

NOT FOR SALE

Yorktown Self-Guided Walking Tour

Produced by:
Celebrate Yorktown Committee



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Yorktown Self-guided Walking Tour

Presented by the Celebrate Yorktown
Committee of the Yorktown Foundation



Thanks to:

William W. Cole
George Bennett
Bonnie Karwac

First edition, Fall, 2006
First revised edition, Winter 2014

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Welcome to Yorktown!



Our small town on the York River traces its origins back over 35,000,000 years, when this area was created by the crash of an asteroid or comet.

More recently, the area was occupied for 10,000 years by the first Americans. Their descendants still live adjacent to the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers which create the York River just 27 miles west at West Point.

Europeans began to occupy this area shortly after Jamestown was settled in 1607. The first settlement was just east of the present village on land currently occupied by the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center.

Yorktown itself was officially created in 1691.

Yorktown came to world attention when Lord Cornwallis surrendered his British army to General George Washington and his allied army effectively ending the American Revolutionary War with an American victory.

After a minor role in the Civil War, Yorktown struggled to revive its importance in Virginia's business life but did not succeed.

The 1881 Centennial and 1931 Sesquicentennial of the surrender of Cornwallis brought world attention to the town again, and the National Park Service created the first national historical park in the United States in 1931.

Since that time, the town has stabilized in population at about 200 people with two major museums, two churches, a few small businesses and a number of other historic and cultural sites available year-round for visitors to enjoy.

Using This Booklet

We are pleased that you have an interest in the history and culture of Yorktown and want to use this booklet for a self-guided walking tour. The booklet is designed to give you an easy walking tour which you can start at any location and finish at that same location without missing anything. You do not need to start at location number 1. Each location on the tour is self-contained, and it is not necessary to visit one site in order to understand any other site.

The icon  tells you that one or more information signs are nearby.

Some areas of the tour are optional—they are shown in italics. You are welcomed to visit these areas, but they generally contain buildings and sites that are not directly related to the historic character of Yorktown.

During certain times, a free trolley connects many of the historic attractions in Yorktown. You can get on and off the trolley at your convenience. There is occasionally narration on the trolley.

The entire walking tour is handicapped accessible, although there are several very steep hills.

SPECIAL NOTE:

Yorktown Onions are a member of the European leek family. Seeds arrived with early colonists. They have naturalized locally and are protected by law - therefore, *“Gathering or collecting the Yorktown Onion shall be prohibited.”*



1. York Hall 1955

301 Main Street

The first court for York County began meeting in 1633. The first courthouse in Yorktown was built on this site in 1697. The building, renamed York Hall in 2000, contains a local art and gift gallery and information area.



Part of the York County Historical Museum is located in the lower level.

2. Swan Tavern 1935

300 Main Street



The Swan Tavern opened as a tavern in 1722. The building was destroyed when black powder in the Swan Tavern was ignited by the courthouse explosion in 1863 during the Civil War. The present building was reconstructed by the National Park Service in 1935.

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3. Medical Shop 1936

307 Main Street

The Medical Shop was reconstructed on property thought to have been owned by Dr. Corbin Griffin, a surgeon who served during the Revolution. Griffin's house and two buildings were also located here in 1781 when Griffin was imprisoned on board a British ship during the Siege of Yorktown.



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Cyrus Griffin (brother of Dr. Corbin Griffin who owned the Medical Shop) lived in Yorktown and died here in 1810, although he is buried at Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg. Griffin was the last “President of the United States in Congress Assembled” under the Articles of Confederation. He immediately preceded George Washington, first president under the Constitution. Griffin was educated in Scotland where he met and married Lady Christina Stuart of Traquair.

Church Street was named for the Episcopal Church at the river end of this street.



4. Grace Episcopal Church c. 1697 **111 Church Street**

Heavily damaged in the 1814 fire of Yorktown, the York-

Hampton Parish Church was renamed Grace Episcopal Church and reconstructed in 1848 using the original marl walls. Burials include members of the Thomas Nelson and Nicolas Martiau families.

