United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in 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.

1. Name of Property
   Historic name:  Ryan Hall Elementary School
   Other names/site number:  Shipman Colored School, VDHR # 062-5230
   Name of related multiple property listing:  N/A
   (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location
   Street & number:  71 Braddock Lane
   City or town:  Shipman  State:  VA  County:  Nelson
   Not For Publication:  NA  NA

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  ___ statewide  ___ local  X  local
   Applicable National Register Criteria:

   X  A  ___ B  X  C  ___ D

   Signature of certifying official/Title:  Virginia Department of Historic Resources
   Date:  
   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.)

Private: X

Public – Local

Public – State

Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

Building(s) X

District

Site

Structure

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

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<th>Noncontributions</th>
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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: **0**

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#### 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)
- EDUCATION/school

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**Current Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)
- WORK IN PROGRESS
Ryan Hall Elementary School
Name of Property

Nelson County, Virginia
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER School

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD; CONCRETE; METAL

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The former Ryan Hall Elementary School consists of two buildings on a two-acre lot on the outskirts of the small community of Shipman, Virginia. The larger and older of the two buildings is a one-story, six-bay, frame building with a side gabled roof topped by a badly deteriorated, simple belfry. It rests on a poured concrete foundation and has two frame vestibules with hipped roofs on the façade. When it was in use as a school it had three classrooms on the main floor and one basement room. The other building is also a one-story frame building with a side gabled roof. It has a four-bay façade with two large banks of multi-light windows and two doors sheltered by a gabled entry porch. This building originally housed two classrooms. The older of the two buildings was constructed ca. 1919 as a two-room school which was then expanded ca. 1925 with an addition on the north end of the building that included a single classroom above a full basement. The second building was added to the property in the early 1930s. African American children in grades Primer (called Kindergarten today) through seven from the community of Shipman and the surrounding area attended school in these buildings from ca. 1919 until ca. 1961. It was closed by the Nelson County School Board in 1961 or 1962 when several small African American elementary schools were consolidated in the building originally constructed for the Nelson County Training School, which is located just to the south of Ryan Hall Elementary School. This new consolidated school was also called Ryan Elementary School. The old Ryan Hall Elementary School was used by a private school called the Sunshine School for several years in the mid-1970s and was later used by a group affiliated with several local churches until the late 1980s before it was ultimately abandoned. It is now privately owned and plans for a restoration are underway.

Section 7 page 4
Narrative Description

Setting

The former Ryan Hall Elementary School is located on a two-acre parcel on what is today known as Braddock Lane, a narrow, two-lane, paved street. The school is situated on the east side of the road with the front of the buildings facing northwest, towards the road. The two buildings on the property are arranged side-by-side with about 35 feet between them, and they are located fairly close to the road with a setback of around 55 feet. There is no driveway or parking area on the property, which is fairly overgrown. Four or five mature trees line the road in front of the school; the rest of the property between the road and the school is open, while the area to the sides and rear of the buildings is thick with brambles, brush, and woods. Within the last couple of years a pergola consisting of four columns supporting a pergola roof was constructed between the two buildings. Neighboring parcels on either side of the school and across the street are occupied by single-family houses located on modest lots that date to the first or second quarter of the 20th century. To the south, down Braddock Lane, is the former location of the Nelson County Training School, the first formal high school in the county for African Americans, which was later used as an elementary school (also called Ryan Elementary School) and has now been converted into apartments. The community of Shipman is centered along Route 56 (also called James River Road) and its intersection with the railroad tracks, which is to the east from the school. Braddock Lane intersects with Oak Ridge Road (Route 650) about 300 feet north of the school and Oak Ridge Road terminates 200 feet beyond at James River Road (Route 56). The population of Shipman is significantly smaller today than it was back in 1920, but the linear, crossroads nature of the community hasn’t changed and the overall setting of the school—off the main road in a small subdivision of modest houses—remains the same. According to oral histories, the school parcel was mostly open when it was in use as a school, with room for the children to play ball and jump rope during recess. There used to be two outhouses behind the school, one for boys and one for girls, and the right to use water from a spring located just beyond the rear property line is mentioned in the original deed for the property; though no one remembers any structure associated with it. At some point a well was constructed on the property; it was located about 20 feet in front of the larger building and slightly off to the side and may have had a structure around it in the 1970s.
Building A (Contributing) – Three-room school building – Exterior

Building A is the larger and older of the two buildings on the property today. It is a one-story frame structure on a poured concrete foundation with a side gabled roof and it measures around 60 feet by 30 feet. A simple open bell tower consisting of a small gabled roof supported by four square wood posts is centered at the ridge of the main roof, while two exterior end narrow brick chimneys bookend the building (the one on the south end of the building collapsed in January 2022). (The original school bell is currently stored inside Building B.) The roughly symmetrical six-bay façade features two projecting hip-roofed frame vestibules. The walls of the building are clad with wooden weatherboards held in place with a combination of cut and wire nails, while the roof is pressed tin shingles. The eaves are boxed with bed molding. The foundation is poured concrete with large chunks of stone aggregate.

This building is in poor condition in January 2022 and most of the windows and door openings are boarded up. It appears that the last time that the building was in use there were three exterior doors on the front of the building – one double-leaf opening in the northern-most vestibule (with a pair of five-panel wooden doors still in place) and two boarded doorways (missing their doors) in the two bays in between the two projecting vestibules. These two doorways open onto a concrete stoop that extends in between the two vestibules and is accessed via concrete steps. The southern-most vestibule has a large window opening (boarded) on the front. The side walls of both projecting vestibules have small 6/6 wooden windows (boarded) and the end bays of the façade each hold a pair of large 6/6 double-hung wooden windows (mostly boarded). Beneath the northern-most end bay window there is a concrete window well excavated around a large window opening (window now missing) in the concrete foundation.
The south side elevation of Building A features two 6/6 double-hung wooden windows flanking an exterior brick stove flue (this chimney collapsed in January 2022). The north side elevation is identical, though both windows on the north side are presently boarded over on the exterior and the chimney is still standing (though leaning away from the wall). There are also two concrete window wells excavated on the north side of the building, each located beneath one of the windows on the main floor. The basement window sash that these window wells accommodated are now missing but the openings remain.

