

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

LISTED ON:	
VLR	03/18/2010
NRHP	06/24/2010

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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 certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Worsham High School

other names/site number Worsham Elementary and High School; Worsham Elementary School; Worsham School; DHR # 073-5064

### 2. Location

street & number 8832 Abilene Road  not for publication

city or town Farmville  vicinity

State Virginia code VA county Prince Edward code 147 zip code 23901

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

    national x statewide     local

[Signature] \_\_\_\_\_ Date 5/16/10

Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources/State Historic Preservation Officer

Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property     meets     does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

    entered in the National Register     determined eligible for the National Register

    determined not eligible for the National Register     removed from the National Register

    other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object
<input type="checkbox"/>	

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
3	0	<b>Total</b>

**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)

EDUCATION/school

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**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER

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**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: BRICK

walls: BRICK

roof: METAL/Tin; ASBESTOS

other: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

See 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.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK

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EDUCATION

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**Period of Significance**

1963-1964

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**Significant Dates**

1963

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**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

N/A

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

**Period of Significance (justification)**

See Continuation Sheets

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

See Continuation Sheets

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

See Continuation Sheets

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

See Continuation Sheets

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**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

See Continuation Sheets.

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**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**

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Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR file # 073-5064

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## 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreage of Property** 8.94  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

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

1	<u>17</u> Zone	<u>726487</u> Easting	<u>4123274</u> Northing	3	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing
2	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing	4	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property)

See Continuation Sheets

**Boundary Justification** (explain why the boundaries were selected)

See continuation Sheets

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Alyson Fickenscher  
organization N/A date January 4, 2010  
street & number 614 N 1<sup>st</sup> St. telephone 703-989-6185  
city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219  
e-mail aly.stokowski@gmail.com

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## Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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## Photographs:

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Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

See Continuation Sheets

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Name of Property: The Worsham School

County and State: Prince Edward County, VA

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**Narrative Description**

**Summary Paragraph**

The Worsham School complex was constructed in 1927 and is situated on 8.94 acres just west of the intersection of Route 15 and Abilene Road in a rural area of Prince Edward County. The main brick school building has a one-story appearance from the front but is built into the hill so that one side elevation and the rear elevation are two stories high. The school contains 12 classrooms on two floors arranged around a central auditorium/classroom. The school is architecturally plain, though the symmetry, use of brick, and recessed, arched entrance show influences from the Colonial Revival style. The property also contains two secondary resources – an agricultural training building and a cannery. The current condition of the school is fair with minimal damage. The majority of the original layout and materials remain preserved.

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**Narrative Description**

The main school building is constructed on a slope and features two levels. It is a brick building, laid in three-course American bond with Flemish variant (three courses of stretchers to one row of Flemish bond), that consists of 12 classrooms (8 on the first floor and 4 on the lower level), a mixed used auditorium/classroom, an office, and 3 bathrooms. The classrooms are situated along the perimeter of the building and form a “U” shape around the mixed-use auditorium/classroom.

The symmetrical front elevation of this building faces northeast with a side-gabled center section and two front-gabled end bays that project slightly. The center section contains the front entrance which is recessed through an arched opening and is marked by double wooden doors with four lights each and a twelve-light transom. A gabled eyebrow dormer containing an arched wooden vent is aligned above the front entrance. Four sets of side-by-side double-hung nine-over-nine windows are located in the center section and the end bays contain no windows along this elevation. The end bays do, however, contain some minimal paterend brick work. Each bay contains two large square panels outlined in soldier course brick with limestone blocks at each corner. Each gable contains a large rectangular wooden vent.

The east and west side elevations mirror each other with the exception being that the east elevation is two stories where as the west elevation is only one. A brick soldier belt course divides the two stories on the east elevation. Along each elevation are nine-over-nine double-hung windows arranged in banks of four or five.

The rear elevation contains two levels and mimics the overall layout of the front elevation with a central side-gabled section and two front-gabled end bays. The central section has two banks of windows vertically aligned marking the center line of the elevation. The soldier belt course continues around the rear from the east side elevation. There are two entrances into the building along this elevation. One on the main level and one on the lower level each marked by double wooden doors with twelve-light transoms and both sheltered by shed roofs supported by carved elbow brackets.

The overall integrity of the exterior is sound with virtually no apparent damage to the brick, but some roof leakage and some rotting of the fascia is present in certain locations. A majority of the window sashes remain either in place or stored in the building. At some point, most of the bottom sashes were removed and the openings boarded.

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Much of the original materials remain within the interior of the building. These include doors, transoms, wood floors, tin ceiling tile, chalk boards, closets, built-in cabinets, trim and moldings. Of the interior walls, approximately 90% of the layout remains intact. Replacement light fixtures were installed at one point. The large space centrally located in the "U" which was originally an auditorium, was converted to a different or combination use of classroom space, cafeteria, gymnasium, and/or auditorium. This is evident by the light fixtures and the removal of any stage or associated features. The proscenium, however, is still present; it is represented by a large flattened arched opening with wide wood molding. The space behind the proscenium was converted into classroom space with the installation of a beadboard wall.

