



**VIRGINIA  
HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION**

File no. 76-21  
Negative no(s). 4371, 4921

**SURVEY FORM**  
house, Brentsville

Historic name Prince William County Court-^^ Common name  
County/Town/City Brentsville, Prince William County  
Street address or route number vic 12249 Bristow Rd., Bristow, Va.  
USGS Quad Nokesville Date or period 1822  
Original owner Prince William County Architect/builder/craftsmen John Claytor (Architect)  
Original use Courthouse  
Present owner Prince William Co. Park Source of name  
Present owner address Authority, Bristow Rd., Bristow, Va. Source of date Architectural evidence; public record.  
Present use Offices Stories 2 stories (second story across front part only).  
Acreege c2 acres Foundation and wall const'n Stone foundation; brick walls.  
Roof type Metal-covered gable roof.

State condition of structure and environs Building and surrounding area in good condition.

State potential threats to structure  
Note any archaeological interest Well, privy, "gibbet," garbage pits probably on site.

Should be investigated for possible register potential? yes  no  In a Brentsville Historic District

Architectural description (Note significant features of plan, structural system and interior and exterior decoration, taking care to point out aspects not visible or clear from photographs. Explain nature and period of all alterations and additions. List any outbuildings and their approximate ages, cemeteries, etc.)

This is a 2-story, brick, Federal-style courthouse having its main entrance in the gable end. Notable architectural features include a fanlight over the main entrance, within a keyed, semi-circular brick arch; an octagonal-roofed frame-built cupola; and a moulded brick cornice. The brick is laid (with badly repointed mortar joints) in Flemish bond on the front, or south end, and in 3-course American bond on the other three sides. The stone foundation is constructed of well-shaped locally-quarried red sandstone laid up in rough courses. At the front entrance is a flagstone and concrete patio measuring about 15' x 32'. Installed in 1976, it replaced a stone walk which led from the courthouse step to Bristow Road. There was also a stone walk which led from the east (side) entrance to the jail. Both of these early "stepping stone" walks, once familiar fixtures in the County, have been paved over with concrete. In 1937, according to a W.P.A. inventory, there was a huge stone doorstep at the courthouse front entrance. This step may have been partly enclosed in the present stone and concrete series of steps leading into the courthouse. It appears as though the earlier doorway has been shortened by about 4 1/2" in height, because the present front door, a replacement, and the present height of the doorway both seem shorter than they should be. There is a recessed plaque in the gable with the following inscription (apparently touched up): "Prince William/County CourtHouse/Built By/William Claytor/-Architect-/1822." The windows on the front have flat arches and stone sills. There is quarter-round moulding around the 6/6 sliding sash windows. Shutter pins are present but no shutters. While the window openings on the front appear original, several windows have been added in the other three walls. These added windows differ from the original windows in that they have round arches and brick, instead of stone, sills. These windows, namely the two flanking both the east and west entrances, and a pair of apparently added 2/2 sliding sash windows at the second floor (level

(continued)

Interior inspected? Yes.

Historical significance (Chain of title; individuals, families, events, etc., associated with the property.)

The Brentsville Courthouse, the fourth Prince William County Courthouse, was built in 1820-22 when the county seat was moved from Dumfries to Brentsville, a more central location. The Courthouse was built by William Claytor of Orange County, Va. At the same time, a jail was built beside the courthouse. Both facilities were constructed on a 3-acre public parcel marked off when the town of Brentsville was established in 1822. Adjacent to the courthouse parcel were 3 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 as a sanctuary for religious freedom. Nothing ever came of the venture, which was a commercial, as much as a religiously-inspired, enterprise to settle a vast territory in what is now Stafford and Prince William Counties. The land was therefore divided among the original grantees.

The 7,500-acre portion allotted to Robert Bristow descended to another Robert Bristow, an Englishman and loyalist who lost his land in 1779 after the Revolution when property belonging to English subjects was confiscated and escheated to the State. The tract was divided and sold at auction, the proceeds going to the Literary Fund for educational purposes. The town of Brentsville was thus established on 50 acres of the original Bristow tract, 2 years after the courthouse was built. The trustees of the town were John Macrae, John Gibson, Gerard Alexander and William S. Alexander.

(continued)



Prince William County Courthouse, Brentsville  
(Continuation Sheet)

Architectural Description (continued)

on the north end, have no hinges present for shutters, and have cyma mouldings instead of quarter-round. Alteration of the two large windows on the north end is also evident: these windows apparently have been made narrower, as can be seen from the patches in the brickwork here.

