



I. PORT NORFOLK: HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE





This 1892 bird's eye view of Portsmouth shows commercial and military waterfront operations as well as the railway lines that served the port. The growth fueled by these activities spurred new residential development at the outer edges of the city which can also be seen in this view.

A. Brief Overview of the City and the Historic Districts

1. General Portsmouth History

The City of Portsmouth is a deepwater port located on the Elizabeth River in the Tidewater region of Virginia. It is considered a part of the harbor and population center known as Hampton Roads, the nation's thirty-third largest metropolitan statistical area. Its roots as a transportation center, a constant throughout the city's history, began when Adam Thoroughgood established a ferry connection between Portsmouth and Norfolk in 1636.

The town of Portsmouth was not formally established and platted until 1752 when Colonel William Crawford gave approximately 65 acres of his plantation land. Over the next 250 years, the city grew to its present size of 26 square miles. The first shipyard, "Gosport," was established south of town in 1767 and began Portsmouth's long association with naval history.

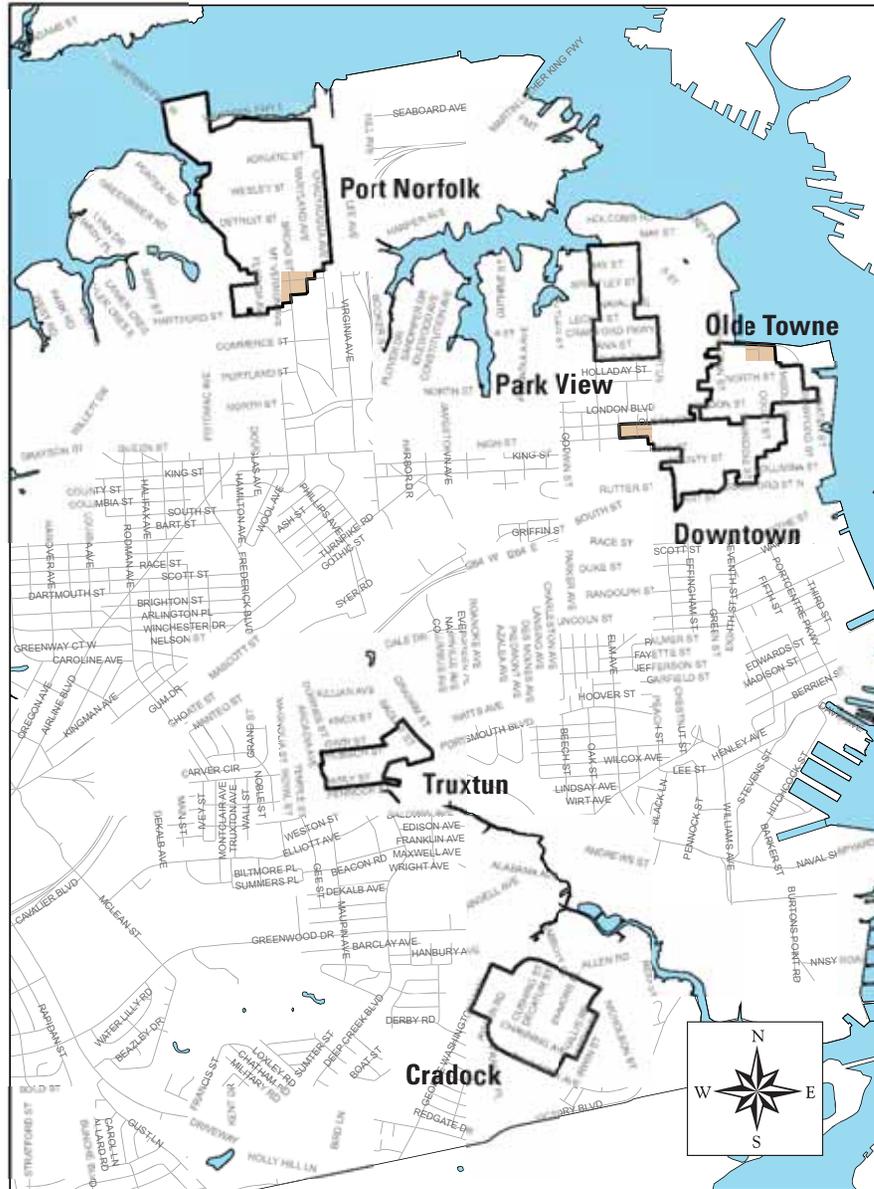
Named for the famed English port, Virginia's Portsmouth is home to many of the United States' maritime firsts. These include the first federal shipyard and drydock in the nation and construction of the first ironclad ship,

