

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 RICE'S HOTEL
other names/site number Hughlett's Tavern; Shirley Hotel DHR # 66-9

2. Location

street & number Jct. of County Routes 1001 and 1002 not for publication N/A
city town Heathsville vicinity N/A
state Virginia code VA county Northumberland code 133 zip code 22473

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>2</u>	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>3</u>	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing: _____
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 3

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.

Heather C. Miller
Signature of certifying official
Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

8/24/92
Date

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.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

Ca. 1790-ca. 1881

Significant Dates

ca. 1790

1832

1881

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Located directly behind the Northumberland County courthouse at Heathsville, Rice's Hotel has been a key element in the courthouse complex since the late eighteenth century. Originally known as Hughlett's Tavern, the building served as a lodging place for visitors to the courthouse for over a century and a half. The two-story frame building follows the classic form of a small-town Virginia tavern (and later, hotel) and its gradual evolution illustrates the changing expectations of Virginia travelers between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today Rice's Hotel is a 110-foot-long structure with continuous double-tier veranda, but it began as a much smaller, two-room-plan building in the late eighteenth century. It was expanded to its present form in three major building campaigns: in the 1830s, 1880s and 1920s. John Hughlett, whose ancestors had owned land adjacent to the courthouse since the late seventeenth century, erected the original portion of the tavern before 1795. The tavern was run by a number of proprietors before John Hughlett sold it in 1824; it continued to be leased by various tavernkeepers until 1866, when John Rice purchased it. The Rice family operated it as Rice's Hotel until the 1920s, and in the following decade it was converted to apartments. In 1990 Cecelia Fallin Rice donated the building to the Northumberland County Historical Society, which plans to rehabilitate it.

JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA

Rice's Hotel is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. It is a characteristic and relatively unaltered example of a nineteenth-century tavern and hotel. The hotel is architecturally interesting for its gradual evolution over a period of a century and a quarter. It is locally significant as the only early tavern surviving in the Heathsville Historic District, and its prominent location directly behind the 1850s courthouse makes it a key visual element in the district. The period of significance ranges from ca. 1790, the earliest

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.2 acres

UTM References

A 18 370490 4197400
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Jett, historian; Willie Graham, architectural historian, et al.

organization Dept. of Historic Resources date January 1992

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone 804 786-3143

city or town Richmond state Virginia zip code 23219

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The hotel faces east and its lot adjoins the perimeter road encircling the courthouse green. A shaded lawn extends on the front and sides of the hotel, but the rear of the parcel is grown up in woods and brush. Behind the hotel stand the ruins of a detached kitchen and a smokehouse, both dating to the early nineteenth century. Documentary evidence and oral tradition indicate that a nineteenth-century cemetery also is located to the rear of the hotel, but its site is so far unknown.

The 1844 Northumberland County jail, now vacant, stands on the parcel to the north of the courthouse, across a county road defining the north edge of the hotel parcel. West of this lot and the hotel lot extend broad, cultivated fields.

Rice's Hotel/Hughlett's Tavern: Section I (late 18th century)

Given the proximity of the eighteenth-century courthouse to this site, it is likely that the building always served as a tavern. Although the building was considerably remodeled in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a close examination reveals much about its original appearance. Measuring 32 by 16 feet, the original section of the building has two-story elevations and a three-bay front. Originally it no doubt had a standard two-room, hall-parlor plan, but physical evidence of an earlier downstairs partition has not been found.¹

The interior detailing in this unit dates to remodelings in the 1830s and the 1920s. The framing, however, remains largely intact. This framing is thoroughly characteristic of late-eighteenth-century buildings in Virginia. Large pit-sawn oak posts, tenoned into an intermediate plate, flank each opening. The corner posts rise uninterrupted a full two stories, and are tenoned into the top plate. Roughly hewn second-floor down-braces are dovetail-lapped to the intermediate plate, while this plate is tenoned into the corner posts. For the remaining wall structure, conventional size studs are set between the principal framing members and are tenoned to the plates.

The attic joists are half-lapped over the plate and are pegged to it. A thick board is used for the false plate. This member rests over the ends of the joists, which are quite irregular in dimension. Except for the false plate, all of the attic framing is quite light, including the joists, rafters and collars. The collars are half-lapped and pegged to the rafters; the rafters are open-

¹ Refer to the floorplans of the hotel, drawn by Carl Lounsbury, showing the four major periods of construction. These drawings are included at the end of this report.

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tenoned at the ridge. Most of the scantling is hewn and pitsawn, and is only roughly prepared. In addition, some riven members, such as rafter braces, are used.

The heavy use of posts and the lack of visible foundations begs an investigation of the sills. Although it is unlikely that the building was earthfast, at some point in the future it may be worth probing the fabric for assurance. If the posts are hole-set, interrupted sills must have been used to carry the studs and down braces.

The brick chimney at the north end of Section I is original. Its sharp grapevine joints are visible in the attic. This sizeable chimney, originally exposed on the exterior of the building, is different from that in Section II.

Original exterior siding survives on the south gable of this section. The boards are unplanned, beaded weatherboards made of tulip poplar. They are not carefully crafted. Interestingly, each board was secured twice per stud using rosehead nails.

On the interior, only one original partition location is evident. The second-floor passage wall at the head of the stairs is still partially intact. The studs used here are bevel-lapped and wrought-nailed to the sides of the attic joists. Original plaster is applied to split lathes with feathered ends.

The universal use of riven or pitsawn technology and wrought nails during the first phase, combined with a two-story frame, suggests the building was constructed before 1815, and probably no earlier than the middle of the eighteenth century. Documentary sources indicate that a tavern stood on the site in 1795; that building was almost certainly the present one. Most likely construction took place some time during the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century.

Section II (1830s)

Hughlett Tavern was enlarged and transformed into a "modern" tavern or hotel in the 1830s. At that time, the building was tripled in size, the interior arrangement was reworked, and a two-story porch or piazza was constructed on the front.

In its enlarged form, the first floor had four front rooms along its length. The south half of the building at first-floor level was built in double-pile configuration; behind the eighteenth-century section was added a single-story shed containing a stair to the second floor. No doubt this stair replaced an earlier one removed from the original section of the tavern.

