



COUNTY OF PRINCE WILLIAM
1 County Complex Court, Prince William, Virginia 22192-9201
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Internet www.pwcgov.org

**PLANNING
OFFICE**

Richard E. Lawson
Director of Planning

July 19, 2002

Mr. David Edwards, Director
Winchester Regional Preservation Office
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
107 North Kent Street, Suite 203
Winchester, VA 22601

**Re: Preliminary Information Forms – National Register Nominations for 5th Prince
William County Courthouse and Bennett School**

Dear Mr. Edwards:

Enclosed are the PIF forms for beginning your consideration of the nomination of two buildings in Prince William County to the National Register of Historic Places. Both buildings are owned by the County and are within the County courthouse complex in Manassas. The courthouse complex is surrounded by the City of Manassas but is County-owned property within Prince William County.

As you know, the 1892 Courthouse building itself has recently undergone an extensive renovation and restoration and a historic easement has been granted on it. The nearby Bennett School will be the next major renovation/restoration project undertaken by the County in the courthouse complex, as identified in the current Capital Improvement Program. The County is exploring the feasibility of using tax credits to assist with the project.

The Bennett School building is proposed to be restored to the appearance of an early 20th century school to be used as a training center and offices. A majority of the interior finishes are intact behind partitions, drop ceilings, and carpeting added to the building in the 1970's. With the light level in the building and the number of partitions, I have not been able to successfully generate more than two interior photos, but it is apparent that the removal of all the later additions will reveal a very handsome, generously proportioned set of classrooms and hall ways.

We appreciate your attention to our applications and will provide any additional information that you will require.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Bainbridge,
Cultural Resources Coordinator

Enclosures: PIF forms, photos and maps

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC RESOURCES
PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM
INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY**

1. Historic Name of Property (if not known, use current name or address):
Bennett School

2. Location:
9300 Lee Avenue
Prince William County, VA

3. Legal Owner(s) of Property: (Include names and addresses of **all** owners.)
Prince William Board of County Supervisors
1 County Complex Court
Prince William, VA, 22192

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Robert Bainbridge
Daytime Telephone: Area Code: (703) 792-7359

4. General Data:

- A. Type of property: School Building
- B. Date(s) of resource(s) and source: 1908 (cornerstone of building)
- C. Outbuildings: Yes No X if yes, number of outbuildings
- D. Approximate acreage: 14.7 acres
- E. Architect, carpenter or mason (if known): Charles M. Robinson
- F. Original Use: School
- G. Present Use: Storage, however Prince William County is in the process of planning the renovation/restoration of the building for offices and/or a training center.

5. General Description:

The Bennett School Building is a two-story, brick building over a high, stone basement. The stone used for the basement walls is a type of local red sandstone. A hipped roof, originally covered in slate and now covered with asphalt shingles, sits atop the brick walls and two interior end chimneys are evident. The building is in the Classical Revival style, as evidenced by its symmetry and classical features. Among these classical features are a dentilled cornice and a portico supported by non-fluted Corinthian columns. While much of the interior of this building was altered for office use, the historic features are still present behind the applied interior finishes of the 1970's. These interior finishes can be easily removed to reveal the historic finishes of the building. The blackboards and closets that were installed for school use are still present in most of the rooms. The staircase in the front entrance is an open string stair with heavy, square, moulded newels, square balusters, and moulded

handrails with drop finials and is original to the building. Original woodwork survives and is of either oak or pine.

Despite having several original architectural features intact, changes have occurred to the Bennett building. These changes appear to date from the 1970's and later, though a few changes are historic. Of these historic changes the most drastic is the brick wing that was added to the building in 1937 to house the increasing number of students attending the school. This addition contains four classrooms, storage closets, and the restrooms. The bricks are laid in the same bond as the main portion of the building. Most of these changes affect the northern façade and northern interior of the building. A cupola that was once present on the building, as evidenced by a photograph from the 1900's, is now gone, but the platform that it stood on is still visible between the two chimneys. Additional exterior changes include the replacement of the front doors, the blocking of the upper half of most windows, and the blocking of the basement windows. It is likely that these exterior alterations were done with the conversion of the building to office use and can easily be corrected.

Interior changes occurred with the building's transition from a school to an office during the 1970s. During this transition each of the eight classrooms that were on the main two floors of the building were divided by partitions into several separate offices, the ceilings were lowered and the lights were replaced. The front entrance of the building was altered through the blocking of the right flight of a symmetrical stairway (that can be removed). The halls have been made narrow by the addition of storage closets and old floors have been covered with carpeting. The walls in some of the offices have been paneled with wood-grain Formica. The remaining open stair in the front entrance has been partially retreaded. The changes that occurred in the 1970's are superficial and can be easily removed. Underneath these new surfaces, the original finishes of the Bennett Building remain intact and are in good condition.

