

VLR-2/16/88 NRHP 11/3/88

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Warwick County Courthouses
other names/site number Warwick County Courthouse and Clerk's Office

2. Location

street & number Old Courthouse Way
city, town Newport News
state Virginia code VA county Newport News (city) code 700 zip code 23602

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private/public ownership and building/site/structure/object categories.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official: A. Bryan Mitchell
Date: 9-30-88
Director, Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
entered in the National Register.
determined eligible for the National Register.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain:)

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT-courthouses

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT-government offices

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

EARLY REPUBLIC-Federal

LATE VICTORIAN- Italianate

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Brick

roof Slate/Metal

other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

**ARCHITECTURAL SUMMARY**

Two Warwick County courthouses, the earlier dating from 1810 and the subsequent structure built in 1884, are both located in Courthouse Square in the Denbigh area of what today is Newport News. The early temple-fronted building, constructed with a three-room T-shaped plan, is one story in height and built of brick. The later building is also brick and possesses typical Italianate decorative features. The perimeter of the landscaped square is clearly delineated by a brick wall.

**ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS**

The historic courthouse square of Warwick County is located in northern Newport News on the south side of Old Courthouse Way (previously known as Warwick Boulevard). Both the 1810 and 1884 courthouses, as well as two historical markers, a monument, a small storage building, and a parking lot, are located within the square. Earlier in this century the site, which is transversed by walks, was enclosed by an iron fence. At an unknown date it was replaced by the existing low brick wall.

The 1810 courthouse is a small symmetrical single story brick building that was originally constructed with a T-shaped plan that today is slightly obscured by a side and rear addition. The brick is laid in Flemish bond with occasional glazed headers. The original portion of the building has three bays and consists of three rooms with a central front entrance flanked on either side by a window. The door and transom openings are currently infilled with wood panels. A stone lintel is inset above the transom and a square stone plaque recording the construction date and names of the masons is inset above the lintel. The center room is the largest and originally functioned as the courtroom. The smaller two end rooms each contain a fireplace with mid-nineteenth century marble mantels. This 1810 section has a slate-covered hipped roof and two interior end chimneys with corbelled tops. Windows throughout are twelve-over-twelve double-hung with stone sills and scored stone lintels.

At an unknown date the original single door entrance was enlarged to a double door, and a portico supported by four Doric columns was added. This pedimented portico is detailed with a pair of pilasters, triglyphs,

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/POLITICS

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1810-1892

Significant Dates

1810

1884

1892

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The courthouses of Virginia occupy a significant place in the architectural and political history of the state and the nation. Spanning four centuries, the commonwealth's courthouse complexes represent a variety of architectural styles and types, as well as different phases in the evolution of republican government at the county, state, and national levels. The Warwick County court square complex exemplifies the development of such complexes in Virginia during the nineteenth century. In 1810 the square contained a courthouse, clerk's office, and jail. In 1884 a new courthouse was built; the old jail was replaced in 1899. After 1904 the old clerk's office was demolished. The square now contains only the two courthouses and the Confederate monument that was unveiled in 1909. For over three quarters of a century the square was the governmental center of county life, until its importance was eclipsed after 1881 by the dominance of the port of Newport News.

**JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA**

The Warwick County court square complex is eligible for registration as a historic landmark under Criteria A and C. The square is eligible under Criterion A because it is associated with the political evolution of the Warwick County-Newport News area from a largely rural environment to a predominantly urban one with increasing dependence upon commerce and shipbuilding. Under Criterion C the square is eligible because it is an unusual example of a nineteenth-century courthouse square containing courthouses from both the beginning and the end of the century.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Warwick County was one of the eight original shires or counties formed in Virginia in 1634. The county seat was Warwick Town, located on a point of land on the north bank of the James River, bounded on the west by Warwick River and on the east by Deep Creek.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

VA Division of Historic Landmarks  
Richmond, VA 23219

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property approximately one acre

UTM References

A 

1	8
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3	6	2	9	8	0
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4	1	1	0	1	8	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Beginning at a point on the west side of Old Courthouse Way, approximately 200' east of intersection with Tulip Drive; thence approximately 200' along west side of Old Courthouse Way; thence approximately 200' southwest; thence approximately 200' south; thence approximately 200' east to point of region.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the entire historic courthouse square located within the brick wall.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title John Salmon, Historian and Julie Vosmik, Architectural Historian  
organization VA Division of Historic Landmarks date Feb. 1988  
street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3143  
city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

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and square modillions of guttae under the cornice. The cornice continues, with the exception of the 1950s addition, around the entire building.

