

CAPITAL REGION LAND CONSERVANCY

Varina LandLab History Guide

May 2023

Original Stewards

Capital Region Land Conservancy (CRLC) was not the first steward of the land now called Varina LandLab at Deep Bottom. Archaeology indicates that the first use of the Deep Bottom area by indigenous people probably occurred during the Paleo-Indian and Archaic Period between 8,000 and 6,500 BCE. Indigenous peoples depended on the land for hunting, fishing, and gathering plants and fibers. During the Transitional period (2,000 – 1,200 BCE), a large base camp was established that later become an intensely occupied settlement and principal place of residence during the Late Woodland period (1,200 BCE – 1,000 CE).



This property is within the historic territory of the Arrohattoc tribe of the Powhatan Confederacy, who lived in this area at the time of the arrival of English settlers in 1607. While John Smith's 1624 map indicates a Arrohatteck village at a nearby location, archaeological evidence suggests that a large village was located on portions of this land at that time. This is further evidenced by the records of the European colonists that took this land from its original stewards.

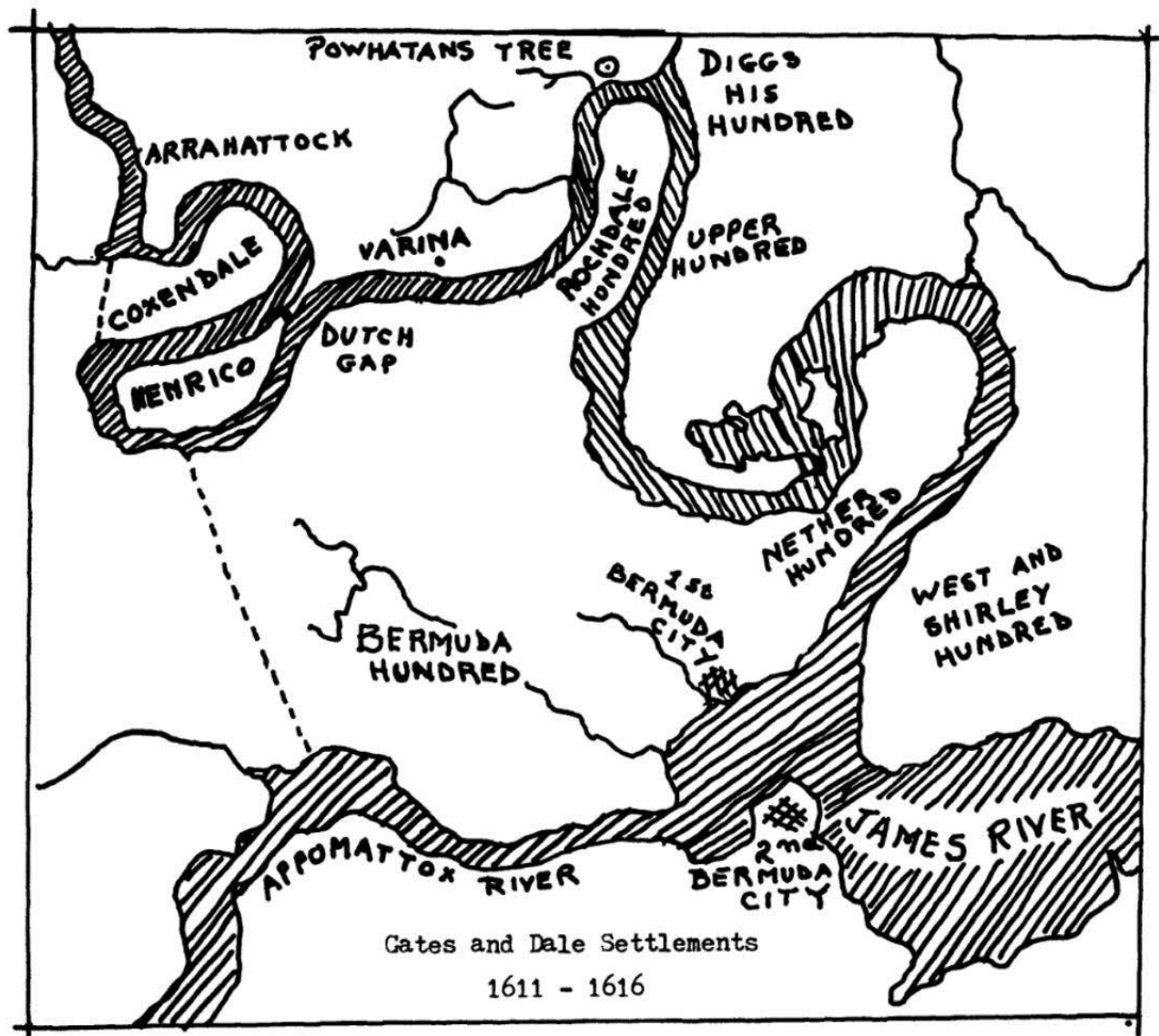
Powhatan's Tree

The earliest legal record of this property is found in a 1634 lease of 60 acres to Seth Ward in Patent Book 1 in the Register of the Land Office of Henrico County. The land was identified as, "abutting West upon land of DANIELL SHERLEY, East towards a tree knowne as Powhatan's Tree, Southerly upon 3 Mile Swamp and Northly into the maine woods." By 1643, Ward had acquired a total of 350 acres, "bounded by two myle creek and Varina plantation, upon three myle swamp taking in said swamp extending in breadth towards the four mile creek, bounded at the end by a running brook called roundabout." Seth Ward sold the property to Morgan Pierce in 1650.