The rear elevation of the building features a pair of large, 6/6 double-hung wooden windows in each of the end bays and the remnants of a bank of three or four of the same window sash in the center bay. The center bay is compromised by a large gash in the wall and roof that has been partially patched with plywood on the interior. There is a vertical board seam running from foundation to eaves visible on the exterior wall in between the north end bay and the center bank of windows that is clear evidence that this building was constructed in two phases. There are three openings in the foundation on the back of the building. One is located between the south end bay and the center bay. It is an intentional gap in the foundation wall that extends from ground level to the sill above and is large enough for a person to crawl through. The other openings in the foundation on the rear elevation are a full-sized door opening and a large window opening; both are located beneath the north end of the building. As with the other window openings in the foundation, this one is protected by a concrete window well and the door opening is accessed via concrete steps leading down from ground level. There was an exterior brick chimney on this elevation that served the coal-fired furnace in the crawlspace and may have served a stove in the central classroom. It was located in the area that is now heavily damaged (see plan view below).
Building A was constructed in two major phases. Constructed ca. 1919, the southern two-thirds of the building represent the original two-room school. The original north end wall of this two-room school is marked on the exterior of the front and rear walls of the building by a vertical board (the one on the front wall of the school is located inside the north vestibule and is therefore not visible from the outside of the school) and on the roof by a subtle ridge. The pressed tin shingles on the roof also have a slightly different design on the two different sections of the building. Ca. 1925 a one-room addition above a full basement was added to the north end of the original building and expanded the school to three classrooms. Architectural investigations by Historic Preservation Architect Joseph Dye Lahendro have further illuminated the evolution of the façade. The southern vestibule was constructed at the same time as the original two-room school building and served as the primary entrance. It was centered on the original façade and probably had double doors on the exterior with a single door leading from the vestibule into each classroom. Interestingly enough, the northern vestibule does not seem to have been constructed at the same time as the north addition (painted clapboards on the exterior of the addition but underneath the roof structure of the vestibule suggest that the area was originally exposed and later covered by the addition of the vestibule). Given the symmetry of the façade and the similar construction, however, it is reasonable to suspect that the north vestibule was added not too long after the addition was complete. With both vestibules in place, the school had two entrances – the south vestibule had doors that opened into the south classroom and the center classroom while the north vestibule led into the north classroom. In between the vestibules the remnants of surviving framing suggest that there was a pair of windows. The two door openings that now exist in between the vestibules, and the associated concrete stoop, appear to date to the post-1965 period, as the concrete stoop covers the fresh air intake for the coal-fired furnace that provided central heat to the building.
Building B (Contributing) – Two-room school building – Exterior

Building B is located south of Building A and arranged end-to-end on the same axis. It is a one-story frame building with a side gabled roof, rests on a concrete block foundation, and measures around 45 feet by 20 feet. The exterior walls are clad with wooden weatherboards and the roof is standing seam metal. Eaves are open with exposed rafter tails. There is a single interior brick chimney centered at the ridge of the roof. The façade is four bays wide with two doors located in the center two bays. The doors open onto a concrete stoop and are sheltered by a gabled entry porch with plain square posts and a sunburst design in the gable field. There are two large banks of five 9/9 double-hung wooden windows in the end bays. These are the only windows in the building; the side elevations are blank. The rear elevation has an unusual small door located high up at the top of the wall but no windows. The use of the small five-panel wooden door, which required the trimming of two rafter tails to allow it to swing open, is unknown at this time. There is also an opening in the concrete block foundation on the rear elevation that permits access to a crawl space.

Building A – Interior

The ca. 1919 original two-room school is represented today by the southern two-thirds of the building, including the center classroom and the southern classroom, while the ca. 1925 addition is represented by the northern classroom and the basement beneath it. The junction between these two sections of the building on the interior is marked by a seam in the flooring and by a large cased opening that used to represent a partition wall. Therefore, for most of the time that this building was in use as a school it consisted of three classrooms.
In January 2022, access to the interior of the main floor is gained through one of the two boarded up doorways on the front of the building. These two doorways open into what was the center classroom and is now a single large room that extends from the front to the back wall of the building, and also extends all the way to the north end wall (to the left when you are standing in the doorway). There is a very large cased opening that divides this large space roughly in half from front wall to back wall and this marks the location of an earlier partition wall and of the original north end wall of the two-room school. To the right when you walk in one of the center doorways is another matching large cased opening that was later infilled with 2x4 studs and sheetrock to create a solid wall. There is a very large six-panel wooden door reused in this wall that is believed to be one of the original doors from the school. Beyond this non-historic wall is a large classroom. There are also the original doorways from the vestibules opening into these classrooms, but the south vestibule was partitioned into two closets or cloak rooms and the exterior doors removed (probably when the later doors located in between the vestibules were added) and the north vestibule was converted into a closet and bathroom and its remaining original pair of exterior doors was nailed shut and made inoperable.

The center classroom, where you enter today, has a beadboard ceiling and tongue-and-groove floorboards, all running parallel to the ridge of the roof. Both flooring and ceiling boards are two inches wide. A small patch in the ceiling up against the former north end wall/current cased opening marks the former location of a stovepipe that connected to a brick chimney above the ceiling. The front and back walls of this center classroom have been seriously damaged and are covered with a combination of sheetrock and plywood. The back wall would have been dominated by a large bank of four windows that would have illuminated the space; in January 2022 it is dominated by a large hole that is patched with 2x4s and plywood.
Ryan Hall Elementary School
Name of Property

The southern classroom retains more original material than the center room. While the existing partition wall isn’t historic, the ghosts of the original partition wall (in the same location as the existing) are visible on the floorboards. The partition walls extended from the front and back walls of the school approximately 7 feet. Large sliding doors could have been shut to complete a solid wall between the two classrooms or opened to connect them into one large space (two of these sliding doors remain in the building – one is reused in the existing non-historic partition wall while the other is stored in the building). Like the center room, this classroom has a beadboard ceiling and tongue and groove floorboards; it also retains beadboard on the front, rear, and south walls of the room. The width of the beadboard and flooring matches that found in the center classroom. There are surviving 6/6 double-hung wooden windows (partially boarded) on the front, rear, and south end walls of this room. There is an early five-panel wooden door opening into this room from the southern-most vestibule. This classroom also retains a blackboard on the front wall of the building and original molded trim on the windows and doors with some bullseye corner blocks.

There is also evidence of several different sources of heat in this room. Like in the center classroom, there is evidence that the original two-room school had brick interior end chimneys that extended from above the ceiling through the roof of the building; stovepipes from woodstoves that would have been centered on the end walls would have extended through the ceiling to tie into these chimneys. The brick stack above the south classroom survives above the ceiling and below the roofline (visible from the attic only). Two U-shaped iron hangers suspended between two ceiling joists carry the load of the brick stack; this construction technique was illustrated in the 1915 publication “The Negro Rural School and It’s Relation to the Community” by The Extension Department of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. The only evidence of this arrangement in the classroom today is a square metal plate that patches the hole in the ceiling. When the north classroom was added ca. 1925, the heating system had to be revamped. The interior chimneys and woodstoves were removed and exterior brick flues were
added that served both stand-alone stoves (wood or coal, the fuel is unknown) and a coal-fired furnace that was located in the crawlspace. Patches in the floor represent the former location of heating vents.

