

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

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Palacios Colored School
Other name/site number: Rainbow Land Daycare, Sanford Community Center
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 907 8th Street
City or town: Palacios State: Texas County: Matagorda
Not for publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐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


Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Signature of certifying official / Title
Date 3/20/2025
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

Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, 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	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: Education: school

Current Functions: Social: clubhouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification: Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements: Bungalow/Craftsman

Principal Exterior Materials: Wood, Glass, Asphalt Shingles

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

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Education, Ethnic Heritage: Black (*local level of significance*)

Period of Significance: 1939-1963

Significant Dates: 1939

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

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

Architect/Builder: NA

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8-10 through 8-17)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 9-18 through 9-19)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. Part 1 approved on (date)
- ☐ 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:

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: 28.708915°N Longitude: -96.220634°

Verbal Boundary Description: PALACIOS ORIGINAL TOWNSITE, BLOCK 81, LOT 1-4 and LOT 15-18 as recorded by Matagorda CAD (Property ID#42798 and 42788, accessed June 21, 2024) and shown on Map 5.

Boundary Justification: The nominated boundary includes all property currently and historically associated with Palacios Colored School.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Conor Herterich (Northeast Texas Program Manager) and Robin Lewis (Property Owner)
Organization: Preservation Texas
Street & number: 100 E. San Antonio St
City or Town: San Marcos State: TX Zip Code: 78666
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Date: 10/15/2023

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets Map-20 through Map-22)

Additional items (see continuation sheets Figure-23 through Figure-27)

Photographs (see continuation sheets Photo-28 through Photo-45)

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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Photograph Log

Name of Property: Palacios Colored School

City or Vicinity: Palacios

County: Matagorda State: Texas Photographer: Robin Lewis

Date Photographed: 10/06/2023

Photo #0001 East (primary) elevation.

Photo #0019 View of original walls and ceiling boards
in hallway.

Photo #0002 South elevation.

Photo #0003 West elevation.

Photo #0004 North elevation.

Photo #0005 Room #1 (see floor plan).

Photo #0006 Room #2 (see floor plan).

Photo #0007 Room #3 (see floor plan).

Photo #0008 Room #4 (see floor plan).

Photo #0009 Interior view of windows in men's
restroom.

Photo #0010 Interior view of enclosed porch (now a
hallway).

Photo #0011 Exterior view of non-original exit doors
on Room #4.

Photo #0012 Original pine plank wood flooring.

Photo #0013 Original plank ceiling.

Photo #0014 Original wainscoting.

Photo #0015 Fiberboard ceiling and wood walls in
storage room.

Photo #0016 Transom windows covered by plywood.

Photo #0017 Photo of the front of the building (east
elevation) when it was Rainbow Land Daycare.

Photo #0018 Exterior view of the wood windows
servicing the men's restroom.

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Narrative Description

Palacios Colored School is at 907 8th Street on the west side of Palacios, Matagorda County, Texas. The chain-link fenced property is a large, flat lot in a residential neighborhood, and an abundance of trees shade the schoolyard. Built in 1939, Palacios Colored School is a one-story wood-frame building with a front-facing E-plan raised on a concrete pier foundation. Non-historic asphalt shingles cover the hipped and front-facing gable roof, and exterior walls have original wood clapboard siding in the double ogee style. Interior classrooms, arranged on the building's west side, feature an abundance of natural light from original 6/6 wood frame windows and hardwood floors. Although its construction post-dates the Rosenwald School Building Program, the nominated schoolhouse resembles the design principles it promoted in the east-west oriented floorplan, banded arrangement of large windows under the roofline, minimal ornament, and economy of construction. Palacios Colored School, now a community center, is in good condition and retains integrity to demonstrate its historical significance.

Setting

Matagorda County is located on the Gulf of Mexico in southeast Texas, approximately 50 miles southwest of Houston. The county is 1,612 square miles in size and is comprised of flat coastal prairie. A narrow barrier island known as Matagorda Peninsula is located a short distance off the coastline of the county. The peninsula creates Matagorda Bay, which is divided into two distinct portions by the Colorado River channel: East Matagorda Bay, and Matagorda Bay proper, which is larger and extends north into an inland bay called Tres Palacios Bay. Tres Palacios Bay is located at the southwestern corner of the county, on the mouth of the Tres Palacios River. The town of Palacios occupies a point on a bend in Tres Palacios Bay. The Palacios Colored School property is located near Central Palacios, which is a grid-like network of streets approximately one square mile in size with mostly residential buildings. The school is in a neighborhood with mostly non-historic infill and is the only non-residential building in the immediate vicinity.

Site

The site consists of two adjacent property parcels (#42798 and #42788) and encompasses the eastern third of Block 81 in Palacios, Texas. The school building is situated on the eastern side of parcel #42798 at the corner of Johnson Avenue and 8th Street. Behind the school is a green space consisting of a stand of pine trees and a community garden. To the south of the school is parcel #42788 which is a large green space with a mix of planted pine and oak trees that is known locally as "The Forest". There is an asphalt footpath around the perimeter of the parcel. Inside the ring formed by the path is playground equipment, wooden benches, a basketball court, and dozens of mature trees. A chain-link fence surrounds the entire property and the only gated access is located directly in front of the school. A wide concrete path leads from the gate to the two front doors of the school building.

Exterior

Palacios Colored School is a one-story, wood-framed building constructed from a two-room schoolhouse that was moved to this site and expanded in 1939. It has five rectangular bays that form an "E" shape with two recessed entrances facing east towards 8th Street. Historically, these were open porches and enclosed at an unknown date. There are four classroom bays and a fifth bay comprised of a small office and two restrooms. Each classroom has one or two associated cloak rooms and storage rooms. The entire structure rests on a foundation of short concrete piers and wood beams that is raised above the ground and covered by non-historic plastic corrugated panels that are painted white. The building's exposed exterior walls have the original double ogee, clapboard white wood siding. Walls on the southern portion of the building are 12-feet-tall while the northern three bays have 10-foot-high walls.¹ The original wood,

¹ All wall heights are measured above the interior finished floors.

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double hung, vertical sash windows with wood sills are a variety of sizes. The following sizes, referenced in subsequent paragraphs, are the most common: *large* with 9/9 panes (3'-4" wide by 7'-10" tall), *medium* with 6/6 panes (3'-4" wide x 6'-4" tall), and *small* with 6/6 panes (3'-4" wide x 4'-6" tall). The windows are typically arranged in banks of multiple windows on one side of each room to maximize the interior's natural daylight. Non-historic single-hung metal windows with 9/6 panes (2'-7" x 6'-0") are in the enclosed entry halls. The roof is of non-historic asphalt shingles featuring one-foot overhangs with exposed rafters.

The building's 114' long **east (primary) elevation** (Photo #0001) consists of the three 22' wide extending wings that comprise the projecting arms of the "E" shape. The easternmost exterior walls have no windows. The two recessed areas of the east façade consist of entry doors and windows. The 32' wide southern, recessed area includes the main entrances to the building with adjacent metal windows. A second accessible entry door, near the main entrance, is accessed by a concrete ramp with metal railings. The two half lite entry doors are separated by two metal windows. To the north of the main entry door there are three metal windows. The narrower 16' wide, northern recessed area of the east façade is a secondary entrance consisting of a half lite door with a metal window to each side. Both stepped entrances are accessed by a three-riser wood stairway with wood railings that is built over an original wide, single, concrete step. All three east facing entry doors have a small curved, metal, wall mounted canopy to protect each door from rain. The recessed entries each have their own shallow shingled shed roof and were originally porches for the Palacios Colored School. The restroom bay's east wall has the building's only gable wall and the only decorative details, which include a louvered attic vent, wood fascia and knee braces supporting the gabled roof overhang to the east. There are three *small* wood windows in the north and south walls of the restroom's bay. There is an electrical service weather head, service mast, electrical panel, electrical meter and phone box mounted on the restroom's gable wall.

The **south elevation** (Photo #0002) has one 41' long, 12' high exterior wall with a battery of 7 *large* wood windows. There are 2 very small (2'-4" wide by 2'-0" high) double hung, metal windows below the *large* wood windows and near the floor which were added at an unknown date to assist in ventilation in Room #1.