5. The Fifes and Drums of York Town **2006**

202 Church Street

Formed in 1976 by the County of York during the Bicentennial of the American Revolution, “The Fifes and Drums of York Town,” now an independent non-profit organization, constructed this building in 2006 to serve as their Corps headquarters.



Continuing south on Church Street, you will find the Marl Inn Bed and Breakfast.



6. Restrooms **400 Main Street**



7. Somerwell House c. 1707 **401 Main Street**

With the addition of a wing on the back, this c. 1707 building served as a hotel in the early 20th century. The National Park Service restored it in 1936 to its colonial appearance.



8. Burcher Cottage c. 1881 **402 Main Street**

The Burcher Cottage, a 19th-century building, has been used as a business for most of its existence. The building is owned by the National Park Service.



9. Le Corbeau (the Crow) Cannon **c. 1761**

408 Main Street

French King Louis XVI ordered 194 cannons, including this one, shipped to Portsmouth, N.H., in 1777, in support of the American rebels, dramatically altering the balance of fire power between the Americans and the British.



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10. Cole Digges House c. 1720

411 Main Street



This property has often changed owners and has served as a storehouse, tearoom, bank and home. Recent historical

research has attributed the construction of the building to Digges rather than Pate, by whose name it had been known for many years.

11. Custom House Ambler House site c. 1721

410 Main Street

Richard Ambler, customs collector in 1721, built and operated the Custom House. Serving as a storehouse for Confederate General John Magruder in 1862 and later as a school, it was acquired by the Comte De Grasse Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1924. Ambler's home next door was destroyed during the Civil War.



Read Street is named for the Read (or Reade) family. Elizabeth, a daughter of Nicolas Martiau, the "Father of Yorktown", married Colonel George Read who was Acting Governor of Virginia in 1638. Their great-great-grandson was George Washington.

12. Poor Potter Archeological site



c. 1720 
221 Read Street

Described by Lt. Governor William Gooch in 1732 as

"the poor potter" of Yorktown, whose output was of "little consequence" to mislead the Crown, William Rogers actually operated one of America's first and most complex pottery factories.

13. York Hall Stable, Wisteria Cottage and York Hall Garage (National Park Service office)

c. 1914
215 Read Street

Between 1914 and 1969 the entire block - from the river to the inner fortifications - was "York Hall," the private estate of Captain and Mrs. George Preston Blow.



The Blows restored the Nelson, Smith and Ballard Houses and built the stable, cottage, garage and formal gardens designed by Charles F. Gillette.

14. Cox House site 501 Main Street

Charles Cox is believed to have built his home here by 1729 when he sold it to Thomas Nelson, in whose family it remained for the next 75 years. The building was destroyed in the mid-20th century.



15. William Nelson House site 507 Main Street

This was the site of the home of William Nelson and his wife, Elizabeth Burwell Nelson. William, born in 1711 in Yorktown, was the son of Thomas Nelson and Margaret Read, a descendant of Nicolas Martiau. The house was destroyed in the fire of 1814.

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16. Gov. Thomas Nelson, Jr., House

c. 1730



508 Main Street

Built by “Scotch Tom” Nelson, this house is best known as the home of his grandson, Thomas Nelson, Jr., member of House of Burgesses of Virginia and Continental Congress, signer of the Declaration of Independence, commander of the Virginia Militia and Governor of Virginia. Used as a hospital during the Civil War, it is now exhibited by the National Park Service. The high relief bronze bust sculpture of General Cornwallis, now found on the west garden wall, was dedicated in 1931 as “A TESTIMONIAL OF THE AFFECTION OF VIRGINIA FOR THE MOTHER COUNTRY.”



Nelson Street was named for this prominent family and was formerly called Pearl Street.

17. Smith House c. 1750



208 Nelson Street



This house was built by Edmund Smith and left to his daughter, Mildred, whose husband, David Jameson, was the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia in

1781. Today it is owned by the National Park Service and used as a private residence.

18. Ballard House c. 1727



214 Nelson Street

This was the home of Captain John Ballard from 1727-1744. A later addition was made to the right side of the chimney of the original 1727 house. Today it is owned by the National Park Service and used as a private residence.



