NPS Form 10-900
(3-82)

OMB No. 1024-0018
Expires 10-31-87

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received JUN 29 1987
date entered AUG 4 1987

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Rafael M. Labra High School

and/or common La Labra

2. Location

street & number Ponce de León Ave., corner of Roberto H. Todd Avenue ___ not for publication

city, town Santurce ___ vicinity of San Juan

state Puerto Rico code PR county San Juan code 127

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	X public	X occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
X building(s)	___ private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	X educational	___ private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	X yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Department of Education - Departamento de Instrucción Pública

street & number Urbanización Industrial Tres monjitas

city, town Hato Rey ___ vicinity of San Juan state Puerto Rico

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. San Juan Registry of Deeds

street & number San Juan Judicial Center

city, town San Juan state Puerto Rico

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Early XXth C. Schools in Puerto Rico has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes X no

date September, 1986 ___ federal X state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office

city, town San Juan state Puerto Rico

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	_x_ original site
_x_ good	___ ruins	_x_ altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Rafael M. De Labra School sits in the heart of Santurce, once a great suburban residential/commercial district of San Juan. The structure is located at a corner site in the intersection of Roberto H. Todd and Ponce de León avenues, facing the latter. Like many other institutional buildings of the area, with its 120 feet tree-shaded set-back from the sidewalk, the school constitutes one of the main urban/architectural events along Ponce de León.

The fenced courtyard building, a two-story U-shaped brick structure raised from the ground, is of huge volume by local standards. Both ends of the U are joined by a one-story arcaded hallway, exhibiting classical Doric columns and pediments which in plan create a portico and signal the two main entrances in the front (North) facade. Mouldings, denticles, cornices, oculii, garlands, festoons and key stones, all combine with the brick facades to grant the structure a decidedly Georgian spirit. These trimmings of white terracota contrast with the use of red brick (from the southern city of Ponce) which is used to create different wall patterns all over the building. Bases, friezes, arcades, and transoms are all expressed on elevation by shifting the use of the brick to respond with each particular shape. Steel rods tie together the brick walls; concrete is also used in diverse areas. Floors are shaped in polished concrete and terracota. Originally, classrooms had wooden floors.

Circulation takes place around a partially landscaped sunken courtyard, with two double-run stairs symmetrically located against the south facade. More solid in appearance, this back facade is punctured with a large amount of windows, that includes those of the basement, which from this side of the building becomes obvious. Slightly articulating the uppermost cornice, and adding two monumental Doric pilasters and a very small pediment, the architect expresses, at both ends of the elevation, the stair exits. A door is located at basement level on axis with the building's volume. Unfortunately, an additional L-shaped wing added in the 1950's partially blocks the south facade. The hallways of the addition connect with those of the original building.

The 1916 pitched zinc roof remains, although wood beams have been substituted by steel joists; a change that does not challenge the building's integrity, for ceilings (new) hide the structural elements. An all wood belfry is located over the pitched roof, on axis with the stepped accesses to the central patio and its fountain.

The total of forty classrooms is well lit and ventilated, as requierd by Board of Education standards of the time. The size (24' x 30') and height (14') also comply with the codes. The two classrooms facing North included a semi-private area for the teacher, an item which, besides being very characteristic of the corresponding building period, was also a controversial issue in public school house design. (See The Architect magazine, February, July 1918.) The original fenestration, now completely removed, was in wood shutters with louvers and glass panes. Aluminum windows are now in its place, somewhat detracting from the building's beauty, especially on the back and side facades.

The object-quality of the building, its ample site, and the trees sorrounding it, combined with the Georgian-style evocation, render Labra High School, not only as one of Puerto Rico's unique academic buildings, but also one of its truly outstanding urban pieces.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	X architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater
___ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation
X 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ other (specify)
		___ invention		

Specific dates 1916 **Builder/Architect** Adrian C. Finlayson

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Labra High School is one of the five best school buildings built in Puerto Rico at the beginning of the 20th century; and in San Juan, the capital, among the two most impressive. In that sense, and because of its scale, it is among the most representative examples in the Island of school building ideas being developed at the time in the United States by architects of reknown, such as Haussander and Perkins of Chicago, Snyder of New York, Cooper of Boston and, especially, William B. Ittner, of St. Louis. Their work and ideas were widely publicized in trade magazines that were locally accesible, like American Architect, Architectural Record, and others.

The architect for Labra High was Adrian C. Finlayson, at the time working for the Insular Government's interior department. He designed some of the most important school structures in the Island: Central High School, Baldorioty de Castro School, Rafael Cordero School in Santurce, and many others of equivalent relevance. As such, Mr. Finlayson is a key figure on our Island's architectural development. In fact, his school building projects were the object of an extensive article published in August 1920 (Vol. 48, pp 136–158) in Architectural Record. In the article, Labra was the object of a long write-up with extended praise. Such recognition awarded to the building since its inception should not come up as a surprise: Labra High School is still today one of the most dignified, imposing structures on the Island, a fact underlined by its architectural style, scale and overall architectural merits.

The Georgian vocabulary and the sophisticated use of brick as construction material are two essential aspects in judging the significance of Labra High School. Said features are nowhere else to be found on institutional architecture of the Island.

