NEWS CLOSEUP

A PLACE BY THE SEA

A Question of Access at Cape Cod National Seashore

For generations, writers, painters, nature lovers, and those in search of seclusion have gathered at a group of tiny cabins at the tip of Cape Cod. Spare and rustic, and removed from the outside world, they offer a dramatic view of the Atlantic on a stretch of Cape Cod National Seashore.

Many of the dune shacks, as they are known, are a product of nearby Provincetown's evolution as an artists' colony. At the turn of the 20th century, people began using deserted structures such as boathouses, chicken coops, and a former lifesaving station as studios or vacation retreats. In time, a small number of modest structures sprang up, still in use today. Seasonal pilgrimages to the shacks have become a tradition, posing a challenge to the National Park Service, which acquired the land in 1961.

Under a decades-old agreement, ownership of the structures is gradually being transferred to the seashore. But those who visit the shacks are concerned about continued access, so the place may warrant special treatment because of its past and its importance to people's experience of the seashore.

An ethnographic study, commissioned by the National Park Service, is looking at whether the people who use the shacks could be considered a culture. Last summer, anthropologist Robert J. Wolfe sought people to talk about their memories. Such ways of life, like habitat for nesting shorebirds, are an aspect of the seashore that the National Park Service is obliged to preserve. "This is a whole new arena for us," says chief of cultural resources Sue Moynihan. "We're used to dealing with the tangible," like the remains of Marconi Station, which sent the first transatlantic wireless message.

When the seashore was established, the shacks were inside the boundary drawn by Congress. Since the dune dwellers did not own the land, they entered into agreements in which they got money and use of the shacks for a specified term. The National Park Service intended to demolish the structures as terms expired.

This prompted local citizens to form the nonprofit Peaked Hill Trust—after the ridge where the shacks reside—with preservation as its aim. The group got the area designated a state historic district, eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The determination was based primarily on an association with the development of American art, literature, and theater (Eugene O'Neill—among others—lived here).

By the end of this year, the National Park Service will be responsible for managing 10 of the 17 shacks. "The ethnographic report is a key component in deciding what to do," says Moynihan.

The study seeks to clarify who the dune dwellers are as well as ascertain their values and why they come here.

Maintenance is key too. The shacks, built with makeshift materials, don't fit conventional preservation strategies. Plus the fragile environment is subject to violent change.

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The study, along with an environmental assessment, will guide decisions on preservation and use.

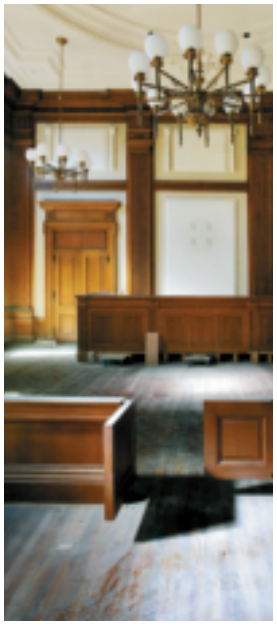
For more information, contact Chuck Smythe, National Park Service, 15 State Street, Boston, MA 02109, (617) 223-5014, email chuck_smythe@nps.gov.

RIGHT AND ABOVE LEFT: STEVE HEASLIP, CAPE COD TIMES

Below left: **Families have summered in the shacks for generations. Local groups conduct artist-in-residence programs in the structures under agreements with the National Park Service; others have leases.** **Below:** **One of the diminutive dwellings.**

Landmark Decision

Federal Courthouse Girds for Potential Disaster



Above: Interior details of Portland's Pioneer Courthouse. Opposite: The landmark's signature cupola.

THE PIONEER COURTHOUSE is probably Portland's most revered landmark. The oldest federal building in the Pacific Northwest, it was completed in 1875, and heavily used since, housing a post office and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The rehabilitation of the National Register property, now underway, has attracted attention for both its technical prowess and local controversy.

Though Portland doesn't snap to mind when one mentions earthquakes, seismologists say one will hit eventually. A 1993 tremor, about 25 miles away, cracked plaster and wood inside the courthouse. A strong quake could collapse it.

