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 ____________________________ Sunny Side Inn

other names/site number ____________________________ Sunny Side Oyster Bar

2. Location

street & number 1102 Washington Street  N/A not for publication

city or town Williamston  N/A  vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Martin code 117  zip code 27892

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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.)

[Signature] [Title]

[State of Federal agency and bureau]

[Date]

[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:

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain) ____________________________

[Signature of the Keeper]

[Date of Action]
**5. Classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)</th>
<th>Category of Property (Check only one box)</th>
<th>Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ private</td>
<td>☑ building(s)</td>
<td>Contributing 1 Noncontributing 1 buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ public-local</td>
<td>☐ district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ public-State</td>
<td>☐ site</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ public-Federal</td>
<td>☐ structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ object</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

N/A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**6. Function or Use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)</th>
<th>Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMERCE/ restaurant</td>
<td>COMMERCE/ restaurant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th & Early 20th Century American:
Craftsman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials (Enter categories from instructions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>foundation <em>concrete</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walls <em>weatherboard</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roof <em>tin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other <em>asphalt</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

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.)

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property  less than one acre  

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Easting</th>
<th>Northing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 1 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9 6 8</td>
<td>2 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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  Penne Smith / Consultant
organization                                         date  August 31, 1995
street & number  415 Evans Street Mall, Suite 1     telephone  919-758-1446
city or town   Greenville                               state  NC   zip code  27858

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.
Sunny Side Inn
Martin County, North Carolina

The Sunny Side Oyster Bar, historically known as the Sunny Side Inn, is a double front-gable frame building in the Craftsman style on the east side of Williamston's Washington Street, near the Highway 13-64 intersection, in Martin County. Located at the edge of Williamston's commercial district near the Skewarkey Primitive Baptist Church, the Sunny Side Oyster Bar has achieved a unique landmark status as a well-preserved and very rare example of an early to mid-twentieth-century eastern North Carolina oyster bar. The building, in its sixty-six years of existence, has evolved in multi-functional units. It began as Theodore Roberson's frame, one-story, gable-front Sanitary Service Market in 1929. Then, in the winter of 1930-1931, Roberson extended his Sanitary Service Market on its south side with a front gable room and opened a small cafe, the Sunny Side Inn, there. Between 1935 and 1940, Theodore Roberson and his two sons, Charles Tilghman (C.T.) and George had a rear extension built onto the Sunny Side Inn, which they used as an oyster bar. The Sanitary Service Market apparently was closed with Theodore Roberson's death in 1940, and the space was incorporated into the Sunny Side Inn. Since November 1945, the building has been known as the Sunny Side Oyster Bar instead of the Sunny Side Inn, and will be referred to as such to minimize confusion.

The setting of the Sunny Side Oyster Bar, originally outside the town limits, has since become part of Williamston; the immediate area around the restaurant, however, consists of older small commercial buildings. An unpaved parking lot lies between the Sunny Side's north elevation and the north property line. The main (west) elevation of the Sunny Side is separated from Washington Street by an unpaved sidewalk and an unpaved driveway leads to the parking lot. The main elevation (west) and north elevations are about fifty to sixty feet long, and the south elevation is approximately eighty-five feet long, creating an irregular building footprint.

The building is covered by a gable-front roof with galvanized metal and rests on a poured concrete foundation; it is also finished with weatherboarding and has Craftsman-style exposed roof rafters, two three-panel front doors (the windows
Sunny Side Inn  
Martin County, North Carolina

and door to the original section have been covered) and, at the entrance to the Sunny Side Oyster Bar, a lancet-shaped louvered ventilator pierces the asphalt hexagonal-tiled front gable.

The first, or north section, of the building was Theodore Roberson's "Sanitary Service Market", built shortly after the Robersons bought the tract of land from Lovette Biggs Harrison in 1929. This simple weatherboarded building still has its original paired windows (with bars across) flanking the flush centered front door on the main elevation. On the building's north side are two barred four-over-one windows, one of which is paired with a three-paneled four-light sash door under a whimsical-looking bracketed flush gable that probably was originally a covered receiving area for the market. Inside the former Sanitary Service Market, the walls and ceiling are sheathed with manufactured beaded board tongue-and-groove siding, and one of the original metal meat display counters is at the east (rear) wall, next to the kitchen entrance. There is an entrance to the adjacent oyster bar's waiting room, at the southeast corner of this room. Presently, this space serves as an overflow waiting area.

The present oyster bar's "waiting area" -- the original "Sunny Side Inn" lunch room opened in 1931 -- is lit by two front display windows, the recessed storefront entry's sidelights, and two four-over-one windows at the side. The guests at Mr. Roberson's opening dinner on January 29, 1931, would have sat at the wooden booths that are still in place and feasted upon "turkey, barbecue, brunswick stew and sea foods" for the price of seventy-five cents. The room still has its original recessed entry, oak floors, and wooden counter at the east end, or back, of the room. Minor alterations include the dropped acoustical tiled ceiling and some sheet paneling. Local history relates that Mr. Roberson chose the name "Sunny Side" because of the sunlight that flooded into the room in the late morning and afternoon, but the Williamston Enterprise has advertisements just before the cafe opened, during the winter of 1930-1931, for a movie called "The Sunny Side," which may have
Sunny Side Inn
Martin County, North Carolina

played a part in the name.

