

# **Cape Lookout National Seashore**

## **Portsmouth Village**

# **Washington Roberts House**

## **Historic Structure Report**

### **Developmental History**

March 2012

Tommy H. Jones

Cultural Resources Division

Southeast Regional Office

National Park Service









**Cultural Resources  
Southeast Region  
National Park Service  
100 Alabama St. SW  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
(404) 562-3117**

The historic structure report presented here exists in two formats. A traditional, printed version is available for study at the park, the Southeastern Regional Office of the NPS (SERO), and at a variety of other repositories. For more widespread access, the historic structure report also exists in a web-based format through the SERO intranet, which includes links to individual files for a variety of photographs, documents, plans and other material used in compilation of the printed report.

2004  
Historic Structure Report  
Washington Roberts House  
Cape Lookout National Seashore  
Portsmouth, NC  
LCS#: 091783

Previous page: photo taken in 2002



---

# Contents

## Contents

## Foreword

## Management Summary

Administrative Data	2
Locational Data	2
Related Studies:	2
Cultural Resource Data	2

## Historical Background and Context

Portsmouth	3
Wallace and Whitehurst	7
Roberts and Ireland	8
Washington T. Roberts	9
Joe Abbot	11
The Site	13

## Chronology of Development and Use

Original Construction	15
Changes, c. 1896	17
Changes, c. 1910	17
Kitchen Wing	18
Main House	19
Modern Changes	20

## Physical Description

Associated Site Features	24
Foundation	25
Bracing	25
Chimney	26
Structural System	26
Kitchen Wing	28
Doors	28
Windows	30
Exterior Finishes	31
Siding	31
Trim	32
Paint	32

Porch	32	
Roofing	32	
Main Block Interior		33
Room 100	33	
Room 101	36	
Room 102	37	
Room 103	38	
Room 200	39	
Room 201	40	
Room 202	41	
Room 203	42	
Kitchen Wing		43
Room 104	44	
Room 105	45	
Room 106	45	

Bibliography	47
--------------	----

# Foreword

We are pleased to make available this developmental history of the Washington Roberts House, part of our ongoing effort to provide comprehensive documentation for the historic structures and landscapes of National Park Service units in the Southeast Field Area. Many individuals and institutions contributed to the successful completion of this work. We would particularly like to thank the staff at Cape Lookout National Seashore especially the park's superintendent Robert Vogel and park facility manager Mike McGee. In addition, local historian Ellen F. Cloud provided invaluable assistance by providing copies of her original deed and census research on Portsmouth and discussing her conclusions on the origins of the house. We hope that this study will prove valuable to park management and others in understanding and interpreting the historical and architectural significance of the Washington Roberts House and in ensuring the long-term preservation of this important cultural resource.

Dan Scheidt  
Chief, Cultural Resources Stewardship  
Southeast Regional Office  
October 2003



---

# Management Summary

One of only two antebellum structures that survive at Portsmouth, the Washington Roberts House is arguably the most significant residence left on the island. Unlike the contemporary Wallace-Grace House, the Roberts House retains most of its nineteenth-century features and, therefore, is the only structure on the island that relates to any significant degree to the village's heyday as an important seaport in the first half of the nineteenth century. The names associated with the property represent some of the earliest families on the island and include Wallace, Styron, Whitehurst, Ireland, and Roberts. Built before the Civil War and occupied until shortly before World War II, the house is the best-preserved example of the village's early architecture.<sup>1</sup>

Virtually abandoned after World War II, the house was long neglected, leading to significant deterioration and wide-spread loss of historic material. Recent work by the park's maintenance staff has stabilized the main house with a new wood-shingled roof and window sash. Siding was also replaced, but an inferior grade of wood was used and the replacement siding did not replicate the beading of the original siding. The interior remains in poor condition. In addition, the century-old kitchen wing, which was itself the last of what were typical additions to most of the nineteenth-century residences at Portsmouth, was allowed to

- 
1. The Wallace-Grace House was significantly altered in the 1920s.



**FIGURE 1.** View south-southwest of Portsmouth, c. 1969, with Roberts House site highlighted. (CALO Coll. C-09)

fall into ruin, and what was left of the structure collapsed during the wind and storm surge accompanying Hurricane Isabel as this report was being completed.

Given the nondestructive nature of building investigation during the course of this project and the lack of laboratory analysis of paint, mortar, and other materials, much remains to be learned about the Roberts House. It is assumed that the house has always been used residentially. Although the North Carolina SHPO's "Historic Structures Short Data Sheet" states that the house "may have been a tavern at one time," no evidence to support that suggestion has been located. However, use of the house as a "public house" where liquor could be had by the dram is certainly possible and might help explain some of what appear to be significant changes to the original structure that were made at a very early date.

The character of materials in the present building are characteristic of a building from the second quarter of the nineteenth century, most likely the 1840s. The character of the materials also suggests that the original structure was altered considerably before the Civil War, again in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and around 1910 when the kitchen wing was added. Few changes are evident after that period, except for those relating to efforts to stabilize the structure in the late twentieth century.

## Administrative Data

### Locational Data

**Building Name.** Washington Roberts House.

**Address.** Portsmouth, North Carolina

**Location.** Cape Lookout National Seashore.

**LCS #.** 091783

### Related Studies:

Atwell, Amy Elizabeth. "Cape Lookout National Seashore, Historical District of Portsmouth Village." Unpublished manuscript, 1991.

Cloud, Ellen Fulcher. *Portsmouth, The Way It Was*. Vol 3. Havelock, NC: The Print Shop, 1996.

Ehrenhard, John E. "Cape Lookout National Seashore: Assessment of Archeological and Historical Resources." SEAC, 1976.

Holland, F. Ross. *A Survey History of Cape Lookout National Seashore*. Department of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, 1968.

Olson, Sarah. "Historic Resource Study, Portsmouth Village, Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina." NPS-DSC, 1982.

Van Beck, Sara L. "Cape Lookout National Seashore, Archives and Records Management Review." NPS-SERO, 2000.

## Cultural Resource Data

**National Register of Historic Places.** Contributing structure in Portsmouth Historic District

**Period of Significance.** c. 1840-c. 1930

**Proposed Treatment.** Preservation



---

# Historical Background and Context

Dating to the mid-nineteenth century and named for its last occupant, the Washington Roberts House is one of two antebellum houses that remain at Portsmouth (the other is the Wallace-Grace House). The names associated with the property represent some of the earliest families on the island and include Wallace, Styron, Whitehurst, Ireland, and Roberts. Built during the village's heyday before the Civil War and occupied until shortly before World War II, the house is the best-preserved example of the village's early architecture.<sup>2</sup>

## Portsmouth

In 1753, the colonial assembly of North Carolina, authorized establishment of Portsmouth, which was to be laid out in half-acre lots "with convenient streets" on fifty acres at the north end of Core Banks. The site lay on the south side of Ocracoke Inlet, which at that time was the principal access into Pamlico Sound and the North Carolina coast. The Assembly also authorized a fort at the site, which because of its remote location was "liable to the Depredations of an Enemy in Time of War, and Insults from Pirates and other rude People in Time of Peace."<sup>3</sup> The first lots were bought in 1756, a tavern opened in 1757, and the fort was garrisoned in 1758.

The town flourished in the 1780s and 1790s, and by 1800 as many as 250 people were in residence, making Portsmouth the largest settlement on the Outer Banks. Recognizing the town's commercial importance, the Federal government established a

customs house at Portsmouth in 1806, provided for a marine hospital in 1827, and authorized a post office in 1840. In 1842, Congress appropriated money to buy land and build a permanent marine hospital at Portsmouth. Completed in 1847 "on the waterfront . . . at the junction of House [Horse?] Island Channel and the Southwest Creek," the hospital was a two-story building, 50' by 90', and the largest structure ever built in Portsmouth.<sup>4</sup> By 1850, the town had a population of 463, a number which included 117 slaves. The town reached the zenith of its growth in 1860 when it had more than 600 residents and 109 dwellings.

On the eve of the Civil War, however, Portsmouth's importance as a port was already in decline. A slow-moving hurricane on September 7-8, 1846, re-opened Hatteras Inlet some twenty miles north of Ocracoke, which provided much better access to the central coast of North Carolina. The new inlet soon began drawing traffic away from the shifting channels of Ocracoke Inlet, beginning a long period of decline for Portsmouth.

The Marine Hospital was closed in 1860, the same year that Edmund Ruffin (1794-1865), the noted agricultural reformer, visited Portsmouth and described the town in *Agricultural, Geological, and Descriptive Sketches of Lower North Carolina, and the Similar Adjacent Lands*:

The occupations of the whole resident population of Portsmouth are connected with the vessels which have to wait here. Pilots, and families and adult males--and the remainder are the few who as shopkeepers, &c., are necessary to minister to the wants of the others. If Ocracoke inlet should be closed by sand (which

- 
2. The Wallace-Grace House was significantly altered in the 1920s.
  3. Sarah Olson, *Historic Resource Study, Portsmouth Village, Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina* (NPS, 1982), p. 27.

- 
4. Sarah Olson, *Historic Resource Study, Portsmouth Village, Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina* (U. S. Department of Interior, 1982), p. 76.

is no improbable event) the village of Portsmouth would disappear--or (like Nagshead) remain only for its other use, as a summer retreat for transient visitors, sought for health and sea-bathing.<sup>5</sup>

Evacuated during the Civil War, Portsmouth never fully recovered its population or its economic vitality after the war and the customs house was moved to New Bern in 1867. The government attempted to sell the old hospital building but was unsuccessful and allowed the U. S. Signal Corps to use it as a weather station between 1876 and 1885.<sup>6</sup>

5. Edmund Ruffin, *Agricultural, Geological, and Descriptive Sketches of Lower North Carolina, and the Similar Adjacent Lands*. (Raleigh, NC: Institution for the Deaf & Dumb & The Blind, 1861).
6. Sarah Olson, *Historic Resource Study, Portsmouth Village, Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina* (U. S. Department of Interior, 1982), p. 76.

As Portsmouth's population declined, the number of residential buildings in the town dwindled as well, falling from a peak of 109 in 1860, to 59 in 1870, to 44 in 1880. By 1883, as Ruffin predicted, the shifting sands of the Outer Banks had closed Ocracoke Inlet to all but the smallest vessels, forcing a dwindling population to find other means of making a livelihood.

The United States Life-Saving Service's establishment of a station at Portsmouth in 1894 gave a boost to the community, offering employment to a few residents of the village. Washington Roberts, whose family had lived at Portsmouth for at least three generations, worked at the station for nearly thirty years, and Jesse Babb was employed for over ten years, first as a cook and then as a surfman and mechanic. Others, including George Dixon, worked as temporary substitutes on

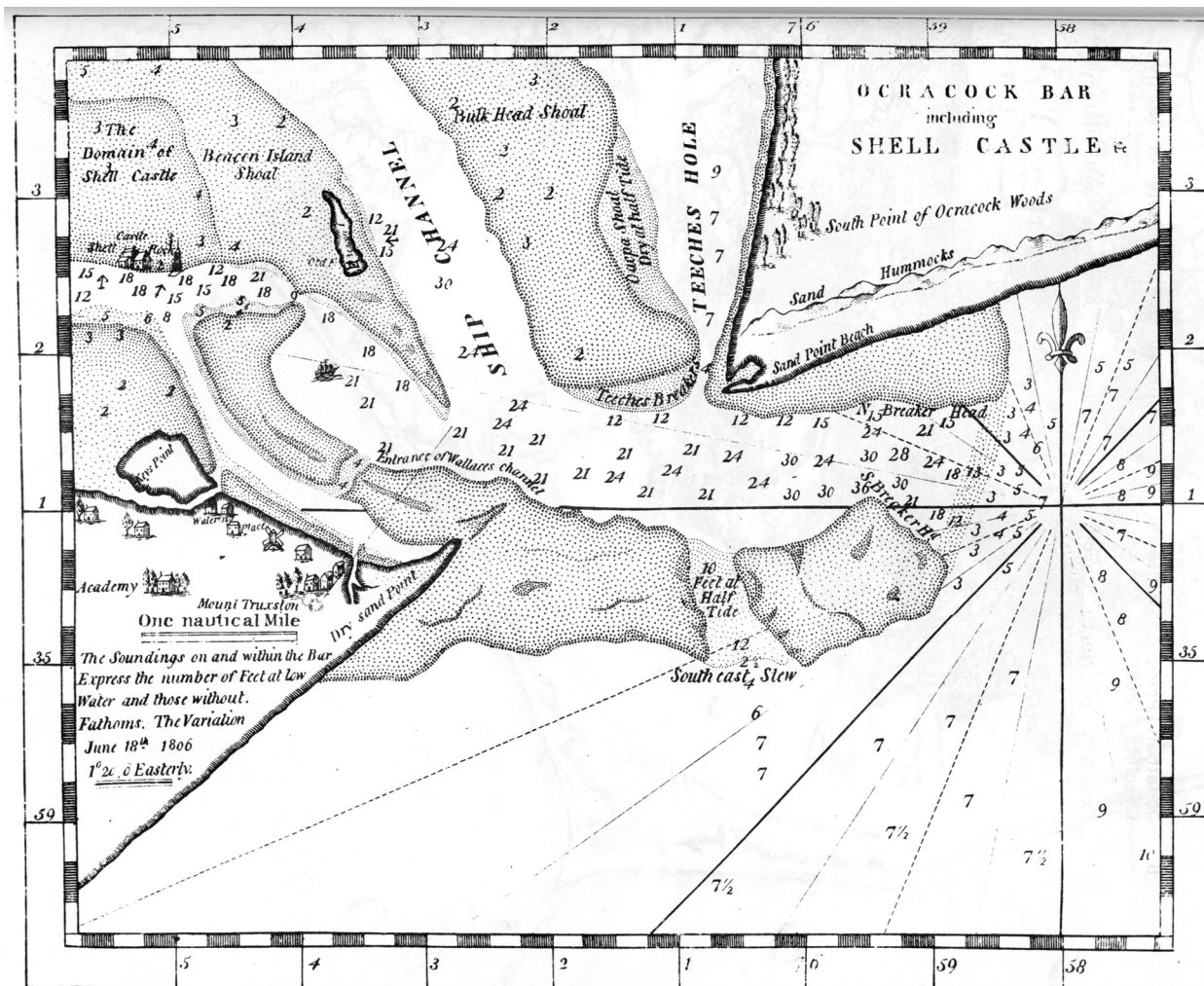


FIGURE 2. Map of "Ocracoke Bar and Shell Castle," Thomas Coles and Jonathan Price, 1806. Site of Roberts House is just east of "Academy" noted at extreme left on this map. (Library of Congress)

occasion. Most continued to make a living as fishermen, although that became an increasingly precarious existence as competition increased and over-fishing depleted stock. The Portsmouth Fisheries Company opened a cannery on Casey Island in 1916 and provided some work until it closed the operation in the 1920s.