The next location is near the end of Nelson Street, just a short stroll on one of Yorktown's residential streets.

19. Yorktown Baptist Church

1947

237 Nelson Street



Baptists met first in Yorktown in 1699. A church was established in 1777. The present church was formed in 1944. The

white frame section was a former Army chapel reconstructed here after World War II.

20. Fletcher House

18th century; 1951

223 Nelson Street

Built prior to 1761 in Accomack County on Virginia's Eastern Shore by Henry Fletcher, this house was rebuilt on this site in 1951 and is the private residence of Fletcher's direct descendant.



21. Wilton Roosevelt House

1927

217 Nelson Street



Wilton and Phoebe Roosevelt built this house in 1927. Their previous home (which burned in 1926) had been guaranteed to them through an unusual arrangement

developed by then-Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Roosevelt, when their farm was purchased in 1920 for part of present-day Naval Weapons Station Yorktown. The home is privately owned and occupied.

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22. Great Valley 601-603 Main Street



During colonial times, this cliffside depression, originally a footpath, was a major thoroughfare to the riverfront. At its head were the shops of “Scotch Tom” Nelson

built in the very early 1700s. Three generations of Nelsons thrived in the mercantile business until the Revolution.

23. Sheild House mid-18th century 600 Main Street



The Sheild House, built in the mid-18th century, is occupied by the Sheild family who has lived here for over 100 years. Mostly original with some modifications for 20th- and 21st-century living, it features one of the best examples of colonial brickwork in the area. The home is privately owned and occupied.

24. Ballentine House c. 1792; 1930s 606 Main Street



This house, built by Admiral and Mrs. John Ballentine in the late 1930s, sits on one of the original 1/2-acre lots surveyed in 1691 to create the port town of York. It was constructed from materials brought from “Dewsville,” built about 1792 in King and Queen County. The home is privately owned and occupied.

25. Dudley Digges House c. 1760 605 Main Street



The Dudley Digges House was home to one of Yorktown’s leading citizens. Digges was a friend of Patrick Henry and served as a member of the House of Burgesses, Comptroller of Customs, member of the Virginia Council and Rector of the College of William and Mary. Today it is owned by the National Park Service and used as a private residence.

Smith Street was named for the Smith family, descendants of George Washington’s ancestors.

26. McNorton House 1890 119 Smith Street



Dr. Daniel McNorton, one of the pillars of the African-American community in Yorktown, practiced medicine successfully in Yorktown for nearly 50 years. He was a mem-

ber of the Virginia State Senate and a Justice of the Peace. His son practiced medicine here nearly 50 years as well. The home is privately owned and occupied.

