Learn More...

To learn more about the history of the Eastern Shore of Virginia or to research your family's history, visit the Eastern Shore Room of the Eastern Shore Public Library. The Eastern Shore Room has hundreds of rare local history books and manuscripts with staff to assist you. Ancestry.com genealogy database can be searched at no charge in the library. WiFi, public computers, and copy machines are available for your convenience. Visit online at www.espl.org or in person at 23610 Front Street in Accomac (until it relocates to Parksley in 2019). Call (757) 787-3400 for additional information.

References:

"Parksley," by H.R. Bennett, Univeristy of Virginia Record Extension Series: An Economic and Social Survey of Accomac County, V. XII, No. 9, 1929.

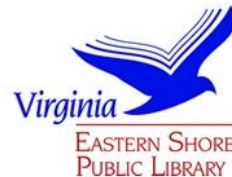"Countryside Transformed: Genesis of a Railroad Town: Parksley, Virgiia, 1884-1904", www.espl.org/genealogy

Arthur Fisher interview June 22, 2016.

Brooks Miles Barnes interview, 2017.

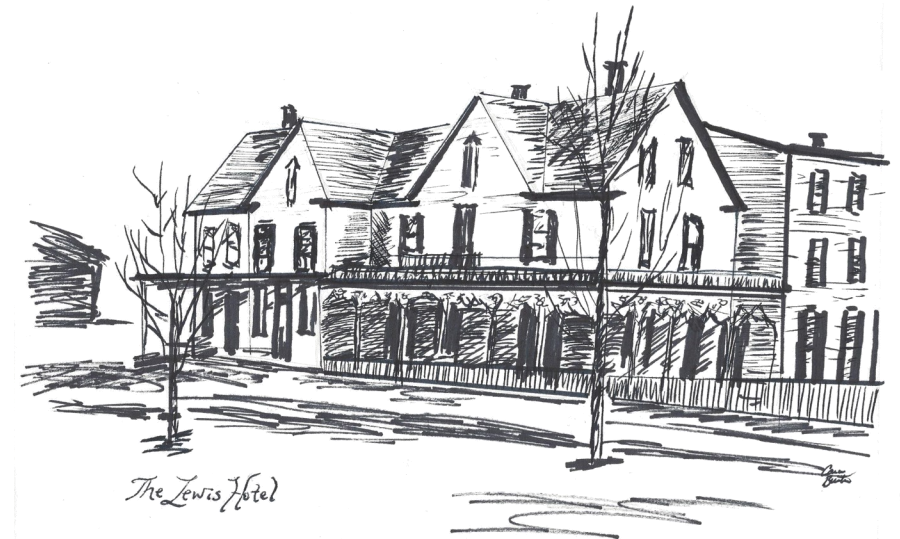"Reminiscences of Parksley, Virginia (1896-1912)," compiled

A list of other notable sites is available on the library espl.org website, under "Genealogy Resources."

Kirk Mariner's book, <u>Off 13</u>, will provide you with many points of interest on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. It is available at local gift shops and the Book Bin in Onley.

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History of Parksley, virginia

In 1885, Eleanor S. and Benjamin F. Parkes sold 160 acres to Rev. J.A.B. Wilson of Philadelphia and Henry R. Bennett and Samuel T. Jones of Dover, Delaware. Later that year, these three owners incorporated as the Parksley Land and Improvement Co. The land was surveyed and laid out into lots. Other PL&I shareholders were Benjamin B. and Catherine Jones Bennett (H.R.'s parents) and Elizabeth S. Chadbourne. H.R. Bennett was the president, but because he traveled off the Shore extensively, Chadbourne handled most of the business as secretary and treasurer until 1917, when she sold out to H.R. Brown. Col. Hiram Staunton Brown was president of RKO and of U.S. Leather. In 1946, George Walter Mapp, Jr. and Lester Drummond, both local attorneys, bought Brown's stock. PL&I sold its remaining lots in 1974 at public auction, and the company was dissolved. Parksley was incorporated in 1904.

Bennett moved to the new town and became active in its development. Many streets, most of which were unpaved until 1912, are named after Bennett's family members or Parksley Land and Improvement Co. associates. Much thought went into planning the town. Four foot strips of property were reserved around the town's boundaries to prevent the sale of lots adjoining the town. Each deed had a clause forbidding the sale of alcoholic beverages on the property; otherwise the ownership would revert back to the Parksley Land and Improvement Co.

