

VLR- 8/15/81

NRHP- 6/13/90

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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THE ALMSHOUSE, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA (boundary increase amendment)  
(West Building)

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this amendment to the Almshouse, Richmond, Virginia, nomination meets the documentation requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official Date \_\_\_\_\_

Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of property 4 acres

UTM References

A 18 285300 4158800

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Almshouse site is recorded in the City of Richmond Tax Assessor's office as number 000-02331001. The section of the site being nominated begins at a point on the north side of Hospital Street about 450 feet northwest of the intersection with 5th Street; thence extending about 320 feet along said side; then about 180 feet northeast; thence about 190 feet northwest to a point on 2nd Street about 180 feet northeast of its intersection with Hospital Street; thence about 660 feet northeast along said side to the south corner of the intersection of 2nd Street and Valley Road; thence about 60 feet northeast along said side to the CSX right-of-way; thence about 590 feet southeast along said right-of-way; thence about 530 feet southeast to the point of origin.

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Numerous changes have modified the appearance of the front and side elevations. A wing was added to the rear of the eastern most pavillion in 1929. This wing preserved, for the most part, the original design. The rear elevation 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, similar to that found on the Main Building.

On the interior of the West Building, modifications have been made out of necessity over the years, and little of the original is visible. Sheetrock and plaster partitions set every bay divides what were originally open wards on each floor. Furthermore, space in the pavilions has been subdivided by other more temporary partitions obscuring their original floor plan. No features of the original interior remains.

Floors in the West Building have been covered with vinyl tile, though the original tongue-and-groove pine flooring apparently remains beneath them. It is visible in certain areas.

The main portion of the West Building appears to date from 1908. Its function was that of a charity hospital for black residents of Richmond, where, in addition, medical students from the Medical College of Virginia were given clinical instruction.

The Garage is of unknown history but is clearly significant to the overall Almshouse complex. The building is basically a two story masonry and wood frame two bay garage. It has no significant interior detail.

The bounds have been drawn to include the Main Building, a ca. 1950 one-story Administration Building, the West Building and the Garage (as illustrated on the attached plat).

The nominated acreage is bounded on the northeast by the Seaboard Coast Line right-of-way, on the southeast by the Hebrew Cemetary, on the southwest by Hospital Street, on the northwest along a line which follows 2nd Street to a point approximately 40' to the south of the West Building and then immediately to the west of the Garage. This boundary includes all structures judged to contribute to the historic integrity of the site.

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The exterior of the West Building is defined along a central linear axis and is composed of three symmetrically spaced pavilions linked by hyphens. Each pavilion is two stories tall, three bays wide, and rises above a raised full-story basement. Each hyphen is two stories high and four bays long; they are also raised above a full-story basement.

Fenestration on all elevations is balanced, and windows are symmetrically spaced in each unit. On the front elevation, the raised basement level has 3/3 square-headed windows and wood sash. Both the first and second floor windows in each hyphen also contain 3/3 square-headed windows with wood sash but with a 3 lite fix transom above each double hung window unit. The windows on the second level have cut stone lintels.

The central pavilion has a raised concrete pedimented porch supported by paired concrete columns. This central porch is flanked by pairs of 3/3 windows with transom. The porch is not original.

The three pavilions are not crowned by pedimented gable as is the case with the Main Building. Instead, each has a gable roof which intersects at right angles with the hyphens. Beneath the cornice there is an unadorned stucco freeze.

The Garage is a simple two story masonry structure with two garage bays on the ground floor.

