

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

11/12/14
N248 2/2/15

National Register of Historic Places

Douglass School
Bristol, VA

Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

historic name The Douglass School
other names/site number File # 102-5021

2. Location

street & number 711 Oakview Avenue not for publication N/A
city or town Bristol vicinity _____
state Virginia code VA county N/A code N/A zip code 24201

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
[Signature] 1/2/15
Signature of certifying official Date
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC RESOURCES
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the
National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the
National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper _____
Date of Action _____

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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)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		sites
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		structures
			objects
		1	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)
EDUCATION/school	OTHER
	WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)	Materials (Enter categories from instructions)
No Style	foundation Brick
	roof Rubber
	walls Brick
	other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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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 a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATION

Period of Significance

Ca. 1921 - 1954

Significant Dates

Ca. 1921-1954

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

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Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 1.879 acres

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

1 17 394896 4051946 See continuation sheet
 Zone Easting Northing

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

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susannah Franklin Buss, Historic Preservation Consultant
 organization Landmark Asset Services, Inc. date _____
 street & number 406 East Fourth Street telephone (336) 714-8917
 city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27101

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

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

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Douglass School Apartments, LLC
 street & number 406 East Fourth Street telephone (336) 714-8911
 city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27101

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Summary

The Douglass School, located at 711 Oakview Street, was built in 1921. Additions were added to the building c. 1929 and in 1963. All parts of the building are brick veneer with a flat roof. Some architectural changes were made to the original building at the time of later additions.

Site Description

The 1921 Douglass School building is situated on a corner of Oakview at a five-points intersection near downtown Bristol, Virginia-Tennessee. The site is 1.879 acres. The school building is close to the street on all sides and encircled by a concrete sidewalk. A short concrete path leads from the corner to the front entrance. The site was not originally considered desirable but "as the years passed, the spot was leveled and graded, grass sown, shrubbery and trees tastefully planted, until it became a desirable campus."¹

Across Oakview Street is a large cluster of white apartments stretching down the street. A small day care sits at the corner. This is the Johnson Court government housing complex. Moving counter-clockwise around the intersection along Moore St. are some commercial or industrial buildings and more clustered apartment buildings. In the final pie-shaped corner block around the five-point intersection are some small single-family homes and a brick church. Lee Highway forms the boundary on the west side of the school.

The Douglass School occupies most of the block on which it sits. As the block widens going back along Oakview and Lee Highway. The original building faces the corner with the earliest addition situated along the highway behind the original building. The larger addition from 1963 projects at an angle to the east side of the building, along Oakview. Parking is provided along Oakview Street and in a large lot behind the building additions. A public park with tennis courts continues behind the lot and a small fenced jungle gym area sits behind the 1963 addition.

Exterior

The Douglass School stands two stories in height and rests upon a raised foundation. The original school building was completed in 1921. The brick façade is divided into three bays. Side bays feature bands of glazed brick headers that form a decorative rectangular pattern. Corners of the design are anchored with decorative concrete squares. A row of header bricks forms a water table atop a concrete foundation. The brick is laid in a 5-1 common bond, and the newer brick parapet was added later. The two brick bays flank the central bay that features a large rectangular panel of glass block above the pedimented entrance. Concrete surrounds the recessed glass block panel. The original building had steps elevated to a main entrance on the first floor. This entrance was later changed to simple double metal doors covered by a single-gabled pediment entering on the ground floor. Before this change, a set of straight-run concrete stairs carried students up to the first floor into a recessed arched entry. Pilasters framed the stairway, arch and windows. In 1963, these pilasters were covered by the current concrete surround. At the same time the glass block panel and flat roof were added. The flat roof replaced the original low, hipped roof. A brick parapet, capped with concrete coping, was added also.

