

City of Jacksonville Landmark Designation Report

Duval County Public School # 8 (J. Allen Axson Elementary School) *at* 1220 East 16th Street

LM-24-07
October 23, 2024



Application Prepared By:
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Property Owner:
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I. Planning and Development Department – Findings,
Conclusions, and Recommendation

**REPORT OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION
AS A CITY OF JACKSONVILLE LANDMARK**

LM-24-07

GENERAL LOCATION:

**Duval County Public School # 8
J. Allen Axson Elementary School
1220 East 16th Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32206**

Prepared in accordance with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department hereby forwards to the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission, its "Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations" on the Landmark Designation, **LM-24-07**, sponsored by agent for the property owner.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- (A) Consistent with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104(d), the Planning and Development Department determined that the application for designation of the property at 1220 East 16th Street as a Landmark was complete.

- (B) As required, the Planning and Development Department had signs posted in front of the property being considered for designation, as well as sent notices by U.S. Mail to each owner of real property within three hundred and fifty (350) feet of the proposed landmark. Notice of the public hearing on the designation of the property at 1220 East 16th Street as a Landmark was published in the *Financial News and Daily Report*. Proof of publication is attached to this report.

- (C) Once designated, any activity affecting the exterior of the building and site of the proposed landmark at 1220 East 16th Street will require a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). All proposed work will be reviewed for consistency with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. The review of most routine work scopes including repairs, maintenance, alterations of previously altered features, small additions and size-limited new construction that would not impact significant historic elements or would not be readily street visible can be processed by the Historic Preservation Section (HPS) of the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department, but certain activities like alterations, additions, new construction, relocation and demolition that would be visible from the public right-of-way, as well as any work the HPS determines to be potentially in conflict with the *Secretary of the Interior Standards*, will require review by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission.

The purpose of the historic designation of this site is to provide protection to J. Allen Axson Elementary School at 1220 East 16th Street, not to discourage or prohibit the future development of the site. The review of work through the COA process is to preserve the historic character, architectural features, and materials of this significant structure, as well as, to ensure any future development of the site is compatible with and sensitive to this primary historic resource.

- (D) In preparing the application, the Planning and Development Department has found the application to meet **three of the seven** criteria. The criteria include the following.

A. Its value as a significant reminder of the cultural, historical, architectural, or archaeological heritage of the City, state or nation.

J. Allen Axson Elementary School is a product of the rapid residential growth of Jacksonville following the 1901 fire and represents a significant institution in the East Springfield/Phoenix neighborhood. After the Great Fire of May 3, 1901, suburban growth began to accelerate following the extension of the streetcar lines along with the opening of new businesses and industries. With the expansion of the Main Street line, the Jacksonville Street Railway Company opened Phoenix Park, originally spelled Phenix Park, along the St. Johns River just north of Long Branch Creek. Opened in September of 1901 and known as a “trolley Park”, the purpose of the park was to encourage weekend use of streetcars. The name for the park was coined by Mrs. F.O. Brown, wife of the President of the streetcar company, to commemorate Jacksonville's rise from the Great Fire of 1901. The park was reached by streetcar along North Main Street, east on Eighth Street and north on Fisher Avenue, now Phoenix Avenue, across Long Branch Creek to the river front site. Phoenix Park was expanded over the years to include an amusement park, dance pavilion, grandstand, and baseball diamond. In 1903, Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics had their spring training at Phoenix Park. The popular Florida Ostrich Farm, which was in Fairfield, moved to Phoenix Park and expanded its animal collection to become the Florida Ostrich and Alligator Farm. After the Florida Ostrich and Alligator Farm moved to South Jacksonville and later to St. Augustine, Phoenix Park began to decline as a recreational destination and was sold to an oil company for industrial storage.¹

By the late 1890s and early 1900s, the industrial character of the area particularly along Talleyrand Avenue was being established. In 1912, the City of Jacksonville, after acquiring control of the electric light franchise in 1911, constructed a new \$635,000 municipal power plant along the St. Johns River off Talleyrand Avenue north of East Eighth Street. The

¹ T. Frederick Davis, *History of Jacksonville, Florida and Vicinity, 1513 to 1924*. (St. Augustine, Florida: The Record Company, 1925), P. 229.

James B. Crooks, *Jacksonville After The Fire, 1901 – 1919: A New South City*. (Gainesville, Florida: University Presses of Florida, 1991), p. 105.

