

VLR-5/18/82 NRHP-9/9/82

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

For HCRS use only

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

## 1. Name

historic Harrison School

and/or common Harrison School

## 2. Location

street & number 523 Harrison Avenue, NW

N/A not for publication

city, town Roanoke

N/A vicinity of

~~congressional district~~

state Virginia

code 51

county (in city)

code 770

## 3. Classification

| Category  | Ownership                                  | Status  | Present Use                                       |
|---|--|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public | <input type="checkbox"/> occupied                   | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> private           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied      | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure              | <input type="checkbox"/> both              | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress           | <input type="checkbox"/> educational              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site                   | <b>Public Acquisition</b>                  | <b>Accessible</b>                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object                 | <input type="checkbox"/> in process        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes; restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government               |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered  | <input type="checkbox"/> yes; unrestricted          | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial               |
|   | <u>N/A</u>                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> no                         | <input type="checkbox"/> military                 |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> museum                   |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> park                     |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> private residence        |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> religious                |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific               |
|   |  |   | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation           |
|   |  |   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant |

## 4. Owner of Property

name City of Roanoke c/o Mayor

street & number Municipal Building, 215 Church Avenue, SW

city, town Roanoke

N/A vicinity of

state Virginia 24011

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Roanoke Municipal Building

street & number 215 Church Avenue, SW

city, town Roanoke

state Virginia 24011

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1982

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good      | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>    N/A    </u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair      | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed               |   |  |

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

### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Harrison School is a brick, three-story, public school building located at 523 Harrison Avenue in northwest Roanoke. The main structure was built in 1916 and is typical school architecture of the period. The two-story wings were added in 1922. Plans call for the conversion of the presently vacant school into a black cultural center with low-income housing units on the upper floors.

### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

As built in 1916, the Harrison School consisted of a thirteen-bay rectangular block flanked by projecting wings, five bays on the sides. In 1922 the present three-bay, two-story wings were added. The school has three entrances that front on Harrison Avenue. The main entrance is contained within the 1916 block and has a segmental-arched doorway with double doors flanked by sidelights and topped by a rectangular transom. The upper panels of the door, the transom, and the sidelights are presently covered with plywood. The doorway is sheltered by a one-story, brick porch distinguished by three semicircular arches each with corbeled brick imposts and extrados. The porch is covered by a shallow hipped roof. The entrances of the 1922 additions have double doors topped by double-light transoms. The upper panels of the door and transom are presently covered with plywood. The doorway is sheltered by a simple porch consisting of a shallow hipped roof supported on posts. The principal fenestration on the 1916 main block consists of closely spaced 9/9 hung-sash windows on the first and second stories; the basement windows are covered with plywood boards. The principal fenestration of the 1922 addition consists of 12/12 hung-sash windows between narrow 6/6 hung-sash sidelights. Since the wings are lower than the main block, they lack the high basement found on the original section.

The plan of the school consists of classrooms off a main passage. The classrooms have plain trim and are entered through transom-light doors. One room on the first floor that last served as the school cafeteria also has a small raised stage.

The school is surrounded by asphalt paving and is prominently located within one of Roanoke's oldest black neighborhoods.

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# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> economics   | <input type="checkbox"/> literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699        | <input type="checkbox"/> architecture           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education   | <input type="checkbox"/> military               | <input type="checkbox"/> social/                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799        | <input type="checkbox"/> art                    | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> music                  | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899        | <input type="checkbox"/> commerce               | <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy             | <input type="checkbox"/> theater                                     |
| <input checked="" 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)<br>Black History |

**Specific dates** 1916; 1922      **Builder/Architect** J.H. Page

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**  
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Constructed in 1916, Roanoke's Harrison School symbolizes the pioneering efforts of Lucy Addison and other black educators in Southwest Virginia to offer academic secondary instruction to all children regardless of race. These efforts were all the more remarkable when one considers the paucity of black public high schools in Virginia during this period and the prevailing educational theory of the Progressive era that Negroes should receive industrial, rather than academic or collegiate, instruction. Prior to the establishment of the school on Harrison Avenue, black pupils in the Roanoke area who wished to pursue academic study beyond the seventh grade were required to attend Virginia State College in distant Petersburg. Throughout its history, the Harrison School has served as a major center of black educational, social, and cultural activities in Roanoke, providing a place of secondary and elementary instruction for many of Roanoke's black professional and civic leaders as well as a point of visitation for such dignitaries as George Washington Carver and Jesse Owen. Architecturally, the building is a typical example of public school design of the period, employing a very modified Georgian-style format.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although the Virginia Literary Fund in the antebellum period offered limited public support for the education of the children of the poor, such assistance was not extended to blacks, whether free or slave. Literacy for slaves was actively discouraged, with only two schools being established for blacks in Virginia prior to the Civil War. Under the authority of the 1868 Underwood Constitution, which marked the end of Reconstruction in Virginia and provided for Virginia's first statewide system of public education, two schools were established within the present boundaries of Roanoke City: the "New Lick School" for whites and the other, unnamed, for blacks. The latter was housed in a one-room log house, to be replaced three years later by a two-room building between Hart and Douglas streets. The establishment of a third black school at Shenandoah Avenue coincided with the founding of the town of Roanoke in 1882. It was at this school that Miss Lucy Addison began her long and distinguished teaching career in Roanoke.

