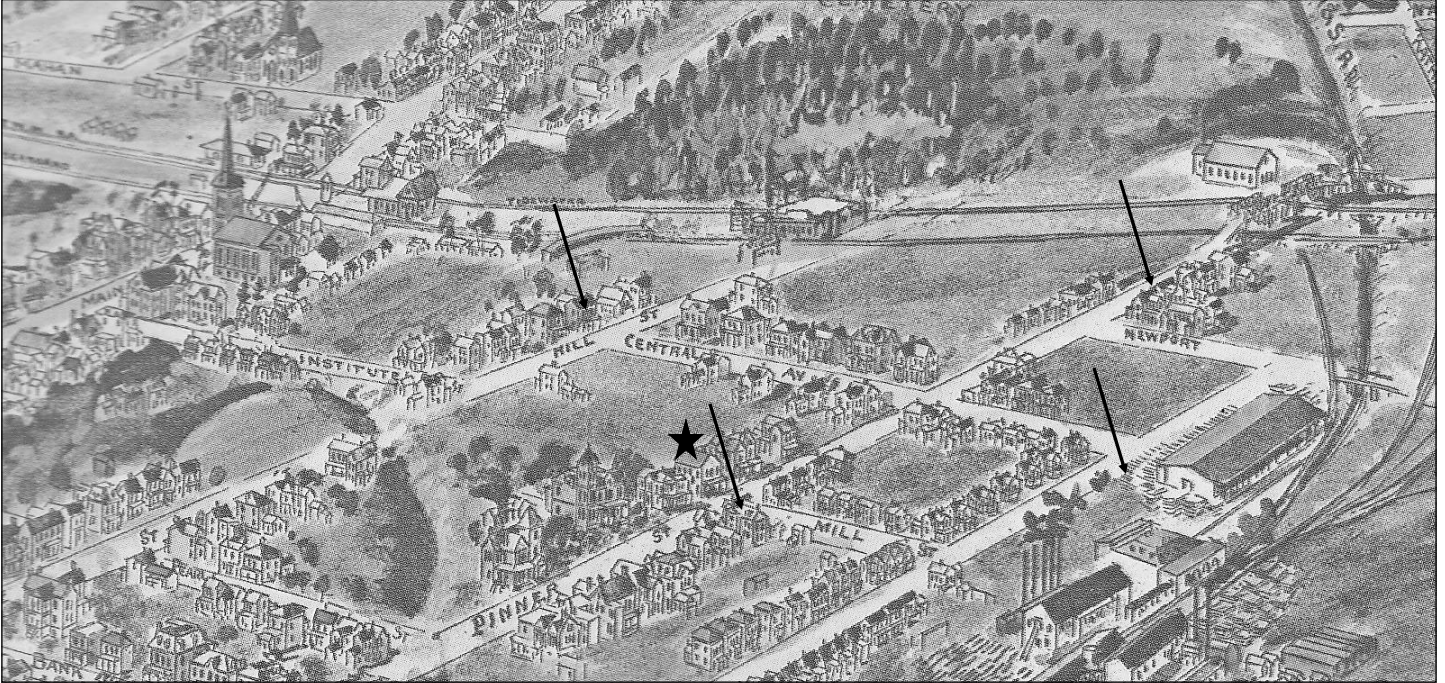


# Masthead

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*Portion of the 1907 Bird's Eye View of Suffolk. The Tidewater Railroad seen above would soon become the Virginian. Apparently, the houses that faced Institute Street (now Finney Avenue) were considered part of Chicken Hill early on. Arrows show the boundaries of Chicken Hill. The house marked with a star was later moved to Hill Street when new Finney Avenue came through.*

## ABOUT CHICKEN HILL

Nobody seems to know the origin of the name but there is general agreement about the boundaries of Chicken Hill—Hill Street to Holladay Street and from the Pinner Street bridge to today's Finney Avenue (the latter being a newer street that took in Institute Street and Mill Street). Many of the houses currently there were constructed prior to 1907.

SNHS member Holmes Small was born in the Chicken Hill neighborhood at 250 Pinner Street on August 2, 1918. His parents were Robert Letcher Small (1890-1972) and Sybell Byrd Small (1890-1971). His older brother Landes had been born at home as well. There were, by then, two hospitals in town but home births were still the custom and doctors like Dr. Claudius Riddick in the next block of Pinner Street still made house calls, most still traveling by horse and buggy.



*Sybell and Robert Small at home at 250 Pinner St.*

Robert Small was a telegraph operator at the Atlantic Coastline Railroad station on East Washington Street. Later the family would own a Model T but when Holmes was a little boy his father, like many others, rode a bicycle to work. Mrs. Small was, like most mothers of the day, a homemaker (or to use today's parlance "a stay at home mom") and keeping house was plenty hard work.

