

Two capes stand at the southern entrance to the Chesapeake Bay: Cape Henry at the northeast tip of Virginia Beach, and Cape Charles across the mouth of the Bay on the southeast tip of the Eastern Shore near the bridge-tunnel entrance. The capes were named in 1607 for the two young sons of King James I of England: Prince Henry, who died as a youth, and Charles, Duke of York, who, upon the death of his father, became Charles I of England. The town is named for the cape.

Where did Cape Charles get its name?

Cape Charles is being appreciated once again.

the Shore. The character of numbers of tourists who visit and now serve the increasing old hotels and tourist homes, breakfasts have replaced the renovated to serve as summer houses have been bought and tall original condition. Many standing, many in substantiality of the original structures still

Most of the town is now a Historic District, with the majority of the original structures still

Palmer golf course and numerous houses have been built as second golf course is under construction, planned by Jack Nicklaus.

In 1992, Cape Charles annexed an area four times its former size, much of it land once belonging to the old Scott farm. A portion of that land was used to build the Sustainable Technology Industrial Park. On the larger tract an Arnold Palmer golf course and numerous houses have been built as second golf course is under construction, planned by Jack Nicklaus.

Traffic and business moved to the Kiptopeke. New highway, and new patterns of commuting arose. With the opening of the Bridge-Tunnel in 1964, the Kiptopeke ferry service also ceased. These changes devastated the town's economy.

Notes on the Houses of Cape Charles

Cape Charles, a town of diverse neighborhoods and building styles, has many excellent examples of Victorian, Colonial Revival, Craftsman, and Neoclassical styles, as well as combinations and sub styles of each. Few towns have a comparable collection of buildings of the era 1885-1940. The oldest houses, dating from the 1880s to early 1900s, are found in the central and eastern sections of town along Mason, Randolph, and Tazewell Avenues and their connecting cross streets. "Gingerbread," the decorative woodwork on porches and gables, is a common feature of these homes, and was often cut by hand on site.

The town's economic growth in the teens and 1920s brought the later, more substantial houses which surround the original neighborhoods. In the northeast section of town are many examples of narrow, two-story blue-collar family houses from the 1920s. Scattered throughout Cape Charles are duplexes, row houses, and the former sites boarding houses and hotels, which served railroad workers and travelers.

At least 11 houses in town have been identified as "Sears" or other "kit" houses, by makers including Sears Roebuck & Co., Montgomery Ward, Alladin, and others. Delivered by rail as kits of about 30,000 pieces with a 75 page manual, Sears houses were popular from the early 1900s into the 1930s depression years, when Sears, which held the mortgages, had to foreclose many houses and ceased production.

Walking through town one sees increasing numbers of restored commercial buildings and houses, as well as others waiting for helping hands. To see fine examples of interior restorations, drop in at any of the **Bed and Breakfasts** in town. Technical and financial information on historic restoration is available at the **Northampton Memorial Library (30)** and from the **Virginia Department of Historic Resources** in Portsmouth.

Cape Charles grew rapidly from its founding to about 1930, when the Depression slowed economic life. At the town dock, elegant trains and steamers exchanged passengers and freight in a service which continued until 1953, when the grand steamer *Elsha Lee* left Cape Charles harbor for the last time. Passenger train service was abandoned shortly thereafter, but freight service continues to this day with railroad cars towed across the Bay on barges. In 1950 the Virginia Ferry Corporation, which had begun operating automobile ferries in 1933, moved its terminal south to

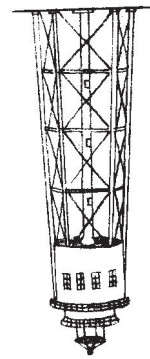
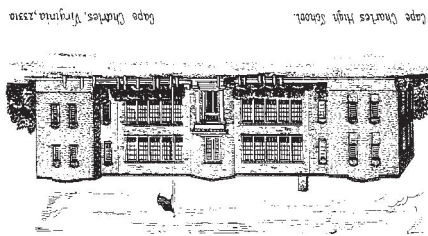
Sea Cottage Addition.

vided 97 new building lots in the additional 38 acres of filled land provided by Bay Ave and Pine Street. The added: Bay Avenue along the edge of the Bay; Harbor Avenue between (called avenues however) were tended west, and two more north-south streets and filled. The original east-west avenues were extended west, and two more north-south streets

In 1911 the swampy land near the Bay was drained and filled. The original east-west avenues were extended west, and two more north-south streets had built more than half the town. there were fewer than 50 houses in town, and, when he died, that he Scores of houses in Cape Charles were built by William H. Lambertson (1863-1948), who came here from Pocomoke. It is said that when he arrived in the 1880s, road employees.

