

# CHAPTER 8: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

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## Overview

Chesterfield County enjoys the distinction of being an area with one of the longest periods of continuous habitation in the country. In looking towards the future, it is important to understand, and to appropriately preserve and promote the county's rich historical and cultural foundation. Not only can students experience hands-on learning at these historic sites, but Chesterfield County can also increase local business development through tourism.

### DESIRED OUTCOMES OF THIS CHAPTER:

- **Preservation of Historic Places and Structures**
- **Leverage Historic Assets to Create a Sense of Place and Foster Tourism**
- **Support Partnerships and Private Preservation of Historic Resources**
- **Utilize Historic Places for Events, Education and Other Unique Experiences**

## A Brief History of Chesterfield County

The county was originally inhabited by the Appamatuck Tribe, one of many tribes ruled by Chief Wahasonacock. In 1611, Sir Thomas Dale led a group of colonists from the original English settlement at Jamestown to the "Citie of Henricus" located on Farrar's Island. In 1613, Dale seized various lands around the area where John Rolfe cultivated a salable variety of tobacco for English export for the Virginia Company of London. Tobacco became the colony's main export and source of revenue. In 1619, the first iron furnace, and one of the first industrial developments in America, was established on Falling Creek near the James River. Other early American accomplishments included private property ownership, beginning of public education and experiments in representative government.



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In March 1622, Chief Wahasonacock's successor, Chief Opechancanough, launched a coordinated attack on area settlements, many of which never recovered and were abandoned. With high profits from tobacco cultivation, however, settlements such as Bermuda Hundred prospered and became the only significant organized settlement in the county until the 1700's.

In 1634 the Chesterfield area became part of the Shire of Henrico, one of the eight original political divisions of Virginia. Tobacco cultivation and coal mining fueled growth which, by 1749, prompted the Virginia House of Burgesses to separate Chesterfield County from Henrico County. The county was named after former British Secretary of State Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Chesterfield. The county seat was established at Chesterfield Court House. The original boundary of the county was the James and Appomattox Rivers in the north, east and south and, generally, Skinquarter Creek in the west. During the early and middle 20<sup>th</sup> century, annexations by the City of Richmond and incorporation of the City of Colonial Heights reduced the county to its present borders.

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African-American history in the county dates to 1634 when the first Africans were brought to Bermuda Hundred. Through the centuries, African-American churches have served as the center of this community. To date, 28 African-American churches have been identified, and research is ongoing into early African-American schools, graves, businesses and post-Civil War settlements throughout the county. In 1882 the Virginia Legislature passed a bill to charter the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute, the nation's first fully state-supported four-year institution of higher learning for African-Americans, in Ettrick. This would become today's Virginia State University.



During the American Revolutionary War, the county courthouse served as a collection point and supply depot for the war effort. This role was strengthened when General Baron Von Steuben established a major military training center in this area in 1780. In 1781, British General Benedict Arnold led a raid along the James River toward Richmond, while General Phillips destroyed the county courthouse and training center. The Virginia Fleet was defeated by Arnold's army at Osbornes, a tobacco inspection station and local shipping center established circa 1761, when his army placed cannons on a high bluff above the river where the fleet's weapons could not reach.

Because of its proximity to Richmond, the county was a Union target from the very beginning of the Civil War. In 1862, the Union Navy attempted to capture Richmond by traveling up the James River. This effort was blocked by the Confederates at Drewry's Bluff. In May 1864, the Union again attempted to capture Richmond, landing General Benjamin Butler's Army of the James at Bermuda Hundred and resulting in two engagements at Port Walthall and one at Swift Creek. Additional significant battles occurred around Chester Station, Woolridge Hill and Drewry's Bluff before the Confederates were able to drive Butler's forces back to the Bermuda Hundred peninsula. After the Battle of Ware Bottom Church on May 20, 1864, both sides established extensive earthworks and fortifications across the peninsula. These were manned until Confederate General Robert E. Lee's retreat from the area in 1865.

