

# PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

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SUBMITTED TO THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS IN DECEMBER 2011

**DRAFT**

## **DUSABLE HIGH SCHOOL**

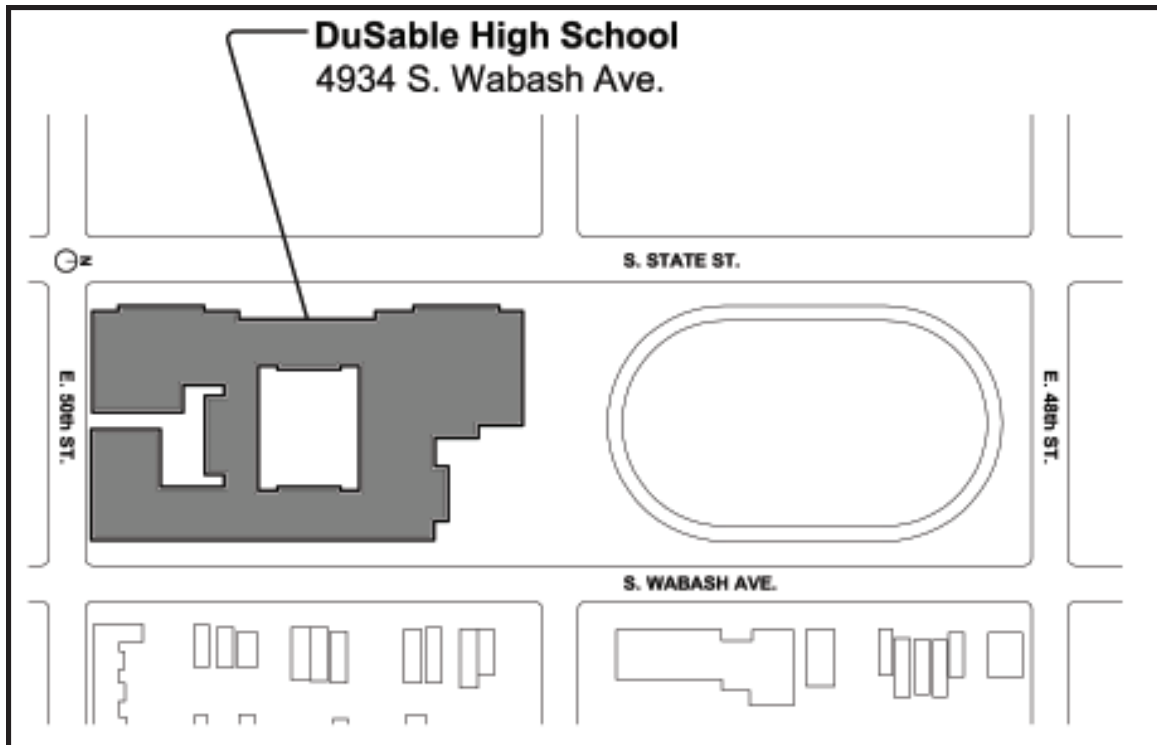
**4934 S. WABASH AVENUE**

**BUILT: 1931-35**

**ARCHITECT: PAUL GERHARDT, SR.**

DuSable High School, a community cornerstone and educational institution that influenced generations of African Americans who journeyed from the South to Chicago during the Great Migration and the years that followed, possesses exceptional historic and cultural significance. The prominent three-story brick school building located in the Grand Boulevard community was built to alleviate severely-overcrowded conditions at nearby Wendell Phillips High School. DuSable's opening in 1935, at a time when the rapidly-growing African American community was predominately confined to a narrow corridor of neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side, has been described by alumnus and first African American mayor of Chicago, the late Harold Washington, as "the fulfillment of a dream."

If steel mills and stockyards promised opportunity to the men and women who migrated from the South, DuSable High School offered an even greater chance for their children and grandchildren. Access to education, highly regarded as a new opportunity for black Americans, became a central focus of the Great Migration. DuSable High School, the first high school in Chicago built to serve an exclusively African American student population, came to be seen as a physical manifestation of the migrants' efforts to improve conditions for their own and future generations. Over the years, numerous students who attended DuSable High School have been



Monumental in both its scale and historic significance, DuSable High School has been an influential educational institution in the Grand Boulevard community since its establishment in 1935.

recognized locally and nationally for their professional and civic contributions, leadership, and talents. Some of the world's greatest jazz musicians including Nat "King" Cole, Dorothy Donegan and scores of other visionary artists studied and performed at DuSable High School under the legendary Captain Walter Dyett.

Construction of DuSable High School was completed in 1935 with federal stimulus money distributed through a federal agency, commonly known today as the Public Works Administration (PWA). The school was designed by Chicago Board of Education architect Paul Gerhardt, Sr., in a visually-subdued variation on the Art Deco architectural style that historians have labeled "PWA Moderne." The building, rectilinear in its overall form, is modestly decorated with limestone used to provide visually-simple detailing such as vertical and horizontal banding delineating building piers and connecting rows of windows.

## **PUBLIC SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CHICAGO THROUGH THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY**

In the 1830s and 1840s educators Horace Mann and Henry Barnard established the basic principles of America's system of universal free public education. The development of state public education laws in Illinois in the 1870s and 1880s, including an 1874 anti-segregation law, aimed at protecting the rights of all children, regardless of race, to attend public schools. Despite these legislative measures segregation remained fairly widespread throughout the state. From 1875 to 1915, Chicago schools employed relatively relaxed racial codes that allowed black students to attend neighborhood schools.

