

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Education Sub: schoolhouse

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: vacant not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Late 19th-early 20th century vernacular

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

roof metal

walls wood

other _____

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

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.
- 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)

Education; Ethnic History: African American; Architecture

Period of Significance ca. 1880- ca.1955

Significant Dates ca. 1880

1954

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation n/a

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property One acre

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

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

1 17 591075 4063888 2 _____

3 _____ 4 _____

See continuation sheet.

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: Michael J. Pulice, Architectural Historian, Virginia Department of Historic Resources,
and Kay Slaughter, Senior Attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center

Organization: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

date July 2005

street & number: 1030 Penmar Ave SE

telephone 540-857-7586

city or town Roanoke

state VA

zip code 24013

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/title: Mr. and Mrs. Franklin R. Agnew

street & number: 532 John Baker Rd

telephone 276-732-8681

city or town Fieldale state VA

zip code 24089

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Rock Run School
Henry County, Virginia**

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7. Description:

Summary

The Rock Run School is located west of Fieldale and south of Stanleytown, on a wooded, moderately sloping hillside above the Rock Run drainage—a tributary of the Smith River, in a rural, residential section of Henry County in Southside Virginia. The school is currently on private property off of John Baker Road (county Route 681), about one-half mile west of The Great Road (Route 683). It is a one-story frame building comprised of an early one-room structure, 42' 8" by 23' 8", and a later, smaller, 29' 4" by 18', one-room addition on the west end. Since the original building is about one foot taller than the addition, the two sections have entirely separate gable roofs. Both roofs have about the same medium pitch, and are covered with very old hand-crimped standing seam "box tin" in 2-4-foot lengths. Rust has slowly replaced the roof's red paint over the years. The fieldstone foundation has subsided at the north end and largely fallen away at the south end. Since its construction circa 1880, the Rock Run School building has not been altered or substantially damaged thereby maintaining excellent integrity and potential for restoration.

Detail

Each section of the Rock Run School building has a single outside entrance that accesses a small vestibule. From the vestibules one can go straight into a cloakroom (one in each section of the building), or turn (left in the west section, right in the east section) and enter a classroom. There is also an interior doorway connecting the two sections. Other than the vestibules and cloakrooms, the school has a single open classroom within each section of the building. Throughout the building the floors, walls, and ceilings are covered with thin, unbeaded pine boards laid flush. The boards in the original classroom are unpainted and somewhat wider than those in the new addition and in both cloakrooms. All of the doors and windows have plain, 1" by 4" board surrounds. The tall windows, separated by thick mullions, are missing all of their glass and most of their wood sashes, although a number of representatives survive on the premises. Only one early door survives, and it is not attached to a jamb.

The older east section of the school was built on a fieldstone foundation that has disappeared below grade with the accumulation of soil around the building since it was in service. It has a single

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**Rock Run School
Henry County, Virginia**

entrance at the west end of the front (south) elevation. It has a three-pane transom light (sash in place, glass is gone), and a roughly two-foot extension of the metal roof overhead, supported by extended rafters and diagonal wooden brackets. The early section also has beveled weatherboards fastened with machine-cut nails, which suggest a nineteenth-century construction date. Beneath the weatherboards is diagonal sheathing, nailed tightly flush to the 2-inch wall studs. This type of sheathing is common in frame structures of the time (before plywood was invented), although it was often considered superfluous. It served to substantially increase the shear strength of the structure, as well as to keep weather and rodents out. East of the front entrance, centered on the remaining wall surface, is a bank of five window apertures, 104" tall, separated by thick mullions, minus all but one, six-light wood sash with slender muntins. From this single remaining sash it appears that both the top and bottom sash originally had six-light configurations. The only other window openings in the east section are in the west wall of the cloakroom. Since the newer section was added on the west side, the southernmost window on the east end was enclosed so that it became a window between two cloakrooms. Both west end windows were the same size and probably had six-over-six sash. It has not been determined if the cloakroom partition was added later, but the unpainted interior matchboard walls and ceiling of the cloakroom, which is thinner than that in the classroom and the same as that in the west addition; and the presence of two window openings in the tiny room, suggest that the school functioned for a time without a cloakroom and one was added when the school was enlarged. A single, small (about one foot square) brick chimney, piercing the roof near the ridge at the west end of the early section, served as a flue for a wood stove. On the back side of the roof, also near the west end of the east section, is a more modern metal flue.