Incorporated on March 1, 1886, Cape Charles quickly became the economic focus of Northampton County life. More cosmopolitan than other Shore towns, with its paved streets, electricity, telephones and central water and sewerage system, it also attracted members of older county families, who came here and built their homes among those of the railroad employees.

profitable in the early 20th century and after 1922 (NYP&N) Railroad, founded in 1882, was highly life and probably never visited Cape Charles. important American collectors of Impressionist works. Mary herself lived in France most of her and persuaded Cassatt to become one of the first sister, the famous Impressionist painter Mary Cassatt, painted at least two fine portraits of him



The first train reached Cape Charles on October 25, 1884, and within six months two passenger steamers, as well as specially designed railroad freight barges, were regularly making the 36 mile Bay crossing. Trains soon arrived daily from New York, and small towns along the shore prospered as their produce could easily be marketed in northern cities. The New York, Philadelphia, and Norfolk

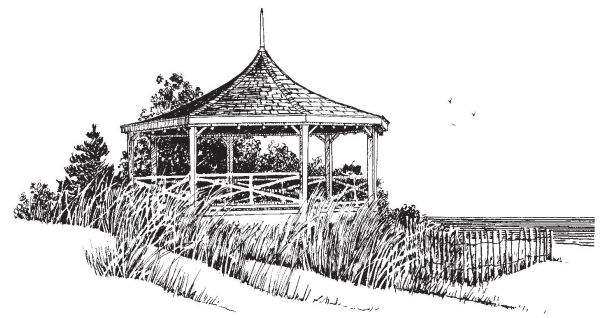
or the harbor dredged. before the railroad tracks were laid (named for fruits or trees) running north-south. Building began even each 40 by 140 feet, with seven avenues (named for famous Virginians) running east-west and six streets town of about 136 acres in 644 lots, about 2,650 acres of farm and timberland for \$55,000. He laid out a pence. Meanwhile, Scott had bought which he dredged at his own expense. Lambertson, harbor, and connecting channel, railroad would take and chose the spot for its southern route the 65 mile route the Pocomoke, Cassatt personally laid out the 65 mile route the Pocomoke, traveling by horseback south from Pocomoke, Scott to make it happen.

In 1882 Cassatt resigned from the PRR to work with engineer and Vice-President of Traffic, was interested. In 1882 Cassatt resigned from the PRR to work with engineer and Vice-President of Traffic, was interested. In 1882 Cassatt resigned from the PRR to work with engineer and Vice-President of Traffic, was interested. In 1882 Cassatt resigned from the PRR to work with engineer and Vice-President of Traffic, was interested.

two rich and powerful men of the time, changed all that. Pocomoke MD, planned, executed and financed by to the north. The extension of the railroad from small creek to the south and the larger King's Creek Charles was a farm and swampy area, bounded by a towns until the 1880s. What is now the town of Cape food and agricultural region with scattered small colonized areas in North America, remained a sea-

A Brief History of Cape Charles

A Walking Tour of Historic Cape Charles Virginia



Visitors are always welcome to drop in and see the interiors of these houses.

A. Sterling House B&B at 9 Randolph, opened in 2001, is a large Craftsman bungalow with unusual dormers and bays, and striking porch columns. It was built by Mr. J.E.N. Sterling, who was mayor of Cape Charles from August 1888 to July 7, 1891. Mr. Sterling, better known as Captain Ned, came to Cape Charles from Crisfield, MD with his two brothers and started the first town industry: seafood. 757-331-2483 www.sterling-inn.com.

B. 645 Tazewell Avenue, on the site of the first one room school (1886), **Cape Charles House B&B** opened in 1994. The 1912 Colonial revival house was built by Tucker Wilkins, Commonwealth's Attorney of Northampton County. The current owners have acquired several items from the original Wilkins household. 757-331-4920 www.capecharleshouse.com.