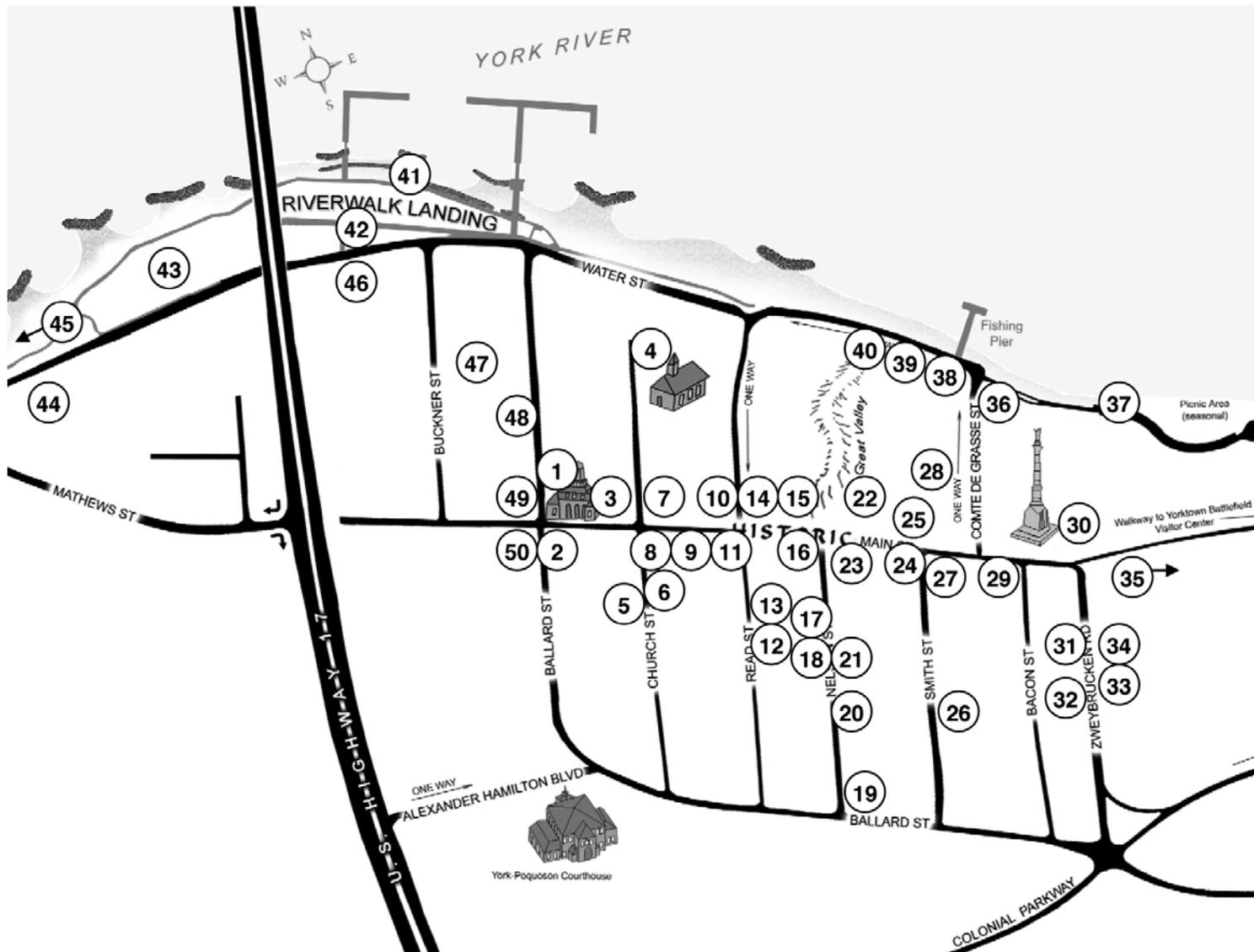
27. Hornsby House 1935 702 Main Street

Built in 1935 by J. W. Hornsby, local businessman, this house is still owned by family members. Mr. Hornsby, initially a waterman, became an entrepreneur in the local oil business. Among his grandchildren is Bruce Hornsby, Grammy Award-winning musician.



Site Locations

(numbers correspond to text listings)



Cornwallis' Cave (c. 1860s)

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



View of monument (c. early 1900s)

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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Go past the Digges House and follow the outside of the fence line toward the river.

28. Civil War Cannon Emplacements 1862

Three depressions and revetments to the rear of the Digges house show where Civil War cannons were in place to guard the river approach to Yorktown. They were used by the Union Army after it occupied the village.



29. O'Hara House c. 1920 706 Main Street



This charming white frame house diagonally across from the monument was built just before 1920 by the present

owner's family. A number of improvements over the years make it the gracious private home that it is now. The home is privately owned and occupied.

Beyond this house is Bacon Street, named for Nathaniel Bacon of the 1676 Bacon's Rebellion.

30. Monument to Victory & Alliance 1881 803 Main Street

Known popularly as the Yorktown Victory Monument, this structure was begun in 1881. Congress authorized the monument on October 29, 1781, but nearly 100 years passed before this 95-foot marble column topped by the figure of "Liberty" was erected.



This section of Main Street was named Zweybrucken Road to honor Zweibrucken, Germany, York County's sister city.



