

## V. HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The following summary of historical information, relevant to the settlement of the Pamlico region of North Carolina, from which Craven County was formed, and to the founding and historical development of New Bern, has been extracted from the work of Dill (1945, 1946), Jones (1981), Lawson (1967), Lefler and Powell (1973), Lefler and Newsome (1954), Mobley (1981), Powell (1968, 1989), Sandbeck (1988), Todd (1920) and Watson (1987).

### A. CRAVEN COUNTY

European settlement of the Pamptecough (Pamlico) area began with English colonization attempts on Roanoke Island during the 1580s. Permanent colonization of North Carolina by people of English descent occurred during the mid 1600s. These settlements were concentrated around Albemarle Sound and resulted in the creation of the Carolina colony and Albemarle County in 1663-1665. The charter granted by King Charles II for the Carolina province, from the present Virginia-North Carolina line southward into Spanish Florida, provided that the people and land were to be ruled by eight Lords Proprietors.

In the early 1690s, the rich bottomlands of the Pamlico region attracted settlers who established farms and plantations along the banks of "Old Town Creek" and its tributaries (Figure 8). Bath County, also referred to as Pamlico County, was formed in 1696 from the territory south of Albemarle Sound and was divided into Archdale, Pamptecough and Wickham precincts in 1705. Because of its natural harbor and close proximity to Ocracoke Inlet, Bath Town, incorporated in 1706, was chosen as the center for trade and government (Paschal 1953).

There were two separate settlements in Carolina: one in the Albemarle region and the other along the Ashley and Cooper rivers. In 1710 these two settlements were made the provinces of North Carolina and South Carolina, respectively.

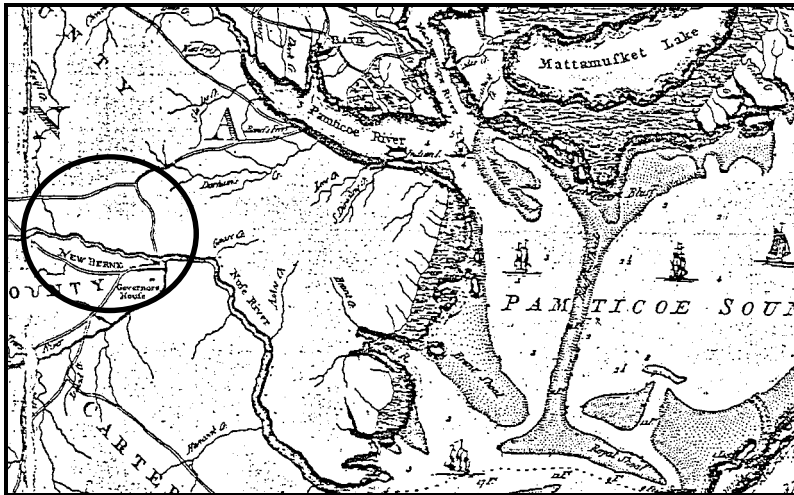


Figure 8. Section of Henry Mouzon's 1775 *An Accurate Map of North and South Carolina*, showing "New Berne and the "Governor's Houfe."

At that time, North Carolina had seven precincts. One, the Archdale precinct of Bath County was renamed Craven County in 1712. The county seat was first called *Chattooka*, the name of the Tuscarora settlement, but by 1723 the name was officially changed to Newbern. By 1897, Newbern was spelled New Bern (Corbitt 1950:74).

Early settlements of the New Bern region were located along the Neuse River and broad creeks. Early patents for land were issued in 1705. By this time Welsh Quakers and English primarily relocating from

Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania had already populated the area. About 1707 or 1708 a group of French Huguenots attempted to settle along the Trent River. These French Protestants came to North America after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Some later settled in the Pamlico region, at Bath, while a larger colony settled on the James River in Virginia near present-day Richmond (Dill

1955:30-31). Pressure resulting from the expansion of European settlement into the Carolina colony resulted in the Tuscarora uprising led by King Hancock in 1711. Conflict continued until 1715 when the Tuscarora were defeated at Fort Neoheroke and eventually removed from the region (Rights 1957).

