





8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
X B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
Commerce
Politics/Government

Period of Significance 1897 -1949

Significant Dates 1897-98

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) Curtis, Simon Reid

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Adolph Wagner, Architect/Engineer

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 #

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources & Virginia Historical Society Library

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 1.6 acres

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18/360460/4117540		2			3			4		

See continuation sheet.

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Dennis F. Swartz, Historic Preservationist & Thomas H. Taylor, Jr., Architectural Conservator  
 organization Burlington Medical Supplies date February 1, 2009  
 street & number 3 Elmhurst Street telephone 1-800-221-3466  
 city or town Newport News state VA zip code 23603

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs** Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name John R. and Barbara W. Lucas  
 street & number 10 Elmhurst Street telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
 city or town Newport News state VA zip code 23603

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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**Architectural Summary Paragraph**

Built ca. 1897, the Simon Reid Curtis house was the first dwelling built in the village of Lee Hall, currently at the northern tip of the city of Newport News, and it is the only 19<sup>th</sup> century residence still standing there. The 2½-story frame structure was built by Simon Reid Curtis (1862-1949), a prominent businessman and land owner, who was an influential political leader in Warwick County, Virginia from the 1890s until his death in 1949. Curtis hired architect/civil engineer, A. Wagner, to design a store and dwelling suitable for his position and business ventures. The Curtis home is a large and imposing mansion (nearly 10,500 sq. ft.) that became the center of political, commercial, and social activities in the county. The Curtis family owned the house until 1996 when it was sold, renovated, and converted into a bed and breakfast. The house sits on a 1.82-acre triangular lot along the railroad tracks, south of the Lee Hall Depot.<sup>1</sup> There is a 16' x 24' noncontributing gambrel roof storage shed built in 1995 at the southwest corner of the property. Most of the original interior architectural decorative elements and materials have been preserved including the store counters, shelves, and post office mailboxes.

**Narrative Architectural Description**

**Detailed Description: Exterior**

S. R. Curtis wanted to concentrate his business interests in one place and asked Wagner to design a single structure to house a dry goods store, post office, boarding house, the tax assessor's office, and his residence at a deserted crossroads in upper Warwick County near the Lee Hall Train Depot. Wagner's solution was to design two separate structures and attach them to form a "T" shaped building with common architectural features (roofs, porches, windows, shutters, and siding).<sup>2</sup> The front of the store, perpendicular to the street, formed the top of the "T" while the dwelling formed the base and faced the railroad tracks. All entrances on Elmhurst Street were for business purposes; patrons of the dry goods store, post office, and boarding rooms entered through the store. Citizens wishing to pay their taxes entered the Treasurer's Office through a small entrance porch next to the store.

The 2½ story Colonial Revival style building had a slate covered hipped roof, boxed eaves and six large dormers each with a pair of 6/6 double-hung wood sash windows. There are five tall slender brick chimneys; three on the store and two on the dwelling. Those on the dwelling have a decorative projecting brick skirt beneath a corbelled cap. The original design specified a tin roof with a low profile hanging roof gutters, and no dormers. Prior to construction, Curtis changed the design by raising the roof in order to create more useable space in the attic and added the dormers and built-in gutters. These changes are shown in pencil on the original ink drawing. The front door of the dwelling is protected by one of the three handsome two-story porches with slender chamfered columns. The front entrance was beautifully designed with a pair of three-panel doors flanked by fluted pilasters, glass sidelights, and a large three-light glass transom. The beveled glass in the transom was replaced with solid wood panels. Each sidelight consists of a glass panel with molded wood tracery in an elliptical pattern above two horizontal raised panels that match those in each leaf of the door. The exterior balcony door over the west entrance is a single four-panel door with a transom and undecorated surround. Wagner specified simple rectangular balusters on the balcony railing only. Curtis made another change by eliminating the two-story porch on the north side of the dwelling and replacing it with a smaller entrance porch for the Warwick Treasurer's Office. The exterior walls are covered with lapped weatherboards. A pair of matching two-story porches; one on the front of the store facing Elmhurst Street and the other one on the rear of the store facing Yorktown Road draws attention to the commercial portion of the structure. A unique feature of his building is that although the porches are identical, the storefronts they protect are different. The storefront facing Elmhurst Street is characterized by a wall of glass consisting of large plate-glass display windows on a solid wood base and a two-light transom on either

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side of a recessed entrance with a pair of matching glass-paneled doors and sidelights. The concrete steps were an early addition. A wall of glass also characterizes the storefront facing Yorktown Road; however, the individual display window lights are smaller than the ones on the front and the central door is flush with the wall. Early photographs show a sign projecting from one of the porch columns facing Elmhurst Street. Windows on the first and second floor of the dwelling and store have matching wooden shutters with moveable slats and molded cast-iron shutter dogs.

The large one-story enclosed porch spanning the full length of the store on the east elevation was another early addition. Early photographs indicate the exterior walls had few windows with a single window and door on the north elevation facing Elmhurst Street. Initially, it may have been used as an extension to the store. By the early 1920s Curtis had removed the upper portions of the exterior walls of the porch and installed glass panels to create a large well lighted space that was used for the marriages of his two daughters, Elsie and Nannie. A small cellar located under the south end of the porch was added to house a coal-fired furnace and radiators were installed throughout the store and dwelling. It appears that Curtis also enclosed the one-story side porch on the south elevation of the dwelling using similar glass panels. At this time he may have also added the concrete steps to the three two-story porches. All the porches including those that are enclosed have tin roofs.

The building sits on a three-foot high foundation. A solid brick wall supports the perimeter while the rest of the structure sits on brick piers. The only noticeable modern changes to the exterior are code-required additions including the two handicap ramps (one for access to the dwelling and one for access to the store) and the ventilation/exhaust system for the commercial kitchen.

A hedge of Japanese privets surrounds the house and store. There is a cast iron fence with concrete posts that surrounds the west lawn in front of the dwelling, apparently erected when the house was constructed. The non-contributing storage building is located outside the fence line on the south side of the property.

**Detailed Description: Interior**

A large center hall provides access to a pair of rooms on each side. The public rooms include a parlor and the Treasurer's Office and are located on the north side of the hall. Family rooms are located on the south side of the hall and include a living room and a kitchen. There is a large straight-run staircase along the south wall that enables both guests and family members a relatively easy twelve foot climb to the second floor. The staircase features heavy carved newel posts and turned balusters. At the back inside corner of each tread is a decorative brass dust plate. A door at the rear of the hall provides the only access to the store from the first floor of the house. The two rooms on the north side of the hall have similar corner fireplaces at the north end of the interior partition wall. These fireplaces have marble faces, limestone hearths, and carved wooden mantelpieces with crosssetted architraves, pulvinated friezes, and cornices with dentil moldings and wood shelves. A pair of glass doors in the center of the interior partition wall allows the two rooms to be used for business or public functions. These rooms have architectural features common to all the rooms in the dwelling including high washboards, molded chairboards, picture rails, molded cornices and operable transoms over the interior doors. The matching rooms on the south side of the center hall were intended for private use. The front room on the south side of the hall has a projecting brick fireplace, limestone hearth, and a carved wooden shelf. The fireplace is located in the center of the interior partition wall. The back room has a closet and a steep narrow staircase to the second floor located directly opposite an exterior door on the south porch. The footprint of the second floor of the dwelling is similar to the first with a wide center hall with two rooms on both sides. The rooms on the north side do not have fireplaces; however, the front room on the south side of the hall has a fireplace with a stone hearth, marble face

surrounded by a large bolection molding with a detached shelf. The interior partition in this room is wood with applied molding above the

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fireplace and the door openings and vertical raised panels that match those in the doors. A bathroom and large closet have been added to the rear room, often referred to by the Curtis's as the nursery.

The store was one large room that spanned the entire length of the building. The original store counters and shelves in the front part of the store have been preserved in their original locations. There are large drawers with brass handles under the counter along the west wall. Tall chambered wood posts provide added support for the second floor. There is a capped flue opening in each of the two projecting chimneys along the east wall indicating that there may have been two iron stoves in the store. The post office was located at the back of the store near the south entrance. A sixty-six-slot mailbox from the original post office was relocated to the south wall of the remaining portion of the store when a commercial kitchen and refrigerated food storage unit were installed at the south end of the store.