The **west elevation** (Photo #0003) is one 114' long exterior wall. The southern half of the façade has 12' high walls. The western wall, for the width of Room #1, has a solid exit door with a 9-pane fixed window above it. To each side of the exit door is a *medium* wood window. The next section of the western façade is Room #2 with 12' high walls and a battery of 7 *large* wood windows. The northern half of the western façade walls are 10' high. There are two groups of windows on the exterior wall of Room #3. There are 2 *medium* wood windows to the south and 4 *medium* wood windows to the north. There is a vertical break in the exterior siding on each end of Room #3. This suggests that Room #3 was connected to Room #4 and Room #2 at different times in the building's history.

The **north elevation** (Photo# 0004) has one 41' long, 10' high exterior wall with a battery of 7 *medium* wood windows.

Interior

The two southern rooms of the building, Room #1 (Photo #0005) and Room #2 (Photo #0006), each have 12' high ceilings and are arranged in an ell shape and each has its own attached cloakroom and storage room. Each classroom's interior dimensions are approximately 21' x 31'. The 4 cloak /storage rooms are approximately 5' x 10'. These two rooms have a 5' high wainscot of wood beadboard and there are blackboards with chalk trays on three walls of each room. The floors are all the original 1x4 wood tongue and groove planks.

The northern two rooms of the building are arranged in an ell shape and consist of Room #3 (Photo #0007) and Room #4 (Photo #0008). These rooms, and their associated cloakroom and/or storage rooms, have 10' high ceilings. The

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floors are the original 1x4 wood tongue and groove planks. Room #4 is a mirror image of Room #1, although its ceiling is 2'-0" lower, and the windows are shorter with 6/6 panes.

Room #3 is unique to the other three classrooms. It is the same width as the other three classrooms, but its longest interior dimension is 7'-0" longer than the others. The 37' room is divided into one larger 22'-8" classroom and a smaller area 14'-3" area to the south. The rooms are divided by a partial wall with an 11'-0" opening in the center. This room is most likely the oldest part of the building and is a one-teacher school plan comprised of a classroom and industrial area.

The restroom bay has *small* wood double hung windows to the north and south of this wing (Photo #0018). There is a small room between the restroom entrances that may have originally been a teacher's workroom and is currently used as an office. This room has a door and a window that open into the hallway. The two restroom doors and the office door all had operable transoms above for ventilation that have been filled in with wood. There is a window in the office that opens into the hallway. Two high and very small openings (10" x 10") open from the office into each restroom's entry hallway. The office and restroom entry halls all have floors of original 1x4 wood tongue and groove planks.

Alterations

The original porches of the Palacios Colored School connected Rooms #1, #2, #3, #4, the teacher's workroom and the restrooms. The porches each had their own shallow shed roof (Figure 3). These porches were enclosed with metal doors and windows to form a hallway at an unknown date (Photo #0010). It is not known if the porches were enclosed when the building was the Palacios Colored School or the Rainbow Land Daycare. The porches were each accessed by an original wide, single, concrete step. Two new three-riser wood stairways with wood railings were built over the single step. The concrete ramp, railings and second entry door were added at an unknown date. The original 1x4 tongue and groove porch floors were replaced with plywood.

New exit doors were added to the rear of Room #1 and Room #4 to satisfy the fire exiting requirements of the Rainbow Land Daycare which opened in 1968. There is a 3-riser concrete precast concrete stairway at each west exit door (Photo #0011).

Original interior walls and ceilings were altered in numerous locations. The upper portion of all classroom walls and ceilings are currently drywall. Fiberboard wall sheathing and fiberboard ceiling tiles were originally in Rooms #1 & #2 and were replaced during the Sanford Community Center reconstruction. The original fiberboard materials can be seen today in the cloakroom and storage room adjacent to each room (Photo #0015). Wood shiplap walls in Room #3 have been replaced with drywall (Photo #0007). Examples of the original wood boards can be seen in Room #3's storage room, in the hallway (Photo #0019) and in the restrooms.

Various heating, cooling and ventilation systems are evident throughout the Palacios Colored School. There is a wood framed flue in the northeast corner of Room #1 (Photo #0005) and the southeast corner of Room #2 that provided original wood stoves in each room with fresh air in-take and exhausted smoke. There is also evidence of hot water radiators in Room #1 and Room #2 for heating that replaced the wood stoves. A gas wall furnace was also located at one time on the common wall between Rooms #1 and #2 and between Rooms #3 and #4 and they have both been removed. These former heating systems have been replaced with a central heating system that is now located in what was at one time a toilet room accessed from Room #2. The furnace serves the entire building with ductwork through the roof trusses and diffusers are in the ceiling of each room of the building. Both Rooms #1 and #2 originally had "breeze windows" or transoms on the walls opposite of the banks of 7 large windows and allowed for cross ventilation through the classrooms onto the original porch. These original breeze windows and door transoms have been replaced

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with fixed plexiglass or plywood (Photo #0016). In recent years, 5 ground mounted air conditioning condenser units have been installed across the west rear façade.

The roof of the Palacios Colored School has been altered. The most current roofing material is asphalt shingles. The original roofing material is unknown. The roof of Room #4 at one time had a gabled roof facing east as is seen in a historic photograph of the school (Figure 5). A former student at the Palacios Colored School says one of the school's roofs was damaged during a storm. This seems to be the gable roof of Room #4 that has since been changed to a hipped roof (Photo #0002) and mirrors the roof of Room #1 (Photo #0004).

The construction sequence of the Palacios Colored School can be estimated by newspaper articles in Palacios and Matagorda County Newspapers. Rooms 1 and 2 were originally a frame building located on the white high school campus that was then moved to the current property and remodeled into the Palacios Negro School in 1931. In 1939, Rooms 3 and 4 were added along with an addition to the front of the building for an office and restrooms. Rainbow Land Daycare continued modifications (mostly interior) throughout the years it resided in the building (1968 - 2011) (Photo #0017). The Sanford Center (2017 to present) has begun the process of restoring many of the original features of the Palacios Colored School.

Integrity

Palacios Colored School still retains integrity. The surrounding neighborhood of the school still possesses many of the neighborhood's original characteristics when the school was built in the 1930s. The school's existence as a segregated school ended following the community school district's desegregation in 1963. Although the porch has been enclosed, the original building has remained largely unaltered. The fundamental integrity of the location, setting, design, workmanship, and materials of the Palacios Colored School remain today, and the building is in excellent condition.

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Statement of Significance

Palacios Colored School, in Palacios, Matagorda County, was the sole public school for the coastal town's African American children from 1939 to 1963. The establishment of Camp Hulen and the effects of the Depression on rural communities, led many Texans to Palacios seeking employment. In 1939, Palacios ISD responded to the increase in its African American student body by enlarging its two-room school. The building illustrates the segregation-era practice of providing inadequate educational resources for African American public schools.² Upon completion, the nominated building resembled the era's Rosenwald Schools with its wood frame construction, E-plan, and large west-facing windows. African American teachers matriculated students up to 7th grade in vocational training, the typical pedagogy for Black education at that time. Palacios Colored School closed in 1963 when the school district integrated. It is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Education and Ethnic Heritage: Black at the local level of significance for the period 1939-1963.