The oyster bar (ca. 1935-1940) is a walled-off narrow, rectangular room directly behind the rear, east wall of current waiting room. The floor joists in the oyster bar are directly on the ground, making it necessary for customers to step down into the room. The U-shaped bar, restored during a recent rehabilitation, dominates the room. Surrounding the bar are wooden stools, many of which are original to the oyster bar, and painted a lacquered green and white, echoing the green-and-white of the beaded-board, tongue-and-groove sheathed walls. Behind the metal bar is the shuckers' station; the shuckers' side of the bar has an aluminum trough all around for easy cleaning, and a plywood floor covered with cedar shavings to catch any stray oyster juice. The use of cedar shavings, a practice outlawed some time ago by the health department, is allowed in the historic oyster bar under a grandfather clause. According to local history, the oyster bar was opened in 1935; the first documentation of its existence, however, was the announcement by Theodore Roberson's sons, George and C.T., that the "Sunny Side Oyster Bar" was, as of November 1945, open for business with steamed oysters the specialty of the house. It is probable that the oyster bar gradually came about in the mid-1930s as a way to supplement the cafe business and in response to seasonal demand for oysters.

The original complex of steaming and storage outbuildings immediately east of the Sunny Side was torn down in 1993, due to its condition, and replaced by a small, side-gable cement block building that houses an oyster steamer, washing pit, boiler, and storage area. The building is simple and unobtrusive. When an order is placed in the oyster bar, the shuckers go to this building to give the orders to the steamer, who hands over the requested oysters in a metal pail -- a process identical to what occurred in the original steamer outbuilding. The steamer itself is the same one used by the oyster bar since the 1940s.
Sunny Side Inn
Williamston, Martin County, N.C.

Statement of Significance

The Sunny Side Oyster Bar is historically significant for two reasons: First, it is an authentic, well-maintained and well-preserved early twentieth-century eastern North Carolina oyster bar; and, second, it is a good example of a small town early-to-mid-twentieth-century cafe/oyster bar, built in the days before franchise restaurants and fast-food chains. The Sunny Side Oyster Bar is, therefore, eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C for its unique architectural integrity, and also under Criterion A for its view into an equally unique history, that of oyster bars in eastern North Carolina in the early twentieth century.

The Sunny Side building, on its original site on the old Washington highway, is markedly similar to documentary photographs of period oyster bars, oyster bar/barbecue stands, and detached frame eating houses, nearly all of which have vanished from rural and small town North Carolina. The Sunny Side, in addition, represents a significant chapter in the American love affair with the oyster, an affair that often bordered on the obsessive, from the seventeenth-century "oyster war" between the Maryland and Virginia colonies to the later nineteenth-century plundering of the Pamlico Sound by Chesapeake oystermen. The ritual of oyster consumption, a common sight in the northeastern cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, where the food writer, M.F.K. Fisher, describes oysters served "on a plate of shaved ice, with small round white crackers in a bowl or vase (Fisher, p: 64);" became a less elaborate ritual in the South. Here, a diner enjoyed an informal intimacy in surroundings and ritual. In a simply finished room lit by an exposed light bulb or a fluorescent tube, all the pleasure is in the ritual and the oysters themselves, as opposed to the decor; the shucker expertly flipping oysters from the shell into a small dish and conversing easily on sports or the weather, while strangers seated all around the bar with their oysters, crackers, and beer might well become friends. Later, there might even be dancing in the front room. This simpler form of entertainment in humble surroundings is given a heightened sense of pleasure because of the seasonal aspect of oysters; six
months out of the year, the oyster bar will be closed, waiting for Fall. In its sixty-four years as a cafe and grocery, occasional fireworks depot, and oyster bar, the Sunny Side has retained its exterior and interior integrity, and its original unpretentious quality.

Of the approximately sixteen oyster bars that flourished and perished in the eastern towns of Williamston, Plymouth, Rocky Mount, Tarboro, Greenville, New Bern and Wilson between 1931 and 1950, the Sunny Side is the only one which has survived to the present day. Since Theodore Roberson opened his "lunch room" next to his meat market in January 1931, the Sunny Side has been a convivial gathering place for local residents and a pilgrimage spot for oyster lovers from Ahoskie, Greenville, Raleigh, Edenton, southeastern Virginia, and places further afield.

