

Wachapreague,  
Virginia:  
Then and Now



by Kirk Mariner

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A Brief History  
with a Walking Tour  
of Its Sites

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## A Walking Tour Of Wachapreague

Begin your tour where Wachapreague began, at **15 Brooklyn Avenue [1]**. Although this is the second house on this site, it was, when it was built in 1860, all that there was to Wachapreague, the "mansion house" of the farm around which the town later grew up. The graves at the side of the house are those of the Teackle family who built the first house here about 1740, but Indian artifacts found over the years on this property prove that the Teackles were hardly the first residents of this original site in Wachapreague.

Behind you at this point (as you face the house you are looking east, with north to your left) is the **Pruitt House [2]** at 18 Brooklyn, built about 1882 and home of the town's first mayor, A. T. Mears.

As you walk north up Brooklyn Avenue, you enter "Riverside Park," the newer section of town developed by John A. Turlington in 1919. On the left is **26 Brooklyn Avenue [3]**, one of several homes in Wachapreague which originally stood on the Barrier Islands. This one, from Cedar Island, was moved to this location in the 1930s. Turlington lived at **5 Riverview Avenue [4]**, the prototype of this 20th-century style house in Wachapreague. Two doors closer to the waterfront is **1 Riverview Avenue [5]**, another house that originally stood on Cedar Island.

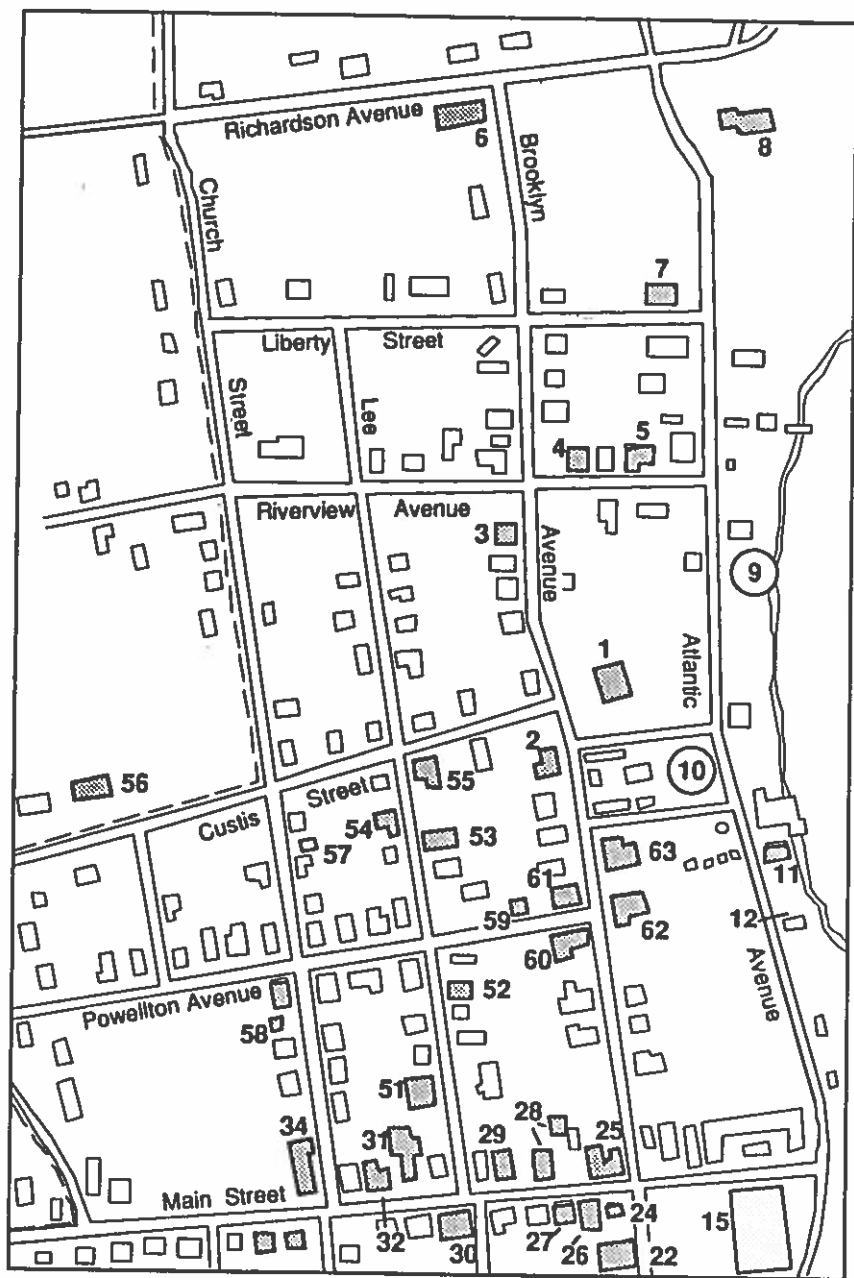
From the corner of Brooklyn Avenue and Liberty Street the **Masonic Temple [6]**, erected in 1928 in "Richardson's Addition," is visible ahead on the left. Turn right on Liberty, which takes you to the waterfront amid the mostly unremarkable buildings of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, the oldest of which is the green-shingled **Reese House [7]** on your left at 1 Liberty. It was built in 1938 by a candy company executive from Hershey, Pennsylvania, and now serves as a dormitory for VIMS. A short detour up the lane in front of it leads you to the grounds of the **Smith House [8]**, originally the home of "Captain" John Richardson, enlarged into a summer home and hunting lodge by Joseph L. Smith of New York in 1942. Birdwatchers may find something to observe at the brackish pond to the left of the lane; if you wish to walk through to Richardson Avenue, keep to the left behind the house.

