

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name First Ward School

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number South Davis Avenue and Thirteenth Street

☐ not for publication

city or town Elkins

☐ vicinity

state West Virginia

code WV

county Randolph

code 083

zip code 26241

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 for 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 of certifying official/Title

Date

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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals: Classical Revival

Materials

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

STONE/sandstone

STONE/limestone

roof STONE/slate

other METAL/tin

Narrative Description

See Continuation Sheets

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

- ☒ **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

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- ☐ **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.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

Period of Significance

1907-1915

Significant Dates

1907

Significant Person**Cultural Affiliation****Architect/Builder**

Lyons, Andrew C.

Withrow Co., Charleston, WV

Narrative Statement of Significance: See Continuation sheets**9. Major Bibliographical References****Bibliography****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:

West Virginia University, Private Individuals

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approx. 1 acre.

UTM References

1 17 599573.6 4308193.7
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See Continuation Sheets

Boundary Justification

See Continuation Sheets

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Robert C. Whetsell
organization C-HOPE date 03/18/09
street & number 202 15th Street telephone (304) 637-5896
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____
Elkins WV 26241

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.
- CD with electronic images if digital photographs.

Floorplans for individual listings

Additional items

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

Property Owner

name Randolph County Board of Education
street & number 40 Eleventh Street telephone 304-636-9150
city or town Elkins state WV zip code 26241

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 listing. 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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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LOCATION and SETTING

First Ward School is situated on the southeast corner of the intersection of South Davis Avenue and Thirteenth Street in a working middle-class neighborhood in Elkins, West Virginia, historically referred to as "South Elkins." The school occupies the center of an open and grassy, approximately one-acre, parcel of land. The property is surrounded at its perimeter by mature landscaping and a residential housing area dating from the 1910s to 1930s; a community that has been shaped by and centered around First Ward School since its completion in 1908. To the south of First Ward School, on an adjacent lot, is the old Elkins High School building and Wimer Field. The former high school building served the community from 1926 until a new school was built south of Elkins in 1994. The old high school has sat vacant since that time. Wimer Field, built in 1936 east of the High School, continues its tradition as home field for the Elkins High School football team. The area that comprises the old high school and football field occupies part of the old Elkins Fairgrounds.

The First Ward School building is a two story brick masonry structure, with full basement. The exterior is trimmed in local hand-cut sandstone and fronts west onto South Davis Avenue. Its architectural styling and embellishments are evocative of the Classical Revival style, borrowing heavily from the traditions of the Greek Revival period. The interior walls are finished in plaster and incorporate native hardwoods, including hard maple flooring and quarter-sawn oak staircases, wainscotings, built-in bookcases, doors, moldings, and trim work. Interior spaces, such as wide halls, grand staircases, and open classrooms, remain intact and largely unchanged from the original design. Despite the loss of its original western portico in the 1980s, First Ward retains the majority of its integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. First Ward School, and a later matching school, Third Ward School, evoke Elkins' first efforts to modernize and expand its educational system at a time of rapid economic and social growth. Both were designed by Fairmont, West Virginia, architect A.C. Lyons, a regional designer of schoolhouses in north-central West Virginia. The renovation of the Third Ward School building into low income apartments in the 1970s irrevocably altered the integrity of the interior spaces and exterior fenestration, making First Ward the best architectural example, replete with intact interior details.

DESCRIPTION

Exterior

First Ward School is a two-story masonry building with full basement designed in the Classical Revival style. This revival style was popular from 1900 to 1920 and emphasized the use of symmetry in its design features. The building's plan is designed with attention to symmetry in a modified "H" or "U" shape. The building is 15 bays wide and 12 bays deep, with a gross area of 27,000 square feet. The school's exterior and foundation is constructed of red brick and trimmed in locally quarried and hand-dressed sandstone blocks. Bonding styles used in the brickwork of the school utilizes a combination of Stretcher Bonding and

Flemish Bonding. Indiana limestone is visible in the decorative trim work used throughout the building's façade. The roofline

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of First Ward's hipped roof is embellished by a decorative tin entablature, featuring a cornice with oversized ornamental brackets (modillions) and dentils. A wide divided frieze band runs just beneath the cornice of both the main roof and the side-entry porticos. The roof of the school building is a complex hipped roof with numerous ridges and valleys. Buckingham Virginia Slate, original to the building, covers the roof in a broad banded, variegated, decorative pattern using plain and scalloped (fish scale) slate tiles. The roof has sustained several leaks, but the slate remains in relatively good shape despite nearly 40 years of deferred maintenance.

The main (west) elevation faces South Davis Avenue. The façade features a recessed central section five bays wide, flanked by two equally sized projecting sections, each five bays wide. The ground floor basement features a water table of native sandstone blocks, capped with belting course of limestone. A second, narrow belting course of limestone is incorporated into the sills for the first floor window openings. A broad course of brick separates the two limestone belting courses. Decorative brick pilasters rise from the limestone belt course, accentuating the corners of the building. Original window fenestrations, covered by plywood boards, remain original and unaltered. Most of the upper floor windows, originally tall, one-over-one-light, double-hung sash windows, are in various states of decay. This can also be said of the row of smaller, square, one-over-one-light, double-hung sash windows that line the basement openings. A large overhead garage door, installed when the original front portico was removed in the 1980s to make a truck loading dock, provides access to the school's basement area [Photo 1]. The original double doors and their broken transom and side lights, once used to access the building's first floor, now "dangles" high above the exterior grade. Three windows for the second floor library also appear suspended. These windows are framed by a broken transom and elaborate hooded pediment made of limestone with raking molding and anthemion embellishments. Between this central feature and three decorative, square-shaped, attic windows, is a rectangular limestone panel with raised-relief carving that reads "1st Ward School." The central portion of the building's west façade is capped by a broad pediment ornamented with dentils, bracketed modillions, and raking molding. At the apex and ends of the pediment are palmette leaf-shaped, limestone anthemion decorations. A low walled parapet interspersed with geometric designed cut-out sections, perhaps made of limestone or wood, once graced the main roofline, but was removed at some point between the 1960s and early 1980s [Photos 21 and 23].

Each side elevation (North and South) features a high stone stoop with stepped stone side walls leading to a covered portico [Photos 2 and 4]. Each portico is capped with a decorative tin entablature and capital, mirroring that found on the school's main roof line. Each side portico roof is supported by four brick, banded columns which mirror the pilasters decorating the corners of the school. The stonework on the north stairway sustained damage to its wall and stairs from a bus-related accident. Access to the interior of the school is provided by wooden double doors, each with six-light insets. Above each doorway is a broken transom with two long sidelights. The transom is framed by a splayed limestone lintel which projects from

the brick facade. Brickwork and a stone water table and banding courses used on the west façade are carried through to the side elevations. The open areas beneath the portico are gated with heavy gauge steel bars used

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to prevent student accessibility. Window fenestration is arranged symmetrically in a row across each floor of the school's façade. Windows are of the same size and style as those found on the front (west) elevation. Each opening on both the north and south facades is decorated with splayed limestone lintels and sills.

The rear (eastern) elevation features a projecting central section with hipped roof and attached two-story fire escape [Photo 3]. Decorations and embellishments used in the lintels of the other elevations of the building are not present. Brickwork and stonework, including a water table and banding courses, are carried onto the rear elevation. The upper and basement window fenestration of the rear elevation's projecting central bay is similar in size to that of the front elevation. The pattern and spacing of windows differs slightly with the small square-shaped windows in the basement section are separated into pairs. It is believed that two original window openings on the second floor may have been altered for doorways for the rear fire escape. Window arrangements for the recessed corners on either side of the rear elevation's central projecting bay use groupings of three narrow, double-hung, wood sash windows in the upper floor, the center window being larger than the other two. A second grouping of three, fixed-sash, single light windows is used for the first floor bathrooms.

Overall condition of the building's exterior is good. However, in certain areas, brick is in need of re-pointing, particularly along the rear elevation. Most serious is an area on the rear elevation below the frieze of the tin entablature where bricks, loosened by leaky box gutters and freeze/thaw cycles, have fallen from the top of the building. As a result, an opening approximately two feet wide by five feet long has opened on the rear (eastern) façade, exposing the interior to the elements and threatening the building's long-term stability.

Interior

The interior of First Ward School is designed for large numbers of school children with its wide halls, broad staircases, and expansive open rooms. Walls of the building are masonry covered with plaster and wood wainscoting or trim. At this time the school is not being used and its interior has not received regular maintenance for some time.

The footprint of the school plan is approximately 9,000 square feet. The building has a basement and two floors, bringing the total gross area to approximately 27,000 square feet, divided equally over the three levels. The attic space is not used, but is accessible through use of a metal ladder on the north stairwell landing. The building was designed without a large assembly area or auditorium for gatherings or school events. Most school events were held in public spaces in downtown Elkins or in the central hall on the building's first floor.

The building plan features a wide central corridor extending north and south on the two main floors above the basement. The first floor is approximately eight feet above the exterior grade. Each end of the first

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floor's main hallway, near the north and south exits, is served by a wide staircase [Photo 9]. These stairs permit access to both the basement and the second floor. Each staircase is of wood construction with narrow oak boards fashioned vertically between the closed subrail and top of the handrail. The handrail of each staircase on the first and second floor is decorated with wooden steps or "teeth" arranged down the center of the rail. This feature was designed to keep school children from sliding down the staircases.

