



Yorktown Virginia

Spring Forward with Family-Friendly Fun in Historic Yorktown

Situated along the York River in South East Virginia, Yorktown is a small town rich in history, Enjoy a self-paced walk around the many historical point of interest in this charming community. This site provides fully interactive maps for the two walking routes, with clickable markers to describe each Point of Interest along the way.

Introduction

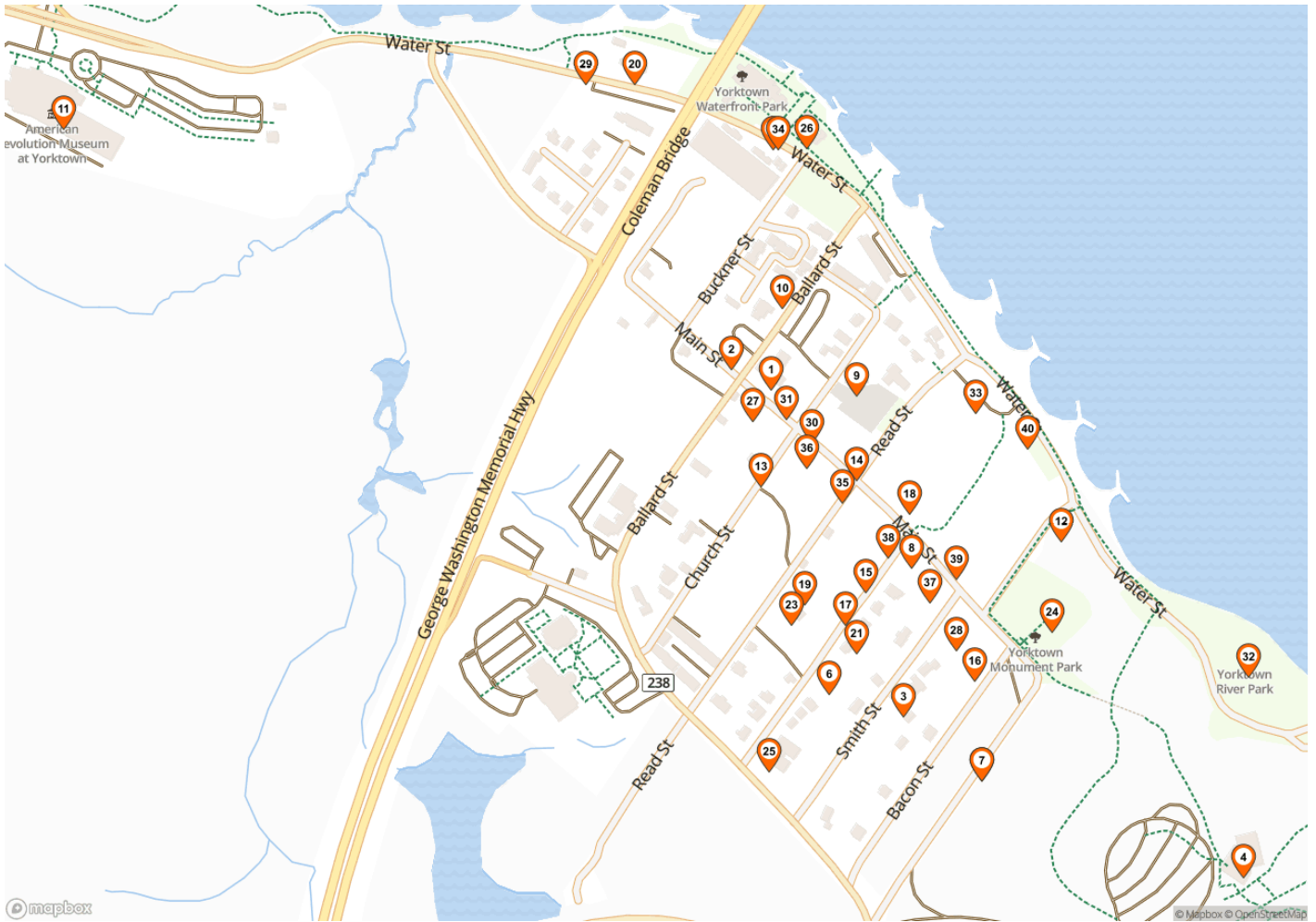
Welcome to Yorktown!

For centuries, York County has played a vital role in the history of Virginia and the nation. Yorktown, the county seat, is best known as the site of the decisive American victory in the Revolutionary War, where British General Cornwallis surrendered to Washington and Rochambeau in 1781. But the area's significance predates that event. Native Americans inhabited the site for over 10,000 years, drawn to its strategic river crossing.

