

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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 certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name José Fontán School

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Del Carmen St. corner with *calle principal final*

 N/A

not for publication

city or town Morovis

 X

vicinity

state Puerto Rico

code PR

county Morovis

code 101

zip code 00687

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this **X** 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 **X** meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Carlos A. Rubio Cancela

Signature of certifying official

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

Title

Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box)

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

| <u>Contributing</u> | <u>Noncontributing</u> | |
|---------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | 0 | buildings |
| 0 | 0 | district |
| 0 | 0 | site |
| 0 | 0 | structure |
| 0 | 0 | object |
| 1 | 0 | Total |

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico, 1900- 1930

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/ School

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/ School

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH& EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS

Spanish Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete

walls: Concrete/Masonry Units

roof: Concrete

other: Metal: Steel

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

The *José Fontán Elementary School*, located at the at the end of *Del Carmen* Street in the Municipality of Morovis, Puerto Rico, is a C-shaped, one story, reinforced concrete building erected near the town's main plaza. Built between 1925 and 1927 in a 1.95 acre lot, the six-classroom school constitutes a most noteworthy academic facility among others erected at the time. It was designed by US architect Joseph O'Kelly, who resorted to a transitional design idiom incorporating Neoclassical and Spanish Revival styles upon designing it. Because of its urban location, a unique chamfered entrance, the appropriation of classical details, the use of Spanish terracotta roof tiles, and fine construction craftsmanship, the *José Fontán School* stands out as a significant historic resource, still relevant in its location.

Narrative Description

The *José Fontán School* sits at the heart of town in Morovis, amidst Puerto Rico's central mountain range. Its northern side adjoins *calle Del Carmen final, Barrio Pueblo*; west of it runs what is called *calle principal* (main street). Somewhat on axis with Morovis' main public square (named after Juan Evangelista Rivera) and the Catholic church honoring our lady of *El Carmen*, the school is flanked on its north side by the parking area of a modern community library, the *Biblioteca Electrónica Municipal Julia M. Chéverez Marrero* (2004). Dating from 1927, the school occupies a footprint of 6,998 square feet in a one-acre lot. Today, along with other adjoining properties, the school is part of the multi-building campus of the Urban Elementary School of Morovis, which comprises three academic entities: *Alonso del Río Graded School* (1925), *José M. Gallardo Graded School* (1939), and the town's high school (known as the *Plan Morovis School*). Smaller, accesory buildings are part of the compuond.

The *José Fontán* occupies a semi-flat terrain that slopes westward, a condition that allows for crawl space and storage in a lower area provided by the original design, but not used today, abandoned instead. Only one story high, the C-shaped school includes six classrooms, two offices, storage areas, two restrooms, and corridors, all within a perimeter of 70 feet x 150 feet. Laid out longitudinally from east to west, the building makes an exception to its otherwise orthogonal composition by incorporating its most notable feature, a chamfered corner (*chaflán*, in Spanish) in its northeast end. Further highlighted by rising taller than the rest of the building, this chamfered facade

houses the main entrance.¹ As the most prominent of all of the school's elevations, the *chaflán* boasts ornamental details absent elsewhere in the property. Explanations (documents, letters, or drawings) accounting for the architect's emphatic urban gesture of the chamfered facade are lacking. Nevertheless – fully aware that facing the main plaza was impeded by an empty plot of land located in between – the designer might have chosen to acknowledge main street and/or the adjacent schools across. What would have been an otherwise symmetrical plan was thus altered to acknowledge specific contextual conditions and to accommodate already existing pedestrian circulations.

In billboard-like manner – with its chamfer anchored by two “folds” at each end - the main elevation of the *José Fontán School* rises imposingly as a result of both its geometrical “shift” in plan, and a rather generous adoption of ornamental components. In this front facade, hierarchy is underscored through myriad design devices. A traditional Roman arch (semicircular) welcomes the visitor at its center. To access the building, one has to climb up seven steps flanked by a low pier at each side.(FIG 1) As high as the set of steps, a base surrounds the whole building, projecting out a few inches. This allows for crawl space and higher storage space underneath in the western portion.

A pair of pilasters with inlay panels edge each side of the entrance arch. They support – if only seemingly - an entablature delineated in subdued, bas-relief manner by a small cornice, and a paneled frieze with the school's name inscription in it. Three overlapping courses of terracotta roof tiles run above it. Slanted forward, the tiles project outward from the façade, creating a soffit in which inlay panels also are featured. To further underscore the arched entry, a projecting ornamental surround with moldings and a *perlario* (a feature emulating a “string of pearls”) have been added. At center, a scroll bracket (doubling as a fake keystone) signals the main axis organizing the façade's composition. Two plain, flat, round medallions were inlaid into this elevation as ornamental escutcheons.(FIG 2)

The above mentioned details – still in place – were required (and illustrated) in the original plans for the project.² Only missing from what was originally intended (and built) is an ornamental, iron grill gate (“*rastrillo*”) and a flagpole that used to stand alone, facing the entrance over a small concrete base. Nowadays, the symmetry of the façade design – with its implied formality – is defied by the addition of an access ramp that crudely cuts in half the original entrance steps and extends alongside the north elevation.

¹ Chamfers become popular by the late 19th century in Europe and, as a consequence, in the Caribbean. Along a street sequence, chamfered corners help to qualify spaces, contrasting their location hierarchically against any prevailing orthogonal grid, thus highlighting them as events within the urban experience. Idelfonso Cerdá's project for the *Ensanche de Barcelona* (1859) best exemplifies the role performed by the *chaflán* within an urban texture, but to quote the Catalan model as the sole urban precedent for the Puerto Rican effort would be inaccurate. Of the several forces behind both the European and Antillean versions of the chamfered corner, a most important one was the influence of the *Escuela de Ingenieros de Caminos, Canales y Puertos de Madrid*. At the turn of the 19th century, alumni from this school assigned by Spain to work in its provinces and territories were responsible for spreading the new gospel of what modern, chamfered cities should look like. In Puerto Rico, the formal properties inherent to the *chaflán* were best expounded in the city of Ponce, but many other locations simultaneously endorsed them. (See Jorge Rigau, *Puerto Rico 1900: Turn-of-the-century Architecture in the Caribbean*. New York: Rizzoli, 1992). By the time the *José Fontán School* was designed, chamfers were commonly used in Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

² (AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Edificios Escolares, Caja: 1088, Leg. 84, Exp. 1) (*Ibid.*, Caja 1140, Leg. 205, Exp. 1) Original plans and specifications for the *José Fontán School* – as well as some correspondence – are preserved at Puerto Rico's National Archive.