C. 202 Madison Avenue Chesapeake Charm B&B opened in 1995. Built in 1921 this is one of the many houses built by W.H. Lambertson. Falling within the Colonial Revival style, its interior is decorated with period furniture. 757-331-2676 www.chesapeakecharmbnb.com.

D. 9 Tazewell Avenue (corner Harbor Avenue), Sea Gate B&B, Cape Charles' first B&B, opened in 1988. Built by W.H. Lambertson in 1912, the house is, like many, a combination of styles including late Queen Anne, Victorian, and Colonial Revival. Note its graceful curving porch. The house was long owned by the Dixon family (unrelated to Thomas Dixon, Jr.). 757-331-2206. www.bbhost.com/seagate.

1. The **Pavilion, at the foot of Randolph beside the beach**, was built in 1922 to house entertainment. The present 1991 structure is a close copy of the original, which collapsed in 1990. It sits on the Boardwalk, which runs the length of the beachfront.

2. **1 & 3 Randolph**. These houses, constructed in the mid-1920s, are excellent examples of the Craftsman style. #3 is a "Sears" house built from a ready-to-assemble kit manufactured by "Sears, Roebuck & Co". There are numerous other Sears and kit houses in town; the exposed rafters and brackets at the eaves are often distinguishing marks.

3. The **Fun Pier**, dedicated in 1995, was built on top of the government jetty, which dates to the creation of the harbor in the 1880s. It is a popular spot for fishing, bird watching, and viewing the harbor and Bay. Due west is the mouth of the York River and Middle Peninsula, visible on a very clear day or evening. On the left is the entrance to Cape Charles Harbor and the pier where rail cars are still loaded on and off barges for the tug crossing to Little Creek in Norfolk. This pier is due west of the site of the former Pennsylvania RR steamer, railroad terminal, and dock. Originally tracks ran to its end to enable employees to fish.

Bayshore Concrete Products Corp. can be seen on the south side of the harbor. Founded in 1961 for the construction of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel that opened in 1964, the company continues to manufacture concrete structures, shipping them out by barge, rail or truck.

4. The former **Northampton Hotel at the west end of Mason** was built by Richard Fletcher in 1909 and became a hotel in the 1930s. The wing was added about 1940.

East on Mason past Harbor Ave. begins the main business district of Cape Charles. Mason Avenue was a one sided street, with all shops overlooking the activity of the railroad and harbor. Early photographs show substantial buildings, many with three story porches. These large commercial and hotel buildings reflect Cape Charles' former position as the commercial center and largest town in Northampton County.

5. **At Mason and Pine** are two **bank buildings**. The Romanesque style brick bank on the west corner was built in 1907 by L.E. Mumford, a prominent local businessman. Its rounded arches and heavy details give it charm and dignity. Just across Pine is a 1921 limestone bank building with grand, Neoclassical style interior and exterior. It now houses Bank of America.

6. **Further east on Mason** is the home of **Charlie & Margaret's Country Store**. It was the private collection of Charlie and Margaret Carlson, who set up a store as it might have appeared around 1900, with local artifacts. The contents have been sold to the Town and Cape Charles Historical Society.

7. **On the west corner of Mason and Strawberry** is a deep four story brick building, formerly **Wilson's Department Store** and once the largest building and department store on the Eastern Shore.

8. **301 Mason at Strawberry**. This part of an 1891 Italianate brick row is unusual for its second floor brick pedimented window crowns and cornice along the top of the building. On this site was the first building in Cape Charles - a bar room built in 1883.

9. Next door is the **Art Deco Historic Palace Theater**, first opened in the fall of 1941. The recently refurbished interior retains its original look, including two dramatic wall murals that were painted in New York. It is now used as a community performing arts center and theater, owned and operated by Arts Enter Cape Charles.

10. **At Peach and Mason**. This service station was built by Pure Oil in the 1930s in Gothic Revival style, few examples of which remain. Another can be found east of town at Rt. 184 and Parson's Circle.

11. **At Plum and Mason**, the 1930 **Art Deco Municipal Building** houses the fire department, organized in 1888, and town offices. The fire department still owns its first piece of motorized equipment, a 1924 American LaFrance engine, which is still seen in parades and special events.

