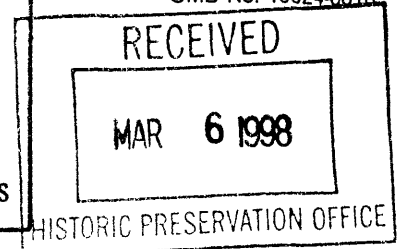
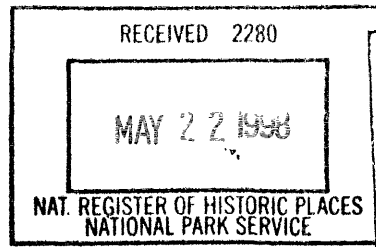


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# 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 *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 Richardson Avenue School

other names/site number Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM (Masonic Hall)

### 2. Location

street & number Richardson Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town Swedesboro Borough  vicinity

state New Jersey code 034 county Gloucester code 015 zip code 08085

### 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.)

[Signature] 4/21/98  
 Signature of certifying official Title Date  
Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources /DSHPO  
 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] \_\_\_\_\_  
 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] \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action 6-7-98  
 Signature of the Keeper

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

- private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal

- building(s), district, site, structure, object

Contributing Noncontributing
1 buildings
sites
structures
objects
1 0 Total

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Education/school

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Social/meeting hall/civic

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th & 20th Century Revivals

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation faceted cinder blocks
walls faceted cinder blocks and
clapboard/asbestos siding
roof asphalt
other

Narrative Description

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

Name of Property

County and State

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

Property is:

- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage/African American
Education

Period of Significance

1931 - 1942

Significant Dates

1931

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Charles Davis (builder)

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government Swedesboro Bd. of Ed.
University
Other

Name of repository:

Gloucester County Historical Society

Richardson Avenue School

NJ Gloucester Co.

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.13

Woodstown, NJ Quad

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

UTM grid 1: Zone 18, Easting 473140, Northing 4399560

UTM grid 3: Zone, Easting, Northing

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.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elaine Edwards, Research Chairperson
organization Swedesboro & Vicinity Women's Progressive Club of
date November 1997
street & number 636 Auburn Avenue telephone (609) 467-2992
city or town Swedesboro state NJ zip code 08085

Additional Documentation

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)

Property Owner

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

name Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM, % Mr. Raymond E. Holmes, Sec'y
street & number 116 Swedesboro Road telephone (609) 478-2158
city or town Mullica Hill state NJ zip code 08062

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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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NJ Gloucester Co.  
Richardson Avenue School

Narrative Description

Established in 1931, the Richardson Avenue School (housed in the Masonic Hall owned by Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 Free and Accepted Masons (F&AM)) began educating the African-American children in a "separate but equal" environment. The Lodge had the Hall constructed in 1931. The building materials used to construct the two-story rectangular building was faceted cinder blocks as foundation, which continued up the surface wall to include the first story and using clap-board in the second story, later covered with asbestos siding. The building has a gable roof. The Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM erected the Masonic Hall for a meeting place for the Lodge. Upon completion of the Hall, it immediately leased as a "separate but equal" school, for the African-American children of Swedesboro and Woolwich Township. The building located about two blocks from the center of town, in the "pocket" of the African-American community. The Masonic Hall is one block from Old Kings Highway. The surrounding land's usage includes the Margaret C. Clifford School to the south and private African-American residences to the north. The St. Paul UAME Church stands to the northwest of the Hall. ph. 1-6

The Masonic Hall, the only building on Block 36, Lot 3, (site of the Richardson Avenue School) stands on its original site located on the corner of Richardson Avenue and Second Street. This property contains about 0.13 acre of land, and consists of one Lot purchased by the Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM in 1930. The Lot yields 52.58 feet of frontage along Richardson Avenue and 112.32 feet along Second Street. Bounding the Margaret C. Clifford School Lot the property extends to a depth of 52.2 feet. Along the eastern section running north and south the Lot extends 112.42 feet. The Hall has a setback of approximately ten feet from the southern side of Richardson Avenue and fifteen feet from the eastern side of Second Street.

As a school, the Masonic Hall consisted of three classrooms; two classrooms on the first floor located on either side of a central north/south wall divider and one full-size classroom on the second floor. Materials and treatments are straightforward and without ornamentation. The structure has a faceted cinder block foundation. There is not a basement; only a crawl space accessible through vents under the building. The exterior walls made of faceted cinder blocks on first story and clap-board covered with asbestos siding on second story. The building has a gable shingled roof. Two faceted cinder block chimneys rise through the roof on the eastern and western side of the building. All exterior doors remain in place and are of solid wood. Outside, a concrete walk extends along the northern front of the building parallel to Richardson Avenue. ph. 1-2

Original wooden windows remain in place. These consist of six windows set in two frames on the northern side, four windows set in two frames on the southern side, eight windows set in two frames on the eastern side, and eight windows set in two frames on the western side of the ph. 1, 2, 4

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Richardson Avenue School

building. Eight windows are on the second floor and fourteen windows are on the first floor. The frames contain one-over-one sash windows. Each window has wooden lintels and sills.

All wooden exterior surfaces are in need of repainting. There is damage to the roof. Although deterioration is apparent in some elements of the building's exterior, recent photographs reveal a sound structure. The building's dimensions and exterior appearance have changed little over the years. The maps show that the structure stands within the original boundaries.

