



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Purpose of Evaluation

Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

Survey and Planning funds from the ESHPF, disaster relief from hurricanes Florence and Michael, have been designated to survey and nominate a historic district in the Town of Montross, Westmoreland County.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR's easement program? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

1. General Information

District name(s): Montross Historic District (263-5038)

Main Streets and/or Routes: Route 3 (Kings Highway), Court Square and Polk St.

City or Town: Montross

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Westmoreland

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban \_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_ Town X Village \_\_\_ Hamlet \_\_\_ Rural \_\_\_

Briefly describe the district's overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

The proposed historic district is mostly linear along Route 3, also known as Kings Highway. The district extends outward from the Courthouse and Court Square, to the east and to the west. Commercial properties are set close to the street with pedestrian sidewalks in front of them, while residential properties at either end of the district tend to be set back on large grassy lots with mature trees. The eastern edge of the district also includes some large tracts in agricultural production. The courthouse is set back from Route 3 and has a large green in front with trees and three war monuments. The courthouse green is a notable landscape feature as is the President's Garden, adjacent to the Westmoreland County Museum, which faces the court green. This garden was designed by notable landscape architect, Charles Gillette, and was a project of the Garden Club of Virginia.

### 3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): Federal, Greek Revival, Colonial Revival, Commercial, Craftsman, Folk Victorian, Gothic Revival, Art Deco, American Foursquare, minimal traditional,

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If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: Bartholomew F. Smith, architect and builder – Courthouse (ca. 1900)

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If any builders or developers are known, please list here:

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Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): ca. 1780 - 1970

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Are there any known threats to this district? Weather events

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#### **Narrative Description:**

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire historic district, such as building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district, as well as typical updates, additions, remodelings, or other alterations that characterize the district..

Montross is an incorporated town in Westmoreland County, but has more of the character of a village. Mostly linear in development, it remained a small Courthouse village from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since Route 3 is a major transportation route going east-west through the Northern Neck, the commercial and residential areas began to grow and push out from the courthouse square more rapidly in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of the automobile. Prior to that, it served mostly the court functions for this large, mostly agricultural county, with a few residents and support businesses. The commercial area is clustered along route 3, closest to the court square with residential properties on the east and west ends. A mid-to-late twentieth century residential area developed to the south and east of the commercial/court core area and is not included in the proposed district. Few buildings in town are over two stories in height and most architectural styles represented in the town are regional and vernacular variations of styles popular at the period of their construction. The Court Square is the center and focal point of town. Montross is a pedestrian friendly town, with sidewalks, low scale buildings and residential lots with large grassy lawns and mature vegetation. Most commercial, civic, religious and educational buildings are brick and most residential buildings are wood frame. Typical alterations to buildings include window replacements, some storefront alterations, and modern additions. Overall, the district has good integrity of plan, materials and workmanship. Some buildings of note are mentioned below.

#### **Court Square:**

**Courthouse Complex** – Built in 1900 in the Romanesque Revival style and remodeled in the Colonial Revival style in 1930. Two-story, brick with hipped roof and large Colonial Revival portico with fluted two-story columns. **Clerk’s Office** – ca. 1830, addition ca. 1930. It is the only Greek revival building surviving in town and features a front pediment with prominent cornice. The **jail** was constructed in the nineteenth century, ca. 1885 and has had several repairs/rebuilding efforts. The brick cornice is 3-courses high with 4-course brick corbeling below. There is a jack arch over the door, which is flanked by two corbeled pilasters. **Monuments** on the courthouse green include one to Confederate soldiers (1876), one to soldiers who fought in WWI, WWII and Korea and the final, added in the 1980s, to soldiers who served in the Vietnam War.

**Peoples Bank of Montross** – the bank was chartered in 1913, and this building was built in 1924. The bank moved to a new building, also in the district in 1967. This building later served as the office of the Westmoreland News. It has a very distinctive Classical Revival façade.

**Ames House** – ca. 1934, brick Colonial Revival, 2-story with slate roof.

**Westmoreland County Museum** – ca. 1940, Colonial Revival. It was built as a replica of the Wakefield Memorial House at George Washington's birthplace specifically to house the large painting of William Pitt, done by Charles Wilson Peale in 1768 and presented to the County. Adjacent to the museum building is the **President's Garden**, designed by Charles Gillette, constructed as a project of the Garden Club of Virginia to honor Virginia's eight presidents.

