

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name First Colony Inn

other names/site number LeRoy's Seaside Inn; First Colony Motor Inn; First Colony Apartments;
Colony Beach Inn

2. Location

street & number 6720 South Virginia Dare Trail N/A not for publication

city or town Nags Head N/A vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Dare code 055 zip code 27959

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William S. King 12-17-92
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)	_____	_____

First Colony Inn
Name of Property

Dare County, North Carolina
County and State

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
- object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
	1	structures
		objects
1	1	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Hotel

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Hotel

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Vernacular Shingle Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation wood

walls wood shingles

roof asphalt shingles

other wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more 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.

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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

architecture
entertainment and recreation

Period of Significance

1932 - 1942

Significant Dates

1932

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Benton, Frank (builder)
Leigh, Willis (designer)

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more 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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

First Colony Inn
Name of Property

Dare County, North Carolina
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.4 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	1	8
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3	9	7	5	8	7	0
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Zone Easting Northing

3

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Zone Easting Northing

2

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4

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rhoda A. R. Lawrence

organization Boyle • Wagoner Architects date 9.15.92

street & number 122 NW 58th Street telephone (206) 789-9271

city or town Seattle state WA zip code 98107

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

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.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

First Colony Inn
Dare County, North Carolina

Physical Description

The First Colony Inn is situated in approximately the center of a 4.4 acre site at Mile Post 16 between NC 12 and Highway 158 By-Pass, squarely facing the Atlantic Ocean, and easily visible from both roads. The primary vehicular approach to the building is from the west, via a semi-circular driveway. In the center of the driveway arc is a croquet green, surrounded by formally placed indigenous shrubs and plantings. The asphalt driveway is flanked on each side by parking strips of sand, structurally reinforced with concealed webbing, minimizing the impact of the number of required parking spaces. On the north, south and east sides of the building a mowed grass border wraps the perimeter and the landscaping is informal in character, planted predominantly with native vegetation -- sand, grasses, wild flowers and live oaks.

On the east side, on the central axis of the building, a simple wood plank boardwalk leads directly to a small gazebo (non-contributing) five hundred feet away, and to the Atlantic Ocean beyond. The new gazebo is constructed in the style and character of the First Colony Inn. To the south of the boardwalk, approximately one hundred feet from the inn, there is an above-ground swimming pool (also non-contributing), surrounded by a privacy screen of unpainted wood lattice.

The two and one-half story, balloon-frame building was constructed in 1932 in the vernacular Shingle Style. As is characteristic of the style, all of the exterior wall and roof surfaces are shingled. The walls are sheathed with unpainted red cedar shingles, many of which are original. The roof is covered with "dimensional" asphalt shingles (weathered wood color), mimicking the original juniper shingles. The building is divided into three equal sections (approximately 25 feet by 60 feet each) separated by open breezeways and arranged in an H-shaped configuration. The building is oriented in a north-south direction, parallel to the coastline, with the legs of the H-plan oriented east-west. Major distinguishing elements of the building include a two-level verandah which encircles the perimeter, simple stairs and slat railings with integral benches (all of unadorned dimensional stock), and a symmetrical pattern of louvered doors and six-over-six single-hung windows. These elements are contained below a massive overhanging hipped roof (9-1/2:12 pitch) that has a series of symmetrically placed hipped dormers. All circulation for the building is external; access to the second and third floors is via open wooden stairways, symmetrically located on each floor. Access to each guest room is afforded from the encircling verandahs.

The building is of wood frame construction. It sits approximately seven feet from finished grade on a foundation of 8 x 8 pilings. The pilings are attached to the floor beams with new steel plates (a current building code requirement). Approximately half of the piles under the building are diagonally cross-braced. The pilings at the perimeter of the building have knee-bracing. Above the floor beams, 2 x 8 floor joists support the floor decking. All of the structural members are exposed below the building, but are partially screened from view by an unpainted screen of closely spaced narrow strips laid horizontally.

The two-story engaged verandah encircles the entire building with floors that slope away from the building for drainage. The first floor verandah decking is spaced, unpainted 2 x 6 pine. The second floor verandah and the third floor stair landings are of painted tongue and groove cypress decking. The ceilings of the second floor verandah and third floor stair landings are painted beaded tongue and groove. The exterior stairs have closed risers and treads.

Simple painted railings and chamfered posts characterize both levels of the verandah. The railings are spaced horizontal 1 x 4s, with a milled top rail. The 5 x 5 posts rest directly on the decking on the first floor and are let

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Dare County, North CarolinaPhysical Description (continued)

into the decking on the second floor. Twenty benches of similar construction are built into the railing on each outside corner of the first floor verandah and on either side of each entry stair.