Brief History of Palacios, Matagorda County

In the late 1820s, the county of Matagorda was settled by Anglo Americans who were drawn to the area by the rich farmland and access to trade from the Gulf of Mexico. As a result, a strong plantation economy developed in the area. By 1850 there were 2,124 people living in the county, including 913 white citizens, 1,208 enslaved people, and 3 freedmen. Between 1850 and 1855 many enslaved people were brought into the county, largely by slaveholders from Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia, to work on large plantations in the bottomlands of the Colorado River and Caney Creek. The profitable plantation economy encouraged planters to bring more enslaved people into the area, and the county's minority white population took various steps to ensure their control. Citizens established a curfew for enslaved and free persons of color as early as 1850. The need to project their control over their slaves was also used by white citizens in 1856 to justify expelling the county's entire Mexican population. As one newspaper item contended, the Mexicans in the county were known to "hang around the plantations, taking the likeliest negro girls for wives.... they often steal horses, and these girls, too, and endeavor to run them to Mexico."³

Between 1850 and 1860, Matagorda County's enslaved population saw an increase of over 200%. By 1860, there were over 1,500 enslaved laborers in the county with a general population of nearly 3,500 people. Though Union troops never entered Matagorda County during the war, the Union blockade of the Texas coast restricted foreign trade, greatly hampering the Matagorda economy that relied on the foreign cotton trade. Because of a serious decline in cotton production due to decreasing land values and the emancipation of slaves following the Civil War, Matagorda County's cotton production did not rebound until the 1870s, and the overall economy and population grew slowly until the end of the 19th century.⁴

The city of Palacios did not begin to develop until the early twentieth century when the Texas Rice Development Company (TRDC) purchased land and subdivided it into lots which subsequently developed into the town of Palacios. The town's longevity was secured when the Townsite Company (a subsidiary of the TRDC) paid a bonus to the Southern Pacific Railroad to extend its line to Palacios in 1903. That same year the Hotel Palacios, a pavilion, and a pier were built to attract and accommodate recreational tourists. Almost immediately, seafood and related businesses opened in Palacios to take advantage of the town's prime location on Tres Palacios Bay, and these businesses

² Susan Cianci Salvatore, et al, *Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States*, Theme Study for the National Park Service, August 2000, 35–36, 56, www.nps.gov.

³ Diana J. Kleiner, "Matagorda County", Handbook of Texas Online, accessed September 25, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/matagorda-county>

⁴ Kleiner, "Matagorda County".

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continued to be important to the Palacios economy through the 1990s.⁵ In addition, the town leaders marketed Palacios as an ideal place for a variety of fruit orchards and farming. Cotton and rice became important products by 1910. Hallmarks of town buildings emerged in the first years after the townsite was platted; in addition to residential construction, civic and commercial building commenced. The first church, a Methodist church, was organized in 1903 and the first newspaper started in 1906 (now *The Palacios Beacon*). Palacios residents voted to incorporate in 1909.⁶ By 1915, about 2,000 residents lived in Palacios, according to the townsite company. The town grew as agricultural jobs farming cotton and rice were abundant, and by 1915 the town had a post office, several churches, school, library, and population of over 2,000 people.

In 1926, the Texas National Guard opened a major training camp there called Camp Palacios (later renamed Camp Hulen in 1930). The Camp provided a significant increase in local jobs as civilians were needed to perform service, maintenance, and support roles. As a result, many rural Black farmers who had been sharecropping areas of Matagorda County moved to Palacios to gain employment at the military facility which offered higher wages and improved working conditions.⁷ Palacios was relatively unaffected by the Great Depression of the 1930s as the seafood business, discovery of nearby fossil fuels, and Camp Hulen helped stabilize the local economy. During this decade several significant improvements were made to the city: a natural gas line was built to the city providing hot water to its residents, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built a new seawall, and work began on all weather roads for bus routes.⁸ The population of Palacios exploded in the 1940s as Camp Hulen was enlarged with new barracks, mess halls, and a hospital to accommodate thousands of new soldiers who arrived there for training during WWII. By 1942, everything “habitable” was occupied or converted to rental properties to house the families of the soldiers and local businesses thrived. During this decade both a new hospital and airport were built, the port was improved to facilitate more tonnage, and the Palacios school system was enlarged by incorporating Turtle Bay school and building a new stadium.⁹

The 1960s was a tough decade for the city of Palacios as it was severely impacted by two hurricanes, Carla (1961) and Beulah (1962). These storms destroyed what remained of the local fishing fleet and damaged virtually every building in town. The aftermath of the storms left a lengthy cleanup, and it took the citizens of Palacios decades to recover.¹⁰ Furthermore Camp Hulen was closed and sold to developers in 1965 and remained abandoned for decades.¹¹ As a result of the erosion of the local economic base during the decade, the city of Palacios did not attain meaningful growth again until the 1990s.

Criterion A: Ethnic Heritage/Black and Education

Historic Context: Segregated Education in Palacios, Matagorda County

The foundation for the Palacios Colored School’s existence is a direct product of the American racial segregation system, which was reinforced in 1896 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation was constitutional in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and so established the idea of “separate but equal.” The separate facilities provided for Black citizens were rarely equal; usually they were not even close to equal, or they did not exist at all.¹²

⁵ Claybourne, Colleen, *Historic Matagorda County: Volume I*, Houston: D Armstrong Co. 1986, page 367.

⁶ Claybourne, p. 369.

⁷ Mary L. Griffin, “Palacios, TX,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed January 24, 2024, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/palacios-tx>

⁸ Claybourne, p. 374.

⁹ Claybourne, p. 376-376.

¹⁰ Claybourne, p. 275.

¹¹ Claybourne, p. 380.

¹² *“Separate but Equal – Separate Is Not Equal”*. americanhistory.si.edu.

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The facilities and social services offered to Black citizens were almost always of a lower quality than those offered to their white counterparts. Black schools had less public funding per student than nearby white schools, used old textbooks and equipment discarded by the white schools, and relied on poorly paid, prepared, or educated teachers.¹³ This was certainly the case in Palacios. In 1933 The Palacios Colored School, funded by the Palacios Independent School District (PISD), was built at a total cost of \$716.40.¹⁴ In compliance with the residential segregation restrictions imposed on Black citizens, the school was placed in the “negro section of the town.”¹⁵ Historically, the city’s Black population was relegated to the northwest quadrant of the town, north of Richie Street and west of the railroad tracks that divided the town in half. This division, which bisects the city north/south along 7th Street, has been a feature of Palacios since it was established in 1903 and can be seen on the original townsite map. In comparison, just three years later the high school for white students in Palacios was built at a cost of approximately \$90,000. A city bond and a federally approved Public Works Administration grant and loan were used to pay for the structure that was designed by famed Texas architect Harry D. Payne.¹⁶

Data recorded in a 1938 study further exemplifies the inequality of educational resources. The scholastic population of Palacios at this time was 865 students, 57 of whom were Black (roughly 7%). According to this study, the Palacios Colored School (which was classified as an elementary school) was a frame building with three classrooms and a combined building and supply value of \$1,300. The white elementary school in Palacios was a brick building with twenty classrooms and a combined building and supply value of \$53,400. The white students were allocated over forty times the dollar value of educational resources as the Black students who were 7% of the population.¹⁷

To address the abysmal conditions of Black education in the southern United States, millionaire philanthropist Julius Rosenwald partnered with Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute to fund the design and construction of schools for Black students across the rural South. The ensuing Rosenwald School Building Program, which lasted from 1913 to 1932, not only built thousands of schools across the South (over 500 in Texas alone) but also improved Black education in other important areas as well. Schools participating in the program were required to have school terms of at least five months, meet teacher pay standards, and provide adequate transportation for students. The Rosenwald Program also funded teacher homes, libraries, and vocational equipment.¹⁸ While other school districts in Matagorda participated in the Rosenwald School Building Program, Palacios ISD did not.

Palacios Colored School

The Two-Room School

The first mention of a “Negro” school in Palacios, Texas was for the 1928-29 school year. The April 4, 1929, edition of the *Beacon* reported that “during the 1928-29 school year ... a Negro school has been maintained at a cost of approximately \$300.00.” Unfortunately, no further information about the school could be found. There is no mention of the location of the school, its structure, teacher, or number of students attending.

¹³ *“Black-white student achievement gap persists”*. *NBC News*. July 14, 2009.

¹⁴ *Palacios Beacon*, March 23, 1933

¹⁵ *Palacios Beacon* March 23, 1933; <https://www.reportingtexas.com/a-historical-look-at-jim-crow-laws-in-texas>; (Figure 2).

¹⁶ *Palacios Beacon*, Nov 12, 1936

¹⁷ Frank J. Balusek, “Survey and Proposed Reorganization of the Schools of Matagorda County, Texas” (Master of Education Thesis. University of Texas, 1939), 25b.

