

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

LISTED ON:  
VLR 09/17/2009  
NRHP 12/23/2009

**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 William H. McGuffey Primary School  
other names/site number William H. McGuffey Elementary School, McGuffey Art Center, DHR # 104-0072-0300

**2. Location**

street & number 201 2<sup>nd</sup> Street N.W. not for publication N/A  
city or town Charlottesville vicinity N/A  
state VA code VA county Independent City code 540 zip code 22902

**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    nationally    statewide X locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] \_\_\_\_\_ [Signature] \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official Date  
**Virginia Department of Historic Resources**  
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

   entered in the National Register  
   See continuation sheet.  
   determined eligible for the National Register  
   See continuation sheet.  
   determined not eligible for the National Register  
   removed from the National Register  
   other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

- building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows: buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

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: School

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Recreation and Culture Sub: Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals: Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
roof Slate
walls Brick
other Cast Stone, Wood, Limestone

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)

- X 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.
X 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
Architecture

Period of Significance 1916-1945

Significant Dates 1916

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Dr. James Johnson with R.E. Lee Taylor and Charles Calrow of Ferguson, Calrow, and Taylor

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

(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 # \_\_\_\_\_

William H. McGuffey Primary School

Charlottesville, Virginia

**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; Charlottesville-Albemarle Historical Society

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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**Acreage of Property** 1.882

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

Zone	Easting	Northing									
1	17	720979	4	212390	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.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**  
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name/title Richard Thrift  
organization N/A date March 2009  
street & number 403 Altamont Circle #3 telephone (434) 295-7973  
city or town Charlottesville state VA zip code 22902

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**Additional Documentation**  
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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)

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

name City of Charlottesville  
street & number P.O. Box 911 telephone (434) 970-3101  
city or town Charlottesville state VA zip code 22901

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**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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 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 National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Fronted by a wide, sloping lawn of deciduous trees and flowering shrubbery, a city’s block in length, the William H. McGuffey Primary School, built in 1915-1916 in what is now Historic Downtown Charlottesville, Virginia, is a palatial Colonial Revival edifice of two stories set upon a full basement. It has a rectangular plan, solid brick walls, and is divided into three pavilions. Its massive slate-covered roof is of moderate pitch, above which rise eight interior faux chimneys that were air vents for the forced warm air component in the original heating and ventilation scheme and two true chimneys. Single-story Tuscan porticos project from each side elevation as well as from its façade. The latter, the larger of the three, is approached by a broad flight of limestone steps. Both primary and secondary windows in all elevations have double-hung nine-over-nine sashes. Above the side elevation doors are fixed, multi-light transoms. A highly distinctive fanlight tops the set of doors beneath the front portico. Besides doors, window sashes and their frames, the entablature is also of wood, with a fine modillion cornice. The decorative panels, the belt course, windowsills, and portico columns are of cast stone. All of the building's components mentioned are original. The school exhibits fine workmanship and the use of quality, local materials. Given its size, dimensions and purpose of being, the building’s exterior reflects harmony in its sense of proportion found only in the better examples of this architectural type. The same can be said for the meticulously conceived interior layout in regards to the “modern school” guidebooks of the period. Among its contemporaries, the McGuffey School building remains the least altered, both externally and internally, in almost all respects. The building sits on 1.882 acres of its original 3.5 acre lot. To the rear, at the present day parking lot’s southern edge is a non-contributing plywood shed.

THE LOCATION, IN DETAIL

“Years before the Patterson site was selected,” wrote Dr. James G. Johnson, the Superintendent of Schools at the time who conceived of the building, in his HISTORY OF MCGUFFEY SCHOOL, 1915-1936, “I habitually went to the northeast corner room on the third floor of the annex to Midway School and would gaze out of the window at the top of the hill and visualize the building that finally was erected on the Patterson site. These were years of hoping and struggling. Many sites were considered but I never lost my desire to have my first choice selected.” The site, to quote Dr. Johnson further, “has the following points of merit: ample size, approximately three and one fifth acres, giving abundance of play space for eight hundred children; splendid elevation assuring a free circulation of air and perfect drainage; accessibility to the main thoroughfares yet in a quiet zone free from the disturbances caused by an ever increasing tide of traffic.”

The McGuffey School/Art Center continues to find itself in a relatively quiet, residential park-like setting, if but one block north of the Downtown Mall and five blocks west of Courthouse Square. Its façade looks out over a semi-shaded lawn with most of its original flowering shrubs and its original sidewalks (including the wide, central "promenade") leading up to it from 2nd Street North West. It is bordered on the north by McGuffey Park, an innovative children's playground; and on the south by the mostly original Market Street storefronts, opposite a tree-shrouded embankment. To the west, beyond a cordon of trees walling off the back of the rear parking lot, the steep-pitched gable ends of the Frank Fosom Smith-designed McGuffey Hill Condominiums - built in 1983 - form an unobtrusive backdrop from their setting along the cusp of McGuffey (formerly Beck's) Hill. The building is a contributing resource within the boundaries of the Albemarle-Charlottesville Courthouse District, a Virginia Landmark and National Register of Historic Places listing since 1980. It is also located within the Downtown and North Downtown Architectural Design Control District created in 2005.

THE EXTERIOR, IN DETAIL

Overview

In its Colonial Revival shell, the McGuffey School building is more Adamesque than Georgian, exhibiting a balanced “lightness” in unity overall with an adherence to classical proportions - in its parts if not in the whole. Thus the building is grand

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in appearance without being imposing (or ponderous) in appearance, and decidedly “non-institutional”, even if it couldn’t be mistaken for anything other than what it is.