The interior is simply a large, high-ceilinged, unpartitioned room (except for the newly-created utility room in one corner), with a balcony containing two offices about 1/3 of the way across the south end of the second floor. The balcony is reached by an enclosed, 2-flight, one-landing staircase (one of formerly a pair, the other having been blocked for installation of central heating and air-conditioning). The stair newel is a square moulded post with a ball finial. The rail is moulded. The two flights are enclosed by waist-high "matchboard." Across the balcony there is a moulded rail with turned balusters. The balcony is supported by two plain, round, wooden columns about one foot in diameter. On a plinth base, the columns taper as they rise and have simple moulded capitals. Architrave trim is present around the doors and windows in the two offices on the balcony, but the doors are modern, hollow-core doors.

The first floor is concrete, covered with asphalt tiles. The interior is painted white with blue trim. There is a brick fireplace with no mantel in the southeast corner. 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 moulded and paneled jambs. The walls are plastered up to the outside edge of the trim, meaning that the walls have been replastered over old plaster. A steel or iron column supports the center of the former courtroom, and the walls are braced at the second floor level by three metal tie rods. The large room is lighted by drop electric lights suspended from the ceiling.

Historical Significance (continued)

The Courthouse was abandoned when the County seat was moved to Manassas in 1893. Thereafter, the building was used as a school (1893-1913); in 1941 it was used for manufacturing mattresses; and it was also used as a public meeting and social gathering place. An unusual lawsuit provided funds to restore the old courthouse in the 'teens. 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 Co., 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 \$5,000, to be used to repair and maintain Brentsville Courthouse as a place of amusement for the white people of Prince William County. A metal plaque in memory of Judge Thornton was purchased and affixed to the building's south wall, interior.

From the late 1930s to 1979, the Courthouse was used as a community center. Throughout most of that time the Courthouse was jointly owned by the Board of Supervisors and the School Board. In 1974, the Prince William County Park Authority acquired the building and established a historical recreational area in Brentsville behind the building. The Park Authority repaired the building and now uses it as offices.

Published Sources (continued)

Burton, Tommye S., "Courthouses of Prince William County," in Virginia Cavalcade, Summer 1978, pp. 34-47.

Burton, Tommye S. "Brentsville Courthouse Has New Role in County," in Manassas Journal-Messenger, 26 July 1974.

Washington Star, 2 Jan 1916 (article with photographs).



Sources and bibliography

Published sources (Books, articles, etc., with bibliographic data.)

W.P.A., Writers Project, Prince William, the Story of Its People and Its Places (c1941), p. 114

Ratcliffe, R. J., This Was Prince William (c1978), pp. 8; 12; 73-74. (continued)

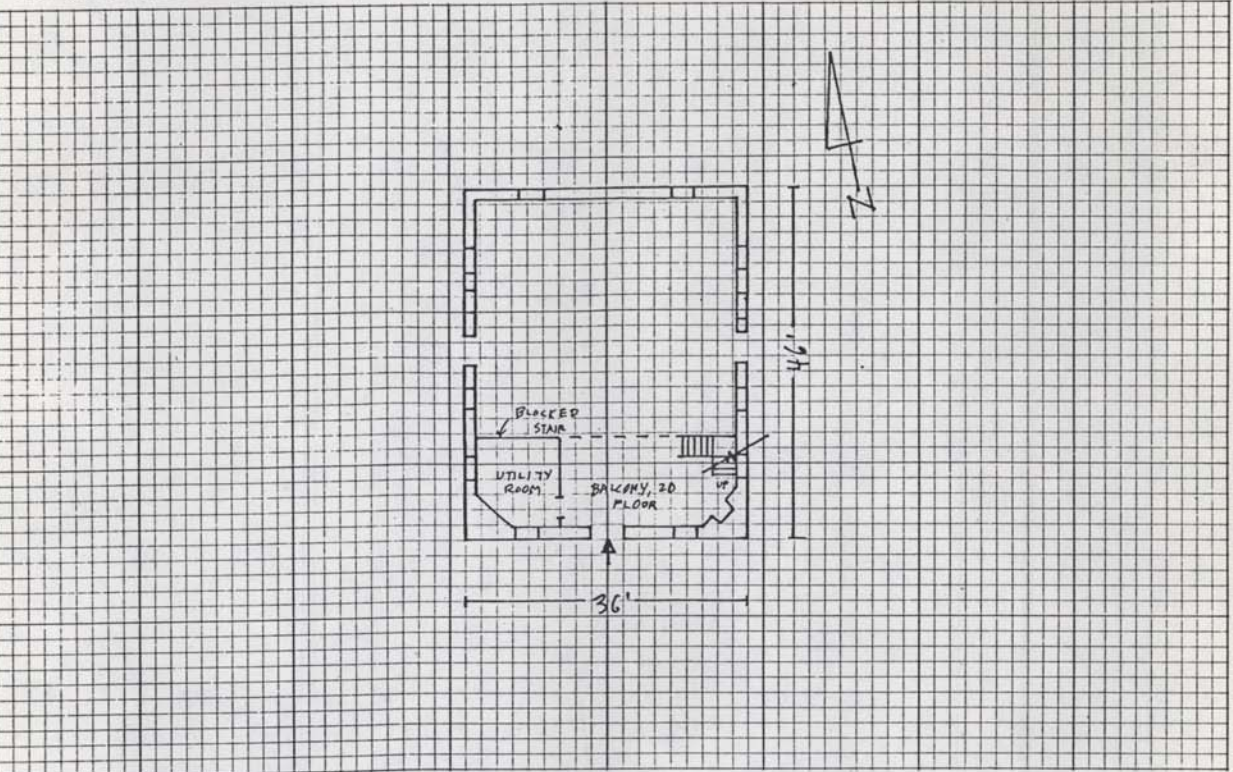
Primary sources (Manuscript documentary or graphic materials; give location.)

