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VCU Department of Urban  
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L. Douglas Wilder School of  
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URSP 691-903 Historic  
Preservation Applications

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## PREPARED FOR

**Hanover Tourism Supporters:** A Grassroots Citizens' Group united to increase Hanover's tourism, jobs, and income

Anne Cross  
Alexis Thompson  
Chris Peace  
Celie Thomas  
John O'Keefe  
Kim Chen  
Owen Matthews  
Sean Davis  
Sue Kaukas  
Wayne Hazzard

Ann Comfort  
Cate Bach  
Dan Johnson  
Edwin Gaskin  
Judy Watkins  
Michael Fiore  
Patti Jackson  
Stephanie Wall  
Tom Wulf

Art Taylor  
Charles Hartgrove  
David Deal  
Faith Boyle  
Kay Pangraze  
Nilam Patel  
Roger Bower  
Steve Brown  
Tommy Miller



## PREPARED BY

**URSP 691-903 Historic Preservation Applications Team**

Shelley Campbell  
Alfred Cassidy  
Sara Duvall  
Eva Hutchinson  
Kaila McClead  
Yvonne Park  
Phillip Sperry  
Khristopher Taggart Wesley  
Tiffany Toliver

Under the Guidance of Professor Kimberly Chen

Department of Urban & Regional Planning

**L. Douglas Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs**

**Virginia Commonwealth University**

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# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

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# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

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[ All photographs taken by Phillip  
Sperry unless otherwise noted. ]

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

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**THANK YOU!**

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hanover Tourism Supporters requested that Virginia Commonwealth University assist in the assessment of historical assets and current tourism infrastructure for the purpose of making specific recommendations to increase visitors to the county, and by extension, visitor spending. Both quantitative and qualitative data from the Virginia Tourism Corporation were used to determine current trends in tourism and specifically in heritage or cultural tourism. A day-long tour of over 20 of the most popular historical sites offered a unique perspective on the logistics of heritage tourism.

Once the information had been gathered, an analysis was conducted of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in order to examine all factors that may have an impact on tourism in the county.

The following goals were identified:

1. Create a coordinated approach to promote tourism in Hanover County, including the City of Ashland.
2. Create a centralized website utilizing electronic and social media, and establish a centralized visitor's center.
3. Create a logo for Hanover County highlighting authentic and unique qualities.
4. Support existing business and attract new businesses within tourism industry.

The recommended goals and objectives presented at the end of this document are intended as a starting point for enhancing tourism infrastructure and increasing regional awareness of Hanover as a destination.



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Cultural heritage tourism means traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes irreplaceable historic, cultural and natural resources.”*

This study was prepared for Hanover Tourism Supporters, a Grassroots Citizens’ Group united to increase Hanover’s tourism, jobs, and income by graduate students in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. The purpose of this study is to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for tourism in Hanover County and to make recommendations to help increase and encourage repeat visitation to Hanover.

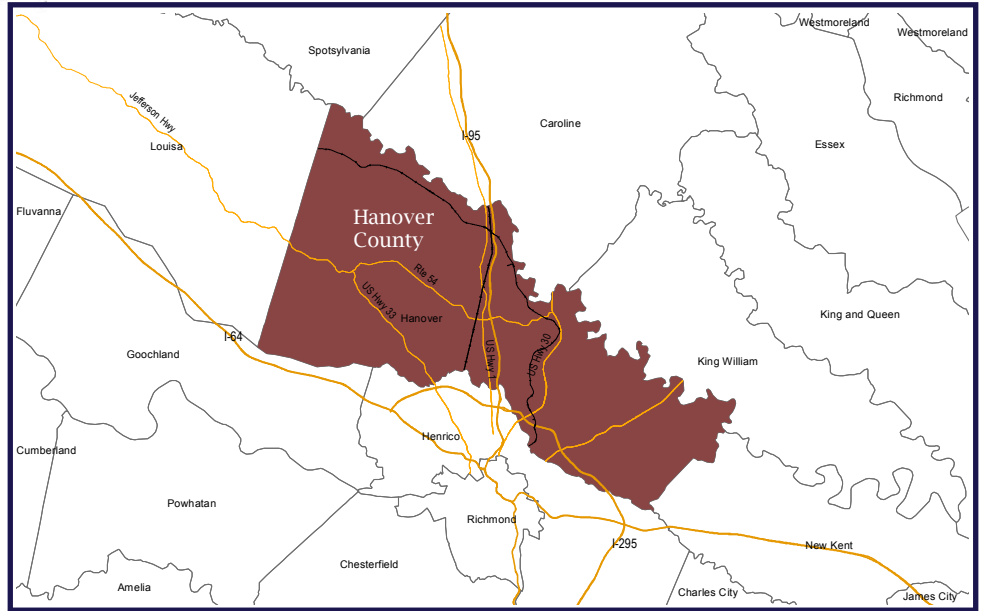
This study will begin with an analysis of tourism as a form of economic development. It will then look at existing conditions in Hanover County as they relate to tourism. This will include an understanding of Hanover County’s current tourism infrastructure, demographics related to tourism, marketing efforts, and signage. The study will also look at precedent plans from similar localities that have successful tourism programs. A SWOT analysis will be performed and recommendations made. The goal is to make heritage tourism a successful, integrated part of Hanover County’s identity and economic development strategies.

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## LOCATION OF HANOVER COUNTY



Map 1. East States



Map 2. Hanover Region

Hanover County is located in the east-central Piedmont region of Virginia between the Chickahominy and Pamunkey rivers. Hanover contains 471 square miles and is a vibrant rural and suburban locality. Two major interstate highways, I-95 and I-295, among the busiest in the eastern United States, pass through central and southern Hanover County. The county is 90 miles south of Washington DC and 12 miles north of the city of Richmond. It is part of the greater Richmond metropolitan area and one of the fastest growing counties in the state. The county has a population of 97,500. Ashland, the county's only incorporated town, has a population of 6,619 and Mechanicsville, the largest suburban area of the county, has a population of 30,464. Randolph Macon College, the oldest Methodist College in the United States, is located in the town of Ashland.



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF HANOVER COUNTY

Hanover County has played a predominate role in American history. The colonists took advantage of the many slow-flowing, navigable rivers like the Chickahominy and the Pamunkey in the region to establish individual farms and plantations that could be reached by ocean-going vessels. Because each plantation became in effect a nearly self-sufficient village, real towns were virtually nonexistent until the mid-eighteenth century. Chartered in 1720, it quickly emerged as a bustling center of commerce and trade, particularly tobacco. Just a decade later, Hanover County became the center of a powerful religious movement called the “Great Awakening,” which challenged traditional notions of an established, state church and eventually lead Virginia’s government to adopt the Statute of Religious Freedom in 1786. This law eventually became the foundation for what many know as the First Amendment, which forever established the free exercise of religion. Hanover County’s Patrick Henry rose to fame during this period, arguing a case that would become known as “The Parsons’ Cause.” Later, Henry would utter the famous words “Give me Liberty or give me Death” for which he is best known. Although Hanover County was spared much of the direct action in the Revolutionary War, this was not the case in the Civil War.

Location and two strategically important railroads ensured that Hanover County would play a prominent role in the conflict. Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, was 12 miles away, and Washington, D.C. the seat of the federal government, was 90 miles away. The Virginia Central Railroad and the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad bisected the county and were vital components of the Confederate supply system. These railroads transported supplies from northern and western Virginia, and transported troops back and forth between Richmond and the front lines. Because of the importance of these railroads, they were under constant attack from Union forces. Major campaigns occurred in the county during the spring of 1862 and 1864. In 1862, with Union forces pressing towards Richmond, a series of battles known as the Seven Days’ Campaign took place around the town of Mechanicsville in southeastern Hanover County. The Seven Days’ campaign while a strategic victory for the south was one of the war’s bloodiest episodes. An observer noted of the battle of Malvern Hill, that ended the campaign, “It was not war – it was murder.”<sup>1</sup> In 1864, Lt. General Ulysses S. Grant began a second major drive against Richmond. The series of battles beginning in Northern Virginia and ending at Cold Harbor in Hanover County would be known as the Overland campaign. The Overland campaign ended in a stalemate, but the cost was ghastly. Both armies suffered horrific losses – Grant’s casualties totaled about 55,000 and Lee’s losses amounted to roughly 27,000 – with each side losing about 45 percent of its strength.<sup>2</sup> These battles forever-changed Hanover County as stated perfectly in a tourism brochure for the county, “The battles they fought made the old county famous again, but at a heavy cost.”

