

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

**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 Bruton Parish Poorhouse Archaeological Site

and/or common Same 099-0070

2. Location

street & number Route 132

not for publication

city, town Williamsburg

vicinity of

congressional district 1st, Paul S. Tribble, Jr.

state Virginia

code 51

county York

code 199

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: forest land

4. Owner of Property

name Colonial Williamsburg Foundation c/o President Charles Longworth

street & number Drawer C

city, town Williamsburg

_____ vicinity of

state Virginia 23185

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. York County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Yorktown

state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Virginia Archaeological Site Survey form(44YO60) has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date December 1978

federal state county local

depository for survey records Virginia Research Center for Archaeology

city, town Wren Kitchen, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg state Virginia

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Bruton Parish Poorhouse Archaeological Site in York County, Virginia, lies approximately [redacted] near the city of Williamsburg. The site is located on a narrow point of wooded land overlooking [redacted] Creek, a tidal estuary 600 feet to the south-southwest. The property is owned by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and is currently forested in pine (Photo 1).

A 1978 archaeological survey by the Virginia Research Center for Archaeology located the foundation remains of an eighteenth century building and well in an area identified by the French cartographer, Desandrouin, in 1781-82 as the site of a four building poorhouse complex (Figure 1). Archaeological field testing defined the limits of the brick foundation as measuring twenty feet by sixty-two feet and oriented on an east-west axis. The foundation walls, which are sixteen inches thick, are laid in English bond. A builder's trench, varying from three to six inches in width, has survived intact.

The foundation walls are covered by twelve inches of overburden. A test pit excavated to a depth of twenty inches within the foundation walls yielded fill dirt containing fragments of brick, shell mortar and rose-headed nails as well as a grinding stone measuring three feet three inches in diameter.

The woods' floor, which bears the scars of previous plowing, indicates that the area was formerly in agricultural use before reverting to a forested state. The 1781 map depicts the area as cleared farmland. Cultural material is widely dispersed over the surface of the nominated acreage with the maximum artifact density in the vicinity of the brick foundation. Eighteenth century artifacts found during the 1978 survey include fragments of white salt-glazed and Rhinish stoneware, North Devon gravel-tempered earthenware, creamware, wine bottle glass and the base of a pharmaceutical phial. Sherds of banded pearlware and shell-edged transitional whiteware, dating to the early nineteenth century, were also present. One window glass fragment, tentatively dated to the seventeenth century, suggests earlier occupation. One prehistoric artifact, a quartzite flake, was found in the surveyed area.

Approximately ninety feet from the northeast corner of the brick foundation is a depression twelve feet in diameter and five feet in depth, presumed to be a well shaft. Augering to a depth of two feet, six inches, produced eighteenth century cultural material. The depth of the shaft exceeded the limits which could be probed (Photo 2).

The acreage nominated includes the foundation, the well and the immediately adjacent area, which, according to the 1781 map, should contain the three other buildings of the poorhouse complex. Evidence of seventeenth century domestic occupation is also expected to be within the confines of the nominated acreage.

8. Significance

Period	Area 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 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"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> political/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Bruton Parish Poorhouse Archaeological Site, the intact remains of an eighteenth century workhouse for the poor, is located on an undeveloped tract of York County land north of Williamsburg, Virginia. Established in 1755 by an act of the Virginia legislature at the request of Bruton Parish Church, the Bruton Parish Poorhouse provided institutional care for the poor of the Williamsburg area in the second half of the eighteenth century. Scientific archaeological excavation of the poorhouse complex could yield unique research data about the daily lives of a large and predominately inarticulate portion of the colonial population. Archaeological research could also provide new insights into the Virginia government's first attempts to provide institutional care for the poor of the colony, whose welfare, by the middle of the eighteenth century, was becoming a major social problem.

BACKGROUND

Since 1661 the Virginia government had assigned the care of the poor to the Vestries of the colony's parish churches. The poor, including vagrants, the elderly, orphans, and persons, who, through infirmity, were unable to support themselves, were lodged in the homes of parishioners who were reimbursed from the parish levies for the cost of their room and board.

Able-bodied poor persons, men, women and children alike, were expected to earn their keep and often were bound out as servants. Although an act was passed in 1668 to set up workhouses to train orphans and children of the poor in spinning, weaving, and other useful trades, it was later repealed and the workhouses were never built. The welfare system in colonial Virginia was modeled after the British poor laws.

Despite the fact that in 1682 the King had authorized the Virginia governor to establish churches and almshouses, it was not until 1727 that the colonial government made an official attempt to relieve the financial burden that the care of the poor imposed on many parish churches by empowering Churchwardens, the leaders of the Vestry, to return vagrant poor persons to their home parishes. If they were too ill to travel the home parish was billed for the cost of their care. In 1736 the British government again granted to the Virginia governor the power to establish almshouses, along with his right to establish parish churches.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the number of indigent persons in the colony had increased to the point that a number of parishes requested the House of Burgesses' permission to establish poorhouses. Churches in Princess Anne, Albemarle, Nansemond, Charles City and James City Counties requested this right, as did Bruton Parish Church in the City of Williamsburg.

