

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Central School Campus  
other names/site number Central School, DeSoto High School

**2. Location**

street & number 221 South Third Street [N/A] not for publication  
city or town De Soto [N/A] vicinity  
state Missouri code MO county Jefferson code 099 zip code 63020-2081

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [ x ] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [ x ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [ x ] locally.  
( See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Mark A Miles August 24, 2009  
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:

	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet [ ].	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet [ ].	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)	_____	_____

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Central School Campus  
Jefferson County, Missouri**

**8. Statement of Significance  
Applicable National Register Criteria**

**A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

**C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

**D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

Property is:

**A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

**B** removed from its original location.

**C** a birthplace or grave.

**D** a cemetery.

**E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

**F** a commemorative property.

**G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

See continuation sheet [x].

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography** See continuation sheet [x].

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record  
# \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

Education  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1882-1955  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1927  
\_\_\_\_\_

1950  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person(s)**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Laubis, Martin, Architect  
\_\_\_\_\_

Weltecke, Roscoe H., Builder  
\_\_\_\_\_

Bonsack and Pearce, Architects  
\_\_\_\_\_

Park, Alden B., Builder  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other:

Name of repository:  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property:** 2.7 acres

**UTM References**

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	714220	4223700			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Debbie Sheals  
organization Private Contractor date June 2009  
street & number 29 S. 9<sup>th</sup> St. Suite 204 telephone 573-874-3779  
city or town Columbia state Missouri zip code 65201

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional Items**

(Check with the SHPO or FOP for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Arapaho Development LLC, attn: Patrick W. Werner  
street & number 1000 A Truman Box 198  
telephone 636-931-4244  
city or town Crystal City state MO zip code 63019

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**Central School Campus**  
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**Summary:** The Central School Campus is a two-building school complex located at South Third and West Mineral Streets in De Soto, Jefferson County, Missouri. The campus sits atop a hill, overlooking the commercial center of De Soto. The irregular lot contains two school buildings: an elementary school named Central School, and the De Soto High School. Both are of brick, with flat roofs, large windows and minimal architectural detailing. Central School was built ca. 1882 and remodeled into its current form in 1950, and the De Soto High School was built in 1927. Central School is on the north end of the property. It is a long rectangular building, set with its short end facing north to Mineral Street. It is two and half stories on the south and west, and the north and east elevations are three full stories. The main entrance is centered on the ground floor of the north elevation. The interior of Central School looks much as it did in 1950. Interior features of note include "fireproof" steel staircases at either end of a double-loaded corridor, early classroom doors, and glazed tile wainscoting in the halls. The De Soto High School is located southwest of Central School, facing Third Street. The main block of that building is three stories tall, and there is an original two-story auditorium wing to the rear. The interior of the high school is highly intact. Like Central School, it has a double-loaded corridor with end staircases on each floor. Those halls retain a good deal of early woodwork, including classroom doors and early or original staircases. The high school auditorium is open, with an oversized stage that doubled as a gymnasium when the school was in use. Central School is in poor condition; the High School is in fair shape. Neither building has seen any major alterations in the past half century. Each is counted as a contributing resource, and there are no other resources on the property.

**Elaboration:**

De Soto, population 6,504, is one of the largest towns in Jefferson County, Missouri. It is located 42 miles southwest of St. Louis, on the Missouri Pacific Railroad. The long narrow commercial core of the community lies in a level valley that includes Main Street (State Highway 21), which runs parallel to the north-south path of the rails. A steep bluff a block west of Main Street separates the commercial center from an older residential neighborhood to the west. The Central School Campus sits on the edge of that bluff, with the commercial center below to the east and residential properties on all other sides. The school property is

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bounded on the north by West Mineral Street and on the west by South Third Street. The wooded bluff runs along the east edge and the southeast corner of the property, and to the southwest is a small residence

**Site.** See photos 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10, and Figures One and Five.

The north and east boundaries of the lot are marked by cyclone fencing that is several decades old but probably not original. A concrete retaining wall runs along the north end of the lot next to the sidewalk; Mineral Street is several feet lower than the school property. Another retaining wall connects to the south wall of Central School and runs near the eastern edge of the property. The northeast corner of the lot is paved, and there is a metal-framed backstop at the very northeast corner of it; that area was occupied by the town's junior high school building until 1968. There is a small paved parking lot south of the high school. A small driveway runs behind the high school and around the elementary school to link to two paved areas. The two school buildings are the only buildings on the property.

**Central School, 1882-1950. (c) See photos 6-10, 13-15 and Figure Two.**  
**1950 remodeling: Bonsack and Pearce, Architects and Alden B. Park, Builder.**

Central School is a long narrow building with a flat roof and a stone foundation. It sits near the north and east edges of the lot, with the narrow façade facing north to Mineral Street. The school was built in two stages. The south end is the oldest; it was built ca. 1882. The north part of the building was added in 1950, during a major renovation project which doubled the overall size and simplified the massing of the original Late Victorian style building. The building today looks much as it did after the 1950 project was complete.

The symmetrical façade is three stories tall with a projecting central entrance bay. (See photo 10.) The lower floor is of limestone blocks and the upper walls are of red brick. The double doorway at the lowest level of the façade is flanked by wall sconces and topped with a large flat stone panel, into which are incised the words CENTRAL SCHOOL. Paired windows above the door mark the interior stair landings, and larger sets of double-hung windows flank the entrance bay on each of the three floors. The corners of the façade and the entrance bay are accented with quoins on the brick parts of the walls, and matching quoins are used on all corners of the other brick walls as well.

The northern end of the building is slightly wider than the rest of it, and the

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windowless front side bays are ornamented with quoins and inset brick panels. On the long west elevation, a double row of quoins at the junction of the two sections of the building mark the location of a double doorway in the basement level. That doorway accesses a wide hallway that held offices when the building was in use. Concrete steps lead down to the doors, which are covered with plywood.

All sections of the building have early or original windows with double hung wood sashes and flat stone lug sills. The sashes are relatively intact, albeit in poor or very poor condition. All of the windows in the north end of the building are paired, with flat tops and wide wooden mullions. They have 6/6 sash configurations. Those in the older south part have slightly taller single window openings that are topped with low segmental arches. Many of the windows on the south end are missing sashes.

The side walls of the building are like the front, with stone on the lowest level and red brick above. The east and west walls of the older section have large brick piers that functioned as chimneys before the remodeling project, and a newer open metal fire escape runs along the south end of the west elevation. The south end of the building has a wide projecting center bay that contains a door and a tall set of windows.

The lot slopes up from north to south for this property, and most of the south wall is just two and a half stories tall. The retaining wall there marks a grade change from east to west, and the eastern edge of that elevation has three full floors above grade. All three floors are above grade on the east side of the building, and there are several exterior doors into the basement rooms there. (Photos 7 and 9.) The west part of the basement, by contrast, is mostly below grade.

The interior of the building is highly intact, although in poor condition. Each floor has a symmetrical plan, with a double loaded central hallway and stairs at the north and south ends. The hallways have plastered walls and ceilings and composition tile flooring, and most also have glazed ceramic block wainscoting. The south end of the first floor hall is the only hallway that does not have the wainscoting, which was installed throughout when the building was expanded in 1950. The stairs, which were also installed in 1950, are of steel with simple rectilinear balustrades.

Each of the upper two floors has eight large classrooms and two common bathrooms. The basement level contains offices, a cafeteria and kitchen, a kindergarten room, and service areas. Most classrooms have tile floors and

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plastered walls and ceilings; a few have newer finishes such as wood paneling or ceiling tiles. The classrooms in the older part of the building have simple woodwork, while the 1950 rooms have glazed block wainscot and little to no millwork. (Photos 14 and 15.) Many of the rooms have light fixtures that appear to date to 1950 or earlier.

