NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Belvidere Plantation House

AND/OR COMMON
Merrick-Nixon House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
East side Sr 1565, 2.1 miles Northeast of Junction with US 17,
0.5 mile from road

CITY, TOWN
Hampstead

STATE
North Carolina

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNER SHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

_DISTRICT
_PUBLIC
_X_UNOCCUPIED

_x_AGRICULTURE

_X_BUILDING(S)
_PRIVATE

_UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

_X_STRUCTURE
_BOTH

_WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

_SITE
_PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

_OBJECT
_IN PROCESS

_X_YES: RESTRICTED

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

_BEING CONSIDERED

_X_YES: UNRESTRICTED

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

_NO

军事

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Mrs. Ramsey Weathersbee, Jr.

STREET & NUMBER
1701 Country Club Road

CITY, TOWN
Wilmington

STATE
North Carolina

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Pender County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Burgaw

STATE
North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
N/A

DATE
N/A

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
N/A

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Determined eligible: NO
Belvidere plantation house is a one-story frame structure with plain-edge siding applied with square-headed cut nails (ca. 1810). The roof is formed of gambrels on the front (northeast) and rear (southwest). The lower slopes of the gambrels are faced with split-weatherboarding, an unusual feature seldom found in the state. The upper slopes of the roof are covered with corrugated metal. Two gable dormers pierce each gambrel where their slopes break.

Masonry is confined to slim piers and step-shouldered chimneys, none of which appear to be original. A shed porch across the front and shed rooms at the rear complete the three-bay exterior.

While much of the fabric of the front porch is not original, such as posts, balustrade and flooring, some unusual features of the early construction have been retained. The solid weatherboarded wall projections at each end of the front porch are noteworthy since they are a rare design feature of uncertain purpose.

The central entrance set in a plain beaded frame encloses a four-light transom and a door of six raised panels (the panels on the reverse side are flat). Flanking the door are 9/6 windows with wide muntins and much early glass. Two-panel shutters (now nailed to the wall in an opened position) are mounted on remnants of H-L hinges. The visible sides of the shutters have beveled panels.

The three-bay rear shed now encloses two rooms; the east bay was originally a piazza room with a two-bay open porch from which the staircase rose to the rooms above. Two 9/6 windows remain in the piazza room. The windows in the enclosed porch are 4/4 with wide vertical muntins and date stylistically to the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The two-bay southeast facade with its one-bay shed extension contains an early 6 panel door with flat panels, surmounted by a four-light transom. This entrance, now sheltered by a modern porch, probably opened across the side yard to a detached kitchen.

Separated from the door by a short section of weatherboards is a chimney of no identifiable bond and single stepped shoulders. Clues that lead one to believe that the chimney is not original are the inferior quality of the brick, the filler boarding to the right of the chimney and the fact that the shoulders are not paved. The 9/6 window to the right of the chimney (in the shed) is like those on the front facade.

The chimney on the northwest side of the house is like its counterpart on the southeast with the exception of having a stepped weathering and a higher shoulder. To the right of the chimney is a 9/6 sash and to the left is a door consisting of two flat panels below a six-light sash turned sideways. The door opening appears to have replaced an early window opening which matched that on the right of the chimney. The shed addition contains a 4/4 sash mentioned above.
The hall and parlor interior is augmented with transitional Federal-Greek Revival elements. The interior doors are 4-paneled with quarter round moldings. Several of the doors are woodgrained in a vernacular manner. The wainscoting is paneled below a flat chairrail and contains Greek Revival moldings that break the wainscoting into vertical sections. The walls above the chairrails are covered with horizontal tongue-and-groove boards. The applied moldings surrounding the doors and windows are simple oges except for the main doorway and those in the enclosed shed porch, which are square-in-section moldings.

The mantel in the hall is Greek Revival in detail. The three-part shelf is formed with a thin board supported by an ovolo molding which rests on a cavetto molding and Greek Revival mitered molding. The lintel above the fire opening is a graceful double-curved ogee.* The sides of the mantel are framed by pilasters containing flat paneled upper sections.

The mantel in the parlor is a replacement of an earlier mantel and consists of two wide vertical boards supporting a lintel of the same proportions. These are capped with a broad mantel shelf. The surrounding walls are covered with horizontal boarding, like the hall, but without a dado and chairrail. The ceiling of both rooms are tongue-and-groove boards.

Upstairs, the walls and ceilings are sheathed as below, except for the walls dividing the staircase from the double bedrooms. The dividing walls are vertically sheathed. Cuts in the ceilings just inside the bed rooms suggest that the walls were either moved towards the center of the house or were not originally installed. If the walls had earlier covered the cuts or joints, these would not have been seen as now. If there were not originally walls upstairs, the joints would simply read as butts along a common ceiling joist, the addition of walls raising the level of one section of ceiling slightly above the other.