Chicago built its first high school in 1856 (Central High School, demolished 1951), and in 1866 adopted the "Quincy plan" of age-graded schools with separate rooms for each grade. In 1875, the City's high schools were organized into divisions according to the geographic area of the City in which the school was located. In addition to the Central High School, North Division, South Division and West Division high schools were established. During this era and continuing to the first decade of the twentieth century, enrollment in public high schools was extremely selective—most students, regardless of race, did not have the opportunity to complete their secondary school education. According to the United States Bureau of Education, in 1911, only 10 percent of the public enrolled in high school ever finished a high school course.

The great growth of Chicago in the late-nineteenth century led to widespread demand for new public school buildings. By 1902, population growth on the South Side necessitated the construction of a new South Division High School. The new school, constructed in 1904 at the intersection of Prairie and Pershing avenues, was named Wendell Phillips High School (a designated Chicago Landmark). Phillips' student population was overwhelmingly comprised of students from wealthy and middle-class white neighborhoods on the South Side; however a small number of black students from the African American neighborhood within the Douglas community also attended the school.



**These photos from circa 1940 document some of the specialized facilities and equipment that DuSable High School was equipped with at the time of its opening. DuSable sought to provide students with educational opportunities that reflected the priorities of Progressive-era educational reforms.**



**DuSable's botany lab (top) and print shop (center) represent the broadened scope of high school curriculum to incorporate hands-on learning experiences. To accommodate physical education programs, DuSable was designed with two assembly halls and a swimming pool (bottom).**





At the same time, the progressive social reform movement sought to improve living and working conditions in increasingly crowded industrial cities like Chicago. Progressive-Era legislation prohibiting child labor and mandating school attendance placed greater demand on the public education system. More significantly, progressive reformers pushed for increased access to public secondary education and curricular changes, particularly at the high-school level, to better prepare students for an active role in the social and civic life of cities.

The development of public schools in Chicago's South Division during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was also impacted by the unprecedented expansion of the African American community. By 1890, the African American population in Chicago had risen to nearly 15,000—more than double—the 1880 total of approximately 6,500 residents. It is estimated that, between 1900 and 1920, approximately 13,000 African American school-age children arrived in Chicago, increasing the black student population in that period by 196 percent. By 1918, black students became the majority (at 56 percent) at Wendell Phillips High School.

## **THE GREAT MIGRATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY ON CHICAGO'S SOUTH SIDE**

The dramatic change in the racial composition of the student enrollment at Wendell Phillips High School and the necessity to construct a new high school building, which would come to be known as DuSable High School, was a direct result of the “Great Migration” of 1916-1918, a period when approximately a half million blacks from the South journeyed to cities in the urban North. It was the largest internal movement of a people in such a concentrated time in the history of the United States. In Chicago the Great Migration and successive migrations continuing into the 1950s yielded the largest unprecedented expansion of the African American community on Chicago's South Side. For many, Chicago held a multitude of possibilities—good paying jobs, access to education, and a more egalitarian society—all of which stood in sharp contrast to the dearth of opportunity and the pervasive, legalized racism that plagued the southern states.

With the advent of World War I, as military production demands rose and industrial workers were drafted into military service, Chicago lost a critical supply of then-predominately white industrial workers during a time of intense need. As a result, African-Americans who were previously excluded from industrial jobs found new opportunities for employment. The *Chicago Defender*, the nation's most influential black weekly newspaper, recognized the significance of this shift and encouraged southern blacks to relocate to Chicago.

Pullman porters, working in railroad cars that criss-crossed the country, also served as agents of change, distributing thousands of copies of the *Defender* with its ideas of freedom and tolerance available in the urban North. With more than two-thirds of its readership base located outside of Chicago, the *Chicago Defender* utilized its influence to wage a campaign to support a “Great Migration” of blacks from the segregated agricultural south to the factories and stockyards of Chicago. It published blazing editorials, articles and cartoons lauding the benefits of the North,

posted job listings and train schedules to facilitate relocation, and declared May 15, 1917, as the date of the “Great Northern Drive.” The *Chicago Defender*’s support of migration contributed significantly to the decision by its Southern readers to migrate to the North in record numbers.

Migrants to the urban North placed great faith in the power of education. One of the primary goals of migrants was to place their children in good schools and perhaps even to go to night school themselves. Readers of the *Chicago Defender* had ample evidence that Chicago provided that opportunity. The newspaper frequently commented on educational facilities in Chicago and contrasted them to southern schools. Its articles celebrating everyday activities at Wendell Phillips High School communicated to black southerners an image of a modern, integrated urban institution – an impression that in 1916 was essentially correct.

Despite offering its students access to modern facilities, very early on Wendell Phillips High School became severely overcrowded. In the 1920s, junior high school students joined high school students at Phillips High School, and the increase in the enrollment forced some drastic accommodations. The school instituted two half-day shifts for students. A dozen or more stove-heated portable buildings were built on the school’s parking lot to accommodate additional students.

During the 1920s, many blacks migrating to Chicago faced discrimination, especially when it came to issues such as access to employment, discriminatory lending and insurance practices, and housing segregation that restricted the black population to portions of the West Side and to the “Black Belt,” the overcrowded chain of neighborhoods on the city’s South Side. By the mid-1930s, the Black Belt, euphemistically renamed “Bronzeville,” existed as a narrow 40-block-long corridor running along both sides of State Street. African-American residential settlement was predominately confined to this almost completely segregated area.

A number of Chicago Landmark designations have recognized the historic significance of “Black Metropolis-Bronzeville.” The South Side Community Art Center, a historically-important art center founded in the 1930s with federal assistance, was designated in 1994. Eight buildings, including the former Eighth Regiment Armory, Chicago Bee Building, and Overton Hygenic Building, plus the Victory Monument, became Chicago Landmarks as part of the “Black Metropolis-Bronzeville” designation in 1997. Wendell Phillips High School, an important early educational institution to the black community, was designated in 2003. Several homes of significant African-American writers, along with the Hall Public Library, were designated in 2010, as was the Griffiths-Burroughs House, which once served as the DuSable Museum of African American History and was home of Dr. Margaret Burroughs, artist and co-founder of the museum, who taught at DuSable High School for 23 years.

