



By Mark Milligan — Potomac News

KEEPING AN EYE OUT — The Rev. and Mrs. A.H. Schumate observe the progress of the dig from their Dumfries home.

DIG

From Page A1

a courthouse for the town. Mason was the owner of Gunston Hall.

The Prince William County Historical Commission contracted with Carl Lounsbury, who has a special interest in researching early courthouses, and William H. Adams, an archeologist, both with Colonial Williamsburg, to direct the research at the courthouse site this week.

Also on the site is Presha Merritt, of Montclair, a junior at George Mason who is studying archaeology.

She said she learned that the project was being planned in Dumfries and contacted Colonial Williamsburg and asked if she could help.

It is her first dig, she said, and she is excited about having the opportunity to work on the project. She said she doesn't mind the worms and the ants, but she can't get over the nerve of the robins who swoop in to grab the worms out of the excavations.

Late Tuesday afternoon, Robert E. Farmer, of the Prince William County Public Works Department, was carefully scraping away the top layers of earth with a backhoe. The archeologists were doing the rest of the scraping and digging by hand with garden trowels.

"Right now, we're not dealing with too many facts. We may think we know where the courthouse was built, but until we examine our artifacts, we don't know," Smith said.

"The design of the courthouse may turn out to be of straight construction, similar to the courthouses at King William and Hanover, or it may have had an arcade, Smith said: "We really don't know yet."

Smith said he thinks they may have found a fallen east wall, a fallen south wall and the west wall.

The huge gnarled mulberry tree that stands off center of where they are digging may have stood on the site the entire time, Smith said.

Mrs. Schumate said she remembers the tree being there, but thinks that it has grown a great deal since she first moved to the Henderson House in 1913 when her first husband, the late Dr. D.C. Cline, bought it and restored it.

"I remember when some of the walls of the courthouse were still standing. Of course the whole thing

was in ruins. We used to keep our two cows in that field," she recalled.

"The jail and the jailer's house were over there, too, and there was supposed to have been a theatre nearby which George Washington attended," she said.

On the left corner of the lot there was an old colonial house, a story and a half. It was hauled in there after the Civil War, she said, and John McIn- teer fixed it up for his family to live in.

At the time the courthouse was built, there were 11 public and a large number of private warehouses in the busy tobacco port. Also in the town was a newspaper, *The Dumfries Gazette*, at least five hotels or ordinaries, a dance hall, a ferry, flour mills, an academy, a brick yard, a shipyard, a bakery and bread inspector.

Potomac Creek gradually silted in, commerce was destroyed, and the town began to fade away.

Stone markers have been placed at the Dumfries site and at three other sites where county courthouses once stood.

Prince William County was formed March 26, 1731, from portions of the old Stafford and King George counties.

The county first extended from Chopawamsic Creek northward to include the present-day Fairfax and Arlington counties and westward to include Fauquier and Loudoun coun-

ties.

The first courthouse was built on Occoquan Creek in 1731 at the ferry landing.

When, in 1742, the area on the upper side of the Occoquan became the new county of Fairfax, a Prince William courthouse was built on Cedar Run, 3½ miles south of Independent Hill.

The town of Dumfries on Quantico Creek was chartered by the General Assembly in 1748, and the courthouse was relocated there when it became a colonial boomtown.

The contractor, Benjamin Tompkins, finished the project in May, 1762 on a hill overlooking Quantico Creek. It was there that in 1774 resolutions were adopted to make the county independent of England and delegates were appointed to the First Virginia Convention.

Soon, the silting of Quantico Creek worsened and Dumfries port business ended.

In 1820 the fourth county courthouse was established in Brentsville.

After 1822, the Dumfries Courthouse became a church and then was abandoned.

The courthouse was finished in Brentsville in 1822 and it was used until 1892 when the present courthouse was built in the railroad junction town of Manassas.

A large new courthouse complex is nearing completion in Manassas.



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CAREFULLY — Presha Merritt, a George Mason University student, digs.

SUPERINTENDENTS — Town Historian Lee Lansing (left) Dumfries residents Pappy Keys (center) and

Cecil Garrison (right) survey the dig, where archeologists seek remains of Dumfries Courthouse.

PN 5/23/84

Archaeologists dust Prince William's past

By EILEEN MEAD
Potomac News Staff Writer

The Rev. A.H. Shumate sat at his sunny porch window in Dumfries Tuesday peering through binoculars at the archaeologists digging in the field across the road.

Annie G. Shumate, 94, his wife of 52 years, showed equal interest in activities of the team from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation who are digging there to find the foundation of the third Prince William County Courthouse.

"Curiosity killed a cat, you know," Mrs. Shumate said, "but I think this project is interest-

ing and worth doing. Now they'll discover where George Washington stopped when he was in Dumfries."

The Shumates live in the historic 200-year-old Alexander Henderson House on Fairfax Street, overlooking the vacant lot where the third county courthouse was built in 1762. The courthouse building was used as a church until 1857 when it was abandoned and fell into decay.

Interest was renewed in the lay-out of the former courthouse recently when researchers from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation found pencil sketches at Gunston Hall which

they thought might be early designs of the courthouse at Dumfries.

Experts think the sketches may have been made by William Buckland, who has been credited with designing Rockledge in Occoquan, the Hammond-Harwood House in Annapolis and Pohick Church in Lorton, among other important buildings.

It is feasible, they said, that George Mason, who was a trustee of the town and Buckland's employer, may have asked Buckland to design

—See DIG, Page A5