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Salmon, *Virginia Civil War Battlefield Guide* (Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 2001), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

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By April 1865, when Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House, Hanover County had suffered significant physical and economic damage from four years of war. The county's infrastructure - bridges, railroads, and buildings – had been damaged or destroyed. The loss of a work force and draft animals, the neglect of agricultural land, and the emancipation of the slave population had a detrimental effect in the post-war era. Postwar agricultural difficulties prompted Hanover County farmers to seek alternative sources of income. The solution for many was to sell the timber on their land for cash. By the latter years of the nineteenth century, the forest resources of many northern states had been badly depleted and Hanover County, with its mix of loblolly pine and hardwoods, and its resurrected rail system was an attractive location for logging during this period. Farming also continued to be a mainstay of the Hanover County economy in the decades following the Civil War. By the latter years of the nineteenth century, the focus of farming in this region had shifted to market gardening. Hanover County, in particular, was known for the quality of its fruits and vegetables, including the famed Hanover tomatoes and melons.<sup>3</sup>

Towns and crossroads began to coalesce in the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In 1858, Ashland, the only incorporated town in Hanover County, was chartered. It is named for the Kentucky home of Hanover County native Henry Clay. Ashland began as the antebellum resort development of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad Company that in its heyday boasted a complex of hotels, cottages, and recreational buildings serving both travelers and Sunday picnickers from Richmond. Following the economic collapse of the town during the Civil War and its aftermath, it was redeveloped by the R F & P as a commuter suburb in the final quarter of the 19th century. Randolph-Macon College, the oldest Methodist College in the United States, moved to the town of Ashland in 1868.<sup>4</sup>

The Barksdale Theatre was founded at the historic Hanover Tavern in 1953, becoming the first dinner theater in the United States and Central Virginia's first professional theatre. The theater led the way in featuring the works of African American playwrights and integrated casts. In 1975, Kings Dominion, an amusement park, opened its doors in Doswell in northeast Hanover County. More recently in 2008, the Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World, a 150,000 retail “experience” opened in the Winding Brook development. Both Kings Dominion and Bass Pro Shops have added tremendously to Hanover's economy and its tourist's attractions.

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<sup>3</sup>Bill Laffoon, National Register Nomination for Montpelier Historic District (2000)

<sup>4</sup>Rosanne Shalf and Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff, National Register Nomination for Town of Ashland (1982)

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## TOURISM

### Tourism as Economic Development

Tourism is a large industry, which directly contributed \$704.4 billion to the United State’s economy and employed 7.4 million Americans in 2009. A majority, 78%, of leisure travelers in the United States engages in cultural or heritage tourism activities and spends on average \$994 per trip. Heritage tourists travel more frequently, making an average of five trips a year, and they spend more on cultural and heritage activities. Heritage travelers are also more likely to participate in related events such as farmers markets or wine festivals and they are attracted to unique and authentic dining experiences. Heritage tourism also supports local property values and fosters community pride. Heritage tourism helps to diversify the economy and preserve local character while being a sustainable form of community economic development. The trend of heritage tourism is only expected to increase.<sup>5</sup>

### Heritage Tourism in Hanover County

Heritage tourism was defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2008 as “traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic, and natural resources.” Since the product already exists, a given municipality must determine how to present or deliver the product—historic and cultural resources and sites—to the visitor/consumer. This can be achieved through innovative partnerships between public and private entities, exploiting current travel trends, and utilization of available federal programs/funding, among other strategies. Hanover County is uniquely poised to implement a heritage tourism initiative due to its many historic and cultural resources, more fully explored later in this document.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 2011 National Trust for Historic Preservation, <http://culturalheritagetourism.org/documents/2011CHTFactSheet6-11.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> 2012 National Trust for Historic Preservation, <http://www.preservationnation.org/>

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Hanover County Tourism Numbers

The Virginia Tourism Corporation uses an economic model created by the U.S. Travel Association to calculate, at the county level, estimated expenditures, employment, payroll, and tax revenue generated by travelers away from home. These estimates reflect domestic travelers away from home overnight staying in paid accommodations, and those on any overnight or day trip more than 50 miles away from home. Expenditures means direct spending by domestic travelers on food, lodging, both public and vehicular transportation, shopping, admissions, and other entertainment. Figures for 2010 are preliminary estimates.

As seen in Table 1, from 2008 to 2009 all travel impacts and tax revenues decreased immediately after the beginning of the national recession. However, from 2009 to 2010 spending, employment, and payroll in travel-related industries as well as state and local tax receipts show an increase even as local food and lodging revenues continue to decline.

Table 1. Hanover County Tourism  
Economic Impact Estimates 2006-2010

Travel Impacts	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Percent Change*
Expenditures	\$175,338,339	\$179,240,196	\$186,018,291	\$166,375,410	\$179,168,050	7.7%
Payroll	\$40,155,777	\$39,249,413	\$40,578,361	\$38,387,326	\$40,058,836	4.4%
Employment	2,426	2,364	2,391	2,252	2,268	0.7%
State Tax Receipts	\$7,459,944	\$7,467,283	\$7,563,274	\$7,228,975	\$7,552,934	4.5%
Local Tax Receipts	\$3,773,027	\$3,839,761	\$4,022,748	\$3,639,042	\$3,822,260	5.0%
<b>Local Excise Tax Collections</b>						
Lodging Excise Tax Collected	\$1,281,597	\$1,305,441	\$1,326,387	\$1,209,196	\$1,117,350	-7.6%
Food Service Excise Tax Collected	\$1,740,219	\$1,750,879	\$1,884,529	\$1,815,232	\$1,764,723	-2.8%
Admission Excise Tax Collected	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	n/a
<b>Local Excise Tax Rates</b>						
Lodging Excise Tax Rate	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	n/a
Food Service Excise Tax Rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	n/a
Admission Excise Tax Rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	n/a

Source: Virginia Tourism Corporation \*Percent Change from fiscal year 2009 to fiscal year 2010

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

Table 2 compares 2010 economic impact estimates across the region: Hanover, Henrico and Chesterfield Counties and the City of Richmond. In 2010, tourism-related industries in Hanover captured \$179,169,050 in travelers' expenditures, placing the county last in the region.

Table 2. Comparison of 2010 Regional Tourism Economic Estimates

Travel Impacts	Hanover Co.	City of Richmond	Henrico Co.	Chesterfield Co.
Expenditures	\$179,168,050	\$538,672,050	\$646,592,148	\$363,044,272
Payroll	\$40,058,836	\$126,419,306	\$156,802,202	\$72,625,038
Employment	2,268	6,044	7,013	4,141
State Tax Receipts	\$7,552,934	\$20,616,735	\$24,697,195	\$14,943,095
Local Tax Receipts	\$3,822,260	\$19,072,691	\$20,521,162	\$8,339,986
<b>Local Excise Tax Collections</b>				
Lodging Excise Tax Collected	\$1,117,350	\$4,789,681	\$9,005,457	\$3,503,222
Food Service Excise Tax Collected	\$1,764,723	\$23,756,425	\$0	\$0
Admission Excise Tax Collected	\$0	\$2,181,971	\$0	\$0
<b>Local Excise Tax Rates</b>				
Lodging Excise Tax Rate	8%	8%	8%	8%
Food Service Excise Tax Rate	0%	6%	0%	0%
Admission Excise Tax Rate	0%	7%	0%	0%

Source: Virginia Tourism Corporation

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Demographics of Tourism

The Virginia Tourism Corporation has collected extensive data on all travelers to Virginia from 2007-2009. Specifically, we looked at the profile for leisure travelers. The picture that emerges from the data about travelers (domestic only) in Virginia from 2007-2009 follows: the most prevalent type of leisure traveler in Virginia is a white college degree holder between 35 and 54 years of age, making \$50,000 or more per year. He or she may travel alone, but if not is likely with a spouse and possibly children. The traveler is probably coming from within the state of Virginia, and is very likely using his or her own vehicle for transportation.<sup>7</sup>

This is of course a broad generalization: all types of people travel to Virginia, and current trends that illustrate different kinds of travelers on the rise. The National Park Service reports that 75% of cultural travelers aged 18-34 say that a trip where they can learn something new is of value to them. A Virginia Tourism Corporation Attitudinal Study conducted in April of 2011 revealed that younger respondents—especially those in the Millennial generation—were “more likely to have experienced an organized trail” in Virginia, the most popular of which were Civil War trails.<sup>8</sup>

US Census data on Hanover County reveals a demographic similar to that of the Virginia leisure traveler: 88.9% of households are white, followed by 8.4% black, 1.4% Hispanic or Latino, 1% Asian, and 0.5% or less of all other races. The median income for all households is \$76,425. 13.1% of the total population is 65 or older, with another 21.6% (21,603 people) reaching retirement age within the next decade.<sup>9</sup> This information is relevant to this document due to the assumption that tourist facilities in a given locality will serve the local population as well as travelers from other areas.



