

**WITNESS TO COURAGE:
ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF
LITTLE ROCK CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
ARKANSAS**



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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AARP	American Association of Retired Persons
AHC	Arkansas Humanities Council
AHPP	Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
AME	African Methodist Episcopal Church
ANCS	Automated National Catalog System
BVHA	Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects
c.	circa
CALS	Central Arkansas Library System
CFAC	College of Fine Arts and Communication
CHMI	Central High Museum, Inc.
CLI	Cultural Landscape Inventory
CLR	Cultural Landscape Report
CMA	Christian Ministerial Alliance of Little Rock
CMP	Collections Management Plan
CNO	Committee on Negro Organizations
D	Democrat
DAB	Development Advisory Board
DOI	Department of the Interior
DSC	Denver Service Center
EA	Environmental Assessment
EAST	Environmental and Spatial Technology lab
EOD	Enter(ed) on duty
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
eTIC	Electronic Technical Information Center
FMSS	Facility Management Software System
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
FY	Fiscal Year
GMP	General Management Plan
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act of 1993
GSA	General Services Administration
H.R.	House of Representatives
HFC	Harpers Ferry Center
HSR	Historic Structure(s) Report
HVAC	Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning
ICFN	Inner City FutureNet
ISC	International Sites of Conscience

JNPA	Jefferson National Park Association
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
LGBT	Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender
LMDI	Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative
LRIP	Long-Range Interpretive Plan
LRSB	Little Rock School District
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	manuscript
MTCC	Mosaic Templars Cultural Center
MWAC	Midwest Archeological Center
MWR-SET	Midwest Region Special Events Team
MWRO	Midwest Regional Office
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NEM	National Expansion Memorial
NHL	National Historic Landmark
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NHS	National Historic Site
NPS	National Park Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
ONPS	Operation of the National Park System
PARK	Positive Atmosphere Reaches Kids
P.L.	Public Law
PMIS	Project Management Information System
R	Republican
Rep.	Representative
RFP	Request for Proposal
Rpt.	Report
S.	Senate
SAT	Save America's Treasures
Sen.	Senator
SCEP	Student Career Experience Program
SCS	Scope of Collections Statement
SFM	Statement for Management
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
SNCC	Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee
STEP	Student Temporary Employment Program
STOP	Stop This Outrageous Purge

UALR	University of Arkansas at Little Rock
UCA	University of Central Arkansas
USPS	United States Postal Service
WASO	Washington, D.C. Office
WEC	Women's Emergency Committee to Save Our Schools
YLA	Youth Leadership Academy

Introduction

The Little Rock school desegregation crisis of 1957 is one of the most-recognized historical events in America in the 20th century. Even those with only a cursory understanding of the Civil Rights movement in America likely are able to conjure images of the mob action that took place at Central High School in September 1957. The images, even if not the full meaning, of what happened then have become part of American culture, the nation's collective memory. Like many memories, though, they can fade or lose their potency amid the welter of images and vital news stories that come to us every day from so many media sources. It is something of a paradox that the memories of Little Rock's school desegregation crisis in the decades that followed 1957 remained more alive outside of Little Rock than within. Visitors to the city were more likely to seek out the famous school and hear about the events than were those who lived there, many of whom preferred to leave them firmly in the past. This is understandable when the memories reflected trauma, pain, shame, or guilt, either individually or on behalf of the City of Little Rock. Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site (NHS), from its creation in 1998 and drawing upon the experience of its predecessor, Central High Museum, Inc., seeks to keep alive not just the memories of that famous series of events in 1957, but their broader meaning and application to the continued quest for civil rights and social justice throughout America and beyond.

Central High School National Historic Site (NHS) was authorized by Congress via Public Law 105-356 in October 1998 and was signed into law by President William Jefferson Clinton on November 6, 1998. The purpose for creating Central High School NHS, according to the legislation, is "to preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit, education, and inspiration of present and future generations, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, and its role in the integration of public schools and the development of the Civil Rights movement in the United States." Central High School NHS is unique within the National Park System as the only park that includes an actively functioning public high school. Although Little Rock Central High School is included within the park boundary, it remains owned and operated by the Little Rock School District (Figures 1 and 2).

In addition to Central High School, the park includes the current Visitor Center at the northeast corner of West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive and South Park Street. This building was completed in 2007 and houses exhibit space, a gift shop, visitor accommodations, and administrative offices. The park also includes the historic Mobil Gas Station at the southeast corner of West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive and South Park Street, which was the original visitor center for Central High Museum, Inc., and currently serves as a storage and maintenance facility; and a Commemorative Garden, located on the northwest corner of West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive and South Park Street, which was completed and dedicated in 1999.¹ The initial boundary also included the former Ponder's Drug Store, located at the northeast corner of West 14th Street and South Park Street. Ponder's Drug Store was a fixture of

¹ During the historic period of the Little Rock Central High School Crisis and until the end of the 20th century, this street was known as West 14th Street. On November 10, 2000, the City of Little Rock officially changed the name of the street to commemorate Daisy L. Gatson Bates, whose work and presence were pivotal in the Central High School desegregation crisis.



Figure 1: Central High School façade, looking west. Photo by the author, 2017.



Figure 2: Central High School, looking northwest. Photo by the author, 2017.

the neighborhood and the location of a pay phone which Elizabeth Eckford attempted to use when she was alone to face the mob on September 4, 1957.

The houses on the east side of South Park Street between West 16th Street and West Daisy L. Gates Drive, across the street from the front of Little Rock Central High School, formed an important part of the context in which the 1957 desegregation crisis took place. When the site was designated in 1998, however, the boundary was drawn to exclude them. The importance of these houses to the cultural landscape is clear, and NPS staff expressed hopes that the boundary could be expanded to include them beginning in the early 2000s. The drive to expand the park's boundary to include these seven houses gained traction in 2017 and was realized with the passage of P.L. 115-117 in 2018. Figures 3 and 4 show the original and new park boundaries, respectively.

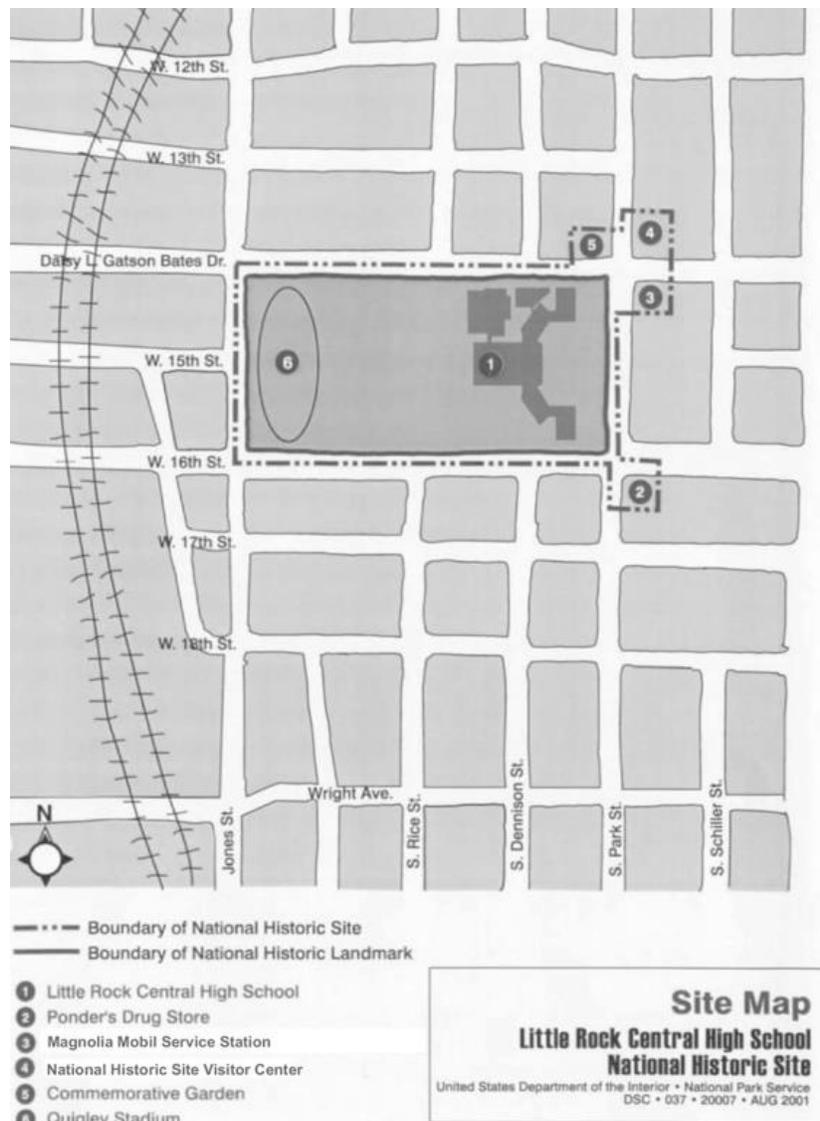


Figure 3: Site Map of Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, showing the original boundaries.

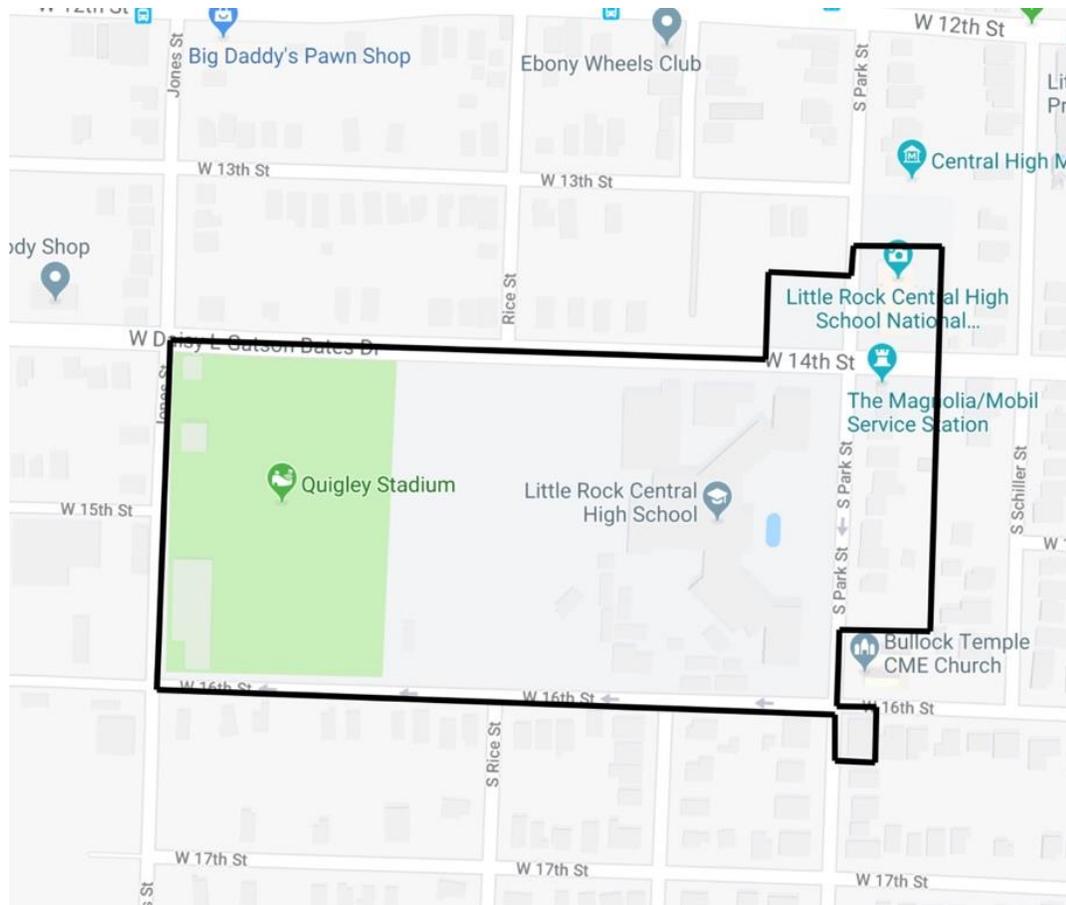


Figure 4: Map showing boundaries of Central High School NHS as amended in 2018.

Rooted in the purpose of Central High School NHS as defined in the enabling legislation, the mission of the park is to interpret the desegregation events of 1957 at Little Rock Central High School, both on its own and as a catalyst for the Civil Rights movement nationwide. The 1957 desegregation crisis emphasized the quest for justice and equality for all, and Central High School NHS seeks to expand an understanding of this fundamental aspiration shown by the Little Rock Nine into contemporary issues. Central High School NHS, therefore, seeks to preserve both the physical and the intangible resources associated with the goals of the Civil Rights Movement in the past, the present, and the future. This dual goal, to convey both the significance of the events at Little Rock Central High School in 1957 and the ongoing pursuit of justice and equality, has resulted in multiple interpretive and public engagement strategies that use the several facilities within the park and beyond.

Within the park's facilities, these strategies include Ranger-led tours of Little Rock Central High School, and a permanent exhibit and public educational and interpretive programs at the Visitor Center. Because of limitations in the number of visitors who can safely be accommodated at the Visitor Center, however, and to expand the public reach of Central High School NHS, NPS staff coordinate and partner with other community groups and educational institutions to sponsor public programs, including lectures, guest speakers, book signings, conferences, and more, throughout Little Rock and the surrounding area. While some of these

programs treat directly the 1957 school desegregation crisis, most are oriented toward a broader perspective on the role of civil rights, justice, and equality in American society. This leveraging approach allows staff to assist visitors to relate the historic events of 1957-59 to contemporary civil rights and social justice issues, keeping the site's mission relevant to new generations and recognizing new obstacles to equality for all.

The purpose of this Administrative History of Central High School NHS is to explore how the National Park Service has developed a national park centered around Little Rock Central High School and the school desegregation crisis of 1957. In the park's enabling legislation, NPS is charged with preserving, protecting, and interpreting "for the benefit, education, and inspiration of present and future generations, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, and its role in the integration of public schools and the development of the Civil Rights movement in the United States." This study, using a combination of archival research and oral history interviews, explores the origin, establishment, and development of this unit of the National Park System. It is an unusual story in several ways: NPS does not own or manage its principal resource, Central High School, and it is based on an earlier, private, non-profit organization that provided an interpretation of the school and the 1957 crisis. The study also describes the evolution of the Central High School NHS from its primary focus on the 1957 crisis and the nine African-American students at the center of the events (the Little Rock Nine) toward an emphasis on serving as a focal point in Little Rock for community discussions on the quest for human and civil rights by multiple groups.

Chapter 1: Historical Background

In seeking to understand the park's interpretation and educational role, it is important to note that the 1957 Little Rock school desegregation crisis was conveyed immediately to the nation on television, the first civil rights event in America to be the topic of live, on-the-spot news coverage beamed directly to the nation's living rooms. Because of the new and sudden impact of live television coverage, people throughout the nation were intensely familiar with what was happening in Little Rock in September 1957, the bravery of the African American students whose entrance into Central High School brought about massive resistance, and the arrival of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division. These visual memories lingered through the subsequent decades as other important civil rights events were broadcast by way of television news, including the March on Washington in 1963, the attack on voting rights advocates in Selma, Alabama, reactions to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and more. By the early 1990s, many within Little Rock began to recognize the importance of the school desegregation crisis to the city and the nation and sought ways to bring a discussion of it into the open. At the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, NPS continues the process begun by local activists of revealing to the public those crucial and pivotal moments and the subsequent national and international ramifications, though in a different, more reflective, venue.

1957 Crisis: Background

The Little Rock school desegregation crisis of 1957 often is seen as the first in a series of major public events of the late 1950s and 1960s that brought the Civil Rights movement to the fore in the wake of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954. It can, with equal accuracy, also be seen as a culmination of an even longer series of legal and legislative actions that stretch back to the end of the Civil War in 1865, when Congress passed the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the United States Constitution, which together required equal access to the laws for all citizens regardless of race. After an initial flurry of laws and Congressional support for full civil rights for the nation's African Americans in the years following the Civil War, even this nominal support began to wane as early as the 1870s. Throughout the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries, this retreat from the promises of the post-Civil War Constitutional amendments was conducted largely by the states, particularly in the South, but also in the North, and drew steady support from decisions handed down by the Supreme Court.

In the decade following the Civil War, Congress was in the hands of the states of the former Union, and the former Confederate states were only gradually allowed representation. In the face of a *de facto* return of slavery throughout the southern states immediately after the Civil War, Congressional leaders sought to increase protections for the former slaves, culminating in the Civil Rights Act of 1875. This law banned discrimination on the basis of race in public accommodations, public transportation, and in selection for juries. Shortly after the Civil Rights Act was passed, however, the era of Reconstruction came to an end with the complicated deal known as the Compromise of 1877 by which Rutherford Hayes was elected President of the United States. As southern states regained political representation and power, the provisions of the act were not enforced, and, in 1883, the Supreme Court issued a decision that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional on the grounds that Congress did not have the authority to

regulate private interactions. Despite the robust and extensive dissent by Justice John Marshall Harlan, the so-called “Civil Rights Cases” decision served as precedent for a long series of Supreme Court and lower court decisions that provided one setback after another for the rights of African Americans.

The next landmark decision came in 1896, when the Supreme Court decided the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. In New Orleans, African Americans had retained a degree of social and political authority that was rare in the South. In 1892, however, the State of Louisiana enacted a law that allowed for separate railroad cars for whites and African Americans. Homer A. Plessy, an African American, was arrested in June 1892 for riding in a car that was set aside for whites only, providing the basis for a lawsuit charging that the law violated the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Citing precedent from the Civil Rights Cases of 1883 as well as various state court decisions, the Supreme Court in 1896 decided that separate facilities in public transportation were in line with the Constitution and upheld the law. The majority decision stated that the 14th Amendment assured political equality but no more than that. The state law which the Court considered related to public transportation quickly also became associated with public education. In 1899, for example, the Supreme Court in *Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education* refused to require Richmond County, Georgia, to provide a high school for African American students, claiming that it did not have jurisdiction to interfere in the decisions by a state court since it could not determine that the state court’s decision had violated the 14th Amendment; this effectively allowed segregation of the races in public education.

As the twentieth century opened, in the absence of any substantial opposition on legal grounds, southern states, in particular, felt emboldened to enforce racial segregation and deny civil rights to African Americans. They received additional support from the Supreme Court in 1908, when, in *Berea College v. Kentucky*, the Supreme Court allowed the State of Kentucky not just to permit segregation, but to require it. Berea College, a small Christian college in central Kentucky, was founded as a non-segregated college in the 1850s and continued to function that way until a 1904 state law required segregated educational facilities. In 1908, the Supreme Court upheld the state law. This decision then accelerated the creation of segregation laws through the South through the 1910s and 1920s, which the Supreme Court continued to uphold well into the 1920s. As Richard Kluger has observed,

By the close of the third decade of the twentieth century, then, segregation of the Negro and other blatant denials of his rights as a citizen were more pervasive in the United States than they had been in 1900. And the Supreme Court, despite skilled arguments before it in the black man’s behalf by white lawyers of the highest ability, continued to interpret the Constitution in ways that legitimized his banishment.¹

As conditions for African Americans in America were reaching a nadir in the 1910s and 1920s, Americans of both races founded new organizations that hoped to restore civil rights and recover the promises of the post-Civil War Amendments. In 1905, W.E.B. DuBois and William Monroe Trotter formed The Niagara Movement, which lobbied actively to stem the growing tide

¹ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America’s Struggle for Equality* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 123.

of African American segregation and disfranchisement. This organization opposed the accommodationist approach being urged by Booker T. Washington, president of Tuskegee Institute, now Tuskegee University, in Alabama. Four years later, DuBois and others organized the first National Negro Conference at Cooper Union in New York City, which included many presentations of scientific and sociological data pertaining to the deteriorating conditions facing African Americans throughout the nation. In 1910, the organizers held the second annual National Negro Conference, at which the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed. Throughout the ensuing decades, particularly from the 1930s on, the NAACP took the lead in fighting legal battles aimed at dismantling racial segregation and disfranchisement. Influenced by the pioneering African American lawyer and educator Charles Houston, who revamped the Howard University Law School to train lawyers who could take on civil rights issues in courts throughout the nation, the young attorney Thurgood Marshall was one of the NAACP's leading attorneys who made multiple appearances before the Supreme Court. In particular, the NAACP's legal arm contested in the realms of voting rights and desegregation in education at all levels. The NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund was pivotal through the 1940s and 1950s in developing local and state civil rights activism.²

As one of the primary urban centers in Arkansas, Little Rock offered more opportunities for African Americans in the early twentieth century than were available in other parts of the state. The presence of many skilled African Americans who were able to lead relatively independent lives in the years before and after the Civil War created an African American urban elite that maintained cordial relations with many of Little Rock's white businessmen. Like other cities in the New South, commercial and civic leaders in Little Rock in the early twentieth century sought to project an image of progress and civilization in order to take part in the nation's overall business and commercial development. The presence of these two groups, black and white, helped to establish and maintain a relatively peaceful status quo at the upper levels of society, with only muted calls for desegregation. Several events and trends from the late 1920s and into the post-World War II years, however, broke this relative calm and engendered renewed calls for civil rights activism.

In 1927, the year that Little Rock Senior High (later renamed Central) was dedicated, a horrifying event triggered a new wave of activism. John Carter, a 38-year-old African American in Little Rock, was accused of assaulting a white woman and her daughter. With the city's white residents already incited by the arrest of another African American man for the death of a white child just days before, a massive mob captured Carter, hanged him, shot his body, burned him using furnishings from African American businesses, and dragged his body through the streets. The horrific incident drew national headlines, and the city's black and white leadership sought to maintain calm despite weeks of tension while a grand jury was deadlocked and issued no indictments. This incident scarred Little Rock's African-American community, as it created justified concerns for physical safety that lingered for decades. Despite the effects of this tragedy, however, the dynamics of the city began to change. African Americans pressed for, and often secured, more gains in the following decades as the influx of rural African Americans into Little Rock and other cities in Arkansas in the 1930s and 1940s created employment

² John A. Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 3.

opportunities in the face of increasing agricultural mechanization during the Depression and the massive manufacturing buildup of World War II.³

The tide began to change for civil rights through the 1940s, both in Arkansas and the United States. Nationally, the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund was achieving more legal victories that began to chip away at segregation laws, and the federal government became less likely to tolerate overt racism and discrimination. As John Kirk has pointed out, "The tension between rising black activism coupled with federal pressure and whites' desire to maintain the status quo helped usher in a new era in race relations."⁴ Signs of change were likewise visible in Arkansas in the 1940s. In 1940, William Harold Flowers, an African American attorney in Stamps, Arkansas, formed the Committee on Negro Organizations (CNO). Through Flowers' activism and his role in coordinating other groups throughout the state, the CNO won several legal victories in local and state courts and helped to draw African Americans in Little Rock into more involvement with pressing for return of their rights. This in turn helped to persuade the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund, which earlier was not made welcome in the state, to take on a greater role in Arkansas. In 1948, the University of Arkansas Law School admitted an African American student for the first time, and school districts around the state, under pressure to comply more fully with laws that required truly equal educational facilities, were struggling to maintain segregationist policies that were increasingly expensive.

Education in Little Rock remained strictly segregated both before and after World War II. Little Rock contained eight public schools for African Americans by the early 1950s, the most prominent of which was Paul Laurence Dunbar High School at the intersection of Wright Avenue and Ringo Street. Funded in part by the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the Dunbar school was designed by George H. Wittenberg and Lawson L. Delony, with plans that were modified and simplified from those prepared for Little Rock Senior (now Central) High School and completed in 1930. Smaller than Little Rock Senior High, it housed grades seven through twelve, while a separate wing contained the Dunbar Junior College, which primarily trained African American teachers. Class sizes at Dunbar were much larger than at Little Rock Senior High School, and the students used textbooks and equipment that had been handed down from other white schools.⁵

The Dunbar School was built just three years after the city's flagship high school for white students was completed: Little Rock Senior High School. Known since 1954 as Little Rock Central High School, it was designed in a combined Collegiate Gothic and Art Deco style vast in scale. Designed to house 1800 students, it covers much of two city blocks and contains over 150,000 square feet. The building is six stories tall including the bell tower and the basement, was constructed of structural brick walls and an internal steel frame, and features an elaborate entrance raised above a court with a reflecting pool.⁶ As with the Dunbar School, Little

³ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line.*, 7-22 *passim*.

⁴ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line.*, 53.

⁵ "Paul Laurence Dunbar High School," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture* (<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2859>, accessed March 29, 2018).

⁶ "Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture* (<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=5423>, accessed March 29, 2018).

Rock High School originally housed the Little Rock Junior College, now the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.⁷

Little Rock School Desegregation Crisis

While the Supreme Court had been showing an increased willingness to challenge the status quo on segregation through the 1940s, largely in response to lawsuits brought by the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund, it made its new direction clear in its landmark 1954 decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Gaining its title from a 1951 lawsuit filed by Oliver Brown and other parents of African American schoolchildren in Topeka who were denied entrance to the city's segregated white elementary schools, the decision combined four other similar lawsuits from Delaware, the District of Columbia, South Carolina, and Virginia. Arguments before the Supreme Court began in late 1952, but the death of Chief Justice Fred Vinson in 1953 delayed action until President Dwight David Eisenhower appointed Earl Warren, the former Governor of California, as Chief Justice. Warren was far less inclined to allow the *Plessy* decision to stand as precedent. He was instrumental in leading the court to challenge the segregationist argument during a second round of hearings in late 1953 and brought about a unanimous decision. In its decision on May 17, 1954, the court struck down the doctrine of "separate but equal" under *Plessy* and ruled that facilities that were segregated by race were inherently unequal on the basis of the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law for all regardless of race or ethnic background.⁸

The initial *Brown* ruling was shocking and caused unequivocal resistance throughout the South and wherever segregated schools were the norm. School districts in Arkansas were faced with difficult choices, and responses varied from initiating integration immediately to entrenched resistance. As John Kirk has demonstrated, dedication to segregation varied throughout Arkansas, with the southern and eastern portions of the state most deeply resistant to change. Communities in the northern and western portions of the state, where the population was 99% white, abandoned segregation more quickly. African Americans had been systematically removed from the counties in this part of the state during the 1920s and 1930s, with the result that the few black families remaining by the early 1950s posed no threat to white hegemony there. In particular, the small city of Charleston, in the western portion of the state, desegregated its elementary and high schools in September 1954. In July 1954, the Charleston School Board voted to close the existing elementary school for African Americans, stop bussing the local African American high school students the twenty miles to Fort Smith, and desegregate the elementary and high schools in Charleston. The Superintendent of Schools then coordinated with civic leaders and the local newspapers to keep the decision secret until after the students began classes; this eliminated the public protests that could have derailed the effort. In 1954, future Senator Dale Bumpers was appointed to the Charleston School Board, giving him a first-hand perspective on the value of desegregation in public schools.⁹ Little Rock, located in the center of

⁷ Dan Chapel and Dianna Kirk, "Little Rock High School," National Register of Historic Places registration form, 1977.

⁸ Rachel Franklin Weekley, "A Strong Pull, a Long Pull, and a Pull Altogether: Topeka's Contribution to the Campaign for School Desegregation" (Historic Resource Study, *Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, Topeka, Kansas*; Washington, D.C., National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 1999), p. 159.

⁹ Mary Belle Ervin, "Desegregation of Charleston Schools," available online at <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=730> (accessed April 10, 2018).

the state, mirrored the general statewide consensus of gradualism: recognizing that desegregation in some form would eventually be necessary, but not in any hurry to see it accomplished.

When it handed down the initial decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court deferred any specifics regarding implementation of desegregation for later. In 1955, the Court finally issued its implementation order; in this announcement, unlike their original decision, the Justices equivocated. Their language softened and left a great deal of the responsibility for integration to local school districts, who were urged to comply with the original 1954 ruling “with all deliberate speed.” This second ruling, as evidenced by the course of events in Little Rock, allowed even moderate communities the opportunity to delay and evade the inevitable.

In the wake of the original 1954 decision, Little Rock Superintendent of Schools Virgil Blossom refused to take any steps until the Court’s implementation decision was issued. Under pressure from the local NAACP, however, Blossom, in 1954, announced a reorganization plan for the school district which included both reorganization of existing schools and the construction of new schools. His plan took into account new patterns of residential development in Little Rock and, for the first time, divided the school district into residentially based zones. Unlike the historic neighborhood that surrounded what is now Central High School, which was mixed both racially and economically, the new post-WWII neighborhoods were developed in ways that reinforced racial and economic segregation. Blossom’s plan included removing the high school component of the Dunbar School, leaving it as just a junior high school. At the same time, his plan called for the construction of two new high schools in addition to the existing Little Rock Senior High School: Horace Mann in the primarily African American section of the city and Hall in the primarily white section. Although there would be no official racial segregation, the schools would be largely segregated in fact based on residential patterns. His plan stipulated that all three high schools would be officially desegregated in 1957, with the elementary schools to be desegregated first, over the next several years.

When the Supreme Court issued its implementation decision in May 1955, with its considerably softer language regarding the process of desegregation, the forces of segregation gained strength. Blossom’s plan was modified to allow for slower segregation, but with consistent pressure from the NAACP and its Arkansas chapter president, Daisy Gatson Bates, he continued to plan for the desegregation of Central High School in 1957. In the summer of 1957, Blossom prepared maps showing areas from which students of both races could be admitted to Central. He also asked the principals of Mann High School and Dunbar Junior High School, both of which were for African American students only, to identify those students who wished to transfer to Central in the fall of 1957. The principals of each of these schools called for student volunteers; following an initial screening, these principals forwarded the names of thirty-two pupils from Horace Mann and Dunbar Junior High School. Superintendent Blossom remained firmly in charge of the process, and conducted rigorous, intensive interviews of the students who had put their names forward.¹⁰

Thirty-five African American students were initially approved for the desegregation program, but more than half withdrew after they and their families faced threats of violence and

¹⁰ Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*, 106-107.

intimidation following the publication of their names and addresses. Seventeen students, ranging in age from fourteen to seventeen, survived Blossom's intensive interview process. Following this initial selection, the students met with the School Board in August to review the rules for attending Central High School, and Blossom informed the students that they would be expelled if they retaliated to any attacks, even in self-defense. In addition, he pointed out that they would not be allowed to participate in any extra-curricular activities such as sports, band, or drama. These conditions led to an additional seven students withdrawing their names, leaving ten students who planned to integrate Central High School on September 4, 1957. Of these ten, only Jane Hill withdrew after the first attempt on September 4, as a result of the violent protests and threats that occurred that day.¹¹

The remaining students came to be known as the Little Rock Nine: Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls. As the president of the Arkansas NAACP chapter and a Little Rock resident, Daisy L. Gatson Bates was the principal liaison with the School District. Mrs. Bates, who, with her husband Lucius C. (LC) Bates, was the co-owner and publisher of the *Arkansas State Press*, a weekly statewide newspaper for African Americans, would remain the NAACP point person for the first students who integrated Central High School, and their house on West 28th Street in Little Rock was a hub of activity for NAACP lawyers and the media.

While the Little Rock School District was committed, however reluctantly, to go ahead with the desegregation plan as devised by Blossom in the summer of 1957, the legal battles were not over. In August 1957, the newly formed Mother's League of Central High filed a lawsuit in the Pulaski County Chancery Court to stop desegregation from proceeding. Arkansas Governor Orval E. Faubus testified at the trial, indicating that violence was likely if the desegregation of Central High School was allowed. The Court ruled in favor of the Mother's League and issued a restraining order against the Little Rock School District from going ahead with the desegregation plan. The NAACP immediately filed an appeal to the Federal District Court. On August 30, 1957, Judge Ronald Davies, filling in from his base in North Dakota, ruled in favor of the School District and ordered the desegregation to occur on Tuesday, September 3.

During his initial candidacy for Governor of Arkansas in 1954, Orval Faubus was a moderate on racial matters, but his stance on the *Brown* decision remained ambiguous in order to retain voters in eastern Arkansas. During his reelection bid in 1956, however, in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1955 implementation decision, Faubus cast his lot with the segregationists to undercut his opponent, Jim Johnson, an ardent segregationist. After the Federal Court order to proceed with desegregation, Faubus, on September 2, called out the Arkansas National Guard, ostensibly to maintain order at Central High School, citing threats of violence. A mob of segregationist protestors surrounded the school. On September 4, Daisy L. Gatson Bates called the Greater Little Rock Interracial Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance to request their support for the students. The Alliance, led by Rev. Dunbar Ogden, offered to escort the students through the mob that had assembled. In accordance with the plan as developed by Daisy L. Gatson Bates, the students gathered at her house before proceeding as a group to Central High School. Unfortunately, Elizabeth Eckford's family could not be reached by telephone, with the

¹¹ Barbara Hendricks, *Lifting My Voice: A Memoir* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2014), 21-22.

result that Elizabeth showed up at Central on the morning of September 4, alone, to face the mob. In part through the assistance of a white bystander, Grace Lorch, together with Dr. Benjamin Fine of the *New York Times* and L.C. Bates, she was able to get on a bus to escape the threatening crowd. The Negro students who traveled to the school by car were not able to enter the school that day because Governor Faubus directed the Arkansas National Guard to prevent their entrance.

Judge Davies remained actively involved and guided the NAACP to file a petition to prevent Governor Faubus from using the National Guard to interfere with the integration of Central High School. At the trial on September 20, 1957, Governor Faubus' attorney announced that Faubus did not recognize the authority of the court and would not be represented. Davies then granted an injunction against Faubus and the National Guard and ordered Faubus to change his orders to the Guard to not allow the African American students on the school campus. Representative Brooks Hays (D-AR) arranged for a meeting between Governor Faubus and President Eisenhower on September 20, after which Faubus dismissed the National Guard entirely. This left the school protected only by the Little Rock police. The following Monday, September 23, the nine students again traveled to Central High School under police escort, and entered the building through the 14th Street entrance; the police removed the students later that morning, however, due to the growing violence outside, during which several journalists were attacked by the mob.

These scenes shocked Americans watching the national news on their living room television sets. The mob violence at Central High School, in defiance of a federal court order, finally impelled President Eisenhower to act. Eisenhower had met with Faubus earlier in the month to attempt to settle the issue but had otherwise remained outside the fray. In response to increased mob violence and the lack of cooperation from Governor Faubus, President Eisenhower declared the impasse at Central High School a National Emergency and signed Executive Order 10730 on September 23, 1957. Eisenhower's action effectively federalized the Arkansas National Guard and directed over 1,000 troops of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division, based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to Little Rock. The federal troops arrived on September 24. The next day, on September 25, 1957, the nine students entered Central High School under the protection of the 101st Airborne soldiers and completed their first full day in the integrated Central High School.

While the entrance of the Little Rock Nine into Central High School in the face of deeply entrenched opposition marked a tremendous victory for civil rights, it was far from the end of the challenges that they, their families, and their supporters would face. The 101st Airborne soldiers were charged only with making sure that the students could enter the school safely and remained in full force in Little Rock only a month, with dwindling numbers remaining until Thanksgiving. The federalized National Guard augmented the 101st Airborne on September 23, assumed all duties at the school in November, and remained for the year. The Arkansas National Guard, like those in all southern states, remained segregated and populated primarily by young, part-time white soldiers, many of them ambiguous regarding integration if not opposed to it, and they afforded little protection to the students. While some of the faculty and administration were sympathetic, their inclination to protect the students within the school was limited, and the African American students faced nearly constant harassment from groups of white students.

Outside the school, the parents of the Little Rock Nine were also faced with threats, harassment, and attacks. Although members of the Little Rock Nine recalled some white students and faculty who either openly opposed desegregation or openly supported them, they referred to most of the students, faculty, and administrators as silent witnesses.

The nine students remained at Central High School for the 1957-58 school year with the exception of Minnijean Brown, who was expelled in February 1958 after responding verbally to girls who physically attacked her. Ernest Green, the only senior among the nine, graduated from Central High School in 1958; despite administration requests that he receive his diploma by mail, he insisted on participating in the graduate ceremony on May 27, 1958. In September 1958, after signing legislation passed by the Arkansas General Assembly in extraordinary session the previous month that allowed for the closing of public schools that were faced with desegregation, however, Governor Faubus ordered Little Rock School District (LRSD) high schools closed for three weeks. The purpose of this delay was to allow the city to hold a referendum where voters were given two choices: close all LRSD high schools to prevent desegregation from continuing and expanding or integrate the entire district all at once. Seventy percent of voters voted to close the schools, many with the expectation that the school district would follow through with a plan to lease public school buildings to private, segregated schools and reopen quickly. Governor Faubus then ordered that all Little Rock high schools would be closed for the 1958-59 school year. After moderates on the school board walked out of a meeting in protest, the remaining segregationist members declared themselves a quorum and voted to fire forty-four teachers who, they alleged, had supported integration. A group of business and civic leaders soon formed an organization, Stop This Outrageous Purge (STOP), to protest the firing of these faculty members for political reasons. A group of moderate women in Little Rock formed the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC) who, with STOP, then organized a successful recall election that replaced the segregationist board members with moderates who supported reopening the schools and continuing the gradual desegregation that had been ordered and approved by the courts. This allowed Central High to reopen for the 1959-60 school year with the voluntary desegregation plan continuing, and with two of the original Nine returning for their senior year, joined by three new African American students.

Progress toward the full integration of Little Rock's schools continued, though slowly, through the 1960s and 1970s. The desegregation of schools remained voluntary into the 1960s, and most students remained in the schools closest to their neighborhoods, where their race was the majority, thus rendering the schools effectively segregated. Early cracks in this segregation came in 1962, when extracurricular activities were integrated, and in 1965, when junior high schools began voluntary desegregation. Later in the 1960s, the first two African American teachers were hired to teach at Central High School, and the number of African American teachers gradually increased. In 1969, a Federal court required that the freedom of choice pupil assignment plan be abandoned and mandated minimum percentages of African American teachers throughout the School District.

Commemoration of the 1957 School Desegregation Crisis

The 1957 desegregation crisis at Central High School in Little Rock and the challenges that followed it divided the city and created wounds among families, friends, and groups that

took decades to heal. In large part a result of the television and print news coverage of the event, with powerful images of mobs of people protesting the arrival of African American schoolchildren broadcast in real time around the nation and the world, the image of Little Rock was clearly tarnished. Many of the city's civic leaders for decades after the crisis were concerned that placing an emphasis on the crisis, or, perhaps, even mentioning it, would make it more difficult to attract visitors and new businesses and instead wanted to highlight the city's growth and progressive nature. The 1957 crisis created deeply painful memories for many in the city who hoped to leave the events firmly in the past. In one sense, this was demonstrably impossible and unnecessary, since Central High School remained an active and popular school. Despite the construction of Hall and Horace Mann High Schools in 1957, Central remained the flagship high school in Little Rock and one of the most important components in the architectural history of the city. With the exception of the "Lost Year" of 1958-59, students of all races have passed through the halls of Little Rock Central High School since 1957 without interruption, ensuring a strong continuity in the community. With this kind of continuity, as new generations of students matriculated and graduated, it became easier to leave the difficult memories of 1957 in the background.

The first step in recovering the history of the era of desegregation came only twenty years after the event and fifty years after the original dedication of the school as Little Rock Senior High School. In 1976, Architect Dan Chapel and Historian Dianna Kirk with the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program prepared a National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nomination form for Central High School. The school was then listed in the NRHP in March 1977.¹² The nomination placed equal focus on the school's remarkable architecture and on its role in the Civil Rights movement. In 1982, the school gained further designation as a National Historic Landmark (NHL).¹³ Another step toward recovering the history of the era came in 1978, when Ernest Green returned to Central High School to give the commencement address, twenty years after he graduated from high school.

Tentative steps toward a commemoration began in 1987. In early September, the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville held a three-day conference on the 1957 school desegregation crisis which included participation by both former Governor Orval Faubus and Wiley Branton, the NAACP lawyer who represented the students.¹⁴ The next month, in late October 1987, the NAACP sponsored a 30th anniversary commemoration of the crisis in association with its annual national meeting in Little Rock. More restrained and less well promoted than subsequent anniversaries, it was, nevertheless, the first commemoration of the crisis. No formal events were planned at Central High School itself, though all nine of the students returned to Little Rock and were invited to a meeting with Governor Bill Clinton at the Arkansas Governor's Mansion.¹⁵ Recognizing the potential for a negative response to the

¹² Dan Chapel and Dianna Kirk, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, "Little Rock Central High School," Washington, D.C., National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, March 8, 1977.

¹³ James Sheire, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, "Little Rock Central High School," Washington, D.C., National Park Service, National Historic Landmark October 13, 1982.

¹⁴ "At Little Rock, 30 Years Later: Starting Over" (<https://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/27/us/at-little-rock-30-years-later-starting-over.html>, accessed April 4, 2018).

¹⁵ See contemporary news articles, including "30th Anniversary of Little Rock desegregation crisis," (<https://www.upi.com/Archives/1987/09/20/30th-anniversary-of-Little-Rock-desegregation-crisis/1716559108800/>, accessed April 4, 2018);

commemoration from Little Rock's residents, Benjamin Hooks, the Executive Director of the NAACP, said in a news conference, "We did not come to open old wounds. But rather we come to celebrate and commemorate an event that changed the course of the nation and made it better."¹⁶ As the *New York Times* observed in 1987, "The events surrounding the desegregation of Central High are clearly not what Little Rock wants to be remembered for, but they continue to hold a fascination, and have created a desire to learn from them."¹⁷

It is likely that these initial calls for, and attempts at, commemoration of the 1957 crisis raised concerns among civic leaders about the possible negative impacts that could result from shining a light on the city's worst moment, and no further commemorations took place for several years. In the early 1990s, however, several parallel developments occurred that led to an increased awareness of the history of the school, the crisis, and the surrounding neighborhood. In 1993, the City of Little Rock used Certified Local Government grants from the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program to begin an extensive survey of the neighborhood that surrounds Central High School. After three years of study and writing, Central High School Neighborhood Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.¹⁸ At the same time, beginning in the early 1990s, a group of civic and business leaders in Little Rock met to initiate planning for a museum that would interpret the events of 1957 and its aftermath. These civic leaders faced headwinds from those who preferred not to broach the topic, but they perceived that the time had come. They persevered and created Central High Museum, Inc., which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

¹⁶ Hooks, in "1957's 'Little Rock Nine' Return to Central High in Joy, Sadness," (http://articles.latimes.com/1987-10-23/news/mn-10813_1_central-high, accessed April 4, 2018).

¹⁷ "At Little Rock, 30 Years Later: Starting Over"

¹⁸ Sandra Taylor Smith and Anne Wagner Speed, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, "Little Rock's Central High School Neighborhood Historic District," Washington, D.C., National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 1999.

Chapter 2: Legislative History

Despite the extensive news coverage that the 1957 school desegregation crisis received, or, perhaps, partly because of it, Little Rock was slow to embrace and promote its historical role in the Civil Rights movement. The school at the center of the crisis, Little Rock Central High School, remained a functioning public school and had become a model of successful integration by the 1980s and 1990s. It was widely assumed that Little Rock's leaders would continue to highlight Central High School's success rather than revisit the difficult years of 1957-1959, when images of mobs protesting and blocking the entry of nine African American students were seen on televisions across the United States. Indeed, in his 1993 editorial, the first public mention of commemorating and interpreting the 1957 crisis, Max Brantley assumed that the National Park Service (NPS) would have to step in and create a National Historic Site. Brantley, editor of the weekly *Arkansas Times* since 1992, observed that

Time was, and maybe still, that the white business establishment would blanch at the notion of creating a monument to the events that made Little Rock dirty words around the world. But Little Rock stands for something positive, too. It represents the federal government's commitment to the Constitution; the victory of law over the mob.¹

Citing the recently created civil rights-related historic sites in Birmingham, Atlanta, and Memphis, and with Arkansas native and former Governor William J. Clinton as President of the United States, Brantley went on to suggest that the time was right to have a National Historic Site in Little Rock devoted to the 1957 crisis. With the importance of Little Rock to the Civil Rights movement, the growing popularity of civil rights historic sites throughout the South, and in the apparent absence of local leadership, Brantley argued that Little Rock should support and encourage NPS to step in and create a National Historic Site. While Brantley ultimately was correct about NPS creating a National Historic Site to commemorate and interpret the 1957 school desegregation crisis, the original impetus came not from the federal government but from a local initiative, which created Central High Museum, Inc. Before discussing the legislative origins of the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, therefore, it is important to review the local origins of the park.²

Central High Museum, Inc.

As the desegregation of Central High School progressed through the 1970s and 1980s, a number of civic leaders in the city began to recognize the importance of commemorating the crisis of 1957 at Central High. Increasing numbers of visitors to the city began to ask about seeing the school, though there were no facilities available to learn more about it. By the late 1980s, Little Rock Central High School was one of the sites that convention visitors to Little Rock most frequently asked to see.³ In a 2010 oral history interview, James L. "Skip"

¹ Max Brantley, "Build a Museum and They Will Come," *Arkansas Times* (Little Rock, Arkansas), November 4, 1993; clipping in files of Little Rock Central High School NHS.

² Max Brantley, "Build a Museum and They Will Come." See also Max Brantley, oral history interview, February 26, 2010; transcript in files of Central High School NHS.

³ Everett (Rett) Tucker, oral history interview, March 4, 2010; transcript in files of Central High School NHS.

Rutherford, former School Board member and one of the founders of the original Central High Museum, recalled a conversation with a federal judge in Little Rock who had the honor of hosting Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Justice O'Connor requested a visit to Central High School on the way back to the airport; "Justice O'Connor asked if she could get out and walk up the steps and he said sure so she did and. . .she pulled out a little instamatic [sic] camera out of her purse and said will you take my picture and he said sure." The import of the story for Rutherford was not just that people wanted to see the school at the heart of the nation's story of desegregation, but that "there was no place to buy a camera, there was no place to park, there was no information."⁴

The 1993 *Arkansas Times* editorial by Max Brantley helped bring together a number of individuals and groups who, in recent years, had come to recognize the importance of commemorating the role of Central High School in the desegregation of America's schools. The origins of the movement were diverse, with a number of individuals beginning to discuss the possibility in the early 1990s. Some grew up in Little Rock in the 1950s and 1960s and had a personal connection; others learned of it as a historical event. Many were civic and business leaders who recognized the potential appeal of a site commemorating such an important civil rights event to visitors to the city. While many individuals were discussing the concept among themselves, much of the early organized efforts coalesced around Mark Abernathy, an Arkansas native and local restaurateur and businessman. As early as 1991, Abernathy began having discussions with several others regarding the commemoration of Central High School and the desegregation of the city's schools. He identified the abandoned gas station at the southeast corner of South Park Street and West 14th Street (what is now West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive) as a possible spot for a museum.⁵ Abernathy soon reached out to other, like-minded Little Rock residents for support to form a board to explore this possibility. One such contact was Virgil Miller. Miller, a banker who had been active in the Little Rock community as a volunteer for several years, quickly supported Abernathy and his vision for commemorating the 1957 desegregation crisis. As Miller recalled in a 2010 interview, Abernathy had "said no one talks about it. It's a sort of topic that people in Little Rock skate over, but its [sic] an extremely important project, an extremely important event that people need to know about. And I certainly agreed with that."⁶

Abernathy assembled a diverse board that began to meet in the early 1990s at his restaurant, Juanita's, in downtown Little Rock. While Abernathy was assembling his board, Max Brantley published his editorial in the *Arkansas Times*. In response to the editorial, several of Brantley's friends and colleagues, including Skip Rutherford, a Little Rock communications professional who later served as the inaugural president of the Clinton Foundation, and Everett "Rett" Tucker, a Little Rock accountant and real estate developer, held their own discussions.⁷

⁴ Skip Rutherford, oral history interview, March 3, 2010; transcript in files of Central High School NHS.

⁵ The Little Rock City Council re-designated West 14th Street Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive in 2000, following Mrs. Bates' death in November 1999.

⁶ Virgil L. Miller, oral history interview, March 5, 2010; transcript in files of Central High School NHS.

⁷ In October 1994, Tucker made a presentation to the Downtown Little Rock Partnership regarding the proposed commemoration of Central High School and its role in desegregation; he was contacted by A. Wyckliff Nisbet, Jr., an attorney who had made a similar proposal in a letter to Webster Hubbell, then Associate Attorney General under President Clinton, on January 3, 1994; see correspondence in files compiled by the University of Arkansas-Little Rock Public History Program for an administrative history, now in the files of Central High School NHS.

Those who joined with Brantley soon heard about the work that Abernathy and his colleagues were doing, and the two groups decided to join forces. Tucker, whose father had been elected to the Little Rock School Board in 1958 as one of the moderates who replaced segregationist members, grew up familiar with the crisis, a familiarity that continued when his own children attended Central High School. Through his business connections, he was aware that many visitors to Little Rock wanted to know more about Central High School and the 1957 crisis. Brantley, Rutherford, and Tucker met with Abernathy at Juanita's for lunch to discuss the path forward for commemorating the 1957 crisis. As Brantley recalled in 2010,

Rett Tucker is a really organizationally gifted guy and I think he was very important in placing a structure on all this. Skip Rutherford, politically influential guy with a lot of ties. His tie to [Senator] David Pryor would prove to be incredibly important in the early going. And before you knew it, we had a committee and the process began to establish a 501(c)(3), we had a board, and all the things began coming together.⁸

Many of these discussions were taking place in 1993 and early 1994. As Brantley noted, the early leaders of the Central High School commemoration project moved quickly, drawing up plans for incorporation in October 1994 as the Central High Museum, Inc., a non-profit corporation.⁹ Development of the initial Central High Museum occurred on two tracks, one led by the Board of Directors, which took charge of financial and administrative concerns, and, later, by the Planning Committee, which led the development of exhibits and interpretive plans. Although the Planning Committee was formed by the Board, and included several board members, it largely operated independently from the Board.

The Board focused its early attention on raising funds and acquiring property for a museum. Following on Abernathy's original idea of the abandoned service station across the street from Central High School as a museum and visitor center, Skip Rutherford confirmed through the photographs of legendary civil rights photographer Ernest Withers that, in 1957, it was a Mobil Gas Station. Through his connections with Senator David Pryor, Rutherford and Tucker met with a lobbyist for Mobil in Pryor's Senate office. Mobil was enthusiastic about providing support, including funds and historical information through the Mobil corporate archives.¹⁰ The new Board also contacted the City of Little Rock for assistance. In early 1995, the City of Little Rock announced that it had received a windfall of \$7.2 million that would not be required for operations and invited local groups to apply for funding. The Central High Museum, Inc., Board submitted an application for \$250,000 for the purchase and renovation of the former Mobil Gas Station as well as the properties at the northeast and northwest corners of South Park Street and West 14th Street, where the current Visitor Center and Commemorative Garden, respectively, are located. The Board was awarded \$225,000.¹¹

⁸ Brantley, oral history interview, February 26, 2010.

⁹ Articles of Incorporation of Central High Museum, Inc., filed with Secretary of State of the State of Arkansas, October 11, 1994; files compiled by the University of Arkansas-Little Rock Public History Program for an administrative history, now in the files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁰ Rutherford, oral history interview, March 3, 2010; Tucker, oral history interview, March 4, 2010.

¹¹ Tucker, oral history interview, March 4, 2010.

With funds from the City of Little Rock, Mobil, and other local fund-raising efforts, the Board purchased the properties at the northeast and the northwest corners of West 14th (Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive) and South Park streets in April 1996 for \$37,500. The former Mobil Gas Station, at the southeast corner of the intersection, was purchased by the City and then conveyed to the Board. The Board announced a phased plan for development, beginning with the renovation of the former Mobil Gas Station on the southeast corner for use as a visitor center and the creation of a commemorative garden at the northwest corner. A larger museum, at the northeast corner, was identified as the second phase.¹² The Board then contracted with an architectural firm in the summer of 1996 to begin work on designs for re-developing the gas station building to include a visitor gathering area with a gift shop in the gas station office space and a small exhibit in the former two-bay garage (Figure 5).¹³ As Johanna Miller Lewis observed in a 2000 article about the formation of the original museum, “The board probably did not realize that buying and restoring the gas station would be the relatively easy part—doing the exhibit would be the hard part, one that would be carried out in front of the public with little time for difficult decision-making.”¹⁴ While the Board provided the overall direction for the organization, it also created a separate Planning Committee to develop plans for the exhibit and interpretive program at the new museum.



Figure 5: Mobil Gas Station, looking southwest from Visitor Center. Photo by the author, 2017.

¹² News Release, “Plans Announced for Central Visitor Center; Commemorative Garden,” May 3, 1996; files compiled by the University of Arkansas-Little Rock Public History Program for an administrative history, now in the files of Central High School NHS.

¹³ Central High Museum and Visitor Center: Visitor Center Plans, c. 1996; files compiled by the University of Arkansas-Little Rock Public History Program for an administrative history, now in the files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁴ Johanna Miller Lewis, “‘Build a Museum and They Will Come’: The Creation of The Central High Museum and Visitor Center,” *The Public Historian* (Vol. 22, Fall 2000), 32.

Ethel Ambrose, president of the Central High School Neighborhood Association and a founding member of the Planning Committee, was instrumental in organizing and coordinating the work of the Planning Committee. In particular, she took the lead in securing funds from the Community Development Planning Grant Program of the Arkansas Humanities Council (AHC) in February 1995 to help the Planning Committee in developing an exhibit. The AHC grant included funds and a technical team to serve as facilitator and provide logistical support for meetings and communications. According to the announcement from AHC, the three groups involved were the Central High Museum, Inc., Board, the Planning Committee, and AHC's technical assistance team, headed by John Matthews.¹⁵

Under the guidance of AHC, the Planning Committee took the lead in developing the overall interpretive focus of the new museum and held extensive discussions beginning in the summer of 1995 to determine the themes and general approach to be applied to the development of exhibits. In the interest of creating a diverse group with a variety of skills and expertise, Ambrose invited Johanna Miller Lewis, a professor of Public History at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), to participate on the Planning Committee, which began meeting in April 1995. By October 1995, the Planning Committee had developed a plan of action for the exhibits in the Mobil Gas Station that included participation by the UALR Public History Program. In particular, UALR students, under the direction of Dr. Lewis, prepared an extensive and well-documented timeline of events related to civil rights and segregation in Arkansas leading up to the 1957 crisis.¹⁶

In August 1996, the Board received a follow-up grant from AHC, totaling \$21,000, to be used for developing and preparing the exhibits in the visitor center.¹⁷ Earlier that summer, the Board had issued a Request for Qualifications for the design and fabrication of exhibits in the visitor center. The Board then selected a short-list of two firms in late August 1996, and ultimately awarded the contract to Quatrefoil Associates, Inc., of Silver Spring, Maryland, in early September 1996.¹⁸ The Board also hired Dr. Lewis to serve as Exhibit Project Manager using a grant from UALR's Community and University Partnerships Program. Additional funds for completing the work came from the City of Little Rock and private donors.¹⁹ Dr. Lewis then engaged graduate students in the Public History Program, including Laura Miller, who later served as Executive Director of Central High Museum, Inc., and as Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources for Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, to assist in the

¹⁵ John Matthews, Program Officer, AHC to Ethel Ambrose, February 9, 1995; in files compiled by the University of Arkansas-Little Rock Public History Program for an administrative history, now in the files of Central High School NHS. See also Johanna Miller Lewis, oral history interview, March 12, 2010.

