Wachapreague, Virginia: Then and Now

Wachapreague enjoys a reputation disproportionate to its small size (population 291) and out-of-the-way location (on Virginia's Eastern Shore). Founded in 1872, it quickly became a vacation resort renowned especially for its fishing, and over the years those who flocked to its famous hotel included governors, film stars, royalty, at least one former President, and not a few other characters less famous, but hardly less memorable. In the early twentieth century it was the haunt of wealthy sportsmen from New England, New York, and Washington. Today *The Washington Post* still gives a weekly description of where and how the fish are biting at Wachapreague.

This book tells the history of Wachapreague, beginning with the Indians who were its original settlers, tracing its story through times of boom and bust down to the present. Its once-vibrant downtown, which boasted a movie theatre, ice cream parlour, pool hall, and even a department store, is now a shadow of its former self, but its residential streets are still remarkably intact, lined with handsome old homes admirable for their "gingerbread" and fine detail. A Walking Tour at the end of the book visits the town's many sites.

More than a century after its founding, the "Little City by the Sea" is not only enduring, but still endearing to the surprisingly large number of visitors who find their way to it. This book is for them, and for all people who love the character and characters of small towns.

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Wachapreague, Virginia: Then and Now

by Kirk Mariner

Beginnings

If you were to enter Wachapreague not by the main road but by Custis Street, turning towards town next to the Methodist church in Locust Mount. . .

And if while traveling up Custis Street you could, in your imagination, blot out the intersecting streets, the houses that come into view. . . .

Then Custis Street would look like many another Eastern Shore country lane that ventures off the main road towards a farm. As you cross the fields, the sky ahead seems luminescent, as if there is water just beyond the horizon, and then at the very end of the road looms a big old house, facing inland down the lane, at its back a landing on the water.

The old house at the eastern end of Custis Street is known today as 15 Brooklyn Avenue. It stands where an even earlier house was, for centuries, all that there was to be seen at Wachapreague. For what we know as Wachapreague is, by Eastern

15 Brooklyn Avenue, site of Wachapreague's first house.

Shore standards, a relatively modern place that was established on what was originally just another old Eastern Shore farm, or "plantation."

The water at Wachapreague is Wachapreague Channel, an

extension of Finney Creek further inland. From the landing here, Wachapreague Channel winds through the wetlands out to the Atlantic between Parramore and Cedar Islands, the easiest natural access to high ground from the ocean between Cape Charles and Chincoteague.

Even before the coming of the white man, the Indians of the Shore recognized the value of this spot, and occupied it. The original inhabitants of this neighborhood were the Machipongo Indians, and across the centuries the soil here has yielded up stone arrowheads, axe handles, and other artifacts of their time. As late as just a few years ago, Indian artifacts were unearthed when Atlantic Avenue was widened and paved.

The first mention of Wachapreague in the historical record dates from 1656, when Wachiwampe, "emperor" of the local Indians, mentioned it in his last will and testament. "My will and desire is that none should rule only my daughter," he wrote, not bothering to name the daughter who was to succeed him. "Also I desire that my hears [heirs] may live at Ockahannock or Watchpreague, but that I leave to their choice, but in case they make choice of Watchapreague, which I think most convenient, then my desire is that the English will procure patent for their land."
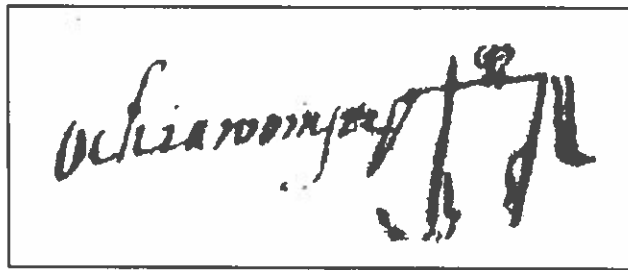
Pictographic signature of the Indian "emperor" Ochiwampe, also known as Wachiwampe.
(Northampton Deeds & Wills, 1651-1654, p. 35)

It seems likely that Wachiwampe's heirs chose Occohannock over Wachapreague, for no "patent" for Indian ownership was ever obtained. In fact, a scant seven years after his will was written two English settlers, Edward Revell and Jonah Jackson, secured title to the land. When they divided their property in 1673, the southern part on which the town was later to arise (below Richardson Avenue) fell to Jackson. By 1705 the Machipongo Indians had only "a small number yet living," some of them, perhaps, still at Wachapreague. But just how long the Indians remained at Wachapreague is not known.

Teackle's Landing

Since landowner Jonah Jackson lived near Exmore and never occupied his property in this neighborhood, it is likely that no English settler really built and lived at Wachapreague until 1744, when Levin Teackle (1717-1794) purchased the property. It was most likely he who erected the first big house at 15 Brooklyn Avenue, and it is he and his family—wife Joyce, son Arthur, and daughter Elizabeth—who are buried there in the side yard. More than a century after his arrival, the neighborhood was still known as Teackle's Landing.

The same easy access to the Atlantic that made Teackle's Landing valuable in peacetime made it vulnerable during war. British warships patrolled the coast during the American Revolution and the War of 1812, making frequent raids upon isolated plantations on the Seaside to secure supplies for their troops. In February 1779, guardians of Wachapreague Inlet from temporary "forts" on Parramore Island and Cedar Island fired upon the British sloop *Thistle* and forced it out to sea, where it sank. Among the local militiamen then posted up the channel back at the landing was William Elliott (1754-1836), founder of the Sunday School at Oak Grove United Methodist Church (said to be the oldest in the country). There is a local tradition that during the War of 1812 a British gunboat, venturing up Wachapreague Channel almost as far as the town, exchanged fire with a company of local defenders. From behind a cedar tree a sharpshooter named Floyd is said to have shot the ship's commanding officer, forcing the British to retreat. Their returning fire blew the top off the cedar, which stood for many years thereafter at the foot of today's Main Street.

Perhaps the earliest business at Wachapreague, other than farming, was the gristmill which George Garrison and James Ashby built in 1788. Their mill was located on the tiny creek that meets the channel right at the southern edge of today's Wachapreague Hotel Marina. Most gristmills on the Eastern Shore used the power of a pond of water stored behind a dam, but this one was a tidal mill, harnessing the tides which rush in and out of this little creek with considerable force. The mill operated for about a hundred years, and modern maps still call the creek on which it was located "Mill Creek."

When Levin Teackle died in 1794, the Wachapreague property was inherited by his grandson James J. Teackle, whose ownership was plagued with financial difficulties. In 1814, Teackle began selling off lots at the western end of his property, and there arose the thriving little community of Locust Mount. From opposite ends of the village rival merchants Jacob Bell (1793-1840) and Thomas

Watts Smith (1801-1883) competed for the local trade, until in 1838 Bell abandoned the race, moved to Craddockville, and opened a store there. A number of homes were erected, and in 1839 Benjamin Nock became the first postmaster at the new Locust Mount post office. Locust Mount was still thriving when the newer town of Wachapreague was established nearby in the 1870s, and at least two of the buildings standing there today date from its early years: The "double house" at 31342 Drummondtown Road, once the home of the Methodist preacher Griffin Callahan (1759-1833), and the old dormered house opposite the church, part of which may be Jacob Bell's old store.

Jacob's Bells Store in Locust Mount, a thriving business long before the town of Wachapreague was born.

Despite the prosperity at Locust Mount, James J. Teackle continued in financial straits, and by 1825 had abandoned his Wachapreague property for upstate New York. When he died three years later John Finney purchased the property from his executor, and the land on which most of Wachapreague sits today was sold for $5,625.59.

A survey map drawn for this sale, still to be found in the Clerk's Office in Accomac, shows how little there was at Wachapreague in those days. A single road (Custis Street) sweeps eastward from the "Neck Road" (Drummondtown Road) at "Bell's Storehouse" in Locust Mount. At its eastern end, near the water, stands a large "Mansion House" (15 Brooklyn Avenue), and just south of it a barn with a line of "corn cribs" behind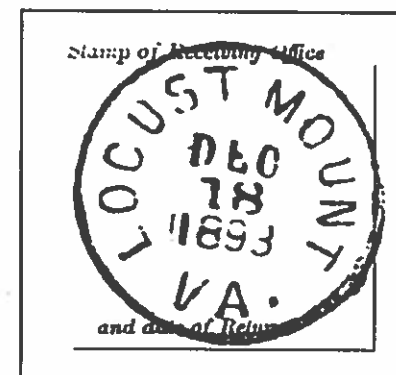 it. Except for "Ashby's Mill," out in the marsh on the southern edge of the property, there is nothing else. Wachapreague was, in 1828, still just a farm, 328 acres purchased by Col. John Finney for his nephew Edward Oswald Finney (1802-1872). The younger Finney inherited the property outright in 1848, and it was probably at about that time that he built another road leading directly from his main lane southward towards Ashby's Mill. Part of that road is still used today as Old Finney Road.

Sometime around 1860 the old house which was the centerpiece of the property burned, and Finney replaced it with a new one, on new foundations just west of the original. Judging from the surveyor's map, the new house bears some resemblance to the old: two stories, tall chimneys on either end, a center front door, three evenly spaced windows on the second floor. The old foundations were still visible as late as 1929; a recent inspection of the house reveals that some of the main floor joists were burned at one time—could they have been recycled from the fire?

This is the house, at 15 Brooklyn Avenue, which over the years has been known as the Finney/Custis/Mapp House, depending upon who owned and occupied it. It is the house around which Wachapreague grew up, one of the finest in town, but not the oldest. That distinction must go to the little cottage that stands today behind 10 Powellton Avenue. Two other homes that were probably already standing on the farm when the main house burned are the "double house" at 22317 Custis Street, and 1 Pearl Street, said to have been erected in 1858.

There was a considerable maritime commerce from Wachapreague Channel in the days prior to the Civil War. In 1825, Captain Jesse Phillips sailed to New York from the dock behind the Finney House with a cargo of cord wood and local sweet potatoes, said to be the first ever shipped from anywhere in Virginia. Such traffic diminished drastically with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Finney's house was still new when a small group of Confederate "coast-guards" camped out just south of it, where the hotel would later be erected, but the Civil War passed lightly over the neighborhood.

Far more important to this community was the resumption of trade on the channel in the decade after the war.

