Just a few miles north of Richmond lies Hanover County, a special place steeped in a long and colorful history. This guide is designed to help visitors experience the people, places and, events in Hanover County that helped to shape Virginia—and America. Throughout the county, dozens of state historic markers and numerous historic sites have been preserved to tell the stories of the earliest Native American inhabitants, the rich colonial history, the struggle for religious freedom, and the fight for independence from the British crown. Three National Park sites and two county parks commemorate battles of the Civil War. Choose one or sample them all. Hanover has something for the casual visitor or the most serious student of American history.

Continued on back cover

Visiting Hanover County
Visitor centers located in Ashland and at the Cold Harbor battlefield, eight miles east of Mechanicsville, are open year round. The visitor’s center at Bass Pro Shops in Winding Brook is open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. These centers are staffed to provide assistance with orientation and trip planning. In the spring and summer months special events like Civil War encampments and National Park Service ranger guided tours help to make Hanover’s history come alive.

For more information
If there is time to plan ahead consult the following web sites for information on special itineraries and events that will help make a visit to Hanover and the Richmond Region even more rewarding.

Civil War
www.civilwartraveler.com
www.nps.gov/rich

Visitor Information
www.visit.richmond.com • 1-888-RICHMOND
www.co.hanover.va.us
Hundred of years before the English set foot in what is now Virginia, indigenous people of the Chickahominy, Pamunkey, and Totopotomoy tribes inhabited this place and the rivers and other natural landmarks now honor their names. Jamestown brought English explorers to the region including Capt. John Smith whose capture by the great Chief Powhatan in Hanover led to his legendary escape led by Pocahontas.

Hanover County, chartered in 1720, quickly became well populated and emerged as a bustling center of commerce and trade, particularly tobacco. Local farmers used slave labor to plant, harvest, and transport this king crop to port at Hanover town on the Pamunkey River for shipment around the world. Evidence of this prosperity can be seen by driving along Hanover’s country roads and witnessing many of the grand plantation homes built during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Hanover also proved to be fertile ground for cultivating an emerging nation’s revolutionary spirit. In the late 1730’s Hanover County became a center of a powerful religious movement called the “Great Awakening.”

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The Reverend Samuel Davies, a newly ordained 23-year-old Presbyterian preacher arrived from Pennsylvania in 1747 to minister to these fledgling congregations. Davies became the first non-Anglican minister licensed to preach in Virginia. During his 12 year tenure, Davies led the pioneering effort to educate the black slave, recruit soldiers for Governor Dinwiddie to fight the French and Indian War, and minister to a young Patrick Henry and his mother at the Polegreen (www.historicpolegreen.org) meeting house. It has been said he had no peer in the pulpit in the Colonies. Before his death Henry credited Davies with “teaching...
me what an orator should be.” By 1800, Baptists, Methodists, and Quakers worshipped in Hanover.

Most Americans cherish our first freedoms, but it is likely that few are familiar with the events in Hanover that secured this right by influencing Virginia’s government to adopt the Statute of Religious Freedom in 1786. This landmark law became the inspiration for the First Amendment to the United States Constitution forever establishing the free exercise of religion. This successful struggle for liberty, in the form of religious toleration, began four decades earlier in Hanover County.

Hanover County’s famous son Patrick Henry fired his first oratorical shot of the coming political and military disturbance known as the American Revolution at Historic Hanover Courthouse in December 1763. Henry, a young lawyer, argued that government was a conditional compact between the king and his subjects. He asserted that by interfering with a law passed by the Virginia House of Burgesses the King was behaving as a tyrant and had sacrificed his right to the obedience of the people in this case. Ironically, the case involved the salaries of clergymen of the Church of England. The case would come to be known as “The Parsons’ Cause.”

Later Henry became a part of freedom lovers worldwide with his thunderous words “Give me Liberty or Give me Death” at St. John’s Church minutes from Hanover. The County is the repository of the greatest collection of Henry related sites in Virginia including his birthplace Studley, his boyhood church Polegreen, his wedding site Rural Plains, his honeymoon cottage Pine Slash, and his adult home Scotchtown, where he lived at the time of his famous call to liberty. You can visit these sites on the Road to Revolution at www.roadtorevolution.org.

