

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name CURTIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 316 NW GRANT STREET

☐ not for publication

city or town TOPEKA

☐ vicinity

state KANSAS

code KS

county SHAWNEE

code 177

zip code 66608

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
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Richard D. Pankratz
Signature of certifying official/Title

8/29/01
Date

State of Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain) _____

CURTIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
Name of Property

SHAWNEE COUNTY, KANSAS
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	
	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: SCHOOL

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS:

LATE GOTHIC REVIVAL

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: LIMESTONE

walls STONE: LIMESTONE; BRICK

roof CERAMIC (CLAY) TILE:

other ASPHALT

CONCRETE; STONE: LIMESTONE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **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.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ 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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1927

Significant Dates

1927

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

WILLIAMSON, THOMAS WILSON

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property LESS THAN ONE ACRE

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 5	2 6 9 3 2 8	4 3 2 8 3 4 7
Zone	Easting	North	ing
2			

3			
Zone	Easting	North	ing
4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title BRENDA R. SPENCER

organization _____ date JUNE 19, 2001

street & number 10150 ONAGA ROAD telephone 785-456-9857

city or town WAMEGO state KS zip code 66547

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

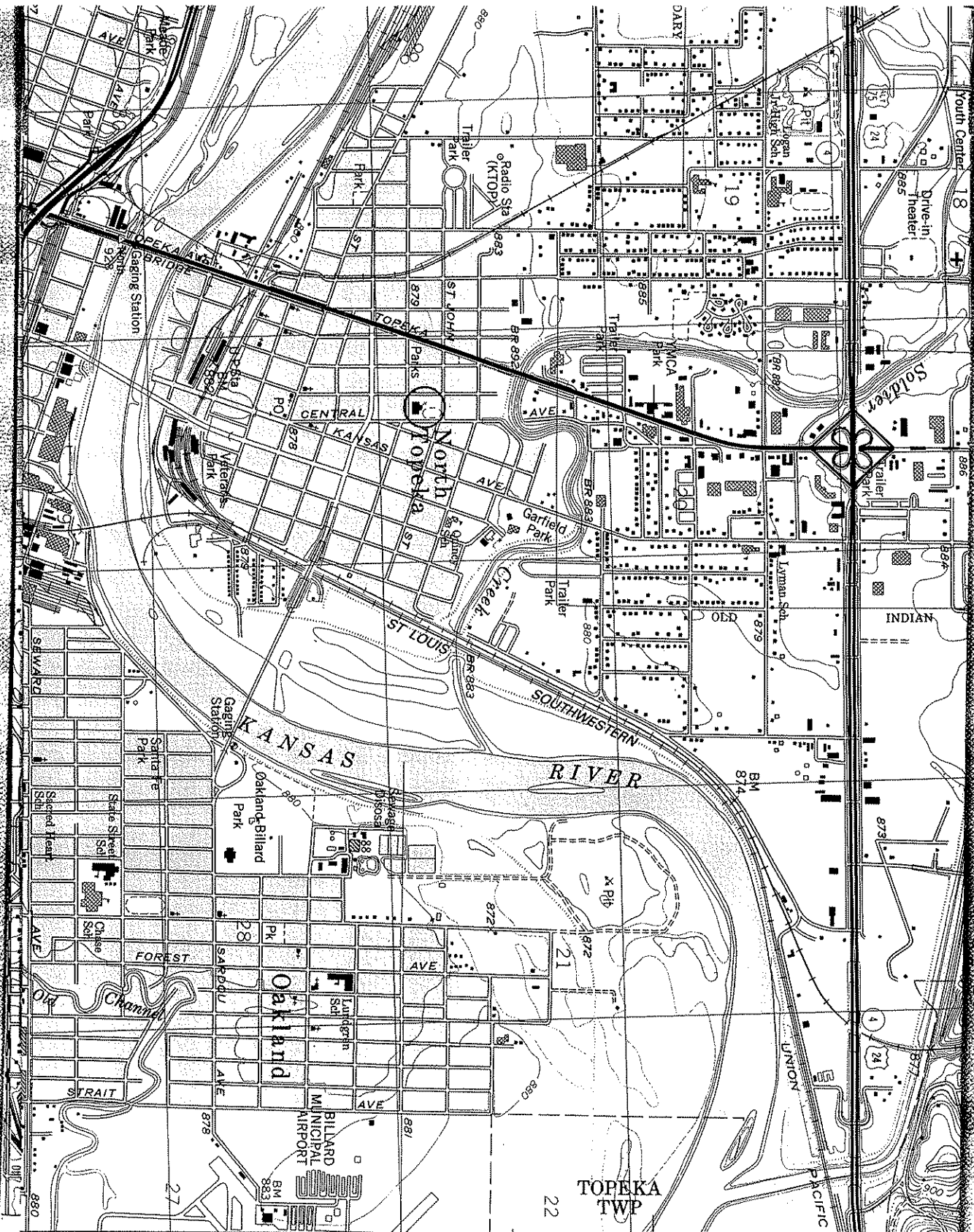
name ROSS R. FREEMAN, PRESIDENT, PIONEER CURTIS HOMES, L.P.

