

CHAS-350  
ALMS HOUSE ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE  
Vicinity of Port Tobacco  
Private

circa 1832-39

A brick building consisting of a 28 by 30 feet, two story "Overseer's House" with end chimneys, from which extended a one story dormitory wing, 90 feet in length and with seven interior chimneys, the Alms House must have been one of Charles County's most substantial early public buildings. Believed to have been constructed by local contractors between 1832 and 1839, it is unusual in that it is one of the very few pre-Civil War buildings for which the original specifications survive. The Alms House was destroyed circa 1916, its site now marked by mounds of brick amidst a copse of gnarled cedars in the middle of an abandoned field.

The Alms House property, also known as Poor House Farm, was sold to the Trustees of the Poor of Charles County in 1832 by John Grant Chapman, wealthy area landowner and political figure. The deed, however, was not officially recorded until seven years later. In 1916 the 201 acre farm and ruins were sold at public auction for \$1,175.00, \$525.00 less than was paid for its purchase.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

CHAS-350

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY #0903505427

1 NAME

HISTORIC

ALMS HOUSE ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

North side of Poor House Road approx. 1/2 mile NW from its junction with Md. Rte. 6

CITY, TOWN

Port Tobacco

X VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Charles

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
  - PRIVATE
  - BOTH
  - IN PROCESS
  - BEING CONSIDERED
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
  - UNOCCUPIED
  - WORK IN PROGRESS
  - YES: RESTRICTED
  - YES: UNRESTRICTED
  - NO
- ACCESSIBLE**

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Virginia F. Vader

Telephone #:

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Charles County Courthouse

Liber #: 131

Folio #: 391

STREET & NUMBER

Charles Street (P. O. Box B)

CITY, TOWN

La Plata

STATE

Maryland 20646

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**7 DESCRIPTION**

<b>CONDITION</b>		<b>CHECK ONE</b>	<b>CHECK ONE</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

**DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

The site of the old county Alms House, located on property known in this century as Poor House Farm, is marked by a copse of gnarled cedars and mature hardwoods in the middle of a large field now overgrown. Mounds of handmade brick, many of which are glazed, establish the actual site and general overall shape and positioning of the structure. Although no parts of the walls remain above ground, it is probable that the foundations survive undisturbed.

An undated and incomplete building contract (copy attached) discovered in the manuscript collection of Perkins Library, Duke University, states that the building was to include "a two story house called the overseer's house and attached thereto a continuation of rooms called dormitories (sic)..." Specifications for the overseer's house called for it to be of brick construction and of a basic Federal style with an end hall and two rooms on each floor. At one end were to be two interior flush gable chimneys. The house was to have a door and window on the first floor level of both side elevations with two windows above, and two windows on both floor levels of the chimney end. The overall dimensions of the main section of the building were to be approximately 28 by 30 feet. The wing containing the dormitories was to measure approximately 28 feet deep and 90 feet in length. The wing was to be of one story height, with six windows and six doors on both side elevations, five chimneys positioned along the roof ridge and two interior flush gable chimneys at the end opposite the overseer's house.

Obviously, the Alms House was a substantial structure. That the building was constructed following the form outlined in the contract is suggested by the fact that the site is marked by a large mound of rubble at the north end from which extends a long lower mound to the south.

Near the site is a small shed, now collapsed, that was constructed reusing hewn timbers from another building. These timbers, which have mortice and tenons, may have been salvaged when the Alms House was destroyed circa 1916. A larger tobacco barn also located near the site and also collapsed, employed hewn framing, but has other features suggesting a mid-nineteenth century construction date.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

CH-350

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 checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

c. 1832-39

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The county Alms House was undoubtedly one of Charles County's most substantial public buildings of the nineteenth century and it is extremely unfortunate that it no longer stands. Nevertheless, the site of the building has remained preserved in a largely undisturbed state and an archeological excavation would undoubtedly reveal many facts concerning the appearance and function of the facility.

The Alms House site is of additional significance due to the fact that it is one of the few pre-Civil War public or private buildings for which the original building contract and detailed specifications survive. The contract, compared with what is known of the building as actually constructed, provides valuable information regarding then current building practices, design and materials. It is interesting to note, for instance, that although the contract specifies that a standardized brick be used, the bricks found at the site are obviously handmade, large and irregular in shape. With their salmon colouring and extensive glazing they more closely resemble eighteenth century brick. Since two adjacent buildings, a barn and small shed both now fallen in, utilize hand hewn framing and morticed and tenoned joints, and yet have other evidence suggesting they are contemporary in date with the Alms House, it appears likely that similar framing techniques were employed in constructing the main building. It is probable that the Alms House, believed to date c. 1832-39, was built by local contractors who continued to practice earlier building methods.

