



HISTORIC WALKING TOUR



Prepared For:
Town of West Point, Virginia

Prepared By:



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Historic Walking Tour

- 1** From 1890 to 1971, the West Point Public School stood on the site of the West Point Station parking lot. The Beverly Allen School lies west on 13th Street, formerly the West Point Colored School built in 1930. Across the street stands the Mt. Nebo Baptist Church, established by the Rev. Jesse Dungee in 1887. Rev. Dungee organized the Bethany and Mount Olive churches and served as an early African-American in the Virginia House of Delegates. The West Point Pleasure Club once housed the Triple River Masonic Lodge and Knights of Pythias in the stucco building at the corner of 12th and Kirby Streets (#1203). A home built in 1903 by contractor William C. Davis stands at 1205 Main Street.
- 2** The West Point United Methodist Church was built in 1889 on the corner of 11th and Main streets.
- 3** St John's Episcopal Church was built in 1882. The former Royal Hotel stands on this corner and across the street is the US Post Office built in 1931.
- 4** Commercial buildings lining Main Street between 9th and 6th typify the renaissance of early 20th-century commerce following the devastating fire of 1903. The blaze claimed fifty-two buildings on four blocks. Sam Bland's General Store and Grocery, built in 1895, located on the NW corner of 8th Street, was one of two structures to survive. One of the many remaining shops of this era on Main Street includes an office located at 913 Main Street built around 1905 by Mr. Skrlec as his shoe shop and home.
- 5** Between 1870 and 1890, as many as 15 saloons along 7th Street plied their trade and catered to the crews of the visiting ships. Following the fire of 1890, a thriving black business district grew, offering everything from seafood to general merchandise.
- 6** The Stark House served as the federal hospital for the Union troops in 1862 where the First Baptist Church Parsonage stands today at 429 Main Street. Across the street stood the three-story brick Masonic Hall built in 1884. Earlier still (1702), the site served as the Pamunkey Neck Chapel and Churchyard.

Looking west down 5th Street, the York Wholesale Building stands as the sole survivor of a once-extensive warehouse, wharf for industrial schooners and steamships, and railroad district. A covered wharf extended three blocks between 3rd Street and 6th Street. Two cotton gins lent testimony to West Point's status as the country's fifth largest cotton port. Following the devastation of the Civil War, the railroad made the decision to move the town's port terminal to Portsmouth. West Point's future as a cotton port disappeared, but the arrival of the 200-room Terminal Hotel in 1887 heralded the town's transformation to a resort destination. Vacationers could then choose between regular train excursions or luxury steamship cruises to Baltimore. Throughout the historic district, the extensive variety of 19th- and early 20th- century residences attest to the prosperity of the steamship and railroad community.

- 7** One of the oldest surviving houses in town is the ca. 1850 William Mitchell House located at 303 Main Street. Mr. Mitchell owned the first grocery, which stood in what is now the front yard of the house. What is believed to be the oldest brick dwelling in West Point stands at 206 Main Street. It was built in 1887-88 by Robert S. Dudley (son of Alexander Dudley), the King and Queen lawyer who headed the Richmond and York River Railroad. The structure locally believed to be the old Colonial Hotel stands across the street at 215 Main Street. It was built in 1884 by Mr. Hughes who was believed to be the first new car



History and Overview of West Point

The Town of West Point has a long and unique history as a result of its location in Colonial Virginia and its rich American Indian heritage. Once the site of an Indian village named Cinquotek, the West Point area, became part of a large land grant made to Captain John West in 1664. In 1691, an act by the General Assembly arranged a purchase of 50 acres of land from West Point Plantation for the development of Delaware Town. In 1859, a rail line up the Pamunkey River from West Point to White House went into service, and in 1860, workers completed an iron drawbridge across the river. The Civil War destroyed this construction, and today, only four antebellum houses survive.

West Point became an incorporated town in 1870. Quickly, it became a thriving commercial port and resort destination. The City of Richmond used West Point as its eastern shipping terminus. Ship traffic included schooners, steamships, and barges. West Point was the first terminus for the Richmond and York River Railroad. The Terminal Hotel stood at the site of the existing Beach Park and served as a popular attraction for tourists and visitors. After the decline of tourism, a shipyard built in 1917 and a pulp mill built in 1918 revitalized the town.

