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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Virginia Commission for the Blind
Other names/site number: VDHR File Number 127-6808
Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

2. Location

Street & number: 3003 Parkwood Avenue
City or town: Richmond State: VA County: Independent City
Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

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 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___national _X_statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

__ A _X_ B _X_ C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Date**

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: **Date**

Title : **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this 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

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private: [X]

Public – Local [ ]

Public – State [ ]

Public – Federal [ ]

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) [X]

District [ ]

Site [ ]

Structure [ ]

Object [ ]

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
EDUCATION: school
GOVERNMENT: government office

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
HEALTH CARE: sanitarium

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; WOOD; STONE: Slate, Granite

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph
The Virginia Commission for the Blind building is a two-story Colonial Revival brick edifice (with basement) with collegiate neo-Georgian features, on a .686-acre corner lot in the southwest quadrant of the intersection of Parkwood Avenue and Sheppard Street in the City of Richmond, VA. The building is U-shaped in plan, with two wings with double-loaded corridors, presenting end façades on the north elevations. The two wings are connected at the south ends by a two-story east-west section with a single-loaded basement and first-floor corridor and a double-loaded corridor on the second floor. The building was completed in two campaigns: the east wing and the six easternmost bays were constructed in 1940-1941, the west wing and the five westernmost front bays (seven bays at the rear) date from 1958. J. Binford Walford designed the 1940 building and the owners returned to his successor firm, Walford & Wright, Architects, to design the addition, resulting in the building's homogenous appearance. The historic property has two contributing resources: the historic building and the brick and ornamental iron fence with brick piers (1 contributing building and 1 contributing structure).

Narrative Description

Site
A fine ornamental iron fence on a buttressed brick base with molded-brick coping and brick piers defines the property's boundaries on the Sheppard Street and Parkwood Avenue frontage. Several mature trees and shrubs remain from the days when the areas east and west of the building were described as landscaped gardens and the courtyard area described as a lawn. A row of paved parking spaces runs across the rear of the property, accessed from the public alley that runs along the southern boundary of the parcel.

Exterior

The building, designed by Richmond architects J. Binford Walford (original 1940 portion) and O. Pendleton Wright of Walford & Wright, Architects (1958 west wing), features a running-bond brick foundation with a molded brick water table and Flemish-bond brick exterior walls with a brick belt course, and corner quoins. The first- and second-story windows are 8/8 double-hung wood sash and appear to be original. The first-story windows feature gauged-brick jack-arch lintels with cast stone keystones and inset raised brick panels between the sill and the water table. The basement windows are 12-light steel windows with 4-light hoppers, except for a fixed single-pane window beside the new basement entrance (1983) on the west elevation of the 1958 wing and the windows in the south wall of the 1958 boiler room, a 24-light curtain-wall-type window with a central row of awning windows above a bottom row of hopper windows.

Above a dentiled wood cornice is the moderately-pitched slate roof. The roof is hipped with the exception of a single gable-end above the original formal entrance to the 1940 wing. This entrance features granite steps with curved metal railings that lead to the brick and granite stoop before a pair of three-panel wood doors with a traceried transom set within paneled jambs and a door surround with pilasters that carry a broken segmental pediment. A central plinth once held an urn (now missing) within the broken pediment. The pediment engages with the lugged architrave of the central window above the door. A lantern-style light mounted above the door on curving metal brackets appears to be original, or at least markedly similar to that seen in historic photographs.

The primary entrance to the west wing is much simpler in design and materials. The stoop is a concrete pad at grade. The painted laminate wood doors, which are not original, are set in a molded wood surround with a leaded glass transom in the same pattern as the traceried transom at the east wing entrance, surmounted by a dentiled cornice above a shallow cushioned frieze.

The courtyard entrance has a Tuscan-columned portico with a pediment with a dentiled cornice and a seven-light transom over the door. The door opening has been modified (width and materials) to accommodate the replacement door. The other 1940 entrance is on the south (rear) elevation and features a pedimented hood on brackets and a 4-light transom over a replacement door.

The 1958 corridor exit doors at the west and south (rear) elevations both have a concrete stoop, steel replacement doors, and gauged-brick jack-arch lintels with cast stone keystones. The 1958 addition was designed with a basement entrance reached by a run of stairs at the south end of the west elevation. These stairs have a steel railing with vertical pickets. Another exterior basement entrance was added in 1983 to provide egress from the basement dining room, reached by a stair at the north end of the west elevation, and is enclosed only by a simple pipe railing. Both stairwells are sheltered by non-historic black awnings supported by metal brackets and metal posts.

There are two corbeled interior brick chimneys in Flemish bond, one in the 1940 portion and the other in the 1958 addition.

Interior

The interior treatment of the building is more modest with simple finishes and trim. A few of the original formal rooms in the 1940 portion survive: the first-floor reception room, a suite of two offices, and the library. Surviving historic material includes the chair rail in the Reception Hall and slightly more elaborate door casings found in the adjoining Office. Stained wood shelving, paneling, and trim lend gravity to the Library. There are transoms over many of the original interior doors, though all have been either painted over or blocked. Some original door hardware remains. The central corridor and stairwells remain intact. An arched opening just past the reception area leads to steel stairs with terrazzo treads, painted metal railings and pipe handrails. A similar stair in an original closed stairwell is located at the other end of the corridor at the rear of the building. A narrow, decorative arched alcove appears on each floor beside the door to the rear stairs. The larger historic spaces in the 1940 portion were modified after 1983 when the building was converted to a retirement/convalescent facility. The sales office and sales room, once used to display and market items produced on site, along with the second-floor work room, have been subdivided to provide a corridor connecting to the 1958 portion of the building and smaller adjacent spaces: a lounge, examining room and nurses' station on the first floor, and additional bedrooms for residents on the second floor. Storage room partitions in the basement, not shown on the original plans, were removed to create the current recreation room. The basement boiler room and laundry have been subdivided. Dropped acoustical tile ceilings partially obscure the metal-framed windows. The original basement walls are painted brick.

The interior of the 1958 portion, designed by the same firm as the 1940 section, has simpler trim and the interior doors do not have transoms. The enclosed stairs have rubber treads, steel railings and molded handrails. In addition to increasing the number of rooms and baths on the first and second floors, the new construction accommodated a new basement kitchen, boiler room, and a large dining room. The interior basement walls are painted concrete masonry units (CMU) except for the boiler room, which is unpainted, and the kitchen, which has glazed wall tile and ceramic floor tile. The dining room has a dropped acoustical tile ceiling. The window, exit door and stairs were added after 1983.

Integrity

With the exception of the missing urn, the 1958 west wing's replacement entrance doors and the modifications to the courtyard entrance, the exterior of the building has a high degree of integrity. Its design, materials, workmanship, and setting retains the essential physical features that made up its character and appearance during the period of its association with L. L. Watts' efforts to improve the conditions of the blind citizens of Virginia. While the interior has seen more extensive modification, sufficient formal spaces and features remain to represent the property's period of significance.

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.
- [x] 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.

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 grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
HEALTH/MEDICINE
SOCIAL HISTORY
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1940-1958

Significant Dates
1940
1958

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
Watts, Lucian Louis

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Walford, J. Binford
Walford & Wright

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Virginia Commission for the Blind building at 3003 Parkwood Avenue is significant at the state level under Criterion B for its association with Lucian Louis Watts for his work in the areas of Health/Medicine and Social Welfare. Of a number of properties associated with Watts' career this is the resource most closely associated with his efforts and achievements in addressing the social welfare of the blind population of the Commonwealth. Watts was acknowledged as a "leader in demonstrating the ability of a state agency to deliver a wide range of services to blind adults and children"[1] and was involved in the founding of state and national organizations for the blind that remain active to this day; namely, the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind (now Virginia Industries for the Blind), the Virginia Commission for the Blind (now the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired), and the American Foundation for the Blind. The building itself is also significant at the state level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as it represents a work in the popular Colonial Revival style by J. Binford Walford, a Virginia architect of statewide significance, notable for his design of institutional buildings at a number of Virginia universities. He is considered the successor to Charles M. Robinson, with whom he worked from 1918 to 1932.[2] His building for the Virginia Commission for the Blind served for some 40 years (1940-1980) as the principal administrative offices for statewide services for the blind and, in addition, provided vocational training, an ophthalmological clinic, and a regional Braille and "talking machine books" library.[3] The period of significance, 1940-1958, encompasses the original construction in 1940 and the 1958 addition that gives the building its current form.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Lucian Louis Watts and the Virginia Commission for the Blind

L. L. Watts (1888-1974) was singularly instrumental in the development of services for the blind in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the individual most responsible for the successful construction of the Virginia Commission of the Blind building at 3003 Parkwood Avenue in Richmond. His work influenced educational and training opportunities for blind Virginians across Virginia for more than 30 years, and his legacy has continued to the present day, making him of statewide significance. As Commission Chairman and Virginia Delegate, the Honorable Herbert J. Taylor stated on the occasion of the new building's dedication, that from the time of the Commission's organization in 1922, "Mr. Watts [. . .] has been the driving force behind the

