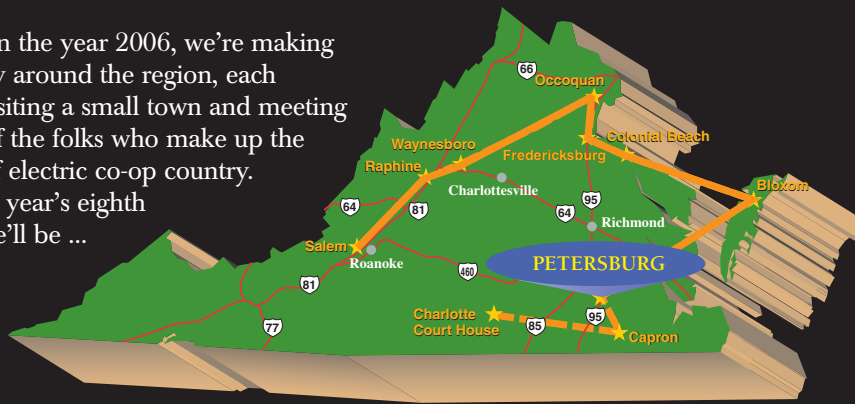


## DOWN HOME SERIES

Again in the year 2006, we're making our way around the region, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this year's eighth stop, we'll be ...



DOWN HOME IN

# PETERSBURG

by Sharon K. DiRienzo, Contributing Writer

Centre Hill Mansion, built in 1823, is open daily for tours and hosts an annual ghost watch in January.

### AT A GLANCE ...

**POPULATION:** 32,757 as of the 2004 Census

**LAND AREA:** 22.9 square miles

**INCORPORATED:** Dec. 17, 1748

**ELEVATION:** 134 feet

**FUN FACT:** The first Memorial Day celebration in the United States was held in Petersburg in June 1866 when a school teacher, Miss Nora Fontaine Davis, and her students placed flowers and small Confederate flags on soldier's graves. The wife of Union General John A. Logan witnessed the sight and as a consequence her husband issued a proclamation calling for the observance of Memorial Day.

With nearly three centuries of Americana and a now-burgeoning Old Towne commercial district, visitors have numerous choices to satisfy their historical curiosity and enhance their enjoyment of Petersburg, a Southside Virginia community

located about 25 miles south of Richmond on Interstate 95.

The Cockade City, named by President James Madison for the emblems worn by the Petersburg Volunteers on their hats in the War of 1812, is a destination for all who want to explore the rich

heritage of a community involved in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

What enabled this region to prosper in the past is still evident today among the diverse membership of the business community, which has contributed to the







revitalization of a city striving to attain its former status.

In the 19th century, Petersburg was the showcase of the South, replete with tobacco trade, iron works, cotton mills and flour mills — and a port second to none. It also contained the largest free black community, which made up one-third of the population.

The Siege of Petersburg, which lasted 10

long months, changed the social as well as the visual landscape forever. Union Forces relentlessly bombarded the city, resulting in the loss of lives, residences, businesses and the capacity to cultivate sustenance.

Finally, after the Battle of the Crater, where both sides experienced devastating losses when a failed Union plan to tunnel beneath and dynamite Confederate troops backfired, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee acquiesced the four-year struggle, and surrendered to Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at nearby Appomattox Court House.

Just as spirited citizens were roused to rebuild after the war and a devastating 1815

Pat Rowland, a docent at Old Blandford Church who relocated to Petersburg and is renovating a home on Jefferson Street, says, "There is nothing you can touch around here that doesn't have a story." The clock atop the old courts building (far left) was visible to Union and Confederate soldiers alike. It is still a working clock and chimes every half hour.

fire in the Old Towne section, Petersburg has again begun to experience resurgence in its growth through the renovation of historic buildings as residences and businesses.

One of the early pioneers in recent years is **James Hillier**, a Chesterfield County

The Brickhouse Run, an English pub, is located in the heart of Old Towne Petersburg. Many other restaurants are located within walking distance of Old Towne.





native, who related that as a child he and his father would come to Petersburg's High Street area. He was initially amazed that there were "so many different styles (of architecture) within a few feet."

Later he would visit as an adult with his childhood memories of the city intact. For 15 years he visited often, looking back in his rear-view mirror as he left to return to his Richmond residence, saying, "I'll never live in Petersburg."