The Florida Times Union, “Jacksonville was too Distracting to be Rube’s Spring Training Site”, March 13, 1994, B-5

River City News, Florida Times Union, “Ostriches in their Own Fairyland”, January 5, 2000, 2-W.

Robert W. Mann, *Street Cars of Florida’s First Coast*. (Charleston, South Carolina: History Press, 2014), pp. 49 & 202.

original 1894 electric plant at Waterworks Park was converted into a substation.² With most of the docks along Downtown Jacksonville being in private ownership, which jeopardized continued federal support for port improvements, the Board of Trade was able to petition the State Legislature to pass an enabling act for a bond issue to construct municipally owned docks and terminals. In January of 1913, a \$1,500,000 bond issue was approved by the voters that established a Port Commission.³ The Port Commission acquired 144 acres along Talleyrand Avenue near the present intersection with East Eighth Street. Starting in 1914, a mile of swampy river front property was filled to prepare for the construction of two 260' wide piers that extended 1000 feet into the river. A City owned and operated terminal railroad connected the new docks with the existing lines located east of Springfield. Completed in 1916, the municipal docks proved to be successful, and were being expanded by the 1920's.⁴

During this period several large industrial uses developed in the area. Two of the largest were the Wilson & Toomer Fertilizer Company and the Armour Company Packing House. Located on a thirty-one-acre site just north of Deer Creek at 1611 Talleyrand Avenue, the Wilson & Toomer Fertilizer Company was founded in 1893 and became one of the largest fertilizer companies in the country. In the 1950s, the company was owned by Plymouth Cordage Company and in 1970 became part of the Kerr, McGee Chemical Company which progressively phased out all operations. The buildings were demolished in 1989 leaving a Superfund Site due to toxic uses.⁵

The Chicago based Armour & Company Packing House came to Jacksonville in 1912 and established a plant just north of the intersection of East 8th Street and Talleyrand Avenue. In 1916, the company opened the Interstate Stockyard to hold animals coming in by ship. Each day the company butchered 500 cows, 1,500 hogs and pigs, and 300 sheep, as well as produced over 15,000 pounds of sausage. The company closed the Jacksonville facility with the buildings being demolished. Today, the Southeast Toyota Distributor's port facility is located on the former site of the Armour packing house.⁶

With the success of the Springfield Subdivision to the west, the establishment of major employers, and extension of streetcar lines north of East Eighth Street, the area, called East Springfield or Phoenix, began to grow as a residential neighborhood. Even before the extension of the streetcar line in 1901, numerous subdivisions had been platted in the area north of East 8th Street and east of the railroad tracks. These pre-1901 subdivisions of East Springfield included Richardson's Subdivision, Corwin's Addition to Campbell's Addition, and Campbelton – Pacetti's Addition.⁷ However, subdivision growth in East Springfield

² Davis, 324.

³ Ibid, p.290.

⁴ Crooks, pp. 66-67.

George E. Buker, Jacksonville, *Riverport – Seaport*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), pp. 153-154.

⁵ Ennis Davis, Glen Myra: The Neighborhood Industry Built, <https://www.thejacksonmag.com>. Published April 12, 2018.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Duval County Courthouse, Platbooks*; Corwin's Addition, 1-17 (1893); Campbelton-Pacetti's Addition, 1-43 (1897); East Lewisville; & Richardson's Subdivision, 2-55 (1887).

exploded after the opening of Phoenix Park and the associated streetcar line in 1901. Some of the subdivisions developed between 1901 and 1910 included Clarkson's Addition to East Springfield (1902), Fisher's Addition (1902), Hartridge's Addition to East Springfield (1902), Dyal-Upchurch Subdivision (1904), Cumming's Subdivision (1906), Knight & Shipman Subdivision (1907), Central Springfield Subdivision (1908), Snell's Subdivision (1908), Talleyrand Heights (1908), and Sutherland Place (1910).⁸

East Springfield/Phoenix and Long Branch were served by two elementary schools, both currently closed. J. Allen Axson Elementary School, 1220 East 16th Street, originally served whites with Long Branch Elementary School, 3723 Franklin Street, opening for black students. Originally called Graded Springfield School # 8, J. Allen Axson was built in three parts. The original building was built in 1910 from a design by Roy Benjamin with construction by O.P. Woodcock. The original part of the school has the same basic design and floor plans as two other schools, Lackawanna Elementary School and Fairfield Public School both built in 1910. J. Allen Axson Elementary School was one of five schools constructed between 1910 and 1911. Funded as part of a bond issue, an eight-classroom addition was added in 1915, also designed by Roy Benjamin. The school was expanded again in 1926 by contractor, O.P. Woodcock using designs by Roy Benjamin. The school was renamed in 1956 after J. Allen Axson (1894 – 1970), principal from 1938 – 1952.⁹