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The first floor of the original building was transformed into the principal entertaining room; all original interior walls and trim were removed. The present woodwork consists of a simple chair rail, a beaded baseboard, and a Federal-style mantel with symmetrical-trim pilasters. Like all surviving doors from this period in the tavern, those used here are six-paneled doors with elegant moldings on the front side and flat panels on the rear. Symmetrically-molded architraves with corner blocks surround all openings in this room, as well as the windows in the adjoining room to the south. All other first-floor opening surrounds have traditional two-part architraves.

Two of the three front rooms in the 1830s section (all but the southern one) have doors opening onto the piazza. Transoms placed over both doorways admit additional light. In the rear of the entertaining room, one opening leads directly to the exterior, the other to the stair in the rear shed. A third exterior door provides access at the north gable end.

The double-pile space in the 1830s section immediately south of the large entertaining room, or eighteenth-century section, is quite small, though it was heated. The partition between the front and rear rooms in this section was removed in the 1920s, making the original interior circulation pattern uncertain. However, the Period II woodwork in the large adjoining room, and the Greek Revival-style concentric-circle plaster ceiling medallion there (it has recently fallen to the floor) both suggest that this room reached its present configuration in the mid-nineteenth century.

The small first-floor front room retains a mantel similar, but more modest than that in the large entertaining room. No chair rail is used here. Twentieth-century double doors now lead to a rear room. This latter space appears to have been enclosed, although it was treated much like a porch with flush, beaded-board interior walls and a built-in bench.

Access to the adjoining set of rooms to the south could be had either via an exterior front door or through the small rooms described above. Here double parlors, set front to back, fill the space. The front room is slightly larger and has a wide fireplace and a closet. The rear room has an angled fireplace whose smoke works its way through the closet into the main chimney.

Both rooms are trimmed with two-part architraves throughout. Although well finished, these spaces are not as finely detailed as the entertaining room in the eighteenth-century unit. The mantel in the front room has rather flat plinths, a backband set in the middle of the backboards (creating a two-part architrave) and a reeded, cove cornice. The mantel in the rear room is of similar construction, but much smaller. Here, though, the frieze has been cut in the shape of a cyma on either end, and instead of a reeded, cove cornice has a more conventional molded one.

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The doorway between the front and rear rooms is eight feet wide. Unfortunately, most of the trim in the rear room was replaced in the 1920s, including that on the rear of this doorway. It is clear, though, that double or bi-folding doors originally swung towards the rear. The front room retains its chairrail and beaded baseboard.

Both rooms lead into the adjacent spaces to the south. The front of these latter rooms had no direct access to the porch, but must have had an end door. This door trim was partially reused to create the 1920s openings that presently flank the end chimney. Again, a chairrail and beaded baseboard adorn this space. The mantel is similar to those on the north. Like at the Devereaux Jarret Manly House (1820s addition) and the Elizabeth Russell House (1828), both in Petersburg, a crane was located in the fireplace of this entertaining room. Undoubtedly it was used to keep a tea kettle warm.

The rear, south room was completely retrimmed in the 1920s. Circulation to it was from the rear parlor and the "tea room" to the front.

The second floor of the 1830s unit is reached via a narrow winder stair from the shed behind the large entertaining room. This stair leads to a narrow, transverse, upstairs passage that intersects a long, north-south, axial passage along the front of the building. In contrast to the first floor, the second floor is only single room deep. The purpose of the front passage was two-fold. First, it allowed independent access to the many small, individual chambers that lined the second-floor corridor. With a growing concern for privacy when traveling, taverns began offering individual rooms to their patrons. Often the rooms were unheated, but that seemed preferential to sleeping with a stranger. In this tavern six rooms had been created on the upper floor by the 1830s, but only three are heated. All mantels are of the plain, two-part architrave type. The walls dividing the rooms are vertical-board partitions with simple beaded trim.

The second purpose of the passage was to give access to the two-tier piazza. Patrons could use the piazza as a sitting area and not be bothered by the commotion going on below, in the public area of the tavern. As is frequently the case in antebellum Virginia, the exterior wall sheathing along the porch consists of flush, rather than lapped, beaded boards. The remainder of the building is finished with beaded weatherboards, rabbetted on their bottom edge. Exposed rafters and floor joists and chamfered posts form the structure of the porch; herring-bone patterned brickwork paves the ground floor of the piazza. This paving predates that of the Period III (1880s) extension to the north.

The building's floorplan as it was enlarged in the 1830s shows that Hughlett's Tavern provided the up-to-date conveniences of other better-quality rural Virginia taverns or hotels. In these

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buildings, privacy (and not space or heat) was of primary concern. Here, as at the Halfway House in Chesterfield County and the Hanover Tavern in Hanover County, many small rooms on the upper floor feed into a long, narrow passage. A second common feature among rural taverns of the period was an ample two-story porch or piazza. This provided a cool, private sitting space for overnight guests, as well as a more public sitting area for the general public on the ground floor.

The entertaining capacity of taverns also changed during the antebellum period. Each major entertaining room was given a separate entrance (as can be seen at Boykins Tavern in Isle of Wight County and the Boutetourt Hotel in Gloucester County). The best taverns of the period, especially those at courthouse communities, provided large entertaining spaces or "ball rooms." Hughlett's Tavern was no exception. Often the ballroom could be quickly modified by swinging partitions (as at French's Tavern) or by large bi-folding doors (as at Hanover and Boykin's taverns). The owners of these taverns chose to provide a larger number of independent spaces than commonly had been available in eighteenth-century taverns of similar size.

In the antebellum period, the southern half of the tavern featured four adjoining rooms. Two served as parlors, while the smaller two appear to have been subservient to them. Although not as large as the ballroom, the double parlors were undoubtedly used for tea parties, receptions, and other entertainments. The fireplace in the room immediately south of the front parlor (possibly a secondary sitting room or family parlor) was outfitted with a light-weight crane. In context of other known cranes in public rooms, it is reasonable to assume its purpose was to keep the tea warm that was served in the parlors.

The remaining first-floor space consists of a small heated room fitted between the ballroom and the double parlors. Its original role is uncertain, but it may have been used like a similar space in the Hanover Tavern. It could have been a lobby, being ideally situated in the midst of the various entertaining rooms and with direct access to the front piazza and a rear enclosed porch. However, the stair is in the adjoining ballroom, which is somewhat problematic. An alternative use might have been a small, private entertaining room such as those that were rented to small parties in the eighteenth century. The inclusion of a fireplace and the lack of direct access to the second floor suggests the latter use. Alternatively, it may have served as an office.