Photo 1.Visitor Center

<sup>7</sup> 2012 Virginia Tourism Corporation, <http://www.vatc.org/research/visitation.asp>

<sup>8</sup> 2012 Virginia Tourism Corporation, <http://www.vatc.org/research/VTCAttitudinalStudyWave7Findings.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> US Census American Factfinder, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## HISTORIC SITES

These matrices map out the attractions in Hanover in three varying ways, the first one looks at specific attractions and their relation to particular historic periods of time. The next looks at the attractions in Hanover in relation to their location in the county and the last one looks at the parks in Hanover and maps out the amenities that are available at each one. Having something similar to these matrixes on a website, would help easily point out specific information on the attractions in Hanover. One trying to plan a trip can plan it out according to what he or she finds important.

History	Revolutionary War Period	Civil War Period	Trains	Patrick Henry
Ashland Station		X	X	
Beaverdam Creek Battlefield		X		
Beaverdam Depot		X	X	
Church Quarter		X		
Cold Harbor Battlefield		X		
Cold Harbor National Cemetery		X		
Enon Church		X		X
Fork Episcopal Church		X		
Gaines' Mill Battlefield		X		
Garthright House		X		
Hanover Tavern	X	X		X
Hanover Courthouse Complex	X	X		X
Newcastle	X			
North Anna Battlefield		X		
Old Church		X		
Pine Slash	X			
Polegreen Church		X		
Randolph Macon College		X		
Rural Plains	X			X
Scotchtown	X			X
Slash Church	X	X		
Studley Plantation	X			
Sycamore Tavern	X			
Trinity Church		X		
Watt House		X		

Chart 1. Historic Sites

Attractions	Beaverdam	Ashland	Hanover	Mechanicsville	Doswell	Glen Allen	Montpelier
Old Towne Carriage		X					
Ballons Over Virginia		X	X				
Kings Dominion					X		
RF&P Model Reailroader Exhibit		X					
James River Wine Cellars						X	
606 Gallery		X					
Windemere Art Gallery				X			
Cross Mill Gallery		X					
Hanover Arts and Activites Center		X					
Henry Clay Inn Art Gallery		X					
Montpelier Center for Arts and Education							X
Barksdale Theater			X				
Ashland Coffee and Tea		X					
Heritage Trail		X					
Ashland Famer's Market		X					
Flux Gallery		X					
Iron Horse Restaurant		X					
Ashland Station		X					
Beaverdam Creek Battlefield				X			
Beaverdam Depot	X						
Church Quarter			X				
Cold Harbor Battlefield				X			
Cold Harbor National Cemetery				X			
Enon Church				X			
Fork Episcopal Church					X		
Gaines' Mill Battlefield				X			
Garthright House				X			
Hanover Tavern			X				
Hanover Courthouse Complex			X				
Newcastle							
North Anna Battlefield					X		
Old Church			X				
Pine Slash				X			
Polegreen Church				X			
Randolph Macon College		X					
Rural Plains							
Scotchtown	X						
Slash Church	X						
Studley Plantation				X			
Sycamore Tavern							X
Trinity Church	X						
Watt House				X			

Chart 2. Attractions

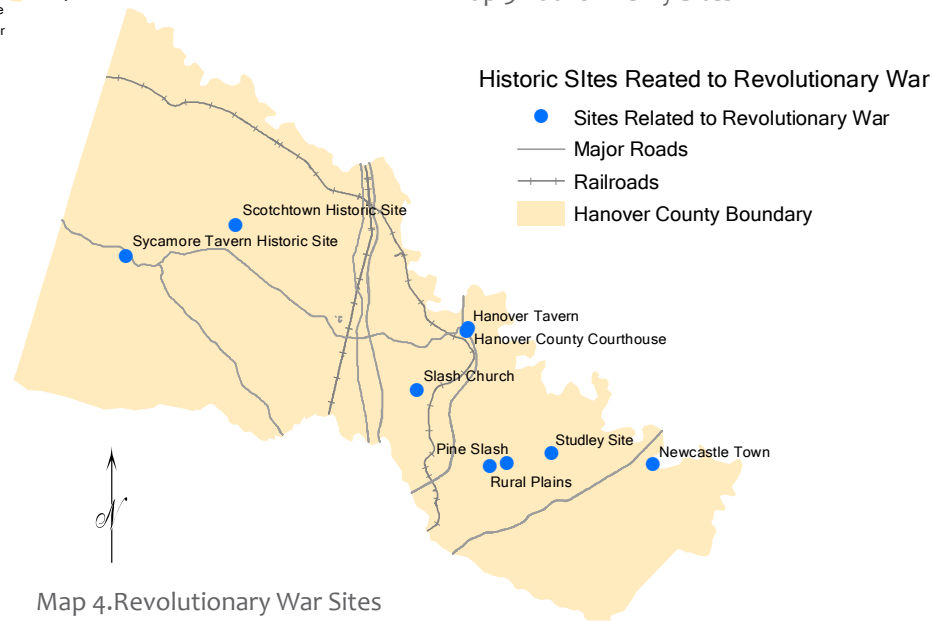
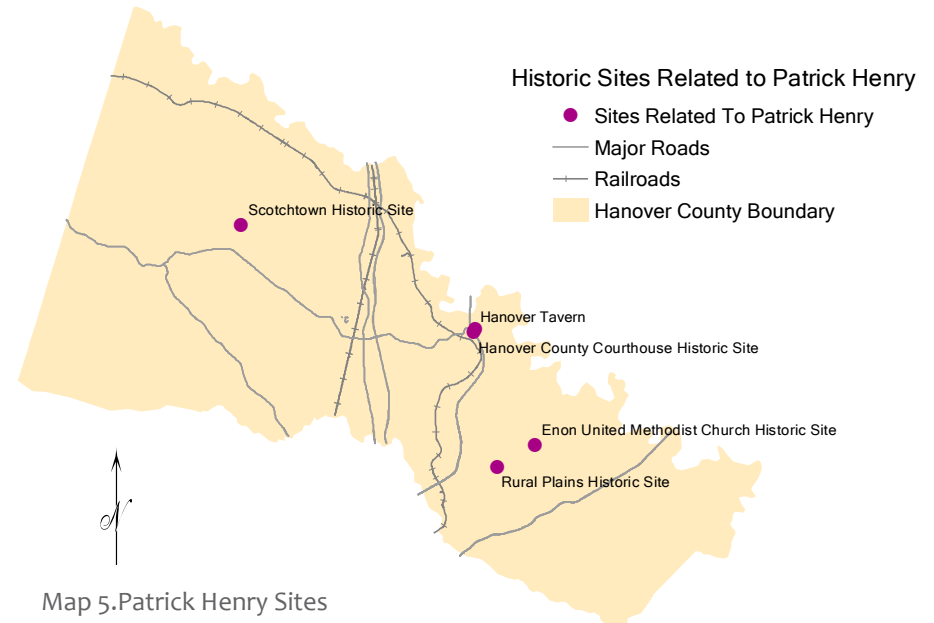
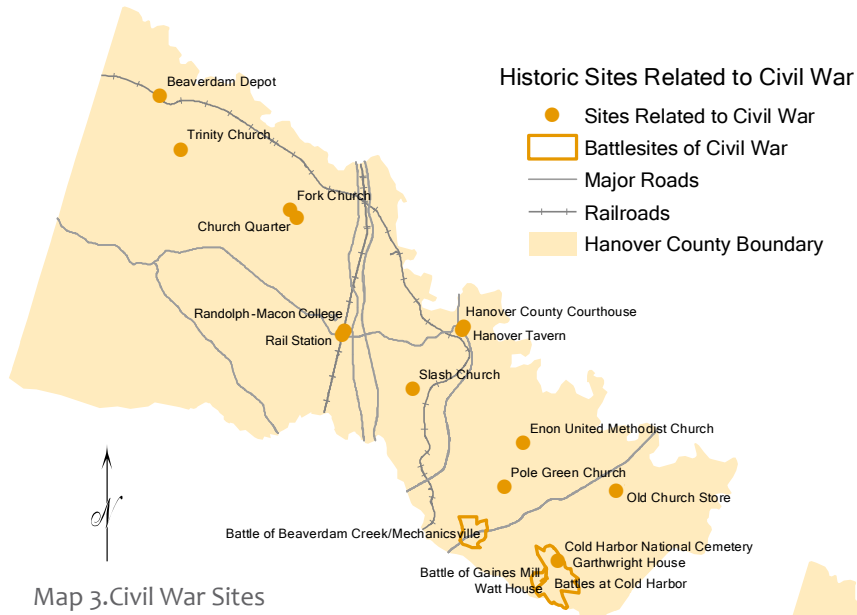
# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