The Locust Mount post office operated from 1839 to 1907.

"Powellton" originally consisted of only 39 acres owned by the Powell Brothers. Their "New Road" linked the wharf with Old Finney Road, and is today the eastern half of Main Street.
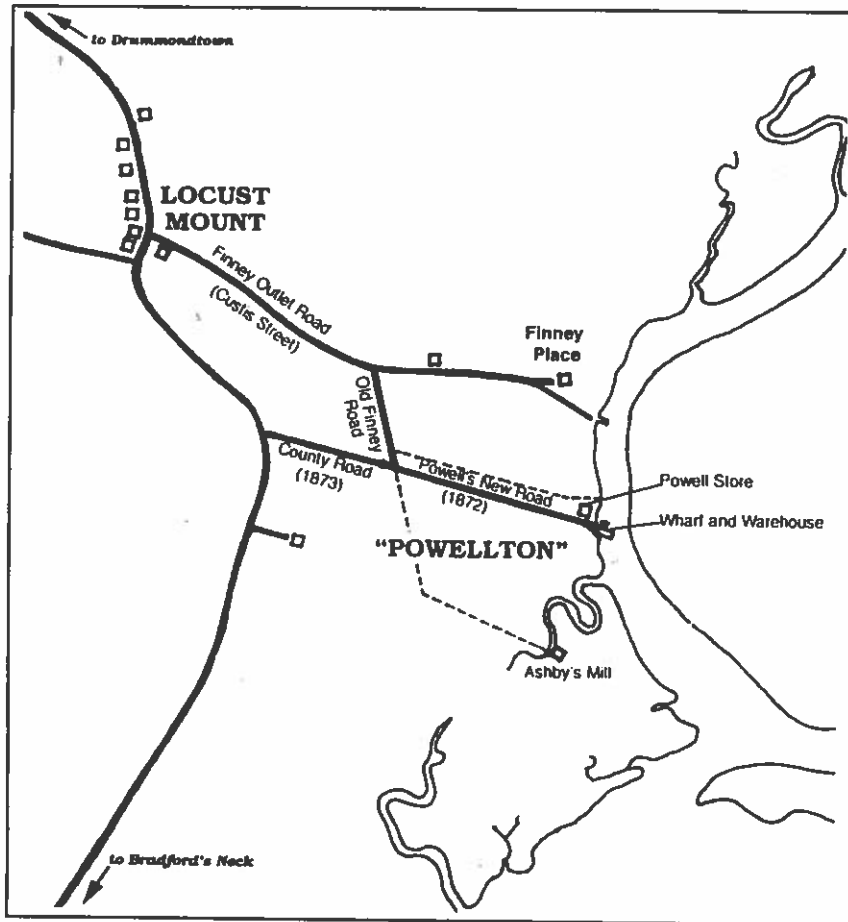
Powellton

On March 12, 1872, Edward O. Finney died, leaving to his daughter Bettie Finney Custis (1839-1926) the old house that then became known as the Custis House. It was shortly before his death that he made a decision that would change this neighborhood forever: He sold about one-tenth of his land, at the southern end of the property, to a firm called Powell Brothers. Within a short time the bustling new village of Powellton was rising within sight of the old house.

The men behind Powell Brothers were George (1825-1885), John (1828-1890), and Henry Powell (1835-1915), successful merchants and entrepreneurs in business together since 1865. George and Henry lived in Onancock, where the firm began, but John Thomas Powell lived just south of Locust Mount on the farm known today as Gulf Stream Nursery. In the next decade the firm would expand into Harborton, but in 1872 it was adding the Wachapreague area to its operations, and it was undoubtedly the middle brother who spearheaded this expansion.

On January 1, 1872, the brothers paid $3,500 for a little less than 39 acres of the Finney property, and within a matter of months they had built a road to the waterfront and erected a wharf. Almost immediately the maritime trade between Wachapreague Channel and northern markets, at a standstill since the war, was "vigorously revived." From their warehouse on the wharf the Powells shipped out local produce, especially potatoes, in their own vessels, and in return imported merchandise to supply the store that they built at the end of the wharf.

Within a year farmers in the region were petitioning for a new road to run directly from the "county road" to the wharf, for "Powell's New Road" to the waterfront (the eastern end of today's Main Street) branched off Old Finney Road, and access to the wharf was only through the old plantation outlet (Custis Street). In early 1873 the requested new road (the western end of today's Main Street) was laid out, and farmers from Bradford's Neck could by-pass Locust Mount to get to the new wharf.

The Powells themselves built the first houses in "Powellton." John erected a big frame house on the south side of the new "Main Street," across the road from the store. It is no longer standing, but nearby, at 10 and 12 High Street, and at 2 South Street, are still to be seen three houses which probably also date from the early 1870s. Similar in design despite the changes made to them over the years, they were most likely built by the Powells as rental properties and "model" homes.

2 South Street, probably built as a "model" house soon after Powellton was founded.
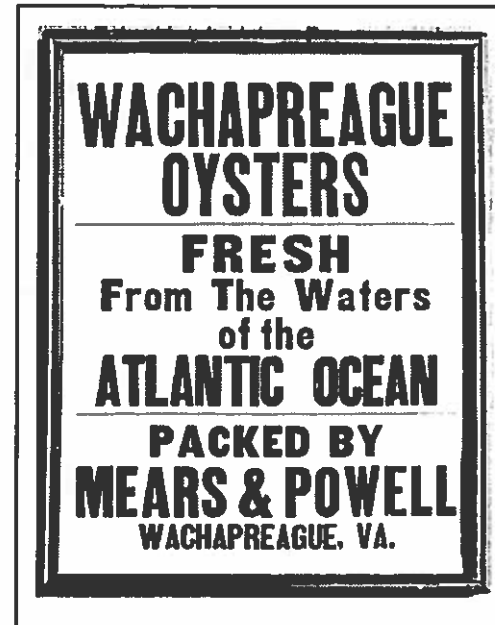
It was not long, however, before Powell Brothers offered to sell building lots to others. Isaac Phillips and Francis Smith, in 1874, and Thomas F. Floyd, in 1876, were the first to buy. By 1883 another 12 lots had been sold, and homes were springing up on Main, High, Center, and South Streets. By 1885 the houses on Main Street reached as far west as Old Finney Road, those on South Street as far west as Pearl Street.

Locust Mount, inevitably, was quickly eclipsed. Though a new "Temperance Hall" was built there in 1875 for Methodist and Presbyterian worship services, it was not long before both denominations abandoned Locust Mount. Powelton Presbyterian Church was organized on July 4, 1880, and dedicated a building on Main Street a year later. The Methodist congregation moved to town in 1882. Like the churches, the public school, located at first in Locust Mount, also moved to town, occupying a new school building that stood at the site of 20 South Street in 1884.

In 1884, when the town applied for a post office, the postal authorities would not permit the use of the name Powellton, since there was already a place by that name in Brunswick County. "A change in name is necessary," reported the local correspondent to the county paper. "Among those which have been suggested are Beechland, Floydville, Bellville, LeCato, Mearsville, Finneyville, City of Wachapreague." The post office, and the town, took the name of Wachapreague on September 8, 1884.

When John Thomas Powell died in 1890, the town no longer bore his family name, and had grown well beyond what the brothers had begun.

Powell lived to see the waterfront at Wachapreague bustling with trade. By the mid-1880s ships from off the Shore were docking regularly to unload coal and countless other products, while ships from the Shore—many of them schooners built right in the Wachapreague area—were plying the routes to Norfolk and New York. At the Powell Brothers wharf, vessels from New Jersey, New York, and New England took on great quantities of shellfish for the northern markets, while from smaller docks north of the wharf, local watermen set out to find trout and drum, clams and oysters. Some of the boats leaving the waterfront ventured no further than nearby Cedar Island, where in 1881 the firm of Fowler, Foote & Company established a factory for the manufacture of fish oil and fertilizer. By 1885 Cedar Island guano was popular on the local market, and being sold also in Norfolk.

WACHAPREAGUE
OYSTERS
FRESH
From The Waters
of the
ATLANTIC OCEAN
PACKED BY
MEARS & POWELL
WACHAPREAGUE, VA.

The first steamboat known to have put in at Wachapreague was the Foote, probably a Connecticut vessel, in February 1884. By then it was rumored that "Wachapreague City" would soon have its own regular steamer connections with New York. In August 1884, after Captain A. Browne LeCato's negotiations with the Old Dominion Steamship Company, the steamer Tuckahoe began

carrying passengers and freight between Wachapreague and New York, a twice-weekly run with a stop at Lewes, Delaware. The *Tuckahoe* could accommodate a cargo of a thousand barrels of potatoes, and in 1885 was also docking at Norfolk. Just how long the steamer plied the Wachapreague route is not known, but it was only for a few years. It was gone by 1890, and another line, between Wachapreague and Philadelphia, was much talked about but never materialized. The *Tuckahoe*, built in Pennsylvania in 1872, was condemned and abandoned in 1906.

At the foot of the wharf, Main Street was alive with business. "Powellton is a rapidly growing and prosperous village," observed the local newspaper as early as 1883, "if we can judge from the extensive business done by its mercantile houses, drug and millinery stores, hotel, barber shop, and wheelwright establishments."

Already by that year there were four stores in town. The first and largest was that of Powell Brothers, on the site of today's Wachapreague Motel, where the man behind the counter was George H. Garrison, son-in-law of John Powell, a "highly esteemed gentleman" who was both merchant and carriage-maker. The corner grocery store still standing on Main Street was built by John A. Brittingham in 1879. McMath and Brother and J. L. Trower & Brother established new stores in 1883, and in 1884 A. B. LeCato and G. Alvin Fox, a pharmacist, built the store known later as Fosque's Grocery. In 1885 yet another merchant, A. H. Gordon Mears, built his first store on the north side of Main, where by the early 1900s his "Big Store" dwarfed all others in town.

The "corner grocery" dates from 1879.

