



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 041-5926

1. General Information

District name(s): Calvary Rural Historic District

Main Streets and/or Routes: Calvary Road (SR 119) and Williamson Road (SR 712)

City or Town: Alton vicinity

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Halifax County

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 844 Acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban _____ Suburban _____ Town _____ Village _____ Hamlet _____ Rural X

Briefly describe the district's overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

Calvary Rural Historic District is a pastoral agricultural landscape set in the Virginia Piedmont, at the southwest corner of Halifax County. Located between the incorporated towns of Danville and South Boston, 1.5 miles south of State Road 58 and 2 miles north of Caswell County, North Carolina, this small rural community is situated along Calvary and Williamson Roads and includes large and small farms of rolling fields, orchards, woodlands, pastureland, ponds, and creeks with vast panoramic views. Most of the architectural resources are domestic and agricultural in nature, indicating a shift from large plantations to smaller farms over the last three centuries.

3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): No discernible style

If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: NA

If any builders or developers are known, please list here: Leonard R Williamson, George Washington Williamson, James Warner Williamson, William (Billy) Williamson, Clarence Grinstead, Jack Grinstead, James (Jim) Bass, Gene Bass, Graham Mise, George (Tump) Williamson, William Washington Williamson, William (Bill) Witcher Williamson, William James Williamson

Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): 1839-1960

Are there any known threats to this district? NA

Narrative Description:

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire historic district, such as building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district, as well as typical updates, additions, remodelings, or other alterations that characterize the district.

Although farmed by ancestors for the last three centuries, surviving structures within the Calvary Rural Historic District date to the mid-19th century. Older structures have since fallen to the effects of time and disrepair. Single-family dwellings and farmsteads now comprise a district reflective of agricultural roots. Architectural relics include domestic and agricultural buildings, church, former schoolhouse (now a residence), former general store (now private storage), two family cemeteries on private property, and one public cemetery on the church grounds. Scattered throughout the district are utilitarian buildings associated with sustenance farming, including barns and wagon sheds. Dwellings and agricultural buildings were hand built by generational owners, using logs timbered on the property up to the mid-20th century. Some of the residential dwellings retain original weatherboard siding with original windows and doors while others have been covered in vinyl for protection from the elements. Today, the entirety of the district remains in the care of the Williamson Family, third century descendants of the earliest settlers in Halifax County, Virginia.

Calvary Rural Historic District includes the Leonard R. Williamson Farm (041-5804) designated as a Virginia Historic Landmark in 2025, hosting the oldest known standing dwelling in the district from 1839. Five homesteads in the proposed district are designated Virginia Century Farms by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in recognition of 100 years ancestral and agricultural stewardship.

Discuss the district's general setting and/or streetscapes, including current property uses (and historic uses if different), such as industrial, residential, commercial, religious, etc. For rural historic districts, please include a description of land uses.

The Calvary Rural Historic District is small with 25 parcels along both sides of the 1.5 mile long Williamson Road, from Calvary Road nearly to Henderson Road on the east end. Brandon Creek bisects the western third of the district, with multiple small tributaries meandering through the area. Calvary United Methodist Church (originally Calvary Methodist Church) continues to anchor the community near the intersection of Calvary and Williamson Roads, with the former Calvary School and former Williamson General Store situated on both eastern corners of the intersection. Each was accessible along an old stagecoach road (now Calvary Road) connecting Richmond, Virginia to Hillsborough, North Carolina, that was used as a main thoroughfare for the southwest section of the county. Today, the district includes about fourteen residential homesteads ranging in size from 1.6 acres up to 127 acres, including the former schoolhouse and general store. Calvary

Church is the only exception as it remains in use for religious and funerary purposes. Some of the agricultural buildings used in the past for tobacco curing or animal shelter sit vacant today or are used for general storage, remnants of a bygone era. Most of the open pastureland remains in agricultural production mainly of tobacco or hay crops and generally includes a large home garden and small pond among scattered patches of woodlands.

The Calvary Rural Historic District comprises the following scope of resources. Architectural integrity of structures ranges from original as-built condition to fully restored. Since the former small schoolhouse was enveloped during expansion into a residential dwelling, it is not considered an individual resource.

