

VLR-7/21/81 EXPANDED: 8/15/89 NRHP-10/29/81

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

Name

historic THE ALMSHOUSE

and/or common Richmond Nursing Home

2. Location

street & number 210 Hospital Street not for publication

city, town Richmond vicinity of congressional district Third (Thomas J. Bliley, Jr.)

state Virginia code 51 county (In city) code 760

3. Classification

Table with 4 columns: Category, Ownership, Status, Present Use. Includes options like district, building(s), structure, site, object, public/private/both, occupied/unoccupied/work in progress, accessible (yes/restricted/unrestricted/no), agriculture/commercial/educational/entertainment/government/industrial/military, museum/park/private residence/religious/scientific/transportation/other: Unoccupied.

4. Owner of Property

name City of Richmond, c/o Mayor

street & number Richmond City Hall, 900 East Broad Street

city, town Richmond vicinity of state Virginia 23219

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Richmond City Hall

street & number 900 East Broad Street

city, town Richmond state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey title has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1981 federal state county local

depository for survey records Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, 221 Governor Street

city, town Richmond state Virginia 23219

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Almshouse is the most imposing Italianate structure in the city of Richmond. Its well-proportioned classically inspired front elevation has undergone only minor changes since its construction between 1860-1861. As with most institutional buildings, some internal modifications have altered the Almshouse's original interior appearance and plan.

The exterior of the Almshouse is defined along a central linear axis and is composed of three symmetrically spaced pavilions linked by hyphens. Each pavilion is three stories tall, three bays wide, and rises above a raised full-story basement. Each hyphen is two stories high and six bays long; they are also raised above a full-story basement. Attached to the northwest corner of the western pavilion is a wing eight bays long and three stories high (the eighth bay appears to be a later addition as indicated by the change in color of the brickwork). Attached to the eastern pavilion is a three-story, two-bay hyphen connecting to a three-story, seven-bay wing. The hyphen is laid in six-course American bond, whereas all the other elevations, including the rear wings, are laid in all-stretcher bond with very thin, recessed white mortar joints.

Fenestration on all elevations is balanced, and windows are symmetrically spaced in each unit. On the front elevation, the raised basement level has 6/6 square-headed windows, wood sash, and granite lintels. Both the first and second-floor windows in each hyphen also contain 6/6 square-headed windows with wood sash, though the dimensions of the second-floor windows are smaller than the first.

In each end pavilion the first floor has a pair of elongated 4/4 round-arched windows in the outer two bays. These windows abut an arched transom-lit entrance to which is attached a pedimented porch supported by fluted iron columns of the Roman Doric order. The porches are raised and have granite steps and iron railings. The second floor of the end pavilions has 6/6 round-arched windows, and the third floor has small 3/3 paned sash windows capped with granite lintels.

The central pavilion has a raised pedimented porch supported by paired iron columns and engaged pilasters both of the Roman Doric order. This central porch is flanked by pairs of 6/6 round-arched windows. On the second and third floors there are six 6/6 round-arched windows of decreasing graduated heights.

Side elevations of the end pavilions are three bays wide and continue the fenestration pattern of the front elevation. Both side wings have evenly spaced 6/6 square-headed windows and granite lintels.

Each of the three pavilions is crowned by pedimented gable ends with broad eaves and recessed tympana. Each hyphen has a gable roof which intersects at right angles with both the center and end pavilions. Beneath the cornice of the pavilions and hyphens there is an unadorned brick entablature punctuated by symmetrically spaced attic vents. The bottom of the entablature is defined by a simple cushion molding.

Numerous changes have modified the appearance of the front and side elevations. The

(See Continuation Sheet # 1)

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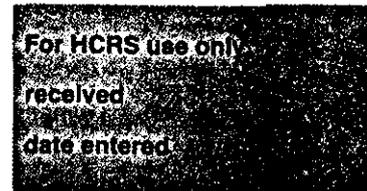
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Continuation sheet # 1

Item number 7

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three pedimented porches on the front elevation were added shortly after the Civil War, and the building's original state can be seen in a Mathew Brady photograph taken in 1865. Their integration into the building's facade through the repetition of the same shape used in the pedimented roofs suggests that they were most likely a part of the original design but were interrupted in their placement until after the war. Second, the two center windows on the top floor of the central pavilion have been lengthened, as have one window on each floor of two hyphens, to accommodate fire escapes. Fire escapes were also attached to the side elevation of each end pavilion. Pairs of chimney stacks originally found above the cornice line of each pavilion have also been removed.

