

# Historic Chincoteague Island



# Self-Guided Tour



## Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce & Certified Visitor Center 6733 Maddox Blvd

Established in 1954, the Chamber of Commerce originally met in different spaces before finding a permanent home in the 1970s in the building in the center of the circle on Maddox Blvd. In 2009, the Chamber was authorized to operate as an official Visitor Center by Virginia Tourism Corporation. This organization provides valuable services to the business community, island locals, as well as visitors to the island.

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### Informational Credits:

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More Itineraries



# The Story of Chincoteague

*While enjoying our beautiful wildlife, exploring our pristine creeks and marshes, relaxing on our beaches, indulging in delicious seafood, and enjoying the many activities and unique experiences that Chincoteague has to offer, take some time to learn more about our island's extensive history.*

The Gingo-Teague Tribe (for which the town is named) were a migratory group that used the island for hunting, fishing, and collection of valued shells. The first British settlers arrived in the early 17th century and, by that time the native Gingo-Teague Tribe had moved farther North on the peninsula. Colonel Daniel Jenifer, a surveyor appointed by Governor Berkeley, was the first to claim land on the island in 1671. His son-in-law, Thomas Welburn, built a small house on the island and had a tenant, Robert Scott, live in the house for a year to "seat" the island. By 1686, the island was considered abandoned and the courts granted half the land to William Kendall and half Major John Robins, with what is now Church Street as the dividing line. The first residents consisted of several tenants of Kendall and Robins as well as enslaved people.



Early Colonial life on Chincoteague was primitive, consisting of farming and raising livestock. The surrounding waters created natural barriers to contain horses, sheep, cattle, and pigs. The homes were one story frame buildings with no windows or chimneys, simply smoke holes and sand floors. By 1776, there were 20 families and over 400 sheep living here and residents relied heavily on the mainland for goods and services.

In 1821, the "Great September Gust" created a tidal wave that destroyed many of the buildings. It is unlikely any buildings still remain that were built prior to that storm. The locals rebuilt and the community continued to grow.

The early 1800's brought a trading post, churches, a school, a doctor, and a population boom. With the growing population, land for farms became less available, and seafood became the main occupation for many inhabitants; an influx of waterman and oysterman began.

In 1861, the island voted 134 to 2 not to secede from the Union. The majority of oysters being sold from the island were going to Northern cities. As such the loyalty of the islanders was solidly in favor of the Union. The town played a role in the Civil War when the Battle of Cockle Creek was fought in Chincoteague Bay in 1861. A secessionist schooner was sunk by the USS Louisiana. After the war, another influx of residents began and in 1866 the island had 110 houses.

The railroad arrived in 1876, ending 5 miles across the Chincoteague Bay, making Chincoteague Island easily accessible for the first time. Ferry boats brought people and goods across the water to the island. The Atlantic Hotel was built bringing tourists and sportsmen. The oyster industry was booming and this little island was flourishing. By 1911, Chincoteague was considered a progressive, modern, and thriving community.

Two major fires in 1920 and 1924 destroyed much of the downtown area, and prompted the creation of the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company (CVFC) in 1925. To raise money for new equipment, the CVFC took over the annual Pony Penning on Assateague Island and established the Annual Fireman's Carnival. These fires shaped the current Historic Main Street we know today.



Meanwhile, work was being done to permanently connect Chincoteague to the mainland as the causeway was created and opened in 1922, making the island more accessible to the growing tourism industry.

WW2 brought the presence of the Army and Navy to Chincoteague, and grew the influence and importance of the US Coast Guard, establishing the base where it stands today.

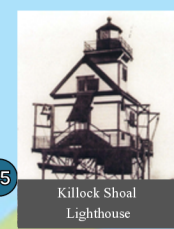
Along with the seafood industry and sportsmen tourism, chicken farming was a major part of the island for many years. The Ash Wednesday storm of 1962 put the town underwater, destroying many structures and devastating the poultry industry. It never recovered, though signs of that history can be seen in old chicken houses and names like Chicken City Road. Despite this tragedy, a new life was beginning for the island, with the completion of the bridge to Assateague Island that same year. With easy access to the pristine beaches and natural beauty of the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, created in 1943, tourism in Chincoteague boomed and has continued to grow since then.

A burst of popularity came to the island after the 1947 publishing of the beloved book *Misty of Chincoteague* by Marguerite Henry with illustrations by Wesley Dennis and again in 1961 with the premier of the film, *Misty*.

