

# GLOUCESTER'S HISTORIC COURT CIRCLE BUILDINGS



## The Colonial Courthouse

Built in 1766 and is one of the oldest Courthouses in the country still in use. While court is no longer held here, it is used regularly by county government and the community for meetings. As you approach the building, you may notice the original roof line of the front portico. The current roof was added to the structure sometime in the early 1900s. When you enter the Courthouse, you will see that it has been ‘modernized.’ In its original state, as you enter the door, the wall directly in front of you did not exist and you would be facing the judges. The side ‘wings’ would have been for the judges’ chambers on one side and jury deliberation on the other side. There were fireplaces at each end of the building. Other changes have been made to the structure such as the addition of two windows on the south wall. There are a number of interesting plaques on the walls. The annex was added in 1954 and is now the Gloucester Visitor Center, where maps, brochures and information is available.

## The Botetourt Building

Across Main Street from the Court Circle is the Botetourt Building. This Gloucester landmark was built in the late eighteenth century as a roadside tavern or ordinary and was known as “John New’s Ordinary.” It is one of the largest, as well as one of the few, brick taverns surviving from the pre-Revolutionary period. The building is believed to have been named for Lord Botetourt Norborne Berkeley, Baron of Botetourt, and sent from Gloucester, England to be Governor of Virginia. Sisters, Misses Emily and Ada Cox, assumed operation of the hotel in 1906 and served local residents and travelers in grand style. They

purchased the building in 1915 and began renovations which brought many changes to the building.

In 1971, Gloucester County received the first Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities Award for Historic Preservation for restoring and finding a functional use for the building.

Gloucester Museum of History opened here in the Spring of 2000. Please visit and enjoy changing exhibits and permanent displays focusing on Gloucester’s past. Open: Monday - Saturday 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. 804-693-1234

## The Clayton Building

Built in 1821 on the foundation of a 1779 Clerk of the Courts office. The earlier building burned in 1820, and with it all of Gloucester’s records were destroyed. An interpretive restoration now depicts a Clerk of the Courts office from the early 1800s. Beneath the brick is the original stone floor. The very large stones probably were used as ballast in the ships coming to America from England. Because the stones had begun to deteriorate, a protective cloth now covers them and the bricks are set in sand. The herringbone pattern is typical of the period. Furnishings in an early clerk’s office were usually ‘hand-me-downs’ from the family and community. We chose the furniture for the large room based on research and visits to the clerk’s office at Colonial Williamsburg. John Clayton served as Clerk of the Court in Gloucester for 53 years. However, he never worked in this building - instead he worked from his home as was customary for clerks in this period. In 1976, the building was named in his honor. Clayton was best known for his contributions as a botanist. An exhibit honoring John Clayton is in the smaller side room. Artifacts found at the site and an illustration of his home are most fascinating.





### **The Debtors Prison**

This tiny building was constructed around 1823 over a portion of a much earlier structure. Recently, under the guidance of an architectural historian, the modern interior walls were removed to reveal the original interior of 1 ¼ inch planks laid horizontally. The planks vary in width between

7 and 10 inches and have several layers of whitewash. The studs are quite close together and laid flush against the bare brick of the exterior wall. This same pattern was used in the ceiling. The placement of the boards on the walls and ceiling kept prisoners from picking away at the mortar to escape. Few examples of this construction method remain today. Furnishings would have been very sparse; most likely a straw mat for bedding, a table and a few eating utensils. Debtors who were incarcerated here were allowed out during the daylight hours for exercise. Boundaries were usually marked with whitewashed stones and the ‘prisoner’ could go anywhere within those boundaries... except into a building where there was a billiard table.

### **The Old Jail**

In 1870, the Board of Supervisors decided to build a new jail, after an earlier prison on the same site was burned by Federal troops during the War Between the States. The building was completed in 1873 and consisted of four rooms, each 16 x 16 foot in size. The upstairs floors were made of 6-inch-thick North Carolina Pine spiked together to form a solid floor. One room up and one down were constructed as iron cages covered with bricks. The building’s walls are 18 inches thick. There are two ‘wings’ on the building with newer brick. These additions were built in the early 1900s and were segregated bathrooms. They have been modernized and made handicapped accessible.

### **The Roane Building**

This 1896 Clerk of the Courts office was built to comply with the State’s rigid fire codes. After having lost precious county records on several occasions, officials weren’t taking any chances. Each of the rooms can be closed off from the remainder of the building

by a heavy iron door. The walls are fire proof and the interior of the roof is cement. In theory, if a fire began in any room, it would not spread to the remaining building. B. F. Smith designed the building and traveled throughout the region selling his buildings from a design catalog. A marble plaque just inside the front door, commemorates the construction and the county officials serving at the time. The building was named for Basil Bernard Roane, Deputy Clerk and Clerk for 59 years. In 2008, a considerable renovation project was undertaken. Drop ceilings were removed to expose the original metal interior. Tile floors were laid in the same pattern as the original floor, paneled walls were removed to expose the plaster, and lighting was installed to reflect the type used in the early 1900s. It previously served as the Gloucester Visitor Center, the Museum of History and headquarters for Gloucester’s 350th Anniversary Celebration.

Court Day was held once a month and lasted from one to several days, depending on how many trials were held. It was a time for socializing, auctioning livestock, and catching up on the latest news. Only men came to town for Court Day. The court green was once surrounded by a rail fence with a brick stile for entry and to keep the livestock out. The brick wall was built in 1935, probably as a WPA project.

The Confederate Monument was unveiled in September 1889, in honor of Gloucester men who lost their lives in the War Between the States. It contains 134 names. Two names were added in 2005.

James Daniel Gardner Memorial - Pvt. Gardner, a Gloucester resident, was the only Gloucester citizen to ever receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. This honor was bestowed for his bravery at the Battle of Chapins Farm, September 29, 1864.

Gloucester Visitor Center 804-693-3215  
6504 Main Street, Gloucester, VA 23061