street & number 1200 S. KANSAS AVENUE telephone 785-232-1122

city or town TOPEKA state KS zip code 66612-1331

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. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.



(GRANTVILLE)
6862 II SE

428
CURTIS JR HIGH
SCHOOL
TOPEKA QUAD
USGS Coordinates
15 269328
4328347

TOPEKA
TWP

GRANTVILLE 3.6
LAWRENCE 28 M

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Section 7 Page 1

Curtis Junior High School
Shawnee County, Kansas

7. Narrative Description

The Curtis Junior High School, named to honor Charles Curtis, United States Senator from North Topeka, is located in the 300 block of N.W. Grant Street in Topeka (Shawnee County), Kansas. Designed by Thomas W. Williamson, the three-story school is characteristic of the Collegiate Gothic style of architecture popular in church and school design from 1890-1930. Williamson specialized in designing schools from early in his career. Curtis Junior High is representative of Williamson's early work, illustrating his understanding of the Collegiate Gothic style.

The concrete structure has brown and green brick veneer with stone detailing. The building's footprint is an 'E' shape. The main portion of the building (classrooms and corridors) are a 'U' shape measuring approximately 155 feet from west to east and 110 feet north to south. The gymnasium (1st floor) and auditorium (2nd floor) form the central prong of the 'E'. The most significant exterior features are the raised entrances with multi-story windows topped by Gothic arched transoms, the clay tile roof with gabled and straight parapets, and the multi-sash steel windows.

The building is in fair to poor condition. Vacant for fifteen years, the building has suffered from lack of maintenance and vandalism. The roof leaks and the majority of glass is broken out of the windows. The property maintains historic integrity in terms of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling.

Exterior - The site of Curtis Junior High is a full city block located in Wineberger's and Firey's Additions, a residential neighborhood in north Topeka, comprised primarily of modest single-family dwellings. The school occupies the south third of the site and is located immediately north of the Curtis Addition, a residential neighborhood also named after Charles Curtis.

A combination of brick and concrete sidewalks line the perimeter of the block. A coursed-rubble limestone retaining wall (date unknown), not original to the school's date of construction, is located along the property line on the west, south, and east sides. The entire site is currently enclosed by a chainlink fence. There are remnants of the former playground west of the school but the site is primarily grass and weeds.

The building's structure is cast-in-place concrete columns, beams, and floors with tile wall infill. The majority of the roof is a combination truncated hip and gable form with gabled and straight parapets. The gable and hip roof material is clay tile. There is a stone cap on the parapets. The roof over the auditorium is flat, most likely with a built-up roofing system. There is a large brick chimney in the center of the east wing.

The exterior masonry veneer on the first floor walls and enframing each of the three major entrances is smooth-faced, squared, and random range limestone in interrupted courses. The upper wall veneer is brown and green brick in a running bond pattern with smooth stone banding and randomly placed smooth limestone blocks. Through-wall penetrations (former radiator grills) are covered by painted plywood panels beneath some windows on the east, west, and south facades.

