

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.



1. Name of Property

Historic name: Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

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

2. Location

Street & number: 1338-1342 South Michigan Avenue, 60605

City or town: Chicago State: IL County: Cook

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

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 X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

XA ___B ___C ___D

	8.23.13
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
_____ 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

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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:)

Jon Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

10.16.13
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

October 24, 2013

Notice to file:

This property has been automatically entered in the National Register of Historic Places on October 16, 2013

This is due to the fact that there was a lapse in appropriations by Congress and our offices were closed from October 1-16, 2013. "Nominations will be included in the National Register within 45 days of receipt by the Keeper or designee unless the Keeper disapproves a nomination" (30CFR60.(r). If the 45th day falls on a weekend or Federal holiday, the property will be automatically listed the next business day.

The documentation is technically sufficient, professionally correct and meets the National Register criteria for evaluation. Thus, this property is automatically listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH & 20TH
CENTURY
CLASSICAL REVIVAL

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

HIDDEN FOUNDATION

BRICK WALLS

TERRA COTTA (façade)

SYNTHETIC ROOF

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building is a seven-story building located at 1338-1342 South Michigan Avenue, in the South Loop neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. The area immediately surrounding the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building has been historically defined by low- to mid-rise commercial properties, but is increasingly dominated by new high-rise construction. The building was constructed in 1922, with a steel-frame and concrete structural system. The exterior sides and rear walls are clad in a combination of brick veneer and hollow clay tiles. The façade is finished with white glazed terra cotta tiling with Classical Revival-style motifs. Based on the area's popularity with furniture concerns during the 1910s, the owners Paul J. Krez and Henry J. Schlacks designed the building to provide large open display areas, particularly on the first floor, and flexible interior office and loft spaces above.¹ This flexible interior and convenient downtown location would prove essential to the operations of the building's most important tenant—the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University. The Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The present-day structure has exterior

¹ Real Estate Transactions," *The Economist*, dated May 20, 1922.

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alterations limited to the replacement of windows on the east and west elevations, the replacement of the original storefront display windows, and the infill of the original front entrances with concrete block. Many of these changes most likely occurred during the mid-1970s, when the building was taken over by Cook County and rehabilitated to house the circuit court.

Narrative Description

Exterior

The Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building rises seven stories above a full basement, terminating in a flat roof. The building features a steel and concrete structural system with masonry walls. The first and second stories are rectangular in plan, while the upper five stories feature recessed middle bays on the north and south sides that were originally designed to serve as light wells for the center of the building.

The building's primary elevation, facing east onto South Michigan Avenue, is finished with white glazed architectural terra cotta tile and white glazed Classical Revival-style terra cotta ornament. The first story of the façade is clad with stretcher-coursed rectangular terra cotta tiles. Two inset pedestrian entrances with ogee-profiled surrounds occupy the northernmost and the southernmost bays. Although these openings have been filled with concrete blocks, portions of the original doorways, including transoms and multi-paned sidelights, are extant behind the infill. The three central bays on the first story were finished with flat plate-glass storefront display windows below a continuous transom. This original configuration was removed and replaced by Cook County with a modern metal and tinted glass system with a center revolving glass door and glass double-doors on each end.

Above the northern and southern entrance bays, pairs of fluted Corinthian pilasters rise from the second to the sixth story, terminating below the seventh story, which serves as the classical frieze. The paired pilasters are separated by window openings that punctuate the building at each story. These openings, which originally held one-over-one double-hung windows, are now infilled with concrete blocks. The second through sixth stories feature window ribbons across the central bays, separated by bands of rectangular terra-cotta tile. Originally composed of eight one-over-one double-hung windows, these ribbons now consist of seven single-light aluminum replacement windows.

Three small, square window openings flanked by terra cotta swags punctuate the frieze at the seventh floor level. These openings originally housed six-light fixed windows or casement windows, which have since been replaced with single-light aluminum replacement windows. Two terra cotta relief panels are located to the north and to the south of the window openings; smaller swags separate the relief panels. The terra cotta cornice, which rises from the frieze, has a reverse ogee profile with a dentil molding set atop an egg-and-dart motif molding. The cornice features two small lions heads sculpted in terra cotta directly above the pilasters.

The north and south side elevations are finished with a combination of six-course American bond brickwork and structural clay tile. The central eight bays on each side elevation are inset from

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the second to seventh stories. Window openings are located on the inset portion of each elevation and feature three-over-three double-hung windows and concrete lintels. Single windows, now filled with brick, are located along the side elevations of the inset bays on both the north and south elevations.

The rear (west) elevation is also finished with six-course American-bond brickwork. Fenestration along the rear elevation has been substantially altered over time, with most of the original window openings infilled with brick. Original concrete lintels remain intact. Some window openings have been modified with brick infill in order to accommodate louvered vents. A metal fire escape is located along the south end of the rear elevation. At each story, the fire escape is accessible via a single-leaf metal door.

Interior

As with most loft buildings from the early twentieth century, the building at 1338 South Michigan was designed as a utilitarian structure that could accommodate a variety of uses. Historic photographs of the building's interior spaces dating from the early 1930s indicate that the concrete structural system was left exposed on all floors and finished only with a coat of plaster, which is how these spaces appear today. The masonry walls of the building have a similar treatment. In the 1970s, Cook County reconfigured the interior of the building into separate courtrooms, holding cells, and office spaces. At that time, the original stairway at the northeast corner of the building was removed and replaced with a new staircase and elevators. When the building was sold in 2005, these later interior partitions were removed along with the non-original staircase. The interiors on all of the floors in the building are currently open, with no interior partitions.

Integrity

Overall, the building retains sufficient integrity of setting, feel, association, location, workmanship, design, and materials to convey its historical significance. The original double-hung windows and seventh story multi-light windows on the east elevation have been replaced with single light aluminum replacement windows. Window openings between the pilasters and the pedestrian entrances have been infilled with concrete blocks. The original first-story storefront windows were modified and are now covered by plywood. Several window openings on the rear elevation have been filled in with brick. The alteration of the pedestrian entrances and window openings with concrete block infill is reversible and the original doorframes and transoms have been preserved beneath the infill. Based on historic photographs from the early 1930s, most of the floors of the building were designed with open floor plans that could accommodate changing furniture displays. The interior treatments on all floors were minimal, with plaster-coated concrete supports and plastered masonry walls. Most changes to the interior of the building date to the 1970s, when the interior of the building was remodeled for the Cook County Circuit Court.

