

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 Fort Chiswell

AND/OR COMMON

Fort Chiswell Site (Preferred)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Fort Chiswell

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

9 (William C. Wampler)

STATE

Virginia

VICINITY OF
CODE 51

COUNTY
Wythe

CODE
197

3 CLASSIFICATION

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

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mrs. Garnett Davis & Virginia Dept. of Highways and Transportation

STREET & NUMBER
RFD

1221 Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

CITY, TOWN

Max Meadows

STATE

Virginia 24360

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Wythe County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Wytheville

STATE

Virginia 24382

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Statewide Survey

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS Virginia Research Center for Archaeology

CITY, TOWN

Wren Kitchen, College of William and Mary STATE
Wmbsbg. Virginia 23186

DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

[REDACTED] town of Fort Chiswell, [REDACTED] lie the remains of a succession of settlements generally known as the site of colonial Fort Chiswell. It has borne this name since 1761. Excavations by University of Virginia archaeologists, in cooperation with the Virginia Research Center for Archaeology, have salvaged a portion of that site which [REDACTED]

Excavations along the southern edge of the area nominated have uncovered prehistoric remains dating from the Middle Archaic period. These excavations also uncovered remnants representative of the three known periods of 18th century occupation, one structure of which survived until the 20th century. Also encountered on the site was the stone foundation of the 20th century building known as the Davis House, constructed circa 1910 and destroyed in 1968. This survived above ground until highway construction began.

The three successive periods of occupation extracted from the historical records are that of Alexander Sayers, 1752-1765, Colonel William Byrd, 1760-1761, and that of James McGavock, who came to the site in 1771, and whose descendants still retained ownership of the family home in 1901 when it burned.

Structural remains from the Sayers period of occupation were all of brick, two chimney bases and a brick box 4 feet by 4 feet. These appear to be from two log cabins and a smokehouse. All three structures have a similar orientation.

The second period of occupation was that of Colonel William Byrd and his men. A magazine was dug into the ground along another orientation, but adjacent to the Sayers cabin. This magazine appeared to have had a brick superstructure above ground.

Limestone foundation walls of three buildings from the third (McGavock) period of occupation survived below ground. Historical records recount numerous buildings at Fort Chiswell during the McGavock period. McGavock constructed an ordinary, a magazine (storehouse), a jail and stocks, a dwelling house, a blacksmith's shop, a carpenter's shop, and a mill. One building excavated measured 20 feet by 20 feet. It coincides with court records ordering the construction of a courthouse of the same dimensions at Fort Chiswell. A second structure measured 66 feet overall and consisted of a house 17 feet by 32 feet with a 25 foot by 23 foot addition. Each section had a stone fireplace. A basement was located in the original building which was on the west end. This second McGavock structure matches a photograph taken circa 1900 claimed to be the original McGavock home. The third structure located, which measures 31 feet by 23 feet, is thought to be the McGavock ordinary or kitchen constructed circa 1772. All of the buildings appearing to date from the McGavock period have foundations of stone and bear a similar orientation. All of the buildings associated with the Sayers complex had brick remains and a common orientation. Their orientation contrasted markedly with that of the buildings of the McGavock complex.

The archaeological work undertaken on this site concerned itself with the area in the path of highway construction. Telltale signs of another structure, off the right-of-way but within the nominated area, are visible at a bend in the creek northwest of the complex of identified buildings. These could be the remains of one of at least two mills known to have been on the site, one constructed by Sayers circa 1754 and the other constructed by McGavock circa 1773.

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 type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" 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"/> 1600-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" 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 Circa 1750-1800

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The area in Augusta County which eventually was named Fort Chiswell was once part of a 100,000 acre tract of land opened for settlement April 26, 1745 and administered by the Woods River Company, a group of men granted permission by the Executive Council to take up the land. The Fort Chiswell land was part of 1150 acres surveyed by the Company's agent, John Buchanan, recorded November 12, 1747 and referred to as Buffalo Lick.

Thomas Walker patented the Buffalo Lick property in 1752. Shortly thereafter the tract was divided between John Montgomery and Alexander Sayers. Sayers' share, which included the Fort Chiswell property, consisted of 504 acres, which he purchased for 15 pounds. Although Sayers did not receive a deed to the property until 1758, by March 25, 1754 he had applied for and secured permission to build a mill there. He and his wife and two children resided on their property in a log cabin. A kitchen and smokehouse were part of the Sayers domestic complex.

On March 29, 1757 Alexander Sayers purchased two lots in the town of New London, on which he was required by law to build a house within a year of the date of purchase. Sayers is known to have been living in New London soon thereafter when he was indicted by the Bedford County Court for blasphemy and intoxication.

It was the Sayers building complex which was used as a campsite by Col. William Byrd in the Fall of 1760 during his Indian Expedition. Byrd's communications with the Governor and Executive Council during that period are datelined "Camp at Sayers" and "Sayers Mill".