The framing of Section II consists of hewn and pit-sawn members secured with machine-cut nails and riven lath. American bond (one- to five-course and greater) is used for the chimney. Both Greek Revival and Federal trim is employed. Rafters, slightly larger than those in the original section (3" x 3") are tenoned and nailed at the ridge. The collars are half lapped and nailed.

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Section III (ca. 1880-81)

In 1866, the tavern was purchased by the Rice family, who ran it as a hotel for over sixty years. The Rices erected the north addition a decade or two later--probably in 1880-81, when the assessed value of buildings on the property rose from \$400 to \$1500. This addition followed the lines and configuration of the previous sections, bringing the old tavern to a length of almost one hundred feet.

The new double-pile wing was a full two stories at the front but only a single story at the rear. The framing and weatherboards of this unit are circular sawn, and the rafters butt at the ridge and use 1" x 10" board false plates. The lath is sawn and all nails are cut.

This northern section forms a seamless whole with the rest of the building, having an identical two-tier front veranda. (A photograph of the building taken around 1900--it accompanies this report--shows the building as it appeared not long after the north wing was added.) This unit has a three-room plan on the main floor, featuring a medium-sized front room and two small rear rooms. A narrow straight-run stair leads to the second floor. The north wing contains no chimney or stove flue of its own; rather, a stove formerly fed into the chimney of the eighteenth-century section.

Like other parts of the tavern, much of the interior of this section was remodeled in the twentieth century.

Section IV (1920s)

Toward the end of the Rice family tenure, a two-story section was erected at the south end of the building to serve as private quarters. Like the rest of the building, this was a two-story frame structure. Though it was built flush with the main facade, it did not have a porch. The lack of a veranda no doubt signalled that this was a private residence, separate from the rest of the hotel.

The south addition has a two-bay facade and a shed roof with parapet front. Most of the windows are paired or grouped, admitting far more light than the windows in the older, public rooms of the hotel. When this roughly sixteen-foot-long addition was erected, wide openings were knocked into the adjoining (northern) room of the 1830s section; this provided a large living room/dining room space centered around an early chimney and connected by sets of double-leaf French doors.

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The windows in this section are equipped with two-over-two-light sash, contrasting with those in the nineteenth-century sections of the hotel, which feature six-over-six- and nine-over-nine-light sash. The interior trim in this section consists of quite plain Colonial Revival woodwork. Perhaps the most notable architectural feature of the wing is the row of windows at the south end, forming a continuous band and giving the south room the appearance of a conservatory.

Since this section was built as private family quarters, it has its own stair--the third stair to be installed in the building. It leads upstairs from the back room to a stair hall giving onto two large, well-lit bedrooms and one very small bedroom. A door in this upper hall opens into the large end bedroom of the 1830s section. Probably that bedroom was used by paying guests rather than by family members.

In addition to the south wing, there are two other small early-twentieth-century additions on the back or west side of the building. One of these is a short one-story shed at the rear of the eighteenth-century unit. The other is a one-story kitchen/pantry wing extending from the back of the 1830s section.

Outbuildings

A ruinous antebellum smokehouse stands directly behind the tavern, a few feet north of a small twentieth-century rear wing projecting from the 1830s section of the hotel. The smokehouse has partially collapsed since the authors last visited the site. Measuring roughly ten feet square, it featured a steep pyramidal roof covered with wooden shingles. The framing of this building exhibits the close studding typical of Virginia smokehouses, a technique effectively used to discourage theivery. The framing members are pitsawn, and the beaded weatherboards appear to be secured with hand-headed cut nails, while all other visible fasteners are mature cut nails. It is likely, therefore, that the smokehouse dates to ca. 1810-30, and may be associated with the second-period development of the tavern.

A few yards southwest of the smokehouse stands a ruinous one-room-plan frame building that probably served as a detached kitchen. This building had a gable roof and was served by an exterior-end brick chimney on south gable end. The walls were sheathed with unusually wide beaded weatherboards. The American-bond brickwork of the chimney and the cut nails used in the building's framing suggest a date more or less contemporary with the smokehouse and the 1830s section of the tavern.

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In the front yard, limited testing in 1990 revealed a significant amount of brick paving likely to be associated with the 1830s building campaign. In the back yard, it is difficult to determine what landscape features, structures or foundations may survive, since it is grown up in brush and small trees. Oral tradition holds that at least one gravestone stood behind the tavern, but no one in recent years has been able to locate it. No doubt stables, privies, servants' quarters and other structures once stood in this area, but it remains for archaeological investigations to discover them.

Willie Graham
Jeff O'Dell

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decade the tavern is known to have stood, to ca. 1935, when the building ceased being used as a hotel. The year 1866 is considered significant because it is the year the Rice family, longterm owners and proprietors of the hotel, purchased the property.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The land on which Rice's Hotel (originally Hughlett's Tavern) stands was part of a grant of 900 acres taken up by John Hughlett in 1663.¹ It was from this land that Northumberland County justices purchased the four-acre courthouse square in 1681 (on which John Hughlett had just built the first courthouse at the present site).²

John Hughlett, the patentee, died circa 1696, testate, but his will was destroyed when the Clerk's Office burned in 1710. However, research has shown that he left the property on which the old tavern now stands to his son John Hughlett II. John Hughlett II wrote his will in 1704. He left the present tavern property to his son Yarrett Hughlett. Yarrett Hughlett wrote his will in 1746/7, and left the subject property to his son John Hughlett (who was called John Hughlett the elder).³

It has not been determined when John Hughlett the elder (great grandson of the original owner of the land) built a tavern on his land adjoining the courthouse square. However, when he wrote his will in 1795, one of the bequests was that "the rents of the ordinary be put to the use of schooling and raising my grandson John Hughlett." He also bequeathed the "land and plantation joining the Courthouse" to his son, John Hughlett, "if he returns." "But if he should not

¹ Nugent, Nell Marion, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, Vol. I, Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc. reprint, Baltimore (1983), pp. 460-1.

² Order Book 1678-98, p. 89 and p. 110.