**Central School Integrity:** Overall, Central School appears much as it did when the 1950 expansion and remodeling was completed. Alterations since then have been limited. Some of the interior finishes have changed, and one of the classrooms on the middle floor has been subdivided to function as office space. Many of the exterior doors have been replaced over the years and some doors and windows are now boarded over, but original openings are intact, and the overall patterns of fenestration are just as they were in 1950. The only exterior change of note is the addition of the fire escape to the west elevation, and that is slated for removal. The building is highly intact and easily recognizable to the period of significance.

**De Soto High School, 1927. (c) See photos 1-5, 11, 12 and Figure Three.**  
**Martin J. W. Laubis, Architect and Roscoe H. Weltecke, Builder.**

The high school faces west to Third Street. It is three stories tall, with a flat roof and textured brick walls that are accented with limestone or cast stone ornament. Darker bricks are also used for ornament. The wide facade has a central entrance and symmetrical fenestration, with large end bays that project forward several feet. (Photo 2.) A simple stone cornice runs along the top of the façade, and an ornamental band of stone and dark soldier-course bricks forms a strong horizontal accent at the top of the ground floor. The windows have flat stone lug sills, and each is topped with a band of dark sailor-course brick. All of the windows in the high school have newer aluminum sashes. The projecting end bays have no windows on the upper two floors. Those walls are ornamented with rectilinear patterns of dark brick and smooth stone. The back sides of those bays are also blank on the upper floors, with the same pattern of brick and stone ornamentation. (See photos 3 and 5.)

The entrance bay on the façade is accented by two-story brick pilasters on the wall above it, and the words 19--DE SOTO HIGH SCHOOL--26 are incised into a stone entablature that runs along the tops of the pilasters. (Construction began in 1926, but the building was not dedicated until 1927.) The doorway itself has an eared stone surround topped with a small cornice. The double doors there are

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newer, and currently covered with plywood. The doorway is flanked by early or original wall-mounted light fixtures and a pair of stone or concrete tablets. The tablet to the left of the door bears the name of the school board in place when the building was constructed: "K. Jones; A. R. Ellis; C. H. Cooper; D. H. Whitehead; E. S. Fauth; C. H. Barnhart." The other one documents the construction date and team: "Erected A. D. 1926; Martin Laubis, Architect; R. H. Weltecke, Contractor."

The north and south elevations are nearly identical. They are largely symmetrical, with a central entrance bay that projects slightly. The side walls have the same ornamental systems used on the façade, including accent bands at the first floor line and stone cornices on the upper walls. The doorways have brick surrounds topped by wide bands of stone molding. There are three small sets of windows in the wall above each door, one for each stair landing inside. Those window sets all have brick surrounds with stone corner pieces. The side walls also have four sets of larger paired windows at each level. Some of the window openings on the lowest level are partially filled with brick that matches that of the surrounding walls; that change appears to have been made at an early date. The other window openings on the building are completely intact, although all of the aluminum sashes now in place are modern.

An original auditorium wing is located on the back part of the high school building. (See Figure Three, and photos 1, 3, and 4.) That part of the building is lower, and more simply detailed than the front section. It has a flat roof and walls of the same type of brick, but there is no stone ornament. The only applied ornament on that part of the building consists of soldier-course brick bands along the upper walls and at the upper edges of the windows. Double doorways on the ground floor near the main block open directly into the auditorium, and there are banks of two-story windows along the back and side walls.

The interior of the building appears much as it did when the school was in use. A central corridor runs north-south in the main block of the building, and staircases at each end serve all three floors. The main hall has doors into classroom and offices on each floor, and on the first and second floor it also provides access to the auditorium. The classroom doorways are tall, with arched transoms, and many of the original doors and transoms remain in place. Doors and transoms alike have multi-paned windows, and the vestibules by the exterior doors have matching multi-light sidelights and transoms. (See photos 10 and 11.)

The halls and most of the classrooms retain their original high ceilings and plastered walls, and most rooms also have early or original millwork, including

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doors and trim, window casing and simple flat baseboards. Almost all of the woodwork in the halls, including the staircases, has a dark varnished finish, while most classrooms and offices have painted woodwork. Most floors are covered with composition tile and many of the ceilings have acoustical tiles over the original plaster. The staircases, which appear to be original, have wooden treads and risers covered by tile, and solid short walls in lieu of balustrades. The newel posts are square with simple rectilinear trim.

The auditorium is notably spacious for a school of this size. It is a two-story room, with a small balcony along the upper east wall, and a small orchestra pit in front of the raised stage. The stage, which was designed to double as the school gymnasium, is also two stories, and slightly larger than the auditorium. Small staircases at the back of the gym provide access to small locker rooms below the stage. The stage area has early or original wood flooring, painted brick walls, and large stacks of windows on three sides. The auditorium has plastered walls and a carpeted sloped floor that had built-in seating when it was new; there is no seating in the room now. The balcony has a stepped floor that is carpeted, and there is a small projection booth on its back wall that appears to be a later addition.

**De Soto High School Integrity:** The high school is very intact. There have been no alterations to the building's form or patterns of fenestration, and the interior plan and most finishes have survived as well. The most notable change this building has seen is the installation of new metal windows which took place in the last few decades. The new windows fit the openings well, however, and have at least a general resemblance to historic sash configurations. Many of the exterior doors have also been replaced over the years, and all are now boarded over, but original openings are intact. The building is slated for a comprehensive rehabilitation, which will include the removal of a modern metal fire escape on the facade and the installation of new windows that more closely match the originals. Even without those changes, the high school looks very much as it did during the period of significance and it clearly reflects its historic ties to education in De Soto.

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**Summary:** The Central School Campus in De Soto, Jefferson County, Missouri, is significant for its association with the De Soto Public School system. The campus served as the central core of the school system from ca. 1882 into the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is locally significant in the area of Education, under National Register Criterion A. The property contains two historic school buildings; Central School, which was built ca. 1882 and expanded to its current form in 1950, and the De Soto High School, which was completed in 1927. Central School was the first building erected specifically for the public school system of De Soto, and it was used as a school for the better part of a century. It housed all grade levels in the late 1800s and in later years served as the main elementary school in the community. The De Soto High School was designed and built specifically for use as a high school, and it retained that function into the 1950s. Both buildings were professionally designed. The high school was the work of Martin Laubis of Poplar Bluff, and the 1950 expansion of Central School was designed by F. C. Bonsack III of the St. Louis architectural firm of Bonsack and Pearce. This campus was the headquarters for the school district from 1882 into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the school district began a building campaign at a different location. Both buildings reflect local responses to national and statewide trends in education. The High School was erected at a time when the State Superintendent of Public Schools in Missouri was pushing for improved high school facilities, and Central School was expanded to address rising elementary enrollment spurred by the national Post-WWII baby boom. The period of significance for the property runs from ca. 1882, when Central School was built, to 1955, when high school students were transferred to the first building to be completed at the new location. The now-vacant buildings on Central Campus are the largest and most intact historic public school buildings in the community today. They clearly reflect their long and important association with public education in De Soto.

**Elaboration:**

De Soto was laid out by the first native-born governor of the state, Thomas C. Fletcher. (It is also the hometown of Missouri's current governor, Jay Nixon.) Settlement in the area began in the early 1800s, but it was under the leadership of Thomas C. Fletcher and his brother-in-law, L. J. Lankin, that De Soto became a town in 1857. Fletcher and Lankin began working to bring railroad service to the area in 1853, after amassing significant tracts of land there. They were successful

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in that venture, and in 1857 service for the Missouri Pacific Railroad came to the community. Missouri Pacific also chose the town as the site of the principal machine shops for their northern division, which became a major source of employment in the area.