The agricultural building is a rectangular cinder-block building with a side gabled roof. This building contains large nine-over-nine double hung windows arranged singly, paired, and in banks of five like the main school building. A modern metal garage door and a personnel door currently occupy the south elevation; it appears that these later alterations may have replaced an earlier large barn or garage-type opening. An original recessed entrance alcove is inset along the west elevation with two entry doors mirroring each other and a gabled hood supported by triangular brackets sheltering the entry area. All of the bottom sashes have been removed and three-quarters of those in-filled with cinder block. All of the top sashes remain in place. The exterior integrity is strong with no sign of damage. The interior is split into two spaces. The first space consumes three-quarters of the building and is situated in the southern end of the building. It is open with concrete floors and maintains a garage-like appearance. The second space is a classroom and makes up the remaining quarter of the building and is situated in the northern end of the building. The classroom space has wood floors, built in shelving, and closet space. The agricultural building was constructed circa 1927.

The cannery building is also a rectangular cinder-block building with a side gabled roof. This building's most interesting feature is the gabled monitor that runs the length of the building. Both the primary roof and the monitor feature exposed rafter tails. This building features smaller six-over-six double hung windows; 40% of the sashes remain in place. A simple single entry door is located on each of the east and west elevations. A double entry door opening is located centrally along the north elevation. This opening has been in-filled. A garage type opening has been added to the west elevation. The exterior integrity is strong with no sign of damage. The interior is simple and open with a concrete floor. The character of the ceiling reveals where a wall once stood that split the building along its width. No equipment or other facilities remain at present. The cannery building was constructed circa 1927.

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Worsham School is eligible for listing at the state level in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Education and Ethnic History: Black, for its association with the struggle to desegregate Prince Edward County's public schools. While Worsham School initially opened in 1927 as an all-white public school, Worsham became part of President Kennedy's solution to help educate the Prince Edward County African-American children denied access to free public education for a four-year period, when the County closed its public schools in 1959 rather than integrate them. The Worsham School was one of four County schools leased by the Prince Edward Free School system, a privately organized but federally supported organization providing free schooling for the African-American students of Prince Edward County. As President John F. Kennedy announced in the summer of 1963 before the schools opened, "There are only four places in the world where children are denied the right to attend school: North Vietnam, Cambodia, North Korea, and Prince Edward County. Something has got to be done about Prince Edward County." The Free Schools operated for one year, until the Prince Edward County Public School system, in response to court order, reopened in 1964 to all children regardless of race.

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The Worsham School's period of significance is from 1963-1964 when it operated as part of the Free School System, providing an education to all children in Prince Edward County regardless of their skin color – but serving largely the County's African American school age population – following the County's closing of its public school system for four years to avoid integrating the schools.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

The Worsham School meets Criteria Consideration G because the property achieved significance within the past 50 years and is of exceptional importance. The property is associated with the struggle to desegregate Virginia's public schools. The struggle was a long and arduous one for the Commonwealth's African-American population. After the United States Supreme Court struck down the principal of "separate but equal" school facilities, public school systems across Virginia began desegregating -- often at a slow pace. Five years after the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board* was handed down, holding segregated school systems unconstitutional, Prince Edward County closed its schools since they could no longer operate a segregated school system. The federal government, under the leadership of President Kennedy, recognized the school closing in Prince Edward County as an issue of national concern and organized an effort to provide free schooling for the African-American population there until Prince Edward County Schools complied with the court order.

Many scholars have written about the closing of Prince Edward County public schools and the County's role in Virginia's effort to achieve an integrated school system. Bob Smith wrote the seminal book on the topic, They Closed Their Schools. Many others have written on the topic, including Dr. Neil V. Sullivan, Superintendent of the Prince Edward Free School system, who chronicled the effort to create a solution to this educational crisis.

The Worsham School was one of only four schools that composed the Free School system in Prince Edward County, and it was the only previously all-white county school used. The Free School system was a federal government response to



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the only school system in Virginia and the nation – Prince Edward County -- that refused to accept integration by closing its schools. The Federal Government not only organized the Board of Trustees of the Free School Association, but also assembled talented administrators and educators from across the nation to help provide access to free education to Prince Edward County's African-American population. Worsham and the other county free schools – which were operated without obstruction by county officials – served as a transition between the County's five-year period without a public school system and what eventually became an integrated public school system. It was the hope of William J. vanden Heuvel, tasked by Attorney General Robert Kennedy with finding a way to provide an education for those students closed out of their schools that the Free School Association would also serve as a bridge to a reconstructed community.<sup>1</sup>

### Historical Background

In 1927, the Worsham School was built through a county-wide building program established to increase the amount of high schools in Prince Edward County. Worsham was built as a high school exclusively for the use of white students.<sup>2</sup> The school was used without interruption from 1927 until June of 1959, when after years of resisting integration ordered by the U.S. Supreme Court, Prince Edward County closed its public school system entirely instead of integrating.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s there was increased interest from the Prince Edward County African-American population in their children having access to public high school education.<sup>3</sup> Some of the county building program money was used to improve the smaller African-American schools in the area. Bus service was increased throughout the County for the African-American students.<sup>4</sup> However, the 1939 Robert R. Moton High School, the primary school serving African-American students, was increasingly inadequate to serve the growing student population.<sup>5</sup> Seeing no solution in sight, in 1951, 450 students decided to take action against the school board and protest the poor conditions of Moton High School.<sup>6</sup> For two weeks the students stayed home, leaving only the teachers in the classrooms.<sup>7</sup> The students finally returned to school when a suit was filed against the Prince Edward County School System in federal court.<sup>8</sup>