In 1729 the Lords Proprietors relinquished their rights to rule Carolina, and in 1731 George Burrington was appointed the first of five royal governors of North Carolina. William Byrd established the dividing line between Virginia and Carolina in 1728. The royal governors resided in Port Brunswick, although New Bern was established as the colonial capital in 1746 (Powell 1989). Throughout the eighteenth century, Craven County was occupied predominantly by owners of small farms. There were only a few large plantations and these consisted primarily of uncleared or “unimproved” land. The rural landscape was “largely dominated by large expanses of farmland, dense lowland forests and swamps, slow-moving coastal creeks and extensive uninhabited pocosins” (Sandbeck 1988).

Agricultural production increased with the clearing of land and the acquisition of slaves in the 1750s and 1760s. Commercial exports included crops of corn, wheat and tobacco, as well as livestock. Some plantations unsuccessfully attempted commercial crops of indigo, flax and rice. Industry focused initially on forest resources like animal skins and furs, and later, by naval stores and wood products, such as shingles and staves. Early economic development was dependent on transportation, and consequently, settlements were located first along the waterways and moved inland with the development of roads, bridges and ferries. By the 1760s the production of tar, pitch and turpentine had become the major source of income for Craven County. Naval stores were produced in small kilns and stills in the backwoods and were shipped by water to New Bern. After the Civil War, numerous small farms were established around agricultural trading centers situated at crossroads and railroad stops (Powell 1989).

## B. NEW BERN

In the early 1700s, John Lawson “built a House about a half mile from an Indian town at the fork of Neuse River.” Lawson’s cabin “stood on pretty high land and by a creekside” (Dill 1955:32-33). This location is generally acknowledged as being in the vicinity of Lawson’s Creek (Jerry Cashion, personal communication 1995).

In 1710, Lawson, Franz Ludwig Michel and Christoph van Graffenreid founded the town of New Bern. Situated at the confluence of the Trent and Neuse rivers, the town was laid out in cruciform plan. The principal streets were East and South Front with Pollock, Broad, Middle and Craven intersecting at right angles. A redrawn version of a ca. 1710 map of the colony (Figure 9) shows 20 families living in the city of New Bern. Only craftsmen were encouraged to live in the town; others lived on 250-acre tracts along the Trent and Neuse rivers (Dill 1955:40).

During the Tuscarora War of 1711-1715, many colonists moved across the Trent River to William Brice’s plantation while a few remained in New Bern. After a decade of

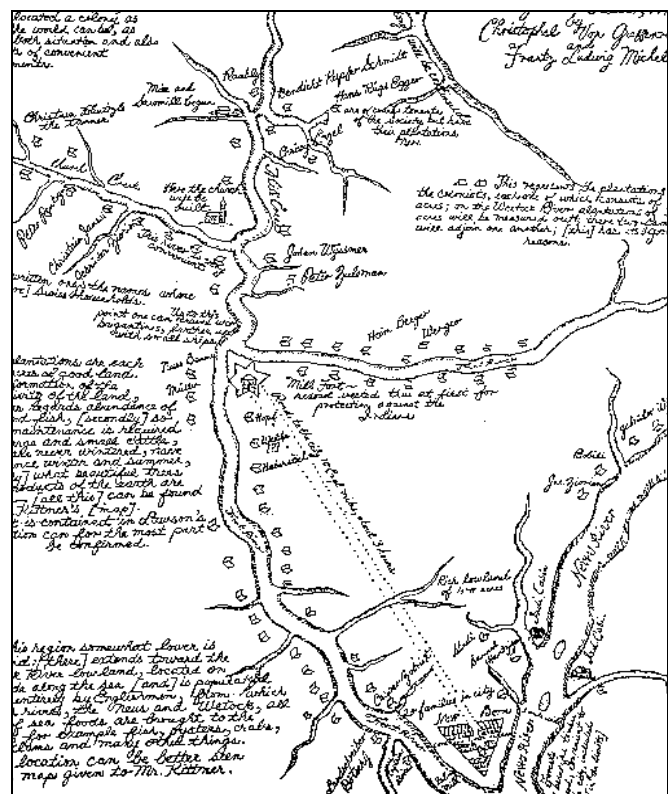


Figure 9. Plan of New Berne, possibly ca. 1710.

