

VLR-12/1/99 NRHP-2/4/00

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 10-90)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name James Blair Junior High School

other names/site number' DHR File No. 122-0474

2. Location

street & number 730 Spotswood Avenue not for publication N/A
city or town Norfolk vicinity X
state Virginia code VA county Norfolk independent city code 710 Zip 23517

3 State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 nationally statewide X locally (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

H. Alexander Wise, Jr. 12/28/99
Signature of certifying official Date

Virginia Department of Historic 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 commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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National Park Service

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4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register
- See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 8 </u> buildings
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 8 </u> Total

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

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

 N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: School

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Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: School

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Beaux Arts

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick
roof asphalt
walls brick

other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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)

- 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.
- 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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.

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- 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
EDUCATION

Period of Significance 1921-1922

Significant Dates 1921

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Calrow, Wrenn and Tazewell

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

(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

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Department of Historic Resources

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5

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

	Zone Easting	Northing	Zone Easting	Northing
1	18 384400	4080830	2	
3			4	

___ See continuation sheet.

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: Kimble A. David, Architectural Historian

Organization: _____ date October 1, 1999

street & number: P.O. Box 7638 telephone (757) 623 - 2752

city or town Norfolk state VA zip code 23509

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Norfolk

street & number 810 Union Street telephone (757) 664-4242

city or town Norfolk state VA zip code 23501

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 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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Abstract:

James Blair Junior High School is designed in a Beaux Arts style with a central core terminated by end pavilions. The school is three stories on an elevated basement story. The building is constructed of brick with limestone applique. Leading to the triple-door entrance on the first story is a grand granite staircase. The interior has a vestibule with main office and nurse's office, which leads through an arcade to the main hallway. The hallway is oriented east-west with classrooms opening on the north and south sides. The north side is dominated by a large auditorium with classical motifs, including pilasters, coffered ceiling and balcony. The school is located on the west side of the city in a mixed commercial and residential neighborhood.

Exterior:

James Blair Junior High School is a Beaux Art building facing south to Spotswood Avenue. The main entrance is centrally located on the façade. The building has projecting limestone foundation walls with a watertable. The building is brick laid in an American bond with limestone applique details. There are windows in the elevated foundation on the south and north sides. All windows on the building were replaced in the mid-1990s with smaller multi-light, metal louvered windows. The window sills are limestone slabs and on the first, second, and third stories two rows of bricks were added between the replacement windows and sills. The entrance of the building is located on the south elevation and consists of three recessed, double leaf entrances with limestone, pedimented surrounds. The doors are replacements. There is a monumental granite stair leading from the street to the three entrances. The cast-metal railings and lights on the cast-metal newel posts are original to the building.

The plan of the original building is I-shaped with two projecting ends flanking a recessed center block. Limestone, Corinthian pilasters divide each window bay in the center block. Between the basement and first stories is a limestone beltcourse, which is the pilasters' plinth. A limestone cornice surrounds the building at the parapet level. The parapet has a decorative date stone element above the main entrance and the entire parapet is capped with limestone slabs. In the pedimented parapet is a limestone applique containing a shield flanked by two fascias. In the shield is the seal of the city of Norfolk and there is a finial above. The projecting ends of the building have monumental blank limestone windows on the north and south sides. The blank window has paired pilasters, an entablature, and fanlight window carved in limestone. The blank window has been placed on the wall at the first story level extending into the second story level. Above the blank windows are a limestone applique with shields and swags at the second

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story level.

On the west side of the building there is a double leaf door that leads to the first story. A monumental stair with a cast-metal rail leads to the doors. There is a one-story addition on the north side of the pavilion end at the west corner. It is also constructed of brick with louvered windows. This addition has a hipped roof and contains the gymnasium. On the north side of the building is a brick stair with landings, which gains access to the auditorium. There are four double leaf doors at this entrance with shield and swag appliques in the blank rounded arch surrounds. Under this stair is a large rounded arch opening. East of the building is a modern addition with a brick façade and flat roof. This building is the cafeteria. On the grass area east of the building complex are eight portable classrooms. They are constructed of metal siding and two have gable roofs.

