

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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5. Name: Negro School (Common Name - Dunbar School)

Location: Comal and Endicott streets

Classification: Category - building; Ownership - public; Status - occupied;
Accessible - yes, restricted; Present use - park (and community center)

Owner of property: City of San Marcos
Dr. Emmie Craddock, Mayor
City Hall
San Marcos, Texas 78666

Description: Condition - good; Altered; Moved in 1890 and 1918.

In contrast to some of the fancy Victorian houses, the frame, one-story Negro School is very simple, but dates from the same period. The main structure is a rectangle formed by joining two structures on their sides. Thus each section has its own hipped roof, and the two roof lines are bridged at one end by an additional transverse roof. There are two extensions from the main block: a small wing to the southeast, and a low, gabled addition moved in from Camp Swift in Bastrop. All roofs are covered by V-crippled sheet metal. The space between the south wing and the main block is filled in with a shed addition. A small kitchen and loading dock abuts the south wall. A freestanding building that was once part of the West End School is located to the southeast, under a pyramidal, corrugated metal roof, and completes the layout.

A brick chimney pierces the peaks of each of the old wings. The weatherboard walls are painted rust to about the midpoint, then buff above that. Trim is also rust colored. Fenestration consists mainly of the original wooden-sash windows with two-over-two lights. Each of the main, long walls contains two groups of six. More windows with two-over-two lights are located on the south wing and the shed inset. The kitchen shed contains sash windows with one-over-one lights while the newer wing has eight-over-eight lights. Behind a corrugated metal skirt, cedar posts serve as a foundation.

Chronology for the Negro School structures, as reported in the documentation and oral interviews, is confusing and sometimes contradictory, but is most probably as follows. The original U-shaped building is the basically rectangular frame structure under the U-shaped hipped roofs and the small gabled extension to the southeast. After the move in 1918, the flat-roofed additions appear to have been built. Sometime around 1930, a square building was brought in for use as a home-economics department. Its construction pre-dates its move by several years, making it visually compatible with the school. About 1946, local contractor John Avey was assigned the task of hauling the last wing to San Marcos. It had to be brought in in pieces, and caused a controversy at the time because many people felt that a completely new wing would have cost less than the moved one. This wing, because it is also of an unornamented, utilitarian style, does not seriously detract from the building's historical appearance. It could easily be removed if a complete restoration were performed.

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Inside, six rooms plus the kitchen lead from a long hall. The walls and ceilings are beaded; floors are pine boards. A vestibule and principal's office are located toward the northwest. The 1940s wing contains shotgun-type rooms.

Significance: Period - 1800-1899, 1900-; Areas of significance - education.
Specific dates - 1890, 1918, 1930, 1946.

Although San Marcos has placed heavy emphasis on education throughout its history, the only public building remaining from the town's earlier periods is the Negro School. Ironically, the building is not of a high style, has been moved twice, and has been composed of several structures. However, its core dates from the 1880s, and it has served the black population in the present location since 1918. The school continues to focus the black community's anti-discrimination efforts.

Education for San Marcos' black children began informally in 1847, when they were taught by the Presbyterian minister's wife and a Mary Sublet. Following passage of the Public Free School Law in 1876, the Negro School District, the first in Hays County, was formally organized on January 13, 1877, with 50 pupils and a black preacher as teacher. In 1890, \$8,000 was raised to build a new school for white children on the site of the old school, on Woods Street, the present location of St. Mark's Church. The old building was moved to center street, next door to the African Methodist Church, and repaired for the blacks' use. A black minister again served as teacher for an average salary of \$37 per month.

John H. Saunders became superintendent of schools for the county when such an officer was required by the state. He developed the entire system, and provided training for black teachers. In 1918, the frame building was moved again, this time to its present location. Along with the old building went the old textbooks; new books were bought for the white children. (Having to use old, outdated books required black teachers to put more of themselves into their instruction, reports an interviewee. This need probably accounts for some of the high esteem in which black teachers are held locally.)

In 1961 the Negro School's name was changed to the Dunbar School, to honor Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872-1906) of Dayton, Ohio, a noted black author. The school closed in the '60s when full integration was achieved, and was sold in 1973 to a philanthropic couple who gave it to the city for use as a community center.

