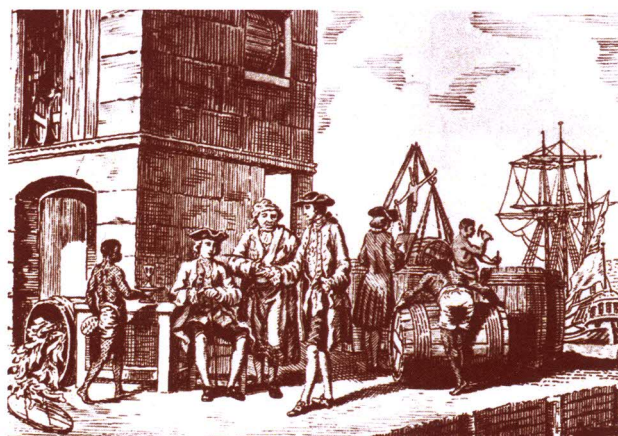


Warwick Town



The Warwick County Courthouse was shown prominently on this map at the mouth of Deep Creek. At some point in the 1680s, county trustees purchased 50 acres on the bluff to establish Warwick Town.

In an age when water travel prevailed, the site of Warwick's first urban center was the scene of considerable commercial activity. A wharf, shipbuilding facilities and a boat yard were located in the vicinity and a ferry plied the James River from Warwick Town. Primary property owners included Colonel William Digges, one of the county's wealthiest men, and members of the Young family, who operated a lucrative ordinary.



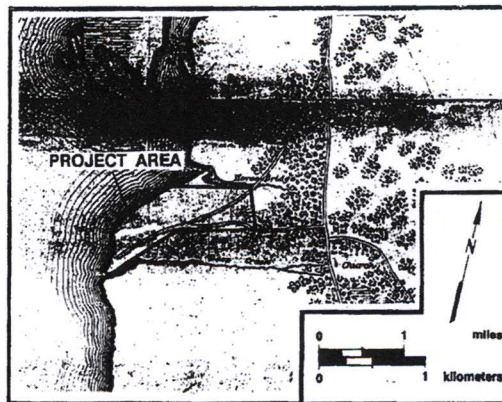
Colonial records reveal that by 1691, there were "several houses there built, together was a brick court house and prison" at Warwick Town. By the 1730s, a tobacco inspection warehouse formed part of the complex and was still in use in 1750, even though tobacco cultivation had all but ceased in Tidewater.



English wine bottle, c. 1740-1780, found during an archaeological dig at the Warwick Town site.

However, Town Point as it was also called, remained rural in character. By 1800, the improvement of inland roads made the isolated courthouse a remote place to travel for most county residents. In a petition dated December 23, 1807, the General Assembly was requested to permit the municipal complex to be relocated to a more convenient place on the main public highway running up the Virginia Peninsula between Hampton and Williamsburg. They indicated one individual, tavern-keeper Richard Young, owned nearly all the land at Warwick Town and thereby had a monopoly. An 1808 counter by Young alleged corruption, claiming names had been forged on the petition, including those of several dead people. Warwick citizens responded that the courthouse had "become so ruinous from the gradual decay of time that...it is necessary to build a new one." They offered acreage to construct another at Stony Run. In 1809, Young again attempted to convince the Assembly to not move the courthouse by pledging 100 pounds toward its reconstruction at Deep Creek. However, his petition was rejected. On December 28, 1809, an act was passed authorizing the construction of a new courthouse in Denbigh. Consequently, in 1810 Young requested that the 1680 town act be repealed, so the acreage would be taxed at the lesser agricultural rate. In 1813, Warwick Town was legislatively voted out of existence.

During the Civil War, the James-York Peninsula was fortified by Confederate forces with three lines of defense. As part of these fortifications, a small earthwork was erected on the Young property at the mouth of Deep Creek. In addition, 30 canal boats were sunk in the Warwick River there to obstruct Union ships. No engagements occurred here. After the war, harsh economic conditions led the Young heirs to sell the land to Hudson and Sallie Mench of Pennsylvania who operated a sawmill. The Menches lived at Deep Creek 50 years, lending the vicinity its present name of Menchville.



In this 1862 reconnaissance map, the canal boats and earthwork defending the Warwick River at Deep Creek are clearly marked. Today, remains of the latter are still visible in the yard south of the prison dormitory.



The Newport News City Farm. The prison barracks were completed in 1931 and expanded in the late 1970s to house approximately 150 nonviolent offenders. In 1937, inmates constructed the brick gambrel roofed barn; its original milking stalls, pens and an earthen ramp remain intact.

Two archaeological surveys conducted in the early 1990s have yielded artifacts indicating the site was a location of base camps for Archaic and Woodland Indians, probably those of the Kecoughtan tribe of the Powhatans. Furthermore, a variety of material ranging from the late 17th through the 20th centuries (pottery, glass, shell, bones, wood items, plaster, etc.) suggested near continuous domestic occupation of the area. An 18th century cellar and refuse midden were excavated on the northeast side of the correctional facility. However, the precise location of Warwick Town remains uncertain. Speculation is that the City Farm structures most likely were built over the foundations of the former town or that the land has been claimed by erosion.



Chinese porcelain saucer, 1785-1800.



Metal finds included coins, military buttons, belt tips and buckles, and minie balls.



Aerial view of the Warwick Town site which now encompasses the City Farm and Riverview Farm Park.

In the early 1990s, a portion of the prison farm acreage was set aside to create the first phase of the popular Riverview Farm Park. Future park plans include eventually relocating the City Farm operation, which will allow for full excavation, interpretation and preservation of the hidden Warwick Town foundations. At such time, the secrets of Warwick Town may be more fully revealed.