

1177

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

RECEIVED

OCT 04 1993

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Magness, William H. & Edgar, Community House and Library

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 118 West Main N/A not for publication

city or town McMinnville N/A vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Warren code 177 zip code 37110

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Hubert L. Haygen 9/27/93
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper entered in the National Register Date of Action 11/4/93
Delores Byers

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is: N/A

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- 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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1931, 32-1943

Significant Dates

1931, 32

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Magness, William Harrison & Cunningham, Mary Steakly

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Waller, George D., architect

Chriclow-Yearwood, builder

Name of repository:

William H. & Edgar Magness Community House and Library

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 1

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

Narrative Description

The William H. and Edgar Magness Community House and Library is located on the northeast corner of West Main Street and Chancery Street in downtown McMinnville, Tennessee. McMinnville (population 13,000) is approximately seventy-two miles southeast of Nashville on the eastern Highland Rim of middle Tennessee. The city of McMinnville is the county seat of Warren County (population 34,000) in which over 700 commercial nurseries are located and is called "The Nursery Capital of the World."

The William H. and Edgar Magness Community House and Library a two story Classical Revival building with two elevations of detailed cut limestone, is one of the more attractive public buildings in the city of McMinnville. The building, approximately seventy-three feet by fifty-three feet, is rectangular in plan and is composed of three floors, a basement and two upper floors. Since its construction in 1931, this building has served primarily as the public library of Warren County. However, the building is truly unique for its other uses. From 1932 until 1960, the basement level served as a lounge with Rest Rooms and beds for women and children (Rest Room, as used in the nomination, represents areas used for rest and waiting, not to be confused with the term restroom, a toilet room). This level also housed the storerooms, from which used clothing was distributed to needy families of the area. The most unique feature of the building was its residential usage. The library and community house was planned and built with two apartments: one on the first floor for the resident librarian, Mrs. Mary Steakley Cunningham (Mrs. J. M.) and the second on the second floor for Mr. William Harrison Magness.

Presently, the building continues to be used by the public as a library and as a center for community and cultural activities (because of its accessible auditorium and meeting rooms), but its apartments have become integrated with the needs of the library and are no longer discernable for their original usage.

The south facade contains the main entrance to the library and faces West Main Street. Constructed of limestone, this symmetrical facade has five bays and a projecting portico. The main entrance doors are double leaf with ten panes in each door and a limestone hood above them supported by scrolled brackets. The east and west corners of the building are faced with a solid pilaster; four more pilasters are positioned between each bay. The center bay contains the main entrance on the first floor with a multi-pane metal frame window with a hopper opening above it on the second floor. The two flanking bays mirror each other with a long multi-pane metal frame windows with a

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 2

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

hopper opening on the first floor and the same type of window above the main entrance on the second floor. The two outer bay windows on both floors are different than the other bays, three metal windows with vertical pane divisions and a central hopper opening. The first floor outer bay's windows are smaller than the second floor. The basement level windows are located below grade and are metal windows with vertical panes surrounded by a window well with a metal rail. Between the first and second levels, there are two large stone tablets, engraved with mottoes in Classic Roman letters. These tablets are positioned on both bays that flank the main entrance bay. On the tablet to the east is a quote from the Bible to note the social purpose of the institution. The words are as follows: "INASMUCH AS YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BRETHREN YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME." On the tablet to the west is a quote from an anonymous author to note the library function of the institution. The words are as follows: "GOOD BOOKS ARE GUIDE POSTS ON THE ROAD TO HAPPINESS AND KNOWLEDGE."

On the west corner of the south facade is the cornerstone on which is engraved "Erected in 1931 by Wm. H. Magness as a memorial to his father and brother. Geo. D. Waller, Architect." The portico extends out from this facade. It is supported by four Composite order capital columns upon which rests a frieze with the engraving, "WM. H. & EDGAR MAGNESS COMMUNITY HOUSE AND LIBRARY" in Classic Roman letters. Above the frieze is a dentil course, a cornice molding, and a large parapet.

The west elevation of the building is also constructed of limestone and has a plain frieze, dentil course, cornice molding, and parapet. Seven pilasters delineate the six bays. This elevation's fenestration is organized according to the interior's room arrangements. The south end of the west elevation contains three groups of paired windows, corresponding with the interior main library on the first floor. The second floor windows are metal with vertical panes and a central hopper opening. The first floor metal windows are long vertical panes with three hopper openings. Between each floor in each bay is a panel outlined with a raised limestone course. On the first floor, the most central bay contains a recessed entry with double leaf doors, ten panes in each door, and a large square transom. Inside, it leads into a long bisecting hallway that extends through the majority of the building and is the same width of the exterior bay. Above it on the second floor, are a pair of windows exactly like the ones on the southern most end. The northern end of the west elevation contains two bays, each with a trio of metal windows with vertical panes and hopper openings. The northern bays also contain panels between each floor, as did the southern end. The second floor windows in these two bays, delineate the auditorium. This facade also contains basement

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 3

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

level windows below grade. Each lines up vertically with its corresponding bay and has a window well with metal rail encasing it.