Fenestration throughout is symmetrical. All windows are six-over-six double hung sash and most of the doors are five-panel. The windows and doors are cased with flat, 1-3/4 inch trim with 1/4 inch beads on the two exposed edges. There are louvered screen doors in front of most of the solid five-panel doors, except at the four lobby and breakfast room doors. These doors have twelve lights and have three-panel screen doors in front. Half-height painted wood screens occur at all of the windows.

Eighteen shingle-sided hip-roofed dormers pierce the roof. The eight dormers on the west and east slopes of the center section (four per side) are original to the building. Each has a single wood window matching those of the lower floors. The ten other dormers are later additions -- symmetrically placed on each of the end section roofs. The four flanking dormers on the north and south ends, added in 1991, are identical in design to those of the center sections; the two central dormers on the north and the south ends have screened openings and double doors, recessed to create a small balcony. The dormers of the east and west slopes of the south section have a single window each, matching the original eight dormers, and those of the north section are slightly larger with two windows each. A small metal chimney is centered on the ridge of the central section and two flat roof windows are located on the west slope of the roof, over the third floor stairs.

On the interior, the building sections are divided into guest rooms, public rooms, and service facilities. The hotel was originally constructed with sixty bedrooms and a central bath facility. There was a small lobby in the center section, and a public dining room and kitchen in the north section of the first floor. Presently there is an entry lobby and a breakfast room located in the first floor center section. The walls in these areas are covered with original white-washed tongue and groove paneling, running horizontally. The ceilings are painted gypsum board with wood trimmed beams. The floor is natural finished heart pine and an open U-shaped stair leads up from the lobby to a guest library. The interior door and window casings are painted 1 x 4 dimensional stock, the window sills are of flat 5/4 inch material and the base trim is a flat 1 x 6 with a base shoe molding. Currently, there are twenty-six individual guest rooms in the building. The interiors of all of the rooms are painted gypsum board with carpeted floors.

The First Colony Inn today closely resembles its original appearance. Over the years, small additions had altered the original form and in the process of the building's rehabilitation, the exterior of the building was returned to its original H-shaped configuration. Additions and alterations made to accommodate earlier use changes (e.g. restaurant seating and kitchen and bathroom ventilation) were selectively demolished to reveal original window and door locations which were subsequently reconstructed. The majority of the exterior building fabric has been retained -- where possible, deteriorated wood elements were repaired and existing elements were used as models for replacement of severely damaged pieces. New matching cedar shingles were installed where missing; the deteriorated decking was replaced in kind and integrated into the existing. The windows were refurbished -- glazing replaced, weights rehung and sashes patched and repainted. Although current health, safety and building codes dictated a number of contemporary modifications -- fireproof roofing material, an additional six inches of deck railing height, and handicapped accessible entry ramp -- these changes have been sensitively and unobtrusively incorporated into the historic building fabric.

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Dare County, North CarolinaPhysical Description (continued)

On the interior of the building, where rooms have been reconfigured to allow for the new uses, visual records of the previous configurations were retained. Existing casing, trim and paneling were used as models to replicate missing elements. The interior access stair to the second floor, although new to the building, is compatible in design and scale with the surrounding elements. The new finishes in the guest rooms and bathrooms are simple in design and material, sympathetic to the original character of the inn.

Although the inn was carefully separated into three sections and relocated (see relocation section of the statement of significance), there is no visible evidence of the reattachment. In the rehabilitation of the First Colony Inn, the original architectural integrity and handsome simplicity of form and association has been retained by utilizing high quality workmanship and sensitive incorporation of contemporary design features. The distinctive deep overhanging roof, engaged two-story verandah, and symmetrical fenestration patterns are uncompromised. The feeling and character of the inn, as described today by guests of the early 1930s, has been recaptured in the 1991 rehabilitation.

Statement of SignificanceSummary

With a two-story encircling verandah, the two and one-half story vernacular Shingle Style, balloon-frame First Colony Inn was constructed during the period of expanding tourism along the Atlantic Ocean in the 1920's and 1930's in conjunction with several other similar establishments. Completely sheathed in shingles, the building now stands as the last original example of a traditional "beach-style" hotel genre that once graced the oceanfront at Nags Head. It is the oldest in continuous operation as a hotel, and has had food and/or restaurant service available under all but one management. The inn has always been the location for all types of organized social activities for guests and visitors alike and for many years was "the" place to dine. Its original proximity to dance halls, tourist and sight seeing activities, and the ocean assisted in securing its reputation as one of the most popular spots on the northern Outer Banks. The First Colony Inn is eligible for National Register listing under Criterion A in the area of entertainment/recreation for its contribution to the development of tourism and patterns of social and cultural development on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