### Historic Settlements & Events

Some of the earliest organized county settlements and villages include:

**Citie of Henricus:** established circa 1611 by Sir Thomas Dale

- First English hospital in America, Mount Malady (1612)
- First private land ownership opportunity
- Early experiments in representative government to support economic growth
- First college in America; originally designed to educate both English and Native American children (1618)
- Settlement was destroyed during the Opechancanough offensive and subsequently abandoned (1622)
- Experienced American Revolutionary War raids (1781)
- Location of the Dutch Gap Canal, dug by U. S. soldiers under Union General Benjamin Butler during the Bermuda Hundred Campaign (1864)

**Bermuda Hundred:** established circa 1614 by Sir Thomas Dale

- First incorporated town in America (1614)
- Designated an official port and market town (1691)
- Damaged in the American Revolutionary War (1781)
- Site of state customs house for import/exports (1788)
- First Baptist Church of Bermuda Hundred, the second-oldest continuous African-American congregation in the county (1850)
- Headquarters of Union General Benjamin Butler during the Civil War Bermuda Hundred Campaign (1864)
- Former railroad terminus and shipping port for Bright Hope Railroad (later Tidewater & Western Railroad) (1883)

**Midlothian:** established circa 1730 as a coal mining village, experienced several mining disasters causing loss of life during the 19<sup>th</sup> century

- First commercially mined coal in the nation (1701)
- Raided by General William Phillips during the Revolutionary War (1781)
- First hard-surfaced road in Virginia, ran from the mines at Midlothian to the wharves at Manchester (present-day Midlothian Turnpike) (1807)
- First railroad in Virginia (Chesterfield Railroad to Manchester – gravity line) (1831)
- Oldest continuous African-American congregation in Chesterfield County – First African Baptist Church, known today as First Baptist Church of Midlothian (1846)
- Target of Union Army raid during the Civil War (1864)

**Osbornes:** established circa 1761 by Thomas Osborne as a tobacco inspection station and local shipping center

- Site of American Revolutionary War battle between British General Benedict Arnold and the Virginia Fleet (1781)
- Former railroad terminus and shipping port for Bright Hope Railroad (1869)
- Abandoned when construction of Dutch Gap Canal caused silting along the James River (1880s)

**Ettrick:** established circa 1810 as a milling village

- First bridge across Appomattox River, Campbell's Bridge (1810)
- First cottonseed oil mill in nation (1831)
- Site of Confederate Army retreat under General Robert E. Lee after fall of Petersburg (1865)
- Current home to Virginia State University, oldest state-supported college for African-Americans (est. 1882)

**Matoaca:** established circa 1833 as a milling village

- Named after Chief Wahasonacock's daughter, Pocahontas, whose native name was Matoaka
- Site of Confederate Army retreat under Robert E. Lee after fall of Petersburg (1865)

**Clover Hill (Winterpock):** established circa 1837 as a coal mining village, experienced several mining disasters causing loss of life during the 19<sup>th</sup> century

- Location of the Clover Hill Railroad (subsequently known as Bright Hope and later Tidewater & Western) (1844)
- One of the major coal producing centers on the east coast (circa 1855)
- Abandoned due to competition from other coal mines (1880s)

