

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Wheatley Public School

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 921 Garfield Street not for publication N/A

city or town Poplar Bluff vicinity N/A

state Missouri code MO county Butler code 023 zip code 63901

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Claire F. Blackwell 24 Dec. 97
Signature of certifying official Claire F. Blackwell Date

Deputy SHPO
Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

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

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

Wheatley Public School
Name of Property

Butler County, MO
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply) Category of Property (Check only one box)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local | <input type="checkbox"/> district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-State | <input type="checkbox"/> site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal | <input type="checkbox"/> structure |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> object |

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count).

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, Missouri

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

<u>EDUCATION</u>	<u>School</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

<u>EDUCATION</u>	<u>School</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS
/Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	<u>concrete</u>
roof	<u>asphalt</u>
walls	<u>brick</u>
other	<u>wood</u>

Narrative Description

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

Wheatley Public School
Name of Property

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions).

EDUCATION
ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK

Period of Significance

1928 - 1958

Significant Dates

1928

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect/Bonsak and Pearce Inc.
Builder/Miller, J.J.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

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

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Department of Natural Resources

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Wheatley Public School
name of property
Butler County, Missouri
county and State
Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, MO

Summary

The Wheatley Public School is a two-story public school building constructed in the Colonial Revival style in 1928. The building is located in a residential area north of the downtown area of Poplar Bluff. The building was designed in a "U" plan and has a cast concrete foundation, flat roof of asphalt based roofing material, and exterior of six-course common bond brick. The building was designed with primary entrances on both the north and south facades. On the east facade is a secondary entrance into the building. The building is composed of central corridors and classrooms on both floors with a gymnasium which encompasses much of the west section of the building. Despite the loss of its original windows, the school retains overall integrity of its design, character, and setting. With the exception of the school, no other building or structure is included within the property boundary. The building is included within the Public Buildings (Schools) property type of the Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, multiple property nomination.

Narrative Description

The Wheatley Public School is located on a large lot with primary entrances facing east towards Garfield Street and south. The main entrance into the building is located on the east facade. This entrance has a ca. 1970 aluminum and glass door and an original cast concrete surround with a dentilled cornice. Above this entrance is a concrete panel inscribed "Wheatley Public School." Secondary entrances into the building are located in the gabled entry bays on the north and south facades. These entrances have ca. 1970 aluminum and glass doors. The original cast concrete surrounds remain extant and display keystones and a dentilled cornice. Over the doors are original copper light fixtures. Between the first floor entrances and second floor windows in this entry bay is a rectangular brick panel with concrete corners. Above the second story windows in this bay is an elliptical brick arch of soldier course brick and a concrete keystone. In the center of this arch is a diamond shaped inset concrete panel. At the roofline of these bays is concrete coping and at the corners are concrete quoins.

Windows throughout the building were replaced ca. 1970 with the existing one-over-one aluminum sash windows. Many of the windows have fixed upper lights above the sash units. One window opening on the south facade has been infilled with brick while another has added wood panels. Most gymnasium windows on the west and north facades have been enclosed with wood panels. The windows retain their original concrete sills and soldier course brick lintels with concrete keystones. At the corners of the building are ashlar concrete quoins. At the roofline of the building is concrete coping. The facades are also accentuated with raised brick trim.

On the west facade of the building are the gymnasium window bays which are separated by brick wall buttresses. Entrances on this facade have ca. 1970 solid wood double doors. On the north facade are several basement windows which have been covered with wood panels. This facade also features an interior end brick chimney for the building's boiler, and an original shed roof frame concrete wing which provides an exterior door to the basement level.

The interior of the building retains its original floor plan and detailing. These features include plaster walls and ceiling, wood floors, and original multi-panel glass and wood doors with rectangular transoms. Leading from the entrance vestibules into the building are original fifteen-light glass and wood double doors with five-light sidelights and multi-light transoms. Original wood staircases connect the two floors and have closed stringers with plaster wall surfaces and wood treads and risers.

The gymnasium has original plaster walls and ceilings and hardwood floor. Incorporated into the gymnasium is also a proscenium arch and stage. Overlooking the gymnasium from the second floor level are four sets of four windows. These windows were originally for spectators to watch sporting events and these windows can be recessed into the wall above. Most classroom spaces retain their original wood floors and plaster walls, although some floors have been covered with carpeting. In most spaces are new light fixtures.