first battleship, and first aircraft carrier. At least one source cites Portsmouth as having one of the greatest concentrations of architecturally significant buildings between Alexandria and Charleston. Portsmouth's current historic districts are representative of its long association with transportation and shipbuilding. Each represents an era in the development of this old and important Virginia city.



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Portsmouth's historic districts are distributed throughout the city. Olde Towne, Downtown, Park View and Port Norfolk are located close to the water in this port city. Cradock and Truxtun, the city's two planned developments for shipyard workers, were located on the outskirts of the city in the early twentieth century.



A. Brief Overview of the City and the Historic Districts *continued*

2. Portsmouth's Historic Districts

Olde Towne was the first established historic district in the city. It represents the town's earliest surviving history and is the only example of an early townscape in the Hampton Roads area. Portsmouth's other residential historic districts have their own stories to tell as well.

Port Norfolk and Park View were both developed in the closing years of the nineteenth century as Portsmouth assumed the position of a regional transportation center. These streetcar suburbs, built on former farmland, provided a healthful and attractive living condition for the middle-class workers involved in the growing shipping and railroad industries taking Virginia products to far-distant ports.

Cradock and Truxtun are the only twentieth century districts presently listed in Portsmouth and date to approximately 1918. Both were built as projects of the U.S. Housing Corporation to house shipyard workers during World War I. They are significant as they are among the first government-funded and planned communities in the country. The design concept of these districts reflect what we today call "new urbanism," a wholly contained community where



In this older aerial view, the close spacing of houses facing onto wide avenues in the Port Norfolk neighborhood can be clearly seen.



A current Port Norfolk street view shows Colonial Revival, Craftsman style and Vernacular Queen Anne residences within the same block.

residents could live, play, and shop within an easy commute of the workplace provided by public transportation.

The newest historic district in the city is the Downtown Portsmouth Historic District that encompasses the original town plat. Most of the buildings date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period of rapid growth for the city. Unlike the other listed districts that are residential in nature, this district is mainly commercial and anchored by the city's main street, High Street.

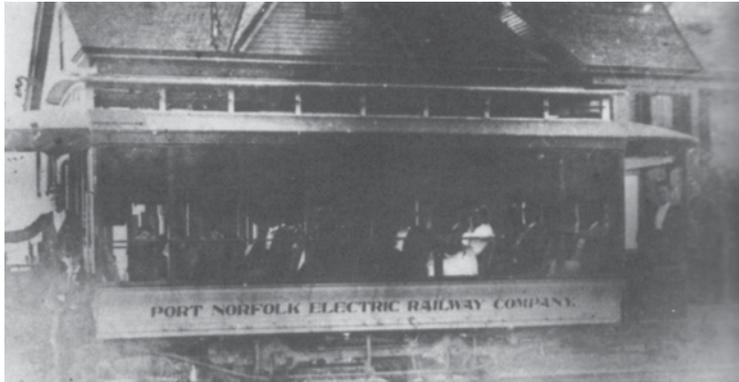
The buildings in this district represent a variety of service-oriented uses and diversity of ethnicity and religion.