Fletcher and Lankin laid out the town in 1857, and a post office was established the same year. The town was called Nopton for a short time, after Missouri Supreme Court judge William Nopton, who was a good friend of Fletcher's. Fletcher and Lankin decided to honor explorer Hernando De Soto instead with the official name of De Soto. De Soto was incorporated in 1869, and became a city of the fourth class in 1878.<sup>1</sup>

De Soto has a long history of communal education. Area settlers operated a small school for their children in the 1840s, and the first official De Soto public school opened around 1870.<sup>2</sup> For the first decade of the public school system's existence classes were held in rented facilities, and the location was changed every few years. That decade was also a period of rapid growth for the community and, as a local history noted, "it was fairly obvious to the city fathers by the late 1870s that a large school building which would provide ample room for a distant future must be built."<sup>3</sup> Community leaders also wanted a central location for their new facility. The town is sited on hilly terrain, and they wanted to make it as easy as possible for students to walk to school from all parts of town.

They found an ideal location on the bluff above Main Street. Around 1882, Central School was built at Second and Mineral Streets, near the geographic center of town. (See Figure Four.) The core of that building is the south end of the Central School that occupies the site today. The Central School of 1882 looked quite a bit different than it does today. The original school had a hipped roof topped with a tall cupola, cross gables on the north and south ends, and large ornamental chimneys on the east and west walls. Those features were eliminated when the building was expanded and rebuilt in 1950, but the original arched windows, brick quoins and high stone foundation were all retained and

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1 De Soto Historical Society, Images of America: De Soto, (Great Britain: Arcadia Press, 2005) p. 7, and

O. L Davis, ed. City Directory of the City of De Soto (De Soto, Missouri: Jefferson County Republican, 1936) pp. 3-11.

2 Eddie Miller, "Education in an Earlier De Soto," in As You Were: Book 2, (De Soto, Missouri, 2000. Private compilation of columns printed in the De Soto Press in 1968-69.) pp. 11-32.

3 Ibid., p 12.

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incorporated into the new design. Much of the original plan also survives, with four large classrooms on each of the upper floors, and a cafeteria in the high-ceilinged basement. The large size and prominent location of Central School soon made it a local landmark. Several early descriptions of the school note that it was visible from all parts of the community.

When Central School opened, public school in De Soto went only as far as the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The new building made it possible to add 9<sup>th</sup> grade, touted as a one-year high school, in 1883. The added class offerings, paired with general growth of the town soon filled Central School, and in the early 1890s three small ward schools were built and opened to serve younger elementary students (grades 1-4).<sup>4</sup>

That change eliminated the need for younger students to walk so far to school, and freed up space in Central School. Central was still used for all grades, but grades 1-4 were only for those that lived nearby. The extra room created by the ward schools allowed the school system to add upper-level classes to the offerings at Central School, and in 1892 the first high school graduation took place.<sup>5</sup> Those first graduating students had probably only taken one or two years of high school classes, as a full four-year high school program was not established until just after the turn of the century.

Rising enrollment spurred the construction of another large school building on the Central Campus in 1899. The new building, which was located east of Central School, was meant to be used for a variety of purposes, but rapid growth in enrollment resulted in it becoming the high school shortly after it was completed. The extra room allowed the school district to bring high school offerings up to a full four-year course of study in 1901.<sup>6</sup>

It was also at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the first school building constructed specifically for African-America students was built in De Soto.<sup>7</sup> Langston School was erected on the east edge of town in 1897. That brick schoolhouse was named for the then-famous black attorney John Mercer Langston, who rose from a childhood as a slave to achieve national prominence in

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<sup>4</sup> Miller, p. 13. The ward schools were simply named: North Ward and South Ward were built first and East Ward was added shortly after.

<sup>5</sup> De Soto Historical Society, *De Soto, Missouri: A Pictorial History*, (De Soto, Missouri: De Soto Historical Society, 1992) p. 82.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> This may have marked the beginning of segregation in the community; local histories give conflicting accounts of where black students attended school before this.

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several areas. He helped to found Howard Law School, served in the U. S. Foreign Service, and was elected to Congress as a Republican in the late 1880s. His autobiography From a Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol was published in 1894. He died the same year Langston School was opened, 1897.<sup>8</sup>

Central School and the schools that were built in the 1890s provided enough space for public education in De Soto through the first quarter of the new century. By 1925 however, the number of students had once again exceeded available class space. A report on enrollment figures at the beginning of the 1925-26 school year noted an increase over the previous year and showed that most teachers were responsible for 40 to 50 students in each classroom. A front page article printed in the local paper in early 1925 offered a less than rosy picture of conditions at the Central School Campus:

There is a very serious problem facing the citizens of De Soto, which concerns the progress of our schools. It must be solved soon. The problem is how are we to take care of the continually increasing number of upper grade and high school children with our present buildings and facilities. Our present high school can comfortably care for 125 pupils, yet there are 223 pupils attending high school this year....There is no gymnasium, yet it is necessary to conduct Physical Education classes throughout the year, to say nothing of athletic games....Central school with nine teachers, has an enrollment of 525 pupils, 280 of whom are in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. How shall we care for them?<sup>9</sup>

The editor of the paper must not have been the only person in town with similar views. Just a few months later, in May of 1925, a special election for a school bond issue was approved. The school board authorized \$95,000 for a new high school building. They announced that construction would start immediately, so that classes could be held in the new building early in 1926.<sup>10</sup> That time frame proved to be a bit ambitious. The construction project took considerably longer, due to a number of factors. There were disagreements with the architect about design issues, and extended discussions on the best site for the new building.

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<sup>8</sup> Miller, pp. 19-23.

<sup>9</sup> "De Soto's Need of School Buildings," Jefferson County Republican, January 29, 1925, p. 1

<sup>10</sup> "School Election Carries by Over Two-thirds Vote," Jefferson County Republican, May 21, 1925, p. 1

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The school board apparently had some differences of opinion with Martin John William Laubis, the architect they hired to design the new school.<sup>11</sup> An article in August of 1925 blamed “Mr. Laubis of Poplar Bluff” for delay in start of work, but also noted that the school board had made several plan changes late in the process. The board had visited new schools in the area and found several features they wanted Laubis to incorporate into his plans for the De Soto High School. The same article noted that “some time was lost by the board during the consideration of the purchase of some lots adjoining the school property, but we understand this proposition has been abandoned.”<sup>12</sup>

The idea to buy extra lots may have been abandoned, but questions over the site of the new building apparently were not. A few months later, another front page article in the paper noted some citizens wanted what would be one of the largest public buildings in town to be in a more visible location. They were also worried about losing part of the elementary playground if the new building were to be constructed next to it. The paper explained that group advocating for a new site felt that it was wrong that “the only public building which will advertise the town will be placed in an out-of-the-way place, where it will never be seen, except by those who make a special trip for that purpose.”<sup>13</sup>

In the end, the school district decided to build on the land they already owned. They were able to gain some extra land by convincing the city to abandon the section of West Clement Street that ran directly south of the campus, and it appears that they did buy some extra lots after all, to add a total of 135 feet onto the south end of the campus.<sup>14</sup> Late in 1925, the school board let the contract for construction of the new high school.

Roscoe L. Weltecke of Sikeston was named the general contractor for the project in December of 1925, but he had to wait until April of 1926 to begin work

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11 Census and WWI draft records show that Martin William Laubis was living in New York in 1900, with his German-born parents, and that by 1910 he had moved to Sikeston, MO, where he was working as an architect. He may have been self-taught, as he was only 19 years old and listed as a self employed architect on his draft card in 1910.

12 “Explanation of Seeming Delay of School Building,” Jefferson County Republican, August 27, 1925, p. 1.

13 “Question of School Site Still Being Discussed,” Jefferson County Republican, December 10, 1925, p. 1.

14 “School Board Announces Site for New High School,” Jefferson County Republican, October 1, 1925, p. 1.

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while the subject of the site was settled. The paper noted that Weltecke had his workmen constructing casings for the doors and windows while waiting for the site to be finalized, and was ready to start digging footings as soon as he knew where to put them. Once the question of location was settled, Weltecke and his crew were able to begin construction in earnest, and the work progressed steadily.