The plan form is essentially an E-shape. Classrooms and corridors comprise a U-shape around the gymnasium and auditorium, which are the central prong on the E. The central prong is free standing on three sides, connected only on the first floor (gymnasium). On the 2nd and 3rd floors, a light well is formed by the void between the east and west end wings and the auditorium in the center. Between 1963 and 1976, a one story blond brick addition (locker rooms) was constructed at the rear (north) of the building on each side of the gymnasium.

South (Main) Elevation - The front elevation is symmetrical and faces south (N.W. Grant Street). This elevation is comprised of seven bays. The two bays on each end are the east and west wings. The end bays are capped by a gabled parapet that has a slot opening with stone surround. The second bay from each end projects out and forms the two primary building entrances. The entrances are raised one-half story above grade and a cut-limestone retaining wall is integrated into the design of the entrance steps. At the first floor, the arched doorway has a pedimented stone enframent. A set of three exterior doors have original wooden frames and arched transom windows. The doors were

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Curtis Junior High School
Shawnee County, Kansas

7. Narrative Description *continued*

replaced with simple wood doors at some point in the past. Above each door (in each stairwell) there is a multi-story metal sash and frame window with Gothic arch transom windows.

The central three bays are identical with projecting brick pilasters between each bay. There are six sets of windows, one on each floor of each bay. The sets are comprised of three windows, a larger center window framed by two narrow windows. Secondary brick pilasters are located between each window. The windows are multi-sash and multi-light steel casement and fixed windows with stone lintels and sills. Most windows have broken glass and moderate levels of rusting.

A curved stone band caps the smooth-faced limestone on the first floor. A smooth stone band is located above the third floor, defining the parapet and, broken only at the entry bays. The crenellated parapet is consistent in height on the center three bays. Inset into the parapet of the center bay, is a carved stone panel with the name of the school, "CURTIS," inscribed. The entrance bays are framed by large projecting brick pilasters. The parapet at the entry bays is stepped higher and has an ornamental carved stone in the center of the crenellated parapet.

East (side) Elevation - The east facade faces N.W. Central Street and is similar in design and detailing to the front facade. This elevation is comprised of four asymmetrical bays. From the south, the first two bays are identical to the central bays on the front facade. The only exception is the absence of the large center window on the first floor of the second bay (location of the boiler room). A secondary building entrance is located in the third bay, toward the north end. The entrance bay is nearly identical to the main entrances on the south facade, lacking only the ornamental stone on the parapet. The fourth bay is approximately one-third the width of the first three, comprised of a single narrow window on each floor. The gymnasium and auditorium and one-story locker room addition is visible at the north end of the east facade.

West (side) Elevation - The west facade faces N.W. Jackson Street and is also similar in design and detailing to the south and east facades except that there is no entry on the west. The elevation is comprised of four asymmetrical bays, each framed by large projecting brick pilasters. From the south, the first bay is identical to the central bays on the front facade with one set of three windows per floor. The second and fourth bays have one large single window on each floor and the third bay is comprised of three large single windows per floor. The central gymnasium and auditorium is visible at the north end of the west facade. The one-story locker room addition at the rear, extends north, flush with the west facade. The west elevation of the addition has a concrete block veneer designed to resemble the stone on the first floor of the original building. The locker room addition has two multi-frame steel windows, similar to the original windows but varying in size and proportions.

North (rear) Elevation - The north facade faces N.W. St. John Street and is comprised of three bays. This elevation lacks the detailing and ornamentation of the front and side facades. Unlike the other facades, the entire rear facade is tan and green brick. The end bays are the east and west wings. There is a single window on the 2nd and 3rd floors, toward the center bay. The center bay is the gymnasium and auditorium. The only ornamentation is simple horizontal and vertical stone banding creating a grid design. Four former window openings on the first floor have been previously blocked in. A one-story, blond brick addition was constructed between 1963-76 to accommodate locker rooms for the gymnasium. The addition is in two sections, on each side of the gymnasium. A single and pair of metal replacement doors provide rear access at the addition. The area between the end wings and the central gymnasium is enclosed on the first floor and an end wall encloses a light well on the second floor.

Interior - The interior is relatively intact, however it too has deteriorated from being vacant and relatively unprotected for the past fifteen years. The original configuration of spaces is intact with the exception of modifications made to the locker room area where an addition was added and minor modifications in the class room configurations. Among the extant interior character-defining features are the following.