Basement Level

The McGuffey School building measures 66 1/3 feet by 171 feet at basement level, its center pavilion equaling three times the length of its balanced end ones. Its front portico sits upon a closed abutment the height of the basement wall, while the side elevation porticos are more or less at ground level (at the rear elevation a closed brick porch, with a slate roof, covers the entrance to the boiler room steps). In the center pavilion there are three basement windows, with double hung 6/6 sashes, set asymmetrically apart. In the end pavilions they are symmetrically set and vertically aligned with the classroom windows above. There are four side elevation basement windows, two on each side of the porticos. The basement windows exhibit a ratio of 1: 1.5, and have cast stone sills (as do all of the exterior windows in the building). Atop the basement windows runs a continuous belt course that caps too the brick course of water table headers. Below and above the water table the bricks are laid in stretcher bond, with a free mix of lighter and darker bats. The building's exterior walls - including those of the front portico's abutment and the porch over the entrance to the boiler room steps - are of solid brick.

First & Second Stories

On the first floor there are four banks of classroom windows, one in each end pavilion and two in the center pavilion flanking the front portico. Each bank holds five double-hung 9/9 sashes. Those on the second floor are vertically aligned with the ones below, with the two in the center pavilion on either side of a tri-partite center window arrangement above the portico. (Those in the center pavilion on the rear elevation flank a tri-partite center window arrangement on both floors that are in perfect alignment with the porch over the boiler room steps below.) Also, there are four smaller, cloakroom windows on each floor, vertically aligned as well. They are paired close together, in twos, at each end of the center pavilion, with double-hung sashes of 4/4 lights. Splayed lintels of cast stone, with keystones, cap all of these windows on both front and rear elevations. There are five oblong cast stone panels per bank of windows on the facade, vertically aligned with the classroom window opening between the first and second stories, each inset with a garland of grapes raised in relief.

The front portico has a flat, tin covered roof that originally sported a classical balustrade (as did the side elevation porticos) that was removed in the 1960s. Its entablature is of wood, with MCGUFFEY SCHOOL in bronze letters fastened to the frieze. Four cast stone Tuscan columns (with two cast stone pilaster returns) support the portico roof, set on flooring of poured concrete between two three-foot-high side walls (each capped by a thick slab of limestone) that descend with the steps to the concrete plaza below. (This is repeated, in part, with the lower - and shallower - south portico, of two columns and pilaster returns; the north elevation portico, likewise with but two columns and pilaster returns, is at ground level.) Beneath each portico is a pair of large wooden entrance doors, with double-leaf raised panels and bronze hardware, in lightly accented surrounds. The doors beneath the side elevation porticos are topped by large, fixed transoms of twenty one lights, while the pair at the front portico entrance are topped by a signature, fixed, semi-circular fanlight of fourteen glass panes. The tri-partite window arrangement above the front portico is in a single frame, its center window consisting of double-hung sashes of 12/12 lights flanked by two vertical sidelights of six panes each.

On each side elevation there is a tall, double set of windows in a single frame centered above the portico roof, with double-hung sashes of 12/12 lights, topped as well by a splayed lintel of cast stone, with a key stone. Flanking these windows (and the porticos) are a set of panels in the otherwise blank wall, a short one that is almost square over an oblong one, that are delineated by courses of raised headers and standing stretchers. All of the second story primary or classroom windows (on both the facade and the rear elevation) are directly capped by the immediate rise of the well-defined entablature with a perfectly proportioned modillion cornice. The cornice conceals a "Baltimore gutter", with four copper downspouts on each elevation.

The Roof

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The slate hipped roof is of about forty degrees or moderate pitch, its mass broken by a miniscule raised hipped outline corresponding to the slight forward projection of each of the end pavilions, that offers a complimentary balance to the whole. Of the chimneys (all interior), there are two actual, symmetrically placed aft of the roof ridge in the center pavilion and spaced about twelve feet apart, with slightly accented crowns. (Originally these chimneys served the two coal fired boilers.) The eight massive faux chimneys were for spent or "vilitated" air (as a part of the fresh warm air and ventilation component to the original heating system); four to each end of the center pavilion, two to each side of the roof's ridge that are joined by a brick apron (each serving two classrooms and the basement rooms directly below). Their non-defined crowns are merely flat courses of headers and soldiers, upon which sit four piers that support great slabs of limestone caps.

Alterations & Repairs

In a 1926 photograph, the metal "grills" that covered the fresh air intake openings on either side of the second story center window over the front portico were still in place; in a 1936 photograph they have been replaced by the six pane vertical side-lights one sees today. In the 1960s, the classical balustrades atop the porticos were removed. Also, in the 1960s, a basement level exit was created under the front portico where a pair of doors, with mesh-wire glass in them, open out to a short flight of concrete steps up to the yard. In 1999, all of the chimneystacks - faux and actual - had extensive repair work done to them: besides re-pointing, the top halves of most were dismantled, cleaned and reset as before. And in 2002, the front portico's abutment (or foundation wall), along with that to the front steps, was about sixty percent rebuilt - as were those to the south side elevation portico, with new limestone treads set to both. The concrete plaza that descends in two levels to 2nd Street N.W. was repaved, with a series of iron handrails embedded where it breaks for steps. Thus viewed, the front and side elevations of the McGuffey School building, in spite of the loss of the portico balustrades and the metal grills, appears exactly as it did in the photographs taken right after it was completed. This, however, can not be said of the rear elevation - and that is only because of the 1995/96 addition of an elevator housing. (This is a brick tower with a short "lobby" connecting it to the north end of the center pavilion, of unbroken flat walls that rise to just above the entablature - which it left intact because the tower itself sits out from it. It is entered at parking lot level through a pair of stainless steel sliding doors.)

