NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Walt Disney Elementary School
other names/site number: NA

2. Location

street & number: 200 Lakeside Drive North
not for publication: NA
city or town: Tullytown
vicinity: NA
state: Pennsylvania
code: PA
county: Bucks
code: 017
zip code: 19054

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide ___ locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official: [Signature]
Date: July 15, 2007

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official: [Signature]
Date:

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet.

___ determined eligible for the National Register
See continuation sheet.

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

other (explain): ______________________________________________________________________

Signature of Keeper: [Signature]
Date of Action: ______________________________________________________________________
5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)
- ___ private
- x__ public-local
- ___ public-State
- ___ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)
- x__ building(s)
- ___ district
- ___ site
- ___ structure
- ___ object

Number of Resources within Property

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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing): N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)
Cat: ___ EDUCATION Sub: School

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)
Cat: ___ EDUCATION Sub: School

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)
- ___ Modern Movement

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)
- foundation Concrete
- roof Asphalt
- walls Brick
- other

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

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

_x_ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
___ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
_x_ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
___ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

___ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
___ B removed from its original location.
___ C a birthplace or a grave.
___ D a cemetery.
___ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
___ F a commemoritive property.
___ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Education
Architecture

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

NA

Period of Significance

1953-1956

Significant Dates

1953

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Carver, John Stanley

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

___ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
___ previously listed in the National Register
___ previously determined eligible by the National Register
___ designated a National Historic Landmark
___ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #
Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- X. Other
Name of repository: Walt Disney Elementary School

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: approximately 20 acres

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

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Domenic Vitelli, MCP, Ph.D.
organization: University of Pennsylvania
date: May 30, 2006
street & number: 734 Wolcott Drive, B2
telephone: 215-248-0292
city or town: Philadelphia
state or zip code: PA 19118

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps
- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs
- Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(name): Pennsbury School District (contact: Principal Fay Manicke, Walt Disney Elementary School)
street & number: 200 Lakeside Drive North
telephone: 215-949-6868 ext. 20801
city or town: Levittown
state or zip code: PA 19054
The Walt Disney Elementary School is a one-story, orange brick school serving grades K-6. Built in 1953-55 at the corner of Learning Lane and Lakeside Drive, it sits at the center of the Lakeside neighborhood of the early 1950s suburban development of Levittown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania; in Tullytown Borough and Pennsbury School District. The school's 20-acre site slopes downhill from the front entrance at the east towards the rear library and classroom spaces at the west. To the west is the Lakeside recreation center and a church, beyond the large ball fields shared by the school and recreation center. The Disney School is a modern style building with a steel frame and a flat roof. Its library and rear classroom spaces constitute a one- and two-story addition(s) at the rear, constructed in 1964 and 1967-69 and renovated and altered in 2005-2006. The 1950s portions of the building retain their ability to reflect the school's historic form and function with integrity; and the later additions are effectively hidden from most views, as they are located at the point where the site slopes downhill.

The facades of the Disney School are clad in orange bricks, with large multi-pane rectangular windows with aluminum sash. At the school's front entrance, a semi-circular driveway is framed by the sweeping curve of a concrete awning that leads up to glass doors in the middle of a granite-clad façade. (The granite covers banks of windows that originally lit the entrance hall, with a large indoor concrete planter to the north of the doors.) A monumental rectangular orange brickwork chimney rises above the school from the boiler room on the north side of the building.

The building's plan consists of a front entrance hall ringed by the principal's office, gymnasium, cafeteria, and "Little Theater." A small wing runs off the south of the entrance hall, consisting of two kindergarten classrooms, a nurse's suite, and a teachers' lounge. The main classroom wing of the building runs to the west off the front entrance hall, with windows that open from a long hallway into each of ten classrooms. The classrooms in this wing each have their own lavatory and coatroom/cubby space, as well as windows that open to the exterior on two sides (making for windows on three sides of each classroom). These classrooms are arranged in a "sawtooth" plan in which each classroom frames its own exterior patio accessible via its own exterior door. A shared playground is located on the south side of the building, while the kindergarten has its own fenced playground at the front of the school. To the north is an asphalt surface parking lot and cafeteria service entry with a loading dock.

The school's hallways have concrete floors covered with synthetic material flooring and dropped ceilings. Their cinderblock walls are adorned with original drawings donated by the Walt Disney Company, while large images of Disney cartoon characters (also original Walt Disney Company artwork) are mounted on the walls of the Little Theater. Each classroom – and indeed each room of the building – has a painted label on the door naming it after a character or feature of a Disney film from the mid-20th century, for example:
The Pennsby School District, which absorbed the Tullytown School District as a result of the Pennsylvania School Reorganization Act of 1964, made two additions to the rear of the school in the 1960s. In 1964 it built a small, rectangular, brick library addition; and in 1967–69 it built a larger, two-story classroom and library addition. Although this latter addition was two stories, it is located where the site’s topography slopes off most precipitously from the original one-story volume of the original 1955 building. Thus, the massing of the 1969 addition does not overpower the rest of the attached building complex. Indeed, from the south it appears as an inconspicuous extension of the original building; and from the front of the building at the east, the 1960s additions at the rear are not even visible.