The rear elevation of the almshouse originally had open galleries of frame construction running the length of the building, giving access to wards on each floor. These were removed in 1953, and enclosed glass-and-concrete porches of an International-Style appearance replaced them. The exterior entrances of each ward, spaced every two bays, have been left intact.

On the interior of the Almshouse, modifications have been made out of necessity over the years, and little of the original is visible. Sheetrock partitions set every two bays divide what were originally open wards on each floor of the hyphens. This subdivision allows interior passage from room to room, and entrances between rooms are set up enfilade. Furthermore, space in the pavilions has been subdivided by partitions obscuring their original floor plan.

Floors in the Almshouse have been covered with vinyl tile, though the original tongue-and-groove pine flooring apparently remains beneath them. It is visible in the far west room on the first floor, most recently used as a chapel.

A few isolated features of the original interior remain in the Almshouse. A simple fireplace and mantel with Greek Revival trim remain in both of the top-floor rooms of the east pavilion. The mantels' designs are provincial but are of the period of the Almshouse construction. An original open-string wooden staircase with its original molded handrail, two turned balusters per tread, and heavy turned newel gives access to each floor of both the center and end pavilions. All three front entrances, which are transom lit and have double doors, appear to be original; however, glass panels have replaced what were originally two long upper molded panels in each door. Much original hardware appears on doorways and doors throughout the building.

The eastern wing of the Almshouse appears to date from the time of the main building and appears in the Mathew Brady photograph of 1865. Its function was that of a charity hospital where, in addition, medical students from the Medical College of Virginia were given clinical instruction.

In 1926 an infirmary was erected at the rear of the east wing. There, tubercular adults were housed until 1955. Between 1952 and 1962, \$449,795 were spent for additions and repairs by the city of Richmond, and by 1976 the city was spending \$30,000 annually on the building and decided to close the facility. On September 21, 1980, the last one hundred patients were moved to the Eastwood Lodge Nursing Home, a private facility bought by the city as a replacement for the Almshouse.

CM

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Medicine

**Specific dates** 1860-61      **Builder/Architect** Washington Gill, Jr., Architect

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Richmond Almshouse, built between 1860-61 as a place of refuge for the city's poor, is a rare Virginia monument to the great reform ferment of the antebellum period. While public attention was directed to social reform, sanitation, and health needs throughout the United States in the 1850s, Southerners in general and Virginians in particular associated "reform" with "abolitionism" and so kept generally aloof from the more zealous efforts of their Northern contemporaries. Richmonders shared in this notable lack of enthusiasm for reform issues; however, by 1859 the city's need to accommodate its growing poor white population could no longer be ignored. In that year, the Richmond Common Council decided to replace the old city poorhouse, built prior to 1810, with a new building that reflected Richmond's impressive standing as the leading tobacco center in the nation. Designed by City Engineer Washington Gill, Jr., the prodigious Italianate structure served during the Civil War as the first major hospital of the Confederacy and as a home and school for the Virginia Military Institute cadets from 1864 to 1865.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Action to build the Almshouse began in May 1859, with the formation of a "Committee on the Poorhouse" by the Richmond Common Council. Upon the committee's recommendation, the Council decided that the city's old poorhouse was beyond repair and that a new building should be erected on the same site. This resolution was adopted on February 13, 1860, and plans for the new building, designed by City Engineer Washington Gill, Jr., were selected. After advertizing for subcontractors, the Council awarded contracts on June 11, 1860, to the following firms: carpentry work, Mr. George Minor; painting, Mr. William A. Wyatt; plastering, Mr. William H. Johnson; and brickwork, Messrs. Williams and Ragland.

Gill served as Richmond's first City Engineer from 1853 until 1869. Besides his work on the Almshouse, he supervised several other large projects, including the dredging of the James River channel (1853-54), the construction and installation of two twelve-inch water pumps with waterwheels (1855), the building of a tunnel under the James River canal for the passage of the city pump mains (1857-58), and the implementation of a new street numbering plan for Richmond (1866). Gill, who was employed by the James River and Kanawha Company before he became City Engineer, lived at 107 East Main Street during the period in which he supervised construction of the Almshouse.