The dormer openings are unusual in that the dormer heads are built at a 90° angle to the sloping gambrel and not at right angles to the ceiling. The windows in the upstairs rooms are 9/6 sash with wide muntins and early glass.

* Broken in the center by a flat, molded panel.
Belvidere Plantation House is an unusual example of a vernacular gambrel roof dwelling incorporating Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival elements, as well as retaining unique porch and roof features. Although its construction date is unknown, it was probably built in the first decade of the nineteenth century and provides a significant key to the architectural history of the area.

The area included in this nomination, as part of a farmstead dating back to 1728, is likely to yield information about eighteenth and nineteenth century plantation life and agricultural practices in the coastal area of Topsail Sound.
Belvidere Plantation is located near the vicinity of Hampstead adjacent to Topsail Sound in Pender County. It is a modest sized one-and-a-half story home whose construction date can possibly be placed early in the nineteenth century. The present structure may contain material from an earlier one which possibly existed on the property.

The Nixon House sits on land that was part of a 320 acre tract granted to Jeremiah Vail, Sr. in 1728. Vail was a prominent early settler in that region then part of Bath County. He was elected to the Assembly held in Edenton under Governor Sir Richard Everard in 1729. In his lifetime, Vail served in such capacities as deputy clerk of Council, a clerk of courts, and a juror. He was also contracted to survey Wilmington in 1743.

It is possible that Vail lived on the property for his name appears on the Moseley Map of 1733. An archaeological site indeed exists where such a house could have been located. Older residents recall the remains of a very old house in the field fronting the sound when they were young. This is the site where remains of colonial period ceramics and brick suggest an early structure existed there. Though referred to as a "slave house" by the Topsail elders, the site could have been the location of the Vail and/or Merrick home.

In 1759, Jeremiah Vail, Jr. sold 960 acres, including the 320 acre tract on which the present house sits, to George Merrick. Jeremiah Vail, Jr. seems to have been residing in New Bern at the time. He was the town representative for that borough in the 1753 and 1754 sessions of the colonial assembly.

George Merrick held extensive lands. Besides Belvidere (the name given to the tract acquired from Vail), Merrick owned Bell Farm and property on Whitehurst Creek. However, by the time of his death in 1806, he was living on the Belvidere tract.

Merrick could have resided at the old house site near the sound when he began construction of the present house further inland. The structure now standing is of Georgian-Federal transitional architecture which could allow for a construction date prior to 1806. George Merrick was a man of note in his community. Besides his vast land holdings which required a work force of eighty-seven slaves, he served on the Wilmington-New Hanover Committee of Safety from 1774 to 1776. In his will probated in 1806, Merrick devised to his great nephew George Merrick Leech, all the lands that he had purchased from Jeremiah Vail, Jr. Leech was the son of Joseph Leech of New Bern. His maternal grandparents were Jeremiah Vail, Sr. and Margaret Merrick Vail. Margaret was a sister of George Merrick, thus George Merrick Leech was named in honor of his great uncle whose land he inherited.

Leech's sister's name was Mary Jones Spaight who was the wife of Richard Dobbs Spaight, a former North Carolina Governor. Richard Dobbs Spaight, Jr., their son, would become a future governor. This is significant for George Merrick's will further stipulated that if "George Merrick Leech dies without a will, the lands and plantation of Belvidere [are] to go to the oldest son of Mary Jones Spaight." George Merrick Leech does not appear to have resided at Belvidere but lived out his life in Craven County finally dying intestate in New Bern in 1810. The conditions of George Merrick's will were carried out. The only
### Historical Significance

**Item Number:** 8  
**Page:** 2

Implicit change to the will seemed to indicate that Richard Dobbs Spaight, Jr., Margaret E. Donnell, and Charles G. Spaight, sister and brothers all got equal shares to the estate.18 There are no records proving that the Spaights, particularly Richard, Jr., ever lived on their plantation of Belvidere. In fact, records pertaining to Belvidere are practically nonexistent between the years 1810 and 1822.

In 1822, Richard D. Spaight, Jr. and his siblings sold two thirds of Belvidere to James Nixon. The remaining third was purchased later by Nixon in 1826 from Charles G. Spaight.19 The Nixon family remained in possession of the house until shortly after the mid-twentieth century. It was during their ownership that the house achieved its present form. Belvidere also reached its greatest prosperity under the Nixons. James Nixon was a planter.20 Married twice, he sired eight children, four of whom saw service in the Confederate Army.21 At his death in 1842, James Nixon's second wife, Henrietta, received dower rights to 500 acres including the house.22 She also received from her husband's estate rent from property described as "... the Old House Tract, 26 acres."23 This may refer to an earlier Vail-Merrick house located near the sound.

