



PATH OF HISTORY

SELF GUIDED TOUR





TAKE A WALK

THROUGH HISTORY

Explore 250 years of American history – and one of the Mid Atlantic’s most notable collections of Federal and Greek Revival homes – in Olde Towne Portsmouth.

The community dates back to 1752, when Portsmouth’s founder William Crawford divided 65 acres of his waterfront plantation into streets and half-acre lots. He named the community for his family’s ancestral hometown of Portsmouth, England.

Today, Olde Towne’s charming collection of period homes, churches, monuments, museums, and African-American heritage sites celebrate a neighborhood that survived war, slavery, fire, and even a Yellow Fever pandemic. And luckily, lived to tell us all about it.



PATH OF HISTORY SELF-GUIDED TOUR

- Historic Sites & Homes
- Places of Worship
- Museums & Monuments
- Path of History

1 Gosport Park (POH)

A collection of 14 “Path of History” signs and mounted military artifacts just outside the historic North End of the Norfolk Naval Shipyard that chronicle the history of the yard.

2 Railroad Museum of Virginia CLOSED

See the restored Norfolk and Western Locomotive No. 1134, known as one of the Lost Engines of Roanoke.

3 Elizabeth River (POH)

Information about early Native American life on the river.

- 4 Hog Island Lighthouse Fresnel Lens (POH)**
This 1896 First Order Fresnel Lens stands ten feet high and is made of 250 prisms of optical glass.
- 5 Civil War Trails: Gosport Shipyard**
Details the role of the Gosport Shipyard during the Civil War.
- 6 Seaboard Air Line Railroad Building (POH)**
Railroad headquarters from 1894-1958.
- 7 William “Buffalo Bill” Cody** PLAQUE
Commemorates the last American performance of this traveling show on November 11, 1916.
- 8 Naval Shipyard Museum (POH)**
Constructed in 1919, this structure served as the local ferry’s maintenance building until 1955. It was converted into a museum in 1963.
- 9 Lightship Portsmouth (POH)**
Launched in 1916, this ‘floating lighthouse’ is now a museum with internal displays of what life was like aboard in 1955.
- 10 The Coast Guard (POH)**
This sign details the United States Coast Guard’s presence in Portsmouth since 1820.
- 11 Cassell-McRae House** 108 LONDON ST.
Built in 1829, the home features a double sunburst window and a hand carved arched doorway. Mark Twain stayed in the Cassell-McRae House in 1907 while a guest speaker at the Jamestown Exposition.

12 Benthall-Brooks Row 419-421 CRAWFORD ST

Built by a sea captain named Benthall Brooks, these three brick English basement homes date back to the 1840s. Captain Brooks lived in no. 421, and rumor has it he financed their construction by selling Caribbean rum. No. 419 still has the servant's quarters in the back of the house.

13 Lafayette Park

The park holds several monuments including the *Congressional Medal of Honor* monument, the *Shipmates Memorial*, and the historic marker commemorating the return of the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824.

14 Spanish American War Monument

One of at one least fifty castings across the country, *The Hiker* was sculpted by Theo Alice Ruggles Kitson in 1905. The statue was erected by the citizens of Portsmouth and Norfolk County on May 23, 1942.

15 Grice-Neely House 202 NORTH ST.

Built in 1820 for US Navy master builder Frances Grice, this house is of the Creole style and retains its original wrought iron balcony. Grice worked at the shipyard for decades and designed one of the Navy's last paddle frigates, USS *Powhatan*.

16 Boarding House 201 NORTH ST.

Built in 1784, this house served as a boarding house for ferry workers. Previous owners include Claudius Murdaugh, a judge in the Court of Hastings and John Gayle, a member of the state legislature.



17 The Hill House Museum 221 NORTH ST.

Portsmouth's only historic house museum is furnished entirely with family belongings from the 19th and 20th centuries. The Hill family lived in the story-filled house for over 150 years, from the early 1800s until 1961.

18 High Victorian House 218 NORTH ST.

An excellent example of High Victorian architecture, this house has a stained-glass fan light and plaster wreaths adorning the third floor. The wreaths and stained-glass continue onto the second level. A curved front porch atop a basement entrance completes this Victorian beauty.