The lawsuit, brought by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, asked for relief in two forms: (1) the facilities of the Moton High School were to be made equivalent with those of the white schools and (2) Virginia segregation laws were to be declared unconstitutional.<sup>9</sup> The case, Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, began on February 25, 1952 and lasted for four days.<sup>10</sup> The plaintiffs presented evidence that segregation resulted in the African-American population being perceived and treated as an inferior class.<sup>11</sup> The defendants presented evidence that the facilities for African-American students were in fact equal, and in some cases better than, the facilities for the white students.<sup>12</sup> T. J. McIlwaine was the first witness for the defendant. As the superintendent of public schools, Mr. McIlwaine testified that although the Farmville High School was superior to the Moton School, the Moton School was superior to the Worsham School.<sup>13</sup> He stated that planned improvements to the Moton School were going to make it superior to Farmville High School.<sup>14</sup>

In a decision handed down on March 7, 1952, the U.S. District Court upheld the segregation of the school system, but ordered improvements to the Moton School to ensure that the facilities were in fact equal to the facilities for the white students.<sup>15</sup> The plaintiffs appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of the United States. The Supreme Court consolidated the case with similar cases from Clarendon County, South Carolina; Topeka, Kansas; Delaware; and the District of Columbia.<sup>16</sup> The Supreme Court heard the appeal, Brown v. Board of Education, on December 9-11 1952.<sup>17</sup> Before the Court handed down the decision later, Prince Edward County constructed a new high school for African Americans costing approximately \$900,000 and retaining the name of Robert R. Moton High School.<sup>18</sup> Finally, over a

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year and a half after arguments were heard, the Supreme Court ruled on May 17, 1954 that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.<sup>19</sup> In 1955, the Supreme Court held in a second case Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (commonly referred to as *Brown II*) that schools were to desegregate with "all deliberate speed."

The Supreme Court's federally mandated integration process moved slowly across the country and in some places did not begin at all. A resistance movement was born in Virginia using an idea put forward by a Virginia attorney named William Old.<sup>20</sup> Mr. Old argued that states may interpose their authority to render the Supreme Court's decision null and void by effectively refusing to carry out the Supreme Court's decision.<sup>21</sup> The Virginia State legislature followed Mr. Old's legal reasoning and enacted numerous laws intended to prevent integration of public schools.<sup>22</sup> This state-wide "massive resistance" policy was enacted through the leadership of U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd, former Governor of Virginia,<sup>23</sup> and was invoked in September of 1958 when Virginia's governor, J. Lindsay Almond, closed schools planning to comply with the court's order to integrate in Norfolk, Charlottesville and Front Royal, locking approximately twelve thousand children out of their schools.<sup>24</sup>

Virginia's school-closing law was held to be unconstitutional in January of 1959 and the schools that had been closed in Front Royal, Norfolk, and Charlottesville reopened as integrated school systems. Prince Edward County was ordered to integrate its schools, but, instead on June 2, 1959, in response to a court order to desegregate by September, decided to close its schools by refusing to appropriate money to operate the public school system.<sup>25</sup> The County stated that they would open the schools only if and when they could open under a segregated policy.<sup>26</sup> A private organization known as the Prince Edward Foundation was created and provided education for the white students in the County, a population of approximately 1,500. The decision to close the County's public schools ultimately resulted in a four-year gap in education for the African-American students in the County.

As the civil rights demonstrations in the South were increasing, the school-less population of Prince Edward County was on the national radar screen.<sup>27</sup> President John F. Kennedy ordered the federal government to search for ways to help solve the problem through a special committee established in the Department of Justice under Attorney General Robert Kennedy's leadership.<sup>28</sup> William J. vanden Heuvel, a New York Attorney, was appointed to the position of special assistant to the Attorney General to find a solution to the Prince Edward County School problem.<sup>29</sup>

The federal government was constrained by the fact that it could not operate schools in the county, nor could it finance them.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, the federal government decided to simply provide organizational skills and fundraising knowledge to establish a board of trustees for the Prince Edward Free School Association<sup>31</sup> which would operate schools for the County's African-American students. As vanden Heuvel began the establishment of the new school system, he found the state government to be completely supportive of the plan, and Governor Albertis S. Harrison, Jr. began working to set the plan in action.<sup>32</sup>

Brooks Hays, Special Assistant to President Kennedy, also assisted in the efforts. He identified the importance of finding an individual to serve as chairman for the Free School system who could navigate the difficult political situation in Virginia. Hays asked an old friend, former Governor and former President of the University of Virginia, Colgate W. Darden to accept the position.<sup>33</sup> Darden was initially reluctant to take the position, but his sense of duty to the Commonwealth, combined with his belief that both races would support the project, led him to accept the position.<sup>34</sup> After accepting the position, Darden was comforted when he learned that the heads of state bodies were placed on the board of trustees, and the Prince Edward County School Superintendent T.J. McIlwaine was also to assist in establishing the new school

