

**NPS Monograph. *Civil War City Point: 1864-1865 Period of Significance Landscape Documentation* (July 2009)**

“THE HISTORY OF CITY POINT THROUGH THE PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE”

Before the first Europeans ever “discovered” the New World, Native Americans had occupied what was to become known as Virginia for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence indicates Native American habitation of the Hopewell, Virginia area by at least 10,000 years ago (before 8,000 BC).

Eastern Native American history is divided into three major stages: the Paleo-Indians (before 8,000 BC) lived in small nomadic groups; their Archaic stage successors (8000 BC to 1000 BC) increasingly tended to remain in one area but would still travel great distances to hunt and gather food; by the Early Woodland period of the Woodland stage (1000 BC to 1607 AD) pottery was introduced, there were increasing numbers of small permanent and semi-permanent settlements, and a growing reliance on horticulture. By the Middle Woodland period, the Hopewell area saw greater integration of plant husbandry into the subsistence system, more storage of food, a more sedentary lifestyle, localized ceramic types and greater social complexity. During the Late Woodland period (900-1600 AD), the inhabitants of City Point and the surrounding areas relied on an array of cultivated crops (especially corn, beans, squash and tobacco) and were settled in established villages under centralized political control. Evidence for all these stages has been found at Grant’s Headquarters at City Point and in the surrounding Hopewell area.

In May, 1607 the English arrived in Virginia and English settlements appeared along both banks of the James River between 1607 and 1613. “Bermuda Cittie” was established in 1613 by Sir Thomas Dale probably at the confluence of the James and Appomattox Rivers. The name “Bermuda Cittie” did not last long. As early as 1619, the area was called “Charles Cittie”, “Charles Hundred”, and Charles City Point”. With the establishment of Prince George County in 1702, the word “Charles” was dropped and the site became known as City Point. In 1635, Francis Eppes was granted 1,700 acres of land lying between Bailey’s Creek and Cawson’s Creek. This was the beginning of the plantation known as Appomattox, portions of which remain in the family’s hands to the present time. Eventually the Eppeses owned land on all sides of the James and Appomattox Rivers. The oldest portion of the present-day dwelling was constructed in 1763. This structure replaced an older building which was built in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Wings were added to the house in 1841, 1854 and 1913.

The Revolutionary War arrived at City Point in the form of British warships in January, 1781. Up to this time, City Point was considered safe, though a guard of troops was kept there as early as

February, 1776. The British invaders were welcomed at City Point with American artillery fire from shore. The British returned again in April and May of 1781: General William Phillips passed through City Point in late April with 2500 men and marched on to Petersburg, which was captured.

In 1790, the first United States census was taken and Virginia was found to be the most populous state with 747,160 people. Prince George County had a population of 8,173. There were 3,387 white residents, 4,519 slaves and 267 free blacks. City Point was included in the total population for Prince George County. During and after the colonial period a Customs office was located at City Point and the post office was transferred from Bermuda Hundred to City Point in 1801.

By the 1820's, river traffic had increased so much that businessmen wanted the Appomattox River channel cleared for shipping. It was thought that this would increase the shipping activity at City Point and cause rapid economic growth. The General Assembly incorporated City Point on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1826, which meant appointed trustees could levy taxes on houses, lots, slaves and horses. The river project was never a profitable business venture and by 1836 the City Point Rail Road Company was established. The railroad led from the waterfront at City Point to Petersburg, eight miles away. It was much easier to transport cargo by rail than by the Appomattox River. The first train completed the trip to Petersburg on September 7, 1838 in the record breaking time of one hour. By 1840, City Point had "...between 90 and 100 residents....In the town, there were twenty-five dwellings, three taverns, three retail shops, a school, a post office, and a church. There were five wharves and a small mill making flour barrels. The community had one doctor. The City Point Rail Road was bought up by the South Side Rail Road in the mid 1850's and was greatly improved."

The population of City Point in 1860 was 142 white residents, 48 free blacks, and 100 slaves for a total of 290 people. The largest land owner was Dr. Richard Eppes (1824-1896), with over 3,200 acres, four farms and 130 slaves. Eppes's plantation included the Appomattox, Hopewell, Eppes Island, and the Bermuda Hundred farms. His estate was valued at \$160,000 in 1860, making him one of the wealthiest men in the United States.

With the coming of the Civil War, Eppes made several entries in his journal describing the tense political atmosphere. On April 18, 1861, he wrote:

*...every thing bears a warlike appearance and if the report is true, Virginia has already passed her ordinance of Secession and we are now out of the Union with a long civil war upon us, our worse foreboding about to be realized, the papers are crowded with notes of preparation for war both North and South and we shall soon be in the midst of it and our section the Cockpit for the strife....*

Eppes did join the 13<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry and remained with the unit for one year until his skills as a surgeon were needed by Confederate forces. From 1862 to 1865, Eppes served as a contract surgeon, first at City Point with the Prisoner of War Exchange Bureau and later at the Fair Grounds Hospital in Petersburg.

Military activity commenced at City Point on May 19, 1862 with the arrival of Union gunboats. City Point was used to exchange prisoners of war briefly in August, 1862 then terminated and resumed again in November, 1862 until May, 1864. A wharf was constructed for the boats and a camp was built for the returned Confederate prisoners to house them until they could be moved to Petersburg. The camp had an officer in charge, a surgeon, medical supplies and a commissary and quartermaster depot.