- 1-Calvary Methodist Church (now Calvary United Methodist Church) and Cemetery
- 2-Former James Warner Williamson General Store (now private storage)
- 3-Eugene and Mae Williamson Harbour House (former Calvary School)
- 4-Leonard R Williamson House (041-5804)
- 5-James Warner Williamson House (041-5804)
- 6-James Warner Williamson tobacco barn (041-5804)
- 7-Leland Williamson chicken coop (041-5804)
- 8-Leland Williamson cotton house shed (041-5804)
- 9-James Warner Williamson horse barn with wagon shed
- 10-Jim and Anna Williamson Bass House
- 11-Gene Bass tobacco shed barn
- 12-Gene Bass three farm equipment barns
- 13-Gene Bass three tobacco barns
- 14- George Washington Williamson old homeplace tobacco barn
- 15-George Washington Williamson House (now Breezy Oaks Bed and Breakfast)
- 16-George Wiley Williamson corn crib
- 17-George Wiley Williamson stable
- 18-George Washington Williamson Sleepy Hollow Farms tobacco barn
- 19-Williamson Family Cemetery
- 20-Emma Williamson House site (only the chimney remains standing)
- 21-Graham Mise three farm equipment barns
- 22-William Washington Williamson Cabin House
- 23-William Witcher Williamson Farmhouse
- 24-William Washington Williamson one-room homeplace House (now storage)
- 25-William Washington Williamson farm equipment shop, corn crib, seven farm storage barns, two tobacco barns
- 26-Mise Farm tobacco barn
- 27-Jack and Cremona Williamson Grinstead House
- 28-James Warner Williamson tobacco barn
- 29-Tom Jones Earp Brick House
- 30-Tom Jones Earp chicken coop, two farm storage barns and tobacco barn
- 31-Clarence Grinstead House
- 32-Clarence Grinstead three tobacco barns and two farm equipment sheds
- 33-William James Williamson Eight Oaks Farm (now Villa Cathedral Bed and Breakfast)
- 34-Foster Family Cemetery
- 35-Caul Scott House
- 36-Caul Scott tobacco barn

4. District's History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the district, such as when it was established, how it developed over time, and significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.) Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

If the district is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

The Calvary Rural Historic District is locally significant for broad patterns of history (Criterion A) in the agricultural area of significance. In addition, a diverse collection of well-preserved domestic and agricultural buildings dating to the mid-19th century provides distinctive characteristics of architecture (Criterion C) as an environment with surviving patterns of agricultural fields with woodlands flanking valleys and waterways. Within the district lies a significant cultural landscape cultivated by district ancestors over three centuries. Remnants of an agricultural past include fields, fence lines, farmsteads, and traffic with agrarian houses, a school, church, cemeteries, and business, but relatively little recent development, resulting in a timeless landscape that still harkens the mid-19th century. Collectively, district components of domestic, religious, social, economic, educational, funerary, and agricultural sites situated on a picturesque landscape of gently rolling hills allows successive generations to immerse in life as it once was on the rural Virginia piedmont over the last two centuries, before such environs also fall to the ravages of time.

Agriculture

Despite the seemingly harsh soil geology within the district, well known for rocky iron-rich red clay soil, tobacco farming managed to thrive continuously as a principal cash crop for three centuries. It was the lure of virgin soil that brought the Williamson family first to Culpeper and finally to the piedmont region of Halifax County in 1746 (Lunenburg County until 1752) from coastal Isle of Wight. In part, colonial migration patterns were driven by the early discovery that the highest quality (and highest earning) tobacco needed to be grown in the most fertile soil that had never been farmed. As tobacco farmers since arrival in 1641, district ancestors passed down that tribal knowledge from the coast to the piedmont for nearly 400 years up to the present day. By the mid-20th century, divisions of large plantations to around 50 acre homesteads were considered too small to support farming as a principal income for families with several sons (daughters generally moved after marriage, while sons inherited generational lands). Rural youth were then driven away from district farms in search of better paying jobs and higher standards of living in urban centers.

Architecture

Living in the remote southwest corner of the 4th largest county in the state, district ancestors often traveled the much shorter distance to Milton, North Carolina (6 miles) for legal matters such as marriages rather than to the county seat in the middle of the 4th largest county in Virginia at Halifax, Virginia (23 miles). Far from town and at best a half-day journey by horse and wagon, district ancestors strove to create a local community hub supporting surrounding farms and families. An early focus was to build a local church as a replacement for the long-standing outdoor religious meeting space. Leonard R. And Mary Foster Williamson donated land to build the first formal community church building known as Calvary Methodist Church. Completed in 1882, it was a simple rectangle wood log structure that finally allowed for gathering indoors protected from the elements. From individual family contributions and many fundraising events, the collective community built a more suitable brick structure in 1949, completing a final fellowship hall expansion in the mid-1970's.

