

PARADISE CREEK

A REMNANT OF THE PAST

Feeding into the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, Paradise Creek is now the boundary between the neighborhood of Cradock to the south, and industrial development including Norfolk Naval Shipyard

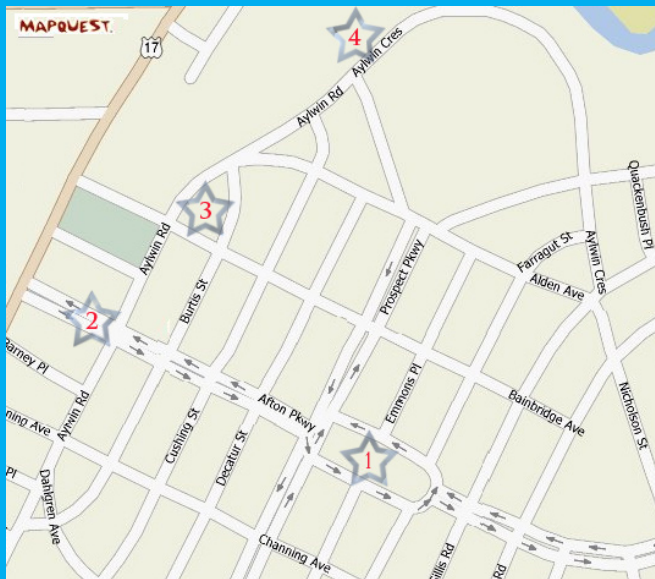


Photo by Laura Purvis

to the north. In 1918, Cradock was developed to house the influx of workers that were employed by the Shipyard. However, the shape of Paradise Creek has remained relatively unchanged in the wake of residential and industrial development. This creek ties local neighborhoods and industry along its banks to the long-standing tradition of travel by water throughout the lower reaches of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Farming activity is documented as early as 1863 along the banks of Paradise Creek, while mills dot many of the small creeks along the Southern Branch much earlier in the mid eighteenth century. The first mention of Paradise Creek is a plat dated to 1883, although oral histories suggest that a farm named Paradise Plantation existed on the site during the colonial period and gave the creek its name. By the Civil War, the land near Paradise Creek had become the Barclay Farm. In the decades before the federal government purchased the land, two farms, Afton and Prospect, divided the original Barclay property. The main roads through Cradock were named for those two farms, and Afton Square may have been the site of one of the original farm houses. The original homes built for the new neighborhood were designed by George B. Post and sons, a New York architecture firm. During the 1950s and 60s, Paradise Creek was a popular meeting place in the summers, and remains an important element of the community today.



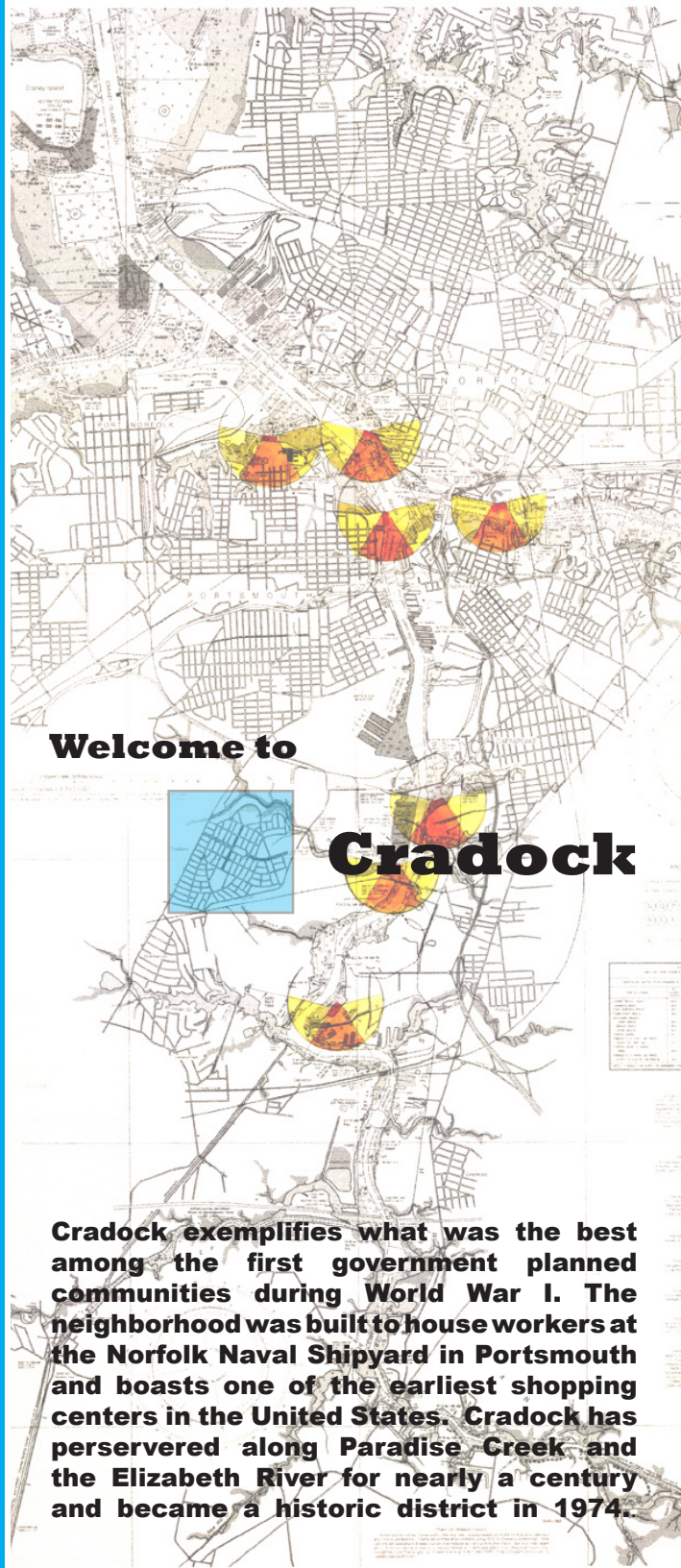
Image Courtesy of Portsmouth Public Library