The school's impressive siting in Santurce is unique, and acknowledged as such by everybody. So has been the school's academic profile within the community. The public recognition of its academic achievements has been as distinguished as its hierarchical role within the urban texture of Santurce. During the past years a victim of gentrification, Santurce is again showing signs (and getting help) for its economic and civic revitalization, thus reaffirming its role as a public and civic stronghold.

Labra High School has always been, and continues to be, one singular element of significant urban and architectural value in Puerto Rico's built history.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Sylvester Baxter, "Recent Architecture in Puerto Rico", Architectural Record, August 1920, Vol. 48, pp 136-158

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name USGS San Juan 1969 **Quadrangle scale** 1 : 20,000

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	19	809000	2042580
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

see enclosed location plan

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county		code
state	N/A	code	county		code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jorge Rigau, AIA Secretary

organization Colación, Inc. **date** March 16, 1987

street & number Ponce de León 653, Miramar **telephone** (809) 725-3948

city or town San Juan **state** Puerto Rico

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national X state ___ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Mariano G. Coronas Castro

title State Historic Preservation Officer **date** June 17, 1987

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Amy Schlagel **date** 8/4/87

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: **date**

Chief of Registration

NPS Form 10-900-a
(3-82)

OMB No. 1024-0018
Exp. 10-31-84

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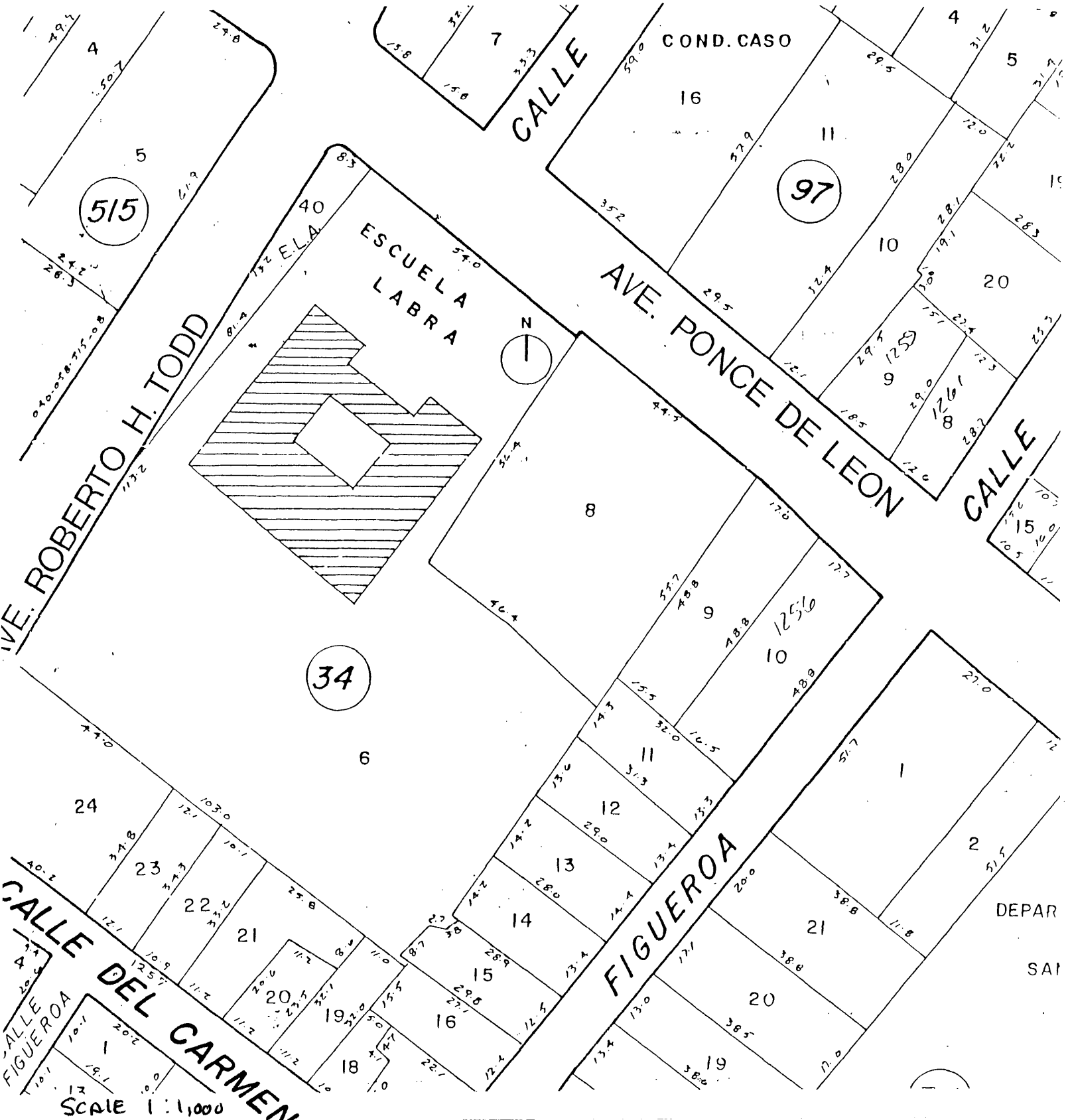
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