

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

LISTED ON:  
VLR 12/17/2009  
NRHP 08/12/2010

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Portsmouth Community Library

other names/site number Portsmouth Colored Community Library, VDHR # 124-5130

### 2. Location

street & number 904 Elm Avenue  not for publication

city or town Portsmouth  vicinity

state Virginia code VA county N/A code 740 zip code 23704

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination     request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     statewide X local

*[Signature]* 6/28/2010  
Signature of certifying official Date

Deputy Director for Policy and Planning      
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property     meets     does not meet the National Register criteria.

         
Signature of commenting official Date

         
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

         
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

### 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	Sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
0	0	buildings
0	0	<b>Total</b>

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

### 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/library

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

### 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

REVIVALS/Colonial Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: BRICK

walls: BRICK

roof: SLATE

other: CONCRETE

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

**Summary Paragraph**

The Portsmouth Community Library is a one-story building at 904 Elm Avenue, beside Neighborhood Facility. The library is on its property through a Memorandum of Understanding between the city and the African American Historical Society. It is about 900 square feet designed in the Colonial Revival style. It was originally built in 1945 at 804 South Street, just outside the Portsmouth Downtown Historic District line. It has been relocated twice. Its style, setting, location, materials, workmanship, feeling and association are appropriate.

## Narrative Description

### Setting

The Portsmouth Colored Library was originally built in 1945 at 804 South Street, just outside the Downtown Historic District line. It has been relocated twice since it was closed in the 1960s, both times to save it. The first move, finalized by 1967, was to the parking lot of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 730 Effingham Street. At that time Ebenezer saw its possibilities for extra meeting space at a time when the city was considering its demolition as an unnecessary facility. It was moved to Ebenezer's parking lot after the city was ordered to close it as the result of a federal lawsuit. The move was 0.40 mile away. Since August of 2007, it has been located at the present location, 904 Elm Avenue, or about 0.49 miles away. Its removal was necessary because the church no longer needed the extra meeting space and the African American Historical Society saw its possibilities as a black history museum for the city. In all three locations, the Community Library has been in predominantly African American urban settings. There have been very few changes in the building. These have included upkeep, lowering of the chimney to go through electric wires when it was moved to Elm Avenue, and the addition of a handicapped accessible ramp and foundation by city workers after removal to the current site to meet ADA requirements.

### Exterior

The main portion of the building is of brick construction in five-course American bond brick and commences at the soldier-course brick watertable. It has a hipped roof with slate shingles and a wood cornice. It has an ell situated on the west elevation with an intersecting gable roof. Windows are mainly 8/8 wood double-hung sash. The façade is three bays comprising a central entrance flanked by windows. The central entrance is accessed by a concrete stair clad in brick veneer with a double-turn handicapped ramp covering the north bay of the façade foundation. The entrance comprises a single-leaf wood six-panel door flanked by four-light and one-panel wood sidelights. A multiple light transom is on the door and sidelights. The door, sidelights, and transom are framed in Classical pilasters supporting a wood cornice that terminates at the roof cornice. The window openings flanking the entrance are evenly spaced and comprise 8/8 wood double-hung sash windows surmounting a wood panel. The windows and panels are framed with Classical pilasters like those found on the main entrance. The window openings have rowlock brick course sills that break the watertable. The north and south elevations have two evenly spaced windows of smaller 8/8 wood double-hung sash windows with rowlock brick course sills. The ell on the west elevations continues the general massing and materials of the main building. It has 4/4 and 6/6 wood double-hung sash windows with rowlock brick sills. The watertable continues on the ell, as does the roof cornice. The gable roof has cornice returns and a louvered vent in the gable.

When the city moved the building, it had to lower the chimney so that it could go through electric and phone wires. Jeff Morgan, the contractor, replaced it according to a picture provided him by the city. He was also in charge of adding the ramp, the stoop and a new foundation with new CMU brick underneath. He matched the existing brick, which had all been painted. He had been called in earlier to repair the left hand corner, which had been damaged.

