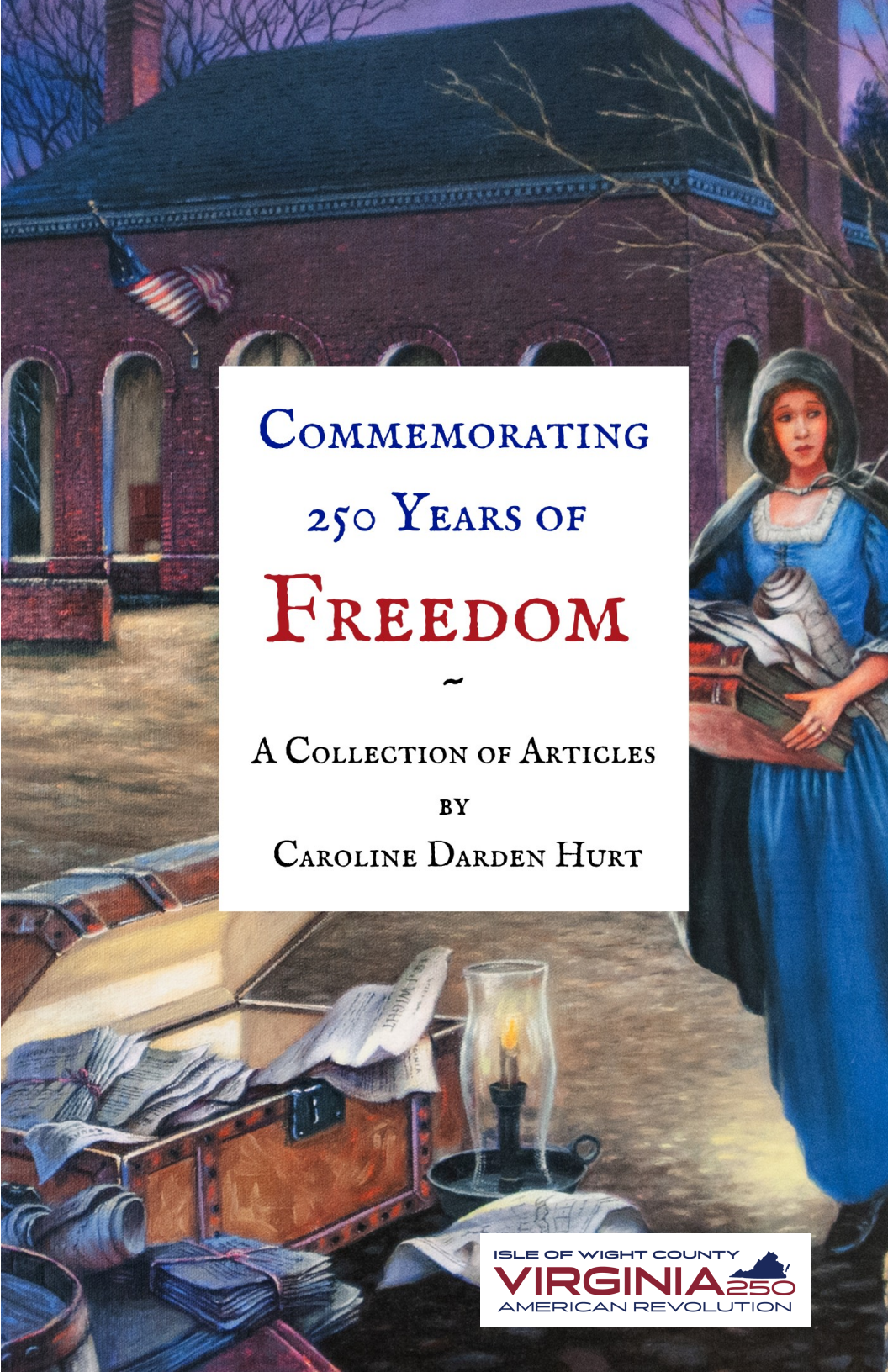

Commemorating 250 Years of Freedom

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A Collection of Articles

by

Caroline Darden Hurt

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY
VIRGINIA 250
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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COMMEMORATING 250 YEARS OF FREEDOM

A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES

Caroline Darden Hurt

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FOREWORD

VA250, the official Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission established by the Virginia General Assembly in 2020, was created to coordinate multi-year statewide programs, mobile museums and signature events marking the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, the Revolutionary War and U.S. independence.

Local and state VA250 committees were formed to work alongside the statewide commission to plan events and educational programs as well as regional celebrations, local history projects and community engagement.

One of the Isle of Wight County VA250 Committee's projects was this article series highlighting Isle of Wight County's early history leading up to the events of the American Revolution. The monthly article series, written by Caroline Darden Hurt with research and assistance from the Isle of Wight County Museum, was published by The Smithfield Times from January 2024 to July 2026.

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY
VIRGINIA 250
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born April 1943, Caroline Darden Hurt is a native of Isle of Wight County. She became a history teacher in Nansemond County and later served as the Human Resources Director for the City of Newport News.

Hurt's love of history and reading inspires her to write about the county. She helped create and edit *The Smithfield Cookbook* for the Woman's Club and wrote a memoir about her family's store, Darden's General Merchandise. Her family has run the store since the 1950s, and the book recalls those early years. In writing about the county, Hurt preserves the memories of her family and the community, and she hopes that her writings pass down the stories and the lessons learned.

SETTING THE STAGE

INTRODUCTION

The Isle of Wight County American Revolution 250 Committee was established to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, Revolutionary War and U.S. independence by examining related events through a local lens.

The Committee will leverage special events and projects in Isle of Wight County to explore the various complex, diverse and multi-faceted aspects of life in Isle of Wight County before, during and after the American Revolution.

This monthly article series will showcase the winding path to self-governance and provide a context to our understanding of America's journey to war with a special focus on Virginia's and Isle of Wight County's roles in this process.

EUROPEAN SUPREMACY

The forces and vision that would ultimately shape this land and the people who have lived here into the United States of America began to take root in the 16th century in various areas of the world. As powerful countries in Europe emerged from the Middle Ages into a new era of enlightenment, exploration, and religious and political thought, they began an all-encompassing struggle for economic and political dominance.

These countries were increasingly dependent on the expansion of trade, the development of new markets and sources for goods and raw materials, the expansion of their land holdings and power and the improvement of economic opportunities for their country.

In the 1500s, Spain and its naval prowess dominated Europe. The gold, silver and other precious materials brought back to Europe from Mexico

and South America seemingly promised great wealth. Rivalries among Spain, Portugal, France, the Netherlands and England increased dramatically during this period.

In 1558, Queen Elizabeth I ascended the throne of England. She encouraged the growth of the English Navy and further exploration of the Americas. In 1588, the English Navy defeated the Spanish Armada initiating the decline of Spain as the foremost European power. However, for England to claim and maintain European supremacy, it had to control America and keep the power of other nations in check. England was small in land area with few natural resources, and settlement in America would make it much more self-sufficient. Additionally, if a shorter route to the Far East could be found in North America, England could control that rich trade.

In 1606, three years after he ascended the throne, King James I granted the first of several charters to a group of London investors known as the Virginia Company of London for land in North America between the 34th and 41st parallels. The Virginia Company was originally a joint stock company with economic objectives benefiting England. The initial charters gave the members of the Company rights to elect officers, frame bylaws, transport emigrants, govern settlements, dispose of land and other resources and carry on commerce. For 12 pounds and 10 shillings, an investor could receive 200 acres of land. Stock was purchased by nobles, businessmen and city companies. Over the first several years, the Company incentivized the colonization of Virginia via charters that guaranteed colonists the same rights and liberties as Englishmen in England. Many of the guarantees in the charters as well as certain encroachments on these early rights would later influence the drafting of the U.S. Constitution.

The stage was set for permanent English settlement in America.

ENGLISH COLONIZATION

In 1585, Sir Walter Raleigh and a group of approximately 112 English people attempted the founding of the first permanent English settlement in North America. By 1590, the Roanoke Colony was abandoned, and the colonists had disappeared. Despite the mystery surrounding the Lost Colony, in December 1606, 143 men under the command of Captain Christopher Newport left London in three small ships to make a second attempt at establishing an English foothold in the New World. These colonizers landed in present-day Virginia in April 1607 and traveled up a river they named the James River to establish a settlement they called Jamestown. They would later learn the indigenous people's name for the river they now called home--the Powhatan River.

Almost immediately, the colonists faced several hardships including famine, bad crops, poor water supply, disease, unstable leadership, hostile relations with the indigenous people and a limited understanding of what they faced in a new land. While there were many settlers with critical skills including soldiers, blacksmiths, gunsmiths, masons and coopers, there were few with the knowledge and skillset required to live off the land. Also among these early settlers were a perfumer, gold refiner, goldsmith and jeweler--perhaps in anticipation of all the riches they hoped to discover. Many of these first settlers were gentlemen investors lacking the expertise necessary to successfully forge a new home here. By December, only eight months after they first landed, their number had dramatically diminished to 38.

Captain John Smith was a controversial leader of the Jamestown colony and a prolific writer chronicling many aspects of the New World and its people. Known for his often exaggerated and embellished descriptions, Smith was one of the few to maintain detailed writings of what he experienced during the early establishment of the Jamestown colony.

Today, his descriptions remain the authority despite some questions regarding their accuracy.

As the English attempted to establish trade with the local indigenous people, one of the first tribes Smith encountered were the Warraskoyack who lived in three villages within the boundaries of modern-day Isle of Wight County. Their main village, referred to on Smith's map by the tribe's name, was in the present-day town of Smithfield. Mokete, a smaller southern village, was once located in the unincorporated community now known as Rescue, and the third village was north in what is the Aberdeen Farm area today.

Smith described the land of the Warraskoyack as a land "wherein falleth 3 or 4 prettie brookes and creeks that half entrench the inhabitants." Unlike several of their neighboring tribes, Smith described his interactions with the Warraskoyack as friendly, and trade may have begun with them as early as the fall of 1607.

In late 1608, Smith and a small party traveled upon invitation to Werowocomoco, the then-capital of the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom, stopping along their way to visit the Warraskoyack. Smith's records indicate that the Warraskoyack chief supplied his traveling party with food and warned him not to trust Chief Powhatan suggesting that Powhatan had sent for him to "cut your throats."

Smith writes of two other friendly gestures which occurred during this visit. With mystery still surrounding the disappearance of the Roanoke Colony, searching for the missing colonists remained an important objective. The Warraskoyack chief provided colonist Michael Sicklemore with "two guides and directions how to seek the lost company of Sir Walter Raleigh." The original record later comments "Master Sickelmore returned from Chawonoke but found little hope and less certainitie of them were left…" The chief also allowed Smith to leave his young page Samuel Collier with the Warraskoyack to "learne his language" and the

culture. One might call Collier the first exchange student in the New World.

From the early days of English colonization, Isle of Wight County has been at the forefront of the history that would inspire the American Revolution and ultimately establish the United States of America.

TSENACOMOCO
THE DENSELY INHABITED PLACE

As the 1607 English colonists sailed up the James River, they likely viewed the shore of their new home with excitement and anxiety. The native people were not unknown to them, nor were the English and other Europeans unknown to many North American native tribes. Since the mid-1500s, Europeans had explored these shores.