Presently (2005-2006), the Disney School is undergoing a comprehensive renovation and restoration. The 1969 wing’s brick was buckling and has been replaced with matched orange brick. There are three minor changes in the building’s plan, all listed on the plan accompanying this form: A) a small volume has been erected on the north side of the building extending the boiler room to accommodate new HVAC equipment; B) an even smaller volume has been constructed filling in a recess between the 1955 and 1969 wings on the south side of the building (photo 8); and C) the library has been extended to the north, with a circular porch. The school will have new windows that preserve the vertical registers but will change the number of panes in each vertical register from three to two. (Note that on the historic photos the original windows have one horizontal separator much thicker than the other – often giving the optical illusion from the exterior that there were two panes arranged vertically rather than three.)

The library and 1969 wing have undergone extensive interior renovations in 2005, but the classrooms, hallways, Little Theater, cafeteria, and gym of the 1955 building will retain their plan and key original features. The classrooms are receiving new sets of drawers and cubbies for students; and, as per state Department of Education mandate, an HVAC unit will be installed in each classroom. These units will be hidden from view and will occupy one of the vertical registers of windows; however, from the exterior those registers will retain the appearance of windows (only when interior lights are tuned on in the evening will they not look like windows from the outside).

The present renovation is taking care to preserve and even restore the most public spaces of the school. The front hallway’s original finish – a brown paint made to look “pickled” – has been painted over several times but will now be replicated. The windows on either side of the school’s
front doorway were filled in and faced with red granite in the 1960s (after their 1950s glass did not withstand rocks thrown through them by neighborhood teens). In 2006, the windows are being reopened and the window box planter will be restored and replanted. Finally, the school’s impressive collection of artwork – original drawings, cartoon cells, and the large figures in the Little Theater – is being protected and preserved as a key feature of the school and its heritage.

The 1960s additions at the rear of the school, significantly altered in the 2005-06 renovation, are considered non-contributing in this proposed nomination. At the downhill end of the site, they are not visible from the front of the school and do not compromise views of either of the long sides of the building.

The rest of the Walt Disney Elementary School, built in 1953-55 and renovated and restored in 2005-06, retains (and will retain when its renovation is complete in mid-2006) its ability to reflect its history and significance with integrity.
The Walt Disney Elementary School in Tullytown, Pennsylvania, is significant under National Register criteria A in the area of Education and C in the area of Architecture, for the period from the start of its construction in 1953 to 1956 (following the National Register 50-year guideline). It reflects key developments in the history of public education in Pennsylvania and meets the registration requirements for the property type of the multi-room school, as described in the MPDF *Historic Educational Resources of Pennsylvania, 1682-1969* context statement, *Pennsylvania Public Schools, 1682-1969*. As a leader in science- and technology-oriented public elementary schooling in the landmark mass suburb of Levittown, the Walt Disney School embodies the great forces of atomic-, space-, and media-age education in the “consumer society” of post-World War Two “sitcom suburbs.” As the first school in the nation to be named for Walt Disney, its 400 pupils in grades K-6 enjoyed a close connection to Disney and his characters, whose likenesses adorn the walls of the building. In their curriculum focused on science and technology, new communications media, as well as the Three Rs, the students were trained to be full members of a Cold War society. Designed by John S. Carver, a Philadelphia architect prominent in public school design in Southeastern Pennsylvania, the Disney School’s physical plant represents important developments in the creation and use of specialized rooms as well as the design of individual classroom spaces that supported this post-war public education. It accommodated its first students in the spring of 1955, was dedicated in a ceremony attended by Walt Disney on September 24, 1955, and has operated continuously as an elementary school ever since.

**Tullytown, Levittown, and their Schools**

The William Levitt & Sons Company developments in Nassau County on Long Island, Bucks County in southeastern Pennsylvania, and Willingboro in southern New Jersey are landmarks of post-World War Two suburbanization.¹ Borrowing a phrase from historian Dolores Hayden, these are the archetypical “sitcom suburbs,” emblematic of the lifestyle and culture of 1950s America—a nation of nuclear families obsessed with the atomic bomb, outer space, Hollywood, and the new medium of television.² Levitt & Sons pioneered mass-produced housing that both served and fueled the mass movement of automobile-driving working and middle class families


² The term “sitcom suburbs” derives from Hayden, *Building Suburbia*. 
to the urban fringe. (The company also built Levittowns in Puerto Rico and France, exporting its model for mass suburbanization.) The largest of the Levittowns straddled Falls, Bristol and Middletown Townships and Tullytown Borough in Bucks County. The need for housing in this previously agricultural district suddenly arose in 1950 when U.S. Steel announced it would build one of the world’s largest steel mills nearby, with 6,000 new jobs in the area. Levitt purchased 5,750 acres of farmland where his company erected 17,311 single family homes between 1952 and 1958 – an estimated 200 homes per week, or one home every sixteen minutes.

Unlike the first Levittown, on Long Island, the community in Bucks County was planned as a “self-contained city” with residential and recreational areas, schools, and churches connected by tree-lined parkways. The entire development was grouped into seven or eight “superblocks,” each divided into 40 neighborhoods of about 430 homes. At the center of each superblock was a civic center consisting of a public elementary school, recreational area, and a public swimming pool. Running through the heart of Levittown, PA, was the 114-foot-wide Levittown Parkway, which gave residents access to the Levittown Shop-a-rama (or Levittown Shopping Center), a sprawling outdoor mall with acres of parking on Route 13 in Tullytown. The center cost $25 million to build in 1952-53, and more than 900 storeowners applied for the 90 store spaces available.

