

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

HAROLD L. ICKES, Secretary

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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COLONIAL NATIONAL MONUMENT

Information Folder

Colonial National Monument is a historical reservation authorized by an Act of Congress July 3, 1930, and defined by Presidential Proclamations to include the areas of Jamestown Island, parts of the city of Williamsburg, the Yorktown battlefield, and a parkway connecting the three points. The Monument was established to preserve and develop for the benefit and enjoyment of the people the historical sites and structures within its boundaries. Its purpose is to commemorate and to interpret the contributions of the Jamestown-Williamsburg-Yorktown section to our national beginnings.

The Monument is administered by the National Park Service, a bureau in the Department of the Interior.

YORKTOWN

The area around Yorktown was settled shortly after 1630 when an order for land was issued to Captain Nicholas Martiau, a French military engineer in the service of the Virginia colony. The settlement grew and in 1691 the "Town of York" was laid out pursuant to an act of the Virginia Assembly for the establishment of port towns. Based on the expanding culture of tobacco in the Tidewater section, Yorktown became an important port of entry and clearance. Many prominent Virginia names such as John West, Edward Digges, and Thomas Nelson are connected with the early history of Yorktown.

During the first years of the American Revolution there was no fighting in the village, but in August, 1781, a British army under Lord Cornwallis fortified Yorktown as a naval base. Reception of the news that the Comte de Grasse with a French fleet would be in the Chesapeake in September enabled Washington and Rochambeau to formulate the plan whereby Cornwallis was captured. Combining their armies, the two generals led them to Williamsburg, where Lafayette awaited. In the meantime de Grasse had brought his ships to the Chesapeake, preventing assistance from reaching Cornwallis by sea. The Allies advanced from Williamsburg and laid siege to Yorktown. The British laid down their arms on October 19, 1781, virtually ending the Revolution.

Since the Siege of 1781 Yorktown has figured

in three major wars: during the war of 1812 it was threatened by a British fleet and garrisoned for a time by the militia; in 1862 as a Confederate post it was besieged and taken by a Union Army under McClellan, who subsequently used the town as headquarters; in 1917 it became an important base for the United States Navy.

There are many points of historic interest in Yorktown. The following paragraphs are numbered to correspond with the structures and sites indicated on the accompanying map.

1. Swan Tavern Group--The Swan Tavern group, consisting of (A) the Tavern, (B) the Kitchen and Smokehouse, and (C) the Stable, is a reconstruction on the original foundations. The tavern is the administration building of Colonial National Monument; the kitchen is a museum of colonial culinary art; in the stable may be seen archaeological exhibits. The original tavern was built between 1719 and 1722 and was for many years a leading Virginia hostelry. During the Civil War it was destroyed by the explosion of a powder magazine. A second "Swan" was built about 1880 and burned in 1915.

2. Court House and Clerk's Office--The present York County Court House and Clerk's Office date from 1875. The records, however, run from 1633 to the present time and constitute one of the most complete collections in Virginia. Information of unique value in the restoration and model work has been obtained from the records.

3. Philip Lightfoot House--Built about 1710, this dwelling was purchased in 1716 by Philip Lightfoot, from whom it takes its name. The house was used as an inn from about 1885 until 1931 when it was acquired by the National Park Service.

4. Grace Episcopal Church--This church was built of native marl about 1697. During the 1781 Siege of Yorktown Cornwallis used it as a magazine. It was partly burned in 1814 and rebuilt about 1825. After the Confederates evacuated Yorktown in 1862, the Union Army occupied the building using the church tower as a lookout station. Among the graves in the churchyard is that of Thomas Nelson, Jr., Signer of the Declaration of Independence. Nelson was Governor of Virginia and commanded the Virginia Militia at the Siege of Yorktown in 1781.

5. Colonial Custom House--On the southwest corner of Main and Read Streets stands the original Custom House, built the early part of the eighteenth century. It was bought by the Comte de Grasse Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and repaired and restored in 1929. The admission fee of 25 cents is for the benefit of the Chapter.