The south addition has a cobblestone foundation, plain tapered weatherboards and wire nails, one entrance at the north end of the front elevation, and a row of 5 window openings, 54" tall, separated by thick mullions, minus the wood sash, roughly centered on the front elevation. The only other opening in the south addition is a single, small window on the rear elevation (again minus the wood sash), which provides light to the cloakroom. From the cloakroom are two doorways—one entering the classroom and one from the vestibule. The classroom once had chalkboards on the north and west walls, and the walls were painted blue below the chalkboards and white above them. The door surrounds are also painted blue.

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**Rock Run School
Henry County, Virginia**

8. Statement of Significance

Summary

The Rock Run School served the African American community of Rock Run in rural Henry County, Virginia from the post-Civil War Reconstruction Period of the early 1880s through the mid-20th century. It is a highly significant vestige of the educational history of Southside Virginia, the rural south, and the black population of late 19th-mid-20th century Henry County. Although in overall poor condition, the school has not been altered over the years or damaged in any substantial way. As such, its historic integrity is remarkable, and its potential for restoration appears promising. It is a rare and irreplaceable surviving example of an educational institution that served African Americans, because it represents several phases in the evolution of African American education in Virginia.

Justification of Criteria

The Rock Run School is eligible under Criterion A in the areas of Education and African American Ethnic History for its significance to the education of the local black community. It is also architecturally significant under Criterion C as one of a few surviving examples of late nineteenth to early-twentieth-century rural schools in the region. Its period of significance begins with its construction, circa 1880 and ends in 1955, about the time that it closed as a schoolhouse.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Christina Draper of the Virginia Foundation for Humanities for her assistance with the historical research contained herein; Anne Copeland of the Bassett Historical Center for her research assistance; and Jean McCrae and Marc Wagner of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Register Division, for their assistance and careful review. Also, this nomination would not have been possible without the efforts and good intentions of Mr. and Mrs. Franklin R. Agnew.

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Rock Run School
Henry County, Virginia

Historical Background

Originally built as a one-room school for the black community sometime after the Civil War, the school was apparently already in use in 1882 when the property was deeded to Henry County.¹ With a second room addition, it operated as a “colored” school until the mid-1950s when it was consolidated into a larger segregated school prior to the walls of segregation beginning to crumble.

Rich African American history in Martinsville and Henry County, Virginia, is just now being uncovered. With the 1999 publication of Henry Wiencek’s *The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White*, a spotlight focused on the North Carolina-Virginia Hairston family dynasty of whites who created a series of plantations across North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee and Mississippi, including eight plantations in Henry County (Hordsville, Beaver Creek, Camp Branch, Leatherwood, Chatmoss, Magna Vista, Shawnee and Marrowbone).² Many descendents of the Hairston slave families still live in the Henry County area, and numerous African American and slave cemeteries are currently being documented. Many of these families also attended Rock Run School.

The history of the Rock Run Community itself is largely recounted through an oral tradition. Reportedly, there were free Blacks who lived near the Rock Run Creek and some slaves attempted their escapes through that community. After the Civil War, a number of African Americans came to own property adjacent to Rock Run, and a thriving residential community exists there today. However, the history of Rock Run School is inextricably linked to the development of public education in Virginia.

Before 1860, there were few publicly run schools, and Virginia, like many other states, had a mixture of neighborhood and church-run schools. With Reconstruction, however, two new groups – African Americans and Evangelical Christians – emerged to call for a common school system. In 1870, William Henry Ruffner was selected as Virginia’s first Superintendent of Public Instruction.³ By April 1870, he had presented the state legislature with a public school statute in which the state assumed responsibility for black education but mandated segregation.⁴ The legislation also established that both the state and local governments would contribute tax revenues to school support. Opposition to public schools came largely from those who felt it would threaten

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**Rock Run School
Henry County, Virginia**

parental authority or those who felt it would elevate blacks. Ruffner however fended off critics by assuring that the public school system would mimic not replace the social structure. Schools were seen as a “bastion of segregation.”⁵

Even so, by 1880, many white southerners had accepted the call for the education of blacks. Virginia was still a largely rural state, and the area around Martinsville and Danville predominantly agricultural, with an emphasis on tobacco with manufacturing becoming a major industry in the early 20th century. Good workers were needed, and education, while still related to a caste system according to race, was seen as important to all.

