

Brunswick County, Virginia

2012 Virginia Association of Counties

Achievement Award Submission

Parks and Recreation

Fort Christanna Historical and Recreational Park



**Brunswick County – Fort Christanna Historical and Recreational Park
Parks and Recreation
2012 Achievement Award Submission
Virginia Association of Counties**

Narrative

Brunswick County is home to the Fort Christanna Historical Site. In 1714, Governor Alexander Spotswood began construction of Fort Christanna on Virginia's western frontier. The 3.5 acre five-sided fort was built, in part, to defend both the local settlers and the Indian tribes that were allied with the English. Fort Christanna was situated within a 36 square mile tract of land set aside for the Saponie and Occaneechee Indians. By 1717 the fort and the school at Christanna had lost its support in London and Virginia, however. The Indian School closed, and its schoolmaster went back east to teach Indian students at the College of William and Mary.

In 2007, the Brunswick County Board of Supervisors recognized the importance and need to develop Fort Christanna into an historical and recreation park. The members of the Board of Supervisors realized that the site was of important regional, state and national significance. The site, which is located 2 miles south of Lawrenceville, Virginia along the banks of the Meherrin River, had become an overgrown wooded area that had nothing to see or attract residents and visitors.

With Brunswick County taking the lead and bring on many public and private partnerships, the site has been transformed into a 25 acre historical and recreational park, with trails around the perimeter of where the five sided fort was located. A new parking area was constructed with handicap parking, with a brick terrace welcome area and information kiosk. Interpretive signage has been installed at the brick terrace area and along the fort wall paths describing Alexander Spotswood's role in the establishment of the fort, Native American presence at the site, construction of the fort and the role of Brunswick County and the National Society of the Colonial Dames of American in the State of Virginia

Brunswick County – Fort Christanna Historical and Recreational Park

Parks and Recreation

2012 Achievement Award Submission Virginia Association of Counties

The Brunswick County Board of Supervisors is a member in good standing with the Virginia Association of Counties and submits this 2012 Achievement Award Application under the category of **Parks and Recreation**.

Background:

Brunswick County is home to the Fort Christanna Historical Site. In 1714, Governor Alexander Spotswood began construction of Fort Christanna on Virginia's western frontier. The 3.5 acre five-sided fort was built, in part, to defend both the local settlers and the Indian tribes that were allied with the English. Fort Christanna was situated within a 36 square mile tract of land set aside for the Saponie and Occaneechee Indians.

Governor Spotswood's fort included the creation of an Indian School. At his own expense Spotswood paid the salary of the schoolmaster Charles Griffin. At the school the students were taught English and Religion. A visitor in 1716 reported that the Indian students knew the Lord's Prayer and could recite the Anglican catechism. As many as 100 students were in the Indian School at Fort Christanna. Having Indian children within the walls of the fort was, in part, a strategy to prevent Indian attack. By 1717 the fort and the school at Christanna had lost its support in London and Virginia, however. The Indian School closed, and its schoolmaster went back east to teach Indian students at the College of William and Mary.

The Fort Christanna experience brought to the tribes of the region new ideas, a new language, a new religion, and new dependency on Europeans trade goods. The old tribal ways and traditions

fast fell away as the Virginia colony expanded. But the tribes whose children were educated at Fort Christanna adapted and endured. Several tribes in Virginia and North Carolina today are proud descendants of those students at the Christanna Indian School.

In time, the fort's palisade walls and buildings fell, and the site reverted to forest land. Even after its decline, however, stories of the fort were kept alive by residents of Brunswick County.

In 2001, the Board of Supervisors, in order to protect the original three acre fort site, purchased 22 acres of surrounding property. In 2006, to further protect the site, two and a half acres, directly across the road from the site was purchased by the Board of Supervisors.

