
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Designation Case Nos. 17-09 and 21-13

National Training School for Women and Girls

601 50th Street, NE

Square 5194, Lot 829 (historically Lots 28-33)

Meeting Date: May 26, 2022
Applicants: Progressive National Baptist Convention
Affected ANC: 7C

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the National Training School for Women and Girls campus at 601 50th Street NE as a historic district to be entered in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and further recommends that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing as of national significance, consisting of three contributing buildings, one historic object, and one non-contributing building, and with a period of significance of 1909 to 1964, spanning from the year the National Training School for Women and Girls opened to the year in which the school transitioned to an co-ed elementary education school. The period of significance includes the evolution of the site development from the commencement of the school to dedication of the chapel.



Photograph of entry gate, c. 1958. (*Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, The Dedication Souvenir Brochure, cover*)

One building of the National Training School, the 1928 Trades Hall, was designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior on July 17, 1991, but there was no concurrent nomination for listing of the property in the D.C. Inventory. More recently, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the owner of the property and occupant of the Trades Hall, entered into an agreement with a developer to construct affordable housing on a portion of

the campus along 50th Street, NE. This apartment building, known as Providence Place, is currently nearing completion on a site (Lot 827) that was formerly part of the Training School campus, but is not included within the boundaries of the nominated historic district (Lot 829). In conjunction with that development, the property owner agreed to nominate the remainder of the property for listing in the D.C. Inventory. The HPO staff participated in conceptual review of the housing project to promote design compatibility with the campus buildings.

In recognition of the National Historic Landmark designation and the school's importance to education advancement, notable individuals, civil rights, architecture, and community development, the owner has submitted a nomination for the National Training School for Women and Girls campus site to be designated an historic district. The nomination, authored by EHT Traceries, encompasses a portion of the original campus site, including the national landmark buildings, a contributing object, a contributing vacant chapel, a contributing dormitory, and a non-contributing school building. The nomination states the district retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Background

The National Training School was founded by Nannie Helen Burroughs, one of America's most influential African American leaders. She distinguished herself as an educator, an organizer of the women's movements, labor advocate, a civil rights activist, and a government official. Her influence in these areas was both regional and national in scope during her lifetime.

Burroughs was born in Orange, Virginia in 1879 to emancipated parents and moved with her mother to Washington D.C. for better educational opportunities. She attended the prestigious M Street School and had hoped to land a teaching job after graduation. Devastated after being rejected for her dream job allegedly due to internal class politics, Burroughs envisioned building a school not beholden to politics.

Burroughs founded The National Training School for Women and Girls in 1909. The early 20th century was an era of business expansion and progressive reform in the United States. It was also the early days of the Great Migration, when thousands of African Americans migrated to eastern cities to escape Jim Crow laws, mob violence, and racism in the south. Burroughs had a vision and plan to build a vocational school in Washington D.C. for women and girls, nationally and internationally, to learn professional trades to improve their livelihood for their families and communities.

The National Training School for Women and Girls was unique because it was not co-educational, had no major funding source from white benefactors, was the first women's school operated by an African American woman outside of the deep south, and offered courses outside of traditional women's occupations. In 1934, the school was renamed the National Trade and Professional School for Women and Girls and it operated under

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Burroughs leadership until her death in 1961.

The site commemorates Nannie H. Burroughs' aims and accomplishments. Burroughs is of national significance because for more than thirty years she successfully worked to further the progress of the African American community throughout the nation. As an educator she helped hundreds of African American women through the founding of the National Training School for Women and Girls and her work with the National Council of Negro Women. As an organizer of women's industrial clubs and labor unions she worked to acquaint women with the intelligent use of entrepreneurship, to combat segregation and unequal education, and to promote suffrage and unified action among women in all matters affecting the lives of American citizens. As a government official, President Herbert Hoover appointed her to chair a committee on housing for African Americans.

In addition to her involvement in educational and federal activities, Burroughs was active in politics and civil rights. She held membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc. (now known as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc. or ASALH). Moreover, she founded or help-to-found the National League of Republican Colored Women, the International Council of Women of the Darker Races, and National Association of Wage Earners.



Burroughs spoke in support of the preservation of African American historical sites and played a vital role in the preservation of the Frederick Douglass home at Cedar Hill in Anacostia. A driving force across decades of Cedar Hill's story, Burroughs worked with the NACW and Fredrick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association to preserve the property, and in the 1920s, was named "Official Custodian of Buildings and Grounds."