Past the 11'-6" high entrance arch, a rectangular vestibule is reached. Its roof, in concrete, reaches 13'-0" high and includes four (4) square glass blocks (not original) that allow light in the otherwise rather dark space. Two doors at each side of the vestibule lead to symmetrical, yet irregularly-shaped offices whose shape is a by-product of the intersection of orthogonal walls in plan with the diagonal imposed by the main entrance chamfer. **(FIG 3)** The offices that once belonged to the school principal and a counselor are still used by the latter, but not the former.³ Each office includes a window and an identical triangular space for storage.

Another arch (10'-6" high) culminates the vestibule space. It provides a transition to the school's patio and, one step below, to the gallery from where the school's open corridors extend south and west to reach the classrooms and restrooms. To address wheelchair accessibility, the step was eliminated by filling in the concrete floor, and having it slope towards each corridor. As a result, some of the original polished concrete floor, patterned in a 28" x 28" square grid, has been lost under the ramp. Some classrooms have to be reached by climbing a step up.

The east wing includes one classroom, the girls' bathroom, and the open hallway to reach them. Said corridor connects to the north wing that, spanning almost 90'-0" long, includes three identical classrooms. The west wing holds two more classrooms and the boys' restroom. Some classrooms have air conditioning units, with suspended acoustic ceiling, fluorescent lighting, and plastic door and window screens. A few of the original ventilation transoms remain above door openings. Cement wall bases remain at classrooms and hallways.

The open corridors are roofed over by a thin, concrete slab. A 2'-0" high, low concrete parapet with crude tubular railings nowadays borders the hallways. **(FIG 4)** Each gallery end has been closed off with cement block up to 6'-0" high, and perforated blocks for ventilation at the top. Rain leaders protrude from the concrete eaves. A five-step stoop (with a minuscule planter on only one side) provides access to the lower, backyard area of the school. No evidence of a fence or wall ever built as original lot enclosure can be found on site or upon consultation of the construction documents. Two additional classroom units – too close for comfort - now deprive the patio of its original openness. The remaining ground area is patched up over in cement.

Reinforced concrete appears in myriad instances: floors of corridors and classrooms, arcades, and restrooms, as well as in exterior and interior steps. Bathroom walls and floor are covered in ceramic tile; toilet partitions are in concrete, with wooden doors. The roof consists of a metal deck and joists structure.

Outside, east, north and west elevations share similar architectural treatment. They are capped by a single string of terracotta roof clay tiles. Low in each wall – at basement level - iron grates for ventilation allow hot air to circulate. **(FIG 5)** Over window openings, a receding panel is articulated in stucco. Windows are in aluminum, jalousie type. They have been made to fit into the original openings; these, in some instances, have been filled adroitly in cement to accommodate smaller window units, also louvered. Eaves paired with wall brackets (all in concrete) cap the windows. All over, concrete walls betray multiple interventions and stucco repairs. **(FIG 6)**

³ The Principal's office is now housed in a small, single-story building adjacent to the *José Fontán School*. The Principal is now responsible for all schools on site grouped under the umbrella name *Escuela Elemental Urbana de Morovis*.

The Impact of Time

Built more than 80 years ago, the *José Fontán School* has been used uninterruptedly as a public educational facility, enjoying the assets and liabilities pursuant to persistent use. By serving its original purpose, it has avoided unrelated, unrelenting changes that often challenge historic properties when their original purpose is subverted. In parallel, for decades – and for myriad reasons - it has nurtured nostalgia and reminiscence from all of those who have been educated and have worked at it.⁴ Unfortunately, spontaneous additions, makeshift repairs, and well meant, but rudimentary maintenance – as well as lack of funds and planning from Puerto Rico’s Education Department – continue to test the school’s architectural attributes. Fortunately, to this day, the property keeps hold of its integrity, and its unique chamfered façade constitutes one of the best preserved in the Island.

In its inception, the school enjoyed visibility of the town’s plaza and its Catholic temple. Throughout the years, several facilities have been built around it, limiting the original, expansive view. Now in close adjacency to other local academic facilities. All of them are now accessed through coarse, security iron grilles (one for vehicles, another for pedestrians) that diminish the properties’ urban presence. Frontage is further limited by the new library building erected in 2004 between the *José Fontán School* and the main plaza of Morovis. In urban terms, said library turns its back completely to the school, preventing it any prominence or participation within the plaza’s extended, surrounding public realm. Moreover, the most significant alteration exhibited today by the *José Fontán School* also relates to the exterior. Two classroom volumes added to the south have taken up most of the original patio area, closing off its views, and leaving too small an open space for activities to develop comfortably within. These volumes, because of their size, proportionally shrink the scale of the original gallery.(FIG 7)

As can be expected, substitution of an original wooden roof system and ceilings (at an unspecified date) detracts from the school’s overall bearing but, as such, it does not constitute too distracting a lack. The new steel deck & joists roof is not visible from the street. In elevation, added (non contributing) concrete eaves and wall brackets, however, are visible over all window openings. Construction plans called for none and the oldest historic photos do not show them. At a date that has not been confirmed, these eaves were most certainly added for control of incoming rain, given the tall height of the original window openings. The size of the window openings was altered as needed to fit aluminum louvered windows.

Cement block partitions have been erected at the end of each open hallway and also substitute the original, wooden accordion doors that granted flexibility to the three classrooms in the northern wing. These folding doors opened up to provide the school with an extended assembly area the size of three classrooms together. Performances, graduations, and other activities were held here. Comparable strategies for flexibility were incorporated in other schools of the period.⁵ The original folding dividers, drawn in detail in the plans for construction are no longer in place. As a result, adaptability of these spaces as one large assembly hall has been lost. Wooden floors were substituted for polished concrete ones and these, in turn, have been indiscriminately patched over

⁴ Formal and informal interviews with people from Morovis rendered countless references from alumni, former and current professors, among these Jaime Collazo, Porfirio Díaz, Fernando Corrada, Loreina Santos Silva, María del Carmen Sierra; also from Morovis’ historian Wilhelm Hernández.

⁵ For example, the *Rafael Balseiro Maceira School*, in Barceloneta; *Eugenio María de Hostos School* at Las Marías; *María Dávila Semidey School* in Patillas; and the *Daniel J. Webster School*, in Peñuelas.

throughout time. In some ceilings, concrete spalling is evident. The entrance ramp added to account for wheelchair accessibility interrupts the original entrance and, in the end, fails in official compliance. The clay roof tiles have been painted over in several occasions, but now accumulate plant material and mold.

Original wooden windows – with louvers, shutters and a transom with glass panes - have been substituted by metal жалousies, easily removable. All windows and ventilation transoms originally in wood have been substituted more than once, the last time resorting to metal louvered ones. Nevertheless, the proportions of most original openings have been retained and/or are retrievable. Where needed, original window openings have been walled up to fit the smaller dimensions of the new windows. Minor damage and poor paint jobs impinge now upon several architectural finishes. The original gate in iron was replaced. Use of the metal deck-and-joists roof has fostered the employment of suspended, acoustic tile systems at classroom ceilings, many of them already damaged by water leakage. Illumination is now of the fluorescent type, where it used to be incandescent. Much of the electrical and plumbing systems has been repaired or replaced. Cables and piping appear surface mounted. Exposed electrical conduits abound, running across the building and vertically towards the roof. On the east wing façade, a concrete shed was attached to store garbage bins. Deteriorations due to vandalism and neglect are visible.⁶ This is primarily evident on the south façade's windows. Although raised from the street level, some of the aluminum жалousies are bent and/or in detrimental conditions.