Problem:

In 2007, the Brunswick County Board of Supervisors recognized the importance and need to develop Fort Christanna into an historical and recreational park to enhance the quality of life for local residents and for cultural heritage tourism and recreational enthusiast. The members of the Board of Supervisors also realized that the site was of important regional, state and national significance. The site, which is located two miles south of Lawrenceville, Virginia on Fort Hill Road (Route 686) along the banks of the Meherrin River, had become an overgrown wooded area that had nothing to see or attract residents and visitors except a monument with cannon, which was placed in 1924 by The National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the State of Virginia.

The Board of Supervisors also realized the need to create and improve the tourism assets in the county to attract more visitors to the area and improve the quality of life for citizens of the county.

Development Overview:

The first action taken by the Board of Supervisors was to create and appoint members to the Fort Christanna Site Development Committee. The committee's purpose and mission was to develop the Fort Christanna site as a cultural resource, creating an educational and recreational experience that effectively communicates the history of Fort Christanna, with preservation of the archaeology and sacred nature of the place. The committee consisted of a member of the Board of Supervisors, a member of the Brunswick County/Lake Gaston Tourism office, the Brunswick County Historical Society, representatives from several Native American tribes that were descendants from Fort Christanna and several interested members of the community. The committee was tasked with formulating a plan to turn the site into an important historical site and recreational area for county residents and visitors. The Board of Supervisors action was supported by the 2006 Brunswick County Comprehensive Plan, which identifies, under "History and Culture," implementation strategies to: "preserve important historic, archaeological and scenic assets of the county, to guide development so as to protect historic and potentially historic properties and perpetuate cultural heritage, and to support historic preservation committees or societies."

Goals and Objectives:

The Fort Christanna Site Development Committee created a set of Goals and Objectives to meet the short and long term needs of the site.

Goal 1: Develop a mission statement for the Fort Christanna Historical Site project.

1. Create and adopt a mission statement to guide the committee and keep the project and development of the site in focus.

Goal 2: Create a Master Plan for the site:

1. Gather ideas on how to best meet the needs and develop the site for county residents and visitors.
2. Hire an architect to take committee ideas and help the committee develop a master plan for development of the site into a historical and recreational park. The plan included parking, trails, interpretive signage, brick entrance and kiosk area and a learning center. All of the aspects of the master plan were created to be as low maintenance as possible.
3. Gain approval from the Board of Supervisors on the Master Plan.

Goal 3: Develop a five year plan of work and budget for the project.

1. Identify and divide the parts of the architect's master plan into stages that will be developed over a period of five years.
2. Develop a working yearly budget that includes the stages of work to be completed each year.
3. Present the five year plan of work to the Board of Supervisors.

Goal 4: Develop signage and funding source to direct visitors to the site.

1. Identify signage needed to direct visitors from major roads to the Fort Christanna Historical Site.
2. Identify a funding source to acquire needed signage.
3. Work with Virginia Logos, the company that handles all signage for the Virginia Department of Transportation, to have signs fabricated and installed to direct visitors to the site.

Goal 5: Develop a Fort Christanna Historical Site Brochure

1. Work with a historical writer and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to develop a color brochure to explain the history and promote the site.
2. Work with area and regional visitors' centers and three official Virginia Welcome Centers to have the brochure available to help entice and attract tourist to visit the site.

Funding:

The Brunswick County Board of Supervisors appropriated \$ 50,000 per year for four years as the lead funding partner on the project. Numerous other financial partners helped achieve the goals of the county and committee. The Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Revitalization Commission awarded a \$ 30,000 grant to the county to provide brown directional signage on Interstate 85 at the Alberta exit, at the intersection of Highway 58 and 46 at Lawrenceville and along the Highway 46 corridor from Alberta through Lawrenceville to the site. The Brunswick Garden Club received the Common Wealth Award from the Garden Club of Virginia to create the learning center and the Virginia Daughters of the American Revolution gave a monetary gift for the entrance sign. Several area businesses such as Vulcan Materials and Lawrenceville Brick contributed building materials. Recently, the Town and Country Garden Club provided funds to establish a Fort Christanna Website which is currently being developed. The county currently promotes the site at their website www.brunswickco.com .

