

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: North Carolina	
COUNTY: Craven	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:
Masonic Temple and Theater (St. John's Lodge No. 3, A.F. & A. M.)

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
516 Hancock Street

CITY OR TOWN:
New Bern (First Congressional District, The Hon. Walter B. Jones)

STATE: North Carolina CODE: 37 COUNTY: Craven CODE: 49

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>Masonic Lodge</u>
			<input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____ _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
St. John's Lodge No. 3, A.F. & A.M.

STREET AND NUMBER:
516 Hancock Street

CITY OR TOWN: New Bern STATE: North Carolina CODE: 37

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Craven County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: New Bern STATE: North Carolina CODE: 37

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1937 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:
East Capitol and Independence Avenue

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: D.C. CODE: 11

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F. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Masonic Temple and Theater exists today much as it was built during the years 1802 through 1809 despite additions and several alterations made over the years. A chronological explanation of those changes, made possible by photographs from various periods, aids in the analysis of the building.

The original part of the building is a very tall two-story brick structure, seven bays wide and four bays deep. Raised on a high basement, the structure has a water table and is covered by a hip roof. On the front (west) facade a pediment spans the five central bays which form a shallow pavilion. The three central bays under the pediment are in turn recessed under an elliptical arch that reaches into the pediment. A wooden cornice of modillions and dentils carries around the entire building and also outlines the pediment. As constructed, the building had two entrances, located in the outer bays of the pavilion, each reached by a straight flight of stairs and treated with a cornice carried on pilasters. The structure also had a cupola and a belt course, both of which have been removed. A Civil War era photograph shows the building covered with stucco, though it is uncertain whether it was applied at the time of construction or later.

After the Civil War and before 1904, windows were cut in the outer bays of the central recess between the two original levels, interrupting the belt course and giving the building the appearance of having three stories.

Additions to the north and south were made to the Masonic Temple and Theater in 1904. The major addition, that on the north, incorporated the end bay, destroying the previous symmetry of the building. A fire escape across the front of the building served a door cut in the south bay between the two original levels. Changes in the surface of the building seem to have occurred either in 1904 or during the 1917 remodeling. Rusticated stucco quoins, painted a terra cotta color, were introduced on the original structure and on the subsequent additions, possibly as an attempt to unify the parts. The belt course was eliminated, the main block restuccoed, and each opening given a false flat arch with keystone. On the main facade, these arches were also painted terra cotta, repeating the color of the quoins. All the openings with the exception of those on the top floor and the mid-level fire escape door were closed, and an off-center service door was cut in the basement at an undetermined time. A polychromatic Masonic symbol (an eye above an open Bible with a square and compass) was painted in the arched recess and above it in the pediment the words, "Masonic Temple."

The lower portion of the building has been altered several times. While it still serves its original purpose, that of a theater, none of the original interiors remain. This is not true, however, of the top floor which contains the Lodge Room and a large assembly or reception room, now designated as Lowthrup Hall.

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7. A

The Lodge Room, located on the south side, takes its length from the entire depth of the building and is two bays wide. (The two window openings in the east wall have been closed.) It is typical of the fine Federal work found in New Bern, except for the unusual wall treatment featuring trompe l'oeil motifs, and symbols of Masonry, painted in 1847 by an itinerant artist. All elements are in a remarkably good state of preservation. The walls are plastered above a flat-paneled wainscot, the molded chair rail and baseboard of which are elaborated with a diamond and oval guilloche, a cable molding, and a band of Greek fret, respectively. The wainscot breaks out to form pedestals for paneled pilasters which flank the window openings. The pilasters with pierced gouge work in the capitals carry a full entablature composed of a plain frieze and end block surmounted by a molded cornice with a dentil course and undercut modillions outlined by a cable molding. Both the soffit and the reveals of the windows are paneled. Possibly the reveals of the windows contain folding interior shutters, but if this is so, many layers of paint have made them immovable. Six-panel doors, one in the center of the north wall and another at the west end of the same wall, give access to the Lodge Room and to a preparation room, respectively. Like the windows, the doors are flanked by paneled pilasters which carry full entablatures; however, there are no wainscot pedestals. While the window friezes are plain, those above the doors carry the 1847 painting. The cornice of the room is identical to those above the doors and windows. Above the cornice, the ceiling breaks into a deep cove.

