

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: North Carolina	
COUNTY: Craven	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Bellair

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
.3 mile driveway north from junction of SR 1401 and SR 1419

CITY OR TOWN:  
New Bern

STATE	CODE 37	COUNTY: Craven	CODE 049
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3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
Mr. and Mrs. G. Tull Richardson

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Route 2, Box 65

CITY OR TOWN: New Bern	STATE: North Carolina	CODE 37
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5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Craven County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:  
302 Broad Street

CITY OR TOWN: New Bern	STATE: North Carolina	CODE 37
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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS 8 acres

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE
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7. DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Bellair is one of Craven County's two surviving major plantation houses. It is a Georgian structure distinguished by very handsome and unusual over-all form and interior detail. Approached by a long alley lined with cedars, Bellair is surrounded by a great variety of old trees and shrubs including pecans, magnolias, and camellias. Built of brick laid in Flemish bond, the house is two stories in height above a high basement delineated by a molded water table. The actual foundation below the brick is of coquina, a natural conglomerate native to the area, locally called "marl." The unusual proportions of the house are quite striking: The broad expanse of the seven-bay facade contrasts with the narrowness of the one-bay sides.

The three central bays of the main (south) facade project to form a shallow pedimented pavilion with the middle bay containing a door at each level, that at the second level formerly having been a window. The first-floor entrance contains a massive eight-panel door which retains its early box lock with fine pendant handles. The panels of the door and the corresponding reveals, instead of being raised on normal fillets, are elevated on a molded surface. The rails and the stiles of both are also molded. A pair of interior ridge chimneys pierce the hip roof at the line of the pavilion returns. A molded cornice enriched with a Wall of Troy band carries around the entire house and outlines the pavilion pediment. Centered in the pediment is a circular oculus with a surround punctuated by four keystones. Each window opening, filled with six-over-six sash, is surmounted by a flat arch of rubbed gauged brick. Most of the present shutters are modern ones, but several early shutters are stored in the basement, and those of the rear basement windows are still in place. Each leaf of these early shutters contains three raised panels molded like those of the front door. An early one-bay pedimented entrance porch has been replaced by a three-bay screened porch that extends across the pavilion and has a flat roof that serves as a gallery for the second-story door. The full-length shed addition across the rear, although having a precedent as early as 1838, appears to be basically a twentieth century construction.

Bellair's linear floor plan has a room on either side of a central room or hall which corresponds to the width of the pavilion. The center and west rooms are finished in the Georgian style and closely resemble the interiors of the Coor-Gaston and Smith-Whitford houses in New Bern. The cornices in both rooms are fully molded, that in the hall being elaborated with dentils and that in the west room with a Wall of Troy band. The walls in both rooms are plastered above a paneled wainscot. The six-panel doors between the two rooms are set in matching paneled reveals and surmounted by wide three-part architraves with single crossettes at the top. The doors are hung on countersunk L hinges and retain their enormous original box locks. The stiles, rails, and panels on these and the other original doors on the first floor are molded like the one already noted. The window reveals of the west parlor are plain, but those in the center room are paneled and arranged with a window seat below.

Of the four chimney pieces in Bellair, that in the west parlor is the most elaborate and the only one with an overmantel. The rectangular fire

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opening, now filled in, has an architrave with single crossettes at the head. Above, the frieze is interrupted at either end by a bracket which supports the cornice shelf where the Wall of Troy motif is repeated. The overmantel is formed by a large panel framed by an architrave with double crossettes at each corner and a delicate border of molding around the field of the panel.

The center hall is, and seemingly always has been, unheated. It contains a curious closed-string stair of which the first run terminates in winders and the second and third in square landings. Carried on balusters square in section, the molded handrail abuts the newel and posts, also square in section. The profile of the handrail is followed on the opposite wall by a rail and posts engaged in the plaster.

The east room, finished in the Greek Revival mode, provides an interesting contrast to the other rooms. Fluted architraves with roundel corner blocks frame all the door and window openings, and in the case of the latter, enclose a paneled bib beneath. The mantel, treated similarly, features a fluted architrave framing the fire opening and a three-panel frieze. Above the architrave is a simple molded shelf. Three roundel blocks, one at either end and one in the center, divide the fluted horizontal member. To the right of the mantel, a closet has been created by enclosing the space between the chimney breast and the wall. Inside the closet some early bird's-eye maple wood graining remains.

