

124-6

VLR-4/7/70 NRHP-4/29/70

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

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

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON:
Portsmouth Court House

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Norfolk County Court House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
NE corner of Court and High Streets

CITY OR TOWN:
Portsmouth

STATE: Virginia	CODE: 45	COUNTY: (in cit.)	CODE: 740
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3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	_____	

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
City of Portsmouth

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Portsmouth

STATE: Virginia	CODE: 45
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5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Portsmouth Court House

STREET AND NUMBER:
Court and High Streets

CITY OR TOWN:
Portsmouth

STATE: Virginia	CODE: 45
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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory

DATE OF SURVEY: 1958

Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Washington

STATE: D. C.	CODE: 08
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STATE: Virginia

COUNTY: Portsmouth (in cit.)

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The approximate dimensions of the Greek Revival Portsmouth Court House, built in 1846, are seventy-eight feet long on the High Street side by fifty-seven feet on the Court Street side. The building stands one story above a ground level basement floor and is topped by a paneled parapet and a Doric entablature without triglyphs. Supporting the entablature around the three principal sides are plain Greek Doric pilasters placed between each of the bays of the main floor. The building originally was surmounted by a domed cupola with a drum surrounded by eight Greek Ionic columns, but this has been removed.

The court house is ^{solid} masonry construction throughout, with lintels, sills, and belt course of cut stone. The gray painted brick walls are laid in American bond. A minor extension on the north side is the only exterior addition to the building.

The principal entrance to the court house initially was through a recessed portico on the main level of the Court Street front. This portico was closed up around 1867, and the stone steps were moved to the High Street side. The principal entrance is now through the projecting tetrastyle Doric portico set on an arcade on the High Street front. This portico was topped by a pediment.

The ground floor of the building originally was divided into three rooms - one for elections on the east end, and two "entirely fireproof" clerk's offices on the west. The entire ground floor has been completely modernized. The main floor contained a court room with dimensions of fifty-seven feet by fifty-four feet and twenty-foot ceilings. There were two jury rooms on the west end of the building and two additional rooms on either side of the recessed portico. About 1867, when the entrance was changed to the High Street side, the original court room was divided into two separate court rooms.

The building is conspicuously situated on the northwest corner of Portsmouth's major intersection. The yard is surrounded by an iron fence and is planted with ornamental trees. The Court Street front faces the town's Confederate Monument, while the High Street front looks over venerable Trinity Church.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

d. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1846

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The present Portsmouth Court House was built in 1846 as the Norfolk County Court House and served in that capacity until 1960, when the county moved its seat of government to Great Bridge. The Court House was designed by a Portsmouth native, William B. Singleton, who was also the architect for the MacArthur Memorial (formerly the court house for the city of Norfolk). The builder was Willoughby G. Butler.

The design of the new building was highly admired, and according to a contemporary description, the court house was "designed to be a beautiful structure, highly ornamental to the town, and proudly indicating the liberality and importance of the County." The site chosen for it was the location of the old clerk's office, across the street from the 1803 Court House.

It was decided from the beginning that both the city and the county would use the building if Portsmouth ever became an independent city. Portsmouth received a charter in 1858, and in 1867 the main court room was divided into two rooms for the separate courts. The building is now used entirely by the city of Portsmouth.

The importance of the Portsmouth Court House, which serves as the judicial center of the city, is enhanced because it is the city's oldest public building and it was designed by a native of the city. The compact and gracefully proportioned building survives as a distinguished example of Greek Revival governmental architecture in a state noted for the quality of its many Greek Revival court houses.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Butt, Marshall W., Portsmouth Under Four Flags, 1752-1961. Portsmouth, Va.: 1961.