THE INTERIOR, IN DETAIL

Dimensions

Three longitudinal corridors, one over the other, their solid brick walls equaling the thickness of the exterior walls, run the length of the building (north to south), although the one in the basement is divided into two equal sections by what was the warm air chamber. And before the fire marshal, in 1975, ordered firewalls built, all three opened to the stairwells on each end of the building. From the front portico one enters the first floor foyer, of fourteen foot width. Directly across the twelve-foot-wide longitudinal corridor is the office. There are the eight classrooms with adjoining cloakrooms on the first floor, four on either side of the longitudinal corridor with the foyer on the front of the building and the office on the rear separating them. Those on the end pavilions measure twenty five by thirty two feet, and those in the center pavilion measure twenty four by thirty two feet. The area of natural light emitted is equal to twenty five percent of the floor space in each. The classrooms on the second floor measure likewise. In addition to more classrooms the second floor also originally featured the library room, located directly above the front foyer, and the teachers' restroom, located directly above the office. The overall effect is that of spaciousness throughout (combined with a generous infusion of direct light), while all three (original) entrances provide easy access to the whole of the building, and swift egress.

Basement

In the basement, all of the (original) interior walls are of brick, and remain painted still - as the guide books at the time recommended - with only the longitudinal corridors' walls (as are the ceilings, other than that in the boiler room) covered with plaster. The floors throughout are of poured, Portland concrete. Wooden doors with raised panels - those to the boys' and girls' toilets (only one is left) had louvers in the bottom half - open from the respective rooms off the longitudinal corridors. The

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rooms also had windows looking out into the corridor, three 3/3 single sashes on hinges per wall. In the north basement, the boys' playroom was equal the length and breadth of two classrooms and their cloakrooms; on the rear of the building here was the boys' restroom - equaling the length and breadth of a classroom and two back to back cloakrooms directly above it - and the janitor's room, with a toilet closet, that equaled three quarters of the classroom directly above it. In the south basement, were the girls' playroom, the girls' toilet and the coal room. What was the coal room's space is several steps down from the longitudinal corridor. And the boiler room (which is at the rear of the building, dead center, and straddles the office directly above it) is several steps further again. Directly ahead of the boiler room was the warm air chamber from which hot forced air was directed via ducts to each classroom - by a motorized fan in the wall between it and the fresh air chamber that was directly below the front foyer. Entrance to these rooms (originally) was through small closets at the end of each longitudinal corridor. These closets - like the warm air chamber they entered into - were likewise fitted with thick hot water radiator coils. The fan room - as the fresh air room was also called - drew the fresh air down from the grill-covered openings on either side of the center window above the front portico through shafts on either side of the first floor front foyer.

Of all the levels in the building, the basement area, over time, has been the most reconfigured, yet the alterations remain within the walls of the original rooms. Very early on it appears that the girls' playroom substituted as the school's auditorium, with a stage built at its south end and a door leading off from it, up a couple of flights of steps to the south entrance landing. In 1975, the stage was closed off to create a separate artist's studio. In the 1980s and 1990s, the remainder of what had been the girls' playroom was divided by first one then another loosely attached sheetrock wall.

In the late 1930s, the north portion of the girls' toilet was bricked off to create a small sewing room with its own door to the longitudinal corridor. Both the boys and girls toilets underwent a series of alterations over the years and, in 1995/96, both were completely replaced with modern restroom facilities. The center portion of the south longitudinal corridor, in the 1950s for certain, was partitioned off, with its own entrance door, to create a small classroom area. The door and steps down to the coal room were not removed when this was done, and since 1975 both these rooms have functioned as a sculpture studio. That area of what had been the south longitudinal corridor's north end, behind this classroom addition, continues to open from its original doorway into the former girls' playroom. In the north basement area, the windows in the longitudinal corridor, before 1975, were sealed up with sheetrock as well - the three to what had been the boys' playroom, the two to the boys' toilet and the one to the former janitor's room. Recently though, the one to the latter has been opened up (this room now is a glassblower's studio), with its sash found intact. In the 1930s, the janitor's room would become - at the same time that the sewing room was created in the south basement - the kitchen room, along with the north portion of the boys' toilet adjoining it for the cooking room (at which time the janitor's toilet closet was removed - and the door down to the boiler room bricked up). Charles Calrow, the Norfolk architect who had worked with Dr. Johnson on the construction of the McGuffey School building (and later the Venable and Clark school buildings) was the architect for these alterations. Following this, the boys' playroom would substitute as the school cafeteria. This room today is subdivided into four artists' studios by two semi-permanent and one in-permanent sheetrock constructed walls. This is a small example of what Dr. Johnson meant when he wrote that the building was so planned that it could absorb change within its original layout. The one room in the basement that remains unchanged is the boiler room. Since 1995/96 a single furnace heats the building. Before that, there were two antiquated furnaces from the 1940s or 1950s, one of which existed (at least after they were restarted in 1975) for the bowdlerizing of it for parts to keep the other working. Originally, there had been two "horizontal water boilers", not only for direct radiation but to heat those coils in the warm air chamber and its closets. The warm air chamber, and the fresh air/fan room forward of it, became obsolete in the 1930s, and were used in part for storage until the city, in 1995/96, removed most of the iron coils (some of those high in the walls remain embedded still) so that the two rooms could be fully utilized for storage, etc..

First Floor

While the longitudinal corridors' walls on all three levels are of solid brick, the walls between the cloakrooms that adjoin each other, between the cloakrooms and their classrooms, and between the classrooms and the front foyer, and between the office

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and the classrooms are of lath and plaster. (The plaster throughout the building is original, but for patchwork after repairs and the 1995/96 renovation.) The floors are of Georgia maple. The exterior doors have limestone thresholds. The woodwork is of simple design and for the most part remains in its natural color. Exceptions to the latter are that in the elevator corridors and in the office (new woodwork went into the office after the 1980 fire.) Though closed off from the stairs at each end by the 1975 firewalls, there is abundant direct light during most daylight hours in the longitudinal corridor from the fanlight over the front doors and the tri-partite door and flanking window glass that front the office. It is otherwise lit today by track lighting on black frames that hang from the black painted ceilings (it is black painted on the walls too, down to the picture rails). There are three globe lights (modern replicas of the originals that once hung through the corridor), one in the front foyer, and one at each end of the longitudinal corridor, just inside the firewall doors. Originally, there were hanging globe light fixtures in the classrooms as well but they were replaced at some point by what looks like 1950s florescent fixtures that remain. All of the classrooms today have at least one dividing wall that is either semi-permanent or moveable - except for those that are the main gallery, the two dance studios and "the classroom", which remain open.