Architectural detailing found in the hallways includes use of oak wainscoting along the walls [Photos 11 and 12]. At the end of each hall around the corner from the stairs are the main bathroom areas for the former school. The boy's bathroom was located on the southern end of the hall and features a double swinging door entry and rows of urinals, toilets and sinks. The girl's bathroom, on the northern end of the school's hallway, is similar in size but the entrance has been removed and items stored within its space.

At the center, eastern side of the hallway on both floors is an arcaded vestibule area [Photo 13]. This vestibule has the door openings leading into the two rooms on the eastern (rear) half of the building's projecting bay.

At the center of the hallway, a short hall intersects perpendicularly with the longer central hall on both the first and second floors. This short hallway extends westward toward the front of the building and is flanked by two staircases that are splayed (curved) at the bottom landing on the first floor. Both staircases are finished in a similar fashion as the other two staircases at the ends of the long central hallway [Photos 6, 7, and 15].

On the first floor, between the staircase and the doorway in the short hallway, are the offices for the principal and other school administrators. Original light fixtures and decorative curtain rods are visible in the principal's office, as are several decorative windows protected by plywood sheathing. The administrative offices are directly across from one another near what was once the doorway which led onto a large portico on the building's western façade. This portico was removed in the early 1980s.

A small library/classroom area is located on the second floor at the top of the central staircase. Like the rest of the building's classrooms, it is also decorated with wainscoting and plaster walls. Interesting features include an oak glass front built-in bookcase with ornamental cornice and the use of arches over the entries for the washroom and a small cloakroom on opposite sides of the library's main entrance [Photos 15, 16, and 17].

The upper two floors of First Ward are each equipped with four classrooms arranged in similar fashion. Each of these eight rooms roughly shares similar dimensions and architectural detailing [Photo 18]. The

classrooms are quite large by current standards (approx. 1,100 square feet). The classrooms are all square in shape and feature a walk through cloakroom with two arched entries at either end of its length [Photo 19].

Cloakrooms were equipped with a corner sink with fountain attachment. Each cloakroom was equipped with

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two rows, an upper and lower, of double hooks that featured a small acorn embellishment [Photo 20]. Oak wainscoting is used throughout the classroom rooms and cloakrooms. All of the rooms are finished in hard maple flooring and have plaster walls. The plaster areas between each of the windows have rounded or curved finished. Window openings, currently covered with plywood, are original and have not been in-filled or altered. Plaster around most of the window openings or in areas that have sustained leaks gradually deteriorated overtime causing plaster to crumble and fall to the floor in many rooms. Lighting for the classrooms has been converted to fluorescent shop lights in most rooms. Some rooms with more serious and sustained leak issues have sections of damaged flooring or holes in the ceiling. All of the slate blackboards have been removed. Most rooms feature Greek-inspired, decorative metal grill work around heating duct openings and returns. Doors leading into rooms are original wood panel doors with single light glass transoms with operating hardware. Ceiling heights in these rooms is approximately 14 feet high.

Although the first floor and classrooms were reequipped with fluorescent shop lights, several original lighting fixtures are visible around the school's interior. In the central hall of the second floor original drop-pendant style schoolhouse lights with milk globes are still in working order. Original light push-button light switches and arts and crafts style sconces are still on the wall of the principal's office and in the hallway.

The basement floors are approximately two feet below the exterior grade. The basement has two large classrooms of equivalent sizing to those found in the upper floors. These rooms are both located on the western side of the school facing South Davis Avenue. Both rooms feature low ceilings, hardwood flooring, and small square window openings [Photo 5]. The eastern and central portions of the basement contain space for mechanical rooms and storage space. Floors in the mechanical rooms and storage areas of the basement are concrete. Period postcards show that during the period when the school was used as a high school (1909-1914), the classroom in the southwest corner of the basement was used as a domestic science lab [Photos 5 and 22].

Despite leaks and plaster damages after being mothballed and neglected for years, First Ward is in remarkably good condition. One report prepared recently by engineers at WKY Associates in a study done for the Forest Festival Association noted that "The Old First Ward School is structurally sound, but is deteriorating at an increasing rate. The design, historic character, and condition of the old school make it a worthwhile candidate for adaptive reuse."

Intrusions to the building interior are minimal and easily repairable. Fluorescent lighting, missing chalkboards, broken window, lost hooks from the cloakroom and plaster and flooring damage from roof leaks can all be replaced or repaired. Most noticeable is the conveyor installed through the first floor in the hall between the central staircases. It was used to move heavy boxes of books during the building's use as a

textbook repository. Another intrusion is the stairwell upgrades. In the 1960 or 70s each of the staircases were fitted with fire doors and the openings at the top of the staircases were walled in and closed in to meet

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state fire codes. This alteration is minimal and does not detract from the architecture of the staircase or the building.

Today, despite outward appearance of dilapidation, the building would only need sensitive repair and restoration of its front portico to restore its original integrity. Inwardly the school is a gem with its wide open rooms, grand staircases, beautiful maple flooring and oak wainscoting that stands ready to be restored and reused. As one of the last of its kind and having undergone only minor alterations to its interior integrity, First Ward is an important link and example of the modern architectural designs that were sweeping the state's schools at the time and for its association with the history of Elkins.

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STATEMENT of SIGNIFICANCE

First Ward School is locally significant and eligible for listing on the National Register under *Criterion A: Education* as the earliest and best preserved representative example of Elkins' first major effort to expand and modernize its educational system after the turn of the twentieth century. First Ward's construction in 1907 heralded a dramatic period of educational improvements in Elkins leading to the erection of three additional school buildings; culminating with the completion of the Elkins High School Building in 1926 on an adjacent lot. It is also locally significant and eligible under *Criterion C: Architecture* for its association with the Classical Revival style of architecture, prominent at the time, and contributes toward the understanding of modern school design in Randolph County at the turn of the century. As other Elkins schools of this period have been transformed into apartment complexes or left to decay into ruin, First Ward School and its level of preservation remains as the community's sole touchstone to a time when architect and builder married style and function to create art.

First Ward School's period of significance spans from 1907, its date of construction, to 1915, the last year it served a dual capacity as both an elementary high school. In 1915 First Ward School ceased being home to Elkins high school students following the completion of the Central School Building in downtown Elkins. At that time, First Ward School reverted to its original purpose as an elementary school, a role it maintained until 1976 when it was retired and replaced. First Ward School's history is reflective of its importance during the first half of the school expansion period in Elkins from 1907 to 1926.

HISTORY

Early Elkins Development (1889-1910)

The history of First Ward School is tied to the rapid early development of Elkins and Randolph County following the coming of the railroad in 1889. In that year, the West Virginia Central and Pittsburg [sic] Railroad, under the leadership of former US Senator Henry Gassaway Davis and his son-in-law, Stephen B. Elkins, extended their rail line southward from Tucker County to tap Randolph County's rich timber, coal, and mineral resources. Construction and extension of the line between Parsons and the tiny agricultural hamlet of Leadsville, later renamed Elkins, culminated with the passage of the first train through the narrow cut north of the new town's center in December 1889.

Beginning in 1888, Davis and Elkins began purchasing large tracts of land along the northern and eastern banks of the Tygart River near Leadsville. Between 1888 and 1889 the two industrialists expended less than \$7,000 acquiring the land necessary to develop and build the town of Elkins¹. Even before the rail had been

¹ Whetsell, *Metropolis Revisited*, 12.

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completed to the new town, a grid-work pattern of streets and building lots on both sides of the Tygart Valley River were surveyed, laid out, and sold by Davis and his wife, Katherine. At its center were the roundhouse and shops of Davis' WVC&P RR and a town square. In 1905, Davis and Elkins sold their interests in the WVC&P RR, later becoming part of the Western Maryland Railroad (WMRR) system.

A census conducted in January 1890 revealed a total of 349 citizens living in the Elkins prior to incorporation. On February 21, 1890, a certificate of incorporation was issued to the newly chartered town, based on the 413-acre area surveyed by F.A. Parsons in December 1889. Soon afterwards, Elkins' first mayor, Dr. J.C. Irons, and city council took office.²

Word spread rapidly of the new town that Davis and Elkins were founding in Randolph County. The new town of Elkins buzzed with activity as laborers, merchants, and artisans flocked to the growing town to live and work. Elkins population grew rapidly over the next decade from 349 in 1890 to 2,023 in 1900. This increase was due to the availability of jobs in the railroad, mining, and timber sectors and the manufacturing, industrial, commercial, and professional jobs they supported. Drawn by the prospect of jobs, Elkins became a melting pot for various cultures and ethnic groups brought by rail to work in the growing town. Many of these migrants to the area brought their families with them. A housing boom soon erupted to meet the demands of the population increase.

Elkins was rapidly expanding beyond its original chartered limits. Beginning in April 1899, citizens residing in an the area south of the Tygart Valley River, opposite of Elkins, organized and chartered the new town of South Elkins, complete with its own city council and mayor. The city of Elkins became concerned over South Elkins as it sought the land to the south to expand industrial capacity and residential housing. Much of this land was owned by H.G. Davis and developed through the Davis-controlled Valley Improvement Company. Areas of this land were set aside and designated for residential areas, commercial/industrial needs, railroad right of ways, recreational use for a fairground, and even a lot for a future school. Much of South Elkins past North 12th Street, however, remained undeveloped. The town of South Elkins was short lived when after May 1901, following an legislative amendment to Elkins' original charter, the city of Elkins incorporated the young town; dividing the entire city of Elkins into five wards. At this time, the land and neighborhoods lying south of the Tygart Valley River from the downtown area became part of First Ward. To this day this area is still known by local residents as "South Elkins."