J. Allen Axson Elementary School also reflects the continued change in school design that started in the 19th century with an emphasis on fresh air, light, space, and sanitation. Continuing to be used well into the 20th century, schools following this philosophy became larger and more substantial in construction. Common was the use of large windows, high ceilings, broad hallways, standard classroom size, individual student seating and sufficient recreational space with playgrounds and athletic fields. Added later were special use rooms such as science labs, home economics, art rooms, along with auditoriums, lunchrooms and libraries. Usually constructed under the auspices of local school boards, the buildings reflected popular architectural trends such as Colonial Revival, Neo-Classical, Prairie, Mediterranean Revival, Late Gothic Revival, Art Deco, as well as many not reflecting any particular style. Many times, the schools are enhanced with the use of cast stone and terra cotta decorative elements that usually accentuated doors and windows. In addition, they were usually designed and built by local or regional architects and contractors sometimes under the supervision of nationally recognized school designers such as architect, William B. Ittner.¹⁰

⁸ *Duval County Courthouse, Platbooks*: Clarkson's Addition to East Springfield 2-8, 1902; Fisher's Addition 3-23, 1902; Hartridge's Addition to East Springfield, 2-87, 1902; Dyal-Upchurch's Subdivision 2-36, 1904; Cumming's Subdivision, 2-54, 1906; Knight & Shipman's Subdivision, 2-84, 1907; Central Springfield Subdivision, 3-17, 1908; Snell's Subdivision, 4-95, 1908; Talleyrand Heights, 3-5; 1908; and Sutherland Place, 4-10, 1910.

⁹ Proposed National Register of Historic Places application for J. Allen Axson Elementary School. # 8, February 1999.

E-Mail: J. Tyler Loehnert, Director-Real Estate, Duval County Public Schools to Joel McEachin, Jacksonville Planning and Development Department, September 21, 2016.

Wayne W. Wood, *Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage, Landmarks for the Future, Bicentennial Edition*. Jacksonville, Florida: (Jacksonville Historical Society, 2022), p. 214.

¹⁰ Diane Maddex, Editor, *Built in the U.S.A., American Buildings From Airports to Zoos*. (Washington, D.C.: (The Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1985), pp. 150 – 153.

B Its location is the site of a significant local, state or national event.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department that the subject property at 1220 East 16th Street, the J. Allen Axson Elementary School, does not meet this landmark criterion.

C It is identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the City, state or nation.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department that the subject property at 1220 East 16th Street, J. Allen Axson Elementary School, does not meet this landmark criterion.

D It is identified as the work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the City, state or nation.

Both the original building and additions for J. Allen Axson Elementary School at 1220 East 16th Street were designed by noted Jacksonville architect, Roy A. Benjamin (1888 - 1963). The school represents the earliest documented project in Benjamin's long career. Moving from Ocala to Jacksonville in 1902, Roy A. Benjamin is credited with the design of many notable buildings, particularly theaters, in Jacksonville and throughout the southeast. In Jacksonville, Benjamin was the architect for the Imperial Theatre (demolished), the Palace Theatre (demolished), the San Marco Theatre, the Arcade Theater (demolished), the Riverside Theatre, as well as serving as associate architect for the Florida Theatre. Responsible for the design of over 200 theaters throughout the South, Benjamin served for over twenty years as the chief architectural consultant for the Paramount-Publix theatre chain, which included the Florida State Theatres as a subsidiary. In addition, he served as a member of the National Board of the American Institute of Architects as a theatre specialist.

Being one of Jacksonville's most prolific and talented architects, Benjamin designed many other significant buildings in Jacksonville. These landmarks include the Otis Elevator Building, Fire Station # 14, Leon Cheek Residence, San Juline Apartments, Memorial Park in association with the Olmsted Brothers, Park Lane Apartments, Fenimore Apartments, Hartimore Apartments, Lauderdale Apartments, Avondale Apartments, Scottish Rite Masonic Temple, the Jacksonville Jewish Center, and the Elephant House at the Jacksonville Zoo (demolished). Several of these buildings and Memorial Park were designed in association with other architects, particularly Mellen C. Greeley who was Benjamin's partner from 1919 to 1924. When he retired after World War II, Benjamin sold his practice to William D. Kemp, Franklin S. Bunch, and William K. Jackson. The firm continues today as KBJ Architects, Inc.¹¹

¹¹ Wood, p. 8.
The Florida Times Union, 1/29/1963.