Some things did not go as planned. "Metompkin" was the orginial chosen name for the town, but it was already taken. The post-Civil War desire to locate the county seat in Parksley was defeated in a general election. The planned hospital was never built in Parksley, but instead in Nassawadox. While the growth of the town was steady, the sale of property was not the financial boon Bennett and his investors had hoped for. Nevertheless, Parksley has been the beloved all-American hometown of many and continues to be one of the more active communities on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

Street names:

- **Adelaide:** Bennett's fiancé

- **Bennett:** after Henry R. Bennett's father

- **Browne:** T.H. Bayly Browne, Bennett's attorney

- **Callen:** Vice President of Pennsylvannia Railroad, which was previously the New York, Philadelphia, and Norfolk Railroad, "NYP&N," nicknamed the "nip and n"

- **Cassatt:** railroad executive, Alexander Cassatt, president of NYP&N and brother of artist Mary Cassatt

- **Catherine:** Bennett's mother

- **Chadbourne:** Parksley Land and Improvement Co. secretary, treasurer and stockholder

- **Cooke:** Bennett's fiancé's last name

- **Dunne:** railroad executive

- **Gertrude:** was the wife of Callen

- **Jones:** Bennett's brother-in-law and PL&I partner

- **Mary:** Bennett's sister

- **Maxwell:** another brother-in-law

- **Patton:** railroad executive

- **Wilson:** PL&I stockholder

- **Willis:** unknown

More to See....

Guard Shore – A county beach popular for sunbathing, swimming, kayaking, fishing, and watching sunsets over the Chesapeake Bay. Take Guard Shore Road west from Va. 316, just north of Bloxom.

Ann's Cove – A county boat ramp and popular with kayakers. Take either Bennett or Maxwell street to Big Road, turn right, the left on St. Thomas Road. You will pass historic St. Thomas Church, drive through Clam, and turn left onto Ewell Road. The next left is Ann's Cove Road, which you will drive to the end.

Hopkins a.k.a. Hunting Creek – Take Bennett Street to the end, turn left onto Big Road, and then right onto Lee Mont Road. Explore Johnson's Landing Road, which has a public boat ramp, and/or continue on down Hopkins Road and visit the quaint hamlet that used to have a steamboat wharf.
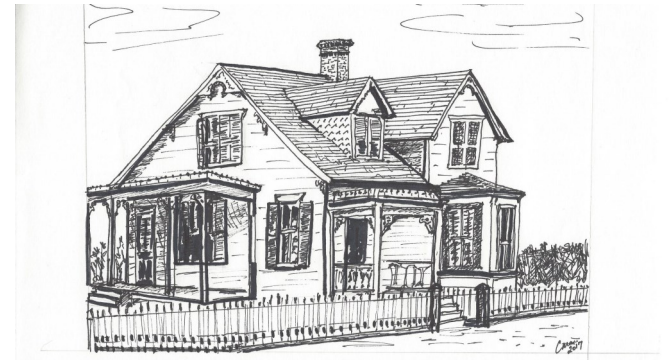
Mutton Hunk Fen State Natural Area Preserve – Take Bennet Street/Parksley Road to U.S. 13. Turn left at the light and right at the church onto Metompkin Road. Bear left on Metompkin and turn right on the third road, Baker Road. Take Baker to a cattle gate and park to the right. Admission to the preserve is free and open to the public during daylight hours. A trail goes straight to a seaside bay. Note: not recommended during tick season.

Further afield: North is Saxis Island with the Saxis Island Museum and Francis Makemie Park. South are the historic towns of Onancock and Accomac.

Home of Dr. J.T . Sledge, first Mayor of Parksley, burned and no longer stands. It was located across the street from Parksley Baptist Church on the corner of Browne Ave. and Adelaide St.

Begin and end your tour at the Eastern Shore Railway Museum

1. **Railroad grounds**. Parksley was founded as a railroad town. The current municipal parking lot was always a working grounds for loading cargo and passengers on the trains. Small buildings facing Dunne Avenue stood with a phone for produce salesmen to schedule train pick-ups. Horses and wagons, and later trucks, congregated here to load perishable produce on the trains heading north. Even today, Associated Grain ships on these rails after tractor-trailers loaded with soybeans or corn transfer the product at the silos down the street. At its height, five passenger trains stopped daily in Parksley.

2. **Veterans Memorial.** Parksley has a proud history of serving its country, as you will see along the tour. This memorial was dedicated in 2017. As you walk downtown, note the Civil Air Patrol historical marker across from the theater.