Following the Civil War, schools had often been held in existing facilities, but by the 1880s, district school boards held an increasing number of pieces of real estate. It seems that Rock Run School was built soon after the Civil War and the title to the land and building passed to the Board of School Trustees in 1882, the same year that State Superintendent Ruffner retired. Even though the state was nominally in charge of public schools, they were inherently local institutions, and because the local government was controlled by the white population, the black schools remained underfunded beginning with their origins during Reconstruction.⁶ Although we don't know by what means the construction of Rock Run School was paid, most likely the parents themselves contributed materials and labor, as was true of other black schools in Virginia.⁷ Rock Run School, however, is unusual among white and black rural schools of that era in that it was built as a frame building. Most Virginia rural schools of the 1870s and 1880s were described as being of log construction.⁸ Indeed, the durability of the Rock Run School for some 125 years attests to its fine construction.

One resident who attended in the 1920s recalls that the playground was red clay and that the water was provided from neighbor Jake Parker's spring. The toilets were outside.⁹ The boys at school cut wood for the wood stove, which was set in the middle of the room with a piece of sheet metal around it to protect the children. Originally there were no desks, only benches; desks were purchased by the parents from the white schools.¹⁰ Every Friday, programs were held in the morning for parents to come and see the school and their children.¹¹

Around this same time that Rock Run property was deeded to the school in 1882, a white man sold adjacent property to Jacob Parker, who had born into slavery in Patrick County.¹² His great-grandson Frank Agnew recalled that “Jake” said he was 5 years old when Lee surrendered

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(although, according to the birthdate given in his obituary, he was probably only 4).¹³ By the early 1880s, Jake was a landowner. Today, his property is owned by his great grandson, Frank Agnew, who is also the current owner of the one-acre parcel on which stands Rock Run School. Other members of Parker's family received parcels from the original tract, and, like Frank Agnew, many of the current owners are descendents of Jake Parker.

By the time that Frank, now 71, attended Rock Run in 1940, a number of reforms had shaped rural schools in Virginia. But one thing was still the same: the modernizers tried to segregate learning according to race, while blacks were determined to reject racial inequality.¹⁴ Frank Agnew, who attended Rock Run until 1947, recalls those years: "The white kids would pass us in the school bus and yell out names and throw things at us." It was a painful time, he said. Yet within their own school, the Rock Run kids did what all kids do: they read, they learned arithmetic; they shot marbles and played ball during recess. They carried their lunches to school.¹⁵

Frank reminisces:

"I remember the summer after the first year. Granddaddy had apple orchard in front of school. So we kids got a bunch of apples and broke the windows. We didn't like it . . . but we didn't have anything to do. There wasn't much to get into if you lived in the country, feed the hogs, and work on the farm . . . not much you could get into.

"My first teacher was Mrs. Mansfield . I don't know where she was from, maybe Martinsville. I feel like it was probably 20 kids in lower school. Right smart more in other room but maybe 30-35. Didn't have as many first graders as 4-6th graders.

"I just remember in the first grades you took reading and writing and in third grade, a little arithmetic. Parents weren't educated. It took a year or so to learn to write your name. People thought children had to be of a certain age to learn."

"Henry County didn't give us desks. We used to have benches and write in your lap. It hurts [to think about it]. People in the community – some like a ladies club or ladies auxiliary – got together and got their husbands (when women go men go) to get used desks, all marked up and cut up and everything else. If you got a book you shared it. A lot of people couldn't afford to buy books. Mr. Randolph, the

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Rock Run School
Henry County, Virginia

black superintendent, came to school. You bought books and if you couldn't afford books, they gave you old books that had been used up and were marked up. There were people that bought books and pushed them on down through years. Never changed books. When you went to 4th grade, I had a cousin who passed his down."¹⁶

By 1916, only 16 Virginia counties had black high schools.¹⁷ By the time Frank reached high school age in Henry County, the black youth went to a Christian-run school, PCI until Henry County finally built George Washington Carver in the 1950s.¹⁸

"Mr. Staples and George Shelton brought a bus to PCI – the Henry county training school," Frank recalls. "Then we went to school in Wagonwheel and Shriner's Club. Then they built Carver, the first county high school [for blacks]. Black only. They built that in 1954 or so. Carver was middle and high school - 8th grade through 12th. All kids in Henry county area and some from Patrick County went there."¹⁹