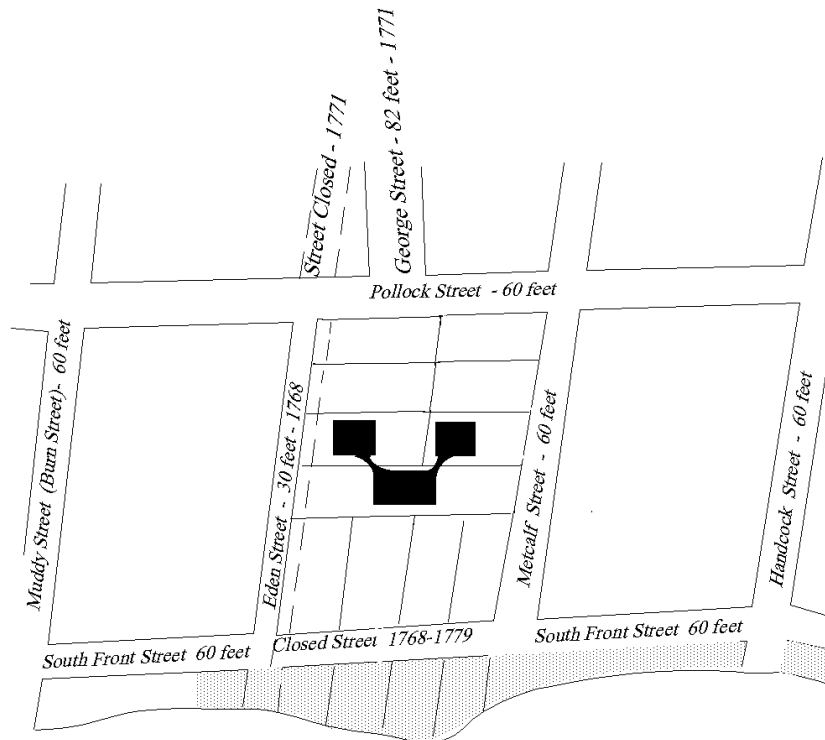


occupation, a freedmen's colony, James City, was established at the confluence of the Trent and Neuse rivers. Twice Confederate troops unsuccessfully attempted to regain control of New Bern.

### C. TRYON PALACE HISTORIC SITE (31CV3)

In 1767, Royal Governor William Tryon and architect John Hawks signed a contract to design the Governor's House to be built in New Bern. An act passed in the 1768 session (Laws of North Carolina 1766, Chapter IV, State Records XXIII: 708-711) confirmed that the governor and his successors had possession of the site Tryon had chosen for the first permanent government seat. The site of the palace comprised twelve lots equaling a town block or square bounded by Eden, Metcalf, Pollock and South Front streets (Figure 11). In addition, the act stipulated that Front Street is closed to the public and that part of Eden Street is included within the palace boundaries (Dill 1955:116). As a result, Eden Street, beginning at the back corner of the twelve-block square and extending to the river, was reduced in size from a 60 foot width to 30 feet, as it exists today. In 1771, the section of Eden Street north of Pollock Street was discontinued and George Street was created (Laws of North Carolina, 1771, Chapter XVII, State Records XXIII: 864, Colonial Records IX: 222). George Street was made 82 feet wide, which is equivalent to the width of the palace. Eden Street between the Trent River and Pollock Street was reopened in 1786 (Laws of North Carolina, 1786, Chapter XXVI, State Records XXIV: 823-824).

Figure 11. Plan of Tryon Palace town lots showing changes in the street locations (Tryon Palace Commission House [TPCH], New Bern).



