



January 3, 2018

Mr. Greg Smith  
National Register Coordinator  
Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 1276  
Austin, TX 78711

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*David Preziosi  
Executive Director*

Dear Greg:

Preservation Dallas would like to submit the former Melissa Pierce School at 7822 Hull Avenue in Dallas for a Determination of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.

We are not the property owner of the former school and are submitting this request on behalf of:

Cyndy Lutz  
Dallas Area Habitat for Humanity  
2800 N. Hampton Road  
Dallas, TX 75212  
214.678.2300  
cynlutz@dallas-habitat.org

Please find enclosed:

- Current Photos
- History of the School
- Location Map

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

David Preziosi  
Executive Director

**Melissa Pierce School**  
**7822 Hull Avenue**  
**Joppa Neighborhood**  
**Dallas, Texas**

**Owner**

Dallas Area Habitat for Humanity  
2800 N. Hampton Road  
Dallas, TX 75212  
214-678-2300

**Owner Contact**

Cyndy Lutz  
cynlutz@dallas-habitat.org

**Property Photos**



A view of the former Melissa Pierce School from Hull Avenue. The lower portion of the building closet to the street contained the classrooms for the upper grades and the taller portion contained the kitchen and gym/auditorium.



A view of the former Melissa Pierce School showing the covered walkway from Hull Avenue to the main entrance (down the enclosed walkway and not visible) and the side of the gym/auditorium which at one time had later attached classrooms.



Entrance to the school accessed from the enclosed walkway.



Separate classroom building for the lower grades.



Gym/auditorium interior with an open truss ceiling, built-in bleachers, and a stage area for performances.



Gym/auditorium showing the built-in bleachers and clerestory windows.



Interior hallway looking towards the main entrance and which separates the gym/auditorium space (on the left) with the classrooms (on the right).



Classroom space with concrete block walls and later partitions added.

### **Date of Construction**

It is believed that the school was built between 1952 and 1953 with later additions in 1954.

### **Architect**

There is no known architect on record for the school.

### **Property History**

The Melissa Pierce School was built between 1952 and 1953 in the historically African American community of Joppa which later became a part of the City of Dallas when it was annexed on October 3, 1955. The school was named for Melissa Pierce a resident of the Joppa community who according to neighborhood residents donated the land for the school and lived in a house at

the rear of the school grounds. She was known as "Auntie Melissa" to many in the community. The school was part of the Wilmer-Hutchins ISD until it closed in 1970 and was subsequently auctioned off in 1972.

In 1948, an article in The Dallas Morning News mentioned that existing schools for black students "had burned." Additional articles indicate that residents of the Wilmer-Hutchins ISD rejected a bond package in 1948 that would have allowed construction of a new \$40,000 school for black residents. Construction of the original Pierce School took place sometime between this failed election and the successful 1953 bond election that provided \$35,000 for a four-room addition to the school as well as \$20,000 for equipment and books.

After the existing schools burned and without any place to go to school the neighborhood children attended class at the Zion Church until the new Pierce School was built. Oral histories also suggest that Pierce donated the land for the church which makes sense as the school was built directly next door to the church. The classes took place in the church sanctuary which still stands today and now serves as the church's fellowship hall behind a newer sanctuary building.

According to interviews with community residents the building was constructed to accommodate grades 1-12 and those who attended the school recall that the smaller building contained the elementary grades. The classrooms in the larger building, with the attached gym/auditorium, were for middle/high school students. Two areas which were later added on for classrooms, one to the side of the gym and the other to the side of the smaller classroom building, have since been demolished. Even with the small size of the school by the 1960s it had ROTC, shop, and sports programs.

Residents of the neighborhood also vividly remember that students were bused back and forth inconsistently during the 1950s and 1960s from Joppa to various segregated Wilmer-Hutchins ISD schools. Some attended Melissa Pierce for the lower grades and went on to graduate from John F. Kennedy Negro High School while others reportedly also attended A. L. Mourney in Lancaster. One resident, recalled attending Pierce for grades 1-2, A.L. Mourney for grades 3-5, and Pierce for grades 6-12.

