

**Historic Landmark Designation Report  
Cherry Hill Elementary School #159  
Baltimore City Commission For Historical  
And Architectural Preservation**

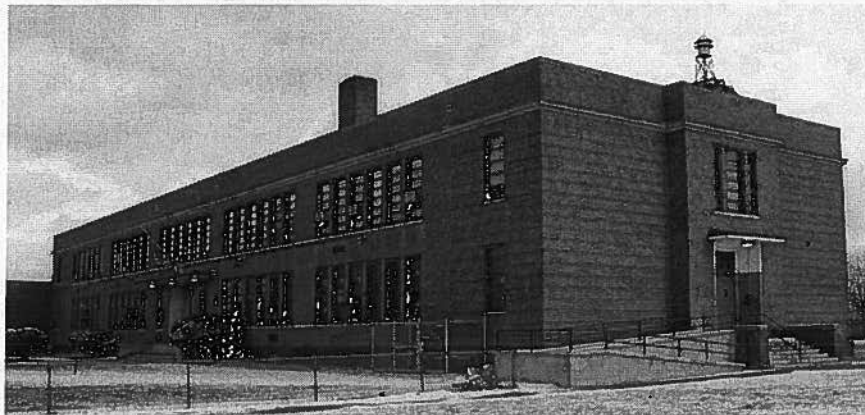


**Public Hearing September 9, 2003.**

**The Commission** for Historical and Architectural Preservation has the responsibility of recommending to the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore the adoption of ordinances designating districts and landmarks within the limits of the City of Baltimore having special historical, architectural, educational, cultural, social or community significance, interest, or value as Baltimore City Historic Landmark, thereby necessitating their preservation, and protection. In making its recommendation, the Commission shall give appropriate consideration to the following standards. In reaching its decision the Commission shall clearly state which standards have been applied

- A. A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:
1. dates from a particular period having a significant character, interest, or value, as part of the development, heritage, or culture of the City of Baltimore; or
  2. is associated with the life of an outstanding historical person or persons; or
  3. is the site of an historic event with a significant effect upon the cultural, political, economic, social, or historic heritage of the City of Baltimore; or
  4. is significant of the architectural style, method of construction, or engineering, or is the notable work of a master builder, designer, engineer, artist or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or
  5. contributes information of historical, cultural, or social importance relating to the heritage of the community; or
  6. has yielded, or may be likely, archeological information important in history or prehistory.

**The Cherry Hill** Elementary School # 159, located at 801 Bridgeview Road Baltimore, MD is **eligible** as a Baltimore City Landmark by meeting Baltimore City Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation Standards for Designation **one and four**. The building meets criteria one as being a significant building to the community of Cherry Hill, which is the first African-American suburban style public housing community in Baltimore City. It is the first school built in Cherry Hill and one of the first institutional buildings in the Community. The school meets criteria four as a significant example of Modern architecture designed by prominent architects Buckler and Fenhagen in 1945.



**Front and side facades Cherry Hill Elementary School.**

The Cherry Hill Elementary School is the first school building in Cherry Hill. The school is a neighborhood landmark within Baltimore's first African American planned suburban type neighborhood. The school embodies not only the progressive neighborhood planning efforts, but also the dynamism of the neighborhood during its first several decades. The school's historic significance becomes apparent within the context of Cherry Hill's development.

The neighborhood of Cherry Hill – with a population around 10,000 people – is a planned residential suburb with one of Baltimore's largest housing projects. It began as a neighborhood, built for African-American World War II workers and expanded several times to a suburban village overlooking the Middle Branch of the Patapsco River.