The second floor of the store consists of a hall along the west side with eight boarding rooms on the east side. The attic stair is located along the west wall, north of the main staircase. The newel is a simplified version of those found on the main stair. The balusters are rectangular in shape and there are only two per tread. The second floor ceiling height is eleven feet. Two of the original guest rooms have been converted to bathrooms. Four of the rooms have direct access to the porch balconies through full-height windows.

Original door and window hardware have been preserved. The four-panel doors on the first and second floors have simple round brass knobs. The doors on the first floor have plain rectangular brass back plates while doors on the second floor of the dwelling have more decorative brass back plates. Most of the doors have their original brass hinges. Every room is equipped with a cast iron radiator. The coal-burning furnace was replaced with an oil-burning furnace in the 1950s. A gas-fired furnace was installed during the 1996 renovation. The first floor of the dwelling is centrally air-conditioned. The rest of the building is equipped with window units. Most of the original light fixtures were sold at auction in 1994.<sup>3</sup> Three of the original second floor lamps were purchased in 2007 and reinstalled. The original four-inch tongue and groove wood flooring has been preserved throughout the building. In both the commercial and private kitchens the wood flooring was covered with vinyl tiles and the wood flooring in two of the upstairs bathrooms was covered with linoleum. Ceramic tile was placed over the wood flooring in the master bathroom.

The majority of the walls and ceilings on the first and second floors are covered with a natural lime plaster containing horsehair and hung on machine cut wood lath. In a few locations where walls were replaced or new walls constructed during the 1996 renovation, drywall was used. Both hallways and the three large rooms on the front of the dwelling are embellished with chairboards and cornice moldings.

**Fence**

The cast iron fence that surrounds the lot is a contributing structure to the Simon Reid Curtis House.

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**Endnotes:**

1. Deed, Old Dominion Land Company to Simon R. Curtis for 1.83 acres at Lee Hall dated June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1897. Deed Book 18, page 27. The deed makes reference to the fact that the land was once part of the "farm known as Lee Hall situated near Lee Hall Station". The Old Dominion Land Company was created in 1880 to handle the purchases of land for the railroad.
2. Architectural Drawings, Adolph Wagner signed a set of undated drawings for Curtis's house and store and indicated he was the architect. The set includes four drawings; one in ink on vellum and three blue prints. The ink drawing shows the front elevation of the house (labeled West Elevation). The blue prints show the foundation plan, the second floor plan and the storefront elevation (labeled North Elevation). Wagner immigrated from Switzerland about 1896. He moved to Newport News and worked in the shipyard prior to becoming an engineer for the Old Dominion Land Company. He produced many maps and drawings for the company regarding the lands purchased in Warwick County near Lee Hall. He started working for the Newport News Light and Water Company in 1900. He had a laboratory and an office in Lee Hall as well as an office in the old Warwick Hotel in downtown Newport News. He is referenced in a letter from W. G. Livezey, president of the Newport News Light and Water Company dated November 26, 1912 to S. R. Curtis, V. P., The Mathews, Curtis Co. Mr. Livezey stated the "our engineer, Mr. A. Wagner" had submitted a contract and specification for raising the embankments and dam at the Lee Hall Reservoir. Mr. Wagner's name appears again in another letter from Mr. Livezey dated July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1913. Mr. Livezey stated that he had received an estimate from "our engineer, Mr. Wagner". His name appears on three survey maps: (1) Plat of Land Near Lee Hall Warwick Co., VA. belonging to Simon R. Curtis dated March 1902, (2) Plat of Lots at Lee Hall, Virginia dated 1908 and (3) Plot of 62.85 Acres of "Lee Hall" Farm in Warwick County Sold to S. R. Curtis, October 1, 1914. All three maps are signed; on the earliest one he refers to himself as a civil engineer while on the other two he refers to himself as an engineer. Adolph Wagner married Anna Virginia Watts, daughter of Judge Abraham Watts of Portsmouth in 1905. The 1930 United States Federal Census indicates that his residence was Tuckahoe, Henrico, Virginia. His age when the census was taken was 57 and his date of birth was "abt 1873". He had two children; Barbara M. Wagner (age 23) and Virginia A. Wagner (age 19).
3. Paust, Mathew. "High rollers swarm to auction: Lee Hall estate draws rich crowd". Newport News Virginia: Daily Press, Sunday, October 23, 1994, Section B1 and B2. Auction of the Estate of Edith Pitts Curtis took place on October 22 and 23, 1994. Owen F. Valentine & Co., Auctioneers and Appraisers conducted the sale.



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**Narrative Statement of Significance:**

**Summary Paragraph:**

Simon Reid Curtis (1863 -1949) was the most powerful political figure in Warwick County during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He held nearly every elected position and was often referred to as the “boss of Warwick County.”<sup>1</sup> His rise to power began when his father obtained a job for him with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. Curtis quickly rose up through the ranks. He soon had the income and the opportunity to establish several partnerships that would eventually give him influence and control over several businesses operating between Newport News (Warwick County) and Cincinnati, Ohio. He was able to manage these operations from his home in Lee Hall. The success of these ventures provided the capital needed to build a mansion in Lee Hall and run for his first elected position as Treasurer of Warwick County in 1899, a position he held for forty-five years (1899-1945). In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century he established several banks on the Peninsula, bought his way onto the Boards of most of the utility companies, gained control of the Warwick County Democratic Executive Committee and acquired thousands of acres of property in the County. In addition, he was appointed Road Commissioner and Postmaster for Lee Hall. Curtis’s new home was his business center from which he operated a large store, post office, tax assessor’s office, and many of his partnerships. Although it was not uncommon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for merchants to live above their shops, S. R. Curtis had a vision for his new home that was far beyond anything else on the Peninsula. To execute his plan he hired Adolph Wagner, an architect/engineer, to design a structure that would enable him to manage all of his business, political, and social activities and reflect his prominent position in the county. The Curtis house is eligible under Criterion B in the areas of Politics/Government and Commerce for its association with Simon Reid Curtis and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Its period of significance begins with the construction of the house in 1897 and ends with the death of in 1949.

**Historical Background:**

The Curtis and Harwood families can trace their lineage to Jamestown, Virginia. Captain Thomas Harwood arrived in the colony in 1620 and brothers Thomas and John Curtis arrived in 1621. The first written record of the Curtis family name in Warwick County, the smallest of the original six shires, dates to 1782, when Edmund Curtis appeared in the Warwick County Landholders List. The two families became intertwined with marriages and births. They were among the largest landowners throughout the history of the County and Newport News, and held many political offices until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> The most influential member of the family and the builder of the mansion was Simon Reid Curtis, the eldest son of Dr. Humphrey Harwood Curtis (1832-1881) and Maria Whitaker Curtis (1836-1919) who owned nearby Endview farm.<sup>3</sup> Simon was born in Caswell County, North Carolina on June 16, 1863, where his mother had moved to escape from the “Yankee invaders” during the Peninsula Campaign. He came home to Endview after the Civil War. In his youth he received some tutoring, but no formal schooling.<sup>4</sup> His father died after a long illness when Simon was only nineteen years old. Simon then became head of the household that included an older sister, eight surviving younger brothers and sisters, his mother, grandmother, uncle, and niece living on three farms: Endview, Lands End and Green Mount. He married Nannie L. Curtis (1864-1947) on October 20, 1893 and they had four children: Elsie, Nannie, Coleman and Douglas.<sup>5</sup>

S. R. Curtis was one of the leading businessmen in Warwick County and controlled many of the commercial and financial interests on the Peninsula. His principal activities included general merchandise and automobiles, farming, contracting, and banking. At an early age he learned to trade and sell horses and real estate. He was successful at both and soon acquired over one-third of the land on Mulberry Island (8,000 acres) and much of the property around Lee Hall where he built an impressive store and dwelling.