[1] Frances A. Koestler, *The Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness in the United States (2nd ed.)*, New York, AFB Press, 2004, p. 18.
[2] John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, *The Virginia Architects 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary*, New South Architectural Press, Richmond, Virginia, 1997, p. 458
[3] "Dream Comes True in Commission for Blind's Building," *Richmond News Leader*, 24 Sept. 1941.

development of the Commission."[4] Watts' history to 1940 is related in a Commission pamphlet that describes his advent in 1919 as that of "a man destined to alter the whole course of work for the blind in Virginia and indeed to win recognition as a leader in this work throughout the United States and Canada."[5]

Watts was serving as a Superintendent of a railroad construction project when he lost his sight in a dynamite blasting accident in 1913. After recuperating, he attended the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind in Staunton, Virginia, and graduated in 1917. He became an instructor at the school and in 1919, he sent an invitation to the alumni of the school and friends of the blind to meet in June to form the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind. In 1920, Watts was appointed to a state commission to investigate the conditions of the blind in Virginia. This temporary commission reported its survey findings to the General Assembly with a recommendation that a permanent Virginia Commission for the Blind be established. The Virginia Commission for the Blind was created on March 23, 1922, through an act of the General Assembly and Watts was chosen as the Executive Secretary of the Commission,[6] a position he was to hold for 34 years.

Watts was also involved in the establishment of the American Foundation for the Blind at the convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind held in Vinton, Iowa, in 1921.[7] The American Foundation for the Blind is the national organization most closely associated with Helen Keller, for which she worked for more than 40 years. Watts, with assistance from the American Foundation for the Blind, arranged for Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy to address a joint session of the Virginia House and Senate as part of a "Three Day's Educational Campaign" on February 12-14, 1924. The goal of the campaign was to raise awareness of the work of the fledgling Virginia Commission for the Blind and to convince the General Assembly to increase the state appropriation to further its work. Fourteen industries of the blind exhibited in the course of the campaign, which culminated in Helen Keller's address on February 14. She appealed for increased appropriations and for the continued independence of the Virginia Commission for the Blind. Governor E. Lee Trinkle reported on the effectiveness of the campaign and the enthusiasm Ms. Keller's address engendered.[8]

In 1925, the citizens of Albemarle County elected Mr. Watts to the Virginia House of Delegates, where he served four terms (1926-1934). Among his active contributions in the legislature, he sponsored a successful bill that made the Commonwealth's compulsory education laws apply to

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[4] Virginia Commission for the Blind, "Transcript of the Formal Dedication of the New Quarters of the Virginia Commission of the Blind, Richmond, Virginia, September 25, 1941," Lucian Louis Watt Papers, M 12, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, VCU, p. 2.
[5] John B. Cunningham, *Virginia's Program for the Visually Handicapped*, American Foundation for the Blind, 1940, p. 33.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 33-35.
[7] "Biography of Watts," Lucian Louis Watt Papers, M 12, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, VCU, p. 2.
[8] Charles B. Hayes, "Report of the Bureau of Information and Publicity," *American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Proceedings of the 27th Biennial Convention Held at Watertown, Massachusetts, June 23 to 27, 1924*, American Foundation for the Blind, New York City, p 193.

blind children.[9] That same year, the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind, under Watts' leadership, opened the Workshop for the Blind as a private broom and mattress factory at South Fourth Street in Charlottesville. The men of the workshop also produced willow baskets and cane chairs. By 1931, the Workshop moved into its current plant on Monticello Road. The State purchased the Workshop from the Association in 1934 and transferred ownership and supervision of operations to the Commission.[10]

The Virginia Commission for the Blind hosted the 1933 biennial convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind in Richmond, where Watts was elected first vice-president of this international organization representing blind workers throughout the United States and Canada. When the president of the organization died in 1934, Watts stepped into the role of the chief executive and was elected president at the next biennial convention in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1935. After the expiration of his term as president, Watts continued to serve on the Board of Directors and as chair of the legislative committee.[11]

Commission Facilities at Parkwood and J. Binford Walford, Architect

The offices of the Commission were initially in Charlottesville but relocated to 1228 East Broad Street in Richmond in 1924. In 1931 the administrative offices moved to a frame residence at 3003 Parkwood Avenue. The use of this property was donated to the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind by Edwin J. Gould of New York. In 1938, the Association was able to purchase the property from the Gould Foundation, on favorable terms, and in December deeded it to the Commonwealth to be used by the Commission for the Blind.[12]

When the City of Richmond's Fire Department condemned the frame building early in 1939, Mr. Watts, as Executive Director of the Commission, petitioned Governor James H. Price for assistance in replacing the facility. The Governor approved the construction of a new building and authorized the Commission to borrow $16,000 to add to the General Assembly's appropriation of $30,000, the Works Progress Administration's allocation of $24,000 and the $10,000 contributed by the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind.[13]

J. Binford Walford (1891-1956) was selected as the architect and in March, 1940, applied for a permit to construct a two-story building with a basement out of concrete, brick, cinder block and wood with a slate roof. Walford attended the Virginia Mechanical Institute and, after working for Richmond architectural firms Scarborough & Howell and Carneal & Johnston, he joined the office of Charles M. Robinson in 1918. Walford became an associate in Robinson's practice by 1922, just as the firm was engaged in designing the first major expansion at the College of William and Mary. When Robinson died in 1932, Walford continued as the head of the office. Walford was associated with O. Pendleton Wright from 1946, forming the practice Walford &

[9] Cunningham, p. 35.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[13] Transcript of the Dedication of the New Quarters, p. 2.

Wright, Architects. Around the time he was selected in 1940 to design the new facility for the Virginia Commission for the Blind, he had been active in designing additional academic buildings, dormitories, and a stadium for the campus of the College of William and Mary. He also designed classrooms, dormitories, and the Trinkle Library at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Converse and Cleveland dormitories at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, and Virginia Hall, Lindsey-Montague Hall, Colson Hall, Langston Hall, and the President's House at Virginia State University in Ettrick, Virginia.[14] These handsome collegiate buildings, in his assured Colonial Revival style, confirm his place in guiding the architectural character of these Virginia campuses.

When demolition of the former Gould residence began in 1939, Watts moved his offices to temporary quarters at 3007 Parkwood Avenue; the women's department relocated to 3154 Ellwood Avenue. Work progressed sufficiently to allow the executive offices and home work department to move into the new building in March 1941. Work continued until the facility was completed in August, 1941. The new quarters were formally dedicated on September 25, 1941.[15] Among the speakers was R. S. Hummel, State Administrator of the Works Progress Administration, who offered his congratulations to Watts and the Commission, and to the WPA workers, in recognition of the quality of the work.[16]

The Work of the Commission

In addition to housing the executive offices of the Commission for the Blind, the new facility offered a library of some 500 books for the blind, as well as "talking machine books", offices, classrooms and workrooms for instructing blind women to sew and weave and a large recreation room and a sales display area for finished goods.[17] (The Commission's Virginia Workshop for the Blind in Charlottesville was the center for the training and employment of blind men.)

The Commission, operating out of 3003 Parkwood Avenue, had the responsibility of administering all funds from the Federal government for Aid to the Blind in Virginia. The Commission also employed a full-time ophthalmologist and nurse, a supervisor of sight-saving classes in coordination with public schools, a placement agent who found employment for blind men, and three home teachers serving blind women in Richmond and Lynchburg. In addition, the Commission oversaw racially and sex-segregated training centers in Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Richmond with a staff of trained social workers.[18]

The Commission was directing its activities and developing its facilities in Jim-Crow-era Virginia, when the baseline practice was to segregate all public education and training by race. Home teaching "among the colored" was limited to cities in the Tidewater area of Virginia,

[14] Wells and Dalton, p. 458.
[15] Virginia Commission for the Blind, "We Dedicate . . ." (Program for the Dedication of the New Facility, September 25, 1941), p. 2.
[16] Transcript of the Dedication of the New Quarters, p. 3.
[17] "Dream Comes True in Commission for Blind's Building," *Richmond News Leader*, 24 Sept. 1941.
[18] Virginia Commission for the Blind, "We Dedicate . . ." (Program for the Dedication of the New Facility, September 25, 1941), p. 2.

where the state had hired a blind woman "to teach the blind of her race."[19] The Commission also operated a segregated training facility for men in Richmond, distinct from the workshop for white men in Charlottesville. This segregation was more due to the prevailing racist social construct than to Watts' personal philosophy. On May 25, 1954, Watts wrote to Governor Stanley, making reference to the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision of May 17, and offering his suggestions for "the integration in the field of education of the blind child and the deaf child of this Commonwealth" in the interest of remedying "the injustices which have been done the blind and deaf children of this Commonwealth for so many years[.]"[20]

The Commission also operated separate training centers for men and women. In reading Commission materials, it appears that boys and girls were educated together in the sight-saving classes. Men and women, however, were offered training in geographically separated facilities. Part of the rationale for this practice is more than likely due to the very distinct skills and training offered as appropriate work for women and for men. The women were taught sewing, weaving, knitting, crocheting, basket-making and the production of leather goods, along with such vocational offerings as typing, stenography and Dictaphone, and switchboard operation. Men were trained to produce mattresses, brooms, wrestling mats, and to refashion and re-seat chairs and in some cases to operate a news stand. There was also a Canteen Service program available to men where, with a seeing partner, they worked a route stocking vending machines. Watts, however, was called upon to defend his practice of not allowing Charlottesville trainees to marry or to bring their wives with them to Charlottesville while they were training. In a 1945 Commission report to Governor Darden, Watts stated that such regulations were "salutary and conducive to the best interests of the program" in order to avoid bringing "a disproportionately large blind population to Charlottesville" which would "tend to encourage more marriages of blind people to each other which is 'undesirable socially' with exceptions in 'extraordinary' cases."[21] This seems to indicate that Watts, who was married, may himself have imposed the sex-segregated structure on the Commission-operated facilities.

