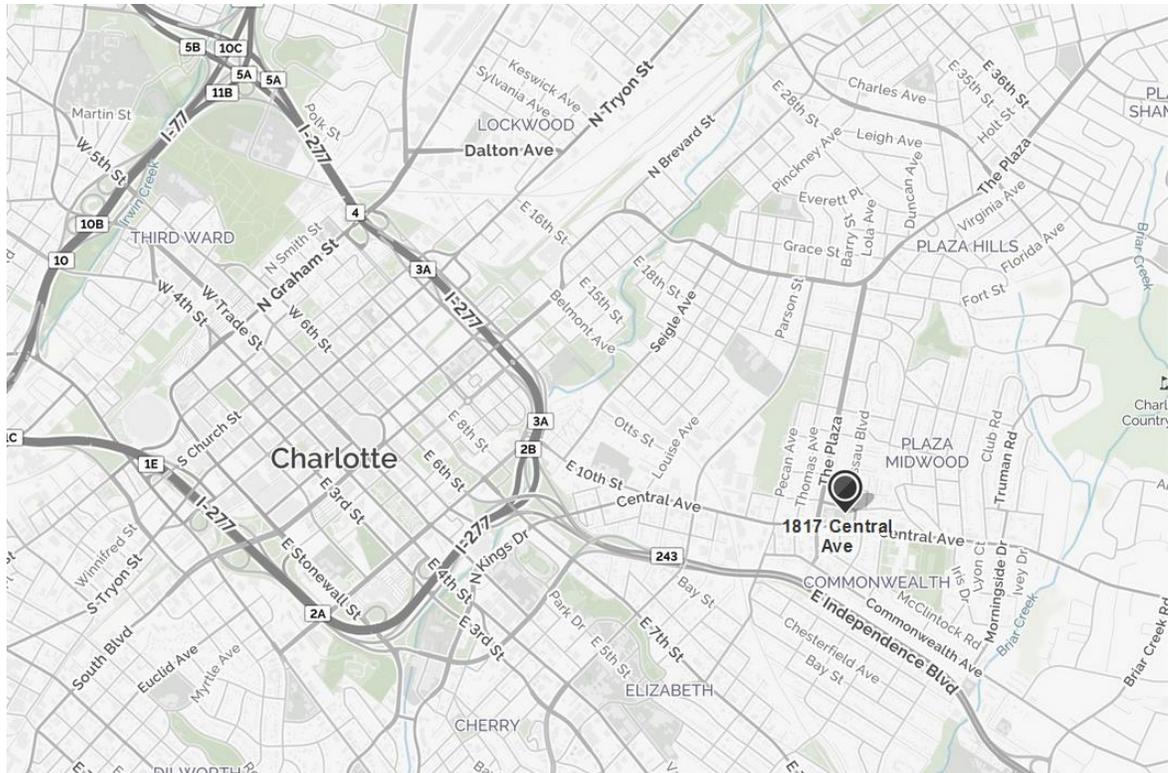


**Survey and Research Report
On Midwood Elementary School
(Originally Named Lawyers Road School)**



- 1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as Midwood Elementary School is located at 1817 Central Avenue in Charlotte, NC.
- 2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property:** The present owner of the property is:

Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education
701 East 2nd Street
Charlotte, NC 28202
Telephone: (704) 343-6011
- 3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the exterior of the property.
- 4. A map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map that depicts the location of the property. The UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator) is 17 517357E 3892290N.



5. **Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The tax parcel number is 09507803. The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 866, Page 127, on June 28, 1934.
6. **A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a historical sketch of the property prepared by Tracy A. Martin and Susan V. Mayer.
7. **A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Tracy A. Martin and Susan V. Mayer.
8. **Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.**
 - a. **Special significance in terms of its historical, pre-historical, architectural, or cultural importance:**
 - b. **Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:**
9. **Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:**

Written December 10, 2001 by Tracy A. Martin
 Updated on November 3, 2009 by Mary Dominick
 Updated on April 20, 2016 by Susan V. Mayer

First opening in 1935 and ceasing function as a school in 2011, Midwood Elementary School continues to serve as an important community institution in the Plaza Midwood neighborhood. Designed by the firm of Charlotte architect M.R. Marsh, Midwood Elementary was the first school to serve the Central Avenue corridor. The area known today as Plaza Midwood slowly grew from its inception as streetcar suburbs in the early 1900s to a popular post-World War II area conveniently located to downtown. Midwood Elementary flourished along with the neighborhood until the 1980s, when declining population and condition of Plaza Midwood and other former streetcar suburbs in Charlotte lead to the closure of the elementary school. Today, Midwood Elementary School has been reborn as a home of the Midwood International and Cultural Center, the Light Factory photography museum, and other non-profit institutions.

As one of several schools built in Charlotte in the 1930s, Midwood Elementary School is one of the last examples of education architecture in the Traditional Revival architectural style, with the classical rhythm, decorative brickwork, pitched roofs that were dropped in favor of the modern, flat-roofed school popularized following World War II. The multi-level classroom building, constructed in 1941 and added to in 1948, demonstrates the transition in architectural styles during this period.

Development of Plaza Midwood

The modern neighborhood known as Plaza Midwood is actually a conglomeration of various developments occurring primarily during the first thirty years of the twentieth century with some later developments following World War II. These neighborhoods, located beyond the former Seaboard Air Line Railroad tracks crossing Central Avenue, include Oakhurst (1903), Logie Avenue (1909), Forest Circle (1909), Chatham Estates (1912), Club Acres (1920s),

Midwood (1920s), Johnston Courts (1920s), Eastern Retreat (1947), and Masonic Drive (1951). Due to its indirect access to downtown Charlotte, the Seaboard Air Line Railway line and sporadic streetcar service, the Plaza Midwood area developed very slowly in comparison to Dilworth, Elizabeth, and streetcar suburbs.¹

Charlotte's first streetcar suburb, Dilworth, was developed in 1891 just south of downtown. Elizabeth, located to the east along Seventh Street, was founded the same year. Further development to this area of Charlotte occurred in 1899, when Piedmont Park was platted by George Stephens and F.C. Abbott along Lawyers Road. Stephens and Abbott would continue to be influential in the expansion of suburban Charlotte—Stephens developed Myers Park in 1911, while Abbott became a prominent realtor in the city. These three developments—Dilworth, Elizabeth, and Piedmont Park—were considered to be within the first tier of streetcar suburbs ringing the city.²

The first residential development in the second tier of streetcar suburbs was Oakhurst, located beyond the Seaboard Air Line Railway along Central Avenue. Benjamin D. Heath, president of Charlotte National Bank, purchased the former Chadwick farm property on Central Avenue out toward The Plaza for \$100 per acre. Starting in 1903, he sold lots for large homes along Central at Louise Street, designated an industrial district along the railroad tracks, and platted a blue-collar residential area that includes modern Plaza Midwood streets Clement, Pecan (then Chadwick), School, and Gordon and portions of Thomas, Kensington, Chestnut, and Hamorton (then Peachtree).³

¹ Thomas Hanchett, "Plaza Midwood," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, <http://landmarkscommission.org/educationneighhistplazamidwood.htm>, accessed March 28, 2016.

