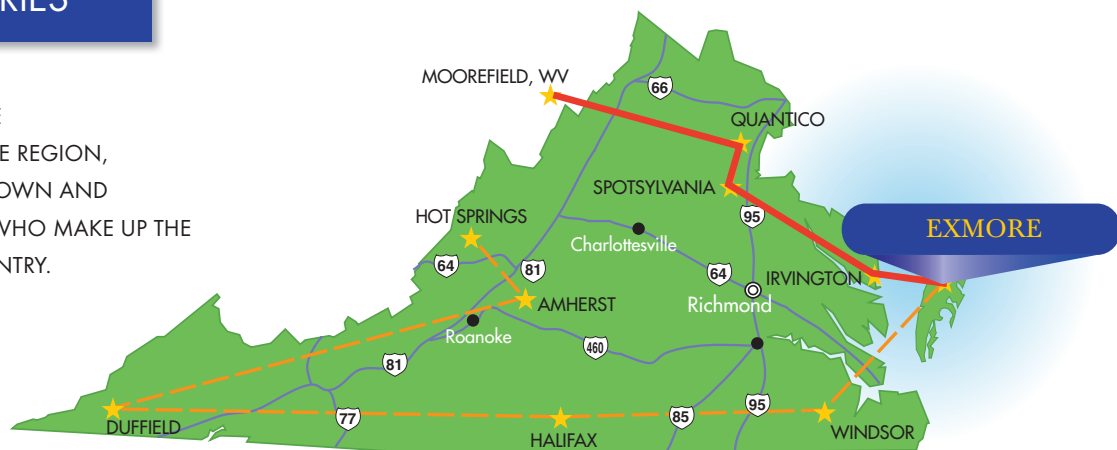


DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2007, 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 FIFTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

EXMORE

BY CANDY FARLOW, CONTRIBUTING WRITER • PHOTOS COURTESY OF CANDY FARLOW

THE TRAIN
NO LONGER STOPS HERE,
BUT YOU SHOULD.

Modern-day Exmore is a town that has reinvented itself, for little remains to indicate the impetus behind its beginnings.

The original Exmore sprung forth in 1884 with the coming of the railroad.

Prior to the opening of the New York, Pennsylvania and Norfolk Railroad (known as the “Nip ‘n N”), most of the villages on the Eastern Shore were located along the water’s edge. There, steamships made regular runs, loading up with fresh produce and seafood bound for the northern markets.

However, as the plan to connect Norfolk with the northern cities took shape, it was decided the rails would be laid parallel to the Shore’s main highway, today known as U.S. Route 13, or Lankford Highway.

Naturally, stations had to be located along the rail line and, before long, towns began to develop around many of those.

One of those was Exmore Station.

Just how the town got its name remains a mystery, although two theories remain popular today.

One is that Exmore was the tenth stop for the trains headed south from the Virginia state line, thus there were “X more” stations to go.

The lesser-held theory, at least locally, is that the town got its name from a village near Devon, England.

Whatever the truth, the name stuck, and by 1948 when the town was officially formed, Exmore was well ingrained as the name of the village.

Back in 1889, however, the area was still mostly undeveloped. That’s when a young man by the name of John W. Chandler, a produce broker from nearby Willis Wharf, saw the opportunity to expand his business and his holdings, and began purchasing land around Exmore Station.



The Exmore Downtown Revitalization Project has breathed new life into the heart of Exmore. Just about everyone in town has expressed an opinion on new facades for downtown stores, according to Charles Antrim of Prestige Painting. Irene Boyd lets him know she approves of his latest job.



AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: Approximately 1,300

SETTLED: 1661, through a land patent to John and Mary Cobb

ESTABLISHED: 1948

AVERAGE ANNUAL TEMPERATURE: 58°F

ELEVATION: 41 feet

FUN FACT: Legend has it that Exmore got its name because it was the tenth stop for the trains headed south from the Virginia state line, thus there were "X more" stations to go to get there.