9. Major Bibliographical References

C.G. Chamberlayne, The Vestry Book of Blisland Parish (Richmond, 1935).

Desandrouin, "Carte des Environs de Williamsburg," 1781-82 (facsimile at the Virginia Research Center for Archaeology, Williamsburg, VA.). See Continuation Sheet #5

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 2 acres

Quadrangle name Williamsburg, Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A			B		
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
C			D		
E			F		
G			H		

Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	n/a	code
state	n/a	code	county	n/a	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date November 7, 1980

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3144

city or town Richmond state Virginia 23219

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Resubmitted 7/20/82:

H. Bryan Mitchell, Exec. Director
Va. Historic Landmarks Commission

Tucker Hill, Exec. Director
title Va. Historic Landmarks Commission

date NOV 18 1980

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On May 16, 1755 the Minister and Churchwardens of Bruton Parish Church petitioned the House to allow them to operate "a workhouse, where the Poor might be more cheaply maintained and usefully employed," claiming that "the Charge of providing for the Poor of the said Parish hath always been burdensome...and of late Years hath much increased."¹ They attributed the "great number of Idle Persons that resort to the city of Williamsburg...who lurk about the Town"² to an influx of indigent people coming to the capital during Public Times and staying in the area until they could fulfill the residency requirements making them a ward of Bruton Parish.

The Bruton Parish Minister, the Reverend Thomas Dawson, and the Vestry and Churchwardens requested that an act be passed permitting them to convert a house the Parish owned near Capital Landing into a workhouse. Their petition was referred to a Committee of the House who were directed to formulate an act which would permit all parish churches to establish workhouses, if they so desired.

An act was readily prepared, giving Vestries the right to erect, purchase, or rent houses for the lodging, maintenance and employment of the poor of their Parishes. The Virginia Assembly, within the text of the legislation, acknowledged that "the number of poor people hath of late years much increased throughout the colony" and hoped to prevent "great Mischiefs arising from such numbers of unemployed poor."³

If contiguous and sparsely populated parishes wished to collaborate in the establishment of workhouses, they could do so jointly. No parish could purchase or rent a tract of land larger than 100 acres as a poor farm. A reasonable sum from the parish levies was to be set aside for the education of poor children residing in the almshouses until the time they could be bound out, according to law.

Churchwardens were given the right to "employ all such poor persons in such work as shall be directed by the said vestry...and to take and apply the benefit of their labor...toward their maintenance and support."⁴ Cotton, flax, hemp, and other materials and implements and tools useful in providing work for the poor could be acquired by the Vestries. The Parish Churchwardens were authorized to order the sheriffs of their localities to bring all persons found begging to the nearest poorhouse where they would be put to work for twenty days or less, applying the profits of their labor toward their maintenance.

The responsibility of managing each poorhouse was to be delegated to one or more persons selected by the Parish Vestry. The overseer was to make and enforce the rules and regulations governing the poor entrusted to him. He was to put the needy to work according to their individual abilities and was allowed to inflict corporal punishment on those who refused to abide by house rules. Up to ten lashes with a whip could be applied to the bare backs of dissidents and persons who refused to work, the ten lash maximum being applicable for each alleged offense. Poor persons refusing to continue residency at their assigned almshouses were ineligible for any other form of assistance from their local Vestries unless deemed too old or physically unable to work. An annual

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accounting was to be made of every poor person in the parish, reporting his or her circumstances and term of residency in the poorhouse. In addition, the poorhouse overseer was to render an account of his expenses and the profits arising from the labor of the poor.

The 1755 act for maintaining the poor literally added a social stigma to the colony's indigent. All poorhouse inhabitants had to wear conspicuously a colorful badge which identified them as paupers in the care of the parish. These badges were to be worn upon the right sleeve, near the shoulder, "in an open and visible manner."⁵ The badges were made of blue, red, or green cloth, as dictated by the Vestry, and were imprinted with the name of the parish to which the poor person belonged. Anyone neglecting or refusing to wear his badge could be given five lashes with a whip and have his subsistence allowance suspended. Conversely, any imposter found wearing a poorhouse badge could be whipped or fined ten shillings.

Although the terms of the 1755 act are severe by today's standards, the act for maintaining the poor was in effect until the close of the Revolutionary War. After that time, the urban poor were commended to the care of the incorporated towns in which they resided, and within Virginia's counties, appointed Overseers of the Poor assumed the welfare responsibilities once delegated to Parish Vestries. These Overseers bound out orphans and children of the poor to be trained until maturity, thereby preparing them to assume a productive role in society. Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1787 that "nearly the same method of providing for the poor prevails throughout our states; and from Savannah to Portsmouth you will seldom see a beggar."⁶

That workhouses paradoxically were perceived as institutions "for the reformation of vagrants"⁸ and places of detention for minor offenders of the law, yet were considered a positive means of rendering humane assistance to the needy by enabling them to support themselves indicates that the government officials of colonial Virginia were attempting to use the workhouses as a catch-all solution to several types of social problems. The population of such institutions inevitably would have been highly diverse.

