

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

LISTED ON:	
VLR	09/30/2010
NRHP	01/07/2011

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Rochelle-Prince House
other names/site number DHR File Number 201-0002

2. Location

street & number 22371 Main Street not for publication
city or town Courtland vicinity
state Virginia code VA county Southampton code 175 zip code 23837

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
 national statewide X local

Signature of certifying official [Signature] Date 11/14/12
Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____
Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register
 determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register
 other (explain:) _____
Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- building(s)
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
0	0	buildings
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Museum

DOMESTIC/Apartment

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/Vernacular Single-Bay, Central-Passage

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: BRICK

walls: WOOD/Weatherboard

roof: WOOD/Shingle

other: N/A

Rochelle-Prince House
Name of Property

Southampton, Virginia
County and State

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

See continuation sheets.

Narrative Description

See continuation sheets.

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.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

 Military

 Politics

 Architecture

Period of Significance

ca. 1814- ca.1900

Significant Dates

1826

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Rochelle, James Henry; Tyler, Martha (Miss
Mattie) Rochelle

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

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

Period of Significance (justification)

The building's Period of Significance is defined as ca.1814 to ca.1900, beginning with the construction date of the building, and ending with the addition of the rear ell, marking the last major physical change to the building. This also includes the period of James Henry Rochelle's and Miss Mattie Rochelle Tyler's association with the property.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

See continuation sheets.

Narrative Statement of Significance

See continuation sheets.

Developmental history/additional historic context information

See continuation sheets.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

**Virginia Department of Historic Resources,
Richmond, Virginia; Southampton County
Historical Society; Southampton County Court**

_____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Name of repository: **House**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____ VDHR ID# 201-0002

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre _____
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

Rochelle-Prince House
Name of Property

Southampton, Virginia
County and State

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 18 315437 4065084
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of this nomination include the entire lot on which the Rochelle-Prince House is located. It is bounded to the north, east, and south by adjacent residential lots, and to the west by Main Street. This matches the real property described as tax parcel 60A 1 6 1 according to Southampton County, Virginia tax records

Boundary Justification

The boundaries described above represent the current property associated with the Rochelle-Prince House owned by the Southampton County Historical Society. Historically, the building sat on lots 14 and 15, which were two of the original 20 ½ acre lots laid out in the plat of the Town of Jerusalem in 1792. Over time, these ½ acre lots were subdivided and eventually renumbered utilizing the current system of blocks and parcels. While it is likely that outbuildings associated with the Rochelle-Prince House were located on property that is now part of adjacent parcels, those outbuildings have since been demolished and the parcels have now been developed and built upon with non-related structures. Therefore the boundaries for this nomination include only the property currently associated with the Rochelle-Prince House.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Robert J. Taylor, Jr. –Architectural Historian

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date June 2010

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city or town Richmond

state VA

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Rochelle-Prince House
Name of Property

Southampton, Virginia
County and State

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Rochelle-Prince House

City or Vicinity: Courtland

County: Southampton **State:** Virginia

Photographer: Robert J. Taylor, Jr.

Date Photographed: October 2009

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of ____.

See continuation sheets.

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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National Park Service**

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Rochelle-Prince House

Southampton County, Virginia

DESCRIPTION

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SUMMARY

The Rochelle-Prince House is located on the east side of Main Street in Courtland, Virginia. This vernacular residence with Federal influences consists of a one-and-a-half-story, two-bay block attached to a two-story, three-bay block. It was built in two phases with the initial construction likely dating to circa 1814. The home was enlarged and remodeled between 1826 and 1827 and a rear ell was added in the early twentieth century. The interior of the house remains much as it was during the nineteenth century, with only minor alterations to convert the private residence to its current function as a local history museum.

SETTING

The Rochelle-Prince House is set on a nicely landscaped rectangular town lot on the east side of Main Street between Court Street and Rochelle Street in the Town of Courtland, Southampton County, Virginia. The property is flanked by private residences to both sides and the backyard of a private residence on Court Street to the rear. The building sits slightly back from the street and adjacent sidewalk with a grassy front lawn that is open except for several young trees planted throughout. The larger rear portion of the property features a manicured formal garden that was created non-historically by the Southampton County Garden Club. The focal point of the garden is an ovular grassy area surrounded by a brick wall lined with boxwood bushes. This grassy area flows into a narrow pathway that meanders towards a brick path that extends off a patio adjacent to the rear of the house. Surrounding the grassy areas, patio, and brick pathways are garden beds planted with boxwood bushes, other ornamental shrubs, crepe myrtles, and mature magnolia trees. The perimeter of the house is lined with garden beds as well that are planted with ornamental shrubs. The entire property is surrounded by a low picket fence.

