

# Department of Historic Resources

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## **THREE HISTORIC BUILDINGS AT UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND ADDED TO THE VIRGINIA LANDMARKS REGISTER**

**—New listings anticipate UR's centennial celebration in 2014  
of the establishment of its Westhampton campus location;  
the listed buildings are Cannon Memorial Chapel (1929); North Court (1913); and Ryland Hall (1913)—**

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**—The VLR listings will be forwarded for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places—**

RICHMOND – In 1914 Richmond College headed west from its location on the then-edge of Richmond, where it occupied a single city block in the city's Fan neighborhood. At a new park-like campus six miles away where a street car ended its run in a Henrico County suburb, its leaders opened the re-envisioned college's campus along with Westhampton College for women. Together in 1920, the colleges were accredited as the University of Richmond.

In advance of the 100th anniversary in 2014 marking that move, the university and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources have partnered to list three campus buildings in the Virginia Landmarks Register, the state's official list of significant places. The partners will continue to collaborate during the run-up to UR's anniversary by designating other buildings to the state register, showcasing the university's history and outstanding architecture.

The three newly-listed buildings — North Court, Ryland Hall and Cannon Memorial Chapel — reflect important aspects of the university's history, from its founding as a Baptist seminary in the early 1830s to opening its classrooms to women in 1898, only a few decades after the severe hardships the school endured during and after the Civil War.

Significantly, the decision in 1906 to broaden educational offerings for women at Richmond College inspired its leaders to secure a new location for the school so it could create a separate women's college. The college's move was hastened by a 1910 fire that damaged the original Ryland Hall, marked today by the remains of an entrance gate at the intersection of Grace and Lombardy streets.

Under Richmond College president Frederic W. Boatwright, the school selected its new campus in the suburb of Westhampton on the site of two farms and a defunct amusement park that abutted a former millpond, which would become a central landmark of the new campus' landscape.

In preparing for a new university, Boatwright stated, "We shall need to plan for a great future and should build with due regard to both permanence and beauty." In 1909, he investigated colleges that could provide a model for educating men and women. His tour introduced him to an architectural style known as Collegiate Gothic, which drew inspiration from the architecture of Oxford and Cambridge universities in England and which was then shaping such campuses as Princeton University, West Point and Case Western Reserve University in Ohio.

Advocates of the style, including its most prominent practitioner, Boston architect Ralph Adams Cram, believed that Collegiate Gothic architecture symbolically expressed what were perceived to be the superior morals and piety of the Middle Ages, values that should be instilled in the minds of students during their shape-shifting college years.

Boatwright tapped Cram to plan the new Westhampton campus, and among the seven buildings Cram designed are North Court and Ryland Hall.

Located in the heart of today's UR campus, North Court served as the main building for Westhampton College, where women could find higher educational opportunities in an era when colleges primarily catered to men.

Exemplifying Cram's Collegiate Gothic style, North Court encloses a courtyard and has a large wing extending from one corner of the building. Its exterior walls are composed of brick with slate tiles covering its multiple gabled roofs. Cast and molded concrete embellishments are used extensively throughout the building, which also features a parapet and projecting pediments. Originally North Court housed all the spaces needed for a self-contained women's college including a dormitory, dining room, kitchen, administrative offices, reading room, chapel, and classrooms.

Ryland Hall, which anchored the new Richmond College, consists of two parallel wings, Robert Ryland and Charles Ryland halls, set apart by a covered connecting passageway (*loggia*). The imposing scale of the hall reflects the importance of the two Rylands to the school's development. Minister Robert Ryland was superintendent of Virginia Baptist Seminary, which in 1834 became Richmond College, with Ryland as its first president. Significantly, he broadened the school's educational mission by opening its doors to non-Baptist students. His nephew, Charles, was the college's librarian.

As with North Court, Ryland Hall contains character-defining Gothic Revival elements as seen throughout the rest of the Cram-designed buildings on campus. These elements include leaded glass windows (with Gothic-style tracery), a gable roof with slate shingles, asymmetrical design, red brick construction, and a cloistered arrangement of buildings with brick walkways surrounding them. The building also features gargoyles in the form of owls, pelicans, and men's faces of varied expressions.

Robert Ryland Hall originally housed the school's administrative offices, including the president's, as well as conference and class rooms. The library was located in Charles Ryland Hall.

Although the school never fully realized Cram's original campus plan, his architectural sensibilities have influenced the university's campus architecture to the present day.

Nowhere is that influence more evident than in Cannon Memorial Chapel, constructed in 1929, and designed in the Late Gothic Revival style by Charles M. Robinson, a prominent Virginia architect who designed many of Virginia's public schools and buildings at today's James Madison University and the College of William and Mary.

Recalling the university's character as denominational institution, Cannon Memorial Chapel features a large interior nave with a soaring vaulted ceiling and large, arched stain glass windows along the clearstory. A rose window is set above the entrance, opposite the chapel's altar end. The exterior is constructed of brick and stone and cast concrete pinnacles.

"The University of Richmond has risen to become one of the top private universities in the country, and has done so by combining the values of a liberal arts education and cutting edge technology with longstanding traditions based on its historic campus," said Governor Bob McDonnell. "The recognition of the storied architecture on campus, and the inclusion of these key campus buildings on the Virginia Landmarks Register

proves that the founders of the university, when they set out with a vision to ‘plan for a great future... with due regard to both permanence and beauty,’ achieved their goal and established an institution Virginia can be proud to call one of its own.”

“The University of Richmond is deeply grateful to the Department of Historic Resources for its thoughtful and diligent work in drafting the nominations that have made these listings possible,” said Edward Ayers, president of the University of Richmond.

“Just as President Boatwright led Richmond College with a bold vision of the future in his day, providing for women’s education and moving the campus to Westhampton where it could grow and thrive, President Ayers is taking the university into its next century, with dynamic and innovative plans,” said Kathleen S. Kilpatrick, director of the Department of Historic Resources (DHR). “I am honored but not at all surprised that President Ayers wanted to kick off the 2014 centennial celebration of a great institution with these designations,” Kilpatrick added.

DHR will soon forward to the National Park Service the nomination form for each of the three buildings for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, DHR will also submit to the NPS a report that offers an overview of the university, titled “The History and Architecture of the University of Richmond, 1834-1977.” Officially known as a Multiple Property Document, the report provides the overarching context and justification for listing multiple buildings at the campus.

The three University of Richmond buildings were approved for listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) during a quarterly meeting of DHR’s two boards Dec. 13. Fourteen other sites from around the state also were approved for listing in the VLR during the meeting.

Listing a property in the state or national register places no restrictions on what the owner may do with the property.

Virginia is a national leader in listing historic sites and districts in the National Register of Historic Places.

Nomination forms for each of the university’s buildings are posted online at the DHR website ([www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/boardPage.html](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/boardPage.html)). The nominations provide detailed information about each building. Photographs of the properties are also posted on the website.

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