

RONALD E. MCNAIR ELEMENTARY



Development of Ben Tillman Housing

As a result of the increase in population caused by the United States' entrance into World War II and the increase in employment at the Charleston Navy Yard, there was a need to develop housing for workers employed by the naval yard and other industries. The City of Charleston in cooperation with the United States Navy planned to construct housing, schools, and other buildings to support this population increase. The Ben Tillman housing development was designed by local Charleston Architect David B. Hyer. Hyer was the superintendent of construction for the Charleston Navy Yard and later became an influential Modernist Architect who designed many buildings in Charleston.

McNair Elementary School

The population increase at the beginning of World War II caused increased student enrollment in the district and required the construction of new schools. Many of the schools in the area during this period were improved by the Public Works Administration (PWA). The Housing Authority of the City of Charleston constructed the Ben Tillman School and construction started in January 1943. The school was built to have 31 classrooms and a capacity of 1,200 students. Harry Morse, the superintendent of the Cooper River School District, announced the opening of the Ben Tillman School and appointed W.B. Goodwin as the first principal.



Desegregation

Before the construction of the Ben Tillman Elementary school there were only eleven elementary schools in North Charleston's Cooper River School District 4. These schools consisted of three white schools and eight African American Schools. In 1963, South Carolina's public schools were the last schools in the south to begin desegregation. In 1964, the Ben Tillman school became one of the first two all-white schools in the Cooper River School District to host African American students.