12. **515 Mason** is the oldest house in Cape Charles. It was built in 1883 on railroad property as the first **Cape Charles Hotel**, and was later moved across the street to its present site. An early photo on display at the Museum shows the hotel and some residents.

13. **One block east at Nectarine** is the **Hump** (Rt. 642), an elevated road above the rail yards, first constructed in 1912 when this was the only entrance to Cape Charles. As Cape Charles was built on a farm surrounded by a fence, before 1892 travelers had to pay a 5 cent toll for someone to open the gate just outside the town. It is said to have been the only such town in Virginia.

Across the Hump, turn right to reach the Harbor, the Coast Guard Station, the Sustainable Technologies Industrial Park, and Bayshore Concrete. Cape Charles Harbor is the only deep water harbor on the lower Eastern Shore, and continues to accommodate both commercial vessels and pleasure craft. It has three free public boat launching ramps, much used by local and visiting fishermen.

On Rt. 642 just beyond the harbor turnoff is the former **Rosenwald School**, one of many built circa 1930 with funds from the Sears Roebuck CEO and philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald. The school served African-American students from first grade into high school from the 1930s to the 1960s. It was later sold and converted to a seafood processing plant.

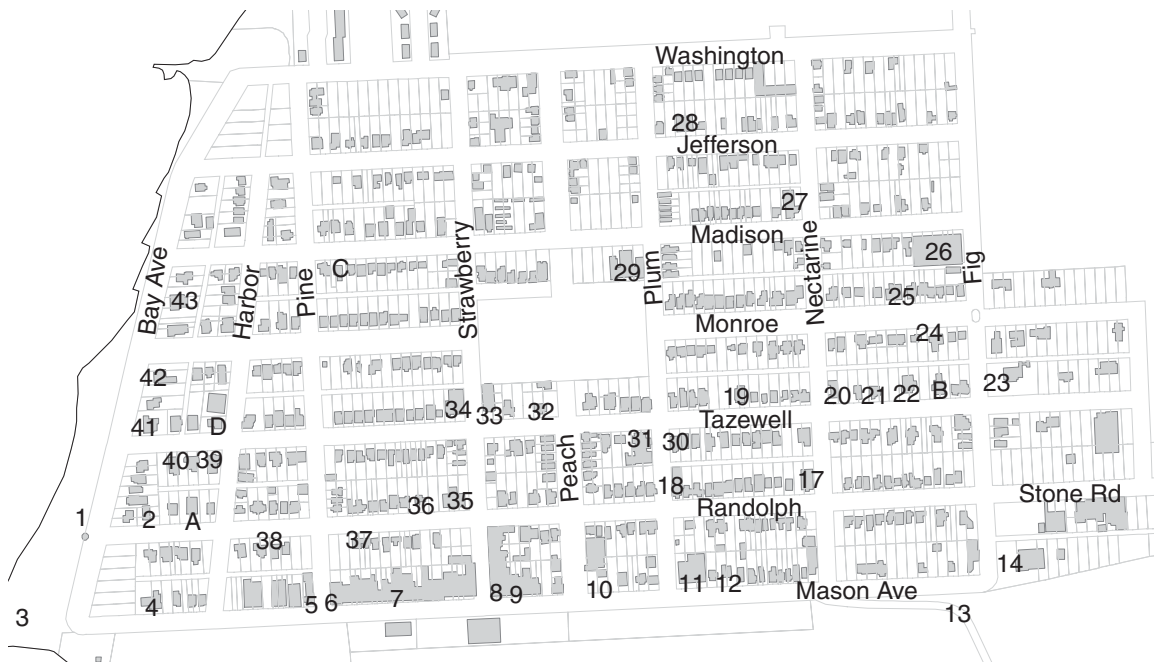
14. **Kellogg Building at Mason and Fig**. This flamboyant Moorish Deco style building, built around 1925, was for many years an auto dealership and service station. On this site in 1885 Mr. B.F. Kellogg built the first private dwelling in Cape Charles. In 1898 an ice house (used to store ice only) was built across the street. It was converted to an ice plant (to make ice) in 1907 and incorporated in 1919 as Heckle and Kellogg, Inc. Ice was essential for preserving the seafood and produce shipped north on the railroad. The ice plant was torn down in 1999 to make way for the new drugstore, built in 2001. The drugstore building has many architectural allusions to ice plant artifacts; note the compressor at the parking lot entrance and soda fountain constructed from the ice plant's original chimney. For many years this spot was known locally as "prosperity corner."

