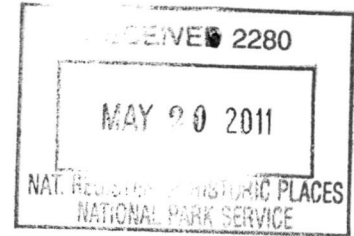


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



407

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
other names/site number Joe Radford Thomas Recreation Center

**2. Location**

street & number 1361 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue not for publication N/A  
city or town Mobile vicinity N/A  
state Alabama code AL county Mobile code 97 zip code 36603

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)

Simuel H. Hankins Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer May 13, 2011  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)  
State or 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 or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson H. Beall

Jon  
Signature of Keeper

6-27-11  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>      </u> buildings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>      </u>	<u>1</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> 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)

Cat: Recreation and Culture Sub: Sports facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Recreation and Culture Sub: Sports facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete

roof: Tar, Gravel

walls: Stucco

other: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

name of property Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
county and State Mobile County, AL

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**7. Narrative Description**

The Davis Avenue Recreation Center is located at 1361 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue in northwestern Mobile on the south side of MLK, facing north. The property is relatively flat with a play area for children located on the western end of the property and an Olympic sized swimming pool (circa 1970) located at the rear. The pool is noncontributing. Constructed in 1936, the recreation center is a one-story, structural tile building covered with stucco. It rests on a concrete foundation and has a gravel on tar flat roof.

The north facade features a slightly projecting central bay with an inset entryway supported by iron posts. Metal double doors are present along with large paned windows surrounding the door. Additionally, sash windows flank the entryway, two on the eastern side and one on the western.

The west elevation can be divided into three main portions. Eight sash windows and a fire exit is present along the first 1/3 of the elevation. The central portion of the elevation, which corresponds to the basketball court and is consequently taller than the rest of the building, features large-paned awning windows and a pair of metal double doors. Two windows along the rear portion of the west elevation have been covered with plywood.

The south elevation features four windows. Two of these windows on the western end have been covered with plywood, while the other two on the eastern end are sash windows. A centrally located fire exit is also present.

The east elevation is similar to the west. However, only five sash windows are present on the first 1/3 of the elevation. Also, no windows are present on the rear portion.

The double door entry opens into a large game room furnished with game tables. Double doors on either side of the gameroom lead to a classroom and computer room, respectively. A single doorway at the front of the room leads to an office. A pair of double doors at the rear of the gameroom leads to the basketball court. Two doorways along the rear wall of the court provide access to the stage and locker rooms. Two double door entrance/exits are located at either end of the basketball court. The floor is tile. The interior walls of the game room, classroom, and computer room are plaster, while the basketball court is painted tile. The ceilings are drop tile. The original ceiling has been dropped to provide for the addition of air conditioning (circa 1970). A clerestory, comprised of a total of twelve sash windows, is present along the central axis of the building.

The Davis Avenue Recreation Center retains its integrity of setting, location, design, materials, and workmanship.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2

name of property Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
county and State Mobile County, AL

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**Archaeological Component**

Although no formal archaeological survey has been made of this area, the potential for subsurface remains is good. Buried portions may contain significant information that may be useful in interpreting the entire area.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage: Black  
Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1936-1961

Significant Dates \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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(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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

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

Name of repository: Mobile Historic Development Commission

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 3 name of property Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
county and State Mobile County, AL

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## 8. Statement of Significance

The Davis Avenue Recreation Center is locally significant under Criterion A for ethnic heritage: black. The recreation center was established in 1921 as the Davis Avenue Community House. It was the first recreation center in Mobile established for African-Americans. In 1936, a new building was constructed to meet the growing demand of local residents for recreational activities. The recreational center is significant for its implementation of athletic programs for African-Americans living along Davis Avenue (now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue). The period of significance for the Davis Avenue Recreation Center extends from 1936, the year it was constructed, to 1961, the fifty-year cut-off date, although it continues to be a recreation center enjoyed by residents of the neighborhood.

The Davis Avenue Recreation Center is also locally significant under National Register Criterion C in the area of architecture. The building is the only example of a recreational facility built for African-Americans in Mobile using WPA funding and utilizing early modernist design elements such as a geometrically precise aesthetic favoring volumetric forms devoid of applied pattern, texture or ornament, and an open interior arrangement with multi-purpose rooms illuminated by large expanses of plate glass windows. Additionally, no other recreational facilities were built in Mobile using WPA funds.

### Historical Summary

Since African-Americans in Mobile were excluded from the larger white society by segregation in fact and later by law, an entire community, essentially a city within a city, developed along Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue. Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and progressing into the early 20<sup>th</sup>, the community developed, and became known colloquially as "The Avenue". By 1920, "The Avenue", complete with its own churches, schools, recreational facilities, and businesses, reached its height and would continue to thrive and grow.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of the recreational/sports facility. The YMCA, founded in London by George Williams in 1844, offered the first of these facilities. The YMCA was introduced into the U.S. in 1851. The organization grew rapidly, and by 1899 Mobile's branch was located in an impressive neo-classical building at Government and Conception Streets (NR listing 1974/demolished 2003). Each facility was staffed by local employees. Its primary goal was to provide the means by which a young man could maintain a healthy spirit, mind, and body. The YMCA branches offered structured sports instruction in basketball, volleyball, swimming, and racquetball. Weight rooms were also a common feature ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)).

City recreational facilities adopted the YMCA model. Founded circa 1920, the Spring Hill Avenue Recreation Center is the oldest in Mobile (Bivens 2004, Appendix HH). This facility was for whites only. In 1921, the City of Mobile purchased land on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue from Dave Patton, a wealthy African-American businessman, and constructed the first recreation center for African-Americans.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 4

name of property Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
county and State Mobile County, AL

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The facility opened later that year and included tennis courts, a swimming pool, and a small park for children. The facility was originally named the Davis Avenue Community House before being changed to the Davis Avenue Recreation Center. The African-American- only facility was consistent with the “separate but equal” philosophy that dominated racial relations before the attainment of full civil rights (Ibid 2004, 147).

In 1936, the original 1921 building was demolished and a new, tile and brick building was constructed. Funding was provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). A small amount of funding was also made available by the city. In 1942, Joe Radford Thomas was hired as director of the facility. During his tenure, baseball, softball, and basketball programs were initiated. Thomas’ stature and contributions to the community were such that the facility was renamed in his honor in 1973. He died in 1964 (Ibid 2004, 148).

During its 84 years, a number of the recreation center’s local users have gone on to gain national fame including Henry “Hank” Aaron, Willie McCovey, Major General J. Gary Cooper, and others. Out of town visitors also included the singer Cab Calloway. The Davis Avenue Recreation Center is the second oldest recreational facility in Mobile and the oldest continuously operated facility in the African-American community (Ibid 2004, 148). Although integration has put an end to the segregated facilities of the South, the recreation center is still strongly identified with the African-American community of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue. Because of its pre-eminent position in the community, the facility is one of the foundations upon which the Avenue’s heritage and culture is built.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section   9   Page   5  

name of property Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
county and State Mobile County, AL

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9. **Major Bibliographical References**

Bivens, Shawn. Mobile, Alabama's People of Color: A Tricentennial History: 1702-2002. Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2004.

City Directories ( 1920 – 1961), Municipal Archives. Mobile, Alabama.

“YMCA” ; available from [http:// www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org); Internet; accessed 22 August 2005.

1924 and 1955 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Mobile, Alabama, Municipal Archives. Mobile, Alabama.

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property Approximately 2 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>16</u>	<u>397910</u>	<u>3396630</u>	4	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	5	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____	6	_____	_____

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.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Shaun Wilson/ Preservation Consultant, reviewed by Susan Enzweiler, AHC NR Coordinator

organization Mobile Historic Development Commission date 03/28/11

street & number P.O. Box 1827 telephone 251-208-7281

city or town Mobile state AL zip code 36633-1827

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**Additional Documentation**

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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)

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**Property Owner**

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

name Rick Rambeau, Director, Parks and Recreation Dept., City of Mobile

street & number 205 Government Street telephone 251-208-1650

city or town Mobile state AL zip code 36644

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page 6

name of property Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
county and State Mobile County, AL

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**10. Verbal Boundary Description**

Commencing at the corner of Rylands Street and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue run southeastwardly along the southern line of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue 370.04 feet to the point of beginning, then continue southeastwardly along southern line of said avenue 204.96 feet, thence southwestwardly 400 feet to a point on the north line of Lyons Street, thence run northwardly along north side of said street 240 feet, thence northeastwardly 176.08 feet, thence southeastwardly 47.90 feet, thence northeastwardly 226.52 feet to the south line of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue and the point of beginning.

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated property includes the entire parcel, which has been historically associated with the Davis Avenue Recreation Center since its construction.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section (photos) Page 7 name of property Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
county and State Mobile County, AL

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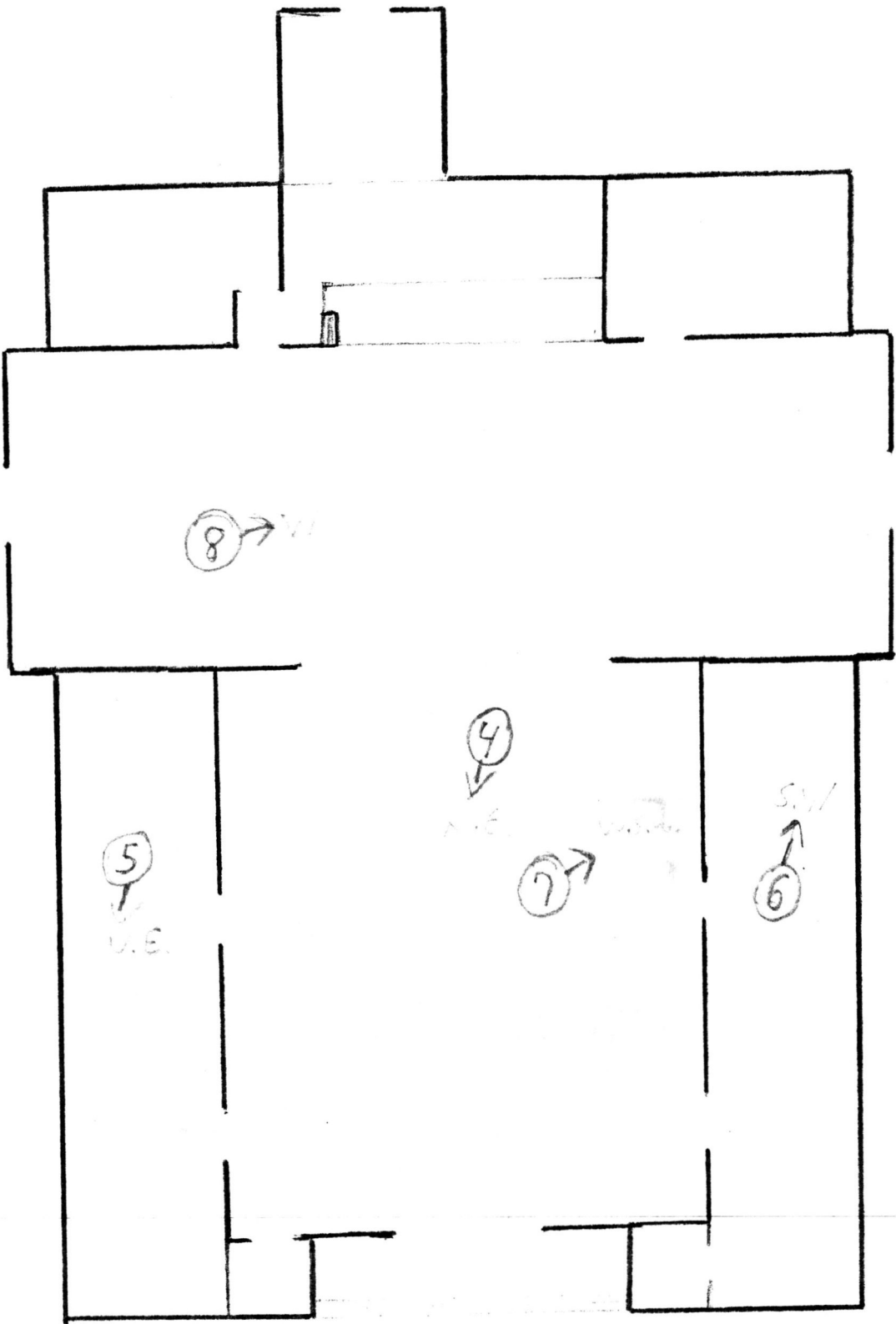
Photographic Key

Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama  
Shaun Wilson, photographer  
February- April 2005  
Location of Original Images: Alabama Historical Commission