The town has a grid pattern of streets and blocks with 1/4-acre lots. Main Street is the primary north-south thoroughfare, and it is home to most of the district's late 19th century and early 20th century commercial, religious, and residential buildings. Beginning at the tip of the peninsula with First Street, the town's east-west streets continue north in numerical order.

The following timeline and accompanying walking tour take you on a virtual journey through the history of West Point, allowing you to relive the many historic events that unfolded here, and providing a better appreciation of the town's rich history.



Main Street. It was built in 1884 by Mr. Hughes who was believed to be the first new car dealer in town. The home of Captain Joseph Lewis Mulford, a successful oysterman from New Jersey, was built in 1902 and stands at 128 Main Street.

8 In 1677, Joseph Ingram, successor-in-command of Nathaniel Bacon's rebel forces, surrendered to Gov. William Berkeley's loyalists. The rebels were tried and many were hanged. Anthony Arnold, Bacon's lieutenant, allegedly met his fate at the end of a rope on a limb of the mulberry tree on 2nd Street. On each end of 2nd Street stood oyster houses: the J. W. Marshall Oyster Packing House to the east, and the G. W. Richardson Packing House to the west. Baltimore steamships connected with the Southern Railroad, a spur of which ran up 2nd Street, to accommodate the patrons of the local hotels. At least three other 19-Century hotels still stand, the Trice Hotel at 5th and Main, the O'Connor Hotel at 5th and Kirby, and the 920 and Royal Hotel at 9th and Main streets.

9 Beach Park, once the playground to thousands, offered recreation facilities including swimming pools, dance pavilions, a merry-go-round, roller coaster, ice cream parlors, movie theater, and shooting gallery, all tied together by a boardwalk that stretched across the entire point. The Marquis de Rochambeau established gun emplacements in support of the revolutionary forces at Yorktown at the time of General Cornwallis's surrender in 1781. The point saw fortification again in 1862, this time by Union forces under the command of General Franklin.

10 Home site of Beverly Allen, Jr., son of a freed slave who attended the Mission School that would become Hampton Institute. A classmate of Booker T. Washington, Allen later returned home to found a progressive school for African-American children. Prior to his contribution, the Freedman's Bureau established the first free school for African-American children in West Point in 1873.

11 The 1706 plan for Delaware Town laid out the original public quay dock on 4th Street, and by 1781 it served as the landing for the Dudley Ferry from King and Queen County. At the end of 5th Street looking east, Triple River Club, a sportsman's retreat, extended over the water until the August storm of 1933 destroyed it.