Va. Acts of the Assembly, 1821 (Ch. 93, p. 69)

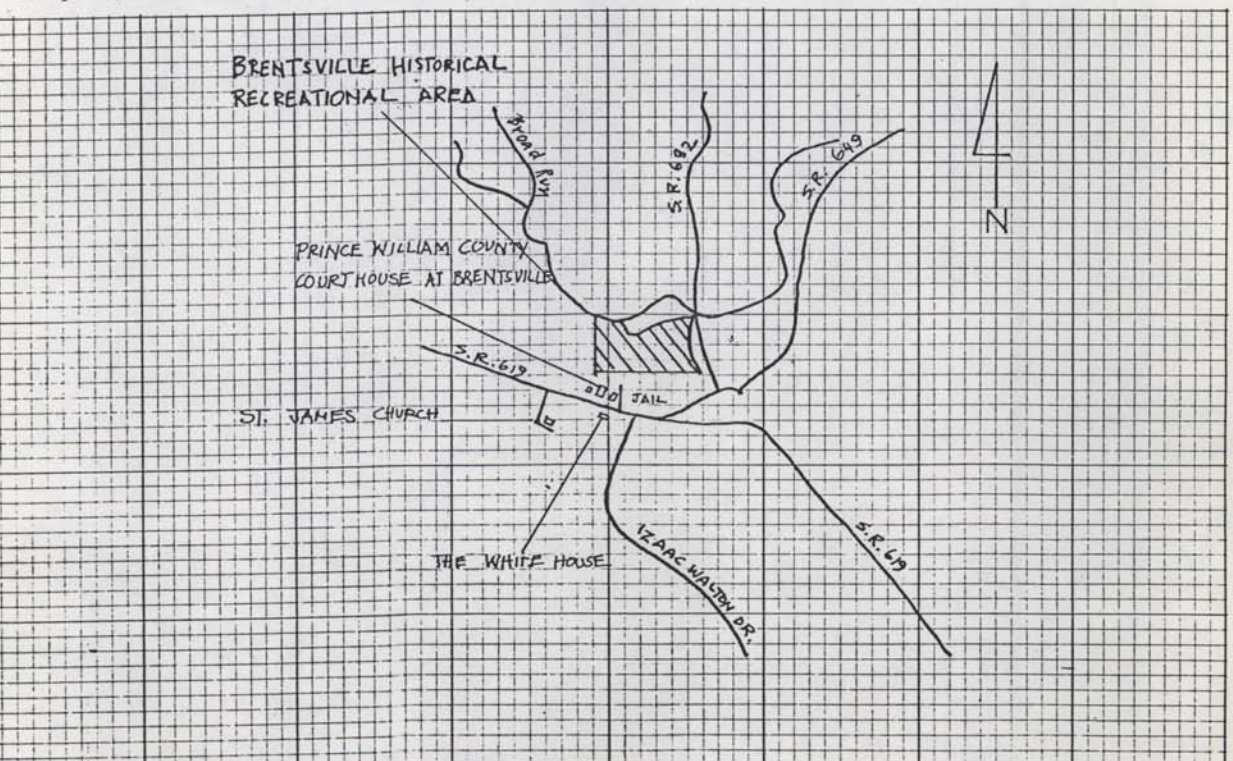
W.P.A. Historical Inventory prep. by Susan R. Morton, 12 May 1937, in Richmond State Library.