19 The Washington Reed House 351 MIDDLE ST.

The home was originally a two-and-one-half story, six room house built by Captain John Thompson. After the Civil War, Washington Reed purchased the home and added six additional rooms. It is an excellent example of late-Georgian architecture.

20 Leigh-Cox House 300 NORTH ST.

A classical Georgian style home, it was built in 1800 by Dr. William Leigh and later sold to Virginia Militia General John Hodges. Hodges later served as Portsmouth's Postmaster, and the Hodges Ferry section of Portsmouth is named after another piece of his property.

21 The Macon House Hotel (POH)

305-309 NORTH AND 350 MIDDLE ST

Built in the 1830s, this resort hotel also served as a Union Hospital during the Civil War. While the resort entrance faced Middle Street, the POH sign is on North Street.

22 Middle Street (POH)

See examples of Federalist, Victorian, and Colonial Revival architecture and learn about Billy Flora, a free Black man from Portsmouth who served as the local blacksmith. A playground, Glasgow Park, is at this location.

23 Leitner House 215 GLASGOW ST.

Named for the 20th century owners who restored it, The Leitner House was originally a one-story home built in 1785. In 1870, the old city market building was moved here and added as a second story whose windows do not align. In the upstairs window, a black metal “Philadelphia Busybody,” was invented by Benjamin Franklin to allow the resident to see activity on the street without being seen.

24 Irish Row House 205 GLASGOW ST.

The last of the Irish Row houses that existed in Portsmouth. These “rows” were settled by Irish immigrants in the early 19th century. This house has a walk-in fireplace and a 24-inch stairway leading to its loft, in the style of cottages in Ireland.

25 The Pass House 422 CRAWFORD ST.

With 24 rooms covering 5,300 sq. feet, this Greek Revival-style home was built in 1841 by local attorney James Murdaugh. Though the Murdaughs temporarily relocated after the Civil War, the family did ultimately return. In 1895, Ellie Murdaugh married John Archer Lejeune in the grand foyer. Lejeune played a critical role in re-organizing the United States Marines in the 1920s, and North Carolina’s Camp Lejeune is named in his honor. It’s called the Pass House because during the Civil War, passes required to leave Portsmouth were issued here.

26 The Crawford House 430 CRAWFORD ST.

In the parking lot of the modern Crawford House luxury apartments once stood the Crawford House Hotel. Built in 1835, it played an important role in the Underground Railroad. Eliza Baines, a slave who worked at the hotel, would obtain ship arrival and departure times from ship captains to aid escaping slaves in securing passage towards freedom.

27 The Red Lion Tavern 218-220 LONDON ST.

Built in the mid eighteenth century as a tavern for soldiers and sailors, old menus and a cockfighting pit were discovered in the cellar during renovations. One of the owners, Mr. John Cornelius Portlock Edwards, was a very colorful character who was buried standing up beside his two favorite horses and four dogs.

28 The Ball-Nivison House 417 MIDDLE ST.

Built in the 1750s, the house was built by John Nivison and originally located on Crawford Street. Moved to its current location to make way for the Seaboard Air Line Railroad in 1869, the house was used as a barracks during the War of 1812. The home also entertained the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824 and President Andrew Jackson in 1833.

29 William “Billy” Flora PLAQUE

Billy Flora was a free Black and the town’s blacksmith who distinguished himself at the Battle of Great Bridge (December 1775) during the onset of the Revolutionary War. His livery stable stood on the corner of London and Middle, where the London Commons Condominiums now stand.

30 Federal Home with Italianate Updates

423 LONDON ST.

Originally built in 1846, this house was a model for the houses at 419 and 421, both built 40 years later. A Federal style frame dwelling, it received an Italianate update with the installation of brackets at the cornice line. During the Civil War, it was used as a hospital and later an apothecary shop.

31 Provost Marshal's House 412 LONDON ST.

Considered one of the oldest homes in Portsmouth, this colonial bungalow was likely built before 1750. During the Union occupation of Portsmouth, the area's Provost Marshal worked out of this home.

32 Parker House 420 COURT ST.

An excellent example of Victorian architecture complete with exquisite brick and ironwork, the home was built by Joseph Parker for his family of 12 children in 1874. The Sacred Heart above the doorway is a symbol of his Catholic faith. His brother William lived directly across London Street at 430 Court with an even larger family of 16 children.

