

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

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Blackwell School
Other name/site number: NA
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 501 South Abbot Street
City or town: Marfa State: Texas County: Presidio
Not for publication: [ ] Vicinity: [ ]

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
[ ] 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 [ ] meets [ ] does not meet) the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
[ ] national [ ] statewide [ ] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [ ] A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D

Signature of certifying official / Title: Mark Wolfe, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 10/21/19
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
[ ] entered in the National Register
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register
[ ] other, explain:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** Education/school

**Current Functions:** Recreation and Culture/museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** Other: Gable Front, No Style

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Metal, Adobe, Stucco, Wood, Concrete

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7-6 through 7-9)

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	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.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations:** NA

**Areas of Significance:** Education, Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic (Mexican)

**Period of Significance:** 1909-1965

**Significant Dates:** 1909, 1927

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** Robinson, Cal (builder)

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 8-10 through 8-18)

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 9-19 through 9-21)

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

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)
- 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 #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Blackwell School Alliance, Marfa Public Library

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** less than one acre

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 30.305819° Longitude: -104.022421°

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The nominated boundary is approximately 0.5 acres of the legal parcel, 13100 MARFA CITY BLK 87 LOT ALL OF BLOCK (Property ID 25766 Presidio CAD). From the intersection W. Waco Street and S. Abbot Street, the area follows the parcel boundary west approximately 160 feet, south 130 feet along the fence line, returns east 160 feet along the south fence line, and follows the legal parcel north to the starting point. The boundary is sketched on Map 2.

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes all property historically associated with the building and was drawn to include all historic features that directly contribute to the significance of the property.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Gretel Enck, President  
Organization: Blackwell School Alliance  
Street & number: P.O. Box 417  
City or Town: Marfa State: TX Zip Code: 79843  
Email: blackwellbroncos09@att.net  
Telephone: (432) 295-3359  
Date: March 6, 2019

## Additional Documentation

- Maps** (see continuation sheets MAP-22 through MAP-23)
- Additional items** (see continuation sheets FIGURE-24 through FIGURE-30)
- Photographs** (see continuation sheets PHOTO-31 through PHOTO-36)

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## Photograph Log

Blackwell School  
Marfa, Presidio County, Texas  
Photographer: Gretel Enck and Bonnie Tipton Wilson  
Date: May 18, 2019 and June 14, 2019

Photo 1: Blackwell School and site, looking northwest. (June 14, 2019)

Photo 2: Primary (east) elevation of 1909 schoolhouse, looking west. (June 14, 2019)

Photo 3: North elevation of 1909 schoolhouse, looking south. (June 14, 2019)

Photo 4: West elevation of 1909 schoolhouse, looking east. (June 14, 2019)

Photo 5: South elevation showing 1909 schoolhouse, looking north. (June 14, 2019)

Photo 6: South elevation showing Band Hall and connecting hyphen, looking north. (June 14, 2019)

Photo 7: The gable end of the 1909 building has two restrooms on its north side. (May 18, 2019)

Photo 8: A small office is on the south side of the 1909 building in the gable end. (May 18, 2019)

Photo 9: View of north classroom, looking west. (May 18, 2019)

Photo 10: Interior opening between classrooms. Looking northeast. (May 18, 2019)

Photo 11: View of south classroom, looking east. (May 18, 2019)

Photo 12: Interior of Band Hall, looking south. (May 18, 2019)

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## Narrative Description

Blackwell School is two buildings, the 1909 schoolhouse and 1927 Band Hall, connected by a narrow hyphen in Marfa, Presidio County, Texas. The 1909 schoolhouse is a 1-story, stucco over adobe brick masonry building on a rough-cut stone perimeter foundation with a square plan, metal roof, and features an extended gable front. It has two large classrooms that retain original wood flooring and ceiling, wainscot, and plaster walls. Deep window sills on the interior show the 24-inch-thick adobe walls. The 1927 Band Hall is 32 x 22 one-room stucco building constructed of structural clay tile over a concrete perimeter beam with a shallow, metal side-gable roof. Originally separate buildings, a cinderblock hyphen now connects the Band Hall and schoolhouse. The school has suffered from lack of maintenance and occasional modifications, yet Blackwell School retains its character-defining features and a high degree of historic and architectural integrity.

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## Setting

Blackwell School is at 501 South Abbot Street in Marfa, which is the seat of government for Presidio County in West Texas. The county is in the Trans-Pecos region, part of the Chihuahuan Desert, with variable topography that includes prairies, mountains, desert, and the Rio Grande. Located in the northeastern part of Presidio County, Marfa has a total area of approximately 1.6 square miles. It is sited on a flat highland plain called the Marfa Plateau between the Davis Mountains (north), Chisos Mountains (southeast), and Chinati Mountains (southwest). Established in 1883 as the freight headquarters for the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Railway, Marfa has an orthogonal grid laid parallel to the tracks. The rail line created four, roughly equal quadrants in the original townsite (**Figure 3**), and the nominated property was built in the southwest quadrant. Today, the Blackwell School is in the southcentral region of the Marfa city limits (**Map 3**) that expanded since the town's founding.

The nominated property is in a residential neighborhood. Blocks north, east, and west of the Blackwell school are characterized by one-story residences with stucco or plaster exteriors and shallow rooflines that are covered in standing seam metal or modern asphalt shingles. Property owned by the Marfa Housing Authority (MHA) south of Blackwell School was once part of the larger, 5-acre Blackwell School campus. Four buildings associated with the historic campus (**Figures 8-9**) were demolished in 1969. Completed by 1971, there are approximately 20 one-story stucco buildings associated with the MHA public housing development.<sup>1</sup>

Blackwell School is in the near center of its block, and a chain link fence separates it from a small park on the west end of the block (**Photo 1**). Although the modern park is associated with the Blackwell School Alliance, it is distinguished from the nominated property by a modern steel fence that borders its west, north, and south sides. Built after the period of significance, the park has benches, picnic tables, and playground equipment. The chain link fence between the park and Blackwell School demarcates the western limit of the nominated property boundary. Blackwell School faces east on the eastern half of its block. Groundcover on the flat parcel is characterized by areas of patchy grass and exposed rocky topsoil. There are four objects on the school grounds—flag pole, memorial marker, Texas Historical Commission State Historical Marker, and signage in front of Blackwell School—that were placed after 1978. The objects are minor resources that are neither substantial in size or scale nor do the objects strongly contribute to the historical significance of Blackwell School.

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<sup>1</sup> Midland architectural firm Pierce Norriss and Pace designed the public housing units, which reflect a vague "Spanish motif" in Pueblo Revival details like flat rooflines, arched entries, rustic wood lintels, and ornamental *vigas*. "Marfa Low-Rent Housing Given Approval," *The Big Bend Sentinel*, October 9, 1969.

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## **Blackwell School<sup>2</sup>**

The Blackwell School is two buildings—a 1909 schoolhouse and 1927 adjunct building, called the Band Hall—connected by a narrow hyphen. Both are single-story buildings with cement plaster “stucco” exteriors and metal “r” panels covering each roof. The hyphen is an enclosed narrow cinderblock passageway on the west elevation of the schoolhouse that connects the south classroom via ramp to an opening in the east elevation of the Band Hall. Door openings in the hyphen are thought to be original to each building, but it is likely the passageway was enclosed after the period of significance.

### ***1909 Schoolhouse***

#### *Exterior*

Built in 1909, the schoolhouse is a 1-story nearly square building with an extended gable front on the east (primary) elevation. It is load-bearing adobe construction on a rough-cut stone perimeter foundation with the finished floor approximately 36-inches above grade. The walls and foundation are 2-feet thick and covered in cement stucco, and the wall planes are devoid of ornamentation. The main section of the building is 46 feet wide and 45 feet deep, and the gabled front vestibule is 32 feet wide by 11 feet deep. The roof has a steep 6:12 pitch, with a gable roof at the east and a hipped roof with flat “tray” over the main building. Originally, the roof was sheathed in wood shingles, but it is currently clad with metal “r” panels, and there is a boxed soffit at the eave. Three chimneys originally projected above the roof from the structural walls, but those were removed. A pyramidal-roofed belfry atop the gable front end is also missing. Fenestration is symmetrical, but some exterior openings were infilled or covered. Most of the building’s windows are modern, aluminum frame. Two windows on the east façade and one on the south façade of the gabled portion of the building are wood double hung 4/4 configuration with the weights & pulleys. While not original, they are sympathetic in style and material to the building’s original windows.