¹⁸ Karen D. Riles, “Historic and Architectural Resources Associated with the Rosenwald School Building Program National Register of Historic Places Nomination,” Texas Historical Commission, 1998.

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In the December 10, 1931, issue of the *Beacon* it was reported that the “work of tearing down and removing the frame building on the southeast corner of the high school (2nd and Moore St.) was begun this week. The material is being taken to a location west of the S.P. railroad and will be rebuilt into a two-room building for the colored children, thus giving them a much better and commodious place for educational work.”

These efforts led to the first school built (or rebuilt) specifically for the purpose of educating Black school children in Palacios. The school district paid all costs for materials, real estate and labor. Based on an article in the *Beacon*, the school maintained in 1928 was not sufficient for the needs of the students and there was a need for a better and more spacious location. This school was a two-room structure located on Humphrey St, between 8th and 9th Streets [lot 7, block 80]. The *Beacon* publication from March 23, 1933, clarifies and expands on the December 1931 report. “The (PISD) board purchased the Callaway property on the south-east corner of the high school campus and a lot in the negro section of the town. The building on the Callaway property was moved to the other lot and remodeled into a 2-room negro school; the whole transaction costing \$716.40.” The teacher for this school was Lola Mulkey.

School Enlarged and Relocated Again

In 1939 this 2-room building was relocated to 907 Eighth Street (also in the Black section of Palacios – west of the Southern Pacific railroad tracks) where it was used as the primary modular component of what became the five-room Palacios Colored School building. The original 2-room structure still exists as the two rooms on the southern side of the extant school building.¹⁹

Plans to relocate the school were discussed and approved at the June 1939 PISD School Board Meeting where the committee made its report which included a proposed plan, cost estimates, and a recommendation that the building be constructed. After some discussion, a motion was made, seconded, and carried, that the report of the committee be adopted as recommended.²⁰

At the August 1, 1939 board meeting, the board approved a bid on the materials needed to construct the negro school. The bid from Grant Lumber Company was approved for \$984.20. Guy Johnson and Wesley Buller were appointed to attend to the details of the construction.

Bills approved by the board of trustees during that time included payments for labor on the school to Andy Campbell, John Shannon, C.V. Valdez, D. Jordan, J.H. Wilkerson, E.A. Linquist, Bill Wagner, Ira Ressler, Joe Ressler, and Vernon Damstorm.²¹

Work on the New Building

On August 21, 1939, work began on the new school building. A notice was placed in the *Beacon*, notifying citizens that “any delinquent taxpayers owing taxes to the School District who desire to work out the amount of their delinquent school taxes on this building may make application at once.”²² There is no indication of how many if anyone- white or Black, took up the offer. We do know that at least one Black man, John Shannon, was a paid laborer

¹⁹ The Palacios Colored School was not part of the Rosenwald School Building Program and post-dates the termination of that program which ended in 1932.

²⁰ Herbert Ressler, a former business manager for Palacios ISD, had access to the minutes from Palacios ISD School Board meetings and compiled information about the Palacios Colored School into an unpublished document that he shared with the authors in an email dated July 12th, 2023.

²¹ John Shannon was the grandfather of Troy Lewis who formed the Palacios Community Coalition 501 c 3. This group restored the Palacios Colored School building and opened it as the Sanford Community Center in 2021

²² *Palacios Beacon*, August 17, 1939

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on the project as it is listed in the minutes of the PISD August 1, 1939 board meeting that his bill was paid by them. The school was completed in one month and opened its doors on October 2, 1939.²³ The teacher at the school was again, Lola Mulkey.²⁴ According to the April 1940 school census, there were 37 students enrolled aged 6 to 16 years old.

It is important to note that one of the contributing factors for an enlargement of the colored school was the population growth that the city of Palacios experienced due to the expansion of Camp Hulen National Guard base. The growth of the base brought work opportunities to the city of Palacios that were sought by many of the surrounding population of Black and white Texans alike.²⁵

The School Days (1939-1963)

By 1941, the Palacios Colored School had significantly upgraded its faculty. The school and the city of Palacios benefited greatly from the dedication, tenacity and high standards of two key figures in particular: Professor Granville Sanford, who served as the school's principal, and his wife, Mrs. Carita Foley Sanford, who served as a teacher alongside Lola Mulkey. Mrs. Carita Sanford graduated from the Prairie View Normal College with a master's degree, and Principal Granville Sanford graduated from the same college (then named Prairie View A&M) with a bachelor's degree.

Granville and Carita Sanford were the primary operators of the school from 1941 until it was closed in 1963. It is not recorded how long Lola Mulkey (Lola V. Mulkey Payne) remained as a teacher at the school. Other teachers at the school through the years were Myrtle Owens Pernetter, Marguerite Reynolds, Elizabeth Oakes, and Ruby Deadrick. Due to the outstanding education and high standards of the Sanfords, Palacios Colored School students won many awards during their tenure. The Palacios Colored School students competed and often won at the Texas Interscholastic League of Colored Schools at the meets for county, district, and state as well as local contests. The awards ranged from spelling, writing, music, athletics and more.²⁶ Larry Deadrick, a student of Miss Lola Mulkey who was the first recorded teacher in the negro schools and later of the Sanford's, said that they (the Sanfords) raised the bar at the Palacios Colored School:

We competed in UIL activities, what is now known as Academic Decathlon. We competed and Mrs. Sanford didn't allow you to lose. We studied all year. We studied, we studied, the year round. We studied in the cotton fields and everything like that. She passed out poems in the cotton fields and on the, on the brown bags that we took our lunch to the cotton fields in and everything like that. We did math problems and first one thing and then another, and speaking and spelling, essay writing the whole works and everything like that. And we didn't lose. We didn't take prisoners. We didn't take prisoners. She said, "Kids, what are y'all gonna do for me? Y'all gonna bring the bacon home?" We said, "No, Ma'am?" She said, "What are you gonna do then?" We're gonna bring you the whole hog!²⁷

The students under the leadership of the Sanfords presented programs to the public, the soldiers at Camp Hulen, and to the other Palacios Schools. They participated in social events around the city and raised funds for the United Way, Tuberculosis Fund Raisers and for the March of Dimes. The students and the school were a vital part of the Black

²³ *Palacios Beacon*, Sept 28, 1939

²⁴ *Palacios Beacon*, Aug 17, 1939

²⁵ <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/camp-hulen>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palacios,_Texas

²⁶ *Palacios Beacon*, March 24, 1955, April 7, 1955, May 22, 1958, Oct 8, 1959

²⁷ Larry Deadrick, Oral History Interview by Dr. Bonnie Benson, December 16, 2013, Sanford Community Center, <https://sanfordcommunitycenter.org/our-history-1#>

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community in Palacios. The senior class of 1955 was treated to a bus trip to Mexico City, paid for by the Sanfords, in 1955 after which they wrote essays comparing the culture of Mexico to that of Texas and the U.S.

In addition to teaching the traditional educational curriculum, the instructors at the school taught trade skills out of necessity. Sewing, farming, ranching, and cooking were all taught as the teachers opted to provide important skills that would allow their students to land jobs available to Black Americans in a segregated society. The reality of life in southeastern Texas at this time was that there were no professional jobs available to most of the students attending or graduating from the school. The notable dedication and insistence, not just on education, but on educational excellence was a hallmark of the Palacios Colored School, and many of the alumni of the school went on to attend college. The Palacios Black community was not wealthy. Many of the students were from families who came to Palacios with parents looking for work at Camp Hulen as cooks, janitors, and other unskilled labor. Larry Deadrick attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBC) Wiley College in Marshall, Texas and returned to Palacios in 1966 to become the first Black educator to teach in the integrated district.