About 1930 a rectangular addition to the rear resulted in an overall H-shaped plan. This added section is also laid in Flemish bond and covered by a slate hipped roof pierced by a single interior brick chimney. The west side of this addition has a single door and three windows that match the original. A single window is located in each of the two end walls.

During the 1950s, a second addition was made to the southeast side of the building. This flat-roofed extension is of modern brick also laid in Flemish bond. The front and rear elevations each have three windows that match those throughout the rest of the building, with the only exception being that their stone lintels are not scored. A door with a simple portico supported by two square columns is located at the end wall. At an undetermined date the area between the foundation and watertable was covered with concrete.

Partition walls have been added to the interior to divide the space into small offices. The north 1810 room now contains mechanical equipment.

The 1884 courthouse is a two-story Italianate building of brick laid in common bond. It has a rectangular plan and a shallow metal-covered hipped roof with three shallow cross gables. Four interior brick chimneys are located on either side of the rear portion of the building. The facade is divided into three sections, with a projecting gabled entrance frontispiece at the center. A focal point of the exterior is its decorative brickwork. Pilasters at each corner and between window groupings extend from the watertable to the corbelled brick band between the second and attic levels. Brick segmental arches with two header decorative label stops are located above the doors and windows. Each window has a simple stone sill.

A dominate feature of the building is the square wood bell cupola that rises above the central projecting bay. Each side of the cupola has two arched openings with louvered slats. The cornice follows the contour of the arched slopes of the pyramidal roof from which projects a decorative finial.

The eaves, which project slightly, are supported by decorative scroll brackets that are paired above each pilaster. Between the brackets are modillions.

The facade features a double-door entrance with a transom, flanked on either side by paired four-over-four double-hung arched windows that are typical throughout the building. Three pairs of windows are located on the second floor. A small arched attic window is centered in the pediment of the gable projection.

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The rear elevation is identical to the front with the exception that the center bay does not project and has a single door. The side elevations are exactly alike with the wall divided into four sections of unequal size by pilasters. A single door with a window above penetrates the front section. Corresponding with the cross gable is a pair of windows on each floor; above each pair of windows is a single attic window. Individual windows are found between the next set of pilasters, and two windows more widely spaced than the rest are found in the rear section. A handicapped ramp has been added to the north side elevation and the door there now functions as the main entrance to the building.

Though partition walls have been added to convert portions of the interior to office space, the interior is surprisingly intact. The original double stair with massive newel posts is located on either side of the front entrance and much original woodwork remains throughout the building. On the first floor a hall extends the length of the building off of which are located several offices. The stairs lead to a hall on the second floor where double doors provide entrance to the large courtroom; it has not been subdivided and is remarkably intact.

A monument approximately twenty feet in height and dedicated to Confederate soldiers in 1909 is located directly in front of the 1884 building. The bottom half of the square column consists of rusticated bands of stone and above the midpoint rusticated and smooth dressed bands of stone alternate. This column rests upon a stepped and rusticated base. A uniformed soldier holding a gun surmounts the top of the column. The smooth bands of the column have carvings of flags, crossed swords and the word "Virginia."

A small, noncontributing brick building is located between the rear of the 1884 courthouse and the brick wall around the perimeter of the square. This utility building has a square plan, hipped roof, and single chimney.

