

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received JUN 29 1987

date entered AUG 4 1987

1. Name

historic Early XXth Century Schools in Puerto Rico (Thematic Group)

and/or common

2. Location

(see individual nominations)

street & number N/A not for publication

city, town N/A vicinity of N/A

state Puerto Rico code 072 county N/A code N/A

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
☐ district	☒ public	☒ occupied	☐ agriculture
☒ building(s)	☐ private	☐ unoccupied	☐ commercial
☐ structure	☐ both	☐ work in progress	☒ educational
☐ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	☐ entertainment
☐ object	☐ in process	☐ yes: restricted	☐ government
	☐ being considered	☒ yes: unrestricted	☐ industrial
	N/A	☐ no	☐ military
			☐ museum
			☐ park
			☐ private residence
			☐ religious
			☐ scientific
			☐ transportation
			☐ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Department of Education, Government of Puerto Rico

street & number Avenida Teniente César González

city, town vicinity of Río Piedras state Puerto Rico

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. See individual nominations

street & number N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Early XXth Century Schools in Puerto Rico has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate September, 1986 ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office

city, town San Juan state Puerto Rico

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent

☒ good

☐ fair

☐ deteriorated

☐ ruins

☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered

☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site

☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The properties included in this thematic nomination are related rather by their common use as centers for public education and their development during the first four decades of the XXth Century than by a common architectural style. Some general characteristics are repeated in all structures, These traits are the one discussed below.

Close examination of these schools will render them as buildings highly responsive to Puerto Rico's climatic conditions. These are structures that "breathe" in response to their tropical surroundings, a fact that should not come as a surprise knowing the men responsible for their design. True: many of them were Americans, but many projects, some of the best, were carried out by local professionals. This was, in fact, the first real opportunity Puerto Rican designers had to leave an imprint on the island's institutional architecture. Their talent, ideas, training and capabilities were being, at last, validated by the government. The best talent of the period worked at designing schools: Francisco Porrata Doria, Luis Perocier, Rafael Carmoega, Pedro de Castro, Antonin Nechodoma and many others. These architects addressed school design from a wide eclectic repertoire: Beaux Arts, Palladian or Georgian, Spanish Revival, or International styles, even Art Deco. But above all, theirs was a work highly interested in spatial values and craftsmanship, two of architecture's eternal concerns.

As the examples chosen for nomination best make evident, urban schools (as well as some rural ones) were strategically located within each town or area's configuration. One prototype is that of schools located within one city block, as can be found in Ponce (Ponce High, McKinley, Degetau...) and Caguas (Gautier Benítez and its neighboring ones and Aguayo Aldea). In this case, scale relationship to the rest of the city is usually one of contrast, always stressing the building's relevance against the urban texture. These schools, many times read as monuments.

As a second category, we find schools that culminate a city grid. The buildings here sit outside or peripheral to the town's original gridded lay-out. A main street usually leads to them, underlining their monumental presence and the idea of dominance over the city. Juncos, Guayama (with the Derkes and Cautiño Schools) and Cabo Rojo (with its Colberth High School) best embody the concept. A third condition refers to schools with appear as events within a street (or linear) sequence. Labra and Central High in Santurce rank among the best where the schools becomes part of a series of elements organized along a street or spine next to which the main urban spatial events occur. So the school becomes part of a sequence by which the spectator can enjoy the town's open spaces, as it also happens, in Yauco, Guayanilla or Humacao.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

JUN 29 1987

date entered

Continuation sheet

1

Item number

7

Page 1

Another important urban relationship; many of the early XXth Century schools exhibit is that of lying adjacent to the town's plaza, thus sharing importance with the church, city hall and other public facilities. Vieques, Arroyo, Guánica and Dorado can be quoted as examples. Given all of the above condition, it should not come up as a surprise that by 1920 Architectural Record would be ranking Puerto Rican schoolhouses as "usually the most monumental building in the place" (Aug. 1920, Vo. 48, pages 136-158). Structures being used as schools of the time of Spanish rule were far from being any sort of imposing institutional presence. Up to 1898 schools were scarce, and teaching took place in wooden houses, rented for said purposes. This contrasted sharply with characteristic schoolhouse construction in the States, which had been established in 1832 with the publication of a brief treatise on school architecture by William A. Alcott. As Fred E.H. Schroeder points out: "Stressing the importance of fresh air, space and light, he prescribed large windows, a classroom providing separate desks for each pupil and open surrounding for recreation. For the next 130 years the basic classroom size of about 25 by 35 feet, expansive windows, high ceilings and an open setting, usually with adjacent playgrounds or athletic fields, distinguished both one-room country schools and large urban schools from other buildings".

