Façade and side view

Rear and side view
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Liberty Hill School
Ellerbe vicinity, Richmond County, RH0673, Listed 1/17/2008
Nomination by Daniel Pezzoni
Photographs by Daniel Pezzoni, July 2006

Façade and side view

Rear and side view
1. Name of Property

 historic name   Liberty Hill School
 other names/site number  Liberty-Exway School; Covington Community Center; RH 673

2. Location

 street & number  234 Covington Community Road (SR 1152)  N/A not for publication
 city or town  Ellerbe
 state    North Carolina  code  NC  county Richmond  code  153  zip code  28338

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 for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 Signature of certifying official/Title  Date
 North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
 State or Federal agency and bureau

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

 Signature of certifying official/Title  Date
 State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

 I hereby certify that the 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
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**Name of related multiple property listing**
(Enter “N/A” if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**
N/A

**6. Function or Use**

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**7. Description**

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<td></td>
<td>roof       Asphalt</td>
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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.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
EDUCATION
ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK

Criteria Considerations
(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

□ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

□ B removed from its original location.

□ C moved from its original location.

□ D a cemetery.

□ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

□ F a commemorative property

□ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Period of Significance

1930-1947

Significant Dates

1930

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

□ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

□ previously listed in the National Register

□ Previously determined eligible by the National Register

□ designated a National Historic Landmark

□ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

□ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

X State Historic Preservation Office

□ Other State Agency

□ Federal Agency

□ Local Government

□ University

□ Other

Name of repository:
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property  Approximately 1.0 acres

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

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Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title  J. Daniel Pezzoni, with Patricia Dial, property owner
organization  Landmark Preservation Associates  date  May 29, 2007
street & number  6 Houston Street  telephone  (540) 464-5315
city or town  Lexington  state  VA  zip code  24450

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps
A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs
Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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

name  Patricia Dial
street & number  103 Bunny Lane  telephone  910.652.3130
city or town  Mt. Gilead  state  NC  zip code  27360

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary

Liberty Hill School is located at 234 Covington Community Road (SR 1152) in northwest Richmond County, North Carolina, approximately seven miles northwest of the closest nearest community, the town of Ellerbe. The school stands near the former community of Covington, now a name that applies more to the section of the county where the school is located. The square parcel on which the school stands, which is almost exactly one acre in area, is situated at 400 feet above sea level on a hill overlooking the waters of Buffalo Creek, a tributary of the Little and Pee Dee Rivers, in what is now a wooded and sparsely populated section of the county. The north-facing school stands near the center of its lot facing the road. The one-story frame building was built in 1930 to serve as a public elementary school for African American children living in the Covington vicinity and is a slightly modified version of the Rosenwald north or south facing two-teacher community school plan with a rectangular form and a forward projecting wing flanked by dual entries. The school has an asphalt-shingled front-gable roof, German siding, a brick foundation, and two brick stove flues. The interior preserves much of the original tongue-and-groove wall and ceiling sheathing, although the partition that formerly divided the space into two classrooms was removed in the mid-1950s when the school was made into the Covington Community Center. The community center was discontinued in recent years and the building began to deteriorate. A cinder block pump house, presumably added when the community center was created, stands next to the building.

