INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

X MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR THEROMATIC NOMINATION

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Webb-Barron-Wells House

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
E side SR 1512 .15 Mi. S of jct. w/Rt. 42

CITY, TOWN
Elm City

STATE
North Carolina

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PRIVATE

EDUCATIONAL

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

EDUCA TlONAl

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

STRUCTURE

IN PROCESS

YES RESTRICTED

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

BEING CONSIDERED

YES UNRESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

N/A

MILITARY

IN PROCESS

NO

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Elizabeth W. Romanek

STREET & NUMBER
P O Box 727

CITY, TOWN
Elm City

STATE
North Carolina

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE
Wilson County Courthouse

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Nash St.

STATE
North Carolina

6 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Káte Ohno, Preservation Consultant

ORGANIZATION
Survey & Planning Branch

DATE
August 23, 1982

TELEPHONE
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CITY OR TOWN
Wilson

STATE
North Carolina

NORTH CAROLINA
The best preserved and earliest documented example of a coastal cottage in Wilson County is the Webb-Barron-Wells House located on the eastern boundary of the county near the Edgecombe County line. The Webb-Barron-Wells House is located on the south side of Rt. 42 off a dirt road (SR 1512) on a 201.5 acre farm. The house, which is visible from the highway, is situated on a rise in a grove of mature trees. Cultivated fields separate the house from the highway.

The Webb-Barron-Wells House is a one-and-a-half story double pile frame coastal cottage which was probably built between 1793 and 1820. The bold sweep of the steeply pitched roofline and the off-center exterior end chimneys give this house distinction. The engaged porch shelters a three-bay facade, and the front wall of the house is flush-sheathed in contrast to the rest of the house which is weatherboarded. Although the porch posts are replacements the original dentil molding still ornaments the porch. The front door is flanked by two six-over-four windows. The same six-over-four windows are used throughout the first floor while two-over-two windows are used on the second floor. Of the two single-shoulder chimneys the one on the north elevation appears to be original, but it has been stuccoed while the chimney on the south elevation appears to date from the 1920s. A modern kitchen/dining room wing, circa 1949, is joined to the south elevation of the house by a screened-in breezeway. The pair of six-raised-panel doors at the rear of the house are an unusual feature in Wilson County.

The interior follows a basic two-room hall-and-parlor plan two rooms in depth. The original enclosed stair rising out of the hall was replaced in the 1920s by an open stair, but otherwise few alterations have been made to the interior. The first floor interiors are simply finished with plaster walls and feature flat panelled wainscot and handsomely molded three-part door and window surrounds. Both mantels are Federal in style. The parlor mantel has two flat panels surmounted by dentils and a molded mantel shelf. The other three-part mantel has fluted pilasters, a reeded central tablet in a chevron design, and a heavily molded mantel shelf. In contrast, the second floor consists of two small flush-sheathed rooms with board and batten doors.

A mixture of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century outbuildings still exist on the site, but none are contemporary with the house. Immediately behind the house are three frame one-story sheds and to the south of the house is the well. In a grove of trees to the front of the house are five frame and two log tobacco barns. Also located on the farm are two one-story frame packhouses, a one-story frame barn, a frame smokehouse, two turn-of-the-century frame tenant houses, five bulk barns and one mobile home. (See map enclosed).

The farm is still in agricultural use and soybeans and tobacco are grown on the property.
The structure, of course, is closely related to the surrounding environment. Archaeological remains, such as trash pits, wells, and structural remains, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the structure. Information concerning use patterns, social standing and mobility, as well as structural details are often only evident in the archaeological record. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structure. At this time no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is probable that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.
The Webb-Barron-Wells House, constructed sometime between 1793 and 1820, is the best preserved and earliest documented example of a traditional coastal cottage in present Wilson County. The one-and-a-half-story, double-pile frame structure, which is located on a farm presently totaling 201.5 acres, was built by either Richard Webb or his son "Long" John Webb, both of whom were early Edgecombe County farmers. The property changed hands several times during the mid-nineteenth century and was ultimately acquired in 1895 by Redmond Stanley Wells, one of the foremost merchants and civic leaders in the town of Toisnot (later Elm City). The house, inherited by Wells' son William Mercer in 1921, remains in the possession of Wells family heirs.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

A. Associated with the early settlement and agricultural development of the area presently comprising Wilson County

B. Associated with prosperous Edgecombe County farmers "Long" John Webb and Bolin B. Barron prior to the Civil War, the Webb-Barron-Wells House was acquired in later years by Redmond Stanley Wells, a prominent merchant and civic leader in the town of Toisnot (later Elm City).