The north elevation, or rear, of the library is a common bond brick wall with a single, central door rear entrance. There are three metal windows with vertical panes and hopper openings on the first floor and four of the same type on the second floor. One of the windows on each floor is actually a pair placed side by side. There are two copper downspouts from the roof and a gutter that extends the length of the roof in the rear of the building. The electrical service also enters the building from the north elevation. Presently, the rear entrance area is being prepared for a handicap ramp to meet the new American Disability Act regulations.

The east elevation, constructed of common bond brick, faces an alley that is approximately eight feet wide. This elevation has two below grade entrances: one at the southern end that leads into a hallway and the other at the northern end that leads to the furnace/utility room. The original coal-fired furnace utilized a large chimney that extends up the northeast side of the east elevation and extends fifteen feet above the flat roofline. There is another chimney serving the fireplaces on the second and third floors of the library. This chimney is flush with the exterior and extends six feet above the roofline at the southern end of the east elevation. The irregular fenestration depends on the interior room arrangements. There are two metal windows with vertical panes and hopper openings, one multi-paned metal window with a central hopper and two - trio's of metal windows with vertical panes and hopper openings on both the first and second floors. The basement level contains the two doors and three windows. At the roofline, there is a slight parapet caped with a beaded metal coping.

The basement level of the library interior has a concrete floor, ceiling, and walls. Every room except the children's library (former Rest Room) and the Memorial Room has retained its original light fixtures. This floor of the building was built for and served the social welfare function of the institution. The south half of the basement was furnished with several beds, tables, and chairs. There are restrooms located at the east entrance to the basement. In addition, there were rooms provided for the storage of used clothing, food, and miscellaneous household items. A room was also provided for the welfare committee to meet and administer distribution of food and clothes in the area. The basement served this original purpose until the mid 1940s. At that time the food and clothing functions passed to other institutions. However, the women and children's lounge was continued until 1960. From 1960 until 1978, the lounge area was

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 4

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

used as storage. In 1978, the south half of the basement, or lounge area, was developed into a children's library and story room with shelving, tables, and chairs. A librarian's desk is located at the center south wall. The central hall at the foot of the stairs leading to the first level is used for historic displays and is accessible to outside via the east elevation door and staircase. The remainder of the basement is used for book and periodical storage. One of these rooms, the Memorial Room, has a brick fireplace that has been painted. The furnace and utility area are also located in the basement, with the furnace room having a door that exits out on the east side of the building via another staircase.

The first floor level features the main library area that occupies approximately one-half of the first floor space. This large room has remained the same for the past sixty-two years. The walls are lined with original bookcases that are decorated with egg and dart molding. There are several free-standing bookcases and a circulation desk with similar molding, but the library also has integrated some new bookcases. Extending from the south to the north end of the library room are four large beams on the ceiling. Each is decorated with twelve inch wide gold leaf crown molding with acanthus leaves and egg and dart molding where the beam intersects with the ceiling. All four beams have been recessed along their bottoms and framed with smaller egg and dart moldings. On both the north and south walls are four pilasters (with moldings that coordinate with the beams) that intersect each end of the beams. The whole room is tied together by more of the molding around the ceiling line. The main room of the library still retains its original lighting fixtures and composite tile flooring. Centered on the east end of the room is a large fireplace made of cut limestone.

Bisecting most of the first floor is a long hallway that contains the west elevation entrance door and the staircase. On the northern side of this hallway are five main rooms, which from 1932 until 1959, served as the living quarters for the resident librarian. In the living room (present day - Horticulture Library) there is an original fireplace and new florescent lighting. The dining room (Horticulture Stacks), bedroom (stack extension area), and kitchen area (service area) have had their light fixtures changed; however, it has not affected the general integrity of this area. All of these rooms still have their original composite tile flooring.

The bathroom in the apartment, which, because of its continuous use, has experienced some wear. The scored plaster walls are deteriorating and the toilet has been replaced. The floor tile, the rest of the fixtures and the lighting, have all remained in good shape. In 1959,

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 5

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

when there was no longer a librarian in residence, bookcases were added to the living room and dining room to create the Porter Henegar Memorial Horticultural Library.

Between the main library area and living quarters, there is a central staircase leading down to the basement and up to the second floor. It also appears that the building utilized a passive cooling system to keep internal air temperatures to a minimum. This cooling system utilized a chimney effect in the stairwell to draw warm air up to a vented skylight on the second floor.

