

FRANKLIN SCHOOL



Sketch of Franklin School
Kesh Ladduwahetty, artist.

*a model of public education
in the District of Columbia*

Foundation: 1804 - 1858

Public education begins in the District of Columbia...

In 1804 Congress amended the charter of the city of Washington to provide for "the establishment and superintendence of schools." President Thomas Jefferson agreed to serve as the first president of the school board.

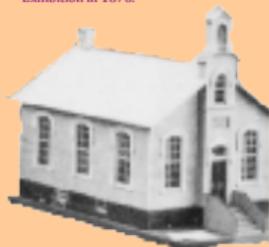
In October 1806 the school board authorized the erection of two wooden one-story school houses, 50 feet long by 20 feet wide.

Poor children were to receive the same instruction as pay pupils (reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic). Pay pupils would learn, in addition, geography and Latin.

The system failed to thrive. The free public schools were seen as charity or "pauper" schools. The public schools were only for white children, but the majority of those who were in school attended privately run establishments. There was no provision for the public education of African American children.

▼ Model of American Schoolhouse

Typical one-room American schoolhouse displayed at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876.



Library of Congress

▼ Western Academy

Located at the southwest corner of 17th and I Streets, N.W., this school stood until 1873.

Historical Society of Washington, DC



▶ Jefferson Stable School

In 1821, a public school relocated to a small brick building on the southeast corner of 14th and G Streets, N.W., formerly a stable for President Jefferson's horses.



Historical Society of Washington, DC

▼ Eastern Academy

Located at 3rd and D Streets, S.E.

Historical Society of Washington, DC



...and expands under Mayor Seaton

Significant improvements of the school system took place during the administration of Mayor William Seaton (1840-50).

By 1856 four school districts had been established with a two-room schoolhouse in each. An 1857 school census revealed that of 10,697 children between the ages of five and eighteen, 22.4% now attended public school, a large increase, while 30% attended private schools. But this still left 47.5%, almost half of school-age children, not attending any school.

HUMANITIES COUNCIL
OF WASHINGTON, DC

Funding for this exhibit is provided by a partnership of the Humanities Council of Washington, DC and the DC Historic Preservation Office. This project has also been funded in part by the US Department of the Interior, the National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund grant funds, administered by the DC Historic Preservation Office, and by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

Funding for this exhibit is also provided by the Association of Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia.

Support for this exhibit is provided by the Historical Society of Washington, DC; Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives; Downtown Cluster of Congregations; Goethe Institute; and Coalition for Franklin School.

Special acknowledgment is given to the following: Kiplinger Research Library; Tanya Edwards Beauchamp, Project Humanities Scholar; Jack Brewer and Margaret Hutto of the Historical Society of Washington, DC.

Exhibition research by Lucinda P. Janke & Dr. Joseph Brown.
Exhibition banner design by Kesh Ladduwahetty.

**"...there is not at present,
either rented from
individuals, or owned by the
city, a single schoolroom
entirely suited for school
purposes."**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES
REPORT, 1858**

SCHOOLS FOR ALL



Wallach School
Drawing by Cluss & Kammerhueber.

Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives

Expansion: 1858 - 1875

Public education expands in the District of Columbia...

Wallach School: the Prototype

► Wallach School (1864)

On Capitol Hill, Pennsylvania Avenue, between 7th and 8th Streets, S.E.



Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives

The prototype for the new public schools was the Wallach School, with space for 600 children. The Wallach was erected in the Third District, on Capitol Hill, which was chosen because "the citizens of eastern Washington then, as now, were noted for...a vigorous assertion of their rights."

The city selected Adolf Cluss to design the building. A German immigrant, Cluss was familiar with European schools that featured graded classrooms. Dedicated in 1864 with a grand ceremony, it was named in honor of the mayor.

"We understand there are now more applications for places in the schools than was ever before known at this season of the year."

