

Town of Port Republic
(Town of Wrangleboro)
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
County Road 575, East of Garden State Parkway
Port Republic
Atlantic County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1036

HABS
NJ
1-FORER,
4-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWN OF PORT REPUBLIC
(Town of Wrangleboro)

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Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, County Road 575, East of Garden State Parkway, Port Republic, Atlantic County, New Jersey.

Significance: Port Republic's development, originally known as Wrangleboro, throughout the nineteenth-century was directly tied to its placement along Shore Road, the major transportation artery prior to the coming of the railroad.

History: The earliest public road in Atlantic County was laid out in 1716 between Nacote Creek and Somers Point, then called Somers Ferry, and ran through the area. The currently-existing Shore Road, Route 9, is a descendant of this early route.¹ In 1776, two men, Patrick McCollum and Micajah Smith, dammed the Nacote Creek and constructed a saw mill and grist mill.² At that time, there was little or no settlement near the mills. It was not until later events caused a shift in population that Port Republic, originally called Wrangleboro, became a cohesive community. During the Revolutionary War, a small skirmish was fought nearby. The 1778 Battle of Chestnut Neck resulted in the British burning the entire town of Chestnut Neck. Facing near-total destruction of their property, many residents chose to move to Port Republic rather than rebuild.

Port Republic had a slow but steady rate of growth during the nineteenth century. Gordon's Gazetteer of 1835 described Wrangleboro, as it was then known, as a village having "a store, one or more taverns, and one mill, and 15 or 20 dwellings." Kirkbride's New Jersey Directory of 1850 mentioned shipbuilding as a principal industry, and published the names of seven shipbuilders, three of whom were named Van Zant. Other professionals and industries, established by the 1850s, included, three attorneys and counsellors, one blacksmith, two boot and shoe manufacturers, one harness maker, two flour and feed mills, three saw mills, six dry goods and grocery merchants, one wheelwright, one hotel keeper, and one physician. By 1872 the town hosted a Methodist church and cemetery, three stores and a shop, a grist mill and a saw mill, two schools, a post office and about 65 dwellings. A 1901 Industrial Directory listed a population at 500, and related that "land for factory sites may be purchased along the banks of the Nacote Creek."³

¹ McMahon, South Jersey Towns (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973), 33-35.

² McMahon, 33; John F. Hall, The Daily Union History of Atlantic City and County, New Jersey (Atlantic City: The Daily Union Printing Company, 1900), 91.

³ Thomas F. Gordon, Gazetteer of the State of New Jersey (Trenton: Daniel Fenton, 1834; reprint, Polyanthos, 1973), 266; "Atlantic County Business Directory, 1850," in F.W. Beer's "Topographical Map of Atlantic County, New Jersey" (Philadelphia: Beers, Comstock and Cline, 1872); "A 1901 Industrial Directory," Atlantic County Historical Society Yearbook (October 1988), 27.

The town name changed from Wrangleboro to Port Republic sometime between 1835 and 1872, and the town was incorporated as a city in 1905.⁴ Though near the commercialized "colonial" town of Smithville, Port Republic remains a quiet, primarily residential community. The steeple of the Methodist church continues to tower over neighborhood rooftops, contributing to the nineteenth-century village atmosphere. Perhaps because Smithville has cornered the market on the quaint and antique, Port Republic continues relatively undeveloped.

Prepared by: Camille Gatza
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- Sources:
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Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatza (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited

⁴ John P. Snyder, The Story of New Jersey's Civil Boundaries: 1606-1968 (Trenton: Bureau of Geology and Topography, 1969), 67.