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Curtis Junior High School
Shawnee County, Kansas

7. Narrative Description *continued*

Terrazzo floors in the hallways and stairways are in good condition except for a few stair treads that have been badly chipped. Wood (pine) flooring in most classrooms is in poor condition from water penetration. A few classrooms have VAT flooring that does not appear to be original. The hallways typically have an integral terrazzo base and the classrooms typically have concrete baseboards. There are wood base boards in the offices and the hallway leading from the main corridor to the back stage of the auditorium.

In most areas, the plaster on interior walls is adhered directly to the masonry substrate, which has been damaged by moisture and cold. Partition walls are plaster on expanded metal lath. Bathroom walls have ceramic tile finish. Classroom ceilings are typically plaster on expanded metal lath and are in poor condition because of moisture penetration. Some classroom have 12" acoustical tile ceilings, also in poor condition. Hallway ceilings are typically plaster directly adhered to the underside of the concrete floor slab and are in poor condition from moisture penetration.

Corridor walls have built-in wooden (oak) lockers and some replacement metal lockers. The wooden lockers appear to be original but most are damaged or missing. Classrooms typically include built-in slate chalkboards with a chalk tray below and tack space above. Two classrooms have built-in wooden (pine) storage cabinets that resemble the design of the lockers in the hallways.

Stair railings are cast iron with wood handrails and newel post caps. A few of the cast iron pieces have surface corrosion. The steel windows typically have glazed brick stools and plaster surrounds at the head and jambs. The original wood panel doors are extant in a few locations but are damaged; most have been replaced. The original door frames are in place. The fluorescent lighting appears not original.

There are few plumbing fixtures extant, most are broken, however there are historic metal toilet partitions remaining in 2nd and 3rd floor bath rooms. An old, non-functioning boiler is extant. Vertical piping for the original plumbing and radiators is extant, but the radiators are missing.

The Gymnasium is on the lowest level of the center prong of the E-shape. The gym is built partially below grade and has a concrete floor and stepped concrete tiers on the east and west sides for bleachers. The bleacher seats are wood. Steel columns support the exposed concrete beams overhead.

The Auditorium, a two-story space above the Gymnasium, is badly damaged from apparent roof leaks. The raised stage (on the north end of the room) has a wooden floor and is surrounded by a simple proscenium arch finished in plaster, which is badly damaged. The concrete Auditorium floor on the main level is sloped and has fixed seating that appears to be original cast iron with upholstered seats and backs. The side walls and ceiling of the Auditorium are finished in plaster with ornamental pilasters and beams. The balcony has a wood floor, and tiered seating that is similar to the seating on the main level but with simpler metal detailing and wood seats and backs. The original light fixtures are molded plaster and metal but most have been damaged. A projection booth at the balcony level was likely added.

Alterations - Curtis Junior High was closed in 1976 due to consolidation. The building was sold by USD 501 to Highland Park Christian Academy in 1976 for \$90,000. The school building was remodeled in 1976 by the Christian Academy; classrooms were modified to create individual learning centers. The Academy opened August 30, 1976. The building has been vacant since the Academy closed in 1985.

The exterior of the building closely currently resembles the original appearance at the time of construction in 1927. Documented changes and alterations include the following. Extensive clean-up and repairs were required to reopen the school when the entire lower floor was damaged by the 1951 flood. A 1955-56 set of plans document electrical improvements. A one story brick addition was constructed at the rear of the building on each side of the gymnasium to

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Curtis Junior High School
Shawnee County, Kansas

7. Narrative Description *continued*

accommodate locker rooms. The exact date of the alteration is unknown but appears to have taken place between 1963-1976.

The most obvious among former alterations, is the rear locker room addition (1963-76) and the 1976 interior remodeling which involved some modifications in the classroom configurations. The classroom modifications involved removal of partition walls in classrooms on the south side of the 1st floor and the addition of at least one new partition wall at the classroom in the southwest corner of the 1st floor. Although the building has been vacant for fifteen years and suffers from neglect and vandalism, the building is not currently beyond repair. However, if necessary maintenance is not executed in the near future, the building could be damaged beyond repair in a relatively short period of time.