Although the original plans for the school have not survived, a detailed description of what they contained was published in the high school newspaper in 1925. Few changes have occurred since then. The top floor was built with a library, a study hall, and three classrooms. The second floor had six classrooms, along with access to the balcony of the auditorium. The first floor housed the superintendent's and principal's offices, as well as rooms for cooking and sewing, a "manual training" room, and large restrooms. The ground floor also contained the 800-seat auditorium, with a stage that doubled as the school gymnasium. Student locker rooms were tucked below the stage, at the very back of the building. The article also commented on its pleasing exterior appearance and noted that "the pupils are eager for that long desired [opening day] to come."<sup>15</sup>

The new high school was dedicated February 17, 1927. It opened to great fanfare, with an open house that drew hundreds of people. Governor Sam A. Baker gave the dedicatory address to an audience that filled the spacious new auditorium. The paper noted that his speech, which "Emphasized the Value of Education," was well-received, and noted that those attending "were pleased with the arrangement of the various rooms and the splendid equipment...all agreed that De Soto has the best building and equipment in the state for the money spent."<sup>16</sup> Baker no doubt enjoyed the event, given that just five years earlier, he was serving as the state superintendent of Public Schools in Missouri. His annual report for the school year ending in 1922 included an article titled "A High School for Every Boy and Every Girl." The article showed that high school development was a priority of Baker's administration at the time. They had the goal of placing "a high-school education within the reach of every boy and girl in the state."<sup>17</sup>

An annual report put out by the state superintendent of schools a few years

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<sup>15</sup> "The New High School," De Sotonian, (High School paper, published with the Jefferson County Republican) De Soto, Missouri, December 17, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> "New High School Dedicated Last Sunday, Feb. 27.," Jefferson County Republican, March 3, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Sam A. Baker, Seventy-Third Report of the Public Schools on the State of Missouri: School Year Ending June 30, 1922. Jefferson City: Midland Printing, 1922.

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later shows statewide progress towards that goal. The 1930 annual report included several profiles of newly constructed high schools in the state. Featured schools ranged from a modest \$12,000 high school in Aldrich, to a massive new high school in Excelsior Springs that was built for \$800,000.<sup>18</sup> The total for the De Soto High School was \$95,000 including equipment. The 1930 state report also showed that the new De Soto high school was accredited as a first class school the year it opened, 1927.

The descriptions in that report show that the new De Soto High School featured a number of elements common to Missouri high schools of the time, including manual training rooms, an auditorium and gymnasium, a library and a study hall. The auditorium was especially welcomed in the community. An editorial in the paper of 1925 had bemoaned the fact that the school buildings then in use had “no auditorium at which public gatherings and entertainments of any size may be held.”<sup>19</sup> Over the years, the auditorium and oversized stage was used for a wide range of activities, including graduation ceremonies for the other schools, basketball games, the annual Junior-Senior Banquet, and even a wedding or two.<sup>20</sup>

Once high school operations were moved into the new building, the former high school in the northwest corner of the lot became the district’s only junior high school. Central School was then used exclusively for elementary students. The ward schools also served the lower grades, and Langston School continued to handle all grade levels for the town’s African-American students.

In the early 1940s, declining enrollment led to some minor operational changes. An article on the opening day of school in 1942 noted that the “students and teachers are equally pleased with the consolidation of schools at the Central campus this week.”<sup>21</sup> The paper noted that enrollment in the elementary school was down to 607, from 728 the previous year, and that high school levels were also down slightly. Changes made that year included putting two grades into each classroom in Central School, and making changes to the junior high to increase capacity there.

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18 Chas A. Lee, Eighty-First Report of the Public Schools on the State of Missouri: School Year Ending June 30, 1930, (Jefferson City: Midland Printing, 1930) pp. 87-90.

19 “De Soto’s Need of School Buildings,” p. 1.

20 Scrapbook of photos on file at the De Soto Public Library, (Undated) and De Soto Missouri: A Pictorial History, pp. 85-86.

21 “School Enrollment Down,” Jefferson County Republican, September 10, 1942, p. 1.

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The lower number of new grade school children was no doubt linked to lower birth rates that occurred during the Great Depression and WWII, but the post-WWII baby boom soon reversed that trend. Not surprisingly, a few years after the nationwide increase in the birthrate, elementary schools in Missouri experienced an equally widespread shortage of classroom space. The problem was exacerbated by the lack of new school construction in the state. As noted in the 1945 annual report on public schools in Missouri: "Practically no new schools have been built since 1941 ... The State Department of Education has recently conducted a survey which shows that approximately forty million dollars worth of new school buildings will be required with the next five years."<sup>22</sup>

The De Soto school district was no exception; by the late 1940s, Central School was bursting at the seams. Between 1942 and 1949, the school had gone from having two elementary grades in one classroom, to three separate first grade classes alone and greatly expanded numbers in all of the lower grades. The local paper noted in early 1949 "Grade school enrollments have mounted rapidly in recent years. Bureau of Census estimates predict that this increase will continue for several years."<sup>23</sup> That increase hit especially hard because the De Soto school district had closed and sold all three of the ward schools in the mid-1940s, leaving only Central and Langston available for elementary pupils.

The school board began planning for an expansion of elementary facilities in the late 1940s, and around 1948 they hired an architectural firm to draw up plans for a major expansion and update of Central School. This time they turned to F. C. Bonsack of the St. Louis architectural firm of Bonsack and Pearce. The addition was designed to add eight large new classrooms on the upper floors, plus a kindergarten, kitchen, mechanical room and offices in the basement. In addition to doubling the size of the building, Bonsack's design also involved removing the pitched roof and Victorian style ornamentation of the old building to create a building design that was more in keeping with the simpler lines of the 1927 high school.

Getting the expansion funded proved to be more difficult than it had in the past, however. Although the school district had amassed just over \$150,000 for

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<sup>22</sup> Roy Scantlin, *Ninety-Sixth Report of the Public Schools on the State of Missouri: School Year Ending June 30, 1930*, (Jefferson City: Midland Printing, 1930) p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> "De Soto School Bids Exceed Building Fund," Jefferson County Republican, January 22, 1949, p. 1

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capital improvements, the lowest bid for the expansion project came in at \$194,000. The board was forced to seek a tax increase to fund the project. Two elections held in early 1949 failed to gather the required approval of two-thirds of the votes cast and the school board finally decided to re-submit the expansions plans for bids. Mr. Bonsack may have reworked that plans to remove extras, as the second round of bids yielded a price within the district's budget. General contractor Alden B. Park of Clayton, Missouri, won the contract with a bid of just over \$153,000.<sup>24</sup> Park had also been the low bidder on the first round of proposals.

An update on construction that was published in the paper the next summer noted the expanded building would be ready for classes in time for the new school year in 1950. Fireproofing improvements such as concrete floors and new steel stairs had already been made, and workmen were starting to remove the high roof of the old building: "They will tear down and rebuild the roof on the old building when the new structure is complete. Construction plans call for the roof to be leveled off at the same height as the addition."<sup>25</sup>

The new Central School was ready for classes in the fall of 1950. As was the custom, the school district held an open house to introduce the public to "De Soto's new 171-thousand dollar Central Elementary School Building." The opening drew hundreds of people and effusive praise in the newspaper: "The new structure, modern throughout...contains eight classrooms plus a separate kindergarten unit, with an adjoining activity room....The building was constructed to keep pace with a growing need for more space for a steadily-enlarging crop of youngsters....De Soto's fine new building will be prepared to accommodate that increase."<sup>26</sup>

The rebuilding project met elementary enrollment needs for another decade or so, but as the baby boom moved up the through the grades, more space was needed for junior high and high school classes. In the mid-1950s, the school district began another major building program, this time at a more spacious new location near the south end of town. A new high school was built at the new site

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24 "Contract Let for Central School Addition, Repairs," Jefferson County Republican, July 7, 1949, p. 1.

25 "New Roof for Original Portion of Central School," Jefferson County Republican, April 6, 1950, p. 1.

26 "Dedication of Central School Building Sept. 8," Jefferson County Republican, August 31, 1950, p. 1.