An ill-fated Spanish mission established in the Chesapeake Bay region in 1570 is just one of examples of interactions between Europeans and native Virginia Indians predating the 1607 establishment of Jamestown. The mission's guide was Pacquiquineo, a Native American man who was taken aboard a Spanish ship from the Chesapeake Bay region in 1561. Whether Pacquiquineo traveled to Spain as a captive or volunteer remains unclear. The Spanish Jesuit priests of this mission ultimately failed, and after struggling with famine and illness, they were killed by Pacquiquineo and his tribe. In 1572, Spanish soldiers traveled to the area and hanged some of Pacquiquineo's tribe in response to the deaths of their missionaries. They did not find Pacquiquineo.

In 1603, there is evidence that an English captain, believed to be Samuel Mace, killed the chief of the Rappahannock tribe, kidnapped a group of tribesmen and took them to England where they were documented as giving dugout canoe demonstrations on the Thames River in December of the same year. The Rappahannock tribe was part of the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom, and Captain John Smith describes an interaction with Chief Powhatan in January 1608 in which he brings him before the Rappahannocks to ask if Smith is the captain who killed their chief in 1603. Smith was not the culprit.

Despite knowing about each other, neither group understood the other as evidenced through surviving records of early Virginia colonization. It

extended far beyond language barriers to vast differences in culture and political tactics that would continually hamper attempts at peace.

Though our understanding of the Virginia Indians is limited, we know that the tribes associated with the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom were Algonquin speakers who lived along the eastern coast of North America. In what we know as Virginia in 1607, there were several large groups organized geographically and politically into chiefdoms. Approximately 32 of these chiefdoms, including the Warraskoyack, were ruled by the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom with Chief Powhatan, as Smith called him, as leader. The Paramount Chiefdom and its geographic area was called Tsenacomoco, an ancient name meaning “densely inhabited place.”

The vast land area of Tsenacomoco—approximately 100 miles in length by 100 miles wide—covered the south bank of the James River and expanded north to the south bank of the Potomac, west to the fall line and east to the Chesapeake Bay and some of the Eastern Shore. The geography of Tsenacomoco served as early boundaries for the Virginia Colony. The Warraskoyack tribe already fell under the dominion of the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom at the time of colonial English contact circa 1607. Smith, as well as modern scholars, estimated the population of Tsenacomoco at 15,000 people.

Chief Powhatan, whose given name was Wahunsenacawh, ruled over Tsenacomoco after inheriting land and six core tribes from his mother which he consolidated and grew into the expansive Paramount Chiefdom that the English colonists experienced in 1607. Chief Powhatan was not an absolute ruler. Each tribe maintained its own chief—or werowance—each of whom sat on a council of advisors to the paramount chief. Alliances were created through persuasion or conquest with marriages and tribute to Chief Powhatan often included in the agreements.

Chief Powhatan was a successful leader and politician. His expansion of the chiefdom implies intelligence and political acumen although he does not appear to have recognized the English colonists for the threat they would become. Tsenacomoco passed to Wahunsenacawh's brother Opechancanough by 1618, and despite the new Chief Powhatan's efforts, the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom faded out of existence following his 1646 capture and execution.

THROUGH THE EYES OF CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

The English were fascinated by the exotic American people, and Captain John Smith and his crew spent considerable time visiting the tribes of Tsenacomoco, learning their language and customs, trading, seeking their help in difficult times, making friends with some and making enemies with others. It is mainly through the writings of Smith that we glimpse the inhabitants of Virginia through the eyes of this 17th century English colonizer.

In Smith's writings, he usually refers to the native people as "natural inhabitants," "naturals" or by their tribal name. Some of the tribes he visited—some friendly, some not—included Appamatuck, Pamaunkee, Mattaponi, Paspaheghes, Patawomekes, Toppahanock, Chickahamania, Nansemund, Warrosqueak, Chesapeaks, Chowanoke, Monacan, Pautuxeent and Kecoughtan. Many of these Indian names remain in use in Virginia today; others have been wiped away through renaming. Smith spelled the names phonetically as the culture of these tribes was based on oral tradition with no written alphabet.

Smith described the natives as generally tall and straight with brownish skin and black hair. The men wore their hair half-shaved and did not grow beards while the women cut their hair but always left some part long. Both men and women wore animal skins and painted their bodies. Some clothing was embroidered with beads, and some was painted with fearsome designs such as snakes and animals. They wore copper chains and jewelry. The men commonly had three holes pierced in their ears and then stretched the holes. In these stretched piercings, they might wear a small live snake or a dead rat tied by the tail. They sometimes wore the wing of a bird or "the whole skin of a hawk stuffed with wings abroad." Of the Native Americans, Smith wrote, "... he is the most gallant that is the most monstrous to behold."

By 1607, the Powhatan Indians, including the Warraskoyack, were no

longer nomadic. They lived in villages along the banks of streams and rivers near their agricultural fields in round or ovular houses formed from bent tree saplings covered with bark or woven reed mats. These structures, which rarely spanned larger than 30 by 15 feet, were labor-intensive to build and had one door which acted as the primary source of light and ventilation. Towns tended to house two to 20 families.

Tribes grew corn and other food in season. They did not maintain livestock except for an occasional dog which Smith described as similar to English wolves but smaller and unable to bark "but howle." Natives did not domesticate any larger animals—no deer or turkeys. Most of the animals we consider livestock are not native to North America; cows, chickens, pigs and even honeybees brought over on ships to Virginia beginning in 1607 to establish English livestock herds. Living instead off the land and waterways, the natives caught and consumed a bounty of fish, oysters and crabs, hunted deer and small game, felled geese and ducks from the sky and foraged.

Smith maintained that the "greatest labor" of the Indians was in planting their corn and described the uses of corn and cornmeal at great length. He also discussed the roles of the men and women in the division of labor writing, "The men bestow their times in fishing, hunting, warres, and such man like exercises, scorning to be seen in any womanlike exercise… The women and children do the rest of the worke. They make mats, baskets, pots, morters, pound their corne, make their bread, prepare their victuals, plant their corne, gather their corne, bear all kinds of burdens, and such like."

Like many of the English newcomers who lacked agricultural experience, Smith was clearly impressed with the farming techniques of the Virginia Indians. The English were also fascinated by native fishing and hunting techniques and weapons.

Smith expressed interest in the warfare of the Native Americans—or

“warres”—noting the approximate population of the tribe and the number of fighting men. Of the Warraskoyack, identified as a smaller and more peaceful tribe, Smith records approximately 40 fighting men while the neighboring Nansemond tribe, recognized as fierce warriors, had approximately 200 fighters.

Interestingly, Smith opined on the frequent wars writing, “They seldome make warre for lands or goods, but for women and children, and principally for revenge.” The English would experience examples of this revenge in the following years.

As mentioned in the second article of this series, Smith is recognized as a controversial leader of Jamestown and prolific writer regarding his experiences here in Virginia. His descriptions of colonial Virginia remain the authority despite some questions regarding their accuracy. In 1609, Smith is the victim of a mysterious gunpowder explosion which historians still believe may have been an intentional incident carried out by those who disliked his leadership. He returned to England for treatment and would never see Virginia again. Many of his recollections regarding his two years in Virginia were written after his return to England with one of the last notable writings completed in 1630, approximately a year before his death.

THE GREAT CHARTER OF 1618
A FOUNDATION FOR 1619 KEY EVENTS

For its first decades, the Virginia Colony was not considered a success, and concerns over the potential failure of the second attempt at English colonization in the New World inspired significant change in 1618 when the officers of the Virginia Company issued important reforms. Known as the Great Charter of 1618, these reforms were designed to entice continued settlement and included a change in the land policy which allowed investors to receive land in exchange for investments.

Another reform established the headright system which offered land for each person who transported themselves or others to Virginia. The system also assisted with a problem the colony was having—shortages in the workforce. There was a profound lack of agricultural and other workers needed in the colony. Indentured servants were brought over via the headright system, rewarding investors with land for financing the influx of labor.

The Virginia Company, recognizing that "the plantation cannot flourish till families be planted and the respect of wives and children fill the people on the Soile," began transporting women to the New World in the hopes that they would marry and establish families. Called the Jamestown Maidens and Tobacco Brides, these women provided some of the stabilization early Virginia needed to survive. Many of the women referenced in early records, though sparse, arrived in Warraskoyack between 1620 and 1624, suggesting that they were Tobacco Brides.

The Great Charter also paved the way for a certain level of self-governance in the form of a General Assembly which was empowered to propose and act on legislation. The first General Assembly met in 1619 marking the first elected legislative assembly in the New World and became a foundation for the United States' constitutional form of government and a model for self-government around the world. What is

now Isle of Wight County was one of 11 settlements represented in this very first meeting. Captain Christopher Lawne and Ensign Washer of Lawne's Plantation were the representatives.

Another notable 1619 event was the arrival of the first Africans in Virginia aboard a Dutch ship. John Rolfe described the arrival, "The captain brought not anything but 20 and odd negroes which the governor…bought for victuals…" Primary sources do not provide a clear description of the status of these first Africans. Whether they were originally regarded as indentured servants or slaves remains uncertain. Anthony (Antonio) Johnson, an African man who arrived at Bennett's Welcome in 1621, was listed by 1647 as an "unindentured man." While their early standing is unclear, the arrival of the first Africans marks the beginning of race-based slavery in Virginia.

While the Great Charter's reforms stabilized the colony in several ways, many issues remained unresolved affecting Virginia's—and Warraskoyack's—success as a permanent English settlement.

ENGLISH SETTLEMENT IN ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY

As England became embroiled in religious division, Virginia was viewed as a haven for those deemed religious dissenters inspiring considerable immigration to the New World. The area south of the James River was largely settled by Puritans escaping the religious unrest in England and Europe. In fact, the first three settlements in Warraskoyack—modern-day Isle of Wight County—were Puritan. While the Massachusetts group may have been more storied, Puritans were in Warraskoyack before Plymouth Rock.

In 1618, Christopher Lawne, a leading Puritan, patented land with plans to settle 100+ colonists in Warraskoyack. The settlement, known as Lawne's Plantation and Isle of Wight Plantation, was settled in 1619. Christopher Lawne and Ensign Washer represented Warraskoyack at the first meeting of the General Assembly that same year, one of many events tying Isle of Wight County to America's founding. Unfortunately, Lawne's Plantation proved to be situated in a swampy and unhealthy location. As with many of the other settlers of Lawne's Plantation, Lawne soon fell ill and died, and his colony was abandoned by the dwindling survivors.

In 1621, Edward Bennett, a wealthy English merchant and influential Puritan, patented land in Warraskoyack called Bennett's Welcome, Bennett's Plantation and Warraskoyack. The Bennett Family is credited with transporting more than 600 settlers to Virginia. Bennett was a member of the Virginia Company and served in the Virginia General Assembly, and Bennett's Welcome proved to be a successful enterprise.

Nathaniel Basse received a patent for a 300-acre tract in Warraskoyack in November of 1621 which he named Basse's Choice and settled the following year. An active citizen and member of the Virginia General Assembly, Basse was named Commander of Warraskoyack in 1624. This

was an early step in the development of local self-government as one of his responsibilities was to try all legal cases—except for capital cases. In 1631, Basse was commissioned to travel to parts of New England, Canada and the West Indies to "invite the inhabitants hither if so inclined especially …those who dislike coldness of climate or barrenness of the soil." In doing so, he acted as an early promoter of Virginia.

Early Isle of Wight County exemplifies the story of America—a melting pot of ideas and perseverance.