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His father served as a physician for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad during the construction of the tracks on the Peninsula. In early 1880 Simon joined the engineering corps of the C&O Railroad and for two years he was engaged in making surveys on the construction work between Richmond and Newport News. He quickly moved up the ranks and was named pumpman at Blow's Mills near Lee Hall. This job enabled him to advance his other interests and he began farming and dealing in lumber. He was successful with the lumber business that included cutting and milling wood piles, heavy timbers, and ties for the railroad. He also began an apprenticeship with his uncle,

James Madison Curtis (1850-1927), Treasurer of Warwick County (1875-1896) in Newport News. In 1893 Simon opened a mercantile business in Lee Hall with assistance from other family members.<sup>6</sup> The general merchandise store was successful and he brought his sons into partnership as S. R. Curtis & Sons. By February of 1897 Simon is identified on official checks as Deputy Treasurer of Warwick County.<sup>7</sup> In 1898 he began contracting for the C&O Railroad and in 1900 he formed a partnership with W. G Mathews, an engineer in Clifton Forge, to form the Mathew-Curtis Company, Inc., a general railroad contracting firm that provided materials for the railroad and conducted surveys in West Virginia and Virginia for the railroad with its headquarters in Clifton Forge and a branch office in Lee Hall. Curtis was Vice President and appears to have been the business manager for the firm as family documents include company ledgers and cancelled checks written by S. R. Curtis from 1903 to 1912.<sup>8</sup> This company secured valuable contracts for railroad construction from Newport News, VA to Cincinnati, OH.<sup>9</sup> In 1905 Curtis formed the Alleghany Construction Company, which built many of the homes in and around Clifton Forge. He began the Clifton Forge Ice & Battery Works, which furnished ice for the Railroad and the towns in the vicinity of Clifton Forge. He was one of the organizers and stockholders of the Virginia & Western Power Company, having control of the public utilities from Lexington, VA to Hinton, WV. He was instrumental in establishing the Clifton Forge National Bank. Curtis was also a director of the Virginia Telephone Company during the construction of the telephone line between Richmond and Newport News.<sup>10</sup> Despite his many diverse business activities in the western part of the state he maintained his residence in Lee Hall. In 1897 he acquired a small tract of land near the Lee Hall Depot from the Old Dominion Land Company.<sup>11</sup> Within the year he hired an architect and was busy constructing his new store and residence. He became president of the First National Bank of Newport News. In 1899 he was elected Treasurer of Warwick County after Newport News became an independent city and his uncle, treasurer of both the county and the town, retained the office in the new independent city of Newport News.<sup>12</sup> In 1900 Simon Curtis served on the Board of Directors for the Schmelz National Bank of Newport News. He organized the First National Bank of Yorktown (1920) and was its first president.<sup>13</sup> In 1922 Curtis organized the First National Bank of Poquoson. Curtis was appointed Postmaster of Lee Hall, a position he passed to his wife and oldest son, C. Coleman (1894-1962).<sup>14</sup> He and his sons, C. Coleman and Douglas C. (1896-1978), established a separate contracting firm in Lee Hall and Suffolk to work on road construction during the early years of 1920s. When S. R. Curtis recognized that the automobile had come to stay he obtained a franchise from Ford Motor Company in 1922. The Curtis Motor Company was located across the street from Curtis's house and store.<sup>15</sup>

Curtis was involved in local politics from the time he could vote and became a powerful political figure on the Peninsula. In 1901 he was elected chairman of the Warwick County Democratic Executive Committee and remained an active member for fifty years. Because of Simon's sound financial practices, his businesses, including the banks he managed survived the Great Depression. Curtis's power base was also derived from his position as a principal stockholder, trustee, board member and officer of numerous corporations based in Newport News, including; York and Warwick Telephone Company, Newport News Light and Water Company, Old Dominion Holding Corporation,<sup>16</sup> Old Dominion Land Company, Virginia and Western Power Company,<sup>17</sup> and Chesapeake Investment Company.<sup>18</sup>

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**The Historical Significance of the Simon Reid Curtis House:**

S. R. Curtis needed to erect a building from which he could manage his businesses and political activities. An 1897 deed shows that the Old Dominion Land Co. sold a 1.8 acre triangular shaped lot in the Lee Hall area of Newport News, Virginia, to Simon Reid Curtis. This property was directly across the street from the Lee Hall Depot, a one-story station owned by the C&O Railroad Co. that linked passengers and freight between Newport News and Richmond. To design a suitable structure he sought the professional skills of Adolph Wagner, who identified himself as an architect on the drawings he prepared for Curtis. Wagner designed a 10,500 sq. ft. mansion with separate sections for commercial and family functions. Two-story porches, one of the distinguishing architectural features, visually unify the two sections. After making several changes to the design Curtis began construction sometime during the following year. As Curtis intended, the large two-and-a-half story structure housed a general store, post office, treasurer's office, boarding house, and dwelling for his growing family. Curtis's house became the center of community life in the village of Lee Hall. Although his boyhood home, Endview, exists and is listed on the National Register, the Simon Reid Curtis house is the only building that reflects the period in which Curtis was active in business and politics.

Adolph Wagner (b. ca. 1873) immigrated from Switzerland about 1896. He moved to Newport News and worked in the shipyard prior to becoming an engineer for the Old Dominion Land Company. He produced many maps and drawings for the company regarding the lands purchased in Warwick County near Lee Hall. He started working for the Newport News Light and Water Company in 1900. He had a laboratory and an office in Lee Hall as well as an office in the old Warwick Hotel in downtown Newport News. He is referenced in a letter from W. G. Livezey, president of the Newport News Light and Water Company dated November 26, 1912 to S. R. Curtis, V. P., The Mathews, Curtis Co. Mr. Livezey stated the "our engineer, Mr. A. Wagner" had submitted a contract and specification for raising the embankments and dam at the Lee Hall Reservoir. Mr. Wagner's name appears again in another letter from Mr. Livezey dated July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1913. Mr. Livezey stated that he had received an estimate from "our engineer, Mr. Wagner". His name appears on three survey maps: (1) Plat of Land Near Lee Hall Warwick Co., VA. belonging to Simon R. Curtis dated March 1902, (2) Plat of Lots at Lee Hall, Virginia dated 1908 and (3) Plot of 62.85 Acres of "Lee Hall" Farm in Warwick County Sold to S. R. Curtis, October 1, 1914. All three maps are signed; on the earliest one he refers to himself as a civil engineer while on the other two he refers to himself as an engineer. Adolph Wagner married Anna Virginia Watts, daughter of Judge Abraham Watts of Portsmouth in 1905, and they had two children, Barbara M. Wagner and Virginia A. Wagner. By 1930, Adolph Wagner had apparently moved to Tuckahoe in Henrico County, Virginia, as indicated in the 1930 United States Federal Census indicates that his residence was Tuckahoe, Henrico, Virginia.

The C&O Railroad Co. built a small platform in Lee Hall in 1881 to load and unload principally agricultural produce from the nearby farms. It was one of four stops between Richmond and Newport News. Collis P. Huntington, owner of the C&O Railroad Co., may have chosen Lee Hall because it was a convenient location to establish a temporary line to Yorktown for the centennial celebration of General Washington's victory over General Cornwallis's army at the Battle of Yorktown. The first passenger trains to transverse the Peninsula took people to Yorktown for the celebration in the fall of 1881, they passed through Lee Hall.<sup>19</sup> In 1918 when the U.S. Army purchased Mulberry Island for Camp Eustis and the U.S. Navy purchased land along the York River near Yorktown for the Navy Mine Depot, Curtis became even wealthier.<sup>20</sup> During World War I, Curtis rented rooms to Army officers and their wives assigned to the post and to the camp's construction superintendent. Camp Eustis was built approximately two miles southeast of the Curtis house. By the end of WWI, a village had emerged adjacent to the depot with the Curtis house as the centerpiece. After WWI, the village included another dry good store, a café, a livery stable, barber shop, bowling alley, bar, doctor's office, USO dance hall, automobile dealership and numerous nearby farmhouses. Curtis continued to rent rooms to officers and their families during World War II. Among the

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who stayed at his home were General Pershing and W. C. Fields.<sup>21</sup> As the village of Lee Hall prospered, Curtis's property took on an increasingly important role. Temporary hotel rooms became more permanent and meals were served for his guests. The people of the village came to his store to buy groceries, pick up mail, pay taxes, and consult with one of the most influential political and business leaders in the county.

Curtis' wife, Nannie L. Curtis (1864-1947), preceded him in death. After Curtis died in 1949, eldest son, C. Colman Curtis, continued to live in the house and operate the store. Many of S. R. Curtis's businesses passed to his two sons. The last family members to live in the house were Edith Pitts Curtis (1897-1992), C. Colman Curtis's wife, and their son, Simon C. Curtis (1910-1986) who resided there until their deaths. The house passed out of the Curtis family when Edith Curtis's heirs sold the property in 1995 to Robert and Barbara Lucas, the current owners. The Lucas's renovated the house by upgrading the electrical, plumbing, heating and air-conditioning systems throughout the store and dwelling and installing a commercial kitchen at the east end of the original store and a bathroom for each of the guest rooms on the second floor above the store. After the renovation it opened as the Boxwood Inn, a bed and breakfast establishment.

