

VLR-7/31/80 NRHP-10/30/80

Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Pythian Castle

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

610-12 Court Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN

Portsmouth

VICINITY OF

Fourth (Robert W. Daniel, Jr.)

STATE

Virginia

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

51

(in City)

740

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

 DISTRICT PUBLIC OCCUPIED AGRICULTURE MUSEUM BUILDING(S) PRIVATE UNOCCUPIED COMMERCIAL PARK STRUCTURE BOTH WORK IN PROGRESS EDUCATIONAL PRIVATE RESIDENCE SITE PUBLIC ACQUISITION ACCESSIBLE ENTERTAINMENT RELIGIOUS OBJECT IN PROCESS YES: RESTRICTED GOVERNMENT SCIENTIFIC BEING CONSIDERED YES: UNRESTRICTED INDUSTRIAL TRANSPORTATION NO MILITARY OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. Claude M. Scialdone

STREET & NUMBER

320 London Boulevard

CITY, TOWN

Portsmouth

 UNKNOWN

STATE

Zip Code

Virginia

23704

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Portsmouth City Hall

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Portsmouth

STATE

Virginia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey

DATE

1979

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITOR FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

221 Governor Street

CITY, TOWN

Richmond

STATE

Virginia

Zip Code

23219

DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE		CHECK ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS				
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED				

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Located at the intersection of Court and County streets, the Pythian Castle is a prominent example of Romanesque Revival architecture in Portsmouth. The three-story, seven-bay building is of brick construction with rough and smooth ashlar dressings. The first floor of Pythian Castle is reserved for commercial use. Both the second and third floors contain large meeting halls.

Entrance to the south bay store is via a door placed on a diagonal to the street. Two Romanesque Revival, smooth-faced ashlar archways, each of which lies parallel to the intersecting streets, frame the corner entrance. A similar arch containing a decorative wrought-iron gate and transom screen frames the stair entrance to the north.

The center commercial front is traditional in form and is composed of a recessed double door flanked by large plate-glass display windows set into metal frames. Large one-light transoms top each window and the paired doors.

The second and third stories continue the three-part facade division established on the ground level. End bay units are set off by attenuated rough-faced, coursed ashlar piers. These piers extend from the first- to the third-story belt courses. A gable parapet flanked by brick minaret projections breaks above the roof line, crowning each end bay. The five-bay center section of Pythian Castle is visually terminated by a series of low, rough-faced ashlar, blind round arches with sunburst stone insets.

Windows on the second and third floors are 4/4 double-hung sash and are attenuated in form. Second-story windows exhibit decorative round brick heads with rough ashlar springers. Third-floor windows are similar in scale but have flat heads. In the end bays beneath the second-story belt course, stone medallions contain the emblem of the Knights of Pythias. Appearing in raised stone letters at the building's center are the words "PYTHIAN CASTLE." A low cast- and wrought-iron balcony stretches across the center section of the building above the first floor.

Pythian Castle measures forty-five feet across the east (main) facade and is sixty-one feet in depth. The building has brick bearing walls with steel and wood floor framings and is covered by a flat metal roof with a slightly raised parapet and finial decoration.

The interior of the building follows a side-hall plan. Large meeting rooms (31'x 58') are situated off the north bay stairs on both the second and third floors.

Decorative elements within the building are of builder catalogue derivation. Simple beaded wood wainscoting and chair rails line most interior walls and the stairs. Turned stair balusters are similarly from catalogue stock. Pressed metal ceilings provide the richest interior decoration. Metal ceilings are found throughout the entire building with the exception of the center commercial unit on the

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES	1897	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Edward Overman
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE			

Designed by the local Portsmouth architect and builder Edward Overman, Pythian Castle was built between 1897 and 1898. The three-story, brick and stone building stands as one of the best surviving examples of Romanesque Revival architecture in Portsmouth. The cornerstone was laid on June 16, 1897, culminating a lengthy parade and celebration held in honor of the event. Dedication ceremonies were held ten months later on April 15, 1898. Typical of late 19th-century fraternal lodges, the Castle's exotic and imposing character symbolized the secret organization and social prominence of the Knights in the community.

