

#645

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

| | |
|------------------|--|
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| RECEIVED | |
| DATE ENTERED | |

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
The Whalehead Club
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
 .2 miles Southwest of Corolla Lighthouse NOT FOR PUBLICATION
 CITY, TOWN, VILLAGE, OR POST OFFICE CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
 Corolla VICINITY OF First
 STATE FIPS CODE COUNTY FIPS CODE
 North Carolina 37 Currituck 053

3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | PRESENT USE |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION | <input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
 Kabler & Riggs, Realtors Mrs. Brindley The Whalehead Club Inc
 STREET & NUMBER
 #17 Northpoint P.O. Box 1006
 CITY, TOWN, VILLAGE, OR POST OFFICE STATE
 Sanbridge Duck Virginia N. C. 27949

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
 Currituck Courthouse
 STREET & NUMBER
 CITY, TOWN STATE
 Currituck North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
 DATE
 DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
 CITY, TOWN STATE
 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Of the approximately ten shooting clubs that have been located on the Currituck Banks, the most visually exciting club is the Whalehead Club due to its focal point of the dramatic mansion built for Mr. and Mrs. Edward Colling Knight in 1922 to 1925. The mansion is juxtaposed to the Corolla Lighthouse with which it vies for recognition. The steep, copper-clad gable roof and the many dormers with flared gable roofs create the initial impression. This impression is heightened by the surprise of discovering such a monumental, high-style structure on one of the least disturbed stretches of the North Carolina Outer Banks. Originally comprised of approximately 4 1/2 miles of these banks, with its northern boundary at the edge of the village of Corolla, the property today is owned by developers; most of it has been divided into lots, but the nucleus of the club remains intact on a 35-acre parcel of land.

This 35-acre area is defined by the dense thickets of pine trees, most of which were planted by the Knights, that surrounds the open expanse of land toward the Sound. Situated on this expanse are the mansion and its many outbuildings. Several one-story gable-roofed storage buildings, four modest one-story houses currently inhabited by residents of Corolla, and a one-story hip roofed, block and stucco garage are located around the periphery of the property. All except a few of the storage buildings were erected for Mr. Adams who bought the estate from the Knights' heirs in 1940. Closer to the house is the small man-made harbor connected to the Sound by two channels dug around the tract containing the main house so that the house originally was on a small island surrounded by a moat and connected to the rest of the property by two low, arched, Oriental-looking wooden lattice-work bridges; in the 1940's Mr. Adams filled in part of the moat and removed one of the bridges. Across the harbor from the house there are a boathouse and storage buildings. East of the house there is a swimming pool installed for the Knights and southwest of the house there is a flat expanse of land jutting into the Sound that was developed in the early 1950's as a landing strip.

The main house was erected on a hill formed by the earth dredged to create the moat. The hill made it possible for Whalehead to have a full basement that rests on sunken wooden pilings, a feature that is considered extraordinary for a coastline structure. Above the basement are the principal story and under the gabled roof are two floors of bedrooms and an attic. The basic configuration of the house consists of a central block five bays long and three bays deep and a smaller block at either end that is neither as tall nor as deep as the central block. These end blocks are out of alignment with the center portion so that they project equal distance toward the Sound. Extending from the gable ends of these small blocks are one-story, partially walled, screened-in porches. The porch roofs are flat and defined by balustrades so that they form sun porches reached from the second story. There are two extension gable-end chimneys that have rounded shoulders at the second floor and three evenly-spaced chimneys in the center block.

All three blocks are capped by steep gable roofs which have gable-roofed dormers that define the second floor. The roofs of the dormers flare and extend beyond the side dormer walls in the same fashion that the steep roof over each section flares and extends beyond the walls to create eaves about one and one-half feet deep. The roofing material is copper strips molded to look like shingles. The portions of the roof that are darker than the rest of the roof are newer strips of copper applied to replace sections blown off by a 1969 hurricane.

The subtle flare rendered by the splayed roofs is carried through in the shallow arches above the dormer and veranda windows. All of the windows, except for the plate glass

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

picture windows on each end of the west end block, are double casement windows, with the exterior window repeated approximately eight inches behind. All of these windows are narrow with one-over-one sashes. The banks of veranda on the Sound side of the center block are six-part, each part having narrow, one-over-one sashes of equal sizes. The ratio of the sashes in each part of the other windows is approximately one to four, top to bottom. The dormer windows are tripartite. Except for the veranda windows, each window is partially shaded by a wooden awning.