Evening Star, August 17, 1864

In 1858 the city charter was amended to improve financial support of the public schools. The increase in funding, new educational theories and a new mayor brought major changes to the city's public school system. Richard Wallach, mayor of the city from 1861-1868, made improvement of the public schools a priority.

The school board resolved to provide a "school-house" large enough to hold the higher grades in a central location in each district, with numerous convenient smaller ones for the primary grades.

The term "school" had meant an often isolated "school-room" with children of a wide range of ages and abilities, with a single teacher sometimes younger than her oldest pupils. The new buildings would bring several of these "schools" under one roof.

Public Schools of the District of Columbia designed by Adolf Cluss

► Seaton (1871)



▲ Jefferson (1872-3)

▲ Curtis (1875)



Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives

In 1862 an act of Congress abolished slavery in the District and for the first time provided for public education of African American children.



Douglas Evelyn private collection

The first public school for African American children was a frame structure built on Capitol Hill in 1869, soon replaced by the brick Lincoln School (1871). Thaddeus Stevens and John F. Cook Schools followed in 1868. The flagship of the public school system for African American children was Sumner School (1871-72), also designed by Adolf Cluss. The Sumner was meant to be the African American equivalent of the Franklin, which at the time was the flagship school for white children in the city's segregated school system.

◀ **Sumner School (1871) stereograph drawing**
Located at the northeast corner of 17th and M Streets, N.W.

"Schools for all, good enough for the richest, cheap enough for the poorest." **MAYOR WALLACH**

FRANKLIN SCHOOL



Adolf Cluss,
architect

Nancy Maguire Pyno & Edward Maguire
private collection

“The Public Schools are among the prominent features of the National Capital.”

Keim's Illustrated Handbook, 1881.

Lucinda P. Jamie



Alexander Gardner collection, Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives

Franklin School, Alexander Gardner photograph

Flagship : 1869 - 1925

Franklin School was intended by the ambitious Mayor Wallach to be the best public school in the country, a showpiece for the city.

The Franklin served as a testing ground for the public school system, which pioneered and developed new programs including age-graded classes and curricula. In 1876, it offered the first high school classes for white students.

Franklin School became the flag ship of the eight large modern schools of a free, comprehensive and universal system of urban public education in the nation's capital. It was to be a model school for the nation, and the architect chosen was again Adolf Cluss.



► Biology class at Franklin School

Frances Benjamin Johnston collection, Library of Congress

Education is the best investment...



S. B. Ledy, Architecture, Library of Congress



◀ History class typical of classes at the Franklin

▲ Franklin School, 13th & K Streets, N.W., 1875

The site selected for Franklin School was on a height in a central location at 13th and K Streets, N.W., a residential neighborhood near the White House. With its lowers and elevated location, the picturesque three-and-a-half-story school had a commanding presence, visible from many parts of the city, including the US Capitol.

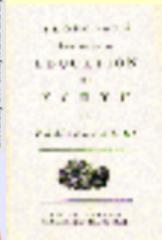
Fears that the presence of a schoolhouse would affect real estate values in the area were soon allayed. The neighborhood continued to expand with the influx of influential and affluent Washingtonians. By the time of the Franklin's dedication in 1869, real estate values had increased. Franklin School was attended by children of prominent citizens, including Presidents Arthur and Garfield, as well as those of ordinary residents. Applications exceeded capacity from opening day.

Public education was on its way to becoming universal.

*And so, I think, Franklin and Sumner Schools...hold all sorts of symbolic meaning in understanding the civic culture of Washington in the immediate post-Civil War era. Every city had model schools, which visitors were shown to demonstrate how far the city had advanced from earlier times. They were symbols of progress. These schools spoke to the triumph of the North, of free enterprise, of a society where hard work was rewarded and social mobility possible, and the promise, not yet realized but still compromised, of racial justice.

Comments of William J. Reese, Professor of Educational Policy Studies and of History at the University of Wisconsin, in 2003.

University of Pennsylvania Library



◀ Benjamin Franklin's pamphlet on education, 1749

Benjamin Franklin, who was an early proponent of universal education, was memorialized in a large bust that topped the clock in the center of the Franklin School façade.