In addition, some residents benefited from the hunting clubs that were established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1900, the great flocks of water fowl that wintered on Pamlico Sound were attracting large numbers of wealthy sportsmen from Baltimore, New York and elsewhere, many of whom maintained hunting lodges on the Outer Banks. The Pilentary Club on Core Banks, ten miles southwest of Portsmouth, and the Harbor Island Club off Cedar Island were two of the best known, but up and down the Banks, residents worked as guides and cooks and provided other services for hunters and their clubs.

Hurricanes and “nor’easters,” which could be as severe as hurricanes, appeared regularly, flooding

the entire island and causing tremendous damage. After back-to-back storms in the summer of 1842, for instance, only one house was said to have remained standing at Portsmouth.<sup>7</sup> The 1890s were an extremely busy decade for the Atlantic seaboard with four major hurricanes sweeping the coast from Georgia northward, including the great “Sea Islands Hurricane” that killed as many as 2,000 people in Georgia and South Carolina in 1893. Perhaps the worst along the Outer Banks was the “San Ciriaco” hurricane, which held the record for the longest-lived storm until tied by Hurricane Ginger in 1971.<sup>8</sup> Beginning in the tropical Atlantic on August 4, 1899, it was a Category 4 storm when it devastated Puerto Rico on August 8 and remained a Category 3 storm when it struck the North Carolina coast ten days later. Passing over Bermuda, it reached the Azores as a Category 1 storm before finally dissipating in early September. The hurricane brought winds of

7. Draft HRS, citing David Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 62.
8. See <<http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/hurdat/>>.

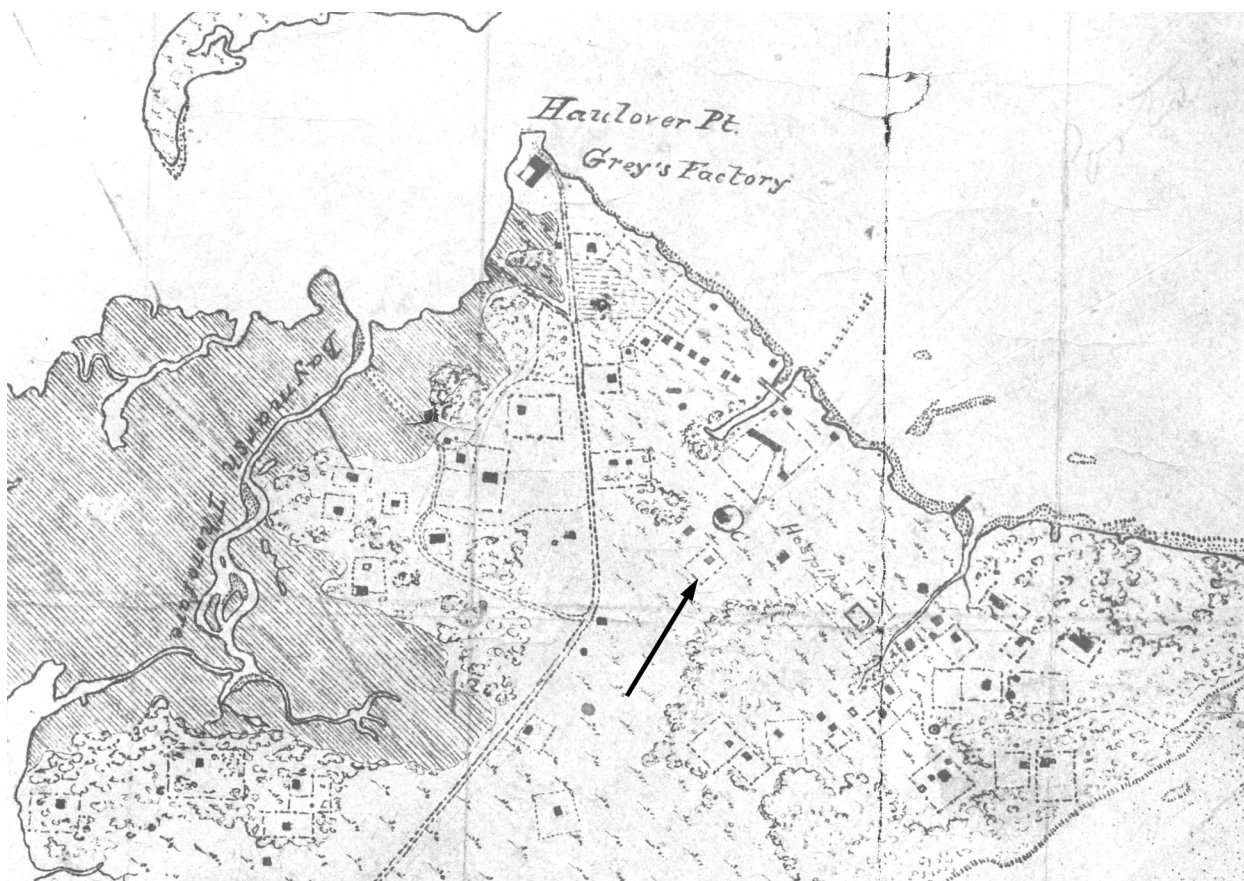


FIGURE 3. Topographical Survey of Portsmouth, 1866. Arrow locates Roberts House and lot. (CALO Coll.)

140 m.p.h. at Hatteras before the anemometer blew away. There was tremendous damage up and down the Outer Banks, and the storm precipitated permanent abandonment of Diamond City and the other settlements that had grown up on Shackleford Banks near Cape Lookout in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Portsmouth, too, was heavily damaged, with both churches destroyed, houses off their foundations, and over 9" of water inside the Life-Saving Station, which occupied some of the highest ground on the Island.<sup>9</sup> Some residents abandoned Portsmouth after that, but there were still nearly 150 residents enumerated in the 1900 census. When another major storm destroyed the Methodist church again in September 1913, the community remained strong enough to support its reconstruction, although that did not occur until the summer of 1915.<sup>10</sup>

The year 1933 set a record for the most hurricanes or tropical storms to form in the Atlantic basin, a

record that stood until 2005, and two of those storms affected Portsmouth. On August 23, 1933, a moderate hurricane swept up the Outer Banks, dumping rain but not with particularly strong winds on Portsmouth. The interior of the Coast Guard station was flooded and much of the wharf destroyed, but for once the telephone line was not damaged. Less than a month later, on September 15-16, a strong Category 3 hurricane swept the Outer Banks. Portsmouth endured 100 m.p.h. winds, torrential rain, and a storm surge that flooded most of the island and destroyed many houses. The families of some of the surfmen at the Portsmouth Coast Guard Station sought refuge at the station, but it was soon flooded with nearly a foot of water on the first floor. At the height of the storm, the officer in charge recorded in the station log the next day, the entire building "was surging badly and expected to go away."<sup>11</sup> The building held, but there was terrible damage all over Portsmouth. The Red Cross finally arrived with much-needed supplies on September 28, but according to one resident, who witnessed waves crashing through her dining room

---

9. Station Log, August 16-19, 1899.

10. Station Log, August 10 and September 13, 1915.

---

11. Station Log, September 15, 1933.



FIGURE 5. View to north of Portsmouth from Coast Guard Station, 1920s. (CALO Coll. A-08)

windows, the damage was so widespread that "everybody just left."<sup>12</sup>

The Core Bank Coast Guard station, which was built in 1895 using the same design as the Portsmouth station, was so badly damaged by the storm that part of its crew was assigned to Portsmouth in February 1934 while the Core Banks building was being repaired.<sup>13</sup> The station at Bodie Island was also heavily damaged and had to be abandoned for over a year before repairs could be made.<sup>14</sup>

With this drain on its resources, the Coast Guard delayed major repairs to the Portsmouth station indefinitely. The station did continue to operate, however, until it was finally deactivated on June 1, 1937, depriving Portsmouth of another reason for being. The station was reactivated in 1942, but by then, there were only forty-two permanent residents of the town. In September 1944, the "Great Atlantic Hurricane," another Category 3 storm, came ashore near Cape Hatteras, sinking two Coast Guard cutters near Oregon Inlet, killing forty-seven people and flooding Portsmouth again. By the end of World War II, even more residents of Portsmouth had relocated to the mainland.

The Coast Guard permanently closed their station at Portsmouth in 1946, and by 1950 the village had only fourteen year-round residents. The post office was discontinued in 1959; and by the time Cape Lookout National Seashore was authorized in 1966, only a handful of permanent residents remained. With the death of the village's last surviving male resident, Henry Pigott, in 1971, the only other residents, Elma Dixon and Marion Babb, moved to the mainland and Portsmouth was abandoned except for seasonal use.

## Wallace and Whitehurst

Title to the property on which the Washington Roberts House was built has been established to the earliest days of the town when it was part of a tract of 100 acres that David Wallace bought in 1767.<sup>15</sup>

12. Olson, p. 93.

13. Station Log, February 14, 1934.

14. Joseph K. Opperman, *Bodie Island Coast Guard Station Historic Structure Report* (NPS, 2005).

The houses (and the windmill) that Wallace and other family members built on this land along the north side of Portsmouth were prominent landmarks in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.<sup>16</sup> After David Wallace's death in 1808, his property was divided and his seven children drew lots for their inheritance. By that time, however, Wallace's son Robert was already dead, and in 1812, Robert Wallace's heirs petitioned the court to appraise and subdivide their portion of the estate, which included one of the "front lots" along the shore, valued at \$300, and a "back lot," valued at \$100 and which probably included the site of the present Washington Roberts House. Robert Wallace's heirs also inherited the windmill, valued at \$250, and an acre of land around it, but only as long as the windmill was operated, after which the property would revert to Nancy Wallace Borden.

It is also significant that the houses of David Wallace, Sr., David Wallace, Jr., and the widow of

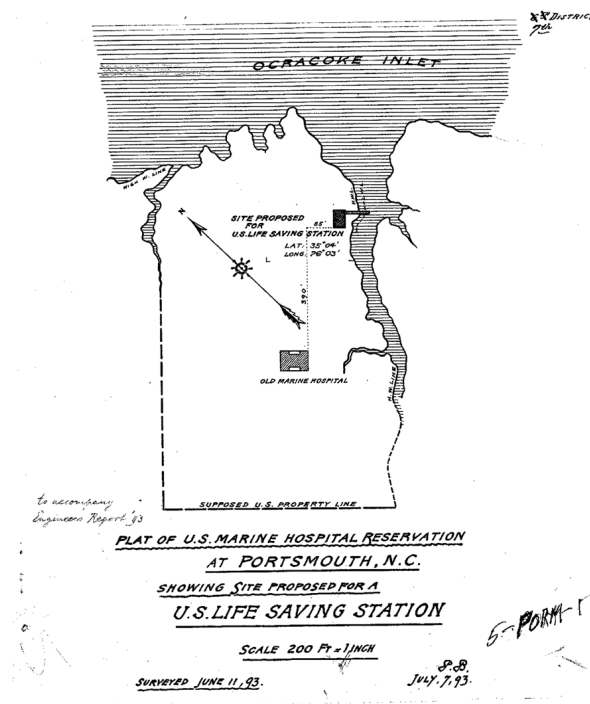


FIGURE 7. "Plat of U. S. Marine Hospital Reservation at Portsmouth, N. C.," showing location of new life-saving station, July 1893. (National Archives and Records Administration, Philadelphia, Record Group 26)

15. Documentation for much of the complex land transactions surrounding the present property was supplied by Ellen F. Cloud, a local historian whose generous sharing of her research has greatly expedited the current study.
16. See, e.g., Tatham's map of 1808 in Olson, p. 114-115.

Robert Wallace were all located on Lot #1 but were described in the estate papers as being “free and unconnected” with the land on which they stood. Similar transactions where the house was deemed “portable” and not attached to the land have been documented around Cape Lookout in the early twentieth century, indicating what may have been a relatively common practice on the Outer Banks.<sup>17</sup>

In October 1823, Robert Wallace’s sons-in-law James Howard and Littleton Styron sold part of the property to Alpheus Whitehurst for \$325. The property was described as containing “one-fifth of the land which fell to the heirs of Robert Wallace from David Wallace, dec’d,” a description that recurs in later nineteenth and early twentieth century deeds for the property.<sup>18</sup> It appears that Alpheus Whitehurst and his wife Abigail built a house on the property, if one was not already present, and were living there when Alpheus died, sometime before 1840.<sup>19</sup> While their house was probably not the same house that exists today, as will be discussed in the following section of this report, Abigail and her daughter Elizabeth may have continued to occupy the property after Alpheus’ death, but in May 1849 she sold it and moved to New Bern.<sup>20</sup>

## Roberts and Ireland

John G. Roberts paid \$300 for the property together with “the buildings improvements [sic],” which was the first mention of buildings on the property.<sup>21</sup> Roberts was a mariner born about 1807, and with his wife Betsy and a young pilot named Wilson Pilver, he appears to have been occupying the property when the Federal census was taken in 1850. By 1860, however, Roberts had apparently sold the property to his nephew David Ireland.<sup>22</sup>

Born about 1824, Ireland was the son of Earls Ireland and his wife Matilda Roberts Ireland, who appears to have been the sister of John G. Roberts. A mariner, Ireland married Mary F. Davis in February 1849, and in July of that year, he bought a house on the southwest side of the village near Sheep Island from John Roberts. When the 1850 Federal census of Portsmouth was taken, the couple was listed, no doubt in their new home, along with four-year-old Martha Styron, whose relationship within the extended family has not been documented. Sometime later that year, Mary Ireland gave birth to their first child, a daughter named Madora. Three more daughters were born to the couple by the time the Federal census was taken in 1860. By then, the Irelands were occupying the present Washington Roberts House.

With the outbreak of civil war in 1861, the Confederate government took immediate steps to improve coastal defenses, but to no avail. Several companies of soldiers originally stationed at Fort Ocracoke on Beacon Island were ordered to Hatteras when it came under attack in August 1861, with shelling that could be heard at Portsmouth. Most of the Confederate defenders were captured when Hatteras fell on August 29, but David Ireland had already brought news of the arrival of the Union ships, having sailed past Hatteras on his way home.