### Interior

The library's interior has a shallow vestibule and open space as the main reading room. The vestibule accesses a two-panel and nine-light wood single-leaf door with three-light and one-panel sidelights. The main reading room entrance from the vestibule is framed in wood. The reading room has an E-shaped plan within the rectangular block of the building divided with built-in wood bookshelves. Bookshelves line the walls within the reading room around window openings that have plain Colonial Revival frames. The walls above the bookshelves are clad in wallboard. The ceiling has acoustical panels applied over the wallboard ceiling. The flooring in the reading room comprises vinyl tile applied over the original flooring. Opposite the main entrance is a doorway leading to the ell. The ell comprises utility space for a furnace and two lavatories. There is a water fountain between the entrances to the lavatories, which are small. Each contains a toilet. A sink is mounted to the wall west of the west lavatory entrance. The doorframes are similar to the Colonial Revival frames found in the main reading room. Within the ell the baseboard is visible. Light fixtures found within the building have a pendant form applied to the ceiling.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Black

SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

1945 to 1962

**Significant Dates**

1945, 1962

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Van Leeuwen, George (architect)

Lucas, E.W. (builder)

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance, from 1945-1962, encompasses the time that the property served as the first freestanding library facility for Portsmouth's African American citizens.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

**Criterion Consideration B.** The building has been moved twice. In 1959, two local dentists, Dr. James Holley and Dr. Hugo A. Owens, successfully sued the City of Portsmouth and the Portsmouth Public Library to integrate the public library. This resulted in the closure of the Portsmouth Community Library. Now vacant, the city had intended to demolish it, but an African American church, Ebenezer Baptist, requested it for their church's use, and the building was moved from 804 South Street to 730 Effingham Street. The building was moved again in 2007 when the church no longer needed it and the African American Historical Society saw its possibilities as a museum. At its original location, the building was

set back approximately 10 feet from the road, on a small level manicured lawn with small shrubs along the foundation, sidewalk, and property line. It was separated from neighboring buildings by only a few feet. At the Effingham Street location it was sited in a parking lot. Its current location approximates the original setback from the road and level lot setting, although the distance to adjacent buildings is greater. It was moved in one piece both times, although during its second move portions of the chimney had to be removed to accommodate overhead utility lines. Despite these two moves, the lone facility constructed to serve as a library specifically for African Americans in Portsmouth, retains its significance as evidence of drive and determination, in a time of systematic and widespread denial of such social and academic facilities for African Americans throughout Virginia.

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The Portsmouth Community Library was built in 1945 to provide for the reading needs of Portsmouth's African Americans. No public library services had been set aside for them when the city founded its library system in 1914. However, African Americans made up about half of the city's population. The Portsmouth Community Library was the first freestanding building in Portsmouth to provide library services for African Americans, using African American staff. Despite the building's small size and shortage of resources, it was significant as a center for the black community and as a source of pride because, according to a quote at the time that the deed was given for the land, only about 10 percent of the nation's population had such access. The students of I. C. Norcom High School, near the library's original location, used it frequently because their school lacked a library. In the approximately 900 square feet, students could enrich their knowledge of the world under the guidance of African American staff. It was a place where children learned to appreciate books and learning. It was space for adults to gather and gain access to books. It worked within the doctrine of racial segregation but worked against it by providing information to African Americans. In the late 1950s, the Portsmouth Community Library became the centerpiece of a federal civil rights lawsuit, which resulted in the provision of better library service for all residents. Since its construction, it has been an icon of equal rights for all. The Portsmouth Community Library is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at a local level of significance under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage (Black) and Social History, with a period of significance of 1945 to 1962, and with Criterion Consideration B for being moved from its original location.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

The Portsmouth Community Library was a center for the African American population of Portsmouth. It served the library needs of the African American population of Portsmouth during the South's final years of segregation. Many young people were introduced to the appreciation of reading and to the love of libraries at the site. Unlike the churches, it was nondenominational and open to all. This was the place in which Mrs. Bertha W. Edwards, the librarian, engaged the students' love of reading. Although the building has been moved twice through no fault of its keepers and has also been used for general space at its second site, it is still essentially the same physical building as when it was the library. There have been very few changes. Although for many it recalls a difficult time better forgotten, for others it brings up a feeling of satisfaction for having raised the money and provided the land. It also brings back their youth and the process of having use of a public library when there were very few others available for African Americans.