The **Montross Inn**, ca. 1800 - across from the courthouse, is believed to have been built on the site of the John Minor Ordinary of 1684. The current building may incorporate eighteenth century foundations and may have at its core, a late 18<sup>th</sup> century or early 19<sup>th</sup> century remnant. It served as an inn throughout the nineteenth century, later becoming apartments and then restored to an inn in 1975. Two and a half stories, five bays, frame on a raised brick foundation. Multiple additions and remodelings.

#### **Commercial Area – several buildings of note:**

**Smallwood Motor Company**, Wakefield Furniture, Westmoreland Museum – ca. 1927 – prominent brick commercial structure facing route 3, but integral to the Court Square. Built on the site of an earlier Clerk's Office.

**Campbell's Auto Sales** – ca. 1930, Art Deco commercial building. The only example of Art Deco in Montross.

**Coca-Cola Bottling, Inc.** – ca. 1930 – one of only a few plants left. Windows replaced, but most other historic fabric remains.

Representing the importance and reliance on farming for the region is the former **Feed and Seed Store** – ca. 1929 – Concrete masonry building with stepped parapet. Feed supply sheds survive at the rear of the building.

#### **Educational and Religious:**

**Washington and Lee Agricultural High School, ca. 1930** – Colonial Revival, 1.5 story, 5-bay, with two recessed wings on each end. The gable walls have pseudo chimneystacks with a connecting parapet. Series of rear additions do not detract from the original school building. Original school had ten classrooms, a library and combination auditorium/gymnasium.

**St James Church and Cemetery** – c. 1880, Gothic Revival

**Residential Buildings:** Range from the late eighteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Two prominent examples date to ca. 1790-1830, representing the Federal Period of Architecture. One is Flemish bond brick, two-story center passage (**DHR file #263-0004**) and the other, the **Hutt House (263-5036)** began as a brick, two-story, side-passage which was later expanded to a center-passage with a frame addition on the east side. The majority of the residential houses are late 19<sup>th</sup> century folk Victorian and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Colonial Revival and Craftsman/Bungalow. Interspersed with these are mid-century minimal traditional/ranch houses and minimal Colonial Revival dwellings from the 1940s-1960s. Because Montross was a small village for so long with large farms surrounding it, quite a bit of the later incorporated town

boundaries include large tracts that are still farmed today. This is mostly found at the eastern end of town and a few of note have been included in the boundaries.

Discuss the district's general setting and/or streetscapes, including current property uses (and historic uses if different), such as industrial, residential, commercial, religious, etc. For rural historic districts, please include a description of land uses.

For a small town, this county seat incorporates all types of buildings related to government, industry, commercial, religious, educational and residential. See above description for general setting and development patterns. The boundaries were drawn to include the greatest concentration of historic buildings. To the east and the west boundaries end where there is a break in the concentration of historic resources with either large tracts of undeveloped land and/or an increase in modern buildings on the landscape.

#### 4. District's History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the district, such as when it was established, how it developed over time, and significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.) Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

If the district is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Montross, which has been at this location since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is significant as the County seat for Westmoreland County. It is important to the history of government and politics for Virginia and also represents the development of a rural town from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The Montross Historic District is recommended eligible under National Register criterion A at the state level in the areas of government and politics and at the local level for commerce, as it was the main center of commerce for the county, particularly during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The historic district is also eligible under criterion C at the local level for its interesting collection of architectural styles that span over 200 years and retain a high degree of historic integrity. The period of significance begins ca. 1685 with the date of the first known courthouse and ordinary at this location and ends ca. 1970.

Westmoreland County was formed in 1653 and a county courthouse has been located on or near the site of the current courthouse since the 1680s. Court records from the period of 1684 – 1686 indicate a courthouse, jail and ordinary were under construction at that time. A second courthouse replaced that one in 1707 and served the county through the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It was in this building that many revolutionary ideas took hold and several important actions occurred including Richard Henry Lee's resolution in 1774 to send aid to the city of Boston whose port had been closed following the Boston "Tea Party." Also, passed here in 1775, was a resolution of the Westmoreland Committee of Safety denouncing Lord Dunmore's seizure of the powder supply in Williamsburg. During the war of 1812, as part of their push to Washington, D.C., the British wreaked havoc throughout the Northern Neck. Landing on Nomini Creek in the summer of 1814, British soldiers marched towards the courthouse, taking possession of it on July 25<sup>th</sup>.