"The classroom", located on the northwest corner of the building, is the one room that most resembles its former self as a classroom - though it has lost its cloakroom to the 1995/96 elevator corridor. It is essentially undivided (it has a moveable wall at the rear) and for the most part its blackboards (on all three walls, though two are covered) remain intact. (In most of the former classrooms the blackboards are either covered over, or have been removed altogether along the lines of those in the main gallery and the dance studio.) One can see in the floor where the desks were fastened. Visible too in the wall above the rear blackboard, and at baseboard level next to where the cloakroom entrances had been, are the outlines of the boarded up warm fresh air entrance "alcove" and the spent air exits respectively. (These are closed off likewise in all of the former classrooms in the building, in the first floor foyer and in the former basement toilets and playroom as well.) .

During the 1995/96 renovation, the two back-to-back cloakrooms located on the northwest end of the center pavilion were sacrificed to an elevator corridor with the wall between them removed and their two open entranceways from the respective classrooms plastered over. The oblong, block-like protruding walls, directly opposite each other, seen jutting out into this corridor now are the faux chimneys' airshafts, formerly inside each cloakroom. The ceiling here is a drop one, with modern florescent fixtures in it. As for the other cloakrooms during this renovation, they lost their original porcelain hand basins and water fountains that were replaced by plastic tubs, but otherwise suffered no further change. Another 1995/96-renovation change on the first floor was the front to the office. The original tri-partite door and windows arrangement, that had survived the fire of 1980, was replaced with a somewhat wider metal-framed facsimile with fixed transoms and sidelights of fireproof glass. It was following the fire of 1980 that the office, originally one room, was divided into a separate office and shop-reception area. The fire started in an electrical outlet and burned its way through the south wall and into the next room that is still the art center's main exhibition gallery. The floor of the main gallery had to be replaced - with matching Georgia maple - but that part of the former office, the front half that became the shop-reception area, remained open to it, giving the main gallery two entrances. The tri-partite window arrangement from the office to the foyer had to be replaced, as did the former office floor area, along with the woodwork and plaster walls. (The chimney shafts on either side of the outer door and flanking windows, originally plaster covered, were left bare - for decorative purpose.) The room that is the main gallery and the former classroom next to it are the most altered rooms, as it were, of all the former classrooms in the building, in that all trace of the blackboards, etc., have been removed and the walls and woodwork are 100% white painted. During the 1995/96 renovations, these rooms were given doors with fireproof glass windows in them, in place of the originals. In the mid-1980s the wall between the adjoining cloakrooms was partially removed and one of the erstwhile cloakroom openings to the McGuffey Art Center's main gallery was wall-boarded-up. In these two former classrooms all of the original woodwork remains, if minus the blackboard troughs and surrounds and painted white.

The Stairs

From the side entrance landing the stairs continue to rise - from the first floor itself, turning, up to the landing between the

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first and second floor (beneath the tall, side elevation window over the respective porticos), before turning again to continue up to the second floor. "Designed for ease and comfort being five and one half feet wide, having six inch risers and thirteen inch treads, the runs being relieved by a spacious landing between each story", is how Dr. Johnson described them in his DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PLANT in the July 24, 1915 edition of the Daily Progress. It is how they remain today, in their cast iron, closed stringer frames with cast iron railings and newel posts coupled with maple banisters making for easy ascent and descent for child and adult alike. The treads, said to have originally been of wood, are now soapstone - as are the landings between the first and second floor.

In 1995/96, florescent wall fixtures replaced the long hanging globe lights over the landings between the first and second floor; shorter hanging globe lights hung over the north and south entrance landings.

Second Floor

The center rooms on the second floor were the library or "special instruction room" and, across the longitudinal corridor from it, the teachers' rest room. It is not certain if the latter was a "restroom" by today's definition or simply a lounge - or both. It was also the school infirmary. In 1995/96, this room was enlarged by a couple of feet taken from the adjoining classroom to the south to create a handicapped accessible men's and women's restroom, each entered from a short lobby off the longitudinal corridor. This replaced a dual set of restrooms within the original walls of the former teachers' restroom that were entered directly from the longitudinal corridor. It may have been that the teacher's restroom had been fronted with the same tri-partite door and window arrangement found in the office directly below. This same arrangement still fronts the former library room across the corridor., The 1995/96-elevator corridor on this floor is the same as on the first floor, with the former classroom on the northwest corner entered from it. Other than the loss of two cloakrooms, the eight former classrooms on the second floor retain their original shape, with their original doors and woodwork. The second floor longitudinal corridor is lit by track lights and two hanging globe replicas while the former classrooms retain their florescent fixtures from the 1950s.

Alterations Within The Building - In Perspective

"School plants are no exception to the general rule that almost all buildings used for any purpose must be changed and modified from time to time to meet conditions and demands." wrote Dr. Johnson. "The original layout of McGuffey School was such that it has been easy to make readjustments as the years have gone by and this structure is still a home for the children who are so fortunate as to attend school here."

The building underwent many alterations during the period of significance as already discussed. The 1980 fire necessitated changes to the office and main gallery area as discussed above, and in 1995/96, the building was closed for nine months for its most comprehensive renovation. During this time the elevator tower was added to the rear elevation, with four cloakrooms, two on the first floor and two on the second floor, sacrificed to created corridors to it.

In addition to the school building, a shed, ca. 1960s, is also located on the property. It is a plywood structure formerly housing either ground maintenance equipment or playground equipment or both. It originally sat at the far back of the school's playground (and later parking lot). It was moved to its present location - close to the southwest corner of the school building/art center - in 1983, when the McGuffey Hill Condominiums were built - and subsequently turned into an artist's studio. It is a non-contributing building.

