

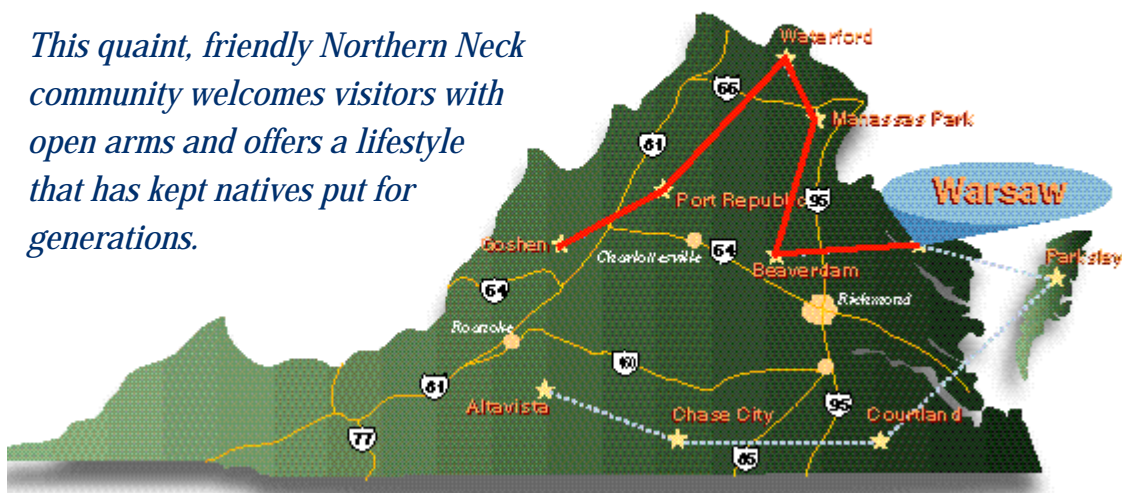
DOWN HOME SERIES

by Diane Franklin,
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During 1999, we're making our way around Virginia, 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 sixth stop, we'll be...

Down Home in Warsaw

This quaint, friendly Northern Neck community welcomes visitors with open arms and offers a lifestyle that has kept natives put for generations.



DIANE FRANKLIN PHOTOS



Thousands of people flock to the town each year in October for the "Warsaw Octoberfest."

Underneath blue skies, situated east of the Rappahannock River, sits the gateway to Virginia's Northern Neck, the town of Warsaw. Surrounded by Richmond County, this tidy, friendly community gives open arms to thousands of visitors every year.

What makes this small town special? What keeps natives here for generations? And just what is it that draws thousands of visitors every year?

Well, it's not just the "ruralness" of the town — as quaint and appealing as that is — or the beautiful historical buildings. And it's not simply the scenic landscapes or landmark mansions. Nor is it just the town's easy access to the Chesapeake Bay, Rappahannock River, and the abundance of seafood that they produce. And nope, it's not just the charming array of country stores and old farmhouses, nor is it just the area's quality educational institutions.

According to Richmond County Museum Curator **Francene Barber** and Warsaw Town Manager **Matt Walker**, the town's charm and character are centered around something pretty simple: "It's the people."

Barber and her husband John moved here 12 years ago and have no plans of leaving.

The town's name was changed to Warsaw in 1830, in sympathy with the Polish struggle for independence.



Warsaw has plenty to offer the avid angler, like this sunny spot on nearby Cat Point Creek.



Warsaw Town Manager Matt Walker (left) and Richmond County Museum Curator Francene Barber (above) agree on what defines Warsaw's character: "It's the people."

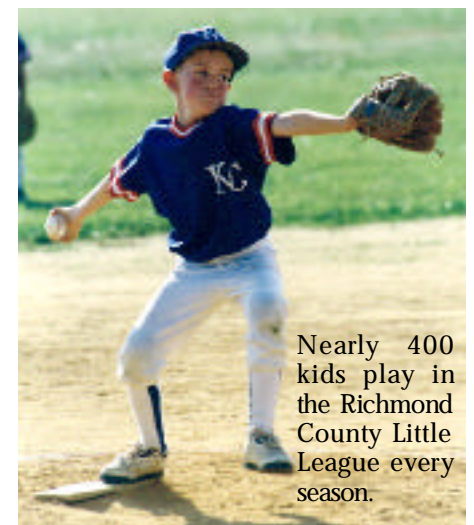
Both plantations are still owned today by family members of the original builder-owners.

