

**CHAPTER 2**  
**HISTORICAL and**  
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

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## CHAPTER 2 – HISTORICAL and ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

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### OVERVIEW

When the ships of the Jamestown Company entered the James River in 1607 the land that was to become Charles City County was home to three Indian tribes, the Chickahominy, Paspehegh and Weyanock. The first English settlement planted within the contemporary boundaries of Charles City was West and Shirley Hundred planted in 1613.

Charles City was one of four “boroughs” or “incorporations” created by the Virginia Company in 1618, and was named for the English King’s son, Charles, who later became King Charles I. The four “boroughs” evolved into county governments most likely following the Powhatan uprising in 1622. When first established, Charles City comprised a large area on both sides of the James River, but gradually it lost land area to the formation of other counties.

In 2007 the Board of Supervisors decided to adopt 1613 as the date of origin for the county because the three other “boroughs” (James City County, Henrico County and the City of Hampton) all use the date of the first English speaking settlement as their date of origin. Also, the 1645 date earlier used by the county is historically inaccurate. The transition to 1613 on all county emblems, flags and seals remains a work in progress. There is no doubt, however, that Charles City is one of the oldest local governments in America.

The county and its residents are a reflection of America’s past. Its historic and archaeological resources provide important data concerning the development of early man, settlements of Native Americans, the entry of the Europeans and Africans into the New World, the colonial periods, and the Civil War. Its river banks, farm fields and timber lands embrace a wealth of historic resources from its unequalled collection of James River plantations to its unpretentious clapboard churches. Many of the county's residents descend from planters, yeoman farmers, indentured servants, slaves, free Blacks and Native Americans who first fished the rivers, cut the timber, and farmed the lands. This connection with the past helps explain why many county residents have stayed and wish to see the county’s resources conserved.



The Charles City County Center for Local History, established by the County Board of Supervisors in late 1995, serves the county’s residents by coordinating the preservation of the county’s historic resources. A possible new facility in the

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courthouse complex could house both a branch of the Heritage Library and the History Center. Interest for beginning the county's Center for Local History was popularized with the publication of Charles City County, Virginia, an Official History. This interest was further promoted with the later publication by D. Gardner Tyler of A History and Pictorial Review of Charles City County, Virginia. This and other works about the county are available through the Charles City County History Center and the Heritage Public Library branch at Charles City Courthouse. The community web site [www.charlescity.org](http://www.charlescity.org) provides historical information about the county and a number of online exhibits and genealogical data bases.

In 2007 the county restored its historic 1901 Clerk's Office to its original exterior appearance and created a self-service visitor center with displays based on the history of the county. This project was a cornerstone in the construction of the first segment of the Virginia Capital Trail, a multi-use paved path that will run from Jamestown to Richmond when completed.

Presently, there are 15 historic markers under the county marker program and ordinance and 22 state historic markers. The county also has a number of sites that are included in national and state networks and trails. Lawrence Lewis Jr. Park is a part of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways network and the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. River's Rest Marina is a gateway site for the Chickahominy Water Trail which is a leg of the same national trail. Ten sites in the county are a part of the Virginia Civil War Trails network. Ten sites are listed on the NPS James River Plantations Travel Itinerary. Nine sites are a part of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. Two sites are listed on the NPS American Presidents Travel Itinerary. The county presently has a total of 13 interpretive exhibits located outdoors and indoors on county property.



**Captain John Smith**

Approximately 40 local businesses serve tourists and travelers alike, which include: Approximately 16 attractions open daily and/or by appointment; 8 places of overnight accommodation; 5 dining establishments; 8 stores/gift shops; and 1 marina.

The county is also known for its cultural and historical events including: The Chickahominy Tribal Pow-Wow, the First Thanksgiving, the Battle of Fort Pocahontas and the Charles City County Fair.