By the time Federal troops arrived off Portsmouth in mid-September, Fort Ocracoke on Beacon Island had long since been abandoned, as had virtually all of Portsmouth. The fort was destroyed by the Federals in October, and at the same time, schooners were sunk in the channels of Ocracoke Inlet, effectively closing it to any traffic. Some residents returned to the island during the war, but just thirty adult males between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five were listed in a census of Portsmouth in 1863. David Ireland was not among them. He is thought to have been a privateer during the Civil War, running the Federal blockade and bringing desperately needed goods into Wilmington. He is even said to have sunk his own ship at one time to prevent its falling into Federal hands.<sup>23</sup>

After the war, Portsmouth regained barely half of its pre-war population. Although David Ireland's parents and several of the Roberts clan returned,

---

17. Carteret County Deed Book S, p. 38.

18. Carteret County Deed Book T, p. 118.

19. When Samuel Dudley sold land for the Methodist Church in 1840, the deed noted that property as being 100 yards northeast of Abigail Whitehurst's residence, which corresponds to the site of the Roberts House. See Carteret County Deed Book Y, p. 50.

20. 1860 Federal Census, Craven Co., NC, #360.

21. Carteret County Deed Book Z, p. 430.

22. No deed for this transaction has been located, but the census suggests that Ireland was already occupying the house in 1860.

23. Ellen Fulcher Cloud, *Portsmouth, The Way It Was* (Havelock, NC: Print Shop, 1996), p. 66.

Ireland himself did not. He remained a seaman, and in 1870, he and his family were residing in Beaufort. Apparently prosperous, he claimed \$3,000 in personal property in the Federal census of that year.

Who lived in the Roberts-Ireland house after it was vacated by the Irelands is not certain, but it seems unlikely that it was left unoccupied.<sup>24</sup> One of the more substantial, well-built houses on the island, the house was considered a “storm house” where neighbors could safely take shelter; with an excellent location, it would have been attractive to any number of the island's dwindling population. Although Ireland continued to hold title to the property until 1896, the order in which the 1870 and 1880 censuses were taken suggests that Ireland's uncle George Washington Roberts and his family occupied the house after the Civil War.

The son of John and Delila Roberts and youngest brother of John G. Roberts, George Washington Roberts was born about 1826 and married Jane T. Davis about 1850.<sup>25</sup> Their first child was born about 1851, and they had at least seven more children before the birth of their last child, Washington T. “Wash” Roberts, in February 1873.<sup>26</sup> Shipping had virtually ceased by that time, and in the 1880 census, George Roberts' occupation is listed only as “sailor.” The date of his death has not been documented; but in the 1900 census, his widow listed the years of their marriage as 47, indicating that her husband died around 1897.

## Washington T. Roberts

His father and other family members were pilots and “mariners”; but by the time Wash Roberts came of age in the 1890s, there was little demand for such

work in Portsmouth. A few residents found part-time work as guides for the tourists who began

frequenting the Outer Banks for recreational hunting and fishing in the 1890s and early 1900s, but most of the village's residents depended on fishing for their livelihood.

In 1894, probably in August or September, the U. S. Life-Saving Service completed its long-awaited life-saving station near the site of the old marine hospital at Portsmouth. Ferdinand G. Terrell was appointed keeper and made his first entries in the station's log on September 30, 1894. By early November, he had hired a crew of “surfmen,” one of whom was Washington Roberts. Like many Portsmouth residents of his generation, many of whom were only marginally employed, Wash Roberts had jumped at the chance of employment



FIGURE 8. Photograph of Washington Roberts (standing right of center) and one of his boats, c. 1925. (CALO Coll. B-51)



FIGURE 10. Crew of Portsmouth Life-Saving Station, with keeper Charles McWilliams, seated, and Washington Roberts, standing at left, c. 1910. (CALO Coll. B-55)

24. Amy Elizabeth Atwell, "Cape Lookout National Seashore, Historical District of Portsmouth," p. 39, states that Ireland occupied the house until it was sold to Washington Roberts in the late 1890s. Federal census information, however, shows that Ireland did not return to Portsmouth after the war but located in Beaufort.
25. Jane Davis' middle name was probably her mother's maiden name, which may have been Tolson, and was probably Washington T. Roberts' middle name as well.
26. Father and son are sometimes confused since the elder Roberts apparently went by his middle name as a young man.





FIGURE 12. Louie Dixon on porch of Carl Dixon House, c. 1930. The house was built by Wash Roberts in the first quarter of the 20th century.



FIGURE 13. View of Ed Styron House, built by Washington Roberts and Cecil Gilgo about 1934. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

by the Life-Saving Service, and by 1901, he was Surfman #1, a position he held until after World War I.<sup>27</sup> At first, employment was seasonal, running from September 1 through April 30 until 1897, when it was extended from August 1 to May 31. After the

27. Roberts' Coast Guard career, including dates of employment, has not been fully documented in Coast Guard records.

Life-Saving Service became part of the new U. S. Coast Guard in 1915, the station was manned year-round.

Wash Roberts was also a skilled carpenter and boat builder and is reported to have been the community's resident coffin maker. Among the houses he is thought to have built which are still standing at Portsmouth are the Carl Dixon House and the Ed Styron House. It is possible that he also constructed the kitchen wing on his own house around 1900, but that has not been documented.

Wash Roberts never married and continued to live with his mother and his two older sisters, Angie and Jonsie, who also never married. It was perhaps the death of his father and a regular income from the Life-Saving Service that precipitated Wash Roberts' acquisition of the house in which he apparently lived most of his life. Although Roberts' cousin David Ireland had not lived at Portsmouth for over thirty years, he appears to have retained title to the family home until September 1896 when he finally sold it to Wash Roberts for \$100. The legal description of the property continued the same language that first appeared when Littleton Styron sold the property to Alpheus Whitehurst in 1823: "beginning at west corner of James Howard's ditch . . . so far as to contain one fifth of the land which fell to heirs of Robert Wallace."<sup>28</sup>

Wash Roberts' mother died in October 1913, and it was the crew at the life-saving station that made her coffin and helped carry her remains back to Cedar island for burial.<sup>29</sup> His sister Angie died not long after that, but Roberts' oldest sister Jonsie continued living with him as did their sister Jennie after her husband's death around 1920. Wash Roberts retired from the Coast Guard in 1925, but continued to build houses, boats, and, presumably, coffins as well. The September 1933 hurricane did tremendous damage to Portsmouth, and the experience was so traumatic for many Portsmouth residents that they moved off the island rather than rebuild. An even stronger storm raked Portsmouth in 1944, but by then Washington Roberts and his sister had moved to Oriental, NC. He is thought to have died and been buried at Washington, NC.

28. Carteret County Deed Book UU, p. 276.

29. Portsmouth Life-Saving Station Log, October 29, 1913.



## Joe Abbot

According to one of the park's oral interviews in 1979, when Wash and his sister move to the mainland in the 1930s, they "allowed their beloved friend Joe Abbot to move in" the Roberts House "as a gesture of affection."<sup>30</sup> Abbot, who was born around 1869 at Portsmouth, was a contemporary of Washington Roberts, and at least by 1900, he was living next door to or very near the Roberts' house. It is quite possible that he and Wash Roberts had been friends since childhood.

Unusual among Portsmouth residents in the twentieth century, Abbot was African-American, the son of Rose Ireland, who was apparently born as a slave of Earls Ireland. The 1900 and 1910 census list Joe, his mother, and siblings as "mulatto," and one local historian has compiled documentation suggesting that Rose was actually the daughter of Earls Ireland. It is possible that a family relationship was the basis for the long and close friendship of Joe Abbot and Wash Roberts, and the reason that Joe's mother and siblings were some of the very few African-Americans who remained at Portsmouth after the Civil War.<sup>31</sup>

Joe Abbot may have been born in the Irelands' house, since he, his mother, and siblings were

enumerated as part of the household of Earls Ireland in the 1870 census. Rose's surname and that of her children, including Joe, was given as Ireland in 1870 and again in 1880, even though by then they were no longer enumerated in the Irelands' household. Joe has not been located in the 1880 census, but in 1900 he was again enumerated with his mother. However, in 1900, the surname of Rose, Joe, and his sister Leah was given as Pigott, a very common surname in Beaufort in the late nineteenth century. While Leah's children continued to go by Pigott, no marriage record has been located for Rose, and it is possible that the census taker made an error in applying the name to Joe and his mother.

A mistake was apparently not made in 1910, however, when Joe gave his last name as Abbot, which it would remain for the rest of his life. Why he changed his name in his middle years is again not known. The only other Abbots known to have lived at Portsmouth was the family of Jeremiah Abbot, who operated a grocery at Portsmouth from the late 1860s to at least the early 1880s. What connection, if any, there might have been between Joe and this family is not known.

In the 1900 census, Joe listed his occupation simply as "cook," but in 1910, he listed it as "clubhouse cook." Circumstantial evidence suggests that Joe Abbot was employed by the Pileitary Hunting Club, located about ten miles south of Portsmouth.<sup>32</sup> The Pileitary Club was one of seven



FIGURE 14. View of Portsmouth in 1969, with arrow indicating location of Washington Roberts House. (CALO Coll. C-01)

30. Dominick & Dixon interview, 1979.

31. Cloud, pp. 98-100.

such clubs, each with elaborate clubhouses, that were established in eastern Carteret County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Attracted by the prolific water fowl on Core Sound, wealthy northern hunters provided a major economic boost to the area and provided much-needed employment for many area residents as guides, cooks, maids, and laundresses.

By the end of World War I, the hunting clubs were in decline, and Joe Abbot was unemployed when the census was taken in 1920. By 1930, he was again employed as a cook, this time at the Portsmouth Coast Guard Station. He may have remained employed there until the station closed in 1937. When Abbot moved into Wash Roberts' house is not known, but it may have been as early as 1933. The Roberts apparently left much of their furniture

in the house, including a four-poster bed.<sup>33</sup> According to one source, Wash Roberts "treasured Joe's friendship so much, that he gave Joe a ring made of gold wire with three stones, possibly blue topaz, set in it. Inscribed on the ring are the words 'from one who loves you.'"<sup>34</sup>

Joe Abbot is reported to have lived in the Roberts House "for many years and took tender care of it."<sup>35</sup> The date of Abbot's death has not been documented, but after he died, the house was apparently abandoned. Joe's nephew Henry Pigott, who would be one of the island's last permanent residents, took what furniture he wanted from the house, sold the rest, and the house slowly fell into disrepair.

---

32. Ben H. Salter, *Portsmouth Island, Short Stories and History*, (no publishing data, 1972), p. 31; Atwell, p. 40.

33. Marion Gray Babb to Pam Stuart, January 20, 1982, transcript of telephone conversation in park files.

34. Atwell, p. 40.

35. Ibid.

# Chronology of Development and Use

Given the nondestructive nature of building investigation during the course of this project and the lack of laboratory analysis of paint, mortar, and other materials, much remains to be learned of the Roberts House. It is assumed that the house has always been used residentially, but the North Carolina SHPO's "Historic Structures Short Data Sheet" states that the house "may have been a tavern at one time." While there is no documentation for that suggestion, use of the house as a "public house" where liquor could be had by the dram is certainly possible and might help explain some of what appear to be significant changes to the original structure that were made at a very early date.

The character of materials in the present building suggest that the original structure was altered considerably before the Civil War, again in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and around 1910 when the kitchen wing was added. Few changes are

evident after that period, except for those relating to efforts to stabilize the structure in the late twentieth century. In 2006, the house remains unused and closed to the public.

## The Site

Local historians have established a chain of title to the property which begins with "Governor" David Wallace's purchase in 1767 of one hundred acres encompassing most of Portsmouth.<sup>36</sup> This connection and the obvious antiquity of the present building have led to suggestions that the house was built by one of Wallace's children, perhaps as early as the 1790s. However, material evidence in the present building and circumstantial historical documenta-

36. Local historian Ellen Cloud kindly provided copies of several deeds related to the property.

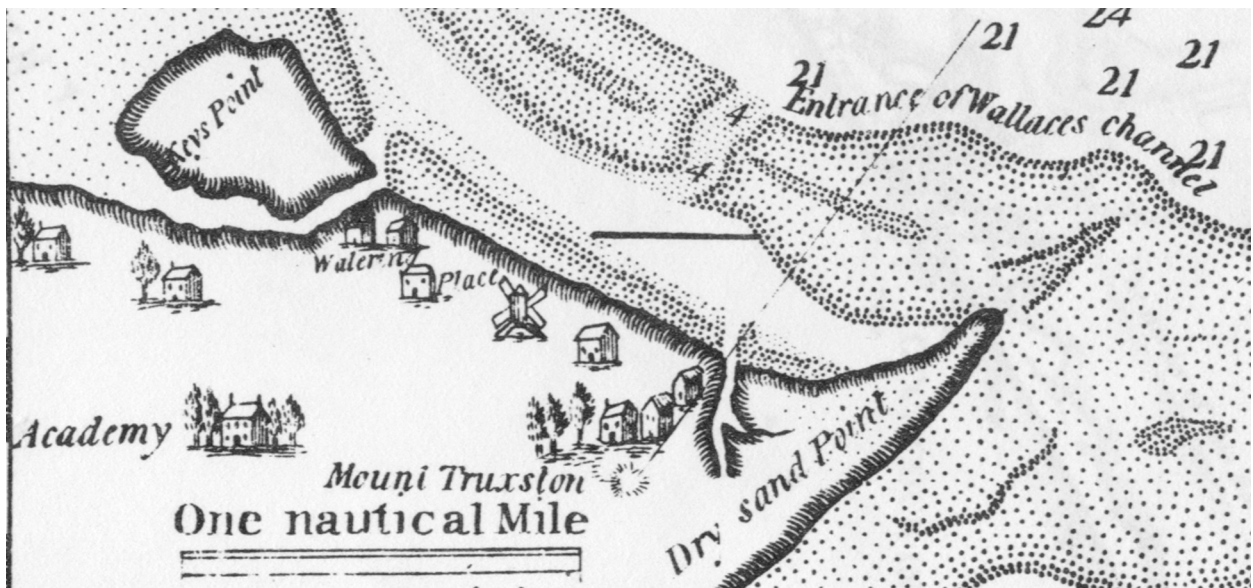


FIGURE 15. Detail of Price's map of Portsmouth, 1806, showing development on Wallace's "front lots," while the apparent site of the Roberts House is undeveloped. (Library of Congress.)

tion suggest that the house dates to the late 1840s or early 1850s. It is clear from the historical record that the site of the Roberts House has been occupied at least since the 1820s when Alpheus Whitehurst bought the property from the heirs of Robert Wallace whose father, David Wallace, in turn had owned the property since the 1760s.