Work proceeded on the building during the remainder of 1860, and mention of its progress was recorded in the Richmond Dispatch of August 11 of that year: ". . .the walls of the Almshouse are going up and (it) will probably be finished . . .by next winter. The building is a mammoth one, and when completed will be very convenient in all its arrangements." Work halted in June 1861, with the outbreak of the war, and the building

(See Continuation Sheet # 2)

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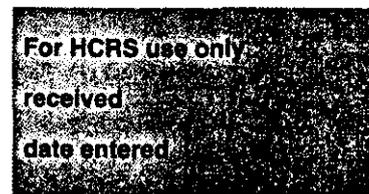
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was soon converted and leased to the Confederacy as General Hospital Number One. At its peak, the hospital housed over five hundred soldiers and was recorded in an article in the Richmond Whig of August 17, 1861, as being the best-managed hospital in Richmond. From December 1864 until the eve of the evacuation of Richmond on April 12, 1865, the almshouse acted as a temporary headquarters and school for cadets of the Virginia Military Institute. The school at Lexington had been burned by Northern troops in the Valley Campaign. During the evacuation of the city, the building was damaged slightly by the explosion of a nearby powder magazine. This event was recorded in a photograph taken by Mathew Brady, now in the collection of the Valentine Museum.

Following the war, the Almshouse served again as an asylum for the city's poor as well as a hospital. During Reconstruction, a Confederate veteran ran the institution with military discipline until a more sympathetic Republican appointee assumed management of the home. Occupied more with the task of providing gas, light, and water service to the capital city than with the work of caring for the poor, the City Council made inadequate allowances for running the hospital, and the building was in constant disrepair throughout the rest of the 19th century.

In 1909 the first annual report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections was issued in Richmond. A document of the Progressive Era in Virginia, this study reflected a growing concern within the power structure of the Old Dominion for maintaining social order among Virginia's poorest inhabitants. The description of the Almshouse in the report showed clearly that Richmond had the largest and most impressive almshouse in the state. Religious services were held there several times a week, indicating a concern for the spiritual well-being of the paupers. Those who were able assisted in performing domestic duties in the home. Some amusement was provided for the almshouse residents, including occasional visits to the city, but failure to obey the rules resulted in the withdrawal of these privileges. It was urged by the visiting committee who wrote the report that separate dining facilities be maintained for men and women. Segregation of the races was maintained without question. The visiting committee found the sanitary arrangements in the building more than adequate, with provision for such modern conveniences as steam heat, gas or electric lights, running water, and indoor plumbing.

The existence of the Almshouse in Richmond represents a traditional concern for the poor in Virginia that can be traced back to the parish vestries of colonial times. The history of the Almshouse suggests, however, that this feeling of obligation toward the poor has sprung as often from a desire to maintain social stability as from a deep philanthropic concern. The Almshouse, later called the Richmond Nursing Home, continued to serve the less-fortunate members of the Richmond community until the late 1970s. Today the building is empty, and its survival is questionable unless an appropriate use for it can be found.

CM/MTP/RAC



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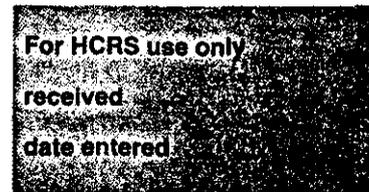
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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Blanton, Wyndham B. Medicine in Virginia in the Nineteenth Century. Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1933, pp. 211, 212.

Chesson, Michael. Richmond After the War, 1865-1890. Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1981, pp. 75-76, 193-194.

First Annual Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections to the Governor of Virginia for the Year Ending September 30, 1909. Richmond, 1909, pp. 106-109.

LaPrade, David F. "Articles on Various Subjects Dealing with the History of Richmond, Va." MS, Department of Public Works, Richmond, Va., 1949, p. 59.

Pulley, Raymond H. Old Virginia Restored, An Interpretation of the Progressive Impulse, 1870-1930. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968.

Richmond, Va. Common Council Journals (January 12, 1857-December 8, 1862), pp. 273, 343, 357, 376, 464.

Richmond, Va. The Valentine Museum Library. Vertical Files. "Almshouse."

Richmond Dispatch. August 11, 1860, p. 1.

Simkins, Francis Butler. A History of the South. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.

7. DESCRIPTION--Boundary Justification

The bounds have been drawn to include only the Almshouse and a ca. 1950 one-story administration building to the rear. The nominated acreage is bounded on the northeast by the Seaboard Coast Line right-of-way, on the southeast by the Hebrew Cemetery, on the southwest by Hospital St; and on the northwest by a line, extending between Hospital St. and the railroad right-of-way and running just northwest of the west wing of the main building.