The atmosphere surrounding the debate on public education in the early years of the 20th century was a vibrant but complex one, due in large part to the emerging philosophy of the Progressive era. In Virginia during this period, black leadership in the field of education was concentrated in the state's black colleges. Educators from Hampton Institute, Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute (now Virginia State University), St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, and Virginia Union University in Richmond established the State Teachers Association and the State Improvement League for the betterment of black education in the Commonwealth. By the second decade of the 20th century, these educators were coming to share the attitude of the outspoken black journalist and historian, W.E.B. DuBois that there was a great need for a college-educated black elite to ensure "full civil and poli-

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

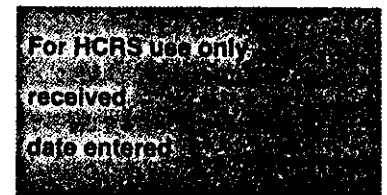
**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

HARRISON SCHOOL, ROANOKE, VA

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 8

Page 1



8. Significance - Historical Background

tical equality for blacks.<sup>11</sup> Dominating the white educational establishment, on the other hand, were the views of white progressives, whose goal was also the improvement of public education throughout the state but with the distinction that this improvement implied different paths for the two races. White progressives believed that blacks were a "child-like" race; accordingly, the aim of education for blacks should be the encouragement of discipline, good work habits, moral character, and training in skills that would make them economically productive, rather than academically successful. Insofar as progressives sought to make the black race self-sufficient, their ultimate goal was to minimize the intermingling of the races. In light of the prevailing progressive view, it is not surprising that only 1,761 black pupils were enrolled in Virginia high schools in 1915 (most of them in Richmond schools), compared to 23,184 white pupils for the same year. Explaining this disparity in an official history of public education in Virginia published by the State Board of Education in 1952, J.L. Blair Buck wrote: "Public high schools for Negroes were then few and not yet welcomed with much enthusiasm by the white public."<sup>2</sup>

Given the white majority's general reluctance to support public secondary education for blacks, the decision of the Roanoke school board in the summer of 1916 to authorize the construction of the Harrison School represented an important milestone in the history of public education in Southwest Virginia. The land for the school was purchased in three parcels during that summer, and plans for the building were drawn by the clerk of the school board, J.H. Page. The contractor for the building was J.F. Barbour. Completed at a cost of \$31,818, the school opened for operation in the winter of 1917 with Miss Lucy Addison as principal. Miss Addison, a native of Fauquier County educated at public schools in Philadelphia and at the Howard University in Washington, was chiefly responsible for gradually extending the curriculum of the Harrison School beyond the seventh grade to the secondary level. The first class to complete four full years of high school instruction under her tutelage graduated in 1924.

Norwithstanding the addition of two substantial wings to the Harrison School in 1922, a growing demand for better-qualified black teachers soon necessitated the construction of a new high school for blacks in the Roanoke area, appropriately named for Miss Addison. Harrison School continued as an elementary school until the 1960s, since which time it has served as a day care center, with plans today for its conversion into a multi-purpose community center with apartment units. One of only two black school buildings that has survived from the early 20th century (the other being the Addison High School which now serves as a school administration building), Harrison School stands as a significant reminder of the valiant efforts of Miss Lucy Addison and her staff in behalf of academic secondary education for blacks in the Roanoke area.

MTP

<sup>11</sup>William Allen Link, Public Schooling and Social Change in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920 (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1981), p. 341.

<sup>2</sup>J.L. Blair Buck, The Development of Public Schools in Virginia, 1607-1952 (Richmond: State Board of Education, 1952), Vol. XXV, p. 169.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Buck, J.L. Blair. The Development of Public Schools in Virginia, 1607-1952. Richmond: State Board of Education, Vol. XXXV, July 1952.  
 Jackson, Luther Porter. History of the Virginia State Teachers Association. Norfolk: Guide Publishing Company, Inc. 1937.

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 3/4 acre

Quadrangle name Roanoke, VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

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**Verbal boundary description and justification** Beginning at a point on N side of Harrison Ave., NW, about 160' W of the intersection with Fifth St., NW; thence extending about 125' NE to alley; thence about 240' NW along alley; thence about 125' SW to N side of Harrison Ave.; thence about 240' SE along said side to point of origin. (Roanoke City Deed Book 1302, pp.127-130,

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries (See Continuation Sheet #2)

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

date April 1982

street & number 221 Governor Street

telephone (804) 786-3144

city or town Richmond

state Virginia 23219

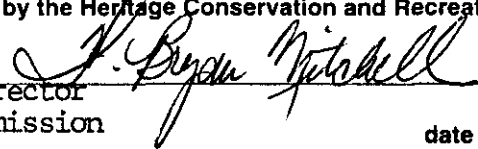
## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director  
 title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission



date MAY 18 1982

**For HCRS use only**  
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
 date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of the National Register  
 Attest \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