² Thomas Hanchett, "Why Central Avenue," *Charlotte Observer*, May 2000.

³ Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

Smaller developments Logie Avenue and Forest Circle were attempted further down Central Avenue in 1909, but little to no construction occurred. The following year, the Mecklenburg Country Club was established on a former farm on Briar Creek just north of Central Avenue. But little growth in the area occurred without extension of the streetcar lines. In comparison, other new developments in Charlotte prospered because of their access to streetcars, including Wesley Heights west of downtown in 1910, Myers Park to the south in 1912, and Wilmore west of Dilworth in 1914.⁴

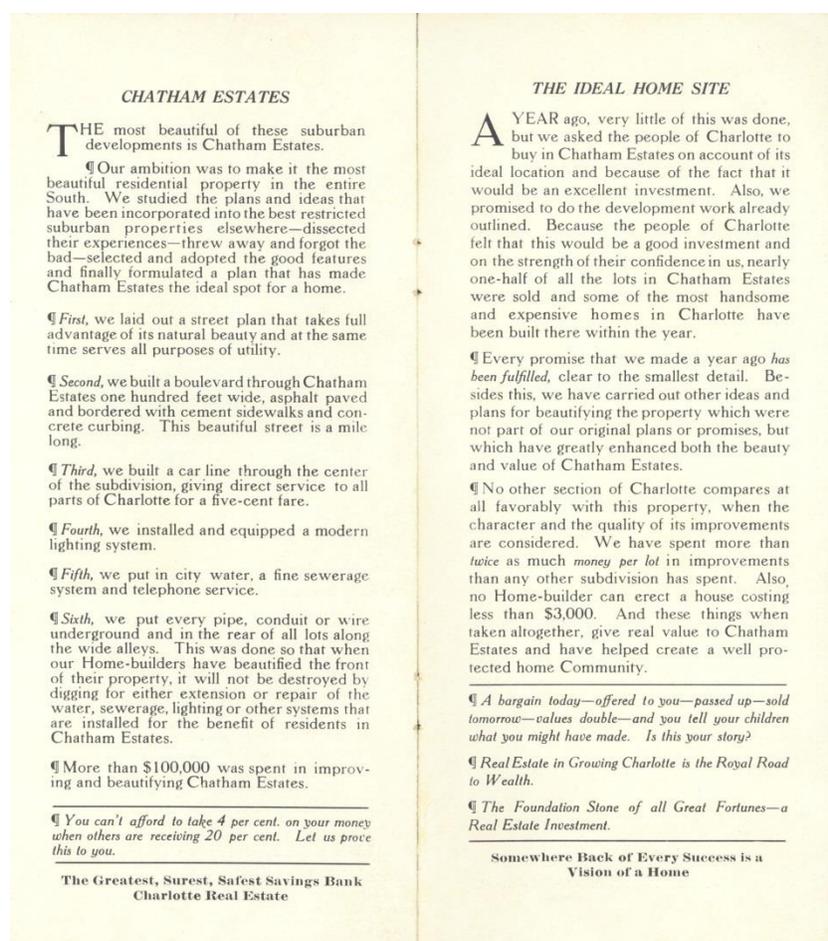


Figure 1 Pages from a 1914 promotional brochure for Chatham Estates. VanLandingham Family Papers, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

⁴ Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

Chatham Estates, the first major development of what would eventually become Plaza Midwood, was the idea of Paul Chatham, son of the owner of Chatham Woolen Mills in Elkin and a transplant to Charlotte in 1907. Chatham hired landscape architect Leigh Colyer to plan the new suburb. Larger homes for the wealthy would be built along The Plaza with more modest homes along the secondary streets in the neighborhood. Key to Chatham's development was a streetcar line to run along Central Avenue and up The Plaza to the Charlotte Country Club.⁵ However, three major issues hindered the ability of Chatham Estates and its adjacent neighborhoods to rival Dilworth as Charlotte's premier streetcar suburb: the area's distance and accessibility to downtown Charlotte, the Seaboard Air Line Railway line, and a dependable streetcar system.

While the intersection of Central Avenue and The Plaza is only one-half mile farther in distance from downtown Charlotte than Dilworth, which enjoyed a direct connection with downtown via South Boulevard, access to Chatham Estates and other neighborhoods via streetcar was by an indirect route. Streetcars traveled down Elizabeth Avenue and turned left on Hawthorne Avenue to head to Chatham Estates. The location of the Central Avenue corridor made it an attractive choice for suburban expansion, but a second problem made development inconsistent.⁶

The heavily-trafficked Seaboard Air Line Railway, a major rail route carrying Charlotte and Gastonia textile products to the port at Wilmington and to Atlanta via a junction at Monroe crossed Central Avenue between Piedmont Park and Chatham Estates. Many manufacturers and other industrial businesses were located along the railroad tracks in this area, including Louise

⁵ Hanchett, Plaza Midwood; Susan V. Mayer, "From Rails to Roads: Public Transportation in Charlotte, North Carolina, 1890-1960," thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2013, 26.

⁶ Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

Cotton Mill, Charlotte Casket Company, Barnhardt Company, and Cole Manufacturing Company. Unlike streetcar lines to Dilworth and Elizabeth, the Chatham Estates line had no bridge over the railroad tracks, but instead had to wait for one of the upwards of thirty passenger trains and even more freight trains to pass before continuing down Central Avenue.⁷



Figure 2 The storage battery car type used on the Charlotte Rapid Transit Company line to Chatham Estates also ran in Concord. Storage battery street car, Concord, N. C., Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2013646432>.

Reliable streetcar service to Chatham Estates became a major problem for the continued growth of the area, primarily for two reasons. First, Chatham chose to utilize the storage battery car rather than the traditional streetcar powered by overhead power lines. This unreliable technology choice was remembered by Piedmont Park resident Jake Newell as the “poor old four-wheeled rattle trap from Chatham Estates.”⁸ Secondly, Chatham had raised the ire of Edward Dilworth Latta, developer of Dilworth and the city’s streetcar system. Latta saw

⁷ Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

⁸ “Street-car Service,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 10, 1919.