In its current physical state, the *José Fontán School* still claims precedence within the urban fabric of Morovis and amongst its people. The building is keenly granted architectural merit primarily because of its idiosyncratic façade; it is enthusiastically acknowledged as one of the town's foremost icons of nostalgia; and it is eagerly granted historic significance for having been the background against which specific local and Statewide events have unfolded.

⁶ As mentioned by the school's current director, María del Carmen Sierra, vandalism is and has been a major issue for this building.

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)

A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Social History

Education

Period of Significance

1928-1962

Significant Dates

1928

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

O'Kelly, Joseph J.

Carmoeaga, Rafael

Puerto Rico & American Insurance Company

Period of Significance (justification)

As stated in the Thematic Nomination for *Early 20th Century Schools in Puerto Rico*, the Island's initial public school building efforts span from 1900 to 1930. Along those three (3) decades, architectural work of significance was produced in abundance throughout diverse localities in the Island, impacting its urban profile and people. These schools brought to bear in Puerto Rico many of the United States' stylistic, formal, climatic, and technological concerns regarding the construction of educational facilities. Siting considerations, typological variations, stylistic interpretations, and the social and cultural implications of it all, eventually coalesced into an architecture of consequence. In spite of many shared influences that underscore the thirty-year period that spans from 1900 to 1930, the process by which public schools were built in Puerto Rico at the beginning of the 20th century comprises three (3) identifiable phases that roughly coincide with each decade: 1900-1910, 1910-1920, and 1920-1930. Having been built in 1927 - the *José Fontán School* represents one of the best products of the period.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary) N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The *José Fontán School* is of statewide significance under *Criterion C* (Architecture), as the property represents an example of substance regarding early 20th century modes and styles of construction as these were applied to a large number of educational facilities erected in Puerto Rico at that time. Built when the Spanish Revival style was taking hold in the Island, the *José Fontán School* constitutes a most curious example of the use of its architectural in an academic facility.

Designed by Joseph O'Kelly, among the noted architects of the period, the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of school building types pursuant to the early 20th century, while simultaneously claiming individual distinction. Statewide significance of the property is also acknowledged under *Criterion A* (Social History) as its construction pertains to an early, extended effort of the United States and the local government to promote education amongst the Puerto Rican population.

In its current physical state, the *José Fontán School* still claims precedence within the urban fabric of Morovis and amongst its people. The building is keenly granted architectural merit primarily because of its idiosyncratic façade; it is enthusiastically acknowledged as one of the town's foremost icons of nostalgia; and it is eagerly granted historic significance for having been the background against which specific local and Islandwide events have unfolded.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Founded in 1818, and nestled among the mountainous region of Puerto Rico, Morovis developed in parallel to other rural areas of the Island, thriving anchored in an agricultural economy well into mid-20th century. Public lighting was inaugurated in 1920; the aqueduct by 1923, the same year in which use of the town's *Benjamin Franklin Graded School* was discontinued given its state of

deterioration. Sanitary officers had threatened to close it, arguing “*its ruinous conditions reveal a deplorable state of hygiene, thus being somewhat inadequate to house academic activities.*”⁷

It would take four years to inaugurate the building to take its place, the *José Fontán School*, and three more for Morovis to boast hospital facilities of its own. Progress came step by step, which adds importance to the process by which *la José Fontán* came to be at such an early stage in the century. On April 1925, the municipality acquired an acre of land within the urban zone, next to the already existing *Alonso del Río School*. A new, six-classroom, academic facility would be built on the premises. Puerto Rico’s Department of Education granted approval in August of the same year.⁸ Assisted by funds from an insular debenture loan (*empréstito*) of six (6) million dollars, the Municipality of Morovis succeeded at erecting its school from 1926 to 1927.⁹

On May 23, 1925 while serving as president of the city council of Morovis, José Fontán Lafontaine signed documentation relating to the construction of school building that now bears his name. He was mayor of Morovis from 1909-1912, and a member of the local school board.¹⁰ This building was dedicated to Fontán’s memory by virtue of a resolution adopted by the city council; it was initially budgeted at \$16,855.21¹¹.

Architect Joseph J. O’Kelly, who worked then in the *Public Works Division* of Puerto Rico’s *Department of the Interior*, designed the six-classroom school under the supervision of head architect Rafael Carmoega. Entrusted with designing many important projects throughout the Island and, particularly in San Juan, in 1923 Rafael Carmoega had recruited three architects from the USA to assist in the project of the Puerto Rico Capitol, then under construction: Harry Pembleton, William Schimmelpfennig, and Joseph O’Kelly.¹² As employees of the Public Works Division, these architects were involved in other government projects, particularly educational ones. O’Kelly would not only be responsible for the *José Fontán School*; the architect also designed the Domingo Aponte Collazo High School of Lares (1926), whose main distinguishing feature also consists of an ornamented chamfered façade.¹³

Joseph O’Kelly (1890-1970) - born in New York to an American father and a Puerto Rican mother - studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, and graduated in 1915 from the *Drexel Institute* of Philadelphia. In Puerto Rico, O’Kelly worked eleven years for the local government. Besides participating in the Capitol design, he collaborated with architect Francisco Gardón in the *Stahl Building*, at the Río Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico. O’Kelly also designed

⁷(AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie Edificios Escolares; Caja 1088; Leg. 84; Exp. 1) Municipal Resolution addressed to the Commissioner of the Interior, dated April 8, 1926, and signed by the Municipal Secretary of Morovis.

⁸(*Idem*). Letter from the Architect of the Department of the Interior addressed to the Mayor of Morovis, dated August 10, 1925.

⁹(AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie Edificios Escolares Caja 1140; Leg. 205; Exp. 1) Project Memoir for the Construction of a Six-classroom School in Morovis., Puerto Rico, M-1.

¹⁰ Born in Morovis in 1879, José’s parents were Epifanio Fontán and Margara Lafontaine, both from Morovis. José attended school up to the elementary level, the highest offered locally at that time. At age 14 he began to work, engaging in business and industry. He owned a general provisions store, a tobacco shop and a bakery.

¹¹(AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Edificios Escolares; Caja 1140; Leg. 205; Exp. 1) Public Bid Announcement, dated August 10, 1926.

¹² María Luisa Moreno, *La arquitectura de la Universidad de Puerto Rico*, Recinto de Río Piedras (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2000), 59.

