

Building History of Hume School

By Andrew Marshall

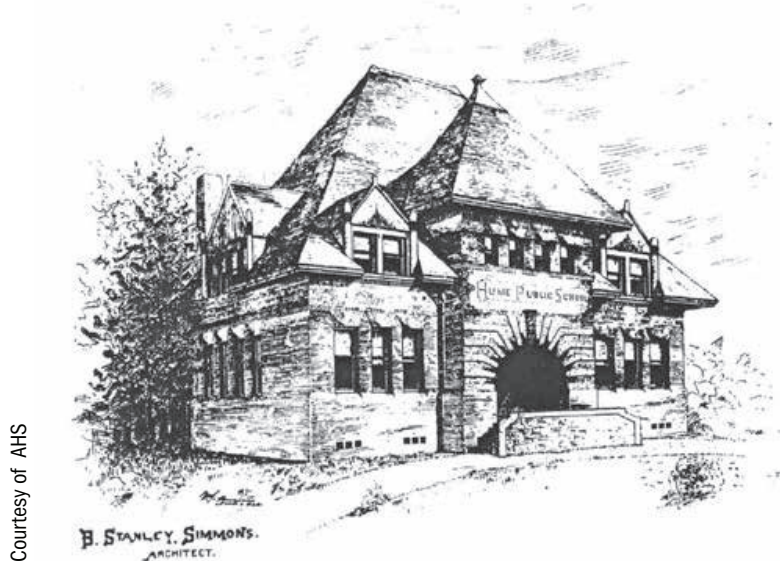


Fig. 1: Preliminary design sketch of Hume School.

In 2020, the AHS funded a condition assessment and feasibility study of the Arlington Historical Museum, where it maintains its exhibits and artifacts. The structure, a charming red-brick schoolhouse built in 1891, is increasingly showing its age. John Milner Associates Preservation, a part of MTF Architecture, an Arlington based firm, conducted the study of the building, and provided recommendations for its preservation and renovation. They suggested waterproofing the edifice, restoring the windows, and upgrading the interior and its systems, including increasing exhibit space and accessibility. In the coming year, the Historical Society will be raising funds to begin the renovation process.

As part of their study of the Arlington Historical Museum, Andrew Marshall, Preservation Architect with John Milner Associates Preservation, wrote a wonderful history of the Hume School building which is excerpted as follows.

Hume School was constructed for \$4,500 in 1891 by the Alexandria County School Board.¹ The building was part of an “ambitious school construction program” by the school board that produced several new school buildings and led to financial difficulties for the county.² The subsequent funding challenges left some of the new schools unfinished for years after their initial construction effort. It is likely Hume School experienced these difficulties as well.

The school was named for Frank Hume, a prominent and “public-spirited” Arlington resident who served in the Confederate Army and later amassed a fortune as a merchant and businessman.³ Hume lived at the nearby Warwick estate and four of his six children attended the school. In concert with the construction of the school, Hume donated the adjoining lots to the south and east of the school for use as a playground for the students.⁴