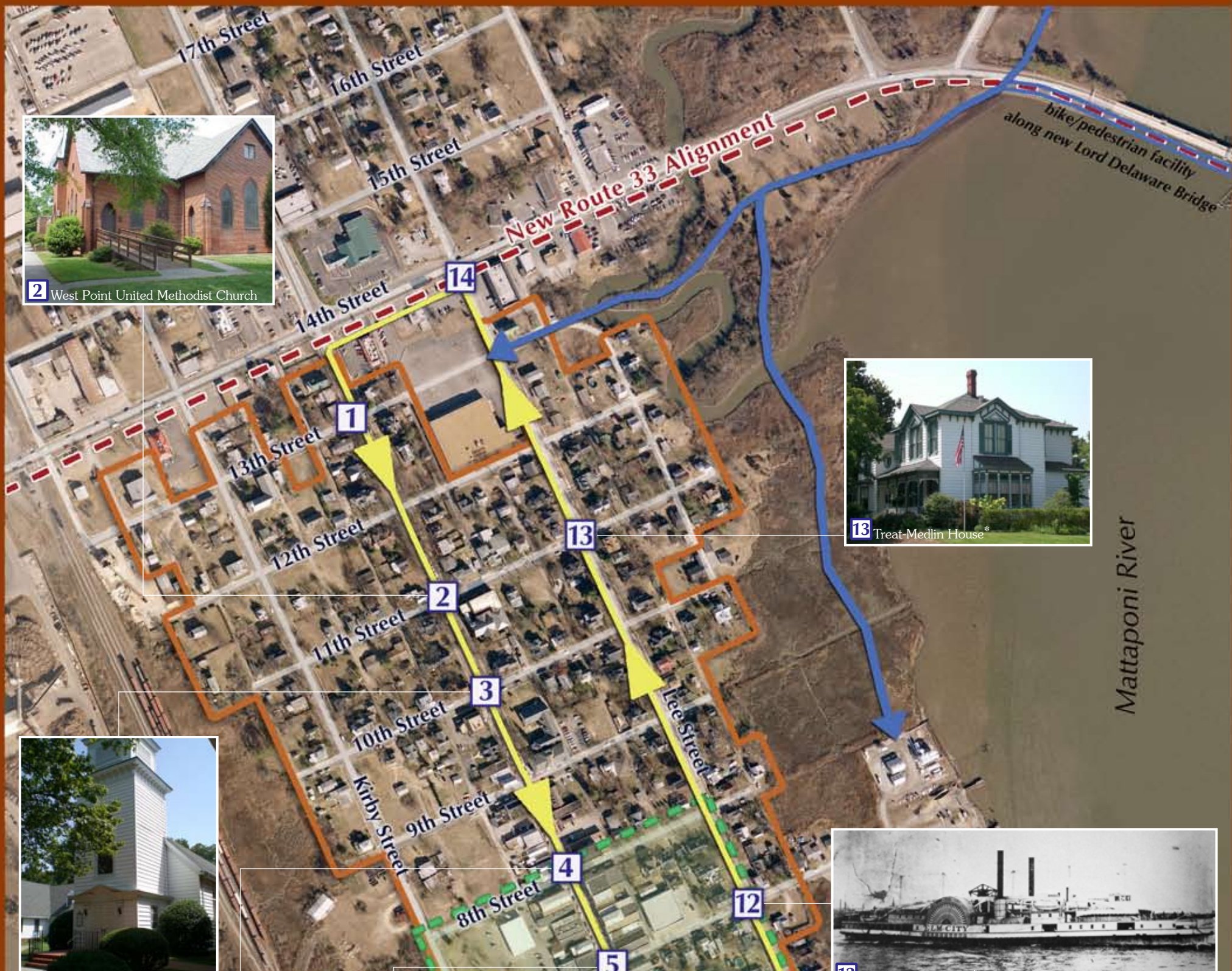
12 Around 1900 this site saw ice and oyster houses, a pickle factory, saw mill, and veneer plant. At the end of 8th Street, the steamships *Elm City* and *Louise* docked. *Elm City*, built in 1855, provided regular service between West Point and Walkerton until 1906 when she was replaced with the *Louise*, which sank near this location in 1926.

At 921 Lee Street stands a Sears, Roebuck & Co. mail order house built in 1913. Mr. Sutton bought the ready-built house when he moved to West Point to begin practice as an attorney.

13 Originally built as a four-room house by David Treat in 1861, the Treat-Medlin House stood at 1023 Lee Street. It is said to have served as the first post office in 1863 and as Morgan Treat's office about 1880. A Victorian addition was completed in 1898. The house was one of five residences left in the town at the close of the Civil War.

14 North towards Broadus Hill lay the Indian village Cinquotek, home of Opechancanough, brother of Chief Powhatan. Captain John Smith was brought here as a captive in December of 1607. Two years later he returned to trade for corn to feed his starving colony. Unwilling to trade, Opechancanough was forced at gunpoint to concede to Smith's demands.

Glass Island operated as a shipyard until occupied by Union forces in the Civil War. The Denmead brothers began operating a marine railway on the island around 1887.



2 West Point United Methodist Church



13 Treat-Medlin House*



3

3 St. John's Episcopal Church*

12 Elm City steamship



4 Citizens and Farmers Bank



5 Main Street Commercial District*



6 New Canaan Church of God



7 Mitchell House*



9 Beach Park*



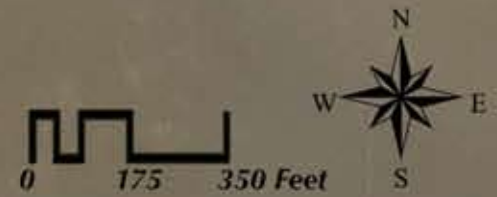
8 Richardson Packing House*



York River

Pamunkey River

- walking tour route
- historic district
- riverwalk
- marsh walk
- area of 1903 fire destruction



Civil War Era of West Point (1861-1863)

1861

In a journal from May 3 to October 11, 1861, Major Tomlin, who was assigned the command of the village of West Point, wrote of the muster and training of the garrison of 219 Virginia Volunteers. They kept watch over the York River down to Gloucester Point, using the hired assistance of the Pamunkey Indians, who were skilled riverboat pilots.