He had restored some homes in Richmond, would still visit the Cockade

City, then closed his restaurant, and decided it was time to retract his reticence.

Hillier bought a house on Market Street, renovated it, sold it, then bought the High Street Inn, made renovations and re-opened it as a bed and breakfast. He sold that venture, leaving to buy other historic homes and then reselling them, too.

What made him a believer in the city has been the hospitality of its residents and business community. "When I got here, I was almost immediately welcomed. The

second time in the bank, they remembered my name," he recalls.

That warm welcome continued with an invitation to join the Architectural Review Board and the Historic Petersburg Foundation. "I was totally involved with community," he says, and compelled to continue efforts to restore and renovate old buildings.

Today, after 20 years in the renovation process, Hillier is again occupied with the restoration of a residence at 42 Perry Street in one of the city's historic districts.

If traveling to Petersburg north on I-85, take exit 69-Washington Street. For northbound travel on I-95, take the 301/460 East route, following parallel to I-95 take exit 50D-Washington Street. If traveling south on I-95, take exit 52-Washington Street.

To begin your tour of the Cockade City, acquire travel information at the **Visitors Center** by visiting their location at Cockade

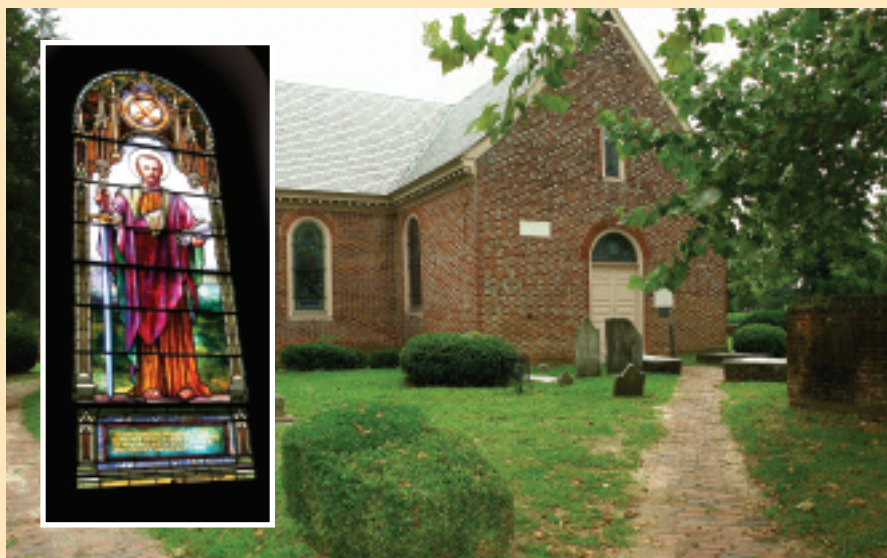
Alley and Old Street or by calling toll-free, 1-800-368-3595; in Virginia, (804) 733-2400; or go online to [www.petersburg-va.org](http://www.petersburg-va.org). The Visitors Center is the home of former Mayor George Jones, built in 1815. The entrance is at the rear of the building. Visitor Center guides can direct you to lodging at numerous bed-and-breakfast inns and hotels.

The Visitors Center is in the heart of Old

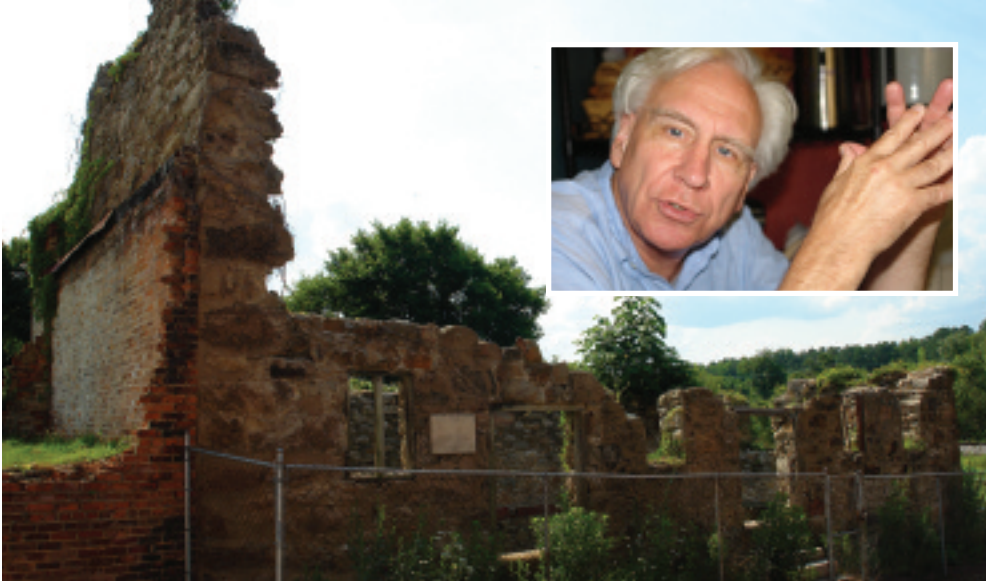
Towne and if a walking tour is your choice, the **Siege Museum, Trapezium House, Farmers Bank** and **Centre Hill Mansion** are just footsteps away.