There are no other buildings on the property now, however several outbuildings were present as late as the early-twentieth century when a photograph depicts several structures to the rear, including what appears to be a smokehouse and another unidentified larger building. A building with a heavy chimney that likely functioned as a detached kitchen is shown to the south side of the house. According to the Southampton County Historical Society, the property historically had a carriage house located approximately two houses further south down Main Street; however, it was no longer present by 1946.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Exterior

The Rochelle-Prince House is an early-nineteenth century vernacular residence consisting of a single pile, one-and-a-half-story, two-bay block attached to a larger single pile, two-story, three-bay block. The home was built in several phases, however there is some debate as to which portion of the building is original. A Mutual Assurance Policy issued in 1817 identifies two structures on the property at the time; a two-story wood-frame

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Rochelle-Prince House

Southampton County, Virginia

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dwelling measuring 20 feet by 28 feet, and a one-story wood-frame doctor shop measuring 24 feet by 16 feet.¹ The 20 by 28 feet measurement roughly matches the dimensions of the two-story mass of the current building, indicating that it is likely the original portion. The doctor shop building is no longer present, although according to oral tradition, was located closer to the street to the north side of the house. Land tax records show that the home rose in value significantly between 1826 and 1827, likely representing the addition of the one-and-a-half-story block to the house as well as other renovations.² A one-story ell appended to the rear of the two-story block was likely a formerly open porch that has since been enclosed. The ell appears to date from the early-twentieth century.

The building has a heavy wood frame structural system that rests on a continuous brick foundation. The exterior walls are clad with a mixture of plain and beaded weatherboard representing recent sections of repaired and replaced siding. Both the one-and-a-half- and two-story portions of the building are topped by side gabled roofs covered with wood shingles. The roof over the one-and-a-half-story block is steeper in pitch than that over the two-story block. There are centrally located exterior chimneys on each end of the building. These chimneys are constructed of brick laid in a 5:1 American Bond and feature a course of mouse-toothed bricks just below the shoulders. The chimneys are separated from the exterior walls above the shoulders. Fenestration is aligned vertically on the two-story portion of the building with the main entrance being located on the northernmost bay of this block. There is a one-story, one-bay portico that shelters the main entrance. This portico has a wood floor that rests on brick foundation piers and is topped by a hipped roof with wide overhangs supported by sets of chamfered square wood posts. All of the windows on the building are wood double-hung sash set in simple frames with molded wood sills. The first floor windows have nine-over-nine light configurations while the second floor windows have six-over-nine configurations. There are two small windows on the gable end of the half-story over the northern block that have four-over-four light configurations. All of the windows appear to be original and feature operable slatted wood shutters.

Interior

The interior of the building is set up for mixed-use, with museum space on the first floor and a rental apartment on the second floor. The layout of the building, particularly on the second floor, has been modified to accommodate the current uses; however, in most cases, the modern partitions are conspicuous and the historic configuration is still apparent.

The first floor consists of a central hallway with a single room to each side created by the original side passage mass, with a one room addition to the other side of the hall. There is a one-room deep ell at the rear of the building that is accessed by a doorway at the rear of the central hallway, as well as through a doorway on the rear wall of the room in the two-story block. This ell contains a small lobby area just through the hallway entrance and is the location of an exterior door that leads to the back yard. A small bathroom is located to the left of this lobby, and the remainder of the ell contains a kitchen.

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Rochelle-Prince House

Southampton County, Virginia

DESCRIPTION

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The staircase to the second floor is located in the rear left corner of the central hallway and consists of an L-shaped flight that rises first to the left, then towards the front of the house. The second floor portion of the staircase has been enclosed, and a doorway now opens into the second floor hallway. Overall, the layout of the second floor is similar to that of the first, however the wide central hallway has been partitioned to contain a bathroom at the rear, and a kitchen at the front. Doorways lead into single rooms on each side of the hallway. Small closets have been added to the interior walls in each of these rooms.

The floors throughout the building are wide-plank wood with most of the original heart pine still intact, although some portions have been replaced. The floors on the first story have been covered with carpet to protect the wood floors underneath, and the floor in the rear ell is covered with modern laminate. The walls throughout the building are clad with plaster atop paneled wood wainscoting. The wainscoting is historic and consists of wide horizontal panels capped by pedestal-type chair rail. Ceilings throughout are also covered with plaster and there is no crown molding. All of the doors and windows in the building feature compound molded wood architraves. The windows are set directly above the wainscoting and utilize the chair rail as a sill. Doors throughout the first floor are raised six-panel with brass butt-hinges and iron rim-lock hardware. Doors on the second floor are later five-panel wood doors, also with iron rim-locks. There are four chimneypieces throughout the building; one in each of the main rooms. The two on the first floor are similar and feature a molded architrave around the brick firebox. Fluted Doric pilasters flank the architrave as well as a large single panel above, and support a compound entablature with a shallow mantel on top. The only difference between the two first floor chimneypieces is the presence of dentils below the mantel in the added room. The two second floor chimneypieces are also similar to each other, both consisting of a simple molded architrave with a simple board atop acting as a very shallow mantel.