Many of these American conceptions were to find their way into local schoolhouses, if not all. Representative of a much larger group, the chosen examples best summarize the characteristic features of the building type on the island. All of them are object buildings, that is, free standing structures of a "sculptural" quality. They can usually be one, two or three stories high: but horizontality is always stressed on the detailing. Basic building shapes make up the plan, which can be C (Derkes), E (Ponce), V (Central) or O (Labra, Aguayo Aldea). Semi enclosed patios and arcades are integral to the basic pattern.

Concrete is the basic building material; floors, ceilings and roofs in most cases were and are of wood. The original fenestration was with wood louvres and shutters; much of it has been replaced. Ventilation was always a main concern: perforated transoms are a trademark.

Formal issues stated a symmetrical handling of the front facade, which on its back could end up turning into a merely balanced condition, yet not truly symmetrical. The entrance porticoes were always highlighted by location, scale and ornamentation. Most schoolhouses were raised,

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

JUN 29 1987

date entered

Continuation sheet

2

Item number

7

Page

2

one of the contributing factors to the biggest asset of these structures: their spatial handling of the entry sequences. The access axis served always as an organizing "spine" to which both special features and repetitive elements (classrooms) related. The former included auditoria, libraries or gyms. Flexibility was also a key item on these schools: folding doors (many with blackboards) allowed for multiple uses of the same facilities. Facades were sober and shallow; ornament was kept to a minimum, usually quite flat, whether Classical, Revival or Deco. Light and shade played a key role in these elevations.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
☐ prehistoric	☐ archeology-prehistoric	☒ community planning	☐ landscape architecture	☐ religion
☐ 1400–1499	☐ archeology-historic	☐ conservation	☐ law	☐ science
☐ 1500–1599	☐ agriculture	☐ economics	☐ literature	☐ sculpture
☐ 1600–1699	☒ architecture	☒ education	☐ military	☐ social/
☐ 1700–1799	☐ art	☐ engineering	☐ music	☐ humanitarian
☐ 1800–1899	☐ commerce	☐ exploration/settlement	☐ philosophy	☐ theater
☒ 1900–	☐ communications	☐ industry	☐ politics/government	☐ transportation
		☐ invention		☐ other (specify)

Specific dates 1908–1939 **Builder/Architect** See individual nominations

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

This thematic nomination for Early XXth Century Schools in Puerto Rico addressess the structure which best represent the island's School building tradition from 1900 to 1940. During these four (4) decades, significant and abundant architectural work of the most varied styles was produced to house ever-expanding educational programs. These schools introduced to Puerto Rico many of the United States stylistic, formal and technical concerns, also climatically and health-oriented ones. The building process by which all these "houses for learning" came to be is related to the larger context of Caribbean history, that of Cuba, the Dominican Republic and, of course Puerto Rico. Inherent siting considerations, building techniques, volumetric and typological variations and cultural associations have all been considered for the selection of the schools included in the nomination.

Each of the nominated schools is considered to be amongst the best surviving examples of its period. Besides their integrity and location in an urban context, they share the fact of having been designed by some of the most distinguished architects that ever worked on the island. All of these schools proved to be a vehicle for introducing in Puerto Rico architectural vocabulary ranging from Georgian to Neoclassical, to Spanish Revival to Art Deco. As such, they not only embodied reigning building concerns at their time, but also became modes widely repeated and reinterpreted on the Island.

One related aspect of the key historical significance deserves special attention: the transformation of the traditional architectural vocabulary of the island by the XX-Century imagery imported via the United States. Main catalyst was the construction of a series of public schools erected around 4 main periods: 1900–1910, 1910–1920, 1920–1930, 1930–1940. Many of these structures deserve to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as schools of architectural value, historical significance and present urban relevance.

