



## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u>      N/A      </u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**  
Summary Description

Sonner Hall, historically known as "Main Building" at Randolph-Macon Academy, is situated on a small hill off 3rd Street in Front Royal. The imposing, 3½-story brick edifice was erected in 1927 after the plans of John P. Pettyjohn of Lynchburg. The building still functions as the principal structure of the school, serving as a multipurpose facility for faculty and student housing, classrooms, and administration. The nomination consists of one contributing building.

### Architectural Analysis

Sonner Hall was built in 1927 after the plans of John P. Pettyjohn of Lynchburg. The structure replaced an earlier building of 1892 that was destroyed by fire. The present structure is reputed to have been built on the stone foundations of the 1892 building and incorporates a swimming pool from the original building. In plan, Sonner Hall is "U"-shaped and consists of a central passage with radiating lateral passages.

The main elevation of Sonner Hall faces east. The 3½-story facade is executed in stretcher-bond brick and is nineteen bays in length and contains the main entrance. The principal entrance occupies the central bay of the building and consists of paneled double doors topped by a semi-circular fanlight. The first-story entrance is surrounded by rusticated brickwork and flanked by 6/6 hung-sash windows. A tetrastyle pedimented portico sits on the projecting one-bay entrance area. The portico is distinguished by Greek Ionic columns and a full entablature with "Randolph-Macon Academy" in the frieze. The portico's tympanum is embellished with ornamental decoration and contains a circular window. The two-story portico shelters three bays of 6/6 hung-sash windows. The central second-floor window is set within an arched niche and has rich ornamentation. The center entrance pavilion is flanked on each side of the first story by four bays of triple-grouped windows with 9/9 hung sash. The second and third stories have 6/6 hung-sash windows. The roof line is broken by gabled dormers with 6/6 hung-sash windows. A slate-covered gambrel roof shelters the main section. The central portion has a ribbed dome with a balustrade and lantern.

The rear elevation is relatively plain when compared to the facade. It has a segmental arched doorway with a fanlight and sidelights and is now sheltered by a contemporary glass enclosure. Fenestration of the rear elevation consists of hung-sash windows in a variety of sizes. The second- and third-story windows of the northernmost bay have been blocked. The side elevations contain 6/6 and 9/9 hung-sash windows and double-door entrances within segmental arch openings.

Projecting to the west of the main block are two parallel three-story wings. The wings are separated by an open courtyard. Fifteen bays in length, the wings contain 9/9 and 6/6 hung-sash windows. Side entrances are provided on the north and south elevations. The rear wall of the north wing has an exterior chimney while the south wing's rear wall has a projecting stair tower.

The interior of Sonner Hall is relatively plain. The main entrance leads to a hall that is distinguished by pilasters topped by a cornice. The main stair runs from the entrance hall to the third floor. A guard room and false doorway flank the main stair on the first floor. Located to the north of the entrance hall is the visitor's lounge. It

(See Continuation Sheet #1 )

## 8. Significance

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

**Specific dates** 1927 **Builder/Architect** J. P. Pettyjohn

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

#### Statement of Significance

Randolph-Macon Academy's Sonner Hall, with its large dome and distinguished entrance portico, is a visually prominent landmark overlooking the town of Front Royal and that town's best preserved building in the Colonial Revival style. Erected in 1927 by Lynchburg builder J. P. Pettyjohn after a fire destroyed the academy's original main building on the same site, Sonner Hall remains the heart of the last surviving preparatory school of the former Randolph-Macon System of academies and colleges. The system was established in 1890 as an auxiliary to Randolph-Macon College and at one time embraced three preparatory schools and two colleges. In the tradition of several other prominent educational institutions in the Valley of Virginia, the school has offered a regular course of military instruction since 1917. ~~It is the only military preparatory boarding school in the nation operating under the auspices of the United Methodist Church.~~

#### Historical Background

In 1820 the General Conference of the Methodist Church meeting in Baltimore recommended to the various conferences that they establish "literary institutions." In 1830 the Virginia General Assembly granted a charter to the Virginia Conference which led to the establishment of Randolph-Macon College, today the oldest Methodist-related college in the United States.