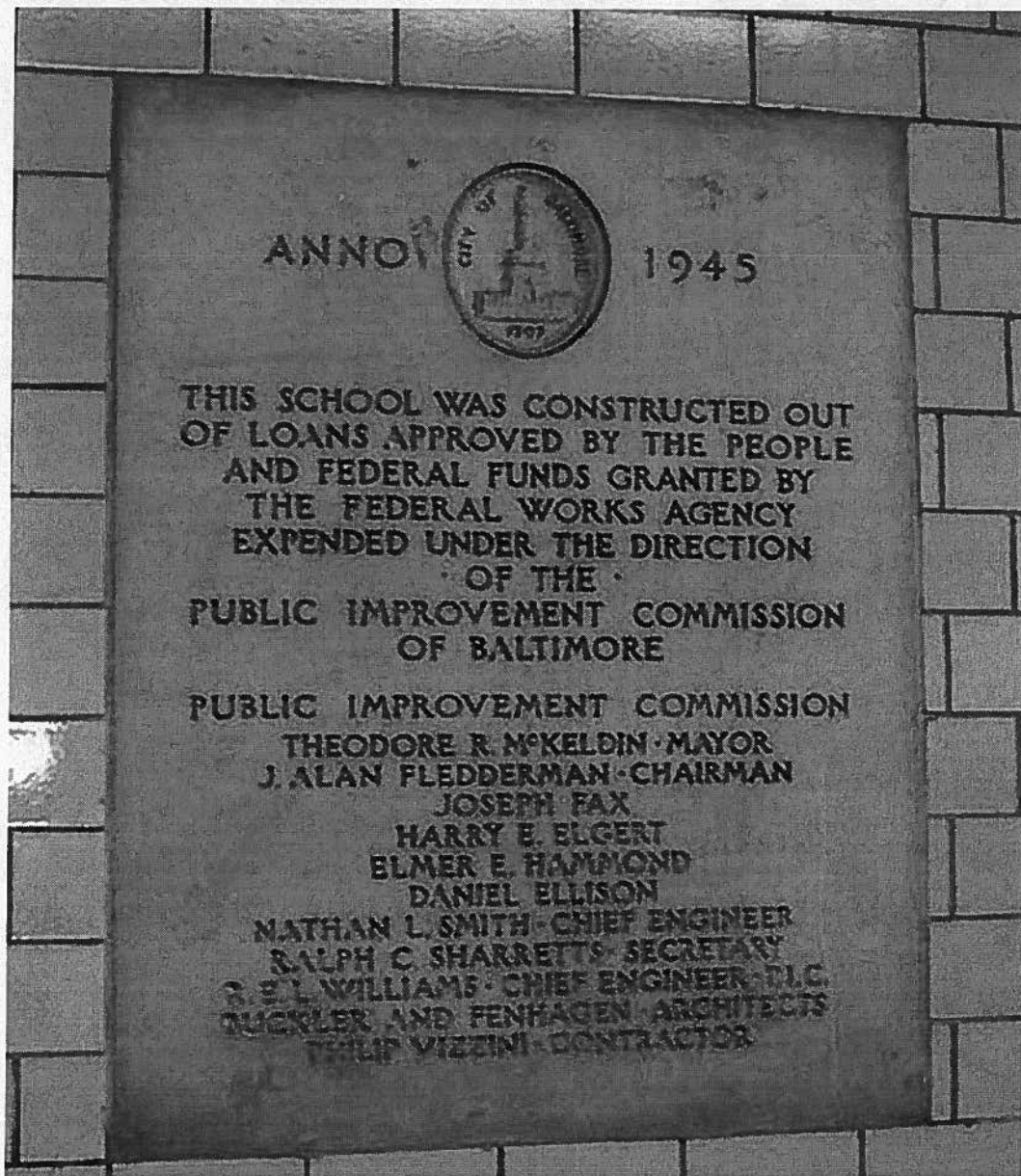
The neighborhood began in response to an overcrowding crisis in Baltimore's segregated African American communities. With President's Roosevelt's executive order 8802, a response to A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement, banned discrimination in industries receiving defense contracts<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, large numbers of African Americans migrated to Baltimore. By the early 1940s, twenty percent of Baltimore's population lived in two percent of Baltimore<sup>2</sup>. In 1943, through the National Housing Association, federal funds were funneled to Baltimore for African American war housing. The funds were earmarked for 2000 housing units that eventually spawned five housing projects throughout Baltimore<sup>3</sup>:

1. Banneker Homes located in Fairfield, 248 temporary dwelling units;
2. Turner's Station, located in Dundalk, 199 temporary dwelling units;
3. Soller's Point, located near Turner's Station, 400 permanent dwelling units;
4. Holabird, Holabird Avenue, 396 temporary dwelling units;
5. Cherry Hill, 600 permanent dwelling units.



