

After running off the Warrosquyoke Indians in the early 1600s, the English settlers, perhaps in a gesture of appreciation or perhaps remorse, named their newly acquired locality Warrosquyoke Parish. This tongue-twister was banished once the parish became Isle of Wight County.

It gets even simpler. The first person to own land in the county was Arthur Smith. On September 10, 1637, Smith patented 1,450 acres described as “a neck of land running southeast along a creek behind the Pagan Shore.” In 1750, his great-grandson, Arthur Smith IV, had the land surveyed and laid off into 72 lots spread out along four streets. Within two years all but 13 lots had been sold at £4-8s each, and the town of Smithfield began taking shape. Smithfield is justifiably famed today for its hams, but also for maintaining the charm and tranquility of a small Tidewater river town.

However, it was as a tobacco port that Smithfield first gained commercial traction. In 1633 there was a tobacco warehouse situated along the riverbank to store the golden weed prior to shipping it directly to foreign markets in Britain and to the Continent.

Smithfield’s Historic District, which includes 44 properties ranging from modest mid-18th century brick to classic Federal, and finally from simple to ornate Victorian dwellings, reflects the ebb and flow of economic times over a span of some 250 years. About half of these buildings line South Church Street, which parallels the Pagan River. Standing alone at the end of Jericho Road, high on a knoll overlooking the river, sits Windsor Castle, the story-and-a-half stuccoed brick house with dormers built about 1750 by Arthur Smith. The district is listed as a Virginia Historic Landmark and is on the National Historic Register.

The old courthouse, on the corner of Main and Mason Streets, was built in 1752 and is one of only four remaining



The old riverfront historic district is bound on the north by the Pagan River and flanked on the left by Smithfield Station and on the right by Smithfield Foods.

WARROSQUYOKE SMITHFIELD AND ISLE OF WIGHT

Story and Photos
by
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The old Isle of Wight Courthouse, now restored, was modeled after Virginia's Colonial Capital in Williamsburg. (below)

arcaded colonial courthouses in Virginia. The concave walled courtroom was patterned after the Capitol in Williamsburg. When Colonial Williamsburg's architects were planning the reconstruction of the Capitol, they were fortunate to be able to study the Smithfield edifice. The courthouse is open to the public Friday through Sunday year-round.

The Smithfield Inn, situated in the heart of the Historic District next door to the old Court House on Main Street, was built in 1752 as a private residence. It offers five comfortable suites with sitting rooms, bedrooms and private baths. The inn's dining, popular with locals as well as out-of-town guests, "reflects a culinary





heritage of the community’s indigenous foods.” It is open for lunch Monday through Sunday and for dinner Tuesday through Saturday.

In addition to Church Street, the Historic District extends several blocks south along Main Street and includes a number of interesting shops and places to have a light lunch. Because this is a relatively compressed section of the town, it can easily be enjoyed on a leisurely walk.

The courthouse was moved some seven miles south of Smithfield in 1800 in order to provide a more central location for a growing population. Major Frances Boykin, a Revolutionary War veteran and entrepreneur, agreed to build a courthouse and jail at his expense on land next to his tavern. Historic Boykin’s Tavern, dating from 1762, was recently restored and is open to the public.

Visiting Smithfield can be enjoyed as a one-day excursion or a weekend stopover. Once you have experienced it, you will certainly want to return. If coming from Williamsburg by way of the Jamestown-Scotland ferry, several historic properties are open to the public within an easy drive along the 22-mile route. Three

Excellent dining spots are interspersed with interesting Main Street shops.

Fort Huger was one of a string of Confederate fortifications on both sides of the James River to protect Richmond.



of particular interest are: Smith’s Fort Plantation, named for yet another Smith, the redoubtable Captain John; Chippokes Plantation, now maintained as an exhibition farm by the Virginia Division of State Parks, and Bacon’s Castle, named after the house was occupied by rebel troops in 1676 during Bacon’s Rebellion.

For Civil War buffs, the recently opened Fort Huger Historical Park, located off Route 10 in the northern reaches of Isle of Wight County, is worth the circuitous effort to reach it. The fort, one of the best-preserved earthen-work bastions from the

Civil War era, is on a high natural bluff overlooking the James River Reserve Fleet.

Traveling to Smithfield from the Hampton Roads direction, you pass historic St. Luke’s Church just a few miles east of the town. You don’t want to pass by, because this is a special place and a rare national treasure. Construction on the church began in 1632 and was one of the places where sessions of the General Court were held in the Colony. Known also as Old Brick, it is the country’s only surviving original Gothic building. Designated a National Historic Landmark and listed on



Old St. Luke's is the oldest existing church of English foundation in America. In 1634 it served more than 500 parishioners.

the Virginia and National registers of historic places, St Luke's also houses a rare 1630 English chamber organ, the only intact instrument of its kind in the world. Neglected from 1777 to 1821 and abandoned again after 1830, the church lost its roof in a storm in 1887, when a part of the east wall also fell in. This damage awakened interest in the community to restore and preserve this special building

Because of its strategic location, the area was occasionally occupied by opposing troops during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War. Many stories relating to these periods still resonate. One amusing account of a company of Union soldiers camped on a farm near St. Luke's has echoed down through the years. It seems that late one night when several soldiers were returning to camp from reconnoitering, their horses became frightened when they saw large white wings flapping from a grave in the churchyard. The soldiers, like their mounts not feeling the need to investigate more closely, sped off. However, the next morning they did make a search of the grounds and discovered that several geese had fallen into a newly-dug grave and had

not been able to extract themselves.