The resulting concentration of Chicago’s African-American community within a narrow corridor of the South Side put pressure on all aspects of the community, from the availability of apartments and single-family houses to the adequacy of the area’s public institutions such as schools. Pervasive residential segregation corresponded to racial segregation in public schools. During the late 1920s, the Chicago Board of Education was increasingly criticized by the black



★ ★ *The Class of June, 1944*  
*The Class of January, 1945*

DuSable influenced generations of African Americans who journeyed to Chicago during the Great Migration and the years that followed. Despite having almost immediately overcrowded conditions, DuSable took exceptional steps to accommodate its students.

Left: Two senior classes graduated annually (in winter and spring) during periods of peak enrollment in the 1940s through 1960s. Bottom: Due to a shortage of space, classes were often held in the school's library, gymnasium, assembly hall, cafeteria, even in the hallways. A crowded study hall circa 1940 is seen below.



community for not providing the same quality of school facilities available in other, predominately white neighborhoods.

## **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DUSABLE HIGH SCHOOL**

In response to widespread public outcry by the African American community to address overcrowding at Phillips High School, in 1929 the Chicago Board of Education voted to construct a new school building at 49<sup>th</sup> and Wabash Avenue. It was the Chicago Board of Education's original intent that the Phillips High School building would become a junior high school once a replacement high school building was completed. However, the Great Depression stalled the construction of the new school.

### *Initial building construction*

Both the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Defender* noted plans for the construction of DuSable High School in 1930, but a building permit for the school building was not issued until February 18, 1931, when Chicago was already deep in the Great Depression precipitated by the catastrophic stock market crash of October 1929. Chicago Board of Education architect Paul Gerhardt, Sr., was the architect of record for the new school, while Harry A. Hanson was the contractor. The estimated cost of the building as listed on the building permit was \$2,500,000.

The new school was grand in scale, planned to take up the entire city block bounded by E. 49th St., E. 50th St., S. State St., and S. Wabash Ave. in the Grand Boulevard community area. Newspaper reports in 1931 noted that it was to be "modern in construction" with an internal steel frame atop a concrete foundation and platform and sheathed with brick walls. It was to be expansively fitted out with the large number and variety of facilities, including classrooms, laboratories, workshops, assembly halls and gymnasiums, typical of Chicago public high schools built in the 1910s and 1920s, a period when progressive school ideas encouraging a wide range of school activities and programs (both academic and vocational) encouraged the design and construction of large and varied school buildings. A large, three-story, roughly U-shaped central section with an interior courtyard was planned to house administrative offices, the school library and a wide variety of classrooms, laboratories, music and art rooms, and workshops. A flanking north wing was intended to house an expansive auditorium seating over 2,200 and a smaller 250-seat hall. The south wing was designed to contain a large gymnasium for boys, plus two smaller gyms for girls, an auxiliary co-ed gym, and a swimming pool.

Construction on DuSable High School started with groundbreaking in February 1931. The original completion date was estimated by Chicago Board of Education architect Gerhardt as January 1, 1932. However, the Board of Education's increasingly-dire money problems, caused by a drastic downturn of tax revenue in the face of the Depression, caused the city agency to suspend construction of the school by December 1931, leaving only the concrete pad and a mess of exposed steel girders in place. It would be three years, not until 1934, that construction on DuSable would resume.



**FOR 2,664 CHICAGO BOYS AND GIRLS**



**RUSH COMPLETION  
OF PHILLIPS HIGH  
SCHOOL BUILDING**

Construction of the new Wendell Phillips High school, 50th and State streets, is progressing rapidly with work on the exterior to be completed this week, John C. Christensen, board of education architect, said yesterday. The building is not expected to be used, however, until February, 1935.

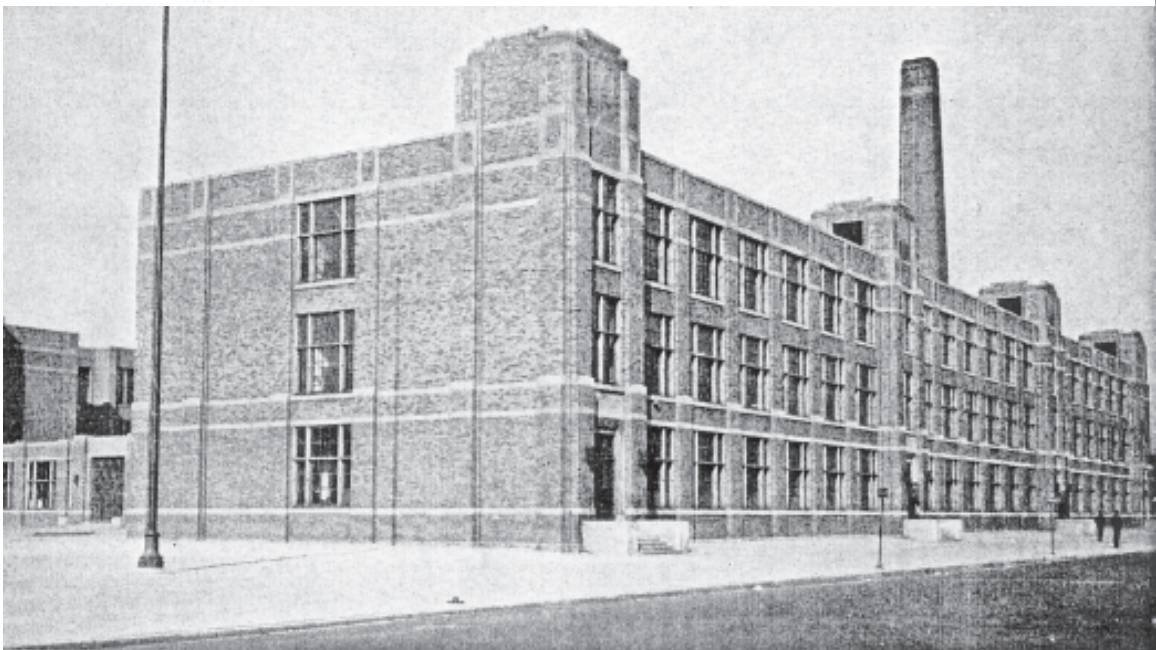
Time elapsing between completion and occupancy will make the beauty of the interior more lasting, inasmuch