The architectural plan for the palace “follows the form and decoration of a typical Georgian manor house of the mid-eighteenth century England” (Sandbeck 1988:108). Surviving documentation of the palace is found in the two eighteenth-century maps of New Bern by Claude Joseph Sauthier dated May 1769 and 1769 (Figures 12 and 13) and a descriptive memorandum dated July 12, 1783, from John Hawks to Francisco de Miranda that includes a sketch of the palace and gardens (Figure 14). The sketch of the palace is attributed to Sauthier. Although the date is unknown, it is assumed to have been drawn between 1767 and 1771 when Sauthier moved to New York (Nancy Richards, personal communication 1996).

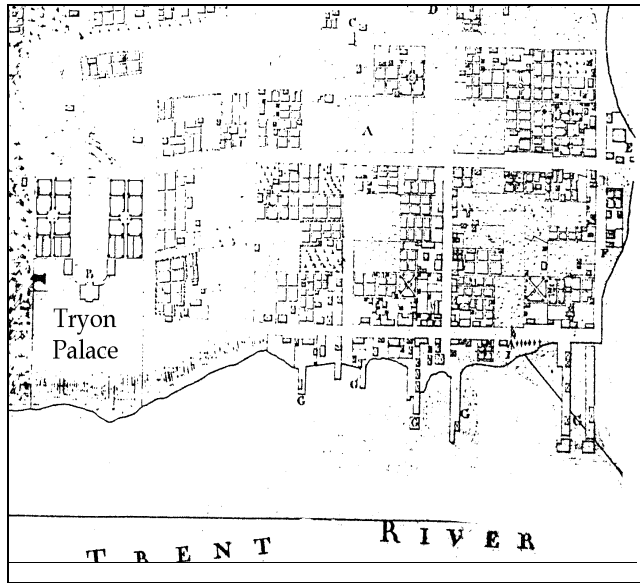
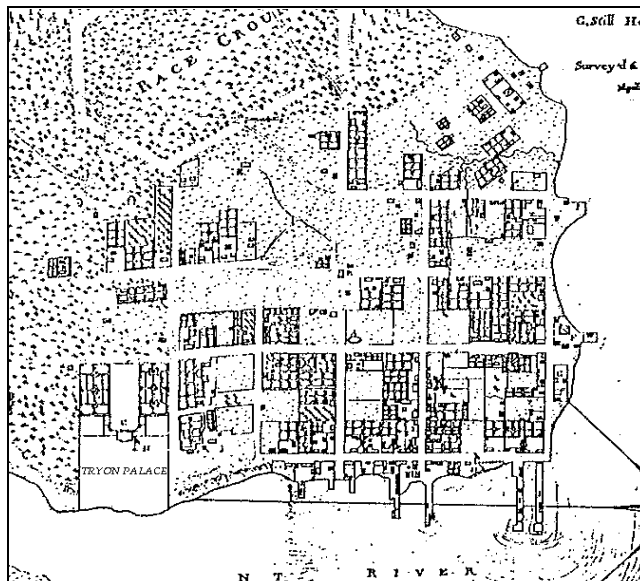


Figure 12. *Plan of the Town of Newbern in Craven County, North Carolina, surveyed and drawn in May 1769 by CJ Sauthier* (London: British Library Topographical Collection, King George III Collection).



Sauthier was a surveyor and cartographer who came to North Carolina in 1767 to join Governor William Tryon who was residing at that time in Brunswicktown on the Cape Fear River. Sauthier left North Carolina in 1771 when Tryon became governor of New York. During his years in North Carolina, Sauthier drew plans for several colonial towns and may have designed or upgraded some gardens in New Bern (Maccubbin and Martin 1984). The two plans of New Bern drawn by Sauthier are both dated 1769. They both show garden squares on each side of the land entrance to the governor’s palace that at that time was still under construction.

According to C. Allan Brown, a landscape historian in Charlottesville, Virginia, the style of these gardens is considered to be similar to the work of French landscape gardeners of the period (22 March 1993, letter on file at TPCH). A translation of Sauthier’s *Small Course on the Architecture of Gardens* provides some insight into the process and organization of gardens of the time (Crettier 1980). In this work, Sauthier defines a “main allée” as being in front of the building. White allées are completely sanded and raked, while green allées are covered with lawn with the exception of two raked pathways along the palisade which were used for maintenance work.