Alterations and Additions

The building has undergone few alterations and retains a high degree of historic physical integrity and character. It has been well maintained by its past and current owners. Because the building functioned as a private residence until 1974, modern amenities such as plumbing, electricity, and HVAC equipment have been installed, although these systems are mostly unobtrusive to the historic character. A modern kitchen and bathroom have been added within the rear ell on the first floor, and a second bathroom and galley kitchen have been partitioned off of the hallway in the second floor. Since the Southampton County Historical Society assumed ownership of the property in 1974, it has undergone several renovation and restoration efforts to preserve the building including a comprehensive restoration directed by architects from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in the 1970s.³ These efforts include repairing and replacing damaged sections of exterior siding, repairing foundation masonry, adding exterior storm windows, and reinforcing floor joists. Additionally, the majority of plaster throughout the interior was replaced in 1974 to repair termite damage to

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Rochelle-Prince House

Southampton County, Virginia

DESCRIPTION

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the wood framing underneath. Despite these modifications, a large amount of historic material is still present on and within the building which appears much today as it did historically.

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Rochelle-Prince House

Southampton County, Virginia

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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SUMMARY

The Rochelle-Prince House is an early-nineteenth century building located in Courtland, Southampton County, Virginia that served as a private residence until the 1970s when it was converted to a house museum by its current owners, the Southampton County Historical Society. The name of the house is derived from several of its notable owners including the Rochelle family, who owned the home throughout most of nineteenth century, and Miss Anne Louise Prince, who owned the home for several decades during the mid-twentieth century and took great care and pride in preserving the home's historic character, and was responsible for leaving the property to the historical society to ensure its long-term preservation and benefit to the public.¹

The Rochelle-Prince House is significant both historically and architecturally. It draws its historical significance from its association with two members of the Rochelle family, who occupied the house for the majority of the nineteenth century. Several family members were prominent citizens in Southampton County, and important to local, state, and national history, particularly James Henry Rochelle, who had a noteworthy career as a naval officer during the Mexican War, Civil War, and later with the Peruvian Navy. His niece, Martha Rochelle Tyler was a granddaughter of President John Tyler and served as postmistress of Courtland for 14 years. During that time "Miss Mattie" gained respect as a social and civic icon in the town and was reportedly responsible for the renaming of the town from Jerusalem to Courtland. Additionally, the house is an excellent example of early nineteenth century vernacular architecture in southeast Virginia and one of the oldest remaining homes in the town of Courtland.

The property is considered historically significant at the local level under Criterion B in the area of Military for its association with Captain James Henry Rochelle and in the area of Politics for its association with Martha Rochelle (Miss Mattie) Tyler. It is considered architecturally significant at the local level under Criterion C for being an excellent example of nineteenth century vernacular architecture. The Period of Significance is defined as ca.1814 to c.1900, beginning with the construction date of the building, and ending with the addition of the rear ell, marking the last major physical change to the building.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Southampton County was created in 1749 when the Virginia General Assembly divided Isle of Wight County after it became too large and populous for a single government.² The county was divided roughly in half at the Blackwater River with the land lying on the west side becoming the new Southampton County. The first Southampton court was held at the private home of Elizabeth Ricks at Bloomfield Farm and by 1750, a new county seat was established approximately two miles to the west near the Flower's Bridge over the Nottoway River. In 1752, the county government was authorized to purchase two acres of land at that location from Elizabeth Exum, in order to construct a permanent courthouse, prison, pillory, whipping post, and stocks.³ A small community grew up around the courthouse, although was not officially recognized until 1791 when 10 acres of land adjoining the courthouse was chartered as the town of Jerusalem.⁴ Twenty ½ acre lots were laid

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Southampton County, Virginia

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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out along Main Street with the courthouse and courthouse green at the center. Jerusalem grew slowly throughout the early 19th century, and remained small and quiet except for court days when citizens from all over the county came to town to attend court, socialize, and watch the horse races Jerusalem became well-known for hosting.⁵

One of the early citizens to purchase and construct a home in town was Dr. Henry Gray, who in 1811 purchased lot 14, located across Main Street from the courthouse. By 1814, he had acquired the adjacent lot 15 as well, and on these lots, constructed his home and office.⁶ The home he built likely represents the original portion of the current Rochelle-Prince House. Dr. Gray lived in the house only for a few years before he passed away in 1817, leaving the property to his wife Martha Hines Gray (1791-1870). He assigned his good friend and acting county clerk, James Rochelle, as executor of the will, and named Rochelle as co-guardian of Gray's son with Martha.⁷ Rochelle ended up marrying Martha, and moved into the house. By 1821, Rochelle had purchased the remaining Gray family interest in the property and thus the Rochelle family, whom the significance of the house is most closely associated with, became the owners of the property for the next six decades.⁸