### The Waterfront

Atlantic Avenue parallels Wachapreague Channel, and as you head south (right) you come first to the **Town Marina [9]** (1995), opposite the newest building of VIMS (also 1995). Beyond it on the right, past the old "mansion house," is the **Carnival Grounds [10]**, site of the Fireman's Carnival annually since 1952.



Wachapreague viewed from the air, looking northwest, c. 1975.



On the site of the "Airplane Ride" stood the old Ice Plant, hence the name of the adjacent street. The four small cabins on the right were moved to this site in the 1960s from the Owl Restaurant and Motel on Route 13, 15 miles to the north. Opposite them, just below an unpicturesque but functioning seafood business, is Hart's Marina, now the location of the **Coast Guard Dock and Headquarters [11]**. The Parramore Beach Station that is still visible in the distance across the water was closed in 1994, and the only remaining Coast Guard presence between Chincoteague and Cape Charles now operates out of this small building and the boat that docks next to it. Just beyond it look for the metal cable sunk into a groove that crosses Atlantic Avenue. This is the simple but effective mechanism by which **Parker's Marine Railway [12]**, hauls boats ashore for repairs.



The Wachapreague Marina as it appeared before the burning and demolition of the hotel.

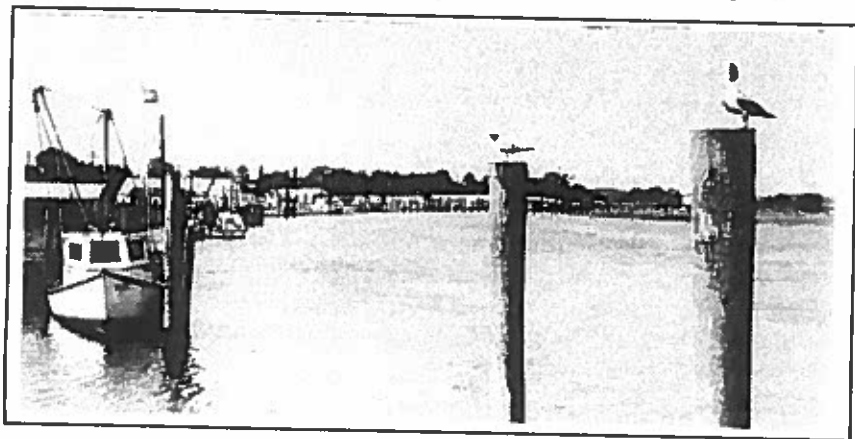
On the left, at the foot of Main Street, once stood Powell's Wharf, a site now occupied by the **Wachapreague Marina [13]** (1959). Its bait and tackle shop was once an old service station. The **Island House Restaurant [14]** operated out of more elegant surroundings until its building burned in 1992—the foundations of the ruined building are clearly visible just north of the restaurant. The boats at the marina constitute the largest private charter fishing fleet in Virginia.