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**Summary Statement of Significance**

The William. H. McGuffey Primary School in Charlottesville, Virginia, was built between 1915 and 1916. It was named for the author of the first standard U.S. reader series who was a staunch advocate of public education and a University of Virginia professor of moral philosophy. The school, a two-story, brick building in the Colonial Revival style, was Charlottesville's first primary school building built for that purpose. It was much lauded for its physical harmony, both on its facade and with its interior layout which followed contemporary guidance for Progressive Era primary and secondary school design. James G. Johnson, Superintendent of Schools, played a major role in determining the features of the school and its appearance and used McGuffey School as a model for other schools he planned in Charlottesville. McGuffey School ceased to be a public school in 1973.

**Justification of Criteria:** Because of its design and execution which closely followed Progressive Era guidelines for school construction, McGuffey School became a model for subsequent school construction in Charlottesville and is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C at the local level for Architecture. As the first purpose-built primary school in Charlottesville, as the first area school to employ a female principal, and as a model for subsequent school design and construction in Charlottesville following the recommendations of Progressive Era educational reformers, the school is also eligible at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Education. The period of significance begins in 1916 when the school opened and ends in 1945. James G. Johnson, Superintendent of Schools, retired in 1945 and this date signals the termination of the school's first period of development.

**Historical Background**

In 1915, Charlottesville had two high schools – Midway School for white students and Jefferson School for African American students. Each was close to the downtown area and both also housed primary and elementary school grades. There were also several primary schools for white children housed in private dwellings in the downtown residential area like the "Miss Virginia Patterson School." The McGuffey School was built to incorporate these primary schools - and the primary grades at Midway School - under one roof.

The design for the McGuffey School was conceived by James G. Johnson, Superintendent of Schools in Charlottesville, who "studied the plans of between four and five hundred school buildings in different parts of the country through actual visits and through plans published in the School Board Journal and in all the books on school architecture that I could lay my hands upon"<sup>1</sup> and utilized Progressive Era concepts and philosophies of school design and construction. R. E. Lee Taylor, a partner in the firm of Ferguson, Calrow and Taylor, drew up the plans with Johnson. Every aspect of the McGuffey School was "scientifically calculated" from the original fresh air intake/heating and ventilation system down to the "correct" amount of natural light for each classroom. Dr. Johnson chose the name for the school as well.

Construction of the school was made possible through the issuance of a bond. "It is no easy thing," Dr. Johnson wrote at the McGuffey School's genesis,

To go through weeks and years of actual searching for suitable school sites, to determine in light of all the fact what is best for the general good of the school system in buildings and equipment... to spend long hours in meetings grappling with the perplexing problems that confront the School Board members who have the unremunerated burden of patriotic service thrust upon them. The City School Board has gone through this process with unselfish devotion to the public welfare. The City Council has approved their conclusions and authorized a bond issue to carry into effect well matured plans evolved through first hand experience in dealing with the most important factor in the civic life of a community...The responsibility now rests with the voters. Will they face this responsibility with patriotic courage?<sup>2</sup>

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The voters did, supporting the measure by a majority of more than two to one when voting on the bond issue on July 20, 1915. One month later ground was broken, and the construction of the McGuffey Primary School commenced. Dr. Johnson was often onsite as the building went up. On September 7, 1916, the Charlottesville Daily Progress announced the opening of the McGuffey Primary School:

To Dr. James G. Johnson is due the credit for the completion of this up to date and splendid addition to the educational facilities of this city and section. Not content with obtaining the very best professional skill in the planning and erection of this building, Dr. Johnson has made the perfect construction of this school house his special interest and pride. Not a day has passed during the past twelve months since the foundation and the first brick laid, that has not seen him present at the work at all hours of the day when his duties permitted, seeing to it that nothing was done in a careless manner, or any act omitted to make the work perfect in every particular. With him it was a labor of love and the finished edifice, which will start the coming generation of Charlottesville's youth on the road to learning, is a monument to his faithfulness and zeal in his profession.<sup>3</sup>

Miss Carrie C. Burnley who served as the first principal of McGuffey School from 1916 to 1945 was Charlottesville's first female principal. She attended schools in Albemarle County and a school in Charlottesville conducted by sisters of Dr. William H. McGuffey, and in 1883 began her teaching career in a one-room log schoolhouse near the Mechum River. After teaching in Harrisonburg she began teaching seventh grade in Charlottesville at Midway School in 1894. She served as assistant principal of the grammar grades, graduating to the high school department before being selected as principal for the McGuffey School. At any given year up to eight hundred pupils attended the school. Early on, she instituted a cold breakfast program for "orphans and those in need." Also, between 1916 and 1945, McGuffey School housed Dr. Johnson's office as Superintendent of Schools and was where the school board met.

From 1916 through 1945, McGuffey School offered a "progressive" curriculum. The school had a newspaper, "The McGuffey Reader," and a number of extra curricular activities were offered under Miss Burnley's leadership and with Dr. Johnson's oversight. Many of Charlottesville's white citizens who became prominent in their community or took active roles in its affairs from the 1940s into the 1990s attended McGuffey School. Also, during this period, the school acted as something as a community center as well, serving as a meeting hall or functioning as a polling place. And, as a model for an entire system of public schools, McGuffey School set the standard for architectural quality and educational excellence. In his capacity as Superintendent of Schools, Dr. James G. Johnson was responsible for the construction of a system of elementary schools in the city.