Several years after this war, the 1707 courthouse building underwent a substantial rebuilding or replacement. Records indicate the new or remodeled building opened for court in 1823. The surviving Greek Revival clerk's office was likely built shortly after the new court building opened.

Because of the continuous occupation of the court square and surrounding parcels since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, this part of the district is considered to have potential for intact archaeological resources from the earlier periods. Evidence of the original ordinary was explored in 1977 on the grounds of the existing Montross Inn. Archaeological site 44WM0043 was identified, mapped and recorded to contain artifacts from ca. 1675 – ca. 1899.

The village was known simply as Westmoreland Court House until the mid-nineteenth century when it was officially named Montross by an act of the General Assembly. On the Town's website is the history of the name Montross: "1751, an Irish merchant, William Black, purchased 110 acres of land surrounding the Courthouse and began to operate a store on the property. Black owned a ship that he used to bring goods from England. The ship was called the Montross, after Black's native town of Montross, Ireland. Shortly after Black began his business, references to the Town of Montross, Virginia, began to appear, and at some later time the Town was officially given that name. Since then, the Town has continued to play an official role as the Westmoreland County seat. Montross also serves as a commercial center for the County."

In 1900, the Bartholomew F. Smith, head of the B.F. Smith Fireproof Construction Company, was contracted to rebuild the 1820s courthouse. However, it appears that he built a mostly, or entirely, new building as the finished courthouse was almost identical to the new courthouse he built for Northampton County in 1899. A historic image from c. 1900 indicates it was an unadorned brick Romanesque Revival building with a hipped roof, flared eaves with brackets and a large central dormer with a pyramidal roof and triple arched windows. The addition to the Clerk's office was done at this time as well. B.F. Smith, whose company was out of Alexandria, Virginia, also designed the courthouses in Northampton County (1899), Northumberland County (1900) and Accomack (1899), all employing similar architectural characteristics and focused on being fireproof. In 1930 the courthouse underwent a major transformation in the Colonial Revival style that is still visible today.

At the time of the Smith Courthouse construction, the Town contained a smaller collection of commercial and residential buildings. As a county, that was mostly centered on agriculture and trades related to the water, Montross existed primarily to serve the functions of the court. This began to change as the 19<sup>th</sup> century ended, with growth out from the courthouse along Route 3 that included additional stores, a bank, and more "in-town" residents. Once the automobile became affordable for the general population, more businesses appeared that served local residents and travelers along Route 3, a major arterial route in the region. Several automobile showrooms and service stations appeared.

Representing the early twentieth century expansion of the town and the presence of the automobile in everyday lives of rural Virginia is the Smallwood Motor Company. An excerpt from a PIF prepared for the building in 2011: Smallwood operated the motor company through the Great Depression and sold cars made by manufacturers including Ford, Essex, and Crosley. Cars entered the interior through doors on the northeast side. A canopy supported by brick piers and ornamented with a decorative railing extended out to cover cars as they took on fuel. This canopy was removed in the mid-twentieth century. During World War II, the building housed the offices of the Selective Service and the Rations boards. The rooms housing these government agencies survive and appear to have been added in the rear section of the second floor at this time. Smallwood built a new garage on another lot and sold the building in 1944 to a Mr. and Mrs. Littlefield who operated as a drugstore with a bar situated in the rear. The building was purchased by Lester Miller in 1946 and continued to operate as a drug store and bar. He sold the structure to Hugh Sisson who established the Wakefield Furniture Store. The Sisson family operated this business for over fifty years. In 2009 the owners relocated the business elsewhere and sold the property to the Westmoreland County Museum.