The town's population is now approximately 3,000 and life on the island has changed in many ways. The primary economy has evolved over the years from farming to seafood and now, to tourism. This tour guide will help show you Chincoteague's rich history and provide a glimpse into the way life once was on this historic and unique island.

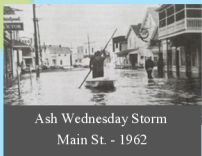


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Killook Shoal Lighthouse

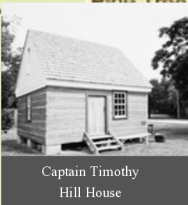
Franklin City Railroad Docks - Once a thriving hub of commerce, Franklin City went into decline after the RR service ceased in 1957. Now a few houses and remnants of the dock remain.



Ash Wednesday Storm Main St. - 1962



Marguerite Henry and Misty



Captain Timothy Hill House

**Biking Guide:**

- Green line: Designated bike lane or path
- Yellow line: Road with shoulder, use caution
- Orange line: Road with no shoulder, use extra caution
- Red line: Road with no shoulder, blind turns, and/or high-traffic intersections. Avoid or walk your bike when on these routes.

**Remember: Walk AGAINST Traffic, Bike WITH Traffic.**  
Walk your bike on sidewalks, ride your bike on streets.



**Legend:**

- Public Restrooms
- Public Parking
- Bicycle Repair Station
- Misty's Trail
- John H. Tarr Bay to Beach Bicycle Trail



In 1876, the railroad came to the Eastern Shore, ending in Franklin City, now a part of Greenbackville on the mainland. Vessels like the "Steamer of Chincoteague" and the gas powered "Manzanita" carried passengers and freight the 5 miles from the island to the railroad dock prior to the completion of the causeway in 1922.

CHINCOTEAGUE

Little Oyster Bay

Assateague Channel

CHINCOTEAGUE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

**1 Curtis Merritt Harbor & Waterman's Memorial (2246 Curtis Merritt Harbor Dr.)**- Built in 2005 the Harbor is named for a local blind decoy carver who inspired his community. The Waterman's Memorial honors local watermen and military personnel lost at sea.

**2 Beebe Ranch (3062 Ridge Rd.)** - This 1920s ranch was home to the Beebe family who bred Chincoteague ponies, including the legendary Misty of Chincoteague. It was purchased and restored by the Museum of Chincoteague Island in 2023.



**3 Veterans Memorial Park (7470 Memorial Park Dr.)** - Located on the Assateague Channel, the park features sporting, fishing, and family activities. There are memorials to all who have served our country. This is also the most popular location to view the annual Chincoteague Pony Swim. Looking across the water you will see Assateague Island. In the 1947 book *Misty of Chincoteague*, Misty was born on Assateague and swam in the Annual Pony Swim. At that time, the ponies came ashore in what is now this park.

**4 Greenwood Cemetery (Corner of Bunting and Willow St)** Ida and Clarence Beebe (Grandma & Grandpa) and Paul Beebe are buried in Greenwood Cemetery alongside the path on the east side.

**5 William C. Bunting House (3594 Main St.)** - Built in 1922, the owner established the William C. Bunting Oyster Company, which was famous for its Tom's Cove brand of salt oysters. The company operated at the dock behind the current Don's Seafood Restaurant on Main Street. William was known in the community as an "exceedingly kindhearted man."



**6 John W. Bunting House (3608 Main St.)** - This home was built in 1901. Orphaned at a young age, Mr. Bunting became one of the most prominent citizens of the Island and wealthiest men on the Eastern Shore. He made his money in the seafood industry and served as a community leader holding several appointed positions in town. He also gave generously to the community.

**7 Firemen's Carnival Grounds (3648 Main St.)**

Originally on Mumford St, then moved to Marlin St, and finally to the current carnival grounds in 1945. The carnival is the primary funding source for the Volunteer Fire Company. Much of the movie *Misty* was filmed on the Carnival Grounds.



**8 Charlie Gall Store (3747 Main St.)** - This building housed one of several neighborhood stores on the Island throughout the early to mid-1900s. The store sold groceries and other merchandise. Islanders often said that if Charlie Gall didn't have it, you didn't need it.

