

## Palmer-Marsh House <sup>[1]</sup>

### Palmer-Marsh House



Palmer Marsh House, Main Street in Bath, Beaufort County, NC  
Historical Marker BB-33. Image courtesy of North Carolina Office of

by Victor T. Jones Jr., 2006Archives & History.

<sup>[2]</sup>

The Palmer-Marsh House in [Bath](#) <sup>[3]</sup> is one of North Carolina's most notable eighteenth-century homes. Famous for its massive chimney, the two-story home was built for [Michael Coutanche](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, a merchant and colonial official, around 1751. Coutanche had moved to Bath from Boston in 1739, setting himself up in the [naval stores](#) <sup>[5]</sup> trade. Coutanche may have used the main room downstairs as a store or office for his business. Michael Coutanche died in 1761, and his daughter and son-in-law sold the house and property to brothers Lillington and James Lockhart in 1763.

In 1764 [Robert Palmer](#) <sup>[6]</sup> purchased the house from the Lockhart brothers. Palmer had come to North Carolina from Scotland in 1753 as surveyor general of the state and, upon his arrival, also became collector for the port of Bath. The property remained in the Palmer family for the next 38 years, but the Palmer children eventually sold their shares. By 1802 the house and lot belonged to Jonathan Marsh, who had moved to North Carolina from Rhode Island with his brother Daniel. Both were merchants, with ships plying the waters between [Beaufort County](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, the West Indies, and ports along the eastern seaboard. The property remained in the Marsh family until 1915. In 1918 Henry Ormond bought the Palmer-Marsh House and turned it into a hotel.

Eventually, the heirs of Henry Ormond sold the property to the Beaufort County Historical Society. The house was restored to its colonial appearance in 1959 and opened to the public for tours in 1962. Exposed on the interior, the house frame includes a large summer beam over 50 feet in length supporting the second story. The stairway in the central hall is original, Georgian-style woodwork. Near the Palmer-Marsh House is a small cemetery, which contains graves of the Coutanche and Marsh families. In 1964 ownership of the Palmer-Marsh House and lot was transferred to the state of North Carolina, under the jurisdiction of the [Department of Archives and History](#) <sup>[8]</sup>. The house was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1970.

On 10 Dec. 1989 a fire broke out in the attic of the house, destroying the roof and attic and closing the home to tours for more than three years. Renovations from 1989 to 1993 allowed researchers to accurately determine the age of the house. Historians previously estimated the house's construction date as around 1744, but dendrochronology reports stated the house was built from timber cut during the winter of 1751-52.

#### References:

Catherine Bishir and Michael T. Southern, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina* (1996).

Jerry L. Cross, *Historical Research Report for the Palmer-Marsh House, Bath, North Carolina* (1976).

Kenneth Marsh and Blanche Marsh, *Colonial Bath: North Carolina's Oldest Town* (1966).

#### Additional Resources:

NC Historical Sites, archaeology: <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/bath/archaeology.htm> <sup>[4]</sup>

NC Historic Sites, Palmer-Marsh House:<http://www.nchistoricsites.org/bath/palmer-marsh.htm> [6]

NC Historical Marker:<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=BB-3> [2]

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) [13]

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