Tullytown Borough and its school district were home to just a portion of one Levittown neighborhood, the Lakeside section. Yet even this more than tripled the borough’s population. In 1950, the borough had just 125 houses, 625 residents, and two wooden two-room schoolhouses. Five years later it was home to more than 2,000 people and the Philadelphia region’s premier suburban shopping center. The Shop-a-rama gave Tullytown the lion’s share of new commercial tax base created by the Levittown’s development. Local leaders spent this veritable windfall on the Disney School. While Levitt & Sons built nearby Thomas Jefferson School in Bristol Township for $475,000, Tullytown spent $850,000 on its new school of comparable size. Included in this cost was $70,000 the Tullytown School District paid to Levitt, which did not donate the site. Cost-conscious columnist Peter Binzen of the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin complained, “after the cost has been financed over 30 years or more the borough – and the entire state – will have spent more than $1,200,000, or more than $2,000 per pupil.”

Schools of the post-World War II era were more than necessary public services. In metropolitan areas increasingly fragmented into myriad city and suburban communities, public schools and the tax base that supported them became tools to support healthy local growth. In a 1955 brochure entitled “Your Schools in an Expanding Community,” the Bucks County School Service Center noted that, “For many, schools were the drawing card in their move to” Levittown. “You are one of about 75,000 persons,” it told readers, “who are moving into what is becoming one of the greatest industrial areas of our country.” School officials estimated 25,000

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3 Peter Binzen, “Whims of Architects and Boards Determine Price of New Schools,” Evening Bulletin (1954). Except where noted, newspaper articles, letters, and other primary sources cited in this narrative are preserved in the scrapbooks of the Walt Disney Elementary School, Tullytown, PA.
new pupils over the next decade, reminding readers “In a period of the worst shortage of teachers in our history 600 new elementary teachers will be needed in the next eight years.”

“Fortunately,” County officials boasted, “your area enjoys outstanding educational leadership. School board members and school administrators... spend three and four evenings per week tackling these problems with only satisfaction as a reward.... As new houses arose from the spinach fields, school buildings were already in construction.” Boosterism aside, local districts could not support this expansion on their own, so local leaders lobbied successfully for state and federal aid that would cover more than 40 percent of building costs. “To meet the teacher shortage,” the County reported, “school boards have raised salaries for beginning teachers above those in adjacent areas to attract the best talent.” With “Modern cafeterias and auditorium-gymnasiums” as well as classrooms with separate washrooms, new schools in the Levittown area included the most “modern” amenities. Nowhere was this more evident than in Tullytown’s $850,000 elementary school.

If the Shop-a-rama and state subsidies paid for this school, the students of Tullytown deserve credit for shaping its distinctive identity and role as an educational institution of “sitcom suburbia.” With the new school in the planning stages in 1953, the school board asked its kindergarten-through-sixth grade students to choose the person for whom the institution would be named. In a market flooded by Disney films, books, magazines, and toys, it should come as no surprise that these five-through-eleven-year-olds chose the person who provided the bulk of their entertainment and inspiration from popular culture. The administrators of adjacent districts named their new schools for historic symbols of American democracy and industrialization such as Thomas Jefferson and steamboat pioneer John Fitch; or they chose names that referenced William Penn’s nearby colonial manor (Penn Valley and Manor Elementary Schools). In selecting Walt Disney, the children of Tullytown effectively defined a distinct cultural and educational agenda for their school.

**Public Education for a Consumer’s Republic in a Media Age**

By 1954, as construction began on both the Disney Elementary School in Tullytown and the Disneyland theme park in Anaheim, California, more than 22 million Americans had TV sets in their homes. Built at the intersection of Lakeside Drive and Learning Lane, the Disney School reflected the media-focused consumer society of the era in more than just its name. Its relationship with Walt Disney himself, the imagery of the school environment, and the educational aspirations of school leaders and students alike reveal a “consumerist” vision of

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4 “Your Schools in an Expanding Community,” brochure prepared by Bucks County School Service Center, Doylestown (c.1954).
5 Ibid.
education in what historian Elizabeth Cohen has termed the “consumer’s republic” of the postwar era.  

Tullytown’s school administrators were apparently surprised at the students’ choice of Disney—presumably they expected the children to name their school after a founding father or war hero in American history. The children “requested that they be allowed to name their classrooms for their favorite Disney characters,” the Bucks County Courier-Times explained. Local “educators were in agreement that a pleasant, happy school atmosphere is conducive to better education, the children’s wishes were readily granted and seconded.” They contacted Disney, who agreed to attend the dedication and pledged to send artists to decorate the school’s interior walls. The school board procured a proclamation from Pennsylvania Governor George Leader and Tullytown Burgess Frederick Rentschler, declaring the day of the school’s dedication as Walt Disney Day. Their decree articulates a vision of Disney and his creations as a fitting muse for public education in a society and culture increasingly dominated by entertainment media:

Whereas, Walt Disney has stimulated the interest of children in the history of our great country and in literature through his portrayal of the lives of real and fictional greats and... furthered educational procedures through entertainment media, thus making it possible for teachers and educators to draw upon the great entertainment industry for educational inspiration and teaching aids...  

