

DORCHESTER COUNTY

HEART OF THE CHESAPEAKE



HERITAGE TRAILS



Waterfront Villages

Life on the water

Take a scenic driving tour through islands along the Chesapeake Bay and get a taste of a different way of life





Crab pots on the waterfront in Madison.

Welcome.

The Heart of the Chesapeake

While it shares an overall common history and culture with the rest of Maryland's Eastern Shore, Dorchester possesses a sense of place and character all its own, as noted by such writers as James Michener, H.L. Mencken and Dorchester native son John Barth. To experience true "Shoreness," nothing surpasses Dorchester County. Dorchester County has a distinctively rich culture with numerous places where you can explore and absorb the heritage that helps make us the Heart of

Chesapeake Country. In this Heritage Trails brochure, we've put together highlights of the waterfront villages from Cambridge westward to islands along the Chesapeake Bay—covering Church Creek, Madison, Taylors Island, and Hoopers Island. These places are rich in history—Native American, European colonial, African-American, maritime, and agricultural. Spend the day exploring or choose one spot that catches your interest.



Today's water views on Hoopers Island are much as they were in this 1959 photo.

PHOTOGRAPH BY A. AUBREY BODINE • COPYRIGHT © JENNIFER B. BODINE

★ Dorchester Visitor Center

2 Rose Hill Place, 410.228.1000, TourDorchester.org

Start your exploration at the Visitor Center.

With its sail soaring 100 feet in the air, the Dorchester County Visitor Center is easy to find. Come for information about the area. See exhibits on local life, agriculture, seafood, the Underground Railroad, natural resources, and more. The Visitor Center also has restrooms, a playground overlooking the river, and a boardwalk.



Open daily, 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m. at 2 Rose Hill Place in Cambridge, near the Malkus Bridge over the Choptank River. Also visit us at TourDorchester.org for hotel and restaurant listings, museums, events, and more.

COMMERCE ON THE CHOPTANK

The Dorchester Visitor Center is on the Choptank River, once a bustling center of commerce. Along this stretch of the river is one of only two deep-water ports in Maryland. In the 1800s and 1900s, steamboats, skipjacks, and many other vessels used this waterway as a major highway. Find out more in the Heritage Trails brochure “Cambridge,” available at the Visitor Center.

Waterfront villages

Take a peek into a quieter way of life.

Waterfront villages are found throughout Dorchester County on rivers, on creeks, on the Chesapeake Bay—and all along the county's 1,700 miles of shoreline. These picturesque villages, each home to a few hundred residents, provide a window into a quieter way of life where there are no traffic lights, where the local church or fire hall serves as the central gathering place, and where tides still rule daily routines.

Though colonial settlers here first looked to farming as a way to survive, many turned to the water as a livelihood, learning from local Indians how to harvest seafood and how to build log canoes.

Today, the tradition of “working on the water” continues. In many of these villages, particularly in summer when crabs are “running,” you’ll find men—and a few women—baiting their trot lines or unloading the day’s catch. Many of the same watermen refit their boats in late fall and winter for harvesting oysters. Other watermen have retooled and offer charter boats for fishing or sightseeing.

While waterfront villages dot the landscape throughout the county, from Secretary in the northeast to Elliotts Island in the southeast, here we focus on islands along the Chesapeake Bay, where you can follow the Heritage Trail tour to experience several villages during a half-day or full-day jaunt.

PLAN AHEAD. Because this Heritage Trail tour includes long stretches where the sole source of refreshment is the beautiful landscape, it's best to plan ahead. Top off the gas tank in Cambridge and pay attention to where general stores and restaurants are noted.



Kayaking around Taylors Island.

RECREATION ALONG THE HERITAGE TRAIL

The natural beauty of the waterfront villages scattered throughout Dorchester and the rural areas that link them make for some excellent outdoor recreation. The quiet roads are perfect for cycling. The many waterways offer up paddling opportunities. Sailing, cruising, and some of the Chesapeake Bay's best fishing happen on local rivers and on the Chesapeake Bay. You'll find necessities—from bug spray to monofilament to sandwiches—in marina stores and general stores along the Heritage Trail. Find out more about outdoor adventure in Dorchester at TourDorchester.org.