**Architecture**

The Simon Reid Curtis House is a rare example of a late nineteenth -early twentieth century Colonial Revival style in Newport News, especially in the semi-rural setting of Lee Hall. A search of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Data Sharing System yielded only five other examples of the style in Newport News dating between 1890 and 1910. Of these, four are contributing to the register-listed North End Historic District, a middle-class and upper middle-class residential district near the shipyard. Residents included shipyard executives, local politicians, and leaders in banking and commerce, whose homes were located near their places of business. The W. W. Harwood House was completed in 1905. It is a 2 ½-story brick house with hipped roof with gables, a pedimented dormer, and a one-story with Tuscan columns. It is the only home in Newport News with a third floor ballroom. Harwood was in the feed business and probably was related to Curtis. The J.A. Willett House was completed in 1901. It is a 2 ½-story wood frame building with a hipped roof, a hipped dormer and a 2-story porch with fluted ionic columns and balustrade. The Homer L. Ferguson House, designed for the second president of the shipyard, was completed in 1906. It is a 2 1/2 -story brick building with a gambrel roof with parapet gable ends, a row of three gable dormers with round-arched windows. The J.E. Warren House was completed in 1905. It is a 2 ½ -story brick house with a symmetrical three-bay façade, gable pedimented dormers, and modillion cornice. The entrance has a fanlight and sidelights. Other architectural styles represented in the district include Queen Anne, Beaux Arts, Bungalow, American Foursquare, Tudor Revival, and later Colonial Revival examples.<sup>22</sup>

The fifth example of the Colonial Revival style in Newport News is the 2 ½-story Harris Store, located at 551 Deep Creek Road in a suburban setting. This former store has an associated dairy, smoke house, and ice house. The Harris Store was determined not eligible by DHR in 1985, due to extensive remodeling and alterations.

The Simon Reid Curtis House, like the four similar houses in the North End Historic District, belonged to a prosperous businessman. The North End Historic District houses, however, were solely residential in nature and located in an urban setting close to the core of the city itself, where the shipbuilding industry thrived. The Lee Hall area of Newport News sits at the far northern tip of the current city in what was then part of the now extinct Warwick County nearly nine miles north of the historic, urban core. To this day, the area maintains a semi-rural setting despite encroaching city development. The Curtis House combined residential, commercial, and government functions in a single building in this distinct area, using the physical arrangements of the exterior and interior features to separate public and private spaces through separate entrances, limited doorways between the private and public spaces, and hallway placement.

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**Endnotes:**

1. Editorial from the *Times Dispatch* dated July 22, 1944 used the term “county boss” when referring to S. R. Curtis and terms such as “courthouse ring” and “courthouse clique” when referring to the Curtis “dynasty” that controlled county politics. The editorial went on to say: “A writer in last Sunday’s *Newport News Daily Press* listed the Curtises and their immediate relatives who now hold, or have recently held, county offices of one sort or another, and the total is astonishing. They also have three postmasterships in the county.” “Simon Curtis was the boss of Warwick County – a confidant of governors, senators, and congressman; his word influenced elections.” Quarstein & Rouse, *Newport News: A Centennial History*, 1966, p.97.

2. Warwick County, one of the original eight shires in the English colony of Virginia, was created as Warwick River Shire in 1634. It was located on the northern bank of the James River between Hampton Roads and Williamsburg. It was named after Robert Rich, second Earl of Warwick, a member of the Virginia Company and proprietor of Richneck Plantation. The county’s name was shortened to Warwick County in 1643. The community of Newport News, located at the southern end of Warwick County became an independent city in 1896 by an act of the Virginia General Assembly. Warwick County sought and was eventually granted independent city status in 1952 in order to prevent annexation of additional land by Newport News. In 1958, after a public referendum, the two cities was consolidated into one, the City of Newport News.

3. Dr. Humphrey Harwood Curtis was born on Mulberry Island in Warwick County, Virginia in 1832. He died suddenly of a heart disease on October 19, 1881. He was educated at private schools, the College of William and Mary, and in medical schools in Richmond, Virginia and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Prior to the War Between the States, Dr. Curtis was a physician in Warwick County. With the outbreak of the war Dr. Curtis raised a company at Lee Hall, known as the Beaureguards, which was incorporated into the Confederate Army as Company H of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Virginia Volunteers. Dr. Curtis served with distinction; however, because of poor health he was transferred from the infantry to the medical department where he held the rank of captain until the end of the war. After the war he brought his family back to Endview and resumed his medical practice. He also served as a physician for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company as the railroad tracks were being laid down the Peninsula. Maria Elizabeth Whitaker was born at Rich Neck in Warwick County, Virginia in 1836. She died on May 25, 1919 at Endview Plantation. She was a very active member of the Lebanon Christian Church and was responsible for rebuilding the church and its maintenance after the war. She and Dr. Curtis had ten children--S. R. Curtis was the oldest male.

4. Curry, *The Curtis Family*, 2007, pp.37-39.

5. Miss Nannie L. Cooke, the daughter of Stafford G. Cooke a Gloucester County farmer, was married at the Lebanon Christian Church. The church is located about ¼ mile from Endview Plantation and was the church the Curtis family attended for several generations. S. R. Curtis, his parents, siblings, wife and most of his children and many of his grandchildren are buried in the church cemetery. S. R. Curtis served as Trustee and Treasurer of the church for most of his adult life. Their children included Elsie Cooke Curtis who attended Mary Baldwin Seminary for six years, Coleman and Douglas who attended

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6. Augusta Military Academy and Nannie Reid Curtis who attended Mary Baldwin Seminary and Mary Lyon Seminary in Philadelphia, PA. After graduation, Coleman returned home to help his father with the store. Douglas attended VMI and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant of Field Artillery in August 1918 and briefly fought in WWI. Correspondence between father and son in 1931/32 indicates that Douglas sustained an injury requiring medical treatment after his discharge.

7. Cancelled Check No. 54 dated May 14, 1896 signed S. R. Curtis & Bro. Printed on the check: S. R. Curtis & Bro., General Merchandise, Lee Hall, VA. The check was made out to Norfolk Pants Co. from the Schmelz Brothers Bankers, Newport News, VA. It is interesting to note that the earliest cancelled Check is No. 858 dated May 11, 1896 signed by S. R. Curtis. Printed on the check: S. R. Curtis, Lee Hall, Virginia. The check was made out to D. W. Morris from the Schmelz Bros. Banker.

8. Cancelled Check No. 20 dated Feb. 26, 1897 signed S. R. Curtis, Dpy. Treas.. Printed on the check: S. R. Curtis, D'py Treas'r., Warwick Co., VA.

9. Letter from W. D. Baker, Secretary, Mathews-Curtis Company, Inc. to S. R. Curtis, dated May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1911. The letter provides Curtis with a summary of the financial position of the firm. It indicates that the firm is operating a roundhouse, a mill, a quarry, and an inn in Clifton Forge, Virginia. The letterhead includes the names of W. G. Mathews, Pres., S. R. Curtis, Vice-Pres., C. C. Dunn, Gen'l Mgr., and W. D. Baker, Secretary. The letterhead describes Mathews-Curtis Company, Inc. as "Railroad and General Contractors, General Office, Clifton Forge, Va. and a Branch Office, Lee Hall, Va." The letterhead also states that the firm deals in "Lumber, Planing Mill and Builders' Supplies." In 1907 the Mathews-Curtis Company obtained a contract for the excavation and construction of terminals of the Virginia Railway at Sewels Point and in 1920 the company obtained a contract for the construction work for the Norfolk Water Works at Lake Prince near Suffolk

10. Biography. History of Virginia, 1924, p. 566.

11. Deed Book 5. Folio 30. (ODLC to S. R. Curtis dated June 21, 1897). Newport News Courthouse Records Room. Newport News, VA.

12. On January 16, 1896 the Virginia General Assembly passed the final vote on a Bill for Incorporation, and the City of Newport News became an independent city. It appears that J. M. Curtis continued to serve as Treasurer of both Warwick County and Newport News until the end of 1899 when S. R. Curtis assumes the position. Cancelled Check dated Dec. 12, 1899 signed S. R. Curtis, Treas. The check is made out to A. W. Hannan Slate [illegible] from First National Bank, Newport News. This appears to be an over the counter check with no printed label. This is the earliest instrument signed by the newly elected Treasurer of Warwick Co. Cancelled Check No. 1182 dated Jan. 18, 1900 signed by S. R. Curtis. The check was preprinted for the Office of the Treasurer of Warwick County, Va. We believe this is a check Simon obtained from his uncle who had been treasurer of Warwick Co. The Citizens and Marine Bank of Newport News, Va. originally issued the check; however, Simon wrote Schmelz Bros. over the name. J. M. Curtis was a director of the Citizens and Marine Bank.