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system.<sup>35</sup> Darden's first task in creating a school system was to find the appropriate person to serve as the Free School System Superintendent. Dr. Neil V. Sullivan was the perfect candidate. Dr. Sullivan was an acquaintance of Robert Kennedy, as the two were introduced through Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>36</sup> Robert Kennedy recommended Dr. Sullivan to Darden, and Darden quickly became familiar with Dr. Sullivan's experience teaching various kinds of at-risk students. Dr. Sullivan then served as the head of the Long Island, New York School System.<sup>37</sup> Dr. Sullivan, the only candidate that Darden approached about the position, accepted the offer on August 27, 1963 after a few days of deliberation.<sup>38</sup> The Free School System was to open on September 16, 1963, leaving Dr. Sullivan less than a month to create an entire school system for the African-American students that had been denied a free public education for the past four years.<sup>39</sup>

Dr. Sullivan initially inspected the school buildings that were designated for lease by the Free School system from the County – another indication of the County's acquiescence with the Free Schools plan -- on his first trip to Farmville on August 26, 1963.<sup>40</sup> He took the trip to help decide whether to accept the position. On his trip, he was told that the schools available for the Free School system's use were the new Robert R. Moton High School, the old Moton High School facilities now known as Mary E. Branch School #1 and Mary E. Branch School #2, and the Worsham School.<sup>41</sup> The Worsham School was the only school previously used for white students that was designated for Free School use. Since Dr. Sullivan intended to use the non-graded school system in the Free School system, all four school buildings were attended by children of all ages without delineation by grade level. In ability, the students ranged from nearly illiterate to very motivated and intelligent.<sup>42</sup> Moton High School served as the Free School's High School with students in attendance ranging from ages 15 to 23.

Dr. Sullivan's first inspection was at the new Robert R. Moton High School. The facilities were built in 1953 and were in good condition. Next, he visited Worsham School. Dr. Sullivan noted that all of the schools except Moton would need a massive cleaning, and repair work on the roofs, floors, and walls.<sup>43</sup> Not until the Prince Edward County Board of Education signed the contract for rent, could repair work begin. This left less than two weeks before the start of the school year to prepare the buildings.<sup>44</sup> The clean-up efforts began immediately at Worsham School, led by Mr. J.D. Dishman, the Prince Edward Public School System building maintenance superintendent.<sup>45</sup>

Dr. Sullivan then set about the monumental task of assembling the administrative and teaching staff. Because most of the African-American teachers previously employed by the County left in 1959 when the schools closed, Dr. Sullivan had to hire an almost entirely new staff of 100 teachers.<sup>46</sup> A stream of unsolicited applicants began to arrive, both in person and on paper, but the challenge for Dr. Sullivan was in finding a group of highly qualified teachers to serve a student body that would need to catch up on four years of missed education.<sup>47</sup> In fact, Dr. Sullivan expected that over 50% of the enrolled student body had never attended school.<sup>48</sup> Dean Gordon Moss of Longwood College assisted in the teacher selection efforts.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, Dr. Sullivan assembled what he referred to as "outstanding" teachers from across the country including Wisconsin, Baltimore, Florida, Georgia, Boston, Philadelphia, New York, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, California, and even some returning Peace Corps volunteers.<sup>50</sup> At least half the teachers, however, were from Virginia.<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Sullivan selected Ms. Etta Rose Bailey, of Richmond, to be the principal of the Worsham School. She had recently retired in June of that year from Richmond, VA where she was a principal of the all white Matthew F. Maury Elementary School.<sup>52</sup> Ms. Bailey was referred to Dr. Sullivan by several Virginia educators as one of the Commonwealth's top principals and her school was known as one of the best in the South.<sup>53</sup> Dr. Sullivan spoke with Dr. Willett, was Ms. Bailey's superintendent, and he recommended her without hesitation but brought to Dr. Sullivan's attention two important facts.<sup>54</sup> Ms. Bailey was 75 years old and had never worked with African-American children before.<sup>55</sup> When Dr. Sullivan telephoned Ms. Bailey to offer her the position, she accepted immediately but with the caveat that she could not accept a

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permanent position, but would serve as the interim principal until a permanent replacement was found.<sup>56</sup> Ms. Bailey ended the conversation by stating that Dr. Sullivan was giving her an opportunity denied to her during her tenure in Virginia schools. She had always wanted to work with African-American children.<sup>57</sup>

Prior to the first day of school, there were efforts to acquaint parents and students with the Free School System and to encourage the students to register and attend. Rev. Francis Griffin, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Farmville, state chairman of the NAACP and a leader in the African American community helped Mr. vanden Heuvel present the case for the Free Schools at organized meetings and shared vanden Heuvel's hope that the Free Schools could serve as a bridge to the time when public education in Prince Edward would be restored.<sup>58</sup>

With faculty hiring continuing and students enrolling, the preparations for the Free Schools' opening continued to move forward quickly. Problems arose on a daily basis, however, but solutions continued to be found. A classroom shortage became evident, and the auditorium at Branch School No. 2 and the stage at Worsham School were both converted into classrooms.<sup>59</sup> A potential faculty shortage was solved through an arrangement with Virginia State College in Petersburg to use student teachers at Worsham with their travel and living expenses funded by the Commonwealth.<sup>60</sup> When expected supplies and textbooks had not arrived by the Saturday before the school was to open, Ms. Bailey made a personal trip to Richmond and brought back her own library of children's books.<sup>61</sup>