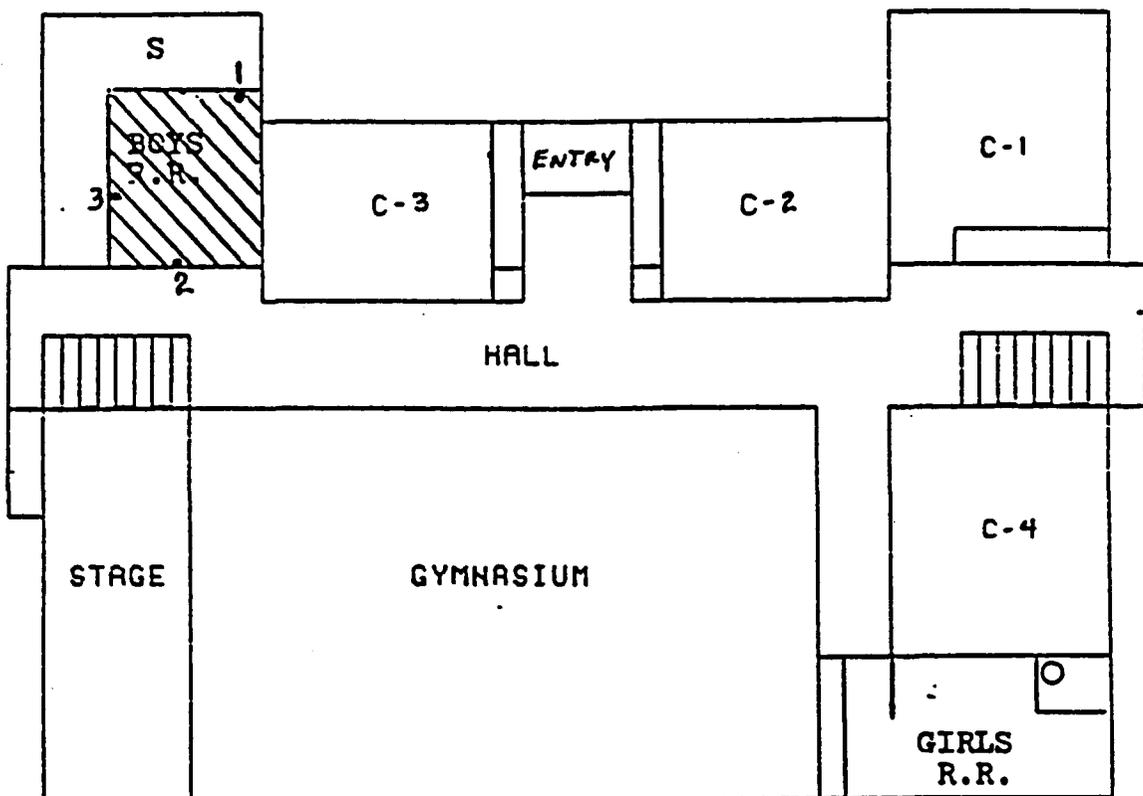
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section 7 Page 2

Wheatley Public School
name of property
Butler County, Missouri
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Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, MO