From the top of the stairway on the second floor there is a large central hallway with wooden chair rail. A large auditorium, which is used by the community for concerts, lectures, and seminars, is situated on the northern end of this floor. It occupies approximately one-third of the floor and has windows facing north, east, and west. The entry contains a double leaf door with fifteen panes in each door and a six-pane transom light. The original fifty double wooden chairs remain in good and serviceable condition, along with a grand piano. Along the eastern wall of the hall is a large wood framed glass showcase with spool molding. It displays items collected by the library. Originally, the area on the east side of the hall was "The Soldiers Memorial Room", a museum with World War I, Civil War, and 19th Century items donated by the community. In 1978, this memorial room was changed to a genealogy and Tennessee history area. The museum items were stored or moved with the showcase to the central hall. With this change, bookcases, tables, filing cabinets and other office items were moved into the room. Original details still remaining in the Genealogy Room are the double leaf door with fifteen panes in each door and a six-pane transom light, a large river stone fireplace and an etched glass and crystal chandelier.

When the library was built, the benefactor, Mr. William Harrison Magness, planned to live in an apartment on the second floor. It was on the west side of the hallway and contained a bedroom (present day Bonner Law Library), bath, and sitting room (Tennessee History Room). The bedroom features a fireplace exactly like the fireplace below it on the first floor in the Horticulture Library and its original light fixture. The fireplace has a central plaque below the mantle, two fluted column supports on each end, a glazed tile firebox surround and hearth, and a decorated cast iron firebox insert. The bath is in pristine condition, having not been used very often. It is composed entirely of ceramic tile with a large, unusual shower. The stall is square with circular water pipe framing extending the height of the shower. The sitting room still has its original light fixture. All doors from the hallway into the rooms have adjustable transoms to

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 6

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

transoms to serve the original passive cooling system of the building. It should be noted that the above mentioned living quarters were only used by Mr. Magness for a few months before he turned the space over the library for public use. It is said that he did not use the rooms because of the noise level from the street below.

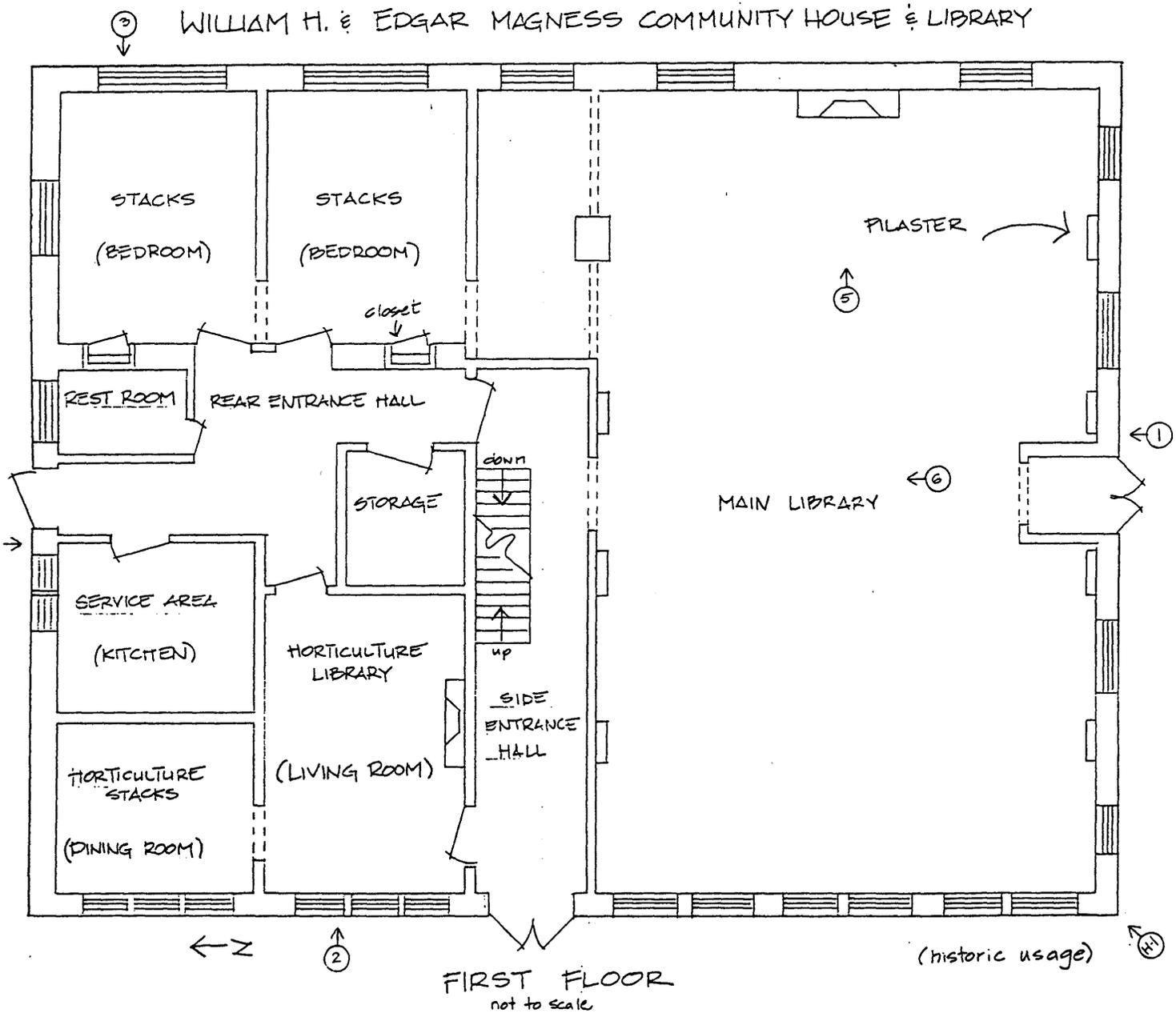
From 1932 until 1986, Mr. Magness's apartment was used as meeting rooms by various organizations and as a temporary museum by the Warren County Historical Society. In 1986, bookcases were added to the bedroom, and it became the Bonner Law Library. In 1993, the sitting room became an area to file genealogies and periodicals. The bathroom has remained the same as when it was built in 1931, including all the period fixtures.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 7

