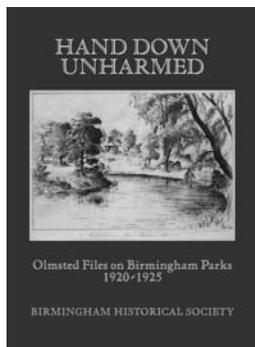


BIRMINGHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Newsletter

February 2008

## Society Publishes Park Letters



It's one thing to hear a re-telling of a significant bit of history—like the important genesis of a park system for Birmingham. It's quite another—more captivating, more human, and more dynamic—to read the proceedings in the words of those who lived and strived to create the park system themselves.

*Hand Down Unharmed—Olmsted Files on Birmingham Parks, 1920–1925*, new from the Birmingham Historical

Society, features 448 pages of intriguing correspondence between Birmingham city leaders and the renowned park-planning firm of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. (who designed the grounds of the U.S. Capitol and conceived the credo for the National Park system).

“It's the story of real life,” says Marjorie White, director of the Society and an editor of the volume. “The correspondence reveals the framework of some projects that came to be and others which are only just being enacted today.” In the course of the fascinating series of letters, politicians espouse their own visions, the protagonist dies of a heart attack, and the intentions of all parties emerge as the human element juggles with the proposed plan.

“The Olmsted Brothers firm included premier designers, professionals at their peak,” continues White. “They had worked with the great park systems of America—Boston, Baltimore, Seattle, Portland, Chicago, and more.” Across the nation, the firm tutored individuals and park boards in what parks were and

how they should be created and managed. “The Birmingham files constitute one amazing correspondence course—full of relevance and insight for those involved with parks today,” says White.

The new book includes:

- Re-creations of written materials donated to the Library of Congress by Olmsted himself
- Annotations from both senders/recipients of the letters and associates involved in all offices
- Reproductions of telegrams, bills, photographs, and drawings accompanying the correspondence
- Period newspaper accounts of the process
- Biographical sketches of local and national figures involved in the park movement
- An epilogue with a historical overview (including the outcomes of plans and people)

“The major figures in park planning in early 20th century America play largely into this collection of documents,” explains Katie Tipton, co-editor. “Their letters and drawings reveal much of what was considered the height of civic planning during that period.”

*Hand Down Unharmed* (\$30 postpaid) follows the Birmingham Historical Society's republication of the original park plan produced by the Olmsted firm in 1925 as well as 2006 book *The Olmsted Vision—Parks for Birmingham*, which analyzes the plan in light of current park projects. All three books are available from [www.bhistorical.org](http://www.bhistorical.org).

## Annual Meeting Salutes Our Hero: M. P. Phillips



M. P. Phillips, c. 1921. Portrait courtesy Birmingham-Southern College, photograph by Marc Bondarenko, 2007.

The publication of *Hand Down Unharmed* will be celebrated with brief talks at the upcoming annual meeting of the Birmingham Historical Society. The meeting, which is open to the public, will be held Tuesday, February 19th, at 7:30 p.m. in the Birmingham Botanical Gardens Auditorium.

Co-editors of Birmingham's Olmsted papers, Katie Tipton and Marjorie White will offer brief insights into the “Man Who Brought Olmsted to Birmingham.”

M. P. Phillips made a fortune trading timber and then turned to his passion, long term planning for the preservation of our region's natural and scenic resources as parks. A native of Maryland, Phillips gave his fortune to Birmingham-Southern College in a secret trust agreement and published the Olmsted Brothers park plan for Birmingham before his untimely death in 1925. He also gave Southern the M. Paul Phillips Library. As his correspondence with the Olmsted firm has been lost in the bowels of the Library of Congress, his role as green space champion remained unknown, until now. Please join us to hear more about this man of integrity and commitment.

### Report of the Nominating Committee

Sara Ruiz de Molina, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, reports that the following individuals are willing to serve as new Trustees and Officers for 2008: Kay I. Worley, Vice President; Lee Bowron, David Driscoll, and Amy Murphy, as New Trustees. Members will vote on the nominees at the Annual Meeting.

### Pick up *Hand Down Unharmed*

2007 Members may pick up their copy of the 2007 book at the Annual Meeting. Volumes will be mailed to those members not picking up their books at the meeting on February 20. Please call 251-1880 if you do not receive your book.

# Cataloguing School Closures

Pre-1920s



Tuggle Institute

Post World War II Building Boom



West End High School

1950s



Tuggle Elementary

1920s



Washington Elementary

*Historic neighborhood schools can enrich student's learning experience, allowing children to walk to school, to attend a smaller, more intimate school with friends from their own neighborhood, and to grow up immersed in the historic school's tradition and surrounded by its distinguished and often unique architecture. And there considerable evidence that smaller schools improve academic achievement.*

Rob Nieweg, Coordinator of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Historic Neighborhood Schools Initiative.

