

VLR - 6-13-01  
NRHP - ~~draft~~ 5-03-02

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 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 : Mason - Dorton School

other names/site number : Mason's Store School, Dorton School, 83-5019

**2. Location**

street & number Route 71, at the intersection of Route 606 not for publication N/A

city or town Castlewood vicinity N/A

state Virginia code VA county Russell code 167 Zip 24224

**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.)

*Walter Sasser* 3/18/2002  
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 Signature of Keeper
- See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the Date of Action  
National Register
- See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_



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### 7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation - Limestone piers \_\_\_\_\_

Roof - Standing seam tin \_\_\_\_\_

Walls - Wood /Weatherboard \_\_\_\_\_

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

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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.
-

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Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Education

Period of Significance 1885-1951

Significant Dates 1885

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder \_\_\_\_\_

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: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of Property 5.5

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

Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing

1 17 385140 4073560 2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet.

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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: Kalli S. Lucas / Architectural Historian

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ date: January 27, 2001

street & number: 16175 Kingsport Highway telephone 423-348-6367

city or town: Fall Branch state: TN zip code 37656

**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 Mr. Henry Harold Dorton

street & number 1516 Sam Lions Trail telephone 540-632-5315

city or town Martinsville state VA zip code 24112

**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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Mason-Dorton School  
Russell County, Virginia

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## NARRATIVE STATEMENT

### Summary

The Mason-Dorton School is a one story, two-room school building that sits on property that has been owned by the Dorton Family for over two hundred years. The school sits at the intersection of primary Route 71, and secondary Route 606 in Russell County, Virginia. Historically the area has been known as Mason's Store, named after the family business that was established about half a mile southwest of the school location. The simple school building was built in 1885 on property that was donated for a school site. The structure was built with function in mind, and has no decoration or outstanding architectural details. The school is abandoned, and in need of some restoration, and repairs. Although the building has undergone some modifications, it maintains its integrity of design, feeling, materials, and workmanship. The building has never been moved, and after abandonment in 1958 was not structurally changed to serve another purpose. No additions were ever built onto the main building, and the interior was not subdivided, or stripped. Mason-Dorton School is the only two room schoolhouse still standing on Primary Route 71 that retains its original integrity. One other historic school, Stony Point School, on Route 71 has been modified to serve as a residence. There are several historic one and two room schools throughout Russell County, but most have been modified for housing, storage, and animal shelter, or are in a state of deterioration.

### MASON-DORTON SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Mason-Dorton School rests on an open lot surrounded by pasture and farmland. The school has a gable roof, which is covered in standing-seam tin. The building measures approximately 46 feet north to south, and 24 feet east to west. The frame construction is covered in weatherboard, which is broken by window and door openings. The west side of the building has double door, entrances that open into the individual classrooms. Each door was originally laterally flanked by a window. Both windows have been removed, and the openings have been repaired with weatherboard. Double six over six, double sash windows originally broke the north and south ends of the building. One of the northern end windows has been removed, and the opening filled. The east side of the school contains a line of twelve six over six, triple sash windows. The building is constructed simply, with no decoration or outstanding architectural features. The structure rests on rustic limestone piers, and natural limestone outcroppings.

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**NARRATIVE STATEMENT (continued)**

The interior of the Mason-Dorton School is also of simple construction, built with function in mind, not aesthetics. The building is equally divided into two rooms, with each room measuring approximately 22.6 feet north to south, and 22 feet east to west. The walls, as well as the ceiling, are covered in horizontal boards. The floor is covered in tongue-in-groove planks. Each room contained a central wood or coal-burning stove for heating. Ghost lines on the walls show that blackboard locations changed over the years. According to the property owner, who attended the school, the line of windows on the east side of the building was added, and is not original to the structure.<sup>1</sup> The most interesting feature of the school interior is the divider between the two rooms. Instead of building a wall between the two rooms, a series of hinged panels were hung from a walled track in the ceiling. Each panel measures approximately 7.6 feet tall by 3.3 feet wide. There are a total of six panels, five of which are still hanging. Every two panels are connected by hinges, creating three folding sections. Each section could be folded up, and slid to the side of the room if there was a need for one open room. Mr. Ray Hurd, who attended Mason-Dorton School from 1937-1945, said the panels were folded back when a speaker came to talk to the entire school, and when they used the school for voting.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Harold Dorton also remembers the panels being folded back for school presentations such as plays and concerts. He remembers the Carter Family performing at the school while he attended.<sup>3</sup>

The school has been weakened by age, and the elements, and shows signs of deterioration. The floor appears to be the weakest structural feature, and has swayed sitting on its stone piers. Many of the windows have been broken, and one of the partition panels has been taken down, or fallen. It is lying on the floor inside the school. Mr. Harold Dorton, current owner, is making plans for restoration of the school.