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee



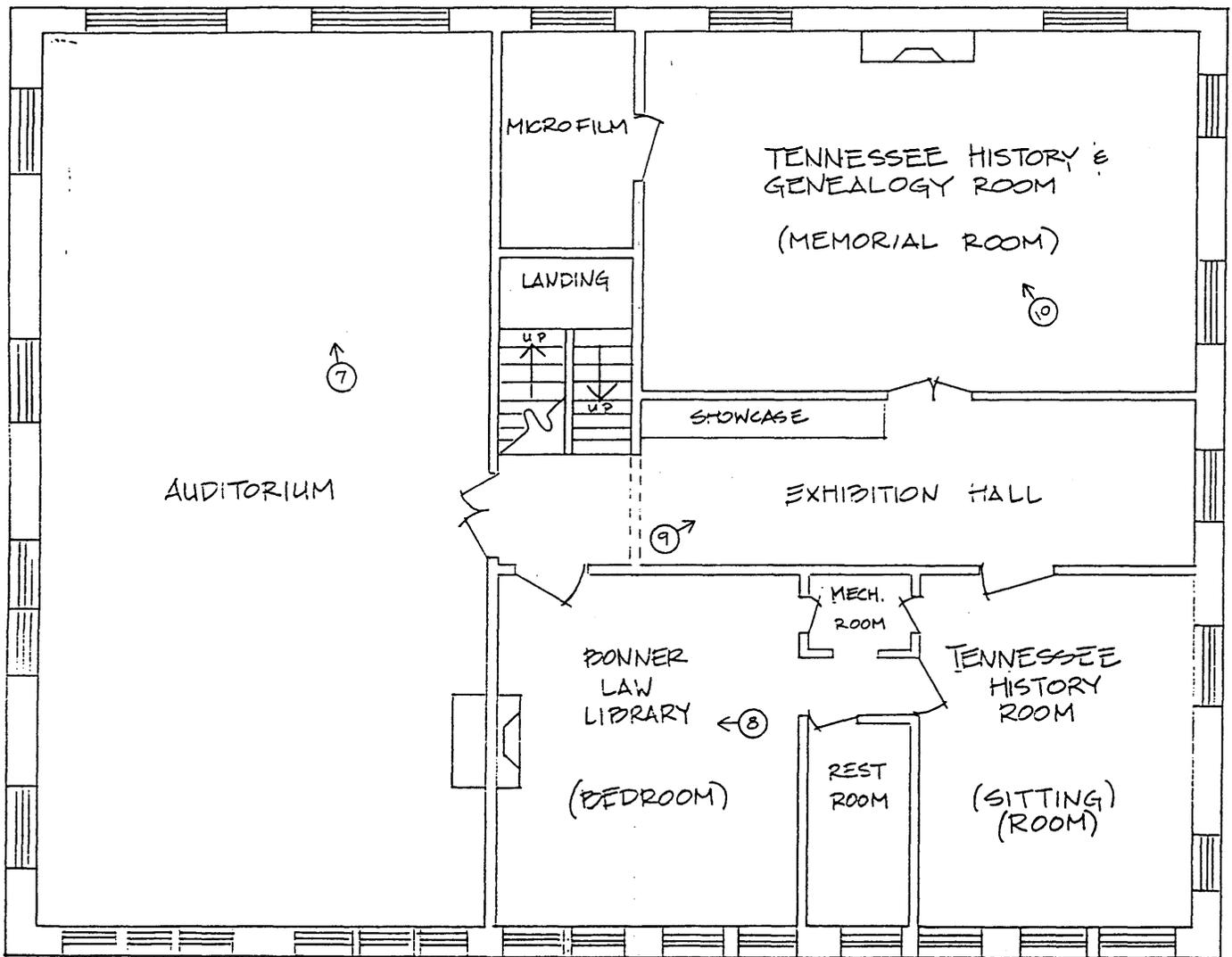
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 8