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By 1807 the inconvenience of the courthouse's location, as well as its state of disrepair, led a number of the county's inhabitants to petition the General Assembly to authorize a change in the location of the county seat.<sup>1</sup> The petitioners recommended relocating the courthouse to the land of the heirs of Richard Cary on Stony Run. The current courthouse, they claimed, had become "ruinous from the gradual Decay of Time;" besides, the fact that it was bounded on three sides by water made it inconvenient. The petitioners warned the General Assembly that a counterpetition would be forthcoming. Richard Young, a tavern-keeper at the courthouse who owned most of the land there, opposed the proposed removal and offered £100 to be divided among those who would join him.

The counterpetition, signed by Richard Young and others, soon arrived before the General Assembly.<sup>2</sup> No mention was made of the £100 offer, but the arguments presented against removal were financial in nature. The petitioners wished to avoid the expense of moving the courthouse because the proposed site was not so much nearer the center of the county and a new jail had been built at the current location in 1798. Furthermore, the present courthouse was "supposed to be one amongst the Oldest in this state, and there has never been a petition for the removal before this." The General Assembly's Committee on Propositions, to which both petitions were referred on 23 December 1807, accepted the arguments of the first one and rejected the second, but no bill was passed authorizing the removal.

There the matter rested for two years; in 1809 both sides tried again.<sup>3</sup> Richard Young and his adherents, who still were opposed to the removal of the courthouse, filed another petition denying the charges about his £100 offer. They charged in turn that their opponents had signed some names to their petition fraudulently. Those in favor of removal, in a separate petition, reasserted their accusations against Young and likewise claimed fraud. This time those favoring removal not only prevailed as before with the Committee on Propositions, but saw the General Assembly pass an act on 28 December 1809 authorizing the removal of the courthouse.<sup>4</sup>

The act provided for the appointment of five commissioners "to sell the public property at the place where the courthouse now stands . . . to assess the value of two acres of land, belonging to the heirs of Richard Cary, deceased, at Stony Run . . . [and] to contract . . . to build a courthouse and jail" on the Cary tract.<sup>5</sup> The commissioners named in the act were Maurice Langhorne, William Garrow, William Digges, Thomas R. Dunn, and Humphrey H. Wynne. The new courthouse was constructed in 1810 by Thomas R. Dunn, T. Sandy, and R. Ratcliff.<sup>6</sup> To the north of the east-facing courthouse a small two-story jail was built; another small structure to the south served as the clerk's office.

The diminutive size of the court square and its buildings amused a Union soldier who encamped there in 1862. On 18 April he wrote to his brother,

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About sun set we came to a halt in a wheat field at a place called Warwick C.H. . . . A brick building about the size of a Smoke House which was used as a kind of County Clerk's office, the records and documents of the County were kept there. . . . Next is the Court house a brick building about the size of a carriage house up our way. The court room is about the size of an office. There are two wings to the building and each have one smaller room in, that is now a kind of commissary. Next is another little smoke house with grated windows which was the jail. These buildings are all in a line. The C.H. is the largest of the whole group. Altogether they perhaps cover a quarter of an acre.

The soldier and some of his comrades rifled the clerk's office and took some early court records. Presumably the remainder had been sent to Richmond for safekeeping in the state courthouse on Capitol Square; the courthouse and its contents were destroyed during the Richmond evacuation fire on 2-3 April 1865.

After the Civil War, the resumption of commerce resulted in the expansion of railroad service. In 1881 the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad was extended to Newport News through Warwick County. The location of the Oriana station near the courthouse increased development pressures in the area; Newport News grew rapidly.

By 1884 the Warwick County courthouse and jail, in addition to being too small for the demands placed upon them, had fallen into disrepair. An act was passed by the General Assembly on 19 February 1884 authorizing the county to issue bonds in the amount of \$10,000 to finance the repairs or, if necessary, to rebuild the courthouse and jail.<sup>10</sup>

During 1884 a new large courthouse was built to the south of the old one. On 5 January 1885 the court

Ordered that H H Wynne clerk of the County & Circuit Courts of Warwick County be authorized & directed to remove all the books & papers & public documents & appurtenances from the present Clerk's office to the apartment prepared in the new Court House for the Clerk of said Courts. And ordered that hereafter the Courts of this County will be held in the new Courthouse building.<sup>11</sup>

Only three years after the new courthouse was occupied, Newport News had so grown in population and importance that there was sentiment for moving the courthouse once again. An act was passed by the General Assembly on



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2 March 1888 authorizing "a poll for the purpose of ascertaining the sense of the qualified voters of [Warwick] county as to whether or not the site of the courthouse of said county shall be changed from its present location to Newport News, in said county."<sup>12</sup> The act further authorized the county government to sell the courthouse and jail then in use, in order to finance new ones in Newport News; if the town ever was incorporated into a city, then the county was to be reimbursed for the new buildings. In 1892 the courthouse was in fact removed to Newport News, where it remained until 1896 when the town was incorporated as a city.