Names and addresses of persons interviewed  
Mrs. Agnes Webster, Brentsville

Plan (Indicate locations of rooms, doorways, windows, alterations, etc.)



Site plan (Locate and identify outbuildings, dependencies and significant topographical features.)



Name, address and title of recorder  
Frances Jones, Architectural  
Historian - Surveyor, NVPDC

Date  
JUN 1980





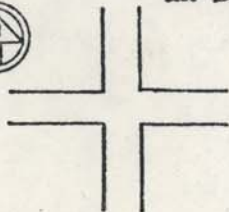


1. STATE <b>Virginia</b> COUNTY <b>Prince William</b> TOWN OR VICINITY <b>Brentsville</b> STREET NO.	2. NAME <b>PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE</b> <small>SEE SPACE BELOW FOR MAP OR DIRECTIONS</small> 4. ORIGINAL OWNER <b>County</b> PRESENT OWNER DATE OR PERIOD <b>1822</b> ARCHITECT ORIGINAL USE <b>Courthouse</b> PRESENT USE <b>Unoccupied</b> CONSTRUCTION <b>Brick</b> NOTABLE FEATURES <b>Fan window, gable roof, octagonal domed cupola</b>	HABS PRIORITY <table border="1" style="width:100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width:33%; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="width:33%; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="width:33%; text-align: center;">3</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3					
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3. HABS SURVEY NO. AIA 5. TO BE FILLED IN BY THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS <table border="1" style="width:100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width:25%;">INDEX NO.</td> <td style="width:25%;">NEGATIVE FILE</td> <td style="width:25%;">PUBLISHED PHOTOS</td> <td style="width:25%;">PUBLISHED DWGS.</td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </table> 6. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE & DESCRIPTION <b>This is the fourth site of the Prince William Courthouse.</b> <small>CONTINUE IN SPACE BELOW</small>	INDEX NO.	NEGATIVE FILE	PUBLISHED PHOTOS	PUBLISHED DWGS.					4. ORIGINAL OWNER <b>County</b> PRESENT OWNER DATE OR PERIOD <b>1822</b> ARCHITECT ORIGINAL USE <b>Courthouse</b> PRESENT USE <b>Unoccupied</b> CONSTRUCTION <b>Brick</b> NOTABLE FEATURES <b>Fan window, gable roof, octagonal domed cupola</b> NO. OF STOR. <b>2</b> BUILDER <b>County</b> <small>CONTINUE IN SPACE BELOW</small>	
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7. PHYSICAL CONDITION OF STRUCTURE (OTHER) <table border="1" style="width:100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th></th> <th style="width:15%;">IN DANGER</th> <th style="width:15%;">PRESERVE</th> <th style="width:15%;">REPAIR</th> <th style="width:15%;">RESTORE</th> <th style="width:15%;">RECONSTRUCT</th> </tr> <tr> <td>EXTERIOR</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">X</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>INTERIOR</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">X</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> 9. POSSIBLE USE  11. AVAILABLE FILES <table border="1" style="width:100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width:25%;">MEASURED DRAWINGS</td> <td style="width:25%;">OLD PHOTOS OTHER</td> <td style="width:25%;">FIELD REPORTS RESEARCH REPORTS</td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </table> 13. REFERENCES: AUTHOR, TITLE AND PAGES <b>Prince William, The Story of Its Places and Its People</b> DATE		IN DANGER	PRESERVE	REPAIR	RESTORE	RECONSTRUCT	EXTERIOR		X				INTERIOR		X				MEASURED DRAWINGS	OLD PHOTOS OTHER	FIELD REPORTS RESEARCH REPORTS				8. VAL. TO <table border="1" style="width:100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width:25%;">NATION</td> <td style="width:25%;">STATE</td> <td style="width:25%;">COMMUNITY</td> <td style="width:25%;">OTHER</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">X</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> QUALITY <table border="1" style="width:100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width:25%;">VERY HIGH</td> <td style="width:25%;">HIGH</td> <td style="width:25%;">NOTABLE MENTION</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">X</td> </tr> </table> 10. NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS ZONED CLASS  12. OPEN TO PUBLIC FEE CONTROL BY  14. NAME, ADDRESS AND TITLE OF RECORDER <b>Dleming McMullin, Jr.</b> <b>Charlottesville, Va.</b> DATE OF RECORD <b>8/28/58</b>	NATION	STATE	COMMUNITY	OTHER			X		VERY HIGH	HIGH	NOTABLE MENTION			X
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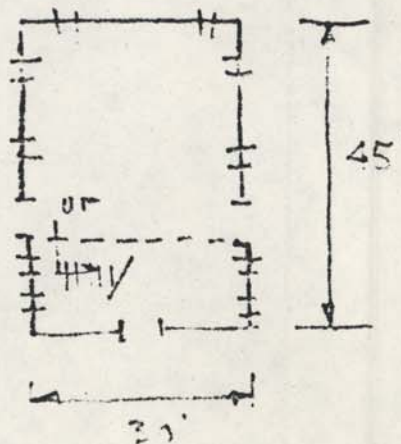
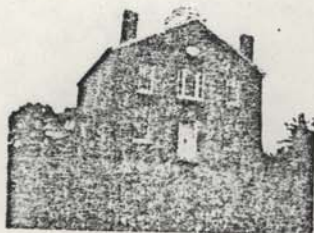
CONTINUE ADDITIONAL DATA, PHOTOGRAPHS, COMMENTS, SKETCH OR MAP IN SPACE BELOW