Parks & Recreation	Amphitheater	Baseball/Softball Fields	Boat/Canoe Ramp	Civil War Info/ Signage	Community Center	Concession/ Restaurant	Football Fields	Picnic Tables	Horseback Riding Ring	Horseshoe Pits	Jogging/ Walking Trails	Bike Trails	Nature Trails	Picnic Shelters	Pond	Public Fishing	Restrooms	Roller Hockey Rink	Skateboard Park	Soccer Fields	Basketball Courts	Tot-lot (Playground)	Volleyball
Parks																							
Carter Park											X			X								X	
Cold Habor				X				X			X												
Hanover Courthouse Park						X		X			X				X	X	X	X		X			
Dejarnette Park								X				X	X	X	X								
Hanover Wayside								X		X	X	X	X	X	X							X	X
Montpelier Park		X			X						X			X						X	X	X	
North Anna				X				X			X												
Pole Green		X			X	X	X	X	X		X			X			X		X	X	X	X	X
Poor Farm	X	X				X	X	X		X	X	X		X			X			X	X	X	X
Pufferbelly Park																			X			X	
Railside Park																							
South Taylor Street Park														X							X	X	X
Wayside Park										X			X	X	X		X					X	
Recreation																							
Rt. 301/Pamunkey			X													X							
Rt. 1/ North Anna			X													X							
Rt. 54/South Anna			X													X							
Rt. 33/ South Anna			X													X							
Glen Allen Golf														X									
Hanover Country Club																							
The Hollows Golf Course						X																	
Hunting Hawk Golf Club						X																	
Cobblestone Park & Splash Zone		X				X				X											X		X
Trails																							
Ashland Trolley Line											X												
Railside Trail											X	X											
Stoney Run Trail											X												

Chart 3.Parks & Recreation

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## SITE MAPS



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Cultural tourism is experiential tourism based on being involved in and stimulated by the performing arts, visual arts, and festivals. Heritage tourism revolves around visiting historic landscapes, sites, buildings or monuments. Heritage tourists want to experience a different time or place, to learn to enjoy cerebral experiences, and to share with others or teach children the history of the site. As tourists are becoming more sophisticated, their need to evoke the past has been increasing. The following matrix identifies different cultural/heritage festivals, events, and activities that occur in Hanover County and the attributes that tourists can utilize during a visit to the various destinations.

Events & Activities	Festivals	Events	Tours	Hanover County Tavern	Hanover Court House	The Ashland Depot	Montelier Park	Shady Grove United Methodist Church	Taylor Park	Couthouse Park	Hanover Wayside Park	Pole Green Park, Mechanicsville, VA	Randolph Macon College, Ashland, VA	Bass Pro Shops	Beaverdam, VA
Civil War Exhibit & Audio Tour			X	X											
Civil War Battle Bus Tour			X		X										
Ashland Depot			X			X									
Easter Egg Hunt		X					X					X			
Family Fun With Taylor / Taylor's Daddy Daughter Dance		X									X				
Woof Wag Walk		X							X						
Family Fishing Day		X								X	X				
Veterans Memorial Day		X									X				
Veterans Day Event		X		X								X			
Tomato Festival	X														
Festival Of Gardening & Luncheon	X						X								
Pit Stop Party		X										X			
Taylor's Autumn Adventure		X									X				
Antique Car Show & Luncheon		X						X							
Lee Takes Command 150th Anniversary			X		X										
Patrick Henry & The Road to Revolution			X		X										
Strawberry Faire	X	X											X		
Down to Earth (HABCC)		X												X	
Beaverdam Wine Festival	X	X													X

Chart 4. Events & Activities



Photo 2.Ashland Clock

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## SIGNAGE

Hanover County has a wealth of informational markers like the Virginia Historical Highway Markers and the Freeman Markers. Hanover also has organizational signage for the Virginia Civil War Trail, the Road to Revolution Trails, and the Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Trail. The majority of the signage in Hanover County is informational only and offers no way-finding information or directional guidance.

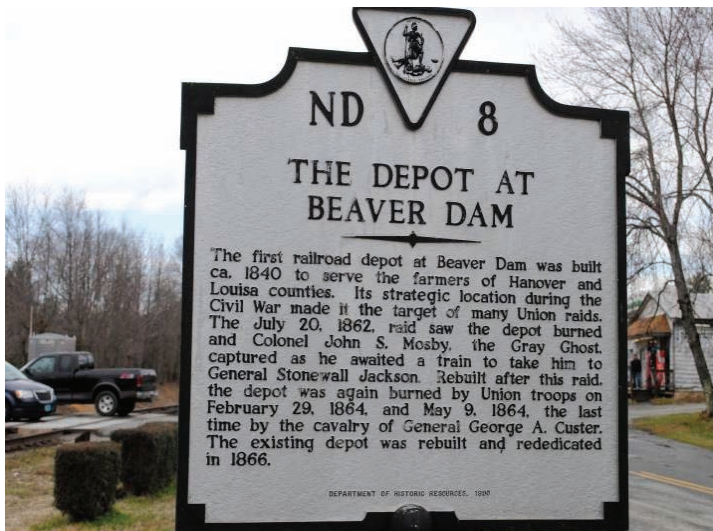


Photo 3. DHR Marker

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) currently manages the Virginia Historical Highway Marker program which has been in existence since 1927 and is the oldest program of its kind in the United States. The first Virginia Historical Highway Markers were placed in 1927 on U.S. Route 1 between Mount Vernon and Richmond. Also in 1927, two markers were placed in Hanover County along Route 360 commemorating the Battle of Cold Harbor and Patrick Henry's call to arms. There are currently 57 Virginia Historical Highway Markers in Hanover County. There are actually 60 cataloged markers in the county but three were identified as missing in 2009. The Historical Highway Markers are strictly informational and provide a brief overview of the historic event, person, or topic being commemorated on the particular sign and they are placed near the locations they are commemorating. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources no longer maintains a historic marker database but a privately maintained database can be found at <http://www.markerhistory.com>. This database can be searched by location or topic and all of the markers are cross referenced to other markers with related themes and information.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/hiway\\_markers/hwmarker\\_info.htm](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/hiway_markers/hwmarker_info.htm)



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

The Freeman Markers are a system of markers identifying Civil War battlefield sites around Richmond and provide historic information about the sites at which they are placed. The system was created by a group of historians called The Battlefield Markers Association. There are sixty-one markers located throughout the Richmond area, with twenty-one of those in Hanover County. The signs in this system are informational only and provide no directional or way-finding information. Finding information about this system online is more difficult, information was found on the Historical Markers Database website's search page – <http://www.hmdb.org/results/ASAP?S>. The Historical Markers Database has Interactive Google Maps but no actual companion maps for this marker system. This resource does provide a location for each individual marker. The signage in this system accomplishes one of its goals by providing the reader with historic information about the site. However, without mapping and directions to the signs themselves, this system is difficult to use.<sup>11</sup>



Photo 4.Scotchtown Freeman Markers

The Virginia Civil Trails Marker System is a system of trails, maps, and signage. Information about this system is available online at <http://www.civilwartraveler.com/EAST/VA>. The signs are found on state route posts and provide rudimentary way-finding, an example can be see below. The signage does not provide any specific information or directions to the trails and are only a way-finding tool when used with a companion map. (These maps are Signage Appendix 2 and 3, the Overland Campaign and the Peninsula Campaign). The companion maps provide a visual over view of the route and detailed information about the events that occurred along the trail. The signs are not very effective by themselves because they provide very little to no actual way-finding information.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.hmdb.org/results.asp?SearchFor=freeman+markers>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.civilwartraveler.com/EAST/VA;>