There is not a central heating system in this building. Oil space heaters supply the heat for the building. There are four toilet rooms (two on first floor and two on second floor) located in the southern section of the building. All original interior doors remain. The exposed wooden tongue and groove floors (two and one-half inches wide) are on the second floor.

ph. 11  
ph. 10, 12,  
13, 15

On the first floor the main building doors open on the northern side into each (apartment) classroom and the western side doors open into a wide staircase with fourteen wide steps leading up to the second floor (meeting room) classroom. Wainscoting featured on all interior walls on first and second floors with plastered walls covered with paneling on the top half of all interior walls.

ph. 8, 14

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Richardson Avenue School

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**Statement of Significance**

The Richardson Avenue School established in 1931, was the most recently adapted school for "separate but equal" education of African-American children in Swedesboro. In September 1931, the Swedesboro Board of Education leased the Masonic Hall (owned by Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM) to embody the school. From the outset the size, location and limited accommodations of the Masonic Hall resulted in the teachers and children enduring many hardships. The New Jersey State Board of Education condemned the Masonic Hall for use as a school in 1940, but the Swedesboro Board of Education, continued to overlook the State's decision for two more years. The Board subjected the children to inconceivable dangers (no fire exits, overcrowded classrooms, limited bathrooms, poor heating and no playground) by continuing to lease the Masonic Hall as a "separate but equal" educational facility for African-American children, until 1942. In the fall of 1942, the children continued their education at the newly constructed Auburn Avenue School (which was the last segregated school built in New Jersey; demolished on December 26, 1995).

The Richardson Avenue School meets the standards in Criterion A for the "separate but equal" educational environment forced upon the African-American children in Swedesboro. The African-American community united and withstood the oppressions; by strengthening the cultural and educational needs of the African-American children in Swedesboro. The teachers, leaders, and parents subjected themselves to many sacrifices, by enduring discrimination, challenging the system, and withstanding emotional and physical deprivation. For the betterment of the children, they diligently gave of themselves knowing that the future education of those children was in jeopardy.

Locally, the Richardson Avenue School (Masonic Hall) shared strongly with the community's African-American history. Situated in the "pocket" of the African-American community (the first area in town the white community allowed African-Americans to live) was the small Masonic Hall. The school lacked many standard requirements furnished in the Swedesboro Grammar School for the white children. The Richardson Avenue School for African-American children did not have a lunch room, auditorium, or gymnasium. With limited funding and inexpensive materials, the three small classrooms provided space for educating African-American children during the day and civic, social and cultural meetings in the evening for the African-American adults and children of the community.

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Richardson Avenue School

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**Historical background and Significance**

According to Giles Wright, Director of the New Jersey Historical Commission, the education of African-American children separately from white children began during the era of slavery. The Society of Friends attempted to establish schools during the 18th century. As early as 1780, many Quaker families had supported the African-American churches in the education of children. The African Methodist Episcopal Churches were one of the forerunners in providing educational programs. In 1759, because of the Quakers' influence, the state legislature ordained that dependent children be taught to read and write. In 1788, the legislature ruled that all servants and slaves under twenty-one years of age be taught to read. (Wright, G. 1988:30; Wright, M. 1941: 195-196)

During the early 19th century, the African-American churches provided education for children. Maps show evidence of a small school-house located in the African-American hamlet of "Small Gloucester", Woolwich Township, about one mile from Swedesboro. The community had about thirty houses and two churches; the Mt. Zion AME Church and the St. Paul UAME Church. The Mt. Zion AME Church financially supported the school. The African-American school was providing a basic education (reading, writing and arithmetic) for the children and adults. Both adults and children, that worked in the fields during the day, attended school in the evenings and on Saturdays. Essentially, that was the first African-American School in Swedesboro. (Wilson: 1996; Ferrell: 1996; Williams: 1997; County Map: 1850)

In 1844, the New Jersey State Constitution adopted annual appropriations for the support of public schools. In 1850, the State Legislature authorized the setting aside of special school districts exclusively for African-American children. The establishment of "separate but equal" schools allowed the African-American children to begin sharing State funds and began their public school education. (Wright: 1988:50)

Schools in southern New Jersey remain segregated longer than the ones in northern New Jersey. In northern New Jersey, there was a migration of many ethnic groups from the European countries, moving into African-American neighborhoods. The location of schools for African-Americans was previously within their own districts. The children of European immigrants attended the nearest schools, making it increasingly difficult for those schools to remain segregated. Gradually segregated schools no longer existed in those areas.

On the other hand, in southern New Jersey there comprised a rural setting inhabited by many white farmers. During most of the 19th century the population of African-Americans (freed from



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slavery) settled in small hamlets similar to Small Gloucester segregated from nearby towns like Swedesboro. The white community established regulations for African-Americans, requiring them to enter the town only to perform various labors and leave before sundown.

Concluding the 19th century, the demand throughout the country for New Jersey's farm products increased; resulting in an increase need for laborers. Encouraged by relatives in the north expressing the opportunities there, African-Americans living in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia, came north and worked as seasonal farm laborers and eventually established residency in the area. Consequently, the number of African-Americans living in southern New Jersey increased.

Working on developing their social environment, the African-Americans unified and constructed churches, established lodges and organized social groups. Later in the 19th century, the African-American men of Small Gloucester united together to form a Masonic Lodge under the principle and commitment of their patriarch Prince. The Prince Hall Masonic Order is the oldest fraternal organization of African-American men in America. Prince Hall, the most successful activist of his time, established the first Masonic Lodge for Africans. (Asante & Mattson: 1992:38)

Prince Hall's concern for the betterment of his fellow man reached beyond his establishment of the Masonic Temples. He continued to petition on behalf of African people. He petitioned to the Massachusetts legislature for the education of African children. It was remarkable for its clarity of purpose. The petition said in part, "We must fear for our raising off-spring to see them in ignorance in a land of gospel light, when there is provision made for them as well as others and they cannot enjoy them, and no other reason can be given than that they are black." (Asante & Mattson: 1992:38)

