

HISTORY & CULTURE



Prince George County Virginia

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The Prince George County Courthouse has stood at the center of Prince George County since 1883. Today, with architecture restored and state-of-the-art exhibits, it stands as the Prince George County Regional Heritage Center, telling the fascinating story of one of Virginia's most historical areas.

Welcome

Welcome to the Heritage Center of Prince George County...

Step into the timeline of a history that begins before human habitation and travels through the development of a region that is today home to major industry and high technology. Experience exhibits and displayed artifacts that continue the story of the land that once knew no boundaries, its people, and its community. Set in the Courthouse of 1883, the Center is unique in its presentation of the County's story and is a great place to begin one's visit to Prince George.

A driving tour through the County using the map on the back page and the corresponding number throughout this guide is a means of further experiencing the history and heritage that surrounds you. Whether it be an immigrant Czech community or a prosperous plantation, an old dirt road or the site of a rail station, the riverbank or a green field that has been producing crops for generations, Prince George continues to promise the visitor a sense of belonging in its ever-unfolding story.

Plantation Life

Along the James River, plantations sprang up from the early land grants. Tobacco was the "gold" of the colonies requiring expanses of land and labor to support that economy. Although owner names have changed, many of the plantation homes still stand and a drive along the roads that surround them is truly a step back in time. *Note: Unless noted otherwise, sites are privately owned and not open to the public.*

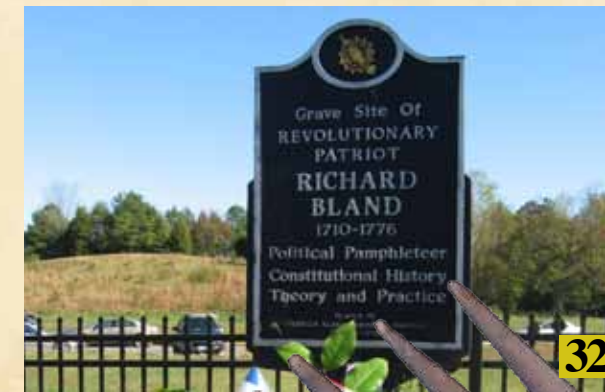
#24 Evergreen, a plantation home built by the Ruffin family in early 1800's. Birthplace of Edmund Ruffin, noted agriculturist and secessionist, who worked extensively on revitalizing the depleted soils of Prince George County farms. *National Register Property.*

#28 A late eighteenth century home, **Aberdeen**, was built by Thomas Cocke. Its unique architectural features include hand-done reeding around windows and doors, unique mantels in each of the main rooms, and a transverse hallway that opens for ventilation at each end. The farmland of Aberdeen was a site of agricultural experiments by Edmund Ruffin. *National Register Property*

#30 A land patent granted to Captain Francis Eppes at City Point in 1635, the plantation house was built in 1763, Appomattox Plantation. Served as headquarters for General Grant circa 1864-65. Annexed by the City of Hopewell in 1923. Now owned and operated by the National Park Service as a part of the Petersburg National Battlefield. Open daily: 1001 Pecan Avenue, Hopewell, 23860. *National Register Property.*

Prince George County

On and after the 23rd day of April which shall be in the year of our Lord God, 1703 the said County of Charles City be divided into two distinct Counties so that James River divide the Same And that, that part of the said County which is & lyes on the North side of the said James River shall for ever thereafter be called and knowne by the name of Charles City County. And that part of the said County which is & lyes on the South side of the said river shall remain and for ever thereafter be called and knowne by the name Prince George County.



#35 Land grant in 1616 to John Martin, an original settler. **Brandon Plantation** features a house built in 1765 by Nathaniel Harrison. Grounds open daily: 23500 Brandon Road, Spring Grove, 23881. *National Landmark Property*

#36 **Upper Brandon**, divided from the original Brandon land in 1807, features a main house erected in 1825 with wing additions completed in 1859. *National Register Property*

#8 Built by Williamson Simmons on Second Swamp near present day Disputanta, **Chester Plantation's** architecture of Greek Revival was unique in the County circa 1845. It was later owned by local philanthropist and business leader, Rennie Arnold. *National Register Property*

#5 This early grist mill (date unknown) at **Lee's Mill Pond** was the site of a Civil War skirmish in 1864.

#34 Founded with a 1618 land grant to Sir George Yeardley, **Flowerdew Hundred** was the site of the first windmill in North America. In 1864, forty percent of the Union Army crossed the river here using a pontoon bridge and landing at Windmill Point. *National Register Property*

#32 **Bland Family Cemetery** at the site of the family home on Jordan's Point. Believed to be the burial site of Richard Bland along with thirty-eight other family members. Owned and maintained by the Prince George Regional Heritage Center. Open daily.

A rocking chair, cradle and early farm implement are only a small part of the Center's extensive collection.





Historic Churches

Throughout its history, the churches of Prince George County have served as more than just houses of worship. They have been focal points for a wide variety of community and cultural activities. Come discover their rich and diverse role in shaping our history.