The family generally walked where they needed to go—to church at First Baptist, to buy groceries at Mr. Allmond's in the neighborhood or at Gardner's Store on Main Street.

During World War I the elder Small was issued a rifle as a member of the Home Guard. He was also called on to do shiftwork at the railroad station because it was crucial that the telegraphs be manned at all times.

When the Armistice was declared on November



*This is what the Baptist Church looked like 1912-1950s.*

11, 1918, a number of neighborhood mothers put their young children (Holmes was an infant and too young) in wheelbarrows and pushed them around the neighborhood (perhaps banging pots and pans as reported from another area), creating an impromptu celebratory parade.

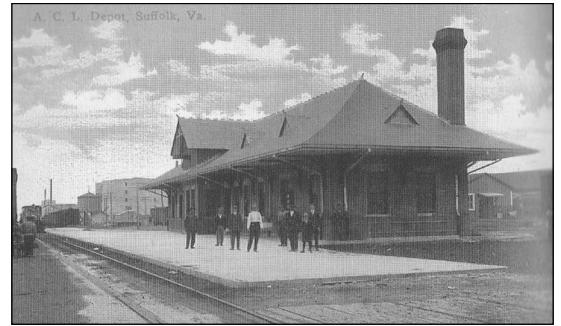
Children in those days were often left to their own devices during the day but when Holmes was a little boy he would frequently go to the station to spend the day with his father.

There was plenty of activity to observe in that busy East Washington Street area with freight trains and passenger trains and jitneys coming and going. That whole factory district was alive and flourishing in what might have been the Golden Age for the World's Largest Peanut Market.

There was no television and radios were still not commonplace but the Chicken Hill children, especially Holmes and his buddy Aubrey Rubenstein, played cowboys and Indians and fought World War I.

*He and I used to play on the railings of their back porch. We played cowboys and Indians—one would be the Indian sometimes and the cowboy the other—we would imagine shooting and falling off our horses. We even played flying—we would fly imaginary airplanes in WWI, and one would be a German and one would be an American or an Englishman ....*

The window these children had on the larger world—cowboys and Indians especially—was the Cavalier Theater on Main Street where every Saturday afternoon children could pay 15¢ to see a newsreel and a western—over and over again until supper-time.



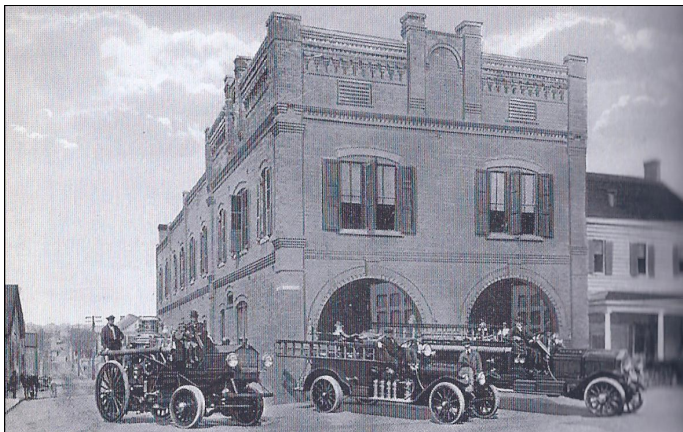
*Atlantic Coastline Railroad Station on East Washington Street (demolished)*



*George Mason School on Holladay Street (destroyed by fire mid 20th century)*

and on the stairway (only Suffolk High had an auditorium) and Miss Brookings would lead them in a "sing" accompanied by the piano that was in the hall.

Once a year in the summer the Fire Department had "a big blowout" at Joyner Park near the Norfolk and Western Station. They would give demonstrations with hoses, nets and ladders. The event included a performance by the Fire Department band, with Jim Tyler and his son "Doc" who were neighbors of the Smalls. Lemonade and other delights were offered.



*Fire Station with new motorized trucks c 1914 (demolished)*

Mr. Allmond's Grocery, built 1910, was on the corner of Central Avenue and Pinner Street where it still stands. The Allmonds lived upstairs over the store at first, later building a house on the lot beside the store. Neighborhood children would sometimes congregate in front of the store. If they became too rowdy, Mr. Allmond would go upstairs, lean out the window and throw water on them.

Students on the east side of Main Street attended George Mason School. It was still relatively new when Holmes started to school in 1924. There were only three grades but another grade was added each year until there were six. After that students would attend Suffolk High School.