The Rochelle family in Virginia dates back to at least the late-seventeenth century, when Ralph Rochelle appears on a tithables tax list for Surry County in 1668. Ralph Rochelle is best known as the attorney for William Rookings, who took part in Bacon's Rebellion and led the attack on the home of Arthur Allen, now known as Bacon's Castle. Ralph had a son, George Rochelle, who also lived in Surry County, and a grandson John, an attorney, who resided in Sussex County.⁹ John Rochelle also had a son named John who came to Southampton County and was the father of James Rochelle (1786-1835), who married Martha Gray and was the first Rochelle to own the Rochelle-Prince House.¹⁰

James Rochelle became a prominent citizen in Jerusalem and Southampton County, serving as an attorney and county clerk there for over twenty years.¹¹ During his time in office, Rochelle carried on extensive correspondence with political figures at the state and federal level and was acting clerk during the Nat Turner Rebellion and subsequent trial at the Southampton County Court House in which his signature appears on numerous orders and records related to the proceedings.¹² Because of Rochelle's background in law and connections to the court system in Southampton County, he acted as executor of numerous wills for friends, family, and neighbors.¹³ While it is not known how Rochelle and Henry Gray became acquaintances, it was while acting as executor that James Rochelle married Gray's widow and became the owner of the Rochelle-Prince House.

James and Martha (Fanny) Hines Gray Rochelle had three children born in the house over the next decade, including two sons, John (dates unknown) and James Henry (1826-1889), and a daughter Martha (Mattie) (1820-1867).¹⁴ Little is known about John other than he was the oldest. Mattie was born in 1820 and married John Tyler, Jr., the son of the future President John Tyler, in 1838.¹⁵ James Henry was the third and youngest child, born in 1826. This addition to the family could very likely have been the cause for the expansion and

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Rochelle-Prince House

Southampton County, Virginia

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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renovations to the Rochelle house that James initiated that year. James Henry spent his early years at home, but left to join the Navy in 1841 soon after the death of his father.¹⁶ He spent several years serving as an enlisted midshipman before entering the Naval Academy at Annapolis, from which he graduated in 1848 and began his noteworthy career as a naval officer. Due to his frequent change of residence during his adult life, the Rochelle-Prince House remains the property most closely associated with James Henry.

Upon James Henry's enlisting in the Navy, he made occasional visits home to Southampton County during periods of leave; however, his sister Mattie remained at home with their mother Fanny for most of her life. Even after marrying John Tyler, Jr. in 1838, and having three children, the couple stayed at the Rochelle House. Thus for a period of time, the Rochelle House was occupied by both the son and grandchildren of the president of the United States. During his father's time as president, John Tyler, Jr. served as his personal secretary and rented an apartment in Washington, however Mattie remained in Jerusalem with the children.¹⁷ It can not be determined if John ever returned to Jerusalem, for following his stint in Washington, he served in the Mexican War and then the Civil War before returning to Washington to work as an attorney. Mattie died in 1867, three years before her mother, and the house came into the possession of Mattie and John's daughter, also named Mattie Tyler (1846-1928). This Mattie, or "Miss Mattie" as she was known, became an influential resident of Jerusalem and was active in both civics and society.¹⁸ She acted as post-mistress of the town for many years and according to lore, was the initiator and driving force behind the renaming of the town to Courtland in 1888.¹⁹

It was also during this decade that the Rochelle family ceased to be the owners of the Rochelle-Prince House. When James Henry Rochelle returned home to Southampton County from Peru in 1877, he resided with his nephew in-law, General William B. Shands also of Jerusalem, who was married to Miss Mattie's sister, Letitia.²⁰ In 1886, Miss Mattie sold the home to Junius Williams, who was himself an influential resident of Courtland, acting as the Sheriff of Southampton County from 1895 to 1915, a position he was well respected for.²¹

Sheriff Williams lived in the Rochelle-Prince House until 1915 when it was passed down to his daughter and her husband, W.C. Parker. The Parkers owned the property throughout the first half of the twentieth century until it came into the possession of Miss Anne Louise Prince in 1956.²² Miss Prince took great care of the property and was responsible for ensuring its preservation until her death in 1973. As recognition of the building's significance to local history, Prince left the property to the Southampton County Historical Society to restore and use as a museum. Although more or less historically intact, the building was in need of repair and renovation which the historical society was able to raise the funds for through generous gifts and donations the first year of owning it.²³ A restoration of the building was initiated under the direction of architects from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and completed in 1974.²⁴ The Rochelle-Prince House, as it was designated by the historical society, was converted to a house museum with a rental apartment on the second floor, which it continues to function as today.