When Washington Roberts gained title to the house in 1896, the recorded legal description repeated the same language used when the heirs of Robert Wallace sold the property to Alpheus Whitehurst in 1823, with both referencing the “west corner of James Howard’s ditch. . . so far as to contain one one-fifth of the land which fell to heirs of Robert Wallace.”<sup>37</sup> Precisely how much land this included is not clear, but it was likely less than two acres. Remnants of a wire fence are evident on the north and west sides of the site and probably represent the historic property boundaries. Aerial photographs of Portsmouth in the 1960s document apparent differences in vegetation that may also relate to the historic boundaries of the property.

The U. S. Geological Survey’s 1948 map of Portsmouth (revised 1983) as well as the aerial photo-

graphs also document the route of a road or driveway running in a southwesterly direction from east of the Roberts House site. This route, which has apparently disappeared from the landscape, would have provided another route to the community along the Straight Road that avoided the marshes of Doctor’s Creek on the northwest side of the site and may have been one reason the house’s main facade was reportedly oriented to the south.

Oral interviews conducted by the park in the late 1970s and early 1980s recalled gardens east and south of the house and a stable standing to the southeast.<sup>38</sup> Interviews also document the house’s historic cisterns, with the most recent described as a circular cistern located near the end of the kitchen. An earlier, “wooden, coffin-like” cistern was also described at the end of the main house next to the kitchen wing, but the only evidence for its existence is the notched hurricane brace to the main house that was apparently altered to provide a support for the cistern.<sup>39</sup>

38. Interview with Ellen Cloud, May 1, 2002; park interviews with Marion Gray Babb and Clara Salter, August 5, 1979.

39. Babb and Salter interview, August 5, 1979. Directional notations in the transcription of this interview are confusing and may be in error.

37. Careteret County Deed Book UU, p. 276.



FIGURE 16. View south-southwest of Portsmouth, c. 1969, with Roberts House site highlighted. (CALO Coll. C-09)

Of special interest on the site now is a large, low mound in front of the house. This may be only a natural feature of the landscape, but if so, it is curious that the house was not built on that slightly-higher ground.

Prior to construction of the present kitchen wing around the turn of the last century, a free-standing kitchen building is thought to have existed west of the house. There would also have been a privy, although there is no documentation for its location. There has been no archaeological survey of the property, but the presence of significant archaeological resources is very likely.

## Original Construction

There is no historical documentation for the present house's original construction. The first certain documentation that a building existed on the property is the reference to "building improvements" in Whitehurst's deed to Roberts in 1849, improvements that almost certainly included the present structure (minus the kitchen wing).

Reports of a hurricane that struck Portsmouth in 1842 stated that only one building was left standing on the island<sup>40</sup>, and while the present house could have been that survivor, that does not seem likely. In particular, the use of machine-sawn lumber for sills and posts would be unusual in residential construction in the 1820s, which is the most likely date for construction of the first house on the site. As one scholar of regional building practices has noted, sills, plates, tie beams, and corner posts "were often too thick and too long for most early nineteenth century saw mills to cut."<sup>41</sup> As a result, most builders utilized at least some hewn timbers until very late in the antebellum period, and no hewn lumber is evident in the Roberts House. However, given dimensions of framing members and characteristics of the joinery and of certain finish details such as the use of beaded siding, it is also unlikely that the house was built after the Civil War. Considering the property's chain of title, it seems most likely that the

Roberts House was constructed by the Whitehursts in the mid- to late-1840s or by John G. Roberts around 1850.

The original house included only the main block of the present structure, probably including a full-width porch on the south side and perhaps on the north side as well. Although there are no piers remaining in the ground on the north side, as there are on the south side, missing siding above the windows on the north side could indicate removal of a porch roof. A porch would certainly not have been unexpected on that side of the house, since it would offer a clear, unobstructed view of the main shipping channel and the port facilities to the north, a view that would have been of more than passing interest to almost every resident of Portsmouth in the mid-nineteenth century.

Although the original wood-shingled roof has been replaced, most of the building's present wood frame, interior flooring, and the siding that was replaced in 2003 appear to have been part of original construction. Some of the window sash appear to be original as well, although it is possible that window openings in the house, as it was originally constructed, did not have sash but only solid wooden shutters. Two generations of sash are evident in the present building, both dating to the nineteenth century. Both are quite similar, having through-mortises between stiles and rails. The primary difference is the use of 1" thick stock for stiles and rails in some windows and 1-1/8" stock in others. The presence of these two sets of sash suggests the possibility of significant damage, perhaps during one of the hurricanes that periodically ravaged the island or when the house was vacated along with the rest of the community during the Civil War.

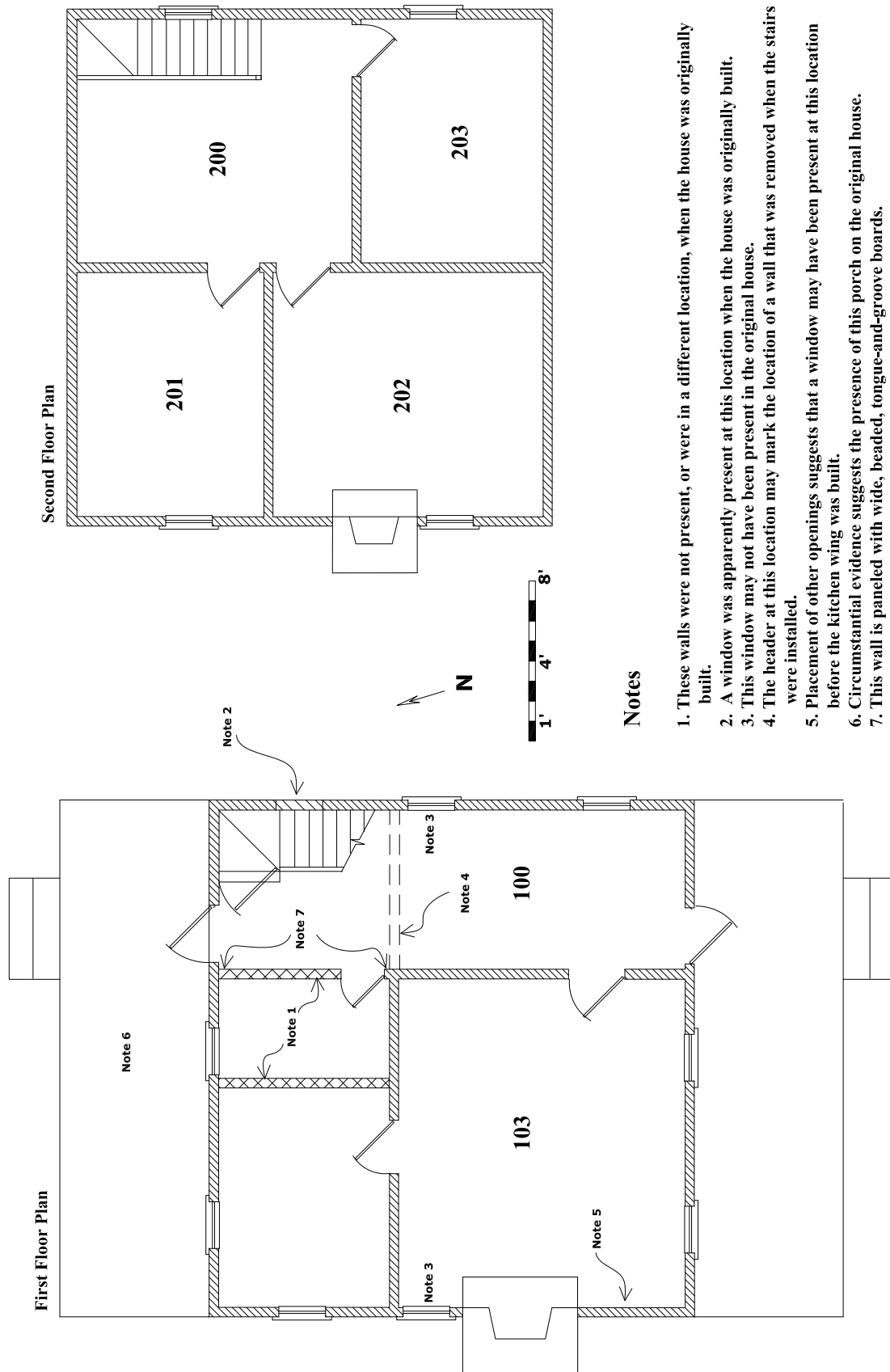
Doors were almost certainly board-and-batten, probably similar to the one that survives at the door to Room 102. Wrought-iron hooks or pintels are set into the exterior casing of the north entrance door and no doubt held strap hinges for an outward-swinging, board-and-batten door.

Less clear is the original floor plan of the house (see Figure 16). The fact that baseboards run behind the east and west walls of Room 101 indicates that those walls were constructed (or reconstructed) after the house was originally constructed. The east wall of Room 103 may be in its original location, but that is

40. See summary of hurricanes in draft Historic Resource Study being developed as of this writing.

41. Catherine Bishir, et.al. *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building*. (University of NC Press, 1990).

FIGURE 17. Plan explaining some of the changes to the original house. (T. Jones, SERO-CRD, 2003.



not certain. The cross wall that forms the north wall of Room 103 and which corresponds to the beam running north to south in the floor framing is probably in its original location. In addition, what appears to be a closed window opening near the north end of the east wall of the house is now blocked by the stairwell, suggesting that the stairway is not in its original location.

The original character of the walls and ceilings on the interior of the house is also not certain. On the west wall in the hall (Room 100), wide, beaded boards were used to panel the walls from floor to ceiling from the north end of the room to the beaded header above the door to Room 101. This is the only wall in the house treated in this manner. This paneling could have replaced sections of plaster that were damaged, or it could be all that remains of original boarded walls and ceilings. The narrow, double-beaded, tongue-and-groove boards used as a wainscot at the south end of the same wall between the south door and the door to 103 is clearly a later alteration meant to cover damaged or deteriorated plaster, but the wider boards at the north end of the hall could very well be part of the house's original interior finishes, left in place in a part of the hall that was certain to get hard use.

Laboratory analysis of plaster and of painted finishes would be helpful in sorting out the sequence of antebellum changes to the interior floor plan and to the wall and ceiling finishes, but it is clear that most of the present interior and exterior woodwork and plaster date to late in the second quarter or to the third quarter of the nineteenth century, with the historical documentation suggesting that they date earlier rather than later during that period.

The present chimney on the main house replaced the original fireplaces in the same location. The extent of the framed opening for the original hearths can still be identified in the pattern of in-filled flooring and siding. The stone rubble next to the present chimney base beneath the house suggests that the original chimney was at least partly constructed of stone.

## Changes, c. 1896

Quite possibly, the character of the house remained essentially unchanged until Washington Roberts

acquired the property in 1896. A series of changes can be identified in the present structure that, based on material characteristics, appear to date to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As a carpenter, Roberts would have been able to do all of the work himself. The first change that may be attributed to him, and which probably occurred in the late 1890s or very early 1900s, was the installation of the wainscot of double-beaded, tongue-and-groove boards in Room 103. The material is typical of the period and, since it ends at the line of the original chimney breast, was clearly installed prior to replacement of the fireplace, which probably occurred when the kitchen wing was constructed a few years later.

## Changes, c. 1910

A number of alterations and a major addition were made to the house around the turn of the twentieth century. No date has been firmly established for these changes, but the use of circular-sawn lumber and wire nails suggests that they could have



FIGURE 18. View of chimney in Room 103, absence of wainscot indicating extent of original chimney. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2003)



FIGURE 20. View of chimney base, with original stone chimney base at left, existing brick chimney at right. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2003)

occurred as early as the 1890s or as late as the 1910s. A date of 1910 is stamped on the kitchen sink that was in the addition, and that is probably an accurate indication of the time period during which these changes occurred.

## Kitchen Wing

Separate kitchen buildings were common in the nineteenth century until the wide-spread use of cook stoves began to reduce fears of fire and, with



FIGURE 22. View of Wallace-Grace house and its kitchen wing, c. 1969. (CALO Coll. C-09)



FIGURE 23. View of Roberts House and its kitchen wing, c. 1969. (CALO Coll. C-09)



FIGURE 24. View east showing south side of kitchen wing, 1978. (CALO Coll. F-418)

other factors, helped begin a trend toward kitchens attached to or, ultimately, part of the main house. As late as the 1880s, the Roberts' neighbor George Dixon built a separate kitchen building for his new home on Doctor's Creek, but when it was damaged by a storm in the early 1900s, he went to the trouble of relocating it and attaching it to the house. The Wallace-Grace House is thought to be contemporaneous with the Roberts House and was a very similar structure until it was remodeled in the 1920s. A kitchen wing, similar in scale and probably in plan as well to the Roberts House wing, was also added to that house in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Neither of those additions survive.

The kitchen wing at the Roberts House contained a dining room and center hall in addition to the kitchen itself, but physical evidence shows that there was no internal connection to the main house. Instead, access was through a door at the south end of the east wall of the dining room (Room 104), which opened to the house's south porch. Thompson's drawings from 1984 indicate the presence of a porch deck (but no roof) on the south side of the kitchen wing, connecting to the porch on the main house. No physical evidence for that deck can be located today. He showed no indication of a porch on the north side of the addition, but a porch or deck may have been present at one time to provide easier access to the wooden cistern that stood at the west end of the main house. The kitchen wing was set on creosoted piers, perhaps salvaged from telephone poles that were installed (and then repeatedly washed away) for a line between Portsmouth and Cape Lookout beginning in the 1890s. Hurricane braces were also installed against the sills but are more crudely made than those on the main block of the house.



FIGURE 25. View west of Roberts House, c. 1978. (CALO Coll. A-417)



The kitchen wing was constructed with a simple box frame out of lumber that was salvaged from an older timber-framed structure. Dimensions of the lumber (e.g., 3" by 4" rafters) and empty mortises in posts indicate that the structure from which this lumber was salvaged may have been constructed in the mid-nineteenth century. Quite possibly, an original, detached kitchen building was taken down to build this wing, but that sequence of events has not been documented.

Walls and ceilings were paneled with 3"-wide, double-beaded, tongue-and-groove boards, similar to the earlier wainscot in Room 103. The walls flanking the hall were not paneled on the hallway side of the framing. All interior woodwork appears to have been painted, first when the wing was built and then only once after that. Flooring was also 3" tongue-and-groove. The wing had board-and-batten doors that appear to have used the same tongue-and-groove material used for flooring. Doors were hinged to swing to the outside, while wood-framed screened doors were hinged to swing inward.

