

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Onancock Historic District VDHR File No. 273-1 other names/site number

2. Location

area including Market, King, North, Kerr, College, Holly, Justis, Marshall. street & number Lee, Onancock, Lake, Parker, Parks, Chandler, & Riley not for publication N/A city, town Onancock streets vicinity N/A state Virginia code VA county Accomack code 001 zip code 23417

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes sub-rows for Contributing and Noncontributing resources.

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: Hugh C. Miller, Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Date: 14 Aug 1992.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: Date: State or Federal agency and bureau:

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. determined eligible for the National Register. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store

RELIGION: religious facility

EDUCATION: school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store

RELIGION: religious facility

EDUCATION: school

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

FEDERAL

GREEK REVIVAL

ITALIANATE

see continuation sheet 46

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

WOOD: weatherboard

roof METAL

other WOOD

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Onancock Historic District contains most of the historic residential, commercial, and ecclesiastical buildings in the town of Onancock. Situated on Onancock Creek, approximately four miles east of Chesapeake Bay, the small town was the original county seat of Accomack County (1680 to 1693), and served as an important port on Virginia's Eastern Shore from the late seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. With a current population of about 1,700 residents, Onancock continues to serve as a commercial center for the central region of Accomack County. Created by act of the colonial House of Burgesses in 1680, the town was laid out in an irregular grid pattern on fifty acres of land and continued to expand until incorporation in 1882. The historic district contains buildings that represent various periods and architectural styles from the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Such styles as the Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, Craftsman/Bungalow, Colonial Revival, and several vernacular house types provide a cohesive variety of streetscapes that adds to the aesthetic appeal of this picturesque port town.

ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Following the 1680 act of the House of Burgesses that established the town of Onancock, fifty acres of land located at the confluence of the central and northern branches of Onancock Creek were purchased by trustees of the Accomack County Court from Charles Scarburgh for the creation of a port town. The next year Colonel Daniel Jenifer was instructed by the court to lay out the new town. Originally called Onancock Towne or Port Scarburgh, the latter name of the town soon fell out of favor. Colonel Jenifer probably laid out an irregular grid pattern of streets and half-acre lots on the town's original fifty-acre tract of land that extended from the waterfront to present North Street on the east; however, no copy of the original map survives. It is believed that the town's present physical plan is closely related to the original late-seventeenth-century plan. Such typical colonial street names as Market, Queen,

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King, and Water streets are indicated (Market and King streets are still in use today) and many of the original lot sizes have been retained.

County records indicate that a courthouse, clerk's office, and church were erected in the town soon after lots were laid out; however, none of these buildings have survived and their locations are not known. Lot 20, bounded by Market, King, Water, and an unnamed street, was designated as the market place for the town and was a possible location for the courthouse and church. Sometime in the nineteenth century a town hall and a school stood on the lot. Today the same lot, a small park containing a gazebo and civic monuments, still serves as a public gathering place for town residents (photo 3).

Given Virginia's moist climate and the practice by her early colonists of erecting impermanent structures, it is not surprising that there are no surviving seventeenth- or early-eighteenth-century buildings located in the town; indeed, very few have survived in eastern Virginia. The town's oldest surviving buildings appear to be a few scattered late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century dwellings.

The oldest surviving building in Onancock appears to be a gambrel-roofed, frame and weatherboard dwelling located near the creek and behind the house at 12 Market Street (photo 12). Locally known as Scott Hall, the house at least dates to 1778 when it was referred to as "the dwelling house lately taken up" in the will of James Scott, the likely builder. Scott Hall was later the home of local Civil War hero Edmund R. Bagwell. The house fell in disrepair before being moved to its present site and renovated by William Wessells in 1921. Since then, the house has undergone many recent alterations, but the original house form is easily identified. A cemetery near the house contains graves dating from 1774 to 1888.