Of course, with seafood such a big part of life here, picking crabs and shucking oysters are their own form of much-loved recreation. In season, local crabmeat and oysters are on the menus of nearly every sit-down restaurant in Dorchester. Some places also offer carry-out crabs (live or steamed). For details, pick up the **Dorchester Restaurant Guide** from the Dorchester Visitor Center.

CHURCH CREEK



Southwest of Cambridge, Church Creek was established in the early 1700s, but wasn't incorporated as a municipality until 1867. Well positioned on protected waterways leading to the Little Choptank River and close to an abundance of oak and pine suitable for boatbuilding, it gained local prominence as a center of shipbuilding. As the forests were depleted in the late 1800s, shipbuilding declined. Today, commercial watermen still keep workboats on Church Creek. While boats used to carry the area's abundant produce to distant places, today's travelers can stop along Route 16 at Emily's Produce (open seasonally), featuring fresh locally grown produce, homemade desserts, hanging baskets, and a children's play area.

GETTING THERE: From the Visitor Center, turn left on Maryland Avenue. Turn right on Route 50 heading east. After 1.5 miles, turn right on Church Creek Road (Route 16). Continue for approximately six miles.

1 White Haven Church

1920 Church Creek Road, Church Creek

Dating to 1846, the church may have been erected upon the site of a Methodist Meeting House dating to the late 1700s. In front of the church is a historical marker referring to the "Treaty Oak," a tree, now long gone, where the settlers and the Indians of the Choptank tribe reportedly negotiated the sale of nearby land.



GETTING THERE: Continue on Church Creek Road (Route 16) past Brannocks Neck Road. Church is on right. Parking in lot.

2 Old Trinity Church

1716 Taylors Island Road, Church Creek; oldtrinity.net

Tucked in a copse of tall trees on the banks of Church Creek, just eight miles from busy U.S. 50, is one of the most historical and serene church-and-cemetery settings in the



state. Old Trinity Church was built on private land after 1660 and before the 1692 Vestry Act created 32 Church of England parishes in Maryland. The brick structure experienced periods of neglect, but today the restored building has the likely distinction of being the oldest Episcopal church in continuous use in its original form in the country. It is no accident that the church was built near water. In the early colonial period, before roads were hacked from woodlands, settlers often by necessity traveled by water. The graveyard holds the remains of Thomas King Carroll (Maryland's governor from 1830-31), his distinguished daughter Anna Ella Carroll (see below), and three Revolutionary War veterans.

GETTING THERE: Take Route 16 west of Church Creek; follow signs at Old Trinity Church Road. Parking in lot.

POLITICAL PIONEER



Buried in Old Trinity's cemetery is Anna Ella Carroll, a Dorchester resident and Unionist author described as the unofficial member of President Abraham Lincoln's cabinet.

A roadside marker provides more of her story. An event usually held in August honors her life. Visit TourDorchester.org for details.

3 Woolford Country Store

1614 Taylors Island Road, Woolford; 410.228.3020

The Woolford Country Store lies just beyond Steamboat Road, where steamboats used to dock after puffing up Church Creek. Attached to the local post office, the store is open all year seven days a week, and offers sandwiches, deli meats, beverages, ice, hunting and fishing gear, and ice cream.



GETTING THERE: Continue beyond Church Creek along Route 16 west to Woolford. Store is on the right.

MADISON



Madison dates to before 1760 and was once known as Tobacco Stick. Local lore has it that the name Tobacco Stick came from a story about a Native American who

used a tobacco stick—a straight length of wood used for drying tobacco—as a pole to vault over a creek to escape English settlers who were pursuing him.

Madison is a quiet waterfront community whose past included a hotel, a steamboat wharf, a sewing factory, a canning plant, a shipbuilding yard, and three churches. Today, one of the churches remains, along with sections of the cannery, now occupied by McCray's Castaways restaurant and bar. Nearby is a public boat ramp and slips. A historic marker tells of Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman's connections to the area.

GETTING THERE: From Woolford, continue west on Route 16, turning right on Old Madison Road and then past the fire station, turning right on Madison Canning House Road.

