SCRIPTYRE AS ARCHITECTURE

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Washington-Alexandria Center for Architecture in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture.

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SCRIPTURE AS ARCHITECTURE

Richard Anthony Zubyk, Jr.

(Abstract)

A church performs many functions. It presents an image; prepares the believer for worship; introduces the unbeliever to God; facilitates worship services; projects the words of the pastor; resonates the music of the choir and orchestra; deepens knowledge and understanding of the faith; instructs children as well as adults; promotes fellowship; shelters the needy; hosts meetings; serves meals; strengthens families; supports missions and ministries; and accommodates weddings, funerals, and baptisms. These functions are performed in obedience to the Word of God. They are expressions of Scripture.

In the past, the church building itself expressed Scripture. The cruciform plan of the great cathedrals was the most profound example, depicting the symbol of Christianity. Clerestory windows filled the vaulted heights above the nave with heavenly light. Mosaics, reliefs, icons and stained glass windows illustrated biblical stories.

How else can the architecture of the church building express Scripture? How can Scripture inspire architecture?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation for my Thesis Advisory Committee and the faculty of the Washington-Alexandria Architecture Consortium for their time, patience and care in molding this skull full of mush. My hope is that the architecture I create during the course of my professional career will cause more pride and pleasure than pain in the hearts of my instructors.

Two gentlemen from the Fairfax Baptist Temple were invaluable to me in this effort. Mr. Gil Hanson, assistant pastor and principal of Fairfax Baptist Temple Academy, and Mr. Alden Guy, project manager for FBT’s new church building, were very generous with their time, and helpful with their answers and background information which formed the foundation for this project.

My journey through this learning experience and, in particular, the delirium which preceded my defense were made bearable, even enjoyable, due to the friendship and support of Catherine Greaver, Kristin O’Connell, Christie Morris, Gayll Worlsey, and Pat Squires. To them I extend my heart-felt gratitude.

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Parti model.
INTRODUCTION

The congregation at Fairfax Baptist Temple (FBT) had outgrown its church and facilities, as it had done several times in its past. The first service of FBT was held in a second floor apartment in October, 1970. Several weeks later, the growing congregation moved to a few rooms at West Springfield High School. On its third anniversary in October 1973, FBT moved into its first facility at 9524 Braddock Road, Fairfax, Virginia. The growing congregation eventually required a still larger facility, which was constructed on the same Braddock Road property, and dedicated in May 1979. In anticipation of further growth, FBT acquired thirty-three acres at the corner of Burke Lake Road and Pohick Road in 1987. Five acres were lost to the construction of the Fairfax County Parkway; however, the property gained greater ease of access, improved visibility to vehicular traffic, and certain improvements provided by a local builder while developing adjacent residential properties. By 1996, FBT again reached a point where it had outgrown its Braddock Road facilities; again it was time to move.

The new facilities planned for the Burke property had to accommodate several activities and ministries with key requirements. The auditorium must seat 1800 to 2000 people for worship services. Educational space was needed to sustain an increasing number of Sunday School classes. Additional and adequate educational space was needed to accommodate increased enrollment in the FBT Academy (FBTA). A 200 seat chapel was needed for Sunday worship services for the Spanish ministry, and for daily devotionals of FBTA students. Finally, athletic facilities were needed for FBT, FBTA and the community.

The circumstances and requirements facing FBT and its new building project offered an ideal scenario for the purposes of this thesis. Site and program for the new FBT facilities were adopted with minor modifications. The focus of this effort will be concentrated on site, church and chapel.
SITE SURVEY

Located on the southwest corner of the Burke Lake Road/Fairfax County Parkway intersection in Burke, Virginia, the site consists of twenty-eight wooded and undeveloped acres. The site is elongated along a northwest to southeast axis with Fairfax County Parkway to the NE, Burke Lake Road to SE, and residential lots to the SW and NW. The immediate area includes additional wooded residential developments of medium to low density, and Burke Lake Park. The extended vicinity includes residential areas of varying densities, churches, shopping centers, public schools, and George Mason University.