The Ionic Lodge #29 F&AM of Small Gloucester, first warranted (confirmed) on December 2, 1876, was the first Lodge in the area. During the year 1878, the name changed to the Euclid Lodge. The Lodge, having forty-five members, was the largest in the jurisdiction in 1880, but the Lodge became dormant in 1890. Ratified on December 29, 1891, to operate in Small Gloucester, the Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM, had been dispensated (given permission from authority) on August 4, 1891. Maintaining the stature of the largest Lodge in the Cape May jurisdiction, the members of the former Euclid Lodge were on the 1891 roster of the present Mount Lebanon Lodge. The Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM assembled for regular monthly meetings at the Mt. Zion AME Church in Small Gloucester. In 1931, the Lodge constructed the Masonic Hall in Swedesboro on Second Street and Richardson Avenue. The members of the Lodge were leaders of the community that provided for the needy African-American people. (Cooper: 1957:166,167)

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In time, the white people for whom they worked allowed some African-Americans to rent houses from them. The specified section of houses owned by white people and rented by African-Americans stood along Second Street and Richardson Avenue in Swedesboro. These houses were (and still are) single and double two-story wood frame dwellings (having five to six rooms) with front porches. Seeing the benefits of this system, the white people allowed more African-Americans to live in the specified areas of the town. The children of those families had the opportunity to attend segregated classes in the Swedesboro Grammar School. As opposed to other districts, Swedesboro (regional small size and population) having one school district did not justify a segregated school.

The African-American community was developing in size, while Gloucester County, including the Swedesboro School District, continued the pattern of "separate but equal" schools. The Swedesboro Grammar School established in 1906, was the first public school in Swedesboro. African-American children attended this school in a segregated environment "under one roof" within the building following a unique procedure. Within the school, the white teachers taught white children in separate classrooms with each teacher responsible for one class. African-American teachers taught African-American children in a multiple-grade classroom. These teachers had sparse supplies and limited room in the basement of the school. African-American teachers taught classes of sixty to seventy-four children. In the same school community, white children used the playground facilities from Monday to Thursday and designating Friday (the last school day) for African-American children. (Payne, Wilson, Bundy and Stewart: 1995; Teachers Register Books: 1927-1928; and Swedesboro News Article, April 3, 1931)

After World War I, the many farms (vegetable and fruit) were demanding more laborers. There was a continuing influx of African-Americans from Delaware, Maryland and Virginia, into the Swedesboro community. African-Americans married and worked in Swedesboro and on surrounding farms. The Hurff Canning Factory (later Del Monte Corporation) was a major employer of African-Americans. Swedesboro was one of the largest shipping stations for tomatoes in this country; a single day's loading of fifty cars of early tomatoes was not unusual. Besides cargoes shipped by boat, some 2,500 cars required annually to move crops (sweet potatoes asparagus, melon, peppers, egg plants and tomatoes), some going as far as Canada and Salt Lake City. In addition, the town of Swedesboro surrounded by a multitude of business owned by white people hiring many African-Americans as laborers. Swedesboro's success along these lines made it one of the wealthiest communities in Gloucester County. (Heston: 1924:476)

Many African-Americans continued to live on tenant farms, in the African-American community of Small Gloucester. Some rented homes ("pocketed" in one or two sections of Swedesboro) owned by the white people for whom they worked. At times there were two and three families

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living in one household; the renter boarding out rooms for extra income. The men and women worked at Hurff's Canning Factory during the peak vegetable processing seasons. During the winter season, the men labored on the nearby farms. When the women were not working in the factory, they were doing domestic work for the white families. Financially, it was difficult for them to obtain loans, but some were able to save enough money to buy houses. The Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM supported the needs of the community by providing financial assistance, life insurance and care for the widows and needy. The enrollment of African-American children continued to increase at the Swedesboro Grammar School.

### **History of the Richardson Avenue School**

By 1930, there were major over-crowding conditions in the Swedesboro Grammar School placing the school in jeopardy of losing state funding. The Swedesboro Board of Education requested a bond for funding an addition to the Swedesboro High School to accommodate students from the grammar school. The voters rejected the bond. Subsequently, this required the Board to take immediate action to prevent the elimination of state funding. (Swedesboro News: March 27, 1931).

The Board formed a property committee "...to investigate the matter of obtaining additional school room..." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: May 11, 1931). "The property committee and Mr. [Walter] Hill, [principal] reported their investigation of the additional school room to take care of the Colored children [and] ... they had made arrangements to rent the Masonic Hall located on Second Street at the rental of \$750.00 per year for the first year." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: June 2, 1931)

Withstanding some opposition within the African-American community, the members of the Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM provided their Masonic Hall as an institution of learning for the African-American children of Swedesboro. The Swedesboro Board of Education decided to sacrifice the educational needs of the African-American children and focus on providing for the educational needs of the white children attending the Swedesboro Grammar School. The Lodge knew how important it was to continue the education of the African-American children; no matter what the oppositions facing them.

The Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM owned the Masonic Hall. It was a new construction located on Second Street and Richardson Avenue (a few feet from a heavily traveled intersection) in the "pocket" of the first African-American community. This Hall was too small and inadequate for use as a school. When the Board of Education signed the lease, the building had insufficient bathroom facilities, no heat and no playground area for the children.

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Correspondence ensued as a result of the move to the new location. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) received the following letter on June 13, 1931. This concerned parent expressed the conditions of the segregated school in Swedesboro.

