



**Survey and Research Report
On The
Derita High School Gymnasium**

October 30, 2018



Derita High School Gymnasium 2018



Derita High School Gymnasium c. 1960

1. **Name And Location Of The Property.** The Derita High School Gymnasium is located at 6115 Rumble Road, Charlotte, N.C.

2. Name And Address Of The Present Owner Of The Property.

Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education
P.O. Box 30035
Charlotte, N.C. 28230

3. Representative Photographs Of The Property. The report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. Map Depicting The Location Of The Property. This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.

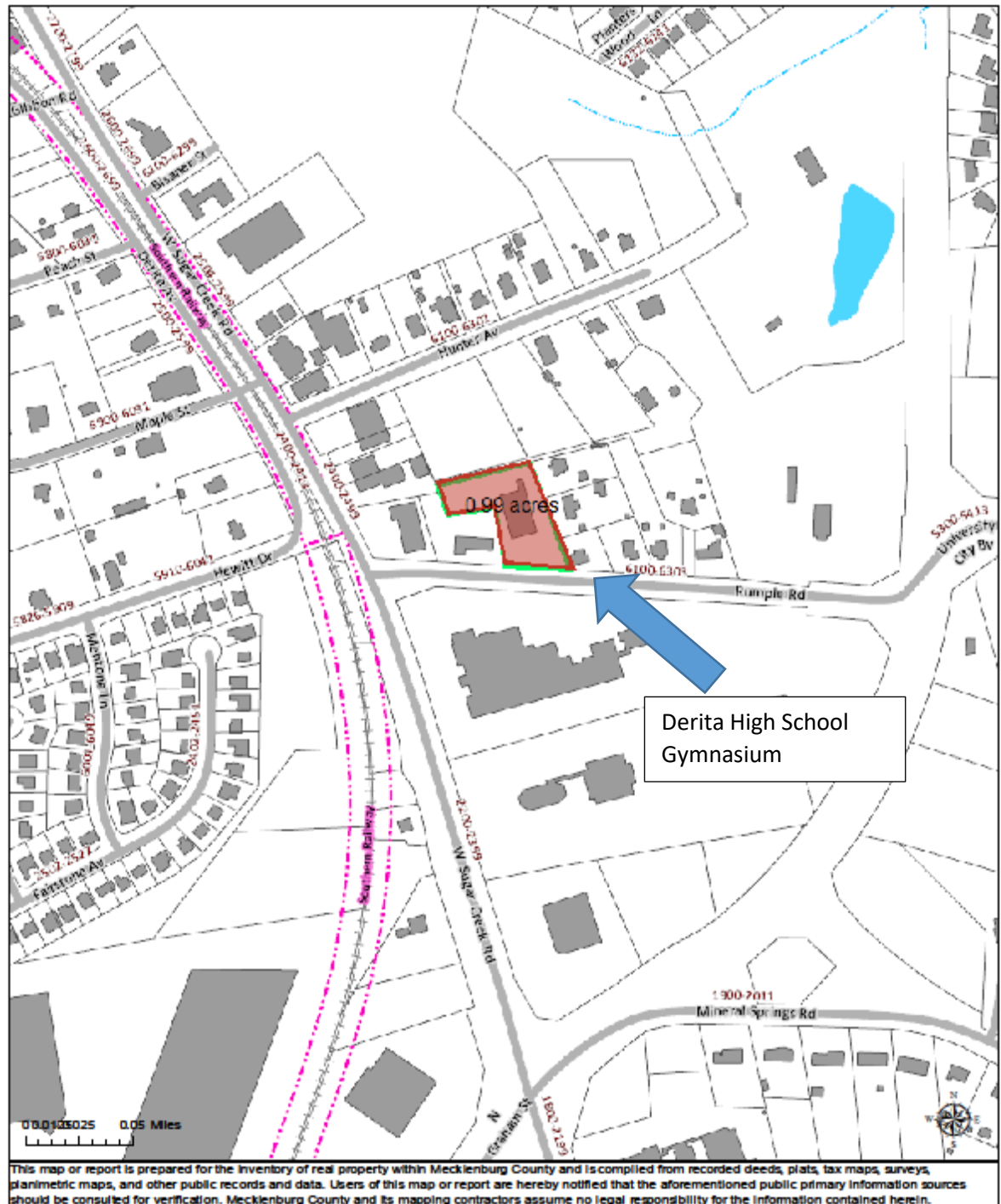


Polaris 3G Map – Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Derita High School Gym

0.99 acres (42959.16 sq ft)

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Portion Of Property Recommended For Historic Landmark Designation: The entire exterior of the Derita High School Gymnasium and the entire Mecklenburg Tax Parcel Number 04704312.