In his *History of Venable School*, 1922-1936, Dr. Johnson wrote: "In the planning and construction of Venable School and every other building with which I have had anything to do with, the architects and I have had but one aim, to combine the elements of harmony, simplicity, utility and beauty in such a manner as to be pleasing to the eye and to serve as a comfortable home at which teachers and children may work together effectively and happily."<sup>4</sup> Altogether, during his tenure as Superintendent from 1909 until 1945, Dr. Johnson oversaw the construction of seven schools in the city including two new high school buildings: the new Jefferson School building in 1926 for the black community and Lane High School for the white community in 1939. While working within the context of "separate but equal" then guiding the school system, Dr. Johnson anticipated the growing demand for public education from, and the necessity of making educational opportunity available for, *all* citizens both black and white, and he sought to keep ahead of that demand. By the turn of the 20th century, public school enrollment was rising twenty five percent per decade. Dr. Johnson was as concerned with the direction that the public education curriculum should take. Dr. Johnson's own thoughts on the matter might have been revealed in his choice for speaker at the McGuffey School's dedication ceremony. Dr. William M. Thornton, Dean of the University of Virginia's Department of Engineering, exhorted his listeners to support the importance of a comprehensive education as opposed to that which would

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"hamper its development, cut out of its curriculum all appeals to the ideal forms in human life and thought, bind it to topics which will pay immediate dividends in wage earning capacity." It appears that Dr. Thornton's plea was adhered to. In a 1936 essay entitled "What McGuffey Does for its Pupils," seventh-grade history teacher, Lillie Payne Woodson, quoted John Dewey on community membership and the spirit of public service in her preface, before going on to laud the school's academic successes as she saw them. She praised, in particular, the recent introduction of "extra curricular activities" which helped to develop "an appreciation of art, music, literature, ideals of home life and an intelligent interest, on the part of the community, in the school, its needs and possibilities."

It was in his office at McGuffey that Dr. Johnson planned and oversaw the construction of Charlottesville's Venable and Clark Schools, among a number of others, with his architect "of choice", Charles J. Calrow (of Furguson, Calrow & Taylor later Calrow, Brown & Fitz-Gibbon of Norfolk, Virginia). Johnson in his 1936 school histories described Calrow as "This most skillful architect who for twenty one years has been my co-worker in developing a group of elementary school buildings."<sup>5</sup> Most of these school buildings - all of which are still in use, two as public schools - Johnson modeled after the McGuffey School, his prototype.

In the years that followed, the McGuffey School was at the forefront of the history of public education in Charlottesville. Established early in the coming of age of public education itself, the school served Charlottesville's white students through two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Cold War period and through the efforts in the 1960s to integrate public schools. The school's final years as an educational facility witnessed its transformation in 1966 from a white primary school to an integrated school for students with special needs. In her 2005 "Downtown and North Downtown Architectural Design Control Study," architectural historian Maral S. Kalbian wrote of McGuffey School: "It had been an all white school for most of its history, but with efforts to desegregate in the mid-1960s, it ultimately became a primarily black school... (It) ceased to operate as an elementary school in 1966 and was converted to a racially integrated Special Education Center for mentally retarded but educable children. In the mid-1970s, McGuffey ceased to function as a school and was converted to the McGuffey Art Center which it remains today." <sup>6</sup>

The McGuffey School building exemplifies Progressive Era philosophy in the field of education and as such, exhibits most of the requisite features proscribed in a veritable flood of manuals and academic treatises on the subject of public school planning and construction being published in Virginia and the rest of the country at the end of the 19th century and well into the beginning of the 20th.

"Let the school building, then, be solidly built, thoroughly fire proof, abundantly lighted, with adequate, straight halls and ample stairways, having sunshine and access for the outer air in every room besides abundant forced ventilation" wrote Frank Irving Cooper in *The Planning of Modern School Houses* (1910). "Let it be cheerful and attractive without and within; well placed and supplied with adequate playground and pleasant surrounds and it will not only be a source of pride, but a blessing to the community, as well as a credit to its designer."<sup>7</sup>

Cooper here easily could have been describing the building that Dr. Johnson, in his Proposed New School Building, offered to the citizens of Charlottesville in the July 14, 1915 edition of the *Daily Progress*, where he wrote: 'An effort has been made to handle every detail to the best advantage for each individual classroom and for the plant as a whole. Harmony, simplicity, utility, beauty have been the ends sought by the architects and school officials.'<sup>8</sup> In all aspects of the building's planning and execution, it appears that Dr. Johnson and his architects took to heart the suggestions (and incorporated the vision) of such expositors on the subject as Cooper and W. G. Bruce (*School Architecture: A Handy Manual for the Use of Architects and School Authorities*) published in 1910.

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The McGuffey School building and its playground were sited on an elevated site, situated so that direct sunlight would fall across the left shoulders of its pupils in those classrooms on the east or front side of the building during the morning hours, as it would likewise in the afternoon in those classrooms on the west or rear side of the building. There was abundant natural light in each of its classrooms throughout the school day - where the ratio of natural light emitted to floor space exceeded the percentage called for in the school construction manuals of the day. Its corridors, playrooms and toilets were exceptionally well lit too. Dr. Johnson described the basement area in the McGuffey as better lit than the classrooms in most Virginia schools, especially with the interior windows in its longitudinal corridors. Natural sunlight "is important for proper sanitation," wrote Dr. Johnson, adding in reference to the McGuffey building. "The most rigid requirements governing the construction of sanitary school buildings have been complied with both in the general and the detailed scheme."<sup>9</sup> The original playground, at the rear of the building, equaled the building's length (it was divided into a girls' side and a boys' side) and about three quarters of its width, and stretched over as level a surface as possible. By mid-day for much of the school year the playground was almost totally awash with sunlight.

Other features from the contemporary building manuals that were incorporated into the construction of McGuffey School were its solid brick exterior and interior walls to lessen the risk of fire or to contain fire; a slate covered roof, also for fire protection; and corridors measuring half the width of the classrooms, open at each end, and without any protruding obstacles so as to ensure ample passage in case of an emergency. The manuals called for separate entrances for the sexes, complete with a portico at each entrance, and double doors that opened outward.