The site slopes from an elevation of 424.8 feet at the NW corner to 343.8 feet at a point along Burke Lake Road. Between the high and low points of the site are two prominent terrain features: a draw and a low ridge. The draw enters the site at a point along the upper portion of the parkway, arcs S and E around the end of the ridge and then dissipates. The draw carries storm drainage from along both sides of the Fairfax County Parkway and a shed area to the N of the parkway, but remains dry otherwise. At a point below the end of the ridge, a spring emerges. The rivulet continues through a wide arc until it exits the site at the low point. Close to its exit, the small stream merges with a second stream which passes across the lower end of the site from near the intersection.
Examination of the site revealed two significant opportunities and one restraint, which became an opportunity: the high ground, the low end of the site, and two terrain features at the mid-ground.

First, the high ground, with its relationship to the rest of the site presented itself as a prominent location for the church building. High ground dominates its surroundings; it is a position of authority, demanding notice. It is also situated at the opposite end of the site from the primary approach. This arrangement casts the rest of the site as the foreground to the church building.

Second, the low end of the site provided the setting for a pond. As an element in the composition, water adds a mirror-smooth textural contrast to vegetation and buildings; a reflective quality that reinterprets the site. It is a source for mist to shroud the foreground, creating an ethereal barrier between the profane and the sacred. A pond may host places and moments of tranquillity, solitude, and provide settings for quiet study, prayer and meditation on the Word. It also has two practical uses: as a living laboratory for the academy science classes, and as a natural baptismal.

Finally, there existed in the mid-section of the site a low ridge and a draw. These elements seemed worthy of preservation, maintaining a portion of the site in its natural, undisturbed state. A connection to the site’s past; as originally created, they would be framed by the church to the NW, the academy building to the N, and the athletic field and pond to the E. The terrain features would become the topographic centerpiece of the site. As with the pond, this natural area will provide places for solitude, reflection, and time with the Lord.

Other elements of the site include a school for the 300 students of FBTA; a bridge over the SW end of the pond; athletic field; amphitheater; plaza; and parking for approximately 600 cars.

Parking is found in three areas of the site; NW of the church; N of the academy; and along the lower portion of the drive. Rather than the typical heat-absorbing, impermeable macadam of the shopping center tradition, all parking surfaces will be of a turf protecting material. Instead of painted lines to identify parking spaces, trees and low berms will separate rows and clusters of cars. The NW parking area and the academy parking will become groves of trees and partially hidden cars. Parking along the lower portion of the drive will also be on a turf protecting surface with trees separating groups of cars. But this parking area will be more open than the other two, since it is a transitional space between the natural area and the athletic field.
The primary approach to the site and the church is from the intersection of Fairfax County Parkway and Burke Lake Road. Moving south along Burke Lake Road offers glimpses of the church and school through the trees. A wide opening in the tree line grants a view of the church at the top of the hill, with the natural area in the mid-ground, and the school to the right. The natural area is separated from the athletic field and drive by a stone retaining wall. The athletic field is a green step-down from the wooded mid-ground and a transition to the pond in the fore-ground. A soft boundary of marsh grasses separates the field from the pond.

The view is lost as a right turn onto Missionary Lane leads to a stone bridge, the threshold between the profane world and the sacred precinct. The journey to the church by vehicle may end at the parking area along the lower drive, but would continue by foot along one of two paths. The first would lead between the gymnasium and library/cafeteria, and along the classroom wing of the school, to the plaza and the church. The view of the church from this path is partially obscured until the plaza is reached.

The second, a narrow foot path, would meander uphill through the Natural area. With trees in foliage, the church would not be visible until one is at the foot of the stairs leading up to the ceremonial entrance to the church, a single wooden door.

Approach by automobile may continue however, through a graceful, rising curve around the school to the school parking. From here, the church is out of view until one walks past the school, toward the plaza and the north entrance. Or the vehicular approach may continue past the school and church, towards the wooded parking area beyond. A walk through the grove of trees will lead to the west entrance of the church.