Throughout the Civil War, Yorktown served as a critical port, changing hands between Union and Confederate forces. Though the town suffered extensive damage, it later found new life. After World War II, the region saw rapid industrial growth and continued success in shipbuilding and seafood processing.

Today, Yorktown is part of Virginia's "Historic Triangle" and remains a vibrant community that honors its past while embracing modern life.

Points of Interest for Yorktown Virginia



1. York Hall



P.C. B. Sleeth

York County's court system was established in 1633. The community's first courthouse at this site was constructed in 1697. Today, the building--renamed York Hall in 2000--hosts a local gallery featuring art and gifts, as well as a visitor information center. The lower level also houses exhibits from the York County Historical Museum.

2. Post Office

126 Ballard St.



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Originally constructed as the Yorktown National Bank, this building once stood among several businesses serving the local community at this busy intersection. It now functions as the U.S. Post Office. Yorktown's postal history dates back to at least 1791, and the town has continuously maintained a post office ever since.

3. McNorton House

Dr. Daniel McNorton was a prominent figure in Yorktown's African-American community, serving as a physician for nearly half a century. In addition to his medical work, he held roles as a Virginia State Senator and Justice of the Peace. His son later followed in his footsteps, also practicing medicine in the community for nearly 50 years. The residence remains privately owned and occupied.



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4. Yorktown Battlefield Visitor's Center

1000 Colonial Parkway



Photo Credit: NPS / Colonial National Historical Park (Public Domain)

Just across the footbridge near the monument is the National Park Service's Yorktown Battlefield Visitor Center. It offers detailed information on tours, programs, and other services to help visitors explore the battlefield and its history. From there, guests can reach the waterfront either by walking down Comte de Grasse Street or by following the scenic "tobacco road" path leading to Water Street.

5. Revolutionary & Civil War Earthwork

Zweybrucken Road

This earthwork encircles the village and was originally constructed by British troops and enslaved laborers in preparation for the 1781 Siege of Yorktown. It was later reconstructed by Confederate forces ahead of the 1862 siege during the Civil War.

7. Secretary Nelson House

Zweybrucken Road

Thomas Nelson, who served for many years as Deputy Secretary of the Colony, built his grand home on this site. During the Siege of Yorktown, it was occupied by British commander Lord Cornwallis. Allied artillery fire rendered the house uninhabitable, and today only the foundation bricks remain. The site is currently owned by Preservation Virginia.



6. Fletcher House c. 1761

223 Nelson St. Yorktown

Originally constructed before 1761 in Accomack County on Virginia's Eastern Shore by Henry Fletcher, this house was relocated and rebuilt at its current site in 1951. It remains a private residence owned by a direct descendant of Fletcher.



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8. Sheild House 1700s

600 Main St.



P.C. R. Nevins

Built in the mid-18th century, the Sheild House has been home to the Sheild family for over a century. While updated for modern living, much of the original structure remains intact. The house is noted for showcasing some of the finest examples of colonial brickwork in the region. It is privately owned and occupied.

9. Grace Episcopal Church



Ken Lund from Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

111 Church St

After suffering major damage in Yorktown's 1814 fire, the York-Hampton Parish Church was rebuilt in 1848 and became known as Grace Episcopal Church. The reconstruction incorporated the original marlstone walls. The church grounds serve as the final resting place for members of the Thomas Nelson and Nicolas Martiau families.

10. Slight House and Martiau Marker

114 Ballard St

In front of the 20th-century Slight House stands a monument erected in 1931 to honor Huguenot settler Nicolas Martiau. General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing delivered the dedication address. In 1691, part of Martiau's land was acquired from his descendants to establish the present town of Yorktown.



P.C. R. Nevins

11. Revolutionary War Museum

200 Water St

The American Revolution Museum at Yorktown tells the story of the nation's founding, from the twilight of the colonial period to the dawn of the Constitution and beyond.

Exciting indoor galleries feature period artifacts, immersive environments and films, including "The Siege of Yorktown," with a 180-degree surround screen and dramatic special effects.



P.C. R. Nevins

12. Two Civil War Cannon

700 Water St.

The faint depressions near the base of Comte de Grasse Street mark the positions used by Civil War soldiers in an attempt to fire or skim cannonballs across the water to strike enemy ships at the waterline.

Though intended to improve the chances of sinking vessels, the tactic proved ineffective and was eventually abandoned.



P.C. R. Nevins

13. The Fifes and Drums of York Town

202 Church St

Established by York County in 1976 as part of the American Revolution Bicentennial, the Fifes and Drums of York Town later became an independent nonprofit organization. In 2006, they built this facility to serve as the Corps' headquarters.



