

A Driving Tour of Gloucester County's Country Stores & Rural Post Offices

Written in February 1999, this project received a National Association of Counties Award.

Gloucester County's history begins with the first European settlement in Jamestown of 1607. It was in Gloucester County that Chief Powhatan had one of his royal villages and legend suggests that it was here that Pocahontas, daughter of Chief Powhatan, risked her life to save John Smith, founder of the Jamestown colony.

Gloucester County grew rapidly in the 17th century. Many land grants were issued to European gentry to farm the fertile Virginia soil. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Gloucester was one of the richest counties in Virginia with its grand plantations.

A location with river access to the Chesapeake Bay caused Gloucester to be ravaged by the Civil War. But the County experienced a rebirth after the Civil War with steamship lines that ran between West Point, Norfolk, and Baltimore. Citizens of Gloucester County clustered in small villages along the banks of the surrounding rivers, not only to profit from the steamship trade, but also for rich fishing and seafood harvesting.

Country Stores and Rural Post Offices sprouted up along the rivers during this period and were quite profitable. Many areas had several stores to serve the expanding population. The prevalence of the automobile, in the early 20th Century, created a new growth in stores and gas stations along major roads. These two types of stores operated simultaneously until the 1930s. Eventually, increased trucking caused the demise of steamship travel and many of the coastal stores struggled to survive.

This tour celebrates the country store and reminds us of its significance during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Travel back to a time when it was a long walk to pick up a necessity from a small store in a rural village. A few of these stores and post offices are still operating: stop by and experience this simple way of life. Enjoy your trip!

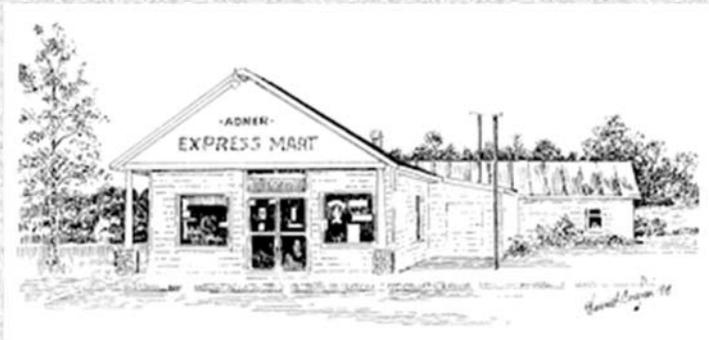


1 - Woods Cross Roads Gas Station & Store

9626 George Washington Memorial Highway Rt. 17. This area, named for John and Anne Woods who operated a tavern here in the 1600s, was a major timber producing region. The Woods Cross Roads post office is one of four ante-bellum post offices in Gloucester County. The tavern and other buildings existing at this intersection in the 19th Century are no longer standing. The current structure, erected in the 1920s, is the only one left. The tornado of September 5, 1935 “swept several buildings to destruction.”



2 - Adner Store (Adner Express Mart)



12228 George Washington Memorial Highway - Rt. 17. Though modernized, this building is the original Adner Store which dates to the 1920s. Since the building is located on the historic north-south route connecting Gloucester Point to King and Queen county, its focus has always been on automobile travel. It is currently a convenience store and gas station.

3 - Freeport Marina & Post Office

12068 Freeport Road - Rt. 673. Stores have been located on this Piankatank River site since the Civil War. The current store was constructed in the 1900s after its predecessor was washed away by a hurricane. The Freeport Store was originally an overnight berth for the Piankatank Steamship line. Steamship service ended in 1932 due to the popularity of automobile transportation. The store is a way station and scenic port for boaters, but landlubbers are welcome also! Open seasonally (Memorial Day until...) Saturday & Sunday 10 am to 5 pm.



4 - Harcum Store & Post Office (Hazel's Store)



7485 Dutton Road - Rt. 198. Originally Harcum Store and Post Office, the store was constructed in the 1900s on the main east-west route across the northern portion of Gloucester County. The name Harcum came from the owner/operator of the store who named the village upon applying for the post office. The store closed in 1998.

5 - Brick Store (James Store Post Office & Store)

10290 John Clayton Memorial Highway Rt. 14. The history of this store dates to the mid 1600s. It is believed to have been the site of the first ever Gloucester County Courthouse. In the late 1700s, when Mathews was still a part of Gloucester County, it was the location of the Clerk of the County of Gloucester. The original brick building also served as a way station for travelers. When Edward James renamed the store in the late 19th century, James Store became the name of both store and community. The brick building burned in 1922 and was replaced by the wood frame building of today. The Post Office closed in 1992 and the store in 1995.



6 - Arthur Tab Store (Nuttall & Company & Ware Neck Post Office)



6495 Ware Neck Road - Rt. 623. Originally built by Arthur Tab about 1875, this store was purchased by Rudolph Nuttall in 1944. Home to the Ware Neck Post Office since 1951, the store is still owned and operated by Mr. Nuttall, who maintains an interesting inventory. Open Monday - Saturday.

Building Update: Mr. Nuttall has passed away, the Post Office is still in place and his general store which is still operating has been updated a bit.