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**Enter in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in that way; Because narrow is the gate, and hard is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.**

Matthew 7:13, 14
The church design is a synthesis of three factors: program requirements, conceptual intent and Scriptural inspiration. In addition to the program requirements cited in the Introduction, FBT needed space in the auditorium for a 150+ member choir, and a 30+ member orchestra, as well as practice and storage spaces for both. Also needed was a finance office suite, and an office suite for the Pastor, secretary, administration staff, ministerial staff and a reception area with several secretaries.

The conceptual intent for the church building was also adopted. FBT, a fundamental, evangelical, independent Baptist congregation, does not view the church building as sacred space. In the present Church Age, sacred space is found in the heart of the true believer, and among the gathering of believers. Sacred space or “The presence of Christ (is found) in the assemblies of Christians. Every believer has the presence of Christ with him; but the promise here refers to the meetings where two or three are gathered in His name, not only for discipline, but for religious worship, or any act of Christian communion” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary, 1 Corinthians 3:16). The church building, however, as space in which the sacred gathering worships, is regarded with respect.

The church building is also viewed as a tool for evangelism. As with all Bible-believing churches, this congregation strives toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, to go into the world to preach the Good News; and to evangelize. To appeal to the unsaved visitor, surrounding neighborhoods and region, the building must present itself as sophisticated, yet inviting. Guests must feel comfortable and welcome.

The parti expresses the church design as a circle, transected by a rectangular wing which extends south, and terminates with a foil. The circle, or cylinder is fronted to the east by a segmented wall, creating a vestibule in the intermediate volume with the north entry at one end, and the west entry at the other end. To the west, the enclosure pulls inward from the cylinder, exposing that segment as structure and screen. A wedge within the cylinder contains the worship space with a mezzanine, and is covered by a concave roof, perforated by conical skylights. The remainder of the cylinder, at grade, contains practice and storage spaces for the orchestra and choir, bookstore and dressing rooms. Classrooms occupy the second and third floors. All floors communicate via an atrium.

The rectangular wing houses administrative spaces on the first floor, and classrooms on the upper floors. The terminus of the wing, the chapel, is a high, slender volume cradled between curved and linear walls. Connecting the chapel to the wing is a double-height, multi-purpose hall.

The exterior of the cylinder and chapel is dressed in pale white 6’x6’ stone panels; the wing by gray, split-faced block.
From Top L to R: Geometry; Parti; Hierarchy; Structure; Circulation to Use; Plan to Section; Massing; Natural Light.
Ground level plan.
Roof plan.
From Top: Longitudinal section facing west; Study of same.
From Top: Section of Auditorium facing east; Study of same.
Next Page: Cross Sections.
From Top: East elevation; Model.
From Top: West elevation; Model.
From Top: North elevation; model.
From Top: South elevation; Model.
As an element of worship, preaching the word is vitally important, in that it is from hearing the word that the unsaved will learn of God’s plan of salvation. Hearing the word also teaches the saved God’s will for his or her life. Since the Word of God, the Holy Bible, is preached by the Pastor from the lectern, the lectern/Pastor/Bible becomes the center of attention, the focal point of the congregation.

The importance of this point in space, therefore, is recognized and honored by becoming the center of the cylindrical mass of the church building. Expanding from this center, the arrangement of seating for the auditorium became a 130° encirclement, which brings all 2000 worshippers within the auditorium and mezzanine as close as possible to the Pastor. In such an arrangement, the sense of fellowship between the Pastor and the congregation, and among the members of the congregation is enhanced. The Pastor is able to maintain eye contact with each congregant without turning his face from anyone. Even at a maximum distance of 117’, the visual acuity of those seated in the back pews is still enough to distinguish facial and slight hand gestures the Pastor may make. Each congregant can also easily see most of the congregation.

The Word center is also acknowledged by the wing and chapel. A portion of the east wall of the wing is aligned with the auditorium lectern and the chapel lectern.
Sectional model of auditorium.
 STAIRS FROM MEZZANINE

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.
1 Corinthians 12:12-14

Just as the Church, composed of all true believers world-wide from the present back through the ages to the apostles, is one entity, one body, this congregation, made up of many members, young and old, is one family, one body. Even to seating, the congregation should not be split or separated completely between the auditorium floor and the mezzanine. Stairs, leading directly from the mezzanine to the auditorium floor, provide a direct line of communication between the two seating areas. The physical unity of the body is maintained.

