

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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**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 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 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. 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 The William Syphax School

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1360 Half Street, S. W.

not for publication N/A

city or town Washington

vicinity N/A

state District of Columbia code DC county N/A zip code 20024

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)

Aria M. Buchanan
Signature of certifying official

6/10/03
Date

DC State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Aria M. Buchanan
Signature of commenting or other official

6/10/03
Date

DC State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

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6. Function or Use
=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: school

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: VACANT/NOT IN USE Sub: _____

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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7. Description
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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS / Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK
roof STONE: slate
walls BRICK
other TERRA COTTA
WOOD
METAL

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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8. Statement of Significance
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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.)

- a owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- b removed from its original location.
- c a birthplace or a 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
EDUCATION
ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance 1901-1954

Significant Dates 1901

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above) _____

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder Marsh & Peter / D. F. Mockabee

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

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property less than one acre (19,030 sq. ft.)

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>18</u>	<u>325760</u>	<u>4304700</u>	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

____ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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11. Form Prepared By

=====
name/title Tanya Edwards Beauchamp/Architectural Historian
organization Tanya Edwards Beauchamp, Associates date September 30, 2001
street & number 930 Leigh Mill Road telephone 703-759-3796
city or town Great Falls state VA zip code 22066
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Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state ____ zip code _____

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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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated
to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box
37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget,
Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

The William Syphax School
name of property
Washington, D. C.
county and State
Public School Buildings of the
District of Columbia, 1862-1960
name of multiple property listing

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DESCRIPTION

The William Syphax School is located at 1360 Half Street, S. W., between N and O Streets on rectangular, 88,629 sq. ft., lot 822 et al in Square 653. It is a free-standing 81' x 84' public elementary school sited along Half Street facing west with a narrow planting area in front and a playground in the rear. It was designed in 1900 by noted Washington architects Marsh & Peter in an exuberant Colonial Revival style. The plan followed the standard interior layout developed by the city's Office the Building Inspector during the late 19th Century. The building was constructed in 1901-02 and dedicated on October 31, 1902. The cost of the land was \$9,754.00; of the building, \$41,535.67.

The building is two stories tall with full English basement and attic. It is of brick masonry construction with terra cotta, wood, and wrought iron trim. The roof is slate with a flared slope and wide projecting eaves, hipped-roof dormers centrally placed on each side, and prominent twin ventilating chimneys. The facade is organized in three bays of three with the central or entrance bay somewhat recessed emphasizing this device, reducing the scale of the facade, and framing the entrance composition. Horizontally the composition is also strongly divided into three sections. The rusticated base projects slightly, ending in contrasting moulded terra cotta stringcourses encircling the building at the sill level of each floor. A running wave motif occurs on the upper string course.

The facades are organized in repetitive bays with large 6/6 light wood double-hung sash, rectangular on the first floor and round-arched on the second. The first floor windows are topped by flat-arched brick lintels and keystones. Terra cotta keystones and impost blocks occur at the second floor windows with a denticulated galvanized iron cornice with egg and dart motif above. Sills are sandstone. The projecting roof eaves terminate in wooden moulding. Wooden soffits are elaborated with galvanized iron flat modillions ornamented with guttae. Flat-arched windows with bluestone sills and 4-light casement sash with original wrought iron grillwork occur at the basement level. Attic dormers include wood moulding and soffits and four-light wood-framed casement sash.

The main entrance portal at the center of the Half Street facade is a colossal engaged Classical portico with triangular pediment, fluted Doric columns, and egg-and-dart moulding. Fashioned of wood, it is painted white as is other wooden detail. The original double wood doors were paneled with copper-screened 4/2 light transom. It is approached from the street by a broad flight of granite stairs and extends one and one half stories from mid-basement level to the height of the first story window arches. Its design impact is continued

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vertically through a large, segmentally arched second-story window with wrought iron balcony. The stone floor of the balcony is supported by scrolled brackets. 4/4 light double-hung sash flank the entrance composition on both floors.

The south facade design is composed of four bays on either side of a monumental entrance bay. Unlike the west and east facades, the entrance bay is not recessed. Entered on-grade, it is designed with an exuberant Palladian window over a sandstone-framed post and beam sandstone entrance portal.

In the original eight-room section each floor has four classrooms with adjoining cloakrooms that open off a long hallway. In the center of each hall is a teachers lounge or office. The interior is embellished with wrought iron design on the railing at the second floor landing. Warren W. Biggs Heating & Ventilating Company installed the hot blast steam heating apparatus.