13. Poster prepared by the First National Bank of Yorktown. It is not dated, but from the text it was probably produced in the early 1930s. It lists S. R. Curtis and D. C. Curtis as directors. The poster is part of the family papers.

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14. Certificate, Nannie L. Curtis received a certificate signed by the president of the U.S. Civil Service Commission and the Acting Chief, Retirement Division dated June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1940 "that in conformity with the laws of the United States, Nannie L. Curtis who was employed as Postmaster in the Post Office, Lee Hall, Virginia Post Office Department, is hereby granted an annuity of Ten Hundred Seventy-one & 24/100 dollars, payable in monthly installments to commence February 1, 1940 and to continue during life, . . ." There was a post office in Lee Hall in 1896 according to *Chataigne's Peninsula Directory: 1896-97*. C. Coleman Curtis becomes Postmaster on December 21, 1942 (Certificate in family papers). C. Coleman Curtis married Edith Pitts Cooke on June 30, 1943. He died on June 27, 1962 of emphysema. According to the estate tax return he had been ill since 1956. The return also indicated that his business or occupation was "Farmer & Retired Postmaster". The return also indicated that he had no children.

15. Letters (6) dated between Nov. 4, 1931 and Feb. 12, 1932 from S. R. Curtis to Anne (Annie Sims Curtis) and Doug. Douglas was "taken sick" and was recovering at Saranac Lake, NY. It appears from the correspondence that they felt the illness was a result of an injury he received during the war. In addition to a discussion of Douglas's health insurance claims, Simon discusses the financial status of the businesses that Douglas ran, principally the "garage" (Curtis Motor Co., founded in 1922) and the sale of gas and oil through the D.C. Curtis, Inc. (founded in 1922). Although they had not sold many new cars, they were busy "reclaiming" cars repossessed by the "Credit Co." "I have made my efforts on three points-to collect old accounts; to keep from loading up with new cars; and to rebuild and sell second hand and repossessed cars." S. R. Curtis to D. C. Curtis (addressed to Anne and Doug) dated December 17, 1931.

16. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Old Dominion Holding Company dated April 26, 1927 signed by W. T. Chapin, Temporary Secretary. S. R. Curtis is in attendance in which the Directors discuss a recommendation to dissolve the Old Dominion Holding Corporation and the Chesapeake Investment Company, a recommendation that was not approved. New officers were appointed. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Old Dominion Holding Corporation dated October 20, 1927 and signed by W. B. Livezey, Secretary. S. R. Curtis was in attendance in which the Directors discuss several investments opportunities including the purchase and operation of the Hotel Warwick and laundry properties. Letter, W. T. Chapin to S. R. Curtis dated November 11, 1926 announcing a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Old Dominion Holding Corporation. The letterhead indicates that F. W. Darling is President, S. R. Curtis in Vice-President, and W. T. Chapin is Secretary & Treasurer. There are similar letters between March 5, 1926 and April 18, 1929. Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Old Dominion Land Company dated January 21, 1929 and signed by W. B. Livezey, Secretary. S. R. Curtis is in attendance in which the Directors discussed several investment opportunities as well as the election of new officers.

17. Biography. History of Virginia, 1924, p. 566.

18. Letter, W. T. Chapin to S. R. Curtis dated March 5, 1926 announcing a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Chesapeake Investment Company. This letter was written on the stationary of the Old Dominion Holding Corporation. There are similar letter between March 5, 1926 and April 18, 1929. Note: In several cases the Board of Directors of the Old Dominion Holding Corporation and the Board of Directors of the Chesapeake Investment Company met at the same time and place.

19. In 1867 the legislatures of both Virginia and West Virginia passed bills for the construction of a railroad line from the Ohio River to the Chesapeake. Collis P. Huntington took charge of the railroad in 1869. In 1871

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Simon Reid Curtis House  
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Huntington had surveys and studies made to determine the best route to the sea. In 1872 he decided to run the tracks down the Peninsula to Newport News and began to buy land along the route. By 1873 tracks reached Huntington, West Virginia on the banks of the Ohio River. On March 4, 1880 the Virginia General Assembly authorized the C&O to lay track to the Atlantic coast. Work to link Richmond to Newport News with the railroad began in October 1880. One thousand German immigrants were brought down from New York to speed construction. Construction began in Richmond in February 1881 and in Newport News in December 1880. The last spike went in on October 16, 1881. In 1963, the C&O merged with the B&O and in 1973 the two lines became the Chessie System. In 1980 the Chessie System merged with the Seaboard system to create the CSX Corporation.

20. Letter from Admiral Mayo, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet to S. R. Curtis dated May 25, 1917 replying to a letter sent by S. R. Curtis. Curtis offered to sell the Navy a farm, Belle Field, along the York River, and a lot in Yorktown for an isolation camp for the sick. The Navy initially rejected the offer, but a few months later decided to buy the property for the Navy Mine Depot (Naval Weapons Station). The Navy acquired the land (approx. 18 sq. miles) on Aug. 7, 1918 and began construction of the mine depot in the fall of 1918 about the same time the Army was constructing Fort Eustis. Both facilities purchased supplies and rented equipment from Curtis. Naval Weapons Station, Yorktown, Virginia <http://www.nwsy.navy.mil/pao/report>.

21. Curry, "Black Jack Pershing Slept Here", The Newport News Gazette, September 10-16, 1998, page 2.

22. North End Historic District. Registration Form. Washington, D.C.: National Register of Historic Places, 08/28/1986

23. Endview. Registration Form. Washington, D.C.: National Register of Historic Places, 05/08/2008.

24. Lee Hall Mansion. Registration Form. Washington, D.C.: National Register of Historic Places, 12/05/1972.

25. City of Newport News, Relocate and Restore the Historic Lee Hall Depot, November 1, 2004, Historical Overview.

26. Warwick County Courthouses. Registration Form. Washington, D.C.: National Register of Historic Places, 11/03/1988.



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S. R. Curtis (1836), Lee Hall

D. P. Curtis (1868), Land's End

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**Boundary Description:**

The level triangular lot consisting of 1.6 acres in the village of Lee Hall, Virginia is identified as parcel ID: 021000113 on the tax parcel maps for the City of Newport News.

**Boundary Justification:**

The property being nominated includes the house and the lot historically associated with, the same parcel that was conveyed to S. R. Curtis in 1897 by the Old Dominion Land Company.

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**Photographs:**

The following information is common to all photographs:

**Name of Property:** Simon Reid Curtis House  
**City:** Lee Hall, Newport News  
**State:** Virginia  
**Photographer:** Thomas H. Taylor, Jr.  
**Date Photographed:** February 2009

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

- Photo 1 of 11 West elevation of the house.
- Photo 2 of 11 North elevation of the store.
- Photo 3 of 11 SW corner of the house and store.
- Photo 4 of 11 South elevation of the house and store.
- Photo 5 of 11 NE corner of the Store and the enclosed porch.
- Photo 6 of 11 SE corner of the store and enclosed porch.
- Photo 7 of 11 North store front.
- Photo 8 of 11 South store front.
- Photo 9 of 11 Center Hall of the house facing east.
- Photo 10 of 11 Interior of the store facing north toward the front entrance.
- Photo 11 of 11 SE corner of noncontributing storage building

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Section Additional Documentation Page 16

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**Figure 1.** First floor plan showing exterior and interior views.