Chatham's Charlotte Rapid Transit Company (CRTC) as a threat to his monopoly on power generation and urban rail travel in the city, which at the time was being challenged by James Buchanan Duke and his Southern Public Utilities Company (SPUCO). Because of this perceived slight, Latta refused to allow Chatham's streetcar to tie into the city system. Chatham Estates residents and domestic workers traveling from other parts of the city had to disembark from the SPUCO streetcar on Hawthorne to transfer to Chatham's CRTC line. In May 1913, tired of problems with the storage battery cars, CRTC contracted with SPUCO for streetcar service.⁹

As noted by historian Kenneth Jackson, the growth of streetcar suburbs needed to be balanced by the profitability of the streetcar. In 1918 CRTC defaulted, leaving Piedmont Park and Chatham Estates without streetcar service. Chatham's choice of the storage battery car had been unfortunate, but the lack of consistent growth of Oakhurst, Logie Avenue, and Forest Circle among other neighborhoods below the Seaboard railroad tracks had combined to doom the development of Central Avenue as a streetcar suburb to rival Dilworth. For two years, the Central Avenue corridor had no public transportation service, and residents had to rely upon the good faith of automobile owners to offer a ride. Some relief came in the form of a new transit service when the jitney, a forerunner of the taxi, emerged concurrently with World War I training camp Camp Greene on the west side of Charlotte. Jitneys provided service from the Hawthorne streetcar stop to Charlotte Country Club beginning in April 1919.¹⁰

As the automobile became more affordable to middle-class Charlotteans, residential development in the Chatham Estates area resumed in the 1920s. Previous developments Logie Avenue and Forest Circle began selling lots. Club Acres, located around the Charlotte Country Club, had also begun development around 1910, but the neighborhood did not truly take off until

⁹ Mayer, 17, 26-28.

¹⁰ Mayer, 28-29.

the following decade. To continue the trend, Midwood had been platted in 1914, but its growth stalled through the 1920s and was not fully developed until the 1950s. Other small developments during the period included Johnston Courts and Club Drive.¹¹

Commercial enterprises followed as residential development occurred in Plaza Midwood. A streetcar shopping strip grew along Central Avenue approaching its intersection with The Plaza. Led by Long's Grocery, which opened in 1916 at the corner of Central and Pecan avenues, the commercial corridor saw more growth through the 1930s. A grocery store operated by W.T. Harris (which grew into the major Southern grocery chain Harris Teeter) and a Pure Oil gas station both opened in 1936. Merchants named this stretch of Central Avenue Charlotte's "Miracle Mile" because the variety of businesses meant that residents could shop within their own neighborhood for basic necessities.¹²

Lawyers Road School/Midwood Elementary School

While Chatham Estates and adjacent neighborhoods were slow to grow in comparison to other Charlotte streetcar suburbs, the area had increased in population enough to warrant the establishment of an elementary school. Nearby residential developments such as Chantilly, platted in 1913 just off Central Avenue between Pecan Avenue and the Seaboard railroad tracks but also initially slow to grow, had swelled the population of the Central Avenue corridor. Children in the neighborhoods attended Elizabeth Elementary School, which had become overcrowded.

However, the United States was in the throes of the Great Depression, which had begun in October 1929. The Mecklenburg County Board of Education felt the financial pinch most acutely, with the yearly budget dropping 61% between the 1931-1932 and 1933-1934 school

¹¹ Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

¹² Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

years. Due to this budget cut, salaries were slashed, staff was laid off, the twelfth grade was discontinued, and the school term was lessened to eight months for the first time since 1882. With the population of Charlotte having exploded from 46,338 in 1920 to 82,675 in 1930, new schools were desperately needed, but funding was obviously in short supply.¹³

In June 1933, Charlotte successfully petitioned the State School Commission to allow the creation of a school district for the city separate from that of Mecklenburg County under jurisdiction of the state commission. An attempt to raise revenue through property tax valuations at 20 cents per \$100.00 was unsuccessful in August 1933, and city schools continued to operate on limited budgets. But a second election in April 1935 saw voters approve a 25 cent per \$100.00 in property value tax to fund city schools. With this infusion of funding, teacher salaries were increased, the twelfth grade reinstated, and the school term was restored to nine months.¹⁴

Despite the budget crisis, the Charlotte city school system still needed more schools to serve its burgeoning population. In September 1933, the School Board took the necessary steps to get funds through the Public Works Administration for a building program. Schools approved for the building program were Lawyers Road, Eastover, and Glenwood (later Enderly Park Elementary School on Clay Street) elementary schools, a high school in Irwin Park¹⁵, and additions to Wilmore School and Charlotte Technical High School. The building program also projects at black schools, including the new Isabella Wyche School in Third Ward, a modern replacement for Alexander Street School in the Belmont neighborhood, and additions to Myers Street School in Brooklyn and Biddleville School. Cost of these new school buildings was

¹³ Harry Harding, *The Charlotte City Schools* (Charlotte, NC: Public Library of Charlotte Mecklenburg County, 1966), 119-120.

¹⁴ Harding, 122-124

¹⁵ Harry P. Harding High School opened in 1935 and was located on Irwin Avenue until a new campus was constructed on Alleghany Street in the 1960s. The school was converted into Irwin Avenue Elementary School.

estimated to be \$690,000.00, a high price necessary for the fire-resistant structures recommended by the Charlotte school superintendent. But the Mecklenburg County superintendent, who had been granted the power by the state school commission to make the budgetary decision, ordered a less-expensive building type to be used for all the schools at a cost of \$400,000.00.¹⁶

Among the approved new schools to be built was an eight-room elementary school on Central Avenue. Approximately 2.5 acres of land was purchased for \$2,700.00 from E.A. Cole, a founder and executive of the Cole Manufacturing Company located near Central and Pecan Avenues along the railroad tracks in Plaza Midwood. Cole resided in a large mansion at the northeast corner of Central Avenue and The Plaza, next door to the new school site.¹⁷

Charlotte architect Willard G. Rogers was commissioned to design the new Lawyers Road School at an estimated cost of \$31,508.46. A native of Cincinnati, Rogers had formerly been employed with engineer Stuart Cramer as well as a partner with C.C. Hook from 1905 to 1916. Notable Hook and Rogers projects in Charlotte included the Egyptian-revival Masonic Temple as well as Chatham Estates-area Cole Manufacturing Plant and VanLandingham house. Later, Rogers operated his own firm, designing the Davidson Graded School gymnasium among other projects across North Carolina.¹⁸

¹⁶ Harding, 124-125.

¹⁷ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 866, Page 127; Harding, 124.

¹⁸ Mecklenburg County Board of Education Minutes, Book 6, Page 12, November 14, 1933; Michelle Michael, "Hook and Rogers," North Carolina Architects and Builders, 2009, <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000269>, accessed April 5, 2016.