¹³ Now renamed *Escuela Elemental Mariano Reyes Cuevas*, the two-story building is located at Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Street, upon entering Lares from the west. Larger, and sitting in a higher, more prominent location at the entrance in town, Lares’ school includes classical details much akin to those used in its Morovis counterpart.

UPR's *School of Arts and Crafts* (now University High School or UHS), and the library and the East Wing of the *School of Tropical Medicine* in Puerta de Tierra.¹⁴ Most of his projects were inspired in the Spanish Revival style. Upon ceasing his government duties at the *Department of the Interior* and other agencies he subsequently worked for, in 1946 O'Kelly established his own architectural practice under *O'Kelly, Méndez, Brunner*. Throughout the years, the firm engaged in apartment, commercial, and residential work.¹⁵ It continues in operation today as *Méndez, Brunner, Badillo & Associates*.

The plans prepared in Spanish by O'Kelly, although comprising only four sheets of drawings and one set of construction specifications for the whole project, are rich in terminology pertaining to the period, as well as school building practices. All woodwork components are individually labeled: *guarnición* (trimming), *alféizar* (window sill), *batiente* (rabbet); many others are featured. like *solera* (sill/wall plate) and *zabaleta* (flashing). Likewise, construction details are offered, showing how to build and where to install *mamparas* (saloon doors), *armarios* (fixed bookstands), folding doors, blackboards, chalk rails, picture moldings even hooks for hats. The construction specifications provided additional information on subjects like the terracotta roof clay tile, the bas-relief name of the school, the ventilating grates, and the entrance iron grill.¹⁶

The bid announcement for building the *José Fontán School* came out on August 10, 1926, being Guillermo Esteves Commissioner of the Department of the Interior and Juan B. Huyke, Commissioner of Education.¹⁷ On August 26, contractor José López Ruiz submitted his bid quotation for \$15,823.00, stipulating eight (8) months for construction time.¹⁸ The contract was awarded to López Ruiz by late September, 1926.¹⁹ Shortly afterwards, López Ruiz "*abandoned the project without any notification to that effect*" and, on March 28, 1927, the *Puerto Rico & American Insurance Company* (the contractor's guarantor) officially assumed responsibility for the project's completion through its agent, Ricardo R. Pesquera.²⁰ Architect Pedro A. Bigay was inspector general for the construction stage. After requesting a time extension to complete the project, by July 12, 1927 the school was finished.²¹ Following normal procedures, a punch list of items yet to be completed was prepared and by August 19, 1927, the Health Department granted an occupancy permit.²² Curiously enough, said permit was granted without the restroom facilities in operation. Without a sewage system to connect to, latrines had to be installed in the meantime.²³ On December 31st, 1927, the school was "accepted" by the Department of the Interior.²⁴

For over eight decades, the José Fontán School has received countless numbers of students, originally from junior high school level, but most of the time from elementary levels. Multiple generations were educated here, including public figures like Baltasar Corrada del Río (born April 10,

¹⁴ María Luisa Moreno, *La arquitectura de la Universidad de Puerto Rico*, 59-64.

¹⁵ Efraín Pérez Chanis, "La arquitectura legendaria de Joseph O'Kelly", *Revista URBE*, Vol. 3 No. 12, April 1965, pp. 18-27.

¹⁶ Construction Specifications for the Construction of a Building in Reinforced Concrete for Six Classrooms in Morovis, Puerto Rico (AGPR, Fondo: Obras Públicas, Serie: Edificios Escolares; Caja 1140; Leg. 205; Exp. 1) E-20, E-21.

¹⁷ (*Ibid.*) Public Bid Announcement

¹⁸ (*Ibid.*) Memorandum addressed to Mr. Carmoega from the Department of the Interior's Chief Clerk, dated August 23, 1926.

¹⁹ (*Ibid.*) Letter to the Commissioner of the Interior from Juan B. Huyke, Commissioner of Education, dated September 22, 1926.

²⁰ (*Ibid.*) Letter addressed by the Commissioner to the Auditor of Porto Rico, dated April 8, 1927.

²¹ (*Ibid.*) Telegram from G. Martínez, Jr., Inspector to Architect Rafael Carmoega, dated July 12, 1927.

²² (*Ibid.*) Letter to the Municipality of Morovis from J. G. Figueroa, Auxiliary Sanitary Engineer

²³ (*Ibid.*) Letter to the Commissioner of the Interior from Baltasar Corrada, Mayor of Morovis, dated September 22, 1927.

²⁴ (*Ibid.*) Memorandum from the Auxiliary Architect to the Commissioner of the Interior, dated December 31st, 1927.

1935) who held diverse significant political positions in the Island, including Resident Commissioner (1977–1985), Mayor of San Juan (1985–1989), and Associate Justice to the Supreme Court (1995–2005). Loreina Santos Silva, a poet and leader of gender studies in Puerto Rico, also attended the *José Fontán School* as participant of a novel, pedagogic project that came into existence within its walls and came to be known as the *Plan Morovis*.

Almost twenty years after it was built, the *José Fontán School* played a significant role as one of the first places in which experimental ideas about rural education in Puerto Rico were first presented, weighed, and decided upon. In 1948, within the school's assembly hall - with its two sets of accordion doors fully open to accommodate a large crowd - gathered teachers, academics, government officers, and local representatives to discuss an alternative to the lack of high school facilities in Morovis. It was a problem shared by other inland towns: students finishing junior high school had nowhere to go, as many localities lacked a high school. In addition, distances and topography made the few existing ones difficult to reach on an everyday basis. During the war years, funds for construction had been limited. These issues were debated at the assembly hall of the *José Fontán School*, culminating in an innovative educational program that would eventually be known as The Morovis Plan. Several forces came into play for it to happen.

In 1948, Luis Muñoz Marín became Puerto Rico's first elected governor having advocated, among other things, for more control of the educational system. By 1949, Muñoz had named educator Mariano Villaronga as Commissioner of Public Instruction. It was not a naive designation. Villaronga had previously endorsed publicly the use of Spanish instead of English as official language at all public schools, and it did not take long for him to make his word work. It was in the same year, 1949, that the Morovis Plan was inaugurated after several meetings held at the *José Fontán School* rendered it as a plausible, yet aggressive and pedagogic, rural outreach program.