Originally the veranda was open. The banks of windows were installed for Mr. Adair within original wooden frames separated by pilasters. These frames are recessed slightly from the pilasters and gently arc at the top and sides to further develop the original aspect. They are carved and molded in simple curving geometric designs, particularly at the corners, suggestive of the Arts & Crafts style. The decoration is carried through in an unbroken band around the house at the level just above the doors and windows. This repeated decoration is best described as a stylized floral motif which varies only in the supports of the awning over the ocean-side entrance; here the floral motif is more specifically that of a water lily and is carved in greater relief. Further decoration consists of short horizontal trellises that project from the house at a 90-degree angle above the windows of the veranda and on the three sides of the end porches. Trellises also are located under the windows in four of the bays of the veranda. All of this decoration is wood. The exterior walls are covered with flush vertical boards; the entire house is framed in six-inch steel beams.

In spite of the curvilinear character of the splayed roofs and the carved decoration, the configuration of the house is characterized overall by a strict symmetry in a general Beaux Arts format more in accord with the later style. If the house were split in half cross-wise, the two halves of the exterior would be mirror images of each other, including the decoration (except for the added plate glass windows). The mirror images also apply if each block were split in half along the crest of the roof. Every exterior element is balanced by an identical, corresponding element. Stringcourses in the gable ends even differentiate interior floors. The strong verticals of the chimneys seem to anchor the structure, while the middle chimney epitomizes the architect's desire for a rigid overall symmetry as it is false, braced in the attic by window frames.

The floor plan of the Whalehead Club is irregular, with that of the basement, first and second floors radiating from transverse halls. On the first and second floors the plan is organized by blocks according to function. The middle block contains the main entrance, dining room, club rooms (including gun room and office) on the first floor and guest bedrooms and bathrooms on the second floor. The west block contains the living room below and two master bedrooms above, while the east end is relegated to service function on both floors consisting of female servants' quarters above and an industrial, ceramic-tiled kitchen complex on the main floor. The sixteen basement rooms serve storage and service functions and include ironing and wash rooms, potato closet, wine cellar, and generator room; for the first several years of the structure's existence it provided its own power source. The third floor, with no dormers, was designed to accommodate mal

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

servants, with dormitory-type bedrooms in the gable ends and a large, windowless living area in the center. There is an attic in the taller central block.

It is in the trim and fixtures that a combination of the Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts styles is evident. Ornamentation is lavish on the first floor and diminishes with successive floors, so that the decor is evident in the male servants' quarters only in a couple doors and a light fixture. On the first and second floors the doors to major room have long recessed panels with rounded corners and bulbous sides and moldings around the frames into which plant motifs are carved. These motifs also appear in the door hardware. Except for those in the living room, the various doors and trim of these floors are unpainted mahogany. The partition that partially encloses the broad, gradually rising main staircase off the foyer consists of three sections richly carved in rounded geometric designs. There are signed and numbered Tiffany light fixtures throughout the first and second floors and in the Butler's room on the third floor. The lamps in the foyer are "drop sconces with gold-colored glass globes in the shape of morning glories. The Arts and Crafts decor of the doors, trim, and partition and more particularly the Art Nouveau light fixtures, are in contrast to the strict geometric tongue and groove corduroy walls throughout most of the central section of the first floor and all of the second floor. Throughout the first and second floors, the radiators are recessed in the walls and the floors are covered with one-half-inch-thick cork tiles.

Most of the furniture of the first-floor living quarters was in the same styles, either custom-made for the Knights or imported from England. Most of the furniture has been removed from the house; the only room that remains virtually intact is the dining room. The walls are sheathed in wide vertical beaded boards which are painted gray on the flat portion and charcoal on the beading. At the top of each board, a carved water lily, also painted charcoal, "grows" out of the beading which represents the plant stem.