Before his death Henry credited Davies with “teaching me what an orator should be.” Hanover was spared much of the direct action of the Revolutionary War until after Yorktown when American and French armies returned. George Washington passed by Hanover Courthouse at this time.

Another famous Hanover native, Henry Clay moved to Kentucky in 1785. Clay’s reputation grew as one of the best orators in American history as well as the father of compromises which postponed the start of the American Civil War by decades.
When civil war came to America in 1861, geography ensured that Hanover County would see a prominent role in the conflict. Most of the county lay within 20 miles of Richmond, and just 75 miles south of Washington, D.C. Northern armies, anxious to strike at the capital city of the Confederacy, repeatedly crossed through Hanover and fought many battles on its soil.

Two railroads bisected the county in the 1860s. The Virginia Central Railroad and the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad were vital components of the Confederate supply system. They brought supplies from northern and western Virginia, and transported troops back and forth between the city and the front lines. Union raiders often attacked those tempting targets, burned key bridges, and damaged sections of track.

Major campaigns in 1862 and 1864 devastated the county. George McClellan led a large Union army against Hanover, Grant narrowly escaped a disastrous defeat at the North Anna River, only to suffer a serious setback at Cold Harbor in June. These battles changed Hanover County and the lives of its inhabitants in a way none could have imagined. The county numbered 8,600 citizens when the war began. Just two years later, combined armies of nearly 200,000 occupied the county. When the armies returned in 1864, they brought at least 150,000 men. The battles they fought made the old county famous again, but at a heavy cost.

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Richmond in the spring of 1862. This period of the war, known as the Seven Days Campaign, included the Battle of Beaverdam Creek and the Battle of Gaines’ Mill in Hanover. Gaines’ Mill was one of the war’s bloodiest contests. In 1864, General Ulysses Grant led the Northern army in its second major drive against Richmond. Maneuvering through upper Hanover, Grant narrowly escaped a disastrous defeat at the North Anna River, only to suffer a serious setback at Cold Harbor in June.

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Above: The site of one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, Gaines’ Mill, is managed by the National Park Service.
Beaverdam Depot

Stood along the Virginia Central Railroad, the depot was destroyed by Union cavalry raiders early in the Civil War. It was quickly rebuilt, but was destroyed and reconstructed several more times during the war. The present structure was built in 1866. Ongoing restoration is taking place.

Church Quarter

Despite its name, Church Quarter was built in 1843 as a residence. It survives as the best-preserved antebellum log dwelling in the region. Strother Jackson reportedly stopped here for water during his march to join Robert E. Lee prior to the 1862 Seven Days Battles. Site is open daily; tours by appointment only.

HANOVER COUNTY VIRGINIA

Civil War Sites

Hanover County has many sites associated with the Civil War. Most of the major battles can be found by following two driving tours established by Virginia’s Civil War Trail program: the 1862 Fanwood Campus and Lee vs. Grant 1864. Maps and information can be obtained by calling 1-888-CIVIL WAR or by visiting www.civillwartrail.com. Both of these trails are indicated on the map by a red dashed line. The sites are accompanied with gold marks.

Major sites along the trails include:

- North Anna Battlefield: Between May 23 and May 26, 1864, approximately 18,000 Union and Confederate soldiers occupied fortifications along the North Anna River. The heaviest fighting occurred on the first two days. On May 23, the armies felt the area on their march toward Cold Harbor. A self-guided walking tour of the Ox Ford portion of the battlefield includes some of the best preserved trenches from the period. 804-365-4095. www.nps.gov/rich

- Gaines’ Mill Battlefield: Here on June 27, 1862, the largest battle of the June 26-28 campaign took place. That afternoon General Robert E. Lee, Confederate army reportedly assailed a smaller Union force that was stretched along a road. The North Anna cavalry of the Seven Days Campaign provided General Lee his first victory as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. The combined casualties for both armies numbered more than 15,000. Walking trails provide a self-guided tour of the battlefield. 804-226-1981 or www.nps.gov/rich

