

PH0663379

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED FEB 21 1978
DATE ENTERED NOV 29 1978

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Portsmouth Village
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Northern end of Portsmouth Island
CITY, TOWN
Cape Lookout National Seashore
STATE
North Carolina
VICINITY OF
First
COUNTY
Carteret
CODE
37
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CODE
0301

3 CLASSIFICATION

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

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)
Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service
STREET & NUMBER
1895 Phoenix Boulevard
CITY, TOWN
Atlanta
VICINITY OF
STATE
Georgia 30349

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

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

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
None
DATE
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS
CITY, TOWN
STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Village of Portsmouth on the Outer Banks of North Carolina has existed on the south side of Okracoke Inlet since before the Revolutionary War--a 1770 map showed eight structures making up the village. The village grew steadily during the next quarter century and the census of 1800 recorded a white population of 165, including 25 heads of families, plus 98 slaves. The glory years of the village were to be the first half of the 19th Century. During this period, it served as a trans-shipment point for cargoes from seagoing vessels that were lightered to warehouses at Portsmouth, reloaded on the sea-going vessels after they had crossed over the Okracoke Bar, or shipped to inland ports such as New Bern, North Carolina. By 1821 there were 37 heads of families, a white population of 265, 92 slaves, and four free blacks. Over 80 percent of the working population was engaged in water-related commercial activities. By 1850 there were 70 dwellings in the village, a free population of 377. Ten years later, Portsmouth reached its peak with a white population numbering 581 and 109 dwellings. Eighty-five percent of the working population was employed in sea related occupations.

With the opening of the Hatteras Inlet to the north in the 1850's and the use of this new passage by shipping, Portsmouth's decline was as rapid as its rise. By 1880 the population was 227. It continued to shrink until by 1955 there were only 14 residents, and by the mid-sixties only three permanent inhabitants remained. The old buildings disappeared also. The Marine Hospital, established by the U.S. Treasury in the 1820's for seamen, burned in 1894. The Methodist Church destroyed in 1899 was rebuilt two years later and still stands in the village. Other structures fell victim to hurricanes or were moved to the mainland by their owners.

Today Portsmouth Village is made up of about 25 complexes of one or more buildings. These are scattered over an area some 3,000 feet east to west and about 1800 feet north to south. Because of the meandering system of roads and the vegetative cover, there is a sense of isolation or compartmentalization. Seldom can more than one or two complexes be seen from the same point. As you walk the narrow grass covered lanes, you "discover" each structure or complex of buildings in turn. Most of the present buildings date from the decades before and after 1900 with architecture typical of the venacular style found on the coastal areas of the Carolinas. The only style that could be clearly identified is bungalow style with additions. The Coast Guard Building has elements of the Stick style.

Many of the buildings are painted white or have weathered to gray. Two of the houses (Henry Piggott's and Dave Willis) are pink and a few others are yellow or ochre. The condition of the structures is varied. The Henry Babb House (HS-520) has collapsed and is in ruins. The Washington Roberts house, possibly the oldest structure in the village, is in an advanced state of deterioration and is now surrounded by mature trees and brush. The majority, however, have suffered some deterioration, but are presently being utilized as vacation or weekend retreats under renewable 1-year special use permits issued by Cape Lookout National Seashore. Maintenance activities allowed under the special use permits are limited to painting and replacement in kind of historic fabric as needed. Four of the complexes--HS 504, 507, 522 and 524--are either life estates or 25-year leases and are in good condition. All the cemeteries except the Babb-Dixon plot are overgrown and need clearing.

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 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 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 checked="" 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

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Portsmouth Village on the northern end of Portsmouth Island is the surviving remnant of the thriving pre-Civil War port that reached its zenith in the decade prior to 1860. Its significance today is as the only existing village on the Core Banks south of Ocracoke Inlet— an existence that can be traced back over 200 years to the 1760's. Today the charm and significance of the area is in the informal placement of the complexes on high ground in the typical low salt marsh outer banks vegetation. These individual sites are connected by narrow, winding, grassy roads or lanes. This site relationship is very characteristic of early coastal villages. Except for these lanes, small cleared building sites and a grass landing strip for light planes, the environment of the district gives the appearance being untouched by the incursions of man.

Portsmouth Village was authorized by the North Carolina Colonial legislature in 1753. A town was laid out shortly thereafter. The 50-acre town site consisted of half-acre lots and a system of streets. The town grew slowly--a tavern existed by 1757 and in 1760, St. John's Parish appointed a reader for Portsmouth. A map dated 1770 shows what appears to be eight structures in the village. The Revolutionary War touched the village only in passing--the British foraged on the island carrying off cattle and sheep. By 1790 the population of the village was over 200, including slaves. The leading citizen was David Wallace, Jr. who owned 16 slaves and by 1795 had two houses--one of them a two-story structure. David was doubtless related to John Wallace who was a major force in developing Shell Castle on Ocracoke Sound.