The water lily motif is carried through every component of the room. It is carved into the otherwise simple table, chairs and sideboard made of snakewood painted with gray enamel to match the flat portion of the panelling. The stone fireplace is flanked by bulbous columns and has a mantel with carved plant-like motifs. The wall sconces are lamps of brass in the shape of plant stems with opalescent green- and cream-colored glass globes in the shape of water lilies. The chandelier also is brass, in the shape of reeds and leaves, with globes identical to those of the sconces. Even the silverware was custom-made in the water lily pattern.

The livingroom retains the only other surviving piece of Art Nouveau furniture; the mahogany Steinway grand piano. It is the largest room in the house. The mantel is very similar to that in the dining room, and under coats of paint that were first applied in the 1940's there is mahogany panelling covering all of the walls. On either side of the five pairs of doors to the room, there are pilasters with plant-like capitals. The ceiling is marked by the steel beams, encased in wood and the only visible indication of the extremely solid construction that has withstood hurricanes for more than fifty years.

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

Notable features of the second floor, in addition to the Arts & Crafts trim and hardware in the hall and Tiffany light fixtures throughout, are the fireplaces in the master bedrooms. Mrs. Knight's wooden mantelpiece has a classical design that has carved raised athenion patterns in the flanking pilasters and corner and center pieces. The mantelpiece was designed to match her bedroom furniture of French antiques. Mr. Knight's fireplace has a mantelpiece identical to his wife's, except that it does not have the athenion designs and the fireplace surround consists of painted ceramic tiles.

The house was designed with comfort and convenience, as well as style, in mind. An elevator serves the first through third floors, room service boxes were installed on each floor, and each bedroom for owners and guests is connected to a private full bathroom. The fact that only the best materials were utilized in constructing the house is evident in the bathrooms; all of the metal fixtures and in-coming pipes are brass, while the drain pipes are lead. This sophisticated use of lead drains is necessitated in the master bathrooms by the tubs which have spigots for hot and cold salt water as well as for fresh water. The guest and master bathrooms also have molded toilet seats, solid glass towel rods, and solid glass spheres for doorknobs.

Today, the Whalehead Club and the Corolla Lighthouse remain the only distinctive man-made landmarks on the Currituck Banks visible from the mainland. Although still as solid as it was fifty years ago, the house has not been inhabited for six years and is badly in need of paint on the exterior and new plumbing and wiring.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

| 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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE A. R. C. | |
| <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 type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER | |
| <input 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 1922-1925

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Architect Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Whalehead Club, built in the early 1920's in an isolated area of the Outer Banks near the picturesque village of Corolla, is the grandest and most exotic of the shooting clubs and lodges that once dominated the land use of the Currituck Banks. In 1922 Edward Colling Knight, Jr., and his wife began supervising the construction of their private hunting retreat on the site of the former Lighthouse Club. The architect for the project is unknown. The unspoiled setting, generous scale, dramatic steep-roofed form, and sophisticated Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau detail create a landmark of unique and memorable character. The combination of such a collection of motifs is apparently unique in the state's domestic architecture.

The Knights continued private use of the complex until their deaths in 1936. Subsequent users in the mid-twentieth century included a private club, lease to the Coast Guard, a private summer school, and a test site for rocket engines. Following subdivision of much of the original 2,000 acres of the property as part of the rapid development of the county, the Whalehead complex now consists of 35 acres, which is for sale.

Criteria Assessment

- A. Associated with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century use of the isolated northern Outer Banks of North Carolina as the site of private hunting clubs for wealthy people, principally northern industrialists; and thus associated more broadly with the recreational history of the coastal region, especially the Outer Banks, of the State.
- B. Associated with the life of Edward C. Knight, Jr., prominent business executive and son of notable inventor and capitalist who had patented the sleeping car and sold to Pullman in 1868.
- C. Embodies distinctive characteristics of sophisticated early twentieth century architectural styles, here in a highly individualized combination of dramatic Beaux Arts form, and Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau detail, surviving, intact in a highly picturesque setting composed of planned elements of water, topography, plantings and secondary structures.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 1

Before 1972, the northern-most stretch of the Outer Banks was undisturbed by commercial land developers. Aside from the residents of the few villages in the northern half of the Currituck Banks, of which Corolla is the only survivor, the only inhabitants were wealthy northerners who were attracted to the hunting afforded by the abundance of waterfowl from November through January along the Currituck Sound. During the second half of the nineteenth century these affluent hunters began to form shooting clubs. Their clubhouses along with the Corolla lighthouse and the life-saving stations constitute the major man-made landmarks of these Banks. The most visually distinctive clubhouse is Whalehead, built in 1922-25 on the grounds of the Lighthouse Club and the only known residence in the Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles in North Carolina. As significant as its architectural style is the colorful history of the Whalehead Club.