![Diagram of stove hanging from ceiling]

*Detail drawing from 1915 publication, “The Negro Rural School and It’s Relation to the Community,” The Extension Department of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute.*

The northern classroom, which was added ca. 1925, has similar finishes to the other two rooms, but there are notable differences. The flooring in the northern classroom runs perpendicular to the ridge of the roof and is slightly wider – at 3 inches – than that found in the rest of the building. The walls are also covered with beadboard but the boards are slightly narrower than what is found in the other classrooms at 1¼ inches and the bead is more pronounced. This room also had a beadboard ceiling but that has recently been removed. Like the southern classroom, this room was illuminated by paired windows on the front wall and paired windows on the rear wall while two single windows flanked the stove on the north end wall. A five-panel door leads from the northern-most vestibule into this room. This vestibule retains an original pair of five-panel wooden exterior doors on the front of the building and was clearly intended as an entry vestibule when it was constructed. At a later date it was converted into a closet and a hanging bar was erected across the space and the doors were fixed shut. Interestingly, the finishes in this northern classroom show a slightly higher quality of workmanship than what is exhibited in the other two rooms. The window and door trim is molded with bullseye corner blocks and there is a built-in bookcase with glass doors in one corner of the room, along with two large but shallow closets or tall cabinets. These closets or cabinets have neither shelves nor rods nor hooks nor evidence thereof, and they are less than 12 inches deep so their use is unclear at this time. When it was originally constructed, this classroom was connected via an interior stair in the southeast corner of the room to a basement room. The stair itself is now gone, but its former location is easily discerned by an L-shaped patch in the floor boards. But interestingly, this patch is not a later alteration. There are hinges on one side of the patch and the remnants of a pull ring on the opposite side suggesting that the stair opening was covered by an operable hatch. The lack of any evidence of a railing around the stair suggests that this hatch was an original feature.
Ryan Hall Elementary School
Name of Property

Nelson County, Virginia
County and State


In January 2022, the basement room is accessible only via an exterior doorway on the back wall of the foundation. Thanks to window openings within window wells on the front, back, and north side of the room, this basement room is surprisingly well lit. All the window sash and frames are now gone, but it appears that the windows on the front and rear walls were paired double-hung sash, while there are two openings that are the right size for single double-hung windows on the north side of the room. Painted “ghosts” on the walls and visible framing in the ceiling above provide evidence for the interior dog-leg stair that used to descend in the southeast corner of the room. The walls and floor of this room are concrete, but the ceiling is white beadboard. There is evidence of a stovepipe hole on the north end wall between the two windows suggesting that the room originally had a heat source. This full basement room is only located beneath the north addition to the building; a concrete wall divides it from the crawlspace beneath the original part of the building. This concrete partition wall is vertically aligned beneath what was the north end wall of the original school building. There are two additional patched round holes in this concrete partition wall, along with a patched rectangular opening high up on the wall; the round openings at least appear to be for duct work related to the central heating system. Some of the beadboard ceiling in this space was falling down at the time of survey in January 2022 and writing was visible on the underside of some of the floorboards above and on a couple of first floor joists overhead - “S.C. Freeman Shipman” was written in cursive letters on several boards in the small area exposed at the time of survey. (Research has revealed that S.C. Freeman was a member of the Nelson County School Board who represented the Lovingston District (of which Shipman was a part) from 1922-1925.)
Beneath the other two-thirds of the building is a crawl space. Access to this space is gained via an intentional gap in the foundation on the back wall of the building. An area just inside the foundation is dug out to a depth of around four feet and an old furnace is located in this space. The rest of the crawl space is much shallower with only about two feet of clearance between the dirt and the first floor joists. There are several foundation piers in the interior of the space, both wood and concrete.

As of January 2022, the school has been vacant for over 40 years and is in poor condition. Window sash are broken or missing, exterior doors are missing, there is a large gash open in the back wall, and the framing is riddled with termite damage. The floor in the north vestibule has collapsed and there are several other areas of flooring that are unsound. The building is partially used for storage.
Building B – Interior

The interior of Building B has been more substantially altered than Building A. This building, which originally housed two classrooms, has been converted into a dwelling. The footprint of the northern classroom remains intact but the other one has been subdivided into a kitchen, bedroom, and bathroom. The original partition wall between the two classrooms remains; there is a stovepipe hole visible in this wall in the north classroom. Wood floors remain (now painted), while the walls and ceiling have been covered with sheetrock. There is one surviving blackboard on the wall in what was the south classroom. The original large banks of windows remain intact and flood the interior with light. The peculiar small door visible on the exterior of the rear wall is visible in the interior of the north classroom as a patched opening up near the ceiling. It would only be accessible with a ladder or stair. A former student interviewed for this project remembered the door but could only chuckle when asked what it was used for - “maybe another exit,” he said.¹

Pergola (Noncontributing)

An open-sided pergola was constructed in the space between the two school buildings within the last five years. It consists of four Tuscan columns supporting an open wooden pergola roof.

Integrity Statement

Ryan Hall Elementary School has excellent integrity of location, design, setting, materials, feeling, workmanship, and association. The school remains on its original site with the original side-by-side relationship of the two buildings intact. The setting is also unaltered from ca. 1961 when the school was last in use – the surrounding houses all date to the first half of the 20th century and the two-acre parcel on which the school sits is overgrown but undeveloped. The physical condition of the oldest school building may be fair to poor, but the physical integrity of
design, materials, and workmanship is quite high. The original design of the school building with regards to both its exterior details and its interior plan, and how it evolved and grew over time, is clearly legible, and the building retains copious historic material, from weatherboard siding and tin shingle roofing to beadboard walls and multi-pane windows. The integrity of workmanship is evident in the built-in bookcases and cabinets and the moldings around the windows and at the cornice. All of these elements together combine to contribute to the integrity of feeling – standing in the middle of a former classroom on a chilly day a visitor can almost smell the smoke from the fires in the stove and hear the footsteps of children on the wood floor. The school retains a strong integrity of association with the history of African American education in Nelson County as it educated countless numbers of Black children during over 40 years of use.
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 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
Ryan Hall Elementary School
Name of Property

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION
ETHNIC HERITAGE: AFRICAN AMERICAN
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
ca. 1919 – ca. 1961

Significant Dates
ca. 1919
ca. 1925
ca. 1930

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

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown
Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Shipman Colored School was built in late 1919 or early 1920 thanks in part to the “donations and advice” of Mary T. Ryan, second wife of prominent financier and philanthropist Thomas Fortune Ryan, who had a substantial estate, called Oak Ridge, a couple of miles away. It was expanded within the next five years with two additional classrooms, one in a new basement, due to additional financial support from the Ryans, and when Mr. Ryan died in 1928 the school was renamed Ryan Hall (later Ryan Hall Elementary School). The school grew again in the 1930s with the construction of a new two-room building beside the original school. By the time this second building was complete, the school had five classrooms, plus the basement room, and employed five teachers. For 40 years it educated African American children from the Shipman area of Nelson County in grades Primer (today’s Kindergarten) through 7th grade. Education in Nelson County was racially segregated and dramatically unequal from the earliest days of free public education in the 1870s all the way through the 1960s. Small graded schools like Ryan Hall that accommodated children through the 7th grade – frame or log buildings with only a few classrooms and no indoor plumbing – were the norm for African American education in the County until 1960. Prior to the construction of Nelson County Training School in 1941, in fact, they were the only schools for African Americans in the County. Ryan Hall Elementary School is eligible at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of Education and Ethnic Heritage: African American; and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture with a period of significance of ca. 1919-ca. 1961. The period of significance begins with the construction of the school in late 1919 or early 1920 and concludes when the school was closed by the Nelson County School Board. The school is a rare surviving example of the type of school attended by all African American children in Nelson County during the first half of the 20th century, and is a tangible reminder of the segregated educational system that united the Black community in their efforts to overcome it.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

Justification of Significance: Criterion A

Ryan Hall Elementary School is eligible under Criterion A in the areas of Education and Ethnic History: African American as an example of a segregated Black elementary school that operated from ca. 1919-ca. 1961. As an intact example of the type of small two- and three-room frame school buildings that served the African American population of Nelson County throughout the segregated era, this property is an important reminder of the trajectory of Black education in the county and of the tremendous efforts of the post-slavery population to improve the opportunities available to their children. Within the Black community, education was always held up by church and community leaders, and parents alike, as the path to a better future, and the advocacy that finally led to the full integration of county schools in 1969 was incubated in the many small graded schools, like Ryan Hall, sprinkled throughout the mountains along twisting roads. The
schools, in turn, nurtured the communities, and former students recall the schools, and the common cause of education advocacy, as a force that drew the community together. The Black teachers that taught at these schools were sometimes the first examples that children had of a Black person with a “professional” career; they inspired their students and encouraged them to reach for more before the students even understood that more was possible.

