VLR-2/19/80 NRHP-5/7/80

Form No 10-300 REV. (9/77)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Charlotte County Courthouse is a brick, temple-form structure approximately 45 feet wide and 71 feet deep. It is fronted by a tetrastyle Tuscan portico with whitewashed stuccoed columns. In the pediment is a large lunette with intersecting tracery. The lights in the lunette have been painted out. The portico entablature is carried around the entire building The pediment is repeated on the rear where it has a large round window with its lights similarly painted out.

The front wall of the courthouse is of even-colored Flemish bond. American bond is employed on the side and rear walls. The bottom courses on all but the front have been cemented over, probably because of rising damp. Each side has five bays; there is a door with a plain transom in the center of each side. A similar doorway serves as the main entrance. Both the side windows and the first-story front windows have early 12/12 sash with plain architraves and sills; the gallery windows on the front have 9/12 sash. All the windows are hung with louvred shutters painted dark green. On the rear wall is a large, three-part window with an entrance on each side. Contained within each entrance opening is a door above which is a panel and a twelve-light fixed-sash hung with shutters. The concrete steps and iron railings are modern.

The interior of the courthouse has undergone alterations but preserves its early character. Indeed, it is one of the few courthouses of the period that retains its original two-story space. The gallery, the pair of gallery steps, railing, and the four columns supporting the gallery all appear to be original. The main alteration was the moving of the wall immediately behind the bench forward to create space for a rear vestibule, jury room, and judge's chambers. The woodwork of the bench and the paneling above it are all 20th-century Colonial Revival. The cornice surrounding the room appears to be Colonial Revival also, but the boarded main ceiling and that beneath the gallery are probably original. The courtroom seating is provided by Victorian wooden benches with high backs. The brick floor is modern. Ornamenting the room are four magnificent Italian colored marble busts (possibly Renaissance) of Roman emperors. The busts were given by the late David K. E. Bruce, the noted diplomat and native of Charlotte County.

Directly behind the courthouse is a handsome two-story, three-bay, brick office building of antebellum origin now used as a law office. Immediately behind that is the late Victorian Clerk's office, made distinctive by its entrance tower with a steep pyramidal roof and arched entrance. The complex is set in an unusually pleasant shady lawn and forms the visual focal point of the tiny settlement of Charlotte Court House.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AF	IEAS OF SIGNIFICANCE CH	ECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW	
PREHISTORIC	_ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	COMMUNITY PLANNING	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	RELIGION
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1500-1599	_AGRICULTURE	ECONOMICS	LITERATURE *	SCULPTURE
1600-1699	X_ARCHITECTURE	EDUCATION	MILITARY	SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	ART	ENGINEERING	MUSIC	THEATER
1800-1899	COMMERCE	EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	PHILOSOPHY	TRANSPORTATION
1900-	COMMUNICATIONS	INDUSTRYINVENTION	POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	OTHER (SPECIFY)

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Thomas Jefferson, Architect John Percival, Builder

TATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE The Charlotte County Courthouse was built in 1821-23 from plans supplied by Thomas Jefferson and is a prototype for numerous Roman Revival court buildings erected in Virginia in the 1830s and '40s. Although no drawings survive to authenticate Jefferson's authorship of the building, it was stated as early as 1835 that he was responsible for its design. The attribution has always been accepted by scholars of Virginia architecture.

Jefferson's interest in housing the young republic's institutions in architecturally dignified buildings led him to set an example with his design for the Virginia State Capitol, the first temple-form Classical Revival public building in the nation and possibly the world. He also had a significant influence on the appearance of the first government buildings in Washington and helped to establish the tradition of monumental Classical structures for the federal government. He provided further examples of "correct specimens" of architecture for his native state with his designs for the great complex at the University of Virginia, numerous houses, a church, and at least two courthouses.

Interestingly, the Charlotte building was not initiated by Jefferson. In 1821 a special committee was appointed by the county court to plan and carry out the building of a new courthouse. The committee consisted of Clement Carrington, Isaac Read, William M. Watkins, John Morton, Jr., Joseph Wyatt, Henry A. Watkins, and Henry Carrington. According to tradition a delegation was appointed by the committee to visit Monticello and obtain a set of plans from the former President. Jefferson dutifully supplied designs for a Tuscan porticoed edifice.

The building was completed in 1823 with \$5,362.61 paid to the builder John Percival. Percival is known to have submitted bids to Jefferson for work at the University of Virginia, but whether or not he actually worked under Jefferson has not been determined. It is unlikely that Jefferson ever saw the results of Percival's labor in Charlotte County.

The Charlotte building directly inspired the courthouses for neighboring counties. It was specified in the contract that the Lunenburg County Courthouse (completed in 1827) be built after the plan of "the new courthouse in Charlotte County." The Mecklenburg County Courthouse (completed in 1838) and the Nottoway County Courthouse (completed in 1841) also follow the Charlotte mode. These courthouses, along with numerous other buildings designed by Jefferson and the master builders who continued his distinctive idiom, form a priceless legacy that has been collectively termed America's first native architectural style.

CL/MTP

(See continuation sheet #1)

	HICAL REFE	RENCES	
Charlotte County Order E			5.
Charlotte County Order E	300k 24, August	1823, p. 52.	
Gaines, William H. Jr. '	'Courthouses of	Bedford and Cha	arlotte Counties." Virginia
Calvalcade, Summer 19	971.		
Lunenburg County Order E			
Martin, Joseph, ed. A Ne	w and Comprehen	sive Gazetteer	of Virginia, and the District
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CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

FHR-8-300A (11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Charlotte County Courthouse, Charlotte County, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET

#1

ITEM NUMBER 6 , 8 PAGE 1 , 1

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

(2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey 1968, 1969, 1978 State Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission 221 Governor Street Richmond, Virginia 23219

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 1 Martin's Gazetteer, 1835, p. 150.
- ² Charlotte County Order Book 23, September 1821, p. 115.
- 3 Lunenburg County Order Book 24, 1821-23, p. 408.