The Lighthouse Club of Currituck Sound was one of the earliest organized shooting clubs on the Currituck Banks. Formed in 1874 by a group of men from New York, it occupied land to the west and south of Corolla that was purchased from Abraham Baum, Samuel Salyer, and Samuel McHorney.¹ The original clubhouse was located south of the Corolla Lighthouse; all that remains of the original compound is portions of a split-rail fence and a few dock pilings. By 1919, the club had dissolved and the property was sold to Leroy W. Davis and Clyde L. Davis who purchased the land as an investment rather than for their personal use. In 1922 they sold the approximately 2,000 acres to Edward Colling Knight, Jr., for whom Whalehead was built.

Knight was the son of Edward Colling Knight, Sr., the northern capitalist and inventor who had made his fortune in the sugar-refining industry. In addition to running steamship lines and railroads, the elder Knight patented the sleeping car which he sold out to Pullman in 1868 for \$2 million. The younger Knight took over his father's business interests to become an executive with the Pennsylvania Railroad, American Sugar Refinery and Knight's Publishing Company. He had hunted at the Lighthouse Club as a guest but had been unable to bring his second wife, Amanda Marie Louise LeBel, also an avid hunter as the club did not allow women. When he learned that the Club was for sale in 1922, he purchased it so that he and his wife could have a private hunting retreat built on the property.

Knight and his wife spent the three hunting seasons of 1922-1925 supervising the construction of the Whalehead Club. One of the first entries in the club's log book is for the 1923-24 hunting seasons: "The name 'Lighthouse Club' changed to Corolla Island. Apparently the dredging of the harbor and channel that created the island and rise on which the house would be situated was complete. Construction on the compound took more than three years because it was carried out only when the Knights were there for the hunting season. Because only the best materials and craftsmanship were employed, the building cost of the estate was \$383,000.³ All work was closely overseen by Mrs. Knight who is recalled as having been a difficult perfectionist who would insist that projects already completed exactly to her specifications (such as doors constructed so that no seams would show) be dismantled and executed anew.⁴ The Knights boosted the local

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

economy by employing many Corolla residents for the construction job and by continuing to pay their salaries during the months construction was suspended. Only the head carpenter, a Mr. Carr, was bought to Corolla from Rhode Island where the Knights maintained another home.

The question of authorship of the house has not been settled. According to all accounts in Currituck County, Knight was an artist and an architect in addition to being a businessman and it was he who designed Whalehead. Unfortunately, no documentation to substantiate this claim has been discovered. That Knight was a man of taste is evidenced by the distinctive style of both Whalehead and his Newport house, the famous Clarendon Court built in 1904. Originally named Clarendon Court in honor of his first wife Clara Dwight, the house is a copy executed by the noted Philadelphia architect Horace Trumbauer after the 1716 English house by Colin Campbell for John Hedworth. Trumbauer also designed Knight's 1928 house, Stonybrook, in Middletown, Rhode Island, the replacement for Clarendon Court which Knight left after his first wife died.

Several architectural historians who have examined photographs of Whalehead concur that it was designed by a professional architect who may not have directed its construction but who must have drawn up precise specifications.⁵ As there is no record of Knight having designed any of his houses and as two of his houses erected before and after Whalehead were designed by a professional architect, it is safe to assume that Whalehead also is the work of a professional. Attempts to assign the work to Trumbauer or any other architect remain fruitless.⁶

An impression of life at Whalehead during the Knights' tenure is conveyed by recollections by Currituck County residents and examination of the log books. These books remain in the house in the only surviving piece of furniture from the Lighthouse Club; this bulky Victorian cabinet is ornately carved with various types of ducks and vegetation and conceals behind a "secret" panel the iron safe in which the log books are kept. Knight took over the last book of the Lighthouse Club and meticulously recorded in his calligraphic script the visitors, weather, and number and type of ducks bagged each day he was there. For the Thanksgiving and Christmas entries he always executed appropriate colored drawings. He always used the third person and even referred to himself and Mrs. Knight as "Knight and wife". Knight's ornate but precise script lends credence to accounts of his foppishness. In contrast, Mrs. Knight cared little for clothes, as attested by the fact that her bedroom has no closets while his has several.