School and Community

During this period, the school building was a central meeting hub in Palacios for the Black community because Jim Crow laws and threats of violence kept Black citizens from utilizing restaurants, entertainment facilities, and other public spaces. The school hosted many social events and gatherings for the community such as an annual fair held on the school grounds reported in the *Beacon*.²⁸ Carnivals, bake sales, cake walks, picnics, student presentations, and general meetings were held year-round. Carita Sanford, an accomplished pianist often held music presentations at the school with singing and student performances for the parents and community. At these recitals the students performed songs and poetry readings and parents were invited to review the work accomplished during the school term.²⁹

Palacios students matriculating to high school from the Colored School were sent to Hilliard High School in Bay City, Texas some 30 miles from Palacios to further their education. Most traveled by personal cars or by Continental Trailways Bus as the PISD or the city offered no transportation for these students.³⁰

Integration (1963)

Segregation of children in public schools was struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional in 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education*. The PISD formed an Integration Committee made up of Black and White community members to study the problems that would arise through integration.³¹ At the November 12, 1962, board meeting, two prominent Black residents, Doris Heard and Howard Law appeared before the board insisting that Palacios ISD integrate the schools at all grade levels. The board responded that a petition signed by the required number of legally qualified voters would be needed for the board to legally integrate the schools.³² The petition, signed by 189 voters, was presented to the board on June 10, 1963. However, in the time since the November 1962 meeting, and the presentation of the petition, the PISD faced pressure from the Texas Division of Progressive Development and School Accreditation (TDPDSA) who had audited the school, and a petition was no longer required.

The report from the TDPDSA audit was not favorable and questioned the daily duration of many classes and the qualifications of some of the teachers on several subjects being taught. The budget for operating the school was

²⁸ *Palacios Beacon*, Thursday May 25, 1961.

²⁹ *Palacios Beacon*, May 25, 1961, May 23, 1963, June 2, 1955, December 13, 1956.

³⁰ "Larry Moore Deadrick," <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/197323303/larry-moore-deadrick>.

³¹ *Palacios Beacon*, August 25, 1955.

³² Doris Davis Heard, Oral History Interview by Dr. Bonnie Benson, February 4, 2014, Sanford Community Center, <https://sanfordcommunitycenter.org/our-history-1#>

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\$30,06.78 and would need to be increased by more than \$18,500 to meet accreditation standards for the state. Two new teachers would also need to be hired. Finally, in 1963 the PISD board voted to integrate the Palacios schools for economic reasons, and the Palacios Colored School was closed. Approximately 53 Black students entered the mainstream schools, and Ruby Jean Adams became the first Black student to graduate from Palacios Senior High School in 1964.³³

Rainbow Land Day Care (1967 – 2011)

After the school was closed, community members sought a new use for the building. Mary J. King led the movement to establish a day care facility at the site known as Rainbow Land, which sought to provide free or reduced day care for working mothers. As reported in the *Beacon*, September 7, 1967 “The purpose of Rainbow Land is to provide non-profit care for children of whatever race, color or creed whose mothers must work outside the home.” At the April 10, 1967, PISD Board meeting, the school board approved a letter of request from the Citizens Community Nursery Committee to lease the former “negro school” for a child day care center. The Board of Trustees, Executive Director Mary J. King, and staff of nine operated Rainbow Land for 40 years and became a major part of life in Palacios Texas. Mrs. King and her staff allowed the children to help plant some of the 100 trees on site that were donated to the daycare center in 1968 by the Palacios Garden Club. These kids named the park, “the Forest,” which it is still referred to as today. Over the 40 years of the center, several generations of children watched the trees grow and always remembered them. Past clients and care recipients still come by the building and reminisce about attending the day care. The children at the day care all remember what they called “the Forest”.

The Sanford Community Center (2021-Present)

The Sanford Community Center (SCC) is the primary project of the Palacios Community Coalition and is named after Granville and Carita Sanford, the principal and primary teachers respectively at the Palacios Colored School which was open from 1939 to 1963.³⁴

Under the leadership of Troy Lewis, The Palacios Community Coalition, a 501c3 nonprofit, purchased the property from the Palacios Independent School District in 2015. It was in dire need of repairs and renovation. After more than six years of rehabilitation financed by individual donations, small awards, grants and a lot of sweat equity, the center is becoming fully operational as a cultural and community center. The SCC highlights the accomplishments of the Palacios Colored School with displays of period newspaper articles, photographs, and recorded testimonials from former students.

Conclusion

The Palacios Colored School is significant under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage/ Black and Education because it was the only available public educational facility for Black students in Palacios from 1939 until the school district was integrated and the school was closed in 1963. The humble wood frame structure is a reminder of the adversity faced by

³³ *Palacios Beacon*, June 13, 1963.

³⁴ On March 2, 1983, the *Beacon* printed this reference to the death of Professor Granville Sanford, “Another of Palacios Independent School District's dedicated principals and teachers recently passed away. Professor Granville served the children of Southeast Texas and Palacios for thirty-three years of which twenty-two years were at the Palacios Colored School. Professor Sanford and his wife Carita served their students well. Evidence of good teaching, discipline and manners were their strong points. His students can attest to his caring for their welfare in many ways. An example of this caring was the many dollars he spent from his own pocket for school supplies and teaching equipment for his students. The late Superintendent of Palacios, Ralph Newsom, said in a letter located in Professor Sanford's file, ‘I would consider him well above average in thoroughness, discipline and in results obtained.’ Many of his students and many of his fellow teachers know Professor Sanford is now busy teaching on a higher level in the greatest school of all.”

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Black school children in Palacios who were forced to learn in an environment with less facilities, supplies, and teachers than those offered to their white counterparts. Despite these unequal conditions, the school maintained a high degree of academic excellence during its years of operation due to dedicated teachers, like the Sanfords, who rigorously prepared their students for academic competitions and provided them with the skills necessary to gain employment.

Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

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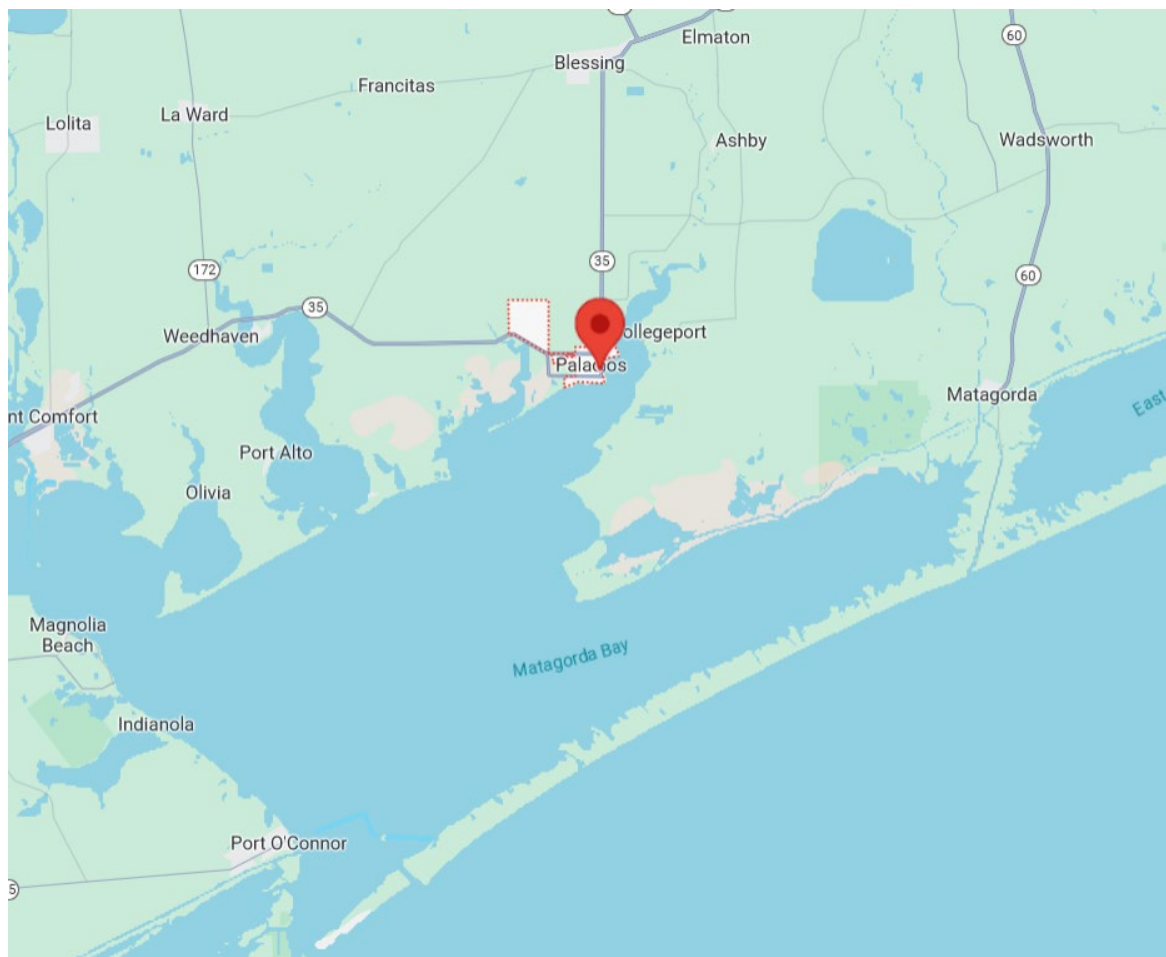
Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Maps