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

The Road to Revolution Heritage Trail connects Virginia historic sites that are related to the life and activities of Patrick Henry. This trail system was created by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2007 “to highlight and celebrate Henry's leading role in liberating Virginia from Colonial rule to independence.” Patrick Henry is extremely important not only to Hanover County, but to Virginia and the United States as a whole. Maps and other information can be found on the website for the trail system <http://www.roadtorevolution.org/>. In the image to the right, the Road to Revolution sign can be seen to the right of the Interstate 95 directional sign. Signage for this trail system is not intended to be way-finding but simply identifying or organizing. Signs are located near locations on the trail or at the locations themselves and require a companion map to navigate between the sites.<sup>13</sup>



Photo 5.Road Signs

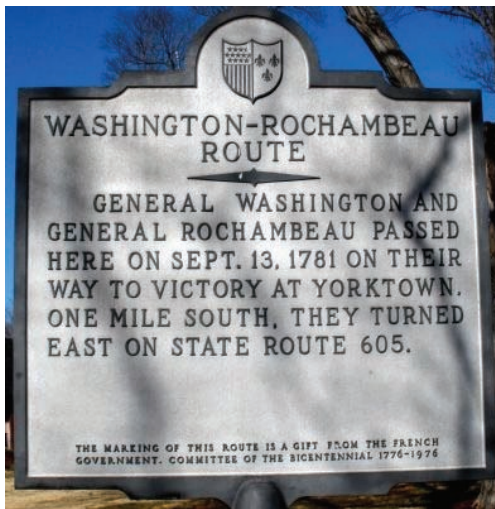


Photo 6.Washington-Rochambeau Route  
Image Source: <http://www.hmdb.org>

The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route signs demarcate the roads used by colonial and French troops under the command of George Washington and Jean-Baptiste de Rochambeau during the Revolutionary War. The 650 mile trail system extends from Rhode Island to Virginia. There are informational signs, similar in style to the Virginia Historical Highway Markers, along the trail and other simpler way-finding and identifying signage. The National Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Association, Inc's website, <http://www.w3r-us.org/>, provides extensive information and maps regarding the trail system. The maps are easy to use and located on the website. Virginia-specific maps for the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route are included in the appendix of this document. Because of the excellent internet presence of this trail, the lack of consistent way-finding signage is not detrimental. To the left is an example of an information/location sign on the trail located in Hanover County.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.roadtorevolution.org/>, <http://chrispeace.com/>

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## MARKETING

### Website

Although currently there is no website dedicated to tourism in Hanover County, there are other websites that contain useful information for tourists and visitors to the county. The Hanover County Planning Department has web pages that provide descriptions of the key historic sites and facts, and the new Hanover County Economic Development website provides a Location Map and a Tourism Map that can be downloaded. Other information that can be found on this website for visitors include parks and recreation facilities, events, and historic sites under the "Things To Do" tab.

However, web searches using the key words such as "Hanover, VA" and "tourism, Hanover, VA" failed to return results leading to these websites. (See the list provided below for results returned for the web searches) Searching using the keyword "things to do, Hanover, VA" returned the Hanover County Economic Development website between 6th to 8th down the list depending on the web search engine used (Google or Bing).

- "Hanover, VA" Google Search
  - Home Hanover County Government Online
  - Hanover County Parks and Recreation Department
  - Assessor's Office/ Hanover County
  - Treasurer's Office
  
- "Tourism Hanover, Virginia" Google Search
  - Virginia Travel Guide/ Virginia.org
  - Travel.yahoo: Hanover, Virginia Vacations, Tourism, Guides, Hotels
  - Local.yahoo Tourism Attractions in Hanover, VA
  - Tourism- Ashland, VA

### Maps

There are several maps on Hanover County, but these maps are buried in brochures, which limits its audience. An easily accessible, interactive map would help tourist that are trying to plan out a trip to the county. Such features should include, but not be limited to, the ability to select interest based on time period, location in the county, etc.

### Brochures

There are numerous brochures on Hanover County that states interesting information on these particular sites, maps that allow those interested in planning trips around the county, and a list of amenities at these particular sites. But this information has limited viewers because of its format and would be better served on a webpage.

A wealth of information may be found at the Visitor Center in downtown Ashland. There are brochures, maps, and other literature available for those seeking information about Hanover County.



Photo 7. Brochures



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## HANOVER COUNTY PLAN ANALYSIS

### Comprehensive Plan Recommendations for Tourism

Section 7 of the Hanover County Comprehensive Plan 2007-2027 provides specific information relating to historic resources and heritage tourism within the County. The County acknowledges that Historic resources "complement land use planning by providing guidance for the identification and protection of the County's abundant historic resources and to ensure that land use decisions are made in a manner that attempts to preserve these historic resources whenever possible."<sup>14</sup> An evaluation and survey of the County has resulted in the documentation and evaluation of more than 1,000 resources throughout the County. In order to protect these historic resources, the County has designated eight Overlay Historic Preservation Districts as well as created several Boards or Committees including the Hanover County Architectural Review Board, the Hanover County Historical Commission, and the Historic Courthouse Area Advisory Committee. Furthermore, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources designated Hanover County a Certified Local Government, which "requires that the County maintain specific credentials for quality preservation programs and provides the County with a way to participate with state and national historic preservation programs, including grant programs that enhance preservation efforts."<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the general efforts being made by the County to protect its historic resources, in the Comprehensive Plan the County has outlined two main goals and several means on how to accomplish those goals. The County's two goals are:

- (1) Comprehensively preserve and protect Hanover County historic resources through regulations and incentives, and to support these historic resources through interpretative and educational programs.<sup>16</sup>
- (2) Enhance historic resources with a community-defined heritage tourism program that will provide a unique cultural experience for residents and tourists, and that will create opportunities for economic development.

The goals as provided above will be accomplished through different means as addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. First, the county realizes that there needs to be a greater understanding of the historical context for resources within the County. Second, the historic sites need to be categorized into three categories depending on the sites historic significance to make sure that more intense focus is put on some resources. Third, a resource impact evaluation needs to occur; specifically, this process will establish criteria for evaluating zoning requests in order to mitigate the impact of proposed development on the historic landscape. Finally, the County acknowledges the importance of heritage tourism as a way to increase the economic benefits within the County and recognizes that bicycle routes need to be a component.

<sup>14</sup>Hanover County Comprehensive Plan 2007-2027, p. 196

<sup>15</sup>Hanover County Comprehensive Plan 2007-2027, p. 197

<sup>16</sup>Hanover County Comprehensive Plan 2007-2027, p. 197

## Economic Development Strategic Plan Tourism Recommendations

The Economic Development Strategic Plan of Hanover County focuses on eight points. Hanover County's main objective is to increase tourism through better promotion, advertising, and marketing combined with current projects to enhance existing attractions. Hanover County's initiatives are to strengthen promotional activities with other organizations in the county with similar goals and objectives.<sup>17</sup> These organizations plan on implementing a travel marketing program that focuses on individuals and groups, capitalizing on the county's central location along I-95 and I-295 and its proximity to major east coast cities.<sup>18</sup> The travel marketing program for individuals and groups will be assessed for its effectiveness, efficiency, and authenticity.

The Economic Development Strategic Plan of Hanover County plans to continue regional tourism efforts by capitalizing and promoting Civil War battlefields as a major tourist site.<sup>19</sup> This effort will promote the historical geography and significance by showing residents as well as tourists what historical events have taken place and the importance of these events to Hanover County. Another focal point the county plans to utilize is marketing the current destination retail, recreational opportunities, and Kings Dominion as a getaway oasis for residents and tourists alike.

Finally, the direct effects of the Economic Development Strategic Plan of Hanover County will have an economic impact on the county by commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War which will bring an influx of visitors to the county and encourage existing county residents to visit local historic sites.

## Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Facilities Master Plan

Although the Hanover County Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Facilities Master Plan never specifically makes reference to heritage tourism, it touches on the advantageous location of the county along I-95 in terms of local growth and tourism opportunities, and the role of existing tourist attractions such as King's Dominion and Bass Pro Shop. It also mentions regional tourism while discussing funding sources; specifically, enhancements to regional tourism infrastructure may be eligible for a grant from the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission. While the document provides recommendations for enhancement of recreational facilities which seem largely intended for county residents rather than tourist destinations, a number of the targeted sites appeal to the heritage tourist as well. Some examples include adding directional signage at all access points to the Ashland Trolley Line, additional signage and ADA compliance in the parking lot of Cold Harbor Battlefield Park, and an expansion of the trail system in the North Anna Battlefield Park to include "points of significant Civil War history" in new sections.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Economic Strategic Plan of Hanover County, p. 9

<sup>18</sup> Economic Strategic Plan of Hanover County, p. 11

<sup>19</sup> Economic Strategic Plan of Hanover County, p. 12

<sup>20</sup> Hanover County Parks & Recreation Master Plan. 2010. [http://www.co.hanover.va.us/parksrec/masterplan\\_final.pdf](http://www.co.hanover.va.us/parksrec/masterplan_final.pdf)

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## PRECEDENT TOURISM APPROACHES

Many counties and cities across the country are now seeking to promote their culture and heritage into a viable tourism opportunity. Like Hanover County, they are rich in history and activities but face the challenge of remaining relevant to the modern day tourist. The discussion of these precedent tourism approaches seeks to make known the experience of a few localities who have successfully developed ideas that promote heritage tourism. It is the hope that studying these precedent approaches will assist in the future of Hanover County tourism.

### Lancaster, PA

Lancaster County is similar to Hanover County in the number and diversity of attractions it has to offer. They have successfully utilized these attractions through events that provide education about the local heritage. Tours are also provided as another means of education, as well as a way to provide local resident participation.

Lancaster County, like Hanover, is concerned with maintaining the authenticity of its cultural heritage. They use a seal of authenticity to promote those sites and goods that are unique to the locality. This seal can be found on banners, signs, and hang tags for heritage crafts throughout the county.<sup>21</sup>

The sites coordinate tourism planning across the county with tourism development areas. They combine their natural, historic, and cultural resources to positively impact economic development throughout the county. These areas create what they call Spirit of Place, saying that a great place to live is a great place to visit. This is done through the preservation of cultural heritage, promotion of community pride, and the addition of attractions for both residents and visitors. Their goal is to enhance the visitor experience while improving the local residents' way of life.<sup>22</sup>



Photo 8. Authentic Lancaster County Logo  
Image Source: <http://www.lmhs.org/>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.lancastercountyheritage.com/lancheritage/lib/lancheritage/presentations/lanc\\_co\\_heritage\\_presentation\\_1-25-10.pdf](http://www.lancastercountyheritage.com/lancheritage/lib/lancheritage/presentations/lanc_co_heritage_presentation_1-25-10.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.planningpa.org/presentations10/19M\\_PlaceBased\\_Tourism\\_in\\_Lancaster\\_County.pdf](http://www.planningpa.org/presentations10/19M_PlaceBased_Tourism_in_Lancaster_County.pdf)



## Dodge City, KS



Photo 9. Dodge City  
Image Source: <http://www.dodgecity.org/>

The history of Dodge City is in the cultural development of a Western city, what they call the mythic West. Their aim was to promote the diversity of their city into the creation of an experience for visitors that they could not find elsewhere. Like Hanover County, they were looking to maintain their cultural heritage and the rural lifestyle.

They recognized the need to keep up with the trends of the modern travelers, including innovative web marketing and social networking strategies.

Another concern for the city was that the signage be not only welcoming and create a sense of place, but also provide clear way-finding. Their goal was to construct logistical links between their sites and attractions to direct and orient travelers.

In their Heritage Tour Master Plan, they recommended a Cluster Concept of sites, a focused group of attractions and/or themes. This would create a marketable grouping of sites that would allow visitors to move around with purpose and also encourage them to stay longer to see and do more. This would ultimately create an economic benefit to the city.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.dodgecity.org/DocumentView.aspx?DID=406>

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## PRECEDENT PLANS

### Rocky Mount, NC



Photo 10. Rocky Mount Downtown Revitalization  
Image Source: <http://www.rockymountnc.gov/>

The revitalization of downtown Rocky Mount was meant to restore the historic foundation of the city. Like Hanover County, their aim was to create a positive, authentic identity that would promote the city as a destination for residents and visitors. Creating a Sense of Place sets Rocky Mount apart and prevents it from devolving into obscurity. By preserving its assets, the city retains its distinctive nature.

The city realized the need to appeal to the local Rocky Mount community through internal promotion, convincing them of the worth of downtown by creating an authentic identity. This inevitably creates community pride based on the city's story – its history, culture, built environment, and memories. The cultivation of resident interest paves the way for external promotion of Rocky Mount as a destination to regional, tourist, and Internet audiences.<sup>24</sup>

In order to increase visitor access to the city, a way finding system, with clear signage at decision-making areas, was created to direct visitors from the interstate to downtown. This simplifies way finding to specific visitor corridors. The highway signage is successful only because the city has first created an appealing destination for residents and visitors.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>[http://www.rockymountnc.gov/downtown/documents/Downtown\\_Action\\_Plan\\_final.pdf](http://www.rockymountnc.gov/downtown/documents/Downtown_Action_Plan_final.pdf)

<sup>25</sup><http://www.rockymountnc.gov/streetscape/>

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT is an analysis method used in a strategic planning process that evaluates strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to identify goals and objectives of the project. Strengths and weaknesses tend to evaluate more internal matters of the organization or the locality such as the current conditions, history of the planning process, and recent changes and trends that have occurred in the area. Opportunities and threats tend to be more external factors. Opportunities may be identified by evaluating the project compared to other cases and best practices for benchmarking. Opportunities and threats may also come from changes in legislation, economic pattern, environmental conditions or new technologies that might have implications on the project.

### Strengths

A strength identifies a characteristic or resource of Hanover County that is beneficial to the overall future of tourism in the county. These offer a foundation on which to build a stronger economy through the advancement of tourism opportunities.

#### Heritage, History, Charm, Rural Attitude

Hanover has fresh air, charm, and rural sensibilities. The county proudly blends its authentic qualities and the preservation of its historic resources with the development of new businesses and events, maintaining its unique rural charm.

Hanover County contains more Civil War sites than any other county. It is also an essential hub for Revolutionary War sites, providing a great resource for the life of Patrick Henry. The county is also linked to state and national historic trails.

#### Highway Access

The easy access to Interstate-95 and Interstate-295, among the busiest highways in the eastern United State, simplifies travel and provides convenience for Virginia and Mid-Atlantic travelers to enjoy what Hanover County has to offer.

#### Numerous Attractions, Festivals, and Events

Hanover County provides an escape from city life to experience the fresh air and easy pace of rural life. This culturally rich county offers many attractions and events, such as fishing at family fishing day at Courthouse Park, catching a show at the Barksdale Theater, or attending the Tomato Festival in July. Visitors are able to utilize what the county has to offer for the meaningful experience they desire in a vacation.

## Weaknesses

A weakness contributes to perceptions of Hanover County that are harmful to achieving its tourism objectives.

### Lack of comprehensive vision for tourism planning

Hanover County-wide vision states “A place, inspired by its people, tradition, and spirit, which will be the premier community for people and businesses to achieve their full potential”. The vision statement’s focus on people, tradition and spirit illustrates the significance of the history and culture in the county. Hanover’s Department of Economic Development acknowledges tourism and recreation as valuable assets stating that tourist and convention services are one of four objectives to achieving the county’s economic development goals.<sup>26</sup> A similar objective is found in the Hanover County Comprehensive Plan section 8 on Economic Development, which includes “Create tourism support” as one of the major objectives.<sup>27</sup> The plan calls for a tourism-marketing program and participation in regional efforts to facilitate and promote tourism. The Comprehensive Plan section 7 on Historic Resources identifies historic preservation and heritage tourism programs as the two goals that should be realized through means such as categorization of historic sites, resource impact evaluation, heritage tourism, and development of bicycle routes and facilities.

Although tourism as an asset is acknowledged in various places within the county, a unified and comprehensive vision for tourism planning in Hanover is yet to be developed. Tourism in Hanover County is closely related to the county’s rich history and its abundant sites and objects. Lack of clear direction for tourism development therefore may mean weaker priority given to the history and heritage aspects of Hanover County. As a result, the County’s sense of identity can potentially suffer.