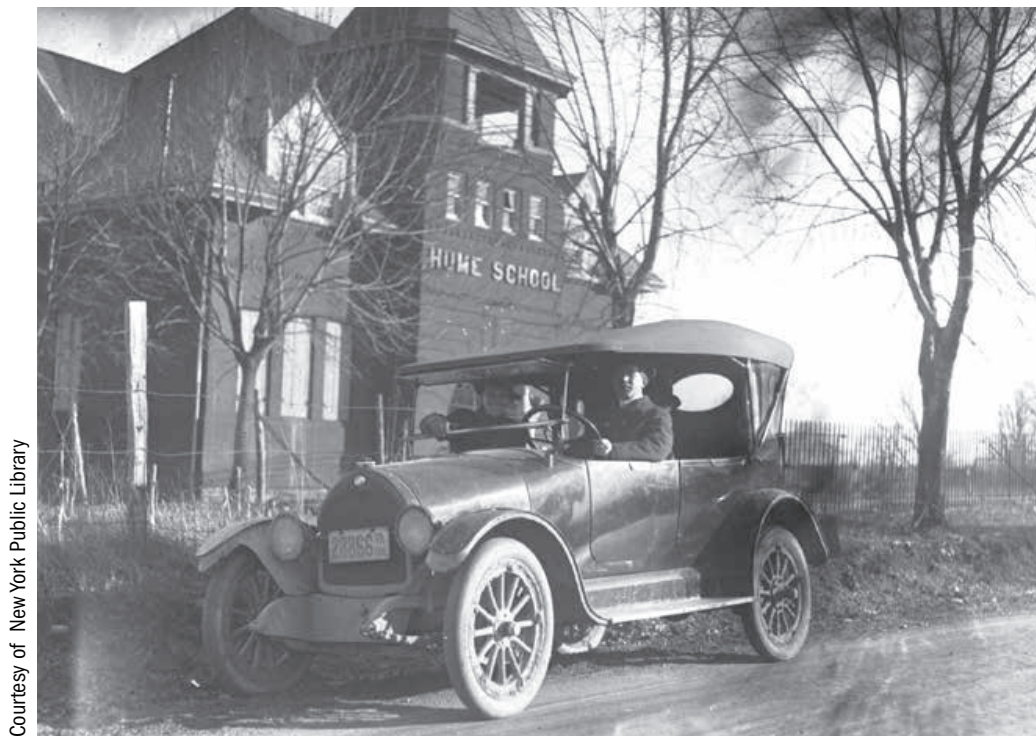
The “handsome” building was declared to be “thoroughly modern in design.”⁵ Hume School was one of the first professional commissions for Washington-based architect B. Stanley Simmons (1872–1931). He was only nineteen years of age at its construction in 1891, an astonishing opportunity for a young designer. Four years later, Simmons graduated from the Boston Institute of Technology (now known as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology). For most of his career, Simmons led his own practice as a sole principal. During a four-decade career, his firm executed numerous high-profile commissions for banks, hotels, and commercial buildings, among other types in Washington, DC, and across the region. Simmons’s architectural designs were executed in a range of styles including Beaux Arts, Georgian Revival, and Gothic Revival. Several prominent designs by Simmons remain in Washington, DC, including the 1907 National Metropolitan Bank building at 613 15th Street, NW; the 1921 Fairfax Hotel at 2100 Massachusetts Avenue, NW; and the 1925 Jewish Community Center at 1529 16th Street, NW.⁶

Simmons’s design for Hume School is an exuberant masonry structure with Queen Anne and Richardsonian Romanesque stylistic influences. A preliminary design rendering by Simmons demonstrates the presence of these influences as central to the design; however, several features, such as the tower and the front entrance, were not refined until later in the design process (Fig. 1). The central bell tower on the west elevation is topped with a steeply sloping roof which is

punctuated by a copper cupola and weathervane. The building's tall roofs increase the presence of the otherwise rather small structure. Ornamented wall dormers punctuate the roof cornice on each facade. The deep-red-colored face brick on the west facade is laid in several decorative patterns and employs molded units in ornamental bands above its semi-circular arched entrance. For much of the building's history, "HUME SCHOOL" was emblazoned in large block letters on the west facade above the front entrance (Fig. 2 and 3).⁷

The original plan of the Hume School building consisted of two classrooms and an office on the first floor and a public hall on the second floor. A 1907 photograph and mid-twentieth century Sanborn maps show a small one-story rear addition constructed of brick masonry that likely served as an enclosed vestibule centered on the rear door.⁸ The two first-floor classrooms were divided into first, second, and third grades and fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The second-floor hall was used for public events and school gatherings with a seating capacity of "about two hundred."⁹ The hall was intended to be versatile to allow for division into two classrooms as needed to accommodate a larger student body. It

Fig. 2: View of Hume School, 1918.



Courtesy of New York Public Library



Courtesy of AHS

Fig. 3: View of Hume School, 1920.

is likely that the space also held an organ.¹⁰ In its early years, the school did not have running water, and a ground pump located adjacent to the front door was used.¹¹

Additional work on the building was performed to achieve its “completion” in 1905.¹² The Ballston School, executed in a nearly identical design, underwent a significant renovation at the same time to partially excavate its basement and installation of a coal chute, likely in preparation of a new furnace located in the basement (Fig. 4).¹³ It is expected that the Hume School’s “completion” included a similar alteration. In the late 1920s or 1930s, the exterior of the building was painted a light color, likely an off-white or light yellow, probably as a result of moisture issues in the exterior masonry walls (Fig. 5). In 1948, safety concerns prompted the construction of a rear fire escape for the second floor.¹⁴