The Taylor's Grays, the Barhamsville Infantry, and the Pamunkey Artillery served under Major Tomlin.

William R. Aylett and 35 others from King William enlisted at West Point under Major Tomlin and formed the nucleus of Taylor's Grays. From May 11 - 21, 1861, Captain Aylett outfitted and equipped the Grays with blankets, canteens, haversacks, camp kettles, frying pans, axes and handles, hatchets, shoes, and socks. Minutes recorded from the Beulah Baptist Church show that female members were instrumental in outfitting Taylor's Grays. The men each signed for receipt of one stand of arms, one flintlock musket, one cartridge box, a bayonet and scabbard, and an accompanying belt with plates.

Company D of the 5th Battalion was formed on July 26, 1861 at West Point. Thirty-five men enlisted for 12 months as members of the Mattaponi Guard. Subsequently, these volunteers, along with Taylor's Grays, reorganized to regular infantry and formed the 53rd Virginia Regiment under then Colonel Tomlin in March 1862.

1862

In the spring of 1862, McClellan's Peninsula Campaign brought together assorted schooners, brigs, sloops, steamers, ferryboats, tugs, canal boats, and barges leased from watermen for the transportation of 100,000 men and their supplies to Fort Monroe. The Army of the Potomac's supply line stretched toward Richmond along many rivers of eastern Virginia including the York, which begins at the convergence of the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi.

The Confederate supply lines stretched under the shadow of the Blue Ridge Mountains and along the converging rail lines that ran from Richmond to Baltimore. Only one east-west railroad fed into Richmond above the James -- the Richmond and York River Railroad. The eastern terminus of this rail line, after crossing the Pamunkey on an iron bridge, was West Point. With its deep-water port, it was also the terminal for the steamer *West Point*.

Early in the conflict, this strategic position of West Point had been noted. A militia under Colonel Tomlin was on sentry duty there to guard the bridge and build gunboats. As the Union soldiers pushed up the York and Pamunkey Rivers, the Confederates destroyed the bridge up the river on the Pamunkey, rendering the railroad useless to General McClellan, who could have used it to move men and supplies from West Point toward Richmond.

McClellan sent several divisions, including General William B. Franklin's, to the right bank of the York near West Point. On May 6th, just 1.5 miles below West Point, the Union flotilla came upon Brick House Point. Their gunboats took position as the infantry and artillery began to disembark. A concealed Confederate battery opened fire on them. A Union man who was floating in a balloon overhead thought he saw a mass of Confederate troops to the south.

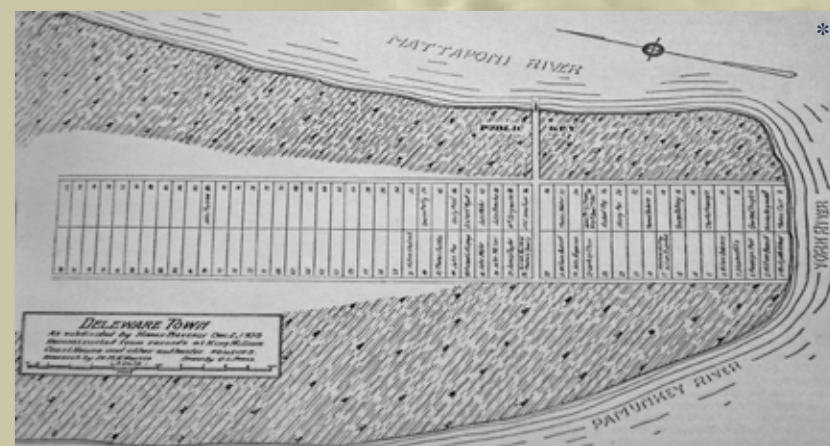
The Battle of West Point, often referred to as The Battle of Eltham's Landing, ensued the next morning in New Kent County. Two Confederate brigades under General W.H.C. Whiting pushed Franklin's men back to their gunboats. The Union lost 186 soldiers in the battle; the Confederates lost 48. George Townsend, a correspondent

1600

1607-1609 – Captain John Smith was taken by forced march and boat through Tidewater to the Indian tribal villages as a prize captive. Historians believe he was taken to Cinquotek, the Indian village where the Pamunkey and Mattaponi rivers meet. Cinquotek was the chief town of Opechancanough, brother of Chief Powhatan and an important town in the Powhatan confederacy. According to Smith's journals, after his release from captivity (through the legendary effort of Pocahontas), he returned to Cinquotek for corn to feed the hungry Jamestown settlers.



