

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC Young Men's Institute

AND/OR COMMON
YMI Building

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER ^{Southwest}
~~Northwest~~ corner Market and Eagle Streets

CITY, TOWN Asheville VICINITY OF 11th

STATE North Carolina CODE 37 COUNTY Buncombe CODE 21

3 CLASSIFICATION

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

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME YMCA of Asheville

STREET & NUMBER
c/o William B. Fesperman

CITY, TOWN Asheville VICINITY OF STATE North Carolina

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Buncombe County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN Asheville STATE North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The YMI Building, located on a corner lot at Eagle and Market streets in the midst of downtown Asheville, is a handsome 2½-story masonry building designed by R. S. Smith in an English-derived style that is at once dignified and picturesque. Because of the shape of the lot it fills, the building, while appearing rectangular in plan, is in fact roughly a parallelogram, for the Eagle-Market corner is an acute angle. The structure, like others of Smith's work, is covered in pebbledash stucco (executed by Wesley E. Wolfe) with emphatic accents in brick, stone, and wood. Brick quoins define the corners of the building and outline windows and doors; bands of brick are also used between some windows and ground level, and fine flat arches of brick surmount the basement windows. Beautifully worked stone forms the sills beneath the windows. Heavy wooden brackets carry the broad overhang of the tall hip roof. Fenestration is irregular, with many of the windows occurring in pairs. Six-over-one double-hung sash is used most commonly at the second level, with the first level having large plate glass shop windows.

Because of the multiple functions housed in this community building, the organization of the structure is rather complex. The Eagle Street side, the shorter side, features two shops at the first level. That to the east is entered through a double door flanked by plate glass shop windows; according to Mr. McKissick, (associated with the YMI for over 70 years) this shop has housed a real estate firm, undertaker, cabinet shop, and city library. The shop--long a drugstore--toward the corner is entered through a doorway angled in at the corner. The shop windows continue around the corner of the building along Market Street. Carrying above the shop fronts of Eagle Street and around the corner as a sheltering canopy is a tile-covered pent roof. Pairs of six-over-one sash occur at the second level.

The Market Street side of the building is much longer than Eagle Street. It is divided almost midway by a two-story pavilion that projects slightly forward on the facade and rises uninterrupted above the main roof to its own hip roof, treated like the main roof. In the south bay of the pavilion is the main entrance to the building, set in an arched opening framed by quoins. Widely spaced windows occur at the second level and two bands of three each at the third. A tall brick chimney rises on the south side of the pavilion. This pavilion is flanked by the two-bay section toward Eagle Street and a longer three-bay section on the south. At the first level, a window occurs in the first bay, then two similar shop fronts with double doors, protected like the others by a pent canopy, carried on brackets. The north one has been a library and beauty shop, the south one a shoe shop and barber shop. At the second level are very tall windows, occurring in pairs.

The east elevation of the building, very close to its neighbor, has irregular fenestration, some arched, some linteled; pairs of windows occur at the second level. This side is not interrupted by a pavilion, but it features the finish and brackets of the more visible facades. The south elevation, however, is a plain, blank brick wall.

Within, the building's plan and finish indicate the many uses it has served. The shops around the periphery have plastered walls and ornate pressed tin ceilings--except for those which have been altered or remodeled. A number of elaborate, handsome radiators survive as well. The hall runs back from the arched entrance in the pavilion, giving access to flanking rooms. The stair which rises at the east end of the hall features

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sturdy paneled newels, turned balusters and heavy molded handrail and closed string.

On the second floor there are various offices and meeting rooms, a kitchen and recreation rooms, most of which have been remodeled over the years. On the south side of the building is the gymnasium/auditorium, an impressive large space with very high ceiling. Dominating the room are six pairs of great timber trusses, which carry the ceiling. The ornate pressed metal ceiling features panels arranged between the trusses.

The third floor rooms (in the central section) contained residence rooms for the people who lived at the YMI. In the basement are various rooms used for showers, coal bin, boiler room, and on the south, dirt-floored rooms that were used for boxing and wrestling.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES

1892-1893

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Richard Sharp Smith

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The YMI Building was constructed during the years 1892-1893, as a community center for the black citizens of Asheville. Founded by George Vanderbilt, whose great estate, Biltmore, was built near Asheville at the time, the Young Men's Institute was intended to serve not only Asheville's black community but also the many black construction workers involved in the construction of Biltmore. The two-story pebbledash and brick building was designed by R. S. Smith, a native of England who served as resident and supervising architect for Biltmore under Richard Morris Hunt. Throughout much of the twentieth century the YMI, housing shops, residence rooms, meeting rooms, and a wide variety of functions, has been an important center of education, religion, and community in Asheville, and is among the most significant focal points of black history in the city.