31. Crooks Methodist Church site Zweybrucken Road

This church served Yorktown for many years in the early part of the 20th century. It was demolished after the congregation moved to establish Crooks United Methodist Church on Cook Road near the Highway 17 intersection.



32. Revolutionary & Civil War Earthwork Zweybrucken Road

This earthwork runs completely around the village and was built initially by British soldiers and slaves prior to the 1781 Siege of Yorktown. It was later rebuilt by Confederate soldiers prior to the 1862 Siege of Yorktown.



33. Secretary Nelson House site Zweybrucken Road



Thomas Nelson, Deputy Secretary of the Colony for many years, built his imposing home here. The house was occupied by Lord Cornwallis during the Siege of Yorktown. Allied gunners made the house uninhabitable. All that remains today are the foundation bricks visible at the site. The site is owned by Preservation Virginia.



34. A Manor Hotel and Country/ Golf Club Hotel site

Construction began in the early 1920s on a multi-story hotel to accommodate golfers from the golf course located on what is now the Yorktown Battlefield.



Construction stopped in 1924 coincidental with a stock market crash in Florida. The Visitor Center and Battlefield occupy the land today.

35. Yorktown Battlefield Visitor Center 1957



Across the foot bridge near the monument is the National Park Service's Yorktown Battlefield Visitor Center which provides

a full description of the many services, tours and programs provided to familiarize visitors with the Yorktown Battlefield and history. Visitors may then travel to the waterfront by Comte de Grasse Street or use the scenic path from the Visitor Center down the "tobacco road" to Water Street.

36. Two Civil War Cannon Emplacements

700 Water Street

These almost obscured depressions at the foot of Comte de Grasse Street were used by Civil War soldiers who shot or skimmed cannon balls across the water to hit invading ships at their water line, increasing the chances of sinking them. The idea failed and was later abandoned.



37. Beach Picnic Area

Water Street

A well-kept picnic and beach area maintained by York County is available seasonally free of charge and located just below the Yorktown Battlefield Visitor Center.



Looking east or to the right, you can see buildings for Plains All American Pipeline terminal and the Dominion Virginia Power Yorktown Power Station to its right. The U.S. Coast Guard Training Center, closer and to the right, is not visible from this spot and was the location of the 17th-century Yorke Village, illustrated below.



The pier at the intersection of Comte de Grasse (named for the French naval commander in 1781) and Water Streets was built in 1982 to reach a cofferdam constructed to facilitate excavation and to give visitors a clearer view of one of the sunken ships, the British transport, "Betsy". Water within the cofferdam was filtered in an attempt to clear up the muddy waters of the York River. The study of this underwater excavation, which ended in 1989, is documented in *National Geographic Magazine*, June, 1988. Many of the recovered artifacts are on exhibit at the Yorktown Victory Center.



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The rich history of Yorktown is featured in a number of information panels along the waterfront. The titles of the panels are noted here for your convenience. Actual texts for all panels are available at www.yorkcounty.gov/yehm by clicking on “Signs Along Riverwalk.”

INTRODUCTORY SIGN



YORKE VILLAGE SIGN



Yorke Village was originally established in 1629 and lasted until the present Town of York was created in 1691.

YORKTOWN'S SUNKEN FLEET



The York River has been the scene of dramatic conflict over the centuries. To the right or east of the town is the Chesapeake Bay. During the 1781 Siege of Yorktown this area was filled with the sunken hulls of scores of British ships purposely sunk to prevent enemy ships from approaching the shore. Masts of some of these sunken ships remained as markers for many years, and the hulls of these ships remain for the most part undisturbed.

THE BRIG “BETSY”



38. Tobacco Warehouses site

650 Water Street

Some of Yorktown's Tobacco Warehouses were located to the left. This area was packed with buildings on small lots and was the center of riverside commercial activity in the 18th century. The buildings were used to store tobacco, a major cash crop during much of Yorktown's early history, prior to shipment to Europe and elsewhere.