FROM TOP: The John W. Chandler House on Main Street, currently undergoing renovation, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. • Old rail cars and an abandoned station house stand at the site of what was once a bustling train station. • Exmore is home to a dozen churches including Exmore Baptist, celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Recently the congregation welcomed back hometown boy Jonathan Carpenter as its pastor.

Chandler also purchased a tract of land for a homeplace, having constructed on the site what is reputedly the first house in the town, a stately Queen Anne-style located on what is now Main Street.

Now owned by **Joe and Dot Ortelli**, the Chandler House is presently undergoing a

loving restoration. It is one of only two structures in the town listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Gazing at the home through the branches of the equally old magnolia trees, one can imagine the original owners standing on the porch of the stately home, watching wagon-

load after wagonload of fresh produce make its way through town to the waiting railcars.

Today, while still situated amid some of the most fertile land the Commonwealth has to offer, Exmore is no longer an agricultural center, with modern-day marketing having replaced the strawberry auctions of old and

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Moggie Marsh, proprietor of Exmore's Antique & Craft Emporium, is always ready to share her expertise as well as a laugh. • Eight-year-old Micah Ivey provides the tempo for revival services at Victory Pentecostal Church of Deliverance while Evangelist Myrtle Ayers-Jenkins and Pastor Henry J. Weathers converse. • Captain Rick Kellam operates Broadwater Bay Ecotours from the docks of nearby Willis Wharf. • Brianna, 11, and Hope, 7, daughters of storekeeper Bonnie Knight, wait for their mom in Exmore's town square across from her children's clothing store, "The Secret Garden."



trucking having long ago replaced rail as the means of shipment.

However, while the train no longer stops here, reminders of that era remain, from the abandoned station and railcars along the tracks to the restored buildings from the town's earliest days.



For a while, it seemed Exmore's fate was to be just a faded reminder of the past; however, the hard work and dedication of recent town leaders have led to a resurgence of business and residential interest in the town.

Utilizing a Department of Housing and Community Development block grant, as well as Virginia Department of Transportation Enhancement and Rural Development Community funds, downtown Exmore has been transformed from a timeworn remnant of its heyday to a sparkling example of the value of preservation.

New street lighting, walkways, parking facilities and landscaping make Exmore a most pleasant place to stroll and shop.

Many stores now feature new facades, fresh and bright, yet reminiscent of the era that gave birth to the town.

History abounds in the shops along Main Street, which has evolved into a virtual paradise for antique collectors from all over.

A visit to the County Way Mercantile is a step back in time to the general stores of old. Next door,

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IF YOU GO...

A visit to Exmore gives travelers a wonderful opportunity to visit other areas of interest on Virginia's Eastern Shore.

If traveling to Exmore from the south, just getting there is a wonderful experience as one must traverse the **Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel**, one of the engineering wonders of the modern world. The northern terminus of the 17-mile-long span puts you near the front door of the **Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge**, a world-renowned migratory bird stopover. The visitor's center there should not be missed.

Heading farther north up the 70-mile-long Virginia portion of the peninsula, be sure to take a short side trip into historic **Eastville**, the Northampton County seat and the home of the oldest continuous court records in the nation, dating back to 1632.

Also not to be missed is the **Eastern Shore of Virginia Barrier Islands Center** in Machipongo. There, visitors can learn about the history and culture that once were part of daily life on the now-deserted islands just offshore.

Those heading for Exmore from the north also have excellent opportunities for side trips, ranging from **Assateague National Seashore**, home of the famous Chincoteague ponies, to the Accomack County seat, the **Town of Accomac**, where historic structures abound.

After reaching Exmore, give Capt. Rick Kellam of **Broadwater Bay Eco-Tours** a call at 442-4363. A direct descendent of a Hog Island family, Kellam is a local authority on the seaside way of life. Outings ranging from clamming in the mudflats to sunset wine-and-cheese cruises are available. There's even the captain's own Eastern Shore version of "Survivor."

