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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY  
OF CRICKET HILL  
MATHEWS COUNTY, VIRGINIA

7MCHS #7-108 Box 113 R

James River Institute for Archaeology, Inc.  
Yardley House  
James town Island, Virginia  
April, 1987

Archives/Research Library  
Virginia Department of  
Historic Resources  
Richmond, Virginia 23219



## MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Cricket Hill, an American Revolutionary War fort located in Mathews County on Milford Haven across from Gwynn's Island, is one of the few surviving remains of the War for Independence in Virginia outside of Yorktown. The hastily erected fort consisted of a long breastwork along the south shore of Milford Haven (Figure 1). The earthwork also contained several embrasures for artillery, which was directed at the forces of Lord John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore and last Royal Governor of Virginia, who had taken refuge and fortified Gwynn's Island. The battle, which was essentially an American artillery bombardment, was well-documented in contemporary newspaper articles and memoirs. Indeed, a sketch of the engagement is included in the Jefferson Papers (Figure 2), though it is not an eyewitness report, but apparently a map based on reports of the battle after the fact.<sup>1</sup>

An aerial photograph of the area in 1964 prior to the construction of the United States Coast Guard Station shows a low earthwork extending from the Gwynn's Island Bridge east into the woods of what is now the property of Robert Payne (Figure 3). Much of this earthwork evidently was destroyed by the construction of the Coast Guard Station. The earthwork along the Payne property has a maximum height of 5'-6' and width averaging 22'. It is pierced by several openings, some obviously gun emplacements (Figure 4) and others of questionable origin.

The James River Institute for Archaeology, Inc. was contracted to conduct a field study on property referred to as the Gwynn's Island Boat-Tel. The project was solicited by Mr. Robert Payne after discussions with officials of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission and the Mathews Historical Society in Mathews, Virginia. The project is located .1 mile northwest of Route 699 and



.2 mile east of the intersection of Route 699 and Route 223 in Cricket Hill, adjacent to the Milford Haven United States Coast Guard Station (Figure 5). Previous archaeological work at the site consisted of a survey in 1968 by E. F. Heite of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission<sup>2</sup> and test excavations by Franklin H. Farmer in 1986, who located a concentration of late eighteenth-century artifacts on the eastern edge of the property (Figure 5).<sup>3</sup>

The site is located on a 5' contour and frequently water stands in the landward ditch behind the earthwork. Trees of pine, hickory, gum, and cedar cover the lot as does a thick undergrowth. Test units excavated during the 1987 survey recovered cultural material of the late eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. No indication of structures, other than the earthwork relating to the 1776 engagement, were identified.

The field survey consisted of excavating test holes at 30' intervals across the Payne property, except along the landward side of the breastwork which was always covered by standing water. A total of 97 holes were dug. A concentration of late eighteenth-century artifacts was found on the eastern edge of the property, confirming the results of Dr. Farmer's work.

A certified land surveyor was contracted to compile a topographical map of that portion of the breastwork threatened by the proposed project. The mapping was done using 1' contour lines. None of the gun emplacements would be destroyed, however, they were also mapped. Subsequently, three backhoe trenches were cut through the western, or threatened, half of the breastwork to obtain construction information. The sections were mapped and photographed (Figure 6).

Artifacts from the late eighteenth-century site suggest an occupation date of post-1770 to 1800. This site may be related to the military activities at Cricket Hill, in fact, several gun flints and a lead ball were found at this site. Phase 2 work is recommended if this site will be impacted in the future. No other



archaeological work for the project is suggested except for monitoring of grading which might reveal features, such as postholes, that are unlikely to be found during Phase I surveying.



NOTES

1. Julian P. Boyd, editor, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 1, (Princeton, NJ, 1950), 576.
2. Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks, Department of Conservation and Historic Resources, File 47-15, Richmond, VA.
3. Dr. Franklin H. Farmer, personal communication (1987).





Figure 1. View of section of breastwork with archaeologists standing in two gun emplacements. Facing east.