The Chicago Board of Education authorized the construction of the school building that would become known as DuSable High School in 1929. However the Great Depression stalled its construction.

Above: A rendering of the building designed by the Architect of the Chicago Board of Education, Paul Gerhardt, Sr., was published in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1930. Left: Construction of the school resumed in 1934 using federal stimulus money through the Public Works Administration program.

Bottom: A photo of the Wabash Avenue elevation of the building taken shortly after its dedication ceremony held on February 4, 1935.

**MAYOR DEDICATES NEW WENDELL PHILLIPS HIGH**



During this interim, the unfinished school was the location of a rally in opposition to the trial of the “Scottsboro Boys,” a group of nine African-American boys accused of rape in Alabama in 1930. A series of trials, including the first in Scottsboro, Alabama, in 1931, drew national attention to the racism and unequal justice system faced by Southern blacks. The Chicago rally occurred on April 21, 1933, and was covered by the *Chicago Defender*. Over 20,000 people marched through the Grand Boulevard community from State and 33<sup>rd</sup> streets to the DuSable school construction site, where speakers spoke passionately about the miscarriage of justice being perpetrated in Alabama against this group of young men. Not so incidentally, the rally also drew attention to the unfinished state of the long-promised high school and the unfulfilled promise to the city’s African-American community that it represented.

To the Board of Education’s credit, it was not just DuSable that sat unfinished. A number of school buildings had been left incomplete in the early 1930s in the wake of the Board’s financial distress. This would change only after the 1932 election of President Franklin Roosevelt and with New Deal efforts to jumpstart the national economy with public-works projects.

#### *The Public Works Administration and the Completion of DuSable High School*

One of the earliest of these efforts was in June 1933, when the National Industrial Recovery Act was enacted by the United States Congress. The bill authorized the federal government to spend \$3.3 billion on a variety of public-works projects throughout the country, ranging from highways, bridges and dams to schools, courthouses and hospitals. Although relatively modest in today’s dollars, the amount provided for in the 1934 Act was roughly 5% of the country’s gross national product at the time.

This federal stimulus money was to be distributed through a new federal agency, the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, more commonly known today by a later name, the Public Works Administration (PWA). The PWA typically did not build projects directly; instead, it provided grants to state and local governments, which in turn conceived, managed and built a wide variety of projects using PWA-provided funds. Newspaper articles at the time of DuSable’s construction note that federal money for the building’s completion came to Chicago due to the efforts of Chicago Mayor Edward J. Kelly and James B. McCahey, President of the Board of Education.

It has been noted by historians that the PWA made possible a large percentage of the public buildings and infrastructure that was constructed in the United States during the 1930s. Some of the most famous PWA projects were the Triborough Bridge and Lincoln Tunnel in New York City, the Federal Trade Commission building in Washington, D.C., the Overseas Highway connecting Key West, Florida, to the mainland, and the Grand Coulee Dam in the State of Washington. It is estimated that roughly 70% of all schools in the country built between 1933 and 1939, including DuSable, were paid for at least in part by the PWA. Although roads and bridges were the most common type of construction project built with PWA funds, schools such as DuSable were second, using 14% of PWA spending.

The City of Chicago received a PWA grant for \$1,326,000 which it used to complete five unfinished high schools, including DuSable. By February 1934, construction on DuSable had



**These circa 1935 photos of DuSable's main entrance (left) and the State St. elevation (bottom) were captured shortly after the building's completion.**





resumed with a team of 135 workman supervised by John C. Christenson, who had replaced Gerhardt as Board of Education architect in April 1931. When a fire severely damaged Phillips High School on January 29, 1935, classes commenced at the new high school building (at the time known as the “new Wendell Phillips High School”), even though it was unfinished. The students from Wendell Phillips High School brought the school colors of red and black to the new school, establishing a tradition that remains synonymous with DuSable High School.

The school’s dedication ceremony, held on February 4, 1935, was attended by Mayor Edward J. Kelly, who delivered the principal address. School Superintendent William J. Bogan and Board of Education President James B. McCahey also spoke at the dedication. Chauncey C. Willard, principal of Wendell Phillips High School, was appointed principal of the new school. In reporting the dedication, the *Chicago Defender* lauded the new building, calling it “the equal of any high school in the world in character of construction, quality of equipment, and general excellence and proficiency of the educational staff.”

## **BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

DuSable High School occupies a full city block, bounded by E. 49th Street, E. 50th Street, S. State Street, and S. Wabash Avenue. It is three stories in height. Varigated orange and brown brick is used for wall cladding over an internal steel structure, while gray limestone is used for trim.

