

VLR-6/15/76

NRHP-11/7/76

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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
Debtors' Prison
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

East side of State Route 764; 200 feet north of intersection of
State Routes 13 and 764.

CITY, TOWN
Accomac

VICINITY OF

First (Thomas N. Downing)
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE
Virginia

CODE
51

COUNTY
Accomack

CODE
001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" 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	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
County of Accomack c/o Accomack County Administrator
STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Accomac

VICINITY OF

STATE
Virginia 23301

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Accomack County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Accomac

STATE
Virginia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS (3) - See Continuation Sheet #1

TITLE
(1) Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory

DATE
1958

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE
D. C.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET #1

ITEM NUMBER 6

PAGE 1

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Historic American Buildings Survey
1960 Federal
Library of Congress
Washington, D. C.

- (3) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
1967, 1968, 1976 State
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
221 Governor Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<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 _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Accomack County Debtors' Prison stands on a small lot in the center of the village of Accomac, near the county courthouse. The oldest public structure in the county, it was erected in 1783 as a jailer's house and converted to use as a debtors' prison in the early nineteenth century.

The Debtors' Prison is a small (18' by 30') one-story, three-bay building constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers. It originally formed the southwest corner of a jailyard wall approximately 70 feet square. A portion of that wall still projects laterally from the northeast corner of the building, and the scar of another portion of the original wall may be seen at the northwest corner of the facade. A two-course stepped water table is employed on the ends and rear (south) facade of the house, but the front wall, which faced onto the jailyard, has none. There are an exterior end chimney at the east end and an interior chimney at the west. The window openings presently have modern nine-over-nine sash, but both the iron lattice covering them and the heavy batten doors date from the conversion of the building to a debtors' prison in 1824. (A window in the east end and one in the south facade have been bricked up in the present century). The box cornice and slate roof are also modern.

The plan is that of a simple hall-and-parlor dwelling. One enters the larger east room, in the southeast corner of which an enclosed stair rises to the garrett. The fireplace treatment consists of plain boards lapped in such a manner as to suggest a crossetted surround. There is a similar chimneybreast treatment in the west room, which is otherwise unembellished. The framed partition between the two rooms is covered on both sides with horizontal beaded sheathing.

The Debtors' Prison was partially restored in 1911, two years after the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities took custody of the building, and again more thoroughly in 1953.