For lodging, check out one of the area's B&Bs. You might consider **Martha's Inn** on Lincoln Ave. in Exmore. A nationally acclaimed inn, the 1933 structure offers its own highlights, including some unusual architecture, antique furnishings and Martha's full country breakfast. You can find out more at 1-800-99-MARTHA.

But don't eat too much! Save room for a meal at the **Exmore Diner**, an authentic structure that originated in New Jersey in the 1940s and found its way to Exmore via rail more than 50 years ago. Today the spot popular with both locals and tourists still boasts of "old-fashioned food at old-fashioned prices." ■



FROM TOP: Southern charm awaits visitors to Martha's Inn B&B • The Yellow Duck Café is Exmore's premier bakery and coffee shop. • A visit to Country Way Mercantile is a journey into history.





Like many small towns, Exmore still relies on its volunteer firefighters for protection.

These days, there is also little human life to be found east of the shoreline; however, that was not always the case.

In years gone by, the barrier islands that protect the main Eastern Shore peninsula from the ravages of the sea were once home to a hale-and-hardy stock of Shore folk. One of the descendants of those folks, **Capt. Rick Kellam** of Exmore, has made it his mission and vocation to ensure the history of those island settlements is preserved.

A founder of the Eastern Shore Barrier Island Center located a few miles south of Exmore, Kellam loves to share his knowledge of area history with all who will listen. Also an expert on local flora and fauna, a visit with Capt. Kellam can be an education in itself.

Ships no longer ply their trade at the wharves along the Shore. And the trains that run through the area are too busy hauling their freight to stop at places like Exmore. Undaunted, however, Exmore's leaders have refused to let the town go the way of the island settlements, and the future looks bright for the hamlet.

In fact, there are even plans for the Nip 'n N's descendant, the Bay Coast Railroad, to establish an excursion service among some of the Shore's old railroad towns.

No one's saying just how many station stops there'll be, but you can bet one group of folks is in there lobbying for at least "X More." ■

Exmore's Antique & Craft Emporium offers antiques, collectibles, and works by local artists and craftsmen.

Toward the southern end of Main Street, collectors will delight in the finds at Antique Addicts and, in season, connoisseurs in the fresh offerings at the Exmore Farm Market.

Just a tad farther south is the famous Exmore Diner, a 1940s facility that found its way from New Jersey to Exmore – by rail, of course. There, down-home cooking and Eastern Shore hospitality are always the specials of the day.

While Starbucks hasn't found its way to the Shore yet, there's really no need, for the aromas that waft down Main Street from the Yellow Duck Café and Bakery are incomparable.

One block over, a private revitalization project not only saved one of the town's largest structures, it also became its largest employer.

New Ravenna got its start as a cottage industry creating custom mosaics. The company now enjoys international fame while providing employment for scores of area residents in a converted clothing factory.

Other artisans also make their living in the area. The folks at Glass Expressions offer not only retail sales and custom work, but also classes in the art of stained-glass creation.

Across the way, in the area's largest shopping center, visitors can find even more original creations at the Smile Gallery & Gift Shop, where a half-dozen local artists display their unique works.

And, like most Eastern Shore communities, the folks of Exmore depend heavily on

their churches as not merely centers of worship, but also of community.

Despite its size, the Exmore area boasts a full dozen churches, ranging from Exmore Baptist Church, now celebrating its 100th year, to the relatively new Victory Pentecostal Church of Deliverance. Epworth United Methodist Church has one of the largest congregations in the area. It's located in the eastern section of the community, next door to Occohannock Elementary School, one of Northampton County's award-winning educational facilities. Also located in Exmore are Broadwater Academy and Shore Christian Academy, providing a choice in educational opportunities.

Almost a religion in itself is the pride many locals take in being "Eastern Shoremen," evidenced by a local saying that proclaims "There's no life west of the Chesapeake Bay."



The Exmore Diner is the real deal, and a popular spot for locals and visitors alike.