



I. TRUXTUN: HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE





This 1892 bird's eye view of Portsmouth shows commercial and military waterfront operations as well as the railway lines that served the port. The growth fueled by these activities spurred new residential development at the outer edges of the city which can also be seen in this view.

A. Brief Overview of the City and the Historic Districts

1. General Portsmouth History

The City of Portsmouth is a deepwater port located on the Elizabeth River in the Tidewater region of Virginia. It is considered a part of the harbor and population center known as Hampton Roads, the nation's 33rd largest metropolitan statistical area.

Its roots as a transportation center, a constant throughout the city's history, began when Adam Thoroughgood established a ferry connection between Portsmouth and Norfolk in 1636.

The town of Portsmouth was not formally established and platted until 1752 when Colonel William Crawford gave approximately 65 acres of his plantation land. Over the next 250 years, the city grew to its present size of 26 square miles. The first shipyard, "Gosport," was established south of town in 1767 and began Portsmouth's long association with naval history.

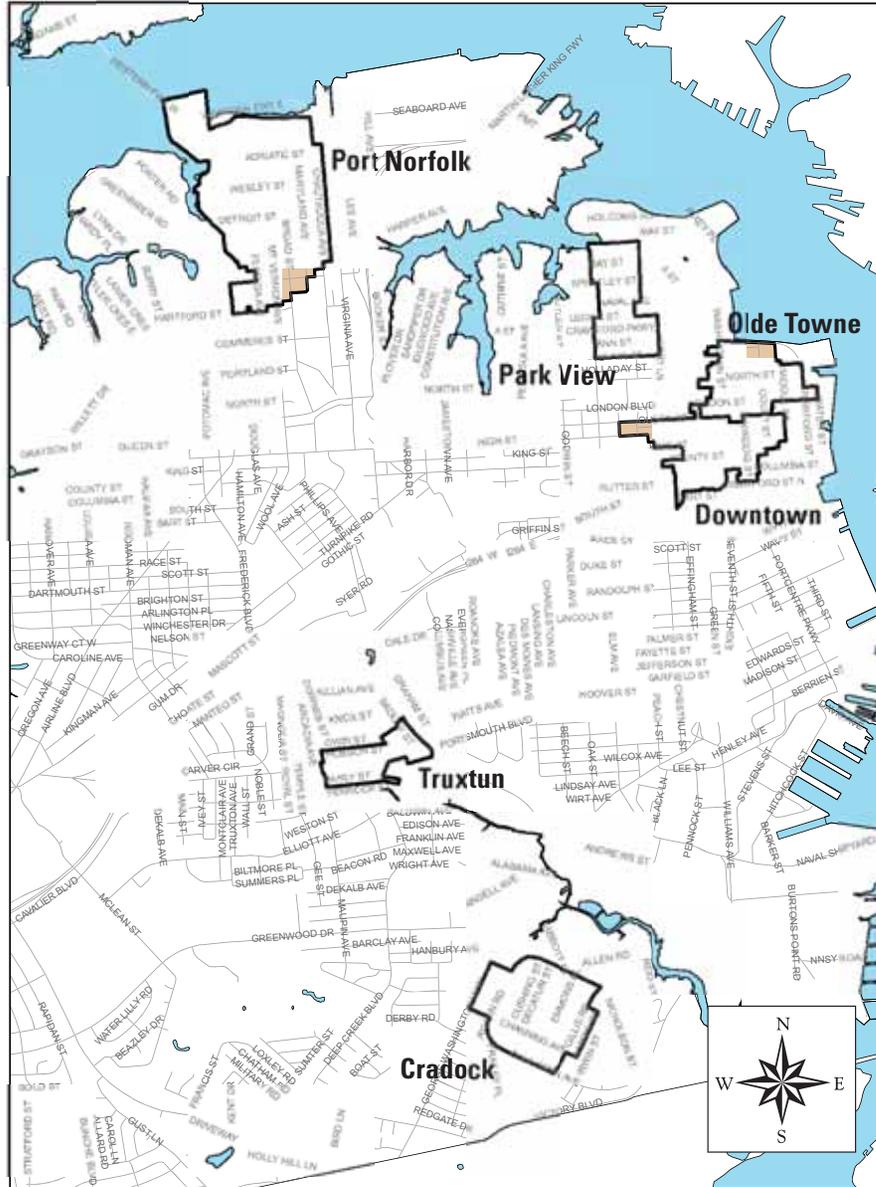
Named for the famed English port, Virginia's Portsmouth is home to many of the United States' maritime firsts. These include the first federal shipyard and drydock in the nation and construction of the first ironclad ship,

first battleship, and first aircraft carrier. At least one source cites Portsmouth as having one of the greatest concentrations of architecturally significant buildings between Alexandria and Charleston. Portsmouth's current historic districts are representative of its long association with transportation and shipbuilding. Each represents an era in the development of this old and important Virginia city.



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Portsmouth's historic districts are distributed throughout the city. Olde Towne, Downtown, Park View and Port Norfolk are located close to the water in this port city. Cradock and Truxtun, the city's two planned developments for shipyard workers, were located on the outskirts of the city in the early twentieth century.



A. Brief Overview of the City and the Historic Districts *continued*

2. Portsmouth's Historic Districts

Olde Towne was the first established historic district in the city. It represents the town's earliest surviving history and is the only example of an early townscape in the Hampton Roads area. Portsmouth's other residential historic districts have their own stories to tell as well.

Port Norfolk and Park View were both developed in the closing years of the nineteenth century as Portsmouth assumed the position of a regional transportation center. These streetcar suburbs, built on former farmland, provided a healthful and attractive living condition for the middle-class workers involved in the growing shipping and railroad industries taking Virginia products to far-distant ports.

Cradock and Truxtun are the only twentieth century districts presently listed in Portsmouth and date to approximately 1918. Both were built as projects of the U.S. Housing Corporation to house shipyard workers during World War I. They are significant as they are among the first government-funded and planned communities in the country. The design concept of these districts reflect what we today call "new urbanism,"



This street view shows the staggered setback of the houses and some of the first residents in Truxtun.



Truxtun today retains much of its original character and architecture.

a wholly contained community where residents could live, play, and shop within an easy commute of the workplace provided by public transportation.

The newest historic district in the city is the Downtown Portsmouth Historic District that encompasses the original town plat. Most of the buildings date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period of rapid growth for the city. Unlike the other listed districts that are residential in nature, this district is mainly commercial and anchored by the city's main street, High Street. The buildings in this district represent a variety of service-oriented uses and diversity of ethnicity and religion.

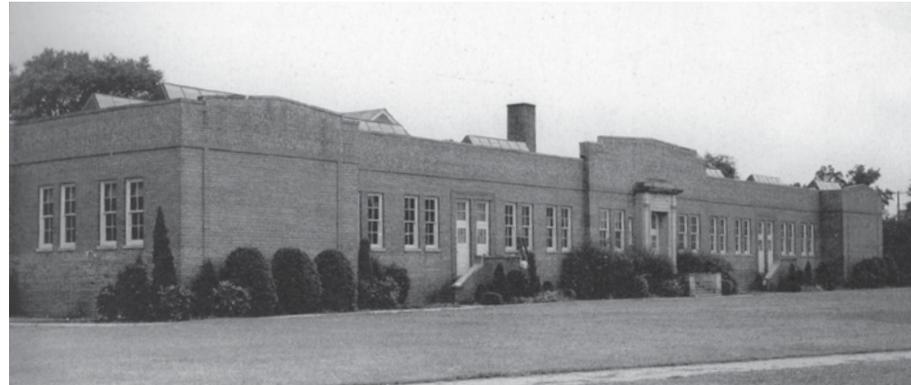
Individually listed properties also contribute to the overall understanding of the development and history of the city. Landmark religious and municipal institutions include Trinity Episcopal Church and the Old Portsmouth Courthouse. Those that represent Portsmouth's long marine and transportation history include Drydock Number One, the Portsmouth Naval Hospital, and the Seaboard Coastline Building. More modern entertainment culture of the twentieth century is represented by the Commodore Theatre. These individual properties help to complete the picture of Portsmouth's past.



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This early-twentieth-century photo shows a row of Truxtun houses near construction completion.



Built in 1920, the Truxtun School served the neighborhood until the 1990s when it was demolished.

B. Truxtun Historic District Character

1. General Truxtun History

The forty-three acre Truxtun neighborhood was built between 1918 and 1920 and named for Thomas Truxtun, an early naval hero. Its location was found suitable as it was bisected by Deep Creek Boulevard, which connected to downtown Portsmouth, and by Portsmouth Boulevard which gave direct access east to the naval shipyard. Truxtun was originally conceived as a self-contained pedestrian community, a predecessor of the current trend towards “new urbanism.” Worker access to the shipyards was to be provided by street car and plans also called for a future rail station.

Truxtun was the first wartime government housing in the United States constructed exclusively for African Americans. Its design concept demonstrates the planning standards of the United States Housing Corporation, the federal agency that financed and built the project. Like Cradock, a similar housing project for white shipyard workers located to the south of the shipyards, Truxtun was built to accommodate the expanding workforce resulting from the outbreak of World War I. At the end of the war, the residences were sold to two African American businessmen who then resold them to primarily their original tenants.

All of the houses, single-family or duplex, originally rented for \$17.50 a month payable to the federal government. In

addition to the residences, the original plan called for a church, community house, school, garage and thirty-five stores, of which only the school was built.

The Truxtun National Register Historic District was established in 1982 and local review, according to the criteria established by the historic districts Zoning Ordinance, began in 1983.



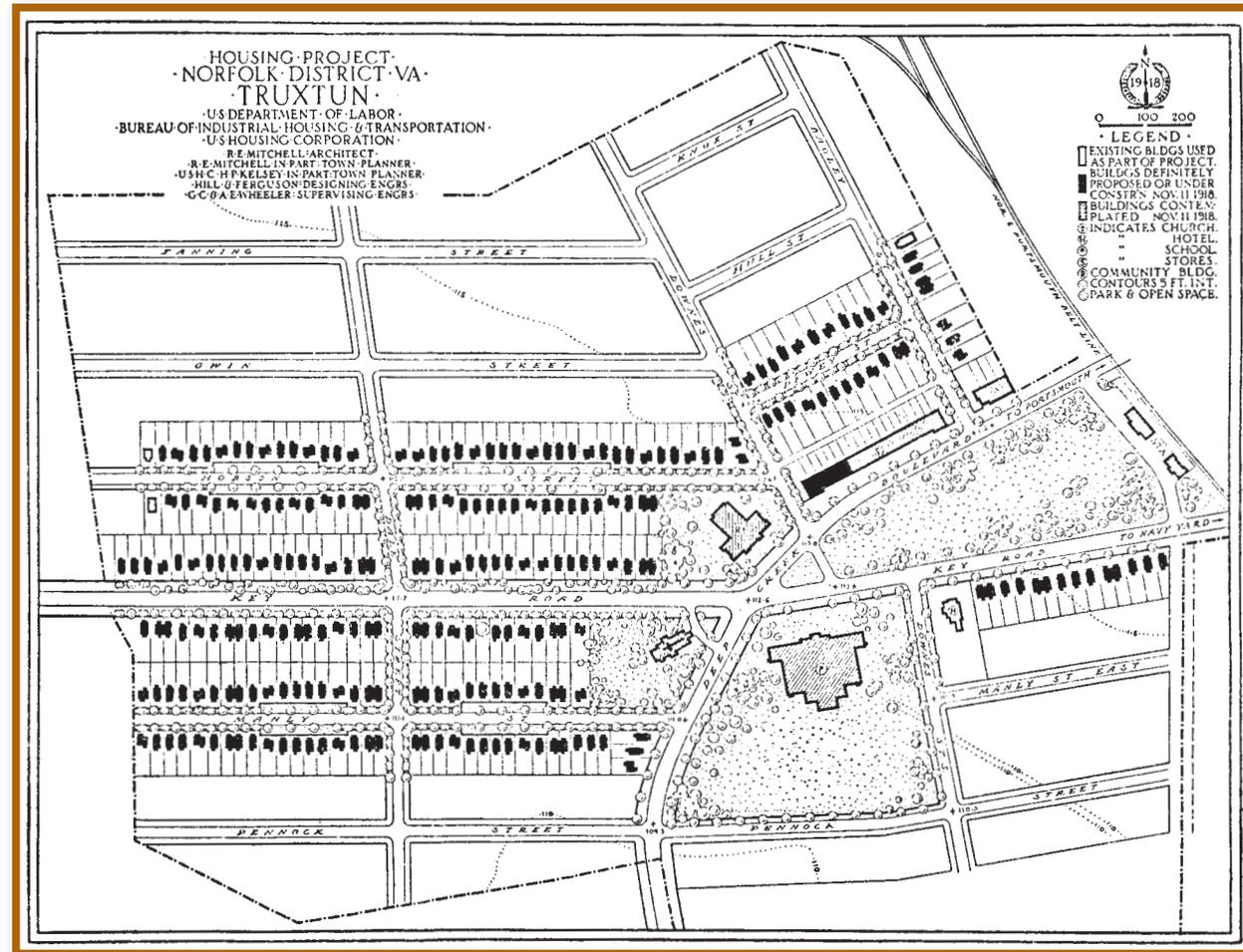
2. Streetscape Character

Truxton is a well-defined planned neighborhood. Its flat topography lends itself well to a conventional street grid pattern, with streets grouped around two existing major roads, Deep Creek and Portsmouth boulevards.

Thirty-foot wide streets, many with street parking on both sides, have replaced the original nine-foot gravel roads. Concrete sidewalks are separated from the street by planting strips, portions of which contain crepe myrtle.

3. Site Character

Relatively uniform site conditions are created by shallow setbacks that are minimally staggered for better porch views. Most sites feature concrete walkways that connect the porch to the sidewalk and concrete ribbon driveways placed in narrow side yards. Contributing to the pleasing appearance of the neighborhood are a variety of foundation plantings. Utilities are placed to the rear of the houses out of view.



The site plan for Truxton as it appeared in a U.S. Department of Labor publication on the development of Truxton.



B. Truxtun Historic District Character *continued*

4. Architectural Character

There are 250 houses in Truxtun. The 224 single lots measure 28 by 100 feet and 26 double lots are of equal depth but 40 feet wide.

Truxtun houses are five rooms each and are based upon a single plan that was rotated and modified to achieve four different exterior designs. Most houses are of wood frame construction with brick foundations.

Truxtun's charm comes from the simple variations in architectural design and, in particular, the Jerkinhead roof form. Also known as a clipped gable, the Jerkinhead roof is synonymous with Truxtun and is found on both end and side-gabled single-family structures in the historic district. More traditional gable roofs are found on the two remaining styles, the end-gable single-family and the side-gable duplex.

To extend the limited living space outdoors, many houses in Truxtun have full-width front porches. While few houses in the district retain their

original siding and roof materials, there are still a number of details that convey the neighborhood's original appearance. These features include exposed rafter ends, dormer windows, and the overall massing of the structures. While many windows and doors may have been replaced over time, the openings retain their original configurations and ratio of wall-to-window and wall-to-door area. And while there are few instances of original seamed metal or asbestos shingle roofs, the new coverings have been applied to retain the original roof forms.



C. Truxtun House Types

The appearance of the Truxtun Historic District is defined by the repetition of a small number of house forms, sited closely together to create a village feel. The simple architecture of the Truxtun house types relies heavily on the popular styles of the early twentieth century. Exposed rafter ends, a common Bungalow style feature, add character to the Truxtun house types while the small-paned windows relate to the Colonial Revival style.

Most synonymous with Truxtun, however, is the Jerkinhead roof form. Also known as a clipped gable, dating to early eighteenth-century England, it is the Jerkinhead roof that alerts you to your arrival in Truxtun. While not all houses in the district share this roof form, they originally shared many other traits including central chimneys, narrow novelty or German siding (the upper part of each clapboard has a concave upper groove), asbestos shingle roofs, and shuttered windows.



Type 1: Front Jerkinhead roof with center entry and large gable-roof porch.



Type 2: Front Jerkinhead roof with side entry and small gable-roof porch with extension.



Type 3: Front Jerkinhead roof with center entry and small gable roof.



C. Truxtun House Types *continued*



Type 4: Front gable roof with center entry and shed-roofed porch.



Type 5: Front gable roof with side entry and shed-roofed porch.



Type 6: Side Jerkinhead roof with side entry and small gable-roofed porch.



Type 7: Side-gabled roof duplex with center entries and shed-roofed porches.