In Brentsville



LOCATION

PHOTOGRAPHS



96-21

ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY FORM

VIRGINIA HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION  
Room 1116 1/2 Ninth Street State Office Building  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

1. County *Prince William County*  
Town *Brentsville*  
Street No.

2. Historic Name  
Present Name *Prince William Courthouse*  
Date or Period *1813*  
Architect  
Builder, craftsman, etc.

USGS Quad Name *Nokesville*  
Quad Date *1966*  
Scale *7 1/2*  
Original Owner *Prince William County*  
Original Use *Courthouse*

Source of Date  
3. No. stories (dormers count as 1/2 story):

Present Owner  
Present Owner Address *Prince W. County, Manassas, Va.*  
Present Use *Headquarters of the Pr. Wm. Historical Society*

Wall construction: *2*  
Acreage *2*  
*Brick - Flemish Bond*

4. Historical Significance (Chain of Title, Families and Events, etc., connected with the property):

*This Building was built about 1813 and was used apparently about*

*no forty years.*

5. Architectural Significance (Note interesting interior and exterior details, etc. cite significant alterations and additions).

*The building is in outstanding condition appears to be an outstanding example of construction of the period.*

*A jail is located on the same property appears to date from about the same period and is presently being used as an attorney's office.*

6. Condition of structure (check one):

(a) sound x (b) in need of minor repairs \_\_\_\_\_ (c) in need of major repairs \_\_\_\_\_  
(d) unsound \_\_\_\_\_

7. State potential threats to preservation of structure:

*None*



8. List Number of Photographs Exterior Interior Outbuildings

9. Sources and Bibliography:

A. Published Sources (author, title, date, page number, etc.)

*History of Old Prince William County published in 1941.*

B. Primary Sources (original or later drawings, old photographs, pictures, manuscripts and their location).

C. Names and Addresses of People Interviewed.

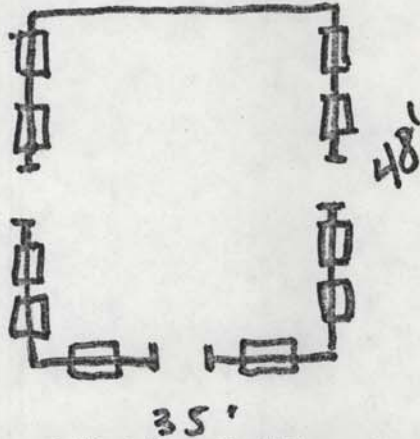
10. Name, Address and Title of Recorder:

*Leu, Falmouth, Va.*

Date of Record:

*Oct 71*

11. First Floor Plan (Rough Plan indicating arrangement of rooms, doorways, windows on ground floor):



12. Site Plan (Locate and identify outbuildings, dependencies, and significant farm structures):