Other Partnerships:

Many public and private partnerships were created with the development of the Fort Christanna Historical Site. The county partnered with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) to have the site added as a stop on the Christanna Loop of the Virginia Birding and

Wildlife Trail. The VDGIF also has provided technical assistance in developing trail signage for the nature trail from the fort site to the Meherrin River, which is a State Scenic River. Because of the early education of Native American children at the fort, the county partnered with Virginia's Retreat, a 13 county marketing consortium, which maintains the Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail, to have the site added as a stop on the trail. Also, the county partnered with the Virginia Department of Transportation to have Fort Hill Road (Route 686) and the Fort Christanna site added as new point of interest on the Official Virginia State Transportation Map.

Brochure:

The committee developed a color brochure explaining the history and significance of the site. Included in the brochure is a map with directions to Fort Christanna and the contact information for more information about the site. 15,000 brochures were printed and approximately 10,000 have been distributed. The brochure has been placed in local tourist information centers in the region as well as three of the Official Virginia Welcome Centers.

Results:

The site has been transformed into a 25 acre historical and recreational park, with trails around the perimeter of where the five sided fort was located. A new parking area with handicap parking was constructed, with a brick terrace welcome area and information kiosk. Interpretive signage has been installed at the brick terrace area and along the fort wall paths describing Alexander Spotswood's role in the establishment of the fort, Native American presence at the site, construction of the fort and the role of Brunswick County and the National Society of the Colonial Dames of American in the State of Virginia. The historical, recreational and scenic assets of the site are being visited, used and enjoyed by visitors to the area as well as county

citizens. The site now is seen as not only an attraction for visitors, but is used to improve the quality of life for county citizens who utilize the recreational trails for exercise.

Visitation:

Since the site is not manned daily, an exact number of visitors has not been established, however, brochures are refilled each week in a weather proof box located at the kiosk. 50-100 brochures are left at the site each week. Also, during the times when committee members are at the site, visitors with vehicles from Virginia and other states such as Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey and Kentucky are seen visiting the site. The site is also being utilized by county citizens for recreational uses, picnics and family outings. Local schools and home schools are also using the site as a teaching tool for local history and nature.

Awards:

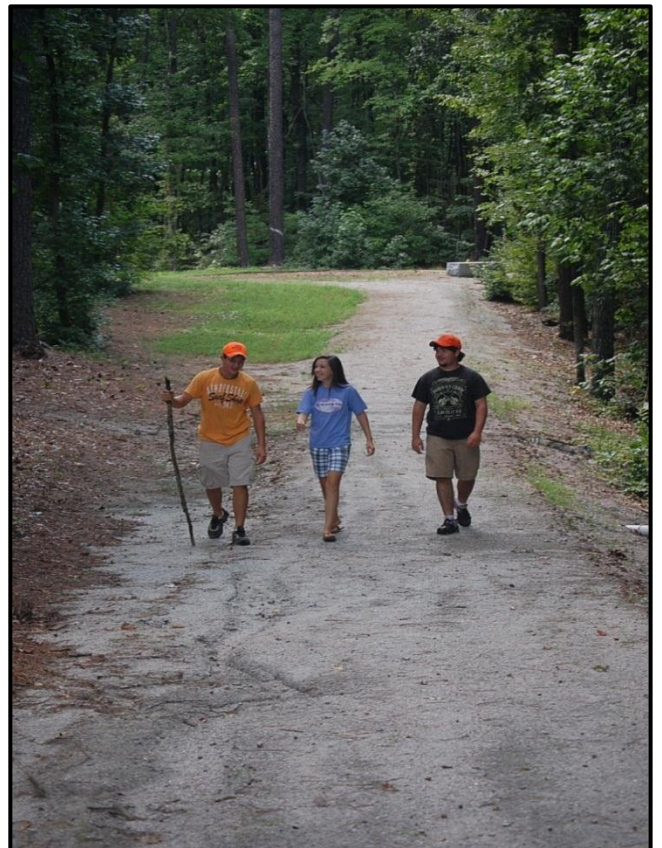
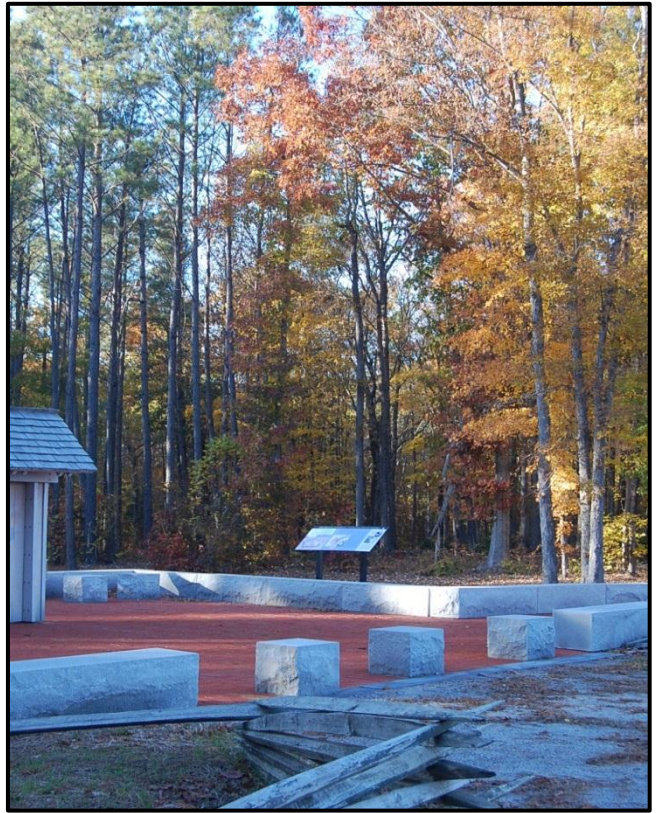
The Fort Christanna Historical Site received the 2010 Award of Merit from the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) Leadership in History Awards. The AASLH Leadership in History Awards is the most prestigious recognition for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of state and local history.

The development of the Fort Christanna Historical Site into an historical and recreational park has been exceptionally successful at achieving both the goals of Brunswick County government and the mission of the Fort Christanna Site Planning Committee. Because of this success, plans are already underway to expand the current park by adding more interpretive signage, an additional walking/nature trail and outdoor privy.

Fort Christanna Historical and Recreational Park
Brunswick County, Virginia
Before Work Began



Fort Christanna Historical and Recreational Park
Brunswick County, Virginia
After Work