**Port Walthall:** established circa 1840s as a rail/port town

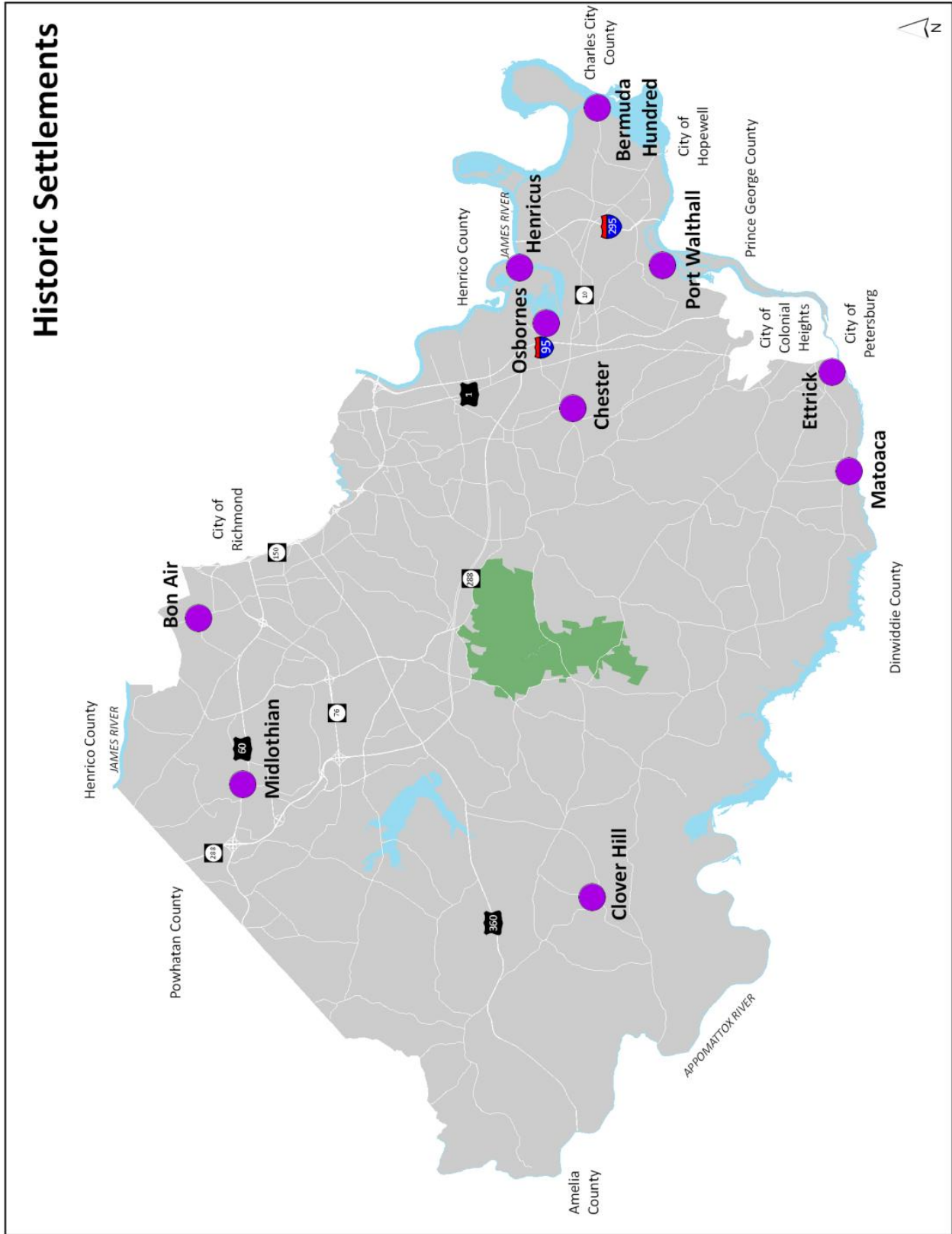
- Location of the branch line terminus of Richmond & Petersburg Railroad (1840)
- Site of Port Walthall Steamboat Company, which carried freight and passengers between ports on the James River then via railroad to Richmond and Petersburg (1845)
- Site of two engagements in May 1864 during the Bermuda Hundred Campaign
- Rail lines were removed during the Civil War, causing decline of settlement (circa 1860s)

**Chester:** established circa 1856 at the intersection of the Richmond/Petersburg and Clover Hill (Bright Hope) railroads

- Established by the same developers of Ashland in Hanover County
- Site of Civil War Battle of Chester Station (1864)
- Location of second bank in county (1903)
- Site of first county public high school, Chester Agricultural High School, forerunner of Thomas Dale High School (1905)
- Location of first county public library (1966)

**Bon Air:** established circa 1877 on a rail line between Richmond and Danville as a resort for wealthy Richmond citizens

- Once boasted three railroad stops, unprecedented for a community of its size
- Location of first private community library, Hazen Memorial (1902)
- First shopping center in county (1949)
- First national historic district in county, created by community (1986)



### Historic Firsts

In addition to those listed previously, additional historic firsts include:

