

PWC - Archaeology

Officials seek more digging in Dumfries

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

REFERENCE

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Two archeologists who initially excavated the site of the former Prince William County courthouse at Dumfries this summer said enough details were found to be "tantalizingly incomplete."

County officials, who have the archeologists' report in hand, say they'd like to pursue the project, but need a cost estimate from Colonial Williamsburg.

John Schofield of the Prince William County Planning Department, which administered a contract for the dig, said Monday that the commission is interested in continuing the archeological work, but awaits an estimate of cost from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Mr. Schofield said it may be possible that interested historical societies and individuals will help raise the additional money needed for the project.

The archeologists studied the courthouse site from May 21 to 26. They are Dr. William Hampton Adams, project director, and Dr. Carl R. Lounsbury, architectural historian, from the Department of Archaeology, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

The county historical commission recognized the historical and

architectural significance of the of the third Prince William County courthouse (1759-1822), about which little is known.

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has been doing considerable research on the landscape and structures of the colonial courthouse in Virginia. Its ultimate goal is the restoration and interpretation of the Courthouse of 1770 in Williamsburg.

Members of the Foundation and of the Commission were equally intrigued by the discovery, in the summer of 1983, of sketches of a courthouse on the back of an interior window frieze board at Gunston Hall.

Architect William Buckland was working for George Mason at Gunston Hall at the time the new courthouse was planned in Dumfries. Some think it possible that Buckland may have made the sketches.

The archeologists conducted their analysis of the Dumfries excavation in June and July, and they recently turned over a 40-page report to the county historical commission.

The report says that the work revealed "a well preserved courthouse foundation and floor paving,

paving. At this point we cannot say whether or not this area represents an entrance flanked by jury rooms, a raised judges' platform, or some other feature," the report says.

It is likely, the archeologists said, that the fallen walls present the possibility that portions of the building may remain intact.

The walls may have fallen outward in sufficiently large pieces that arches, doorways and window openings may still be evident. If that is so, a reconstruction drawing of what the courthouse may have looked like is much more feasible, according to the report.

The prime focus of the dig was the courthouse itself, rather than the entire courthouse complex, the report says.

domestic buildings in the area, it is likely that Aquia sandstone quoins decorated the corners of the brick walls," the report says.

At some point a slate roof was added, since two roofing slates were recovered. The structure was about 48 feet wide, but the length could not be determined. Evidence was found suggesting an arcade along the east side, which may have been the front, with partial arcades bending around the north and south sides for a distance of 27 feet.

"If this interpretation is correct, then a room or several rooms could be within the area enclosed on three sides by the arcade."

"This projected room would be 18 by 32 feet with an entrance on the north side, based upon the worn

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as well as some indications of spatial plans for the courthouse complex."

It says that "only the complete excavation of the courthouse will reveal if the link between architect William Buckland, George Mason, the Gunston sketches and the courthouse in Dumfries is an acceptable hypothesis."

"It is fairly safe to state that the Dumfries Courthouse is sufficiently different from all other courthouses in the region that we cannot know from the evidence at hand what it looked like."

The archeologists found that the structure was built of brick and had some stone facing. "Based upon other prominent public and