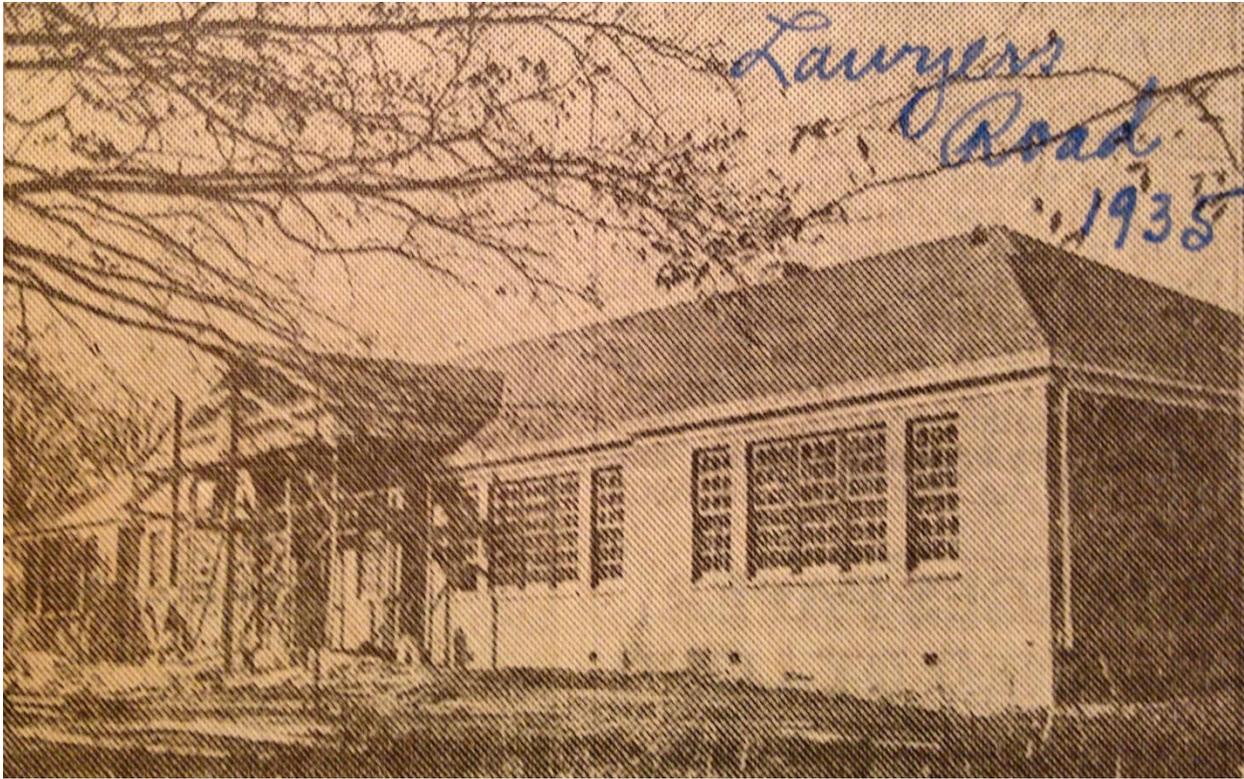


Figure 3 Lawyers Road School under construction in 1935.

From Midwood School Scrapbook, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

At the same time Lawyers Road School was being designed, the firm of Charlotte architect M.R. Marsh (1901-1977) was at work on Eastover Elementary School. Born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1901, Marsh studied architecture through correspondence courses and through work with his brother's architecture firm. Marsh practiced in Charlotte his entire career except for a brief period during World War II, when he was stationed in New York and Washington with the War Production Board. Between 1922 and 1964, Marsh designed several well-known Charlotte buildings, several residences, and many institutional structures. The most visible surviving structure of his is the main office of Mutual Savings and Loan at 330 South Tryon Street, which was completed in 1962.¹⁹

¹⁹ "Oasis Temple Designer, Marion Marsh, Dies at 76," *Charlotte Observer*, September 5, 1977.

James A. Stenhouse (1910-1996), an architectural draftsman working for Marsh who had recently graduated from Georgia Tech University in Atlanta, was assigned Eastover as his first project out of college. Completed in two weeks' time, Eastover had six classrooms. The design was modified for Lawyers Road School to include two additional classrooms. Rogers remained the architect overseeing the Lawyers Road project, however. The reason for the use of modified Eastover plans for the school was most likely cost, since the estimate for the Marsh design was for about \$8,000 less than Rogers' design estimate.²⁰

Lawyers Road School opened in fall 1935. Eva H. Burch (1895-1988) was assigned as the first principal of Lawyers Road School. She had previously served the same position at Parks Hutchison School on Graham Street.²¹ [genealogy site says she was first female principal in NC]

Lawyers Road School was an instant success—eighty students had to be turned away because enrollment was full. The new school was already inadequate to serve the number of students in the area. In November 1936, the citizens of Charlotte authorized a bond of \$584,000.00 to be used in the school building program of 1937. Out of this funding, Lawyers Road School was allotted \$18,000.00 for an addition to the building and \$1,780.00 for extra equipment. A new classroom wing was constructed at the northeast corner of the original building.²²

²⁰ Mary Lynn Morrill, "Eastover Elementary School History," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, <http://landmarkscommission.org/Eastover%20Elementary%20School%20History.htm>; City of Charlotte Application for Building Permit No. 952, July 25, 1934.

²¹ "Idea of Reopening Midwood School Warms Hearts," *Charlotte Observer*, February 16, 1984; Harding, 128.

²² Harding, 132-133.

ADDITION READY The new addition at Midwood school, one of the city's fastest growing schools, will be formally opened at exercises next Tuesday night under the direction of the Parent-Teacher association, of which Mrs. Herbert Theiling is president. City and county school officials, Parent-Teacher leaders, former school board members and others will be honor guests, and the school plant will be open for inspection from 7:30 to 9 o'clock that night. (Observer Staff photo.)