4 Madison United Methodist Church

1213 Old Madison Road, Madison

This tall-steepled church, with a cemetery behind it, dates from 1910 when Madison was a busier place. A short walk away is an enclosed graveyard with a tablet and church bell commemorating the former Gethsemane Protestant Church. This church was founded in 1840, rebuilt in 1892, and ultimately razed in 1986 after a damaging fire.



GETTING THERE: From Woolford Country Store, turn right on Old Madison Road. The church is down the road on the left. Old Madison Road loops back onto Route 16.

5 Stewart's Canal

Parsons Creek Bridge, Route 16, Madison

Dorchester's native hardwoods were prized by boat builders and others in need of lumber, but the challenge was transporting the lumber along the area's muddy marshes and shallow, serpentine creeks. The solution was canals. Joseph Stewart and other landowners in the area designed a canal in the early 1800s to float logs and agricultural products to the wharves and shipyards in Madison Bay. Enslaved and free blacks dug this seven-mile canal—grueling and sometimes deadly work. Today the canal stretches in a straight line, visible from the southern side of Parsons Creek bridge on Route 16 west of Madison. The canal is part of the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument. Tubman worked in timbering operations nearby.



GETTING THERE: From Madison, continue west on Route 16 to Parsons Creek Bridge.

Oral tradition suggests that Harriet Tubman, before she became the famous Underground Railroad conductor, lived during the mid-1840s with her husband south of Madison near the site of the current Malone Church and Cemetery on White Marsh Road. The Malone Church, founded in 1864, was formed from the strong, well-established faith communities that would have existed during Tubman's time.

TAYLORS ISLAND



Land grants on Taylors Island date to 1662, making this region between the Chesapeake Bay and Slaughter Creek one of the earliest settled by Europeans in Dorchester history. Approximately eight miles long and two miles wide, Taylors Island is known for its historic churches and spectacular sunsets. Many sites are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Before crossing onto Taylors Island, you'll see the Slaughter Creek Marina (on the right), which has boat slips, boat rentals, and a ship's store. Also on the waterfront here is Palm Beach Willie's Restaurant, on a floating dock that used to be a Coast Guard station. Just beyond the Slaughter Creek bridge on Taylors Island (on the right) is a combination restaurant and country store, the Island Grille. Built in 1916, the Island Grille served in the past as a post office. In the same complex is the Chapel Cove Marina and a bait and tackle shop. A public boat ramp is located nearby.

GETTING THERE: From Madison, continue on Route 16 west about four miles.

6 Becky Phipps Cannon

Taylors Island Road (Route 16), Taylors Island

In the winter of 1814, local militia volunteers surrounded a British vessel trapped in ice near the mouth of the Little Choptank River and forced the surrender of the crew and officers. The prisoners were marched to Cambridge. The British cannon, which remained on the island, was nicknamed “Becky Phipps,” a version of the names of the vessel’s black cook—Becca—and its commanding officer—Matthew Phipps. This site is part of the National Park Service Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail.

GETTING THERE: On Taylors Island Road, the cannon is on the right just past the Slaughter Creek Bridge.



ABOVE-GROUND BURIAL VAULTS

Dorchester’s oldest cemeteries contain burial vaults with exposed lids. This was an interment practice designed to keep coffins above the high water table found throughout the region. The tradition continues to this day.



WATCH OUT FOR WATER ON ROADS:

As low-lying islands, Taylors Island and Hoopers Island are subject to occasional high tides and storm surges that bring water onto the road. If you see water on the road, use caution.

7 Taylors Island School

Hoopers Neck Road, Taylors Island

Built in 1917, this “consolidated” school replaced three other schools on the island for the white children, and also served as a community center. The black children had a separate school built about the same time. Children who graduated from here and went to high school in Cambridge had to walk or bike four miles to get to the bus at the general store. The school closed in 1974 and served as a museum for several years.



GETTING THERE: Continue on Route 16 about a third of a mile past Island Grille, where Route 16 turns into Hoopers Neck Road. Building is on the left.

