

DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2009, 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 FIFTH STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

EASTVILLE

Story and photos by Candy Farlow, Contributing Writer

In 1608, Captain John Smith struck out from Jamestown, accompanied by 32 fellow explorers. Their destination was the unmapped area now known as the Eastern Shore of Virginia. During their visit the Englishmen made contact with King Debedeavon, the “Laughing King” of the Indians, and a genial relationship was established.

Indeed, Debedeavon became a true friend to the colonists.

During the winter of 1613-1614, as starvation threatened the Jamestown settlers, the good-humored king sent canoes laden with food across the Chesapeake. It was about this same time that Debedeavon granted a tract of land to Thomas Savage, who then established himself as the first permanent English settler on the Eastern Shore. The land given to him is today known as Savage's Neck and many descendants of Savage still reside in the area.

A historic marker in the colonial-era town of Eastville memorializes the historic land transfer from Debedeavon to Savage. But when it comes to history in Eastville, that marker is but the tip of the iceberg, for this rural hamlet offers a much broader view of colonial life in America.

Here, in the Circuit Court clerk's office, visitors can view court records dating back to 1628. The office also houses the oldest continuous court records in America that begin with an entry in 1632. Among those treasures are a deed marked by the sign of Indian Chief Ochiwamp, another signed by Daniel Boone, Debedeavon's will designating his daughter as his successor, and the records of court actions dealing with debts, marriages, indenturement and other aspects of life.

As the community grew, so too did the need for a local government and, by 1680, Eastville had been established as the county seat for Northampton — and has remained so ever since.

A Confederate monument is centered on the town's historic Courthouse Green. The Eastville Courthouse Green is one of the earliest and most complete in Virginia. INSET: Albert Christian pauses to learn more about the town's history.



AT A GLANCE...

POPULATION: 203

LAND AREA: 0.22 square miles

ESTABLISHED AS COUNTY SEAT: 1680

FACTOID: Home of the oldest continuous court records in America. Declaration of Independence read from courthouse steps in 1776.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Eastville Inn has been welcoming travelers since the early 1700s.

- The old courthouse and clerk's office are now national treasures.
- Homes in Eastville are of both the Victorian and
- Colonial style.
- Traci Johnson is the clerk of the Circuit Court and the keeper of the nation's oldest continuous court records.



As such, the town has been the site of many historic events, including the passage of a court order declaring the Stamp Act of 1766 unconstitutional and the reading of the Declaration of Independence from the courthouse steps on Aug. 13, 1776.

That courthouse, built in 1731, stands today on Eastville's Courthouse Green. Also on the Green is the old clerk's office, circa

1750, as well as the debtor's prison and later court buildings.

In fact, the Eastville Courthouse Green is one of the earliest and most complete in Virginia and is listed as a historic district on both state and federal registers. Today, the Northampton County government, in conjunction with APVA Preservation Virginia, maintains the area.

Just south of the Courthouse Green is the historic Eastville Inn. A colonial coach house, circa 1724, the Inn has been carefully restored and now offers regional cuisine. A colonial-style court garden behind the Inn is perfect for an after-dinner stroll.

In addition to fresh local seafood and produce, the inn features award-winning Chatham Vineyards Wines.

IF YOU GO...

Northampton County Circuit Court Clerk's Office

Traci L. Johnson, Clerk
5229 The Hornes,
Eastville, VA. 23347-0036
757-678-0465
Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Eastville Inn

16422 Courthouse Road
Eastville, VA 23347
757-678-5745
Open Thursday through Sunday
11 a.m. to 9 p.m.
www.eastvilleinn.com

The Gallery At Eastville

16319 Courthouse Road
Eastville, VA 23347
757-678-7532
Open Friday through Monday
11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Other times by appointment
www.TheGalleryAtEastville.com

Windrush Farm

5350 Willow Oak Road
Eastville, VA 23347
757-678-7725
www.windrushholidays.com

The Barrier Islands Center

7295 Young Street
Machipongo, VA 23405
757-678-5550
Open all year, Tuesday through
Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sundays June 1 through Labor Day
1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
www.barrierislandscenter.com

Chatham Vineyards and Winery

9232 Chatham Road
Machipongo, VA 23405
Open Thursday through Monday
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Except Sunday 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.
www.chathamvineyards.net

Indiantown Park

7399 Indiantown Road?
Eastville, VA 23347
757-678-0468
Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Those wines are produced at the Eastville area winery located on historic Chatham Farm. The farm, patented in 1640, was named after William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham.

A Federal-period house is the backdrop for the European-style vineyard of Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot vines. The winery utilizes both French and American oak cooperage. Best of all, complimentary tours and tastings are offered by the Wehner family, owners of the operation.