It would appear that the Wilmer-Hutchins ISD was aware that it was in violation of the new rulings post *Brown v. Board of Education* and attempted multiple strategies to maintain "separate but equal" school facilities. In 1954, the Dallas NAACP chapter organized parents of the Joppa community to demand admission for their children to the all-white Linfield Elementary School in the Wilmer-Hutchins ISD. The students were denied admission to Linfield as the Principal at the time stated that the Texas Education Agency ruled that schools

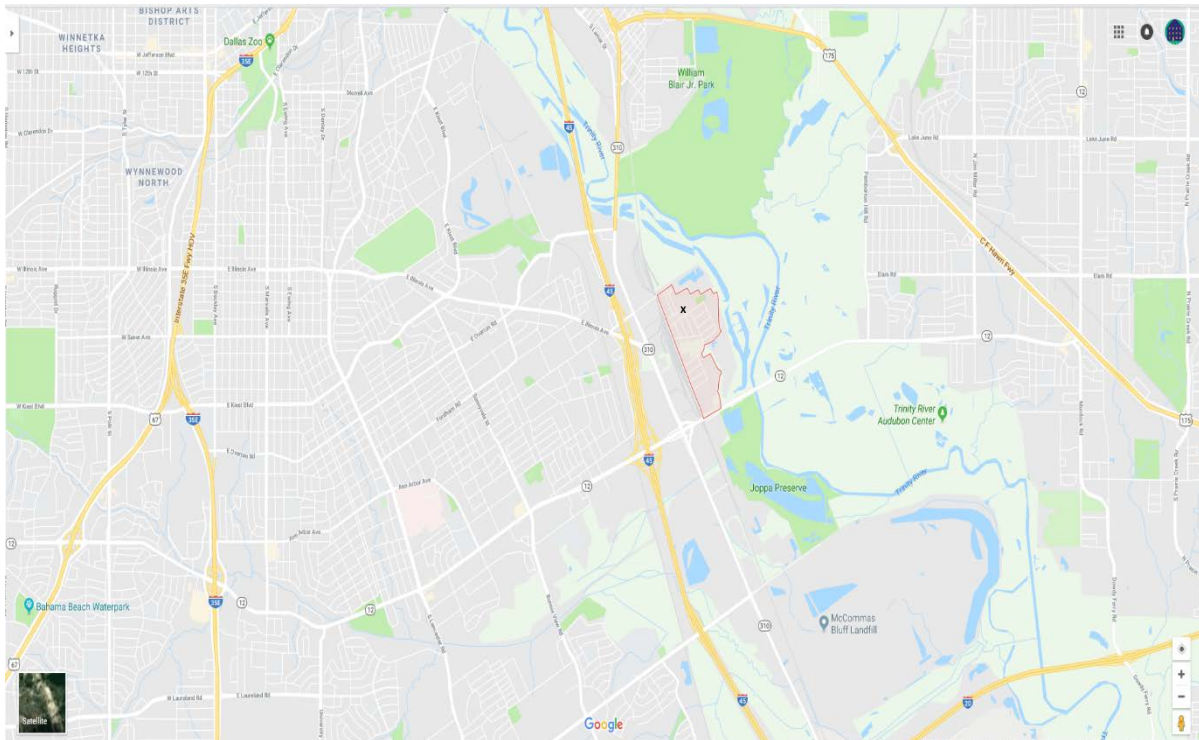
were to remain segregated and so instruction continued at Melissa Pierce. Segregated black schools in agrarian communities in Dallas County also maintained a different calendar than the white schools in their respective districts. The African American schools were closed in September and October so the children could serve as labor to the local cotton picking industry. This could have also been a factor in the determination not to integrate the schools. It is unclear when and if the calendar changed to try and synchronize with the white school calendar. Some of the Joppa residents recall their parents wanting them to work in the cotton fields so that they would “learn about hard work.” It appears that no law suits were filed relative to the Melissa Pierce School.