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

WILLIAM H. & EDGAR MAGNESS COMMUNITY HOUSE & LIBRARY



← Z

SECOND FLOOR
not to scale

(historic usage)

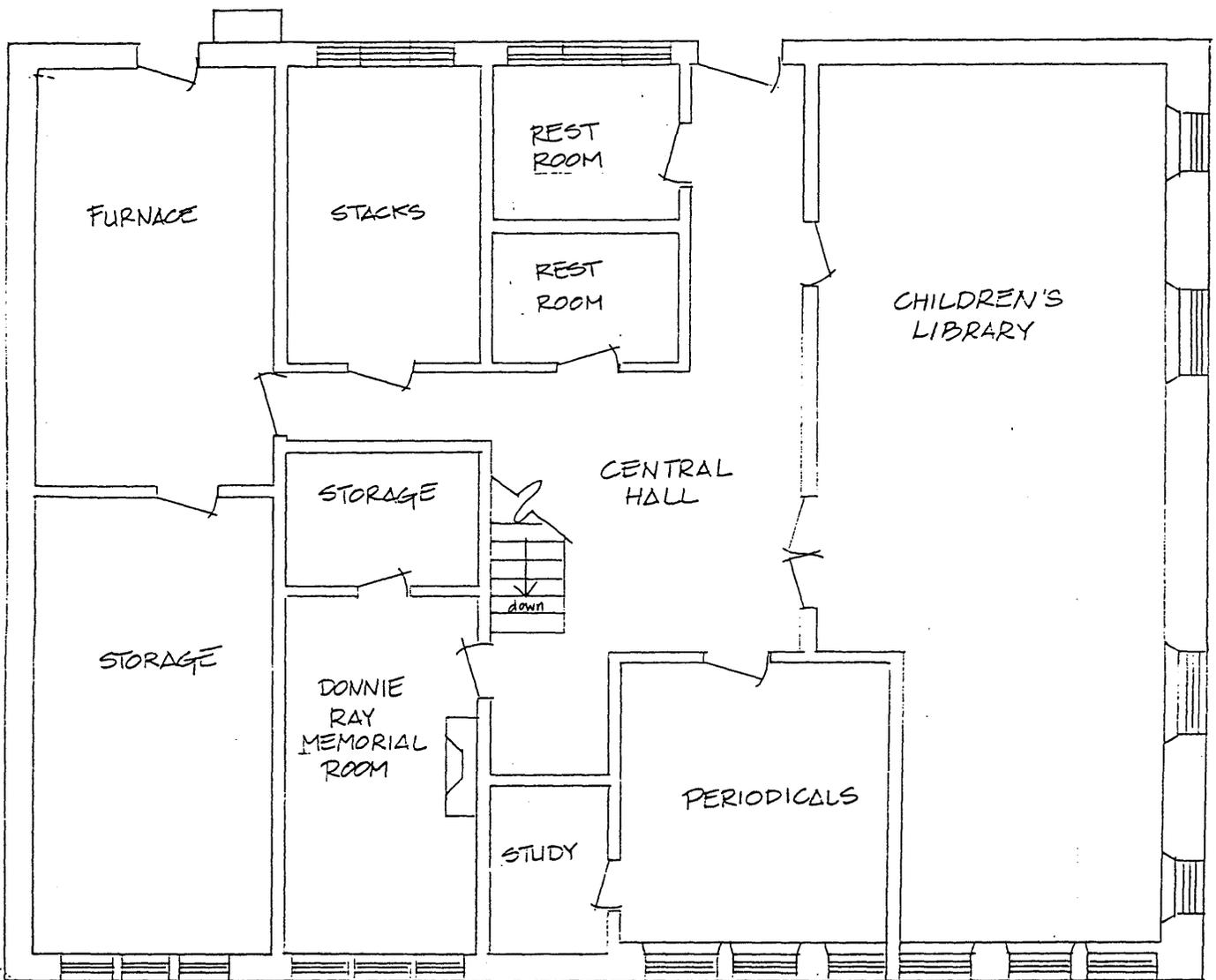
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 9

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

WILLIAM H. & EDGAR MAGNESS COMMUNITY HOUSE & LIBRARY



← Z

BASEMENT
not to scale

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 10

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

Statement of Significance

The William H. and Edgar Magness Community House and Library, built in 1931, is locally significant and eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, B, and C. The institution meets Criterion A for its cultural significance to McMinnville and Warren County, Tennessee. The building contributed to the social history of the city and county because of its use as an educational, community, and philanthropic center. Under Criterion B, the building is important for its association with William Harrison Magness, an outstanding philanthropist in Middle Tennessee and also the librarian, Mrs. Mary Steakley Cunningham, its strict but benevolent administrator. This building is also eligible under Criterion C for its Classical Revival architecture designed by architect, George D. Waller.

