

VLR-12/15/81 NRHP-9/16/82

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

For HCERS us:  y  
received  
date entered

**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 Halifax County Courthouse

and/or common same

**2. Location**

street & number U. S. Route 360 N/A not for publication

city, town Halifax vicinity of Fifth congressional district (W. C. Daniel)

state Virginia code 51 county Halifax 083 code

**3. Classification**

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name Halifax County c/o Chairman, Board of Supervisors

street & number Halifax Courthouse

city, town Halifax vicinity of N/A state Virginia zip code 24558

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Halifax County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Halifax state Virginia

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1981  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, 221 Governor Street

city, town Richmond state Virginia

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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

Halifax County Courthouse is located in the center of the town of Halifax at the intersection of U.S. Routes 360 and 501. The original court building was erected in 1838-39 by Dabney Cosby, Sr., according to a plan determined by the county commissioners. The result was a T-shape-plan building with a facade executed in Flemish-bond brick. Like all of Cosby's Virginia buildings, the brickwork is very finely executed with carefully tooled narrow joints. In 1904 the ell (west) was extended and the courtroom moved to the newly created second story, replacing a second-floor gallery. At this time the present clerk's office and record vault were constructed on the first floor. In 1964 the ell was again extended and the rear wing was erected to house expanded county offices.

The facade (east) is dominated by a two-story, tetrastyle portico in the Greek Ionic order. The portico has unfluted columns supporting a pediment. The portico shelters the main entrance which has replaced double doors and a four-light transom by a paneled architrave and topped by a lintel with square corner blocks. Pedimented display cabinets, added in the present century, flank the main entry. One of the most distinguishing features of the building is its massive Ionic entablature with dentils. The entablature is extended to the structure's pedimented ends and is duplicated on the 1904 addition. Fenestration consists of 12/12 hung windows on the first story and 6/9 hung-sash windows on the second story. The windows are topped by flat lintels with square corner blocks. The north and south elevations are unpierced. The 1904 extension has 2/2 hung-sash windows on the first story and 12/12 windows on the second story; the second-story windows may have been removed from the rear wall when the building was extended. Interior chimneys break the roof line on the north and south elevations.

The judge's chamber and jury room are all that survive of the original interior. Both rooms have Greek Revival-style mantels and symmetrically molded architrave trim that surrounds the original paneled doors and also the windows. Twin stairs in the hall date to the 1904 renovation; they have paneled newel posts, turned balusters, and molded handrails. The present courtroom was extensively remodeled in the 1960s, and no original fabric of 1838-39 or 1904 survives.

Five 19th-century lawyers' offices surround the courthouse. Among them, north of the court building stands a one-story, stretcher-bond-brick double office that dates, in part, to the 19th century. To the south stands a similar structure also used for lawyers' offices. A number of such offices were built in the last quarter of the 19th century, but were removed by the expansion of the courthouse. In front of the building (east) stands a Confederate War Memorial monument erected in 1911. In the 1920s a strong wind blew the statue down, necessitating the current replacement. The grounds surrounding the courthouse are landscaped with many old trees that date to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The town of Halifax retains the character of a small rural community; the scale of its commercial buildings remains two and three stories.

## 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 type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1838-9 **Builder/Architect** Dabney Cosby, Sr.

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Halifax County Courthouse of 1838-39 belongs to the important collection of Classical Revival court buildings erected by master builders influenced by Thomas Jefferson while constructing the University of Virginia. Its designer and builder was Dabney Cosby, who with his son, Dabney Cosby, Jr., provided Southside Virginia with numerous houses, churches, and public buildings. Before building the Halifax courthouse, Cosby had been involved with three other courthouses: the Buckingham courthouse of 1823, designed by Jefferson himself, and the Goochland and Sussex courthouses, both designed by Cosby. At Halifax, Cosby abandoned the strict temple form in favor of a T plan and a Greek Ionic order. The courthouse remains the most distinguished landmark in the town of Halifax and occupies a site that has been used for court purposes since 1776.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The County of Halifax, named for the second Earl of Halifax, was formed from Lunenburg County in 1752. Inhabitants had complained that attendance at the monthly court was "grievous and burdensome (because of) the great distance from the courthouse..."<sup>1</sup> Therefore the General Assembly designated all the land south of the Staunton River and west of Aaron's Creek to be a new county. This land constituted the present area of Pittsylvania, Henry, Patrick and part of Franklin counties as well as present-day Halifax. The first Halifax Court met at Hampton Wade's house on Tuesday, May 19, 1752. Successive courts met at various places until finally settling at Punch Spring for May Court, 1753. A brick courthouse was built by 1755, and the town of Peytonsburg was established.

In 1766 the General Assembly was again petitioned for a new county. Halifax had grown, and the inhabitants in the western section complained of the many inconveniences endured in traveling to Peytonsburg. Pittsylvania County was thus created, and the new boundary placed the Halifax courthouse in the new county. In 1768 the Halifax court moved to a barn on the property of John Apperson, Jr., located several miles north of the present-day Halifax. These temporary quarters were tolerated amidst much bickering and dissension among the citizens. The greatest criticism was that the site was north of the river. The issue was settled in 1776 when John Boram offered his land for the new courthouse, and the General Assembly ordered the courthouse to be erected south of the river on Boram's land.

Built ca. 1777-79, the first courthouse erected at this site proved to be of inferior quality, needing numerous major repairs. Therefore, a second courthouse was built in 1803 by Thomas C. Stone and David Hunt, and a clerk's office soon thereafter. This courthouse complex served the county for thirty years. During the 1830s the necessary repairs became extensive and costly, and the county gave serious consideration to the replacement of the clerk's office, jail, and courthouse. In November 1834 commissioners advertised for bids on the building of a clerk's office. The contract was let to Dabney Cosby in January 1835, and the office was completed before the year was out. A brick jail, built by James Murphy, was completed in 1836.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Cook, Kenneth H. "History of Halifax Courthouse." The Record Advertiser-The South Boston News, September 7-12, 1972.