"Swedesboro, New Jersey  
June 13, 1931

Dear Sir,

I happen to pick up the paper and read where the Association was making a study of school segregation and so I am writing to see if you wont include Swedesboro New Jersey colored school situation among those to be investigated. There is a terrible piece of segregation about to be put in force with the opening of school in September and Swedesboro colored people like many colored people of small towns will sit by afraid to say anything because they work for the white people of the town. But for the good of the Negro people who live everywhere something ought to be done, even if financing if need be any has to come from interested people in other parts of state. For years the Negro children have been attending same school where the white children attended. There were two colored teachers there for the colored children from first to sixth grade. Lately the colored children attendance has increased so that another colored teacher must be had for next year. Instead of finding some place for just this extra class needed since its claimed theres no room in the present building for another teacher, all the colored children are to be taken out and placed in a hall which was never meant for a school. Now the first thing about placing the colored children to themselves in a town like Swedesboro is a violation of a State law in regards to segregation. For Swedesboro has no colored community, and it is unlawful to establish a colored school only where there is a colored community. The greater number of colored children lived on farms and comes from all directions of Swedesboro. For this reason alone this attempt at segregation could be done away with if worked upon by some powerful organization. The Swedesboro Board are claiming its just for two years but common sense ought to tell us once colored children are out they'll never get back in white building. So the time to fight is now and not let them throw our children any place for no length of time until they are prepared to give us a lawfully built regular school house and not a hall fixed up for

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classrooms, which hall by the way belongs to some colored group which is anxious for or badly in need of money and so will rent it for anything. For over ten years one of colored classes had been in basement of school where they now are and many of us parents have tolerated this disgraceful condition thinking when children did come out of basement they would go into a decent sanitary and safe building and not a hall opening almost on the highway, paving the way for many number of accidents to little Negro children. If its said they only want the hall for two years then let them fix up another classroom in basement for just that length of time. Theres plenty of room in basement and if they are not just trying to get rid of them they will do this until something worthwhile in school structure can be given. Why it seems almost like slavery time to push anything like a hall, matters not how lately it was built its not a school, on a group of people in the Northern state. All thought southern states Delaware and other places we see pictures of beautiful school for colored, and surely, here in Swedesboro, its enough to make one's blood boil to think of pushing over 130 Negro children on 3 teachers and into a hall. They say just for 2 years but they mean many more. Wont you help the few of us who resent it for justice sake to not let it ever be for 2 days.

Mrs. Wilson"

(Reproduced from the collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress)

In September 1931, the Richardson Avenue School (Masonic Hall) became the designated facility providing a "separate but equal" education for African-American children. In the southern region of the state, there was a sizable African-American population. Swedesboro Borough and Woolwich Township (farming area surrounding the Borough of Swedesboro) had a combined population of about 3,000 people, with 400 being African-Americans living on tenant farms and in several restricted areas in the Borough. Consequently, some of the children living on tenant farms walked for miles to the one designated school. "The Transportation committee [of the Board of Education] reported that they had received a request from Clinton Holton to carry three colored children, but they had not instructed the driver to carry as the bus was full." Denied permission to ride the school bus, because of the color of their skin, the children walked to and from school.

(Bd. of Ed. Minutes: March 1, 1932; Payne: 1995)

The Richardson Avenue School opened with three African-American teachers: Miss Alberta Hardy, principal and teacher, (replaced by Mr. Rolston Gaiter in 1935) Miss Helen Freeman and

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Richardson Avenue School

Miss Leona Guley. The Board of Education hired teachers who lived outside the township. The teachers boarded with African-American families during the week and traveled home on the weekends. Daily, the parents of the children prepared lunches for the teachers. (Payne, King and Stewart: 1995)

The Richardson Avenue School (named for its street location) had many recurring problems from its inception. There were insufficient toilets and heat for 140 children. The Property Committee (of the Board of Education) "...reported on the progress on the stoves at the Richardson Avenue School and on motion they were given the authority to order the stoves they select." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: October 6, 1931). The school was always cold and the Property Committee (of the Board of Education) "...reported that they had ordered another stove for the Richardson Avenue School." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: December 1, 1931). Playground space was nonexistent. There were three overcrowd classrooms. One classroom had the dimension of twenty-four feet by thirty-four feet and two had the dimensions of twelve feet by thirty-four feet. Sixty-five children were in the largest classroom. (Roane and Clark: 1996) The school received discarded desks, after the purchase of new desks for the Grammar School housing the white children.

The sewer line in the town was not available to the African-American community. The Board of Education addressed the sewer connection for the Richardson Avenue School. This matter referred to the Property Committee, with direction to "...having sewer [line] connected if the Mount Lebanon Lodge would dig it out." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: December 1, 1931). The Mount Lebanon Lodge "...dug the trench [for the sewer line] and Board made the connection at their expense." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: December 30, 1931).

Funding did not exist for substitute teachers. Teachers shouldered the responsibilities during another teacher's absence. The children shared used books and supplies. The Richardson Avenue School did not have special teachers for physical education, sewing, music and manual training. Special subject classes taught in the Swedesboro Grammar School were available on Friday, (last period of the day) for the African-American children. They walk unescorted to and from the Grammar School for the once-a-week sewing and manual training classes. (Bundy, Moore, Stewart and King: 1995)

The Board formed a special committee to investigate the availability of using the Battentown School (a one-room school located about one mile from Swedesboro) in place of the Richardson Avenue School. The committee reported "...that they found in the Battentown School a floor space of twenty-six by thirty-four feet, this would make two rooms of a width of thirteen feet each. Richardson Avenue [school] present rooms are twelve by thirty-four feet, and that there were five rows of seats, of thirteen seats to a row [and] one row against wall." They concluded

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that the Battentown School was too small to accommodate the 140 children. (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: April 4, 1933)

The African-Americans community persistently voiced their concern for the children's safety, to the Board of Education. The African-American churches and lodge united together, increasing the numbers expressing dissatisfaction and frustration. They regarded the educational institution allocated by the Board of Education as unjust for the education of their children. Resulting from the complaints by the African-American community, Mr. James Payne received the following letter, on October 24, 1933.