“Great credit is due to the municipal authorities, who, with commendable public spirit, have sustained this undertaking, which will form a lasting landmark in the history of popular education in this Republic.”

ADOLF CLUSS
DEDICATION OF FRANKLIN SCHOOL, 1869



FRANKLIN SCHOOL



Frances Benjamin Johnston collection, Library of Congress

◀ Teacher training at Washington Normal School

The Teacher Corps

In 1873 the Board of Trustees authorized a “normal school” for the professional training of the city’s teachers. Established at the Franklin, it was a success and of great public interest.

Until the establishment of Washington Normal School, the main source of teachers had been young graduates of the public schools, who did not receive any special training.

Washington Normal School addressed the challenge of creating a competent corps of teachers and providing them continuing education. In 1913, after 40 years at the Franklin, the Normal School moved to its own building, becoming the Wilson Teachers College.

Frances Benjamin Johnston collection, Library of Congress



▲ Washington Normal school teachers, 1890s



◀ Graduating class of 1898

Historical Society of Washington, DC

International Recognition



Library of Congress

◀ Model of Franklin School at Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, 1876.

Only four years after the Franklin opened, a model of it was on exhibit at an exposition in Vienna where the city received international recognition for its public schools.

The city received medals at the Centennial exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, in Paris in 1878, and in New Orleans in 1884. The leaders of foreign countries requested copies of the Franklin’s building plans and members of Congress sent copies to their home districts.

Center of School Administration

The offices of the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees (later the Board of Education) were placed in the Franklin when it opened in 1869. In 1925 the school became the Franklin Administration Building, the headquarters of the school system for another four decades.

The school administration outgrew the Franklin and plans were made to relocate. In 1968, after a century at Franklin School, the superintendents and the Board of Education moved out.

▼ Myrtilla Miner
Founded the School for Colored Girls in 1851, the first teacher training school for African Americans in Washington, DC.

Library of Congress



Teacher training, like the school system itself, was segregated along racial lines. The Washington Normal School at Franklin was for white teachers only. In 1879, the Miner Normal School for African American teachers joined the Washington Normal School as part of the DC public school system. In 1955 teacher training became racially integrated with the merging of these schools in the District of Columbia Teachers College.

► Normal School teachers with J. Ormond Wilson, Superintendent of DC Public Schools, 1873



Historical Society of Washington, DC



SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE OF ADOLF CLUSS

Adolf Cluss

► Original floor plan of Franklin School, Cluss & Kammerheuber

Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives



Modern Renaissance

Cluss's term for the architecture of Franklin School was "Modern Renaissance."

Cluss's architecture combined Renaissance purity of line and proportion with the most modern technology to create a new architecture for a new era.

In 1864, the city chose the firm of Cluss & Kammerhueber, architects of Washington, DC's first large modern school-house, to design the Franklin School. The architects drew on their knowledge of current theories about school architecture here and abroad to produce an innovative plan with 14 classrooms accommodating 900 pupils.

Natural light was generously supplied in each classroom through windows on two sides. The other two sides featured blackboards, an innovation in DC schools at the time. The teacher's desk was placed in front of a niche that served to optimize the acoustics of the classroom. School children were seated in individual seats, not the communal benches that were common at the time. Cloakrooms further insulated each classroom and provided space for coats and lunch bags. On the third floor was a large auditorium where the entire school could assemble. It also served as a gathering place for neighborhood events. Waterclosets were housed in a separate building in the rear.

In the 1860s, girls and boys were segregated through the use of separate classrooms, play areas and entrances. By the 1890s, they were allowed to mingle.

Smithsonian Institution Archives

► Adolf Cluss, 1880



▼ Window arches at Franklin School

Keith Lockwood/123RF



Keith Lockwood/123RF

▲ Mansard roof at Franklin School

▼ One of two bell towers of Franklin School



Francis Benjamin Johnson collection, Library of Congress



Edward Gentry

◀ The *fresco secco*, or *dry fresco*, in the Great Hall. This was designed to match the Franklin's exterior rounded arches. Originally stretching 34 feet from floor to ceiling, this topmost section of the fresco has survived in the attic above the dropped ceiling.