From 1896 until 1958, when Warwick County was annexed by Newport News, the county's courts again were held in the 1884 courthouse, and the 1810 courthouse was used as a clerk's office.<sup>13</sup> On 27 May 1909 the Confederate monument standing in the square was unveiled in a ceremony at which Governor Claude A. Swanson gave the dedicatory address. Following the annexation of the county by Newport News in 1958 the old court buildings were put to other uses.

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Endnotes

1. Records of the General Assembly, Legislative Petitions, Warwick County, 1782-1858, petition referred to Committee on Propositions on 23 December 1807, in Archives Branch, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va.
2. Ibid., petition referred to Committee on Propositions on 23 December 1807, VSL&A.
3. Ibid., petitions referred to Committee on Propositions on 11 December 1809, VSL&A.
4. General Assembly, Acts Passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia (Richmond: Samuel Pleasants, 1810), 31.
5. Ibid.
6. Preliminary Information Form, 5 December 1983, in DHL File 121-1. Information copied from plaque above courthouse door.
7. Plat Book 1, Newport News, Page 1 thru 112, p. 16, "Plat of Court House Lot . . . December 15th, 1904," shows buildings in square. Also, sketch of court square ca. 1862 appears in Newport News Historical Committee, Development Study Report (1987), [6], in DHL File 121-1.
8. Development Study Report, [6].
9. Ibid., [7-8].
10. Acts and Joint Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly . . . 1883-84 (Richmond: R. U. Derr, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1884), 170-171.
11. Warwick County, Court Orders, 1881-1886, 251.
12. Acts and Joint Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly . . . 1887-88 (Richmond: J. H. O'Bannon, 1888), 465-466.
13. Development Study Report, [8].

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### Primary Sources

- Newport News. Plat Book No. 1, Page 1 thru 112. Courthouse, Newport News, Virginia.
- Records of the General Assembly. Legislative Petitions, Warwick County, 1782-1858. Petitions dated 23 December 1807 and 11 December 1809. Archives Branch, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Virginia.
- Warwick County. Court Orders, 1881-1886. Courthouse, Newport News, Virginia.