It was John Powell who saw in Wachapreague the potential for being not simply a commercial center but also a resort. Late in 1881 he leased his big house on Main Street to Alfred S. Kellam, and shortly afterwards Kellam opened there the town's first hotel. "Powellton as a sea side resort has many attractions for lovers of gunning and fishing," advertised Kellam, even "bathing unsurpassed a short distance of the Hotel." Within weeks he was entertaining guests from as far away as Philadelphia and Baltimore; by the summer of 1886 there were guests, as well, from Richmond and the Valley of Virginia.
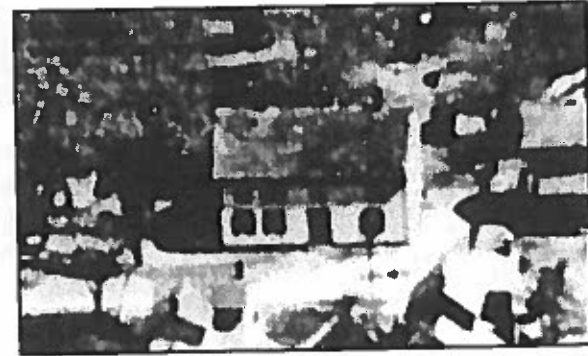
The original Wachapreague Hotel operated from 1881 to 1902 (from an aerial photograph, c. 1935).

By the year of Powell's death Wachapreague could boast a Town Hall, where "elegant entertainments" were held, a Masonic Lodge on the corner where the today's Town Hall stands, and a lodge for the Independent Order of Temperance, still standing at 16 South Street. And in that year, briefly, the town had its own newspaper, the *Farmer and Fisherman*, edited by Captain N. B. Rich of the Life Saving Service. Within a year the assistant editor John H. Johnson moved to Belle Haven, and the paper followed him.

Meanwhile the building boom in houses continued—13 new homes in 1883, 10 in 1885. A typical building lot in Wachapreague cost between $400 and $600 an acre, but Elliott Johnson paid $2,400 for the acre on which 9 Brooklyn Avenue was built. Carpenters and masons like Rupert T. Christian, Levin Hopkins, A. T. Mears, and Parsons & Brothers were kept busy building many of the homes noteworthy today for their admirable "gingerbread" and decorative detail. Among the finest homes in the village was the one at 22 Main Street, erected in 1885; here lived George W. LeCato (1842-1903), a physician who served in the State Senate from 1893

to 1902. and who was at one time a candidate for Lieutenant Governor of Virginia.

In fact, Wachapreague had already outgrown the area owned by Powell Brothers. A significant portion of the town was the creation not of the Powells but of Thomas F. Floyd, who, profiting by the Powell example, purchased 25 acres of the old Finney property and in 1882 began to sell building lots. His land lay north of the Powells and south of the old main house, where by 1883 several new streets—today's Brooklyn Avenue, Powellton Avenue, and Ice Plant Street—had come into being. Burton House (1883) and Hart's Harbor House (1885) are among the houses still standing today on lots sold by Floyd, as are also 8, 10, 12 and 18 Brooklyn Avenue on the other side of the street.

George W. LeCato

One other house in this part of the town was the large one that Thomas Floyd built for himself in 1884, between the waterfront and Brooklyn Avenue. Floyd, however, did not remain long in Wachapreague. In 1901, when he was living in Baltimore, he sold the bulk of his Wachapreague property to Edwin T. Powell (1852-1918), son of the founder John T. Powell. Floyd's house is no longer standing, but his mark is still on the town: To this day the streets on the north side of Main—Brooklyn, Lee, and Church—do not align precisely with High, Center, and West on the south side of Main because the original Powell and Floyd sections of town were developed separately.
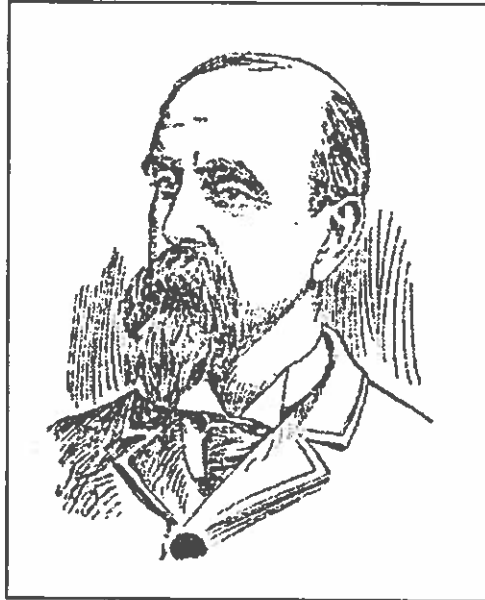
A New Town for a New Century

Wachapreague, in the early days, was to all appearances a place of middle-class uprightness. On Main Street stood two churches, Presbyterian and Methodist, with no want of worshipers on Sunday mornings. At 16 South Street stood the lodge of the Independent Order of Temperance, built in 1887. At the corner of Main and High, in the little park adjacent to today's Town Hall, stood a Masonic lodge, built by 1891.

So when "that fascinating amusement called dancing" became the rage among the young in 1884 and 1885, the venerable Reverend J. W. A. Elliott (1813-1896) took readily to the Methodist pulpit to sound the alarm against such ungodliness. And when townsman George W. LeCato took office in the State Senate in 1893, he was ready to support all "measures to curb the liquor traffic."

But Wachapreague was also a place where one could obtain amusements frowned upon by churchgoers. Hardly were the churches upon the scene than liquor, also, put in its appearance, at least as early as April 1882. The Methodists were still working on their building on Main Street when Flavius Josephus Bulman (1858-1928) obtained a barroom liquor license, and "whiskey merchants" became a town fixture.

By the 1890s it was apparent to many that this busy town of both dock workers and churchgoers was "sorely in need of a peace officer." That Wachapreague had a rougher edge was undeniable after February 1899, when a brawl broke out between white and Afro-American watermen at the waterfront. The battle began on Saturday, lay quiet during a tense Sunday, and started up again on Monday morning, when "clubs, baseball bats, and other handy weapons were speedily brought into play." "Wachapreague is entirely without an officer of the law," lamented the correspondent reporting the event.

No doubt such tensions as these lay behind the movement to give the town its own government and laws. In April 1902 the state legislature granted the community a charter, and the Town of Wachapreague came into being. When the first election was held on July 2, the town chose Arthur T. Mears (1839-1908) as Mayor, E. J. Foote as Town Recorder, and elected a Town Council consisting of James K. Harmon, Alfred S. Kellam, A. F. Richardson, E. B. Scarborough, and C. V. Willis.

Now at last there was someone with the authority to control such businesses and entertainments as pool halls and "ten-pin alleys." As for liquor, the new Town Council was "adamantly opposed" to its sale, and refused to issue licenses for it. And now

to enforce such laws there was a Town Sergeant; Muscoe R. Bulman (1856-1927) was the first person to hold that position.

At the very time that the town was busy with these deliberations, there were important developments at the foot of Main Street. There on April 10, 1902, Andrew Herbert Gordon Mears (1861-1944), merchant and seafood dealer, purchased the old Powell property, and set about expanding and improving the hotel. The existing hotel, which had operated since 1881, was moved aside (to a lot on the same block, opposite 3 High Street), and in its place arose a newer one. Locals watched with interest and amazement as G. Wellington Coard (1852-1924) and his workers erected a building far larger than any other in town, an ornate four-story structure framed by porches and topped by dormers, with stained glass windows, an elegant dining room with a view of the waterfront, and

A. H. Gordon Mears founder of the Hotel Wachapreague.

materials salvaged from the famous Hygeia Hotel across the bay at Old Point. In a day when most Eastern Shore hotels were simply large houses with a dozen rooms or less, the new Hotel Wachapreague had 30 guest rooms, and cost $30,000.

The opening of the hotel on September 18, 1902, was a gala event. Senator LeCato delivered the opening address, after which guests flocked to the new dining room for lunch. Mears ran a boat over to Cedar Island, where the evening meal could be taken on the beach, while diners back at the hotel could enjoy a pianist and an exhibition of "picture and talking machines." (If by "picture machine" is meant motion pictures, this is the earliest reference yet discovered to "movies" on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.)

Not without reason did many locals greet Mears' new hotel with skepticism. Wachapreague was, after all, a town of fewer than 500 inhabitants, well off the beaten path, accessible by no paved road and no regular boat. Despite its reputation for fishing and hunting, few believed that it could attract enough sportsmen to justify 30 rooms. Furthermore, Mears, a devout Methodist, was adamantly "dry" and determined not to sell liquor in his establishment. Even as the hotel was being built, he was elected Vice-President of the newly organized Anti-Saloon League of the Eastern Shore.

Undaunted by predictions of failure, Mears advertised in northern newspapers and sporting magazines, and was soon attracting "a refined patronage" of leisured northerners. When his guests alighted from the train at Keller, a carriage awaited to escort them straight to the hotel. There they could take "splendid" meals in the dining room, or enjoy billiards or tennis, or, in formal attire, simply lounge on one of the porches to enjoy the breezes and take in the view. Mears replaced the old Powell wharf, which was right at the end of Main Street, with a new one a few yards to the south, aligning it with the lawns and entrances of the hotel. Here guests could rent a fishing boat for all day or for 50¢ an hour, and often the owner himself accompanied his guests on fishing trips. For hardcore sportsmen less concerned with amenities, he also offered accommodations at the Island House Hotel, right on the beach on Cedar Island.

On February 28, 1907, the post office at Locust Mount was discontinued. Church, school, and stores had long since abandoned the old village for the new town of Wachapreague less than a mile away. Old Locust Mount began to change from a white to an Afro-American community, a change accelerated by the erection of Grace Methodist Church five years later.