³ Record Book 1718-26, p. 49; Record Book 1, p. 42; Order Book 1773-83, p. 81 and Record Book 9, p. 283. Also, see Jett, Carolyn H., *Heathsville, Yesterday & Today, Northumberland County Woman's Club (1980)*, p. 10 and pp. 16-43; also see Hughlett, Lloyd H., Editor, *Hughlett/Hulett Descendants from Colonial Virginia*, Hughlett Genealogical Trust, 1981 (corrected version, at Northumberland County Historical Society), pp. 26-61 and pp. 58-71.

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return," that land was to go to "granson John."⁴ As an accounting of the estate of John Hughlett the elder shows, his son, John, had not returned, having been away for 15 years in 1796. He was then presumed to be dead, and his estate was divided among his siblings.⁵ This meant that according to the terms of the will of his grandfather, John the elder, the tavern property was inherited by "granson John."⁶

While young John Hughlett was growing up, the ordinary continued to be rented out. The names of those renters cannot be determined. However, in 1812, young John Hughlett applied for a license to operate it himself.⁷ It appears that the business did not prosper under his management, for in 1823 he mortgaged the tavern.⁸ In 1824, the property was sold by the trustee to Griffin H. Foushee.⁹

In 1822, when the value of buildings first appeared on the real property tax list, John Hughlett's property [the tavern] was shown as worth \$1,200. This same value continued through 1831, then the value was increased to \$2,000 in 1832, and \$3,000 in 1833. Therefore, it seems probable that the building was significantly enlarged at that time, with the construction taking more than a year to complete. Over the next six years, the value remained at \$3,000. However, in 1839 it increased to \$4,000 and remained at that figure through 1850.¹⁰ The reason for the value increase in 1839 has not been determined. However, later records indicate that there was another house on the same lot in 1835, "which said house or the several rooms and basement story thereof are used and occupied" at that time "by James Alexander and others

⁴ Record Book 15, pp. 226-7.

⁵ Record Book 15, pp. 355-6.

⁶ Just for clarification of the record, the reader might like to know that grandson John was not the son of the missing John, but the son of the missing John's brother, Yarrett Hughlett. See Hughlett, pp. 68-71, pp. 97-98, and pp. 107-109.

⁷ Order Book 1811-1815, p. 71.

⁸ Record Book 23, p. 381.

⁹ Record Book 24, pp. 86-7.

¹⁰ Northumberland County Real Property Tax Records, 1782-1850, microfilm.

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as mechanic's shops."¹¹ Then, in 1852, in a later sale, it was indicated that there was "a house erected for the Cannon & Caisson, furnished by the state of Virginia for the use of the 37th Reg't Va. Militia."¹² It is probable that a number of buildings, such as stables, and other dependencies or storage houses were also on the lot. An archaeological dig might well provide useful information about the arrangement and types of structures on the tavern property.

After Griffin H. Foushee purchased the tavern in 1824 he continued to rent it out, first to Henry Tankersley, then, in 1826, to Thomas Hughlett for a five-year term. According to the terms of the agreement, Hughlett was to "well and truly preserve, keep up and in repair the fences and enclosures, and carry out and put on the lands, lots and gardens attached to the premises all the manure which may be raised thereon."¹³

William Harding, a wealthy Heathsville planter and merchant who lived at nearby Springfield farm, was constantly buying and selling local real estate. The tavern became one of his many holdings when he purchased it in 1835 from Griffin H. Foushee.¹⁴ Harding kept it until 1844, at which time he sold it to Richard A. Claybrook.¹⁵

Claybrook, who was an attorney, apparently did not operate the tavern himself, but leased it. He lived in Heathsville only a short time, later moving to the Lottsburg area, to a plantation which he called Piedmont. He represented Northumberland County in the Virginia legislature.¹⁶ In 1860 he was a candidate for the senate, but lost. He later became a lieutenant colonel in the 40th Virginia Infantry.¹⁷ Claybrook kept the tavern less than a year, then sold it to Seneca M.

¹¹ Record Book 28, p. 632.

¹² Deed Book B, p. 145.

¹³ Record Book 25, p. 34.

¹⁴ Record Book 28, p. 632.

¹⁵ Record Book 34, p. 254.

¹⁶ "Frederick William Claybrook 1844-1914..." *The Bulletin of the Northumberland County Historical Society*, Vol. XIV, 1977, pp. 70-74.

¹⁷ Krick, Robert E. L., *40th Virginia Infantry*, H. E. Howard, Inc., Lynchburg, Va., 1985. p. 77.

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Conway. At that time, Peter C. Claughton was occupying it.¹⁸

Seneca M. Conway, born circa 1822, was the son of Thomas Conway and his wife, Hannah Middleton. He was the only surviving son of five children born to this couple. Thomas Conway died before 1831, for then his widow remarried. At that time, Seneca became the ward of his uncle, Colonel William Middleton, of Union Village. Young Seneca attended William & Mary College, from which he received a Bachelor of Law degree on 11 Oct. 1842, at the age of twenty. Soon after purchasing the tavern, Seneca Conway left this area and went to Wisconsin where he became involved in the mining of lead. According to Hayden, he became a member of Congress in Wisconsin. He died there in February or March of 1848, leaving the bulk of his estate, including the tavern, to the children of his sister, Mary, and her second husband, William H. Sydnor.¹⁹

When Conway's estate was settled, ownership of the tavern passed to William Sydnor as guardian of his children. The 1850 census shows that George Henderson was the proprietor at that time.

George Henderson had married the widow of Robert Moss, whose grave is said to be in the woods at the back of the tavern. Although the gravestone has not been seen in recent years, there is still hope that it will be rediscovered. Robert Moss was a watchmaker.²⁰ Since Moss

¹⁸ Record Book 34, p. 255.

¹⁹ Record Book 29, pp. 189-192; Record Book 31, p. 71; Hayden, Horace Edwin, *Virginia Genealogies*, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., Baltimore, reprint 1979. "Conway of Lancaster County, Virginia," pp. 221-290 and p. 741; Will Book A, pp. 6-8; also, an unpublished genealogical report entitled "The Descendants of Seneca M. Conway," by Carolyn H. Jett, in her files.

²⁰ Henderson family Bible, presently owned by Harold Eubank of Kilmarnock, and copied several years ago by Carolyn H. Jett; Neale, Alma Brent, "Northern Neck Epitaphs," *Northern Neck Historical Society Magazine*, Vol. IX, pp. 837-849; also, *In the Shadow of Chicacoan Oak*, "Henderson Family," unpublished manuscript by Carolyn H. Jett. The fact that Robert Moss was a watchmaker is proved by an heirloom watch owned by a local family. The watch has an inside plate which is engraved with the name of the maker, Robert Moss, and the date he made the watch. Note: Moss' widow, prior to her remarriage to George Henderson, was the builder of Moss Cottage, one of the homes in Heathsville Historic District.