*¡The Morovis Plan! ¡How many pleasing memories are awakened in the hearts of many former students who spent their best years warmed within its humble walls!*²⁵

Scarce documentation on the purposes of the plan is complemented by what those who participated on the initiative - still alive - remember about it. On occasion of the 25th anniversary of the plan, professor Jaime A. Collazo Morales, former English teacher, and Ana Mercedes Russe Otero, high school librarian, recalled significant aspects of the Plan Morovis in a commemorative article published in 1973 in the journal of Puerto Rico's Department of Education. As they explain, it all started with a request from local citizens for high school facilities where students from Morovis could continue their junior high school studies. The Department of Education, however, lacked the funds for a building. In 1948, Francisco Collazo, Interim Commissioner of Education, visited Morovis in the company of several government officers. At a well-attended meeting at the *José Fontán School*, Collazo outlined an alternative: a program by which students in town, but also those from distant areas, would carry out studies independently, showing up periodically (every two weeks) to receive assistance from specially-trained teachers. These teachers would act as individual and/or group "consultants", reviewing the students' assigned "tasks", offering them orientation and advice, as well as being responsible for testing, and grading. As Russe Otero and Collazo Morales underline,

²⁵ Ana Mercedes Russe Otero, Jaime A. Collazo Morales. "Aniversario de Plata del Plan Morovis: una retrospectiva de 25 años", *Revista Educación* (Departamento de Instrucción Pública, Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico) Vol. 38, Noviembre 1973, 71.

Plan Morovis began two weeks after Collazo presented his proposal.²⁶ Forty students from Morovis joined the first of many groups that for over a decade benefitted from this outreach program. Nearby localities would eventually enroll students in the plan. All the gears were set in motion with the *José Fontán School* as nest.

The program's daily operation, however, was carried out elsewhere, for quotidian activities went on uninterrupted at the *José Fontán*. Registered students used an *ad hoc*, nearby facility equipped with a small laboratory and library space of its own. Newspapers and magazines were there made available for students and teachers: *El Mundo*, *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*, *Asomante*, and *Alma Latina*.²⁷ Field trips and the use of films were encouraged to motivate students. This was in keeping with parallel efforts led throughout the Island by Governor Luis Muñoz Marín's administration to empower communities through public education by means of organisms established during the same period, like the *División de Educación de la Comunidad (DivEdCo)*, which produced texts and films to be distributed, presented and debated upon in remote, rural areas.²⁸

Former participants of *Plan Morovis* consistently praise the impact the program had on their lives. Poet Loreina Santos Silva readily acknowledges: "*I learned my research skills from Plan Morovis. I am most grateful to it*".²⁹ Furthermore, in her novel *Este ojo que me mira*, a character celebrates "*ya estoy en el Plan Morovis*" (I am already enrolled in the Morovis Plan).³⁰ For *moroveños*, it was the success of the plan what led, years later, to the construction of a new high school in town (to this day referred to as the *Plan Morovis High School*, one of the facilities adjoining the *José Fontán School*). The experimental pedagogic project, however, reached well beyond the town's own limits.

In March 1949 - only eight months after the plan's inception and after a preliminary assessment of its performance - authorities deemed proper to put into practice similar initiatives in other rural towns with similar geographic and financial predicaments, among these: Hormigueros, Quebradillas, Naranjito, Maricao, Rincón, and Toa Alta.³¹ The name, however, remained *Plan Morovis*, regardless of the place where it was implemented.³² In addition, the plan was, at some point, considered for application in Puerto Rico's State Penitentiary, and enabled many veterans to get a high school diploma without having to leave their home.³³

It seems only fitting that the first graduation of the plan's participants in 1951 took place where the program first came to life: in the assembly hall of the *José Fontán School*. A radio station with Island-wide reach aired the event, "*one of singular relevance to the Island's academic life*".³⁴ Throughout the ensuing years, the Plan succeeded at serving many rural communities. By the late

²⁶ Such a fast start seems rather hasty; there must have been official preplanning for it, long before the public meeting to announce it was held, but Russe Otero and Collazo Morales do not mention it.

²⁷ Ana Mercedes Russe Otero, Jaime A. Collazo Morales. "Aniversario de Plata del Plan Morovis...", 76.

²⁸ For a study on the outreach strategies of said division, see Catherine Marsh Kennerly, *Negociaciones culturales: los intelectuales y el proyecto pedagógico del estado muñocista*. (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Callejón, 2009).

²⁹ Interview with Loreina Santos Silva, May 29, 2012.

³⁰ Loreina Santos Silva. *Este ojo que me mira* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1996), 59.

³¹ Ana Mercedes Russe Otero, Jaime A. Collazo Morales. "Aniversario de Plata del Plan Morovis...", 74, 76, 78.

³² (*Ibid.*), 73. Russe Otero and Collazo Morales argue that the name *Plan Morovis* was coined by *El Mundo* Newspaper, on page 12 of an August 2, 1948 article regarding the initial informational the meeting held at the *José Fontán School*.

³³ Sandra Cruz Fernández. *Plan Morovis*. Monograph submitted for the fulfillment of the Seminar on Pedagogic Writings, University of Puerto Rico, Graduate School of Education, August 1981), 45, 46.

³⁴ Ana Mercedes Russe Otero, Jaime A. Collazo Morales. "Aniversario de Plata del Plan Morovis...", 78.

1950's in Morovis, the Plan had evolved into a more traditional high school structure, one that would eventually lead to the construction of a building to house it.³⁵ Nowadays, after half a century, the *Plan Morovis* is listed among pioneer distance learning education models, and quoted often by researchers of this subject.³⁶

Association with the noble goals of *Plan Morovis* has granted the *José Fontán School* added allure and respectability within the local community. The initiative's righteous objectives, the dedication with which many local teachers carried it out, and the pride that characterizes most of the program's alumni, have all contributed in the (re)signification of the building. As such, at the *José Fontán School*, communal values reinforce considerably the property's particular architectural attributes. Ultimately, both conditions succeed at granting it icon status within Morovis and its surrounding rural region.

Developmental history/additional historic context information(if appropriate)

9. Major Bibliographical References

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³⁵ (*Ibid.*), 82.

³⁶ See José R. Otaola, *Review of Research on Computer-based Distance Education in Higher Education Institutions in Puerto Rico: Methodology and Scope* <http://www.biotzetik.net/PR%20Research.html> ; also Ana del Castro, Noridis Medina, Juan Meléndez; and José Sánchez, *Los orígenes de la educación a distancia, Proyecto Cosypedal, 1ra Fase: Historia de la Educación a Distancia en Latinoamérica (HEDAL); País Puerto Rico* https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:iNssloDHvWwJ:www.oocities.org/es/tonytarco/hwct/ii_articulos/a14.pdf+PIan+Morovis+Cosypedal&hl=en&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEShmJs2vm_PJAgkDklsgH_yZcFhvT-VL-kXfvnxg_MQ3LwWdpApPuN78aEwxod5UoYWezGgUpsUnpYI0zh1-LIYhvp7QWEnjAg3xYQGmbeIONnA3-1yMsqR3u0iVQ-BQonTchPZw&sig=AHIEtbQKDerOP4NGixREu7DnzRAzTZGRFA

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Albúm de Obras Municipales Puerto Rico 1919-1928

Eduardo Miranda, April 28, 2012

Internet

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<http://www.biotzetik.net/PR%20Research.html>

Interviews(April 28, 2012)

School Alumni

Fernado Corrada

Porfirio Díaz

Roberto Martínez, alumnus

Loreina Santos Silva, poet (May 29, 2012)

