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Statement of Significance

The Olive Branch High School is being nominated to the National Register under Criteria A and C. It meets Criterion A for its association with local education and is a good representative of a rural turn-of-the-twentieth century high school. It meets Criterion C for architecture as a good example of the Craftsman style as applied to a public school and the work of architect Charles I. Williams. Olive Branch High School is an eye-catching building that conveys the importance that the rural township placed on educational architecture in the early years of the 20th century.

General History

Clark County and Bethel Township

Clark County, named for military leader General George Rogers Clark, was set off from neighboring counties and officially organized in December 1817. Springfield was designated the county seat the following spring. The rich, fertile soil of Clark County made it among the most prosperous agricultural lands of the state. In addition to being the local governmental center, Springfield grew to become the commercial hub for the surrounding farmlands and villages. Beginning in the 1850s manufacturers in Springfield began producing agricultural implements, which eventually resulted in the city becoming the leader of such products in the United States. The city prospered due to its manufacturing success and increasingly drew more people to the county.

Shortly after its formation, population for the county in 1820 was 9,533. By 1850 the population was 22,178, having the largest increase by decade in the first half of the nineteenth century. The significant rise in population may be attributed to the arrival of the National Road.

The National Road passed through Clark County in 1838 bringing a westward migration of people, commerce, and culture to the area. The National Road was the United States' first federally funded highway beginning in Cumberland, Maryland and continuing west, crossing the entire state of Ohio, before reaching Vandalia, Illinois. Springfield was the largest community along the National Road in western Ohio. Several businesses such as hotels, taverns, stores, blacksmiths, and wagon makers were established to take advantage of the passing traffic, creating Springfield's first economic boom. A number of villages in the county were established to take advantage of the road's commercial potential and inns were scattered between the villages as well.

Railroad lines reached Springfield and the county more than a decade later. With the improved transportation routes, Clark County flourished and population continued to increase. In 1880 figures reached 41,948. Population grew at a steady pace through the early 1900s. It made a sizeable jump from 66,435 in 1910 to 80,728 in 1920, reflecting the industrial boom of Springfield during those years. Steady, but incremental growth occurred after that until the three decades after WWII when population shifted to suburbs and outer lying areas of the county. In 2000 the population was 144,742.

Bethel Township, located in the southwest corner of the county, was predominantly agricultural in nature and a vigorous nursery trade was centered near New Carlisle, from where hundreds of thousands of fruit trees were shipped. The first

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settler in the region was John Paul, who built a cabin near the fork of Honey Creek in 1790. A trickle of other pioneers settled in the area later in the 1790s, but the larger number of settlers came after 1800. They mostly came from Kentucky, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. In 1881 when the county history was written, the township had a population of 3,133.

Three villages - Medway, New Carlisle, and Donnelsville – are located in the township. New Carlisle, the largest, was established in 1810 and is located slightly north of the National Road. Donnelsville, located on the National Road, was established in 1832, likely in anticipation of the pike. Between 1875 and 1881 the Indiana, Bloomington & Western Railroad was extended diagonally across Bethel Township and a railroad station was established at the crossroads of the National Road, just west of Donnelsville. The stop was on the land of the Forgy family and became known as Forgy Station. Three Forgy brothers had settled in the township in 1806 and their heirs continued to have large land holdings into the late 1800s. In addition to the railroad depot, the crossroads settlement of Forgy eventually had a post office, grocery, and a cluster of about a dozen houses.

As of the 2000 census, nearly 19,000 people live in Bethel Township. In addition to the three villages, two large housing developments contribute to the population clusters. Other than these concentrated nodes of density, the township remains predominantly rural and agricultural.