One of Jacksonville's most prolific builders during the first half of the twentieth century, Owen Preston Woodcock constructed all the buildings and residences that were part of the original San Jose Estates Development, including the San Jose Country Club, the San Jose Hotel (Bolles School), and the San Jose Estates Administration building (San Jose Episcopal Church). In the construction business since 1897, the O.P. Woodcock Company built numerous landmark structures in Jacksonville including the Professional Building, 126 West Adams Street (1914); 1907 addition to the Seminole Club, 400 North Hogan Street; Buckman and Ulmer Building, 29-33 West Monroe Street (1925, demolished); the Masonic Temple, 410 Broad Street (1912-16); the commercial building at 643 Edison Avenue (1924); John Gorrie Junior High School, 2525 College Street (1923-24); the Lane Drug Company Building, 2665 Park Street (1942); Willow Branch Library, 2875 Park Street (1929-30); the commercial building at 3556-3560 St. Johns Avenue (1927); Kirby-Smith Junior High School, 2034 Hubbard Street (1923-24); 1926 addition to the Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant, Wambolt Street at the St. Johns River, (1924, demolished); Elizabeth Swain Memorial Methodist Church, 1620 Naldo Avenue (1925); 1917-1918 addition to Lackawanna School, #10, 3108 Lenox Avenue; and the concrete section of the original Gator Bowl. After his death in April of 1953, the O.P. Woodcock Company continued to be operated by a relative, Ira Kroger.

E Its value as a building is recognized for the quality of its architecture, and it retains sufficient elements showing its architectural significance.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department that the subject property at 1220 East 16th Street, J. Allen Axson Elementary School, does not meet this landmark criterion.

F It has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department that the subject property at 1220 East 16th Street, J. Allen Axson Elementary School, does not meet this landmark criterion.

G Its suitability for preservation or restoration.

In utilizing this criterion, it has been the practice of the Planning and Development Department to evaluate proposed landmarks based on evidence of significant exterior alterations that have negatively impacted character-defining features, as well as represent alterations difficult, costly, or impossible to reverse. Further, the degree and nature of any exterior deterioration, as well as the evidence of long term and potentially on-going neglect are also a factor in evaluating potential landmarks for their suitability for preservation or restoration. Quoting from the Landmark Application regarding J. Allen Axson Elementary School suitability for preservation or restoration:

The building is suitable for preservation and restoration. Efforts have already begun to save the school building's integrity. Debris removal and clean up, security measures, and more have improved the building from further degradation. The current owner is an architect, urban designer, general contractor and developer. They have reestablished a connection to JEA electric power and water, and they conduct weekly maintenance of landscape, fences, and removal of graffiti.

The owners have already created concept plans for new uses on the structure and are working with engineers and other experts to ensure the building is not only renovated and adaptively reused, but also that significant architectural elements are preserved. The intent is to preserve the large, open hallways, the sizeable windows openings; to restore historic features like the ornamental concrete lintels that are beginning to fragment in areas; and, to remove added elements that deter from the historic architecture, such as the dropped ceiling that block portions of the windows and trim, and vinyl flooring that covers the original wood floors. They have a plan to restore all of the mail structures and historical elements damaged by intruders, repair of all of the windows and staircases, remove graffiti, restore or replace the entry doors, and to reset all electrical and plumbing throughout the structure. This significant building is worthy and suitable for restoration and important to the preservation of Jacksonville's history.

Based on the application, it is the opinion of the Planning and Development Department that J. Allen Axson Elementary School is suitable for preservation or restoration.

RECOMMENDATION

Since an agent of the property owner is the sponsor of the designation, at least two of the seven criteria must be met. In reviewing the application, the Planning and Development Department has found the application to meet **three of the seven** criteria. Based on the findings of this report, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department recommends that the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission **APPROVE** the designation of 1220 East 16th Street, J. Allen Axson Elementary School (**LM-24-07**) as a City of Jacksonville Landmark.