The larger segregation issue is important to the history of schools in the Dallas area and across the country at the time, especially in the south. It is clear though that the children in the Joppa community faced segregation and were not allowed to go to white schools. More research is needed though in this area as documented records are sparse and any remaining official records will have to be located and studied. Wilmer-Hutchins ISD was disbanded in 2005 due to mismanagement and taken over by Dallas ISD. Unfortunately, there are no records for the Pierce School in the Dallas ISD archives. There could be some surviving files that include minutes from Wilmer-Hutchins ISD board meetings but they have not been located yet. There may also be some information in the archives of the Texas Education Agency and the Dallas NAACP. Additional research into The Dallas Morning News coverage and the Dallas Express could shed more light on this issue.

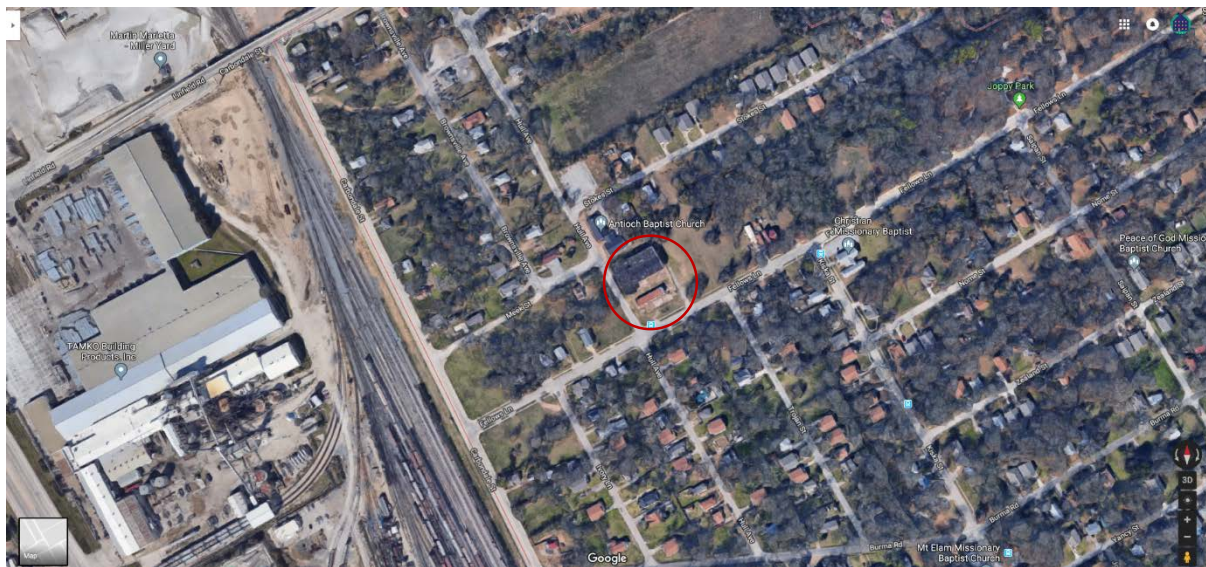
The architect of the Pierce School remains unknown and it is an example of a modest and durable brick and masonry institutional vernacular. It lacked the sculptural and ornamental embellishments of schools built for white students during the same time period in Dallas County. While the Melissa Pierce School doesn't have exceptional architectural significance it is still a product of school architecture of the era and an example of what was built and considered adequate for African Americans in a rural school district. More importantly though, the school is a product of a time when schools were segregated by color and African American children had no alternative for education. The school is also highly significant for its ties to the Joppa community, especially with the land for the school being donated by a resident and the school named after her. The school had a relatively short existence of only being open for 18 years; however, it still survives relatively intact in the Joppa community and is an important landmark for the neighborhood. It is also an example of a time when African American students were not considered equal to white students and the segregation of schools in rural Texas was the norm. The Melissa Price School was an example of that philosophy and remains an important part of the built and social history of the Joppa neighborhood and the former Wilmer-Hutchins ISD.