Interior:

Upon entering the school from the main entrance is a vestibule with three arched openings leading to the main hall which runs east-west. The main school office is located on the west side of the vestibule and the "Clinic" or nurse's office is located on the east side. On the east end of the hallway, there is a door and there is no opening on the west wall of the main hallway. Lining the hallway on the north and south sides are metal student lockers. The floor is linoleum and the walls are parged with tile wainscoting. Classrooms are located to the north and south of the hall to the east and west of the main entrance. Classrooms consist of rectangular spaces and are defined by the window openings on their north or south sides. Chalkboards are located on the east and west walls of the classrooms and built in furniture is located on the side of the room opposite the windows. Large radiators are located under the windows.

Restrooms for each gender are located north of the main hallway on each floor. The men's restroom is located on the west side of the side of the building and women's on the east. The restrooms are located adjacent to the stairwells. East and west of the auditorium and its entrances are two stairwells with wood handrails. There are landings on each story and in the middle of each story.

The auditorium is located opposite the main entrance. The upstage wall of the auditorium is the north wall of the main hallway in the center of the school. Access to the auditorium is gained from the main hallway via double leaf doors, which open to the side aisles of the auditorium. The stage is on the south wall of the auditorium with entrances to the stage from the side aisles

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leading from the main building hallway. The side aisles are elevated and flank the main seating area. Upholstered metal seats are placed in curved rows with "JB" cast on the side of the aisle seat in each row. The sloped floor in the auditorium is tongue-and-groove hardwood. Wood, battered piers support a U-shaped balcony above the carpeted walkway around the main seating area. The frieze above the piers is a carved detail. Stairs to the balcony are located on the northeast and northwest corners of the auditorium. There are recessed panels on the solid balcony rail with a shield flanked by swag applique. The entrance from the north to the auditorium is located on the north wall and consists of bank of single leaf, wood multi-light doors opening into a vestibule with four doors leading to the stair on the north wall. There is a ticket window to the west of the bank of doors with modillion details. The ceiling of the auditorium is coffered with classical details.

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Abstract:

James Blair was one of the first two junior high schools constructed in the city of Norfolk. Built in 1922, it was designed by Calrow, Wrenn, and Tazewell and constructed at a cost of \$595,400. The concept of the junior high schools was new in Virginia and had only been approved in the 1917-1918 school year by the State Board of Education. It was determined that median school-age students fared better separate from the upper and lower grades. These schools were also formed at a time when the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools had begun accrediting high schools. The school was named from James Blair, a prominent Virginia educator, who founded the College of William and Mary. This school is the only remaining of the two originals and still serves the median grades, though now a middle school.

The building is significant under Criteria A due to its role as one of the first junior high schools in Norfolk, Virginia and a symbol of evolving attitudes toward models of education in Virginia. It is also significant under Criteria C as a fine example of an early 20th century Beaux Arts school designed by a prominent architect, noted for his school designs in Virginia.

History:

James Blair Junior High School was one of the first two junior high schools constructed in the City of Norfolk. Blair, along with Ruffner Junior High School opened in 1922 to serve students in 7th, 8th and 9th grades. It is the only remaining junior high school building of the original two.

The design of the school was awarded to the Norfolk architecture firm of Calrow, Wrenn and Tazewell in the summer of 1921. The Manufacturers' Record lists the award for "Western Junior High School" at a cost of \$595,400. This short-lived firm had only been in existence for 2 years prior to this large commission. It was the largest commission of their two-year existence. Charles J. Calrow was the senior partner of the firm and had no formal education. He was a draftsman for noted Norfolk architect J. E. R. Carpenter and by 1903 was a partner in Breese, Ferguson and Calrow. Calrow remained associated with Ferguson until 1919. Calrow continued to practice architecture professionally until 1934, when he became the Director General of the Virginia State Planning Board. Calrow had experience designing school buildings in the Norfolk area prior the James Blair Junior High School commission. Along with Ferguson, he designed the Portlock School in Norfolk County and the High School in Petersburg. Both of these schools have classical elements, which are seen in James Blair Junior High School. After his

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disassociation with Wrenn and Tazewell, he was awarded the design of other Norfolk schools including Meadowbrook School and Larchmont School.