¹⁶ The focus of this chapter is the organizational development of the Central High Museum, Inc., as a precursor to the Park, and is concerned primarily with the actions of the Board. The actions of the Planning Committee, which was focused primarily on interpretation and exhibits, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

¹⁷ Barbara G. Taylor, AHC, to William B. Worthen, August 23, 1996; in files compiled by the University of Arkansas-Little Rock Public History Program for an administrative history, now in the files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁸ Notes from Program Sub-Committee report to Board of Central High Museum, Inc., September 10, 1996; in files compiled by the University of Arkansas-Little Rock Public History Program for an administrative history, now in the files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁹ "The Central High Visitor Center," excerpt from *The UALR History Alumnus*, December 1996. See also in files compiled by the University of Arkansas-Little Rock Public History Program for an administrative history, now in the files of Central High School NHS.

work. Work on renovating the former Mobil Gas Station, and designing, fabricating, and installing the exhibits continued during late 1996 and through the summer of 1997. The opening date was scheduled for September 25, 1997, to coincide with the 40th anniversary commemoration of the 1957 crisis, a commemoration which included participation by President William J. Clinton and the Little Rock Nine.

Enabling Legislation: Designation as a National Historic Site

The creation of the visitor center and the installation of a successful exhibit was a triumph of vision and planning by the many Little Rock citizens who took part from the early 1990s to 1997. The level of organization needed to create the Board, to raise the necessary funds to renovate the visitor center, and to develop and install a successful exhibit in such a short period was impressive. Many on the Central High Museum Board, however, recognized that raising funds to create the facility was a far different endeavor from sustaining it into the future. For some, the goal from the beginning was to prepare the museum for takeover by the National Park Service; others were drawn to that conclusion by the financial realities of sustainability. In the mid- and late 1990s, however, the political climate was overwhelmingly favorable toward having the site become a part of the National Park System. There was no organized opposition.

In his 1993 editorial promoting the idea of a museum focused on the 1957 desegregation crisis, Max Brantley pushed for cooperation with NPS. He was a long-time fan of NPS, and, given the importance of the site, Brantley recalled in 2010 that “It just seemed to me that [NPS ownership and management] had to be the Holy Grail.”²⁰ Most of the other early Board members, however, became aware later that continuing to fund the museum as a private entity was not viable. The different members of the Board came to this realization at various points in the planning process. According to Virgil Miller, for example,

our focus was on getting this thing up and running and getting it built and then reality set in. Oh my gosh, we’ve built something, now how do we support it? And so that’s when it began to crystallize with us. Not initially. Initially, was coming together, getting people to agree that this is something that should be done.”²¹

Before the opening of the visitor center in 1997, however, Rett Tucker, president of the Board at the time, had already become concerned about the sustainability of their project. He approached Richard Davies, Executive Director of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, for advice regarding long-term viability. As Tucker recalled in 2010, Davies responded with the observation that “if museums made money, Wal-Mart would have a museum division.” Tucker had estimated at the time of the museum opening that the Board could fund the museum’s administrations and operations for approximately two years with the money it had already raised but could not see the Board continuing to fund it adequately after that.²² Skip Rutherford, one of the city’s leading businessmen with longstanding political ties to Senator Pryor and President

²⁰ Max Brantley, oral history interview, February 26, 2010.

²¹ Virgil Miller, oral history interview, March 5, 2010.

²² Rett Tucker, oral history interview, March 4, 2010.

Clinton, remained focused throughout the planning process on opening the museum and coordinating the 40th anniversary celebration. Once the opening was completed, however, “my ultimate goal at that point was to find a way to get this site into the National Park Service.” The people who wished to commemorate the 1957 school desegregation crisis had many and varied stories to tell, Rutherford believed, “and I thought that by getting to the National Park Service that that story could be more objectively told from all sides.”²³

As the Central High Museum Board began its discussions regarding inviting NPS to acquire the museum, it quickly became apparent that political connections were vital and that the current political climate for such a move was ideal. Two powerful politicians with Arkansas roots were crucial in assisting Little Rock Central High School to become a National Historic Site at a breakneck pace: President William J. Clinton, and Senator Dale Bumpers. Don Castleberry, a native of Little Rock and a graduate of Little Rock Senior (now Central) High School and a senior NPS employee who served as the Regional Director for the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, Nebraska (MWRO), retired to Little Rock in 1994 and soon joined the Board. With his experience of bringing new sites into the National Park System over many years, Castleberry was able to guide the Board through the process of transitioning the museum property to NPS ownership. As Castleberry recalled telling people at the time, “if they had Bill Clinton in the White House and Dale Bumpers in the Senate they don’t need me, because it’s going to happen.”²⁴

President William Jefferson Clinton, an Arkansas native who was eleven years old at the time of the 1957 desegregation crisis, knew Little Rock well after serving as Attorney General for Arkansas before being elected Governor. As Governor, Clinton emphasized educational reform, and, while race was not at the center of his policies, he advocated for economic and political advancement by African Americans. In 1987, Governor Clinton invited the Little Rock Nine to the Governor’s mansion in association with the 30th Anniversary commemoration of the 1957 crisis. Clinton, both personally and politically, favored causes that would promote racial harmony and, at the same time, boost the national reputation of Little Rock, his adopted home town. As Board member Skip Rutherford recalled, “clearly Bill Clinton had a long time interest in Central High School. This was a national Governor’s model school when he was Governor. He invited the Little Rock Nine in the 30th anniversary. . . this issue was not new to him by any means.”²⁵

Senator Bumpers was a native of Charleston, Arkansas, a small town in the western part of the state near the Oklahoma border. Bumpers got his start in politics on July 27, 1954, when he was appointed to the Charleston School Board as a temporary replacement. The same meeting at which Bumpers was appointed included a historic vote to close the schools for African Americans only and fully integrate the remaining schools. As discussed more fully in Chapter 1, Charleston was the first school system in Arkansas to be desegregated, making it a model for other districts throughout the state. Bumpers served on the Charleston School Board as a

²³ Skip Rutherford, oral history interview, March 3, 2010.

²⁴ Don Castleberry, oral history interview, February 26, 2010.

²⁵ Skip Rutherford, oral history interview, March 3, 2010.

moderate, voting for desegregation when the issue came up for a vote again, and was elected to a full seat in 1957.²⁶

Bumpers' deep personal experience with school desegregation impacted him throughout his political career, including during his term as Governor of Arkansas. In 1970, Bumpers, a relative unknown who served as the Charleston City Attorney beginning in 1952, defeated the former governor, Orval Faubus, for the Democratic nomination. Bumpers went on to win the race for governor in 1970 and 1972 before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 1974. Because of his experience in Charleston and Little Rock, Bumpers was eager to help promote the commemoration of the end of public school segregation in Arkansas. By the end of his long career in the Senate in 1998, Bumpers was the ranking minority member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which continues to have oversight of the National Park System. Bumpers was one of the leading champions of the National Park System in the Senate.

As his retirement in 1998 neared, Bumpers initially urged the designation of Charleston's schools as a National Historic Site, given its history of early, peaceful desegregation. A feasibility study by NPS Historian Harlan Unrau, however, recommended against the designation. According to Unrau's report, which was approved in late February 1998, the school buildings that existed in 1954 were no longer standing. Unrau also argued that the town did not subsequently establish any broader precedents for the Civil Rights movement.²⁷ Instead of National Historic Site designation, Bumpers was able to insert a provision in Public Law (P.L.) 105-277, the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for FY 1999, designating the Charleston schools as a National Commemorative Site, the first time such a designation had been made. The designation was accompanied by an appropriation of \$200,000 to build a memorial.

Senator Bumpers proved vital to securing passage of the bill to designate Central High School as a National Historic Site. With the favorable national political situation and encouraged by their success so far, the Board initially contacted NPS staff for input in 1997. According to Rett Tucker, the first response from NPS was cautious; paraphrasing the response in a 2010 interview, Tucker recalled that "our first entrée to the National Park Service was that, 'This is an interesting project, interesting story, we're not adding historic sites. We're not in the process of growing the department very much. But, it's a good story and I think you could look at maybe three to five years at having a shot at this.'"²⁸ Fortunately, however, the Board was well-connected politically. In particular, Board member Skip Rutherford was a personal friend of both President Clinton and Senator Bumpers, and he held talks with President Clinton and his staff and with Senator Bumpers (Figure 6). Both were enthusiastic about the possibility of designating Central High School as a National Historic Site, and Senator Bumpers took on the project. NPS began a Special Resource Study of Central High School as a National Historic Site in 1997, likely at the insistence of Senator Bumpers.

²⁶ Dave Hughes, "At long last integration of '54 to go on the map," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* (Little Rock, AR), November 15, 1998; available online at <http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/1998/nov/15/long-last-integration-54-go-map/?print> (accessed April 17, 2018).

²⁷ Dave Hughes, "At long last integration of '54 to go on the map." See also citation to Unrau's report in bibliography of Brian J. Dauherity and Charles C. Bolton, eds., *With All Deliberate Speed: Implementing Brown V. Board of Education* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 252.

²⁸ Rett Tucker, oral history interview, March 4, 2010.



Figure 6: Betty Bumpers, President William J. Clinton, Senator Dale Bumpers, 1999. Public domain photograph.

On June 25, 1998, Senator Bumpers introduced Senate bill S.2232, which Senator Tim Hutchinson (R-AR) co-sponsored. As introduced, Bumpers' bill established the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site (NHS) as a unit of the National Park System and required the Secretary of the Interior to prepare a General Management Plan (GMP) within three years of funding, and a National Historic Landmark (NHL) Theme Study on the history of desegregation in public education within two years of funding. In addition, Bumpers' original bill directed the Secretary of the Interior to use the Theme Study to identify potential new NHLs related to the topic of school desegregation. Unlike Central High Museum, Inc., which operated the former Mobil Gas Station as a visitor center across the street from Central High School, Bumpers' bill identified Central High School itself as the National Historic Site, with a boundary that included only the school and its campus.

The bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, which in turn forwarded it to the Subcommittee on National Parks, Historic Preservation and Recreation. This subcommittee held hearings on July 9, 1998. NPS Acting Associate Director for Professional Services William D. Shaddox testified at this hearing and supported the bill. Shaddox noted that Congress had directed NPS to conduct a special resource study in 1997 to determine the feasibility of Central High School as a unit of the National Park System.²⁹ In making the case for the school to come into the National Park System, Shaddox acknowledged

²⁹ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the Special Resource Study for Central High School National Historic Site, which was completed in August 1998.

the excellent work that the Central High Museum Board had done but emphasized that funding limitations could jeopardize the site if NPS did not assume responsibility. In addition, he argued that little was then being done “to ensure comprehensive preservation of the historic fabric of the school, the surrounding neighborhood, and other buildings related to the important events of 1957.” Shaddox then testified that NPS would be best suited to take on several roles at the proposed Little Rock Central High School NHS. These included promoting community partnerships and encouraging dialogue between these partners, developing and leading a comprehensive interpretation program, developing and implementing a volunteer program, providing historic preservation assistance to the Little Rock School District, the City of Little Rock, and the surrounding neighborhood, and working with partners to generate additional public and private sector support and to supplement and expand the existing site programs.³⁰

While he supported the bill, Shaddox recommended several amendments during his testimony. In particular, he suggested an amendment that would clarify the role of NPS in regard to the maintenance and operations of Central High School. The amendment proposed by NPS, which the Senate adopted, emphasized that NPS would not serve as a traditional land manager at the school or in the surrounding neighborhood, but that the Little Rock School District and the City of Little Rock would retain authority over these resources respectively. In addition, Shaddox presented an amendment that emphasized, according to Shaddox, “the importance of local partners in ensuring efficient and effective management of the historic site.” Shaddox also presented an amendment that extended the time available for NPS to prepare a GMP for the site from two years to three years. This, Shaddox argued, would allow NPS to develop and coordinate with more local partners. Finally, Shaddox presented a proposed NPS amendment to the proposed NHS boundary. As originally conceived, only Central High School and its campus lay within the boundary. According to Shaddox, it might be best to include the Central High Museum, Inc., properties as well if the ongoing planning process identified NPS “as the most appropriate entity to manage the facility,” and to also include Ponder’s Drug Store at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West 16th Street.³¹

In addition to the testimony by Shaddox, the Senate subcommittee hearing included testimony from people more directly connected to Little Rock and Central High School. Rett Tucker, president of the Central High Museum Board, attended the hearing. In his testimony, Tucker described the ongoing fascination that people have with the story of the 1957 desegregation crisis: “civil rights, the sovereignty of the Federal Government, the strength and courage of nine children to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds and the emergence of television as the primary means of communication with the American people.” He went on to suggest that the story could be better preserved and interpreted by NPS, and that “Central High Museum, Inc. is offering its ownership of the Visitor Center, which has operating reserves in the bank and no debt, to the National Park Service.” Tucker then echoed the recommendation of NPS Acting Associate Director Shaddox by suggesting that the boundary originally proposed be expanded to include the visitor center and the two properties on the northeast and northwest corners of West 14th Street and South Park Street.³² In a later oral history interview, Tucker

³⁰ Testimony of William D. Shaddox, Acting Associate Director for Professional Services, NPS, July 9, 1998, included in Senate Report 105-307, 105th Congress, 2nd Session, September 8, 1998.

³¹ Testimony of William D. Shaddox, 1998.

³² Testimony of Everett Tucker, S. 2232, July 9, 1998; typescript MS in files of Central High School NHS, D18.

recalled that Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine, also “came and spoke extemporaneously and gave a great testimony.” Otherwise, he recalled, the hearing was straightforward, with no substantial questions.³³ On September 8, 1998, Senator Frank Murkowski (R-AK), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, issued a report on the bill. The report recommended passage of the bill, if the amendments proposed by NPS were included. The bill then went to the full Senate, which voted to approve the amended bill by unanimous consent on October 2, 1998.

From the Senate, the bill went to the House of Representatives where it was introduced by Rep. Vic Snyder (D-AR). It was referred immediately to the House Committee on Resources, which discharged the bill on October 8, 1998. The full House voted on the Senate bill as amended the same day and passed it without objection. The bill was then presented to President William J. Clinton on October 30, 1998, for signature. President Clinton signed the bill into law as P.L. 105-356 on November 6, 1998.

Commemorative Coin

The Central High Museum Board focused on September 1997, the 40th anniversary of the Central High School desegregation crisis, as the target date to open the original visitor center. This visitor center, located in the former Mobil Gas Station at the southeast corner of West 14th (Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive) and South Park streets, quickly proved inadequate after NPS began to operate the site. The Board of Central High Museum, Inc., had purchased the lot directly across West 14th Street for use as a future museum and enlarged visitor center, which NPS incorporated into its planning. For the new building, NPS set a target date of the 50th anniversary celebration in September 2007. In order to commemorate the 50th anniversary and raise funds for the site, members of the Arkansas Congressional delegation began to call for the creation of a commemorative silver dollar.

On January 25, 2005, Rep. Vic Snyder, with more than 300 Congressional co-sponsors including the other three representatives from Arkansas, introduced H.R. 358, the “Little Rock Central High School Desegregation 50th Anniversary Commemorative Coin Act” in the House of Representatives. The coin would be one of two commemorative coins approved by Congress each year. Each coin has a face value of \$1 but is sold with a surcharge of \$10. This surcharge covers the costs of producing and marketing the coins, with any net profits designated to a specified agency. According to the original bill drafted by Rep. Snyder, the profits would be paid in equal amounts to the Jefferson National Parks Association (JNPA), which operates the educational book store at Central High School NHS, and to the Secretary of the Interior through NPS for use by the park. The portion going to JNPA was to provide for support of programs and other developmental activities at Central High School NHS, and the portion going to NPS was to be used for site improvements at the park, “including the establishment of cooperative agreements to preserve and restore the historic character of the vicinity in the historic site’s boundaries.”

The House Financial Services Committee reviewed the bill in the spring of 2005 and recommended that, with an amendment, the bill should pass. As amended, the bill called for all

³³ Rett Tucker, oral history interview, March 4, 2010.

profits to be paid to the Secretary of the Interior, “for the protection, preservation, and interpretation of resources and stories associated with Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site.” In particular, the amendment specified that the funds would be applied to site improvements, the development of interpretive and educational programs and historic preservation projects, and the establishment of cooperative agreements designed to preserve or restore the historic character of the area surrounding the vital intersection of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive.

Throughout the spring of 2005, Rep. Snyder lobbied his fellow members of the House of Representatives with great vigor to secure passage of the commemorative coin bill. The bill was brought to the floor of the House on June 27, 2005, in the face of procedural rules that made this action difficult. The bill passed on a motion to suspend the rules. Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) spoke in favor of the bill, and outlined the difficulties:

Had we simply been considering the merits of this resolution, the commemoration for one of the great blows for freedom and against bigotry in America, it would have been easy; but there were a lot of complicating factors. Members should know that it was the diligence, the persistence, occasionally annoying, of the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. SNYDER) that got this bill to the floor. I am happy that we are passing this today commemorating this great event, and I am also happy that it is not a subject I will have to discuss with the gentleman from Arkansas for the next few months, it having occupied a great deal of my time previously. He deserves a great deal of credit for his diligence.³⁴

On March 9, 2005, while the House was discussing the bill, Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Mark Pryor (D-AR) introduced an identical companion bill in the Senate. In the fall of 2005, the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs reviewed the bill as passed by the House of Representatives and made two additional amendments. First, the Senate’s amended bill recognized the importance of the Little Rock School District in its cooperation with NPS in the protection of Central High School and allowed the funds that the School District spent on improvements to the school to count as matched private funds. Second, the Senate clarified that this would be one of only two commemorative coins approved by Congress for 2007. With those two amendments, the Senate Committee favorably discharged the bill by unanimous consent, and the amended bill went to the full Senate. The Senate then passed its version of the bill on November 8, 2005, after which it went to a Conference Committee to resolve the differences. On December 18, 2005, the House agreed to the Senate’s amendments and voted to pass the bill by voice vote. President George W. Bush signed the bill as P.L. 109-146 on December 22, 2005.

Boundary Expansion

As identified in the original legislation and as further defined in the General Management Plan (GMP), the park’s boundaries included Central High School and its campus, Ponder’s Drug Store at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West 16th Street, the original visitor center in the former Mobil Gas Station, the location of the current visitor center, and the

³⁴ *Congressional Record-House*, June 27, 2005, H5186.

commemorative garden. This left the east side of South Park Street between West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive and West 16th Street outside the boundaries of Central High School NHS. It was long recognized, however, that this block, which includes six houses and one church directly across the street from the front of the school, was a vital part of the spatial context for the 1957 desegregation crisis. According to the GMP, “A major feature of the cultural landscape is the historic streetscape that is located along both sides of South Park Street in front of the school. The private residences on the east side of South Park Street are not within the boundary of the NHS.”³⁵ Despite the buildings retaining much of their appearance from 1957, out of deference to concerns from residents of the surrounding neighborhood about excessive federal intrusion, this block of South Park Street was not included in the original boundary.

The GMP, however, included a recommendation that this block be added to the park’s boundary.³⁶ In the interest of further preserving the integrity of the cultural landscape of the 1957 crisis, Central High School NHS gradually gained support from the surrounding neighbors for including this block in the NHS boundary. Because the original boundary was specified in the enabling legislation, the proposed boundary expansion required new legislation. Representative French Hill (R-AR) introduced a bill, H.R. 2611, on May 23, 2017. The bill would authorize NPS to enter into cooperative agreements with the private property owners of the buildings on the east side of South Park Street across from Central High School and would allow NPS to use operational funds “to mark, interpret, improve, restore, and provide technical assistance for the preservation and interpretation of the properties.” In addition, NPS could also “assist the homeowners in applying for federal grants.” All of the property owners and several community members supported the measure before the bill was introduced.³⁷ A companion bill, S. 1202, was introduced in the Senate by Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) on the same day.

H.R. 2611 was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, which then referred it to the Subcommittee on Federal Lands on May 23, 2017. After review by the subcommittee, the Committee on Natural Resources met on July 25, 2017, to consider the bill. The House Natural Resources Committee reported favorably on the bill without any amendments and returned it to the full House on September 5, 2017, with House Report 115-290. The House Report pointed out that

The residences on South Park Street across from the high school are inextricably connected with the significant events of 1957, as images of the Little Rock Nine, crowds of protestors, the public, and National Guardsmen appeared in newspapers across the nation and were broadcast live through the emerging media of television.

The House Report went on to note that the bill would authorize NPS to enter into cooperative agreements with the private owners of the houses, and thus allow “NPS to use the site’s operational funds to mark, interpret, improve, restore, and provide technical assistance” for the preservation of the houses, and would allow NPS to assist the owners of the houses to apply for

³⁵ *Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Little Rock, Arkansas* (April 2002).

³⁶ *Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*, 42.

³⁷ House Report 115-290, 115th Congress, 1st Session, September 15, 2017.

federal grants. The full House considered the bill a week later and passed it unanimously on September 12. From the House of Representatives, it was sent to the Senate.

The Senate, meanwhile, had sent the identical companion bill, S. 1202, to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and from there to the Subcommittee on National Parks. The Senate Subcommittee on National Parks held hearings on July 19, 2017, which included testimony from Acting Deputy Director of NPS Robert Vogel. Vogel reassured the Subcommittee that NPS had no plans to purchase the seven properties on South Park Street, but said that

Images of the South Park Street properties are inextricably associated with the 1957 events. As images of the Little Rock Nine, crowds of protestors, public, and National Guardsmen appeared in newspapers across the nation and were broadcast live through the emerging media of television, the neighborhood became as recognizable as the high school itself. Because South Park Street in front of Central High School retains a high degree of historical integrity, this legislation would provide a unique opportunity to preserve a setting that will allow visitors to more accurately visualize the events that occurred there in 1957 when the Little Rock Nine attempted to attend Central High School.

Vogel then went on to note that the property owners and several community members supported the proposal.³⁸

The Senate took no further action on S. 1202 since H.R. 2611 had passed the House of Representatives without amendment and was forwarded to the Senate. H.R. 2611 then came to the Senate floor on December 21, 2017, where it was passed without amendment by voice vote. President Donald J. Trump signed the bill into law as P.L. 115-117 on January 12, 2018.

³⁸ Acting Deputy Director Vogel's testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks can be found on the Department of the Interior's website, <https://www.doi.gov/oc/s-1202> (accessed April 19, 2018).

Chapter 3: Initial Implementation

The National Park Service (NPS) was working with an established precedent when it began planning for the implementation of Central High School NHS. Central High Museum, Inc., (CHMI) not only created a visitor center with an excellent interpretive exhibit, it also demonstrated that the public was interested in learning about the 1957 desegregation crisis at Little Rock's Central High School and that Little Rock's civic leaders did not need to be reticent about the topic. As a small non-profit organization, however, Central High Museum, Inc., faced a daunting task to continue to operate and fund the visitor center. Even while coordinating the successful opening of the new visitor center in association with the 40th anniversary commemoration of the crisis in September 1997, therefore, members of the organization's board of directors began discussions with their extensive political contacts, including President Bill Clinton and Senator Dale Bumpers, regarding NPS acquiring the site. With such powerful advocates in Congress and the White House, a record of achievements, and a compelling story, they were able to begin the process of becoming part of the National Park System.

Special Resource Study

As described in Chapter 2, the Board of Central High Museum, Inc., began laying the political groundwork while also preparing for the opening of the visitor center in the former Mobil Gas Station. They received support and encouragement from the Arkansas Congressional delegation, particularly from Senator Dale Bumpers. Bumpers, from his senior position on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee which oversaw the National Park System, lobbied for the inclusion of Central High School in the system. Even with this encouragement, however, NPS was legally required to conduct a study to determine the site's eligibility. During deliberations for the appropriations bill for NPS' FY98 funding, Senator Bumpers sponsored a provision for a Special Resource Study which the Senate Committee on Appropriations included in Senate Report 105-56 on July 22, 1997, pertaining to the Department of the Interior's funding.¹ Within the overall funding providing for general management plans within NPS, the Committee recommended providing \$150,000 "for a study to determine the suitability and feasibility of designating Central High School in Little Rock AR, as a unit of the National Park System due to its importance in interpreting the development of the Civil Rights movement in the United States." This recommendation survived the committee process and was included in P.L. 105-83, the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, which passed Congress and was signed by President William Clinton on November 14, 1997.

Work on the Special Resource Study began in February 1998 when NPS staff from the Denver Service Center (DSC) visited Little Rock. These staff members included historians, interpretive planners, a park planner, and a landscape architect. They received support from Central High Museum Board member Don Castleberry, retired NPS Midwest Regional Office (MWRO) Regional Director, and Laura Miller, Executive Director of the Central High Museum and Visitor Center, as consultants, together with Superintendent Bess Sherman and Chief of Interpretation Tyrone Brandyburg at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. The DSC staff met with interested parties including representatives from Central High Neighborhood,

¹ See Briefing Statement, NPS, prepared for Director Stanton, June 2, 1998; files of Central High School NHS, D18.

Inc., the Central High Museum Board, the Central High School administration, elected officials, and with Elizabeth Eckford, one of the Little Rock Nine. This initial visit was followed, two months later, with a series of workshops held by DSC staff in April 1998 with Central High Museum, Inc., students from Central High School, and the general public.

In part due to the pending retirement of Senator Bumpers at the end of 1998, Congress sought to have the Special Resource Study completed in time to allow for legislation while he remained in office. Indeed, the Special Resource Study was still being prepared when the legislation was being drafted in the summer of 1998.² This caused DSC to work on a shorter schedule than normal, and the fast pace showed in the early internal reviews of the document. A particularly thorny issue that persisted after the park was created was the role of Central High Museum, Inc., Early drafts of the Special Resource Study left unclear the nature of their operations, their needs in order to continue operating the visitor center, and whether they wanted NPS to fund their operations or absorb them entirely. Actions by the Board taken in the spring of 1998, which will be discussed later in this chapter, clearly indicated that Central High Museum, Inc., sought to be subsumed entirely by NPS and have all operations transferred to the National Park Service.

Once completed, the Special Resource Study included a historical overview of the school desegregation crisis of 1957. The focus of the study's discussion of the site's significance clearly was on the role of Central High School within the larger Civil Rights movement, particularly the opportunities to illustrate and interpret the process of desegregation of the nation's public schools. Given the range of themes that could be illustrated at Central High School, DSC staff did not anticipate that Central High School would duplicate the particular themes and significance of the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Kansas. Both the school and the surrounding neighborhood retained a high degree of integrity, though there were few assurances that this condition would remain in perpetuity. While the Little Rock School District (LRSD) had an interest in preserving and maintaining the school, "historic preservation is not the primary mission" of the district. The Central High neighborhood, meanwhile, although listed as a historic district in 1996 and expanded in early 1997, had few protections. As observed in the Special Resource Study, "little is being done to proactively ensure preservation of the cultural landscape in the school environs."³

Two aspects in particular highlighted the ability of the proposed Central High School National Historic Site (NHS) to interpret the Civil Rights movement in America. First, the role played by the Little Rock Nine allowed for a discussion of the response of individuals to rise above mob action: "Central High School is not just a story of hatred and violence, but, more importantly, it is a living monument to the human spirit—it is a story that provides evidence that courage and conviction provide hope in the face of adversity." Second was the fact that the principal resource of the proposed National Historic Site, Central High School, remained a functioning school. The school has operated continuously as a desegregated public school since 1957, with the exception of the 1958-59 school year, when Governor Faubus, under the authority

² Memorandum, Acting Associate Director, Professional Services to Regional Director, Midwest Region, June 25, 1998; files of Central High School NHS, D18.

³ *Special Resource Study: Little Rock Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas* (NPS, August 1998); typescript MS in files of Denver Service Center, accessed through Electronic Technical Information Center [ETIC], 21.

of legislation passed by the Arkansas General Assembly in late August 1958 in an extraordinary session, declared that all public schools in Little Rock would remain closed due to the threat of desegregation. It took valiant and tireless efforts by members of the community of both races throughout the Lost Year to secure the reopening of Little Rock's schools in September 1959. As a result, the school's "legacy continues to live in the high school programs that continue today, the school district that supports those programs, and, most importantly, in the students that make up its living legacy."⁴

The fact that Central High School would remain an active school created an unusual situation for NPS in terms of management and interpretation. The Special Resource Study stated that NPS would not seek to acquire the school or to take on the traditional responsibilities of a land manager. Instead, NPS made clear that the Little Rock School District and the City of Little Rock would retain their roles and responsibilities regarding planning and maintenance of the school and the surrounding neighborhood. Since NPS would not own the principal resource, the Special Resource Study deferred a discussion of land acquisition and construction costs and whether any additional properties would be required until the role of NPS at this site became more precisely defined. Chief among possible acquisitions was Central High Museum's visitor center, located in the restored Mobil Gas Station across from the school; the role of NPS with regard to this building and its exhibits would be worked out through a future General Management Plan (GMP).

With regard to interpretation, NPS planned to develop a comprehensive program through a series of local partnerships. The anticipated role of NPS included facilitating partnerships, developing a volunteer program, providing technical, and perhaps limited financial assistance for historic preservation to the Little Rock School District, and leveraging partners to develop additional public and private sector support for the site. The likely interpretive themes identified in the Special Resource Study included the 1957 crisis itself, the Civil Rights movement, the use of executive power, equal rights, and the history of the school, the neighborhood, and the state of Arkansas.

The National Park Service team, together with the stakeholders and consultants, identified three alternatives for Central High School. The first, identified as the "No-Action" alternative, was to leave the school as a National Historic Landmark, with the Central High Museum and Visitor Center providing the only interpretation. The second alternative was to have Little Rock Central High School be an affiliated area of the National Park System, which would provide a limited degree of technical and/or financial assistance; Central High Museum, Inc., would remain as the principal manager of the site. Finally, the third alternative was to designate the school and its immediate surroundings a part of the National Park System. This alternative "would explore an evolutionary approach to Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site that involves multiple parties in the management and development of the resource."⁵

The Special Resource Study recommended that the third alternative be adopted. According to the study's conclusion, Little Rock Central High School

⁴ *Special Resource Study*, 26-27.

⁵ *Special Resource Study*, 39.

is suitable for addition to the national park system because of its place in American civil rights history as a preeminent symbol and icon of the continuing struggle for equal protection under the law for all American citizens. No other existing unit of the national park system, nor similar area managed by another entity, matches the potential of Central High School to create vivid understanding and appreciation for our country's struggles and accomplishments related to desegregation in public schools.⁶

Transition to NPS

The Special Resource Study bolstered the political support for NPS designation that Central High School enjoyed, and President William J. Clinton signed the law that created the National Historic Site on November 6, 1998.⁷ In part because Central High Museum, Inc., had personnel and facilities in place, however, the transition from private to federal management of the site was gradual and subject to negotiation. Neither the Special Resource Study nor the legislation specified the role that Central High Museum, Inc., would play once NPS had assumed management of the site or indicated the ultimate ownership of the restored Mobil Gas Station that served as the initial visitor center. The legislation called for the development of a General Management Plan for the site within three years, which gave NPS and Central High Museum, Inc., time to plan the best way for the two organizations to cooperate.

For nearly four years, from late 1997 until September 2001, the Central High Museum Board worked on several tracks simultaneously. On the one hand, it successfully created and opened a visitor center in September 1997 with an all-volunteer organization, but then had to transition to an ongoing concern with a professional staff. This required additional fund-raising and providing direction for staffing, programming, retail activities, publicity, and more. On the other hand, the Board had to contend, first with the possibility, and then with the reality, of the site becoming a unit of the National Park System. This entailed a new set of concerns, particularly the issue of determining exactly what would be its role within the National Park System. At the same time, the Board was planning for the creation of a commemorative garden at the northwest corner of South Park Street and West 14th Street (now W. Daisy L. Batson Gates Drive).⁸ This volunteer Board had its hands full.

As talented and capable as the Board members were in creating and funding the original visitor center, they realized that in order to maintain and operate the site successfully, they would need to hire professional staff, starting with an executive director. In the summer of 1997, before the visitor center opened, the Board established a Personnel Committee tasked with developing a job description for an executive director, determining a salary range, and advertising the position. The position was first advertised in the late summer of 1997, and the Board received more than twenty applications. Subsequent discussions within the Board during September 1997 led the Personnel Committee to revise the job description and re-advertise the position in October 1997. In early December 1997, the Board voted to offer the position to Laura Miller. Miller, formerly a graduate student in the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) Public History program,

⁶ *Special Resource Study*, 31.

⁷ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the Park's legislative history.

⁸ See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the development of the Commemorative Garden.

had been involved in the development of the interpretive program at the visitor center located in the Mobile Gas Station (Figure 7). Miller had also worked in a business environment prior to entering graduate school and was comfortable with the retail operations of the gift shop. She had worked part-time for the Board during the summer and fall of 1997, through the opening of the site and after, and began work as the full-time executive director in January 1998. She remained the sole full-time staff until after the site was designated a component of the National Park System in late 1998; under the aegis of NPS, she was able to hire a full-time assistant under a student work program.⁹

From 1998 to 2000, Laura Miller was focused on successfully operating the first visitor center. This included preparing annual budgets, overseeing maintenance of the building, promoting the site locally and regionally, coordinating with schools and other visiting groups for special tours and programs, and expanding programming by preparing special exhibits and initiating development of a curriculum-based school program. At the same time, Miller managed the gift shop, including helping to identify special items for sale, managing inventory, and holding special events such as book signings to promote sales. As a result of her efforts, revenues continued to increase throughout her tenure.¹⁰



Figure 7: Former Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller. Photo by Deborah Harvey, 2018.

⁹ Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010.

¹⁰ Miller provided an update on visitor center operations during each of the monthly meetings of the CHMI Board of Directors meetings.

While the Board was overseeing Miller's operation of the site, they also began coordinating with NPS in 1998. In early 1998, the Board invited former Midwest Regional Director Don Castleberry to join. Castleberry had recently retired from NPS and relocated to Little Rock. Due to the depth of his experience with NPS, he was able to guide the Board in its relations with NPS as it moved toward integration. The Board's early focus was the Special Resource Study, and, in April 1998, it voted to support Alternative 3 of the study, which called for full integration of the site into the National Park System. The Board was then kept apprised of the progress of the legislation to designate Central High School as a National Historic Site. When the bill passed both the House and the Senate in October 1998, Castleberry predicted that "the legislation will take possibly the next few months to sort itself out."¹¹

Once the legislation that created Central High School NHS was enacted in early November 1998, the Board's relations with NPS became more formal. At the direction of Midwest Regional Director William Schenk, Hot Springs National Park (NP) Superintendent Roger Giddings began attending meetings regularly, to provide assistance with the transition. Additional NPS staff from MWRO and DSC began attending meetings on an occasional basis in the spring of 1999, once work on the General Management Plan began. They conducted public workshops and provided the Board with updates on the progress. While NPS staff had been through the GMP and park implementation process before and understood the time that it took, for most members of the Board it was their first time, and the deliberative process caused some uncertainty. In particular, the role of Central High Museum, Inc., and its assets were left unclear in both the Special Resource Study and in the legislation. While the Board had other issues to deal with after the 1997 opening, including planning and raising funds for the Commemorative Garden and continuing to operate the visitor center, these issues regarding the Board's future were important topics of conversation at nearly every Board meeting.

The Board faced two related issues in particular with regard to NPS. One was the status of the original visitor center located in the renovated former Mobil Gas Station. The original legislation designated Central High School itself as a National Historic Site, and only in amendments was the boundary expanded to include nearby properties such as the former Ponders Drug Store, at the southeast corner of South Park and West 16th Street, and the former Mobil Gas Station. According to the legislation, NPS would "coordinate visitor interpretation of the historic site with the Little Rock School District and the Central High School [sic] Museum, Inc." While NPS was authorized to take on the interpretation of the high school as a historic site, the role of Central High Museum and its visitor center were left undefined. In its meeting in July 1999, the Board raised this topic during a report given by Mr. Castleberry on behalf of the NPS Committee. Several members of the Board expressed concern that NPS might not assume management of the visitor center. If NPS intended to leave management of the visitor center to Central High Museum, Inc., they asserted, the Board would need to plan for raising additional funds. In response to the discussion, the Board voted to turn over management of the visitor center to NPS in October 2000.

MWRO Chief of Planning and Compliance Sandra Washington attended the meeting of the Board in August 1999 and noted that, in its planning process, NPS needed to consider a range of alternatives for management before making a recommendation. These options included

¹¹ Minutes, CHMI Board of Directors meeting, October 15, 1998.

Central High Museum, Inc., retaining responsibility for managing the visitor center. When Board member Rett Tucker mentioned the hope of the Board that NPS would take over the visitor center in October 2000, “Ms. Washington said that may or may not happen,” pending the completion of the GMP and the final appropriations from Congress. However, she suggested that “NPS might be able to locate resources to help with expenses during the transition process.”¹² The status of the visitor center remained uncertain into early 2000. In February 2000, MWRO hired Superintendent Dave Forney. Superintendent Forney’s tenure at the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site will be discussed at length later in this chapter. It is worth noting here, however, his involvement in resolving the issue of the relationship of CHMI with NPS. Forney met with the Board during their March 2000 meeting. Forney announced his plan “to have a working partnership” regarding the visitor center for one to two years. Responding to concerns from the Board that the visitor center’s budget would run out at the end of 2000, both he and Washington pledged to work as quickly as possible, though iterating that a final determination of the visitor center’s status would come only with the completion of the GMP process. Mr. Forney said that he would provide funding through Central High School NHS’s ONPS (Operation of the National Park System) FY 2000 allotment.

The Board clearly conveyed its sense of urgency regarding funding for the visitor center during Superintendent Forney’s first several months in Little Rock. As Forney recalled in 2010, his first meeting with the Board

did not go very well at all. They were anticipating, I believe the Museum Board was really anticipating that the . . .federalers were going to come in, arrive on the scene, and then they [the Board] would just simply turn it over to me during that meeting, that first meeting, and once I explained to them that that was not going to happen and that we would have to set up arrangements there was [sic] some very unhappy people on the Museum Board and they made that very clear to me and to the other NPS people that were there.”¹³

Forney and the Board continued their discussions over the coming weeks, as Forney explained how NPS would handle the transition. In particular, Forney introduced to the board the possibility of a cooperative agreement, by which federal funds could be transferred to a private non-profit organization “in order to continue the mission of the park.”¹⁴ On July 31, 2000, the Board entered into a cooperative agreement with NPS regarding the operation of the visitor center. Under the terms of the agreement, NPS was to begin covering the costs of the visitor center on October 1, 2000. This included staff salaries, maintenance costs, and repairs to the roof, drainage system, windows, and overhang canopy.¹⁵ This eased the sense of financial urgency for the Board but still left the final status of the visitor center undetermined. A complicating factor was that the City of Little Rock had purchased the former Mobil Gas Station lot on behalf of the Board in 1996. According to the legislation that designated Central High School NHS, NPS cannot purchase land from state and local governments but can only accept donations of property. Accordingly, Superintendent Forney, assisted by Board member Rett

¹² Minutes, CHMI Board of Directors meeting, August 19, 1999.

¹³ David Forney, oral history interview, March 23, 2010.

¹⁴ David Forney, oral history interview, March 23, 2010.

¹⁵ Central High School National Historic Site, FY2001 Annual Report; files of Central High School NHS, D66.

Tucker, entered into discussions with Little Rock Mayor Dalton J. “Jim” Dailey to donate the property to NPS.

As the budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2001 was finalized in late 2000, NPS announced that it would assume all visitor center expenses beginning April 1, 2001.¹⁶ In late March, NPS announced that it needed to delay the transition for up to two months. The delay was in securing the necessary legal paperwork from the Department of Justice to allow transfer of the visitor center property to NPS. At the same time, during the early summer of 2001, the Board finalized the development and construction of a commemorative garden at the northwest corner of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive. Since the target date for completion of the commemorative garden was in September, Superintendent Forney suggested that NPS and the Board hold a joint ceremony in September 2001, both to dedicate the commemorative garden and to announce that the Board would turn over the complete property, including the visitor center, to NPS within a few months. The ceremony took place on September 25, 2001, and included speeches by former Senator Dale Bumpers, Little Rock Mayor Dalton J. “Jim” Dailey, MWRO Director William Schenck, and Carlotta Walls LaNier, one of the Little Rock Nine. Former Board President Rett Tucker, who had led many of the early fund raising efforts and was aware of the financial challenges that the Board would have faced if NPS had not assumed responsibility for the site, later recalled, “that day we handed the keys over, that was the best fundraiser we ever had.”¹⁷ While the ceremony took place in September 2001, however, the formal legal transfer was not executed for several months. On December 14, 2001, Regional Chief of Land Resources Alfred Suarez accepted the property on behalf of NPS, and a Notice of Final Donation Settlement was finalized on January 21, 2002.

In addition to the status of the visitor center, the second issue facing the Board was the retail operation of the gift shop. This, in turn, led to a parallel discussion of the status of the Board with regard to NPS. Under the administration of Central High Museum, Inc., (CHMI) the sales in the gift shop at the visitor center grew steadily from 1998 through 2000. The Board began discussions in September 2000 in association with a report of the Finance Committee, and questions arose as to the status of the gift shop after NPS assumed administration of the visitor center. Executive Director Laura Miller explained that NPS, as an agency within the federal government, is prohibited from operating the educational gift shop itself; the options were having the Board continue to operate the shop, or NPS could contract for its operation with an outside concessionaire such as Eastern National, one of the standard concessionaires for educational park stores in units of the National Park System.

In the wake of this Board meeting, Don Castleberry began discussions with Superintendent Forney regarding the possibility of the Board becoming a Cooperating Association. Forney then attended a Board meeting in November 2000 to discuss the two options for management of the educational book store. The first option was that the Board could become a Cooperating Association, which is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization authorized by NPS to operate bookstores at a park or site. Since Central High Museum, Inc., was already a registered 501 (c)(3), it need only revise its bylaws in order to be a Cooperating Association. It would have responsibility for stocking the educational park store, though NPS staff would operate it. The

¹⁶ Minutes, CHMI Board of Directors meeting, January 18, 2001.

¹⁷ Rett Tucker, oral history interview, March 4, 2010.

second option was for the Board to become a Friends Group, a volunteer organization that provides a range of services that may include resources management, fundraising, and political support. If the Board chose that option, NPS would work with a separate concession organization to operate the educational gift shop.

In January 2001, the Board voted to become a Cooperating Association and to continue its responsibility for the commercial shop in the visitor center. The cooperative agreement, which the Board signed with NPS on July 31, 2000, served as the foundational document for the Cooperating Association. The Board formally entered into a Cooperating Association Agreement on September 21, 2001, which was to expire on July 31, 2005. In 2004, however, the Board decided to terminate its status as a Cooperating Association and, instead, become a Friends Group, a move that NPS supported. Central High Museum, Inc., and NPS then entered into an agreement on December 16, 2004, to cancel the Cooperating Association Agreement effective January 24, 2005. At that time, Jefferson National Parks Association (JNPA) took on the role of Cooperating Association for the retail operations at Central High School NHS; in late January 2005, JNPA agreed to purchase the remaining inventory for \$9,935.05, with payments spread over three months.¹⁸ In place of the Cooperating Association Agreement, the Board and NPS drafted a Fundraising Agreement under which Central High Museum, Inc., would support the work of the park by raising funds in coordination with the Superintendent. The Fundraising Agreement went into effect on June 23, 2005, for a five-year period.

NPS Initial Implementation

Staff from MWRO, DSC, and other parks had been visiting Little Rock since early 1998 when Congress authorized the Special Resource Study. Regular communications between NPS staff and the Central High Museum, Inc., Board continued as legislation that created Central High School NHS moved through Congress and onto President Clinton's desk for signature in November 1998. Because the legislation was drafted even before the Special Resource Study was finalized, there was no time gap from the first NPS public meetings in early 1998, less than six months after the visitor center was opened, through the full implementation of Central High School NHS with its own staff.

For more than a year after the legislation was signed, however, all NPS activities took place either from MWRO or DSC. The Denver Service Center staff took the lead on developing the GMP, while MWRO staff began work on budget, staffing, and general administrative implementation, and Hot Springs NP Superintendent Roger Giddings met regularly with the Board to assist in the transition. The Board received additional input into the process from MWRO Chief of Planning and Compliance Sandra Washington, who frequently attended Board meetings with Giddings.

In the summer of 1999, Washington announced that the search had begun for a Superintendent for Central High School NHS. According to Giddings, however, by September 1999, only two applications had been received; as a result, MWRO reopened the search. By late October 1999, MWRO had received twelve applications and conducted interviews in late fall and

¹⁸ David A. Grove, Executive Director of JNPA to Johanna Miller Lewis, President, CHMI, January 27, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, A34.

winter. In mid-March 2000, the CHMI Board was introduced to the park's first Superintendent, Dave Forney (Figure 8). Forney, who entered on duty on March 26, 2000, had been serving as the management assistant at Lowell National Historic Park, Massachusetts, where he had also been the operations supervisor. His background was primarily in interpretation, serving at Valley Forge National Historical Park, Pennsylvania, the C&O Canal National Historical Park, Maryland, and the National Mall, Washington, District of Columbia.¹⁹

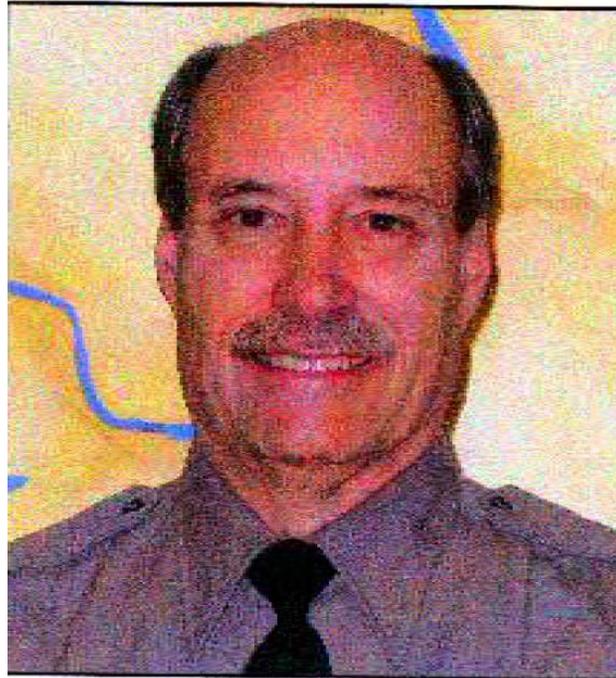


Figure 8: Superintendent David Forney. Upper Delaware newsletter, 2007

Cooperative Agreements

Almost immediately upon taking up his new position, Forney initiated the process of entering into partnerships in order to carry out the mission of Central High School NHS. As defined in the park's enabling legislation, these partnerships were to be managed in the form of Cooperative Agreements. Three partnerships were crucial in the short-term: with Central High Museum, Inc., the Little Rock School District (LRSD) and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. As described earlier in this chapter, the park entered into a Cooperative Agreement with Central High Museum, Inc., in the summer of 2000 regarding the operation of the visitor center.

With Central High School NHS having the unique distinction of being the only unit of the National Park System with a functioning public high school as the central feature, a good relationship with LRSD was vital. As Forney recalled in a 2010 interview, "one of the very first things I did was to go down to the Superintendent of Schools to meet with him and just asked him permission. . .if he'd mind another Superintendent being in town and operating over there at Central High School." Forney recalled that he made this visit even before his first meeting with the Board of Central High Museum, Inc.²⁰

¹⁹ News Release, National Park Service, February 1, 2000; files of Central High School NHS, D18.

²⁰ David Forney, oral history interview, March 23, 2010.

According to the park's enabling legislation, NPS was to do nothing that "shall affect the authority of the Little Rock School District to administer the Little Rock Central High School." Furthermore, Central High School NHS was called upon to "coordinate visitor interpretation of the historic site with the Little Rock School District and the Central High Museum, Inc." In their first meetings with Forney, LRSD officials reminded him that their "primary role is to educate the kids." Forney likewise made clear he recognized this fundamental fact and reassured them "that we both had an educational mission, so I was able to work I think very effectively with the school board and letting them know that. . .we want to compliment [sic] the school district." Soon after arriving in Little Rock, Forney negotiated a wide-ranging Cooperative Agreement with LRSD that included provisions for NPS-led tours of Central High School, the development of educational programs, and preservation efforts at the school.²¹

Forney also developed a Cooperative Agreement with UALR, with primary contact through the university's Public History graduate program. Under provisions of the Cooperative Agreement, UALR provided graduate assistants to produce a brochure and resource guide for the new Commemorative Garden and help with the operation of the information desk and the educational program. Through the Cooperative Agreement, Central High School NHS also assisted UALR in developing a public interpretation program at the home of the late Daisy L. Gatson Bates on West 28th Street. Bates served as liaison for the Little Rock Nine during the 1957 desegregation crisis, and her home had been designated a National Historic Landmark in 2001.²² Subsequent Cooperative Agreements with UALR have included provisions for conducting oral history interviews and support for planning the exhibits in the new Visitor Center.

Office Space

While Forney's first task was to establish these working relationships with key partner institutions, he also needed a place from which to work. One of Forney's first tasks, therefore, was to secure office space in Little Rock. When he arrived in March 2000, "there was no office, there was no phone numbers [sic], there was no staff, there was no money, it was me, and so we started from the very beginning." He initially worked out of a restaurant on Main Street in Little Rock: "for the first two or three weeks I just made phone calls out of that little restaurant down there and did a lot of my business from right there."²³ While working from the restaurant, Forney coordinated with MWRO and the General Services Administration (GSA) to secure administrative space in the Federal Building at 700 West Capitol Avenue. The General Services Administration signed a lease for a small, 160-square foot office in the Little Rock Federal Building on June 11, 2001, for a five-year term. Interpretive staff, once they were hired, maintained offices in the original visitor center.

By 2003, Central High School NHS increased their office space to 628 square feet to accommodate the growing staff. For FY06, the park leased an additional 330 square feet in the Federal Building in order to provide space for two work areas: a public information officer during the planning for the 50th anniversary celebration in 2007, and additional space to be used

²¹ Central High School NHS Annual Report, FY2001; typescript MS in files of Central High School NHS, D7.

²² Central High School NHS Annual Report, FY2001.

²³ David Forney, oral history interview, March 23, 2010.

for interns and meeting space.²⁴ By 2007, Central High School NHS leased three suites in the Federal Building, totaling 1,375 square feet. With the construction of the present Visitor Center in 2007, however, the park no longer needed to lease space. In March 2007, then-Superintendent Mike Madell informed GSA of the park's intent to vacate the space later in 2007. In May 2007, Superintendent Madell notified GSA that Central High School NHS would need to retain one of the suites, with 196 square feet, to house the museum collections that could not be taken to the new Visitor Center when it opened. The other two suites that were being used for offices were vacated in early September 2007, and the remaining suite being used for storage was vacated in mid-January 2008.²⁵

Staff

Even before he had office space in place, however, Forney hired his first staff member. Laura Miller had served as the executive director of Central High Museum, Inc., since January 1998. In his planning for Central High School NHS, Forney identified a historian/interpretation specialist as his primary need, particularly one who knew the background of the site. Given her experience with the development and initial implementation of the Central High Museum, Miller was an ideal candidate for the position, and Forney accepted her application. Miller entered on duty as Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources on March 26, 2001.

Forney and Miller were the only two staff members through 2001; most administrative and maintenance functions were served by staff from Hot Springs NP, including the hiring of janitorial contractors.²⁶ In early 2002, however, with an expanded budget, Forney increased the staff by focusing on interpretation. He hired two student trainees as interpretive rangers: Rhonda Stewart, who was hired through the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), and Spirit Trickey, who was hired through the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). Spirit Trickey was the daughter of Minnijean Brown Trickey, one of the Little Rock Nine (Figure 9). Also in 2002, Forney hired Taronia Armstrong to serve as the first Interpretive Ranger; Armstrong had worked at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, and came to Central High School NHS from Arkansas Post National Memorial.

²⁴ Central High School NHS Annual Report, FY2005.

²⁵ Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, Midwest Region, August 24, 2004; Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, Midwest Region, June 27, 2005; email, Jan Lee, Central High School NHS to Lois VanderTuin, MWRO, July 28, 2006; Michael Madell, Central High School NHS to Kriss Hinebaugh, GSA, March 19, 2007; Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, May 9, 2007; Janice A. Lee, Central High School NHS to Audra Oliphant, GSA, August 31, 2007; Oliphant to Madell, March 24, 2008; files of Central High School NHS, A80.

²⁶ Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; Central High School NHS Annual Report, FY2001.



Figure 9: Chief of Interpretation Spirit Trickey. Constitutional Writes newsletter, 2010.