DTU

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

Penology

SPECIFIC DATES 1783; 1824

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

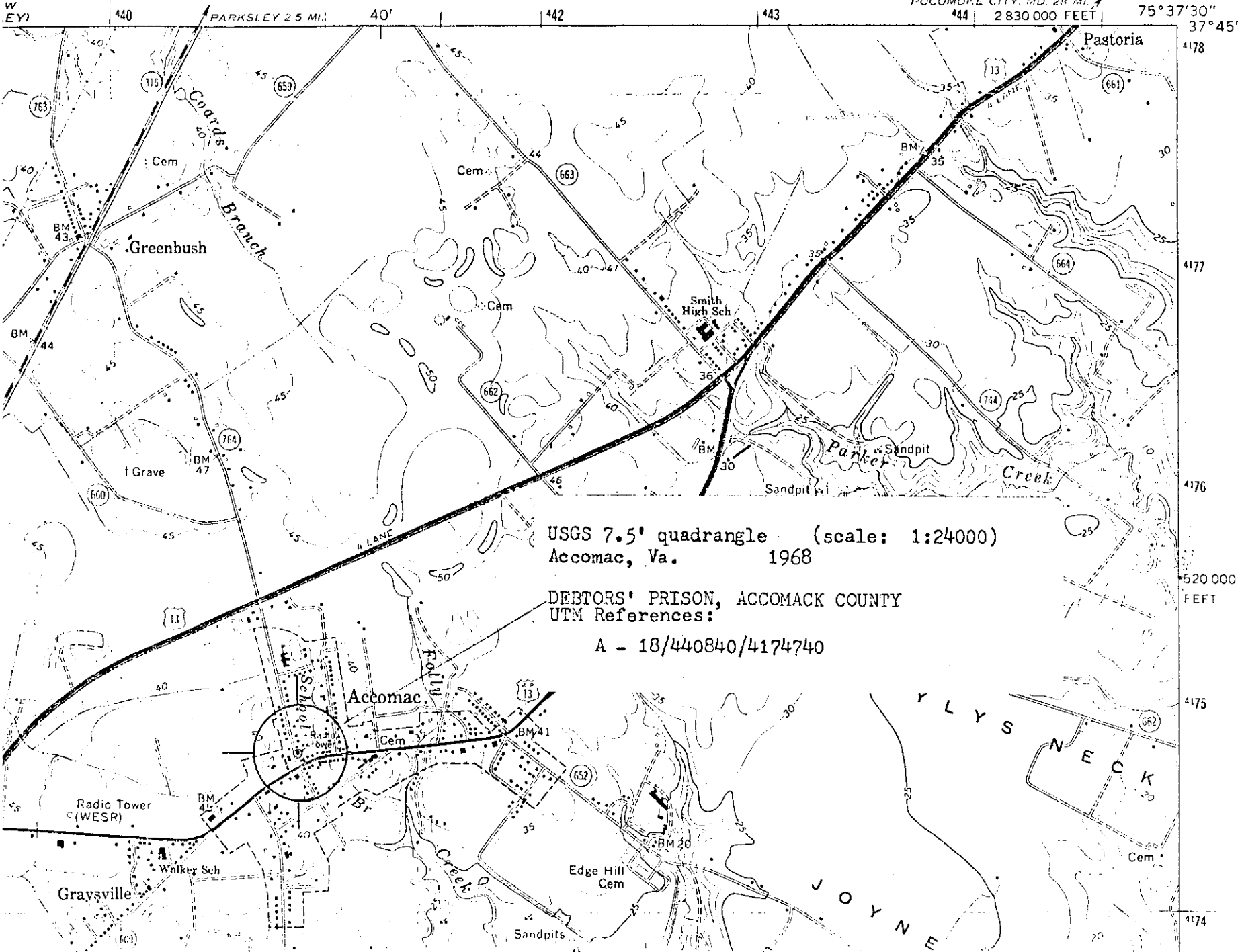
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The small brick Debtors' Prison at Accomac Court House stands as a rare example of an eighteenth-century penal structure in Virginia and is the oldest public building in Accomack County. Built in 1783 as the jailer's residence and converted to use as a debtors' prison in 1824, it is the only survivor of a complex which originally included a jail and jailyard as well.

The county court of Accomack in 1775 ordered a committee to "plan and lay off a Draught for a new prison for this County." An inspection committee in 1782 approved of the building, but suggested "that a suitable wall made of Brick around the Gaol at a convenient distance is absolutely necessary and that there ought to be a small house built at the public expense in one corner and adjoining the said wall for the residence of the jailor, without which we are of opinion that the prisoners cannot be kept in perfect security." These new structures were accepted by the county in 1784. Archaeological testing undertaken in 1969 by the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission revealed that the 1784 complex consisted of a seventy-foot square, brick-walled jailyard with the jail in the northeast corner and the jailer's house forming part of the south wall of the yard at the west corner.

The need for repairs to the building and a new state law requiring the provision of separate facilities for debtors and felons caused the county to study new uses for the building during the third decade of the nineteenth century. A committee pointed out to the county court in 1824 that the law did not require that they provide a jailer's house and that furthermore "there are few if any Counties in the State in which houses are provided at the public expense." It seemed to them that "the Jailor's house might be appropriated to the purpose of a Jail for the confinement of debtors without injury to the public." Reversing their predecessor's judgement, the new committee thought that "the contiguity of the Jailor's House to the Jail furnished no security for the safe keeping of the prisoners." Further study suggested "that iron bars to the windows of inch iron and oak Batton doors to be hung outside, is all that is necessary to be done to the said house, to answer the purposes intended, because it is believed that debtors have no inducement to brake prison, the Law authorizes them with little trouble to discharge themselves whenever they wish so to do." The work was accomplished promptly, and the jailer's house served its new function until the abolition of imprisonment for debt in Virginia.

In 1909, the old jail and wall were demolished by the county and custody of the Debtors' Prison was entrusted to the Drummondtown Branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, which undertook a partial renovation in 1911 and a fuller one in 1953. It served from 1911 to 1927 as a library and is presently a museum of Accomack County history.



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale: 1:24000)
Accomac, Va. 1968

DEBTORS' PRISON, ACCOMACK COUNTY
UTM References:

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520 000
FEET

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