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had no apparent connection with the owners of the tavern at the time of his death, the fact that he was buried there raises the possibility that the tavern grounds were used as a cemetery by the townspeople. It is interesting to note that in 1866, when the property was sold to John Rice, the sale was "subject to the right of burial of Dr. G. B. Campbell."²¹

When the courthouse square was surveyed in 1848, the resulting plat shows that a portion of the tavern grounds extended into the public square. When portions of the public square were sold after the present courthouse was completed in 1851, the portion in front of the tavern was sold to the heirs of William Sydnor.²²

In 1852 the tavern was sold to William Middleton, Jr. for the sum of \$2,405.²³ According to the deed, said Middleton then resided on the property. However, a year later William Middleton lost the property and it was purchased by Benjamin S. Middleton for the same price.²⁴ Benjamin S. Middleton sold the tavern in 1866 to John Rice for the price of \$3,000.²⁵ It was then that it became Rice Hotel.²⁶

In the aftermath of the Civil War, it must have taken much courage to risk that sum of money on this business venture. However, Rice was experienced in the management of an ordinary, having owned the Palo Alto tavern prior to his purchase of Hughlett's Tavern.²⁷

The 1850 Land Tax records show the total property valued at \$4,000 with \$2,000 of that designated as the value of the building or buildings on the property. There was a major

²¹ Deed Book D, p. 64.

²² Deed Book B, pp. 7-9; Also, see plat, Appendix A.

²³ Deed Book B, p. 145.

²⁴ Deed Book B, p. 178 and p. 182.

²⁵ Deed Book D, p. 64.

²⁶ The original name of this establishment was "Rice Hotel"; in later years the designation "Rice's Hotel" has become prevalent.

²⁷ Deed Book C, p. 131 and Deed Book D, p. 66.

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reassessment of property values that year, and without any reason being given the value of the tavern property decreased. In 1851, the building value was given as \$1,000 and the total property value as \$1,500. In 1857 the building value increased to \$1500 but the total value, which had been at \$2,024 since 1854, decreased to \$1936. Interestingly, in 1873-74, the total value dropped to \$1,600 and the building value dropped from \$1,500 to \$400.²⁸ Although the depressed values after the Civil War could account for some of the value decrease, it probably does not account for that much of a decrease. A couple of possibilities come to mind. Other buildings on the property might have been destroyed in some way, or it could be that there was a portion of the tavern removed at that time - perhaps an even older section than the existing 18th-century part.

In 1881 the value of Rice's Hotel jumped to \$1,500 and the total property value increased to \$2,000.²⁹ It seems probable that it was in 1880 that John Rice added a large section to the tavern.

Under Rice's management his hotel became a fashionable spot, according to local legends. A photograph, taken in the 1890s, shows the hotel in excellent condition, trim and tidy. On its front porch are well dressed ladies and gentlemen, including the proprietor, Mrs. Felicia Rice (wife of John Rice). Standing at the front entrance is a stylish horse-drawn buggy. The hostler is holding the horse, waiting, perhaps, for the passengers to come out.³⁰

Some of the tavern residents were permanent ones, while others came and went. It was a favorite of traveling salesmen, or "drummers," as they were called.

After the death of John Rice, in 1892, Mrs. Felicia Rice continued to operate the hotel until her age led her to retire, which apparently was in the first decade of this century. She then leased the property to a relative, George D. Shirley, who called it Shirley Hotel.³¹

The old building came very close to destruction on November 11, 1907 when a fire threatened

²⁸ Land Tax records.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See Appendix B.

³¹ Interview with Wellington H. Shirley, grandson of George D. Shirley.

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its existence. In that fire, all the buildings that stood just north of the courthouse were destroyed. In a newspaper ad placed in the December 5, 1907 edition of *The Echo*, Mr. and Mrs. Shirley extended their appreciation and thanks "to those who so heroically [*sic*] aided in saving our hotel during the fire."

Felicia Rice died in 1907 and left all her property to be divided between her sons (or among her sons and a grandson, should the grandson ever be restored to sanity).³² In 1909 her heirs sold Rice Hotel to James G. Rice, another of their cousins. The property contained 44 acres at that time.³³ The name, Rice Hotel, was re-established with their ownership. They continued to operate it successfully over the next couple of decades. During their ownership, they added living quarters on the south end of the structure. However, the tax records do not reflect this addition.

No one remembers exactly when the Rice family gave up the operation of Rice Hotel, but it is believed by longtime residents that it was during the Depression. The last persons to operate it were Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Edwards, in the early 1930s. Soon after it ceased to be a hotel, portions of it were converted to apartments.³⁴

In a deed made by James G. Rice prior to his death, he gave the property to his wife, Liela Palmer Rice.³⁵ In 1933, Liela Rice wrote her will, and in it she gave "all of the hotel proper" to her son, J. G. Rice. Apparently, she excluded the family living quarters from that bequest, for she also gave J. G. Rice "three rooms in the residence known as living room [,] family dining room & the room behind the dining room known as his room." To her daughter, Sallie Rice Brooke, she gave "the 5 rooms to the south & in the residence namely library [,] sun parlor [,] kitchen back of sun parlor [,] 2 rooms above with bath [,]" and "the flower plot extending to row of box bushes on the south & west to wire fence." She also left to Sarah Tolson "a home

³² Will Book B, pp. 267-8.

³³ Deed Book T, p. 83.

³⁴ Interviews with Cundiff and Catherine Simmons, Winifred Dawson, and Katherine Rowe, all long-time residents of Heathsville.

³⁵ Deed Book X, p. 175.