The large empty lot opposite the marina is the site of the late, lamented **Hotel Wachapreague [15]**, the crown jewel of the town

until it burned in 1978 and was demolished in 1980. The Wachapreague Motel (1961) was an annex to the hotel, and continues the business that, despite the hotel's demise, has operated here continuously since 1881.

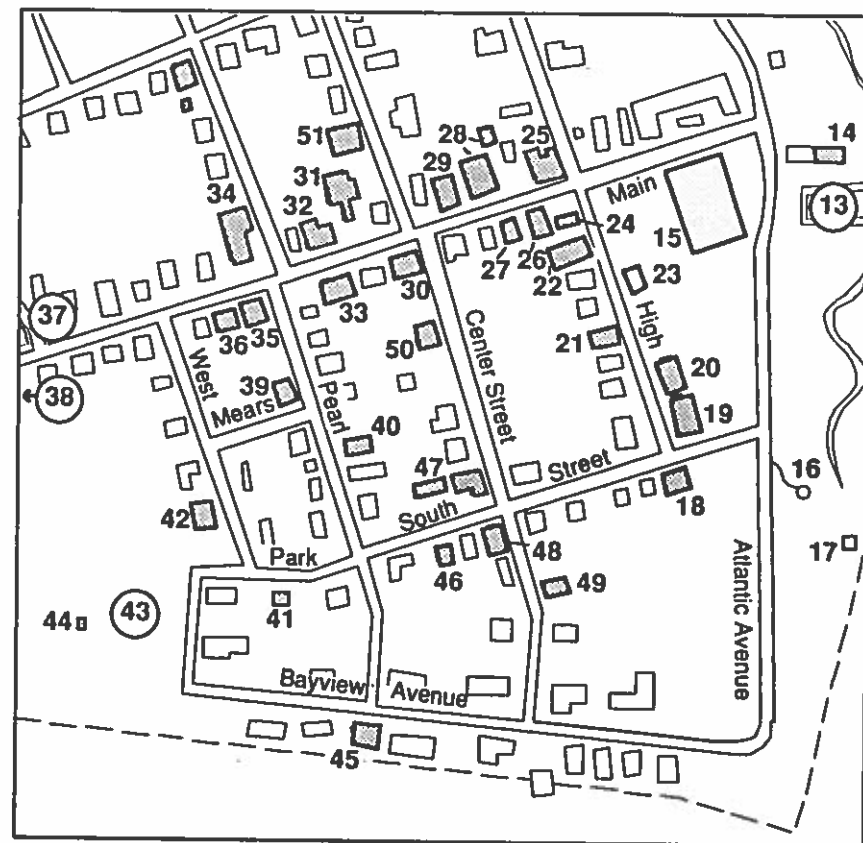
On the left below the marina, the Town of Wachapreague and the Nature Conservancy have created a small **Scenic Overlook [16]**, which is a good place from which to admire the distant view across the marshes. To the left in the distance are cabins on Cedar Island, to the right is larger and wooded Parramore Island with its abandoned Coast Guard station. Between them, merged into the horizon, Wachapreague Inlet spills the Wachapreague Channel into the ocean. The body of water between the mainland and Parramore Island is shallow Bradford's Bay; the Channel itself winds to the ocean just to the left (north) of it, with the result that from this vantage point boats entering and leaving Wachapreague seem to plow through the marshes. Immediately in front of the Overlook, more visible at high tide than low, is Mill Gut, the little creek on which **Ashby's Mill [17]** once stood.