**CADD drawings by Juan Carlos Morgado**

**Date drawn: 2008**

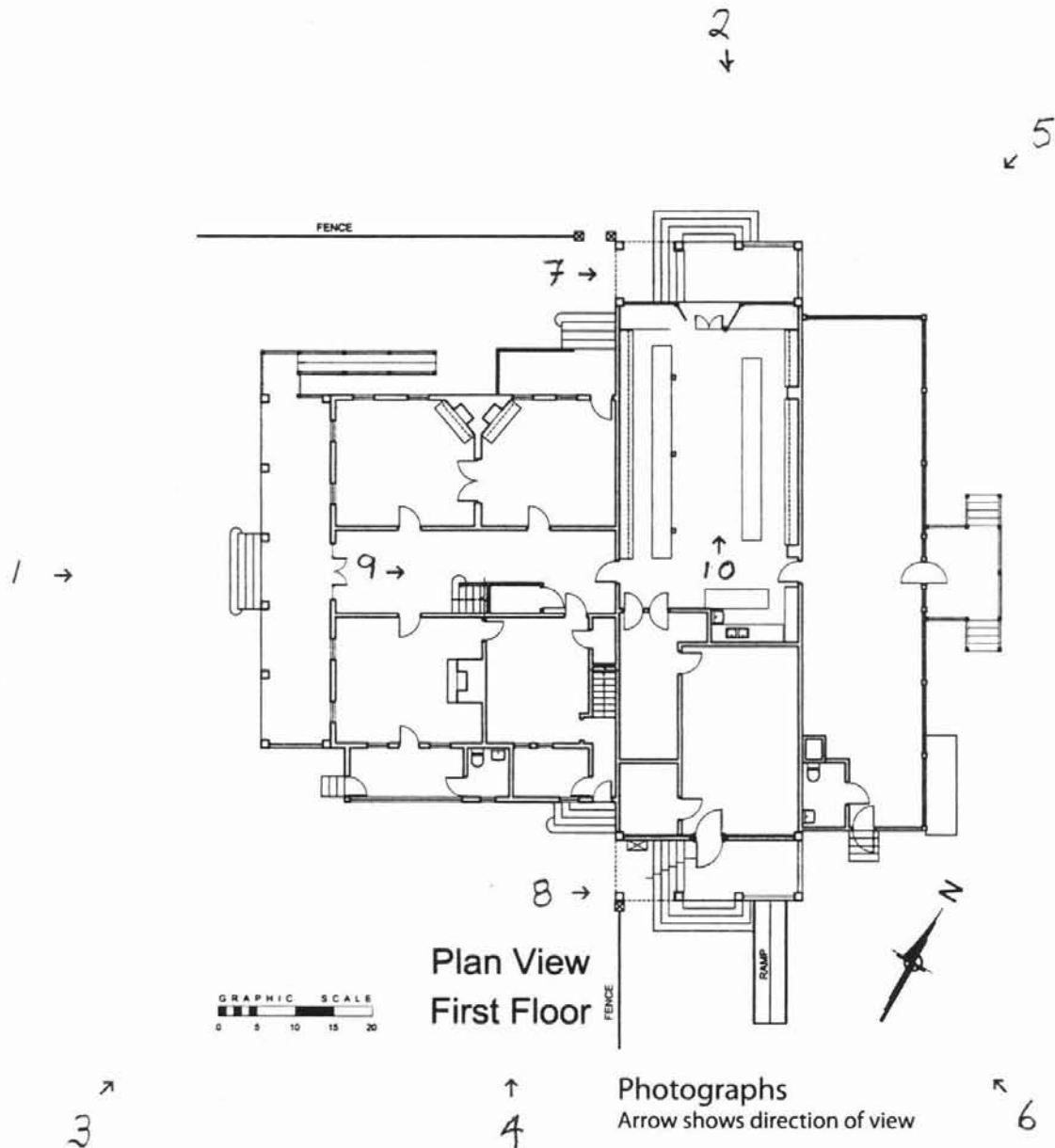
CADD 1 of 4	Drawing of the foundation plan
CADD 2 of 4	Drawing of the first floor plan
CADD 3 of 4	Drawing of the second floor plan
CADD 4 of 4	Drawing of the attic plan

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SHEET

Name of Property: Simon Reid Curtis House  
County and State: Newport News, Virginia

Section Photograph Placement Drawings Page 1

Figure 1. First floor plan showing exterior and interior views. Arrow shows direction of view.



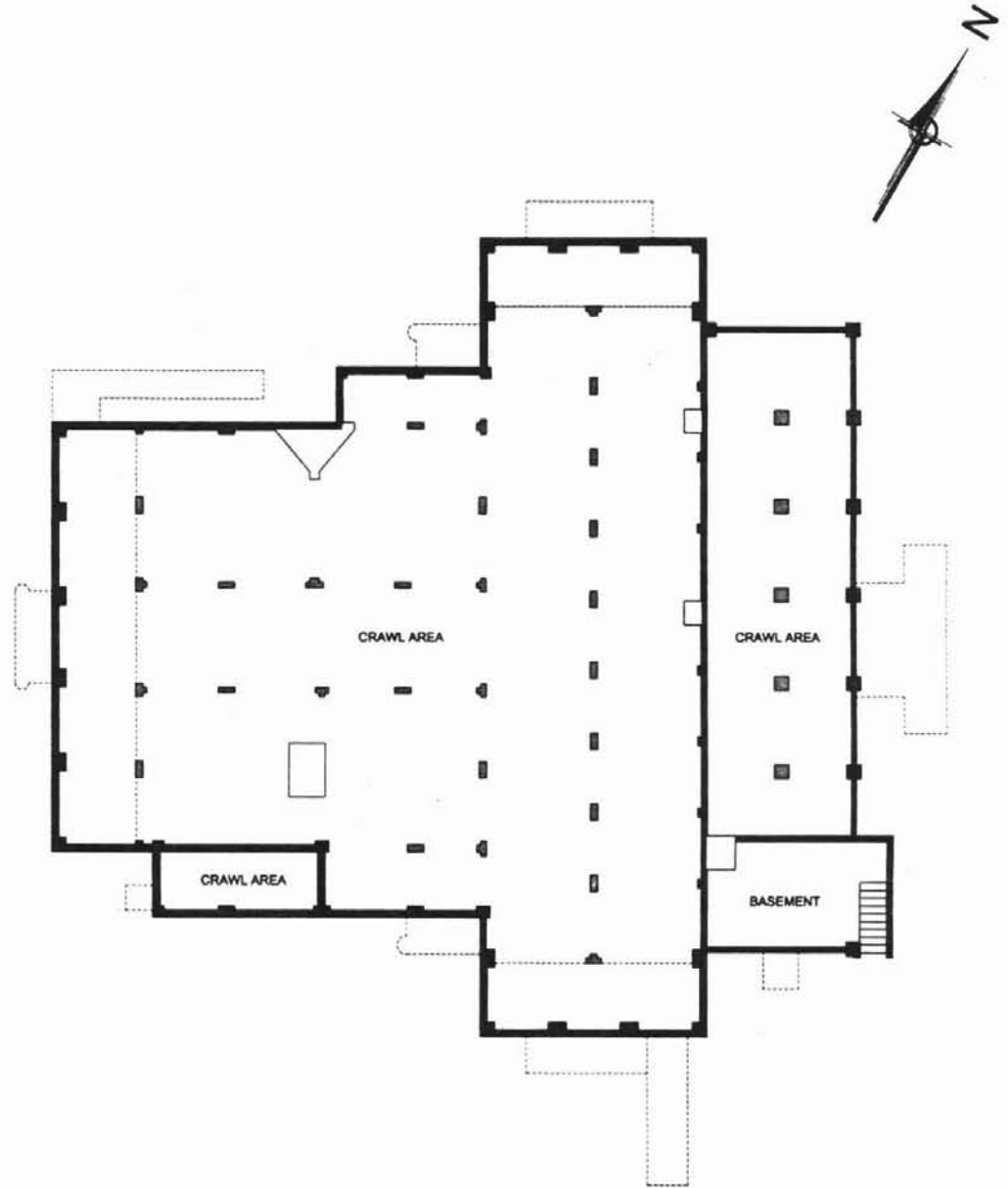
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Name of Property: Simon Reid Curtis House  
County and State: Newport News, Virginia

Section CADD Drawings Page 2

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CADD Drawing 1.  
Foundation Plan



