

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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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 Inkwell

AND/OR COMMON

The Octagon House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER South side of US 264, 0.5 miles west of the junction of US 264 & SR 1318

CITY, TOWN

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Amity

VICINITY OF

1st

North Carolina

CODE

37

COUNTY

Hyde

CODE

95

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 type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: <u>unused</u>

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Payne heirs, c/o Mrs. B. M. Martin Octagon House Restoration, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER

Route 3, Box 398 Rt. 1, Box 90, Englehardt, NC.

CITY, TOWN

Williamston

— VICINITY OF

North Carolina 27892

27824

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Hyde County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Swan Quarter

STATE

North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" 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

The broad, level farmlands of Hyde County offer vistas over great distances of the region's widely scattered farms and churches. One of the best known landmarks of this fertile agricultural region is the Octagon House, also known locally as the Inkwell, the Inkbottle House, or the Round House. Located just off US 264 and standing among a few ancient trees, the house has been a source of curiosity to generations of travelers. It is in fact one of the few octagon plan houses ever constructed in North Carolina. Despite changes to its exterior and interior surfaces, its shape and plan survive.

The eight-sided, two-story frame house rests on brick piers and is covered with a low-pitched, tent-like roof of standing seam metal that rises from all sides to the central octagonal chimney of stuccoed brick. The lower portions of the exterior walls are covered in plain weatherboard up to the level of the sills of the first-story windows; above this the walls are shingled. According to local tradition, the house was originally plastered or stuccoed on the exterior, and the presence of heavy sawn lathing under the shingles gives some credence to this tradition. The front entrance is set on the north-west face of the house; this was apparently a double door originally, later partially enclosed with weatherboard to accommodate a single door, which is a twentieth century replacement with glass panes. Windows are centered on the first and second levels on the north, east, and south faces of the house, and above the front entrance on the north-west face. These windows are of paired six-over-six sash set in plain surrounds. A rear door, also at some point reduced from double to single width, is cut in the south-west face. The northeast, southeast, and west faces of the house are without fenestration. Under the eaves on all eight sides is a cornice featuring widely spaced sawn brackets, four to a side, which accent a broad frieze decorated with shallow dentils, also rather widely spaced.

Rather than the wedge-shaped rooms that might be expected, the main two rooms on both levels are square and oriented back-to-back on a north-south axis around the central chimney, leaving trapezoidal spaces on east and west. The trapezoidal space on the west side of the house serves as an entrance/stair hall. The corresponding space on the east side, first floor, is divided into a triangular-plan closet off the south room and an irregular four-sided room entered from the north parlor and lighted by the window on the east face. On the second floor the trapezoidal space becomes two triangular closets flanking a small rectangular room.

Exactly how much of the interior fabric is original is uncertain; much of it appears to be of a slightly later period than the mid-nineteenth century date traditionally given the house. The original lath-and-plaster wall surfaces have been replaced with narrow vertical sheathing on the first floor and wall board on the second, though plaster remains in one of the second floor closets. An unmolded baseboard carries around all interior walls. The door surrounds of the north parlor are symmetrically molded and have corner blocks with rondels; all other surrounds are of unmolded boards set in post-and-lintel fashion. Doors are of four panels except for the replacement glass-pane door which joins the stair hall and north parlor. The north parlor mantel is an attenuated post-and-lintel type with the lintel supported by thin free-standing, turned columns. The other three mantels are post-and-lintel with flat pilasters and the lower edge of the lintel cut with a shallow pointed arch. The open-string stair rises southward one flight along the west wall of the stair hall to the second floor; the rounded handrail begins at a turned newel and is carried by thin turned balusters. Around the stair-well