The year 1907 brought to Wachapreague both a new school and a new church. The public school, located since 1884 at 20 South Street, moved to newer and larger quarters on Main Street just west of Old Finney Road, where by 1909 the town had an "accredited high school." The new church stood at 13 Lee Street, a Pilgrim Holiness congregation founded by Cole Hope after a series of tent meetings.
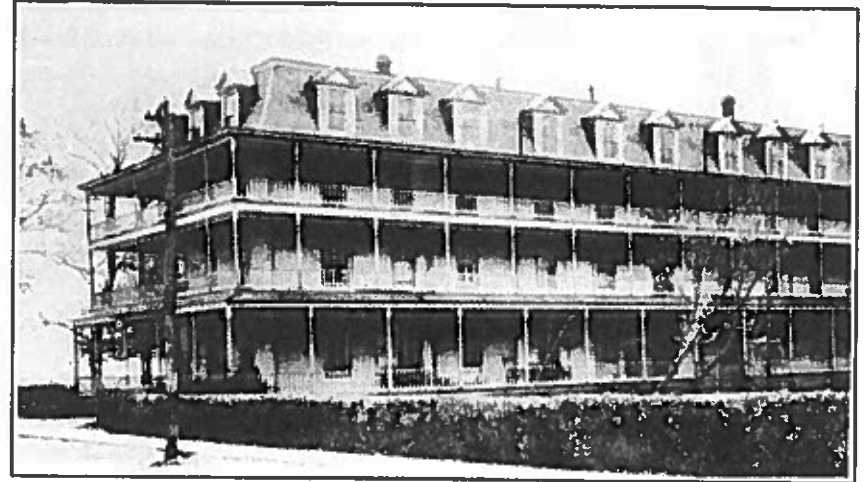
Hotel Wachapreague

On March 12, 1907, citizens of Wachapreague pledged $1,715 for the building of a trolley line to connect the town with Onley, Accomac, and Onancock.

The possibility of a trolley was the talk of the Eastern Shore that year. Not only would an electric trolley connect outlying towns to the railroad, and seaside towns to steamboat wharves on the bayside, it would also provide a new source of power—electricity—for homes, businesses, and communities along the route. In March 1907 the Accomack Traction and Power Company was organized to promote the project, but it was quickly thrown into turmoil over
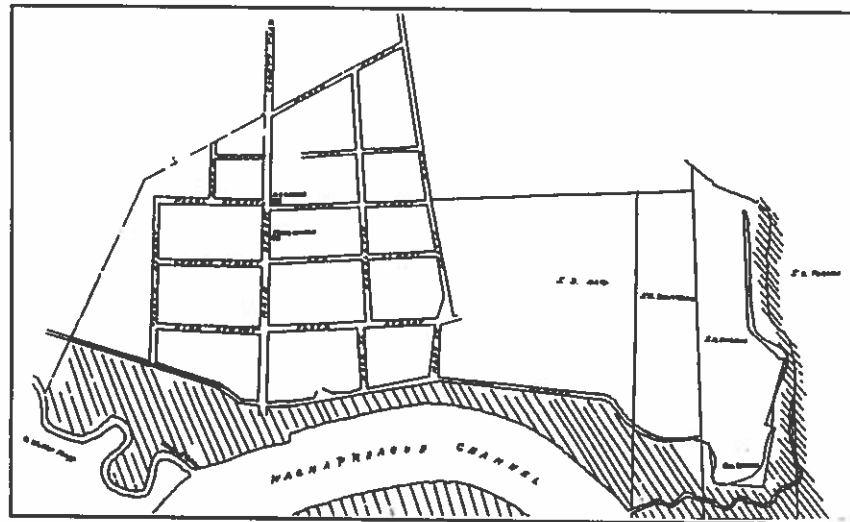
Wachapreague in 1914 did not extend north of Custis Street or south of South Street.

whether the line should run from Onancock to Accomac via Tasley, or from Onancock to Accomac via Onley and, by an extension, southward to Wachapreague. In April 1907 the Onley-to-Wachapreague advocates within the group organized the rival Chesapeake and Atlantic Light and Power Company, with E. T. Powell as president and A. H. Gordon Mears as one of its directors. But after September the Onley-to-Wachapreague effort fell through, as did, within a short time, the Onancock-to-Accomac project.

So when electricity came to Wachapreague it was not from a trolley line, but from the Exmore Light & Power Company, which was lighting the town by 1914. In that year there were three fish companies in operation on the waterfront, and Gordon Mears' oyster-shucking establishment had been re-built and enlarged to accommodate as many as 60 workers. In 1914 the Wachapreague

Ice Company began the construction of an ice plant near the waterfront. Though the company was financially troubled and lasted only about a decade, the ice plant itself, located at the corner of today's Ice Plant Street and Atlantic Avenue, became a local landmark until its demolition in 1960.

Meanwhile the Hotel Wachapreague enjoyed a "steady procession of repeat customers" with each passing year. Some of its guests were from the ranks of the rich and famous, among them Walter Chrysler, silent screen star Evelyn Nesbit, British actor Ronald Coleman, several Virginia governors, and former President Herbert Hoover.

None of them, however, was more colorful than Trixie Eisenstein, who came down from New York City every summer for a two-month stay. Trixie, an acknowledged master of the "grand entrance" who revelled in shocking locals and visitors alike with her plunging necklines, avant-garde coiffures, and provocative after-dinner conversation, was no "come-here." Born and raised on a farm south of Wachapreague, she was the niece of Senator LeCato, daughter of his brother Nathaniel J. W. LeCato (1835-1911), the Shore-born preacher, lawyer, merchant, postmaster, hotel keeper, lighthouse attendant, school principal, politician who made good as a novelist and lived most of his adult life in New York. Beatrice "Trixie" LeCato, like her father, made New York her home, married Julius Eisenstein, and vacationed annually at the hotel even after her husband's death in 1933.

For three-quarters of a century Wachapreague meant, to many people, the Hotel Wachapreague. Who could imagine the town without it?
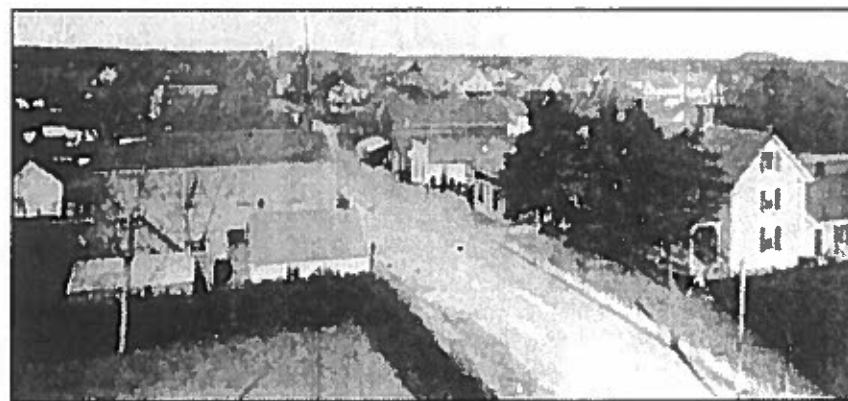
Downtown Wachapreague, looking west from the roof of the hotel, c 1915. The large building on the left is Fosque's Store, the small building in front of it the old Post Office.

American Theatre

WACHAPREAGUE, VIRGINIA

Cecil B. De Mille's
Greatest Production

A Paramount Artcraft Picture

"Male and Female"

July 3 and 5, 1920

3 Shows Saturday, July 3
3:30 -:- 7:30 -:- 9:30 P. M.

2 Shows Monday, July 5
7:30 and 9:30 P. M.

ADMISSION---War Tax Paid

Adults, - - 50c.
Children, - - 35c.

Later known as the "Neptune," Wachapreague's movie theatre was originally the "American." Advertisement from *Accomack News*, May 14, 1920.

Boom and Depression

In 1920 downtown Wachapreague was a vibrant collection of businesses, far more to see than is there today. A visitor strolling westward on Main Street from the hotel would encounter first, on his right, the "big store" of Gordon Mears, largest in town, a department store whose immense freight elevator was as fascinating to the locals as the hotel was to visitors. Next, on his left, was the small frame post office, and next to that Fosque's Grocery on the corner. The three old store buildings still standing downtown today were there in 1920, and on the site of the present firehouse was another store. Where the Town Hall stands today, with its little park, were a "five and dime" on the corner and, next to it, what was undoubtedly the most popular place in downtown Wachapreague, a movie theatre.

Motion pictures were shown in Wachapreague at least as early as 1915, upstairs in Fosque's Store, but the town gained a proper moviehouse on June 22, 1918, when Edwin T. Powell, Jr. (1895-1957) opened his American Theatre. Powell's theatre could seat 485 people, and it also contained a pool hall. Up in Chincoteague, the Town Council, in an apparent effort to keep them out altogether, had been known to tax pool tables at $500 each, but Wachapreague's town fathers licensed Powell's pool parlor without resistance.

At the western end of downtown Wachapreague stood the Wachapreague Banking Company, founded in 1920, the post office building of today. Two other downtown landmarks stood next door on the grounds of the house at 17 Main Street. On the eastern end of this lot, right on the street, was a little store building (sometimes a restaurant) that was later moved back from the street; it still stands there in the back yard. And in the same back yard, no longer standing, was a larger metal building which the town used to house both its fire-fighting equipment and its law-breakers. For in January 1916 the Town Council at last succeeded in getting two locked steel cells for use as a jail. The jail, imported from Chicago, was "a long-felt want." "Look out for yourselves, ye violators of town ordinances!" warned the newspaper after it was installed.

All this time Wachapreague, built entirely on lands once owned by either the Powell brothers or by Thomas Floyd, stretched no further north than Custis Street, no further south than South Street. Then quickly in the 1920s three new sections of town were created as the owners of adjacent lands developed their properties.

The first was "Riverside Park," begun in 1919 by John A. Turlington (1887-1965), a veterinarian, who divided his lands north of Custis Street into building lots. Atlantic and Brooklyn Avenues, Lee and Church Street were extended north across two

new streets, Riverview Avenue and Liberty Street, and over 80 new building sites were offered for sale.

Three years later a new section called "Southern View" enlarged the town at the other end. Center Street, which then stopped just south of South Street, was extended to intercept a new street called Bayview Avenue, making 19 new building sites.

Downtown Wachapreague, looking west on Main Street, c. 1920.

Four years after that, in 1926, Capt. John W. Richardson (1862-1930), former keeper of the life-saving station on Parramore Island, divided his lands north of Turlington's new development and created "Richardson's Addition." Brooklyn Avenue and Church Street (and, on paper, Lee Street) were extended north beyond Liberty, where they intersected Richardson Avenue, which Richardson had recently opened all the way out of town to Locust Mount. There were 26 new building sites in Richardson's Addition.

Of the more than 100 new places to build in Wachapreague, only those in "Southern View" lay outside the incorporated limits established in 1902, and in all three new sections houses began to spring up. Turlington built his own house at 5 Riverview Avenue, a square two-story home with front porch and peaked roof typical of the 1920s. There are today in Wachapreague no fewer than 21 houses in that style, the greatest concentration of them in "Riverside Park."

