

COLONIAL PARKWAY
(Jamestown Island-Hog Island-Captain John Smith Chesapeake
National Historic Trail District)
(James River District)
Colonial National Historical Park
Jamestown Island to Yorktown
Jamestown
James City County
Virginia

HALS VA-74
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

**HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
COLONIAL PARKWAY
(Jamestown Island-Hog Island-Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail
District)
(James River District)**

HALS NO. VA-74

Location: Jamestown Island to Yorktown, Colonial National Historical Park, Jamestown, James City County and Yorktown, York County, Virginia.

Western Terminus: 37.211310, -76.777255 (Center of Historic Jamestowne Visitor Center, Google Earth, WGS84)

Eastern Terminus: 37.230796, -76.502421 (Center of Yorktown Battlefield Visitor Center, Google Earth, WGS84)

Significance: The Colonial Parkway is a 23-mile scenic roadway designed to connect the Yorktown Battlefield to Historic Jamestowne, via Williamsburg, the colonial capital. The Colonial Parkway was designed to allow motorists to visit and enjoy the whole of the Colonial National Historical Park (CNHP). The roadway, constructed in two stages, reflects the legacy of the National Park Service's (NPS) efforts to integrate purposely designed roads, beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, with the conservation of the cultural landscape and the interpretation of the national parks and their historic resources. The development of the Colonial Parkway marks an important change in the history of NPS road-building traditions as it represents the first NPS-designed parkway that unifies dispersed sites as part of a cohesive national park. The Colonial Parkway, as an individual resource, is an intact example of a scenic road constructed in response to the increased interest in automobile travel as a means of recreation in the mid-twentieth century, particularly on the east coast. The parkway also derives significance from its landscape architecture in terms of its design, which blends the picturesqueness of east coast parkways with the wilderness roads in the NPS's national parks in the west, as well as incorporates Colonial Revival architectural elements such as bridges and drainage systems in atypical fashion, directly influenced from Colonial Williamsburg. The parkway is significant in its landscape design, the design of the road, and its association with the NPS's preservation movement (Eyring and Ellin 1999; NPS 2016; O'Donnell 1997:xxii; Meko 1988).

Description: Colonial Parkway, as designed, incorporates the area's scenic natural resources and its cultural landscape to create a unified whole. The Parkway, as previously mentioned, was constructed to connect Jamestown Island with the Yorktown Battlefield. Between the two Colonial-era sites the Parkway runs along the coastline east of Jamestown then turns north as the road crosses College Creek until it reaches Williamsburg, the Parkway's mid-point. North of Williamsburg the parkway curves east until the York River, and turns southeast along the

shore to Yorktown. The landscape along the Parkway ranges from open agricultural fields, dense woods, and shoreline with marsh grasses and tidal wetlands. As visitors drive along the parkway in either direction, the landscape purposely moves from open vistas, like those of Yorktown and along the coast line of the James River, to enclosed woodland areas. Plantings included in the parkway's design were carefully selected for the visitor experience and meant to create a frame for the vistas encountered along the route. Several areas along the parkway in Williamsburg have experienced dense residential and commercial development, which has altered views along this section of the parkway; however, most vistas remain intact. In addition to the purposeful design of the plantings, the spatial characteristics of the parkway were further defined by the design of the road alignment and type of grading, which in turn enhanced the purpose-built vistas viewed by the visitor (O'Donnell et. al. 1997:238-239 and 336-338).

Vegetation prior to the construction of the parkway included pine, oak, and tulip poplar with an understory of hollies and dogwoods, among other smaller flowering trees. Junipers, wax myrtle, willow, and beach plum, as well as other species from nearby areas, were planted in addition to the existing trees to create the desired effect as illustrated in the parkway's plans. Today, types of trees along the parkway continue to be mainly pine and oak with holly, mountain laurel, dogwood, and redbuds as the understory. The flowering trees of the understory create a colorful landscape for visitors during the spring. Wetland areas, both forested and non-forested, include grasses, walnut, ash, gum, bayberry, sumac, and Virginia rose, among other species. Open fields and parkland feature mown grass and meadows (O'Donnell et. al. 1997:282-288 and 365-369).

The Parkway's design, through the construction of overlooks equipped with parking and picnic benches, allowed visitors to fully experience the scenic beauty along the roadway. The overlooks, currently a total of 17, along with the interpretive signage (added in the 1950s), became an integral part of the parkway, and were constructed at strategic scenic points. Short footpaths from the overlooks allow access to historical, scenic, or natural sites, which provide interpretive opportunities (O'Donnell et. al. 1997:276-280).

