
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 23-08

Eastern High School

1700/1730 East Capitol Street NE
Squares 1094, 1095, 1108 and 1109

Meeting Date: July 27, 2023
Applicant: Capitol Hill Restoration Society
Affected ANC: 7D

The Historic Preservation Office recommends the Board designate Eastern High School at 1700/1730 East Capitol Street NE a historic landmark to be entered in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. HPO further recommends that the Board forward the nomination under the Multiple Property Document *Public School Buildings in the District of Columbia, 1862-1960* to the National Register of Historic Places for listing under Criteria A and C with a Period of Significance from 1923 to 1938.

Eastern High School occupies a large and prominent site at 1700/1730 East Capitol Street NE at the eastern edge of Capitol Hill, just west of RFK Stadium in Ward 7. Begun in 1921 and completed in 1923, the striking red brick school building is designed in an exuberant Collegiate Gothic Revival style and is a well-known and notable visual landmark in the city. The building was designed by Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford but was completed by his successor Albert Harris. Eastern was one of the last public buildings to be designed by Ashford and is an excellent example of the Collegiate Gothic Revival style of architecture. The property consists of the 1923 school building, including its attached gymnasium/classroom wing and greenhouse additions, the school grounds, including its multi-use stadium, athletic facilities, parking area and open field.

This nomination has been submitted by the Capitol Hill Restoration Society at the request and encouragement of Eastern High School to honor the school building in celebration of its 100th anniversary.

Historical and Architectural Background

Eastern High School traces its origins to around 1890 when high school classes for students who lived in the eastern end of the city were held at the Peabody School building at 5th and C Streets, NE—built in 1879 as an elementary school. In 1892, the first purpose-built Eastern High School was constructed at 7th and C Streets SE. This school was one of three high schools—all for White students, only—that existed in the city in the late nineteenth century. In 1906, in recognition of city-wide educational infrastructure deficiencies, Congress established the Schoolhouse Commission to study the city's schools and to recommend a plan for improving its existing school buildings and for the construction of new ones. In 1908, the Commission published its findings recommending, for one, that new high school buildings be constructed for

the city's expanding student body and in accordance with established Progressive Era design standards highlighted in the report. In response, and over the course of the next two decades, the city constructed three high schools for White students and one for Black students for the city's then-racially segregated dual school system: Central High School (later Cardozo High School) at 13th and Clifton Streets NW (1916), Eastern High School at 1700 East Capitol Street NE (1923), and McKinley High School at 2nd and T Streets NE (1928) for Whites, and Dunbar High School (1916) at 1st and O streets, NW for Black students.

Shortly after the Commission published its schoolhouse findings, America's entry into World War I delayed funding for the new high schools, along with other school buildings and municipal projects. By the end of the war, Eastern High School's student population had expanded significantly, so in 1921, the Office of the Municipal Architect prepared plans for Eastern High School for a student body of 1,800 rather than the pre-War enrollment of 800. Ashford's design for the new Eastern High School was greatly influenced by that of Central High School (now Cardozo High School), designed not by Ashford, but by nationally recognized architect William B. Ittner (1864-1936). Ittner was a leader in school architecture and his school designs had been praised by the Schoolhouse Commission, so Ashford commissioned Ittner to design the school while his own office would take on the design for the others. As Ittner had done for other schools in other cities, he chose the Collegiate Gothic style for Central High School. He also established an E-shaped building plan with central-loaded corridors that allowed for extensive light and air, which earned extensive praise by the Schoolhouse Commission.

Snowden Ashford and his Office of the Municipal Architect thus followed suit, designing both Dunbar (now demolished) and Eastern High Schools in a Collegiate Gothic Revival style with two central fortified towers making up the central pavilion and long classroom wings to either side. In addition to the exterior styling, Ashford followed Ittner's design at Central High School by implementing a similar, E-shaped, single-loaded corridor plan. In 1921, before the designs of Eastern were fully completed and before construction began, Snowden Ashford resigned as Municipal Architect. However, his successor, Albert Harris, carried out Ashford's design and the building was completed and opened in March 1923. On the day of the move, students marched from the former Eastern High School at 7th and C Streets SE one mile east to the new building with the school band leading the way.

For the next several decades, Eastern served an all-white high school population. After *Brown v. Board of Education*, the city transferred students from the all-Black Cardozo and Spingarn High Schools to Eastern High School. By 1963, just ten years after desegregation and a major shift in demographics, Eastern High School's student body was 99% Black. During and after this demographic shift, student pride at Eastern High School remained and continues to remain strong. This year Eastern High School is celebrating its 100th anniversary.

Evaluation

Eastern High School has been evaluated under the Multiple Property Document, *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960*. Eastern meets DC Designation Criteria B (History) and D (Architecture and Urbanism) and National Register Criteria A and C.

Eastern High School meets DC Criterion B and National Register Criterion A with Education as its Area of Significance because the property provides important information on the history and development of the public school system in the District of Columbia. Eastern High School was built in response to recommendations made by the Schoolhouse Commission, established by Congress in 1906, to construct high schools according to established Progressive Era principles of education and design. The property meets DC Designation Criteria D and National Register Criterion C for Architecture as an excellent example of the work of noted Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford under the Multiple Property Document's Associated Property Sub-type, "The Office of the Municipal Architect, Snowden Ashford, 1909-1921." Eastern High School exemplifies the high-quality design of Ashford's public buildings and contributes significantly to his body of work. Eastern High School is also an excellent example of the Collegiate Gothic Revival style of architecture.

Period of Significance

The Period of Significance extends from 1923 when the main building was completed through 1925 when the stadium was built to 1938 when the auditorium/classroom wing was completed.

Boundaries

The boundaries of the property consists of the four squares upon which the school sits including the school building and its additions, the stadium, tennis courts, athletic fields and parking. The contributing elements include: the school building with its attached greenhouse and gymnasium/classroom wing addition, the landscaped front (south) yard with its semi-circular walkways and central flagpole, the sail handling and systems wing with its chimney stack and designed air vent located in the west side yard (and corresponding one in the east side yard), and the stadium to the north, built in 1925. The non-contributing elements include the tennis courts, baseball field, parking area and open field between the tennis court and baseball field.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board designate Eastern High School for the reasons cited above and it further recommends that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places.