The physical housing of children is just one of the challenges facing Boards of Education.

Today, the Birmingham Board of Education operates 65 schools and is reviewing the closing of scores of historic schools to meet state-mandated financial requirements. Other historic schools been recently closed and remain vacant.

In 1952, when the Birmingham Board of Education and the Birmingham Planning Commission studied needs for school buildings for the "foreseeable" population, 95% of Birmingham school children attended 70 public schools. These facilities included 8 high schools and 62 elementaries, most of them built during the remarkable building campaign of the late 1920s under the administration of Supt. Charles B. Glenn. Philanthropist Erskine Ramsay served as Chairman of the Board that built these massive, red brick, neighborhood schools designed by the finest architects of the era. The new facilities replaced then existing complexes of frame structures, rented stores, church basements, and houses that had served as schools. A 1923 study of system wide needs laid out the building campaign. With ample budgets provided by bond issues, community and business support, these schools were built to stand for the ages. As neighborhood schools, they were tightly woven into the fabric of the early 20th century communities in which they were located. A second School Survey was published in January 1927 and the citizens voted another bond issue for more new school buildings.

By the 1950s, with veterans returning from World War II and families and neighborhoods growing and expanding into farmlands to the east and west of the city center, the 1952 study suggested the

construction of many new school complexes and additions to existing schools to ease the crowding due to increased numbers of students. Forty-one new school buildings were built by 1961, others rebuilt or partially rebuilt. Auditoriums and gymnasiums were also provided. The Birmingham system provided separate facilities for blacks and whites, who from 1926 to 1950 were zoned into certain residential areas of the city where neighborhood schools were built. Most of the schools suggested for closure (first list) today serve 200-300 elementary age students in historic neighborhoods, including Ensley, East Lake, Enon Ridge, Gate City, Norwood, North Birmingham, Titusville, West End, Woodlawn, and Wylam.

Recent allocations of major City funds have permitted the Birmingham School Board to once again construct new schools. These include Carver and Ensley High Schools and South Hampton and Robinson Elementaries. The Board has also added to other schools and renovated Phillips and Woodlawn High Schools.

The construction of newer and larger school buildings, together with declining enrollments in the city schools, and state-mandated financial belt-tightening, has led to the proposed closing of historic schools. This catalog showcases school buildings, already closed, and those recommended for closure by Superintendent Stan Mims in late 2007. In late January 2008, the superintendent recommended a new list of schools for closure that includes those schools indicated an asterisk (\*) if they were also on the 2007 list and otherwise indicated in *italics*.

This catalog is published to provide information about the schools and to encourage respectful treatment, particularly of those schools built for the ages and as neighborhood anchors.



Wilson Elementary



Council Elementary



North Birmingham Elementary

## Schools Proposed for Closure



**Robert C. Arthur Elementary** (1971-1972)  
625 14th Avenue NW, Brindlewood

This sprawling campus is set deep within its neighborhood of 1950s and 1960s era homes. Robert C. Arthur served as a member and President of the Birmingham Board of Education.



**Charles A. Brown Elementary School**  
(1951, 2002)  
4811 Court J/48th Street, Belview Heights

Named for educator Dr. Charles A. Brown, teacher, principal, and associate superintendent, who served Birmingham children for four decades from 1893 to 1939, and as associate superintendent from 1922 to 1939. In the 1950s, the school superbly set into its tree-line neighborhood originally served 800 students.



**Bush Middle School-Magnet** (1923, 1928, 1952, 1957, 1990s)  
1112 25th Street (25th and Avenue K), Ensley  
Architect: D. O. Whilldin (in the 1920s)

Named for Ernest Forrest Bush, first principal of the first Bush school built by the city of Ensley near this site in 1901 before Ensley became a Birmingham neighborhood. Money for the original school building was secured from a loan of \$7,000 and was retired by a tax on saloons. Bush, Ensley High School, and a branch library complete the current educational complex here. New houses are being built nearby at Tuxedo Junction.

**Center Street Middle School** (opened 1955, recent major additions)  
1832 Center Way South

This sprawling campus is nestled deep within the Titusville neighborhood.



**Councill (Negro) Elementary School**  
(1926, 1928)  
1400 Avenue M, Ensley

The first Councill School was built by the city of Ensley and named for Dr. William Hooper Councill, founder, president A&M College at Normal, Alabama. The massive, red brick 1920s school sits on a triangular park site, but lies within the floodplain of Village Creek. At construction it accommodated 1,040 pupils.

