.”

Recommendations: The overall ‘feel’ of this suite of rooms should be retained as much as possible, such as built in furniture, the fireplace, the bath, etc. This area can be used as a teacher’s lounge or meeting room should Phillips High School function again as a school.
**Aspect:** The Bank is an interesting and unusual feature of the building and serves as an example of the extensive curriculum taught at Phillips during that era. In addition to teaching bookkeeping and finance, the room has the look and feel of a real bank, complete with marble floor and teller windows.

**Recommendations:** This novel room should be retained. Furniture and the like can be refinished, the marble cleaned, and the grillwork repaired.

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**Interior-All Levels**

**Aspect:** Throughout the school the original brass room numbers and names are still mounted above the doors. Details such as this contribute to the overall integrity of the building.

**Recommendations:** These should be cleaned and retained.

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**Aspect:** Classroom and office doors, in most cases, are original as are the glass transoms. These elements contribute to the overall integrity of the building.

**Recommendations:** These should be refinished and retained, along with the original doorknobs and other hardware.
**Aspect:** The metal pane windows in the stairwells are original.

**Recommendations:** These should be retained.

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**Aspect:** The handrails and balusters in the stairwells are original. Details such as this contribute to the overall integrity of the building.

**Recommendations:** These should be retained.

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**Aspect:** It appears (in places where the paint has chipped) that the steps in the stairwells are marble.

**Recommendations:** If the steps are marble then the paint should be carefully stripped to expose the original surface.
Aspect: The side stairwells (illuminated by the bay windows) are open. The bay windows retain their original wood paneling and built in seating.

Recommendations: The stairwells should not be enclosed as this would detract from a major feature of the interior design of the building. However, fire codes may take precedent here. If they are to be enclosed, then a division sympathetic to the building’s interior should be utilized. That is to say, the exterior finish of this division should be stained wood, preferably with ogee arches and the like. Interior features of the bay windows, such as wood paneling and built in seating, should be retained.

Aspect: Radiators are still present throughout the building, and add to the overall integrity of the interior.

Recommendations: Although in all likelihood the climate control systems of the building will be modernized, it is recommended that all radiators be retained, cleaned, and painted.
Aspect: Throughout the building, historical fixtures such as vacuum outlets, doorstops, etc. still survive and contribute to the overall integrity of the interior.

Recommendations: These should be retained wherever possible.

Aspect: In some corridors particle board covers the original plastered walls.

Recommendations: Unhealthy and unsightly at best they detract from the historic fabric of the interior and should be removed.

Aspect: Several original stairwells have been blocked, namely those adjacent to the gymnasium.

Recommendations: These stairwells should be unblocked and retained.
Aspect: All corridors and classrooms have modern tile floors. Period newspaper articles indicate that the original flooring was wood.

Recommendations: If practical, the linoleum tile should be replaced with hardwood flooring.

Aspect: The original supply closets and chalk trays remain in a number of classrooms.

Recommendations: These add to the overall integrity of the interior and should be retained.

Aspect: During renovations, especially in the basement, old books and newspapers may be discovered.

Recommendations: These should be kept by the Board. Should school personnel not wish to keep these materials should then be turned over to the Birmingham Public Library Archives.

Aspect: The skylights help bring natural light into the interior and reflect a time when natural lighting was paramount in illuminating large buildings.

Recommendations: Where possible, these skylights should be restored.

Aspect: The wide corridors and light courts contribute to the openness of the design and allows ample natural light and air circulation.

Recommendations: These corridors should remain open and not be partitioned. The light courts should remain open as well and not enclosed.
**Concluding Statement**

The John Herbert Phillips High School in Birmingham, Alabama, is one of the most remarkable educational buildings in the state, and certainly ranks among the finest in the nation. This Jacobethan style building served as the premier school in the Birmingham area, educating thousands of white high school students from the time of its completion in 1923 until the school was finally desegregated in 1964, thereafter Phillips educated high school students of all races until its closure in 2001. On the verge of a multi-million dollar renovation and conversion into the proposed Park Place School, the Birmingham Board of Education has ensured its preservation by taking this first step towards listing it on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). It has been determined that Phillips High School retains a high degree of integrity of both exterior and interior elements. In addition to its architectural merits, the school stands as one of the most significant designs of prominent Birmingham architect D.O. Whilldin, who designed hundreds of buildings in the South between 1904 and 1962. In other areas of historical significance, as the flagship school for white Birmingham students, Phillips became the target of local civil rights desegregation efforts in 1957 and serves as a contributing resource in the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement Multiple Property Submission (NPS). For these reasons, the John Herbert Phillips High School appears to be eligible for listing on the NRHP.
Figures
Figure 1. Property location of the John Herbert Phillips High School.
Figure 2. The Birmingham Board of Education Warehouse (1921) and physical plant (1922) (from the BPL Archives, Jefferson County Board of Equalization, Tax Appraisal File 22-25-3-162).