LIVESTOCK
BUILDING HERDS, BUILDING STOCK

When the first English colonists arrived in Virginia, they encountered a very different animal population from that of England. Notably, there was an absence of domesticated livestock including horses, cattle, mules, pigs, sheep and goats. As early as 1607, the Virginia Company sent shipments of European animals to Virginia. Cattle, oxen, horses, hogs and chickens were among the cargo.

In Virginia Company records, Governor De La Warre in 1610 mentions, "God that …Gates will arrive with an extraordinarie 100 Kine [an archaic term for cattle] and 200 Swine and other provisions." A 1619 record mentions that "a store of cattell" will be transported bringing the number of "cattell to about five hundred with some horses and goates, and infinite number of swine, broken out into the woods."

The first animals imported to Virginia did not fare well. Many died because of weather and disease. Fowl, hogs and smaller animals seemed to adapt more easily to Virginia and quickly reproduced, establishing stable populations. Larger animals like cattle, horses and oxen took longer to build sustainable herds. Larger animals also proved to be preferred prey for wolves, which the English had not had experience combatting since the 15th century. Hogs and smaller animals could survive in the woods, but larger animals, especially cattle, required more protection, later giving rise to the need for fences and an end to free-range husbandry.

To help build a larger cattle population, in 1619, the Virginia General Assembly passed a law that prohibited anyone without express permission from the governor from killing any cattle, young or old. By 1620, a census indicated a population of more than 300 head of cattle, over 300 swine, 200 goats and 11 horses in Virginia. Only two years

later, the cattle population had increased to 1,500. While livestock-related laws were proving somewhat successful in encouraging herd growth, the population suffered a setback in 1622 when livestock were killed during a surprise attack carried out by the Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom. Herds rebounded by 1624 when another census listed 365 cattle, over 500 swine and one horse in the colony. The Virginia General Assembly maintained the laws against slaughtering livestock, and by 1649, there were 20,000 head of cattle counted in Virginia.

Horses were a rare import and were considered a status symbol. But over the next several years, horses and mules would become important and populous as beasts of burden. To build the Virginia envisioned by the Virginia Company, its settlers would need to accomplish heavy work such as clearing and cultivating large expanses of land, operating sawmills and building boats, houses and structures. The use of draft animals would become a necessity. Meanwhile, additional non-native species were imported. A shipment in 1621 from England included "Pigeons, Connies (rabbits), Peacocks and beehives."

Species such as pigs, cattle, horses and even honeybees are not native to North America and did not greet the English upon their arrival to the New World. By 1649, Virginia's dedication to natural herd growth had proven successful, ending earlier periods of starvation.

BECOMING VIRGINIANS

Virginia experienced a tenuous start during its first two decades as the colony was populated largely by motivated but unseasoned and inexperienced immigrant workers beset by sickness, starvation, unrest and a high mortality rate.

Only 1,095 of the several thousand settlers who came to Virginia beginning in 1607 survived until the 1625 muster. However, the colony showed great promise with abundant natural resources, fertile fields and waters and ready consumer markets in Europe. Virginia began to prosper by the late 1620s with major changes in governance, immigration and land policies and successful crops.

Virginia's population grew dramatically in the 1600s and 1700s. The estimated population of Virginia increased from 2,500 to 58,560 people from 1630 to 1700, then to 447,019 by 1770 and finally to 747,610 by 1790. Virginia became the largest of the British colonies in North America. In Isle of Wight County, the population increased from 55 in 1623 to 532 by 1635 and to 9,028 by 1790.

In the 1600s, colonists came predominantly from England—mostly as indentured servants with religious freedom, financial success and land ownership as primary motivators. Records indicate approximately 50,000 people came to the Chesapeake Bay region from 1640 to 1680 as indentured servants.

In the 1700s, settlers came in large numbers from France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, other parts of the British Isles and other parts of Europe. This was mainly in response to the perpetual need for skilled and experienced labor including medical doctors, metal workers, leather workers, tobacco farmers, sawmill operators, fishermen, brickmakers, silkworm workers and many others needed to support the colony. Some such as Quakers, Puritans, Huguenots, Baptists and

Presbyterians were dissenters who fled civil unrest and religious persecution in their home countries.

Many Virginia colonists had first settled in other colonies but over time migrated in search of better opportunities. The Valley of Virginia formed a natural thoroughfare for settlers traveling south and west, and people, especially those from the German colonies, migrated to Virginia from the north. Furthermore, a small number of settlers were English prisoners sent to Virginia to relieve overcrowded jails in England.

In the 1700s, approximately 40% of the population of Virginia were enslaved individuals forcibly brought from Africa or the Caribbean. There were four enslaved listed in the 1623 census in Isle of Wight County with almost 3,000 in Virginia in 1680, 16,000 by 1704 and 210,000 by 1776. Census records indicate that by 1790, most inhabitants of Virginia were of English or African descent with the third most populous group of German descent.

Initially, settlers tended to identify with their country of origin. Yet, as they worked together, their country of origin became less of an identifier. They instead became Virginians. Over time, Virginia and Isle of Wight County grew with the immigration of people from many different places and walks of life—with different views, needs and visions. They all came together in common cause to build this county, state and country.

VIRGINIA SILK CULTURE

Early Virginia settlers marveled at the agricultural opportunities that Virginia presented. Tobacco was the primary economic engine of the colony, but the need to develop other resources and diversify the economy was ongoing. The Virginia Company was responsible for the management of the colony with goals of making it successful and profitable while promoting laws to spur new business ventures.

One such enterprise was the silk industry which was hoped to be compatible with Virginia's resources and climate. Silk culture was favored due to its status as a desirable luxury commodity with strong markets in Europe. Additionally, silk was favored over tobacco by King James I as he called smoking tobacco, "…a custome loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the braine, and dangerous to the lungs."

Envisioning a burgeoning silkworm population for the production of silk fibers, the first Virginia General Assembly passed laws in 1619 requiring every man to plant and maintain white mulberry trees. "About the planting of mulberry trees, be it enacted that every man… for seven years …every year plant and maintain six mulberry trees at the least and as many more as he shall think convenient and … such persons as shall neglect the yearly planting and maintaining …shall be subject to the censure of the Governor and Council."

The planting of white mulberry trees, native to Asia, was essential as they are key in the hearty silkworm diet. The worms unfortunately did not eat leaves of the red mulberry tree which were native to America and grew locally.

While silk culture was an exciting possibility, it soon proved to be unsuitable for the routine of early Virginians. Silkworms cannot walk or fly, and they require almost constant human care. Silk culture is labor intensive, tedious work. Great skill and knowledge of caring for

silkworms is necessary for success—a level of expertise not readily found in Virginia.

While the silk effort was vigorously pursued for a while, little cloth was produced, and colonists ultimately turned to other crops. The Stuart Kings continued to support silk culture, and it is said that they wore coronation robes made of Virginia silk.

Today, many white mulberry trees remain in Isle of Wight County and are mostly regarded as an invasive species. It is not known if they are descendants of those planted for silk culture or if they were planted later, but they are another connection to the early days of Isle of Wight County.

The first settlers pursued new ideas and activities pioneering possibilities without the benefit of prior attempts, and that spirit has resounded in other aspects of the history of this country.

VIRGINIA'S EARLY GOVERNMENT
OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE

As early Virginia settlers began to establish new plantations and communities, law and order became an important aspect of their fledgling society. A basic governmental structure was needed to protect them and their property, settle disputes and handle affairs of government. Despite being a frontier, Virginia was not a lawless place.

Colonists were extended many of the rights and privileges of Englishmen as promised in the first charter of the Virginia Company. It stated, *"…*all and everie the parsons being our subjects which shall dwell and inhabit within everie or anie of the saide severall Colonies and plantacions and everie or anie of theire children…shall have and enjoy all liberties, franchises and immunities as if they had been abiding and borne within this our realme of England.*"* There was also latitude for the colony to establish certain aspects of its own government system provided that these were compatible with the laws and rule of England.

Sir George Yeardley arrived in Jamestown in 1619 as the new governor of Virginia. Under new instruction from the Virginia Company via the Great Charter, he established the first legislative assembly. After 1619, the seat of local government in Virginia remained in the colonial capital at Jamestown until it relocated in 1699 to Williamsburg. The capital's general court served as the colony's supreme court and tried all court cases including those from distant new settlements like Lawne's Plantation, Basse's Choice and Bennett's Welcome.

In 1626, the Court of Colonial Virginia ordered, "… that the Governor with his best conveniency shall give a commission to some sufficient man in every Plantation for the Command and Government thereof," thus setting into motion the foundations for expanded local government in Virginia. The increasingly difficult travel required to attend or participate in court proceedings in the capital as settlements spread

further from Jamestown necessitated this development. In Warraskoyack, Captain Nathaniel Basse was commissioned to try all but capital offenses at Basse's Choice which marked the beginning of the county court system and self-government in Isle of Wight County. His responsibilities included land patents, indentured servant contracts and militia affairs.

Over the next century, the local county court grew to take on more complex responsibilities for a broad variety of local government actions including passing and enforcing local laws and regulations, inferior courts, some judicial functions, settling debts and disputes among residents, overseeing roads and bridges, taxation and budgets, hiring and overseeing employees and maintaining legal records including wills and deeds. During this period, there was significant growth in new counties and courts in Virginia increasing from eight in the 1630s to 61 in the 1770s. As new counties were established, some of Isle of Wight's boundaries were slightly redrawn to balance the population and area. In 1749, in a major action, more than half Isle of Wight's land was transferred to the new county of Southampton.

THE ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY COURT

In 18th-century Isle of Wight County, the first Thursday of each month was eagerly awaited by almost everyone. Court Day was a day filled with pageantry and drama. Decisions were made that affected citizens, their future and the future of the colony.

Court Day was the day each month that Isle of Wight County's local governing board met and the day each month that people came to the courthouse to transact a range of personal and county business. All county citizens, at one time or another, had business with the court—recording wills and deeds, buying and selling property, settling disputes and debts or meeting with the justices of the peace. Citizen might appear as witnesses or jurors, request a new county road or ferry, appear as guardians for children or be tried for a minor infraction of the law.

Just as important were the informal gatherings on the courthouse green where people caught up with others, discussed politics, had a meal at one of the taverns, bought items from local shops and vendors and played cards at the gaming house. Court Day brought people together from different walks of life and provided the opportunity to observe government action, to voice concerns and to participate in governing.

Isle of Wight County's court was one of the earliest in America. This was a large county, and people wanted and needed their government to be accessible. Over the years, there were petitions by Isle of Wight County citizens to move the court closer to them, and the court was moved several times. Additionally, the population was growing, and the business of the court was increasing—sometimes with more than 150 items on the docket requiring two days to hear.

By the 1700s, county government and operations were overseen by a panel of justices of the peace appointed by the governor. Only male

white property owners aged 21 or older were eligible. The justices oversaw a wide variety of local law and government operations. There were no special qualifications for justice beyond the ability to read and write - though those appointed were usually noted for their character and were considered men of influence, ability, intelligence, capability and fairness who served without compensation.

In 1750, the General Assembly mandated each county have, “a courthouse, stocks, pillory, ducking stool and whipping post.” It was then that the 1750 Courthouse on Main Street in Smithfield was authorized and constructed. It served this county for more than 50 years.