The second floor repeats the plan of the first, and the rooms contain their original trim. All three rooms have molded chair rails, baseboards, and cornices. The cornice in the east room is elaborated with a Wall of Troy band. Single crossetted architraves surround the fire openings on both mantels. The mantel in the east room has a coved entablature and a cornice shelf with the Wall of Troy motif, while that in the west room is treated more simply with only a plain cornice shelf. The doors, all six-panel and wood-grained, are hung on HL hinges.

The basement is floored with wide planks and in the west side has a large brick fireplace. The area was used as a kitchen and in the summer as a dining room.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The site of Bellair seems to have been surveyed and "taken up" by John Swift before 1719, when John Lovick acquired it after Swift allowed his grant to lapse. It was acquired by William Wilson in 1733-1734 and remained with his descendents until 1787, when it passed to Wilson Blount.

William Wilson died in 1744 at his home, Clermont, the earliest brick house known to have been built in this area of North Carolina. Wilson willed Clermont to his wife "during her natural life," and then to his daughter, Elizabeth, along with other property, including dwellings in New Bern. The Bellair property was willed directly to his daughter, Elizabeth, without his widow's dower.

Elizabeth married Richard Spaight in 1756, two years after he arrived in North Carolina. Spaight, a grandnephew of Governor Arthur Dobbs, became acting clerk of the upper house of the Assembly soon after his arrival and in 1755 paymaster to the North Carolina regiment which participated in Braddock's expeditions against the French and Indians. That same year he was commissioned secretary of the colony, and shortly after his marriage to Elizabeth Wilson, he became a member of the governor's council. Their son, Richard Dobbs Spaight, born in 1758, became a governor of North Carolina, as did their grandson, Richard Dobbs Spaight, Jr.

Mrs. Wilson, after the death of her husband in 1744, married Roger Moore and continued to live at Clermont. After the marriage of Elizabeth and Spaight, the young couple set up housekeeping in New Bern, as evidenced by an early will in which Elizabeth was left household furniture, silver, etc., which had been lent to her "when she went to housekeeping in New Bern shortly after her marriage."

The young Spaights were socially and politically prominent, and wealthy. Evidently such dwellings as the town offered them were not sufficient and they decided to build a country house at Bellair. Clermont, destroyed during the Civil War, was a circa 1740 house, and it is unlikely that its design influenced Bellair. One other house as early as Bellair exists in Craven County, but it is frame, and quite different from the sophisticated Georgian massing and plan of Bellair. Virginia houses, such as Blandfield which is similar in design, could have served as the models for Bellair. Spaight's position and wealth would have made him aware of such houses, and capable of constructing one either from published works

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or from models such as Blandfield.

Spaight's death in 1763 and the death of his wife soon thereafter evidently left Bellair an unfinished shell. Their young son, Richard Dobbs, was sent to England to be educated, and did not return to North Carolina until 1778, after the Revolution had begun. In addition, young Spaight's grandmother died in 1765, also, so that there seems to have been no reason and no responsible individual in the family to complete the construction of the house.

When Richard Dobbs Spaight returned from England he is believed to have gone to reside at Clermont, and would have had little incentive to finish Bellair, though in its unfinished state it may have been serving tenants. He sold the house to Wilson Blount in early 1787, and the Blounts moved to Bellair. It was probably they who began the finishing of the interior. They were certainly in residence by September 21, 1789, when William Attmore noted in his diary, "went to William Blount's and spent the evening. Saw Polly Leech. She is to be married next Tuesday to Colonel Spaight [Richard Dobbs Spaight], September 25 th. She is a lovely girl." The house was still not finished at that time. One story told by Colonel John D. Whitford, however apocryphal it may be, seems to be borne out by the architectural evidence.

Mr. Blount was not over endowed with conjugal felicity. Himself and his wife would quarrel, this was continued until a fair division of the rooms in the house was suggested for the sake of peace by Mrs. Blount and without hesitation agreed to by the husband. Friends were called in by each choosing one to make the allotment. The two happened to be of one mind. The rooms to the west side of the passage through the house were plastered and they were given to Mrs. Blount and those on the east side of the passage were not plastered and they were deeded good enough for Mr. Blount and accordingly given to him, then again Mrs. Blount was given the right of way up and down stairs next to the rail. . . .