C. The earliest known and most intact example of a coastal cottage in present Wilson County, the one-and-one-half story, double-pile Webb-Barron-Wells House displays the steeply pitched roofline, engaged front porch, and two-room hall and parlor plan typically associated with this traditional architectural form. Notable interior features include two Federal style mantels and original molded three-part door and window surrounds.
The Webb-Barron-Wells House was built by either Richard Webb or his son "Long" John Webb between 1793 and 1820. The style of the house and its interior appointments suggest a date closer to 1820 than to the late eighteenth century. As it stands today the Webb-Barron-Wells House is the oldest and most intact coastal cottage in Wilson County.

Both Richard and John Webb were Edgecombe County farmers. Little is known about Richard Webb except that he began to acquire property in 1785 and that in 1793 he purchased a 245 acre tract near the east prong of White Oak Swamp upon which the present house was built. No house is specifically mentioned in the 1793 deed from John Permenter to Richard Webb, but the clause "To have and to hold the said land and premises with the appurtenances" is included, suggesting that there might have been a house on the premises at the time, but the relationship of this possible structure to the present house is unknown and the acreage and sale price provide no clues.

Richard Webb is included in the 1820 census and at that time his household consisted of one male and one female aged forty-five or more, probably himself and his wife. He is not included in the 1830 census, so he probably died before that date. In 1811 Webb conveyed the former Permenter tract to his son, "Long" John Webb. This deed mentions the conveyance of "all houses, outhouses..." already situate on the property creating the impression that the property did include such structures at this date. Again, the relationship of these structures to the present house is undocumented.

"Long" John Webb was born circa 1785 and he married a woman named Annie (maiden name unknown) circa 1811. Twelve children were born of this union. Annie Webb died prior to 1848 and Webb probably remarried after her death but his second wife's name is unknown. Webb married Mary A. J. Burriss, his third wife, on February 21, 1848, but apparently no children were born of this relatively short-lived union.

Webb continued to acquire land in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and by 1850 he was a prosperous farmer owning 1,800 acres of land of which 400 acres was cultivated. His farm was valued at $2,700.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES
Edgecombe County Deeds, Edgecombe County, N. C.
Wilson County Deeds, Wilson County, N. C.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 201.5 acres
UTM REFERENCES See continuation sheet also.

ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING
---|---|---
A | 1,8 | 2,5,1,19,3,0 | 3,9,6,0,6,0
B | 1,8 | 2,5,2,7,8,0 | 3,9,6,1,3,4,0
C | 1,8 | 2,5,3,0,6,0 | 3,1,6,0,6,0
D | 1,8 | 2,5,3,2,0,0 | 3,5,5,9,8,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
Property being nominated is outlined in red on the enclosed planimetric map.
and he owned twelve slaves. His livestock consisted of six horses, six milk cows, two oxen, fifty-two other cattle, thirty sheep and 100 swine. His major crop was Indian corn, of which he produced 1,000 bushels, but he also cultivated peas and beans, sweet potatoes and some barley. His hay harvest was impressive, totalling five tons in 1850. Included in his household at that time was his third wife, Mary A. J. Webb, his daughters Anna, Nancy and Tempy, a young white male named Larrat Webb, age twenty-three and four grandchildren.

On October 19, 1845, "Long" John Webb made his will naming his fourteen children as his major heirs. Bequests of money were made to his grandchildren, and his third wife, Mary A. J. Webb, whom he married three years later in 1848, is not mentioned. Only five of his children were to receive land under this will. His son, Nathan, was to inherit one tract of Land lying on the Reedy Branch & Tarborough Road known as the Kelly Land Adjoying John Ellis & others also one other Tract of Land adjoying the above Tract and adjoying Charles Ellis & others - intending hereby to include all the Lands I bought belonging to Joseph Kelly [purchased from Kelly in 1837 and 1838] Also...one other tract of land adjoying the Lands of John Carter & James Barron & others.

To his daughter Temperance (also called Tempe or Tempy) he devised the Tract or parcel of Land whereon She now lives Supposed to be about one Hundred acres being all the Land I at present own on the South Side of a Large Pocoson Branch running from Tarborough Road into Whiteoak Swamp Said Land being on the west side of the Road adjoying the Lands of Jobe Felton & Hiram Forbs.

To his daughter Nancy he devised "a part of the Old Tract of Land given me by my Father whereon Henry Webb did live Say Fifty acres." His sons David and John Webb were to have equal shares in the lands not otherwise disposed, this forming the bulk of his real estate.

