

NRHP: 10-29-81 # 187-7
VLR: 6-16-81

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Pittsylvania County Courthouse

and/or common

2. Location

street & number U.S. Business Route 29 not for publication
city, town Chatham vicinity of congressional district Fifth (W.C. Daniel)
state Virginia code 51 county Pittsylvania code 143

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Board of Supervisors, Pittsylvania County, c/o Chairman
street & number P. O. Box 426
city, town Chatham vicinity of state Virginia 24531

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pittsylvania County Courthouse
street & number
city, town Chatham state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys (2) (See Continuation Sheet #1)

(1) Historic American Buildings
title Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1940, 1941 federal state county local
depository for survey records Library of Congress
city, town Washington state D.C.

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Pittsylvania County Courthouse is located on the east side of U.S. Business Route 29 in the town of Chatham. The two-story, stretcher-bond brick edifice was erected after the plans of L.A. Shumaker. Built in 1853, the building combines elements from the Classical Revival and Italianate styles. The variation in styles is due to the fact that the structure was constructed near the end of a period of great popularity for Classical Revival styles that began with Thomas Jefferson's Roman Revival courthouse designs and culminated at mid-century in the Greek Revival styles. Alterations to the building include the enlargement of the Clerk's office in 1898, the addition of space for court-related offices in 1917, and a rear addition for the Sheriff's and Commonwealth's Attorney's offices in 1968.

The facade (west) is distinguished by a pedimented Greek Revival portico that was influenced, according to building records, by the Campbell County Courthouse, located about forty miles to the northeast. The portico has Doric columns on square piers and a Doric entablature with triglyphs and guttae. The tympanum is finished with formal shiplap siding. The portico shelters a restored double-door main entrance that features a louvred transom and a stone lintel with turned corner blocks. Two auxiliary entrances flank the portico on the ground level; an original single-door side entrance is found on the south elevation. Fenestration on the facade's first story consists of 6/6 hung-sash windows in three-part architraves. The side elevations have 6/6 hung-sash windows topped by lintels with turned corner blocks. Larger openings similarly executed are found on the second story. The building is topped by a cupola which, according to documentation, was added as the building was nearing completion in August 1853 to house a bell. The cupola is divided into two stages: the lower one containing the clock, the second the belfry. The belfry has an Italianate bracketed cornice and a railing with turned balusters.

The building's ground floor is divided into the Clerk's and Treasurer's offices. The main floor contains the courtroom. Flanked by court-related offices, the courtroom has elaborate Italianate plasterwork which consists of a paneled ceiling, a large circular ceiling medallion, and a three-part cornice. The cornice has engaged balls, acanthus leaves, and a plain band. The ceiling's corners are distinguished by floral compositions, similar to that found around the center medallion. The principal doors and windows are framed by symmetrical architrave trim with turned corner blocks. The judge's bench is separated from the auditorium by a balustrade with vase-turned balusters. The Colonial Revival aedicule and paneling behind the bench date to ca. 1947. The auditorium benches date to the present century. Portraits of past judges and distinguished county residents line the walls of the courtroom.

An iron fence separates the courthouse from the sidewalk. The fence was mentioned specifically in the building specifications of 1853 and was erected to extend along Main Street with an entrance gate to the present jail. The size of the fence has been much reduced. The traditional Civil War statue stands to the north of the courthouse. The presence of Chatham's commercial development around the building contributes to its urban setting, which is somewhat relieved by the trees that grow along the fence.

RCC

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The nominated property for the Pittsylvania County Courthouse consists of approximately one-half acre. It includes the courthouse building and the Civil War monument. Newer county buildings that date to the mid-20th century are not included within the boundary.

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 type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1853 **Builder/Architect** L. A. Shumaker