In early November 1760 while Byrd was camped at Sayers Mill, Little Carpenter and 32 other Cherokee Indians met with him and agreed to suspend hostilities until March if the Army would proceed no further that fall. The Indians were given trade goods and records state that they went home well satisfied.

Byrd had been instructed by the Executive Council to use his own judgement as to the stationing of the troops. In late November he informed them regarding the disposition of the five companies of the Old Regiment and requested permission to go to New York on personal business.

In communication with Executive Council via a letter dated February 7, 1761, the Sayers property is first referred to as Fort Chiswell. The name stems from Col. William Byrd's friendship with Col. John Chiswell who owned the lead mines at near-by Austinville, several miles south of the Sayers tract.

Fort Chiswell continued to be used as a military outpost during 1761 and the early

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months of 1762, when a formal treaty was made with the Cherokees. According to a portion of the April 23, 1762 Indian Treaty, traders were to go as far as Fort Chiswell with goods for the Indians.

During the Byrd period of military occupation, the subterranean lozenge shaped powder magazine was built immediately adjacent to the Sayers cabin. In keeping with the practice of occasionally fortifying solitary cabins and utilizing them as forts, it is thought that Col. Byrd reinforced the abandoned Sayers cabin in this manner, and considered it a fort. The widely fluctuating troop population at Fort Chiswell, plus the list of equipment carried routinely by ordinary soldiers indicates that the men would have camped in tents within the vicinity of the fortified cabin. A nearby spring would have provided them with water.

The Fort Chiswell property remained in the ownership of Alexander Sayers during its first period of military usage. Sayers, prior to his death in 1765, had mortgaged the lands to Walter Buchanan. Following his death and the subsequent death of his mortgagee, the property was tied up in court litigation between the Sayers and Buchanan heirs, until 1771 when James McGavock made his first payment toward purchasing the property. By then the land was within the boundaries of Botetourt County.

James McGavock, a skilled entrepreneur, immediately capitalized on Fort Chiswell's location. The property was situated on the main road westward to the Frontier, at a point where that thoroughfare intersected a road leading south into the Carolinas.

Early in 1772 McGavock obtained permission to build an ordinary at Fort Chiswell. In January 1773 he was granted permission to construct a mill on his land. A prominent frontier citizen, McGavock was also named a Justice of the Court in January 1773. Surviving records from McGavock's businesses indicate that much retail activity took place at Fort Chiswell during the 1770's as wagon trains passed through. McGavock erected a blacksmith's and carpenter's shop on his land and employed his sons in these family businesses.

In 1775 when James McGavock was named to the Committee of Safety of what was by then Fincastle County, the Fort Chiswell site assumed a new significance. It became the distribution point for massive quantities of bar lead transported from the nearby Austinville mines, a distinction held until the close of the 18th century. Because McGavock was made Commissary to the militia, salt and powder were also stored at Fort Chiswell in his magazine storehouse. Records state that the Committee of Safety met many times at Fort Chiswell during the late 1770's.

When the entity known as Fincastle County was dissolved in late 1776 and its land included in Montgomery County, the first court session for the newly formed county was held at Fort Chiswell on January 7, 1777. The Court continued to meet there regularly.

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On April 8, 1778 James McGavock donated 20 acres of land on which he offered to build a courthouse and town. Early in 1779 construction of the courthouse began; later that year the Court abandoned the plan to build a town at Fort Chiswell, deciding that the land was too arid and inaccessible to attract settlers. Although a jail had been scheduled for construction at Fort Chiswell, this idea, too, was abandoned for several years. Finally nine years later, the Court decided to use McGavock's storehouse as a prison. The following April, David McGavock was authorized to build a prison at Fort Chiswell.

Throughout the last quarter of the 18th century and the first part of the 19th century, McGavock's ordinary and store flourished. However, as westward migration through Fort Chiswell slowed, the site steadily declined in importance.

Members of the McGavock family continued to own and occupy the property until 1901 when the old McGavock home burned down. In 1910 the Davis family elected to build a home in front of the McGavock house ruin. This residence stood until 1968 when it was demolished.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet #3

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 94 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>[REDACTED]</u>	B	<u>[REDACTED]</u>
	ZONE EASTING NORTHING		ZONE EASTING NORTHING
C	<u>[REDACTED]</u>	D	<u>[REDACTED]</u>

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

[REDACTED]

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Ms Martha McCartney

ORGANIZATION

Virginia Research Center for Archaeology

DATE

12/10/76

STREET & NUMBER

Wren Kitchen, The College of William and Mary

TELEPHONE

804 220-2773

CITY OR TOWN

Williamsburg,

STATE

Virginia 23186

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE Junius R. Fishburne, Jr., Executive Director
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE DEC 21 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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