The building was designed by Chicago Board of Education architect Paul Gerhardt, Sr., in a visually-subdued variation on the Art Deco architectural style that historians have labeled “PWA Moderne.” Tracing its origins to the forms and ornamentation used for buildings at the 1925 Paris *Exposition des Arts Decoratif*, Art Deco was a non-historic “modernistic” style that was popular in the late 1920s and 1930s. In the 1920s, many Art Deco-style buildings were built with visually-dramatic ornament in a variety of geometric and abstract foliate patterns. In the fiscally austere years of the Great Depression, however, many buildings, especially those built under the auspices of the PWA such as DuSable, were designed with more visually-modest ornamentation around entrances and along rooflines that accented bold building forms and lines.

DuSable High School is rectilinear in its overall form, with a visual emphasis on bold massing, relatively little projecting detailing, and parapets without projecting cornices. The building is modestly decorated, with limestone used to provide visually-simple detailing such as vertical and horizontal banding delineating building piers and connecting rows of windows. Building entrances are ornamented with stylized Art Deco-style geometric and foliate ornament carved from gray limestone. Small medieval-influenced towers (showing the continued influence of the earlier Collegiate Gothic architectural style on school buildings such as DuSable) rise above building entrances and are visually enhanced with modernistic carved-limestone eagles, a decorative motif popular in the 1930s for public buildings.

The building, roughly U-shaped in plan, featured administrative offices and classrooms organized around a central courtyard. Entrances to the school originally opened off both State





**Possessing a commanding presence within the Grand Boulevard community, DuSable High School occupies a full city block, bounded by 49th St., 50th St., State St. and Wabash Av. The building is characterized by its bold massing and streamlined Collegiate Gothic-influenced towers which accentuate the Wabash Av. (top) and State St. (bottom) elevations.**



DuSable's towers and entrances are ornamented with stylized Art Deco-style designs carved from gray limestone.



Above: Limestone banding outlines rows of windows and delineates piers on the State St. elevation.

St. and Wabash Ave. Along State St., this central section is slightly recessed between flanking wings to both the north and south. These wings contain an auditorium and cafeterias (north) and a natatorium, gymnasiums, and other spaces (south). A tall smokestack provides an emphatic visual element on the building's northeast side and is a well-known visual landmark to DuSable alumni.

When the building opened in February, 1935, the *Defender* noted that the new high school had been built to house over 2,600 students. With great pride, the newspaper's reporter, David W. Kellum, noted the well-equipped nature of the new school, enumerating all of the varied spaces and facilities, including 24 classrooms, 2 study rooms, 8 laboratories, 2 art rooms, 2 mechanical drawing rooms, several workshops for auto repair, woodworking and electrical work, 2 assembly halls, a library, gymnasiums for both boys and girls, a swimming pool, a chorus room, a rehearsal room for band and orchestra, and 2 lunchrooms. The building had cost \$2,800,000 to complete, exclusive of equipment and furnishings.

## **ARCHITECT PAUL GERHARDT, SR.**

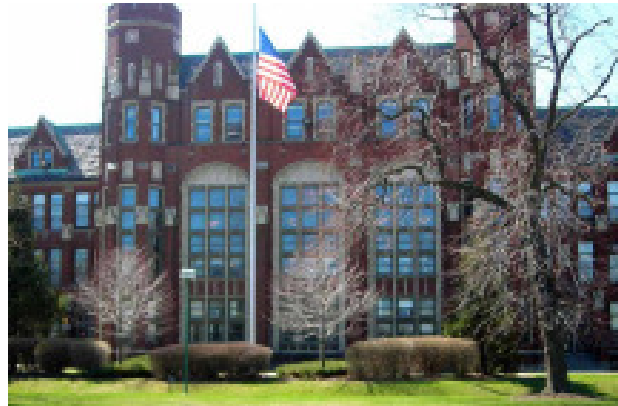
**Paul Gerhardt, Sr. (1863-1951)**, the architect of DuSable High School, was born in the town of Dobeln in what was then the Kingdom of Saxony (now part of Germany). He attended the Royal Academy in Leipzig and earned an engineering degree at the Technical University of Hanover in 1884. He then came to the United States in 1890 at the behest of the German Textile Corporation to design and construct spinning mills. He designed one of the largest mills in the United States at the time—the Botany Worsted Mill in Passaic, New Jersey. Gerhardt continued to take commissions for other large manufacturing facilities throughout his career, including a number of mill complexes, a plant for the International Gas Engine Company in LaPorte, Indiana, and a distillery in Elgin, Illinois.

Gerhardt came to Chicago in 1893 and soon started his own architectural firm, taking on various residential, commercial, and industrial projects. Prolific in the first decade of the twentieth century, his list of projects listed in the *American Contractor*, a trade publication, alone numbers nearly 70 between 1898 and 1910. Projects announced in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* from that period include apartment and flat buildings such as the brownstone-clad “Roseberry Flats” on N. Elaine St. (1896). Additionally, Gerhardt's 1910 listing in *Who's Who in Chicago* cites him as the architect for “many warehouses, mercantile buildings, and hotels” in and around Chicago.

According to Frank A. Randall's *History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago*, Gerhardt's work during this early period of his career included the Hall Building (1908, demolished), which was a seven-story industrial building of heavy mill construction located at 440-472 W. Superior St.; and the Winston Building (1911, demolished), a seven-story industrial building of flat slab construction and concrete exterior at 341-349 E. Ohio St. Other designs in these early years were hotels and restaurants for German clientele, including an earlier Bismarck Hotel and the Rienzi restaurant.



While serving as Architect of the Chicago Board of Education, Paul Gerhardt, Sr., also designed Lane Technical High School at 2501 W. Addison St. (right), and Von Stueben High School at 5021 N. Kimball Av. (lower right). During his tenure as Architect of Cook County, Gerhardt designed the Cook County Hospital (bottom). In 1924, he designed the Lindemann & Hoverson Company Showroom and Warehouse at 2620 W. Washington Bl., a designated Chicago Landmark (lower left).