8 Grace Episcopal Church Complex

4401 Hoopers Neck Road, Taylors Island

On the National Register of Historic Places, this complex includes three historic structures. The Victorian Gothic-style Grace Episcopal Church was built in 1873. The Chapel



of Ease was erected in the early 1700s for members of the “Old Trinity Church” near Church Creek who lived closer to Taylors Island. The building later served as a blacksmith shop, a voting place, and a school for African-Americans. The Old Schoolhouse, a 15-foot square building built in the 1780s, is believed to be the first schoolhouse in Dorchester County.

GETTING THERE: Continue on Hoopers Neck Road about a mile. Complex is on the right. Parking near church.

9 Lane Methodist Episcopal Church



4511 Hoopers Neck Road,
Taylors Island

Built in 1897 to serve the island's black community, the church drew large crowds to its summer "camp meetings" until the mid-1900s. Regular services were discontinued when the congregation joined the New Revived Methodist Church in the 1980s

(see next page). Like many rural Eastern Shore churches, the front door is flanked by two narrow windows.

GETTING THERE: Continue on Hoopers Neck Road for about a mile; church is on right. Parking by side of road.

10 Bethlehem Methodist Episcopal Church

4519 Hoopers Neck Road,
Taylors Island

Also known as the Old Brick Church, this structure was built in 1857 on the site of a previous church erected 70 years before, making it the oldest Methodist Episcopal church on record in Dorchester County. During the debate over slavery in the 1800s, the congregation split from the main Methodist church, which officially decried human bondage. Across the road are graves, some dating to the late 1700s; some of War of 1812 veterans. The church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



GETTING THERE: Church is on right about a half-mile from Lane. Parking by church.

STAY OVERNIGHT: Extend your explorations. Lodging options in the area include the Island House B&B (513 Taylors Island Road, 410.228.2184) and the Taylors Island Campground (4362 Bay Shore Road, 410.397.3275). The camp store is open to non-campers.



TURNING POINT: From here, you have the option of returning to Cambridge by retracing your steps. Or you can continue on to Hoopers Island via Smithville Road (another 12 miles to the northernmost point of island). Smithville Road skirts a section of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. While there are no auto gas stations in this area, there is one on Hoopers Island.

11 New Revived Methodist Church

4350 Smithville Road, Taylors Island



This building replaces a church dating to the late 1800s.

Rural Dorchester was home to many communities of African-Americans who worked on the water as fishermen or in the timber trade. With the decline in both industries, many

moved away for jobs in Cambridge and other places, a trend that has left numerous African-American churches empty. This church serves as the only active African-American congregation remaining in its rural area.

GETTING THERE: From Route 16, head south on Smithville Road. Parking near church.

12 Oak Grove Methodist Episcopal Church

3647 Smithville Road, Taylors Island

Toward the end of Smithville Road, about seven miles from New Revived Methodist Church, lies the carefully maintained Oak Grove Methodist Episcopal Church, built in the 1870s and painted a rich brown with white trim. The roof has an unusually steep pitch, accented by a six-sided sealed window.



GETTING THERE: Follow Smithville Road south beyond Beaver Dam Creek. Church is on the left. Parking by road.

13 St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church, Tubman Chapel

917 Hoopers Island Road, Fishing Creek



St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church replaced the earlier Tubman Chapel, across the road, which was the first Catholic church built in Dorchester County. The original church served the community from the late 1760s until 1872. Services at the first church were administered

by Jesuit priests who sailed twice a year from St. Mary's County in Southern Maryland. The Tubman Chapel was restored by a descendant of Richard Tubman, who granted the original property to the church.

GETTING THERE: From Smithville Road, turn right onto Route 335 (Hoopers Island Road) and continue about 1.5 miles. Parking at St. Mary Star of the Sea.

HOOPERS ISLAND



The namesake of Hoopers Island is Henry Hooper, whose family settled here in 1669. At various periods in its history, islanders farmed, built ships, canned tomatoes, and sewed overalls and jumpers. Today it is a center of seafood catching and processing and charter sport fishing. Two of the three islands, Upper Hooper and Middle Hooper, are connected to the mainland by high arched bridges. A wooden bridge to the third island, Lower Hooper, was washed out years ago and has never been replaced. Hooper Island is subject to high tides and storm surges. Use caution if you see water on the road.

GETTING THERE: From St. Mary Church, continue to follow Route 335 (Hoopers Island Road) crossing the Fishing Creek bridge to Upper Hoopers Island.