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as long as she wants to stay & behave."³⁶

However, after writing this will, Mrs. Liela Rice made a deed for the entire property to her son, James G. Rice, Jr., on condition that he would "take care of and provide for the said Lelie E. Rice so long as she lives should she need such care and assistance." She reserved a life interest in the property for herself.³⁷

Mrs. Liela E. Rice died on 8 Feb. 1940, after which her 1933 will was put to record.³⁸

The hotel property continued to be rented. However, very little was done in the way of maintenance and upkeep, so before long the effects of neglect began to show. James G. Rice, Jr. wrote his will in 1958, in which he left his entire estate to his wife, Cecelia Fallin Rice. He died on 10 Aug. 1974, and his widow became sole owner of the property.³⁹

By that time, most of the hotel was uninhabitable. The downstairs center portion was used for a time by the Department of Motor Vehicles for a license renewal center. It also was the polling place for Heathsville District for a few elections.

In 1981, a few weeks before Century III Celebration (commemorating the 300th anniversary of the establishment of the courthouse square), the county sheriff determined the balcony of the old hotel was a threat to public safety, and decided to have a rope barrier put in front of the building. Rather than have that happen, Mrs. Rice had some maintenance done to shore up the balcony, which preserved it for a few more years. However, in 1989, the central portion of that balcony finally succumbed to age, collapsed, and was removed.

About a year later, Mrs. Cecelia Fallin Rice made a deed of gift for the building, with 1.2 acres of land, to the Northumberland County Historical Society.⁴⁰

³⁶ Will Book D, p.377.

³⁷ Deed Book OO, pp. 194-5.

³⁸ Will Book D, pp. 377-8.

³⁹ Will Book I, p. 415.

⁴⁰ Deed Book 313, p. 483.

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Since that time, a foundation has been formed and incorporated as a fund-raising organization whose purpose is to restore the old hotel. Although a use for the restored building has not yet been determined, the foundation directors are making plans for their campaign. This National Register nomination is an initial step in increasing public awareness of the hotel and its history.

Included as a contributing property in the Heathsville Historic District, the old tavern is described in that nomination as "the quintessential courthouse tavern," and "perhaps the largest traditional tavern in any Virginia town east of Fredericksburg and north of Gloucester Court House."⁴¹ It provides for us glimpses and reminders of a way of life that usually we can only read about.

A walk across the front porch of the tavern gives an excellent view of carpentry methods that are no longer used. The beams, hewn with axes by hand, and the framework secured with mortise-and-tenon joinery: these remind us of a time when power driven tools did not exist, when all that was available was hand labor.

The massive chimneys remind us that fireplaces provided the only heat when this tavern was built. And the porches along the front, facing east, probably were filled in the summer evenings by tavern guests escaping the heat of their rooms at a time when no one even dreamed of air conditioning.

Just the existence of the building is a reminder of a time when a trip of fifty miles could take all day, and without conveniently placed taverns along the roads the traveler could have been forced to spend the night in the open.

Rice's Hotel is a link with the past.⁴² Its listing on the National Register of Historic Places should help ensure its preservation for future generations to study and enjoy.

Carolyn H. Jett

⁴¹ O'Dell, Jeff, Nomination of Heathsville Historic District, Section 7, pp. 6-7.

⁴² These concluding sentences were previously used in *Heathsville, Yesterday & Today*, p. 35.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of this 1.2 acre parcel are shown in the attached legal plat entitled "Plat of the Old Hotel in Heathsville," and dated 22 August 1990.

Boundary Justification

The entire 1.2 acre parcel is included because it has been associated with the tavern since at least the nineteenth century. The back portion of the lot, which is currently woodland, may contain the archaeological evidence of buildings and other structures associated with the tavern/hotel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Documentary evidence and oral tradition also suggests that part of this lot was used as a cemetery in the nineteenth century.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

The Historical Context in Section 8 was written by Carolyn H. Jett, historian, of Heathsville, Virginia. The majority of the Architectural Description in Section 7 was written by Willie Graham, architectural historian with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in Williamsburg, Virginia. Jeff O'Dell of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources edited and expanded Section 7 and prepared the rest of the nomination.

Mr. Graham would like to recognize three persons who, along with him, made a detailed record of Rice's Hotel in September, 1990. These are: Dr. Carl Lounsbury of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Michelle Daleiden, and Beth Ann Spyrison. Jeff O'Dell would like to recognize Dr. Elmer Ballintine, who assisted him in recording the Rice's Hotel buildings in May 1989.

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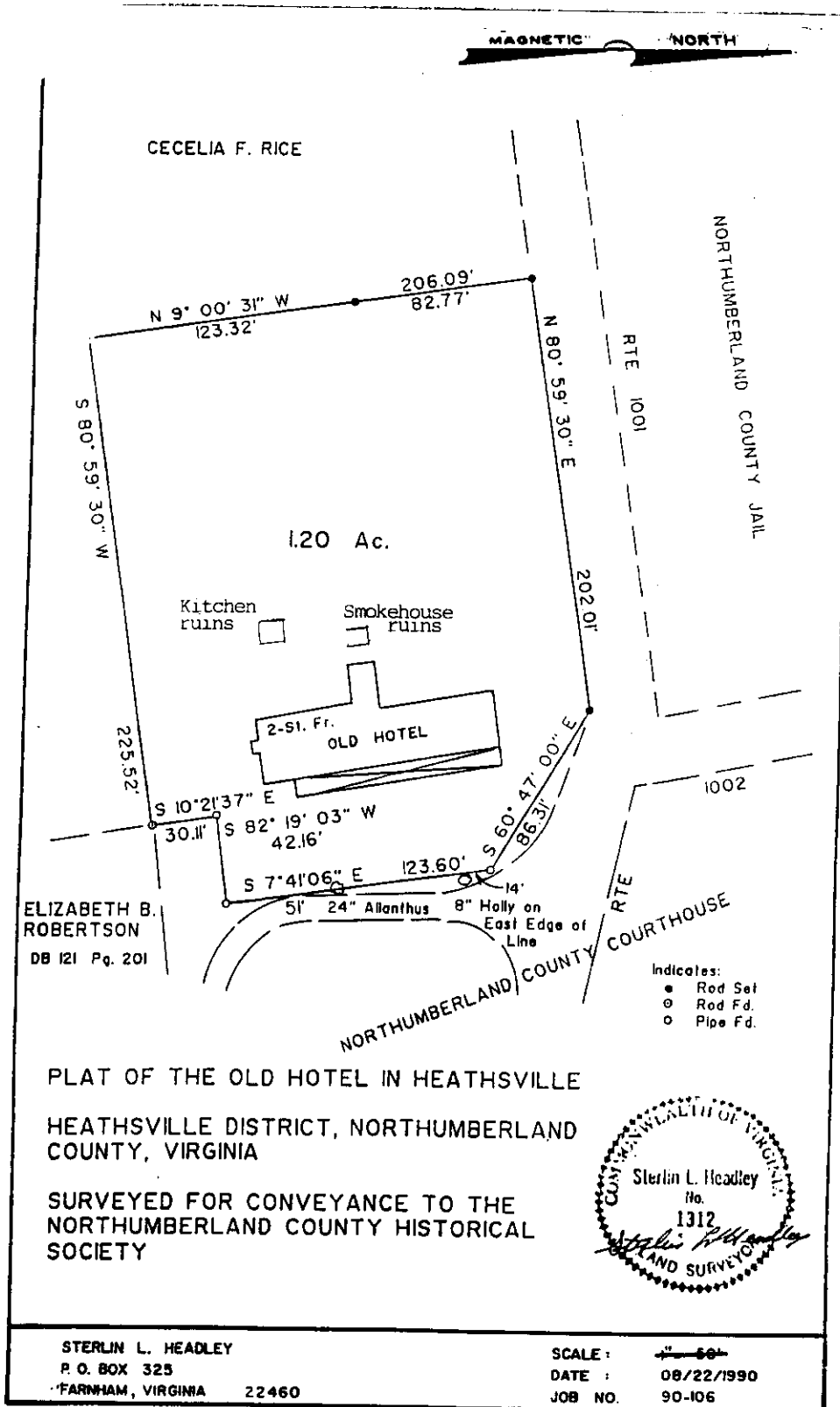
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Drawing has been reduced