5. Current Tax Parcel Number Of The Property. The tax parcel number of the property is 04704312.

6. A Brief Historic Sketch Of The Property. The report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

7. A Brief Physical Description Of The Property. The report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

8. Documentation Of Why And In What Ways The Property Meets The Criteria For Designation Set Forth In N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.

a. Special Significance In Terms Of Its History, Architecture, And/Or Cultural Importance. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the Derita High School Gymnasium possesses special significance in terms of Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) The Derita High School Gymnasium is one of only three extant gymnasiums that were erected by the Mecklenburg County Board of Education before World War Two.

2) The Derita High School Gymnasium documents the rising importance of physical education and sports in secondary public education in Mecklenburg County in the 1920's and 1930s.

3) The Derita High School Gymnasium, designed by Lucian Jackson Dale, is the only extant pre-World War Two public school gymnasium in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, that exhibits features of mid-century non-revivalist civic design.

b. Integrity Of Design, Setting, Workmanship, Materials, Feeling, And/Or Association. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the physical description of the Derita High School Gymnasium included in this report demonstrates that the Derita High School Gymnasium meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal. The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property that becomes a designated "historic landmark." The Derita High School Gymnasium is exempt from the payment of Ad Valorem taxes.

Date Of The Preparation Of This Report: October 30, 2018

Prepared By: Dr. Dan L. Morrill

**A Brief History Of The
Derita High School Gymnasium
Dr. Dan L. Morrill
October 30, 2018**

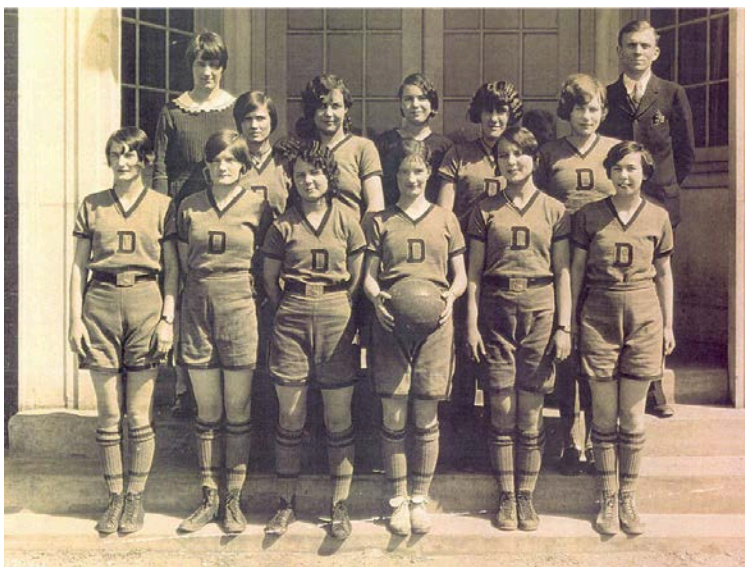


The special significance of the Derita High School Gymnasium is best understood within the context of the growing importance of physical education and sports in the schools of the United States in the 1920s and 1930s.¹ It is one of only three extant gymnasiums that were built by the Mecklenburg County Board of Education before its merger with the Charlotte City Schools in 1960, the others being the Davidson High School Gymnasium and the Long Creek High School Gymnasium. The Derita High School Gymnasium also has special significance because of its place in the architectural history of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Unlike all the other high school gymnasiums built by the Mecklenburg County Schools in the 1930s, the Derita High School Gymnasium broke with tradition and was a bold and locally unique expression of pre-World War Two non-revivalist gymnasium design.

According to sports historians Richard A. Swanson and Betty Spears, physical education became an “integral component of the educational system” of the United States between World War One and World War Two.² “Physical education,” they explain, “emerged as an accepted part in the curriculum in secondary and post-secondary institutions.”³ During the inter-war years, they write, the United States “became a nation in which sport was firmly woven into the fabric of its life—as entertainment, as an integral part of education, and as an accepted and worthwhile way to spend time.”⁴ A consequence of the rising pedagogical significance of sports was the requirement that school systems construct new buildings, including gymnasiums.