Subsequent generations enhanced the community hub by adding a schoolhouse and small general store at the intersection of Calvary and Williamson Roads. In 1914, Halifax County built Calvary School on the northeastern corner of the intersection on land donated by district ancestors George Washington and Araminta (Minnie) Emeline Mise Williamson. When the school closed in 1941, the building served as a

community center until converted to a residence by Eugene and Mae Williamson Harbour in 1956. It was later expanded to 5,600 square feet, suitable for hosting many large family gatherings. When prior local general stores closed, district ancestors James Warner and Nettie Lucinda Taylor Williamson opened a small store on the family farm at the southeastern corner of the same intersection. Given the 15 mile distance to the nearest town, the store brought farm and household goods much closer to the Calvary community. Following Warner's untimely passing, the general store building continued to be central in the Calvary community serving as a community center and polling location for voting through the late 20th century, then returned to private use.

Since 1811, district lands were cross-transferred to the Williamson family from generational relations with Wesley, Foster, Earp, Mise, and Brandon families by inheritance, customary dowry, or purchase. A few district parcels began as ancestral lands of the Earp and Brandon families. Williamson, Mise, Earp, Brandon, and Foster families were each early settlers in this southwest corner of Halifax County, Virginia with descendants remaining in the community today. Through three centuries of existence, the Calvary Rural Historic District has remained a community supported social, religious, and educational center for surrounding farms and families. From its beginning, the district has been a close-knit and self-reliant tobacco farming community. A place where members routinely gathered to share a bounty watermelon harvest or hand build an entire barn in a single day. During times of crisis, the community rallied around an ill or injured farmer to collectively harvest the tobacco crop that would sustain the farmer's family as the only source of annual income. Everyone contributed during these events, with men working while women cooked and fed everyone. Much of this effect is attributed to the generational kinship shared among community residents. Farmsteads along Williamson Road were once part of an approximate 1,000 acre plantation owned by George Washington and Minnie Mise Williamson in the mid-19th to early 20th centuries. In 1926, George divided the plantation into 8 parcels as homesteads for each of his children. A few parcels have been further divided since then, but most remain intact after 100 years. Many of the surviving dwellings within the district are remnants of George and his children. Today, all but three parcels remain under proud stewardship of George and Minnie's descendants. Those three properties include the church and a farmstead belonging to a descendant of William A. Williamson, George's brother. Owing to the rural agrarian nature of the district, most of the farms include surviving utilitarian outbuildings once essential for crops, animals, and farm equipment.

It should be noted that the use of the plantation label should not be considered an indicator of slavery within the district. Rather, it is used as a reflection of once common owner descriptions found in Last Will and Testament records. No evidence has been found suggesting that district lands employed slave labor, although other much larger local farms were not immune from the practice. Instead, tobacco farming labor was generally carried out by the sons in each farm family. As recently as the mid-19th century, sons were required to work in the tobacco fields beginning around the age of 10 years old. Since tobacco farming produced just one revenue stream per year to sustain large families throughout an entire year, families tried to maximize income where possible. Often this meant sending sons to work tobacco fields on neighboring farms and in Canada during summer breaks from school, as young as 12 years old. Families with many sons held a clear advantage. As a way of life, tobacco farming was strenuous, risky, and constantly stressful. Every daily detail mattered to family survival, from planning to harvest and sale, with weather adding endless stressors. One weather event may leave families without income for a year and dependent on the generosity of others in the impoverished community.

Historical Context

Evolution of district ancestors and lands began more than 400 years ago in London, England and early colonial Virginia. Although nearby but not in this district, Thomas Williamson was the district family's first ancestor to settle in Halifax County, Virginia with a patent for 400 acres along the Dan River from King George III of England in 1763 following a land survey in 1756. His ancestor, London tobacco merchant Sir Richard Williamson, Knight, (now referred to as the father of all Williamsons in Virginia) made several trading trips to the early Virginia Colony and is the first district Williamson ancestor to settle in the new