P.C. R. Nevins

14. Cole Digges House c. 1720

411 Main St

Over the years, this property has had many owners and various uses--including a storehouse, tearoom, bank, and residence. Although long referred to as the Pate House, recent historical research credits its construction to Digges.



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15. Smith House c. 1750

208 Nelson St

Built by Edmund Smith, this house was later inherited by his daughter, Mildred. Her husband, David Jameson, served as Lieutenant Governor of Virginia in 1781.

Today, the home is owned by the National Park Service and functions as a private residence.



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16. O'Hara House c. 1920

706 Main St.



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This inviting white frame house, located diagonally across from the monument, was built shortly before 1920 by the family of the current owner. Thoughtful improvements made over the years have helped shape it into the gracious private residence it is today.

17. Ballard House c. 1727

214 Nelson St.

Captain John Ballard lived in this home from 1727 to 1744. A later addition was constructed on the right side of the original 1727 structure, adjacent to the chimney.

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The house is now owned by the National Park Service and serves as a private residence.



18. William Nelson House

507 Main St.

This location was once home to William Nelson and his wife, Elizabeth Burwell Nelson. Born in Yorktown in 1711, William was the son of Thomas Nelson and Margaret Read, a descendant of Nicolas Martiau. The house was lost in the devastating fire of 1814.



P.C. R. Nevins

19. York Hall Stable, Wisteria Cottage and York Hall Garage. c 1914

215 Read St

From 1914 to 1969, the area stretching from the river to the inner fortifications was known as "York Hall," the private estate of Captain and Mrs. George Preston Blow.

During their time there, they restored the historic Nelson, Smith, and Ballard Houses and added several new features, including a stable, cottage, garage, and formal gardens designed by noted landscape architect Charles F. Gillette.



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21. Wilton Roosevelt House 1927



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217 Nelson St.

Wilton and Phoebe Roosevelt built this home in 1927 after their earlier residence was lost to a fire in 1926. Their original home had been promised to them through a unique agreement arranged by then-

Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, when their farm was acquired in 1920 for what is now Naval Weapons Station Yorktown. Located at 217 Nelson Street--formerly known as Pearl Street and renamed in honor of the Roosevelt family--the house is privately owned and occupied today.

23. Poor Potter Archeological site c. 1720

221 Read St

In 1732, Lieutenant Governor William Gooch downplayed William Rogers as "the poor potter" of Yorktown, claiming his work was of little significance--likely to mislead the British Crown. In reality, Rogers ran one of the earliest and most advanced pottery operations in colonial America.



P.C. Nevins

20. Watermen's Museum



309 Water Street Yorktown Va

Founded in 1981, the Watermen's Museum shares the history of those who have made their living on the Chesapeake Bay, from pre-colonial times to the present. The museum's

buildings, originally constructed in Gloucester County in 1935, were transported by barge across the York River to this site in 1987. You can catch another view of the museum from Water Street.

22. Riverwalk Landing

331 Water St

The riverfront's shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues line a scenic pedestrian walkway and were designed to echo the architectural style of Yorktown's colonial past. Two large black cast iron bollards, once used to secure ships, serve as decorative reminders of the area's commercial maritime history. Nearby, an original British cannon--recovered from the York River in 1931 and mounted on a reconstructed carriage--stands as a relic from one of the British ships sunk during the 1781 Siege of Yorktown.



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24. Monument to Victory & Alliance 1881



Photo Credit: NPS / Colonial National Historical Park (Public Domain)

803 Main St.

Commonly known as the Yorktown Victory Monument, this 95-foot marble column topped with the figure of "Liberty" was begun in 1881. Although Congress authorized its construction on October 29, 1781, shortly after the American victory at Yorktown, nearly a century passed before the monument was finally built.

25. Yorktown Baptist Church 1947



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237 Nelson St.

Baptist gatherings in Yorktown date back to 1699, with a formal church established in 1777. The current congregation was organized in 1944. The white frame portion of the building is a former Army chapel

that was relocated and reconstructed here following World War II.

27. Swan Tavern

300 Main Street

First established in 1722, the Swan Tavern served guests for over a century before being destroyed in 1863, when an explosion at the nearby courthouse ignited stored black powder during the Civil War. The current structure was rebuilt on the original site by the National Park Service in 1935.



by Bernard Fisher, May 30, 2015, courtesy of HMdb.org

29. Windmill Site



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301 Water St

The steep hillside on the landward side of Water Street, known as Windmill Point, was once home to a windmill built in 1711. It operated for many years before disappearing from the landscape by 1850.

