

VLR-7/20/82 NRHP-9/9/82

EXP. 12/31/84

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

For NPS use only 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

279-3

1. Name

historic Giles County Courthouse

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number NE corner VA 100 and US 460 N/A not for publication

city, town Pearisburg N/A vicinity of congressional district

state Virginia code 51 county Giles code 071

3. Classification

Table with 4 columns: Category, Ownership, Status, Present Use. Includes checkboxes for building(s), site, object, public acquisition, accessible, and various present uses like government, industrial, etc.

4. Owner of Property

name Giles County, c/o Chairman, Board of Supervisors

street & number Giles County Courthouse

city, town Pearisburg N/A vicinity of state Virginia 24134

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Giles County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Pearisburg state Virginia 24134

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

(1) Historic American Buildings Survey title Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes X no

date 1958 X federal state county local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state DC

## 7. Description

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

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

#### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Giles County Courthouse is located on the public square in Pearisburg, formed by two major streets. The building has evolved in several stages, with the original Federal-style section, constructed by Thomas Mercer in 1836 displaying excellent workmanship in such details as its brickwork and cornice. The central block with wings stands as the chief architectural landmark in the mountainous community.

#### ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Giles County Courthouse was originally a T-shaped structure composed of the present two-story projecting central block built in 1836 by Thomas Mercer. The smaller flanking wings were added soon after the first construction. The three sections are built of painted, Flemish-bond brickwork with five-course-American bond at the sides and rear above a limestone foundation. Several 20th-century additions have been constructed at the rear of this section.

The central block is covered with a steep, asphalt-shingled hipped roof with a large octagonal cupola at its apex. The cupola features segmental arched multi-paned windows crowned by a domical roof. Gable roofs with asphalt shingles pierced by interior end chimneys cover the wings. A projecting molded cornice runs along the perimeter of the roof lines decorated with circular applied trim, dentil bands, and mutules. The portico, added in 1900, rises a full two stories supported by paired, fluted Corinthian columns. The building's cornice is repeated on the portico's pediment. Sheltered by the portico, the entrance consists of double doors with a broad fanlight set into a brick arch with reeded soffit. Traces of a window arch centered above in the second story can be seen behind the pediment. Exterior end chimneys at one time framed the central block but have been closed and the chimney stacks removed.

Originally, fenestration across the facade consisted of equal size window openings with doors located in the first story of each wing. When the portico was added, the windows were changed to 2/2 double-hung sash on the first-story center block with tall 9/9 double-hung sash below six-light transoms in the second story. Fenestration throughout the rest of the building consists of various size hung sash. All of the window openings have brick jack arches.

The west wing has been altered by being made deeper several feet, thus changing the roof pitch.

A two-story hyphen connects the front section with the three-story rear (north) addition built in 1900. These additions have been treated similarly to the original portion of the building. Secondary entrances are located in the east and west gable ends of the addition, the west end protected by a single-story portico.

The interior of the building has also witnessed numerous alterations. Stairs originally flanked the main entrance and joined on a landing directly above at the rear of the courtroom. The stairs are now located in the east wing. The courtroom was remodeled in 1941 at which time high birch-paneled wainscoting was added. The focal point of the room

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

# 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"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
			<input type="checkbox"/> science
			<input type="checkbox"/> social/
			<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
			<input type="checkbox"/> theater
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1836 Builder/Architect Thomas Mercer