6. History:

The Bennett Building was built in response to the Virginia General Assembly's authorization of the establishment of one public agricultural school in each of the state's ten congressional districts in 1908. Manassas was chosen as the site for the agricultural school in the eighth district and a two-story brick building was constructed on land donated by Dr. M. C. Bennett. Charles M. Robinson, who designed buildings on most of Virginia's colleges and universities, as well as several elementary and high school in the state, designed the Bennett Building. Six of Robinson's school buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Robinaon also published *The Improvement of Towns and Cities or the Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics*, which made him a key player in the City Beautiful Movement. His involvement in the City Beautiful Movement is easily seen in the Bennett Building with it's Classical Revival style, one of the trademarks of the City Beautiful Movement. The building cost \$16,000 dollars to construct. As the workers dug the building's foundations between 1908 and 1909, they found the graves of unknown

Civil War soldiers. The Manassas School District Trustee, George Carr Round, a Union veteran, and Schools Superintendent George Tyler, a Confederate veteran, ordered that the bones be left where they lay, and the school was built over the graves.

Though built as an agricultural school, Bennett building was never actually used for this purpose. Due to a large elementary school enrollment during the period, the school was used for primary instruction and teacher training. Children within a nine mile radius attended grades 1 through 8 there. A separate building, the Ruffner Building, was constructed to house agricultural and domestic science classes and secondary classes. The Ruffner Building was located near the Bennett Building, but is now demolished. By 1913 an additional building had been erected on the site, a small, two-story, frame building, to house agricultural and manual arts workshops. Additional land was purchased from neighboring residents, including Bennett, Round, and G. Raymond Ratcliffe for agricultural experiment grounds, playgrounds, and athletic fields. In 1937 a brick wing was added to the rear of the Bennett Building.

In 1926 a bond issue was passed by the citizens of Manassas to build a new high school. A thirteen room, brick high school was built next door to the Bennett School and called the Osbourn Building. This new building served as the high school for students in the western half of the county until 1953, when a new Osbourn High School was built, and the old high school became an annex to the Bennett school. The two buildings were known as Bennett Elementary School until a new Bennett Elementary School was built and the old Bennett and old Osbourn schools were closed. In the 1970s, the Bennett School Building was converted into offices for the county police and fire offices.

Bibliography

Clint Schemmer. 1987. Bennett School: 'money pit' or a diamond in the rough. Potomac News Manassas Edition, 11 February, sec. E, p. 1.

Lucy Walsh Phinney. 1993. *Yesterday's Schools: Public Elementary Education in Prince William County, Virginia, 1869-1969*. Privately Published.

Professor Campbell, "A Selected Chronology of Events," 31 August 2001, <http://www-personal.umich.edu/%7Esdcamp/UP540/timeline.html>, (12 July 2002).

"The Charles M. Robinson Story," <http://www.charlesmrobinson.com/history.html>, (12 July 2002).

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey Form (File no. 155-7).

1998. Structures and Sites from the Cities of Manassas and Manassas Park. In *Prince William: A Past to Preserve*, edited by Laurie C. Wieder. Prince William VA: Prince William County Historical Society

7. Reason for Request:

This request was made because of the building's architectural significance, and the building's historic importance as an academic institution. The Bennett building was one of the ten schools that were built in the state of Virginia to serve as agricultural high schools.

8. Photographs:

Ten black-and-white exterior photographs (north, south, east and west elevations) and two black-and-white interior photographs are provided. The interior was too dark and partitioned to get additional interior shots.

9. Maps:

Two County-generated GIS maps are enclosed showing the County-owned property of the Bennett School.