As designed, the roadway is 30 feet wide with two lanes and a center passing lane. The roadway, the surface of which is concrete with exposed aggregate, utilizes large radius curves with few straight sections. The Parkway also incorporated unobtrusive concrete bridges, which spanned water crossings, and Colonial Revival over and underpasses constructed of poured concrete and clad in brick. The manner in which the culverts were designed followed similar treatment as the over and underpasses. Today, the Parkway's appearance remains essentially the same as when it was completed in 1957, although for safety wood and poured concrete guardrails and curbing were added in the later

decades of the twentieth century (O'Donnell et.al. 1997:xxi-xxii, 1; NPS 1988; Eyring and Ellin 1999).

History: Plans for the Parkway began as early as 1909 when the City Council of Williamsburg passed a resolution for securing funds to build a road from Jamestown (James City County) to Yorktown (York County). A subsequent bill was sent to the United States Congress; however, no federal funds were allotted during this time. Even before plans for the Parkway, a sense of preservation of the Colonial history of the area, in particular Yorktown, Williamsburg, and Jamestown, was growing during the late nineteenth century. During the early twentieth century, the preservation efforts increased with the collaboration of the National Park Service (NPS), Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, and the Virginia Conservation and Development Commission. The three organizations put a plan together to create a "historical park," which would later transform into the Colonial National Monument (O'Donnell et. al. 1997:170-171; Eyring and Ellin 1999).

Funds for the Colonial Parkway were finally secured in 1930, when the bill, introduced into the legislature that year, was signed by President Herbert Hoover. The bill, as passed, appropriated funds for the planning of the parkway, as well as the historic park. The design, survey, and planning of the parkway was conducted by Charles Peterson, a landscape architect for the NPS in California. Peterson was one of only two NPS landscape architects working full-time in the 1930s. Others included Engineer Oliver Taylor, Associate Highway Engineer William Smith, and Park Superintendent William Robinson Junior. In the initial design stage of the project, planners of the parkway studied other early twentieth parkway systems including several in Westchester County, New York, and the Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway, which ran from Washington's Arlington Memorial Bridge to Mount Vernon. The Parkway is now part of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Although issues regarding the design of the park and parkway were encountered by the NPS – the concept of the historic park had not been executed before by the NPS – the construction on the first segment began in 1931. The first segment was constructed between Ballard Creek and Hubbard Lane and took approximately four years to complete (O'Donnell et.al. 1997:173-189). As the construction of the first section was underway, planning for the Parkway's extension between Williamsburg and Jamestown had begun. Construction began in 1933 and was completed in 1939 (O'Donnell et.al. 1997:198 and 174-195; Eyring and Ellin 1999; NPS 1988).

The construction of the Parkway was not without its problems. Issues with the alignments, problems with right-of-way acquisition, public opposition, politics, materials, and the advent of World War II and the Korean War all impact the project. While planning continued during the war years, construction efforts were halted for the most part (O'Donnell et. al. 1997:207-210). Although slow

to gain momentum after World War II and the Korean War, the Colonial Parkway, with the impetus of the impending 350th anniversary of Jamestown, was finally complete in 1957 (O'Donnell 1997:210-213; NPS 1988; Eyring and Ellin 1999).

Sources: O'Donnell, Patricia et al. *Colonial Parkway Cultural Landscape Report: History, Existing Landscape and Analysis*. Westport: Connecticut, 1997. Ms. Yorktown, VA: National Park Service, Colonial National Historical Park.

Eyring, Shaun and Phyllis Ellin, "Colonial Parkway" National Register of Historic Places Nomination form, 1999 (approved 2001). Available from: http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/Counties/JamesCity/047-0002_Colonial_Parkway_2001_Final_Nomination.pdf, Accessed March 2017.

National Park Service (NPS), "The Colonial Parkway," <https://www.nps.gov/colo/parkway.htm>, accessed 12/06/2016.

National Park Service, Colonial National Monument Parkway (Colonial Parkway) Running from Jamestown Island to Yorktown, via Williamsburg James City County, Williamsburg City, and York County /Virginia, (Historic American Engineering Record [HAER] 1988). Available from: <https://cdn.loc.gov/master/pnp/habshaer/va/va1400/va1489/data/va1489data.pdf> . Accessed March 2017.

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July 10, 2017



View of James River from Parking Area/Pull Off South of Black River Lane (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



View of James River from Colonial Parkway to the West of the Bridge Spanning the Black River (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



View from Colonial Parkway of Adjacent Roberts Farm/James City County Bible and Horticultural School (VDHR #047-5113) (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



View of Colonial Parkway and Portion of Pull Off (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



Colonial Parkway from Entrance to College Creek Beach Access (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



Bridge over College Creek Inlet (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



View of Entrance to College Creek Beach from Colonial Parkway (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



View of College Creek Beach and Inlet Bridge from the James River (Wes Stewart, 7/15/2015)