

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER/GEORGIA REGISTER NOMINATION

1. Name: Claflin School

2. Location: 1532 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Columbus, Muscogee County, Georgia

3a. Description: The Claflin School is located a few blocks northeast of downtown Columbus, the county seat of Muscogee County in western Georgia. The property comprises one large block bounded by three streets and a curving railroad line. It includes two school buildings constructed in 1921 and 1948, though the site was first used for African-American education as early as 1868. The two extant buildings are U-shaped, and arranged next to each other with facades facing opposite directions, creating an interior open courtyard. The fronts of both buildings are symmetrical with prominent central doorways flanked by large banks of windows. The one-story 1921 building faces east and is constructed of hollow clay tile blocks with alternating rows of wide and narrow tiles. It has elements of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, though it has lost its upper parapet section. Eight classrooms are reached by an interior hallway. The two-story 1948 building faces west. Its exterior is red brick, accented with stone belt courses. It exhibits characteristics of the International Style, including a flat roof, large groups of windows, and a horizontal emphasis. Stripped Classical elements are visible on the curved entry portico. The interior has double-loaded corridors on each floor. The symmetry is broken by a large auditorium wing extending to the north. Both buildings have good integrity, despite some losses due to abandonment, lack of maintenance, and vandalism. Landscaping on the property is minimal, consisting primarily of flat grassy areas with few trees, paved and gravel parking lots, and sidewalks. The current setting includes historic brick industrial buildings, vacant lots, and a railway corridor.

3b. Period of Significance: 1921-1965

3c. Acreage: 2.34 acres

3d. Boundary Explanation: The boundary of the nominated property follows the original parcel of land on which the school was constructed, which is also the current legal boundary.

4a. National Register Criteria: A and C

4b. National Register Areas of Significance: Black Ethnic Heritage, Education, and Architecture

4c. Statement of Significance: The Claflin School is significant in the area of black ethnic heritage as a rare example of a well-built African-American school constructed before the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The first four-room school on the site (not extant) was created in 1868 by the Freedmen's Bureau, the Claflin Academy of Boston, and local trustees (among others) to provide crucial education to recently emancipated African-American children. By 1880 the City of Columbus operated the school as part of its public school system. The current buildings were added in 1921 and 1948, but the campus continued to be segregated until 1970. Students could attend kindergarten through the fourth grade in the 1920s; classes up to the eighth grade were available by 1950 in a combined total of 16 classrooms. According to Carole Merritt in *Historic Black Resources: A Handbook for the Identification, Documentation, and Evaluation of Historic African-American Properties in Georgia*, "the history of black educational resources in Georgia reflects the evolution of racially separate facilities, from the founding of private institutions after emancipation through the development of public schools in the 20<sup>th</sup> century." A 1920s survey of Georgia's African-American schools determined that a majority of them were wood frame construction and only one in five schools had two or more rooms. The Claflin School was therefore a rare exception. The school is significant in the area of education as a good example of a centrally located urban public school, as defined in *Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in Georgia, 1868-1971*, a statewide historic context. The Claflin School is significant in the area of architecture for the two buildings that reflect the transitions that occurred in the design of early to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century urban schools. The character-defining features on the 1921 building include influences from California, such as simplified Spanish Colonial Revival details. The architect was Frederick Roy Duncan (1886-1947), a native of Columbus. The 1948 building is more streamlined with a linear form that was a precursor to the sprawling 1950s one-story schools. Architects were the Columbus team of James J. Walton Biggers, Jr., and Thomas Firth Lockwood, Jr. (1894-1963).

4d. Suggested Level of Significance: Claflin School is being nominated at the local level of significance as a good example of an early to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century public school constructed for African Americans during the era of segregation in Columbus.

5. Sponsor: The nomination is sponsored by the City of Columbus, and nomination materials were prepared by a volunteer.