Inventory


Exterior

The school measures approximately forty-four feet by thirty-six and a half feet in plan with an approximately twelve by twenty foot wing containing the Industrial Room centered on the north-facing facade. The foundation is constructed of stretcher-bond brick and is in good condition except for a hole that was created on the rear elevation as a crawlspace access. Small rectangular vents with cast iron grilles ventilate the crawlspace. Brick ledges project at grade at two locations along the length of the foundation; these are interpreted as sections of footing that happen to be visible at grade. Under the building are several rows of brick piers to support the floor. The two brick stove flues, which are also stretcher-bond and have simple corbelled caps, rise from the roof ridge at the rear and near the front.
In the eaves of the main roof are exposed rafters with clipped corners, whereas the exposed rafters in the eaves of the gable-fronted Industrial Room wing are plain. There are large rectangular louvered vents in the front and rear gables of the main roof and a smaller vent of similar form in the front gable of the Industrial Room wing. Triangular Craftsman brackets with beveled ends on the horizontal members appear in the gables of both roofs and also support small shed roofs over the two front entries. These are located in recesses to each side of the front wing and have doors with five stacked panels. On the façade of the Industrial Room wing is a row of four tall nine-over-nine windows. Two pairs of these windows appear on the side elevations of the building proper (there are no windows on the rear elevation). Under the sills of the nine-over-nine windows of the east elevation and front wing are moldings (the moldings do not appear to have been installed under the west elevation windows). Smaller six-over-six windows illuminate the two cloak rooms in the front corners, one window per room. The upper sashes of these windows have been replaced with German siding. This was done in the late twentieth century when the east corner cloak room was made into a restroom and the ceiling lowered. Presumably the other window was then modified for symmetry. A deteriorating wood handicap ramp leads up to the west entry.

**Interior and Pump House**

As originally constructed the school contained two classrooms approximately thirty by twenty-two feet in dimension. The partition that separated the classrooms was removed in the mid-1950s conversion, but its location is apparent from trim boards on the walls and ceiling and a seam in the floor boards. The walls and ceilings retain much of their original v-seam tongue-and-groove sheathing. Sections of wall have drywall patches and the ceiling over the west classroom was replaced with paper tiles. Like the two front entries, the doors into the two cloak rooms and the two doors into the Industrial Room have five stacked panels. The interior doors are stained and one or two retain the original metal knobs with decorative lock plates. Door and window trim is plain, not molded. The Industrial Room was made into a kitchen in the mid-1950s conversion and plywood base cabinets with a beige formica top were added under the windows. At the east end of the cabinets is a Frigidaire Super stove. The wall surface visible inside the cabinets was painted white, presumably the original interior color as well as the present color. At the center of the room is an Atlanta Thermostatically Controlled wood stove manufactured by the Atlanta Stove Works, Inc. The two cloak rooms retain shelves for hats and other apparel. The east cloak room, made into a restroom, has a small vanity and a toilet dated 1977. Other interior features include exit signs and fluorescent ceiling lights. Next to the front handicap ramp stands a low cinder block pump house, presumably built in the mid-1950s, with an asphalt-shingled gable roof and a batten door.
NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

Liberty Hill School meets National Register of Historic Places Criterion A in the areas of education and black ethnic heritage and Criterion C in the area of architecture. The 1930 school, which stands at a lonely hilltop location established as a school site in the nineteenth century, was built for the African American children of the Covington area of Richmond County with assistance from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. The Craftsman-influenced frame building is closely modeled on the Rosenwald Fund’s north or south facing “Two Teacher Community School,” a design by Rosenwald Fund Director Samuel L. Smith published in 1924. The gable-fronted school features a projecting Industrial Room on the front and there is evidence for the original division of the interior into two classrooms. The school was discontinued in 1947 and sold to a private party the following year. In the mid-1950s it was modified for use as the Covington Community Building. The present owner acquired the building in 2006 and plans to rehabilitate it. Liberty Hill School is associated with black education and ethnic heritage in Richmond County. Architecturally, it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Rosenwald Fund approach to school design, and it stands today as one of only three Rosenwald schools known to survive in the county. Liberty Hill School is of local significance.
Historic Context: Education and Black Ethnic Heritage