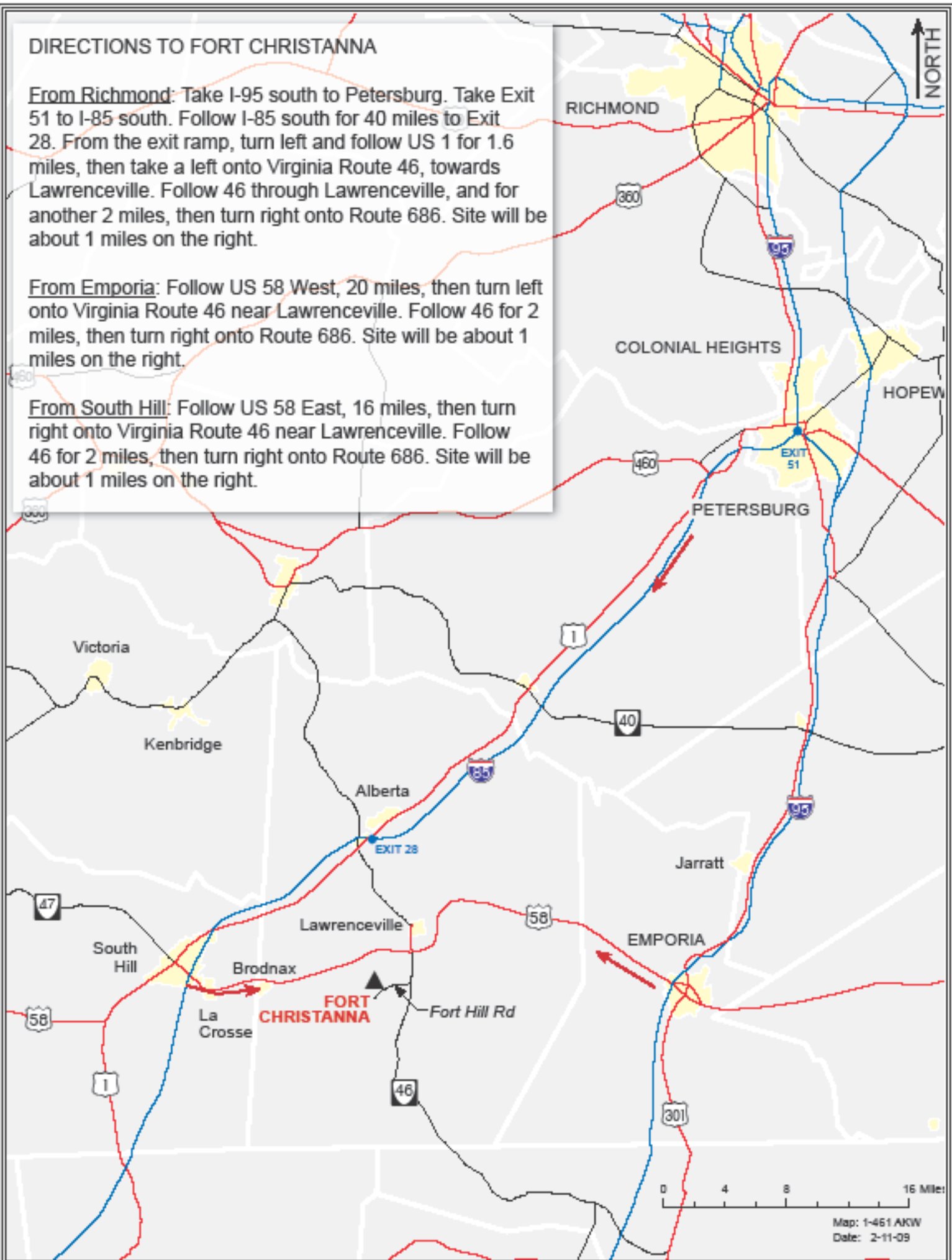


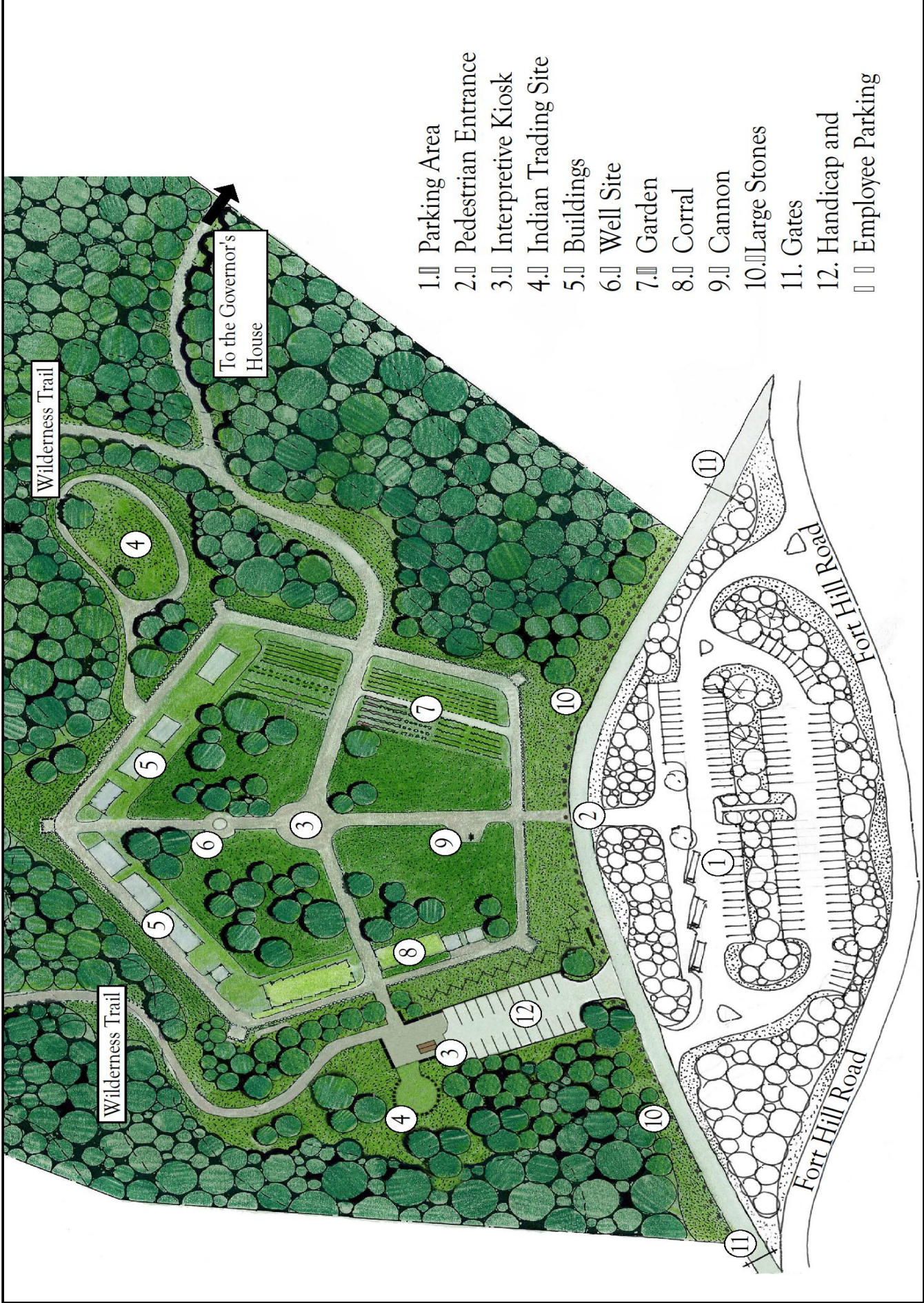
DIRECTIONS TO FORT CHRISTANNA

From Richmond: Take I-95 south to Petersburg. Take Exit 51 to I-85 south. Follow I-85 south for 40 miles to Exit 28. From the exit ramp, turn left and follow US 1 for 1.6 miles, then take a left onto Virginia Route 46, towards Lawrenceville. Follow 46 through Lawrenceville, and for another 2 miles, then turn right onto Route 686. Site will be about 1 miles on the right.

From Emporia: Follow US 58 West, 20 miles, then turn left onto Virginia Route 46 near Lawrenceville. Follow 46 for 2 miles, then turn right onto Route 686. Site will be about 1 miles on the right.

From South Hill: Follow US 58 East, 16 miles, then turn right onto Virginia Route 46 near Lawrenceville. Follow 46 for 2 miles, then turn right onto Route 686. Site will be about 1 miles on the right.





