

PH0363669

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	NOV 9 1976
DATE ENTERED	APR 13 1977

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

* HISTORIC MASSIE COMMON SCHOOL HOUSE

AND/OR COMMON

Massie School

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 207 East Gordon Street

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN Savannah

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

___ VICINITY OF

1st - Bo Ginn

STATE

Georgia

CODE 13

COUNTY Chatham

CODE 051

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
___ DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	___ AGRICULTURE	___ MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	___ PRIVATE	___ UNOCCUPIED	___ COMMERCIAL	___ PARK
___ STRUCTURE	___ BOTH	___ WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
___ SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	___ ENTERTAINMENT	___ RELIGIOUS
___ OBJECT	___ IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	___ GOVERNMENT	___ SCIENTIFIC
	___ BEING CONSIDERED	___ YES: UNRESTRICTED	___ INDUSTRIAL	___ TRANSPORTATION
		___ NO	___ MILITARY	___ OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Board of Public Education, City of Savannah, County of Chatham

STREET & NUMBER 208 Bull Street

CITY, TOWN Savannah

___ VICINITY OF

STATE Georgia

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Chatham County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER Bull and York Street

CITY, TOWN Savannah

STATE Georgia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Historic Savannah

DATE 1968

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Historic Savannah Foundation, Inc., 119 Habersham Street

CITY, TOWN Savannah

STATE Georgia

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Massie School Building occupies a prominent location overlooking the southeast corner of Calhoun Square, one of 24 squares of Savannah's National Landmark Historic District. Calhoun Square, located in the Southern area of the district, was laid out in 1851, its scale, shape and street pattern and its contiguous building sites following the original planning concepts used for the plan of Savannah by General James E. Oglethorpe in 1733.

The scale of the neighborhood is residential, with the exception of the massive Wesley Monumental Methodist Church at the west side of the square. All buildings fronting the square have been rated as historic structures, and in this milieu the architectural scale of the Massie School becomes extremely important. The structure is erected on the street-side building line, its proximity to the square enabling it to be an effective "closer" or "definer" of the outdoor space of the square. The building is, in fact, 3 separate 2-story high structures, and the imparted feeling is therefore a very comfortable, compatible residential scale quality.

The middle structure was the first element erected. It has basic plan dimensions of 45 feet (frontage) by 70 feet deep on the lot, and was built in 1856 from plans by the Architect John S. Norris, designer of many important local buildings.

The exterior statement is simple and direct; the middle structure meets the ground very positively, having a strong plinth course of sandstone from the ground to the first floor level. The walls are built of Savannah Gray Brick, a popular basic masonry material of the period, and finished in stucco with deeply incised scoring at fairly large spacings to impart the feeling of massive stonework. The front elevation is modeled to produce four equally spaced pilasters, two stories in height; these pilasters are connected above the second story windows by low round arches, and this assemblage is finally surmounted by the gable end of the roof, stated as a classical pediment having a scored stucco frieze. A belfry framed in heavy timbers is centrally located on the ridge of the roof. Principal entrance is a pair of large scale wood doors, axially located, and the windows of the second floor are similar, but have a gently curving head shape, following the curve of the modelled wall into which they are set.

The two-story western most wing was built in 1872 from plans by the Architect John B. Hogg, and in 1886 the east wing was erected. Each of these wings is smaller than the original, having plan dimensions of 31 feet (frontage) by 29 feet deep; the modeling of the principle facades is identical, and the window arrangements and sizes are the same. These wings do not have entrances from the street, but have access from the interior of the central, original building by outdoor, covered passageway connectors. Exterior surfaces of the wings have the same statement and finish as the original, except that the plinth is built of brick masonry units finished in stucco. All windows were originally protected by louvered wood shutters.

The buildings are in excellent condition, structurally, showing no movement in the exterior masonry walls and no significant cracking. The floor framing, of heavy pine timbers, and the roof structure, pine trusses, are also in excellent shape. The exterior stucco has lost the strong articulation of the original scoring, probably due to surface erosion and subsequent coat of paint. Original window shutters are gone and the handsome entry doors have been replaced by smaller, more functional but less appropriate ones.

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Plan configuration has been modified only slightly, this modification occurring at the rear of the central building; where two original classrooms existed, one was converted to kitchen space.

The main entry doors lead into a small foyer, flanked on either side by stairwells with gently curving stairs giving access to the second floor. (The aforementioned covered passageways provide access to each of the two wings, on both the first and second floors; the stairwells lead to these passageways.) Doors from the stairwells also lead into a large assembly room (same width as the building) on each floor, with the lower assembly room having a pair of interesting fluted cast-iron columns about five feet apart and centrally located in the space. The meeting point at the plaster walls and ceiling is strongly defined by a heavy raked plaster cornice. Behind the assembly rooms on each floor, a pair of classrooms are located. The lower classroom has a pair of fluted cast-iron columns matching those of the lower assembly room.