From its founding, Elkins was the economic heart and the center of commerce and industry in Randolph County but it wanted more. That came in 1900 when political power in Randolph County shifted to Elkins following a bitter struggle with Beverly over the transfer of the county seat. In 1908, the same year that construction was underway on First Ward School, the new Randolph County courthouse was completed. Its

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² Rice, D.L., *Elkins Centennial Album*, 151.

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imposing stone edifice in the Richardsonian Romanesque style gave proof of Elkins' rise to power and its influence on Randolph County politics in the century to come.

In 1904, just three years before the construction of First Ward School, the city of Elkins was a bustling place served by five railroad lines. Citizens were offered "quick and convenient means of transportation to every quarter of the globe" via the WVC&P (later the WMRR), the Coal and Iron Railway, the Coal and Coke Railway, and branch connections to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad via Belington. These railroads also linked Elkins businesses and industry to markets in Pittsburgh, Wheeling, Baltimore, Charleston, Huntington, Cumberland, and Staunton.³

The railroad facilitated manufacturing and industry to flourish in Elkins, providing employment to the growing population of skilled and unskilled laborers entering the city. The majority of industries were tied to the railroad, timber, or coal trade. Among the growing numbers of industries listed in operation in Elkins in 1904 were the WVC&P car and machine shops, Elkins Brick Company, Elkins Ice Plant, Elkins Machine and Foundry Company, Elkins Tanning Company, Elkins Milling Company, a boiler works, heading factory, a pail factory, and three planing mills.⁴ Two years later, the town celebrated its achievements and gave notice of its rising prominence in West Virginia in the book *Elkins, West Virginia, November, Nineteen Six: The Coming Metropolis of the State*.

Commercial and retail businesses and public services in Elkins expanded rapidly during the period between 1890 and 1910. Dirt roads and boardwalks gave way to brick paved streets and sidewalks; outdoor privies were replaced by a new water works system and sewer lines; early lighting and heating sources for domestic and manufacturing purposes, such as kerosene, coal and wood, were improved by electricity, natural gas, and steam. Changes in fire-proofing and construction methods resulted from the aftermath of the Great 1897 Fire, which devastated the early, largely wood-frame constructed, commercial center of Elkins. These changes would have a dramatic impact on the future of building design and architecture in Elkins. Ordinances passed prohibiting the construction of wooden public and commercial buildings, favoring instead, buildings constructed of fire-resistant materials such as brick, stone, metal, and concrete. Immediately, brick and stone became the most common building material for public buildings including stores, theaters, hotels, banks, churches, and schools, and would continue to dominate well into the first half of the twentieth century in Elkins.

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³ Cobb, *Prospectus 1904*, 1

⁴ Ibid., 3

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Education History of Elkins (1889-1907)

Beginning in 1889, Elkins strove to update and modernize the community services to accommodate the rising demands of its growing population. As with paving streets and laying sewer lines, education improvements were equally in need of improvement. In 1889 school children in early Elkins attended classes in a crude

wood-framed building sided with rough sawn wood planks situated along First Street on the site of the present Lutheran church. With little insulation between the boards, students used heavy paper brought from home to fill the cracks and decorate the interior. The rough and rustic appearance of the building prompted the children and locals to give the building the name of "Long Onery." This building served eighteen students prior to the founding of Elkins. With the growing town came a need for additional space where classes could be taught. Between 1891 and 1894 classes were taught in Fout's Opera House, the Campbell's building on Third Street and in the upper floors of such Elkins commercial businesses as the Kendall Furniture store on Buffalo Street. During this time, three teachers (Miss Durkin, Mr. W.L. Stalnaker, and Miss Pearson) had charge of approximately 125 pupils, with the numbers of pupils increasing each year.⁵

Black students in Elkins attended a small segregated school situated within a small black enclave along the Tygart Valley River on River Street. This school was enlarged in the mid-1920s and became known as Riverside School. Elkins area schools remained segregated until 1954 when West Virginia Governor William Marland ordered full integration of all public schools in West Virginia.

In 1893, under the leadership of State Senator C.H. Scott of Elkins, the West Virginia State Legislature passed an act establishing the Elkins Independent School District, its boundaries, curriculum, and the minimum length of annual school terms. Shortly afterward, a school board was elected and \$10,000 in bonds was approved in a special election for the erection of a suitable school building. That first year enrollment in the Elkins Independent School District attained 225 pupils being "poorly accommodated in different buildings in town."⁶

On July 4th 1894, a dedication ceremony was held during the laying of the cornerstone for the Elkins Public School building at the corner of 2nd Street and Henry Avenue. When completed on December 17, 1894, the imposing two-story, brick and stone building contained ten classrooms and featured a massive central clock and bell tower. The school became a proud landmark for the new city and a proof of Elkins commitment to educating its citizens.⁷

It was thought that this building would meet the future needs of the town. This would be proven wrong as the population of the county, increasing at a rate estimated at 1,000 per year, soared to nearly 5,000 by 1904,

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⁵ Rice, D.L., Elkins Centennial Album, 71.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rice, D.L., Elkins Centennial Album, 72.

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with more than half residing in Elkins. By 1910, the population of Elkins exceeded more than 5,000 inhabitants. The 1894 Public School soon became obsolete as public need and the numbers of students outpaced the school's capacity.⁸

Compounding the problem of how to educate increasing numbers of children was where to educate them. Significant structural issues with the new public school were soon discovered, evidenced by several large cracks in its foundation and walls following its construction. By 1905, fearing a potential collapse and need to protect student safety, use of the building was significantly curtailed. In fact, the building was virtually abandoned by February 1910 with only School Superintendent Wilson's office occupying the old portion of the building. These factors once again forced students to be taught in temporary makeshift classrooms set up in commercial buildings scattered throughout the downtown.

In 1907 the Elkins school system had reached a crisis, as student enrollment for the Elkins Independent School District was nearing 1,000 students and space to house classes outside the school was limited and poorly suited for instructing students. The health and mental well-being of the students was at stake as they were being "herded" into the one school, as one newspaper reported, "like so many sheep."⁹ It was obvious to the school board and parents that something had to be done to improve safety and learning conditions for the students.

In 1906-1907, the school superintendent and board members studied the feasibility of repairing the existing 1894 school or building a new facility. On May 14, 1907 the board recommended moving forward with plans to build two new modern facilities large enough to handle the anticipated increase in the town's student enrollment. To cover the anticipated costs, \$60,000 in bonds would be sold by the board. A special citywide vote was scheduled for June 15, 1907 regarding the sale of the bonds. The *Randolph Enterprise* weighed-in in support of the board's decision, noting "It will be generally admitted that the present facilities in Elkins are totally inadequate." The solution, they insisted, was to "provide additional facilities" supported by the issuance of bonds. The Enterprise argued that any increased taxation "will be so immaterial that it will never be felt and even if it were, it should be ungrudgingly paid" by its citizens as an investment "in the future of your children."¹⁰ After great debate, approval of the bonds was overwhelming, especially in the First and Third Wards where the two new schools were to be erected.

First Ward School
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Randolph County, West Virginia
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⁸ Cobb, Prospectus, 1.

⁹ Randolph Enterprise, May 30, 1907.

¹⁰ Ibid., May 23, 1907

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First Ward School (1907-Present)

In 1906 Fairmont, West Virginia architect Andrew C. Lyons was contracted to prepare plans and specifications for two “Public School Buildings” for the Elkins Independent School District.¹¹ Lyon was a well-known and respected architect, noted for his innovative schoolhouse designs which utilized classically inspired architecture to incorporate the most modern ideas of the day regarding schoolhouse form and function. Lyons built many of Fairmont’s large commercial houses, residences, and schools, including Fifth Ward School located along Locust Avenue in Fairmont. Today, several examples of Lyons’ commercial buildings are part of the Fairmont Downtown Historic District (March 1995) and are individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Jacob-Hutchinson Block/Peoples National Bank).¹² It was Lyons’ Fifth Ward School, later known as White School, which gave inspiration to the design of First and Third Ward Schools in Elkins. However, it would be Lyons’ Elkins design that would garner him statewide recognition for school design and styling.

Plans called for the Elkins schools to be designed as “Ward Schools” with each containing eight classrooms, to be used for “graded school work ranging from first to eighth grade” and of “modern construction, fully completed and furnished and equipped ready for occupancy at the earliest practicable time.”¹³ Lyons plans incorporated a Neo-Classical Revival design similar to that of his Fairmont school, but with unique variations in its design features as necessitated by the local school board, which altered its scale, massing, floor plan, and use of materials.

Lyons completed the original plans for First Ward School in May of 1906. The construction of the two schools, planned to begin in the fall of 1906, was initially delayed after it was determined the school district plans of raising a 25-cent levy (or \$12,000) and the sale of \$60,000 in bonds needed approval from the state legislature.¹⁴ The bond vote was delayed until the following summer where it was passed by a large majority of the city residents. Sealed bids were opened on July 27, 1907.¹⁵

Prior to the construction of First Ward School in 1907, South Elkins was a poorly drained area full of rabbits and scrub brush and virtually devoid of homes. According to the 1897 T. Fowler map of Elkins only a handful of houses and commercial businesses dotted the area just south of the Davis Avenue Bridge towards what is today 11th Street. Between 1902 and 1907 development in South Elkins (also known as the Valley Improvement Company Addition, named for the land holding company supervising its sale and development)

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Randolph County, West Virginia
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United States Department of the Interior

¹¹ Ibid., August 9, 1906.

