SURVEY RECORDS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Similar to the other eight or so prominent shooting clubs that have existed on the Currituck Banks, the Currituck Shooting Club stands on the sound side on a level expanse open to the sound and sheltered from the ocean by dunes to the east which curve around the structures in a wide arc to the north and south. The original gable-roofed clubhouse was built in 1857 and oriented so that the gable ends faced north and south. It was a typical coastal building—a one—and—a—half—story rectangular structure with shed-roofed porches continuous with the slope of the main roof along the entire east and west sides and with a plan bisected on the north—south axis by a hall. The building no longer exists.

Today, the Currituck Shooting Club's compound consists of the 1879-1882 clubhouse, a boatmen's house, and boathouse complex, and scattered outbuildings as well as a few primitive open wooden towers along the sound that are used for scanning the water in order to keep track of shooting parties. The clubhouse is really three buildings connected by one-story passages. The largest unit, at the southern end, 75 yards northwest of the original clubhouse, was built in 1879 when the club was re-organized. The 1879 structure is similar to the 1857 building in that both were built as rectangles covered in weathered cedar shake shingles—a common material on the Outer Banks, suited to the severe weather of the islands. It also repeats the gable roofs (the ends to the north and south), and a plan in which each floor is divided by a hall that runs north—south. The present structure differs from the original in that it is larger, being two stories with an attic, four bays wide and seven bays long. On the long side facing the sound there is a three—window bay that is the only projecting portion of the walls to break the otherwise regular rectangle.

Another major difference is the location on the south gable end of the only porch, which covers the main entrance. This porch has a one-story hipped roof supported by simple four-by-four posts. The entrance is located in the middle of this facade and contains double doors with two raised wooden panels and two glazed panels per leaf. The fenestration is a consistent size with six-over-six double-hung sashes, evenly spaced on each facade except for the south, entrance facade. The narrow flat board architraves that are painted gray are the only portions of the entire structure that are painted.

The crest of the roof is broken by four internal, evenly-spaced chimneys. One chimney is connected to the fireplace in the living room and the others are part of a system of kerosene stoves. There also is a wind gauge and a square observatory platform surrounded by a simple latticed railing at the center of the roof which is covered by asbestos tiles. The rake boards in the gables are decorated by round, raised bosses and narrow raised strips of wood which outline the board and enframe the end bosses as well as the boss at the crest. This raised wooden decoration and the ridges of projecting bricks around the mouths of the chimneys constitute the only adornment of an otherwise very stark structure.

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In the three years after this main portion of the clubhouse was constructed in 1879, two other buildings also oriented with gable ends to the north and south, were erected consecutively, one next to the other to the north. The buildings immediately to the north housed a gunroom and a dormitory for the boatmen; today it consists of a large kitchen and accommodations for the caretakers. This building is smaller in area than the main section (three bays long and two bays wide) and shorter, although it is also two-and-a-half stories high. There is similar raised decoration on the barge boards of the gable ends, and there are three chimneys at the crest of the roof. A one-story shedroofed porch that runs along most of the west facade was enclosed within the last ten years for a crew's mess. The many windows of this addition are two-over-two sash, and in the center of the west facade there is a double-doored entrance.

The second building to the north of the main section is a one-story, gable-roofed structure with a flat-roofed porch along the west facade supported by posts and recently enclosed. This building, originally the kitchen, now houses the club's superintendent. Many years ago, a one-story gable-roofed passage was built to connect the main building with the middle one and recently a passageway was constructed to connect the two northern buildings, so that the effect of the complete clubhouse is that of a string of three buildings connected end to end.

The interior of the clubhouse is fairly austere, characterized by varnished pine doors, trim, and wainscoting of vertical beaded boards approximately 2½ inches wide. ceilings throughout this main block are constructed of varnished boards also approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. On the first floor of the simple central hall floor plan the living room and dining room are on the west side of the hall and six rooms which all used to be bedrooms are on the east side; as new needs have arisen, three of these bedrooms have been converted to a bathroom, a gun room, and a television room. A dogleg stairway at the north end of the hall rises to the second floor where six doors line each side of the hall; they originally opened onto twelve more bedrooms-one was converted to a bathroom and one is now a reproduction of an 1880s member's bedroom. Altogether there were twenty-one bedrooms--two more were in the attic which is now used for storage, and the one that was at the southwest corner of the first floor was eliminated for expansion of the living room. Each interior door has a transom (except for the dining room doors) and is panelled in the same fashion as the entrance doors but without the glass. The meter of the wind gauge, which was installed when the house was built, is located in the first floor hall.