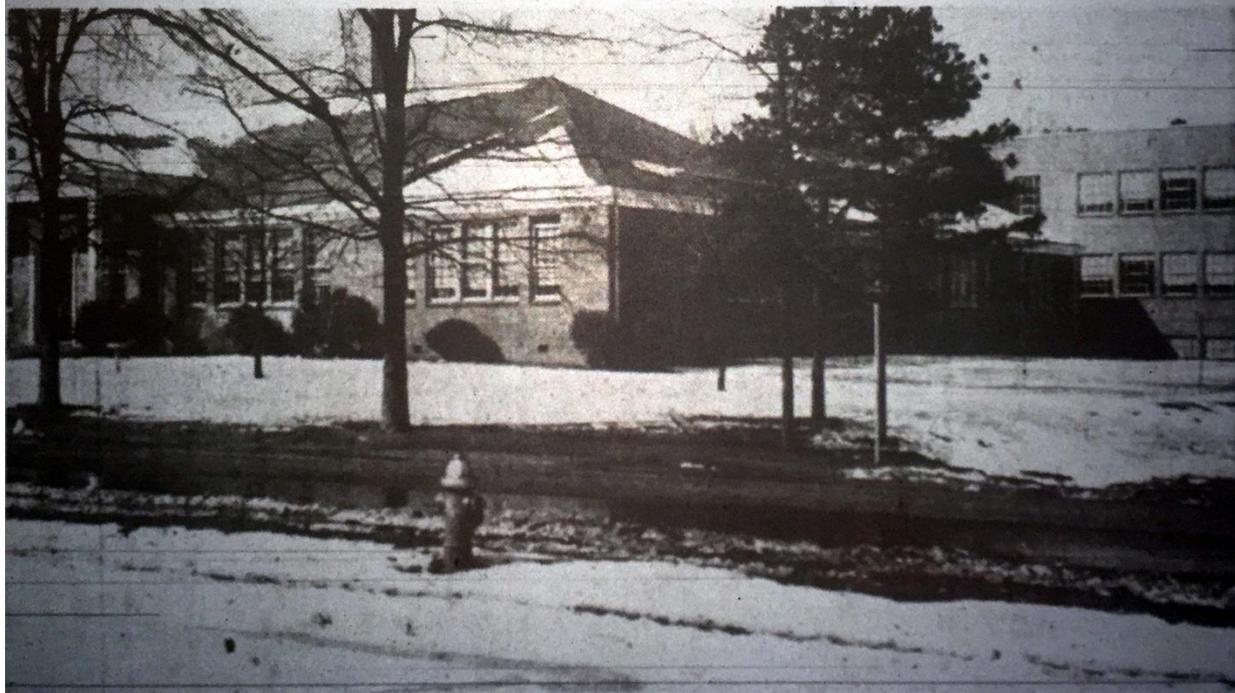


Figure 4 The new two-story addition to Midwood Elementary School is seen in the background of the photo. "Open House Planned for School Section," *Charlotte Observer*, February 26, 1942.

On August 1, 1941, a fire damaged classrooms in the north wing of Midwood Elementary School (the name Lawyer's Road School was dropped in the early 1940s). While an inconvenience, especially considering the new school year would begin a little over a month, the fire came at a somewhat opportune time. Midwood Elementary had more students than it had space, with the enrollment of 592 students in spring 1942 being double the number of students just five years before. The school building program of 1941 remedied this by repairing the classrooms that were damaged by the fire as well as adding a new auditorium to the west of the original building and a three-story classroom wing at the northeast corner of the property.²³

²³ Harding, 143; "Open House Planned for School Section," *Charlotte Observer*, February 26, 1942.

During the years following World War II, residential development across the United States rapidly expanded. Charlotte would double in population between 1940 and 1960, becoming a city of over 200,000 residents. The city faced a housing shortage in the late 1940s. Underdeveloped neighborhoods such as Midwood and nearby Chantilly began to fill up, and additional developments Eastern Retreat and Masonic Drive were platted and sold.²⁴



Figure 5 Midwood School Orchestra, 1938-1939 school year. From Midwood School Scrapbook, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

Like many other elementary schools on the city limits, Midwood Elementary School was overcrowded. Many city and county schools were in need maintenance as well since building materials had been reserved for wartime efforts. Bonds for the funding of over \$10,000,000 in city and county improvements, of which nearly \$6,000,000 was earmarked for schools, were approved by voters on April 23, 1946. The building program of 1946-1949 looked to address these issues by building several new schools, including Chantilly Elementary School, Park Road Elementary School, Eastway Junior High School, and Myers Park High School. An expansion of Midwood designed by M.R. Marsh was completed in 1948. The addition, which expanded the

²⁴ Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

two-story classroom wing added in 1941, included a new cafeteria, visual education room, and three classrooms as well as improvements in the heating system.²⁵

But despite this additional space, Midwood continued to be crowded. A year after the addition, every available room in the school was dedicated to class space. The school nurse's office was made into a classroom. Louise Andrews taught her 39 third grade students on the stage of the school auditorium. But the auditorium was also used by the school orchestra during first period since the music room was occupied by another class. Mrs. Andrews's class could not be conducted while the orchestra was practicing, so the students would spend time in the library and playground until their class space was once again available.²⁶

²⁵ "City, County School Needs are Urgent," *Charlotte News*, April 15, 1946; Harding, 148-149; "Work Started or Contracted on 13 Projects," *Charlotte Observer*, May 28, 1948.

²⁶ "Schooling Comes Hard in Crowded Classes," *Charlotte Observer*, September 15, 1949.

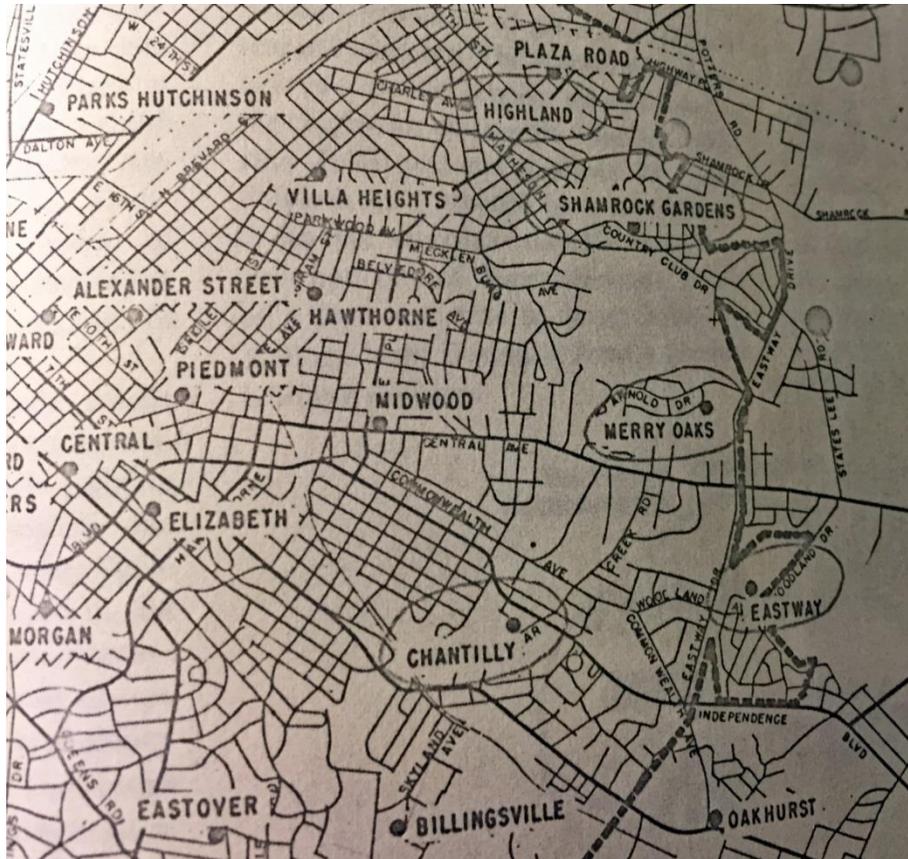


Figure 6 This 1956 map of shows the schools around Midwood Elementary. “The Individual School and the Community, Charlotte, N.C.,” *Architectural Record* 120 (October 1956), 237.