Figure 13. *Plan of the Town of Newbern in Craven County, North Carolina, surveyed & drawn in 1769 by Claude Joseph Sauthier* (London: British Library Topographical Collection, King George III Collections).

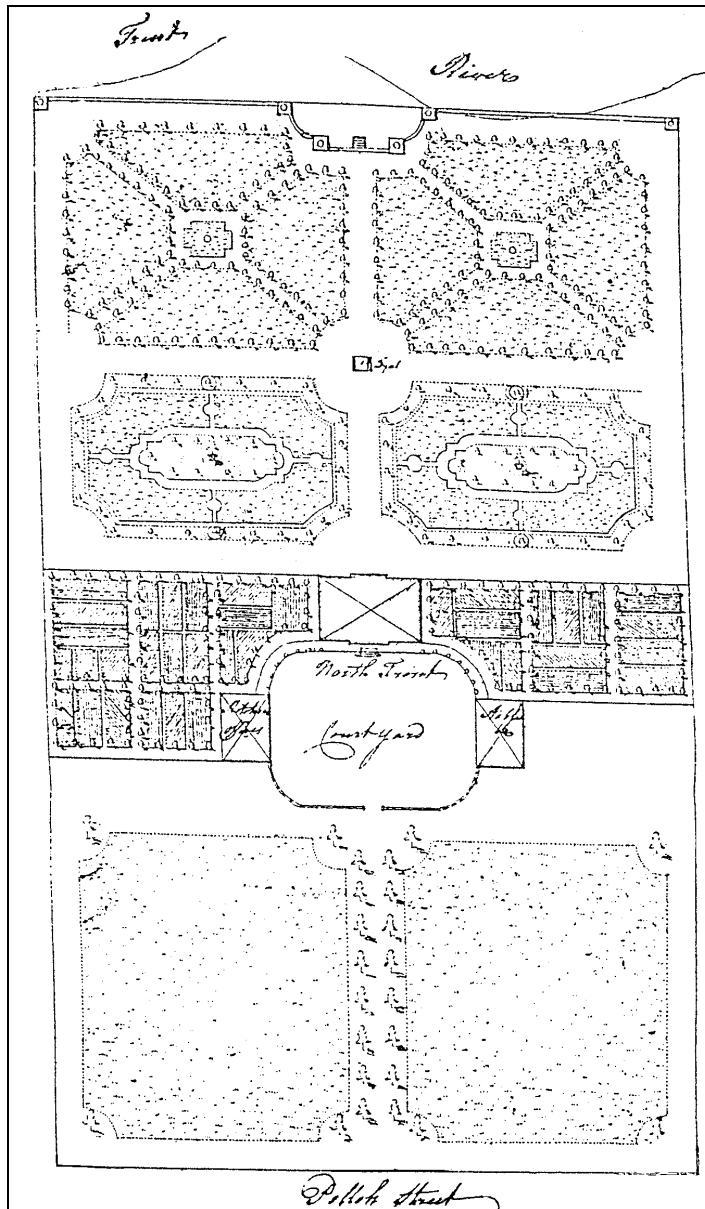


Figure 14. Ca. 1767-1771 sketch of Tryon Palace and gardens (Archivo de Francisco De Miranda, Tomo 5, Folios 95-97, Academia Nacional de al Historio, Caracas, Venezuela).

To cover the excessive costs of building the palace, Tryon increased taxes. In response, a group of protesters known as the Regulators threatened to set fire to New Bern. This threat resulted in the excavation, or the “throwing up,” of an entrenchment approximately 1500 yards long between the Trent and Neuse rivers “which will with those two rivers encompass the whole town” (Letter from Tryon to Lord Hillsborough from New Bern March 11, 1771: *North Carolina Colonial Records [NCCR] VIII*: 525). The entrenchment began at Muddy Street (now Bern Street, which lies one-block west of Eden Street).