The development of education in Richmond County mirrored developments in other areas of North Carolina. Schooling was at first closely tied to religion. In Richmond County one of the earliest references to a school is a 1774 deed that provided for a schoolhouse to be established at the same site as the Cartledge Creek Baptist Church. Private academies were established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and in 1839 passage of state legislation led to the creation of the county’s first public schools. One of these was the 1840 Naked Creek School, believed to be the forerunner of the ca. 1880 Bostick School listed in the National Register in 2005. The Civil War and the economic dislocation that followed interrupted the local development of public education. When efforts resumed, the local school system accommodated black children as well as whites. In 1875 public education in North Carolina was officially segregated, the beginning of the “separate but equal” paradigm that remained in force until desegregation in the third quarter of the twentieth century. The original Liberty Hill schoolhouse was built in 1875, according to local historians James and Ida Huneycutt. Carrie Alsobrook was Liberty Hill’s first teacher. Many of the first students to attend Liberty Hill School were probably the children of former slaves who lived on the large cotton plantations of northeastern Richmond County’s Pee Dee River valley.

An early reference to the school appears in the Richmond County Board of Education Minutes for September 3, 1877, apparently the first date the minutes were kept. The minutes set forth the boundaries of the county’s black and white school districts. “District No. 4 Col’d” was established for the “Liberty Hill School House” and was bounded by the Montgomery County line, the Little and Pee Dee rivers, and the line of Steele’s Township. The committeemen appointed for the district were Elias Baldwin, Jones Hadley, and Eli Hines. In the 1880s the district was known for a time as Powelton (or Powelton) after the nearby antebellum plantation of that name, but a July 2, 1892 deed, the first pertaining to the school, refers to it as Liberty Hill. The one-acre schoolhouse lot was taken from the property of Alfred and Catherine Hadley. According to the 1880 federal census there were a black Alfred Hadley (b. 1813), classified as a laborer, and a white Alfred Hadley (b. 1839), classified as a farmer, living in close proximity in Steele’s Township. Both were married but neither had wives named Catherine in 1880. Presumably the grantor was the white Alfred Hadley, who as a white man and farmer was more likely to have been a property owner. The deed notes that the lot was located on “the old Plank road.” This was a section of the antebellum plank road that ran through northern Richmond County from Fayetteville to Salisbury (Covington Community Road today follows part of its course). The plank road would have provided convenient access to the school for children from surrounding farms.

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2 Richmond County Board of Education Minutes; Richmond County Deed Book AAA, p. 188; U.S. census.
Little is known about Liberty Hill School’s early years, although it may be assumed that the school’s activities received strong support from the local African American community. This is suggested by the name of the school, which presumably refers to the emancipation that occurred not many years before the school’s establishment, and also by a period account related in John Hutchinson’s county history. According to Hutchinson, in 1884 a local observer noted, “The negroes seem to take a great deal more interest in educating their children [than] the white people do. This may not be the case in towns, but it is certainly so in many localities in the country.” The observer added that at least one of the county’s black schools remained open through the summer.3

After the optimism of the earlier post-war years, the educational outlook for North Carolina’s African American children grew increasingly dire. Rosenwald School historian Thomas Hanchett notes that in 1915, the state spent only $2.30 per black pupil compared to $7.40 per white pupil (the national average was nearly $30.00 per pupil). The problem existed throughout the South, a manifestation of disenfranchisement and other assaults on black civil rights. Working to enhance educational opportunities for the region’s blacks was Booker T. Washington, who promoted the concept of “industrial education” at his Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The philosophy of industrial education stressed practical training as a way to better the economic condition of blacks. Washington’s work attracted the interest of a Chicago philanthropist named Julius Rosenwald, the head of Sears, Roebuck and Company. As the son of German Jewish immigrants, Rosenwald was sensitive to the racial prejudice endured by blacks. He first met with Booker T. Washington in 1911, and in 1917, he formed the Rosenwald Fund with Washington to address the crisis in African American education in the South. The Fund’s objectives were four-fold: “the building of schoolhouses for rural African-American children, the establishment of libraries, the education of teachers, and the development of centers for higher education for the black population.”4