The double window of the façade matched those along both side elevations; paired six-over-six pierces the second story above the original arched entry. Banks of six-over-six, double-hung wooden sash windows pierce each story of both the east and west elevations. A metal lintel with bolts provides a detail

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over the windows. There are two brick chimneys symmetrically located one on each side of the original building.

Two additions were made to the original school building. The first was built c. 1929, as seen in two photographs from that date. It was a two-story, brick addition made along the south elevation. This addition is approximately 12 feet shorter than the original building. It is constructed with brick veneer in a 5-1 common bond. Originally it had a low-hipped roof and six-over-six windows. The original roof has been replaced with a flat roof. The original windows were double six-over-six double-hung windows. They are now fitted with wooden vertical boards with two small window openings in the center of the original opening.

The final addition was made in 1963. Added along the west elevation, this brick addition stands two-stories high and has a flat roof. A concrete foundation of approximately four feet blends into the 7-1 common bond brick veneer. Banks of metal, hopper-style windows fill the north and south elevations. Large rectangular panels of glass block surmount double-leaf entries into two locations in the north elevation. A double-leaf entry in the east elevation is flanked by sidelights and capped with a transom. A set of hopper-style windows penetrates the second story of the east elevation directly above the entry.

Interior

The current configuration of the school's first floor interior houses the former workroom and coal storage as well as boys and girls dressing rooms in the original building. The former gym, stage and present ballroom are in the 1930's addition. The later wing houses the kitchen, cafeteria and various classrooms. The entire second floor has classrooms and administrative offices.

The configuration of original building and the 1930's addition will be primarily intact. The corridor of the large, later addition will remain and apartments will exist where classrooms were.

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Statement of Significance

The Douglass School in Bristol, Virginia is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A, having solely provided for the education of African-American students living in Bristol, Virginia. Founded as "The Colored School" in 1896, the original building was a one-story brick building located on Piedmont Avenue in Bristol. In 1911 the name of the school was changed to Douglass School for Negro Students, in honor of the nineteenth-century orator and abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. The motto of the school, "Let us be seen by our deeds," was inspired by Douglass as well. The current building was constructed in 1921 with additions to accommodate an expanding student body made in the 1930's and 1963.

The Douglass School is associated with events and broad patterns of local history in the areas of education, particularly African-American education. The period of significance, 1921 through 1954, marks the years of importance for Douglass School. During this time Douglass served the African-American community of Bristol, Virginia. In 1966 the senior class was integrated, and the entire high school was integrated the following year. The school stands in memory of the racially segregated educational system that was in place in the South during these years, and continuing into the 1960's.

History of Bristol, Virginia

Though Bristol, Virginia was not officially granted a charter until 1890, when the name was changed from Goodson, the history of the area begins in 1749 when the area was known as Sapling Grove. Prior to this era, the Great Valley of Virginia was traveled by Native Americans. Until the 1850's this was a small, quiet town with a population of about 800 citizens. The first train arrived in downtown Bristol on October 1, 1856, and the subsequent growth of the town is evident. Bristol grew from only 3400 people in 1880 to 10,400 in 1890.² During this time there were in operation the Bristol Cotton Mill, Bristol Woolen Mill, a veneering factory, carriage factory, flour mill, tobacco plant and furniture factory.³ These industries along with banks, hotels, restaurants and churches contributed to the town's growth. Over one half of the town's inhabitants had running water and phone service in the home and some had electricity.

Education in Bristol benefited greatly from this growth as well. "Early settlers in the Bristol area had little opportunity for formal schooling."⁴ Wealthier families could provide for a tutor or governess to live in their home and teach the children. Despite earlier protests from many citizens, the first public school met in September 1891 in Burson's Church.⁵ The school was opened by Prof. J. Ballard, who was the head of the school, with a scripture reading and singing of a hymn.