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Rochelle-Prince House

Southampton County, Virginia

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE

James Henry Rochelle (Military)

The Rochelle-Prince House is significant for its association with Captain James Henry Rochelle, who was born at, and spent many years of his life in the home. During James Henry Rochelle's lifelong career in the Navy, he gained respect and fame as a distinguished officer, taking part in many noteworthy naval events of the mid- to late-nineteenth century in the US and overseas. Rochelle's lifelong career in the Navy prevented him from settling in a single location for any length of time, and therefore the Rochelle-Prince House where he lived both as a child and through retirement is the residence most closely associated to his life.

James Henry Rochelle was born in the Rochelle-Prince House on November 1, 1826 to James and Martha Hines Gray Rochelle.²⁵ His father died when he was only nine years old which may be part of the reason he did not follow his father and many of his ancestors' path in the study of law. Instead, James Henry joined the Navy at the age of 15 and six months later, his uncle in-law, John Tyler, the then President of the United States, whose son had married Rochelle's sister three years earlier, personally granted him a full midshipman's warrant.²⁶ Rochelle was almost immediately called to duty and saw his first active service during the Mexican War with Commodore Perry. After the Mexican War, Rochelle enrolled in the Naval Academy at Annapolis and graduated in 1848.²⁷

His first foreign duties led him to the Mediterranean aboard the frigate *Constitution*, where he spent three years in Italy and Malta. His next assignment took him to Japan where he served under Admiral Perry in the opening of Japan in 1852-54. After a brief leave when Rochelle returned to Jerusalem for several months, he was promoted to Master on September 14, 1855, and on the next day was commissioned as Lieutenant and assigned to duty on the Coast Survey Squadron. He assisted in the survey of New York harbor, Casco Bay and the Florida reefs, followed by a brief expedition to Paraguay.²⁸

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Rochelle, as many others were, was tasked with choosing to retain his commission in the United States Navy, or take up arms against it. As most from the southern states did, Rochelle resigned his post in order to defend his native Virginia, and was quickly offered a commission as Captain in the new Confederate Navy. He was assigned to the James River Squadron, commanded by Captain John Randolph Tucker, tasked with patrolling and protecting the river that was the main access to the Confederate Capital in Richmond. It was the James River Squadron and its flagship the *CSS Virginia*, better known as the *Merrimack*, which unsuccessfully attempted to destroy the Union blockade on the Chesapeake Bay in the famous Battle of the Ironclads at Hampton Roads. During the battle, Rochelle was present as the executive officer aboard the *CSS Patrick Henry*, captained by John Randolph Tucker.²⁹ On the first day of the two-day battle, March 8, 1862, the *Patrick Henry* sank the *USS Cumberland*, the ship that Rochelle had last served on with the US Navy. On the second day, the *Patrick Henry* fired long-range at the *USS Monitor*,

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Rochelle-Prince House

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however inflicted only minimal damage and eventually retreated to Norfolk with the rest of the Confederate Navy. Several months later when the Norfolk Naval yard and the lower James River were abandoned by the Confederate Navy, the *Patrick Henry* took part in a risky night mission to evacuate men and supplies from the yard.³⁰

The *Patrick Henry* and the rest of the fleet retreated upriver to Richmond, establishing a position at Drewry's Bluff, the last major defensive position up the James River before Richmond. Here Rochelle oversaw the removal of the ships guns, which he and his men carried 100 feet up the bluff to mount in Fort Darling overlooking the river.³¹ When the Union Navy attempted to sail upriver, they were bombarded from the fort, with the massive 8-inch smoothbore guns relocated from the *Patrick Henry*, and were forced back. Following the battle, the crew was ordered to remain on land as infantry for a brief period of time with Rochelle commanding. Soon afterwards, Rochelle was reassigned to South Carolina to assist with the defense of Charleston Harbor which had been laid to siege. Once again, Rochelle was placed under the command of his comrade and friend, Captain John Randolph Tucker aboard the ironclad, *CSS Chicora*. With Tucker and Rochelle in charge, the *Chicora* mounted a successful attack against the Union Blockade on January 31, 1863 that resulted in the opening of the harbor briefly until additional US ironclads were brought in to replace the lost ships. For this accomplishment, Tucker was given a promotion and several other officers were reassigned to various posts under his command including James Henry Rochelle, who was made Lieutenant Commander of the *CSS Palmetto State*, the only other Confederate ironclad in Charleston Harbor.³²