In many ways, Ryan Hall was a typical example of the many school buildings that served the Black community in the early 20th century – two modest frame buildings housing five classrooms and eighth grades, no indoor plumbing, stoves for heat – and it may be the most intact survivor out of a total population of over 25 schools that once existed in the county. There are only a couple of other two- and three-room graded schools rumored to still exist in Nelson County. The Pine Hill School reportedly still exists buried within the building currently housing Pine Hill Baptist Church, though there is nothing recognizable about it; a Black school in Arrington still stands converted into a house; there is a possible one-room Black school abandoned in the woods off of Union Hill Road; and two others are rumored to still be in use by local churches as social halls – one at St. Joy Baptist Church and one at Locust Grove. None of these buildings have been recorded or documented.

**Justification of Significance: Criterion C**

Ryan Hall Elementary School is eligible for listing under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an example of a segregated Black elementary school that evolved physically to meet a growing demand for education. The original two-room building was expanded with an addition housing another classroom and a useable basement within the first six years of its operation, and then expanded again with a separate building housing two more classrooms within the next ten years. In many ways it was typical of the more than 25 graded school buildings built for African Americans in Nelson County during the first half of the 20th century – frame construction, concrete foundation, gable roof with end chimneys, beadboard walls and ceilings, large sliding doors in between classrooms to make the interior space flexible, large multi-paned windows, often paired or grouped, to maximize natural light, minimal decorative details, wood or coal stoves for heat, no indoor plumbing. Many of these construction details, including the hanging chimney stacks used on the original two-room building, were widely publicized in illustrated pamphlets published by the Extension Department of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in the late 1910s and 1920s as part of the Rosenwald Fund’s school building initiative. Many of the two- and three-room Black schools that survive across Virginia were financially supported by the Rosenwald Fund and are often referred to as Rosenwald Schools. But Nelson County never pursued any financial support for the construction of Black schools from the Rosenwald Fund and records show that there were zero schools funded by the Rosenwald program in Nelson County. While Ryan Hall isn’t a Rosenwald School, the use of the hanging chimney stack detail in the original two-room building suggests that whoever built the school was familiar with the construction guidance provided by the Rosenwald Fund. Ryan Hall is actually unusual as an example of a segregated Black school from the early 20th century in Virginia that wasn’t supported by Rosenwald funding. The two-building plan used at Ryan Hall doesn’t seem to be unique in the County (there was at least one other Black school that had a
similar plan - Midway Mills), and it reflects the growing school population over the first two
decades of the school’s operation. The inclusion of a basement at Ryan Hall, however, is
unusual. The fact that the basement had large windows protected by deep, concrete window
wells, in addition to both an exterior entrance and an interior stair to the first floor, suggests that
it was always intended to be used as educational space. Basements were never included in any of
the school plans published by the Rosenwald Fund and it is an extremely unusual detail to see in
a two- or three-room graded school building.

History of the Community of Shipman

Nelson County, Virginia is a rural, mountainous county located on the east slope of the Blue
Ridge mountains in between the larger cities of Charlottesville, to the north, and Lynchburg, to
the south. Agriculture, particularly apple orchards, and the timber industry formed the backbone
of the County’s economy in the early 20th century. The community of Shipman traces its roots
back to 1859 when the Southern Railway extended a line south to Lynchburg and established a
depot at the location where the railroad crossed an east-west wagon road (known today as James
River Road/Rt. 56). At the time, this depot was called Nelson Station. A small community grew
up around this intersection that was centered on the commercial opportunities connected to the
railroad – both the shipping of agricultural materials as well as businesses that catered to the
railroad passengers. The name of the community was changed to Montreal in the late 19th
century, changed again to Oak Ridge in the first decade of the 20th century, and finally became
known as Shipman by 1910.2 Most residents of the community in the early 20th century made a
living tied either to the land – farming, working in an apple orchard, or working in the lumber
industry – or they were employed by the railroad.

In 1901 Thomas Fortune Ryan, a Nelson County-born Wall Street business tycoon, American
Tobacco Company owner, and philanthropist, purchased an old plantation known as Oak Ridge
that was located just southwest of the Shipman community. Ryan renovated the main house and
constructed an elaborate estate at Oak Ridge that employed many local Nelson County residents,
both from Shipman and beyond. By the time Ryan died in 1928, he owned more than 8,700 acres
in Nelson County, including 4,791 that made up the Oak Ridge estate; he was the largest
landowner in the county.3 His second wife, Mary Townsend Nicoll Lord Cuyer Ryan, remained
at Oak Ridge following Thomas Fortune Ryan’s death until her own death in 1937. Under the
Ryan’s ownership, Oak Ridge resembled a small village with 40 separate job titles - including
the predictable cook, maid, and gardener, and the more unexpected bee keeper, stallion man, and
whitewasher – and an on-site commissary that operated like a company store.4 In 1906, a
newspaper reported that 25 of the workers at Oak Ridge lived on the estate while an additional
25 lived in surrounding communities (including Shipman). Surviving payroll records from 1905-
1909 document 109 employees in 1905 and 314 in 1909. The racial breakdown of employees
isn’t clear from the surviving records, though it is estimated that at least 2/3 were white.5 For the
residents of the Shipman area, the return of Thomas Fortune Ryan provided an unprecedented
employment opportunity right in their own backyard.
Ryan Hall Elementary School

Ryan’s financial successes and his philanthropy during his lifetime are both well-known; his extreme wealth was balanced by a strong Catholic faith and the idea that he owned a debt to God for his own blessings. In a letter dated December 11, 1920 to Patrick Cardinal Hayes, Thomas Fortune Ryan lays out his philosophy on philanthropy:

I have in the course of my life built and established one Cathedral (that of Richmond) besides some eighty other churches, schools and hospitals…All these were offerings to Almighty God to be used by the Church authorities in their absolute discretion in whatever they considered would be most conductive to His glory and the salvation of souls. I ask no personal credit whatever for them. The cost of them was but a small proportion of the fortune with which He has blessed me.6

Ryan and his first wife, Ida Barry Ryan, contributed millions of dollars towards various church projects – a 1907 newspaper article stated that Ida Ryan had spent five million dollars building schools, hospitals, and churches in Virginia alone, but also contributed to projects in other states including New York, Arizona, New Mexico, and Indian Territory. Unlike his second wife, Ida Ryan never spent much time at Oak Ridge and considered New York her home.7 Following Ida’s death in 1917, Thomas Fortune Ryan wed Mary a mere 10 days later in Charlottesville and the two of them spent many months at home at Oak Ridge. Also following Ida’s death, Ryan’s philanthropy took a more secular cast, focusing less on the Catholic Church and more on secular concerns.8

While many of the schools funded by Thomas and Ida Ryan were associated with the Catholic Church, in some cases the schools had no religious affiliation. In 1909, Ryan paid for the construction of a two-room school to serve white children on his Oak Ridge estate, named Bellevue School, and donated it to the Nelson County School Board.9 And, between 1917 and 1925, the Ryans were instrumental in the construction of the building originally called Shipman Colored School just a few miles away from their Oak Ridge estate.

