

VLR-1/20/81 NRHP 10/1/81

FHR-8-300 (11-78)

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Academy Street School

and/or common same

2. Location

street & number Academy Street

not for publication

city, town Salem

vicinity of

congressional district

Sixth (M. Caldwell Butler)

state Virginia

code 51

county

in City

code 77j

3. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public | <input type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> museum |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure | <input type="checkbox"/> both | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational | <input type="checkbox"/> private residence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site | Public Acquisition | Accessibte | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | <input type="checkbox"/> in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> no | <input type="checkbox"/> military | other: |

4. Owner of Property (See Continuation Sheet 62)

name School Board, County of Roanoke

street & number 526 S. College Avenue

city, town Salem

vicinity of

state Virginia 24153

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Salem City Hall

street & number

city, town Salem

state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Virginia Historic Landmarks
Commission

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1980

federal state county local

depository for Survey records Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, 221 Governor Street

city, town Richmond

state Virginia 23219

7. Description

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Academy Street School, an educational landmark, is sited on a spacious lot off Academy Street in the heart of Salem. The school complex consists of two classroom buildings: one constructed in 1890 and an annex built ca. 1903. A small hyphen, erected in the middle of the present century, connects the two buildings. A small power plant is situated to the rear (north) of the structures. The 1890 edifice has a Flemish-bond brick facade and four-course, American-bond brick secondary walls on a brick foundation. The annex is constructed in five-course, American-bond brick on a stone foundation. Both are covered by hipped roofs sheathed in standing-seam sheet metal.

The main entrance to the 1890 structure is through a projecting, three-story entrance tower that was crowned originally by a mansard roof topped by cresting. The first-story entry is enclosed within a round-arch doorway that originally featured a large transom window that has been temporarily blocked with plywood. The original paneled double doors remain in place. A similarly treated entrance is found on the rear elevation. A basement entrance, now covered by a shed roof, is found beneath modern concrete steps that serve the main entrance. The steps replace the original twin stairway that featured a handsome balustrade. Fenestration consists of segmental-arched openings on the first story and round-arch openings on the second story. All openings presently are covered with plywood, protecting the original multi-pane, hung-sash windows. The structure has notable brickwork. Each bay is defined by brick pilaster strips with recessed brick panels between the first- and second-story windows. The imposts of the arched openings are defined by raised brickwork. A bracketed cornice runs along the eaves on all elevations. A projecting gabled pavilion is found on the east elevation. Triangular dormers with louvres break the roof line.

The annex is L-shaped in plan with the main entrance found on the east elevation within a shallow entrance pavilion. The pavilion is topped by a parapet with a recessed brick panel and a corbeled brick cornice. The entrance is sheltered by a one-story porch, covered by a shed roof. The porch has Doric columns, turned balusters, and a plain entablature. The main entrance consists of a round-arched doorway whose transom has been blocked with plywood. The original paneled double doors remain in place. The first-story windows have stone lintel-type heads; the second-story windows have segmental-arched heads. All openings are blocked by plywood and retain their multi-pane hung sash. A bracketed cornice and corbeled brickwork run along the eaves. Brick pilaster strips define the bays. The hipped roof is broken by triangular dormers inset with louvres.

The stair is the focal point in both buildings. The closed-string stair has a square newel ornamented with applied moldings. A wainscot of matchboarding follows the course of the stair and is used in all classrooms. The openings in both buildings have symmetrical architrave trim with turned corner blocks. The paired four-part folding doors that separate second-floor classrooms are an unusual feature of the annex. Most classrooms retain their original blackboards, cast-iron heating grates, and hardwood floors.

The rear heating plant, which houses the original furnace, is distinguished by a tall brick chimney.

The later hyphen connecting the two buildings is undistinguished architecturally and may be removed in a forthcoming renovation.