By 1929 Wachapreague had 12 stores, five fishing companies, four oyster shucking plants, a 30-room hotel, a restaurant, an ice cream parlor, a bank, a movie theatre, a pool hall, an ice plant, a

service station, and a dairy farm. Within the town limits lived 585 people, and the population of the entire neighborhood was about 800.

The town was as big and as busy as it would ever be, for half a century of continuous growth and prosperity would soon grind to a screeching halt during the Great Depression.

The full force of the economic crisis that began with the stock market crash of 1929 was not felt across the Eastern Shore of Virginia until 1934, but Wachapreague was already feeling the pinch by the end of 1931, when its bank closed. By September 1932, the town had outstanding debts of $450, over $2,000 due in unpaid taxes, and a balance in its checking account of only $24.86. The Town Council appealed, in turn, to the Town Sergeant, the Edgar Smith Collecting Agency, and attorney J. Brooks Mapp of Keller to collect the taxes, but there was simply no money to be had from the citizens.

On August 22, 1933, Nature added her fury. For two days a heavy "northeaster" pounded the Eastern Shore, causing millions of dollars worth of damage and the loss of five lives. A storm surge rolled across the marshes from the ocean, sending water up Main Street as far as the bank and overflowing the "Big Ditch" at the southern edge of town. Water stood two feet deep in Fosque's Store, and knee deep inside the Charles Little's "beer parlor," though Little remained open for business during the storm. All over the town yards were covered by water. Gilbert Stiles' boat *Osprey* ended up on Main Street in front of the theatre, just one of the vessels, oyster houses, wharves, and fishing establishments that was damaged or ruined. The total damage to the town was estimated to be as high as $75,000.

Main Street after the Storm of 1933.

Eighteen months after the water came fire. At 10:30 a.m. on Sunday morning, February 10, 1935, the Methodists were gathered for Sunday School when Eliza Mears, wife of the hotel owner, noticed a brown spot on the chimney above a stove. Within minutes the church was ablaze, and firefighters from Onancock and as far away as Pocomoke City and Cape Charles were unable to save it, and only with difficulty kept the fire from spreading across town. Along with their church building of 1902, the Methodists lost a Sunday School building only seven years old, and only recently paid for.

The 1930s were not all decline. The Methodists quickly built a new brick church, ready within six months after the fire. The hotel continued to draw visitors, including the prince of Thailand, the Egyptian ambassador, and Thomas A. Edison, Jr. The 21 businesses in town in 1935 included five fish companies, a restaurant, and the moviehouse, now enlarged, improved, and renamed the Neptune Theatre.

The decade brought new houses to town because not all of the northerners who regularly vacationed in Wachapreague chose to stay at the hotel. In 1938 Harry B. Reese of Hershey, Pennsylvania, built the house at 1 Liberty Street as a vacation home for his large family. Four years later Joseph L. Smith of New York purchased the house next door, once the home of Capt. John Richardson, and turned it into a summer house and hunting lodge. Four houses (26 Brooklyn, 14 Center, 1 Riverview, and 23348 Riverview) were moved to Wachapreague from the Barrier Islands, after storms caused massive erosion on Hog, Cedar, and Revel's Island.

The 1930s also brought important government projects. In 1933, Main Street was paved, the eastern end of a new state highway from Wachapreague to Harborton, the first east-west hard-surface road on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. In 1939 the Work Projects Administration built a protective "breakwater" on the marshes opposite the waterfront, lining the channel with an eight-foot high barrier built up from the marshes themselves. The following year the W.P.A. began repairs on streets throughout the town.

By the time the Methodists were dedicating their new building, the Pilgrim Holiness Church on Lee Street had faded quietly from the scene, and the town government was in dire straits. The municipal coffers contained $2.94 in September 1935, only 89¢ the following April. In November 1936 the council abolished the office of Town Sergeant, combining the offices of Mayor and Treasurer "as a collecting agency for the Town of Wachapreague" and giving to W. Heber Burton and R. Greenwood Northam the authority "to assume the general management of this town." Almost a year passed before the Town Council convened again, and by then an election had been missed and unpaid taxes totalled over $4,700. After another ten-month hiatus, from December 1937 to September 1938, the town government was virtually defunct.

Finally on September 7, 1938, a "mass meeting" of citizens gathered in the Neptune Theatre to "get the opinion . . . whether or not they wanted the corporation [of the town] to continue." Wachapreague's citizens voted unanimously to keep the town government, but also to cancel all back taxes.

Ironically it was that old bugaboo alcohol that enabled Wachapreague's municipal government to return to a sound financial footing. In 1934, after national prohibition ended, the Virginia legislature created the Alcoholic Beverage Control and made funds from the sale of alcohol available to local municipalities. On September 22, 1938, only two weeks after the vote to cancel all back taxes, the Town was rescued by a check for $522 from the A.B.C.

An aerial view of downtown Wachapreague, taken prior to 1935.
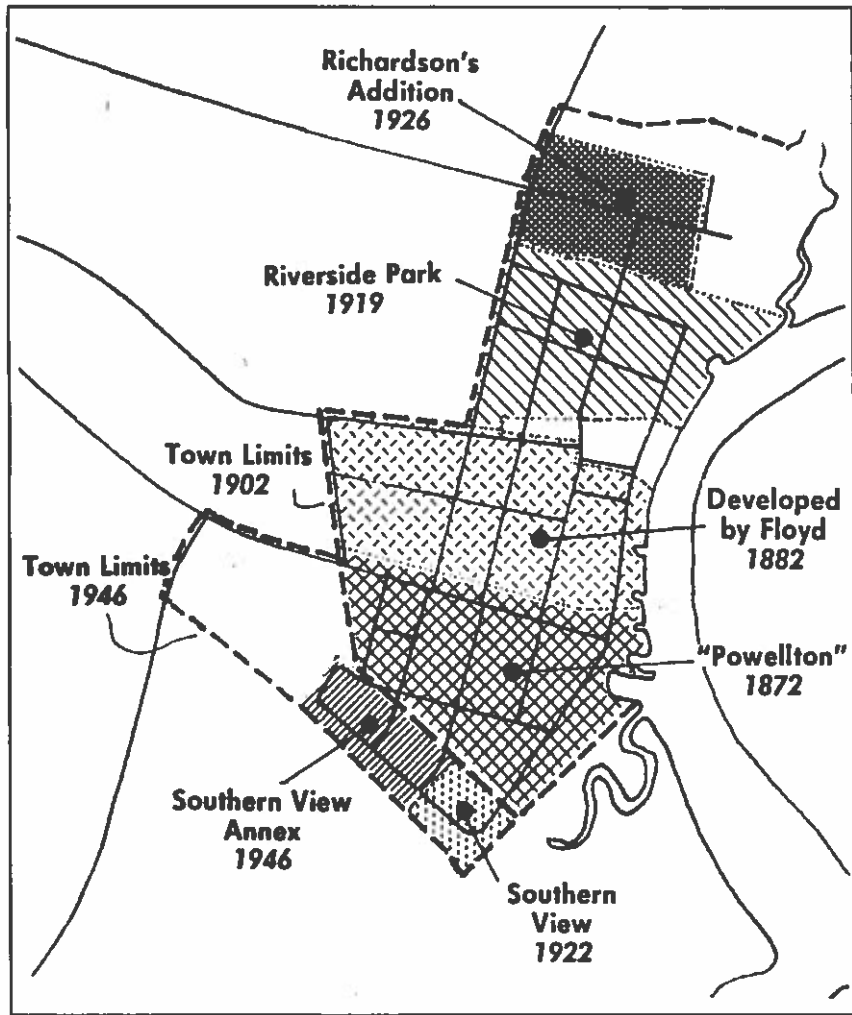
The development and expansion of Wachapreague, 1872-1946.

The Past Half-Century

A visitor returning to Wachapreague today after an absence of fifty years would find its quiet residential streets looking very much as they did in 1940. But the past half-century has brought many changes to downtown Wachapreague and the waterfront.

In the mid-1940s downtown Wachapreague was so busy that there were parking restrictions on both sides of Main Street. In those days you could go to the movies in Wachapreague, or shoot a game of pool. You could shop at the corner five-and-dime, the new Colonial Store, or one of the three smaller grocers, eat at a restaurant, grab a bite at the soda fountain across the street, fill your car's tank with gas, get a haircut, and—of course—take a room at a renowned hotel. And it was not unusual, in those days, to see the waterfront as crowded with boats as Main Street was with cars, as many as 70 or 80 vessels, some of them from as far away as Nova Scotia.

Wachapreague was still growing in the 1940s. In 1946 an entirely new section called "Southern View Annex" was surveyed and opened up for development, its 30 building lots reached by a new street called Park Avenue and by extending Pearl Street southward and Bayview Street westward. To accommodate it, the town annexed the area as far south as the "Big Ditch" and as far west as the road to Quinby. With annexation came a new charter from the state legislature.

It was in the early 1940s that the Virginia Fisheries Laboratory built a small shed on the waterfront and began researching the reasons for the growing mortality in oysters throughout the region. Though this initial effort ended shortly after World War II, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science resumed the project in 1959, and later built a more permanent laboratory at the corner of Atlantic and Liberty.

The 1940s brought a new volunteer fire company (1943) and a new firehouse (1944), the first town Christmas decorations (1945), and more paved streets (1946). By 1950 the population stood at 551.

But also in the 1940s began the losses that were to transform the face of downtown and the waterfront. On July 24, 1948, after a showing of the film "The Fabulous Texan," the Neptune Theatre closed its doors for good. Within seven years the vacant building had been declared a fire hazard, by 1956 it was demolished.