"Swedesboro, N.J.  
Oct 24. 1933

Mr. James Payne: Dear Sir-

We the white people of this town are concerned over the way that you and a few others have let the parson of your church treat the best colored people of this town.

We have them at heart and are willing to help them in any move they make against him. He is no fit character to come to this town. We see his movements every day in this town. How can law and order be kept in this town without the best colored people's help? Schools and churches are the only institutions that makes people and how can you folks allow a man from another town to come here and discharge your best people because they refuse to let him put them in bondage about their money? They are right by not doing so and will get our support. Your parson has mocked God with money and the stain of sin is upon him and his aids. Away with him.

K.K.K"

(Reproduced from the personal letters of James Payne, Sr.: 1933)

Mrs. Ashcraft, (owner of property bordering the school) issued many complaints to the Board about the "...children of the Richardson Avenue School playing on her property and that she was unable to rent same on account of this fact." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: Sept. 4, 1934)

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The Masonic Hall was not only a school, it became a meeting place for the African-American Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, Segregated Parent Teachers Association (PTA), St. Mary's Chapter Order of Eastern Stars #42, and the local chapter of the NAACP. The first chapter of the Gloucester and Salem County NAACP chartered in Swedesboro, holding their monthly meeting at the Masonic Hall. The Chapter's purpose was to establish a working foundation and deal with the issues confronted by the African-American community concerning the Richardson Avenue School. In 1935, a group of African-American parents from the segregated PTA attended the Swedesboro Board of Education meeting. At that meeting three fathers (Mr. Mack Staton, Reuben Staton and James Payne) spoke "...about building a new school house for the colored children as they thought their children were not getting what they should in the present building." The Board avoided taking action concerning this matter. (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: Dec. 3, 1935)

The African-American community, continued to go on with their daily lives, working on farms, in factories and businesses owned by the white people. They tried to overlook the turmoil to enforce the educational laws of New Jersey. Some African-Americans started their own businesses; a barber shop, a candy store, a used furniture store and restaurants. The Mount Lebanon Lodge sponsored a segregated Boys and Girls Scout troop, organized by Mr. Rolston Gaiter, principal, exposing the children to some activities offered to the white troops in town. St. Mary's Chapter Order of Eastern Stars #42, organized in 1935, gave the women an opportunity to expand their interests and to interact. (Gaiter, Holmes, Payne and Stewart: 1996)

The African-American community continued to assert their concerns pertaining to the Richardson Avenue School. Mr. Rolston Gaiter, principal, expressed his concerns for the children and the school being a fire trap. (Gaiter: 1996). A Special Committee (of the Board of Education) "...met with the committee from the [segregated] Parent Teachers Association from the Richardson Avenue School concerning the construction of a new school. Mr. Estilow [board member] reported...that after an explanation they decided that this was not the time to build" (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: January 7, 1936). There was gross inequity between the salaries of African-American teachers and their white counterparts. The white teachers received \$200+ more than African-American teachers. (Clark & Brown: 1978:50; Bd. of Ed. Minutes: May 13, 1936)

Again, a committee from the African-American PTA, and Mount Lebanon Lodge approached the Board presenting their concerns about the dangerous environment and overcrowded classrooms at the Richardson Avenue School. This time the Board proposed expansion (at the expense of the Mount Lebanon Lodge) to the Masonic Hall. A Board Member (Mr. Shaw) reported "...that the Lodge committee had turned down any proposition to enlarge and after a conference with Mr. J. Harvey Rodgers and a representative from the State Architect Office...advised that we will be compelled to build a school at some later date." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: Sept. 7, 1937)



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The African-American community never gave up their fight to obtain the school needed for their children. Though, his words seem to fall on deaf ears, when "Mr. Horace Stewart as spokesman requested that the Board consider constructing a new school house for the colored children. After the Board heard the request they left the matter for further discussion by the Board." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: February 7, 1939)

Throughout the year the Board received many letters from the Mount Lebanon Lodge, Mr. Gaiter, principal, NAACP and (segregated) PTA. The property committee filed the letters taking no action. The "...Secretary read letter in reference to the building of a school, to replace the Richardson Avenue School, complaining about the petitions which were filed in reference to having a new building [and] also referring to actions of the principal, Mr. Gaiter. Letter was signed M. K. The Board president appointed a Special Committee to await on Mr. Gaiter relative to references in the letter and also on the committee from the Mount Lebanon Lodge relative to the conditions at the Richardson Ave. School. Committee was appointed..." (Bd. of Ed Minutes: March 7, 1939; April 4, 1939; December 5, 1939) Again, the Board took no action to improve the conditions at the Richardson Avenue School.

During the years from, 1931 to 1940, the Swedesboro Board of Education ignored the numerous complaints coming from the African-American community, and continued to keep the children in jeopardy. The Swedesboro Board of Education made the children, teachers and parents victims of their system. Ultimately, "Mr. J. Harvey Rodgers, Superintendent of Gloucester County and Charles D. Anderson Asst. Commissioner [of the NJ Department of Public Instruction], presented and discussed the matter of the Richardson Avenue School. Mr. Anderson stated that he felt that one year would be sufficient time for us to take some action regarding the improvement of conditions and Mr. Rodgers stated that there was two things that could be done, 1st. provided adequate facilities for all colored children, 2nd. place them in the grades with the other [white] children..." (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: Sept. 4, 1940)

Finally, the Swedesboro Board of Education received a letter from "...Charles D. Anderson, Assistant Commissioner [in] reference to the report received from Seymour Williams, State School Building Inspector in which he condemns the Richardson Avenue School. The correspondence told the Board that they must eliminate the use of the school after September 1, 1941. A copy of Mr. Williams's report was attached." Forced (against their will) by the State of New Jersey, the Swedesboro Board of Education implemented plans to provide a decent and safe school for the African American children. (Bd. of Ed. Minutes: November 6, 1940)

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As a result of the State of New Jersey's order, the Board of Education decided to construct a "separate but equal" school for African-American children. Swedesboro voters approved a bond for construction of the school. School completed just before the onset of the civilian-sector material shortages caused by the needs of the war effort. In September 1942, the Auburn Avenue School opened for the education of African-American children. Demolition of the Auburn Avenue School (which was the last segregated school built in New Jersey) took place on December 26, 1995, at 8:00 a.m.