In June 2002, Superintendent Forney accepted the position of Superintendent of the Upper Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River, Pennsylvania. Laura Miller was appointed Acting Superintendent and served in that capacity until Michael Madell entered on duty as the second Superintendent on January 13, 2003. Madell had served as MWRO Regional Chief of Planning and Compliance when the Special Resource Study was being prepared, and thus had an extensive knowledge of the site.²⁷

General Management Plan

The park's enabling legislation required the completion of a General Management Plan within three years. Work on the GMP was conducted by DSC, with a team led by Community Planner Mary L. McVeigh and supported by MWRO Planning staff. DSC was contracted to complete the work in late April 1999, and a team of planners and historians traveled to Little Rock in May 1999 to conduct the first public meetings and workshops. The National Park Service team met with representatives from Central High Museum, Inc., the Little Rock School District, students from Central High School, the Central High School Neighborhood Association, and the general public. Several ideas came out of these public meetings, including the possibility of changing the park's boundary to include the seven houses on the east side of South Park Street across the street from the school, adding to the existing visitor center building to provide additional interpretive space, constructing a new and larger visitor center, coordinating with the neighborhood to minimize negative impacts, and renovating both the former Ponder Drug Store building and the Campus Inn (two former pre-World War II Army barracks that were moved to the school grounds after World War II to provide overflow from the school's cafeteria). The

²⁷ Central High School NHS Annual Report, FY2003. Chapter 4 contains a discussion of subsequent staff members.

purpose of each of the options was to provide additional visitor services, administration, or interpretive space.²⁸

The planning team from DSC then took the rest of 1999 and into early 2000 to develop initial concepts for the new park. In March 2000, shortly before Superintendent Forney arrived at Central High School NHS, DSC prepared a newsletter outlining the process to date and defining nine “essential conditions” that their analysis had identified, future functions that NPS should achieve at the park. These “essential conditions” included expanded interpretation, visitor services, neighborhood protection, coordination with LRSD, tours of the interior of the School, promoting partnerships, and encouraging visitors to work toward improved rights for all.²⁹ Through the spring of 2000, the Denver Service Center planning team developed a draft GMP including purpose and significance statements, mission goals, and interpretive themes. In addition, DSC began the task of developing draft alternatives for management of the site that would best meet the goals for the site identified through the public participation process. These four alternatives remained essentially intact through the draft and final GMP, with each emphasizing a different interpretive scope for the site. In the initial draft stage, these alternatives were identified as No Action, the Site, the City, and the International Impact. These initial alternatives were summarized in a second newsletter, which was sent to participants in the GMP process in the summer of 2000 with invitations to comment.³⁰

On the basis of the comments returned and further staff analysis, the Denver Service Center planning team prepared a draft GMP for internal NPS review in January 2001. This draft provided further clarification to the four alternatives and included a preferred alternative. The four alternatives were:

1. No action. NPS would continue to manage operations of the existing visitor center and provide basic visitor services and interpretation.
2. NPS would focus on preserving and interpreting significant structures within the site’s boundaries, with expanded visitor services. NPS would seek Congressional authorization to expand the Park’s site boundaries to include the seven houses on the east side of South Park Street and would construct a new visitor center at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive.
3. NPS would expand its interpretive focus to other civil rights-related sites in and around the City of Little Rock and would include an emphasis on other aspects of the Civil Rights movement in Arkansas and throughout the United States. The Park would lease a building within the area for an interpretive

²⁸ Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Newsletter 1, March 2000; files of Central High School NHS, A42. See also Minutes, CHMI Board of Directors meeting, May 20, 1999.

²⁹ Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Newsletter 1, March 2000; files of Central High School NHS, A42.

³⁰ Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Newsletter 2, July 2000; files of Central High School NHS, A42.

center and administrative offices and provide shuttle bus service to the existing visitor center and Central High School.

4. NPS would make the Park a center for the scholarly study of the Civil Rights movement in the United States and would construct a new education center at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive, which would include a lecture hall and technologically sophisticated classrooms that would allow for communication with diverse groups.

The draft GMP identified Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative. According to a summary prepared in February 2002, this alternative would place a clear focus on Central High School and its immediate environs, while the new Visitor Center would provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the events of 1957. This was the alternative that most clearly focused on the preservation of cultural resources, including the school, the Mobil Gas Station, and the surrounding streetscape.³¹ The document was subject to extensive internal NPS review, by staff at MWRO and in NPS Headquarters Office in Washington, District of Columbia, through the winter and spring of 2001. The draft GMP was then released for public comment with a Notice of Availability on September 10, 2001. Public meetings were held on November 13, 2001. The final GMP was then published on April 10, 2002, and a Record of Decision was issued on July 30, 2002. The decision was to adopt Alternative 2, the Preferred Alternative, as the plan for development of Central High School NHS.

In keeping with the preferred alternative, the Final GMP included several key management provisions: construction of a new Visitor Center and administrative headquarters, tours of Central High School, coordination with LRSD on the maintenance and preservation of the school, maintenance of the commemorative garden as a contemplative space, keeping the Mobil Gas Station as an interpretive and visitor education area, and emphasizing the preservation and protection of the historic streetscape along South Park Street across from the school. The Final GMP included a recommendation that NPS expand the park's site boundary and acquire the former Ponder's Drug Store, take the lead on establishing agreements with the owners of the seven houses on South Park Street facing the school to maintain the 1957 ambience, and purchase the lot at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive. Finally, the GMP recognized that LRSD would be ultimately responsible for Central High School, but that NPS would provide technical assistance for its preservation and would seek federal and other grants and funding sources to support the preservation and interpretation of the school.³²

Initial Planning Documents

Cultural Landscape Inventory

Coincident with the Special Resource Study and the General Management Plan, NPS began work on three initial planning documents for the new park. The first of these was a Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI). Landscape Architect Geoff Burt from MWRO conducted

³¹ Memorandum, Summary of Preferred Alternative, February 22, 2001; files of Central High School NHS, D18.

³² Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, General Management Plan: Summary Brochure, July 30, 2002; files of Central High School NHS.

field work for the Level II CLI in the summer of 1999, with assistance from Sarah Beth Sammons, a student. More limited in scale than a Cultural Landscape Report, and without a landscape treatment plan, the CLI provided an inventory and preliminary evaluation of the integrity of Central High School NHS' natural and cultural landscape. The primary focus of the document was Central High School and its supporting buildings on the main campus, though the park's boundaries also include the lots at the corner of South Park Street and West 14th Street, and the former Ponder's Drug Store at the southeast corner of South Park Street and West 16th Street.

The school is at the center of a campus that covers more than five acres and is surrounded by residences on the east, west, and south; the former Mobil Gas Station and two vacant lots on the north side of West 14th Street lay to the northeast of the school. In addition to the school, the campus contains the massive Quigley Stadium, a playing field, and several smaller support buildings. Although the school was designed by a consortium of several architects, the report notes that the landscape was designed by Landscape Architect John Highberger of Memphis, Tennessee. The CLI provides an analysis of several specific factors regarding the landscape's integrity, including natural systems and features, land use, cultural traditions, topography, vegetation, circulation, buildings and structures, views and vistas, and small-scale structures such as benches, courtyards, and walls. For each of these categories the CLI provides descriptions of the resources and indicates contributing features within several of the categories including natural systems and features, topography, and vegetation.

The report concluded that, while the school and most of its supporting buildings suffered from lack of maintenance, they retained much of their integrity. The landscape, however, had not retained good integrity. The plant materials had been completely changed from the original design, using materials that were not specified in the original landscape design. In addition, the plaza in front of the school had been substantially altered when the original reflecting pool was infilled and the fountains removed. The streetscape, meanwhile, had remained largely intact since the 1950s, particularly the seven houses that face the school on South Park Street. The report was completed in 1999.

Strategic Plan

Once the GMP had been completed, Central High School NHS staff prepared a Strategic Plan in 2002 in compliance with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. The Strategic Plan presented a framework for the park's management and operations for the following three fiscal years, 2003 to 2005.

The Strategic Plan drew from the newly created GMP to identify a mission statement for Central High School NHS. The Strategic Plan then included three general sets of goals that would allow the park staff to accomplish the park's mission. These three general goals are: to Preserve Little Rock Central High School NHS Resources, to Provide for the Public Use and Enjoyment and Visitor Experience of Little Rock Central High School NHS, and to Ensure the Organizational Effectiveness of Little Rock Central High School NHS. Within this framework, Central High School NHS staff identified several factors which would help them to accomplish the goals they had set. These factors included the identification and protection of resources, both buildings and cultural landscapes and completing the List of Classified Structures for the park. In

addition, Central High School NHS staff provided goals for visitor satisfaction, safety, and understanding, for creating a diverse workforce and employee standards, and for increasing public participation through volunteering at the park and through donations to the collections.

Once the goals had been identified and described fully, the Strategic Plan provided a summary of how the goals would be achieved in terms of staff levels and budgets. Finally, the Strategic Plan included forms with the goals specified, so that the park's performance could be measured annually.

Long-Range Interpretive Plan

The new Central High School NHS staff made rapid strides in the first two years of operation toward developing an interpretive program. The Planning Committee of Central High Museum, Inc., in coordination with the Public History Program of UALR, had done a great deal of work in 1996 and 1997 to develop interpretive themes. Planners for NPS incorporated many of these themes into the Special Resource Study that led to designation as a National Historic Site. In the spring of 2000, NPS planners prepared draft interpretive themes that included the 1957 event itself, the Civil Rights movement, the use of executive power, equal rights, Central High School as a building, and the relations between the 1957 desegregation crisis and the City of Little Rock and the State Arkansas. As a part of the planning process, NPS developed a proposal to conduct Ranger-led tours of the school's interior, which the Little Rock School District approved in late July 2000.³³ Early work also included developing tours of the Commemorative Garden and the Visitor Center and preparing a pre-visit informational packet for teachers.³⁴

These early components of Central High School NHS' interpretive services were being developed simultaneously with the preparation of the park's GMP. In January 2002, once the GMP was largely complete, work began on the park's first Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP). The purpose of the LRIP is to define the park's goals for visitor experiences and to provide the necessary components to achieve these goals including facilities, interpretive media and programs, and resources. Working with members of the public, including area residents, representatives of other local agencies and organizations, and subject matter experts, together with members of the Little Rock School District, MWRO staff members, and staff members from NPS' Harpers Ferry Center, Central High School NHS staff developed a series of significance statements that included the role of the 1957 desegregation crisis in the overall Civil Rights movement generally and in the desegregation of public schools in the South particularly, and the school as a National Historic Landmark.

The LRIP is organized around five management prescription areas, which represent key themes in the park's interpretation and visitor experience goals for the school and the desegregation crisis in relation to particular places and facilities, both actual and anticipated. These management prescription areas were Visitor Services, Administration, and Operations

³³ "School Board approved tours at Central High," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, July 28, 2000; clipping in files of Central High School NHS, UALR Administrative History collection.

³⁴ Central High School National Historic Site Draft Interpretive Themes; MS attached to email from Sam W. Vaughn, DSC to Mary McVeigh, DSC, et al., May 2, 2000; Central High School National Historic Site, Interpretive Report, Fiscal Year 2001; files of Central High School NHS, A42.

Area; Interpretive and Visitor Education Area; School Area; Contemplative Area; and Historic Scene Area. Management recommendations were then developed for each of these areas. The key recommendation within the Visitor Services, Administration, and Operations Area was the construction of a new Visitor Center at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive with the expectation that it would be the first stop for most visitors, “welcoming, setting context, orienting, providing thought and reflection, and providing a multi-sensory and diverse educational experience.”³⁵ The proposed new Visitor Center would provide visitors with an orientation to the site but would also include exhibits that would “connect the interpretive stories with orientation to park resources and experiences.” Additional recommendations pertaining to the Visitor Services, Administration, and Operations Area included publications, a website, a library and archives, work areas, and acquisition of the former Ponder’s Drug Store.

Recommendations within the Interpretive and Visitor Education Area included converting the original visitor center, located in the former Mobil Gas Station, into an education center for scheduled groups. This would be a space where Central High School NHS staff could provide curriculum-based education programs for school groups. Other substantial recommendations were included within the Historic Scene Area, such as seeking Congressional authorization to expand the park’s boundaries to include the seven residences facing the school on the east side of South Park Street and installing wayside exhibits near the school and the proposed new Visitor Center. The recommendations for the Contemplative Area and the School Area, meanwhile, included continuing the existing interpretive programs at the Commemorative Garden and the school. Finally, the LRIP included discussions regarding the importance of forming partnerships with local organizations to extend the interpretive and educational reach of Central High School NHS staff, the development of educational programs, and research needs including oral histories.

³⁵ Long-Range Interpretive Plan: Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site (July 2004), 32; files of Central High School NHS.

Chapter 4: Administration

Staffing

Unlike most National Park System units, the National Park Service (NPS) inherited an existing staff and administrative structure at the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site (NHS), one that had been in place for several years before NPS assumed a direct managerial role. Central High Museum, Inc. (CHMI), the predecessor organization to NPS, hired Laura Miller as its first full-time Executive Director and only staff member in January 1998. Miller began her relationship with the site as a graduate student in the Public History Program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) in 1996, taking part in a class project to develop a detailed timeline of events associated with Central High School. This timeline was to be the first step in the development of an interpretive program for the site, thus giving Miller insight into the history of the school and its significance in the 1957 crisis and afterwards. With a background in marketing and business administration, Miller was also able to help set up the gift shop and bookstore in preparation for the opening of the site in September 1997. She continued to work as a part-time employee through the fall of 1997. In late 1997, the CHMI Board offered her the position of Executive Director, and she began work on January 2, 1998.¹

In February 1998, the CHMI Board hired Rhonda Stewart as a part-time assistant at the Visitor Center; later that year, as the level of visitation and tours increased, the Board agreed to hire Stewart as a full-time employee.² This small staff, together with a graduate assistant from UALR, operated the Visitor Center under the direction of the CHMI Board into the period of transition to NPS operation. The site was operated with great vigor, as the staff coordinated visits by school groups and other organizations, worked with local students on the development of exhibits and programs, worked to get placement for the site in a variety of local, regional, and national publications, worked with the City of Little Rock's Convention and Visitors Bureau, developed outreach materials, and more. Visitation to the site by school groups and the general public continued to rise throughout 1998 and 1999.³ This successful continuation of the site's operation under CHMI's management, with Miller and her staff at the helm, was vital to NPS' ability to plan for the long-term management of Central High School NHS.

With Miller continuing to manage the Visitor Center after designation of the park in November 1998, NPS provided administration and initial planning from the Midwest Regional Office (MWRO) in Omaha through 1999. The first NPS employee to serve on-site was Superintendent David Forney, who entered on duty March 26, 2000. Forney's initial efforts, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3, focused on establishing relationships with local organizations including CHMI, the Little Rock School District (LRSD), and others, coordinating the initial budgets; securing office space; and initiating the General Management Plan (GMP) process.

Under the terms of the Central High School NHS' enabling legislation, NPS' role in the preservation of Central High School was strictly limited. As a result, interpretation was identified as the most vital component of the new site rather than cultural resources. The first staff position

¹ Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010, p. 3.

² CHMI Board Minutes, May 13, 1998; December 17, 1998.

³ The monthly minutes of the CHMI Board of Directors provides invaluable information pertaining to the operations of the site during the transition period of 1998-2000.

that Forney filled, then, was Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources. Laura Miller, with her depth of experience with the site from very early in its existence, was an obvious choice. Miller applied successfully for the position in late 2000 and entered on duty January 2, 2001 as Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources. With regard to interpretation, Miller recalled in a 2018 interview, “it was essentially doing what I had been doing, which was running the day-to-day operations of the Visitor Center and doing research. . . . the public programming, the education efforts that we did, that sort of thing – developing exhibits.” In addition, however, she had responsibility for cultural resources. In that capacity, she worked with Superintendent Forney and MWRO to coordinate the development of a Collections Management Plan, Historic Structures Reports for the original Visitor Center and Central High School, the Cultural Landscape Report, and the Long-Range Interpretive Plan. Although the NPS environment was new to Miller, and she had an expanded range of responsibilities as a result, she observed that “it was really sort of a continuation of what I’d been doing. In developing the site, developing the programs, it really – sort of formalizing the interpretation and education program, but also helping with transition.”⁴ Miller remained with the Central High School NHS for nearly a decade. She served as Acting Superintendent after Superintendent Forney transferred to Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, New York and Pennsylvania, as Superintendent in June 2002, and as Acting Superintendent of the Ulysses S. Grant NHS on temporary duty in 2008. In late 2010, Miller accepted the offer to serve as the first Superintendent of the President William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace Home in Hope, Arkansas.

Miller was largely responsible for the hiring of the next staff member, the first Park Ranger at Central High School NHS. Taronia Armstrong had worked for NPS for several years and was serving as Park Ranger at Arkansas Post National Memorial in Gillett, Arkansas in 2001 when Miller made a personal visit to the site (Figure 10). Miller recalled that she

was very impressed by her, so, when we were looking for, “Okay, who can we bring in who has a lot of Park Service experience?” Because, I was new to the Park Service. And, while I felt pretty comfortable. . . working at that site and starting that program, I thought, “You know, we do need somebody who has a more well-versed background in the larger system,” so Taronia was just a perfect fit for that. And she came on and. . . immediately became a big part of the team and our Lead Park Ranger, working with bringing on new staff, and younger staff, and helping train them, too.⁵

Armstrong, a native of Arkansas, began her career with NPS in 1991 as a student in the Co-op Program at Gateway National Recreation Area in New York. She became a permanent NPS employee in 1994 at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She worked at Arkansas Post National Memorial for less than a year before accepting the lateral move to Little Rock Central High School NHS in 2002 as a GS-9 Park Ranger. Armstrong

⁴ Laura Miller, oral history interview, February 16, 2018.

⁵ Laura Miller, oral history interview, February 16, 2018.



Figure 10: Former Park Ranger Taronia Armstrong. Photo by Deborah Harvey, 2017.

remained in her position at Little Rock Central High School NHS until 2009, when she took a management position at Cane River Creole National Historical Park in Natchitoches, Louisiana.⁶

With Armstrong leading the park's interpretive program under Miller's direction, Central High School NHS hired two student trainees as Interpretive Rangers in 2002. Rhonda Stewart, who had previously worked as an employee of CHMI under Miller, was hired under the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) as a graduate student in Public History at UALR. Spirit Trickey, daughter of Minnijean Brown Trickey, one of the Little Rock Nine, was hired as a GS-4 Park Guide under the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) while an undergraduate. Stewart remained in her trainee position until August 2003 (Figure 11). Trickey, meanwhile, transitioned to a permanent full-time position as a Park Ranger in 2005. She also took on the responsibility for public relations officer as a collateral duty in late 2004.⁷

After Superintendent Forney transferred to Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River in June 2002, Laura Miller served as Acting Superintendent for the rest of the year. On January 13, 2003, Michael Madell entered on duty as the second Little Rock Central High School NHS Superintendent (Figure 12). Madell already had an extensive career with NPS,

⁶ "Meet Taronia Armstrong: Superintendent at the Clinton Birthplace National Historic Site in Hope," available at <https://www.arkansas.com/articles/meet-taronia-armstrong-superintendent-clinton-birthplace-home-national-historic-site-hope> (viewed October 24, 2018).

⁷ Central High School NHS Staff Meeting Minutes, December 19, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A40.



Figure 11: Interpretive Staff in 2003: Laura Miller, Spirit Trickey, Taronia Armstrong Bennett, Rhonda Stewart, and Superintendent Mike Madell (L-R).

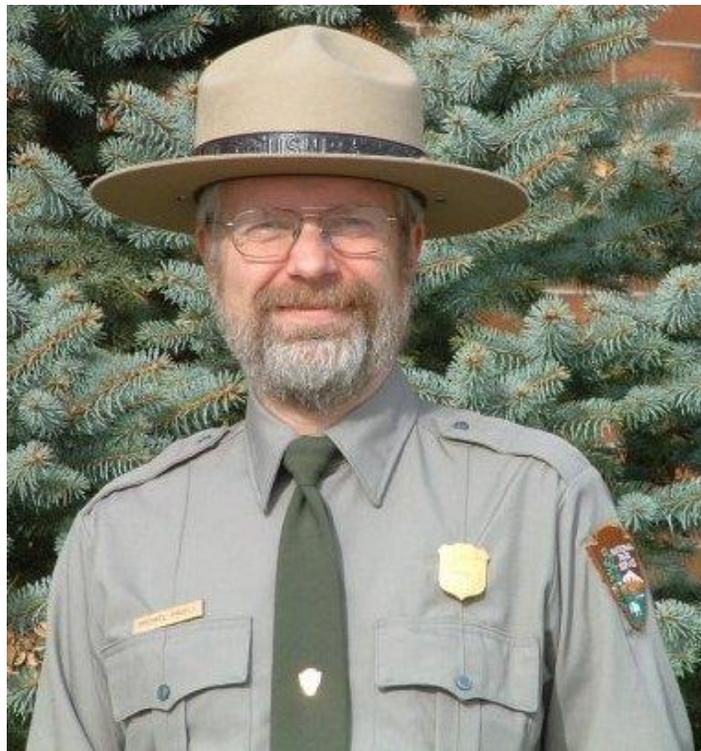


Figure 12: Superintendent Mike Madell, 2015

including serving as Chief of Planning and Compliance for MWRO during the period when Little Rock Central High School NHS was created. While Superintendent Forney, with the assistance of Laura Miller, had focused on establishing the site and conducting the initial planning work, Madell's assignment was to expand on that foundation to develop the site more fully as a park. Two aspects of Madell's tenure were key: building up the staff and leading the development, planning, and construction of the new Visitor Center. As Madell recalled in a 2010 oral history interview, these two functions were related.

Central High School NHS received an increase to the base budget in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 in order to grow the park, but it was up to Madell to determine how that growth would take place. While there was general consensus among NPS staff and regional leadership that the existing visitor center was too small, whether and when a new Visitor Center could be funded and built was uncertain. As a result of this uncertainty, Madell could not predict with precision "the specific mix of staff that we might need." As a result, he continued, "We were very conservative and methodical about adding new staff and rather than devote all of that base increase at least initially to staff, we took care of some needs that the Park had that we would not have otherwise been able to do."⁸

Madell hired two key staff positions in his first year. His first hire was Janice Lee, who served as the first Administrative Officer for Central High School NHS (Figure 13). Lee, who came to Little Rock after serving as the Administrative Officer for the Ice Age and North Country National Scenic Trails, entered on duty July 13, 2003, and remained on duty until July 2013. Less than two months later, Madell hired Lea Flowers Baker as the park's first Education Specialist (Figure 14). Baker had a background in Arkansas history and came to the Central High School NHS from the Department of Arkansas Heritage. She entered on duty September 8, 2003, and was tasked primarily with developing a curriculum-based education program.⁹ At the same time, Superintendent Madell recommended successfully that the park did not need any Law Enforcement staff; as he noted in a 2003 assessment, "in consideration of the small size of the site [0.91 acres owned in fee], no history of criminal incidents, foreseeable use and visitation patterns, and the site's good working relationship with both the Little Rock School District and the City of Little Rock, we do not believe there is a need for law enforcement staff for the foreseeable future."¹⁰

Education Specialist Baker remained on staff until 2006, when she moved to Mexico City, Mexico, to teach history at the American School Foundation. On September 5, 2006, Amy Garrett entered on duty as the new Education Specialist (Figure 15). Garrett came to Little Rock Central High School NHS from Homestead National Monument of America (NMA) in Beatrice, Nebraska, where she served as Park Ranger/Education Coordinator. During her time at Homestead NMA, Garrett promoted the use of distance learning technology. Additionally, Madell hired Alyssa Warrick as a park guide. Warrick previously served at Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Lincoln City, Indiana. These new staff members, together with

⁸ Mike Madell, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁹ Annual Superintendent's Report, 2003, page. 1.

¹⁰ "Law Enforcement Needs Assessment: Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site," June 26, 2003, page 7; files of Central High School NHS, W26.



Figure 13: Administrative Officer Jan Lee.



Figure 14: Education Specialist Lea Flowers Baker



Figure 15: Education Specialist Amy Garrett. Photo from Constitutional Writes, 2007.

Superintendent Madell, Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller, Park Ranger Armstrong, and Park Ranger Trickey, comprised the park's full-time staff. This staff, with the exception of Amy Garrett replacing Lea Flowers Baker, remained in place through 2007 and led the initial expansion of the site's interpretive and educational programs. Madell also took advantage of the opportunities provided by the STEP program to hire students to serve as park guides. From 2004 through 2007, these included Quincy Watson, Julie Jackson, Rhonda Allen, Christian Davis, and Crystal Mercer. Quantia Fletcher, meanwhile, served as a term park guide.

There were no changes to the staff through the opening of the new Visitor Center in September 2007. The first change after the Visitor Center opening was the departure of Superintendent Madell in May 2008: Madell made a lateral move to become the Superintendent of the Missouri National Recreational River in Yankton, South Dakota. In August 2008, Madell was succeeded by Superintendent Robin White, who had been serving as Superintendent of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Cincinnati, Ohio (Figure 16). White had a three-decade career with NPS, serving primarily in the roles of Park Ranger, Supervisory Park Ranger, and Chief of Interpretation. White came to Central High School NHS with a vision to build upon the foundation that Superintendents Forney and Madell laid and to expand upon it to tell a wider story regarding human rights to a bigger audience. As White recalled,

Mike [Superintendent Madell] had established a great foundation for me to build upon. I went out into the community, attended meetings, to get a feel of the community, what people were thinking— and how they felt about the site. Is it a cornerstone of the community, or can it be a cornerstone of the community? Those are the things I had to look at: not what is, but what could be. And with that networking, getting a feel of what's important to the people in the

community. We needed to look at how can we serve the community, or empower the community, to tell and share their narratives.¹¹

White began reaching out, both to external groups by hosting or attending a number of community discussions to identify the range of concerns that Central High School NHS could address, and internally to the staff, to understand how they thought the park could best reach the community and serve its needs.



Figure 16: Superintendent Robin White. Photo by Deborah Harvey, 2017.

Several important staff changes took place in 2009. Superintendent White recognized the need to have a permanent facilities management staff at the park. Superintendent Madell had arranged for Hot Springs NP maintenance worker Robert McKelvey to transfer to Little Rock Central High School NHS as the site's first Facilities Manager (Figure 17). McKelvey left the position in 2008 to return to Hot Springs NP; in early 2009, however, McKelvey returned as Facility Operations Manager reporting to Superintendent White. McKelvey entered on this duty on February 2, 2009.¹² At the same time, Hot Springs NP Maintenance Worker Daniel Lee was hired to serve as the park's first Maintenance Worker; Lee also entered on duty on February 2, 2009. Subsequent Facilities Management staff included Tom Crenshaw, who entered on duty in 2010.

¹¹ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017, page 6.

¹² Robin White to Robert McKelvey, January 30, 2009; files of Central High School NHS, P72.



Figure 17: Superintendent Mike Madell and Facilities Manager Rob McKelvey (L-R).

In the spring of 2009, one of the original staff members departed. Park Ranger Taronia Armstrong, the first Ranger at the site, accepted a position as the Chief of Interpretation at Cane River Creole National Historical Park in Natchitoches, Louisiana. Superintendent White subsequently hired several new staff, including two in the summer of 2009. In early 2008, Education Specialist Amy Garrett transferred to a position at Fort Smith NHS, though she subsequently died later that year. In July 2009, Kimble Talley accepted the position of Education Specialist, entering on duty August 2, 2009 (Figure 18). At the same time, Mary Jo (Jodi) Morris accepted the position of Park Ranger under the SCEP program (Figure 19). Both Talley and Morris reported to Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller.¹³ Talley resigned her position in 2011, to accept the position of Training Specialist with the Stephen T. Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. The position of Education Specialist has remained vacant since then due to lack of sufficient budget.¹⁴

In late 2010, Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller resigned her position at the Central High School NHS to become the first Superintendent of the President William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace Home National Historic Site in Hope, Arkansas. Following the departure of Park Ranger Taronia Armstrong the year before, Miller was, at this time, the last of the initial staff remaining at Central High School NHS. To replace Miller, Superintendent

¹³ Robin White to Kimble L. Talley, July 10, 2009; White to Mary Joe (Jodi) Morris, July 17, 2009; files of Central High School NHS, P72.

¹⁴ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.



Figure 18: Former Education Specialist Kimble Talley.



Figure 19: Park Ranger Jodi Morris. Photograph by Deborah Harvey, 2017.

White appointed Spirit Trickey as the second Chief of Interpretation after she served temporarily as the Acting Chief of Interpretation. Trickey had been actively involved with the park's interpretive program for many years, serving as a park guide and Park Ranger and helping to develop several innovative interpretive programs. Trickey resigned her position in 2013 to take the position of Chief of Interpretation at the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Seattle, Washington. Enimini Ekong, who had previously served at Mary McLeod Bethune and Frederick Douglass Historic Sites, replaced Trickey. Ekong served until May 2016, when he transferred to Brown v. Board of Education NHS (Figure 20). Jodi Morris then served as interim Chief of Interpretation until current Chief of Interpretation, David Kilton, entered on duty June 2017 (Figure 21). Park Rangers in 2018 included Fabian Ruiz, Randy Dotson, and Toni Webber.



Figure 20: Chief of Interpretation and Education Enimini Ekong. Photo by Central High School NHS, 2016.

As discussed in greater detail in the following section, the park's base budget reached a high point in 2009 and 2010 at just over \$1 million, and has either remained stable or declined since then, reaching a low of \$960,514 in 2015; the 2018 base budget was \$984,954. One result of this reduction in base budgets is a stagnation in staffing levels; the park's budget had not allowed for new permanent hires until 2017, when Kilton entered on duty. As Superintendent White noted, the majority of the staff in recent years have been students. In fact, from its inception, Central High School NHS has provided career development opportunities for employees to gain experience quickly and then move on to other units of the National Park System to utilize their acquired skills.



Figure 21: Chief of Interpretation David Kilton. Photo by Deborah Harvey, 2018.

Although this pattern is atypical for the National Park System, it is an innovative response of the three park superintendents to the problem of addressing staffing needs in the face of budget restraints by taking advantage of the huge pool of students available in the Little Rock area. Several of these students came through Central High School NHS to move into supervisory positions elsewhere in the National Park System.

Budgets

Central High School NHS' budget grew quickly in its first several years as it became a fully operational National Park System unit. After the first decade in operation, however, the park's base budget allocation reached a plateau, but the budgets gained in complexity as staff accessed a range of new funding sources for programs.

From the time of designation of the site in late 1998 until 2000, when the first Superintendent arrived, the costs for operating the site fell primarily to the Central High Museum, Inc., Board. This included salaries for the permanent staff, maintenance, and insurance. The role of NPS at this point was related to planning: setting in place the GMP process and coordinating with CHMI Board members. These costs, including travel and staff time, were handled through MWRO's operating budget. Senator Bumpers, in his appropriation request, had

made \$300,000 available for the initial planning process. As reported by CHMI Board member and former Midwest Regional Director Don Castleberry, however, this initial appropriation for Little Rock Central High School NHS was allocated to MWRO's Maintenance budget rather than to the Planning budget. This would require additional time to correct, including securing a letter from Senator Bumpers about his original intentions for the funds.¹⁵ In June 2000, the CHMI Board entered into a Cooperative Agreement with NPS by which NPS would fund a portion of the CHMI's operating expenses including salaries and maintenance costs. In addition, as Superintendent Forney recalled, he had a budget of \$75,000 for Fiscal Year (FY) 2000, which included his salary.¹⁶

Increases in budget allocations began in FY 2001, when the park's budget grew to \$297,000. Superintendent Forney later recalled that the rapid increase in the base budget during its initial years was due, in part, to the unique set of connections which the CHMI Board had. Former Midwest Regional Director Don Castleberry was a member of the Board and was "absolutely instrumental in working with me and working with his contacts in the regional office in order to have Central High School a priority for funding in the region itself and even for the National Park System." In addition, the timing of the park's creation in the late 1990s was fortuitous. Some members of the Board, Forney speculated, reached out to

their contacts with the Clinton Administration; also, provide some behind the scenes support for Central High for these operating increases. . . . I think just with the high profile this park was at that time coming on as a brand new civil rights site and experience the Little Rock Nine and what that meant for their service and for the country. I think that alone itself propelled the park to the top for funding because not only did we get funding in FY01, we also got funding increased in FY02.¹⁷

Budget increases allowed for salaries for two full-time staff members, the Superintendent and the Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources. The focus of the staff's activities in 2000-2001 was on planning efforts and on developing education and interpretation programs. Fiscal Year 2001 concluded with the formal transfer of the CHMI property to NPS, including the Mobil Gas Station and its exhibits and the Commemorative Garden. The budget increased by 95% in FY 2002, to a base allocation of \$536,760. As the Annual Superintendent's Report noted, "This large increase reflects the fact that the park is transitioning from startup/planning mode to a fully operational park."¹⁸ Superintendent Madell later recalled that the large increase was made "in order to add more staff and to continue to grow and develop as a park."¹⁹ In addition to the base allocation, Central High School NHS received Cyclic Maintenance funds totaling \$10,000 to replace the roof on the Mobil Gas Station. Another substantial increase in the base budget took place in FY 2003, to \$633,000; as noted in the Annual Superintendent's Report, "The continued upward trend of the budget reflects the park's ongoing evolution to becoming fully

¹⁵ Central High Museum, Inc., Board of Directors meeting, December 17, 1998, page 2.

¹⁶ David Forney, oral history interview, March 23, 2010. See also Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the negotiations between the NPS and the CHMI Board regarding the assumption of operating costs.

¹⁷ David Forney, oral history interview.

¹⁸ Annual Superintendent's Report for 2002, February 3, 2003, page 2.

¹⁹ Michael Madell, oral history interview, March 9, 2010.

operational.”²⁰ The park also received cyclic funds totaling \$21,000 for entrance signs and exhibit repairs, and \$38,300 for the initial oral history project.

The park’s base allocation remained relatively stable for the next two fiscal years, 2004 and 2005, with a staff level set at just over seven full-time equivalents (FTE). While Central High School NHS continued to receive monies for projects and maintenance through cyclic funds, it also received line item funds in FY 2005, 2006, and 2007 for the planning, design, and construction of the new Visitor Center. In FY 2007, the park also received a large increase in its base budget allocation to \$902,800. This reflected the status of Central High School NHS as becoming fully operational, with its own administrative, interpretation, and maintenance staff and the completion of the new Visitor Center. Additional, project-specific, cyclic funds focused on landscaping measures, while line-item costs totaling nearly \$300,000 were applied to the development of exhibits in the new Visitor Center. In FY 2008, additional line-item allocations were made for exhibit development and construction totaling nearly \$100,000.

Beginning in FY 2008 and continuing through FY 2018, the base budget allocation remained relatively stable at approximately \$1,000,000 despite inflation, cost of living increases, and increased salaries. Over the succeeding years, this has crimped the staff levels. In particular, as Superintendent Robin White noted, Central High School NHS has been unable to fill the Education Specialist position due to budget constraints.²¹ At the same time, beginning in FY 2009, the variety of funding sources began to increase substantially, often for specific educational and interpretive programs. In particular, the park, in FY 2009, received the first of its grants through the Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative (LDMI), a Congressionally mandated project that required NPS to undertake a series of studies pertaining to the cultural legacy of the Lower Mississippi Delta and to assist others to do so through grants. Central High School NHS initially received \$20,000 in LDMI funding to create two programs. It has continued to apply for, and receive, LDMI funding for specific educational projects.

Also in FY 2009, Central High School NHS received the first of its funding through the sale of the special commemorative coins issued by the United States Mint on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the 1957 Little Rock crisis. In early 2009, the park received word that the surcharges resulting from sales of the coins would provide \$1,907,710. The funds were to be divided equally among three line items in the budget: interpretation, education, and improvements to structures.²²

After the rapid increases throughout its first decade, Central High School NHS’ budgets have declined since 2011. The base budget reached a peak in 2011, at \$1,015,000, and has either fallen or remained stable since then. In 2013, when the federal government was in an extended sequestration, the base budget fell to an abnormally low level of \$909,240, though most years since 2011 have had base allocations between \$970,000 and \$990,000. Accounting for inflation, this is substantially lower than the budgets of the 2008-2011 period and has had a significant impact on the ability of the Superintendent to hire permanent staff.

²⁰ Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2003, February 17, 2004, page 4.

²¹ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017, page 13.

²² Email, Jan Lee, Central High School NHS to Joyce Nurton, MWRO, January 7, 2009; files of Central High School NHS, F54.

Hot Springs National Park Support

When it was first designated in late 1998, Central High School NHS had no staff. Instead, planning efforts were coordinated through MWRO, while day-to-day operational efforts were coordinated through Hot Springs National Park (NP). As noted in Chapter 3, Hot Springs NP Superintendent Roger Giddings took part in the transition process and attended several meetings with the CHMI Board, including the first several monthly meetings after the 1998 designation of the site. This support continued for several years. The first staff members, including the Superintendent, Chief of Interpretation, and Lead Ranger, all relied on Hot Springs NP for administrative support, including budgeting, personnel, contracting, computer support, and facilities management.²³

In 2003, Superintendent Michael Madell hired Administrative Officer Jan Lee as his first expansion of staff. Her arrival allowed several of the administrative functions to transition from Hot Springs NP to Little Rock Central High School NHS. Hot Springs NP remained as the servicing personnel office and continued to provide computer support and some contracting assistance. In particular, Hot Springs NP remained nominally responsible for facilities maintenance at Little Rock Central High School NHS until 2008. This included arranging for custodial and grounds-keeping contracts with local minority-owned businesses, while directly providing personnel for supplemental maintenance services. In addition, Hot Springs NP maintained the Facility Management Software System (FMSS) database for Little Rock Central High School NHS through 2006²⁴ Finally, in 2007, Superintendent Madell hired Rob McKelvey, who had served as a maintenance worker at Hot Springs NP, to serve as the first Facility Manager at Little Rock Central High School NHS. After Superintendent Robin White arrived in August 2008, she compared private sector contracted janitorial costs to the cost of hiring federal employees and she elected to build a park maintenance division.

Evaluations of Management and Operations

Immediately after creating the General Management Plan, which served as a foundational document to establish the overall direction and mission of Central High School NHS, NPS staff developed a series of documents outlining management policy and procedures. The goal of these documents was to provide the administrative structures that would enable park staff to fulfill the vision that was described in the GMP and to act as responsible stewards of the park's resources. Subsequent evaluations of Central High School NHS pointed to the strengths and weaknesses of the young park's management and operations.

One of Superintendent Forney's first tasks was to create a Strategic Plan for Central High School NHS for Fiscal Years 2003-2005. The development of a Strategic Plan for individual parks was a relatively new requirement within NPS. Little Rock Central High School NHS was created in the early stages of what some in NPS dubbed the "Performance Management Revolution." Inspired by new approaches to management developed in the private sector in the 1970s and 1980s and codified in the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA),

²³ Superintendent's Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2002, page 2.

²⁴ Superintendent's Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2003, page 7.

this approach to management focused on measuring performance against clearly identified goals, both long-term and short-term, with evaluations of both individual and corporate results and outcomes based on measurable criteria. NPS developed its own approach to the new performance mandates of GPRA in the mid-1990s that called for the development of Strategic Plans, Annual Performance Plans, and Annual Performance Reports tailored to the needs and goals of individual units of the National Park System. Rather than a traditional focus on specific activities and issues, NPS began requiring park staff to more clearly determine their particular missions and to develop identifiable goals, results, and outcomes that would help them to achieve their missions. NPS first developed a service-wide draft Strategic Plan in 1997, just one year before Little Rock Central High School NHS was created, and finalized it in early 2000. In 1998, Congress passed the National Park Management Omnibus Act requiring all units of the National Park System to create appropriate management documents consistent with GPRA. Little Rock Central High School NHS, created in late 1998, was, therefore, one of the first parks to start its life under this new approach to management and budgeting.

The initial Strategic Plan identified the mission of the park, together with a discussion of the historical significance of Central High School and its role in the implementation of the two Supreme Court decisions in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and in the desegregation of public schools in the South. The Plan then set out three general Goal Categories: Preserve Central High School NHS Resources, Provide for the Public Use and Enjoyment and Visitor Experience of Central High School NHS, and Ensure Organizational Effectiveness of Central High School NHS. Within these categories Central High School NHS had a series of long-term goals, including identifying, inventorying, and protecting historic structures and cultural landscapes; developing interpretive strategies that focused on visitor understanding, satisfaction, and safety; creating a diverse workforce and providing specific performance plans for staff; and developing relations with other agencies, organizations, and individuals who can help to support the park. The Strategic Plan also outlined the unique, non-traditional status of Central High School NHS in which the key resource, Central High School, is operated by a separate entity, the Little Rock School District. As a result, the Strategic Plan noted, the management of the park requires “extensive partnerships to meet management goals in neighborhood preservation, interpreting civil rights, rehabilitation of Central High School, documenting the events of 1957 through actual participants, and developing education program initiatives.”²⁵

Finally, the Strategic Plan included an Annual Performance Plan in the form of a series of multi-year worksheets for individual goals, with responsible staff members and associated budget requirements. These worksheets continued to serve as templates for annual management reports which Superintendent Madell completed during his tenure through the first half of FY08. The management reporting procedures, however, changed as NPS adjusted its reporting requirements under GPRA and sought to adopt a more business-like approach to management through the early 2000s. In particular, NPS management developed a “Core Operations” program that tied budget and staff levels to an analysis of a park’s core operations. This approach was developed by Intermountain Regional Director Mike Snyder early in the administration of President George W. Bush, with the goal of streamlining individual parks’ budgets by focusing on core operations. It was adopted throughout the National Park System during 2006 and 2007.

²⁵ *Strategic Plan for Central High School National Historic Site, October 1, 2003—September 30, 2005*; quote on page 13.

Planning work for the Core Operations process began in March 2008, during the final months of Superintendent Madell's tenure. In late 2007, Madell had encouraged MWRO to conduct a Core Operations evaluation for Central High School NHS as soon as possible, even though the park had not been scheduled for one. According to the park's staff meeting minutes for January 2008, "Historically these reviews have justified park funding increase requests. Mike [Madell] feels it would be very positive to have an evaluation early in the park's history to avoid future budget deficits."²⁶ The on-site evaluation was scheduled for May 5-6, 2008. Superintendent White, who entered on duty in August 2008, inherited the program in progress and brought it to completion in early 2009. The process called for the staff to work together to revisit and define the park's mission and core operational needs. As Central High School NHS was still in formative mode with budgets that had been increasing over the previous six years, one of the needs was to determine how to apply these increases in base allocations to the park's mission. In the initial planning process, the NHS staff developed a revised purpose statement reflecting previous planning documents and the experience of creating the park:

The purpose of Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site is to provide education and interpretation about the struggle to desegregate Central High School, and the role of these events as a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement, emphasizing the stories of citizens exercising their fundamental human rights in pursuance of justice and equality in a land of promise and democracy that remain as valid today as they were in 1957; and to preserve and protect the tangible resources associated with those stories.

In light of this statement of purpose, the Core Operations Report goes on to identify the essential operational functions of the site that are required to achieve it. These include aspects specific to the particular administrative divisions of Central High School NHS: Superintendent's Office and Administration Division, Facility Operations and Maintenance Division, and Interpretation and Cultural Resources Management Division, together with functions that are common across the several divisions including safety and risk management, strategic planning, leadership and program management, communications, and training and administrative duties. The report then identifies a staffing level that is required to fulfill these key functions. The recommended Core Operations Target Organization represented a total Full-Time Equivalent staff of 14.7, which was slightly above the 14.4 FTE staff level at the time.

The Core Operations program was vigorously debated and criticized within NPS for its emphasis on cost-cutting at the expense of programs, and new NPS Director Jon Jarvis, in 2009, officially brought this budget analysis program to an end. At Central High School NHS, however, the Core Operations analysis concluded that, not only were no staff identified as working on non-core functions, but several core functions were not being "performed at an acceptable level due to a lack of staff and other resources." These functions included administration, education, and facilities management.²⁷ The proposed staff organization included four divisions reporting to the Superintendent—Interpretation, Administration, Facility Manager,

²⁶ Central High School NHS Staff Meeting Minutes, January 10, 2008; files of Central High School NHS.

²⁷ "Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site: Core Operations Report," January 5, 2009, page 15.; files of Central High School NHS, A64.

and Cultural Resources Specialist—with the majority of staff reporting to the Chief of Interpretation, including an Education Specialist, and both Park Rangers and Park Guides. The report acknowledged the still-developing nature of Central High School NHS, noting that an increase of staff “is logical, as Central is a relatively new park area and is just now approaching a stage of evolution where its programs and facilities are comparable to a mature park area.” The proposed new organization structure, the report continued, “will enable the park to complete its evolution from a developmental unit to a fully mature and operational unit of NPS.”²⁸

As discussed above, base budget allocations have stagnated or been reduced since reaching a high point in 2011. It is unclear whether the provisions for reporting and accountability within the Core Operations program would have provided the Superintendent with the justification to secure the budget increases that could allow for the staff that the analysis indicated would be adequate to address the program needs of the park.

As Central High School NHS staff were concluding the Core Operations report, Regional staff conducted an Operations Evaluation Report for the park. Ten staff members from MWRO and other parks in the Region spent the week of May 11, 2009 at Central High School NHS to review park operations and to interview staff. The purpose of the Operations Evaluation was to assess the park’s operations in accordance with a range of factors including leadership and management, facilities and landscape planning, commercial services management, facility management, resource and visitor protection, interpretation and education, risk management and safety, emergency services, acquisition management, agreements and partnerships, property management, records management, information technology, human resources, and financial planning.

The report was in part a checklist, to ensure that the park had required plans and policies in place and that they were being followed appropriately. More than this, however, the report addressed the strengths and weaknesses at Central High School NHS in detail. The Operations Evaluation Report, combined with the Core Operations Report that was being prepared simultaneously, provides a richly detailed view of the workings of Central High School NHS at a moment of transition. These two reports in 2009 marked the park’s coming of age, a decade after its creation and after the first full year of operations in its new, modern visitor center and under the direction of a new Superintendent. As detailed in the Operations Evaluation report, the strengths of the site were clear: the significance of its story, its interpretive focus, and the depths of its relationships with the LRSD and with groups throughout the community. As a relatively young park, however, and with the turmoil resulting from building the new Visitor Center, the Regional staff noted several areas in need of improvement.

The most important issue that the Operations Evaluation Report noted for improvement was in the area of Resource and Visitor Protection. In particular, the report cited a lack of agreements in place with the Little Rock Police Department and the Little Rock Fire Department. Noting that the Little Rock Chief of Police had written to Central High School NHS in 2004 requesting a meeting but got no response from the park, the Operations Evaluation Report called on the Superintendent to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement for both police and fire

²⁸ “Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site: Core Operations Report,” page 9.

protection by the end of 2009.²⁹ Regional staff also noted that Central High School NHS did not have a formal agreement with the State of Arkansas regarding jurisdiction over park property. The park claimed Proprietary Jurisdiction as a federal property, meaning that the federal government was acting as a private, proprietary landowner, and was leaving obligations for law enforcement with the local and state governments. Because the park had not yet secured an agreement on these terms, the role of local law enforcement on park property was limited. This situation would need to be addressed quickly. In addition, the Operations Evaluation Report pointed out other potential security issues including an infrequent use of park-provided radios for interpretive staff, a lack of controlled access to secure areas such as computer servers, the lack of a Physical Security Plan, and inadequate locks for janitorial spaces.³⁰ The Operations Evaluation Report observed that the process for approving or disapproving Special Use Permits was not well-defined.³¹ Finally, the Operations Evaluation Report made several recommendations for improvement, including expanding volunteer opportunities, identifying and creating a maintenance facility, developing an interpretive film for the new Visitor Center, and adding two FTE staff: filling the vacant Education Specialist position and creating a Cultural Resource Manager position.³²

Offsetting these concerns, however, the Operations Evaluation Report found many strengths at the park. In particular, the report heaped praise upon both the interpretation and education programs at Central High School NHS. “The park’s Interpretation Program,” the report stated, “addressed park interpretive themes in an exceptional manner through both personal services and interpretive media.” In particular, the report highlighted the expansion of the park’s interpretive mission beyond the 1957 crisis and the Little Rock Nine to encompass the quest for civil rights and social justice more broadly. As the report explained, “The park takes special care to establish the relevance of the history associated with the park in the 21st century by pointing out the ongoing efforts around the work to promote human rights for all.” The reviewers encouraged the park “to continue its efforts to become a venue where the public can encounter and discuss issues related to human rights through informal dialogue, formal programs, and special events.” As a part of this expansion, the report suggested that the park could lead the development of a network of parks that interpret civil rights. A network such as this, the report concluded, could “engage the public on a wider scale than through the efforts of each individual park.”³³

The report also gave the education program high marks despite the lack of an Education Specialist. It detailed the range of educational programs and services that the park had developed in just the previous few years, including curriculum-based programs, distance learning opportunities, teacher workshops, and digital-based educational resources. The report did note

²⁹ In late 2009, the park implemented a Memorandum of Understanding with the Little Rock Fire Department. In 2019, the park is negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding with the Little Rock Police Department.

³⁰ Subsequently, the park updated its radios which are used on a daily basis by the Superintendent, Chief of Interpretation, and Chief of Maintenance. In addition, a radio is available at the visitor center front desk and two are assigned to the Division of Interpretation.

³¹ As a result of the Operations Evaluation Report, the park adopted a standard operating procedure for Special Use Permits.

³² Central High School NHS programmed for a new interpretive film that was developed and installed in 2016.

³³ “Little Rock Central High School Operations Evaluation, May 11-15, 2009,” Word document in digital files of Central High School NHS.

that the park's Education Specialist position had gone unfilled for more than a year, a situation that should be corrected. The report also pointed to the plans to convert the historic Mobil Gas Station and former visitor center to serve as educational space, suggesting that the park needed formal classroom space. As noted in Chapter 7, Central High School NHS has since determined that the Mobil Gas Station is not suitable for use as an educational space, and it remains as office and storage space for the park's maintenance program.

Finally, the Operations and Evaluation Report approved of the degree to which Central High School NHS had conducted its planning program. The report pointed to the impressive list of planning documents that the park had already completed, including a Cultural Landscape Inventory and List of Classified Structures, Scope of Collections Statement, Collections Management Plan, Cultural Landscape Report, and Historic Resource Survey. Moreover, the report noted that Central High School NHS was one of the very few parks in the Midwest Region to have completed an Annual Implementation Plan to fulfill its Long-Range Interpretive Plan. In addition, park staff had a strong record of complying with resource management issues, including compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act regarding the protection of historic properties. This included work that Central High School NHS had either conducted or facilitated at the Mobil Gas Station and Central High School.

Volunteer Programs

Volunteers frequently play an important role in units of the National Park System, providing a range of necessary services in support of parks, allowing the parks to accomplish more than they could normally, giving citizens a chance to participate in the operations of a park and potentially learn new skills, and affording park staff an opportunity to expand their reach throughout a community. The National Park Service promotes volunteering nationwide through the Volunteers-in-Parks (VIP) program, which serves as a clearinghouse for volunteer opportunities throughout the nation.³⁴ Central High School NHS began promoting volunteer opportunities at the park in 2003, but, while volunteers have provided valuable service, the VIP program has rarely been actively promoted and constitutes only a small portion of the park's operations.

The park's attempts to recruit volunteers began in late 2003, when Laura Miller secured help from an Americorps group associated with the Arkansas Children's Hospital. The principal focus of this local component of the national Americorps program is on the development and use of school and community gardens to encourage access to healthy foods. Miller arranged for these Americorps volunteers to help the park with caring for the Commemorative Garden on weekends. This relationship continued for several years as the Americorps volunteers took on a variety of tasks. In late 2005, for example, Park Guide Spirit Trickey developed activities for the Children's Hospital volunteers including replacing shrubs at the Mobil Gas Station and improving the Commemorative Garden, while the Americorps volunteers assisted with invitations to the 50th Anniversary event in the spring of 2007.³⁵

³⁴ See the VIP website, <https://www.nps.gov/getinvolved/volunteer.htm>, for additional information on the VIP program.

³⁵ Central High School NHS Staff meeting minutes, December 10, 2003, November 29, 2005, and May 10, 2007; files of Central High School NHS.

After being hired as the park's first Education Specialist in the fall of 2003, Lea Flowers Baker took on the role of volunteer coordinator. The following summer, Flowers prepared an article for the Central High School NHS newsletter, announcing that the park hoped to establish a VIP presence. In particular, she stated that the park sought volunteers who could help with the bookstore, interpretation (including historical research, photography, and video production), and gardening. Baker continued to have notices promoting volunteer opportunities at the park in the newsletters with modest success until she resigned her position in June 2006. At that point, Spirit Trickey assumed the responsibilities of volunteer coordinator and expanded the opportunities to include public programming. In October 2006, for example, volunteers helped with the National Night Out program, which brought 400 people to the evening event.³⁶

The high point of volunteer activity at Central High School NHS was in 2007, with the planning and execution of the park's involvement in the 50th Anniversary event. The 2009 Operations Evaluation Report noted that 246 volunteers contributed 1,187 hours of service during FY07. Many of these volunteers were parts of community groups that offered their services to the park, including the Black Firefighters Association, City Year (a local organization that uses Americorps volunteers to help at-risk students remain in school), the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, the Little Rock School District, the National Association of Social Workers, and the UALR Public History Program. A year later, however, only 76 volunteers donated their services to the park, contributing 710 hours of time. Noting the sharp decline, the Operations Evaluation Report pointed out that the park's volunteer coordinator recently returned to school and was working on a part-time basis, "which seemed to thwart her ability to pay a necessary amount of attention to the park's Volunteer Program." The report then strongly encouraged the park to reinvigorate its volunteer program in ways that drew upon suggestions from the entire staff. Recruiting new volunteers, the report suggested, "will further the park's efforts to enhance its presence within the community and to serve all residents including under-engaged NPS audiences."³⁷

While Central High School NHS has continued to recruit volunteers and to identify roles for volunteers to fill, it has not been a substantial part of the park's operations from 2008 to the present. However, it is an important component in the park's youth programs, which have expanded since 2010. In the summer of 2009, Superintendent White took part in a VIP Advisory Council meeting in the NPS Washington, DC office, where the emphasis was on President Barack Obama's efforts to promote a "service learning youth program." Both the Youth Leadership Academy, a program sponsored by the park, and the Memory Project, a program developed by Central High School with participation by park staff, provide extensive volunteer opportunities for the city's high school students.³⁸

³⁶ Central High School NHS Staff meeting minutes, June 8, 2006; see also *Constitutional Writes*, Winter 2006. Each issue of *Constitutional Writes* from Summer 2004 through Fall 2006 included invitations to join the VIP program at Central High School NHS.

³⁷ "Operations Evaluation Report," 15-16. For information on the role of volunteers in the 50th Anniversary event, see *Constitutional Writes* Winter, 2008.

