

VLR-12/13/88 NRHP-8/10/89

HISTORIC SITE FILE: PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE, BRENTSVILLE  
PRINCE WILLIAM PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM  
RELIC/Bull Run Reg Lib, Manassas, VA

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Brentsville Courthouse and Jail  
other names/site number: DHL No. 76-21 (courthouse) and DHL No. 76-231 (jail)

2. Location

street & number: 12239 Bristow Road (courthouse); 12249 Bristow Road (jail) N/A not far publication  
city, town: Brentsville N/A vicinity  
state: Virginia code: VA county: Prince William code: 152 zip code: 22013

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		<input type="checkbox"/> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>2</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Civil War Properties, Prince William County, VA  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 4

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

*A. Bryan Mitchell*  
Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_ Date June 16, 1989  
Director, Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

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

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions):

Government: courthouse and jail

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions):

Government: government offices

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**7. Description**Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions):Vernacular, with neoclassical  
influence

Material (enter categories from instructions):

foundation: stone - red sandstone  
walls: brickroof: metal-covered gable roof  
other:

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Describe present and historic physical appearance. See continuation sheet

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**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

 nationally  statewide  locallyApplicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  DCriteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  GAreas of Significance (enter categories from  
instructions):

Politics/Government

Period of Significance:

1861-1865

Significant Dates:

1861-1862

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Significant Person: N/A

Architect/Builder:

William Claytor - courthouse  
? - jail

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State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. See continuation sheet

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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See continuation sheet

- Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A
- 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 #

- Primary location of additional data:
- State historic preservation office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Specify repository: DHL  
221 Governor Street, Richmond, VA 23219
- 

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of property: 3.0 acres

UTM References:

A /18/ /2.82.520/ /42.85.100/  
Zone Easting Northing  
C / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

B / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing  
D / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

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Verbal Boundary Description:

This property includes Prince William County land parcels 066-01-0058 and 066-01-0057, which are located in Brentsville, Virginia, and recorded in Deed Book 1074, page 517, and Deed Book 1074, page 514, respectively.

The courthouse is on parcel 066-01-0058 and the jail is on parcel 066-01-0057. The enclosed map (1"=200") shows the configuration of the property and the exact locations of the buildings.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the three acres of property historically associated with the courthouse and jail.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title: Jan Townsend, County Archaeologist  
organization: Prince William County, Planning Office  
street & number: 1 County Complex Court  
city or town: Prince William

date: May 1989  
telephone: (703) 335-6830  
state: VA zip code: 22192

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Property Type: 1st and 2nd Battle of Manassas

Summary Description

Brentsville was the county seat of Prince William County at the time of the Civil War. The Brentsville Courthouse is a vernacular, two-story brick building with neoclassical influence. It was built in the 1820s; the architect was William Claytor. Notable architectural features include a fanlight over the main entrance, within a keyed, semicircular brick arch and an octagonal-roofed, frame-built cupola. The Brentsville Jail is 30 yards to the east of the courthouse. It is a well-constructed, two-story, gable-roofed structure. Although changes have been made to the courthouse and jail, they can be reversed. There are two noncontributing buildings on the property. One, a former schoolhouse, is a small wooden frame building, probably built on the foundation of what was the clerk's office. The other is a wooden storage building in disrepair at the back of the property. Currently, the courthouse and jail are owned by the Prince William County Park Authority. Recently, the Prince William County Historical Commission leased the courthouse from the Park Authority; they plan to use the building for meetings. The jail serves as the headquarters of the Park Authority rangers. The courthouse and jail are located in a Historic Recreation Area. The setting is parklike.

Description

The Brentsville Courthouse and Jail are located in the Brentsville Historical and Recreation Area, which is operated by the Prince William County Park Authority.

Brentsville Courthouse:

The courthouse is a 2-story, brick, Federal-style courthouse having its main entrance in the gable end. There is a recessed plaque in the gable with the following inscription: "Prince William/ County CourtHouse/ Built by/ William Claytor/ -Architect-/ 1822." Notable architectural features include a fanlight over the main entrance, within a keyed, semicircular brick arch; an octagonal-roofed, frame-built cupola; and a molded brick cornice. The brick of the front, or south wall, is laid in Flemish bond. The other three

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walls are 3-course American bond. The foundation is constructed of well-shaped, locally-quarried red sandstone laid up in rough courses. The courthouse measures 46 feet north-south and 36 feet east-west. Two large chimneys are located at the front of the building and a smaller one rises from the northeast corner.