Sites 15 and 16 are on Rt. 184 heading out of town. Route 184 was built about 1920 and is named **Stone Road** because it was the first road in the county to be paved. The trees lining it are crepe myrtles, which flower in pink, red, lavender, and white from June to October. The trees were planted by the Woman's Club of the Eastern Shore, continuing all the way to the Maryland line.

15. **Cape Charles Museum & Welcome Center**. Built in 1947 as an electric power generating station, this late Industrial Deco style building served as a "peaking unit" facility for 40 years and was donated by Delmarva Power to the Cape Charles Historical Society in 1993. The original 1946 Busch-Sulzer diesel engine and generator remain on display, along with exhibits of old photos and ship models. The former Bloxom Passenger Station has been reconstructed east of the main building. Behind it are a Richmond Fredericksburg & Potomac baggage car and a Nickel Plate Railroad cabooses. Owned and operated by the Cape Charles Historical Society, the Museum is open April through November.

16. **Water Tower**. This 1992 award-winning design was patterned after the 1893 Cape Charles Light House on Smith Island. The tank holds 300,000 gallons of water and sits 217 feet above the ground.

17. **St. Charles Roman Catholic Church at Randolph and Nectarine**, organized in 1886, was the first Roman Catholic church on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. The building was erected in 1889. The adjacent rectory was built in 1893, and the former Catholic School behind the church, in 1898. The grave of the Rev. Edward Mickle, founder and pastor for more than 40 years,



lies between the church and rectory, and is the only grave ever authorized in the town. A columbarium (repository for human ash remains) was dedicated in 2003.

18. **Cape Charles Baptist Church, at Randolph and Plum**, was built in 1902. Originally all wood, it was brick veneered in 1975. The stick style roof and cross supports of the bell tower are typical elements of a style popular in America in the 1880s.

19. **The north side of Tazewell between Nectarine and Plum** hosts **Cassatt's Row**, consisting of ten houses at opposite ends of the block (four on the west end; six on the east). Built in 1887 by Alexander Cassatt to house railroad workers, these houses are among the oldest in town. The houses at the west end are fine examples of the Shingle style.

Across the street, note the gingerbread at 538 Tazewell. The daughter of W.H. Lambertson recalls watching her father design the pattern with pencil and rule, and cut it at home in the evenings with his keyhole saw.

20. **Emmanuel Episcopal Church at Tazewell and Nectarine**. Built in 1893 and remodeled in 1928 in the English Gothic Revival style, its red brick surface, square tower, and flared eaves are reminiscent of an English parish church.

21. **611 Tazewell**. This charming shingle and clapboard residence displays elements of both the Queen Anne and Shingle styles. The house was built in 1895 by bachelor R.H. Nicholas, superintendent of the NYP&N railroad.

22. **629 Tazewell**. Successive railroad superintendents lived here in "Honeysuckle Lodge" from 1900 to 1956. From 1894 to 1896 it was the home of Thomas Dixon, Jr., a famous New York minister who moved his family here to escape the unhealthy city conditions, though he continued to commute to his pulpit in New York every week. In 1905 he wrote *The Clansman*, on which the D.W. Griffith 1915 motion picture, *Birth of a Nation* was based.

23. **711 Fig Street**. The W.B. Wilson family, owners of the town's early hardware and department stores, built this large house around 1900 on land purchased from the estate of William L. Scott, when it was still outside the town's boundaries. Mr. Wilson never succumbed to the motor car, in the 1930s still driving his horse and buggy to Mason Avenue to check on business.

24. **644 Monroe**. Built in 1924 for the Kellogg family, this brick Colonial Revival house is distinguished by its parapeted gable roof. The Kelloggs were prominent citizens and businessmen.

25. **635/637 Monroe**. Rapid growth of the town created a de-

mand for this school building, third and oldest surviving, by 1894. The west wing was added in 1898, and frame additions, now demolished, followed. It served until 1912.