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in 1955, and over Christmas break of the 1955-56 school year, high school classes were transferred to the new building.<sup>27</sup> The 1927 high school building was then used for elementary classes and administrative offices for the school district.

The 1955-56 school year also marked the beginning of desegregation in the De Soto school system. High school students from Langston School were transferred to De Soto High School in the fall of 1955. African-American students in the lower grades stayed on a Langston for a few more years, but by 1958 they too had transferred to Central School, and Langston School was closed for good.<sup>28</sup>

The school district continued its building campaign at the new location, and junior high students were the next to be transferred. Elementary classes followed a few years later. In 1968, the old junior high on the Central campus was demolished, and Central School has been vacant for many years. The old high school housed school administrators into the 1990s, but it too is now vacant. The buildings have been sold, and plans call for rehabilitation of both buildings into senior housing.

**Significance of the Central School Campus:** This property is the surviving core of De Soto's original public school complex. The vast majority of the public school students in De Soto during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century attended classes in one or both of these buildings. Each building was built to serve as a school, and each did so for many years. Their history is an important part of De Soto's history, as well as a reflection of statewide trends in education. The complex provides a significant link to the history of public education in De Soto, Missouri.

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27 "De Soto Class of 1956," (De Soto: 2006. 50th Reunion Book on file with the De Soto Public Library) np.

28 Eddie Miller, As You Were: Book 1, pp. 22-23. The Langston School building still stands on the east side of town, not far from the East Ward School.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

ALL OF BLOCK NO. 9, PLUS THE WEST HALF OF LOT NOS. 10 AND 11, AND ALL OF LOT NOS. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 AND 17 IN BLOCK NO. 8, ALL OF THE ORIGINAL TOWN OF DESOTO, MISSOURI, NOW THE CITY OF DESOTO, MISSOURI, AS RECORDED IN PLAT BOOK 1 PAGE 1 OF THE RECORDS OF THE RECORDER OF DEEDS FOR JEFFERSON COUNTY, MISSOURI. ALSO, THAT PART OF WEST CLEMENTS STREET BETWEEN BLOCKS EIGHT AND NINE THAT WAS VACATED IN 1926.

**Boundary Justification**

The current boundaries encompass all of the land currently and historically associated with the Central School Campus.

**Photographs**

The following information is the same for all photographs:

Central School Campus  
221 South Third Street, De Soto  
Jefferson County, Missouri  
Debbie Sheals  
March 6, 2009

**List of Photographs**

See photo key for description of camera angle.

1. Looking north on Third Street to high school.
2. Facade of high school, looking southeast.
3. Looking southwest to north wall of high school.
4. Rear, east, wall of high school.
5. Streetscape looking south on Third Street.
6. Streetscape looking east-southeast on Mineral to Central School.
7. West elevation of Central School
8. South elevation of Central School
9. West side of Central School
10. Front (northeast corner) of Central School
11. First floor hallway, high school.
12. Second floor school classroom, high school.
13. South staircase, Central School.
14. Classroom, original part of Central School.
15. Classroom, 1950 addition to Central School.

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Figure Two. Floor Plan, Central School.

Figure Three. Floor Plan, High School.

Figure Four. Location of the Central School Campus, on a 1900 Sanborn Map of De Soto.

Figure Five. 1926 Sanborn Map with added notes on individual buildings.

Figure Six. Photo Key.

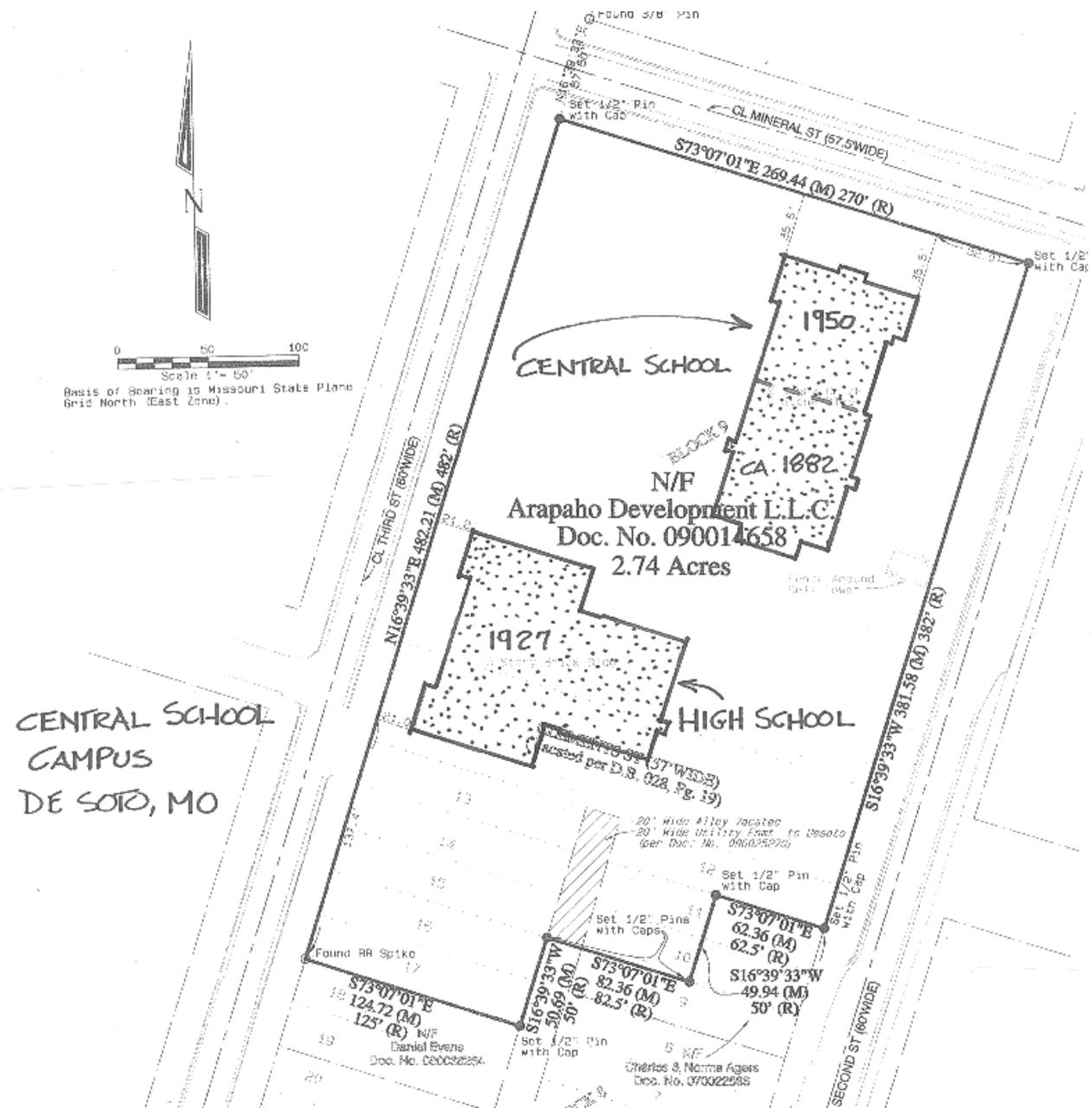
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Figure One. Site Plan  
Survey by Govero Land Services Imperial, MO