The Rosenwald Fund had a transformative effect on black educational facilities in the South. Part of its success may be attributed to the participation of white-dominated school boards; Rosenwald funding was not made available without school board commitments to construction and operating expenses. By the time construction grants ended in 1932, the Fund had supported the construction of 5,357 buildings in fifteen Southern states. North Carolina had the greatest share of buildings constructed with Fund assistance—813—of which twenty-one were built in Richmond County during the period 1919 to 1930. Liberty Hill School, which was also referred to as Liberty-Exway School, was among the last Rosenwald schools to be built in the county, at a cost of $2,000. The Richmond County Board of Education approved funding for the school at its November 4, 1929, meeting. On September 1, 1930, the board discussed construction planning for two unnamed “Rosenwald negro school buildings” and approved the chairman and secretary of the board to contract with the lowest bidder for construction. The timing of this action referring to Liberty Hill

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3 Hutchinson, No Ordinary Lives, 188.
4 Hanchett, “Rosenwald Schools;” Van Dolsen, “Wake County’s Rosenwald Schools.”
School suggests the possibility that construction was not completed until 1931. (Examination of minutes for 1931 did not uncover additional references to the school.) Liberty Hill School is one of three Rosenwald schools known to survive in the county; the other two are Green’s Chapel School and Morrison Grove School, both located near Hamlet.  

Perlie Chappell, who lives in sight of Liberty Hill School, attended school there from 1940 to 1947. During her school years there was only one teacher, Miss Hula Mae Thomas (a roster of black teachers for the 1944-45 school year listed Miss Thomas as Liberty Hill’s only teacher). Miss Thomas held classes in one classroom while the other classroom was reserved for meetings, parents days, and presentations. The school’s use for purposes in addition to education was in keeping with Booker T. Washington’s philosophy. According Thomas Hanchett, Washington “saw each school as a community center. Rosenwald buildings would not only teach the young, but would help dispersed rural people come together to improve farming techniques and forge a strong community culture.” The girls and boys privies were located behind the school, and the area to the east side was used for ball games. In 1931 the county school board had authorized the construction of “pit-type toilets . . . for all school buildings needing them” measuring four feet square or four-by-six feet. Presumably Liberty Hill’s privies were similar; they may in fact have been a result of the 1931 privy-building decision.

In 1944 Liberty Hill School had an enrollment of forty-two students. It was one of four one-teacher African American schools in Richmond County. In April 1946, in response to state policy, the county superintendent of schools submitted a plan for the consolidation of the county’s one-teacher black schools. That October the school board secretary noted that “some of the negro school buildings in the county have not been repaired or painted because consolidation of negro schools when feasible and possible, is on the State program.” Beginning with the 1947-48 school year Liberty Hill’s students went to Mineral Spring School in Ellerbe, located approximately seven miles from Liberty Hill, which at the time had the county’s largest African American faculty and presumably enrollment. In the spring of 1948 the school board auctioned off excess school buildings. Liberty Hill was first offered for sale in May but the county was disappointed by the bidding. In June a bid of $493.00 from John Nicholson and his wife was accepted and the school was sold, the deed noting that it had “become unnecessary for school purposes.” According to Perlie Chapman, blacks were not allowed to use the building during the years the Nicholson family

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5 Hanchett, “Ware Creek School,” Section 8 p. 3; Hanchett, “Rosenwald Schools;” Hanchett, “Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina,” 408, 440; Turberg, “Forest, Farm, and Factory,” 34; Huneycutt and Huneycutt, History of Richmond County, 255; Richmond County Board of Education Minutes, 1925-64 vol. 1, pp. 166, 172; Turberg and Pezzoni, Architectural History of Richmond County, draft.