Bellevue School (White), built at Oak Ridge by Thomas F. Ryan and donated to the Nelson County School Board. Image published in the Times-Dispatch, Richmond, October 10, 1909.
Prior to the Civil War, the education of white children in Nelson County took a variety of forms depending on the means of their families—options included private tutors, private academies, and “pauper schools.” There was, of course, no formal education for Black children. Following the Underwood Constitution in 1869, a system of free public education, segregated by race, was established and an 1871 report from the Nelson County Superintendent of Schools provides a snapshot of the county’s public school system at the very beginning. The county had a total population of 13,898 (7,586 white and 6,312 Black) and was divided into three school districts, each with its own school board. There were a total of 40 public schools in the county in 1871 serving 567 white students and 342 Black students. Patrick H. Cabell, the first superintendent of schools for Nelson County, wrote in an 1872 annual report, “The colored people continue to manifest a great desire for education…Their idea of an education is to be able to read and write, and in their sacrifices in order to be able to send their children to school, they set an example most worthy to be imitated by many of our white population. I have been able to detect no material difference in the capacity of the two classes to learn….The colored people show a most commendable spirit in their desire for proper deportment in their schools…” While the Black community in 1872 may have championed schools for their children, the opportunities for white and Black students in Nelson County would remain uneven for nearly 100 years.

By 1880, the number of white schools more than doubled the number of Black schools (49 vs. 23) and the percent of Black children in daily attendance at school consistently lagged behind that of whites (Greenburg, 34). The total number of schools in the county continued to grow, albeit unevenly, and by 1904 there were 94 public schools in Nelson County employing 72 white teachers and 27 Black teachers. Most of the schools were small, one-room affairs; an 1890 report listed 84 school buildings operated by the school system – 18 were frame construction while 66 were log buildings, and only five had outhouses and only 20 were noted as having “good furniture”. By 1900, there was concern statewide with the sheer number of small one-room schools being operated by the local districts. Especially in rural counties like Nelson, transportation challenges made it extremely difficult for local officials to provide adequate supervision and support to the many small schools in their charge, and the operation of many small schools was seen as fiscally inefficient; the calls for school consolidation began. The first step was to consolidate the management and oversight of the school system. Since 1872, Nelson County had contained three, then four, separate school districts, each with its own school board. The growing cry from the state’s Department of Education was to abolish the district system of schools management and shift to a county unit approach, which would unify conditions, length of school terms, teacher salaries, etc. across an entire county. In Nelson County, this system became effective in September 1922 and the four distinct school districts were consolidated beneath a single county school board.

Statistics from around 1920 paint a picture of a booming rural county dominated by apples and tobacco – by 1919, 154,655 barrels of apples were harvested, 92% of which were shipped out of the county, and by 1929, 382 commercial apple orchards were located in Nelson County. By 1927 the county produced two million pounds of tobacco, about the same level of production as...
Ryan Hall Elementary School
Name of Property

Nelson County, Virginia
County and State

before the Civil War. A comparison of census data suggests that the population of 17,277 people living in Nelson County in 1920 represented the population apex; it declined in numbers from that point forward. Most county historians agree that the county reached its economic highpoint between 1910 and 1929. During the 1922-23 school year, the county reported a total school age population of 5,088 – 3,346 white students and 1,742 Black. The percent of school-age Black children attending school continued to lag behind that of whites – 44% vs 60%. There were 92 school buildings in the county in 1922-23, 66 for whites and 26 for Blacks (including Shipman Colored School). An overwhelming majority of these schools, including all of the Black schools, had only one or two rooms – 78 out of 92. Black schools were, on average, more crowded than white schools with more students per building, and the student to teacher ratio in Black schools was much higher – of 145 total teachers employed in those 92 schools, only 32 were Black.

In his thesis, Heywood Greenberg offers descriptions of two Black schools from the late 1910s-early 1920s, based on oral histories of former students. The Beech Grove School is described as a one-room school with an iron stove in the middle of the room. Students were responsible for splitting wood for the stove, wood that their parents had to donate. A nearby spring provided drinking water, while two outhouses with no pits were often toppled by a strong wind. Greenburg also provides the detailed account of Sam Rose, a Black man who entered Blue Gravel School in Piney River in 1919. He described his school as a one-story, two-room, frame building with a wood stove in each classroom. He recalls that the classrooms were crowded and benches were arranged in rows with a teacher’s desk at the front of the classroom. Students had tablets to write on and there were blackboards on the walls; their lessons were largely based on memorization and recitation and students had to buy their own textbooks. Rose remembered playing baseball on the school grounds during recess. According to his account, there were no buses serving his school until the 1930s, so all children had to walk to school. He also recalled that parents built an outhouse at the school “after he had been in school awhile,” before that “we went in the woods.” Some years the school never opened because there was no teacher.

In contrast, a 1938 dissertation by Mary Elizabeth Hankla, “The Holding Power of the Four Consolidated High Schools in Nelson County, Virginia” (quoted in Greenberg), provides a detailed description of the facilities provided for the four white high schools in the county in the late 1930s (at the time there were zero high schools for blacks in Nelson County). Three of the four white high schools were one-story brick buildings with auditoriums, indoor toilets, an office for the principal, libraries, laboratories, central heat, and drinking fountains.

Clearly then, the pattern in Nelson County followed that seen across the southern states in the early 20th century – education was racially segregated and dramatically unequal. The School Board minutes utilized in Greenberg’s thesis reveal that when they were pressed to improve the physical facilities of Black schools, the School Board often demanded that the local Black residents also contribute to the effort. In August 1923, they agreed to consolidate two schools for black children at Union Springs and Elmington into a new two-room school “provided the patrons will contribute as much as $400.00 in cash, labor, and materials.” Interestingly, there is no evidence that the Nelson County School Board ever considered tapping into a well-known
outside source to support Black schools – the Julius Rosenwald Fund. A collaboration between the wealthy CEO of Sears, Roebuck and Company, Julius Rosenwald, and Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee Institute, the Rosenwald Fund school building program funded thousands of schools for Black children across the south between 1917 and 1932. The program provided a portion of the funding and architectural plans for the school buildings on the condition that the local communities would also provide funding and operating costs for the schools. Local Black communities often had to contribute cash, labor, or land towards the construction of the schools, and the land and the school buildings constructed thereon became the property, and the responsibility, of the local school boards. The meticulous records maintained by the fund record the cost of each school building and the breakdown of contributions, and, in many cases, there is even a photo of the recently completed school. There is no evidence in the records of the Rosenwald Fund that they funded any schools in Nelson County, and Mr. Greenburg’s research in the school board minutes failed to uncover any evidence that it was ever discussed.