Antonio Ojeda, municipal employee

Jaime Collazo, retired English teacher (also June 1st, 2012)

Wilheim Hernández, historian (also May 28, 2012)

María del Carmen Sierra, school director

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.16 acre
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

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

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | <u>19</u> | <u>703800</u> | <u>2028300</u> | 3 | <u> </u> | <u> </u> | <u> </u> |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing | | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| 2 | <u> </u> | <u> </u> | <u> </u> | 4 | <u> </u> | <u> </u> | <u> </u> |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing | | Zone | Easting | Northing |

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The boundaries are indicated on the accompanying base map, and are shown as the dotted line on the accompanying map. See continuation sheet, section 10.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The nominated property includes the entire lot historically associated with the José Fontán School.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Arq. Jorge Rigau, FAIA

organization Jorge Rigau Arquitectos date

street & number #67 calle Los baños, 1er piso telephone (787) 982-0002

city or town San Juan state Puerto Rico zip code 00911

e-mail rigau@jorgerigau.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

1. José Fontán School
2. Morovis, Puerto Rico
3. Eduardo Miranda
4. April 28, 2012
5. Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico
6. Northeastern facade and north side elevation, looking southwest
7. #1

1. José Fontán School

2. **Morovis, Puerto Rico**
 3. **Eduardo Miranda**
 4. **April 28, 2012**
 5. **Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico**
 6. **Main entrance northeastern facade, looking southwest**
 7. **#2**
-

1. **José Fontán School**
 2. **Morovis, Puerto Rico**
 3. **Eduardo Miranda**
 4. **April 28, 2012**
 5. **Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico**
 6. **Vestibule, looking southwest**
 7. **#3**
-

1. **José Fontán School**
 2. **Morovis, Puerto Rico**
 3. **Eduardo Miranda**
 4. **April 28, 2012**
 5. **Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico**
 6. **Southeastern corridors, looking northeast**
 7. **#4**
-

1. **José Fontan School**
2. **Morovis, Puerto Rico**
3. **Eduardo Miranda**
4. **April 28, 2012**
5. **Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico**
6. **Original ventilation grill in iron, east façade elevation, looking west**
7. **#5**

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register

other (explain:) _____

Jose Edison H. Beall
 Signature of the Keeper

8.28.12
 Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
 (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
 (Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1 | 0 | buildings |
| 0 | 0 | district |
| 0 | 0 | site |
| 0 | 0 | structure |
| 0 | 0 | object |
| 1 | 0 | Total |

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico, 1900- 1930

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/ School

EDUCATION/ School

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

José Fontan School

Morovis, Puerto Rico

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)
Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico,
1900-1930

Section number 10 Page 1

10. Geographical Data

The boundaries are indicated with gray shading. Map shows the contributing resource. The limits were obtained from the official boundaries map provided by the Puerto Rico Planning Board.

JOSÉ FONTAN, MOROVIS, PUERTO RICO

Location: Del Carmen St. corner with Principal Final St, Puerto Rico 00687
UTM Reference: 19, 773857, 2028205
Acreage of Property: Less than one acre



JORGE RIGAU
ARQUITECTOS

- ◀ Contributing resource
- Property boundary



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

José Fontan School

Morovis, Puerto Rico

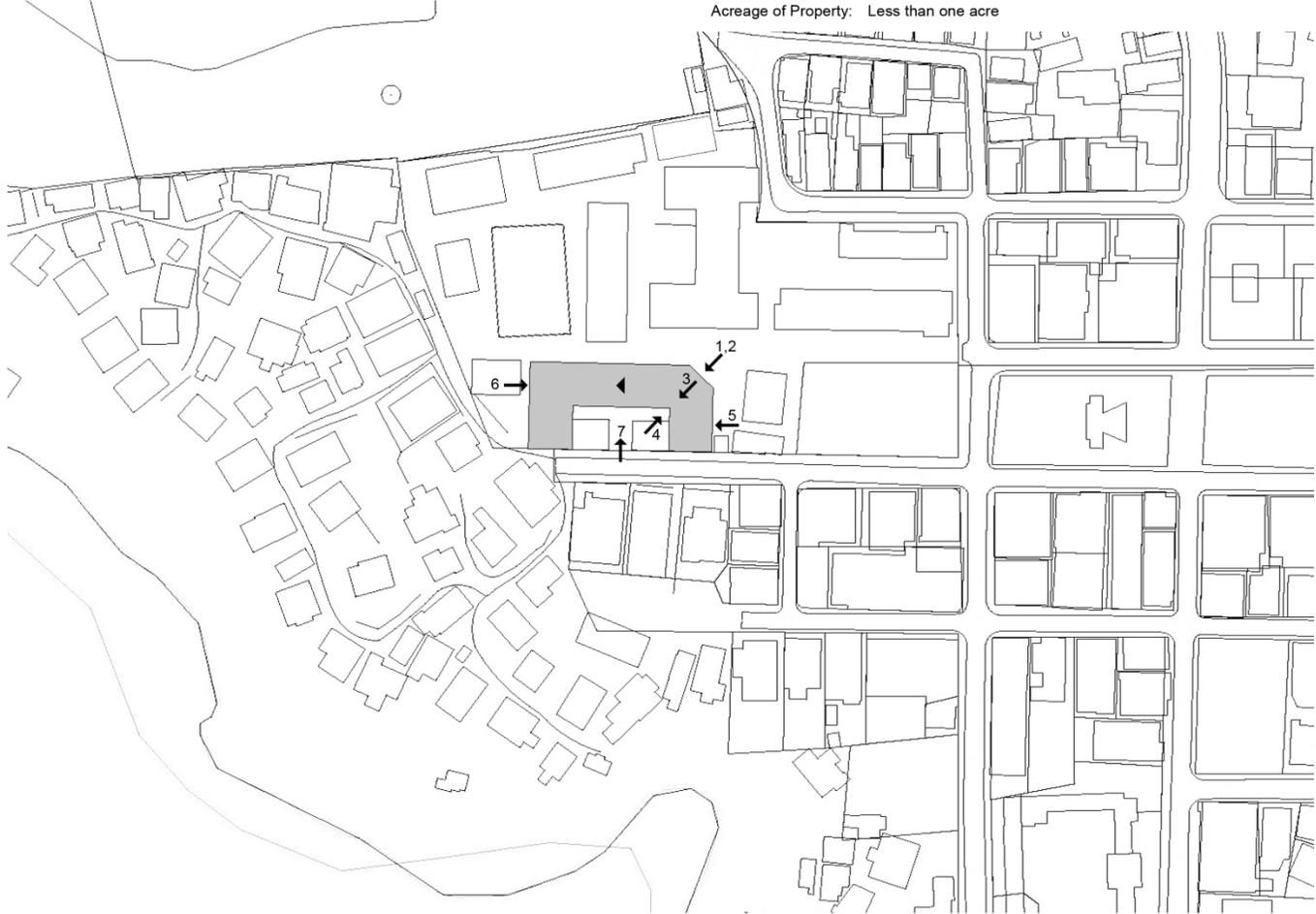
Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)
Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico,
1900-1930

Section number 10 Page 2

Photographs viewpoint are indicated, shown as an arrow. The numbers correspond to the list of figures.