Many black residents feel that the city has not developed the school's community role as fully as is appropriate. For example, the school was used for storage and lawn mower repair space, while utilization for classes and recreation remained low. Many feel that no fee should be charged for public use of the building and some have refused to pay it. In order for Dunbar School to receive more attention, blacks have organized to pressure the city and keep the neighborhood informed of changes. Need for a public soccer field has recently been voiced; there is a push for the playing fields around Dunbar to be upgraded for this purpose. Neighborhood old people have no place to go for socializing. Some sit on the steps of a closed lodge building on nice days. Repairing,

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equipping, and opening the school all day for the use of these lonely people is another goal the community hopes to see realized. Those meetings and events that are held at Dunbar are well attended, while similar functions held elsewhere are not. Mrs. Ollie Giles summarized local sentiment with this statement: "Dunbar is something special. It's something that can identify us."

The Negro, or Dunbar, School Building is mainly over 50 years old, and is the only surviving historic school connected with the San Marcos black community.

Bibliography:

- Historical Markers in Hays County 1907-1976, pp. 184-188.
- Interview with Theodora Scrutchin, June 9, 1982.
- Interview with Catherine Hardeman, May 21, 1982.
- Interview with Mrs. Charles Williams, undated.
- Interview with Yancy Yarbrough, August 12, 1982.
- Interview with Mrs. Ollie Giles, November 5, 1983.

Geographical data: Acreage - approximately two acres
UTM reference - 14 / 601730 / 3305370

Verbal Boundary Description - The northwest boundary is a line 135 ft. long that starts at the south corner of Comal and Endicott and runs southwest along Comal. The northeast boundary is a line beginning at the same point, approximately 630 ft. long, or, the length necessary to reach Purgatory Creek, which forms the southern boundary. The remaining boundary is created by turning 90° at the end of the 135 ft.-long line on Comal Street and proceeding directly southwest until Purgatory Creek is reached. This line encloses the main building, its attachments, the separate building, and part of the playground surrounding them.

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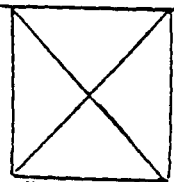
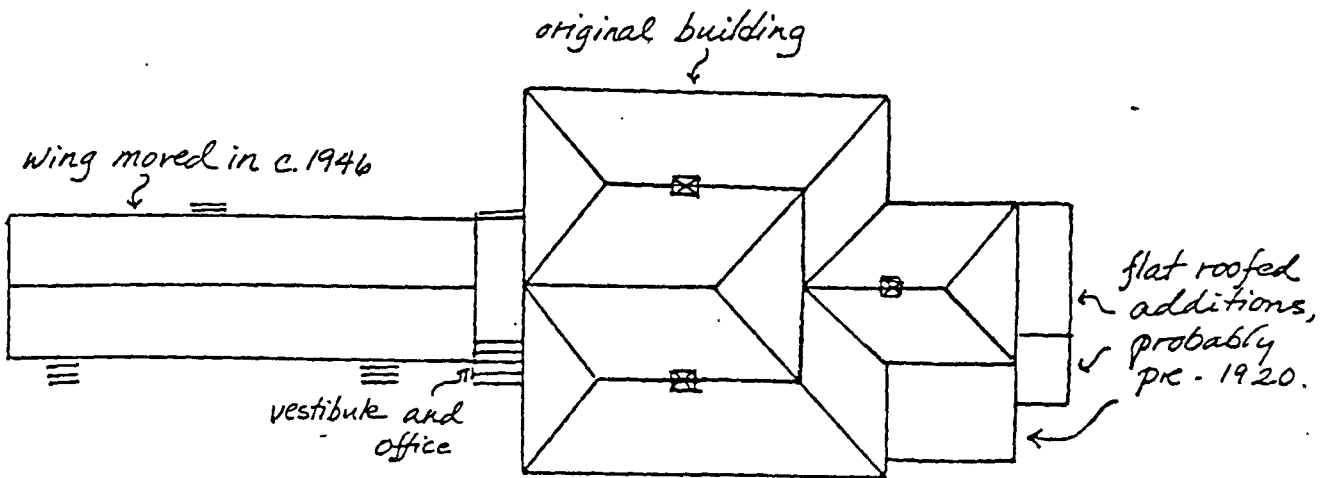
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*Historic Resources of San Marcos
#5 Negro School*

Home
Economics
Bldg. moved in
c. 1930. Construction
is earlier.

Scale is approximate.