The reference to "Powhatan's Tree" is significant. It marked a meeting between Opechancanough, the paramount chief of Tsenacomoco, and missionary George Thorpe of Berkeley Hundred sometime after 1619 and before 1622 during which the 1614 peace treaty between Powhatan and the English settlers was reaffirmed by stamping the words of the treaty into a brass plaque and affixing it to an oak tree.

The Second Anglo-Powhatan War began on March 22, 1622 with the assault on colonial settlements and the destruction of Henricus. Thorpe was killed at Berkeley Hundred during the assault. War broke out for the next decade. Peace was again agreed to in 1632. This is important to understand contextually because two years later Seth Ward began to acquire the land surrounding "Powhatan's Tree" marking the first recorded deed for this property.

The Third Anglo-Powhatan War began in 1644 and ended in 1646 when Opechancanough was captured by Virginia colonial governor William Berkeley and died while in English custody. It is after this conflict that references to "Powhatan's Tree" were systematically removed from the description of the property boundaries, centering the colonialist perspective in the historical record.



Stoneware Pottery

Archaeological research on the property has uncovered decorated ceramics sherds, referred to as Townsend ware, created by indigenous peoples who lived in the area from the Late Woodland Period to the pre-contact era. After colonial settlement, the clay found at Deep Bottom, Four Mile Creek, and Bailey Creek was also an important resource for the burgeoning stoneware pottery businesses of Henrico County in the early 19th Century. Spurred by the demand that followed a reduction in imports due to the Embargo Act (1807), the Non-Intercourse Act (1809), and the War of 1812, a number of commercial potteries were operating near the village of Newmarket. These included Richard Randolph, Samuel Frayser, Thomas Amoss, and most notably Stephen B. Sweeney (1799-1863). Sweeney is credited with bringing substantial commerce to Deep Bottom at a time when stoneware was at its height in popularity, production, and consumption.



Sweeney came to own several hundred acres in the area, including portions of the property, and enslaved people of African descent to labor in his commercial pottery operations. By 1860, Sweeney's annual stoneware production was worth \$3,000. In addition Sweeney operated a hotel called "Claymount" that catered to travelers on New Market Road.

Ferry House Chimney



One of the most notable landmarks at Varina LandLab is an original fireplace chimney which stands in a low-lying area by the James River. The chimney is all that remains of a former ferry keeper's house that operated during the 1850s when the property was owned by Col. Titus C. Rice, a Connecticut-born merchant who manufactured stove pipes in Richmond. The ferry operated by Rice crossed the James River to Jones' Neck in Chesterfield County. Rice also cultivated wheat in Henrico County and was commended for "another

fine specimen" by the Virginia State Agricultural Society in 1854. It is likely that wheat grown on the property was milled into flour at nearby grist mills on Four Mile Creek and was then exported from Deep Bottom Landing where farmers and manufacturers like Sweeney could ship their goods by water. Flour was second only to tobacco for Virginia industries and exports in the antebellum period.

Civil War Battlefields

The site of Deep Bottom Landing and Rice's ferry crossing also became an important strategic location during the American Civil War. The land now called Varina LandLab played a prominent role in several Civil War battles, including the Battles of First and Second Deep Bottom as well as the Battle of New Market Heights. The site contains numerous earthworks and rifle pits that were used by Union troops during the Richmond-Petersburg campaign.



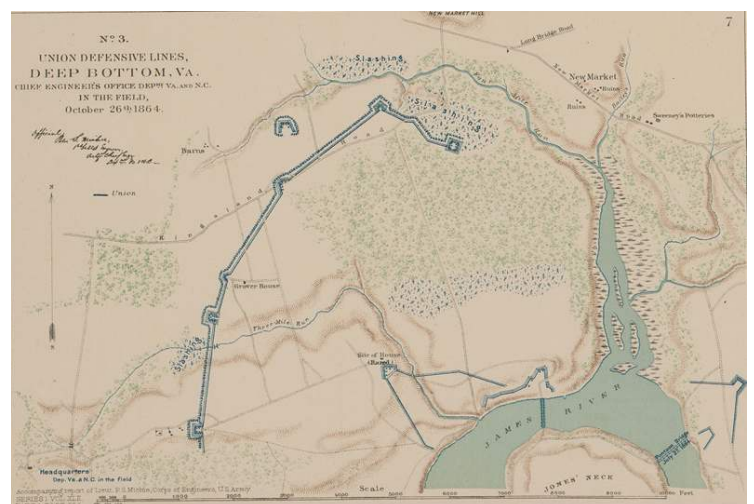
On Jun 20th, 1864 engineers assisted by 2,000 troops erected the first pontoon bridge crossing at Deep Bottom. A picket-line and entrenched earthen bridgehead was quickly established. It wouldn't be until July 26th that Confederates led by Maj. Gen. Joseph B. Kershaw would attack the position setting the stage for the First Battle of Deep Bottom.