John Wallace and John G. Blount of Washington, North Carolina, on the Pamlico River were developing a major shipping and trading center on Shell Castle during the 1790's. Here vessels from the open sea could anchor, unload their cargoes via lighters, make repairs, load their outbound cargoes and depart without having to enter Pamlico Sound or dock at the old port towns up the Neuse or Pamlico Rivers. By 1800 Shell Castle contained a warehouse that was 300 feet in length, a grist mill powered by a windmill, a lumber yard, store, and ship chandlery, a tavern and extensive wharves. The Shell Castle lighthouse was lit in 1803. The permanent population totaled 25. A combination of Wallace's death, a series of hurricanes, and the closing of the channel that served Shell Castle combined to end the activities on this island by 1812.

Perhaps as a result there was considerable growth in the village of Portsmouth which by 1810 boasted a population of 246, including 121 slaves, as well as an academy and a windmill. With over 4/5th of the population involved in sea-related commercial activities, Portsmouth was the second largest town on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

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Portsmouth was at one time the largest settlement on the Outer Banks of North Carolina and today remains as the only surviving village on the Core Banks which stretch north from the Cape Lookout Lighthouse to Ocracoke Inlet, a distance of 40 miles. Although the surviving residences and support buildings are less than 100 years old, it may be assumed that evidence of many other structures that date to the years before the Civil War could be found to the south of the road that runs from the Coast Guard Station to Pamlico Sound or are scattered among the surviving structures north of this road.

Buildings and Sites Contributing to Character of District:

^{3 4}
501A. Coast Guard Station is a two-story stick style structure with a screened porch, observation cupola and two sets of large doors for launching of surf rescue boats. It rests on wood piers enclosed by lattice work. Dimensions approximately 66 x 43. ^{1B}

501B. The Sugar Shack was one of the out buildings, probably the kitchen or dining hall. A frame structure with gable roof, the west half is shingle siding and the east half weather boarding. It measures 31 x 19.5 feet. ^{1B}

501C. A wood frame structure with vertical siding that served as support building. Now used as housing under special use permit. ^{1B}

501D. Boathouse with large garage type doors, wood frame with gable roof. Contains 333 square feet. ^{1B}

⁵
502. Lionel Gilgo House is white frame structure with modified hip roof and open porches on front and back. Rests on brick piers. ^{1B}

¹
503A. Dave Willis House - frame house with low gable roof with center gable dormer. Front porch columns are wood supports on brick piers. House is irregular in shape. Outbuildings include privy and collapsed shed. ^{1B}

503B. George Willis House - has collapsed and is in ruins. Dimensions were 14x25 feet. ^{1B}

^{8 9}
504. Marion Gray Babb House - rectangular frame house with gable roof and center gable roofed dormer, central chimney. Side porch on rear. Outbuildings include gable roof shed with rear addition, privy, gable roof shed, and shed with hip roof. Main house is 830 square feet. The complex is held as a life estate.

505. The Kitty Cabin Home of Ed and Kate Styron is a small frame building on wood piers with an open porch. It is on a special use permit. Area, including porch, is 450 square feet.

⁴
506. Babb, Dixon, Pigott Cemetery is a well kept area enclosed by a white picket fence. It is the final resting place of Henry Pigott, last resident of the island, and members of the Dixon and Babb family. Plus two parakeets who belonged to the Babb family.

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9 507. Elma Dixon House - Ell with gable roof. Front porch has shed roof with side porch on rear. Enclosed by picket fence. Outbuildings include raised rabbit or chicken pen less than 11 square feet in area, plus two sheds with gable roofs. This complex also is part of a life estate. 3 11

508. ^(10, 11, 12) Methodist Church is National Park Service property. Features central extension tower on front. Wooden construction on brick piers of earlier church. Windows in church are gothic in style. Interior has wooden pews, organ and lectern. Bell in the tower still works. Sanctuary is 40 1/2' x 25' with 10' x 10' tower.

509. The Washington Roberts house is very deteriorated and may be the oldest house on the island. Interior features wainscoting to chair rail height. Mode of construction would date house to 1880 or earlier. Contains hand hewn timbers, hand split lath and solid oak floors.