The **east (primary) elevation (Photo 2)** faces S. Abbot Street and features the centered gable front. The extension is narrower than the width of the main building mass, which extends out at either side. Visitors enter the school through a single, five-panel door that sits above concrete steps at the center of the façade. It is recessed from the exterior wall plane. An early photograph (**Figure 5**) shows that the entrance was originally a wide archway open to a vestibule with the two classroom doors in the background. It also shows the exposed adobe construction and brick piers that supported the archway. Later photos show multiple modifications to the entry wall. By 1920 (**Figure 6**), the open vestibule was boarded in by wood and had a single, five-panel door in the center. The building was also plastered by this time, covering brick and adobe blocks, and reaching the entire height of the gable end. The archway no longer exists as the east wall was reconstructed with a concrete lintel above the single doorway. There is no documentation to confirm the date of the alteration, but it was completed before 1978 (**Figure 7**). Single window openings are on either side of the central door. The windows, including one on the south side of the gable front extension, are reproductions based on historic photographs. Each are approximately 7’-tall and are wood double-hung 4/4 configuration. The wall plane above the entrance is bare except for a small vent at the top of the gable end. The gable end has cornice returns made from the simple flat boards of the fascia trim and bargeboard.

The **north and south facades (Photos 3 and 5)** are identical in original fenestration, with three window openings evenly-spaced on each elevation. The center opening on the north façade has been covered over, and the other openings were altered after the period of significance to fit aluminum windows that are smaller than the historic openings. Similarly, the center window on the south elevation is partially covered over and accommodates a swamp

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Sue Ann Pemberton, “Historic Structure Report Presented to The Blackwell School Alliance Board,” April 24, 2019, College of Architecture, Construction, and Planning, University of Texas, San Antonio.

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cooler. Again, the other two windows on the façade are aluminum frame and the openings were altered to fit the modern units.

A large, rectangular part of the north side of the **west (rear) elevation** adobe wall was removed and infilled with a stud wall (**Photo 4**). The infilled portion includes a makeshift window and door opening. The hyphen that connects the 1909 school building and 1927 Band Hall is nearly centered on the west elevation. A window opening on the south portion of this elevation is covered with plywood. Originally, the façade was fenestrated by two rear doorways and two windows (**Figure 2**). There is a concrete and stone loading dock below the infilled wall plane that abuts the hyphen. A wood ramp follows the north elevation of the Band Hall to connect the loading dock to the ground.

*Interior (Figure 1, Photos 7-11)*

The 1909 schoolhouse retains the original interior plan and is divided into three areas: a vestibule and two classrooms. The vestibule was sub-divided to make two restrooms on the north and an office on the south. The ceiling in the vestibule is bead board with planks running east to west throughout, including above the office and the space above the toilets which been enclosed to the ceiling for storage. The floor material is concrete in the bathrooms, tongue-and-groove wood planks inside the entry door, and vinyl over wood in the office.

Doors in the west wall of the vestibule open to two classrooms, which are divided into north and south rooms by a 17" thick adobe wall. The rooms are internally-connected by a 6' wide by 7' high opening in the center of the dividing wall. It is unknown if the opening is original to the building. The classrooms are identical in size, configuration, and materials. Differences in fenestration are the result of later modifications. In general, the walls have a wainscot and cap at approximately 4' above the floor and are plaster above the cap. The tongue-and-groove floor planks are of various lengths, some as much as 18-20', and run east to west. Beaded board tongue-and-groove ceiling planks run east to west through both rooms. A non-original door frame is on the east wood frame wall of the north classroom. The west end wall of the north classroom is infilled as previously described. The south room has a door frame, doors, and transoms on both east and west end of the room. An added door opening, without a transom, is on the east wall. This opening is covered with oriented strand board. All window openings have a deep wood sill and jamb with an apron below the sill. There is wood casing at doors and windows.

*1927 Band Hall*

The 1927 Band Hall sits south and west of the main building block. It is constructed of structural clay tile over a concrete perimeter beam and measures 32 feet wide and 22 feet deep at approximately 6" above grade. The side gable roof ridge runs north and south and is clad with metal "r" panel. Originally, it had a shingle roof. Exposed rafter tails are present. The **north and south elevations** are without fenestration (**Photo 6**). The **east elevation** originally had a wood panel door and transom on the north side, but it is currently infilled. Another opening on this façade is enclosed by the hyphen. Historically, there were five windows on the **west façade** that are now enclosed (**Photo 4**). A single door with glass upper panel is installed near one of the modified window enclosures on the southern half of the west elevation. The **interior** is a single room with plastered walls. The ceiling is made up of 4x8 plywood with battens. The flooring is tongue-and-groove plank of varying lengths and runs north to south.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pemberton, Sue Ann. Historic Structures Report, 2019, 12-18.

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### **Alterations and Integrity**

The Blackwell School has undergone alterations since its construction in 1909. During the period of significance (1909-1965), the belfry and chimneys were removed from the roofline. Evidence of the chimneys are present within the walls of the building. By 1920, the original open vestibule on the east elevation was enclosed, and the exterior was plastered. It is likely the arched entry was changed to its current appearance in the mid-to-late 1960s. The interior vestibule was sub-divided for restrooms and an office. In recent decades, the fenestration on both buildings was heavily altered. Original window openings on two elevations of the schoolhouse were made smaller when aluminum frame windows replaced the historic wood frames. A sizable part of the rear adobe wall was removed from the west elevation. Other window and door openings on the school building were covered or infilled. Five windows on the 1927 Band Hall were infilled at an unknown date and new openings were created for modern doorways on the east and west facades.

The Blackwell School retains good architectural and historic integrity to communicate its significance as a segregated school built for the education of Marfa's Hispanic population for the period 1909-1965. The school is at its original location within a residential neighborhood on the south side of Marfa. Modest residences characterized the neighborhood setting during the period of significance and through the present-day. There is no modern infill on the nominated property or in blocks around it. Spatial relationships between the nominated buildings and the setting are intact.

The 1909 Blackwell Schoolhouse and 1927 Band Hall retain integrity of design. Both retain the historic form, plan, and massing that distinguish the simple buildings. The schoolhouse retains the gable front extension, its primary distinguishing architectural feature, and roof shape. The entrance archway was the most significant stylistic feature for the school building, and its removal adversely impacts the integrity of design. However, the preponderance of intact design features is intact. The Band Hall retains its design as a small, rectangular side gable building with a shallow roof pitch. Interior floor plans in the 1909 schoolhouse are intact with two large classrooms. Sub-division of the entry vestibule was likely undertaken during period of significance and does not significantly detract from the identifying interior layout of the school building. The adobe structural and clay tile construction for each building are in overall good condition, and the methods used reflect the periods (1909 and 1927) in which both were built. Fenestration, although infilled or altered in places, is visible enough to convey its architectural integrity.

Material integrity was greatly diminished by the replacement of original wood windows and shingled roof for modern materials. The removal of a large section of adobe wall on the west elevation also adversely impacted the integrity. The cement stucco exterior is also not original as it replaced the historic lime plaster that once covered the adobe walls. Intact materials and structural workmanship help offset the poor integrity of exterior materials. Interior wood materials in the 1909 schoolhouse—wainscoting, floors, ceilings, window sills, and trim—are original and repairable. These materials, plaster walls, water fountains, and door transoms are representative of the period of the building's construction. The workmanship and material integrity of the 1909 school building's adobe construction is not visible but indirectly evident in the interior. Deep window sills and wall partitions evidence the building's thick adobe walls and reflect a method of construction common in Marfa in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Conditional analysis showed the adobe and stone foundation to be well-built and in sound condition, which is the result of quality workmanship at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The nominated property retains good overall integrity of its physical features, and thus, it communicates the feeling of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century school. Through the efforts of the Blackwell School Alliance, Blackwell School retains a direct association to its historic significance. It currently serves as a museum dedicated to preserving the school's history and the memories of its students and faculty.

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### Statement of Significance

Blackwell School in Marfa, Texas was the sole public education institution for the city's Mexican and Mexican American children from 1909-1965. Segregated education began in Marfa in 1892 following the completion of a new school for the city's Anglo students. Mexican children attended the city's original school building until 1909 when the district constructed a two-room adobe brick building on South Abbot Street. Although there was no state law that mandated separate schools for Hispanic students, Texas school districts perpetuated the practice of *de facto* segregation through the mid-twentieth century. Known originally as the Ward or Mexican School, Blackwell School was later named for its longtime principal Jesse Blackwell. As the student population grew, more buildings were constructed next to the 1909 schoolhouse. Blackwell School closed in 1965 following the integration of the Marfa Independent School District, and most buildings associated with the school were razed. Marfa's Mexican and Mexican American culture and history are directly tied to the Blackwell School, and the nominated building is tangible reminder of a time when the practice of "separate but equal" dominated education and social systems. Blackwell School is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Education and Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic (Mexican) at the local level of significance because it was the only public institution built for the education of the Mexican American community of Marfa, which it served for more than fifty years. It represents the period of racial segregation in Marfa and is the sole extant property directly associated with Mexican education in the city, the remaining buildings being torn down after the school closed in 1965. The period of significance is 1909-1965.