14 Hoopers Island General Store

2806 Hoopers Island Road, 410.397.3123

This full-service country store offers hot meals, groceries, hardware, beverages, and gas. The nearest comparable store is more than 20 miles away.

GETTING THERE: Continue on Hoopers Island Road. The store is about a third of a mile after the Fishing Creek bridge on Upper Hoopers Island.

15 Hosier Memorial United Methodist Church

2637 Hoopers Island Road, Fishing Creek

The first church on Hoopers Island, Hosier dates back to 1896. Four years after it was built, it was destroyed by a storm and then rebuilt using timber from the remains of the church. The church's architectural style is representative of early Methodist construction in rural communities of the Chesapeake Bay area.



GETTING THERE: Continue south on Hoopers Island Road. Church is on the left.

16 Chesapeake Gold Oysters

2500 Old House Point Road, Fishing Creek; 410.397.3664

Chesapeake Gold Oysters are the harvest of Hooper Island Oyster Aquaculture Company, a facility that grows oysters in Chesapeake Bay waters, transitioning the traditional methods of watermen into a new industry. Open to the public; call ahead to reserve.

GETTING THERE: Continue south on Hoopers Island Road. Stay straight to go onto Old House Point Road.

17 Old Salty's Restaurant & Gift Shop

2560 Hoopers Island Road,
Fishing Creek; 410.397.3752

A few years after the local high school closed in 1976, the building was converted into one of the county's most popular restaurants. Old Salty's is open year-round and counts as one of its specialties locally-caught crab meat picked in a nearby processing house. The old gymnasium and stage remain and are used for banquets and receptions.



GETTING THERE: From Chesapeake Gold, head north on Old House Point Road. Turn left on Hoopers Island Road. Restaurant is on right after 0.3 miles.

18 A.E. Phillips & Son

2423 Hoopers Island Road, Fishing Creek; 410.397.3188

The Phillips family of Hoopers Island, known throughout the mid-Atlantic for its crab restaurants, started out in the seafood business in 1916 with this processing plant. The family opened a small crab house in 1956 in Ocean City as a way to sell surplus crabs. Business flourished and the family went on to open seafood restaurants all over the East Coast. Tours by appointment.

GETTING THERE: Stay on Hoopers Island Road past Old Salty's restaurant. Plant is on the left.

19 Hoopers Memorial Methodist Church

1746 Hoopersville Road, Hoopersville

With its back to the Chesapeake Bay, the church was built in the late 1800s. Unusually high water damaged it and many island buildings following the 2003 Hurricane Isabel.

GETTING THERE: Follow Hoopers Island Road over the bridge to Middle Hooper Island and Hoopersville. Church is on the right. Parking nearby.



20 Rippons Harbor

1814 Hoopersville Road, Hoopersville; 410.397.3200

Here along the traditional working waterfront on the eastern side of Hoopers Island, you'll see traditional engine-powered workboats that local watermen use to catch, in season, crabs, oysters, and other seafood. Many local families here have some connection to working the water, as crabbers, oyster tongers, or seafood packers.



Charter fishing boats also fill the slips here, with access to the Honga River and to the Chesapeake Bay—and some of the best spots for hooking striped bass (also called rock), croakers, bluefish, flounder, and mackerel.

GETTING THERE: Rippons Harbor lies across the road from Hoopers Memorial Methodist Church.

OYSTER WARS

The Chesapeake Bay had its own Wild West era in the late 1800s, when oystermen seeking to cash in on Maryland's abundant shellfish beds routinely exchanged gunfire with each other and the police. Things came to a head in Dorchester in 1888, when pirate watermen fired on the *Eliza Howard*, a sloop in Maryland's so-called Oyster Navy. Oysters became scarce due to over-harvesting, disease, and pollution, but today research is looking at how to increase the oyster population.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

21 Hooper Island Lighthouse

On a clear day, you can see this lighthouse three miles off the western edge of Middle Hooper Island. It is one of only five such aids to navigation built in the bay during the 1900s. The tapered 63-foot-high cast-iron caisson structure, complete with a veranda, a watchtower room, and a parapet, began operating in 1902 with a flashing white light. Keepers occupied the lighthouse until the U.S. Coast Guard automated it in 1961. The structure is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The lighthouse is being restored; for details, visit hooperislandlighthouse.org. Tours to see the exterior of the lighthouse close-up are available through Sawyer Charters, www.sawyercharters.com.