Warsaw was also the town of Francis Lightfoot Lee, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the husband of Tayloe's daughter Rebecca. Their vast plantation, Menokin, was built nearly five miles outside town.

Walnut Lawn, another beautiful and substantial house, was built in 1853. Some of the estate's lovely English boxwoods were sent to Washington, D.C., during the Great Depression, to be planted at such places as the Lincoln Memorial, and the Bishop's Garden at the National Cathedral.

Within the Town of Warsaw stands Belleville, built in 1826-1830 by Major Moore Fauntleroy Brockenbrough.

In the heart of Warsaw also stands the beautiful 1889 home of Congressman William Akinerson Jones, who is best remembered for his advocacy of independence for the Philippines. His support resulted in the passage of legislation bearing his name under which the Philippine people obtained their national independence. At his death in 1918, the Philippine Republic erected an attractive, imposing memorial over his grave.



Nearly 400 kids play in the Richmond County Little League every season.

"It's the people, the friendly welcome, their heritage, their environment and their involvement in the community. I think that you are attracted to places (where) you feel at home," she says.

Prior to moving from their Northern Virginia home, the Barbers would often come to the area to visit John's family at the historic River Dale Farm in Richmond County. "We had ties here and just knew that one day we would be living in the area," she says.

According to town manager Walker, "The cultures and values are similar to those like you see in 'Mayberry RFD.' You feel as if you are part of an extended family, because everybody knows each other by their first name. I have found it to be a caring community." Walker moved to the area several years ago after applying for the job as town manager. "I have lived all over the state and have found Warsaw to be the best place to live and raise your family," he continues.

Even though many newcomers have been moving to the area in recent years, most of the population consists of the native families that have been here for hundreds of years.

The area was settled by the English about 350 years ago, after Captain John Smith originally explored the area in 1607-1608.

Richmond County was formed in 1692, when (old) Rappahannock County was divided into two counties: Essex and Richmond. Rappahannock County had been formed from Lancaster County in 1656.

The generally accepted explanation of the county name is that it comes from the first Duke of Richmond, first cousin to both King William III and Queen Mary.

Originally, the county seat was located closer to the Rappahannock River, but was moved inland in 1730 and named Richmond County Courthouse. In 1830, the name was changed to Warsaw, in sympathy with the Polish struggle for independence. Warsaw was incorporated as a town in 1947, and is governed by an eight-member town council and town manager.

Warsaw was home to the well-known Col. Landon Carter, son of Robert "King" Carter. His vast 1730s-era plantation home, Sabine Hall, still shines today as a historic landmark.

Just up the road is Mt. Airy, the historic mansion that was home to the famous Col. John Tayloe. It's also been the birthplace of many famous racehorses that are seen today on thoroughbred racing tracks across America.

If You Go...

In Warsaw, there is something for nearly everyone. First, be sure to stop by the Richmond County Museum and visit with Francene Barber or one of her associates. The museum has exhibits that date back thousands of years, when the county was first inhabited by Native Americans. There are also Colonial artifacts that were once part of the county's history. While here, take a stroll around the old courthouse and clerk's office located next door. For information, call (804) 333-3607.



Richmond County Museum

If genealogy is your desire, then stop by the newer Richmond County Courthouse and dig through the pages of history. The genealogy seeker may also wish to visit the Library Center located at Rappahannock Community College. The center houses a large amount of other interesting materials. The college is located in the center of town. While here, you may wish to take the well-known Nature Trail or take in a game of tennis. For information, call (804) 333-6710.

If you're an overnight traveler, you can stay at the new Warsaw-Best Western. For prices and reservations, call (804) 333-1700. If camping is your delight, then be sure to stay at the nearby Heritage Park Resort. Heritage Park has hundreds of campsites located on beautiful Cat Point Creek.

For dinner, enjoy dining at The China Inn, JH, or Anna's Italian Restaurant. For a pleasant afternoon picnic, go to the county's park located on Route 3, overlooking Totuskey Creek.

For a good workout, stop by the Family Gym and visit owner and trainer Dan Wilson.

If you plan your trip in August, be sure to come to the Richmond County Fair, or in October come to the yearly Octoberfest.

at Warsaw's historic St. John's Church.

