





Norfolk

Virginia's Historic Seaport

by
Beau Beasley

The Grady White fishing boat pitched ever so slightly as we headed out toward open water and what I hoped would be a great day of fishing on the Chesapeake Bay. Living in Northern Virginia, my day is dictated by the traffic patterns; today, however, I was on the water with Captain Tommy Mattioli, an excellent guide who knows how to handle his boat and how to find fish. I've fished with Tommy before and never leave empty-handed.

Small cresting waves on the Bay caused our boat to bounce as we made our way to the day's fishing grounds. As Tommy maneuvered us toward our destination, I scanned the horizon intently

looking for diving birds, a sure sign of feeding fish.

Suddenly we heard a roar from behind. Before I could turn around to investigate, an enormous Navy helicopter zoomed over the top of our small boat. There was no question that he had buzzed us. The noise was bone jarring, and the chopper was flying so low that I think I could have thrown a rock and hit it.

"What in the world is he doing?" I shouted at Tommy. Because he had approached us from the rear, the chopper's roar had been obscured by the wind and our motor until he was right on top of us. He had come upon us like a hawk closing in on a mouse—and make no mistake: We

were the mouse.

Tommy turned to me and replied coolly, "He is politely asking us not to crowd his friend over there," nodding his head toward the right. And there to my astonishment was an aircraft carrier, the mightiest ship on the seas, about 1,000 yards away. How had I missed it?

He turned away from the direction the looming carrier was heading, and the chopper passed over one more time—but with much more room over our heads. "He seems happy with our change of course," Tommy said wryly. I watched as the chopper itself turned and flew higher and nearer to the carrier once more. I smiled as the chopper flew out of sight,



Granby Street, north of Monticello Avenue, in the early 1900s (Photo courtesy of City of Norfolk Library)

Granby Street today (Photo courtesy of City of Norfolk, Dept. of Communications)



both in awe of the might of our armed services and in gratitude that I had nothing to fear from my country's own Navy. Local Norfolk residents could not say as much two and half centuries ago.

Norfolk's Near Destruction

Established in 1682, Norfolk, which today boasts a population of more than 230,000 residents, has always been an important city in the Old Dominion. In fact it was nearly chosen to be the state's capital.

Though England had settled and ruled the area known as Virginia since the early 1600s, by the late 1700s relations with the English colonies were not good. After a string of unsuccessful royal governors, John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore, was dispatched from England to rule on behalf of King George. Lord Dunmore was a well-connected nobleman of Scottish birth, and it was hoped that he could more appropriately lead the obstinate Virginia colonists.

Instead Dunmore proved to be England's undoing: He quickly fell out of favor with the colonists after a series of unpopular decisions, the most egregious of which was to deprive the local populous of their arms. Fearing that they might rebel, Dunmore confiscated the colonists' arms and powder held in the armory near the governor's private residence in Williamsburg, then the colonial capital of Virginia. Armory stocks had been established to protect citizens from Indian attacks or slave revolts. This act so upset the colonists that on June 8, 1775, Lord Dunmore fled Williamsburg with his family in fear for his life and took up residence on the *HMS Fowey* stationed on the York River.

On December 9, 1775, colonial forces routed Lord Dunmore and 200 redcoats at the Battle of Great Bridge. On January 1, 1776, Lord Dunmore, still smarting from his losses at Great Bridge, gave the order to burn the City of Norfolk.

The British Navy mercilessly fired on the city, destroying nearly 800 buildings. The colonists, fearing that Lord Dunmore might retake the city, took it upon themselves to burn the 400 buildings that remained. When the smoke cleared, Norfolk had essentially been burned to the ground. In fact, Norfolk was the only city to be totally destroyed during the Revolutionary War and then completely rebuilt.

Up and Coming

By 1801, Norfolk had regained its momentum and was on its way to becoming a major city. The former colonists now found themselves facing a new challenge: Free from British rule, they now had to fend for themselves in a new and ever-changing political climate. Because America's distance across the sea from Europe was also its greatest protection, the first order of business was to ensure the security of the fledgling country by building a navy. The first Continental Navy Yard was established in the city of Norfolk, and to date Norfolk is home to the largest naval yard in the world.

Although the city's seaport brought goods and plenty of business opportunities to the burgeoning population, it also brought plenty of hardships as well. In 1855 the steamer *Ben Franklin* arrived in Hampton Roads and along with the passengers came an unexpected and unwanted guest: yellow fever. The epidemic swept through Norfolk like a tidal wave killing 2,000, and by the fall of that year, nearly half the population had fled the city. Norfolk was nearly torn in two, and the nation would soon follow.