Also, in responding to the Pastor’s invitation to come to the front of the auditorium and receive Christ as Personal Savior, anyone seated in the mezzanine need not leave the auditorium to find stairs. The respondent, then, maintains contact with the moving Spirit, music and congregation. The stairs from the mezzanine to the auditorium floor minimizes distractions and obstacles. The connection is not lost.
LIGHT FROM CLOUDS ABOVE

*It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth forever—that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord. So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.*

2 Chronicles 5:13, 14

*The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*

Numbers 6: 24-26

*Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.*

Isaiah 60:1

Clouds are used in numerous ways throughout the Bible. In 2 Chronicles, God filled the temple, built by Solomon and the elders of Israel, with a cloud of glory to signify His acceptance of the temple, and their work and obedience. It is also from clouds and from above that God’s glory shines.

The ceiling of the assembly space consists of convex wooden panels. In addition to producing even and dispersed sound distribution, the panels are the final filtering element of natural light emitted by the conical skylights. The skylights are seemingly random in individual orientation, so that only one or two can conduct natural light into the assembly space at any one time. The order of skylights emitting light is nonsequential. Sunlight passes through the skylight and is divided or partially blocked by members to the trichord roof trusses. The light is further shaped as it passes between the ceiling panels.

From below, the ceiling panels may resemble billowing clouds. Due to the orientation of the skylights, only a few, constantly changing patterns of light will reach the floor and touch certain congregants.
From Top: Partial reflected ceiling plan of Auditorium and Vestibule; Studies of acoustical ceiling panels for Auditorium.
From Top: Roof structure plan for Auditorium and Vestibule; Profiles of trichord trusses for Auditorium; Section of conical skylight.
From Top: Section model of roof at auditorium; Section model of roof structure at auditorium.
CROWN

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had plaited a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spat upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

Matthew 27:27-31

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:7, 8

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

James 1:12

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight of it, not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

1 Peter 5:2-4

Like the cross, the crown has both an historical and metaphorical significance. Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus was humiliated, in part, by being crowned with a crown of thorns. Crowns are also mentioned in Scripture as rewards: crowns of righteousness, life and glory as well as others.

The concave roof of the auditorium supports an array of eighteen conical skylights. Each skylight has a unique orientation and elevation, giving the entire array an organic, unplanned appearance. Viewed from the east, the roof and skylights portray a crown.
**CROSS**

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; And, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he (Jesus) said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

Mark 8:34-35

Scripture refers to the cross both historically and metaphorically. Both are to remind and instruct the believer. The cross reminds the believer that God the Son, Christ Jesus, left heaven to become man, and lived the perfect, sinless life. Though not guilty of sin, He accepted death on the cross, paying the penalty for the sins of all mankind. The empty cross is a statement of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The cross may also instruct the believer of the cost and rewards of discipleship, giving all for Christ, in the promise of everlasting life.

The cross of the church building is formed by an opening in the center segment of the east wall of the vestibule; and is conspicuous and visible from Burke Lake Road. This cross would be a beacon when lit at night.

The orientation of the church uses the sunrise on Easter and the cross opening to cast a cross of light onto the inner wall of the vestibule. The center doors to the auditorium would be at the foot of the cross of light. Those entering the auditorium by these doors will receive a heart-felt reminder of what Jesus did for them.

**WOODEN DOOR**

I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

John 10:9

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Revelation 3:20

The door is used by Jesus as a metaphor for Himself as the way to salvation. It may also illustrate man’s manner of acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior. Jesus knocks at the door of the heart; man must answer the door by opening it and inviting Jesus to enter.