<sup>26</sup> Economic Development Strategic Plan, Hanover County Department of Economic Development, 2009. [http://www.co.hanover.va.us/econdev/pdfs/strategic/Final\\_Strategic\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.co.hanover.va.us/econdev/pdfs/strategic/Final_Strategic_Plan.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Hanover County Comprehensive Plan Section 8 Economic Development, [http://www.co.hanover.va.us/planning/compplan/Sec\\_8\\_Economic\\_Development.pdf](http://www.co.hanover.va.us/planning/compplan/Sec_8_Economic_Development.pdf)

## Poor web presence and other tourist friendly features

Hanover County Comprehensive Plan 2007-2027 Program has developed the Historic Hanover County brochure,<sup>28</sup> which appears to be the most comprehensive publication for the tourists in Hanover that is currently available. The brochure introduces the history of Hanover, provides a map showing the sites and description of the sites, and visitor information. Although the hard copies of this brochure may be picked up at the tourist center and other places sites, it was only present within the tourism and recreation section of the Hanover County Economic Development website. Web search using words such as “historic Hanover county” or “Hanover county tourism” did not return the information on the brochure. The web search did however return a result that leads to the county’s Historic Hanover page on which the historical facts of the sites are available.<sup>29</sup>

The search for the tourist information on the web revealed the county’s weak web presence. Although several websites, including the ones for specific historic sites, exist that have the information useful for the tourists, there is currently no single information point on the web where a tourists can become better acquainted with Hanover County and plan a trip.

## Lack of connectivity and way finding among the attractions

The county lacks features that will aid the tourists to visit and facilitate their experience while in the county. The county’s attractions have weak web presence and the information on them is either unavailable or difficult to retrieve. The county lacks way finders as well as choices of transportation to get to the tourist sites. Access to the Tomato Festival is faced with difficulties of congestion on 2-lane road (further research may reveal opportunities for alternative options to get to the event).

The tourist resources (including natural/open spaces, community facilities, historic places, other attractions and events) have weak relationships hindering physical, visual and cognitive connection among them. This is also believed to be a reason why the tourist attractions of Hanover are hardly known to the outsiders (and perhaps insiders too).

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<sup>28</sup>[http://www.co.hanover.va.us/econdev/lifestyles\\_recreation.html](http://www.co.hanover.va.us/econdev/lifestyles_recreation.html)

<sup>29</sup><http://www.co.hanover.va.us/pio/historic/historic.htm>

## Opportunities

An opportunity is an external situation that gives Hanover County a chance to improve its viability to tourists, the number of tourists coming to Hanover County, and, most importantly, the amount of tourism dollars that Hanover receives.

### 2020 Anniversary (Hanover's 300th Anniversary)

All aspects of Hanover's rich history can be celebrated at one event, or, ideally, a series of events that could last the entire year, or from mid-spring to mid-fall. The Hanover Tomato Festival could be the “anchor” for a series of festivals commemorating various events in Hanover’s history.



Photo 11. Street Signs

### Hanover Tourism Supporters

Hanover County has the ability to capitalize on the initial work that a grass-roots citizens' group began in 2011. A group of Hanover residents and business owners have been convening to discuss tourism in Hanover. That group, Hanover Tourism Supporters (HTS), would like to ask the Hanover County Board of Supervisors to appoint a special committee to analyze and determine if Hanover County is doing enough to capture tourism dollars and, if not, how the County can improve its tourism activity.<sup>30</sup>

HTS currently consists of twenty-eight (28) citizen participants including: Anne Cross, Ann Comfort, Art Taylor, Alexis Thompson, Cate Bach, Charles Hartgrove, Chris Peace, Dan Johnson, David Deal, Celie Thomas, Edwin Gaskin, Faith Boyle, John O'Keefe, Judy Watkins, Kay Pangraze, Kim Chen, Michael Fiore, Nilam Patel, Owen Matthews, Patti Jackson, Roger Bower, Sean Davis, Stephanie Wall, Steve Brown, Sue Kaukas, Tom Wulf, Tommy Miller, and Wayne Hazzard.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.habcc.com/Default.aspx?pagelD=1225335>

<sup>31</sup> Hanover Tourism Supporters Presentation



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## Private Welcome Center (Bass Pro Shops)

Another opportunity lies not with tourists, but with local Hanover County residents. Many, if not all, of the resources and historical sites, parks, etc, could not only attract tourists but be made attractive to local residents. The Bass Pro Shops, outlet stores, can serve as a natural anchor of activity due to its centralized location in the county and its ease of access to both U.S. Route 1 and Interstate 95. A private “Welcome To Hanover” center will be integrated into the anchor created by the Bass Pro Shop, soon-to-be-completed outlet stores and new hotel into Destination Hanover. Hanover County already has many excellent historical sites that would appeal to a wide range of tourists. Consolidating information on all these sites and providing better access for driving tourists, cycling tourists and locals is the best way for Hanover to capitalize on this excellent opportunity.

Included on this site will be the new 40-acre park with attractions for both local residents and tourists, including fishing and possibly new historic exhibits. Looking forward, this focal point could be integrated into the new bicycle paths and possibly the East Coast Greenway bicycle path. Further integration into Richmond’s hosting of the 2015 International Cycling Championship. With the rising cost of fuel, cycling is becoming a serious option not only as a recreational hobby but as a genuine means of transportation for the average citizen. Hanover has the opportunity to capitalize on this fact. The gains would be two-fold, increased tourism frequency by recreational cyclists and improved access to historic and tourist sites throughout the county.



Photo 12. Bass Pro Shops  
Image Source: Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World

## Link to Ashland

The Town of Ashland, frequently known as "the Center of the Universe", is a small municipality located in the heart of Hanover County. Ashland has an existing tourism website that includes videos, an interactive calendar, detailed websites for different events, etc.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Ashland has a multitude of events, festivals and activities occurring throughout the calendar year and available to local residents as well as the general public.<sup>33</sup> Ashland's central location in the County provides it a chance to cooperate with, learn from and utilize its existing tourism success.

<sup>32</sup>[http://www.elocallink.tv/clients3/va/ashland/tourplay.php?movie=asva\\_tourhst\\_rev1&spon=tourismh](http://www.elocallink.tv/clients3/va/ashland/tourplay.php?movie=asva_tourhst_rev1&spon=tourismh)

<sup>33</sup>[http://www.town.ashland.va.us/index.asp?Type=B\\_EV&SEC={C81E0C00-47FC-4395-8DE0-251F22E6142C}](http://www.town.ashland.va.us/index.asp?Type=B_EV&SEC={C81E0C00-47FC-4395-8DE0-251F22E6142C})

## Threats

A threat is an external situation that decreases or negatively affects the profitability or viability of tourism in Hanover County. When related to a weakness identified in a SWOT analysis, it can make the threat even more serious.

### Other Area's Visions

Surrounding localities (Richmond, Henrico, and Chesterfield) have chosen their tourism niche, while Hanover County still seems unfocused. These counties, through better organization, are already taking advantage of present and future development and investment opportunities. Each has recently added a top tourism officer to their payroll. All three localities' tourism officers will focus on drawing visitors with a variety of strategies. The city of Richmond will focus on its railroad history and the Slave Trail as well as improving and standardizing signage. Chesterfield County wants to build on its history, with a focus on the Civil War and the sesquicentennial commemoration of the Battle of Drewry's Bluff. Last, Henrico's newly appointed tourism officer plans to complete a marketing plan within a year's time, highlighting the county's first-class facilities, amenities, and hospitality that are already pulling in visitors.

### Economic Recession

It seems logical that the recent years of economic downturn would have a negative effect on tourism at all levels. Indeed, travel expenditures, travel-related employment numbers, and travel-related tax revenues declined substantially from 2008 to 2009 across the country (Virginia Tourism Corporation, 2011).

However, the data shows that in spite of limited budgets, Americans still want to travel. Virginia experienced an increase in tourism-related expenditures from 2009 to 2010. Discounts in lodging, food, and attractions can entice travelers to visit a given location. 40% of respondents to an American Express Travel survey said that getting a good deal on hotels, rental cars, flights, etc. was the most important factor in planning for weekend getaways.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation lists "Emphasize Value" as one of its recommended strategies for survival in difficult economic times (NTHP, 2008). An emphasis on pulling travelers from within the state for short weekend visits combined with financial incentives such as discounted lodging and an emphasis on weekend trips will offset the external threat of the troubled economy.