26. **At the corner of Madison and Fig. Wendell Distributing**. Joseph and Frank Wendell, Austrian immigrants, founded an ice and firewood hauling company in the 1890s. In the early 1900s they started a soft drink bottling plant, Frank Wendell Bottler, adding Budweiser and other beers after prohibition ended in 1934.

At the north end of Fig (about 1/4 mile) are King's Creek and King's Creek Marina and Villages, previously King's Creek Marina. On the other side of the creek are Cherrystone Aquafarms and Campground, on the site of the first official settlement (1620) on the Eastern Shore, known as the Towne Fields. The longest continuous court records in the U.S. dating back to 1632 originated at Towne Fields, first called Secretary's Land. The records are now housed in the county courthouse in Eastville.

27. **First Baptist Church, Madison at Nectarine**. This white frame building was built about 1887. It was moved to its current location in 1901.

In this neighborhood are many early examples of narrow two story blue-collar family houses.

28. **On Jefferson, near its intersection with Plum, is St. Stephen's African Methodist Episcopal Church** built in 1885 at 500 Monroe as the Bethany (northern) Methodist Church. It is the oldest church structure in Cape Charles and also housed the first public school classes, for whites only. St. Stephen's purchased it in 1889, when it became the first school for African-American children. It was moved to its present location in 1912.

29. **Cape Charles High School** was built in 1912 and expanded as the town grew. Known for its academic rigor and working honor system, it housed all 11 (later 12) grades until the town and county school systems were merged in 1987. It now serves various municipal and community functions. The tennis courts on the grounds are available to residents and their guests.

30. **The Northampton Memorial Library, Plum at Tazewell**, was dedicated in 1927 to the memory of local men who died in World War I, and was the first memorial library in Virginia. This charming 1900 shingle Victorian was originally the Presbyterian Church.

31. **Trinity United Methodist Church**, opposite the Library on Plum. The original brick and shingled Queen Anne structure was built by W.H. Lambertson in 1893 as Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Note its interesting shingle steeple.

32. **403 Tazewell**. This Colonial Revival (1906) house was built for James W. Wilson, son of W.B. Wilson (22) by prominent Norfolk architect James W. Lee.

Peach and Monroe retain their original boulevard personalities with landscaped medians leading into **Central Park**. The houses on Peach are uniformly of small house Victorian character.

33. **309 Tazewell was Peggy Read's Boarding House**, one of the earliest Cape Charles houses, built in 1885. It was moved to this site in 1925 when the First Presbyterian Church (34) was built.

34. **The First Presbyterian Church of Cape Charles, Strawberry at Tazewell**, moved to this Gothic Revival building in 1926. L.E. Mumford, prominent businessman and owner of the Mumford Bank, gave most of the money for its construction resulting in the elaborate granite edifice.

35. **The Post Office, at Randolph and Strawberry** and built in 1932, is a fine example of the Colonial Revival style adapted for public use.

36. **237 Randolph** beside the Post Office. This Gothic Revival Vernacular house still retains its iron fence, the only one surviving in town.

37. **212 & 214 Randolph**. These 19th century houses have settled toward each other so that their roofs are almost overlapping.

38. **109 Randolph** is a brick Sears bungalow that retains original stained glass windows and brick and wood detail. It is easily recognizable in the Sears Catalog.

39. **10 Tazewell**. Built in 1920, this house is a fine example of the Bungalow style.

40. **6 Tazewell**. One of the many houses built by W.H. Lambertson, this white frame structure has an interesting hitching post in front and a graceful, curving wrap-around porch. Built in 1912, it was the home of L.E. Mumford (34).

41. **204 Bay at Tazewell** is a Colonial Revival with an elegant *porte cochere* to the left. It was constructed in 1914 by a Mr. E. T. Dryden, who also built the double houses behind it on Tazewell and the four-unit row house on Harbor just north of Tazewell.

42. **212 Bay** is the only French eclectic style house in town. The curved hip roof and porch arches are characteristic of this style. Five dormers originally on the third floor were destroyed by fire.

43. **306 Bay**. Built in 1914 for the J.V. Moore family, this large Neoclassical house by the noted Norfolk architect William N. Diehl is typical of the more substan-