In 1880 the President of Randolph-Macon College, W. W. Bennett, noted to the college board, "If it could be established and properly conducted, a good preparatory school would be a valuable auxiliary to this institution."<sup>1</sup>

Virginia's public school system, which had not been established until Reconstruction, so far had proved unable to produce students who were adequately prepared to enter Bennett's curriculum at Randolph-Macon.<sup>2</sup>

Bennett's successor, President William W. Smith, continued to urge the creation of a preparatory school. On January 3, 1889, the board agreed and in 1890 the original charter was amended to permit the establishment of related institutions of learning.<sup>3</sup>

The College's first preparatory school was established in Bedford, Virginia and its building dedicated on July 4, 1890. The immediate success of the academy resulted in considerable interest in the founding of a similar institution elsewhere in Virginia. The Winchester District Conference, four months after the dedication of Bedford proposed the establishment of an academy west of the Blue Ridge. Offers from Middleburg, Winchester, and Front Royal led to the consideration of several sites. The most appealing one came from Front Royal, offered through the good offices of the Front Royal and Riverton Improvement Company: "five acres of land and one-fourth of the construction cost, provided the conference spend not less than twenty thousand dollars and not more than one hundred thousand dollars on the academy."<sup>4</sup>

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

"Randolph-Macon Academ." Archives File No. 112-8, 112-57. Division of Historic Landmarks, Richmond, VA

Scanlon, James Edward. Randolph-Macon College: A Southern History. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approx. 1 1/2 acres

Quadrangle name Front Royal, VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 

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4	3	1	1	7	5	0
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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

(See Continuation Sheet #5)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Division of Historic Landmarks

organization Division of Historic Landmarks Staff

date September, 1986

street & number 221 Governor Street

telephone 804/786-3143

city or town Richmond

state Virginia 23219

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

H. Bryan Mitchell, Director

title Division of Historic Landmarks

date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

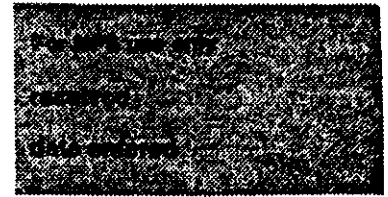
date

Chief of Registration

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

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

SONNER HALL, Warren County, VA



Continuation sheet 1 Item number 7 Page 1

7. DESCRIPTION — Architectural Analysis

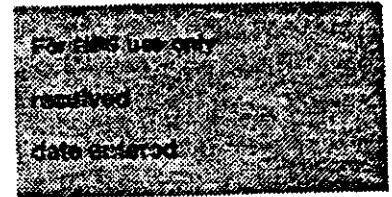
is divided into two spaces by a double archway. The remaining rooms along the first-floor passage are classrooms and administrative offices. The library is located on the first floor of the north wing while the pool is found in the south wing. The pool is all that survived after a fire destroyed the 1892 building. The pool area has since been refurbished. The dining room is situated in the basement. It has square posts that support a beamed ceiling. The posts and beams were originally stained and are now painted.

Dormitory rooms are located on the upper floors, off the main corridors. Faculty apartments are found off the north ends of the corridors.

RCC

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

SONNER HALL, Warren County, Virginia



Continuation sheet 2

Item number 8

Page 1

8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

By June, 1891, William W. Smith reported to his board that sponsors had raised \$59,000 in cash and notes for the academy at Front Royal with promises of an additional \$7,000 in land and a site of fifteen acres. The whole was valued at \$90,000, the trustees pledging \$10,000. William Poindexter, a Washington, D. C. architect, was hired to design the new school building. Poindexter had fashioned the academy building at Bedford and was thus a logical choice for Front Royal. By June, 1892 almost \$50,000 had been paid out for the new building and \$29,000 was owed. The school officially opened in September, 1892.

A ca. 1894 catalogue stated the mission of the school: "In establishing the academy, the board, choosing for it the field between the preparatory home school and the real college course, purposes to prepare youths for college or university, under discipline appropriate to their years and maturity and under the most wholesome moral influences."<sup>5</sup> Preparing young men for college, particularly Randolph-Macon College, the school from the outset also offered business courses for those who did not intend to go to college.

By 1897 the Randolph-Macon System embraced five institutions: the original college at Ashland; a women's college at Lynchburg; a female institute at Danville; and male preparatory academies at Bedford and Front Royal. It was governed by subcommittees of the local members of the board with William Waugh Smith as its first and only chancellor (1897-1912).

In 1917 the Front Royal school became a military academy. Professor C. L. Melton in an article in the Academy catalogue entitled "Military Instruction at Front Royal" made the following observation: "The world-involving war now in progress has drawn our nation into the contest. Congress will pass a bill for universal military training, and we must be able to guide and protect the interests of those students who are committed to our care."<sup>6</sup>

Disaster struck the school in 1927. On the night of January 10th, a fire of undetermined origin completely destroyed the main building which had been in service since the school's founding. Unfortunately, the board had only limited insurance of only \$100,000 with the replacement cost calculated at \$250,000. Undaunted, the board decided to rebuild.