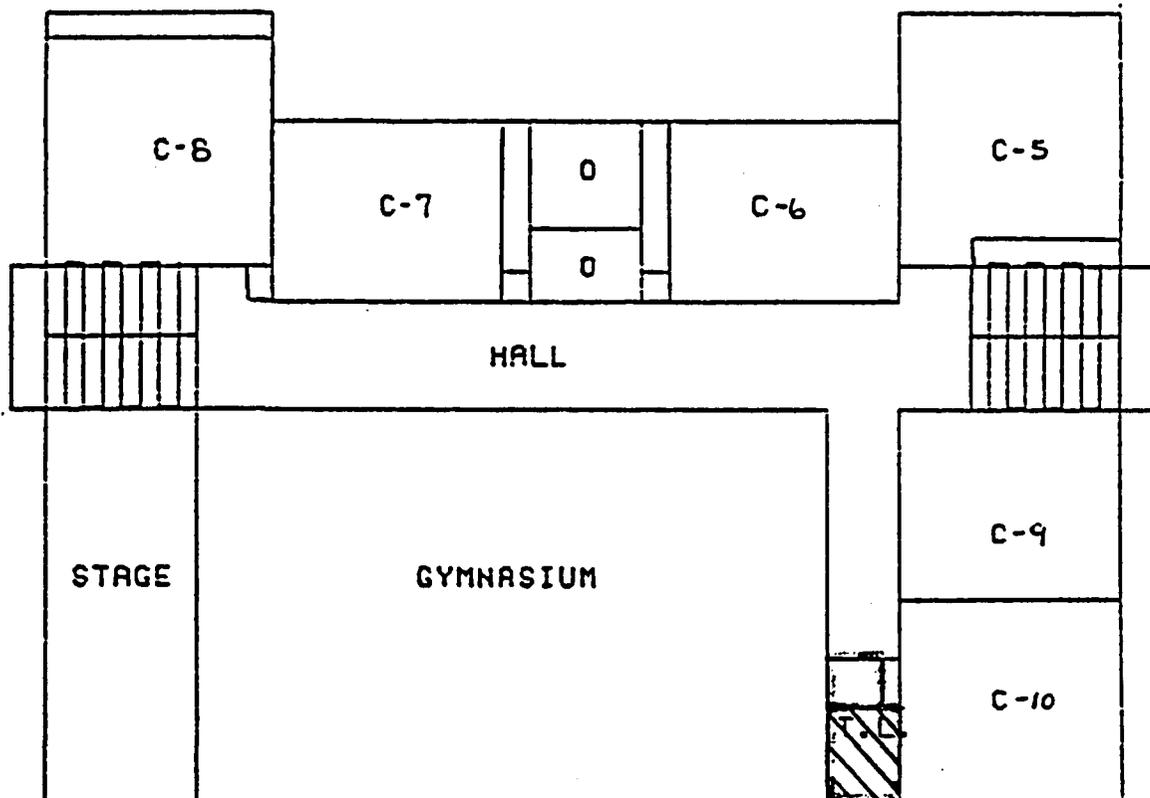
Wheatley Public School
921 Garfield Street
Poplar Bluff, MO
Floor Plan, First Floor
Not To Scale

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Wheatley Public School
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Wheatley Public School
921 Garfield Street
Poplar Bluff, MO
Floor Plan, Second Floor
Not To Scale

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Section 8 Page 4

Wheatley Public School
name of property
Butler County, Missouri
county and State
Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, MO

SUMMARY

The Wheatley Public School is significant under National Register Criteria A for its role in the educational history of Poplar Bluff and for its association with ethnic history. The Wheatley Public School was constructed in 1928 to serve the African American community and it continued in this use for thirty years until desegregation in 1958. The building is one of the strongest links to Poplar Bluff's African American residents and it continues to be used as a school by the city. Although the building's original fenestration was replaced in the 1970s, its overall form, plan and Colonial Revival style detailing are evident. The building is also notable under National Register Criteria Consideration G for exceptional significance within the past fifty years. It remained Poplar Bluff's only African American school until desegregation in 1958. Following the end of segregation, the school became one of a number of integrated schools with the city's educational system. The building's period of significance extends from its construction date to the end of segregation in 1958. The Wheatley Public School is associated with the historic context of Public Buildings (Schools) of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1883 - 1945. The building is included within the Public Buildings (Schools) property type of the Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, multiple property nomination.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The first school in Poplar Bluff was established in 1869 by the "Butler County Education Society."¹ This two-story frame building was succeeded by a new brick public school in 1875. By the early 20th century, the Poplar Bluff school system included the Central High School building which was built in 1891 and used as a junior high school, and the Mark Twain school which was built in 1910 as the primary high school. In addition to these schools there were also several elementary schools scattered throughout the city.

The north side of Main Street became the home to Poplar Bluff's working-class and middle-class African American community at the turn of the century. To meet the educational needs of these residents, the city constructed a one-room schoolhouse in 1901 at the present site of the Wheatley Public School. This school was renamed the "Wheatley School" in 1908, in honor of Phillis Wheatley (1753?-1784), a well-known black poet who was born in Africa and brought to America as a slave. The school enrolled approximately two hundred black students by 1907, and continued to grow in the early twentieth century. In 1928, the need for a larger, replacement school was acknowledged and the present Wheatley Public School was constructed.²

The new Wheatley Public School was designed by the architectural firm of Bonsack & Pearce, Inc., and the building contractor was J.J. Miller. This building, which served grades one through twelve, boasted a library, eight classrooms, and one of the best gymnasiums in southeast Missouri. The building was designed in the Colonial Revival style which was popular for school building during this period. This style emphasized symmetrical plans and utilized classical detailing such as quoins, arches, and classical pilasters and columns. The influence of this style was expressed in the Wheatley Public School through its corner brick quoins, window lintels with keystones, and dentilled cornices over the entrances. The Wheatley Public School is representative, but not an outstanding example of, Colonial Revival architecture. The building's appearance was altered in the 1970s through the use of modern aluminum and glass doors and windows and in recent years other window openings have been enclosed with plywood panels. Due to the extent of these alterations, the building is not nominated for its architectural design but instead for its historical significance.

