

VLR-4/15/75 NRHP-5/12/75

Form 10-300  
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

STATE: Virginia  
COUNTY: Prince William  
FOR NPS USE ONLY  
ENTRY DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

1. NAME  
COMMON: Weems-Botts House  
AND/OR HISTORIC: Weems-Botts House

2. LOCATION  
STREET AND NUMBER: Southwest corner of Duke and Cameron Streets  
CITY OR TOWN: Dumfries CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Eighth (Herbert E. Harris II)  
STATE: Virginia CODE: 51 COUNTY: Prince William CODE: 153

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY  
OWNER'S NAME: Town of Dumfries (see continuation sheet #1)  
STREET AND NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY OR TOWN: Dumfries STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION  
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Prince William County Court House  
STREET AND NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY OR TOWN: Manassas STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS  
TITLE OF SURVEY: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey  
DATE OF SURVEY: 1973  Federal  State  county  Local  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
STREET AND NUMBER: 221 Governor Street  
CITY OR TOWN: Richmond STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

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STATE: Virginia  
COUNTY: Prince William  
ENTRY NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Weems-Botts House is located on Duke Street, on a hill above Dumfries' Main Street, and is a small framed structure built in four sections. It is sheathed with weatherboards, has gable roofs covered with sheet metal, and is lit by modern six-over-six and four-over-four sash. The house's various sections date from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.

The earliest portion is the northeastern room. It is brick nogged and sits upon a slate foundation, the east wall of which has been removed to replace a rotting sill. It is a true story-and-a-half building, with a single 11 by 16 foot room on each level. The first floor retains a section of beaded horizontal pine sheathing which has been reproduced throughout the room in the course of the present restoration. Exposed beaded joists and an open winder stair with a beaded newel comprise the remainder of the decoration in this room. The firebox of the exterior end chimney, which is now enclosed in a later addition and which is built of brick laid in three-course American bond, has been refaced. The second story is unembellished except for a post-colonial chair rail across its open gable end. The original flooring survives here, as it does in the first floor. Another noteworthy early appurtenance is the single, louvered casement shutter on the front of this section of the house.

In the mid-nineteenth century, another, larger single-celled unit was added to the west of the original portion. Like the earlier section, it is very plain. It has a closed winder stair in the southeast corner and simple mantels in both stories. In the northeast corner of the first story, a portion of early pit-sawn, whitewashed weatherboard cladding survives on the former west exterior wall of the original portion.

In the twentieth century, a one-story kitchen ell was added behind (south of) the eighteenth-century wing and another one-story wing was appended to the west end of the mid-nineteenth-century section. Also in the present century, a one-story porch with chamfered posts was built across the entire facade of the house.

The house is currently undergoing a sympathetic restoration by Historic Dumfries Virginia, Inc.

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**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	<u>Historical</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	<u>scholarship</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Music		_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation			_____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Weems-Botts house is associated with the names and professional activities of two prominent early Virginians--Mason Locke (Parson) Weems and Benjamin Botts. The house is also one of the few early structures surviving in the old Potomac port town of Dumfries. Its earliest portion is a fine specimen of a small commercial structure of the late-eighteenth century and is noteworthy for being a true story-and-a-half building, an unusual type for Virginia.

Mason Locke Weems bought the half-acre plot known as Lot 51 from two trustees of the Town of Dumfries in June, 1798. He had by this time retired from the full-time ministry and was a bookseller. It is likely that he built the earliest portion of the building for use as a bookshop and temporary lodging, for he had not yet established his residence in Dumfries even though his association with the village began in 1795.

As early as 1797, Weems became convinced that small, cheap books would be popular with the reading public and that uplifting messages could easily be promoted through them. George Washington struck him as an admirable subject, and he began to prepare a short biography, enticing his publisher in June, 1799, with the prediction that "it will sell like flax seed at quarter of a dollar. I cou'd make you a world of pence and popularity by it." When Washington died later that year, the book, much of which Weems had presumably written at his Dumfries shop, was almost ready. It appeared a month and a half later, an anonymously issued 80-page pamphlet entitled The Life and Memorable Actions of George Washington. . . .

Weems sold the property in June, 1802, to Benjamin Botts, a successful criminal lawyer who was prominent among the team of attorneys who defended Aaron Burr during his treason trial. Botts used the building as his law office.

Botts and his wife died in the Richmond theater fire of 1811, and the property title remained in his estate. It was sold for taxes in 1835 and three years later repurchased by four of Botts' sons, among whom were Charles Tyler Botts, founder of the Southern Planter, an agricultural journal, and John Minor Botts, a Whig politician.

After brief periods of ownership by others, during which time the nineteenth-century wing was added, the Merchant family purchased the property in 1869 and held it until 1968. In 1974, it was acquired by the Town of Dumfries and leased to Historic Dumfries Virginia, Inc., who are restoring it as a museum.

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Flory, William E. S., "Parson Weems - First Biographer of Washington," ms. in Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission archives.  
 "George Didn't Sleep There But the Cherry Tree Man Did," Journal Messenger (Manassas, Va.) February 14, 1974.  
 Prince William County Deed Books  
 "Weems: Scalawag or Admirable Man?," Potomac Scene, March 29, 1974.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	

UTM References:  
18/297050/4271240

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1.6 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission      DATE: April 1975

STREET AND NUMBER:  
221 Governor Street

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond      STATE: Virginia      CODE: 51

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION	NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION
<p>As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name <u>Junius R. Fishburne, Jr.</u>            Junius R. Fishburne, Jr., Exec. Director            Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission            Title _____</p> <p>Date <u>APR 15 1975</u></p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p>_____            Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</p> <p>Date _____</p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p>_____            Keeper of The National Register</p> <p>Date _____</p>

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet) #1

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
Prince William	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

Lessee and Operator:

Historic Dumfries Virginia, Inc.  
Box 26  
Dumfries, Virginia      code: 51

U.S.G.S. 7½' quadrangle (scale:1:24000)  
Quantico-Va.-Md. 1966

WEEMS-BOTTS HOUSE, PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY

UTM References:  
18/297050/4271240