1646 – Governor John West was given 850 acres of land after the Indians vacated the area. In 1653 he patented an additional 3,000 acres of land including the old town of Cinquotek. His plantation home was sited two miles up King William County (then York County) on the Pamunkey River. John West, Sr., died and left the plantation, then called West Point, to John West, Jr., a loyalist to the Crown of England. He aided then-governor Berkeley in his fight with Nathaniel Bacon. John West III inherited the Plantation in 1689. Two years later he and his siblings conveyed 50 acres of land to King and Queen County to establish a town and port, Delaware Town. The county paid to establish the town with a special levy of tobacco.



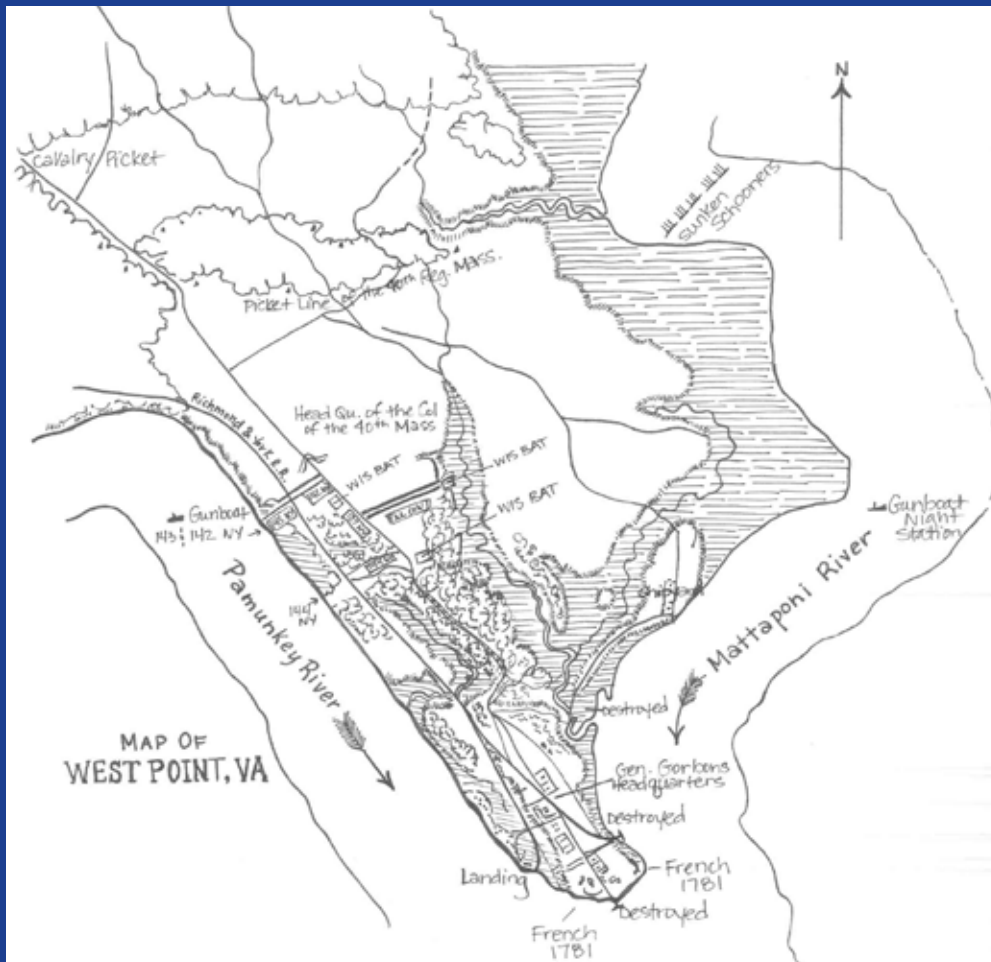
for a New York newspaper, traveled up the rivers a few days later on a mail steamer and reported that the York River was filled with Union merchant and naval craft. He reported passing two Confederate gunboats that had been burned while still standing half-completed in their stocks, stating their "charred ribs stuck out like the remains of some extinct monsters."