One of the oldest and finest dwellings in Onancock is Kerr Place (photo 13), a two-story, Flemish-bond brick, Federal-style dwelling with a central projecting pedimented pavilion, bracketed cornice, and rubbed brick jack arches over all windows. The house also features round attic windows with fine tracery in each gable and its main entrance is framed by a broken-pedimented frontispiece with a semicircular fanlight. In addition, the interior woodwork of the house is some of the most elaborate and formal of any found on the Eastern Shore. Originally built as a country house by Onancock merchant John Shepherd Ker between 1799 and 1806, Kerr

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Place (as it is spelled today) is situated on a large lot on Market Street that is surrounded by later nineteenth-century residential development. In 1960 Kerr Place was acquired by the Eastern Shore of Virginia Historical Society, which operates it as a house museum, and in 1970 the house was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Another Federal-style house occupies a commanding site atop a rise of land on the north side of Market Street overlooking Onancock Creek. Built in 1830 according to a date found on a protected roof shingle, the Alicia Hopkins House (photo 14) is a two-story, frame and weatherboard dwelling with interior end brick chimneys and three front gable dormers. The rear ell is composed of several sections that may predate the main block.

Originally built for William D. Seymour, the house was purchased by Captain Stephen B. Hopkins, a local merchant who in 1842 established a commercial and maritime trading store at the waterfront. His daughter-in-law Alicia Hopkins inherited the house and lived out her life there.

Moved a short distance from its original location, Hopkins & Bro. Store (photo 15) is a two-story, frame and weatherboarded, gable-fronted building with an attached 1 1/2-story ell that probably dates to 1842. The larger addition features corner pilasters, a bracketed cornice, and a Gothic attic window situated in its front gable. A well-preserved example of Victorian commercial architecture with most of its nineteenth-century fittings intact, the store remained in operation by the Hopkins family until 1965. Now owned by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, the store has been leased and reopened since 1983.

The Harmon House on Ames Street (photo 16) is another early Onancock house that is situated on Onancock Creek. The house was built in two major sections; the earlier section (ca. 1825) is the 1 1/2-story gambrel-roofed wing and the later section (mid-19th century) is the 2 1/2-story, frame and weatherboard, Greek Revival-style main block. On the creek behind the house was once a thriving shipbuilding operation and marine railway that operated during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. East of the house is an old graveyard with gravestones dating from 1811 to 1885.

At least four additional dwellings in town date from the early to mid-nineteenth century. They include: the John Major Fosque House (11 Market St.) built around 1839; the John Hopkins House (8 Market

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St.) built in 1860; the Fitzgerald House (photo 17) at 25 King St. with its typical Eastern Shore house form, sections of which may date to the late eighteenth century; and the small house at 25 North Street (seen in photo 8). All of these dwellings are 1 1/2- or two-story, side-passage-plan, frame structures with interior end brick chimneys. Later additions have provided these houses with a variety of rooflines, building heights, and architectural treatments.

Perhaps the town's finest mid-nineteenth-century dwelling is Holly House (photo 18) located at 7 Holly Street. Also known at various times as The Poplars and The Maples, this stately, two-story, hip-roofed, central passage/double pile-plan, frame and weatherboard house was constructed for Tully Joynes in 1860. It features Greek Revival-style details such as paneled corner pilasters, wide architrave window and door trim, a central entrance with refined transom and sidelights, and wide six-over-six-sash windows. An incongruous Italianate-style bracketed cornice nevertheless adds visual interest to the symmetrical and otherwise austere facade.

Another fine mid-nineteenth-century dwelling is located at 85 Market Street. Originally built on a three-acre lot in 1860 for successful Accomack County attorney Upshur B. Quinby, the Quinby House is similar in size and detail to Holly House and was probably built by the same craftsman.

Many houses in Onancock appear to have rear ells that may predate later and larger front additions. For example, Ingleside, an 1880s fashionable Victorian L-shaped dwelling located near the waterfront at 4 Market Street, features a rear frame ell that probably dates to the 1840s. Also, Sans Souci, an 1880s Victorian vernacular I house located at 82 Market Street has a rear ell that may date to the 1850s.

The majority of historic architectural resources in Onancock are dwellings and commercial structures that were constructed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of the houses from these two periods are simple vernacular frame and weatherboard structures with a front porch (usually screened at a later date) and little exterior decoration.

Onancock's Victorian-period vernacular house types can be divided into three main types: the L- or T-shaped dwelling with a projecting front gabled ell; the I house, which is a two-story, central passage/single pile-plan dwelling that usually features a

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central front gable; and the foursquare, which is a four-room-plan square dwelling (sometimes with a central passage) with a prominent hipped roof that usually features a central front gable or a single dormer.