**Historical Background and Social History Context**

Oysters rapidly emerged as a gastronomic delicacy in colonial America. The Swedish traveler Peter Kalm wrote in 1748 of the exceptional quality of oysters in Philadelphia and, particularly, New York City; "Oysters here are reckoned very wholesome," Kalm noted, adding that "some people assured us that they had not felt the least inconvenience after eating a considerable quantity of them (Kalm, 126)." In Samuel Wood's *Cries of New York, 1808-1814*, there is mention of the "many oyster stands in the city, where black men are ready with some of the finest oysters, which they open and serve out raw from one to three cents a piece."

Oyster cellars opened in the basements of Philadelphia townhouses, and the docks and waterfront of New York and Boston had their share of oyster saloons (rather than cellars) into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Initially, according to John F. Watson's 1830 *Annals of Philadelphia*, the oyster cellars in that city were "entirely managed by blacks, and did not include gentlemen among their visitors [sic.]" (Watson, 220). Nine years later, Francis J. Grund's American diary compares the oyster cellars in Philadelphia and New York; overall, Philadelphia's reputedly "elegant" cellars, he wrote,
"are mostly kept by white men" and that ownership of the New York oyster cellars was quickly turning from African Americans to whites (Grund, 280). A print of an 1830s oyster cellar in Philadelphia indicates these establishments were not exactly genteel. Booths alongside the front window were curtained, whether for privacy or anonymity; the patrons at the oyster stand, all white men, appear slightly furtive and disreputable. A bar in the niche between the entrance and wall is run by a white man, but the oyster shucker is an African-American. All in all, it appears to be a nineteenth-century version of what would today be called a "dive."

In 1849, railroads began shipping oysters packed in ice to inland cities such as Buffalo and Chicago; where there were no railroads, horse-drawn wagons brought oysters inland (Root, 135). By the 1880s, hungry eyes were looking south to North Carolina's "great Pamlico Sound, with its wonderful oyster bed" (Nowitzky, 206). Norfolk and Baltimore became major oyster processing centers, shipping most of their product to northern cities. According to Gary Dunbar's study of the North Carolina oyster industry, Virginian oystermen freely plundered the waters of the Pamlico for "spat" (or young oysters) in the late 1880s, thereby revitalizing their own oyster stocks (Dunbar, 86). Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps reveal that oyster canneries and smaller oyster packing houses were a dominant feature of the 1890s and early 1900s townscapes of Beaufort, Elizabeth City, Morehead City, Washington, and New Bern, North Carolina. The major oyster dealer in New Bern at the end of the nineteenth century was George Ives, a strong advocate for North Carolina's early oyster industry. Belhaven had the Montgomery and Makely packing house and Washington had the J.S. Farrow and Company Canning Factory in 1901.

New Bern and Elizabeth City appear to be the first towns in North Carolina with oyster-eating establishments. Lack of firm documentary evidence, however, precludes definitely stating that these establishments were oyster bars as known today. Raleigh also had establishments offering oysters in season (for health reasons, oysters were traditionally consumed between September and April) like the Moseley House at 124 Fayetteville Street in

*A copy of this print was sent to me by Dell Upton, who did not list a citation; until I find out otherwise, I'm assuming it's from Francis Grund's Aristocracy in America.
the 1880s. A circa 1900 photograph of Elizabeth City's Episcopal Church on Fearing Street includes a sign for a nearby oyster saloon. In 1880, New Bern had Detrick's Restaurant and Billiard Parlor at the corner of Pollock and Middle Streets, which advertised "Oysters In Every Style" as part of its menu. There was also a short-lived oyster saloon at 45 1/2 Middle Street in 1898, as well as oysters in season at the Norfolk and Southern Railroad's Lunch Room. It is possible that the other restaurants on Middle Street below Front Street, New Bern's oyster and fish market center until the 1930s, were oyster bars; an unattributed photograph, circa 1900, in a 1960 New Bern tour guide brochure of the Middle Street docks shows a sign on the west side of the dock labeled "Restaurant -- Oysters of All Kinds."

The oyster saloons in New Bern and Elizabeth City were in the tradition common to cities farther north such as Baltimore and New York. But there was a spontaneous factor, also common to the docks of northeastern urban centers, that prefigured the oyster-eating establishments to come later in North Carolina. A circa 1900 photograph in the Craven County Public Library's collection shows a group of African American and white children thronged around a Middle Street photograph gallery -- and a small African American boy, posing just in front of them with a tray of oysters in his hand (Acc. No. 21-23). It was then a common practice that oyster shuckers would proffer raw and steamed oysters to passers by on the docks (Fearing, 3/95 interview). The informality and guilty pleasures of eating oysters in the open air continued in these riverside towns, according to Fred Fearing of Elizabeth City, into the 1930s.

This informal, spontaneous form of dockside dining had a counterpart in eastern North Carolina's early twentieth-century cafes. In the 1933 Beaufort County Directory, there are two illustrations of "sandwich shops" in Washington, NC -- Togo's Sandwich Shoppe at Charlotte Street and the Shore View on East Main Street. Togo's Sandwich Shoppe, a side-gabled, one-story log bungalow, had a front-gable porch and two timber-frame outbuildings, one a pavilion and the other an open shed with a chimney grill visible. The Shore View is depicted as a plain one-story, side-gable building with a rear shed extension -- and an open side deck, all with a view of the Pamlico River. Another similar cafe (but not illustrated) of the time in Washington was the Ed Hassell Cafe at South Market Street, which
advertised "Oysters. Barbecue. Short orders and regular meals."