Historians have regarded the county court and Court Day as important institutions in Virginia and used terms such as “training ground for democracy,” “training ground for diplomats,” “where colonists learned the art of governing” and crediting this experience for preparing colonists with the knowledge and understanding to take on the responsibility for self-governing and building American democracy.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
VIRGINIA'S PARISH SYSTEM

One of the basic tenets of the United States' form of government is the concept of separation of church and state. Yet in colonial Virginia, the Church of England, the established state church, played significant roles in colonial life and local government.

Virginia's early government was an extension of the Church of England. Attendance at services was required as was paying parish taxes. Additionally, the church was active in ministries and social welfare needs.

In the early 1600s, the struggle for some choice in worship began to take root in Europe with some of the first immigrants to the New World coming for religious reasons. While not legal in early colonial times and often severely punished, dissent was tolerated. Many of Isle of Wight County's early settlers were non-conformists. Puritans, Quakers, Baptists and other groups pioneered their worship here. In 1689, England's Parliament passed the Acts of Toleration granting more freedom of worship for non-conformist groups. The Church of England remained the official state church of Virginia until 1784 when it was disestablished after the American Revolution.

During the colonial period, the Church of England and its responsibilities were organized by the General Assembly as geographic divisions called parishes. Similar to counties in size, parishes had a central church with smaller places of worship called chapels of ease. Generally, each parish was headed by a minister who was responsible for the parish's religious life, teaching and worship, social welfare and church attendance. Ministers were few, and vestries exercised enormous control. Generally composed of 12 white men, vestries oversaw operational matters including levying parish taxes, caring for church property and surveying and recording land ownership records. They had limited responsibility

for processing minor violations of law as serious matters were handled by the county court. Missing church and cursing were two of the most frequent offenses cited in county records and were typically punished by fines paid to the church.

It was through social programs that the parish was closest to the people. Life in this relatively remote county was difficult at best. There was no modern medicine; sickness and disease swept the population. Mortality was high, and children were often orphaned. The economy, based largely on prices of tobacco, was uncertain, and many colonists lost their property and livelihood to debt. Other than the church, there were no assistance programs. The church assisted the poor, cared for the sick and protected and taught orphans. The vestry levied the annual parish taxes that funded these programs.

The first parish in Isle of Wight County, known as the Lower Parish and later as the Newport Parish, was established no later than 1629. Newport Parish's 17th-century brick church still stands in the outskirts of Smithfield and is known as St. Luke's Historic Church & Museum today. The ruins of early churches still dot the landscape of Virginia serving as reminders of a time when the separation of church and state was a novel concept not yet considered nor part of the burgeoning American identity.

VIRGINIA TAXATION

History tells us that every civilized nation has collected taxes in some form to finance government services and expenses. Throughout history, there have also been people who considered taxes a burden and others who agreed with Oliver Wendell Holmes, an early Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, who said, “Taxes are the cost of a civilized society.”

By the 1750s, England and the American colonies, especially Virginia, had become major trading partners. Most of the American colonies had asserted certain rights to establish some of their own financial laws and monetary systems. The colonies, each with their own variations, raised their own funds and taxes to pay for various government services and projects.

The English owned extensive land and were active in many businesses in North America for which they also charged fees, taxes and tariffs associated with trade. But Americans did not pay English property or income taxes.

In Virginia, the primary taxes on residents were those assessed by the colony’s government, the county’s government and the parish. The public levy was paid by all tithable Virginians.

The definition of a tithable person changed over time, but for most of the period after 1723, it consisted of all white men over 16 years of age. All Black, biracial and indigenous people older than 16 were tithable. Children were not tithable, nor were white women unless they were the head of their household.

The tithable tax was determined by estimating the expenses of the jurisdiction and dividing the expected expenses by the number of tithable persons within that jurisdiction, deriving the amount owed per tithable. County records show that in 1783, the county levy was

determined in pounds of tobacco. The 33,930 pounds of tobacco was collected from 1805 tithables at 18 pounds per person. While all were welcome to pay with cash, most did not have cash. In this case, the tax was three shillings.

The public levy was raised when necessary to pay the colony's bills. The proceeds were used for Virginia's governmental expenses including facilities maintenance, court costs, infrastructure improvements and salaries and expenses of officials and employees. The county levy paid for county governmental expenses including facilities, bridges, staff salaries, court costs and law enforcement. Parish taxes paid for church facilities, operations, ministers, social welfare, services for the poor and the expenses of parish orphans.

Virginia's form of taxation was a poll tax or capitation tax. A poll tax is a flat tax charged regardless of wealth or status. In addition to the public taxes, Virginia raised other funding in the form of rents, import and export duties, business fees, port charges, sales of lands and natural resources, taxes on alcohol and other items and shipping charges.

In an unusual local example of how England used its collected Virginia taxes, revenue that had previously been sent to England to supplement general customs collections in compliance with the Plantation Duty Act of 1672 was redirected in 1692 to the newly founded College of William and Mary in lieu of any other financial aid from England.

In the 1750s, in what was considered vastly unpopular and unfair moves, the English began taxing Americans to defray the costs of recent English wars. Widespread concerns about the impact that this would have on America's future led to "No Taxation without Representation" which became an American rallying cry for the Revolutionary War.

INDENTURED SERVANTS

Gerald Gwaltney, Contributing Writer

Economic success came to the Virginia colony with dangerous and intensive manual labor. The streets were not paved with proverbial gold, and it was apparent that significant prosperity would come primarily through agriculture—most abundantly through tobacco—and through the use and refinement of natural resources such as lumber. One of the most difficult problems facing Virginia's early growth and stability was the continuous need for workers—especially agricultural workers, skilled workers and craftsmen.

To recruit such labor, King James I of England issued the Great Charter of 1618, and the Virginia Company instituted several reforms to spur immigration and to make the colony more appealing to those seeking a new life. Major reforms included headright system provisions which made it easier for colonists to own land. This system permitted subjects wishing to emigrate the ability to enter into a legal agreement—or indenture—of voluntary servitude by which a sponsor or master paid the servant's passage and provided food, clothing and shelter for a certain period—usually 7 years—in exchange for work. Immigrants from several European countries were permitted to enter these agreements.

At the end of the indenture, the worker was released from the agreement and received 50 to 100 acres of land. The master also received 50 to 100 acres of land per indentured servant, thus increasing the master's holdings. Frequently, the former servants went on to sponsor new arrivals—often their family members—thus increasing their own land wealth.

Indentured servants were not enslaved. However, they did live under the supervision of their master and often experienced difficult day-to-day lives. Their activities were restricted, and laws designated for indentured servants allowed harsh punishments for master-determined

infractions. While there were some unfair aspects of the headright system, it provided an avenue for many to settle in the Virginia colony and become landowners. Between 50,000 and 70,000 immigrants are estimated to have come to the Chesapeake Bay colonies between 1630 and 1680, and an estimated 2,000 came to Isle of Wight County during the same period.

One immigrant who settled in Isle of Wight County was Thomas Gwaltney. Born in 1618 in Wales, he made his way from London to Barbados at age 22 to serve a seven-year indenture working on cotton plantations. Thomas was lured to Barbados with false promises of free housing, good wages and a plot of land at the end of the indenture. When his indenture was up, there was no land, so he boarded a ship bound for the Virginia colony and indentured himself for a second time. His new master was William Yarrett, a prominent Quaker in Isle of Wight County who had property on Goose Hill Creek. At the end of this indenture, Thomas leased more land and indentured four more people, receiving 200 acres granted by Governor Berkeley in May 1666 for these endeavors. One of many who came to Isle of Wight, Thomas Gwaltney's story represents the many hardy pioneers who built America.

THE ENSLAVED IN ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY

The first Africans in the colonies were brought to Virginia in 1619 aboard the *White Lion* at nearby Point Comfort with 20 plus people aboard. All had been captured by English privateers and taken from the slave ship *San Juan Batista*. They were traded as bonded laborers by the ship's crew in exchange for food and supplies.

Though these first Africans were not labeled enslaved, they were the beginning of the transition to a legal system of chattel slavery. However, these early laborers were typically considered indentured servants and treated as such. Antonio/Anthony Johnson was one such African indentured servant who served at Bennett's Welcome beginning in 1621. In 1623, another African indentured servant by the name of Mary arrived who would later become Anothony's wife. The first muster of this small remote settlement in 1623 and 1624 lists 33 people living at Bennett's Welcome. Both Anthony and Mary appear to have successfully fulfilled their terms of indenture and are referenced as free in the legal record by 1647. They established a plantation on the Eastern Shore—using the headright system to their advantage—before moving and settling in Maryland in 1665.

In 1623, the first four enslaved Africans of what would become Isle of Wight County were documented as arriving at Bennett's Welcome. The legal standing of African bonded laborers was quickly changing in Virginia as can be seen in Mary Johnson's 1623 standing as an indentured servant and as an enslaved African laborer at Bennett's Welcome within the same year. The number of African laborers first grew slowly—rapidly increasing as the system of slavery became more established in Virginia. In 1650, there were 300 enslaved in Virginia—increasing to 6,000 by 1700 and to almost 300,000 by 1790.

In 1782, Virginia passed the Emancipation Act which allowed slaveholders to free their slaves without government approval. Several

Isle of Wight County slave owners freed—or manumitted—hundreds of slaves by will or deed before 1806 when the law was reversed.

In 1798, George Benn, a leading Methodist, freed eight of his slaves and provided freedom to several youths when they later came of age. Joseph Hill of Isle of Wight County stated that after he read the Bill of Rights, he was fully persuaded that, “Freedom is natural right and no law moral or divine gives me a just right or property in … any of my fellow creatures…”

In 1802, Timothy Tynes freed all 81 of his enslaved by name upon his death and left them large tracts of land.

The county’s population in 1790 included 4,786 White, 3,867 Black enslaved and 375 free People of Color. By 1860, just before the Civil War, the county’s population numbers remained largely unchanged, listing a population of 5,037 White, 3,570 Black enslaved and 1,370 free People of Color.

Virginia quickly became a key stakeholder in the slave trade, transporting more than a million slaves to the Lower South in the 1800s. Slaves became Virginia’s most profitable export, even more so than tobacco.

CARING FOR ORPHANS

The high mortality rate in colonial Virginia often left large numbers of orphaned children in its wake—some orphans hailed from wealthy families while most came from poor families with insufficient resources. The Virginia Colony implemented several regulations and programs to provide basic care for its growing orphan population. The colony, parish, orphans' families and the community all shared responsibility for different aspects of orphan care.

In Virginia, the term *orphan* usually referred to a minor child whose father was deceased. As women did not tend to have rights to the personal property and resources of their male counterparts, mothers may have continued with the day-to-day care of their orphaned children but were not considered legal guardians. Instead, the education of the orphan and the care of any inherited estate were typically managed by a will-appointed or court-appointed male guardian.

Guardians were expected to keep detailed records regarding the care of orphans and to make regular financial reports to the court. The Isle of Wight County Court held Orphans' Court annually where guardians reported on their charges for review by the justices of the peace. Additional orphans' hearings were held during regular Isle of Wight County court days throughout the year, and the number was often significant.

Guardians were generally male relatives or close friends—uncles, grandfathers, older brothers —and were often appointed by the father in his will and reviewed by the court. If there was no will, the county's court justices appointed a guardian. To avoid conflict of interest, the guardian was not the person who would inherit the estate upon the death of the orphan.