Bethel Township Educational History

Given the difficult task of settling land and basic survival in the early Ohio wilderness, provisions for the education of children were often put off for several years after settlement. As there was no system for public education, children were either taught at home or at subscription schools, for the families that had the means to pay for basic education. Compared to other sparsely populated pioneer settlements, the people of Bethel Township were progressive in establishing subscription schools even as the area was being settled. Two subscription schools were built by 1805: one on the farm of Captain McPherson and one on the farm of George Lowman. The McPherson farm and school was located in Section 21, near the present site of the Olive Branch High School. As shown by records from 1810, children from neighboring townships were enrolled in one of Bethel Township's first two schools, thus indicating that schools had yet to be established in other nearby areas within the county. (1881 Clark County History)

Later subscription schools in the township included one in New Carlisle, Keifer Detrick School, Valley School, Wallace School, and New Boston School. All were established between 1810 and 1820. These early school buildings were simply constructed log buildings, often with dirt floors.

In an effort to support public education, state legislation was passed in the 1820s, permitting property taxes to be collected on the local level for the purpose of school construction. An 1825 law placed the responsibility of schools at the township level. Despite these early financial attempts at supporting public education, funds were often insufficient, resulting in inconsistent school development from township to township and the continuation of subscription schools.

In the 1830s and 1840s, responding to a steadily increasing population and the ability to spend more time constructing a proper school building, a second generation of schools in Bethel Township replaced the earlier ones. These schools

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typically were larger, more comfortable, and brick. The upgraded schools, potentially, were also the result of at least a modest measure of public funds. The following decade brought momentous change, to the organization and funding of public schools.

“Significant legislation that had an impact on townships was passed in 1853. Now responsibility for township schools was removed from the township government and placed with a township school board that could more efficiently organize township schools, therefore providing more consistent oversight. Township school boards would now own the school property. They also were mandated to offer six months of school per year, increasing from the minimum of three months mandated in 1829. The new law further required that all basic education be free, which eliminated the fees that students had to pay in some districts where the public money was not sufficient.” (Kane, p. 10)

Following the Civil War, a third generation of Bethel Township schools was constructed. Many of these were two-story and replaced the mid nineteenth century buildings. Largely constructed in the 1870s, these schools were again in response to an increase in student population due to state legislation mandating school attendance, as well as a desire to separate children according to age and grade.

Once considered a luxury, high schools were increasingly seen as a necessary part of a child’s education as the nineteenth century progressed. The workplace had become more industrial and complex, resulting in the need for high schools to teach advanced knowledge and skills. A general acceptance, of the need for high schools, translated into pressure on the government to provide them for free like the primary schools were. Beginning in 1853, state legislation allowed for public tax money to be used for secondary education. However, this only applied to cities or exempt villages. It was another twenty-five years before township school districts could provide secondary education. In 1878, the Ohio General Assembly passed legislation allowing rural districts to establish high schools.

In an effort to consolidate the older children, the Bethel Township school board had begun campaigning for a central school building for the 4th through 8th grades, as early as 1865. Following eight years of dispute over this radical concept, a new two-story school was completed in 1873. Located in roughly the center of the township and near the Forgey settlement, the new school was named Olive Branch as an offering of conciliation to those opposed to the school’s location.

Always looking forward in educational matters, the school board was soon considering the establishment of a township high school. Once the 1878 state legislation was passed authorizing township high schools, the board began in earnest to explore the idea. It was proposed to dedicate one of the unused rooms at the Olive Branch School for high school instruction. Initially considered to be an experiment, the high school opened in October 1880. Quickly declared a success, the school board worked to link the high school with the other district schools. In order to improve the system as a whole, the high school principal also served as superintendent for all the township’s schools beginning in 1883.

At the appointment of the superintendent, Bethel Township was organized into eleven school districts, each one having a substantial building. Over half of the sub-districts had a two-story building. This system of school organization lasted into the twentieth century. In 1905, the township still had eleven sub-districts. During the fight over the decision to

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build a new high school in 1907, the Springfield Gazette noted Bethel Township as being the third richest school district in Clark County. (*School Fight in Bethel Goes Merrily On*)

Olive Branch High School

The nominated Olive Branch High School was born from the necessity to replace the 1873 Olive Branch School building. By 1900, the building was overcrowded with nearly 100 students, worn and in need of much repair. Although some of the State Inspector's mandated repairs were made that year, the township Board of Education began discussion of constructing a new school building. It took six years before a majority of the Board was in agreement to replace the old building and in May they voted to begin construction in 1907. In late 1906, architect, Charles Insko Williams presented preliminary plans for a new school to the Board.