#### Secondary Sources

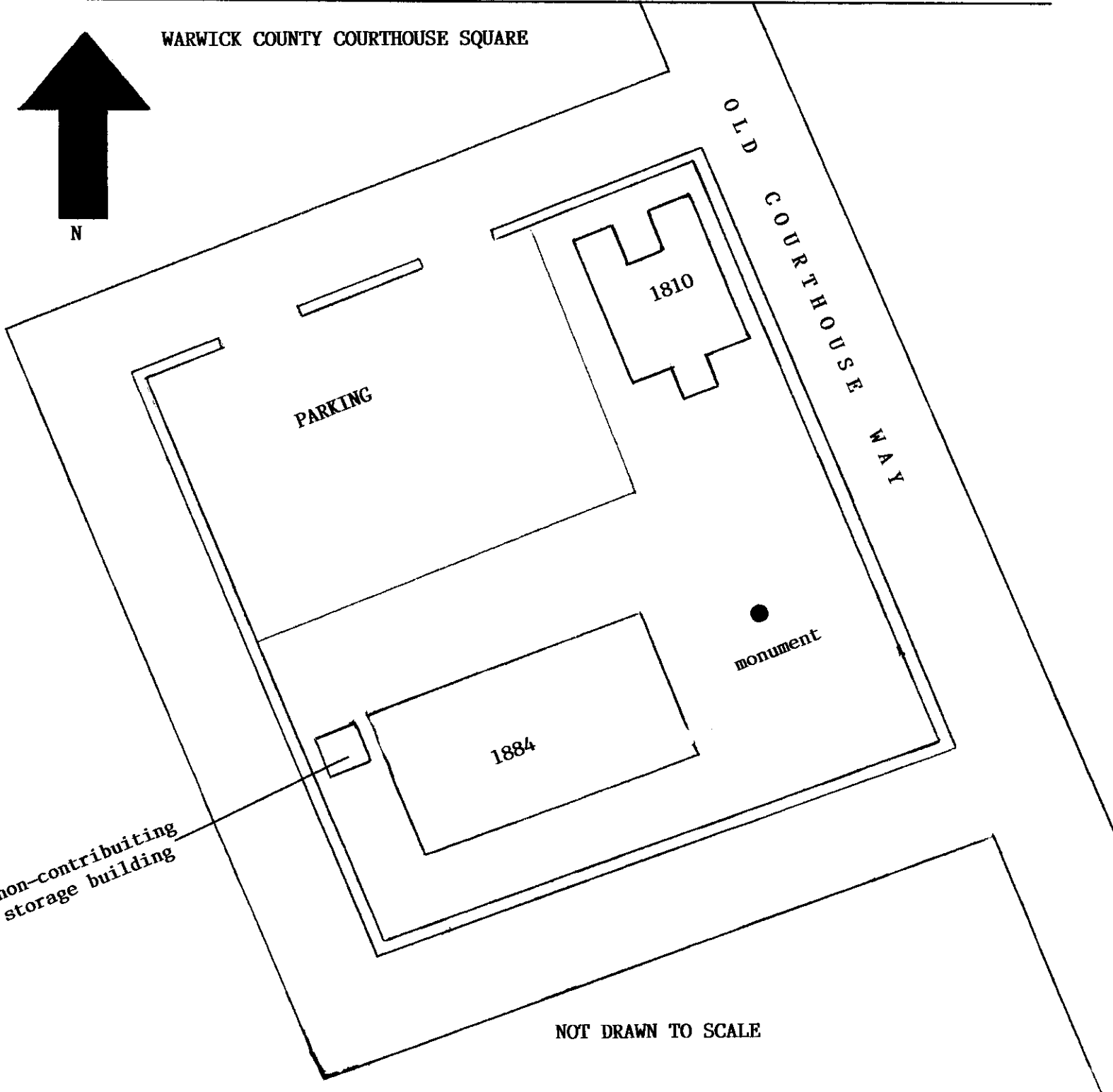
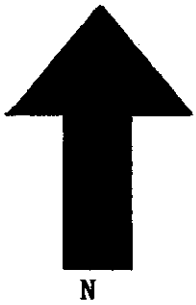
- General Assembly of Virginia. Acts Passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Richmond: Samuel Pleasants, 1810.
- Acts and Joint Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly  
. . . 1883-84. Richmond: R. U. Derr, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1884.
- Acts and Joint Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly  
. . . 1887-88. Richmond: J. H. O'Bannon, 1888.
- Newport News Historical Committee. Development Study Report (1987).  
Preliminary Information Form, 5 December 1983, in DHL File 121-1.

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WARWICK COUNTY COURTHOUSE SQUARE