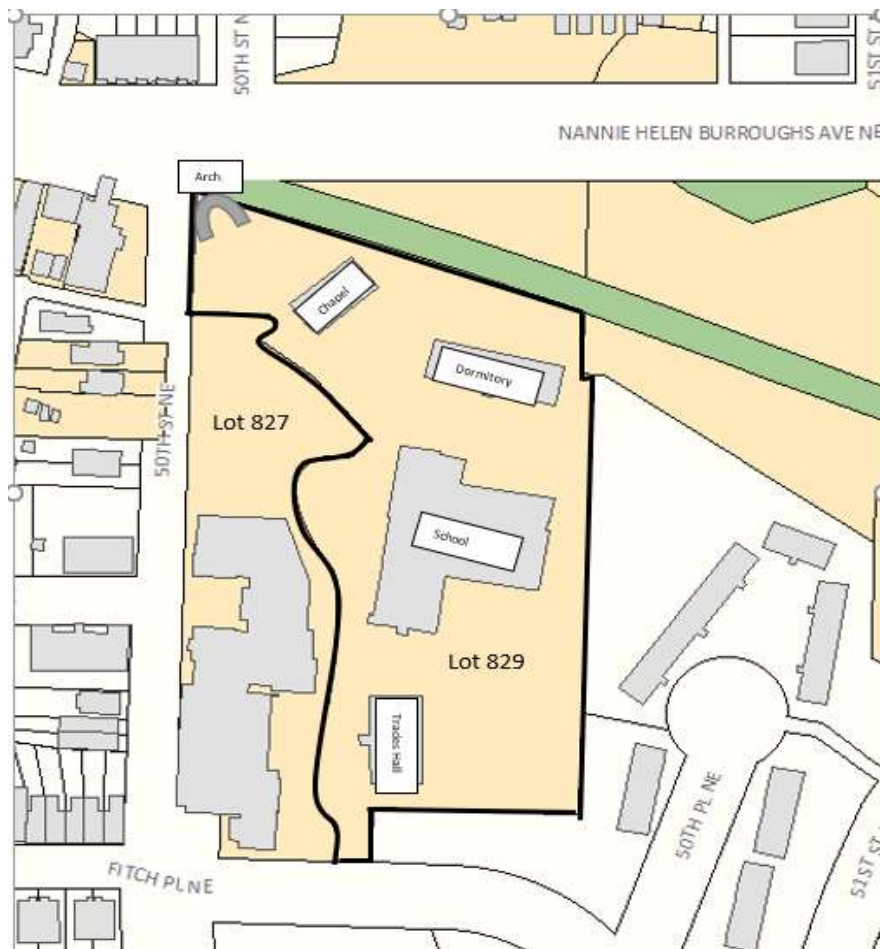
Nannie Helen Burroughs died on May 20, 1961, having dedicated her entire life to the advancement of the African American race, especially African American working-class women. In 1964, the school was renamed the Nannie Helen Burroughs School in her honor. Burroughs defied societal restrictions placed on her gender and race and her work foreshadowed the main principles of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Boundaries

The National Training School for Women and Girls is located at 601 50th Street, NE, at the corner of 50th Street, NE, and Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, NE, in northeast Washington, D.C.'s Lincoln Heights neighborhood. The original campus sat in square 5194. Nannie Helen Burroughs originally purchases lots 30 thru 35 and a portion of lot 29 under a deed in trust. The northern edge was defined by Watts Branch. The lots were later known as Lot 814, Lot 815, Lot 816, Lot 807, Lot 806, Lot 808. In 1917, Burroughs purchased lot the remainder of lot 29 (lot 807) and lot 28. By 1929, The National Training School campus occupied between 6.5 to 7.5 acres and included 8 main buildings. Trades Halls is the last remaining building from that era.

Although the historic campus site included portions of Watts Branch (Lot 814) across Nannie H. Burroughs Avenue, the site of the community service building (demolished), Burroughs deeded the land to the National Park Service and it is not include in the historic district boundaries. The area now serves the community as the Marvin Gaye Greening Center and part of the Watts Branch Trail. The nomination also excludes portions of lot 827, now occupied by the soon-to-be-completed apartment building that sits to the west of the Trades Hall NHL site.

The historic district is bound to the north by Watts Branch on Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, NE; to the west by 50th Street, NE; to the south by Fitch Place, NE; and backs up on the east to buildings along 50th Place, NE.



Significance

The 1990 nomination of Trade Hall National Historic Landmark notes it as the most appropriate building to represent the school and the work of Nannie Helen Burroughs as it is the only remaining building from the National Training Schools most active period. However, Burroughs was active in the development and progress of the campus until her death in 1961. Burroughs lived and worked on the campus until her death. Her life-long advocacy for women and the African American community is connected to this historic district and its landscape.

Nannie Helen Burroughs first envisioned the National Training School for Women and Girls as a national school for African American women and girls to help prepare them for a productive life in twentieth century society. The National Professional and Trade School for Women and Girls (formerly the National Training School for Women and Girls) campus became one of the most influential institutions to the African American community nationally while also supporting its local community through service. The schools' location in the District was a deliberate act to provide industrial and classical education for African American women and girl at a national level and to showcase the development of an institution based solely on African American contributions.