On September 8, 1769, a hurricane destroyed two-thirds of the town. A letter from Tryon to Lord Hillsborough describes the storm and attributes the effects to “a blazing star or planet” seen in New Bern and Brunswick. A letter from Clifford Howe reported the effects of the storm in New Bern to Governor Tryon who was living in Brunswicktown while the palace was being built. Howe indicates that “the edifice (the palace under construction) has received no damage” although New Bern “is a spectacle, her streets full of the tops of houses, timber, shingles, dry goods, barrels and hogsheads, rubbish, etc. In so much that you can hardly pass along.” (*NCCR VIII* 71:72-25).

Another hurricane struck New Bern on August 1, 1795 (Dill 1955:259). An account of the effects of this storm is found in a letter from Jane Gaston to her brother (William Gaston Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill). In this letter the storm is described as having the “highest tide ever known in New Bern. It carried away all the wharves, warehouses and stores on Front and Water Street and several dwelling houses.”

A catastrophic fire destroyed one-third of New Bern, including 64 houses, in the fall of 1791 (Dill 1955:259). Three years later, two other fires leveled Craven Street. Tryon Palace burned February 27, 1798, with the west and east wings surviving. The destruction of the east wing, where the kitchen and office were located, is unknown; however, Peter Millers’ *Recollections of Newbern Fifty Years Ago* suggests that by 1825 it was no longer standing (Nancy Richards, personal communication 1996). The west wing of the palace still stands and is referred to as the “stable.”

By the end of 1799 the Assembly passed an act to sell the bricks and the lots of the palace square (Dill 1955:260) and to extend George Street to join with Front Street (Figure 15). The bricks sold in 1789-1799 were very likely those from the palace and colonnades (Nancy Richards, personal communication 1996). New lot designations were assigned to the section of George Street that now cut through the site of Tryon's Palace. With the extension of George Street, it has been suggested that the high ground that the palace was reported to have been situated on may have been leveled by at least three feet (Dill 1942:161).

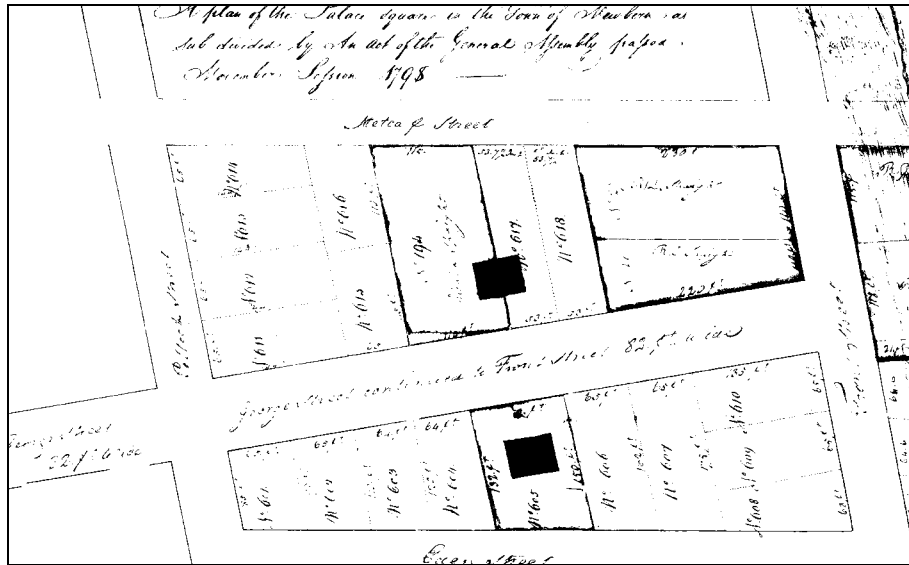


Figure 15. The 1798 plan of the Tryon Palace lots (North Carolina General Assembly, Session Records).

The Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of the study area show a series of residences built facing Eden, Pollock and George streets (Figures 16-20). The 1913 map (Figure 17) shows two dwellings that faced Pollock Street between George and Eden streets had been replaced by a filling station by 1924 (Figure 20). With the exception of the Dixon-Stevenson House (609 Pollock Street) which was built between 1826 and 1833 and the remodeled west wing of the palace, nearly all the structures were removed from the study area during the reconstruction of Tryon Palace between 1950 and 1959. Prior to the construction of the Dixon-Stevenson House on lot 611, the 1819 tax list identified that lot as having a “negro house” valued at \$300 (Sandbeck 1988:203).