In the mid 1880s, George Washington Vanderbilt (1862-1914), youngest son of William H. Vanderbilt and grandson of the "Commodore," Cornelius Vanderbilt, visited Asheville, North Carolina, and determined to build his estate there. By 1891, construction was well underway on the Biltmore Estate, and among the construction workers employed were several hundred blacks. Out of concern for these workers, and at the urging of Prof. Edward L. Stephens, a native of the West Indies who was educated at Cambridge University in England and was principal of the Catholic Hill School (Asheville's first black public school), Mr. Vanderbilt decided to found an institution in Asheville "for the convenience and service of colored men and boys."¹

He began with plans for the YMI building. Land for the structure was purchased September 5, 1891, from Martha B. Patton, by Vanderbilt's estate manager Charles McNamee. This land, bought by Martha Patton and E. H. Neis from Richmond Pearson in 1890, was described as part of the "Pearson addition to the city of Asheville."²

Construction of the YMI building commenced in 1892 under the supervision of its architect Richard Sharp Smith. Born in Keighley, Yorkshire, England on July 7, 1852, Smith received his education and architectural training in London, England, and migrated to America at the age of 20. He began work in New York, first employed with B. L. Gilbert, then in the larger office of Hunt and Hunt, where he assisted in preparing plans for Mr. Vanderbilt's huge Biltmore House. Richard M. Hunt, Sr., who designed Biltmore House, sent Mr. Smith to Asheville as resident and supervising architect for the erection of the mansion, and Smith remained in Asheville until his death in February, 1924. He designed the Paragon Building on Haywood Street, in which he began his practice, and shortly afterwards designed for Mr. Vanderbilt the many houses, office buildings, stores, school and entrance gate to the Estate of Biltmore House in Biltmore Village. As recalled by his daughter, Mrs. Odd White, his work in Asheville includes the Masonic Temple, the Legal Building, the Oates Building, the Laughren Building, Lewis Funeral Home, Vance School, St. Genevieve School of the Pines, St. Mary's Episcopal Church,

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Grace Memorial Episcopal Church, Zealandia (P. S. Henry Addition), and Breezemont. He also designed numerous homes in the Montford district of Asheville as well as many residences in nearby Flat Rock, and the Henderson County Courthouse.

Smith corresponded with Charles McNamee throughout the period of construction of the YMI building. His letters clearly identify him as the architect, and show that he received a \$500 commission for the \$32,000 building. They also show a meticulous attention to detail, and a concern that only the best materials be used in construction. The softness of the brick caused him particular concern, and he had carloads returned until he received those of the necessary quality. This correspondence also shows that the pebble dashing and paving were done by Wesley E. Wolfe, master pebble dasher and uncle to author Thomas Wolfe.

The building was nearly completed on February 12, 1893, when the organizational meeting of the Young Men's Institute was held. The electric lights had yet to be installed, and the concrete pavement around the building to be poured. The building was described in the Asheville Daily Citizen as "one of the handsomest in Asheville." The Young Men's Institute apparently thrived in its early days, serving as a meeting place and true community center, offering a kindergarten and a gymnasium, and even bathing facilities, where over two thousand baths were taken in one year. Among the most popular events were the Sunday afternoon song services. The Young Men's Institute also extended its facilities to the black churches, public schools, and civic organizations, which held their entertainments in the YMI hall.

Not all of the building was used by the YMI, and space on the first floor was rented. Dr. James W. Byron, one of Asheville's first black doctors, had his offices in the YMI building, as did many other black professionals. There seems always to have been a drugstore in the building, and other shops as well. Congregations often met in the YMI until their church buildings were constructed. From 1926 to 1966 the YMI building was the site of the Market Street Branch of the Asheville Public Library.

The Young Men's Institute apparently experienced its first financial difficulties around 1900, when members who had been employed in the building of the Biltmore Estate found themselves out of work and ceased paying their dues. This problem was successfully dealt with by the newly recruited general secretary, W. J. Trent, a YMCA secretary from Charlotte, N. C. Mr. Trent served as secretary of the YMI from May 10, 1900, to July 6, 1911, a critical time in the Institute's history.

In late 1905 Mr. Vanderbilt decided to divest himself of the YMI property. He gave the Institute six months to raise a purchase price of \$10,000, after which time the property was to go on the open market for \$15,000. It was at this time that the Young Men's Institute was formally incorporated. On May 8, 1906, the corporation was formed "for the purpose of establishing and assisting the spiritual, mental, social, and physical

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well-being of the Negro people of Asheville and vicinity, and as a literary organization."⁹ Among the forty-nine incorporators were the most prominent men in Asheville's black community, including the preeminent black educator, Walter S. Lee; J. W. Walker, J. W. Bryan, and Lee Otis Miller, physicians; James V. Miller, contractor; attorney Harrison Brown; and clergymen C. B. Dusenberry, J. R. Nelson, B. L. Madison, and W. J. Herritage.