In 1941 the school was tripled in size with the construction of two wings, one with classrooms and the second with offices and a combination gymnasium-auditorium. Municipal Architect Nathan C. Wyeth designed the 1941 addition using a standard extensible building layout developed by his predecessor Albert L. Harris in the 1920s. The additions do not detract from the integrity of the original building. They are designed in a compatible, more modern version of the Colonial Revival style and linked to the original building with a two-story hyphen, well set back. The school was expanded again in 1953 by Wyeth's successor as municipal architect, Merrel A. Coe, when an additional classroom wing was connected to the rear of the 1941 classroom wing. The additions are also two stories high and built in red brick with limestone trim. The facades are planar with a limestone belt course capping the water table, and a limestone Classical cornice topped by a plain red brick parapet. Windows are rectangular 6/6 light sash set in untrimmed openings with limestone sills.

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NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The William Syphax School is dedicated to and memorializes the life and work of William Syphax, prominent African American who worked tirelessly to create a public school system in the District of Columbia with equal educational opportunities for his race. It is a fine illustrative example of the public schools designed by private Washington architects for the Office of the Building Inspector during the first years of the twentieth century, as discussed in the multiple property listing "Public School Buildings of Washington, D. C., 1862-1960," property sub-type III, "The Architects in Private Practice, 1897-1910." This program was a significant manifestation of the progressive civic design philosophies of that era, and constitutes an important phase of the development of the city's public schools. Syphax School embodies the distinguishing characteristics of the early Colonial Revival style as applied to public school construction in Washington. It is a good representative example of the work of noted Washington architects Marsh & Peter, influential in their field of endeavor. As the most imposing structure in its surroundings, and a traditional community center, the building embodies the civic presence in the local community. The commonality of such distinguishing structures throughout the city's neighborhoods is a direct result of the strength of public design in the nation's capital. It creates a distinctive cityscape and binds the city's various neighborhoods together through shared characteristics. The building possesses sufficient integrity to convey the values and qualities for which it is judged significant, and sufficient time has passed since it was constructed to permit professional evaluation in its historic context.

WILLIAM SYPHAX

William Syphax was born a slave at the Arlington estate of George Washington Parke Custis, grandson of Martha Washington. His father, Charles Syphax, was a slave of Custis and grew up with Custis' daughter, Mary, who became the wife of Robert E. Lee. Charles married Maria Carter, daughter of Custis and one of Martha Washington's house slaves, at Arlington House in 1821. In 1826, William was manumitted with his mother and elder sister Elinor. He grew up on a seventeen acre Arlington parcel given to his mother by Custis and attended private schools in Alexandria and Washington, D. C. In 1850 he was a founder of the Civil and Statistical Association for the educational, moral, and financial advancement of area African Americans. In 1851 he was appointed to a position in the office of the Secretary of Interior where he came in contact with many government officials, earning their respect for his abilities and integrity.

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He served under nine Secretaries of the Interior. In 1864 the 1,170 acre Arlington estate was purchased at auction by the federal government. There was no document to prove Maria Syphax's ownership of the parcel given to her by Custis. William brought the matter to the attention of Congress. On May 16, 1866, Senator Harris, from the Committee on Private Land Claims, reported a bill (S. No. 321) for the relief of Maria Syphax. The bill passed the House on June 8, 1886; the Senate, on June 11; and was signed by President Andrew Johnson on the following day.

Syphax was involved in all movements to advance the position of African Americans, and saw education as of primary importance. He was an early advocate of integration in the schools and was disappointed in the establishment of the segregated system here. He was the first African American appointed to the Board of Trustees for the Colored Schools of Washington and Georgetown. The three-member Board was created by Congress on July 11, 1862, shortly after the emancipation of slaves in the District (April 16, 1862). Oversight of the Board was delegated to the Department of the Interior, with building construction approval from the Architect of the Capitol. Syphax served on the Board from July 1, 1868, until June 30, 1871, first as chairman (1868-70) and then as treasurer (1871). The Thaddeus Stevens (1868), Abraham Lincoln (1871), and Charles Sumner (1871-72) Schools were constructed during his tenure. These were the first schools for African American students considered equal to those being constructed for white students. Syphax took an active role in supervision of their construction. Under his leadership the personnel in the colored schools changed from sixty-six white and eleven colored teachers to sixty-six colored and eleven white teachers. The preparatory high school for advanced African American students was also organized during his tenure. Syphax continued to take an active role in efforts to advance the position of African Americans until his death in 1894. The William Syphax School was dedicated on October 31, 1902, and named in honor of this pioneer builder of the colored school system of Washington, D. C. In 1939, the *Washington Star* noted his accomplishments on the occasion of a presentation of his portrait to Dunbar High School--

As president of the Board of Trustees, he indorsed the bill for mixed schools in the District of Columbia sponsored by Senator Charles Sumner in 1870. He vigorously denounced segregated schools and insistently demanded equal standards and proportional representation for both branches of the school system. He supervised the building of the Abraham Lincoln, Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner Schools and named all three, the latter while Sumner was still alive. (Star, 3-19-1939)

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SCHOOL BUILDING DESIGN IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

During the dozen years between 1897 and 1909, about half of the city's public school design was contracted out to private architects. This paralleled a similar practice of open competition instituted selectively by the federal government. It also coincided with the period of progressive civic design that began to transform Washington into a monumental city, and led to the establishment of influential institutions like the Commission of Fine Arts. It was also a period of institutional reorganization, with the consolidation of authority over the schools in the Board of Education, and the abandonment of a separate superintendency of African American schools.