A small square chimney was built at the western end of the wing. Constructed of brick and mortar similar to that used on the chimney in the main house, the new chimney was also built to serve a wood- or coal-burning stove. A new brick cistern was also constructed off the western end of the kitchen wing, apparently storing water shed from the roof of the wing. A cast-iron pump was installed inside the kitchen itself (Room 106) with an enameled cast-iron sink built into the southwest corner of the room. The old wooden cistern at the western end of the main house may have been removed when the wing was constructed.

## Main House

With construction of the kitchen wing, the original external chimney and open fireplace, which were at least partly stone construction, were taken down, the framed opening for the chimney breast in-filled, and a new internal brick chimney constructed. Built in the same location as the original chimney, the brick chimney was designed and constructed for wood- or coal-burning stoves and so was considerably smaller than the original chimney.

In Room 103, areas of the west wall left open by removal of the old chimney were repaired with plaster on wood lath to match the earlier plaster but

the wainscot was not extended to meet the new chimney arrangement. The new chimney was enclosed by a wood-framed wall of plaster on wood lath on both the first and second floors. The, and on the second floor, a small closet (the only one in the house) was constructed next to the enclosed chimney. A door was apparently never a feature of this closet.

The only other alteration to the main house that appears to be associated with construction of the kitchen wing was the addition of screen doors at both the north and south end of the hall (Room 100). As was typical at Portsmouth and other areas routinely exposed to high winds, the screen doors were hinged to swing inside the house.

The house was roofed with asphalt singles prior to World War II, the design of the shingles suggesting that they were installed by Roberts in the 1920s or early 1930s. It is likely that the concrete steps to the



FIGURE 27. View of southwest of kitchen wing, 1983. (CALO Coll. F-416)



FIGURE 28. View of Roberts House after exterior rehabilitation and Hurricane Isabel. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2003)

south porch also date to that period, although they could have been built as early as the 1910s.

It is not known how long Joe Abbot lived in the house after Wash Roberts and his sister moved to Oriental, NC, in the early 1930s, nor has the date of his death been documented. If he were still alive, he would have turned 70 in 1939, and it is unlikely that he lived in the house much beyond that point. Like much of the rest of Portsmouth, the Roberts House appears to have been vacant after World War II, except for occasional use by hunters or fishermen who camped out in the old house.

## Modern Changes

There were some attempts to stabilize the house in the twenty-five or so years after World War II. By the 1950s, both porches were removed or had collapsed, and the asphalt roof covering that

Roberts appears to have installed before World War II was beginning to fail. Roll roofing was installed over the main block of the house, but not over the kitchen wing, which continued to deteriorate. The house's original beaded siding was already badly deteriorated, and most of it was removed from the south side of the house along with the lower runs on the east and north sides. In all these areas, the siding

(or a substitute material) was laid flush and covered with cement-asbestos siding.

In the late 1990s, park staff installed a new metal roof on the main block of the house, but not on the kitchen wing, which by then had fallen into almost complete ruin. Then, in the summer of 2003, park staff replaced all of the historic, but badly-deteriorated, beaded siding on the main house as well as the deteriorated and missing window sash. The new material replicated the beading of the historic siding but in order to stay within the park's budget, a lesser grade of wood was used and some alterations were made to the dimensioning of sash components, which also required alterations to interior stop. In addition, the modern metal roof covering was removed and replaced with cedar shingle roofing.

In September 2003, as this report was being completed, Hurricane Isabel swept the Outer Banks with the eye coming ashore around Drum Inlet a few miles south of Portsmouth. Although only a Category 2 hurricane, the storm's surge inundated the entire island and a number of structures sustained significant damage. The nearby George Dixon House was severely damaged, but little, if any, damage was sustained by the main block of the Roberts House. Unfortunately, wind and water completed destruction of the house's ruined kitchen wing. It was partially reconstructed in 2006.



FIGURE 29. View of Roberts House after exterior rehabilitation and after destruction of kitchen by Hurricane Isabel. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2003)

<b>Chronology</b>	
1808	David Wallace dies and his estate is divided
1822	Alpheus Whitehurst marries Abigail Simpson
Oct 1823	Littleton Styron and James Howard sell 1/5 of land which fell to Robert Wallace's heirs to Alpheus Whitehurst
1840	Alpheus Whitehurst dies
Jul 1842	Severe hurricane is reported by one source to have destroyed all but one house at Portsmouth
22 Feb 1849	David Ireland m. Mary F. Davis
May 1849	Abigal Whitehurst and dau. Eliz. Whitehurst sell property to John Roberts for \$300
Jul 1849	John G. Roberts sells property to David Ireland for \$325
c. 1850	Geo. Washington Roberts m. Jane T. Davis
c. 1969	Joe Abbot born to Rose Ireland
Feb 1873	Washington T. Roberts born
Dec 1894	Portsmouth Life-Saving Station completed
Jul 1896	David Ireland sells land and house to Washington T. Roberts for \$100
1897	Washington T. Roberts signs on as surfman at new Portsmouth LSS
c. 1897	George Washington Roberts dies
August 1899	"Great Hurricane" floods Portsmouth
1900-1910	Joe Abbot works as cook at Pilentary Hunting Club
1910	Date of manufacture for kitchen sink at Roberts House
August 1913	Hurricane destroys Methodist church
c. 1914	Washington Roberts' mother and his sister Angie die
1930	Washington Roberts retires from Coat Guard; Joe Abbot working as cook at Portsmouth Coast Guard Station
September 1933	Major hurricane hits Portsmouth, after which "everybody just left"
1938	Portsmouth Life-Saving Station closed
c. 1945	Roberts House abandoned
1959	Portsmouth post office closes
1960	Fourteen residents remaining in Portsmouth
1966	Cape Lookout National Seashore authorized by Congress
1971	Joe Abbot's nephew Henry Pigott dies and Portsmouth is abandoned except for seasonal residents
1978	Portsmouth Historic District listed on National Register of Historic Places
1979	Architect John Thompson produces plans and elevations of Roberts House
2003	Exterior siding and windows replaced in main house; Hurricane Isabel completes destruction of kitchen wing



---

# Physical Description

Located east of Doctor's Creek, about 300 feet southwest of the Methodist Church, and facing in a southerly direction, the Washington Roberts House is a wood-framed structure that consists of a two-story main block flanked on its west end by a one-story wing added as a kitchen and dining room in the 1890s or early 1900s. The main, two-story block of the house, which dates to the mid-19th century, is constructed of sash sawn lumber in dimensions typical of that period. It is about 26' end to end and 24' front to back, encompassing about 1,200 square feet of floor space with four unequally-sized rooms on each floor. The wing measures about 30' by 15' and contained about 450 square feet in two rooms flanking a center hall. There is physical

evidence for very early changes to the original building, some of which may date as early as the 1850s. These include alterations to the floor plan, installation of the present staircase, and replacement of board ceilings and walls with plaster. A few other alterations accompanied construction of the kitchen wing around 1900.

The house is badly deteriorated, with the kitchen wing in ruinous condition.<sup>42</sup> The front porch was removed before the 1960s, all of the historic doors

---

42. Note that this physical description and most photographs date to 2002 before Hurricane Isabel and subsequent rehabilitation obliterated some of the building's historic features.



FIGURE 30. View northwest of Roberts House. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 31. View southwest of east end and north side of house. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 32. View west of west end of house and kitchen wing. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 33. View to east, showing ruined kitchen wing in foreground. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

but one have been stolen, much of the plaster has been badly water damaged, and the windows, many of which are missing sash, have been covered with plywood. In spite of the losses, most of the building's historic wooden siding, paneling, flooring, and trim remains in place.

Building investigation for this report was non-destructive and based on a visual examination of the property. The building was measured and new drawings created for this report. The project budget did not permit laboratory analysis of materials, which could answer a number of questions concerning the historic evolution of the present building.

## Associated Site Features

The 1866 survey of Portsmouth shows a small, rectangular parcel of property associated with the house. The historic extent of that property has not been documented, but there may have been only an acre or two that was historically associated with the house. Although the present building dates only to the mid-nineteenth century, the historical record suggests that the site may have been occupied since the late eighteenth century and that there was almost certainly a house on the site by the 1820s.

The present house and its partially-collapsed kitchen wing are the only structures on the site today; but brick debris off the west end of the kitchen wing may indicate the presence of the workshop remembered in oral interviews in 1979.<sup>43</sup> Of special interest on the site, is a large, low mound in front of the house, although it may only be a natural feature of the landscape. There has been no archaeological survey of the property, but the presence of significant archaeological resources on the site is very likely. The surface of the ground beneath the house has been covered with oyster shells, commonly used to help stabilize the light, sandy soil against erosion during the tidal surges that occasionally sweep across the island.

---

43. Interview with Ellen Cloud, May 1, 2002; park interviews with Marion Gray Babb and Clara Salter, August 5, 1979.

## Foundation

Typical of a number of buildings in the village, the house was built on wooden piers, probably of cedar or juniper. Piers under the main part of the house are about 7" by 7-1/2", mortised into the sills and sunk to an indeterminate depth in the ground. Five piers are placed across both the front and the rear of the house and four piers across each end. None of the piers were placed directly at the building's corners, a common feature in the area since corner piers were especially susceptible to dislocation by flood-swept debris.

The added kitchen wing was built on creosoted pine piers, but these were toe-nailed, using wire nails, rather than mortised into the sills. Most of the piers appear to be original, but some are badly deteriorated, especially along the south side of the house.

## Bracing

In addition to the foundation piers, there is a series of hurricane braces surrounding the main block of the house. These braces were meant to keep the house from being washed from its foundations by the storm surges that periodically rake the island. Known locally as "bird's mouths" because of their configuration, they are around the same size as the foundation piers but are notched at one end where they meet the sill. Attached to the sill with large wrought-iron spikes, the braces were set into the ground at an acute angle. The suggestion that whale bone or wooden pegs were originally used to secure the braces to the house's framing is probably not correct.<sup>44</sup>

There are three braces each on the south, east, and north sides of the main block of the house, but there is only one brace on the west side. A 90-degree notch has been cut into the sloping face of that brace, probably to support the framing of the wooden, "coffin-like" cistern that once stood in that area. Part of the sill on the west side is covered by the kitchen wing and could not be examined, but with the original chimney in that location, additional bracing may have been unnecessary. Some of the original braces may have been replaced over the years, with the ones on the north and west

44. See Atwood, p. 40.



FIGURE 34. View of typical joist and pier connections at center beam. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 35. View of a typical "bird's-mouth" hurricane brace on north side of house. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 36. View of chimney foundation, with brick at right marking existing chimney base and stone at left marking larger extent of original chimney. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)





FIGURE 37. View southwest under main block of house, showing shells used to stabilize the ground under the house. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 39. View of typical connection of second floor joists and studs. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 40. View of connection of wall studs and floor joist on east side of Room 101. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2003)

sides of the house most likely to be original. Condition varies, however, and a number are badly deteriorated.

## Chimney

The present brick chimney rises on the west side of Room 103. The foundation is about 20" by 30", corbeling back to a straight stack about 14" by 30" that rises through the floor framing inside the house. The red, hard-fired brick and Portland mortar as well as the craftsmanship in this chimney are very similar to those of the chimney for the kitchen addition, suggesting that they are contemporaneous. Both were built to serve stoves and not open fire places. On the interior, the chimney stack is enclosed by wood-framed, plastered walls. At both the first and the second floor short lengths of 6"-diameter, terra-cotta provide a flue into the chimney for stoves.

The present inside chimney replaced the original outside chimney which sat in the same location. The foundation for the original chimney appears to have been built of stone, but it is not known if the entire chimney stack was stone as well. The framed opening in the floor apparently accommodated a hearth, while the breaks in the exterior siding show it to have been an outside chimney, with the chimney breast flush with the interior walls and the stack above the second floor fireplace rising outside the walls and not penetrating the roof.

## Structural System

The main block of the house was built with a modified, braced frame typical of the mid-nineteenth century. Framing lumber, including sills, was mill sawn using a reciprocating saw and constructed using mortised-and-tenoned joints generally fixed with wooden pegs. Nails were used only for installing finish material. Apparent anomalies within the existing structure suggest that the plan of the original building was significantly altered at an early date, but the extent of those alterations has not been clearly identified.

Leaking roof coverings and termites have caused serious structural damage to the main house, although considering its age and the long period of neglect the structure remains in surprisingly good condition. The most serious damage has occurred



## Physical Description

around the structure's northwestern corner, where there has been severe termite damage to the corner posts and nearby wall framing, and along the south side of the second floor, where a leaking roof has allowed severe rot in the floor framing of the second floor.

Original sills on the main block of the house are around 6-3/4" to 7" by 8-3/4" to 9" and top plates are around 4" by 7". Joists at both first and second floors are around 3" by 8", 24" on centers, and run continuously from front to rear of the house. Joists are supported on the first floor by the outside sills and a large beam, 6" by 7", that runs the length of the house and rests on four, wooden, internal piers set about 6' apart.

Joists are mortised into sills at the first floor, into studs at the second floor, and into rafters at the second floor ceiling. Spacing of joists is reduced to about 18" on either side of the fifth joist from the east end of the house. The fifth joist is the only joist that is discontinuous from the front to the rear of the house, with a typical 3" by 8" joist on the north side of the center beam and a 4" by 4" joist continuing on the south side of the beam. The closer spacing appears to have been designed to support the weight of the partition wall on the first floor. Joists at the first floor level are in generally excellent condition. The exception is a single joist under the southwestern corner of Room 103, which was apparently overloaded, causing the joist to develop a split that runs three or four feet from the sill.

Walls are framed with posts that are typically 4" by 6" and studs that are typically 3" by 4"; both are mortised and pegged to sills and plates. The first floor ceiling is at 8'-4" from the floor, with the outside walls of the house rising as knee walls about 3'-2" above the second floor. Gable ends peak at 13'-10" above the level of the second floor, with the second floor ceiling formed by collar beams set 7'-8" above the floor.

The roof of the main block of the house is framed with common rafters that are generally 3" by 4". Rafters are half-lapped and pegged at the ridge and notched to lap the top plate of the walls. Collar beams are 3" by 4" and double as joists for the second floor ceiling.