If the orphan had no estate or property, their care was usually provided by relatives or the parish. Under Virginia law, if a child had no estate,

they were subject to being “bound out” to someone to learn a trade or serve as an apprentice. Male children usually entered such servitude around age 10 and continued until age 21. Girls were taught “some suitable trade or employment” and apprenticed until they were no older than 18. While the focus of this system was to teach children a trade and take advantage of their labor, Virginia law required a very basic education in the form of reading and writing provided by the caretakers and/or bosses of all bound out children.

Isle of Wight Country court records give many accounts of orphans and their care. In 1673, Lidia Silvester entered an agreement with Robert Coleman to bind out her son until he was 21. He was to be a faithful son to Coleman. The little boy was only three years old at the time.

Life was difficult for all early Virginia colonists, and orphans were no exception.

EARLY INDUSTRIES OF VIRGINIA AND ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY

The Virginia Colony was settled with economic objectives in mind—to provide new lands and opportunities for England as well as raw materials for industrialization and a new base of trade in an expanding world.

John Smith described a land of opportunity when reporting to the Virginia Company, "The waters, Isles, and shoales, are full of safe harbours for ships of warre or marchandize, for boats of all sorts, for transportation or fishing…The Bay and rivers haue much marchantable fish, and places fit for Salt coats, building of ships, making of Iron…"

While not all the colonists' early ventures would prove successful in this opportune location, the roots of Isle of Wight County's major industries can be found in their endeavors.

Virginia's most successful and enduring industry is agriculture. From the early success of tobacco crops in the 1600s to specialty agriculture today, local farmers have fed this community and exported county-grown products around the world. Isle of Wight County has been a foremost supplier of pork, tobacco, corn, grain and cotton as well as a major producer of peanuts. While our economy has diversified since the 17th century, agriculture remains a dominant force. Today, the county is one of Virginia's top producers of soybeans.

Country hams, traditionally made from peanut-fed hogs, have been cured and smoked here for generations. This ham culture began with the arrival of hogs in the early 1600s and led to the establishment of family ham businesses including that of Mallory Todd who is credited with the earliest written record of ham exports from Smithfield in 1779. By the mid-19th century, Smithfield hams had gained some level of world

-renown with Queen Victoria ordering six Smithfield hams a week for her palace kitchen.

P.D. Gwaltney Jr. also made a name for himself in the ham industry beginning in the late 1890s as an impressive advertiser, inventor and businessman. The local ham industry lives on today through Smithfield Foods Inc., headquartered here in Smithfield.

But Isle of Wight County's legacy didn't exist solely in its fields—the waterways provided abundant opportunities. Virginia's seafood industry, possibly its oldest industry, has excelled since English settlement.

Sturgeon have been called the "fish that saved Jamestown," and as early as 1610, the English colonists requested the Virginia Company recruit sturgeon and caviar processors. Caviar made from sturgeon roe was enjoyed by settlers here but ultimately proved too fragile to be shipped long distances. Over the next centuries, sturgeon experienced periods of popularity and decline.

In the 1800s several caviar businesses existed on the James River. Shipping products locally and to northern markets, the Woolley Family operated a caviar processing business in the late 1800s to early 1900s in Rushmere. Ultimately, overproduction drove sturgeon dangerously close to extinction. Today, Atlantic sturgeon are protected and listed as an endangered species.

Many of our early industries were guided by the bellies of hungry settlers who were hungry for good food and economic prosperity. Arguably they managed to find and establish both here in Isle of Wight County. Today, we still enjoy the legacy of these industries when we eat local seafood, buy local hams or pick up fresh corn from the farmer's market.

OCCUPATIONS THAT BUILT AMERICA

While Virginia's experimentation in agriculture proved successful, the Virginia Company continued to explore ideas for new businesses and mine natural resources to establish profitable enterprises. The Virginia Company emphasized learning from successes in other countries and recruiting workers in creative and varied fields.

When the English arrived, Virginia was populated with dense forests. Wood and byproducts of its processing were in high demand in England and in much of Europe. As early as 1610, the Virginia Company requested sawmill operators from Holland to build sawmills in Virginia. Turpentine, pitch and tar—collectively called naval stores and exported in great quantity—were derived from the longleaf pine tree and used for building, waterproofing and repairing ships.

As the population grew, so did the need for construction. Craftsmen were recruited to build specialized structures—from ships to wagons and furniture to churches. Gristmills were built to refine flour and corn for making bread and other foods. Mills tended to become local gathering spots and landmarks. Several local areas and roads still bear the name of mills no longer there. Familiar Isle of Wight County mill names include Hardy's Mill once located in the Lawne's Creek area; Wrenn's Mill still standing until the 1990s in the Bethany Church area; and Boykin's Mill at the Isle of Wight County Courthouse which remained standing until somewhat recently.

Several of the tradesmen who settled in Isle of Wight County were important producers of wares used throughout the Virginia colony. By 1675, Joseph Copeland settled in the eastern end of the county near Chuckatuck. As one of the colony's only pewterers, his distinct pewter spoons have been found in several early Virginia archaeological sites including Jamestown. Copeland was declared the caretaker of utensils

and ornaments for the House of Burgesses in 1688, further suggesting the importance of his trade.

The Lawnes Creek Potter was another Isle of Wight County resident whose trade supported daily life in the Virginia colony. His recognizable peach colored clay with green glaze was harvested and produced here in Isle of Wight County at a site along Lawne's Creek from circa 1690 to 1730. Much like Copeland's spoons, this pottery has been found in archaeological sites across Virginia and parts of the Eastern Shore.

In the early 1600s and beyond, boats were owned by most everyone, necessary for most travel and work. There were few roads making the James River and its tributaries the most direct route from one point to another. Watercraft were essential, and the waterways were populated with boats of all kinds. Because of this, shipwrights were in demand and a higher paying trade in the Virginia colony. Some plantations even employed shipwrights to perform repairs and build various crafts.

After 400 years, these Virginia businesses—agriculture, sea culture, the pork industry, the timber industry and other major Virginia Industries—still have a dominant role in local and national business. One can stand on the shores of the James River in Isle of Wight County and see the sites of the early industries that have sustained generations of Isle of Wight County residents and workers in our country for centuries.

COLONIAL EDUCATION

Despite early challenges in Virginia, educating youth was a primary concern for the English settlers. What was considered an appropriate education was much more limited at the time and mainly consisted of basic reading, writing and simple arithmetic. As the population grew, new opportunities grew with it, creating a need for broader education.

This education did not extend to all. The education of enslaved children was not a priority and oftentimes prohibited. White male children from families of a higher socioeconomic status were the focus of early education in the Virginia colony.

Education in colonial Virginia was not funded or supported by the government or the church, leaving the responsibility of educating children to their families and heavily influenced by their economic status. Most children received basic education from family members. Wealthier families often hired a tutor to teach in the home while other families sent their children to academies or schools in larger towns.

More than a basic education was considered a luxury reserved primarily for boys of wealthy families who might also study “casting accounts,” arithmetic and some mathematics or literature and languages. Wealthy girls were taught to read with a primary focus on home skills and homemaking with very little arithmetic included. In fact, many tutors charged more for teaching girls than boys. Such schooling rarely followed a regular schedule or curriculum. Yet, early Virginia and Isle of Wight records suggest education was highly valued.

Free schools became increasingly common and were funded via donations from individuals and/or supporting groups, typically for impoverished children whose families might not otherwise be able to afford any education. Field schools, informal educational gatherings planned by families or neighbors and conducted by volunteer teachers, also became common and were held wherever space was available

including vacant barns. These informal lessons were more likely to focus on what was considered the basics.

Wills frequently included gifts for education. In his 1655 will, John Moone of Moonefield Plantation in Isle of Wight County left “four cows to serve as stock forever for fatherless children without means of support for education.” Furthermore, community members often left property or livestock to specific free schools as donations upon their deaths—as was the case for Benjamin Syms, previously of Basse’s Choice in Isle of Wight County upon his death in Elizabeth City—modern -day Hampton—prior to 1647.

Other wills and court documents indicate the importance that parents placed on their children receiving an education.

Thomas Griffin in 1669 left instructions for his son to be placed in a teacher’s care so that he might learn to read and write and cast accounts. In 1679, Thomas Crosby took the rare step of “bequeathing his son to Thomas Groves of London that he should be properly educated.”

In his will of 1686, David Wiliams left his sons his cows but added the caveat that “if their mother is not able to put them to school, then sell the animals to pay for their education.” In circa 1753, Elizabeth Bray Allen Smith funded, founded and oversaw a free school in newly formed Smithfield.

Today, education is more than an expectation in America, and Isle of Wight County has a long legacy of education, teaching and investment.

COLONIAL QUALITY CONTROL

Quality management is an important concept in today's business world. But the concept of quality control dates to medieval times. The notion was very familiar to early Virginia craftsmen and an important component in the establishment of Virginia business and economy.

Most of the colony's major products for export—notably including many products from Isle of Wight County—had quality standards specified by laws enacted by the Virginia General Assembly as early as the 1600s. Growers, manufacturers, merchants and shippers were required to have goods examined by locally appointed inspectors to ensure quality standards were met. Failure to meet standards was punished with fines and other censure.

Colonial Virginia's major crop—the foundation of its economy—was tobacco, and the reputation of local business was based on the quality of tobacco grown here. Inferior tobacco could lessen demand and income and, more importantly, harm recognition and reputation. In the 1630s, Virginia took action to ensure that tobacco not meeting standards was removed from sale and destroyed.

The Virginia General Assembly passed an act in 1680 establishing port towns and warehouses intended to accelerate economic growth. In Isle of Wight County, the tobacco warehouse and port town were established as Pates Field or modern-day Battery Park. The Tobacco Act was passed in 1730 which reformed, expanded and strengthened the authority of inspectors to view and evaluate all tobacco for local sale and export.

Tobacco inspectors were appointed by county court justices and regarded as men of ability and honesty. Inspectors were required to unpack, "diligently and carefully view and examine" and repack bulk tobacco. Tobacco that met standards was certified, repacked in wooden

barrels called hogsheads and stamped as approved. Inspectors were also administered an oath: "…you will diligently and carefully view and examine all tobacco and faithfully discharge your duty in the office of inspector, that you will not receive, stamp or pass any tobacco that is not well conditioned, merchantable, and clear of trash…without fear, favor, affection, malice, or partiality…"

Other colonial products were subject to inspection as well. Turpentine, tar and pitch were inspected to ensure that the containers were properly labeled as to contents, weight and gauge and that the contents were "good, clean, sound and merchantable." Pork and beef exports were also inspected and extensively regulated. Legislation passed in 1762 required whole pork be butchered into small pieces and packed into hogsheads containing "at least two hundred and twenty pounds of good clean, fat, sound, merchantable meat, well salted between each layer, well pickled and no more than two heads of pork in one barrel." The pork was unpacked, inspected and weighed, and if all qualities and packing requirements were met, stamped by the inspector.

Quality was essential to the early reputation of Virginia products—even in Isle of Wight County—and to the success of the colony's businesses and livelihood. Quality and reputation remain primary considerations to success in today's world.

THE TOWN OF SMITHFIELD

For the approximately 130 years following its English settlement, Isle of Wight County did not house a proper town. In colonial Virginia, towns were entities established by private investors and approved by the General Assembly based on set criteria. England encouraged forming towns for a variety of reasons—concentrated housing was more defensible, centralized populations encouraged broader trade and larger markets and the benefits of centrally located government operations. However, few planned towns had been successfully established in the colonies by the 1700s. Towns such as Williamsburg, Norfolk and Richmond began to develop, but much of Virginia remained rural.

