

Va. - Pr. Wm. Co. - Court Houses
Potomac NEWS 4-30-69 VA ROOM

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Photographs
By Paul Muse



Original bricks
from 1762
courthouse at
Dumfries.

Milestones In History

Prince William's Five Courthouses



Brentsville Courthouse Served County for 73 Years; Jail Is at Far Right

Like milestones, five different courthouse locations mark Prince William's 238-year history as a county.

Today, all remain identifiable, though in three cases only because of stone markers standing at the sites.

The story behind each can be found within the pages of Prince William, The Story of Its Places and Its People, a 261-page volume available at \$3 from the County Library.

Prince William was formed March 26, 1731, from old Stafford and King George counties. At the outset the county extended from Chopawamsic Creek (its present southern border) northward to include present-day Fairfax and Arlington counties, and westward to include Fauquier and Loudoun counties.

It was with this sprawling territory in mind that a site on Occoquan Creek was picked in 1731 for the first courthouse. A stone marker and bronze plaque stands today on the west side of U.S. 1 just south of Occoquan Creek, locating the site as 150 yards eastward - or on the opposite side of the highway on what was once an estate owned by George Mason III, father of the celebrated George Mason IV of Gunston Hall.

THE GOVERNOR and Council directed that a courthouse, with jail, pillory and stocks, be erected on the "upper side" of Occoquan Creek. Instead, the justices of the new county selected the site on the "lower" or southern side, now Woodbridge. In any event, the new courthouse was situated at a ferry landing which was a key link in the colonial-day forerunner of U.S. 1 - the Potomac Path. The ferry plied between the courthouse and an estate acquired by George Mason II, where the town of Colchester was laid out in 1753, according to the book.

Came 1742, and the area on the upper side of the Occoquan became a new county, Fairfax. The courthouse at Woodbridge



Woodbridge Site Remembered By Plaque

was erected the following year.

Today the site is a part of the Quantico Marine Corps base. A dirt road leads into the woods to a stone marker whose bronze plaque was removed by a souvenir hunter within the past year. There is no trace of the courthouse, nor of the clerk's office, jail, taverns, stores and homes which soon surrounded it nor of the dream of some that one day a great city would arise at Cedar Run.

It was at the Cedar Run courthouse that Henry Lee, grandfather of Robert E. Lee, took his oath as a practicing attorney.

Tompkins, finished the project in May, 1762. Only a few of the bricks which he used stand today - as part of a marker at the now-vacant but well-trimmed site which overlooks U.S. 1.

In the meantime, three of the town gentry were appointed "to agree with some person to erect a ducking stool on Quantico Creek" nearby.

Within the courthouse the people of the county met in 1774 to adopt resolutions approving measures seeking the country's independence from England, and to appoint delegates to the First Virginia

Site of Cedar Run Courthouse (right) is now a part of Quantico Marine Corps Base.



Marker at Dumfries (below) tells tourists of 1762 courthouse which stood in field in background



PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY
COURT HOUSE
DUMFRIES 1762-1882
THIS MARK INDICATES THE SITE OF THE
FIRST COURTHOUSE OF PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY
WHICH WAS BUILT IN 1762. THE PRESENT
COURT HOUSE WAS BUILT IN 1882. THE
MARKER WAS PLACED BY THE PRINCE WILLIAM
COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS IN
1931.

Potomac Scene

The Potomac News, Wednesday, April 30, 1969

was no longer centrally located for what remained of the county it was supposed to serve.

Intense rivalry among five sections of Prince William caused the selection of a new county seat to be placed in the hands of a board of arbitrators. It recommended in December, 1742, that the courthouse be erected at the plantation of Philemon Waters, a tract along Cedar Run about 3 1/2 miles south of present-day Independent Hill. The building

THE FIRST NOTE of the death knell for the Cedar Run dream was struck in 1748 when the General Assembly chartered a new town at Quantico Creek, called Dumfries. It quickly became a colonial boomtown. It could not long be ignored as the county's center of commerce, and in 1759, the Governor and Council ordered that the courthouse be established there. The contractor, Benjamin

Convention. But the same Revolutionary War period marked a worsening of the siting of Quantico Creek which put Dumfries out of the port business. The town withered, and in 1820 a decision was reached to move the courthouse to a more central area. After 1822, the old building at Dumfries became a church, then was abandoned. Selected as the new county seat was Brentsville. The courthouse, a red brick structure in Flemish bond with a small octagonal domed cupola at the front end of its gabled roof, was finished in 1822. It stands today and serves a useful life by housing the Didlake School for Retarded Children.

ALSO PRESERVED at one corner of the courthouse green is the red jail building. Fifty acres were developed into a town with stores, taverns, a house of entertainment, a church, homes and a public square.

Brentsville held on to the courthouse for 73 years. But it wasn't without a struggle. Manassas, a railroad junction town, was born in 1852 and prospered - despite its traumatic entanglement with the Civil War. In 1872 the town fathers set their sight on becoming the county seat. The town offered to donate a site, erect the necessary buildings and pay moving expenses from Brentsville, but in a referendum, the county's voters stuck with Brentsville.

