

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

Ca. 1790-ca. 1881

Significant Dates

ca. 1790

1832

1881

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA

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

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.2 acres

UTM References

A 18 370490 4197400
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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

organization Dept. of Historic Resources date January 1992

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone 804 786-3143

city or town Richmond state Virginia zip code 23219

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section II (1830s)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Section III (ca. 1880-81)

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

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

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

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

Section IV (1920s)

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

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