This will was to some extent contradicted by a deed made in 1851 whereby Webb deeded to his son, John Webb, Jr., 150 acres of the home tract, $400 and four slaves. Webb reserved life rights to his property for himself and John Webb, Jr. was only to have this property under certain conditions. "Long" John Webb stated in the deed that his son was to have this property at his death only if his son would live with him. Webb further specified that he would "attend to my business from now untill my death he is also to worke on the plantation with me and my hands and after paying all expenses he is to have one-third of the ballance after supporting the family every and every year during my life."
"Long" John Webb died in 1853 and apparently his will and the subsequent deed to his son John created some confusion over the division of his estate. At the spring term of the Wilson County Equity Court of 1859 John Harrell, Joseph Harrell and Nathan Harrell, heirs of Webb's daughters Celia and Elizabeth Harrell, brought suit against Webb's surviving children Willis Webb, Tempe Webb, Dempsey Jones and his wife Cinthia Jones, Edwin Ellis and his wife Delphia Ellis, Nancy Webb, Ormand Webb, Nathan Webb and John T. Webb. The plaintiffs' petition to sell three tracts of land was granted, and one of the tracts sold was the parcel "known as the old place" adjoining Blake Baker and Hyram Forbs and containing 260 acres. Part of this tract may have been granted to Temperance Webb in her father's will of 1845. On January 1, 1860 this 260 acre tract was sold to Bolin B. Barron, a prosperous farmer. 14

Bolin B. Barron was born circa 1826, and he was the son of James and Martha Barron of Edgecombe County. 15 On July 9, 1851, Barron married Mary E. Amanda Thomas. 16

According to the 1860 census Barron was a farmer living in Edgecombe County owning real property valued at $30,000 and personal property valued at $65,000. Barron owned sixty-six slaves which were housed in thirteen slave houses on his property. Barron died before 1870, and there is no evidence that he ever occupied the Webb-Barron-Wells House. 17

His father, James Barron, owned property adjoining "Long" John Webb (see above: tracts devised to Nathan Webb in John Webb's 1845 will), and it is likely that Barron viewed his purchase of the Webb property as a way to expand his holdings inherited from his father.

Barron eventually sold the property before his death to his brother, Dr. C. H. Barron, a medical doctor. Dr. Barron was born in 1839 and served in the Civil War. 19 Dr. Barron never received a deed for the property, so it is uncertain when he actually acquired it, but it was probably after his active service and before his brother's death. Dr. Barron moved to Wilson County in the early 1880s and he is listed as a medical doctor with a mailing address in Toisnot (now Elm City). 21 It is unknown whether he actually occupied the farm or whether he had a tenant farmer as his brother did. In 1888 Dr. Barron mortgaged his "home tract" called "the Barron place" in Gardners Township to leading Elm City merchant R. S. Wells. 22 The following year he remortgaged the property and when he defaulted and the property was offered for sale at the courthouse door on January 28, 1892, Wells was the highest bidder, but he transferred his bid to John N. Vaughn. 24 The property included 873 acres of land in Wilson and Edgecombe Counties purchased by Barron from his brother. 25 The "James Webb place" made up 261 acres of this purchase. Three years later Vaughn sold the land back to Wells, whose heirs still own the property. 26

Redmond Stanley Wells was born in Nash County in 1848. He was the son
of Redmond Daniel and Emma Taylor Wells. He grew up on the family farm in Nash County and received his education in both public and private schools. As a young man he clerked in a general store where he became interested in business and he later became a principal in the firm of Parker & Wells which operated a general store at Joyner's Depot. Shortly before the incorporation of the town of Toisnot (later Elm City) in 1872 Wells was a principal in the new town's first general store and in 1876 he went into business on his own. Wells became one of the town's foremost merchants and civic leaders and in 1901 he was an organizer of the Toisnot Banking Company and acted for many years as its president. He was a director of Underwriters' Fire Insurance Company of Rocky Mount and served for many years on the town board of commissioners and on the local graded school board.

In 1881 Wells married Bettie Mercer and at about the same time Wells established his permanent residence in Elm City on Main Street where he lived until 1910 when his new house on the corner of Main and Branch streets was completed. (See the Elm City Municipal Historic District nomination, #2). Wells died intestate in 1921 and his sole heir, his son William Mercer Wells, received the whole of his real property.

William Mercer Wells was born on May 18, 1884 and graduated from Trinity College in 1907. After graduation he returned home to Elm City where he lived with his parents. He worked as a cashier in Toisnot Banking Company and helped his father manage the family farms, amounting to a total of more than 1,800 acres, and the family store. Wells married Josie McCullers of Wake County in 1918 and the couple lived with the elder Wellses during their early married life. In 1921 Wells succeeded his father as president of Toisnot Banking Company. Wells was also a principal in the Planters Tobacco Warehouse in Wilson. Following his father's footsteps in the political arena he served on the Elm City Board of Commissioners and the local school board.