SITES OF INTEREST

- 1) Afton Square**
One of the first planned shopping centers in the country, Afton Square was the center of commercial and social life in Cradock from the 1920s-1960s.
- 2) Afton Parkway**
The broad medians dividing the lanes of Afton and Prospect Parkways near Afton Square are the remnants of the streetcar line that would carry residents to their jobs at the neighboring shipyard and beyond.
- 3) Emmanuel Episcopal Church**
Congregations constructed their own buildings in this government planned neighborhood and, in order to house the quickly growing population, unused buildings were purchased from the local military bases. The white clapboard building at Emmanuel Episcopal is the only remaining example.
- 4) Barclay Graveyard**
The first family known to live on this property had their family burial plot in this unmarked lot. From here the concrete remnants of the foot bridge over Paradise Creek are visible - once a popular meeting place for children in the 1950s-60s.

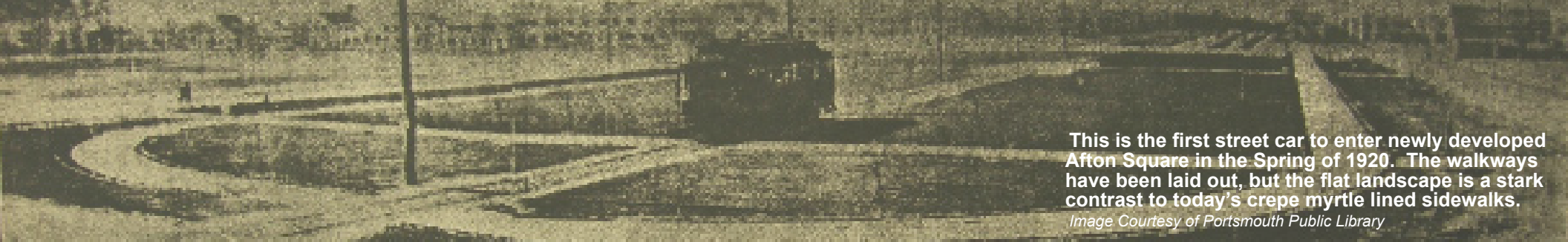
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Welcome to

Cradock

Cradock exemplifies what was the best among the first government planned communities during World War I. The neighborhood was built to house workers at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth and boasts one of the earliest shopping centers in the United States. Cradock has persevered along Paradise Creek and the Elizabeth River for nearly a century and became a historic district in 1974.



This is the first street car to enter newly developed Afton Square in the Spring of 1920. The walkways have been laid out, but the flat landscape is a stark contrast to today's crepe myrtle lined sidewalks.
Image Courtesy of Portsmouth Public Library

The Powhatan Empire

The land along the Elizabeth River was inhabited by the Chesapian (Chesapeake) Indians well before the first Spanish explorers sailed into the Bay in 1561. By 1607, the entire region was part of the Powhatan Empire. The political organization



of these tribes extended from the Potomac River to the Great Dismal Swamp. Settlements were mostly along rivers for easy transportation by water.

Photo by Laura Purvis



Afton Square circa 1953

This view from the winter of 1953 shows Afton Square when it was a vibrant center for shopping and dining. Cradock increased in population with the growth of Norfolk Naval Shipyard during the World Wars.

Photos Left and Below from Portsmouth: A Pictorial History by Robert W. Wentz, Jr., 1975. Used with permission of the Donning Company Publishers, Virginia Beach, Va.



Photo by Laura Purvis

Afton Theater

Once the community movie theater, Afton Theater is located in Afton Square and part of the Cradock historic district. Students at the former Cradock High School often reminisce about walking to this theater with their classmates in the 1950s. There are ongoing initiatives to revive this important landmark within this early example of a government planned community.

1600

1800

1900

1920

1940

1960

1980

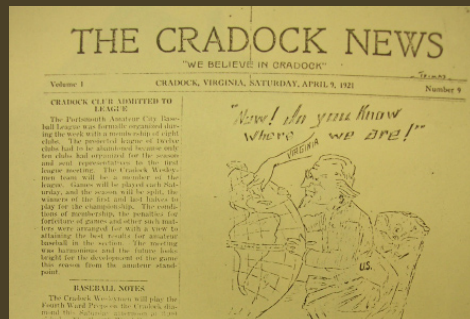
PRESENT

Carl Weston's Mill

Grist mills were built in the 18th and 19th centuries to supply grain to the increasing population, and wood mills soon followed. Mills at each creek took advantage of the proximity of raw materials, such as cedar, from the Great Dismal Swamp and were dependent on the water for daily operation and transportation of goods.



Photo Courtesy of Norfolk County Historical Society



The Cradock Newspaper, 1921

Residents formed community organizations and produced their own newspaper when the federal government privatized the neighborhood in 1920.

Image Courtesy of Portsmouth Public Library

Cradock Firestation and Truck

Cradock was outside the boundaries of the City of Portsmouth at its founding, so plans included a school, churches, shops, sewer, and a fire station - pictured below.



Photo from Portsmouth: A Pictorial History by Robert W. Wentz, Jr., 1975. Used with permission of the Donning Company Publishers, Virginia Beach, Va.



Gazebo, Afton Square

Marking the center of Afton Square, the gazebo has become the symbol of Cradock today.

Photo by Laura Purvis