Except for the incorporation of the bedroom, and new ceiling panelling, the living room is in its original state. The $2\frac{1}{2}$ foot high wainscoting is varnished, but the doors and trim have been painted. The only fireplace in the house, opposite the bay window, is of plain brick with a simple wooden mantle and a wide brick hearth. Much of the furniture is original to the construction of the house, and several pieces came from the Narrows Island Club, also on the Currituck Banks, which the Currituck Shooting Club purchased in the 1930s. A narrow bar room lined with private wine lockers connects the living room and dining room. From the dining room there is a passage which leads to the large, modern kitchen in the second building. The rest of this middle building is randomly subdivided into quarters for the caretakers.

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A few yards away from the clubhouse to the southeast there is an austere, two-story gable-roofed rectangular building, three bays long and two bays wide, which rests on cement piers and is covered in weathered cedar shakes. The date of this building is uncertain, although it appears to have been built about the time of the three other buildings. Once used to house boatmen, the building is in a deteriorated state and is scheduled to be demolished soon.

Along the sound there are two one-story storage buildings, one gable-roofed and one shed-roofed. Two older gable-roofed one-story boathouses were connected in 1974 by a square, hip-roofed boathouse from which two docks extend into the sound. All of these buildings are sided with vertical weatherboards. Southwest of the clubhouse are dog pens and an old privy, and northwest are feeding areas for geese. A lawn stretches from the clubhouse to the sound. Today, the Club consists of several islands and approximately $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles of land between the sound and the partially paved road that runs through the Currituck Banks. Although the ocean side of the road has been sold and is divided into lots which are being developed, the large expanse maintained by the Currituck Shooting Club preserves the wilderness of the Banks and interrupts the line of the dunes only by the simple roofline of the clubhouse and an occasional wooden lookout tower.

The structures of course are closely related to the surrounding environment. Archeological remains, such as trash pits, wells, and structural remains, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the structures. Information concerning use patterns, social standing and mobility, as well as structural details are often only evident in the archeological record. Therefore, archeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structure. At this time no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is probable that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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SPECIFIC DATES 1857, 1867, 1879

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Currituck Shooting Club is the oldest of the several exclusive hunting clubs for which the Currituck Banks are famous. In 1857, a group of businessmen met in New York City to draw up the constitution and bylaws for the club on the 3100 acres purchased at \$1.00 per acre from Abraham Baum. The original Clubhouse was so ravaged during the Civil War that it was not fit for use; the core of the present clubhouse and the subsidiary buildings were erected from 1879 to 1882. Located between the road and Currituck Sound in an area that extends for approximately 3 1/2 miles, these three later gable-roofed buildings sheathed in weathered cedar shakes are connected by one-story passageways to form the nucleus of the compound, clubhouse provides few luxuries: heat is provided by kerosene stoves and until 1967 there were no bathrooms. The club has been in continuous operation for 113 years solely during the November--January hunting season. Originally composed of twenty-one members predominantly from the North, today the club includes only twelve members, many of whom are executives of southern textile corporations. Although the land along the ocean opposite the club is being developed, the Currituck Shooting Club preserves the landscape for which the Currituck Banks is noted,

Criteria Assessment:

- A. Associated with the development of the Currituck Banks as a famous "market and sport shooting" center. Currituck Shooting Club formed in 1857, is the oldest of a number of clubs in Currituck County, and it has been in continuous operation during the months of November January since 1867. Also associated with the increased economic development and dependency of the community on sportsmen until the 1930s.
- B. Organized in 1857 by prominent businessmen and sportsmen from the north who led by Philo T. Ruggles, the membership today is principally composed of Southern textiles executives and headed by Stewart Richardson.
- C. Embodies the simple, rustic, and fairly austere coastal features which are typical of the frame buildings of the area, particularly, the use of the weathered cedar shakes to sheathe the exterior walls. The Club compound consists of the 1879-1882 clubhouse, boatman's house, boathouse complex, scattered outbuildings and several open, frame watch towers. The Currituck Shooting Club remains an area institution and one of the best examples of the importance of duck hunting in the region. Its extensive land holdings, consisting of several islands and approximately 3 1/2 miles of land between the sound and the road, assist in the preservation of the natural wilderness of the Banks.

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The Currituck Shooting Club was formed in 1857 by a group of northern businessmen and sportsmen led by Philo T. Ruggles of New York City. The Club purchased 3,100 acres from Abraham Baum for \$3,100 in that year and built a clubhouse. The Currituck Shooting Club was the first of many such clubs based in Currituck County, an area frequently called a "sportsmen's paradise" and is considered the oldest such club still active in the United States. Like the other clubs, the Currituck Shooting Club concentrated on hunting wild fowl, particularly duck, in the winter hunting season.