In 1928, Watt's Commission for the Blind had pioneered the first free eye clinics available to school children. Initially, these operated with a traveling field nurse who coordinated the volunteer service of local eye specialists. In 1935, Watts raised, by public subscription, sufficient funds to hire a full-time staff ophthalmologist.[22] In time, the state legislature provided the funds for this position. The Commission also worked throughout the state to prevent blindness from ophthalmia neonatorum, from gonococcal infection in both newborn and adult eyes, and suppressing outbreaks of trachoma, or granulated eyelids, in the mountainous and southwestern portions of the state.[23]

[19] Cunningham, p. 15.
[20] Watts Letter to Honorable Thomas B. Stanley, Governor of Virginia dated May 25, 1954, Lucian Louis Watt Papers, M 12, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, VCU
[21] "State Commission for Blind Absolves Itself of Charges; Watts' Work Is Praised," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 1 Dec. 1945.
[22] Cunningham, p. 25.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Watts had indeed achieved much for the blind in Virginia. Watts' energy and approach were described in a news article on the dedication of the new facility, "Nowhere in the State of Virginia or in these United States will you find a more down-to-earth point of view about blindness. Mr. Watts has adopted some all-out policies in connection with his handicap, and with the energy of a pile-driver he has put them into effect."[24]

Watts' drive and effectiveness were not always well received. As reported by the Richmond Times-Dispatch, in 1945, eleven workers at the Charlottesville workshop brought complaints of "unfitness," "'dictatorial' manners and attitudes," and "a lack of sympathetic and sufficient case work." Governor Darden requested an investigation and received a report that cleared the Commission and Watts of the charges and included praise for the executive director's "magnificent" work. To address the allegation that the Association of Workers for the Blind and the Virginia Commission for the Blind (a private group and a public agency) were "too close", the report spelled out the relationship between the two groups:

> The association, parent organization whose efforts established the State-supported commission, provides funds and services the commission does not offer and the commission's work has "been enormously enhanced" by aid of the association.[25]

In 1956, the Commission for the Blind became the Virginia Commission for the Visually Handicapped. On July 1 of that year, L. L. Watts retired after serving as Executive Secretary of the Commission for 34 years.[26] A statement that appeared in a pamphlet published in 1940 remained true: "From the founding of the Association in June 1919 to the present date, the history of work for the blind in Virginia is largely the story of Mr. Watts and his expanding activities through the Association and through the Virginia Commission for the Blind."[27] In retirement, Watts continued to work to increase membership in the Association of Workers for the Blind and to advocate for his principles on how the cause of the blind could best be advanced.

Expansion and Evolution

In 1958, recognizing the need to expand the facility at 3003 Parkwood Avenue, Governor Almond authorized the expenditure of $193,820 for a major addition that would house a regional Braille lending library to serve the blind residents of Virginia and Maryland.[28]

Although Walford had died in 1956, the Commission looked to his firm, Walford & Wright, to guide the expansion. The Bass Construction Company applied for a building permit on November 10, 1958, with plans by Walford & Wright, Architects, that would essentially double

[24] "Dream Comes True in Commission for Blind's Building," *Richmond News Leader*, 24 Sept. 1941.
[25] "State Commission for Blind Absolves Itself of Charges; Watts' Work Is Praised," Richmond Times-Dispatch, 1 Dec. 1945.
[26] "Watts to Retire After 34 Years Service to Blind," *Free Lance-Star*, Fredericksburg, 21 June, 1956.
[27] Cunningham, p. 34.
[28] "Almond Oks $193,820 Braille Library Building," *Richmond News Leader*, 31 Oct. 1958.

the size of the building by extending the rear portion of the building and constructing a wing similar in scale and parallel to the portion of the original building fronting on Parkwood Avenue. The addition was designed to be indistinguishable from the original portion, but with simpler treatment of the doors and entrances, and with an exterior basement entrance.

Watts had been Executive Secretary of the Virginia Commission of the Blind throughout the planning and construction of the building, and for all but the last two years of the period of significance. From his offices in the building he directed the commission's activities throughout the Commonwealth and, in retirement, continued his leadership in the national movement to train and employ blind workers. Watts died on April 30, 1974, at the age of 85. He had retired the previous June from his position as general manager and treasurer of the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind but continued to serve on the Board of Directors[29], some 55 years after the organization's founding. His stature as a leading advocate for the blind is reflected in the numerous national awards bestowed on him by his peers: the Ambrose M. Shotwell Memorial Award in 1953 for "significant contributions to the personal adjustment or rehabilitation of adults who are blind or visually impaired and whose leadership and services have exerted influence on a national or international scale," a lifetime membership to the American Association of Workers for the Blind in 1955, the R. B. Irwin Award from the National Industries for the Blind in 1957, and in 1962 the M. C. Migel Medal by the American Federation for the Blind, to honor "professionals and volunteers whose dedication and achievements have improved the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired."

In 1980, the Virginia Commission for the Blind became the Virginia Department for the Visually Handicapped and relocated to the current offices on Azalea Avenue in Henrico County. The facility at 3003 Parkwood Avenue was sold into private ownership. Plans from 1983 illustrate its conversion to Parkwood Manor, a retirement home. The potential new owner plans to preserve and rehabilitate the former Commission for the Blind as an apartment building.

Appendix: Additional Properties Associated with L. L. Watts

- Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, Staunton, Virginia—Watts was a student 1914-1917 and a supervisor/instructor 1918-1920. It was here that he convened the meeting to establish the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind on June 9, 1919.
- Virginia Workshop for the Blind, 1102 Monticello Road, Charlottesville, Virginia—Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind manufacturing site under the supervision of the Virginia Commission for the Blind. Operations moved to this site from South Fourth Street in 1931.
- 1228 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia—The first Richmond offices of the Virginia Commission for the Blind from 1924 to 1931.
- Gould Residence, 3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, Virginia (demolished)—Frame residence that served as the offices of the Virginia Commission for the Blind from 1931-1939.

[29] "Lucian L. Watts, worker for blind," City and area deaths, *Free Lance-Star*, Fredericksburg, 2 May 1974.

- 3007 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, Virginia (demolished)—Served as temporary offices for Virginia Commission for the Blind from 1939-1941 while the new building was under construction
- 3154 Ellwood Avenue, Richmond, Virginia—Temporary offices for the Women's Department of the Virginia Association for the Blind (1939-1941) while the new building was under construction.
- 2920 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, Virginia—Watts' place of residence during his active tenure with Virginia Commission for the Blind.
- 124 Westmoreland Avenue, Richmond, Virginia—Watts' residence in retirement
- St. James Workshop and Training Center, 508 St. James Street, Richmond, Virginia—Racially and sex-segregated facility coordinated by Virginia Commission for the Blind.
- 17 South Mulberry Street, Richmond, Virginia—Housed the offices of the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind where Watts served on the Board and as treasurer in retirement.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

City of Richmond, Assessor's Records

City of Richmond, Building Permit Applications, Library of Virginia

Cunningham, John B., *Virginia's Program for the Visually Handicapped*, Virginia Commission for the Blind, Richmond, Virginia, 1940

Free Lance-Star, City and area deaths, "Lucian L. Watts, worker for blind", Fredericksburg, May 2, 1974

Free Lance-Star, "Watts to Retire After 34 Years Service to Blind," Fredericksburg, 21 June 1956

Hayes, Charles B., "Report of the Bureau of Information and Publicity," , *Proceedings of the 27th Biennial Convention held at Watertown, Massachusetts, June 23 to 27, 1924*, American Association of Instructors of the Blind

Koestler, Frances A., *The Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness in the United States (2nd ed.)*, New York, AFB Press, 2004

Lucian Louis Watt Papers, M 12, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, VCU