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### Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

In 1883, the Galveston Harrisburg and San Antonio Railroad company established Marfa as a water stop and freight headquarters on its newly-completed, 638-mile track that connected San Antonio with El Paso.<sup>4</sup> It quickly became an important shipping center for area cattlemen who ranged their herds in Presidio County. Two years after its founding, the county seat transferred from nearby Fort Davis to Marfa. In 1885, the county courthouse was built, and Marfa's first churches, newspaper, and school were established.

Marfa's proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border significantly shaped its political, economic, and social history, and was reflected in local demographics. In 1887, Marfa had the largest population in the county with 770 people. Overall population figures for Presidio County at the time showed of the 2,786 people living there, 2,378 were of Mexican descent.<sup>5</sup> As the county population increased over the next five decades, the percentages of whites (Anglo-American, European immigrants) and Hispanics (comprised primarily of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants) remained steady; African Americans represented approximately 1% of the total county population. Marfa's population peaked at 5,000 in 1945 as the result of two important local military installations, Fort D.A. Russell and Marfa Army Air Field, but both closed following the end of World War II.

The county's Hispanic population first concentrated in villages along the border and in Presidio, a sister city with Ojinaga, Mexico. Some were Tejanos (native born Texans of Mexican descent) who had set up ranches in, what was once, Spanish, and then Mexican territory and remained there following the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.<sup>6</sup> Economic opportunities in the sheep and cattle-raising and mining industries attracted new settlers, some of whom first

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<sup>4</sup> Lonny Taylor, "What We Know and Do Not Know about the History of Blackwell School," (working paper in support of Historic Structures Report, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> L.L. Foster, *Forgotten Texas Census: First Annual Report of the Agricultural Bureau of the Department of Agriculture, Insurance, Statistics, and History, 1887-1888* (Texas State Historical Association: Austin, 2001), 182.

<sup>6</sup> Where the author discusses the larger population in Texas and the United States, they recognize "Hispanic" as a general ethnonym for persons descended from culturally and racially diverse countries in Latin America and Europe. In Marfa, however, most Hispanic persons are native-born United States citizens of Mexican descent or Mexican immigrants. "Hispanic," when used in the nomination to describe the collective population in Marfa, it refers to a group of people whose culture and race reflect both Mexican and Mexican American heritage.

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arrived as migrant laborers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When the mines in Shafter and Terlingua closed, many moved to larger towns like Marfa to become “the backbone of Hispanic communities” in Presidio County.<sup>7</sup> The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 also had a profound effect on Marfa’s cultural and economic history. Smuggling of arms and ammunition across the Rio Grande led to a U.S. Cavalry post being set up in Marfa, and the military presence remained in the city until after World War II.<sup>8</sup> In 1913, thousands of Mexican refugees crossed the border. Pancho Villa’s revolutionary army made a Christmas Day attack on the city of Ojinaga, just 60 miles south of Marfa. In the next days, 4,000 refugees, soldiers, and civilians walked or rode horseback to Marfa under U.S. military escort and were housed at the cavalry post. While many refugees were eventually dispersed to El Paso and other places, others remained in the city and became part of the community.<sup>9</sup> The influx of Mexican nationals to the county in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century amplified white hostility towards this group.

Hispanics were critical to the development of Marfa and Presidio County, but there was racial and ethnic tension with the majority Protestant Anglo citizenry. Although there were no legal means to disenfranchise Hispanics, white prejudice against Mexican culture and language was manifested in *de facto* segregation and blatantly-racist policies.<sup>10</sup> Until the mid-1960s, public institutions and local businesses provided separate accommodations for Hispanics. Hispanic Marfans resided in the south part of the city, and places like the segregated Blackwell School became foundational institutions in that community. Jessie Silva, a former student at Blackwell, remembered the era before integration when she sat in the balcony seats at the movie theater while white patrons watched from the first floor. For Silva, racism in Marfa was “what we were used to,” and segregation “was a thing we accepted.”<sup>11</sup> Although segregation was normalized in Marfa, there were local efforts to join the larger Hispanic Civil Rights movement, and Marfa was among the first West Texas communities to organize a local League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC).

### Segregated Education in Texas

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which officially ended the Mexican-American War (1846-1849), delineated the boundary between the two nations and added 525,000 square miles of land to United States territory. Written during the period of African American enslavement, the treaty guaranteed that Mexicans living in the newly-acquired territories of the U.S. be given the rights of U.S. citizenship as guaranteed under the Constitution. They were, according to this document, to enjoy the same legal protections to liberty, property, and the free exercise of religion as all white American citizens. Despite a legal claim to whiteness, most white Texans viewed Mexicans as a racially inferior group undeserving of equal rights. Thus, Mexicans (and later any American of Hispanic or Latin descent) “occupied a nebulous, intermediate status” as both white and non-white, and disenfranchisement of this group throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was undertaken through *de facto* segregation and other extralegal tactics.<sup>12</sup>

The 1876 Texas Constitution mandated racial separation of African Americans and whites from elementary school through college. There were no statutes or laws, however, mandating the segregation of Hispanic students. Instead, the separation of these students was conducted outside of any legal structure, *de facto* segregation, which made it hard in succeeding decades to identify, litigate against, and dismantle racist practices.<sup>13</sup> Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, school administrators justified separate “Mexican” schools or classrooms on language deficiencies in Hispanic students, even

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<sup>7</sup> Vol. 1 301.

<sup>8</sup> Lonn Taylor, *Marfa for the Perplexed* (Marfa, TX: Marfa Book Company, 2018) 105.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 27-8.

<sup>11</sup> Jessie Silva, “Voices of Blackwell,” Oral History by Diana Nguyen, Marfa Public Radio, October 20, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997):19-22.

<sup>13</sup> Victoria-Marie MacDonal, “Demanding their Rights: The Latino Struggle for Educational Access and Equity,” *American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study*, (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2013) 310-311.

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if they spoke English.<sup>14</sup> Segregation existed in Texas expanded greatly after 1890.<sup>15</sup> From 1902 to 1940, Texas school districts operated segregated schools for Hispanic and African American students in 122 districts across 59 counties throughout the state.<sup>16</sup> By 1965, there were more than 600 districts statewide that integrated local schools.

Hispanic children faced barriers to accessing equal education. In the 1880s, free public education existed at all levels of learning, but Hispanic and African Americans were often limited to primary education. Given only foundational lessons in literacy and basic workforce skills, the curriculum reinforced systemic economic and social subjugation of these groups. Private and parochial schools were the primary means for Hispanic students to seek secondary and collegiate-level schooling.<sup>17</sup> School officials consistently channeled Hispanic children into low-track classes. At the secondary level, students were deprived of opportunities to excel and instead set apart in general education or vocational classes. Some educators assessed student performance on biased tests or on assumptions that Hispanics were “intellectually inferior, culturally backward, and linguistically deprived.”<sup>18</sup>

Texas school facilities for non-white students were also unequal. Buildings were generally older, smaller, poorly-kept, recreation space was minimal and substandard, and school equipment was inadequate.<sup>19</sup> In 1949, for example, the *Big Bend Sentinel* reported on Marfa’s first class of African American students. The five children were educated in an off-campus building, and the author noted: “There isn’t any playground equipment but the children are using beer cans and improvised amusement devices for entertainment in recess time.”<sup>20</sup> What would likely be deplorable recreational equipment for white students, was touted as satisfactory for non-white children who, in the author’s mind, were either unaccustomed to nicer equipment or too intellectually-inferior to require anything better. Although the Blackwell School had a larger campus, playground, and newer buildings, the facilities were substandard compared to local white public schools. Disparities in physical and intellectual resources reflected and perpetuated racism towards Hispanics and non-whites.

Public school curriculum ultimately subordinated Mexican culture and language as educators looked to assimilate students in the Anglo-dominant American culture. Between 1971 and 1974, the United States Commission on Civil Rights documented the effects of separate but unequal education, the no-Spanish rule, and other culturally exclusionary acts on the education of Hispanic Americans. The commission reported that traditional monolingual schools had fostered poor academic performance, demeaning influences, and alienation among these students.<sup>21</sup>

The first case in which Texas courts reviewed Hispanic school segregation was tried in Del Rio in 1930. Mexican American parents sued the school district, charging that students were being deprived of the benefits afforded “other white races.”<sup>22</sup> The case garnered the attention of rights groups and attorneys—including those with the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). *Del Rio ISD v. Salvatierra* ultimately failed the intent of the parents because the ruling legalized the segregation of children of Mexican descent in schools through the third grade. Yet the organizing and fundraising built upon itself, and LULAC prioritized its work to develop strategies for bringing about school desegregation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Cynthia E. Orozco, “Del Rio ISD V. Salvatierra,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (2010). tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/jrd02 (accessed January 5, 2019)

<sup>17</sup> Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., “Mexican Americans and Education,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, (2010) tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/khmmx (accessed January 5, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> San Miguel, “Mexican Americans and Education.”