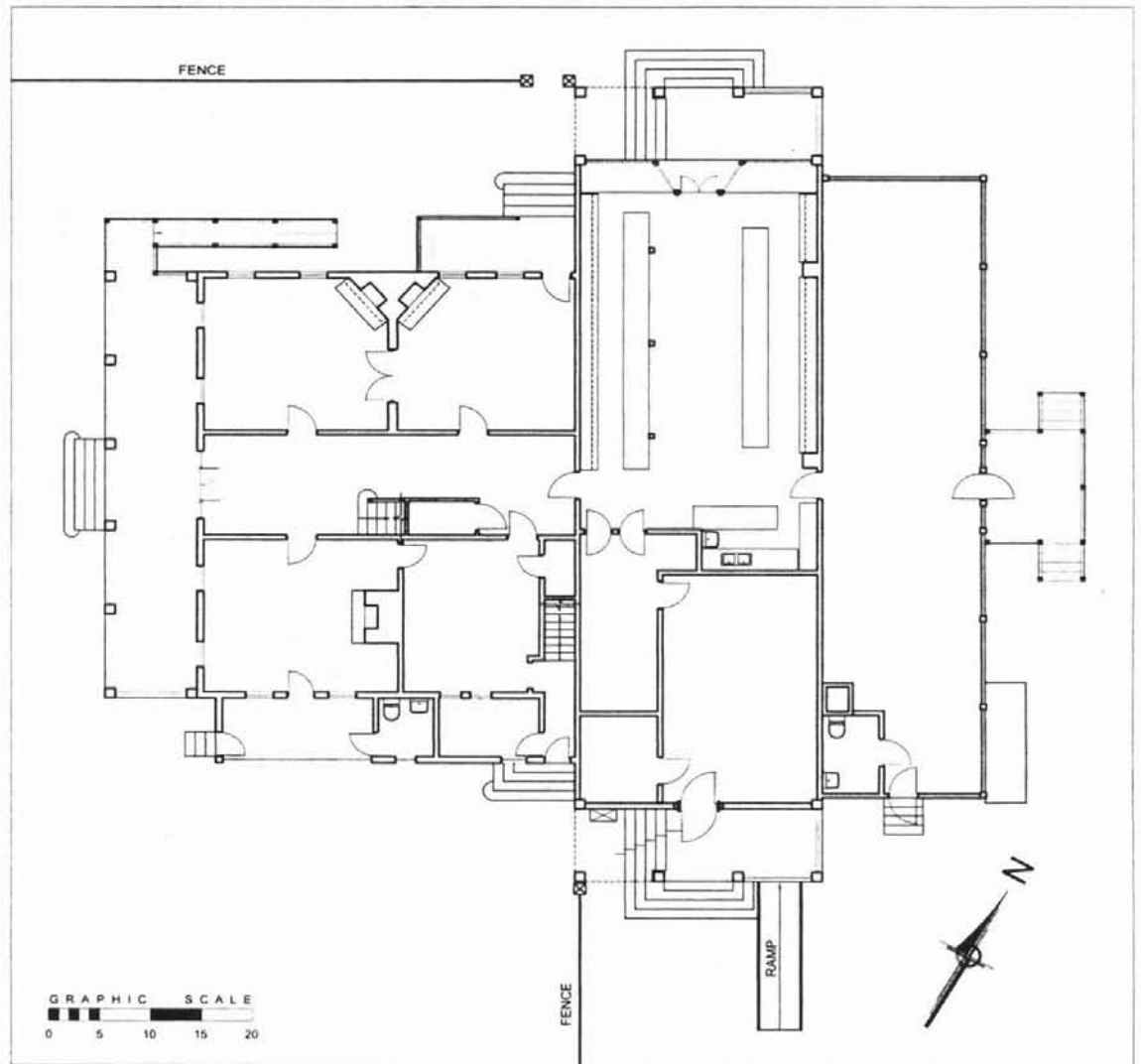
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Name of Property: Simon Reid Curtis House  
County and State: Newport News, Virginia

Section CADD Drawings Page 3

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CADD Drawing 2.  
First Floor Plan



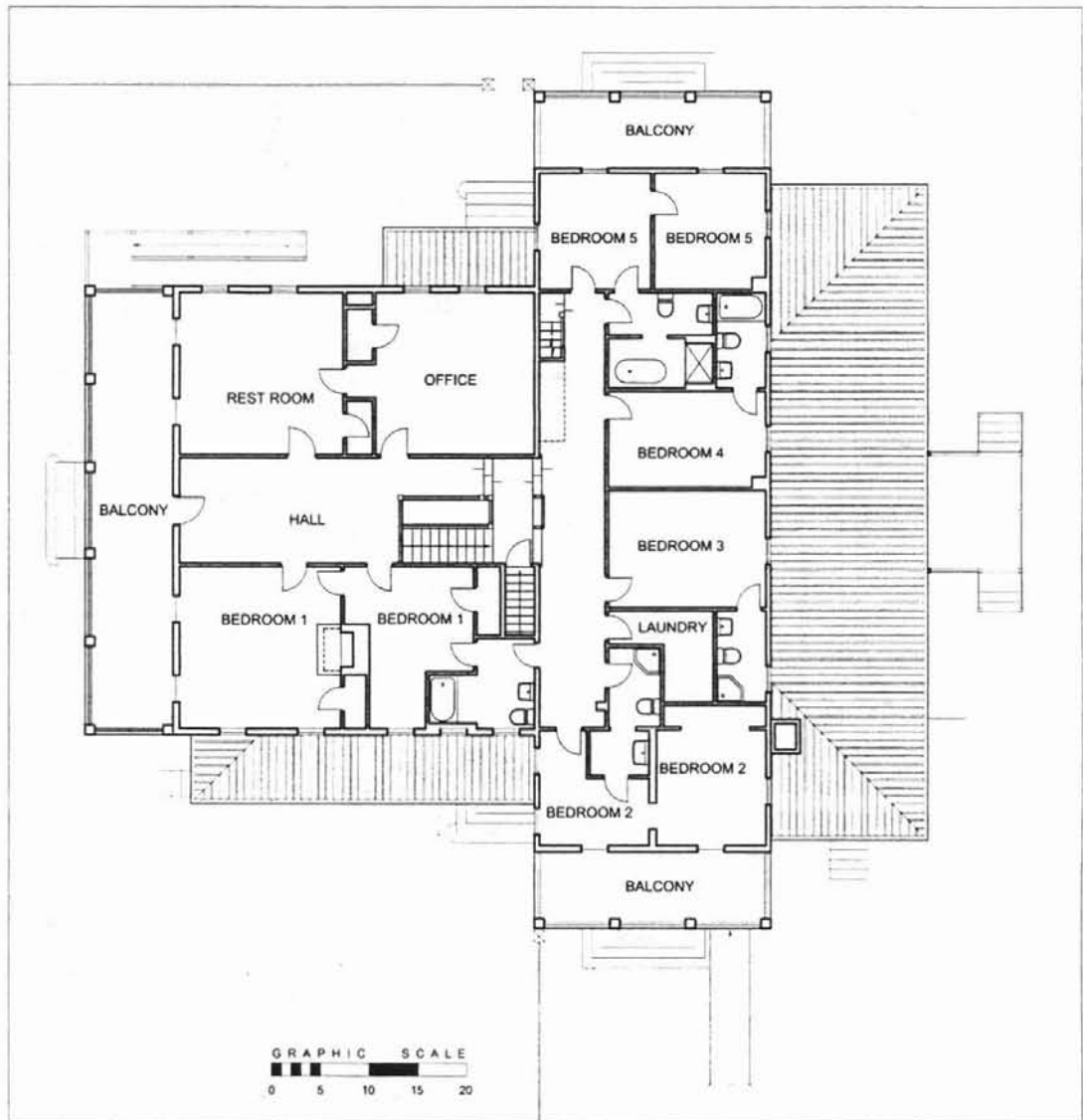


NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Name of Property: Simon Reid Curtis House  
County and State: Newport News, Virginia