From the Overlook turn back up Atlantic Avenue and left on South Street, then right to High Street. At the corner of South and High Streets are three once-identical houses which were probably "model" or "rental" homes built by the Powell Brothers in 1872. Of the three, **2 South Street [18]** is the least changed. But **12 High Street [19]**, despite its large modern addition, and **10 High Street [20]** are (or were) essentially the same design, complete to the "semi-outside" chimney on one end. The **Tom Stevens House [21]** at 7 High Street dates probably from 1882, and with its two-story front porch is unlike any other in Wachapreague. Opposite the **Firehouse [22]** stood, from 1902 until it burned in 1957, the **Old Hotel [23]**, predecessor to the larger Hotel Wachapreague.



### Downtown Wachapreague and Main Street

The corner of Main Street and High Street is still "downtown," but today's buildings constitute fewer than a quarter of the businesses that once lined the street here. Between High Street and the waterfront stood, on the left, Mears' "Big Store" (site of the Motel), on the right Hotel Wachapreague, the old Post Office, and Fosque's Store (on the corner). Luther Powell's 5 & 10¢ Store and the Neptune Theatre stood on the corner occupied today by the **Town Hall [24]** (1959). The oldest part of the **Corner Grocery [25]** dates from 1879, the **Ray Nock Store [26]** opposite it was also once a grocery, with an ice cream parlor in its small annex. The small memorial in front of the Town Hall includes a sculpture by renowned Eastern Shore sculptor William H. Turner.



Main Street west (left) from High Street is lined with many of the town's oldest and most interesting homes and buildings. The **Ewell Stevens House [27]** at 10 Main dates from about 1882, and is one of only two houses in town with a mansard roof. Opposite it is the less elegant, but more storied **Eva Stevens House [28]** (17 Main), the oldest part of which dates from about 1883. Here at one time lived the colorful Southey "Sud" Bell, the eccentric last resident of Hog Island, whose skills on the banjo are legendary on the Eastern Shore. It was during his family's residence that this house contained a large and elaborate "still" cleverly concealed beneath the floorboards. There were two faucets in the kitchen, one of which



Eliza Mears pretends to strum along with Southey "Sud" Bell, banjo-player *par excellence*.

gave water, the other "moonshine," and it is said the authorities never discovered the still because, apparently, they never stopped for a drink from the kitchen sink. In the backyard of this house is a small store building which once stood at the street's edge, behind the cement slab just east of the house; this was at various times a general store, a restaurant, and an antique shop. Also in the backyard here, next to the post office, stood

the Town Jail. The **Post Office [29]** itself was built in 1920 as the Wachapreague Banking Company.

At the corner of Main and Center stands the handsome **LeCato House [30]** (16 Main), with its admirable "gingerbread" ornamentation and distinctive "clipped gable" roof; it was built about 1890 and was once the home of State Senator George W. LeCato, the town's physician. Lovely **Powelton Presbyterian Church [31]** was built in 1881. Just west of it (27 Main Street) is the **Watson House [32]**, built about 1883, its eastern end used as a hat shop as late as the 1950s. Its next-door neighbor (29 Main

Street) is the Methodist Parsonage, the first house on Main Street thus far not to date from the turn of the century or before.

On the south side of Main Street are three houses (18, 22, and 24 Main) which appear to have been built by the same hand, for they share architectural details despite the changes made to two of them over the years. Least changed and most handsome of the three is **22 Main Street [33]**, built about 1885, the home of A. H. Gordon Mears, founder of the Hotel Wachapreague. Note that the "dental" work above its windows is identical to that of 18 Main, its distinctive front porch columns to those of 18 and 20 Main; its side porch is probably not in its original state.

**Ocean View United Methodist Church [34]** was built in 1935 to replace a building of 1902 that burned; the 1882 cornerstone of the town's original Methodist building can be found behind the shrubs at the corner. Opposite the church stands the **Nevins House [35]** (24 Main), erected about 1886. Its neighbor is the **Herbert Powell House [36]** (26 Main), home of the scion of the Powell family who married the daughter of the hotel owner, the other house in town with a mansard roof.

