



Clockwise from top: Here, a view of Hoskins Creek; St. Margaret's School's Brockenbrough House, which dates from 1763 and was hit by cannonball in the War of 1812; an art class at Water and Queen Studio; a swing overlooking the Rappahannock at St. Margaret's.



Rappahannock to a T

The Essex County seat, Tappahannock, is finally coming into its own.

Long known as a sleepy pass-through for summer people headed to The Northern Neck and points east along Rt. 360, Tappahannock is waking up to the possibility that we might want to stop and stay awhile. Although the arrival of Wal-Mart a decade ago seemingly threatened the existing business base of the town, there are those who've kept the faith and remained and others who are investing in the future, with energetic Mayor Roy Gladding cheering them on. He's the man behind the big new food-and-fun event in town, RivahFest! The following are a few more signs of life to consider:

While it may not sound glamorous, the new Hoskins Creek bridge is making a big difference for those who live in and visit Tappahannock. As things have started to pop around town, a thing called traffic, a heretofore unknown phenomenon, was getting a little snarly. The new four-lane



TOWNS

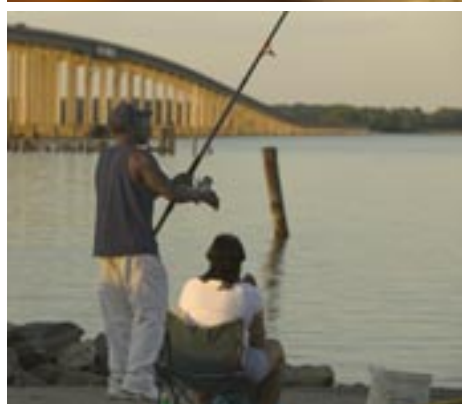
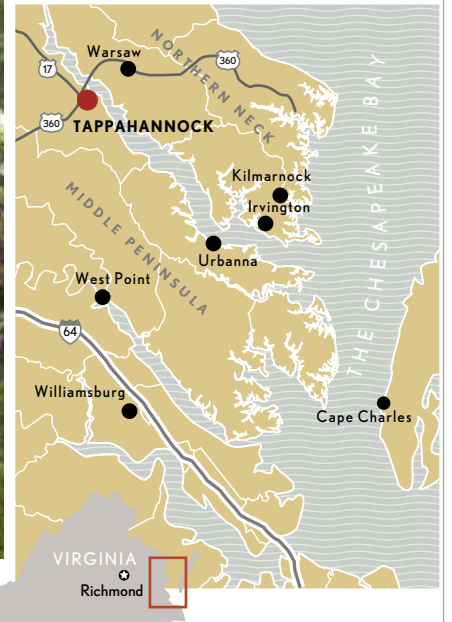
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bridge promises to make access to Tappy town a bit easier.

Evidence of commitment to preserving the town's Colonial past are two restoration projects in the works in the historic district, and old house buffs will be interested to take a peek at the progress of both. The older of the pair is the former **Emerson's Ordinary** (c. 1710), possibly the oldest house in Essex County, and definitely

the pet project of architect George Jennings, who is painstakingly reviving the place from its crumbling foundation up to its gambrel roof. When the work is complete, Jennings plans to live in the back of the house and run a gallery in the front rooms. A half-block away on the banks of the Rappahannock is **St. Margaret's School**, a day/boarding school for girls. A component of the campus is the historic (ca. 1763) Brockenbrough House. Commanding a panoramic view of the Rappahannock River, this late Georgian house was the site of a demonstration against the Stamp Act in 1766 and a target for British artillery in the War of 1812. Extensive termite damage has necessitated a massive preservation effort, which is now under way. The finished space will be used for offices

Clockwise: The unique landscape at the Essex Inn; a countryside view outside of town; fishing near the bridge to Warsaw; Victorian architecture in town; broiled crabcakes at Lowery's, a major stop on Route 17.



and available for public gatherings.

Want to know more about the history of the environs? The **Essex County Museum**, staffed by volunteers, offers a chronological snapshot of the area's history, ranging from prehistoric fossils up through the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Photographs and historical items detail the days of steamboat travel along the Rappahannock.

For the treasure hunter, Tappahannock has become a great town for meandering through aisles of old stuff. From the venerable **A-Z Antiques** and **Nadji Nook**, two of the oldsters on the block, to the upstart **Pizazz** now housed in an old filling station, there are plenty of places to satisfy the scavenger. **Queen Street Mall** and the **Essex Square Antique Mall** offer multiple dealers under one roof. Vintage books, glassware, furniture and furnishings, jewelry and oddities are all part of the offerings.

For a bite to eat other than the standard fast food fare, there's the **Riverside Café** on Prince Street. Sandwiches are all priced under \$5 and you can eat in or carry out. The old guy in town is **Lowery's**, a longtime favorite of locals and purveyor of specialties like fried shrimp. The **Crabby Oyster** on Rte. 360 also offers seafood. Locals also tout **Roma's** for Italian and **Ferebee's** for drinks, dinner and live music.

Visitors who find that they need more time to explore will find shelter at the new **Essex Inn**. Built on Duke Street in 1850, this Greek revival home has been transformed by Aylett native John Owen Gwathmey and wife Kelly. With four guest rooms in the house proper and two apartments adjacent, the National Historic Landmark is perfect for overnighting or throwing a party. From the Inn, guests can easily walk to antique shops, the Essex County Museum, eateries and St. Margaret's School, which dominates Tappahannock's waterfront. Open just slightly more than a year, the Inn's guest book already boasts names from as far as Texas and Illinois. — Elizabeth Cogar

The Essex in at (804) 443-9900, toll free (866) ESSEX-VA or EssexInnVa.com. For general information, visit Essex-Virginia.org.