In March 1957 the old hotel burned to the ground. Not the Hotel Wachapreague, which was still very much in its prime (former President Herbert Hoover was a guest in that year), but its predecessor, the house that John T. Powell built in the 1870s, then

leased as a hotel in 1881. Moved aside in 1902 to accommodate its larger and more famous successor, the old hotel had served as an apartment building on High Street until it went up in flames.
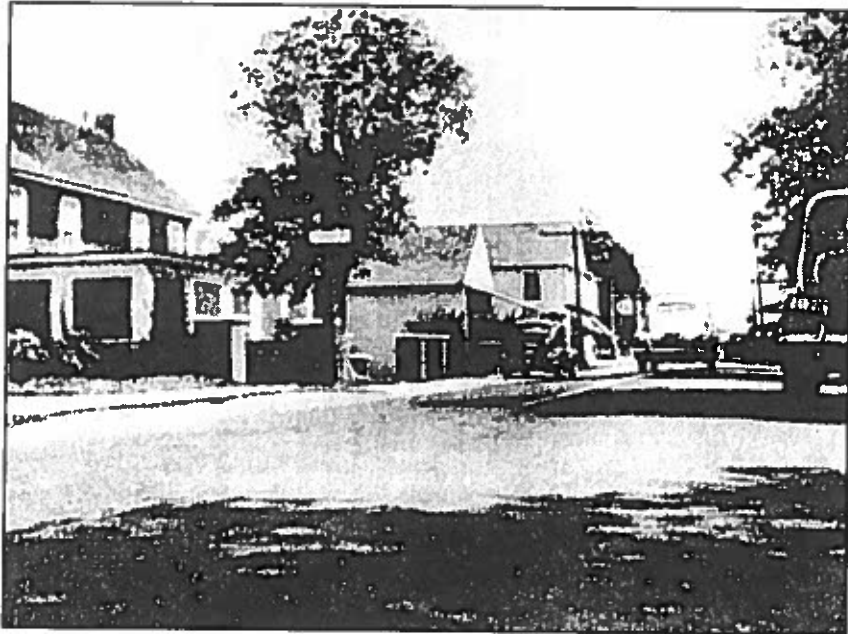
Main Street, looking east, late 1940s.

Two old landmarks fell victim to the continued success of Hotel Wachapreague. In 1959 the hotel's owners removed the wharf which had, for half a century, connected the hotel to the waterfront, and in its place built the town's first marina. Then in 1961 they tore down the old "big store" on the north side of Main Street to accommodate a new motel, an extension of the hotel.

In March 1962 the "Ash Wednesday Storm" devastated the waterfront, carrying tides as far up Main Street as the post office and flooding every place of business for two days. Water stood eight inches deep in the new motel, a foot deep in some homes, and in the office of the Mears & Powell shucking plant at the end of Main Street both safe and desk were completely under water. As a result of the storm the Town Council requested the Corps of Engineers to restore the dike built by the Work Projects Administration in the 1930s, but by 1964 it was obvious that the project was too costly.

In 1967 the Wachapreague School came to an end. Once a high school with a faculty of nine, the school had housed only elementary

students since 1928, and by 1963 was down to three teachers. The building was sold at public auction in 1968, and torn down shortly thereafter.

The Wachapreague School shortly before it was dismantled in 1969.

By the end of the 1960s the town's population had dropped dramatically from 507 (in 1960) to 399 (in 1970). Thus by 1973 the once-vibrant downtown was reduced to only five businesses: the hotel, two grocery stores, a filling station, and a guest house at 3 Brooklyn Avenue called Fisherman's Lodge.

The most spectacular loss occurred on July 1, 1978, when a fire of electrical origin broke out on the top floor of the Hotel Wachapreague. Seventy-five firemen from ten local companies managed to contain the blaze, but the fourth floor was virtually a total loss, and the rest of the building sustained heavy water damage. When funds could not be found to repair the hotel, the grand old building was demolished in January 1980.

Despite this decline, Wachapreague defied all who predicted its demise. Even with the old building in ruins, the hotel's owners promptly built the Island House Restaurant across Atlantic Avenue at the waterfront, and expanded the motel by renovating the adjacent building that had once housed the barber shop of Willard Sterling. After another fire in August 1992, the restaurant moved to smaller quarters at the waterfront. With the motel, it is the direct lineal heir of the hotel opened in Wachapreague by Alfred S. Kellam over a century ago.

The once-commercial waterfront remained popular with

sportsmen, and today as many as 600 boats put in and out of Wachapreague in a week. Just up Atlantic Avenue a new Town Marina was completed in 1995, fulfillment of a dream of the Town Council dating back to 1956.

For all the changes downtown and on the waterfront, the residential sections of Wachapreague remain largely unaltered. The handsome old homes of an earlier era are now increasingly admired, and among them are many which have been or are being restored, including 8 Brooklyn Avenue, 7 Center Street, 11 Powellton Avenue, and two which now function as bed-and-breakfast inns, Hart's Harbor House and Burton House at 9 and 11 Brooklyn Avenue respectively. It is not unlikely that the next few years will bring further restorations and preservations, for the population has continued to decline, to 291 in 1990; in that year only 146 of the approximately 225 houses in town were occupied.

Wachapreague today is not a big place, nor the commercially active place it once was, but it retains a renown and an importance disproportionate to its size among Eastern Shore communities. After more than a century, the "Little City by the Sea" is not only enduring, but still drawing visitors who find it endearing.
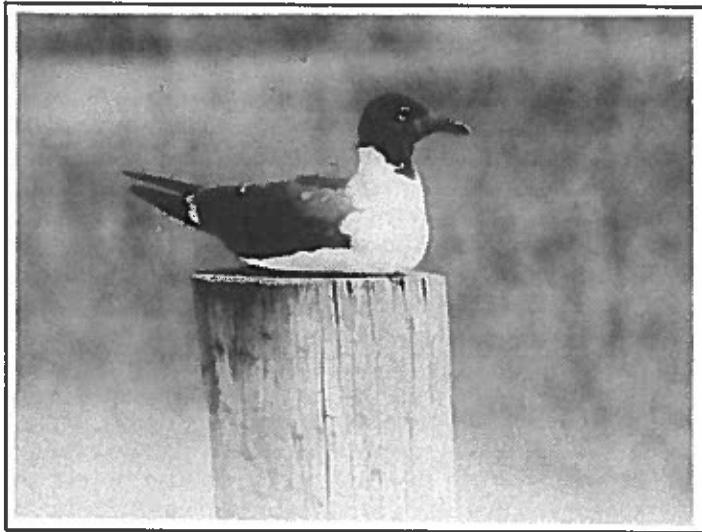
A Walking Tour Of Wachapreague

Begin your tour where Wachapreague began, at **15 Brooklyn Avenue [1]**. Although this is the second house on this site, it was, when it was built in 1860, all that there was to Wachapreague, the "mansion house" of the farm around which the town later grew up. The graves at the side of the house are those of the Teackle family who built the first house here about 1740, but Indian artifacts found over the years on this property prove that the Teackles were hardly the first residents of this original site in Wachapreague.
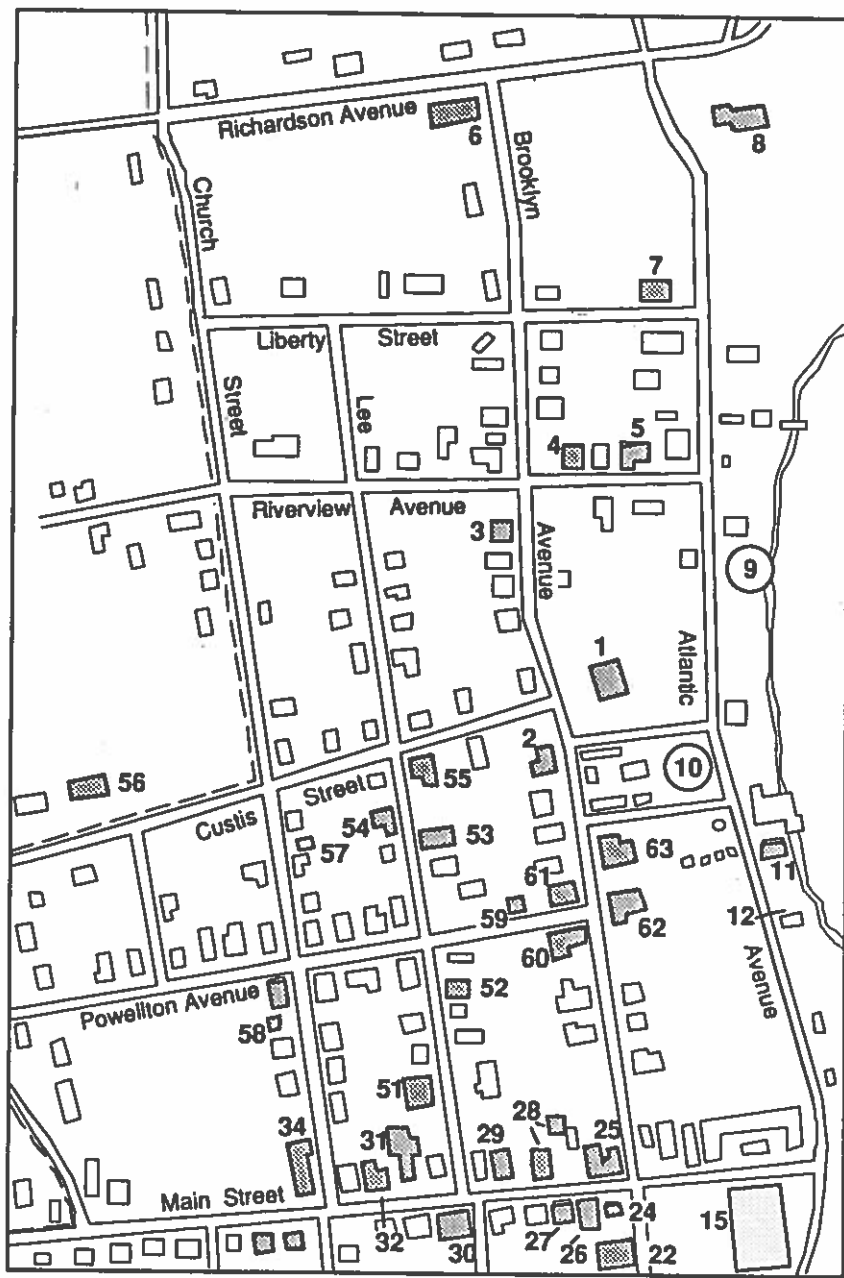
Behind you at this point (as you face the house you are looking east, with north to your left) is the **Pruitt House [2]** at 18 Brooklyn, built about 1882 and home of the town's first mayor, A. T. Mears.