The original doorway was probably about 4.5 inches higher in height than the present-day doorway. The front windows appear to be original. They have flat arches and stone sills, and there is a quarter-round molding around the 6/6 sliding sash windows. Shutter pins are present but no shutters. Two windows have been added to both the east and west walls. They are 6/6 sliding sash windows, but have round arches and brick, instead of stone, sills; and shutter hinges are not present. Sometime in the past, the two large windows in the north wall of the courthouse have been made narrower; brick patching is visible around the edges of the windows. A pair of 2/2 sash windows have been added to the second floor of the north end. They have cyma molding instead of quarter-round and shutter hinges are not present.

The interior consists of a large, high-ceilinged room with a balcony containing two offices about one-third the way across the south end of the second floor level. A steel or iron column now supports the center of the former courtroom, and the walls are braced at the second floor level by three metal tie rods. A brick fireplace with no mantel is located in the northeast corner of the building.

The walls are plastered up to the outside edge of the window trim, meaning that the walls have been replastered over old plaster. The interior is painted white with tan trim. The floor at the first level is now concrete covered with asphalt tiles. The window and door trim is a mixture of older architrave, replacement architrave, and plain box trim. The pairs of windows on either side of the east and west walls and the two small windows on the north end have plain box trim and plain side panels. The other windows, and the doors, have architrave trim (some reproduction) and molded and paneled jambs. The large room is lighted by drop electric lights suspended from the ceiling. The Park Authority has removed all its partitions from the first floor.

The balcony is reached by an enclosed, two-flight, one landing staircase, which was formerly part of a pair of staircases. The

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second staircase has been blocked for installation of central heating and air conditioning. The stair newel is a square molded post with a ball finial. The rail is molded. The two flights are enclosed by waist-high matchboard. Across the balcony there is a molded rail with turned balusters. The balcony is supported by two plain, round, wooden columns which are about one foot in diameter. On a plinth base, the columns taper as they rise and have simple molded capitals. The two offices were used by officers of the court. Architrave trim is present around the doors and windows of the offices. The doors, however, are modern.

Outside, a flagstone and concrete patio measuring about 15 feet by 32 feet is located at the front entrance. The patio was installed in 1976 and replaced a stone walk which led from the courthouse to Bristow Road. There was also a stone walk that led from the east (side) entrance to the jail. Both "stepping stone" walkways have been paved over with concrete. In 1937, according to a W.P.A. inventory, there was a huge stone doorstep at the courthouse's front entrance. This step may have been partly enclosed in the present stone and concrete series of steps leading into the courthouse.

Brentsville Jail:

The jail is located about 30 yards to the east of the courthouse. It is a sturdily constructed, two-story, gable-roofed structure. A three-bay, double-pile, central passage, I-plan building, it once had a 1-1/2- to 2-story frame addition on the rear. The jail was built about 1820 by James Driscoe Masson, whose name is inscribed on a stone tablet in the gable. The building is laid up in 5-course American bond, and it has both round and flat brick arches over the windows. The exterior brick walls are two feet thick, while the interior bearing walls are 9.5 to 11 inches thick. Along the base of the building, just above the stone foundation, are the broken remains of a molded brick water table. There is a molded brick cornice beneath the gable roof. Two chimneys project from the roof. The one on the northwest side is large and would have connected to fireplaces. On the opposite side of the building is a smaller stove chimney.

For the most part, the windows are 2/2 sliding sash, although two small, rear, second-floor windows are new 1/1 sliding sash with vertical steel bars. The doors and most of the door frames are not

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original. The one exception is a doorway on the west side of the building (on the courthouse side). The original pegged-together, single-beaded door frame appears to be intact. A new doorway has apparently been created at the rear of the building by enlarging a former window.

The interior was remodeled for offices in 1967-68 and there is little, if any, of the original woodwork left. Offices are located on either side of the stair hall. The floors are carpeted and replacement trim is around the windows and doors. The 35-inch-wide, single-flight, open-string stair has a late 19th or early 20th century mantel in the front room on the northwest side.

The rejointing and repairs of the walls done in the 1960s would not meet the Secretary of the Interior's standards for rehabilitating old buildings and the new rear doorway is inappropriate. These recent changes and additions to the building can be corrected, however, to return the exterior to a more authentic appearance.