Theodore Roberson's Sunny Side Inn was, although not on a river front, very much in the spirit of a less formal dining atmosphere in tune with the needs of a small town/rural North Carolina community. Roberson, listed in the 1920 U.S. Census Report as a forty year-old proprietor of a grocery store, married, and with three small children, bought a tract of land from Lovette Biggs Harrison near the Skewarkey Primitive Baptist Church in 1929, where he built a meat market (Harrison> Annie L. Roberson: Deed. Martin County Register of Deeds, Book D-3, p. 426, September 26, 1929). The stock market crash one month later affected Roberson, like many small businessmen; he took out an ad in the Williamston Enterprise on December 31st, thanking his customers for their business but emphasizing "Business conditions compel me to sell only for -- Cash Next Year." A little over a year later, Roberson took out another ad in the Enterprise on January 27, 1931, to announce the opening of a "New Lunch Room -- Sunny Side Inn" on Thursday, January 29. The opening celebration was to include a dinner of turkey, barbecue, brunswick stew, and "sea foods" for seventy-five cents. Deciding to open a lunch room could have either have stemmed from a need to make ends meet for his growing family, or to capitalize upon his successful grocery business. Four years later, Roberson is said to have added the oyster bar in an addition at the back of the lunch room. Roberson further diversified his small mercantile establishment by selling fireworks at the Sunny Side during the 1934 and 1935 Christmas seasons.

Williamston residents have recalled that Theodore Roberson did not get his oysters from the local North Carolina markets but, instead, from Virginia. This has not been verified, but conditions of the time make it probable; in the 1930s, the Virginia oyster industry, as well as its general seafood industry, was more sophisticated and extensive. In 1931, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce's 1933 Statistical Abstract of the United States, North Carolina's overall seafood harvest was approximately 98,000 pounds but Virginia's came to 226,637 pounds. Norfolk and Portsmouth had seven major seafood wholesale distributors in 1931 and, apart from a 1925 quarantine due to an outbreak of typhoid fever, the oyster industry had steadily grown stronger in the Virginia and Maryland area while the stock in New Jersey and Delaware Bay waters was attacked by
parasitic "oyster drills." Paul Titlow, a writer for the Atlantic Fisherman trade periodical, noted in 1933 that Norfolk's "oyster shipments in a single week [in November 1933] from near-by packing houses reached a total valuation of $50,000." (Titlow, 12) Within the industry, there was great concern that oyster prices remain stable "in order that those in the business may not show a list to the loss side", and smaller dealers could remain in business (Sandusky 1931, 9). The trucking industry increased oyster sales, much in the way transporting oysters by railroad or wagon had one hundred years before. In 1934, Curtis Sandusky reported to the Atlantic Fisherman that "Virginia oysters, taken from beds in the Rappahannock River near Urbanna, are now being served in homes and restaurants in Dayton, Ohio, and it is probable that when present plans are completed, a number of trucks will be in constant service carrying bivalves to cities of the Middle West" (Sandusky 1934, 12).

An article on the front page of the November 27, 1931, issue of the Williamston Enterprise quoted H.F. Prytherch, the Director of the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries' station at Beaufort, NC, as saying, "It will not be long before much of the bottoms of the inland waterway in this State will be planted in oysters, as much of the area through which it passes is admirably suited to oyster growing." Three years later in 1934, the Atlantic Fisherman reported that Prytherch's efforts to recultivate the North Carolina waters were well under way, but oysters from the small town of Belhaven were already gaining popularity; J.H. Ward's Market in Williamson, NC, advertised "We now have fine Belhaven Oysters. They are fresh and fine," in 1932. A month later, the Enterprise reported on its front page that "an employee of George N. Baker, Belhaven oyster dealer," had been apprehended in Charleston, SC, for selling Baker's oysters and pocketing the money himself. The felon was one of Baker's truck drivers; according to the story, he had sold nearly all the oysters in his shipment and abandoned the truck in Williamson, where he "asked a worker in the cafe here to call the owner and tell him where the truck was." The cafe is not identified in the article.