However, in March, 1907, as contracts were to be let in preparation for the new school, J.B. Trumbo, the lone dissenter on the School Board, led an opposition movement and took legal action that delayed construction for months. At his instigation, a restraining order was placed against the Bethel Township School Board on March 22, 1907, preventing them from letting demolition contracts. His position was that the 1873 school could be repaired and enlarged and that the Board did not have sufficient funds for the new construction.

Despite the restraining order, the School Board was permitted to issue bonds to raise money for the school, which ultimately allowed them to prove to the county that they had enough funds to pay for the school. By the beginning of July, the last of the injunctions were lifted. A last ditch court effort was made on a Saturday afternoon by the opposition, but to no avail. Led by Bert Hause, a Dayton contractor, supporters of the new school building began demolishing the old one that day. By the following week, newspapers were reporting that the building was largely leveled.

Constructed at a cost of \$30,000, Charles Insko Williams' new Olive Branch High School design was completed in May, 1908. Although it was the designated township high school, the building contained space to serve the lower grades of sub-district three. Dedication ceremonies were held on May 15, 1908, with the keynote speaker being Dr. William Oxley Thompson, president of the Ohio State University. "Dr. Thompson made an eloquent address and urged the board and the people to spare no means making Bethel Township schools the best in the state of Ohio in rural communities. He complimented the people very highly on the handsome new school building." ("Patrons").

Monday, November 10, 1913 brought tragedy to the school, when a boiler in the basement caught fire. Despite efforts of teachers, students, and firefighters from as far away as Springfield, the building was largely destroyed. After several months of deliberation, the Bethel Township School Board decided to rebuild the fire gutted school. Bonds for reconstruction of Olive Branch High School were issued, in the amount of \$7000. The April 14, 1914 school board minutes indicate that Charles I. Williams was involved with the reconstruction. The minutes state that the advertisement for bids for the new high school could be found on file in the Clerk's office and also in the office of Charles Williams, Architect, Davies Building in Dayton. In May of 1914, the Dayton Construction Company was chosen to rebuild the school at a cost of \$14,497. Students returned to the building later in the year.

The building was reconstructed on the extant foundation. An examination, of historic photographs, illustrates that the school was rebuilt with the same floor plan and use of exterior materials. However, the window pattern changed slightly

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from three separate windows to a band of three windows on the main walls. The light pattern also changed from 8-over-2 to the current pattern. The clerestory window pattern also changed, from four separate, single pane windows on the rotunda walls to two, paired windows with the current sunburst pattern. The skylight with finial was also added at this time. As the majority of the historic fabric dates to the 1914 reconstruction, the period of significance begins with that year.

The Olive Branch High School was outgrown fairly quickly, and a newer high school was constructed next to it in 1929. This second high school was of the more typical two-story Neo-Classical Revival style popular for school buildings in the 1920s (demolished 2007). Although it was no longer the township's high school, the Olive Branch High School continued to be used for educational purposes. Classes for lower grades were held in the building until the 1970s. Since then, the building has been used as a warehouse for the school district. Despite its continued contributions to the township school district, the period of significance for the Olive Branch High School ends with 1929, the year that it ceased serving as Bethel Township's high school. There is considerable affection for the building within the local community and options for its preservation and re-use are being investigated.