The building is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A because it represented a time when many regular resources were not available to African Americans because of segregation. In the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that facilities for African Americans had to be separate but equal. However, in reality usually separation did not equate to equality. By the 1960s African American professional people, students, and residents were becoming unsatisfied with the status quo with which they were faced.

### **Historical Background**

There was a time in America when the doors of knowledge, culture, self-improvement, and universal education were closed to "people of color."<sup>1</sup> However, African Americans struggled for those doors to be open. The Portsmouth Community Library is part of that effort.

**Libraries, Schools, and Churches for the Black Community.** Prior to the 1930s, the city of Portsmouth did not provide library services to African Americans. This was not unusual in Virginia. Books or libraries for "people of color" were located in the private collections of professional African Americans—educators, doctors, lawyers, preachers, musicians, fraternal organizations, women's groups and lodges. The first public library for African Americans in the state of Virginia

did not open until 1921 in Norfolk. Until the opening of Norfolk's Blyden Branch, "The Negro population of Virginia was approximately, 700,000, and there was 'not' a single library in the state that provided service to Negroes."<sup>2</sup>

To understand the evolution of library services for African Americans and library services in Portsmouth, it is necessary to examine the history of the drive of former slaves to become literate, to read and write, and the struggle to get an education. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, there was a drive for the "education of the Negro."<sup>3</sup> Although the Underwood Constitution of 1869 established mandatory state-sponsored public schools in Virginia, and William Henry Ruffner, the first superintendent of public instruction established Virginia's system of separate schools for white and black children, public schools for whites had been established in Portsmouth in 1848. Public schools for African Americans in the city of Portsmouth did not open until about 1871, however, some 23 years after public schools opened for whites, and were not equal in the quality of education. White teachers were paid higher salaries and the funds for African American schools and the per capita amount for student funding (supplies and equipment, etc.) were not equal to the funding appropriated for white schools. Additional elements that caused African American educational opportunities to be inferior to that offered white children included larger class size and poorly constructed school buildings, many of which were rented store fronts and poorly heated buildings. Despite the disparity, African Americans had a spirit of resilience to "make good" with what they had. They had a burning desire to speak up for better schools and higher salaries for teachers, and their drive to become a more literate population was clear. In Portsmouth, both black and white teachers were employed to teach in the schools. Several schools in Portsmouth did not have a gymnasium, an auditorium, cafeteria or a library. "In 1885, the third district school, lead by the able and noble educator, Israel Charles Norcom, who served as principal and teacher had grades which covered grammar and intermediate levels."<sup>4</sup> That school, Chestnut Street School did not have an auditorium or a library. Graduation was held for the students at the surrounding churches: Emanuel AME, Ebenezer Baptist Church, or Zion Baptist Church.

In the South, legal segregation was widespread, "there was not a public library in the state which provided services to Negroes."<sup>5</sup> During this time period the United States Supreme Court decision Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) was handed down. Although the Plessy v. Ferguson specifically addressed segregated seating in railroad cars going in and through Louisiana, the decision set a precedent that segregation was constitutional as long as equal facilities were provided for all people involved. This decision influenced public library service throughout the South in its mandate of "separate but equal" (Dumont, 1986; Malone, 1995).

A timeline of library development for African Americans reveals that services were established earlier in other states before they were opened in Virginia. In 1903, the Cossitt Library was constructed in Memphis, Tennessee. A one-room annex was added to the rear of the Eighth Street Colored School in Henderson, Kentucky, in 1904 to serve as a library. Central High School was opened in 1905 in Galveston, Texas, to serve as a school and public library for African Americans. In 1910, James Gregory of Marblehead, Massachusetts, funded a traveling library for southern African-Americans.<sup>7</sup>

**Early Library Development in Portsmouth.** In 1914, In Portsmouth, Virginia, the Portsmouth Students Club opened a small library whereby the librarian was contracted by the city and served the city's public library. Due to segregation, it served only the white population. The first librarian for that library was Miss Esther Wilson who received \$25.00 a month in salary.

