



*Aerial view of Town Point Farm taken in 1940 by the late Ann Hurff Ballard. Bennett's Creek can be seen in the upper left-hand corner. The Nansemond River is seen lower left and to the right. The farmland to the left of the road would give way decades later to the Bennett's Creek Landing development. (Yes, that's the airplane wing; Frank Hurff was the pilot.) Photo courtesy Robert Hall Ballard*

## Between the River and the Creek

This land has history. The Nansemond River—like the James and other Virginia rivers—was the superhighway for early English settlers in our area. The land near the mouth of the river was, of course, the first of present day Suffolk seen by John Smith in 1608 as he explored the area and looked for signs of the lost Roanoke Island colonists.

In 1667 an act was passed to build forts in each County. The Nansemond fort was ordered built at Town Point. Then in 1680 the General Assembly ordered a town built there. We have little information about that long ago settlement but know that it was later supplanted by the inland town chartered as Suffolk in 1742.

Thanks to these Tour sponsors.



Harbour View Oral  
& Facial Surgery

A large, stylized cursive signature of "R. Bennett" in black ink.

Richard Bennett's signature from  
*Peninsula in Passage*; used with permission

## The Man Behind the Name

The Bennett family made a splash early in our history. By the 1600s they had acquired thousands of acres by headright grants along the James and Nansemond Rivers and in the Maryland colony. Richard Bennett came from England to join other family members here in 1628. By the 1630s he had patented more than 2,000 acres of his own between the Nansemond River and the creek that would be named for Bennett. Our friend Karla Smith, the guiding light behind *Peninsula in Passage* (and the book from which much of the information in this issue was taken), says that all of this year's Tour sites are on pieces of Richard Bennett's 2,000 acres. He was granted more land at other locations but it appears that this was the largest piece.

Richard Bennett was elected to the House of Burgesses in 1629 and to the Governor's Council in 1642 and 1652. He replaced William Berkley as Governor during the reign of Oliver Cromwell.

For decades at least, maybe longer, Richard Bennett's house was thought to have been up Bennett's Creek on property that now belongs to the Eberwine family.

During an archeological dig prior to the development of Bennett's Creek Landing, a brick foundation was discovered. Findings indicated that it was a very early site and the home of a well-to-do planter. All signs seem to point to Richard Bennett. The question is, which is the real Bennett home site?

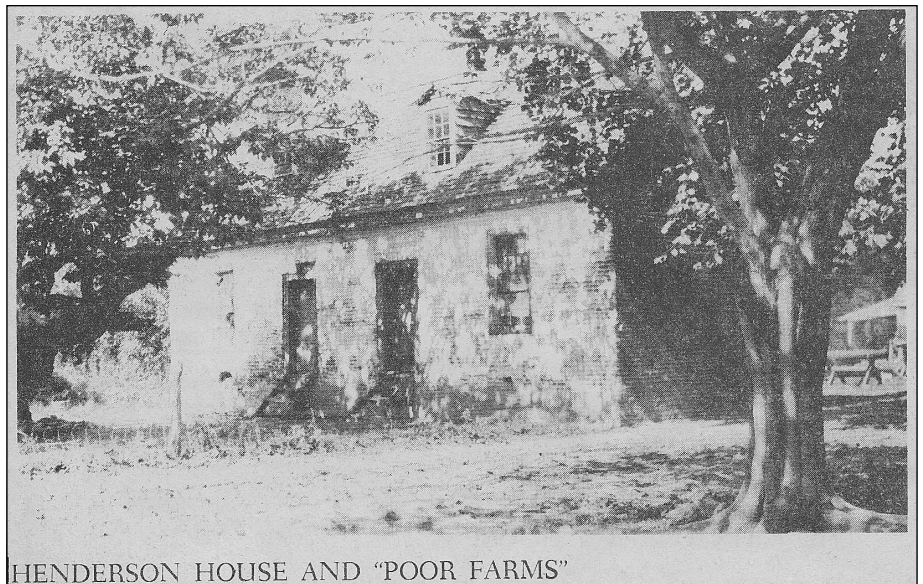
## The Bennett Trust

Aside from leaving his name on the map—Bennett's Creek, Bennett's Pasture Road and several neighborhoods and sites—Bennett left a plan for philanthropy that has lasted more than 300 years.