Figure 3. Phillips High School soon after construction. Only the first unit has been built (from Dedication-John Herbert Phillips High School [Birmingham. Birmingham Board of Education, May 1923]).
Figure 4. Proposed rendering by D.O. Whilldin, architect, of the new Central High School (Phillips) (from the Birmingham Board of Education annual reports).

Figure 5. General view of Phillips High School.
Figure 6. Postcard image of the first unit of Phillips High School (BPL Archives, Postcard Collection 1081.3.168A).

Figure 7. Phillips High School as it stands today.
Figure 8. Phillips High School, west façade, south entrance.
Figure 9. Phillips High School, east façade, central door.

Figure 10. Detail of Figure 9. Note arch jambs, spandrels, light fixture, and vertical lights contrasted with the modern metal doors.
Figure 11. Phillips High School, east façade, bay window above central entrance. Note carved panels and gargoyles along cornice.
Figure 12. Phillips High School, main façade, central entrance (from *Dedication-John Herbert Phillips High School* [Birmingham: Birmingham Board of Education, May 1923]).
Figure 13. Phillips High School, main façade, front bay window above entrance to school.
Figure 14. Phillips High School, detail of upper zone of bay window and towers.

Figure 15. Detail of east tower.
Figure 16. Phillips High School, stone panel with drapery, shield, oak leaves, and acorns located above cornice. Note gargoyle along cornice.

Figure 17. Phillips High School, detail of gargoyle along cornice.
Figure 18. Phillips High School, detail of gargoyle along cornice.

Figure 19. Phillips High School, detail of gargoyle along cornice.
Figure 20. Phillips High School, detail of gargoyle along cornice.

Figure 21. Phillips High School, detail of gargoyle along cornice.
Figure 22. Phillips High School, detail of gargoyle along cornice.

Figure 23. Phillips High School, east façade, terrace and balustrade at south entrance.
Figure 24. Phillips High School, detail of terrace pavement and flagpole base.
Figure 25. Phillips High School, main façade, entry loggia. Note elaborate jambs and block plinth, light fixture, and carved oak doors.
Figure 26. Phillips High School, main façade, detail of base of bay window, Tudor arch and hood molding. Note spandrels.

Figure 27. Phillips High School, main façade, detail of block plinth and watertable. Note different carving techniques.
Figure 28. Phillips High School, main façade, general view of entry doors. Note ogee arches.

Figure 29. Phillips High School, main façade, detail of brass doorstops and kickplates.
Figure 30. Phillips High School, entrance hall, interior doors with mural over door.

Figure 31. Phillips High School, entrance hall, general view of interior. Note marble steps, trim, plaster sculpture, and the non-original steel handrails.

John Herbert Phillips High School
Birmingham, Alabama
Figure 32. Phillips High School, entrance hall, plaster relief sculpture on west wall.

Figure 33. Phillips High School, entrance hall, plaster relief sculpture on east wall.
Figure 34. Phillips High School, first floor, main corridor, “The Development of Education” mural over main entry doors.

Figure 35. Phillips High School, first floor, main corridor, “The Discovery of Fire” mural over left auditorium door.
Figure 36. Phillips High School, first floor, main corridor, “The Dawn of Civilization” mural over center auditorium door.

Figure 37. Phillips High School, first floor, main corridor, “The Birth of the Alphabet” mural over right auditorium door.
Figure 38. Phillips High School, first floor, main corridor, plaster relief sculpture to left of center auditorium door.

Figure 39. Phillips High School, first floor, main corridor, plaster relief sculpture to right of center auditorium door.
Figure 40. Phillips High School, auditorium (from Dedication: John Herbert Phillips High School [Birmingham: Birmingham Board of Education, May 1923]).