The idea of a public library for the African American citizens of Portsmouth had its origins at a meeting of the Mission Study Group at Monumental M.E. Church on February 23, 1927. That was when Rev. M. B. Birchette, the rector of St. James P. E. Church, spoke to the group about the need for a library for African Americans. Rev. Birchette had often stated that he wanted to read Babbitt, written by Sinclair Lewis. It was this [message] by Rev. Birchette that he shared with the Mission Study Group that he had ventured into the city library to borrow that book and was told that "Negroes could not borrow books from that library."<sup>8</sup> This revelation was a surprise to him as well as many of the leading white citizens present at a later meeting to discuss a library for African Americans. An investigative committee was formed of the missionary organizations, the city manager, and various civic groups. The investigation revealed that the city library was indeed a private institution supported by gifts from the public. Thus, a movement to establish a library for African Americans began."<sup>9</sup>

It was about 10 years before the dream became a reality. The coming of the Great Depression would have slowed down the process. But Rev. Birchette appointed a committee from church members to raise money and public awareness and to collect reading materials. Rev. Birchette had a library committee composed of Mrs. Lillian Jones, Mrs. Cornelia Reid, Mrs. Corine Gregory, Mrs. Julia Willis, Mrs. Willie Mae Sanford, Mr. Moses Gibson, Sr., Mrs. Margaret Stewart, Mrs. Mary Johnson, Rev. W. H. Willis. Rev. Washington, and Rev. M. B. Birchette. Rev. Birchette was elected president; Mrs. Jones, secretary; and Rev. W. H. Willis, treasurer.

The next meeting with the white community was at the office of the Welfare Department, with Mr. M. O. Williams presiding. At this meeting, it was discovered that funding was available for a library through the New York Administration (NYA) and the WPA. Initially, a temporary space was secured and books were donated for the proposed library. Mrs. Kitty Leary, a former librarian from Richmond, VA, trained the workers who were to take care of the proposed library.

In 1937 the Portsmouth Community (Colored) Library was opened on February 23 in the Parish House of the St. James Episcopal Church. On October 26, it had its formal opening ceremony. The following persons were listed on the program: "Mr. Bernard Flayson, district representative of the NYA, Dr. L. H. Denny, Public Welfare Director represented the City Manager, Mr. M. O. Williams, Welfare Dept., Mrs. S. C. Blaycock, local WPA Educational Director, Rev. Eosoe Johnson, Pastor of Cottage Place M. E. Church, Rev. C. C. Sommerville, Rev. Birchette, Mrs. Margret Stewart, Misses Ruth Alexander, Florence Mabry, and Mrs. Willie M. Sanford."<sup>10</sup>

"The Portsmouth Community Library, the city's first Colored Library, opened with impressive ceremonies on the first day of service. The first patron was the Rev. M. B. Birchette. Rev. Birchette was largely responsible for its establishment."<sup>11</sup> Library services in the new library for African Americans flourished and were touted in a local weekly newspaper, The Journal and Guide. The "Guide," a weekly newspaper serving the African American community, reported about the library activities to the community. The report in the newspaper "gave the daily patron usage and the time that patrons spent in the library reading books and magazines. In addition to the nearly 300 patrons signed up since opening day, the library circulation report showed that 730 fiction and 40 non-fiction books were borrowed and 1,911 books had been donated."<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the numerous books checked out by the patrons, it is interesting to note the variety of donations which also included numerous magazines by the citizens of the city. Some of the memorable donations included: "Mr. Blaycock donated four files for cards; flowers were donated by Mrs. Annie Smith, Albert Holiday donated a mat to go under the stove, and the Watts Brothers donated a load of wood."<sup>13</sup>

