

VLR-12/18/79 NRHP-3/17/80

Form No 10-300 (Rev 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Brems Slave Chapel (preferred)
AND/OR COMMON Grace Church Parish House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Grace Episcopal Church
CITY, TOWN Brems Bluff VICINITY OF Seventh (J. Kenneth Robinson)
STATE Virginia CODE 51 COUNTY Fluvanna CODE 065

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES - RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES - UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Wardens and Vestry
STREET & NUMBER Grace Episcopal Church
CITY, TOWN Brems Bluff VICINITY OF Virginia 23022

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC Fluvanna County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN Palmyra STATE Virginia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
DATE 1967, 1979
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission - 221 Governor Street
CITY, TOWN Richmond STATE Virginia 23219

has this property been determined eligible? X Y N

FEDERAL X STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE 1884 &
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE 1924
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Brems Slave Chapel is located just up the steep hill from the James River in the village of Brems Bluff. Built in 1835 at chapel field, Lower Brems, (a part of the overall Brems plantation), the building was moved between 1882-84 to Brems Bluff and became Grace Church. It was considerably altered at this time, only to be moved again in 1924 for use as a parish hall for the present Grace Church. The slave chapel is a 24'5" x 43'4" rectangular structure covered by a gable roof. A vestry was added to the rear of the building in the present century.

The chapel is set on a brick foundation laid in stretcher bond. The front (east) elevation was given a new brick facing in 1966 when the present steps and iron railings were added. The small ell to the rear (west) is set on cast stone. The wood-frame structure is covered with board-and-batten siding. The roof is covered with slate shingles, a common roof covering for the area. A stove chimney projects from either slope of the roof, and a third chimney is found on the rear of the ell.

Fenestration consists of 4/2 hung-sash windows, the upper sash executed in the form of a pointed arch. The present sash appears to date after the first move. The main (east) entrance contains Gothic, paneled, double doors flanked by louvred shutters. A side entrance is provided on the south elevation in the rear ell.

The plan of the church consists of an auditorium, sanctuary and rear kitchen. The sanctuary is divided from the auditorium by plastic folding doors. Located behind the sanctuary, the kitchen is reached through a simply executed doorway. Plain wooden pews, added in the 1880s remain along the side walls. The present seating consists of wooden chairs. The ceiling and present lighting fixtures date from the mid-20th century.

Just to the south of the building is Grace Church, a brick, Georgian-style edifice. Immediately behind is a dense woodland.

RCC

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The Brems Slave Chapel nomination consists of one acre. The chapel is located to the north of the cemetery of Grace Episcopal Church, and the nominated property includes only the church and sufficient area around the building.

RCC

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1835; 1884

BUILDER/ARCHITECT unknown, probably J. H. Cocke

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The building now serving as the parish house of Grace Episcopal Church, Brems Bluff, was constructed originally in 1835 as a slave chapel for Brems, the vast plantation of General John Hartwell Cocke. While chapels for slaves can be found on large plantations in the deep South, the Brems Slave Chapel is the only known structure used for such a purpose in Virginia. The simple board-and-batten Gothic Revival structure represents the culmination of the planter's deep concerns about the moralities and practicalities of the institution of slavery and of the religious state of the slave.

John Hartwell Cocke was born in Surry County on September 19, 1780. Educated at the College of William and Mary, Cocke reached his majority in September 1801 and became master of 5,691 acres of James River land in Surry and Fluvanna counties. Cocke, no ordinary planter, was described by his biographer as "...caught up in the ferment of reform emanating from the North. He was in some sense at least a lonely outpost of freedom's ferment, a figment of New England reform, a harbinger of Victorian morality and the Bible Belt, paradoxically ensconced in Neo-Classical magnificence on the banks of the James River, master of human slaves."¹ Cocke was a leader in the program to encourage voluntary emigration to Africa for blacks. Although opposed to slavery in principle, he felt that immediate emancipation was impractical. He believed that the South should be preparing for the future when freeing the slaves would become a reality. As part of the emancipation process Cocke felt that it was a Christian's duty to provide religious instruction for his slaves.

As early as 1821, the slaves at Brems were coming together for worship. Cocke and members of his family would conduct services for them. In 1825 Cocke erected a brick building at Brems for religious and educational instruction for his slaves. Cocke's wife Louisa shared her husband's convictions, and her diaries are crowded with references to religious instruction and services. On January 14, 1828 Louisa recorded, "I found much amusement today from little Betsey. I hope to train her up for heaven, and there it will never be asked what colour her skin was of while upon earth."² On a Sunday afternoon in November 1827 she "attended the few of the col'd people who would come through the snow."³ A month later on a Sabbath afternoon she "endeavoured to instruct a few of the female servants as usual."⁴ Several young missionaries also attended to Cocke's slaves, and in the fall of 1835 the Cockes dedicated the new chapel for religious worship. Up until the Civil War Cocke's belief in religious instruction for slaves remained firm, as evidenced by his taking communion in Richmond's African Baptist Church in 1852. Following the War, the Brems Slave Chapel fell into disuse. Cocke died in 1866, and the plantation was inherited by his sons.

In the spring of 1881 Cary C. Cocke, William Cocke and Charles E. Cosby, as trustees, purchased two acres of land, the present site of Grace Church. At some point between July 25, 1882 and February 14, 1884 the Cocke family offered the old slave chapel to the community of Brems Bluff, and it was moved from the chapel field of Lower Brems to the

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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Bremo Slave Chapel, Fluvanna County, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET #1

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 1

8. SIGNIFICANCE

site of the present brick church. The chapel was consecrated as Grace Church on February 14, 1884 by Bishop Alfred M. Randolph. Services were held in the chapel until 1924. In that year the church was moved slightly to the north to its present site, and a new brick church was built to replace it. Thus, the Bremo Slave Chapel has served three functions in its 145-year history -- first as a place of worship for slaves, second as a house of worship for the Episcopalians of Bremo Bluff, and today as a parish hall for that church. Above all else it stands as a unique reminder of a most unusual Virginian who truly believed that the slave deserved and needed religion.

MTP/RCC

¹M. Boyd Coyner, "John Hartwell Cocke of Bremo--Architecture and Slavery in the Antebellum South." (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1961), pp. 24-25.

²Louisa Cocke's Diary, 1827-28. (January 14, 1828).

³Ibid. (November 17, 1827).

⁴Ibid. (December 16, 1827).

USGS 7.5' quadrangle
Arvon, Virginia

(Scale 1:24000)
1968

BREMO SLAVE CHAPEL, Fluvanna County, VA

UTM References:

17/738220/4177660