39. Cornwallis Cave



600 Water Street

This mysterious configuration is known as Cornwallis Cave.



What it is, what its purpose was, and why it acquired that name are now lost to history.

40. Archer House



18th century; c. 1814

624 Water Street

Built in the 18th century, the Archer House had its frame portion destroyed in a fire in 1814, along with every other building on this lower level of the town of York. Many of the buildings including this one were quickly rebuilt on their foundations, but this building is the only one of that group to survive. The house is owned by the National Park Service and is privately occupied.



Proceeding along the Riverwalk by the York River, you will pass a number of businesses catering to today's Yorktown visitors. Along the riverwalk, many of the plants are identified by small green ground-level signs. Also, look for these other information panels:

PIRATES IN YORKTOWN



CHESAPEAKE BAY IMPACT CRATER



The world's sixth largest impact crater was created about 35 million years ago when a two-to-three-mile-wide asteroid or comet struck the sea floor, east of Yorktown, near present-day Cape Charles, Virginia, creating a 56-mile-wide crater. Yorktown and Gloucester Point sit on its western rim.

GREAT FIRE OF 1814



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TOBACCO INSPECTION



YORKTOWN'S STORMY PAST



TRANSAMERICA BIKE TRAIL



STEAMBOATS ON YORK RIVER



CIVIL WAR HOT-AIR BALLOONS



USS YORKTOWN



SEAT OF COUNTY OF YORK



The native population called the river the Pamunkey. The English renamed it the Charles River. In 1643, the river and county were renamed York. The 2010 census recorded 65,464 residents in York County.

Continue your stroll along the walkway next to the river.



THE YORK RIVER



YORK RIVER ECOSYSTEM



KISKIACK INDIANS



VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF MARINE SCIENCE



41. Freight Shed 1934

moved in 2004

331 Water Street

The Freight Shed was built by the National Park Service after the devastating 1933 hurricane destroyed most of the buildings on the waterfront. Serving first as a ferry and freight terminal and later as the local post office, it is now an events venue.



HEAVY ARTILLERY AT YORKTOWN



WARS & YORKTOWN



42. Riverwalk Landing 2005

Water Street

These riverfront shops, dining establishments and entertainment venues along a scenic pedestrian walkway were designed in the spirit of colonial architecture reflecting the town's historic buildings.

Two large black cast iron mooring bitts or bollards remind visitors of the commercial use of the pier that preceded the present development. The bollards serve a decorative purpose today. The original British cannon (on its reconstructed carriage) was raised from the York River in 1931 from one of the British ships sunk in Yorktown's harbor in 1781.

NICK'S SEAFOOD PAVILION



N. S. SAVANNAH



GEORGE P. COLEMAN BRIDGE



In 1952, a two-lane bridge replaced the centuries-old ferry system. In 1996, the present six-lane bridge replaced the earlier bridge. The replacement bridge was prefabricated in Norfolk in six pieces and was installed in only ten days. The Coleman Bridge is a rare double-swing-span bridge with the two 500-foot spans pivoting on their center supports to permit ships to use the deep natural channel in the center of the river. The Coleman Bridge is the second longest of this type in the world, with the longest located at the Suez Canal in Egypt.

YORKTOWN'S TEA PARTY



CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERMEN



YORK RIVER FERRY



AVIATION FIELD YORKTOWN



YORKTOWN'S WINDMILL



**43. Watermen's Museum**

1935; moved 1987

309 Water Street

Begun in 1981, the Watermen's Museum tells the story and displays artifacts about working the waters of the Chesapeake Bay



from pre-historic times to today. The buildings were originally built across the York River in Gloucester County in 1935 and were barged to this location in 1987. Another view of the buildings will be seen from Water Street.

On the hill above the Watermen's Museum is the York River Inn Bed and Breakfast.

NAVAL WEAPONS STATION

The pier for Naval Weapons Station Yorktown can be seen on the south side of the York River, and a pier farther up river serves the Cheatham Annex Naval Supply Depot. The two bases include about 15,000 acres.