¹² McMillan, Debra, “Fifth Ward School,” 1.

¹³ Randolph Enterprise, “Notice to Contractors,” May 23, 1907.

¹⁴ Ibid., August 9, 1906.

¹⁵ Ibid., July 11, 1907.

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was on the rise. However, large areas of open land remained undeveloped, except for the large horse racing track and grandstands of the Elkins Fairgrounds along the extension of West Virginia Avenue, later renamed South Davis Avenue. Water and sewage lines did not exist across much of the addition until First Ward was built.

Work on First Ward School started July 18, 1907 when workmen began excavating the foundation.¹⁶ The construction site was located at the corner of Davis Avenue and Thirteenth Street, just north of the Elkins Fairgrounds and horse racing track. This was not the original spot that had been selected for a school in the addition. In August 1892 H.G. Davis, president of the Valley Improvement Company, offered the Board of Education Lots 722-727 in Block 70—three blocks north of First Ward's present location on South Davis Avenue. It is unclear why this site was not selected for First Ward or how the Board of Education came to build on Block 100 instead. No record exists as to why this action occurred. However, in 1920 the Valley Improvement Company traded the six lots in Block 70 for lots 1040-1044, plus an additional half block known as 1044 ½, in Block 100.¹⁷ It is most likely that the Board was leasing the property from the Valley Improvement Company, just as the Elkins Fair Association had done for the neighboring fairgrounds. Davis would most certainly been involved in the decision to move the school location and would have opted for the more prominent site along South Davis Avenue for several reasons; besides reducing long walking distance for most students, its location near a major rail line, town fairgrounds, and central thoroughfare gave proof to visitors of Elkins prosperity and commitment to educating its youth.

At the time of First Ward's construction, many areas of the state were experiencing economic "hard times" and a "scarcity of money." In Elkins, however, there was a construction boom. One Elkins paper noted, as evidenced by the number of construction projects being undertaken, including First Ward, that "the building trades in Elkins are having a fairly good year" despite the economy. The article added, "For this relief, much thanks."¹⁸

The Withrow Company of Charleston, West Virginia, was selected to oversee the construction of both First and Third Ward Schools. The contracting firm stressed its desire to use local sub-contractors to do the work on the building. As a result, most of the work on the exterior and interior was done by builders and craftsmen from the community, thus aiding the local economy. One such local craftsman awarded a contract was A. A. Talbott. Talbott, a prominent Elkins wall paper hanger and painter, was hired to paint and decorate the interiors of both First and Third Ward Schools. The Randolph Enterprise noted that "The fact that he has been awarded the contract assures a splendid job..."¹⁹

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¹⁶ Ibid., July 18, 1907.

¹⁷ Randolph County Deed Book No. 115, "Valley Improvement Co. Deed Board of Education Elkins Ind. Dist.," 339.

¹⁸ Randolph Enterprise, September 17, 1908.

¹⁹ Randolph Enterprise, n.d.

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In addition to use of local craftsmen, First Ward's building materials, whenever possible, were supplied locally. Oak lumber for wainscoting and hard maple for flooring was harvested from surrounding mountains and milled locally. Hand cut sandstone blocks, called "Calico stone" by local Italian stone masons employed at the Coffman quarry near Harding, West Virginia, supplied the stone used in the school's exterior masonry. Bricks used in the construction of the building were manufactured and supplied by the Elkins Brick Company whose South Elkins plant was less than a mile from the work site. Bricks from this plant were used to construct most of the early brick buildings in Elkins.

Lyons' demand for use of only quality materials in the design of First Ward School required the importing of a variety of construction materials, like limestone and slate, from distant locations to Elkins. Without the railroad, it would have been expensive and virtually impossible to transport the required limestone from Indiana to Elkins. Indiana limestone, also known as Salem limestone, was a highly desired light colored, fine-grained stone prized by architects and used predominately on a variety of Revival styles of the 19th and early 20th century, mostly for detail work. It's presence on First Ward School illustrates Elkins' capacity and rising economic status at the turn of the 20th century to import the building stone into rural West Virginia from the Midwest.

The Buckingham Virginia Slate used to protect the school from the elements was specially chosen by Lyons for its unique hardness, durability, luster, and unfading qualities. The mica rich, blue-black colored tiles (commonly referred to as Oxford-Grey) originated from slate quarries in Buckingham County, Virginia, near Arvon, and arrived in Elkins by rail for use on First Ward School. The use of Buckingham Virginia Slate was sought by architects across the United States for its exceptional enduring qualities (150 to 175 years or longer) that withstood fading or decaying. Its use was an assurance to architects that their buildings would receive lifetime protection, and that the beauty which they built into the structures, like First Ward, would be preserved. Other prominent buildings using Buckingham Virginia Slate include Ford's Theater, the Smithsonian Institution's "Castle," and the Maryland State House.

In May of 1908 cost overruns for First Ward jeopardized Third Ward's completion. The board reported that the \$72,000 raised by levy and bond sales for the two schools in 1907 was not enough to complete Third Ward. New school board members estimated that an additional \$45,000 was needed to complete the second school as First Ward cost estimate had ballooned to \$57,000. Among the reasons given for the high costs was \$2,500 paid to cover architect Lyons design fees for First Ward.²⁰ On August 1, 1908 a second special election was held to authorize the sale of bonds necessary for Third Ward's completion. The measure passed 6 to 1 in favor. Third Ward School was completed at its site on Hinkle Hill overlooking Elkins' west side in 1910.²¹

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United States Department of the Interior

²⁰ Ibid., May 21, 1908.

²¹ Ibid., July 9, 1908; August 6, 1908; July 1, 1909.

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First Ward was completed in September of 1908 and ready for occupancy. Local newspapers pronounced the new school a “beauty” and an asset to the growing community. First Ward “will do much to relieve the uncomfortable crowding which has heretofore been necessary.”²² However, despite all its advances in modern school design and its stature as a symbol of Elkins growth, children attending First Ward were required to utilize temporary outdoor privies. Unfortunately, the school’s location placed it outside the reach of the city’s water and sewer lines. First Ward was pushing the boundaries of the community’s water and sewage systems. The eventual extension of these lines to First Ward School helped speed development in South Elkins, enabling utility services to extend to an area once considered part of the city’s outer fringes.²³

Aside from the minor plumbing setback, First Ward School was a thoroughly modern school featuring the latest scientific ideas in school architecture and design. These design features improved conditions for educating children by providing a safe and healthier learning environment, while utilizing the latest improvements in school furnishings, plumbing, lighting, and heating methods. Lyons chose a classically inspired architectural revival style that enhanced the stature and prominence of the building giving it a stately presence.

Lyons’ design for First Ward won him acclaim across West Virginia. In 1910, the same year Lyons completed both ward schools in Elkins, M.P. Shawkey, the State Superintendant of Schools complimented Lyons and First Ward School saying the school was “a building with fine architectural lines and artistic substantial appearance.” Shawkey’s book, *School Architecture* (1910), offered a discourse on all aspects of rural school design in West Virginia. In it, Lyons design for Elkins’ First Ward School was cited as a shining example of proper planning, design, and craftsmanship that incorporated a healthy, yet pleasant, learning environment for children. Using a large photo of First Ward, Shawkey exemplified the school’s design as one that should be emulated and copied across West Virginia for school districts desiring to build larger schools with eight rooms or more.²⁴

The school’s setting and floor plan were key features in Lyons’ design for First Ward. The school’s placement on a broad and level corner lot provided ample space for children to play outside and visibility for supervision. Lyons recognized the healthy benefits of providing students with natural light and designed First Ward with this in mind. He did this utilizing a modified “H” or “U” style floor plan featuring a recessed entrance flanked by two projecting bays on the west elevation and a large projecting bay on the rear or eastern elevation. This design worked exceptionally well for large schools, as it provided the greatest amount of natural light to penetrate and bathe the interior classrooms. This effect was enhanced through the use of tall, double-hung windows throughout the building’s exterior walls, most importantly for the

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National Park Service

²² Ibid., September 17, 1908.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Shawkey, *School Architecture*, 46.

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classrooms on the first and second story. Electric lights provided secondary interior lighting sources for each room.

First Ward School's indoor plumbing improved sanitary conditions at the school through the use of separate gender specific bathroom facilities. To aid student hygiene, the cloakroom in each of the eight rooms was equipped with a small corner sink with a sanitary drinking fountain attachment. Student comfort was maintained through improvements in heating systems. Heat for the school was provided by a central coal fired furnace that forced warm air through vents to circulate evenly throughout each classroom using a gravity heating system to prevent cold spots. Warm air entered the room through large ornate grill openings near the ceiling while cooler air dropped and left the room and school through a second opening near the floor.