\* **A. G. Gaston K-5 and 6-8**  
5400 Oakwood Street, Roosevelt City

Named for Arthur Green Gaston, legendary Birmingham business entrepreneur, the school was built to educate youth in the growing post World War II neighborhood. Originally a county school, it was annexed into the City of Birmingham in the 1950s.

\* **Gate City Elementary School** (1955, with additions)  
6910 Georgia Road, Gate City

Named for the community of Gate City, the current school was built to educate 700 students who moved to the newly constructed 500-unit Marks Village built in 1950.



\* **Gibson Elementary School** (1926, 1928)  
50th Street North/9th Court North/Messer Airport Highway, Woodlawn

Named for school board member, J. B. Gibson, who donated the school site, this red brick school house with 1930s stone bleachers overlooking its ball field, is among the handsomest in the system.

**Glenn Middle School**  
Originally Charles B. Glenn Vocational High School (opened 1952)  
901 16th Street West, Bush Hills

Named for the Harvard University educated Charles B. Glenn, who served as assistant superintendent of the Birmingham Board of Education from 1898 to 1921 and superintendent from 1921 to 1942, the gorgeous property houses a hillside campus of low-scale buildings.



**Going Elementary School-Magnet** (pre 1972)  
1015 N. Martinwood Drive, Martinwood

This school is set deep within its neighborhood of 1950s and 1960s homes. Dr. J. C. Going served as associate superintendent of Birmingham schools from 1942 to 1957.

**Green Acres Middle School** (1956, recent renovations/additions)  
945 Pineview Road, Green Acres

Named for the community of Green Acres. Mrs. Zula Cofield, whose land she claimed had been condemned at an unfair value, protested the construction of the 1950s school. It has served as a community anchor ever since.



\* **Hayes High School** (1960, with many subsequent expansions)  
501 43rd Street North/Messer Airport Highway, North Avondale

Named for Carol W. Hayes, longtime Director of Negro Schools who became principal of Slater School in 1922 and serving children in the system until 1966. Located on a 17 acre site, Hayes was completed in four sections with three classroom wings and a circular structure housing the library, music/band area, and auditorium. Hayes has served as both high school and middle school. Nearby are Whatley Elementary (opened in 1960), a Birmingham Public Library branch, and the M. L. K. Recreation Center.



**Hill Elementary School** (1950s, renovations planned 2001)  
507 Third Street N, Smithfield

Brunetta C. Hill served as the first principal of this neighborhood school.

**Kingston K-8** (1950s, recent renovations)  
801 46th Street North, Kingston

Named for pioneer settler Peyton G. King whose family platted his farmlands as the

Kingston subdivision in the early 20th century, the school met demand for increased facilities following World War II.

**\*Kirby Middle School** (post 1972)  
1328 28th Street North



**Robert E. Lee Elementary School**  
(1925, 1928)  
630 18th Street SW, West End

Named for Gen. Robert E. Lee, the neighborhood elementary has served for eight decades as the feeder school to West End High School located on the same campus.



**\*North Birmingham Elementary School**  
(1923, 1930, 1950)  
2620 35th Avenue North, North Birmingham  
Architect: Warren, Knight and Davis

Perhaps the handsomest red brick school in the system, it is named for the town of North Birmingham in which the first school on this site was built in 1908 prior to the town's annexation into Birmingham. The current school was attended by 1,000 students in the 1920s. Its academic excellence has been often and recently cited. It is located on a major traffic artery and close to the new Carver High School.



**Norwood Elementary** (1923-1925, 1928)  
3136 Norwood Boulevard, Norwood  
Architect: Warren, Knight and Davis

Named for the subdivision platted in the 1890s and expanded in 1912 by the Birmingham Realty Company whose president named the area for his associate Sidney Norwood, the school serves as a neighborhood anchor along Norwood's grand boulevard.

**Oliver Elementary School** (1959)  
6871 6th Court South, Oakwood

Named for Henry Jefferson Oliver, the school is nestled deep within its neighborhood.

**Powderly Elementary School**  
Dawson Avenue SW & 20th Street SW,  
Powderly

Named for the Powderly neighborhood which was annexed into Birmingham in 1953 and 1954, Powderly was formerly a county school.



**\*N. H. Price Elementary School** (1956,  
renovations planned 2001)  
532 28th Street SW, West End

Named for N. H. Price, former principal of the Elyton, Hemphill, and Lee Elementary schools, as well as Jackson and West End High Schools, the 1950s school is located deep within its neighborhood of 1950s era homes.