colony at Isle of Wight County of the coastal Virginia region in 1641, across the James River from Jamestown and just 34 years after Jamestown's founding. The Williamson family appears to have been affluent on arrival in the Virginia Colony. By 23 May 1609, Sir Richard was a subscriber (stockholder) of the 2nd Charter for the Virginia Company of London sponsoring the Virginia Colony. By 24 July 1621, Richard's son and district ancestor Dr. Robert Williamson was a subscriber to the 3rd Charter Ordinance and Constitution for Council and Assembly in Virginia. In 1641, Dr. Robert transported 62 persons to the Virginia Colony for which he patented 3,100 acres of land in Isle of Wight County (50 ac per person), making him the 4th largest landowner in the county. Both Dr. Robert and his brother James Williamson are Jamestown Qualifying Ancestors. Dr. Robert married Joan Allen whose tobacco merchant father Arthur Allen was one of the wealthiest men in the county. His wife Alice Tucker was the daughter of Daniel Tucker, the second Governor of Bermuda from 1616 to 1619. Arthur Allen built his magnificent 5,300 square foot brick home in the neighboring Surry County circa 1665. In 1676, the home, belonging then to Arthur Allen II was seized, occupied, and garrisoned by 70 rebel followers of Nathaniel Bacon during an uprising against Virginia Governor Berkeley and British rule. Today, Bacon's Castle, as it has been known since the 1676 rebellion, stands preserved as the oldest brick home in the country. Colonial affluence continued with the next generation as district ancestor Colonel George Arthur Williamson, son of Dr. Robert and Joan Allen, married Hester Bridger. Hester was the daughter of the wealthiest and largest landowner south of the James River with more than 16,000 acres in coastal Virginia and Maryland, Colonel Joseph Bridger. Bridger held many notable offices, including the 1664 Commission to adjust the boundary line between Virginia and Maryland, 1666 Adjutant General of the Virginia forces, 1675 Commander of the Isle of Wight militia during the Indian War, and 1683 Deputy Vice-Admiral of Virginia's maritime matters. Col. Bridger was also the principal benefactor of St. Luke's Church located in Smithfield, Virginia. Today, St. Luke's is the oldest standing brick church in the country circa 1685. Dr. Robert, Col. George, and Col. Joseph were each members of the House of Burgesses for Isle of Wight County beginning in 1658. Subsequent generations of tobacco farmers quickly recognized a need to leave the coastal Virginia region in search of fertile virgin land on which to grow the best tobacco. This led district ancestors to migrate and cultivate premium tobacco next in Culpeper, Virginia. Three generations later, three brothers (Thomas, William, and John Williamson) once again left Culpeper for the never farmed soil of the Virginia piedmont, settling in Halifax County by 1746. Only one brother, Thomas remained in the county. William migrated south to Caswell County, North Carolina. The third brother John migrated first to South Carolina to grow an indigo crop, finally settling in Georgia. His descendent Robert McAlpin Williamson migrated from Georgia to Texas forming the modern day Texas Rangers, alongside associates Sam Houston and Stephen Austin. After the Rangers, Williamson practiced law and served many years as a judge in his namesake Williamson County, Texas.

References:

1. <https://www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/a-brief-history-of-bacons-castle.htm>
2. <https://www.jamestowne.org/qualifying-ancestors.html>
3. <https://ia601605.us.archive.org/>
4. The Williamson Family of Isle of Wight County, Virginia, Southampton County, Virginia, Northampton County, North Carolina, Caswell County, North Carolina by Elizabeth Williamson Dixon
5. Architectural History of Halifax County by Halifax County Historical Society
6. Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine article entitled Robert McAlpin Williamson by James D. Gray
7. Williamson Genealogy by Patricia Jewell Ballowe
8. Seventeenth Century Isle of Wight County Virginia by John Bennett Bodie

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: X Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

6. Applicant/Sponsor (Individual and/or organization sponsoring preparation of the PIF, with contact information. For more than one sponsor, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: Michelle Williamson
organization: _____
street & number: 3112 Sacramento Drive
city or town: Virginia Beach state: Virginia zip code: 23456
e-mail: chel.v@verizon.net
telephone: 757.650.7678

Applicant's Signature: Michelle Williamson

Date: 16 July 2025

• • *Signature required for processing all applications.* • •

In the event of organization sponsorship, you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than applicant/sponsor listed above)

name/title: _____
organization: _____
street & number: _____
city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____
e-mail: _____ telephone: _____
Date: _____

7. Notification

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator, City Manager, and/or Town Manager.

name/title: Scott R Simpson, PE
locality: Halifax County, Virginia
street & number: 1050 Mary Bethune Street
city or town: Halifax state: Virginia zip code: 24558
telephone: 434.476.3300

PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Calvary Rural Historic District
Halifax County, VA
DHR ID# 041-5926

 Proposed Boundary

0 2,000
 Feet



Williamson Farm
DHR ID# 041-5804
VLR 2025



PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Calvary Rural Historic District
Halifax County, VA
DHR ID# 041-5926

 Proposed Boundary

0 2,000
Feet



Williamson Farm
DHR ID# 041-5804
VLR 2025























































