33 Pre-Fabricated House (POH) 401 COURT ST.

During the California Gold Rush of 1849-50, there was a massive demand for prefabricated frame houses. The Niemeyer House is one of those "ready to put up" designs often shipped west by boat and rail.

34 Elks Lodge (POH) 329 NORTH ST.

An elaborate example of Romanesque Revival architecture, this building was originally built in 1894 for the Armistead family. It later became the Elks Lodge and appeared in the opening credits of the TV show, Dr. Madblood.

35 The Bain House 326 NORTH ST.

The house sits on the original site of General Cornwallis's Portsmouth headquarters. Cornwallis and his troops sailed from Portsmouth to Yorktown to fight the final battle of the American Revolution. The Bain House was built in 1830 by Antonio Bilisoly. The Bain brothers purchased the home just after the Civil War. They were bankers and in 1885, were involved in the biggest bank fraud scheme in Portsmouth history.

36 Trinity Church Rectory 340 COURT ST.

The Trinity Church Rectory is one of the best local examples of a traditional English Basement home. Built in 1825 by Baptist minister Thomas Hume, it is one of the tallest homes in Olde Towne. Trinity Church purchased the home in 1902 with the intention of tearing it down and building a new rectory. During the Great Depression, much of the original woodwork was sold to the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

37 Peters House 315 COURT ST.

Pierre L'Enfant, who designed the street plan for Washington, D.C., also designed this Classical Revival house as an officer's quarters for the Navy. William Peters, the clerk to the Admiral of the Navy Yard, obtained the plans and built the house in 1859. Confiscated by Union General Benjamin Butler for his headquarters in 1862, the home was sold in 1910 to John Porter, the grandson of the naval architect responsible for the Confederate ironclad *Virginia*. It has been in the Porter family ever since.

38 Civil War Trails: Olde Towne Portsmouth

Signage details the role of key Olde Towne buildings during the Civil War.

39 Craney Island (POH)

The Battle of Craney Island was an important engagement during the War of 1812. The Battle of the Ironclads also took place off Craney Island almost a half century later.

40 Crawford Bay (POH)

Crawford Bay is shown on nautical maps as Craford Bay, based on the original spelling of Portsmouth's founding father, William Craford (later Crawford).

41 Swimming Point Walk

Swimming Point Walk allows pedestrian access to the Swimming Point neighborhood, best known for the Dale-Reed House (200 Swimming Point), the oldest house in the city. Colonel William Crawford built this Georgian style house in 1732 for his plantation overseer Daniel Dale. It included 100 acres of plantation, and is the birthplace of Commodore Richard Dale, a famous American Revolutionary naval officer.

42 Fort Nelson Park (POH)

AT MAIN GATE TO PORTSMOUTH NAVAL MEDICAL CENTER

A collection of "Path of History" signs and naval artifacts. The park is dedicated to telling the story of the Portsmouth Naval Hospital, the oldest continuously running naval hospital in America.

43 Cedar Grove Cemetery (POH) FORT LN.

The first secular cemetery in Portsmouth, Cedar Grove was founded in 1831 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

44 Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church 637 NORTH ST.

Built and crafted by hand, the church has one of the oldest congregations in Portsmouth. Among its unique features are a number of benches which were crafted by enslaved church members. Tradition states that the altar rail was carved from trees that grew along North Street. Emanuel AME was pivotal for the Underground Railroad and has long played a leading role in the city's African American community.

45 Lincolnville (POH) 610 NORTH ST.

Portsmouth's first middle class African American neighborhood was developed in 1890. It was a 'city within a city,' with its own schools and services.

46 Civil War Trails: Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad ran through Portsmouth with a central hub being the Emanuel A.M.E. Church.

47 Hampton Place (POH)

Signage shows scenes of daily life in an area of land reclaimed from tidal marshes. The development of this part of Olde Towne began around 1890.

48 Richard Dale Monument

The monument commemorates Commodore Richard Dale, the first Commandant of the Gosport Shipyard (now Norfolk Naval Shipyard). Dale was born a few blocks to the north at Swimming Point and fought in the American Revolution.