The schoolyard has a black-top covering.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1890; ca. 1903 **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Academy Street School complex is significant both as a monument to early public school education in southwestern Virginia and as an architectural landmark in the City of Salem. The construction of the 1890 school on the site of an earlier female academy resulted from an increase in state funding for public education that coincided with a tremendous construction boom in the Valley caused by the expansion of the Norfolk and Western Railroad. As with many of the public schools of the period, the new schoolhouse was located conspicuously at the head of a street and was fashionably Victorian, characterized by decorative brickwork, bracketed cornices, and an imposing entrance tower. Its well-lighted, centrally heated, spacious classrooms symbolized an enlightened attitude toward primary education and contrasted significantly with the one-room, wooden schoolhouses that had served Virginians in an earlier day.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The idea of universal public education in the Commonwealth was slow to take form. In the late 18th century Thomas Jefferson proposed a plan of public education. The bill, as enacted, was so amended as to make it virtually worthless. In 1810 the General Assembly established the Literary Fund which provided that certain taxes be set aside for the encouragement of learning. The next year it was decided that when the Fund amounted to \$45,000 the interest earned thereon was to be used solely for the education of indigent white children in the counties. In the 1816-17 legislative session Charles Fenton Mercer of Loudoun County offered a comprehensive plan to make public education available to all white children in the Commonwealth by augmenting the Literary Fund without increasing taxes. Mercer's plan suffered the same fate as Jefferson's earlier proposals. The young Federalist was opposed successfully by a Jeffersonian bloc led by Senator Joseph C. Cabell who preferred to establish the University of Virginia at Charlottesville instead of founding a system of popular education.

The Census of 1840 revealed alarming white illiteracy in many states, including Virginia. Two educational conventions were held in the state in 1840 and 1845 to remedy the situation. In 1846 the General Assembly responded with legislation establishing a school system; however, the law provided no means of taxation for the schools nor any centralized direction. The burden fell on the individual counties. Some counties did develop a system of common schools, but the majority did not. In 1856 and 1857 Governor Wise made a notable effort to set up an adequate system of public education, declaring that schools "should not be a state charity, but the chief element of the freedom of the state;" however, the General Assembly failed once again to appropriate money for schools.¹ The Civil War stopped any momentum towards public financing of education. Primary schools were closed and revenues from the Literary Fund were diverted to the war effort.

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Andrew, Matthew Page. Virginia, The Old Dominion. New York: Doubleday, 1937.
"City Birthday Saluted." Salem Times-Register, 7 July 1977.
"Conditions in Schools Here in 1834 Shown." The Times-Register Centennial Edition 1838-1938, p. 69.

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1 1/4 acres

Quadrangle name Salem, Virginia

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

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Verbal boundary description and justification Beginning at a point 600' N of West Main, on W side of Academy Street, N of Norfolk and Western Railroad tracks; thence extending approximately 300' S on said side of Academy Street; thence extending 100' W to alley; thence extending 350' N to S side of Taylor Avenue; thence extending approximately 150' E on said side of said street to point of origin.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date January 1981

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3144

city or town Richmond state Virginia 23219

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

J. Tucker Hill
title Tucker Hill, Executive Director
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

date JAN 20 1981

For HCRS use only
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Academy Street School, Salem, Virginia

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| For HCRS use only |
| received |
| date entered |

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 7,8

Page 1

7. DESCRIPTION

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property for the Academy Street School consists of 1¼ acres. This includes the 1890 school, the ca. 1903 annex, and the power plant. The black-top schoolyard is included also. This has been the site of the Academy Street School since the mid-19th century. The nominated property is defined by Academy Street on the east, Taylor Avenue to the north, an alley to the west and Clay Street extended to the south.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

After the war the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-68 drew up the bitterly contested Underwood Constitution. A notable feature was the immediate requirement for a statewide comprehensive system of public schools which would establish 2,900 schools, employ 3,000 teachers, and accommodate 130,000 pupils. At the next general election only twenty-six delegates out of 132 were reelected; consequently, funding for the schools was withheld. According to Governor Holliday, who vetoed an important measure providing more money to the schools, "Our fathers did not need free schools...they are a luxury...to be paid for by the people who wish their benefit."² Many prominent Virginians shared the Governor's attitude. As a result, throughout the 1870s the state school system consisted almost entirely of elementary schools, segregated by race, with rural areas often having but one teacher. Counties actually were forbidden by law to use state funds for high schools; therefore, few schools adequately prepared students to enter college.