JOSÉ FONTAN, MOROVIS, PUERTO RICO

Location: Del Carmen St. corner with Principal Final St, Puerto Rico 00687
UTM Reference: 19, 773857, 2028207
Acreage of Property: Less than one acre



JORGE RIGAU
ARQUITECTOS



◀ Contributing resource

■ Property boundary

← Visual angle of photography

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

José Fontán School

Morovis, Puerto Rico

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)
Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico,
1900-1930

Section number Additional Documentation Page 3

Additional Documentation Map

The limits of the plot were obtained from the official boundaries map provided by the Puerto Rico Planning Board. The boundaries of the nominated resource are identified by an outline.

JOSÉ FONTAN, MOROVIS, PUERTO RICO

Location: Del Carmen St. corner with Principal Final St, Puerto Rico 00687
UTM Reference: 19, 773857, 2028205
Acreage of Property: Less than one acre



JORGE RIGAU
ARQUITECTOS



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

José Fontán School

Morovis, Puerto Rico

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)
Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico,
1900-1930

Additional Documentation Page 4

Additional Documentation Photographs



The Spanish Revival building incorporates a chamfered façade, with a round arch at an entrance highlighted with two pilasters and one medallion at each side, cornices, stairs, inlay rectangular panels, wood louvers and glass casement windows, spanish clay roof tiles, a flag pole and cast iron ventilators on the lower parts. Photographer: Unknown, Date: Unknown, Source: AGPR, Album Obras Públicas

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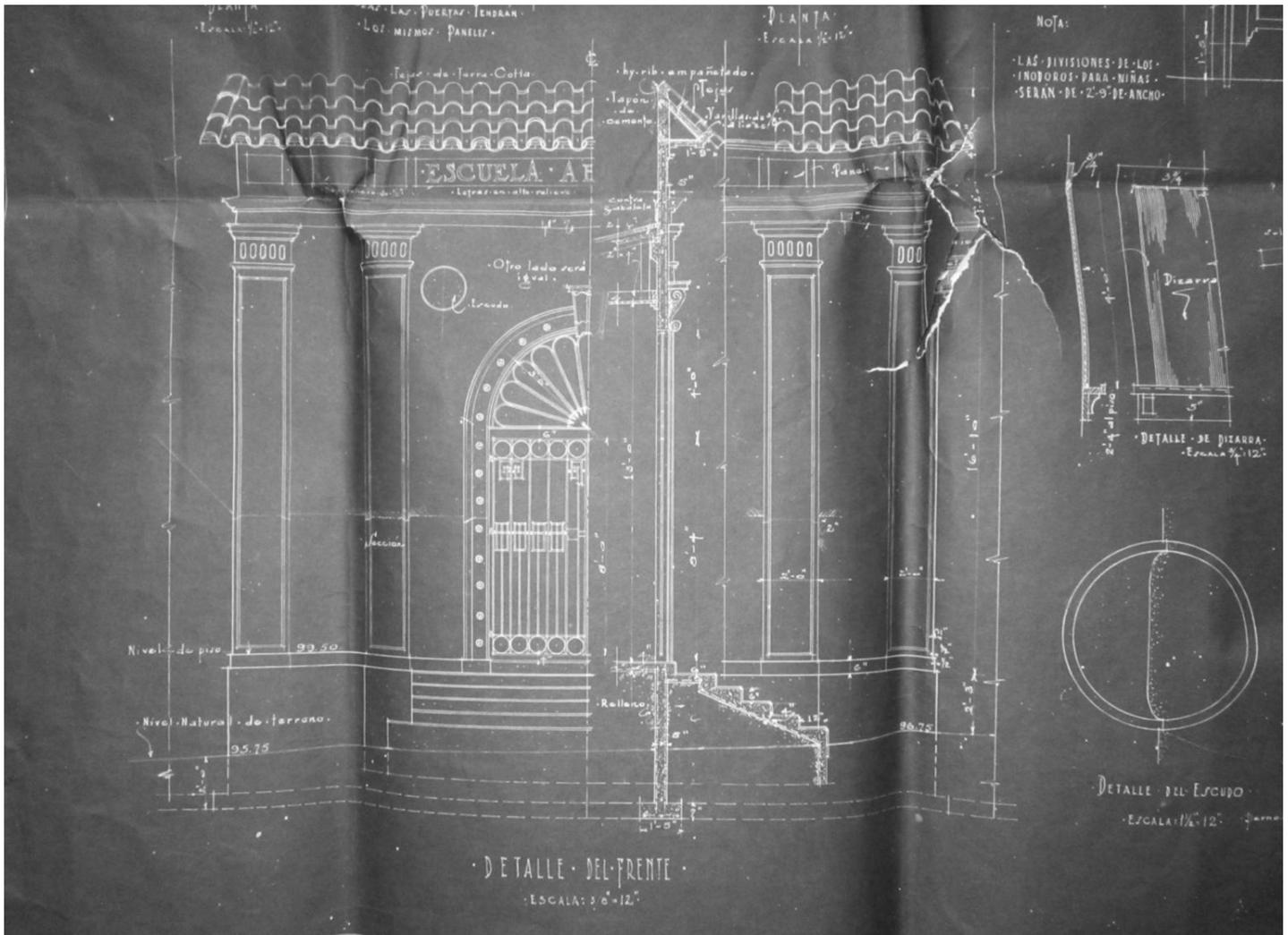
José Fontán School

Morovis, Puerto Rico

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)
Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico,
1900-1930

Additional Documentation

Page 5



Main entrance detail drawings for the José Fontán School designed by architect Joseph O'Kelly.
Source: AGPR Fondo Obras Públicas, Edificios Escolares. Caja: 1140, Legajo, 205, Exp. 1