Because only a few remnants remain of the eighteenth century Vestry records of Bruton Parish Church, there are no extant documents describing the Bruton poorhouse or the circumstances of its inhabitants. As previously noted, Bruton's Vestry in 1755 expressed a desire to convert to a poorhouse a structure already standing on land they owned near Capital Landing. The Church had gained ownership of the 150 acre tract through the 1726 bequest of Jonathan Drutt, who had himself inherited it in 1714. The land had previously belonged to Lucy Drutt, who had purchased from a William Batten. According to Jonathan Drutt's patent, the land was occupied by Thomas Pinchback at the time Drutt acquired it. Patent records for the north side of Queens Creek indicate that the area had been relatively well settled since the middle of the seventeenth century.

See Continuation Sheet # 3

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In 1762 the Bruton Parish Vestry obtained permission to sell three lots in Williamsburg and "lay out the money for the benefit of the poor of the parish."⁸ At the same time, they gained the right to use the proceeds derived from the use of the Drutt land for any charitable purpose and by 1769 had leased a portion of it to a joint stock company which proposed to manufacture cotton and linen cloth.

How long the Bruton Poorhouse was in operation is not known. In 1770, however, Lord Botetourt subscribed 60% to the Bruton workhouse, and the 1781 Desandrouin map shows four buildings identified as "poorhouse" within the acreage nominated (Figure 1). An early nineteenth century deed indicates that both the linen factory and poorhouse were located within the 150 acre Drutt tract and that the linen factory was built downstream from the Poorhouse, closer to Capitol Landing. The two facilities were in operation simultaneously, raising the possibility that some needy persons may have been employed in the linen factory.

Many parish churches elected to discontinue their poorhouses during the 1770's, finding them burdensome to maintain, a problem which also might have been encountered by Bruton Parish. Nearby Blissland Parish, in James City and New Kent Counties, proposed to build a poorhouse in 1773 but never did so. Poorhouses and the land in which they were located were sold in various parts of Virginia during the 1770's because the Vestries found them uneconomical.

During the American Revolution all property of the Church of England was confiscated by an Act of Incorporation. Although this act was repealed at the close of the eighteenth century, in 1802 another similar act was passed. Despite the fact that the act was challenged by Bishop James Madison in a Court of Appeals, it was upheld.

In 1813 the Reverend James Bracken, Rector of Bruton Parish Church, and the Vestry petitioned the General Assembly for the right to sell "a small tract of land of about 150 acres, lying on the head of Queens Creek and commonly called the Factory, which they hold by device for charitable purpose but which from the ruinous state of the buildings and other circumstances has become unproductive."⁹ They proposed that the money be spent on educating the poor children of the parish. By 1821 Robert P. Waller purchased the land which has continuously remained undeveloped.

The Bruton Parish Poorhouse Archaeological Site offers a unique opportunity to investigate scientifically the diverse and largely inarticulate segment of colonial society that would have been assembled at the poorhouse. Paupers, the elderly, the disabled and young orphans would have lived in community with minor lawbreakers, vagrants, and others of mean circumstances. Archaeological excavation could yield invaluable and otherwise unavailable research data on the status and daily lives of these people. As a workhouse which may have served as a minor educational and industrial facility, the Poorhouse site could provide new insight into an example of the Virginia government's earliest attempt at an institutionalized welfare program. Living near the capital of the colony and close to Capital Landing, a port which enjoyed intra- and extra-colonial trade, poorhouse residents would have had the opportunity to interact with individuals from all levels of eighteenth century society. A unique and well preserved archaeological site, the Bruton Parish Poorhouse warrants inclusion in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

M.W.M.

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Footnotes

1. H.R. McIlwaine, Journals of the House of Burgesses, Vol. IV, 266.
2. Ibid., 266.
3. W.W. Hening, Hening's Statutes At Large, Vol. VI, 475.
4. Ibid., VI, 476.
5. Ibid., VI, 478.
6. Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 133.
7. Hening's Statutes, XII 578.
8. McIlwaine, House of Burgesses, V, 108.
9. Tyler's Quarterly Magazine, II, 192-3.

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W.W. Hening, Hening's Statutes At Large (Richmond, 1809-1823).

Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (Chapel Hill, 1955).

H.R. McIlwaine, Journals of the House of Burgesses (Richmond, 1909).

H.R. McIlwaine, Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia (Richmond, 1925).

Nell M. Nugent, Cavaliers and Pioneers, Volume III, 1695-1732 (Richmond, 1979).

Mary Stevenson "Queen Mary's Port; Princess Anne's Port," n.p. (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

L.G. Tyler, Tyler's Quarterly Magazine (Richmond, 1928).

William and Mary Quarterly, Series 1, Vol. 3 (Richmond, 1895).