¹ Deem, History of Butler County, p. 79.

² Long, "The Integration of Poplar Bluff R-1 School District," p. 3-4.

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Wheatley Public School
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Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, MO

From 1928 to 1958, the Wheatley Public School was one of the centers of the African American community. It was the only school which housed African American students and the building was also used for social gatherings, theatrical productions, and other community services. The school gained statewide recognition in 1938 when it won the state basketball championship in Jefferson City. In 1939, Poplar Bluff contained five public grade schools (including the Wheatley School), a senior high school (the Mark Twain School), and a junior high school (the Central High School). In this year the school system employed 81 teachers and were attended by 2,704 students.³

The Wheatley Public School was considered one of the best schools for African Americans in Missouri in the 1950s and it boasted that all fourteen of its teachers had achieved at least their B.S. degree. In the early 1950s, a separate Industrial Building was constructed which housed industrial classes and a shop. This building was constructed facing Benton Street and due to its age is not included within the property boundary.

In 1954, however, the landmark Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, declared that segregated schools in America were "inherently unequal." Many school systems across the country began voluntary integration of public schools soon after, however, most places within the South waited until the 1960s to integrate. The City of Poplar Bluff reacted to the Supreme Court ruling by deciding to voluntarily integrate its public schools in 1957. The Class of 1957 was the last for graduating seniors at the school and in 1958 the Wheatley Public School and Poplar Bluff High School were integrated. However, the integration process was planned to affect only one grade at a time and desegregation was not fully achieved until the 1968-69 school year.⁴

In 1967, the Wheatley Public School was damaged by a fire. The school was forced to close and the African American children attending Wheatley had to attend school in the city's other public schools. City officials decided the building was too damaged to repair and wanted it razed, however, the insurance company felt that the damage was not extensive enough to warrant its destruction. The insurance company's decision prevailed and the Wheatley Public School was repaired and ready for school in the fall of 1968.

Even after the school's integration, the Wheatley Public School was seen as a center of African American community in Poplar Bluff. Local black civic leaders were allowed access to the school and its gymnasium for community activities and sporting events. The school is located adjacent the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, a historic African American congregation founded in 1871, which was built in 1917. Although the school has been integrated since 1968, the local community continues to see the Wheatley Public School as a symbol of the local black community's heritage.

Additional information can be found in the accompanying multiple property cover document, "Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, Missouri."

³ Deem, History of Butler County, p. 81.

⁴ Long, p. 5-7.

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Section 9 Page 6

 Wheatley Public School
name of property
 Butler County, Missouri
county and State
Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, MO

Bibliography

Deem, History of Butler County, Missouri.

Long, Sarah J. "The Integration of the Poplar Bluff R-1 School District." Report prepared for Southeast Missouri State University, 1992.

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Section 10 Page 7

Wheatley Public School
name of property
Butler County, Missouri
county and State
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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary for the Wheatley Public School includes all of lots 1,2,3, and 4 of block 25 on the Butler County tax map 13-2-3. The boundary includes the four lots upon which the school building is sited and omits post-1950 buildings to the west and southwest which are also owned by the Poplar Bluff Superintendent of Schools. The school is bounded on the north by Jefferson Avenue, on the east by Garfield Street, and on the south and west by concrete sidewalks.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The boundary for the Wheatley Public School includes all property historically associated with the school during its period of significance (1928 – 1958). The boundary omits buildings and structures constructed after the period of significance which are on adjacent lots.

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Section Photographs Page 8

Photographs

Wheatley Public School
name of property
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county and State
Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, MO

Wheatley Public School
921 Garfield Street
Poplar Bluff, Butler County, Missouri
Photo by: Thomason and Associates
Date: January 25, 1997
Location of Negatives: Department of Natural Resources

- Photograph No. 1: East and south facades, view towards the northwest.
- Photograph No. 2: Detail of entrance on the south facade, view towards northwest.
- Photograph No. 3: West and south facades, view towards the northeast.
- Photograph No. 4: North facade, view towards the southeast.
- Photograph No. 5: Interior view of first floor staircase.
- Photograph No. 6: Interior view of second floor hallway. Windows on the left open into the gymnasium.
- Photograph No. 7: Interior view of gymnasium.





NO SMOKING
Tobacco products are prohibited
in or on
the campus of
Poplar Bluff R-1 Schools

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