Despite countless challenges and setbacks, the Prince Edward Free School system opened successfully on September 16, 1963 as planned. In a speech in February 2009 recalling the Free School system in Prince Edward County, vanden Heuvel recalled that just the day before the school system opened, four young girls were killed in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham Alabama. In his remarks vanden Heuvel described the school opening as "the other side of the coin" when compared with the church bombing. "A willingness to reach out to a fractured community distorted by attitudes of racial supremacy was the definition of our effort."<sup>62</sup>

The enrollment in the Free Schools for the school year totalled 1, 578 students.<sup>63</sup> In the first few weeks of the school system operation, the faculty and staff realized they had to increase their initial efforts to help a student population that had been without education for the four years prior. Ms. Bailey held faculty meetings during lunch hour and after school, eventually adding breakfast meetings as well.<sup>64</sup> Dr. Sullivan's non-graded teaching system was effective. A team from Michigan State was brought in to conduct tests on the students.<sup>65</sup> The students were then placed by these results in classes according to their capabilities and not their age. A high teacher-to-student ratio was important in addressing the students' needs.<sup>66</sup> In November of 1963, Prince Edward County approved an additional lease to the Free Schools for the use of the cannery at Worsham, which was also used for classroom space in addition to the classrooms in the main building and the agricultural building.<sup>67</sup>

While the Free Schools served largely the African-American school-age population, a handful of white students also attended. Worsham's enrollment consisted of African-American children and one white child, eight year old Letitia Tew.<sup>68</sup> Letitia's parents, Mr. and Mrs. William W. Tew, enrolled Letitia in the Free Schools because they had made the decision not to send Letitia to a private school. Her parents firmly believed in the public school system and consequently did not want to support the private school system, even though they could have paid the tuition for the private academy.<sup>69</sup> Some community members were upset by the Tew's decision to send Letitia to Worsham School. An offer was made to Mrs. Tew for the tuition funds necessary for Prince Edward Academy but the Tews refused.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, Mrs. Tew was personally threatened when a man confronted her in a store and threatened to cut off her head if she let Letitia attend the free school.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, the Free School system would open and operate without any major threat to the student body,

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but Dr. Sullivan himself continued to receive at least one piece of hate mail daily as well as a threatening phone call each evening through the course of the Free School System's operations.<sup>72</sup>

William vanden Heuvel described the impacts of the Free School system and the ways it enhanced students' lives through efforts to address physical concerns – with free lunches, medical care and polio vaccinations, optometric, hearing and dental exams – as well as providing them with opportunities that many had never had before. Field trips were organized, movie nights were held for parents and students, books were given to families to start home libraries, and a concert band was organized using donated musical instruments and uniforms.<sup>73</sup>

The school year continued successfully, and donations for the system continued to arrive, thanks in large part to the skills of Mr. Bailey as a fundraiser. After two months of operations, Dr. Charles Jarrell was hired to replace Ms. Bailey as the Principal of the Worsham School.<sup>74</sup> He had previously served as the principal of an elementary school in Maryland.<sup>75</sup> Ms. Bailey, however, wanted to continue helping the cause of the Free Schools after she returned to Richmond.<sup>76</sup> She created her own telephone campaign to raise funds, and the calls resulted in a particularly large gift.<sup>77</sup>

One of the most touching stories of the Free Schools is the all-school campaign organized by the students to raise money for the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library Fund. After the death of John F. Kennedy, the entire student body of the Free School System decided to raise and donate \$47, one dollar for each year of the President's life.<sup>78</sup> The calculation was that if each student could raise on average 3 cents, then they could reach their goal. In fact, the students raised \$99.94, well beyond their goal. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and his wife flew to Farmville to accept the donation personally at each of the four schools.<sup>79</sup>

Following the assassination of President Kennedy, William vanden Heuvel observed signs that the Free Schools were easing the transition from segregation to acceptance of an integrated school system.

"There seemed to be a new acceptance by the general community. The integrated faculty of the Free Schools was invited to use Longwood College's library, the first time ever that a white library in Farmville had been opened to African Americans. Thirty students from Hampden-Sydney College volunteered for afterschool tutoring coordinated by...the College chaplain, Arthur Field...Free School representatives were welcomed at Hampden-Sydney assembly programs and representatives of the College accepted our invitations to special events...at the Free Schools."<sup>80</sup>

Overall, the operations of the Free School system were successful. Almost all African-American children attended, with the exception of the older teen-agers who were reluctant to leave wage-earning positions to return to school.<sup>81</sup> The Free Schools, however, were only able to repair some of the damage that had been done by the four years without schooling. Dean Moss of Longwood University used the expression "The Crippled Generation" on the NBC Chet Huntley Reports show in August of 1962 to describe these children and the immeasurable damage that had been done to them and surrounding community.<sup>82</sup> As Dr. Sullivan himself stated, "Four year's loss will never be made up entirely. All I've said is that we'll narrow the gap."<sup>83</sup>