A trip to **Blandford Church** and cemetery on South Crater Road will require a vehicle. The remains of 30,000 soldiers are buried there. The church's famed Tiffany stained-glass windows are striking, as is the haunting statuary. Movie star Joseph Cotton, a Petersburg native, is also buried in the cemetery.

Should you be inclined to thirst for historical knowledge, take a tour of the **Petersburg National Battlefield** on state Route 36. Call (804) 732-3531, ext. 200, or visit the Web site at <http://www.nps.gov/pete>. From I-95 and I-85, take the Wythe Street (state Route 36 East) exit. Turn onto this road of one-way traffic and follow it 2.5 miles to the park's entrance on the right. From I-295, take exit 9B onto state Route 36 West, just past Fort Lee. The battlefield is open from 9 a.m. to



Old Blandford Church of Bristol Parish, erected in 1735, is the burial ground for soldiers of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War. The church contains 15 memorial windows honoring soldiers from the Confederate states. Louis Comfort Tiffany designed the shrines.



From left: 1) Jim Hillier, who has restored a number of homes in Petersburg, appreciates the hospitality of its residents.

2) The High Street Inn, a B&B in the historic district, exudes Victorian charm and is a short walk from many of the city's attractions.

3) The remnants of the Peter Jones Trading Center, located on North Market Street and Grove Avenue, is slated for renovation for the 400th Anniversary celebration of Jamestown. Petersburg is named for the fur trader, who operated this post in the 1600s. Local historian Delaney Ward (inset) is always willing to explain the many facets of the city's rich history.

Before Jamestown colonists settled here, the Appamattuck Indian tribe, part of the Powhatan federation, inhabited the area, which was named for fur trader Peter Jones, a friend of William Byrd II.

In 1645, Jamestown colonists, led by Capt. Abraham Wood, built a garrison, Fort Henry, and began trade with the Indians while exploring other regions for settlement.

In 1646, Fort Henry became free from taxation by the British-occupied Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in North America, and flourished.

Early settlers located in the area because of its proximity to a fall line, which provided access to fertile hunting and fishing grounds and the then-named Appamattuck River for trade and exploration.

"There are very few places on either coast that have such a location. Petersburg is important because it is located between two watersheds," says local historian **Delaney Ward**, a consultant for the city of Petersburg.

With the close proximity of the river, trade and exploration became pivotal in

sustaining a community and ensuring its longevity. "Petersburg became a major port," adds Ward. "Important exporters in Petersburg were known in Europe and Liverpool, England," he notes.

As technology developed, so did Petersburg's port and railroad system. Dredging of the Appomattox River allowed large ships to export the bounties of tobacco, cotton, peanuts and iron to ports around the world. And with access to five rail paths, the city was a major player in expediting goods and services.

**The MacIlwaine House, built in 1825 by Petersburg Mayor George Jones, serves as the Visitors Center. The center is a good jump-off point for a walking tour of the city.**

5 p.m. every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. The Petersburg National Battlefield tour is a 15-stop, 26-mile driving tour, which includes a visit to City Point in Hopewell, scene of Grant's headquarters. For a full appreciation of the famous Battle of the Crater, take two days to soak up all the history. It was at the Battle of the Crater that Union Forces tried unsuccessfully to tunnel beneath and dynamite Confederate forces, capture Petersburg, and cut off Lee's food supply and ammunition sources. The bloody battle ended the Siege of Petersburg, a 10-month-long struggle to capture the city and its railroads.