Prior to the establishment of these clubs duck hunting was an important part of Currituck's commerce. In 1828 the Currituck Inlet, at that time composed of salt water, was closed by a storm and the vicinity gradually became fresh water. This change allowed vegetation such as wild celery and ell grass to grow on the marsh bottom and this new vegetation attracted wintering fowl in greater quantities than before. Local men began hunting the fowl and transporting them to Norfolk. The largest of these so-called "Market-hunters" was probably Edgar Burroughs, who in 1856 "employed 20 hunters to shoot wild fowl in Black Bay for the market." Transportation to market was arduous. "The few [fowl] killed for sale then were drugged through mud and mire with team and cart miles away, and for a small price." This changed in 1859, however, with the completion of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. The canal connected Norfolk and Currituck County. Several years later the Norfolk and Southern Railroad was built through Elfzabeth City, and a spur line was built to Munden Point. These transportation improvements opened up vast new markets, and Currituck ducks were soon gracing the finest tables in Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. This, in turn, publicized Currituck as a region where good duck hunting could be found, and northern sportsmen flocked into the region after the Civil War.

The Currituck Shooting Club had been in operation only a short while before the Civil War intruded. Naturally, northern businessmen were not welcome in the area at this time and the club did not re-form until well after the war. The clubhouse, in the meantime, was ransacked. "The local citizens confiscated such moveables as guns, ammunition, and decoys to be sold in front of the county courthouse as spoils of war; however, they didn't damage the clubhouse." The club re-formed in 1867. In 1879 the present clubhouse was built, although the old one was not torn down until 1906. Other buildings were built in the complex in the 1880s.

The Currituck Shooting Club was joined after the war by a number of other clubs, the most prominent of which were the Pine Island Club, the Monkey Island Club, the Narrows Island Club, and the Swan Island Club. The Currituck Club changed presidents rapidly, with six men holding that office before 1877. However, the club had exceptional continuity in the office of caretaker. B. F. Taylor was the first caretaker, serving from 1867 until 1872. He was replaced by Thomas J. Poyner, who held the position until 1902.

Records indicate that the Currituck Club was particularly successful around the turn of the century. From 1888 until 1910 72,124 fowl were killed by members of the club. A peak was reached in 1901 when an average of 46 birds per stand per day was attained. One observer writes, in 1901, that "Josephus Baum, who lives at the headquarters of 'Currituck Shooting Club' killed on the 9th of December [presumably 1900], 120 ducks, 30 geese and 3 swan." This is the best days's shooting of the season." Another member of the

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Currituck Club, John Dimond of New York, killed 107 ducks on the same day, while Stratton Berrety, also a member of the Currituck Club, killed 80 ducks on the same day. Another observer writes that in the early twentieth century the Currituck Club "was the center of much market and sport shooting." Currituck County benefitted from national publicity in such magazines as Outing and Field and Stream. One such article raved: "By the end of that day . . . you'd seen all the ducks in the world." 14

Eventually the success of these shooting clubs, and the success of numerous other hunters, endangered the Currituck duck. One prominent local citizen, Henry Ansell, writes in the early part of this century:

There are millions of wealthy people of speculative habits roaming this country, some for pleasure, some for both pleasure and lucre . . . These hunters hail from everywhere and go where-ever wild birds and beasts are found . . . Then why should there by as many now as then /before the Civil War/? In his youth the writer could see in two miles square more ducks then can now be seen in going from Vanslyck's to the Virginia line. If these brooding places are not protected soon there will be neither ducks nor other like birds to visit us.

The situation continued to worsen until the 1930s, at which point "the water-fowl population crisis . . . drastically reduced bag limits and shooting season." These limits and shorter seasons, along with other restrictions, such as the elimination of battery shooting, saved the duck population. Other factors, however, conspired to diminish the clubs. "Rising land values gave the death knell to the clubs . . . Local farmers and watermen who could care for the clubs and guide members went to work in factories." Senator Furnifold Simmons claimed in 1930 that five thousand people were "dependent wholly or to a considerable extent, upon the hunting and fishing industries" in Currituck Sound. During the Second World War many of these people found better paying work, particularly in nearby Norfolk.

The Currituck Shooting Club has managed to overcome these problems to survive into the 1980s. As of the conclusion of the 1979-1980 season the Club had twelve members. Most of the membership now consists of southerners, although the current president, Stewart Richardson, is a vative of Staten Island, New York. The membership fee is \$75,000 which buys the members "a key and deed to a room, a duck skiff and decoys, and permission to enter the club room." In order to broaden its offering the club recently experimented with permitting fishing on its 2,018 acres.