³⁸ Central High School NHS staff meeting minutes, July 15, 2009. See also Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

Publicity and Visitation

Central High Museum, Inc., was reliant on gift shop sales for a portion of its operating revenues. As a result, increasing visitation to the site was an important function of the Board and the staff. After an initial burst of visitors surrounding the opening of the visitor center in September 1997, the number of visitors dropped quickly to a range of 30-50 people per day in the fall of 1997. For 1998, however, the CHMI Board set an ambitious goal of 20,000 visitors.³⁹ Executive Director Laura Miller and the CHMI Board worked assiduously to increase the visibility of the visitor center, including coordinating with schools for tours, mailing brochures, and assisting with and preparing articles and other notices for placement in local, regional, and national newspapers and magazines. Periodicals including *Southern Living* and the travel section of the *New York Times* published profiles of the Central High Museum in 1998, which increased the national visibility of the site. Miller also worked with the Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Little Rock Museum Consortium to promote the site and develop promotional materials. During a reception and fund raiser in September 1998, for the 41st anniversary of the desegregation crisis, local news and radio stations profiled the museum and interviewed Ms. Miller. All this activity paid off as visitation steadily climbed through 1998 and 1999, even though the goal of 20,000 visitors per year was not met.⁴⁰

The Central High Museum, Inc., Board continued to operate the visitor center even after the park was designated in 1998, as NPS focused its energies on managing the transition and developing the initial planning and management documents. The first goal of NPS was to put the park on a firm administrative basis, defining the mission of the site and creating a staffing and budget structure that would allow that mission to be fulfilled. At the same time, NPS put an early effort into the visitor experience, ensuring that the story and significance of the 1957 desegregation crisis at Central High School was being conveyed in the most effective way. Because Central High School NHS was in the unique situation of having its key resource, the school, under the authority and management of a separate agency, and because the Central High Museum Board had done so much to raise the visibility of the site over the past two years, the initial NPS staff had the luxury of time and opportunity to focus on interpretive plans and public programming more than on facilities management and promotion.

From the foundation established by Laura Miller and the CHMI Board, the new status of the site as a unit of the National Park System drew increasing numbers of visitors. During Superintendent Madell's first meeting with the CHMI Board, he asked for the Board's help with enhancing the site's visibility: "He wants to make sure that people come to Central and that it is a 'must-see' site for visitors to Little Rock. The Board can help with the Site's visibility by serving as advocates and helping fund site bulletins and other Site publications."⁴¹ The park's visibility also was stimulated by the development of the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock, which was under development in the early 2000s and opened in November 2004.

³⁹ "Central High Museum & Visitor Center Goals for 1998," in UALR Administrative History Files, files of Central High School NHS.

⁴⁰ Minutes from the monthly meetings of the CHMI Board contain regular updates on activities associated with the Visitor Center, including visitation numbers and public relations work; UALR Administrative History Files, files of Central High School NHS. Despite these valiant efforts, the goal of 20,000 visitors was not met: visitation for 1998 totaled 15,431; in 1999, the museum had 16, 637 visitors.

⁴¹ CHMI Board Minutes, January 16, 2003; UALR Administrative History Records, files of Central High School NHS.

Visitation climbed steadily if not rapidly in the early years of Central High School NHS, rising to 23,000 people in 2002. By the summer of 2003, visitation had doubled since 1998, and projections that were made during the GMP process indicated that visitation would increase to nearly 60,000 by the time of the 50th anniversary commemoration in 2007.⁴²

Promotion of Central High School NHS came through a variety of media. As a unit of the National Park System, the park employs standard publicity channels including brochures and press releases. The Friends of Central High Museum takes on additional publicity and promotional efforts, leveraging the Board members' connections in the community to place press releases and stimulate additional media coverage.⁴³ Beyond these traditional media outlets for publicity and promotion, however, the park's staff have been active in using the partnerships with, and outreach to, groups throughout Little Rock and Arkansas, particularly those with an interest in the history of civil rights and social justice. These groups include Philander Smith College, the University of Arkansas-Little Rock, the Mosaic Templars Cultural Foundation, and the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Library. In addition, Central High School NHS staff began issuing a quarterly newsletter, *Constitutional Writes*, in the summer of 2003, which continues to the present and is sent to those on the park's mailing list. This newsletter provides news about Central High School NHS events, programs, and staff and volunteers together with an emphasis on youth programs and civic engagement. The park also developed its first website in 2003, with Education Specialist Lea Flowers Baker serving as the web coordinator during her tenure at Little Rock Central High School NHS. She took classes in web design and construction and used this training to re-design the initial site. Her update to the park's website included regularly updated information pages, educational offerings, and management documents; she was also instrumental in moving the revitalized website to the official NPS server.⁴⁴ In recent years, Central High School NHS has begun engaging in a limited way on social media outlets, including joining Twitter in 2010 (@CentralHighNPS) and having an active presence on Facebook. Superintendent White noted in a recent interview that the park's social media program has partially lapsed, despite an active presence on Twitter during the 60th anniversary events in September 2017. However, Superintendent White hopes to revive a social media presence, using Twitter to extend her goal of using Central High School NHS to stimulate discussions on topics of race, social justice, and civic engagement.⁴⁵

Central High School NHS also hosts organized tours that focus on the history of the Civil Rights movement in America. These include Sojourn to the Past, a program that brings middle school and high school students to sites associated with civil rights. In addition, the park is a prominent component of the United States Civil Rights Trail, a program of NPS that invites people to learn about the history of, and the places associated with, the Civil Rights movement in America through a virtual environment online and by providing maps and other information to encourage in-person visits to these sites. The Civil Rights Trail includes more than one hundred locations in fourteen states, from Topeka, Kansas, in the west to Wilmington, Delaware, in the

⁴² "Law Enforcement Needs Assessment," page 4. The prediction for the 2007 visitation proved to be accurate, with an official count of 56,938.

⁴³ Sanford Tollette, oral history interview, April 6, 2018.

⁴⁴ Annual Report for 2004, page 5; files of Central High School NHS. See also Staff Meeting Minutes, December 10, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

⁴⁵ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

east, with a mix of NPS, state, municipal, and privately owned sites that are accessible to the public.

Chapter 5: Cooperative Associations and Partnerships

Perhaps the most important of Central High School NHS' distinguishing features is the extent and depth of its collaborative partnerships. This component of the park's management draws in part from legislative necessity: the National Park Service (NPS) does not own its primary resource, Central High School, and is barred under its enabling legislation from interfering in the administration of the school and the management of the surrounding neighborhood. In order to provide interpretation at the school, therefore, and to protect the character of the school's cultural context, NPS needed to establish a partnership with the Little Rock School District (LRSD) and the City of Little Rock. In addition, with Central High Museum, Inc., (CHMI) already operating the site, the need to foster a relationship and partnership with the CHMI Board to continue operating the site was clear. The first NPS Superintendent, David Forney, worked to implement these and other partnerships immediately upon being appointed to the position, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

There is, though, a more significant reason for this collaborative approach to the site's administration. The Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site commemorates an event that was, by its nature, profoundly exclusive. In September 1957, and again during the "lost year" of 1958-1959, the power of the State of Arkansas and of popular opinion was marshalled to keep African American students from entering a high school and seeking an education in the company of their fellow citizens. This was a case of exclusion writ large, unashamedly, and on a very public stage. As a counterweight to this historical prejudice, both the founding Board members of CHMI and NPS staff who have served at Central High School NHS have emphasized inclusiveness. At the outset, this meant ensuring that the CHMI Board included as wide a representation of the community as possible and that the initial exhibits and programming incorporated as many viewpoints as possible. One of the founding CHMI Board members, Virgil Miller, recalled that inclusiveness was always present in discussions that led to the opening of the visitor center:

there certainly was passion about who should do the work—who should the architect be, who should the contractor be. We need to make sure its diverse. It shouldn't be an all white company doing this, it shouldn't be an all black company doing this, maybe there should be partnerships. . . .I don't think we were divided on race, but race was certainly something that was talked about as it related to getting the project done. Our board was diverse and so we needed to seek out diversity when it came to putting the project together.¹

In their recollections of the initial implementation of Central High School NHS, the first two Superintendents emphasized the importance of forming partnerships. Superintendent Forney, for example, explained that "The other thing then what we worked toward was to, I think trying to develop. . .very effective partnerships and to illustrate. . . that the National Park Service is here to work with the community and develop something that's going to be a real treasure for the city itself." Superintendent Mike Madell spent the five years of his tenure continuing to strengthen these partnerships as he and his staff implemented the General Management Plan and worked

¹ Virgil Miller, oral history interview, March 5, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

with the community on the creation of the current Visitor Center. When Superintendent Robin White entered on duty in 2008, she made dialog with the community a central focus of her, and the park's, mission. As she described it, "We work with different organizations and groups – and in partnership with many, mind you, and I think that's important. And let me tell you why I think that's important. Number one, we don't have the resources, okay? Number two, it's very important to be inclusive of others to afford them ownership or empowerment."² This approach of reaching out to the community and forming partnerships in order to expand Central High School NHS' programs and convey the broader significance of the events of 1957 continues as a central feature of the site.

Central High Museum, Inc.

The primary partnership which the new NPS staff forged in late 1998 and early 1999 was with the Board of Central High Museum, Inc. The CHMI Board was delighted to have the site designated as a National Historic Site but initially disappointed at the time it would take for NPS to begin operating it fully. The Board owned the existing visitor center, and with that ownership came the responsibility to operate the site. NPS was not yet in a position to accept the visitor center and operate it, thus leaving responsibility with the CHMI Board. The Board had raised sufficient funds to continue operating the site for approximately two years, and the gift shop was creating revenue to supplement the Board's fund raising. The Board recognized early on that their model was not sustainable beyond those two years, however, and were eager to have NPS take on responsibility for operating and funding the site.

As discussed more fully in Chapter 3, Superintendent Forney proposed a short-term solution to the Board's dilemma in the form of a Cooperative Agreement. Under the terms of this Cooperative Agreement, which was negotiated during late 1999 and signed on July 31, 2000, NPS agreed to fund approximately 80% of the visitor center's operating expenses, leaving only 20% to the Board. This freed up a great deal of the Board's budget for 2001, which they were able to apply to the development of the Commemorative Garden, opened in September 2001.³

At the same time, the CHMI Board had to decide the nature of their ongoing relationship with NPS once they formally transferred their property and responsibility for operating it. Their two options, as Superintendent Forney explained, were becoming either a Friends group or a Cooperating Association. The deciding factor, as Board member and former Midwest Regional Director Don Castleberry explained in December 2000, was whether the Board wished to continue to operate the gift shop sales on behalf of NPS. If the Board decided to continue to operate the gift shop as it had been doing since 1997, it would sign a Cooperating Association agreement with NPS. Castleberry advocated gently for the Board to become a Cooperating Association, suggesting that "It might be a somewhat smoother transition if we do choose to continue operation, since there would need to be no change of staff or daily routine. This way, the Board would continue to have a direct, active role in site operations." In addition, becoming a Cooperating Association before NPS took over operations of the site and then deciding to relinquish the commercial operation at a later date would be easier than starting as a Friends

² Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

³ CHMI Board Minutes, May 1, 2000; July 20, 2000; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

group, since NPS would then form a Cooperating Association partnership with a separate group for operation of an educational book store, an arrangement that would be more difficult to change.⁴ At their monthly meeting in January 2001, the Board voted unanimously to become a Cooperating Association.⁵

Since CHMI had already been operating the bookstore and gift shop, the transition to a Cooperating Association was a smooth one, despite Laura Miller, CHMI's Executive Director for the visitor center, becoming an employee of NPS effective March 26, 2001. As a result, she could no longer handle Board business or the Board's money, including the gift shop, in an official capacity.⁶ However, NPS staff, including Ms. Miller, continued to staff the gift shop at the visitor center on behalf of CHMI. In the summer of 2001, the Board voted to hire a graduate student from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) in order to handle the administrative functions of the Board, including bookkeeping and ordering items for the gift shop.⁷ By early 2002, according to Board President Johanna Miller Lewis, with the official transfer of CHMI property to NPS recently completed, the Board's main responsibility was operation of the bookstore at the visitor center.⁸

The CHMI Board remained a Cooperating Association, with responsibility for operating the bookstore at the visitor center for NPS, for nearly three years. Despite their experience with the original visitor center, operating a bookstore for NPS was on a larger scale than their experience with the original visitor center had been. By 2004, NPS staff was making preparations for a new Visitor Center that would be a considerably larger operation. Superintendent Madell recalled that

as we were preparing for the new facility, we figured we needed maybe a little higher level of sophistication for our cooperating association than Central High Museum, Inc. could bring to bear and we had some conversations with the board at that time. . . . bounced off them that the prospect of. . . turning over their cooperating association duties to someone else and sort of concurrently kicking the idea of possibly having them morph again into a friends organization, which has a similar purpose and that is to develop advocacy and resources for the park, although not necessarily through the running of a facility like that.⁹

During the rest of 2004, while continuing to operate the bookstore as a Cooperating Association, the Board worked with Central High School NHS staff to develop a new agreement as a Friends group. Under the draft agreement prepared for review in late 2004, the CHMI Board would operate primarily as a fundraising organization for the benefit of Little Rock Central High School

⁴ Memorandum, Don Castleberry to Central High Museum, Inc., Future Activities Committee, December 8, 2000; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁵ CHMI Board Minutes, January 18, 2001; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁶ See CHMI Board Minutes, March 22, 2001; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁷ CHMI Board Minutes, July 19, 2001; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁸ CHMI Board Minutes, March 21, 2002; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁹ Michael Madell, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

NHS. By then, the Board had over seven years of experience with raising funds for the Central High School site, but would now have less responsibility for operations. After additional negotiations and review by the Department of the Interior Rocky Mountain Regional Solicitor, the Friends agreement was signed and went into effect on June 23, 2005 for a period of five years.¹⁰ This agreement has been renewed regularly and continues in effect.

Laura Miller, former CHMI Executive Director and the inaugural Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources at Little Rock Central High School NHS, explained the value of a Friends organization that can raise money for particular projects. The advantage of working for NPS, she recalled, was that “we were guaranteed a certain amount of funding. . . .you know everybody’s going to get their salary paid and. . .everybody’s going to be fed and watered. But still,” she noted, “in the Park Service, when we do additional programs, like an oral history project, or something like that, you would compete for the funding. . .if you want extras, then you can compete for funding for that.”¹¹ The need to secure this funding so far in advance and the uncertainty of whether the funds would be available make it difficult for NPS staff to plan for special events. Sanford Tollette, a long-time supporter of the site and current member of the Friends of Central High Museum (the successor group to the CHMI Board), described their work as “trying to raise money to be able to help and augment a lot of initiatives that they [NPS] have. For example, a lot of times, like, we had Harry Belafonte here, Andrew Young here, Dick Gregory here. . . .For special events, the Friends Board, then, would pay for the meal costs or the hotel costs, those incidentals that would not fall under the ability of the federal government.”¹²

Little Rock School District

The NPS’ partnership with the CHMI Board was a matter of course; the Board was already operating the visitor center, with an administrative structure, when the Little Rock Central High School NHS was created in 1998. A partnership with the CHMI Board was not truly necessary, but it was a natural and particularly effective approach to take. A partnership with the Little Rock School District, however, was necessary for the park since Central High School was included within the park boundary and was the principal reason for the site’s designation. Despite this inclusion, the enabling legislation was clear about the limits of federal authority: “Nothing in this Act shall affect the authority of the Little Rock School District to administer Little Rock Central High School.” At the same time, though, NPS needed to coordinate interpretation of the site with both the CHMI Board and the Little Rock School District because the stated purpose of the Act “is to preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit, education and inspiration of present and future generations, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, and its role in the integration of public schools and the development of the Civil Rights movement in the United States.”¹³

¹⁰ Memorandum, Regional Director, Midwest Region to Regional Solicitor, Rocky Mountain Region, pertaining to review of draft General and Fundraising Agreement, December 9, 2004; General and Fundraising Agreement Between the National Park Service Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site and Central High Museum, Inc., dated June 23, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, A42.

¹¹ Laura Miller, oral history interview, February 16, 2018.

¹² Sanford Tollette, oral history interview, April 6, 2018.

¹³ Public Law 105-356, 105th Congress, November 6, 1998.

Immediately after starting work in late March 2000, Superintendent Forney made the Little Rock School District a top priority. Forney made his first “office” in a restaurant in downtown Little Rock, and from there initiated contact with the LRSD Superintendent, followed quickly by meeting with the Central High School Principal.¹⁴ Superintendent Madell also commented on the degree of cooperation between the School District and Central High School NHS staff: “probably the biggest issue was a nonissue and that is all the time that I was there the School District was just amazing to work with. I truly don’t think they ever said no to any idea that we approached them with or if there was something that they were a little nervous about, they’d say well let’s talk about it.”¹⁵

As a part of Superintendent Forney’s early discussions with the Superintendent of Schools and members of the School Board, two issues became apparent in which NPS and the School District could best collaborate. These were making provisions for NPS to provide interpretation of, or at, the school, and having NPS provide technical advice and funding for appropriate renovations to protect the school. Both aspects of cooperation between LRSD and NPS were discussed initially at a School Board meeting in June 2000 and resulted in two separate Cooperative Agreements.¹⁶ The first topic at that meeting dealt with interpretation and education, as NPS sought ways to interpret the history and experiences of the Little Rock Nine during the 1957-1958 school year. At their June 2000 meeting, the School Board discussed ways of coordinating with NPS “for the planning and development of educational programs in initiatives at Central High School.” The School Board voted to move forward with an agreement regarding interpretation, and the next month they discussed NPS’s interpretive plans in greater detail. These discussions led to a Cooperative Agreement that “establishes the conditions under which NPS tour guides will conduct tours of the building during school hours, on weekends, and during the summer months.” The School Board voted unanimously to approve the Cooperative Agreement.¹⁷

The second area of coordination between the School District and NPS concerned renovations to Central High School. This was a matter of pressing concern to the School Board, with much deeper roots than the issue of interpretation. Little Rock Central High School was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1982 as a result of its combined historical and architectural significance. Maintenance on such a vast and aging masonry building, however, presented an enormous financial as well as a logistical challenge, given the number of students. The challenges were magnified by the building being a public school and, thus, subject to budget pressures resulting from the need to seek funding from taxpayers. By 1996, the condition of the school had slipped to the point that it was included on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Most Endangered Properties List for that year.

With the 40th Anniversary commemoration of the 1957 desegregation looming, the Little Rock School District was aware of the need to begin a substantial rehabilitation program at

¹⁴ David Forney, oral history interview, March 23, 2010; UALR Administrative History Records, files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁵ Michael Madell, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; UALR Administrative History Records, files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁶ LRSDB Minutes, June 22, 2000.

¹⁷ LRSDB Minutes, June 22, 2000; see also LRSDB Minutes, July 27, 2000.

Central High School. In April 1997, the District submitted an application to the Getty Foundation for a \$25,000 grant to fund initiation of a long-term comprehensive historic preservation program, in particular. Although the School District had to resubmit the grant application in October of 1997, and the funds were not received until January 1999, it is important to understand that historic preservation was part of the School District's plan for Central High School.¹⁸ During the 40th Anniversary events in September 1997, in addition, then-Assistant Principal Nancy Rousseau provided a tour of the school for visiting NPS staff; it is likely that the topic of the school's need for substantial rehabilitation work was raised at this time.¹⁹ The School Board members were, therefore, attuned to this issue in April 1998, when NPS planners held a series of public meetings while preparing the Special Resource Study prior to proposing designation of the site. On April 10, 1998, the President of the School Board and the Superintendent of the Little Rock School District signed a joint letter endorsing the designation of Central High School as a national historic site. "This designation," they affirmed, "would enhance our commitment to preserve and protect this historic landmark which will continue to provide a quality education for all children."²⁰

By the time of the School Board meeting in June 2000, the White House Millennium Council announced that it had awarded a grant through the Save America's Treasures (SAT) program to assist with several maintenance and structural needs facing Central High School. Central High School NHS ultimately received grants in two consecutive years, including \$500,000 in FY00 and \$2,000,000 in FY01. School Board member Dr. Vic Anderson introduced this news at the School Board meeting in June 2000, adding that President Bill Clinton had been instrumental in getting this funding approved. Dr. Anderson explained that NPS proposed a second Cooperative Agreement with the Little Rock School District to allow NPS to assist the School District with maintenance and repairs to the school, starting with work under the SAT grant. As with the plan for providing interpretive programs in Central High School, the Board voted unanimously to approve the plan.²¹ Both Cooperative Agreements, to work with NPS on maintenance and renovation projects, particularly the SAT grant, and to work with NPS on interpretation programs, were signed on August 28, 2000. A year later, in June 2001, Superintendent Forney again appeared before the School Board to announce that the Central High School NHS had received authorization for the full \$2.5 million SAT grant and could begin work.²²

Central High School NHS has maintained its relationship with LRSD to the present, with the most recent Cooperative Agreement renewed in 2017. The park's role in repair and

¹⁸ Little Rock School District, School Board (LRSDB) Minutes, August 28, 1997; October 23, 1997; January 28, 1999; typescript MS in collections of Butler Center, UALR Center for Arkansas History and Culture, Little Rock, Arkansas.

¹⁹ Nancy Rousseau, oral history interview, December 11, 2017. Ms. Rousseau did not indicate in her interview the nature of her discussions with NPS staff.

²⁰ Judy Magness and Leslie V. Carnie to William Schenk, MWRO, April 10, 1998; included in Appendix B of *Special Resource Study of Little Rock Central High School* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, August 1998).

²¹ LRSDB Minutes, June 22, 2000.

²² LRSDB Minutes, June 28, 2001. See Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion of the rehabilitation projects that were conducted under the several cooperative agreements

rehabilitation efforts at Central High School are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, while the development of interpretive programs with Central High School are discussed in Chapter 7.

University of Arkansas-Little Rock

As with the Central High Museum, Inc., NPS inherited a relationship with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock when the site was designated in 1998. The relationship emerged from a telephone call in the mid-1990s between Ethel Ambrose, who was President of Central High Neighborhood, Inc., and a founding member of the Community Planning Committee of CHMI, and Dr. Johanna Miller Lewis (Figure 22). Lewis was then an Assistant Professor in the UALR History Department and the coordinator of the Public History Program. Her first local project after joining the faculty in 1991 was to prepare the history of Paul Laurence Dunbar Junior and Senior High School, which was built in 1929 as the Negro School of Industrial Arts and later named after the famous African American author, playwright, and poet. Her work included developing an archive and a traveling exhibit pertaining to the school and its history. Lewis agreed to take part in the Central High School Museum Planning Committee in the spring of 1995, and, by July, was a co-chair of the Program Subcommittee. By 1996, Lewis was more actively involved with the full CHMI Board than with the Planning Committee and took the lead on developing the exhibits for the visitor center in the renovated Mobil Gas Station. As she recalled in 2010, “I think the Board felt confident enough with my skills as a Historian that the Planning Committee and the exhibit designers that they were not going to be led astray. . . .when I had to come to the Board to . . .report, this is what happened, this is who we recommend that you hire, they were fine with that.”²³



Figure 22: Professor Johanna Miller Lewis. Photo from UALR website.

²³ Johanna Miller Lewis, oral history interview, March 12, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

As Lewis worked with the Planning Committee and the CHMI Board on developing the exhibits, she recognized the need for additional historic context on the 1957 crisis. In the fall of 1996, she was teaching a Museum Interpretation Seminar in the UALR Public History program. Rather than following the syllabus that she had prepared, she had the seminar students turn their attention to Central High School. As she recalled later, “the semester I think had started and I ended up sort of trashing the syllabus that I had and re-doing it and saying okay, this is what we’re going to work on, and they were great. Divided people. . . up on different tasks and had two teams; one that worked on the timeline in the bibliography, and the other team that worked on the collections management policy” for the visitor center. The graduate students, she recalled, developed “a lovely detailed timeline of events concerning race in Arkansas sort of leading up to Central and through and eventually that became sort of the foundation document for the exhibit.”²⁴

Lewis clearly proved her value to the CHMI Board and to the community on a volunteer basis in planning for the new exhibits in the visitor center through 1995 and 1996. In 1997, the UALR administration made a more substantial commitment by funding her and several graduate students to work on a full- or part-time basis during the final preparations for the opening of the visitor center in September. The Chancellor of the University at the time, Charles Hathaway, was a champion of having the university deeply involved in the community, referring to it as the Metropolitan University. As Lewis recalled, Chancellor Hathaway had been a proponent of the Public History program for its involvement in the city, “and I think he was anxious and pleased to see us take on larger profile projects that would. . . [help] rate the profile of the university as well so it was a very good partnership and one that endures to this day [2010].”

As NPS staff took a more active role at the Central High School NHS through 1999 and 2000, the opportunities for partnering with UALR increased. On July 2, 2001, NPS and the UALR administration entered into a Cooperative Agreement that provided a foundation for future collaborations. This partnership was manifested in several projects and programs over the years. In 2001 and 2002, UALR provided graduate research assistants to work at the park. These students worked with Forney and Miller to develop a brochure and resource guide for the Commemorative Garden that the CHMI Board was then developing. They also assisted with operation of the information desk and with development of educational programs under the direction of Laura Miller. Two other programs on which UALR and Central High School NHS collaborated have had an even more lasting impact on the operations and management of the park and its relationship with the community: the renovations of the Daisy Gatson Bates House, and an oral history program.

Daisy L. Gatson Bates (1914-1999) was the President of the Arkansas Chapter of the NAACP during the 1950s and served as the NAACP point person for the first students who integrated Central High School, and their house on West 28th Street in Little Rock was a hub of activity for NAACP lawyers and the media. As others have noted, her house at 1207 West 28th Street in Little Rock, built in 1955 just 1.5 miles from Central High School, was “command-central” for the 1957 crisis (Figure 23). Later in her life, the Christian Ministerial Alliance of Little Rock (CMA) worked with Mrs. Bates to stop a foreclosure action against the house, and,

²⁴ Johanna Miller Lewis, oral history interview.



Figure 23: Daisy Bates House looking southeast. Photo by the author, 2017.

in return, Mrs. Bates assigned to CMA custodial rights, with the agreement that the house would be maintained “as a depository for important records, documents, photographs, and other memorabilia and artifacts related to significant people and activities related to the Little Rock Central High School crisis of 1957.”²⁵

Mrs. Bates was still alive when Central High School NHS was designated in 1998, and, although the house was not included in the Special Resource Study prepared for the park’s designation by Congress, an awareness of the deep connection between her house and Central High School NHS was recognized immediately. Barely a year after the designation, in early December 1999, MWRO Historical Architect Al O’Bright conducted a condition assessment of the house at the request of Regional Chief of Planning Sandra Washington. The house had been damaged in a tornado in January 1999, and O’Bright visited it with permission of CMA, preparing an initial report for MWRO in 2000.²⁶ Collaboration with UALR began shortly after this visit. Based on an assessment of national significance of the Bates house for its critical association with the 1957 desegregation crisis, Joanna Miller Lewis agreed to prepare a National Historic Landmark nomination for the house, with the support and encouragement of Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and President William Clinton.²⁷ The Bates House was designated a National Historic Landmark in January 2001, and, on July 2, 2001, NPS and UALR entered into

²⁵ Internet site for the L.C. and Daisy Bates Museum Foundation, Inc.

(<https://www.batesmuseumfoundation.org/about-us>), viewed November 11, 2018.

²⁶ Memorandum from Historical Architect Al O’Bright to Chief, Cultural Resources, Midwest Region, December 17, 1999; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

²⁷ U.S. Department of the Interior Press Release, April 27, 2000; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

a Cooperative Agreement, a component of which provided for collaboration to assist CMA at the Bates House.

Dr. Lewis' graduate students in the UALR Public History program worked with the site in the fall of 2001, forming teams to create an Interpretation and Exhibits Plan and an Operations Plan. In the winter of 2001-2002, MWRO Historical Architect Mark Chavez conducted an updated condition assessment of the house, which led to a detailed rehabilitation plan. In early 2002 also, UALR secured a grant for \$11,800 from the Arkansas Humanities Council to continue with interpretive planning, and, in June 2002, the university secured a \$7,500 grant from the Arkansas State Energy Office to conduct improvements to the heating/ventilation/air conditioning (HVAC) system at the house.²⁸ In April 2002, UALR also hosted an event at the Bates House to raise money for the house's rehabilitation. The event featured former President William Clinton. Skip Rutherford, former CHMI Board member and the first President of the Clinton Foundation, helped with the arrangements to secure President Clinton's participation.²⁹

Concurrently with the work done by UALR, Central High School NHS staff obtained a \$10,000 grant from the Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative for repairs to the Bates House based on estimates provided by Historical Architect Chavez. These funds, according to Acting Superintendent Laura Miller, would be used for three projects: termite inspection and repair of damaged areas, drainage improvements to the rear of the house, and window repair/replacement.³⁰ The park also secured a \$5,000 grant through the Challenge Cost Share Program of NPS.³¹ At the same time, Acting Superintendent Miller and National Historic Landmark Coordinator Rachel Franklin Weekley at MWRO consulted with the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) regarding the potential effects of these repairs to the house as a historic property under the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.³²

In August 2002, with funds raised by both UALR and NPS, Dr. Lewis, on behalf of UALR, solicited bids for repairs to the house. A misunderstanding soon arose between CMA and both NPS and UALR, however, as CMA thought that funds raised would be given to CMA rather than put directly into repairs to the house. In early September 2002, the presidents of CMA and the L.C. and Daisy Bates Museum Foundation, Inc., wrote to Dr. Lewis calling upon her and UALR to cease all work and return to CMA the funds that were raised during President Clinton's visit in 2001. CMA and the Bates Museum Foundation alleged that they had not authorized UALR to apply for any grants. As recently as late August 2002, however, Acting Superintendent Miller had written to Imam Johnny Hassan, a leader of the CMA who coordinated the group's

²⁸ The amount for the grant was provided to UALR by NPS staff based on estimates provided by Historical Architect Chavez; see Laura A. Miller to Johanna Miller Lewis, June 27, 2002, files of Central High School NHS, H34.

²⁹ *University of Arkansas Little Rock Forum*, April 24, 2002, newspaper clipping in files of Central High School NHS; email, Johanna Miller Lewis to Dr. Anderson and Bob Denman, June 11, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

³⁰ Laura A. Miller to Frances "Missy" McSwain, July 23, 2002; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

³¹ Memorandum, Acting Regional Director, Midwest Region to Acting Superintendent Laura A. Miller, August 16, 2002; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

³² See Laura A. Miller to Missy McSwain, September 10, 2002; Ken Grunewald to Rachel Franklin Weekley, September 5, 2002; Ken Grunewald to Laura Miller, October 9, 2002; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

association with the Bates Museum Foundation, to explain the process and describe the source of the funds and how they would be used. In late October 2002, Dr. Miller wrote to Acting Superintendent Miller with notice that the UALR Public History program was no longer affiliated with either CMA or the Bates Museum Foundation, and that they had returned to the State Energy Office the \$7,500 grant and had frozen all other funds.³³ In December 2002, UALR turned over to CMA the proceeds from the April 2001 fundraiser, totaling approximately \$30,000.

While CMA and the Bates Museum Foundation expressed interest in continuing to work directly with the National Park Service, NPS had obligated the funds to UALR through its Cooperative Agreement and was thus unable to use the money for the Bates House rehabilitation. Acting Superintendent Miller, and then Superintendent Mike Madell, worked through late 2002 and into 2003 to coordinate discussions among the several parties to ensure that the work could go forward since NPS had already obligated the funds for that purpose through the Cooperative Agreement with UALR. In June 2003, Dr. Lewis proposed a solution to the UALR administration in which NPS would pass the funds for the Bates House rehabilitation through the UALR Foundation directly to the contractor, Wali Caridine, who was an alumnus of UALR. The UALR administrators agreed with the proposal, and the work was conducted during 2004.³⁴ In December 2004, Superintendent Madell announced that the work had been completed. The work completed under the Cooperative Agreement and using funds from the NPS Challenge Cost Share included restoration of the original windows, installation of a French drain at the rear of the house, reinforcing of the basement stairs, repairs to a hole in the roof, and repairs to the basement that had been caused by termites.³⁵

The third component of the Cooperative Agreement with UALR involved conducting oral history interviews. The project was developed in 2002-2003, and interviews began in the fall of 2003. Central High School NHS secured cyclic funds for the project through the Cultural Resources Preservation Program, including \$38,300 in FY03 and \$42,704 in FY04, with these funds obligated to UALR through the Cooperative Agreement. The plan for the project encompassed more than forty interviews with key figures in the 1957 school desegregation crisis, including all of the Little Rock Nine, members of the Arkansas National Guard, Little Rock Police personnel, Central High School teachers, staff, students, and others. The interviews were held at UALR studios, with Dr. Johanna Miller Lewis conducting most of the interviews. They were recorded on videotape by Park Ranger Spirit Trickey, then a student at UALR. Although the initial funds were obligated in June 2002, few interviews were held. By February 2005, only seven interviews had been completed. These included four of the Little Rock Nine (Minnijean

³³ Memorandum, Laura Miller to Imam Johnny Hassan, August 27, 2002; Imam Johnny Hassan and Rev. Don R. Gibson to Johanna Miller Lewis, September 9, 2002; Johanna Miller Lewis to Laura A. Miller, October 23, 2002; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

³⁴ Email, Michael Madell to Laura Miller, November 26, 2002; memorandum, Laura Miller to Deborah Baldwin, December 11, 2002; email chain concluding with Johanna Miller Lewis to Laura Miller, June 17, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

³⁵ Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Rachel Franklin Weekley, December 10, 2004, containing Challenge Cost Share Program, FY02 Project Completion Report; Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Associate Regional Director, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnership, MWRO, December 22, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

Brown Trickey, Carlotta Walls Lanier, Jefferson Thomas, and Thelma Mothershed Wair).³⁶ The impact of the slower pace was noted in late 2004, when Terrance Roberts' mother died. As recorded in the park's monthly meeting minutes in December, "Unfortunately, she died before the University got her oral history taped and this strongly emphasizes the need to complete our project before more participants are lost."³⁷ In the spring of 2005, however, NPS staff began planning for the exhibits in the new Visitor Center with the input of Dr. Lewis. The great need for oral history interviews in the new exhibit created a sense of urgency, and more interviews were completed in time for the opening of the exhibit in September 2007.

Protecting the Streetscape

The Little Rock Central High School NHS is located within an urban neighborhood first developed for single-family residences in the 1880s. The neighborhood was connected to downtown Little Rock by streetcar lines by the late nineteenth century, and new houses were built during two principal phases, from 1900 to 1914 and again from 1920 to 1930. The streets and houses in what is now Central High Neighborhood were developed with an orientation toward those of modest means, with families headed by blue-collar and modest professional workers. Though it served as a pleasant and unassuming residential neighborhood for its first eighty years, it was catapulted into national prominence by the 1957 school desegregation crisis. This notoriety created a certain amount of self-awareness among the neighborhood's leaders by the 1980s. An architectural survey in the early 1990s led to the designation of the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District in 1996.³⁸

While many of the neighborhood's residents were proud of their association with the events of 1957, some were concerned when Central High Museum, Inc., was formed in the mid-1990s. Some of the organization's members were particularly concerned that the increased attention to the neighborhood would create parking problems, gentrification leading to inflated home prices, and other ills. Others, however, were more enthused about the possibility of drawing more attention to the historic nature of their neighborhood. The Central High Neighborhood Association was formed to promote development of the neighborhood, focusing on economic and educational initiatives and the maintenance and protection of the neighborhood's buildings and trees, and to give the neighborhood a stronger voice in legislative issues. Ethel Ambrose, President of the Neighborhood Association, was an early member of the CHMI Board, working with Mark Abernathy beginning in the early 1990s to help people, both visitors to Little Rock and residents, to understand the significance of Central High School and the neighborhood that surrounded it. Ms. Ambrose was instrumental in securing the original planning grant from the Arkansas Humanities Council that led to the creation of Central High Museum Inc., in 1994. She continued to serve on the Board after the designation of Central High School NHS in 1998.

³⁶ R. Michael Madell to Johanna Miller Lewis, February 25, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, H22.

³⁷ CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL NHS Staff Meeting Minutes, December 19, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

³⁸ Sandra Taylor Smith and Anne Wagner Speed, "Little Rock's Central High School Neighborhood Historic District," Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 1999, pages 15-16.

The CHMI Board clearly recognized the need to coordinate with the neighborhood and to invite participation from its residents. Although the relations between the CHMI Board and the neighborhood were primarily positive, there were some dissensions. In particular, some members of the Neighborhood Association thought that the focus of attention should be shared between the school and the neighborhood on an equal basis to promote the redevelopment of the neighborhood. However, as CHMI Board President Rett Tucker recalled, “Our mission was not to revitalize the neighborhood. Our mission was to tell the Central High Story. And hopefully there would be some spill over in the neighborhood as a result of that. That was clearly never our focus.”³⁹ In a similar way, former CHMI Board member Skip Rutherford recalled that “I think at times the neighborhood felt like the Board had too much control. I think at times the Board felt like the neighborhood was not realistic.”⁴⁰

Upon becoming Superintendent in 2000, Dave Forney inherited this cautious but generally positive relationship between the neighborhood, NPS, and the City of Little Rock. During the planning meetings for the GMP, Forney included representatives from the Central High Neighborhood and the City of Little Rock in the series of public meetings, assuring that their input would be heard. Forney also emphasized preservation of the neighborhood, particularly the buildings that face Central High School on South Park Street. In his discussions with Ms. Ambrose and other members of the Neighborhood Association, Forney recalled that “I told them. . .that our objective was to try to preserve the neighborhood as it was,” and that “we worked with the Neighborhood Association then in order to I think define the visitor experience what it would be in that neighborhood and things that would be available perhaps for funding in order to help them preserve their homes and that type of thing.”⁴¹ Ethel Ambrose echoed these comments, recalling that Forney “thought it was important that the National Park Service perhaps not acquire all of it, but be involved in the development of the houses that face Central High and also the old Ponder’s Drug Store, which is diagonally across from Central High School at Park and 16th, and. . .the Neighborhood Association [was] working with him on an idea for the retrofitting of the Ponder’s Drug Store.”⁴²

From the earliest discussions of Central High School NHS in 1998 and 1999, the block of South Park Street facing Central High School, together with the former Ponder’s Drug Store, have been seen as vital components in the interpretation of Central High School and the story of the 1957 desegregation crisis (Figure 24). The importance of protecting this part of South Park Street, which NPS has identified as the historic streetscape, was noted in such early documents as the Cultural Landscape Inventory completed in 1999, the 2002 *Strategic Plan*, and the 2002 GMP.

³⁹ Rett Tucker, oral history interview, March 4, 2010; UALR Administrative History files, records of Central High School NHS.

⁴⁰ Skip Rutherford, oral history interview, March 3, 2010; UALR Administrative History files, records of Central High School NHS.

⁴¹ Dave Forney, oral history interview, March 23, 2010; UALR Administrative History files, records of Central High School NHS.

⁴² Ethel Ambrose, oral history interview, March 24, 2010; UALR Administrative History files, records of Central High School NHS.



Figure 24: East side of South Park Street, looking southeast. Photo by the author, 2018.

The *Strategic Plan* included a recommendation that the former Ponder’s Drug Store be included as a future acquisition priority, while the rest of the historic streetscape was to be “managed through partnerships and cooperative efforts with the Little Rock School District, the City of Little Rock, the Central High Neighborhood Association, and the State Historic Preservation Officer. The use of scenic easements, land purchase, and local preservation efforts will be utilized to preserve the landscape.”⁴³ According to the GMP, which was also completed in 2002, the historic streetscape “is the location most recognizable as the backdrop of the events of 1957. Many of the historic photographs were taken along this block, which has remained largely architecturally intact and unaltered since 1957 (one home was damaged by fire several years ago). There is a need to preserve this setting in order to interpret the events of 1957.”⁴⁴ Despite the acknowledged significance of the historic streetscape, however, neither the houses facing Central High School on South Park Street nor the former Ponder’s Drug Store were included in the original park boundary (Figure 25).

Both NPS and the CHMI Board have retained an interest in protecting and preserving the houses on South Park Street and the former Ponder’s Drug Store. Only the former Ponder’s Drug Store has been seriously considered for acquisition in fee, though reluctance to sell on the part of the owner through the late 1990s and into the 2000s made that proposal impractical; the 1998 enabling legislation allows for purchase from willing sellers only. As late as 1999, when the CLI

⁴³*Strategic Plan*, 2002, page 6.

⁴⁴ *General Management Plan, Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site*, 2002, page 6.



Figure 25: Former Ponder's Drug Store, looking southeast. Photo by the author, 2018.

was completed, the former Ponder's Drug Store was in fair condition and retained moderate integrity, with intact windows and a corner commercial entrance.⁴⁵ The failure to acquire the building and protect an important component of Central High School's cultural landscape has frustrated leaders associated with the site for more than a decade. Central High School Principal Nancy Rousseau expressed that "my biggest disappointment for in the neighborhood—because I've watched the neighborhood grow, and people are buying homes and upgrading—is the Ponder's Drug Store. . . . This is an important part of the Central story. It needs to be renovated. I want to see something done to it." Speculating that it would serve well as a convenience store for those in the neighborhood and for the students, she added that she has shared her concerns and hopes with the City of Little Rock and the Central High School Alumni Association, but the owner is reluctant to sell even though the building has undergone substantial deterioration. With the owner unwilling to sell for a price that the NPS found reasonable, she concluded, "that's my big disappointment, is that one person seems to be holding the goods on this building that is about to collapse."⁴⁶ Current CHMI Board member Sanford Tollette expressed similar disappointment. Noting that he is a member of the church that occupies the opposite corner of South Park Street and West 16th Street, he explained that his church had contemplated purchasing the building. The church, however, like the CHMI Board, cannot afford the asking price: "And it just makes me sad that it's about how much money we can get versus putting a plaque up in honor of that person's name and them being recognized in a meaningful way, forever, versus, an exorbitant amount of money. And the roof has fell in on Ponder's Drug, and

⁴⁵ See photograph and brief description of the building in *National Park Service Cultural Landscape Inventory July 1999: Little Rock Central High School* (Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center), page 3.

⁴⁶ Nancy Rousseau, oral history interview, December 11, 2017.

it's just deteriorating.”⁴⁷ Current Central High School NHS Superintendent Robin White, meanwhile, has expressed concerns that the building has deteriorated past that point that it would be feasible to restore for interpretive use in the park: “If it was done earlier, it would have been great, but, with all the damage. . .it would be challenging.”⁴⁸

The park has had greater success in protecting the block of South Park Street that faces Central High School. Currently, the east side of the 1500 block of South Park Street contains seven single-family residences and one church, the Bullock Temple, located at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West 16th Street (the former Ponder’s Drug Store is located across the street, at the southeast corner of South Park Street and West 16th Street). Bullock Temple CME Church was built in 1970, replacing a house that had been present during the 1957 desegregation crisis.

In the summer of 2004, NPS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Little Rock and Central High Neighborhood, Inc., to encourage cooperation for the long-term protection of the surrounding neighborhood and to maintain and restore the neighborhood’s significant resources and characteristics. Later that summer, on the basis of the MOU, NPS and the City of Little Rock finalized a Cooperative Agreement that allowed the City and NPS to share resources that would help to promote historic preservation and to study parking and pedestrian safety in the neighborhood. The Cooperative Agreement also provided the basis for developing the 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2007. With this emphasis on protecting the neighborhood in 2004, Central High School NHS also first began to develop proposals to expand the boundary of the park to include the seven houses on the 1500 block of South Park Street.⁴⁹

Central High School NHS staff never proposed to acquire in fee the properties on this block, although the Special Resource Study in 1998 proposed that they be included in the NHS boundary.⁵⁰ The boundary as finally established in the enabling legislation, however, did not include this block of South Park Street. The General Management Plan (GMP) included a recommendation that Central High School NHS staff seek Congressional authorization to expand the park’s boundary to include the seven private residences on South Park Street. Such an expansion of the park’s boundaries, however, would require careful and patient coordination with the owners of these homes and with the Central High Neighborhood Association. Park staff, in cooperation with the Central High Neighborhood Association, gradually gained support from the surrounding neighbors for including this block in the NHS boundary. As described in greater detail in Chapter 2, Congress passed a bill in 2017 that expanded the Central High School NHS’ boundary to include the seven houses on the east side of the 1500 block of South Park Street, and President Donald Trump signed the bill into law in January 2018. This boundary expansion will allow NPS to enter into cooperative agreements with the property owners to help them with rehabilitation of their houses through technical assistance and assistance in applying for federal grants.⁵¹ Ultimately, these partnerships will give NPS a greater ability to preserve the important

⁴⁷ Sanford Tollette, oral history interview, April 6, 2018.

⁴⁸ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

⁴⁹ *Constitutional Writes*, Fall/Winter 2004.

⁵⁰ *Special Resource Study of Little Rock Central High School* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998), 41.

⁵¹ See Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

cultural landscape of Central High School and, in doing so, to better interpret the 1957 desegregation crisis.

Retail Operations

The CHMI Board operated a gift shop in the Mobil Gas Station as an important source of revenue to supplement the funds that it raised through grants and donations. The Board incorporated the gift shop with the initial planning work and established a separate account for retail operations. The gift shop was fully stocked in time for the opening of the visitor center in September 1997, and the success of the opening ceremonies required that the staff, then headed by Dr. Johanna Miller Lewis as the temporary Executive Director, re-order supplies by early September 1997. Much of the work to establish the gift shop was handled by the first full-time Executive Director, Laura Miller, who had a background in business administration, and by another graduate assistant, Stacey Craig, who had previous retail experience. As Miller recalled, “we did a lot of the work to set up the first gift shop and bookstore. So we researched titles and things like that. We talked to vendors for t-shirts and key chains and that sort of thing and presented that to the board and then we helped really set up the sales area.”⁵²

As described earlier in this chapter, the CHMI Board entered into a Cooperative Agreement with NPS in 2000 which allowed them to continue to operate the bookstore at the visitor center on behalf of NPS. After an initial burst in 1999, resulting in \$43,832 in total revenue, sales slumped in 2000 and 2001 back to near \$30,000. In 2002, gross sales totaled \$43,499, and increased to \$46,280 in 2003.⁵³ By 2004, however, with planning for the new Visitor Center underway, Central High School NHS staff and the CHMI Board agreed that it would be better for the Board to transition to a Friends organization and allow an established operator of NPS bookstores to assume the retail responsibilities. In April 2004, Superintendent Madell discussed the possibility of managing retail operations at the park with David Grove, Executive Director of Jefferson National Parks Association (JNPA).⁵⁴ JNPA had its origins in what was then called the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, re-designated in 2018 as “Gateway Arch National Park” in St. Louis, Missouri. Incorporated as a non-profit company in 1961, it initially served as the retail outlet for just that park. In 1989, the firm expanded its operations to include the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site, also in St. Louis, and has since entered into partnerships with eight units of the National Park System throughout the Midwest Region.⁵⁵

In June 2004, representatives from JNPA visited the site and met with Superintendent Madell and his staff. By August 2004, JNPA and the Central High School NHS staff had reached an agreement for JNPA to assume operation of the bookstore in early 2005. This would allow the CHMI Board to continue operating through the opening of the Clinton Library, which took place

⁵² Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁵³ See Scope of Sales Statement, attached to letter, R. Michael Madell to David Grove, JNPA, November 3, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A22.

⁵⁴ R. Michael Madell to David Grove, April 30, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A42.

⁵⁵ Information on JNPA comes from the firm’s website, <http://www.jnpa.com/about-us.shtml> (viewed November 12, 2018).

on November 18, 2004; as reported in the monthly staff meeting minutes, “This will give them [CHMI Board] a little bit more revenue and will allow for the transition process.”⁵⁶

Jefferson National Parks Association entered into an agreement with NPS in November 2004 to serve as a cooperating association and assumed responsibilities for the park’s bookstore in January 2005. As with the operation by the CHMI Board, proceeds from the sale of items in the bookstore continued to support the educational and interpretive programs at Central High School NHS. The transition from the CHMI Board to JNPA was a smooth one, and JNPA’s Executive Director wrote to Dr. Lewis, then-President of the CHMI Board, that “Your organization’s commitment to this national historic site is apparent and we are honored to be involved with the retail operations and also continue to work alongside your organization in supporting the site.”⁵⁷ Gross sales increased substantially almost immediately, with gross revenue of nearly \$80,000 in just the first ten months of FY06.⁵⁸ Each year, JNPA announced to the Central High School NHS Superintendent the funds that would be available to the park for interpretive and educational programming as a result of these sales. As the Executive Director regularly stated, “we prefer to fund items of lasting interpretive value, such as publications and historical objects or to fund interpretive programs for the public.”⁵⁹

Jefferson National Parks Association staff worked closely with Central High School NHS staff throughout 2006 and 2007 to prepare a retail space for the new Visitor Center. With the new and enlarged space, and with increased visitation, revenues at the bookstore increased substantially. By FY 2013, JNPA was able to make \$16,500 available to the park for interpretive programs based on the average net income at Central High School NHS for Fiscal Years 2009-2011.⁶⁰ These funds, available each year, make possible many exciting and valuable programs that promote the park’s mission. In 2012, for example, JNPA funds helped sponsor Central High School NHS’ annual program celebrating school desegregation with the theme “Collective Voices for Social Change,” a forum for community dialogue “on issues that severely impact our political and economic structure and our educational and family institutions.”⁶¹

Informal Partnerships

In addition to the formal and long-term partnerships that have been established through Cooperative Agreements, notably with the Central High Museum, Inc., Board, the University of Arkansas Little Rock, the Little Rock School District, and Jefferson National Parks Association, park staff have formed partnerships with many other local organizations, either on an informal or a shorter-term basis. These partnerships provide support for Central High School NHS’ activities and allow staff to extend their expertise into the community to support organizations with missions that are compatible with the park’s. In some cases, this involves Central High School NHS staff preparing grant applications that would allow them to support other local organizations. In 2004, for example, park staff prepared a successful grant application to the

⁵⁶ Central High School NHS monthly staff meeting minutes, August 19, 2004; see also monthly staff meeting minutes, June 28, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

⁵⁷ David A. Grove to Johanna Miler Lewis, January 27, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, A34.

⁵⁸ Memorandum, David Grove to Mike Madell, September 19, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, C38.

⁵⁹ David Grove to Mike Madell, November 14, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, A22.

⁶⁰ David Grove to Robin White, October 20, 2012; files of Central High School NHS, K18.

⁶¹ Robin White to David Grove, October 19, 2012; files of Central High School NHS, K18.

Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative (LMDI), a program established by Congressional initiative and managed by NPS, that let Central High School NHS staff partner with the new Mosaic Templars Cultural Center (MTCC) in Little Rock. This was a new organization created in 2004 which was developing a museum of African American history and culture in Arkansas, with a particular focus on the years after Reconstruction and before the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s. The 2004 grant made possible Central High School NHS support for the development of interpretive exhibits in MTCC's new facility on West 9th Street.⁶² This relationship has continued through the years with numerous occasions of collaboration. Of particular note was a symposium in 2010 that commemorated the 53rd anniversary of the 1957 desegregation crisis, titled "Agents of Change: Preserving Our Structures, Our Stories, and Our Communities." The symposium was held at MTCC in September 2010 and featured speakers who discussed efforts to preserve communities and individual buildings, particularly those whose stories involved the search for equality.⁶³

Central High School NHS has been very successful in securing grants through LMDI. Nearly every year since 2004, park staff have received funding for a range of specific projects. While many were for programs conducted at the park and developed by staff, several of these projects funded by LMDI grants were conducted in partnership with other local and regional organizations. These have included coordinating with Arkansas State University on exhibits at the Southern Tenant Farmers Museum in 2006, the Museum of Discovery in Little Rock on African American exhibits in 2007 and 2009, and with Arkansas County to preserve historic county records.

Central High School NHS has also had a long-standing informal relationship with Philander Smith College in Little Rock. Park Rangers regularly took part in career fairs at the college, and several Philander Smith College students have joined the Little Rock Central High School NHS staff as Park Guides. An important point of collaboration came in 2009 when the park, together with UALR and Philander Smith College, hosted a symposium in association with the 52nd anniversary of the 1957 desegregation crisis. Chapter 8 includes additional information about this public event.

The park's willingness to reach out to a variety of local organizations continues to the present and allows Central High School NHS to extend its mission despite a limited staff. In a collaborative project in 2017, for example, the park began teaming with the Arkansas River Trail Alliance, the City of Little Rock, and Pulaski, Saline, and Garland Counties to create a rail-to-trail program from Central High School NHS to Hot Springs National Park. Through this program, Central High School NHS hopes to take further advantage of the growing interest in civil rights heritage tourism, which has drawn increasing numbers of traveling tour groups to Little Rock and to other civil rights-related historic sites throughout the southeast since 2010.⁶⁴

The park's approach to fostering partnerships with a variety of local and national civil rights and social justice organizations was based in the enabling legislation of 1998 and

⁶² Annual Report for 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A2621.

⁶³ See discussion of the symposium in *Constitutional Writes*, Fall 2010, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Jodi Morris, oral history interview, December 11, 2017.

developed through the first decade of Central High School NHS' operation.⁶⁵ Superintendent White gave it a new impetus upon her arrival in 2008. Civic engagement has been a hallmark of her administration as Superintendent. In the fall of 2008, she held a series of public receptions that included focus group discussions. The goal of these programs was to better understand the needs of the community in relationship with the park. In the fall of 2010, Superintendent White described her vision of civic engagement in a brief essay in the Central High School NHS official newsletter, *Constitutional Writes*. The park's enabling legislation, she noted, provided for the development of partnerships and to "execute a wide variety of civic engagement programs on a regular basis to interpret the historic events of the desegregation crisis. The park serves as a gateway to allow visitors to experience history; and strives to focus on social issues critical to the community through civic engagement programs." She announced a goal to "broaden the storyline" of Central High School NHS, including the 1957 desegregation crisis but recognizing its wider significance in the quest for human rights both within Little Rock and Arkansas and throughout the nation and the world.

As a part of her desire to see the park serve as a source of inspiration for civic engagement and dialogue, Superintendent White has not only supported direct partnerships with a range of groups but has broadened the approach by fostering collaborations between Central High School NHS' partners. In the wake of the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, in the summer of 2014, for example, the park partnered with the National Alliance of Faith and Justice to send two members of the Little Rock Nine, Carlotta Walls LaNier and Terrence Roberts, to lead discussions in the city. No park staff traveled to Ferguson with LaNier and Roberts, but Central High School NHS facilitated their travel and provided lesson plans, movies, and other educational components. More recently, the park prepared a grant application to the International Sites of Conscience (ISC) in collaboration with the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site; ISC, a global network of museums, historic sites, and memory initiatives, promotes the understanding of human rights. The grant allowed the Youth Leadership Academy (YLA), a student organization created and sponsored by Central High School NHS in 2010, to create a program in partnership with the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis.⁶⁶ Despite staffing limitations imposed by budget constrictions since 2012, Central High School NHS staff have continued to seek such opportunities for partnerships among and within a range of local and national organizations, effectively extending the reach of the park and its mission. As stewards and facilitators of the stories that speak of freedom and dignity, Superintendent White pledged that the park's staff would "further our visitors' understanding of the relevance to their own lives. We will continue to provide opportunities for diverse communities and new audiences to experience their stories in meaningful and relevant ways, thus providing a venue for continual learning and shared stories."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ See the extensive lists of informal, short-term partnerships which allowed the Park to extend its outreach in the Annual Reports for 2005 and 2007. Partnering organizations included the Clinton Presidential Center, Arkansas State Parks, the Arkansas Secretary of State, the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas, Unity in the Community, Joseph Pfeifer Camp, Central Arkansas Library System, Butler Center of Arkansas Studies, the Inner City FutureNet, and others.