Tullytown School District President Benjamin Kine echoed this vision, explaining, “To this school we have given the name of a man, a pioneer, one who understands and is understood by all the children and peoples of the world.... one who is opening new frontiers in understanding and in education.” In a world in which cartoon books and movies were becoming children’s earliest and best-loved media of learning and communication, Disney and his characters were raising a generation of Americans (and other nations’ children) whose literacy—and cultural literacy—depended ever more on Hollywood. In a school intimately connected to Disney, adults assumed the pupils would consume their education all the more rapaciously.

On Saturday, September 24, 1955, just after 3:00pm, Walt Disney arrived from Hollywood on a Pennsylvania Railroad train at the Levittown/Tullytown station. President Eisenhower had been invited, but nobody seemed to notice that he did not attend. In an article entitled “Tullytown Becomes Modern Suddenly,” the Courier-Times announced, “The Borough of Tullytown... is destined for nationwide fame... with the appearance of the fabulous Walt Disney.” Some 7,000

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8 Ibid.
9 Benjamin Kine, President, Tullytown Board of School Directors, letter to “The Children of the Twenty-First Century, c/o The Walt Disney School,” in the time capsule at the Walt Disney Elementary School, Tullytown, PA.
10 “Tullytown Becomes Modern Suddenly.”
Levittowners greeted Disney at the station. Shouting children swarmed him, clutching at his coat sleeves and pants. After a brief tour of Levittown with the area’s congressman and other local politicians, he arrived at the school. There he was officially greeted by Sixth Grade Class President Colin Cho, “Miss Levittown” Ann Cheatham, and a thousand children decked out in Davy Crockett caps and masks. (Although Levittown was notoriously a “closed” all-white community that rioted when the first African American family moved into the Dogwood Hollow section of Bristol Township in 1957, Chinese Americans evidently lived there from at least 1955 – and were popular enough among children to be voted class president.)

In a brief ceremony under cloudy skies, Walt Disney helped lay the school’s cornerstone, applying the final touches of mortar. “I am very glad,” he said to the two thousand people in attendance, “that you people named the school after me two years ago. For today… it would probably be known as the Davy Crockett school,” after the star of the Disney film currently raking it in at the box office. Following the dedication, the crowd entered the building, which had been partially open since the spring. Disney visited each classroom and students performed skits based on Disney tales in the school’s Little Theater. For the pupils’ further enjoyment (and education) in this room, Disney had given the school copies of his most popular films.

Even when the movie mogul had returned to Hollywood, the children of the Disney School would be left with daily reminders of the man and his “magic kingdom” of characters. The Disney Company donated a portrait of its founder for display in the school’s main lobby. Enlarged cells from Disney films and original drawings of Disney characters adorned hallways and offices, including a charcoal rendering of Captain Hook for the principal’s office. Walt Disney Productions’ Creative Director C. Robert Moore and his staff prepared four-to-eight-foot tall characters mounted on Masonite, including Donald Duck, Goofy, Dumbo, Peter Pan, Pinocchio, Jiminy Cricket, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and of course Mickey and Pluto – all of which were mounted in the Little Theater. (Moore also designed murals for the next two schools named after his boss, in Marceline, Missouri, and Anaheim, California.) According to Disney’s Advertising Manager Larry Graburn, these images made “it the Walt Disney School in more than name only.”

Science, Technology, and Cold War Public Schooling

The cornerstone that Walt Disney helped lay in 1955 is a hollow block of marble that, like many cornerstones, serves as a time capsule. At the dedication ceremony, Levittowners inserted seeds from Congressman Karl King’s Tullytown ranch, a postcard of Levittown, iron ore from Venezuela, blueprints of the school, as well as letters and photographs. School Board President Kine’s contribution was a letter to “The Children of the Twenty-First Century, c/o The Walt

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13 Larry Graburn to John S. Linscott, Jr. (August 11, 1955).
Disney School." His message expresses a widely shared view of the purpose of American public education a decade into the Cold War:

We of the Twentieth Century are living in a world of strife and turbulence where forces of darkness, as in all eras, threaten to stifle our freedom. We know if democracy is to continue it will be on the basis of an enlightened, thinking people. History has shown the existence of liberalism and liberty can be maintained only with the coexistence of a vigorous, free public school system. We in this little town of ours have tried to do our part in making your future secure, 'young friends of the Twenty-First Century.' We have built the best of educational programmes. We have done our utmost to enkindle the desire for truth and knowledge and a spirit of pride which will give your grandfather’s grandfather, the child of today, a sound basis for his life and we hope for yours.  

For Kine and his colleagues in Tullytown, a “consumerist” education was a social and political imperative in an era in which capitalist America and the communist USSR had become supreme enemies, in what had come to be called the Cold War. The Walt Disney Company was a powerful symbol of American capitalism in the face of “the Communist threat” that politicians like Senator Joseph McCarthy warned was lurking at home and abroad. Like youngsters across the nation, students at the Disney School in Levittown huddled beneath their desks during bomb raid drills. But there was more to Cold War society and education than political ideology and the threat of nuclear war.