John Naismith (1861-1939), an instructor in the gymnasium department of the YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts, invented basketball in 1891. The YMCA needed a game that could be played indoors during the winter months, and basketball was the answer. The game was instantly popular with male and female players.⁵ Mecklenburg County was no exception. “Never before in its history has there been manifested such wide-awake interest in basketball,” declared the *Charlotte News* in 1908, “and the game is becoming more popular each season it is played.”⁶ In December 1910, the *Charlotte*

Observer reported that basketball “was rapidly coming into its own in this part of the country.”⁷ According to Swanson and Spears, “basketball began to be the most popular high school sport for boys” by the outbreak of World War One.⁸ Charlotte high schools first organized basketball teams to play other schools in December 1917.⁹ On December 14, 1920, the *Charlotte Observer* announced that an 8-member basketball league of Mecklenburg County high schools had been established. It included boys teams and girls teams. Derita High School was a member.¹⁰



1929 Derita High School Girls Basketball Team

High school basketball games in Charlotte-Mecklenburg during the 1920s were played outdoors or on indoor courts at the Charlotte YMCA for boys and at the Charlotte YWCA for girls.¹¹ Charlotte Central High School acquired its own gymnasium in 1930.¹² The 1930s also witnessed the construction of gymnasiums at the rural and small town high schools operated by the Mecklenburg County Board of Education. The Civil Works Administration (CWA) of the New Deal co-funded the erection of high school gymnasiums at Paw Creek, Berryhill, Long Creek, Pineville, Sharon, Oakhurst, Huntersville and Bain in 1934.¹³ Of these only the Long Creek Gymnasium remains.¹⁴ All the CWA-built gymnasiums in Mecklenburg County had similar architectural attributes. They were strictly utilitarian and had no distinctive decorative details.



Paw Creek High School Gymnasium (Destroyed)



**Sharon High School Campus.
Gymnasium In Rear (Destroyed)**



Bain High School Gymnasium (Destroyed)



The Long Creek High School Gymnasium. Built in 1934, it is the only gymnasium of its type that survives in Mecklenburg County.

On November 3, 1936, the voters of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County approved the issuance of \$1,169,000 of school bonds, which included funds for the construction of gymnasiums at the Davidson High School, the Matthews High School, the Derita High School, and the completion of the gymnasium at the Newell High School.¹⁵ Unlike the earlier high school gymnasiums built in rural and small town Mecklenburg, these gymnasiums were designed by prominent Charlotte architects. Willard G. Rogers prepared plans for the Davidson High School Gymnasium.¹⁶ In keeping with his training and career,

Rogers produced a Classical Revival style building. The Newell High School Gymnasium and the Matthews High School Gymnasium also harkened to the past.



Davidson High School Gymnasium



Newell High School Gymnasium
(Destroyed)



Matthews High School Gymnasium (Destroyed)

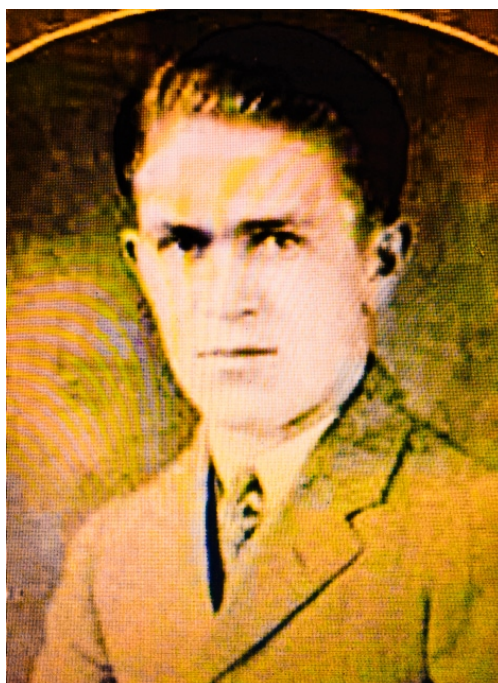
The architect of the Derita High School Gymnasium was Lucian Jackson Dale (1902-1957).¹⁷ A native of Kinston, N.C., Dale graduated from North Carolina State College in 1924 with a degree in architecture.¹⁸ In keeping with other architects during the Great Depression, Dale had to produce an eclectic array of designs to survive economically. His plan for the Charles Miller House at 254 Colville Road in Charlotte's Eastover neighborhood was uncompromisingly traditional.¹⁹