3. **Hotel Lewis**. Imagine stepping off the train, as many "drummers," also known as traveling salesmen, did in to a town that was bustling with farmers, fishermen, tourists, and shoppers. The hotel started as a store, built 1887, located about where the Masonic Temple is now. The hotel (1889-1912) was built by Stanley Lewis and stood where the small white-frame building is now. Henry Melson bought the hotel in 1895. Drummers would rent a horse and buggy from Durbin Johnson's livery stable, which is where the library is now. The hotel burned in 1912. *Cross the street and walk left toward the stores.*

4. **Downtown Parksley**. First you will walk by the Royal movie theater, originally owned by the Hopkins family. People lined up down the street to see the latest film, until the television was invented. Prior to the theater's construction, silent movies were seen in "Hopkins Hall," on the second floor of what is now Jaxon's Hardware. Originally called Parksley

Trent Grocery Store. Located on Parks Street and opened in the 1940s by Edward Trent who was also a cooper at the Parksley barrel factory. His wife, Undine, was a teacher.

Adams United Methodist Church. The church is located at the intersection of Church Street and Lee Mont Road. It was established in 1878 by members of Johnson Metropolitan Methodist Church. The original structure, built under the administration of the Rev. J.K. Adams, was replaced in 1928 and still serves the community.

Park Theatre. Hargis Street, west of Staunton Avenue. One of the few African American movie houses located in the Quonset Hut™ at the end of the road, now a landscaping business. It operated from 1948 to the early 1960s.

For more information about African American landmarks on the Shore, read "*Landmarks: Black Historic Sites on the Eastern Shore of Virginia*," various authors, a project of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 2006.

Other source: "Off 13: The Eastern Shore of Virginia Guidebook" by Kirk Mariner, 2010.

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*The **Rosenwald Foundation** was established by Julius Rosenwald, a president of Sears, Roebuck and Co. in Illinois. Rosenwald collaborated with Booker T. Washington of the Tuskegee Institute to build African American schools in the South. Between 1912 and 1932, 5,357 schools were built providing 700,000 African American students across rural, isolated southern states with education. The foundation provided matching funds to spur neighborhoods and local governments to provide safe, sanitary school buildings at a time when few public funds were invested in African American education. *For further reading, visit "Encyclopedia Virginia," www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Rosenwald_Schools.*

23. **Shirt Factory** – The large white building, one of the few four-story buildings on the Shore, was a shirt factory. Originally, it served as Matthews wholesale and retail hardware store. The shirt factory opened in 1937 and was one of four on the Eastern Shore, the others being in Exmore, Tangier, and Chincoteague. It employed 175 people at its peak. Ladies who worked at the factory would get lunch at local stores and shop before going home. The closing of the factory certainly hurt Parksley's economy. Of note are the stone-look blocks from which it is made. These were produced in Greenbush by the Charles Russell Co. and are an interesting building material that you will find on the Shore. *Walk to the intersection and cross back over the train tracks to the parking lot.*

We hope you have enjoyed the tour. To learn more about Parksley and Eastern Shore history, visit the Railroad Museum and our many fine shops and restaurants. Our new Eastern Shore Regional Library and the Eastern Shore of Virginia Heritage Center are expected to open in 2019.

Whitesville

South of Parksley is Whitesville, with a population of 219 in 2010. Likely named after Harry White, an early landowner, Whitesville was developed by Miss Lizzie Chadbourne when she bought 50 acres. When Parksley was incorporated in 1904, Whitesville was excluded from the town limits, intentionally segregating the African American community. The neighborhood is roughly bordered by Va. 316, Lee Mont Road, Staunton Road, and Willis Street. Whitesville boasted several establishments:

Whitesville Elementary School. End of Leslie Trent Road, off Staunton Avenue. Built in 1925 with $900 from the Rosenwald* Foundation, $1,700 from the black community, and the remaining $4,150 from public funds. It was a "3 teacher" type school and operated until 1964 when schools were consolidated with the opening of North Accomack Elementary School for African American students. Schools here were not fully integrated until 1970. Currently, it serves as the International Brotherhood of Yahshua's Disciples (IBOYD) meeting place.