Map 1: Matagorda County, Texas

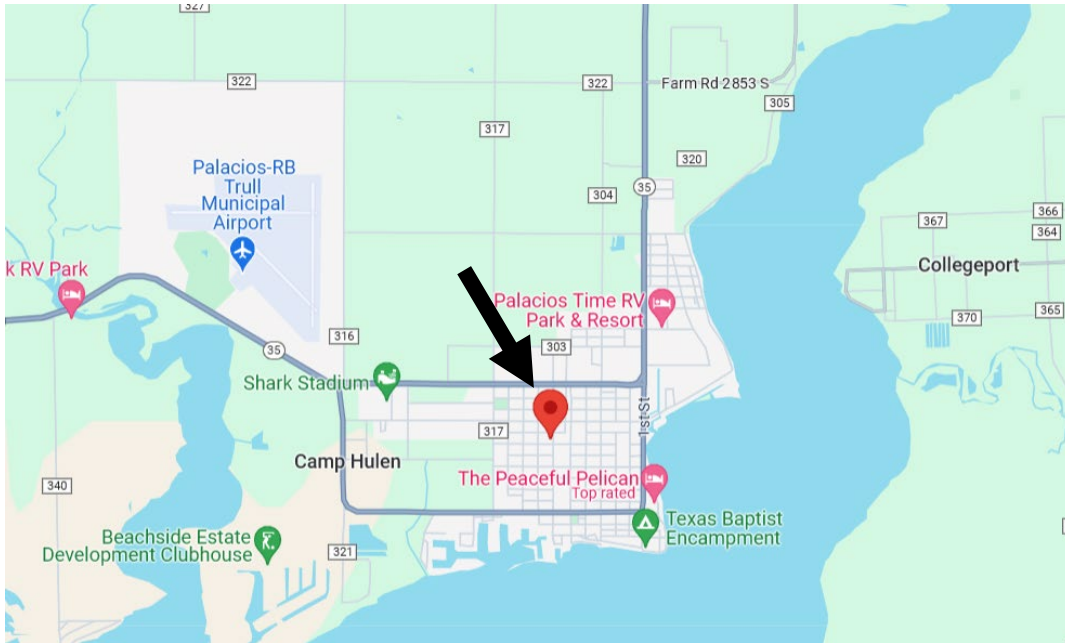


Map 2: Palacios, Matagorda County



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Map 3: Palacios Colored School at 907 8th Street. Source: Google Maps



Map 4: Aerial View of Parcel, Zoomed in Palacios, Palacios Colored School 28.708915° -96.220634°



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

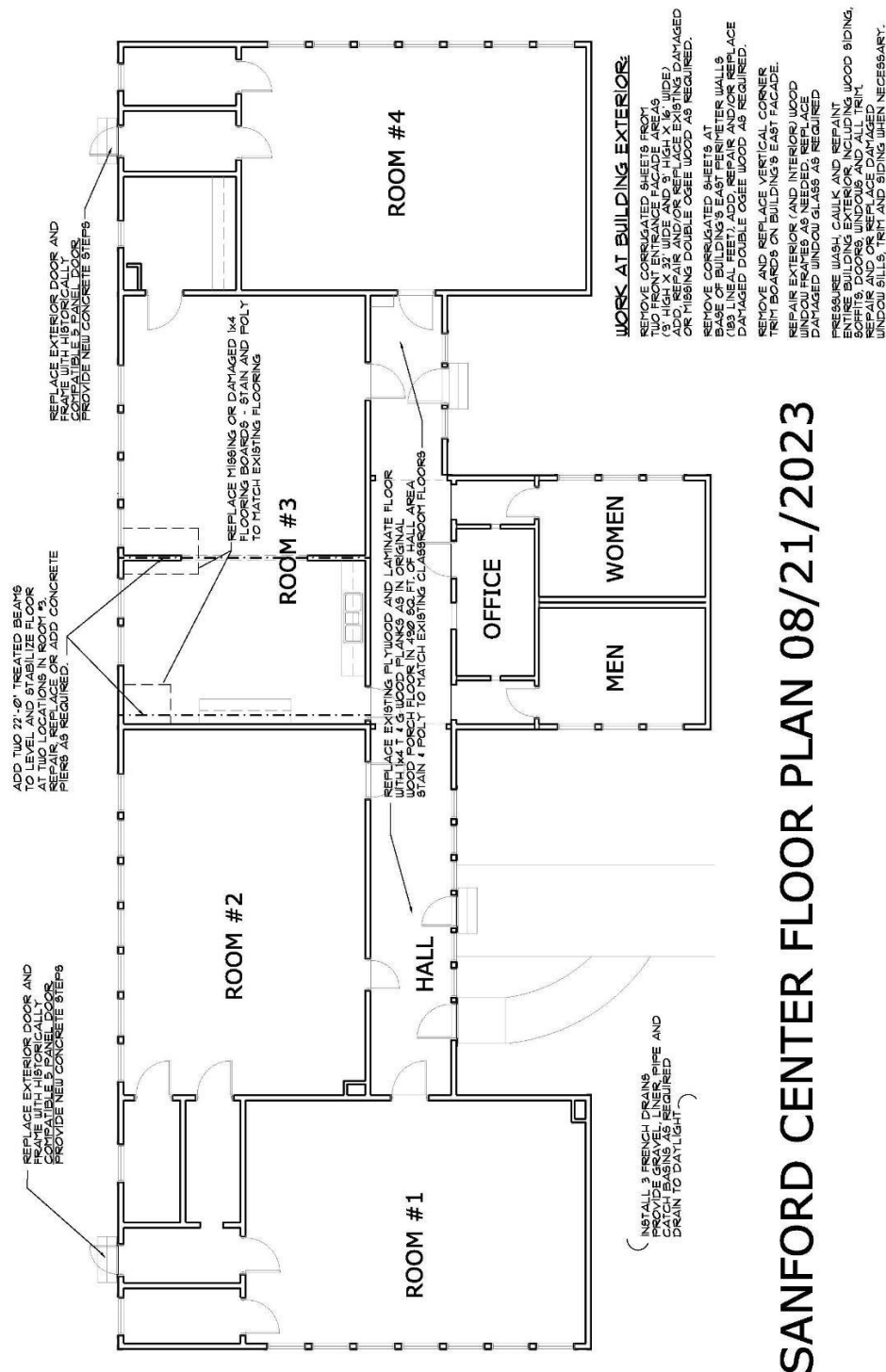
Map 5: Boundary in red. Source: Matagorda CAD, Property ID#42798 and 42788, accessed June 21, 2024