By May 1906, the deadline set by Mr. Vanderbilt, \$2,500 had been raised. Determined that the building should remain in use as a community center, a committee from the YMI convinced the Rev. R. R. Swope, McNamee's successor as G. W. Vanderbilt's estate manager, that they should be permitted to mortgage the property, and so the \$10,000 was raised and the property conveyed to the Young Men's Institute, Inc., now an entirely independent organization. It flourished for the next thirty years, with occasional financial problems overcome by the work of such dedicated general secretaries as Fenton H. Harris, whose tenure was from 1923 to 1926 and again from 1930 to 1937. The cumulative effect of the Depression took its toll, and in the early 1940s the work of the YMI was gradually discontinued and the building fell into disrepair.

On March 24, 1944, a reorganization meeting was held, and under the leadership of Dr. Robert M. Hendrick, the building was renovated. It reopened March 25, 1945, with another of the popular Sunday afternoon song services.¹⁰

On April 15, 1946, the YMI Building and property was sold for \$10,000 by the YMI, Inc. to the Board of Trustees of the South Market Street Branch of the YMCA. A stipulation of the deed is that the property cannot be conveyed except by a two-thirds vote of the active members of the Market Street Branch of the YMCA."

The opening of the YMCA Branch was announced August 25, 1946. The YMCA continued the work of the YMI in the building until December 30, 1976, when the branch was closed due to the extensive repairs needed on the building. In January, 1977, the commercial and religious tenants were evicted, and the building is now empty. The YMCA has no desire to reopen their branch in the building, but would like to see the building preserved, if a suitable purchaser comes forward.

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Footnotes

¹W. J. Trent, The Young Men's Institute, Asheville, North Carolina (unpublished, n.d.), 1.

²Buncombe County Deed Books, Buncombe County Courthouse, Asheville, Deed Book 72:619.

³R. Sharp Smith, Letters (Asheville: unpublished, n.d.) Vol I, preface.

⁴R. S. Smith, Letter to Charles McNamee, July 8, 1892.

⁵R. S. Smith, Statement, November 23, 1892.

⁶"Young Men's Institute - A Well Attended Meeting Held There Yesterday," Asheville Daily Citizen, February 13, 1893, p. 1.

⁷Marie Louise Boyer, Early Days - All Souls' Church and Biltmore Village (Biltmore, N. C.: Gollifox Press, 1933) p. 20.

⁸Fenton H. Harris, Short History and Report of Young Men's Institute, Incorporated (Asheville, N.P., 1937) p. 3.

⁹Article of Incorporation of the Young Men's Institute (Incorporated), filed May 14, 1906.

¹⁰"Dr. Trent to Speak at YMI," Asheville Citizen, March 25, 1945.

¹¹Buncombe County Deed Books, Buncombe County Courthouse, Asheville, Deed Book 632: 277.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Article of Incorporation of the Young Men's Institute (Incorporated), filed May 14, 1906.
Asheville Citizen. "YMI Pays Vanderbilt \$10,000 and Secures Title." June 12, 1906.
Asheville Citizen. "Dr. Trent To Speak At YMI." March 25, 1945.
Asheville Citizen. "Negro YMCA Branch to be Opened in City." August 25, 1946.
Asheville Citizen. "Market Street Y Closed." December 31, 1976.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 9 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 9 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| ZONE | | EASTING | | | | NORTHING | | | | | | | | |

B

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| ZONE | | EASTING | | | | NORTHING | | | | | | | |

C

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| ZONE | | EASTING | | | | NORTHING | | | | | | | |

D

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| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ZONE | | EASTING | | | | NORTHING | | | | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Description prepared by Catherine W. Bishir, Head, Survey & Planning Branch
 Significance prepared by Betty Betz and Johnnie Baxter, Asheville, Consultants

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Division of Archives & History

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

109 East Jones Street

733-4763

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Raleigh

North Carolina 27611

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE May 12, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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- Asheville Daily Citizen. "Young Men's Institute - A Well Attended Meeting Held There Yesterday." February 13, 1893.
- Biltmore Company. Biltmore House and Gardens. No Publisher. 1976.
- Boyer, Marie Louise. Early Days - All Soul's Church and Biltmore Village. Biltmore, N. C.: Gollifox Press. 1933.
- Buncombe County Records. Buncombe County Courthouse. Asheville, North Carolina.
Subgroup: Deeds.
- Harris, Fenton H. Short History and Report of Young Men's Institute. Asheville, North Carolina: 1937.
- Smith, Richard Sharp. Letters. 3 Volumes. Unpublished, n.d. North Carolina Collection. Pack Memorial Public Library. Asheville, North Carolina.
- Smith, Richard Sharp. Letters to Charles McNamee and others concerning construction of the Young Men's Institute Building. May 26, 1892-January 11, 1896. Biltmore Estate Archives. Asheville, North Carolina.
- Trent, W. J. The Young Men's Institute - Asheville, North Carolina. Unpublished Memoir. No Date.
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