The building also is eligible under Criterion C for its distinctive adaptation of the traditional Nags Head cottage architecture. Although constructed several years after the national zenith of the Shingle Style, the First Colony Inn is exemplary in its presentation of the elements that made the style popular. Rather than the highly developed asymmetry of the mature Shingle Style, it displays a vigorously ordered symmetry and simplicity of form dictated by climate, function and economy. The broad, encircling verandahs provide welcome sun protection as well as shelter from driving storms, while Nags Head benches protrude from the verandah railings as breeze catching devices. The strict adherence to the symmetrical disposition of doors, windows, dormers, and railings demonstrates the economy of construction and the elegant simplicity of the design. Although efforts to save the building necessitated its relocation a short distance to the south in August 1988, the First Colony Inn meets Criteria Consideration B due to the retention of the building's architectural and environmental integrity. The inn has received a National Park Service Historic Preservation Certification for the rehabilitation completed in May 1991. The period of significance for the First Colony Inn extends from its construction date, 1932, until 1942, fifty years prior to the date of this nomination.

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Dare County, North CarolinaStatement of Significance (continued)Historic Context: Entertainment and Recreation

The calm, peaceful atmosphere of the Outer Banks of North Carolina has attracted "mainlanders" since the turn of the nineteenth century. The long chain of narrow barrier islands that protects the North Carolina mainland was originally accessible only by regular steamer lines from Elizabeth City, Norfolk, and the Eastern Shore of the Albemarle Sound, or via private vessel. This geographic isolation and the accompanying social informality were the foundation blocks for a summer life-style that continued into the twentieth century.

Nags Head is one of North Carolina's oldest coastal resorts. As early as the 1750s, people from the mainland came here seeking the healthy, rejuvenating effects of clean air and sea bathing of the islands. Because it did not experience the commercial and industrial development occurring in other coastal areas, Nags Head became "the" choice of summer vacationers. It was not until the early 1830s, however, that the area experienced significant development. It is said that the rapid growth of the community was started by a Perquimans County planter who purchased a parcel of land to build a summer residence for his family. When the house was completed, friends and neighbors from the mainland quickly decided they, too, wanted to escape the poisonous vapors and summer sicknesses believed to be prevalent in the swampy, low-lying inland areas.¹

As the numbers of vacationers increased, a need for public accommodations and organized summer entertainment developed. In 1838, in response to that need, the first hotel was built. It was constructed, like some of the first cottages, on the shore of the Albemarle Sound. By 1851 the facility had expanded to include over 200 guest rooms. It also boasted several detached guest cottages, a dining room and a ballroom, a general store, steamer wharf, and a boardwalk and tramway to the beach. Early hotel advertisements tempted visitors with promises of healthful and entertaining activities, and even offered steamer transportation.² The summer community at Nags Head thrived in spite of the continued commercial development of the other coastal areas such as Beaufort and Morehead City. At the onset of the Civil War in 1861, however, the vacation spot was deserted by the mainlanders and the land belonged once again to the native Bankers.³

After the end of the war, the summer residents of Nags Head steadily returned. The summer of 1867 saw the construction of a brand new hotel, and Nags Head reportedly had never been so patronized.⁴ Before that time, most of the buildings of the family resort had been confined to the sound side of the island chain -- vacationers reached the ocean via mule-drawn railroad cars.⁵ In the late 1860s, returning vacationers began moving their cottages to the ocean side, and new visitors bought property and built their cottages nearer the ocean. The first cottage actually constructed on the Atlantic Ocean was that of W.G. Pool, and dates from 1866.⁶

¹ Stick, Outer Banks, p. 97.

² Bishir, Unpainted Aristocracy, p. 7.

³ Stick, Outer Banks, p. 106.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 171.

⁶ Outlaw, p. 19.

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Dare County, North CarolinaStatement of Significance (continued)

Nags Head continued to experience slow but steady growth during the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, in spite of World War I. Following the intertwining periods of war and peace, dangerous tempests and placid waters, Nags Head, "the gay summer capital of Albemarle Society," once more emerged as "the center of things" in the summers of the 1930s.⁷ A new paved road, connecting two new bridges at either end of the main island, allowed increased vehicular access and served to reinforce the development shift from the sound to the ocean side. One of the first commercial structures constructed on the ocean side, after completion of the Wright Memorial Bridge in 1930, was a dance hall called the Pirate's Den. It was strategically located, along with several cottages, in a direct line from the east end of the new bridge at Kitty Hawk Beach. The hope was to attract mainlanders to purchase property along the Atlantic Ocean. Unfortunately, the building burned down after only four or five years of operation. Following the demise of the Pirate's Den, and a short-lived real estate venture at Virginia Dare Shores, the State flattened and widened the access road from the sound to the ocean.⁸ It was at that time that the business of tourism began to change the face of the Outer Banks.

