

# REVOLUTIONARY FARE

*Historical Driving Trail*



The Eastern Shore of Virginia has been called the “Breadbasket of the Revolution,” and for good reason. Accomack and Northampton Counties, the two counties making up the 70-mile-long peninsula, boast a rich agricultural tradition stretching back centuries. Eastern Shore families have been cultivating this land since before the American Revolution. Though no major battles were ever fought here, the Eastern Shore contributed to the war effort in its own unique way: helping feed and supply the U.S. Continental Army and Navy. As you follow the Revolutionary Fare trail, you will discover how the unique location and plentiful resources of the “breadbasket” played a critical role in securing American independence, and how its legacy endures on the Eastern Shore of Virginia to this day. The trail is about 90 miles long. It may take around two and a half hours if you stop at each place.

## Museum of Chincoteague Island

7125 Maddox Blvd, Chincoteague, VA

Both the natural resources and the geography of this land shaped the Eastern Shore's contributions to the war effort. Thanks to the sandy loam, farmers had rock-free fields that were easy to plow. As tobacco growing in this area declined early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the land remained less depleted than the rest of Virginia. The isolation of the Eastern Shore from the mainland meant two things: cities were yet to develop so lots of acreage remained open for farming or forestry, and no battles were fought on the Shore.

Eligible men either joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment and marched north to fight, or stayed here, providing the foodstuffs that fed the American soldiers. Those that stayed harvested the crops, guarded the storage warehouses, patrolled the shipping lanes, and managed a complex smuggling import/export operation.

## Veteran's Memorial Park

7470 Memorial Park Dr, Chincoteague, VA

Chincoteague was historically used to pasture livestock. During the Revolution, there was a constant threat of British and privateering raiding parties, and the Virginia Constitutional Convention feared that the cattle and sheep on Chincoteague were particularly vulnerable. On May 21, 1776, they passed a Resolution to move the livestock to the mainland, to the dismay of Chincoteague residents. A few weeks later, another Resolution was passed allowing them to keep the livestock if they could raise a militia capable to "*defend their stock against any small cruising vessels of the enemy*".

Another commodity that needed guarding was salt, incredibly important for preserving food in the pre-refrigeration days. Also in 1776, an ordinance was passed to erect salt works in several coastal districts including the Eastern Shore. Virginia also began to import salt, mostly from Bermuda. In exchange, they brought corn, which was one of the most abundant crops on the Shore. The increased need

for importing salt and other goods increased the Shore's role in international trade—and smuggling.



*Have you driven on "Chicken City Road"? The name comes from Chincoteague's large chicken industry that had developed by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the chicken business was destroyed in the Ash Wednesday storm of 1962, and today Chincoteague thrives on tourism.*

## LOVE Sign

Downtown Chincoteague Waterfront Park, 4096 Main St, Chincoteague, VA

Imports from the Caribbean islands delivered to Accomack seaside ports were brought across the peninsula by wagon to bayside ports. From there, the goods were shipped across the Chesapeake Bay. Using this route, the Revolutionary patriots were able to bypass British ships patrolling the mouth of the bay.

*Colonel John Cropper wrote in his May 3, 1779, diary, "Yesterday, a schooner with 90 hhd's. of rum, Capt. Mosely, arrived here from St. Eustatia. Today another schooner with 40 hhd's. of rum, Capt. Dillingham, arrived from same place".*

In 1781, the arrival of the French fleet increased the demand for Eastern Shore imports. In addition to rum and other goods, gunpowder was also shipped from Dutch St. Eustatia and French Martinique to the Shore. Bermuda was a British colony like Virginia and had sympathizers for the Virginian rebels. Smuggling brigs would have ported near Chincoteague in Horntown and Metompkin's Folly Creek, home of Colonel Cropper. From Horntown, cargo could be taken to Snow Hill and down the Pocomoke River to the bay.



*The Shore still has several public wharves on both seaside and bayside that are used to launch fishing boats and kayaks. There are many creeks and marshlands to explore!*

## Captain Timothy Hill House

5122 Main St, Chincoteague, VA

Captain Timothy and Rebecca Hill moved here from New York, building the house that stands before you in the early 1800s and living here with their six children. Though dated post-Revolution, this home gives us a clue to how our founding families lived on the Shore, a generation of Americans enjoying the liberties of their new independence. Dendrochronology has shown that the logs used to build this home started growing in 1610 and were cut down in 1773. In 1836, there were 28 homes on Chincoteague. This is the only one remaining.