In December 1910, Gerhardt was picked to replace William Holabird as Cook County architect. Soon after, the Cook County Board announced that a new county hospital building would be constructed. As county architect, Gerhardt drew up designs for the new building, a visually impressive Beaux Arts-style building that remains on Chicago's Near West Side along W. Harrison St. Due to numerous clashes with the County Board over the hospital building and other issues, Gerhardt was forced to resign his post as County Architect in January 1913. The design of the hospital, which was completed within the year, remained Gerhardt's, however, and it remains one of his best-known buildings in Chicago.

After leaving his position as Cook County architect, Gerhardt returned to private practice until 1928, when he was chosen to serve as supervising architect for the Chicago Board of Education. Some of the school buildings designed by Gerhardt during his three-year tenure, along with DuSable, include Wright Junior College in the 3400-block of N. Austin (1929), Amundsen School in the 5100-block of N. Damen (1929), the mammoth Lane Technical High School at the intersection of N. Western and W. Addison (1930) and the terra-cotta-ornamented Von Steuben High School at 5021-55 N. Kimball Ave.

Paul Gerhardt designed the Lindemann & Hoverson Company Showroom and Warehouse Building (a designated Chicago Landmark) at 2620 W. Washington Blvd. during the years between his positions as Cook County architect and architect for the Chicago Board of Education. Other known buildings Gerhardt designed in Chicago during this time period include the Three Links Temple (now the Dank-Haus German cultural center) at 4740-48 N. Western Ave.; Schlake Dye Works Plant, 4203 W. Grand Avenue (1921); Fraternal Order of Eagles Building (c. 1921, demolished), Carpenters' District Council Building, and the Edgewater Athletic Club (c. 1928, demolished).

Although Paul Gerhardt, Sr., is best known for his municipal and school designs, he was a pioneer in industrial architecture for his efforts to increase the glazed wall area of reinforced concrete buildings. In 1917, Gerhardt patented a new type of industrial reinforced-concrete loft design, noteworthy for introducing continuous sash or window walls to industrial buildings. Patent # 1,243,281, dated October 16, 1917, called for illuminating interior spaces through continuous window "curtain walls" made possible through the placement of interior support columns in back of the window sash line. Gerhardt's Winston Building (1917, demolished), located at 341-349 E. Ohio St., was a seven-story industrial building of flat slab construction that is considered the first structure to use this construction method.

## **HISTORY OF DUSABLE HIGH SCHOOL SINCE 1935**

On April 25, 1936, the Chicago Board of Education officially named DuSable High School for Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable, Chicago's first non Native-American settler who has become known as the "Father of Chicago." DuSable was of mixed West Indian (African) and French ancestry and was a fur trader whose cabin was located on the north branch of the Chicago River just east of the future North Michigan Avenue. DuSable lived in the area from at least 1790 (some accounts indicate his arrival in the area as several years earlier) to 1800. According

to author, historian and DuSable alumnus, Dempsey Travis, the name “DuSable” was selected for the school through a contest sponsored by the *Chicago Defender*.

Through the decades, DuSable High School grew to be an important educational institution to Chicago’s African American community. A number of its faculty and students are significant within their chosen fields or for public service.

#### *Captain Walter Henri Dyett and the DuSable High School Music Program*

Early on, the music program at DuSable High School flourished under the direction of Captain Walter Henri Dyett (1901-1969). From 1931 through 1966, Dyett taught classical, military and jazz music to more than 20,000 students at Wendell Phillips and DuSable High School. Dyett acquired the title “Captain” when he was appointed the Bandmaster of the Eighth Regiment Infantry Band of the Illinois National Guard. According to student accounts, Dyett combined the disciplined direction of a drill sergeant with the musical talent of a concert violinist.

Beginning in the 1930s, Dyett produced an annual musical revue at DuSable High School that came to be known as “Hi-Jinks.” These performances showcased the school’s musical talent and drew ticket-paying crowds from across the city, including students from other schools hoping to study with Dyett. The tradition of “Hi-Jinks” continued at DuSable into the late-1960s even after Captain Dyett’s retirement.

Howard Reich, music critic of the *Chicago Tribune*, has called DuSable the most famous high school in the history of jazz. Some of the world’s greatest musicians, particularly in the genre of jazz including Nat “King” Cole, Dorothy Donegan and Dinah Washington credited Dyett’s musical training at DuSable High School as fundamental to their success. In 2008, a statue was dedicated to honor the legendary music teacher and band leader in the courtyard bearing his name at DuSable High School.

#### *Art Teacher Margaret Burroughs*

Dr. Margaret T. Burroughs (1917-2011), a long-time teacher of art at DuSable High School, was renowned for her lifetime of artistic endeavor, education, and service. Beginning in 1946, Dr. Burroughs taught art at DuSable for 22 years while serving as a mentor for many students. She was one of the founders of the South Side Community Art Center (a designated Chicago Landmark), located at 3831 S. Michigan Ave. and dedicated in 1941.

Dr. Burroughs was the founder and long-time coordinator of the Lake Meadows Art Fair, started in 1957. Sponsored by the Lake Meadows Businessmen’s Association, the Lake Meadows Art Fair was one of the city’s largest art fairs in the 1960s and 1970s and a prominent venue for the display and purchase of art by Black artists, drawing hundreds of artists and thousands of fair goers during its heyday. In 1959 she helped found the National Conference of Artists, the oldest professional organization of black artists in the United States, and served as its chairperson until 1963. Along with her husband Charles Burroughs and other friends and colleagues, Dr. Burroughs founded the DuSable Museum of African-American History (originally known as the Ebony Museum of Negro History) as a pioneering institution for the preservation and dissemination of African-American history, art and culture.