The ocean side Nags Head of the 1930s closely resembled the earlier family resort of the sound side in social makeup. Women and children arrived during the week and were met by their husbands and fathers on the weekends. Those who could not spend the entire summer on the Outer Banks in their own cottages came for a week or two at a time, often staying in one of the several large hotels. On the sound side, the hotels had been social centers, where families vacationing in their own cottages gathered with friends for entertainment and social activities.⁹ The new hotels of the oceanfront fulfilled similar roles, providing not only accommodations and dining, but tourist services such as fishing trips and sailing and entertainment in the forms of dancing, bonfires and concerts for people of all ages. Days were alive with sunbathing, fishing, boating, and sightseeing; nights were filled with bowling, dancing and entertainment. Bedtime never came to Nags Head.¹⁰

The Nags Head of the 1930s differed from that of the earlier resort in its steady growth and influx of modern conveniences for the tourists. Old cottages were expanded and new ones built. Filling stations for the newly arrived automobile sprang up and the Coast Guard station got a telephone. It was in this period of "progress" that the oceanfront hotels and establishments were built and promoted. They were all of simple wood frame construction, designed to be functional and serviceable without pretentious trimmings. Most were built on pilings and featured wood shingle siding and wood railings and shutters. Several also had open perimeter porches that allowed the capture of sea breezes and protection from the sun on a hot day.

The amenities provided at each establishment varied slightly. One, the Casino, was primarily a dancing and bowling hall with rooms upstairs, and Hollowell's had a general store and post office on the first floor. Parkerson's included a dining room, delicatessen, soda fountain, ladies' restrooms and sleeping quarters for

⁷ Independent, August 7, 1931.

⁸ Benton & Fearing interview, October 19, 1991.

⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁰ Independent, July 1, 1931.

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Dare County, North CarolinaStatement of Significance (continued)

visitors. The Croatan and the Arlington were strictly for accommodations and dining, and the Nags Head Beach Club advertised series of well known dance bands.¹¹

Most of the early "beach-style" hotels no longer exist, but their names and memories still remain in the minds of those people who spent their summers there. Hollowell's Hotel, built on the sound side by Graham Hollowell, was one of the first hotels relocated to the ocean side. It burned to the ground in the late 1970s. The Arlington, run by Cassey Morrissette, was also relocated from the sound side but was destroyed by a storm in the early 1980s. Parkerson's, noted for its dance bands, burned in the 1940s, and the Wilbur Wright was damaged by a tornado and subsequently torn down. The Casino was demolished by its owner in the 1980s. Presently, there are only two remaining hotels from the 1930s zenith: the Croatan (partially occupied as a restaurant and no longer operating as a hotel) and LeRoy's Seaside Inn (renamed First Colony Inn in 1937).

The attraction of Nags Head, the oldest seaside summer resort on the North Carolina coast, has always been its romantic and social aspects. From the early periods, when the first few families arduously trekked fifty miles from Elizabeth City to spend the summer months in rude primitive style, to the early 1930s when hotel advertisements boasted "freedom from social restraints,"¹² Nags Head has been the chosen place for vacationing. Its popularity as a vacation playground has continued into the twentieth century, and the Outer Banks still attracts thousands of visitors a year to its mystery, charm, and relaxation.¹³

Architectural Context

The vernacular Shingle Style is a uniquely American building style, one that achieved its height of popularity on the mainland between 1860 and 1900. Chronologically, the height of the Shingle Style's popularity coincided with that of the flamboyant Queen Anne Style and both were national reactions against the neo-classical revivals of the early nineteenth century. On the other hand, the Shingle Style reflected the renewed interest in American Colonial architecture which expressed a fondness for natural wood materials -- siding, shingles and trim.¹⁴ The style was characterized by truthfulness of purpose, perceived sense of simple organization, and extensive use of unpainted wood. It developed primarily in the New England states, where it was especially popular in fashionable resorts such as Newport, Rhode Island, Cape Cod, Long Island, and coastal Maine.¹⁵ The development of industrialized building technologies and mass produced components made the residential Shingle Style adaptable to suburban and vernacular resort style architecture. The buildings could easily be made ample in size and substantial in appearance. As a resort style, it served equally well for pretentious and utilitarian structures. Proponents of the Shingle Style emphasized an architecture that was in harmony with its surroundings -- buildings that fit into the landscape through the use of natural colors and have forms and spatial

¹¹ Stick Interview, October 19, 1991.

¹² Original LeRoy's Seaside Inn brochure

¹³ High Point Enterprise, June 2, 1991.

¹⁴ Scully, p. xxxi.

¹⁵ McAlester. p. 290.

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Dare County, North CarolinaStatement of Significance (continued)

arrangements dictated by site and climate.¹⁶ Differing from their Queen Anne counterparts, Shingle Style buildings typically did not display excessive decorative details or combinations of contrasting materials. The overall effect was simpler in massing and detail, although roofs and dormer configurations often continued to be dominant. The porches, verandahs and asymmetrical shapes that remained popular were integrated into the overall form of the building with the continuous sheathing of wood shingles. The emphasis of the Shingle Style, as the name suggests, was the complete shingle covering -- walls and roofs -- that blended all the exterior features of the building. Irregular arrangements of doors, windows and other openings were unified with an unbroken covering of wood shingles beneath a simple, continuous roof line.