First Ward's classrooms were designed with student comfort in mind. Originally, each classroom was fitted with long rows of ornate black wrought iron desks with wood bench seats. The bench-style seats were hinged and featured curved backs and seats to allow correct posture control. Each row was separated by a wide aisle. Seating of this type was used throughout the most of school's history. Walls were finished in plaster for easy cleaning and painted in a restful color using a dull finish to ease eye strain and reflection. Cloakrooms were open and well ventilated featuring upper and lower rows of hooks. The tip of the each cast iron hook was embellished with a tiny acorn design. This acorn motif was representative and associative of the metaphor surrounding the acorn and the tree of knowledge. This subtle design feature served as a psychological reinforcement for students of the value and importance of knowledge and education.

First Ward was the first of several new schools built to relieve over-crowding conditions in the Elkins school district. Until Third Ward School was completed in 1910, students crowded into First Ward or continued to be taught in makeshift classrooms in Elkins' downtown commercial buildings. First Ward also briefly provided space for older students attending high school from 1909 to 1915. In 1915, the entire high school student body and teachers were transferred to the newly built Central School Building, located on the former site of the 1894 Public School building, where a section was devoted for high school use. It would not be until 1926 that a separate Elkins High School building would be built in South Elkins on a lot adjacent to First Ward School. The construction of Elkins High School in 1926 closed an era of expansion in the local school system until the 1970s.

One design feature missing from the two ward schools was an auditorium for school events, such as plays, lectures, or class talent shows, referred to as "stunt nights." It is not believed this was an omission, but was planned. Early on, Elkins schools and school children provided an important source of entertainment to the community. Fout's Opera House, destroyed in the 1897 fire, and Posten's Opera House were regularly utilized for many of school related events which attracted hundreds; many to sold-out performances. Events were often used to raise funds for the schools or various social clubs. Newspapers of the day would often

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review the previous evening's entertainment. Until the completion of Central School and its auditorium in 1915, graduation ceremonies for those attending high school at First Ward from 1909 to 1915 were held at the Posten Opera House in downtown Elkins.

School sporting events were also held in Elkins area locations, in particular at the YMCA or the fairgrounds ("Davis Field"). Elkins sporting events drew large crowds. In 1914 great community pride was had when the Elkins High School's basketball team, then attending school at First Ward School, defeated West Virginia University to win West Virginia's first State Basketball Championship.²⁵ The win not only provided the school with its first championship team but gave team leader, and future legendary Elkins High School coach, Frank C. Wimer his first taste of sporting victory. Wimer's house, situated on Buffalo Street in Elkins, is today listed on the National Register of Historical Places as part of the Wees Historic District.

Each of these events, as well as others held in the town's opera houses linked the schools directly with the community and helped entertain, educate, and enlighten those in attendance. Town opera houses began falling out of favor with the public prior to WWI around the time motion pictures were first introduced. By the early 1910s nickelodeons and movie theaters were present on nearly every corner of the downtown with names like The O-Kay Theater, The Hippodrome, The Grand, and The New Avenue.

Finding large venues where the board of education could hold local school events was increasingly difficult and expensive. Moreover, as years past following the construction of First and Third Ward Schools, enrollment continued to increase, particularly in the high school department. In response to increases in the numbers of students and difficulties of obtaining use of large meeting rooms, the school board opted to build another school, Central School Building. Plans for the new building would include space for a large auditorium where the city's school activities, shows, and graduations could be held. Until its completion, high school students would remain at First Ward School.

Not long after its First Ward's completion, residential housing construction increased dramatically. Within a short period of time, First Ward School was located in the midst of a neighborhood of newly constructed homes. The neighborhood around First Ward School was predominantly comprised of working class families living in wood frame vernacular homes or those designed in variations of the popular American Foursquare, Tudor Revival, and Arts and Crafts-inspired bungalows. Many of the parents who sent their children to First Ward were employed as laborers in the nearby tannery, manufacturing plants, lumber mills and warehouses that grew up along the railroad lines that bisected the area. The school also educated orphans living nearby in the WV State Odd Fellows Home.

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²⁵ Whetsell, *Metropolis Revisited*, 141.

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On September 16-17, 1915 the new Central School Building on the corner of Second Street and Henry Avenue was completed and dedicated. The massive three story brick school designed by Columbus, Ohio architect Frank L. Packard, dwarfed First Ward School. The \$115,000 new school boasted 19 classrooms and additional library and office space. The 700-seat auditorium was the most welcome feature of the building, as were the seven rooms devoted for the high school department use on the third floor. Upon its opening a writer for the West Virginia School Journal commented on the new school's design, "It is perfect in arrangement, artistic in its adornment, and cheerful and inviting in every way."²⁶

Beginning in September of 1915, after the high school students were moved to Central School building, First Ward School was finally permitted to revert to its original intended purpose as an elementary grade school for children in grades one through six. No other elementary schools were constructed until the 1970s in Elkins.

The mid 1920s marked the close of the school expansion period in Elkins, with the updates and the second floor addition made to the all segregated Riverside School around 1925 and completion of the Elkins High School Building in 1926. In 1953, the county school board saw the need for the construction of the Elkins Junior High School building in the Third Ward school district for grades seven through nine.

For nearly 70 years First Ward School served the citizens of South Elkins. This tradition came to an end in the mid 1970s when Randolph County School Board members, faced with rising energy costs, undertook a massive school construction program. Between 1974 and 1976 the county built six new school buildings; four (Midland, North, Third Ward and First Ward) were constructed to replace the aging First Ward, Third Ward, and Central Schools. The energy efficient square-shaped, single story buildings were low in profile with earthen berms; the tinted windows were shaded by wide eaves. Designed by the Clarksburg firm Whalen King Architects, the new 35,000 square foot schools were furnished with air conditioning, carpeting, and a large multi-purpose room; "features not known to the old schools," one newspaper at the time reported.

With the purchase of property in the Riverview Addition of South Elkins in November of 1975, First Ward School's days were numbered. The following year the new First Ward School was completed and renamed in honor of former US Senator from West Virginia, Jennings Randolph. The old First Ward School was closed in 1976.

For the last 33-years, First Ward School has been used primarily as a storage facility for the Randolph County School Board. The other school properties, the former Central School and identical Third Ward School, have been converted into efficiency apartments for low to moderate income renters. Since their adaptive reuse in the late 1970s and early 1980s by a local businessman, both former schools have undergone

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²⁶ *The Tiger*, Commencement Number, 1914, Vol. 7, No. 6, 21; Thanksgiving Number, November 1915, Vol. 9, No. 1, 12.

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dramatic changes with interior spaces being altered and in-filled and original features removed or replaced, thus dramatically compromising their historic integrity.

In 1981, First Ward became the repository for the county school system's 30,000 free textbooks.²⁷ This use had a dramatic impact on the building's condition. In order to store the textbooks the county installed gas heaters and boarded up the windows to provide security and prevent sunlight from damaging the books. The meager heat provided by the heater helped keep mildew and moisture out for many years. With limited maintenance, interior gutters and a leaky roof have continued to cause problems. Despite this, the building is in good condition and has retained a large degree of its character.

The most dramatic changes also came with the building's use as a storage center for textbooks and canned goods for the school lunch program. In the early 1980s, in order to make books deliveries operate more efficiently, the front portico of the school was razed and an overhead garage door put in its place. To move heavy boxes of books from the ground floor to the first floor storage area a conveyor system was installed by cutting a section of the first floor hall near the original entrance area outside the former principal office. With historical images, measurements from Third Ward School's original entrance, and access to similar period building materials it is believed that the portico and entrance can be restored.

Criteria A: Education

Today, First Ward School still sits within the residential district it helped create and serve. Many of the original homes built between 1908 and the 1970s, the time the building served as the sole school for First Ward residents, remain intact and part of a cohesive middle class neighborhood.

First Ward School is locally significant under *Criterion A: Education* as the earliest and best preserved representative example of Elkins' first major effort to expand and modernize its educational system after the turn of the twentieth century. This response was fueled by the economic prosperity and rapid influx of working and middle class families who flocked to the Elkins area in search of jobs in the railroad, timber, and coal related industries that flourished from the late 1890s to the early 1920s.

The period from 1907 to 1926 saw an impressive new era of expansion in the school system in Elkins. This "Expansion Era" began with the groundbreaking for the construction of First Ward School (1907-1908) and was followed by Third Ward School (1909-1910) and Central School Building (1914-1915). It culminated with the expansion of the black-segregated Riverside School (1924-25) and the completion of the Elkins High School Building in 1926. This era saw unprecedented and unified local support for the passage of city school levies and programs that furthered an increase in school construction, advances in school design, and improved curriculum.

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²⁷ Elkins Inter-Mountain, October 29, 1981.

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Prior to this period, it was hard to gain support for school levies or improvements. Elkins school children were regularly crowded into substandard school buildings and unsafe makeshift classrooms in the upper storerooms of downtown commercial buildings. First Ward School helped to eliminate the overcrowding and was the first school of its kind in the history of Elkins to incorporate modern conveniences that improved health conditions among pupils, most noticeably through the use of indoor plumbing and access to clean drinking water. These features alone decreased absentee rates and prevented the spread of communicable diseases through the elimination of privies and communal drinking cups and ladles. Additional architectural design features, seen first in First Ward's design, improved pupil comfort and study environment. No other school like it had been seen prior to its construction. The schools that followed tried to duplicate and surpass the First Ward's amenities.