<sup>19</sup> San Miguel, “Mexican Americans and Education.”

<sup>20</sup> “Something New Has Been Added in the Marfa Public Schools for 1949-1950,” *Big Bend Sentinel*, September 30, 1949.

<sup>21</sup> Rodríguez, “Bilingual Education.”

<sup>22</sup> Orozco, “Del Rio ISD V. Salvatierra.”

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

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In 1948, *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District* was heard in United States District Court. The court ruled that maintaining separate schools for Mexican American children violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>24</sup> *Delgado* permitted separate classrooms on the same campus and in the first grade, but only to correct deficiencies determined by tests given to all students.<sup>25</sup> While some schools ended segregation, later court cases and struggles by Hispanic organizations indicated that most school districts in Texas ignored *Delgado*.

The U.S. Supreme Court first recognized Mexican Americans as an identifiable ethnic group in the landmark 1954 case, *Hernandez v. Texas*. This case reviewed the seating of Mexican Americans on juries and affirmed that the Fourteenth Amendment extended beyond the classification of Black or white. This ruling opened the door for *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District* in 1970, a case that revisited arguments from *Salvatierra*. In *Cisneros*, the judge ruled that Mexican Americans were “an identifiable ethnic minority group,” and therefore were subject to the benefits of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case that concluded separate but equal educational facilities for racial minorities were inherently unequal.<sup>26</sup>

### Blackwell School<sup>27</sup>

Before the railroad opened West Texas to settlement, the county’s isolation and sparse population made a regular public system of education impossible in Presidio County.<sup>28</sup> In 1875, the State of Texas established the Community System of education, a decentralized system that held the county judge as the ex-officio county superintendent and allowed for lax and mutable definitions of school communities.<sup>29</sup> The Texas Legislature adopted a district school system in 1883, yet Presidio County was exempted until 1893. At that time, the County Commissioners Court subdivided the county into three Common School Districts, with Marfa in District 1. In 1927, the state public school program changed to independent school districts.<sup>30</sup>

The first public school in Marfa opened under the Community System in an adobe building on Galveston Street in 1885.<sup>31</sup> Kate Barnhart, B.F. Adams, and J. H. Taft were among the teachers who taught both Hispanic and white students of this community school.<sup>32</sup> The original building is now a private residence at 214 West Galveston Street. Regarding the original Galveston Street school, Ellen Ruth Livingston reported that “For some time, this was the only public school in Marfa, and was used by all children until the first section of the two story red brick building was constructed in 1892 on the present location of the [Marfa] high school.”<sup>33</sup> From 1892 on, the community segregated students, with the white students attending class in the new brick building while Hispanic students remained at the Galveston Street school that became known as the Mexican School.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> V. Carl Allsup, “Hernandez V. Driscoll CISD,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (2010). tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/jrh02 (accessed January 5, 2019)

<sup>26</sup> MacDonald, “Demanding their Rights.”

<sup>27</sup> Adapted from Sue Ann Pemberton, “Historic Structure Report Presented to The Blackwell School Alliance Board,” April 24, 2019, College of Architecture, Construction, and Planning, University of Texas, San Antonio.

<sup>28</sup> J. E. Gregg, “The History of Presidio County.” (Masters Thesis, University of Texas, 1933) 177.

<sup>29</sup> Frederick Eby, *The Development of Education in Texas* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925).

<sup>30</sup> Gregg, “The History of Presidio County.” 186.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, “What We Know and Do Not Know”

<sup>32</sup> Gregg, “The History of Presidio County.” 182.

<sup>33</sup> Ellen Ruth Livingston, “Blackwell School Memoirs” *Marfa Independent and Big Bend Sentinel*, July 16, 1987.

<sup>34</sup> Earlier historic investigation into the origins of the Blackwell School found the first purpose-built Mexican School was a potentially a church. On the wall of the current Blackwell School museum hangs a photocopy of a handwritten account by Carmen Mendias dated 1940. This account states that the nominated building was built as a Methodist Church and opened up to use as the Mexican School in 1889. Although the Alliance has not yet determined where that story originated, or if perhaps it goes with a different building, it is worth mentioning here as it has long been the source of misinformation. Two lines of investigation have been useful in disproving its veracity and tracing the real history of the education of Mexican Americans in Marfa. Although documents have not been found describing the continuation of a Mexican School on Galveston Street,

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The local newspaper reported on May 29, 1909, that the school board “decided to sell the old Mexican School property and to build a new and up to date school house on property in the southern part of the city, in as much as the present location is too small and the old house is in a dilapidated condition.”<sup>35</sup> The new school property was Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Block 87 at the southern edge of town on South Abbot Street. John M. Dean, the founder of Marfa, originally owned all land within the city limits, and deed records show he sold the lots on which the current school building stands to the School Trustees of District #1, Presidio County, for \$150 on June 25, 1909.<sup>36</sup> In July, the newspaper reported that the “foundation for the new Mexican school is now completed,” and, “No doubt the building will be finished in ample time for the opening of school on the first day of September.”<sup>37</sup> The schoolboard hired contractor Cal Robinson to construct the adobe building, and it was completed in August. The *New Era*, a weekly newspaper, illustrated local Anglo prejudices towards Hispanic Marfans when it said, “The patrons of the school should be proud of the building and take pains to assist the board in seeing that it is not destroyed.”<sup>38</sup>

The new elementary school opened in September 1909 and was named the Ward School. It was designed in the style of a traditional one-room American schoolhouse with a front-gabled wood-shingled roof, symmetrically fenestrated, with a belfry holding the school bell. Some nicknamed the Ward School “the Cathedral,” because the belfry gave the building an ecclesiastical appearance. In 1914, a teacher provided more details about the building, which had already been changed on the primary façade:

It is a three-room adobe plastered house with a belfry, a coal house, and two outside toilets. In front, the east side, had a long room that ran north to south. There was an archway and a short wooden stairstep that led to a double or very large door. On the west there were two side-by-side classrooms. Each of these rooms had an outside door and a heavy staircase. There was no playground equipment—just an open gravel and sand lot.<sup>39</sup>

Oral and written histories with former teachers chronicled their professional experiences and gave insight into scholastic life at Blackwell School. Ruby Jordan was the first principal, and Mary Shannon (**Figure 5**), a recent graduate of Marfa High School, was a teacher. Her salary was \$75.00 monthly.<sup>40</sup> When Shannon graduated from Marfa High School at the age of 15, a teacher who had been hired to start in the fall resigned before school started. The school trustees asked Shannon to take the exam and teach. She later recalled, “I took the exam and taught three years in the Mexican School. We had no books, so I cut pictures out of magazines and taught them English in that way.”<sup>41</sup> During that time, Shannon reported having 80 students and being one of two teachers. Myrtle Barnett MacDonald Sheperd taught at Blackwell from 1918 to 1921. She remembered:

Edith Coker from San Antonio was a co-worker. My salary was \$60.00 a month. Annabel Bunton (Wood), the principal and I taught over 100 children in the Cathedral Building

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neither have documents been found that contradict it. Deed research conducted at the Presidio County Courthouse in January 2019 found that Lots 15 and 16 of Block 32 were owned by Presidio County from 1885, when County Judge W.H. Slaughter purchased the land “for Public Free School purposes”, until 1910, when the property was sold by Presidio County to a private citizen. Presidio County, Texas, Deed Book No. 3, 403; 5 November 1885. Office of the County Clerk, Marfa, Texas; Presidio County, Texas, Deed Book No. 42, 41; 13 October 1910. Office of the County Clerk, Marfa, Texas.

<sup>35</sup> *New Era*, “School Board Meeting,” May 29, 1909.

<sup>36</sup> Lonny Taylor, “Report on the Land History of Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Block 87, Original Town of Marfa,” (working paper in support of Historic Structures Report, 2017).

<sup>37</sup> *New Era*, “The New Mexican School House,” July 24, 1909.

<sup>38</sup> “New Building,” *New Era*, August, 28, 1909.

<sup>39</sup> John Fortner, “Blackwell School Memoirs,” *Marfa Independent and Big Bend Sentinel*, April 23, 1987.