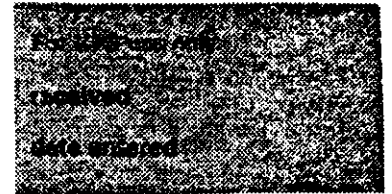
In June, 1927, the J. P. Pettyjohn Company was hired to build the new structure at a cost of \$254,000. Pettyjohn, a Lynchburg builder, had constructed the Main Hall of Randolph-Macon Women's College and assisted William Smith in raising funds for its endowment. Pettyjohn was also a contributor to the college in Ashland, thereby making his company a prime candidate for the reconstruction of the academy.

The loss of the familiar landmark led the citizens of Front Royal to rally to the school's support. They promised to raise \$25,000 to reopen the academy. The board authorized the sale of one hundred \$1,000 bonds with the mortgage held by the Lynchburg Trust and Savings Bank.

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Inventory—Nomination Form**

SONNER HALL, Warren County, Virginia



Continuation sheet 3

Item number 8

Page 2

8. SIGNIFICANCE — Historical Background

The Main Academy Building, renamed Sonner Hall in the late 1970s, is suitable testimony to the trustees' ambition to keep the school in operation. In plan, the structure followed Poindexter's original scheme of a main hall concept found also in his buildings at Lynchburg and Bedford. Stylistically and functionally Sonner Hall is more up-to-date, however, the older plan being covered in Colonial Revival dress with careful attention given to modern fireproofing throughout the design. The building's crowning feature is its dome which is visible for miles due to the school's commanding site.

The depression fell especially hard on Randolph-Macon Academy. Enrollment declined and debts mounted. In 1932 the board came close to closing the school but ultimately decided to keep it open. Ironically, the decision to preserve the school came from its debt. If the academy was closed, the debt of \$195,000 would come due taking a heavy toll on other schools within the Randolph-Macon System. To make matters worse the citizens of Front Royal had, according to the board's records, "repudiated their obligation (of 1927) and much vexatious litigation has followed in the attempt to collect." Ultimately, the school recovered some of its pledges and the debt was reduced.

In 1953, Randolph-Macon Academy witnessed the end of the Randolph-Macon System, as each school within the system became independent. Since that time the school has stood largely on its own resources, receiving additional financial support from the Virginia Methodist Conference.

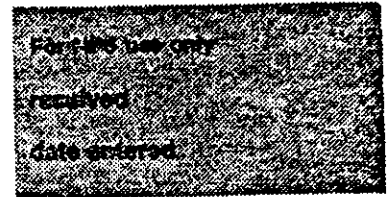
Sonner Hall continues to function as the principal building of the academy which remains the only military preparatory boarding school in the nation operating under the auspices of the United Methodist Church.

RCC

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SONNER HALL, Warren County, Virginia



Continuation sheet 4

Item number 8

Page 3

SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

Notes:

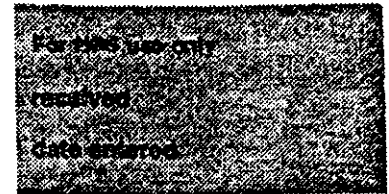
1. James Edward Scanlon, Randolph-Macon College: A Southern History (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), p. 200.  
Scanlon's book is the chief source from which the information in the Historical Background section was compiled.
2. Ibid., p. 199.
3. Ibid., p. 201.
4. Ibid., p. 203.
5. "Randolph-Macon Academy," catalogue, nd., VHLD archives.
6. C. L. Melton, "Military Instruction at Front Royal," nd., VHLD archives.
7. Scanlon, p. 340.