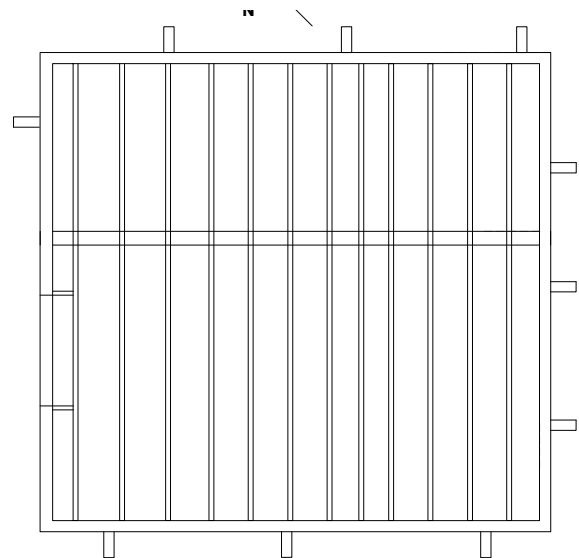


FIGURE 41. Plan of first floor floor framing. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 42. View of typical connection of collar beams and rafters. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 43. View south of kitchen wing. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

The rafters on the main house are decked with 1" by 6" boards, widely spaced and originally covered



FIGURE 44. View of typical connection of collar beams and rafters. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 45. View of typical rafter connections at ridge. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 46. View of north side of kitchen wing at Room 104. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

with wood shingles. The original wooden roofing was later covered with green asphalt-composition shingles in an unusual design. In the 1990s, the old roofing was completely stripped from the main block of the house and the present corrugated metal roofing installed.

## Kitchen Wing

Total neglect of the roof covering has subjected the kitchen wing to water penetration and resulting rot, so that the entire roof structure, the west end wall, and part of the south wall have now collapsed. Except for window sash and doors, however, the character and dimension of all of the original materials and the original floor plan can be identified in the the existing ruins of the building.

A variety of lumber was used in framing the walls of the kitchen wing, much of it with empty mortise pockets and dimensions that indicate the material were salvaged from an earlier building, perhaps from the original detached kitchen on the site. New lumber for the wing was circular sawn, and all connections were generally made with wire nails. Unlike the main body of the house, the kitchen wing was built with a loose box frame finished with vertical board-and-batten siding.

The kitchen wing is framed on 4-1/2" by 8-1.2" sills, laid flat and toe-nailed to the wooden foundation piers. Posts are around 4" by 5" at door and window openings and 3-1/2" to 4" by 4" elsewhere. The top plates are also around 3-1/2" by 4" and there are intermediate horizontal nailers set midway of stud height. Floor joists are typically 3" by 6" set on 32" centers. The ceiling, which was about 7'-2" from the floor, is framed with 2" by 4" joists, also on 32" centers. The badly-deteriorated condition of the roof makes it difficult to characterize completely. Rafters appear to have been generally 3" by 4", probably on 24" centers. The gable at the west end of the addition, which has fallen more or less intact away from the house, originally rose about 4'-8" above the top plates of the wing or about 12' from the bottom of the sills.

## Doors

Except for one interior door, all of the historic doors are missing from the building, a number of them apparently ripped out by thieves, damaging door frames and casing in the process.

Historically the main house had two exterior door openings at the front (D-1) and rear (D-2) of the hall. Both door openings are 2'-10" by about 6'-7". Neither of these doors remain on the building. Wrought-iron hooks are spiked into the outside of

## Physical Description

the door (D-2) jamb on the north side of the main house, indicating a door hung with a strap hinge and opening outward. The same condition was probably present at the other entrance as well. The only evidence for the possible design of these doors is found on architect John Thompson's drawings of the house from 1984 (see Appendix). In those he has included a wooden door with two vertical panels at D-1, but it is not clear if such a door was actually present at that time or if he had additional information that documented that design. In addition, there were screen doors hung on the *interior* side of the jamb at D-1 and D-2, but only the 1" by 2-1/2" mortises for their butt hinges remain.

The kitchen wing has three door openings, one at each end of the center hall and a third at the southeast corner of Room 104 that opened onto the porch that originally spanned the south side of the main block of the house. The condition of the addition prohibited ascertaining the exact size and character of these doors, but the openings at either end of the hall (D-4 and D-5) appear to have been around 2'-6" by 6'-2". Photographs of the house taken in 1983 document a badly-deteriorated vertical-board and cross-braced board door at D-4 the south end of the center hall. Architect John Thompson included a restored condition of this door in the drawings that he made of the house in 1984, and it might be assumed that the door at the north end of the hall as well as the narrower door at the east end of Room 104 were similar to this one.

Neither of the interior doors in the kitchen addition could be identified, although evidence may survive under the collapsed roof. Except for the door between Rooms 102 and 103, all of the interior doors in the main block of the house are also missing, most of them torn from their frames. The surviving door is historic and is probably typical of the original interior doors. Measuring 6'-6" by 2'9", it is constructed with three beaded boards, two around 12" wide, and a center board about 5" wide, held together by three chamfered ledger boards. The door is hung on 4-1/2" butt hinges and originally was fitted with a large rim lock. Only the lock catch remains in place on the jamb, the lock having been ripped off by thieves, splintering the door in the process.



FIGURE 47. View of outside face of door D-9 to Room 102. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

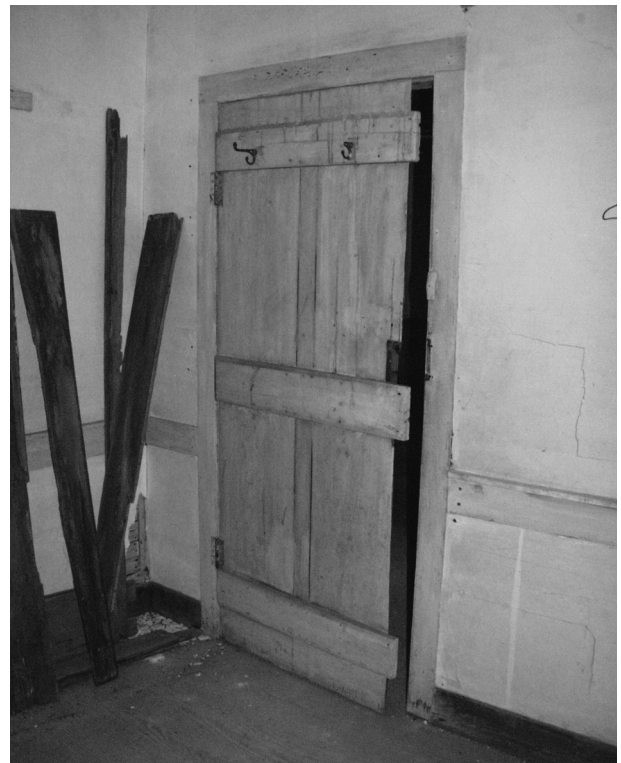


FIGURE 48. View of inside face of door between 102 and 103. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 49. View of W-1 with original exterior sill and casing intact. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 50. View of W-2 with sash and trim typical of first floor windows. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

## Windows

The eight first-floor windows in the main block of the house are typically 2'-4" by 4'-6" with single-hung sash, nine lights over six. The four second-floor windows are also single-hung, 2'-4" by 3'-8", six lights over six. Glass panes in all of these sash are 8" by 10", much of it antique blown glass.

There appear to be two generations of window sash in the main house, both apparently dating to the nineteenth century. The earliest and presumably original sash were constructed with 1"-thick stiles and rails; later replacements used 1-1/8"-thick stiles and rails. Muntin profiles are almost identical in both generations of sash.

The exact size of the four window openings in the addition could not be determined since only the frames remain at two of the openings and both of these are racked out of square and badly deteriorated. Additional examination of these surviving frames after they are removed from the building should confirm the size of the openings. Preliminary examination indicates that the two windows on the south side of the house were slightly larger than those on the north side of the house but that is not certain. Although now missing, sash in these windows were probably six-over-six, as depicted in Thompson's drawings in 1983. However, the single sash that survived and was photographed in the western window (W-9) in the dining room (Room 104) in 1984 had a metal track, which remains in place, indicating that the sash may have been a modern replacement of the original. Additional evidence for the historic sash may survive amid the debris of the roof.

Details for individual window openings follow, with letter/number designations corresponding to those shown on the plan at the end of this section.

**W-1:** 2'-4" by 4'-6", six-over-nine sash, both sash missing; top of frame damaged; interior stop missing on right side and at header; interior casing and backband complete; one of two windows with exterior sill, casing and backband essentially intact, although badly eroded.

**W-2:** 2'-4" by 4'-6", six-over-nine sash, both sash missing; top of frame damaged; interior stop missing on right side and at header; interior casing and

## Physical Description

backband complete; one of two windows with exterior sill, casing and backband essentially intact, although badly eroded. This window appears to have been relocated at a very early date, probably when the present staircase was constructed.

**W-3:** 2'-4" by 4'-6", six-over-nine sash, upper sash missing, lower sash missing a muntin but reparable; interior stop and trim intact; exterior backband missing.

**W-4:** 2'-4" by 4'-6", six-over-nine sash, both sash missing; interior stop and trim intact; exterior backband missing.

**W-5:** 2'-4" by 4'-6", six-over-nine sash, upper sash intact, stiles, top rail, and one muntin only remain from lower sash; interior stop and trim intact; condition of exterior elements uncertain.

**W-6:** 2'-4" by 4'-6", six-over-nine sash, lower sash missing; interior stop on sides missing; condition of exterior elements uncertain.

**W-7:** w-5: 2'-4" by 4'-6", six-over-nine sash, both sash missing; interior stop on right side missing; condition of exterior elements uncertain.

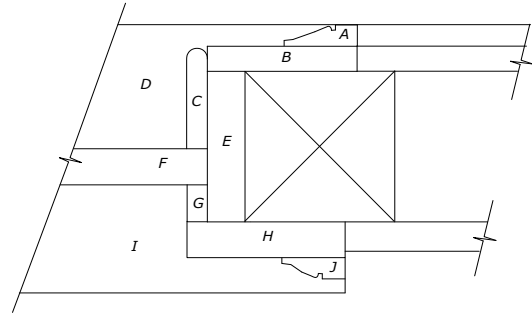
**W-8:** 2'-4" by 4'-6", six-over-nine sash, interior stop and trim intact; condition of exterior elements uncertain.

**W-9:** Frame racked and severely deteriorated but possibly around 2'-6" by 4'-2", probably with six-over-six sash; modern aluminum track remains on one side of frame covering conventional jamb with rabbet for parting stop, which remains exposed on the other side.

**W-10:** Nothing remains intact at this opening, but elements may exist in the debris of the interior; window was apparently identical to W-9.

**W-11:** Nothing remains intact at this opening, which was probably identical to W-12.

**W-12:** Frame racked and severely deteriorated but possibly around 2'-3" by 3'-8", probably with six-over-six sash; casing was probably 1" by 6"; no other details discernible.



- A Interior backband, molded,  $\frac{5}{8}$ " x  $1\frac{15}{16}$ "
- B Interior casing,  $\frac{11}{16}$ " x 4"
- C Interior sash stop,  $\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " ( $3\frac{3}{4}$ " at header), rounded edge
- D Interior stool,  $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 3", continuation of chair rail
- E Window jamb, 1" x  $4\frac{1}{4}$ "
- F Sash, 1" thick on earliest windows,  $1\frac{1}{8}$ " on historic replacements
- G Upper sash stop,  $\frac{1}{2}$ " by 1"
- H Exterior casing, 1" by  $3\frac{3}{4}$ "
- I Exterior sill, 2" thick, projecting approximately 2" beyond casing and set at about 30°
- J Exterior backband probably molded like interior backband but only  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " wide vs. 2" on interior

FIGURE 51. Section through typical first-floor window frame. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

## Exterior Finishes

Most of the historic exterior finishes remain on the main block of the house and can be identified in the ruins of the kitchen wing. Woodwork is extremely deteriorated, primarily due to the absence of paint and resultant erosion by rain, wind-driven sand, and UV degradation.

### Siding

Historically, there were two types of exterior siding on the house. On the main block of the house the original siding consisted of weatherboard,  $\frac{3}{4}$ " by  $8\frac{1}{2}$ ", with a quarter-inch bead along the lower edge and laid with a reveal of about 7". On the kitchen wing, siding was vertical board-and-batten, in random widths of 8" to 12". Size of battens could not be determined.

All of the siding is badly eroded, and the beading of the siding on the main block of the house has disappeared from all but a few of the boards that were protected by the kitchen addition. Nearly all of the siding on the north, east, and west sides of the



FIGURE 52. View of original beaded siding remaining on north west side of main block at kitchen addition. All of this siding was replaced in 2003. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 53. View of north corner of house, showing typical treatment of eaves and corners. Light areas appear to be paint but may actually be due to the presence of lichen or other natural discoloration. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

house remains in place but badly deteriorated. On the south side of the house, however, the historic lap siding appears to have been relaid as flush siding using wire nails when cement-asbestos siding was installed in that area after the porch was removed in the mid-twentieth century. Siding on the kitchen wing is extremely deteriorated.

## Trim

Besides the siding and the window casing and trim described above, the main block of the house had three other elements of wood trim. Vertical boards, 1" by 3-3/4", were used to finish each corner on the south and north facades, lapping about 1-1/2" beyond each corner and against which the siding on each end of the house was butted. Rake boards, approximately 6" wide, trimmed the top of the walls at the gable ends. The eaves on the south and north sides of the house are trimmed with boards about 6" wide, apparently with chamfered edges to allow it to fit flush at an angle to the siding and the roof deck.

## Paint

Any evidence that the exterior of the house was painted historically has almost completely disappeared, but in a few very isolated areas there is fragmentary evidence of what appears to be white paint. It is likely that the house was kept painted throughout the nineteenth century but has not been repainted since that time. Lab analysis would be necessary to identify and define the historic material.

## Porch

Except for wooden piers and concrete steps, nothing remains of the porch that originally ran along the front (south) side of the house. From placement of surviving piers and steps, the original porch appears to have run the full width of the main block of the house and was about 7'-6" deep. Two concrete steps, each about 15" deep and 60" wide, are located in line with the front door to the house.

According to Thompson's drawings of the house in 1984 (see Appendix), an open deck continued across the south side of the kitchen wing, but no evidence for its existence is evident. On the north side of the house, door steps at both entrances have disappeared entirely. Wooden piers remain in the ground in front of the kitchen wing, but they do not correspond to the small stoop or porch that Thompson indicated in his drawings in 1984.