The characteristic natural materials and simple massing of the Shingle Style well suited the physical environment and social informality of the Outer Banks as it emerged in the early twentieth century. Up until the 1940s much of the developing cottage architecture of the ocean side was of a form popularized by retired carpenter/builder, S.J. Twine of Elizabeth City, N.C. Mr. Twine combined the then-popular Shingle and Bungalow styles of the mainland with the functional designs that had traditionally existed on the Outer Banks to create a distinctive vernacular character. The cottages had simple floor plans, were constructed of inexpensive materials, and were sheathed in unpainted wood shingles.¹⁷ The Shingle Style's combination of organic materials and informal plans made it popular as a public building style also on the Outer Banks of the early twentieth century and was utilized to develop a prototype for several North Carolina coastal life-saving stations.¹⁸ Natural wood materials were readily available from the mainland and were capable of withstanding the harsh environment of the Outer Banks.

Historical Background

On January 18, 1932, Marie LeRoy purchased eight adjacent oceanfront building lots in Nags Head from Greenville, N.C. developer S.W. Worthington (George T. Stronach, trustee), in what was then known as the Stronach Subdivision.¹⁹ These lots were purchased for approximately \$750.00 each.²⁰ In February of that same year construction began on LeRoy's Seaside Inn, which would be renamed First Colony Inn in 1937. (Previously, the LeRoys owned and operated the popular sound side LeRoy Cottage, which was built during the period preceding the ocean side development.²¹) The LeRoys' new hotel was built in the traditional style of Nags Head architecture -- simple wood-frame construction, form and features dictated by climate and function, and utilization of readily available materials.

¹⁶ Scully, p. xxxiii.

¹⁷ Bishir, Unpainted Aristocracy, p. 24.

¹⁸ Bishir, North Carolina Architecture, p. 377.

¹⁹ Dare Co. Deeds, Book 13, Page 582.

²⁰ F. Benton Interview, July 20, 1988.

²¹ Advance, July 19, 1933.

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Dare County, North CarolinaStatement of Significance (continued)

Lumber for Henry J. LeRoy's new hotel was purchased from Kramer Brothers Lumber Company, one of the four largest lumber mills operating in Elizabeth City.²² Known for their manufacture of church pews, Kramer Brothers had an enviable reputation for using only the finest materials and performing excellent work. At the time, the success of the lumber mills had great influence on the building practices of the surrounding areas. The mill employed large numbers of men, producing great quantities of finished building products and manufactured items. Their location on the Pasquotank River served as a convenient departure point for the transportation of these items to such remote places as the Outer Banks.²³

Mr. Willis Leigh, an employee of Kramer Brothers who later married Mr. LeRoy's daughter, Marguerite, played a significant role in the design of the hotel. He modeled the distinctive features of the hotel -- the broad overhangs and sweeping roofline, the encircling breeze-catching verandahs, the protruding "Nags Head benches" incorporated into the simple slat railings -- after the trademarks of Mr. Twine.²⁴ It was this traditional functionalism that dictated the form and details of LeRoy's Seaside Inn, as well as the other large hotels that sprang up along the ocean side in the early twentieth century.

The building was constructed by Mr. Frank Benton, a noted Elizabeth City carpenter and builder. Mr. Benton employed a crew of approximately sixteen to twenty men, including his son, Frank Benton, Jr., and members of the Bishop and Garrington families. The carpenters were paid fifty-five cents per hour, and for \$8.00 a week were afforded room and board at Cassey Morrissette's Arlington Hotel (now destroyed). LeRoy's Seaside Inn was originally sited three hundred feet from the high tide line and elevated four and one-half feet above the sand level. The pilings were all leveled by eye, using the horizon to the east as the base line. Only the best materials were utilized -- all sap pine, four-inch beaded board for the walls and ceilings, tongue and groove flooring, red cedar wall shingles from Canada, and juniper roof shingles from East Lake (on mainland Dare County).²⁵ By June 10, 1932, for a total construction cost of \$16,000.00, and only four months after construction began, LeRoy's Seaside Inn was open for business.²⁶

For the next five years, LeRoy's Seaside Inn offered an ideal retreat for sport, rest and recreation, even in the shadow of the nationwide depression. LeRoy's, in conjunction with the other hotels and establishments in operation along the beach at Nags Head, comprised an unsurpassed social scene.²⁷ LeRoy's was significant among the other hotels such as the Arlington, Hollowell's and Parkerson's, in that it was the first one to have electricity. The original Delco plant was located in a small outbuilding to the north of the hotel. LeRoy's had basins with running water in every room and "kerplunkers" (toilets) at the end of the hall. The rooms were