Both the courthouse and jail were restored by the Prince William County Park Authority in the 1970s. Most of the work, however, was directed at stabilizing the structures. According to available sources, at least the courthouse was also repaired in the 1910s or the 1930s. Information on exactly what was done or when it was done is not available. Based on accounts from the Civil War, which are presented in some detail in the following section, the courthouse and jail were at least partly damaged by Union soldiers, and there must have been some reconstruction after the war. There is no documentation for this, however.

Although there have been alterations to the buildings, they are reversible. The basic structure of the buildings is sound. Many of the interior modifications (e.g., office partitions) are essentially temporary and easily removed. Overall, the buildings have maintained their integrity.

The courthouse and jail presently serve as the Park Authority's headquarters. The entire historical and recreation area is about three acres and is parklike in setting. An expansive lawn surrounds the buildings and continues almost all the way to Broad Run, which is to the north of the courthouse and jail. The well, which is now covered, is located on the lawn in front of the courthouse. The gallows stood on the back portion of the lot.

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Also, just to the north of the two buildings is a small gravel parking lot. A sports field is located nearer to Broad Run. A few large shade trees are located near the buildings. Flowering shrubs have been planted around the building foundations. The buildings and environs are in very good condition.

There are two noncontributing structures on the courthouse and jail parcels. One, which is located along the northern edge of the jail parcel, is a storage structure and has no historical significance. The second is on the courthouse parcel and is called the schoolhouse. It is currently used as office space. This one-room schoolhouse dates to about 1910, and is in good condition. An 1822 map of the lot shows an office in the same location. In all likelihood, the present structure is located atop what was the brick foundation of the 1822 office. This cannot be documented, however, with available information. As a result, for the purposes of this nomination, the schoolhouse is considered to be a noncontributing structure.



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Summary Significance Statement

Brentsville Courthouse was Prince William County's fourth courthouse. The first through the third courthouses are no longer standing. The courthouse and jail were constructed during the early 1820s on three acres of land designated as public property. They are fine examples of early- to mid-1800s public buildings that are of a vernacular architectural style with neoclassical influence. Brentsville remained the county seat during the Civil War; but, when the Union occupation began in 1862, the county buildings were essentially abandoned. The county records, which covered the floor to a depth of two feet, had been left to be rummaged through by all passersby. Many documents were taken and most were destroyed. The loss of these records is still felt today by those researching land records or other pre-1860s historical documents. After the war, the courthouse and jail again began functioning as county buildings. The county seat was moved to Manassas in the 1890s and the courthouse and jail were abandoned.

Historical Background

The Brentsville Courthouse, the fourth Prince William County courthouse, was built in 1820-22 after the decision was made to move the county seat from Dumfries to the Brentsville area. The courthouse was built by William Claytor, of Orange County, Virginia. The jail was built beside the courthouse at the same time. Both facilities were constructed on a 3-acre parcel designated as public when the town of Brentsville was officially established in 1822. Adjacent to the courthouse parcel were three acres set aside for a tavern.

The town of Brentsville was created from 50 acres of the Bristow portion of the original Brent Town Tract, a 30,000-acre tract granted in 1686-87 by James II. The grant was made to Richard Foote, Robert Bristow, Nicholas Hayward, and George Brent, and the tract was to serve as a sanctuary for religious freedom. The venture, which was as much commercially as religiously inspired, failed to attract a sufficient number of settlers to western Prince William and eastern Fauquier counties, and the Brent Town Tract was eventually divided among the original grantees. (W.P.A. 1976:112-114)

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The 7,500-acre portion allotted to Robert Bristow descended to another Robert Bristow, an Englishman and loyalist. His land was confiscated in 1779 during the Revolutionary War when property belonging to English subjects were taken over by the commonwealth. The tract was divided and sold at auction, with the proceeds going to the Literary Fund for educational purposes. The 50-acre Town of Brentsville was officially established on part of the tract in 1822 and after the courthouse was constructed. The trustees of the town were John McCrae, John Gibson, John Mills, John Leachman, John Fox, John Hooe, Gerard Alexander, William S. Alexander, Richard Davis, Charles Hunton, William French, Benjamin Johnson, and James Foster. (W.P.A. 1976:114)

The Brentsville Courthouse and Jail served the entire county for many decades. Unfortunately, most all of the pre-Civil War records were lost or destroyed as a result of the war. We do know that there was one hanging at the courthouse prior to the war. In 1850 Agnes, a county slave woman, was hanged for the murder of her master, Gerard Mason of Woodbridge. After the Civil War one other person was hanged; a freedman named Jesse Fouks who was caught stealing food. He confessed to murdering Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah Herndon and a little black boy named Addison Russell. (Burton n.d.) After Fouks was captured and jailed, he burned a hole in the floor of the jail and escaped. He was soon recaptured, jailed, tried, and hanged in 1875. (Ratcliffe 1978:73)

Records also remain that identify who the county clerks were and their tenure. They were as follows: Philip B. Dawe (1813-1832), John Williams II (1832-1854), Philip D. Lipscomb (1854-1865), Mordacai B. Sinclair (1865-1869), John C. Poor (1869-1870), Little C. Osmann (1870-1870), Lucian A. Davis (1871-1887), and Edwin Nelson (1887-1911).