As you walk north up Brooklyn Avenue, you enter "Riverside Park," the newer section of town developed by John A. Turlington in 1919. On the left is **26 Brooklyn Avenue [3]**, one of several homes in Wachapreague which originally stood on the Barrier Islands. This one, from Cedar Island, was moved to this location in the 1930s. Turlington lived at **5 Riverview Avenue [4]**, the prototype of this 20th-century style house in Wachapreague. Two doors closer to the waterfront is **1 Riverview Avenue [5]**, another house that originally stood on Cedar Island.

From the corner of Brooklyn Avenue and Liberty Street the **Masonic Temple [6]**, erected in 1928 in "Richardson's Addition," is visible ahead on the left. Turn right on Liberty, which takes you to the waterfront amid the mostly unremarkable buildings of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, the oldest of which is the green-shingled **Reese House [7]** on your left at 1 Liberty. It was built in 1938 by a candy company executive from Hershey, Pennsylvania, and now serves as a dormitory for VIMS. A short detour up the lane in front of it leads you to the grounds of the **Smith House [8]**, originally the home of "Captain" John Richardson, enlarged into a summer home and hunting lodge by Joseph L. Smith of New York in 1942. Birdwatchers may find something to observe at the brackish pond to the left of the lane; if you wish to walk through to Richardson Avenue, keep to the left behind the house.

The Waterfront

Atlantic Avenue parallels Wachapreague Channel, and as you head south (right) you come first to the **Town Marina [9]** (1995), opposite the newest building of VIMS (also 1995). Beyond it on the right, past the old "mansion house," is the **Carnival Grounds [10]**, site of the Fireman's Carnival annually since 1952.

The map on the left shows street names: Richardson Avenue, Brooklyn, Church, Liberty Street, Lee, Street, Riverview Avenue, Avenue, Atlantic, Custis, Street, Powelton Avenue, Main Street, Avenue. Numbered markers: 6, 8, 7, 5, 4, 3, 1, 9, 56, 55, 2, 10, 54, 53, 57, 63, 11, 59, 61, 62, 12, 60, 52, 58, 51, 34, 31, 29, 28, 25, 32, 30, 27, 26, 24, 22, 15.

On the site of the "Airplane Ride" stood the old Ice Plant, hence the name of the adjacent street. The four small cabins on the right were moved to this site in the 1960s from the Owl Restaurant and Motel on Route 13, 15 miles to the north. Opposite them, just below an unpicturesque but functioning seafood business, is Hart's Marina, now the location of the **Coast Guard Dock and Headquarters [11]**. The Parramore Beach Station that is still visible in the distance across the water was closed in 1994, and the only remaining Coast Guard presence between Chincoteague and Cape Charles now operates out of this small building and the boat that docks next to it. Just beyond it look for the metal cable sunk into a groove that crosses Atlantic Avenue. This is the simple but effective mechanism by which **Parker's Marine Railway [12]**, hauls boats ashore for repairs.

The Wachapreague Marina as it appeared before the burning and demolition of the hotel.

On the left, at the foot of Main Street, once stood Powell's Wharf, a site now occupied by the **Wachapreague Marina [13]** (1959). Its bait and tackle shop was once an old service station. The **Island House Restaurant [14]** operated out of more elegant surroundings until its building burned in 1992—the foundations of the ruined building are clearly visible just north of the restaurant. The boats at the marina constitute the largest private charter fishing fleet in Virginia.

The large empty lot opposite the marina is the site of the late, lamented **Hotel Wachapreague [15]**, the crown jewel of the town

until it burned in 1978 and was demolished in 1980. The Wachapreague Motel (1961) was an annex to the hotel, and continues the business that, despite the hotel's demise, has operated here continuously since 1881.

On the left below the marina, the Town of Wachapreague and the Nature Conservancy have created a small **Scenic Overlook [16]**, which is a good place from which to admire the distant view across the marshes. To the left in the distance are cabins on Cedar Island, to the right is larger and wooded Parramore Island with its abandoned Coast Guard station. Between them, merged into the horizon, Wachapreague Inlet spills the Wachapreague Channel into the ocean. The body of water between the mainland and Parramore Island is shallow Bradford's Bay; the Channel itself winds to the ocean just to the left (north) of it, with the result that from this vantage point boats entering and leaving Wachapreague seem to plow through the marshes. Immediately in front of the Overlook, more visible at high tide than low, is Mill Gut, the little creek on which **Ashby's Mill [17]** once stood.

From the Overlook turn back up Atlantic Avenue and left on South Street, then right to High Street. At the corner of South and High Streets are three once-identical houses which were probably "model" or "rental" homes built by the Powell Brothers in 1872. Of the three, **2 South Street [18]** is the least changed. But **12 High Street [19]**, despite its large modern addition, and **10 High Street [20]** are (or were) essentially the same design, complete to the "semi-outside" chimney on one end. The **Tom Stevens House [21]** at 7 High Street dates probably from 1882, and with its two-story front porch is unlike any other in Wachapreague. Opposite the **Firehouse [22]** stood, from 1902 until it burned in 1957, the **Old Hotel [23]**, predecessor to the larger Hotel Wachapreague.
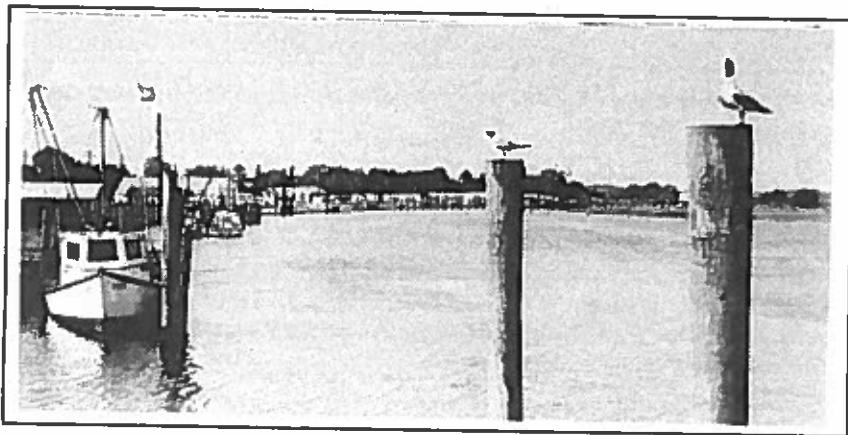
Downtown Wachapreague and Main Street

The corner of Main Street and High Street is still "downtown," but today's buildings constitute fewer than a quarter of the businesses that once lined the street here. Between High Street and the waterfront stood, on the left, Mears' "Big Store" (site of the Motel), on the right, Hotel Wachapreague, the old Post Office, and Fosque's Store (on the corner). Luther Powell's 5 & 10¢ Store and the Neptune Theatre stood on the corner occupied today by the **Town Hall [24]** (1959). The oldest part of the **Corner Grocery [25]** dates from 1879, the **Ray Nock Store [26]** opposite it was also once a grocery, with an ice cream parlor in its small annex. The small memorial in front of the Town Hall includes a sculpture by renowned Eastern Shore sculptor William H. Turner.
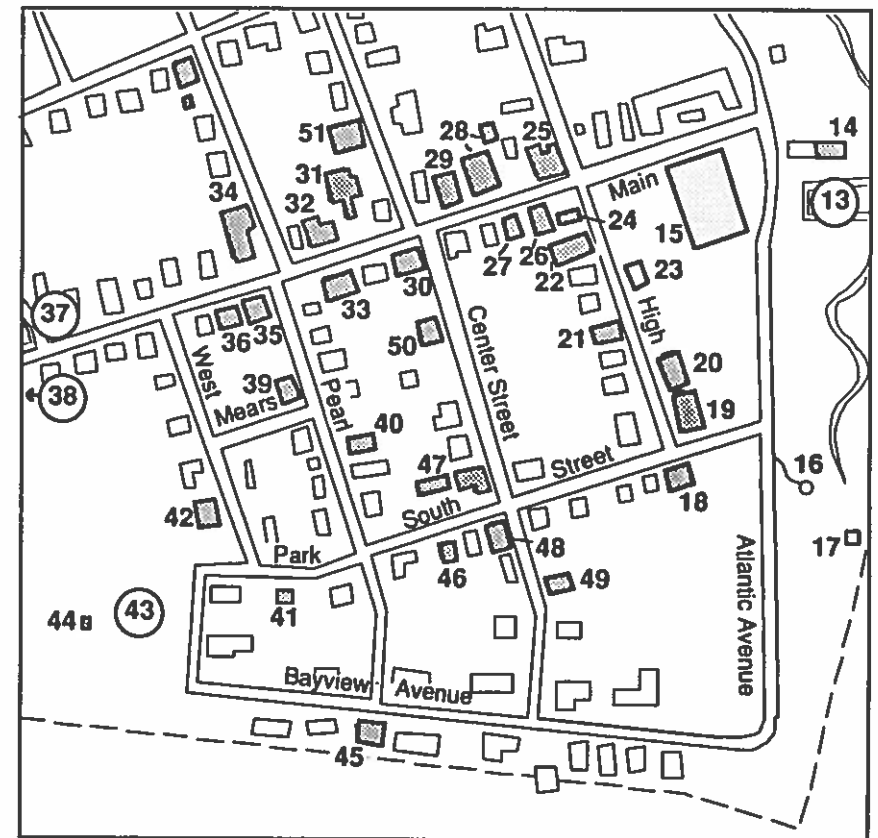
Main Street west (left) from High Street is lined with many of the town's oldest and most interesting homes and buildings. The **Ewell Stevens House [27]** at 10 Main dates from about 1882, and is one of only two houses in town with a mansard roof. Opposite it is the less elegant, but more storied **Eva Stevens House [28]** (17 Main), the oldest part of which dates from about 1883. Here at one time lived the colorful Southey "Sud" Bell, the eccentric last resident of Hog Island, whose skills on the banjo are legendary on the Eastern Shore. It was during his family's residence that this house contained a large and elaborate "still" cleverly concealed beneath the floorboards. There were two faucets in the kitchen, one of which gave water, the other "moonshine," and it is said the authorities never discovered the still because, apparently, they never stopped for a drink from the kitchen sink. In the backyard of this house is a small store building which once stood at the street's edge, behind the cement slab just east of the house; this was at various times a general store, a restaurant, and an antique shop. Also in the backyard here, next to the post office, stood the Town Jail. The **Post Office [29]** itself was built in 1920 as the Wachapreague Banking Company.