**9 "Squealer" Dan Wheaton House (3760 Main St.)** - Squealer Dan was a sea captain with a high pitched voice who transported cargo on his schooner, *Alberta*, up and down the East coast. In 1901, the same year he built this home, he purportedly saved the crew of a sinking Spanish ship off Winter Quarter Shoal. Dan was one of the Island's well-known characters. While in court on a charge of hunting out of season, Dan, who loved hunting, told the judge "I just couldn't help it." He and his wife, Elizabeth, had a daughter, Ida Virginia, who later became the inspiration for Grandma Beebe in the *Misty* books.

**10 U.S. Coast Guard Station (3823 Main St.)** - The station was established during World War II in 1943 as the 6th District Headquarters. In the 1990s, additional land was acquired to enlarge the facility. Prior to the establishment of the headquarters, multiple "life saving stations" were located on Assateague and the surrounding islands. The station occupies land that was previously Wimbrow Brothers Shipyard.

**11 Frank Matthews House (3860 Main St.)** - This home was built in the 1890s and was the home of Chincoteague's first Mayor elected in 1908, when the "Act to incorporate the town of Chincoteague" was passed. The original town borders were Booth St. to Poplar St. and the waterfront on the Chincoteague Bay to the waters between what is now Willow St. and Ridge Rd., then known as "the Glade."

**12 Old Firehouse (4028 Main St.)** - The original firehouse was a wooden structure built around 1925 on Cleveland St. The current structure was built in 1934 and enlarged in 1957. The CVFC served the community out of this site for 83 years. The wooden eagle above the garage doors was carved in the 1890s and first mounted on the Red Men's Hall, which was located on the site of the current post office. That building, purchased in 1895, had 3 floors. The top floor was the first unofficial "Town Hall." The CVFC moved to its new building in 2017.



**13 Old Town Jail (6287 Cropper St.)** - This building was built around 1927 after a fire in the old wooden jail on Mumford Street. This "modern" structure served as the Town Jail into the 1960s.

**14 Brasure Building (4039 Main St.)** - The building includes part of John A.M. Wheaton's home, built in 1861. Wheaton is said to have introduced the "cultivation" of oysters in 1864. Outside the house, he installed a large bell to warn the island in an emergency. He led the effort to keep Chincoteague with the Union during the Civil War, largely due to the island's reliance on northern cities for their oyster trade.

Main Street - 1962  
Pictured is Kelly Conklin,  
owner of the Island  
Creamery. The Brasure  
Building can be seen  
behind him.



**15 Chincoteague Channel Fishing Pier (4067 Main St.)** - Prior to 2009, this was the location of the bridge onto the island. The causeway and original bridge were an engineering feat, built in 1921-22. Originally, it was a privately owned toll road and upon completion a full day of parades and festivities was planned. The day was interrupted by a heavy rain, which turned the new causeway into mud. Over 60 vehicles became stuck, including the Governor of VA, and locals jumped into action to rescue the stranded guests and dignitaries. The pier is now a beautiful place for locals and guests to enjoy and view the wonder that is the causeway which connects the island to the outside world.



**16 Watson Brothers Building (4065 Main St.)** - Originally Watson's Ice Cream Parlor in 1930, the building later housed a restaurant, pool hall, real estate office, and retail store.

**17 Island Theatre (4068 Main St.)** - The former site of the island's first hotel, Atlantic Hotel, which opened in 1876 by Joseph English and was the largest building in town. The hotel burned in 1920 and was not rebuilt. In 1947 the theatre, built in a late art deco style with a vitrolite glass, Chincoteague Pony marquee, and yellow brick facade, opened. In 1961, the movie *Misty* premiered there with an appearance by Misty - her hoofprints placed in the cement in front of the theatre with Marguerite Henry signing Misty's name. In 2011, the Chincoteague Island Arts Organization was formed to purchase the theatre and restore it to its original condition with modern upgrades. The theatre remains a hub for the performing arts, events, and classic & current films, offering cultural opportunities to the community.



**18 Telegraph Office (4071 Main St.)** - This 420 square foot building was built in 1940. It was the second telegraph office on the island and is now a barbershop.

**19 Boatman's Bank Building (4073 Main St.)** - Erected in 1896, the Boatman's bank was the first official bank on the island. This building later served as a doctor's office, barbershop, and book store.

**20 Chincoteague Island Library (4077 Main St.)** - Built in 1887, the building was originally the O.M. Jones Drug Store. In 1908, the building became Wallace "Tig" Jester's Barber Shop. For 75 years, Tig offered a shave, haircut, and a gathering place for Island men. In 1983, the Citizens' League purchased the building and moved it to its present location. The new addition, completed in 2009, is modeled after the Caulk House (1866) which was better known as the "Round House" and had served as a Customs House, near the current Post Office.