*Can you find the images carved on the exterior walls of the house? Who do you think carved them, and why?*



*Open to the public for tours on Fridays 1-3pm during summer season. Admission is free but donations greatly appreciated.*

Looking at Chincoteague today, it is hard to imagine that it was once all farmland, but at one time, it had a thriving agricultural community. In 1776, about twenty families lived on the island. They were constantly aware of the threat of the British and privateers raiding. As one story goes, William Burch of Assateague was plowing



*An American farmyard*

with his oxen and disappeared, leaving the oxen where they stood. The British had kidnapped him! They required him to pilot their ship through the treacherous waters of the coastline that he knew well. After doing so, he was released—months later at the end of the war, on a raft fifteen miles from

his home! At long last, his wife and son found him walking along the shore, bearded and bedraggled, but alive to tell the tale.



*Today, you can still walk for miles on undeveloped Assateague Beach and through the island's wooded trails to gain an idea of the homestead environment for early families. The Eastern Shore has the last 90 miles of undeveloped shore on the East Coast! Look out for pirates!*



## Greenbackville Harbor

Harbor Drive, Greenbackville, VA

Standing here during the Revolutionary War, you would have seen many boats carrying cargo across the bay. Just south of here stood Corbin Hall, the home of Colonel George Corbin (1744-1793), who served as the Accomack County Lieutenant. The two-story brick mansion pictured to the right sat on a large plantation.



*Corbin Hall overlooking Chincoteague Bay*

Corbin's plantation and others on the peninsula had enslaved workers who were relied upon to grow, process, and pack the provisions that fed the Continental Army. The British often coaxed them to run away or kidnapped them.

Virginia militia were stationed at "Corbin's Landing", which was likely a wharf on the property. Wharves like this were the ports where smuggled goods were imported from the Caribbean. Local watermen and farmers would sell their seafood and crops here, too.



*Ker Place, a colonial style home in Onancock, offers free tours Monday-Friday 11-3 most of the year and has historical exhibits throughout the home. By visiting, you can imagine what Corbin Hall must have looked like in its time. Virtual tours are also available online.*

## Pitts Landing on Pocomoke River

Pitts Creek Road, New Church, VA

In December 1776, the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment (formed of men from the Eastern Shore) was ordered north to Philadelphia. One of the positions in a regiment is Quartermaster. The Quartermasters held a lot of responsibilities, making sure the regiment was supplied with food, clothing, tents, candles, soap, and other necessities, as well as keeping records of the purchases. In the muster roll for July 1777, Obed Cary was listed as the quartermaster.

A soldier's knapsack was carried for weeks or months on end, holding provisions designed to sustain the soldier that would not spoil. Standard rations included hardtack (like a thick, dry, unseasoned Saltine), salted meat, dried peas or beans, cornmeal or rice, and spruce beer or cider. Between fighting on the battlefield and trying to secure fresh provisions for seventy men in areas that had already been raided, and figuring out how to pay for it all, the Quartermaster had a tough gig! Obed Cary must have been successful in his role though, because by June 1779 he was listed as a sergeant.



*Imagine you could travel back in time and meet Obed Cary as he prepared supplies for the regiment. If you could bring him a supply of one modern item to add to the soldiers' knapsacks, what would it be?*



*Since 1941, the U.S. Army Quartermaster School and Corps headquarters have been located at Fort Gregg-Adams in Prince George County, Virginia, near Petersburg. Available after base security is the Quartermaster Museum, open to the public.*

## Makemie Monument Park

699 Temperanceville Road, Temperanceville, VA

You are standing on just part of what was once the vast estate of Ann Makemie Holden (1702-1788). She was the only child of Reverend Francis Makemie, who brought Presbyterianism to the colonies, to survive into adulthood, and was buried here. She is recognized with a large monument and smaller plaque nearby.

Many farms that provided food for the soldiers and sailors were supervised by women who were widowed or had a family member serving away from home. Ann Holden was recorded in November 1782 for providing beef and pork to the militia and in July 1783, corn to the U.S. Army. By then, Madam Holden was 80 years old and widowed three times over! She was a very wealthy woman who acquired property from her father and married well. In 1756, she required her husband to sign a marriage contract listing that they owned 100 head of cattle, 20 steers, and 150 head of sheep, indicating the size of their estate and success of their business ventures. Before her death in 1787, she drafted a deed of gift to some cousins stating that they must *"always vote at the annual election for the most wise and discreet men, who have proved themselves real friends to American Independence, to represent the county Accomack..."* There is no doubt that Madam Holden was a faithful friend of American Independence herself.