John Robinson Purdie's 1884 papers suggest that merchants had already begun shipping in the area that would become Smithfield as early as 1730, importing and selling foreign goods to the surrounding community. In 1750, Arthur Smith IV petitioned the General Assembly to create the town of Smithfield from his property. The town was officially incorporated in 1752 and contained 4 streets, 72 lots, a wharf and courthouse.

The establishment of a new county courthouse location was an important development as there had been continued concern over the convenience of the courthouse since the county's first cases heard at Basse's Choice as early as 1626. The county's original footprint was massive with those settling furthest from the James River often traveling for days to reach court days. Locating the courthouse in Smithfield also identified the town as the local seat of government, increasing the town's chances of success and permanence.

The little town of Smithfield grew rapidly and established itself as a bustling port town, importing foreign goods and exporting local products including tobacco, pork, fish and lumber. Ships from other

colonies and countries conducted trade with the growing number of merchants of Smithfield. Noteworthy merchants include George Purdie and *Hyndman & Lancaster*, the Scottish firm that he came to Smithfield to support and later represent. This merchant firm was one of the earliest referenced in what would become the town of Smithfield.

As merchants flocked to the area and purchased lots along the water, private wharves were established, convenient to the stores that merchants often housed in their own homes. Other noteworthy merchants include Captain Mallory Todd, credited with the earliest written record of a ham export shipped from Smithfield in 1779, and Thomas Pierce who arguably had one of the earliest mercantile stores in what would become Smithfield adjoining his residence as early as 1730. Many of these mercantile firms changed names often based on partnerships and parent companies. Thomas Pierce participated under the mercantile name of *Pierce, Wilson Co.* and housed his store at Pierceville, his family's property which neighbored the Smith Plantation.

The growing population encouraged more and different types of businesses, attracting lawyers, doctors and other professionals as well as more skilled craftsmen and purveyors of fine goods. As the location of court business, the population was interested in and very involved in government and politics. Many residents participated in the events that built America including the American Revolution and later design and drafting of founding documents.

TRADE AND PORTS IN COLONIAL ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY

While much of Isle of Wight County remains rural today, there were bustling epicenters of colonial trade that never developed into significant towns in the way that Smithfield did.

Designated inspection warehouses and established ports included Pates Field in the present-day Battery Park area, the Old Bay Warehouse along Burwell Bay and a bustling port near the area still known as The Rocks. Furthermore, trade along the waterways was conducted up and down the Blackwater River with South Quay Port, located in modern-day Suffolk. It was the leading interior port to the Tidewater Area from its 1657 establishment to its 1781 destruction by British troops.

Trade was a way of life, and cultured Virginia gentlemen tended to maintain several forms of business as part of their social status with many landowners also acting as merchants and holding some form of public office. Beyond the tobacco inspection warehouses and government-mandated ports, private wharves actively participating in trade were found throughout the county. Stores, though very different from our modern understanding of stores, developed near tobacco warehouses, ports and in private homes with storerooms of goods.

Merchants marketed their wares with a simplified bartering and banking system—often advertising available imports in the *Virginia Gazette*. Popular items imported from England and Scotland included linens, woven fabrics, decorative articles, silver, pewter, clothing, books and alcoholic beverages. Manufactured items including guns and tools were also popular. Salt was an important and much-needed import until the American Revolution. Exports to Europe and the Caribbean included tobacco, honey products, barreled meats and hams, grains, cotton, fish, lumber and raw materials. The import of enslaved people was also an

active industry in Isle of Wight County with *Virginia Gazette* advertisements demonstrating a bustling slave trade.

Tobacco warehouses functioned as banks in some ways as hogsheads of tobacco were used as the primary form of payment. Warehouses issued tobacco notes to those "depositing" tobacco for inspection. The warehouse marketed and stored those deposits, and they carried a record of the value of balances. The tobacco note could be used much like cash to pay bills, buy items, purchase land, pay a court fine, etc. The value of tobacco fluctuated much like the stock market does today—impacting the value of the tobacco each person had stored in the warehouse and the value in their account.

In several sleepy residential areas of Isle of Wight County are the remains of those former bustling epicenters of trade—from the remnants of private wharves in the waterfront backyards of historic houses in Smithfield to the customs house in the community of Battery Park. While Isle of Wight County is no longer synonymous with most world trade, its legacy of ham exports remains, and Smithfield is still known as the ham capital of the world.

From humble roots to world renown, Isle of Wight County has changed, but its culture and trade story is an important chapter in the development of the United States of America.

PIRATES, PRIVATEERS, PATRIOTS AND SMUGGLERS

The years between 1650 and 1730 were considered the Golden Age of Piracy. This time coincided with much of Virginia's colonial history, and while Isle of Wight County was not a Caribbean cove where pirate treasure was painstakingly hidden, tradition suggests a few noteworthy pirates may have occasioned through the area. Blackbeard and his crew may have used the Pagan Creek as refuge once or twice according to local tradition. While Isle of Wight County avoided most pirate activity, a few noteworthy privateers ultimately settled here.

Privateers were essentially licensed pirates with their actions approved by countries during war times as a form of warfare. But in 1715, the War of Spanish Succession came to an end with a series of treaties between Great Britain, Spain, France and other European powers. Peacetime left privateers out of a job, and many sailors turned or returned to piracy, smuggling or attempted to reintegrate back into society as law-abiding merchants.

John Sinclair operated as a privateer during the American Revolution—working closely with his two brothers-in-law to run British blockades, harass enemy ships and import goods into the American colonies. His reputation as a successful privateer was well known in the small town of Smithfield and may have caused some of the issues he experienced in the summer of 1794 when he was accused of outfitting his vessel the *Unicorn* for the defense of the French. While ultimately found not guilty of this illegal activity, the investigation caused a rift in Sinclair's family that never healed when Sinclair's daughter ran off with Copeland Parker, whom Sinclair felt should have done more to defend him against the charges given the closeness between their families.

Trade among countries and colonies was an essential enterprise in colonial Virginia with import and export trade greatly increasing in the 17th and 18th centuries. Considerable wealth and influence could be gained by those who successfully risked the dangers of the seas. Most of Europe and the colonies enforced strict trade regulations and imposed duties and taxes. From the mercantile economic perspective of European countries at the time, this maintained the balance of wealth and power.

In the 18th century, Great Britain enacted the Navigation Acts, a series of laws which benefitted the British economy at the expense of the American colonies' business and trade. These acts were hated and highly resisted by the colonists as they greatly limited supplies of necessary and desirable items to the American colonies and increased costs and burdensome taxes for American colonists. As the cost of goods dramatically rose or goods fell into short supply, there was increased resistance from the American colonies.

Some colonists reacted by undertaking smuggling, thus avoiding paying duties or taxes. This often included buying and selling illegal products, stealing from legal shipments, secretly buying and selling goods from other countries while circumventing tax laws and bribery. In 1794, Town of Smithfield Surveyor and Port Inspector Copeland Parker wrote to President George Washington, "There is not a port in the state where smuggling has been carried on with greater success." This suggested that Smithfield merchants were particularly successful smugglers.

While many of the private waterfront wharfs of Smithfield and Isle of Wight County have washed away into obscurity, our waterways still tell daring stories of pirates, privateers, patriots and smugglers. Privateers became talented blockade runners during the American Revolution and carried on a rakish form of patriotism that maintained the import and export of goods despite British blockades.

AMERICAN REBELLION VS. REVOLUTION

Two-hundred-and-fifty years removed from the events of the American Revolution, we sometimes forget, overlook or otherwise downplay the tumultuous events leading up to American Rebellion, the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the battles that marked the beginning of war. The American colonists did not wake up one day and, as modern memes often joke, "choose violence." Perceived slights by British Parliament, increased taxes, lack of representation and many other government acts, actions and regulations slowly boiled over.

In Isle of Wight County, disheartened colonists experienced these perceived offenses as early as 1764 with the establishment of the Sugar Act, a tax on molasses and other goods imported into the colonies, and the Currency Act which restricted the colonists' ability to print their own paper money. The Quartering Act, which required the colonies to provide housing and supplies to British soldiers, and the Stamp Act, which taxed all paper goods including newspapers and legal documents, were passed the following year, piling on additional grievances. In 1767, the Townshend Acts imposed import duties on goods such as glass, lead, paint, paper and tea. What was perhaps one of the final straws for many colonists was the Tea Act in 1773 which established a British monopoly on tea sales in the colonies, seen by many as Parliament trying to force them to accept their taxation.

On December 16, 1773, these grievances culminated in what the British perceived as an act of rebellion—the Boston Tea Party. On July 23, 1774, the community of Isle of Wight County met at the courthouse and drafted a public notice to the King of England. Regarding the Tea Act, county residents wrote, "… imposing a duty on tea imported into America, is, in our opinion, unconstitutional, tyrannical, and unjust…" They went on to defend the actions of the Boston Tea Party and declare their distaste for Britain's response—the Intolerable Acts. The

Intolerable Acts, passed in 1774, were a series of punitive measures in response to the Boston Tea Party which included closing the port of Boston until the tea was paid for. In protest of the Intolerable Acts, Isle of Wight County citizens declared their intentions to only buy American-made goods.

This was not the only local show of support for the Boston Tea Party. In Virginia, an official boycott of British goods had gone into effect on November 1, 1774, and most merchants had agreed to stop imports. A few days later, on November 7, York County threw its own Tea Party, dumping two imported chests of tea into the York River that had arrived aboard the *Virginia* earlier that day. Virginian's remained patriotic rabble-rousers worthy of keeping an eye on throughout the Revolutionary War and Isle of Wight County was certainly on that list. Lord Dunmore, then-governor of Virginia, stationed the British ship *Kingfisher* at Burwell's Landing in 1775 before the formal declaration of war, and used the vessel to keep an eye on signs of rebellion within the Hampton Roads region.

As 2025 ends, we reflect on 2026 and the history it echoes from 1776—the official beginning of the American Revolutionary War. As we begin this new year in history, museums and historic sites across the U.S. are preparing their own exhibits and celebrations of some of the most noteworthy events in the establishment of the democratic republic that we are today.

AMERICA'S ROAD TO REVOLUTION

In the study of our history, we are frequently left with questions regarding how the American colonies came to fight a long and costly war for independence.

For more than 150 years, Virginia, as the premier English colony, was closely aligned with England. Most Virginians still considered themselves British with a shared history, heritage, culture and core religious background. While there were fundamental disagreements on a few important issues, the Virginian British shared many common objectives and values with their British mainland counterparts.

However, as the American colonies grew, people evolved their different backgrounds, talents, aspirations, ideas and spirit and grew further from England and its oversight. The colonists were becoming Americans with a unique identity and culture separate from the fundamentals once shared with Great Britain.

In 1776, the American colonies were estimated to have a population of 2.5 million. England and Ireland consisted of approximately 12 million people. And Britain, the dominant world power at that time, was growing its influence been elected by a specific colony. While most individual colonies — including Virginia — had local representative-elected legislative bodies, their reach and influence was limited to their colony. Virginia's elected legislators and across the world through colonization — expanding its kingdom into Canada, the Caribbean, Africa and India.

Since the Glorious Revolution of 1688, England had been a constitutional monarchy with the ruler's power limited by Parliament. Parliament was composed of the House of Commons and the House of Lords with all members primarily consisting of wealthy, landed male elite. From the British perspective, Parliament conducted virtual

representation for the British Empire, meaning that every member of Parliament was believed to represent the interests of the entire empire, even if they had not officials did not represent the colony in Parliament. Thus, the American colonies had no representation in Parliament and really no say or sway in their overall government.