1863

A Federal brigade occupied West Point during a portion of May and early June of 1863.

Blacks from the farms surrounding West Point flocked to the Union lines. The men found employment under the quartermasters and the women washed and cooked for the troops.

General Gordon had his headquarters in West Point at the Grove House (hotel). Troops built earthworks and rifle pits from the high bluff above the Pumunkey River to high ground above West Point Creek. Cannon emplacements using or converting the Confederate works were put along the road to the Courthouse and at the "point." Soldiers proceeded to "liberate" the stock from nearby farms. Adamant in his role of liberator, however, General Gordon tried to discourage the taking of cows and pigs and sent some of the horses back. By the end of May, General O.C. Ord replaced Gordon and soon the men were shipped back to Fort Monroe and Yorktown. While pickets were posted and troops moved through West Point, the town played no additional prominent position in the Civil War.



Map of West Point produced during the Civil War by a Union Army cartographer

1700

1707 – The first deeds were recorded. It was set forth that each grantee shall pay the trustees the sum of four hundred eighty pounds of sweet-scented tobacco and pay an annual rent on October 10 of each year that consisted of one ounce of flax seed and two ounces of hemp seed. Grantees were also required to build one good house, 20-feet square, within one year of the date of deed; otherwise the right-of-sale would be forfeited without consent. The town failed and unsold lots reverted back to the plantation.



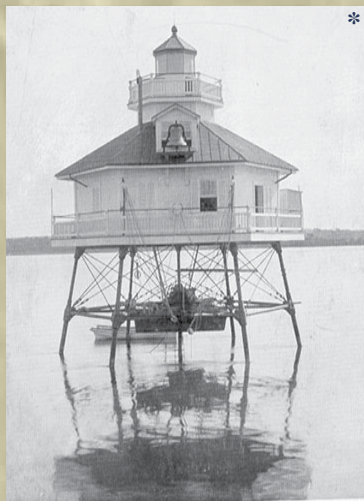
Carter Braxton (1736-1797), signer of the Declaration of Independence for Virginia, established residence at West Point in a home near what is now Seventh and Main streets in 1781. Braxton became a notable political figure, serving in Virginia's House of Burgesses, first general assembly, Patriots Committee of Safety, Continental Congress, and House of Delegates until his death in 1797.

Although initially opposed to the revolutionary movement, Braxton yielded to the majority, signing the Declaration of Independence in 1776. In fact, after he relocated to what was then the "West Plantation," the area now known as the West Point Plantation became known as "Brackson's Plantation," used by Louis XVI to quarter French troops in support of the Revolution in 1781. The former Braxton home, transformed by the 1860s into the Grove Hotel, housed several Union generals during the Federal occupations of West Point.



1800

1821 – The Bell Rock Lighthouse was built in the York River. It was removed in 1928, but the screw-pile base remains and supports navigational markers.



1839-1850 – The once-colonial town of Delaware was again absorbed by the West Point Plantation, which was now owned by William Penn Taylor, son of John Taylor.

The Richmond and York River Railway Company formed in 1850. In 1855, West Point was chosen as the eastern terminus for the railroad. Construction ended in 1861, but one year later, in 1862, the Confederates destroyed the line by tearing up the tracks so the advancing Union army could not use them. The railroad was rebuilt in 1869 and became the primary transportation for visitors to Beach Park through the 1880s as well as a major importing and exporting hub for the town. The railroad terminal moved to Portsmouth in 1895 with serious economic effects on West Point. The Virginia Corporation Commission gave Southern Railway permission to end the last two daily runs on the West Point-Richmond track, ending passenger rail transportation to West Point in 1941.

1856 – The West Point Land Company purchased 500 acres from William P. Taylor. James M. Daniel laid the present town plan in 1860.

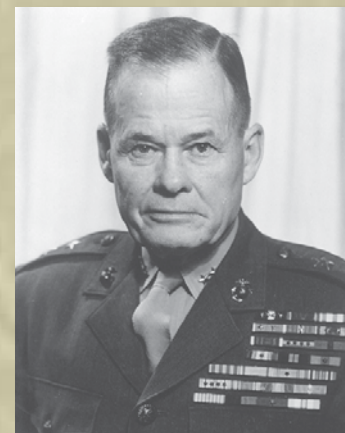
1861 – Treat's store and Post Office opened at 1023 Lee Street.