The original mantel in the middle of the south wall was removed and replaced by a later version. The frieze and center tablet, however, seem to be remnants of the original, for they are painted with Masonic symbols like those that appear throughout the room.

The painted wall surfaces are broken into vertical and horizontal panels that are outlined by a gilded trompe l'oeil rococo motif. The area outside the panels is a tan color, while that within the panel is blue. The figures and symbols illustrated (Justice, Temperance, Industry, Fortitude, etc.) are precepts by which one should live in order to achieve eternal life in heaven. Most striking is a trompe l'oeil panel between the windows on the east wall which, through the use of perspective, appears to be a three-dimensional alcove. The ceiling, representing a celestial atmosphere, shows the "All Seeing Eye," the sun, moon and stars, and Jacob's ladder, which according to the Masonic ritual can be ascended by devoting one's life to faith, hope, and charity.

To the north across a one-bay wide passage hall, Lowthrup Hall presents a curious combination of styles. Originally this room was probably four bays square; however, the northern bay seems to have been sacrificed when the 1904 addition was made. Since none of the woodwork in this room is Federal, it was probably finished sometime after the Lodge Room. The room is entered through double doors, each leaf of which has one large panel,

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7. B

with a circular panel in the center. A pair of engaged Corinthian columns on pedestals flank the door and carry three arches, a tall wide one above the door and smaller ones on each side.

A narrow elevated bandstand, located to the left of the entrance, is supported on three carved acanthus brackets and enclosed by a gilded cast-iron railing. A molded plaster arch on the wall behind further accentuates the bandstand.

It seems likely that the mantel now located on the east wall was formerly situated on the north wall and moved when the room was shortened. Since there is no evidence of a chimney to service the fireplace as it is now placed, the move must have been a purely decorative one. The paneled motif of the doors is repeated on the mantel.

A shallow cove rises from the molded plaster cornice. The ceiling above the cove is sheathed and in the angles is ornamented with sawn curvilinear triangular forms. Near the center of the room the ceiling opens into another deeper cove in the center of which occurs a circular sawn ornament.

3. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian; | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Although St. John's Lodge was chartered in 1772, Masons in New Bern had been organized since before 1764. In 1791 the local group officially became St. John's Lodge No. 3, A. F. & A. M., a position it finally accepted in 1795. The organization numbered among its membership many of the notables of the late eighteenth century North Carolina, and accepted many others as guest members. When George Washington visited New Bern for two days, April 20-21, 1791, St. John's Lodge presented official greetings, as it did to President James Monroe and members of his party (which included John C. Calhoun) in April of 1819. Before the construction of the present building the order met at various places, including the Jones-Roberts House at the corner of New and Metcalf streets, and Tryon Palace.

Shortly after Tryon Palace burned in 1798, a committee was appointed to choose a site for a lodge structure and, on September 22 of that year, purchased the present site from Elisabeth Haslen.

At a meeting on Wednesday, March, 13, 1799, it was

Moved and seconded that Brother J. Dewey draw up a plan of a building fit for a lodge of the dimensions of 50 by 36 feet also an estimate of the expenses to close the same in and building the chimneys and lay the same before the lodge.

In 1799, John Dewey, a Mason who was a house carpenter by trade, drew up plans for a lodge and made an estimate of expenses. The next year a drive for public support was well under way, and petitions were circulated to secure funds. One petition noted that because of inadequate funds,

persons who are not masons as well as members of the Society are invited to lend their aid. It is proposed that the building shall contain six rooms and it shall be constructed as to answer to the purpose of dancing assemblies. . . .

Sufficient money was eventually received, and on April 15, 1801, the cornerstone of the structure was laid with appropriate Masonic ceremonies. Progress in construction was evidently slow, and on October 5, 1803, the lodge

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Resolved, that the committee for superintending the building of Mason's Hall be directed to wait on br. Dewey, ascertain the progress of the building and the reason of its tardiness report on Saturday night.

That same meeting also authorized appropriation for lath, woodwork and plastering; thus the structure was apparently near enough to completion to warrant interior finishing.

The portion of the structure that houses the theater must have been completed by the end of 1804, for the lodge discussed its rental for theatrical purposes on November 28, and a lease was signed on November 29. Though not used immediately, the theater was certainly in use by 1805, when on November 7, the lodge received about \$50 as "profits of a play."