The land on which the site is located was sold to the Trustees of the Poor of Charles County by John Grant Chapman in 1832, but the deed was not recorded until 1839. Chapman was a very wealthy local politician and landowner. A member of the Maryland House of Delegates, 1827-44, and member of the U. S. House of Representatives, 1845-49, he died in 1856 and was buried on an adjacent property, St. John's, part of which made up the original Alms House tract. In 1916, presumably following the destruction of the building, the Trustees of the Poor, empowered by an Act of the Maryland General Assembly, sold the 201 acre property at public auction. The sale price was \$1,175.00, \$525.00 less than they paid for its purchase in 1839. The land has continued in private ownership to this day.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Land Records, Charles County Courthouse, La Plata, Maryland.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Alms House site is located on a 166.70 acre tract of land identified as Parcel 1, Map 43, Charles County Tax Maps (revised January 1976.)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE COUNTY

STATE COUNTY

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

J. Richard Rivoire, Consultant

ORGANIZATION

Charles County Planning Department

DATE

September 1978

STREET & NUMBER

Charles County Courthouse

TELEPHONE

645-6537

CITY OR TOWN

La Plata

STATE

Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust  
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 267-1438

POOR HOUSE, Charles County

The dimensions, materials and so forth of the Poor House explanatory of the diagram hereto annexed; viz- A two story house called the overseers house and attached thereto a continuation of rooms called dormitories shall be built of the following dimentional plans, materials and architecture; the whole building to be brick. The four external walls of the overseers house and the three external walls of the dormitories to be of hard brick of the Washington standard in size. The chimneys where exposed to the atmosphere, to be of hard brick. The mortar used to be of Thomastone lime and sharp sand properly mixed in due proportions so as to make a good and durable cement. The foundations for all the external walls above enumerated to be sunk 18" below the surface. The internal walls at and from the foundation to the first floor of all the building to be two bricks thick; above the first floor to be brick thick. The internal walls upon which floor joists rest to be brick thick. All other internal walls one brick thick. The overseers house to be divided into two rooms on a floor, each room to be 14 ft. by 17 ft. in the clear and pitch below and ft. pitch above, and a passage 8 ft. wide in the clear running parallel with the wall on the side or end next to the dormitories and opposite to the end where the chimnies are. This passage will be formed by the external wall, next to the dormitories, and an internal parallel wall at the distance of 8 ft. in the clear. The rooms will be formed by an internal wall at a right angle to the passage wall, dividing the space left after taking off the passage into two equal parts. The chimneys will run up or be on that end of the overseers house opposite to the dormitories and the fire places in each of rooms of said house will be nearly in the middle of that side of each room above and below as is practicable. There will be doors in the internal passage wall leading into each room and doors one above and one below in the wall separating the rooms, so as to make a direct communication between the rooms. The stair step will ascend out of the lower passage. The end of the upper passage opposite the landing place will be formed into a store room as large as the space will permit, allowing space for a door out of the said passage into each room above. There will be an outward door at each of the lower passages. There will be windows over the lower passage doors in the passage above. There will be two windows in each room, one in each room between the chimneys and one in each room on the sides between the passage wall and the wall where the chimneys are placed. Window sash is to contain 18 lights or panes of glass 8 by 10 inches, properly put in and glazed. The floor joists of all the building in the first floors to be of white oak 3 inches by 9 inches and the floor joists in the rooms above in the overseers house to be of white pine of the same dimensions. All the floor joists to be carefully straightened and levelled before the floors are laid. All other joists in the building to be of locust or walnut. All the floors to be 1-1/4 inches North Carolina flooring planks; the floors above in the overseers house to be perfectly tight. The doors of the whole building to be panelled, to be made of 1-1/2 inch white pine panel stuff hung properly on good and substantial hinges, with good locks. The outward doors to be painted with 3 coats of paint, the window frames and door frames to be neat and substantial, the window sashes of the like nature as with the doors, painted in like manner

and made neat and strong. The rooms in the overseers house to be finished with wash and chair boards, a mantle or chimney pieces in each room, two coats one course the said fine plaster. Fireplaces of the proper size, hearth well laid and all the roofs to be of the best suffolk shingles pointed and put on in the best manner to form an angle most fit and approved for strength, durability and lightness. There will be ten dormitories, 14' by 14' in the clear, in double file, with a 9 ft. pitch in the clear, attached to the overseers house. These dormitories will be formed by three external walls, and the external wall of the overseers house next the passage these four wall enclosing the whole space. The space will be divided first by a wall running at right angles with the said external passage wall and running parallel with and equal distant from the lateral external walls of the said dormitories. This wall will divide the space in half and in length be sufficient to have five rooms on a side, 14 ft. in the clear. In the middle wall will for each space have two fireplaces, one for each room. The space thus divided will be subdivided by walls at right angles with the middle wall so as to form rooms of the said dormitories, leaving the middle wall 14 ft. shorter than the external lateral walls making a room farthest from the overseers house, 14 by 28 ft. in the clear. This room will have two chimneys in the external end wall farthest from the overseers house. Each room 14' by 14', to have an outward door and one window of the same material as mentioned above. The floor joists and floors of the like mentioned above plastered in the same manner with a wash board only, a plain chimney piece....

Edited copy from typewritten copy of the incomplete original  
from the Stone papers, Historical Society of Charles County,  
La Plata, Maryland.



CHAS-350

ALMS HOUSE SITE; View From  
West. J.R.Rivoire, 1978



CHAS-350

ALMS HOUSE SITE; View From  
North. J.R.Rivoire, 1978