Nationwide, school consolidation efforts gained steam in the 1920s, and by 1930 the one-room schoolhouse was in decline. In Nelson County in the early 1930s, however, 2/3 of the 67 school buildings were only one room, while the rest were two- and three-room models. Road improvements of the 1930s, in combination with the increased use of early school buses, did result in school consolidation even in Nelson County, however, and the total number of school buildings declined between 1920 and 1940 from 105 in 1920 to 56 in 1940. The number of black schools, however, remained steady at 26 in 1923 and 27 in 1941, a function of school consolidation efforts that prioritized building larger new schools for white students. The statistics of the 1929-1930 Annual Report reflect the continued inequality between white and black education during this time – from the length of the school term to teachers’ salaries to the per capita cost of education to the value of school property, black education lagged behind that offered to white students.

Little changed over the next 10 years in school conditions, but Black parents were growing increasingly dissatisfied with the County’s efforts to educate their children. The biggest need, as the parents saw it, was for a Black high school. Up until 1941, there was no opportunity for Black students in Nelson County to continue with their education past the 7th grade. In March 1941, the school board agreed to build a public high school for Blacks after a delegation of Black citizens appeared before them and asked them to comply with the recent Supreme Court decision in the case of Alston vs. the School Board of Norfolk. (The Alston case argued that paying Black teachers less than their white counterparts, solely on the basis of race, violated the 14th Amendment. The Supreme Court agreed and issued a judgement that required the equalization of teachers’ salaries; the case became the basis for equalization lawsuits across the South.) The Nelson County School Board agreed to build a four-room high school to cost no more than $8,000 provided that the site for the building was donated by the Black citizens. In the same meeting, the Board also agreed to equalize the salaries of white and Black teachers. The new high school was called Nelson County Training School and was a one-story, four-room cinderblock building located just down the street from Ryan Hall Elementary School. One
member of the community recalled that all the Black communities of Nelson held many fundraising events to raise money to go toward building the new high school.  

The Training School must have been overcrowded almost immediately, as it received a two-room addition as early as 1947, and this theme of overcrowding in the Black schools was a prominent one in the 1950s. Superintendent Carter described enrollment at the one- and two-room Black elementary schools as “increasing to the bursting point” in the mid-1950s and in August 1958 a group of Black citizens organized themselves as “The United Civic Club” to demand better schools for their children; this group was the forerunner of the Nelson County branch of the NAACP. In spite of the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, which found that state laws establishing racial segregation in public education were unconstitutional, the Nelson County School Board minutes document in August 1955 their intention to maintain segregated schools. According to Greenberg’s research, there is no further mention of integration between 1955 and August 1964; the Board focused instead on building what are often called “equalization schools” - new schools for Black students that were more physically similar to the facilities for white students in an effort to justify maintaining a “separate but equal” school system. In 1960, the School Board opened Nelson Memorial High School, a Black high school that was intended to be equal to the white Nelson County High School, and transferred all high school students out of Nelson County Training School. At the same time, they closed all of the remaining small two- and three-room Black elementary schools across the county and consolidated them at the old Training School, which they had expanded with another three-room addition in 1956, and renamed Ryan Elementary School. In August 1964, the School Board received a letter and petition from Mrs. Cecile L. Epps, president of the Nelson County branch of the NAACP, demanding that they end segregation. In 1968, the Board finally integrated Nelson County High School and converted Nelson Memorial to an integrated junior high; it wasn’t until September 1969 that all Nelson County schools were finally fully integrated.

**History of Shipman Colored School/Ryan Hall Elementary School**

On June 5, 1920, Mayme S. Wilson and her husband William R. Wilson sold to the Trustees of Shipman Colored School for $1 a two-acre parcel of land described as being “Lot No. Three (3) located on Juliette Street, in Rosemont Subdivision, to Shipman, containing two acres of land, more or less.” The deed goes on to include this interesting provision:

“...It is further covenanted and expressly agreed by all the parties of the first part and all the parties of the second part, trustees and those for whom they legally act, that Mrs. Mary T. Ryan, of Oak Ridge, Virginia, and New York City, N.Y. whose generous donations and advice made the erection of a school building and the establishment of a graded school a fact, be and is hereby empowered to change or have changed upon her, the said Mary T. Ryan’s advice, the whole or any part of the said Trustee Board, herein provided and substitute or have substituted in their places or his place, any person or persons whom the said Mrs. Mary T. Ryan shall deem or think fit and suitable.”
Local history has always held that Thomas Fortune Ryan donated the land on which the school sits, funded the construction of the school, and then leased the completed school to the Nelson County school board. The actual deed for the property casts doubt on this story, however. Based on the language in the deed, it appears that the school may have already been standing in 1920 when the deed for the property is transferred — “made the erection of a school building and the establishment of a graded school a fact.” Because Mary T. Ryan didn’t marry Thomas Fortune Ryan until October 1917, she didn’t become Mary Ryan or begin spending time at Oak Ridge until after that point. A portion of the plat for the Rosemont subdivision is reproduced in Deed Book 45, Page 18 along with a deed for the transfer of Lots 4 and 5 (these are the adjoining parcels adjacent to the school parcel on the north) from Mamie Snyder Wilson (although it appears to be the same person, the name Mayme/Mamie is spelled differently in the two deeds) and William R. Wilson to William and Charlotte Cox; this deed is dated August 15, 1919 and the plat is dated December 26th, 1918. The school is not shown on the plat, nor is it mentioned in the deed for Lots 4 and 5, and if the school was standing in 1918 or 1919 it seems likely that it would have been illustrated on the map or referred to in the deed as a reference point — instead the deed describes the property as being “near Shipman Depot.” The evidence, therefore, suggests that the Shipman Colored School was built in 1919/1920.

The physical evidence described in Section 7 indicates that this earliest school was a two-room frame school with interior end brick chimneys on the gable ends. But it was quickly expanded. According to Greenberg’s research, in September 1924 the school board was informed that Thomas Ryan had agreed to donate $1,000 towards the operation of the Shipman Colored School on the condition that he would not be connected with the operation of the school in any manner. At the same time, he agreed to donate the use of a cottage at Oak Ridge for the use of the teachers at the Oak Ridge School (white) and to supplement the salaries of the teachers of that school “as might be deemed necessary in order to secure properly trained teachers.” This $1,000 donation probably funded the construction of the one-room addition with full basement at the north end of the original school. Based comparably on the construction costs delineated in the records of the Rosenwald Fund, $1,000 is a plausible amount for the cost of this addition (during the 1924-25 budget year, one-teacher schools supported by the Rosenwald Fund in Virginia had a total cost between $1,600 and $2,400 for a completely new building). Moreover, the writing found on the underside of floorboards in this addition supports a pre-1925 construction date for this portion of the building. The script reads “S.C. Freeman Shipman” and is replicated on several floorboards and joists, as if being labeled. It is plausible that the materials for the addition were shipped from a mill and so marked to identify the individual who placed the order; S.C. Freeman was the school board member representing the Lovingston District (of which Shipman was a part) between 1922 and 1925. If this addition was, in fact, funded by Ryan’s donation, that could also explain why the level of finish in this part of the building is slightly higher than that found in the original school, with built-in cabinets and bookcases, and why it included a basement, which would have been costly. It therefore seems likely that the older of the two existing buildings took its three-room form by 1925 and that both phases of its construction were funded largely by Mr. and Mrs. Ryan. In fact, following Thomas Fortune Ryan’s death in 1928, the school became known as Ryan Hall.
Ryan Hall Elementary School

The construction date for the second building on the property is less easily defined. In the absence of the school board minutes, the Annual Reports to the State Superintendent of Public Education were consulted, but, while they are a wealth of statistical information, they do not contain detailed information about individual schools. For example, the Annual Report for the 1933-1934 school year records three “negro” school houses built during the course of the school year but it doesn’t provide any information about their names or locations. In the absence of written records, the best evidence is oral history – Mr. Rennie Scott, interviewed for this project in February 2022, was born in 1938 and recalls the two-room building always being there as long as he went to the school. Construction details between the three-room building and the two-room building are different enough (boxed eaves with bed molding on the earlier building and open eaves with exposed rafter tails on the later; 6/6 windows on the earlier building and 9/9 on the later) that it seems conclusive that they were constructed at different times, so a construction date for the two-room building between 1925 and 1938 seems likely.