On June 25, 1964 the Prince Edward County School Board began to make plans for the operations of the public schools in Prince Edward County for the 1964-65 session, employing all necessary staff effective July 1, 1964.<sup>84</sup> The Free Schools closed in August of 1964, and in September most of the student body was enrolled in the reestablished Prince Edward County Public School system, which was reopened under orders of the Supreme Court of the United States.<sup>85</sup> The decision stated that the courts had the authority to force supervisors to appropriate funds to maintain a school system similar to those in other counties in the state.<sup>86</sup> The Free School system authorities worked with county officials to

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prepare for the reopening of the public schools and transferred to the public school system thousands of books, audio-visual equipment, clean and modern facilities, and teachers who were available for hiring.<sup>87</sup>

While most of the white student population continued to attend private schools, the Free Schools System closed its doors one day and reopened the next day as a public school system serving almost essentially the same student body, with a majority of African-American students. The Worsham School was used exclusively as an elementary school after the reopening of the public schools in Prince Edward County on September 8, 1964.<sup>88</sup> In July 1964, the School Board approved the appointment of 16 elementary school teachers for Worsham, and named Mrs. H. Celestine Johnson, Principal.<sup>89</sup> Enrollment records for the 1964-65 school years list a total of 501 pupils in First through Fourth grades at Worsham Elementary, and 19 pupils in traditional special education programs.<sup>90</sup>

The Free School Superintendent, Dr. Sullivan, continued his work to bring adequate public education to African American children. He went on to lead the desegregation efforts in Berkley, CA, and was the principal architect of the Berkley Plan, approved in 1968, which was effect for 25 years.<sup>91</sup> The plan successfully integrated the public schools in Berkley, CA, making it the first city of over 100,000 to have a fully integrated school system.

Worsham continued to operate as an elementary school with the additon of both kingergarten and fifth grade classes. Approximately 15 to 20 teachers were employed at Worsham on average each school year. In November 1972, grades kindergarten through three were moved from the Worsham School to the new classroom space at Prince Edward Elementary.<sup>92</sup> In November of 1987, Prince Edward Middle School received its certificate of occupancy and all students and teachers of Worsham Elementary School were transferred there to complete the 1987-1988 school year.<sup>93</sup> The transfer actually occurred on February 15, 1988, and the 5th Grade students and teachers from Worsham completed their school year in the new Middle School.<sup>94</sup> The Worsham School complex was sold by the Prince Edward County School Board on June 14, 1991 to a private owner.<sup>95</sup> Today, the Worsham school remains vacant and in its original location and both the agricultural training building and the cannery building remain intact, forming a tangible reminder of an educational trial that eased the transition between a segregated school system and one open to all students, regardless of race.

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The Ambassadors Review/ Spring-2009, "Closing Doors, Opening Doors: Fifty Years After the School-Closing in Prince Edward County, Virginia," Council of American Ambassadors, <http://www.americanambassadors.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Publications.article&articleid=173>

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Clarence Bradshaw, History of Prince Edward County, Virginia (The Dietz Press, Inc., 1955), 499

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw, p.500

<sup>5</sup> Bradshaw, p.500

<sup>6</sup> Bradshaw, p.500

<sup>7</sup> Bradshaw, p.500

<sup>8</sup> Bradshaw, p.500

<sup>9</sup> Bradshaw, p.500

<sup>10</sup> Bradshaw, p.500

<sup>11</sup> Bradshaw, p.501

<sup>12</sup> Bradshaw, p.501

<sup>13</sup> Bradshaw, p.501

<sup>14</sup> Bradshaw, p.501

<sup>15</sup> Bradshaw, p.502

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- <sup>16</sup> Bradshaw, p.502  
<sup>17</sup> Bradshaw, p.502  
<sup>18</sup> Bradshaw, p.503  
<sup>19</sup> Bradshaw, p.503  
<sup>20</sup> Bob Smith, They Closed Their Schools (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 141  
<sup>21</sup> Smith, p.141  
<sup>22</sup> Smith, p.152  
<sup>23</sup> Smith, p.152  
<sup>24</sup> Smith, p.152  
<sup>25</sup> Smith, p.151  
<sup>26</sup> Smith, p.151  
<sup>27</sup> Smith, p.236  
<sup>28</sup> Smith, p.237  
<sup>29</sup> Smith, p.237  
<sup>30</sup> Smith, p.237  
<sup>31</sup> Smith, p.238  
<sup>32</sup> Smith, p.238  
<sup>33</sup> Smith, p.238  
<sup>34</sup> Smith, p.239-240  
<sup>35</sup> Smith, p.239  
<sup>36</sup> Neil V. Sullivan with Evelyn S. Stewart, Now Is The Time; Integration in the Berkeley Schools (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1969), xii  
<sup>37</sup> Smith, p.240  
<sup>38</sup> Smith, p.240  
<sup>39</sup> Neil V. Sullivan, Thomas LaSalle Maynard, and Carol Lynn Yellin, Bound For Freedom: An Educator's Adventures in Prince Edward County Virginia (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1965), 5  
<sup>40</sup> Sullivan, p.15  
<sup>41</sup> Sullivan, p.15-17  
<sup>42</sup> Sullivan, 119-120  
<sup>43</sup> Sullivan, p.18  
<sup>44</sup> Sullivan, p.54  
<sup>45</sup> Sullivan, p.54  
<sup>46</sup> The Ambassadors Review/ Spring-2009, "Closing Doors, Opening Doors: Fifty Years After the School-Closing in Prince Edward County, Virginia," Council of American Ambassadors, <http://www.americanambassadors.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Publications.article&articleid=173>  
<sup>47</sup> Sullivan, p.76  
<sup>48</sup> Sullivan, p.76  
<sup>49</sup> Sullivan, p.80  
<sup>50</sup> Sullivan, p.80  
<sup>51</sup> Sullivan, p.80  
<sup>52</sup> Sullivan, p.82  
<sup>53</sup> Sullivan, p.82  
<sup>54</sup> Sullivan, p.82  
<sup>55</sup> Sullivan, p.82  
<sup>56</sup> Sullivan, p.82  
<sup>57</sup> Sullivan, p.82