By 1861 the United States of America were no longer united; the entire country plunged into a bloody civil war. Few states can boast of seeing as much military action during the Civil War as the Old Dominion. Military engagements raged across Virginia from her farmlands to her shores. Once again Norfolk found



Waterside Marina is popular with those traveling by boat through the Intercoastal Waterway.

itself in the middle of a major conflict precisely because it was so important to the surrounding region. The famous maritime duel between the *USS Monitor* and the *CSA Virginia*, better known as the *Merrimac*, took place just off the city's coast. This naval engagement, the first among the ironclads, would forever relegate wooden ships to the annals of history as far as naval warfare was concerned.

Fortunately, in just over a decade after the close of the Civil War, Norfolk had prospered to such an extent that it was able to hire a paid fire-fighting force—making it only the third city in the country to do so.

Shifting Sand

Norfolk's landscape has changed a great deal in the last 200 years, and Barclay Winn of Winn Nursery has certainly influenced the city's appearance. In fact, the full-service nursery has been shaping the landscape of Norfolk and the surrounding region since 1885 and takes on jobs large or small with the same zeal. Barclay Winn began working at the nursery in 1970, and in 1985, he and his cousin Carter Winn bought the business. Their

work sites stretch from Williamsburg to Elizabeth City, North Carolina. They currently landscape everything from individual homes to multimillion dollar complexes.

"I like to tell folks that if it's got trees or shrubs, we can do it," says Winn with a chuckle. "We've never had to turn down a job because it was too big for us, and I never want to tell someone that their job is too small for us."

Norfolk insider John Vellines, a committed sportsman and associate broker for Nancy Chandler Associates, attests to the fact that more than trees are growing in the city. Vellines, a native son of Norfolk, knows this city like the back of his hand and can't imagine living anywhere else. Norfolk, he says, is "truly wonderful. We have it all here, and folks who move to this city really have a hard time leaving. I of course get a lot of military officers as clients, and they think they'll live here for a year or two and then move on. The interesting thing is that once their two-year stint is up, they often want to rent the house out rather than sell it because they want to move back to the area as soon as they can."

Why is Norfolk so popular?

Vellines doesn't hesitate: "We have excellent schools, four distinct seasons, and the downtown area is second to none. I also have to give a lot of credit to the city's mayor, Paul Fraime. He's done a lot to improve the city when others just talked about it."

Perhaps you think Vellines loves this city because he's been so successful buying and selling real estate in the area. You're only half right. In fact, what really excites him are the many sporting opportunities that the city's location offers. Vellines has served as the master of ceremonies for the Norfolk Ducks Unlimited Chapter Banquet for the past 20 years. He also founded a children's fishing tournament at the Norfolk Yacht and Country Club that boasts some 100 participants each year, with each participant winning an award for something.



Jim Grady, general manager of Norfolk Yacht and Country Club

Jim Grady, manager of the Norfolk Yacht and Country Club for 20 years and himself a father of five, agrees with Vellines that involving the whole family in an event is crucial. "We have over 1,400 members here, and most of them have families. The club is constantly searching for ways to reach out to club members and others in the Norfolk community. We have a 24,000-square-foot athletic center and a swim team, as well as sailing classes for youngsters."

Fire Fighters and Fishermen

Ronnie Boone, a 14-year career fire fighter for the City of Portsmouth Fire



Ocean View Pier is the longest privately owned pier in North America

Department, responds to everything from house fires to medical emergency calls when on duty. He's also a part of the region's elite Hazardous Materials team, which is responsible for handling things like fuel spills and chemical leaks. Boone is lauded in his community—but not, surprisingly, for his public service work. In 2002 Hurricane Isabel tore through the City of Norfolk destroying homes, ruining businesses, and completely demolishing one of Norfolk's most beloved landmarks, Harrison's Pier, which had been used by tens of thousands of anglers since its construction in 1949. The landmark was completely obliterated and, after the storm, pieces of the beloved pier washed up on shore for weeks. Residents were heartsick and lovingly picked up smaller pieces from the tide.

Boone, along with his mother Judy, a prominent real estate broker, and his father, a local builder, decided that they could not let this piece of Norfolk history simply wash out to sea. Boone's family had been in negotiations to buy the land surrounding the pier before Hurricane Isabel. Now that the pier had been destroyed, they were faced with a tough decision: Develop the land with condos and offices, or bite the bullet and replace a

Ronnie and Lisa Boone



landmark. For the Boone family, the choice was clear: The pier must be replaced.