The Seven Years War (1756-1763) and its North American component — the French and Indian War (1754-1763) — were in many ways the catalysts that influenced the destruction of the relationship between Great Britain and the American colonies. These conflicts were costly, and records indicate that England's national debt grew from 75 million pounds to over 133 million pounds following the wars. The British felt that the colonies should pay their fair share of the war burden and enacted a series of taxes. This represented a major departure from its longstanding policy — later coined salutary neglect — in which Great Britain enforced various trade laws leniently in the belief that it would benefit colonial trade and the colonies' continued growth and development.

Since 1619, American colonists had enjoyed some responsibility for self-government and guiding their future. While loyal to the crown, colonists had, to some degree, ruled themselves, judging for themselves what was important for their colony and their communities. This spirit of self-government and the heavy burden of increased taxes led to outcry — cries for increased influence over their own government and future and an end to taxation without representation in Parliament.

In 1775, Isle of Wight County formed its Committee of Safety and prepared for war.

COLONIAL ROADS GROW
ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY

There were no highways in colonial Virginia. Early thoroughfares often followed the paths of Native American trade routes or animal migration paths. Unpaved, these roads were rough on people, the rare carriage, wagons and beasts of burden. Uneven with potholes and rough terrain, roads had no signs, and very few maps were available for guidance.

As colonization spread from Jamestown and moved above the fall line, the waterways--the preferred mode of transportation--became more difficult to access. Roadways therefore became more of a necessity.

The Virginia Company received letters with concerns regarding the establishment of roadways and related infrastructure as early as 1621 and voiced the need for road planning in a letter to the Governor and Council, “That especial care be given to hiring a surveyor to lay out a map of the whole country including rivers, low ground, the boundaries of several Hundreds and Plantations,...to cast an imaginary eye to view where…the grand highway may pass through the dominions and the places for bridges may be considered for the satisfaction of all.”

By 1657, the House of Burgesses had passed various pieces of legislation providing for a system of roads, bridges and management to be carried out by local county government.

Roadway supervisors or surveyors were designated in each county. These positions were labor intensive and involved broad transportation-related responsibilities including construction, repair, cleaning, marking and other aspects of road maintenance.

Justices, who performed duties similar to those on today’s county board of supervisors, felt that it was an honor to perform municipal services. Most citizens performing public work knew that it was for the public good, and while some positions such as sheriff and inspectors were paid

a salary or fees, other positions like road supervisors were not paid for keeping their section of roads passable. However, they could be fined for not doing their jobs. In 1759, three road surveyors were charged for not keeping Smithfield's roads clean, but only one was fined 15 shillings.

Additionally, surveyors were responsible for determining where roads should be built with particular care towards ensuring that roads leading to churches, mills and courthouses received priority.

Based on road laws established in 1705, mill dams were considered bridges and had to be a minimum width of 12 feet. Many of Isle of Wight County's early roads were named for and connected mills and their mill dams to the surrounding community. The courthouse mill dam that Courthouse Highway crosses in front of Boykin's Tavern still stands as an example of this.

While early road laws focused on maintenance, the novel idea of road improvement would not become a significant focus in Virginia until after the American Revolution. Isle of Wight County, like many patriotic footholds, had instead turned its attention to war rather than infrastructure.

To some extent, the disorganization of some aspects of the roadways, bridges and available maps worked in favor of the burgeoning American patriots as many localities destroyed infrastructure or otherwise impeded travel. When British forces encountered 200 Virginia militia commanded by Colonel Josiah Parker in January 1781 at Mackie's Mill, Captain Johann Ewald and his elite Hessian Jäger corps, under Benedict Arnold's command, devastated the militia's cannon crews and forced a retreat. Ewald described his position with respect to the importance of the bridge and the mill in his journal by writing, *"…The pass consisted of a small stream, which had high banks. The mill lay on the other side, behind which was the bridge demolished by the enemy."*

Today, we do not think about transportation beyond how it impacts our own day-to-day travel and movement. While most citizens now are not personally responsible for maintaining sections of roadway, transportation is still a crucial and important function of society. Luckily, VDOT employees now receive paychecks.

BACON'S REBELLION

Virginia by 1676 was home to multiple populations and communities, each with their own issues, needs and priorities. This was a difficult era with people of different backgrounds competing for the same land. Unrest grew and as can be seen in many phases of history, the situation was rife for a common enemy and a champion.

Nathaniel Bacon, a distant relative of Governor Berkeley, was a wealthy young newcomer who demanded a militia commission from Berkely to exterminate all Native Americans, regardless of their friendly or hostile status. Bacon promoted the grievances of those along what was considered the frontier--those who were most vulnerable to raids and lived in fear of local Native American populations. Bacon championed and enlisted colonists including indentured servants and enslaved individuals along the western portions of Virginia, including Isle of Wight County.

Isle of Wight County was deeply divided between loyalists to Governor Berkeley and followers of Nathaniel Bacon. Fort Boykin was refortified in 1677 and served as a stronghold for Governor Berkeley's loyalist forces. Joseph Bridger was a powerful member of the Governor's Council and commander of the county's militia. He was such a staunch loyalist that he fled to the Eastern Shore with Berkeley in September of 1676. During the rebellion, Bridger's plantation in Isle of Wight County was occupied and plundered by the rebels for which Bridger would later file claims for damages and take overall aggressive steps to restore both royal authority and his own wealth.

While much of the county's leadership was loyalist, a significant portion of the population joined the rebel cause. Rebel supporters in Isle of Wight County included Richard Pyland who participated in the uprising and later had to request formal pardon in 1677. John Jennings, then clerk of the court, was the most noted of Bacon's

adherents in Isle of Wight County and was ultimately banished from the colony after the end of the rebellion. He died before his banishment was carried out.

While Nathaniel Bacon has long been recognized for his success in bringing together and championing a diverse coalition of Virginia colonists, the long-term impacts of his rebellion have not often been explored. At its peak, the rebel army consisted of approximately 500 men. This large and multiracial alliance deeply alarmed the colonial elite. After the sudden death of Nathaniel Bacon via illness and slow death of his rebellion soon after, there is an intentional and organized cultural shift from race based on family to a skin-color-based understanding of race.

Virginia adopted a strict slave code in 1705, officially codifying racial slavery and stripping Black Virginians of their rights in the beginnings of a chattel slavery system. Furthermore, Bacon and his militia captured and enslaved many Native Americans during their rebellion including members of the local Pamunkey tribe, absorbing them into the non-white hereditary system of slavery. The colonial elite used the law and new cultural norms they created to form a white vs. non-white mentality and society that in some ways still persists.

The intentional misconceptions created by a minority of wealthy Virginia planters terrified of a future successful uprising carried out by all Virginians--regardless of race or economic status--ultimately created modern interpretations of race as well as a system of codified slavery that would remain in place for approximately 160 more years. Only 71 years after the creation of the 1705 Slave Codes, patriotic Virginians would come together in a far more successful rebellion--the American Revolution. But slavery would remain.

COLONIAL MILITIA & MILITARY ROOTS OF REBELLION

The Virginia militia was established in 1607 as a part of the English military system with a primary role of repelling invasion and insurrections in Virginia as well as enforcing the laws of England and Virginia.

In Virginia, the militia successfully quelled Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. Prior to 1775, each of the colonies had established their own individual military organizations--generally a colonial militia--to deal with governmental, legal and defense matters. In Virginia, all able-bodied white men in the colony between the ages of 16 and 60 were required to serve with some exceptions for ministers, students and government officials.

Black men, initially, were not permitted to serve, but this ban was later reversed due in large part to Lord Dunmore who was actively encouraging the enslaved to flee their "rebel masters" and join British forces. While Virginia began to allow free Black men to serve in the militia in 1775, they were only allowed in non-combat roles such as drummers, trumpeters or pioneers--the term for militia members who did the most engineering and constructions work. By December of 1775, the Virginia Committee of Safety changed its tune and began allowing free Black men to join combat roles in the militia, mainly to prevent them from defecting to the British. From 1776 to 1777, George Washington began allowed free Black men to enlist in combat roles in the Continental Army, but this was a somewhat begrudging action caused by a desperate need for additional soldiers.

Militiamen were required to attend mandatory training, usually at least once every 3 months. In Isle of Wight County, militia training and drills occurred on the courthouse green that was once located across the

street from the 1750 Courthouse in Smithfield. Local militia leader Josiah Parker trained the county's militia in the techniques of 18th-century tactical warfare. Training was a time for the soldiers to build esprit de corps--a feeling of pride, fellowship and common loyalty shared by the members of a particular group--as well as solidify a collective commitment to the fight for independence.

The Second Continental Congress convened on May 10, 1775, in Philadelphia and was attended by delegates from the 13 colonies. Several key decisions were made including the selection of commander-in-chief for the newly established Continental Army. It had become clear that warfare, equipment and procedures as well as changing political European politics would require modern, consolidated, more highly trained and capable fighting and diplomatic force for any hope of success. An important qualification for the commander-in-chief was that he be representative of the needs of all the colonies, not just a New Englander or a southerner. George Washington of Virginia was known to the delegates for his success in the recent French and Indian War and for his military capability and leadership qualities. Washington was elected unanimously.

Virginia still has active militia laws today which define the militia as all able-bodied residents between the ages of 16 and 55. These laws give the governor of Virginia authority to create a militia during emergencies, invasions or to uphold state law. Title 44 splits the militia into three key groups: the National Guard, Virginia Defense Force and the "unorganized" militia or drafted residents. Virginia has technically had some form of militia since Jamestown's establishment in 1607 though it has not been broadly activated since the American Civil War. There was an interesting case in 1946 where Governor William M. Tuck famously used the unorganized militia laws to end a strike by Virginia Electric and Power Company workers, but that is a story for another day.

COURT CURIOSITIES

County courthouses were epicenters of colonial life and served as both catalyst and witness to many significant historical events. They served as stages for change and represented opportunities for assembly that would ultimately inspire a fervor for civic duty and patriotic sentiment. As a community gathering place, not all the stories of the 1750 Courthouse located in Smithfield and later the circa 1800 Courthouse are dry tales of basic court cases.

When the 1750 Courthouse was first built, the county provided funds for repairs, quality furnishings, proper cleaning and care. In 1752, John Taylor was paid 250 pounds of tobacco annually for its cleaning. In 1770, one record read, "Mary Jackson to be paid 1,500 pounds of tobacco for the past 3 years of keeping and cleaning the courthouse." Either by mistake or oversight, this annual payment to Mary Jackson had been neglected for the past three years. Jackson was a Smithfield resident who lived in the still-standing cottage on North Mason Street which she also operated as an ordinary, a business establishment typically licensed to provide alcohol, food and overnight accommodations to guests and travelers. In 1778, she "died possessed of an estate of so small value that none will administer same." Therefore, the sheriff ordered it disposed of in accordance with the law.

The fate of Mary Jackson was typical in that one of the few occupations for women of that era was operating boarding houses and ordinaries. This is evidenced in an Isle of Wight County order book dated March 3, 1774, which read, "An Indenture of bargain and Sale between Elizabeth Ward of the one part and Richard Edwards of the other part was acknowledged by the said Elizabeth Ward..." and she, along with "the several Ordinary keepers in this County are allowed to sell as follows... A Brakefast [Breakfast] or Supper, One Lodging a night in a good and clean Sheet..." It is interesting that similar records specifically identify a

lodger's cost for dirty versus clean sheets—the latter being more costly for obvious reasons.