⁶⁶ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017. The origins and organization of the YLA are discussed in Chapter 7.

⁶⁷ Robin White, in *Constitutional Writes*, fall 2010; files of Central High School NHS.

Chapter 6: Cultural Resources

The Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site (NHS) has an unusual status among units of the National Park System for several reasons, not least of which is that it has no control over its principal cultural resource, Central High School. As the enabling legislation (P.L. 105-356) puts it, “Nothing in this Act shall affect the authority of the Little Rock School District to administer Little Rock Central High School.” In his testimony before Congress in 1998, moreover, National Park Service (NPS) Acting Associate Director for Professional Services William D. Shaddox outlined the expected NPS role in managing the site. “We do not envision,” he asserted,

a role in matters related to the operation of the high school, nor in maintenance or capital improvements to the school or any other structures within boundaries of a NHS. We do not envision a role that would usurp the City of Little Rock’s responsibilities for public health and safety or for land use management and controls. Finally we do not envision that the National Park Service would serve as a traditional land manager at Central High School.”¹

When Central High School NHS was created in 1998, NPS owned no property in fee at the park since the visitor center was still owned by the Central High Museum, Inc., (CHMI) Board and the City of Little Rock, and the location of the present Visitor Center had not yet been purchased. In addition, the principal historic landscape context for the school, the buildings that face the school on South Park Street, remain in private hands. While nearly all the buildings on this block are now within the park boundary, excepting only the Bullock Temple CME Church at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West 16th Street, NPS has no authority over them.

Despite this lack of authority, NPS does have a responsibility to work with the owners of these buildings to provide advice, technical assistance, and assistance with seeking funding regarding their maintenance and preservation. In his Congressional testimony cited earlier, William D. Shaddox identified that one of the key roles of NPS would be “providing historic preservation assistance to Little Rock Schools, the City of Little Rock, and neighborhood residents and property owners to ensure long-term preservation of cultural resources and landscapes.”² The House Report which recommended passage of the Little Rock Central High School NHS Boundary Modification Act in 2017, likewise noted that NPS would be authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with owners of the seven private houses on South Park Street across from Central High School: “This authority would allow the NPS to use the site’s operational funds to mark, interpret, improve, restore, and provide technical assistance for the preservation and interpretation of the properties. It would also allow the NPS to assist the homeowners in applying for federal grants.”³

¹ William D. Shaddox, Statement before the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks, Historic Preservation and Recreation of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, concerning S. 2232, July 9, 1998; files of Central High School NHS, D18.

² Shaddox, Statement before the Senate Subcommittee, 1998.

³ House of Representatives, 115th Congress, 1st Session, Report 115-290, September 5, 2017, page 2.

Much of the park's cultural resources responsibilities, therefore, are carried out indirectly through partnerships with the owners of the buildings. As of September 2001, however, NPS acquired its first two properties in fee. One of these properties was the original visitor center in the restored Mobil Gas Station at the southeast corner of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive, which CHMI restored in 1996-1997. The second of these properties was the Commemorative Garden at the northwest corner of the same intersection, which the CHMI Board developed and built between 1999 and 2001 and which was dedicated and transferred to NPS at the same time as the visitor center. Both facilities require maintenance, and, as a historic building, the Mobil Gas Station requires management as a historic property under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) (NHPA). In addition, NPS purchased the lot at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive. The site of a former greenhouse and nursery, it is now the location of the Visitor Center for Central High School NHS. These are all properties that NPS manages directly.

Central High School

The most important cultural resource for Central High School NHS clearly is Central High School itself. Completed in 1927, it is a vast, four-story, masonry building in the Collegiate Gothic style, with an approximately Y-shaped plan. It was identified by the American Institute of Architects at the time that it was built as the most beautiful high school in America. While a beautiful building, and one of overwhelming historical significance, it is an expensive building to maintain given the effects of decades of heavy pedestrian traffic, Arkansas humidity, and often deferred maintenance. While some renovations were made through the 1950s and 1960s, most of these were in the form of interior remodeling and alterations to the basement level of the south wing. More substantial changes occurred during the late 1970s and 1980s, however, including resurfacing the roof, replacing most of the original wood frame windows with aluminum-framed versions, conducting masonry repairs to minimize water infiltration, replacing most of the original exterior doors and transoms, and filling the original reflecting pool with concrete.⁴

Unfortunately, even with these renovations into the 1980s, the building's condition continued to deteriorate, largely as a result of damage from moisture. As described in Chapter 5, the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1996 identified the building as one of the eleven most threatened buildings in America given the level of deterioration and the estimated \$6,000,000 that it would take to repair it properly. In 1998, the Little Rock School Board secured a grant from the Getty Foundation to assess the building's needs and develop a plan for maintenance and renovation. This study was needed to provide the basis for an increased millage request; the school millage request passed in the spring of 2000, with Central High School due to receive approximately \$7,000,000.⁵ Superintendent Forney and Midwest Regional Office (MWRO) staff coordinated with the Little Rock School District (LRSD) Facilities Manager Doug Eaton on the building assessment, which focused particularly on mitigating water

⁴ Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects, *Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site: Little Rock Central High School, Tiger Field House, and Quigley Stadium, Historic Structures Report* (December 2010), 20-21.

⁵ National Historic Landmark Status Report, 2000 Update, Little Rock (Central) High School; included as attachment to Memorandum, Regional Director, Midwest Region to Superintendent, Hot Springs, March 13, 2000; files of Central High School NHS, H34. See also Nancy Rousseau, oral history interview, December 11, 2017; CHMI Board Minutes, May 18, 2000; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

infiltration through windows, and on the roof and roof drainage systems. The investigators also identified a need for a new HVAC system for the building. At the same time, because Central High School was listed as a National Historic Landmark and because work was being conducted in part with federal funds, NPS staff needed to brief LRSD facilities staff on the requirement to work in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.⁶

In addition to this technical assistance, NPS staff at Central High School NHS and at MWRO acted quickly to provide funding to LRSD for maintenance work at Central High School. This included applying for a Challenge Cost Share Grant. This grant program is designed to encourage individual National Park System units to foster partnerships with local organizations. In 2001, NPS provided a \$10,000 grant from the Challenge Cost Share program for repairs at Central High School, to which LRSD added \$20,000. Park staff, which then included only Superintendent Forney and Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller, completed the consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA. This, the first collaborative project between NPS and LRSD, resulted in identifying and sealing water infiltration through the forecourt stairs and terrace of Central High and replacing the step surfaces with in-kind materials. According to the 2001 Annual Report for the park, "This project will be typical of future partnerships with the LRSD to provide for the protection and preservation of Central High School."⁷

At the same time, the White House Millennium Council announced that it had awarded a grant to the Central High NHS through the Save America's Treasures (SAT) program.⁸ This was still a new program at the time, having been created by NPS in 1998 in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Endowment of the Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Congress appropriates the funding from the Historic Preservation Fund, which is based on revenue from federal oil leases. In the summer of 2000, NPS' White House Millennium Council announced that it had awarded a grant for \$500,000 for repairs at Central High School. This money had to be matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis by LRSD. Forney announced the news to the LRSD Board meeting in June 2000.⁹ The park then received a second SAT grant the next year, for \$2,000,000. In 2001, NPS obligated the initial \$500,000 through the Cooperative Agreement with LRSD for repairs to the roof of the school in the effort to control moisture infiltration. For this work, LRSD replaced the 1980s roof with a new membrane and conducted other repairs to masonry joints and windows to prevent moisture infiltration.¹⁰ In 2002, NPS obligated the second grant for \$2,000,000 through the Cooperative Agreement, which was used primarily to replace the aging HVAC system at the school. The condensate lines from the original steam heating system had allowed a great deal of moisture to leak into the building, causing deterioration; these lines were replaced with new, insulated lines.

⁶ Annual Report for 2001; files of Central High School NHS, D66.

⁷ Annual Report for 2001, page 3; see also *Historic Structures Report*, p. 23; CHMI Board Minutes, September 20, 2001; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁸ See email correspondence pertaining to Save America's Treasures FY 2000 Historic Preservation Fund Grants, in William J. Clinton Presidential Library, Clinton Presidential Records, Speechwriting subgroup, folder "Anderson Cottage 7/7/00 Save America's Treasures Awards6/2000," available online: <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/12195>.

⁹ LRSD Board meeting, June 2, 2000. The source of the application for the SAT grant could not be found during the present research, though it likely was a Congressional earmark, promoted by President Bill Clinton.

¹⁰ *Historic Structures Report*, page 22.

In addition, the work included new acoustical tile ceilings, the installation of an elevator to provide handicapped access to the upper floors, and renovated restrooms.¹¹ Again, Central High School NHS staff, specifically Superintendent Mike Madell and Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller, coordinated the Section 106 consultation with SHPO in association with LRSD and LRSD's architects, Witsell Evans Rasco Architects.¹²

In 2003, planning work began on the next round of rehabilitation at Central High School. This initial work included Section 106 consultation and development of plans and specifications. On September 23, 2003, as part of the 46th anniversary of the 1957 desegregation crisis, Central High School Principal Nancy Rousseau and Superintendent Mike Madell jointly announced the partnership between LRSD and NPS to restore the reflecting pool in front of Central High School (Figure 26). This structure at the base of the grand front steps, which had been part of the original design of the building, had been filled with concrete and covered over in the 1980s, perhaps as late as 1988, to facilitate grounds maintenance. The reflecting pool was, however, part of the streetscape that was in place during the 1957 desegregation crisis, and, therefore, was an important character-defining feature. NPS obligated \$50,000 through a Cooperative Agreement, with LRSD providing a match, with additional funds from Little Rock High School Class of 1953.¹³



Figure 26: Central High School reflecting pool under construction. Photo from *Constitutional Writes* newsletter, 2004.

¹¹ *Historic Structures Report*, page 23.

¹² Annual Report for 2002, files of Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center.

¹³ *Constitutional Writes*, Winter 2004, page 2; see also *Historic Structures Report*, page 23.

The plans were drawn up in the summer and fall of 2003, and Section 106 consultation was initiated in December with the submittal of initial plans.¹⁴ Both the Arkansas SHPO and the MWRO staff were invited to review the proposed plans. In addition to rebuilding the reflecting pool, the plans called for including a circulation system that would prevent the growth of algae and eliminate the pool as a breeding grounds for mosquitoes. In the process of developing the plans in 2003, it was determined that the original design for the reflecting pool had not been implemented, but a different design was built. The plans, therefore, included designs that would recreate the designs actually implemented, together with connecting sidewalks. Cultural resources specialists at MWRO made several recommendations to the initial plans in March 2004.¹⁵ Additional work which was completed in consultation with the SHPO was to remove the steps on the south side going down to the restored reflecting pool. Although a change from the original installation, it is not visible from the street and so does not impact the historic appearance of the building from the street, an important consideration for historic buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. This work made the reflecting pool handicapped accessible for the first time.

The plans were approved as revised by the Arkansas SHPO and MWRO, and the reflecting pool was re-built during the summer of 2004. Staff from the park and Central High School organized a dedication ceremony for the 47th anniversary of the 1957 desegregation crisis on September 26, 2004. Senator Mark Pryor, who attended Central High School, gave the keynote address at the ceremony, with other addresses by Superintendent Mike Madell, Principal Nancy Rousseau, and LRSD Superintendent Ray Brooks. In addition, the event was joined by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), which had created its *Voices of Civil Rights* tour to gather and preserve stories from individuals about their civil rights experiences. Both the Arkansas State Director of AARP and a national AARP Board member spoke at the dedication ceremony, and a film crew from the History Channel helped to record stories from those who were present at the event.¹⁶

Central High School NHS and LRSD continued to collaborate into 2006 and 2007. In the wake of the extensive construction work in 2004-2005, and in anticipation of the 50th anniversary celebration in 2007, the School District decided to embark on landscape improvements to Central High School's campus. The National Park Service provided a Challenge Cost Share Grant in 2006, with a match from LRSD and additional local funds, which allowed for a landscape rehabilitation project on the front section facing South Park Street. Work for this project, which was scheduled in two phases (in 2006 and 2007), included replacing extensive sections of sidewalks that had deteriorated or been damaged, and planting new trees and shrubs consistent with the historic vegetation. Many of the older trees were then decaying, and the landscape rehabilitation plans in 2006 included their replacement with similar types of trees to establish a new generation of large trees such as oaks and bald cypress. The flower beds along the school's

¹⁴ John Greer, Jr., Witsell Evans Rasco Architects, to Missy McSwain, SHPO, December 2, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, H42. See response from McSwain to Greer, January 21, 2004, acknowledging receipt and awaiting further refinement of plans.

¹⁵ Memorandum, Regional Director, MWRO to Superintendent, Central High School NHS, March 12, 2004, with attachments that include the project proposal and copies of original plans and early photographs; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

¹⁶ *Constitutional Writes*, Fall/Winter 2004; files of Central High School NHS.

foundation, meanwhile, were reestablished using flowering shrubs that were available and typical in the 1950s.¹⁷ The project was completed during the summer of 2007.

The Little Rock School District has developed several other rehabilitation projects at Central High School, all aimed at protecting the building as a National Historic Landmark and as a functioning high school. In recent years, these have included removing, carefully restoring, and re-installing the front doors and windows in the main entrance to the school using \$75,000 from the park's commemorative coin fund, and using a \$500,000 African American Civil Rights grant to replace the terraces and front steps, which was completed in 2017.¹⁸ In 2018, the School District received a second African American Civil Rights grant in the amount of \$499,218 for rehabilitation of the school's windows.

In 2009, Central High School NHS contracted with Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects (BVHA) to oversee and prepare the development of a Historic Structures Report (HSR) for Central High School. BVHA then subcontracted the architectural history and assessment to Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., and the mechanical assessment to Alvine & Associates, Inc. While the document is focused on Central High School, it also includes the Tiger Field House (1951) and Quigley Stadium (1935), both on the Central High School campus. The purpose of the HSR is to document the original construction and subsequent alterations to the buildings, to evaluate the structural stability of the buildings overall and their various materials, and to make recommendations as to future treatment of the buildings. The HSR provides an extensive historical overview of the school itself as well as the 1957 desegregation crisis. In addition, the document provides a detailed and useful construction history of the buildings, including the several attempts at renovation, particularly since the early 1980s, and the addition of the Jess W. Matthews Library on the school's northwest side.

While the building has great architectural significance as an excellent example of the Collegiate Gothic on a grand scale, the HSR acknowledged that the school's role in the desegregation of public schools in the United States was a more important component of its significance. In this assessment it confirmed the building's period of significance (1957-1958) as defined in 1982 when it was designated a National Historic Landmark. The HSR provides a detailed list of the elements that contribute to the significance of each of the three buildings, including site features, architectural features of the school's exterior, the interior floor plan and architectural aspects, and the interior and exterior features of the Quigley Stadium and Tiger Field House. Overall, the school was identified as being in fair to good condition, though the HSR noted that water infiltration in the exterior masonry walls continued to be a concern for both exterior deterioration and the impacts of water infiltration on some interior finishes. Quigley Stadium and Tiger Field House, meanwhile, were in generally good condition, needing only rehabilitation to address programming and space needs. The HSR was completed in 2010 and was approved by MWRO in January 2011.

¹⁷ XXX Form, Assessment of Actions Having an Effect on Cultural Resources, June 6, 2006, attached to Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, Attn: Historical Landscape Architect, June 15, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

¹⁸ Nancy Rousseau, oral history interview, December 11, 2017.

Mobil Gas Station

The National Park Service had the benefit of inheriting the existing historic Mobil Gas Station when Central High School NHS was designated. This historic gas station at the southeast corner of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive and, thus, across the street from Central High School's campus played an important role in the 1957 desegregation crisis as the location of a telephone booth. Newspaper reporters who swarmed the area used this telephone to call in their stories for publication in their respective newspapers. Because of its proximity to the school, the gas station also served as a staging area for the National Guard.

The gas station was built in the 1920s by the Magnolia Petroleum Company, which was based in Texas and one of several regional oil companies owned by the Mobil Oil Corporation. The gas station closed in the 1980s and was used for several years as storage by the greenhouse and nursery business across West 16th Street (now Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive), where the current Visitor Center is located. It was then allowed to sit vacant until 1995 when it was purchased by the City of Little Rock for redevelopment by the CHMI Board. Despite its deteriorating condition in the early 1990s, it was immediately part of the vision that Mark Abernathy had for the site.¹⁹ In 1996, the Board hired the Little Rock architectural firm Witsell, Evans and Rasco to prepare restoration plans for the exterior and rehabilitation plans for the interior that was to be converted to exhibit, retail, and office space.

Because the original gas station had only 1,200 square feet of usable space, CHMI and the architects decided to construct an addition at the rear (south) of the building and connected to it by a small passageway (Figure 27). The addition, approximately 900 square feet, was intended to house restrooms and an office for CHMI staff. It was designed to be compatible in scale, fenestration, and style with the original gas station, employing similar terracotta barrel tile roofing, yet clearly separate from the original by means of brick siding that contrasts with the white stucco siding on the original gas station.²⁰ In their restoration and rehabilitation work, as well as with the new addition, Witsell, Evans and Rasco coordinated with the office of the Arkansas SHPO to comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.²¹ The Arkansas SHPO noted in 2001 that "the existing new addition to the historic structure is an outstanding example of the 'spirit' of these standards. . . .The linking hall area between the visitor/exhibit area and the bathrooms/office area is a major feature of this design in that it visually separates the historic structure and the new addition while maintaining a physical link."²²

¹⁹ A more detailed discussion of the role of the Mobil Station in the early history of CHMI, and how CHMI led its restoration, can be found in Chapter 2. Additional history can be found in Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects, *Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Magnolia Mobil Service Station: Historic Structure Report* (2010), pages 8-9.

²⁰ National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet, proposed addition of the Mobil Gas Station as a contributing element to the existing Central High Neighborhood Historic District; files of Central High School NHS, H34.

²¹ See Memorandum, Charles Witsell, Jr., to Ron Woods et al., January 8, 1997; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

²² Ken Grunewald, SHPO to David C. Forney, September 4, 2001; files of Central High School NHS, H42.



Figure 27: 1996 addition at rear of Mobil Gas Station. Photo by the author, 2017.

The very success of this addition led to a later disagreement between SHPO and NPS. As NPS was preparing to take ownership of the building in the summer of 2001, recognizing that the building with the new addition was still too small to accommodate the new staff, Superintendent Forney and Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller proposed to create additional office space. They proposed to enclose approximately one hundred square feet by expanding the small hallway that connected the original gas station to the new addition. The existing hallway between the two buildings was located off-center to the west; NPS proposed to expand this hallway to the east. This would be a temporary enclosure but required covering over one of the original rear windows of the gas station.²³ With the support of MWRO, the National Park Service, in consulting with SHPO, claimed that this addition would have no adverse effect on the historic gas station. In its response, however, SHPO stated that it would have an adverse effect. Pointing out the importance of the small scale of the link to the compatibility of the old and new buildings, SHPO argued that “By enclosing one side of this area, the balance of the link will be jeopardized and a portion of the historic structure will be covered (including a window).”²⁴

This response from the SHPO forced NPS to undertake additional work. Superintendent Forney, together with Regional Historical Architect Mark Chavez, former CHMI Board member Cheryl Nichols, and John Greer, the architect of the 1997 addition, met with Missy McSwain from SHPO to discuss the project. The National Park Service representatives argued that it was a permanent but reversible addition that would leave the original gas station intact. In October

²³ See the XXX Form, completed by Laura A. Miller, August 8, 2001; and David C Forney to Ken Grunewald, August 14, 2001; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

²⁴ Grunewald to Forney, September 4, 2001; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

2002, NPS held a public scoping meeting with a representative of SHPO in attendance. On the basis of these discussions, SHPO issued a tentative determination of no adverse effect, with final approval pending the completion of an Environmental Assessment (EA). In the fall of 2002, NPS contracted with Woolpert LLP to complete the EA for the proposed improvements to the visitor center. The proposed alternative in this EA was to add the enclosure as originally proposed. The outer (east) wall of the addition, according to the EA, “would be recessed 1.0 foot to help maintain the historic integrity of the service station. The exterior walls and roof of the new addition would incorporate design elements that complement both the historic service station and the 1997 addition. The south exterior wall of the service station that would become enclosed would not be altered.” Moreover, the addition would be designed and constructed so that it could be removed “with minimal changes or damage to the historic integrity of the service station.”²⁵ With the EA completed and accepted in 2003, Central High School NHS used base funding to complete the work.²⁶

While consultation for the addition was under way, the park began a more substantial effort to repair the visitor center. In the summer of 2002, maintenance staff from Hot Springs NP expressed concerns for the roof of the original building. Water was seeping into the building and causing damage to the plaster walls. In July 2002, while serving as Acting Superintendent, Laura Miller coordinated with Hot Springs NP staff to develop a plan for repairing the roof and consulting with the Arkansas SHPO. The entire roof structure would need to be replaced with one of like kind and quality, “except this time,” Miller concluded, “it will be installed correctly.” The work as planned would involve removing the built-up roofing, insulation, and flashing that had been poorly constructed, and replacing it correctly with new materials. The Arkansas SHPO quickly approved the work and agreed that the work constituted no adverse effect.²⁷ Maintenance staff from Hot Springs NP contracted for the work and oversaw its completion by local contractors.

Over the next several years, Central High School NHS staff implemented several maintenance and repair projects at the Mobil Gas Station. These included painting the interior, replacing the flooring, and beginning the planning for replacement of the earlier rooftop HVAC unit. By 2005 and 2006, however, planning was well under way for the construction of the current Visitor Center, which would replace that at the Mobil Gas Station. The question then became one of determining how the original visitor center should be used. The initial plan was to convert the building for use as an Education Center. Toward that end, park staff began planning a renovation program in the fall of 2007, after the 50th anniversary commemoration. Together with continuing the planning for replacing the HVAC unit, this work included rewiring the interior to bring the electrical controls for the exhibits from the modern addition to the original front part of the building and replacing the original security system.²⁸ Even with these improvements, however, the education program has remained in the new Visitor Center. As Superintendent

²⁵ Woolpert LLP, *Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site: Environmental Assessment for Visitor Center Improvements* (Draft, March 2003), Section 3.2; see also summary of SHPO consultation in Section 6.0; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

²⁶ Annual Report, FY03; files of Central High School NHS.

²⁷ Laura A. Miller to Frances “Missy” McSwain, July 25, 2002; Ken Grunewald to Laura Miller, August 12, 2002; see also XXX submitted by Laura Miller, July 2, 2002; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

²⁸ R. Michael Madell to George McCluskey, SHPO, October 22, 2007; XXX Form, 10/17/2007; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

White observed, the Mobil Gas Station, even with the modern addition at the rear, is too small to serve as an Education Center for Central High School NHS, and its location across the street from the new Visitor Center created additional challenges.²⁹ Instead, the building has served as the park's Maintenance facility to provide office space for the Facilities Manager and to store equipment and other park-related materials that are not part of the park's collections (Figure 28).



Figure 28: Interior of Mobil Gas Station. Photo by the author, 2018.

In 2009, NPS included the completion of a Historic Structures Report of the Mobil Gas Station within a larger contract with Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects that included the HSR of Central High School described earlier in this chapter. As with the HSR for the school, the Mobil Gas Station HSR includes a thorough historical overview of the building and its construction history. The HSR concluded that the Mobil Gas Station was in generally good condition but recommended repairs to prevent water infiltration and deterioration primarily of the exterior of the building, including the roofing systems, parapets, flashings, and windows and doors.³⁰ Like the HSR for Central High School, the Mobil Gas Station HSR was completed in 2010, and was accepted by MWRO in January 2011.

²⁹ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2007.

³⁰ *Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Magnolia Mobil Gas Station: Historic Structures Report* (December 2010).

Commemorative Garden

An important component of the visitor experience at Central High School NHS is the Commemorative Garden. This is a peaceful and contemplative space, a carefully and distinctively landscaped garden with a pathway that curves through a small grove of trees and includes two monumental sculptural arches. Designed to commemorate the events of 1957 and to encourage thoughts of transcending the ugliness of that event, the Commemorative Garden is located directly across South Park Street from the Visitor Center, and across West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive from the north side of Central High School. The final development was planned and executed by the CHMI Board, which held a dedication ceremony in September 2001 when the Commemorative Garden, along with the original visitor center, was ceremonially transferred to NPS.

The Commemorative Garden had its origins in the spring of 1997, when Dr. Thomas A. Bruce met with members of the CHMI Board to propose the idea of a commemorative garden in association with development of the Central High Museum visitor center.³¹ Dr. Bruce was a prominent physician, and, after a career as physician and professor in New York City, Dallas, Detroit, and Oklahoma, he returned to Little Rock in 1997.³² Dr. Bruce and his wife, Dolores, were active philanthropists in the Little Rock area. By the summer of 1997, he and Rett Tucker, President of the CHMI Board, were discussing the idea of a sculpture competition to complement the proposed commemorative garden. In September of that year, he and his wife announced that they would commit up to \$100,000 toward the sculpture competition.³³

During the initial planning stages of the Commemorative Garden in the summer of 1997, the CHMI Board considered the lots at the northwest corner of South Park Street and West 14th Street (now West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive). While the lot at the immediate corner was vacant, it was bordered to the north by a lot with an existing vacant building, a frame house built approximately 1900, in poor condition. Because of the aluminum siding that had been applied to the house, it was identified as not contributing to the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District. However, Cheryl Nichols, a CHMI Board Member and Executive Director of the Quapaw Quarter Association, a historic preservation advocacy organization in Little Rock, expressed grave reservations regarding the building being purchased by CHMI for the purpose of demolishing it.³⁴ The Commemorative Garden Committee of the CHMI continued to discuss the location of the garden in the fall of 1997 and determined that the empty lot was too small. Suggestions for saving the existing house included purchasing the lot to the north of the vacant house and relocating the house to that lot, donating the house to an organization that would move it to another location, and incorporating the house in the design of the garden, perhaps as a tea

³¹ Everett Tucker, III to Dr. Thomas A. Bruce, May 8, 1997; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

³² See biography at <http://www.wildwoodpark.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Thomas-Allen-Bruce-MD.pdf> (viewed November 15, 2018).

³³ Thomas A. and Dolores Bruce to Everett Tucker, III, September 11, 1997; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

³⁴ Cheryl Nichols to Rett Tucker, July 10, 1997; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

room or as office space.³⁵ None of these options proved practical, and the Bruces provided funding for purchasing the lot and demolishing the house in 1999.³⁶

The CHMI Board worked with Dr. and Mrs. Bruce to prepare a Call for Artists, requesting proposals for the sculpture. While the Board initially proposed giving priority to artists with a connection to Central High School or Little Rock, the Bruces argued against it: “We feel that the ultimate goal is a work of art that is both exciting from an esthetics perspective and powerful/moving in its emotive force, and that the ultimate test for determining the awardee should be the artist’s ability to speak meaningfully to people of all kinds over generations to come. While it would be nice to have a sculptor with local connections,” they explained, “it is our conclusion that an open contest would be more appropriate to meet the objectives.”³⁷ Working within that mandate, the Commemorative Garden Committee continued to deliberate through 1997 and 1998. In the summer of 1999, following a meeting with the CHMI Board at which a range of ideas for the sculpture were discussed, the Bruces elaborated further their goal for the work. Their idea was not historical, nor did they wish to focus on the evil and tragedies of the 1957 crisis, but rather to have “an artistic statement which celebrates the positive outgrowths of 1957.” Referring to the range of ideas that were presented in the meeting, they elaborated:

Whether the ultimate decision of the Committee is to celebrate the transcending achievements of those nine children who were innocently victimized, or the peace and equanimity that has come through the years for the other 1957 students and teachers at Central High, or the dignity and pride that eventually benefited those left behind in obscurity at Dunbar High, or the triumph of tolerance and diversity over discrimination, or the re-emergence of a superb multicultural school out of disarray (our initial goal), or other such issues, is not our concern so long as the sculpture is uplifting and reflects human optimism in the way most will perceive it.³⁸

In the fall of 1999, the CHMI Board finalized a Call to Artists and released it publicly. By the spring of 2000, the Commemorative Garden Committee had received twenty-five entries from around the country and selected three finalists for the sculpture competition. These finalists were Jon Berge, Michelle Lach, and Christopher Yoculan of Columbus, Ohio, who proposed installing a row of nine bronze desk sculptures with textures, words, and quotations engraved on the surfaces of the desks and chairs; Michael Warrick and Aaron Hussey, professors at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) who proposed two triumphant arches at the center of a walkway surrounded by nine trees; and Susan Hassed at the University of Oklahoma Health

³⁵ Minutes, Central High Museum Commemorative Garden Committee, November 5, 1997; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

³⁶ Dolores F. and Thomas A. Bruce to Everett Tucker, III, August 4, 1999; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS. According to the Bruces, the cost of the lot and demolition, totaling \$18, 042.71, was in addition to the \$100,000 that they pledged for the sculpture competition.

³⁷ Dolores and Tom Bruce to Rett [Tucker], September 5, 1997; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

³⁸ Dolores F. and Thomas A. Bruce to Everett Tucker, III, August 4, 1999; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

Sciences Center, who proposed nine columns of stepped heights within a circular pool surrounded by a circular wall with a waterfall.³⁹

Two of the three sets of artists presented their designs to the CHMI Board on May 18, 2000. After a vigorous debate at the next Board meeting on June 15, 2000, the Board voted to approve the plan from Warrick and Hussey for the arches, which they titled “Transcendence.” Several of the participants, including Little Rock Nine Member Elizabeth Eckford and Dr. Bruce in addition to the Board members, had concerns about the desks design: Eckford and UALR Chancellor Charles Hathaway felt that the desks were too reminiscent of the Oklahoma City bombing memorial, Dr. Bruce felt that they looked backward rather than forward, and Johanna Miller Lewis expressed concerns for safety should visitors climb on the desks. The design for “Transcendence,” meanwhile, was judged to fit into the landscape better, while Board member Larry Ross felt that it would serve more effectively to draw visitors to the Visitor Center, and Dr. Bruce liked the depiction of the school’s evolution. The proposal for “Transcendence” received ten votes, while the proposal for the desks received three votes.⁴⁰ The Board contracted with Merle E. Seamon and Associates, a landscape architecture firm in Little Rock, to design the surrounding garden and to coordinate with the artists on the installation of the sculptures.

While the Commemorative Garden Committee was coordinating the call for artists and the selection of finalists, the Board initiated a fund-raising campaign. The goal of the campaign, which kicked off with an event featuring former Senator Dale Bumpers on November 5, 1999, was to raise \$125,000 for the commemorative garden.⁴¹ The campaign entered a new phase once the sculpture for the garden was determined, and, in September 2000, Board President Rett Tucker announced that the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation had made a grant of \$10,000 for the Commemorative Garden in honor of their executive director, Dr. Sybil Jordan Hampton.⁴² In November 2000, the Board voted to put \$50,000 from their account toward the Commemorative Garden, while the City of Little Rock offered to donate the site work and some landscaping, amounting to a value of \$15,000; the City later provided the nine trees that were used in the garden to surround the arches.⁴³ Construction on the site began in the winter of 2001, while the artists were preparing molds for the sculptures. At the same time, the artists began working with Johanna Miller Lewis and Laura Miller to look at historic photographs for use on the arches. The sculptures were completed and installed in the garden during the summer of 2001, by which time the fundraising was complete and the garden paid for (Figure 29).⁴⁴

³⁹ “Three About the Nine,” *Arkansas Times*, March 10, 2000; clipping in UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁴⁰ CHMI Board Minutes, June 15, 2000; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁴¹ Press Release, October 28, 1999; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS. In announcing to the Board his pledge of \$100,000, Dr. Bruce specified that it was to be put toward the sculpture competition only, and that the money for the garden would have to be raised separately.

⁴² CHMI Board Minutes, September 15, 2000; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁴³ CHMI Board Minutes, November 16, 2000, January 1, 2001; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁴⁴ CHMI Board Minutes, September 20, 2001; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.



Figure 29: Commemorative Garden, looking northeast. Photo by the author, 2017.

The Commemorative Garden was dedicated as part of a two-day commemoration on September 24 and 25, 2001. It coincided with the CHMI Board’s annual fund raiser, at which the premier of a documentary film, “Turning Points of History, The Little Rock Nine” was screened, while five of the Little Rock Nine were in attendance. The Commemorative Garden, as Central High School NHS’ Annual Report observed, “will serve the park and its visitors as an area of quite [sic] contemplation and reflection of the events of 1957.”⁴⁵ The Commemorative Garden continues to serve as an end-point for tours of Central High School, providing an opportunity for quiet reflection after what, for many, is an emotional experience.

The Garden has seen no substantial changes since it was constructed in 2001, and Central High School NHS has provided regular maintenance. In 2005, the original sprinkler system failed and was replaced in-kind. By 2006, the handicapped-accessible ramp portion of the original decorative concrete and brick walkway had deteriorated to the point that it was unsafe; regular cyclic maintenance funds in 2006 allowed the park to remove the existing concrete in the ramp and place a new ramp and curbing, while also repointing the brickwork along the walkway. In 2010, Central High School NHS carried out a similar project to repair the concrete sidewalks, decorative brickwork, and brick retaining walls, primarily by repairing cracks and resealing joints. Finally, the Commemorative Garden was first subjected to vandalism in the fall of 2010, when large amounts of permanent ink were spilled along the concrete walkway and on several benches. The stains could not be removed by conventional means

⁴⁵ Annual Report for 2001; files of Central High School NHS, D66.

including pressure washing, bleaches, or detergents; instead, the walkways and benches were subjected to sandblasting to remove the stains.⁴⁶

Daisy Gatson Bates House

Chapter 5 details the involvement of NPS in the initial condition assessment and rehabilitation of the Daisy Gatson Bates House beginning in 1999. This work, including repairing the original metal-framed windows, installing a French drain, and repairing termite damage, was completed in 2004. The work was conducted through a Cooperative Agreement with UALR, which in turn was doing the work in association with the owners of the house, the Christian Ministerial Alliance (CMA) and the L.C. and Daisy Gatson Bates House Museum Foundation, Inc.

The National Park Service was involved more directly with the Daisy Gatson Bates House and the CMA with regard to additional rehabilitation and interpretive planning. As early as 2003, Central High School NHS' interpretive staff began developing a tour of the Bates House, which first took place in January 2004.⁴⁷ The park coordinated with CMA regarding access to the house for tours, which have been conducted once a year with press releases announcing the schedule. These tours typically coincide with Daisy Gatson Bates Day, a state holiday authorized by the Arkansas legislature in 2001 and celebrated on the third Monday of February. Central High School NHS also produced a brochure regarding the Bates House and continues to schedule events around the annual event in addition to the tours. These events include book signings and public lectures.⁴⁸

The L.C. and Daisy Gatson Bates House Museum Foundation, Inc., planned additional rehabilitation efforts to convert the Bates House into a museum. In the summer of 2005, the Foundation contracted with Kwendeche, an architect in Little Rock, to prepare a condition assessment of the house. The National Park Service had no direct role in these efforts but served in an advisory capacity by commenting on the proposed work and the proposed uses of the building and helping to coordinate these efforts with the Arkansas SHPO. Both Central High School NHS and MWRO staff expressed concerns with the proposed work as a result of what they considered a lack of "a comprehensive plan of how the house & site are going to be used, interpreted, and what repairs are needed to support this." The National Park Service took on this role because of NPS' involvement with the site dating back to 1999 and because the house had been designated a National Historic Landmark in 2001, for which NPS has particular responsibilities. Regional Historical Architect Mark Chavez explained to Kwendeche that MWRO and Central High School NHS expressed such concerns because NPS is "tasked with monitoring NHLs and assisting stewards with technical questions, etc. Our concerns stem from that responsibility, and we're not sure all folks understand that. We're not trying to step on

⁴⁶ XXX Form for sprinkler system, June 21, 2005; PMIS Form for handicap ramp repair, March 28, 2006; Memorandum, Acting Regional Director to Central High School NHS Superintendent, April 8, 2010; Robin White to George McCluskey, Arkansas SHPO, October 28, 2010; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

⁴⁷ Central High School NHS Staff minutes, December 12, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

⁴⁸ See R. Michael Madell to Ada Hollingsworth, March 9, 2005, files of Central High School NHS, K14; Press Release, February 7, 2008; files of Central High School NHS, K3415.

anyone's toes; we're just trying to ensure that America's 'exceptional places' are properly cared for."⁴⁹

The Christian Ministerial Alliance and the L.C. and Daisy Gatson Bates Museum Foundation, Inc., have continued to work toward the interpretation of the Bates House in association with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). According to Superintendent White, Central High School NHS staff remain actively involved with CMA, meeting twice monthly with them regarding operations at the house and coordinating tours and events with them. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) had been developed among the Museum Foundation, NPS, and NAACP regarding the operation and interpretation of the Bates House. While CMA supports working with the park through the proposed MOU, NAACP has so far resisted entering into the agreement.⁵⁰

Collections

Central High School NHS is oriented toward the interpretation of the events of the 1957 desegregation crisis and its broader meaning in contemporary society. Following the path laid out by CHMI, Central High School NHS is not set up as a museum, which would place a greater emphasis on developing and maintaining collections of artifacts and documents. In her recollections of the founding of CHMI, Ethel Ambrose, at the time the President of Central High Neighborhood, Inc., expressed disappointment that, despite the name of the organization, it was not set up as a museum: "It's always been a concern to us that the Visitor Center has been marketed as a museum and this still happens. . . .It was not a museum. The present day National Park Service Visitor Center is a Visitor Center just as the name says and it was our goal, it was our vision that we would develop a museum."⁵¹

Despite the initial focus on restoring the Mobil Station and interpreting the 1957 desegregation crisis, however, CHMI received several artifacts before Central High School NHS was created. These items came to CHMI as donations from members of the Little Rock Nine, former Central High School students, and the local community.⁵² Johanna Miller Lewis, who served first as an advisor to the CHMI Board and then as its President, arranged for them to be stored at UALR. In the fall of 2003, Superintendent Madell approached Dr. Lewis in her role as President of the CHMI Board about obtaining the CHMI collection for NPS. "We have progressed," he explained, "to the point where we would like to begin adding to the collections of the historic site, including three-dimensional objects and the primarily archival materials currently housed at the UALR Archives & Special Collections." Anticipating a new and larger Visitor Center, Madell argued that expanded exhibits and collections facilities were part of the planning process, and that the ability to house the collections in a single facility "will certainly enhance its value to, and ease of use for, researchers."⁵³

⁴⁹ Email, Mark Chavez to Kwendeche, May 3, 2007; printed version in files of Central High School NHS, H34.

⁵⁰ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

⁵¹ Ethel Ambrose, oral history interview, March 24, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁵² *Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Central High School National Historic Site: Scope of Collections Statement*, September 8, 2004; typescript MS in files of Central High School NHS, H20.

⁵³ R. Michael Madell to Dr. Johanna Miller Lewis, October 16, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, H20.

Until suitable storage space became available, however, the collection continued to reside at UALR's Ottenheimer Library Archives and Special Collections, and CHMI maintained possession of them. Items that had come to NPS since 2002 were housed at the park's administrative offices in the Little Rock Federal Building.⁵⁴ At the start, Central High School NHS had only the original visitor center, where suitable collections storage space was not available, and the office space in the Little Rock Federal Building. In early 2004, the park began exploring options for additional secure and climate-controlled storage space in the Little Rock area. This was expensive, however, and Central High School NHS delayed securing space. Reporting in 2004 that the park would not achieve its performance target for cataloging museum objects, Superintendent Madell explained that an additional 500 feet of space requested for the park's use had not been funded in FY04; "Accordingly, we still do not have suitable space for storage of a collection. . . .The small existing collection will continue to be housed at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock; we will not acquire additional collection items in the short term." At the same time, he added, the Central High School NHS budget also did not allow him to purchase the then-current collections management software, ANCS+.⁵⁵ Finally, in 2004, the park received a copy of ANCS+, and a UALR graduate student was employed to begin cataloging the items in the collection at UALR, with data entry to begin later in the year.⁵⁶

Despite the lack of storage space and the software used to manage NPS collections, Central High School NHS created its first Scope of Collections Statement (SCS) in 2004.⁵⁷ This was an admittedly preliminary document, noting that any consolidation of its collections would have to await construction of the new Visitor Center, which would include both a library and research center and museum storage. In the meantime, the SCS declared that any efforts to develop collections would be guided by the need for these collections to support the overall interpretive goal of Central High School NHS, and to "further support the park's visitor experience goals and interpretive themes specified in the GMP and LRIP [Long-Range Interpretive Plan, which was also created in 2004]." Accordingly, the SCS proposed to focus on collecting contemporaneous items related to the desegregation crisis of 1957-1959 which had a documented connection to the crisis and its participants, which did not require extensive conservation treatment, and which were not redundant to items already in the collection. The SCS also recorded that the bulk of the park's collections at the time were document archives. These included oral history interviews, original park records, personal papers and memorabilia, photographs, and items that the CHMI Board had collected pertaining to the restoration of the Mobil Gas Station. In terms of goals for the collections, Central High School NHS staff hoped in particular to acquire personal papers from the members of the Little Rock Nine, together with additional records pertaining to Central High School, the Mobil Gas Station, the former Ponder's Drug Store building, and the seven houses on South Park Street facing Central High School. The

⁵⁴ *Scope of Collections Statement*, 2004; see also Central High School NHS Staff Minutes, April 8, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A40: "Currently we plan on leaving the collection at UALR until we have the proper storage space." See also Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Curator, MWRO, June 28, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, H20: "Our small collection continues to be maintained at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. We will take direct possession of the current collection and begin to accession other items when suitable storage becomes available."

⁵⁵ FY04 Park Performance Report, attached to Memorandum from Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, MWRO, June 21, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A6437.

⁵⁶ Annual Report for FY04; files of Central High School NHS.

⁵⁷ See Central High School NHS Staff Minutes, April 8, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

purpose for these collections would be primarily for use in exhibits and other interpretive programs, together with use in research and publications.⁵⁸

As plans for the new Visitor Center were being developed through 2005 and 2006, Central High School NHS staff included provisions for collections storage. The MWRO Regional Curator was involved in planning efforts, and the architects were instructed to incorporate a collection storage facility that met the applicable standards.⁵⁹ Park staff also continued to catalog the items in the collection, building on the initial cataloging completed in 2004-2005 by a UALR graduate student. By the summer of 2006, 170 items had been catalogued, and by 2007 all items in the collection had been cataloged. According to the Scope of Work for a Collections Management Plan that was issued in the summer of 2007, Central High School NHS' collection consisted of eight archeological items, thirty historical items, and 355 archival items, for a total collection of 393 items.⁶⁰ By 2008, the park had accepted donations of several artifacts, including two M-1 rifles, a bayonet, and a helmet used by a former member of the Arkansas National Guard while on duty at Central High School in 1957, artifacts from the courtroom where many of the legal pleadings were heard pertaining to the desegregation of Central High School, and a collotype print of the famous 1964 Norman Rockwell painting of Ruby Bridges as she was being escorted to school.⁶¹

Following the completion of the new Visitor Center in September 2007, Central High School NHS staff moved the collections from the former Administrative offices in the Little Rock Federal Building and from UALR, to the new, dedicated collections storage room in the Visitor Center. The park contracted for a Collections Management Plan (CMP) in 2007 to assess this space, which was presented in draft form in 2008. Noting that the earlier Scope of Collections Statement was preliminary, the 2008 CMP sought to provide more specifics to the process and mission of acquiring documents and artifacts. The 2008 CMP also provided recommendations regarding cataloging the collections, protecting records pertaining to the collections, appropriate materials for shelving and storage, and the preparation of an Emergency Operations Plan.⁶²

An updated Scope of Collections Statement (SCS) was produced in early 2011. Acting Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Spirit Trickey oversaw the development of the SCS beginning in 2010, which drew extensively upon the earlier CMP. As noted in the updated SCS, Central High School NHS does not have a Resource Management Plan that would provide particular guidance on museum collections. Instead, collections, of both archives and artifacts, “support the park’s resource management goals as reflected in the park’s GMP and strategic

⁵⁸ *Scope of Collections Statement*, 2004, *passim*. See also Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010: “we’re not a museum of Central High School, so we don’t collect things related to the entire school’s history except insofar as they help interpret the story of what happened here in 1957.”

⁵⁹ Annual Report for FY05; files of Central High School NHS.

⁶⁰ Annual Report for FY07; files of Central High School NHS. See also Collections Management Plan Scope of Work, attached to contract award to Midwest Conservation Associates, Inc., July 18, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, S7215.

⁶¹ See acknowledgment letters from Superintendent Madell in files of Central High School NHS, D62 and A34.

⁶² *Collections Management Plan and Storage Plan for the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site* (April 30, 2008), MS typescript draft copy with handwritten annotations; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

plan.” The purpose of the park’s collections, in other words, is to support the interpretive mission of Central High School NHS and the overall protection of the park’s cultural resources, including the school, the houses on South Park Street facing the school, the Mobil Gas Station, and the historic streetscape. This document provided additional, specific information regarding the nature of the collections and their role in furthering the interpretive and visitor experience goals. In particular, the 2011 SCS divided the collections into cultural and archival, with cultural collections consisting of documents and artifacts relating to archeology, ethnology, and history, and the archival collections containing documents prepared by NPS or collected by NPS from outside the agency. The SCS also identified the types of collections that would be appropriate to acquire in order to further the Central High School NHS’ mission and goals. The SCS defined the collections strategy as oriented specifically to the school desegregation crisis of 1957-1959, together with artifacts and archival materials that provide context for the crisis; items that do not have documented connections to the 1957-1959 crisis can be collected only for specific exhibit needs or study.⁶³ The inclusion of archeological materials in the SCS resulted from the limited archeological surveys done in advance of the construction of the current Visitor Center, while the inclusion of ethnology as a collection type relates to the possibility of better understanding the nature of the relations between White and African American communities in Little Rock.⁶⁴

Cultural Landscape

Central High School NHS is an urban park set within a portion of a neighborhood surrounding Central High School. This setting is centered around the 1500 block of South Park Street, with Central High School and its campus on the west side and seven houses and a church on the east side, with the park’s Visitor Center, Commemorative Garden, and former Mobil Gas Station occupying three of the four corners at the north end of the block, and the former Ponder’s Drug Store occupying the southeast corner at the south end of the block. Though diminutive in comparison to some cultural landscapes, it is dense with historical associations as the setting for the dramatic events of September 1957. As noted in Chapter 1, the 1957 school desegregation crisis was one of the first national events to be broadcast live on local and national news. As a result, images of Central High School and its immediate neighborhood surroundings became a part of the nation’s understanding of the Civil Rights movement. The streetscape is therefore an important component of NPS’ interpretation of the site.

The importance of the streetscape surrounding Central High School was illustrated by its inclusion in a Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) produced as one of the park’s first management documents. Focused on the developmental history of Central High School and its five-acre campus, the CLI observe that “A character-defining feature of the landscape is the streetscape in front of and around the school,” and makes the case that “the contributing landscape such as residences, commercial buildings, and the streetscape reinforce the overall integrity of the cultural landscape and offer a moderate integrity.”⁶⁵ The importance of the

⁶³ “Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site Scope of Collections Statement,” approved by MWRO April 8, 2011; files of Central High School NHS, H20.

⁶⁴ *Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site: Scope of Collections Statement* (2011); typescript MS, files of Central High School NHS, H20.

⁶⁵ *Little Rock Central High School: National Park Service Cultural Landscape Inventory, July 1999*, pages 28 (first quotation) and 2 (second quotation); collections of Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center, NPS.

landscape surrounding Central High School was also included in the Environmental Impact Statement for the GMP, which stated that “The site is part of, and depends on, a much larger cultural setting and surrounded by [sic] the historic district. This surrounding cultural landscape is important for understanding the park’s story. The cultural landscape is that of a busy high school campus surrounded by residential housing.”⁶⁶

Central High School NHS staff have promoted historic preservation in the neighborhood surrounding Central High School, including coordinating with the City of Little Rock and Central High Neighborhood, Inc. through MOUs and Cooperative Agreements and working to build support for expanding the park’s boundary to incorporate the seven houses on the east side of South Park Street.⁶⁷ Central High School NHS also produced a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for the site. In early 2005, park staff coordinated with the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville to bring a graduate student, Blanche McKee, to embark on a study of the cultural landscape surrounding the school.⁶⁸ The study was developed under a 2004 Cooperative Agreement with the City of Little Rock, to be financed with NPS funds. Unfortunately, Ms. McKee fell ill and, by the summer of 2007, was unable to continue work on the project. By that time, however, Central High School NHS had secured funding for a new CLR.⁶⁹ Work on the new CLR began in the fall of 2007, with Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects overseeing the project and John Milner Associates preparing the document.⁷⁰ A draft CLR was presented in the winter of 2008, with the final document completed in October 2009.⁷¹

The CLR broadened the scope of the cultural landscape of Central High School to include a large portion of the Central High Neighborhood Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.⁷² “These boundaries,” the CLR explains, “were established as the larger setting for the major events related to the desegregation of Central High from 1957 to 1959 and include the route taken by Elizabeth Eckford from the W. Twelfth Street bus stop to Ponder’s Drug Store, as well as the core of what remains of the neighborhood fabric of homes, streets, and commercial and industrial properties from that time period.”⁷³ In addition to providing a thoroughly documented developmental history of the neighborhood, the CLR also contains a study of the existing conditions including land use, buildings and structures, and vegetation; an analysis of the integrity of the neighborhood; and a treatment plan.

The recommended treatment plan for the neighborhood recognized the key fact of Central High School NHS: that it includes an active high school over which it has no control set within a living neighborhood over which it also has no control. It is neither practical nor possible to focus on preservation, restoration, or reconstruction as treatment plans, given the situation of the

⁶⁶ *General Management Plan, Environmental Impact Statement: Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Little Rock Arkansas* (April 2002), page 12.

⁶⁷ *Constitutional Writes*, Fall-Winter 2004, page 2.

⁶⁸ R. Michael Madell to Ethel Ambrose, March 4, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, H22.

⁶⁹ R. Michael Madell to Blanche McKee, June 18, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, H22.

⁷⁰ Preliminary Start-up Meeting Agenda, Cultural Landscape Report, October 9, 2007; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁷¹ *Central High School Cultural Landscape Report* (John Milner Associates, Inc., Charlottesville, VA, October 2009).

⁷² Smith and Speed, National Register Nomination, 1999.

⁷³ *Cultural Landscape Report* 2009, page 1-2.

neighborhood and the needs of LRSD and NPS. Instead, the CLR recommended rehabilitation as a treatment plan, placing an emphasis on stabilizing and preserving the buildings that contribute to the streetscape:

Because rehabilitation is defined as the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property, this approach allows for protection of the site's historic character and resources while carefully addressing the needs for facilities expansion, infill construction, building remodeling, and enhancement of interpretive opportunities. Under rehabilitation, stabilization, protection, and preservation of historic resources are actions that must occur even as new uses are accommodated.⁷⁴

In order to support this recommended treatment plan, the CLR includes specific design guidelines for the buildings to assist property owners in preserving and rehabilitating their own properties. The National Park Service can then use these guidelines in discussions with owners of properties that surround the school as a way of providing technical advice.

In addition to recommending the completion of a Historic Structure Report for Central High School, which was then ongoing, the CLR also made several policy recommendations. Most notably, these included collaborating with the City of Little Rock, the LRSD, and neighborhood residents to establish a local historic preservation district that would provide a zoning overlay for special protection and support for the completion of Historic Structure Reports for the seven houses on the east side of South Park Street facing Central High School. These recommendations arose from an assessment of the threats facing the historic character of the neighborhood, including absentee ownership and the neglect, abandonment, and demolition of buildings.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *Cultural Landscape Report* 2009, pages 3-3, 3-4.

⁷⁵ *Cultural Landscape Report* 2009, page 3-6.

Chapter 7: Education and Interpretation

From its conception in late 1998, the focus of Central High School NHS has been primarily on interpretation. Although having direct responsibilities regarding collections and other cultural resources, these have been secondary to the core mission of the park, which is interpreting the 1957 school desegregation crisis at Central High School and its broader significance. Building on the foundations laid by the Central High Museum, Inc., (CHMI) Board and staff, Central High School NHS has sought to convey the events of 1957 and how they have resonated through the years by a variety of means including exhibits, tours, brochures, public presentations, and classroom materials. At the same time, park staff have endeavored to bring the message of, and lessons from, the 1957 school desegregation crisis and its aftermath to broader audiences by partnering with other local and regional organizations to develop a wide range of events and programs on a variety of topics including justice, equality, and equal opportunity. This broader approach to public programming by means of partnering with other organizations is driven in part by the limitations of space in the park's facilities and in part by an interest in broadening the interpretive scope of Central High School NHS while staying true to its founding mission. This chapter will explore the park's educational and interpretive programs focused primarily on Central High School and the 1957 desegregation crisis. The park's approach to public programming beyond this focus will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Central High Museum, Inc.

The initial focus of the CHMI Board and staff was to develop and promote visitation at the original visitor center in the restored Mobil Gas Station. The site's interpretive program had three principal approaches: the exhibits in the visitor center, tours that led visitors to the Central High School grounds, and educational outreach.