Because no historic floor plans dating to the period of Curtiss-Wright's occupancy have been located, the writer's understanding of the interior spaces occupied by the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University is based on written descriptions of the spaces and a handful of historic

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photographs that were included in the school's promotional literature. According to this source, the fourth floor of the building was fitted with an office, laboratory, four classrooms, a library, and a student lounge. Only one of these spaces, a classroom, is shown in the photographs. None of the partition walls dividing these spaces remains. The third floor housed an engine shop, airplane shop, and engine test stands. Although the walls dividing these spaces do not remain, the photographs show that they were large open spaces with no special detailing or finishing, with plaster-covered concrete structure and plaster-covered masonry walls. The photograph of the first floor welding room, which was located at the rear of the first floor, shows students in an unfinished space with exposed masonry walls. Despite interior alterations, the building is important as the only known facility directly connected to the professional development of the Challengers, a pioneering group of black aviators who played an important role in the advancement of aviation in Chicago and beyond. The only other facilities connected specifically to the Challengers during the early twentieth century—an airfield and hanger built by the Challengers in nearby Robbins, Illinois and an airfield at Harlem & 87th Streets— have both been demolished.

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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
-

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- 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.)

EDUCATION
ETHNIC HERTIAGE/Black

Period of Significance

1922-1953

Significant Dates

1922, 1929 & 1931

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

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Architect/Builder

Schlacks, Henry J.

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building is locally significant under National Register Criterion A as the home of the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University, the first accredited flight school in the Midwest to admit black students and to hire black instructors. During the early 1900s, Chicago emerged as a center for black aviation rivaled only by Los Angeles. The Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University served as an important entry point for many of the country's pioneering black pilots, who went on to play important roles in the promotion and expansion of black aviation in the United States and abroad. The building at 1338-1342 South Michigan Avenue is also one of the last known remaining structures associated with the rise of Chicago's black aviation community during the 1920s and 1930s. The building is significant under the themes of education and cultural heritage of black Americans with a period of significance extending from 1929 through 1953, mirroring the occupancy of the Aeronautical University.

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

The 1920s and 1930s were the height of the golden age of flight in America, marked by spectacular air shows, record-breaking flights, and larger-than-life aviators. Early milestones, such as the Wright brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903 and Glenn Curtiss' flights for the Scientific American Trophy in 1908, 1909, and 1910, had occurred at remote sites scattered across the county. However, by the end of World War I, Chicago had successfully positioned itself as the epicenter for America's aviation activities. The Aero Club of Illinois—founded in 1910 and guided primarily by industry titan Harold F. McCormick—had worked tirelessly during the 1910s to establish Chicago as a world aviation center. In 1911, the group organized the Chicago International Aviation Meet, the city's first major air show. Held over the course of nine days in August at Grant Park, the show attracted over 100,000 spectators and brought national attention to Chicago aviation efforts. That same year, the Aero Club opened Cicero Field west of the city. The field, which featured a 1,500 foot-long runway and room for 250 planes and 40,000 spectators, was one of the country's best early airports and a vast improvement over the parks and temporary flying fields that offered little more than a flat space on which planes could take off and land.² By the mid-1920s, the Chicago area was home to more

² Young, David and Neal Callahan. *Fill the Heavens with Commerce: Chicago Aviation 1855-1926*, Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1981: 23-33.

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than a dozen commercial flying fields, including Ashburn Field, Checkerboard Field, and Maywood Field. These fields served companies such as the Checkerboard Airplane Service and the Chicago Air Park Company, which offered airplane rides, exhibition flying, flying lessons, aerial photography, and air express service. In 1926, the Chicago Municipal Airport opened at 63rd Street and Cicero Avenue—by 1928, it had become the busiest flying field in the nation.³

The success of these initial efforts attracted the interest of the Curtiss Flying Service, a division of the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company founded by aviation pioneer Glenn Curtiss. By the end of 1928, the company had formed the Curtiss Flying Service of Illinois as part of an ambitious plan to establish a national chain of flying fields and flying schools. Major Rudolph Schroeder, a Chicago resident and aviation engineer who earned lasting fame during the 1910s for his record-breaking stratospheric flights, was appointed vice president and general manager of the new organization. In February of 1929, the *Chicago Daily News* announced that the Curtiss Flying Service had purchased 288 acres of land in Glenview, Illinois, just north of Chicago. Major Schroeder confirmed that plans were underway to establish a new million dollar airport that would “occupy a key position in the national chain of 25 airports established at strategic points throughout the country.”⁴

In June of 1929, the Wright Aeronautical Corporation and the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company merged to form the Curtiss-Wright Corporation. The merger united over a dozen aircraft manufacturing and distributing organizations, including the Curtiss Flying Service, and created an aviation superpower with assets of more than 70 million dollars. Local excitement surrounding the merger intensified in August when the Curtiss Flying Service announced the opening of an aeronautical university in downtown Chicago, which would provide academic and ground laboratory training to complement the flying instruction offered at the newly completed Curtiss-Reynolds Airport in Glenview. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on August 11th that “negotiations are now under way for the leasing of a seven-story building on the near south side, which will contain classrooms and a modern aviation laboratory.” In October of 1929, the Curtiss Flying Service officially leased the first, third, and fourth floors of the building at 1338-1342 South Michigan Avenue. According to the *Tribune*, the company initially intended to use the first floor of the building to display airplanes for sale. The upper floors would be used by the Aeronautical University, which would take additional floors in the building as they became available.⁵

The opening of the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University represented a change in aviation education in Chicago. Although a handful of reputable private schools existed within Cook County—the aviation school at the Municipal Airport at 63rd and Cicero had been operating since the early 1910s, and Gray Goose Airlines opened an expansive airfield with training facilities near Glencoe in early 1929—a Better Business Bureau report released in 1929 revealed

³ Ibid: 145, 151-155. Scamehorne, Howard L. *Balloons to Jets: A Century of Aeronautics in Illinois, 1855-1955*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000: 172.

