

Gloucester County Courthouse Square

The Gloucester County Court House Square, located in the heart of the town on Main Street, stands as a classic example of an early Virginia county seat complex. The large square, enclosed by a red brick wall, comprises a circular courtyard green with five buildings, including an old debtor's prison, a jail, the Roane Building, the Clayton Building, and the monumental courthouse. The jail, erected in 1873 after an earlier prison was burned by Federal troops during the Civil War, is a two-story, simple brick structure built in the traditional post-bellum architectural style. The Clayton Building was originally built in 1766 as the clerk's office and was named for John Clayton, the Clerk of Gloucester Court from 1720-1773. The structure was almost entirely destroyed by fire in 1820, and the current building, which sits on the earlier foundation, was constructed in 1823. The Roane Building, named for Basil Bernard Roane, a native of Gloucester County and a clerk for 59 years, was built in 1896 and stands as a strong example of a late 19th-century public building, with its brick facade, heavy metal doors, and iron gratings. While these buildings within the walled portion of the square date from between the early 19th century to the mid 20th century, they are constructed of brick, stucco, and weatherboarding and range in height from one to two stories. Though not colonial structures, these buildings were constructed in architecturally sensitive styles appropriate to the venerable role of the courthouse complex and add to the unity of the overall square.

The courthouse, traditionally listed as dating to 1766, is the only colonial component within the square and forms the focal point of the entire assemblage of buildings. The large, high-styled, Flemish bond brick structure follows the typical 18th century courthouse architectural pattern, yet the building's impressive brickwork, round-arched windows, and precise proportions classify it as one of the more architecturally important examples of Virginia's significant colonial courthouses. Constructed with a T-shaped interior floor pattern, the courthouse is one story with a triple-sectioned façade composed of two symmetrical wings. The center section consists of a tetrastyle Ionic portico projecting outward to shelter the main entrance of the building. A hipped roof, complete with interior brick chimneys on both wings' ends, covers the main section of the courthouse. The building's fenestration remains consistent along the front and rear facades, with six-over-six sash and a sunburst fanlight resting between the architrave and cornice. Other impressive detailing includes the main entrance's double door with a square-grid, arched fanlight above the architrave. The roof frame, the walls, and the modillioned cornice are the only truly original features associated with the courthouse, as the structure has been renovated a number of times. However, the courthouse remains historically intact and currently retains its original function.

Due to Gloucester's role as the county seat, the courthouse square became a hub of business activity, and over time a number of necessary and associated establishments began to sprout up along Main Street, in close proximity. For example, the historic Botetourt Building, originally a tavern and later a hotel, cropped up on the south side of the square around 1770 to serve the increasing population. The square and its adjacent historic structures exist to this day in much of their original form, retaining the regal ambience of an old Virginia county seat complex. In 1971, the National Park Service designated the entire area an historic district and listed it on the National Register of Historic Places. Visitors to the Gloucester County Courthouse Square will feel an

alluring charm and sense the magnitude of the square's role in history while walking through this section of Main Street.