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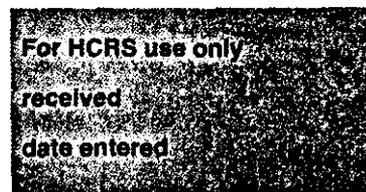
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Continuation sheet #4

Item number 10

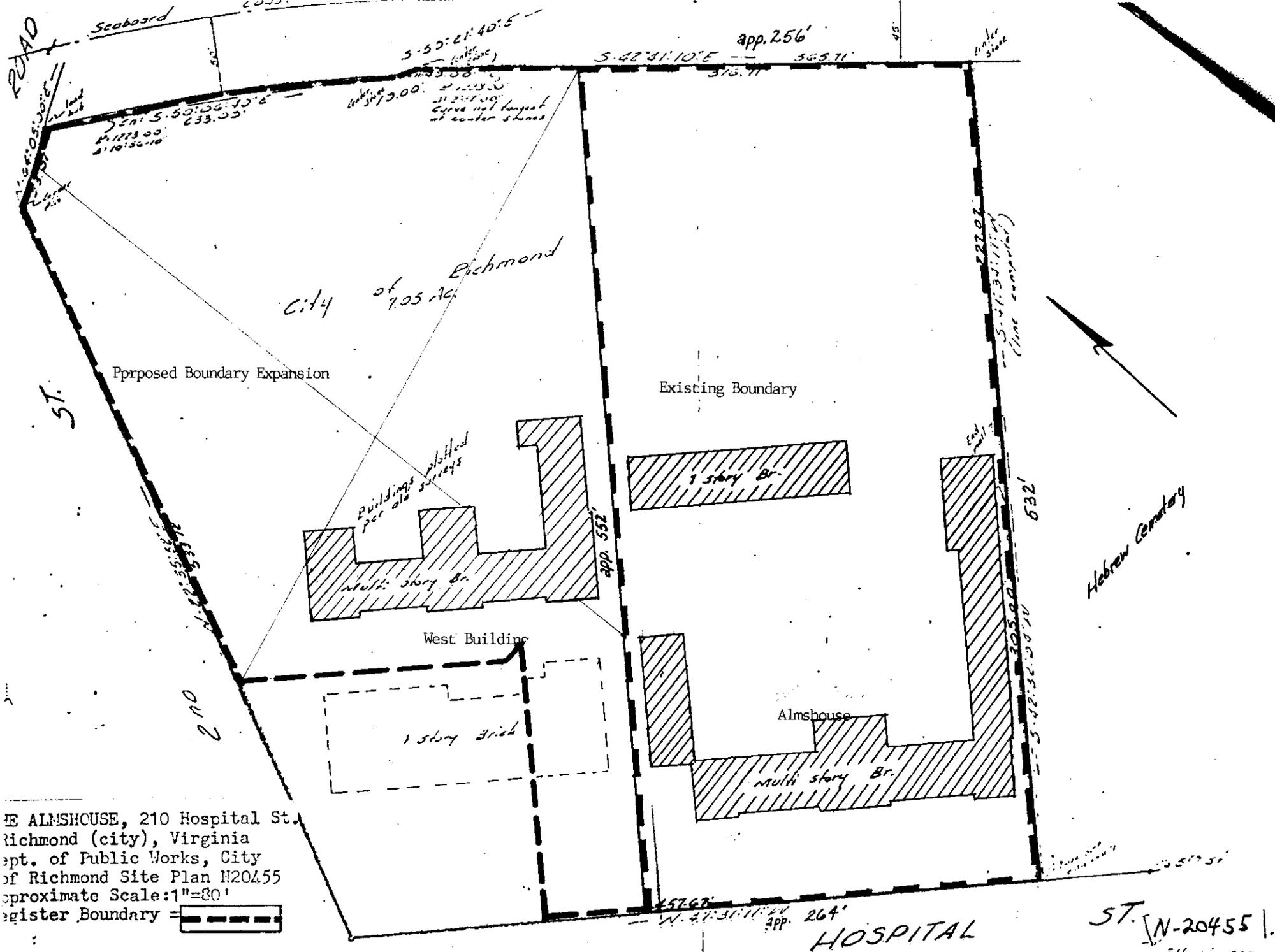
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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA - Verbal Boundary Description (Cont'd)

Coast Line right-of-way; thence about 260' SE along right-of-way, thence about 530' SW to point of origin.