St. John's was constructed about 1836 on land donated by Major Brockenbrough. Also still standing in the town is the old Richmond County Courthouse and its clerk's office. These buildings were constructed about 1748, during the town's so-called "Golden Age."

In 1872, the jail was erected and now houses the Richmond County Museum. The Museum was founded in 1992, when the county celebrated its 300th birthday. It offers a variety of exhibits, such as old copper stills and area Indian artifacts. Special events are offered every year.

In 1973, the new county office/courthouse building was completed. The clerk's office and the record room hold a trove of treasures for the genealogy seeker.

Excellent Schools

Education is another asset high on the town's list. Since 1972, hundreds of students have been drawn each year to Rappahannock Community College, located in Warsaw. It offers college preparatory, vocational, business, technical and trade courses. "The college is a positive town asset to the community," says museum curator Barber.

Richmond County also has an excellent public school system, with the county's three public schools all centrally located in the Warsaw area. The standards of learning at the county schools are above those seen in a lot of rural towns. "I think this is primarily because you have the dedicated parents working together," Barber points out.

Warsaw is also the home of the Northern Neck Regional Vocational Center, which provides a comprehensive program for area students and works closely with area employers to help meet their needs.

The Richmond County Public Library, located in Warsaw, is part of The Library Center at Rappahannock Community College, and is one of the largest facilities in the Northern Neck. The library relies both on county and town support, as well as dedicated volunteers such as The Friends of the Library. Citizens also have full use of the Academic Library, Regional Law Library and a substantial Genealogy Library, all located within The Library Center.

No town could quite be truly American if it didn't have some version of America's traditional favorite pastime, baseball. "Thank God for Kids" was the slogan that inspired the fund-raising kickoff for the Richmond County Little League in 1996. During this major campaign, townsfolk were entertained by the well-known country music singers the Oak Ridge Boys. Over \$60,000 was collected to help the little league.

Nearly 400 kids play baseball and softball every season. "This is our 19th year," says league president **Shirley Lucas**. "Hundreds of parents join in and volunteer their time to

make this league the success it is," she points out. Other forms of recreation in the area include nature trails, tennis courts, and the county's YMCA.

Twice a year, thousands of people come to town, first in August for the Richmond County Fair, and second in October for "Warsaw Octoberfest."

Visitors are often surprised at the variety of retail shops in town, from the second-hand Corner Bargains to the Ames Department Store. Specialty shops include Thoroughbred Racing Catalog Center, and Country Colonial Collectibles & Gifts. There are also a number of new businesses underway. According to town manager Walker, "Warsaw will have the benefits of some urban areas, but won't be swallowed up (by urban growth)." In 1992, Richmond County purchased a 56-acre tract of land in Warsaw, to develop a business/industrial park. The site is located near the Route 3 intersection with U.S. Route 360, in the center of the Northern Neck.

There are currently four churches located in the town. Although Warsaw may be a busy little town during the week, all things seem to take a slow pace on Sunday mornings, with very few cars moving. The places of worship include the oldest, St. John's Episcopal, plus Warsaw Baptist, Victory Baptist, and Warsaw Methodist.

A town, of course, is not complete without a local newspaper, and in Warsaw that's *The Northern Neck News*, which has been in continuous weekly publication since May 16, 1879. "The continuous publication of the News has spanned wars and depressions and has faithfully chronicled the day-to-day lives of people of this isolated peninsula," writes **Charles H. Ryland** in the book, *Richmond County History*.

For over a century *The Northern Neck News* was owned and operated by one family. In 1891, William Younger Morgan, who 12 years before as a 16-year-old had helped publish the first edition, became the sole owner. Morgan retired in 1949 and his grandson Rodney Marshall Coggin became publisher and owner, a job he kept until 1992, when the paper was purchased by the current owner, Chesapeake Publishing Corp. It is one of the few papers remaining in Virginia that still includes the "social column" news about goings-on in the small towns throughout the Northern Neck.

Also located in town is the headquarters of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, which has provided reliable, affordable electricity to the region since 1937.

Of all the reasons why someone might choose Warsaw as their hometown, town manager Walker perhaps sums them up best when he says, "Warsaw is just the type of place that many people find worth living in and raising their family." ■