The first public high school building was erected on Mary Street in 1892 with several teachers and 75 students. It was called the Central School. By 1895 it was too full and a schoolhouse owned by the Catholic Church had to be rented and the faculty increased to eight.⁶ In 1900 a new school was built. Known as the Robert E. Lee School, some of the students from Central were transferred there. In 1914 a high school building was erected on Piedmont Avenue. Then in 1923 the Thomas Jefferson School opened to replace the old Mary Street building. These schools served the white population of Bristol.

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African-American Education

The education of African-Americans in the south was almost non-existent prior to the Civil War. As slaves, blacks were positioned to be dependant on the white race, and often it was illegal to educate slaves. Black freedmen in Virginia had been exposed to elementary education, as provided by religious and charity groups.⁷ For many blacks who served in the Civil War, new educational opportunities became available. However, during the harsh period of Reconstruction many reacted with hatred and resentment, including groups like the Ku Klux Klan. During this period much opposition to black education arose. Klan members would terrorize teachers and burn schools. By 1871, when the Freedman's bureau stopped operating and there were approximately a quarter of a million blacks in schools across the South, the opposition was mounting.⁸ The church, particularly the Baptist church, remained an ally for blacks seeking education. Many learned reading and scripture in Sunday schools.

In 1870 Virginia established its free school system. The state superintendent was H.R. Ruffner who was regarded as liberal in his view of educating blacks. Conditions in 1870 were not good for black education, however. The number of whites over twenty who were illiterate was around 48,000 and the number of blacks was over 200,000.⁹ By 1910 there were only four public-supported high schools for blacks.¹⁰ Most blacks were not exposed to much public education until the 1920's when changes in the labor market and a growing black population necessitated this change.¹¹ During this time and later the majority of black schools were located in urban areas. This reflected the opposition of many southern whites to education for black students, which was especially strong in rural communities and small towns. Virginia maintained six black public high schools in 1916. Most taught liberal arts including Latin, although many public schools for blacks in Virginia and across the south maintained a racially motivated focus on training black students for industrial jobs.¹²

In Bristol, a school for black students opened in 1892 in the Odd Fellows Hall and in 1896 a building was erected on Piedmont Street known as "The Colored School." The building was rented for ten dollars a month and had one teacher. The City Council allowed money for heating the "colored school." In 1907 the "colored principal's" salary was raised to \$42.50 a month.¹³ In 1911 the name was changed to the Douglass School and in 1921 a new public school was built on Oakview Avenue, replacing the one-story brick building on Piedmont Avenue. The first principal of the school was Professor Morris Johnson. Several other principals followed and then in 1948 the consolidation of Douglass with the African-American school in nearby Abingdon took place. These students were bussed in while those originally attending Douglas lived close by and walked. This increased the size of the school substantially. The number of graduates in 1954 was approximately sixteen and in 1955 the first class to graduate after the merger was 50. The same year H.K. Breedlove, who received a bachelors degree from University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a masters degree from Columbia University in New York City, became principal. He served in that capacity until 1977. In November of 1948 a Student Council was formed to promote student activities and to encourage a closer relationship between the students and faculty. The Council served as a governing body over all disciplinary matters and interests pertinent to the student body.

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The school operated as a segregated school until in 1966 the senior class was integrated into the high school. The remaining high school classes were integrated in 1967, and Douglass became an elementary school. Other changes in student body and grade levels occurred over the next 26 years until the school closed its doors in 1991. The building has served as a community center since then. It currently houses a Head Start program among other tenants.

Douglass school served the African-American population of Bristol, Virginia for over forty years. During this time Douglass offered more than just an education. There were many opportunities for students to participate in "assembly programs and club activities."¹⁴ In the 1940's the school began observing Negro Health Week and Negro History Week. A well-equipped library and school lunchroom were established. A Business Department was added in 1952. The Douglass marching band was formed that same year. Additions and improvements continued over the following decades.