But at heart Dale was an innovator. The *Charlotte Observer* called Dale's design for the Walgreens Drug Store at Fifth and North Tryon Streets "one of the most modern buildings in Charlotte." "The entire building is faced with hydraulic pressed brick especially made for the structure," stated the newspaper.²⁰ A founding member of the Charlotte Junior Chamber of Commerce, Dale helped organize a five-day event in July 1938 to highlight up-to-date construction practices. People visited newly-built residences in Myers Park to see illustrations of cross sections of the homes and to learn how the houses were put together. Dale even arranged for the illustrations to have an audio component, no small technological feat in the 1938. The building materials spoke for themselves, literally.²¹ Dale was particularly



active in preparing plans for commercial and industrial buildings. He was the architect for two Coca Cola Bottling Company buildings, one in Concord, N.C. and another in Salisbury, N.C.²² He also designed a building for Biltmore Dairy Farms on West Morehead Street in Charlotte.²³

Lucian Dale earned the respect of his fellow architects. He served as Secretary of the North Carolina A.I.A. in 1939.²⁴ Also indicative of his standing among Charlotte architects was the fact that he was one of two representatives who appeared before the Mecklenburg County School Board in November 1936 to speak on behalf of Charlotte Architects Associated (CAA). The CCA was authorized to allocate all school construction projects among the architects of Charlotte.²⁵ One can imagine the importance of this responsibility during the Great Depression. It was through the CCA that Lucian Dale was awarded the contract to design the Derita High School Gymnasium. And the Derita High School Gymnasium still functions and bears witness to the creative spirit and talent of Lucian Jackson Dale.



Lucian Jackson Dale (1902-1957)



Interior Of The Derita High School Gymnasium

**A Brief Physical Description
Of The Derita High School Gymnasium**

**Dr. Dan L. Morrill
October 30, 2018**



Derita High School Gymnasium (2018)



Derita High School Gymnasium (c. 1960)

The Derita High School Gymnasium is located in the Derita neighborhood of Charlotte, N.C. It is on the north side of Rumble Road on a mostly treeless lot that slopes gently downward from Rumble Road and then is mostly level. The parcel is across the street from where the Derita High School was once situated. The former campus of Derita High School is now the location of a Performance Learning High

School operated by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools. The Derita Gymnasium is located approximately 75 feet from the edge of the Rumble Road right-of-way. The parcel is grassed except for a gravel parking lot and concrete pad between the Derita High School Gymnasium and Rumble Road. To the immediate west of the Derita High School Gymnasium are commercial properties, and houses are to the immediate east.

The Derita High School Gymnasium is a 5-bay wide by 6-bay deep, south-facing, one story, frame building clad in red brick laid in running bond with decorative corbeling. The predominant window type was originally 6/6 double-hung sash with three 3/3 windows on the upper level of the southern (front) and northern (rear) facades. The predominant window type is now 3/3 fixed lights. The three windows on the upper level of the rear and front of the gymnasium are now single pane fixed lights. 2/2 fixed windows are on the outermost bays of the northern and southern facades and above the side entrances into the gymnasium. A standing-seam, hipped, metal roof with deep soffits is atop the gymnasium. A one-story rear addition contains bathrooms and dressing rooms. It has a chimney with a masonry cap that partially penetrates the main roof at the center back. A one-story brick addition with a brick chimney is at the northeast rear corner of the Derita High School Gymnasium. It most likely houses the furnace.

The main entrance to the Derita High School Gymnasium is on the southern or front façade of the building. It consists of three doors evenly spaced across a shallow brick projection that occupies the middle bay and the two bays on either side of it. The entry doors have narrow rectangular lights with wire embedded. A masonry slab in front of the gymnasium extends to masonry steps that rise to the shallow masonry landing in front of the entry doors. There is a side entrance into the Derita High School Gymnasium at the rear bay of the eastern façade and at the rear bay of the western facade. Low cheek brick walls with masonry caps border five masonry steps that rise to a masonry landing in front of a pair of solid doors. Three circular metal handrails are at each entrance – one in the middle of the steps and one embedded in each cheek wall.



Eastern Side Entrance



Western Side Entrance

Lucian Dale made subtle references to classicism in his design of the Derita High School Gymnasium. Corbled rectangular panels simulate pilasters between the six bays on the eastern and western façades of the building. Corbled pilasters bracket the outermost bays on the southern or front façade of the gymnasium, and corbled quoining exists at the corners of the front façade. An especially compelling