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Figures

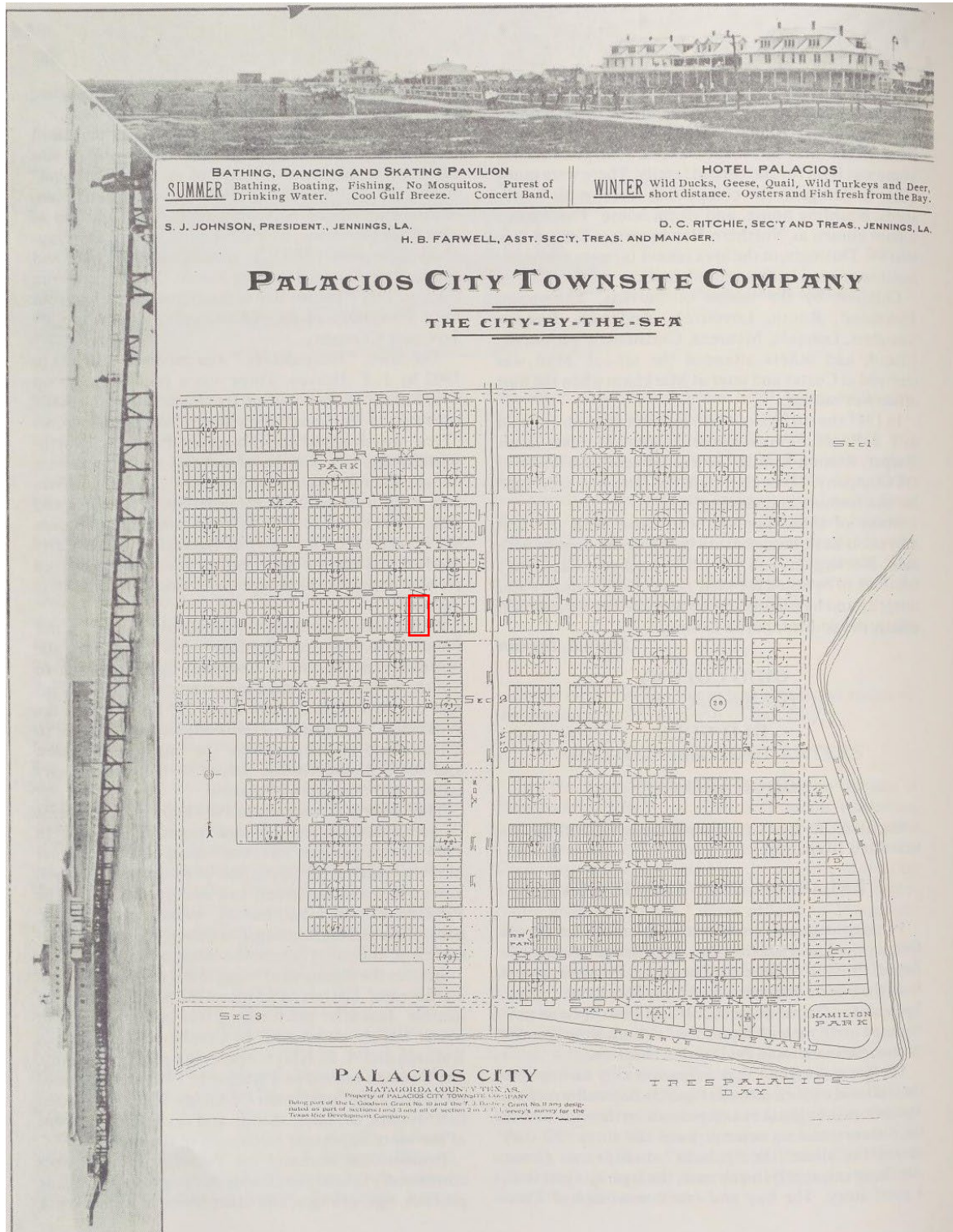
Figure 1: Floor Plan of the Palacios Colored School.



SANFORD CENTER FLOOR PLAN 08/21/2023

Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Figure 2: Original town plat. School property boundary outlined in red.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Figure 3: Historic photo of the southeast elevation of the Palacios Colored School. Date unknown.

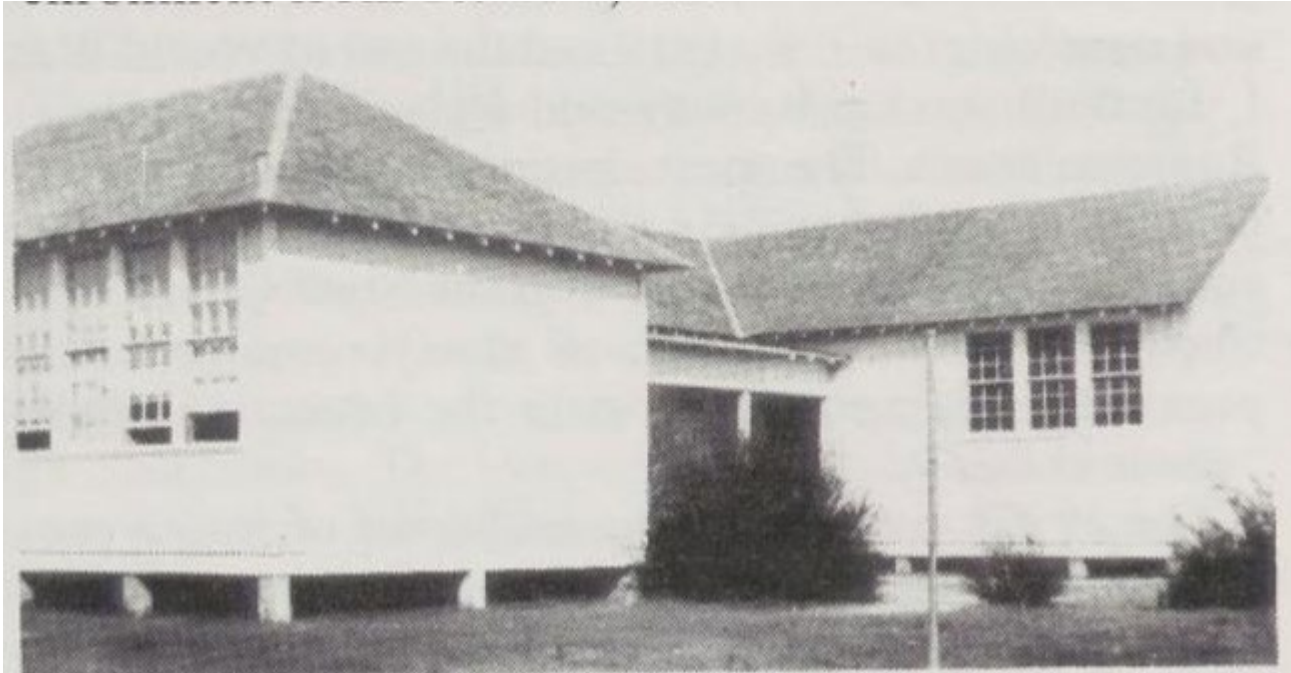
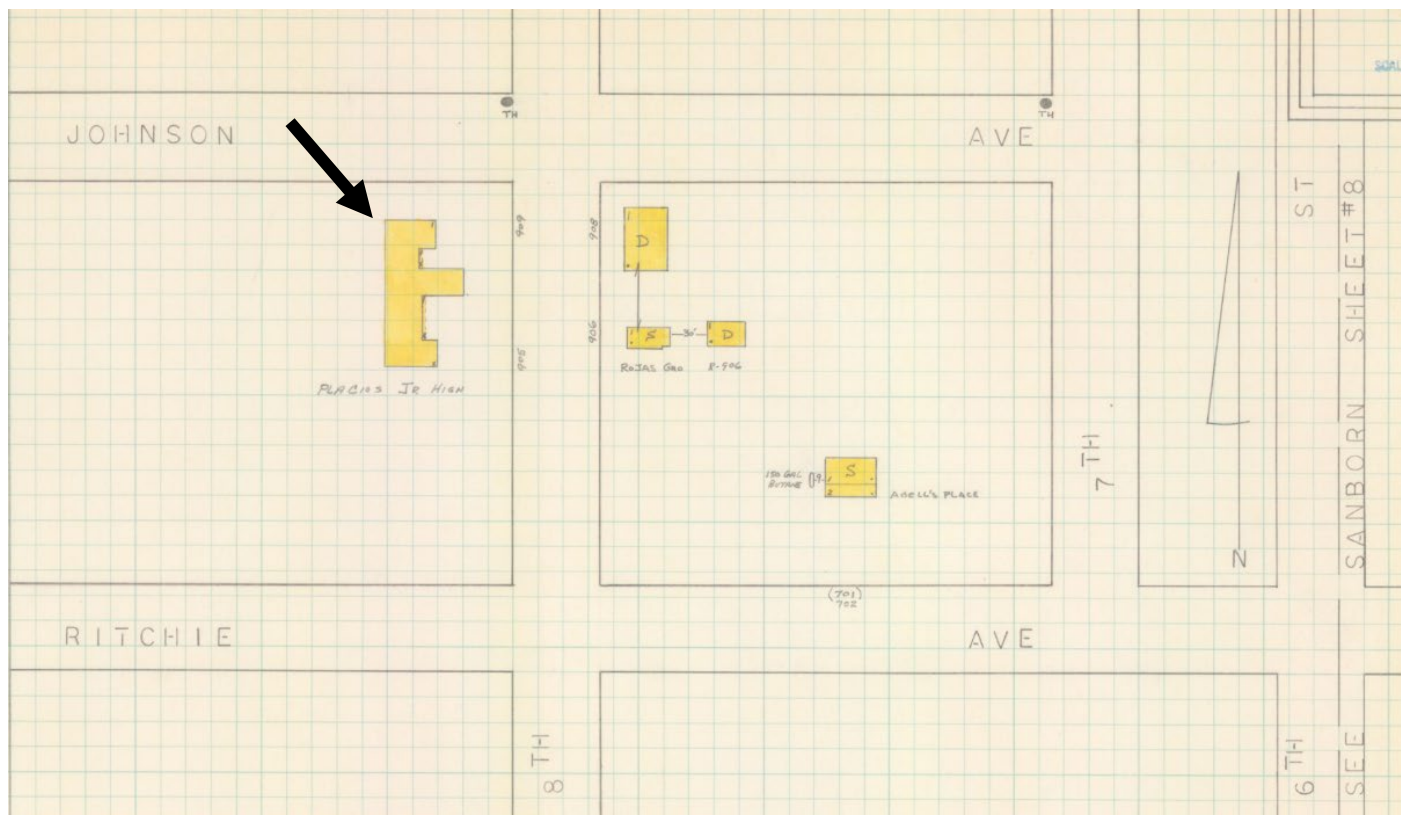