When the court moved from Smithfield to Isle of Wight County around 1800, Court Day activities changed somewhat, but the central purposes remained the same. With more space came horses and horseracing with betting and wagering while vendors displayed and sold their wares. Boykin's Tavern, next door to the courthouse building, was a place of raucous conversation for the men in attendance, but it was also known for a few of its delicious treats. Horse cakes, molasses cookies baked in the shape of a horse, have a long and delicious history with Boykin's Tavern. Many wistfully recall their fathers bringing home horse cakes baked by Aunt Nancy Weaver from Court Days in the 1920s. Court Days were often a great time to conduct business, and as such, horses were often traded, bought and sold on the courthouse green in what became known as "Horse Court"—thus the on-theme molasses cookies. Alas, Horse Court and Horse Cakes can now only be found as a recipe and anecdote in *The Smithfield Cookbook.*

In colonial days, one of the primary court officials was the court crier, an individual with an important and quirky role. Communication was important in the 1700s as many people could not read. The crier was an essential position charged with walking through town dressed flamboyantly and ringing a brass handbell as he made announcements on the issues and orders of the day. Criers also made public announcements, read official notices and posted notices. The crier usually opened court with the resounding cry of "Oyez! Oyez!" For a good portion of the 1700s, Jethro Gale was Isle of Wight County's court crier with an annual salary of 600 pounds of tobacco.

From horse cakes to horse races to court criers, county courthouses remained the powerhouses of change and the epicenters around which many aspects of colonial life revolved for a significant portion of

DIVIDED LOYALTIES
PATRIOTS VS. LOYALISTS IN ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY

As one of the original eight shires of Virginia, Isle of Wight County has long revolved around the revolutionary events of America's independence. As Americans, we often focus on exciting stories of patriotic bravery as the basis of today's American culture; however, the American Revolution did not garner 100% support, and not all colonists became patriots.

George Purdie, a Scottish merchant who settled in Isle of Wight County and married local Mary Robinson, was accused of being a Loyalist and of price gouging patriot militia forces with high gunpowder prices in 1775. However, according to Purdie, there was no gunpowder to be had. Either way, the situation became more dramatic when locals began threatening to tar and feather Purdie. He wrote a letter to the Committee of Safety refusing to appear before them in person.

His letter, dated July 26, 1775, paints a clear picture of Purdie's concerns and intended defense. He wrote, "To the Gentlemen of the Committee of Isle of Wight County, I am now cited to appear before you tomorrow…which I should think it my duty to do, was I not informed that there are a number of Men in the County who have already declared they intend to tar and feather me, whether you found me guilty or not. This is a punishment from which I beg the promise of your protection…When that is granted, I hope I shall be able to convince you that I am not that enemy to this Country which some people could have you believe." There are no clear records of what occurred afterwards, but there is nothing to suggest that George Purdie was ever tarred and feathered.

Purdie's caution, however, may have been warranted. In August of the same year, another Scottish merchant named Anthony Warwick was captured near Smithfield by what is described as "a multitude" and

dragged 10 miles to town where he was tied to the public whipping post and tarred and feathered in front of a reportedly large crowd. Warwick, like many merchants, had promised to halt imports of British goods in agreement with a non-importation association, but there was evidence that he had gone back on his word, refusing to turn over imported tea and gunpowder in early 1775 and later by sending barrels of pork to British troops in Boston. Northampton County's Committee of Safety declared him an enemy to the patriotic cause which ultimately led to his zealous capture in Isle of Wight County soon after. Anthony Warwick survived his experience with tar and feathers as well as his trip out of town with rotten eggs thrown at him. Additionally, he appears to have continued to run afoul of Virginia patriots long after.

In November 1775, Lord Dunmore issued a proclamation offering freedom to any enslaved who escaped their slave masters and joined the British in their fight against patriot rebels. Several escaped enslaved from Isle of Wight County can be found in the records of Black Loyalists including Aberdeen--who escaped from Mary Bridger when he was 40 years old--and Delkeith who ran away from James Ronaldson in 1778. Free Black people were sometimes also listed in the records such as Robert Bias who was born free and lived with Mr. Hanford in Smithfield before joining British forces at age 20. After losing the war, most Loyalists fled America with the help of British forces, many moving to Nova Scotia.

Smithfield was the cradle of many local patriots including John Sinclair and Mallory Todd who were talented blockade runners whose merchant sloops continued to supply Virginia militia with much-needed supplies and Josiah Parker who served under General George Washington and received much recognition for his dedication and military strategy. Despite the fervor and zeal of many Isle of Wight County citizens, the American Revolution did not get the full undying support some of us may romanticize that it had. It was a hard-won war that spanned many

WE THE PEOPLE

Since the establishment of the first permanent English settlement in North America in 1607, Isle of Wight County has remained a foremost witness to—and later advocate for—the cradle of democracy that Virginia became. The land that makes up the county today and the people who cared for it experienced struggle and strife and the general ebb and flow of changing times. The land has been cared for by many hands of those belonging to many different cultures and backgrounds… from the Warraskoyack who called this area home when the English arrived in 1607 to the early British colonists who established settlements and plantations here and the enslaved people whose labor laid the foundations of Virginia society. Echoes of history remain in the soil here—sometimes literally in the form of artifacts but also figuratively in the stories and sweat and care of those who walked here before us.

While there were a few local Loyalists, the Revolutionary War period in Isle of Wight County was ultimately a period of patriotic zeal, and the people here helped birth, support and raise the ideals that would become ingrained in American political culture such as the importance of political representation, the principle that government exists only through the consent of the governed and the significance of a separation of power so that no singular branch of government may claim absolute authority. These ideals and others were so important to the patriots of Isle of Wight County that they took up arms, formed the militia and, with the support and authority of the local county government in the form of the Committee of Safety, prepared for war. Local heroes like Colonel Josiah Parker oversaw militia drills on the Courthouse green that once existed across the street from the 1750 Courthouse.

Local merchants took up their ships applying for letters of marque and using their licenses for privateering to harass enemy British ships

successfully running blockades and stealing supplies from incoming British merchant vessels. Supply lines to the British were disrupted, and the British blockade only proved so fruitful thanks to the local merchantmen-turned-privateers. Records suggest that smuggling was carried out with great success, and Smithfield and Isle of Wight County remained an invaluable supply line for Virginia and the Continental Army throughout the Revolutionary War.

The expressions of freedom and liberty found in the Declaration of Independence changed the culture and were so all-encompassing that it altered the rhetoric with which slavery was discussed. In John Pretlow's December 1788 will where he discusses his requests for the manumission and care of his enslaved, he includes, "… inasmuch as he is persuaded that freedom is the natural right of all people and this it is [not] my will to deprive any thereof… I am desirous as far as in me lies and the law of the land will allow that they may be made to enjoy that inestimable blessing in common with other people…" Many manumission records from the period both in Isle of Wight County and broader Virginia demonstrate a similar cultural shift.

The ideals of those Revolutionary-era patriotic sentiments—the power of the People, the natural born right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness, the importance of representative government whose power is derived by the governed—remain the groundwork of our modern society and uniquely American culture.

The road was neither smooth nor straight, but despite its rocky history, Isle of Wight County remains as not only one of the oldest counties in North America but also as a spindle in the cradle of American democracy.

Over two and half years, this article series has explored the American Revolution through the local lens of our county's involvement and experience. Thank you for joining this journey.

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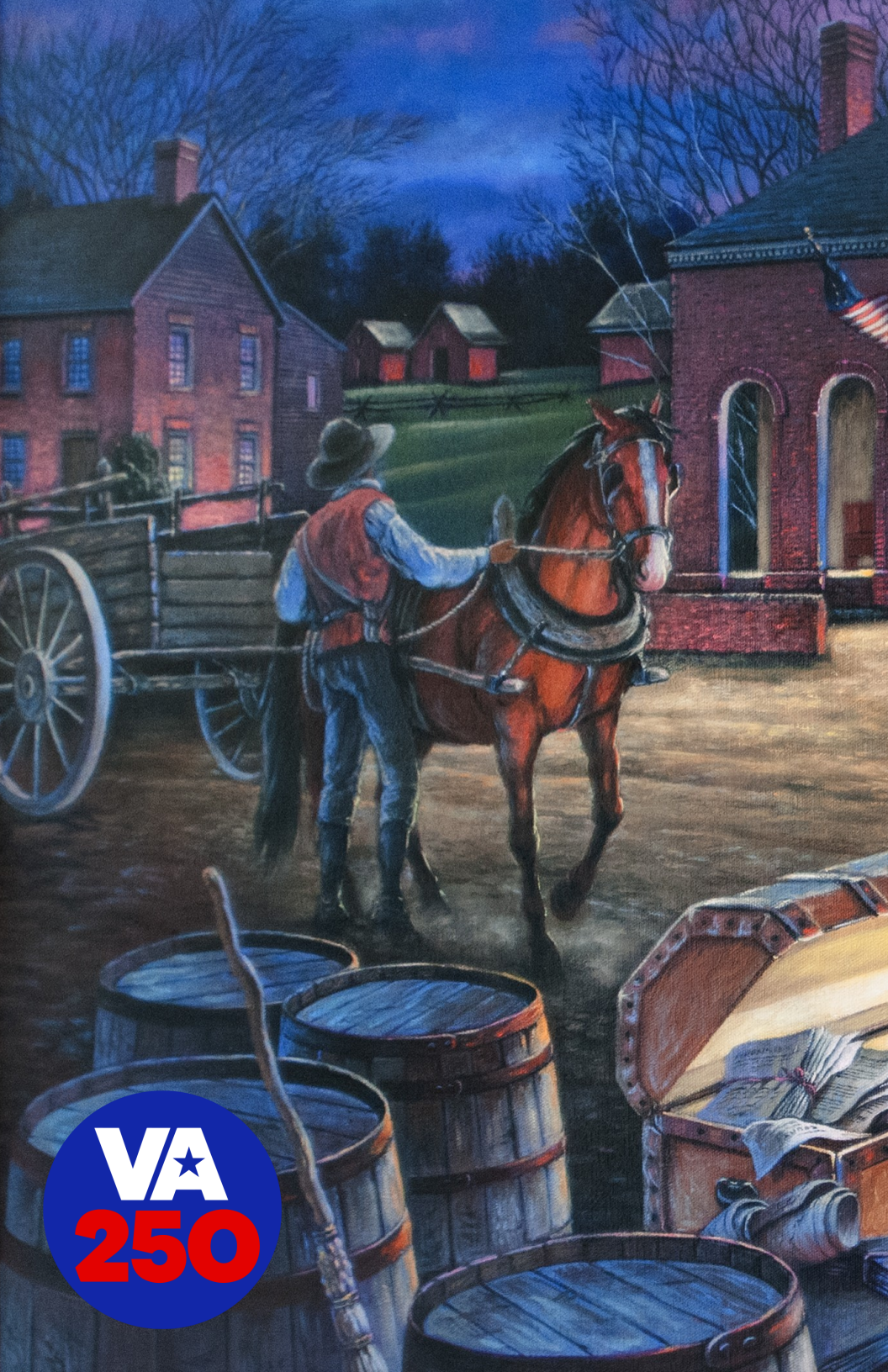
ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY VIRGINIA 250 AMERICAN REVOLUTION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