The growth of the oyster industry in North Carolina and the popularity of informal barbecue/oyster stands spelled competition for the Sunny Side Inn. Its most flamboyant early competitor was Greenville's Yum Yum Barbecue Palace, located north of the Tar River Bridge on Greene Street. It would have
been, at that time, about an hour's drive from Williamston. On December 18, 1931, J.W. Clark ran an ad in the Enterprise announcing that "Cards will be thrown from aeroplane Sunday, December 19, on Main Street, Williamston," entitling the lucky recipients to a free airplane ride after a meal at the Yum Yum Palace. The menu at the Yum Yum consisted of "barbecue, brunswick stew, slaw," and "oysters all styles," and dances were also held there. A competitor closer to the Sunny Side's doorstep emerged with Mickey's Place (later Mickey's Inn) in the fall of 1935. Mickey's Place, located on the Everett highway one mile from Williamston (across from Martin Community College), advertised itself as a "little colony" complete with steamed oysters, homemade barbecue, "drinks, and other miscellaneous items sold at modern filling stations and lunch stands." Two years later, now advertised as Mickey's Inn, business was apparently healthy; "an unlimited supply of fireworks" for the Christmas and New Year's holidays was listed, along with "Drinks of All Kinds and DeMais Sandwiches" and, prominently centered, "Dancing and Oysters." There is a documentary photograph of Mickey's Inn, circa 1937, in the Martin Community College Library collection; the building itself, a frame one-story, side-gable store, was modest and comparable in style to the Sunny Side. Another photograph in the library's collection features a Williamston Gulf station with a small cement block rear addition with "Hot Barbecue -- Oysters in Season" painted directly on the facade, a further indication of the growing popularity of oyster dining in the region.

These documented oyster/barbecue stands, now either gone or significantly altered, give a sense of what these places were like: small frame or concrete block structures, unpretentious in appearance, and often a bit tumbledown. They reveal an interesting dichotomy in the 1930s and 1940s oyster industry's promotion of its product. A 1934 editorial in the Atlantic Fisherman extolled the nutritional value of the oyster and its potential to become a family foodstuff on the plateau occupied by chicken, pork, or fish. On the other hand, there are the oyster bars and oyster/barbecue stands of eastern North Carolina with their advertised connotations of spicy barbecue, warm steamed oysters, drinks (after Prohibition was repealed), and dancing; while the oyster/barbecue establishments were frequented by respectable people and were not dens of iniquity, neither were they, by nature of their sensual connotations, considered clean family fun.
Between 1930 and 1954, seventeen oyster bars or oyster/barbecue stands have been documented in eastern North Carolina, and there were probably more; the fifteen other documented oyster bars, which were located in Rocky Mount, Plymouth, Williamston, Greenville, Wilson, Raleigh, New Bern, and Tarboro, no longer exist. One exception, besides the Sunny Side, is Cliff's Oyster Bar (now Cliff's Seafood Restaurant and Oyster Bar), which was established in the early 1950s by Clifton Whitehurst outside of Greenville, North Carolina. It is interesting that these cities are, for the most part, inland.

The seafood restaurants in the Morehead City and Beaufort area were comparatively more sedate than these inland barbecue/oyster establishments. There were cafes comparable to Mickey's Inn or the Juniper Lodge (Plymouth, NC, 1944-1946) in the area, particularly Stanley's on Route 70 east of Morehead City between 1939 and 1941. Local ordinances on the sale of beer and restaurants serving beer, however, indicate that the citizens of Beaufort and Morehead City preferred restrictions on alcohol. In 1938, Ted Garner and Tony Seamon rented an old fish house from Charles Wallace, an established local fish and oyster wholesale merchant on the Morehead City's waterfront, with the understanding that "no beer would be sold and no drinking [would] take place" (Morehead City, 108). The original Sanitary Fish Market seated twenty people; by the 1970s, as the tourist industry continued to expand in the Morehead City area, the restaurant's "new" building (circa 1949) east of its original site seated over 500 customers (ibid, 109). Captain Headen "Bill" Ballou, in turn, renovated an old fish house on the Morehead City waterfront in 1941 into an officer's club and, in 1945, "Capt. Bill's Waterfront Restaurant" (ibid., 106). Unlike the majority of the inland oyster bars, these restaurants were self-sufficient in terms of seafood produce. They were also more conventional restaurants, which offered full meals and catered especially to young families.

The Sunny Side was in the Roberson family for just over sixty years, except for a brief interlude in the early 1940s. On July 2, 1943, the Williamston Enterprise announced "The Reopening of Sunny Side Inn, Operating Under New Management"; Geraldine Moore, the new proprietress, advertised chicken and steak dinners. Apparently, this venture was not very successful because the Sunny Side Inn metamorphosed into the "Traveler's Rest Cafe" just a year later. Mr. and Mrs. Mayo Matthews
advertised the bill of fare as including "Vegetable Dinners", steak, chicken, and seafood. By November 1945, however, the Sunny Side was either back in the Roberson family, or back in the management of the Roberson family, and remained so until 1993. In those ensuing years, C.T. Roberson ran the oyster bar during the months between October to April; his other source of income was the C.T. Roberson Tire Company at 905 Washington Street, which he sold in 1977. Annie L. Roberson, Theodore Roberson's widow, deeded the Sunny Side property to her son, C.T., in 1964 (Roberson>Roberson: Deed, Martin County Register of Deeds, Book R-7, page 152, October 22, 1964). In 1993, the Robersons leased the Sunny Side to a group of local investors, who have carefully restored the exterior and sensitively rehabilitated the interior.