Rochelle remained in this command until February 1865 when Charleston was evacuated by Confederate forces. Just days prior to the evacuation, Rochelle was assigned a detachment of about three hundred men from the crews of the *CSS Palmetto State* and *CSS Columbia* to travel by rail to Wilmington, North Carolina to cooperate with the Army as a body of infantry to help defend the besieged city. The efforts proved fruitless, and Wilmington was abandoned later that month. At that time, Rochelle and his men rejoined with Captain Tucker and were ordered to Richmond. For the short remainder of the war, Tucker was sent back to Drewry's Bluff, while Rochelle was placed in co-command of the Confederate Naval Academy, a somewhat futile assignment that late in the war, yet honorific nonetheless. When Richmond was finally evacuated, Rochelle marched his cadets in body to Georgia, where they were officially disbanded following the capture of Jefferson Davis and the dissolution of the Confederacy.³³

James Henry Rochelle returned to Jerusalem after the war to live with his mother and sister at the Rochelle House where he remained for a number of years before being contacted by Captain Tucker.³⁴ Tucker had accepted a commission as an Admiral in the Peruvian Navy almost immediately following the Civil War and was put in charge of surveying the upper reaches of the Amazon River. He was permitted to acquire his own staff, and promptly sent for James Henry Rochelle to serve with him on the *Peruvian Hydrographical Commission*. In this position, he assisted Tucker and the commission in surveying and charting 1500 miles of the Amazon River throughout the country. During his three year stay in Peru, Rochelle even acted as stand-in

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president of the commission by order of the Peruvian government for a period of time when Admiral Tucker's duties took him away from the Amazon for other assignments.³⁵

Rochelle's time in Peru was his last naval duty, and his return to Southampton County in 1877 following it essentially marked his retirement. He spent the remainder of his life in Jerusalem reading, writing, and enjoying the company of his family. It was during this time that he authored, The Life of Rear Admiral, John Randolph Tucker; the defining biography on Tucker's naval career. Rochelle greatly respected Tucker who he had served with and under for a large part of life. In his introduction, Rochelle states, "In writing this biographical sketch I have performed not a task, but a labor of love, for I was, during many years, both in times of peace and of war, intimately associated with the distinguished sailor whose career I have attempted to trace."

James Henry had become a distinguished sailor himself, throughout his lifetime in the Navy. However, after having fallen ill for only a day, James Henry Rochelle died in Courtland, on March 31, 1889 at the home of his nephew in-law and fellow Civil War veteran, General William B. Shands. In her biographical sketch of him, James Henry's niece Miss Mattie Tyler wrote, "he was a doughty warrior and soldier, and from the beginning loved a career of arms. He sorrowed over the rupture of the Government, but when his State went out he nobly stood by her; went to the front, and never grounded his arms until there was nothing left to fight for. He knew to win would bring honor and safety, and failure would make him a rebel, and while success on the Northern side gave to many of his old comrades in arms on that side marble and bronze statues in the new Pantheon at Washington, yet with the courage of his convictions, in disaster his only regret was that he did not win. Of such stern stuff are the cavaliers of Virginia made, and such as these are yet to lift her from the dust and crown their old mother again with glory."³⁶

Mattie Tyler -Politics/Government local

The Rochelle-Prince House also derives significance from its association with Martha Rochelle Tyler, or "Miss Mattie" as she was known. Mattie Tyler was the niece of James Henry Rochelle and the granddaughter of John Tyler, the tenth President of the United States. Mattie gained great respect taking part in civics and society of Courtland. During the Civil War when many of her relatives were off fighting in the Confederate Army and Navy, Mattie acted as a nurse at the local Baptist Church which was converted into a hospital. Years later, she became postmistress of the town, a position she held for nearly 14 years with the backing and support of not only the local citizens, but the postmaster general in Washington, and even several Presidents. Mattie was also active in the local church, a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and Daughters of the Confederacy. She was revered as great source of local and state history, a great philanthropist, and well respected by everyone that knew her.

Martha Rochelle Tyler was born March 1, 1846 in the Rochelle-Prince House to Martha Rochelle and John Tyler, Jr.³⁷ Martha Rochelle was the only daughter of James and Martha Gray Rochelle and John Tyler, Jr. was

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the oldest son of John Tyler, the tenth President of the United States, and his first wife, Letitia. Martha and John Tyler, Jr. wed in 1838 and lived in the Rochelle House with her mother and brother, because John did not have a steady career at the time. This situation concerned his father who wrote to the elder Martha Rochelle, claiming that John Jr, can not be “content to live in a state of daily dependence in your family.” He suggested that the two parents help the young couple become happy, “which then can never be until they are made to feel a mutual dependence upon eachother in the discharge of the duties of life by going to housekeeping on their own footings.” When John Tyler became president in 1841, he appointed John Tyler, Jr. as his secretary and provided for his living in Washington. He adds in his letter to Martha’s mother that, “if Martha consents to accompany him to Washington, she will be received with all the affection which would be manifested to our daughter.”³⁸