Another not-to-miss battleground is nearby **Pamplin Historical Park & The National Museum of the Civil War Soldier**. The park is situated on 422 acres with historic homes, museums, living-history presentations and guided tours. A gift store is on site and the Hardtack & Coffee Café provides hot or cold meals. Call 1-877-Pamplin or (804) 861-2408. Pamplin Park's online address is [www.pamplinpark.org](http://www.pamplinpark.org).



Every second Friday of the month about 20 venues, including museums, restaurants and businesses, showcase the work of up-and-coming artists with a program, **Friday at The Arts**. At the **Petersburg Regional Art Center** on Sycamore Street, juried multi-media artworks are showcased from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. An arts bus is available to visit the sites throughout the historic district.

A favorite spring/summer activity is the popular music series, **Thursdays in Old Towne**. Carolina Beach Music, rock and roll and contemporary music can be heard outdoors and indoors at the Old Towne Civic Center. Admission is \$7 with cold beverages and food available. The series usually runs from mid-April to the end of August. ■





The city and its residents prospered and Petersburg became known for its wealth of opportunity. Blacks came from Liberia and created a free black population.

A wealth of potential still sustains those seeking business opportunities in Petersburg. **Kim Calos** is one of those business owners who appreciates the business climate. "It's one of the first places that I've lived in where people are so supportive," she explains.

Why? "It's because they (business owners) all have something at stake. Everybody



Joyce and Bill Heath (above, left) sell produce at the Farmer's Market on High Street, where the Blue Grass Boys of Dinwiddie (above) perform country music standards for patrons.



(Above, left) Caroline Price (l) shops for a rhinestone bracelet with the assistance of Wendy Livingston at the Oak Antique Mall. (Above) Bill Wallace, marketing manager for Petersburg's Dept. of Economic Development, is excited about the city's future.



is a stakeholder. If your neighbor fails, you fail. If they succeed, you do, too," says Calos, owner of Kimberly Ann's, an eclectic antique store on Sycamore Street in the city's historic Old Towne district.

The plucky antiques dealer further explains the good nature of the business community as, "Everybody is just so nice. It's unbelievable. If there's a need, they just jump in and help. And if you do a favor, it's returned tenfold."

**Steve and Ella Dickinson**, owners of a British pub, The Brickhouse Run, provide an explanation for the recent success of business owners in Petersburg. "They (newcomers) are restoring old buildings as single projects, where a building is restored as a residence or business: a specific building for a specific purpose. New owners are concentrating on doing one project and doing it well," Ella Dickinson offers.

Kim Calos represents one of Petersburg's "new blood" shop owners. She has delighted in the communal spirit of her fellow business owners since establishing Kimberly Ann's, an eclectic antique boutique.

Such single-mindedness has produced an array of new art centers and eateries: The Petersburg Regional Art Center, expansion of the existing Petersburg Area Art League, the creation of The Friend House Art Gallery, Wabi-Sabi, Andrade's International Restaurant, M&M Ice Cream Parlor and The Bistro at Market & Grove.

Having a palette of various offerings is important to Petersburg being viewed as an attraction for locals and travelers, Ella Dickinson concludes. "Old Towne is now a destination. People now say, 'Hey let's just go to Old Towne and hang out.' Now, there are alternatives."

There are, indeed, many alternatives for those seeking to discover this lovely city, graced by tree-lined streets, new signs designating the historic district and the increased verve of its residents and successful business owners.

An enthusiastic city resident is also its mayor, **Annie Mickens**. "It appears that we have now reached a time when many things are coming together. It's the right time in Petersburg," she says.

Her optimism stems from the inroads made by the Petersburg Housing and Economic Development Department in designating mixed-use housing, the upcoming increase of Fort Lee personnel, the rebuilding of Southside Regional Medical Center, interest in adding a link to John Tyler Community College in the inner city, the designation of Petersburg as a link in the Intermodal Center, which will permit high-speed transit from New York to Atlanta and federal funding and resources for the Appomattox River dredging project.

The city of Petersburg holds a fascination for some because of its illustrious past, for others because of what it can become, and for others still who view it as a renewable resource to be preserved, protected and loved. ■