John Dewey presented the plans for the finishing of the lodge room and superintended the construction from the beginning to the end. The minutes of the ceremony of consecration on June 27, 1809, referred to him as the architect. Dewey was engaged in the house carpenter's trade in New Bern and took apprentices as early as 1792, and in many following years until as late as 1817. That plus the fact that there were numerous delays in the construction of the Masonic Theater (causing the lodge considerable concern) probably indicates that he was actively involved in the early nineteenth century building boom in New Bern, and thus that other structures of his exist.

The Masonic Theater attracted early attention. When Bishop Asbury visited New Bern in 1802, he commented in his diary on the commerce of the town and wrote that

there are seven hundred or a thousand houses already built, and the number is yearly increased by less and greater additions, among which are some respectable brick edifices; the new court house truly so; neat and elegant; another famous house, said to be designed by the Masonic or theatrical gentleman, it might make a most excellent church.

The structure had a cupola or dome, completed in 1806. Colonel John Whitford later reported that the roof ornament was a "structure of peculiar shape," which was removed finally because it was found "expensive to keep in repair."

Extensive renovations took place in 1847, and it was probably at this time that the lodge room received its painted decorations. Colonel Whitford advanced the money for the painting, which was accomplished at his insistence. His memoirs and the published history of the lodge give the date as mid-nineteenth century, a date near enough to the 1847 renovations to make that year probable.

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8.B

At the beginning of the Civil War the building became a Confederate arsenal, and after the capture of the town by Union Forces in March, 1862, a Union hospital and coffin manufactory. A wounded man who stayed there described the Lodge Room:

. . . This ward was the hall of the Grand Lodge of Masons. Its walls were covered with the emblems of the Order painted very artistically. The ceiling, domeshaped, was covered with paintings and gold stars and was a pleasanter sight than bare walls. In a short time all the beds throughout the building were filled.

The room remains today as finished in 1809 and painted in 1847.

Lowthrup Hall, adjacent to the Lodge Room on the top floor, has been used for various public assemblies and purposes since it was finished, and the theater has served almost continuous use since it was first used in 1805. Even during the Civil War years it served periodically as a place for the production of plays, and, since the introduction of motion pictures October 12, 1917, it has been a movie theater.

The membership of the lodge has included many influential North Carolinians including William Joseph Williams, a local artist and portrait painter; John Dewey, designer of the Masonic Theater; Otway Burns, privateer captain of the Snap Dragon; and others such as governors Richard Caswell and Richard Dobbs Spaight.

The Masonic Temple and Theater is of considerable historic value locally for its association with some of New Bern's most prominent citizens and for the long continuous use of the structure as a Masonic hall and theater. It is of architectural significance as a fine Federal structure that, despite remodeling, remains much as built. The most notable feature of the building is the superbly rendered and well-preserved group of mid-nineteenth century trompe l'oeil paintings, apparently unique in design and execution in North Carolina.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Allen, Corporal Luther F. "The Personal Experience of A Comrade Wounded in the Battle of Whitehall, December 16, 1862." In History of the Forty Fifth Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, compiled by Albert W. Mann. Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts: Brookside Print, 1908.

Carraway, Gretrude S. Years of Light, History of St. John's Lodge No. 3 A F & A M New Bern, N. C. New Bern: Owen G. Dunn, 1944

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES							
CORNER	LATITUDE				LONGITUDE			LATITUDE			LONGITUDE	
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	35°	06'	47"	77°	02'	24"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: $\frac{1}{2}$ Acre

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Survey and Planning Unit Staff, John B. Wells, III, Supervisor

ORGANIZATION: State Department of Archives and History
DATE: 3 November 1971

STREET AND NUMBER:
109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN: Raleigh
STATE: North Carolina
CODE: 37