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1836 - Founding of **Shiloh Baptist** congregation. Current church building, 1884, stands on original site.



4

1787 - Parish at **Gary's Methodist** established as part of the revival of Methodism. Current building dates back to 1880.



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Established 1714 as the first Baptist Church in Virginia, **Oakland Baptist Church** became the Oakland Czech-Slovak Baptist Church in 1923. It remained primarily a Czech speaking group until the 1950's.



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Trinity United Methodist Church, 1883, established as the union of three churches: Warwick, Centerville, and the new Disputanta church.



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The **Church of the Sacred Heart**, the remaining symbol of the nucleus of Czech families that settled after the Civil War to form the community of New Bohemia. Today's church structure is the third, the first having been erected in 1906.



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Established in 1875 as non-denominational, **Rosewood Presbyterian Church** became Presbyterian in 1927. Named for the donor of the land (Rosa) as well as for the woods that surrounded the chapel in its early years..



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Gregory Memorial Presbyterian Church originally held services in the 1883 County Courthouse. Named for its founding minister, the Rev. William F.C. Gregory, its original sanctuary still stands in the center of the County Courthouse community.



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Faith Lutheran Church, deeded in 1858 as Mount Sinai Methodist. Congregation of Faith Lutheran purchased building in 1972 after Mount Sinai merged with the congregation of Newville United Methodist Church.



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One of the earliest Czech-Slovak churches in the County, **Bethlehem Congregational Church** was established in the community known as Begonia in 1894, meeting at the Mistr home. The Church structure was completed in 1898.



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Pleasant Grove Baptist Church was organized in 1865 by freed slaves. Services were held under a bush arbor until a small log building could be built. The second church building remains a part of the Prince George Courthouse community, no longer used by its original congregation.



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Dating back to 1844, the original **Sycamore Church** was located two miles east of its current location. Skirmishes in the Great Beefsteak Raid took place here. The present-day structure was built in 1875, using salvage from the original as much as possible.



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St. Paul's Slovak Lutheran Church Site, Church organized in 1904; services conducted in Slovak tongue. Building taken down in 1997, cemetery remains.



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African American Congregation first established in 1865 as **Harrison Grove Baptist Church**. Founders from First Baptist Church, Harrison Street, Petersburg. A schoolhouse where black children went to elementary grades is also on the property.



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Merchant's Hope Church, parish was established in 1657. Building constructed circa 1740 and remains an active parish church, one of the oldest in the nation.



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Fourth church structure for **Martin's Brandon Parish**, established as part of John Martin's land grant, 1616.



Commerce

From our earliest days, America's entrepreneurial spirit has been an important part of life in Prince George County. Here are some key locations that played a part in the history of Commerce within the County.

- #1 **The Bank of Carson** was founded in 1911. This current building dates from 1927. It is one of several local banks that merged to form what is today the Bank of Southside Virginia.
- #16 Built circa 1870, the **F.L. Buren Store** supplied both visitors and the courthouse community until it closed in 1983. Its location along the old stage route and across from the courthouse made it a focal point.
- #27 **Cumming's Store**, date unknown, is one of many smaller general stores that populated the County during the twentieth century.
- #2 Railroads were a key to growth in the 19th century. The rail town of **Carson** was established between 1890 and 1910. The depot building now serves as a branch library for the Appomattox Regional Library System.
- #9 Disputanta was established in 1853 as a thriving railroad community, one of several in the County. This rail underpass (circa 1914) remains in use today.
- #6 **The Richard Bland College of the College of William and Mary** was established by the General Assembly in 1960. Richard Bland is the only Junior College in the Commonwealth and named after a County native son and patriot.



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Education

- #11 Built originally in 1956 for African-American students, the **J.E.J. Moore School** was named for an early black educator who served as head of the Disputanta Training School. In 1964, the J.E.J. Moore principal, Dr. William Clayborn, became the first African-American principal in a Virginia integrated school.
- #13 Site of the **Disputanta Training School**, where African-American students were educated until J.E.J. Moore School was built. After 1956, the school became the Bessie Mason Elementary School.
- #17 Now N.B. Clements Junior High School, **Prince George School** was built in 1953 to serve white elementary and high school students at the school district of Hopewell and Prince George split into separate units. The building later became the County High School.