The First Battle of Deep Bottom was fought July 27 - 29, 1864. Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and Maj. Gen.

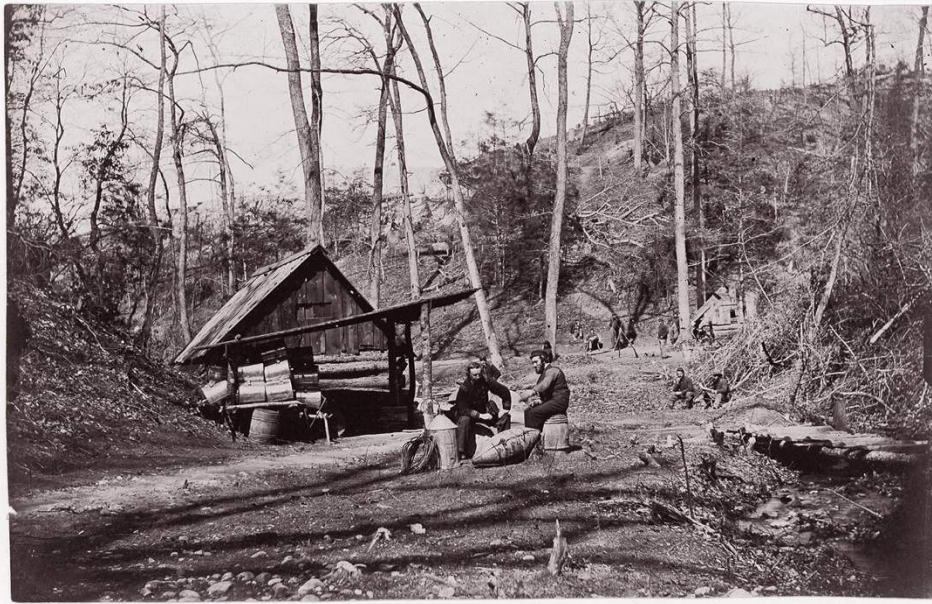
Benjamin F. Bullter sent a Union force

of 24,000 soldiers under Maj. Gens. Winfield S. Hancock and Philip H. Sheridan to simultaneously threaten Richmond, and its railroads, while preparing an attack on the Petersburg defensive line that would become the Battle of the Crater. Because the Union infantry and cavalry force was unable to break through the Confederate fortifications at Camp Hill and Camp Holly by attacking from the east at Bailey's Creek and Fussell's Mill, they withdrew to the bridgehead location and back south of the James River. However, the attack achieved its desired effect of drawing Confederate forces away from Petersburg.

Nearly all of the Property lies within the core area of the First Deep Bottom Battlefield as determined by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission of the National Park Service in 1990. Additionally, nearly all of the Property also lies within the core of the Second Deep Bottom Battlefield as determined by the Commission. The Commission was tasked with identifying and evaluating the most important civil war battlefields and historic sites for eventual conservation.



Deploying the same strategy as before, Maj. Gen. Hancock led 28,000 Union soldiers back across pontoon bridges on August 14, 1864. After days of indecisive skirmishing with 327 killed and 1,851 wounded Union soldiers, the Confederates drove back the threat and the Second Battle of Deep Bottom was over on August 20.



Another month would go by before the Union Army would again send 26,600 soldiers across the river on pontoon bridges to Deep Bottom. In the early hours of September 29, 1864, Maj. Gen. David B. Birney's X Corps augmented by a United States Colored Troops (USCT) division under Brig. Gen. Charles J. Paine from the XVIII Corps would attack Confederate defensive positions at the New Market Line. This

third attack that was originally called the Third Battle of Deep Bottom is better remembered as the Battle of New Market Heights where 14 USCTs received the Medal of Honor for feats of valor during their victory.

During the three battles that ensued at Deep Bottom in 1864, more than 1,300 Union and Confederate soldiers died and another 7,000 were wounded.

Life After Reconstruction

After the Civil War and emancipation of those formerly enslaved, Black ownership of land in Varina flourished. Portions of the Varina LandLab were owned by the Allen and Morris families who purchased 81 acres in 1888. In 1922, the Allen family sold its land marking a pattern of Black farmers losing more than 12 million acres of land over the 20th Century. A family cemetery remains on the property and contains two headstones – one for Maria Allen Morris (1867-1953) and the other for her son Paul Morris (1894-1947). Paul Morris served in World War I with the 545th Engineer Service Battalion that included more than 1,000 African American men who were mobilized at Camp A.A. Humphreys (Fort Belvoir). The 545th provided services for road construction including maintaining more than 107 kilometers during the month of October 1918.