The Knights of Pythias was founded in Washington, D. C., on February 19, 1864, by the Arion Glee Club, a local men's group. Originally intended to be a society of government clerks, the Knights of Pythias soon evolved into a complex secret fraternal order. According to early chronicles, it was to be a "society [whose] business and operations [were to be] of a secret character having for its ultimate objectives Friendship, Benevolence, and Charity."² Blending Greek mythology, Christian philosophy, elements from the Middle Ages, and super-patriotism, the order gained wide appeal during the post-Civil War period. Within five years of its founding, branches of the lodge had been established in fifteen states spanning the Union and the old Confederacy. By their 1873 annual meeting held in Richmond, Virginia, Pythians had established lodges in twenty-eight states.³

Perhaps due to their close alliance with government, the membership of the Knights of Pythias modeled their organization after that of the Federal government. In addition to executive, judicial, and legislative branches, a military branch called the "Uniform Guard" was established to promote military spirit. Dues were called "taxes," and a "constitution" governed the order.

Membership in the Knights of Pythias was limited to literate white males of good moral character, aged twenty-one to fifty. Gamblers, barkeepers, and retailers of spirits were barred from membership.⁴ As a secret order, rituals, semiannual passwords, and the significance of various symbols, banners, and uniform decorations were known only to members.

The first Portsmouth chapter of the Knights of Pythias was founded in April 1871. Called the Atlantic Lodge, it was founded by eighteen Pythians already belonging to other Virginia lodges. Their charter was granted on May 5, 1871, by the Grand Lodge of Virginia. Prior to erecting their hall on Court Street, the Pythians used the hall of the Arcade Building (southeast corner High and Crawford streets), Ashton's store (on High Street), and, from late 1870s to 1897, the third floor of the Portsmouth Insurance Company Building.⁵

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Carnahan, James R. Pythian Knighthood, Its History and Literature. Cincinnati: The Pettibone Manufacturing Co., 1904.

Ledger-Star (Norfolk), May 12, 1971.

Portsmouth Star, June 15-17, 1897; April 15, 1898.

Supreme Statutes of Order of Knights of Pythias and Supreme Constitution, Nashville, 1903.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

1/10 acre (approximately -- 5085 sq. ft.)

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

UTM REFERENCES

A [1,8] [3,8,3] [9,5,0] [4,0] [7,7] [0,1,0]
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

Quadrangle name: Norfolk South, Va.
Quadrangle scale: 1:24000

B [] [] [] [] [] []
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C [] [] [] [] [] []

D [] [] [] [] [] []

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
Comprising a city lot at the NW corner of Court and County
streets, measuring 56.5' x 90', the former being the frontage on Court Street. The
building itself roughly measures 56.5' x 60'. The nominated property occupies
610-612 Court Street and is recorded in Portsmouth City Deed Book 52, p. 116.
(See survey map).

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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12 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE
July 1980

STREET & NUMBER

221 Governor Street

TELEPHONE
(804) 786-3144

CITY OR TOWN

Richmond

STATE
Virginia
Zip Code
23219

13 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL _____

STATE

LOCAL _____

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

TITLE Tucker Hill, Executive Director
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE JUL 31 1980

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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Pythian Castle, Portsmouth, Va.

CONTINUATION SHEET

#1 ITEM NUMBER 7, 8 PAGE 1

7. DESCRIPTION

first floor and minor secondary rooms. The ceiling of the center commercial space on the first floor displays beaded siding laid in a diagonal pattern. All door surrounds are of beaded woodwork with round-stamped corner blocks.

A one-story brick and rough-faced, coursed ashlar addition is found to the north of Pythian Castle (610 Court Street). Added ca. 1908, the extension is also Romanesque Revival in style. The small building is fronted by a coursed ashlar facade with round-arch openings forming a small entrance porch. Voussoirs and the central column are all of smooth-faced ashlar. A dentil frieze and battlement parapet top the addition.

The interior of the addition follows a shotgun plan. Each of the two main rooms is similar in size and possesses corner coal fireplaces with catalogue mantels. The overmantel from the front (east) room has been removed. The beaded chair rails and door surrounds in the addition remain intact.

Both the Pythian Castle and the one-story addition are in good condition and display only minor interior alterations.

BNZ

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property consists of the 56.5' x 90' city lot on which the building is situated.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

Representatives from many of Virginia's fraternal organizations arrived in Portsmouth to witness the laying of the cornerstone and the dedication of the present building in 1897. In addition to the more than two thousand of the general public in attendance, others participating in the cornerstone celebration included representatives from the Masonic Lodge, grand lodge officials, the Pythian Hall Association Choir, orphans from the Masonic Home, officials of the Portsmouth Navy Yard, court judges, and ministers of all the city churches.⁶

In 1979 the Knights of Pythias sold the Pythian Castle following over eighty years of continuous use as a fraternal hall. The building remains in good condition with no major exterior or interior alterations. Current plans are to convert the building to a restaurant.

MTP/BNZ

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Pythian Castle, Portsmouth, Va.