Only two structures that were constructed during the early nineteenth century remain standing on Eden Streets. These are the Robert Hay House (built ca. 1805, enlarged ca. 1816-1830) at 227 Eden Street and the John Jones House (ca. 1809) at 231 Eden Street. Both are located on the west side of Eden Street facing Tryon Palace. Two relocated historic structures are within the study area facing Pollock and George streets. The John P. Daves House (ca. 1813) at 613 Pollock Street was moved to its present location in 1955 “to facilitate reconstruction of the Tryon Palace gardens” (Sandbeck 1988:208-209); and the John Wright Stanly House at 307 George Street was moved in 1932 and 1966 (Sandbeck 1988:415). Based on recent dendrochronology, the date of construction for the John Wright Stanly House has been established as ca. 1779 (Nancy Richards, personal communication 1996).

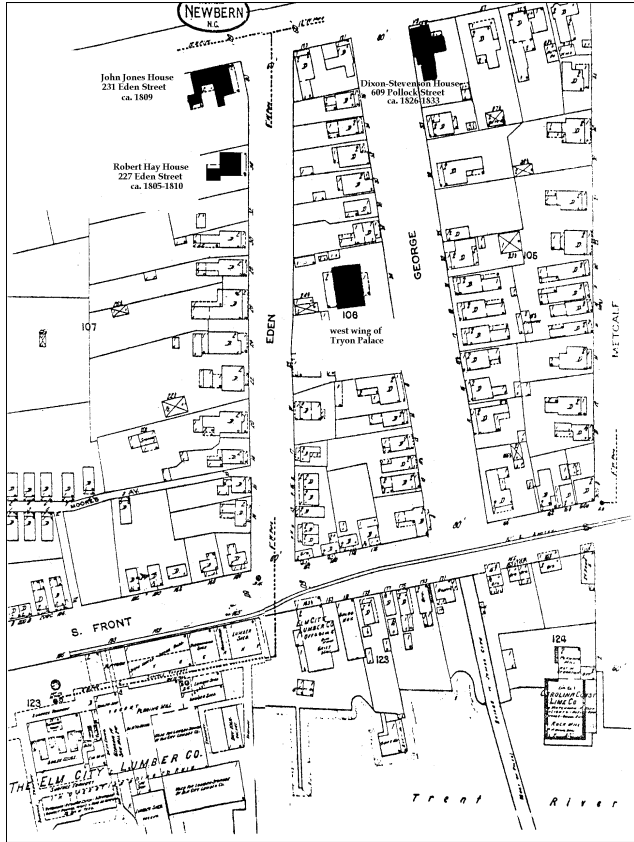


Figure 16. 1908 Map of New Bern, Craven County, North Carolina (Sanborn Insurance Company).

Figure 17. 1913 Map of New Bern, Craven County, North Carolina (Sanborn Insurance Company).