In his 1675 will—before separation of church and state—he left 300 acres, the income from which was to be used by the Church to care for the poor in that parish. In 1749 another family member added to that land.

At first it was administered by the wardens of the Church. (The only church recognized was the Church of England until after the Revolution.) Over time that has changed and oversight is given to five court-appointed trustees from the Sleepy Hole and Chuckatuck boroughs. Many trustees through the years have served for decades. The name has changed several times (for a time known as the Poor Lands Trust) and now it is called the Richard Bennett Trust.

Originally the Trust might have provided firewood, food or shelter for the poor. In modern times it is more likely to support larger community needs. Would that we could all leave such a lasting legacy for good.



*This photo found in our collection is from an unnamed and undated newspaper. Its caption explained that this was part of the Richard Bennett poor lands. This photo appeared in a 1958 publication. We are told that the house has since been demolished. The Poor Farms are near Glebe Church.*

**WALTER HURFF**  
**GROWER AND SHIPPER**  
**FARM PRODUCE**  
**DRIVERS, VA.**

*1929 letterhead, SNHS collection*

The proximity to the Chesapeake Bay was a definite advantage. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Atlantic Coastline Railroad offered another shipping option as well. Potatoes, cabbage, kale, spinach, mustard greens, strawberries, as well as various kinds of melons (and, according to one source, cut flowers) could be harvested and shipped to market overnight by steamship or railroad. The area around Driver became known for truck farming.

In 1934 the Eberwine family, who formerly shipped their fresh produce to Baltimore, decided to open a cannery to preserve and sell their surplus crop without the urgency of dealing with fresh produce. Cans of Eberwine spinach and other leafy vegetables could be found on grocery store shelves for 50 years until the business closed in 1984.

Another business that was a complement to the area's truck farming was the Ramsey Package Corp. which made wooden crates and cartons for packing truck. The factory was near the intersection of Bennett's Pasture Road and Driver Lane.

## Everything Was Farming

The word *truck* was in use long before motorized vehicles by that name were ever thought of. *Truck* means to carry or it could be the wagon that did the carrying or it could be produce or food stuffs for market.

Prior to the War Between the States, farms were generally larger and were more apt to grow money crops such as tobacco or cotton.

Following the War, farmers began to take advantage of our longer growing season and the need for fresh produce in the northern urban centers.



*SNHS collection*

**RAMSEY PACKAGE CORP.**  
MANUFACTURERS OF  
**BEST QUALITY TRUCK PACKAGES**

FACTORY LOCATED  
 AT DRIVER, VA.

*1929 billhead,  
 SNHS collection*

“Everything was farming. Potatoes were the main crop and were sent by train, truck and boat to market. The boat stopped on Bennett's Creek. I grew up picking potato bugs for fun. My job was to drop burlap covers onto the filled potato barrels and nail the cover on. We'd start at 3:30 a.m. and work until it got too hot for the mules—about 1 p.m.—and then started up again at 4 p.m. I grew up knowing that I did not want to be a farmer.

We had a World War I veteran mule named Jack. He had a brown saddle and USA branded on his hip — and he was mean. We also had a nice mule named Kate and a Bay horse named Lady that used to draw the sleigh in the winter. . . . After World War II the community started to change. I always thought the whole area would develop and I remember my grandmother saying that one day Portsmouth and Suffolk would be one city.”

SNHS member and Driver native Judge William Wellington Jones quoted in *Peninsula in Passage*

In the last half century the situation has changed for farmers everywhere. The once heavily agricultural area around the village of Driver is now yielding to housing developments.



## Taking to the Water



*John Arthur Jones (1834-1905) of Suffolk was a kinsman/friend of the Driver Joneses.*

This past summer members of the May family, now residents of Delaware and New Jersey, came to visit family sites including Driver. According to family lore their ancestor, John Arthur Jones, a steamboat captain, worked as a blockade runner out of Bennett's Creek during the War Between the States. Later he regularly took local truck or produce by steamship to Baltimore for sale. His son, Arthur Llewellyn Jones, became a steamboat captain, too. He worked out of Norfolk and in the sounds of North Carolina at first. Eventually he moved the family to Baltimore and ran excursions from there.