The school included a library or "teaching room," considered an essential component by Dr. Johnson, where teachers might work individually with a pupil, as well as a teachers' restroom (that could substitute as the school's infirmary). Lighting was important in the "modern" design for the school. The stairs were placed at each end of the building so that they would be lit naturally from top floor to basement level by the large windows. The stairs themselves were designed with a gentle rise and with ample width, broken by spacious landings. The basement had ample size playrooms and toilets for each sex, both well ventilated and the latter with "fixtures of the most approved automatic type."<sup>10</sup> Both playrooms and toilets were physically separated to guarantee privacy. The basement's boiler room was "entirely fireproof reducing the danger of fire to a minimum."<sup>11</sup> Other basement space was provided for the requisite coal room; the janitor's room (with its own toilet); as well as a fresh air fan room and a warm air chamber of radiator coils for the indirect radiation system.

The McGuffey School's classrooms were designed to comfortably seat forty-five pupils each, with desks secured to the floor - between which and the sub-floor was laid a "deadening quilt". Following construction manual guidance, the floors were the requisite 13-foot pitch and the windows were equipped with "transparent shades that will shut out the dazzling sun light during that portion of the day when the sun beams directly into the rooms in full force".<sup>12</sup> There was no wainscoting as it "harbored dirt and bacteria".<sup>13</sup> The classrooms were painted in the recommended colors, those of quiet hues. There was a cloakroom in each classroom - independently lit, heated and ventilated, and accessed from the classroom by two open entrances that were in direct view of the teacher's desk. It was equipped with all the necessary implements: racks for coats and hats, boots, umbrellas, and shelves for lunch boxes. It was equipped, too, with a porcelain hand basin and water fountain.

The classroom blackboards were of natural slate, three and one half feet wide and fitted with chalk troughs covered by wire screens and were placed at heights to suit the children in each grade. Each classroom had blackboards along three walls. Heat was from both direct and indirect radiation. In Dr. Johnson's words,

The classrooms are cared for by direct radiation to overcome loses through exposed walls and windows while an abundant supply of fresh warm air is forced into each room by a motor driven fan from the warm air chamber located in the basement and supplied with fresh air taken from a point over the front entrance insuring freedom from pollution of any kind. The air is removed from each room through ventilating flues that lead out to the open

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air above the roof. <sup>14</sup>

The large amount of space in the building given over to the fresh warm air and the ventilating system in the construction of the building illustrates the importance of this system in the "sanitation" philosophy at that time. It is described in various details in all of the school building manuals and books on "modern school architecture." The system was eventually discontinued at McGuffey and elsewhere most likely because of the difficulty of keeping the heat and humidity in near perfect equilibrium as the system required to function most efficiently.

McGuffey School served as the model for Venable (opened 1925) and Clark (built ca. 1930) elementary schools in Charlottesville, both of which remain open and active. The three were virtually the same in floor plan and have similar facilities and features, but each presents a different façade. Venable, located closer to the University of Virginia, has a two-story front portico with columns and there are two cupolas instead of McGuffey's massive chimneys. Clarke School lacks the end porticos of McGuffey, but has a large two-story front portico topped with a classical balustrade. The schools possess the same window arrangements and all three buildings share similar proportions of length, width and mass.

The William H. McGuffey Primary School building - some alteration notwithstanding - retains its original mass and form and much of its historic materials. It remains a vibrant model of an architectural expression that set the standard for the public school plant in the first half of the 20th century in the United States. The two schools modeled on McGuffey's plan -- Venable School and Clark School -- are still an intrinsic part of the Charlottesville school system. The McGuffey School building now functions as the city's art center, still serving the community at large.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Wm. H. McGuffey Primary School/McGuffey Art Center is identified on the tax parcel maps for the City of Charlottesville as plot # 174(3) on Tax Map 33.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property's boundaries contain all of the acreage currently associated with the McGuffey School building. The rear of the original school property was sold off and subdivided for a condominium development in the 1980s and is therefore not included.

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The Following is common to all photographs:

**WM. H. MCGUFFEY PRIMARY SCHOOL, DHR file # 104-0072-0300**

**Location: Charlottesville, Virginia**

**Photographer: Murray Whitehill**

**Date of photographs: September 4, 2009**

PHOTO: 1 of 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0001.tif

SUBJECT: Facade of building

VIEW: Looking southwest

PHOTO: 2 of 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0002.tif

SUBJECT: Facade of building

VIEW: Looking northwest, from junction of W. Market Street and 2nd Street NW

PHOTO: 3 OF 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0003.tif

SUBJECT: The south portico

VIEW: Looking northeast

PHOTO: 4 OF 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0004.tif

SUBJECT: The rear elevation of the building, showing the 1996 addition of an elevator housing

VIEW: Looking southeast

PHOTO: 5 of 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0005.tif

SUBJECT: Front entrance foyer, with former superintendent of schools office in background (now divided into the art center's reception area and office)

VIEW: Looking west

PHOTO: 6 of 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0006.tif

SUBJECT: Front entrance foyer from the front doorway

VIEW: Looking west

PHOTO: 7 of 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0007.tif

SUBJECT: The 1st floor longitudinal corridor, with office midway on left, and the front foyer across from it on the right. Before 1975 this corridor (as well as those in the basement and the one on the 2nd floor) was open at both ends to the stairwells. (Note: everything above the picture railing is painted black)

VIEW: Looking north

PHOTO: 8 of 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0008.tif

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SUBJECT: The south end stairwell from the 1st floor, looking down towards south portico exit doors on the landing halfway down to the south basement. In the left side of the tall end elevation window on the landing to the 2nd floor is a piece of stained glass art work placed in front of the lower sash.

VIEW: Looking south

PHOTO: 9 of 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0009.tif

SUBJECT: The 2nd floor longitudinal corridor. On the left is the original facade to the "library room".

VIEW: Looking south

PHOTO: 10 of 10

VA\_Charlottesville\_McGuffey\_School\_0010.tif

SUBJECT: Former 1st floor classroom, now artist studio, on the front of the building.