1867 – The York River Line of steamers began sailing between West Point and Baltimore.

1870 – The Town of West Point was incorporated.

1873 – Beverly Allen, Sr., “a free man of color,” purchased a lot in the town. He came to serve on the West Point Town Council. The council appropriated the sum of \$55.00 toward a free school for black children in the home of Beverly Allen, Jr. in 1873.

1898 – General Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller was born June 26, 1898, in West Point. He attended Virginia Military Institute until enlisting in the Marine Corps in August 1918 and was appointed a Marine Reserve second lieutenant in 1919. Due to force reductions after World War I, he was placed on inactive duty ten days later. He rejoined the Marines as an enlisted man, serving in Haiti before returning to the United States in 1924. Over the next three decades, he served or taught in Norfolk, VA, Quantico, VA, Pearl Harbor, HI, San Diego, CA, Nicaragua, China, Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, Camps LeJeune and Pendleton, and the US Asiatic Sea Fleet aboard the USS *Augusta*.



A Marine officer and enlisted man for 37 years, General Puller served at sea or overseas for all but ten of those years. Excluding medals from foreign governments, he won a total of 14 personal decorations in combat, plus a long list of campaign medals, unit citation ribbons, and other awards. He was the only man to be awarded five Navy crosses, the highest honor the Navy can bestow for heroism and gallantry in combat, and holds its Army equivalent, the Distinguished Service Cross. General Puller passed away in Hampton, Virginia, at the age of 73 after a long illness.

1900

1903 – In May of this year there was another disastrous fire, destroying most of the business section of the town.

Around 1913 a pulp mill owned by the Chesapeake Pulp and Paper Company was built at the location of the old cornstalk factory along the marshes of the Pamunkey River. The Old Dominion Industrial Corporation provided much timber to the new mill. The Chesapeake Pulp and Paper Company sold a majority of stock to Elis Olsson and a New York shipping financier in 1918.

1876 - The Baptist congregation completed a frame church at Main and Fourth Streets. It was replaced by the existing church in 1927.



1882 - St. John's Episcopal Church was constructed at Main and Tenth streets. Mt. Nebo Baptist Church was built at Kirby and Thirteenth streets by a congregation that would later be pastored by the Reverend Jesse Dungee.

1884 - The first brick building, the Masonic Hall, was built.

1885 - Electricity came to West Point.

1887 - James H. Dooley built the 200-room Terminal Hotel. Its complex included a Beach Park with a boardwalk, skating rink, dance pavillion, soda fountain, and amusement rides. Excursion trains brought hundreds of visitors daily to the park. Fire destroyed the hotel in 1926, thus ending West Point's time as a resort destination.

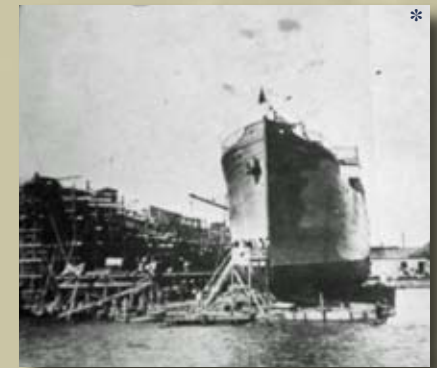
1888-1889 - Telephone lines were installed in the town. The Tidewater Commercial College for young men and boys was established.



1921 - After struggling with the postwar recession, Chesapeake Pulp and Paper Company became West Point's first successful permanent industry. The Company was sold in 1921 to the Chesapeake Corporation. In 1933 the Chesapeake Corporation hired the first professional forester, which began the present day program of forest management. Today the Smurfit-Stone Corporation owns the mill, where it manufactures various paperboard products.

1913-1914 - The Gresham Bridge (today called the Lord Delaware Bridge) was built across the Mattaponi. The bridge remained tolled until 1928.

1917 - The short-lived York River Shipbuilding Corporation was established on the Mattaponi River to build 1000 wooden cargo ships.



1925 - A toll bridge was constructed over the Pamunkey River, marking the end of the previous ferry system.

1942 - The War Shipping Administration began pressing the Bay boats into service. The *Yorktown* was sunk by a Nazi submarine during the Battle at Midway; while the *City of Richmond* made her last run to Baltimore on July 11, ending the era of the steamers into West Point.