⁴ Scamehorne: 192. “Hanger 1, Naval Air Station (Glenview)”, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form dated August 13, 1998: 5-6.

⁵ “Chicago Gets A Downtown Air University,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 11, 1929:4. “Curtiss Aviation Takes Space on South Michigan Avenue,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 3, 1929:32.

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that the vast majority of the dozen or so aviation schools operating within the city were poorly equipped, inexpertly staffed, and provided their students with little, if any, adequate training. The Aeronautical University's connection with the Curtiss-Wright Corporation gave the school a validity that other aviation programs in the Chicago area lacked, and the venture was widely supported within the aviation community.

When it opened, the University was the only aviation school in the Chicago district that was accredited and approved by the United States Department of Commerce.⁶ This was an important distinction, since licensing and registration for pilots had become a key issue during the late 1920s. The Air Commerce Act of 1926 had created the first federal framework for regulation of air travel that included licensing requirements for pilots. In 1928, the Illinois General Assembly supplemented these federal regulations with the Aeronautics Act, which extended federal licensing and registration requirements to apply to pilots participating in intrastate air travel as well.⁷ "The new aeronautical university," Major Schroeder declared, "will modernize commercial aviation training and advance Chicago not only as an air center but as an aviation educational center as well."⁸

Although the economic crisis that would later become known as the Great Depression curbed some of the far-reaching plans of the Curtiss Flying Service, there was a widespread belief that the new field of aviation could transcend the immediate downturn. A promotional catalog for the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University declared that the "new, modern industry" of aviation would "help revive trade and commerce, and speed industry back to the next great age of prosperity." To prospective students, it promised that "no other industry offers a brighter future, more interesting work in the open air, or better pay to young men properly trained."

The Aeronautical University at 1338-1342 South Michigan Avenue offered courses of study in aviation mechanics, aviation administration, and aviation welding in addition to three separate pilot courses. Lecture-style classes were supplemented with a good deal of hands-on training. The first floor (actually the basement of the building) was given over to the welding school, where students had the opportunity to "do actual work on overhaul jobs." On the third floor, students worked on standard airplane engines like the OX5 Curtiss, Wright Whirlwind, and Curtiss Challenger. An airplane shop with woodworking and gluing equipment allowed students to practice the "rebuilding of complete wings, replacement and repair of spars, the rebuilding of ribs, etc." The fourth floor of the building housed the school office, physics laboratory, and classrooms as well as a student lounge and library. Course at the University ranged from \$50 for the Private Pilot's Ground Course to \$250 for the Master Mechanics Course. Flying courses at the Curtiss-Reynolds Airport ranged from \$600 for a Private Pilot Course to \$4500 for a Transport Pilots' Course.⁹

⁶ "Curtiss-Wright Aviation Training Courses," Curtiss Wright Corporation, ca. 1930, from the collections at the EAA Boeing Library, Oshkosh, WI.

⁷ Scamehorn: 238-240.

⁸ "Chicago Gets A Downtown Air University," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 11, 1929:4.

⁹ "Curtiss-Wright Aviation Training Courses."

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From the beginning, the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University promoted itself as an inclusive institution. The *Chicago Daily Tribune*, in the 1929 article announcing the opening of the school, took pains to emphasize that women were eligible to enroll in classes at the school, and that anyone over sixteen years of age with some grammar school education could take basic classes. Such open-mindedness did not initially extend to black Chicagoans. When the school first began to operate out of the building on South Michigan Avenue, it admitted only white students. By the early 1930s, however, the school would become the first accredited aviation school in the Midwest to admit black students and hire black instructors.

CORNELIUS COFFEY, JOHN C. ROBINSON, AND THE CHALLENGERS

African Americans, like all Americans, were eager to take advantage of the new possibilities offered by the aviation industry. Bessie Coleman, who broke through the dual barriers of race and sex by becoming a successful and accomplished aviatrix, had inspired a whole new generation of black pilots before her death in 1926. However, in aviation as in most other industries, African Americans routinely faced discrimination and blatant racism at every turn, and were typically denied entrance to aviation schools, and refused training by the Army Air Corps.¹⁰ In the face of such daunting racial barriers, early black pioneers banded together to forge their own paths to the sky.

In 1930, two automotive mechanics, Cornelius Coffey and John C. Robinson, applied to the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University for admittance into the airplane mechanics course. Both men received acceptance letters, but when they arrived for their first class the school administrators refused to admit them because they were black. Coffey, encouraged by his employer to stand up to the school administrators, threatened to sue the school if he and Robinson were not allowed to attend classes.¹¹ Superintendent L. M. Churbuck capitulated, and Coffey and Robinson became the first black students in the Midwest to be accepted into an accredited aviation school. Both men would eventually go on to become licensed pilots and airplane mechanics; Coffey had the distinction of being the first African American to hold both a pilots' and mechanics' license.¹² They would also be the only black students of the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University to attend classes alongside white students. Although Coffey and Robinson excelled in their courses, the Aeronautical University was unwilling to continue to accept black students on an integrated basis, most likely out of fear that white students would no longer want to attend. In a compromise of sorts, Churbuck agreed that if Coffey and Robinson could enroll twenty-five black students, the school would agree to admit and educate them as a separate class. In 1931, as part of their effort to stimulate interest in aviation activities among black Chicagoans, the two men formed the Challenger Air Pilots Association. By January of 1932, the two men had gathered together enough men and women under the auspices of the Challenger Association to form the Aeronautical University's first black class.¹³ Harold Hurd,

¹⁰ Hardesty, Von. *Black Wings*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008:21.

¹¹ Coffey and Robinson both worked at a Chevrolet dealership in Elmwood Park, Illinois. The owner of the dealership was a white man named Emil Mack.