Individually listed properties also contribute to the overall understanding of the development and history of the city. Landmark religious and municipal institutions include Trinity Episcopal Church and the Old Portsmouth Courthouse. Those that represent Portsmouth's long marine and transportation history

include Drydock Number One, the Portsmouth Naval Hospital and the Seaboard Coastline Building. More modern entertainment culture of the twentieth century is represented by the Commodore Theatre. These individual properties help to complete the picture of Portsmouth's past.



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The Port Norfolk Electric Railway Company replaced an earlier horse-drawn line and provided economical transportation to Port Norfolk's residents.



An early view of the Smith house on Chautauqua Avenue shows the beginning of the more dense development of the district in the distance.

B. Port Norfolk Historic District Character

1. General Port Norfolk History

The Port Norfolk Historic District was built on a 175-acre parcel in the northern area of the city. The land was originally part of Colonel Crawford's landholdings and was donated by him to serve as the glebe for Portsmouth Parish and Trinity Church. This land was also the site of the British landing when Portsmouth and Norfolk were captured during the Revolution.

After 1815, the former glebe parcel passed out of church ownership and was operated as a successful private farm through most the nineteenth century. In 1890 the land was purchased by the Norfolk Land Company. This former farmland was platted into thirty city blocks and advertised as "healthful and attractive" housing for railroad and shipping facility workers. The name Port Norfolk is derived from the combination of the words Portsmouth and Norfolk.

A streetcar line connected residents to downtown while a hotel, pavilion, and fishing pier attracted visitors from downtown to the new suburb. A small commercial district was located in the center of the neighborhood. It contained a pharmacy, bakery, and grocery store to serve the needs of the residents, alleviating the need to make the trip downtown.

Like Park View to its east, Port Norfolk was an attempt by developers to satisfy the need for middle-class housing for a fast-growing workforce employed by Portsmouth's railroad, shipping, and manufacturing industries. Many of Port Norfolk's original residents worked to the south or east of the neighborhood in bordering industrial areas, and the Seaboard Line's tracks form the southeastern boundary of the district.

The Port Norfolk National Register Historic District was established in 1983 and local review began the same year.



A color map produced by the Port Norfolk Investment Company shows the grid layout of streets in Port Norfolk and nearby Pinner's Point. Residences, commercial entities, and railroad lines are all depicted in this three-dimensional drawing.



2. Streetscape Character

Northern investors platted the former glebe and farm, Port Norfolk, into a typical grid pattern of 30 blocks, each 300 hundred feet by 600 feet. There were approximately 25 house lots per block, each measuring 40 by 140 feet.

The north-south primary streets were specified to be 70-foot wide and the secondary east-west streets a more narrow 50 feet. Concrete sidewalk and curbs were poured and trees were planted along the primary streets. These mature street trees now obscure the overhead utility lines that run in front of each house.

3. Site Character

Most houses in the Port Norfolk Historic District are sited facing the primary north-south streets with shared alleys bisecting the length of the block. House placement maintains a consistent shallow setback that provides a rhythm to each street in the district. A departure from this arrangement is made at the northern end of the district where a number of lots are oriented on an east-west axis along Bayview Boulevard to capitalize on the waterfront views.

Foundation plantings and site trees characterize individual sites as do concrete walks that extend from the curb or sidewalk to the house. Minimal side yards are often occupied by concrete ribbon driveways.



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The Port Norfolk Academy and the residence next door are representative of the vernacular Victorian buildings that provide the basis for Port Norfolk's distinctive architectural character.

B. Port Norfolk Historic District Character *continued*

4. Architectural Character

Between 1890 and 1920 approximately 740 houses were built in Port Norfolk. This relatively fast-paced development resulted in a cohesive collection of middle-class housing from the turn-of-the-century period.

The majority of residences date to between 1890 and 1910 and are compatible in design, scale, and materials. These houses in the Queen Anne, American Foursquare, Colonial Revival and Bungalow styles were the typical middle-class residential housing of the period. Higher-style Queen Anne dwellings are found along Bayview Boulevard overlooking the Elizabeth River.



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A hipped-roof vernacular Queen Anne is accented with cross-gables and a second-story bay on the facade.