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Federal-style Giles County Courthouse, the earliest and most prominent landmark in the town of Pearisburg, is the third courthouse to stand on the town's central public square since the county was established in 1806. The structure's original two-story central block with its distinctive octagonal cupola, constructed in 1836 by Thomas Mercer, displays handsome workmanship and detailing that bear a stylistic similarity to several notable area residences which traditionally have been attributed to an unknown Bedford County builder or builders. The courthouse square achieved Civil War significance as the theatre for a military encounter between Union and Confederate troops in May 1862 that is graphically recorded in the diary of Lt. Col. Rutherford B. Hayes, the Union officer then in command and later 19th president of the United States. The ca. 1900 portico and other additions and alterations of the same period reflect the prosperity that followed intense railroad, lumber, and coal development in much of Southwest Virginia at the end of the 19th century.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Giles County, named for U.S. Senator, Congressman, and Governor of Virginia William Branch Giles, was formed in January 1806 from Montgomery, Monroe (now in West Virginia), and Tazewell counties. In December 1805 citizens of the area presented a petition to the General Assembly calling for the creation of a new county because of hardships suffered by inhabitants of the area when traveling across the rugged land to any of the three distant courthouses. A bill designating a new county soon won legislative approval, and on May 16, 1806, the new justices of the peace for Giles County held their first meeting at the house of George Pearis, a prominent local merchant.<sup>1</sup> Pearis offered the county by a deed of gift on July 9, 1806, fifty-three acres of land for a town, a portion of which was to be designated as a public square.<sup>2</sup> In addition, he offered to furnish stone and timber for a temporary log courthouse. The log building was used until 1808 when a two-story stone courthouse was constructed by the builders Henry Smith and Samson Smith. That same year the town of Pearisburg was created officially by an act of the General Assembly and named in honor of its public-spirited founder.

Martin's Gazetteer of Virginia described the town in 1835, one year before the present courthouse was completed, as having ordinary county buildings, about thirty houses, four stores, two taverns, two common schools, two tanyards, two saddlers, two hatters, two cabinetmakers, one chair maker and painter, one shoe factory, one wheelwright, one tailor, and one brick and stone mason.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the lack of refinement of the county's courthouse, impetus for construction of a new courthouse was provided by the commencement of the Cumberland Gap Turnpike in 1834, which when completed connected Pearisburg with towns to the east and west. On September 29, 1834, commissioners were appointed by the court to contract for a new courthouse and clerk's office and to choose a location within the public square on which to build the new structures.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References (See Continuation Sheet #3)

Acts of the General Assembly. Richmond, Va., Jan. 16, 1806.

Eckenrode, H.J. Rutherford B. Hayes Statesman of Reunion. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press Inc., 1930.

Friend, Robert C. Giles County, Virginia 1806-1956. Pearisburg, Va.: Giles County Chamber of Commerce, 1956.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1 acre

Quadrangle name Pearisburg, Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

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**Verbal boundary description and justification** Beginning at a point on NE corner of intersection of VA 100 and US 460; thence extending about 200' NW along E side of VA 100; thence about 200' NE; thence about 200' SE to N side of US 460; thence about 200' SW along said side to point of origin. Boundary Justification: The Giles County Courthouse nomination includes one acre which

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries** (See Continuation Sheet #3)

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 July 1982

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature H. Bryan Mitchell

H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date JUL 20 1982

For NPS 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  
National Park Service

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

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GILES COUNTY COURTHOUSE, GILES COUNTY, VA

Continuation sheet #1

Item number 6, 7, 8

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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey  
1967, 1982 State  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
221 Governor Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

7. DESCRIPTION -- Architectural Analysis

is the judge's bench which is segregated from the rest of the courtroom by a railing composed of heavy turned balusters. The bench is further distinguished by a floor-to-ceiling birch panel on the wall at its rear with flat pilasters supporting a segmental arch. Wooden benches with scrolled arms face the bench. A jury room adjacent to the courtroom has recently been remodeled with applied paneling. A simple paneled wainscot and a narrow cornice finish the major hallways.

The flat courthouse lawn is bordered by a decorative wire fence. The square also contains the Giles County War Memorial and a statue commemorating Rutherford B. Hayes's involvement in a Civil War battle at the site. The county jail stands directly to the east of the courthouse, outside the nomination boundary.