31. Medical Shop 1936

307 Main St.

The Medical Shop stands on land believed to have once belonged to Dr. Corbin Griffin, a Revolutionary War surgeon. In 1781, during the Siege of Yorktown, Griffin was held prisoner aboard a British ship while his home and two additional buildings occupied this site. The current structure is a reconstruction.



P.C. B. Sleeth

26. Freight Shed

Yorktown Historic Freight Shed

Constructed by the National Park Service following the destructive 1933 hurricane that leveled much of the waterfront, the Freight Shed originally functioned as a ferry and freight terminal, then as Yorktown's post office. Today, it serves as a venue for community events and private gatherings.



P.C. R. Nevins

28. Hornsby House 1935



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702 Main St.

Constructed in 1935 by local businessman J.W. Hornsby, this home remains in the hands of his family. Hornsby began his career as a waterman before becoming a successful entrepreneur in the local oil industry. Notably, one of his grandchildren is Grammy Award-winning musician Bruce Hornsby.

30. Somerwell House c. 1707

401 Main St

Originally built around 1707, this structure functioned as a hotel in the early 1900s following the addition of a rear wing. In 1936, the National Park Service restored the building to reflect its colonial-era design.



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32. Beach Picnic Area



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800 Water St

Water Street offers a well-maintained seasonal picnic and beach area, free to the public and cared for by York County. Located just below the Yorktown Battlefield Visitor Center, it provides views to the east of the Plains All American Pipeline terminal and, further right, the Dominion Virginia Power Station.

33. Cornwallis Cave



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600 Water St.

Known as Cornwallis Cave, this curious formation remains something of a mystery. Its original purpose and the reason behind its name have been lost over time, leaving its story largely unknown.

34. Four Heros of Yorktown

331 Water St

Four bronze statues--depicting George Washington, Marquis de Lafayette, General Rochambeau, and Admiral de Grasse--stand at the heart of Yorktown's shopping and dining area. Created by Virginia sculptor Cyd Player, the series was commissioned by the Yorktown Foundation, with installations spanning from 2005 to 2021. The statues rest on a stylized deck meant to represent a fictional meeting aboard Admiral de Grasse's flagship, *Ville de Paris*. The site has since become a popular photo spot for visitors from around the world.



35. Custom House Ambler House c 1721

410 Main St

The Custom House was built in 1721 by Richard Ambler, who served as Yorktown's customs collector. Over the years, it has had many roles, including use as a Confederate storehouse under General John Magruder in 1862 and later as a school. In 1924, the Comte De Grasse Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution acquired the property. Ambler's adjacent home was destroyed during the Civil War.



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36. Burcher Cottage c. 1881



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402 Main St

Dating to the 19th century, the Burcher Cottage has served primarily as a place of business throughout its history. Today, it is owned and maintained by the National Park Service.

37. Ballentine House c. 1930's



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606 Main St.

Built in the late 1930s by Admiral and Mrs. John Ballentine, this home stands on one of the original half-acre lots surveyed in 1691 for the creation of the port town of York. It was constructed using materials salvaged from "Dewsville," a house dating to around 1792 in King and Queen County. Today, the home is privately owned and occupied.

38. Gov. Thomas Nelson, Jr., House c. 1730

508 Main St.

Constructed by "Scotch Tom" Nelson, this home is most famously associated with his grandson, Thomas Nelson, Jr.--a prominent figure in American history. Nelson served in the Virginia House of Burgesses and the Continental Congress, signed the Declaration of Independence, led the Virginia Militia, and briefly served as Governor of Virginia. During the Civil War, the house was repurposed as a hospital. Today, it is preserved and interpreted by the National Park Service. A bronze bust of General Cornwallis, mounted on the west garden wall, was dedicated in 1931 as "a testimonial of the affection of Virginia for the mother country."



P.C. B. Sleeth

39. Dudley Digges House c. 1760

605 Main St.

The Dudley Digges House was once home to one of Yorktown's most prominent residents. A friend of Patrick Henry, Digges held several influential roles, including member of the House of Burgesses, Comptroller of Customs, member of the Virginia Council, and Rector of the College of William and Mary. Today, the property is owned by the National Park Service and serves as a private residence.



P.C. R. Nevins

40. Archer House

624 Water St.



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Originally constructed in the 18th century, the Archer House lost its frame section in the devastating 1814 fire that swept through Yorktown's lower level. Although several structures were rebuilt on their original foundations, the Archer House is the only one from that group still standing today. It is currently owned by the National Park Service and privately occupied.