## Roofing

The main block of the house and the kitchen wing were originally roofed with wooden shingles but these were replaced by black asphalt shingles before World War II. The roofing on the main block of the house was later covered with green roll-type



roofing, which was subsequently removed and replaced by the present metal roofing. The asphalt shingles on the kitchen wing were not replaced when the main block was re-roofed. The existing metal roofing is in fair condition, but a large section near the peak of the east gable has begun to rust.

## Main Block Interior

The interior of the two-story main block of the house appears to have undergone its last renovation in the 1890s or early 1900s and, except for theft of the doors and serious water damage in some areas, remains substantially intact. The interior also appears not to have been repainted in the twentieth century, and elements of the historic color schemes remain apparent in spite of the deteriorated condition of the paints. The house contains eight rooms and encompasses around 1,100 square feet. Ceiling heights are 8'-4" on the first story of the main block of the house and 7'-8" on the second story.

Most ceilings and walls are plastered on an unusual lath which was created out of sawn boards that were split longitudinally to create keys for the plaster. Much of this material remains intact along with plaster on sawn lath from later alterations. Walls are paneled, which may have been typical of finishes

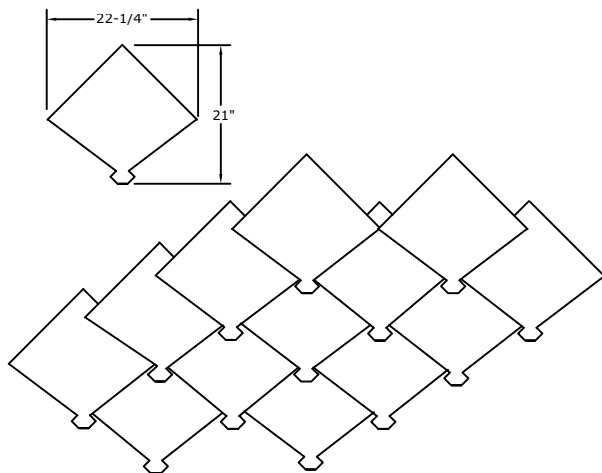


FIGURE 54. Drawing of asphalt shingles used to roof the house in the 1920s or early 1930s. (T. Jones, NPS-SERO-CR, 2003)

used throughout the original house. Simple moldings and beaded boards remain throughout the house, but only one of the doors remains in place. All rooms are floored with quarter-sawn, tongue-and-groove boards, probably southern yellow pine, 5" wide on the first floor and 8" to 10" wide on the second.

## Room 100

Measuring 8' by 23'-2", this side hall has exterior entrances at the north and south ends and includes the stairway to the second floor. It is unclear how the second floor was accessed prior to construction of this stairway, the construction of which apparently precipitated relocation of window W-2. The wall adjoining Room 101, which is probably contemporaneous with the stairs, was also an early alteration which brought this space to its present form.

**Floor.** Most of the flooring is typical 5"-wide tongue-and-groove. An area about 4' by 6' at the south corner of the room has been patched with plain boards.

**Walls.** Walls are finished with typical plaster on split lath, except for the added wall at Room 101, which is paneled with horizontal, random-width, beaded boards, 6" to 12" wide. (The reverse side of this wall in Room 101 is plaster on split lath.) Plaster on the west wall is in relatively good condition, but there has been significant water damage to the plaster on the other walls. Between the door to Room 103 and the front door (D-1), the wainscot is finished with 3"-wide tongue-and-groove boards, evidence of a late nineteenth century repair.

**Ceiling.** The ceiling is finished with typical plaster on split lath. There are large areas of the plaster that have been lost due to water penetration. At the head of the stairs, a beaded joist transverses the ceiling, apparently serving as a header for the stair stringers.

**Doors.** There are five door openings in this space, but the historic doors are missing from all of them. The exterior door openings are both 2'-10" by 6'-7" and had doors that swung to the outside. Screen doors, added in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and mounted on 2" by 2-1/2" hinges, opened to the inside, but doors and hinges are missing.



FIGURE 55. View south in hall, Room 100. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 56. View of ceiling in Room 101, showing typical split-board plaster lath. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

The door opening to Room 101 was originally 2'-3-1/2" by 6'-5-1/2", but the opening was narrowed by an inch, perhaps to allow the door, when opened, to clear the south wall of Room 101. The door opening to Room 103 is 2'-8" by 6'-6", and a door also

originally closed the stairwell in an opening 2'-4" by 7'-1".

Doors are cased with 1" by 4" boards and the same 2"-wide backband used at the windows. The inside edge of the casing is beaded except at the door to Room 103 where plain, unbeaded casing material is used.

**Windows.** Both windows are 2'-4" by 4'-6" with typical nine-over-six sash. The lower sash is missing from the northernmost window and the other sash are in poor condition. The northernmost window closest to the stairwell appears to have been relocated, as suggested by the placement of framing and breaks in the exterior siding in that area.

**Trim.** A chair rail 6-1/4" wide surrounds the room at 34" from the floor. It consists of a 1-1/4" by 5-1/2" board set flush with the plaster and a 3/4" by 2" board that forms a projecting cap. At the south corner of the room, a triangular wooden shelf, about 42" on its long side, is fastened to the top of the chair rail. An unmolded baseboard 1-1/4" by 5-3/4" runs around most of the room. At the foot of the stairs, however, is a small run of beaded baseboard of the





FIGURE 57. View north in hall, Room 100. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

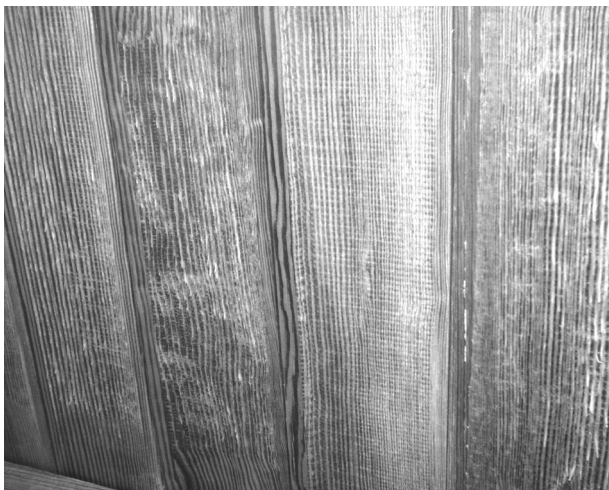


FIGURE 58. View of underside of original flooring on first floor. (T. Jones, SERO-CRD, 2002)

same size. Along the portion of the west wall at Room 101 that is paneled, there is no baseboard, but the wall has been painted in a contrasting color to continue the line of the baseboard found around the remainder of the space.

**Paint.** Walls show no visible evidence of anything but white paint. A reddish-brown paint remains on the baseboard. A medium green is exposed in several areas on window and door casing, all of which were last painted brown. Lab analysis will be necessary to identify and define the historic color schemes.

**Stairwell.** The enclosed stairwell rises from the east corner of the room. The stairs are steep, having a rise of 8-1/2" and a run of 9-3/8" with a pair of winders at the second and third step. The exposed,

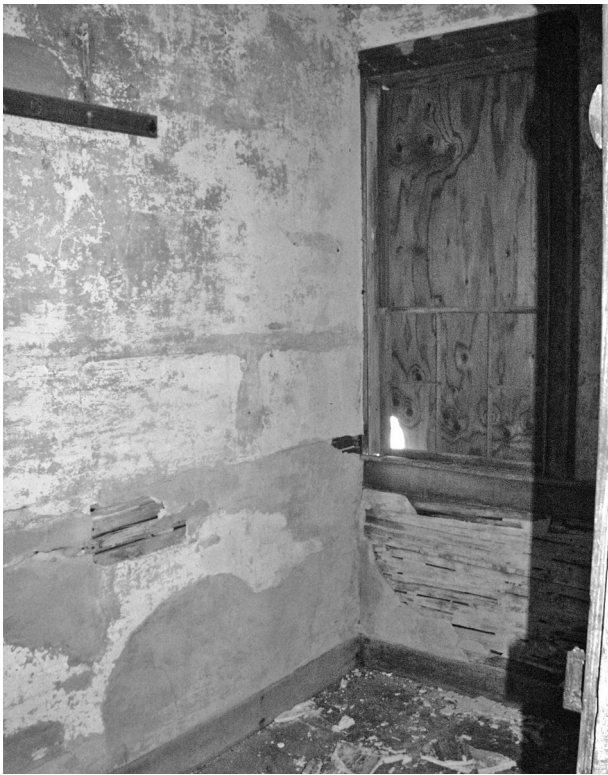


FIGURE 59. View north in Room 101. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 60. View north in Room 101. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

beaded header for the stair well opening is a unique feature in the house.

## Room 101

This small room, only 5' wide and 8-1/2' long, was apparently created by partitioning an earlier space, as suggested by the continuation of baseboard and chair rail behind the junction of the west and east walls with the outside wall of the house. As presently configured, the room was lined with shelving and appears to have been used for storage. However, the presence of a wooden pivot latch on the inside facing of the door frame suggests that the room might have been used for bathing, dressing, or other activity that required some privacy.

**Floor.** Flooring is typical 5"-wide tongue-and-groove boards.

**Walls.** Walls were finished with plaster over split lath, some of which has been lost due to water damage, especially around the window.

**Ceiling.** The ceiling is typical plaster over split lath.

**Windows.** A single window opening, 2'-4" by 4'-7", is located on the east wall. The window was originally single-hung with nine-over-six sash, but only the lower sash remains.

**Trim.** The room has two generations of trim, with that on the north and south walls apparently pre-dating the construction of the other two walls. The room has a 5"-1/2" baseboard, with that on the north and south walls beaded and the remainder without a bead. A 4-1/2" chair rail is present on all but the west wall. The rail is beaded only on the north wall, and the cap is present only on the east and south walls.

**Miscellaneous.** Three shelves, 10-1/2" wide, were originally present on the east wall, but only one remains. The other two were removed and the plaster repaired where they were located. There is also evidence of smaller shelves on the south and west walls. A large wrought-iron hook is mounted in the ceiling. Probably used to hang an oil lamp, it is not in the center of the space and is another indication that the house's original plan has been altered.



FIGURE 61. View south in Room 102, showing the only original door remaining in the house. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

## Room 102

Used as a bedroom, this space, like Room 101, appears to have been created after the house's initial construction. The room measures 8'-6" by 10'-9". It has the only original interior door remaining in the house, although it has been damaged by vandals.

**Floor.** Flooring is typical 5"-wide tongue-and-groove boards.

**Walls.** Walls are typical plaster over split lath. Large areas of plaster on the west wall have been lost due to water penetration, exposing part of the building's braced frame to view.

**Ceiling.** The ceiling is finished with plaster over split lath. It has been badly damaged in the north corner of the room.

**Doors.** The board-and-batten door to this room is the only surviving historic door. Measuring 2'-9 by

6'-2", it is constructed of beaded tongue-and-groove boards and was originally fitted with a large rim lock, which was apparently torn from the door along with part of one of the boards making up the door.

**Windows.** Windows are typical nine-over-six configuration, but both sash are missing from the north window. The upper sash remains in the west window, but only the top rail and stiles remain of the lower sash.

**Trim.** The room is finished with a typical chair rail that utilizes a beaded rail on the north and west walls and a plain rail on the other two walls. Baseboards are beaded on all but the east wall.

**Paint.** Lab analysis will be necessary to identify and define the historic color schemes. Generally the walls appear to have been painted white, chair rail and door and window casing grey, and the baseboard brown.



FIGURE 62. View northwest in Room 102. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 63. View of fireplace and mantel in Room 103, probably installed along with construction of the kitchen wing in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

## Room 103

Measuring 14'-3" by 16'-2" and the largest room in the house, this room was clearly the main living or sitting room. As a space, it may have existed from the house's original construction but underwent significant alterations in the 1890s or early 1900s when the fireplace was replaced and a wooden wainscott added to the room.

**Floor.** Flooring is typical 5"-wide tongue-and-groove with historic patches where fireplace was altered.

**Walls.** Walls are plaster on split lath, except sawn lath was used where the walls were altered when the fireplace was replaced. Prior to rebuilding the fireplace, which probably occurred in the 1890s or early 1900s, a wainscot was created by installing 1/2" by 3", double-beaded, tongue-and-groove boards over the plaster beneath the original chair rail. A molded chair rail, about 3/4" by 1-1/2", was used to finish the junction between the added boards and the projecting lip of the original rail. The existing chimney breast is just over half as wide as the original. When the original fireplace was removed, the wall where it stood was plastered over sawn lath, but the wainscot was not extended to meet the new fireplace.

**Ceiling.** The ceiling is typical plaster on split lath, but there has been major damage due to water penetration through the roof and Room 204.

**Windows.** All of the window sash are missing from the two windows on the south wall (W-7 and W-8), and only the upper sash remains at the window by the fireplace (W-6). Interior stop and trim are intact except for the right stop on W-7 and the stop on both sides of W-6.

**Trim.** Casing for the doorway to Room 102 is beaded; casing for the doorway to Room 100 is not. One-inch quarter round replaced the original baseboard around the perimeter of the room when the wainscot was installed.

**Paint.** Walls and ceilings appear to have been painted white and the wainscotting painted ochre. A reddish paint appears to have used on the chair rail, while door and window casing appears to have been painted white or grey. Lab analysis will be necessary to identify and define the historic color schemes.

**Fireplace.** The original fireplace in the house appears to have been replaced by the existing 6" terra cotta flue and brick chimney in the 1890s or early 1900s. Built to accomodate stoves, this chimney never had fire boxes. Walls were framed around the chimney using 1-3/4" by 3-3/4" circular-sawn studs finished with plaster over sawn lath.



FIGURE 64. View north in Room 103. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 65. View south in Room 103. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

Simple wooden pilasters support a mantle frieze and shelf above the flue. The top of the mantle shelf is at 57" above the floor. One of the pilasters has been removed along with the molding that finished the frieze panel. A wide, concave bed molding trims the

junction of the frieze and the mantle shelf. There is no hearth. To the left of the chimney breast, floor patches indicate the extent of the original hearth. On the south wall between the two windows, wooden pegs, which may predate the plaster, are set into the wall.

### Room 200

Measuring 12' by 13'-7", this room serves as a stairhall, with the other three rooms opening from it. Except for doors and water-damaged plaster, most of its historic features remain in place and in good condition.

**Floors.** Flooring is a random mixture of tongue-and-grooved boards, 8" to 12-1/2" wide, most of it in good condition.

**Walls and Ceiling.** Walls and ceiling were plastered over split lath, but most of the plaster has been lost from the ceiling and the east wall due to water damage. On the north wall is the only section of plaster that still exhibits the original coved junction of the knee wall and ceiling.