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Curtis Junior High School
Shawnee County, Kansas

8. Narrative Statement of Significance

Curtis Junior High School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion 'C' in that it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Collegiate Gothic style of architecture and is the work of prominent Kansas' architect Thomas W. Williamson. Curtis Junior High served USD 501 (Topeka, Kansas) school system as a junior high school for nearly fifty years (1927 - 1975) and was named to honor Charles Curtis, United States Senator from North Topeka who later became the 31st Vice-President of the United States (1929-1933) under Herbert Clark Hoover.

Collegiate Gothic - Curtis Junior High School was built in 1927, designed in the Collegiate Gothic style by Thomas Wilson Williamson.

Collegiate Gothic was a part of the Late Gothic Revival which occurred roughly from 1890-1930. This revival was largely defined by architects Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. Cram developed a theory that because of the upheaval caused by the Classical Renaissance and Protestant Revolution, that sixteenth century Gothic Architecture had been cut off before it could die a natural death. Therefore, this revival was an attempt to pick up the English Perpendicular style of the sixteenth century and allow the architect to continue developing it into something new. This philosophy of "making the style your own" set the movement apart from the Early Gothic Revival. A more simple "quieter and smoother" Gothic design was the result.

The movement was introduced to educational buildings at Bryn Mawr in the early 1890s. This "Collegiate Gothic" continued at Princeton University (at which Cram was the supervising architect), Yale, Duke, and the University of Chicago.¹ Like English Gothic structures, Collegiate Gothic design incorporated elements of the Gothic style such as pointed windows, crenellations or battlements, and towers. Most Collegiate Gothic structures had as their principle material red brick, but often used stone or tile design elements.

Although the style was named for its use on college campuses during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was most often used in Kansas for elementary, junior high, and high school buildings. The ornate Topeka High School (1930) is the best known example of Collegiate Gothic style in Kansas. Simpler examples include Fort Scott Junior High School (1918) in Fort Scott, Kansas and Garden City High School (1910) in Garden City, Kansas^{2,3}.

Curtis Junior High School embodies the Collegiate Gothic Style in the following ways: the exterior walls are brick with stone Collegiate Gothic Style detailing; Gothic arched transom windows are prominent features at the building's primary entrances; also at each primary entrance, the parapet rises higher than the adjacent parapet to suggest a tower; the windows are predominately vertical rectangular openings with multi-light sashes; the building parapets on the three primary facades have projecting piers that reference the crenelation common in Gothic Style architecture; gable ends have a parapet and are ornamented with a tall thin rectangular window common to the Gothic Style and sometimes known as a "Beautiful Princess"; finally the letter style used for "Curtis" in the carved stone panel on the south elevation is typical of the Gothic Style lettering used in Collegiate Gothic buildings. Curtis Junior High was designed by Thomas Williamson just fifteen years after he opened his own architectural firm. The school illustrates Williamsons' early grasp of the Collegiate Gothic Style, a style fully executed three years later in Williamson's design of Topeka High School.

Thomas Wilson Williamson - Curtis Junior High is significant as an excellent example of the work of Topeka (Kansas) architect, Thomas W. Williamson, known for specializing in designing schools and public buildings. The school stands today as one of over 175 schools designed by Williamson in the state of Kansas.

Thomas W. Williamson was called the "grand daddy of Kansas architects" in a 1952 Topeka Capital article. The article referred to Williamson's firm, with a staff of 46 architects, draftsmen and engineers, as "one of the best-known and most successful architectural firms in the mid-west."⁴

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Curtis Junior High School
Shawnee County, Kansas

8. Narrative Statement of Significance *continued*

Thomas W. Williamson was born August 4, 1887 in Hiawatha, Kansas (son of Leaman Wilson and Rebecca Ella McCulloch Williamson). He graduated from Topeka High School in 1907, attended the University of Pennsylvania and returned to Topeka in 1911. He worked in the state architect's office for a short time and spent one year working for John F. Stanton, a leading Topeka architect, before opening his own firm in April of 1912. His first office was a single room over the Topeka State Bank at 8th and Kansas; two years later he moved his offices to the Central National Bank Building.