In later years Wells and his first wife were divorced and he married Pearl K. Wells. The Wellses moved to Reno, Nevada, by 1956 and in 1961 Wells died leaving a large portion of his estate, including the Webb-Barron-Wells property, to be divided between his three children from his first marriage, William M. Wells, Jr., Alice Elizabeth Wells Romanek and R. S. Wells. The estate was never divided and Wells' children are the present owners of the property which is managed by Henry Romanek, A. Elizabeth Wells Romanek's husband. The house has been occupied in the past by tenants, but at present is vacant. The Romaneks are concerned with the preservation of the building and it has been well maintained.

Footnotes

1 John Parmenter to Richard Webb, March 2, 1793, Book 7, 318, Edgecombe County deeds, Tarboro.
2 Fourth Census of the United States: 1820, Edgecombe County, North Carolina.
Richard Webb to John Webb, August 14, 1811, Book 14, 128, Edgecombe County deeds, Tarboro.

Seventh Census of the United States: 1850, Edgecombe County, North Carolina, population schedule.

Peter Harrell and wife Cely and Elijah T. Owen and wife Martha to Watson Harrell, November 28, 1853, Book 26, 281, Edgecombe County deeds, Tarboro, states that Annie Webb, deceased, and John Webb, deceased, were the parents of Cely Harrell and Martha A. Owens, two of the couples' twelve children. The eldest child still living in John Webb's household in 1850 was Temperance Webb, born circa 1812.

According to John Webb's will made in 1845 and proved in 1853 (Archives & History, Raleigh) fourteen children are named of which twelve were the result of Webb's marriage to Annie, will hereinafter cited as John Webb will.

Ruth S. Williams & Margarette G. Griffin, Marriages of Early Edgecombe County (Rocky Mt.: Dixie Letter Service, 1958) 168, hereinafter cited as Williams & Griffin, Edgecombe County Marriages.


John Webb will.

John Webb to John Webb, Jr., August 23, 1851, Book 26, 88, Edgecombe County deeds, Tarboro.


Seventh Census of the United States: 1850, Edgecombe County, Population Schedule. See also dower allotted to Martha Barron, widow of James Barron, January 7, 1849, Book 24, 598, Edgecombe County deeds, Tarboro.

Williams & Griffin, Edgecombe County Marriages, 11.


B. B. Barron ex parte to C. H. Barron, March 28, 1890, Book 28, 463, Wilson County deeds, Wilson, states "C. H. Barron filed his Petition setting forth that at a sale had under a decree rendered in said proceeding he purchased the hereinafter described land and paid the purchase price of Same; but never received a deed for said land."

24 S. A. Woodard, Commissioner, to John N. Vaughn, April 9, 1892, Book 31, 130, Wilson County deeds, Wilson, hereinafter cited as Vaughn deed, 1892.
25 Vaughn deed, 1892.
26 Obviously "James" Webb was a mispelling. The census records list no "James" Webbs as heads of household in Edgecombe County in 1820, 1830, 1840 or 1850, or in the Wilson County census for 1860 or 1870. The acreage identified as 261 acres shows a difference of only one acre from the property sold by John Webb's heirs to B. B. Barron. Barron received no land documented as coming from a James Webb.
27 John Vaughn to R. S. Wells, March 27, 1895, Book 38, 561, Wilson County deeds, Wilson.
31 Before R. S. Wells' estate was settled his wife, Bettie M. Wells died in 1928. See Administrator's Record, Book 6, 125, Wilson County Courthouse, Wilson.
34 W. M. Wells Will.
Boundary Justification

The 201.5 acres being nominated with the Webb-Barron-Wells House are part of a 245-acres tract purchased by Richard Webb in 1793. Either Webb or his son, "Long" John Webb, built the house on the land between 1793 and 1820. There was a house on the property in 1811 when Richard Webb conveyed the tract to his son, John. John Webb acquired 1800 acres during his lifetime; the "old place" went to one of his daughters, Temperance, who sold it in turn to Bolin B. Barron. The 201.5 acres which are being nominated have been associated, as a farm, with the Webb-Barron-Wells house since its construction.

Photographs

The survey which initiated this nomination was conducted in 1980. The photographs which accompany this nomination were taken at that time. The site was revisited in 1985 by Survey and Planning staff to determine the condition of the property. The photographs accurately depict the condition of the house.