

Paul Lawrence Dunbar School

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Physical Description

The Dunbar School is a four story, fourteen bay, orange brick building designed in the Deco/Moderne style. The building is defined by both its verticality and a series of subtle projections and recessions typical of the stylistic time period. Ribbon bands of windows, grouped in three's are given emphasis by pronounced brick mullions which rise three stories in height. Further emphasis is given by the brick pilasters with compound capitals which punctuate the bay openings. This sharp vertical progression is broken by the spandrel panels below each of the window openings. At the first floor, large vents are cleverly concealed within the spandrel panel. On the upper floors chevron patterns embellish these areas. The building end entrances have handsome door surrounds which rise to a stylized battlemented conclusion. Above the third floor is a caged, recreational area. Beyond this out door deck, the building steps back to rise an additional story.

Statement of Significance

This skillfully crafted building represents a transition from the more traditional Art Deco style, boxy in character to the functional and streamlined Moderne style of design. Constructed in 1931-1932 this building represents just one element of the spectrum of buildings designed by Irwin T. Catharine. Son of School Board Chairman Joseph Catharine the younger Catharine studied architecture at Drexel Institute in preparation for a career with the School Board. Constructed shortly after his appointment to the position of Superintendent of Buildings, the Dunbar School and its companion structure the Delaplaine McDaniel School shows his sensitivity and understanding of twentieth century design aesthetics. The subtle differences in the design of the Dunbar School (1931) and the McDaniel School (1937), both designated as design type 166, reflects Catharine's ability to individualize and improve upon his most standard forms. His ability to successfully interpret the design vocabularies of Art Deco, Moderne, Neo-Classical and Academic Gothic indicates the dimension of his design talent. During Catharine's tenure, the level of design for school buildings, such as this one, was unsurpassed.

Thus the Dunbar School is significant as a transitional Art Deco/Moderne design by the important public school architect Irwin T. Catharine.

area of significance: architecture

verbal boundary description

The nominated property consists of Philadelphia County lot 8861630 which contains the school and its contiguous grounds.

EVALUATION

EVALUATOR(S)

OR

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Spring Garden School #2
12th & Melon St.
18E486 620N4423 660

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Spring Garden School #1
12th & Odgen St.
18E486 660N4424 040

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
W&E Martin Orthopedic Sch.
18E485 100N4424 220

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Lydia Darrah School
18E485 820N4424 020

PHILADELPHIA QUADRANGLE
PENNSYLVANIA-NEW JERSEY
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

SW 1/4 SE
FRANKFORD



Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Daniel Boone School
18E488 920N4423 200

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Edison High School
18E487 660N4426 780

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
David Farragut School
18E488 420N4426 200

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
William S. Stokely
18E484 040N4425 900

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Paul Lawrence Dunbar
18E486 800N4430 600

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
William Penn School
18E486 040N4423 660

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Alexander Dallas Bache
18E485 140N4424 220

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Mifflin School
18E487 760N4423 500

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Fleischer School
18E486 340N4423 460

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Thaddeus Stevens School
18E486 340N4423 380

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Meredith School
18E487 100N4420 820

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
J. Sylvester Ramsey Sch.
18E486 300N4421 420

Philadelphia Public Schools
Philadelphia County
Samuel J. Randall School
18E486 340N4421 120

Philadelphia Public Schools