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<sup>58</sup> The Ambassadors Review/ Spring-2009, "Closing Doors, Opening Doors: Fifty Years After the School-Closing in Prince Edward County, Virginia," Council of American Ambassadors, <http://www.americanambassadors.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Publications.article&articleid=173>

<sup>59</sup> Sullivan, p.89

<sup>60</sup> Sullivan, p.91

<sup>61</sup> Sullivan, p.94

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Sullivan, p.205

<sup>64</sup> Sullivan, p.119

<sup>65</sup> Sullivan, p.240

<sup>66</sup> Sullivan, p.240

<sup>67</sup> Minutes of the Prince Edward County School Board, 1955-1991, located in the Prince Edward County School Board Clerk's office, November 1963

<sup>68</sup> Sullivan, p.82

<sup>69</sup> Sullivan, p.82

<sup>70</sup> Sullivan, p.81

<sup>71</sup> Sullivan, p.82

<sup>72</sup> Sullivan, p.59-60

<sup>73</sup> The Ambassadors Review/ Spring-2009, "Closing Doors, Opening Doors: Fifty Years After the School-Closing in Prince Edward County, Virginia," Council of American Ambassadors, <http://www.americanambassadors.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Publications.article&articleid=173>

<sup>74</sup> Sullivan, p.157

<sup>75</sup> Sullivan, p.157

<sup>76</sup> Sullivan, p.157

<sup>77</sup> Sullivan, p.157

<sup>78</sup> Smith, p.204

<sup>79</sup> Smith, p.204

<sup>80</sup> The Ambassadors Review/ Spring-2009, "Closing Doors, Opening Doors: Fifty Years After the School-Closing in Prince Edward County, Virginia," Council of American Ambassadors, <http://www.americanambassadors.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Publications.article&articleid=173>

<sup>81</sup> Smith, p.241

<sup>82</sup> Smith, p.243-244

<sup>83</sup> Smith, p.241

<sup>84</sup> Minutes, July 1964

<sup>85</sup> Smith, p.258

<sup>86</sup> Smith, p.258

<sup>87</sup> The Ambassadors Review/ Spring-2009, "Closing Doors, Opening Doors: Fifty Years After the School-Closing in Prince Edward County, Virginia," Council of American Ambassadors, <http://www.americanambassadors.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Publications.article&articleid=173>

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>89</sup> Minutes, July 1964

<sup>90</sup> Minutes, July 1964

<sup>91</sup> Elaine Woo, Neil Sullivan, 90, Led Fight to Desegregate Schools in Virginia, Boston, Berkley (Los Angeles Times, August 14, 2005)

<sup>92</sup> Minutes, November 1972

<sup>93</sup> Minutes, November 1987

<sup>94</sup> Minutes, February 15, 1987

<sup>95</sup> Minutes, June 1991



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Woo, Elaine. "Neil Sullivan, 90, Led Fight to Desegregate Schools in Virginia, Boston, Berkley." Los Angeles Times, August 14, 2005, National edition.

**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property)

The nominated property is identified as tax parcel number 064-A-59 with boundaries as shown in Prince Edward County Deed Book 284 at Page 043.

**Boundary Justification** (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The boundary forms one contiguous tract that is the result of multiple purchases by Prince Edward County and subsequent transfers to the school board to be used by and serve, in whole, the Worsham High School. The current boundary is the same as was present at, and unchanged since, the period of significance and includes three buildings described in this nomination.

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**The following is the same for all photographs:**

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City or Vicinity: Worhsam  
County: Prince Edward County State: Virginia  
Photographer: Ross Fickenscher  
Date Photographed: November 29, 2009.