Planning for the exhibits began at the same time as plans for restoration of the building. Johanna Miller Lewis, who headed the Public History Program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), turned the attention of her Museum Interpretation graduate seminar to planning for the new visitor center, with one group of students tasked with developing a collections management policy, and the other group tasked with developing a highly detailed timeline of school desegregation issues generally and the Central High School crisis particularly. This timeline then served as the basis for the development of the exhibit, during which Lewis coordinated with members of the CHMI Board and the Planning Committee. A key task was to hire an exhibit designer who could work with the initial concept as promoted by the Planning Committee and with the timeline developed by the UALR students. Lewis coordinated with CHMI Board member William Worthen to prepare a Request for Proposals for the exhibit design and identified a list of possible firms. After narrowing the response to two, the Board selected Quatrefoil Associates, an exhibit design firm based in Maryland, with Abbie Chessler serving as the lead designer. It was Chessler's task to take the general concepts as developed by the CHMI Board, the Planning Committee, and Lewis and create an organized exhibit around them. As Lewis recalled, "we knew that we wanted to spend most of the time talking about what happened

in 1957, '58, and into '60, but we also felt very strongly that it had to be placed in the historical context and so we needed to do a run-up in terms of history and civil rights to that time.”¹

The resulting exhibit, which had to fit into the small interior space of the restored Mobil Gas Station, was grouped into several topics pertaining to civil rights and school desegregation. These included a summary overview of African American history from the American Revolutionary War to the Civil War, gains and setbacks in civil rights from the era of reconstruction after the Civil War to the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision, civil rights and desegregation from that decision until 1954 with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, from *Brown v. Board* to the 1957 desegregation crisis, “and then what was left which wasn’t very much was then to the present.” While creating a multi-panel exhibit in a small space which covered such an expansive topic was challenging, Lewis recalled, “What stumped us was the intro panel because. . .you need to have something inspiring and you don’t want it to be dry. . .we just could not really come up with what we wanted. . .so I basically sent a list of points to Max Brantley and he wrote it. I mean he just chunked it out, sent it back, and it was perfect.”²

The conclusion to the exhibit was vital also. An important component of the exhibit design was driven by a concern from several members of the Little Rock Nine who attended the planning meetings. As Lewis recalled, what “they were very adamant about. . .was being able to place their experiences into a larger context to show that, in fact, individuals can make a difference in history;” this theme particularly influenced the final panel of the exhibit, which “talked about individuals and. . .different places and different times. . .taking a stand and making a difference.”³

While most of the Board and the stakeholders who commented on the exhibit design process were generally uniform in their understanding of the nature of the exhibit, one issue proved particularly contentious. Many of the historic photos being used in the exhibit panels showed the Confederate battle flag being held by opponents of Central High School’s integration, and an intense debate arose over whether to include a Confederate flag in the exhibit. Some argued for it on the grounds of historical authenticity and that having the flag in the room would be a shock to many and encourage them to think about the nature of the protests. Others, however, were concerned for the impact that the flag might have on visitors who may not be able to see past it and thus learn nothing else from the exhibit. This latter argument proved more convincing to the CHMI Board, which decided not to include the flag in the exhibit. As founding CHMI Board member Virgil Miller recalled, “It just evoked too much passion and emotion and it was just too divisive and it ended up not happening.”⁴

The exhibit in the visitor center served as the principal content of the tours that were offered before the arrival of NPS. Tours were composed of groups who scheduled in advance, individual drop-in visitors, and school classes. Executive Director Laura Miller coordinated extensively with the Little Rock Convention and Visitor Bureau, the Arkansas State Capitol, and

¹ Johanna Miller Lewis, oral history interview, March 12, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

² Johanna Miller Lewis, oral history interview.

³ Johanna Miller Lewis, oral history interview.

⁴ Virgil Miller, oral history interview, March 5, 2010.

other organizations to promote visitors to Central High Museum. She put particular emphasis on school groups and contacted schools throughout the region with invitations to plan a tour of the facility. As early as February 1998, she had scheduled eighteen groups for the month, and that spring set a goal of having at least one school group per week throughout the 1998-1999 school year. Scheduling tours was complicated given the small size of the visitor center, and Miller and her staff developed ways of handling the challenge of managing tour groups in the small space and with the small staff. Miller's outreach proved successful, with numerous groups scheduling to tour the visitor center, both local and from around the country. Although CHMI did not provide tours of the interior of Central High School, they were able to coordinate with the Little Rock School District (LRSD) to hold programs there. In March 1999, for example, Little Rock Nine member, Elizabeth Eckford, provided a program at Central High School for a school group from San Bruno, California.⁵

In late 1998 the CHMI Board adopted a committee system, dividing its several functions into committees where much of the work was designated to take place. As a result of a division of the original Planning Committee, the Board created a Program Committee in the spring of 1999 which worked primarily with educational and curriculum-related programs. Their goal was to prepare a curriculum for elementary school students. Working with Executive Director Laura Miller, the Program Committee members contacted the Curriculum Developers for each local school district to obtain the names of teachers who might be able to help the committee. The committee began meeting in the summer of 1999 with teachers who expressed an interest in helping to develop a curriculum that could be provided to schools. As Miller and the members of the committee met with the teachers in the fall of 1999, several educational plans emerged, including developing a traveling loan box that teachers could request for their classrooms. By early 2000, however, the Board's attention turned toward coordinating the transition to NPS and planning for the Commemorative Garden, and the Program Committee gradually faded away.⁶ The foundation for a curriculum focused on the Central High School crisis of 1957 had been laid, however, and Miller was able to take it with her upon joining the National Park Service staff in the spring of 2001.

An important educational outreach opportunity arose in the summer of 1999, when the Little Rock International Airport announced that, as part of extensive renovations to the airport, it would provide exhibit space for local cultural institutions. There was no charge for the space, but each organization had to provide and pay for its own exhibit. Laura Miller and her staff worked to create a small exhibit for the space which opened in October 2000. The only requirements were that exhibits be changed at least three times per year and that the organizations which participated contribute to the janitorial costs of keeping the exhibit space clean.⁷ Central High School NHS staff continued to maintain the exhibit at the airport, providing new, temporary exhibits on a regular basis at least through 2010.⁸

⁵ CHMI Board Minutes, March 18, 1999; the monthly minutes beginning in 1998 provide regular updates regarding the activity of the visitor center, including remarks on groups that toured the visitor center.

⁶ See CHMI Board Minutes, May 20, 1999; June 17, 1999; July 15, 1999; August 19, 1999; and October 21, 1999.

⁷ CHMI Board Minutes, July 15, 1999; September 16, 1999; November 11, 2000; see also Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁸ Central High School NHS Staff Minutes, August 19, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

Visitor Center Exhibit

Central High School NHS continued to use the original CHMI exhibit in the Mobil Gas Station for nearly nine years, from the designation of the NHS in late 1998 to the opening of the new Visitor Center in September 2007. National Park Service officials and staff understood from the beginning that the original visitor center in the restored Mobil Gas Station, successful as it was, would not suffice in the long run. While it allowed park staff to have an interpretive presence at the site from the very beginning, which many new parks did not have, all recognized that the exhibits were not comprehensive enough and the space was not large enough to fulfill the mission of Central High School NHS. A new Visitor Center was included as one of the most important recommendations in the GMP and, with it, new exhibits.

For the first several years of operation, the park's staff worked with the existing exhibits while focusing on the overall interpretive and public outreach programs and preparing the several planning documents that would guide various facets of Central High School NHS' operations. As discussed more fully later in this chapter, park staff in coordination with the NPS Harpers Ferry Center (HFC) began work on the park's first Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) in January 2002, following completion of the General Management Plan (GMP). As with the GMP, the LRIP assumed the creation of a new Visitor Center at the northeast corner of South Park Street and West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive. The existing visitor center, according to the LRIP, "is extremely small. . . .Due to this space limitation, many visitors are unwilling to wait to enter the exhibits; therefore, they leave without experiencing even the limited interpretive opportunities available."⁹ The LRIP went on to address the goals for exhibits in the anticipated new Visitor Center, including providing the historical context for the events of 1957-1959, connecting the interpretive stories with an orientation to the park's resources and experiences, encouraging visitors to develop their own emotional and intellectual connections to the topic, and directing visitors to additional sources of information. "Much of the park's purpose. . .will be accomplished in the exhibit area. Consequently the exhibition space requirements are higher than for exhibits in many other parks with similar visitation. Also, this site requires the kind of interactive, immersive, and stimulating exhibits that have been shown to attract and hold the attention of diverse visitors."¹⁰

Preparing the LRIP in coordination with HFC during 2004 helped Central High School NHS staff to maintain a focus on the development of new exhibits in the proposed Visitor Center. Formal work on the project, however, had to wait until Congress approved funding for the new building.¹¹ In late 2004, the Harpers Ferry Center began preparing bid requests for the building and the exhibits in anticipation of Congressional approval. In December 2004, staff received word that planning funds had become available, and the Harpers Ferry Center began issuing the bid requests in early January 2005. The project moved very quickly at that point, with contractors for both the building design and the exhibit design selected by late February 2005. Quatrefoil Associates, which had prepared the exhibits for the original visitor center in 1997, was

⁹ *Long-Range Interpretive Plan: Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site* (July 2004), 21-22.

¹⁰ *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, 34.

¹¹ See Chapter 9 for a comprehensive discussion of the development of the current Visitor Center.

again selected under an Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity contract with the Harpers Ferry Center to prepare the exhibit design, with a budget of \$301,738.¹²

As Central High School NHS staff began the planning for the exhibits in the new Visitor Center, they were able to draw upon several years of constant interaction with visitors. Through the process of giving tours of the school and the existing exhibits, they gained a greater understanding of the needs, interests, and information gaps of the site's visitors. Particularly because Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller was involved in creation of the original exhibits, park staff were aware of its limitations and developed ideas for what should be included in the new exhibits with the possibility of substantially more space with which to work. The central insight from the Little Rock Nine during planning for the initial exhibit, that individuals can make a difference, was the foundational concept for the exhibits in the current visitor center. While exposing the racism, violence, and exclusion that was on display so clearly during the 1957 desegregation crisis, the point of the exhibits was to show that all people, of whatever age and from whatever background, can take steps to make the world a better place. At the same time, aware that the small space in the Mobil Gas Station limited the exhibits to a timeline approach, Central High School NHS staff, in developing the new exhibits, sought to expand the story that they could tell, in particular to show the historical depth of the 1957 crisis. This included starting with the ringing ideals of equality expressed so eloquently in the nation's founding documents and the deviations from these ideals both formally and informally, from the very beginning. This allows the exhibits to show the 1957 Central High School crisis not as an isolated incident in one particular place but as an integral part in a continuum of attempts by individuals as well as organizations to move the nation closer to its founding ideals.

Central High School NHS staff, led by Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller, worked quickly with Quatrefoil to develop an exhibit plan during the winter and early spring of 2005. A public visioning workshop was held on March 1, 2005 to solicit input on both the building and the exhibits. The input received from this meeting, together with the extensive background research materials which the park provided, allowed Quatrefoil to prepare a preliminary plan of the new exhibits by late April 2005. The plan emphasized the importance of the exhibits to the park's overall interpretive program: "Little Rock Central High School is a functioning high school, and opportunities for the public to experience the building itself are very limited. Therefore, the new visitor center will establish the context and provide the principal interpretive experience for most visitors." The stories surrounding the 1957 desegregation crisis and its role in the dismantling of racially segregated public schools throughout the nation, the plan continued, "are highly complex, and cannot be told by simply viewing the façade of the school, or even walking through its halls."¹³ During the course of preparing this initial plan, Quatrefoil guided NPS staff to reorganize the original six interpretive themes (the event, Civil Rights movement, use of executive power, equal rights, the school, and the city and state) to three major interpretive themes with a number of sub-themes:

¹² Central High School NHS Staff Meeting minutes, December 19, 2004, February 23, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, A40. See also Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS. See also Project Report (Design/Construction), August 20, 2007, attached to Memorandum, Acting Director, Denver Service Center to Regional Director, Midwest Region, September 5, 2007, files of Central High School NHS, A4027.

¹³ *Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site Visitor Center—Schematic Plan* (Quatrefoil Associates, April 25, 2005); electronic file from Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center, 037/138485.

- The Event
 - The School
 - The City and State
- Civil Rights Movement
- Nation's Commitment to Equal Rights
 - Evolution of the nation's commitment to equal rights
 - Use of executive power during the Central High School crisis

Working with the preliminary designs for the new building's interior, Quatrefoil's preliminary plan also provided rough sketches of the exhibits in-situ, with three options for arrangements and general visitor flow patterns. The first of these options was formed largely of arcs of concentric circles surrounding a circular public forum, a second was formed of two convex curves facing each other within a rectangular space, creating a portico shape, while the third option was arranged as a five-sided series of panels (Figure 30). All options included an interpretive film that would be created for the exhibits. This film would be shown in a dedicated theater in the first and second design options but would be incorporated into the exhibits in the third option.¹⁴

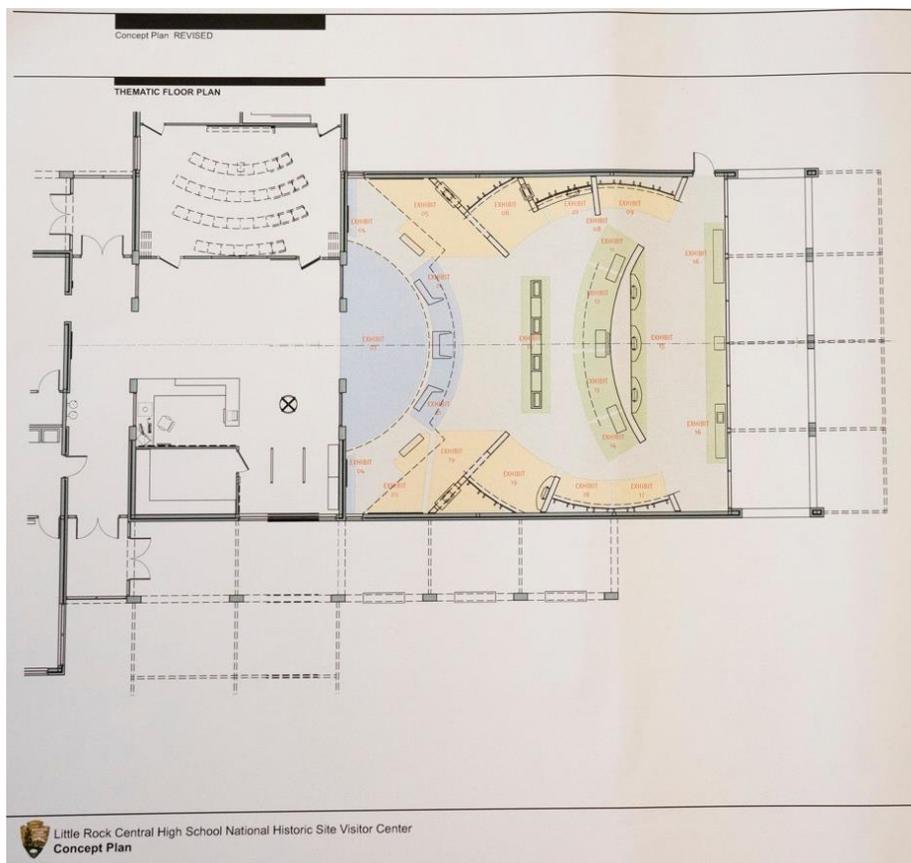


Figure 30: Visitor Center exhibit thematic floor plan, draft, 2005. Copy photo of document in files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁴ *Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site Visitor Center—Schematic Plan.*

As early as the fall of 2005, however, the film had been removed from the program, largely due to budget constraints. Because of factors beyond the control of NPS, including skyrocketing prices for construction materials in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the overall budget for the new Visitor Center had to be reduced substantially. As Superintendent Madell recalled,

We didn't get to do everything as extensively as we would have. The most obvious omission . . . we wanted very much to have an introductory film and that maybe fifteen or twenty minutes to tell the story of the Nine. We couldn't afford to do that. Similarly, we had to change what had been envisioned as a theatre for the showing of that movie to what it is now—the multipurpose room and downsize the technology in there a little bit.¹⁵

In the course of subsequent public meetings in the spring and summer of 2005, and in consultation with Central High School NHS staff, Quatrefoil prepared an advanced exhibit plan in the fall of 2005 that included the second design option, which incorporated a series of concentric circles within a portico plan. With the creation of the draft text for the exhibit's several components, together with the integration of the videotaped oral histories created by UALR and Central High School NHS and items from the park's collections, the focus of the exhibits continued to draw from the foundational point that came from the Little Rock Nine in planning for the 1997 exhibits, that individuals can make a difference. The advanced plan defined the principal messages of the exhibits as: "The story of the school desegregation crisis in Little Rock is a powerful moment in American history where individuals exercised their rights under the Constitution," and "One person's actions can make a difference."¹⁶

Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller led the review of the exhibit text as developed by Quatrefoil. While the organization of the materials was successful, the initial draft of the text did not meet the park's expectations, particularly in light of the sense of personal agency that she and her staff intended to convey. It was, she recalled, "written very much in the third person, very passive, very, you know, 'These things happened, and they just sort of happened.'" She challenged Quatrefoil to more accurately reflect the principal theme of individuals making a difference by making the language stronger, "we really wanted it to be powerful and hard-hitting and let the voices of the participants, themselves, come out into that." She also had a vision of showing the continuity of sentiments from the 1950s to the present (2005-2006). Despite revisions by Quatrefoil, though, she and Johanna Miller Lewis remained unsatisfied. As she recalled, the two of them "gathered up everything, we gathered up their script, all of . . . our accumulated sources and resources and everything else, and we spent about a week in her dining room at her house. We both just . . . told our respective employers, 'Don't bother me for a week.' And we re-wrote the script."¹⁷

¹⁵ Michael Madell, oral history interview, March 9, 2010. Despite not having the film as originally planned, the exhibits had several audio-visual elements that were installed in time for the opening.

¹⁶ *Exhibit Plan: Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site Visitor Center* (Quatrefoil Associates for the National Park Service Harpers Ferry Center, October 27, 2005), page 1; electronic file from Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center, 037/138482.

¹⁷ Laura Miller, oral history interview, February 16, 2018.

By late in the winter of 2006, Central High School NHS staff and Quatrefoil had developed a final plan for the exhibits, and, in March 2007, Superintendent Madell and Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller, with Park Ranger Spirit Trickey, presented the final plan at a meeting with Johanna Miller Lewis of UALR, several members of the Little Rock Nine (Minnijean Brown Trickey, Thelma Mothershed Wair, and Elizabeth Eckford; Gloria Ray and Terrance Roberts had seen the presentation several days earlier), Ralph Brodie (Central High student body president in 1957-1958), Dale Charles (director of the Arkansas NAACP), Rett Tucker, and Dr. Linda Reed, Professor of History at the University of Houston. The presentation included a Power-Point generated walk through the exhibits with a discussion of the goals and content of each section. The comments from those who attended were generally positive, with an appreciation for the combination of deep historical context regarding the history of civil rights in America going back to the nation's founding documents and an emphasis on individuals and their actions. In her review of the presentation, Reed concluded that "the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site with its Final Design Plan has brought together in excellent fashion the right amount of history, the 1957 series of events, and the aftermath of 1957, which really helps us to understand that individuals make history, that individuals instigate change, and that individual voices are significant in all narrations of history."¹⁸

With the design components completed by the spring of 2006, Central High School NHS staff in association with HFC continued to produce and refine the specific components of the exhibits, including text, photographs and other graphics, artifacts from the park's collections, and oral history videotapes. Due to the expansion of the exhibits from the initial exhibit in the Mobil Gas Station and the subsequent ability to cover more and different topics, Central High School NHS staff had to secure the rights to use a new set of photographs. Additionally, the oral histories were seen as vital to the exhibits from the beginning. As Miller recalled, "one of the biggest parts of the exhibit and things that visitors like the best are the oral history interviews. They really will sit and listen to a lot of those, listening to the people talk about their experiences from that time." The exhibits were built with the flexibility to incorporate different oral histories as new interviews were conducted.¹⁹

With the design largely completed by the spring of 2006, HFC requested bids for exhibit fabrication. In August 2006, HFC awarded the contract for exhibit fabrication to Fruland and Bowles, in Toledo, Ohio, with a contract amount of \$1,263,000.²⁰ Construction on the building began in June 2006, and a priority was placed on the southern end of the building, where the exhibits were to be housed. This section was largely complete by June 2007, which allowed Fruland and Bowles to begin installation.²¹ Questions about accessibility proved challenging

¹⁸ Linda Reed, "Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site: Comments on Final Design Plan," attachment to Memorandum, Chief of Interpretation & Cultural Resources to File, March 24, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, D62.

¹⁹ Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010.

²⁰ Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; see also Project Report (Design/Construction), August 20, 2006, attached to Memorandum, Acting Director, Denver Service Center to Regional Director, Midwest Region, September 5, 2006, files of Central High School NHS, A4027.

²¹ "Construction is on track at Central Visitor Center, New phase of facility will be open in time for 50th anniversary of school's integration," digital reprint of *Arkansas Democrat-Citizen*, May 26, 2007; files of Central High School

during the installation, as Miller found that it had not been sufficiently integrated with the design. She recalled working extensively with HFC staff to identify potentially hazardous situations or exhibit features that could be difficult to experience for those with various disabilities, including color-blindness and other visual challenges, and that were not taken into account in the initial planning and design. The monitors for the oral history videos, in particular, she recalled, were too small: “we ended up with these little monitors for the oral histories, and the first thing we noticed when you get them up and going in real life, it’s like “Okay. Well, if you’re over fifty, you can’t read those captions” In addition, she recalled the challenges of planning for the exhibit design without the support of a facilities manager, which Central High School NHS did not yet have. This support would have been particularly helpful with regard to planning for the future cleaning, maintenance, and replacement of the equipment.²² Despite these difficulties, and with continued urging from park staff and project managers from the Denver Service Center (DSC), the building was completed, and most of the exhibits were installed in time for opening of the new Visitor Center in September 2007.



Figure 31: Visitor Center interior, lobby with view of exhibits and bookstore on right. Photo by Central High School NHS, 2018.

The exhibit area as completed opens from the combined lobby and bookstore space, with the multi-purpose room opening to the left (Figure 31). Designed in a series of segmental arches along the side walls and a pair of convex curves in the center, the exhibit gallery creates several discrete viewing areas within a small space. Visitors enter through a series of floor-to-ceiling

NHS. See also Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Project Manager, Denver Service Center, July 16, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, D18.

²² Laura Miller, oral history interview, February 16, 2018.

exhibit panels arranged in curves facing outward, with introductory materials on the faces of the panels facing outward. Once past the panels, exhibits on the left provide information regarding the historical background of discrimination and segregation in the United States, from the Constitution through the post-Civil War civil rights amendments and pertinent Supreme Court cases in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, concluding with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. A series of panels in the center of the exhibit space, arranged in a straight line shaped as a portico, provides the background to the 1957 crisis in Little Rock, while a semi-circular series of panels provides detailed information, graphics, and videos about the events of September 1957 on the left and center, with information about the Lost Year of 1958-1959 and after on the right. At the rear of these semi-circular panels, in a more enclosed space facing the back wall, a set of three video screens provide clips from oral history interviews with members of the Little Rock Nine and other participants in the 1957 desegregation crisis. The right wall of the exhibit space mirrors the left wall with a set of curved panels highlighting the quest for a range of civil rights in America including for Japanese-Americans who were detained during World War II, women, disabled Americans, and others. Exiting the exhibit space, visitors have the opportunity for reflection and leaving their own comments and thoughts on the quest for civil rights at a series of individual stations on the rear of the introductory panels. Figures 32 and 33 provide views of the Visitor Center exhibits.



Figure 32: Visitor Center interior, entry to exhibits. Photo by Central High School NHS, 2018.



Figure 33: Visitor Center interior, left wall of exhibit. Photo by Central High School NHS, 2018.

Most of the panels feature a combination of text and graphics, either reproductions of founding documents, drawings of historical people and places, or photographs of the events of 1957. The exhibit incorporates sound and moving images, however, in videos of news footage from 1957 that loop regularly and in on-demand clips from the videotaped oral history interviews. It was designed as a permanent exhibit, though two spaces near the entry and exit areas were configured to allow for changes as Central High School NHS staff saw the need. As Miller described it, the staff hoped that this space would be used for temporary exhibits that reflected current events, “as a way to start conversations.” In addition, with more oral history interviews available than can be shown at one time, it is possible that the interview clips can be expanded. The exhibit in the Visitor Center is just one component of the park’s overall interpretive and exhibit program. As Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller noted, “it’s a visitor center and. . .the way the National Park Service does things is we build permanent exhibits and they are permanent. But we brought in traveling exhibits before and put them up in the multipurpose room. We have a small exhibit space at the airport where we do changing exhibits. . .we do those kinds of things, but mostly the things that change are the programs that we do, the special events that we do, and things like that.”²³

The exhibit as designed in 2007 has remained essentially intact and unchanged to the present. As Miller recalled, “anytime you do an exhibit, you know it’s a static thing and the

²³ Laura Miller, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; oral history interview, February 16, 2018.

world goes on, and its not going to change, but we wanted to have a place where you could at least do temporary something to start a conversation, and then that would be the experience, is to have that kind of interaction with people.” While the space for temporary exhibits has not always been used as it was planned, the exhibit remains a stimulant for exploration and discussion (Figure 34). In addition, in 2017 Central High School NHS received funding under the Flexible Park Program, a fund source within NPS that was first appropriated in FY08 and was used primarily for accessibility and sustainability. Targeted for elimination in the FY18 budget, the park used money from this fund to substantially improve the accessibility of the audio and interactive components of the exhibits in April 2018.²⁴



Figure 34: Visitor Center interior, exhibits with temporary exhibit space on left. Photo by Central High School NHS, 2018.

Interpretive Programs

Although Central High School is a beautiful and powerful building to view from South Park Street, and its surrounding streetscape likewise remains largely intact from 1957, the full import of its significance in American history cannot be experienced by simply viewing it from either inside or outside. Ethel Ambrose, the former President of the Central High School Neighborhood Association and a founding member of what became Central High Museum, Inc., had observed the interest in Central High School for years. In 1991, Mark Abernathy began assembling a group of like-minded individuals who were interested in the history of the Little Rock desegregation crisis, recognizing that the school already was a popular tourist destination.

²⁴ Jodi Morris, oral history interview, December 11, 2017.

As Ambrose recalled, “we saw cars and buses pull up in front of Central High School every day. People would pour out of those vehicles, take pictures. We felt that they came largely uninformed and they went away largely uninformed and we thought that the story needed to be told.”²⁵ An awareness of the role that Central High School played requires a more complete learning experience than just viewing the school, one which incorporates both information about the event in its historical context and the emotional impact that the events of 1957 had on individuals at the time and since. Through a proper interpretive experience, visitors have the potential to understand at a deeply personal level the broader meanings of the story of desegregation at Central High, the courageous response of individuals seeking their rights as American citizens, and how the stories and images of that courage have resonated with people around the globe.

Telling the story of the 1957 desegregation crisis at Central High School and its broader impact was key from the outset. This role was incorporated into the legislation that designated the site, which defined the purpose of the site: “to preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit, education, and inspiration of present and future generations, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, and its role in the integration of public schools and the development of the Civil Rights movement in the United States.”²⁶

For nearly three years following designation of Central High School NHS in 1998, much of the interpretive program continued to be conducted by CHMI Executive Director, Laura Miller, who had a small, part-time staff to assist at the original visitor center. Working from the foundations established by Central High Museum, Inc., historical interpretation has been at the center of the park’s mission and operations from the beginning. Upon starting work at the site in 2000, Superintendent Forney began to establish the relationships and partnerships that would allow NPS to tell the story of Central High School in its fullness, coordinating with CHMI, the Little Rock School District, the City of Little Rock, and others. The first employee position he hired was Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller, with responsibility for interpretation, but a Park Ranger and two student trainees for interpretive positions followed shortly, whose positions regularly entailed providing tours of the exhibits and the school. The majority of people who took part in these tours were parts of groups, primarily from local and regional schools, though many adult groups scheduled tours as well. In addition, CHMI staff and, later, NPS staff, hosted walk-in visitors, both individuals and tour groups. Because space in the original visitor center was extremely limited, the early CHMI and NPS staff developed methods to handle large crowds, including dividing large groups into smaller ones and staggering the interior tours while some waited outside. As early as 2002, the site’s interpretive staff provided formal interpretive programs for nearly 150 groups, ranging in size from couples to more than 150 people, while also coordinating five special events that reached approximately 1,700 people. A year later, the rangers conducted programs for nearly 200 groups, developed twenty-one special programs, and sixteen special events and outreach programs.

Superintendent Forney initially worked with interpretive planners at DSC to develop interpretive themes for tours of the site. By the spring of 2000, these themes included the particular events of 1957, the broader Civil Rights movement, the use of executive power for the

²⁵ Ethel Ambrose, oral history interview, March 24, 2010.

²⁶ P.L. 105-356, Section 1.(b).

first time to enforce civil rights, the concept of equal rights as it has developed in the United States, Central High School as an architectural monument and as a symbol of change, and changes in Little Rock and Arkansas.²⁷ Forney and, soon, Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller, incorporated these themes into the development of the park's interpretive programs.

Several important developments were crucial to the growth of the Central High School NHS' interpretive program. Perhaps most significant was the agreement reached in 2000 to allow tours of the interior of Central High School. In early 2000, Forney and Laura Miller, then the Executive Director of CHMI, coordinated with LRSD and Central High School administration to develop a proposal for handling tour groups in the school. In April 2000, according to a news report, "school officials made it plain that their top priorities were to make certain that the rhythm of daily life at the school would not be interrupted and that Central High would not be left open to security risks." Miller explained that tours of the school's interior would allow visitors to more directly grasp the story of the 1957 crisis and the difficulties faced by the Little Rock Nine during the 1957-1958 school year. Such tours would make the story more readily understandable and allow for a deeper emotional understanding of what it was like for the Little Rock Nine at the time. It was in the course of seeing the school's interior, as Miller noted, "where staircases and curving hallways are everywhere, that visitors can grasp the impact of a rule like the one the administrators instituted to deal with the harassment of black students: if an adult didn't see it, it didn't happen." (Figure 35)²⁸ On July 27, 2000, the School Board voted to approve tours of the school's interior.²⁹ The agreement allowed NPS, initially through the CHMI staff, to conduct tours of the school at 9:30 am on Tuesdays and Thursdays in October, February, March, and April, while one-hour tours were allowed in the mornings and afternoons on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays during the summer months. Tours would include the lobby, cafeteria, staircases, auditorium, and grounds to encourage an understanding of both the 1957-1958 school year from the perspective of the Little Rock Nine and the current integrated status of Central High School.³⁰ The first tours of the school began in October 2000.

The tours of Central High School's interior remain important components of the park's interpretive offerings. The schedule has expanded over the years, including the days and times when Central High School NHS is allowed to provide tours, and they continue to be extremely popular with visitors who seek a more immersive experience than the exhibits alone can provide. Tour schedules are regularly filled throughout the school year, primarily by school groups, and the two tours per day during the summer weekdays regularly fill as well.³¹ The park and the Central High School administration have retained a good working relationship regarding tours of the school, each recognizing the value that the partnership brings. Although NPS interpreters who lead the tours work to minimize the tour groups' impact on the school's schedule, the students at Central High have become accustomed to seeing tour groups during the days. Central

²⁷ "Central High School National Historic Site Draft Interpretive Themes," document attached to email, Sam W. Vaughn to Mary McVeigh et al., May 2, 2000; files of Central High School NHS, A42.

²⁸ "Proposal opens Central High to tours inside" (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, July 7, 2007), clipping in files of Central High School NHS, D18.

²⁹ LRSDB Minutes, June 22, 2000.

³⁰ "School Board approved tours at Central High" (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, July 28, 2000), clipping in UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

³¹ David Kilton, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

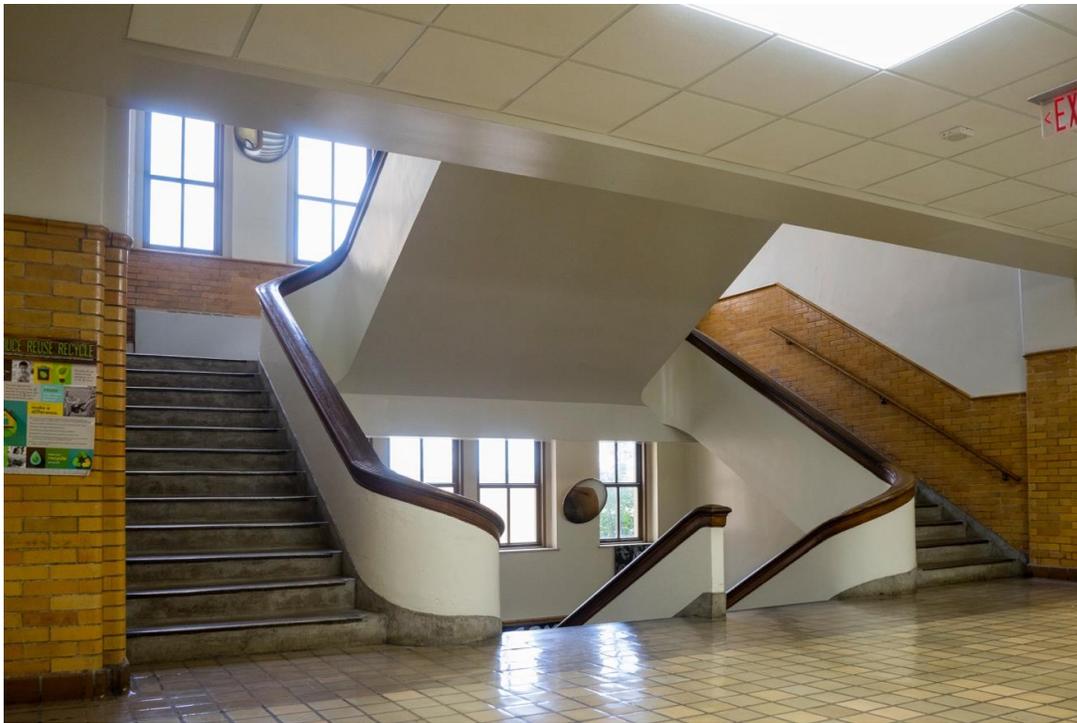


Figure 35: Central High School interior staircase. Photo by the author, 2018.

High School Principal Nancy Rousseau explained that “The kids—the kids at Central are so used to visitors. They’re like pigeons at Central Park,” and she will talk to the tour groups herself on occasion to provide additional perspective (Figure 36).³²

The Park Rangers and interpreters receive training for giving tours from the senior park staff. Laura Miller developed the core script for the tours, initially for the exhibit in the original visitor center, for the school grounds, and then, in the fall of 2000, for the interior of the school. Taronna Armstrong, Central High School NHS’ first Park Ranger, had taken an NPS training program for developing tours, which included guidance on conducting research, identifying goals and objectives for a tour, and then developing a tour template. After entering on duty in 2002 and reporting to Miller, Armstrong was able to support Miller in the refinement of the tours. While the core scripts for the tours have remained intact since 2000, each interpreter is encouraged to develop his or her own tour. The park provides binders containing the accumulated research to the interpreters, who then conduct their own research to develop tours. The interpreters are evaluated twice per year, a process that includes having a senior staff member accompany a public tour to gauge how the interpreter conveys information and engages with the audience.³³

Although the content of these tours remains largely the same, the personal experiences that each visitor brings to the school affects the nature of the tour and its emotional impact. As Lead Park Ranger Jodi Morris described, “every tour is different. Every day is a different

³² Nancy Rousseau, oral history interview, December 11, 2017.

³³ See oral history interviews: Taronna Armstrong, December 13, 2017; Christian Davis, December 13, 2017; Laura Miller, February 16, 2018; Jodi Morris, December 11, 2017.



Figure 36: Central High School Principal Nancy Rousseau. Photo provided by Nancy Rousseau.

challenge. And the context—what’s happening currently—always affects how people are reacting to the history that we’re sharing with them. I wasn’t prepared,” she recalled further,

for the emotional reactions that people have to the site. It’s not unusual, at all, to have visitors in tears, whether it’s in a tour that you’re leading, or they’re listening to one of the interactives in the exhibits. It triggers memories of, maybe, a time that they experienced discrimination or witnessed something happening. . . . Sometimes it’s feelings of guilt for not taking action, for doing something.”³⁴

The tours of the school always conclude with a visit to the Commemorative Garden, across South Park Street from the Visitor Center to allow for a period of quiet contemplation.³⁵

Central High School NHS staff introduced other important interpretive developments in the first few years of operation. In 2003, park staff began conducting weekly summer walking tours of the neighborhood surrounding Central High School and developed three new interpretive programs. These new programs—“2, 4, 6, 8, we ain’t gonna integrate,” “Segregationist Resistance to School Desegregation,” and “Who is Jim Crow?” allowed Central High School NHS interpretive staff to explore various aspects of the story of desegregation at Central High School in different contexts.³⁶ Park staff also produced the first newsletter, *Constitutional Writes*, in the summer of 2003, along with the site’s first bulletin to be distributed to visitors.

³⁴ Jodi Morris, oral history interview, December 11, 2017.

³⁵ See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the Contemplative Garden and the interpretive intent of the creators and funders of the sculptures.

³⁶ Annual Report for 2003; files of Central High School NHS, D-13.

Given the limited size of the original visitor center in the Mobil Gas Station, Central High School NHS staff began collaborating with local and regional groups to provide interpretive programs as early as 2001. These outreach activities included setting up displays for teacher resource fairs, giving talks at professional meetings, and distributing brochures and other information about the site at neighborhood fairs.³⁷ These outreach programs expanded through the next several years to providing tailored programs to other groups. In 2005, for example, the park initiated its relationship with the Joseph Pfeifer Kiwanis Camp, which provides Alternative Classroom Experience programs for economically disadvantaged and at-risk children. Park interpretive and educational staff provided a series of summer programs at the Camp in collaboration with the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Library, Pinnacle Mountain State Park, and the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission.³⁸ The park has maintained its relationship with the Camp, which is directed by Sanford Tollette, current CHMI Board member, and which affords children outdoor experiences such as camping and canoeing. Tollette supports the relationship between the Camp and Central High School NHS, noting that

it's been a place where the dream, for me, of Martin Luther King, when he said, 'I believe, one day we will live—America will live up to its dreams when little black boy and little white boy and little white girl and black girl walk hand-in-hand in the red clay of Georgia.' Then, my life has been committed to they're walking [sic] hand-in-hand in the green grass of Pfeifer Kiwanis Camp. Which, they're walking in the social justice every time we get a chance to do initiatives. .

³⁹

The pace and variety of interpretation outreach programs increased as the 50th anniversary commemoration of 1957 and the opening of the new Visitor Center approached. In 2006, for example, the park collaborated with KUAR Public Radio in Little Rock to produce a series of historical “vignettes.” These vignettes were short, one-minute pieces on various historical topics pertaining to desegregation, which staff prepared and which KUAR aired regularly from September 2006 to September 2007. Park Ranger and Public Information Officer Spirit Trickey recorded the segments, which included clips from oral history interviews conducted under the cooperative agreement with UALR.⁴⁰ In addition, Central High School NHS developed a range of new public programs through 2006 and 2007 in association with the new Visitor Center, which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Much of the park's attention since the opening of the new Visitor Center in the fall of 2007 has focused on developing new partnerships to provide programs and events. These events reflect the park's goal of understanding and relating the significance of the 1957 crisis at Central High School in a broader context, and as applied to topics beyond just public school desegregation. In 2010, the staff initiated a new program that brought together interpretation,

³⁷ See “Central High School National Historic Site Interpretive Report Fiscal Year 2001,” Servicewide Interpretive Report for FY02, Central High School NHS; files of Central High School NHS.

³⁸ Servicewide Interpretive Report for FY05, Central High School NHS; files of Central High School NHS.

³⁹ Sanford Tollette, oral history interview, April 6, 2018.

⁴⁰ Central High School NHS Staff meeting minutes, April 6, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, A40. See also Servicewide Interpretive Report for FY06, Central High School NHS.

education, and public outreach. Central High School NHS staff began developing the Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) in 2009. Superintendent White expressed to the staff that the park needed a youth program, one that appealed to students who were too old for the Junior Ranger Program. She appointed Park Ranger Spirit Trickey to develop the program: “I didn’t tell her how I wanted her to do it. I said ‘We need a youth program.’ And she came up with the YLA.”⁴¹ Trickey was then a graduate at the Clinton School of Public Service in Little Rock, and developed the YLA as her capstone project.

High school students throughout the Little Rock area were invited to apply for the program in late 2009 and early 2010, with the idea that nine students would be chosen for the program, mirroring the Little Rock Nine. The purpose of the program, according to the announcement, was to

involve young leaders at the Historic Site to promote volunteerism, nonviolence, youth empowerment and stewardship for the National Park Service. Our mission is to help develop student leaders, raise consciousness in communities, and encourage creativity in education about civil and human rights. Participants will seek knowledge of themselves and the local and global community, and pass that knowledge on to others as change agents for leadership and nonviolence.⁴²

The first group of YLA students was announced on Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, January 18, 2010 (Figure 37).



Figure 37: Initial class of Youth Leadership Academy, 2010. Photo from *Constitutional Writes*, 2010.

⁴¹ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

⁴² Central High School NHS website: [https://www.nps.gov/Central High School NHS/youth-leadership-academy.htm](https://www.nps.gov/Central%20High%20School%20NHS/youth-leadership-academy.htm).

The program involved the students in the life and mission of Central High School NHS, including workshops, meetings with visiting scholars and dignitaries, and opportunities to volunteer their time at the park. As Park Ranger Spirit Trickey explained in a year-end report, “students have the opportunity to learn about careers in the National Park Service and about student employment programs. The YLA not only provides learning opportunities for young people, it also helps the NPS meet its mandate to recruit and retain a diverse workforce and engage a new generation of leaders. This unique program aims to build responsible young leaders and public servants.”⁴³ Students can remain in the program as long as they are in high school, with some taking part for their entire four years. The program typically recruits new students every one or two years, and has continued from 2010 to the present. All YLA participants serve as volunteers at the park during their terms, and one has continued on to full-time employment with NPS. Fabian Ruiz was a member of the original YLA class, and currently serves as a Park Ranger at Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site (Figure 38).

Long-Range Interpretive Plan

Central High School NHS staff, with DSC and MWRO, began work on a Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) in early 2002, just as work was concluding on the site’s General Management Plan. National Park Service staff conducted workshops with the public, including neighborhood residents, former Central High School students, members of the Little Rock Nine, and subject matter experts, soliciting input on all phases of the plan. The LRIP drew heavily on



Figure 38: Park Ranger and former YLA member Fabian Ruiz. Photo by the author, 2018.

⁴³ Servicewide Interpretive Report for FY10, Central High School NHS; files of Central High School NHS. See also *Constitutional Writes*, Spring 2010; Robin White to Juanita Evangeline Moore, May 24, 2010; files of Central High School NHS, K18.

the still-new GMP, including discussions of the anticipated visitor experiences and management prescriptions. After defining the park's principal interpretive themes and the management prescription areas where these themes would be manifested in a way that would support the park's mission, the LRIP presented a series of recommended actions to be completed over the following decade. The LRIP made clear the importance of interpretation to Central High School NHS and its broader mission: "The interpretive functions of the visitor center are of paramount importance. The park preserves the actual site of events that changed our history and our lives today; yet the site yields none of its significance without effective interpretation."⁴⁴

In its discussion of the park's interpretive themes, the authors of the LRIP referenced the concepts and practices that had been developed by CHMI on the foundational work provided by the UALR Public History program in 1996 and 1997. These themes include the 1957 desegregation crisis, the broader Civil Rights movement, the use of executive power in the enforcement of federal civil rights legislation and Supreme Court decisions, the search for equal rights among various disadvantaged groups, Central High School, and Little Rock and Arkansas. These themes, even those with a singular focus such as the school and the 1957 crisis, have multiple subthemes within them that allow for a wide array of interpretive approaches and programs. During discussions of the interpretation of the 1957 event, for example, one workshop participant suggested that attention could also be paid to "the 44 teachers that were fired for supporting and assisting the Little Rock Nine. And the role of the Women's Emergency Committee." Within the Civil Rights movement, another workshop participant pointed to the role of the news media, both at the time and in shaping the public's understanding of history.⁴⁵

Following the discussion of Central High School NHS' interpretive themes, the LRIP defined the five management prescription areas. Drawing from a similar approach in the GMP, these management prescription areas were the particular places and facilities within and adjacent to the park boundary where the park's mission and interpretive themes could be realized. The discussion of each theme included the types of visitor experiences that would be expected in each and the needs of each space or facility in terms of maintenance and preservation. Three of the management prescription areas were highly structured places, including Central High School, the locations of Visitor Services, Administration, and Operations, and facilities for Interpretation and Visitor Education. The latter two areas included the visitor center in the restored Mobil Gas Station and the proposed new Visitor Center at the northeast corner of West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive and South Park Avenue. Others were non-structured spaces, including the Historic Scene, which encompassed primarily the streetscape surrounding Central High School, and the Contemplative area, which included the Commemorative Garden.

The LRIP concluded with recommendations to be executed over the next decade. These recommendations included completing the new Visitor Center and acquiring and renovating the former Ponder's Drug Store. The recommendations suggested several specific features for the proposed new Visitor Center, such as components of the exhibit, the role of multi-media displays, a research library and media center, a multi-purpose room, and archival storage. With the completion of the Visitor Center, the LRIP continued, the restored Mobil Gas Station should

⁴⁴ *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, 32.

⁴⁵ *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, 7.

become an education center for scheduled groups and oriented toward curriculum-based programs for school groups. For the block of South Park Street facing Central High School, the LRIP presented recommendations for wayside exhibits that would provide passive interpretation supplemented by guided walking tours and brochures.

The original LRIP has not been updated as of the writing of this history. However, Lead Park Ranger Jodi Morris, with the support of Superintendent White, is currently (2018) preparing a draft revised LRIP. Important practical components of the new LRIP, according to Superintendent White, should be a budget increase to allow for hiring a full-time Education Specialist and support for additional MOUs with local, regional, and national organizations to create new programs. In addition, Lead Ranger Morris hopes to look more broadly at Central High School NHS' process of interpretation. She is preparing the new LRIP as a doctoral dissertation, together with an updated Interpretive Training Manual and Education Plan. Centered on the theme of Interpreting Racism, Morris hopes to expand upon the park's practices with audience-centered experiences. In practice, Morris explained, this means "encouraging dialogue, encouraging visitors to speak up, to ask questions," and to elicit personal experiences from the visitors. This includes, she points out, drawing out the personal stories of those who supported segregation. This is a challenging approach, she acknowledges: "how do we interpret their perspective without endorsing discrimination?" Such an approach, she continued, requires "treading very carefully. . .it goes against the dictates of our own agency: we will not discriminate. We will not tolerate our staff or our visitors to be discriminated against or to be harassed because of race or gender or ethnic background or religion. . .and yet, if we are to tell all sides of the story, how do we present that perspective?"

Educational Programs

Superintendent Forney began planning for both interpretation and more formal, curriculum-based educational programs immediately after working to establish relationships with the park's several partners. Central High School NHS staff made initial steps toward developing the site's educational programs as early as 2001 and 2002. By the fall of 2002, Forney had met with LRSD officials to discuss plans for an educational component with Central High School, while Historian Miller began working with a contractor to develop a first draft of the park's educational plan. When Superintendent Mike Madell began work in early 2003, he rapidly accelerated the development of an educational program for the site. In August 2003, he hired Lea Flowers Baker as Central High School NHS' first Educational Specialist. Baker immediately assumed responsibility for completing the draft educational plan while also developing the first two lesson plans. In late 2003, Baker provided to Regional Chief of Interpretation and Education Tom Richter drafts of the park's first two lesson plans: Crisis of Little Rock Central High School, and Daisy Bates. These plans, she noted, had been developed in accordance with guidelines from the Arkansas Department of Education to fit within the United States History Frameworks. She explained to Richter that the park's goal with its educational program was "to begin to tell the story of Little Rock Central High School and the crisis of 1957 from a variety of opinions—students, parents, civil rights leaders in Arkansas and the nation, the governor, the United States Supreme Court, etc. In this manner, we can make sure that all voices are being heard and we have comprehensive interpretation."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Memorandum, Lea Flowers Baker to Tom Richter, December 5, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, K38.

The pace of development accelerated during 2004, as Baker added three more curriculum-based lesson plans by September and continued to work with staff at the Arkansas State Capitol to develop a joint lesson plan. She also introduced the first of a series of workshops for teachers throughout Arkansas in the summer of 2004, which continued for several summers with a defined theme each year. The first year's workshops centered on the theme of government authority and civil rights activism in Arkansas, and the summer 2005 workshops explored depictions of race, gender, and regionalism in movies in the mid- and late twentieth century.⁴⁷ In 2004, also, Baker began work on a new distance-learning program. Central High School NHS partnered with Central High School and with a division of the Nebraska Department of Education, K-Nections, to develop the program. Baker successfully applied for a grant of \$6,105 to purchase the necessary equipment, which allowed park staff to provide educational programs for students through the nation and the world. The distance learning program went online in December 2004.⁴⁸ As of 2016, Central High School NHS offered one distance learning program, suited for grades 6 through 12. This program focused on Little Rock Nine member Elizabeth Eckford, her experiences facing the crowd of protesters alone on September 4, 1957, and the role of the news media in the desegregation crisis.

In the summer of 2004, Education Specialist Baker and Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller began meeting with 9th-grade instructors from the Freshman Academy at Central High School to begin the development of a new curriculum unit that combined civics and the 1957 desegregation crisis. This curriculum, which was funded by a NPS Parks as Classrooms grant, was designed to use the 1957 crisis as the focus of a year-long study of civil rights for 9th grade civics classes, and to connect the Little Rock crisis to efforts by other groups through time to secure civil rights. The curriculum had an oral history component in which the students were required to interview family or community members about their personal experiences regarding race relations or civil rights issues, and it incorporated use of the internet as students were to turn their projects "into web pages for their Civil Rights Memory Project. New interviews and research by each entering freshman class will be added to make this an on-going civil rights project."⁴⁹ The new curriculum, titled "'With Liberty and Justice for All': Making Civil Rights Real in America," was piloted at Central High School during the 2004-2005 school year. In 2006, the program was expanded with three additional lesson plans, and copies of the curriculum were sent to every high school in Arkansas.⁵⁰

One result of this innovative curriculum is what has come to be known as the Memory Project. The foundation of this program is the oral histories which successive classes of 9th grade students at Central High have collected in audio and video form. As part of the oral history assignment, each student is required to write a narrative essay about "particular stories that stick in my mind and why." In the years since the first set of interviews in 2004-2005, a succession of

⁴⁷ See *Constitutional Writes*, Summer 2004 and Summer 2005.

⁴⁸ Annual Report for FY04, files of Central High School NHS, A2621.

⁴⁹ "With Liberty and Justice for All: Making Civil Rights Real in America," curriculum guide, files of Central High School NHS. See also Laura A. Miller to Dr. Morris Holmes, LRSD, April 21, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, K18. Additional information on the creation of the program can be found in the Project Management Information System (PMIS) form, December 28, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, F26.

⁵⁰ Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, MWRO, July 5, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, K18.

interested student-editors have taken on the task of compiling these essays and the supporting oral history interviews. These students launched a website for the Memory Project in 2006 to serve as a clearinghouse for the program, and, in 2009, they edited and published their first book, *Beyond Central, Toward Acceptance*, which included fifty essays written by students in the 9th grade curriculum, together with lesson plans. The book was co-published with the Butler Center Books of Central Arkansas Library System and distributed by the University of Arkansas Press. A second book, with forty-five essays and ten interdisciplinary Common Core lesson plans, was published in 2013 as *Mapping the Road to Change: Insights on Perception, Prejudice, and Acceptance—Oral History Collected by Students of Little Rock Central High*. This program has been featured on local, regional, and national news programs and has received numerous awards. In recent years, members of the Memory Project have interacted with students from throughout the nation and were instrumental in the development and installation of a bench close to Central High School commemorating Elizabeth Eckford's ordeal in 1957 after arriving at the school by herself.⁵¹

Baker continued to develop, or to contract for the development of, additional curriculum-based lesson plans through 2005 and 2006. In 2005, for example, Central High School NHS collaborated with the Southeast Arkansas Educational Service Cooperative, using funds provided by the Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative, to contract with two social studies teachers at Norman Junior High School in Crossett, Arkansas to develop a lesson plan titled "'The Medium is the Message': The Media and Desegregation at Hoxie and Central High School." This lesson plan, along with others created by park staff, was made available free to teachers through the park's web site, which Baker worked to create.⁵²

In addition to these curriculum-based plans, Central High School NHS also created less formal educational opportunities. In 2003, the park established a Junior Ranger program, a standard component at units of the National Park System nationwide. Children between ages nine and twelve who enrolled as Junior Rangers at the park received a booklet with a series of activities designed to provide them with information about Little Rock and the 1957 desegregation crisis. Students who were not able to visit the park in person could instead log on to the internet and sign up as a WebRanger. A Junior Ranger rally on July 24, 2003, at the visitor center kicked off the program; by the end of 2004, nearly 1,300 children had enrolled as Junior Rangers.⁵³ In 2004, meanwhile, the Arkansas Humanities Council awarded Central High School NHS a grant to create a loan box program. The initial loan box focused on life in 1950s America, with boxes sent to schools that had participated in the summer teachers' workshops. The boxes contained "such 1950's artifacts as poodle skirts, Tinkertoys, and issues of *Life* magazine, as

⁵¹ "Chronology of Little Rock Central High's Civil Rights 'Memory Project', 2004-2017; provided to the author by George West, Education Coordinator, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 2018. See also the Memory Project website, <http://lrchmemory.wixsite.com/lrch/student-produced-content>.

⁵² Lea Flowers Baker to John Way, June 22, 2005; R. Michael Madell to Friends and Fellow Educators, June 21, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, K18. For the availability of curriculum guides on the Park's website, see Central High School NHS Staff Minutes, August 19, 2004.

⁵³ *Constitutional Writes*, Summer 2003; see also Annual Report for FY03, FY04; files of Central High School NHS, A2621.

well as information on the 1957 desegregation crisis and posters depicting the upcoming U.S. postage stamp commemorating the Little Rock Nine.”⁵⁴

Education Specialist Baker continued to develop new educational offerings through the summer of 2006, including a lesson plan focused on the Little Rock Nine, titled “Every Person Has a Story: The Little Rock Nine,” which was completed in the winter of 2006. Later that summer, however, Baker resigned her position at Central High School NHS, and, in early September 2006, Amy Garrett entered on duty as the new Education Specialist. Garrett had previously served as a Park Ranger/Education Coordinator at Homestead National Monument of America, Nebraska, where she helped to establish a distance learning program, coordinating also with MWRO in this technology. Her work at Homestead gained her the Freeman Tilden Award for excellence in interpretation and education in 2002.⁵⁵ Garrett arrived barely a year before the new Visitor Center was due to open in 2007, and her focus quickly turned to preparing educational materials associated with the 50th anniversary commemoration. Teacher workshops, she announced in her first column for the park’s newsletter, would focus on the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in light of recent Supreme Court hearings, “as well as look how far we have come and what the future might be.”⁵⁶

Much of 2007 was taken up with preparing for the opening of the new Visitor Center in September. Garrett took part with Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller in planning for the new and expanded exhibits while continuing to develop a lesson plan and lead teachers’ workshops. In addition, however, Garrett developed a new component of the park’s distance learning program. This new program was called the Electronic Field Trip, which Central High School NHS staff developed in coordination with Ball State University and the National Park Foundation and was part of the park’s 50th anniversary commemoration. Taking place on December 4, 2007, the program was titled “Commemorating Courage: The Nine Who Made a Difference” and featured appearances by Little Rock Nine members Ernest Green and Minnijean Brown Trickey. Park Ranger Spirit Trickey served as host for the live, interactive event, during which students from forty-seven states and three foreign countries—Australia, Canada, and Switzerland—visited Central High School via the internet to learn about the 1957 desegregation crisis. Ball State University provided the web platform for the event, which included multiple cameras throughout the building, while subject-matter experts were on hand to answer questions from participating students in real time. Teachers and students had the opportunity to prepare for the program in the preceding months by reviewing lesson plans, videos, interactive games and activities, and tips on the dedicated website for the event.⁵⁷

Education Specialist Amy Garrett continued to develop new lesson plans and curriculum guides through early 2008, when she resigned her position. Superintendent Robin White then

⁵⁴ William D. Baker to Robert Bailey, Director of Arkansas Humanities Council, June 24, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, K18. See also *Constitutional Writes*, Fall-Winter 2004.

⁵⁵ *Constitutional Writes*, Fall 2006.

⁵⁶ *Constitutional Writes*, November 2007.

⁵⁷ *Constitutional Writes*, Winter 2008; see also notice of the event on the Ball State University website, <https://www.bsu.edu/news/articles/2007/11/ball-states-electronic-field-trip-pays-tribute-to-the-little-rock-nine-on-dec-4> (viewed November 27, 2018).

hired Kimble Talley as the new Education Specialist, who entered on duty August 2, 2009.⁵⁸ Talley continued to develop new lesson plans, including two that were developed in association with the Civil War Sesquicentennial in 2010: “Civil War to Civil Rights,” and “Harriet Tubman: Women and the Civil War.” During her tenure as Education Specialist, however, Central High School NHS embarked on a major new initiative, the Civil Rights Teachers’ Institute. Created in 2010, this has become an annual event held during the summer at the park. The first Teachers’ Institute was held from July 18-July 23, 2010, and included two members of the Little Rock Nine—Elizabeth Eckford and Minnijean Brown Trickey—together with Ralph Brodie, the senior class president at Central High School during the 1957 desegregation crisis, Johanna Miller Lewis, and others.⁵⁹ Now known as the Civil Rights Educator Institute, this has become an ongoing program at Central High School NHS and includes travel to civil rights-related sites throughout Arkansas for the participating teachers. This program is one of several professional development opportunities for educators that the park provides, with workshops available throughout the year by appointment. These workshops include “Explore Civil Rights through Service Learning and Oral History,” “Exploring Arkansas History with the National Park Service Online and On Foot,” “Theater Arts and Social Justice using the Central High Story.”⁶⁰

Education Specialist Talley remained at Central High School NHS until 2013, when she transferred to Harpers Ferry Center, West Virginia. The position has remained vacant since then, due primarily to budget constraints. Lead Park Ranger Jodi Morris serves as Acting Education Specialist; she had served as Education Specialist at Arkansas Post National Memorial, Arkansas, prior to entering on duty at Central High School NHS on August 2, 2009. Morris, according to Superintendent White, “is a programmer, and she’s definitely a visionary. She has great ideas, but we have limited resources of staff to implement those ideas.” In addition to adjustments to the budget that would allow the park to have an Education Specialist, Superintendent White also highlighted the need to expand the organizations with which the park can partner through MOUs: “We need more MOUs, Memorandum of Understanding [sic], in place in working with Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, UALR, UCA [University of Central Arkansas], and other higher learning institutions and social justice organizations. That’s what I would like to see happen.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Robin White to Kimble Talley, July 7, 2009; files of Central High School NHS, P72. See also Central High School NHS Staff Meeting Minutes noting lack of an Education Specialist, February 28, 2009; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

⁵⁹ See thank-you letters from Robin White to participants, all dated August 9, 2010; files of Central High School NHS, A8215.

⁶⁰ See list of Professional Development opportunities at the Park on the Park’s website, <https://www.nps.gov/CentralHighSchoolNHS/learn/education/professionaldevelopment.htm> (viewed November 27, 2018).

⁶¹ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017; see also Robin White to Mary Joe (Jodi) Morris, July 17, 2009; files of Central High School NHS, P72.

Chapter 8: Public Outreach and Programming

At Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site (NHS), the National Park Service (NPS) is tasked with helping the public to understand the events of the 1957 Central High School desegregation crisis on its own and in a broader context. In recognition of the fact that NPS would not own the principal resource (the school) or the site's existing visitor center, the enabling legislation for Central High School NHS recommended that the park enter into partnerships with the Little Rock School District (LRSD), Central High Museum, Inc., (CHMI), the City of Little Rock, and others. Once the park was operational with staff on-site beginning in the early 2000s, practical realities required that park staff collaborate with other organizations because the original visitor center had no real meeting spaces for programs. As a result of these inherent limitations, Central High School NHS staff have continued to reach outward to other local and regional groups for ways to collaborate, whether teaming with these groups to create programs or holding events at other venues with larger meeting spaces. Chapter 5 describes the outward reach of the park's staff through formal partnerships and agreement documents with a variety of organizations, and Chapter 7 discusses Central High School NHS' interpretive and curriculum-based educational programs oriented primarily toward the park itself and the issues of race and desegregation in education. This chapter includes a discussion of Central High School NHS' public programs that, while not necessarily tied to the events of 1957, nevertheless allow NPS to interpret the broader meaning of the desegregation crisis by promoting dialog and understanding around the topic of equal rights, civic engagement, and the role of the individual in making a difference.

Central High School Anniversaries

Many of Central High School NHS' public programs took place in conjunction with key anniversaries in the history of the Civil Rights movement. Annual commemorations of the 1957 desegregation crisis are the clearest examples. Such events provide opportunities for public outreach and reinforce the reasons for the park's existence. The event's 30th anniversary was an understated affair led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which arranged for a reunion of the Little Rock Nine at Central High School, and Governor William Clinton made an important statement by hosting the Little Rock Nine at the Governor's Mansion at that time. By contrast, the 40th, 50th, and 60th anniversaries were much larger commemorations, planned for months or years in advance and involving the coordination of local, state, and federal agencies. The commemorations of the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the 1957 event will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 10.

The annual commemoration of the Central High School crisis, aside from the decennial years, together with occasional annual celebrations of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and other civil rights milestones, allowed the park to focus on specific aspects of the broader school desegregation movement in particular and the Civil Rights movement generally. These programs also provided Central High School NHS with additional opportunities to partner with local organizations. In 2002, for example, Central High School NHS coordinated with LRSD to bring Minnijean Brown Trickey, one of the Little Rock Nine, to Central High School for a program as part of the 45th anniversary commemoration of the 1957 crisis. In September 2003, the park collaborated with the MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History in Little Rock

to host a lecture on President Eisenhower's role in the 1957 crisis. In 2004, Central High School NHS partnered with Philander Smith College to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. This program featured a panel discussion among local and national leaders in the Civil Rights movement including Dr. Angelo Ancheta with the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, Christopher Mercer, the former field secretary for the NAACP in Arkansas, and others, to discuss the implications of the decision.¹ Central High School NHS again partnered with Philander Smith College to celebrate the 52nd anniversary of the *Brown v. Board* decision in May 2006, with a series of public lectures that included a talk by John A. Stokes, one of the plaintiffs in an integration lawsuit in Virginia that was one of the cases consolidated into the *Brown v. Board* decision.² For the 50th anniversary of the integration of the schools in Hoxie, Arkansas, in August 2005, meanwhile, the park partnered in sponsoring a screening of a documentary film about the integration of schools there combined with a panel discussion at the Central Arkansas Library in Little Rock.³

In 2005, also, the park initiated its association with Unity in the Community: A Gateway for Humanity, an annual event created by a collaboration of several community groups and houses of worship in Little Rock to celebrate "how far Little Rock has come since the Central High School desegregation crisis."⁴ This commemoration of the 48th anniversary of the Central High School crisis featured a youth workshop on non-violence for social change, led by Minnijean Brown Trickey and her daughter, Park Ranger Spirit Trickey.⁵ Central High School NHS partnered again with Unity in the Community the next year, commemorating the 49th anniversary in 2006 with a screening of the documentary film "Mendez vs. Westminster: For All the Children." This film documented the 1947 decision by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in California to require the end to the forced segregation of Mexican-American students in Orange County, California. The filmmaker, Sandra Robbins, and the child of the plaintiffs, Sylvia Mendez, led a workshop following the showing of the film in the library at Central High School.⁶

Central High School NHS did not hold a 51st anniversary commemoration of the Central High School crisis in 2008, as it was a transition year following the extensive 50th anniversary events in 2007 and with Superintendent Mike Madell being replaced by Superintendent Robin White. In 2009, however, Superintendent White planned a major two-day symposium sponsored by the park and co-hosted by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) and Philander Smith College. Initially conceived as a symposium on racism and politics in the 21st century in late 2008, the emphasis evolved over the spring and summer of 2009 as more speakers accepted Superintendent White's invitations to take part. White invited members of the Little Rock Nine to be involved in the planning, together with members of the local community. The purpose of the event, as White described it in August 2009, "is to provide a forum for addressing issues that

¹ *Constitutional Writes*, Fall-Winter 2004-2005.

² Press Release, April 6, 2006; files of Central High School NHS.

³ See letters of invitation to panel participants from Taronia Armstrong, July 25, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, K18.

⁴ Press Release, September 16, 2005; files of Central High School NHS.

⁵ Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, October 7, 2005 (State Coordinator Report); files of Central High School NHS, L7019.

⁶ News Release, jointly released by Central High School NHS and Unity in the Community; September 19, 2006; files of Central High School NHS.

severely impact our political and economic structure and our educational and family institutions.”⁷

Several members of the Little Rock Nine, together with a number of community leaders, helped plan the symposium, which was held on September 24-25, 2009, and finally titled “Speaking the Truth on Social Issues and Politics in the 21st Century.” The symposium’s day sessions were held at Philander Smith College, with an evening reception at UALR. White recruited a remarkable lineup of speakers, leaders in a variety of fields throughout the nation, including Representative French Hill (R-AR); communications and market research executive Ivan Juzang; the long-time editor of the *Arkansas Times* and founding CHMI Board member Max Brantley; Missouri State Senator Maida Coleman; Little Rock Mayor Mark Stodola; the Medical Director for the University of Arkansas’ Arkansas Minority Health Commission, Dr. Creshelle Nash; Lottie Shackelford, the first woman to serve as Mayor of Little Rock in the 1980s; Kerry Kennedy, the daughter of Robert F. Kennedy and a leading human rights advocate; member of the Arkansas House of Representatives Darrin Williams; economist and film-maker Valerie Red-Horse; and others including Little Rock Nine members Terrence Roberts, Ernest Green, and Carlotta Walls LaNier. White also invited Phoebe Ferguson and Keith Plessy, descendants of the protagonists in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision of 1896, to speak at the event.⁸ As Superintendent Robin White recalled, “all the dialog around [that] made it worthwhile. People were interfacing with each other, and it wasn’t about resentment. It was more about how we can make change. How we can work together.”⁹

In May 2011, Central High School NHS sponsored an extension of this 2009 symposium. This was an “Immersion Experience” aimed at youth, which White defined as “a mobilized civic engagement effort facilitated by the National Park Service to serve the community on a global scale.” Managers within NPS, she explained, are becoming “cognizant of environments beyond park boundaries. National Park Service administrators recognize the need for a culture of progression and innovative methods to engage constituents in building capacity and stewardship.” Central High School NHS coordinated the program with youth and staff from Positive Atmosphere Reaches Kids (PARK), a program in Little Rock that supports at-risk teenagers, together with the City of Little Rock, AmeriCorps, the Joseph Pfeifer Kiwanis Camp, and the park’s Youth Leadership Academy. Featured speakers included NPS Communications and Community Assistance Deputy Director Mickey Fearn, NPS Special Assistant to the Deputy Director Brian D. Joyner, Little Rock Nine member Minnijean Brown Trickey, and Olabisi Olakolade, Director of the International Institute of Positive Education. The event was facilitated jointly by Patrick Oliver, founder of the literary arts program Say It Loud! and Acting Chief of Interpretation Spirit Trickey. The program fostered dialog among the participating students regarding both civic engagement and social justice and offered opportunities for young people to become engaged through NPS.¹⁰

⁷ Robin White to Lottie Shackelford, August 21, 2009; files of Central High School NHS, A8215.

⁸ See notes of acknowledgment to all speakers from Superintendent Robin White, dated October 5, 2009; files of Central High School NHS, A3821. See also Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

⁹ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017; see also *Constitutional Writes*, Summer 2009.

¹⁰ *Constitutional Writes*, Spring 2011.

With Robin White as Superintendent, Central High School NHS continued to hold symposia to commemorate the anniversary of the Central High School crisis, though generally smaller in scale than in 2009. In 2010, for example the park partnered with the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, a museum of the Department of Arkansas Heritage, to hold a one-day symposium titled “Agents of Change: Preserving Our Structures, Our Stories, and Our Communities.” Focused on the role of historic preservation in protecting neighborhoods and communities, the one-day event featured the McDonogh Three (Leona Tate, Tessie Prevost-Williams, and Gail Etienne-Stripling) who, as African American schoolchildren in 1960, integrated an all-white elementary school in New Orleans. As noted in the park’s newsletter, “Local and regional historic preservation experts exchanged a wealth of ideas and experience as to how to preserve our nation’s structures, stories and communities.”¹¹ For the 54th anniversary in 2011, Central High School NHS held a symposium on youth-led projects completed in honor of the Little Rock Nine, titled “9 to the Power of 10: Amplifying Social Justice.”¹²

In 2012, to commemorate the 55th anniversary of the Central High School desegregation crisis, NPS partnered with the Little Rock Film Festival to present The Reel Civil Rights Film Festival from September 21 to September 25. As discussed later in this chapter, the Reel Civil Rights Film Festival was developed by Park Guide Spirit Trickey in 2007. The 6th annual program featured several films and documentaries about civil rights issues in the United States and abroad. At the same time, the park also hosted a one-day symposium on September 22, “Victory Through History: The Power of YOUth!,” which featured guest speakers and film screenings. The overall program concluded on September 25 with an appearance by Harry Belafonte, the internationally acclaimed vocalist and human rights activist in association with a screening of a documentary about him, *Sing Your Song: The Music, Hope and Vision of a Man and an Era*.¹³ The Reel Civil Rights Film Festival continued for four more years. In 2014, in association with the commemoration of the 57th anniversary of the desegregation crisis, the program featured *Home of the Brave*, a documentary about the murder of civil rights activist Viola Liuzzo in 1965; *The New Black*, about the gay rights movement within the black community; *Been Rich All My Life*, a documentary about the Silver Belles, a group of women who had been dancers during the Big Band Era in Harlem; and a feature-length movie, *The Cherokee Word for Water*. The program also included a panel discussion that honored local educators and social activists, with a keynote address by Little Rock Nine member Terrence Roberts, and a series of programs and short movies produced by a collaboration of the Central High School Memory Project and the park’s Youth Leadership Academy. Finally, renowned film director Oliver Stone presented clips from the latest episode of his documentary film series, *The Untold History of the United States*, focusing on the 1950s, after which Stone took part in a moderated panel discussion.¹⁴ In September 2016, Central High School NHS sponsored the Reel Civil Rights Film Festival for the final time, featuring five films: *40 Years Later: Now We Can Talk*, a 2013 film about the integration of White High School in Batesville, Mississippi; *All the Difference*, a 2016 documentary that follows a group of African American young men through

¹¹ See letters to participants from Superintendent Robin White, August 21, 2010; files of Central High School NHS, K18. See also *Constitutional Writes*, Fall 2010.

¹² *Constitutional Writes*, Fall 2010.

¹³ Robin White to Hon. Mike Beebe, August 27, 2012; files of Central High School NHS, K18. See also *Constitutional Writes*, Spring 2012.

¹⁴ See information on the several programs on the website of Little Rock Culture Vulture: <https://lrculturevulture.com/?s=reel+civil+rights+film+festival&submit=Search> (viewed January 15, 2019).

five years; *And Still I Rise*, a documentary about the African American poet and activist Maya Angelou; *The Lost Year*, about the 1958-1959 school year at Central High School; and *The Giants Wore White Gloves*, a documentary about the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, which led the charge to keep Little Rock's schools open during the 1958-1959 school year.

Public Outreach

Central High School NHS has sought to interact with the surrounding city and region from early in its existence. In addition to sponsoring major events such as symposia and conferences, park staff have brought park-related programming to other institutions and organizations in the surrounding area and brought the public to the park for special events. While most of these programs are oriented to Central High School NHS' mission regarding the 1957 Central High School desegregation crisis and its impact on the nation's quest for civil rights, others provided lighter and more family oriented activities.

Early public events were designed in part to introduce the new park to the community. While CHMI's visitor center premiered to great fanfare as part of the larger 40th anniversary commemoration in 1997, NPS began work at the site more gradually, with only three full-time staff through 2002. These three professional staff members—Superintendent, Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources, and Park Ranger—were also occupied during much of this time with developing initial policies and procedures and preparing management and planning documents to lay the foundations for the park's future operations. By 2003, however, with the addition of full-time Education and Administration specialists and part-time student interpretive staff, the staff began to do more to introduce Central High School NHS to the public. In the fall of 2003, for example Park Ranger Taronia Armstrong and Park Guide Spirit Trickey began a new outreach effort preparing interpretive programs to be given at local churches. Starting with the Union African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Little Rock, Armstrong and Trickey provided programs at several churches in the Little Rock area through late 2003 and 2004, bringing with them copies of the newsletter which the park had recently begun to produce, together with sign-up lists for future mailings.¹⁵ Later in 2004, the park also conducted an interpretive program at the McCain Mall in North Little Rock, with a temporary exhibit that lasted for several days.¹⁶

In 2004, also, Central High School NHS began offering a range of summer programs. This included new Ranger-led walking tours of the historic block surrounding Central High School, together with a series of public interpretive talks on topics related to school desegregations throughout the nation.¹⁷ To these events in the summer of 2005, the park added two movie nights at the Sue Cowan Williams Library in Little Rock, showing *The Ernest Green Story* and *Ruby Bridges*.¹⁸ In 2006, the park offered a series of four public lectures on Thursday afternoons at the Visitor Center.¹⁹

¹⁵ Central High School NHS Staff meeting minutes, September 8, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

¹⁶ Central High School NHS Staff meeting minutes, May 25, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

¹⁷ Press Release, June 28, 2004; files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁸ Press Release, June 13, 2005; files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁹ Press Release, Jun 8, 2006; files of Central High School NHS.

During the lead-up to the opening of the new Visitor Center in 2007, Central High School NHS staff initiated a series of new programs aimed at raising the visibility of the park and extending its interpretive outreach to the community. Central High School NHS kicked off the year in February with events to celebrate the Daisy Bates holiday and Black History Month. These included a series of eight programs at various public library branches throughout Little Rock featuring either brief lectures or children's book readings. For the Daisy Bates holiday, the park sponsored a first-person interpretive talk by Sheila Arnold, a character interpreter who portrayed the life of Daisy Bates and discussed Bates' relationship with NAACP, Thurgood Marshall, and the events of the Central High School's desegregation crisis.²⁰

The next month, in March 2007, Central High School NHS organized the first annual Reel Civil Rights Film Festival. Developed and coordinated by Park Guide Spirit Trickey, this was a partnership among the park, the Market Street Cinema in west Little Rock, and the Ozark Foothills Film Fest. The films were shown at the Market Street Cinema, and included *The Ernest Green Story*, *Ruby Bridges*, *Journey to Little Rock: The Untold Story of Minnijean Brown Trickey*, *Hoxie: The First Stand*, *A Time of Fear* (a documentary about the experiences of Japanese Americans who were interned in Arkansas during World War II), and *The Lost Year* (a documentary about the 1958-1959 school year in Little Rock). Two other short documentaries produced by students were shown as well, *Separate But Equal: The Ruling that Changed the Future* and *A Girl Like Me*.²¹ The festival took place over two days, March 10 and 11, 2007. In April, the park held the first of its Ranger-led bicycle tours of sites in Little Rock associated with the 1957 desegregation crisis, including the Daisy Bates Home, the State Capitol, and the Governor's Mansion in addition to Central High School and its neighborhood. Planning for the tour began in the fall of 2006 when park staff identified likely routes, for which the Environmental and Spatial Technology (EAST) lab at Central High School prepared maps. Members of Bicycle Advocacy of Central Arkansas provided safety training to the Rangers who led the tours, which were held through the spring and summer of 2007. The bicycle tours have remained popular events during the spring and summer months: in 2009, the bicycle tour focused on the Trail of Tears and included discussions of American Indian rights, with a tour on the Arkansas River Trail.²² Bicycle tours remained a component of the park's interpretation and public programs each spring until at least 2016, when four seven-mile tours were announced on Saturdays in March and April; by that time, however, the park was seeking volunteers to lead the bicycle tours.

Central High School NHS staff gained experience from hosting this series of events in the months leading up to the 50th anniversary commemoration in 2007 and have expanded upon them in the years since with year-round slates of public events. The pace of events increased substantially in 2009. Many centered on cultural expressions including additional film screenings and live performances in addition to lectures and book signings. The 3rd Annual Reel Civil

²⁰ Press Release, January 20, 2007; files of Central High School NHS.

²¹ <https://www.arkansas.com/little-rock-central-high-desegregation-crisis-50th-anniversary-events-sidebar> (viewed December 7, 2018); *Constitutional Writes*, Winter 2007.

²² Central High School NHS Staff meeting minutes, September 20, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, A40. See also Press Releases: April 5, 2007; May 16, 2007; and "Little Rock Central High School Operations Evaluation," 13.

Rights Film Festival took place over two days in February 2009, and additional films pertaining to civil rights topics such as women’s rights, Japanese American internment in WWII, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) issues, desegregation for Hispanic Americans, and hip-hop music and culture, were screened nearly every month throughout the spring and summer. In April 2009, park staff organized the first annual Spoken Word Live! Program, at which young poets presented their work. The top finalists presented their original work at a “poetry slam” at the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, for which the park partnered with the Arkansas Literacy Festival, the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, and Power 92 Jamz radio station.²³

Such wide-ranging public programs have become among the principal activities of Central High School NHS in recent years, in addition to Ranger-led tours of the exhibits and Central High School. As described in Chapter 4, the park regularly partners with community groups to sponsor, or co-sponsor, programs throughout Little Rock. Such programs have included panel discussions, in September 2016, on the Black Lives Matter movement, featuring prominent activist Shaun King, which the park co-sponsored with Philander Smith College, and, in February 2017, with three African American women journalists—Lillie Fears, La’Keisha Gray-Sewell, and Janis Kearney—about the legacy of Daisy Bates. Central High School NHS also continues to organize and sponsor the screening of films that pertain to the quest for civil rights, such as the October 2017 screening of the documentary film by Ava DuVernay, *13th*, which explores the intersection of race, justice, and mass incarceration in the United States.

In creating or sponsoring such programs, Central High School NHS staff have worked to expand and fully realize the mission of the park as originally created. This mission focuses on the Central High School crisis specifically but also “its role in the integration of public schools and the development of the Civil Rights movement in the United States.” The broader purpose of NPS in Little Rock is to expand its message from the struggle by children to attend a public school in 1957 to explore the larger search for full participation in the nation’s social, political, cultural, and economic life. The National Park Service has the opportunity to be a leader in the full expression of citizenship in the face of a range of obstacles and to promote dialog and engagement in the present on the basis of its charge to interpret the history of the 1957 desegregation crisis at Central High School. This is, according to Superintendent Robin White, “a world-wide story, and it belongs to everyone. . . . I strongly felt that it’s relevant, and it can connect to every group of people that has been in a struggle. It’s not only a black or African-American story. This is an international story. This is America’s story. And so, I had to look at ways in which we could make the story relevant beyond the community.”²⁴

Little Rock Nine

The nine African American students who so bravely integrated Central High School in 1957—Melba Pattillo, Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Gloria Ray, Carlotta Walls, Thelma Mothershed, Terrence Roberts, and Jefferson Thomas—were strong supporters of the creation of the park, and the eight that survive (Jefferson Thomas died in 2010) have remained engaged both individually and through the Little Rock Nine Foundation which they

²³ Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, 2009 Ranger Program Calendar of Events; files of Central High School NHS.

²⁴ Robin White, oral history interview, December 12, 2017.

created in 1999. The Little Rock Nine, both collectively and individually, were supportive of events sponsored by Central High Museum, Inc. Elizabeth Eckford frequently took part in CHMI Board meetings, and, in 1999, she donated her Congressional Gold Medal, which she and the other Little Rock Nine were awarded by President William Jefferson Clinton, to the Central High Museum, Inc.²⁵ Ernest Green, meanwhile, agreed to attend a reunion of the Central High School Class of 1958 sponsored by CHMI, and Minnijean Brown Trickey served on the CHMI Board beginning in 2003.

The Little Rock Nine have taken part in events surrounding many of the anniversaries of the 1957 crisis, particularly the 40th Anniversary which coincided with the opening of the Central High Museum in the restored Mobil Gas Station, the 50th Anniversary which included the opening of the current Visitor Center, and the 60th Anniversary event in 2017.²⁶ Superintendent Madell provided the Little Rock Nine with regular updates on events at Little Rock Central High School NHS during the early 2000s. As the 2007 commemoration approached, he regularly communicated with the group, providing updates on planning and soliciting advice for the commemoration event and for the planned exhibits in the new Visitor Center. As he stated in a 2005 joint letter to the Little Rock Nine, “We are honored that Congress has trusted the National Park Service to be stewards of the stories and resources associated with the Little Rock Nine, equal opportunity in education, and the Civil Rights movement. We are committed to doing our part to ensure that those stories and resources are preserved in perpetuity, so that many future generations remember, learn, and grow from your experience.”²⁷

Other events in the early years of Central High School NHS afforded opportunities for NPS to cement its relationship with the Little Rock Nine. In 2003, the United States Postal Service (USPS) announced plans to issue a series of stamps commemorating important events and people associated with the Civil Rights movement. Regional Director Ernest Quintana wrote to the Citizens’ Stamp Advisory Committee to urge the Committee to recommend to the Postmaster General that Little Rock Central High School be included as part of the series. The school, he argued, “is a grand symbol of the end of racially segregated schools in the United States. . . . The admission in 1957 of nine black students to Central High School attracted national and international attention, and was the first fundamental test of the nation’s resolve to enforce black civil rights in the face of significant public defiance.”²⁸ The USPS selected ten milestones in the Civil Rights movement for the stamp series, which was titled *Form a More Perfect Union*, including the Little Rock Nine on behalf of the Central High School desegregation crisis, together with the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Freedom Riders, the Greensboro, North Carolina, lunch counter sit-ins, the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott, the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, Executive Order 9981, which led to the end of segregation in the nation’s armed forces, and the 1963 March on Washington. The image for the stamp commemorating the Little Rock Nine was a

²⁵ Letter from Ronnie A. Nichols, CHMI Board Member, to Virgil Miller and Laurel [sic.] Miller, November 19, 1999; UALR Administrative History files, in files of Central High School NHS.

²⁶ Chapter 10 provides information about the 50th and 60th anniversary commemorations of the 1957 desegregation crisis.

²⁷ Michael Madell, NPS, individual letters to each of the Little Rock Nine, September 21, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, K14.

²⁸ Ernest Quintana to Ron Robinson, April 17, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, A82.

painting titled “America Cares” by George Hunt, an artist based in Memphis, Tennessee.²⁹ The stamps were officially released on August 30, 2005, with public events at eight locations including the grounds of Central High School. Staff from the park participated in the event, together with several members of the Little Rock Nine including Melba Patillo Beals, who was identified as the official contact for the Little Rock Nine.³⁰

On the same day, August 30, 2005, the Little Rock Nine also participated in the unveiling of a statuary group on the grounds of the Arkansas State House. The group features a life-sized bronze statue of each of the nine, all walking together toward the State House (Figure 39). The statuary group, titled Testament, was created by Little Rock artists John and Kathy Deering, who received funding from the Arkansas State legislature for the project. The Deerings created full-sized clay models around steel frames which were then shipped to a bronze foundry in New Mexico for casting of the figures. While members of the park staff participated in the unveiling, NPS had no formal role in the event or the sculptural group.³¹



Figure 39: Little Rock Nine sculptural group, Arkansas State House grounds. Photo by the author, 2018.

²⁹ *Constitutional Writes*, Winter 2006.

³⁰ See schedule for first day of issue in eight locations, August 26, 2005, attached to letter, Etta Smith to Michael Madell, October 26, 2005; files of Central High School NHS.

³¹ *Constitutional Writes*, Winter 2006; <https://www.arkansas.com/impressive-sculpture-memorial-honors-little-rock-nine> (viewed December 10, 2018).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Congress, in 2005, approved the creation of a commemorative silver dollar recognizing the achievements of the Little Rock Nine (Figure 40). Surcharges from the sales of these coins were provided to Central High School NHS to fund improvements and interpretive programs. The park partnered with the Little Rock Nine, the United States Mint, NAACP, and Central High School to hold a first day of issue ceremony on May 19, 2007, in the Central High School Auditorium. The event coincided with a meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Little Rock, which sponsored a panel discussion as part of the 7th Biennial Daisy Bates Education Summit.³² A set of coins had been delivered to the park in advance of the program and were available for sale through the Jefferson National Parks Association at the event.³³



Figure 40: Little Rock Central High School Commemorative Coin.

In addition, individual members have participated in several events in which Central High School NHS was either a sponsor or another participant, making themselves available to students at Central High School and elsewhere and to visitors from around the world (Figure 41). Ernest Green, for example, participated in the 52nd anniversary commemoration in 2009 that provided a forum for community members and subject matter experts to discuss topics on social issues and politics. Terrence Roberts served as the moderator for the 53rd anniversary symposium, “Agents of Change Preserving Our Structures, Our Stories, and Our Communities” in 2010. Elizabeth Eckford has taken part in numerous events and commemorations including the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Bus Rides in 2011. Minnijean Brown Trickey, whose daughter Spirit Trickey served as a Park Ranger and Chief of Interpretation at the park, has also supported the park by participating in numerous interpretive programs. While the remaining members of the Little Rock Nine continue to support the park, they have, in recent years, limited their public appearances, both generally and at the park. Their most recent appearance was at the 60th anniversary event in September 2017.

³² Press Release, May 17, 2007; files of Central High School NHS.

³³ Central High School NHS Staff meeting minutes, May 10, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A40.



Figure 41: Little Rock Nine Members Carlotta Walls LaNier, Jefferson Thomas, and Thelma Mothershed Wair (L-R) speaking at UALR's Brown v. Board class. Photo from *Constitutional Writes*, 2004.

This generosity on the part of the Little Rock Nine to participate in such wide-ranging events is a continuation of the civic engagement they first showed in 1957. Particularly in the two decades since Central High School NHS was created, the Little Rock Nine have served as ambassadors of courage, social justice, and reconciliation. The National Park Service staff at Little Rock Central High School NHS, in their efforts to interpret the events of the 1957 desegregation crisis and its meanings in a variety of ways, have relied on the example set by the continuing willingness of the Little Rock Nine to tell their story.

Chapter 9: Visitor Center

As the National Park Service (NPS) began planning to commence operations of the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site (NHS) after it was designated by Congress in late 1998, it was almost universally recognized that the existing visitor facilities were inadequate. Because Central High Museum, Inc., (CHMI) had renovated the former Mobil Gas Station in 1997 and completed the exhibits, NPS was relieved of the need to create a Visitor Center immediately. During its first three years of operating the visitor center, CHMI staff provided interpretive services to approximately 16,000 people per year, including school groups, scheduled tours, and drop-in visitors. The existing facilities were strained even at this level, however, and larger tour groups often had to tour the building in shifts. Once the site had been designated a National Historic Site, however, it would receive much greater publicity, and early planning efforts projected a tripling of the number of people who would visit the site within the first decade of operation. The visitor center in the Mobil Gas Station, as valuable as it was to allow NPS time to plan its operations, would not suffice for such a large attendance every year.

Although initial planning efforts hinted at the long-term inadequacy of the existing visitor center, it was not immediately clear that NPS planned to build a new building. Given the uncertainty over the exact mission of the proposed park and the nature of its operations, both stakeholders and NPS planners who prepared the initial Special Resource Study in 1998 entertained several possibilities. Indeed, the Special Resource Study included no firm recommendation that NPS assume management of the existing visitor center; this, the authors recommended, would be best determined through the General Management Plan (GMP) process. While the authors of the Special Resource Study envisioned the likelihood of a substantially greater demand for access to the existing visitor center, they identified a range of options for providing visitor center services including adaptively using an existing nearby building, leasing space in a neighborhood building, and building a new administrative facility to provide “support functions for visitor use.” Such a building, which, the report suggested, could be built on “two vacant properties across the street from the school,” was just one possibility. According to the writers of the Special Resource Study, “The potential for a commemorative garden, an expanded visitor center, and an institute on interracial relations would be examined in the future.”¹

At the outset of the GMP process, in the spring of 1999, a new Visitor Center was, therefore, just one of several possibilities discussed during a scoping session. The CHMI Board had already begun planning for its proposed Commemorative Garden at the vacant lot on the northwest corner of West 14th Street (now Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive) and South Park Street, so this lot became a fixed point in all discussions of potential facilities and operational schemes. Of the three concept drawings created by NPS planners in May 1999 showing how Central High School NHS’ interpretive program might look, only one included a new Visitor Center in its current location; the other two called for parking at this site. As late as spring of 2000, moreover, while a new Visitor Center was an active point of discussion, it had not yet emerged as part of the preferred alternative. Public meetings for the GMP in April 2000 considered the possibility of a larger Visitor Center, either a new building or an enlargement of the existing Mobil Gas Station. In either event, those who attended the meetings acknowledged the need to have the

¹ *Special Resource Study of Central High School* (August 1998), 30, 41.

larger space be architecturally compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.² In July 2000, the second issue of the park's newsletter designed to provide information on the GMP process identified the need for a "well-defined single point of arrival, welcome, and site orientation," though not yet defining that as a new building. Instead, the possibilities included renovating the former Ponder's Drug Store, expanding the existing visitor center in the Mobil Gas Station, and building a new museum at the location of the current Visitor Center.³

By late 2000, however, NPS had developed a preferred alternative for the GMP that included the construction of a new building at the location of the current Visitor Center. This recommendation was driven largely by the need to provide additional interpretive services and to accommodate an expected visitor load that went beyond the capacity of the existing visitor center in the Mobil Gas Station. Although an initial review of the first draft by the National Park Service's Washington Office questioned the need for a new Visitor Center, the recommendation remained within the preferred alternative when the Final GMP was approved in the summer of 2002.⁴

Site Preparation and Acquisition

Even before the GMP was finalized, with the recommendation to build a new Visitor Center at the northeast corner of West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive and South Park Street, NPS began investigating the site for possible acquisition. The first step was a Pre-Acquisition Environmental Site Assessment Survey, which Versar, Inc., conducted under contract to NPS. The survey report was based on a study of real estate transactions of the property, research to identify historical land uses of the site, and interviews with people who had direct knowledge of the site. The property was then owned by Capitol Wholesale Florists, Inc., and had been used historically for greenhouses and an associated showroom and warehouse buildings; a two-story house had also been located at the corner as late as 1995. Only foundations remained of the warehouse and showroom buildings, which had burned in a fire in 1989; the house and its foundation had been removed by 2002. Although the survey did not include soil investigations, the likelihood that fertilizers and pesticides were in the warehouse at the time of the fire, together with the presence of asbestos-containing floor tiles on the remaining portions of foundations, were points of concern for the environmental safety of the site.⁵ However, the results of the Pre-Acquisition Survey did not indicate the presence of high levels of contaminants.

² Little Rock Central HS Public Comments, Newsletter 32, April 26, 2000; computer-generated document in files of Central High School NHS, D18.

³ Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Newsletter 2, July 2000; files of Central High School NHS, D18.

⁴ See undated Memorandum, Associate Director, Professional Services to Regional Director, MWRO [2001]; files of Central High School NHS, D18. "Clearly a visitor center is essential for interpretive purposes at this site since we cannot use the primary structure, the school. However, despite all the visitation statistics cited, it is not clear the Magnolia Mobil Service Station is too small."

⁵ *Final Report: Level I Pre-Acquisition Environmental Site Assessment Survey, Central High School National Historic Site* (Versar, Inc., March 1, 2001); files of Central High School NHS, 01-102, Kathryn J. Burke et al. According to the report, interviewees included Wayne Burke, the owner of Capitol Wholesale Florists, Inc.

In the spring of 2002, with the draft GMP completed that included a recommendation to purchase the northeast corner lot at West Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive and South Park Street, the Midwest Regional Office (MWRO) began discussions with the property owner, Wayne Burke. With permission of Burke, Acting Regional Chief of Land Resources Barney Olson executed a Right-of-Entry for Survey and Exploration in late June 2002, and Realty Specialist Dewayne Prince began contracting for a Level II Environmental Site Assessment.⁶ The Level II survey, which was completed in early 2003, confirmed the presence of both pesticides and asbestos tiles and recommended further investigations with a Level III study.⁷ The Level III study, completed by the early summer of 2003, recommended remediation of the soils in the northeast tract due to small amounts of pesticides.⁸ Superintendent Mike Madell coordinated with Regional Environmental Specialist Randy Correll to arrange for the environmental remediation. Correll recommended pursuing remediation under the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfields Program and contacted a representative of the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality in late August 2003 to initiate the consultation.⁹

The National Park Service contracted for an appraisal of the property in the summer of 2003, and, in October 2003, made an offer to the owner of the site to purchase the 1.3-acre tract. The offer was for the full appraised value of \$115,000 subject to the availability of federal funds and the completion of an Environmental Site Assessment Survey.¹⁰ In a meeting with the CHMI Board in April 2003, Superintendent Mike Madell noted that \$130,000 had been appropriated for purchase of the property through a Congressional add-on.¹¹ This purchase offer allowed NPS to participate in the Voluntary Clean-up Program under Arkansas Brownfields Program which, in turn, allowed NPS to proceed with acquisition of the site.¹² The MWRO and the owners of the property continued negotiations through the winter of 2003-2004 while Terracon, Inc., prepared the Brownfields Assessment. Negotiations were completed by April 2004, and the sale of the property was completed on May 20, 2004, for the appraised value of \$115,000.¹³

Terracon, Inc., completed the Brownfields Assessment in May 2004, which determined that only the shallow soils showed evidence of contamination by a pesticide at levels below the threshold for industrial uses but slightly above the threshold for residential uses. Additionally, the Brownfields Assessment stated that asbestos-containing floor tiles remained at the site and

⁶ Alfred M. Suarez to Kathryn Burke, March 28, 2002; Barney Olson to Wayne Burke, June 224, 2002; files of Central High School NHS, 01-102, Kathryn J. Burke et al. See also CHMI Board minutes, June 27, 2002; files of Central High School NHS, A42.

⁷ Memorandum, Chief, Land Resources, MWRO to Regional Director, MWRO, February 12, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, 01-102, Kathryn J. Burke et al.

⁸ Memorandum, Chief, Land Resources, MWRO to Acting Regional Director, MWRO, July 8, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, 01-102, Kathryn J. Burke et al.

⁹ Randy Correll to Chris Hemann, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, August 25, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, 01-102, Kathryn J. Burke et al.

¹⁰ Alfred Suarez to Wayne E. Burke, October 16, 2003; Amanda Gregory, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality to R. Michael Madell, January 14, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, 01-102, Kathryn J. Burke et al.

¹¹ CHMI Board minutes, April 17, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, A42.

¹² Alfred Suarez to Wayne E. Burke, October 16, 2003; Amanda Gregory, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality to R. Michael Madell, January 14, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, 01-102, Kathryn J. Burke et al.

¹³ Alfred M. Suarez to Laura L. Show, Beach Abstract and Guaranty Company, April 22, 2004; Warranty Deed, between Kathryn J. Burke et al. and the United States of America, May 20, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, 01-102, Kathryn J. Burke et al.

should be properly disposed.¹⁴ Terracon then conducted the remediation in early 2005, consisting of excavating and removing the top three feet of soil in two discrete portions of the property.¹⁵ This completed the remediation of the site and paved the way for site preparation in advance of construction.

In addition to a study of hazardous materials at the site, NPS arranged for an archeological survey of the northeast corner lot in the autumn of 2003. Central High School NHS contracted with the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC) to conduct the survey, which took place September 15-18, 2003 (Figure 42). With support from Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller, MWAC documented the site through historical research and geophysical surveys including the use of ground-penetrating radar and magnetic gradiometer. The historical research undertaken by the MWAC team indicated that the site had been developed extensively, primarily for nurseries and greenhouses, from the 1890s until a fire burned the facilities in the late 1980s. As a result, the site had seen extensive ground disturbance for more than a century by the time of the survey, a conclusion which was verified by the ground-penetrating radar: “the lot has been subject to significant ground disturbance from multiple construction events, architectural expansion, underground utility installation, and activities associated with the commercial operation. Residential activities also contributed to the ground disturbance, though presumably to a lesser degree.” The MWAC archeologists noted only two areas of concern: a possible foundation remaining beneath the surface that could be associated with early greenhouse operations, and the area surrounding the former residence at the southwest corner of the lot, where early historical materials may still exist. The MWAC archeologists recommended no further archeological work for most of the lot, but also recommended that no construction take place at the former residential area at the southwest corner of the lot because of the high potential for intact archeological deposits.¹⁶

Funding

While the acquisition of the site was accomplished through a Congressional add-on, the design and construction of the new building required additional Congressional effort and negotiations. Shortly after he arrived at the park, Superintendent Mike Madell began discussions with the state’s Congressional delegation and state political leaders regarding the new building. He was aware that “with the 50th Anniversary coming in 2007. . .the country and the world would be looking at Little Rock, that Central High would be under a media microscope and there would be substantially increased visitation during the commemoration of the anniversary.” His approach with the political leaders, as he recalled, was to provide “lots of pictures of school groups that were there where the old exhibit gallery was literally just blanketed with people and impressed on them the importance of this to the community as well as to the Park Service.” Madell also pointed out to the Congressional delegation and state leaders, in response to requests for information, that disinvestment had occurred in the neighborhood in recent years, “and that

¹⁴ *Comprehensive Site Assessment Report: Brownfields Assessment for National Park Service Central High School National Historic Site Visitor Center* (Terracon, May 2004).

¹⁵ David Hopkins and Merrick Rotenberry to Dave Ciaccio, Report of Excavation of Contaminated Soil at National Park Service—Central High School National Historic Site, May 12, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

¹⁶ Ann C. Bauermesiter and William J. Hunt, Jr., *Archeological Geophysical Surveys at Central High School National Historic Site, Little Rock, Arkansas* (National Park Service-Midwest Archeological Center, 2004).



Figure 42: MWAC Archeologist Ann Bauermeister speaks to Central High School students at future site of Visitor Center. Photo from *Constitutional Writes*, 2004.

this new facility could be used as leverage to catalyze reinvestment in additional growth in that neighborhood.”¹⁷

Madell’s efforts at providing information to members of Arkansas’ Congressional delegation began to pay off later in 2003 and early 2004. As early as October 2003, the Lieutenant Governor of Arkansas wrote to President George W. Bush to request his support for funds for a new Visitor Center, then estimated to cost \$5.3 million.¹⁸ In early 2004, staff for both Senator Mark Pryor and Senator Blanche Lincoln contacted Superintendent Madell to determine what would be necessary to have a new Visitor Center in operation by September 2007, the time of the 50th anniversary of the 1957 crisis. In his response to both Senators, Madell noted that a Senate request for \$267,000 in pre-planning funds during the FY04 budget cycle had been removed during a Senate conference committee pending an analysis of the anticipated level of visitor services. Madell explained that Central High School NHS had since completed the analysis, which indicated the need for a facility of approximately 10,000 square feet. This, he noted, was similar to the size recommended in the GMP, on the basis of which a cost estimate in 2002 estimated a cost of just over \$5 million. By 2004, however, with inflation, the cost to build a Visitor Center of that size was estimated at \$5,824,000, including the building, exhibits,

¹⁷ Michael Madell, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁸ Lt. Governor Win Rockefeller to President George W. Bush, October 13, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, A34.

audiovisual equipment, outdoor wayside exhibits, landscaping, parking, and other incidental features. The new Visitor Center could be completed in time for the 50th anniversary commemoration, Madell concluded, if both design and construction funds were provided in FY05, and if the facility was constructed using a design-build approach to accelerate the schedule.¹⁹

As Madell recalled later, however, NPS “typically doesn’t do that so it would have been very outside the box and that idea wasn’t accepted.” In response to queries from the staff of Representative Vic Snyder (D-AR) in the early spring of 2004, Madell explained that a proposed initial appropriation in the FY05 budget of \$400,000 would allow for pre-planning the facility, including environmental compliance, archeological surveys, schematic design, and preliminary exhibit development. With regard to pre-planning, however, Madell pointed out that “We are ahead of the curve at Central High. Much of the work noted above already has been completed,” including environmental compliance and remediation. Madell foresaw no difficulties in obligating the \$400,000 in pre-planning funds, but it was the larger design and construction funding that concerned him: “I must also point out that a new visitor center for Central High School National Historic Site currently is not prioritized through the National Park Service’s nationwide five-year line item program.” He hoped that, with the recent completion of the visitor services analysis, which justified the required size of the new facility, it would be included in a renewed nationwide priority list.²⁰

Unfortunately, the Senate Appropriations Committee in the spring of 2004 did not include the pre-planning funding in the Interior Appropriations Act as expected. As Senator Lincoln noted in informing Superintendent Madell, however, the committee did include language directing NPS to consider the need for a new Visitor Center. She also promised that she would work to secure earmarks that would allow for the full funding of the new Visitor Center.²¹ Arkansas’ Congressional delegation then worked diligently through the summer and fall to build support for a new Visitor Center at the park. In early September 2004, Senator Pryor introduced Senate Resolution 420, with Senator Lincoln as co-sponsor, which asked Congress to fully fund the \$5.8 million for design and construction of the new Visitor Center so that it could be open in time for the 50th Anniversary commemoration. Representative Elijah Cummings (D-MD), on behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus and with the support of Representative Vic Snyder, introduced a sister bill in the House of Representatives in September also. They were unable to secure support to fund the entire project under a design-build concept. In late September and early October 2004, however, Senator Conrad Burns, Chairman of the Senate Interior Subcommittee and Senator Byron Dorgan, ranking member of the Senate Interior Subcommittee, made arrangements to include \$733,000 in the Interior Appropriations bill to provide for the design phase of the new Visitor Center.²² This funding was then included in the sprawling FY05 Omnibus Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-447), which President George W. Bush signed on

¹⁹ R. Michael Madell to Hon. Mark Pryor, February 10, 2004; letter of same date to Hon. Blanche Lincoln; files of Central High School NHS, D22. See also Madell, oral history interview.

²⁰ R. Michael Madell to Hon. Vic Snyder, March 31, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, D22.

²¹ Blanche L. Lincoln to Michael Madell, June 9, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, D22.

²² *Congressional Record-Senate* (October 5, 2004), S10460; see also email, Michael Madell to Jan Lee et al. containing the text of Senate Resolution 420 as sponsored by Senator Pryor and Senator Lincoln; files of Central High School NHS, W18.

December 8, 2004.²³ While not what Madell had hoped for, he recalled that the park would need to “proceed [with design and planning] basically just on a good faith effort that the construction money would be forthcoming the next year.”²⁴

The appropriation of \$733,000 in FY05 allowed the initial planning and design work to go forward through the winter and spring of 2004-2005. The Arkansas Congressional delegation then worked to secure the \$5.1 million that was needed for construction of the facility. Construction work would have to begin in 2006 for the new Visitor Center to be open, with exhibits intact, by September 2007. Senators Lincoln and Pryor, together with Representatives Marion Berry, Vic Snyder, John Boozman, and Mike Ross, sought to include several Arkansas projects in the FY06 Interior Appropriations Bill. The Conference Report for the Interior Appropriations Bill contained more than \$14 million in projects in the state, including fully funding the new Little Rock Central High School NHS Visitor Center for \$5.1 million.²⁵ The bill was introduced in the House of Representatives as H.R. 2361. After passing through the House and the Senate, President George W. Bush signed the bill into law on August 2, 2005, as P.L. 109-54.

Planning and Design

While Central High School NHS staff had been informally planning the Visitor Center, the space that it would require, and the kinds of exhibits and programs that it would house, since the GMP planning process from 2000 to 2002, the formal process of planning and constructing the new Visitor Center began in the fall of 2003 in anticipation of funding. Superintendent Madell submitted documentation for the NPS’ Facilities Planning Models Questionnaires to the Washington, D.C. Office (WASO) Construction Management Division in November 2003. Madell’s documentation consisted of responses to three separate questionnaires, each with a different assumption: that the park would have a visitor center and administrative office in the same facility, that the park would have a visitor center without administrative office in the same facility, and that the park would have a separate administrative office facility. As Madell noted, the questionnaire that assumed a separate administrative facility would be built also assumed that the former Ponder’s Drug Store building would be used, since the FY03 budget included funds to purchase it. As for the Visitor Center facility itself, Madell assumed an annual peak visitation of 56,500, and he argued that the building needed space for rotating exhibits, an on-site classroom, curatorial collections storage, and a library. In addition, Madell argued for extra space for interpretation: “The stories of school desegregation, civil rights, Federalism vs. states’ rights, etc. are highly complex. Visitors cannot gain true appreciation for these stories by simply viewing the exterior of the high school or by taking a ranger led tour through its halls or through the neighborhood. We believe,” he concluded, “that the space we need to tell our stories may be

²³ See Press Release from office of Senator Pryor, November 22, 2004, attached to email from Michael Madell to Jan Lee et al., February 2, 2005; files of Central High School NHS.

²⁴ Michael Madell, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

²⁵ Senate Report 109-80, June 10, 2005; House of Representatives, Conference Report 109-188, July 26, 2005, both to accompany H.R. 236; see also Press Release from Senator Lincoln, July 29, 2005, attached to email, Michael Madell to Patty Rooney et al., July 29, 2005; files of Central High School NHS.

larger than would typically be necessary for parks of our general size and nature.”²⁶ These questionnaires allowed NPS to place the new Visitor Center on its five-year prioritization list.

Much of 2004 was spent finalizing the purchase of the property, including coordinating the environmental remediation of the site and waiting for funding to begin work on the building itself. When Congress included planning funds for the new site in the FY05 Omnibus Appropriations Act, Central High School NHS had the approval to move forward. Midwest Region contracting officers coordinated with park staff and moved quickly to secure both a lead architect and an exhibit designer in early 2005. By late January 2005, NPS had awarded a contract in the amount of \$425,000 for the architectural design to AJC Architects, based in Salt Lake City, Utah. In early February, NPS selected Quatrefoil Associates, Inc., of Laurel, Maryland under an IDIQ contract through the Harpers Ferry Center (HFC), for a contract amount of \$258,000.²⁷ Quatrefoil had previously designed the exhibits in the original visitor center for CHMI. The Denver Service Center provided overall project management related to the planning, design, and construction of the building, while HFC assisted in the project management of the exhibits.²⁸

The spring of 2005 proved to be a rush of activity, with the first step being to plan and hold a Visioning Workshop. In early February 2005, Central High School NHS began planning for the public meeting and invited community representatives, stakeholders, and the Little Rock Nine to attend the public meeting which was held in downtown Little Rock on March 1. Representatives from AJC Architects and Quatrefoil Associates took part in the meeting, which was designed to solicit input from the community and from potential users of the new Visitor Center. As Superintendent Madell explained, “It is important for us to understand the community’s hopes and expectations for the center.” Topics included integrating the new building with the historic neighborhood, identifying the particular stories related to the desegregation crisis that should be addressed, making the Visitor Center an inviting facility, and creating personal understandings of the importance and relevance of civil rights.²⁹

Another major step occurred the next month, when AJC Architects hosted a Value Analysis workshop in their Salt Lake City office. Attended by Central High School NHS and MWRO staff and its consultants, this workshop was planned to evaluate three preliminary design alternatives that included designs for both the building and the exhibits. This process, which was developed in the late 1990s in the private sector and was adopted quickly by NPS, promotes an

²⁶ Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Associate Regional Director, Professional Services, Midwest Region, November 13, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, D22. In her oral history interview on February 16, 2018, Laura Miller recalled discussions with NPS officials regarding the needs for interpretive space in the new Visitor Center; when NPS planners pointed out how little time the average visitor spends in a visitor center, she recalls responding “And we’re like, ‘Well, that’s at Grand Teton, where you want to be outside! This is—this is where the experience happens here, inside! And we need more space to adequately capture that.’”

²⁷ “Central High Center to expand: Plans in works for permanent site as visitor numbers climb,” text of article from *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* attached to email from Michael Madell to Patty Rooney et al, February 28, 2005; files of Central High School NHS.

²⁸ Project Agreement among MWRO, Central High School NHS, DSC, and HFC pertaining to Central High Visitor Center construction, February 1, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, D22.

²⁹ R. Michael Madell, a series of identical letters to each of the Little Rock Nine, February 4, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, D2217. See also Central High School NHS Staff meeting minutes, February 23, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

analysis of alternatives through an understanding of the different advantages that each alternative offers, the relative importance of those advantages, and the costs associated with each advantage.³⁰

The workshop was held over several days in late April 2005, and resulted in a report in May 2005. The architects and exhibit planners presented three alternatives for interior and exterior designs that included “different siting strategies, floor plan layouts, massing of building volumes, and interpretive exhibit experiences.”³¹ The analysis incorporated the results of the Visioning Workshop in March, together with an assessment of the critical functions that the new Visitor Center would need to fulfill, the relationship to Central High School and the surrounding neighborhood, and the anticipated types and numbers of visitors. The report made clear the challenges which the architects faced, particularly in the relationship between the new building and the neighborhood:

The use and function of the building is so different than anything else built in the immediate neighborhood. It is not a house, a monumental school, or a drug store. The program needs of this building are in blocks much bigger than the program elements of a residence. None of the buildings in the area are designed to be sustainable. The building and site design is supposed to intuitively draw the visitor to it, and yet not stand out. The interpretive experience must be the driving force of the architecture and yet is supposed to blend with the surrounding buildings that were designed with very different functions.³²

The workshop resulted in the selection of Alternative B as the preferred design. This design was more linear in plan than the other two alternatives, with the long side facing South Park Street, but with variations in the surfaces where the “façade of the building is ‘pulled away’ from the building in key locations to emphasize programmatic importance of the space within.”³³ While the proposed budgets for each alternative were within a narrow range, Alternative B was projected as the least expensive, with a total budget of \$2,518,785 for the architecture, and \$1,014,775 for the exhibits. The consensus of the workshop participants was that the building siting and massing were most in line with the neighborhood, the outside space was the most flexible for both visitor enjoyment and orientation and for the gathering of groups, and the exhibit space offered the most flexibility.

Central High School NHS hosted a second public workshop in Little Rock in late May 2005, to present the three alternatives and the preferred alternative. Those who attended the workshop “agreed that the selected design concept was consistent with the general vision identified by the public at the March 2005 workshop and open house.”³⁴ On the strength of the Value Analysis workshop as confirmed by the follow-up public meetings, the park submitted its

³⁰ Annual Report for FY05; files of Central High School NHS, A2621. For information on how the NPS uses the Choosing by Advantages process, see summary by Sue Masica, February 24, 1999, available for download at <https://www.nps.gov/dscw/upload/CBA-OnePageDescription.doc>

³¹ *Little Rock Central High School Visitor Center: Value Analysis Report* (AJC Architects, Salt Lake City, Utah, May 12, 2005), Executive Summary (n.p.).

³² *Little Rock Central High School Visitor Center: Value Analysis Report*, 22.

³³ *Little Rock Central High School Visitor Center: Value Analysis Report*, 36.

³⁴ Annual Report for FY05; files of Central High School NHS, A2621.

designs to NPS Development Advisory Board (DAB) in late May and early June 2005. Central High School NHS received approval from DAB on June 29, 2005.³⁵ With the signing of the FY06 Interior Appropriations Bill in early August 2005, which appropriated the \$5.1 million necessary for construction of the building and exhibits, the park was ready to move forward with expectations of having the building completed and ready for opening in time for the 50th anniversary commemoration in September 2007.

Although it is a new institutional building, the design of the proposed Visitor Center was intended to fit into the historic residential neighborhood that surrounds it. It would do this, according to the narrative developed by AJC Architects, by means of massing and orientation on the site. The one-story building is composed of five forty-foot-wide columns arranged in a linear fashion with the long side facing South Park Street. These five sections, moreover, vary in height and setback from the street; this variation “helps to reduce the perceived size of the 10,000 square-foot building, and relates more closely to the scale of the residences in the surrounding neighborhood.” The interior and exterior walls surfaces, both the materials and the colors, were “deliberately modest,” in order to focus the visitors’ attention to the exhibits within and the historic neighborhood without. The building also incorporated several design elements with the intent of connecting the interior and the exterior, including large expanses of glass windows, shaded by metal roof overhangs. The windows on the south end of the building were planned to provide a view of Central High School and to draw visitors into the exhibit space.³⁶ The building also includes a raised four-sided clerestory above the central lobby area, providing additional natural light to the public space. Superintendent Madell recalled later that, “There were some in the community who wanted it to be an architectural statement and. . . I didn’t feel that was necessary because how can you presume to make an architectural statement with that huge high school right across the street from it.” Of the three preliminary designs, he noted, the one that was built “was probably the most conservative. . . . Although this is nothing more than a gut feeling—it was probably a good thing because the other two designs had a little more fancy architectural elements and we might not have been able to bring the project in under budget if we went that route.”³⁷

An important component of the building’s planning and design was environmental sustainability. NPS did not seek formal accreditation for green building design according to the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards, but the design incorporated several environmentally friendly features including a ground source heat pump for heating and cooling and restrictions on water consumption such as flow restrictors and drought-tolerant native plants.³⁸

³⁵ Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Chief Construction Management Division, WASO, June 7, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, D22. See also Project Report, Central High School National Historic Site, August 16, 2005, attached to Memorandum, Deputy Director, DSC to Regional Director, MWRO, September 9, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, A4027.

³⁶ Design Narrative, within *Little Rock Central High School Visitor Center, Construction Documents 100% Final* (March 10, 2006), n.p.

³⁷ Michael Madell, oral history interview, March 9, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

³⁸ Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Associate Director, Park Planning, Facilities and Lands, October 31, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, D22. See also Annual Report for FY05.

The design of the building continued to be modified and completed through the fall of 2005. During this period, Superintendent Madell involved his staff by soliciting their input and opinions on many of the features of the building. This included allowing the staff to vote on the color of the bricks, the type of rugs, and the interior painting scheme.³⁹

At the same time, Central High School NHS staff finalized consultation with the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding impacts of the proposed construction to existing historic properties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Of particular concern to SHPO was the potential impact on the Central High Neighborhood Historic District, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.⁴⁰ In addition, park staff regularly consulted with SHPO regarding the archeological survey of the lot prior to construction. In December 2005, Superintendent Madell and Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller met with SHPO staff to finalize the consultation regarding the proposed design of the building and its landscaping plan. The Arkansas SHPO staff registered no complaints about either. In early 2006, after reviewing revised architectural drawings, SHPO “determined that the proposed new building will be compatible with the properties in the surrounding area in terms of massing, scale, and materials.”⁴¹

The Arkansas SHPO declined to concur on the final determination of no adverse effect until the remaining concrete foundation pad had been removed and the soil beneath it studied for archeological resources. The Arkansas SHPO staff agreed, however, to allow Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller to serve as “para-archeologist” during removal of the concrete slab once construction began, monitoring the excavation and photographically recording the soils and any findings.⁴² When construction began in June 2006, the first task was to remove the existing concrete slab that remained from the foundation of the former Capitol Wholesale Florist. Miller, together with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers archeologist Chris Davies, monitored this initial phase of construction over the course of eight days. Their work identified two features related to the historic occupation of the site by nurseries and greenhouses: the foundation of a furnace used to heat a greenhouse, and the remains of a brick well. After contacting the Arkansas SHPO office upon finding each feature, both features were photographed and documented, and both were determined to be non-contributing features.⁴³ The contractors then removed the furnace foundation and filled the well without removing it.

In addition to working within the restrictions of the Central High Neighborhood setting, the designers of the building faced additional challenges from two natural disasters in the late summer and early fall of 2005: Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Although they did not physically

³⁹ Taronia Armstrong, oral history interview, December 13, 2017; see also Christian Davis, oral history interview, December 13, 2017.

⁴⁰ Smith and Speed, National Register Nomination, 1999.

⁴¹ Ken Grunewald to R. Michael Madell, January 27, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

⁴² Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to The Record, December 19, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, H42. See also summary of the project and Section 106, R. Michael Madell to Ken Grunewald, December 19, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, H42.

⁴³ R. Michael Madell to Ken Grunewald, July 6, 2006; concurrence letter, Grunewald to Madell, July 18, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, H42. See also Madell to Roger C. Hicklin, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, July 14, 2006, thanking the Corps of Engineers for making Davies available to assist Miller; files of Central High School NHS, A34.

damage the site, these disasters severely impacted the funding for the new building in two ways: the diversion of federal funds to recovery efforts, and the rapid rise in the cost of construction materials. As Superintendent Madell recalled, NPS was preparing to put the project out for construction bids when the hurricanes struck: “and, of course, that required a lot of money and lot of construction materials be diverted back into the Gulf Coast states to help them rebuild. . . and then, at the same time, as I recall, there was a big blip in the demand for construction materials going to China.” The combination of these factors, Madell explained, “effectively decreased our buying dollars for that five point whatever it was million dollar appropriation by, I want to say, roughly a third. So, in the end, we got a building that was essentially the size that we thought we needed. We brought it in within budget, which was good, but we had to make a lot of hard choices. We didn’t get to do everything as extensively as we would have.”⁴⁴ Both present and former staff have noted several features that were lost in the final design. One of the most disappointing was the proposed theater, where videos and movies could be shown to visitors. According to Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Laura Miller, that space was threatened by the budget cutback, and was reduced to an open, multi-purpose room. Even to keep that space in the plans, however, Central High School NHS staff had to make another compromise and give up having restrooms within the staff area.⁴⁵

With the design largely complete, the Director of NPS, through the Division of Planning and Construction, gave final approval to the project budget on March 21, 2006.⁴⁶ In anticipation of this notice, Central High School NHS began planning for a groundbreaking ceremony in early 2006. Originally scheduled to kick off the Daisy Bates State Holiday on February 19, 2006, the event was cancelled due to inclement weather. On February 22, 2006, however, the park released the final design of the new Visitor Center to the public.⁴⁷ Although the preliminary designs had received generally favorable comments from those who attended the public workshops and open houses, the release of the final designs brought out those who were more critical of the plans. As early as April 2006, Central High School NHS staff were alerted to those who were “unhappy with the building design and/or the exhibit plan and are trying to gain support for their ideas within the media, local government, and even congressional personnel. There are a few who have even taken to attending ranger-led talks to closely monitor what is being said.” While advocating patience, openness, and dialog in dealing with these critics, staff were urged to keep in mind that the Superintendent “has not found anyone willing to put the project on hold to redesign the building or the overall exhibit plan.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Michael Madell, oral history interview, March 9, 2009; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS. A nomination for FEA Team of the Year Award in 2007 noted that “The impact of 2006’s natural disasters on construction costs also required creativity and skill in stretching dollars to ensure that the building and exhibits stayed within budget while continuing to support agency policy and park mission goals.” Files of Central High School NHS, A82.

⁴⁵ Laura Miller, oral history interview, February 16, 2018.

⁴⁶ Director’s Construction Project Approval, attached to email, Roger K. Brown to Michael Madell et al., March 23, 2006; files of Central High School NHS.

⁴⁷ Press Release, February 22, 2006; files of Central High School NHS.

⁴⁸ Central High School NHS staff meeting minutes, April 6, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

Construction

Once NPS approved construction in March 2006, the opening of the Visitor Center became an important component of planning for the 50th Anniversary commemoration. When the groundbreaking ceremony was rescheduled for May 20, 2006, the events included appearances by Senator Mary Pryor, Congressman Vic Snyder, Little Rock Mayor Jim Dailey, and members of the Little Rock Nine. The program also included an announcement of the events that had been planned for the 50th anniversary, one of which was the grand opening of the new Visitor Center.⁴⁹



Figure 43: Visitor Center interior under construction, 2007. Photo from *Constitutional Writes*, 2007

The Denver Service Center solicited bids for construction of the Visitor Center in March 2006. On May 24, 2006, Noacon was awarded the contract, in the amount of \$3,396,365.⁵⁰ On June 1, 2006, DSC accepted a proposal from AJC Architects for construction management, in the amount of \$61,409.⁵¹ The construction manager for the project, Hollis Knight, was with the National Guard at Central High School in 1957.⁵² This was only fifteen months from the required date of completion, a compressed schedule that required close collaboration between NPS and Noacon. Construction work began on June 21, 2006 and continued on schedule through the rest of 2006 and into the spring of 2007 (Figure 43). The contractors placed a priority on completing the southern third of the building, where the exhibits were to be housed. This section was largely

⁴⁹ Press Release, May 12, 2006; files of Central High School NHS.

⁵⁰ Ed Tafoya, DSC to Michael Lester, Noacon, May 24, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, D5217.

⁵¹ Email, Rick Rampi to Ed Tafoya, June 1, 2006; attached to email from Michael Madell to Jan Lee et al., June 1, 2006; files of Central High School NHS.

⁵² Central High School NHS staff meeting minutes, June 8, 2006; files of Central High School, A40.

completed in June, though the formal notice of occupancy was not given until mid-July. The exhibits were installed beginning August 20, 2007.⁵³ According to the contract, the building was to be completed by August 15, 2007; the actual completion date was August 31, 2007. The exhibits were also mostly completed by August 31, and, while the audio-visual equipment was installed and running for the building's opening, the assistive listening system was not complete until October 31, 2007 because the exhibit had to be up and running to finish installing it. The building was completed within the contract budget, though the park had to request additional construction management funds for the completion of the audio-visual equipment in the fall of 2007.⁵⁴ A media tour of the new building was held on September 17, 2007, and a special tour for the Little Rock Nine and their guests and family occurred on September 23, 2007 with a catered brunch.



Figure 44: Visitor Center, looking northeast. Photo by the author, 2017.

⁵³ Edward L. Tafoya to Noacon, Inc., July 16, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, D18. See also Project Report, Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, August 20, 2007, attached to Memorandum, Acting Director, DSC to Regional Director, MWRO, September 5, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, D18. See Chapter 7 for an extended discussion of the creation of the exhibits in the Visitor Center.

⁵⁴ "Request for Additional Construction Management Services: Construct Permanent Central High Visitor Center," attached to email, Michael Madell to Jan Lee, November 1, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, D18.



Figure 45: Visitor Center entrance, looking southwest. Photo by the author, 2017.

The new building was dedicated on Monday, September 24, 2007, the day before the 50th anniversary commemoration of the 1957 desegregation crisis (Figures 44, 45). It was part of a week-long series of programs that commemorated the 50th anniversary and featured participation by all of the Little Rock Nine. Congressman John Lewis, a nationally recognized civil rights leader who was a Freedom Rider in the early 1960s, Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and one of the organizers of the 1963 March on Washington, gave the keynote address. Lewis' famous response to an older civil rights leader's question about the participation of young people in the movement—"If not us, then who? If not now, then when?"—served as an inspiring theme to Central High School NHS staff and was featured prominently in the creation of the exhibits in the new Visitor Center. Speakers at the event also included Senator Mark Pryor, NPS Director Mary Bomar, and Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne (Figure 46). The Freedom Singers, a group of African American singers who first rose to prominence in the early 1960s and became an important component of the Civil Rights movement, also performed at the opening ceremony. The Arkansas National Guard Governor's Honor Guard also performed, and current members of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division escorted members of the Little Rock Nine onto the stage (Figure 47).⁵⁵ Approximately 2,000 visitors attended the dedication ceremony.

⁵⁵ See Chapter 10 for additional information on the Visitor Center dedication ceremony in relation to the overall planning of the 50th anniversary commemoration.



Figure 46: Members of the Little Rock Nine at the Visitor Center dedication, with NPS Director Mary Bomar (L), Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne (R), and Congressman John Lewis (center-left). Photo from *Constitutional Writes*, 2007.



Figure 47: Little Rock Nine Member Elizabeth Eckford being escorted by member of 101st Airborne at Visitor Center dedication. Photo from *Constitutional Writes*, 2007.

Reception and Alterations

Shortly after its completion, the new Visitor Center received an award for Outstanding New Construction in a Historic Setting from the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas. The award was announced at the annual awards dinner on November 9, 2007. The award, in a summary in the park's newsletter, "recognized the NPS for achieving the goal to have the visitor center visually integrate with the surrounding residential neighborhood."⁵⁶ Not all of the initial reviews were as positive, however. Ethel Ambrose, the former President of Central High Neighborhood, Inc., was very critical of the building in her recollections in 2010. When asked about the current Visitor Center, she responded that

we feel that this building as it exists is an abomination unto the Lord. . . .We feel that it is an ugly building, we feel that it does not blend in with the neighborhood, and we fully understand physical constraints and, however, we strongly believe that for the same amount of money with good planning, that's the key, you can have a good building whether it's a public building such as this or whether it is a private residence.⁵⁷

Writing in Central High Neighborhood, Inc.'s, newsletter in October 2007, UALR Professor George Wittenberg was more circumspect. After opening his review by proclaiming "We got a lemon," he went on to provide a more nuanced assessment. His principal problem with the building, he said, is that "it says nothing. It is too much a background building when a foreground building was called for. This building blends too much into the woodwork of the neighborhood, without the outward appearance to declare why it's there." Wittenberg acknowledged the reasoning, that NPS took seriously the comments from the public meetings to the effect that the new building should fit into the neighborhood. He disagreed with this attitude, however, and argued that NPS should take the lead in providing good architectural design: "So, this mediocre building is less the fault of architecture than a result of the bureaucratic process, the politics of funding and community leadership."⁵⁸

Writing on behalf of NPS Director Mary Bomar, MWRO Regional Director Ernest Quintana responded to Ambrose and Wittenberg by reciting the extensive opportunities for public input and reviews provided by NPS. Quintana also iterated the approach that resulted from the public input process, that the new building "not compete architecturally with Central High School." Quintana also explained that the choice of materials, scale, and landscaping allowed the architects to create a building that not only did not disrupt the surrounding neighborhood but that would "convey a sense of welcome to park visitors." The most important part of the building, Quintana concluded, was that "the new center and its interpretive exhibits provide a wonderful new base from which our staff can continue to share the stories of Central

⁵⁶ *Constitutional Writes*, Winter 2008.

⁵⁷ Ethel Ambrose, oral history interview, March 24, 2010; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁵⁸ George Wittenberg, "Central High School National Historic Site Visitor Center," in *CHNI Update*, October 2007. Attached to Ethel N. Ambrose, Central High Neighborhood, Inc., to Mary Bomar, WASO, January 2, 2008; files of Central High School NHS, A36.

High School, the Little Rock Nine, and the civil rights movement with people from across the country and from around the world.”⁵⁹

With approximately six times the space of the original visitor center in the Mobil Gas Station, the new Visitor Center was a dramatic improvement. The additional office space that allowed the entire staff at that time to be in the same building, a dedicated and secure collections storage space, and a library/meeting room are great benefits to those who work there, while the substantially expanded and improved interpretive exhibits and the multi-purpose room combined with additional parking allows for significantly enhanced visitor experiences. Particularly for those members of the staff who were present for the transition in 2007, the change was welcome and made possible interpretive and educational programs that could not be achieved before. Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Miller, for example, reflected on the transition to the new building and shared that

with the goals that we had going into it, and knowing that we wanted to really inspire people and help them understand that this wasn't just about Little Rock, that it's a much larger thing, about all of us, I think we got there. You know, the exhibits won a couple of awards, and I've heard comments from people who've gone through it who really feel inspired and empowered by it. . . .it's a good feeling!⁶⁰

As Central High School NHS staff has changed, and with experience over the past decade, several alterations have been made to the building and certain limitations have become clear. Superintendent Robin White made two changes to the building shortly after being appointed in 2008. The building as designed did not have doors protecting the men's and women's restrooms; as former Park Ranger Tarona Armstrong described them, “It's kind of like the airport.” Superintendent White had doors installed on the restrooms and also had a door installed between the lobby and the staff offices. Prior to her arrival, it was the responsibility of the staff member at the front desk to keep visitors from venturing into the office area.⁶¹ Currently (2018), the door to the office area is kept closed and is protected by a security system.

Superintendent White has also encountered limitations of the building, particularly its size. While substantially larger than the original visitor center, White thinks that the original planners “underestimated what we can do here, and the potential number of visitors.” The plan to house the park's Education staff in the Mobil Gas Station was flawed, she argued, given the lack of space, its separation from the new Visitor Center, and the fact that the new building did not include space for the park's Maintenance staff, which now occupies the Mobil Gas Station. With the expansion of the park's public programs, particularly with the several symposia and other large meetings that the staff have organized, the shortage of space has become clear, and has required Central High School NHS to rely to an even greater extent on its partnerships with other organizations that have sufficient space.

⁵⁹ Ernest Quintana to Ethel Ambrose, January 29, 2008; files of Central High School NHS, A36.

⁶⁰ Laura Miller, oral history interview, February 16, 2018.

⁶¹ Tarona Armstrong, oral history interview, December 13, 2017. Superintendent White used the same analogy in her oral history interview: “I was amazed, when I arrived here, that there were no doors on the restrooms. We're not at the airport, you know!”

Chapter 10: 50th and 60th Anniversaries

Throughout this Administrative History, we have referred to the annual commemorations of the 1957 school desegregation crisis, not to celebrations of the event. There is little to celebrate in the violence that was brought to bear in the prolonged attempt to prevent nine children from attending school in Little Rock in 1957. To commemorate, however, is to remember together, an act of community. More important than just fostering community, to remember is a means of bringing together past and present, to make the past symbolically present. In the case of the kind of racial prejudice that led to the prevention of young people from exercising their rights as citizens, which embodied sentiments that continue to resonate for some today, this process of bringing the actions of the past to the consciousness of the present is all the more important. Given the mission of Central High School NHS “to preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit, education, and inspiration of present and future generations” and the role that Central High School played in the desegregation of the nation’s public schools, such regular, public commemorations of the event have become an important component of the park’s public programming.

Commemorations of the 1957 crisis began with the 30th anniversary in 1987. Led and organized primarily by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), it featured the first formal reunion of the Little Rock Nine, including an invitation to visit the Governor’s Mansion by Governor William J. Clinton. Beginning in 2003, as discussed in Chapter 8, the National Park Service (NPS) began sponsoring programs in September of each year, events that were not necessarily tied to school desegregation or the Little Rock Nine but that allowed Central High School NHS to bring to the public’s mind a way to commemorate the 1957 crisis and reflect on its wider significance. These annual programs have become larger in scope since 2009 and have included symposia on various topics and other large-scale events.

The three recent decennial commemorations, however, in 1997, 2007, and 2017, have been much larger in scale, and have involved far more individuals and organizations. The 40th anniversary event in 1997, for example, included the sitting President of the United States, William Clinton, which required an extraordinary level of planning and coordination. This event was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1. While the 50th and 60th anniversary events in 2007 and 2017, respectively, did not require that level of logistical support, they nevertheless continue to highlight the nature of the partnerships through which Central High School NHS continues to fulfill its mission.

50th Anniversary: NPS Participation

The City of Little Rock initiated and provided overall coordination of the 50th Anniversary commemoration events. Little Rock Mayor Jim Dailey began working on initial planning with his staff in early 2003, and, in May 2003, he was a guest at a meeting of the Central High Museum, Inc., (CHMI) Board to discuss his preliminary plans. Central High School Principal Nancy Rousseau and Central High School National Historic Site (NHS) Superintendent Mike Madell were also present for the discussion. Madell encouraged Mayor Dailey to work with NPS to make the commemoration a community event, which Principal Rousseau supported. Rousseau also hoped that the event could portray the positive side of public

education and offered to help with the planning.¹ Dailey's planning efforts continued through 2003, and, in his State of the City address in early January, 2004, he announced the creation of the Central High Integration 50th Anniversary Commission, an eighteen-member group that would take the lead on coordinating and promoting civic involvement in the event. The commission's co-chairs were Virgil Miller, the former President of the CHMI Board, and Nancy Rousseau, while Madell served on the committee as chairman of the Festival subcommittee; Park Ranger Spirit Trickey, who was also the park's interim Public Relations Officer, also served on the Festival subcommittee as well as on the Public Relations subcommittee.² The commission's mandate from the Mayor was, in part, to "reflect on the past, examine the present, and promote future reconciliation and growth."³

With the appointment of the commission, planning for the event accelerated through 2004 and 2005. The National Park Service was hampered in planning for its participation, however, by the uncertainty over funding, particularly in relation to the proposed new Visitor Center. The park's status as a new unit, which was still in the process of adding staff, created additional complications in securing funding. Superintendent Madell submitted initial funding requests for the anniversary in FY04: \$50,000 for general anniversary-related activities and \$33,000 for security. At the same time, he suggested to the Midwest Regional Director that an alternate proposal, to bring the staffing levels to full complement, would allow him to both develop Central High School NHS and begin planning for the anniversary events. Time was an issue, though, as he would need to make commitments to potential speakers as early as possible.⁴ Uncertainties over the budget continued into the summer of 2005. As Superintendent Madell argued, "Meaningful planning for the anniversary can begin only when we have a reasonable idea of the financial resources that we will have at our disposal." Madell planned to apply approximately \$12,000 from his base budget allocation for FY06 and FY07, originally designated for interpretive and educational programming, toward anniversary events and programming. In the face of this uncertainty, Madell developed a budget that requested approximately \$174,000 over the two fiscal years, a sum that included two permanent Park Guides, a STEP/SCEP Park Guide, and a seasonal Park Guide in FY07.⁵

The City and its anniversary commission continued to move forward with planning through 2005 and 2006. While Central High School NHS staff were occupied primarily with planning for the new Visitor Center and working to develop interpretive and educational programs, they were kept apprised of the progress of the 50th anniversary commemoration. Both Superintendent Madell and Park Ranger Trickey served on the City's 50th anniversary

¹ CHMI Board Minutes, April 17, 2003; files of Central High School NHS, A42.

² Email, Michael Madell to Ernie Quintana et al., January 7, 2004; files of Central High School NHS, A22. See also Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, MWRO, April 21, 2005; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS. See also Central High School NHS staff meeting minutes, April 6, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

³ FEA of Arkansas Team of the Year Award Nomination, Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site Team; text document in files of Central High School NHS, A82.

⁴ Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, MWRO, April 21, 2005; UALR Administrative History records, files of Central High School NHS.

⁵ Memorandum, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, MWRO, July 13, 2005; files of Central High School NHS, A82.

commission and reported back to the staff during monthly meetings beginning in April 2006.⁶ In the fall of 2006, the staff held a retreat to begin planning for the anniversary on a broad scale, which they then followed by developing cost estimates for the several proposed programs. The principal concern for Central High School NHS staff was to plan for the opening and dedication ceremony for the new Visitor Center, but, given the scale of the program for the anniversary, the National Park Service components overlapped with the overall planning. This included making arrangements for transportation such as buses, shuttles, and limousines, lending NPS support for speakers and performers, and coordinating with the Little Rock Nine. By early 2007, Central High School NHS staff was working in even closer cooperation with the City of Little Rock and the City's 50th Anniversary commission. The park entered into a cooperative agreement with the City in January 2007, which allowed NPS to reimburse the City for joint printing projects for such items as programs, brochures, and tickets.⁷ Central High School NHS had other materials produced through the U.S. Government Printing Office in St. Louis.

The park's involvement in the program increased during the spring and summer of 2007. Due to the growth of Central High School NHS over its first several years, Superintendent Madell coordinated with MWRO to expand the park's budget to hire additional interpretive staff, both permanent Park Guides and Rangers and student workers, through the Student Training Employment Program (STEP). With a larger team of junior staff, the park was able to contribute to additional aspects of the overall anniversary commemoration events by developing the commemorative programs, which used several items from the park's collections as illustrations, finalizing anniversary mailing lists, preparing press releases, and arranging requests for tickets to the several events. Staff from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) library provided extensive assistance in making available the Central High Historical Collection to media and researchers.⁸

Central High School NHS staff continued to leverage their position with NPS to assist the City and other groups during the 50th anniversary events. For example, park staff during the early spring of 2007 finalized discussions with the 101st Airborne to secure their participation. Ten soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division took part in the Visitor Center dedication and in the main ceremony at Central High School, primarily by escorting members of the Little Rock Nine as they had fifty years earlier.⁹ The Arkansas National Guard Governor's Honor Guard also provided support for the ceremony.¹⁰ In addition, NPS arranged for the Freedom Singers to perform at the Visitor Center opening. This group of African American singers were vital components of the early Civil Rights movement and regularly performed in association with meetings and campaigns of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). By 2007, only one of the original four members of the group, Charles Neblett, remained active, but he continued to maintain the Freedom Singers to support civil rights initiatives. Superintendent Madell arranged with Charles Neblett to have the Freedom Singers perform at the Visitor Center

⁶ Central High School NHS staff meeting minutes, April 6, 2006; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

⁷ Central High School NHS staff meeting minutes, January 11, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A40.

⁸ R. Michael Madell to Linda Pine, UALR Ottenheimer Library, October 9, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A34.

⁹ Central High School NHS staff meeting minutes, March 8, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A40. See also letter of appreciation, R. Michael Madell to Major General Jeffrey J. Schloesser, October 9, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A34.

¹⁰ R. Michael Madell to LTC Anita Long, October 9, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A82.

opening and conduct a workshop at WorldFest, a major annual community event in Little Rock that took place at the same time as the 50th anniversary. The workshop, titled *Music in the Civil Rights Movement*, was sponsored by the City of Little Rock's Racial and Cultural Diversity Commission, and NPS provided a \$7,500 honorarium to the group for their participation in both events.¹¹

In early 2007, Central High School NHS was approached by the Coca-Cola corporation regarding a fund-raising effort. The company announced its plans to produce a limited run of 6,000 eight-ounce bottles of Coca-Cola in commemoration of the 50th anniversary, which was to be released during a fundraising reception held by the Little Rock Nine Foundation. Approximately 200 of the commemorative bottles, which are popular among collectors, would be given away at the fundraiser, while the park was offered the chance to sell the remaining bottles during the event and to keep the proceeds. In June 2007, Superintendent Madell contacted Reverend Howard Gardner, the head of the Inner City FutureNet (ICFN), a non-profit organization in Little Rock that sought to foster a sense of self-sufficiency in children and their families in the urban neighborhoods that surround Central High School, particularly through urban gardening. Madell suggested that ICFN students, board members, and supporters staff the tables where the commemorative bottles would be sold, while splitting the after-tax proceeds between the park and ICFN. In 2006, ICFN had also been the recipient, at the groundbreaking of the new Visitor Center, of a gift of 500 begonias from the Tipton Hurst florist company of Little Rock, which had its original facility in 1886 at the lot where the new Visitor Center was being built.¹²

The central event of the 50th anniversary program was the Commemoration Ceremony held on the front steps of Central High School on Tuesday, September 25, 2007. The program featured appearances by all of the Little Rock Nine, with a series of speakers that included former President William Clinton, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe, Central High School Student Body President Cyrus Bahrassa, and others. The opening and dedication of the Visitor Center took place the day before, on Monday, September 24, 2007, featuring members of the Little Rock Nine with the 101st Airborne, and a keynote address by Representative John Lewis.¹³ Many other events surrounded these key dates, however. On September 20, 2007, for example, the Mosaic Church in Little Rock hosted a town hall symposium "Character and Courage: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Now, Where Do We Need to Be," which included discussions on race and education. The next day, the UALR Bowen School of Law hosted a day-long Judicial Form, featuring several speakers on legal topics related to race and discrimination. The Clinton Foundation, meanwhile, secured the loan of the original Emancipation Proclamation from the National Archives, with former President Clinton hosting a private reception for the Little Rock Nine to view it, and the Little Rock Nine Foundation held a gala event on the evening after the Commemoration Ceremony to raise money

¹¹ R. Michael Madell to Freedom Singers c/o Charles Neblett, July 23, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A82.

¹² Central High School NHS staff meeting minutes, June 14, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A40; R. Michael Madell to Reverend Howard Gardner, June 19, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A8215. Coca-Cola also donated 10,000 water bottles for the event. See also Press Release, May 19, 2006; files of Central High School NHS.

¹³ See Chapter 9 for a discussion of the dedication ceremony for the new Visitor Center.

for its scholarship program.¹⁴ Finally, the park also teamed with NAACP to sponsor events in association with the Daisy Bates Home National Historic Landmark, including tours of the house and the release of a new book on Daisy Bates, *Daisy Bates: In Her Own Words*.

Central High School NHS helped to coordinate many of these events, and, in turn, drew upon support from other parks in the Midwest Region. In particular, several staff members provided assistance during the Visitor Center dedication and anniversary commemoration at the request of Superintendent Madell. These included Buffalo National River Park Rangers Shane Lind, who had worked at Little Rock Central High School NHS on detail in its early years, and Tracy Whitaker; Arkansas Post National Memorial Education Coordinator Karla Sigala; Hot Springs National Park staff members Gail Sears, Toni McDowell, and Larry Wacaster; Fort Smith National Historic Site staff member Quoya Waters, who had assisted in installing the new telephone and computer systems in the Visitor Center; Jason Boyd and David Wachtveitl from Lincoln Home National Historic Site in Illinois; and five staff members from Brown v. Board National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas.¹⁵ This support from other parks in the Midwest Region was vital. It is important to note that Central High School NHS staff planned and oversaw construction of the new Visitor Center, implemented many public programs in advance of the 50th anniversary commemoration, and coordinated the dedication of the new Visitor Center with a total budget allotment of 7.7 full-time employees (FTE). As described in a nomination for Team of the Year Award, “That is, a staff of 7.7 talented, committed, visionary, and dynamic FTE who worked closely together to implement the NPS and community vision of simultaneously opening the new visitor center and commemorating the 50th anniversary.”¹⁶

60th Anniversary: NPS Participation

Like the 50th anniversary commemoration events, the City of Little Rock took the lead in planning for the 60th anniversary in 2017. Unlike the multi-year planning efforts leading up to 2007, however, the City’s 60th anniversary planning committee held its inaugural meeting only a year before the event. The committee included representatives from UALR, NAACP, the Clinton Foundation, the Christian Ministerial Alliance, Philander Smith College, the Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Little Rock School District (LRSD), the Urban League of Arkansas, the Central High School Student Council, the City of Little Rock, and NPS, together with Skip Rutherford, by then the head of the Clinton School of Public Service at the University of Arkansas. The inaugural meeting in September 2016 also included participation by Terrence Roberts and Ernest Green, members of the Little Rock Nine.¹⁷ The committee parceled the work

¹⁴ See <https://www.littlerock.gov/news/plans-announced-for-central-high-integration-50th-anniversary/> (viewed December 21, 2017); Calendar of Events, Little Rock Central High 1957-2007: Commemorating 50 Years of Integration; files of Central High School NHS.

¹⁵ See memoranda of appreciation to the Superintendents of the respective NPS units, all dated October 9, 2007; files of Central High School NHS, A34.

¹⁶ “FEA of Arkansas Team of the Year Award Nomination, Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site Team, National Park Service,” n.d. [c. 2007]; files of Central High School NHS, A82.

¹⁷ Central High Integration 60th Anniversary Committee, Thursday, September 22, 2016 Minutes; attached to email, Scott Carter to Marchelle Williams [Central High School NHS], October 6, 2016; files of Central High School NHS provided to the author.

to a series of six subcommittees: Education, Gala, Program, Interfaith, Public Relations, and Logistics. Subsequent meetings added subcommittees for volunteers and the concert.¹⁸

The National Park Service provided funding for several components of the overall program, and Central High School NHS staff coordinated with the City committee for the main events and developed programs of their own. As in 2007, a series of events spread over several days were centered on the Commemoration Ceremony itself. Both the 40th and the 50th anniversary commemoration ceremonies had been held on the front steps of Central High School. For the 60th anniversary, however, prompted by concerns expressed by the Little Rock Nine during the planning in the summer of 2017 over the physical difficulties of being out in the heat for several hours, the ceremony was held in the Roosevelt Thompson Auditorium of Central High School.¹⁹ The program and the speakers had largely been arranged by late July 2017. The program's Master of Ceremony was Sybil Jordan Hampton. A 1962 graduate of Central High School and the first African American student to attend Central from the tenth through the twelfth grades, Hampton was a higher education administrator and former President of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Representative students from each of Little Rock's five high schools led the Pledge of Allegiance, and opening comments were given by Little Rock Mayor Mark Stodola, Midwest Regional Director Cameron Sholly, and Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson. Harvard University Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., gave an address, followed by comments from the eight surviving members of the Little Rock Nine, Jefferson Thomas having died in 2010. As in 1997 and 2007, former President William Jefferson Clinton gave the Commemorative Address.

The series of programs organized by the City of Little Rock began on Friday, September 22, with the dedication of a new sculpture that had been placed on the grounds of Central High School. For this installation, Sculpture at the River Market, a non-profit entity in Little Rock that commissions works of public art throughout the city, arranged a competition for a sculptural group in 2015. In April 2016, the organization announced the winning sculpture for 2017, a bronze group by Clay Enoch, titled *United*. The sculpture features two standing figures facing each other, each holding an incomplete ring (Figure 48). As Enoch noted of his work, "The rings become inter-connected without losing their identity, showing that unique qualities of each are not erased when united. The rings are incomplete to show that there is still progress to be made."²⁰ Other major events of the City's commemoration program included an education symposium at the William J. Clinton Presidential Center that featured separate panels on the period from *Brown v. Board of Education* to August 1957, the 1957/1958 school year and the 1958/1959 Lost Year, and from 1959 to the present; a panel discussion among the children of the Little Rock Nine co-hosted by the Clinton School of Public Service, the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, and the City of Little Rock; and an Interfaith Service at the Robinson Center Performance Hall led by Rev. Raphael G. Warnock of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church. On Saturday, September 23, the City arranged for a concert featuring the famous gospel and rhythm

¹⁸ Central High Integration 60th Anniversary Committee, November 16, 2016 Minutes, July 26, 2017 minutes; files of Central High School NHS provided to the author.

¹⁹ Central High Integration 60th Anniversary Committee, June 21, 2017 Minutes, files of Central High School NHS provided to the author.

²⁰ From a description of the sculpture by the artist, with additional information: http://sculptureattherivermarket.com/?page_id=2140 (accessed December 26, 2018).



Figure 48: "United" sculptural group at Central High School. Photo by the author, 2018.

and blues singer Mavis Staples at the Robinson Center Performance Hall; Staples performed as the headliner for the concert that served as a fundraiser for the Little Rock Nine Foundation.

Central High School NHS helped plan the events that were part of the 60th anniversary commemoration and supported the City's efforts through funding for several aspects of the program.²¹ In addition, the park developed a set of programs that were part of the overall 60th anniversary commemoration. The theme for the commemoration was "21st Century Reflection of Progress." One of the major events provided by Central High School NHS was a screening of the new film, *Marshall* on Friday, September 22, 2017, to kick off the park's 60th anniversary events. The movie, which was completed earlier in 2017, focuses on Thurgood Marshall and his partnership with Samuel Friedman, a young Jewish attorney, as they argued for the defense in *State of Connecticut v. Joseph Spell*, the 1940 case in which a black chauffeur was accused of rape by his white employer. The case was one of Marshall's first, and resulted in Spell's acquittal. *Marshall* held its world premier at Howard University on September 20, 2017, the historically black university in Washington, District of Columbia, where Thurgood Marshall, among many other African American men and women, received his law degree. The park partnered with Open Road Films, the Central Arkansas Library System, the City of Little Rock, Unity in the Community, and the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service to bring the film to Little Rock immediately after its initial showing in Washington, D.C. The screening in Little Rock was held in the Ron Robinson Theater of the Central Arkansas Library

²¹ Central High Integration 60th Anniversary Committee, August 9, 2017 Minutes, files of Central High School NHS provided to the author.

System and included a reception, music, and a short theatrical production before the film. A discussion of the film was held after the screening.

On Saturday afternoon, September 23, Central High School NHS sponsored an education workshop which featured a signing of books by and about five of the Little Rock Nine and authors of related books together with students from the Central High School Memory Project, which had released two books: *Beyond Central, Toward Acceptance* (2010) and *Mapping the Road to Change* (2012). The book signing was followed by two panel discussions: a discussion with FBI agents regarding federal hate crime laws, and an intergenerational panel on racism and racial healing (Figure 49).



Figure 49: Book signing event at Visitor Center during 60th Anniversary commemoration, with Little Rock Nine members Carlotta Walls LaNier (red shirt) and Terrence Roberts (dark suit). Photo provided by Central High School NHS.

Central High School NHS also partnered with *Oxford American* magazine to host the world premier of a jazz composition, the *No Tears Suite*. This thirty-minute composition by the Little Rock jazz pianist and composer Chris Parker was inspired by the memoir of Little Rock Nine member Melba Pattillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*. The premier took place in an outdoor concert at the Mobil Gas Station on Saturday, September 23, 2017, as part of a day-long music festival featuring jazz tunes that were part of or inspired by the Civil Rights movement. Together with *Oxford American*, partners and sponsors of this musical event included the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) College of Fine Arts and Communication (CFAC), the Arkansas Arts Council, the Department of Arkansas Heritage, and ACANSA Arts Festival.²²

²² ACANSA is a Sioux Indian word and is the name of a major village of the Quapaw people in southeastern Arkansas; it was also one of the words that non-natives used to refer to the Quapaw people. See the ACANSA Arts Festival website: <https://acansa.org/about/> (viewed January 16, 2019).

The University of Central Arkansas College of Fine Arts and Communication partnered with the park on other events during the 60th Anniversary. The most prominent of these was an event titled “Imagine If Buildings Could Talk,” identified as a Projection Mapping Event. The project was conceived by Gayle Seymour, associate dean at CFAC and Jennifer Deering, a grant writer for CFAC. The 3-D mapped video was created by UCA film professor Scott Meador, while UCA music professor Blake Tyson composed a score for marimbas, vibraphones, and glockenspiel to accompany the film. The 3-D video was projected onto the principal entrance section of Central High School above the central terrace after nightfall, with spectators standing on the front lawn of the school and South Park Street (Figure 50). It consisted of a blend of moving images and historical maps, plans, and photos which created the appearance that the façade of the building itself, including the statuary on the façade, was moving and being transformed. The nine-minute video was shown every fifteen minutes from 7:30 to 9:30 pm on Saturday and Sunday, September 23 and 24. According to Dr. Seymour, the video projection “immersed the public in a complete audio/visual experience, and like the intensity of live theater, experiencing it with hundreds of people made it a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”²³



Figure 50. Photograph of Central High School entrance during performance of "Imagine if Buildings Could Talk" 3-D mapping video performance, 2018. Photo provided by Central High School NHS.

In addition to the 3-D mapping video, UCA also coordinated with the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) to develop and sponsor architectural history bus tours of the neighborhoods and sites that surround and were associated with Central High School. The tours,

²³ A description of the program, with a link to a video of the performance, can be found at <http://uca.edu/magazine/imagine-if-buildings-could-talk/> (accessed December 27, 2018).

developed by Kimberly Little of the UCA Department of History, and Mark Christ and Kylee Cole of AHPP, were ninety minutes long and included the Arkansas Baptist College, Dunbar Junior/Senior High School, the Ernest Green House, the Daisy and L.C. Bates House, and Philander Smith College in addition to Central High School and the Mobil Gas Station. Central High School NHS also coordinated with UCA to organize a dance and spoken word event at the Commemorative Garden on the evening of September 24, 2017. This event featured a performance by the Core Performance Company, the Central High Writeous Poetry Club, and others, with remarks by the Harvard University history professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Tania Leon, the composer of her in-progress opera, “Little Rock Nine.”²⁴

Finally, Central High School NHS contracted with Candrice Jones to create a series of new curriculum plans. Jones, who has been an English teacher at Central High School since 2012, developed thirteen curriculum guides for periods ranging from eight to twenty-four 80 or 90-minute blocks. Each of these curriculum guides focused on reading and comprehending texts and research materials. Each is organized around a particular theme in civil rights and social justice, many of them based on memoirs and interviews with members of the Little Rock Nine and Daisy Bates. Most were developed for students in grades seven through twelve, though three were aimed at students in elementary and junior high school. The longest plan, comprising twenty-four 80-minute blocks and based on Melba Patillo-Beals’ memoir *Warriors Don’t Cry*, was targeted specifically to grades nine through eleven. These plans, together with guides for a one-day scavenger hunt, were prepared for the park, which could then distribute them to schools.²⁵

As with the 50th Anniversary commemoration in 2007, Central High School NHS had to request support from other NPS units in the Midwest Region. Because the park has no Law Enforcement rangers, Superintendent White submitted a request to Midwest Regional Director Cam Sholly in the summer of 2017 for emergency funds for security. In particular, she requested the assistance of the Midwest Region Special Events Team (MWR-SET) to help to manage the several components of the event. This team consisted of eleven NPS staff members from parks throughout the Midwest Region who work in conjunction with local law enforcement. In early August, Superintendent White prepared a budget to cover the travel expenses, time, expenses, and overtime for the eleven staff members, which came to approximately \$54,000, a sum that went beyond the event budget that the park had available. By way of justification, Superintendent White asserted that the park’s interpretive rangers had experienced an increase in verbal assaults and noted a recent shooting incident across from the Central High School NHS parking lot. Particularly given the number of dignitaries who would be attending the multi-day event, including former President Bill Clinton, the Governor of Arkansas, several Congressional representatives, and members of the Little Rock Nine, the additional security was warranted, she stated, to prevent either dangerous or embarrassing incidents, and to “prevent impairment of an atmosphere of unity in the community, amongst the diverse communities that will attend the

²⁴ Details of these events can be found at the 60th Anniversary page of the Park’s website, <https://www.nps.gov/CHSC/60th-anniversary.htm> (accessed December 29, 2018).

²⁵ The individual curriculum documents are available in 60th Anniversary files of Central High School NHS provided to the author.

multiple activities.” Superintendent White proposed using NPS’ Incident Command System to coordinate the communications among the additional security officers.²⁶

The additional staff from NPS worked closely with event staff from the City of Little Rock, UALR, the Little Rock School District, and the park. It was a well-attended series of events that resulted from the high level of coordination that has typified the relations among the park and its many partners, with screenings for *Marshall* sold out in advance and large crowds for the commemoration ceremony in the Central High School auditorium. The importance of Central High School in the ongoing quest for civil rights and equal opportunities for all was an important theme for the speakers, who reflected on the progress that has been made on the journey since 1957 and the great distance that remains. Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his comments during the Commemoration Ceremony said that, being in Central High School together with the Little Rock Nine, “I feel like I’m visiting a religious shrine. This is a shrine. These are the saints.”²⁷

Former President Clinton likewise highlighted the importance of the Little Rock Nine to the nation’s quest for civil rights and justice in his address during the commemoration ceremony: “You taught us that in economics and in social policy and in politics, addition is better than subtraction, and multiplication is better than division. . . .So, celebrate today. Put on your dancing shoes, but tomorrow . . .tomorrow, we need you again. Put on your marching boots.”²⁸ The event also provided the Little Rock Nine members an opportunity to offer additional reflections on the past and the future, on progress and on the achievements yet to come. Terrence Roberts, for example, commenting on the official theme of the commemoration—“Reflections of Progress”—suggested that “we focus not so much on progress, because that suggests that something has really happened in a progressive way. I think all the indicators suggest that we have a very long way to go before we can even begin to use the word progress.” Melba Patillo Beals likewise commented that “I thought that we would be much farther ahead today than we are. I disagree with the people who find fault with the Little Rock [School] system spending money to do this. I think that unless we stop and measure how far we’ve come today, we’re not necessarily inspired to do the fight that it’s going to take to take this battle where it needs to go.”²⁹

It is precisely this process of measuring, of assessing the progress made and the distance yet to go, that these anniversary commemorations are intended to facilitate. These events force us in a special way to bring to mind the sentiments and actions that brought about the 1957 desegregation crisis, both fear and hatred, courage and persistence. At the same time, these exercises in public memory in the present allow us to examine both similarities and differences

²⁶ Undated draft memoranda, Superintendent, Central High School NHS to Regional Director, Midwest Region; Excel spreadsheet with details of Emergency Law & Order Funding Request, August 14, 2017; 60th anniversary files of Central High School NHS provided to the author.

²⁷ Gates quoted in “60 years later, Little Rock Central High students reflect on legacy,” USA Today, September 25, 2017; available online: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/09/25/little-rock-high-legacy-60-years/702536001/> (viewed December 31, 2017).

²⁸ Clinton quoted in “60 years later, Little Rock Central High students reflect on legacy,”

²⁹ Roberts and Beals quoted in “Central High School 60th Anniversary Commemoration Events Begin in Little Rock,” UALR Public Radio, September 23, 2017, available online <https://www.ualrpublicradio.org/post/central-high-school-60th-anniversary-commemoration-events-begin-little-rock> (viewed December 31, 2017).

between now and then and to become more aware of what has yet to be done to achieve the promises of equality and justice for all on which the nation was founded.

Conclusion

Central High School NHS was established in 1998, drawing upon more than five years of skillful planning and execution by the Little Rock citizens who created Central High Museum, Inc. Founded on the vision established by CHMI and encouraged by President Bill Clinton, the park received its mandate from Congress to “preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit, education and inspiration of present and future generations, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, and its role in the integration of public schools and the development of the Civil Rights movement in the United States.” While keeping to this foundational mission, the park in the past decade has expanded its interpretive mission. Through its tours of Central High School, the exhibits in the Visitor Center, and its interpretive programs, NPS staff at the park encourages visitors to see the actions of the Little Rock Nine during the 1957 desegregation crisis in a broader context. In this broader context, the quest for justice and equality that drove the Little Rock Nine continues into the present in a wide range of civil rights and social justice issues.

In addition to expanding its interpretive focus from the 1957 desegregation crisis to include the pursuit by a variety of groups for justice and equality, Central High School NHS has worked to extend its reach beyond the park boundary. In keeping with this outward push, the park has been successful over the years in forming partnerships with groups throughout Little Rock and beyond. It has leveraged its position as a unit of the National Park System to bring prominence, and occasionally funding, to its partners, and it has used the physical space of other venues to reach a variety of audiences, many of which are traditionally underserved by NPS. All of these activities, at the park and throughout the community, are aimed at encouraging dialogue among a diverse group of people on the topic of human rights. The combination of personal attention during tours at the park and in facilitated public programs in other venues allows Central High School NHS staff to encourage both formal and informal dialogue. The ultimate goal of this broadly conceived interpretive effort is civic engagement, an awareness of the needs and rights of others and a willingness to talk openly and honestly with them. Through its own programs and the ones that it supports through partnerships, the park helps citizens recognize the role that individuals, acting on convictions, drawing upon an awareness of the past, and in relationship with others, can play in creating a more just world.

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This Administrative History of the Little Rock Central High School NHS relied primarily on records found in the park's central files, located in the Headquarters Office in Little Rock, Arkansas. There are two sets of records at the park's Headquarters Office. The first and most useful for the day to day activities of the park are the park's working files. These records have not been accessioned into the park's collections. Because of the relatively young age of Central High School NHS, the files have not yet been organized for archival purposes. Moreover, information about many of the programs and managerial developments since 2012 are likely contained in electronic communications which have not yet been archived or made available.

The second set of records at the park's Headquarters Office are those that have been accessioned into the park's collections. While much of the park's collection is three-dimensional items, several archival collections have been accessioned as well. In 2010, graduate students in the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) Public History Program researched and prepared an administrative history of the park. The research files for this project, which includes voluminous records pertaining to the activities of the Central High Museum, Inc., Board, as well as the transcripts for oral history interviews, are now part of the park's collections. These files proved invaluable to understanding the roots of the park in the activities of Central High Museum, Inc.

In addition to the park's files, the Denver Service Center maintains extensive records pertaining to the studies that have been conducted at the park. These files were made available to us through the Electronic Technical Information Center (eTIC).

Another important source of records are the minutes of the Little Rock School District's Board of Education. These minutes provided very useful information about the interactions between the park and the School District regarding tours of Central High School and the park's role in preserving the school. Minutes for the monthly meetings have been made available on the School District's website from 2001 to the present. The minutes for Board of Education prior to 2001 are now archived at the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, a department of the Central Arkansas Library System and are available at the research room which is shared with UALR's Center for Arkansas History and Culture.

Oral histories proved vital to the completion of this Administrative History. University of Arkansas Little Rock graduate students conducted eleven interviews with people who were instrumental in the development of Central High Museum, Inc and with the first two superintendents of the park. These interviews, together with the nine new oral history interviews conducted for this study, provided an enormous amount of information and perspectives that would otherwise have been lost, and have greatly enriched this Administrative History.

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Forney, David. March 23, 2010. Interviewed by Brian Irby, UALR.

Kilton, David. December 12, 2017. Interviewed by Deborah Harvey, OTB.

Kirk, John. December 12, 2017. Interviewed by Deborah Harvey, OTB.

Lewis, Johanna Miller. March 12, 2010. Interviewed by Eric Mills, UALR.

Madell, Michael. March 9, 2010. Interviewed by Darcy Baskin, UALR.

Miller, Laura. March 9, 2010. Interviewed by Darcy Baskin, UALR.

Miller, Laura. February 16, 2018. Interviewed by Deborah Harvey, OTB.

Miller, Virgil. March 5, 2010. Interviewed by Sara Drew, UALR.

Morris, Jodi. December 11, 2017. Interviewed by Deborah Harvey, OTB.

Nichols, Cheryl. March 1, 2010. Interviewed by Brian Irby, UALR.

Rousseau, Nancy. December 11, 2017. Interviewed by Deborah Harvey, OTB.

Rutherford, Skip. March 3, 2010. Interviewed by Sara Drew, UALR.

Tollette, Sanford. April 6, 2018. Interviewed by Deborah Harvey, OTB.

Tucker, Everett. March 4, 2010. Interviewed by Brian Irby, UALR.

White, Robin. December 12, 2017. Interviewed by Deborah Harvey, OTB.

Appendix A: Legislation

Appendix B: Staff List

CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL NHS Staffing

Note: The following list of staff who have served at Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site represents permanent staff only and does not include seasonal staff or student employees.

Name

Dates of Service

Superintendents:

David Forney	March 26, 2000-June 2002
Laura Miller (Acting)	June 2002-January 12, 2003
R. Michael Madell	January 13, 2003-May 2008
Robin White	August 2008-Present

Chief of Interpretation

Laura Miller	March 26, 2001-2010
Spirit Trickey	2010-2013
Enimini Ekong	2013 (?) -May 2016
Jodi Morris (Acting)	May 2016-June 2017
David Kilton	June 2017-Present

Park Rangers / Park Guides

Tarona Armstrong	2002-2009
Spirit Trickey	2004-2010 (STEP Employee 2002-2004)
Julie Jackson	May 2005-Spring 2009
Alyssa Warrick	February 14, 2006-2008
Christian Davis	2006-December 2011
Quantia Fletcher	June 24, 2007-December 20, 2007
Crystal Mercer	2007-2010
Cordell Anderson	May 10, 2009-April 23, 2010
Mary Jo (Jodi) Morris	August 2, 2009-Present
Brian Schwieger	July 5, 2010-
Fabian Ruiz	2014-Present (STEP 2010-2014)
Nicholas Roll	March 23, 2014-September 17, 2015
Toni Webber	2014-Present
Randy Dotson	2016-Present

Education Specialist

Lea Flowers Baker	September 8, 2003-2006
Amy Garrett	September 5, 2006-2008
Kimble Talley	August 2, 2009-2011

Administrative Officers:

Janice Lee	July 13, 2003-July 26, 2013
Kara Roll	January 12, 2014-October 12, 2015

Secretary

Oshara Hayes

September 27, 2009-October 1, 2010

Chief of Maintenance/Facility Manager

Robert McKelvey

February 2, 2009-January 23, 2016

Maintenance Workers

Daniel Lee

February 2, 2009-July 23, 2013

Roger W. Rusher

August 2, 2009-October 6, 2012

Tom Crenshaw

August 2, 2009-

Josh Hines

February 12, 2012-May 14, 2017

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