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

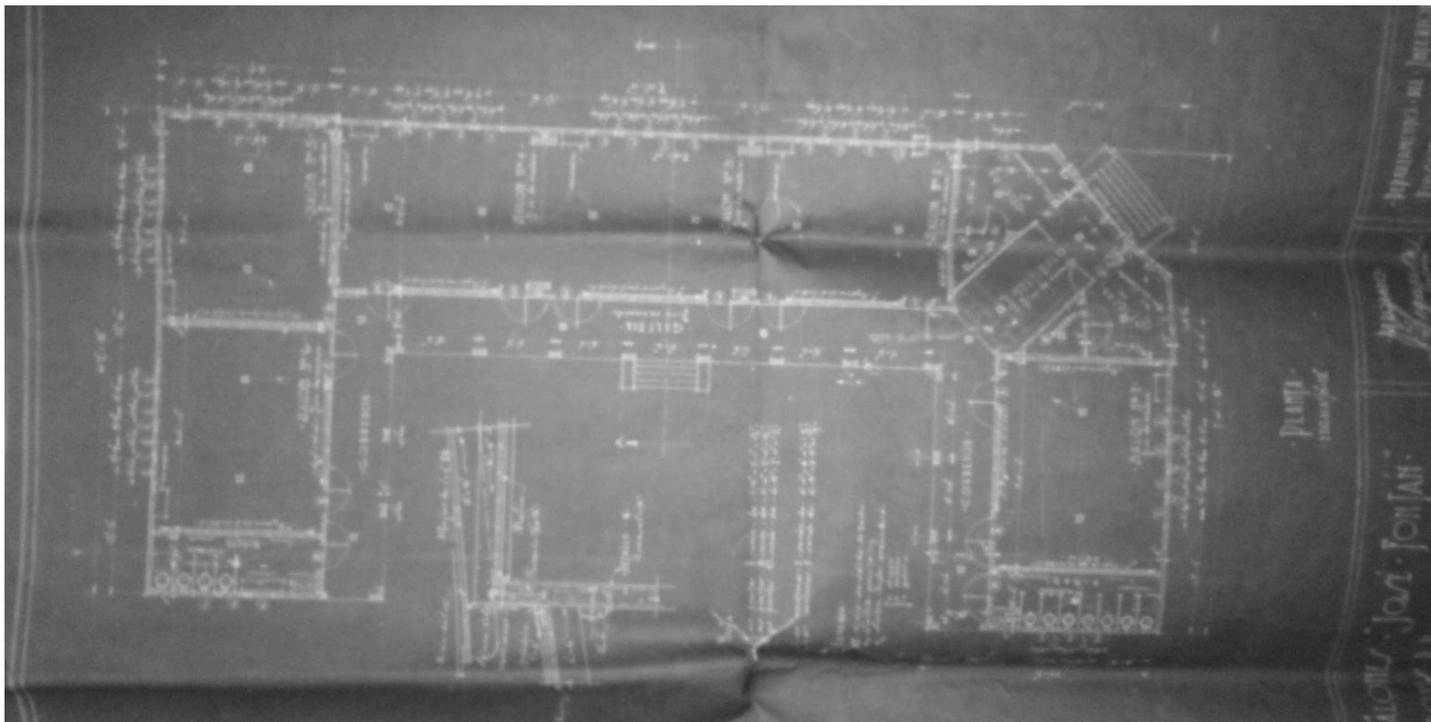
José Fontán School

Morovis, Puerto Rico

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)
Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico,
1900-1930

Additional Documentation

Page 6



The C-shape arrangement in plan for the José Fontán School incorporates a semi-enclosed patio and arcades facing south. Source: AGPR Fondo Obras Públicas, Edificios Escolares. Caja: 1140, Legajo, 205, Exp. 1

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

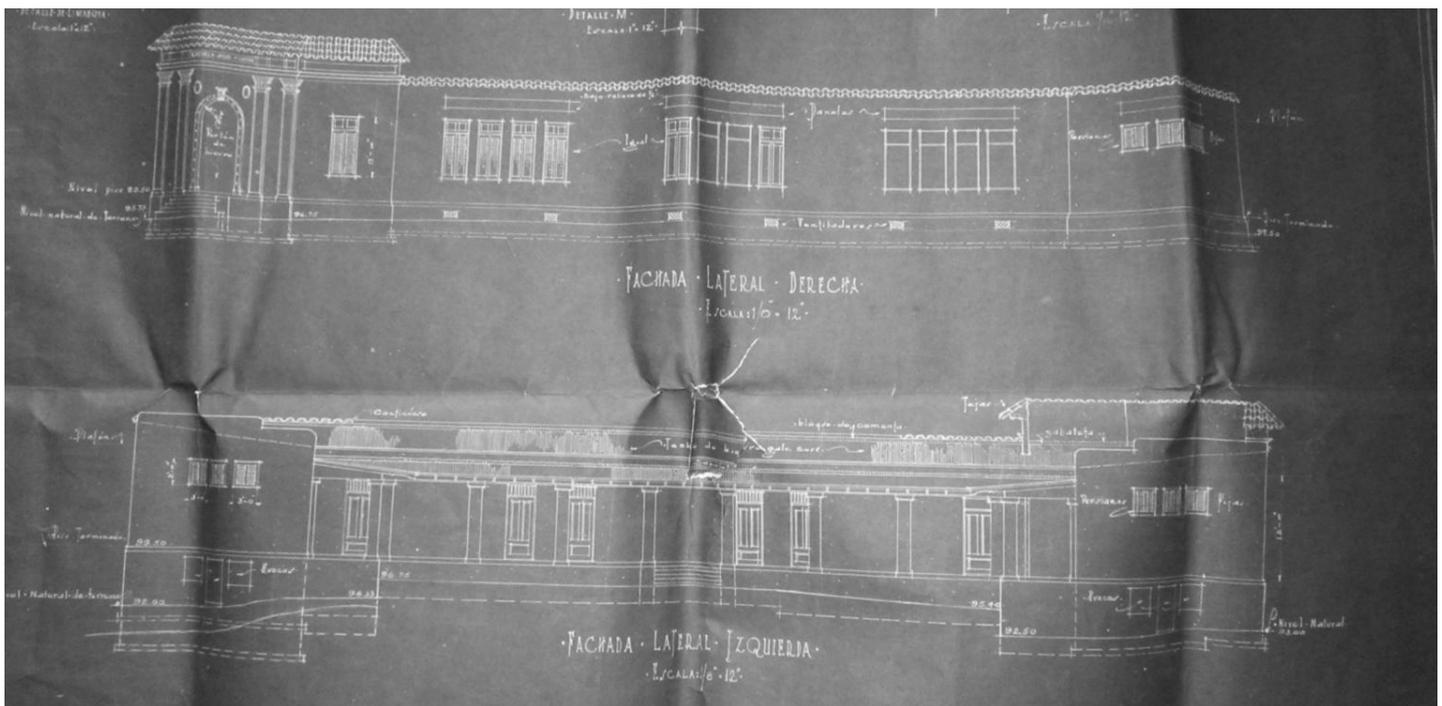
José Fontán School

Morovis, Puerto Rico

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)
Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico,
1900-1930

Additional Documentation

Page 7



North and south façade elevations. The north façade (upper drawing) incorporates three groups of four vertical casement windows, providing north light access to the classrooms. In the south elevation an open corridor with fourteen rectangular columns shelters the classrooms from the heat, while doors with open transoms promote cross ventilation. Source: AGPR Fondo Obras Públicas, Edificios Escolares. Caja: 1140, Legajo, 205, Exp. 1