22 F. Benton Interview, July 20, 1988.

23 Butchko, p. 53.

24 Bishir, Unpainted Aristocracy, p. 24.

25 F. Benton interview, July 20, 1988

26 Independent, June 10, 1932.

27 C. Midgett interview, May 23, 1992

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Dare County, North CarolinaStatement of Significance (continued)

simple, double beds predominated, and there was a slot machine in the lobby.²⁸ Great pride was also taken in the food and service that was available at LeRoy's.²⁹

In April 1937, LeRoy's Seaside Inn and its garage and outbuildings were sold to Capt. C.P. (Neil) Midgett and Ernest J. Jones, who changed the name to the First Colony Inn.³⁰ Captain Neil and his wife Miss Daisy (Daisy Harrison of Currituck County) owned and operated the inn until 1961. During those twenty-four years, the First Colony Inn established itself as "the" place to be on the beach at Nags Head. Much of the inn's reputation was derived from the restaurant's cook, John White, who not only prepared the meals, but served as the night watchman and controlled many of the inn's services. Miss Daisy, it is said, liked "big shots." During the Midgetts' ownership, such state celebrities as Lindsey Warren, Herbert C. Bonner and Melville Broughton (governor of North Carolina 1940-1944) stayed there. One of the "cottages" on the original site was known as the "governor's cottage" because as many as five North Carolina governors spent time there.³¹ In addition, the First Colony Inn was the weekend retreat for many a businessman from Elizabeth City and Edenton, N.C., and Newport News and Norfolk, Va., whose family was staying at the inn for a week or more. Guests and relatives of nearby cottage owners also stayed at the inn during the peak vacation season.³²

Despite World War II, tourism at Nags Head (the oldest seaside summer resort on the North Carolina Coast) continued. Travel and vacations were curtailed somewhat and portions of the beach areas were blacked out, but by the summer of 1946, tourists began to pour across the Albemarle Sound once more.³³

The year 1961 was a time of dramatic change for the First Colony Inn. In January of that year, the estate of C.P. Midgett conveyed the property to J. Emmett Winslow and Lucille S. Winslow³⁴ (who also owned the Carolinian, a hotel on the beach north of the inn).³⁵ The Winslows, of Hertford, N.C., undertook a major remodeling effort. The original sixty rooms and dining room were converted to twenty-three modernly furnished apartments, some with cooking equipment, and all with modern baths and refrigerators. While the overall exterior character of the building remained, the interior changes were extensive; the beaded board walls and ceilings were replaced or covered with luan paneling and gypsum wall board, interior trim was removed, and all new furnishings were installed. The name was changed to the First Colony Apartments and Rooms, but the "old Nags Head" atmosphere of romance, charm and relaxation still prevailed.³⁶

²⁸ V. O'Brient interview, July 18, 1988.

²⁹ Advance, July 19, 1933.

³⁰ Dare Co. Deeds, Book 17, Page 544. (The Midgetts had operated the Whalehead Club in Corolla, N.C.)

³¹ P. Prichett interview, August 21, 1988.

³² F. Benton interview, October 19, 1991.

³³ Stick, Outer Banks, p. 251-252.

³⁴ Dare Co. Deeds, Book 97, Page 450.

³⁵ L. Winslow interview, September 20, 1988.

³⁶ State Magazine Ad, 1961.

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Dare County, North CarolinaStatement of Significance (continued)

Until the late 1980s, the Winslows' remodeling was the most radical post World War II change to the inn. The Ash Wednesday storm of 1962 caused major damage, knocking out stairs and walls, filling the first floor rooms with sand and sea water, and washing a section of fishing pier through the center first floor section, but repair was undertaken and the inn opened for the 1962 season on schedule. On April 28, 1966, the property was purchased by Murray O. and Betty B. Clark, of Charlottesville, Virginia.³⁷ Modifications by the Clarks included the conversion of the north and south end attic spaces to rentable rooms and the subsequent addition of dormers in those areas. During the Clarks' ownership, students from the University of Virginia were hired as summer help and a local art gallery was opened in the original garage (now relocated to a separate site).³⁸ In 1982, when the property was conveyed to the Keeper Company (Messrs. Shrewsbury, Milker and Foreman), the name was changed to the Colony Beach Inn, but the property (inn and adjacent cottages) continued to provide the traditional Nags Head hospitality for which it had come to be noted. In 1985, the Back Porch Restaurant was opened in the old kitchen and dining room and became known as the "best kept secret on the beach."³⁹ In 1986, the name was returned to First Colony Inn.