6. Digges House--Across the street from the Custom House is the Digges House, built in 1705. This attractive example of colonial architecture takes its name from the family which bought it in 1713 and lived in it for many years. The dwelling was privately restored in 1925.

7. Eighteenth Century House

8. Colonial House

9. Nelson House--The famous Nelson House, now called York Hall, stands at the southwest corner of Main and Nelson Streets. At the time of the Siege of 1781 it was the property of General Thomas Nelson, Jr., Commander of the Virginia Militia. The Nelson House is owned privately, but may be visited from April through October for a fee of 50 cents. The gardens are open all year at an admission fee of 50 cents.

10. Eighteenth Century Cottage

11. Sheild House--The Sheild House was built about 1699. During the Revolution it was the home of Mathew Pope who was twice Mayor of Yorktown. When McClellan occupied the town in 1862, this house was used as a headquarters by General Naglee. It takes its name from the present owners, who occupy it as a residence.

12. West House--The West House, early eighteenth century dwelling on the north side of Main Street, was used by British officers during the Siege of Yorktown and still bears the marks of cannon balls fired from the Allied trenches. It was named for a nineteenth century occupant. It is privately owned and occupied, but may be visited for an entrance fee of 25 cents.

13. Victory Monument--When the news of the surrender of Cornwallis reached Philadelphia in October, 1781, Congress resolved that a monument commemorating the victory should be erected at Yorktown. However, due to lack of an appropriation, the cornerstone was not laid until the Centennial Anniversary in 1881.

14. Foundations of Secretary Nelson's House--On Monument Road two hundred yards to the south of Victory Monument, a tablet marks the site of the pretentious home of Thomas Nelson, for many years Secretary of the Virginia colony. The mansion, occupied during the early part of the Siege by Cornwallis, was practically demolished by shells from the Allied batteries.

15. Old Fortifications--A part of the fortifications which form a semi-circle around Yorktown are shown here. They were erected in 1862 by General John Magruder on approximately the positions occupied by the British 1781 fortifications.

16. Moore House--The Moore House, now a part of Colonial National Monument, is the house in which the terms of Cornwallis' surrender were drawn up by the officers representing the British and the Allies. Neither Washington nor Cornwallis was present. The room used by the commissioners on October 18, 1781, is on the first floor, northwest corner. Temple Farm, on which the Moore House stands, was patented in 1631 by Governor John Harvey. Augustine Moore and his wife were living here during the Siege. The Moore House is about a mile and a quarter from Yorktown. It is open to visitors free of charge. Adjacent to the house is the kitchen, reconstructed on the original native marl foundations.

In addition to seeing the historic homes and buildings the visitor may ride or walk over attractive trails in the battlefield area. These roads follow the lines of the original colonial and Revolutionary highways. Sites of historical interest have been appropriately marked.

Recreational activities include swimming, golf, fresh and salt water fishing, and horseback riding. The National Park Service supplies free picnic and camp grounds equipped with water and comfort stations. Hotel accommodations may be secured in Yorktown at Monument Lodge, York Beach Inn, Hilltop Inn, Martiau Tavern, and Lafayette Tavern. At the entrance stations on highways U.S.-17, southeast entrance to Yorktown, and Va.-170, southwest entrance to Yorktown, the visitor may secure information concerning the Monument.

JAMESTOWN AND WILLIAMSBURG

In addition to Yorktown, the authorized area of Colonial National Monument includes Jamestown and Williamsburg. At Jamestown, the life of the early settlers is being studied. Extensive archeological excavations conducted by the National Park Service are yielding significant contributions to the story of the first permanent English colony in North America. Restoration and research projects at Williamsburg are sponsored by the Williamsburg Restoration, Incorporated.

The parkway linking the three shrines is designed to incorporate natural scenic beauty with convenience to intermediate points of historical interest.

The representative of the National Park Service in immediate charge of Colonial National Monument is the Superintendent, B. Floyd Flickinger, whose address is Colonial National Monument, Yorktown, Virginia. All letters requesting information should be addressed to him.