VIEW: Looking north

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- <sup>1</sup> History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936. page 28
  - <sup>2</sup> James G. Johnson, The History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936, page 28.
  - <sup>3</sup> James G. Johnson, The History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936, page 32.
  - <sup>4</sup> The McGuffey Reader, Edition 1936, Vol. 1-9.
  - <sup>5</sup> The McGuffey Reader, Edition 1936, Vol. 1-9.
  - <sup>6</sup> Maral S. Kalbian, Downtown and North Downtown Architectural Design Control Study...2005.
  - <sup>7</sup> Frank I. Cooper. The Planning of Modern School Houses, 1910.
  - <sup>8</sup> James G. Johnson, History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936, The McGuffey Reader, Edition 1936, Vol. 109.
  - <sup>9</sup> James G. Johnson, The History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936, page 29.
  - <sup>10</sup> James G. Johnson, The History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936, page 29.
  - <sup>11</sup> James G. Johnson, The History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936, page 29.
  - <sup>12</sup> James G. Johnson, The History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936, page 29.
  - <sup>13</sup> James G. Johnson, The History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936, page 29.
  - <sup>14</sup> James G. Johnson, The History of McGuffey School, 1915-1936, page 29.

2680 8/24/09

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE  
"A World Class City"

Department of Neighborhood Development  
Services



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Charlottesville, Virginia 22902  
Telephone 434-970-3182  
Fax 434-970-3359  
[www.charlottesville.org](http://www.charlottesville.org)

August 19, 2009

Commonwealth of Virginia  
Department of Historic Resources  
2801 Kensington Avenue  
Richmond, Virginia 23221  
ATTN: Marc Wagner

Dear Mr. Wagner,

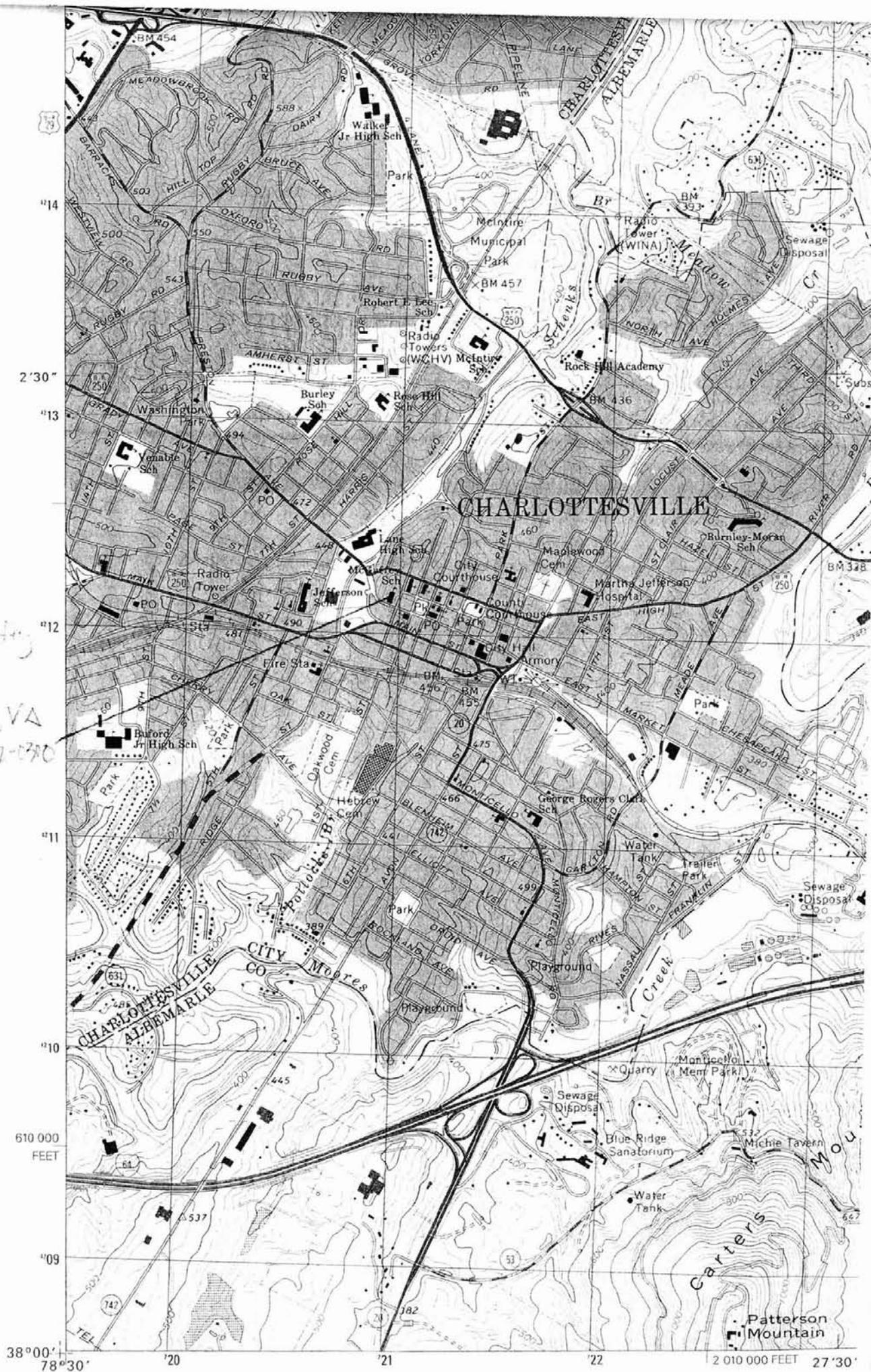
Thank you for providing the opportunity for the City of Charlottesville's Board of Architectural Review to review and comment on the nomination report to consider the McGuffey School in Charlottesville, Virginia for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.

The BAR at its meeting on August 18, 2009 enthusiastically endorsed (7-0) the nomination to individually list the McGuffey School on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Joy Scala".

Mary Joy Scala  
Preservation and Design Planner



William H. McGehee  
 Dimmock School  
 Charlottesville, VA  
 DHA# 104-0072-030  
 Zone 17  
 Easting  
 720979  
 Northing  
 4212390