



The County Courthouse

SITE OF INSURRECTIONISTS' TRIALS

**NAT
TURNER
TRAIL**

1831
Southampton
Insurrection

You are at the site of the 1795 Federal-style Southampton County Courthouse. The trials of Nat Turner and many of his followers were held here after the defeat of their insurrection in 1831. The 1795 courthouse was replaced in 1834. The new design was an austere brick temple-form building with a pedimented gable, simple cornice, and lunette window. A portico was added in 1926, providing a provincial Greek Revival look. The courthouse was expanded in 2022.

Governor John Floyd

John Floyd, governor of Virginia in 1831, desired that the normal judicial process be followed when dealing with the captured insurrectionists. He wished to avoid widespread vigilante justice once the revolt had been suppressed. Consequently, a Court of Oyer and Terminer was convened in which the county only had jurisdiction in capital cases over bondsmen.¹

1. Oyer and Terminer [French: to hear and to determine] — In 1692, the Virginia General Assembly created these special courts, eliminating an enslaved person's right to a jury trial.



John Floyd was governor of Virginia from 1830-1834. This portrait by William Garl Brown was painted after Floyd's death in 1837.

Courtesy of Library of Virginia

The Rebels' Trials

After the rebellion, the captured alleged insurrectionists were arraigned for trial.

The hearings were held between August 31 and November 21, 1831, when Nat Turner and his fellow conspirators were charged with "conspiring to rebel and making insurrection." Of the 53 enslaved people arraigned, 18 were executed, 21 were discharged, and 12 were transported into slavery elsewhere. Five "free persons of color" were arrested. The cases against Arnold Artes and Isham Turner were dismissed. Thomas Hathcock (Haithcock), Berry Newsum, and Exum Artist were bound over for trial at the next session of the Superior Court. Only Newsum was convicted; he was executed on May 11, 1832



Southampton County Courthouse, ca. 1895.

Speech and Photographs Relating to Nat Turner's Insurrection, Accession # 10673, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.