From the beginning, Williamson specialized in designing school buildings. The 1952 Topeka Capital biography stated that more than 61,500 Kansas children attended classes in buildings designed by Williamson. Williamson practiced in Topeka for nearly 60 years. His firm designed more than 30 schools in and near Topeka, more than 14 churches, four hospitals, and over 50 business buildings. Topeka schools designed by Williamson include Sumner, Clay, and Monroe

Elementary Schools, Curtis Junior High and Topeka High School. In addition to schools in the Topeka area, Williamson designed schools in a number of Kansas cities including: Buffville, Burlington, Caney, Chanute, Coffeyville, Delia, Iola, Independence, Johnson County, Leavenworth, Parsons, Toronto, and Westphalia.

Stylistically, Williamson's designs varied over the years and seemed quite in keeping with national architectural trends. Representative of his earlier works, Curtis Junior High illustrates Williamson's understanding of the Collegiate Gothic style and in hindsight, was a precursor of things to come. Williamson is perhaps best known as the architect of Topeka High School, built in the early 1930s. Topeka High School is recognized as one of Kansas' best examples of the Collegiate Gothic style of architecture. The school was selected by the National Education Association as the second best high school physical plant in the United States shortly after it was completed. The Gothic bell tower at Topeka High was renamed the "Williamson Tower" in his honor in October, 1974.

One wonders if Curtis provided Williamson the opportunity for exploring the Collegiate Gothic style, fully executed at Topeka High just four years later. There is little question that Williamson's success with the earlier schools such as Curtis, influenced the school board's selection of Williamson for Topeka's new High School in 1930.

Ironically, Topeka High may have been Williamson's culmination of design in the Collegiate Gothic style. A few years later, in Williamson's design of Sumner School (1936), the architectural detailing typical of the collegiate Gothic style had all but disappeared giving way to a new standard of simplicity seen in the emergence of PWA and WPA projects.

In addition to schools, Williamson designed numerous public and commercial buildings in Topeka. In 1932, Williamson moved his firm to "Topeka's tallest building," the newly opened 14-story art-deco, First National Bank Building at 535 S. Kansas Avenue. Designed by Williamson, the First National Bank Building was considered one of the modern in the Midwest. Other outstanding examples of Williamson's work in Topeka include the First Methodist Church, the Jayhawk Hotel and Theater, the Mulvane Art Museum, the Masonic Temple, and the Methodist Episcopal Home. Williamson also designed the Jackson and Smith County Courthouses in Kansas.

Three Kansas buildings designed by Williamson are listed on the National Register. The Jayhawk Hotel, Theater and Walk (Topeka, 1926) were listed on the National Register in 1982. Two Topeka schools, Sumner and Monroe, were designated National Historic Landmarks in 1987 and 1991 respectively. Williamson was commissioned to design three Topeka schools in 1926, Monroe and Clay Grade Schools and Curtis Junior High. Monroe is a two-story rectangular brick building. The exterior lacks the ornamentation and detail prevalent on Curtis. The windows and interior finishes are similar to Curtis, probably bid together during construction. It is possible that Curtis' function as a Junior High was the stylistic distinction from Monroe and Clay Elementary Schools, designed at the same time. A decade later, Williamson designed Sumner Elementary. It was constructed in 1936 as a PWA project. Representative of the simplicity typical of WPA and PWA projects, Sumner is a two-story rectangular brick building. The entrance is defined by a projecting tower that extends

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Curtis Junior High School
Shawnee County, Kansas

8. Narrative Statement of Significance *continued*

slightly above the height of the main building. These two schools are known less for their architecture than the fact that they served as the focus for the dispute which led to the 1954 landmark segregation case, Brown versus Topeka Board of Education. This Supreme Court decision opened the door to the civil rights movement. The schools' role in the Brown case is the basis for their National Historic Landmark listing.

A leader in civic affairs, Williamson was instrumental in the creation of the Kansas Architects Registration and Examining Board and served as its first secretary. He retired in 1970 and continued to reside in Topeka until his death in November, 1974.