- **1811:** First commercial tramway (the predecessor of railroads) operated in the northern Belmont Road area.
- **1811:** First use of steam engines in the nation at Black Heath Pits in Midlothian.
- **1812:** First school for deaf mutes in America was located at Cobbs Plantation on the lower Appomattox River.
- **1816:** Bellona Arsenal and Foundry in the northwestern section of the county was established as one of the first federal weapons repositories in the nation, later becoming the second largest producer of armaments for the Confederacy behind Tredegar Ironworks in Richmond.
- **1862:** First Medal of Honor awarded to Corporal John Mackie of the U.S. Marine Corps as a result of his actions during the May 15, 1862 Battle of Drewry's Bluff.
- **1921:** First Father's Day was organized by three ladies from Drewry's Bluff.
- **1934:** First wayside park in Virginia was established at the circa 1824 Stone Bridge on Jefferson Davis Highway over Falling Creek.

### Historical & Cultural Tourism

Historical and cultural resources offer unique places for people to visit and learn about the history of the county and the nation. These resources are both publicly and privately-owned, and include federal, regional and local attractions. In addition, the county partners with regional entities such as Richmond Regional Tourism, Virginia Tourism, Petersburg Area Regional Tourism, Henrico County, the Virginia Association of Museums and the Henricus Foundation to promote historical and cultural tourism.



### LOCAL ATTRACTIONS AND DESTINATIONS

The following is a list of attractions and destinations for historical and cultural tourism within the county.

#### *Castlewood*

This circa 1817 plantation house built by Parke Poindexter, clerk of the county court, and has a unique formal 5-part building plan unlike any other recorded historic structure in Virginia.

#### *Chesterfield County Courthouse Square*

The Chesterfield County Historic Courthouse Square includes the 1892 Jail, 1828 Clerk's Office, 1889 Clerk's Office, 1917 Courthouse and a replica of the 1749 Courthouse. The Chesterfield County Museum is located in the replica of the county's circa 1749 Courthouse that was torn down in 1917.

The museum contains exhibits showcasing the county's history. The 1892 jail includes a law enforcement exhibit and allows visitors to experience prisoner accommodations of that period.

### **Civil War Sites**

The Parks and Recreation Department provides protection and interpretation of many earthworks and sites that were a part of the Civil War including Battery Dantzler, Dodd Park at Point of Rocks, the Dutch Gap Canal, Fort Stevens, Fort Wead, Historic Point of Rocks Park, Howlett Line Park, Sergeant James Engle Park, 39<sup>th</sup> Illinois Park and Ware Bottom Church. Drewry's Bluff and Parker's Battery are additional Civil War sites that are part of the Richmond National Battlefield Park system.

### **Eppington Plantation**

This home, built circa 1770, by Francis Eppes VI, a prominent politician from Henrico, was visited frequently by Thomas Jefferson. It was originally comprised of nearly 4,000 acres. Eppington's main architectural significance lies in the design of a main block structure with lower wings that is emblematic of a typical 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian style design.

### **Falling Creek Bridge**

The bridge over Falling Creek where it passes under Jefferson Davis Highway is one of the earliest bridges in the state. Constructed circa 1824, the bridge played an important early role in linking the cities of Richmond and Petersburg. The bridge fell out of use in 1933 and became Virginia's first wayside park. The bridge was heavily damaged during Hurricane Gaston in 2004.

### **Falling Creek Ironworks Park**

This first iron furnace in America was built in 1619, and subsequently destroyed in 1622 by Native Americans. Several later attempts to revive the ironworks here resulted in mixed success. Archibald Cary also operated a mill in this area in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century that was destroyed by Benedict Arnold. Trails and a public green were constructed in 2016 and a museum and visitor's center are planned.

### **Henricus Historical Park**

This attraction has stunning views of the James River and offers 18 re-created Colonial and Virginia Native American structures. This living history museum provides encounters with period dressed historical interpreters. Colonial demonstrations include militia drills, cooking, blacksmithing, crop planting and tobacco growing and harvesting. Native American demonstrations include canoe building, hunting skills and tool making.