Henrietta Nixon continued to live in the home with her sons until her death in 1852.24 Benjamin Franklin Nixon was the last of the James Nixon heirs to live in the house.25 Benjamin had trouble managing the estate. At one point, with the consent of his remaining brothers, he mortgaged the family lands.26

In 1859, by two transactions, Benjamin and his brothers sold the house along with 780 acres to Susan Nixon, an aunt by marriage.27 Susan did not retain the tract long, for in 1861 she sold the home and 500 acres to her son, Robert C. Nixon, who moved into the structure.28

Besides raising a large family, Robert C. Nixon grew a variety of crops. In 1880 for example, on 150 improved acres he produced Indian Corn, cotton, potatoes, apples, and peaches. Wine also was made. The farm's estimated worth was $5,000.29 According to an on site archaeological survey, Robert C. Nixon may have been responsible for moving the house further inland. Artifact findings seem to indicate that this could have occurred around 1880. If so, the structure has remained at the 1880 site ever since.30

Robert C. Nixon died in 1891. Ruth Nixon, his widow, continued to manage the property. Their children, upon reaching the age of twenty-one were to inherit their individual share of their father's estate.31 Ruth Nixon lived until 1922. No division of the property was made during her lifetime.32

Robert A. Nixon's share of the division of R. C. Nixon's estate was lot number 2 totaling 100 acres and including the house.33 After his death in 1957, R. A. Nixon's property was put up for public sale on June 13, 1958, at which time Dr. Ransey Weathersbee, Jr. of New Hanover County was the highest bidder at $3,850.34 Dr. Weathersbee obtained the house along with 117.9 acres. In 1959, other Nixon heirs conveyed an additional 35 acres to Dr. Weathersbee.35

Mrs. Dorothy Weathersbee, Ransey Weathersbee's widow, is the present owner of the home by virtue of her husband's will in 1973.36 Mrs. Weathersbee now lives in Wilmington, and
the old home is currently being leased. The land surrounding the home is still active farmland.
FOOTNOTES


5 Reaves, *Nixon House Report*.


7 New Hanover County Deed Books (microfilm), Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, Deed Book D, 405, hereinafter cited as New Hanover County Deed Books.


12 New Hanover County Will Books (microfilm), Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, Will Book A and B, 139; *Nixon House Report*; McKoy, *Early New Hanover Records*, 26; New Hanover County Court Minutes (microfilm) Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, Book 2, 1797-1820, p. 127.

13 George Merrick Leach and Mary Jones Spaight Estate Papers, 1811, Craven County, Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

14 McKoy, *Early New Hanover County Records*, 156.


17. George Merrick. Leach and Mary Jones Spaight Estate Papers.

18. George Merrick Leach and Mary Jones Spaight Estate Papers; Reaves, Nixon House Report.


27. R. C. Nixon Estate Papers (Deeds); Reaves, Nixon House Report; New Hanover County Deed Book PP, 711.


32. R. C. Nixon Estate Papers (Map)

33. R. C. Nixon Estate Papers.

34. Pender County Deed Books (microfilm), Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, Deed Book 352, p. 4, hereinafter cited as Pender County Deed Books.

35. Pender County Deed Book 352, p. 358.

36. Pender County Index to Estates 1968-1976 (microfilm).
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY

152.9 acres

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING NORTHING
A [1,8] [25,5] [9,0] [3,8] [0,8] [3,7] B [1,8] [25,6] [2,1] [3,8] [0,8] [6,0]
C [1,8] [25,7] [2,4] [3,8] [0,7] [3,0] D [1,8] [25,16] [8,18] [3,8] [0,7] [0,21]

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Portion of land shown on Plat map surrounding the house and continuing to the Topsail Sound. See map outlined in red.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

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<th>CODE</th>
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FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE
Renee Gledhill-earley, Survey Specialist
Walter D. Best, Researcher

ORGANIZATION
Survey and Planning Branch
Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section

STREET & NUMBER
North Carolina Division of Archives and History
109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN
Raleigh

STATE
North Carolina

TELEPHONE
(919) 733-6545

DATE
April 9, 1981

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

DATE
April 14, 1982

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item number</th>
<th>BIBLIOGRAPHY</th>
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Belvidere Plantation House
(The R.C. Nixon House) near Topsail, N.C.

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First Floor
- Kitchen
- Bath
- Hall
- Parlor
- Front Porch

Second Floor
- Originally a Piazza Room
- Originally an Open Porch
- Originally a Window

---

NOT TO SCALE
E.F. Turberg, Del. 8/80.
SKETCH MAP
OF
NIXON PROPERTY

- Large oaks & suspected foundation
- Nixon Graveyards
- Prehistoric Site #1
- Mid-19th Century Homestead Prehistoric Site #2
- Suspected Graveyard Site
- Prehistoric Site #3
- Colonial Homestead Prehistoric Site #4
- Topsail Sound
- National Register Property Boundary