

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **Rehabilitation of Historic Eureka School**

The proposed project is to complete Phase II of the multi-phased rehabilitation and restoration of Historic Eureka School, the first high school for African Americans in Hattiesburg, and the second brick school for blacks in Mississippi. The applicant proposes to continue the restoration this year by removing damaged surface materials and mechanical/plumbing/electrical systems in the auditorium and cafeteria wing of the school, and refinishing these areas for use by the community and museum development personnel.

The Hattiesburg Convention Commission, which owns the building, is requesting \$280,000 in grant funds to be matched with \$125,000 in local funds. All work will meet *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*.

Eureka School is a significant landmark at the state and local levels. It is a designated Mississippi Landmark (August 2005) and is at the core of the history and heritage of the African American community in Hattiesburg. When it opened in 1921, it was one of only two high schools for African Americans in the state. The other was in Jackson.

#### **History**

Eureka School was constructed on the site of the first Hattiesburg school for African Americans - - "the red frame school on East 6<sup>th</sup> Street." A new domestic science building was constructed on the site in 1918, then, in the 1919-20 school term, a \$75,000 bond issue provided for construction of a new building for grades 1 through 12. The school opened in September 1921 in what was said to be the second modern, brick facility in Mississippi for education of African Americans. The school was dedicated with the name Eureka in lieu of any community consensus for another name.

Eureka was a union school housing grades 1 through 12 from 1921 to 1949. W.H. Jones was the first principal. As many who attended Eureka have said, Eureka was not only a union school, it was the unifying element and most significant educational and social resource of the African-American community during the 1921-49 period. Student enrollment grew from approximately 800 pupils in 1940 to 1,400 in 1947. This overcrowding was relieved in 1949 with the opening of the new Royal Street – later named Rowan – High School. Eureka School Administrators besides Jones included J.W. Addison, E.L. Washburn, Edward Tademy, N.R. Burger, Jessie Patrick, Hollie Leggett, Della Ruth Jones and Stave Weathersby.

Eureka continued as an elementary school until 1987. Under a new desegregation plan for elementary schools approved at that time, the Eureka campus was closed as an elementary school and became a Community Education Center. As such, Eureka housed a variety of education programs, including adult and community education, as well as a number of district services. Clara Weathersby was the director. A portion of the space at Eureka was devoted to the sole use of EURO, the Eureka-Royal Street-Rowan Alumni Association, which maintains a Heritage Room there today. EURO sponsored the placement of a state historical marker on the campus and funded the original (and current) Master Plan for preserving this historical building.

The Community Education Center was closed in the mid-1990s. In 2007, the Hattiesburg Public School District deeded the school to the Hattiesburg Convention Commission for the purpose of developing an African American Heritage Museum. Phase I of the Restoration Master Plan was completed in 2009.

## **Type and Style**

Eureka School was constructed as a simply massed, two-story, brick building with hipped roof and symmetrical facades. The roof had open eaves with exposed rafter tails. The front (south elevation) façade featured a one-story, central portico. The portico was supported on two sets of paired columns mounted on brick pedestals. A central brick pediment with stone-trimmed pointed arch rose above the portico, extending above the roof line. This arch was flanked by shorter, brick pedestals. The front and rear entrances consisted of double, wood-panel doors with two, vertical upper lights per door and horizontal multi-paned transoms above. The doors were framed with curved arch stone trim. A triad of double-hung windows was centered over the front portico. The rear entrance was uncovered with a paired set of double-hung windows above.

All windows were wood-framed, double hung, nine-over-nine, duos or triads. The front façade window pattern – first and second levels – was as follows: one duo set, two triads and one duo set. This pattern was identical on each side of the center entrance. The same pattern was used on the rear façade, while the east and west facades had three duo sets on the first and second levels.

The original building was approximately 9,000 square feet per floor or about 18,000 square feet total. The original floor plan had eight large classroom spaces, four on each side of central staircases, and a central hallway running the length of the building. The staircases rose from front and back entrances to the second level. The second level had four classroom spaces with a central hallway on the west side of the central staircase with a large auditorium space on the east side.