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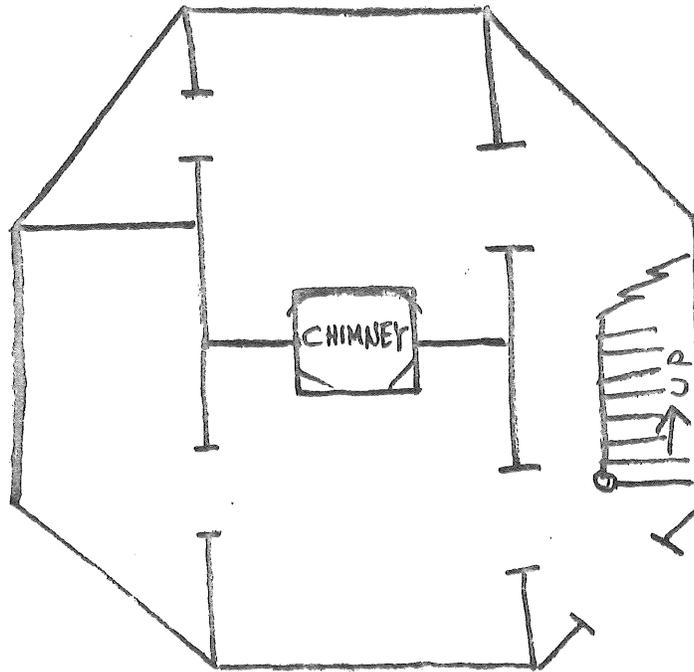
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on the second floor this same handrail is supported by square-in-section balusters.

No outbuildings associated with the house survive.



SKETCH OF FIRST-FLOOR PLAN
NOT TO SCALE

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input 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

A landmark in the broad, open farmland of Hyde County is the distinctive octagonal house known locally as the Inkwell or the Inkbottle House. It is traditionally described as having been built for Dr. William T. Sparrow in the 1850s. The two-story frame building is one of the few known examples in North Carolina of the octagonal mode of building popularized by Orson S. Fowler's book, The Octagon Mode: A House for All (1848). Intended to provide economical, safe housing, with greater economy of space, the octagon mode found expression throughout mid-nineteenth century America, a novel and interesting departure from the standard rectangular components of most buildings of the period. Despite some alterations, the Inkwell retains its notable form and floor plan, focused on a central chimney. It is one of the few surviving examples of the mid-nineteenth century octagon mode in the state.

Strong local tradition maintains that the Inkwell house near Lake Landing, also called the Inkbottle house, was built by Dr. William T. Sparrow sometime in the early 1850s. Sparrow is said to have built the eight-sided house after a hurricane destroyed his conventional one, in the belief that the octagonal form would give the house added protection from the storms that frequently battered Hyde County.

Although only a few octagonal houses were built in North Carolina, there was a widespread movement in the 1850s promoting the building of such houses. The leader of this movement was Orson S. Fowler, a New York phrenologist, educator, and reformer.² Although not a professional architect, Fowler and his book, The Octagon House: A Home for All, first published in 1848, led to the building of approximately 1,000 octagonal houses in the United States by 1857.³ It is not certain that Dr. Sparrow was familiar with the writings of Fowler, but it is clear that prior to the latter's efforts the octagon shape had been used only rarely in domestic architecture in this country. Fowler argued that the octagonal house was cheaper to build than conventional houses, permitted greater economy of space, admitted more sunlight, facilitated communication between rooms, eliminated square corners, and was in closer harmony to nature than rectangular houses. The octagonal house was⁴ Fowler's answer to the problem of providing economical, safe housing for the masses.

Dr. Sparrow married Elizabeth Jennett in 1847. They had three children, Ida, born in 1848, Robert, born in 1857, and Mary, born in 1859.⁵ Dr. Sparrow supplemented his medical income by extensive farming. In 1860 his farm was valued at \$3,000 and his produce included 2,000 bushels of corn.⁶ Elizabeth Sparrow died in 1860 and Dr. Sparrow died in 1866, without a will. Also in that year, Ida Sparrow married Francis M. Swindell, a Civil War veteran born in 1841. Swindell was appointed legal guardian of Robert Sparrow, and was also named to hold the property.