The members of the Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM have distinguished themselves as being men of great character and honesty. It is important that the success and efforts of these men be preserved for review and continuous example of the past, present and future contributions. It is noteworthy to remember that the era (in which they made an influence) was dangerous and difficult for them and for the African-Americans community of Swedesboro.

The Masonic Hall (which housed the Richardson Avenue School) is still the property of the Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM. The Lodge Members are leaders in the community and have continued their active involvement for the betterment of the Swedesboro community. The Lodge sponsors educational programs for the community. Their efforts through the years are endless. They provide food and assistance to the sick and needy. They have helped to encourage, support and sustain the needs of the children and families of the African-American community.

The former Richardson Avenue School represents and symbolizes a legacy for its former alumni and the nation. It represents the African-American experience during an era when equality in education was not available to everyone. The State and Federal Laws to ensure that all men received life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness didn't protect the African-American community.

The Masonic Hall (owned by Mount Lebanon Lodge #47 F&AM) which housed the Richardson Avenue School must remain a part of Swedesboro's historical structures. The important history associated with this site is equal to the prominent existing historical sites as the Old Swedes Inn, Stratton House, the Old Swedes Trinity Church and many others. The Richardson Avenue School, the most recently adapted school for "separate but equal" education of African-American children in Swedesboro, has a history needing proper acknowledgment, understanding and preservation

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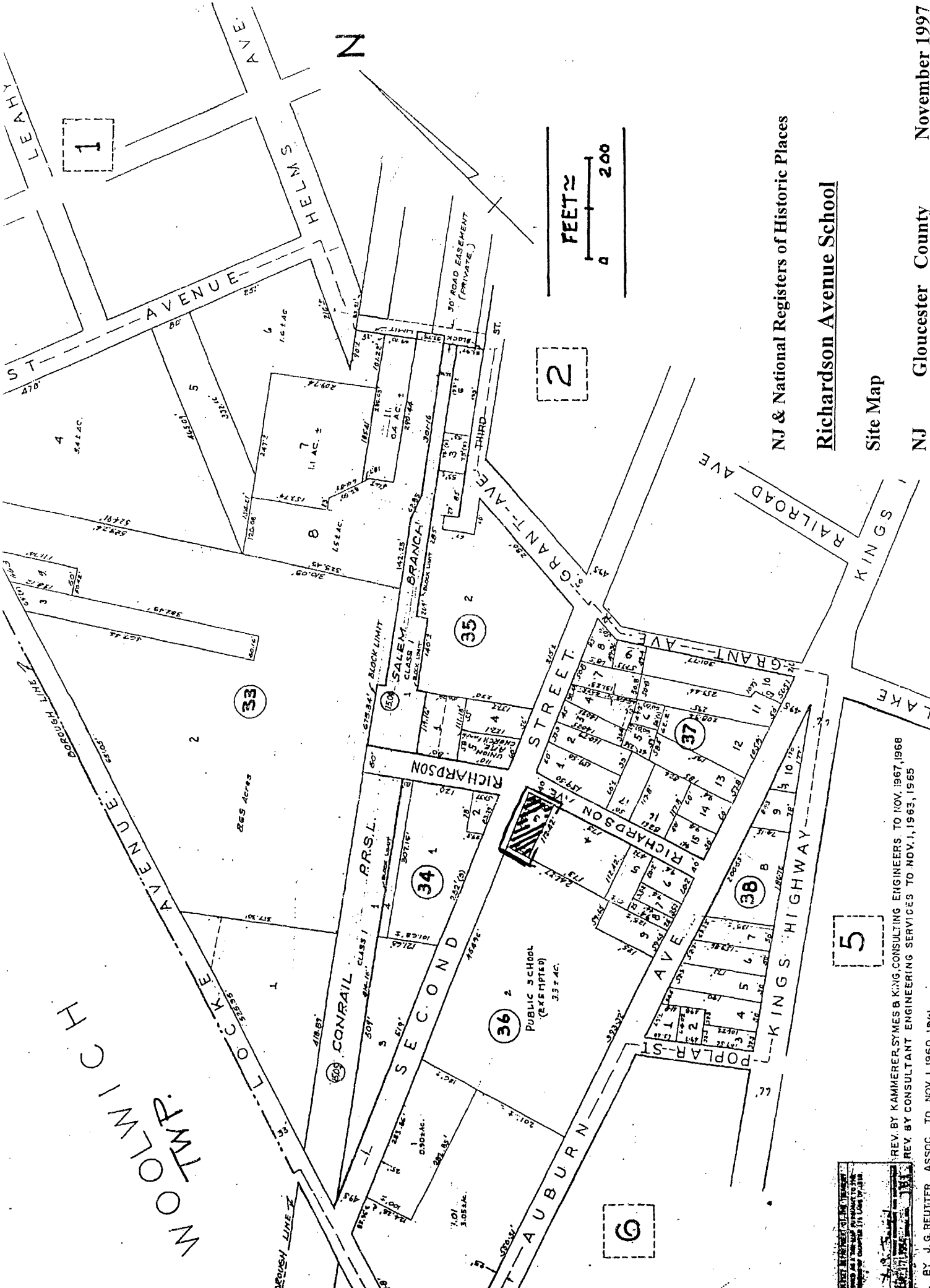
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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property consists of Swedesboro Borough Block 36, Lot 3

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the school.