The sidewalk on Main Street ends at **Old Finney Road [37]**, the original town limits. From this point the houses on the left side of Main are in the town, those on the right are not. Beyond the **James Store [38]**, visible down the street, lies the present end of town. Main Street from here to the waterfront was laid out by the Powell Brothers in 1872, from here to the Quinby road by the county in 1873.

### South of Main Street

From Main Street turn south down West Street, then left (east) on Mears Street and right (south) on Pearl Street. **1 Pearl Street [39]**, the little cottage at the corner of Pearl and Mears, is said to date from 1858, and to have been the kitchen of the original hotel, later moved to this site. **12 Pearl Street [40]** appears unremarkable, but it was built as Baker Memorial Baptist Church in 1902; it stood several miles north of town on Drummondtown Road, and was moved to this site in pieces in the late 1930s.

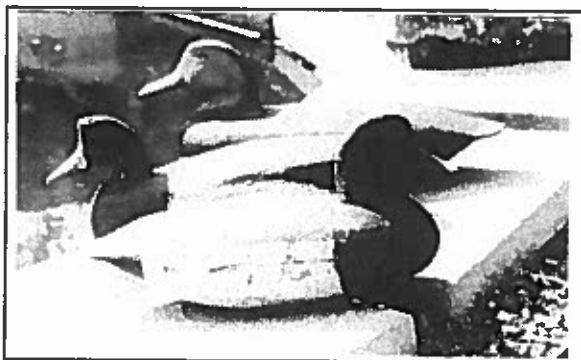
From Pearl Street turn right (west) on Park Avenue, where the second lot on the left contains the ruins of the **Boy Scout Building [41]**, begun in 1959 and never completed. From the next corner can be seen **5 West Street [42]**, a fourth house similar to the three early "model" homes at the corner of South and High Streets, dating perhaps from the 1870s. Park Avenue leads to an area once known as "Sheep Pen," now **Herbert S. Powell Memorial Park [43]**, named for the educator who lived at 26 Main Street. Among the trees on the knoll beyond the pavilion is an old **Burial Ground [44]** of the Ashby, Fox, Kellam, Mears, and Parker families, where the oldest

grave dates from 1771, the most recent from 1907. Park Avenue circles around to become Bayview Avenue, the newest section of Wachapreague, opened in 1946. No old houses in this block, except **18 Bayview Avenue [45]**, which began life as the Pender Grocery Store on High Street, and was moved aside for the construction of the firehouse in 1944.

After one block of Bayview turn left (north) up Pearl, then right (east) on South Street. **16 South Street [46]** on the right was the old "Temperance Hall," erected about 1887. It faces the backyard of the **Phillips House [47]** (7 Center Street), built about 1887, which has been handsomely and whimsically restored. **12 South Street [48]** may date from as early as 1883; it has architectural details similar to the LeCato House at 22 Main. Look south down Center Street to **14 Center Street [49]**, a small shingled cottage that originally stood on Cedar Island. Turn left (north) up Center Street towards Main. **1 Center Street [50]** is a small house of undetermined age, but apparently among the older ones of Wachapreague.