Photo#	Description
1.	Davis Avenue Recreation Center, front façade & west elevation, camera facing south (AL_MobileCounty_Davis Avenue Recreation Center1.tif)
2.	rear & east elevations, camera facing north (AL_MobileCounty_Davis Avenue Recreation Center2.tif)
3.	west & rear elevations, camera facing northeast (AL_MobileCounty_Davis Avenue Recreation Center3.tif)
4.	gameroom, camera facing northeast (AL_MobileCounty_Davis Avenue Recreation Center4.tif)
5.	computer room, camera facing northeast (AL_MobileCounty_Davis Avenue Recreation Center5.tif)
6.	classroom, camera facing southwest (AL_MobileCounty_Davis Avenue Recreation Center6.tif)
7.	clerestory, camera facing west southwest (AL_MobileCounty_Davis Avenue Recreation Center7.tif)
8.	basketball court, camera facing west (AL_MobileCounty_Davis Avenue Recreation Center8.tif)

2 ← 2

0x2



3

On the floor  
plan...

5  
↑  
1

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ALABAMA, Mobile

DATE RECEIVED: 5/20/11 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 6/10/11  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 6/27/11 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 7/05/11  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 11000407

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 6.27.11 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places**

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



Joe Redford Thomas Recreation Center

# 1

Mobile, Mobile County, AL

MLK/MPS 3/13



Joe Radford Thomas Recreation Center

# 2

Mobile, Mobile County, AL

MLK/MPS 3/15

STH



Joe Raulford Thomas Recreation Center

#3

Mobile, Mobile County, AL

MLK/MPS 3/16



Joe Relford Thomas Recreation Center

#4

Mobile, Mobile County, AL

MLK/MPS 3/18



Joe Raulford Thomas Recreation Center  
Mobile, Mobile County, AL  
MLK/MPS 3/19

#5



Joe Radford Thomas Recreation Center

#6

Mobile, Mobile County, AL

MLK/MPS 3/20



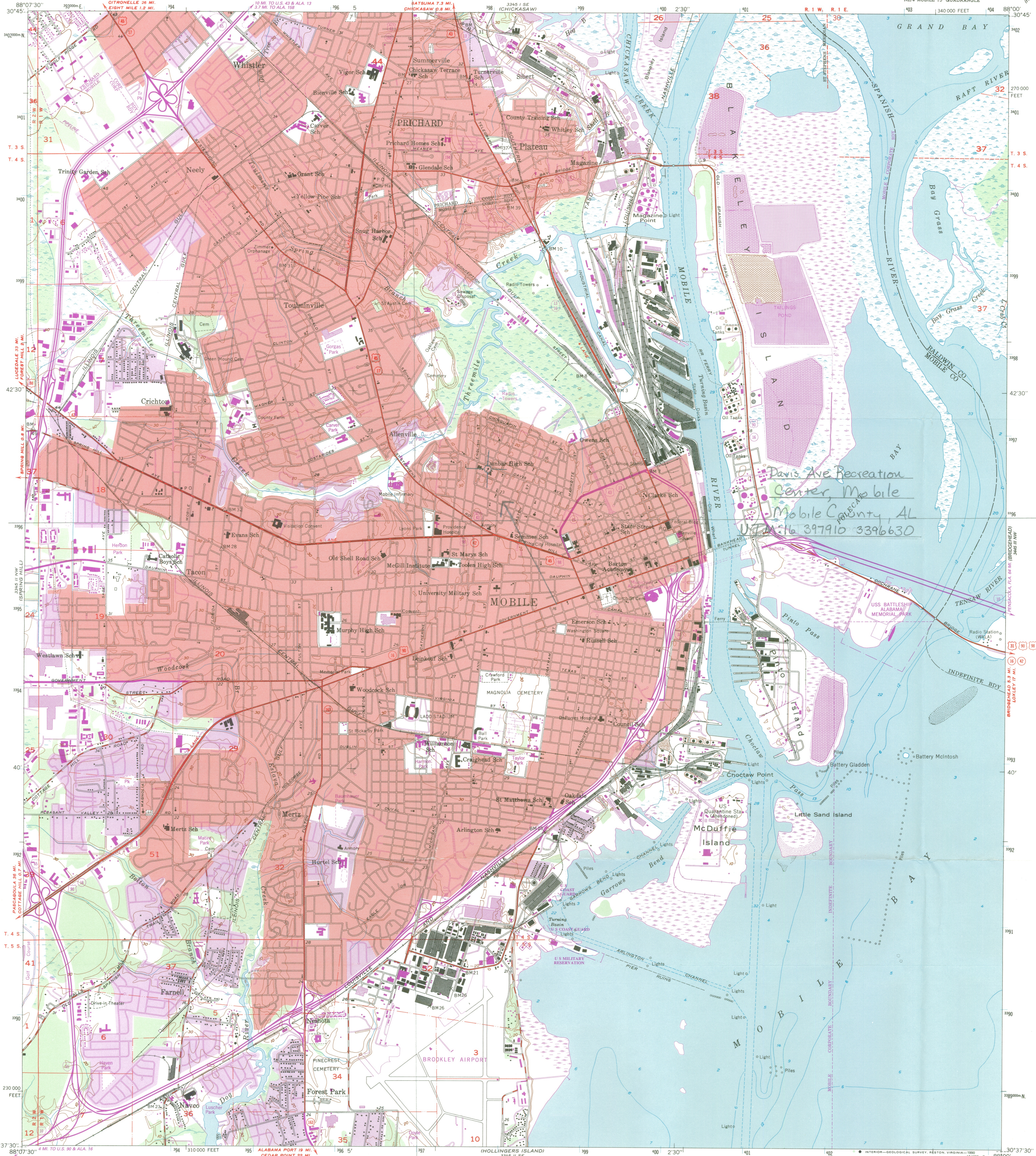
Joe Radford Thomas Recreation Center  
Mobile, Mobile County, AL  
MLK/MPS 3/21