The Sunny Side Oyster Bar's survival as a business and distinctive example of an early twentieth-century cafe and oyster bar is due largely to the tenacity of both the Robersons and the loyal following the Sunny Side acquired over the years, who have appreciated the original simple finish and furniture of the place and have, by their patronage, ensured that it remain thus. But the Sunny Side Oyster Bar's survival is remarkable, because of both the transient nature of oyster bars and oyster/barbecue stands and because of the conscribed season that is peculiar to oyster bars, which makes it a unique and not always lucrative business.
Architectural Context

The Sunny Side Oyster Bar (historically known as the Sunny Side Inn) is the only one of seventeen known or documented oyster bars/barbecue-oyster bar establishments built in eastern NC between 1930 and 1955 that has continuously been a cafe/oyster bar. It is only one of three known buildings that has retained its original exterior and interior appearance. There is enough documentation, among photographs, directory citations, newspaper articles, town maps, and oral histories, to piece together an approximation of the material and form of these early-to-mid-twentieth century oyster bars and the Sunny Side Oyster Bar's place in this family of buildings. This approximation will not be identical to the Sunny Side, but it will be close enough to validate how the Sunny Side is part of this picture -- and possibly the lone survivor of an early twentieth-century authentic small-town oyster bar in coastal North Carolina.

The locations of oyster bars have contributed to their being difficult to document. Many of the known oyster bars or oyster bar/barbecue restaurants built during this period were located outside of town limits. This may have been one reason why beer and wine were available at them, and, conversely, that their location could have been deliberate. The following is a list of oyster bars in the area located outside of the respective town limits:

- Sunny Side Oyster Bar*  Williamston, NC  near Hwy. 17 [1931]
- Mickey's Inn*  Williamston, NC  on Everettts Hwy [1935]
- Juniper Lodge  Plymouth, NC  Hwy 64, e. of town [1944-46]
- Respess Barbecue*  Greenville, NC  Greene St., over Tar River bridge [1930-1960s]
- Cliff's Oyster Bar*  Greenville, NC  Hwy. 264, e. of town [1953]
- Port Terminal Inn  Greenville, NC  Hwy. 264, e. of town [1947-1949]
**An additional oyster bar, now demolished, was in the Greenville, North Carolina, city limits -- the Oyster House at 101 Short Street (1944-1946), which was briefly May's Oyster House in the late 1950s. Citations exist in the Greenville City Directories, the *Daily Reflector* (Greenville, NC), and there are documentary photographs of the building/s in the 1960s as well as documentation from the Sanborn City Maps.**

Of these building complexes, most apparently originally had their oyster bars separate from their other eating facilities. The original Mickey's Inn complex, operated by S.J. Dickson in the 1940s, was located on the north side of what is now Highway 13-64, about one and a half miles west of the Highway 17 junction. Three of the surviving buildings include the gas station/cafe, facing Highway 13-64; the Dickson's house, a small frame single-pile two-story simple Craftsman side gable with a one-story rear ell; and the oyster bar, now rehabilitated into a residence but still retaining its original frame exterior (front-gable, three-bay, one-story vernacular Craftsman cottage), interior brick flue, six-over-two, and four-light windows. The rear shed ell is thought to be original, and where the oysters were stored and possibly steamed. There are still mounds of oyster shells around the lot. There is also a 1946 record of the Virginia Electric and Power Company (VEP CO)'s easement with the Dicksons to construct a pole line on the Mickey's Inn property. This easement describes the lot as containing "one store, one residence, and one oyster bar." A photograph, not dated (but apparently pre-1945), in the Francis Manning Collection at Martin Community College shows the Mickey's Inn Complex -- the residence, the store just barely, and two of the tourist cabins that were on site in the 1930s. Unfortunately, a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dixie Inn</td>
<td>Wilson, NC</td>
<td>Jct. Routes 22 and 40</td>
<td>[1931]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanley's Cafe</td>
<td>Morehead City, NC</td>
<td>Hwy 70, w. of Morehead City</td>
<td>[1939-41]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purifoy's Oyster Bar</td>
<td>Rocky Mt., NC</td>
<td>1333 Tarboro Street</td>
<td>[1950-1963]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = Buildings are still standing
car is blocking the oyster bar, but a large wooden sign where the bar was apparently reads "OYSTERS".

Another oyster bar was located at the Respess Brothers Barbecue Restaurant and Oyster Bar (now Pirates' Galley) in Greenville, between the 1930s and 1960s. The former Respess Brothers' restaurant was originally the Yum-Yum Barbecue Palace in 1930-1931. It is not known how the Yum-Yum actually looked. The earliest documentary photograph of the Respess Brothers Restaurant found to date is from 1960, and shows the building much as it appears today: a long concrete block side gable building with a center entrance sheltered by an attached hipped-roof porch supported by two posts over piers. A closer inspection reveals that, on either side of the porch, the building appears to be different; on the south side are three paired one-over-one sash windows, but on the north side, which has a side entrance, the three windows are nine-light metal casement windows. Greenville natives who went to Respess in the 1940s and 1950s have recalled that they entered the building at the side entrance, and the oyster bar was to the left, upon entering (Howard, 1995).