Visitors to Eastville will also want to stop by the old county almshouse. Built in 1880, the almshouse has now been restored and is utilized as the Barrier Islands Center Museum and Gift Shop.

The center uses the historic 17-acre setting to house priceless artifacts from the Virginia barrier islands. Once, those islands were home to Native Americans, watermen, farmers, outdoorsmen and the Lifesaving Service. While those island communities are now gone, the museum preserves their stories.

Books on local history are available at the center's gift shop, as is local art.

More local art can be enjoyed at The Gallery At Eastville. A design studio located in an original 1908 Sears house, The Gallery houses the award-winning design team of Mary Miller and David Bruce Handschur. Here, visitors can marvel at their designs in glass, wood, fiber, paintings and jewelry.

Just down the street from The Gallery is Christ Episcopal Church. This church, built in 1828, is part of Hungars Parish that has provided services on the Eastern Shore since 1623. The communion service in Christ Church was given in 1741 by John Custis of nearby Arlington Plantation. Custis was the father-in-law of Martha Custis, whose second husband was George Washington.

Lt. Gov. Francis Nicholson, one of the founders of the College of William & Mary, presented the silver alms basin that can be found at the church.

Another of Eastville's churches, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal, also has a rich history. After the white Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia segregated blacks in

1787, Richard Allen established the African Methodist Episcopal denomination. It wasn't until 1865, however, that the Eastville church was founded. Today, the 300 members of the church gather in the third building to house the congregation, a Gothic-Revival structure erected in 1903.

Visitors wishing to extend their stay in Eastville have an opportunity to enjoy lodging at the pet- and horse-friendly Windrush Farm B&B. A circa-1850s country manor, Windrush is also a horse farm complete with stables and pasture, as well as lovely English gardens. Boarding facilities are provided for guests who trailer their own horses, and guided horseback tours along the Chesapeake Bay shoreline are available for those who do so. Guests also have access to nearby Smith Beach on the Chesapeake Bay.

PRIME LOCATION FOR OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS

Being located between the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean offers Eastville's residents and visitors numerous opportunities for outdoor adventure. The area is a mecca for anglers, both onshore and offshore, as well as for those who enjoy boating, canoeing or kayaking.

The pristine marshlands on both the bay and seashores of the Eastern Shore peninsula are home to numerous species of wildlife, drawing nature lovers and photographers from around the world. This is particularly true each autumn when birding enthusiasts flock to the area for the fall migration along the Atlantic Flyway.

For those who prefer to travel on two wheels, the area's bucolic back roads are a cyclist's dream.

The growing sport of disc golf is also popular in the Eastville area, with a course being located at Indiantown Park. The 55-acre park is now owned by Northampton County. However, from the late 1600s until around 1835, Indiantown Park was a reservation for the Native Americans being driven from their land by the settlers.

Through the centuries, much of the area has remained largely undisturbed, although some very limited archeological digs have occurred. What is believed to be a burial mound is considered a sacred site by the Assateague

Indian tribe that occasionally still holds pow-wows at the park. Here, in November of 1998, the remains of 10 Native Americans unearthed during a dig from another area on the Eastern Shore were laid to rest.

The decline of the Eastern Shore natives was a relatively quick one. In 1622, the natives from mainland Virginia planned a massacre. Debedeavon refused to take part and even warned the settlers of the Shore. Instead of offering gratitude for his loyalty, Shore settlers used Debedeavon's warning as an impetus for turning on his people. Some were enslaved, some were killed outright and some were bred out by miscegenation. Sadly, some died due to epidemics, such as the smallpox epidemic of 1677 that ravaged the area.

By the time of the Civil War in 1861, the natives were a memory. Whites had forced them to sell their land in Indian-town Park and most of the natives moved north to Maryland.

Today, children play baseball and soccer on what would have been the oldest Indian reservation in America, had the natives not been driven away.

No one is driven away from the area these days; rather, visitors are greeted with open arms, including those extended by Linda Baylis, executive director of the Northampton County Chamber of Commerce. The chamber office is located just across the street from the Eastville Inn. It's a good place to begin a tour of the area since Baylis and her team of volunteers, known as "The Chambermaids," stand ready to ensure you're on the right path as you take a walk through Eastville — and through history. ■

TOP TO BOTTOM, L-R: David Bruce Handschur and Mary Miller are award-winning designers of works in many media that can be seen at The Gallery. • Linda Baylis is the executive director of the Northampton County Chamber of Commerce and can point visitors in the right direction. • Ellen Gordon and her brood are ready to welcome guests to Windrush B&B. • Christ Church is part of Hungars Parish, which has conducted services on the Eastern Shore since 1623. • Chelsea Mapp strolls down Eastville's Courthouse Road, the main street running through town.