Multiple former students of Ryan Hall Elementary School were interviewed as part of this project; all attended the school in the 1940s and 1950s and their memories provide a glimpse into what a school day for a Black child was like at that time. Mr. Rennie Scott attended Ryan Hall Elementary School (the name he knew it by) from 1st grade through 7th grade, starting around 1944. At the time he lived about two miles from school, between Lovingston and Shipman, and took the school bus to school. He remembers that there were a total of five classrooms spread between the two buildings with two grades in each classroom and one teacher per classroom; he remembers the school being very crowded with up to 50 students in his grade alone. When he attended the school, the basement room was where lunch was prepared and the students would go down the interior stair to collect their lunch from the basement and then would take it back to their classroom to eat (another former student reported that the food was prepared by a married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Washington, during her aunt’s time at the school). The school had no indoor plumbing or running water – there was a spring and a pump on the property and two outhouses behind the school. Wood stoves and later coal stoves provided heat in the winter. The bell on top of the school had a rope that came down through the ceiling of the center classroom and it rang to announce the beginning of the school day. He fondly recalled playing ball behind the school, where the property was all open, at recess. Ms. Tessie Cole was the principal and ran the school while he was there. “I loved school,” he declared, and he went on to graduate from the Nelson County Training School in 1956.
Ms. Edith Napier and Ms. JoeAnn Mitchell also attended Ryan Hall Elementary School in the mid to late 1950s, starting around 10 years after Mr. Scott, and their experiences provide a window into what the school was like during its final decade of operation. In many ways their experiences did not differ very much from those of Mr. Scott – there were multiple grades in each classroom and each teacher taught multiple grades, the boys played baseball behind the school at recess while the girls jumped rope, outhouses were out back, and the building was heated by wood or coal stoves. They remembered the names of some of their teachers: Thelma Dunning, Birdie Bryce, Delores Truesdale, Ms. Lomax, Ms. Bridgeforth, Ms. Sampson, and Leroy Witt – all of whom were Black. Mr. Witt was also the principal of the school. Because there was no high school for Blacks in Nelson County prior to 1941 and no teacher training opportunities, many of their teachers came from other counties and boarded with student’s families during the school year. The community referred to it as “putting up teachers” and some teachers stayed with the same family year after year; Ms. Napier recalls a couple teachers who brought their own children with them. There was also at least one larger house in Shipman that rented rooms to school teachers during the 1950s. Mr. Leroy Witt taught several grades and was also the principal of the school. Because there was no high school for Blacks in Nelson County prior to 1941 and no teacher training opportunities, many of their teachers came from other counties and boarded with student’s families during the school year. The community referred to it as “putting up teachers” and some teachers stayed with the same family year after year; Ms. Napier recalls a couple teachers who brought their own children with them. There was also at least one larger house in Shipman that rented rooms to school teachers during the 1950s. Mr. Leroy Witt taught several grades and was also the principal of the school. Because there was no high school for Blacks in Nelson County prior to 1941 and no teacher training opportunities, many of their teachers came from other counties and boarded with student’s families during the school year. The community referred to it as “putting up teachers” and some teachers stayed with the same family year after year; Ms. Napier recalls a couple teachers who brought their own children with them. There was also at least one larger house in Shipman that rented rooms to school teachers during the 1950s. Mr. Leroy Witt taught several grades and was also the principal of the school.
themselves. By the 1950s the basement was no longer being used by students; neither Ms. Napier nor Ms. Mitchell ever recall going into the basement room and Ms. Mitchell doesn’t recall the interior stair at all (while the location of the stair is visible, the stair itself is not present today). Both recall that lunch for the elementary students was prepared at the Training School down the road; Ms. Napier recalls that it was brought to the school for the younger students, while Ms. Mitchell remembers lining up to walk to the Training School to pick up their lunch, for which they paid 25 cents.40

Students from Ryan Hall Elementary School lined up to get lunch from Nelson County Training School. Ca. 1950s.
From the private collection of Ms. JoeAnn Mitchell.

One of the original sliding doors that was used to divide the classrooms when Ms. Napier and Ms. Mitchell attended Ryan Hall in the 1950s retains the original wheeled hardware that allowed it to roll along a hanging track. This door is stored in Building A; another original door is reused in the modern partition wall in Building A but is missing the hardware. January 2022.
Ms. Napier recalled a story of an older aunt who recounted that during the summer months when school was out, the principal of Ryan Hall would take a group of the older children north via bus to Connecticut. There, they would spend their summer as farm laborers. They were provided meals and shabby accommodations at these work camps, and earned some money to take back home. It is unclear exactly when this occurred or for how many years it continued, but Ms. Napier’s relative did not have fond memories of the experience.

Everyone interviewed for this project repeated a variation on the same theme: the importance of education within the Black community. Most, if not all, of those interviewed were born to parents whose educational opportunities were severely limited – recall that there was no high school for Blacks in Nelson County until 1941. But they all recognized that education was the way to a better life for their children. Ms. Napier notes that she was one of nine children born to a homemaker and a farmer/logger/manufacturing worker and her parents expected that every one of their children would graduate from the Training School (they did). Ms. Mitchell was the only child of a domestic worker and an orchard worker and she would come home from school and offer to teach her parents what she’d learned that day at school. She was encouraged by a teacher at the Training School to pursue a college education and eventually obtained her Master’s degree. From providing wood for the stoves, to buying school books for their children from their meager wages, to performing basic maintenance on the school buildings, to putting up the teachers, to holding events to raise money to build the Training School, to eventually forming a Nelson County branch of the NAACP and demanding better school facilities for their children, the Black community of Nelson County in the early to mid-20th century engaged in a perpetual forward struggle to improve the opportunities for the next generation and fulfill their potential.