The Knights had a very private existence at Corolla. Of the approximately twenty-five guests listed in the log for the eleven-year period, never more than three were entertained at one time. Several names are listed repeatedly, including Benjamin Chew, Charles Browne and Richard Stockton from Princeton, New Jersey. Henry Jennings Knapp visited for several days at a time every season; apparently Knapp, a New York physician, was one of Knight's closest friends as Knight gave him his own cottage on the grounds (only the chimney remains) and left him \$3,000 annually in his will.⁷ There are only three entries for female guests, the first occurring during the 1928-1929 season. Two of

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

three days each week were designated as rest days during which no one hunted and are so noted in the log.

The Knights continued to bolster the Corolla economy after the construction was completed. They bought a few servants with them, but most, particularly the guides and boatmen, lived in Corolla. The Knights needed more than the usual retinue of servants as the estate provided its own electricity, as well as fresh water by collecting rain water in cisterns. At one point, Knight prepared to set up a water distillery, but his plans were foiled when his wife refused to swear for the notarization of papers. The Knights also provided other jobs unrelated to the house that usually involved landscaping or erosion control. Several of the projects they sponsored were carried out on a strip of land that consequently earned the nickname "unemployment point."

The last notations made by Knight in the log record only nine days in November of the 1934-1935 hunting season. Apparently an illness forced Mr. Knight to return to Philadelphia. He died at his Middletown, Rhode Island House, Stonybrook, on July 23, 1935 and Mrs. Knight died four months later. The bulk of his estate was left to his two grandchildren. Only Stonybrook is mentioned in the estate notices. According to a Currituck County realtor whose father was the attorney for the subsequent owner, the Knight heirs were not at all interested in the hunting retreat.

The estate was on the market for quite a while before an interested buyer was found. Lindsey Warren, a Congressman from the Currituck district, had seen the property and had told several of his associates in Washington about it. Congressman Sirovich from New York made a bid of \$175,000 that was accepted, but he died suddenly on the day of the closing. Finally, another friend of Warren, a Washington, D.C. meat packer named Ray T. Adams, made an offer of only \$25,000 (2,500 down and the balance in nine years at four percent interest) that was accepted. At Mr. Adams' request, the executors included all of the furnishings at no additional charge.⁸ Reports that Adams more than paid for the estate through sale of the furnishings are unsubstantiated.⁹

The atmosphere of the estate underwent great changes with Adams and each of the next three owners. Adams was interested in duck hunting, but his major motivation for acquiring the 2-000-acre estate was to use it for entertaining the government officials who controlled the contracts that provided the bulk of his business. On November 1, 1940 Adams formed Whalehead Club, Incorporated, with ten shares distributed as follows: Ray Adams, 7; Eleanor Adams (his wife), 1; Chester Morris and K.P. Inman of Washington, 1. According to tradition, in the process of clearing land for the air strip that would facilitate transportation of guests, a whale bone was found which prompted Adams to rename his estate Whalehead Club. The log, which Adams continued to keep (although with none of Knight's artistic sensibility) lists numerous guests, including Sam Rayburn and O. Max Gardner, former governor of North Carolina.

In 1942 Adams complied with a request by the Coast Guard to rent Whalehead Club as a transient station for men and materials. Part of the arrangement was a provision that

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 4

Adams' club superintendent, Dexter Snow, be made a chief bos'n mate and be stationed at Corolla to look after Adams's interest. Before the Coast Guard took over, an extensive inventory and valuation was made of every single item on the compound. Changes to the estate made by the Coast Guard included construction of a couple dormitories east of the house (as many as 300 men were stationed there at one time) and painting the mahogany panelling in the living room.