49 Pritchard House and Yellow Fever (POH)

525 NORTH ST.

Built in 1775 by William Pritchard, a wealthy ship builder and merchant marine captain, the house was used as an orphanage for children whose parents died in the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1855. The official list showed nearly 400 children had passed through the Pritchard House during the ordeal.

50 The Watts House 500 NORTH ST.

Colonel Dempsey Watts built this house in 1799. It was originally constructed on a small hill between Dinwiddie and Washington Streets and moved to its current location in 1808. President Andrew Jackson and Congressman Henry Clay were entertained here. Chief Black Hawk, a British supporter during the War of 1812 and eventual leader of the Sauk tribe in the Midwest, was also a guest in this house.

51 Glasgow Street Park (POH) 411-431 GLASGOW ST.

The original church cemetery for the 1772 Monumental Methodist Church, this park is one of 103 sites statewide that form the War of 1812 Heritage Trail.

52 Brown-McMurrin House 359 WASHINGTON ST.

Originally built in 1789 as a one room deep, two story tall farmhouse on the highest point of Olde Towne, this home once belonged to Thomas Veale, heir to the city's founder, Colonel Crawford. The house's side windows are quite small as glass was very expensive in eighteenth century Virginia.

53 Smuggler's House 412 WASHINGTON ST.

Tradition holds that during the Civil War, Confederate women smuggled scarce, stolen medication from the Federal hospital at the Macon House Hotel on North Street by hiding it in the hems of their petticoats and stashing it under a stone beside the door of this house. It would then be picked up from here and smuggled through Union lines.

54 St. John's Episcopal Church

424 WASHINGTON ST.

Founded in 1848 by seven dissenting members of Trinity Church, the original church was located on Court Street. The current brick and stone building opened in 1896 and was designed by local architect Charles Cassell. It includes one of the nation's largest Tiffany and Company windows. The brass cross facing Washington Street promises "All Seats are Free" due to the original church charging rent for pews.

55 St. Paul's School 441 WASHINGTON ST.

Built in 1892 at the bequest of Elizabeth Burke Gregory, this school was operated by St. Paul's Catholic Church for almost 100 years. It became Portsmouth's first integrated school in 1959. Upon closing in 1991, it was one of the oldest Catholic schools in the nation. It was renovated in 2020 and is currently a commercial event venue called Cambridge Hall, named for the square in which it resides.



56

St. Paul Catholic Church 518 HIGH ST.

Built in 1897 after a fire destroyed the original wooden church, the current St. Paul's features fine stone carvings, such as a doorway relief of Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the only flying buttress in Olde Towne.

57

Monumental United Methodist Church

450 DINWIDDIE ST.

Founded in 1772 as one of the oldest Methodist congregations in America, members completed the current sanctuary in 1831. The steeple was replaced in 2020 after it caught fire in 2018, and the original Casavant organ was completely restored during the reconstruction process.

58

The Commodore Theatre 421 HIGH ST.

Opened in 1945, the Commodore was considered the best-equipped theatre in Hampton Roads. After a meticulous restoration in the late 1980s, including the original 1945 ticket box, it features recreations of the original murals, crystal chandeliers, restaurant style seating, a full balcony, a THX sound system, and 42-foot screen. The Commodore is on both the Virginia and National Registers of Historic Places.

59

1846 Courthouse (POH) 400 HIGH ST.

This classic example of Greek Revival architecture served as the Norfolk County Courthouse from 1846 to 1963. In 1984, the building reopened as the Courthouse Gallery on the second floor and the Portsmouth Children's Museum on the main floor. It currently serves as the Portsmouth Art & Cultural Center.

60 The Catholic Club 450 COURT ST.

The building was constructed as a single family home in 1859. During prohibition, the basement served as a speakeasy. Later in the 20th century, the main floor became the Catholic Club of Portsmouth and was used for events and parties. Today, you'll find a modern speakeasy-style restaurant in the basement.

61 Court Street Baptist Church (POH)

447 COURT ST.

Founded in 1789, the church burned and was rebuilt in 1901 using pink granite quarried in Salisbury, N. C. This church is one of only two Baptist churches in this exuberant Romanesque Revival style in the nation.