The Cold War era marked a profound shift in U.S. industry and labor markets, which in turn reshaped the roles of schools in American life. Historians now view the post-World War Two decades as a turning point in the United States’ shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a service- and knowledge-based economy. U.S. Steel was the impetus for Levittown’s initial construction, yet Levittown was not a steel town whose children were raised to toil in the mill. Rather, parents and school administrators envisioned a future labor market of scientists, entertainment industry workers, and service sector professionals. Although they may not have anticipated the great difficulties arising from the decline of the manufacturing economy in Pennsylvania and the Rustbelt of the Northeast and Midwest, they were right about the general direction of the American economy.

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14 Kine to “The Children of the Twenty-First Century.”
16 For a discussion of the rise of the knowledge economy and its impacts on urban and suburban development, see Margaret Pugh O’Mara, Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004).
In the context of this labor market shift, coupled with the GI Bill that swelled college enrollments with military veterans, for the first time ever a large proportion of the students at working-and-middle class suburban schools like Disney were expected to seek a university education. Elementary schools, their leaders and parents began to pay unprecedented attention to how their schools rated compared to others in an increasingly competitive educational environment. In an international economy and culture with a high premium on science and high technology, “instructional technology” became the watchword at the elementary school level. While high schools were judged by their laboratory facilities, the quality of an elementary school was often judged not only by its teachers and library but also by the number of film projectors, recording devices, and other communications devices it had. It was this that made the Disney School the envy of science- and economy-minded adults in Lower Bucks County.

As the building at Lakeside Drive and Learning Lane neared completion, the Tullytown School Board was busy investing in the materials and technologies that would make the new school a leader in elementary education. In January 1955, the Board announced that it had already purchased more than 1,000 books for Disney’s library of an estimated 2,000 books (a large collection for an elementary school of the era). Even more important was its advanced media apparatus: “Among much equipment purchased for the new school in recent weeks were three record players, two portable classroom radios and a tape-recorder,” the Board crowed. At a local meeting, Assistant County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Morton Botel “told Tullytown directors and spectators the Disney school ranks in the upper one percent in the country in the quality of its equipment and in instructional material. He said the school also rated in the upper ten percent in the quality of its instruction.” Local efforts were supported by county-wide initiatives. The brochure on Levittown’s new schools put out by the County School Service Center boasted of its special reading programs, whose “Clinical facilities are... equivalent to those in nearby universities.” The County Service Center’s film library offered “Over 350 reels of educational and civil defense films” available for loan to schools, PTAs, and other civic groups. Presumably the Disney School needed little assistance of this sort from the County, as it acquired its own remarkable collection of Walt Disney films, helping to make it the envy of children in Lower Bucks County.

On April 14, 1955, the partially completed Walt Disney School opened its doors to its first students. Soon thereafter, it installed a piece of playground apparatus beyond any child’s Cold War dreams. “When the Board of Education in Tullytown, Pa. began choosing playground equipment for its new elementary school,” reported LIFE magazine in its May 16 issue, “officials decided to hunt for something different from the usual swings and slides.” Congressman King had procured a Douglas Skyrocket supersonic jet destined for the scrap heap, which the Navy stripped of its motor and electronic gear and sent to Levittown for just $324 in shipping costs. This ground-test plane had once traveled at a record-breaking speed of 1,300

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17 “Disney School Main Wing Scheduled To Open March 1,” Evening Post (January 7, 1955).
18 “Disney School Rated High; Dedication Plans Readied” (unidentified newspaper clipping).
19 “Your Schools in an Expanding Community.”
miles per hour and set an altitude record of over 13 miles. "Not only do the youngsters love it," the LIFE article continued, "but the school supervisor happily concludes, 'It's cheaper than a good set of swings -- and a lot less dangerous.'" The magazine celebrated the Skyrocket as the ultimate symbol of a space age education:

When it comes to acquiring a streamlined education, the new Walt Disney School in Tullytown, Pa., should be the children's choice. Where else can one find a real-to-goodness space ship in a school playground that cost almost $9,500,000 to build, set an altitude record of more than 13 miles, and has zoomed through the air at better than twice the speed of sound? ... [The plane] at the disposal and command of the space-minded children attending the Walt Disney School... is the most expensive piece of playground equipment in the United States.... Although the school continues to feature the 'Three R's' it has been suggested that the 'Four R's' -- Readin' -- Ritin' -- Rithmetic and rocket planes' -- would be more in line with today's education. The plane, destined for the scrap heap after serving its usefulness as an experimental research plane, is, indirectly, teaching the children about the world in space around them. They discuss the stars, the moon and the planets they will soon be 'blasting off' for in their 'Flying Swordfish' -- a job that even the Navy hesitated to try in the Skyrocket.

LIFE also profiled how the plane was already informing education in the classroom. The caption of one photograph read: "Teacher Patricia Meckley holds a globe of the world as she indicates to class where their plane flew in tests." In everything from science to geography, the Skyrocket inspired Disney's teachers and students to pursue a global, "high tech" elementary education befitting their Cold War society.