¹² Chanute Air Museum Military Aviation Hall of Fame, http://www.aeromuseum.org/exhibitsHistory_coffey.html

¹³ *Soaring Above Setbacks: The Autobiography of Janet Harmon Bragg, African American Aviator as told to Marjorie M Kriz*. Washington: Smithsonian Museum Press, 1996: 27. Janet Waterford, "Robinson Arouses Race Interest in

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Ambrose Porter, Janet Waterford Bragg, Willa Brown, Bill Jackson, and Joe Muldrow were among the first students to enroll. Robinson and Coffey were hired as instructors at the school, and both would eventually teach not only black but white students as well.

In 1933, the Curtiss-Wright Corporation relinquished its control of the Glenview airport and the aviation school at 1338-1342 South Michigan. The school continued on as the Aeronautical University, Inc. under L. M. Churbuck, Kenneth L. Burroughs, and other members of the original staff. Although the instruction at the ground school was unchanged, without the connection to a flying field, getting actual experience in an airplane became next to impossible for the University's black students. Frustrated by the discrimination they faced at local airports, members of the Challenger flying club first built an airstrip and wooden hangar in the the all-black community of Robbins, Illinois, and later made arrangements to move the club to 87th Street and Harlem Airport in Chicago. Both of these facilities have been demolished.

The number of Challengers graduating from the Aeronautical University continued to increase through the 1930s, and the group became more adept at self-promotion. John Robinson left Chicago in 1935 to fly for the Ethiopian air force after the country was invaded by fascist Italy, and his triumphant return to Chicago in 1936 gained wide media coverage. Other Challengers sought to make strides closer to home. Willa Brown, a flamboyant aviatrix who styled herself after the early barnstormers by regularly donning white jodhpurs, a leather jacket, and tall boots, made a memorable appearance at the office of the *Chicago Defender* in 1936 to demand that the paper cover an air show coordinated by the Challengers. Brown convinced *Defender* editor Enoch Waters to cover the air show, which attracted between 200 and 300 spectators. By the late 1930s, all-black air shows had become popular in Chicago and other parts of the country. Media coverage of the club's air shows helped the club attract new supporters.

Black graduates of the Aeronautical University used the training they received to affect changes within Chicago and in the larger aviation world. The career paths taken by the University's first black students were indicative of the pioneering roles that Chicago's black aviators took on during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1934, eager to start their own aviation school for African Americans, Robinson and Cornelius Coffey embarked on a long-distance flight from Chicago to the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Robinson had graduated from Tuskegee in 1924. After a tumultuous journey that nearly ended when Robinson was forced to make an emergency landing in Decatur, Alabama, both men appealed to the Tuskegee administrators to set up an aviation program and offered to teach under the program. Although Tuskegee would become synonymous with black aviation during the 1940s, when the U.S. Army training program known as the "Tuskegee Experiment" proved that black pilots could be trained in large numbers for skilled combat operations, the school declined Robinson and Coffey's offer.¹⁴ Frustrated but undaunted, the two returned to Chicago. The next year, Robinson left for Ethiopia. Coffey, who had spent the early 1930s developing his reputation among Chicago aviation circles, organized

Aviation," *The Chicago Defender*, April 18, 1936: 3. A photograph from the *Chicago Defender*, taken on January 14, 1931, shows the University's first black class in the engine room on the third floor of 1338 South Michigan.

¹⁴ Hart, Phillip S. *Flying Free: America's First Black Aviators*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Co (1992): 49-53. Bragg: 32. The "Tuskegee Experiment" to training black aviators is not to be confused with the infamous and controversial Tuskegee Syphilis Study conducted by the U.S. Health Service from 1932 to 1972.

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his own aeronautical school, the Coffey School of Aeronautics. In 1939, the school made history when it became the only black aviation school unaffiliated with a university to be approved for the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) Program, a federal program that aimed to establish a pool of trained pilots that could be dispatched in the case of a national emergency.¹⁵

Coffey used his considerable influence and experience to encourage other black Chicagoans to push for racial equality in aviation training. In 1939, Coffey and several members of the Challengers club, including Janet Bragg, Willa Brown, and Harold Hurd, formed a new organization called the National Airmen's Association of America (NAAA) to "further stimulate interest in aviation and bring about a better understanding in the entire field of aeronautics." That same year, the group organized a long-distance flight from Chicago to Washington D.C. as part of a coordinated effort to lobby for racial equality in all federal aviation programs. The two pilots chosen to make the flight were Dale L. White and Chauncey E. Spencer—both graduates of the Aeronautical University at 1338 South Michigan. The flight proved successful, and White and Spencer were granted a meeting with then Missouri senator Harry S. Truman. This initial meeting was the beginning of a process that would culminate nine years later with President Harry Truman signing Executive Order 9981, which effectively ended segregation in the United States military.¹⁶

From 1938 to 1945, upward of 1,000 students went through the Coffey School of Aeronautics, including many of the Tuskegee Airmen. After the war, Coffey went on to play an important role in the local black community, served as an instructor at the Lewis School of Aeronautics in Lockport and then at Dunbar Vocational High School, training some of the first blacks to be hired as mechanics by commercial airlines.¹⁷

John C. Robinson also established an aviation school in Chicago with the help of African American cosmetics mogul Annie Malone. Malone, who operated the Poro Beauty College at 4415 South Wabash Avenue in Chicago, gave Robinson free use of the large coach house on her grounds to use for his new school. In addition to his work with local youth, Robinson also brought many young students to Chicago from Ethiopia for flight training. After World War II, he returned to Ethiopia to establish the Ethiopian Air Force Training Program. Later, Robinson also established a small air service, which became the forerunner of the modern Ethiopian Air Lines.¹⁸

The Aeronautical University continued to offer courses at 1338-1342 South Michigan through 1953, although the school's influence in the area of aviation training diminished as more traditional universities added aviation programs to their curriculums.¹⁹ The only other major tenant in the building was also a vocational school, known first as the Allied School of Mechanical Trades and later as the Allied Institute of Technology. The Aeronautical University

¹⁵ Hardesty: 36-41. Another member of the Aeronautical University's first black class, Harold Hurd, would serve as a sergeant in the U.S. Army Air Forces training program at Tuskegee during World War II.

¹⁶ Ibid: 55. Hardesty: 41. Bragg: 36-37.