62 Original Town Square (POH) 340 HIGH ST.

Signage describes the original Towne Square and what role it played in building the community. The square contained a church, a courthouse, a jail, and a market.

63 Trinity Episcopal Church 500 COURT ST.

Originally known as Portsmouth Parish of the Church of England, this church was built in 1762 as part of the original town plan. The cemetery is the final resting place of several Revolutionary War heroes and the church bell was cracked while ringing in the 1781 victory at Yorktown. The crew of the CSS *Virginia* was blessed at the altar prior to the 1862 Battle of the Ironclads, and the church later served as a Union hospital for African American soldiers. Six Tiffany windows were added in 1894.



64

First Presbyterian Church 515 COURT ST.

Founded in 1822, the Presbyterian Church of Portsmouth was located on Middle Street. Fire twice destroyed the church in 1871 and 1877. The current building was dedicated in September 1877 as Court Street Presbyterian, reusing English pews and stenciled glass which were saved from the fire. Adopting the name First Presbyterian in 1897, the church continued to expand through 1974.

65

Portsmouth Public Library (POH)

601 COURT ST.

Portsmouth Public Library began in 1914 with support from the Seaboard Air Line Railroad and the YMCA. In 1963, it moved to its current location in the 1909 Federal Post Office building.

66

Pythian Castle 612 COURT ST.

The three story 'Pythian Castle' was built between 1897 and 1898 for the Knights of Pythias' Atlantic Lodge. It was designed by architect Edward Overman in the Romanesque Revival style typically favored by the period's fraternal lodges.

67

Knights of Columbus Hall 519 COUNTY ST.

Originally built as a Methodist Church and later converted into a Jewish Synagogue, this structure has been home to Knights of Columbus' Council 418 since 1958. This local chapter of the well-known fraternal organization was established June 4, 1899 by Father Thomas Brady and thirty-four laymen from St. Paul's Catholic Church.



68 Chevra T'helim Synagogue (POH)

607 EFFINGHAM ST.

Chevra T'helim, which means "Family of Psalms," was founded in 1917 and the current building opened in 1918. The oldest synagogue in Portsmouth, it was the centerpiece of a thriving first and second generation immigrant Jewish community. Today, it is home to the Jewish Museum and Cultural Center.

69 Ebenezer Baptist Church 728 EFFINGHAM ST.

Founded on the first Sunday of January in 1865 by John W. Godwin, the Morris family, Phillip Ackins, John Williams, and Susan King, the First Colored Baptist Church of Portsmouth initially secured the use of Temperance Hall at the corner of South and Middle Streets to hold services. After occupying several locations around town, the congregation built and dedicated the current facility in June of 1894.

70 St. James Episcopal Church 928 EFFINGHAM ST.

In 1890, some African Americans at Trinity decided to form their own congregation. Between 1893 and 1917, the congregation moved a number of times prior to purchasing a grocery, liquor, and wine store on the corner of Effingham and Bart Streets. They began renovating the building and added a parish hall in 1982.

71 Portsmouth Colored Community Library Museum (POH) 904 ELM ST — RECOMMEND DRIVING.

The Community Library served Portsmouth's Black citizens during a time of segregation between 1945 and 1963. It is now a museum dedicated to telling the story of segregation in Portsmouth.



FUN FACTS

ABOUT PORTSMOUTH:

1

Portsmouth is home to the nation's oldest naval shipyard.

2

America's first ferry service started crossing the Elizabeth River between Norfolk and Portsmouth in 1636. You can still cross the river by ferry today.

3

Built mostly by slaves and opened in 1857, Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church at 637 North Street served as an important secret hideaway on the Underground Railroad.





4

Portsmouth sits at Mile Marker Zero on the Intracoastal Waterway - halfway between Miami and Maine.

5

An 1851 map denoting the original Olde Towne Squares was used to place granite markers throughout the historic district. They provide a glimpse of what the city looked like when it was founded in 1752.

6

In 1833, America's first dry dock opened at Portsmouth's Gosport Navy Yard, now Norfolk Naval Shipyard. The dry dock is still in use today.

7

From 1919 to 1922, the U.S. Navy converted the collier *Jupiter* into the nation's first aircraft carrier, the USS *Langley*, at the U.S. Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth.





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