Figure 4: Historic photo of the east elevation of the Palacios Colored School. Taken c. 1940.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Figure 5: The nominated school became Palacios Junior High by 1966. Source after integration. Source: "Palacios G, 1966" Texas Department of Insurance State Fire Marshal fire insurance maps. Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library and Archives Commission.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Figure 6: Students standing outside of the back of the building (west elevation) in 1946. Courtesy of Larry M. Deadrick.



Figure 7: Granville Sanford, principal, and Carita Sanford, educator, for Palacios Colored School.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photographs

Name of Property: Palacios Colored School

City or Vicinity: Palacios

County: Matagorda State: Texas Photographer: Robin Lewis

Date Photographed: 10/06/2023

Photo 1 - East (primary) elevation



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 2 - South elevation



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 3 - West elevation.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 4 - North elevation.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 5 - Room #1 (see floor plan).



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 6 - Room #2 (see floor plan).



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 7 - Room #3 (see floor plan).

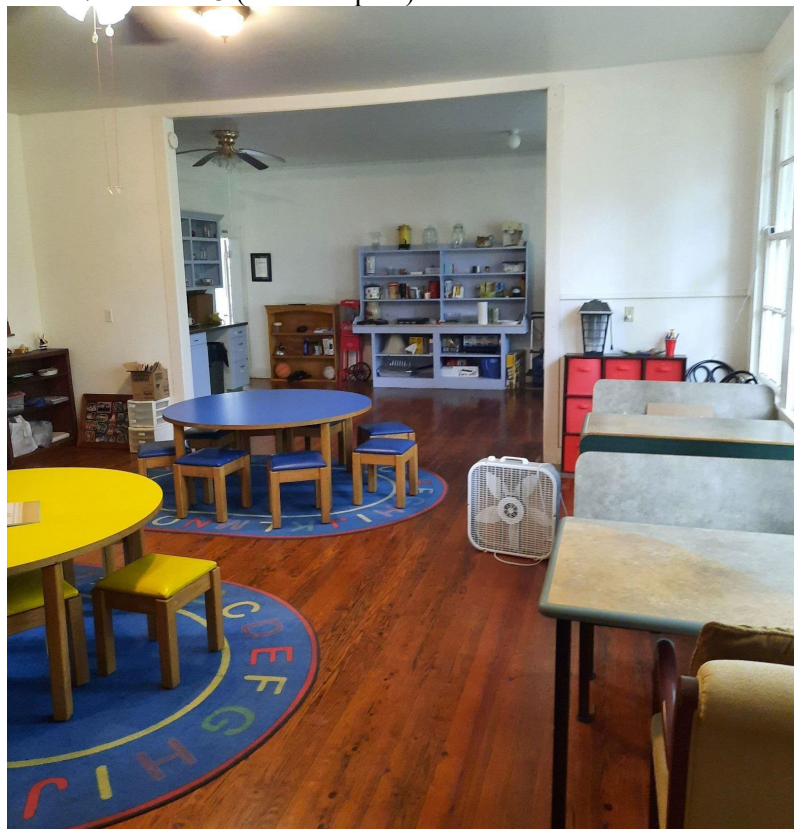
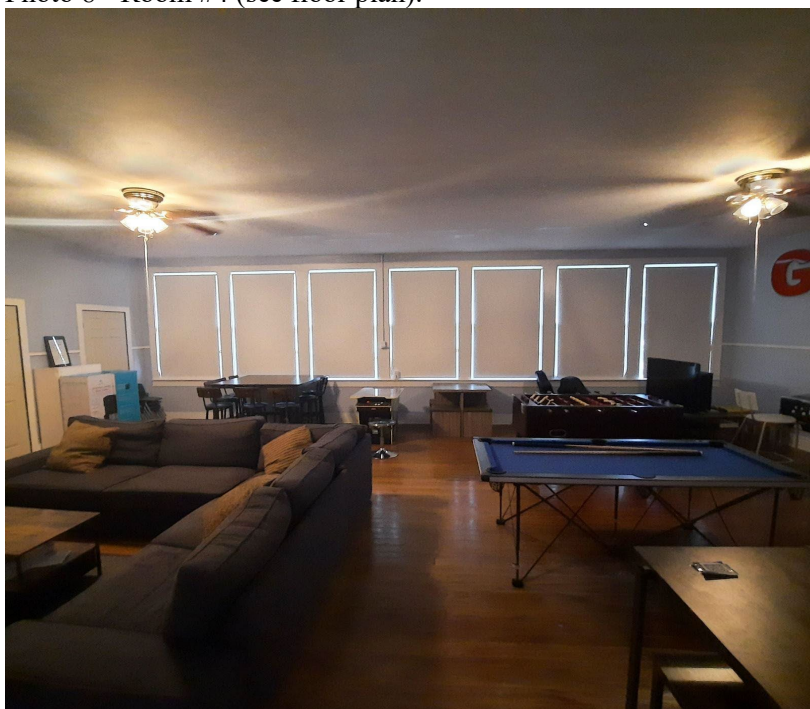


Photo 8 - Room #4 (see floor plan).



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 9 - Interior view of windows in men's restroom.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 10 - Interior view of enclosed porch (now a hallway).



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 11 - Exterior view of non-original exit doors on Room #4.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 12 - Original pine plank wood flooring.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 13 - Original plank ceiling.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 14 - Original wainscoting.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 15 - Fiberboard ceiling and wood walls in storage room.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 16 - Transom windows covered by plywood.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 17 - Photo of the front of the building (east elevation) when it was Rainbow Land Daycare.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 18 - Exterior view of the wood windows servicing the men's restroom.



Palacios Colored School, Palacios, Matagorda, Texas

Photo 19 - View of original walls and ceiling boards in hallway.