DuSable's music program flourished under the direction of Captain Walter H. Dyett (top left). Some of the world's greatest jazz musicians studied with Dyett at DuSable including Nat "King" Cole (top right) and famed pianist Dorothy Donegan (left). DuSable's annual revue "Hi-Jinks" (bottom left) gave many students their first opportunity to perform in a grand production.

Dr. Margaret T. Burroughs (bottom right), a long-time art teacher at DuSable, was renowned for her lifetime of artistic endeavor, education, and community service.



### *DuSable High School Alumni*

In an effort to preserve history and promote school pride, an alumni group known as the DuSable Booster Club instituted a “Hall of Fame” in 1975. Since that time there have been scores of inductees. Through their professional and civic contributions, leadership and talents, numerous students from DuSable High School achieved local, national and even international recognition.

Some have achieved “firsts” in their field, such as Harold Washington, Chicago’s first African American mayor; Fred Rice, the first African American to be appointed Superintendent of the Chicago Police Department; and Margaret C. Smith, the first African American female elected to the Illinois State Senate. Other DuSable alumni include business leaders, such as John H. Johnson, President and CEO of Johnson Publishing Company and the publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. Some are well known locally, such as entrepreneur, author and civil rights advocate Dempsey Travis, and Dr. Timuel Black, author, historian and educator.

Through the efforts and inspiration of Captain Dyatt and the DuSable music program, many alumni went on to significant careers in music. These include singer Nat “King” Cole, who was internationally famous in the 1950s and 1960s and inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2000. Other musicians include jazz singer Dinah Washington, also a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee; jazz pianist Dorothy Donegan; jazz trumpet player Sonny Cohn, who played for years with Count Basie; tenor saxophonists Gene Ammons, Von Freeman, and Johnny Griffin; jazz singer Johnny Hartman; jazz violinist LeRoy Jenkins; jazz percussionist Walter Perkins; jazz bassist Ronnie Boykins; and folk singer Ella Jenkins, also known for her work in children’s music.

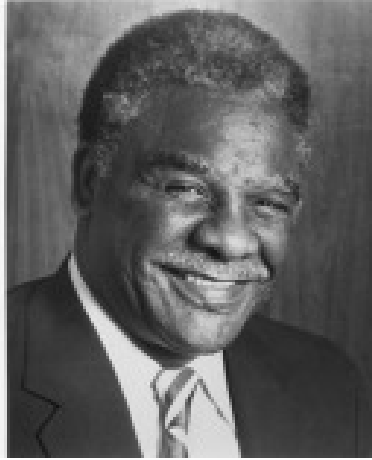
Other alumni were famous entertainers, including television personality Don Cornelius, host of “Soul Train;” and comedian and actor Redd Foxx, best known for his starring role on the television series “Sanford and Son.” Sports figures include Nate “Sweetwater” Clifton, who was the second African American to play in the National Basketball Association (NBA), as well as NBA guards Kevin Porter and Maurice Cheeks.

### *Later history of DuSable High School*

At the peak of its student enrollment, in the 1940s to the 1960s, DuSable High School was packed with more than 4,000 students. Its student population was so large that the school held two graduations—in winter and spring—to accommodate everyone. During the 1950s, the school was expanded by a series of additions which included an expansion of a narrow two-story hall in the interior courtyard into a double-loaded corridor to accommodate classrooms and executive offices. Also during this time, a southeastern wing was added at the corner of Wabash Avenue and 50<sup>th</sup> Street. The new southeastern wing allowed for additional classrooms, a gymnasium and an assembly hall. When complete the expanded corridor and the new wing formed a south interior courtyard.

In the 1960s, hundred of homes in the community surrounding the school were leveled to make way for the high-rise public housing towers of the Robert Taylor Homes, which once stood across State Street from DuSable. This so-called “urban renewal” had the effect of eliminating

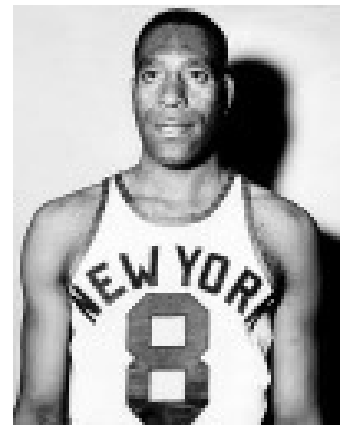




Just a few of the many distinguished alumni of DuSable High School are seen here.

Above: Harold Washington, the first African American Mayor of Chicago, who served from 1983 until his death in 1987.

Above: John H. Johnson, President and CEO of Johnson Publishing Company, the publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines.



Clockwise from top left: Dempsey Travis, author, entrepreneur and civil rights advocate; Redd Foxx, comedian and actor; Nate "Sweetwater" Clifton who was the second African American to play in the NBA; famed tenor saxophonists Von Freeman and Gene "Jug" Ammons; and television producer Don Cornelius, the creator and host of the television show "Soul Train."

neighboring working-class black neighborhoods and driving away much of the commerce in the area surrounding the high school. The school struggled to maintain the traditions of the past, but its academic and musical programs met with a steady decline.

In 2005, DuSable High School was reorganized into three small “schools-within-a-school.” Today the DuSable Campus is home to the Betty Shabazz International Charter - DuSable Leadership Academy High School, a charter school serving grades nine through twelve; the Bronzeville Scholastic Academy High School, a four year college preparatory high school; and the Daniel Hale Williams Preparatory School of Medicine, a four-year magnet high school providing focused study on medical fields.