### **HISTORIC RESOURCES IN CHARLES CITY COUNTY**

Identified by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources

The county is well-known for an abundance of historic sites and structures. As shown on **Map 2**, these resources are found throughout the county. Twenty-eight sites are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources has identified another five sites that are eligible or potentially eligible for the Register and one potentially eligible historic district. Some of the information found in the Department's survey follows:

#### **AARON HILTON SITE**

##### **Virginia Historic Landmark**

Includes the remains of a simple house built between 1870 and 1877 for Aaron Hilton, a respected former slave.

#### **BELLE AIR, Charles City Courthouse**

##### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Built circa 1700. Rare exposed interior framing and the heavy Jacobean closed-string railing are characteristic of seventeenth century building methods.

#### **BERKELEY, Herring Creek**

##### **National Historic Landmark, National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Settled in 1619 as Berkeley Hundred. The present house was built in 1726 by Benjamin Harrison IV. President William Henry Harrison was born at Berkeley.

#### **CHARLES CITY COUNTY COURTHOUSE,**

##### **Charles City Courthouse**

##### **National Register of Historic Places**

##### **Virginia Historic Landmark**

Built circa 1730, succeeding earlier county seats at City Point and Westover. One of Virginia's six colonial court structures built with an arcaded facade.



#### **CHARLES CITY COUNTY COURTHOUSE HISTORIC DISTRICT**

##### **Potentially Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places**

The county seat, one of Virginia's original eight shires. Including Charles City Courthouse, Major House and Store, original Charles City High School, Greenway, Bush Hill, and Belle Air.

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### **DOGHAM, Wayside**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Greek Revival style, one-and-a-half story, frame, center-hall plan house built in the mid nineteenth-century.

### **EAGLES NEST (MARGOTS/CLAYBANCKE), Mount Zion**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Built in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. A rare survival of Virginia's early manor houses. Distinctive brickwork laid in English bond includes glazed headers.

### **EDGEWOOD (HARRISON'S MILL), Herring Creek**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Gothic revival style house built circa 1854 for Richard S. Rowland, formerly of New Jersey. The eighteenth-century mill was owned by Benjamin Harrison V.

### **EDNA'S MILL AND MILLER'S HOUSE, Hughes Store (Roxbury)**

#### **Potentially Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places**

An unusual eighteenth-century miller's house and late nineteenth-century, frame mill.

### **EPPEIS ISLAND, Wayside**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Originally settled as part of Shirley Hundred. The island contains five seventeenth-century sites, two eighteenth-century sites and one circa 1790 dwelling.

### **EVELYNTON**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

This two story brick Georgian house with a slate roof was originally built around 1760 and later burned in 1860. The house was rebuilt for the Ruffin family in 1860. The current house was built in the 1930s.

### **FORT POCAHONTAS**

#### **National Register of Historic Places**

#### **Virginia Historic Landmark**

1864 site built and secured by over 1,000 members of the United States Colored Troops against CS Major General Fitzhugh Lee and his 2,500 soldiers.



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### **GLEBE HOUSE OF WESTOVER PARISH, Charles City Courthouse**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

This two-and-a-half-story, brick house was built between 1720 and 1757 during the tenure of Rev. Peter Fontaine. Served as the residence of the clergymen until 1805.

### **GREENWAY, Charles City Courthouse**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

The frame, one-and-a-half-story, center-hall plan house was built circa 1776 for Judge John Tyler, Governor of Virginia (1808-11). Birthplace of President John Tyler.

### **HARDENS, Roxbury**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

First served as a subsidiary farm to Shirley. Built in 1846 by Hill Carter of Shirley for his son Lewis Warrington Carter. Acquired by David Walker Haxall in 1852.

### **HIGH HILLS, Westover**

#### **Potentially Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places**

Prominent home once inhabited by Charles Carter.

### **JOHN TYLER HOUSE (SHERWOOD FOREST)**

Charles City

#### **National Historic Landmark, National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

The home of President John Tyler from 1845 until his death in 1862. Interior woodwork based on the designs of Minard Lafever. Expansive three-hundred foot facade.



### **KITTIEWAN, Charles City**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Built for David Minge before his death in 1779. This medium-sized colonial plantation house possesses elaborate interior paneling. General Sheriden camped here.