Historic Context

The Olive Branch High School meets Criterion A for its role in local educational history. It reflects the community's dedication to education. From the pioneer days of the township, education has been a priority. The 1881 County History identified the township as being exceptional, claiming that, "In educational matters Bethel Township seems at the first settlement as well as now to have occupied the front rank." (p. 707)

Often at the avant-garde of local education, the leaders of Bethel Township pursued the latest ideals in education. In the 1860s when the grading of students was an educational topic statewide, the township school board was vigorously arguing for the separation of the older children. A more contemporary newspaper article has declared the 1880 Olive Branch High School to be "the first rural high school in Ohio." (Schmunk) While the distinction giving Bethel Township credit for the first rural high school has not been verified, it is known that the school board was actively trying to figure out how to institute a high school in the 1870s, before state legislation permitted them to do so. Upon the 1878 state law approving township operated high schools, the board worked to find a suitable location and had established Olive Branch High School within two years. Emphasizing the importance of the high school, its principal was appointed to be superintendent of all of Bethel Township's schools. Appointing such an administrator also reflected a growing educational trend in the 1880s, where "Progressive districts now had superintendents to provide administrative leadership." (McCormick, p. 90)

When it was determined that a better high school facility was needed in 1908, the school board chose to build a separate high school, with some dedicated space for the younger sub-district children. This was in direct contrast to the general pattern in many of Ohio's townships where centralized union schools were being constructed to consolidate the sub-districts and educate the children of the township under one roof. After the 1913 fire that largely destroyed the Olive Branch High School, the board again chose to offer separate high school facilities, even though the consolidation trend

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was in full force. In this manner, the Bethel Township School Board acted more like a city school district than a rural township one, with its desire to offer separate educational facilities to its high school students.

“By the 1880s public high schools were common in Ohio’s urban areas, and cities vied to have the latest technology and an architecturally designed building that reflected local civic pride.” (McCormick, p. 88) Although Bethel Township had established an early high school during this time, it was contained within an existing school building. Because of this, it was not until 1907, when the decision was made to construct a new one, that the township finally had an opportunity to build a school building that reflected their pride in the school system. Not only were the educational provisions important, but the building that housed them was as well. In this way, education and architecture were entwined.

The design of Olive Branch High School, and the decision to keep a separate high school, reflected an interest in the school as a celebrated building. The building was a statement that signified civic pride and made a local declaration about the importance of education. As related in *Educational Architecture in Ohio*, the design of a school building often was extremely important for community identity, especially in a crossroads community with a small population. (p.72)

The Olive Branch High School, today, is still a well-known landmark in the township. It was designed in 1908 not only to provide the best high school education for township residents, but to make an architectural statement as well. Six-hundred people filled the newly constructed auditorium at the May, 1908 dedication ceremonies. Discussing the new school a Springfield newspaper reported, “The building is considered the most practical and best equipped township high school structure in the state. It embodies all the latest plans in modern school architecture and has attracted state-wide interest among educators and members of boards of education.” (Pres. Fess Gives Bethel Township Baccalaureate) It is a significant historic institutional building in the context of Bethel Township, and it continues to exemplify the dedication of the community and its civic leaders to the development of the township’s school system.

The Olive Branch High School is significant as an intact local example of the Craftsman style and also meets Criterion C as a good representative of the work of local master architect, Charles Insko Williams. When constructed in 1908, the Olive Branch High School was a model of the then popular Craftsman style. The contrasting natural materials with random field stone on the bottom and stucco on the top, deep eaves, low-pitched tile roof, emphasized porch, and multi-paned windows with slender mullions were all features of the Craftsman style employed in the Olive Branch High School. Bungalow houses, with Craftsman characteristics, can be found in the township, but the Olive Branch High School is the only example of a Craftsman public or institutional building. It is fitting that a township, with a reputation for progressive educational offerings, would hire an architect that proposed the latest in architectural fashion. Both, the 1908 and the reconstructed 1914, versions of the building exemplify the popular Craftsman style.