The modern heating and ventilating system can be seen on the exterior through the symmetrical octagonal central bell towers and corner towers that form the defining design features of the building.

Cluss's red brick schoolhouse designs fell out of favor and most of his many Washington buildings were demolished in the 20th century. His flagship Franklin and Sumner Schools are rare and important survivors of the work of this significant 19th century Washington architect.

"From this golden age of the art in Italy springs the pervading spirit of the design of the Franklin School Building."

ADOLF CLUSS ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF FRANKLIN SCHOOL



NO PLACE FOR SEGREGATION

► Parents demanding better schools outside a DC school board meeting at the Franklin Administration Building, December 1947



Washingtoniana, DC Public Library

Victory for DC Students

As the headquarters of the public school administration until 1968, the Franklin was the focus of civil rights activism in the 20th century that challenged, and eventually overturned, racial segregation in DC public schools.

Rapid demographic changes, especially after World War II, increased disparities between schools for white and black students. Black students attended badly overcrowded, underfunded schools, while the superior schools for white children emptied out as families left the city for the postwar suburbs.

African American parents descended on the Franklin Administration Building, which housed the unelected school board, to demand better -- or even integrated -- schools for their children.

Browne Junior High School in Northeast, the most overcrowded of the black schools, was at the center of the controversy. The Browne PTA asked the school board to allow students to attend the white Eliot Junior High, effectively integrating the schools. The school board refused and the PTA took legal action through *Carr v. Comings*.

Unlike the Browne PTA, the Browne Parent Group advocated direct action. Over 160 parents signed a petition demanding better conditions. Gardner Bishop, a barber, presented the petition to the school board at the Franklin in December, 1947.



Washingtoniana, DC Public Library

▲ Gardner Bishop, Eulalia Matthews and other Browne parents picketing in 1947

In the face of inadequate response from the school board, the Browne Parent Group launched a boycott that lasted six weeks.

In late 1947, the Browne Parent Group began to meet with the DC NAACP, which included Charles Hamilton Houston of Howard University Law School. Houston convinced the parents to end the boycott to pursue the NAACP's broader legal strategy for equal school facilities for all DC students, not just those at Browne. Houston's role ended prematurely with his death from heart disease in 1950.

Washingtoniana, DC Public Library



▲ Charles Hamilton Houston

Washingtoniana, DC Public Library



Bolling v. Sharpe Makes History

▼ Attorneys George E. C. Hayes & James M. Nabrit, Jr.

After Houston's death, attorneys Hayes and Nabrit worked with the Consolidated Parents Group, successor to the Browne Parents Group. Nabrit rejected Houston's cautious strategy of demanding equal facilities, based on the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. He chose the bold path of the earlier, unsuccessful *Carr* case, directly challenging segregation itself.

On September 11, 1950, Bishop led a group of eleven black students from Browne Junior High School to demand admission to new Sousa Junior High School with excellent facilities and several empty classrooms. One of the students was Spottswood Bolling. The school board at the Franklin adamantly refused the transfer, leading to the lawsuit, *Bolling v. Sharpe*. Nabrit and Hayes argued it before the Supreme Court as a companion case linked to the historic *Brown v. Board of Education*. Technically, *Bolling* was decided separately from *Brown*, because the District of Columbia was not a state. However, the end result was the same: in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students and desegregation of the schools.

The school board at the Franklin, led by President C. Melvin Sharpe (the defendant in the lawsuit), issued its desegregation plan only eight days after the Supreme Court's ruling. Integrated public schools in the District of Columbia opened in September 1954.