By the spring of 1988, however, the First Colony Inn was in a state of disrepair. The property was purchased by developer George B. Kemp of Virginia Beach, Va., who intended to construct duplexes on the site. The building was to have been burned down until the Nags Head Board of Commissioners passed an ordinance prohibiting the burning of historically significant buildings. Rather than face the expense of conventional demolition methods, Kemp offered the building to anyone who would move it off the site. After repeated efforts by various public and private organizations, a suitable location and plan were secured for the building.⁴⁰

Lawrence Property Management, Inc., of Lexington, North Carolina, engaged Expert House Movers of Virginia Beach, Va., to prepare the building for its move in August 1988. The building was carefully sawn into three sections and reassembled on a new site three and one-half miles south of its original location.⁴¹ Following the move, the new owners spent three years rehabilitating the inn to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, selectively removing earlier inappropriate additions, repairing deteriorated features where possible, and refurbishing the interior and exterior finishes to retain the historic quality. Although relocated, the inn is situated in a setting that recalls the open, natural qualities of the original environment. The building, reopened as a bed and breakfast inn in 1991, retains its original, handsome simplicity and architectural integrity.

³⁷ Dare C. Deeds, Book 133, Page 236.

³⁸ B. Clarke interview, July 22, 1988

³⁹ Beachcomber, August 14, 1987.

⁴⁰ High Point Enterprise, May 7, 1989.

⁴¹ Coastland Times, June 4, 1991.

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First Colony Inn
Dare County, North CarolinaStatement of Significance (continued)The Relocation of the First Colony Inn

The American tradition of moving buildings has been going on since the Revolutionary War when the British expressed their surprise at the colonists' propensity for moving their houses around.⁴² The notion of building relocation grew largely out of the fact that early American buildings were built of simple wood framing, were light weight, and had an integral structural system. In many instances the only way to save or protect a building is to physically move it out of harm's way.⁴³

This approach is particularly commonplace on the Outer Banks where buildings have often led a transitory existence. The dynamic, hostile nature of the coastline can have a detrimental effect on the natural and built environment. Waves, sand, and driving storms have threatened cottages, hotels, and other businesses since they were first constructed on both the sound and ocean sides of the islands. The simple wood frame structures, typically built on wood pilings above the destructive waves and sand, were easily disconnected from their sites, picked up, and moved farther away. When ocean side development first occurred, some structures were simply relocated from the sound side. Some structures are believed to have been moved as many as four times. With this history, fewer historically significant structures exist on their original sites than those which have been moved. More than one longtime resident/vacationer (incorrectly) recollected that the First Colony Inn had been originally built on the sound and later moved to the ocean side. One hotel, The Arlington, and a portion of another hotel named Hollowell's did experience such moves.⁴⁴

The First Colony Inn was severely damaged by storms in early 1988, and its future was threatened by a developer who had purchased the property and intended to demolish the building to construct duplexes on the site. When the deteriorated building was in danger on its existing site, the logical and traditional method of salvation was relocation away from imposing danger. When a suitable site and new owner for the building were secured, and all the permits and approvals were granted, the First Colony Inn was relocated three and a half miles to the south, to a new, previously undeveloped 4.4 acre site.

One of the most important aspects of the historic value of a building is the character of its environment. When originally constructed, the inn was one of the first buildings on the oceanfront. It was later surrounded by small, low-rise cottages and commercial structures. The new location provides an open, natural site that closely resembles the original setting. It is similar in size and orientation to the original, as well as having similar sandy, slightly rolling terrain and native vegetation. The only differences between the two sites are the location with respect to Virginia Dare Trail (NC 12) and the building's distance to the ocean. At the original site, Virginia Dare Trail was located to the west of the inn, away from the ocean. At the new site, Virginia Dare Trail is to the east of the inn, on the ocean side. The building is now located approximately 600 feet away from the ocean, 300 feet further away than when originally constructed. This distance is expected to diminish over time as Nags Head experiences beach erosion in varying amounts each year. Views to the Atlantic Ocean still

⁴² Schiller, OHJ.

⁴³ Fitch, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Outlaw, p. 36.

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First Colony Inn
Dare County, North Carolina

Statement of Significance (continued)

exist, and pedestrian access to the beach is afforded via a dedicated easement on the east side of Virginia Dare Trail.

The overall environment of the new location is compatible with the visual appearance of the inn and compatible with the use. The majority of the surrounding buildings are residential in scale. The town-required setbacks all around the building and the placement of the building on the site ensures that future development will not encroach on the inn.

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First Colony Inn
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Mrs. Lucille Winslow (one time owner of the First Colony Inn), Hertford, NC, September 20, 1988.

Mrs. Pearl Sawyer Pritchett (niece of Miss Daisy Midgett), Elizabeth City, NC, August 21, 1988.

Virginia O'Brien (niece of Capt. Midgett and long time Nags Head resident and cottage owner), Nags Head, NC, July 18, 1988.

Patricia O'Brien Suitor (long time Nags Head vacationer and cottage owner), Nags Head, NC, June 28, 1988.