<sup>40</sup> Thompson, *History of Marfa*, vol.2. 61.

<sup>41</sup> Livingston, “Blackwell School Memoirs.”

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[Blackwell School]. On top was a belfry and the students delighted in pulling the rope that rang the bell. To my dismay, some of the students were old as I but were so eager to learn.<sup>42</sup>

Sheperd's account of older children among younger classmates corresponds with memories of former students, that even in later years many students, boys and girls, would leave school to help families during harvest. Cotton was an important crop north of Marfa in the Midland-Big Spring area. Students would leave in the autumn and might not return until after the Christmas holiday. Some would later catch up and complete the grade, but others would not.<sup>43</sup>

In 1922, Jesse Blackwell arrived in Marfa to be the principal of the Ward School. Blackwell was born on a farm in Rusk County, Texas, in 1871. One of ten children, and living on a remote farm, Blackwell's schooling started late and remained sporadic. Yet he persevered and began teaching school in 1890. Over many years, his teaching jobs alternated with bouts of bad health.<sup>44</sup> His arrival in Marfa seems to have ended the outward manifestations of health problems. He dedicated more than two decades to instruction and management of the Ward School, and the community recognized his contributions by re-naming it Blackwell School in 1942. He retired in 1947.

When Blackwell started at the Ward School, Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants made up more than 74% of the total population in Marfa, but very few children attended school. He found there was "one building, three rooms, coal stoves, outdoor toilets, two other teachers, and 125 Mexican boys and girls."<sup>45</sup> During Blackwell's 25-year tenure as principal of Blackwell School, Marfa grew as a city and correspondingly the school grew. Evelyn Bishop Bentley shared a common memory of overcrowding in her classroom., "One hundred students was a bit too much for one teacher, so Mr. Blackwell divided the class with some fifty pupils going in the morning and the other half in the afternoon."<sup>46</sup>

In 1927, a small annex (the Band Hall) was constructed at the rear of the 1909 schoolhouse. By 1933, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Marfa showed two, "Mexican Schools:" the nominated property and a second clay tile building a half-block to the south and west.<sup>47</sup> Ellen Ruth Livingston taught in the 1927 Band Hall from 1932 to 1935:

My classroom was the building behind the original building. It was a spacious room with an entire west wall of large, high windows. There were no shades and the afternoon sun was blinding. It being Depression years, there were no funds for shades, and surely the teacher could not buy them as teachers received no money, just script. I found old shades, no rollers, climbed to the top of the windows and nailed the pieces of shades to the window frames.<sup>48</sup>

Under Blackwell's oversight the campus grew to 5-acres and had six buildings by 1948. As the campus grew, the school allowed students to name the buildings after teachers who worked there. They named the 1909 schoolhouse the "Harper Building" and the 1927 adjunct building, the "Wheat Band Hall." One building, completed in 1941, was constructed with local bonds and Public Works Administration funds. The *El Paso Times* wrote in 1938 that the then-proposed nine-room building with a combined gymnasium and auditorium was to replace a condemned four-room building at Blackwell School.<sup>49</sup> Following the end of World War II, the schoolboard purchased several Marfa Army Airfield buildings and moved one onto the Blackwell campus. The building was converted to classroom space, which

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<sup>42</sup> Myrtle Barnett MacDonald Sheperd, "Blackwell School Memoirs." *Marfa Independent and Big Bend Sentinel*, July 16, 1987.

<sup>43</sup> Mario Rivera, personal communication, November 10, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Patty McKenzie, "Former Teacher Marks 16<sup>th</sup> Year as Paisano Secretary," *El Paso Times*, July 26, 1952.

<sup>45</sup> J. E. Gregg, "Excerpts from a Speech at the Lion's Club in 1949," *Marfa Independent and Big Bend Sentinel*, June 11, 1987.

<sup>46</sup> Evelyn Bentley Bishop, "Blackwell School Memoirs," *Marfa Independent and Big Bend Sentinel*, April 30, 1987.

<sup>47</sup> Sanborn Map Company, "Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps." Marfa, Presidio, Texas, 1933.

<sup>48</sup> Livingston, "Blackwell School Memoirs."

<sup>49</sup> "\$216,000 in Public Improvements Planned for Marfa," *El Paso Times*, November 6, 1938.

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was “badly needed” at the time.<sup>50</sup> In his 1945 commencement speech, Superintendent J. E. Gregg counted the school’s physical developments, shown on the following table:

	Buildings	Rooms	Teachers	Pupils
1922	1	3	3	120
1924	1	4	4	
1927	2	5	5	
1932	3	8	8	
1934	3	11	11	
1937	4	13	13	689
1941	5	15	15	651
1942	5	16	17	633

The foundational curriculum at Blackwell was based on English language instruction. Teachers confirmed what many students later shared about their primary education at Blackwell, that most students had never spoken English before attending school. The school employed white teachers like Lolla Bunton Bledsoe who spoke Spanish fluently. She once said, “I struggled through the first day at Blackwell and the next. Soon it became a delightful experience watching [the students] grasp the sound or phonetic system to read and to add and subtract numbers proficiently.”<sup>51</sup> Students also learned English through the repetition of the Pledge of Allegiance and singing songs.<sup>52</sup> In 1936, Blackwell organized a Spanish-speaking branch of the Interscholastic League. He believed that Spanish-speaking students should not have to compete with English-speaking students in literary events. In 1937, more than 150 Spanish-speaking students attended the Spanish Interscholastic League in Marfa. Participating towns were Fort Stockton, Alpine, Sheffield, Fort Davis, Redford, and Marfa.<sup>53</sup>

This support of Spanish linguistics was not customary to the principles of education at Blackwell. In 1954, seventh grade teacher Evelyn Davis arranged a ceremony with a cardboard coffin to bury “Mr. Spanish,” an object that personified the subordination of Mexican and Mexican American culture in Texas public education. She instructed all Blackwell students to write, “I will not speak Spanish” on paper scraps that they put in the coffin. At a schoolwide gathering, they buried the coffin in the flower bed around the flag pole.<sup>54</sup> Davis later described her motivation: “Having taught in high school and college for four years in Seguin, I found it difficult to correct the heavy accent of my students so was determined to do a better job in speech instruction at Blackwell.”<sup>55</sup> Maggie Marquez was in elementary school at Blackwell when they buried Mr. Spanish. After the ceremony, Marquez told her friends, “*Nadie me va quitar mi español. No pueden hacernos esto.* [No one’s going to take away my Spanish. They can’t do that to us.]” A teacher heard her and sent her to the principal’s office. “He whupped me so hard with a big paddle, I’ll never forget it,” Marquez said, and “I ran all the way home.”<sup>56</sup>

The 1940s were boom years in Marfa, largely due to the military presence at Fort D.A. Russell and the Marfa Army Air Field. Local businesses were supported by the personnel stationed at the edge of Marfa near Blackwell School. Mary Lee Harper taught fourth grade beginning in 1942. She described her classroom: “It was a large, light airy room with large windows. It had good window shades, good blackboards with good corkboards above them, good floors,

<sup>50</sup> “Something New Has Been Added in the Marfa Public Schools for 1949-1950,” *Big Bend Sentinel*, September 30, 1949.

<sup>51</sup> Lolla Bunton Bledsoe, “Blackwell School Memoirs,” *Marfa Independent and Big Bend Sentinel*, June 11, 1987.

<sup>52</sup> Lionel Salgado, Personal communication, June 24, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson, *History of Marfa*, vol.2. 430.

<sup>54</sup> Lucy Garcia, Interview in *Children of Giant*, Directed by Hector Galan, Public Broadcasting System, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Evelyn Davis, “The Last Rites of Spanish Speaking,” Unpublished Memo, 1954.

<sup>56</sup> Sterry Butcher, “Blackwell Memories: Moving Past the Pain and Into the Future,” *Big Bend Sentinel*, May 24, 2007.