◀ Supreme Court brief, *Bolling v. Sharpe*



Historical Society of Washington, DC

Acknowledgments: Funding provided by the Kiplinger Foundation

Legacy of the Brown & Bolling Court Cases

The school board at the Franklin oversaw the integrated system for the next fourteen years. But despite the resounding legal victories, public schools in the District of Columbia did not truly integrate. White families moved to the suburbs or moved their children to private schools, and *de facto* racial segregation remained a stubborn reality for DC public schools.

"...in the capital of democracy, in the capital of the free world, there is no place for a segregated school system."

JAMES M. NABRIT, JR.
ATTORNEY, *BOLLING V. SHARPE*

▼ Opening day at Strong John Thomson Elementary School, September 1954



Washingtoniana, DC Public Library



DON'T TEAR IT DOWN



Washington Post, April 1972

Rally at Franklin Park April, 1972

Nearly 150 participants rode bicycles on a tour past threatened landmarks. The rally was a turning point in the history of historic preservation efforts in the city.

Preservation: 1968 - Present

Franklin School Preservation Timeline

- 1964 Listed on the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites
- 1973 Listed on the National Register of Historic Places
- 1977 Board of Education votes to restore Sumner and Franklin Schools
- 1986 Sumner School restored and opened to public
- 1992 Exterior of Franklin School restored
- 1996 The Franklin designated a National Historic Landmark
- 2002 DC historic designation amended to include interiors
- 2003 City advertises for tenant for the Franklin
- 2004 Franklin School used as a homeless shelter. DC Preservation League lists Franklin as endangered due to lack of use and maintenance, threatening historic interior
- 2005 City issues Request for Proposal to develop Franklin School
- 2009 City issues another Request for Proposal to develop Franklin School

The battle for preservation...

By the turn of the century, Washington's red brick schoolhouses were in disfavor, and many of these buildings fell victim to the wrecking ball in subsequent decades.

But by the 1960's, when the School Administration vacated Franklin School, the public had developed a new appreciation of the city's architectural heritage. The Franklin had been included in a 1964 inventory of historic sites in the District of Columbia. In 1966 Congress passed the first national law that offered some protection for landmarks and established the National Register of Historic Places.

Despite these developments at the federal level, the District of Columbia had no local law that could prevent demolition of Franklin School. In 1971 the threat of demolition of a number of historic buildings sparked the creation of a citizen's action group called Don't Tear it Down, which became the DC Preservation League. Their first objectives were to prevent the demolition of the Old Post Office, Old City Hall, and Franklin School. Of these, only the preservation of the Franklin remains unfulfilled.

Sumner School barely escapes demolition



◀ Sumner School under renovation, 1984 - 86

Closed in 1978 and with a partially collapsed roof, the Sumner School survived demolition by the narrowest of margins. It was ultimately restored through a public-private partnership in the 1980s.

◀ The Adult Education Center at Franklin School, transformed with fluorescent lighting and modern furniture.



Charles Sumner School Museum Archives

"...chances are that the Franklin School will be gone by the time we celebrate the Bicentennial in 1976."

WASHINGTON POST, 1972



SURPLUS SCHOOLS



Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives

Original Cranch School designed by Adolf Cluss. Located at 12th & G Streets, S.E., it was demolished and in its place today is a parking lot.



Lucinda P. Jenke

Downsizing: 1960s - present

In the mid-20th century, the District's school population began to decline.

Desegregation ended the School Board's policy of separate schools for white and black students. The dramatic growth in home ownership and automobile use meant the rapid expansion of the suburbs. The District needed fewer schools.

Large numbers of historic school buildings were razed, with little thought for their historic and cultural value.

In the Capitol Hill neighborhood, the Wallach School, which had been erected in 1864 as the first major public school building, was demolished. Other demolished school buildings include Lincoln School and Dunbar High School. Dunbar, the city's renowned public high school for African-American students, was demolished despite emotional resistance on the part of the alumni.

Demolished Schools

▼ Brent (1883)



▼ Payne (1896)



▲ Lincoln (1871)



Historical Society of Washington, DC

Even on sites that continued to be used for school buildings, the historic structures were razed and modern buildings erected that were of significantly lower aesthetic value.