As we all know, at the time of the Spanish American War of 1898, the United States had other objectives in mind for Puerto Rico, besides progress and freedom, among these, expansionism and naval power, "Manifest Destiny" ideals and, of course, long range economic interests. The war was brief, the outcome a milestone in Caribbean history; Cuba and Puerto Rico became U.S. territory, the latter still is. American soldiers were more than welcome in Puerto Rico; most pepole rejoiced at

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

JUN 29 1987

date entered

Continuation sheet

1

Item number 8

Page 1

their sight. Opposition was nil; support granted by a large segment of the population. A short-lived military government paved the way for the establishment of a civil one, with appointed American officials in charge. Eventually, all Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens, the above changes having all taken place between 1898 and 1917.

The unheralded cultural transition which unfolded during these two decades impacted Puerto Rican life at all levels...and set the stage for later developments.

The schools to be nominated to the National Register as part of this study were built in Puerto Rico under the auspices of the American Government during the first decades of the Twentieth Century, a highly important period in the island's development. During the second decade of the present century, and due to a prosperous economic condition, construction of schoolroom facilities reached unparalleled numbers. Dressed up in Revival disguise, these schools became key elements in each town's urban configuration. From the Spaniards we had inherited the twin presence of church and city hall at the heart of the town; the new schools succeeded in establishing their very own civic presence as the third most important element in the city. Such a feat was achieved through the clever (and premeditated) choice of size, scale, location and, of course, style. Diverse typologies would succumb, all alike, to different ornamental styles deemed proper at the time.

Schools were instrumental for teaching English, but also "americanism"; Commissioner of Education Juan B. Huyke would speak in 1921 of schools as agencies for the process of americanization. Another Commissioner, Samuel M. Lindsay, as early as 1902, would describe schools as "military barracks" for the peaceful colonization of the Island. Aida Negrón de Montilla and Angel Quintero Rivera have produced impressive work related to this subject. For the latter, education politics of the time are closely related to the transformation of our society into a capitalistic one. The argument is made stronger upon knowledge of the American government's insistence on building "an American school at each valley and on each hill"; "with the building facing an important street", making its presence evident and only comparable to that of church and city hall in each of our towns.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received JUN 29 1987

date entered

Continuation sheet

2

Item number

8

Page 2

Since the beginning of its political relationship with Puerto Rico, the American Government established the construction of roads and schools as a main priority. Public works also included a large number of health centers, and city halls, all developed with eclectic unrestraint. Neoclassical, Georgian, Bungalow, Victorian or Prairie, were but a few of many entries in a catalogue of featured styles which in a way marked the new cultural alliance.

During Franklin D. Roosevelt's term as President, these priorities were again the focus of most governmental efforts. According to the terms of the "New Deal" the U.S.A. would directly intervene in economic and industrial matters pertaining to the development of the island. An offspring of this was the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA), which from 1933 to 1936 spent 29 million dollars creating jobs, roads, hospitals, bridges and, of course, schools. The island's demographic profile had continued to change drastically. In 1918, Puerto Rico's population density had been established at 146 persons per square kilometer; by 1940 the figures had risen to 210 persons per square kilometer.

Social and political conditions have changed since then. Most of these school buildings still survive and, most importantly, still function as originally intended. It is a surprising fact that, in spite of the speed with which with the government set out to build all of these educational facilities, most of them turned out to be significant buildings whose superb siting and design still today more than ever, deserve proper recognition as such.

The importance of Early XXth Century School architectural examples transcends mere utilitarian purposes. For certainly, the facilities are still relevant for use today, but the role which they perform in our society is a more encompassing one. Similar schools were built by the United States in Cuba and the Dominican Republic during the same decades. In Santiago and Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) schoolhouses resemble closely those erected in Puerto Rico. Coral Gables Elementary School, Miami Shores School and William Jennings Bryan School, all in Miami, are akin to our own educational facilities at the beginning of the century.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

JUN 29 1987

date entered

Continuation sheet

3

Item number

8

Page

3

The ambitious school building program carried out by the U.S. Government in Puerto Rico, represented by our entries for nomination, links the island with the concerns of 19th century education reformers who advocated improved school buildings. Schroeder summarizes these concerns perceptively: "Practical interior related to illumination, sanitation, ventilation, furniture, equipment and, in urban schools, special-purpose rooms. Improved interior designs were justified on the basis that good architecture was supposed to contribute a moral influence on the formation of character. Exteriors tended to mirror current stylistic tastes".