510. George Dixon House is rectangular with gable roof and shed roof porch on front and back. House rests on wooden piers. Chimney is offset to right. House measures 37 x 30 1/2 including front and rear porches. Wood cistern, 7' in diameter, is to left rear of house. Used as residence under special use permit. 11

511. ¹⁴ Henry Pigott Cottage is a 2-story gable roofed ell shaped structure built of frame. Painted pink, the Pigott house is surrounded by a picket fence and has shed roof porches on the front and side. There are six outbuildings associated with this complex including privy, former kitchen (10.3 x 16.5) with rear chimney, and shed-all with gable roofs. Two shed roof structures and an elevated chicken or rabbit house of about 12 square feet complete the complex. Main house has three bedrooms upstairs and measures 21 x 32 feet. 4/3

512. Tom Gilgo House is a small gable roofed wood structure with vertical siding and rear wing. Open porch has shed roof on front with side porch.

513. ¹⁶ Old Grace or Wallace House is two story with gable roof and one large center front dormer and two large rear dormers. Structure was built on foundation of earlier house. Evidence of older foundation is visible on the north side. A rear wing has been removed.

514. Cemetery across from Post Office may be the Grace Cemetery. It is overgrown and in need of maintenance. Contains two or three graves. 5

515. Ben Salter House is on road to former school house and is a rectangular house with low gable roof and open porch across front. Windows are boarded over, structure is in poor to fair condition. Measures 16 x 33 with an 6 x 8 front porch. A rear porch has collapsed.

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516. Old Schoolhouse. Now used as residence under special use permit, it is a hip roof structure measuring 20.5 x 36.5 feet. Adjacent to the main building is an above ground cistern 8 feet in diameter, a gable roofed shed with rear addition and a privy.
517. Large Cemetery containing over 25 graves including members of Dixon, Babb, Styron, Williams, Daly, Gilgo and Roberts families. Heavy overgrown, it is located near the Post Office.
518. Former Post Office and General Store - The building of frame construction with gable roof measures 37 x 17.5 and still contains some furnishings including safe and mail clerk's office.
519. Theo Salter House (Salter Gun Club) is a two-story frame hip roof structure with hip roof dormers on front and back. Features two interior chimneys. Rear wing is also hipped roof and there is a widow's walk accessible from outside. Front porch has wood columns on brick piers. Out-buildings include storage shed and privy, both with low hip roofs. Square footage of main house, including porches, is 1525. Utilized under special use permit.
520. Henry Babb House has collapsed, but brick chimney is still standing.
521. Carl Dixon House is a gable roof structure with an enclosed shed roof addition on the side, a screen porch on the front, and a shed roof porch on the rear. There is a catwalk or widow's walk accessible from outside. Wood frame building. Adjacent to the main house are a generator building and net building, both gable roofed. Main house contains 850 square feet, including porches.
522. Frank Gaskill House is wood frame structure with a shed roof porch. Roof on the main house is a low hip roof. A brick cistern measuring 6 x 6 1/2 feet and a privy are located at the rear of the house. House is 31 x 21 feet, excluding 8 x 15 porch. Nearby is a shed with tin walls and a flat roof also tin. Complex is held as a life estate.
523. The Jody Styron (Tom Bragg) House is a 1 1/2 story frame house with a hip roof and dormers on all four sides. An open porch is on the front with a screened porch on the left rear. There is a central chimney in the main house and a second chimney in the rear addition. Exterior dimensions are 32.5 by 46.5 with a front porch measuring 7.5 x 27 feet. Outbuildings include a small privy and a gable roof shed with shed roof addition as well as a boat house on Pamlico Sound.
524. Armfield House--modified and modernized the house, under a 25-year lease, is frame with a low gable roof. It rests on wood piers. Overall dimensions are 34.4 by 26 feet. Nearby are a boat house and a flat roofed shed.

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525. Ruins of frame house which may have belonged to Ed or Carl Dixon.

526. A frame building in ruins with the roof collapsed and the interior littered with structural material.

The one clearly non-conforming building is the trailer near the mouth of Doctor's Creek. It is a 28 x 8 foot mobile home with an 8 x 16 foot attached shed. Adjacent to this is a badly deteriorated structure and a tin shed, both less than 100 square feet in area. Designated EMN on map. The grassy landing strip, more open field than air field, is inobtrusive.

The addresses of the four individuals who hold either Life Estates or long term leases on properties within the boundaries of Portsmouth Village are set out below.