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In 1879 Swindell petitioned the Superior Court of Beaufort County for permission to sell the Sparrow property. This⁸ permission was granted and the property was sold to John S. Northan on May 13 for \$750. Northan was a prosperous Hyde County merchant and farmer, described as one of the wealthiest men ever produced in the county. The 1880 census credits Northan with land holdings of almost 200 acres, valued at \$2500. Most of his production was in corn and wheat. His wealth evidently came from a general store in the Lake Landing area.¹⁰ Northan died in 1904 of cancer, and was described by the Washington Progress as an "old landmark" and "perhaps the wealthiest man in Hyde County."¹¹

Northan never married. His will divided his property into eight parts, with all eight going to either a grand nephew or a grand niece, or, in two cases, to the children of a deceased grand niece. Court appointed commissioners awarded the "tract of land known as the Sparrow land," consisting of 110 acres to Ola Gibbs, the daughter of Northan's deceased grand niece Molly Gibbs.¹² Ola Gibbs married Charlie Lavender Payne on December 21, 1910.¹³ The property remained in the hands of the Payne family until recently, when it was purchased by Richard Barnes. The house has suffered from neglect in recent years, but there are plans to renovate it in the future.

FOOTNOTES

¹Hyde County Historical Society, Hyde County History (Hyde County Historical Society, 1976), Section 3-75, hereinafter cited as Hyde County History; Bill Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina (Raleigh: Sharpe Publishing Company, 1958), II, p. 902, hereinafter cited as Sharpe, New Geography of North Carolina.

²Orson S. Fowler, The Octagon House: A Home for All (New York: Dover Publications, 1973, reprint of 1853 revised edition), vii-viii, hereinafter cited as Fowler, The Octagon House. Phrenology was a would-be science that argued that character could be determined by analyzing the cranium. Fowler published the American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany, this country's leading phrenological journal.

³Fowler, The Octagon House, viii-xii. The decline of octagonal house building can be traced to the crippling Panic of 1857.

⁴Fowler, The Octagon House, vi, pp. 3-4.

⁵Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Population Schedule, Hyde County, North Carolina.

⁶Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Agriculture Schedule, Hyde County, North Carolina.

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⁷ Information provided by current owners; Louis H. Manarin (compiler), North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865: A Roster (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1968), II, pp. 722-724.

⁸ Hyde County Deeds, pp. 15-61.

⁹ Hyde County History, III-14; Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina, II, p. 905.

¹⁰ Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Agriculture Schedule, Hyde County, North Carolina; Levi Branson (ed.), Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1877-1878 (Raleigh: Levi Branson, 1878).

¹¹ Washington Progress, February 4, 1904.

¹² Hyde County Wills, 11-422; Hyde County Deeds, 28-304.

¹³ Hyde County Marriage Index.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Branson, Levi (ed.). Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1877-1878. Raleigh: Levi Branson, 1878.

Fowler, Orson S. The Octagon House: A Home for All. New York: Dover Publications, 1973 reprint of 1853 revised edition.

Hyde County Deed Books. Microfilm copy. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.42 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	_____	_____	_____
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	
C	_____	_____	_____

B	_____	_____	_____
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	
D	_____	_____	_____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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 Description prepared by Michael T. Southern, Survey Specialist
Significance prepared by Jim Sumner, Researcher

ORGANIZATION Division of Archives and History

DATE

STREET & NUMBER 109 East Jones Street

TELEPHONE 733-4763

CITY OR TOWN Raleigh

STATE North Carolina 27611

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE 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

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE January 12, 1978

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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

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Hyde County Historical Society. Hyde County History. Hyde County Historical Society, 1976.

Hyde County Marriage Index. Microfilm copy. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History.

Hyde County Will Books. Microfilm copy. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History.

Manarin, Louis H. (compiler). North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865: A Roster. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1968.

United States Census Office. Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Population Schedule, Agriculture Schedule, Hyde County, North Carolina. Microfilm copy. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History. Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Agriculture Schedule, Hyde County, North Carolina. Microfilm Copy. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History.

Washington Progress. February 4, 1904.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY

Middletown quad

(ENGELHARD WEST)

2'30"

MANNS HARBOR 42 MI.
ENGELHARD 2.7 MI.

S K E E T
WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Inkwell (Octagon House)
South side US 264, 0.5 mi. W of jct. with
US 264 & SR 1318
Amity vic., N.C., Hyde County

Latitude Longitude
35° 29' 03" 76° 03' 11"