On May 5, 1864, Major General Benjamin Butler's Army of the James approached City Point by water. Colonel Samuel A. Duncan's brigade of Brigadier General Edward Hinck's division of black troops landed and captured City Point. The rest of Butler's army moved upriver and landed at Bermuda Hundred.

On June 15, 1864, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant arrived at City Point to conduct military operations against Petersburg. Grant was general-in-chief of all Union armies and his objective was to destroy General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Petersburg served as a major railway and manufacturing center for the Confederacy. If Grant could cut all the railroads leading into Petersburg, Lee would be forced to evacuate both Petersburg and Richmond. Without supplies, Lee's fighting capacity would be severely restricted and the war would eventually end. Grant chose City Point for his headquarters and supply depot because of its strategic location. The site provided easy water communication with Fort Monroe and Washington D.C. Supplies could be sent up the James River directly to City Point. From here the old City Point Railroad ran from the waterfront to the rear of the Union army at Petersburg, allowing Grant to easily send reinforcements and supplies to the forces in the field.

Grant established his headquarters on the east lawn of Dr. Richard Eppes's home, Appomattox. Tents were erected and served as quarters for Grant and his staff during the summer. Grant did not intend to stay at City Point, as he planned to defeat Lee before the summer was over. By November, the coming of winter compelled Grant to replace tents with log cabins. Eppes's home had been damaged on three sides from artillery shelling by Union gunboats two years earlier and it was in a state of disrepair. Brigadier General Rufus Ingalls, the Chief Quartermaster for both the Army of the Potomac and the Army of the James, had the house repaired so it could be used for his offices.

City Point became the largest logistical operation of the Civil War and one of the busiest ports in the world for nine and a half months. On an average day, between 150 and 200 vessels could be seen in the rivers. From here, Grant supplied over 100,000 troops and more than 65,000 horses and mules. The animals consumed more than 600 tons of fodder each day.

The United States Military Rail Road Construction Corps arrived at City Point on June 18, 1864, and immediately began repairs to the old City Point Railroad (now part of the South Side Rail Road), which had been partially destroyed by the Confederates. In less than three weeks the railroad was fully operational for a distance of five miles. The Construction Corps not only worked on railroads but they built wharves, warehouses, repair shops, a bakery and hospitals. By the end of the war they had constructed over 280 buildings, eight wharves, several railroad trestles and nearly 22 miles of

track. An engine house and a car repair shop were built at City Point to keep the trains in running order.

Two quartermaster wharves were built along with a commissary, forage, mail, ordnance, coal and railroad wharves which stretched for a half-mile on the James River. They covered more than 350,000 square feet and at the end of the war they were valued at \$193,000. Large warehouses were constructed to stockpile vast amounts of supplies. On an average day, the Union army had thirty days of food and twenty days of fodder stored in and around City Point. This amounted to 9,000,000 meals and 12,000 tons of hay and oats.

Seven hospitals were constructed at City Point, the largest being the Depot Field Hospital, which covered over 200 acres and could handle as many as 10,000 patients at the height of the fighting season.

Grant and his staff received many important visitors at headquarters during their stay at City Point. The most notable were military generals and politicians. Officers' wives and families were allowed to visit beginning in December, when active military operations ceased for the winter. Grant's wife, Julia and their youngest son, Jesse, shared the cabin with the General. The most famous guest was President Abraham Lincoln who visited twice. His first visit was for three days in June, 1864.

Lincoln's second and longest visit was in March and April, 1865. He arrived at City Point on March 24, accompanied by his wife, Mary, and their son, Tad. Lincoln visited the front at Petersburg and he entered both Petersburg and Richmond when those cities fell to federal forces. Lincoln visited the Depot Field Hospital at City Point, talked with the wounded and held a soldier's hand as he was dying.

While at City Point, Lincoln stayed aboard the *River Queen* on the James River the night of April 1-2. That night Lincoln had a terrifying dream. He did not mention the dream to anyone until he had returned to Washington D.C. Ten days later, at a gathering at the White House, Lincoln told his wife and a few friends about the hideous dream. He began his story by saying there was a "death-like stillness about me." Lincoln said he heard "subdued sobs", left his bed and "wandered downstairs" in the White House where the silence was broken "by the same pitiful sobbing, but the mourners were invisible." Lincoln went from room to room. No living person was in sight but "the same mournful sounds of distress met me as I passed along." Lincoln said he was puzzled and alarmed. Lincoln finally arrived in the East Room where he "met with a sickening surprise. There in front of me was a catafalque, on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments." Soldiers acting as guards were stationed around it. Lincoln said "there was a throng of people, some gazing mournfully upon the corpse, whose face was covered, others weeping pitifully." Lincoln asked a guard, "Who is dead in the White House?" The guard replied "The President, he was killed by an assassin." Then came a loud burst of grief from the crowd, which awoke me from my dream. I slept no more that night; and although only a dream, I have been strangely annoyed by it ever since."

Lincoln remained at City Point until the evening of April 8, when he returned to Washington. The next day, April 9, Lincoln learned of Lee's surrender and the war in Virginia was over. One week later he was dead, killed by the bullet of an assassin. Lincoln's ominous dream had become reality.

The supply depot at City Point was one of the main factors responsible for the defeat of the Confederacy. Grant, and even Lee, knew the Army of Northern Virginia would not be capable of holding off the armies of the United States for long. Nearly a year before the end of the war, Lee had told General Early, "We must destroy this army of Grant's before he gets to [the] James River. If he gets there it will become a siege, and then it will be a mere question of time." Lee's prophesy had come to pass.