*You will see many large farms as you drive this trail. You will likely not see cattle, though some small farms do raise some, along with sheep and goats. Most farmers these days grow corn, wheat, and soybeans. You can usually find local produce to enjoy at roadside stands or farmers markets on the Shore!*



## Saxis Beach

Saxis Island, Virginia



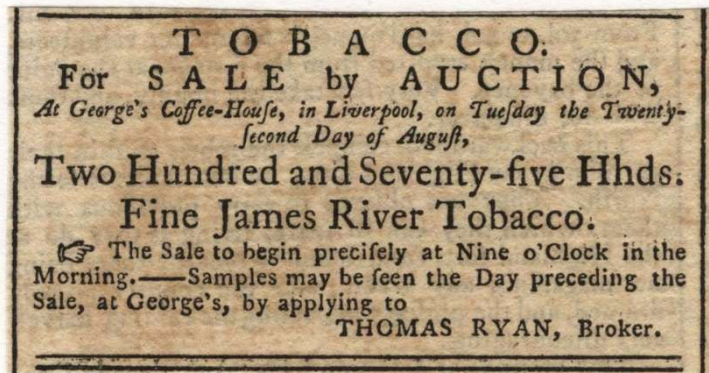
*Hogsheads of tobacco*

You are standing in front of Pocomoke Sound, where Saxis residents likely stood and watched boats pass by two and a half centuries ago. Supplies were not only imported from the seaside, but from the western shore of Chesapeake Bay. Soon after the war began the Eastern Shore acted like a port with goods traveling east and west across the peninsula. In a 1778 letter, Governor Patrick Henry instructed John Bowdoin, local Chairman of the Committee for Inspection on how to handle tobacco. He specified that it must be *"waggoned or carried acrofs to some secure Post on the seaside..."* and that the wagons *"should be Drove by a trusty White man"* to bring tobacco to

the Continental Army after the *"Passage up the Bay is stopped by the Enemies Vessels."*

A few days later, Bowdoin is mentioned in another letter on shipments for the State of Virginia via a schooner. This letter gives us an idea of Bowdoin's responsibilities in the commerce of the state, as the shipment included: *"white linens for Officers and Soldiers' Shirts... Thread Stockings... Shoes and Knee Buckles... Blanketts."* What the officers likely looked forward to the most? *"Rum—Sugar—Molasses & Some Coffee."*

The production of tobacco was extremely crucial to Virginia's economy. During the Revolution, all tobacco exports to Britain were cut off. Records show that all the tobacco exports during the war (1776-1782) combined failed to equal those of a single year before the rebellion. The price of tobacco during the war was subject to wild fluctuation. From 1775 to 1781, the price for tobacco went from 18 shillings per one hundred pounds, to 2,000.



Advertisement for a tobacco auction in Liverpool, England



*Imagine being a farmer whose livelihood depended on tobacco during the Revolution. Would you risk transporting your crop through enemy-controlled waters, or try to protect your family's future by holding onto it?*



## Saxis Island Muszum & Old Crockett Store

20101 Saxis Rd, Saxis, VA

Here are just some of the things a village store like this may have carried in the colonial era: shoes, saddles, bridles, hats, buttons, needles, thread, stockings, gloves, tools, nails, cheese, rum, and sugar. Britain was the source of some of these goods before the war, but during it people had to rely on smuggling or learning to



Depiction of men shopping in a dry goods store

manufacture such items to get them here. However, village stores like the one you see now were not typical in rural Virginia during the Colonial era. Trade often took place in the county square on court days when the proceedings being held would be sure to bring a congregation of people into town. Other traders set up at high traffic areas near the wharves. Otherwise, they were

usually on plantations, where there was enough work for them. Plantation craftsmen were usually highly skilled in trades such as weaving, blacksmith, carpentry, and leatherworking, which made them highly valuable. Most families were self-sufficient, growing their own food. If they needed other items, they used the barter system to obtain them, which linked the community in a network of local exchange.



*Americans today rely on big box stores for food and goods. The Shore, however, still has many family-run farmers markets, seafood stores, and artisan shops, just like it would have in the Colonia era. Each fall there is a shorewide Artisan's Guild Studio Tour.*



## Saxis Fishing Pier

19484 Saxis Rd, Saxis, VA

In the 1700s, the primary industry of Saxis Island was raising cattle. The islands of the Eastern Shore were ideal for raising livestock, as expensive fencing was not necessary. Cattle, hogs, and sheep were profitable in many ways. Their meat could

be eaten, hides tanned for shoes, wool used for clothing, and their milk made butter and cheese. All these items could be exported to help the patriotic cause. Seafood was harvested too, as Saxis is known for today. Oysters were a cheap staple in diets. In the Colonial era, the Chesapeake Bay was clean, and oysters had not yet been overharvested. They could be preserved and shipped to the English, who had eaten oysters even before immigrating to the colonies. The famed Chesapeake blue crab was not yet a staple to their diet. At the time, fishing was done with hook and line. Most fisherman didn't fish far from shore to avoid the threat of enemy kidnapping.