### **Historical Highway Markers**

This program, begun in 1927, commemorates people, places or events of regional, statewide or national significance. The county is currently home to over 50 of these highway markers.

### **Historic Route 1 Corridor**

Chartered in 1816 to connect the cities of Richmond and Petersburg, the Manchester & Petersburg Turnpike was the second toll road built in the county. This corridor has witnessed numerous historical events from the American Revolution, the Civil War and early suburban development. The many historic landmarks and highway signs attest the rich history of the area.



### **Magnolia Grange**

This Federal-style home was built circa 1822 by William Winfree and is now a museum interpreting 19<sup>th</sup>-century plantation life. The home was named after the circle of magnolia trees that once stood in its front lawn.

### **Mid-Lothian Coal Mines Park**

This park highlights the history of the first commercially-mined coal in America and is located at the site of the former Grove Shaft Mine, where visitors can see the stone ruins of the former mining operation.



### **Pocahontas State Park**

This nearly 8,000-acre park was built by the Civil Conservation Corps, a Great Depression public work relief program. In addition to park amenities such as camping, fishing, boating, hiking, mountain biking, swimming and picnicking, a Civilian Conservation Corps Museum commemorates the workers that shaped the infrastructure of America. An outdoor amphitheater hosts numerous community concerts. A major portion of the Richmond Regional Ride Center, designated as a bronze-level status ride center by the International Mountain Biking Association, is located at Pocahontas State Park.

### **Point of Rocks Historic House & Grounds**

This county park, a local, state and federal historic landmark, offers beautiful views of the Appomattox River from a high bluff overlooking the Port Walthall Channel. This area had a significant role in the Civil War with the historic 1840 home built by Reverend Alexander Strachan serving as a surgeon's quarters for the large military hospital located on the property during Union General Butler's Bermuda Hundred Campaign.

## **CULTURAL AMENITIES**

In addition to historical resources, the county and surrounding communities have many other cultural offerings. Among these include music, arts and neighborhood events throughout the year, as well as museums, art galleries, dance studios and theaters. Performing arts organizations include the Richmond Symphony, Richmond Ballet, Virginia Opera, Theater IV and Theater Virginia, along with numerous school-based choral and theater groups. The region is also home to many television and radio broadcasting facilities. An effort is currently underway to construct the Chesterfield Center for the Arts in partnership with the Chesterfield Center for the Arts Foundation in the Chester area.



## Historical & Cultural Preservation Programs

Historical and cultural resource preservation efforts take place at the national, state and local levels. Several public and private organizations are concerned with historic and cultural resources, ranging from the federal government to local community preservation groups.

### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES & VIRGINIA LANDMARKS REGISTER

As of 2016, there were 20 individual landmarks and six historic districts on the state and national historic registers for the county.

#### Listing Process

The 1966 *National Historic Preservation Act* created the National Register of Historic Places and mandated that states establish historic preservation offices. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources is the home of the State Historic Preservation Office. This department is responsible for evaluating property nominations to the state and national historic registers. If approved for the Virginia Landmarks Register, the landmark is automatically listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These listings are primarily symbolic, acknowledging the presence of an important resource, and do not place restrictions on the use, regulate improvements to the property or require provision of public access.



#### Incentives

A historic preservation easement program is administered by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Through this voluntary program, property owners guarantee perpetual protection of a listed resource while still maintaining ownership, use and enjoyment of their property. In exchange, the properties may qualify for federal and state income tax deductions.

Tax credit programs are available that encourage rehabilitation of listed resources by providing credits for incurred expenses by private individuals. Rehabilitation work using these programs must be consistent with national preservation standards.

Matching grants may be available to non-profit organizations and local governments for preservation work to registered landmarks through the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

More information about state and national landmarks and incentive programs can be found at the [Virginia Department of Historic Resources website](#).

### **CHESTERFIELD COUNTY HISTORIC DISTRICTS, LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES**

As of 2016, there were 48 county-designated landmarks.