Warren County is located on the eastern Highland Rim of Middle Tennessee. It is a small, rural county that during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s began to improve its basic economy from agriculture and marginal textile industries to plant nurseries and wide variety of manufacturing. However, during the late 19th and early 20th Century, McMinnville and Warren County were struggling with a post Civil War, southern rural, depressed economy with concomitant cultural disadvantages. The need for a lending library was realized, and several attempts were made to establish a library in the city. For the want of a full-time librarian, initial efforts to establish a library failed. In addition, social services and a means to provide them were in great need during this period.

Interestingly, the first library to succeed and remain until this day, began as a women's lounge and Rest Room. In 1913, the Woman's Civic League of McMinnville with the leadership of a charter member, a person of great compassion, Mrs. Mary Steakley Cunningham, opened a public lounge and Rest Room for women on the south side of the McMinnville courthouse square. The purpose of the Rest Room was to help the women of the area who came into town with their husbands and were left on the streets while their husbands conducted long hours of business. Many of these women had nursing babies or children who often became sick. Soon books were added to the lounge and Rest Room, and this was the beginning of the library. Several months later, the Rest Room was moved to a large two-story frame building on the northeast corner of the Main and Chancery Streets. Mrs. Cunningham lived in a second-floor apartment with her children, and served as the Rest Room supervisor and librarian of an expanding library. In 1919, the institution, known as the Rest Room, became the Soldiers Memorial Library, and the governing bodies of the city of McMinnville and

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 11

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

Warren County agreed to pay Mrs. Cunningham to manage and maintain the dual facilities.

In 1926, Mr. William H. Magness bought the library and Rest Room building, and the institution became the William H. and Edgar Magness Community House and Library. In 1931, Mr. Magness established a trust that paid \$40,000 to build the present building on the site of the old library. He also left \$60,000 in trust to help support the institution for ninety-nine years. No percentages of support were stipulated and funding was and is negotiated yearly with the institution's board of trustees. The library was deeded to a corporation whose board of trustees legally managed the institution.

Mrs. Cunningham was given an apartment in the library, where she served as manager of civic and social services and resident librarian until her death in 1954. During the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the library on November 5, 1931, Mr. Magness, in his address to the fifteen hundred people in attendance, stated that it was Mrs. Cunningham who had conceived of the idea which he was bringing into being. Indeed, the rooms of the library and community house have been used for countless lectures, musical recitals, community club meetings and various historical exhibits and cultural events. In addition, the social services of the institution, which began in 1913, were continued and expanded in the new building.

The William H. and Edgar Magness Community House and Library is being nominated under Criterion A because for over 40 years this unique institution provided many forms of charity and social services for the area as well as contributing to the public's education. The auditorium on the second floor has been used for various concerts, lectures, seminars and meetings. Mr. Magness's apartment rooms have also been used by community organizations. Used clothing and food were collected and distributed from a "loan closet" by a United Benevolent Committee of the institution. In addition the United Benevolent Committee sent many blind and crippled children for operations and treatment at the various specialty hospitals around the country. Almost any need of the unfortunate was looked after by an organization housed in the Community House and Library. There is no record of where the money came from to supply the "loan closet," or where the funds came from to pay for transportation, care, or treatment of many children. However, Mrs. Cunningham and her United Benevolent Committee managed to do many acts of mercy. In Mrs. Cunningham's diary, there are long lists of children and families helped. Also, in her diary, Mrs. Cunningham recounts trips with children and has many letters from the doctors who treated these children. However the library came about because of one particular

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 12

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

philanthropic institution, the Rest Room. It served as a resting and waiting place for women and children who were in the city and had no alternative place to go, while in the meantime creating a distinctive status within the area.