Adams returned to Corolla in 1946 and proceeded to make plans for the commercial development of the estate that included two motels, a shopping center, and five-acre tract. The drawings of this proposed project is still mounted on the wall of the veranda. His idea of turning the area into a luxury resort was twenty years ahead of its time and Adams eventually was forced to abandon it. The log for New Year's Eve, 1957, records that Adams died there suddenly at 6:10 p.m.

The last log entries made by Mrs. Adams or friends and the next owners, mention the Academy that is the next phase of the Club's history. In 1958, Adams' heirs sold the property to George MacLean and Bill Wipp, Portsmouth, Virginia contractors, for \$375,000. MacLean and Wipp rented the estate to a private educational foundation based in England and for the next three summers Whalehead Club was the site of Corolla Academy, a "comprehensive summer school for boys. . . under the supervision of Corolla Academy Foundation . . . a chartered non-profit organization."¹⁰ The bulletin for the 1961 summer session state

Corolla Academy is the result of the firm conviction that summer study for boys of secondary level is a rewarding and enjoyable experience. The time has passed when American boys can afford to waste the three months' interval between the end of school in June and the resumption of classes in September. . . .

Without compromising its high requirements for individual performance, Corolla Academy offers a curriculum with flexibility to meet the needs and to challenge the potential of every one of its students. At the same time much attention is devoted to a recreational program . . .¹¹

The school failed to pay for itself and closed at the end of the 1961 season; branches of the school are still maintained in England and in the Shenandoah Valley. Wipp and MacLean then leased the estate to Atlantic Research with an option to purchase that ARC exercised in 1964 for \$1.25 million.

Ownership of Whalehead Club by ARC constitutes the most dramatic phase of the compound's history as ARC used it for rocket engine testing that included testing of the Poseidon rocket engine and engines to be used for soft moon landings. ARC added some storage buildings on the 35-acre expanse surrounding the house and built metal quonset huts to the south for storage of toxic materials and for test sites. The isolated setting was considered ideal for the dangerous tests that utilized brillium, a highly toxic fuel.

FMR-8-300A
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 5

Stringent precautions that included the curtailment of air and water traffic in the area were taken for the static firings of the engines, which were as large as 4,000 pounds.

When the use of brillium was phased out, the isolated site was no longer necessary for the tests. ARC sold the estate to three Currituck County businessmen who in turn sold it in 1972 for \$3 million to \$4 million to Kabler & Riggs, real estate developers based in Norfolk.¹² Kabler & Riggs, who have developed Carova Beach on the Currituck Banks just below Virginia, implemented plans similar to Adam's. All but the 35 acres next to the house has been subdivided; many of the lots have been sold but few beach houses have been constructed. For a few years Kabler & Riggs planned to utilize the house as a clubhouse for development landowners, but that idea has been abandoned and the 35-acre estate in a somewhat neglected condition, is for sale for approximately \$1 million.

Fortunately, the deterioration of the house does not extend beyond overgrown shrubbery, peeling paint, and the need for new wiring and plumbing. Successfully constructed to withstand the most severe coastal storms, Whalehead Club remains a local landmark and a startling surprise to newcomers unprepared for the presence of such a grand and exotic structure in the least spoiled yet inhabited stretch of the Outer Banks.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 6

Footnotes

1. Travis Morris, "Clubhouses in Currituck," The Journal of the Currituck County Historical Society, vol. 1, No. 3 (1977), p.30.
2. Log, unpublished journal kept in safe at the Whalehead Club, 2 volumes that cover last 20 years of the Lighthouse Club through 1958. All future references to the log pertain to this source. "Whalehead Club" is used throughout this nomination rather than the original "Corolla Island" as the former designation is more commonly used in Currituck County.
3. Interview with Travis Morris held in Currituck County, North Carolina, March, 1979. Mr. Morris says that his father Chester, who was attorney for the next owner, Ray T. Adams, was given this figure by Mr. Knight's bookkeeper.
4. Recollections and tradition were gleaned from interviews with Shirley Austin, Walton Carter, Travis Morris, and Barbara Snowden. Special recognition should be given to Shirley Austin, caretaker for Whalehead, for the hours she spent with this investigator.
5. These architectural historians include Keith Morgan, Survey and Restoration Staff, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina; and Richard Longstreth, Department of Architecture, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas.
6. William H. Jordy, The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century. Vol. 4 of American Buildings and Their Architects (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1976), p. 56
7. "E. C. Knight Jr.'s Will Lists Ten Institutions," New York Times, August 9, 1936, Section II, p. 6, col. 7.
8. Letter file in possession of Travis Morris.
9. Most of the original furnishings have disappeared. Each owner after the Knights removed some of the furniture for their other homes. Some pieces, such as Mrs. Knight's French antique bedroom suite, have been seen in antique shops in Philadelphia and Washington, D. C. Mrs. Adams denies that her husband sold any furniture, but she did not go to Corolla until several months after her husband purchased the estate.
10. "Corolla Academy," bulletin for 1961 summer session, n.p.
11. Ibid., p. 2.
12. A. R. C. had previously traded 700 acres of Whalehead for c.3 acres next to their home office in Arlington, Virginia.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Branam, A.S. Jr. Letter to Claus von Bulow, 8 June 1978