Coal and Hardware (1919), it also was owned by "Captain" John Hopkins, and later his sons, Charles T. and A. Stephen. Hopkin's establishment included an ice house and a coal-generated electric plant located behind the hardware store. ANEC still owns the electric plant site. The Hopkins brothers went to business school in Rochester, NY, and a classmate invited them back to Parksley to see the business potential of electric generation. Charles convinced his father to invest in this capital venture, creating a power company called J.H. and C.T. Hopkins. *At the main intersection, cross over and walk along the downtown sidewalk of Dunne Avenue.*

Parksley's downtown endured two fires, one on June 3, 1896 and another March 2, 1954. What is the Club Car Cafe now was originally Dr. William Goffigon's drugstore, built in 1966. You can step inside, walk through the bar into the banquet room (which was formerly Farmers and Merchants Bank) and see a large mural of Parksley in 1920. D.H. Johnson and Son's Department Store was in the three story building until the 1950s.

5. **Library, Bank and Drugstore**. On the corner of Dunne Avenue. and Cooke Street is a landmark brick building. Accomack Banking Co. operated until the Depression. During World War II, the building served as a draft board. The Selective Service Clerk was D. Frank White, a WWI veteran. In 1959, Jefferson C. Grinnalds started the Twyford Memorial Library with his large book collection and endowed the library, but the library lasted only briefly. The building later became Runninger's Pharmacy, which closed in 2017.

6. **Old Hotel, 24316 Cooke St.** On the right/south corner of Cooke Street and Virginia Avenue, is a three story white building that served as a hotel, owned by Will Young of Justisville. It was turned into apartments for WWII veterans as housing became scarce when servicemen returned home after the war. A building boom started after the war. One hundred six Parksley lots were sold in six months. *Turn down Cooke Street. Walk one block and turn left onto Browne Avenue.*

7. **Browne Avenue**. This street was named after Congressman Thomas Henry Bayly Browne, the lawyer for Parksley Land and Improvement Co. He took his salary in lots, which his wife sold.

8. **WPA project** – After two blocks, you will see a small brick building on the right. This is the town's water department, a Depression era Works Progress Administration project. Before that, the Hopkinses provided public water. Read the plaques on the building to learn more. *Continue another block.*

9. **"Bellwood," Bennett home, 18367 Browne Ave.** – This was Henry R. and Phoebe Bennett's house. Bennett was a paint and fire equipment "drummer" until late in age. He would have seen the great benefits of the railway for the Shore, as it could improve his ability to cover his sales territory. With the extraordinary vision for Parksley, he must have been a real go-getter. He married Phoebe Bell of Albany, NY. He lived to old age and was well liked. He became totally blind, but that did not stop him from selling up and down the Shore. He would wait patiently by the road for a friend or local bus to pick him up. Bennett passed away in 1940 and is buried in Liberty Cemetery. Phoebe Bennett passed away after being moved to Delaware to live with her niece. They had no children. Bennett never named a street after his wife. *Turn left on Maxwell Street.*

10. **Minor League Ballfield** –– As you walk west on Maxwell, the right side of the street was home to the Parksley "Spuds." Homeplate was on the north side of the corner of Browne and Maxwell. Parksley participated in the Eastern Shore League from 1922 to 1927. It was the smallest community in the United States to have a professional baseball team. Hall of Famers Jimmie Foxx and Mickey Cochrane played at Parksley. Foxx played briefly for Parksley.

Browne Street curves to the left and turns into Gertrude Street. Turn left onto Patton Avenue. If you are tired, continue straight back to downtown. If not, then turn right onto Maxwell and cross the railroad tracks. Go over rail tracks. Continue straight onto Maxwell.

11. **Office of Dr. Ira Hurst (1880-1937) 24331 Maxwell St.** – Many professionals had their business either in their home or in a small building on their property. This small office was originally on Adelaide Street. *Continue to the corner of Wilson Avenue.*

19. **Town Park** – One of the planned amenities of the town is this park, which boasts a tennis court and street hockey rink in addition to play-ground equipment. Soccer is popular on the open grounds. In addition to the park, the far-sighted Bennett had planned a playground near the ball-field on the other side of town, but it was never constructed.

20. **Victorian Beauties** – Past Wilson Avenue, Mary Street is lined with grand Victorian homes erected in the early days of Parksley. Virginia Del. Wrendo M. Godwin's (1896-1976) home was 24246 Mary St., behind the Confederate Monument.