So the place is getting a "seismic upgrade," plus a thorough rehabilitation that includes historically accurate landscaping. The entire building will rest on 75 large ball bearings, each sitting in a shallow stainless-steel dish. A four-foot-wide "moat" around the foundation's perimeter will allow the building to move freely during a quake, after which it will settle back into its original position.

The technique is expensive. Of the 400 historic buildings under the care of the Government Services Administration, only one—San Francisco's U.S. Court of Appeals—has been stabilized this way.

GSA has long wanted to stabilize the Pioneer Courthouse with the technique, but "it was dropped year after year from appropriations," says Barbara Campagna, a historic preservation officer with the agency. Finally, Congress approved a special appropriation. "We couldn't have done it otherwise," she says. "It deserves that level of protection."

THE ENTIRE BUILDING WILL REST ON 75 LARGE BALL BEARINGS, EACH SITTING IN A SHALLOW STAINLESS-STEEL DISH. A FOUR-FOOT-WIDE "MOAT" AROUND THE FOUNDATION'S PERIMETER WILL ALLOW THE BUILDING TO MOVE FREELY DURING A QUAKE.

Other developments have lent an added twist. The post office was moved out to make more room for the Ninth Circuit Court, which, according to GSA—the federal government's property manager—needed the space. To local residents, however, the post office was both convenient and a beloved landmark. Nor was there much enthusiasm for a new underground parking garage for judges—which meant punching a hole in the foundation wall.

But the parking wasn't just judicial whim. According to federal guidelines governing courthouse design, judges must have secure parking underground, and there was none. This is of particular concern in the post-September 11 climate.

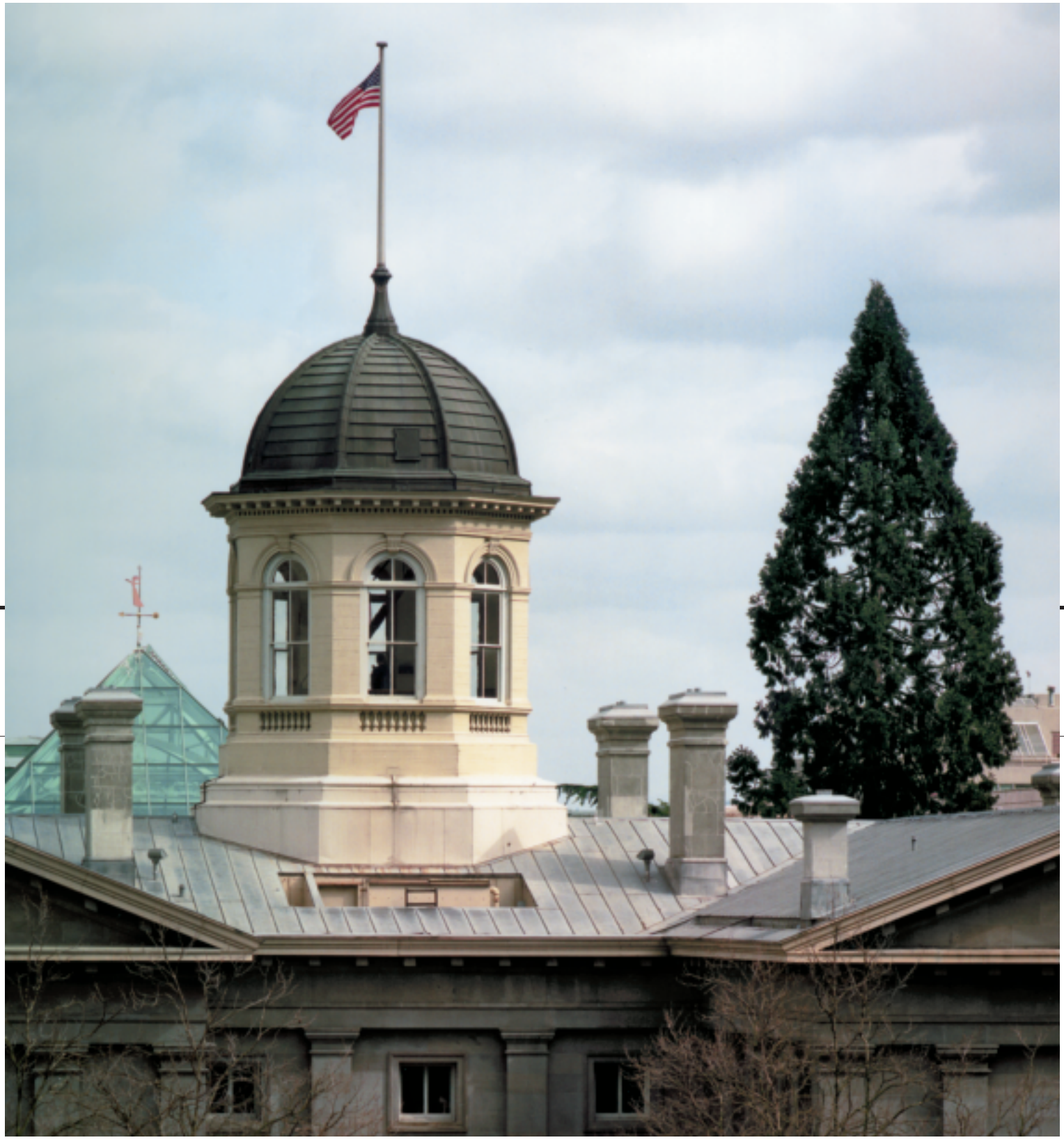
The city resisted the parking because cars would cross light rail tracks, a zoning violation. GSA wrangled with Portland until legal proceedings looked inevitable, and the city issued a permit.