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**Mason-Dorton School**

**Russell County, Virginia**

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**Statement of Significance**

**Summary**

The Mason-Dorton School built in 1885, is a common style, traditional two-room school building that served the Mason's Store area of Russell County until its close in 1958. The school is a good example of a two-room school building, which retains its original construction form, including a unique set of folding panels inside the school that divided the two rooms. The school was constructed on land that has been in the Dorton Family for over 200 hundred years, and stands as a memorial to the family, and to their place in the early settlement of Russell County. The school was originally called the Mason's Store School, named from the business that opened along Route 71 by the Mason Family. This early store was a gathering place and hub of the community, a community that became known as Mason's Store.

**Justification of Criteria**

The Mason-Dorton School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A. This is the only public education building of its type and age still in existence in the area. The school meets Criterion A for its association with the development of education, not only at Mason's Store, but also throughout Russell County. Its period of significance is from 1885 to 1950, and is eligible at the local level of significance.

**Historical Background**

The property that the Mason-Dorton School rests on became part of the Dorton Family landholdings in the late 1700s. William Dorton Sr., who had large landholdings in Scott, and Russell Counties, originally owned the property. In the early 1770s William Dorton Sr. settled in the Copper Creek area of Scott County. Dorton had resided at the Castlewood Settlement, and was one of the original six settlers to leave and establish a homestead outside of the safety of Castlewood. He, his wife Elizabeth and their children, built a fortified structure along Copper Creek near present day Nickelsville, in Scott County, Virginia, 9.5 miles from the school location. The school property appears to lie along the eastern border of William Sr.'s landholdings. According to local tradition, and several written records, William's wife Elizabeth was a Native American Cherokee who, during a previous marriage, had given birth to Bob Bengé. This is the same Bengé who became known throughout the southwest Virginia area as a

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Statement of Significance (continued)

raider, who showed little mercy on the early settlers. He is said to have lived at Dorton's Fort during his childhood. This may explain why there are no records of attack on the fort. A raider killed William Dorton Sr. in 1780. It is not clear which Native American group was responsible.<sup>4</sup>

William Dorton Jr., it appears, lived on the lands in Russell County near the school location.<sup>5</sup> He, along with his two brothers, served in Col. William Campbell's 15<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment, Continental Line, at the Battle of King's Mountain.<sup>6</sup> William Jr. continued his military career with the Washington County militia, attained the rank of ensign in 1782, and was promoted to captain in 1793. He served under Col. Andrew Lewis and protected the forts and settlements from Native American raids.<sup>7</sup> Dorton was in one of the parties that overtook Benge's group when Benge (Dorton's presumed half brother) was killed.<sup>8</sup> He appears to have served as constable for Russell County late in his life. He died in 1823 and was buried near the Mason-Dorton School in the Dorton-Mason Family cemetery.

William Jr's son Jacob, who was born in 1798, married Edith Fugate and had five children. Their oldest son William Bracken (1822-1906) probably donated the land for Mason's Store School to be built. His son Robert Clark (1859-1932) was a wagon maker, and ran "Dorton's Shop" along Route 71 near the school. Robert's son, Henry, was the father of Harold Henry Dorton, the current owner of the school.<sup>9</sup> Harold's brother, William, still lives in the Dorton Family home across the road from Mason-Dorton School.

William Jr's son Edward Dorton had a daughter named Nancy (1839-1909). Nancy married Drewry Mason (1838-1911) who operated Mason's Store during the late 1800s. The store was combined with a post office, and Nancy served as postmistress. Their son John Mason served on the Russell County Board of Supervisors forty years. He sat as chairman for twenty of those years.<sup>10</sup> The Mason store and home still sit along Route 71 near the Dorton-Mason Family cemetery.