The new schools designated in the building program of 1946-1949 began to open in the early 1950s. On February 10, 1950, Chantilly Elementary School opened on Briar Creek Road. The new school, also designed by M.R. Marsh, had been built to relieve overcrowding at Midwood and Elizabeth Elementary School. However, the new school opened to crowded conditions itself, and classes had to be held on other school campuses as well as nearby churches. A 10.3 acre tract between Eastway Drive and the Charlotte Country Club was purchased by the school board in 1952 for a new elementary school to relieve crowding at both Midwood Elementary and Plaza Road Elementary School, located north of Midwood near the North

Charlotte neighborhood. The new school, Merry Oaks Elementary School, would open in 1953.²⁷

Although Midwood Elementary School had no new building additions after 1948, updates would be made periodically. As part of a system-wide program to update wiring and lighting, Midwood had its outdated lighting (though only about 15 years old) replaced with new fluorescent fixtures in 1951-1952. Also, an expansion of the kitchen and cafeteria facilities was made in 1953.²⁸



Figure 7 Miss Marion Price and her kindergarten class at Midwood Elementary School, 1958. Midwood School Scrapbook, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte Mecklenburg County.

As residential development spread farther from downtown Charlotte in the 1960s and 1970s, Chatham Estates, Midwood, and other surrounding neighborhoods with their older homes became less desirable to homebuyers who desired newly built properties. In 1962 the city of Charlotte implemented a comprehensive zoning plan that targeted older neighborhoods, rezoning many areas from single-family homes to business and multi-family occupancies. As noted by Thomas Hanchett in his history of the area, “as original owners grew old and died, speculators

²⁷ “New Chantilly School Packed Opening Day,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 11, 1950; “City Purchases Tract for New School Plant,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 1, 1952.

²⁸ “Only Eight Schools Left in Relighting Program,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 9, 1951; “Permits Issued on 3 Schools,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 15, 1953.

bought up houses with the idea of running them down as rental property, then demolishing them to build new apartments and offices.”²⁹ It was during this time that the former E.A. Cole residence adjacent to Midwood Elementary at the corner of Central Avenue and The Plaza was razed in favor of a strip shopping center.

Both new residents to the area and older denizens sought to fight these changes. One method was to create a cohesive identity for the collection of neighborhoods that had grown over a fifty year period. A neighborhood group successfully fought against the proposed extension of Matheson Avenue through Club Acres. The group became permanent as the Plaza Midwood Neighborhood Association (PMNA), and the area was dubbed Plaza Midwood. PMNA organized activities and events such as the Miracle Mile Street Fair in October 1982 to feature the area’s commercial core and Plaza Midwood: A Neighborhood Heritage Celebration to highlight the history of the neighborhood.³⁰

However, the decline of the Plaza Midwood area had taken its toll. Midwood Elementary School closed in June 1983 due to declining enrollment. At its prime in the 1950s, the school had 1,000 students, but during the 1982-1983 school year Midwood only had 272 students. A short year later, school superintendent Jay Robinson proposed reopening Midwood Elementary to relieve overcrowding at nearby Eastover Elementary School, but the plan was abandoned.³¹

With its closure, Midwood Elementary School began to deteriorate. The plaster on the walls peeled and broke and vandals broke many of the windows. Charlotte Mecklenburg

²⁹ Hanchett, Plaza Midwood.

³⁰ Hanchett, Plaza Midwood; “Midwood Salutes Shops at Miracle Mile Street Fair,” *Charlotte News*, October 22, 1982; Plaza Midwood: A Neighborhood Heritage Celebration, brochure, Plaza-Midwood Neighborhood Association Records, J. Murray Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

³¹ “Idea of Reopening Midwood School Warms Hearts,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 16, 1984.

Schools sought to utilize the building lest it fall too far into disrepair. The county department of social services used the former school as a site for distributing surplus food.³²

In February 1985, an elementary school in Plaza Midwood was reborn once again, albeit briefly. An arson fire caused considerable damage to Albemarle Elementary School, and 300 second and third graders needed a new school. The abandoned Midwood building was only five miles away and was the only viable option. Getting the old building ready was a massive undertaking. The school had been left in decay for several years. After an initial inspection of the building, work started almost immediately the following Saturday afternoon. Over seventy workers had until Monday night to have the building prepared for students on Tuesday morning at an estimated cost of \$10,000 in overtime pay to workers and \$6,000.00 for materials.³³

After Albemarle Elementary School had been repaired, the former Midwood Elementary became home to the Dolly Tate Teen-Age Parents Services School (TAPS), a program for teenage mothers in the Charlotte Mecklenburg school system. TAPS was established in 1971 to provide expecting female students a supportive learning environment and encourage them to remain enrolled following childbirth. Also, the under-utilized cafeteria at Midwood Elementary became the preparation site for a hot lunch program for seniors in eastern Mecklenburg County, Mint Hill, and Matthews in 1986.³⁴

In 1992 the campus became Midwood High School, an alternative school aimed at dropout prevention. TAPS, which shared the campus, provided in-school daycare for students, and CMS implemented the Mastery Learning Program to provide flexible class schedules.

Placement of the alternative school in the former Midwood site was unpopular with some

³² "Midwood School Restoration 'A Miracle,'" *Charlotte News*, February 19, 1985.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "Murphy Drops Plan to Close TAPS," *Charlotte Observer*, April 9, 1992; "Mint Hill Gets Hot Lunch Program," *Charlotte Observer*, December 28, 1986.

community residents, who complained that students parked on side streets, loitered at local businesses, and verbally harassed residents. The school closed in June 2011.³⁵

Once again, the former Midwood Elementary School was vacant. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools decided to utilize the building as a school for students who needed an additional year to transition from middle to high school, termed the Grade 8.5 curriculum. In October 2006, the school board accepted a bid by Hendrick Construction Company to renovate 22 classrooms and make major improvements to plumbing, roofing, and other elements of the building at a cost of approximately \$2.3 million.³⁶

On January 27, 2013, the Midwood International and Cultural Center officially opened in the former Midwood Elementary School. The primary tenant was International House, a non-profit which encourages cultural diversity and immigrant acceptance into the Charlotte community founded in 1981. The following year, the Light Factory Contemporary Museum of Photography also relocated to the former school. Established in 1972, the Light Factory hosts traveling exhibits and offers photography classes.³⁷

The ability of Midwood Elementary School to evolve its function while keeping its historical integrity is reflective of its place in Plaza Midwood, a neighborhood which has demonstrated similar traits. The campus has retained a great deal of architectural integrity, with the only visible changes being upgrades to the mechanical systems as well as wheelchair ramps and other elements to bring the buildings up to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

³⁵ “Kids Voting,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 27, 1992; “Relations Sour Between School’s Evening Program, Its Neighbors,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 2, 1993; “The Student She Knew It Was Hers to Achieve,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 2, 1993; “CMS Shuffles Its Listing of Needy Schools,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 20, 2011.