The privately commissioned school designs of this period reflect national advances in the technology of heating, ventilation, and lighting. The prevailing architectural eclecticism of the time also contributed to a great richness of invention. There was a greater variety of facade treatment for the standard eight-room layout developed by the Office of the Building Inspector. Engaging the talent of the city's finest architects did indeed produce some of the most elegant of the city's public schools. Syphax School is among these, displaying a highly sophisticated interpretation of Colonial Revival design with Arts-and Crafts influences. In 1941 and again in 1953, new additions were appended to the north to accommodate the burgeoning school population. These were designed in a compatible Colonial Revival style and accessed the original building through the north side entrance, having a minimal impact on the integrity of the building.

The William Syphax School is linked with Progressive Era efforts to provide decent housing in the city's poorest neighborhoods. Soon after the construction of Syphax, in 1909-10, the Washington Sanitary Improvement Company built a large complex of more than a hundred two-family rowhouse flats occupying the entire block to the north of Syphax. The product this project, designed by Appleton P. Clark, replaced a mid-block alley with a new public street (now Carrollsburg Place, it was originally named "New Street"). These rowhouses remain a notable part of the neighborhood around Syphax School. As in the case of the original building, the 1941 Syphax addition coincided with development of an adjacent multi-block housing complex. In 1942 the National Capital Housing Authority began construction of James Creek Dwellings, designed by prominent African American architect Albert Cassell. Though substantially rebuilt in later years, these garden apartments on the blocks to the west of the school constitute another notable component of the neighborhood around Syphax. Syphax School has been purchased by a private developer who plans to develop the site as compatible housing, largely demolishing the 1941 and 1953 additions and

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retaining and restoring the original school as a community center with child care facilities. This use does not diminish the historic integrity of the building, but continues its close association with affordable neighborhood housing.

MARSH & PETER

Marsh & Peter began their architectural partnership in 1898 after working for the noted Washington firm of Hornblower & Marshall. William Johnston Marsh (1864-1926) and Walter Gibson Peter, Sr. (1868-1945) were both Washington natives and spent their entire practice here. Notable examples of their work include the Evening Star Building (1898), Walter Reed Army Hospital (1908), First Church of Christ Scientist (1915), and Georgetown's gold-domed Farmers and Mechanics National Bank (1926).

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Construction documents: Engineer Department (E. D.) records.

Architectural drawings, Engineering Archives, D. C. Capitol Construction Services Administration. All drawings are dated December 1900 and are signed by Marsh & Peter.

1. Front elevation
2. Side elevation
3. Rear elevation
4. Longitudinal section on line B-B
5. Longitudinal section on line A-A
6. Roof plan
7. First story plan
8. Second story plan
9. Longitudinal section showing plumbing
10. Drawings of 1941 auditorium and gym
11. Drawings of 1953 addition to rear of 1941 addition

Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives. Standing files.

Cook, George F. T. "Historical Sketch of the Colored Schools, Past and Present." *First Report of the Board of Trustees of Public Schools of the District of Columbia, 1874-'75.* Washington City: M'Gill & Witherow, 1876.

Lee, Antoinette J. "Public School Buildings of the District of Columbia, 1804-1930." Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives, September 1989.

Maloney, David. Historic Preservation Review Board: Staff Reports and Recommendations. Landmark Designation Case #99-5 (March 25, 1999) & H. P. A. #99-401, 402, and 404 (June 24, 1999).

Syphax Community Center, Inc. Historic Preservation Review Board: Application For Historic Landmark Designation (April 1, 1998).

Syphax, Evelyn Reid. "William Syphax--Community Leader." *Arlington History Magazine.* Vol. 1, No. 1, (1977), pp. 42-44.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The William Syphax School is located at 1360 Half Street, S. W., facing west mid-block between N and O Streets. It is situated on lot 822 in Square 653.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

Legal recorded boundaries of historic site.

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Additional Documentation

The William Syphax School
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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photocopy of 1902 construction photograph of Syphax School. Perspective view looking northeast from Half Street, ~~S.~~ W.

Tanya Edwards Beauchamp, photographer
September 2001, date of photograph 1.
March 2002, date of photograph 2.

Tanya Edwards Beauchamp, Associates / 930 Leigh Mill Road
Great Falls, Virginia 22066 / 703-759-3796

1. Perspective view, looking northeast from Half Street, ~~E. W.~~ SW
2. View of south playground facade, looking northeast from Half Street, ~~N. W.~~ SW

MAP

1. Sanborn Map, 1903-04.

N. ST.

S.W.

Syphax School
(Sanborn Map 1903-04)

ONE - HALF