¹⁷ "Cornelius Coffey, Early Black Aviator." *Chicago Tribune*, 4 March 1994.

¹⁸ Hardesty: 33. Interview with Tyrone Haymore, Robbins Historical Society, August 2008.

¹⁹ Polk's City Directory 1953

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shared space with the Allied School between 1945 and 1953, and the Allied School expanded its presence in the building after the Aeronautical University moved out. In the early 1960s, International Telephone and Telegraph purchased the Allied School of Mechanical trades and changed the school's name to the more forward-thinking Allied Institute of Technology. In 1964, ITT purchased the building at 1338-1342 South Michigan Avenue outright. ITT remained the sole owner of the building until 1975, when the company donated the building to Cook County for use as a circuit court.²⁰

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT ON SOUTH MICHIGAN AVENUE

The construction of the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building—originally conceived as a furniture showroom building—reflects the early twentieth-century redevelopment of South Michigan Avenue and adjacent streets from low-rise residential to more-intensive commercial uses. At first, Michigan Avenue's identity in the early part of the century was as the city's new "Motor Row," comprised of buildings housing automobile dealers and related businesses that were drawn to the street's fine paving (considered excellent for test drives) and its convenient location between Loop businesses and upper-income residential neighborhoods on the South Side. In 1905, automobile pioneer Henry Ford constructed an early automobile showroom at 1444-46 S. Michigan Ave, which was one of the first Ford branches outside Detroit, and within a few years dozens of other automobile-related buildings were erected along the mile-and-a-half-long corridor between Roosevelt Rd. and 26th St. By the mid-1920s, South Michigan Avenue's Motor Row had become the largest automobile sales and service district in the United States.²¹

As construction along Motor Row slowed during the late 1910s and 1920s, the residential blocks immediately north of 14th Street transitioned into a small but vibrant commercial district dominated by wholesale furniture warehouses and showrooms. Despite the consolidation that occurred as a result of the depression of the 1890s, the Chicago furniture industry remained primarily an industry of thriving medium-sized firms well into the twentieth century. By 1910, the city had over 200 furniture manufacturers and a total workforce of 10,000. The extension of the railroads and the growth of cities across the United States fueled the growth of Chicago's furniture trade. By the early 1920s, Chicago dominated the Illinois furniture industry, which ranked second only to New York in furniture production.²²

Spurred by the construction of several large furniture exhibition buildings during the late 1890s and early 1900s (including the Furniture Manufacturer's Building at 1304-1324 South Indiana Avenue, the Furniture Exposition Building at 1406-1412 South Indiana, and the Central Market Furniture Building at 1414 South Wabash Avenue), Chicago furniture companies and speculative

²⁰ Cook Country Land Record from 1964-1975, Cook County Recorder of Deeds. "ITT gives county a building for branch courtroom site" *Chicago Sun Times* March 2, 1975.

²¹ "Motor Row District" Landmark Designation Report, Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 2000:1-12.

²² "Furniture" *Encyclopedia of Chicago* <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/493.html>

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builders began constructing new loft buildings with open display areas and showrooms in the area south of Roosevelt Road between South Indiana Avenue and South Wabash Avenue. In 1921, The *Chicago Daily Tribune* announced the construction of a “six story building by a Chicago furniture concern” at 1309-1315 South Michigan Avenue, “adjoining the Furniture Exhibition building”.²³ In July of 1922, the owners of the Central Market Furniture Building announced the construction of a twelve-story annex to their existing building on Wabash Avenue to meet increasing demand for wholesale furniture exhibit space.²⁴

THE INTERIOR FURNISHINGS EXHIBIT BUILDING CORPORATION

In response to the growing demand for exhibition space in the burgeoning “furniture row” on the near south side, Chicago architect Henry J. Schlacks and local businessman Paul J. Krez (1869-1925) entered into a speculative building project in 1921 under the auspices of the Interior Furnishings Exhibit Building Corporation. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* first reported on the project in December of 1921, noting that the proposed seven-story loft building would be located in the “fast-growing furniture center” along South Michigan Avenue and that Krez would “probably rent it to the furniture trade, which seems gradually to be ousting the automobile concerns from this (*sic*) neighborhood.”²⁵ Krez, president of the contracting firm Paul J. Krez and Company, was also known as a manufacturer of asbestos packing. Schlacks was set to be the project’s architect.

Henry John Schlacks (1868-1938) was born and educated in Chicago. He attended St. Peter’s Parochial School and went on to receive his early architectural training by working as a draftsman in the office of Adler and Sullivan. After working for Adler and Sullivan, Schlacks trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for two years. Extensive travels through Europe to study historic architecture supplemented the training Schlacks received at MIT. Schlacks returned to Chicago in 1891 after his travels abroad and began an architectural practice with Henry Ottenheimer, who had also worked as a draftsman for Adler and Sullivan. Ottenheimer and Schlacks remained in partnership for five years.²⁶

In 1895, Schlacks opened a practice on his own. As a solo practitioner, Schlacks was best known for his ecclesiastical works, especially Catholic schools and churches. Edward R. Kantowicz, author of *To Build the Catholic City*, dubbed Schlacks “the master of Catholic Church architecture in Chicago.”²⁷

²³ “Furniture Firm Buys a Site for \$250,000 Home” *Chicago Daily Tribune* August 6, 1921:10.

²⁴ “Furniture Row to Get \$500,000 12 Story Annex” *Chicago Daily Tribune* July 9, 1922:22.

²⁵ “Plan 7 Story Building for Furniture Row” *Chicago Daily Tribune* December 15, 1921:26.

²⁶ “Henry J. Schlacks” *The New World* Saturday, April 14, 1900, vol. VIII, no. 33:4. Whitney, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn Whitney. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects*. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970:540. Schlacks is credited with the design of the Chicago Sharpshooters Association Club House in Palos Park, Illinois. Constructed in 1892, the building alludes to the Tudor Revival style with its stucco and half-timbering details. The Clubhouse was a private hotel, shooting range, and picnic area, owned by a group of wealthy Chicago Germans.