A review of state records for the depression years of 1932-33 gives one view of the school for that year: 65 children almost equally split between boys and girls attended. Teacher E.K. Moody, a college graduate, was paid \$58.50 per month out of which he had to pay \$10.00 for room and board. No pupils were given textbooks although they could purchase them.²⁰

This one teacher spent the morning from 9 a.m. to 12:25 teaching reading, arithmetic spelling, physical education, English, history and geography to 4th through 7th grades and then spent the afternoons teaching the younger children, 1st through 3rd grades, arithmetic, spelling, reading, writing and physical education. There were two Hairston children who traveled from another county to attend the school.²¹

By the mid-30s, the Commonwealth was making some efforts to improve African American education, and in August 1936 appointed the first State Assistant Supervisor of Negro Education. Yet, gross educational inequalities in Black and white education remained evident. For example, The typical Black teacher received about 60% of the white teacher's salary.²² As African American teachers began to challenge this inequity, many principals and teachers lost their jobs for standing up to the system. Cases were also brought to improve the facilities themselves, although it would require the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education (and **Section 8** **Page 8**

subsequent cases in Virginia) in 1954 to eliminate the "separate but equal" doctrine of

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segregation. Rock Run closed its doors for good in the mid-1950s.

Despite the hardships of the segregated years at Rock Run School, many students have succeeded in their lives and have promoted education in the next generation. After his graduation from Henry County Schools and attending a year of college, Frank Agnew worked for many years at Dupont. He proudly recounts that his own children have gone on to college and beyond. Frank is now intent on preserving the Rock Run School and using it as a community center for the 30 or so African American families who live in the neighborhood.

Endnotes

1. Henry County Deed Book 21, page 157
2. Henry Wiencek, *The Hairstons*, map, xiv and following.
3. Link, 17.
4. Link, 17.
5. Link, 20.
6. Link, 39.
7. Link, 42.
8. Link, 50.
9. Mrs. Ora Hairston, Undated Notes to Frank Agnew.
10. Frank Agnew Interview, July 2005.
11. Mrs. Hairston.
12. Frank Agnew Interview.
13. Obituary of Jacob Parker, undocumented newspaper, 1944
14. Link, 182.
15. Frank Agnew Interview.
16. Frank Agnew Interview.
17. Link, 189.
18. Frank Agnew Interview.
19. Frank Agnew Interview.
20. Rock Run School 1-11-03-03-2, State Records Center, Library of Virginia, Division 4.
21. Rock Run School 1-11-03-03-2.
22. Archie G. Richardson, *The Development of Negro Education in Virginia 1831-1970*, 40-78.

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9. Bibliography

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Agnew, Franklin R., Interview by Kay Slaughter, July 2005.

Alexander, Fred. M. *Education for the Needs of the Negro in Virginia*, Southern Education Foundation, 1943.

Hairston, Ora. Undated Notes to Frank Agnew.

Link, William A. *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920*. University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

Richardson, Archie G. *The Development of Negro Education in Virginia 1831-1970*. Richmond, VA Chapter, Phi Delta Kappa, 1976.

Wiencek, Henry. *The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White*. New York, St. Martin's Griffin, 1999.

10. Geographic Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated 1.0-acre parcel, in which the Rock Run School is located, is identified in Henry County Deed Book/Page Number 601/474 as Parcel 601790010.

Boundary Justification

The boundary conforms exactly to that of Parcel 601790010, (Henry County Deed Book/Page Number 601/47), which includes the school building and a small wooded buffer around it.

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Photographs

All photographs: Rock Run School

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**Brookside Farm & Mill
Grayson County, Virginia**

Henry County, Virginia

Date: March 2005

Photographer: Michael J. Pulice

Type: archivally-printed digital; CD with images included

1. Rock Run School, exterior, facing NE
2. Rock Run School, exterior, facing West
3. Rock Run School, older (east) section exterior, facing north
4. Rock Run School, newer (west) section exterior, facing north
5. Rock Run School, older (east) section exterior, facing south
6. Rock Run School, older (east) section interior, facing east
7. Rock Run School, newer (west) section interior, facing east
8. Rock Run School, newer (west) section interior; from vestibule, facing north into cloakroom