**21 Robert Reed Waterfront Park (4083 Main St.)** - The waterfront of this park was once the site of the railroad docks, bringing goods and passengers from the mainland to the island before the causeway was built. There were oyster houses, fisheries, and other commercial buildings alongside the docks, making it a hub of the community. A fire in 1924 and the Ash Wednesday storm of 1962 destroyed most of the buildings, many were never rebuilt. Now owned by the Town of Chincoteague, the waterfront park features the 10ft tall Adirondack "LOVE" chairs, gifted by the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce, and statue of Misty of Chincoteague, sculpted by Brian Maughan.

**22 Old Powell Opera House and Theater (4098 Main St.)** Built in 1909 by James T. Powell, this building was the first movie theater on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. The theater had a Steinway player piano for silent movies and the facility served as the site of live entertainment. After Powell's death in 1948, the theater closed. The building was eventually converted into individual shops and now stands as the Village Mall.

**23 Bank of Chincoteague (4102 Main St.)** - The bank was established in 1909 as the second bank on the island. This structure was built in 1925 and was damaged by a fire before completion. After being rebuilt the bank served the community, eventually merging with the Marine Bank (#25) in 1933.

**24 Accomack Masonic Lodge (4108 Main St.)** - In the early 1900's the island had 8 different fraternal lodges. The Masonic lodge was established in 1889 and the building erected at this address in 1892, then rebuilt after burning down in 1921. Masons remain active on the island in a newer building on Woodland Dr. A mural depicting the history of the island by Michael Rosato now adorns the side of the building.

**25 Marine Bank (4116 Main St.)** - In 1870, the island's first telephone exchange was in a tiny building on this site. The bank building came in 1918. The inside of the building burned in the 1920 fire that destroyed much of the east side of the downtown area, leaving the just the walls and facade intact, but it was quickly repaired and reopened.

A postcard from the 1920s showing #22, 23, 24, & 25



**26 Channel Bass Inn & Tea Room (6228 Church St.)** - Originally called the "Hurdle House" this building was owned by the Wheaton family. It was purchased by Emma Russell, moved from Main St. to Church St. and renamed Channel Bass Inn. At the time it was one of two hotels on the island, after the Atlantic Hotel burned down. The building has been enhanced extensively over the years and has operated as a hospitality business for over a century. In 1935 John W. Winder, twice Mayor of Chincoteague, purchased the property and it stayed in his family until the 1970s.

**27 Methodist Episcopal Church & Parsonage (6254 Church St.)** - The Methodist Episcopal Congregation began in a building on Main St. near Taylor St. In 1886, they built this wood structure on Church St. They moved to the new building across the street (#30). The old church building currently houses the United Methodist Women's Opportunity Shop to provide affordable items to the community.

**28 Saint Andrew the Apostle Catholic Church (6288 Church St.)** - This structure was originally erected in 1888 as the Methodist Protestant Church. A corner stone preserves the history on the lower right corner of the foundation. The parsonage at 6270 Church St. was built in the early 1900s. One of the first "Colored Regiments" of the Civil War protected the Assateague Lighthouse. While on Chincoteague, they were housed in this building. By 1930 the Methodist Protestant church closed and the building was purchased in 1964 by the growing Catholic Congregation.

**29 Union Baptist Church (6365 Church St.)** - In 1804 a small schoolhouse stood on this land, a rarity on the Eastern Shore at the time. It was abandoned by 1828 and repurposed as the island's first religious building, shared by multiple congregations. It was sold in 1840 and the profits divided between the Methodists and Baptists. After a fire burned the Union Baptist's building in 1895, the current structure was built on this site in 1898. The original structure only had one spire on the right side of the front of the building. When the second spire was built in the 20th Century, the contractor is said to have intentionally built it larger than the first. It was later given a stone facade.



**30 Christ United Methodist Church (6253 Church St.)** - The Methodist Episcopal Congregation erected this building in 1922, leaving the wooden structure across the street (# 27). It is built of Pennsylvania Chestnut Hill stone, shipped by railroad and boat to Chincoteague where it was carried by horse cart to the building site. It was largely paid for by a wealthy fisherman on the island, John Leonard. The church merged with the Methodist Protestant Church as Christ United Methodist Church in 1939. During the Ash Wednesday Storm of 1962, the water rose to the top of the pews and the pipe organ was destroyed.