From this documentation, it can be deduced that the rear oyster bar at the Sunny Side Inn (later the Sunny Side Oyster Bar) was the normal practice, if the oyster bar itself was not detached altogether. It can also be deduced that these establishments tended to be simple, straightforward, frame or block early-to-middle twentieth-century structures with little exterior or interior decoration that were generally located on the edge of town, if not out in the country. That the Sunny Side is incredibly well-preserved and intact when so many of these once-popular restaurants are no longer in existence makes it, truly, a rare example of this early twentieth-century eating establishment.
Urban documented oyster bars in eastern North Carolina are, as follows:

Detrick's Restaurant [1880] New Bern, NC Pollock & Middle
Union Station [1880s] New Bern, NC
"oyster saloon" [1898] New Bern, NC 45 1/2 Middle St.
"oyster saloon" [1900] New Bern, NC Middle St., W. side
Railroad Lunch Room [1908] New Bern, NC N&S Passenger Station
John B. Watson [1920-21] New Bern, NC 2 Middle Street
Bee Jay Oyster Bar [1937] New Bern, NC 73 Broad Street
Bowden's Oyster Bar [1937] New Bern, NC 27 Middle Street
Beacon Oyster Bar [1937] New Bern, NC not known
Bowden's Oyster Bar [1941] New Bern, NC 46 Middle St.
Hamilton's Cafe [1941] New Bern, NC S. Front St. at Trent River Bridge
Dixie Inn, Inc. [1950s] Raleigh, NC 3625 Hillsborough St.
It is not known if any of these urban buildings are still standing or are still recognizable as oyster bars or restaurants with oyster bars.
Sunny Side Inn
Bibliography

Primary Sources

Butchko, Thomas, Survey File on Sunny Side Oyster Bar for National Register nomination for Williamston, NC, 1994


Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Company Maps for North Carolina: Elizabeth City, Belhaven, Washington, Beaufort, Morehead City, New Bern, Williamston, Greenville (1880s-1930s)

Bransons Directories, 1869 - 1897. Raleigh, NC


City Directories, 1880-1955:

Beaufort County, North Carolina


Greenville, North Carolina


Miller’s Greenville, NC City Directory, 1938-1939. (pp 295, 293)
Sunny Side Inn

Bibliography

Miller's Greenville, NC City Directory, 1940-1941. (pp 294, 297, back cover)

Greenville (NC) City Directory, 1944-1945. Asheville: Charles Miller, 1944 (pp 313, back cover)

1967

1973

New Bern, North Carolina

Charles Emerson and Company's Newbern, NC, City Directory for 1880-1881. Raleigh: Edwards, Broughton and Co., Printers and Binders, 1880 (pp. 1, 120, 121)

Business Directory of the City of New Berne, NC, 1893 (pp. 64, 69, 74, 76, 79)

New Bern, NC, City Directory. Richmond: Hill Directory Company, 1904 (pp. 184, 203)

New Bern, NC, City Directory, 1907-1908 (pp 186, 200)

New Bern, NC, City Directory, 1911-1912 (pp 192)

New Bern, NC, City Directory, 1918-1919 (p 37)

New Bern, NC, City Directory, 1920-1921 (pp 51, 72)

New Bern, NC, City Directory, 1926 (pp 265, 288)


New Bern City Directory, 1941 (pp 382, 399)

Bibliography

Raleigh, North Carolina


Rocky Mount, North Carolina


Williamston, North Carolina


Secondary Sources:

Sunny Side Inn

Bibliography


Grund, Francis J., Aristocracy in America From The Sketch-Book of A German Nobleman (Vol. 1 and 2). London: Richard Bentley, 1839 [Reference courtesy Dell' Upton, University of California at Berkeley].


Sunny Side Inn
Bibliography


Prescriptive Sources

[Elizabeth City, NC] Elizabeth City, North Carolina, 1905 [pamphlet with advertisements]


Sunny Side Inn
Bibliography

Periodicals

**Atlantic Fisherman**, Boston MA (1920 -1931); Manchester, NH (1932-1936)


——, January 1925, Vol. 5, No. 12. "Oyster Ban Severe Blow To Industry" (p 16)

——, March 1925, Vol. 6, No. 2 (p. 16)

——, November 1925, Vol. 6, No. 10 (p. 16)


——, January 1931, Vol. 11, No. 2 (p. 15)

——, February 1931, Vol. 12, No. 1 (p. 10)

——, April 1931, Vol. 12, No. 3 (pp 24-26)

——, May 1931, Vol. 12, No. 4 (p. 14)


——, February 1933, Vol. 14, No. 1 (p 15)

——, Titlow, Paul, "Virginia Sees Improvement In Seafood Business." December 1933, Vol. 14, No. 11 (p. 12)
Sunny Side Inn

Bibliography

Curtis, Sandusky, "Virginia Oyster Prices Rise." March 1934, Vol.15, No. 2 (p. 14)


Newspapers

Beaufort, North Carolina, The Beaufort News (1939-1945)

Greenville, North Carolina, Daily Reflector (1930-1946)


Plymouth, North Carolina, The Roanoke Beacon (1944-1945)


Williamston, North Carolina, The Enterprise (1929-1949)
Sunny Side Inn
Bibliography

Interviews

Dr. Kathryn Carter, Telephone Interview [High Point, N.C.], December 12, 1994.