There is a small basement below the front portion of the ground floor, containing some components of an original furnace and ducted heating system. This feature of the building merits further study.

Each of the wings contains but one room on each floor, and their depth on the lot is substantially less than the central wing, so that outdoor playyards occur at the rear of each wing. Brick masonry walls were erected around these two outdoor spaces at the time the wings were built.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1855-65 1872-western annex 1886-eastern annex BUILDER/ARCHITECT John S. Norris (1810-1876)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Massie Common School House located in Savannah, is significant for its architectural character, historic associations, community function, and educational role. The building, whose north facade fronts historic Calhoun Square, is in Savannah's "Old City" area laid out by General James Edward Oglethorpe in 1733 as Georgia's first settlement.

Calhoun Square is the most intact of Savannah's open planes. "There are no 'gaps' or adverse intrusions on this square, and Massie School forms an important visual anchor for the City Plan at this point. The fact that the physical structure of the school was enlarged by two additional wings which repeated the central block, retaining the rhythm of the street facade and complementing the scale of adjacent buildings, gives a model for developers today."

Opened in 1856 "for the education of the poor children," Massie is the only remaining original building of Georgia's first public school system. Built for a free and public school, it had been operating for almost a decade before the Board of Education for the City of Savannah and the County of Chatham was established by an Act of the Georgia Legislature in 1866.

Massie has served educational purposes exclusively except briefly in 1865 when the building housed wounded Federal troops. The unadorned masses and fine proportions of the Massie Common School House are Greek Revival at its simplest and best, entirely appropriate to the introduction of the public school system.

The square and the school for generations have been centers of citizens activity. Newspapers and old records are replete with accounts of mass meetings, May Day celebrations, and even public examinations of the students.

Massie School was designed by the New York-born architect John S. Norris, whose work is now being recognized in national circles as a result of the research of Mary Morrison. The Victorian Society in America and its Savannah chapter have urged the restoration of the Massie Common School House.

Educational opportunity in Savannah in the first half of the nineteenth century was largely a private affair with many individual school masters running their own little schools. There was much rivalry--often very bitter--among these usually one-teacher schools. Ignorance was abroad in the land also, for hundreds of indigent children had no educational opportunity whatsoever.

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Then into this maelstrom Peter Massie of Glynn County, Georgia, dropped the seed money for the Massie Common School and, indirectly, for Savannah's present school system. Mr. Massie, a Scotchman who had migrated to America, bequeathed in 1841 \$5,000 "for the education of the poor children of Savannah . . .to be applied for that purpose in such a manner as the corporate authorities of said city shall direct." Steamship passenger lists from old newspapers show that Mr. Massie had sailed regularly in the spring from Savannah to New York and returned in the fall. He had no doubt seen many times the hordes of unschooled children roaming Savannah's dusty streets.

But counsel for the city had to prosecute the claim to obtain Mr. Massie's bequest which then was wisely invested until "a large enough sum should be accumulated" for building. The Massie fund increased and on April 5, 1855, City Council by resolution decreed that \$9,000 of the fund be devoted to the erection of a building to be known as the Massie Common School House. Construction began in December 1855, and the new school opened in October 1856. From Peter Massie's bequest enough money had accrued to build, equip, and operate the school for the first year.

An ordinance was passed by City Council on December 24, 1856 to the effect that the Mayor, four aldermen and four citizens at large, to be appointed by the Mayor, should constitute a Board of Commissioners for the care, support, and management of Massie Common School. Another feature of the ordinance gave the Massie Commissioners authority to make "such rules and regulations for the government of said school as they may deem expedient; such rules and regulations to be reported to the City Council . . .and when approved by Council shall be of full force." Also the ordinance stipulated "for the support of said school there shall be appropriated annually out of the City Treasury a sum not exceeding three thousand dollars."

The school year 1864-65 began normally for Massie School, as reflected in the minutes of the institution's Commissioners which are now in the possession of the Board of Education. On December 21, 1864, when Sherman took Savannah, many inhabitants fled. There is a hiatus in the minutes for several months when no written records were kept; but it is logical to conclude that school was in recess. The Federal troops temporarily took over all public buildings,

Minutes of May 3, 1865 show that "the Massie School building had already been assigned by Major Gillmore for a school for the Freedmen." Other old unpublished records at the Board of Education (Savannah's Public Schools, Albert S. Otto, p. 406) state". . .the Rev. S. W. Magill, a native of Georgia and agent of the American Missionary Association in Connecticut, came from the North with a

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corps of competent teachers and opened a school in the Methodist church on South Broad Street (now 304 East Oglethorpe Avenue). At the close of the first week 300 children and 118 women were enrolled. The school soon outgrew its quarters here and was removed to Massie School on Gordon Street, which building was assigned to this service by General Grover, commander of the district."