Today, Historic St. Luke's Restoration, Inc. is dedicated to insuring the preservation of the church's future course. Although regular Sunday worship is no longer held, an Episcopal service is conducted there on the fifth Sunday of the month. In addition, weddings, baptisms and other special ceremonies are scheduled at the church. St. Luke's is open to the public Tuesday through Sunday, except during the month of January.

For those wishing to visit

Smithfield by sail or powerboat, Smithfield Station, located on the Pagan River east of town, four nautical miles from the James River and 12 miles from Hampton Roads, features a 100-slip marina with floating docks. The adjacent Waterfront Inn, surrounded by a cluster of shops and a popular restaurant featuring local seafood selections, rounds out this attractive complex.

The other day, I noticed a sign over a newly opened store on Prince George Street in Williamsburg. It read, "Genuine Smithfield Hams." Which begs the question: what constitutes a genuine Smithfield ham? "The answer is in the curing process," John Edwards, editor and publisher of *The Smithfield Times*, told me. "The ham is a long cut or a full hock and is dry cured in salt for at least six months. In order to protect their franchise brand," he pointed out, "local packers established a geographic profile specifying that only those hams cured within the town's corporate limits could be called Smithfield Hams." The Virginia Legislature confirmed this into law in the 1930s.

In Surry County, just west of Isle of Wight County, Edwards's Hams enjoy a loyal following. Mr. Edwards, whose uncle founded Edward's Hams, said, "Our hams are cured in a similar fashion to Smithfield hams, but they cannot claim to be such even

Tom Darden not only runs Darden's Country Store, he also cures about 900 hams in his smoke-house using traditional methods each year.





The Smithfield Foods complex is situated on the Pagan River where steamboats once plied in and out carrying passengers and freight to Newport News and Norfolk.

though there is no difference in taste between the two hams.”

It was sometime in the 18th century that a gentleman by the name of Mallory Todd perfected the primitive technique, acquired from the Indians, of curing the meat from razorback hogs. E. M. Todd & Co., founded by Mallory Todd, has an invoice dating from 1779 that indicates they were shipping hams to the West Indies at that time. More recently, the town’s museum, located in the old Smithfield Bank building on the corner of Church and Main Streets, preserves orders from Windsor Castle that were shipped to Queen Victoria.

In times past, before the ham production business expanded to the degree it has, the best hams came from hogs that were allowed grow lean and strong by being left free to roam through the woods and fields during the spring and summer. In the fall they were turned out into fields where peanuts had been harvested to scavenge and fatten on the peanuts left for them. After the hogs were slaughtered, hams were packed in salt, and suspended in a confined place above a smoldering

hickory fire where the smoke added to the process.

The final step was to store them for at least a year, allowing a thick mold to form. I once watched an old-timer stick an ice pick into the flank of a curing ham and sniff it to make sure he was selecting one that was ready for the table. It reminded me of a winery, where a vintner goes from barrel to barrel using his nose and palate to determine the state of the vintage.

Today, the old packinghouses of Gwaltney, Jordan and Luter, have been consolidated into Smithfield Foods, Inc., a giant firm with international operations in 13 countries. It is the world’s largest pork processor and hog producer. In addition, this global company is a leader in several other key food categories. Notwithstanding this growth, the hams that retain the Smithfield name also retain the quality and reputation that Smithfield hams have earned.

Should you wish to see the traditional method of curing hams on a small scale, head for Tom Darden’s Country Store, located about six miles out of town at the

intersection of Bowling Green Road and Carroll Bridge. Last year Mr. Darden cured more than 900 hams in his smokehouse, located across the road from the store he and his wife run. Although they have a long list of regular customers for their hams, it may be possible to be added to the list.

While visiting Smithfield, my wife Bernice and I enjoyed a light lunch at the Ice Cream Parlor, which serves subs, sandwiches and soups as well as ice cream. We also picked up a few sweets across the street at Miss Bessie’s Best Cookies and Candies. There is also the Olde World Tea Company nearby offering light-lunch fare as well as tea, and the Smithfield Gourmet Bakery and Cafe. Although we did not make it to Smithfield Station for lunch this time, they offer a more extensive luncheon menu, featuring local seafood. The Darden Country Store offers ham biscuits.

With the population of Virginia continuing to increase, particularly in the greater Hampton Roads area, Smithfield has felt the change. The population is just over 7,000, of which some 30 percent

commute to the larger metropolitan communities in the area. Yet being bound on the west by Pagan Creek, which forms into the Pagan River on the north and Cypress Creek on the east, which flows into the Pagan River, Old Smithfield has been compelled by the rhythms of these waters to preserve and restore the charm and character this Tidewater river town has been noted for down through the years. Come see for yourself!

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March 30 Chevy Lovers

April

4-6 Battle of Chancellorsville -
Heritage Park on Rte 258

12 3rd Annual Luter YMCA Youth
Triathlon

May 8 Grand Opening Fort Huger

June

Every Saturday Smithfield Farmer's
Market

26-28 Olden Days

July 3 Fireworks

Every Saturday Olde Town Curb
Market

August

Every Saturday Olde Town Curb
Market

September

18-21 County Fair Heritage Park on
Rte. 258

Last weekend Neptune Festival in
Virginia Beach

October

4 Smithfield Music Presents Mike
Aiken & Friends Fest

11 Town & Country Day &
Olde Town Curb Market

November

11 Veterans Day

6-9 Smithfield Little Theatre Fall
Production

22 Olde Town Curb Market

December

5-7 Smithfield Little Theatre presents
Christmas show

12 The Bon Vivant of Smithfield
Wine Guild

13 Smithfield Christmas Parade