6 Perlie Chappell personal communication; Richmond County Board of Education Minutes, 1925-64 vol. 1, pp. 174, 359; Hanchett, “Rosenwald Schools.”
owned it. On April 5, 1954, John Nicholson and his wife Blanche sold the school and its seventy-yard-square site to Richmond County. The county converted the school into the Covington Community Center, which was used for community gatherings and square dances and as a polling place. The partition that separated the two classrooms was removed during this period and other alterations were made to the building. In January 2006 the county sold the building to Patricia Dial, who plans to rehabilitate it as lodgings.7

Architecture Context

For Liberty Hill School’s construction in 1930, a Rosenwald Fund school plan known as Floor Plan No. 2-C “Two Teacher Community School to Face North or South Only” was selected. The original plan was drawn up by Samuel L. Smith, the director of the Rosenwald Fund office in Nashville, and was first published along with other plans in the 1924 booklet Community School Plans, which was distributed throughout the South by the Interstate School Building Service. The local school authorities closely modeled Liberty Hill School on the Rosenwald plan. The one-story frame building has a rectangular form with a forward projecting wing flanked by dual entries, a front-gable roof, wood siding, and two brick stove flues, and a two-classroom interior, as called for in the plan. Small changes were made such as altering the number and placement of windows, adding Craftsman brackets to the gables, and dispensing with wainscots on the interior. The local school authorities also modified the proportions, enlarging the Industrial Room and reducing the two cloak rooms in size.

Two design principles that were faithfully adhered to were the related instructions for siting and natural lighting. Liberty Hill School is aligned north-south, as stipulated in the plan on which it is based. It was not important whether a school built to this plan faced north or south, only that the side windows faced east and west. Liberty Hill’s many large windows provided the natural light that S. L. Smith and other progressive educators of the era regarded as essential to safeguard the eyesight of pupils and teachers and to optimize the teaching environment. Liberty Hill School also incorporates the Industrial Room that was a common feature of the various Rosenwald school designs. According to Van Dolsen, the room served “for girls to be taught home economics and

7 Perlie Chappell personal communication; Richmond County Board of Education Minutes, 1925-64 vol. 1, pp. 370, 371, 379; vol. 2, 2, 6, 17; Richmond County Deed Book 295, p. 330; Deed Book 347, p. 551.
boys farmwork and how to use simple tools.” The Industrial Room was an expression of Booker T. Washington’s belief in the importance of vocational training in education for blacks.

*Community School Plans* also contained specifications and suggestions for a range of details and finishes, including paint colors. For school exteriors white with gray trim or gray with white trim were recommended. Liberty Hill School had white siding in the 1940s, adhering to this recommendation. The present paint scheme of light blue with white trim is not dissimilar from the gray and white scheme suggested in Rosenwald literature.  

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8 Perlie Chappell personal communication; Van Dolsen, “Wake County’s Rosenwald Schools;” Hanchett, “Rosenwald Schools.”
Bibliography

Chappell, Perlie. Personal communication with authors, 2006.


______. “Rosenwald Schools: Beacons for Black Education in the American South” (www.rosenwaldplans.org).

______. “Ware Creek School.” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1996.


Richmond County Board of Education Minutes, 1877-1925 and 1925-64 (in two volumes). Microfilm at the North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

Richmond County deed records. Richmond County Courthouse, Rockingham, N.C.


United States Census. 1880 population statistics for Richmond County, N.C.


______. “Wake County’s Rosenwald Schools.” Associated Historic Context (2001) prepared for the National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form “Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County, North Carolina (ca. 1770-1941).”
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Liberty Hill School
Richmond Co., N.C.

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the nominated area correspond to Richmond County Parcel ID No. 754000069046.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated area encompass the acreage historically associated with the school.
PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Subject: Liberty Hill School (same for all photos)
2. Location: Richmond Co., N.C. (same for all photos)
3. Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni (same for all photos)
4. Photo date: July 2006 (same for all photos)
5. Original negative archived at the N.C. Office of Archives and History, Raleigh (same for all photos)
6. Description of view: Front (north) and west elevations. View looking southeast. Photograph number appears at beginning of entry (same for all photos)

2. South and east elevations. View looking northwest.

3. Interior, combined classrooms.

4. Interior, Industrial Room.