### North of Main Street

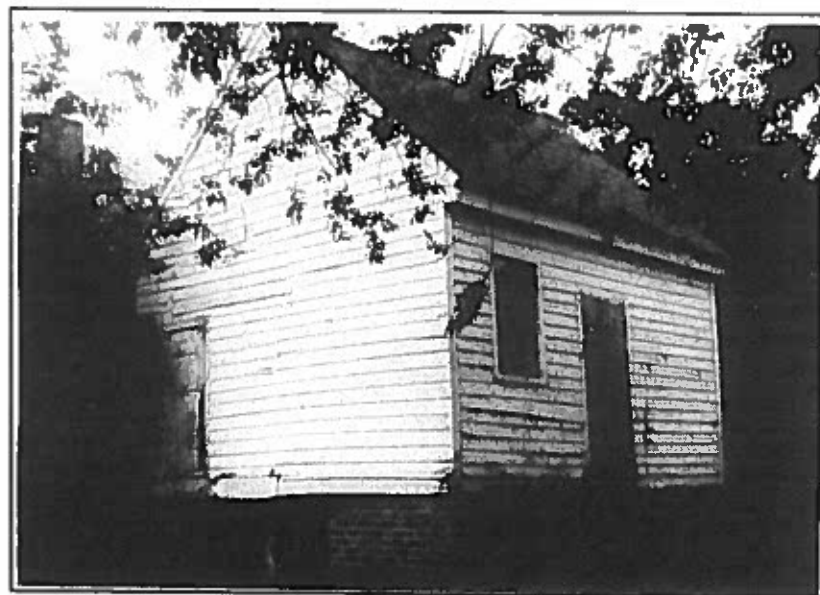
Lee Street leads north from Main into the section of town developed not by the Powell Brothers but by Thomas F. Floyd. **2 Lee Street [51]**, on the left, was once a guest house known as Channel Bass Inn. The charming **Fanny Jones House [52]** at 7 Lee Street has been authentically restored. At 13 Lee Street, just past Powellton Avenue, is the old **Pilgrim Holiness Church [53]**, erected 1907 and used as such until 1935. **10 Lee Street [54]** was the home of Isaac "Ike" Phillips (1858-1954), best known of the decoy carvers of Wachapreague, who made them by the hundreds and sold them for \$12 a dozen. On the corner stands the late 19th-



Decoys of Capt. Ike Phillips.

century **Copes/Belote House [55]** (15 Lee Street), unlike any others in Wachapreague but similar to many in Parksley in the northern part of the county.

From Lee Street turn left (west) to Custis Street, the original road into Wachapreague (note that behind you the street ends at the "mansion house" at 15 Brooklyn Avenue). After one block, at the corner of Custis and Church Streets, you can see ahead of you an old **Double House [56]** (22317 Custis Street), on the right; its age is undetermined, but it is similar to many other early 19th-century houses on the Eastern Shore, and is undoubtedly older than the town itself. Turn left (south) on Church Street, where **The Oldest House in Wachapreague [57]** used to stand just north of 7 Church Street. It has since been moved a block further south, and stands today in the yard behind **10 Powellton Avenue [58]**, which is itself a handsome house of the 1890s.



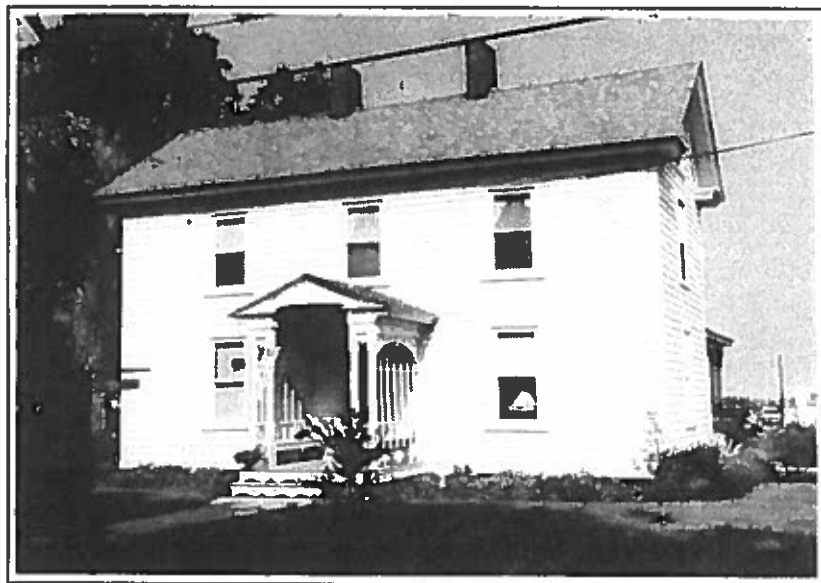
The oldest house in Wachapreague, now in the backyard of 10 Powellton Avenue, was probably a tenant house on the original Teackle plantation.