Figure 41. Phillips High School, auditorium, general view from side balcony.
Figure 42. Phillips High School, auditorium, general view from top of balcony.
Figure 43. Phillips High School, auditorium, decorative plasterwork around proscenium.
Figure 44. Phillips High School, auditorium, detail of decorative plasterwork around proscenium.
Figure 45. Phillips High School, auditorium, detail of decorative plasterwork of around proscenium.
Figure 46. Phillips High School, auditorium, detail of stage lighting.
Figure 47. Phillips High School, auditorium, detail of hardwood flooring and chairs. Note decorative face along aisles and interlaced lettering.
Figure 48. Phillips High School, auditorium, detail of decorative plasterwork on ceiling.
Figure 49. Phillips High School, auditorium, detail of decorative plasterwork on ceiling.
Figure 50. Phillips High School, second floor, original brass lettering above doors.
Figure 51. Phillips High School, second floor, west stairwell. Note built-in bench of bay window.
Figure 52. Phillips High School, second floor, west stairwell.
Figure 53. Phillips High School, one of the main forward stairwells. Note original railing, balusters, trim, and window.

Figure 54. Phillips High School, light court looking south towards auditorium walls.

John Herbert Phillips High School
Birmingham, Alabama
Figure 55. Phillips High School, lunch room as it looks today.
Figure 56. Phillips High School, vintage photographs of the lunch room (from the Birmingham Board of Education annual reports).

HIGH SCHOOL LUNCH ROOM

All set for the hungry throng. This section of the counter and kitchen of the Phillips High School lunchroom shows steam tables with their hot foods, glass shelves with a variety of salads and desserts, glasses of lemon and orange ade, trays of wholesome sandwiches and bottles of the best pasteurized milk. In the background are the hoods to carry away the fumes and hot air from the gas stoves, steam kettles and ovens.
Figure 57. Phillips High School, vintage photographs of the lunch room (from the Birmingham Board of Education annual reports).
Figure 58. Phillips High School, vintage photographs of the lunch room (from the Birmingham Board of Education annual reports).
Figure 59. Phillips High School, vintage photograph of the machine shop (from the Birmingham Board of Education annual reports).
Figure 60. Phillips High School, vintage photograph of the forge (from the Birmingham Board of Education annual reports).
Figure 61. Phillips High School, machinery room, detail of old equipment.
Figure 62. Phillips High School, girl’s gymnasium. The stage of the auditorium is to the right.
Figure 63. Phillips High School, vintage photograph of the girl’s gymnasium (from the Birmingham Board of Education annual reports).
Figure 64. Phillips High School, third floor, vintage photograph of the Apartment or Household Suite (from the Birmingham Board of Education annual reports).
Figure 65. Phillips High School, third floor, living room of the Household Suite as it looks today.
Figure 66. Phillips High School, third floor, vintage photograph of the Cooking Room (from the Birmingham Board of Education annual reports).
Figure 67. Phillips High School, third floor, Bank Room.
Figure 68. Phillips High School, second floor, vintage photograph of the Library (courtesy of the Birmingham Board of Education Archives).
Figure 69. Phillips High School, second floor, Library, detail of ceiling.
Figure 70. Phillips High School, second floor, Library, detail of grilles below windows.

Figure 71. Phillips High School, second floor, Library, detail of fireplace.
Figure 72. Phillips High School, second floor, Library, detail of carved owl on fireplace.
Figure 73. Phillips High School, an example of insensitive remodeling. Note particle board wall surfaces and glass and metal enclosure of the stairwell.

Figure 74. Breeding and Whilldin, Architects; The Birmingham High School, 1906-1918 (BPL Archives, Postcard Collection, 1081.3.153).
Figure 75. Civil Defense personnel guarding the entrance to Phillips High School in 1963 (Copyright, photographs by *The Birmingham News*, 1963. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with Permission).
Figure 76. Demonstrations by white students against integration of Phillips High School, 1963 (Copyright, photographs by The Birmingham News, 1963. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with Permission).
Notes

1 Birmingham Public Library Archives, Jefferson County Board of Equalization, Tax Appraisal File 22-25-3-15-1]


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid, 16-19; Plans are from BPL Archives, Hill Ferguson Collection.


9 Morris and White, Designs on Birmingham, 8; White, Birmingham District, 33-37, 46-49.

10 Morris and White, Designs on Birmingham, 8-9.

11 White, Birmingham District, 62-63.


13 Ibid, 6-7.

14 Ibid, 8-9.

15 Ibid; White, Downtown Birmingham, 95.


18 Ibid, 9-10.

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*Manufacturer’s Record*, Volume 81, no. 7 (2/16/22), 78.


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This information is taken from the draft version of *The Alabama Architecture of D.O. Whilddin*, an M.A. Thesis being prepared by Thomas M. Shelby at the University of Alabama.
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