10. Would you be interested in the State and/or the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits?

Yes No

Would you be interested in the easement program? Yes No

11. Additional Comments:

12. Applicant Information (Individual completing form) REQUIRED

Name: Stephanie Wilson

Daytime Telephone: Area Code :(703)792-7058

Address: 15100 Archelon Way

City/State/Zip Code: Woodbridge, VA 22193

Applicant's Signature: Stephanie Wilson Date: 7/19/2002

Mayor of the city or town:

Not Applicable

Chairman of the board of supervisors (for county and town properties):

Sean T. Connaughton

Prince William Board of County Supervisors

1 County Complex Court

Prince William, VA 22192

County administrator:

Craig S. Gerhart, County Executive

1 County Complex Court

Prince William, VA 22192

Director of county planning department:

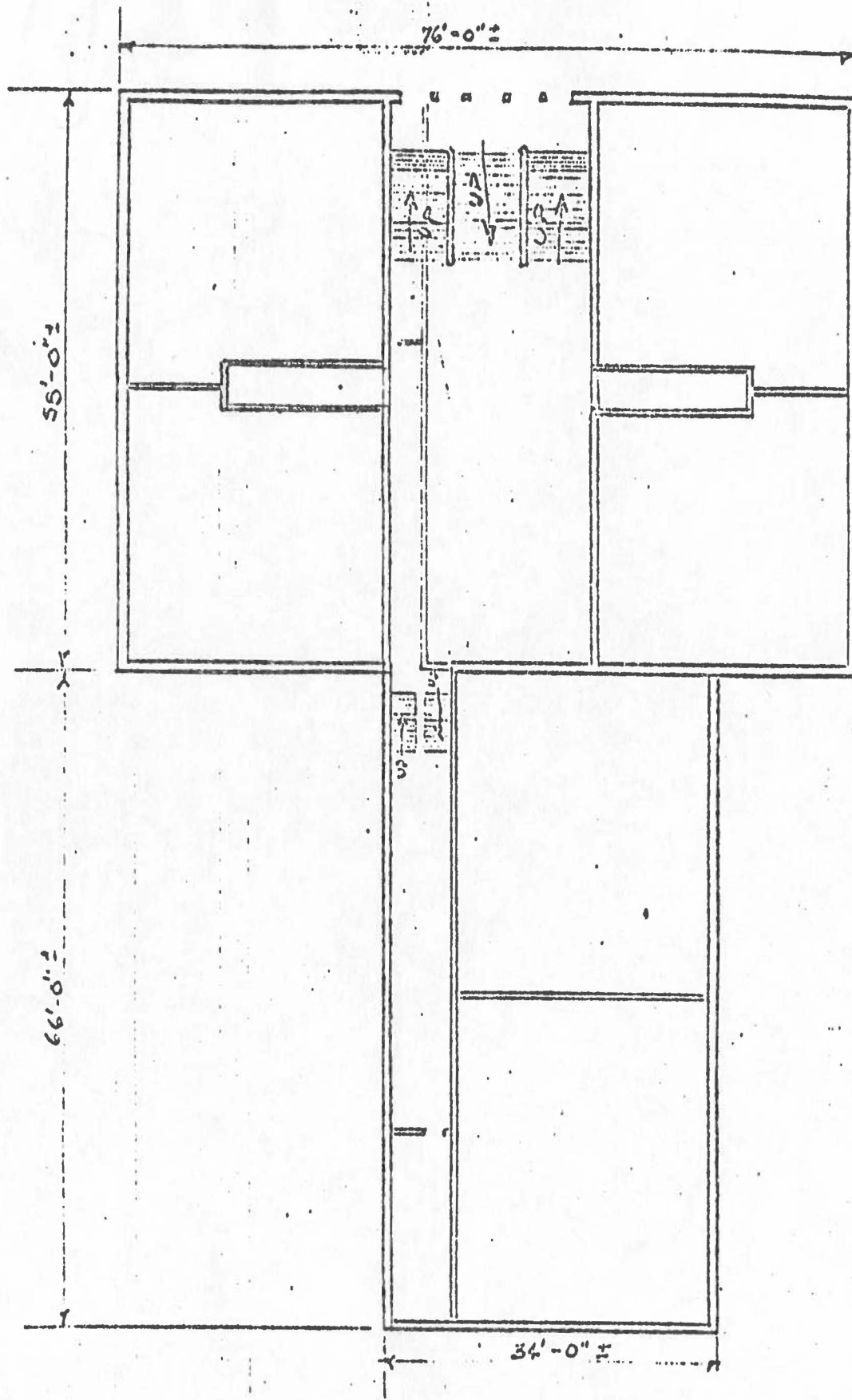
Richard E. Lawson
Office of Planning
1 County Complex Court
Woodbridge, VA 22192

Chairman of county planning commission:

Geoffrey M. Swanberg
3504 Beaver Ford Road
Woodbridge, VA 22192

County supervisor in whose district the property is located:

L. Ben Thompson, Brentsville District Supervisor
Prince William Board of County Supervisors
8506 Wellington Road, Suite 101
Manassas, VA 20109



OLD BENNETT BLD. # III

SCALE 1/16" = 1'-0"