#2

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

8. SIGNIFICANCE

¹ Portsmouth Star, June 15-17, 1897; April 15, 1898.

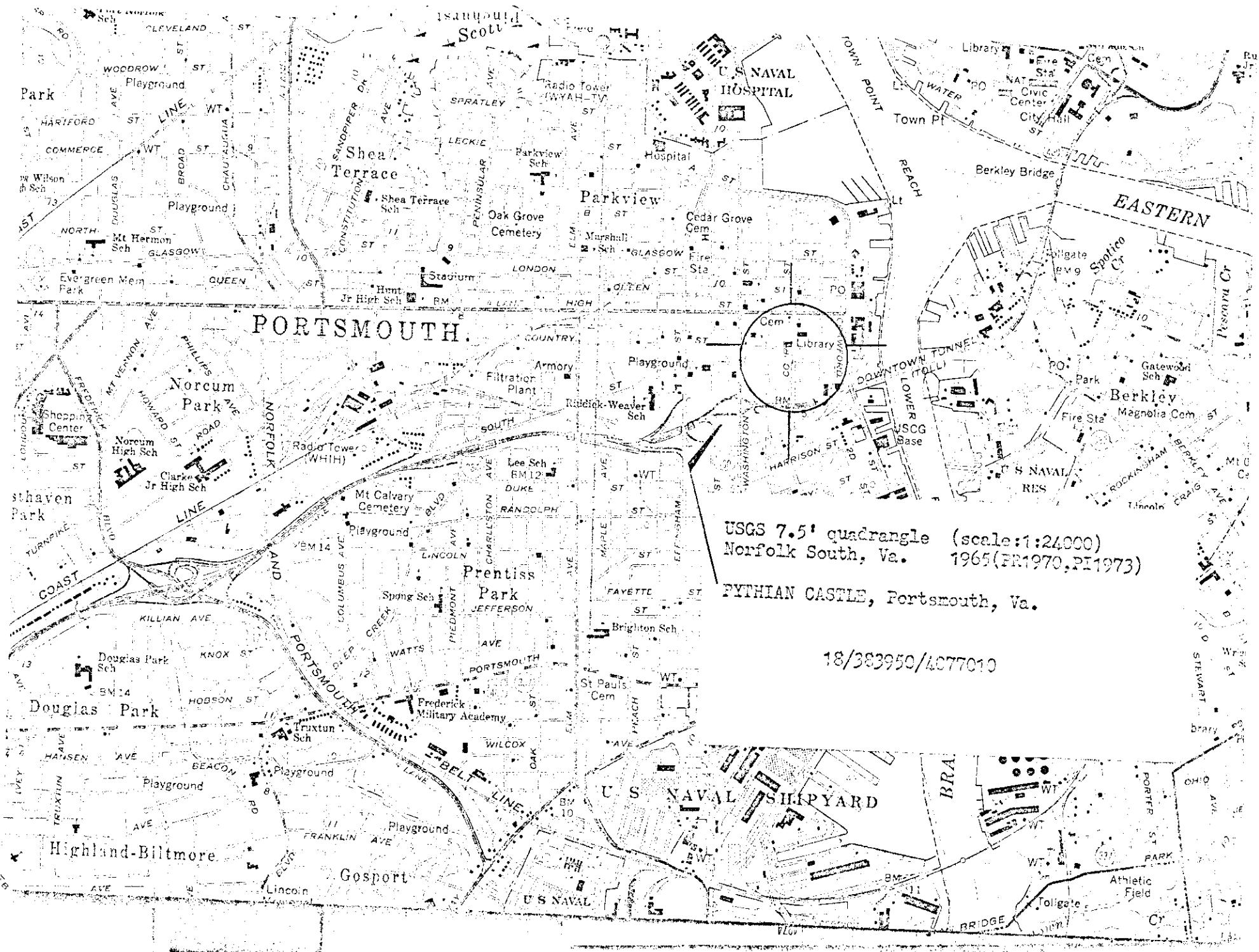
² James R. Carnahan, Pythian Knighthood, Its History and Literature (Cincinnati: The Pettibone Manufacturing Co., 1904), p. 121.

³ Ibid., pp. 239-245, 286.

⁴ Supreme Statutes of Order of Knights of Pythias and Supreme Constitution (enacted September 1, 1894; Nashville, 1903).

⁵ Ledger-Star (Norfolk), May 12, 1971.

⁶ Portsmouth Star, June 16, 1897.



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale: 1:24000)
Norfolk South, Va. 1965(FR1970, PI1973)

PYTHIAN CASTLE, Portsmouth, Va.