von Bulow, Claus. "Clarendon Court, Newport, R.I. A House and its Ghosts." Bulletin of the Newport Historical Society. Vol. 47, No. 156 (Fall 1974) : pp. 21 26.

Currituck County Deed Books.

"Corolla Academy." Unpublished bulletin for the 1961 summer session.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

| | | | Latitude | Longitude |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------|
| ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY <u>35</u> | | | NW 36° 22' 36" | NW 75° 50' 15" |
| UTM REFERENCES | | | NE 36° 22' 36" | NE 75° 49' 47" |
| | | | SE 36° 22' 19" | SE 75° 49' 47" |
| | | | SW 36° 22' 18" | SW 75° 50' 15" |
| A | [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] | [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] | B | [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] |
| | ZONE EASTING NORTHING | | | ZONE EASTING NORTHING |
| C | [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] | [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] | D | [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] [][] |
| | ZONE EASTING NORTHING | | | ZONE EASTING NORTHING |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the 35-acre nominated property are indicated by the red line drawn on the accompanying photo-copy of a portion of the aerial photograph that is used by Currituck County as the tax map for the area around Corolla. This is the land, still undeveloped, remaining with the Whalehead Club.

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

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Claudia P. Roberts, Consultant

June/79

ORGANIZATION

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

107-B Sue Ann Court

TELEPHONE

(919) 967-7961

CITY OR TOWN

Carrboro,

STATE

North Carolina

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE X LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Brent D. Hays

TITLE Deputy
State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE September 13, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

FHR-8-300A
(11/78).

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

9

PAGE

1

"E. C. Knight, Jr. Dies. Retired Rail Officer." New York Times. July 24, 1936.

"E. C. Knight, Jr.'s Will Lists Ten Institutions." New York Times.
August 9, 1936. Section II, p. 6, col. 7.

"E. C. Knight, Sr." Dictionary of American Biography. Vol. X. Edited by
Dumas Malone. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.

Interviews with Shirley Austin, Walton Carter, Travis Morris and Barbara
Snowden held in Currituck County, North Carolina, March 1979.

Jordy, William H. The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century.
Vol. 4 of American Buildings and Their Architects. Garden City, N.Y.:
Anchor Books, 1976

Log, Unpublished hunting records kept at the Whalehead Club, Corolla, N.C.

Longstreth, Richard W. Letter to Claudia Roberts, May 24, 1979.

Morris, Travis. "Clubhouses in Currituck." The Journal of the Currituck County
Historical Society. Vol. 1, No. 3 (1977); pp. 19-41

"Oceanfront Property Scarcest Land in the World." Unpublished color brochure
printed by Kabler and Riggs.

Scull, Hilda. "The Whalehead Club." Coastlander Times. August, 1973

Weatherly, Donna. "Fabulous Whale's Head." Virginian-Pilot. April 23, 1972.