MPM

8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

No article of agreement is known to exist between the builder and the commissioners. However, on September 26, 1836, the court accepted the new building as complete according to plan:

Thomas Mercer who contracted with certain gentlemen...to build a courthouse, having this day applied to the Court for the purpose of having the same seal<sup>d</sup>, and after an examination of the article between said Mercer and said commissioners and also after an examination made by part of said commission it is therefore the opinion of the court that said courthouse is finished agreeable to said contract.<sup>4</sup>

The courthouse bears stylistic similarities to a group of houses in the area which according to local tradition were constructed by an unknown builder from Bedford County. Whether or not Mercer had any Bedford connections is unknown, but the courthouse is similar in workmanship and detail to Tazewell County's Chimney Rock Farm, traditionally attributed to the unidentified Bedford builder. Details of the building also bear a resemblance to earlier Georgian- and Federal-style buildings in Virginia.

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

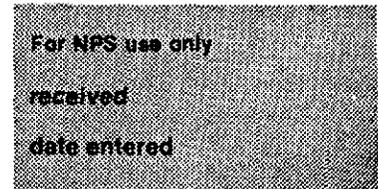
**National Register of Historic Places  
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GILES COUNTY COURTHOUSE, GILES COUNTY, VA

Continuation sheet # 2

Item number 8

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8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

In May 1862 a skirmish between Union and Confederate troops that involved future U.S. President Rutherford B. Hayes took place in Pearisburg. Hayes was one of the Union officers and his diary provides a quite flattering glimpse of the county and town during the war. On May 7 and May 8 Lt. Col. Hayes recorded:

Just reached here from Princeton after a fatiguing march of 28 miles... The country after the road strikes New River is romantic, highly cultivated, and beautiful. Giles Court-house is a neat, pretty village with a most magnificent surrounding country both as regards scenery and cultivation. The people have all been Secesh, but are polite and intelligent. When [the three Union officers] entered town, the people were standing on the corners, idly gossiping - more numerous than the invaders. They did not at first seem to know who it was; then such scampering, such rushing into the streets of women, such weeping, begging, etc., etc...May 8, 1862, Thursday--A perfectly splendid day. No attack or approach last night... Selected my ground in case of an approach of the enemy. Talked with Mr. Pendleton and Col. English. Find more intelligence and culture here than anywhere else in Virginia...This is a lovely spot, a fine, clean village, most beautiful and romantic surrounding country, and polite and educated Secesh people.<sup>5</sup>

Although Hayes continuously begged for reinforcements for his party of 250 men with no artillery, none were sent, and the Union soldiers were attacked and forced to retreat. According to Hayes's diary, his request for additional support was aimed at preventing destruction of the town, and he lamented the serious loss of position and property that ensued.<sup>6</sup> A photograph taken after the Civil War shows the effect of the skirmish in the boarded-up courthouse cupola.

During the late 19th century a local land promotion plan was widely publicized calling attention to Giles County's abundance of fertile land, railroads, navigable waterways, coal veins, and timber. This spirit of optimism and commercial enterprise which was typical of Southwest Virginia counties in the late 19th to early 20th centuries undoubtedly contributed to the construction of the ca. 1900 and later additions and alterations to the courthouse.

VDS/MPM

<sup>1</sup>Giles County Deed Book A, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Robert C. Friend, Giles County Virginia 1806-1956 (Pearisburg, Va.: Giles County Chamber of Commerce, 1956), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Martin, Gazetteer of Virginia (Charlottesville: Moseley and Tompkins, 1836), p. 346-8.

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GILES COUNTY COURTHOUSE, GILES COUNTY, VA  
Continuation sheet #3

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8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Footnotes continued

<sup>4</sup>Giles County Order Book, 1836, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Richard Williams, Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1924), p. 254-7.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Giles County Deed Book A, H, F; Order Books 1833-1839; 1806-1809.

Hollowell, Betty. Historic Crab Orchard Museum, Tazewell, Va. Telephone Interview, June 1982.

Martin, Joseph. Gazetteer of Virginia. Charlottesville, Va.: Moseley and Tompkins, 1836.

Williams, Charles Richard. Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1924.

10; GEOGRAPHICAL DATA -- Boundary Justification

is the total amount of land within the boundaries of the public square surrounding the courthouse.