Apparently Massie School was used by the freedmen only two or three months before the structure was returned to the Massie Commissioners for its normal operation. At this time--late summer of 1865--the school must have been almost devoid of furniture. Minutes of October 7, 1865, include a letter to the Commanding General which states: "The Board of Education appointed under General Order No. 33 would respectfully call your attention to the fact that the Massie School furniture was all destroyed by General Sherman's army while in use as a Corps Hospital, and used for firewood." General Brannan gave half the money, City Council the other half, for refurnishing the school.

How different is Massie's story from that of other buildings burned during Sherman's march to the sea. The General Order of December 26, 1864¹⁸⁶⁴ for disposition of troops in Savannah from L. M. Dayton, Aide-de-Camp, by order of Major General W. T. Sherman reads: ". . . churches, schools, and all places of amusement and recreation, should be encouraged . . ." In a letter to his wife, General Sherman wrote: "I doubt if Savannah, either before or since, has had a better government than during our stay... ; schools were opened . . ." ("War Is Hell!", The Beehive Press, Savannah, 1974--pp. 182,185).

Actually a tax had been imposed by the encamped militarists upon the citizens to support a system of schools; a Board of Education and a superintendent were appointed, and buildings were assigned. Under this now-unified organization, education continued in Savannah and at the Massie Common School House until the spring of 1866 when the Georgia Legislature passed the Act under which public education officially began in the mother city.

The Massie Common School House, whose beauty lies in its dignity and simplicity, retains its original "suitable yard rooms", the brick walls, the old bell in the belfry, the twin curving stairs with their mahogany rails and spindles, the Grecian molding, and the fluted columns. Even the mid-nineteenth century furnace is still in the basement! The stone steps, however, have been worn thin by the feet of many generations of boys and girls who passed through the old building's lofty front doors, later to become men and women of distinction in the city, state and nation.

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According to the Savannah Morning News of September 23, 1932, "No public bequest ever made in Savannah has probably reaped a harvest of greater value to the community than that of the Scotchman Peter Massie." As the late J. Frederick Waring, former president of the Georgia Historical Society, wrote in 1969, "The special significance of this school warrants its preservation as an historic monument and as a going concern."

FUTURE PLANS

Present plans call for the exterior to be returned to its original appearance with warm beige-colored scored stucco, blinds, stone name, and lofty doors. The interior vestibule, anterooms, twin stairs and one floor of the central portion are to be restored for educational and community use, to include an authentic "heritage classroom" as a living museum where students on field trips can actually experience "schooling" of a past era. The other floor of the central portion and both wings are to have an adaptive use, serving the school system as a professional library and materials (or media) center.

Excerpted from an article by Saxon P. Bargerion.

This property is located in the Savannah Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 15, 1966.

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

A. Old Hand-written leather-bound records:

1. Official Minutes of Massie School Commissioners.
2. Official Minutes of Savannah--Chatham County Board of Public Education.
3. Official Minutes of the Savannah City Council.

B. Unpublished material in Board of Education files:

1. Otto, Albert S. The Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County (commonly called Savannah's Public Schools).
2. Letters and clippings.

C. Books:

1. Bowden, Haygood S. Two Hundred Years of Education 1733-1933. Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Printing Co., 1932.
2. Harden, William. A History of Savannah and South Georgia, vol. I. Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1913.
3. Harden, William. Recollections of a Long and Satisfactory Life. Savannah, Georgia: Review Printing Co., 1934.

D. Old microfilmed and abstracted newspapers:

1. Daily Morning News.
2. Daily News and Herald.
3. Savannah Daily Herald.
4. Savannah Daily Republican.
5. Savannah Morning News.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Verbal Boundary ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

All those certain lots, tracts or parcels of land situate, lying and being in the City of Savannah, County of Chatham, and State of Georgia, being known according to the official map or plan of the City of Savannah as Lots numbered 34 and 35, Calhoun Ward; said lots hereby conveyed having a combined frontage -on the South side of Gordon Street of 123.6 feet, more or less, and a rectangular depth in a Southwardly direction along the Eastern side of Abercorn Street of 100 feet, more or less, and being bounded on the North by Gordon Street, on the East by Lot number 36, said Ward, on the South by a lane and on the West by Abercorn Street. Express reference is hereby made to the aforesaid map or plan for better determining metes, bounds, and dimensions of the property conveyed hereby.

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Photographs

ITEM NUMBER

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Photographs for this site are on file with the National Landmark Office
in the:

Landmark File: Other Sites Considered.