Eliza Mears pretends to strum along with Southey "Sud" Bell, banjo-player *par excellence.*

At the corner of Main and Center stands the handsome **LeCato House [30]** (16 Main), with its admirable "gingerbread" ornamentation and distinctive "clipped gable" roof; it was built about 1890 and was once the home of State Senator George W. LeCato, the town's physician. Lovely **Powelton Presbyterian Church [31]** was built in 1881. Just west of it (27 Main Street) is the **Watson House [32]**, built about 1883, its eastern end used as a hat shop as late as the 1950s. Its next-door neighbor (29 Main

Street) is the Methodist Parsonage, the first house on Main Street thus far not to date from the turn of the century or before.

On the south side of Main Street are three houses (18, 22, and 24 Main) which appear to have been built by the same hand, for they share architectural details despite the changes made to two of them over the years. Least changed and most handsome of the three is **22 Main Street [33]**, built about 1885, the home of A. H. Gordon Mears, founder of the Hotel Wachapreague. Note that the "dental" work above its windows is identical to that of 18 Main, its distinctive front porch columns to those of 18 and 20 Main; its side porch is probably not in its original state.

Ocean View United Methodist Church [34] was built in 1935 to replace a building of 1902 that burned; the 1882 cornerstone of the town's original Methodist building can be found behind the shrubs at the corner. Opposite the church stands the **Nevins House [35]** (24 Main), erected about 1886. Its neighbor is the **Herbert Powell House [36]** (26 Main), home of the scion of the Powell family who married the daughter of the hotel owner, the other house in town with a mansard roof.

The sidewalk on Main Street ends at **Old Finney Road [37]**, the original town limits. From this point the houses on the left side of Main are in the town, those on the right are not. Beyond the **James Store [38]**, visible down the street, lies the present end of town. Main Street from here to the waterfront was laid out by the Powell Brothers in 1872, from here to the Quinby road by the county in 1873.

South of Main Street

From Main Street turn south down West Street, then left (east) on Mears Street and right (south) on Pearl Street. **1 Pearl Street [39]**, the little cottage at the corner of Pearl and Mears, is said to date from 1858, and to have been the kitchen of the original hotel, later moved to this site. **12 Pearl Street [40]** appears unremarkable, but it was built as Baker Memorial Baptist Church in 1902; it stood several miles north of town on Drummondtown Road, and was moved to this site in pieces in the late 1930s.

From Pearl Street turn right (west) on Park Avenue, where the second lot on the left contains the ruins of the **Boy Scout Building [41]**, begun in 1959 and never completed. From the next corner can be seen **5 West Street [42]**, a fourth house similar to the three early "model" homes at the corner of South and High Streets, dating perhaps from the 1870s. Park Avenue leads to an area once known as "Sheep Pen," now **Herbert S. Powell Memorial Park [43]**, named for the educator who lived at 26 Main Street. Among the trees on the knoll beyond the pavilion is an old **Burial Ground [44]** of the Ashby, Fox, Kellam, Mears, and Parker families, where the oldest

grave dates from 1771, the most recent from 1907. Park Avenue circles around to become Bayview Avenue, the newest section of Wachapreague, opened in 1946. No old houses in this block, except **18 Bayview Avenue [45]**, which began life as the Pender Grocery Store on High Street, and was moved aside for the construction of the firehouse in 1944.

After one block of Bayview turn left (north) up Pearl, then right (east) on South Street. **16 South Street [46]** on the right was the old "Temperance Hall," erected about 1887. It faces the backyard of the **Phillips House [47]** (7 Center Street), built about 1887, which has been handsomely and whimsically restored. **12 South Street [48]** may date from as early as 1883; it has architectural details similar to the LeCato House at 22 Main. Look south down Center Street to **14 Center Street [49]**, a small shingled cottage that originally stood on Cedar Island. Turn left (north) up Center Street towards Main. **1 Center Street [50]** is a small house of undetermined age, but apparently among the older ones of Wachapreague.

North of Main Street

Lee Street leads north from Main into the section of town developed not by the Powell Brothers but by Thomas F. Floyd. **2 Lee Street [51]**, on the left, was once a guest house known as Channel Bass Inn. The charming **Fanny Jones House [52]** at 7 Lee Street has been authentically restored. At 13 Lee Street, just past Powellton Avenue, is the old **Pilgrim Holiness Church [53]**, erected 1907 and used as such until 1935. **10 Lee Street [54]** was the home of Isaac "Ike" Phillips (1858-1954), best known of the decoy carvers of Wachapreague, who made them by the hundreds and sold them for $12 a dozen. On the corner stands the late 19th-
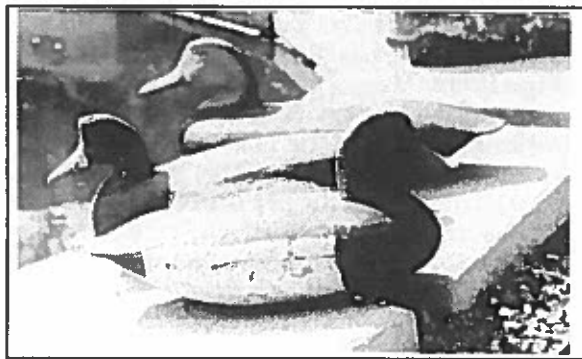
Decoys of Capt. Ike Phillips.

century **Copes/Belote House [55]** (15 Lee Street), unlike any others in Wachapreague but similar to many in Parksley in the northern part of the county.

From Lee Street turn left (west) to Custis Street, the original road into Wachapreague (note that behind you the street ends at the "mansion house" at 15 Brooklyn Avenue). After one block, at the corner of Custis and Church Streets, you can see ahead of you an old **Double House [56]** (22317 Custis Street), on the right; its age is undetermined, but it is similar to many other early 19th-century houses on the Eastern Shore, and is undoubtedly older than the town itself. Turn left (south) on Church Street, where **The Oldest House in Wachapreague [57]** used to stand just north of 7 Church Street. It has since been moved a block further south, and stands today in the yard behind **10 Powellton Avenue [58]**, which is itself a handsome house of the 1890s.

The oldest house in Wachapreague, now in the backyard of 10 Powellton Avenue, was probably a tenant house on the original Teackle plantation.

From Church Street turn left (east) on Powellton Avenue, misnamed since it is not in that part of town developed by the Powell Brothers. **3 Powellton Avenue [59]**, on the left, is an attractive small house of the 1880s or 1890s with a remnant of "gingerbread" under the front gable. On the right where Powellton ends at Brooklyn Avenue is the **Levin Core House [60]** (8 Brooklyn Avenue).

a handsome home of the 1880s beautifully restored; it is said to have been built by a Coast Guardsman, who attempted to replicate the style then current among Coast Guard stations. On the left is **10 Brooklyn Avenue [61]**, also from the early 1880s, and looking deceptively small from the outside, for inside the ceilings on the lower floor are ten feet high.

Looking westward down Powellton Avenue is **Hart's Harbor House [62]** (9 Brooklyn Avenue), built in the early 1880s and now restored as a bed-and-breakfast inn. The Boulter family, who once lived here, owned the first automobile in Wachapreague. Its neighbor, also a bed-and-breakfast, is **Burton House [63]** (11 Brooklyn Avenue), built 1883 and named for W. Heber Burton (1882-1939), at one time the mayor of Wachapreague. The gazebo at the back of the house contains beams and railings from the Hotel Wachapreague.

This walking tour ends at the two bed-and-breakfast inns, a short distance from where it began.

Hart's Harbor House at 9 Brooklyn Avenue was built in the 1880s.
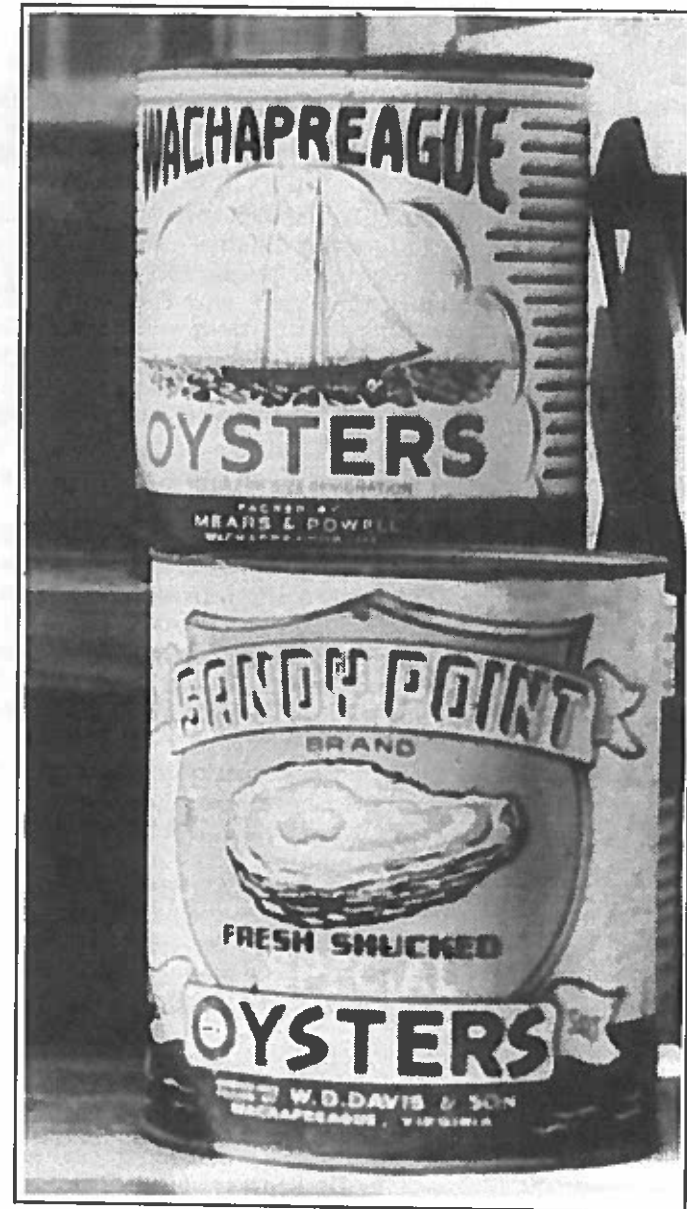
Wachapreague Collectibles.

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