Oysters leaving the Chesapeake Bay in a ship's hold



*Commercial crabbing did not begin to thrive until new harvesting and transportation technologies arrived in the mid-1800s. The speed of steamboats and railways opened new markets for the sale of fresh seafood and produce. Today, the Eastern Shore of Virginia is the third-largest producer of marine products in the nation.*

## Behrmann Pier at Cherry Point

Muddy Creek Road, end of Rte. 683 outside Bloxom

In May 1776, the Virginia Convention of the Revolution ordered the building of two galleys (oared gunboats) to protect the Eastern Shore. They were built near here in Muddy Creek, which must have boasted a sizeable boatyard to build ships capable of holding 43 men, provisions, and weapons. The galleys were named *Accomac* and *Diligence* and cruised around the seaside. William Simpson, cook for the crew of the *Accomack*, hailed from the place of the same name.

Meals for sailors were like the soldiers; except they had access to fresh seafood. The inventories



Shipyard

of the galleys include molasses, preserved salt pork, corn meal, flour, bacon, and of course, rum. On June 3, 1779, Colonel John Cropper, whose diary entry you read at the LOVE sign, recorded that he and his wife Peggy "*dined onboard the diligence galley.*"



Today, we use "galley" to refer to a ship's kitchen, which is historically a long, tight space. The word is like "gallery", which is usually a long slender room. A galleon was a much larger sailing vessel.



We learned that Colonel Cropper and his wife dined aboard a galley. What meal do you think William Simpson would have prepared for these special guests? What would you prepare?



## Old NASA Ferry Dock

Pierce Taylor Road and Point Breeze Lane, Mappsville, VA

The Revolutionary patriots had a fort on Wallops Island. In the spring of 1779, it was taken over by about thirty British sailors. The crew had impersonated French traders and lured a local about to provide information on the port. They occupied the fort without firing a shot, taking the eight men there captive. One of the captives escaped and notified Colonel Corbin, the county lieutenant, who raced to the scene with militia to recapture the fort. Before they arrived, the British spiked the artillery and fled.

The British sailors saw the fort as an easy target to obtain provisions for their sailors. Private James Davis, age 17, was stationed at the fort during the attack. "*We would have some sharp shooting with the British barges and privateers when they would come in the creeks and inlets...*" he said. He did "*half as much duty and more in alarms and marches*" as he did at the regular places of keeping guard. While the Eastern Shore did not have large battles like on the mainland, their diligence in protecting the supplies and transport lanes was critical in the success of the War for Independence.



Wallops Island is now home to the NASA flight facility where rockets are launched throughout the year. Learn more about the history of Wallops Island and the discoveries of space by visiting the Wallops Visitor Center.



Wallops Visitor Center is open Thurs-Sat 10am-3pm; closed on federal holidays. Admission is free. No food and drink available for purchase, bring your own and enjoy at the outdoor picnic tables. No pets inside.



## Queen Sound Landing

37286 Chincoteague Rd, Hornpoint, VA

Throughout the Revolution, finding adequate food was a constant struggle for the Continental Army's survival that caused many other struggles that an already overworked General Washington had to confront, from disease to poor morale. As he said in his own words, the poor diet of salted meat and flour contributed "*to the many putrid diseases incident to the Army and the lamentable Mortality...*" Despite these struggles, Washington was able to keep the army together and defeat the British, gaining independence for the American colonies. Not only did the Shore grow, harvest, process, and ship provisions, it was a hub of strategic importing, warehousing, and shipping of a variety of items that the Continental Army and Navy critically needed. Locally, families and soldiers stationed here fared well with a diverse diet. In addition to the items mentioned in the tour, they also had fresh produce, terrapin, a variety of birds, and their eggs to eat. All this was done under the constant threat of British and privateering raids of family farms. You can learn more about such threats and skirmishes on the "Be Free! Rebel On!" trail.

In traveling the "Revolutionary Fare" trail, we hope you have learned why Accomack and Northampton Counties were known as "The Breadbasket of the Revolution". We invite you to explore the local cuisine on the Shore that has emerged since the Revolution by dining at our variety of local restaurants and food trucks and shopping at the local markets, antique stores, gift shops, and farm stands. Then you will know why we boast that we have a flare for Revolutionary Fare!