Unpublished history of the Portsmouth Court House prepared by the Portsmouth Historical Association, copy on file at Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, Richmond, Va.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES			
CORNER	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE			
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"
	36°	50'	06"	76°	18'	06"

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1 acre

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE: April 2, 1970

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

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond

STATE: Virginia

CODE: 45

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

National State Local

Name Edward P. Alexander

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

Date April 17, 1970

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

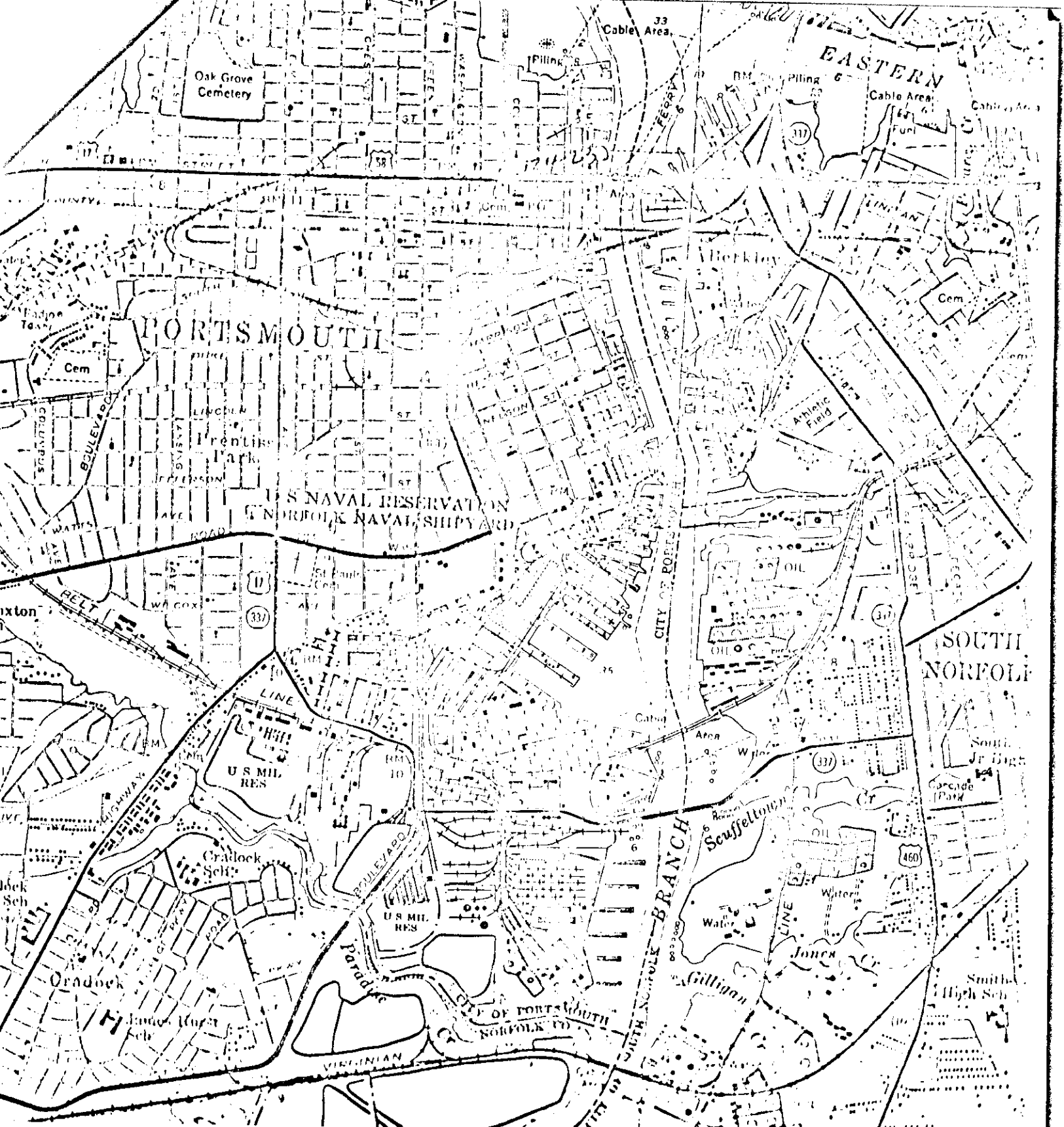
Date _____

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



U.S.G.S. 7.5' quadrangle (Scale:1:24000)
 Norfolk South, Va. 1955

Portsmouth Court House

Latitude Longitude
 36° 50' 06" 76° 18' 06"