A more noteworthy donation came from Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In a "thank you" letter dated, June 2, 1938 written (typed on a typewriter) by Mrs. Willie Mae Sanford, she said: "It is with deep appreciation and gratitude that we send to you this note of thanks for this absorbing book, with such powerful characterization: Pick of the Crop by Doris Mae Murray, which you were so gracious and kind to send to our library. Although our library is in its infancy, we are striving to have on our shelves material that will be uplifting and elevating and such a book as this will play a big part in helping us to bring it up to the desired standard."<sup>14</sup>

From 1937 until 1941 library services were available for the black people of Portsmouth at the Parish House on the second floor of the St. James P.E. Church. The Portsmouth Community Library survived four years in St. James' Parish House before funding was cut. The first Portsmouth Community Library closed in 1941.

The idea of a library continued to be of interest to the citizens of the African American Community, and though Rev. Birchette was not around to continue the mission, another man stepped in his shoes to chair the library committee to carry the idea forward to build another library for African Americans. The person who stepped up and took action to reorganize the library committee was Rev. W. H. Willis, who had served on the committee as the treasurer. He was the principal of the Brighton/Truxtun School. Rev. Willis rallied the library committee together and this committee went to City Council to ask for funding for another public library for African Americans. The City Council agreed to fund a new library building if the land were purchased by the citizens. The library committee started an impressive campaign to raise funds to purchase the land for the new library. The local newspaper, The Portsmouth Star, with articles written in the column called "Colored Notes" by Lee F. Rodgers, had numerous articles about the plight of the committee in raising funds to buy the land for a new public library.

**The Portsmouth Community Library as a Freestanding Building.** In 1944, a group of citizens met with the city council to request the construction of a freestanding public library for African Americans. The city agreed to pay for maintenance if the citizens would provide a building site and pay for construction. A fundraising campaign in 1944 and 1945 enabled African Americans to secure two lots at 804 South Street and pay for construction of a modest facility. As the campaign to raise funds for the land went forward, City Council selected the architect to draw plans for the library. The architect selected was Mr. George Van Leeuwen, of the Norfolk, Virginia, firm Rudolph, Cooke, and Van Leeuwen, Inc.,<sup>15</sup> who submitted a bid of \$9,387.71 to do the diagram for the library. Mr. Van Leeuwen submitted the following plans: "the building will be brick-finish; it will have spacious windows with draft; ventilation, double door with a vestibule and storm door, with approximately 900 sq. ft in the library"<sup>16</sup>.

The builder that won the bid to build the library was E. W. Lucas. Mr. Lucas had responded to the announcement by Council. "Bids were opened for the construction of a Colored Library near the corner of South and Effingham Streets on the northwest side..."<sup>17</sup>

The announcement of the construction and presentation of the deed for the library property to the city was made in 1944 at Zion Baptist Church. The search for two available lots in the downtown section area was suggested by Dr. John Jackson who suggested that the two lots on South Street near Effingham were available for \$1800.00. "The Library Association began a 30-day campaign to collect \$1.00 from as many citizens as possible for the purpose of buying the lots. A membership card was issued to everyone who made a contribution."<sup>18</sup>

The Portsmouth Community Library, located at 804 South Street was formally opened and dedicated as the public library for all African Americans in the city of Portsmouth on December 20, 1945, with an impressive program at the Fourth Baptist Church. Following the church program, the dedication and reception took place in the library building. "The library building, a brick structure was erected by the city on land which was acquired by the Library Association through public solicitation."<sup>19</sup>

The building was considerably smaller and had insufficient reading materials as compared to that provided for whites. However, African Americans could gain access to materials not available at the Portsmouth Community Library by requesting them by interlibrary loan from or through the white library. At that time, the white facility was located in the Museum and Fine Arts Administration Building on High Street. Part of it may have been demolished over time but the space provided for the white library was still larger than the Portsmouth Community Library.