The William H. and Edgar Magness Community House and Library is being nominated under Criterion B of the National Register for its association with William Harrison Magness, an outstanding philanthropist in Middle Tennessee. The Magness family was among the early pioneer families to settle DeKalb and Warren Counties in Tennessee. The father of William Harrison Magness was William Hall Magness for whom, along with William Harrison's brother, Edgar, the library was dedicated. William Hall Magness was a prominent banker in McMinnville. Edgar Magness was a noted banker in Nashville and was instrumental in the founding of Commerce Union Bank. William Harrison Magness, 1865-1936, was an investor of capital and was very successful at his occupation. During the early stages of the Great Depression, William Harrison Magness traveled to Nashville, Tennessee in the disguise of a homeless street person. He visited several churches and institutions supposedly seeking help and a meal. According to Mr. Magness, he was poorly treated in all the places that he visited with the exception of the Salvation Army. The Army gave him food and compassion, and he, in turn, established a trust of \$350,000 for the Salvation Army, which has grown to well over \$1,000,000 in 1993. In addition, the income from the trust was used to build and fund the Magness Center in Nashville, which has helped thousands of people in need. Also, in Nashville, Mr. Magness gave a large sum of money to the Madison Sanitarium. In addition, he made a large gift to the Cumberland Mountain School at Crossville, Tennessee. In Warren County, Tennessee, he established the Magness Home for the Aged and Indigent and funded the purchase of the building and property for both the Magness Community House and Library.

It may be of interest to note what has happened to many of the above mentioned charitable gifts of William Harrison Magness for than a half century later. In Nashville, the Salvation Army recently received a million dollar donation from the Potter family for an addition to the Magness Center. Subsequently, the Magness Center has been renamed the Magness-Potter Center. In McMinnville, the Magness Memorial Baptist Church burned in the late 1970s, was rebuilt, and subsequently was renamed First Baptist Church. The Magness Home for the Aged and the Indigent was abolished in 1982, and its function was turned over to Human Services. However, the farm land, belonging to the Home for the Aged and Indigent, was used by the county to locate a hospital, a vocational technical school, and an extension to Motlow Community College, and an industrial park. The William H. and Edgar Magness

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 13

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

Community House and Library alone remains as it was conceived by Mr. Magness sixty-one years ago.

In McMinnville, it is said that William Harrison Magness gave many substantial gifts to charity, most of which we shall never know about. This is certainly in keeping with the acts of a true philanthropist. It was of no little consequence that the philanthropic deeds of Mr. Magness came during the Great Depression of this century. The personal life of Mr. Magness was very simple. Although he was quite wealthy, he did not appear to be so. He was a bachelor and lived all of his adult life residing in hotels or apartments. During the winter months, he lived in the Maxwell House Hotel in Nashville. During the remainder of the year, he lived in an apartment off Chancery Street in McMinnville, Tennessee.

The Magness Library is also significant under Criterion B for its association with Mary Steakley (Mrs. J. M.) Cunningham (born June 8, 1869), the institution's superintendent and librarian. In an era where women had a very defined role in society, Mrs. Cunningham exemplified the feminine genteel southern standards of selfless devotion to one's family, religion, and service. This cult of domesticity meant that women were the foundations to society. Mrs. Cunningham and her involvement with the Magness Library stems from these standards. In 1913, under the auspices of the McMinnville Women's Civic League, a women and children's Rest Room was organized, in part because Mrs. Cunningham agreed to supervise the rooms. It appealed to her because she would be helping others, thus fulfilling her social and religious duties, which was what a good Christian woman of the early Twentieth century was expected to do. The Rest Room was opened to the public on July 18, 1913. Soon after this, Mrs. Cunningham saw a need to help the women who patronized the Rest Rooms fill their time while they stayed there, so she brought six of her own books and placed them on the Rest Room mantel. This was very well received, and soon it became the fashionable thing for the ladies of town to add other books to the mantel. However there were some people in the community who believed that no one would want to use the Rest Rooms or come to its library. But Mrs. Cunningham saw the possibilities for a free lending library and ignored the criticism, and began soliciting the town for support verbally and through articles in the town paper. In her diary she stated that she began giving one-half of her tithe for book buying until such time an endowment was provided. She did this until February 1936, when Mr. Magness died and left the Library a trust fund.

The early years of the Rest Room Library were difficult. Mrs. Cunningham campaigned continuously for money, supplies, books and

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 14

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

other types of support for the institution. She began writing columns in the Southern Standard, describing the "goings-on" [sic] there, the new book acquisitions, praise for its supporters, attendance, and always a few stern words about "need" and "responsibility".

Often times, Mrs. Cunningham was required to rescue the Rest Rooms. The Municipal Board of McMinnville and the County Court of Warren County held quarterly meetings that, among other things, dealt with monetary appropriations to various institutions. The Rest Rooms depended on these appropriations for their existence. Many times, Mrs. Cunningham had to go down to these meetings alone, and plead for support for the Rest Rooms or continuances for the appropriations. If it had not been for her diligence, the Rest Rooms would have closed down for lack of monetary support.