Fred Fearing, Telephone Interview [Elizabeth City, N.C.], February, 1995.


Nathan Mizelle, Interview [Williamston, N.C.], June 1, 1995.


Ms. Daphne Richardson, Telephone Interview [Greenville, N.C.], August 17, 1995.

Register of Deeds


____, D-3, 426: L.B. Harrison > Annie L. Roberson, Deed, September 26, 1929 [Lot].

____, R-7, 152: Annie L. Roberson > Charles Tilghman Roberson, Deed, October 22, 1964 [Sunny Side Oyster Bar].

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries for the Sunny Side Oyster Bar are as drawn on the attached survey plat of the property prepared for William L. and Ann T. Ritter by Roanoke Land Surveying in August, 1993. ("Tract I" on survey plat).

North:  S 58°33'01"E
South:  N 59°10'52" W
East:  S 36°32'12"W
West:  N 33°07'14"E

Tract I is bordered on its north side by "Tract II", an undeveloped lot; on its south side by Nancy-R. Lilley's property; on its east by property belonging to the Motor Inns of Carolina; and on its west by Washington Street.

Boundary Justification

The above boundaries listed encompass all of the lot historically associated with the Sunny Side Inn.
Announcing Opening

New Lunch Room

Sunny Side Inn

THURSDAY NIGHT
January 29th

I wish to announce that my new lunch room, "Sunny Side Inn," will be opened for business on Thursday night at 7:30 o'clock.

For this special occasion, I have prepared a very special dinner which will be served for the small cost of 75 cents per plate. The opening dinner will consist of turkey, barbecue, brunswick stew and sea foods.

This is a special invitation to all. Your presence and patronage will be appreciated. Don't forget the opening date—Thursday Night, January 29th

Theo. Roberson, Mgr.

"The Home of Good Eats"
MINISTRY

Attending Conference
Mrs. Mary Seabolt, Mrs. George Harrison, Mrs. T. B. Brandon and Mrs. Claude Goodson are attending extension service conference in Raleigh this week.

Visits Grandmother
Mrs. Emma Seabold of Louisburg College spent the week-end in Eroves with her grandmother.

Simpson More Back To Home
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Simpson have moved back to their home on Watts Street, following two years spent in the service by Mr. Simpson.

Secure Marriage License
A marriage license was issued in the county last Saturday to James Minor and Hilda Hopewell, both of Oak City.

GOOD NEWS
For Folks With Sniffles

Head Colds
Quick relief from distress of head colds is provided by Vicks VA-TRO-NOL. This powerful expectorant relieves congestion and stuffy sinuses. It is prescribed by doctors. It is pleasant and safe to use. Children’s drops or syrup for infants.

VICKS VA-TRO-NOL

“SUNNY SIDE
OYSTER BAR”
NOW OPEN

Service From 6 P.M. To Midnight

Steamed Oysters Our Specialty

We extend to you and your friends a cordial welcome to visit us.

George and C. T. Roberson
Highway No. 17 — Williamson

I N S U R A N C E

Office and Storage, Located in the

Carolina

— We Pay —

HIGHEST MARKETS

Be sure to see or check before you sell your

We Pay Drainage To Our Telephone

Gurganous &
Roy Gurganous, Ur
Rossell Roper
Williamston, N.C.

Glass To Beautify Your
We can furnish ready to install with screws

DOOR MIRRORS (Fall Leaf)
MANTLE MIRRORS
WALL MIRRORS
Easy to install. Send us your measurements for a quotation.

MIRRORED TABLE PLACER
Size 18" x 18" with octagon or inverted corners.

FURNITURE AND DESKTOPS
Any pattern, polished edges protect your furniture and will match your pattern or measurements.

ARTCRAFT GLASS CO.
1710 South Ave. — Box 8
Rocky Mount, N. C.
SUNNY SIDE INN
Martin County, NC
(Exhibit E)

A PHILADELPHIA OYSTER CELLAR, c. 1830

Print List Entry 290

From F. Grund, Aristocracy in America (vol. 2)
SUNNY SIDE INN
Martin County, NC
(Exhibit F)

Jones, from 12 Caton Woodville p'tg 1898

Tobbin in an Oyster Cellar

LC-USZ62-36094
SUNNY SIDE INN
Martin County, NC
(Exhibit A)