²⁷ “St. Gelasius Church” Preliminary Summary of Information, Commission on Chicago Landmarks September 2003:11.

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Chicago was growing rapidly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as its factories and other businesses drew thousands of European immigrants to the city. As the city grew, so did its Roman Catholic parishes. The Archdiocese of Chicago rapidly added parishes and built buildings during this period, including churches and schools for both English-language and “national” (i.e., foreign-language) parishes. One of Henry Schlacks’s first commissions was as supervising architect of St. Martin Church, located at 5848 South Princeton Avenue. The church, with its German Gothic-inspired design, was built between 1894 and 1895 as a German national parish for the Englewood neighborhood. St. Martin’s Church was purportedly based on a sketch Schlacks initially made in Mainz, Germany.

Schlacks’s skilled design for St. Martin Church led to numerous commissions for other German parish churches and parish buildings throughout Chicago and its suburbs over the next twenty years. In 1895, Schlacks received his second major commission – St. Peter’s Church in Niles Center (present-day Skokie), Illinois. Modeled on the small-scale Gothic churches Schlacks visited in Germany, the church was simple in design and constructed of brick. Henry J. Schlacks is particularly well-known for his third major ecclesiastical commission—St. Paul’s Church, which is located at the intersection of Hoyne Avenue and 21st Place. The church, completed in 1896 and designed in the German Gothic tradition, was the first church in Chicago built with masonry vaulting. Schlacks worked on two more German national parish churches during the 1900s: St. Boniface Church (1902-1904) at 1348 West Chestnut Street and St. Henry Church (1905-1906) at 6360 North Ridge Avenue, which subsequently became the Angel Guardian Mission.²⁸ In 1900, *New World* journal praised Schlacks’ contribution to ecclesiastical architecture, noting, “Many of his buildings show not only originality of design, but versatility in detail work that is generally pleasing and always interesting.”²⁹

In addition to his ecclesiastical work in and around Chicago, Schlacks is also notable for his involvement in establishing the University of Notre Dame architecture program. In 1898, Schlacks began the architectural instruction program at Notre Dame; he oversaw the program by making weekly visits to the campus to supervise students interested in architecture. Professor Francis X. Ackerman provided additional instruction to the architectural students. Ackerman went on to head the Department of Mechanical Drawing. Henry Schlacks appears in the faculty directory listed in the school’s bulletin through the 1904/1905 academic year where he is listed as “Director, Architecture.”³⁰ In 1906, the College of Architecture was officially established and offered three degrees: the B.A. Beaux Arts (design) course; the B.S. Architectural Engineering Course; and a fifth year of work in either design or engineering for a Masters.³¹

By the 1910s and 1920s, Schlacks began to receive commissions for non-German parish churches and several parish buildings including an asylum, a convent, schools, rectories, and hospitals. During this period, Schlacks designed ten substantial churches throughout the city of

²⁸ Ibid. Whitney: 540. Lane, George A. *Chicago Churches and Synagogues: An Architectural Pilgrimage*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1981:235.

²⁹ “Henry J. Schlacks” *The New World* Saturday, April 14, 1900, vol. VIII, no. 33:4.

³⁰ “Schlacks, Henry John” from <http://classic.archives.nd.edu/findaids/html/faculty.htm>

³¹ Klimek, Anne. *The Zahms’ Legacy: A History of Engineering at Notre Dame 1873-1993*. Notre Dame: College of Engineering University of Notre Dame, 1993:20.

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Chicago.³² Although a handful of these structures employ the Gothic style, these churches generally exhibit the Renaissance Revival and Classical Revival styles, illustrating a shift in Schlacks' architectural preferences that would also influence his design for the building at 1338-1342 South Michigan Avenue. The Interior Furnishings Exhibit Building project was one of three speculative ventures with which Schlacks was involved, but it is the only commercial structure in Chicago that he is known to have designed.³³

Cook County land records indicate that Krez purchased the lot on South Michigan Avenue on December 13, 1921 and transferred ownership of the property seven days later to the Interior Furnishings Exhibit Building Corporation. On March 20, 1922, the Interior Furnishings Exhibit Building Corporation made and issued bonds valued at \$375,000 on "The Schlacks Building" through the Chicago Title and Trust Company; the bonds were made payable to Leigh, Holzer and Company.³⁴ The issuance of a building permit for the "seven-story brick furniture exhibit" building was reported in the *Chicago Tribune* on May 4, 1922; H.J. Schlacks was the architect of record and Interior Furnishings Corporation the owner of record.³⁵ Shortly after the building permit was issued, an advertisement appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* for the purchase of "First Mortgage 7% Real Estate Bonds" on the "Schlacks Building" from Leight, Holzer and Company. The advertisement featured a rendering of the "seven story and basement, steel and concrete structure, designed for store, office, and display purposes" that was already under construction.³⁶

On May 20, 1922, the *Economist* reported that the proposed building would be "the tallest and most conspicuous building on Michigan Avenue at the present time south of the Blackstone Hotel" and would feature an "unusually attractive" terra cotta façade.³⁷ Schlacks, no stranger to working with conspicuous structures, enlivened the standard loft design by applying a Classical Revival style façade of white glazed architectural terra cotta. Architectural terra cotta experienced a renaissance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout the United States and England. The material was favored for its fireproofing qualities, economy, and plasticity; terra cotta allowed for a wider range of expression and color than any other material at the time.³⁸ The adaptability of terra cotta to structural steel framing caused rapid growth within the terra cotta industry; the production of architectural terra cotta doubled between 1890 and 1900 and quadrupled between 1900 and 1912. Terra cotta was used to produce distinctive building details in an era when construction was becoming increasingly standardized. Decorative trim, ornamentation, logos, trademarks, entrances, and entire facades were easily created with

³² Lane, George A. *Chicago Churches and Synagogues: An Architectural Pilgrimage*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1981:235. St. Adalbert Church (1912-1914); All Saints - St. Anthony Church (1913-1915); St. Mary of the Lake Church (1913-1917); St. Ignatius Church (1916-1917); Resurrection Church (1916-1918); Our Lady of Solace Church (1917); St. John of God Church (1918-1920); St. Clara - St. Cyril Church (1923-1927), subsequently renamed St. Gelasius Church; St. Ita Church (1924-1927); and St. Henry Church (1928-1929).