Olstrom, Clifford E., *Undaunted by Blindness* (2nd Ed.), Perkins School for the Blind, Watertown, Massachusetts, 2011

Richmond News Leader, "Dream Comes True in Commission for Blind's Building", Richmond, September 24, 1941

Richmond News Leader, "Almond Oks $193,820 Braille Library Building", Richmond, October 31, 1958

Richmond Times-Dispatch, "State Commission for Blind Absolves Itself of Charges; Watts' Work Is Praised," Richmond, 1 Dec. 1945

Virginia Commission for the Blind Annual Report (1939-1940)

Virginia Commission for the Blind, "We Dedicate . . ."(Program for the Dedication of the New Facility), September 25, 1941

Virginia Commission for the Blind, Transcript of the Formal Dedication of the New Quarters of The Virginia Commission for the Blind, Richmond, Virginia, September 25, 1941

Wells, John E., and Robert E. Dalton, *The Virginia Architects 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary*, New South Architectural Press, Richmond, Virginia, 1997

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 # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:
_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
_X__ Other
Name of repository: VCU, James Branch Cabell Library, Special Collections; Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR No. 127-6808

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .686

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.551665 Longitude: -77.479858

Or
UTM References
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)
The boundaries of the property correspond to City of Richmond Assessor Tax Parcel Number W0001354013. The true and correct historic boundaries are shown on the attached Sketch Map/Photo Key and the attached Tax Parcel Map.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)
The boundaries selected correspond to those of Richmond tax parcel W0001354013 as it is the single parcel that represents the parcels acquired and aggregated for the development and operation of the Virginia Commission for the Blind at this location during the period of significance.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: James Hill, Senior Project Manager
organization: Sadler & Whitehead Architects, PLC
street & number: 726 West 33rd Street
city or town: Richmond state: VA zip code: 23225-3531
e-mail: jim@sadlerandwhitehead.com
telephone: 804-231-5299
date: May 27, 2016

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

The following information is the same for all photographs:

Name of Property: Virginia Commission for the Blind
City or Vicinity: Richmond (Independent City)
County: N/A State: Virginia
Photographer: James Hill
Date Photographed: February-March, 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0001
View: View of campus from corner of Parkwood Avenue and Sheppard Street, camera facing SW

Photo 2 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0002
View: Entry elevation of 1940 portion, camera facing S

Photo 3 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0003
View: North elevations and central courtyard, camera facing SE

Photo 4 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0004
View: Courtyard entrance on Parkwood Avenue, camera facing S

Photo 5 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0005
View: 1958 addition, north and east elevations, camera facing SW

Photo 6 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0006
View: 1958 addition, west elevation, camera facing SE

Photo 7 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0007
View: Rear (south) elevation, camera facing NW

Photo 8 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0008
View: Ornamental fence (contributing structure) along east property line, camera facing NW

Photo 9 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0009
View: Original (1940) main entrance, north elevation, camera facing S

Photo 10 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0010
View: Granite steps and ornamental railing at main entrance, camera facing SE

Photo 11 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0011
View: 1940 Reception Hall and main entrance doors, camera facing NE

Photo 12 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0012
View: 1940 front stair hall, camera facing NW

Photo 13 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0013
View: 1940 Library, camera facing NW

Photo 14 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0014
View: 1958 Basement kitchen, camera facing NW

Photo 15 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0015
View: 1958 Resident room with typical door and trim, camera facing SE

Photo 16 of 16: VA_Richmond City_Virginia Commission for the Blind_0016
View: Dedication Plaque beside Main Entrance, camera facing S

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.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Virginia Dept. of Historic Resources

V-CRIS

Virginia Cultural Resource Information System

LOCATION MAP
Virginia Commission for the Blind
City of Richmond, Virginia
DHR No. 127-6808

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates:
37.551665/-77.479858

N

Feet

0 100 200 300 400

1:4,514 / 1"=376 Feet

Title: 127-6808 Virginia Commission for the Blind **Date: 6/22/2016**

DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.

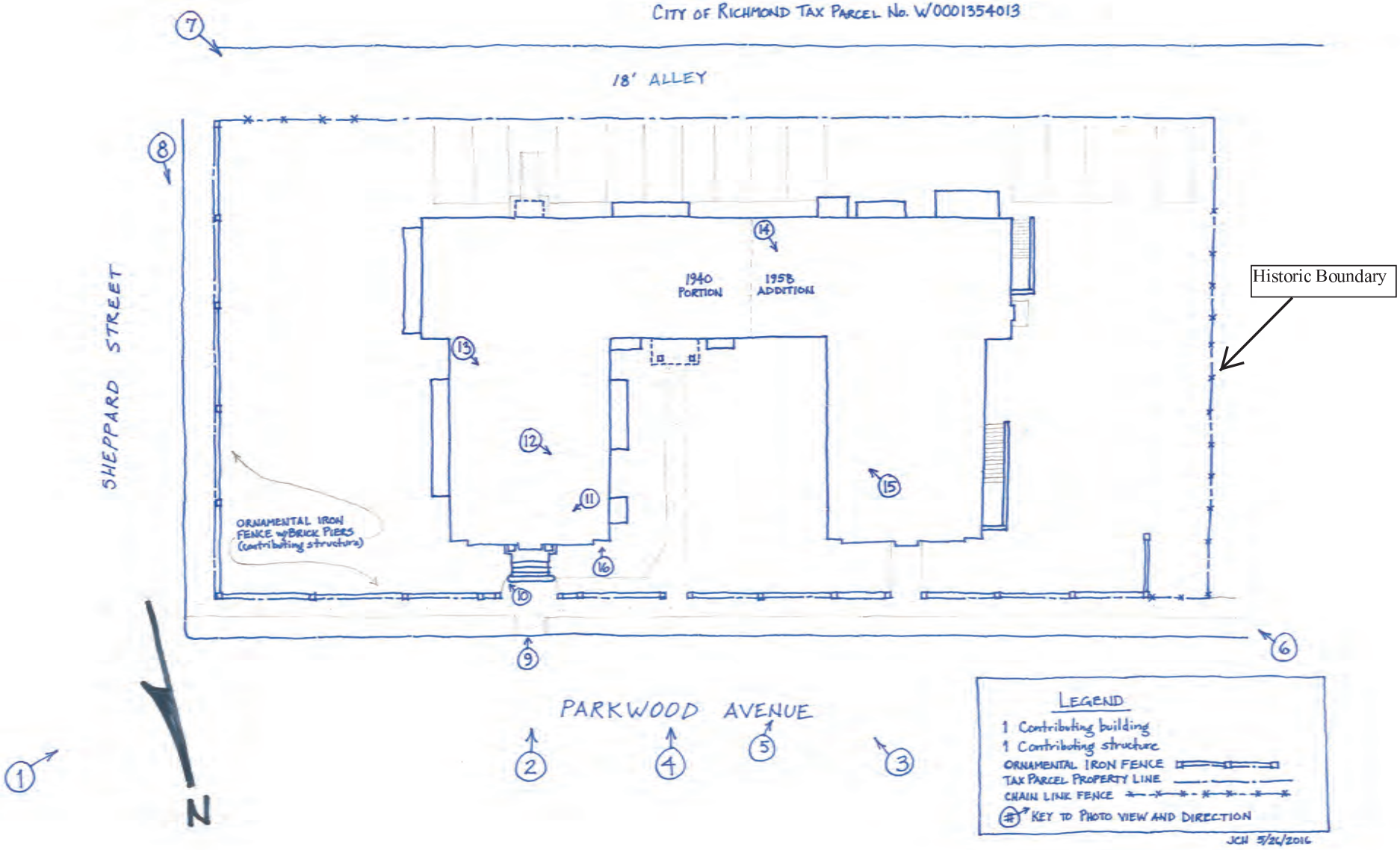
Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.