In June, the Disney School graduated its first class of sixth graders. In a series of speeches at the commencement ceremony, students recounted their school's place in the history of education: Karen Walterick read a paper on "Education Among Primitive People"; Donna Johnson surveyed "Education in Colonial America"; Joan Smith covered "Public Education in the United States"; Barbara Kitson reminded those assembled of "The Value of Education"; and finally Tecla Fritz completed this evolutionary tale with remarks on "Education at the Walt Disney Elementary School" -- presented as the acme of elementary schooling in the free world. A School District administrator read a "letter from Walt Disney congratulating the graduating class and expressing regret that he could not personally attend the ceremony." He would join them at the school's formal dedication in September.

Yet in the euphoria surrounding the new Disney School, the happy images of cartoon characters and children climbing on a decommissioned airplane captured only the optimism of the era. The Douglas Skyrocket was more than a benign machine built to make people fly like Peter Pan -- it

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was ultimately a tool of the military-industrial complex. And this darker side of Cold War educational imperatives reared its head two years after Walt Disney came to Levittown. On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, the first artificial satellite to orbit the planet Earth. The United States had suddenly fallen behind in the space race. From universities and corporate research labs to the elementary schools whose students would someday study and work in those colleges and labs, Americans took immediate steps to remedy this.

In November, the Courier-Times reported that administrators had invited local scientists to a meeting at the Disney School to consult them on how to expand its science curriculum. John Liscott, Jr., Supervisor of the Tullytown School District and Disney’s first principal, explained:

It would appear that our survival as a nation may depend upon maximum utilization of technical skill and development of lay citizens who are capable of understanding the implications of technological advances.... This development of technological skill and enlightenment can be accomplished only with increased emphasis on the sciences beginning as early as kindergarten and extending throughout the life of an individual. It seems necessary then to provide now for reassessment of the adequacy of the present science and arithmetic program and to plan for a long range improved school wide science and arithmetic program as well as a specific program in their fields for our fast learners.  

While no one imagined all Disney students would grow up to be scientists, the children were expected to attain a high level of technological literacy in order to be full citizens of an increasingly technological society engaged in a space race and a corresponding arms race. Its Cold War curriculum included classroom lessons and special assemblies on simple chemistry, astronomy, and robotics, in addition to mathematics, natural science, and the old staple of wartime public education, Americanism or patriotism (photos 19, 20).

Despite its focus on modern technology, the Disney School also showed a very human side of the era’s schools. Cold War suburban America has been portrayed as a society of nuclear families relatively isolated from one another, assembled on the couch watching television or cowering in their private nuclear bomb shelters. Yet cultural historians and sociologists have pointed out that churches, myriad clubs, and in particular schools brought early mass suburbanites together to shape their own social networks and identities as communities. Indeed, in addition to the Tullytown scientists’ contributions to the school, the level of parents’ and children’s extra-curricular participation at Disney suggests a great measure of social investment, excitement, and interaction in the school as an institution of community-building.

District administrators enabled a culture of what the Levittown Times called “open schools.” In the summer of 1954, a local newspaper reported the school directors “voted to allow all non-profit organizations in Tullytown free use of Walt Disney facilities. Boy and Girl Scouts were

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22 "Tullytown Schools Plan Science Unit," Courier-Times (November 1957).
23 See, for example, Gans, Levittowners; May, Homeward Bound; Halberstam, The Fifties.
also granted rent-free privileges providing the troops had Tullytown representation.”

Citing interest from about 200 parents beyond the district boundaries, the following spring they voted to extend Disney’s kindergarten “to children living outside the borough,” for tuition fees of $200 per year. In July 1955, following the school’s first months of operation, the Philadelphia Inquirer noted “a record attendance during the first three days of the summer recreation program at the Disney School” – 210 youngsters, fully 84% of its initial enrollment.

Parents, too, flocked to the school as a center of their new community. In September 1956, two hundred attended a tea sponsored by the PTA, whose membership counted some 239 engaged citizens. In its early years, the organization sponsored a variety of events of concern to this Cold War community, including evening lectures by child psychologists, scientists, physical fitness experts, and educators, as well as school-day events such as book fairs, bake sales, “yuletide frolics,” a Dental Hygiene Day, and a fashion show and ice cream party. At Walt Disney, the “public” in public schooling thus merged the public purpose of scientific education for a Cold War society with the civic engagement of a new media age suburban community whose school represented the hopes and aspirations of its citizens. The modernity of this mission was reflected in the building’s design.

Modern Architecture for a Modern School

The Disney School garnered national attention for its architecture (in addition to its jet plane). When Modern Schools Magazine profiled the school in 1956, it marveled at three things in particular. The Little Theater was a great luxury in an era when most schools used their gymnasiums or cafeterias for performances and assemblies. The classrooms were remarkable for their “use of the outdoors for instruction” and their individual sinks, drinking fountains, and tiled lavatories contained in each “integrated” classroom. These two features were unique to Disney, even among the schools of other affluent Bucks County districts in this era. And of course the Disney imagery and names on each door – from the principal’s office to the public bathrooms – distinguished the school from its counterparts named after founding fathers or inventors of the nineteenth century (with whom elementary school students had far less intimate, engaged relationships).