"I was born and raised here, and I just couldn't let the pier go by the way-side," says Boone. Boone's dream was to rebuild a fishing pier that was second to none, and by all accounts his dream has become a reality. After two years of construction and at a cost of \$4 million, Ocean View Pier is unlike any pier you've ever seen. At 1,790 feet, it's the longest privately-owned pier in North America—but that's just the beginning. The wooden planks that anglers love to walk on (and kids love to peek through) may look good but they belie the sturdy concrete construction that lies beneath them.

"About every 40 feet there are concrete pilings that secure the pier to the ocean floor," Boone says with pride. "The pier was also built with steel girders that

are a foot wide and 40 feet long. We really overbuilt this pier, but it's what I wanted." If the construction of Ocean View Pier isn't enough to wow you, the design surely will. Along with the panoramic views and the requisite bait and tackle shop comes a full-service restaurant. Above the restaurant is a 6,000-square-foot deck (complete with gazebo and tiki bar) available for private party rentals. Live music livens up the atmosphere every Friday and Saturday night when the space isn't rented. Clearly this is not your father's fishing pier, and no one knows that better than Captain Cory Routh.

Routh, a passionate angler and kayaker and owner of Ruthless Fishing guide service, which caters to kayaking anglers, is also the president of the Tidewater Kayak Anglers Association. As such, it was his responsibility to find a place to hold the association's annual Charity Tournament Dinner. Routh knew that the Ocean View Pier was the perfect spot.

The New Norfolk

Today Norfolk is a thriving seaport town that provides both residents and visitors with plenty of reasons to celebrate. Among the city's jewels is the National Maritime Center, which includes a 120,000-square-foot, multi-level maritime showcase with over 150 nautical exhibits and the *USS Wisconsin*, America's largest battleship. Those who prefer to watch artists in action should take in a visit to the d'ART Center. Many enjoy watching the Norfolk Tides baseball team play at Harbor Park or visiting the General Douglas MacArthur Memorial Museum. And if all of the touring makes you hungry, you're in luck. Granby Street Corridor, which is downtown Norfolk, is booming with fine dining and a great night life. Colley Avenue in the Ghent Historic District features more family-priced options as well.

If the old saying that "money talks" is true, then Norfolk is shouting. The city recently announced a \$36 million

project to create a Cruise and Celebration Center to expand and enhance the experience of passengers aboard the cruise lines for which Norfolk is a port of call. Prefer to visit Norfolk aboard your own watercraft? No problem: The Waterside Marina has a 20-foot depth and can handle as many as 35 boats up to 200 feet; it also sports several hundred feet of lateral docking. The marina even provides taxi service, which allows boating visitors to take advantage of the marina's athletic club, showers, laundry facilities, and other amenities. Those experiencing mechanical difficulties can request mobile mechanical service and refuel before heading back out to the Intracoastal Waterway.

In the midst of Norfolk's new splendor may be found hints of its dramatic and tumultuous past. A cannonball, fired from one of the ships under Governor Dunmore's orders, is still lodged in the wall of St Paul's Episcopal Church and is open for public viewing. Ironically, Norfolk named a street after the infamous

Norfolk waterfront at night (Photo courtesy of photobylarry.com)



Lord Dunmore. This street was not named to honor him, however, but rather to commemorate the last place that he set foot in the city of Norfolk. But despite Dunmore's best efforts to demolish it, the city rose like a phoenix from the ashes of the buildings that were destroyed during the Revolutionary War to be more beautiful and more prosperous than ever before. Indeed, Lord Dunmore seems to be the only visitor that the City of Norfolk considered unwelcome. It's a shame, really, because the poor fellow and his family would have a blast in Norfolk if they could see it today.

Beau Beasley is an award-winning outdoor writer and a regular contributor to *The Virginia Sportsman*. His first book, *A No-Nonsense Guide to Fly Fishing Virginia*, is scheduled for release in spring 2007. You can reach Beau at Fishutopia@adelphia.net.

The Second Annual Tidewater Kayak Anglers Association Charity Tournament will take place on September 30, 2006. The event is the largest kayak fishing tournament in the Mid-Atlantic as well as the final stop of the 2006 East Coast Kayak Fishing Championship Series. Proceeds from the tournament will go toward conservation efforts to improve the Chesapeake Bay and the surrounding watershed. The event is expected to draw nearly 200 kayaking anglers from Maine to Texas who will compete for the coveted East Coast Cup. For more information on sponsoring or participating in the tournament, contact Captain Cory Routh at 757-403-0734 or by email at cory@tkaa.org.

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