Curtis Junior High School - Constructed in 1927 at an approximate cost of \$250,000, Curtis Junior High was designed to accommodate 500 students. The first junior high instruction in Topeka began in 1915 at Quincy and Sumner schools. Curtis, in addition to Boswell, Roosevelt, Holiday, and Crane Junior High Schools were built in a 1920s building boom. As was the case with most new Topeka schools, Curtis was built to serve an increasing number of students.⁶

When planning the construction of Curtis Junior High School, The Board of Education selected the highest ground in North Topeka for the site of the new junior high. A number of local (Topeka) companies were involved in the construction of the school. 1926 Minutes of the Topeka Board of Education document the following involvement in the design and construction of Curtis Junior High: The firm of T.W. Williamson & Company was hired by the Board of Education to draw plans for three school buildings, the North Topeka school, Monroe school and Clay school; Gurtler & Company were awarded the general contract for the school for \$128,000; The heating contract was awarded to Bass & Linton at \$19,500; The contract for plumbing was awarded to W.F. Sheahan at \$7,495; Tucker Electric Co.'s bid of \$7,995 for wiring was accepted; D. H. Forbes Hardware Co. was awarded the bid for hardware in Monroe, Clay, & Curtis schools; and Mr. Bushey of Kansas Municipalities League was hired to develop a landscape plan.⁶

The school was designed as a state-of-the art facility and to accommodate future additions. The original design included 12 classrooms, 5 laboratories, rest rooms, a clinic room, offices, an auditorium and a gymnasium. The June 1927 issue of *Progress, official voice of the Kansas League of Women Voters* touted the modern features of the new school. "The building contains the latest ideas in finish, with hard plastered walls and wood and terrazzo floors. The floors in the Manual Training rooms are a special preparation of wood blocks laid on end with the grain laid vertically, so that tools can drop on it without breaking and still the floor would last indefinitely. The Domestic Science room floors are finished with linoleum, same as a high class kitchen. The walls and ceilings of the auditorium are treated acoustically so that the echo is eliminated."⁷ Most of the features and finishes described in the 1927 article are still evident today although damaged by moisture and exposure.

The school opened in September of 1927. S.H. Stark was the first principal of Curtis. Pupils attending Curtis Junior High came from Grant, Quincy and McKinley elementary schools.

The school was named 'Curtis' to honor United States Senator Charles Curtis who grew up in North Topeka, not far from the site of the new school. 1927 Topeka Board of Education Minutes document a letter from Senator Curtis expressing his appreciation of the honor done his family name by naming the Junior High School of north Topeka now under construction, "The Curtis." Although minutes reference a letter from Senator Curtis accepting an invitation to attend a September 9 dedication for the school, he later had to cancel and the Board postponed the dedication until October. No record could be found that the dedication ever took place.

Charles Curtis - Charles Curtis was born on a farm in a log cabin (later called Eugene, now North Topeka) on January 25, 1860. He was the son of Oren Arms (Captain Jack) Curtis, and Helen C. Pappan of French and Indian descent, whose great grandfather was Kaw Indian Chief White Plume. Charles Curtis was 1/8 Kansa-Osage Indian.

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8. Narrative Statement of Significance *continued*

Charles Curtis worked as a reporter for the "North Topeka Times" from 1877 until he began studying law in the Topeka law office of A.H. (Hib) Case in 1879. Admitted to the bar in 1881 at the age of 21. His office was located at rooms three and four at 406 Kansas Avenue, and criminal law was his specialty.

Charles Curtis served as Shawnee County Attorney from 1885-89. In 1892 he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives on the Republican ticket where he served until 1907. In January 1907, Curtis was chosen by the state legislature to fill an un-expired term in the United States Senate. He was then elected for the 1907-1913 term. He was defeated for reelection in 1912 but won the nomination again in 1914 and was elected to three more terms where he served until 1929. He served as Senate Republican Whip from 1915-25, and as Senate Majority Leader from 1925-29.

In 1928, Herbert Clark Hoover, the Republican Presidential candidate, chose Curtis as his vice presidential running mate. They won overwhelmingly (58% - 41% over Democrat Al Smith of New York). Charles Curtis gave his acceptance speech in Topeka. Four years later (after the start of the Great Depression in 1929) the Hoover-Curtis team was badly defeated (57% - 40%) by the Democratic candidates, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John Nance Garner.