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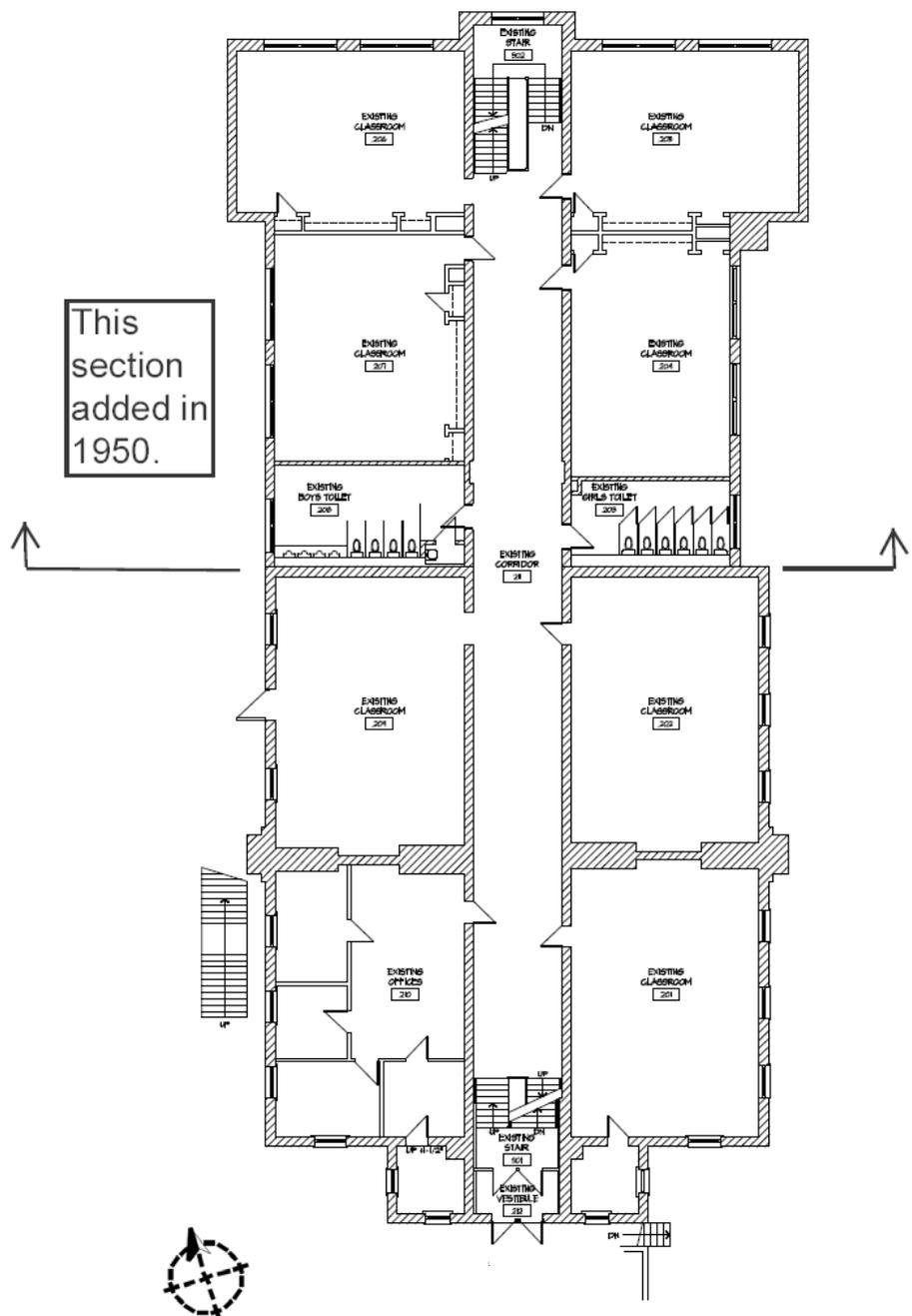
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**Figure Two. Floor Plan, Central School.**

Drawn By Stark Wilson  
Duncan Architects, May,  
2009



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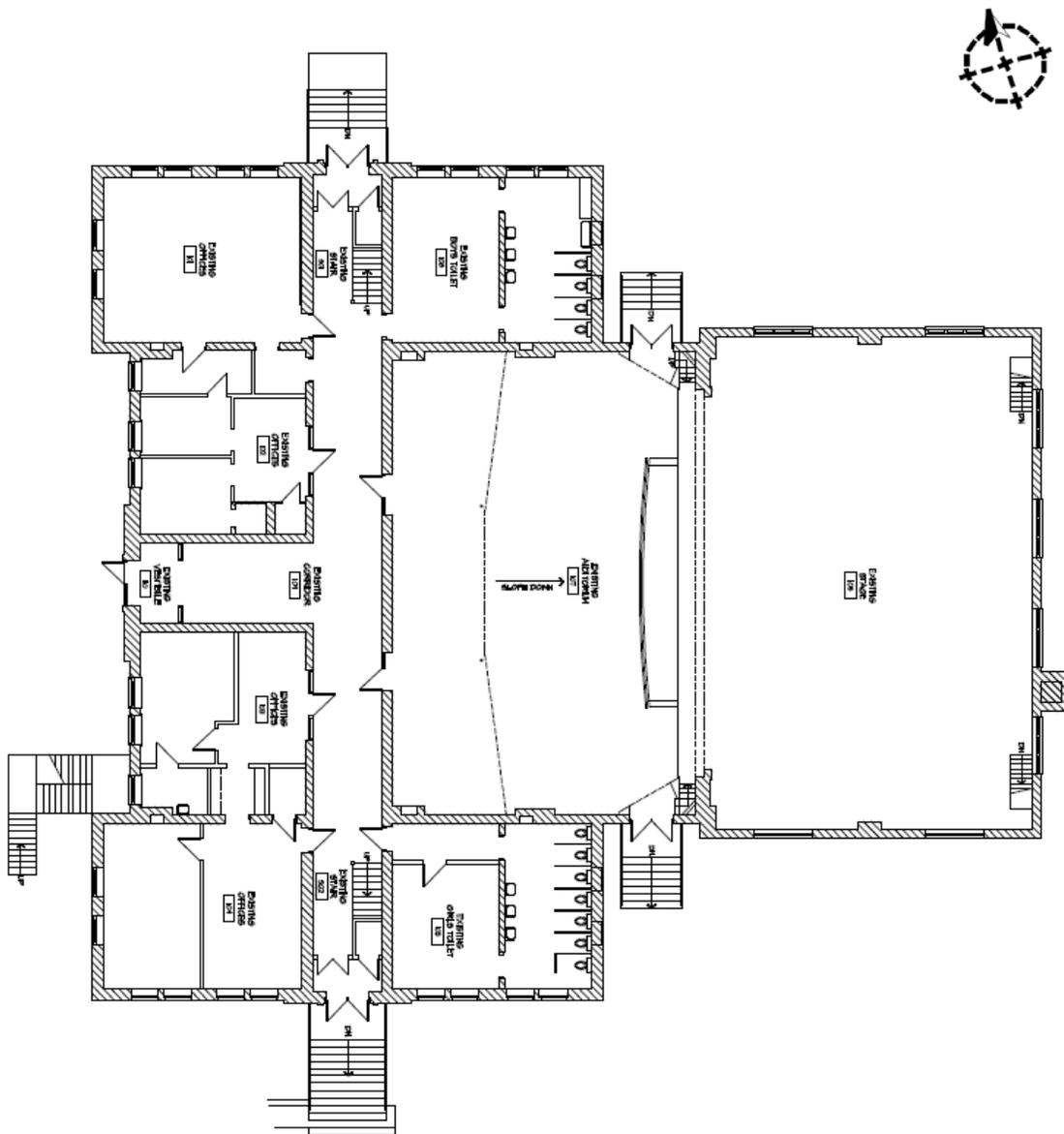
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**Figure Three. Floor Plan, High School.**