The L- or T-shaped dwelling usually consists of a two-story, rectangular, gable-roofed, frame section with a perpendicular gabled ell that projects to the front or rear. A three- or four-bay porch with decorative sawnwork usually extends the length of the main ell. The best preserved examples of this vernacular house type include the late-nineteenth-century dwellings at 4 Market Street (Ingleside built in the 1880s), 12 Joynes Street, 9 Kerr Street (photo 19), 96 Market Street (Ralston House built in 1883), 6 Marshall Street, 8 Parker Street, 22 North Street, and a row of three examples at 27, 29, and 31 North Street.

The I house is the most common vernacular house type in Onancock. The form was especially popular on the Eastern Shore during the late nineteenth century. The dwellings at 10 Market Street, 16 Market Street (George B. Fosque House built in 1882), 13 and 15 Kerr Street, 29 and 31 King Street (photo 20), 76 Market Street, and 8 Riley Street (photo 21) are some of the town's best preserved examples of this house form. All of these examples have symmetrical three-bay facades with central entrances and original three- or five-bay front porches. Most of the houses have a central front gable with a small attic window, a pair of central interior brick chimneys, and decorative sawnwork adorning the front porch. A few examples have bracketed cornices or fanciful bargeboards.

The foursquare was another late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century house form that was popular for larger houses in Onancock and elsewhere on the Eastern Shore. Late-nineteenth-century examples are usually two-story, frame and weatherboard, central-passage-plan dwellings with a central front gable and a three- or five-bay front porch. Because they were large, square, double-pile structures, they were most often topped by a hipped roof or a modified mansard roof. Examples include the houses at 6 Holly Street, 12 and 23 Kerr Street, 16 King Street, 4 Lee Street, 72 Market Street, 101 Market Street (Carminé house built in 1887), and 2 and 9 Parker Street.

Later examples of the foursquare tended to be frame or brick, pyramidal hip-roofed buildings with asymmetrical facades and a central front gable or a single hip-roofed dormer at the front.

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Primarily dating from the first decades of the twentieth century, examples include those houses at 3, 5, 7, 21, and 77 Market Street, 9 Onancock Street, 10 Parker Street, 12, 38, and 66 Kerr Street, and a few unusual rusticated concrete block houses at 5 and 7 College Avenue and 7 Parker Street.

The prosperity of several of the town's residents at the turn of the century is reflected in the large Queen Anne-style dwellings that are mostly located on Market Street. Characterized by irregular massing, projecting bay windows and gables, and wraparound porches with decorative sawnwork, these houses are similar to many regional examples of the style. One particular feature, however, appears to have been popular with Onancock builders of such houses; twin symmetrically positioned gables over front bay projections seems to have been a local builder's trademark. The best preserved examples of dwellings representing the Queen Anne style are located at 30 North Street, 39 Kerr Street, 27 King Street, 1 Turner Street (photo 22), 74 Market Street (photo 23)--the Dr. Lewis Harmanson House built in 1899, 79 Market Street (A. W. Lilliston House built in 1908), 87 Market Street (Dr. Oscar L. Powell House built in 1907), and 98 Market Street (William B. Pitts House built in 1906).

A few Victorian-period houses in Onancock are unusual for their rare architectural style (in Virginia) or building treatment. The Second Empire-style house (photo 24) at 68 Market Street features a mansard roof, round-arched dormer windows, and bracketed cornice that are characteristic of the style. Built in 1890 for prominent businessman Frank A. Slocomb, the house was acquired in 1909 by Holy Trinity Episcopal Church for use as its rectory.

The house at 58 Market Street, built in 1887 for Dr. Charles L. Harmanson, possesses a Stick-style projecting wall dormer with strapwork and multi-pane windows. The 1883 Hallette-Rogers House at 102 Market Street features an unusual Italianate bracketed cornice and frieze band consisting of tongue-in-groove vertical boards with scalloped bottom edges and small round frieze windows. In addition, a central front gable is topped by a tall wooden finial.

One of the most unusual houses in town, however, is the large, 2 1/2-story, frame and weatherboard dwelling at 8 Joynes Street. Known as Harbor Breeze (photo 25) and built in 1912 as a summer home for the Frank Walter family of Washington, D. C., the building is reminiscent of antebellum plantation houses of the Deep South