Brent Elementary School still serves as a school, but the 1883 structure at Third and D Streets, S.E. was demolished in 1969 to make way for a new building. The original Payne School, at 15th & G Streets, S.E. was demolished and a new school built at the same location. The brick Lincoln School was built in 1871 at 2nd and C Streets, S. E. to replace the frame structure that was the first public school for African-American children in the city. The Lincoln also fell to the wrecking ball.

Public Schools Put to Other Uses

► Edmonds (1903)



▲ Dent (1901)

▲ French (1904)

Lucinda P. Jenke

Many District schools that were shut down and long stood empty have been converted to commercial use, most commonly for real estate development. The Lovejoy (1872), Giddings (1887), Carbery (1887), Berrett (1888), Lenox (1888), and Logan (1891) Schools have all been converted to condominiums.

Other school buildings have been taken over by non-profit organizations. The Edmonds school, an African-American school, is now occupied by the DC Federal Teachers Credit Union.

The French School, a "manual training" or vocational school built in 1904, was leased to the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop in 1980. The Dent School now belongs to the private Capitol Hill Day School. The preservation of these historic schools continues to enrich the District of Columbia both culturally and financially.

Cluss's historic Wallach School was demolished in 1950 to make way for Hine Junior High School. Hine is now closed, the students relocated, and the future of the building is uncertain.

Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives



Joseph Browne



SURVIVAL

► Franklin School at 13th & K Streets, NW has been barely used since 1968



Joseph Browne

Legacy of Great Schools

Washington has several school buildings built in the 19th century that are still standing and serving as schools.

The Sumner School Restored

Very nearly demolished, the Sumner School re-opened to the public in 1986 after careful renovation through a public-private partnership thoughtfully crafted by the DC Board of Education and the DC government.

It is now the Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, preserving and making accessible the records of the D.C. public school system. Its large assembly hall and smaller lecture hall host a variety of events, while its former schoolrooms feature a number of exhibitions. It remains a showpiece of Adolf Cluss's eight public school buildings, of which only two survive.



Richard Longstrech, Collection 2004

▲ Sumner School, 17th & M Streets, N.W., as it appears today.

▼ Peabody

▼ Maury



Lucinda P. Janke

Lucinda P. Janke



Ross School website

Grant School website

▲ Ross

▲ Grant

The Peabody, Maury, Ross, and Grant schools are all 19th century school buildings that stand today as symbols of the city's commitment to public education.

The 1879 Peabody School on Fifth Street, N.E., is the city's oldest public school still serving its original function. The largest elementary school of its time, with twelve classrooms, it is now part of the Capitol Hill Cluster Schools.

The Maury School is still operating in its 1886 building in the 1200 block of Constitution Avenue, N.E., with large modern additions. Built for white children, it was transferred to the African-American system in 1952. It now serves a diverse population of nearly 300, with highest enrollment in its lower classes, which range from pre-school through fifth grade.

The Ross School, at 1730 R Street, N.W., was erected in 1888 in the growing neighborhood north of Dupont Circle. In 1929 it became an administrative annex for overflow from school system headquarters at the Franklin School. It is serving again as an elementary school with a recently renovated library.

The Grant School in Foggy Bottom was built in 1882 and became the School Without Walls in 1971. It is a small, innovative magnet high school that serves fewer than 500 students and has a long waiting list. The diverse student body comes from all sections of the city.



Lucinda P. Janke

▲ Ad for Charter School. Many DC school children are on wait lists for public charter schools.

The Future of Franklin School

Franklin School stands empty today, with a deteriorating roof that is badly in need of repair. The homeless shelter that operated there for five years has been closed.

Current suggestions for its reuse include a charter school, a neighborhood high school, an International Baccalaureate school, and a new home for the David A. Clark School of Law of the University of the District of Columbia.

▼ Buchanan School, built in the 1890s at 13th & E Streets, S.E., stands empty with an uncertain future

Lucinda P. Janke



"We don't think our past is surplus."

WASHINGTON POST,
JUNE 19, 1972