Russell County appears to have a strong educational history. As early as May 7, 1818, Russell County had already appointed nine school commissioners. On October 7, 1846 the county was laid out into 14 school districts in accordance with an Act of the General Assembly passed March 5, 1846, and a commissioner was appointed to each district.<sup>11</sup> In 1869 the Underwood Constitution demanded the creation of a public school system in Virginia. Dr. William Ruffner,

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

Virginia State Superintendent, was ordered to submit a comprehensive educational plan within 30 days. Ruffner's plan was similar to one proposed by Thomas Jefferson in 1796, which in brief, placed the cost of public elementary education upon the taxpayers. The plan was a success and at the end of the first year 2,900 schools were in operation throughout the state. Southwest Virginia led the state in the percentage of students attending public schools.<sup>12</sup> Thirty-eight schools opened in Russell County. In 1870 the public school system was put under the control of a Superintendent of Schools, the first being E. D. Miller. Eighteen men were appointed by Miller to serve as trustees for each school district, Copper Creek District was represented by M. C. Moneyhem, John G. Bundy, and J. H. S. Fugate. There was much opposition to the school system development but Miller and his associates persevered to create a working organization.<sup>13</sup>

The first public schools in Russell County were simple buildings, many of which were log with small windows, and wood-burning fireplace. The students, whose ages ranged between four and twenty, sat on puncheon benches with no back rests. During Superintendent Miller's tenure, the simple log schoolhouses began to change. They were replaced by larger frame buildings, with six shuttered windows, coal burning Burnside heating stoves in the center of the room, blackboards, and benches with back rests. Mason-Dorton School was built in this style. In 1889 it was one of 33 frame schools in the county. The majority of schools, 51, were still log buildings. Each school was provided a galvanized pail and tin dipper, a broom and a box of chalk by the School Board. Many times the buildings were also used for churches and community buildings.<sup>14</sup>

By 1885, when Mason-Dorton School was established, Superintendent Miller reported the schools were in excellent condition, and achieving satisfactory results. Eighty-one additional schools opened that year, and the cost of tuition was 64 cents a month.<sup>15</sup> Salaries for teachers who had a third grade certificate were fifteen to eighteen dollars a month. For those holding a second grade certificate, pay was about twenty dollars and month. Teachers with a first grade certificate were paid twenty five to thirty dollars a month. The school term lasted one and half to five months and many times teachers traveled from school to school during a calendar year. The school day started between 7:30 and 8:00 am. At mid-morning there was a fifteen-minute recess, an hour recess at lunch, and another fifteen-minute recess in the afternoon.<sup>16</sup> The boys carried water from a nearby water source, and coal and kindling in the winter to keep the fire going. The girls would rotate the sweeping and dusting duties during recesses. School was dismissed between 4:30 and 5:00 pm. Textbooks were usually the only teaching tool in the early

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Statement of Significance (continued)

schools, and much of the daily lessons were memorized and recited for the teacher. Poems were recited from memory from an early age, and long works of poetry and prose were recited every Friday by the upper grades. Spelling bees were also held on Friday, and attracted several parents and local spectators. The teachers' biggest challenge came in teaching several grades in one room, and keeping everyone busy.<sup>17</sup> Mason-Dorton School had one room that held first through third grade, while the other room held the fourth through seventh.<sup>18</sup> In 1889 there were 114 students in the two small rooms, one can assume the teachers had their hands full.<sup>19</sup> The teachers also acted as disciplinarians, and dealt out punishments according to the severity of the offense. Minor transgressions could be punished by having the child stand on one foot, putting them in the corner, or depriving them of recess. The more severe punishment was usually "switchings", the number of lashes depended on the offense.<sup>20</sup>

In 1913 Superintendent H. W. Fugate defined seven districts. Mason-Dorton School was one of many one and two room schools that served the Russell County area. As of 1931 it was one of 76 elementary schools in a 496 square mile county. Mason-Dorton School was in the Copper Creek School District along with Baker's Ridge, Emerson, High Point, Stony Point and Sulpher Spring Schools. Mason-Dorton School was one of 21 two-room schoolhouses still in operation in 1931. At this time one-room schools were being phased out and consolidated. Two-room schools soon followed.<sup>21</sup>

In 1931 Mason-Dorton School had two of the 156 elementary school teachers in the county. A teacher's average salary was \$637.97 a year. There were a total of 7,153 students in the county, with an equal male to female ratio. The use of trucks for student transportation had begun, thus perpetuating the idea of consolidation.<sup>22</sup> Mason-Dorton School continued to operate until 1958, at which time the school was closed and the children were transported to Copper Creek School in Dickensonville.<sup>23</sup>