³⁶ “Contracts for Projects at 3 Schools Are Approved,” *Charlotte Observer*, October 15, 2006; “Old Midwood School to be Used in New Role,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 15, 2006.

³⁷ “International House Now in Plaza Midwood,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 3, 2013; “Longtime Backers Lead Light Factory Revival,” *Charlotte Observer*, March 11, 2014.

Architectural Description

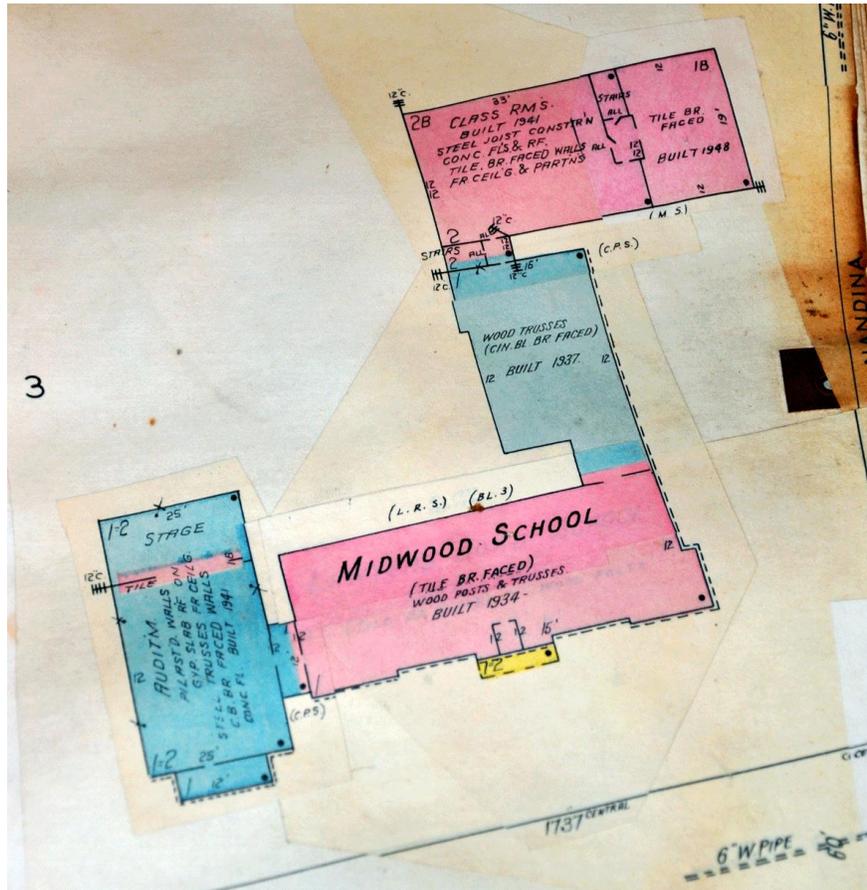


Figure 8 This 1951 Sanborn fire map of Midwood Elementary School shows the various additions made to the school throughout the years. An expansion of the cafeteria and kitchen was made to the circa 1937 addition in 1953; the expansion was placed on the west side of that structure. Sanborn Map Company, *Charlotte, North Carolina*, Scale 50 feet = 1 foot, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1951, 222.

Midwood Elementary School, designed by the firm of Charlotte architect M.R. Marsh, is an important example of the Traditional Revival architectural style that was used for many institutional buildings in Charlotte during the 1930s and 1940s. The school is located on Central Avenue in Plaza Midwood, a collection of streetcar suburbs developed in the early twentieth century. The area experienced a major decline in the 1970s and 1980s, but today Plaza Midwood is a vibrant, diverse area of Charlotte known for his historic homes and variety of businesses.

Midwood Elementary School is situated on a 2.54 acre parcel on Central Avenue. The site is bordered by Nandina Street on the east and Hamorton Place to the north. A strip shopping

center at the corner of Central Avenue and The Plaza and Green Memorial Baptist Church at The Plaza and Hamorton Place borders the property on the west. Parking lots are sited at the southeast and northwest corners of the property. The topography is generally level with a slight decline at the northeast corner.

Midwood Elementary School is made up of four distinct masses forming an exaggerated L shape. The circa 1935 original building faces Central Avenue, as does the circa 1941 auditorium located to the west. The circa 1937 one-story addition, along with the circa 1953 expansion of the cafeteria, is attached to the original building perpendicular to its northeast corner. Perpendicular to this wing of Midwood Elementary is a multi-level building—a three-level portion added circa 1941 and a two-level portion circa 1948.

The school is sheathed in red brick, which is laid with a combination of running bond, common bond, and Flemish bond brickwork. Quoins adorn the corners of the auditorium, later converted to a gymnasium, and the multi-level classroom addition. The roofs of the circa 1935 original building, circa 1937 addition, and 1941 auditorium/gymnasium are hipped with asphalt shingles. The circa 1941 and 1948 multi-level addition and the circa 1953 cafeteria expansion have flat ballasted roofs.

The original building and circa 1937 addition are constructed on a crawl space; the floor level is demarked by a row of soldier course brick on the exterior. The multi-level classroom addition features a basement and is built on a slab below grade. The auditorium/gymnasium is also built on a slab.



Figure 9 South elevation of the original building.

The south and east elevations of the circa 1935 hip-roofed original building are immediately visible from Central Avenue. The south elevation is five bays wide. The center bay, which served as the main entrance to the school, is a gabled portico with four columns and an octagonal window in the pediment. This bay has a pair of 12-over-12 sash windows on either side the inset entry with half-light double doors topped with a large transom. The center bay is flanked by a pair of identical bays. Each bay consists of five total 9-over-9 sash windows arranged in a single-triple-single configuration. The second and fourth bays are stepped back.