### **LOTT CARY BIRTH SITE, Adkins Store**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

The late eighteenth-century dwelling recognized as the birthplace of Lott Cary (1780-1829), the first black missionary to Africa and a founding father of Liberia.

### **MOSS SIDE, Binns Hall**

#### **Potentially Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places**

This two-story, frame, center-hall plan house was built in 1857 for Edmund Archer Saunders. The original pantry wing and smokehouse also survive.

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### **MOUNT STIRLING, Sandybottom**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

A sophisticated two-story, brick, four-over-four, center-hall plan, Greek Revival style house with vernacular outbuildings.

### **NORTH BEND, Weyanoke**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Built in 1819 for Sarah Harrison and enlarged in 1855 for Thomas H. Willcox. Federal style and Greek Revival style elements from both periods survive.



### **PINEY GROVE, Binns Hall**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Original log portion built circa 1800 on the plantation of Furnea Southall, Sheriff of Charles City. A general merchandise store was operated by Edmund Archer Saunders.



### **POPLAR SPRINGS, Binns Hall**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Frame, one-and-a-half story, side-hall plan house built in 1809 for Joseph Vaiden and enlarged in 1844 as a center-hall house for Susan Vaiden Gregory.

### **RIVER EDGE, Willcox Wharf**

#### **Potentially Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places**

An eighteenth-century, one-and-a-half-story, frame, center-hall plan house with Colonial Revival style additions.

### **THE ROWE, Sandy Point**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

The east wing was built before 1779 by David Minge. The Palladian-inspired tripartite scheme was completed before 1808 by Minge's son, George Hunt Minge. This site is no longer standing.

### **SHIRLEY, Wayside**

#### **National Historic Landmark, National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

First settled as Shirley Hundred. Patented in 1660. Forecourt buildings built circa 1723 and house built circa 1740. House contains elaborate staircase and paneling.



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### **UPPER SHIRLEY, Wayside**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Built 1868-70 by Hill Carter for his son, William Fitzhugh Carter, by A.H. Marks of Petersburg and enlarged 1890-91 by the Edmund Archer Saunders family.

### **UPPER WEYANOKE, Weyanoke**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

A two-story, brick, Greek Revival style dwelling built in 1859 for Robert Douthat. The early nineteenth-century, brick cottage was probably built by John Minge.

### **WESTOVER, Herring Creek**

#### **National Historic Landmark, National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

America's premier example of eighteenth-century Georgian domestic architecture was built circa 1730 by William Byrd II. Original gardens, outbuildings and English gates.



### **WESTOVER CHURCH, Herring Creek**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Established as early as 1625, the present brick structure was built in 1731 to replace an earlier church on the grounds of Westover.

### **WEYANOKE PLANTATION, Weyanoke**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

This area was first settled by Indians circa 6500 B.C., during the Middle Archaic period. Housewright John Stubbs built the two-and-a-half story, frame house in 1798 for Fielding Lewis.

### **WOODBURN, Willcox Wharf**

#### **National Register of Historic Places, Virginia Historic Landmark**

Shortly after 1813, John Tyler built the provincial tripartite Palladian-inspired house which he sold to his brother Wat H. Tyler before he became the tenth U.S. President.

In addition to these sites and structures, the John Tyler Memorial Highway (Route 5), which links the City of Richmond with the City of Williamsburg, provides access to several historic sites in the county and is designated as a Scenic Byway by the state. The Scenic Byway designation, specially marked on state highway maps, helps promote the county's historic tourism industry along Route 5.

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Several of the county's historic structures located along Route 5 are open to the public for tours. This allows visitors to see how life was lived in earlier times. In addition, commercial activities such as bed and breakfast inns have been opened in some of the county's historic structures. Many of the original plantation houses have been preserved and help us understand the society of that time. The plantation settlements are especially significant because they encompass four centuries of plantation life.