Mr. Ray Hurd remembers fondly his days at Mason-Dorton School. He recalls when he attended from 1937 to 1945 school started at 9:00 am, and ended at 3:30 pm. He had a two-mile walk each way, to and from Moll Creek, where he grew up. He spent the day learning the three R's: reading, writing and arithmetic. Recess was spent playing with his friends. The boys played ball and "Dare Base", a game like tag, in the field near the school. He and his classmates sat at tables with chairs until the third grade, then they moved to double seated desks, working on a desk top attached to the seat in front of them. Irene Mays and Evelyn Johnson taught the lower

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**Statement of Significance (continued)**

grades while Mr. Hurd attended school, and Curtis Davis taught the fourth through seventh grades. Mr. Hurd was eventually transported to Grassy Creek Elementary and did not finish at Mason-Dorton School.<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Harold Dorton the current owner of the school attended the school from 1925 until 1931, and his father attended from 1890-1896. Harold Dorton remembers being taught by siblings Ralph and Verna Baker. Verna taught the lower grades and kept a piano in the classroom to play. Mr. Jack Fugate, a well-known local pianist, played at the school often. Mr. Dorton said he was taught the 3 R's, as well as geography and physiology in the upper grades. Mr. Dorton remembers the windows in the building changing sometime between his 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade year. The windows on the east side of the building were added and the windows near the doors were removed. He remembers the school being used for the Methodist Church during the 1920s and 1930s. His fondest memory of school was eating lunch with his best friend Jim Dickenson, sitting on the rocks nears the ball field, and then playing ball.<sup>25</sup>

Since the closing of the school the building has been used as a community center and for farm storage. The school served the Mason's Store community and the surrounding area for many years. The school served as a place of education for the children, and as a meeting place and entertainment center for the adults. The school represents the evolution of education in Russell County, from the simple one or two-room schools to the consolidation of the smaller schools to larger countywide consolidated schools. The Mason-Dorton School is a historical survivor from the educational development of the Mason's Store Community, as well as Russell County.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property is located on a 5.5-acre parcel immediately south of the intersection of secondary route 606 and an abandoned stretch of primary route 71. The rectangular parcel is bounded on the eastern side by secondary route 606 and on its northern end by the abandoned piece of primary route 71. The 5.5-acre parcel is shown on map number 154R2186 of the tax parcel maps for Russell County, Virginia.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries for the Mason-Dorton School nomination encompass the school building and the surrounding acreage that historically has been associated with the school.

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ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Dorton, personal communication.
- <sup>2</sup> Hurd, personal communication.
- <sup>3</sup> Dorton, personal communication.
- <sup>4</sup> Fleenor, Benge!
- <sup>5</sup> Dorton, personal communication.
- <sup>6</sup> Gwathmey, Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution.
- <sup>7</sup> Russell County Heritage Book Committee, Russell County Heritage Book, Vol. II.
- <sup>8</sup> Fleenor, Benge!
- <sup>9</sup> Russell County Heritage Book Committee, Russell County Heritage Book, Vol. II.
- <sup>10</sup> Russell County Heritage Book Committee, Russell County Heritage, Vol. II.
- <sup>11</sup> Tate, An Economic and Social Survey of Russell County.
- <sup>12</sup> Barrett, Pioneers of the Western Waters.
- <sup>13</sup> Miller, History of the Public Schools in Russell County.
- <sup>14</sup> Barrett, Pioneers of the Western Waters.
- <sup>15</sup> Miller, History of the Public Schools in Russell County.
- <sup>16</sup> Barrett, Pioneers of the Western Waters.
- <sup>17</sup> Barrett, Pioneers of the Western Waters.
- <sup>18</sup> Hurd & Dorton, personal communication.
- <sup>19</sup> Miller, History of the Public Schools in Russell County.
- <sup>20</sup> Barrett, Pioneers of the Western Waters.
- <sup>21</sup> Tate, An Economic and Social Survey of Russell County.
- <sup>22</sup> Tate, An Economic and Social Survey of Russell County.
- <sup>23</sup> Dorton, personal communication.
- <sup>24</sup> Hurd, personal communication.
- <sup>25</sup> Dorton, personal communication.



Mason-Dorton School  
Russell Co., VA

UTM Reference:  
Zone 17  
Easting 385110  
Northing 4073560

47' 30"  
4072  
4071  
M. TO U.S. 58 ALT.