**\*Putnam Middle School** (1962)  
1757 Montclair Road

The middle school campus sprawls beneath the pines just east of Eastwood Mall. W. E. Putnam served as director of research for the Birmingham Board of Education.



**Tuggle Elementary School** (1952, 1957)  
412 12th Court North, Enon Ridge

Named for Carrie A. Tuggle, founder of the private school Tuggle Institute which operated at the site from 1903 to 1933 and educated orphans and future community leaders, the 15 acre site with 13 buildings was purchased by the Birmingham Board in 1934 and named Tuggle Elementary in 1936. The current facilities were built in the 1950s.

**Washington (Negro) Elementary**  
(1908, 1929)  
115 4th Avenue South, Titusville

Built originally by the town of Elyton and named for Booker T. Washington, educator and founder of Tuskegee Institute, the school (pictured on page 2) was demolished in 2007.

**Wenonah Elementary** (not in system  
in 1972)  
3008 Wilson Rd. SW, Wenonah



**\*West End High School** (1930, 1949)  
1840 Pearson Avenue SW, West End  
Architect: Warren, Knight and Davis, D. Whilldin and consulting architect.

Named for the West End community and located on 12.5 acres, the massive red brick complex adjoins Robert E. Lee Elementary. Built by the finest architects and contractors of the era, the construction is worthy of careful reuse.



**Wilson Elementary** (1928, renovations  
planned 2001)  
1030 4th Terrace West

This sturdy red brick school nestled in the neighborhood near Birmingham Southern College is named for Woodrow Wilson President of the United States from 1913 to 1921.



**Wylam Elementary School** (1922)  
701 Erie Street, Wylam  
Architect: D. O. Whilldin

Named for the town of Wylam in which the original school on the hilltop site was built in 1900 by the newly incorporated town. Wylam, a city neighborhood since 1910, is named for the English town from which a pioneer resident of the former coal mining community came.

Editor's Note: In late January 2008, the superintendent recommended a new list of schools for closure that includes those schools indicated an asterisk (\*) if they were also on the 2007 list and otherwise indicated in *italics*.

# Models for Successful Reuse of Historic School Buildings

Since the early 1980s, alumni, educators and corporations have worked with the Birmingham Board to successfully reuse historic school complexes. This approach is a win-win for all. Three red brick buildings built in 1901 serve as offices. Gorgeous hilltop properties set within neighborhoods operate educational and community service programs and also host neighborhood activities. And Thomas School houses the Jimmy Hale Mission.

A most successful reuse is Birmingham's JCCEO program which operates Head Start Centers in these former public and parochial schools: Graymont, Calloway, Center Point, Fairmont, St. Francis, St. Joseph's, Sherman Heights, West Center Street. JCCEO has classes or offices in Oliver, Tuxedo, and Wenonah schools. The majority of Head Start students feed into the Birmingham system.



Graymont Elementary

**Graymont Elementary** (1901, 1908)  
300 Eighth Avenue W

The first desegregated school in the Birmingham system (September 1963), historic Graymont School is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and serves today as the headquarters for the Jefferson County Office of Economic Opportunity (JCCEO).

**Lakeview Elementary-Martin Advertising** (1901)  
2801 University Boulevard

Lakeview has served as offices for Martin Advertising since the grammar school closed in 1981. Alumna and educator Penny Cunningham led the campaign to save Lakeview and listed it on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Thomas Elementary-Jimmy Hale Mission** (1920)  
Second Avenue N. at 35th Street

The former school was converted to the Jimmy Hale Mission in 2007.

**Ullman School-UAB** (1901, 1950s)  
14th Street at Sixth Avenue S.

Ullman operated as a high school from 1939 to 1970 and is now used by UAB Department of Behavioral Sciences. As a member of the Board of Education Samuel Ullman (1840-1921) insisted educational opportunities for blacks be expanded. Ullman is best known for his poem: "Youth." UAB has also preserved the Ullman Residence on Southside as a museum.

**Fairmont Elementary-JCCEO Center** (1950s)  
4217 Lewisburg Road

Set on a ridge on a wooded, elevated site, the school was annexed into the city in 1953 and has served for years as a Head Start Center.

**West Center Street Elementary-JCCEO Center** (1959-60)  
1712 3rd Street SW, Woodland Park

This hilltop site surrounded by playing fields and nestled deep within its neighborhood has served as a Head Start and community center for more than 20 years.

**Calloway Elementary-JCCEO Center** (1958)  
3417 34th Terrace N

Just south of the Sloss coke and chemicals plant, this former elementary has recently been converted to a Head Start Center.