7 - E. B. Brown Store & Schley Post Office

5778 Ware Neck Road - Rt. 623. Sam Brown opened the original Schley store in 1898 and the Post Office in 1902. The name Schley was chosen by his mother-in-law, to honor a U. S. Navy Admiral who traveled to Antarctica. The present building was built in c. 1910 by E. B. Brown, one of two stores he owned in Ware Neck. An unusual characteristic of this store is the walkway around the interior walls of the second story. The store has closed but the post office continues to operate



8 - Williams Store & Wan Post Office (Ware Academy)

7936 John Clayton Memorial Highway Rt. 14. One of the largest country stores in the 1920s, the William's Store and Wan Post Office, was the first stop when leaving Gloucester Courthouse for Mathews Courthouse. This land-locked store thrived with the increased automobile traffic of the late 1920s. It presently serves as Ware Academy, a private school.





9 - Horsley Store & Short Lane Post Office

6721 George Washington Memorial Highway - Rt. 17. This building was originally a Texaco station, post office, and country store for the town of Short Lane. The name Short Lane is derived from the short road which connects George Washington Memorial Highway (Rt. 17) with T. C. Walker Road (Rt. 629). Located along the major north-south route in Gloucester County, the store's focus, with its covered gas pumps, was on automobile travel. A Texaco insignia still hangs in the porch roof gable.

Building Update: Short Lane Ice Cream Company now operates in this historic building. Featuring all home made ice creams, you will want to stop by for a treat. Open Tuesday thru Saturday, seasonally.

10 - W. E. & J. Edgar Pointer Store & Bena Post Office

8835 Guinea Road Rt. 216. Originally the Pointer Store, this building was constructed in 1904 by W. E. & J. Edgar Pointer. It was one of three stores at this busy intersection. In 1957-58 the road was paved & the store had to be rolled back. Customers were allowed to remain in the building to finish their meals. As they left they had to watch their step because the building had been elevated. It is currently occupied by the Bena Post Office.

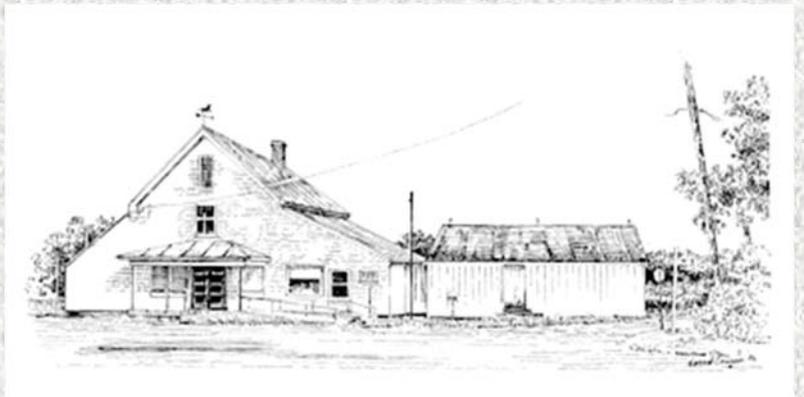


11 - Hall Brothers Store (C. B. Rowe & Son)

8850 Guinea Road - Rt. 216. The C. B. Rowe & Son country store was built in the 1880s & once served as the Bena Post Office. With the passing of C. B. (Buck) Rowe, Jr., son of the original C. B. Rowe, who purchased it from the Hall Brothers & renamed the store in 1920, the store has closed. In 1957-58 the road was paved & the store was rolled back to its present site. But locals still gather there to have a cup of coffee and reminisce.

12 - J. M. Shackelford's Store & Severn Post Office (Frogs Place)

3051 Guinea Circle Rt. 652. A store has been located on this site since the early 1850s. The Shackelford family, one of the earliest to arrive in Gloucester County, continues to be involved in water related businesses such as fishing and oyster harvesting in the Guinea area. They owned and operated the store until 1970 and the post office until 1996.



This publication was created and produced by the Gloucester County Historical Committee and the Parks, Recreation & Tourism Department. Partial funding and support was obtained through a grant from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

For additional information on the history of Gloucester County please visit the Gloucester Museum of History. The museum is open Monday thru Saturday from 11:00 am until 3:00 pm. Appointments can also be scheduled by calling 804-693-1234.

For additional information on Gloucester County, stop by the Visitor's Center at 6509 Main Street. Or visit Gloucester Tourism on the web www.gloucesterva.info/tourism



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Artwork Courtesy of Harriet Cowen, About the artist. A special thanks goes to Harriet Cowen who generously donated all of the artwork for this brochure. Ms. Cowen, was a resident of Bena, Virginia, used her masterful talents with pen and ink drawing to capture the beauty and detail of the old country stores. She graciously agreed to undertake this project which required her to visit many of the sites as well as working from photographs.

In her lifetime Ms. Cowen has completed more than 400 commissioned "Home Portraits" which were her specialty. She was a talented artist, a devoted citizen and a woman that lived her life. As a teacher, musician, artist, traveler, friend and student of life she touched many lives and is missed by everyone she encountered.