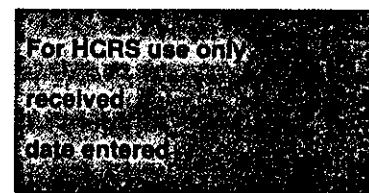
**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

HARRISON, SCHOOL, ROANOKE, VA

Continuation sheet #2

Item number 9 , 10

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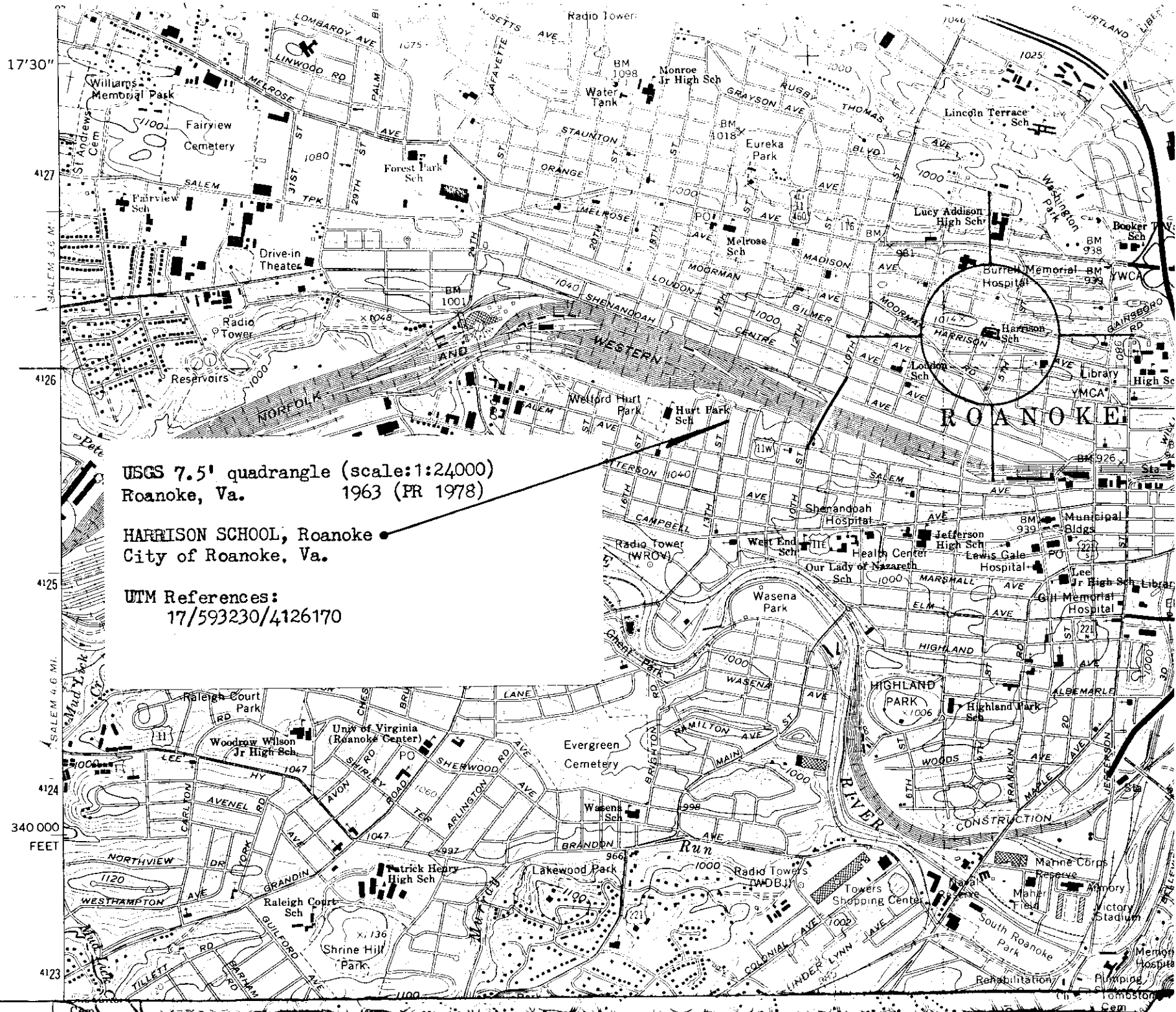
9. Bibliographical References

Link, William Allen, Public Schooling and Social Change in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920.  
Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1981.

Richmond, Va. Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Archives. Roanoke City File #128-43,  
"Harrison School."

10. Geographical Data - Boundary Description

10/28/71). Boundary Justification: The nominated property for the Harrison School consists of 3/4 acre. This includes the school building and the surrounding playground with its asphalt paving. The nominated property is the same land that was purchased in July of 1916 by the School Board of the City of Roanoke from William Mackey and Jackson Mitchell consisting of city lots #519, 521, and 523.



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24000)  
 Roanoke, Va. 1963 (PR 1978)

HARRISON SCHOOL, Roanoke ●  
 City of Roanoke, Va.

UTM References:  
 17/593230/4126170

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