**Rear and side facades, Cherry Hill Elementary School.**

After much turmoil Cherry Hill was chosen for several reasons. First, the site was separated from white neighborhoods. Secondly, private housing initiatives were already underway with the development by Edward and Julius Meyerberg. These developments, Dupont Manor, Cherrywood and Cherry Hill Village, were built with federally subsidized low interest loans for African-Americans. By 1944, the Commission on City Plan drew a comprehensive plan for the area. In 1945, Cherry Hill elementary school was being built. By 1946, the shopping center was in place as well as several other institutions. By the time of the large expansion in 1952, Cherry Hill was a thriving community.



Plaque located inside the main entrance.

The School not only addressed the social and educational needs of the community, but was deliberately planned to be the focal point of the neighborhood. Jack Breihan, former CHAP Commissioner and Professor of History at Loyola College, described the planning process as follows:

Before 1940, planned suburban communities like Roland Park had been built for the upper classes, and the federal government's planned community of Greenbelt had been built for middle class workers. Now these same ideas would be put to work for an African American planned community.

The first major decision planners made was to center the new community on the upper slopes of Cherry Hill. They could have chosen a waterfront site on the Middle Branch, but in the 1940s the harbor was definitely not a desirable place. It was filled with smoky workboats, and the water itself was polluted by Baltimore's industry. So Cherry Hill would be a "city on the hilltop."

The next decision was where to put the streets. A grid of streets meeting at right angles to each other was the standard for working-class neighborhoods in Baltimore, but Cherry Hill's planners opted for a web of gently curving streets, similar to those Baltimore's upper-class white communities like Roland Park, Guilford, and Homeland. In fact, some of the land surveying was done by the Roland Park Company.

Following the natural slopes of the hillsides, the street pattern emphasized nature – and incidentally required less grading. Curving streets were also thought to be safer than straight ones. Cars could not travel them so fast, reducing accidents. There were few really long rows of houses and a higher proportion of cross-ventilated end-of-row units.

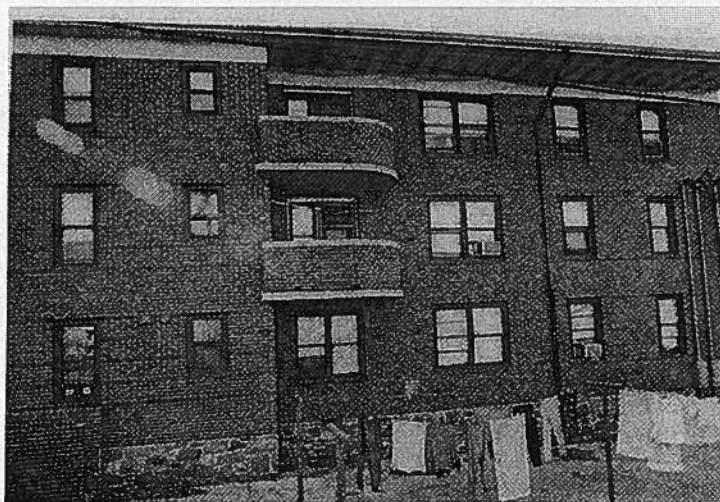
Cherry Hill's streets curved away from an inner oval defined by Roundview and Bridgeview roads on the inside, and an outer "beltway" formed by Seamon and Reedbird avenues and Round Road. The central oval was the site of the first public school, Cherry Hill Elementary. The community shopping center was located on a hillside site overlooking the harbor on Cherry Hill Road. Sites for two more schools, a firehouse, police substation, health center, swimming pool, playgrounds, and even churches were reserved for future growth. Planners looked forward to an eventual population of twelve to fourteen thousand residents in Cherry Hill, about half in public housing and half in privately owned dwellings.