The Disney School is a distinctive work of 1950s modern design. The sweeping curve of its concrete front entrance awning frames the school’s public driveway, evoking the forms of other

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24 “Disney School Rated High; Dedication Plans Readied” (summer 1954).
26 “School Budget of $266,924 OKd by Tullytown,” Philadelphia Inquirer (July 9, 1955).
28 “Disney PTA to Hear Levittown Dentist” (February 1960); “Walt Disney School’s PTA will sponsor a fashion show and ice cream party... at the Levittown school” (April 1960).
29 Jo Drager, Editor, Modern Schools Magazine, to Fred Gehlhaus, Philadelphia Electric Company (February 14, 1956).
concrete automobile-oriented architecture like motels and root beer stands. Its monumental orange brickwork chimney sprouts from its sprawling one-story structure, resembling the basic form of the massive suburban factories of the post-World War II era that increasingly employed the fathers of children at Disney and other schools – and promised to employ the children when they grew up. However, the “sawtooth” plan in which the square volumes of its classrooms frame their individual outdoor courtyards distinguished it from those factories as well as from other schools. The banks of windows extending nearly floor-to-ceiling, looking out to the schoolyard and into the building’s central hallway, lit each of those classrooms on three sides and gave them a light, open feeling reminiscent of the elite residential architecture of the Modernist period. Finally, the names of Disney characters on each door and the Disney Company artwork, from the figures in the Little Theater to the artwork hanging in the hallways, adorned this quintessentially modern building with some of the most emblematic imagery of 1950s American visual culture.30

The region’s press celebrated – and critiqued – the Disney School’s originality. Striking a chord with the experiential emphasis of education in the consumer’s republic, journalist Maury Allen called it “Scaled and carved for the young... a living world of juvenile dreams. Learning can be nothing but an exciting adventure in that building.”31 The Evening Post cited its “very best modern, comfortable equipment” and the layout of classrooms that “facilitate teaching methods” both indoors and outdoors.32 Alternately, in his exposé on public spending for school buildings, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin reporter Peter Binzen complained that the “new concept” of “integrated classrooms, each with its own wardrobe, lavatory and outside exit door,” unnecessarily “multiplies the maintenance problem, especially in regard to lavatory walls.” Writing while the school was under construction in 1954, he referred facetiously to the Little Theater as “the piece de résistance” and swooned at the projected $38,700 cost of school equipment, which outpaced the technology investments of any other Pennsylvania school he could find.33

The building’s architect, John Stanley Carver (1900-1975), was a leading designer of public schools in Eastern Pennsylvania. A native of the region, his education was a technical one from the start. After studying at the Williamson Technical School, he pursued extensive design training at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, then Syracuse University, and finally the Beaux-Arts Institute in Paris. From 1924 to 1945, he served as an in-house architect for the School District of Philadelphia, designing the Jules Mastbaum High School among others. In the early 1940s, he also designed public housing for wartime workers in Pottstown, Montgomery County. From 1945 to 1953, he practiced in the firm of Davis, Dunlap & Carver, which specialized in public schools, including commissions for the Glenolden Elementary

30 For discussion of Disney’s role in the visual culture of 1950s America, see: Karal Ann Marling, As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994).
33 Binzen, “Whims of Architects and Boards Determine Price of New Schools.”
School in Delaware County; John Hartranft School in Norristown and the Upper Dublin Junior High School, both in Montgomery County; Samuel Gompers School in Philadelphia; and Solebury-New Hope Elementary School in Bucks County. The firm also designed a public housing project in North Philadelphia.\(^{34}\)

From 1953, Carver practiced alone, continuing as one of the most active and important public school architects of the Southeastern Pennsylvania suburbs. Already in 1952, he had received mention in William Cornog’s book, School of the Republic; and the region’s architectural establishment celebrated his Walt Disney School design in the ALA/T-Square Yearbook in 1954 and 1956.\(^{35}\) This was apparently his first solo project after parting ways with M. Edmunds Dunlap and Paul A. Davis; and the Levittown school and the publicity it received clearly boosted Carver’s reputation and gained him new clients. Between the mid-1950s and early 70s, he designed some twenty new suburban elementary, junior high, and high schools, including the Whitpain Elementary School (Montgomery County, 1955); Eagleville and Woodland Elementary Schools (Lower Providence, Montgomery County, 1956 and 1968); Thomas Fitzwater Elementary School (Springfield, Montgomery County, 1962); Joseph Hart and Everett A. McDonald Elementary Schools and William Tennant High School (Warminster, Bucks County, 1962, 1966, and 1962, respectively); Ridley South Junior High School (Ridley Park, Delaware County, 1968); Lower Merion Elementary School (Montgomery County, 1968); and Norristown Elementary School (Montgomery County, 1968); Lower Moreland Senior High and Intermediate Schools (Montgomery County, 1968 and 1970); and Fort Washington Elementary and Three Tuns Junior High Schools (Upper Dublin, Montgomery County, 1970 and 1971). He also designed the John B. Kelly Elementary School (1969) for his old employer, the School District of Philadelphia.