In 1892, there was another referendum. This time Manassas won. The new courthouse was completed the following year. Despite the selection of a large special commission to oversee the project - or perhaps because of it - the result was what Prince William, Places and People, describes as "uninspired architecture characteristic of the 1890s."

The red brick edifice still serves in name as Prince William's county courthouse. But the march of history continues. The circuit court, long the main attraction of a county courthouse, has moved to another building. And the county's governing body, the Board of Supervisors, no longer meets there. County court, where misdemeanors and small civil actions are heard, is its chief tenant.

Many expect a sixth county courthouse in the not too distant future.



Today's Prince William Courthouse at Manassas

East End PTA Council Is Formed

"Resources can be saved and duplicate efforts avoided if we share our experiences in solving problems" stated W.S. Elmore as five elementary school Parent-Teacher Associations met last Wednesday at Potomac View to reorganize the Eastern Prince William County PTA Council.

Parent-Teacher Association officers and school principals from Elizabeth Vaughn, Featherstone, Marumco, Potomac View, and Rippon met with Robert Rousseau, Neabsco Representative on the County

School Board; David Kite, District Director of the Virginia Congress of PTAs; and Elmore, President of the Prince William County Elementary Principals Association in the 3-hour session before deciding a Council could provide the instrument for a concerted effort to improve County schools.

Kite noted that the schools alone represented over 3,000 families and it is anticipated that all of the Eastern elementary and junior high schools will eventually

participate in the Council. Such representation should have a much greater voice than an individual school's appeal for help from the County, according to Kite.

George Boah, Elizabeth Vaughn PTA President, made the motion, seconded by Dean Kilby, Marumco principal, to form the Council of all elementary and junior high schools in the districts of Woodbridge, Ocoquan, Dale City, Dumfries, Belmont, Triangle and Coles. He stated that with the transportation and unique area problems, formation of an East-West Council should not be considered at this time.

Nathan Fields, Marumco; Al Milbert, Featherstone; Mrs. Frances Tyrrell, Rippon; George Boah, Elizabeth Vaughn, and Shep Elmore, Potomac View each presented an orientation to his school listing problem areas for future discussion.

A steering committee of the PTA presidents was set up to amend the by-laws and present them at the next planning session to be held on Wednesday, May 28 at 7:30 at Potomac View School, Dale Road, Marumco Acres, Woodbridge. All schools in the Eastern districts will be invited to participate at the session to finalize the organization. Each individual PTA will then have to ratify its participation in the Council at its first meeting in the Fall. At that time, assignments will be made to research and report on such problems as discussed at Wednesday's session: Faulty construction, remedial reading, class size, health services, vandalism, sex education, kindergartens, and guidance in elementary schools among others.

Nathan Fields, Marumco PTA President, "compared the Council formation to a grain of sand that one does not even hear hit the window, but a handful of it can break the glass."

Laughter rang out at the session when Bill Mockabee Vice-President Elect of Potomac View asked Rousseau how much of the school budget was padded to withstand the

year's budget cut by the Board of Supervisors. Mockabee continued with a recommendation for increased efforts in public relations to gain community support for the needs of the school system.

Dick Gastley, Elizabeth Vaughn, reported the work of its PTA in landscaping the grounds through a community effort. He was complimented

on the work by Rousseau, who reflected that it was proof of what can be accomplished through united effort.

Mrs. Tyrrell, Rippon and Al Milbert, Featherstone, reported their schools had begun research work in remedial reading and sex education programs and expressed how much the Council could aid in this work.

Ralph Johnson, Elizabeth Vaughn, principal, discussed a pilot program for special education that is being caught in the funds squeeze. He believed it to be a successful program but without the necessary support which can be generated through wider dissemination through a council.



AT COUNCIL FORMATION — Potomac View PTA President Charles Crum (left), greets Robert Rousseau, Neabsco District member on the County School Board and W. S. Elmore (right), president of the Prince William County Elementary Principals Association. Potomac News photo.

School System Shuffled

A reorganization of the administrative staff has resulted in the Prince William County School system having three assistant superintendents of schools, three newly created positions to be filled by three present directors, remaining in their same fields of work, with the same pay ratio they have now.

Effective July 1, Herbert Saunders will be assistant superintendent for personnel; Claude DeHaven will be assistant superintendent for instruction; and Joseph Tosti assistant superintendent for special services.

The jobs of coordinators have been eliminated and four asst-

of supervisory categories delineated according to broad programs, areas of responsibility and levels of responsibility. Saunders told the Potomac News the new organization will permit a greater flexibility and more recognition to the individual depending on the area and amount of responsibility he is assigned.

Additionally, the board is seeking two leaders in instructional fields for the posts of director of elementary and directory of secondary education. These individuals will have earned the degree of doctorate of education.

Under the old organizational

chart, there were three echelons — the superintendent and three directors; the coordinators and the supervisors, who had a variety of responsibilities not always equitably assigned in proportion to their pay scale, Saunders said.

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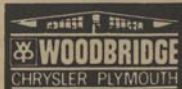
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