Mrs. Bertha Winborne Edwards, a graduate of Hampton Institute in 1942, was selected as the librarian for the Portsmouth Community Library. She had majored in library science and social studies at Hampton Institute. The library thrived steadily under the leadership of Mrs. Edwards who had an assistant, Mrs. Faulks. The library was totally supported by many clubs, sororities, the Eureka Club, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, the Links, Inc., and area churches that made donations of books, gift magazine subscriptions, and other services to support the library. In addition to the library services, there were other extended services to the community, which included various community programs, workshops and meetings. The Portsmouth Community Library also served as the only library for many of the students at the I.C. Norcom High School located very near the "Colored Library." Thomas C.C. Burrell, now of Eldridge, Iowa, a 1964 graduate of I. C. Norcom High School states: "As a child who lived in the Newtown section of Portsmouth from 1946 to 1964, I can think of no other institution that has had as significant impact on me and my friends as the Colored Community Library. It was there that I learned many lessons. First, I learned how to borrow a book and how to take care of it. I also learned how to be kind to others, and how to ask for help. Someone was there to help you."<sup>20</sup>

During the years of 1945-1962, many library programs were held, new books listed, contests held, magazines and other library services about the Portsmouth Colored Community Library were published frequently in the local newspapers, the Portsmouth Star and in the Journal and Guide.

**The Civil Rights Era and Beyond.** The city was planning to move then white-only library services in 1959 to its present location, a large former post office on Court Street. Its size dwarfed both former libraries put together. In 1959, two local dentists, Dr. James Holley III, currently the Mayor of Portsmouth, and the late Dr. Hugo A. Owens filed a lawsuit against the city to gain access for African Americans to the public library. U.S. District Court Judge Walter Hoffman ruled on December 20, 1960 that the library must allow access to everyone or close down, "lock, stock, and barrel."<sup>21</sup> In 1962, the Portsmouth Colored Community Library's collection was integrated into the city's public library system.

After the library services merged, the city planned to demolish the building, but Ebenezer Baptist Church requested the relocation of the building to their parking lot in an effort to preserve it and to use it for additional space. It was subsequently moved to their lot and was used for several years for the Scouts, a clothes bank, and general meeting space.

Camille Bowman (DHR) in her remarks to the Portsmouth City Council on January 9, 2009 stated, "The Portsmouth Community Library, formerly known as the Portsmouth Colored Library, stands today as physical evidence of segregation in Portsmouth, in Virginia, and in our nation." ...and though Civil Rights history is not a pleasant history to remember, it behooves each of us to remember that history, to retain its physical reminders for our children, and to take care of those reminders – maintain them—so that history can be experienced."<sup>22</sup>



Portsmouth Community Library  
Name of Property

City of Portsmouth, Virginia  
County and State

**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

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**Endnotes:**

1. Meyzeek, A. E. "A Separate flame." <http://lfp.org/western/htms/sepflame.htm>.
2. "History of the Blyden Branch Library." Norfolk Public Library website [http://npl.lib.va.us/branches/blyden/blyden\\_history.html](http://npl.lib.va.us/branches/blyden/blyden_history.html).
3. Jones, Rienette F. "The Early kinship: Kentucky Negro Public Education, libraries and librarians." <http://www.uky.edu/subject/earlyken.html>.
4. Smith, Charles Henry Edward Sr. An Historical Look at the Roots of Black Education in Portsmouth: The History of the Education of Blacks in the Portsmouth City Public Schools, 1871-1933: A Case Study. Portsmouth, VA: n. d.
5. "History of Blyden Branch Library. Op.cit.
6. Jones, Reinette. Op.cit.
7. "Timeline in Library Development for African Americans." <http://ala.org/ala/online/resources/selectedarticles/afraamtimeline>.
8. Sanford, Willie Mae. "History of the Portsmouth Community Library." Speech given by W. M. Sanford at Zion Baptist Church on the night when Deed to Library property was turned over to the city, etc. 1944.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. "A new library was formally opened." Journal and Guide. (6 November 1937).
12. "Growth of Community Library is Reflected in Complete Report." Journal and Guide. (13 December 1937).
14. Sanford, Willie Mae. "Letter to Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt." A thank-you letter written to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt thanking her for the donation of a book to the library. (June 2, 1938). Letter is on file in records of the AAHSP, Inc.
15. Wells, John E. and Robert E. Dalton. The Virginia Architects 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary. New South Architectural Press, Richmond. 1997. p. 455.
16. Portsmouth City Council Minutes. "Portsmouth Community Library." (November 8, 1944).
17. City Council, Op. cit. "Portsmouth Community Library. (November 28, 1944).
18. Edwards, Bertha Winborne. A History of the Portsmouth Community Library: 1945-1963. Portsmouth, VA.: 1979.
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20. Burrell, Thomas C. Email message sent to Mae Breckenridge-Haywood." April, 2006.
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22. Bowman, Camille. "Remarks to Portsmouth City Council" Portsmouth, VA.: (January 9, 2008).