- 1. || Parking Area
- 2. || Pedestrian Entrance
- 3. || Interpretive Kiosk
- 4. || Indian Trading Site
- 5. || Buildings
- 6. || Well Site
- 7. || Garden
- 8. || Corral
- 9. || Cannon
- 10. || Large Stones
- 11. || Gates
- 12. Handicap and Employee Parking

Official Virginia Transportation Map Section
Showing Addition of Fort Christanna and Route 686



TRADE IN YOUR
LACE FOR
BUCKSKIN.



GOVERNOR
SPOTSWOOD DID
JUST THAT.



SIX TIMES
HE CAME TO
FORT
CHRISTANNA...



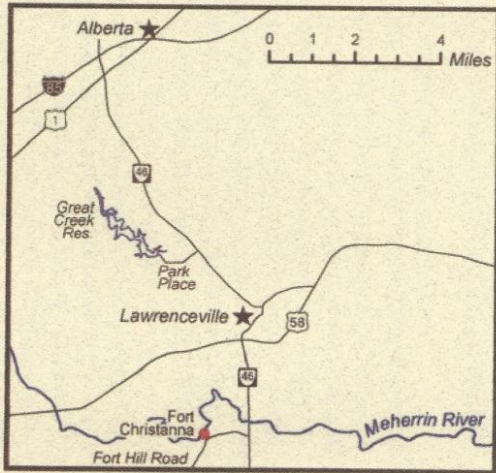
TO MEET THE
TRADERS,



TO MEET
THE
INDIANS.



Brunswick County/Lake Gaston Tourism Assn.
228 N. Main Street, Suite B 100
Lawrenceville, VA 23868
866-STEWPOT - 866-783-9768



Explore Virginia's Old Frontier.
Come to Christanna.



**WHY DID THE
GOVERNOR WANT
TO LEAVE
WILLIAMSBURG?**



**TO GO TO
FORT CHRISTANNA,
OF COURSE.**

**COME DISCOVER
VIRGINIA'S WILD
FRONTIER, 1714.**

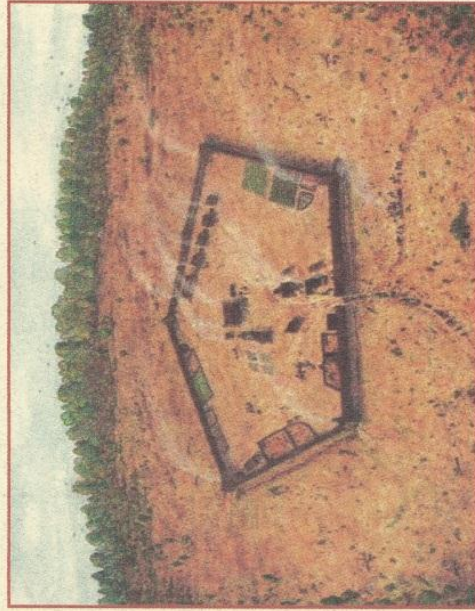


Fort Christanna

a Brunswick County Historical Treasure

Brunswick County is the home of one of the largest frontier forts ever built in Virginia: Fort Christanna. Alexander Spotswood, Virginia's Royal Governor from 1710-1722, built this five-sided log fort in 1714. Originally named *Christ Anna*, it served as both a fur trading center and a military fort to protect the southern border of the Virginia colony.

The fort itself was situated in the center of a 36 square mile tract of land set aside for the use and protection of the Saponie, the Toter, and the Occoneechee – so-called “tributary tribes” that had signed treaties with and were friendly toward the English.



FORT CHRISTANNA.
1714

These tributary tribes (who in time came to be referred to simply as “Saponie”) were the principal Indians involved with Fort Christanna, though as many as 15 tribes came to the fort to trade, to make treaties, and to make war. Their “six miles square” tract of land straddled the Meherrin near present-day Lawrenceville.