In 1966, Carver was named a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.\(^{36}\) This honor clearly recognized his school designs, as his was a highly specialized practice. Only two other Carver projects in the post-1950 period are listed in the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings database: the Pennsylvania State Police Troop B Headquarters in Wyoming County (1965) and the Main Line Unitarian Church in Easttown, Delaware County (1970).\(^{37}\) And with the exception of the school in inner city Philadelphia and the one in elite Lower Merion, all of his educational commissions were located in growing, middle class sitcom suburbs that took their inspiration from Levittown.

\(^{34}\) Information on Carver and associated firms is from the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project, www.philadelphiabuildings.org. Obituaries of Carver were printed in the Philadelphia Inquirer (1 September 1975) and Sunday Bulletin (31 August 1975).

\(^{35}\) William H. Cornog, School of the Republic (Philadelphia, 1952), 304; ALA/T-Square Yearbook (1954 and 1956), 29 and 27 respectively.


\(^{37}\) For a review of Carver’s career and commissions, see: www.philadelphiabuildings.org.
The Disney School after Walt Disney

If the Disney Elementary School was a seminal work for the career of architect John Carver, its connection to Walt Disney himself was far more important and enduring for the school community itself. When the animator died in 1966, a local newspaper reported, the news “came especially hard to the 400 Levittown youngsters whose school is named after the famous cartoonist. At the brightly decorated Walt Disney Elementary School the pupils had been preparing get-well cards to send to their school’s namesake. Principal George Kobal said they will now make sympathy cards instead, and will send them to Disney’s family.”

The 1960s brought more changes to the Disney School. The state’s School Reorganization Act 299 merged the Tullytown School District into the Pennsbury District, which made two additions to the rear of the building – a library in 1964 and a new classroom wing in 1969. The new district’s board sold the Douglas Skyrocket plane to the New England Air Museum at Bradley Airport in Connecticut, which later sold it to a private collector.

Yet the school’s connection to Disney and the collective sense that this school stands out from its counterparts in suburban Bucks County live on. In anniversary celebrations in 1985, 1995, and 2005, the school has preserved and added to its cornerstone time capsule, including contemporary Disney Company and Disney School paraphernalia. In 2005, the Walt Disney Corporation declared the school’s students “honorary citizens” of Disneyworld. Through its latest renovation in 2005-2006, school administrators have protected and preserved the Disney Company artwork, reversed alterations made to the front entrance in the 1960s to recapture the original design, and ensured that the 1955 building remains preserved in its original form.

In its history and built environment, the Walt Disney Elementary School in Levittown, Pennsylvania, archetypically embodies the central themes in the cultural, economic, and architectural history of post-World War Two elementary education. It was a key institution in building America’s mass suburban, Cold War, space age, media age, “consumer’s republic” society, mediating the transition from a manufacturing economy to an information economy dominated by high tech, science-based industry, services, and media. It continues to reflect its historical significance in the areas of Education (criterion A) and Architecture (criterion C) with integrity.

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38 "Disney Death Stuns Pupils" (1966).
39 *Bristol Courier* (September 25, 1964).
40 John Fretts, "The story of 'The Walt Disney Rocket’ lost and found!" (n.d.).
Bibliography

Newspaper articles, letters, and other primary sources cited in this narrative are preserved in the scrapbooks of the principal's office at the Walt Disney Elementary School, Tullytown, PA.

AIAT-Square Yearbook (1954 and 1956).


Boundary Description

The boundaries of the Walt Disney Elementary School at 200 Lakeside Drive (the corner of Lakeside Drive and Learning Lane) consist of the school building and adjacent grounds. Beginning at the northwest corner of Lakeside Drive and Learning Lane, the property line runs west along the north side of Lakeside Drive to the northeast corner of Lakeside Drive and Pine Lake Park Lane; thence north along the east side of Pine Lake Park Lane to the southeast corner of Pine Lake Park Lane and Pinewood Drive; thence east along the south side of Pinewood Drive to the southwest corner of Pinewood Drive and Learning Lane; thence south along the west side of Learning Lane to the point of beginning. In total, the property encompasses approximately twenty (20) acres.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Walt Disney Elementary School property include the one-story building designed by John S. Carver and erected 1954-1955, together with the rear additions completed in 1969 and 2005 (a 1964 addition was partially subsumed by the 1969 addition and completely subsumed by the 2005 addition) and the grounds surrounding the school on all sides. The property consists of the land set aside by developer Levitt & Company for the school at the center of the Lakeside neighborhood of Levittown, PA, and purchased by the Tullytown School District (which was later subsumed by the Pennsbury School District). The grounds continue to serve their original functions as playgrounds and playing fields on the south side of the building and parking for faculty and staff on the north side of the building. The curving drive at the front (east side) of the school retains its original route.
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<td>Canopy for bus drop-off area; lobby and main offices</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Canopy for bus drop-off area; note fenced playground for kindergarten rooms extending from edge of canopy</td>
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<td>Kindergarten rooms and fenced playground area</td>
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<td>South side of school, showing original classrooms (right and center) and 1964 classroom addition (left)</td>
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<td>South side classroom showing angled patio arrangement</td>
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<td>Kindergarten classroom interior; note door accessing fenced play area</td>
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<td>Typical classroom interior, tennis balls on chair legs for floor protection and noise reduction</td>
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<td>Little Theater view from stage, showing artwork on wall, original seating and lighting design</td>
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