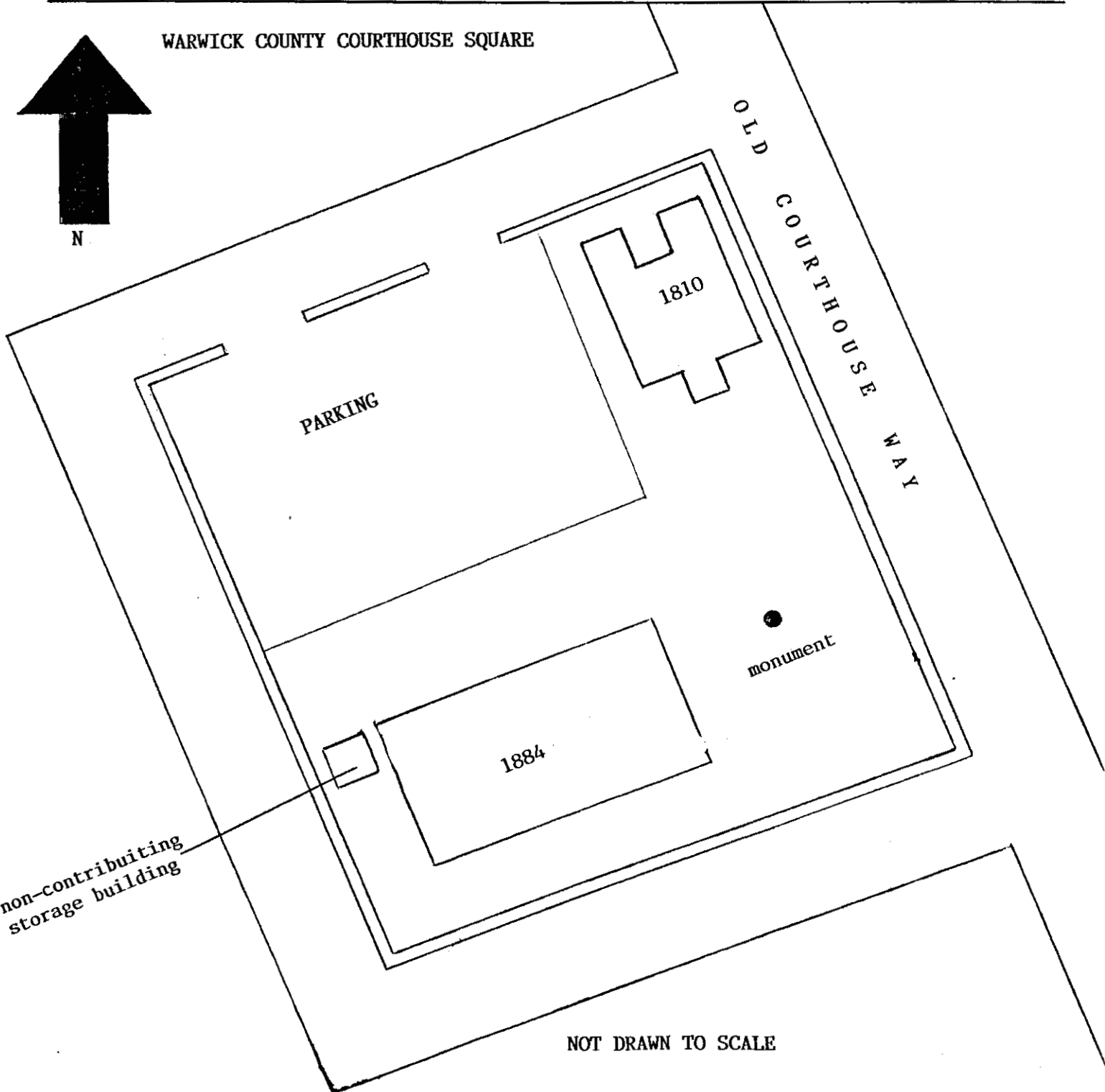
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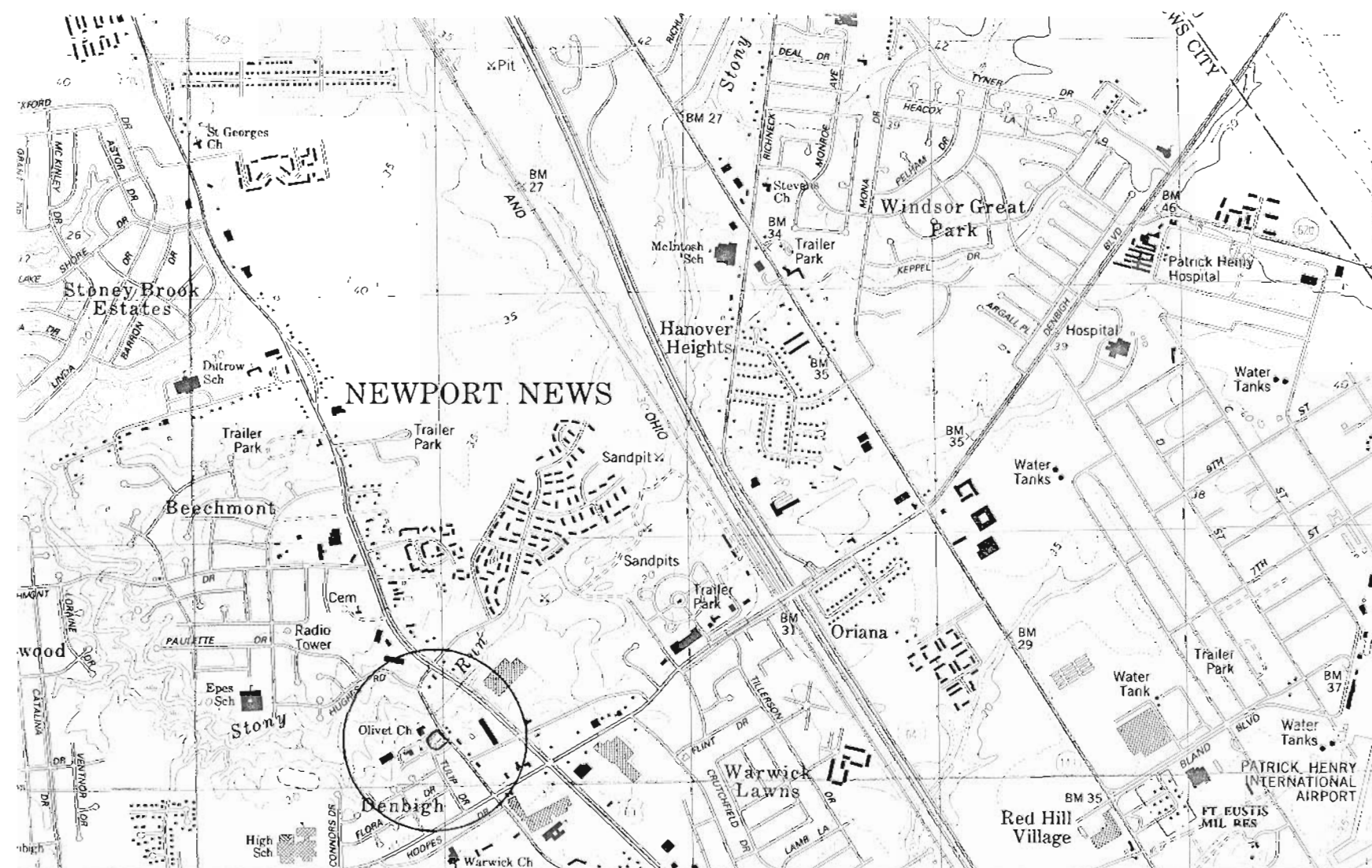
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SKETCH MAP Map 1 of 2

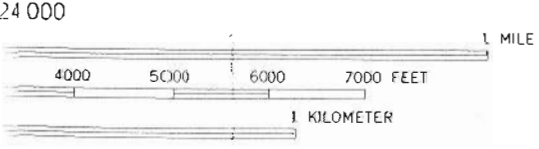




13  
11  
1000m  
37°07'30"  
78°30'

*Handwritten notes:*  
 The location of  
 Yorktown, VA  
 would be  
 Courthouse and  
 clock tower  
 15/2529/411018

ISLAND) 362 32'30" 3650000E 366 37°07'30" 78°30'



SCALE 10 FEET  
 5-FOOT CONTOURS  
 DATUM OF 1929  
 DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER  
 TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE  
 LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER  
 APPROXIMATELY 2.4 FEET



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

- Primary highway, hard surface
- Secondary highway, hard surface
- Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
- Unimproved road
- Interstate Route
- U. S. Route
- State Route

(NEWPORT NEWS NORTH)  
 5.78 N. SW

MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
 AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

YORKTOWN, VA.  
 37076-B5-TF-024

1984