*Arthur Llewellyn Jones (1857-1956) with his son Arthur Carroll Jones (1894-1985).*



*The Jeremiah Jones (or Woodward-Jones) house on Bennett's Creek was demolished in the 1980s to make way for development. This house was built around an earlier frame house with a beam that dated it to 1716. It was believed to have been the oldest frame house in Virginia at the time it was demolished. The land once belonged to Richard Bennett but Trotter is the earliest name associated with the house.*

"During the War Between The States the old Woodward-Jones House was occupied by Jeremiah and Virginia Woodward Jones. Their children John, Jeremiah, Annie Lee, Nettie, and Ella lived there with their parents and ranged in age from a few months to 13 years old.

Jeremiah being too old for fighting, used his small sloop and was a blockade runner for the Southern cause. He would go from his wharf down Bennett's Creek to the Nansemond River and thence to where it emptied into the James River and then into Hampton Roads. From there he would go into the Atlantic and down the coast."

Excerpt from an account by Judge William Wellington Jones in *The Quiet Regiment*.



*An archeological study of the Woodward-Jones site yielded the bottom of an early Delft punch-bowl with the slogan Success to the Lasess.*

## The Tour

This year all our Tour houses are on land that was once part of Richard Bennett's vast holdings and all four sites are on land that was once farmland from which produce was shipped.

There is so much more to say about the land between Bennett's Creek and the Nansemond River—this land with so many layers of history. We highly recommend *Peninsula in Passage* by the Crittenden-Eclipse-Hobson Heritage Foundation now called Suffolk River Heritage. The book is available at several locations and will be available on Tour days at the schoolhouse/office at Town Point.

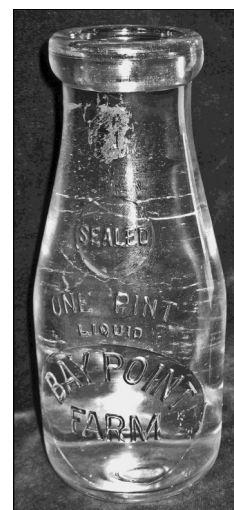


### 4700 Sleepy Hole Road – The Obici House Former Bay Point Farm

Amedeo Obici, Italian born founder of Planters Peanuts, came to Suffolk in 1913 and built a plant for the business he and his brother-in-law had started in Pennsylvania. In 1924 he and his wife Louise bought more than 260 acres on the Nansemond River. They moved a c. 1870 farmhouse to the site they had chosen and they built around it, creating an Italian villa on the Nansemond River. They called it Bay Point Farm. They raised dairy cattle and operated a dairy that carried the farm name. The Obicis planted hundreds of trees on the property and accented the natural beauty of the place with statuary. Mr. Obici kept his yacht *The Alura* at the dock. According to one source, the Obicis had the first telephone in the Driver area with a line that ran straight to the Planters factory in Suffolk.

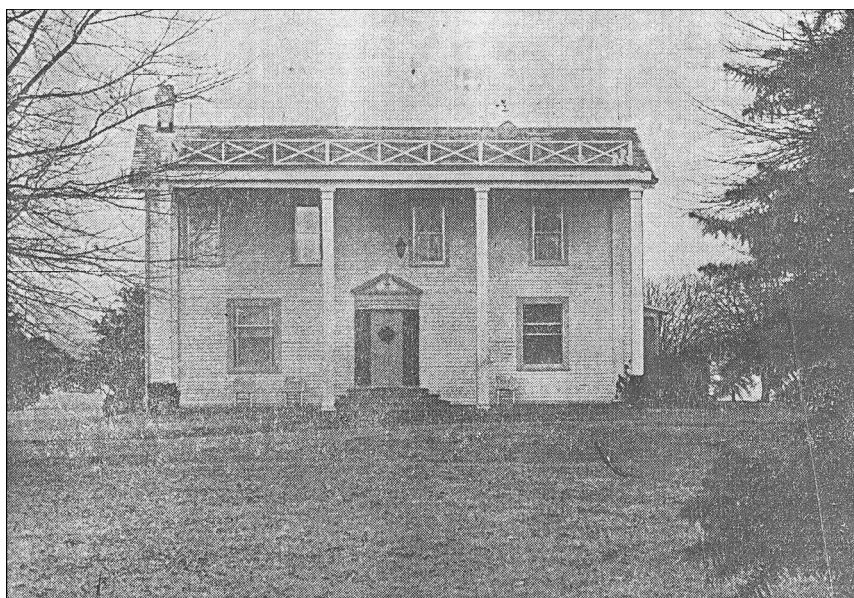
Mrs. Obici died in 1938 and Mr. Obici followed in 1947. After a period of other private ownership, the property was sold to the City of Portsmouth in 1966. Eventually that municipality built Sleepy Hole Golf Course on the Obici land. In 2002 the City of Suffolk bought the property and

leased the entire site to Ronnie Rountree. Mr. Rountree oversaw a major renovation of the Obici mansion, preserving many of its original fixtures as well as beautiful stained glass windows. The house is now an events facility with a basement pro shop.