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The SWOT analysis revealed that Hanover County is rich in the authentic qualities that attract tourists – scenic rural landscapes, quaint communities, an abundance of historic buildings and sites, and numerous events and activities. The analysis also showed that the county has a wealth of human capital dedicated to promoting the character and tourism resources found in the county. These resources include the Hanover Tourism Supporters, the boards and staffs of the many historic sites in the county, the Ashland Department of Tourism, the citizens of the county, political leaders, and business owners. There is also an abundance of print literature and excellent maps informing visitors of the many things to see and do while in Hanover County. The greatest weakness that was revealed was the lack of a centralized source for information on all things related to tourism in Hanover County. It was also observed that there was a lack of connectivity between the resources both in the form of cross promotional activities and in way finding signage throughout the county to guide visitors from one site to another. The external threats to tourism in Hanover County were seen in the well organized tourism departments in Henrico and Chesterfield counties and the city of Richmond. The opportunities to promote and capitalize on tourism as an economic enterprise in Hanover County are great because of its wealth of resources and dedicated groups and individuals.

The following goals have been formulated to assist Hanover County in its efforts to maximize its tourism potential. Under each goal is the identified purpose for each goal and a set of action items or steps to be taken to achieve the goal. The action items are presented in priority order.



Photo 13. Historic Polegreen Church

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

**Goal 1:** Create a coordinated approach to promote tourism in Hanover County, including the town of Ashland.

## **Purpose:**

A coordinated approach to Hanover County Tourism should include a unified vision that is compelling and inspiring and be linked to the county's goals for future growth and economic development. The county should identify the ideals and values that are shared by the Hanover Tourism Supporters, the Ashland Department of Tourism, business owners, representatives from the many historic sites, as well as the county residents and others. This vision needs to ensure the quality of life is preserved for the county's residents. This will be beneficial for the tourism industry because a beautiful, enjoyable place to live is attractive to visitors. The tourism vision should also appeal to a variety of potential visitors in order to bring diverse revenue into the county.

## **Action Items:**

### Tourism Vision Statement

- Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Urban and Regional Planning graduate students will develop a tourism plan that will help guide the overall tourism vision, goals, and objectives of Hanover County, VA.
  - Survey local residents and businesses on what attractions or events they would be interested in visiting or participating in. Citizen participation and input are essential to developing a tourism vision statement for the County. The research shows that tourism activities and promotions that are geared towards existing residents are more effective in attracting a larger audience.
  - The Hanover Tourism Supporters, the county, and other involved parties need to identify and set goals both immediate and long-term to promote tourism.
- Tourism initiatives should be supported by providing hospitality, entrepreneurship, and marketing training to individuals, and existing and potential business owners.
  - Revise and revisit tourism vision, goals, and objectives every 3-5 years.
    - A tourism survey should be developed for visitors who visit the county for the first time to get feedback, comments, and criticism from individuals.
    - Establish maximum participation of all individuals in crafting ideas and promotions through joint meetings and frequent meetings.
    - Ensure that tourism products, experiences, services and facilities meet new visitor's satisfactions, expectations, and authenticity of Hanover County.

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

**Goal 2 :** Create a centralized website utilizing electronic and social media, and establish an easily accessed, centralized visitor's center.

## Purpose:

In order to promote Hanover County as a viable tourism destination, the county must appeal to the modern day traveler who is now utilizing the internet and other social media as a way to find information. With easier access to the county assets, more people will be attracted to Hanover. Implementation of signage off the well-traveled highways will also draw additional visitors to Hanover County. Once in the county, visitors must be able to orient themselves with signage to avoid frustration or getting lost.

## Action Items:

Develop a tourism website

- A *comprehensive* and *interactive* website must be created to simplify visitor access to the county's assets. The website must contain information about specific sites and attractions that Hanover has to offer and be useful to those traveling to and within the county. The interactive website should allow visitors to plan out trips based on the number of days they are staying, interests, locations, etc.
- Social media should be utilized as a way to capture a wider variety of modern day travelers and to expand the advertising, marketing, and promotion of current events and activities, as well as local sites and attractions.
  - A tourism survey should be developed for visitors who visit the county for the first time to get feedback, comments, and criticism from individuals.

- Other means of marketing and advertising that should be utilized for Hanover County tourism:

- Smart phone app
- QR barcodes (smart phone scanner)
- Television advertisements
- Radio advertisements
- Internet advertisements

Establish a full service visitor's center to give the county one strong voice to actively market tourism products, gain market share, and attract investment.

- Destination Hanover at the Bass Pro Shops Site
  - Have in place by 2020 for the county's 300th anniversary celebration



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

**Goal 3 :** Create a logo for Hanover County that highlights the authentic and unique qualities of the county and use it to identify, organize, and better market events to attract county residents, regional visitors and long distance travelers.

## **Purpose:**

Creating an authentic, unique logo for Hanover County will promote community pride in the residents and also attract modern travelers who are looking for a memorable experience they could not get anywhere else, increasing both present and future revenue for the county. The logo will also help to unify and organize different sites and events in the county.

## **Action Items:**

Create an “authentic Hanover” logo, which could be present on hang-tags and signs throughout the county, and showcase the unique sites and goods that are only available from Hanover County.

- Start a new advertising, marketing, and promotional campaign utilizing the Hanover logo for current annual events and historical sites in Hanover County. To a greater capacity utilize print media, social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc) and radio spots to reach new individuals.
- Create community events that bring local skilled workers/crafters’ and farmers together that are unique to Hanover County.

Create groupings of historical sites, attractions, events, and activities that would give visitors a sense of purpose when visiting the county. These themed packages and promotions could include: Revolutionary War, Civil War, Patrick Henry, Railroad, and Farming and agriculture.

- Offer family, group, and corporate discounted getaways that focus on particular attractions in Hanover.
  - Discount Packages (offering a cheaper price with the purchase of a bundle of tickets to several sites/attractions, or multi-day packages)

- Corporate Weekend getaways
- Dining/Hotel Packages
- Develop package tours that focus on particular events or themes.
  - Utilize the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War and Emancipation to develop prototype tours that could be continued.

Utilizing signage as a way to capture visitors, as well as orient and direct them within the county.

- Billboard signage on I-95 and I-295, to capture visitors from the highways and direct them to a centralized tourism information hub.
  - Billboard signage should extend north to Washington, DC and south to the VA/NC state line.
  - A billboard idea that would build interest could state: “Looking to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city in exchange for harmony, peace, and tranquility, visit Hanover County”.
- Implement directional signage throughout the county for better navigation between sites.



# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

**Goal 4 :** Support existing businesses and attract new businesses that supplement the tourism industry in Hanover County.

## **Purpose:**

In order for tourism to thrive, new business development and business retention is necessary. In order for this to occur, the Hanover Tourism Supporters and other entities in Hanover County should recruit new businesses and reinforce existing businesses by offering tax incentives, business grants, or business improvement funds. Businesses that support tourism and reflect the unique qualities of Hanover County should be encouraged. Lakeridge Parkway offers a unique opportunity as a focal point for businesses that support tourism because of the availability of commercial, retail, and office space. Using the Lakeridge Parkway location as a focal point for tourism and related businesses would be ideal for Hanover County because of its proximity to Hanover County Airport, the Bass Pro Shops, and I-95. Business retention and development should be encouraged throughout the region, especially in nodes like Ashland, Montpelier, and Mechanicsville. Tourist related businesses would increase tax revenues throughout the county and foster “leapfrog” development, because the increased revenues could be used for infrastructure improvements and to attract additional businesses and development.

## **Action Items:**

Encourage businesses in specific areas by creating business associations.

- This will encourage communication between businesses and allow them to share information and resources.
- Participating businesses can create a positive atmosphere that will attract residents and visitors alike.

Explore financing tools and incentives for new and existing businesses.

- Offer financial benefits as an incentive for businesses to locate to or remain in the county.
- Provide tax relief and reforms and simplify the tax process for small and medium sized businesses during the first two years of operation in the County.

Create opportunities for artisans and farmers to sell their products to county residents and tourists.

- Explore creating an “arts incubator” to display and sell the wares of craftspeople in the county.
- Expand local farmers markets and have them open at times that might be attractive to both residents and visitors.

Create adequate infrastructure for new business development and existing business expansion and retention.

# HANOVER COUNTY TOURISM STUDY

## CONCLUSION

Hanover County has significant potential for tourism and the resulting boost to the economy that it can provide. The recommendations are meant as a starting point for achieving the long-term goal of a highly successful tourism industry in Hanover County: increased numbers of visitors and increased tourism-derived revenues. Cooperation and coordination at the local level between private landowners, elected officials, and all additional stakeholders will be the key to implementation.



Photo 14.Railroad