

VLR-6/2/70 NRHP-9/8/70

Form 10-309 (July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:	Virginia
COUNTY:	Portsmouth (in cit.)
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
SEP 8 1970	

1. NAME

COMMON: Portsmouth Olde Towne ~~Conservation Project~~ Historic District

AND/OR HISTORIC: Portsmouth

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: Bounded on the north by Crawford Parkway, on the south by London St., on the east by Elizabeth River, and extending .1 mi. west of

CITY OR TOWN: Washington St. Portsmouth

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Virginia	45	(in cit.)	740

3. CLASSIFICATION

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

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Multiple ownership

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Portsmouth STATE: Virginia CODE: 45

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Portsmouth Court House

STREET AND NUMBER: Court and High Streets

CITY OR TOWN: Portsmouth STATE: Virginia CODE: 45

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Report #124-34

DATE OF SURVEY: 1969-70 ( ) Federal (X) State ( ) County ( ) Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

STREET AND NUMBER: Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond STATE: Virginia CODE: 45

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Virginia COUNTY: Portsmouth (in cit.) FOR NPS USE ONLY ENTRY NUMBER: 124-34 DATE:

7. DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Olde Towne Conservation Project encompasses nearly twenty blocks in the northeastern section of Portsmouth overlooking Crawford Bay. The district's streets are laid out in a grid pattern, with the east-west streets generally more narrow than the north-south streets. Nearly all the streets are tree-lined, and they retain their granite curbs and their brick or stone slab sidewalks. The district is densely built up, primarily containing two- and three-story townhouses set close together on narrow lots. Brick and frame construction is used in nearly equal proportion throughout the area.

While the district is noted chiefly for its many Federal and Greek Revival townhouses, it is also interspersed with numerous post-Civil War and early-twentieth-century structures. Architecturally, the later structures are generally compatible with the earlier ones and serve to unify the block facades.

Nearly all of the Federal and Greek Revival townhouses stand on high English basements, with exterior access to the principal floor gained by a long flight of wooden steps. This arrangement is a characteristic feature of Portsmouth architecture, and it gives the district a distinctive quality.

Although many individual structures have been restored in recent years, the district has never been in a state of serious decay. At present it is about to undergo a general redevelopment, with plans calling for the closing of several streets, the creation of park-like malls and neighborhood parking lots within the blocks.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian;  16th Century;  18th Century;  20th Century  
 15th Century;  17th Century;  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Portsmouth was founded in 1752 when Colonel William Crawford set aside approximately sixty-five acres of his plantation on the Elizabeth River to be laid off for a town. The new town was named in honor of the great English naval port and dockyard city. The original western boundary of Portsmouth was Court Street, although in 1763 it was extended to Chestnut Street, thus encompassing the entire area of "Olde Towne." Portsmouth was occupied by the British four times during the Revolution, but it did not suffer such extensive damage as Norfolk did. The town, however, retains few structures that can be identified positively as colonial. Most of "Olde Towne's" early structures were built in the Greek Revival period, though several date from the late-eighteenth century.

Predominate throughout "Olde Towne" is the so-called "basement house," an early-nineteenth-century architectural form characteristic of Portsmouth. Because of Portsmouth's low-lying situation, basements could not be dug, and on the town's small lots outside kitchens were not feasible, so the serving and dining areas were located in an above-ground "basement." Perhaps the best example of the "basement house" is the Hill House, built in the first half of the nineteenth century by Captain John Thompson and now used as a house museum and as headquarters of the Portsmouth Historical Association.

Other important houses in the area include the 1799 Watts House, in which Chief Black Hawk and Henry Clay were entertained; the Washington Reed House and the Bain House, two excellent examples of Federal architecture; the recently restored Grice-Neely House, an important Greek Revival townhouse with outstanding iron decoration; and the Nivison-Ball House, an eighteenth-century gambrel roof house moved several blocks in 1869 to its present location on Middle Street. Probably the oldest house in the area, the Nivison-Ball House received both the Marquis de Lafayette and Andrew Jackson.

A significant assemblage of late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century urban architecture, "Olde Towne" is also the only early townscape in the historic Hampton Roads area. The efforts of interested citizens to restore and develop this area to its fullest potential resulted in the establishment in 1968 of the Olde Towne Conservation Project, the first federally-assisted conservation project in Virginia.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Butt, Marshall W., Portsmouth Under Four Flags, 1752-1961. Portsmouth, Va.: Portsmouth Historical Association, 1961.  
 Grimsley, Ed., "The New Vitality at Portsmouth," The Commonwealth Magazine (January, 1969), 28-33.  
 O'Neal, William B., Architecture in Virginia. New York: The Virginia Museum, 1968.  
 Forrest, William S., Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity, Including Portsmouth and the Adjacent Counties. Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1853, pp. 429-435.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	36° 50' 26"	76° 18' 19"				
NE	36° 50' 26"	76° 17' 50"				
SE	36° 50' 12"	76° 17' 50"				
SW	36° 50' 12"	76° 18' 19"				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 70 acres

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:  
 Staff, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, James W. Moody, Jr., Director

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE: April 2, 1970

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond

STATE: Virginia

CODE: 45

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

National  State  Local

Name Edw. P. Alexander by John

Title Dr. Edward P. Alexander, Chairman Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

Date June 3, 1970

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

SEP 8 1970

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date SEP 8 1970

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
PROPERTY MAP FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with map)

STATE Virginia	
COUNTY Portsmouth (in cit.)	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER SFP 8	DATE 1970

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME			
COMMON: Portsmouth Olde Towne Conservation Project			
AND/OR HISTORIC: Portsmouth			
2. LOCATION			
STREET AND NUMBER: Bounded on the north by Crawford Parkway, on the south by London St., on the east by Elizabeth River, and extending .1 mi. west of			
CITY OR TOWN: Washington St.			
Portsmouth			
STATE: Virginia	CODE 45	COUNTY: (in cit.)	CODE 740
3. MAP REFERENCE			
SOURCE: U.S.G.S. map 7½', quadrangle Norfolk South, Va.			
SCALE: 1:24000			
DATE: 1955			
4. REQUIREMENTS			
TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS			
1. Property boundaries where required.			
2. North arrow.			
3. Latitude and longitude reference.			

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)

STATE Virginia	
COUNTY Portsmouth (in cit.)	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER JLI 0	DATE -

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME			
COMMON: Portsmouth Olde Towne Conservation Project			
AND/OR HISTORIC: Portsmouth			
2. LOCATION			
STREET AND NUMBER: Bounded on the north by Crawford Parkway, on the south by London St., on the east by Elizabeth River, and extending .1 mi. west of			
CITY OR TOWN: Washington St.			
Portsmouth			
STATE: Virginia	CODE 45	COUNTY: (in cit.)	CODE 740
3. PHOTO REFERENCE			
PHOTO CREDIT: Fariss Pictures, Inc.			
DATE OF PHOTO: 1968			
NEGATIVE FILED AT: Fariss Pictures, Inc. Norfolk, Virginia			
4. IDENTIFICATION			
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.			
View of Benthall-Brooks Row, 411, 415, 419, 421 Crawford Parkway from the West.			



U.S.G.S. 7½' quadrangle (Scale: 1:24,000)  
 Norfolk South, Va. 1955

Portsmouth Olde Towne Conservation Project

Latitude	Longitude
NW 36° 50' 26"	76° 18' 19"
NE 36° 50' 26"	76° 17' 50"
SE 36° 50' 12"	76° 17' 50"
SW 36° 50' 12"	76° 18' 19"