FIGURE 66. View north in stair hall, Room 200. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 67. View east in stair hall, Room 200. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

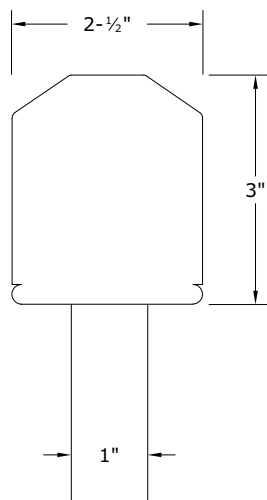


FIGURE 68. Section through bannister at second floor. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2003)



FIGURE 69. View south in Room 201. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

**Window.** The one window is missing its upper sash but interior trim remains intact.

**Trim.** A plain, 5-1/2"-wide, one-piece, chair rail is present on the west and south walls but was apparently not used on the other two walls. A plain 1-1/4" by 5-1/2" baseboard, typical of the second floor, surrounds the room. Door casing is composed of plain boards, 1" by 2-5/8". The window is cased with plain boards 1" by 3-3/8" and has a plain 5-1/2"-wide apron.

The bannister along the west side of the stairwell remains intact and in good condition. It has a plain newell post, 2-1/2" by 3" in plan and 33-1/2" tall, with 1"-square pickets set on 4" centers. The rail is also 2-1/2" by 3" and has a chamfered top and a 1/4" bead along the lower edges.

## Room 201

Measuring 9'-3" by 12'-3", this is one of three bed chambers on the second floor. It has some of the best-preserved plaster in the house.

**Floors.** Flooring is a random mixture of tongue-and-grooved boards, 8" to 12-1/2" wide, most of it in good condition.

**Walls and Ceiling.** Walls and ceiling were plastered over split lath. Only the lath and fragments of plaster remain on the ceiling, the north wall, and a portion of the west wall.

### Physical Description

**Window.** The single window in this room retains both sash and is the most complete window in the house.

**Trim.** A plain, 4-7/8"-wide, one-piece, chair rail is present on the south and west walls. A 5-1/2"-wide, one-piece rail is used on the east wall. A chair rail was apparently not used on the north wall.

Door casing is composed of plain boards, 1" by 2-5/8". The window is cased with plain boards 1" by 3-3/8" and have a plain 5-1/2"-wide apron. A typical 1-1/4" by 5-1/2" baseboard surrounds the room.

### Room 202

Water penetration has seriously damaged much of this room. Measuring 12'-3" by 13'-5", this is the largest of the three bedrooms and the only one that was heated. The fireplace and the closet were apparently added along with the new fireplace on the first floor.

**Floor.** Flooring is a random mixture of tongue-and-grooved boards, 8" to 12-1/2" wide, with significant

damage from water penetration along the west side of the room.

**Walls and Ceiling.** Walls and ceiling were plastered over split lath, but most of the plaster has been lost from the ceiling as well as from south and west walls.

**Window.** The single window in this room is missing both sash.

**Trim.** A plain, 5-1/4"-wide, one-piece, chair rail is present on all but the south wall. The end of the rail on the west wall indicates the extent of the original fireplace in this room. Door casing is composed of plain boards, 1" by 2-5/8", except on the closet door where casing is 7/8" by 3-3/4". The window is cased with plain boards 1" by 3-3/8". A typical 1-1/4" by 5-1/2" baseboard surrounds the room.

**Miscellaneous.** When the present brick chimney was constructed, a 6" terra cotta flue for a wood-burning stove was included in this room. As it was downstairs, the chimney was enclosed by a wood-framed wall with plaster on sawn lath. The use of



FIGURE 70. View north in Room 201. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002))

wire nails in constructing the enclosure is an indication that the chimney was built after the 1880s. The mantle is plain, with a mantle shelf 1" by 6-3/4" by 41" set 52" above the floor. The same 2" molding used as a backband on the first floor is used to trim this mantle. A small closet, 15" by 38" on the interior, was constructed along with the chimney. The narrow (1'-10" by 5'-7") opening appears never to have had a door.

### Room 203

This room measures 9'-1" by 12'. Water penetration from a failed roof-covering has caused major damage, and in some areas the floor is not safe.

**Floor.** Flooring is a random mixture of tongue-and-grooved boards, 8" to 12-1/2" wide. The southwest quadrant of the floor has suffered major damage from water penetration through a failed roof covering.

**Walls and Ceiling.** Walls and ceiling were plastered over split lath, but most of the plaster has been lost from the ceiling and the south and east walls.



FIGURE 72. View southwest in Room 203. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)



FIGURE 71. View west in Room 202. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002))



## Physical Description

**Window.** The single window in this room is missing both sash as well as the interior sash stop.



FIGURE 73. View of damaged floor in Room 203. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

**Trim.** A plain, 5-1/4"-wide, one-piece, chair rail is present on all but the south wall. Door casing is composed of plain boards, 1" by 2-5/8", except on the closet door where casing is 7/8" by 3-3/4". The window is cased with plain boards 1" by 3-3/8". A typical 1-1/4" by 5-1/2" baseboard surrounds the room.

## Kitchen Wing

The one-story kitchen wing at the west end of the house dates to the 1890s or early 1900s and contains three rooms encompassing about 375 square feet. Walls, ceilings, and floors were finished with tongue-and-groove boards, with most walls and ceiling boards double beaded. Ceilings in the kitchen wing were set at 7'-1" above the floor. In spite of the deteriorated condition of the kitchen wing, nearly all of its original materials are readily



FIGURE 74. View north of Room 104. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002) the main house, this room was clearly used as a dining room. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

indentifiable, and like the main block of the house, the interior may not have been repainted after World War I.

## Room 104

Thompson recorded the dimensions of this room as 13' by 14'. Although badly deteriorated, the original features and materials of the room can still be identified. Entered either from the hall (Room 105) or from a door that opened on to the front porch of

**Floors.** Flooring appears to be 3"-wide tongue-and-groove. Its condition could not be ascertained, but there is likely to be major deterioration of the material.

**Walls and Ceiling.** Both were finished with 3"-wide, double-beaded, tongue-and-groove boards. The west wall adjoining the hall was not conventionally framed but was simply a curtain wall of vertical

boards attached to nailers at floor, mid-span, and ceiling.

**Doors and Windows.** The size and details of the historic doors and windows has not been determined, although evidence for both probably survives in the debris inside the room.

**Trim.** The room did not have a baseboard, although quarter-round may have once trimmed the junction of the floor and the walls. A 2-1/4"-wide bed molding was used as a crown molding at the ceiling. The same double-beaded tongue-and-grooved boards used to panel the walls and ceilings was also used as door and window casing and for an apron at the windows.

**Paint.** Lab analysis will be necessary to identify and define the historic paint schemes. The room appears to have been repainted once after its original construction. Walls and ceiling appear to



FIGURE 75. View east of kitchen wing, showing remains of Rooms 105 and 106. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

## Physical Description

have first been painted blue with window and door casing painted red. Probably in the 1910s or 1920s, all of the paneling and trim were painted aqua green.

### Room 105

Thompson recorded the dimensions of this room, which was a center hall with door openings at each end, as being 4' by 14'. Walls were apparently unfinished, being composed of the exposed framing and back sides of the board wall in Room 104. The ceiling probably used the same tongue-and-groove boards found on the other ceilings. Evidence of the historic doors probably survives amid the debris in the space. Thompson's drawings and photographs document an exterior door of tongue-and-groove boards, probably like the boards used to finish walls and ceilings.

### Room 106

Thompson recorded the dimensions of this room as being 12' by 14'. The chimney for a wood-burning cook stove and the well pump in the west corner of the room indicate the room's original use as a kitchen, replacing an older detached kitchen building.

**Floors.** Flooring appears to be 3"-wide tongue-and-groove. Its condition could not be ascertained, but there is probably very little undamaged material that remains.

**Walls and Ceiling.** Both were finished with 3"-wide, double-beaded, tongue-and-groove boards. The east wall adjoining the hall was not framed but was simply a curtain wall of tongue-and-groove boards attached vertically to nailers at floor, mid-span, and ceiling.

**Doors and Windows.** The size and details of the historic doors and windows has not been determined, although evidence for both probably survives in the debris inside the room.

**Trim.** Window and door casing was probably double-beaded tongue-and-groove boards like



FIGURE 76. View southeast of kitchen wing. (NPS-SERO-CR, 2002)

those used on the walls and ceilings. Quarter-round molding finished the junction of ceiling and walls and of floor and walls.

**Miscellaneous.** An enameled cast iron sink that originally sat at the southwest corner of the kitchen is now stored in the main house. It measures 24" by 18-1/4" by 5-1/2" deep and bears a date of February 16, 1910. This may document the construction date of the entire addition, but that is not certain.

The chimney at the west end of the kitchen wing is intact, but is tilted several degrees from the vertical. The slight tilt may be a feature of its original construction, since brick and mortar remain in reasonably good condition, in spite of the collapse of the walls of the room itself. Measuring about 14-1/2" by 14-1/2" in plan and rising approximately 16'-6" above ground, it was constructed of hard-fired, red brick and a white, Portland-cement mortar.

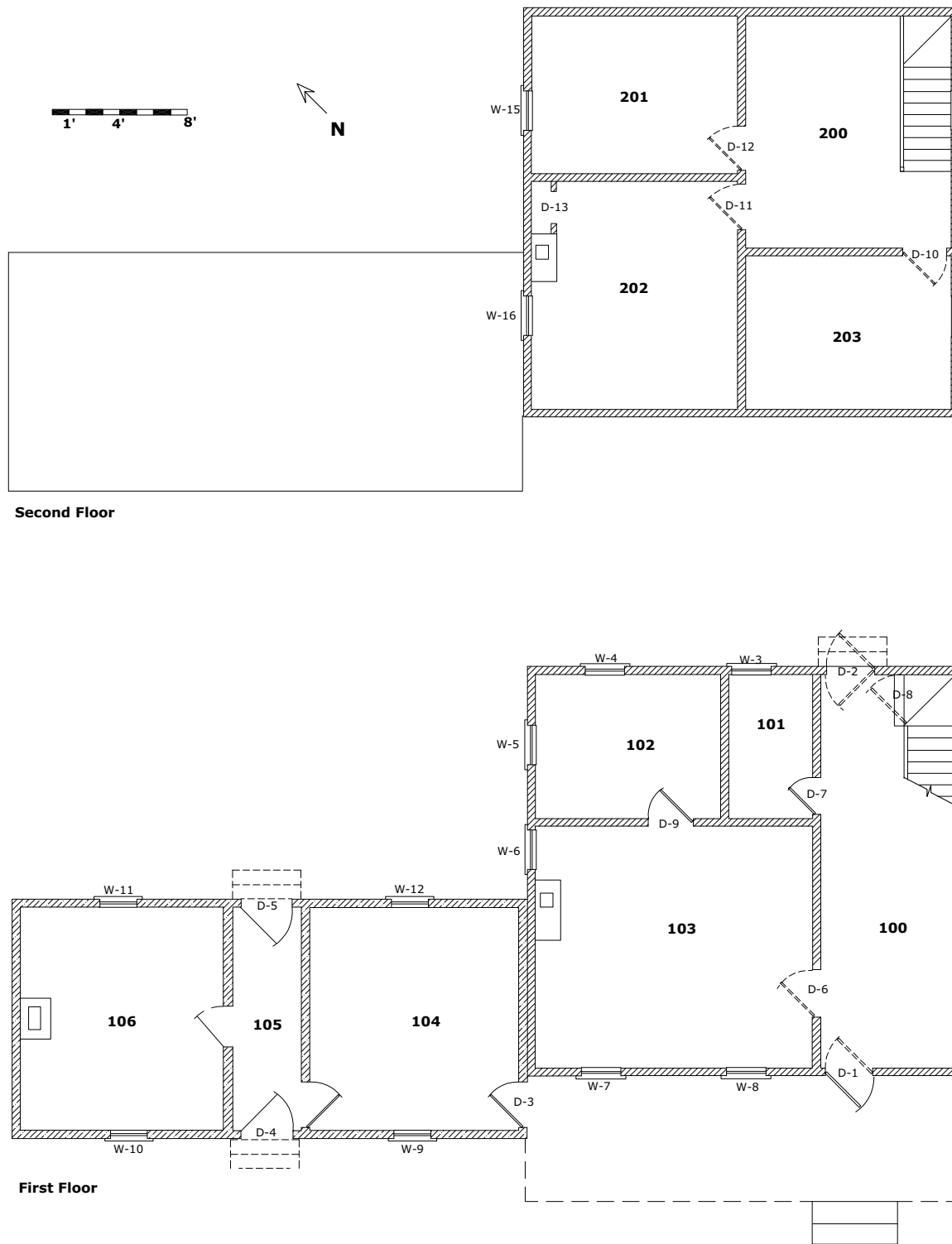


FIGURE 77. Floor plans of existing building. (I. Jones, NPS-SERO-CR, 2003)

---

## Bibliography

- Atwell, Amy Elizabeth. "Cape Lookout National Seashore, Historical District of Portsmouth Village." Unpublished manuscript, 1991.
- Berry, Merlin S. History of Northeastern North Carolina Storms. <<http://www.rootsweb.com/~nchyde/Hurricane.htm>> (28 November 2002).
- Burke, Kenneth E. "The History of Portsmouth, North Carolina, From Its Founding in 1753 to Its Evacuation in the Face of Federal Forces in 1861." Unpublished undergraduate thesis, University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia, 1958. Revised 1974, 1976.
- Carteret County, North Carolina. Records of Superior Court, Deeds & Mortgages, Births, Marriages, Deaths.
- Cloud, Ellen Fulcher. *Portsmouth, The Way It Was*. Vol 3. Havelock, NC: The Print Shop, 1996.
- Ehrenhard, John E. "Cape Lookout National Seashore: Assessment of Archeological and Historical Resources." SEAC, 1976.
- Holland, F. Ross. *A Survey History of Cape Lookout National Seashore*. Department of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, 1968.
- Olson, Sarah. "Historic Resource Study, Portsmouth Village, Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina." NPS-DSC, 1982.
- Salter, Ben B. *Portsmouth Island, Short Stores and History*. 1972 (no publ. info)
- United States of America. *Federal Census, 1790-1930*.
- Van Beck, Sara L. "Cape Lookout National Seashore, Archives and Records Management Review." NPS-SERO, 2000.