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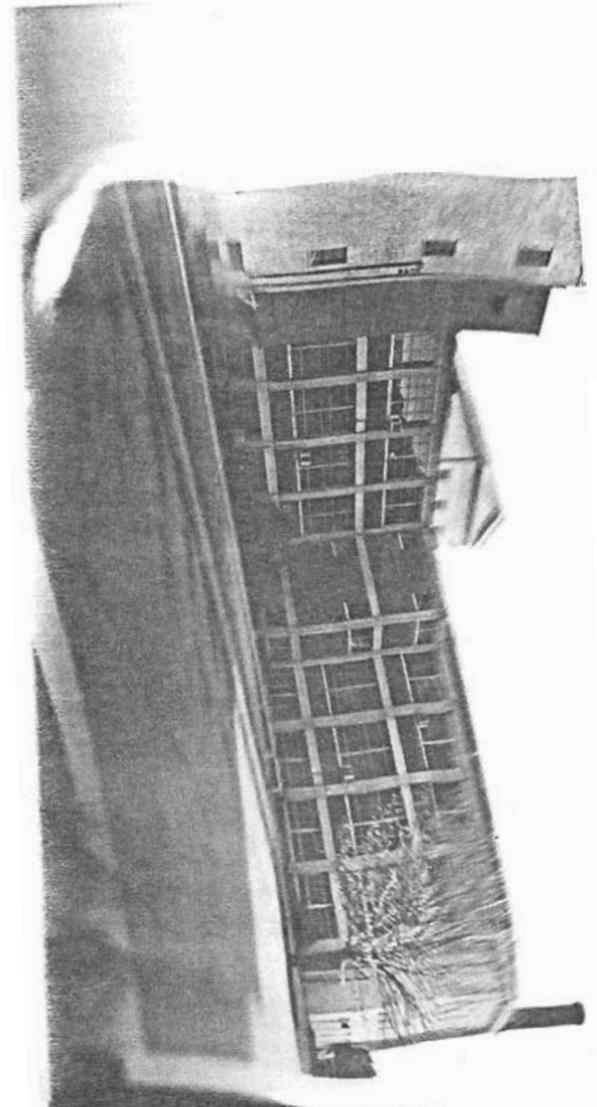
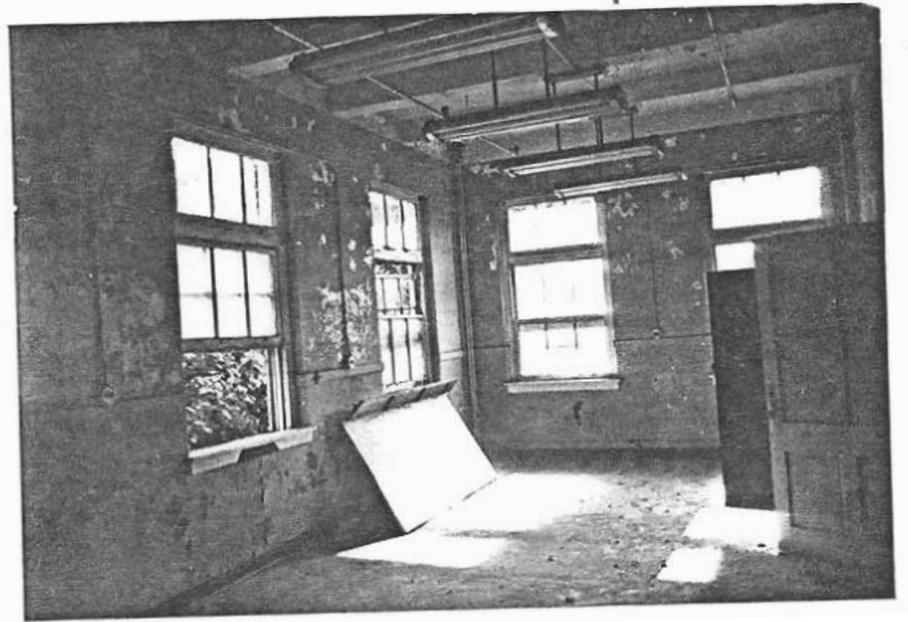
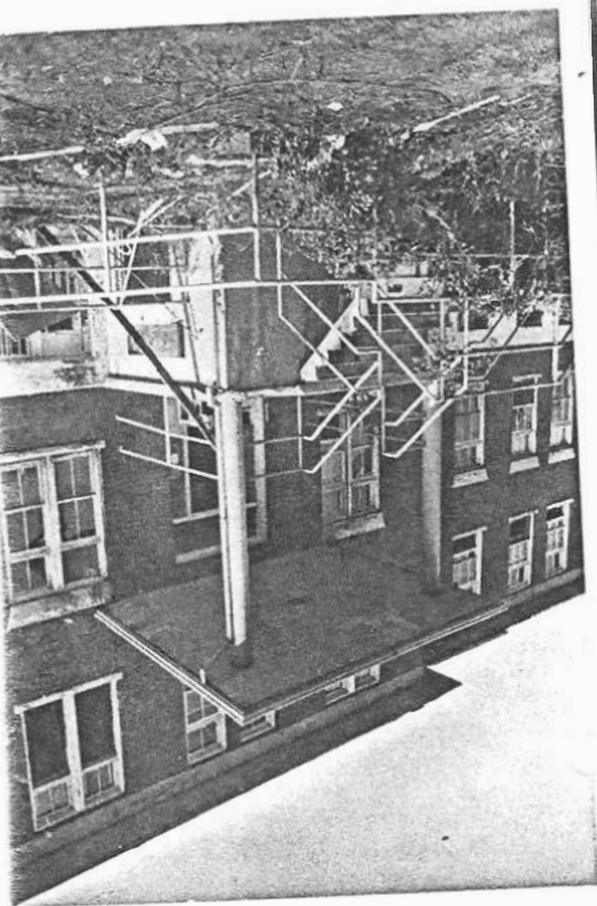
Virginia, like other states in America were profoundly influenced by the social reform movement which developed at the turn of the century. Between 1900 and 1910 there developed in the state a significant reform of the state's educational and welfare institutions. School facilities were dramatically improved, the prison and asylum system was modernized, and numerous labor laws were enacted. In 1900 the Virginia Conference of Charities and Corrections was formed by a small assemblage of hospital and asylum officials meeting in Marion. It was out of this movement and the social awakening that it created that the need to meet the needs of the City's growing black population became apparent. In 1908 the Council authorized the construction of the home for the City's "poor Negro".

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 providing for black residents as well as white. 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 by separate living quarters. The visiting committee found the sanitary arrangements in the building were more than adequate, with provisions 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 which reached its height during the reform movement of the early 20th century. 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.



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PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

1. West Building, Almshouse, Richmond, VA  
David White, photographer  
September 1988  
Negative on file at the VA State Library, Richmond, VA  
View of rear elevation
2. View of front entrance
3. View of rear elevation
4. View of typical interior room
5. View of garage