Betty Clarke (summer resident and owner of the FCI 1966 - 1982), Nags Head NC, July 22, 1988.

Deeds

The deeds listed below are from the Register of Deeds of Dare County, North Carolina:

Book 560, Page 396: General Warranty Deed from the Keeper Company to George B. Kemp.

Book 321, Page 593: General Warranty Deed from First Colony Inn (Betty B. Clarke) to the Keeper Company.

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Bibliography (continued)

Book 225, Page 571: Deed from J. Emmett Winslow and Lucille S. Winslow to First Colony Inn (Betty C. and Murray O. Clarke).

Book 97, Page 450: Deed from Cornelius P. Midgett (deceased) to J. Emmett Winslow and Lucille S. Winslow.

Book 17, Page 544: Deed from Marie LeRoy to C.P. Midgett and Ernest J. Jones.

Book 13, Page 582: Deed from Geo. T. Stronach (trustee) to Marie LeRoy.

Book 2, Page 452: Deed from S.W. Worthington and wife Lucy Worthington to Geo. T. Stronach (trustee).

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is indicated by the bold line on the accompanying survey for "Lawrence Inn Properties" by Wesley Meekins, Jr., as revised 11-21-90.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses all of the property currently associated with the First Colony Inn, moved to this site in 1988. This property constitutes an appropriate setting for the building as it is very similar in character to that of the original.

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First Colony Inn
Dare County, North Carolina

Photograph Labels

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. First Colony Inn | 1. First Colony Inn |
| 2. Dare County, North Carolina | 2. Dare County, North Carolina |
| 3. Rhoda Lawrence | 3. Kevin Warner |
| 4. December 1991 | 4. December 1992 |
| 5. Seattle, Washington | 5. Chicago, Illinois |
| 6. West and North Elevation, view from the northwest corner of property | 6. East Elevation, view from the swimming pool deck |
| 7. #1 | 7. #5 |
| 1. First Colony Inn | 1. First Colony Inn |
| 2. Dare County, North Carolina | 2. Dare County, North Carolina |
| 3. Kevin Warner | 3. Tom Lawrence |
| 4. September 1992 | 4. December 1991 |
| 5. Chicago, Illinois | 5. Seattle, Washington |
| 6. West Elevation | 6. East Elevation, view from the southeast corner of property, swimming pool fence in the foreground |
| 7. #2 | 7. #6 |
| 1. First Colony Inn | 1. First Colony Inn |
| 2. Dare County, North Carolina | 2. Dare County, North Carolina |
| 3. Rhoda Lawrence | 3. Rhoda Lawrence |
| 4. December 1991 | 4. December 1991 |
| 5. Seattle, Washington | 5. Seattle, Washington |
| 6. West and South Elevation, view from the southwest corner of property | 6. Partial East Elevation |
| 7. #3 | 7. #7 |
| 1. First Colony Inn | 1. First Colony Inn |
| 2. Dare County, North Carolina | 2. Dare County, North Carolina |
| 3. Kevin Warner | 3. Rhoda Lawrence |
| 4. September 1992 | 4. December 1991 |
| 5. Seattle, Washington | 5. Seattle, Washington |
| 6. West Elevation, view from the northwest corner of parking area | 6. South Elevation of Second Floor Verandah, showing door and window patterns. Gazebo in background. |
| 7. #4 | 7. #8 |

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First Colony Inn
Dare County, North Carolina

Photograph Labels (continued)

1. First Colony Inn
2. Dare County, North Carolina
3. Rhoda Lawrence
4. September 1992
5. Seattle, Washington
6. Interior View of Entry Lobby, showing wood moldings and beaded board walls
7. #9

1. First Colony Inn
2. Dare County, North Carolina
3. Rhoda Lawrence
4. September 1992
5. Seattle, Washington
6. Guest Room Interior, #16
7. #10

1. First Colony Inn
2. Dare County, North Carolina
3. Rhoda Lawrence
4. September 1992
5. Seattle, Washington
6. Guest Room Interior, #18
7. #11

1. First Colony Inn
2. Dare County, North Carolina
3. Rhoda Lawrence
4. December 1991
5. Seattle, Washington
6. Guest Room Interior, #17
7. #12

1. First Colony Inn
2. Dare County, North Carolina
3. Tom Lawrence
4. July 1988
5. Seattle, Washington
6. West Elevation, original site
7. #13

1. First Colony Inn
2. Dare County, North Carolina
3. Tom Lawrence
4. July 1988
5. Seattle, Washington
6. East and North Elevation, original site
7. #14

1. First Colony Inn
2. Dare County, North Carolina
3. Rhoda Lawrence
4. September 1992
5. Seattle, Washington
6. View of Swimming Pool from Second Floor East Verandah
7. #15



First Colony Inn Dare County NC, #1