Here, Professor Breihan notes the importance of locating the school on the central oval in the middle of the neighborhood. Symbolically, the site of an elementary school within a newly created neighborhood emphasizes future opportunities through education as well as future generations. Complimentary to the site, the style of architecture reinforces the forward look of the neighborhood. Cherry Hill Elementary School has educated three generations of Cherry Hill residents. The school has been a gathering place for the community for fifty-five years. Many important neighborhood decisions were made at the site. Most importantly, the PTA successfully fought Baltimore City Administration to have more schools built for the neighborhood. Consequently, several were added.



**Cherry Hill Elementary School showing brick banding on the end bays.**

Cherry Hill was envisioned as a progressive neighborhood embodying the most up to date architecture and planning principles. The Neighborhood was designed with modern architectural characteristics. The first phase of public housing – eleven three-story apartment houses – were designed in the Modern style by James Edmunds and Lucius White. Here, the apartment buildings, with flat roofs curving Art Moderne balconies and horizontal brick banding, set the architectural tone for the neighborhood.



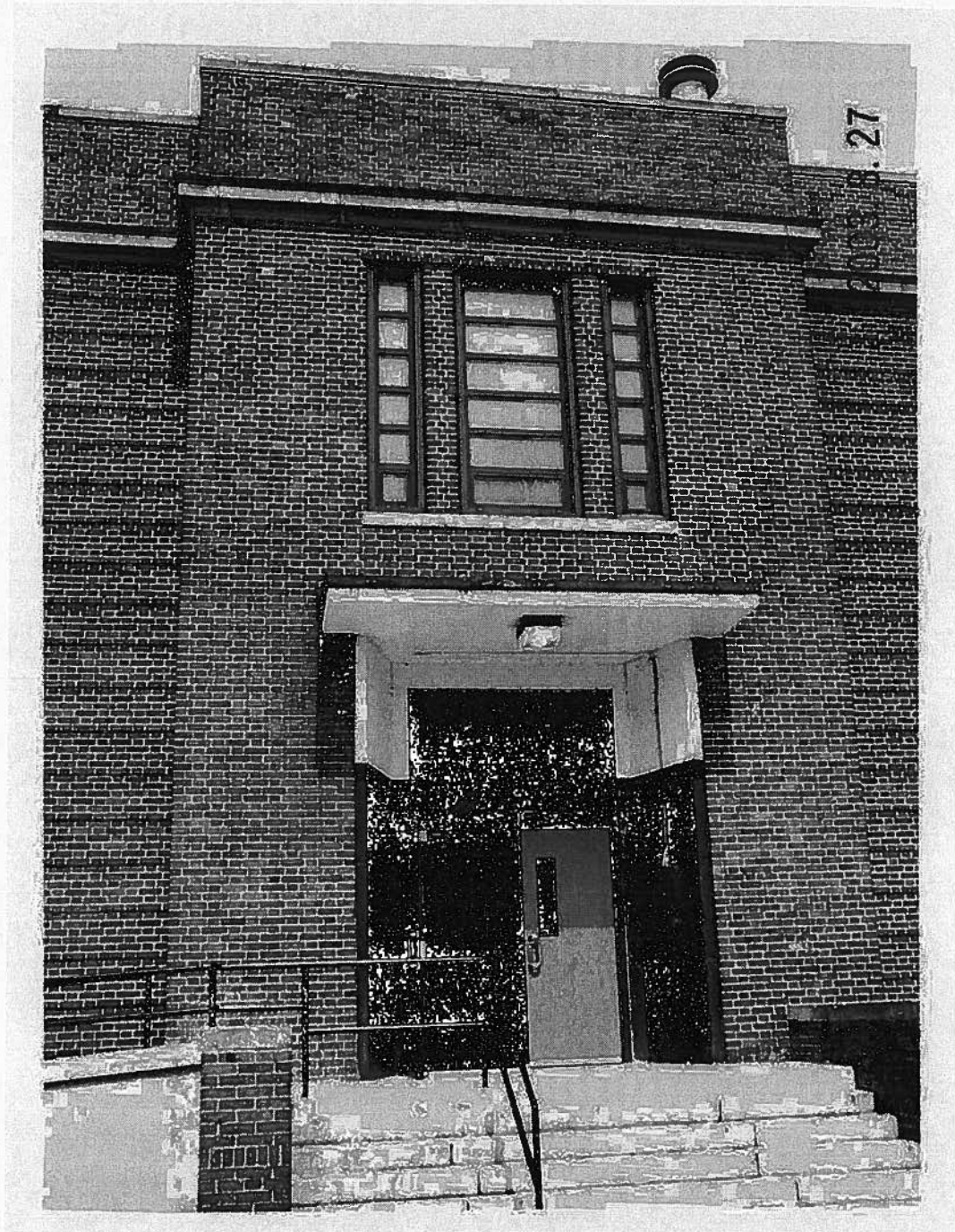
**Cherry Hill Apartments designed by James Edmunds Jr. and Lucius White.**