The National Park Service, the state preservation office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation all consulted. The work, to wrap this fall, will cost about $22 million.

In use since the Grant administration, the courthouse was the creation of Alfred B. Mullett, a prolific architect for the U.S. Government. The courthouse is classic Italian Renaissance, built with Tenino sandstone quarried in Washington State, its interior decorated with elaborate plaster moldings and extensive millwork in oak and fir.

For more information, contact Barbara Campagna, GSA, 400 15th Street SW, Auburn, WA 98001, (253) 931-7192, email barbara.campagna@gsa.gov. For more on GSA's historic building program, go to www.gsa.gov, click on "buildings," then "public buildings" and "historic preservation."

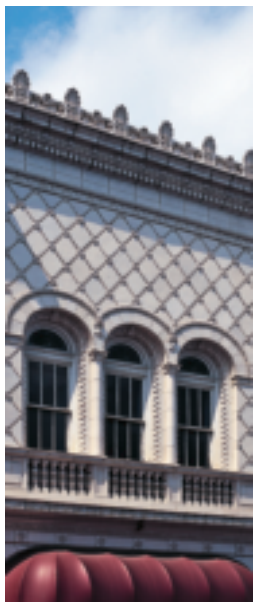
ALL PHOTOS CAROL HIGHSMITH



MAIN STREET COMEBACK

EXPLORING VIRGINIA'S SMALL TOWNS WITH THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Much has been written about the death of downtown and usually with good reason, what with the march of strip malls and big box stores. That's why it's both heartening and surprising to drive through rural Virginia and see a host of small towns that have preserved their historic commercial districts, and are still alive and thriving—the 17 spotlighted in "Virginia Main Street Communities," an online travel itinerary from the National Register of Historic Places.



RADFORD, BERRYVILLE, WINCHESTER, FRANKLIN—THEY COULD BE anywhere. They are like thousands of American towns that grew up along a river or at a crossroads, quiet communities with modest commerce, their heydays now past. The difference is that these towns, unlike many of their counterparts, look like a trick of time travel. Rockwellian set pieces, their buildings gleam with polished glass and fresh paint. Business activity signals health, nurtured by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Main Street Program.

Each town on the itinerary has photographs, a brief history, and links to National Register sites. The links yield images and information on the town's historical significance. The itinerary also provides practical information such as directions and special events, everything you need for a trip.

Most of the towns have their origins in the late 18th or early 19th centuries, springing up around rivers, mills, railroads, and turnpikes. Virginia's flourishing agricultural economy, the taming of rivers with locks, sluices, and dams, and, eventually, the railroad, all contributed to development.

And then there was perhaps the ultimate expression of permanence and purpose: the courthouse. A courthouse put a town on the map, declaring that this was where things got done. There are several on the itinerary, beautifully designed, many which played major roles in historical events.

Above, right: Staunton's architectural treasures, packing the downtown and the hilly residential districts, complement a lively arts and shopping scene.

The Civil War affected nearly all of the towns, almost destroying Manassas. As the 19th century progressed, mining and industry left their mark. The car and the highway introduced the era of tourism, along with sprawl, congestion, and the death knell of main street.

The Virginia Main Street Program got started in 1985 in response to the steady exodus of businesses. Federal and state tax incentives have been key to preservation, advantages contingent on carefully

ALL PHOTOS DAVID ANDREWS/NPS


Garrett's
MENSWEAR
DEPOT

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rehabilitating historic structures. Towns that participate connect to a network of groups dedicated to downtown revitalization. The state offers training, marketing and public relations consulting, and design assistance.

Since the program's inception, private investors have put about $264 million into the state's historic downtowns, translating into thousands of new businesses and jobs. Over 4,000 buildings have been rehabilitated.

The program follows a strategy formulated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which determined that marketing was essential to reviving small towns. Businesses had to offer something not found in malls. And they had to band together and not bail out when times got lean.

A GOOD EXAMPLE IS WINCHESTER, at the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley. A welter of plastic signs and fast food restaurants, which greet the visitor initially, soon gives way to downtown charm, anchored by a broad, red brick walkway shaded with stately locust trees. On either side is a collection of architectural styles so dense and varied it momentarily defies description.

Buildings are meticulously preserved, an unmistakable sign of healthy business—chic cafes and coffee shops, Victorians populated with law offices. People move along the street as if they have important business—which they do, here in downtown. Winchester is suffused with a new sense of now, but rich with the texture of then.

Following the itinerary, visitors discover how the town's strategic location—at the northern end of the valley—made it a focal point for trade as well as an important place in the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. During the Civil War, Stonewall Jackson had his headquarters at a house in town, now listed in the National Register.

Winchester changed hands numerous times during the conflict, its 1840 Greek Revival courthouse serving as a hospital. A recent renovation uncovered soldiers' graffiti.

AT THE FAR END OF BERRYVILLE'S MAIN STREET, A FREIGHT TRAIN ROLLS SLOWLY through town with the Blue Ridge in the distance. Architectural styles repeat down the street: Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate. A modest crossroads settled in colonial times, Berryville owed its success to a location along trade routes. It is modest still, the quintessential small town.

When John Singleton Mosby hit Union supply lines, he chose Berryville as the place to strike. Though at the edge of Washington, DC's westward creep, it has kept its character, and when a traveler turns off main street, the town's quiet unpretentiousness is affirmed as houses thin quickly and give way to lush green hills dotted with livestock.

Left: Open for business in Radford, with the signature sound of a nearby railyard a poetic backdrop when this picture was taken. Above left: Signs of the past just around the corner. Above right: Afternoon neon in Bedford.

Left:
Lynchburg's waterfront boasts an arts district with warehouse lofts overlooking the James River; pictured here is Amazement Square, home of the Rightmire Children's Museum, where insect sculptures dance along the sidewalks.

MOST OF THE TOWNS HAVE THEIR ORIGINS IN THE LATE 18TH OR EARLY 19TH CENTURIES, SPRINGING UP AROUND RIVERS, MILLS, RAILROADS, AND TURNPIKES. VIRGINIA'S FLOURISHING AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY, THE TAMING OF RIVERS WITH LOCKS, SLUICES, AND DAMS, AND, EVENTUALLY, THE RAILROAD, ALL CONTRIBUTED TO DEVELOPMENT.

THE HOMES OF OLD WARRENTON evidence its popularity with the well-heeled since colonial times. A Classical Revival courthouse, the historic district's showpiece, was built in 1890. Perched on a knoll, it overlooks the sprawl that caused concerned residents to get the town to join the state initiative. Today, the district has 100 percent retail occupancy. The county jail, built in 1808, is preserved as a museum.

Idyllic and stately, Warrenton was a popular destination for dignitaries from Washington who wanted to spend time in the Virginia countryside. They included Andrew Jackson, the Duchess of Windsor, and Teddy Roosevelt, who made the 50-mile trek on horseback on a January day in 1909, had lunch at the Warren Green Hotel, and rode back to the White House immediately afterward.

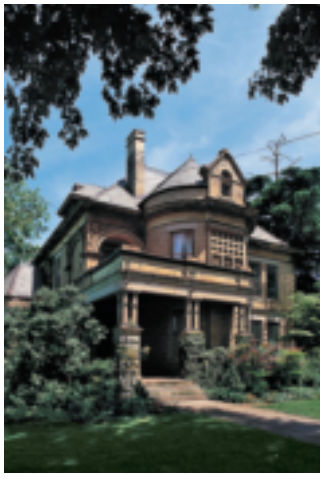
The itinerary gives a glimpse of Warrenton's rich past, from its reputation as a cosmopolitan country town to the ever-present background of the Civil War.

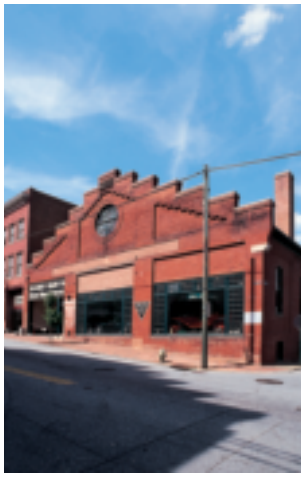
HOW TOBACCO LOOMED IN Virginia's history is evident in the small town of Danville, on the North Carolina border. It had a natural route to outside markets in the Dan River, later augmented by the railroad. As tobacco merchants got rich, they sunk their profits into textile manufacturing and extravagant houses, many visible today in the town's historic district. Danville emerged unscathed from the Civil War, and its rehabbed brick warehouses and factory buildings give the place more of an industrial feel than the other towns on the itinerary.

In a notable attempt to capture the essence of the town's bustling past, Danville rehabilitated a row of commercial buildings that were constructed between 1900 and 1930, but covered with a metal facade for a more uniform, streamlined look in the 1950s. The veneer has been stripped off to expose the distinct style of each structure, evocative of Danville's optimistic march into the 20th century.

Along side streets running off the main thoroughfare, commercial buildings proliferate, an indicator of Danville's earlier success. They include former banks, theaters, and fraternal lodges, many of which are now occupied by retail and service businesses. Another sign of Danville's good fortune is the most concentrated collection of Victorian and Edwardian residential architecture in Virginia. This impressive legacy includes an extensive array of styles from the Antebellum era to World War I.

THE TOUR FOLLOWS THE SPINE OF THE BLUE RIDGE WITH STOPS AT Staunton, Lexington, Radford, and elsewhere. Visitors discover one architectural showcase after another, explore country churches, railroad depots, a theater from the 1920s, and the grand houses of politicos, generals, and industrialists. The itinerary offers in-depth commentary on the evolution of the architecture, transportation patterns, agriculture, and industry that shaped what the visitor sees today. Web pages link to individual sites, and there are suggested readings for those who want to delve deeper into the region's history.





Above left and center: Lynchburg's masterworks top a series of hills that look out on the Blue Ridge, some streets still paved with brick. Above right: Antique cars peer through the windows of this stepped facade in downtown, alive with architectural richness.

"Virginia Main Street Communities" was produced in cooperation with the state and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers. To see the itinerary, go to www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/vamainstreet. For more on the Virginia Main Street Program, visit www.dhcd.virginia.gov/mainstreet.