INTRODUCTORY SIGN**44. Windmill site****Water Street**

The steep hill south (land side) of Water Street, called Windmill Point, was the site of the 1711 windmill. An active enterprise for many years, it had disappeared by 1850.



Continuing from this point will be about one-half mile.

If you like, you can take the trolley from the stop at the Watermen's Museum or any of its stops to visit the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown.

Otherwise take the brick walkway on Water Street to continue the walking tour.

45. Yorktown Victory Center**200 Water Street**

This state-operated museum, which opened during the nation's Bicentennial, chronicles the American Revolution through gallery exhibits and living-history. The site is undergoing a transformation and will become the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown.

46. Nick's Seafood Pavilion site**Water Street**

Nick's Seafood Pavilion sat close to the site of the parking garage on Water Street from the 1940s until 2003. Known for its charismatic

owners, Nick and Mary Mathews, seafood cuisine and decor, Nick's was an institution attracting customers from all over, putting Yorktown on the

map. Some remnants of the Mathewses' 1981 monument are displayed on the exterior walls of the parking garage.



The metal representations are of Washington and Rochambeau.



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Buckner Street recalls William Buckner who built the windmill in 1711.

Ballard Street commemorates the Ballard family, one of whom was one of the original trustees of Yorktown in 1691.

50. Ballard & Main

To the west along Main Street and along both the east and west sides of Ballard Street were houses and businesses from the 18th century. All have disappeared and been replaced by modern homes or by grassy or wooded lots.

A short stroll south down Ballard Street takes you to the Redcoat Antiques, York-Poquoson Courthouse and other York County government offices, Nancy Thomas Gallery, and the Yorktown's Masonic Lodge No. 205.

47. Kiskiack Watch 1990

Ballard Street

This modern development sits on the site of occupation by the Kiskiack Indians. Before construction, archaeological excavations were conducted, and many of the artifacts can be seen at the York County Historical Museum in the lower level of York Hall.

48. Slight House 1927



Martiau Marker 1931

114 Ballard Street

The monument in front of the 20th-century Slight House was erected in 1931 in memory of Huguenot Nicolas Martiau. The dedication speech was given by General John J. ("Black Jack") Pershing. A portion of Martiau's land was purchased from his descendants in 1691, providing the site for the present town.



49. Post Office 1957



126 Ballard Street

This building was built as the Yorktown National Bank when this intersection contained other businesses catering to the local community. Today the building houses the U.S. Post Office. The earliest known post office in Yorktown was in 1791, and there has been a post office in the town ever since.

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We hope you have enjoyed your visit to Yorktown and that you found this guide helpful. Please share with us your suggestions for improvement of our booklet.

Send your comments to:

Celebrate Yorktown Committee
Walking Tour
P. O. Box 557
Yorktown, Virginia 23690

You may leave them along with your name and address at the Gallery at York Hall or email them to info@yorkriverinn.com.

Image credits:

Yorktown Onion - by Mary Boynton

14 - Karwac Collection, postcard

28 - Library of Congress

31 - Crooks United Methodist Church archives

32 & 33 - George Bennett

34 - Yorktown Country Club membership book

36 - Confederate Battery with 8-inch Columbiads. Library of Congress - Selected Civil War Photographs, 1862

37 - Yorke Village watercolor by Dennis Crawford

38 - Cartouche on Joshua Fry - Peter Jefferson Map, published 1753

44 - "View of Yorktown, from the Old Windmill, as You Approach from Williamsburg", published 1848 by Robert Sears

Building Photos (by number):

Bill Yardley (4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 29, 35, 41, 43, back cover)

Ken Knight (1, 2, 3, 7, 11, 16, 18, 23, 24, 27, 30, 39, 40)

Bonnie Karwac (9, 37-picnic area & pier)

Jerry R. Karwac, Jr. (46, 48)

Thanks to York County's Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism for its support of the printing of this revised edition.

Booklet designed and printed by
Peacock Business Solutions, LLC



Nelson House
Library of Congress
Selected Civil War Photographs, 1861-1865

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