#### **Designation**

In 1987, the historic districts, landmarks and landmark sites ordinance was adopted as part of the county Zoning Ordinance. Unlike the state and national listings, the county's landmark designation is designed to protect the architectural and physical integrity of the resource. A resource does not need to be listed on the national or state register to be designated as a county landmark or historic district.



Through this ordinance, a Historic Preservation Committee was established to make recommendations on proposals for new historic district and landmark designations, and to review and authorize changes to designated structures and properties.

Designation is voluntary and is initiated by owners of property having historical or cultural significance. The Historic Preservation Committee and Planning Commission consider the application and make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors makes the final determination as to whether or not to designate the resource.

#### **Incentives for County Designation**

An incentive program is administered through the Department of Real Estate Assessments that provides a partial property tax exemption for rehabilitation work on a designated property. This work must increase the assessed property value by at least 25 percent, but no more than \$500,000. The property tax rate is based upon the pre-rehabilitation assessed value for a period of 10 years and is transferable with the property.

More information about the Chesterfield County preservation ordinance and incentive program can be found at the [Chesterfield County Preservation Committee website](#).

### General Historical & Cultural Resources Guidelines

The General Historical and Cultural Resources Guidelines provide direction and support for historical and cultural resource preservation, promotion and enhancement.

Major considerations in the development of these guidelines include:

- ❖ Promoting public awareness of the county's history.
- ❖ Promoting the county's history to enhance tourism and economic development.
- ❖ Supporting voluntary preservation efforts.
- ❖ Supporting appropriate adaptive reuse of historical structures.
- ❖ Integrating preserved areas into developments.
- ❖ Protecting unique architectural and design qualities in historic villages.

The following General Historical and Cultural Resources Guidelines should be used when addressing historical and cultural preservation:

- **Public Awareness and Education.** Consider enhancement and expansion of programs, events and other activities that increase public awareness of the county's historical and cultural resources and their contribution to the region, state and nation. Partner with educational institutions such as Chesterfield County Public Schools, John Tyler Community College, Virginia State University and other relevant organizations to promote county history programming to students.
- **Tourism.** Promote tourism through marketing the county's historical and cultural sites.
- **Historic Designations.** Encourage voluntary local, state and national historic landmark and district designations through incentive programs. Consider designation of only that area necessary to accomplish preservation thereby affording the option for future use of the remaining area.
- **Historic Easements.** Encourage voluntary historic preservation and other easements for preserving important historical and cultural resources.
- **Development Integration of Historical and Cultural Resources.** Encourage preservation, incorporation and integration of historical and cultural resources through design and layout of development projects. Consider development incentives such as reduced parking, setbacks, buffers and other design standards.
- **Adaptive Reuse.** Encourage adaptive reuse of county-designated historic sites and structures in accordance with the recommendations of The Land Use Plan chapter.
- **Incentive Programs.** Encourage the use of local, state and federal incentive programs to promote historic preservation efforts and explore other incentive programs that could be offered.
- **Historic Villages.** Within historic villages as determined through development of Specific Area Plans, consider development standards such as architectural features, landscaping, setbacks and other

design measures that enhance the village character. These historic villages could include Bon Air, Chester, Ettrick, Matoaca and Midlothian.

- **Historic Trails.** Encourage development of interpretive trails that provide access to historical and cultural resources such as along Civil War earthworks and battlefield sites, Lee's Retreat route and waterfront areas.
- **Historic Parks.** Consider development of special purpose parks that provide public access to historical and cultural sites.
- **Maintaining County-Owned Resources.** Encourage proper funding for maintenance and preservation of county-owned historical and cultural resources.
- **Support Cultural Amenities.** Support the provision of cultural amenities such as arts centers, theaters and other similar facilities as a part of mixed-use developments, and in other community focal points.
- **Collaboration.** Continue to foster collaborative relationships with organizations and foundations such as the Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia, the Henricus Foundation, the Eppington Foundation, the Falling Creek Ironworks Foundation, the Mid-Lothian Mines Foundation, the Chesterfield Foundation for the Arts and other relevant organizations to preserve, maintain, enhance and promote historic and cultural amenities.