In 1933 Curtis retired from public office and opened a law office in Washington, D.C. Charles Curtis died of a heart attack in Washington, D.C. on February 8, 1936. He is buried in the Topeka Cemetery located at 10th Street and California.

Summary - Curtis Junior High is significant as a distinctive example of the Collegiate Gothic style of architecture and the work of Topeka, Kansas architect Thomas Wilson Williamson. As such, it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion 'C' - Architecture.

¹ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992).p

² David Sachs and George Ehrlich, *Guide to Kansas Architecture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996).p

³ Christy Davis, *National Register Nomination for Lincoln School, Newton, Kansas*.p

⁴ *Topeka Capital Journal*, September 21, 1952.

⁵ Daniel Fitzgerald, ed. *Gone But Not Forgotten: The Lost Schools of Topeka* (Topeka: Shawnee County Historical Society, 1990).

⁶ *USD 501 Topeka Board of Education Minutes* (Book G, 1926-28).

⁷ *Progress, the Official Voice of the Kansas League of Women Voters* (Wichita, Vol. IV, No. 12, June, 1927).

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Topeka Capital Journal, July 13, 1980.

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Topeka Daily Capital, January 19, 1963.

Topeka Daily Capital, November 22, 1974.

Topeka State Journal, October 26, 1974.

Topeka State Journal, November 16, 1974.

Topeka State Journal, November 17, 1974.

Topeka State Journal, April 9, 1976.

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10. Geographical Data
Verbal Boundary Description

The legal description of the site is:

Tract 1:

Lots 1,3,5,7,9,11,19,21,23,25,27,29, 31, and 33 on Central Avenue;

Lots 2,4,6,8,10,12,14,16,18,20,22,24,26, 28, 30, 32, and 34 on Jackson Street

and the vacant alley lying adjacent to said lots.

All being in the Wineberger's Addition to the City of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas.

AND

Tract 2:

Lot 84 on Jackson Street and Lot 123 on Central Avenue and the vacant alley lying adjacent to said lots.

All being in the Firey's Addition to the City of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas. The site is one full city block bordered on the south by Grant Street (primary entrance); on the west by Jackson Street; on the east by Central Avenue, and on the north by St. John Street.

Boundary Justification

The site is in a residential neighborhood and surrounded on all sides by modest, single-family residences. The site is clearly defined by bordering streets and distinguished from the surrounding residential area by the size of the building and density on the site.

A combination of brick and concrete sidewalks line the perimeter of the block. A coursed-rubble limestone retaining wall (date unknown), not original to the school's date of construction, is located along the property line on the west, south, and east sides. The entire site is currently enclosed by a chainlink fence. The boundaries reflect the original site purchased by the school district when the school was constructed in 1927.

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Additional Documentation
Photographs

Except where noted, all photographs were taken June 13, 2001 by Mike Boatwright; Brenda Spencer holds the original negatives.

Photo #	Description of Views, [] indicates camera direction
1	Front (south) elevation [north]
2	West (side) elevation from northwest [southeast]
3	East (side) elevation from southeast [northwest]
4	North (rear) elevation [south]
5	Locker room addition and light well between gymnasium and east end wing [southwest]
6	Carved stone panel at parapet on south elevation [northeast]
7	Primary entrance (one of two) at east end of south elevation [northeast]
8	Interior view of west stairwell from 2nd floor [south]
9	Interior view of east stairwell from 1st floor [south]
10	Exterior view of "typical" windows [east]
11	Interior view of "typical" window [west]
12	"Typical" corridor [north]
13	Built-in lockers in corridor [west]
14	Terrazzo floor and base in corridor [southeast]
15	Wood baseboard and door casing in hallway between main corridor and backstage [west]
16	"Typical" classroom [east]
17	Classroom with built-in lockers [north]
18	Historic paneled doors and frame in office on 1st floor, south wall [southwest]
19	Ceramic tile in bathroom [east]
20	Gymnasium [south]
21	Auditorium from 1st floor [southwest]
22	Auditorium from 2nd floor balcony [northeast]