Representing an important industry to the County is the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant – From the VCRIS record: It should be noted that this bottling plant is one of only, a hand full of privately owned Coca-Cola Bottling Plants left. The significance of this business cannot be underestimated. The role it played in the employment of the residents during the Depression, and the social and entertainment value of the products produced and sold, are immeasurable. The Carver family came up with a very unique recipe for ginger ale after the turn of the century, and it was a staple of the Northern Neck for many years. The recipe called for using cane sugar instead of fructose or corn syrup, giving it a true ginger taste, with less carbonation. The original recipe was marketed and bottled in Montross under the name Carvers Original Ginger Ale. The mass produced ginger ale called Northern Neck Ginger Ale is a modified version of the original recipe, recently discontinued by the Coca-Cola Company.

The Westmoreland County Museum is important cultural site on the Court Square – as described on their website: The Museum was established in 1941 and became the first museum to open regularly in the Northern Neck. The museum was built as a replica of Wakefield, the birthplace of George Washington, to display the portrait of William Pitt (Lord Chatham) painted by Charles Willson Peale in 1768. Pitt was an instrumental member of Parliament responsible for the repeal of the Stamp Act. Major objection to this tax was voiced in Westmoreland County by way of the Leedstown Resolves, a document signed by 115 of Westmoreland County's well known residents including the Lee and Washington families. The Pitt painting

began Peale's 60 year career as America's most famous portrait artist. There are eighteen other portraits honoring important residents of Westmoreland County throughout its long history. The museum provides numerous exhibits and programs to remind visitors of the important role played by the county and its people in Virginia's and the nation's history. The Westmoreland County Museum also houses the county information center and is the location of the Presidents' Garden, the first garden designed by Charles Gillette in the Northern Neck and a project of the Garden Club of Virginia, honoring Virginia's eight U.S. presidents.

In ca. 1930 the Washington and Lee High School was built for white students that included an Agricultural curriculum. In a segregated society, the A.T. Johnson High School (NRHP listed, 1998) was built in 1937 for African American students, also in the Colonial Revival style, but several miles east of town. It was one of the first African American high schools built on the Northern Neck.

Following the Great Depression and WWII, development in Montross continued at a generally slow pace. Additional residential dwellings appeared along route 3, pushing out further to the east and west. The existing Post Office building was built in the 1950s and the Peoples Bank of Montross built a new building in 1967. Late 20<sup>th</sup> century infill buildings appeared in the commercial area such as a pharmacy, a new town hall, a new bank, and a few other new businesses. Older buildings were rehabilitated to serve modern needs and incorporated more modern materials such as siding, shingle roofs and new windows. Most of the earlier residential buildings remained relatively unchanged. New construction is generally compatible in scale and materials.

#### Sources:

Department of Historic Resources, Virginia Cultural Resources Information System (VCRIS) records for the Town of Montross.

Norris, Walter Briscoe, Jr., editor. *Westmoreland County Virginia, 1653-1983*. Westmoreland County Board of Supervisors. Montross, Virginia. 1983.

Peters, Margaret T. and John O. *Virginia's Historic Courthouses*. University of Virginia Press. Charlottesville, VA. 1995

<https://www.townofmontross.org/>

<http://westmorelandcountymuseum.org/about-the-museum/>

**5. Property Ownership** (Check as many categories as apply):

Private:  X  Public\Local  X  Public\State \_\_\_\_\_ Public\Federal  X

**6. Applicant/Sponsor** (Individual and/or organization sponsoring preparation of the PIF, with contact information. For more than one sponsor, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title:  Walt Heyer   
organization:  Westmoreland County Museum   
street & number:  43 Court Square, PO Box 247   
city or town:  Montross  state:  VA  zip code:  22520   
e-mail:  wkh@museumsolutionswkh.com  telephone:  804-493-8440

Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••**

In the event of organization sponsorship, you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Applicant Information** (Individual completing form if other than applicant/sponsor listed above)

name/title:  Elizabeth Lipford   
organization:  Department of Historic Resources   
street & number: \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town: \_\_\_\_\_ state: \_\_\_\_\_ zip code: \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail:  elizabeth.lipford@dhr.virginia.gov  telephone:  804-482-6454

**7. Notification**

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator, City Manager, and/or Town Manager.

name/title:  Patricia Lewis, Town Manager

locality:  Town of Montross

street & number:  15869 Kings Highway, PO Box 126

city or town:  Montross  state:  VA  zip code:  22520

telephone:  804-493-9623