High-style Queen Anne residences are often accented by a tower and wrap-around porch.



Similar to the illustration above, this design features a two-story projecting bay.



A rare brick example of a high-style Queen Anne residence in Port Norfolk. Most examples are of frame construction.

C. Port Norfolk Architectural Styles *continued*

2. Queen Anne

The Queen Anne style is the most frequent style found in the historic district. Dating from the 1890s in Port Norfolk, this style is characterized by its frame construction, two-and-one-half story typical height, and asymmetrical appearance. Additional features include weatherboard cladding often mixed with wood shingle sections, complex roof forms, and sawn decorative elements applied to the cornices, gables and porches.

High-style, or more ornate, examples are often characterized by complex roof lines, vertical proportions, wrap-around porches and roof turrets or towers. Detailed ornamentation may include a variety of brackets and other sawn millwork.



3. Bungalow

The least represented early-twentieth-century style in the district is the Bungalow. Built between 1910 and 1930, these houses are characteristically one-and-one-half stories and are of frame or brick construction. They are defined by sweeping gable roofs with shed-dormers sheltering full-width porches, and wide overhanging eaves with exposed rafter tails. Short columns on masonry piers usually support the trademark porch.



The hipped roof of this Bungalow extends to cover the full-width porch. The dormer repeats the hipped roof of the main structure.



A gable-roofed Bungalow with a shed-roofed dormer and exposed rafter tails is pictured here.



The American Foursquare style borrowed elements from the Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles. This example uses the symmetrical massing and six-over-one paned windows of the Colonial Revival. The square posts on piers that support the porch roof and small paned door and sidelight designs reflect the Craftsman style. The full-width front porch is a typical element of most American Foursquare dwellings.



C. Port Norfolk Architectural Styles *continued*

4. American Foursquare

The American Foursquare enjoyed popularity across the country in the early twentieth century and Port Norfolk was no exception. These frame residences are usually two-and one-half story frame construction covered in weatherboard and/or shingles. They always have hipped roofs, often with a single dormer. The arrangement of openings on the facade is usually asymmetrical. Often there is a full-width porch with various types of columns on brick piers.

This example displays a more asymmetrical arrangement of openings than the illustration above. Colonial Revival full-height round columns support the porch and on the first level, a Craftsman-influenced window has vertical divisions in the upper sash.





5. Colonial Revival

Houses in the Port Norfolk Historic District built between 1930 and 1950, well after the initial period of development, were often constructed in the Colonial Revival style.

The symmetrical appearance of these structures was a marked departure from the earlier Queen Anne style. Common elements of the Colonial Revival style include its two-story brick or frame construction; gable or gambrel roofs; multi-pane glazing in one or both sashes; pediments, fanlights and sidelights to accentuate doorways; and dentil or modillion cornices.



A symmetrical facade, restrained ornamentation and small-paned windows are elements of the Colonial Revival style.



Smaller, single-story cottage-like dwellings also borrowed from this style, as well as the Tudor Revival style.



A rare example of a Colonial Revival dwelling with an asymmetrical facade. Small-paned windows and a classical portico are typical Colonial Revival elements.



One-and-one-half story Colonial Revival style dwellings are often referred to as Cape Cod houses. This example features a symmetrical arrangement with first-level bay windows and wall dormers above.



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The brick building to the left is a good example of early twentieth century neighborhood commercial architecture. The hipped roof structure to the right reflects a residential design.



As the streetcar lines were replaced by the automobile, this gas station was built in Port Norfolk.

C. Port Norfolk Architectural Styles *continued*

6. Commercial

The small commercial section of the Port Norfolk Historic District is located at the intersection of Broad and Detroit streets and features a row of turn-of-the-century brick and frame vernacular commercial structures as well as a free-standing gas station.

The majority of the commercial structures consist of a three-part facade. The lower section contains the storefront while the upper floors have patterns of windows. The final third element is some sort of decorative cornice at the roof line.