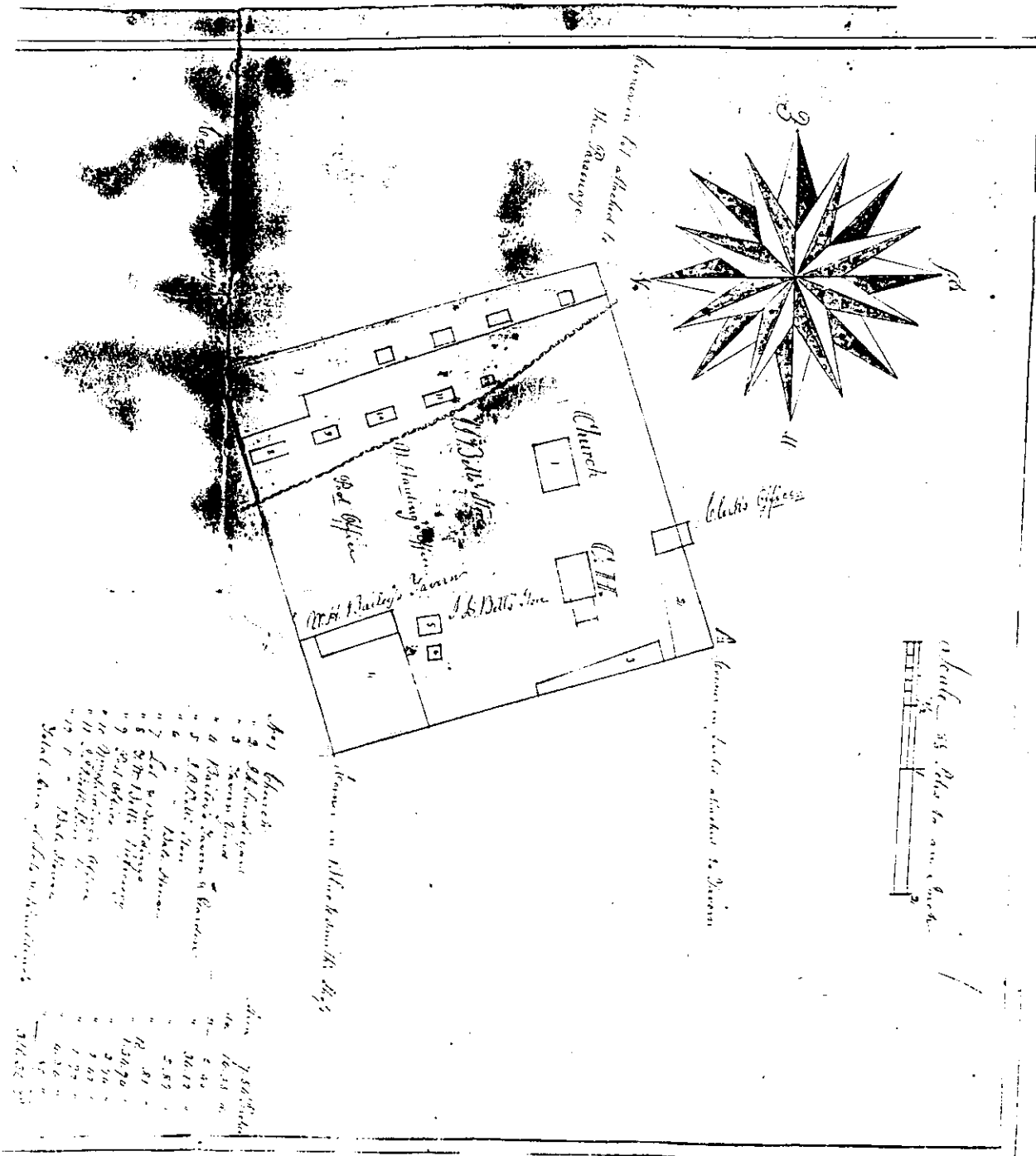
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ILLUSTRATION 1: 1848 Plat of Courthouse Square



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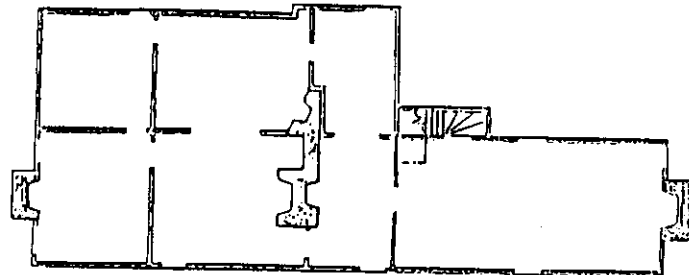
Rice's Hotel
Northumberland County, VA

ILLUSTRATION 3: Lounsbury Drawings

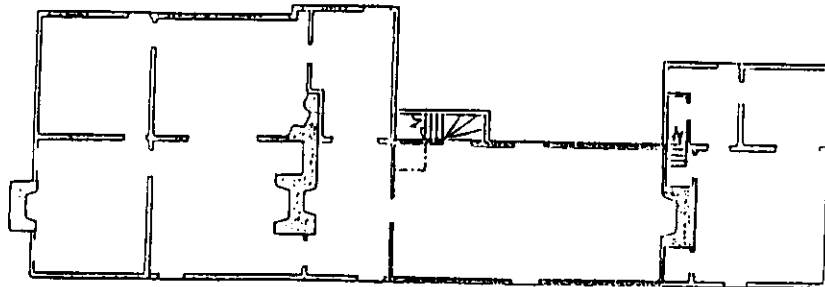
Drawings by Dr. Carl Lounsbury,
Colonial Williamsburg, showing
the stages in the development
of the tavern or hotel.