Such notable plantations include: Berkeley Plantation, Westover Plantation, Shirley Plantation and Sherwood Forest. The Berkeley Plantation mansion was built in 1726 by Benjamin Harrison, IV. Berkeley was the birthplace of Benjamin Harrison, V, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the governor of Virginia. Berkeley was also the home of William Henry Harrison, the ninth president of the United States. Westover Plantation was constructed around 1730 by William Byrd, II, a notable Virginia planter, author and colonial official. Shirley Plantation was built around 1738 by Charles Carter and is still owned by the Carter family. Finally, Sherwood Forest is a plantation that was purchased in 1842 by John Tyler, the tenth President of the United States.

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources has conducted an architectural survey of properties and structures in Charles City County. Presently, the department has inventoried and recorded 271 historically significant properties or structures and maintains detailed records of each. From the information collected by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in the 1980s, the department prepared a brief report on the historic resources in the county. The major recommendations to the county in this report were:

1. Conduct a more intensive study of historic resources before the next revision of the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Consider the establishment of rural historic districts along John Tyler Memorial Highway (Route 5) and along The Glebe Lane (Route 615) and Willcox Neck Road (Route 623).
3. Develop a slide and tape program on historic and archaeological sites in the county to be used in the public school system.

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A copy of this report can be obtained from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. In addition to the recommendations found in the report, the county believes any study of historic resources should include recommendations about sites and structures for commemoration with historic markers or for nomination to the National Register. In particular, the county believes any study of historic resources should specifically identify and document sites and structures important to the history of Charles City County's free Black population. Such sites and structures include the Parrish Hill and Mt. Zion school houses, both built with monies from the Rosenwald Fund. The Lott Cary House, already part of the National Register of Historic Places, is recognized as the birthplace of the first Black missionary to Africa and a founding father of the Country of Liberia. Fort Pocahontas, also on the National Register, was the site of the first major test of U.S. Colored Troops after the Fort Pillow massacre.



### ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Several hundred archaeological sites have been identified in Charles City. Most of these archaeological sites lie along the James and Chickahominy Rivers and waterways extending into the interior of the county. **Map 2** provides the general locations of the archaeological findings.

The earliest known archaeological sites in Charles City can be found at Weyanoke. The peninsula has been occupied since about 8000 B.C. and contains many sites from the Prehistoric and Middle Archaic periods. Eppes Island also has a significant number of prehistoric sites from the Archaic and Woodland periods.

Archaeological findings reveal the presence of Native American communities in Charles City County in the early 1600s. Sites consist mainly of Indian camping grounds along the shoreline areas. Three Indian tribes have been identified. These are the Chickahominy along the Chickahominy River, the Paspahegh in the

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Sandy Point area and the Weyanock in the area stretching from Weyanoke to Shirley Plantation.

Colonial era settlements were established in the same areas of Charles City as those of Native Americans. Sites indicate the presence of farming communities and industrial activities along the James River. In fact, Sturgeon Point is considered to be one of the first sites for the brick making industry in the nation.

Many Civil War sites exist in the county including Fort Pocahontas. At this fort the United States Colored Troops soundly defeated an attack by 2500 Confederate Troops, which were under the command of Major General Fitzhugh Lee, the nephew of General Lee, in 1864. Fort Pocahontas and the Saint Mary's (Samaria) Church battlefield site may be candidates for preservation under the American Battlefields Protection Act.



It is expected that many more sites exist in Charles City County. The time and labor necessary to survey one archaeological site limits the ability to conduct a county-wide survey. Therefore, archaeologists suggest that an archaeological survey be required prior to construction of any major development or permitting of any mining in the county.

### SUMMARY

Charles City County is a reflection of America's past. Its historic and archaeological resources provide important data concerning the development of early man, settlements of Native Americans, the entry of the Europeans and African into the New World, the colonial period, and the plantation period. The county and its peoples' history, archaeological remnants, and unique culture are a rare treasure and should be valued by both residents and visitors alike. As the county continues to boldly advance into the 21st century, it should both consider and be mindful of its vivid and vibrant past.