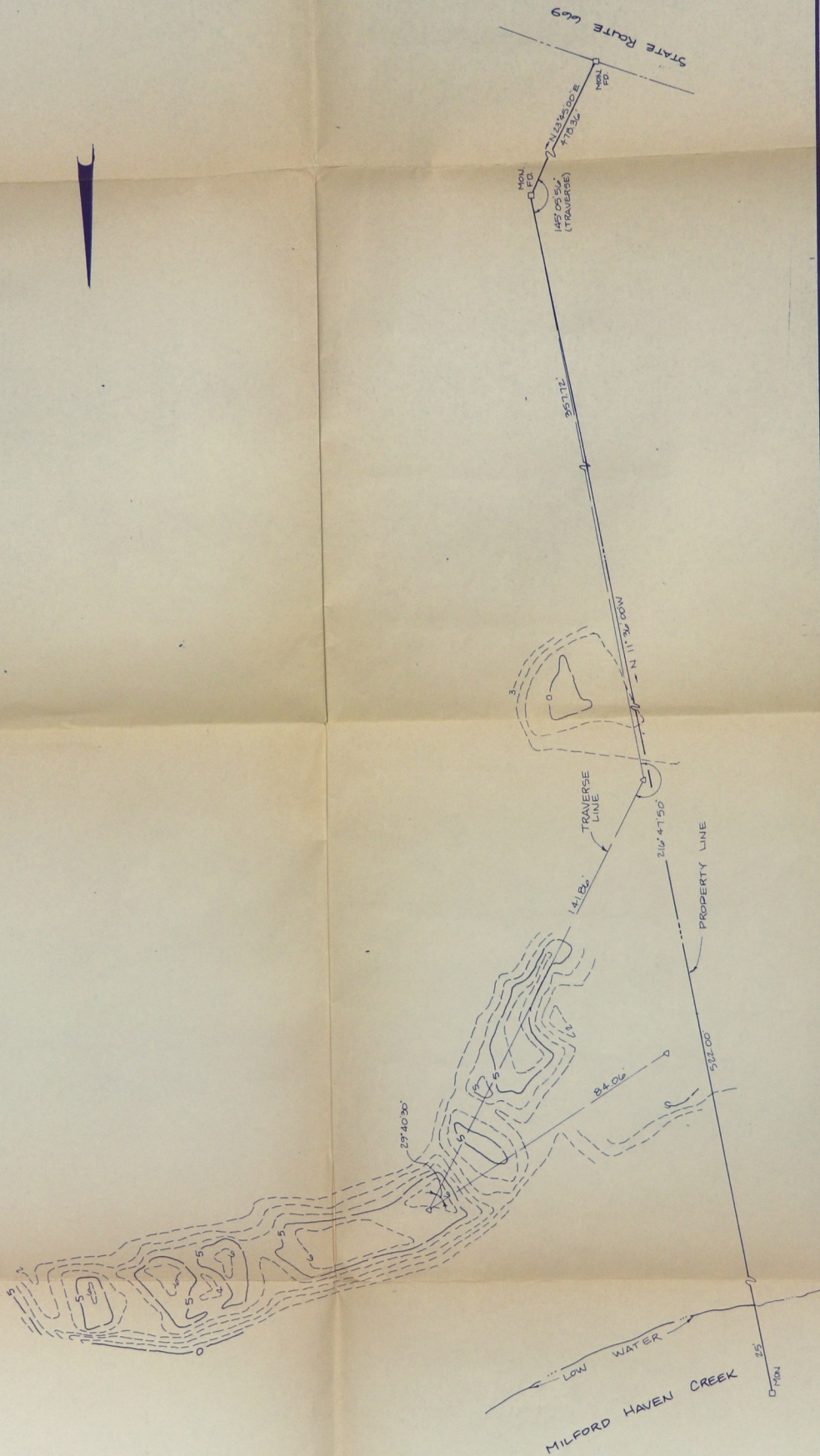






Figure 3. Aerial photograph of Cricket Hill prior to construction of Coast Guard Station. Note apparent breastwork along south bank. Facing north.





A TOPOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF  
 GWYNN'S ISLAND BOAT-TEL  
 MATTHEWS COUNTY, VIRGINIA



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DATE MARCH 9, 1987    DESIGNED    DRAWN    SCALE 1"=20'

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Figure 4







Figure 6