### 5301 Bennett's Pasture Road – Eagle Point Farm

This property was bought by the current owner's parents in 1946. The originally unimposing farm house with the grand views of the river was built in 1908 by an Odom family according to a date brick. The current owner's parents made additions and improvements and more have been made by the current generation. Small windows have been replaced by larger, more numerous ones to embrace the sweeping river views. Evidence of the artistic skills of the ladies of the house and the work of artistic friends can be seen throughout. Treasured family furniture and portraits from New York and Illinois have a home here, too. Of note are an original carbide gas light fixture and the gas house in the yard. The former truck farm now grows nursery stock. *Dr. and Mrs. George Cornell, owners.*



1955 newspaper picture of the Cornell house prior to the addition.

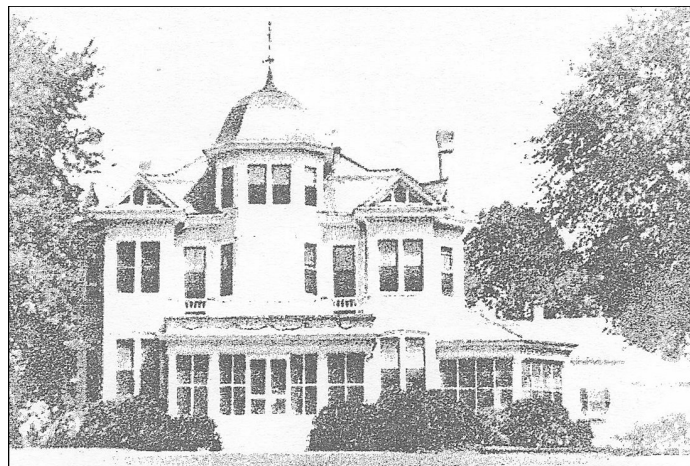
## 2527 Bridge Road – The Willis House former Town Point Farm

*Town Point* was the name given this piece of land early in the written history of the area. During the War Between the States people along the river saw plenty of activity with gunboats up and down the river. People at and near Town Point were able to see and hear the historic Battle of the Ironclads March 9, 1862.

It was farm land for centuries but truly came into its own under the hand of Confederate veteran Willis John Lee, late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He engaged in truck farming, opened a store and built a cotton gin. He built a small fleet of vessels that hauled truck to northern markets in season and were used for oystering in cold weather. The name *Town Point Farm* came to stand for quality. In 1895 Mr. Lee and his beloved wife Jennie built the large Victorian dream of a house that stands near the Nansemond River Bridge today. The Lees had no children but kept the house filled with family and friends.

They built a schoolhouse on the property for children in the area and the Lees provided a teacher, too. The schoolhouse has other uses now but will be open as part of our Tour.

Today the house is lovingly maintained by another family who has filled it with interesting and lovely items of antiquity that they have collected over time. *The Leonard Willis family, owners.*



*Vintage photo, SNHS files.*



*Mary Jennet Jones Lee (1850-1930) and Willis John Lee (1846-1919). According to a book about the couple, These Twain, she was "the queen of his life and the idol of his love."*

## 117 Riverside Drive — The Northey Home also part of the former Town Point Farm

This house, like the others on the Tour, enjoys amazing views of the Nansemond River, but unlike the others this residence was only built in 1992. The lovely traditional home stands on original Town Point Farm land, not far from the site where archeologists found evidence of a substantial 17<sup>th</sup> century dwelling house. There has been speculation that it might have been the home of Colonial Governor Richard Bennett whose original land grant underlies all of this year's Tour houses.

This modern home on the old farm land is lovingly cared for by the family for whom it was built. The sweeping views of the Nansemond River and Hampton Roads are rivaled only by interior vignettes of beautiful things, beautifully displayed. *Mr. & Mrs. M. A. Northey, owners.*



### Members, please note:

The **Wreath Sale** was not held this year because of supply issues last year.