Puerto Rico lived through it all, adhering in its school projects to "codes" or accepted procedures, in many instances, adopted in the United States through German or English influences. That is how the two story scheme with basement came to be preferred, auditoriums placed on the uppermost floor, stairs provided in multiple sets; transoms ventilated... and so on. These and other ideas were being developed at the time in the USA by architects or renowned such as Haussander and Perkins in Chicago, Snyder in New York, Cooper in Boston and William B. Ittner in St. Louis. Their names, ideas and work was consistently featured at trade magazines of the time: The American Architect, Architectural Record and The Architectural Forum. The issues addressed in the States become ours: school hygiene and sanitation; climate as a main consideration; beauty as a result of function; expansion as a possibility. Professional debate was centered also around site selection, minimum square foot standards; compositional or proportional concerns; historical precedent and decoration. When such an architectural heritage is understood in full scope, it will become obvious that our Early XXth Century schools embody an all-inclusive legacy which commands attention, interpretation and recognition.

Examination of these schools renders effective design strategies regarding building typology, siting, applied ornamentation, symmetry, prototype reinterpretation (all other issues above mentioned). An important lesson offered by these buildings relates to the use of simple construction methods to their fullest potential. Paired with the different patterns and practices each building nominated represents, the design alternatives embodied by all together cover all conditions inherent to the school prototype on the Island.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

JUN 29 1987

date entered

Continuation sheet

4

Item number 8

Page 4

The schools chosen for nomination are truly landmarks of their own period. Not only do they represent their own style, but by their location mark, in many instances, the limits of town at the time of their erection. Study of these structures not only facilitates an understanding of urban growth, but also of the role played by key figures in our architectural history, so far unrecognized as such. The work of Adrian C. Finlayson, designer of Labra, Central, Ponce High and many other schools on the island is an excellent example of this. Credit to his work is much overdue.

A significance statement on Early XXth Century schools must, however, cover additional aspects. One relates to the (cultural-associational) values inherent to these centers for learning, attended by several generations which now conceive of them as key items in their collective memory. Puerto Ricans of all socio-economic strata attended these schools which, in that sense acted as a unique social fulcrum unparalleled by any other institution in Puerto Rico.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See enclosed bibliography

10. Geographical Data

See individual nominations

Acreage of nominated property N/A

Quadrangle name N/A

Quadrangle scale N/A

UTM References

A	Zone	Easting	Northing	B	Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See individual nominations

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code
state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jorge Rigau, Architect AIA

organization COLACION, Inc. date May, 1987

street & number Box 997 Old San Juan Station telephone (809) 725-3948

city or town San Juan state Puerto Rico

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national ☒ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Mariano G. Coronas Castro

title State Historic Preservation Officer date June 22, 1987

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

See continuation sheet for listing

Keeper of the National Register

date

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

JUN 29 1987

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

Multiple Resource Area
Thematic GroupName Early Twentieth Century Schools in Puerto Rico TR
State Caguas Co. (and others), PR

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

Cover

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

Amy Schlager 8/4/87

Keeper

Edna B. B. 8/4/87
for Keeper

Attest

Keeper

Amy Schlager 8/4/87

Attest

Keeper

Amy Schlager 8/4/87

Attest

Keeper

Amy Schlager 8/4/87

Attest

Keeper

Amy Schlager 8/4/87

Attest

Keeper

Amy Schlager 5/14/89

Attest

Keeper

Amy Schlager

Attest

Keeper

Attest

Keeper

Attest

Keeper

Attest

52 1. Aguayo Aldea Vocational
High School~~Substantive Review~~

2. Central High School

~~Substantive Review~~

3. Ponce High School

~~Substantive Review~~

4. Rafael M. Labra High School

~~Substantive Review~~5. Eleuterio Derkes Grammar
School~~Substantive Review~~done
5/16/89 6. Escuela Brambaugh~~Substantive Review~~done
5/11/89 -
5/26/89 7. Escuela Graduado Jose Celso Barbosa
~~Substantive Review~~

8.

9.

10.