Drawn By Stark Wilson Duncan Architects, May, 2009



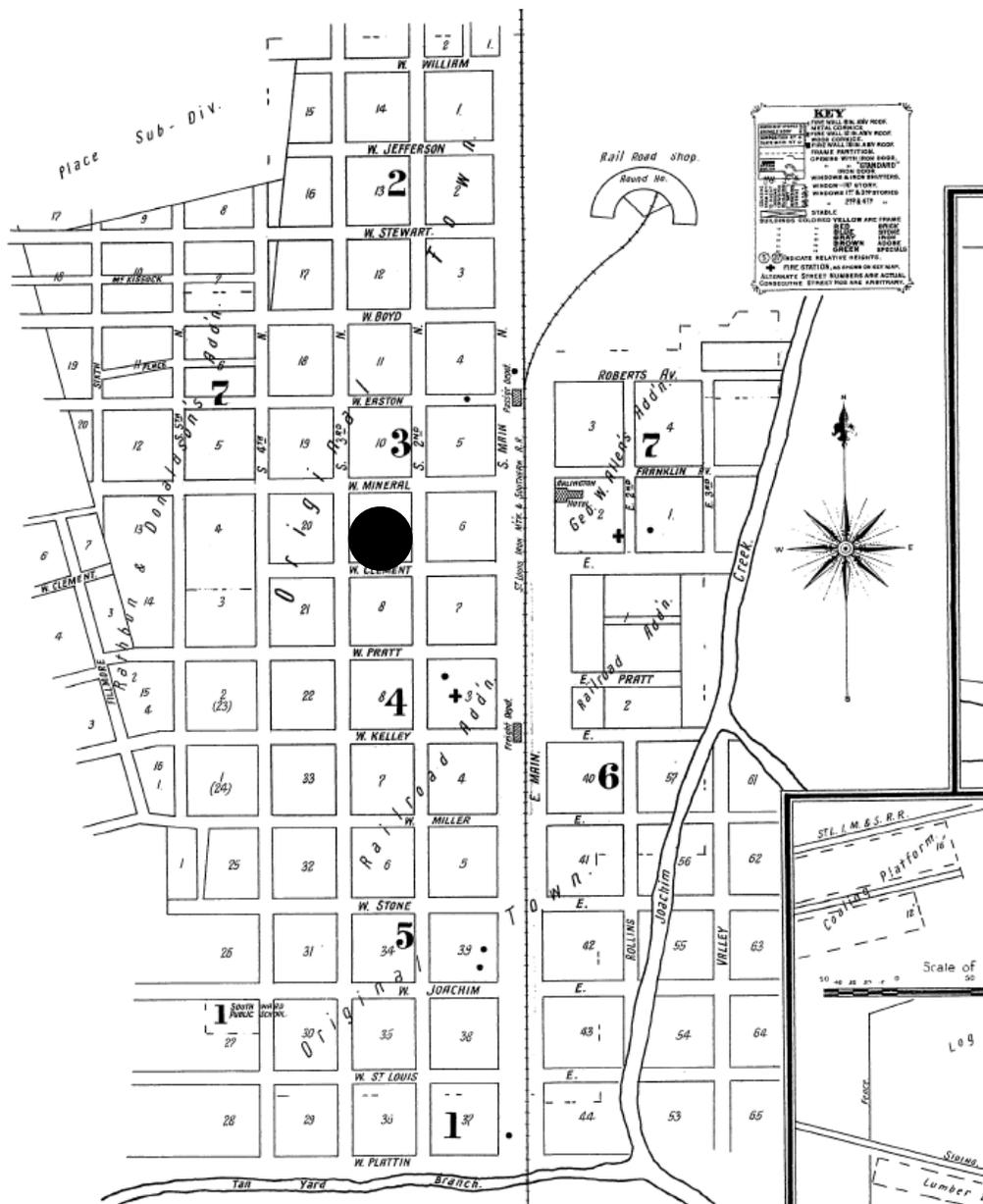
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Figure Four. Location of the Central School Campus, on a 1900 Sanborn Map of De Soto.



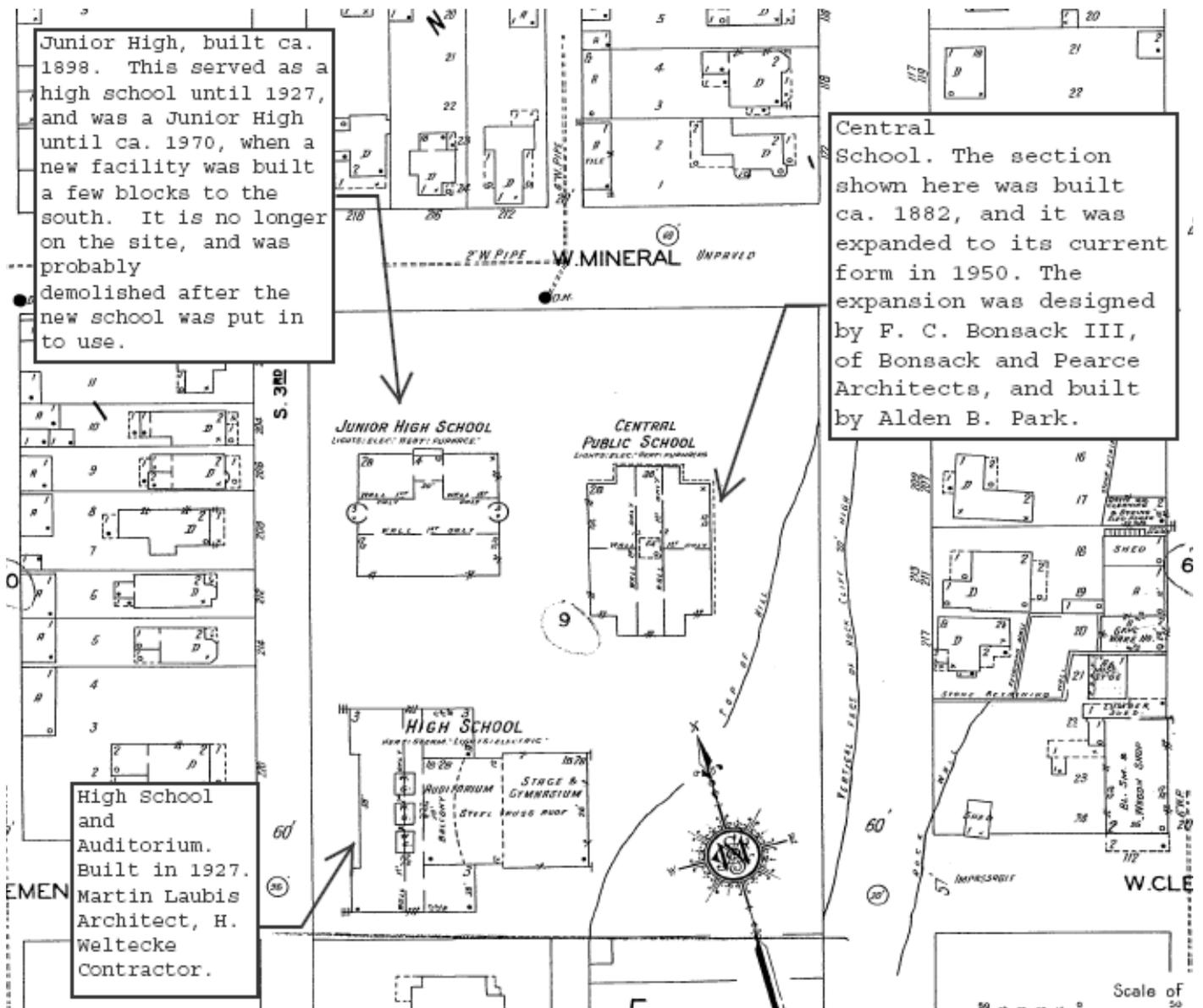
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Figure Five. 1926 Sanborn Map with added notes on individual buildings.