Some discrimination likely did exist in the school system, however. For example a student remembers in the 1940's getting an "old used and discarded, hand-me-down arithmetic book... [with] pages in the back [that] are all ragged or torn out." Additionally this student remembers paying "book fees."¹⁵ In 1935 the Douglass School senior graduating class motto was "We will sail though the waves be rough"¹⁶, a somber but resolute motto for high school seniors. At one time the sports teams used "mismatched hand-me-down uniforms from the white schools."¹⁷

Many students gained a great deal from Douglass School despite some hardships. It was not uncommon for graduates to return as teachers or go on to other rewarding careers. According to alumni Wilhelmina Banks, "The success and accomplishments are many and fantastic despite the difficult times and defects of the educational system designed for African-Americans."¹⁸ Teachers instilled in their students a strong work ethic and sense of discipline. The pupils were expected to go on to higher education, college or junior college, and many did.¹⁹ According to Fred Delaney, President of the Douglass Alumni Association and 1954 graduate, the idea was instilled that the students had to be better than the white students because they would have more hurdles to overcome.²⁰ There was a high standard that students were expected to achieve and a quality education was provided.

Many alumni and those associated with the school made contributions to the community and black education. Mrs. Isom, former Principal Breedlove's daughter helped establish a scholarship fund for students who wanted to become teachers.²¹ The H.K. Breedlove scholarship, named in his honor, is awarded in the spring to a senior at Virginia High School. The alumni of Douglass offer their own scholarship, the Douglass School Alumni Association Scholarship Award, supported by individuals and sometimes classes as sponsors. First awarded in 1993, there are now two scholarships, one of \$1000 and one \$1500 for a senior whose parent is a Douglass alumnus.

The role Douglass played in the African-American community is perhaps as important as its academic contributions. The students benefited from numerous activities like sports and clubs. Until the 1950's there was a boys football team and basketball team and a girls basketball team. More teams were added after that. A video from an alumni reunion shows old footage of events at Douglass such as the annual May Day celebration, Homecomings, dance and athletic performances, and other gatherings. Many spectators

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were very involved with the PTA, and worked with the teachers to achieve discipline. The students' families lived nearby; many lived in the Johnson Court projects across Oakview Street. They attended church and school together. According to Mr. Delaney the school and church were the "center of our community."²³ He relates a story of the city championship football game that was played between the Douglass Demons and the Slater, the black school of Bristol, TN. Every black citizen in the two towns was present for the big school event. The black parents, teachers and administrators ran the school and had a sense of pride and ownership in it. It "kept the black community together."²⁴

Douglass School served the black population of Bristol, Virginia for over four decades. The students gained a solid education and the community came together for the activities at the school. Douglass brought education to the black population of Bristol, Virginia and armed students with the discipline and knowledge to succeed and meet the challenges that would face them in the world. The Douglass School stands as a testament to the academic opportunities for black students and as a center of strength and connection to the black community. The pride of the students and alumni in Douglass School is evident in the school Legacy:

"Hail! Dear Old Douglass, Proudly you've braved the strife through
many weary years as time marched on.
Loyal Sons and daughters, true, ever will sing thy praise;
and to uphold your name Dear Douglass Hail!"²⁵

Endnotes

¹ Douglass School Reunion booklet, 1997.

² Bristol Historical Association. *Bristol Virginia Tennessee: A Pictorial History*. Bristol, Virginia: Quality Printers, 1985.

³ Elery A. Lay. *An Industrial and Commercial History of the Tri-Cities in Tennessee-Virginia*. Kingsport, TN: Lay Publications, 1982.

⁴ Bristol Historical Association. *The Passing Years... History in Pictures, Bristol Virginia-Tennessee, 1940-50's*. Bristol, TN: B&B Meridian Group, 1993.

⁵ Bristol Historical Association. *The Passing Years... History in Pictures, Bristol Virginia-Tennessee, 1940-50's*.

⁶ Robert S. Loving. *Double Destiny: The Story of Bristol, Virginia-Tennessee*. Bristol, TN: The King Printing Company, 1955, 111.

