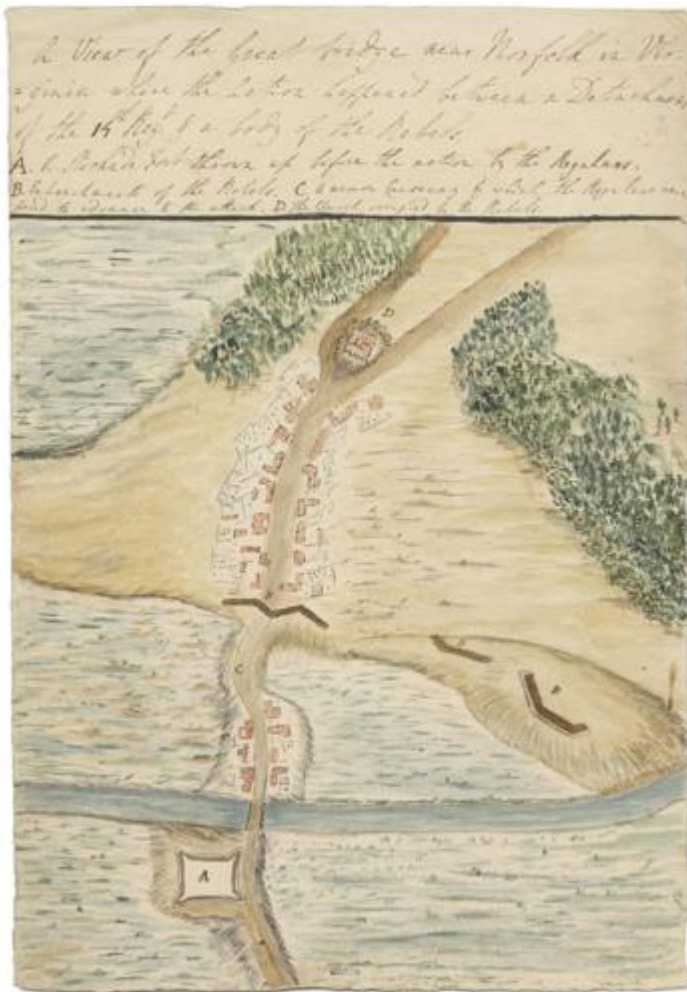


Where Culpeper Minutemen fought, Battle of Great Bridge land preserved



[Allison Brophy Champion](#)

Battleground on which the Culpeper Minutemen notably fought, significantly impacting the outcome of the American Revolution, will be preserved for perpetuity.

Department of Historic Resources announced Jan. 15, a historic preservation easement has been executed and recorded over property associated with the Battle of Great Bridge, the first major armed conflict of the American Revolutionary War in Virginia.

The easement protects the 0.664-acre property from subdivision and future development, according to a release from the state agency.

Known as the Mair Tract, the property is part of the Great Bridge Battlefield in the City of Chesapeake. It adjoins the Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways Historic Park created to commemorate the Battle of Great Bridge on Dec. 9, 1775.

Formerly enslaved men in the Ethiopian Regiment participated in the Revolutionary War clash, further adding to the battle's historical significance, according to the release.

Threatened with rebellion in late summer 1775, Virginia Royal Gov. Lord Dunmore ordered British forces to seize gunpowder stores in Williamsburg, the colonial capital. Patriot militia units converged in Williamsburg after word of Dunmore's order spread.

Dunmore then fled to Norfolk and Portsmouth and began to raise an army. He declared martial law Nov. 7, and issued a proclamation that promised freedom to any enslaved person who entered military service. He organized recruits into the Ethiopian Regiment and tasked them with raiding Patriot militia camps, according to the release from DHR.

The primary entry to Norfolk in 1775 was the Great Bridge that spanned the Elizabeth River. The Great Dismal Swamp surrounded the bridge, accessible only through narrow causeways. Recognizing the strategic importance of the bridge, Dunmore ordered a stockade constructed on the north side of the river.

On Dec. 7, Patriot forces gathered on the south side of the bridge. Over the next few days, Royal and Patriot troops engaged in the nearby bogs and swamps. By Dec. 9, Dunmore's troops attacked the Great Bridge village and Patriot fortifications.

The British staged their attack from the Mair Tract and its vicinity. During the fighting, British infantry and grenadiers crossed the property and advanced along the narrow causeway to the Great Bridge. Patriot troops quickly attacked British soldiers confined within the causeway.

The Culpeper Minutemen, with recruits from Culpeper, Fauquier and Orange, were among those patriots, including Lt. John Marshall, later chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The local battalion arrived in Williamsburg in October and five companies helped defeat the British at the Battle of Great Bridge. After the battalion disbanded in 1776, many members joined the Continental Line, according to research from the Museum of Culpeper History.

"Returning to Williamsburg, they joined Colonel Woodford's 2nd Virginia Regiment and marched to block Great Bridge. At daybreak, a company of British grenadiers charged across the bridge. The Culpeper Minutemen, led by Billy Flora, a free black man from Princess Ann County, stopped the attack, causing a British retreat to Norfolk and the safety of their ships," according to Virginia Sons of the American Revolution.

Flora was the hero at Great Bridge, said Charles Jameson with the Culpeper Minutemen Chapter SAR. Jameson said he was awakened at his SAR induction at Great Bridge in 2016 to Billy Flora.

"The VASSAR has a medal for Color Guard Duty, The Billy Flora Medal," said Jameson. "He stood his ground so we could stand ours."

At the end of the battle at Great Bridge, the British abandoned Fort Murray and retreated to Norfolk. Soon after, Patriot forces entered Norfolk, which forced Dunmore and his troops to flee Virginia. As a direct result of the Patriots' victory in the Battle of Great Bridge, the Virginia Convention adopted the first public declaration expressing a spirit of independence.

American Battlefield Trust acquired the Mair Tract in 2019 with funding from the American Battlefield Protection Program, Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund and City of Chesapeake grants.

As a requirement, the easement was donated to to the Virginia Board of Historic Resources last year. The Trust intends to transfer tract ownership to the City of Chesapeake, which owns portions of Battlefield Park. The city plans to incorporate the property into Battlefield Park, according to the release.