Located at the base of the cross opening in the vestibule, the ceremonial entrance to the church is a large wooden door with no handle on the exterior side. No handle would require those wishing to enter here to knock, illustrating how Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts, a door which can only be opened from within. Candidates for graduation from FBTA may, as part of their procession, march through this door on their way to the auditorium. By entering at the foot of the cross, they are reminded of what their education has been centered around.
From Top, L to R: Light study simulating Easter morning condition at ceremonial entrance; Center entrance from vestibule to auditorium on Easter morning; Model; Model; Door elevation and plan.
VESTIBULE

The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord, our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

Psalms 113:4-6

Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou who dwellest in the heavens.

Psalms 123:1

The high, unadorned walls and glazed roof of the vestibule, framing a view of the sky, lead the eye upwards. Looking towards the sky, through the glazed roof, one may be humbled by reflecting on the awesomeness of God Almighty, and on just how small the heavens, the earth and in particular, the individual really are by comparison. With this sense of humbleness and meekness, one may pass from the vestibule into the auditorium prepared for worship.

From Top L to R: Model; Vestibule; Ceiling of vestibule; Model.
From Top L to R: Model at north entry; Model at west entry; Interior perspective of west lobby facing north.
CHAPEL

The chapel is a tall, slender volume bounded by linear north and east walls, and a curved south wall that meets the north wall at their west end. It is further defined by two grids. The first is oriented with the linear connection between the lectern in the auditorium and the lectern in the chapel. This orientation reaffirms the auditorium lectern/Pastor/Bible center as the organizing element, the focal point of the church building, of which the chapel is part. The second grid is aligned with the axis of the wing, acknowledging the chapel as the terminating statement of the wing. The relationship between the grids arranged the pews in the chapel. Pews on one side of the aisle are on axis with the wing; the other side is aligned with the lectern axis.

The intersecting grids also directed the form of the dormers at the ceiling/roof. One side of each dormer is aligned with the lectern axis, and the other side is on axis with the wing.
From Top L to R: Trusses at Chapel roof; Seating to truss relationship; Cross section; Detail of Chapel clerestory; Study of grid intersection; Interior perspective of Chapel.
L to R: Model at Chapel roof; Model at Chapel interior.
LIGHT AT CHAPEL LECTERN

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
John 1:1

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.  
John 3:16-21

Central to the Christian faith is Jesus Christ, who he is and what he has done for each of us. The Bible refers to Him by many names, two of which are The Word and The Light.

The focal point of the chapel combines both the Word, as lectern, and light. The east wall, behind the lectern, is split horizontally at the second floor level, relative to the wing. The lower portion of the wall is aligned with the wing. The upper portion is canted along the lectern axis. The break in the wall became a glazed opening, washing the lectern platform and east end of the chapel with light during the morning and mid-day hours.

A pastor or speaker conducting worship service or daily devotionals will be illuminated by natural light.
CONCLUSION

Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet;...

Isaiah 28:16-17

How can the architecture of a church building express Scripture? How can Scripture inspire architecture?

Scripture is a strong source of inspiration, even for buildings. For all the biblically centered activities conducted in a church, to instruct and strengthen the believer’s relationship with God, the shelter itself can be built on the truth, teaching and wisdom of Scripture. Foundations and walls can be structured with the Word at its center, as the hearts and lives of believers would be. Walls and glass ceilings can raise the eyes heavenward to soulful contemplation and humbleness. The ceiling can also remind us of God’s acceptance and pleasure when obeyed. The roof can illustrate pain and great rewards. Light, its connection with God’s glory and the Son, as well as an indispensable element of architecture, can be brought into a space to touch the individual, and to emphasize the preaching of the Word.

These are but a few examples of Scripture as architecture. Many more lessons and truths remain to be constructed.
**Experience:**

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<td>April 1999</td>
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**Education:**

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<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Degree/Program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University College of Architecture and Urban Studies</td>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
<td>Master of Architecture, expected completion 2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington-Alexandria Architecture Consortium</td>
<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Virginia Community College</td>
<td>Manassas Campus</td>
<td>Associate of Science in Architectural Technology, and Certificate in Drafting, 1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manassas, VA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Washington College</td>
<td>Fredericksburg, VA</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germanna Community College</td>
<td>Locust Grove, VA</td>
<td>Associate of Science in General Studies, 1980</td>
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