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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (II known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The small log jail beside Highway 15 in the village of Worsham has the solid appearance of a building constructed with security in mind. The 14' by 18' structure consists of a single room with unutilized attic space above. The square hewn logs of the walls are closely fitted, without chinking and are held together with half dovetailed joints at the corners. The floor and ceiling are also constructed of heavy squared logs set closely together. The ceiling logs extend about one foot beyond the front and back walls to form a slight roof overhang. The roof structure itself is of lighter frame construction. The building sits on a low sandstone rubble foundation and has an interior-end brick chimney.

Entrance into the jail is through a set of two doors in the center of the front wall. The outer door may be a replacement, but the inner door, of vertical beaded boards and horizontal braces, appears to date from the eighteenth century. Two small square unglazed windows flank the door, the southern one being a conjectural restoration based on the northern opening. Remains of three vertical iron bars found in the original window also served as precedent for restoration. A small opening in the back wall appears to have been a latrine slot.

A lean-to addition at the back was constructed in the nineteenth century when the jail was converted into a residence. A larger window was cut in the front wall, and an opening was made in the log ceiling to give access to the attic space.

Most of the post-eighteeenth century additions were removed in a 1951 restoration of the building. The tin roof was replaced with wooden shingles, and all beaded siding except that under the gables was removed. This siding was certainly of pre-War Between the States date, and it may have been eighteenth century. The jail is now scheduled for further restoration and repair by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.

A more substantial jail of stone was constructed just north of the earlier one around 1855. This structure had fallen in by the mid-1950's, and the walls were then dismantled. A heavy iron door and window grate from the stone jail were preserved and put up just outside the log prision.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Worsham was the county seat of Prince Edward County from its foundation in 1754 until 1872, and the debtors' prison constructed there in 1787 remains the oldest public building in the county. Debtors' terms of imprisonment were usually comparatively short in the eighteenth century, and their places of incarceration were usually separate from those provided for criminals.

The Prince Edward "gaol for debtors" was authorized in 1786, with Thomas Scott and Charles Allen directed to let bids. The completed building was viewed and received the following year, and Richard Bibb was paid fifty-two pounds for its construction.

Imprisonment of debtors was abandoned in the nineteenth century, and apparently as early as 1820 the log building was converted into a residence. In 1908 the property was deeded by the Burke family to E. L. Dupuy, whose family retained ownership until it was purchased in 1950 by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. This organization carried out restoration of the structure in 1951.

As a documented log public building surviving from the eighteeenth century, the Worsham debtors' prison is a rare survival in Virginia. Its quality of construction is also notable, being of finely fitted squared logs that form the ceiling and floor, as well as walls.

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SEE INSTRUCTION

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