1A

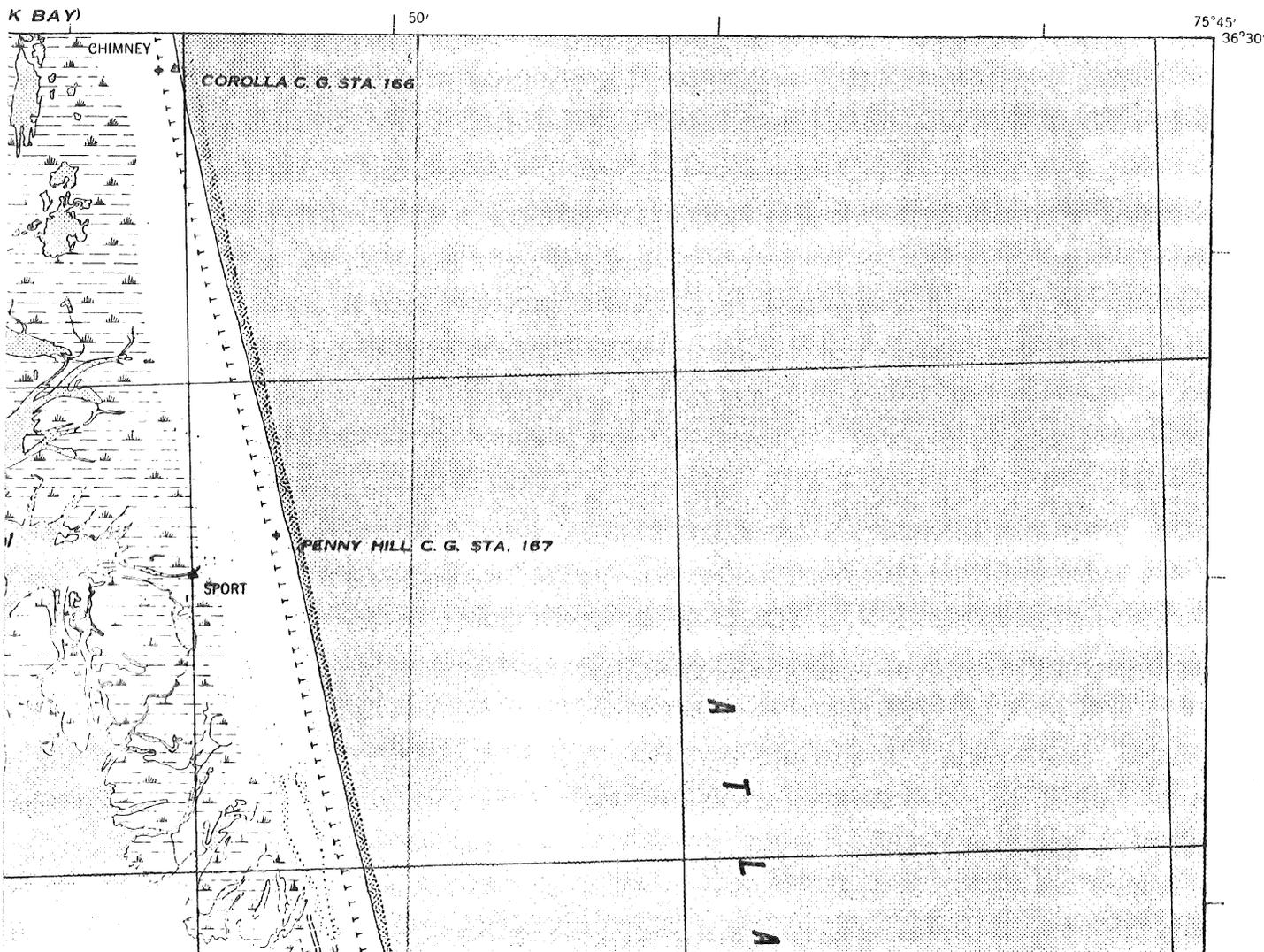


AIR STRIP

under house

DEPARTMENT
ENGINEERS, U. S. ARMY

NORTH CAROLINA
BARCO QUADRANGLE



WHALEHEAD CLUB

.2 miles southwest of Corolla Lighthouse
Corolla vicinity, Currituck County, NC

Barco Quad 1:62500

Latitude: NE 36° 22' 36"/SE 36° 22' 19"
SW 36° 22' 18"/NW 36° 22' 36"

Longitude: NE 75° 49' 47"/SE 75° 49' 47"
SW 75° 50' 15"/NW 75° 50' 15"



MAR)
ISLAND