⁷ Lester F. Russell. *Black Baptist Secondary Schools in Virginia, 1887-1957*. Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1981, 27.

⁸ Russell, 32.

⁹ Russell, 38.

¹⁰ Russell, 105.

¹¹ James D. Anderson. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988, 186.

¹² Anderson, 199-200.

¹³ School Board Minutes from 1892-1916.

¹⁴ Douglass School Reunion booklet, 1997.

¹⁵ Wilhelmina Banks. "The ABC's of the African-American Educational Quest, 1865-1965 in Southwest Virginia." Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, 2000, 4.

¹⁶ Banks, 5.

¹⁷ Banks, 6.

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- ¹⁹ Interview with Fred Delaney, August 31, 2004.
²⁰ Interview with Fred Delaney, August 31, 2004.
²¹ Douglass School Reunion booklet, 1997.
²² "Down Memory Lane," reunion video of Douglass alumni Association.
²³ Interview with Fred Delaney, August 31, 2004.
²⁴ Interview with Fred Delaney, August 31, 2004.
¹ Douglass and Slater Reunion booklet, 2004.

Bibliography

- Anderson, James D. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Banks, Wilhelmina. "The ABC's of the African-American Educational Quest, 1865-1965 in Southwest Virginia." Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, 2000, property of Wilhelmina Banks.
- Bristol Historical Association. *Bristol Virginia-Tennessee: A Pictorial History*. Bristol, Virginia: Quality Printers, 1985.
- Bristol Historical Association. *The Passing Years... History in Pictures, Bristol Virginia-Tennessee, 1940-50's*. Bristol, TN: B&B Meridian Group, 1993.
- Douglass School Reunion booklets, 1997 and 1995, property of Fred Delaney, President of Douglass Alumni Association.
- "Down Memory Lane," Douglass Alumni Association reunion video, 1995.
- Interview with Fred Delaney, telephone interview conducted by Susannah Franklin Buss, August 31, 2004.
- Lay, Elery A. *An Industrial and Commercial History of the Tri-Cities in Tennessee-Virginia*. Kingsport, TN: Lay Publications, 1982.
- Loving, Robert S. *Double Destiny: The Story of Bristol, Virginia-Tennessee*. Bristol, TN: The King Printing Company, 1955.
- Russell, Lester F. *Black Baptist Secondary Schools in Virginia, 1887-1957*. Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1981.
- School Board Meeting Minutes from 1892-1916.

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Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries include 1.879 acres located at 711 Oakview Street as indicated on attached Bristol Tax Map.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries comprise the area of the original and continuous usage and ownership by Douglass School. This is a historically appropriate setting for the school.

All photographs are of:

DOUGLASS SCHOOL
Bristol, Virginia
VDHR File Number : 102-5021
Jeff Smith, photographer

All negatives are stored with the Department of Historic Resources Archives, Richmond.

Date: July 20, 2004
View of: Front Façade
Neg. No.: 21747
Photo 1 of 10

Date: July 20, 2004
View: Southeast Elevation
Neg. No.: 21747
Photo 2 of 10

Date: July 20, 2004
View: South Elevation
Neg. No.: 21747
Photo 3 of 10

Date: July 20, 2004
View: Addition- south elevation
Neg. No.: 21747
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Date: July 20, 2004
View: Original block, west elevation
Neg. No.: 21747
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Date: July 20, 2004
View: Mid-century wing, second-story corridor
Neg. No.: 21747
Photo 6 of 10

Date: July 20, 2004
View: Interior front stairwell
Neg. No.: 21747
Photo 7 of 10

Date: July 20, 2004
View: First-story classroom
Neg. No.: 21747
Photo 8 of 10

Date: July 20, 2004
View: Northeast elevation
Neg. No.: 21747
Photo 9 of 10

Date: July 20, 2004
View: Side elevation
Neg. No.: 21747
Photo 10 of 10