Village and township school buildings in Ohio, in the first two decades of the 20th century, tended to be Neo-Classical Revival in style. Though the Craftsman style enjoyed popularity from 1900 to 1930, it was chiefly reserved for residential structures. It was not a common choice for schools, although Gustav Stickley did promote it, in a 1912 publication of Craftsman floor plans. It was Stickley’s assertion that rural schools were, “the poorest imitation of city educational institutions, in no way suited to the rural life and environment of farm boys and girls.” (Stickley, p. 164) His concern for quality rural schools related to a broader philosophy of American progress and the success of rural communities independent of cities. It was his belief that in order to improve country life there must be good rural

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schools, and the best way to encourage learning and a strong work ethic among children was to employ the Craftsman style in school construction. Despite Stickley's practical concerns for worthy rural education and American progress, there is a romantic undertone to his writings. In 1912, he was proposing designs for small picturesque one-room schools, or a slightly larger version with an adjoining work room. By this date, most townships had either already constructed school buildings with multiple rooms to separate the grades or were in the process of consolidating the smaller schools into a centralized school that also separated the children by age and grade level.

The Board of Education minutes indicate that Charles Insko Williams was approved for hire at the April 4, 1907 meeting. Williams was one of Dayton's leading architects, in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He was born in Cincinnati in 1853 and moved with his family to Dayton at the age of 16. He followed his public education, with a degree from the Chickering Institute of Cincinnati in 1870 and then studied at the Troy Polytechnic Institute in New York. He was employed for a time with the Pacific Northern Railroad in 1873, within the civil engineering department. Williams returned to Dayton, around 1873, and operated an artist's studio for several years. Beginning in 1880, he worked for two years for a lumber dealer, the John Rouzer Company. In 1882, Williams established an architectural practice. In 1888, he partnered with two other architects to form Williams, Otter & Dexter. Williams died in February 1923, at the age of 69.

Williams designed numerous buildings in Dayton and the surrounding region. He was responsible for several of Dayton's prominent and large-scale buildings including the YMCA, Sacred Heart Church, the Riebold Building, the Algonquin Hotel, Dayton City Club, and the Callahan Bank Building. Additionally, he designed apartment buildings, houses, and schools. His school designs included two buildings in the Riverdale neighborhood and the Stivers Manual Training High School. The Stivers School (listed, 2001), the Sacred Heart Church (listed, 1987), the Insko Apartments Building (listed, 1994) are examples of his work that have been entered into the National Register.

To date, no information has come to light regarding Williams' choice to design the school in the Craftsman style. A review of the *Springfield Gazette* and *Springfield Daily News*, from the beginning of construction in the summer of 1907 and the dedication in May 1908, did not reveal any discussion of the architectural design. With its massive chimneys, massive porch columns, and flowing interior space, elements of the Prairie style were also introduced into Olive Branch's design. Overlapping in time period with the Craftsman style, the Prairie style also espoused honesty in materials. An experienced architect, such as Charles I. Williams, likely would have been familiar with the writings of Stickley, as well as the features of this newly emerging style. Also, the 1905 construction of Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie style Westcott House, in nearby Springfield, certainly would have had an impact on creative local architects.

The Olive Branch High School is an important example of Williams' work, expressing his diversity and mastery in working with differing architectural styles. He chose to depart from the more standard use of Neo-Classicism, as an expression of the noble goals of education and democracy, as was the norm in early twentieth century school designs. In the case of Olive Branch, not only was he versatile in the language of the Craftsman style, but in its uncharacteristic application to a building type that typically was more reserved in appearance. While he may have been following Stickley's philosophy, on the improvement of rural schools through the use of the Craftsman style, Williams applied the style to a school building that respected the need to separate the grades (as Olive Branch High School still contained one sub-district of younger children) and provided for modern amenities, such as the auditorium/gymnasium and cafeteria.

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Discussing Charles Insko Williams' architecture in his 1909 history of Dayton, Drury proclaims that Williams' structures in Dayton "are ornaments to the city" and that he is "one of the most prominent representatives of this calling not only in Dayton but in the state" (p.1008). Similarly, it could be said that through his innovative design for the Olive Branch High School, he created an ornament in the county for the citizens of Bethel Township.