First Ward School served south Elkins for nearly seventy years before closing its doors for good in the mid 1970s. During that time no additional elementary schools were built in Elkins. Curriculum changed to meet the needs of the times as children from Kindergarten to 6th grade received instruction at First Ward School. Over its history, thousands of children occupied First Ward School's halls and were nurtured in its classrooms. However, with the completion of a new generation of schools in the mid 1970s, all but two of the old schools were sold by the Randolph County Board of Education. Thus began a new chapter for Third Ward School and Central School Building as each underwent catastrophic alterations in their appearance during transformation into apartment complexes. First Ward School and Elkins High School remained owned and used by the school system. In the early 1990s Elkins High School was abandoned and permitted to decay following the construction of a new high school, while First Ward School continued its use as a school book repository for the county school system. They remain in that capacity to this day.

First Ward School, along with the similarly designed Third Ward School, reflected the rapid growth of the expanding city in the early twentieth century as the population increased and residents pushed out into the open suburbs beyond the crowded economic center. Thus, the placement of the two schools in the two fastest growing areas of the city--south and western Elkins. The schools also represented the desire of the town to become a modern city with modern educational facilities. First Ward was the first attempt by the town to reflect its modern ideals through education and schoolhouse design.

Criteria C: Architecture

First Ward School is locally significant under *Criterion C: Architecture* as an excellent example of Neo-Classical architecture. It is representative of the type and function of building used for early twentieth century educational facilities in Randolph County. It's massing and plan, modern for its day, adopted many of the new technologies and designs available at the time, which were generally reserved for use in public school buildings found in larger cities. These included electric lighting, indoor sanitary plumbing, forced air

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central heat system, drinking fountains, and a modified “H” floor plan that incorporated multiple large window openings which made the most of available natural light during various seasons.

In 1910, First Ward School’s classical design, by the prominent Fairmont architect Andrew C. Lyons, won it great acclaim and was recognized by the West Virginia State Superintendent of Schools. That year First Ward School’s design was featured in the only book ever published by the State of West Virginia on modern school architecture for rural areas. It’s presence in the book heightened First Ward’s prestige, but not its numbers, as no other similar styled schoolhouses appear to have been built elsewhere in West Virginia following the book’s publication. These facts add to the importance of this extremely rare and unique local architectural form.

When it was completed in 1908 First Ward School was the largest and most modern school in surrounding Randolph County and the pride of the up and coming city of Elkins which had only recently become the new county seat. First Ward School’s construction also heralded the beginning of the city’s efforts to modernize its public school system and relieve overcrowding brought about by the dramatic increase in population as a result of the railroad, timber, and coal industry in the area. The design of the school was so well liked by members of the Elkins Independent School Board that a second school of the same design called Third Ward School was erected overlooking the Hinkle addition of the west end of the city. These were the only two “ward” type schools built in the city. This boom in school construction reached its peak with the completion of the Central School Building in 1915 and ended following the construction of the adjacent Elkins High School Building in 1926.

Comparisons

Only one building truly compares with First Ward School in age, construction methods, and architectural design; its sister school, Third Ward School. The First Ward and Third Ward Schools, located in opposite sections of the community, were cut from the same cloth. Both were two story, brick constructed school houses with Neo-Classical architectural detailing and complex, slate-covered, hipped roofs. Both were built during the same early period and initially funded under the same bond issue. Both schools were built using the exact same interior floor plans. The two schools were essentially twins. Until the mid 1970s the two buildings differed little in appearance as a result of regular maintenance from the county school system. The fate of Third Ward School shifted after it was sold to a developer who converted it and the Central School Building into low-income, efficiency apartments. During work to convert the space, workers removed/replaced the school’s large one-over-one-light, original, wooden sash windows with smaller vinyl windows and in-filled the remaining space with vinyl siding. Workers also removed the original slate roof replacing it with asphalt shingles. Interior spaces shared a similar fate, as the once spacious classrooms were irreparably altered through the movement of original walls or the division of open spaces. Furthermore, original

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architectural elements and fixtures were removed or replaced. Unlike First Ward School, however, Third Ward does retain its original, massive, raised portico on the front façade, complete with a pair of tall wooden fluted columns and its decorative pressed tin entablature. This is good news for any First Ward reconstruction efforts as Third Ward School's portico could easily provide clues to aid in the restoration of the First Ward missing portico.

Despite having lost its raised front entrance portico in recent years the remaining building is intact and exhibits extraordinary preservation. Its interior retains its original hardwood floors, open classrooms with walk in cloak rooms, wide central hallways with original school house lights, grand staircases with decorative trim, plaster walls, oak wainscoting. Exteriorly, the building features original Indiana limestone decorative trim work, decorative windows, two side entrance porticos, original fenestration openings, original slate roof, and many other original decorative elements associative and evocative of its Neo-Classical design traditions and Greek-Revival influences. Much of the building is in original condition with few alterations to detract from its historic association and integrity.

SUMMARY

First Ward School is eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. Although it has had some neglect over the years, First Ward remains an elegant and important property with great architecture, history, and potential. It is connected to the early development of Elkins and its educational history and embodies the advances in schoolhouse design and architecture styling (Neo-Classical) sought in West Virginia schools in the early twentieth century. Its groundbreaking in 1907 spurred an era of expansion and modernization in the school system in Elkins that wasn't witnessed again in the county until the mid 1970s. First Ward School is potentially a rare example of the work of West Virginia schoolhouse architect and designer Andrew C. Lyons. Lyons' skills, perfected on his design for First Ward School, garnered him recognition from the West Virginia Superintendent of Schools in his 1910 book on modern school architecture in West Virginia. Today, First Ward School, despite signs of age, retains great integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and is worthy of its place in West Virginia architectural history.

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"Keeping in Line," May 30, 1907.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Boundary Description is taken from the records of the Randolph County Clerk's Office, Randolph County Courthouse, Elkins, WV. Deed Book 115, Page 339 between Valley Improvement Company and Board of Education, Elkins Independent School District, August 11, 1920:

“On the North for 150 feet by 13th St., on the East for 210 feet by a 20 foot alley, and 40 feet by land owned by the party of the first part [Valley Improvement Co.] , on the South for 150 feet by lands owned by the party of the first part and used and occupied as a fair ground, and on the West for 250 feet by Davis and West Virginia Avenues.”

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The wording above is consistent with the historic boundary of the property following a change made on the above date which added an additional ½-acre to the original lot. This change made in 1920 was the last addition to the property prior to the construction of the Elkins High School building in 1925-1926 at which time more property was added. First Ward School site contains lots 1040, 1041, 1042, 1043, 1044, and 1044 ½. , today known as parcel #192 of block 22. The 1920 deed identifies the historic boundary separating the First Ward School property and the former Elkins High School property. For purposes of this nomination, the legal description, stated above, shall be used to delineate the boundary between the two properties as they existed historically and today.

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Photographer: Logan Smith

Date: 03/15/2009

Photo 1 of 23	West elevation, showing loading dock area Camera facing east
Photo 2 of 23	North and west elevations Camera facing southeast
Photo 3 of 23	South and east elevations Camera facing northwest
Photo 4 of 23	South elevation, portico Camera facing northwest
Photo 5 of 23	Interior, basement, SW classroom, former high school domestic science lab Camera facing northwest
Photo 6 of 23	Interior, 1 st floor, central stairwell, southern staircase Camera facing southwest
Photo 7 of 23	Interior, 1 st floor, conveyor, central stair landings, west entrance and office openings Camera facing west
Photo 8 of 23	Interior, 1 st floor, northern administrative office Camera facing northeast
Photo 9 of 23	Interior, 1 st floor, south stairwell, staircase detail Camera facing northeast
Photo 10 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, view of south stairwell landing from top of stairwell Camera facing northeast
Photo 11 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, south end of central hallway Camera facing south
Photo 12 of 31	Interior, 2nd floor, north end central hallway, central stairs, and arcaded vestibule Camera facing north

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Photos: (Cont.)

Photographer: Logan Smith

Date: 03/15/2009

Photo 13 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, arcaded vestibule, central hallway Camera facing southeast
Photo 14 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, detail, original milk-glass globed light fixture in central hallway Camera facing north
Photo 15 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, view towards library/classroom, fire doors at top of central staircases Camera facing west
Photo 16 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, library, doorway & arched openings, cloakroom & sink Camera facing east
Photo 17 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, library, bookcase & leak damage Camera facing southwest
Photo 18 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, SW classroom, typical classroom, showing details & plaster damage Camera facing northwest
Photo 19 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, typical doorway & arched cloakroom entrances, SW classroom Camera facing northeast
Photo 20 of 23	Interior, 2 nd floor, SW classroom, interior view of cloakroom Camera facing south