An important catalyst for educational reform in Virginia was the generous assistance given to its school system by the Peabody Educational Fund of New England, established after the war by George Peabody "as a gift to the suffering south." Between 1870 and 1882 the Fund awarded Virginia \$233,000, a gift that by 1879 convinced both bondholders and the legislature of the necessity of modifying the terms of earlier funding acts. Three years later the General Assembly carried this reform forward both by voting the public schools a cash payment of \$400,000 and quarterly payments of \$25,000 and by appropriating \$379,000 to the Literary Fund. The stage now was set for the construction of the Academy Street School in Salem.

When the General Assembly established the public school system in 1870, Roanoke County appointed L. R. Holland as its first superintendent. His first duty under the new law was to organize four district school boards, one for each magisterial district in the county. The first recorded meeting of the Salem district was held on December 10, 1870. In 1871 the Salem District School Board organized a white school with three teachers in a four-room building on Academy Street that formerly served as the Salem Academy, a private Presbyterian school for girls, built before the Civil War. A black school with two black teachers met in a different building. In 1887 the Board razed the old Academy structure after it obtained a \$6,000 loan to construct an eight-room school building on the site for white pupils. Who designed the school is not presently known, but it is likely that the Board appointed a local architect. During the construction of the new building the school met in the Virginia House, a hotel on East Main Street. The size and style of the new school undoubtedly were influenced by the promotional campaign of the "Citizens Executive Committee." The committee was formed in order to secure for Salem its share in the rapid commercial development that swept the

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
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Academy Street School, Salem, Virginia

Continuation sheet #2

Item number 8,9,4

Page 2,1,1

8. SIGNIFICANCE

Valley of Virginia after the coming of the Norfolk & Western Railroad. After its first meeting the committee cited among the advantages of the growing town "...The Public Graded School of Salem (which) has for years maintained a high rank for efficiency..."³ The Salem Press reported, "Education is given considerable attention. White schools' attendance 225, 350 capacity. There is a County Superintendent of Schools..."⁴

A New York publication, extolling the attractions of Salem to prospective residents, wrote in August 1890, "...there is a handsome public school building just completed."⁵ The Salem Improvement Committee issued a brochure in 1891 that noted, "The handsome brick building was completed a year ago, is heated by steam and furnished with the best appliances for instruction."⁶ At this time the corbeled brick building with its prominent entrance tower was among the town's finest institutional structures. The building continued to serve as a school until 1977 when it was abandoned for newer quarters. Plans presently are underway for its restoration by the Salem Historical Society.

VDS/RCC

¹Virginius Dabney, Virginia, The New Dominion (New York: Doubleday) 1971, p. 250.

²Ibid., p. 381.

³Salem and the Roanoke Valley - A Circular of Information," Times-Register, 1884.

⁴Ibid., p. 12.

⁵Salem Improvement & Development Committee. Salem, Virginia. Its Advantages and Attractions. (A Circular). (Giles County, 1891), p. 18.

⁶Ibid., p. 32.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dabney, Virginius. Virginia, The New Dominion. New York: Doubleday, 1971.

"Detailed Account of Progress Made in County Given in Report by Head of Educational System." The Times-Register Centennial Edition 1838-1938, pp. 113, 115, 118.

"Early Records Here Reveal Appropriations For Schools Made As Early As Year 1846." The Times-Register Centennial Edition 1838-1938.

"Salem and the Roanoke Valley - A Circular of Information." Times-Register, 1884.

"Superintendent of Schools Chosen in Roanoke County As Early As 10 Years Before War." The Times-Register Centennial Edition 1838-1938.

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

The building is presently being leased by the City of Salem, which will acquire the structure in 1983. After this transfer of ownership, correspondence should be addressed to:

City of Salem
 c/o City Manager
 P. O. Box 869
 Salem, Virginia 24153

USGS 7.5' quadrangle (Scale 1:24000)
Salem, VA 1963 (PR 1978)

ACADEMY STREET SCHOOL, Salem, VA

UTM References:
17/583180/4127620