NJ & National Registers of Historic Places

Richardson Avenue School

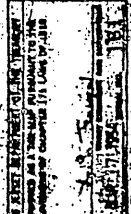
Site Map

NJ Gloucester County

November 1997

Swedesboro Borough

E. Edwards

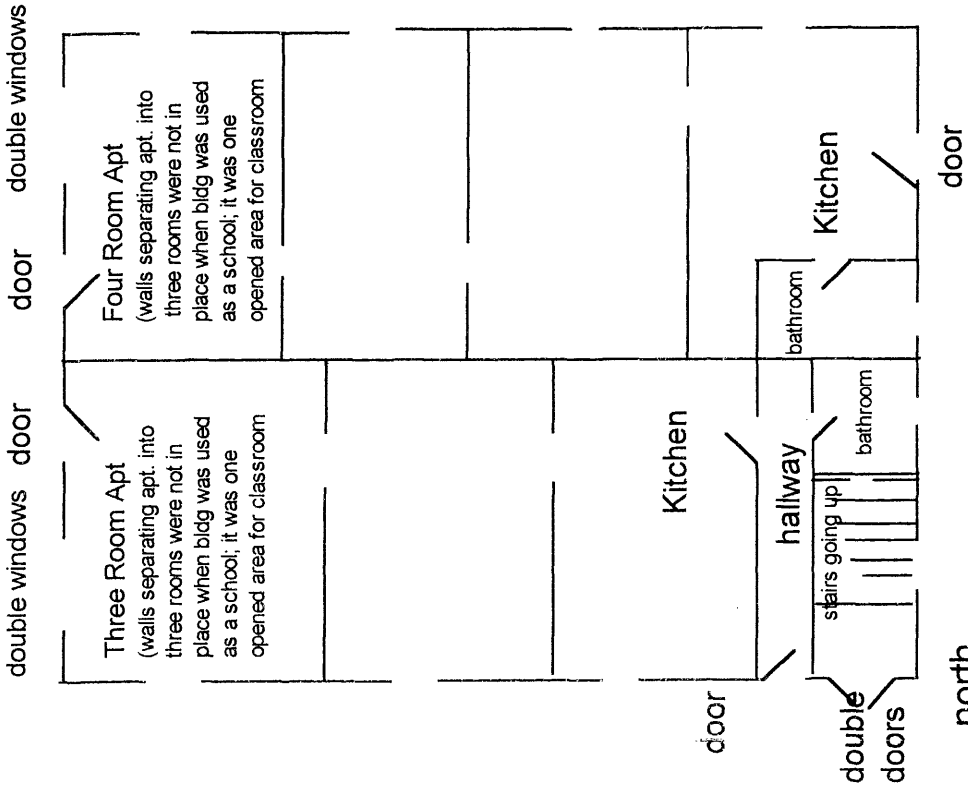


REV. BY KAMMER, SYMES & KING, CONSULTING ENGINEERS TO NOV. 1967, 1968  
 REV. BY CONSULTANT ENGINEERING SERVICES TO NOV. 1, 1963, 1965  
 REV. BY J.G. REUTER ASSOC. TO NOV. 1, 1950, 1961

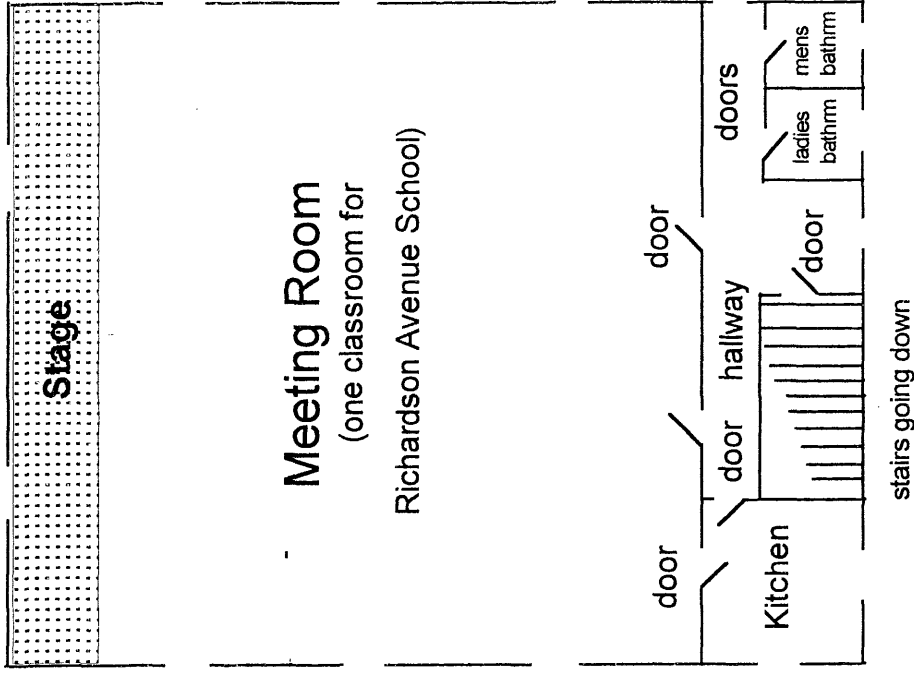
REVISED BY HALLIWELL WOOD & ASSOCIATES, INC. TO DEC. 1984.  
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# Front of Building