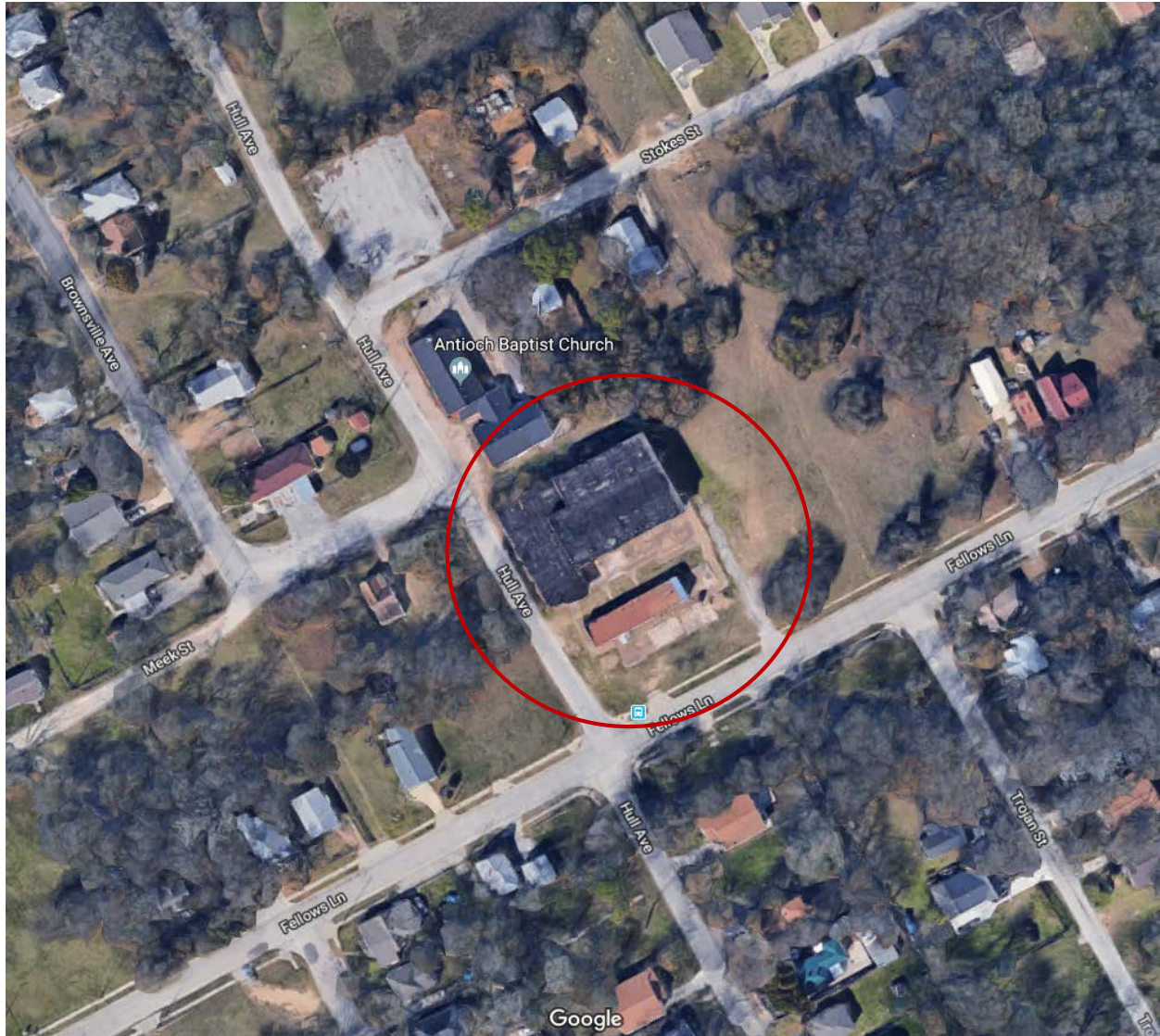
## Location Maps



The Joppa Copummny is outlined in red and the Melissa Pierce School is marked by an X.



The former Melissa Pierce School complex is circled in red.



The former Melissa Price School is circled in red. The larger building, with the black colored roof, contained the gym/auditorium space, kitchen, and classrooms for the older students. The smaller building, with the red color roof, contained classrooms for younger students.