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name H. G. Jones

Title Director, State Department of Archives and History

Date 3 November 1971

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

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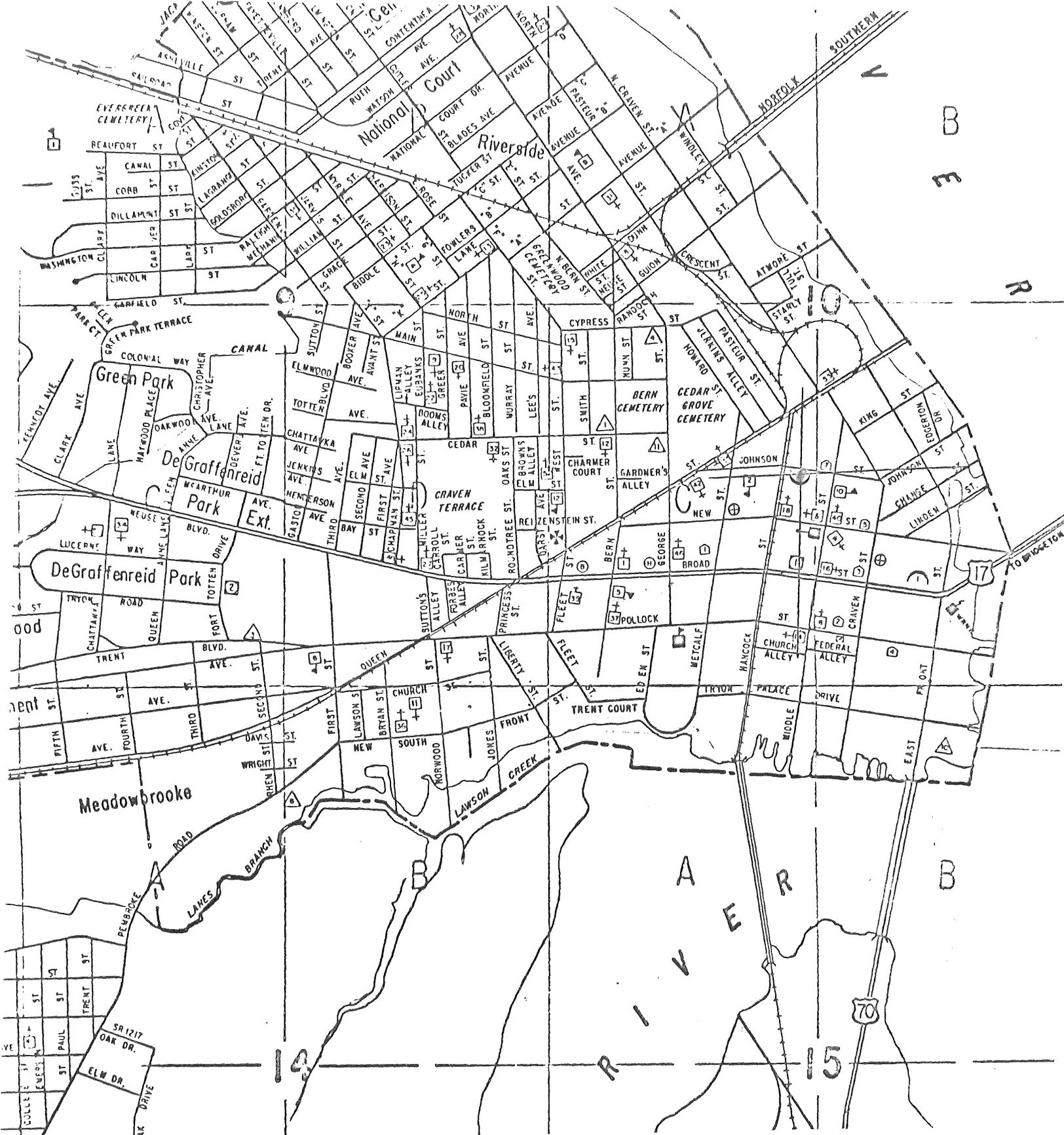
Craven County Records, Craven County Courthouse, New Bern, North Carolina, Offices of the Clerk of Court and the Register of Deeds. (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills, Court Records).

Craven County Records, State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills, Court Records).

Johnson, Guion Griffis. Ante-Bellum North Carolina. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937.

Minute Book No. 2, January 17, 1798, to May 8, 1805, vaults of St. John's Lodge, New Bern.

Whitford, Colonel John D. "The Home of the Walking Stick-Early History of Biblical Recorder and Baptist Church at New Bern," before 1900. Unpublished manuscript, typed copy in possession of Mrs. G. Tull Richardson, Bellair, New Bern, North Carolina.



Masonic Temple and Theater
516 Hancock Street
New Bern, North Carolina

Map of New Bern and Vicinity, New Bern Chamber of Commerce
drawn by: Gilfredo Gonzalez
Scale: 1"/1200 feet
no date