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good desks, and steam heat,”—a vastly dissimilar experience from Livingston’s, just ten years before. Harper went on to praise her students primarily, and the parents too: “Somehow, there was something—a spirit of interest and understanding and cooperation and love that made us seem like one big family—which made Blackwell School something special.”<sup>57</sup>

As organizations like LULAC and individuals fought for Hispanic educational rights across Texas and the U.S. in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, local opinions changed in favor of education reform. Although the passage of *Brown vs Board of Education* did not require Marfa Independent School District to integrate its Hispanic students, the Supreme Court decision did instigate reform at the local level. Marfa never had a segregated high school. Juan de la Cruz Machuca was the first Hispanic to graduate from Marfa High School in 1911, despite the assumption that no Hispanic children would achieve a higher level of study.<sup>58</sup> Although Blackwell added ninth grade education after 1937, the Marfa school district cut the school’s ninth grade in 1953, and graduates transferred from Blackwell to the white Marfa High School. An account of the Blackwell School’s development written in 1947 reported that, “This fall semester a total of 29 Blackwell graduates entered the Marfa High School. It is the hope of the administration that every Blackwell graduate will continue his education through senior high school.”<sup>59</sup>

In 1964, the school district began construction on a new elementary school for all of Marfa’s students. When children came back from Christmas break in January 1965, their new school was ready. Teacher Cora Lee Ridout remembered, “A big truck backed up to the Hutton Building to load all the desks and boxes of equipment. Carrying all their books and supplies, my students hopped on a school bus and were transported to the new Marfa Elementary School.”<sup>60</sup> Alberto Garcia was in the seventh grade and recalled the Cenicerros Freight Company provided trucks and men to move the desks and chairs. Some of the older boys helped load and load the furniture.<sup>61</sup> The campus was officially closed in 1965 after all the Blackwell School students were consolidated into the Marfa Elementary School, Marfa Junior High, and Marfa High School.<sup>62</sup>

In October 1969, Marfa ISD sold approximately five acres of the Blackwell School campus to the Marfa Housing Authority (MHA) to construct public housing units for families and the elderly. After HUD approved the loan, Marfa ISD razed all campus buildings leaving only the 1909 schoolhouse and 1927 Band Hall, which remained part of the school district. After the sale, the schoolhouse was used for various activities, including a vocational school (1971-1996). During that period, the building underwent changes. Original wood windows were replaced, the roof was changed to metal, and there was partial removal of the west adobe wall to accommodate a garage door. In 2006, a group of alumni formed the Blackwell School Alliance (BSA) and signed a 99-year lease with Marfa ISD. Since then, they have worked to restore the building as a museum to highlight the stories of Mexican Americans and Mexicans in early Texas and the Southwest and preserve the history of the school.

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<sup>57</sup> Mary Lee Harper, “Blackwell School Memoirs,” *Marfa Independent and Big Bend Sentinel*, July 16, 1987.

<sup>58</sup> Lonny Taylor, “The Lost History of the Blackwell School,” *The Rambling Boy, Big Bend Sentinel*, June 2, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Jay B. Bolin, “Blackwell’s Program of Development and Its Growth,” *Big Bend Sentinel*, December 1947, patrons’ bulletin.

<sup>60</sup> Cora Lee Ridout, “Blackwell School Memoirs,” *Marfa Independent and Big Bend Sentinel*, July 2, 1987.

<sup>61</sup> Lonny Taylor, email message to author, June 17, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> G. H. Adams, “Blackwell School Memoirs,” *Marfa Independent and Big Bend Sentinel*, July 9, 1987.

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## **Conclusion**

The Blackwell School was the only public educational institution for Mexican and Mexican American children in Marfa, Texas from 1909-1965. Unlike African Americans, there was no state law that mandated segregation between whites and Hispanic people. Instead, Texas school districts established schools for Mexican Americans through *de facto* segregation. The Blackwell School is a significant local example of the period when the practice of “separate but equal” dominated education and social systems in the United States. It is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic (Mexican) and Education. The period of significance is 1909-1965, the years the Blackwell School operated.

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Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

**Maps**

Map 1: Presidio County, Texas

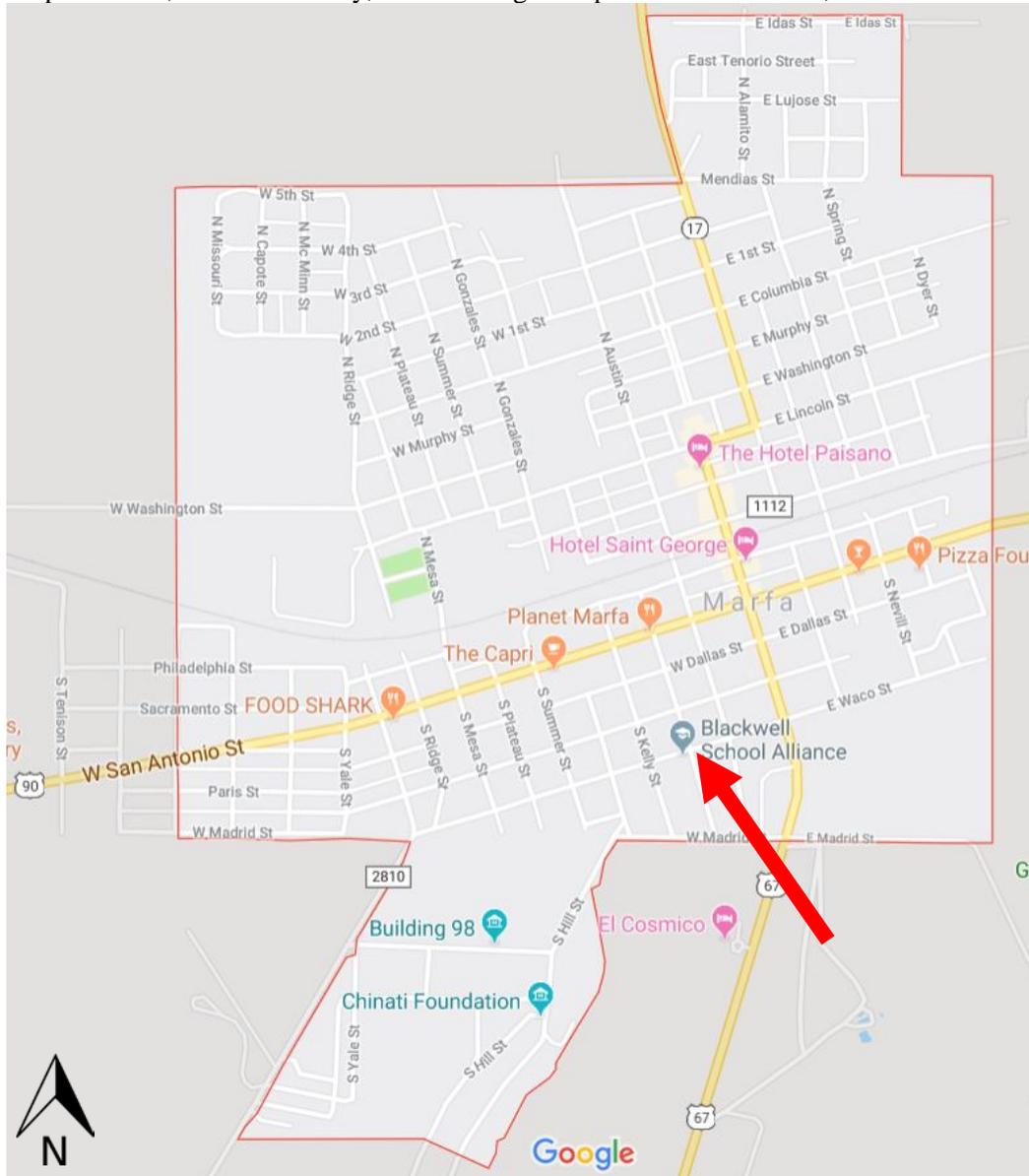


Map 2: Marfa, Blackwell School 30.305819° -104.022421°. Google Earth accessed June 10, 2019. The yellow box demarcates the nomination boundary. The nomination boundary is approximately 0.5 acres of the legal parcel: 13100 MARFA CITY BLK 87 LOT ALL OF BLOCK (Property ID 25766 Presidio CAD).