From Church Street turn left (east) on Powellton Avenue, misnamed since it is not in that part of town developed by the Powell Brothers. **3 Powellton Avenue [59]**, on the left, is an attractive small house of the 1880s or 1890s with a remnant of "gingerbread" under the front gable. On the right where Powellton ends at Brooklyn Avenue is the **Levin Core House [60]** (8 Brooklyn Avenue).

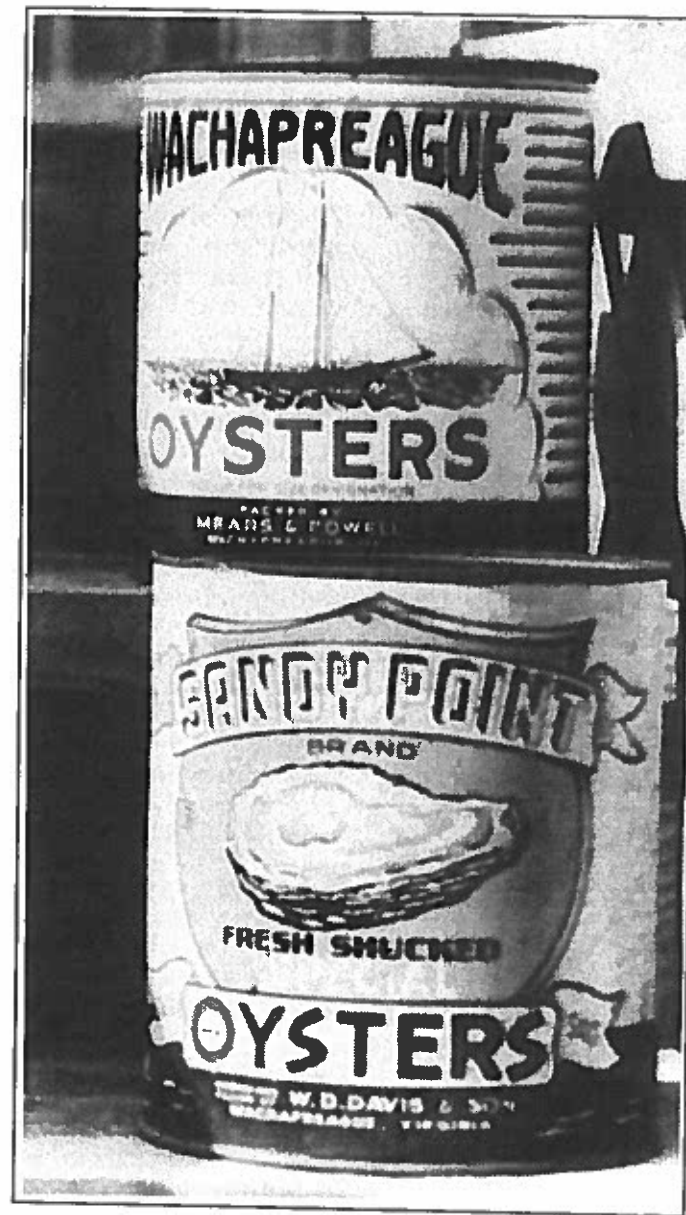
a handsome home of the 1880s beautifully restored; it is said to have been built by a Coast Guardsman, who attempted to replicate the style then current among Coast Guard stations. On the left is **10 Brooklyn Avenue [61]**, also from the early 1880s, and looking deceptively small from the outside, for inside the ceilings on the lower floor are ten feet high.

Looking westward down Powellton Avenue is **Hart's Harbor House [62]** (9 Brooklyn Avenue), built in the early 1880s and now restored as a bed-and-breakfast inn. The Boulter family, who once lived here, owned the first automobile in Wachapreague. Its neighbor, also a bed-and-breakfast, is **Burton House [63]** (11 Brooklyn Avenue), built 1883 and named for W. Heber Burton (1882-1939), at one time the mayor of Wachapreague. The gazebo at the back of the house contains beams and railings from the Hotel Wachapreague.

This walking tour ends at the two bed-and-breakfast inns, a short distance from where it began.



Hart's Harbor House at 9 Brooklyn Avenue was built in the 1880s.



Wachapreague Collectibles.

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