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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

### Major Bibliographical References

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other—

Virginia Department of Historic Resources,

Name of repository: Richmond, VA

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**10. Geographical Data** Norfolk South (USGS Quad)

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**Acreage of Property** <1  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

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

1	<u>18</u> Zone	<u>382800</u> Easting	<u>4076860</u> Northing	3	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing
2	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing	4	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property)

This Portsmouth Community library has a street address of 904 Elm Avenue, and its boundaries correspond to City of Portsmouth tax parcel 2. This is property owned by the City of Portsmouth and is known as the Olivia S. Cooke Estate. The property is rectangular, and runs from the northeast corner 72.5 feet south along Elm Avenue, then runs 125.50 feet west, then 72.5 feet north, then 125.5 feet east to the beginning.

**Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)**

The boundaries run with the parcel lot lines. The parcel size was determined by a resolution of the Portsmouth City Council and staked out by a surveyor on May 3, 2010.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Kimble David, Mae Breckenridge-Haywood, Margaret Windley  
organization Portsmouth Community Library date September 25, 2009  
street & number 904 Elm Avenue telephone c/o 757-487-9431  
city or town Portsmouth state VA zip code 23704  
e-mail \_maehaywood@msn.com, mnw777@verizon.net

Address all mail to

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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**Photographs:**

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Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

The information below is the same for photographs 0001 through 0008

Property: Portsmouth Community Library  
Location: 904 Elm Avenue, Portsmouth, Virginia  
Photographer: Kimble A. David, Architectural Historian  
Date Photographed: November 27, 2007  
Photograph File: Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
2801 Kensington avenue  
Richmond, Virginia

Photograph Number:

0001 Ell-Opposite Main entrance comprising utility space and two lavatories (VA\_Portsmouth\_Portsmouth Community LibraryDSC0124.tif)

0002 Back right side of main reading room (VA\_Portsmouth\_Portsmouth Community LibraryDSC0126.tif)

0003 Front vestibule (VA\_Portsmouth\_Portsmouth Community LibraryDSC0130.tif)

0004 Front left side main reading room (VA\_Portsmouth\_Portsmouth Community LibraryDCS0131.tif)

0005 Back left side Main Reading Room (VA\_Portsmouth\_Portsmouth Community Library DSC0132.tif)

0006 Front exterior of library (VA\_Portsmouth\_Portsmouth Community Library DSC0139.tif)

0007 Exterior. Back of building (Va\_Portsmouth\_Portsmouth Community LibraryDSC141.tif)

0008 Front stoop and handicapped access ramp (VA\_Portsmouth\_Portsmouth Community LibraryDSC0142.tif)

For photo 0009, this is the identification information:

0009

Property: Portsmouth Community Library  
Location: 904 Elm Avenue, Portsmouth, Virginia  
Photographer: Mae Breckenridge-Haywood, Retired Librarian  
Date Photographed: November 27, 2007  
Front Exterior of building (VA\_Portsmouth\_Portsmouth Community LibraryDSC01175.tif)

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Portsmouth  
Community  
Library  
City of  
Portsmouth  
VDHA #124-5130  
UTM Zone 18  
Northing  
4076860  
Easting  
382800  
Norfolk  
South  
quadrangle  
NAD 83