THE ALMSHOUSE, 210 Hospital St.  
 Richmond (city), Virginia  
 Dept. of Public Works, City  
 of Richmond Site Plan N20455  
 Approximate Scale: 1"=80'  
 Register Boundary = [dashed line symbol]

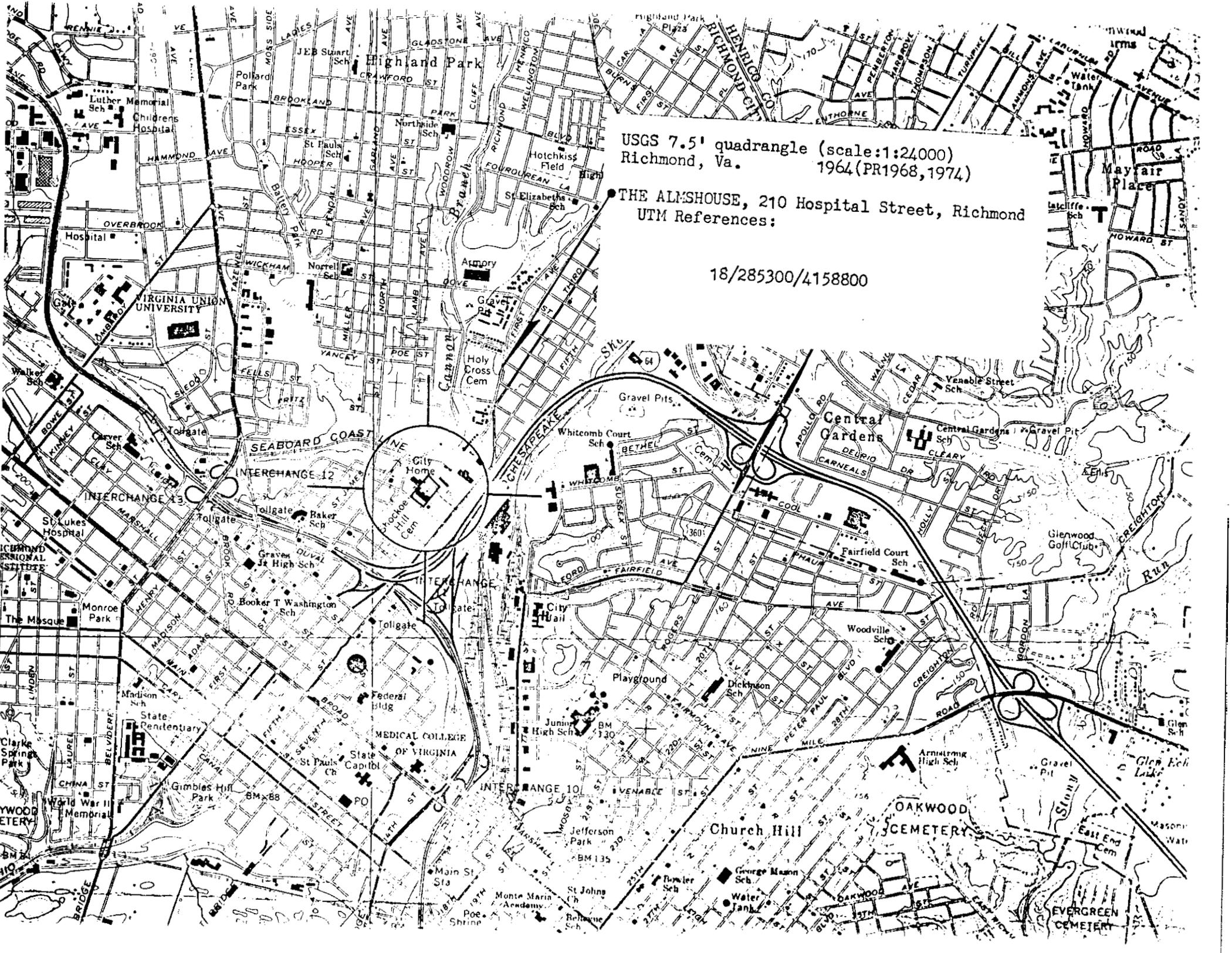
NOTES

- 1. [Symbol] represent the difference
- 2. [Symbol] of property line and the
- 3. Lot dimensions in parentheses are from deeds.
- 4. Grades Adjusted by City-Manager

Surveys conducted by [unclear]  
 CNA Division

HOSPITAL ST. [N-20455]

Plan of Proposed Sale of City Property  
 Located at 2nd and Hospital Streets



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24,000)  
Richmond, Va. 1964 (PR1968,1974)

THE ALMHOUSE, 210 Hospital Street, Richmond  
UTM References:

18/285300/4158800

