

Mary Washington College-Center for Historic Preservation *Weems-Botts Mus. C. I.*

**VIRGINIANA FILE**

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*Historic Sites  
(Prince William Co.)*

*Courthouse Site)*

*(Third - Dumfries)*

September 18, 1985

Mr. Steven Bodolay, Chairman

Prince William County Historical Commission

c/o Prince William County Planning Commission

Manassas, Virginia 22110

Dear Mr. Bodolay:

I am writing in response to your kind letter of September 10, 1985 in which you express your deep concern about the site of Prince William County's 18th-century Courthouse at Dumfries. I am encouraged to hear that the Prince William County Historical Commission continues to be interested in this important site, and it is my fervent hope that your letter and my response to it will mark the beginning of a constructive dialogue concerning Prince William County's mid-18th-century Courthouse, the archaeological excavations that were conducted there during 1985, and the disposition of the site and its artifacts.

Please know that I share your concern that the excavations at the Courthouse have yet to be back-filled. Lee Lansing of Dumfries continues to work diligently to mobilize the resources, both financial and material, that will be necessary to back-fill the site. Ideally, the site should be back-filled with sand. That, however, is an expensive proposition, but one that Mr. Lansing is doing all that he can to ensure that the site is back-filled as expeditiously and efficiently as possible, and I will do whatever I can to make sure that the site is back-filled to everyone's satisfaction.

I share your genuine concern that the Courthouse site has yet to be back-filled, but I must admit to being somewhat puzzled by the

by the remainder of your letter. Regrettably, you appear to have been misinformed on several points. First, complete color and black and white photographs were taken of the site on June 21st. Elevations across the site were recorded on June 27th and June 28th. Second, copies of the report on the excavations conducted at the Courthouse during 1984 were distributed to Mr. and Mrs. James A. Bishop, the Town of Dumfries, and the Prince William County Historical Commission. A report of the excavations conducted during the spring and summer of 1985 will be prepared during October of this year. Copies of that report will be made available to all interested individuals as soon as it is completed. Third, a letter of agreement executed between Mr. and Mrs. James A. Bishop and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1984 stipulated that artifacts recovered during the excavations in that year would remain in the archaeology laboratories of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation until all identification and analysis had been completed. Upon completion of all identification and analysis, the artifacts recovered during 1984 would be deposited in the Weems-Botts Museum in Dumfries. A letter of agreement executed between Mr. and Mrs. James A. Bishop and the Center for Historic Preservation and which covers the 1985 excavations provides for a similar disposition of the artifacts recovered at the Courthouse site. As soon as we have had an opportunity to compare the artifacts recovered in 1984 with those recovered in 1985, the former will be deposited at the Weems-Botts Museum. The latter will be forwarded to the Weems-Botts Museum when analysis of these artifacts has been completed. Fourth, Mr. Lee Lansing of Dumfries continues to check on the site at regular intervals, as has Dr. Carl Lounsbury of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Dr. Lounsbury reports that he found the grass as the site to be rather high, but he found no signs of vandalism that would be a cause for alarm.

It is my fervent hope that my letter has answered some of your

questions. The site of Prince William County's 18th-century Courthouse at Dumfries is indeed an important one, and the very modest excavations which were conducted there in 1984 and 1985 have revealed that the plan of the Courthouse was unique among 18th-century courthouses in Virginia. Our excavations have also disclosed tantalizing evidence that there perhaps was a close relationship between George Mason's building at Gunston Hall and the construction of the Courthouse at Dumfries. The site is certainly deserving of our best efforts, and the site and its eventual preservation will be best served by open communication and unselfish cooperation by all those parties who are concerned about the site and its future. I look forward to hearing from you if you have any additional questions about the involvement of the Mary Washington College Center for Historic Preservation in the excavations at the Dumfries Courthouse site. Please feel free to call me at my office (703) 899-4037 or at home (703)373-8940) at any time.

Sincerely,

Carter L. Hudgins  
Director