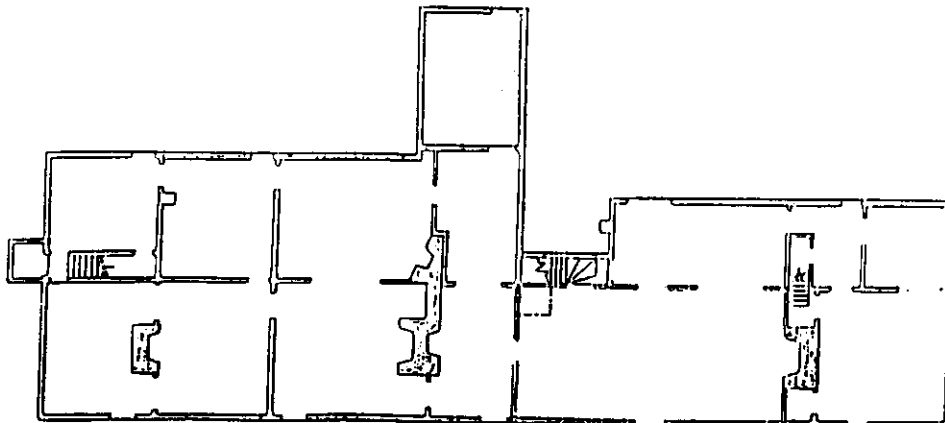
I. late 18th c.



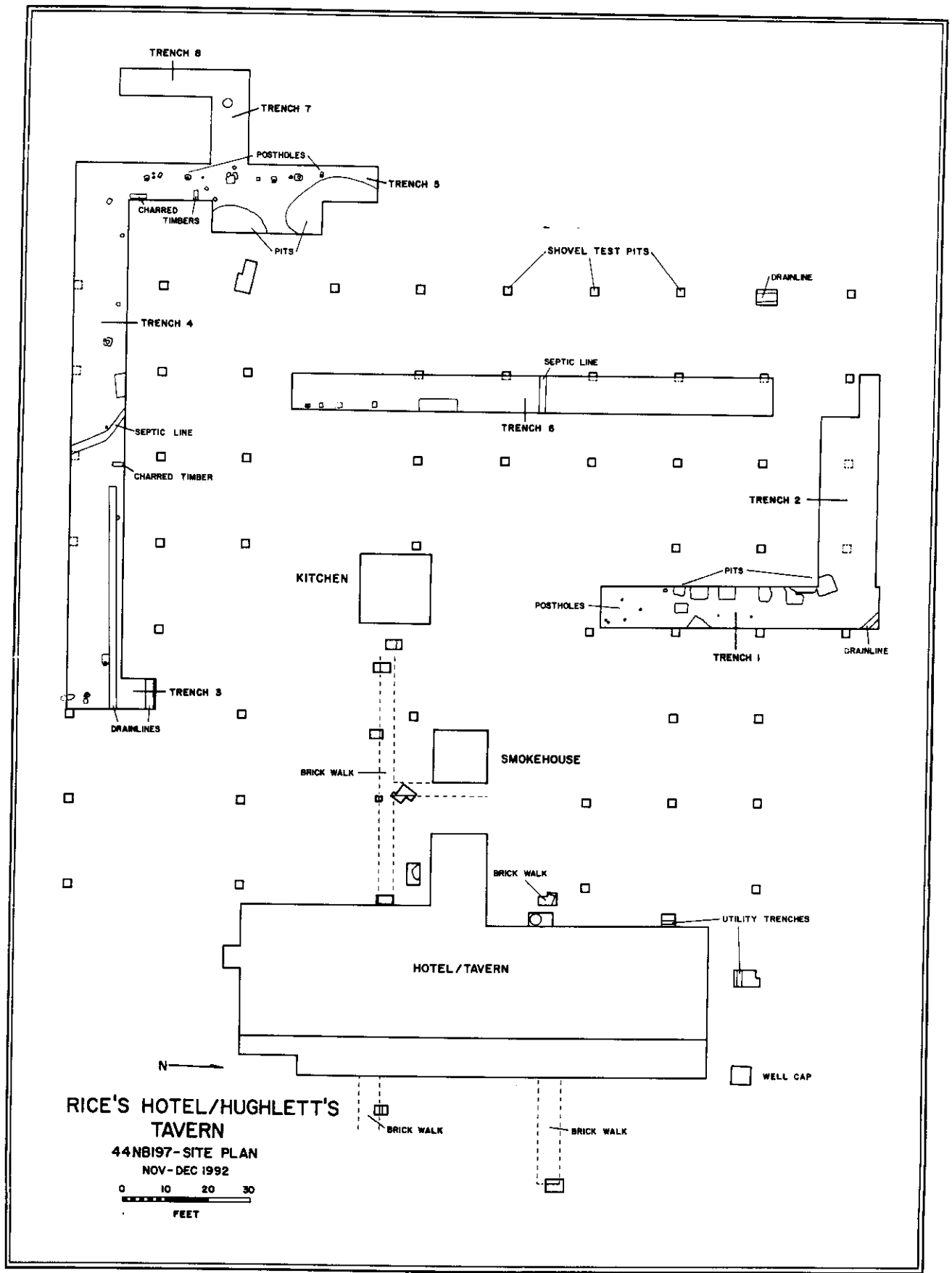
II. 1830s



III. post Civil War



IV. 1920s



Plan of archaeological test units and features at the hotel/tavern complex.