For these reasons, this historic district is significant for its association with an institution and achievements that contributed significantly to the heritage and culture of the District of Columbia and, at least as much so, to the nation. It merits listing in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and in the National Register of Historic Places for meeting the following criteria:

- **DC Criterion B (History)** and;
- **DC Criterion C (Individuals)**.

- **NR Criterion A (Events)** in the areas of Education, Development of Equal Education Opportunities, and Vocational Training, and;
- **NR Criterion B (Persons)** for its association with Nannie Helen Burroughs, a noted twentieth century civil rights leader and education advocate.

Period of Significance and Name

The proposed period of significance extends from 1909, the year that the school was formally established through 1964, the year that the trade school curriculum was eliminated. The school was originally named *The National Training School for Women and Girls*. In 1929, Burroughs changed the name to *National Trade and Professional School for Women and Girls*. After Burroughs' death in 1961, the school was renamed *The Nannie Helen Burroughs School*. In 1962, Progressive Baptist National Convention split from National Baptist Convention and acquired the campus site, demolished the remaining framed building, and built the elementary school. Their headquarters are now located in the Trades Hall Building.

For nomination to the National Register, the name for the campus should best reflect the property's historic importance or was commonly used for the property during the period of significance. Therefore, staff recommends the name of the historic district be changed from "The Progressive National Baptist Convention and National Training School for Women and Girls Historic District" to the "National Professional and Trade School for Women and Girls Historic District" as it was called for thirty-two years until Burroughs death.

Contributing Buildings, Objects, and Sites

- 1) Trades Hall is located on Square/Lot: 5194/829. Its date of construction is between 1927-1928. It was designed by local architect, Thomas M. Medford and built by the G. G. Loehler Co. The building will continue its status as an NHL within the boundaries of the historic district.
- 2) Lincoln Memorial Arch is a concrete entrance arch with a bas relief profile of Abraham Lincoln centered on its north side that sits at the intersection of Nannie Helen Burroughs and 50th Street NE located on Square/Lot: 5194/830. Its date of construction is between 1913-1915. The architect was J.A. Moore and the sculptor of Lincoln's head is Isaac Hathaway. The arch was built to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Staff recommends that additional information on the sculptor, Isaac Scott Hathaway,¹ an artist and educator who created masks and busts of important African American leaders and designer of the first two U.S. coins to feature African Americans, be added to the final National Register nomination. Similarly, additional information should be sought on John A. Moore², an African American architect from Washington, D.C. Moore is noted in Burroughs records as the contractor for the laundry and model home (both demolished) and constructed several complicated carpentry projects for the campus.

- 3) The Dormitory is also located in Square/Lot: 5194/829. Its date of construction is between 1954-1956. The architects were R.I Vaughn & Ferguson and the builder was McKissack and McKissack, Inc. Staff recommends that additional information on the local African American architect firms R.I Vaughn & Ferguson and builder, McKissack and McKissack, Inc. also be incorporated into the final document. McKissack and McKissack Inc is known to be the oldest minority owned architecture and construction company in the United States.
- 4) The National Memorial Chapel is located in Square/Lot: 5194/829. Its date of construction is from 1959-1961. The architect and builder are unknown. The chapel dedication was held on July 2, 1961, following Burrough's death on May 20, 1961 and Burroughs' public viewing was the first public event held at the chapel.
- 5) The Monroe School Building is the only non-contributing building located within the historic district, on Square/Lot: 5194/829. Its date of construction is 1971-1974 and outside of the period of significance. The architect and builder are unknown. Construction of the building cost one million dollars and resulted in the demolition of original frame buildings associated with the National Training School. The building houses a private, co-ed, elementary school named after Burroughs, which closed in 2012-2013. The school building is used by the Monroe Charter School and continues to house Nannie Helen Burrough memorabilia. The school building is a substantial non-contributing feature.

¹ Stewart, R.S.S. "Designing a Campus for African-American Females, 1907-1964." Sunnyvale, CA: Lambert Academic Publishing. 2014.

² African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945. United States, Taylor & Francis, 2004.

- 6) The Landscape adds to the significance of the property. The development of the campus landscape as from a “cottage-style campus” similar to many women’s colleges of the era to its more institutional character today still encompasses features of the landscape that characterized the property during the period of significance. This includes the path from the arch to the school, the open space and grading along 50th street, and the fields below the chapel and behind the dormitory. The building and the apartment complex that sits outside of the historic district boundary, while prominent, does not completely erase the historic setting of the campus. It is recommended that the campus landscape/site be included as a contributing resource to the nomination.

Integrity

The proposed historic district and its landscape retain integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association with their setting principally affected by the addition of a large non-contributing structures on the site. There have been no major alterations on the contributing buildings or the contributing object and retain their historic massing, materials, and details. Some deterioration and window replacements exist, and as does one non-contributing building, but these changes do not compromise the overall character and cohesiveness of the collection. The landscape has been subdivided and altered but the greensward and the concrete walkway to the chapel and dormitory building remain intact.