**31 Miss Molly's Inn (4141 Main St.)** - Built in 1896 by the Rowley family, the building served as a lodging house for the Island. Marguerite Henry wrote the story of *Misty of Chincoteague* while staying at the Inn in 1946. The building is a bed and breakfast today.

**32 Island Manor House (4160 Main St.)** - This building was originally two homes built by brothers-in-law married to two sisters. Dr. Nathaniel Smith first came to the island as the assistant surgeon on a Union warship during the Civil War. He became the island's second doctor and married Juliet Caulk. He later opened a drugstore on Main St. Joseph Kenny came to the island after having served here during the Civil War as well. He ran a mercantile shop on Main St. Their neighboring homes were joined to form the current structure which served as a bed and breakfast for many years.

**33 Watson House (4240 Main St.)** - This house was built in 1898 by Robert Watson and his son, David. Records indicate that Watsons were on the island as early as 1767. Robert's brother at one time owned most of the land between Maddox Blvd. and Clark St. Many of the original houses on these streets were occupied by members of the Watson family.

**34 Captain John Dukes House (4356 Main St.)** - This house was built in 1893. Captain Dukes was a member of the U.S. Life Saving Service which later was incorporated into the U.S. Coast Guard. Dukes was the officer in charge of several stations on the barrier islands.

**35 Killock Shoal Light** - The remnants of this once vital lighthouse can still be seen. Erected in 1886 to guide ships through the shoal to the busy docks, it was automated in 1923, and decommissioned and the house removed in 1939.

**36 Chincoteague Combined School (4586 Main St.)** - Built on the site of a former wild goose farm in 1959, the school was renovated to its current state in the 1980s. During the "Ash Wednesday Storm" of 1962, the flood water stood at six feet and waves splashed the roof of the school.

**37 Clarence Tarr House (4653 Main St.)** - This Victorian era home was preserved in the mid-20th Century by television actress Linda Lavin ("Alice") who moved the house from the east side of the street to its current location overlooking the Chincoteague Bay. It is now known as the "Lavendar House."

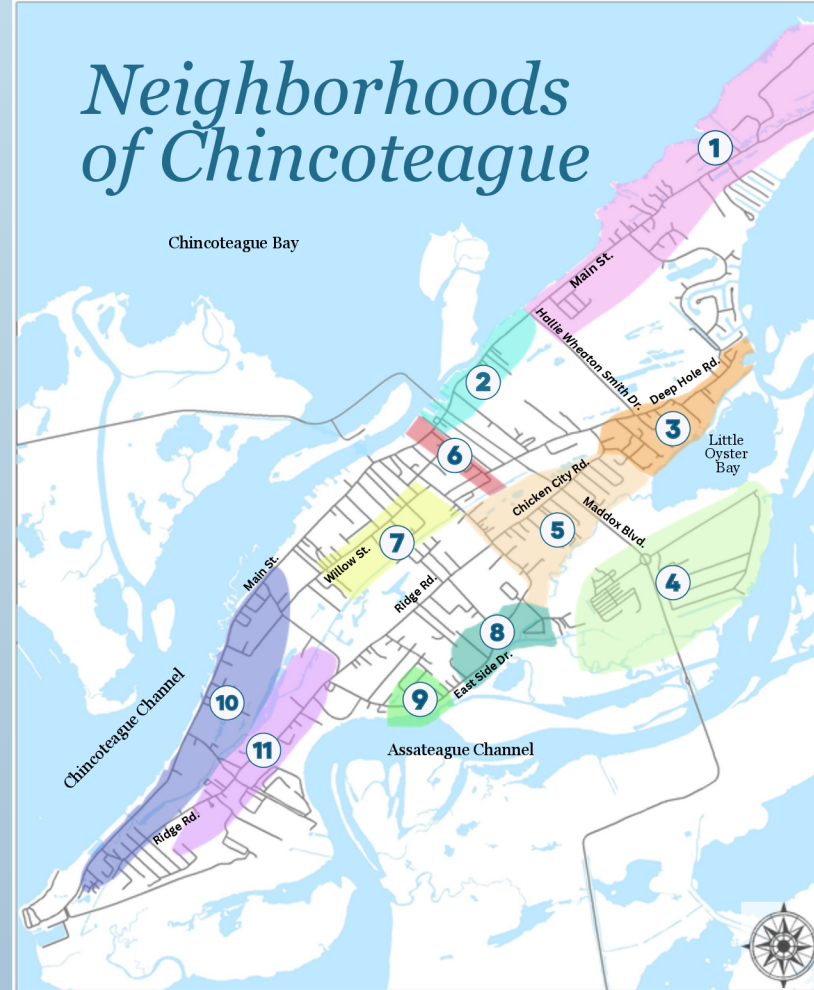
**38 Christ Holy Sanctified Church (5084 Main St.)** - This church was formed in 1892 by former members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Their beliefs and practices were considered extreme and lead to persecution, causing most members of the church to leave the island in 1894 and establish congregations across the United States. The building was built in 1903 by the Methodist Episcopal Congregation and moved to its current location in 2008. Some early members of the church are buried in Holy Ridge Cemetery behind the church.