The recruiting of Confederate soldiers occurred on the public lot adjacent to the courthouse. Once the Union occupation of the Brentsville area began in 1862, governmental activities at the Brentsville Courthouse and Jail ceased. We do know, however, that on October 6, 1863, the courthouse and jail were visited by Union soldiers. The following is Captain Joseph Keith Newell's account (1875:235-236) of what happened.

A squad was detailed to go to Brentsville Court-house, after bricks for the General. . . . That the detail did get bricks

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for the General, the appearance of the Court-house and clerk's office, both large brick buildings, will testify. With the Court-house, they commenced at the top to get bricks, beginning with the chimneys and working down, while with the clerk's office, they commenced at the bottom and worked up.

The clerk of the county [presumably Philip D. Lipscomb] carelessly left all the county records and papers, when he stepped out, and at this date they were in bad condition. The floors of four rooms were covered, fully two feet deep, with the papers and documents, some of great antiquity.

There were "millions of papers that would accumulate in such a place in two centuries of time" (Newell 1875:235-236). Documents included wills, marriage licenses, land deeds, officer commissions, certificates of membership, etc. George Washington's signature was noted, and many of the deeds were signed by Lord Fairfax. Mr. Newell added to the end of that day's account the following comment:

When next they begin to govern Prince William County, it is thought they will have to commence their county records where the war left off, and it is hoped they will appoint a county clerk who will take better care of his papers in the future (1875:238).

After the Civil War governmental activities resumed at the Brentsville Courthouse and Jail. The courthouse and jail were abandoned when the county seat was moved to Manassas in 1893. Thereafter, the building was used as a school (1893-1913); a place to manufacture mattresses (1941); as a school for retarded children (1960s); and as a public meeting and social gathering place. (Burton n.d.) In 1941 the jail served as a residence and in 1971 was being used as an attorney's office.

An unusual lawsuit provided funds to restore the old courthouse. James Bankhead Taylor Thornton, a longtime county judge who was born and grew up in Brentsville, willed a popular swimming hole on Cedar Run to the white citizens of Prince William County. In 1931, the Virginia Public Service Company, in connection with a proposed dam to be built across Occoquan Run, condemned the property on Cedar Run where the swimming place was. The citizens sued, and the court awarded the complainants \$4,500, to be used to repair and

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maintain Brentsville Courthouse as a place of amusement. A metal plaque in memory of Judge Thornton was purchased and affixed to the building's south interior wall.

From the late 1930s to 1979, the courthouse was often used as a community center. Throughout most of that time, the courthouse was jointly owned by the Board of County Supervisors and the School Board. In 1974 the Prince William County Park Authority acquired the building and established the Historical Recreation Area.

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Virginia Cavalcade. (pp.34-47). Summer 1978.
- Jones, Francis  
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prepared by Francis Jones.  
1980 Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
survey forms for Brentsville Courthouse and  
Brentsville Jail.
- Martin, Joseph  
1835 Gazeteer.
- Morton, Susan R.  
1937 historical handwritten notes that were  
used in compiling the W.P.A. book reference  
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- Newell, Captain Joseph Keith  
1875 Annals of 10th Regiment, Massachusetts  
Volunteers, in the Rebellion. C.A. Nichols &  
Co. Springfield, MA.
- Prince William County  
1822 Deed Book 8, pp.348, 481.
- Ratcliffe, R. Jackson  
1978 This Was Prince William. Potomac Press.  
Leesburg, VA
- Smith, Easy  
n.d. "Brentsville: It's People and Places."  
manuscript.
- W.P.A.  
1976 Prince William: The Story of Its People and  
Places. Reprint of 1961 edition, originally  
compiled in 1941. The Bethlehem Good Housekeeping  
Club, Manassas, VA.

CIVIL WAR PROPERTIES  
Prince William Co. VA  
Brentsville Cemetery  
and Jail  
Independence Hwy, VA  
Road

UTM Reference:  
18|282520|4285100