Halifax County Records: Deed Book, 13,15; Minute Book, 6,6a,7-9; Pleas Book No. 9.

Martin, Joseph. Gazetteer of Virginia. Charlottesville, Va.: Moseley and Tompkins, printers, 1835. See Continuation Sheet #2

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2 acres

Quadrangle name Halifax, Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	B	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	D	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	F	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	H	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Beginning at a point on SW corner of intersection of U.S. route 360 and 501; thence extending about 250' S along W side of 501 to NW corner of intersection of said route with court square drive; thence about 250' W, then about 200' N, then about 100' NW, then about 75' N to S side of 360--all following along NE side of said drive; thence about 125' SE along S side of 360 to point of origin. See Continuation Sheet #2  
**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 Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date December 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

title date

For HCRS use only  
 I hereby certify that this property is eligible for National Register.

Keeper of the National Register

Antes

Chief of Registration

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

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



HALIFAX COUNTY COURTHOUSE, HALIFAX CO., VA.

Continuation sheet

#1

Item number

8

Page

In February 1838, "the justices of the County being summoned for that purpose and the Court having taken the votes determined to build a new courthouse for the county.. Commissioners were appointed to prepare a plan for a new courthouse and let the building of same according to such plan."<sup>2</sup>In April 1838 the court adopted the plan and entered into a contract for the building; Dabney Cosby, Sr., was hired to erect the structure at a cost of \$6,657. The commissioner's "plan" probably resulted from a collaboration both by the commissioners and Cosby, with most of the architectural decisions such as detailing and proportion as well as the construction left to Cosby.

Dabney Cosby, Sr., the builder of the Halifax Courthouse, was born in Augusta County in 1779, where he worked until contracting to construct the West Range at the University of Virginia in 1819. Cosby's experience at the University is vividly described in his obituary which was published in the Raleigh Semi-Weekly Standard of July 12, 1862:

More than sixty years ago, Mr. Cosby, when a young man, worked on the University of Virginia, under the direction and superintendence of Mr. Jefferson. We have often heard him speak of his conversations with that illustrious man, and the information he received from him in architecture and the art of making brick."<sup>3</sup>

It was this "information", a knowledge and understanding of classical architecture, acquired from Jefferson, that became manifested in Cosby's subsequent work. As evidenced by the superior workmanship of the architecture at the University, Jefferson set extremely high standards for his workmen and under his supervision master builders received detailed instruction. In Cosby's case the lessons were particularly well received; his later work has masonry detailing comparable in quality to the finest American brickwork of the period.

When Jefferson sent Charles Yancey, a Buckingham County Commissioner, the plans for the Buckingham courthouse, he noted in his letter, "I cannot therefore but recommend to you to get the work undertaken by some of the workmen of our University. Better work, or more faithful, in brick or wood, was never seen anywhere."<sup>4</sup> Cosby's first major commission after his employment at the University of Virginia was the Buckingham County Courthouse designed by Jefferson in 1821. Cosby's work in Buckingham was followed by the ~~Sussex~~ County Courthouse and the Goochland County Courthouse, the cornerstone of the latter calling him "architect". Working in Southside Virginia, Cosby built two faculty residences at the original Union Theological Seminary (Hampden-Sydney College)-- Middlecourt and Penshurst, Prince Edward County--and the major buildings for the old Randolph-Macon College in Mecklenburg County. Around 1835 Cosby moved to Halifax County to build the new courthouse.

By the third decade of the 19th century, Halifax County entered a period of great economic prosperity. The red soil of its hilly terrain was turned to grow tobacco with such success that within twenty years, Halifax became the second largest producer of tobacco in the United States. Although Dabney Cosby, Sr., moved to North Carolina ca. 1842, his son, Dabney Cosby, Jr., was responsible for building a number of prominent residences and public buildings throughout Halifax during this period of economic growth.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
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HALIFAX COUNTY COURTHOUSE, HALIFAX CO., VA.

Continuation sheet #2

Item number 8,9.10

Page

8. SIGNIFICANCE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (continued)

The courthouse was enlarged substantially in 1904 when the present twin stair, clerk's office, and courtroom were installed. In 1964 the rear wing was added in order to accommodate expanded county offices. The Confederate Memorial was erected in 1911. With the establishment of South Boston as the county's leading tobacco market, the town of Halifax has managed to retain a size and scale reminiscent of the quintessential 19th-century courthouse town.

VDS/RCC/CL

<sup>1</sup>William H. Gaines, Jr., "Courthouses Halifax and Pittsylvania Counties", The Virginia Cavalcade, Vol. XX, No. 4, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Halifax County Minute Book 7, p. 245.

<sup>3</sup>Semi-Weekly Standard (Raleigh), July 12, 1862.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Charles Yancey, July 23, 1821, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Gaines, William H., Jr. "Courthouses (of) Halifax and Pittsylvania Counties." The Virginia Cavalcade Vol. XX, No. 4.

Semi-Weekly Standard (Raleigh), July 12, 1862.

Washington, D. C. Library of Congress. Jefferson Papers.

10. Boundary Justification

The Halifax County Courthouse boundary is drawn to include two acres. The boundary follows the roadways that surround the courthouse square. The two acres include the main courthouse, confederate monument, and five structures serving as lawyers offices and county offices that surround the main court building.