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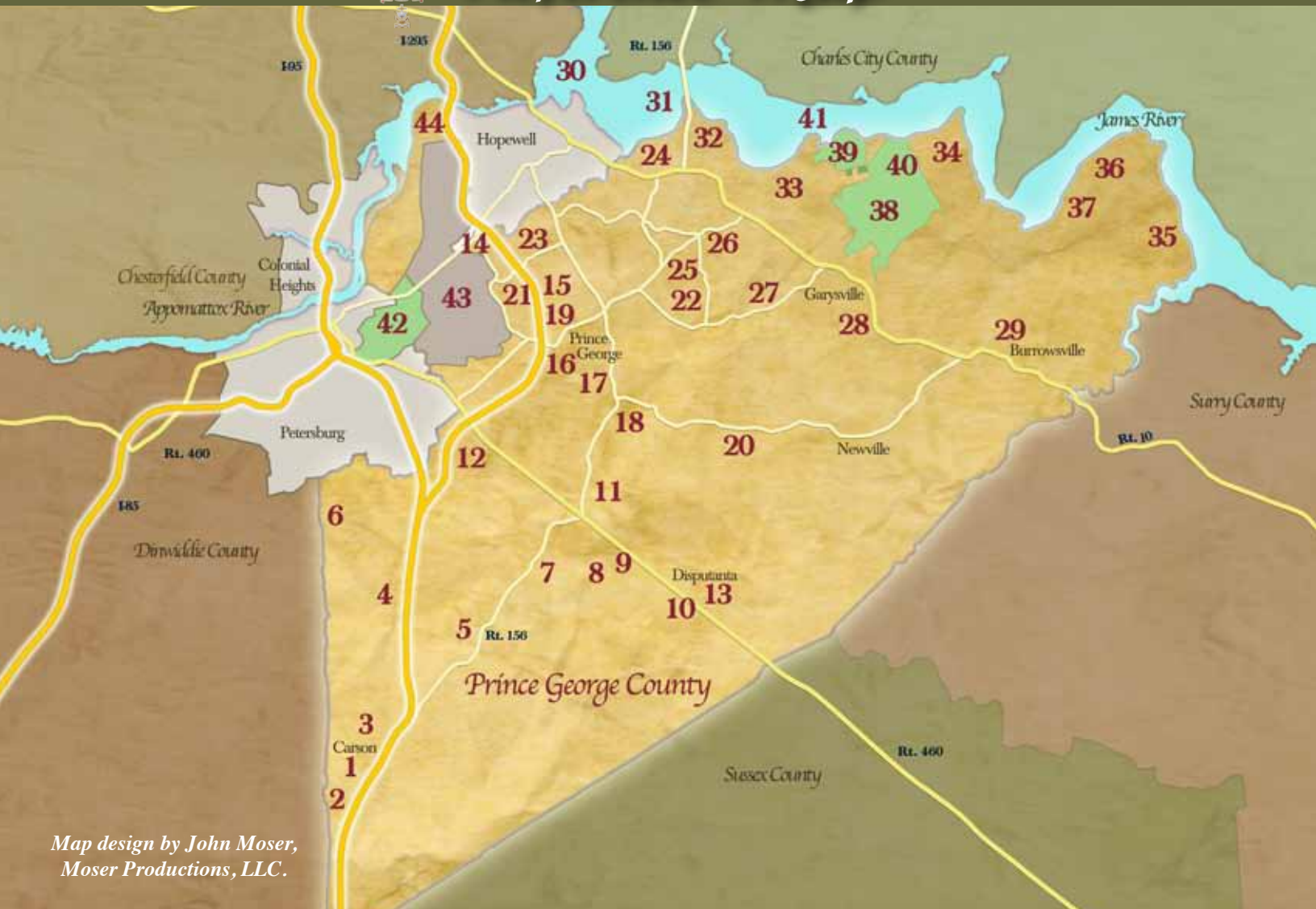
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The Courthouse District Walking Tour

In 2004 the Department of the Interior declared the 1883 Courthouse Building and twelve structures surrounding it to be "The Prince George County Courthouse Historic District". From the Heritage Center, Building One on the tour, an easy walk through the Courthouse campus reveals unusual architecture with unique features, a "fire-proof" structure designed to keep documents and records safe, village homes that evolved to office space for a growing County administration, an ordinary turned country store and the place that became home to the owner of that establishment. Tour brochures available at the Heritage Center.



Reference Map



Map design by John Moser,
Moser Productions, LLC.

Annual Events and Observances

Memorial Day

Founder's Day: Last Saturday in June

Great Beefsteak Raid Commemorative Dinner: Third Wednesday in September

Veterans Day

Community Tree Lighting: Wednesday Prior to First Saturday of December

Christmas Parade: First Saturday in December

"Toys of Yesteryear" Exhibit: Thanksgiving Weekend through First Week of January

Throughout the year there are events of interest scheduled.

Check for details at: www.princegeorgevahistoricalsociety.org or www.princegeorgeva.org

Expansion of the Heritage Center

In June 2014 the Heritage Center expects to open additional exhibits and programs, including a genealogy research center. Its immigration exhibit will feature Czech and Slovak heritage as well as arts and cultural exhibits from the many immigrants that settled in this area. The Center expansion will be housed in the Historic Clerk's Office, next to the 1883 Courthouse.

6406 Courthouse Drive
Prince George, VA 23875
804-863-0212

Prince George County Regional Heritage Center
www.princegeorgevahistoricalsociety.org

Operating hours:
Mon.-Fri. 10a.m. - 4p.m.
Sat.&Sun., 1p.m. to 4p.m.