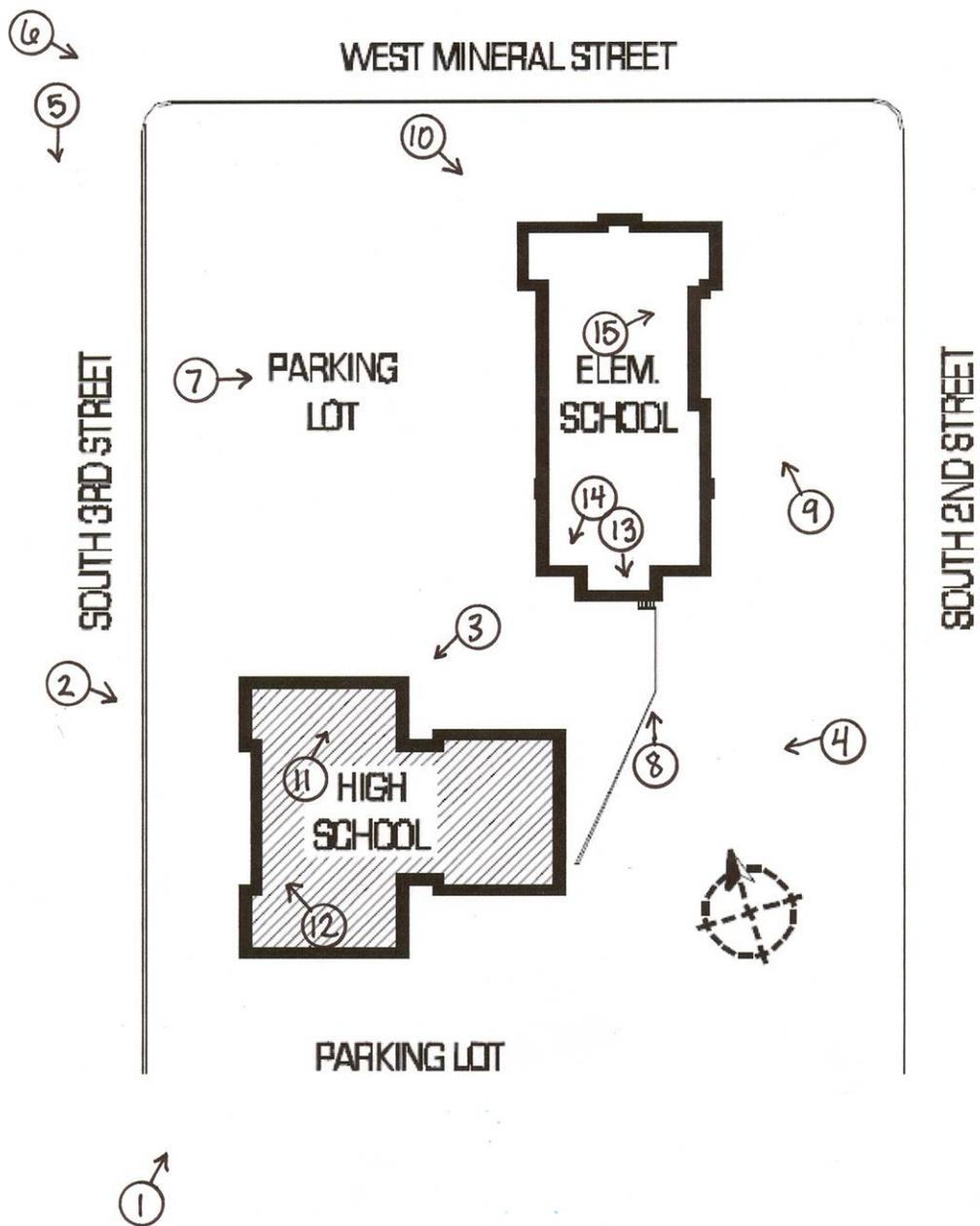


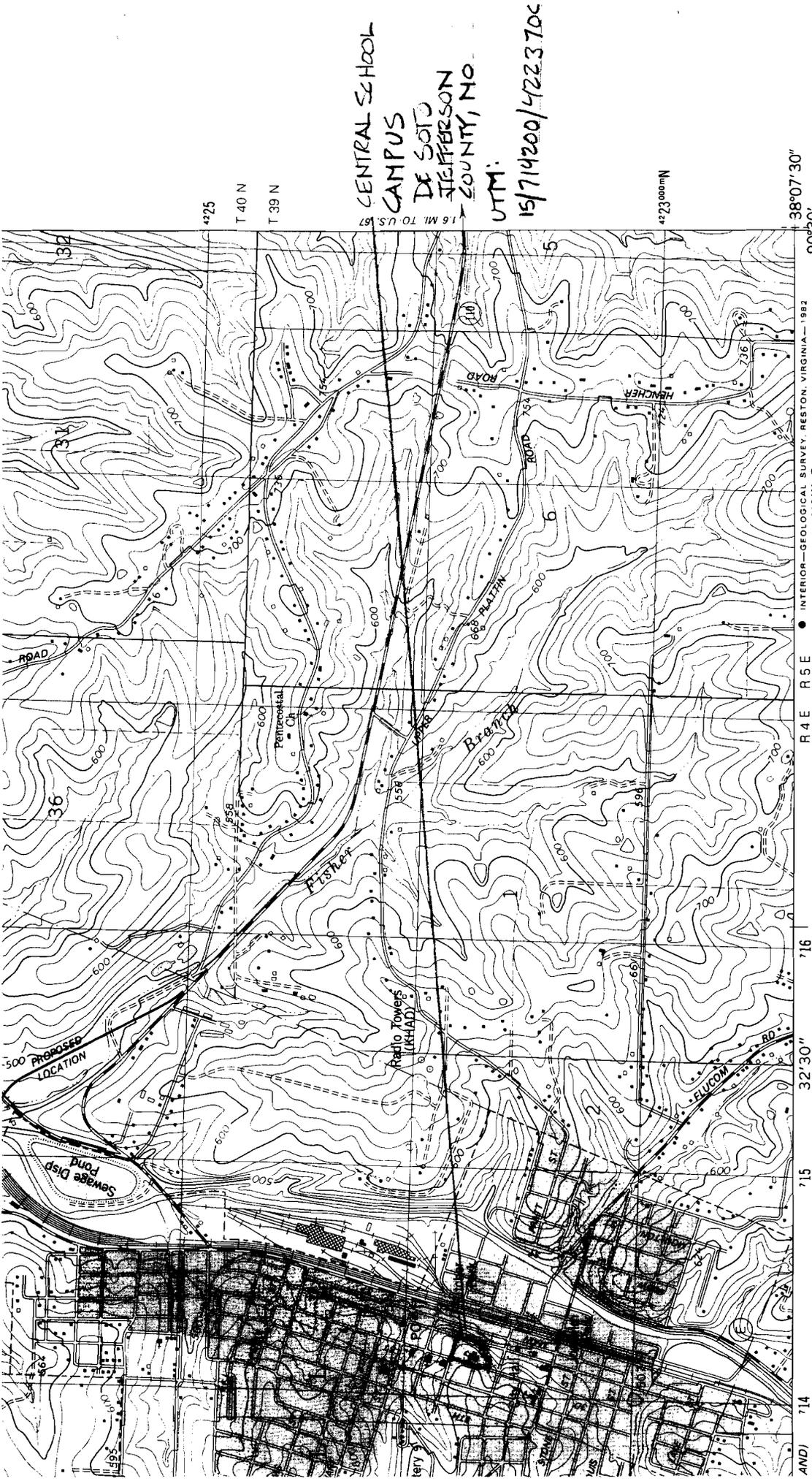
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**Figure Six. Photo Key.** Key plan by Stark Wilson Duncan Architects, Kansas City.



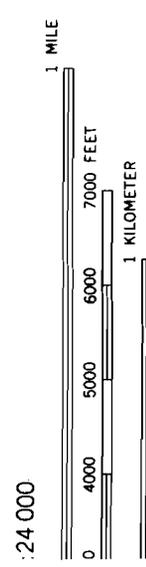


**ROAD CLASSIFICATION**

Primary highway, hard surface ———— Light-duty road, hard or improved surface ————

Secondary highway, hard surface ———— Unimproved road ————

○ Interstate Route    □ U. S. Route    ○ State Route



RVAL 20 FEET  
TICAL DATUM OF 1929

VAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092,  
LOGY AND LAND SURVEY  
RESOURCES, ROLLA, MISSOURI 65401  
AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



DE SOTO, MO.  
N3807.5-W90307.5

1981





19 DE SOTO HIGH SCHOOL

















CENTRAL  
SCHOOL