SKETCH MAP/ PHOTO KEY

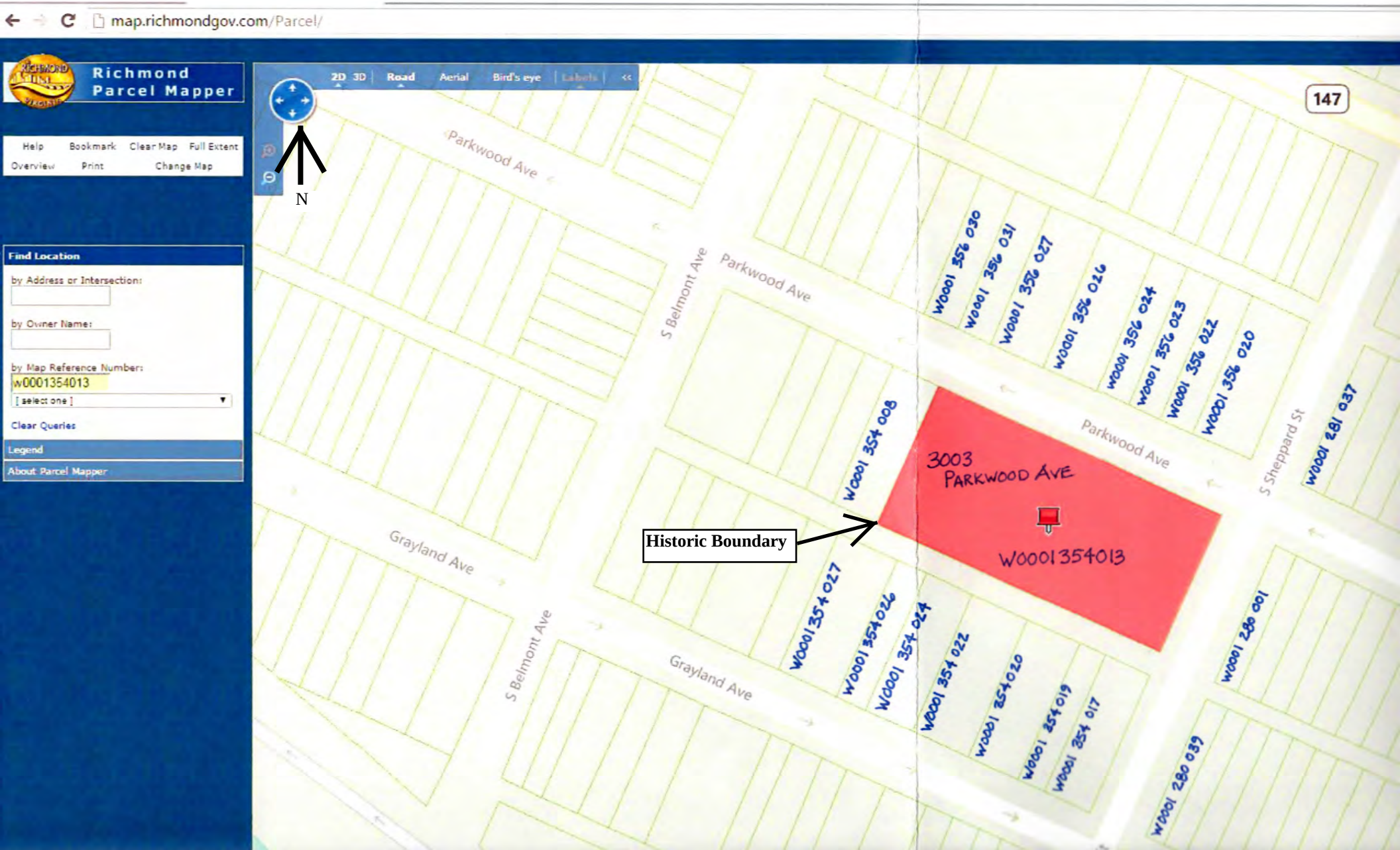
VIRGINIA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND
3003 PARKWOOD AVENUE
RICHMOND VA 23221-3554

VDHR FILE No. 127-6808

CITY OF RICHMOND TAX PARCEL No. W0001354013



Virginia Commission for the Blind (VDHR File #127-6808
3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond VA
National Register Nomination Tax Parcel Map: Ownership verified 6/21/2016



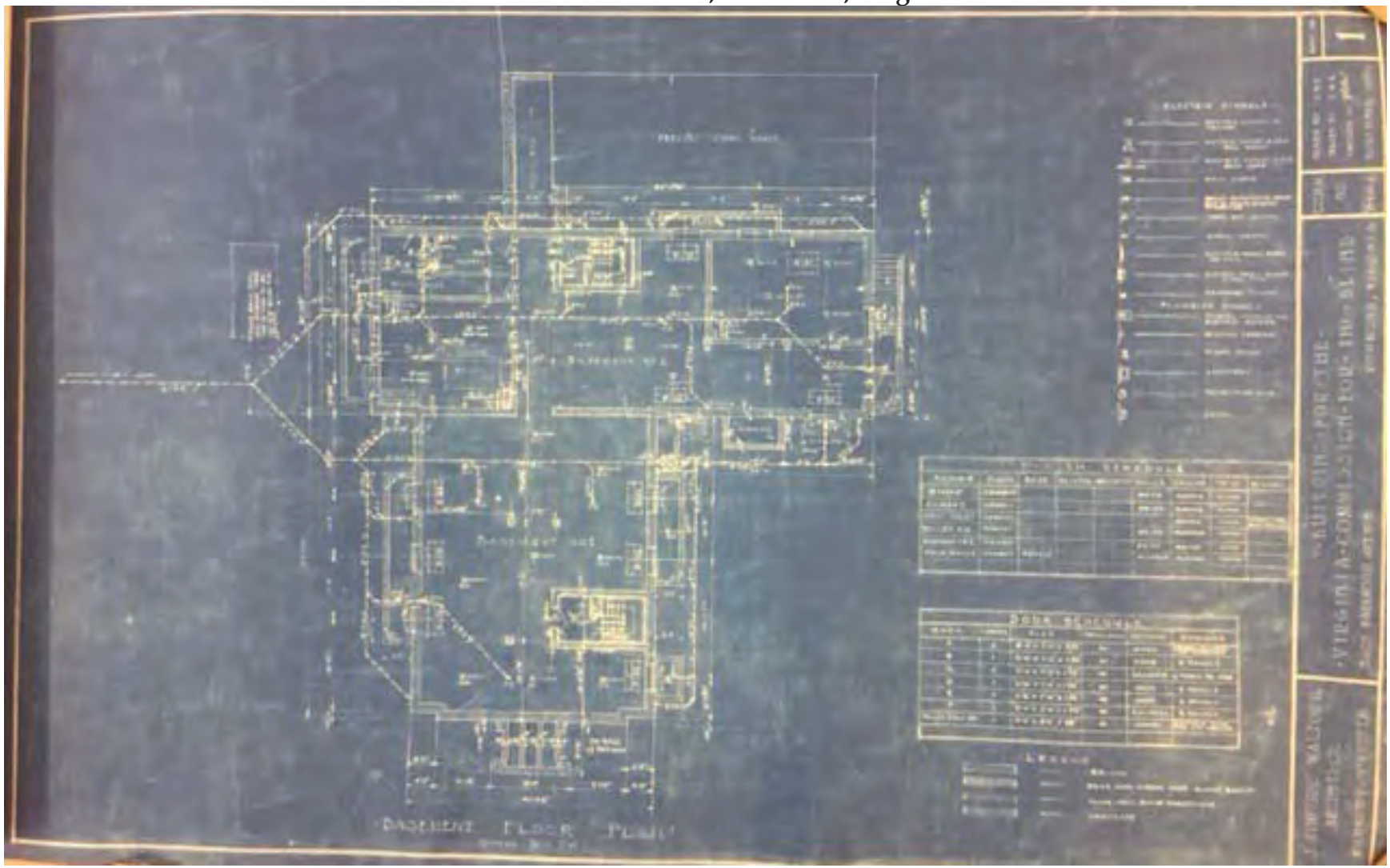
ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

1940 Virginia Commission for the Blind
3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, Virginia
DHR No. 127-6808

Historic Photograph taken for Dedication Program
September 25, 1941

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION:

1940 J. Binford Walford Plans for Virginia Commission for the Blind
3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, Virginia