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Pittsylvania County Courthouse is a distinguished architectural landmark for the town of Chatham. The edifice was erected in 1853 after the plans of L.A. Shumaker to replace an earlier 1782 wood-frame structure. At the time the building was erected, the designs of the Commonwealth's courthouses had been heavily influenced by Thomas Jefferson, whose Charlotte County and Buckingham County courthouses paved the way for a widespread acceptance of the Roman Revival and subsequent Greek Revival styles. By mid-century this spirit of Classicism was beginning to yield to the Italianate style, widely promulgated in pattern books published in the northeast and extensively used throughout the United States. While Classical in form and Greek Revival in detailing, the Pittsylvania courthouse shows the influence of the Italianate style in its cupola and interior detailing. The third courthouse to serve the county, it remains the main depository of the county's records and the most important forum in which the rights of citizens are preserved and the obligations of citizenship enforced.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Pittsylvania County was formed from Halifax County in 1766. It was named for William Pitt, later Earl of Chatham, the great English statesman and champion of colonial interests. The first courthouse was erected on the land of James Robards in the village of Callands and is traditionally thought to have been modeled after the Halifax County courthouse. On the division of Pittsylvania in 1776 with the western portion becoming Henry County, the county seat was moved to a more central location on Jeremiah Worsham's land, now called Chatham. For five years the court met at the Cherrystone Meeting House located in a valley in this area. In 1782 an order was entered for the jail to be moved to a nearby hill. The courthouse was subsequently built on this hill after substantial controversy about its location. The town laid out around the courthouse was called "Competition" because of the competition over the location of the building. The builder was David Hunt, who was paid 1,000 pounds of tobacco for his work.

By the 1850s it became apparent that a new courthouse was needed for the prosperous tobacco county of Pittsylvania. Property was acquired from Robert and Catherine Wilson on the east side of Main Street opposite the 1782 building and adjacent to the new jail built in 1842. The county records referred to the new courthouse as being "large and commodious." The builder, L.A. Shumaker, was paid \$10,000 for the courthouse building. The plans for the new courthouse called originally for a building in the shape of a cross, 60' x 72'; however, the plans were modified to a rectangular shape. The plans also called for the elevation with the portico to be finished as "that of Campbell County" with steps leading to the "Portico of freestone, well and smoothly finished...wrought iron rails on each side of the steps and around the portico." On August 15, 1853, Mr. Shumaker was directed to place a bell on the courthouse as well as to grade the yard surrounding it and enclose the area. Few changes were made in the following fifty years until 1898, when a contract was let to B.F. Smith to enlarge and fireproof the Clerk's office at a cost of \$6,800. At that

9. Major Bibliographical References

Clement, Maude Carter. The History of Pittsylvania County, Virginia. Lynchburg, Va.: J.P. Bell, Inc., 1929.
 Gaines, William H., Jr. "Courthouses: Halifax and Pittsylvania." Virginia Cavalcade, #4, Spring 1971, pp. 5-11.
 (See Continuation Sheet #1)

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property 1/2 acre
 Quadrangle name Chatham, Va. Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u>6</u> <u>4</u> <u>2</u> <u>8</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>7</u> <u>6</u> <u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification Beginning at a point on E side of U.S. B-R 29, about 75' S of the intersection of said route with Town Route 1401; thence extending about 200' E, then about 75' S, then about 200' W to E side of U.S. B-R 29; thence extending about 75' N along said side to point of origin.

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

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date May 1981

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 *Tucker Hill* date JUN 16 1981

Tucker Hill, Executive Director

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Pittsylvania County Courthouse, Pittsylvania County, Virginia

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 6,8,9

Page 1

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
1973, 1974, 1981 State
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
221 Governor Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

8. SIGNIFICANCE

time the Clerk's office assumed its present form. Another addition to the courthouse was made in 1917. Designed by Pritchett and Herndon, Architects, the addition included the present judge's office, enlargement of the Clerk's office on the first floor, and an alcove at the east end of the courtroom. In 1961 the Clerk's office was remodeled, and two rooms on the south side of the building were joined through the elimination of a brick wall and fireplace. Finally, a substantial addition was completed in 1968 to house the growing activities of county offices.

Portraits of leading Pittsylvania County citizens line the walls of the courtroom and include: Whitmell Tunstall, founder of the Southern Railway Company; Claude A. Swanson, Congressman, Governor of Virginia, U.S. Senator, and Secretary of the Navy; and Dr. C. O. Pruden, founder of Chatham Hall School.

MTP/RCC

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Jones, Judge Langhorne. "Pittsylvania County Court House, 1853-1968." MS in Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Archives.
Pittsylvania County Court Records, Books 41 and 42, 1851-1856.

USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24,000)
Chatham, Va. 1965(PR1978)

● PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY COURTHOUSE, Chatham,
Pittsylvania County, Va.
UTM References:

17/642850/4076480