The pentagonal fort was large. Its wooden palisade walls enclosed an area of nearly 3.5 acres. At each of its five corners was a house that served as a protective bastion. Five 1400-pound cannons were placed in bastion houses to protect the fort and its surrounding hill from possible attack. Within the walls were a forge, places for livestock, buildings to protect “the King’s stores,” a place to secure fort provisions, and shelters for wood supplies. The fort was manned by 12 colonial rangers under the command of Captain Robert Hicks (Hix), so the fort must have had some sort of barracks within. Governor Spotswood was a frequent visitor to Christanna and would sometimes stay for weeks at a time. Spotswood even had a house built for himself just east of the fort, but before that was completed there must have been special housing for the Governor within the walls of the fort.

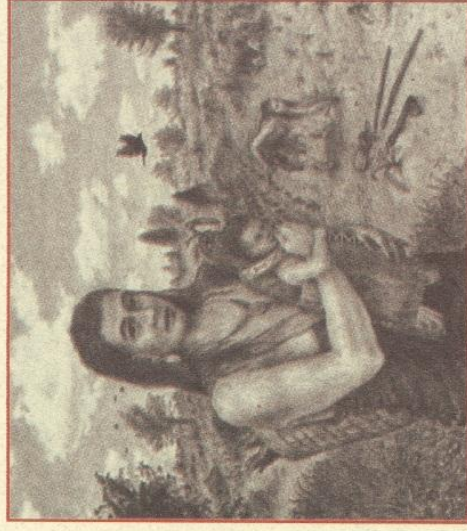
Also within Fort Christanna was a school for Indians. At his own expense, the Governor provided a schoolmaster to teach the Indian children at the fort. Charles Griffin was brought to Christanna to manage an Indian school. As many as 100 students were part of this school where the children were taught religion and English in a European manner. Visitors reported that the students could recite the Anglican catechism and the Lord’s Prayer. Griffin collected a vocabulary of Indian words that has survived to this day. He was apparently a well-accepted and effective teacher. But we should remember that when Governor Spotswood wrote back to England, he always referred to the Indian students as hostages. He wanted the presence of the children in the fort to ensure peace on the frontier.

Historic records and archaeological findings help us imagine a busy day at Fort Christanna. Tribes like the nearby Meherrin would haul in deerhides and other pelts to trade at the fort for European trade goods – metal knives, blankets, scissors, iron pots, metal hoes, guns, powder and shot. Dozens of Indian children would be gathered near the schoolhouse around their teacher. Some rangers would be situated high on the catwalk keeping watch for any sign of trouble, while others would be leaving the fort with felling axes for cutting firewood. At one side of the fort the Governor sits in council with a group of tribal elders. Today they bring him grievances: they were attacked by a band of Genitos and want permission to send out warriors. We see someone chasing a pig that has gotten loose from its pen, while two rangers look on, drinking rum and laughing.

In 1714 we would see that most of the people at this English fort are Indians. And nearby were many more Indians, because the Saponie built a town down the hill from the fort. Two hundred Indians lived in this town called Junkatapurse, situated on the river. In 1716 Governor Spotswood visited this town, saw their dances, and hosted an archery contest for the boys. John Fountain’s journal gives us a good record of this visit.

In time political opposition arose in the colony to the Governor’s self-designed monopoly on the profitable fur trade. By 1718 British support for Fort Christanna was terminated. When William Byrd II passed through the area in 1728 to establish the dividing line between Carolina and Virginia, he reported that the fort was long-abandoned. It is likely, however, that the Indians in the region continued using the fort for years after the colonials abandoned it.

Why is Fort Christanna important in American history? It provided a sure defense for the Virginia colony in the early 1700s. But Fort Christanna was more than that. It was a place where a remarkable collaboration



between the English colonials and Indians developed, where peoples with very different pasts and priorities came together to benefit mutually from trade. It was also an extraordinary effort to bring English education to Indians at the very frontier of the colony.

DISCOVER FORT CHRISTANNA.
COME TO VIRGINIA’S COLONIAL FRONTIER.