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

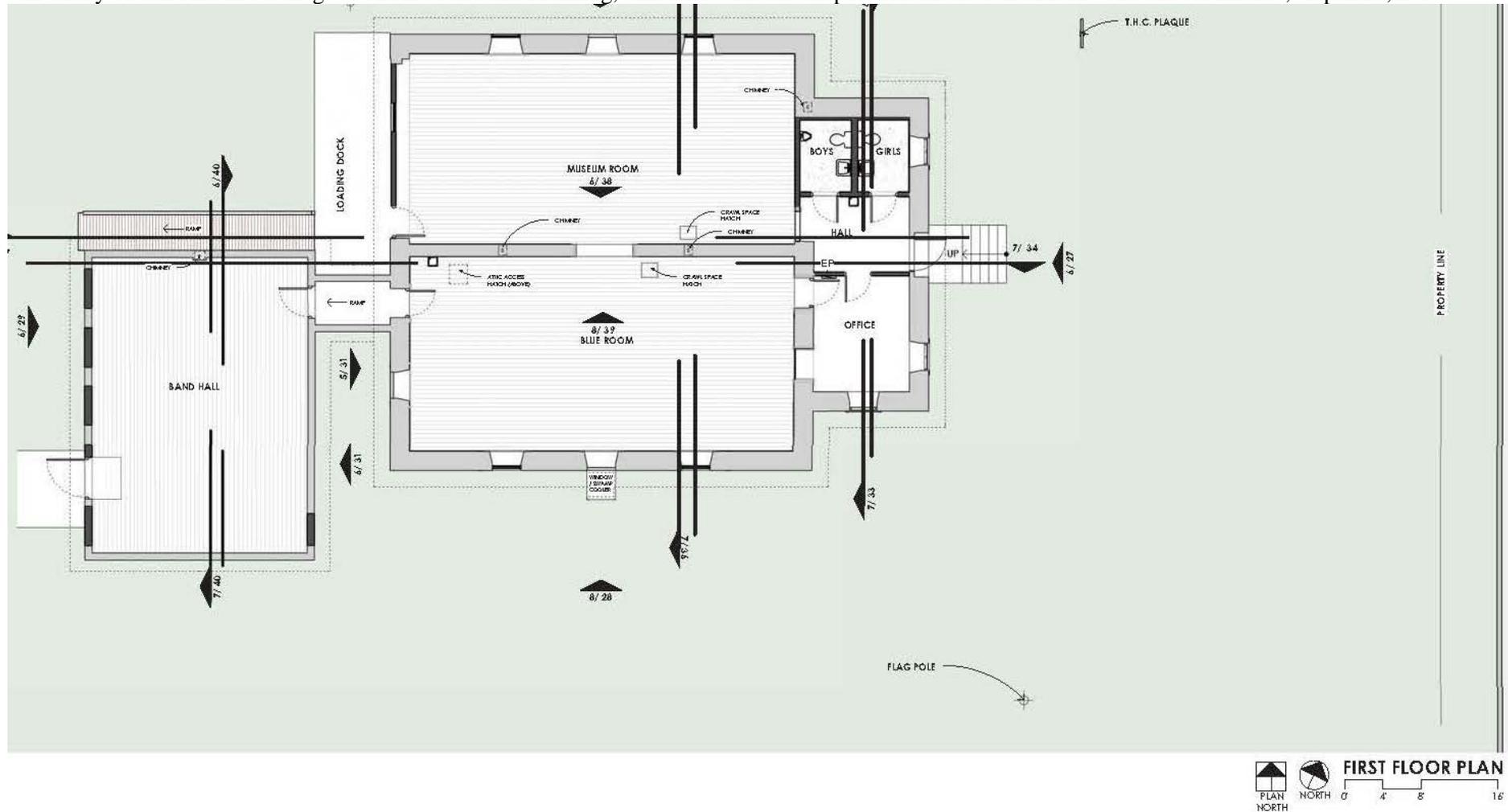
Map 3: Marfa, Presidio County, Texas. Google Maps accessed June 10, 2019.



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

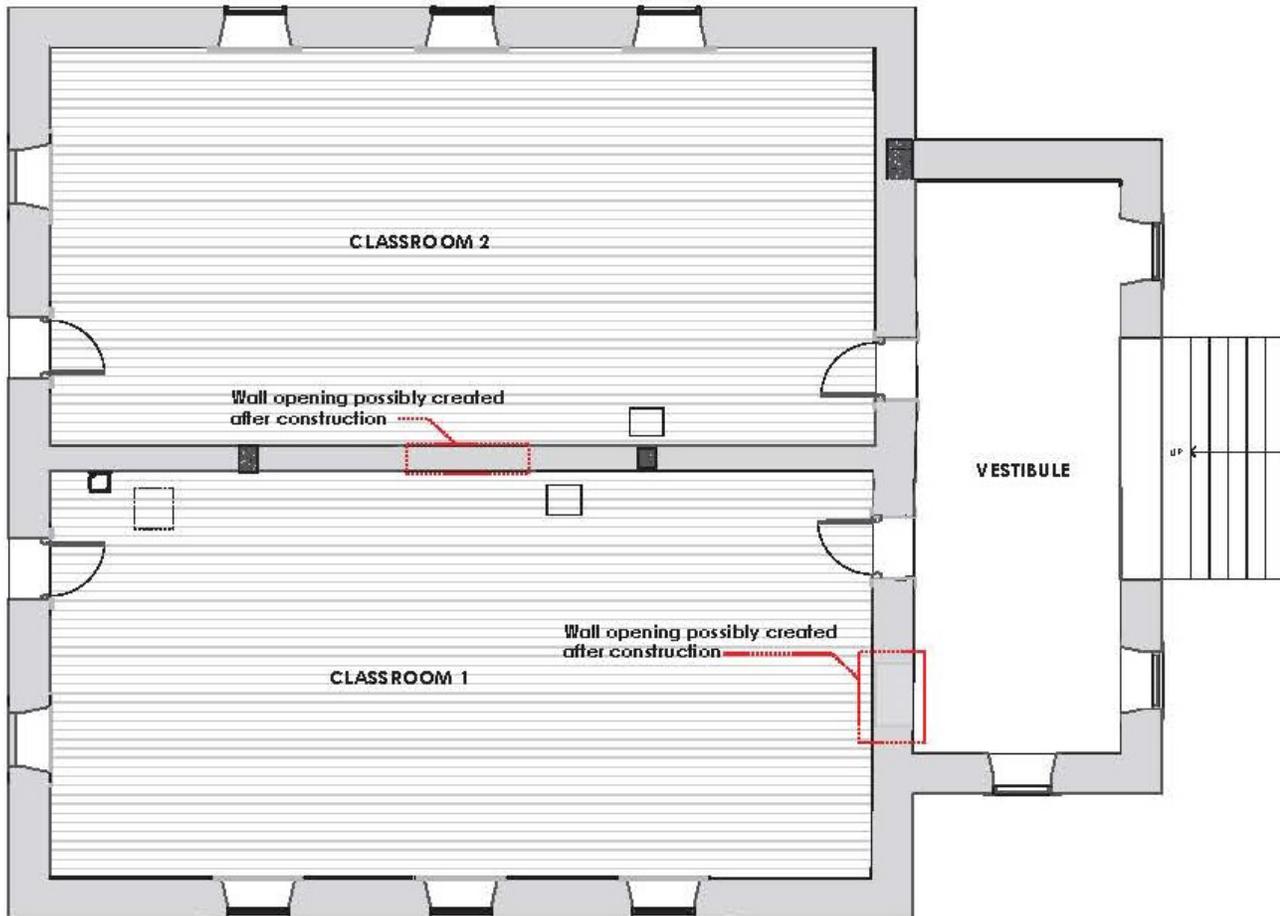
Figures

Figure 1: 1909 Blackwell School and 1927 Band Hall floor plan. **Keys shown do not correspond with the photographs in the nomination.** Source: University of San Antonio College of Architecture and Planning, "Historic Structure Report Presented to the Blackwell School Alliance," April 24, 2019.

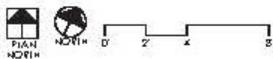


Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

Figure 2: Speculative historic floor plan of 1909 schoolhouse. Source: University of San Antonio College of Architecture and Planning, "Historic Structure Report Presented to the Blackwell School Alliance," April 24, 2019.