Marion Babb House

Marion Babb - Life Estate

P. O. Box 311

Beaufort, North Carolina 28516

Elma Dixon House

Elma Dixon - Life Estate

P. O. Box 311

Beaufort, North Carolina 28516

Potters House

Armtex, Inc., - 25 year lease

Ed Armfield

P. O. Box 546

Pilot Mountain, North Carolina 27041

Frank Gaskill House

William and Lola Guthrie

Route 1 Bogue

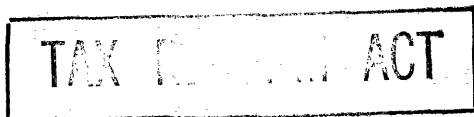
Newport, North Carolina

and

Life Estate

Roger W. Jones

Broad Creek, North Carolina



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The village of Ocracoke on the northern side of the inlet was slightly larger. The population by 1820 totaled 362. The population of the village and the island of Portsmouth continued to grow during the next 40 years with a total of 109 dwellings reported in 1860. Edmund Ruffin, an agricultural scientist from Virginia, described Portsmouth in the late 1850's as follows:

"The village of Portsmouth owes its existence to the fact of its adjoining the nearest water of Pamlico Sound, where vessels must anchor and wait for fair winds and tides to cross the shallow and dangerous bar of Ocracoke Inlet-- and after passing outward, as usual but partly laden, to wait to receive the remainder of the cargo, carried across the bar by lighters. The occupations of the whole resident population of Portsmouth are connected with the vessels which have to wait here. Pilots and sailors or owners of vessels make up the greater number of heads of families and adult males--and the remainder are the few, who as shopkeepers, etc., are necessary to minister to the wants of the others." ¹

Ruffin offered a final observation on Portsmouth that had the ring of prophecy, "If Ocracoke Inlet should be closed by sand (which is no improbable event), the village of Portsmouth would disappear--or, (like Nagshed) remain only for its other use, as a summer retreat for transient visitors, sought for health and sea-bathing."² Hatteras Inlet had been opened by a hurricane in 1846 and continued to enlarge during the fifties. By 1861, Hatteras had surpassed Ocracoke as the most important inlet on the coast.

The Civil War touched the Outer Banks during its first year. Confederate troops occupied the banks and were stationed at Portsmouth. Fort Morgan in the center of the inlet was manned. In August 1861 when the Union troops moved against the forts near Hatteras Inlet, the troops at Portsmouth were moved to Fort Hatteras. With the fall of Forts Hatteras and Clark, Fort Morgan on Beacon Island was abandoned. When the Federal soldiers arrived at Portsmouth, they found a ghost town as most of the inhabitants had fled. After burning the military stores, the troops departed.

¹ Edmund Ruffin, Agricultural, Geological, and Descriptive Sketches of Lower North Carolina and the Similar Adjacent Lands (Raleigh: Printed at the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, 1861), pp. 123-132.

2. Ibid.

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When the inhabitants returned at wars end the village's vitality was gone. Attempts to revitalize the village came to naught. By 1870 the population was 323 and dropped another hundred in the next 10 years. In 1880 there were 44 dwellings on the island of Portsmouth, most in the village. Those residents that remained continued to depend on the sea for their livelihood. Storms played their part in reducing the population. Houses were destroyed and residents moved to the mainland. Other residents left taking their homes with them to the mainland. In 1895 a Lifesaving Station was established at Portsmouth that provided employment for seven of the residents from 1897 to 1938 when it was closed. The Post Office, open in 1840, was finally closed in 1959 when the total number of permanent residents numbered less than 15. The school, active into the 1930's, closed its doors in the fifties also. By the mid-1960's, there were three permanent residents--Henry Piggott, Elma Dixon, and Marion Gray Babb--on the island.

Portsmouth Village in 1977 is composed of groups or complexes of buildings separated by vegetation and topographic features in such a manner as to give each a sense of isolation, yet the narrow winding grass covered lanes and the similarity of materials and architecture combine to unify the district. The houses date to the last decades of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century. Because most fall within this 40-year range and all have a sense of age and weathering about them, there is a distinct feeling of time and place about the village—the time about 1930 and the place a town on the Outer Banks which still boasted all the amenities of a small village. The only modern intrusion into this is the grassy airstrip at the Coast Guard Station and even it seems to be part of the environment for it is more open meadow than airstrip, and is used by weekend residents who fly into their vacation cottages. With the exception of four complexes, all the houses are utilized under 1-year special use permits issued by Cape Lookout National Seashore.

The Portsmouth Historic District includes not only the surviving buildings but also now-hidden remains of other buildings of 125 years ago when Portsmouth still made claim to being a major port on the Outer Banks of the Carolina Coast.

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Latitude

Longitude

A 35° 4' 09"

76° 3' 05"

B 35° 3' 55"

76° 3' 13"

C 35° 3' 45"

76° 3' 54"

D 35° 4' 02"

76° 4' 22"

E 35° 4' 30"

76° 3' 58"