**39 Captain Timothy Hill House (5122 Main St.)** - Built in the early 1800s, it is the oldest known house on the island. After purchasing the dilapidated building in 2009, the owners discovered a rare piece of American architectural history was hiding beneath the crumbling facade. Visitors can now enjoy the early architectural style with hand hewn log planks, carvings of ships on the walls, and a replication of the original wooden chimney.

**40 Captain Joshua Chandler Gravesite (5580 Main St.)** - Capt Chandler was a waterman who came to Chincoteague from Delaware. He was killed by lightning on his sailboat in 1877. The inscription on his tombstone reads: "Farewell wife and children dear. I am not dead but sleeping here. As I am, some day you will be also. Prepare for death and follow me."

**41 Museum of Chincoteague Island (7125 Maddox)** - Founded in 1965, as the Oyster Museum, Inc. by a group of Island women, the Museum opened in 1972 and operated through 2010 as the Oyster and Maritime Museum. The Museum changed its name to more correctly reflect its collection and was completely renovated in 2011. The Museum continues to add new exhibits every season.

# Neighborhoods of Chincoteague



## 5 Chicken City

In the late 1800s, John Thornton, known as the "Butcher" of Chincoteague, lived in this area. After butchering and preparing beef for sale to local residents, he would dispose of the leftover bones and intestines in the nearby swamp and woods to be eaten by the buzzards. The region became known as "Buzzard Swamp". In the 1940's people began clearing off the land known as "Buzzard Swamp" to build chicken houses. The poultry industry flourished on the island and nearly 7 million broilers were produced annually by the 1950s. At this time it was called "Chicken City Road". (The Ash Wednesday storm ended the poultry industry on the island in 1962.)

## 6 Madcalf Lane

Before there were stock laws on the island, cattle and horses roamed at will. One night a boy was escorting his girl home from church. The couple walked down the dark lane and as the boy started to step over what he thought was a log, a cow reared up and took off with the boy on its back. The lane became known as Madcalf Lane. Today, the lane is known as Clark Street.

## 7 Tick Town

There were many ticks in the woods in this area. Local legend states that if a boy married a girl from Tick Town, he would either do all of the cooking or starve, but he was certain to have one of the prettiest wives in town. The area is known as Willow Street today.

## 1 Up The Neck

The northern end of the island became known as "Up the Neck". The name is probably due to the shape of the area, it is long and narrow like a neck.

## 2 Up The Creek

As the population of the island increased after the Civil War, residents began referring to this northern portion of the island as "Up the Creek". The name probably references Lewis Creek that runs along the area, which is a narrow channel leading from Chincoteague Channel to the Bay.

## Deep Hole

This was one of the first areas of the island occupied by the early settlers because it was a protected and accessible port from which to work on the water. In the early 19th Century, the land adjoining this deep creek was called "Deep Hole Creek". The creek got its name from a very deep (30 ft.) hole at the midway point of the creek.

## 4 Piney Island

This part of the island was covered with pine trees. It was used for many years for grazing cattle.

## 8 Dodge City

This area was given its name during the period when the TV show "Gunsmoke" was on air in the 1960s. A resident in this area often shot his gun like a cowboy. The old name for this area is Bear Claw.

## 9 Birch Town

There were many members of the Birch family living in this neighborhood.

## 10 Down the Marsh

This was the name given to the southern end of the island by the earliest settlers.

## 11 Snotty Ridge

This area was named for kids in the area who would wipe their noses on their shirt sleeves.

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