During the period of Blount ownership, 1789-1799, the finishing of the east wing seems to have been as stated. An 1820 lease agreement with Thomas Kean, whose family acquired Bellair in 1799, notes that

he his executors, administrators and assigns shall and will within the first year of this lease include the plantation on the demised tract with a good substantial farm like fence, will repair the roof and windows of the dwelling house thereon, put a coat of paint and tar on the roof and put a neat and decent steps both in front and rear to the said dwelling house and will cause the barn on said plantation to be repaired.

The Greek Revival finish of the rooms on the east end of the house appears to

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date from that or a later period, and may have been part of the repairs made to the plantation house at that time. The indications are that it took some 60 years to complete the house.

Traditionally the house was built circa 1772, but there is no documentary evidence on hand to support that date, and indeed no owner available to build at that date. Traditionally also the house has been attributed to John Hawks, who arrived in New Bern in 1765 to superintend the construction of Tryon's Palace. T. T. Waterman in his Early Architecture of North Carolina attributes the John Wright Stanly house to Hawks and notes that because of similarities in interior trim between Bellair and the Stanly house "there can be little doubt that the designer or craftsman of the two was the same."

Hawks did later own a plantation within a few miles of Bellair and would have been aware of the house, but the interior finish of Bellair bears little relationship to the sophisticated work of Hawks at the Stanly House and the Coor-Bishop House which he is also believed to have designed. It bears a much more striking stylistic kinship to the interiors of the Coor-Gaston House, built by James Coor. Coor was a carpenter who probably worked with Hawks, since Hawks's hand is evident in the first house he built (the Coor-Bishop House). Coor would have been available to finish the interior of Bellair in a post Revolutionary period. The Blounts may have retained Coor to work on the interior of the house shortly after they acquired it in 1787, and, because of their marital difficulties, left the task uncompleted. Indeed the stair and some of the trim probably existed from the circa 1763 building period. The closed-string stair in particular would seem more akin to the earlier than to the later period.

Whatever the date, derivation, or attribution of Bellair, it passed from Blount ownership in 1799 to Thomas Kean, and remained with his heirs until 1838 when it was acquired by John H. Richardson, whose descendents still own and occupy the house and plantation. The Richardsons and allied families were prominent land owners in New Bern and Craven County, and were actively involved in the social and political life of the community.

Unlike other houses in the area Bellair seems not to have suffered during the Civil War, and the Richardson family remained there throughout the four years that New Bern was occupied by the Federal forces. Within a week of the occupation of New Bern by the forces of General Ambrose E. Burnside, Bellair and its owners were given a Union safeguard. That order, dated March 20, 1862, hangs at Bellair today and notes that

All officers and soldiers belonging to the Army of the United States are therefore commanded to respect this safeguard, and to afford, if necessary, protection to John H. Richardson, his family and his property.

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The document is part of a large collection of papers, furniture, and objects pertaining to eighteenth and nineteenth century New Bern in the possession of the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. G. Tull Richardson.

Bellair is one of only two brick houses known to have been constructed in Craven County outside New Bern in the eighteenth century and the only one that survives. It is also among the few remaining Georgian houses in the county and has unusual importance since it predates the construction of Tryon Palace, its only other brick competitor of the style and era.

Throughout its history the house has been associated with prominent North Carolina families. That fact, together with the sophisticated plan and massing of the exterior, unusual for the era in North Carolina, and the later interior detail suggesting a connection with master builder, James Coor, make it one of the most important pre-Revolutionary structures in North Carolina.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Craven County Records, Craven County Courthouse, New Bern, North Carolina, Office of the Register of Deeds. (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills).  
 Craven County Records, State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh North Carolina. (Subgroups: Deeds, Wills).  
 Deeds, Wills, Surveys, photographs, and other unpublished material in the possession of Mr. G. Tull Richardson, Bellair, New Bern, North Carolina.  
 Moore, Elizabeth, "Bellair." Unpublished manuscript.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
NW	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "	35 °	10 '	50 "	77 ° 07 ' 19 "
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:  
 Survey Planning Unit Staff

ORGANIZATION: State Department of Archives and History

DATE:

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN: Raleigh

STATE: North Carolina

CODE: 37

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

National  State  Local

Name H. G. Jones

Title Director, State Department of Archives and History

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

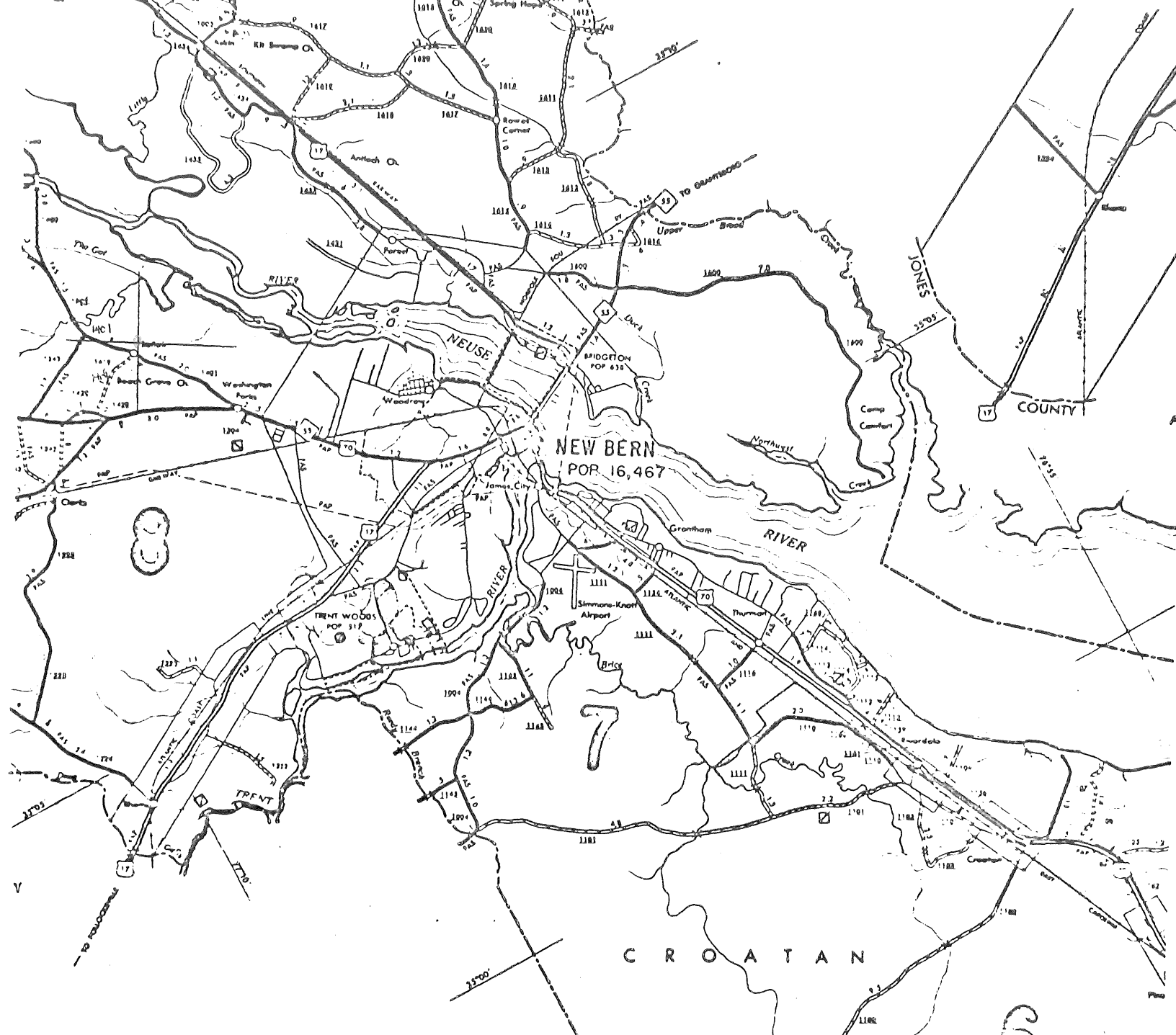
ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS





Bellair  
 .3 mile driveway north from junction of SR 1401  
 and SR 1419  
 New Bern, North Carolina

Map of Craven County, New Bern Chamber of Commerce  
 Scale: 3/8" : 1 mile  
 Date: none

Latitude	Longitude
degrees minutes seconds	degrees minutes seconds
35 10 50	77 07 19