Also, this year we will not hold our **Sugar Plum Bakery** because no easy location presented itself. We expect to bring it back next year. For 2013, please just come take the Tour!

# Thanks to our 2013 members, received as of November 5, 2013.

Our memberships run with the calendar year.

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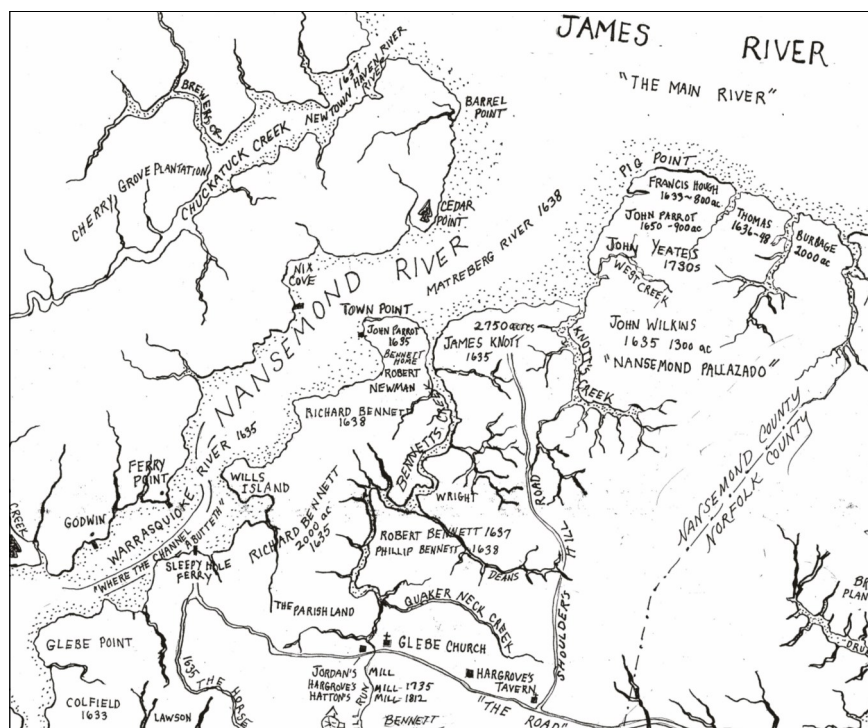
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Printer—insert Train Station picture and info here

37th Annual Candlelight Tour December 7 & 8, 1—5 pm



***Willis Home***  
***old Town Point Farm***  
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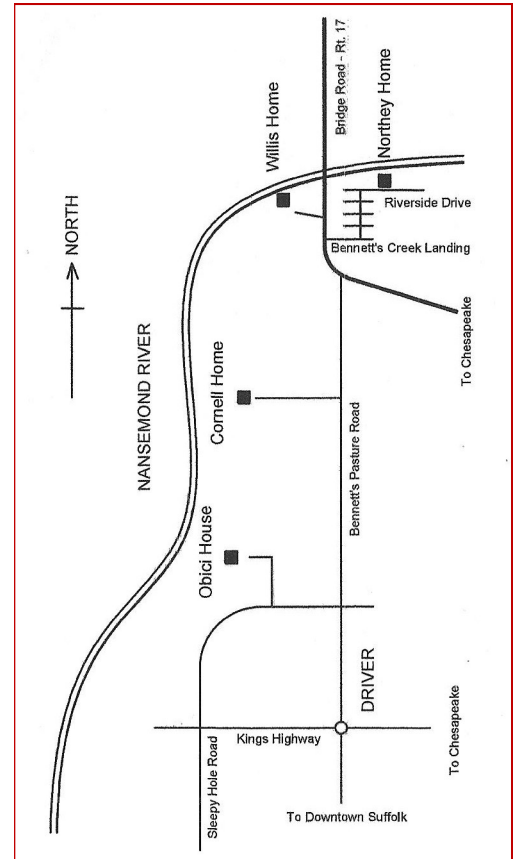
***Northey Home***  
***in Bennett's Creek Landing***  
117 Riverside Drive



***Cornell Home***  
***Eagle Point Farm***  
5301 Bennett's Pasture Road



***Obici House***  
***old Bay Point Farm***  
4700 Sleepy Hole Road  
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Map by Kermit Hobbs

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