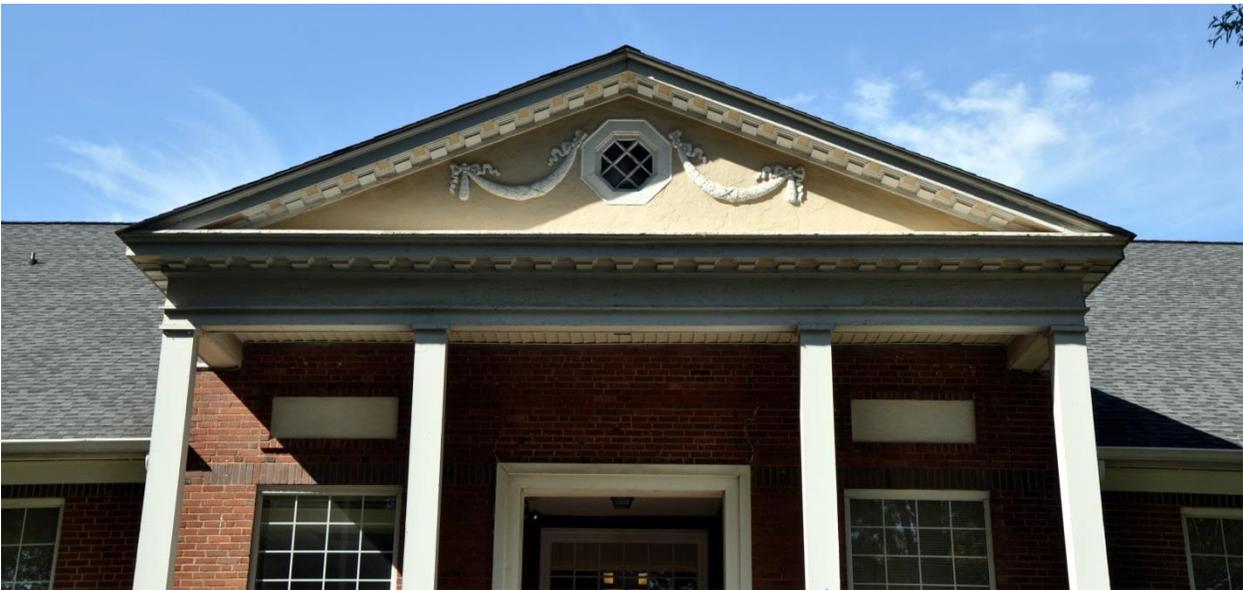


Figure 10 The pediment of the portico at the original building.

The pediment of the center bay is triangular with a stuccoed gable. Modillions adorn the cornices. The octagonal window in the pediment has a 9-panel window flanked by draped decorative architectural trim. These are the only decorative elements applied to the exterior of the building which typify the Traditional Revival architectural style and contrast the original building with the later additions, especially the multi-level classroom building.



Figure 11 East elevation of the original building and the circa 1937 addition.

The east elevation of the original building ties into the circa 1937 addition, which is also features a hip roof. This elevation of the original building is two bays wide with the first bay being a protruding blank wall, and the addition is three bays wide. The four bays, like the south elevation, feature 9-over-9 sash windows arranged in a single-triple-single configuration.



Figure 12 (top) South elevation and (bottom) east elevation of the multi-level classroom building.

Located off the north end of the circa 1937 addition extending toward the northeast corner of the property is a multi-level classroom building. The three-level portion was built in 1941, and a two-level addition was made in 1948. Delineation between the two portions of the building is clearly made with the retaining of the quoins from the circa 1941 building. Brick is

laid in running bond save for a single soldier course located at the floor level of the circa 1937 addition. Also, a cove parapet element rises between the two portions of the building, which calls to the traditional architectural style of the original building.

The multi-level classroom addition is three bays wide at the south and north elevations and one bay deep at the east and west elevations. All corners of this building incorporate quoins. The left bay of the south elevation consists of a blank wall which ties into the circa 1937 addition. The center bay features five windows, a single 12-panel casement window and four grouped 12-panel casement windows, on the top two levels, and four 12-panel casement windows and two 8-panel casement windows on the basement level. The right bay, which is only two levels, continues the four grouped 12-panel casement windows on the upper level and the four pairs of 8-panel casement windows on the basement level. The east elevation of this building has no windows with a center bump-out one course of brick deep consisting of a single steel door and concrete pan stairs at the upper level and steel double doors with a flat-roofed porch extending to the sidewalk at the basement level.



Figure 13 North elevation of the multi-level classroom building.

The north elevation of the multi-level classroom addition is four bays wide. The left bay consists of the circa 1948 two-story addition and has the same fenestration pattern as the south elevation, with four grouped 12-panel casement windows on the upper level and the four pairs of 8-panel casement windows on the basement level. The circa 1941 three-level portion of the multi-level classroom building has three bays, the first having steel double doors exiting between the middle and basement levels of the building. A 12-panel casement window is located midway between the middle and top levels of the building at a stair landing. The second and third bays both have four grouped 12-panel casement windows on each level.



Figure 14 West elevation of the multi-level classroom building and the cafeteria expansion.

The west elevation of the multi-level classroom addition is one bay wide. The two levels have four grouped 12-panel casement windows flanked on the left side by two riser ducts and the right side by a single steel door exiting at ground level with a 12-panel casement window above, which denotes a stairwell. Just to the south, the cafeteria expansion, located off the west side of

the circa 1937 addition, is two bays wide and two bays deep. The elevations are pierced with ventilation grills.



Figure 15 The north elevation of the original building.

View of the north elevation of the original building of Midwood Elementary School is partially blocked by the cafeteria extension. The elevation is three bays wide. The first bay at the right end of the elevation has steel double doors with an arched window above and a 12-over-12 sash window. The center bay has a single 9-over-9 sash window, three grouped 9-over-9 sash windows, and a single steel door which formerly had a transom extending to the same level of the sash window heads. A brick chimney separates the center bay from the left bay, which features three grouped 9-over-9 sash windows flanked on either side by a single 9-over-9 sash window.



Figure 16 The north (top) and west (top and bottom) elevations of the auditorium/gymnasium.

The auditorium/gymnasium is attached to the circa 1935 original building at its east elevation. The building has a gabled roof with cornice returns, and the corners are adorned with quoins. The gabled north elevation is one bay wide and has two large duct risers piercing the brick wall. In the center of the elevation, concrete stairs lead to a single steel door topped with a brick header lintel which enters into the building at floor level.

The west elevation, which is five bays wide, formerly had four arched windows at all but the bay nearest the north elevation (the first bay), but these have been bricked in. The brick

header arches remain over these spaces. The third and fifth bays have metal vent panels at the top. A brick firebreak extrudes out from the roof between the first and second bays, which has a pair of steel doors. Adjacent to the fourth bay is a single steel door exiting to a wheelchair ramp that extends toward the south elevation.



Figure 17 The south and east elevations of the auditorium/gymnasium. A cornerstone with the year of construction, 1941, is clearly visible.

The south elevation, also gabled, features an octagonal vent at the gable peak. A stepped out entry has 6-over-6 sash windows flanking steel double doors. An octagonal vent with flaking decorative trim is located in the gabled peak. The east elevation also has a formerly arched window now bricked in with a steel vent panel in its place. A connector bay with steel double doors is located between the auditorium/gymnasium and circa 1935 original building.

The interior of Midwood Elementary remains unchanged. There are a total of twenty-four classrooms. Many of the doors to the classrooms have retained the large eight-pane transoms.