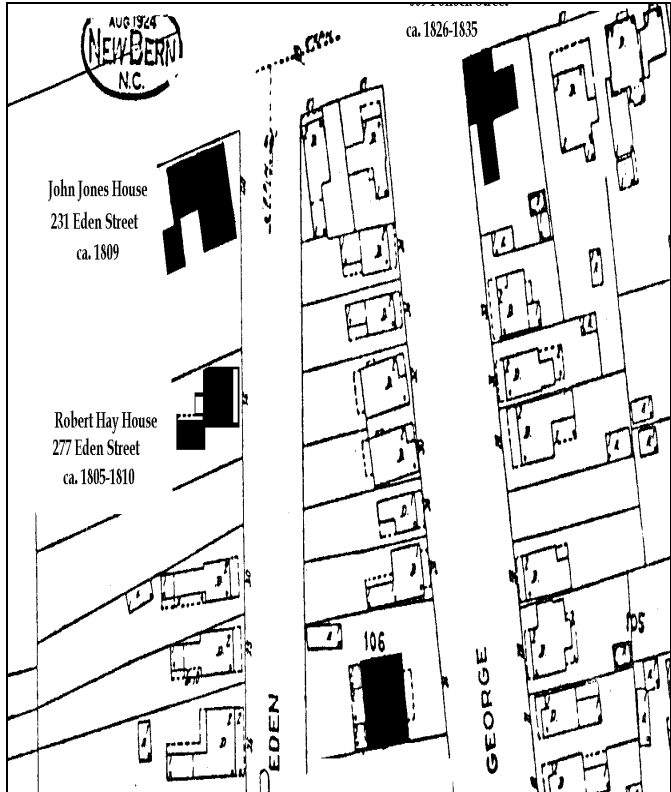


Figure 18. 1924 Map of New Bern including James City and Bridgeton, Craven County, North Carolina (Sanborn Insurance Company).

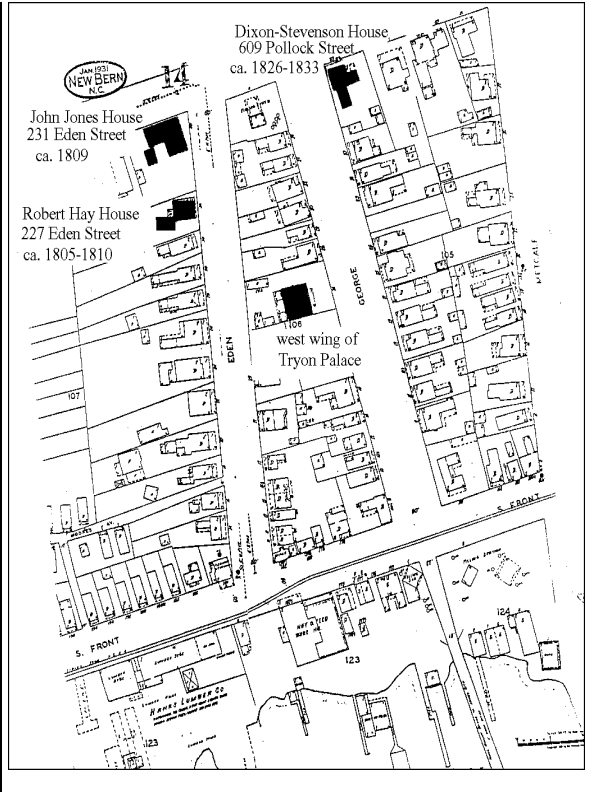


Figure 19. 1931 Map of New Bern including James City and Bridgeton, Craven County, North Carolina (Sanborn Insurance Company).

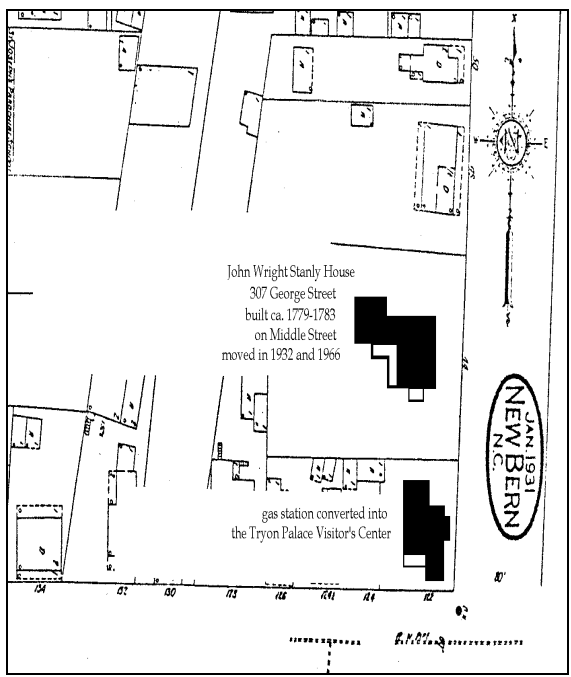


Figure 20. 1931 Map of New Bern including James City and Bridgeton, Craven County, North Carolina (Sanborn Insurance Company).