GETTING THERE: From Rippons Harbor or any point heading north back to Cambridge on Hoopers Island Road, look to the west to see the lighthouse in the bay.

ENDANGERED GRAVEYARDS

Hoopers Island is home to historic graveyards that are threatened by rising waters, wind, and erosion. The white stone markers of the Old Hoopers Island Graveyard are visible from the arched bridge spanning Fishing Creek. Another is known as the Anchor of Hope Graveyard. Local efforts are attempting to preserve the graveyards, but Mother Nature is a fierce foe.



THE HERITAGE TRAIL ENDS HERE.

At this point, you can return to Cambridge to end this tour of heritage sites or choose to continue your travels by exploring South Dorchester's waterfront villages (see next page). To return to Cambridge, head north via Hoopers Island Road, Route 335, and right onto Route 16 at the town of Church Creek. Route 16 brings you back onto U.S. Route 50 in Cambridge.

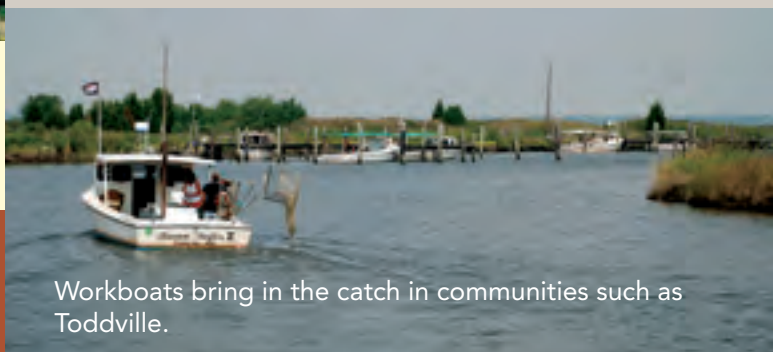


Looking west toward the Honga River in Bishops Head.

SIDETRIP: THE STRAITS DISTRICT

The drive into the Straits District in southern Dorchester County leads to one of the last remaining strongholds of traditional Eastern Shore maritime industry and culture and can add a half-day to your explorations. This marshy area is bounded on the west by the Honga River and on the east by Fishing Bay. In many small harbors and narrow creeks, the conventional workboat still outnumbers the pleasure boat. Although seafood harvests have substantially declined from the records set in the past century, many residents of Toddville, Wingate, Bishops Head, and Crocheron still rely on the fishing industry much as their forefathers did.

GETTING THERE: From Hoopers Island, proceed east on Route 335 past Gootee's Marine (about 7 miles), where the road becomes Route 336. After passing Blackwater Road, the road takes a sharp right bend and becomes Lakesville-Crapo Road. This road leads you into the heart of the Straits District.



Workboats bring in the catch in communities such as Toddville.

DISTANCE ALERT: The Straits District goes deep into southern Dorchester County. It's about 25 miles from Hoopers Island to the southern point of the Straits District, or, if traveling from Cambridge, about 35 miles.

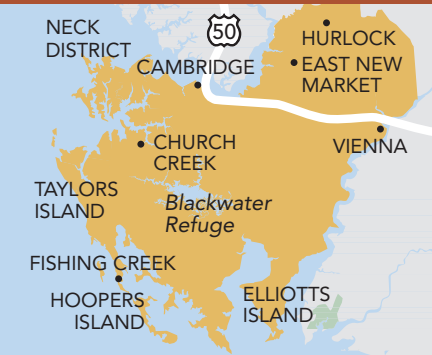


Dredging for oysters
under stormy skies
on the Choptank River
in 1947.



PHOTOGRAPH BY A. AUBREY BODINE • COPYRIGHT © JENNIFER B. BODINE

DORCHESTER COUNTY



MORE HERITAGE

TRAILS: Don't miss the other Heritage Trails brochures: "Cambridge" and "Sidetrips off Route 50." Pick them up at the Visitor Center in Cambridge.



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TourDorchester.org

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