By the midcentury, the reputation of the Hume School had soured. Overcrowding of students and deterioration of the building had produced undesirable educational conditions and safety concerns. A

letter to the editor in the *Arlington Sun* from a local parent declared “both the parents and taxpayers of this community want Hume School replaced now, without further delay and undue waste of public money.”¹⁵ At the time, 110 students, most suffering from learning disabilities, were taught in six classes across the school’s two floors. Fire safety concerns soon led to the abandonment of the second floor for educational purposes, reducing the number of pupils to 60.¹⁶ By 1949, county officials began pursuing a replacement school and soon thereafter commissioned an architect to design “the new Hume school.”¹⁷ In 1950, Arlington County constructed a twelve-room replacement building named Oakridge School. The building was designed by local architects Dickey and Graham and cost of \$346,700 to construct.

The outmoded Hume School was closed in



Courtesy of AHS

Fig. 4: Undated view of Ballston School, which was executed with a nearly identical design to Hume School.



Courtesy of AHS

Fig. 5: Hume School with painted exterior, ca 1960.

1956. The local community pondered what to do with the vacant building. Margaret Cooke Birge, granddaughter of Frank Hume, proposed that the building be repurposed for use as a local history museum by the newly formed Arlington Historical Society.¹⁸ This proposal adhered to the deed restrictions imposed by Frank Hume on the surrounding site requiring its use for educational purposes.¹⁹

The plan to save the school building proved successful. The Arlington County School Board sold the building and property to the County Board of Supervisors who, in turn, donated them to the Arlington Historical Society for its use as a local history museum in the fall of 1960. A lack of investment had caused the building to become a “discouraging sight.” The Historical Society’s fundraising drive helped to procure the \$45,000 needed for the full renovation.²⁰ The renovation project, which began in September 1962 and was completed by May 1963, proved to be the most significant alteration in the history of the building.

The renovation overhauled the interior of the building and heavily changed the exterior. The paint was removed from the exterior masonry by sandblasting and the small rear addition was removed.²¹ It is assumed that the slate roof was replaced with asphalt shingles as a part of the 1963 renovation as well. The interior changes were significant. The basement was further excavated for additional exhibition space and restrooms. The first floor was opened up to create a single museum space and a new stair and restroom were inserted in the west side of the building. The second floor was impacted by the new stair and was divided with removable partitions. A classroom modeled on the original interior of the school was placed into the space within the tower on the second floor. New finishes were installed across much of the interior for floors, walls, and ceilings.

In the intervening years, there have been many maintenance and improvement efforts completed by the Arlington Historical Society. These various efforts are listed in the building chronology. With only limited exceptions, the school building continues to reflect the 1963 renovation.

The Hume School was added to the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register in 1979 (Fig. 6). A year earlier, Arlington County listed the site as a local historic district. Hume School is notable locally as the oldest school building in Arlington



Fig. 6: 1979 photograph of Hume School.

County and statewide as a rare example of a surviving nineteenth century masonry public school building.

Building Chronology

- 1891 Hume School constructed.
- 1905 Additional work performed to “complete” the building, likely including the excavation of the basement and installation of a coal furnace, also may have included installation of pressed tin ceilings on the second floor. Adjoining tract of land donated by Frank Hume.
- ca. 1925 Exterior brick walls painted in a light color.
- 1948 Construction of rear fire escape from second floor.
- 1956 Hume School closes.
- 1960 Hume School donated to the Arlington Historical Society by the Arlington County Board of Supervisors.
- 1963 Full building renovation completed at a cost of \$45,000. Alterations included removal of rear addition, sandblasting

- of exterior to remove paint, construction of new interior stair, partial excavation of basement, installation of new mechanical and electrical systems, new ceiling and floor finishes, and construction of new restrooms. It is also assumed that the slate shingles were replaced with asphalt shingles during this renovation.
- 1970 Partial renovation of basement completed.
- 1977 New street curbs and gutters installed along Arlington Ridge Road. Interior of museum painted.
- 1986 Exterior alterations, funded in part by state and local funding, undertaken. Alterations included new asphalt shingles, new parking lot with accessible entrance, wrought iron fence installed along street, landscaping, window air conditioning units installed, and minor miscellaneous repairs.
- 1987 Interior renovations completed, including electrical wiring upgrades, removal of layers of interior paint, application of white paint on interior.
- 1988 Museum Assessment Report by Ann Barton Brown completed. Conservation Survey by Jill Rawnsley completed.
- 1990 Air conditioning mechanical equipment installed in building to replace the window units.
- 1993 Renovation of building completed, alterations included: new HVAC equipment; localized repairs to roof, soffit, and gutters; new electrical equipment and interior and exterior lighting; plumbing repairs; and interior finish repairs.
- 1994 Exterior repairs completed. Localized areas of brick masonry repointed, and wood and metal components painted.
- 1995 Architectural Conservation Study by Richard Bierce completed.
- 1997 Exterior repairs completed in collaboration with Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Work included brick repointing and moisture barrier installation, installation of a foundation drain along west exterior wall, environmental monitoring system, and animal control improvements and repairs.
- 2001 Partial building renovation completed, including partial replacement of gutters and downspouts, paint exterior