**Sherman Heights Elementary-JCCEO Center** (before 1955-56)  
2000 Pleasant Hill Road

Set on a breathtaking site overlooking the valley in which Ensley lies, the 1950s school has served as a Head Start Center since the 1980s.

**St. Joseph's School-JCCEO Center**, formerly a Catholic School, now Head Start  
1105 30th Street, Ensley

**St. Francis School-JCCEO Center**, formerly a Catholic School, now Head Start  
508 Central Ave, Bessemer

JCCEO also offers classes in the Wenonah and Oliver schools and has offices in Tuxedo. It operates other Head Start programs in Center Point, Graysville, Midfield and Tarrant.



Lakeview Elementary



Thomas Elementary



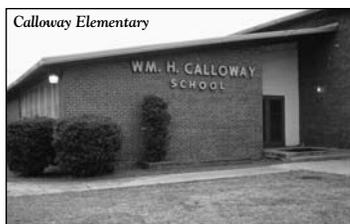
Ullman School



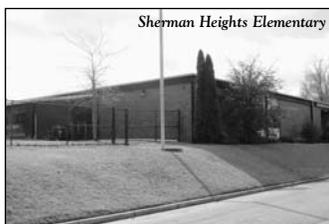
Fairmont Elementary



West Center Street Elementary



Calloway Elementary



Sherman Heights Elementary

# Schools That Have Been Closed and Await Reuse



Elyton Elementary



Ensley High School

**Elyton Elementary** (1908, 1926)  
Center Street at Second Avenue  
Architect: D. O. Whilldin

**Ensley High School** (1910)  
Avenue K between 24th & 25th Streets  
Architect: D. O. Whilldin

With the recent completion of a new Ensley High School, historic Ensley High School and the adjoining Bush Elementary await new opportunities.



Powell Elementary

**Powell Elementary** (1888)  
Sixth Avenue N. and 26th St.

Named for James R. Powell, enthusiastic promoter of early Birmingham who donated his salary as Mayor to support growth of public schools. Powell is the oldest remaining Birmingham school and a superb example of the first generation of red brick American school with all classrooms amply lit with sunlight and fresh air.

**Robinson Elementary** (1909)  
First Avenue S. at 84th St., East Lake  
Architect: D. O. Whilldin

Named for Judge J. E. Robinson, Mayor of East Lake, the town that built this school prior to its incorporation as a neighborhood in the city of Birmingham in 1910. A new elementary has been constructed adjacent to this building which is vacant, awaiting reuse.

Other schools that have been recently proposed for sale: Old Carver High School, Lane Professional Development Center and Apple Valley, Fairmont, Mc Caw, Powell Annex, Sandusky, Old Scott, Sherman Heights, Old Spaulding, Stockham Valve, Sandusky Elementary and West Center Street schools. Of these schools, Fairmont, Sherman Heights, and West Center Street Schools are being used for Head Start programs and community centers.



Robinson Elementary

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

"How to Save Your Historic Schools 10 Action Steps" at [www. National Trust for Historic Preservation.org](http://www.NationalTrustforHistoricPreservation.org); Publications from the National Trust for Historic Preservation: [A Community Guide to Saving Older Schools](#). This booklet demonstrates through case studies that older school buildings can successfully adapt to new technology and the latest educational mandates. [Historic Neighborhood Schools in the Age of Sprawl: Why Johnny Can't Walk to School](#). This publication highlights the problem of "school sprawl" and the impact that public policy has had on older schools in our communities. The report includes case studies illustrating how citizens in various communities have rescued and rehabilitated historic schools and steps to avoid school sprawl and to promote historic preservation. Both are available through Preservation Books online at [www.nthpbooks.org](http://www.nthpbooks.org) or call 202-588-6296.

## SOURCES FOR THIS REPORT:

*Report of Progress on Birmingham Public Schools, 1921-1931*; *History of Birmingham Public Schools, Centennial Edition, 1874-1972* by Elsie H. Dillon; clipping files with newspaper stories on individual schools and school policy in the Southern History Department of the Birmingham Public Library. As the clipping files rarely extend beyond 1980, research into post 1950s construction has been limited. However, field visits and photographic documentation of the schools and their grounds were made by Kaydee and Sybil Breman and Marjorie White. Historic photographs of the schools are from the collections of the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts.



One Sloss Quarters  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

[www.bhistorical.org](http://www.bhistorical.org)

*Special Issue*  
Cataloguing School  
Closures

Baseball grandstand behind home plate, Gibson Elementary (1930s).