- Beaverdam Creek Battlefield: On June 26, 1862, General Robert E. Lee initiated the Seven Days Campaign by crossing the Chickahominy River with a large portion of his army. That afternoon he struck the Federals who were located behind Beaver Dam Creek. Although Lee’s army suffered five times the casualties of the Union army, the Federals abandoned their position during the night and retreated toward Orange. A walking trail encompasses both Union and Confederate positions. 804-226-1981 or www.nps.gov/rich

Old Church

Union infantry and cavalry passed through this hamlet on their way toward Cold Harbor in 1864. At the time a few scattered buildings comprised the community, including a schoolhouse and a tavern that served as headquarters for the Union cavalry corps. The tavern stands largely unchanged from its wartime appearance. The church that gave the community its name was long gone by 1861, but just to the east stands Immanuel Church, which was converted into a Union hospital during the Cold Harbor campaign.

Enon Church

On May 28, 1864, Union and Confederate forces clashed around Enon Church in one of the fiercest cavalry battles of the Civil War. The seven-hour battle, known as Enon’s Charge, ended when Union cavalry fell back west of the church and built fortifications to withstand the Union advance. The tables were turned the following afternoon General Robert E. Lee’s Confederate army pushed the Union force back. The fighting resulted in nearly 800 combined casualties.

Cold Harbor Battlefield

Union and Confederate forces clashed at the crossroads known as Cold Harbor on May 31, 1864. Within hours thousands of troops began to converge on the area, constructing fortifications that stretched for more than seven miles. On June 3, Union forces under General Ulysses S. Grant attempted to break through the Confederate defenses in one of the most memorable assaults of the war. Three full-scale attacks produced hundreds of casualties. The armies remained in position for several more days, and the area was eventually returned to Union control.

Hanover County Court House Complex

The historic courthouse (c.1755) along with the tavern, and early 19th century jail and clerk’s office, served as the political and judicial center for the county. Here Patrick Henry successfully argued the famous “Parson’s Cause” case against the Crown in 1765, and on the eve of the Revolution, citizens of the county assembled inside the courthouse to adopt the “Hanover Resolutions.” The courthouse is open by appointment. 804-537-5815.

Polegreen Church

This site was the center of the struggle for religious and civil liberty in the middle of the 18th century in Virginia. The Hanoverians, under the leadership of Presbyterian Minister Samuel Davies, challenged the established Anglican Church sponsored by the Colonial government. Patrick Henry spoke here throughout the adolescence, and years later he “Davies taught me what an orator should be.” The church was destroyed by Confederate artillery fire in 1864 and was never rebuilt. www.historicpolegreen.org

Rural Plains

During from about 1720, the house stayed continuously in the Shadwell family for more than 250 years. Virginia patriot and politician Patrick Henry reportedly named Sarah Shadwell in his 1754, 1710 A.D. then later in the center of the U.S. Army’s position during the Battle of Monacacy Creek. It survived that action, despite being pillaged by Confederate artillery fire. The house and site surrounding acres are preserved by Richmond National Battlefield Park. 804-226-1981 or www.nps.gov/rich

Scotchtown

(c.1750) Sir Charles Cockburn’s house and 960 acres were purchased by Patrick Henry in 1774. From here he rode to St. John’s Church in Richmond where he gave his “Liberty or Death” speech. Also served as childhood home of Dolley Madison. The home is owned and operated by APA’s Preservation Virginia and is furnished with a spectacular collection of period antiques. Open by appointment. 804-226-1981 or www.nps.gov/rich

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Significant Dates in Hanover History

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1600s</td>
<td>- Patrick Henry is born in Hanover County.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1700s</td>
<td>- Beaverdam Depot established along the Virginia Central Railroad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1800s</td>
<td>- Hanover County Courthouse Complex established.</td>
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2010s

- Michelle’s at Hanover Tavern is open Tuesday-Sunday, and a dinner theater. Open for tours Monday-Saturday, “Squashapenny” sprang up in this community. Virginia was located. General stores and other business such as taverns, were opened.

2015

- Ashland Theater is restored and reconstructed several more times during the war. The present structure was built in 1866. Ongoing restoration is taking place.

2100s

- Hanover Town Square is restored and reconstructed several more times during the war. The present structure was built in 1866. Ongoing restoration is taking place.

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