The school is located in the Ghent neighborhood approximately two blocks west of Norfolk's first high school, Commodore Maury. It was placed in a prominent location along Colley Avenue, one of the Ghent neighborhood commercial corridors. Ghent was the earliest suburb of the City of Norfolk and grew rapidly after World War I. With the establishment of a Navy Base and increased shipping-related industry in Norfolk after World War I, Norfolk's population grew dramatically. Suburbs that had once been relatively sparsely developed were booming with new house construction. With families migrating to Norfolk, the need to increase school space was required. With the increase in student population and more school age children attending school, Norfolk built additional schools or additions to existing schools to accommodate them. Examples of school expansions are John T. West School, Ballentine School and Lafayette School, which received additions in the early 1920s. New school construction was also underway. A large number of schools were constructed in the early 1920s, including J. E. B. Stuart Elementary School and Walter Herron Taylor Elementary School.

Changes in education also occurred during this period. Previously there were only two types of schools in Virginia; elementary and high. The concept of junior high schools was begun in the 1917-1918 school-calendar-year in the Commonwealth of Virginia. It was determined that students of this median school age fared better separate from the younger and older students of the elementary and high schools, respectively.¹ There was also an "effort to accredit and encourage two types of high schools, standard four-year and junior high schools, and abandon first, second and third grade classifications for high schools."² Virginia began to accredit its high schools in 1912-1913, which was established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.³ The three official factors that the School Board used to create junior high schools were: to give a more thorough foundation to specialized courses taken in high school, to give students courses that were geared toward their abilities, and to focus on general education, thus deterring specialized education courses.⁴ Students in the 6th grade were given an aptitude test for placement in junior high school. The results were evaluated and students of the same

1 Buck, J. L. Blair, The Development of Public Schools in Virginia, 1607-1952, Richmond, VA: 1952, 236.

2 *Ibid.*, 236.

3 *Ibid.*, 170.

4 School Board of the City of Norfolk, The Public Schools of Norfolk, VA: A Brief Description, Norfolk, VA: 1925, 22-23.

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abilities placed together.⁵ By the 1922-1923 school-calendar-year, Virginia had 38 junior high schools in operation. This number declined due to the changes directed by the Commonwealth School Board, including the consolidation of high schools in the more rural counties and the lower attendance records for junior high schools.⁶

In the spring of 1920, the Norfolk School Board voted to add junior high schools to their education standards. They authorized the 6-3-3 plan, which placed the middle three grades, 7th, 8th, and 9th in junior high schools, thus removing them from elementary and high schools. It was decided that two schools would be constructed to serve the western and eastern portions of the city. Each school would cost approximately \$700,000 and would be named for a prominent Virginian.⁷

The curricula of the junior high school was English, Foreign Language, Commercial, Industrial Arts, and Household Arts. The curricula were taught in each year of school, and some curricula were geared for a particular gender, such as Household Arts. Household Arts was required of each female student. Two periods per week of Household Arts were required and four additional periods could be taken for "more extensive study of home-making." The intent of the junior high school was not to focus on specialization, though this course may appear specialized, and any student was able to chose from the five curricula listed. ⁸ There were also extra curricula such as Home Room, Assembly, Clubs, Art Education, Health Education, and Music. Each school also had a school paper. Blair's was named the BLARE and Ruffner's, the MIRROR.⁹

Courses were not just geared toward pure education, but also toward personal development and maturity. The extra curricula provided this through each of their specialized functions. Home Room provided time for students to discuss various school activities independently from their coursework. It also allowed the students to discuss school conduct and organize programs for holidays and special assemblies.¹⁰ These assemblies were conceived to be a general school meeting and focused on the larger interests of the school.¹¹ Clubs also enriched the students

⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁶ Buck, 236.

⁷ School Board of the City of Norfolk, Virginia, 21.

⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁹ Ibid., 26-29, 31.

¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹¹ Ibid., 27.

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with more individual interests. They were avocational and focused more on general and personal interests. These clubs were seen as the cornerstone of the junior high school, whose motto was "individual justice."¹² Art Education was studied to improve the students' hand-eye coordination and hone concentration, self-reliance and perception skills.¹³ Health Education helped students achieve a "strong moral fiber" through instruction on hygiene, nutrition, and physical play, which improves honesty, fair-play, loyalty, honesty, self-control, and emotions. Music was also a part of each school, with orchestras, quartets, bands, and glee clubs, and each school had a school song.¹⁴

James Blair Junior High School was officially opened to students in September 1922. The first year of Blair Junior High School's operation yielded a registration of 1200 students and was the greater of the two junior high schools.¹⁵ There were a number of differences between the two junior high schools from their inception. Blair only served the 8th and 9th grades, while Ruffner, the 7th, 8th and 9th grades. Another difference was in the curricula of the 8th grade between the two schools. Students at Blair had to choose between the English and Foreign Language curricula in the first semester of the 8th grade and took the remaining three, Commercial, Industrial Arts and Household Arts, during the second semester, while students at Ruffner could chose any one of the five for each semester.¹⁶

The school was named for James Blair, a prominent Virginia Educator who established the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. The name was suggested by Robert M. Hughes, then Superintendent of Norfolk schools.¹⁷ Blair was born in Scotland in 1655 and educated at the University of Edinburgh. He studied the ministry and became an Anglican priest. Upon arriving in London, England, Blair impressed the Bishop of London and traveled to the colony of Virginia to minister. Blair landed in Virginia in 1685 and took a church in Henrico County, but later became the minister of the Bruton Parish church in Williamsburg. One of his most dedicated goals was the creation of a college in Virginia to educate the local Indians and colonists. Blair traveled to England and gained support from King William and Queen Mary, including a charter to build the school, 20,000 acres of land and 2000 pounds. When the college

¹² Ibid., 28.

¹³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷ Henry S Rorer, History of Norfolk Public Schools, 1918-1968, (Norfolk: Henry S. Rorer, 1968), 204.

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burned four years after the completion of construction, Blair was diligent about having the building reconstructed. Blair died April 18, 1744 in Jamestown and is interred in the cemetery of Bruton Parish Church.¹⁸

James Blair Junior High School was integrated in 1960 along with the rest of Norfolk's public schools.¹⁹ It was later renamed James Blair Middle School in the 1980s, when junior high schools were reorganized as middle schools, which moved 6th grade students to middle school and 9th grade students to high school. The school is still operating as a middle school.

¹⁸ Arthur, Margaret, *How Norfolk Schools were Named*, Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, May 1, 1926.

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Arthur, Margaret. *How Norfolk Schools were Named*. Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, May 1, 1926.

Buck, J. L. Blair. The Development of Public Schools in Virginia, 1607-1952. Richmond, VA: Commonwealth of Virginia School Board, 1952.

Rorer, Henry S. History of Norfolk Public Schools, 1918-1968. Norfolk: Henry S. Rorer, 1968.

School Board of the City of Norfolk, The Public Schools of Norfolk, VA: A Brief Description, Norfolk, VA: School Board of the City of Norfolk, 1925.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The property, on which the James Blair Junior High School is located, is bound by Spotswood Avenue to the south, Colley Avenue to the west, Washington Park to the north and Manteo Street to the east.

Legal Description: Plate 614, block 11, Washington Park, 13-55 and 14-58

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries represent all property historically associated with the school.

5197 1 NW
LITTLE CREEK



James Blair Jr
High School
122-0474

UTM Reference
18 381400 408085

200 000
FEET

24 MI TO U.S. 13
VIRGINIA BEACH (U.S. 60) 16 MI

7 1/4 IN (1/4 INK NORTH) 384 17'30" 385 6 MI TO U.S. 60 386 2 650 000 FEET 387 HAMPTON (U.S. 258) 17 MI 2.3 MI TO INTERSTATE 64 76° 15' 36° 52' 30"