First Ward School
Name of Property

Randolph County, West Virginia
County and State

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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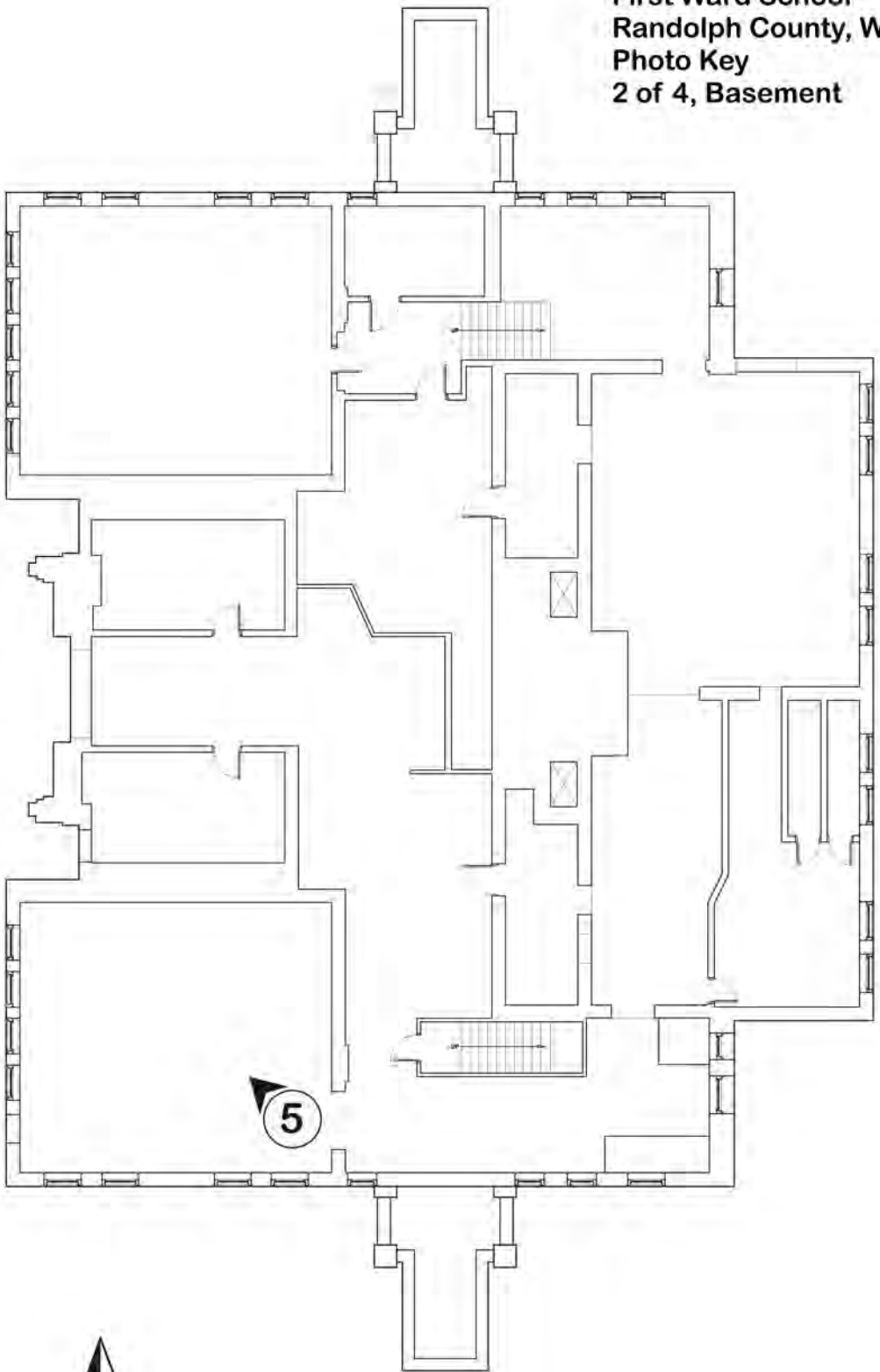
Photos: (Cont.)

Historic Period Photos (1913-1946)

Property of Robert C. Whetsell

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Photo 21 of 23 | Exterior, west façade, view from South Davis Avenue, 1913
Camera facing east |
| Photo 22 of 23 | Interior, basement, southwest classroom, domestic science kitchen, postcard, 1913
Camera facing northwest (See photo 8, modern view of same room) |
| Photo 23 of 23 | Exterior, west and south facades, view from South Davis Avenue, ca. 1946
Camera facing northeast (See photo 7 for modern view) |

First Ward School
 Randolph County, WV
 Photo Key
 2 of 4, Basement



EXISTING BASEMENT PLAN



AS-BUILT DRAWING FOR:
 FIRST WARD SCHOOL
 CORNER OF 13TH STREET & SOUTH DAVIS AVENUE
 ELKINS, WEST VIRGINIA

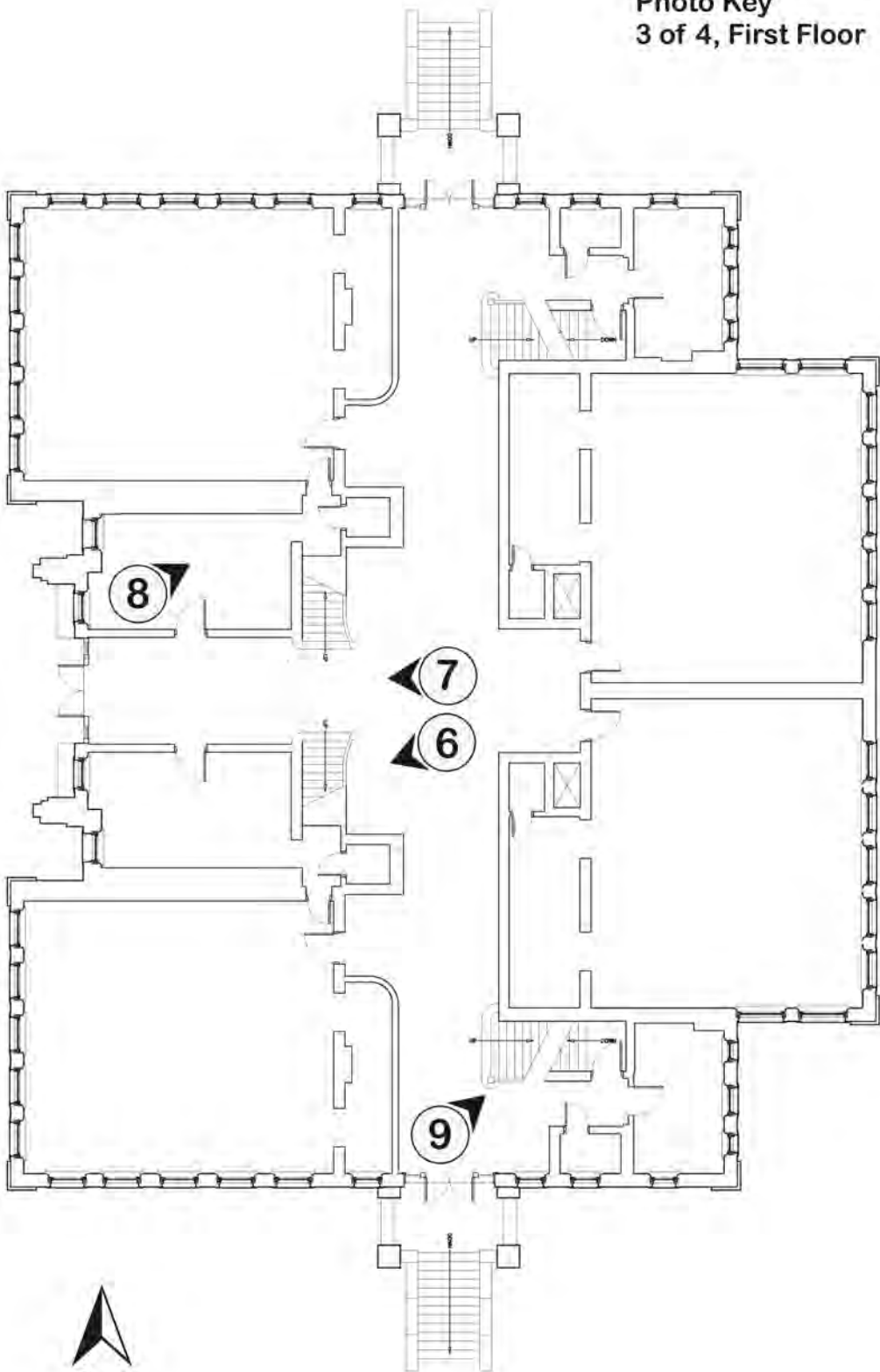
26241

VANNOSTRAND
 ARCHITECTS
 218 MAIN STREET, STE 4
 ELKINS, WV 26241
 PHONE: (304) 635-1111
 FAX: (304) 635-1112
 WWW: VANNOSTRAND.COM