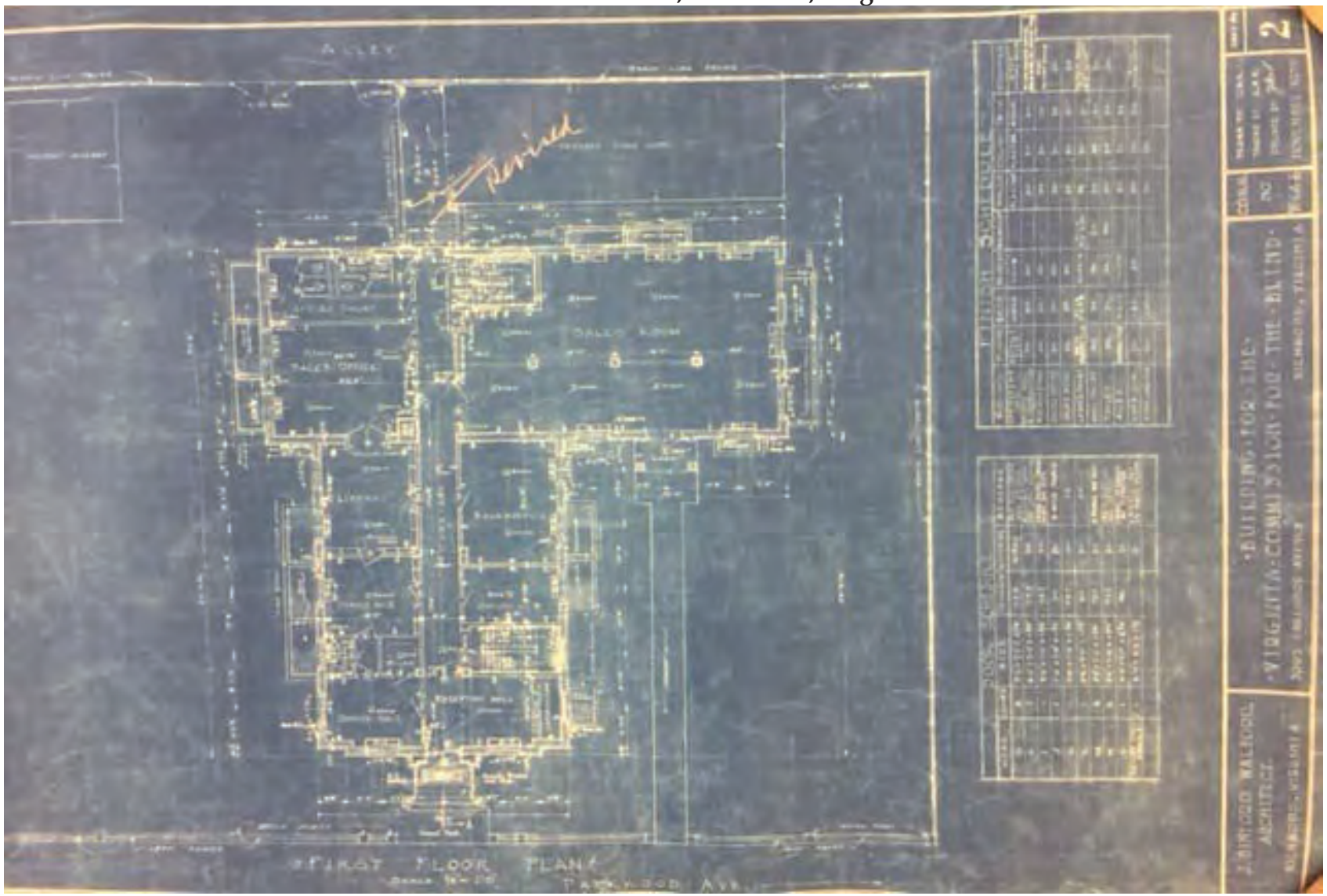


Basement Floor Plan

DHR No. 127-6808

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION:

1940 J. Binford Walford Plans for Virginia Commission for the Blind
3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, Virginia

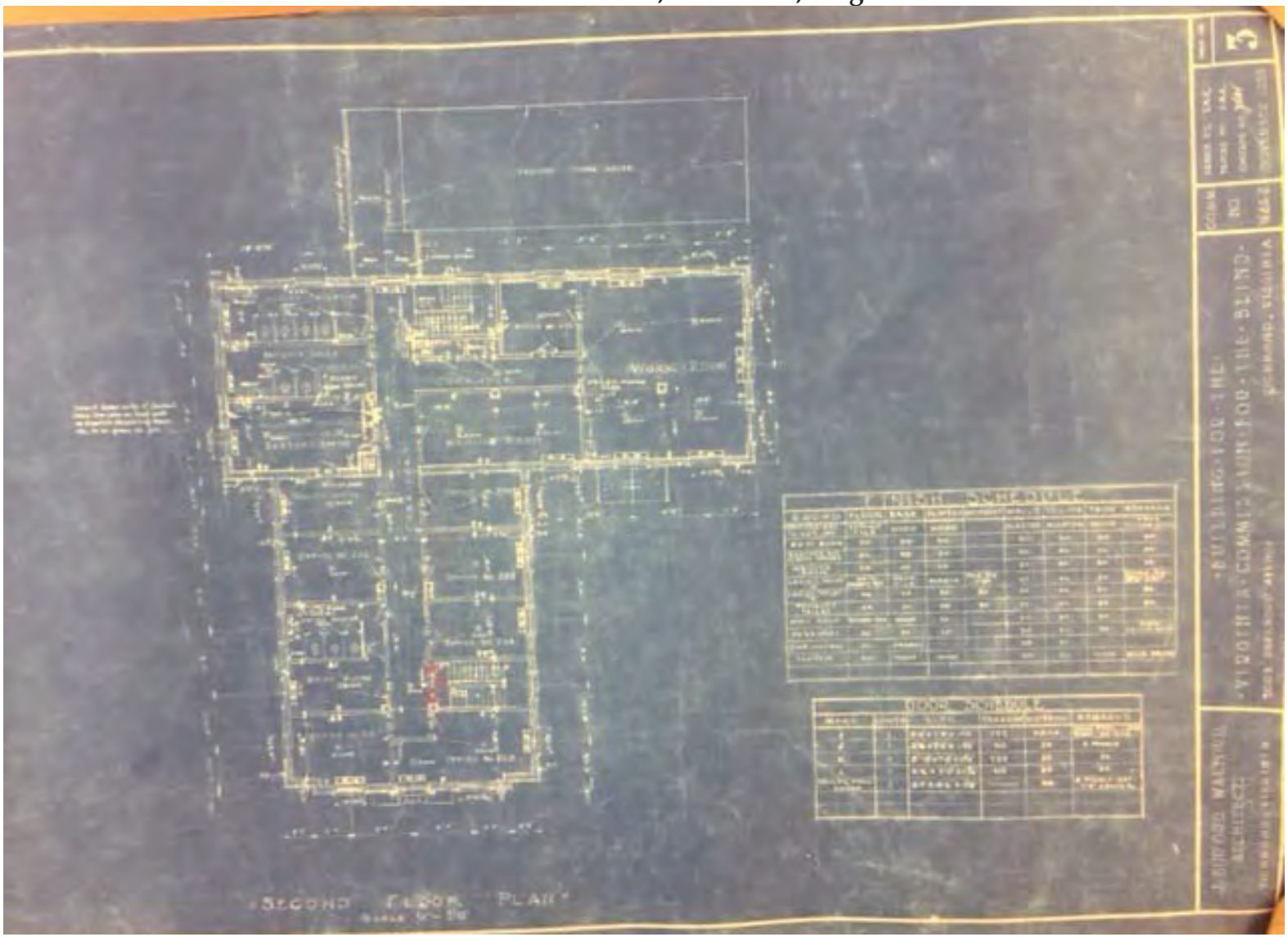


First Floor Plan

DHR No. 127-6808

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION:

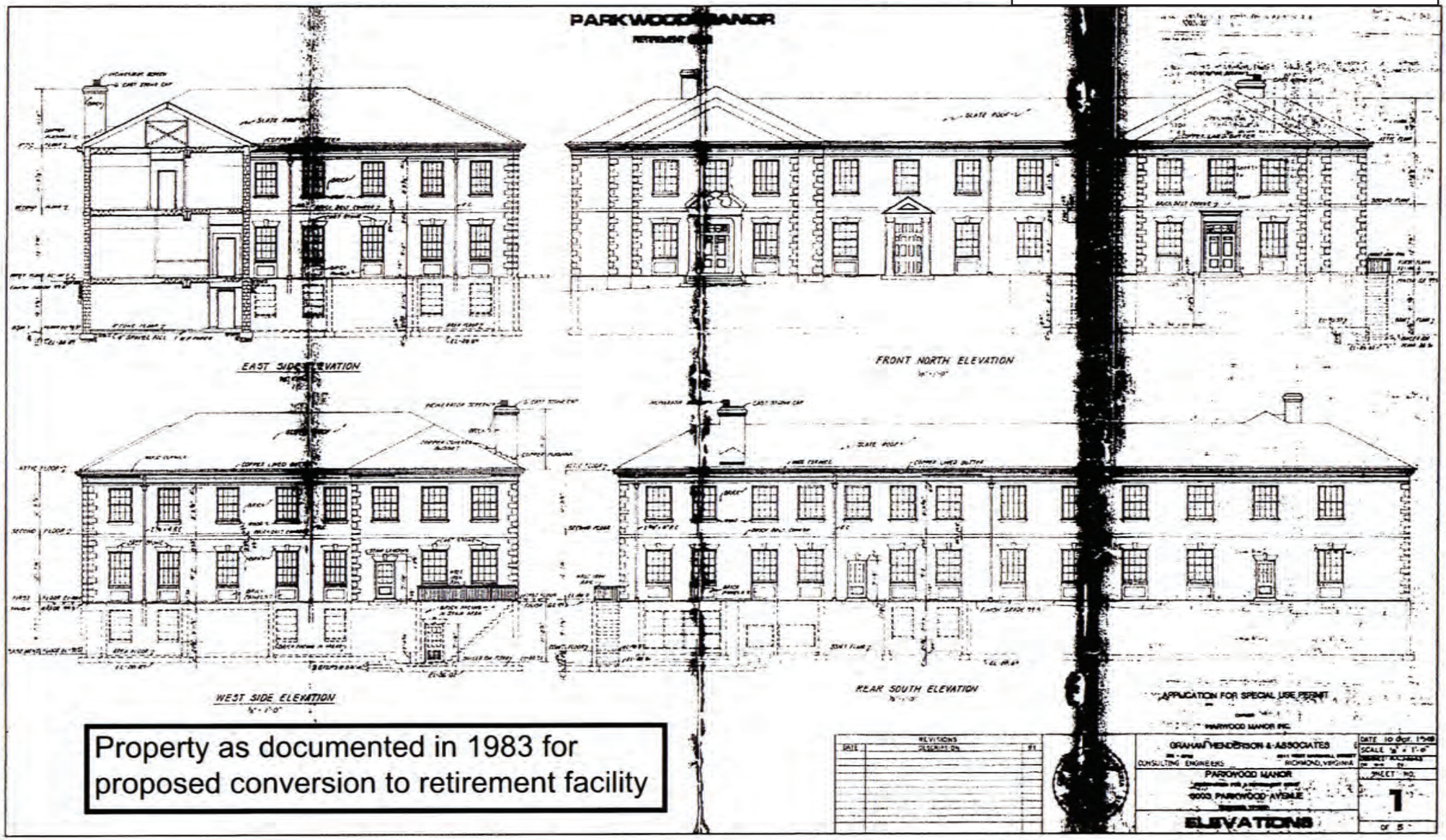
1940 J. Binford Walford Plans for Virginia Commission for the Blind
3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, Virginia