Pupils walked to school and walked home for lunch. The City school system never had buses and there was no cafeteria until one was built near Jefferson and the High School mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A highlight of the school week was a visit by the City music teacher Miss Yancey Brookings (later Mrs. William Birdsong). The students gathered in the hall



*Miss Brookings*

Holmes's written recollection (available to readers upon request) names many families but here are a few to give a glimpse of Chicken Hill:

Mr. Bright on Newport Street grew flowers and carried them in a pushcart to the City Market to sell. The John-sons on Hill Street had a beautiful daughter, Lottie Mae. The Fords on Central Avenue had a son Vernon, called Hump, who went to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and became "a big football player and a star" there. Mr. Chilton ran a radiator repair shop. Miss Bett Odom on Eugenia Street had a pomegranate tree and shared ripe fruit with children who made themselves obvious in pomegranate season. Charlie Smith was a soda jerk at Ruden's (later called Russell's) drugstore. Holmes's Aunt Emma and her husband Alfred Guthrie, a plumber, lived on Central Avenue with



their 9 children.

The Pinner Street bridge was one of the boundaries of Chicken Hill. It crossed three railroads. Two, the Seaboard and the Virginian, went on to cross Main Street and the third, the Suffolk and Carolina, headed to the Nansemond River.

Hobos often jumped off the trains and came into this neighborhood looking for handouts. Sybell Small was one of the kind women who would give them a meal and some change if she could spare it.

Another little bridge crossed the Suffolk and Carolina Railroad at the end of Newport Street, taking traffic to the Benthall Machine Works and its foundry. (See this area on the model at the Train Station.) Back on the west side of the bridge was the Sunnybrook Bottling Company. Also on Newport Street was the Bell Hosiery Mill which became West Overall Factory (and in the 1960s was the first building for Nansemond Suffolk Academy). Producers Peanuts made peanut butter in a facility on Central Avenue.



*Pinner Street Bridge, shown c 1915, was replaced during the Depression and again in the 1980s. From Suffolk, A Pictorial History, by Hobbs and Paquette, used with permission.*



*Holmes and older brother Landes Small at home on Pinner Street about 1923. Grandmother watches from the porch.*

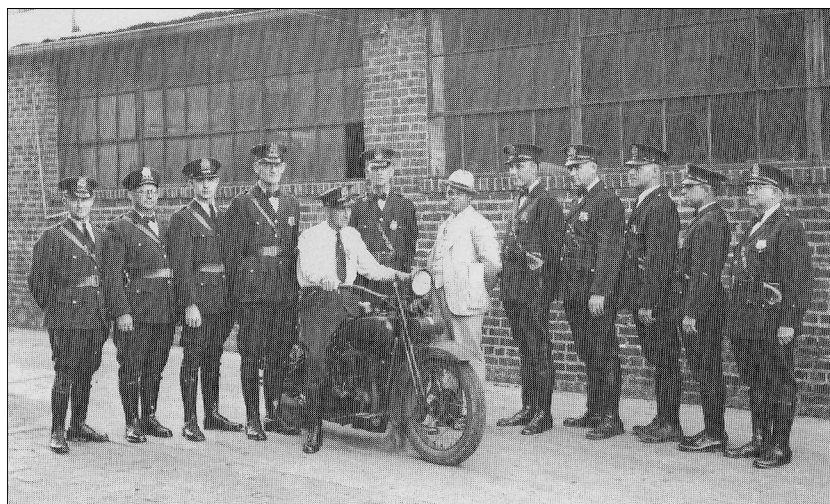
This was a community of working class families who owned or rented relatively modest homes. These homes sat cheek-by-jowl with the railroads and an industrial area on the one hand and a neighborhood of very substantial houses on the other. This quirky mix is part of what made Suffolk interesting.

This is based on memories recorded by Holmes Small and transcribed by Mardane McLemore. Interviews with Mr. Small were also used.

### **Robinson Arnold (1825-1911)**

Late in his life Robinson Arnold lived on Chicken Hill. He was the son of cabinetmaker Edward Arnold in whose Mahan Street shop the Great Fire of 1837 started. Robinson recorded myths, legends and his own adventures in the Dismal Swamp in *Uncle Alek and His Mule*, published in 1888. This charming little publication gives an interesting look, not only at the Swamp, but also at Suffolk and Nansemond County in the second half of the 19th Century.

Arnold was a Confederate veteran who served in the 59th Militia, 3rd Co. He became partially blind while a P.O.W. at Pt. Lookout, Maryland. The book was, he said, an attempt to place himself "beyond penury."



Suffolk Police Department c. 1934, left to right: Sidney Hayes, unknown, L.B. Butler, W.T. Pond, Eugene Walls (on motorcycle), Tom Spiers, Chief H.W. "Monk" Churn, T.L. Simon, Aubrey Morgan, **Joseph Pratt**, John Daughtrey and Henry Murphy. From *Suffolk, A Pictorial History*, by Hobbs and Paquette, used with permission.

Officer Joseph S. Pratt (1885-1935), who lived at 309 Pinner Street near the bridge, holds the sad distinction of having been the first police officer killed in the line of duty in Suffolk.

His son, Harrell Pratt (1914-1976), married Angelina Kehayas who would become one of the early presidents of Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society.