Section CADD Drawings Page 4

CADD Drawing 3.  
Second Floor Plan

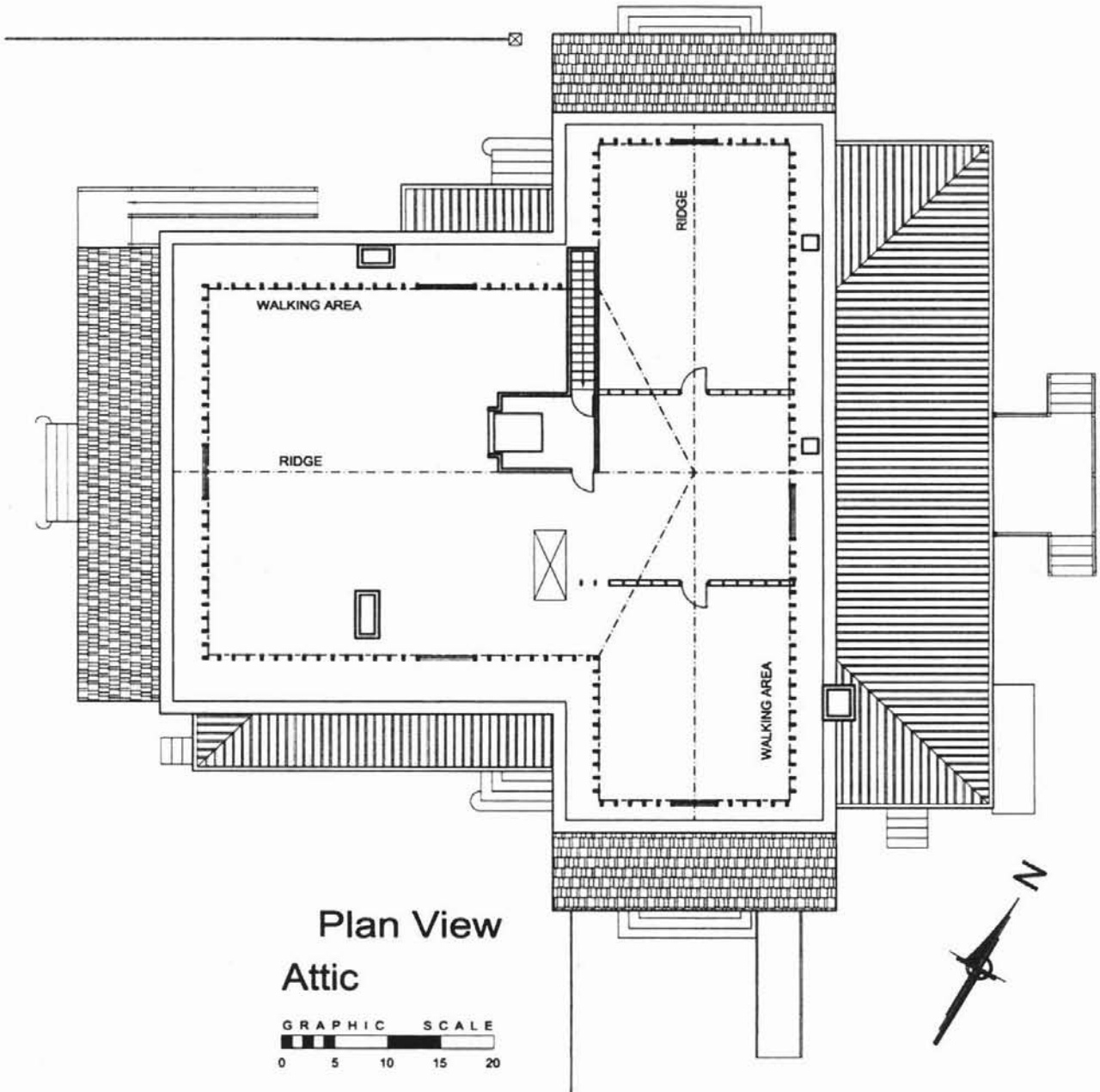


NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Name of Property: Simon Reid Curtis House  
County and State: Newport News, Virginia

Section CADD Drawings Page 5

CADD Drawing 4.  
Attic Plan



READY 6/14/09, ACC  
MOW

# City of Newport News

Virginia 23607



Office Of The City Manager

2400 Washington Avenue  
(757) 926-8411  
Fax (757) 926-3503

June 10, 2009

Mr. Marc Christian Wagner  
Director, Resource Information Division  
Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
2801 Kensington Avenue  
Richmond, Virginia 23221-0311

Dear Mr. Wagner:

I am writing this letter to support the nomination of the *Simon Reid Curtis House* to the National Register of Historic Places and for inclusion in the Virginia Landmarks Register.

The *Simon Reid Curtis House* is located in the northern end of the City of Newport News. Built in 1896, this building was the home of Simon Reid Curtis who served as Warwick County's road commissioner and treasurer. The building has been restored and currently operates as the Boxwood Inn, a local bed and breakfast.

The nomination of the *Simon Reid Curtis House* for designation as a National and State registered landmark is highlighted in the City's comprehensive plan ("*Framework for the Future*"). Staff from the City's Historic Services Division, a unit of our Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, has reviewed the nomination application on the Department of Historic Resources' website, and concurs with the applicant's submittal.

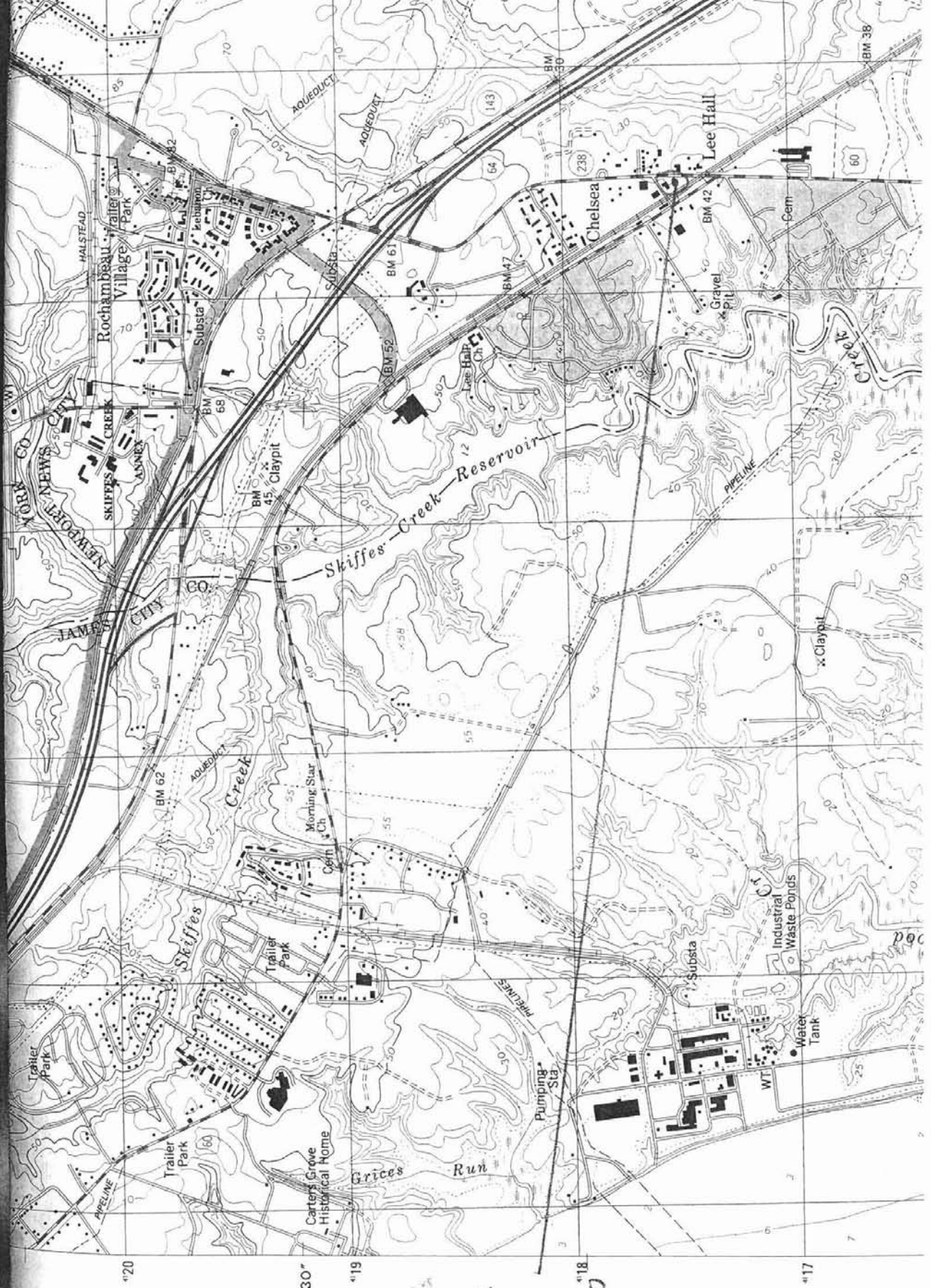
To this end, and on behalf of the City of Newport News, I fully support the nomination of the *Simon Reid Curtis House* to the National Register of Historic Places as well as to the Virginia Landmarks Register.

Sincerely,

Randy W. Hildebrandt  
City Manager

RWH:MDP:kyb

cc: The Honorable City Council  
Michael Poplawski, Director of Parks, Recreation & Tourism  
Al Riutort, Director of Planning



12°20'

12°30'

19

18

17

Zone 18  
 Simon Reid Curtis  
 House  
 10 Elmhurst St  
 Lee Hall VA  
 E-360460  
 N-4117540  
 Newbury Parks  
 DMR # 121-5031