Ryan Hall Elementary School closed around 1960 when Nelson Memorial High School opened and all the two- and three-room graded schools were consolidated at the former Training School, which was renamed Ryan Elementary School. One person interviewed for this project recalled that Ryan Hall, Gladstone, and Tye River graded schools stayed open for a couple of years after the rest of the graded schools closed, in part to relieve overcrowding at the new Ryan Elementary School. There was no space for the primer grade at the new school so the old graded schools were used by some of the younger students for a couple more years. But by the mid-1960s the school had ceased operation as a public school for good. It was given to a consortium of Baptist churches, the Piedmont Baptist Association, who attempted to turn it into a community center; some renovations to the two-room building were undertaken while it was under their control. It was used for a private school, known as the Sunshine School, in the mid-1970s. The operator of that school reports that the building was one large open space when they used it and that beyond basic clean-up and reconnecting to a well that was located in front of the building, they didn’t have to make any major repairs or changes. The building had fallen out of use by the 1980s and the church group was eventually forced to walk away from their plans for the building due to issues with plumbing and the water supply. The old school slowly fell into disrepair. When the current owner, Ms. Mitchell, returned to Nelson County and attempted to buy the property, there was some difficulty in clearing the chain of title. The resulting deed work suggests that the property was never formally transferred out of the control of the Trustees of Shipman Colored...
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<th>Ryan Hall Elementary School</th>
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School, who acquired the property in 1920. Following a decree by the Circuit Court of Nelson County, Ms. Mitchell was able to acquire the two-acre former school property in 2017. She is currently pursuing plans and funding to rehabilitate the school and preserve its history.
9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)


Personal Communications
Ms. Dorothy Hutchinson, February 2022
Ms. Edith Napier, February 2022
Ms. Valerie Walker, February 2022
Mr. Rennie Scott, February 2022
Mr. Lee Marmon, February 2022
Mr. Heywood Greenberg, February 2022
Ms. JoeAnn Mitchell, February 2022
Ms. Margaret Henderson, February 2022
Ms. Frances Lee, February 2022
Mr. Joseph Dye Lahendro, Historic Preservation Architect, January-April 2022
Ryan Hall Elementary School
Name of Property

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service / National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
NPS Form 10-900

Name of Property
Ryan Hall Elementary School

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 #___________
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #___________

Primary location of additional data:
_X__ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other
    Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR #062-5230

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _____2_____

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84: ____________
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)
1. Latitude: 37.722580 Longitude: -78.852040

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or
**Ryan Hall Elementary School**

**Nelson County, Virginia**

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

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**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

- [ ] NAD 1927  
- [ ] NAD 1983

1. Zone: 
   - Easting: 
   - Northing:

2. Zone: 
   - Easting: 
   - Northing:

3. Zone: 
   - Easting: 
   - Northing:

4. Zone: 
   - Easting: 
   - Northing:

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of the listed property correspond with the boundaries of tax parcel number 68 A 84, as shown on the attached parcel map. This map was obtained on March 3, 2022, from the Nelson County Geographic Information System.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries of the listed property correspond exactly with the boundaries of the property transferred from Mayme Wilson and her husband to the Trustees of Shipman Colored School on June 5, 1920, and represents the entirety of the school property during the period of significance. The property's historic setting and all known associated historic resources have been included within the historic boundary.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Kristin H. Kirchen, Architectural Historian

organization: Iron Dog Preservation, LLC

street & number: 532 Pantela Drive

city or town: N. Chesterfield state: Virginia zip code: 23235

e-mail: irondogpreservation@gmail.com

telephone: 804-516-8200

date: March 11, 2022

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
• Additional items: (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs
Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn’t need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Ryan Hall Elementary School, DHR #062-5230
Town/City or Vicinity: Shipman
County: Nelson County    State: Virginia
Photographer: Kristin H. Kirchen
Date Photographed: December 2021 and January 2022

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 20   VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0001
View  School property from Braddock Lane, camera facing southeast.

2 of 20   VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0002
View  Looking south down Braddock Lane, school property on the left in the photo.

3 of 20   VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0003
View  Building A in the foreground, Building B in the background. Camera facing south.

4 of 20   VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0004
View  Building A, front (west) elevation.

5 of 20   VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0005
View  Building B, northwest oblique.

6 of 20   VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0006
View  Building A, south side elevation. Chimney has now collapsed.

7 of 20   VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0007
View  Building A, rear (east) elevation.
Ryan Hall Elementary School
Name of Property

View 8 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0008

View 9 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0009

View 10 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0010

View 11 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0011

View 12 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0012

View 13 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0013

View 14 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0014

View 15 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0015

View 16 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0016

View 17 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0017

View 18 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0018

View 19 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0019
Ryan Hall Elementary School
Name of Property

View Building B, interior, south classroom, southwest corner. Original bank of windows and blackboard visible.

20 of 20 VA_NelsonCounty_RyanHallElementarySchool_0020
View Original bell removed from bell tower, stored in Building B.

Historic Images Log

1. Detail drawing from 1915 publication, “The Negro Rural School and It’s Relation to the Community,” The Extension Department of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

1 Interview with Mr. Rennie Scott, February 9, 2022.
4 Marmon, The Measure and Mirror of Men, 86.
5 Marmon, The Measure and Mirror of Men, 86.
10 The whereabouts of the records of the Nelson County School Board, including the minutes of their meetings during the period of significance for Ryan Hall Elementary School, are unknown at this point in time. They have not been archived with the Library of Virginia and neither the current clerk of the school board nor the historical society have been able to locate them for quite some years. In the early 1980s, Mr. Heywood Greenberg was able to do extensive research in the minutes for his thesis. At the time, he says they were stored in cardboard boxes in a closet in the school board offices. Unfortunately, in the intervening 35 to 40 years they have been misplaced, hopefully
only temporarily. Thankfully, Mr. Greenberg completed his thesis in 1987 and most of the information in this section is taken from that document. I have tried to provide citations for the page numbers for various statistics included herein, but in the interest of readability, in some cases I inserted a note at the end of a paragraph that applies to the entire paragraph, instead of footnoting each sentence. Unless otherwise noted, all of the information in this section is indebted to the research of Mr. Greenberg.


12 Greenberg, 35-36.
13 Greenberg, 55.
14 Greenberg, 58-59.
15 Greenberg, 47.
16 Greenberg, 61.
17 Greenberg, 54.
18 Greenberg, 62.
19 Greenberg, 80-81.
20 Greenberg, 84-85.
21 Greenberg, 111-113.
22 Greenberg, 67.
24 Greenberg, 91.
25 Greenberg, 102.
26 Greenberg, 102.
27 Greenberg, 125.
28 Greenberg, 134.
29 Valerie Walker, Interview with author, February 7, 2022.
30 Greenberg, 135.
31 Greenberg, 169, 171.
33 Greenberg, 215.
35 Mayme S. Wilson and Husband to The Trustees of Shipman Colored School, Nelson County Deed Book 45, page 238-239.
36 Greenberg, 70.
37 Greenberg, 70.
39 Mr. Rennie Scott, Interview with the author, February 9, 2022.
41 Walker, Interview.
42 Mr. Heywood Greenberg, Personal Communication, February 14, 2022.
DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided “as-is”. More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR’s Richmond office.

Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.
Title:

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Ryan Hall Elementary School
Shipman, Nelson County, Virginia
DHR # 062-5230

- Latitude 37.722580
Longitude 78.852040

Title: Ryan Hall Elementary School  Date: 3/9/2022

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SKETCH MAP/ PHOTO KEY

March 3, 2022

Ryan Hall Elementary School
Nelson County, Virginia
062-5230
Parcel map  68 A 84
Sketch map and Photo Key  \( \text{Photo number and view} \)

Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community
TAX PARCEL MAP

March 3, 2022
https://www.nelsoncountygis.org/#/mwl

Historic Boundary —

Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community