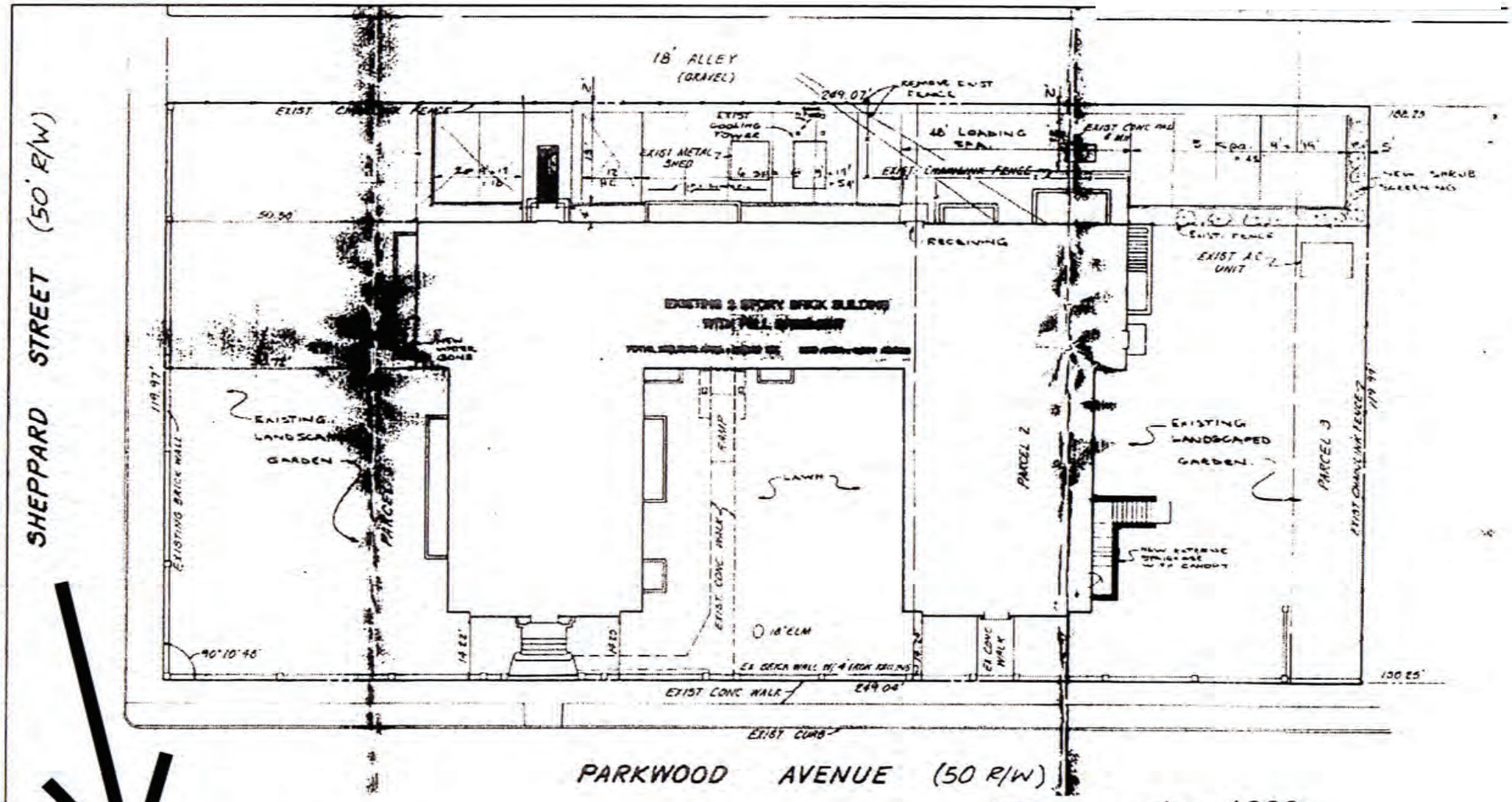
Second Floor Plan

DHR No. 127-6808

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION:
1983 Plans
Virginia Commission for the Blind
City of Richmond, VA
DHR No. 127-6808



Property as documented in 1983 for proposed conversion to retirement facility



OWNER
HARWOOD MANOR INC.

n.t.s. 1983

REVISIONS		
DATE	DESCRIPTION	BY

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
CERTIFICATE No.
PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER

GRAHAM HENDERSON & ASSOCIATES
CONSULTING ENGINEERS RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

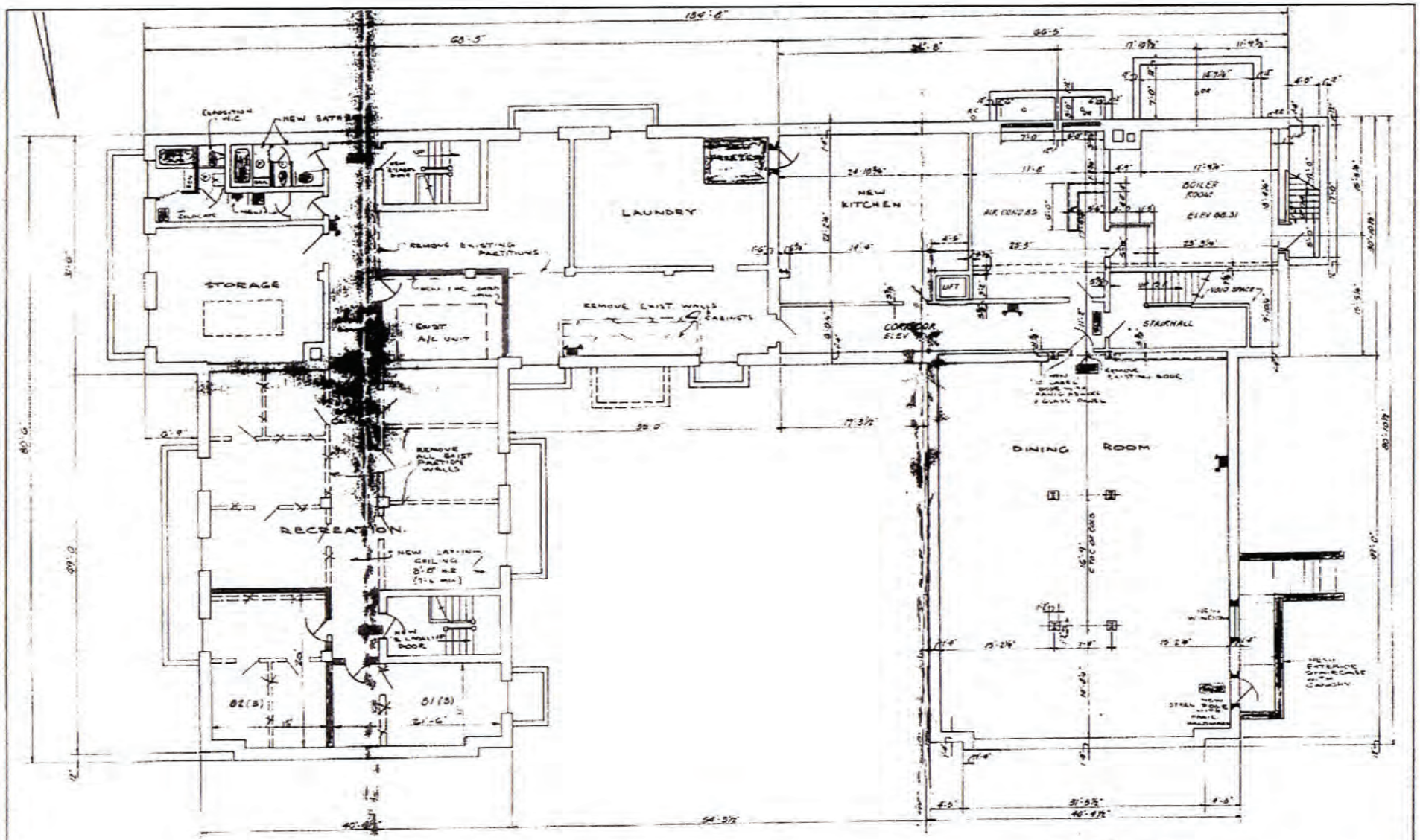
PARKWOOD MANOR
RENOVATION FOR A RETIREMENT HOME
3003 PARKWOOD AVENUE
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