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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
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SONNER HALL, Warren County, Virginia



Continuation sheet 5

Item number 10

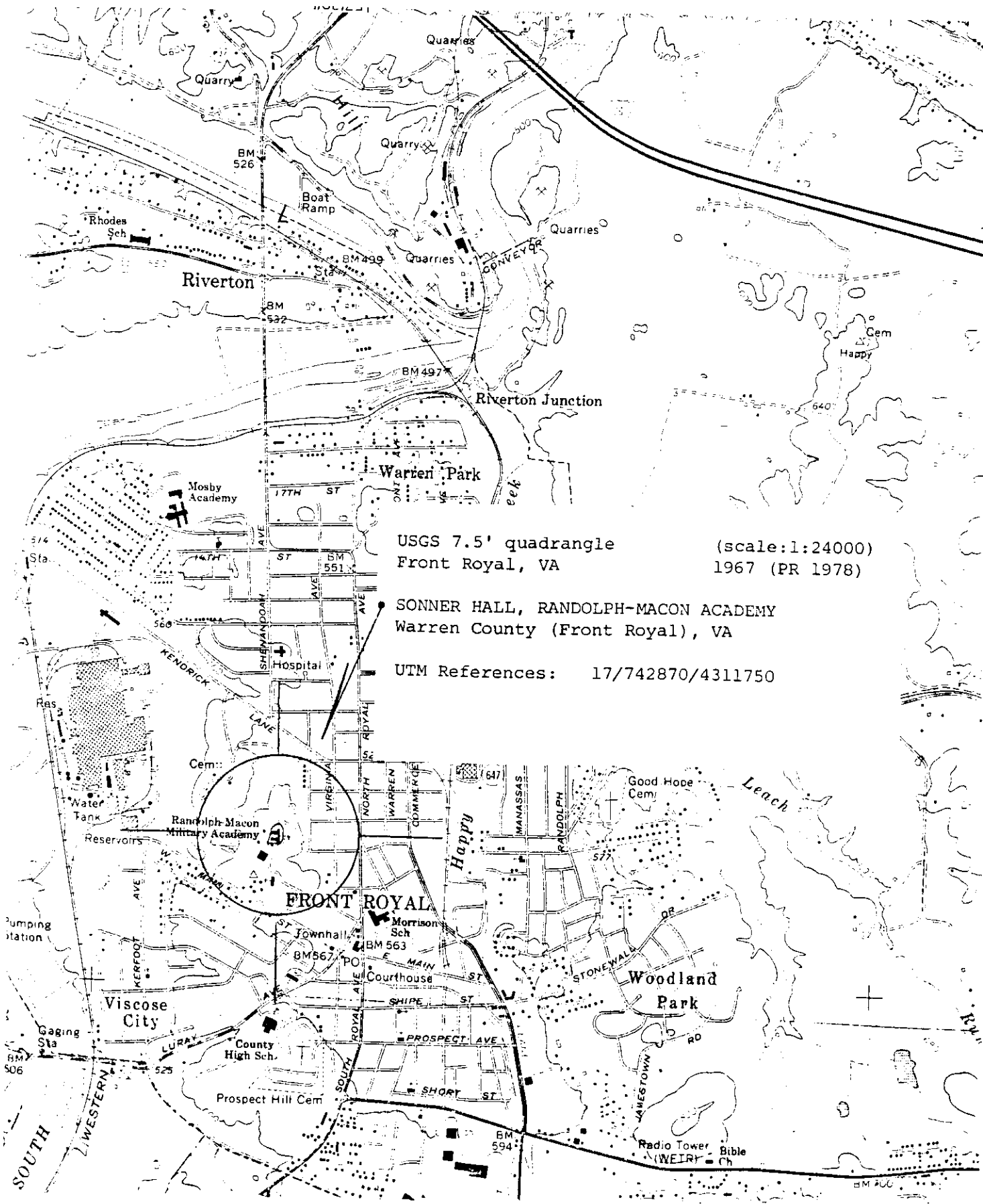
Page 1

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA — Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at a point at the SW corner of the intersection of 1st and 3rd streets; thence following E side of 3rd Street approx. 100' SW; thence following said side of said street approx. 100' SSW; thence continuing along E side of 3rd Street approx. 250' S; thence approx. 200' E to a point on W side of 1st Street; thence following W side of 1st Street approx. 100' NE; thence continuing along W side of 3rd Street approx. 150' N; thence following said side of said street approx. 100' NNW to point of origin.

Justification

The bounds have been drawn to include only Sonner Hall, the main building on the Randolph-Macon Academy campus and a small amount of land immediately surrounding the building.



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24000)  
 Front Royal, VA 1967 (PR 1978)

SONNER HALL, RANDOLPH-MACON ACADEMY  
 Warren County (Front Royal), VA

UTM References: 17/742870/4311750

**FRONT ROYAL**

Randolph-Macon  
 Military Academy

Woodland  
 Park

Viscose  
 City

Leach

County  
 High Sch.

Radio Tower  
 Bible Ch

SOUTH  
 L'WESTERN

BM 506