For a hundred years the hunting clubs have been an important part of Currituck County's economic base. Although many of the members of these clubs, such as the Currituck Club, are not, and have not been from the area, Currituck citizens still have obtained benefits as guides, as superintendents and caretakers, as builders and sellers of equipment. The Currituck Shooting Club remains an area institution, and one of the best examples of the importance of duck hunting in the region.

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Footnotes

¹Zack Taylor, "Currituck's Grand Old Hunting Clubs," Sports Afield, Vol. 180, No. 6, December 1978, p. 39, hereinafter cited as Taylor, "Currituck's Clubs"; Jack Baum, "A History of Market Hunting in the Currituck Sound Area," Wildlife in North Carolina, Vol. XXXII, No. 12, December, 1968, 6-7, hereinafter cited as Baum, "Market Hunting"; Samuel Russell, History and Notes Relating to the Currituck Shooting Club (Pelton and King, 1925), 12, hereinafter cited as Russell, History and Notes Relating to the Currituck Shooting Club. The other original members of the club were Stephen Tabor, Stephen Townsend, John T. Irving, Archibald T. Finn, Richard S. Emmet, Benjamin H. Lillie, George H. Fox, Elias Wade, Jr., Dwight Townsent, William J. Emmet, Valentine Hicks, Edwin Post, George S. Galston, and William Furman.

²Bill Sharpe, A New Geography of North Carolina (Raleigh: Sharpe Publishing Company, 1961), III, 1280-81.

³Baum, "Market Hunting," <u>Wildlife in North Carolina</u>, Vol. XXXII, No. 11, November, 1968, 12.

Henry B. Ansell Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, I, 45, hereinafter cited as Ansell Papers.

⁵Baum, ''Market Hunting,'' 6.

Baum, "Market Hunting," 8.

Russell, History and Notes Relating to the Currituck Shooting Club, 20-21; Roy E. Sawyer, Jr., "A Tour of Historic Sites in Currituck County," The Journal of the Currituck County Historical Society, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1973. The Currituck Club began extending its holdings after the Civîl War. The Currituck County Deed Index lists over four dozen purchases between 1872 and 1912.

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Taylor, "Currituck's Clubs," 38-41; Baum, "Market Hunting."

⁹Baum, "Market Hunting," 8. Pyner has been succeeded by only four men, J. C. Gallop, J. W. Poyner, Murray Chappell, and Carl Ross, the current superintendent.

10_{Baum}, "Market Hunting," 7-8.

11 Richard Benbury Creecy, Grandfather's Tales of North Carolina History (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1901), 283, hereinafter cited as Creecy, Grandfather's Tales.

12 Creecy, Grandfather's Tales, 284-285.

13 Baum, "Market Hunting," Wildlife in North Carolina, Vol. XXXII, No. 11, November, 1968, 12.

14Roland Clark, "Canvasbacks in Currituck," Field and Stream, January, 1917, p. 248. This article is available in the North Carolina Collection in Wilson Library at the

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University of North Carolina. Other articles available in the same collection include B. W. Mitchell, "Why Jack Quit: A Ducking Experience on Currituck Sound," Field and Stream, January, 1907 and T. M. Barnes, Jr., "A Day on Currituck Sound," Outing, March, 1899.

- ¹⁵Ansell Papers, Vol. 1, 47-48.
- Taylor, "Currituck's Clubs," 40-41.
- Battery shooting was a form of duck hunting which used a partly submerged disguised "battery" from which to shoot the ducks. By all accounts it was highly effective. One observer noted: "From a conservation angle it is well that this type of shooting /battery/ has been abolished." Martin Bovey, Whistling Wings (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1947), 45.
 - 18 Taylor; "Currituck's Clubs," 41.
- ¹⁹Furnifold Simmons, "The Tragedy of Currituck," <u>Outdoor America</u>, February, 1930, 2, hereinafter cited as Simmons, "The Tragedy of Currituck."
- Taylor, "Currituck's Clubs," 41; Telephone Interview with Carl Ross, Superintendent of the Currituck Shooting Club, February 6, 1980.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

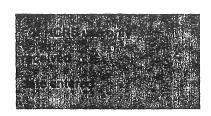
Ansell Papers, Henry. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

Barnes, Jr., T. M. "A Day on Currituck Sound." Outing, March, 1899.

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- Sharpe, Bill. A New Geography of North Carolina. Raleigh: Sharpe Publishing Company. 4 volumes. 1954-1965.
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- Taylor, Zack. "Currituck's Grand Old Hunting Clubs." Sports Afield. Vol. 180. No. 6. December, 1978.

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