AB.5

First Ward School
Randolph County, WV
Photo Key
3 of 4, First Floor



EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN



AS-BUILT DRAWING FOR
FIRST WARD SCHOOL
CORNER OF 13TH STREET & SOUTH DAVIS AVENUE
ELKINS, WEST VIRGINIA

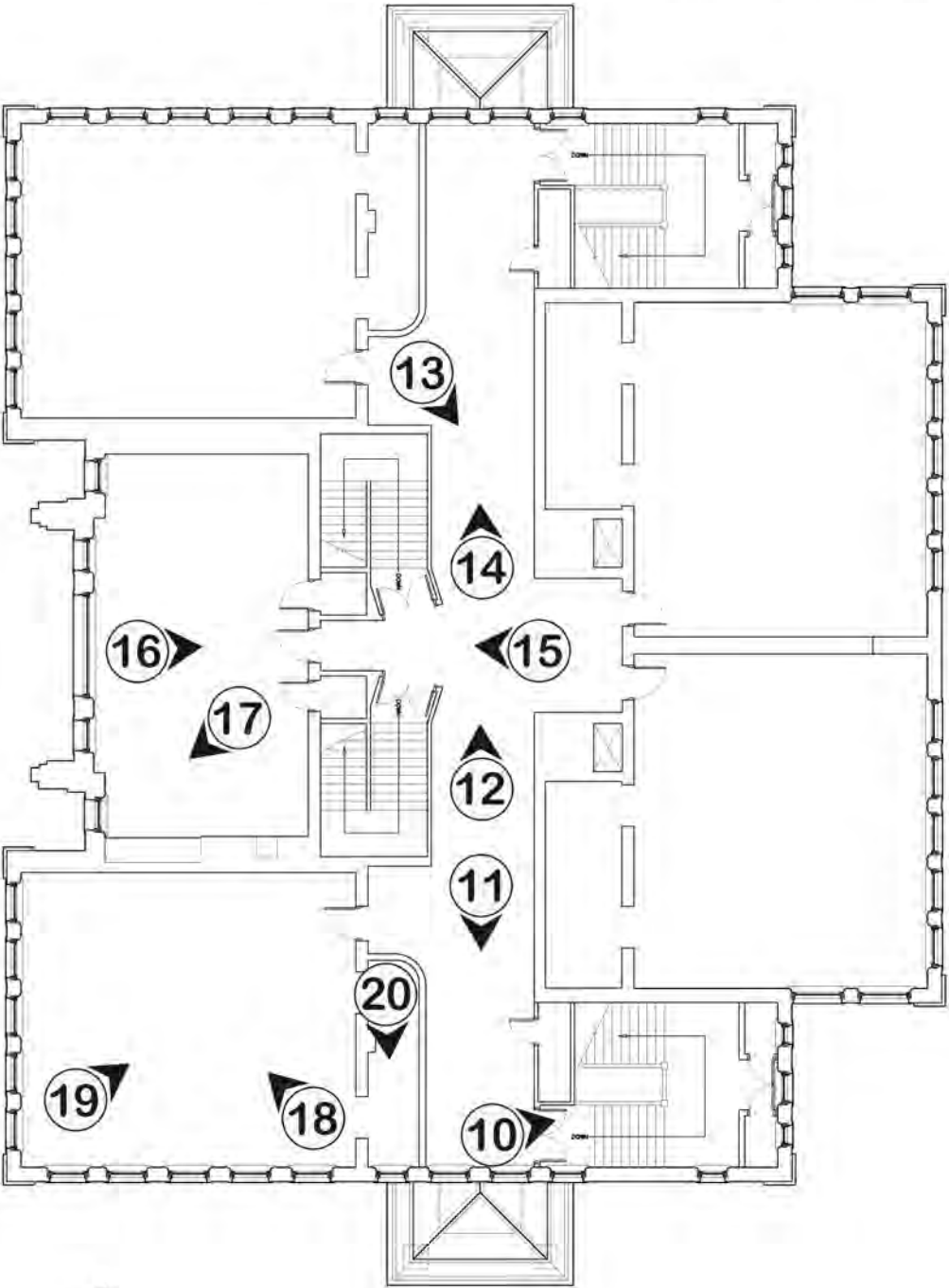
26241

AB.6

VANNOSTRAND
ARCHITECTS
218 MAIN STREET, STE 10
ELKINS, WV 26039
TEL: 336-2341
FAX: 336-2342
WWW.VANNOSTRAND.COM



First Ward School
 Randolph County, WV
 Photo Key
 4 of 4, Second Floor



EXISTING SECOND FLOOR PLAN



AS-BUILT DRAWING FOR
 FIRST WARD SCHOOL
 CORNER OF 13TH STREET & SOUTH DAVIS AVENUE
 ELKINS, WEST VIRGINIA

26241

VANNOSTRAND
 ARCHITECTS
 218 MAIN STREET, 3RD FLOOR
 ELKINS, WV 26241
 PHONE: (304) 635-1111
 FAX: (304) 635-1112
 WWW: VANNOSTRAND.COM



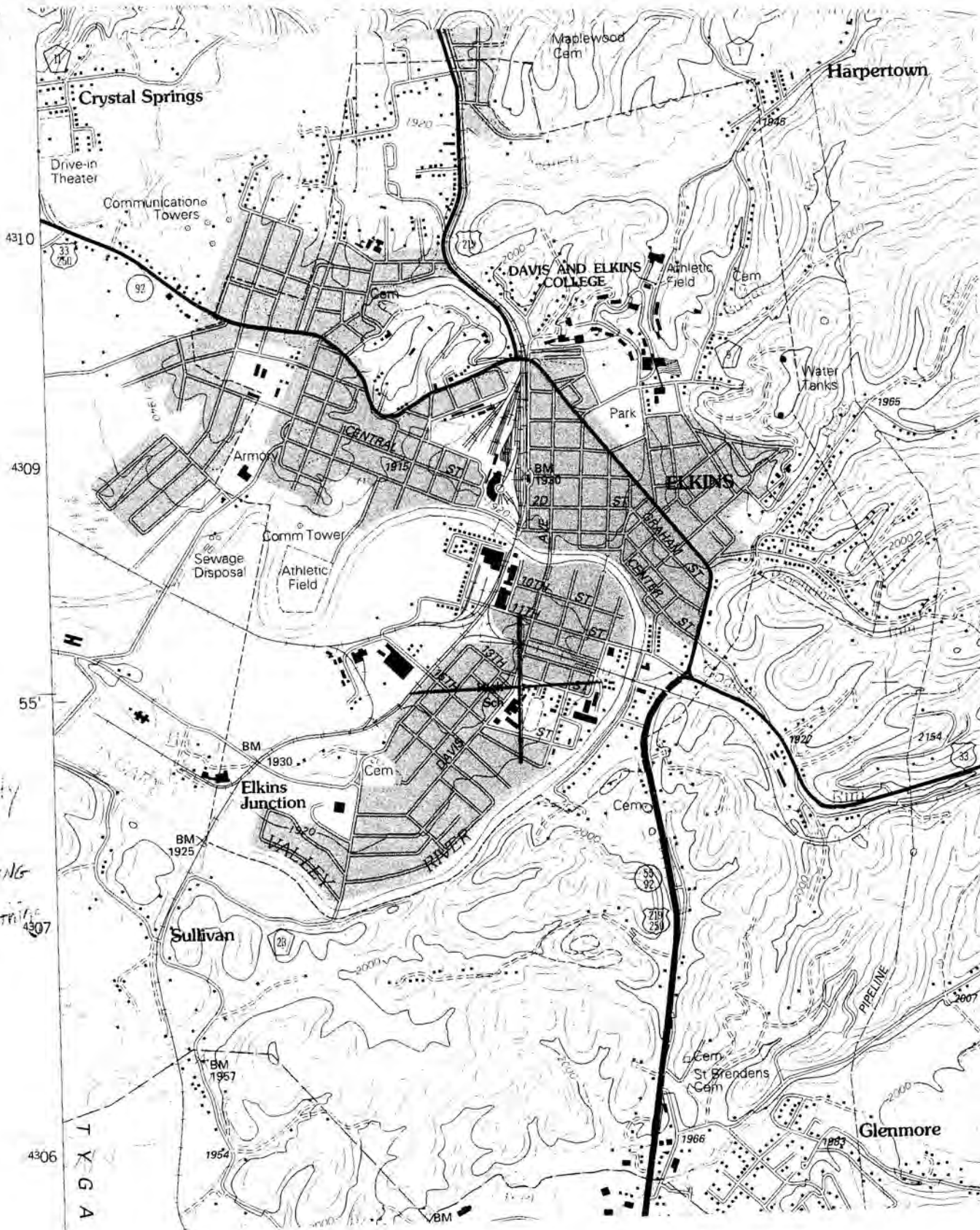
AB.7

FIRST WARD
SCHOOL

RANDOLPH COUNTY
WEST VIRGINIA

7/599573 EASTING

4308193 NORTHING



First Ward School
Randolph County, WV
Photo Key
1 of 4, Site Plan

13th STREET



1

S. DAVIS AVE.

2

OPEN AREA

SIDEWALK

GRAVEL PARKING

FIRST WARD SCHOOL

DRIVEWAY

DRIVEWAY

ALLEY

FIRE ESCAPE

4

3

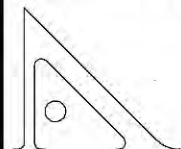
OPEN AREA

1.13 ACRES +/-

Proposed National Register Boundary

ELKINS HIGH SCHOOL

SITE FEATURES ARE APPROXIMATE



**VANNOSTRAND
ARCHITECTS**
79 E. MAIN STREET, STE. 4
P.O. BOX 572
BUCKHANNON, WV 26201
304-473-0555 (tel)
304-473-0751 (fax)

SITE PLAN
FIRST WARD SCHOOL
SOUTH DAVIS AVENUE
RANDOLPH COUNTY
ELKINS, WEST VIRGINIA

26241

job:	07010148
drawn:	DCS
checked:	BVN
date:	4-16-09
scale:	1"=50'-0"
sheet	A.1



THE WARD SCHOOL

GRAFFITI













SYLVANIA

SYLVANIA

PLEASE
DO NOT
SMOKE
Tobacco

ST
DOES
WHEELBAR











FIRE DOOR
KEEP CLOSED









FIRE DOOR
KEEP CLOSED

FIRE DOOR
KEEP CLOSED













1 ST WARD SCHOOL BUILDING, ELKINS, W. VA.



Domestic Science Kitchen, Elkins High School,
Elkins, W. Va.