Martha instead chose to remain in Courtland with her mother and James Rochelle Tyler, the son of she and John, born in 1839. John made regular trips back to Courtland and they had two more children during his father’s time in office, including Letitia born in 1844 and Mattie born in 1846.³⁹ When his father’s term in the White House ended, John spent a brief period of time fighting in the Mexican War before coming back to Virginia to assist his fathers political career and campaign for James Buchanan’s Presidential nomination. When the Civil War broke out, he took a commission as Colonel in the Confederate Army. James Rochelle served in the army as well, as did William B. Shands, Letitia’s husband. Mattie was only fifteen years old at the time, but took part by assisting with nursing wounded soldiers brought to the Jerusalem Baptist Church that was converted to a hospital.⁴⁰

Martha Rochelle Tyler died soon after the Civil War and John undertook a number of different ventures, none of which were succesful and he reportedly spent most of the remainder of his life in poverty. He attempted to work as an attorney in Washington and Baltimore, and was given a position in the US Customs Department in Florida by President Grant in the 1870s. He returned to Washington in the 1880s and was appointed a position in the Treasury Department.⁴¹

Throughout the time after the Civil War, he carried on extensive correspondance with his daughter Mattie who appears to have remained in Jerusalem, having inherited the Rochelle-Prince House when her grandmother, Martha Gray Rochelle, died in 1870.⁴² In 1887 John Tyler, Jr. was stricken with paralysis and forced to retire to his apartment in Washington. Mattie seems to have moved to Washington, or at least spent a large amount of time there, to assist him as this was the year she sold the Rochelle house to Junius Williams.

Following her father’s death in 1896, Mattie returned home from Washington to take her appointment as post-mistress of Courtland, recently renamed from Jerusalem, a change that local lore claims she was responsible for to honor the town’s prominence as county seat. Miss Mattie held the position of postmistress for seventeen years, a position she was infamous for, primarily because of the publicity from the politics and tactics she employed to acquire and keep the job. She was granted the position by acting Postmaster General James Gary

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in 1897 after a lengthy departmental debate as to her eligibility. Gary was a child in Baltimore Maryland in the early 1840s when President John Tyler made a trip there and unassumingly picked up a small boy from the crowd and said to his parents, "that's a bright looking little boy." Apparently Gary remembered the event and when he learned that Miss Mattie Tyler was the granddaughter of President Tyler, he stepped beyond the normal appointment procedure and personally assigned her the post.⁴³

Miss Mattie held the position of postmistress in Courtland for seventeen years, serving the town and being well respected for her job. Her tenure was not without dispute, however, for even before receiving the job, the Post Office Department had questioned her eligibility, stating that she lacked the administrative ability necessary for the proper conduct of the office. Despite these questions, she was granted the job and successfully carried it out until 1907 when the Post Office Department attempted to remove her from the position. They offered her a clerkship in the Norfolk post office, explaining that she would be better suited to perform the service of clerk in a post office which she could satisfactorily do under conditions not requiring administrative responsibility. However, she was told that the appointment as post office clerk required an Executive order as the position is a competitive one. This caveat did not deter Miss Mattie at all; she travelled to Washington where she met with President Theodore Roosevelt personally. Upon meeting her and hearing her case, the President issued Executive Order 652 on June 11, 1907, "Authorizing Appointment of Mattie R. Tyler as Clerk in Post Office at Norfolk, Virginia, Without Regard to Civil Service Rules."⁴⁴

How long she retained this clerkship could not be determined, but Miss Mattie eventually reclaimed her position as postmistress in Courtland. She once again served the position successfully until 1914, when she was challenged again, this time by what Mattie claimed to be, "a clique of Virginia Politicians trying to remove her of her post." This time, the Civil Service regulations were officially amended making her legally ineligible to hold the position, without having passed the Civil Service Examination. Once again, Miss Mattie took her grievance directly to Washington, this time to meet with President Wilson.⁴⁵ The President was unable to meet with her at the time, however promised to look into her case.⁴⁶ Mattie returned to Courtland, where several days later, she was presented with a notice of commission for the post office by B.A. Williams, her replacement that the new Postmaster General had selected. Mattie refused to surrender the office, forcing Williams to telegraph the Post Office Department for instructions. Three days later, Mattie received orders to release the office, which she promptly did without further question.⁴⁷

Miss Mattie spent the next 14 years of her life researching, writing, and being active in several civic organizations. She was an active member of the local Episcopal church, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Daughters of the Confederacy. She was highly regarded as a woman of unusual interest and intellect. Accounts claim she possessed a marvelous store of historical information with regards to her grandfather's time as Vice-President, President, and later member of the Confederate Congress. She was well versed in the history of the county, state, the south, and of the Confederacy, and was regarded as a "never failing source of information and interest." Mattie Tyler died in Courtland on January 12, 1928.⁴⁸