View: Main Building-North Elevation  
Photo: 1 of 12

View: Main Building-North and East Elevation  
Photo: 2 of 12

View: Main Building-West Elevation  
Photo: 3 of 12

View: Main Building-South Elevation  
Photo: 4 of 12

View: Main Building-Cabinets and Shelves  
Photo: 5 of 12

View: Main Building-Classroom  
Photo: 6 of 12

View: Tin Ceilings and Tracks For Movable Wall  
Photo: 7 of 12

View: Main Building-Classroom  
Photo: 8 of 12

View: Main Building-Auditorium and Classroom Space  
Photo: 9 of 12

View: Agriculture Building-North and East Elevation  
Photo: 10 of 12

View: Agricultural Building - South and East Elevation  
Photo: 11 of 12

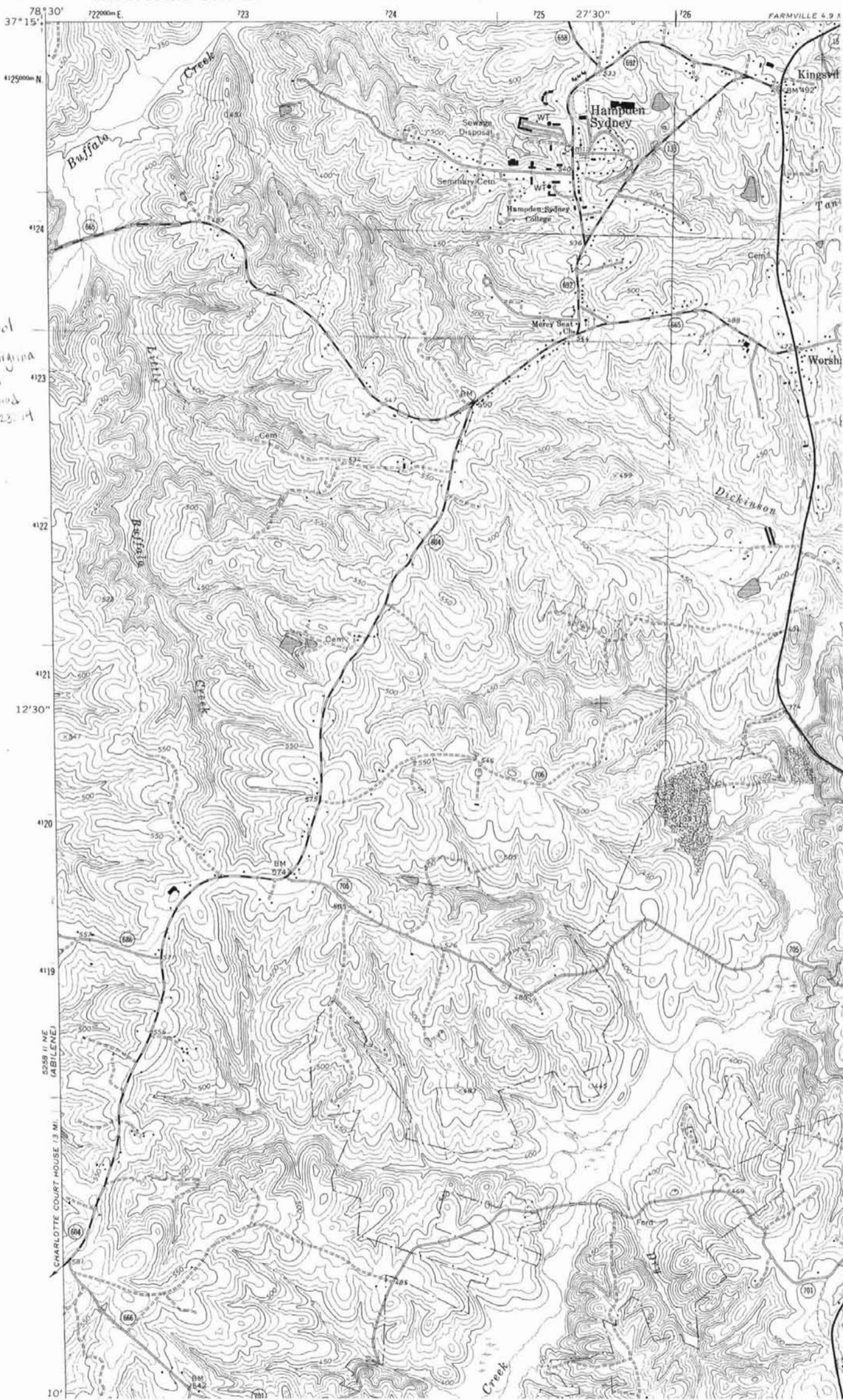
View: Cannery Building-North and East Elevation  
Photo: 12 of 12

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(PROSPECT)

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Worsham High School  
Prince Edward Co., VA

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
DIVISION OF MINERAL RESOURCES



Worsham High School  
Prince Edward Co., Virginia  
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Zone 17 E 726487 NH123: 14

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March 17, 2010

Mr. Marc Christian Wagner  
Manager, National and State Registers Program  
Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
2801 Kensington Avenue  
Richmond, Virginia 23221

**Re: Worsham High School, Prince Edward County**

Dear Mr. Wagner:

At its March 9, 2010 meeting, the Board of Supervisors of the County of Prince Edward unanimously supported the nomination of Worsham High School to the Virginia State Review Board and the Virginia Board of Historic Resources for recommendation to the National Register of Historic Places and for inclusion in the Virginia Landmarks Register.

If we may be of further assistance, please feel free to contact Sarah Elam Puckett, Assistant County Administrator, at 434-392-8837.

Sincerely,

W.W. Bartlett  
County Administrator

PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MISSION STATEMENT

TO REPRESENT ALL CITIZENS, PROVIDE LEADERSHIP, CREATE VISION AND SET POLICY TO ACCOMPLISH EFFECTIVE CHANGE, PLANNED GROWTH AND PROVIDE ESSENTIAL SERVICES WHILE MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY.