

Architectural Styles in Onancock – An Overview and Walking Tour



The Onancock Historic District contains most of the historic residential, commercial, and ecclesiastical buildings in the town of Onancock. Situated on Onancock Creek, approximately four miles east of Chesapeake Bay, the small town was the county seat of Accomack County (1680 to 1693), and served as an important port on Virginia's Eastern Shore from the late seventeenth to the twentieth centuries.

The historic district contains buildings that represent various periods and architectural styles from the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Such styles as the Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, Craftsman/Bungalow, Colonial Revival, and several vernacular house types provide a cohesive variety of streetscapes that adds to the aesthetic appeal of this picturesque port town.

Given Virginia's moist climate and the practice by her early colonists of erecting impermanent structures, it is not surprising that there are no surviving seventeenth- or early-eighteenth century buildings located in the town; indeed, very few have survived in eastern Virginia. The town's oldest surviving buildings appear to be a few scattered late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century dwellings.

Once the bustling port for trading schooners and other traditional sailing craft, steamboats beginning in the 1840s greatly increased commercial activity and created strong economic and cultural ties to Baltimore. Steamboats and a nearby railroad also contributed to Onancock's role as a popular transportation center for many Eastern Shore residents. Most of the buildings described in this walking tour were constructed during the second half of the nineteenth century – the heyday of Onancock's commercial and cultural activity.

The descriptions in this presentation draw on material in the Historic District Application to the National Register of Historic Places and on the extensive research of Anne B. Nock. The Onancock Historical District was placed on the National Register in 1992

The Federal Style



Ker Place, 69 Market St. - Ker Place, built from 1799-1802, is the finest example of Federal architecture on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Federal-style architecture is the name for the classicizing architecture built in North America between c. 1780 and 1830, and particularly from 1785 to 1815. This style shares its name with its era, the Federal Period.

In the early American Republic, the founding generation consciously chose to associate the nation with the ancient democracies of Greece and the republican values of Rome. Grecian aspirations informed the Greek Revival, lasting into the 1850's. Using Roman architectural vocabulary, the Federal style applied to the balanced and symmetrical version of Georgian architecture that had been practiced in the American colonies new motifs of Neoclassical architecture as it was epitomized in Britain by Robert Adam, who published his designs in 1792.

American federal architecture differs from preceding Georgian colonial interpretations in its use of plainer surfaces with attenuated detail, usually isolated in panels, tablets and friezes. It also had a flatter smoother facade and rarely used pilasters. It was most influenced by the interpretation of Ancient Roman architecture fashionable after the unearthing of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The bald eagle was a common symbol used in this style, with the ellipse a frequent architectural motif. As headquarters of the Eastern shore of Va. Historical Society, Ker Place is open to the public from March to December. It is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places.

The Queen Anne Style



Lilliston House, 79 Market St. - In the United States, the so-called "Queen Anne style" is loosely used of a wide range of picturesque buildings with "free Renaissance" (non-Gothic Revival) details rather than of a specific formulaic style in its own right.

A Corinthian-columned porch, shingled decorative work and an unusual roof design give the house a distinctive look. Distinctive features of American Queen Anne style (rooted in the English style) may include overhanging eaves, shaped and Dutch gables, a porch covering part or all of the front facade, including the primary entrance area; pedimented porches; differing wall textures, such as patterned wood shingles shaped into varying designs, including resembling fish scales, terra cotta tiles, dentils, classical columns, painted balustrades and wooden or slate roofs.

"Queen Anne" is broadly applied to architecture of the period 1880 to 1910; some "Queen Anne" architectural elements, such as the wraparound front porch, continued to be found into the 1920s. The Lilliston house was constructed in 1908 and has recently been restored.

The Italianate Style



Holly House, 7 Holly St. - The Italianate house with hip roof, two-story paneled corner pilasters (the paneling differentiates them from the fluted pilasters of the Greek Revival style) and bracketed cornices was built in 1860 by Tully Joynes. In years past, it was known as the Poplars, the Maples, and Miss Margaret Groton's piano studio.

Italianate was one of the most popular Victorian-era housing styles from the mid- to late-1800s. Homes in this style ranged from modest two-story town houses to ornate mansions of sea captains and other wealthy entrepreneurs.

Inspired by villas of Italy -- or at least pictures of them, since few American architects traveled abroad -- the style is defined most by the use of single or paired decorative brackets under wide cornices.

The homes were typically two to three stories in height, with flat or hip roofs, bay windows with inset wooden panels, corner boards and two over two double-hung windows. The windows often had curved or molded window caps.

Italianate remained the preferred house style in the USA until the 1870s. Italianate was also a common style for modest structures like barns and for larger public buildings such as town halls, libraries, and train stations. You will find Italianate buildings in nearly every part of the United States except for the deep South. There are fewer Italianate buildings in the southern states because the style reached its peak during the Civil War, a time when the south was economically devastated.

After the 1870s, architectural fashion turned toward late Victorian styles such as [Queen Anne](#).

Victorian / Tudor Revival Transition



Harmonson House, 58
Market Street - Built in 1887
by Dr. Charles Harmonson,
the house that bears his name
is an early example of the
transition between the Queen
Anne style and the Tudor
Revival and Art and Crafts
styles that became popular at
the start of the 20th Century.
The presence of half-
timbered decoration and the
design of the windows and
glasswork have more in
common with the later styles,
while the architecture of the
home itself echoes the Queen
Anne and Gothic Revival
houses of the mid 19th
Century.

18th Century Virginia Story and a half



Scott Hall 2 South St. -
The oldest standing house in Onancock was built in 1778. Although modified many times over the years, it retains a gambrel roof and nice proportions of Virginia “story and a half” houses that were common during the first half of the 18th Century.

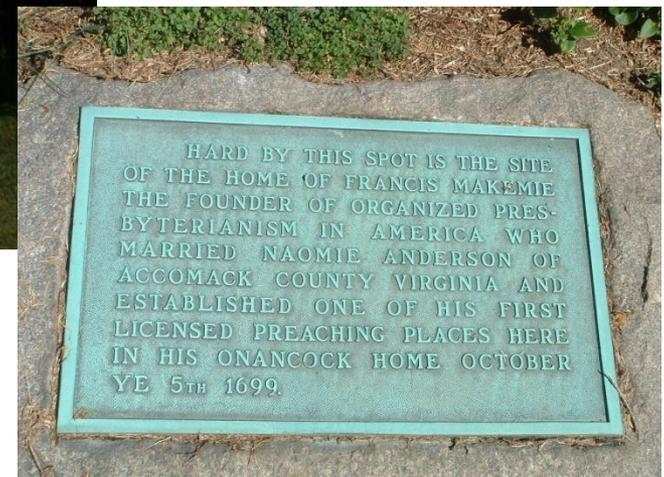
Revolutionary War hero, Commodore Zedekiah Whaley, is buried to the rear of the house in the Scott Hall cemetery which is accessible via a Market St driveway.

Colonial Revival



Holden, 9 Market St. – This is a good early example of the Colonial Revival style, with a symmetrical front facade and an accented doorway, but lacking the evenly spaced windows on either side of it. The style, which became popular following the Centennial Exposition of 1876, borrowed from colonial period houses of the early 19th century. The pediment and columns at the front door are Federal/Georgian in style. The main part of the multi-gabled structure is an early 1880s house to which a small school (circa 1830), originally located on the town square, was attached.

A marker in the front yard commemorates action taken by Francis Makemie, father of American Presbyterianism to establish religious freedom in his Onancock home in 1699.



The Victorian Style



Ingleside 4 Market St. - The home of Capt. Stephen Hopkins's oldest son, William provides a good example of the modification of small homes to become larger and more impressive houses. This modification is common to many of the larger homes along Market and King Streets.

Standing on the Mt. Prospect bridge, you can see the smaller 1840s section on the rear of Ingleside, which is almost hidden behind the imposing 1890s Victorian addition facing Market St.

19th Century Commercial



Hopkins & Bros. Store
Moved a short distance
from its original location,
Hopkins & Bro. store is a
late 19th century two-story,
frame and weatherboarded
building with an attached
1 1/2-story ell that
probably dates to 1842.
The larger addition
features corner pilasters, a
bracketed cornice, and a
Gothic attic window
situated in its front
gable. A well-preserved
example of Victorian
commercial
architecture with most of
its nineteenth-century
fittings intact,
the store.
A section of the building
has been leased to a
restaurant that has
excellent views of
Onancock harbor.

Eastern Shore Traditional



Fitzgerald House - 25 King St.
- This house is one of only a few in Onancock to retain its traditional Eastern Shore design of big house-little house-colonnade-and-kitchen. A wing across the back of the house looks out at the north branch of Onancock Creek. Built in early-to mid-19th-century, this two-story, frame and weatherboard, side-hall-plan dwelling features interior end brick chimneys and 6/6 and 9/6 sash windows.

Walking Map of the Houses

If you park at Ker Place and follow the houses by number, the walk should take about 25 minutes. With the exception of Ker Place and the Hopkins & Bro. store, all homes are private residences.