PLOT PLAN

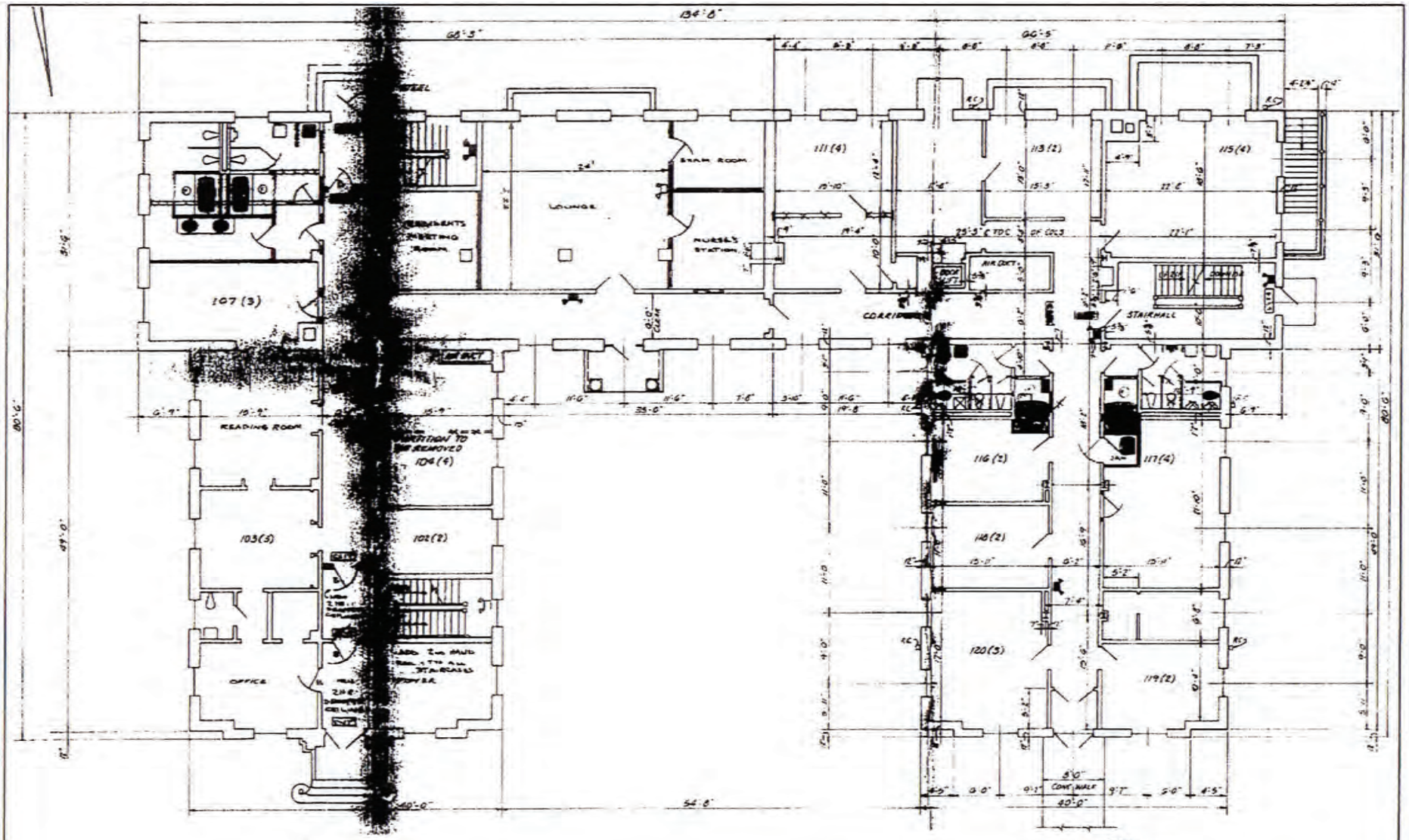
DATE: 10 Oct 1983
SCALE 1/16" = 1'-0"
DESIGNED GA
DR BB CK

SHEET NO.
2
OF 5

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION:
1983 Plans
Virginia Commission for the Blind
City of Richmond, VA
DHR No. 127-6808



ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION:
1983 Plans
Virginia Commission for the Blind
City of Richmond, VA
DHR No. 127-6808



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Virginia Commission for the Blind
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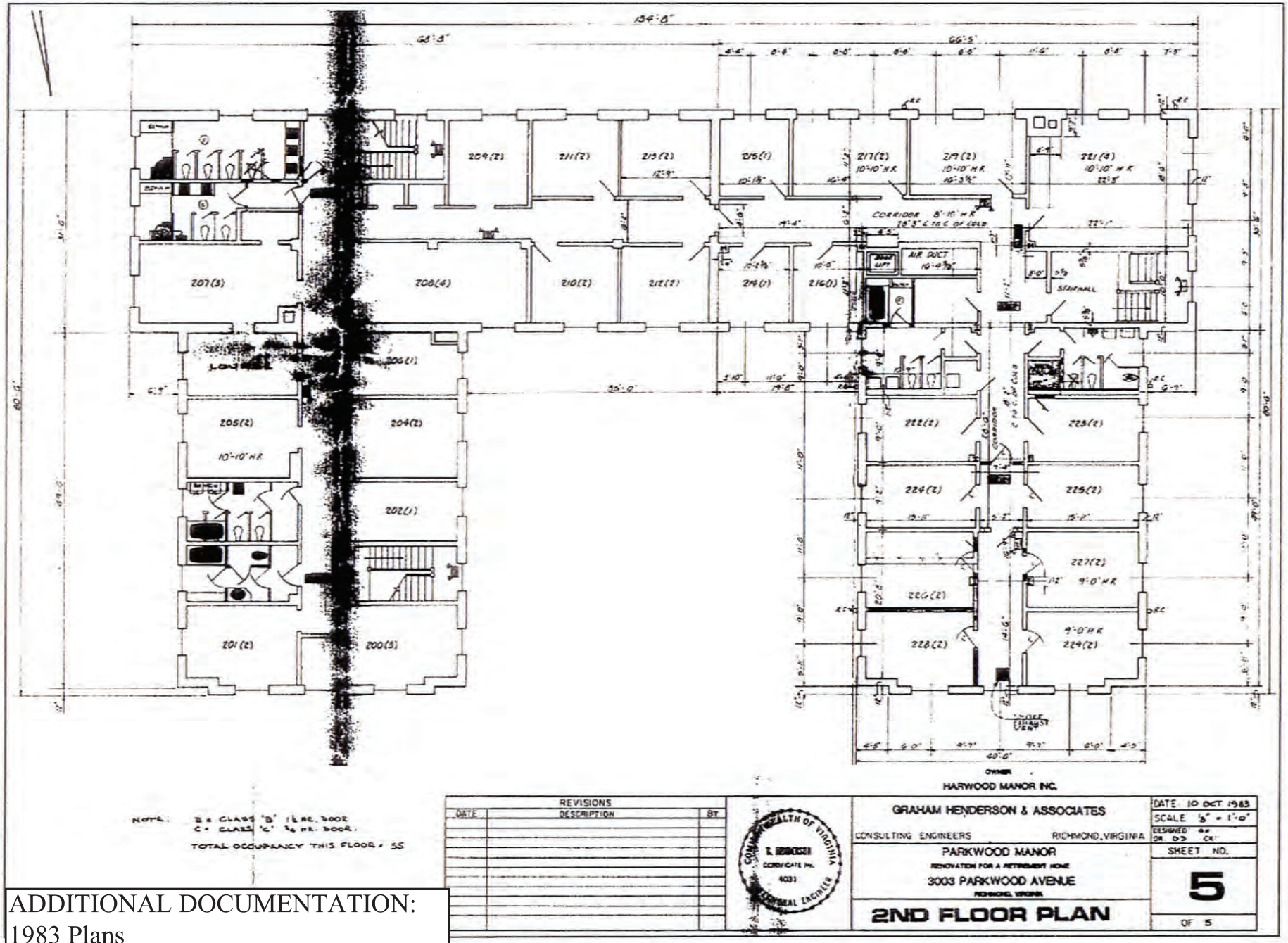
DHR No. 127-6808



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1983 Plans
Virginia Commission for the Blind
City of Richmond, VA
DHR No. 127-6808