## **CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION**

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect 2-120-620 and -630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a preliminary recommendation of landmark designation for an area, district, place, building, structure, work of art or other object with the City of Chicago if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated “criteria for designation,” as well as possesses sufficient historic design integrity to convey its significance.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that DuSable High School be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

### ***Criterion 1: Value as an Example of City, State or National Heritage***

*Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- DuSable High School possesses exceptional historic and cultural significance as an influential educational institution that served generations of African Americans who journeyed from the South to Chicago during the Great Migration of 1916-1918 and successive migrations throughout the 1950s. The history of its planning and construction, combined with the achievements of its many teachers, students and alumni over the years, reflect important aspects of the history of the African American community in Chicago.
- More broadly, DuSable High School’s massive size was a response to the rapid increase in high school enrollment in the early twentieth century resulting from the rapidly growing population of Chicago’s neighborhoods in this period, including the Bronzeville neighborhood.
- With its comprehensive set of facilities, including classrooms, laboratories, workshops, gymnasiums, and assembly halls, DuSable High School exemplifies the lasting influence of Progressive-Era educational reforms which sought to broaden the scope of public education to include social, physical, and vocational education.

### ***Criterion 3: Significant Person***

*Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States*

- DuSable High School is noteworthy for faculty such as music director Captain Walter Dyatt and art teacher Dr. Margaret Burroughs; as well as many of its alumni who achieved recognition, both local and nationally, in their chosen fields, including Chicago Mayor Harold Washington; singers Nat King Cole and Dinah Washington; and publisher John H. Johnson.

### ***Criterion 5: Work of Significant Architect or Designer***

*Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- Paul Gerhardt, Sr., the architect of DuSable High School, is a significant architect in the history of Chicago architecture through his public service as architect to Cook County and the Chicago Board of Education.
- Gerhardt was Cook County architect during the early 1910s and was the designer of the Cook County Hospital, a large Beaux-Arts building located on Chicago's West Side.
- Gerhardt was Chicago Board of Education architect from 1929 to 1931, during which time he designed, along with DuSable, such noteworthy school buildings as Lane Technical High School and Von Steuben High School.

### ***Integrity Criteria***

*The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architecture or aesthetic value.*

DuSable High School retains good exterior physical integrity displayed through its historic location, overall design, historic materials, details and ornamentation. The building is located on its historic site and retains its orange-brown brick walls, as well as limestone and metal trim, including decorative Art Deco-style entrance and tower ornament. The majority of the building's original window openings and entrances remain. A 1960s addition to the south side of the school was built using similar brick and stone detailing.

Changes to the exterior of DuSable High School are relatively minor in the overall context of the building. Entrance doors have been replaced, as have window sash. Some windows in the north and south wings have been infilled with visually-compatible brick. Roof parapets and exterior walls have been repaired with replacement brick. Entrance steps have been modified in places to meet ADA requirements. Taken as a whole, these changes are relatively minor and reversible, and they do not detract from the building's ability to convey its exceptional historical value.

## SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the “significant historical and architectural features” of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon its evaluation of DuSable High School, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be identified as follows:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the building.

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Early on DuSable High School emerged as a community cornerstone and a great source of pride in Bronzeville. During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, DuSable maintained one of the most active ROTC programs in City. Top right: DuSable Lt. Col. Crossley is recognized for his accomplishments by United States General Davis in 1944. Top left: Students gather at the entrance of DuSable's assembly hall in 1944 to participate in a fundraising drive. Left: Members of DuSable's ROTC prepare to march in formation outside of the assembly hall in 1952.

Today, DuSable High School continues to be an important visual landmark to alumni and passersby in the surrounding neighborhood. Bottom: A view of DuSable High School from the south shows the State St. elevation and its distinctive smokestack.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### CITY OF CHICAGO

Rahm Emanuel, Mayor

### Department of Housing and Economic Development

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### Illustrations

Chicago Department of Housing and Economic Development: pp. 2 (left center and map), 13, 14, 16 and 25 (bottom).

From *Red and Black*: pp. 4, 7, 11, 19 (top left and bottom left), 25 (top and center).

From *The Chicago Daily Tribune*: p. 9 (top and bottom).

From *The Chicago Defender*: p. 9 (center).

Nat “King” Cole from [www.fanpop.com/spots/nat-king-cole/images/301786\\_1009\\_1254.jpg](http://www.fanpop.com/spots/nat-king-cole/images/301786_1009_1254.jpg)

Dorothy Donegan from *Ebony Magazine*, 1946.

Dr. Margaret Burroughs from [www.chicagoist.com/2010/11/22/dr\\_margaret\\_taylor\\_burroughs\\_1917-2.php](http://www.chicagoist.com/2010/11/22/dr_margaret_taylor_burroughs_1917-2.php)

Harold Washington from <http://exhibits.library.northwestern.edu/archives/exhibits/alumni/washington2.jpg>

John Johnson from [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/2/24/John\\_H.\\_Johnson.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/2/24/John_H._Johnson.jpg)

Dempsey Travis from [www.idvl.org/thehistorymakers/Bio3.html](http://www.idvl.org/thehistorymakers/Bio3.html)

Redd Foxx from [www.nndb.com/people/698/000022632/](http://www.nndb.com/people/698/000022632/)

Nathaniel “Sweetwater” Clifton from [http://adversityinharlem.blogspot.com/2007\\_12\\_01\\_archive.html](http://adversityinharlem.blogspot.com/2007_12_01_archive.html)

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Von Freeman from [www.jazzmusicarchives.com.images.artists/von-freeman.jpg](http://www.jazzmusicarchives.com/images.artists/von-freeman.jpg)

*The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Housing and Economic Development, Historic Preservation Division, 33 N. LaSalle St., Room 1600, Chicago, IL 60602; (312-744-3200) phone; (312-744-9140) fax; web site, <http://www.cityofchicago/landmarks>.*

*This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation proceedings. Only language contained within the final landmark designation ordinance as approved by the City Council should be regarded as final.*