By 1915 the Rest Room Library had collected 226 books. However, she still felt that many people undermined her efforts. After hearing a woman say, "why I had no idea a library could be started so easily", Mrs. Cunningham responded angrily in her November 1915 column,

Face to face with cold indifference as to the task of the vital interests that are making our Rest Rooms different, and the only one of the kind in all the Southland, is counted a hard day; but the comfort these Rooms bring to the great masses of women and children more than doubly over balances the other side. (diary)

The Women's Civic League had by 1919, absolved interest in the Rest Rooms, so the first board of trustees were selected to take their place. But it was Mrs. Cunningham who made sure that the Rest Rooms were kept open - "It was to this Court House (Warren Co.) that I went, year after year, for fifteen, asking and pleading (until I was blue in the face) for a continuance, or perhaps a raise of their appropriation which rarely exceeded \$15.00 per month." (diary)

By 1919 the Rest Room Library boasted its "Institutional Activities" as a Public Library, United Benevolence, Red Cross Health Center, Warren County Historical Society, and a Civic Center for All Community Activities. By 1920 the library had more than 2500 books. It was a place where several local organizations were formed (many by Mrs. Cunningham) and where they held meetings - the Sewing and Swimmer's Club, Story Tellers League, Homemaker's Club (demonstration), Children's Story Hour, Red Cross groups, vacation reading clubs, and even the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Mrs.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 15

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

Cunningham also organized a branch library at the colored school which also had a Children's Story Hour.

Mrs. Cunningham became an important figure in Warren County because of her leadership surrounding the Rest Rooms and Library, as well as, the many philanthropic services it provided. In her September 1922 Rest Room column, she reported that,

Seventeen women and children furnished with clothing, twenty-five persons given food, four girls positively rescued from lives of sorrow and placed in a safe environment, eleven warned against threatening dangers, etc. One young man assisted in getting vocational training, one bright faced boy placed in the Memphis Hospital for Crippled Children and between sixty and seventy Home Service Red Cross cases aided. (diary)

She had begun correspondence with the Memphis Hospital and they began taking local children brought to Mrs. Cunningham's attention, and correcting their maladies. The governor appointed her to be a delegate at the Tennessee Conference on Social Work for many years. Mrs. Cunningham continued to be the librarian at Magness until her death in 1954. Her driving force and energy created a lasting institution and philanthropic tradition in McMinnville.

The William H. and Edgar Magness Community House and Library is also being nominated under Criterion C because of its Classical Revival architecture, unique interior design, and its association with the prominent Nashville architect, George D. Waller. The building's main facades have elevations of detailed cut limestone, while the alley elevations are brick. This was not an uncommon approach of the time in which it was built, because this technique spent most of the building budget and effort on the most visible sides of the building. Several notable features of the building, including the cut limestone facade (which was an uncommon material prior to 1932 in McMinnville), the elaborate woodwork and plaster detailing in the main library area, the unusual and varied fireplaces, fanciful light fixtures, and the passive cooling system to keep internal air temperatures to a minimum during periods of summer heat. This cooling system utilized a chimney effect at the stairwell to draw warm air up to a vented skylight. Its designer, George Waller (1883-1969), was a native Nashvillian who studied in his home town and subsequently built many buildings there. Specific ones include: C. D. Raglan and Co., M. E. Derryberry and Co., Turner and Day, and the Wolf Building. Mr. Waller also built two other buildings in the mid-state area that are presently listed on the National Register: the Cannon County

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 16

**Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee**

Courthouse in Woodbury (NR 04/14/92) and the Crichlow Grammer School and E. C. Cox Memorial Gym in Murfreesboro (NR 12/17/92). He was well known as a school building specialist designing more than twenty-five schools in Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, and Georgia.

There are only four Classical Revival buildings, including the Magness Library, remaining in McMinnville. They are as follows: the First National Bank, built out of limestone in 1923; the U.S. Post Office, built in 1930; and the Central Church of Christ, which was built of brick in 1970.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9

Page 17

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Community House Cornerstone Laid." The Southern Standard
Newspaper. November 5, 1931, McMinnville, Tennessee.

Cowden, John B. Tennessee's Celebrated Case 1958 "Cause Celebre."
(publisher not listed).

Cunningham, Mrs. J. M., Personal Diary-Scrapbook, 1913-1946.

Cunningham, James M., Jr., son of Mrs. J. M. Cunningham; personal
interview by R. Neil Shultz, June 22, 1993.

Dillon, James, Warren County historian, personal interview by R. Neil
Shultz, June 21, 1993.

Turner, Bill. Chairman of the Board of Nashville Salvation Army
(1985, 1986, 1987). Telephone interview by R. Neil Shultz,
April 3, 1993.

Womack, Walter. McMinnville at a Milestone, 1810-1960.
McMinnville, Tennessee: Standard Publishing Co. and Womack
Printing Co., 1960.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10

Page 18

Magness, William H. & Edgar,
Community House & Library
Warren County, Tennessee

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Magness Community House and Library are located on Parcel 9, Warren County tax map 68E. See attached Warren County tax map.

VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary for the Magness Community House and Library consists of the present lot, which is all of the historic lot this building was built upon.