³³ In 1917, the architect designed and built a seven-story courtyard apartment building on Sheridan Road at a cost of \$400,000. Three years later, Schlacks and his brother, Henry, constructed an eight-story hotel with 200 apartments in the Streeterville area.

³⁴ Cook County Land Records, Document #7480608, dated March 20, 1922.

³⁵ "Building Permits" *Chicago Daily Tribune* May 4, 1922:27.

³⁶ "Display Ad 27 - No Title" *Chicago Daily Tribune* May 28, 1922:A10.

³⁷ "Real Estate Transaction," *The Economist*, May 22, 1922.

³⁸ Berry, George A. *Common Clay*. Chicago: TCR Corporation, 2004:1.

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architectural terra cotta. From the immediate post-Fire years of the 1870s through the early 1930s, Chicago was a leading American center for architectural terra cotta design and manufacture. Terra cotta factories took advantage of Chicago's vibrant and innovative architectural community, its strategic location at the center of the nation's great railroad transportation network, and its proximity to clay deposits in nearby Indiana. By the beginning of World War I, three nationally-important terra cotta companies—Northwestern, American, and Midland—were all headquartered in or near Chicago. The Midland Terra Cotta Company of Cicero provided the terra cotta tiles and ornament for 1340 South Michigan Avenue in 1922.

Construction of the building at 1338-1342 South Michigan Avenue was complete by the end of 1922, and almost immediately the building's owners experienced financial difficulties. The relocation of Furniture Row during 1923 and 1924 may have contributed to these difficulties. After years of consistent growth along South Wabash and South Michigan Avenues in the early 1900s, Chicago's Furniture Row abruptly migrated north during 1923 and 1924. A *Chicago Daily Tribune* article from 1924 described a seven-story building at Erie and Fairbanks Avenue, well north of the center city, as being located in "the new furniture row". That same year, the first phase of construction was completed for the mammoth American Furniture Mart building, described by the *AIA Guide to Chicago* as "a lavishly ornamented monument to the wholesale furniture trade".³⁹ The building was prominently located on Lake Shore Drive between East Erie Street and East Huron Street. The construction of an eleven-story exhibition building in December of 1924 for the Gold Furniture Company and the Western Picture Frame Company across from the new furniture mart cemented the relocation of Furniture Row from to the Streeterville neighborhood. Both firms had previously maintained showrooms at 1331 South Michigan Avenue, but decided to "give up their quarters on the south side furniture row for the new north side district."⁴⁰

This northward migration came at a bad time for the Interior Furnishings Exhibit Building Corporation as it attempted to find tenants for the newly completed loft building at 1338-1342 South Michigan Avenue. By 1924, the space had been leased to at least two tenants: the McCarrie School of Mechanical Dentistry and A.J. Johnson and Sons Furniture Company. However, the building was still not a profitable venture for Schlacks and Krez. Plagued by numerous mechanics liens and unable to pay the debts incurred during construction of the building, the two partners relinquished the property in 1926 and it was sold at public auction to Rudolph W. Gerding.⁴¹ Under Gerding's ownership, the building finally landed a high-profile tenant in 1929, when the Curtiss Flying Service of the Middle West leased the first, third, and fourth floors of the building to house the newly established Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University.

³⁹ Sinkevitch, Alice. *AIA Guide to Chicago*. Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2004: 119.

⁴⁰ "Furniture Exhibit Building" *Chicago Daily Tribune* December 21, 1924:A7.

⁴¹ Cook County Land Records, Document #9479864, dated 11/19/1926

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
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10. Geographical Data

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Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

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(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

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| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

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|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary encompasses the entire parcel of land currently associated with the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary encompasses the parcel of land that is associated with the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Emily Ramsey
organization: MacRostie Historic Advisors
street & number: 53 W. Jackson Blvd.
city or town: Chicago state: IL zip code: 60604
e-mail: eramsey@mac-ha.com
telephone: (312) 786-1700
date: April 2013

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University

City or Vicinity: Chicago

County: Cook

State: Illinois

Photographer: Kelsey Shipton, Emily Ramsey

Date Photographed: July 2012

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 13: East (primary) and north elevations, looking southwest from Michigan Avenue
- 2 of 13: East (primary) and south elevations, looking northwest from Michigan Avenue
- 3 of 13: North and east elevation, looking southwest from across Michigan Avenue
- 4 of 13: North elevation, looking south
- 5 of 13: South elevation, looking north
- 6 of 13: West (alley) elevation, looking east
- 7 of 13: East (primary) elevation, terra cotta detailing at end bays
- 8 of 13: East (primary) elevation, upper story terra-cotta detailing
- 9 of 13: East entrance, detail of historic transom from interior of first floor
- 10 of 13: Looking south along interior of first floor at east elevation, 1970s non-historic storefronts
- 11 of 13: First floor, looking west from east end of building
- 12 of 13: Typical upper floor, looking west
- 13 of 13: Typical upper floor, original window along light well on south elevation

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

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Figure 1: Advertisement for the Curtiss-Wright Flying Service, a division of the Curtiss-Wright Corporation, circa 1930.