Over the years, modifications to the building included removing the central staircases, closing the rear entrance and adding staircase wings on the west and east ends. The west addition has a double-door entrance. The front entry portico and pediment were removed. The second level auditorium was divided into three large and two smaller rooms with a central hallway. In the 1950s a one-story, flat roof cafeteria/auditorium addition was added to the east side. The original windows were removed and smaller, aluminum frame windows were put in place. The building façades were filled in with wood siding around the new windows and a substantial portion of the center block was covered with stucco.

## **Current Condition**

Eureka School had been in relatively stable condition with maintenance at a minimal level as use of the building has changed and declined. Last year, through the help of a MDAH Grant, the building's original portico was restored as well as the south (main) face of the building. This grant allowed the Hattiesburg Convention Commission to allocate monies to match the grant and continue with restoration activities. These activities included complete renovation of the exterior, restoration of all windows in the building, complete replacement of the hipped roof, replacement of the flat roof on the auditorium/cafeteria wing, exterior painting of the added stairwells and main side landscaping. The building and grounds are now routinely maintained, and the building is insured as part of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission inventory of properties.

## **Plans for Reuse**

Historic Eureka School is proposed for adaptive reuse as an African American Heritage Museum and interpretive center for the Civil Rights Movement in Hattiesburg, particularly Freedom Summer activities of 1964. The goal is to develop a museum and center that have high-quality exhibits and appropriate certification. Paired with the Historic East 6<sup>th</sup> Street USO Club that houses the African American Military History Museum, these facilities would become destination locations for residents and visitors alike, open to the public on a regular schedule. They would, in the opinion of local tourism and economic development agency directors, become strong attractions for heritage tourism in Hattiesburg, and the development of these facilities as

museums is strongly supported by the VisitHattiesburg (Hattiesburg Convention and Visitors Bureau) and will be fully funded, renovated and operated by the Hattiesburg Convention Commission.

Rehabilitation and reuse of the building comes under the catalyst of the Southern Mississippi Arts and Restoration Team (SMART) partnership that has as its project goals 1) the rehabilitation and reuse of the Historic Hattiesburg High School 2) rehabilitation and reuse of the Historic Eureka School and 3) extension of the Longleaf Trace Rails-to-Trails into Downtown Hattiesburg. The goals of the SMART partnership are critical to preserving and reusing significant historic properties and to economic revitalization of the historic downtown (Hub City Historic District), North Main Street Historic District – both National Register of Historic Places districts – and Mobile Street District, the historic African American commercial district that dates to the earliest days of the city.

### **Work to Date and Proposal**

The conceptual pre-planning for the rehabilitation and reuse of Eureka School was completed in the summer of 2003 by Albert & Associates Architects, P.A., with the assistance of an African American Community Heritage Preservation Grant of approximately \$26,000 awarded by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The grant was awarded to the City of Hattiesburg in partnership with the Hattiesburg Public School District and EURO, which provided a cash match.

The Master Plan calls for exterior restoration and treatment of later additions to include a new front portico to match the original design, replication of original windows and removal of stucco, re-pointing and brick restoration on the original building with brick additions to be painted, and re-roofing of flat roofs. This was completed in Phase I. In addition, a new elevator for handicap accessibility, new glass curtain wall is planned. Interior renovation will include mechanical updating and restoration of doors, floors and ceilings and new finishes. The interior space would be made suitable for its new use as a museum and interpretive center. Space would be retained for EURO and its activities. Site development would include plans to make the site functional (parking) and attractive. The Convention Commission purchased adjacent land to open the site to the Historic Mobile Street and installed a boulevard entry.

Hattiesburg Convention Commission, which is one of the SMART partnership entities, is seeking a Community Heritage Preservation Grant of \$280,000. The grant funds will be used to continue with the complete renovation of this historic structure and put into use. Phase II will address the critical needs of the auditorium/cafeteria wing from an infrastructural standpoint. This phase provides for the removal of damaged surface materials and mechanical/plumbing/electrical/fire systems in the noted area and the refinishing of the same, which will provide for safe and effective use of this part of the historic structure by community and museum development personnel.

The Hattiesburg Convention Commission believes that continuing the vital project that will highlight and preserve the Civil Rights history of Mississippi is critical. As the State of Mississippi is unable to move as quickly as desired on a statewide Civil Rights Museum, Hattiesburg and the Convention Commission continue forward on their commitment to effectively preserving and displaying the powerful Civil Rights history of Mississippi, Hattiesburg and the Mobile Street area which includes the Historic Eureka School.