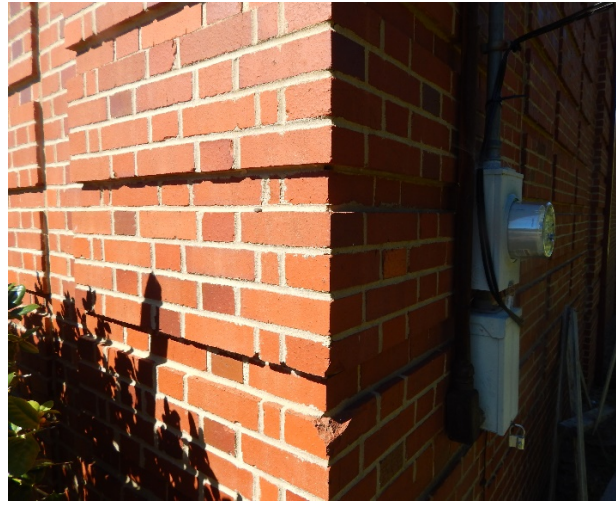
reference to classicism extends across the three middle bays of the southern façade of the Derita High School Gymnasium at the top of the corbled projection above the entrance doors. It consists of a masonry half-round cornice moulding above masonry dentils. A masonry rectangle above the middle entrance door contains the address numbers 6115. Decorative corbelling extends below the outer windows on the southern or front façade of the Derita High School Gymnasium. Finally, a handicapped access with metal railing leading to the western front entrance of the Derita High School Gymnasium has been added.



Masonry Cornice Moulding Above Front Entrance To The Derita High School Gymnasium



Southern Façade Of Gymnasium From Southwest



Corbled Quoining At Edge Of Southern Facade



Furnace Room With Chimney



Southern Façade Of Gymnasium From Southeast

Note: *Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools did not provide permission for access to the interior of the Derita High School Gymnasium nor did the owner give written permission for landmark designation for the interior of the building. Staff recommends designation of the exterior of the Derita High School Gymnasium and the tax parcel upon which it is located.*

¹ Amos Rumble, a leading landowner in a settlement about six miles north of Charlotte on the Atlantic Tennessee & Ohio Railroad, chose the name Derita when he succeeded in having a post office established there in 1882. The most complete history of Derita is found in Eddie Conley, *June Bug on a String. A History of Derita, North Carolina As Experienced Through The Eyes Of A Ten-Year-Old Boy Growing Up In The 1950's* (Warren Publishing Company, n.d.), 221 pp.

² Richard A. Swanson and Betty Spears, *History of Sport and Physical Education in the United States* (Boston: WCB/McGraw-Hill, 1995), 226. The pedagogical belief that strengthening the body was as important and developing the mind originated in Germany in the early 1800s. Gymnastics stood at the heart of physical education curricula until the turn of the last century. Thereafter, sports occupied an increasingly consequential place. (see John A. Kennard, "The History of Physical Education." (*Signs*, Vol. 2, No.4, Summer 1977)), 836.

³ Swanson and Spears, 206.

⁴ Swanson and Spears, 207.

⁵ Swanson and Spears, 173.

⁶ *Charlotte News*, March 1, 1908.

⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, December 27, 1910.

⁸ Swanson and Spears, 175.

⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, December 9, 1917.

¹⁰ *Charlotte Observer*, December 14, 1920. The members of the League were Matthews High School, Paw Creek High School, Pineville High School, Huntersville High School, Cornelius High School, Derita High School, Cochran High School, and Dixie High School. The City of Charlotte also had a high school basketball league.

¹¹ *Charlotte Observer*, February 8, 23, December 14, 1920.

¹² *Charlotte Observer*, November 13, 1930.

¹³ <http://www.cmhpf.org/S&Rs%20Alphabetical%20Order/surveys&rlongcreekgym.htm>

¹⁴ <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/old-paw-creek-gymnasium-demolished-charlotte-nc/>

¹⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, November 4, 1936,

¹⁶ <http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Davidson-School-SR.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/70428808/lucian-jackson-dale>. *Minutes of the Mecklenburg Board of Education* (March 10, 24, 1937). Hereinafter cited as *Minutes*.

¹⁸ https://www.ancestry.com/search/?name=Lucian_Dale&event=charlotte-mecklenburg-north+carolina-usa_20937&birth=1957&name_x=1_1. <https://ocr.lib.ncsu.edu/ocr/ag/agromeck1924nort/agromeck1924nort.pdf>

¹⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, July 8, 1936.

²⁰ *Charlotte Observer*, June 26, 1937.

²¹ *Charlotte Observer*, July 17, 1938; February 23, 1954.

²² *Charlotte Observer*, March 12, 1936; April 24, 1938.

²³ *Charlotte Observer*, November 24, 1938.

²⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, February 26, 1939.

²⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, November 13, 1936