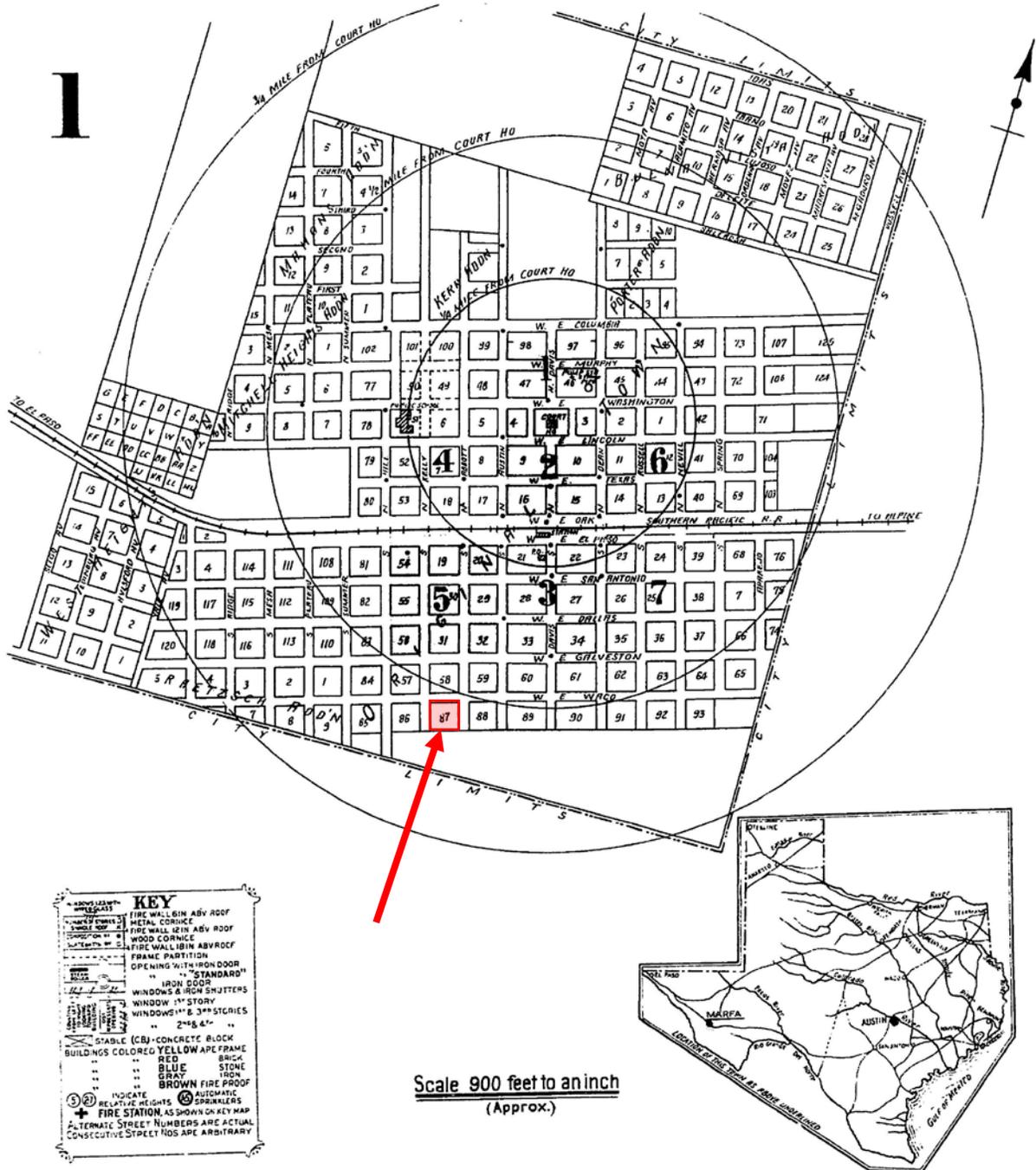


Blackwell School (Marfa, TX): Speculative Floor Plan



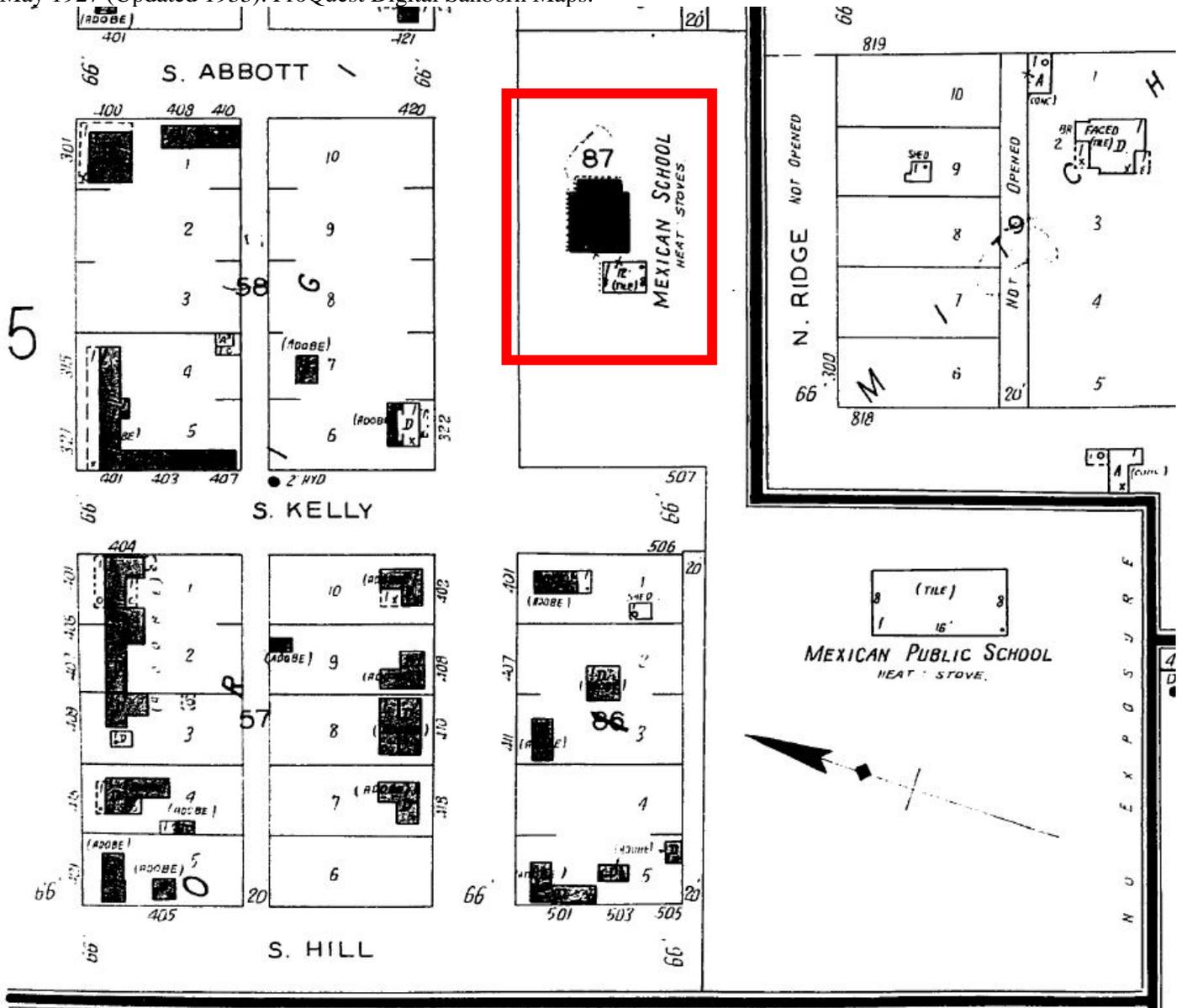
Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

Figure 3: The nominated property is on Block 87 as show on the 1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Marfa, Presidio County. ProQuest Digital Sanborn Maps.



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

Figure 4: The nominated building is outlined in red. Source: Sanborn Map Company. Marfa, Presidio County, Texas, May 1927 (Updated 1933). ProQuest Digital Sanborn Maps.



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

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Figure 5: Mary Shannon's class (c. 1910) standing at the front entrance. The exterior was plastered, and entry vestibule enclosed within five years of the photograph. Source: Blackwell School Alliance



Figure 6: Blackwell School, c. 1930. Source: Blackwell School Alliance



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

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Figure 7: In 1978, the nominated property was a vocational school for Marfa Jr. High. Source: Texas Historical Commission via Portal to Texas History.



Figure 8: Blackwell School Campus, c. 1950. The buildings shown were razed in 1969.



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

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Figure 9: Blackwell School assembly, c. 1950. Source: Blackwell School Alliance



Figure 10: First graders playing on the school playground, c. 1945. Source: Blackwell School Alliance



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

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**Photographs**

Blackwell School

Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

Photographer: Gretel Enck and Bonnie Tipton Wilson

Date: May 18, 2019 and June 14, 2019

Photo 1: Blackwell School and site, looking northwest. (June 14, 2019)



Photo 2: Primary (east) elevation of 1909 schoolhouse, looking west. (June 14, 2019)



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

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Photo 3: North elevation of 1909 schoolhouse, looking south. (June 14, 2019)



Photo 4: West elevation of 1909 schoolhouse, looking east. (June 14, 2019)



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

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Photo 5: South elevation showing 1909 schoolhouse, looking north. (June 14, 2019)



Photo 6: South elevation showing 1927 Band Hall and connecting hyphen, looking north. (June 14, 2019)



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

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Photo 7: The gable end of the 1909 building has two restrooms on its north side. (May 18, 2019)



Photo 8: A small office is on the south side of the 1909 building in the gable end. (May 18, 2019)



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

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Photo 9: View of north classroom, looking west. (May 18, 2019)



Photo 10: Interior opening between classrooms. Looking northeast. (May 18, 2019)



Blackwell School, Marfa, Presidio County, Texas

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Photo 11: View of south classroom, looking east. (May 18, 2019)



Photo 12: Interior of Band Hall, looking south. (May 18, 2019)