In concert with the modern design and planning principles laid out by the Baltimore City planning commission and Edmunds and White, The architecture firm of Buckler and Fenhagen integrated modern principles into their school design. With its horizontal character, window fenestration, no cornice and the visually unobtrusive doorway, the building embodies the principles of the modern movement. This elementary school is one of the early examples of post WWII Modern architecture in Baltimore.

Throughout the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Buckler and Fenhagen contributed greatly to Baltimore's built environment. George Corner Fenhagen, born in 1884 was raised in Baltimore. Between 1903-1905, he attended the University of Pennsylvania Architecture Program. In 1905 he worked for Pell and Corbett in New York City. In 1906-07, he attended the American Academy in Rome. In 1911, he became the assistant consulting Architect for the Philippines. Soon thereafter, he became the consulting architect for the Philippine Government. In 1916, he returned to Baltimore and helped form the firm Sill, Buckler and Fenhagen. In 1923, he became an architecture professor with Paul Cret at the University of Pennsylvania while still being active in his firm. In 1941, the Governor appointed Fenhagen to the Maryland Board of Examination and Regulation of Architecture.

Born in 1883, Riffin Buckler graduated from the Johns Hopkins University in 1904. He then attended MIT. He then worked for McKim, Mead and White for three years and in 1910 joined the firm Sill and Buckler. In 1921, the firm was renamed Buckler and Fenhagen. The firm is known to have designed many prominent structures including City College, Charles Carroll of Carrollton High School on Central Avenue, St. Matthews United Methodist Church in Mayfield, Roland Park Branch, and Govan's Branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Greenmount Cemetery Masoleum, Howard Park Church and many houses. In 1946, the firm became Buckler, Fenhagen, Meyers and Ayers. The successor firm Ayers, Saint, and Gross today specializes in college buildings and campus design.

In conclusion, the architectural style of the building reinforces the school's siting, which in turn symbolically captures the hopes and dreams of the original planners and residents of Cherry Hill. Moreover, designating the school is part of a continuing renaissance in Cherry Hill. During the 1990s, the neighborhood has undergone extraordinary physical changes as three sections of public housing have been razed. Moreover, much of the older houses have undergone comprehensive renovation. These renovations look toward the future by embracing the past. Flat roofs have acquired gabled roofs, older rowhouse communities have been embellished with architectural details, and the shopping center has been undergone a comprehensive rehabilitation. The designation of the school underscores preservation as a force in reinventing Cherry Hill based upon the principles of the original planners, designers and residents. History is now part of the neighborhood's future.



**East side entrance of Cherry Hill elementary school number 159.**



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<sup>1</sup> Breihan, John R. Cherry Hill: A Community History. Baltimore: Loyola College 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Hobbes, Clark. *City Negroes Crowded into Small Living Areas*. Evening Sun February 12, 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Holcomb, Eric. *From Herring Run to Cherry Hill: Politics of Racism and the location of War Housing for Negro Workers*. Unpublished document CHAP, 1996..