	elements, repair of two windows on south side, construction of wall and cabinets on second floor, conversion of first floor bathroom to meet accessibility requirements, replacement of window shades in museum room, and additional interior painting.
2002	Landscaping of grounds completed. New insulation installed in localized areas above second floor.
2005	Landscaping of grounds completed.
2001	Repairs to HVAC equipment.
2016	New asphalt shingle roof installed.

About the Author

Andrew Marshall is a preservation architect with John Milner Associates Preservation, a division of MTFA Architecture, in Arlington, Virginia. He has over ten years of experience managing the restoration and renovation of historic buildings. His architectural history research focuses on the public architecture of Virginia.

Endnotes

1. This cost figure was noted in an 1893 article in the *Virginia School Journal*. A later newspaper article from a 1907 issue of the *Alexandria Gazette* suggests a figure of \$8,000. The more contemporaneous estimate is included in the body of the text. Virginia State Board of Education, "Items of Interest," *The Virginia School Journal* (March 1893), 97; "Alexandria Has Many Fine Schools," *Alexandria Gazette* (August 20, 1907): 1.
2. C. B. Rose, Jr., "Public Schools in Arlington District of Alexandria County, Virginia 1870–1905," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, 3, no. 1 (October 1965): 17–39.
3. "Alexandria Has Many Fine Schools," *Alexandria Gazette*, 1.
4. Everett W. Brockman, *Early American History, Hume, and Allied Families* (Minneapolis: , 1926), 93–94; L. L. Ecker-Racz, "How the Hume School Historical Museum Happened," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, 2, no. 3 (October 1963): 8.
5. "Items of Interest," *The Virginia School Journal*, 97.
6. The National Metropolitan Bank building was executed as a joint venture with Gordon, Tracy & Swartwout of New York City. "B. Stanley Simmons." *DC Architects Directory*, Prepared by EHT Tracerics (October 2010).

7. It is assumed that the letters were removed in the 1961 renovation.
8. It is unclear if this enclosure was original to the building. However, due to the lack of trace evidence on the existing east facade, it is expected that it was an early addition.
9. "Items of Interest," *The Virginia School Journal*, 97.
10. A 1901 newspaper article notes the fundraising effort for an organ in the second-floor assembly hall, see "County Items," *Alexandria Gazette* (December 17, 1901): 3; The non-operating fireplace was added in the 1962 renovation.
11. Sherman Pratt, "Vivian Thomas Ford: Abingdon's Last Living Resident," *Arlington Historical Magazine* 12, no. 3 (October 2003): 65–71.
12. "Local Brevities," *Alexandria Gazette* (January 31, 1905): 3.
13. C. B. Rose, Jr., "Public Schools in Arlington District of Alexandria County, Virginia 1870-1905," 30.
14. The embedded portion of the steel angle supports for the fire escape remain visible on the rear of the school building.
15. "Hume School Site Price \$85,000," *Arlington Sun* (December 30, 1949): 4.
16. "Equipment Given By Service Club," *Arlington Sun* (June 8, 1951): 2.
17. "Arlington Ridge Report Scored by C.C.S.I.," *Arlington Sun* (March 30, 1951): 3.
18. L. L. Ecker-Racz, "How the Hume School Historical Museum Happened," 9.
19. If these conditions are not met, ownership of the site is to revert to the Hume descendants.
20. L. L. Ecker-Racz, "How the Hume School Historical Museum Happened," 11.
21. A description of the renovation project in the *Arlington Historical Magazine* states that the exterior was "steam cleaned" to remove the paint. However, the exterior masonry clearly demonstrates the effects of sandblasting. L. L. Ecker-Racz, "How the Hume School Historical Museum Happened," 12