## First Floor

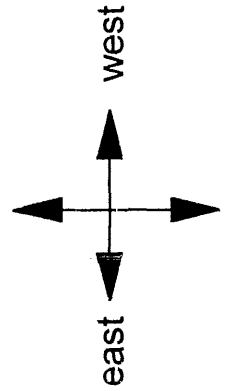


## Second Floor



# Masonic Hall and Richardson Avenue School

Swedesboro Borough, Gloucester County, New Jersey





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**Photographs**

Photographer - Elaine Edwards, 636 Auburn Avenue, Swedesboro, NJ

Date Taken - July 1997

Who Holds Negatives - Elaine Edwards, 636 Auburn Avenue, Swedesboro, NJ

- Photo 1 of 16 - Front - North/West
- Photo 2 of 16 - Front - North/East
- Photo 3 of 16 - Front - Corner Stone - North
- Photo 4 of 16 - Rear - South/West
- Photo 5 of 16 - Main Eve of Roof - North/West
- Photo 6 of 16 - Front - Front Entrance - First Floor - North
- Photo 7 of 16 - Side - Side Entrance - First Floor and Second Floor - West
- Photo 8 of 16 - Original - Stairs and Banister - Leading to Second Floor
- Photo 9 of 16 - Original - Lectern - Second Floor
- Photo 10 of 16 - Original - Doors and Door Knobs
- Photo 11 of 16 - Original - Space Heating Unit
- Photo 12 of 16 - Original - Wood Molding and Wainscoting
- Photo 13 of 16 - Original - Wood Molding
- Photo 14 of 16 - Original - Stairs Leading from Second Floor to First Floor Exit
- Photo 15 of 16 - Original - Coat Hooks
- Photo 16 of 16 - Original - Lectern - Folding Chairs - Wainscoting

# Front of Building

6 2 3

## Second Floor

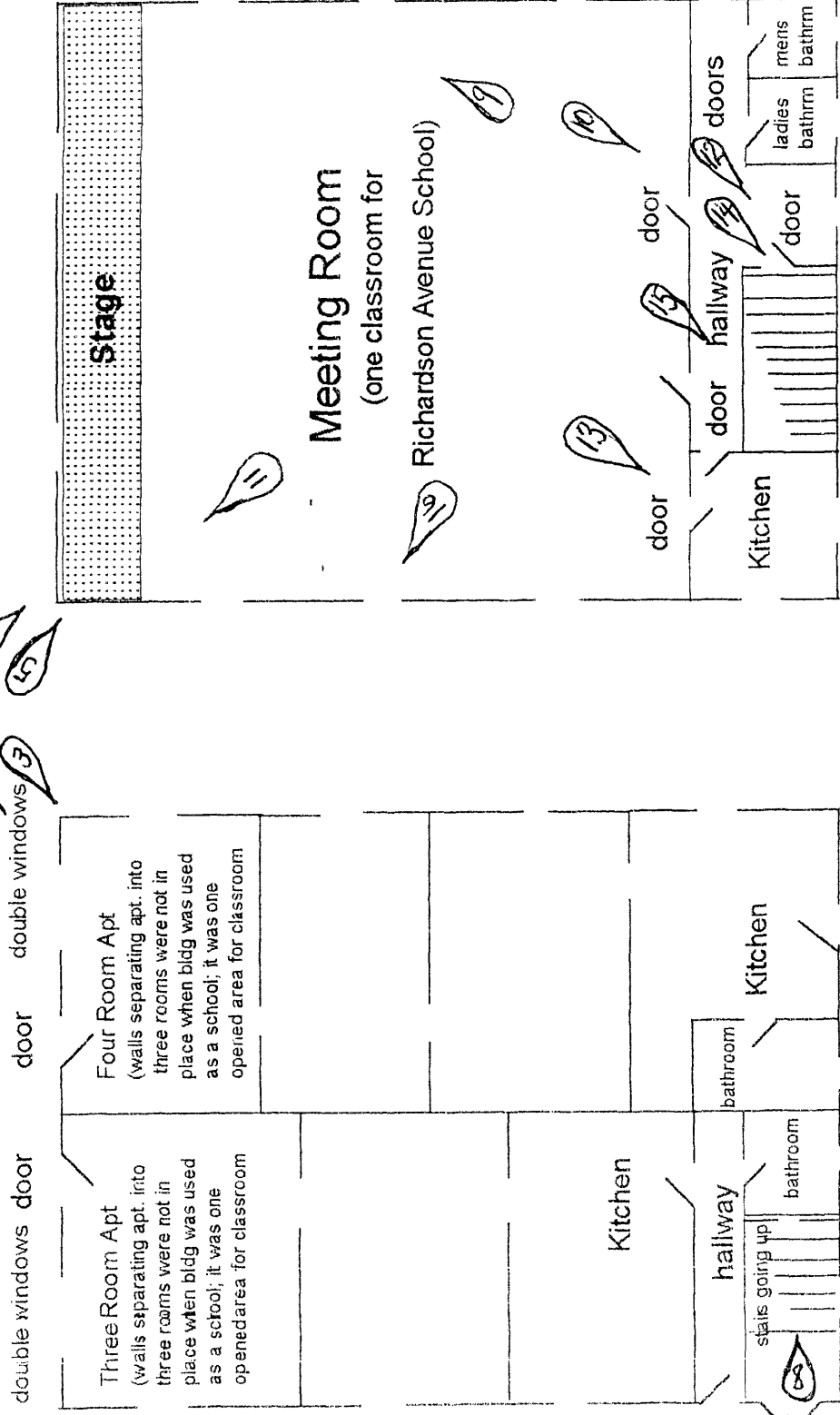
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2 3

## First Floor

6

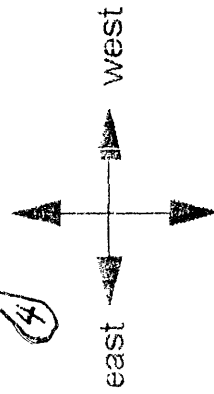
1 5



stairs going down

door

north



# Masonic Hall and Richardson Avenue School

Swedesboro Borough, Gloucester County, New Jersey

south