21. **Confederate Monument** – Bennett wanted Parksley to be the county seat. By the late 1880s, Accomack needed a new courthouse and Bennett seized on the opportunity, arguing that the courthouse should be in a rail-road town with convenient travel for witnesses, jurors, and attorneys. The proposed site was 24335 Callen St. The decision went to referendum in 1898 with Accomack retaining the county seat 2-1. The monument was funded through private subscription through the Harmanson-West Camp, Confederate Volunteers. It was built by Gaddess Bros. of Baltimore in 1899. Across the street by the pavilion, a new War Memorial has been built to carry on the town's tradition of honoring servicemen. *Turn right onto Cassatt Avenue and walk west.*

22. **Cassatt Avenue** – This main road was named after Alexander J. Cassatt. He organized the New York, Philadelphia, and Norfolk Railroad in 1882 and was also the brother of the Impressionist artist Mary Cassatt. It is doubtful she ever visited Parksley. Her brother saw the town playing a key role in the railroad business on the Shore, bringing produce and sea-food north and tourists south to the many hunt clubs on the Shore. In 1939, this road, Route 316, was extended to Tasley to facilitate the movement of civil defense equipment. Locals call it "The Concrete Highway." When WWII ended along with its gas rationing, truck transportation exploded, putting rail traffic in decline.

15. **Home of Del. John R. Rew, 18412 Wilson Avenue**—The grand , green Victorian stands on the corner of Wilson Avenue and Adelaide Street. Rew, born in 1874, was killed in a car crash on stone road 13 in 1918. At that time, he was chairman of the Virginia Board of Fisheries.

Turn right onto Adelaide Street and walk one block.

16. **Growth of the Town** – Note as you are walking away from downtown, the houses get more modern. Have you noticed that north to south roads are avenues and the east to west roads are streets? Parksley was one of the first planned communities in the South. While not all planned amenities came to fruition, such as a hospital, the courthouse, or playground, it is remarkable that this land investment did mature into a thriving Shore community. Bennett had envisioned 10,000 residents in this town. At its height, it had a population of 950 in 1979. When cars became common, well-to-do farmers began to move to "fashionable" Parksley with its amenities and commute to their farms. Parksley was the first town on the Eastern Shore to have electricity in homes. *Turn left onto Jones Avenue.*

17. **Parksley High School –** The school formerly stood on the vacant lot bounded by Jones, Adelaide, and Staunton. A brick building was erected on this spot in 1926, promptly burned down, and was almost as promptly replaced. A private developer demolished it about 2007.

18. **Justis' Store** – On the left was Lucy and Harold Justis' Store, that sold candy, Nabs, bologna sandwiches, hotdogs, and sodas. Also popular with the students were cigarettes at 2 cents apiece. The store closed in the 1960s. Harold would walk down the school halls with a bushel basket to pick up the bottles to secure the 5 cent refund. Back then, you could drink soda in the classroom during recess.
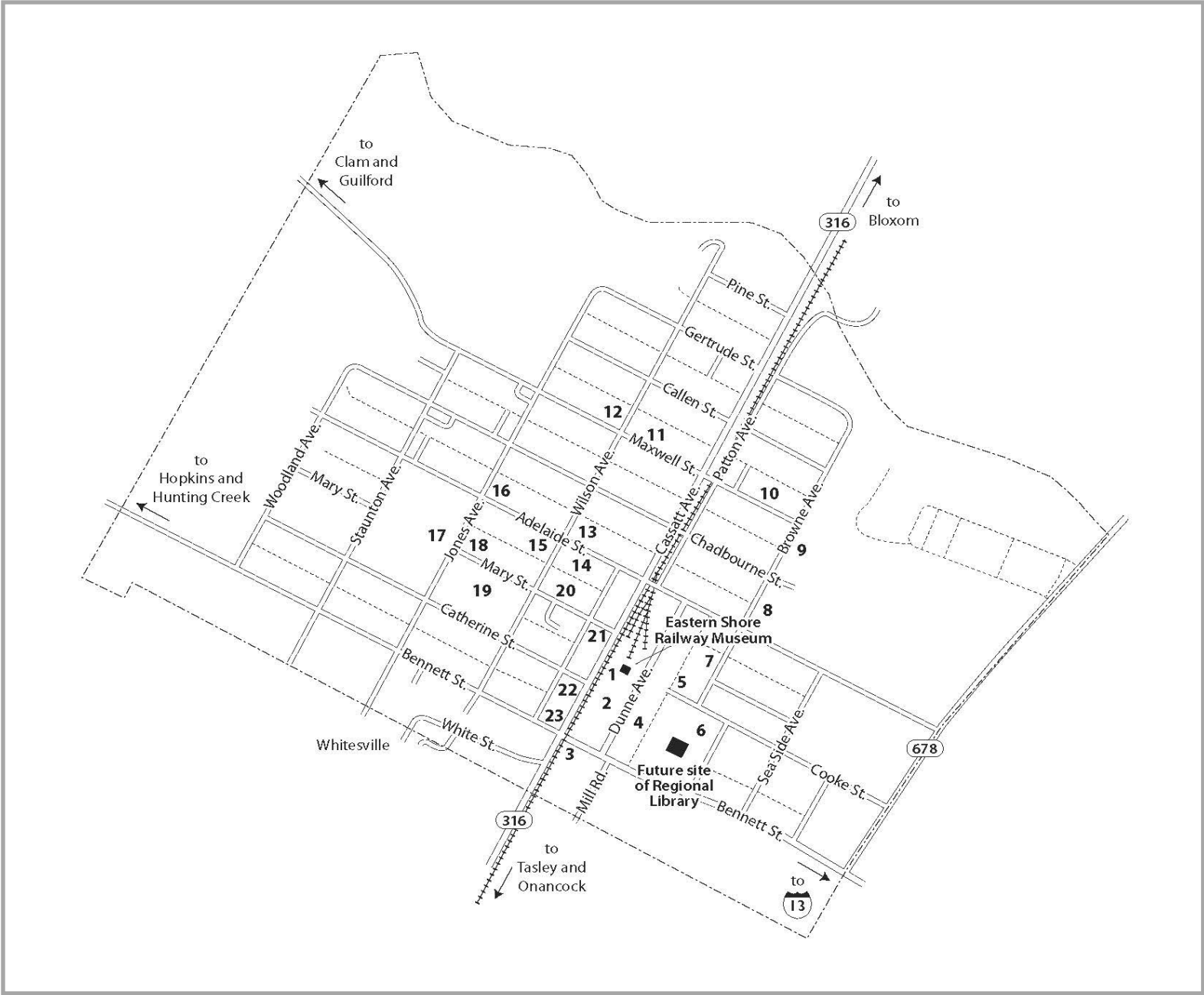
Turn left onto Mary Street.