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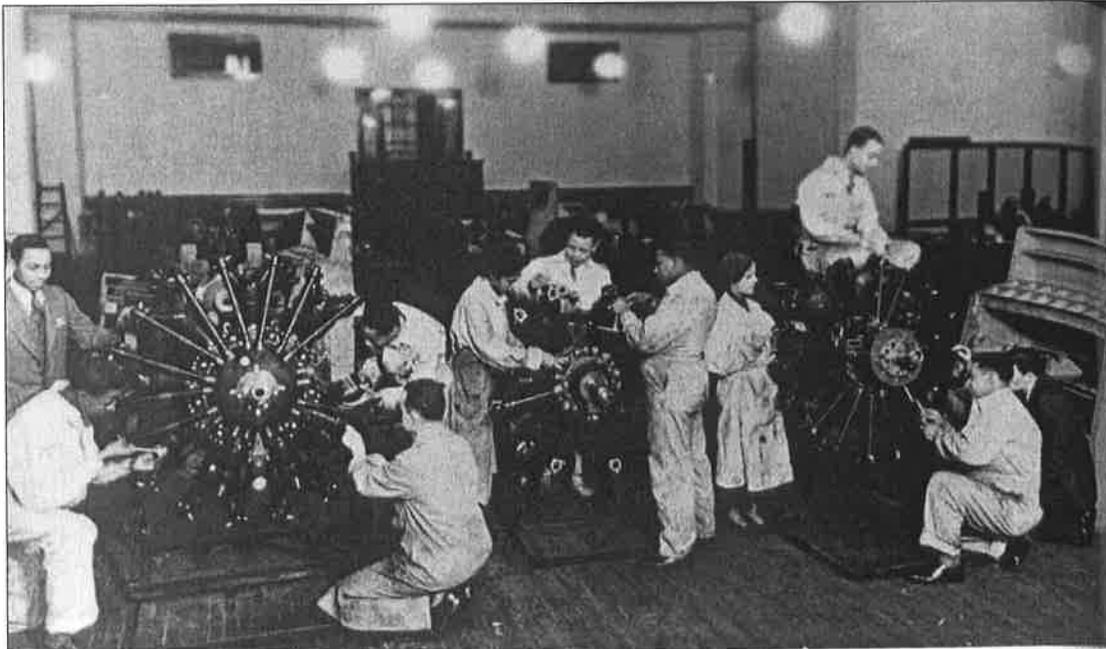


Figure 2: The first black class at the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University, 1932 (Photograph from the *Chicago Defender*)



Figure 3: The first black class at the Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University, 1932 (Photograph from the *Chicago Defender*)

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Figure 4: The Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University Building, 1929

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Figure 5: Members of the Challenger Air Pilots' Association, 1935

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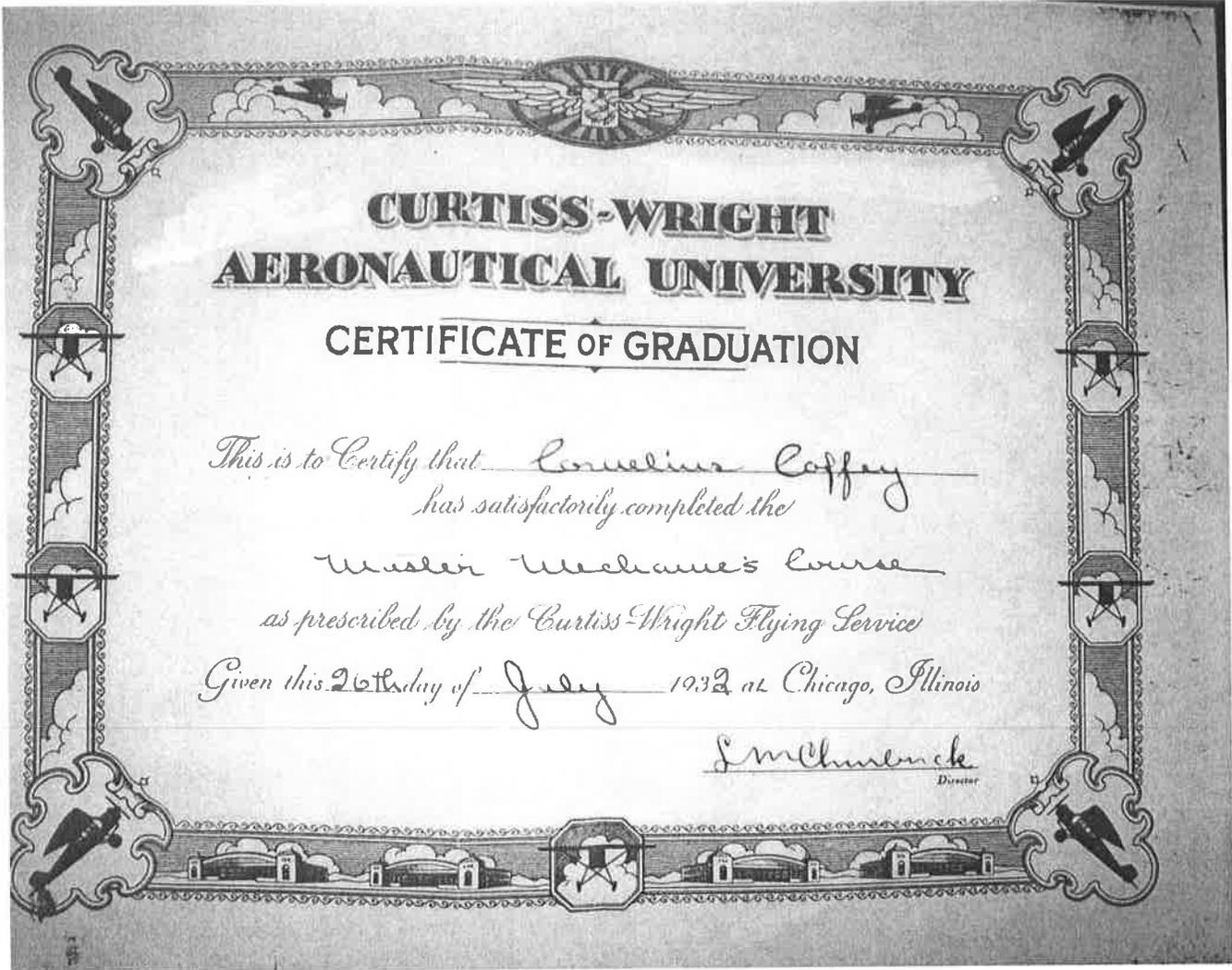


Figure 6: Cornelius Coffey certificate of graduation from Curtiss-Wright Aeronautical University, dated July 1932

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Figure 7: Cornelius Coffey (left), greets Dale White (center) and Chauncey Spencer after their 3,000 round trip flight from Chicago to Washington, DC.



Figure 8: Curtiss Wright students at Robbins Airport, 1932 (Photograph from the *Chicago Defender*)

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