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Architecture local

Architecturally, the Rochelle-Prince House has significance for being a well-preserved example of early- to mid-nineteenth century domestic vernacular architecture in Southampton County, Virginia.⁴⁹ Built circa 1814, the home has had few owners in its nearly two-century lifetime, and has been relatively unaltered during that time. It is currently owned by the Southampton County Historical Society who sponsored a restoration of the building in the 1970s, to preserve its nineteenth-century appearance. It is one of the oldest buildings remaining in the town of Courtland; and as one of the few antebellum structures remaining there, it contributes to the historic character of the town centered on the county court house across the street.

While a detailed history of the construction and development of the Rochelle-Prince House can not be obtained, the available records and information indicate that the earliest portion of the home was built circa 1814. That year, the lot the building is located on was purchased by Dr. Henry Gray and by the following year, he had purchased the adjacent lot. A Mutual Assurance Policy from 1817 taken out by James Rochelle for Gray, shows two buildings located on the property; a one-story 16 feet by 24 feet doctor's office, and a two-story 20 feet by 28 feet residence.⁵⁰ Twenty by 28 feet approximately matches the dimensions of the two-story portion of the current Rochelle-Prince House, indicating it is likely the original mass. Southampton County land records show a large increase in taxable value of the home between 1826 and 1827, likely representing the construction of the one-and-a-half-story northern wing, as well as significant renovations and upgrades to the overall house.⁵¹

When the Southampton County Historical Society acquired the house in 1973, it retained a high degree of historic physical integrity, however was in need of general repair and maintainance. Through various grants and donations, they were able to undertake a restoration project in 1974 under direction by architects from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. This project consisted of repairing and replacing damaged joists, tuckpointing the brick foundation and chimneys, and removing termite damaged-framing and studs. As part of the termite abatement, most of the interior plaster work had to be replaced, however the historic interior woodwork and wainscoting were retained. At that time, the private residence was converted into a house museum on the first floor, with a rental apartment on the second. The Southampton County Historical Society completed additional restoration to the property in 2004.⁵²

As it stands today, the Rochelle-Prince House is a testament to its time and an excellent example of its type. With its sturdy construction and unobtrusive decoration it is reflective of the era in which it was built. Early dwellings in Southampton County shared a common reliance on traditional forms and materials and the Rochelle-Prince house follows this pattern with its frame construction and central passage form. The more affluent residents of the county did incorporate style into their homes although ornamentation remained relatively simple throughout the antebellum period. The majority of ornamentation on the Rochelle-Prince House likely dates to the 1826 renovation of the building and includes minor Federal influences. On the exterior, this includes the molded sills and boxed cornice, the classically-inspired portico, and the double shouldered

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chimney stack on the one-and-a-half story addition. The interior of the building is also reflective of Federal period influences. The one-and-half-story addition to the north side, made the formerly side-passage into a central hall, thus making a symmetrical floorplan, the popular form of the period. The mantels in each of the two first floor rooms are adorned with classically inspired architraves and fluted Doric pilasters which support cornice shelves, and the walls throughout the first floor are clad with paneled wainscoting. The door and window surrounds are compound and the heavy paneled doors are complete with rimlock sets.

Some modifications have occurred to the building throughout its life to allow for its continued use. The second floor was modified, likely in the early-twentieth century, to install modern amenities. A restroom has been added in the hallway and closets were constructed in the bedrooms. The doors to the bedrooms, restroom, and closets on the second floor are all five-panel, indicating a late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century time period. A rear porch was added to the building in the early-twentieth century that has since been enclosed to allow for a modern kitchen. A small kitchenette was also added to the second floor to allow for the conversion of this level to a separate apartment.

Despite these minor alterations, the Rochelle-Prince House remains predominately intact and conveys its historic character well. Being located across from the Southampton County Court House in Courtland, on one of the original twenty town lots, the Rochelle-Prince House stands as one of the architectural focal points in the town. Further, according to the state historic inventory, it is one of the oldest remaining buildings in Courtland and one of only five antebellum buildings recorded in the town. It is an excellent example of vernacular domestic architecture in southeastern Virginia, particularly in Southampton County and the town of Courtland, and remains as one of the most significant architectural resources in the town.

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INVENTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHS

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Location: Southampton County, Virginia
Photographer: Robert J. Taylor, Jr., Dutton + Associates, LLC
Date of Photograph: October 2009

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Description of View: Second Floor, South Bedroom, Facing Southwest

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⁵² Southampton County Historical Society. "History of the Rochelle-Prince House."

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