#7



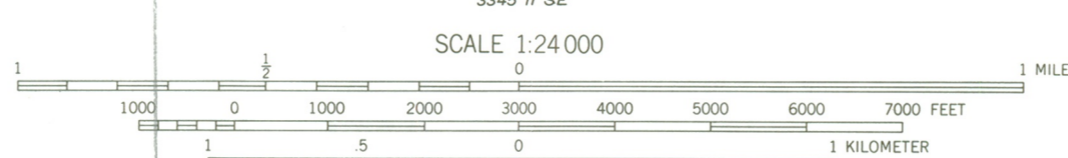
Joe Rufford Thomas Recreation Center  
Mobile, Mobile County, AL  
MLK/MPS 3/22

#8



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, USC&GS and Alabama Geodetic Survey  
Culture and drainage in part compiled from aerial photographs  
Topography by plane-table surveys 1938-39. Revised 1953  
Hydrography from USC&GS Chart 1266 (1:80,000)  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Alabama coordinate system,  
west zone  
Red tint indicates areas in which only  
landmark buildings are shown  
Dashed land lines indicate approximate locations  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks  
zone 16, shown in blue  
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983  
move the projection lines 17 meters south and  
1 meter east as shown by dashed corner ticks

UTM GRID AND 1982 MAGNETIC NORTH  
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET  
There may be private inholdings within  
the boundaries of the National or  
State reservations shown on this map



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929  
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET-GULF COAST LOW WATER DATUM  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE  
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER  
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 1 FOOT  
THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Heavy-duty ——— Light-duty ———  
Medium-duty ——— Unimproved dirt ———  
Interstate Route U.S. Route State Route

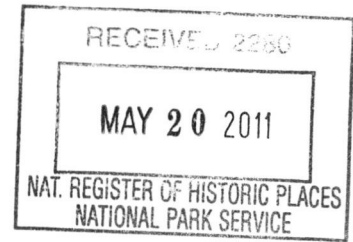
MOBILE, ALA.  
NE 1/4 MOBILE 15' QUADRANGLE  
N 3037.5 - W 8800 / 7.5  
1953  
PHOTOREVISED 1982  
DMA 3345 II NE - SERIES V844

Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial  
photographs taken 1981 and other sources  
This information not field checked. Map edited 1982  
Purple tint indicates extension of urban area





STATE OF ALABAMA  
ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
468 SOUTH PERRY STREET  
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130-0900



FRANK W. WHITE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

May 13, 2011

TEL: 334-242-3184  
FAX: 334-240-3477

Ms. Carol Shull  
Keeper of the National Register  
U. S. Department of the Interior, NPS  
Cultural Resources  
National Register, History & Education Programs  
1201 "I" Street NW (2280)  
Washington, D. C. 20005

Dear ~~Ms. Shull:~~ *Carol:*

Enclosed please find the nomination and supporting documentation to be considered for listing the following Alabama resource in the National Register of Historic Places:

Davis Avenue Recreation Center  
Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama

Your consideration of the enclosed National Register of Historic Places nomination is appreciated.

Truly Yours,

Elizabeth Ann Brown  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

EAB/sme/nw

Enclosures