12. **Home of John T. Williams, owner of Williams Funeral Home** – On the right is a colonial looking brick and wood house. This is the oldest home in Parksley, but it is not the oldest home *built* in town. This house, as well as the small outbuildings, were moved here . Before this house was moved here, a funeral home was here, which was torn down when Williams purchased the property and business. *Turn left (south) onto Wilson Avenue and continue to Adelaide Street.*

13. **Methodist Episcopal Church, 24235 Adelaide St. (corner of Wilson and Adelaide) –** This was the first church built in Parksley under eldership of the Dr. Rev. J.A.B. Wilson. While the church is no longer here with a home now on the property, the parsonage is at 24241 Adelaide St. The deed for this land was the first to be recorded in Accomack County and possibly in the Commonwealth of Virginia that had an "absolute forfeiture" clause if intoxicating liquors were made or sold on the premises or if gambling occurred. The church was disbanded; the building was moved downtown for storage use and no longer stands. Grace Methodist Church (corner of Wilson Ave. and Catherine St.) received funds from Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to pay the second half of the funds for the pipe organ, the first pipe organ on the Eastern Shore. The current 1976 church building is on the original location, but it is not the original 1892 sanctuary, which burned in 1909.

14. **Property of Nora Miller Turman, 24240 Adelaide St.** – On the south side of Adelaide is a small house that belonged to beloved school librarian, genealogist, and historian Nora Turman (1901-1999), author of "*Eastern Shore of Virginia (1604-1964).*" Turman came to the Shore as a demonstration agent in the 1930's. This house was previously her husband's dentist office when they lived in the larger home to the left and that she later rented. This is one example of the many home-medical practices in Parksley, when doctors had little equipment.

Map of Parksley, Virginia

to
Clam and
Guilford

316 to
Bloxom

Pine St.

Gertrude St.

Callen St.

12

11

Maxwell St.

to
Hopkins and
Hunting Creek

Woodland Ave.

Mary St.

Staunton Ave.

Wilson Ave.

Patton Ave.

10

Browne Ave.

16

Adelaide St.

Cassatt Ave.

Chadbourne St.

9

17

Jones Ave.

18

15

13

14

Mary St.

19

20

Catherine St.

8

21

Eastern Shore
Railway Museum

7

Bennett St.

1

Dunne Ave.

5

22

2

23

4

6

Sea Side Ave.

678

White St.

Whitesville

3

Mill Rd.

Future site
of Regional
Library

Cooke St.

Bennett St.

316

to
Tasley and
Onancock

to
13