A detailed historical map of Yorktown, Virginia, showing the town's fortifications and the York River. The map is overlaid with a large-scale illustration of a naval battle, featuring numerous three-masted sailing ships. Some ships are numbered, such as 16, 18, 20, and 22. A large plume of smoke and fire is visible in the lower right, indicating a battle scene. The title 'Historic References to the YORKTOWN WINDMILL' is printed in large, bold, black letters across the top of the map. The word 'YORKTOWN' is split across two lines. The word 'WINDMILL' is on the third line. The background map shows the town's layout, including the windmill mentioned in the title, and the surrounding waterways.

Historic References to the
YORKTOWN
WINDMILL

Prepared by
Walt Akers,
The Yorktown Windmill Project

Historical References to the Yorktown Windmill

Overview

Although the exact dates of the construction and destruction of the Yorktown windmill are not clearly documented, the windmill was a landmark and the subject of art, literature and cartography for more than 100 years. Historic references cited here detail that a parcel in Yorktown was acquired on July 16th, 1711 for the purpose of constructing the windmill. Other documents continue to refer to the windmill and document its presence as late as November 14th, 1863. As the attached references show, it cannot be clearly established that the windmill in Yorktown was a single entity or if it was reconstructed or relocated over time. Maps that span its lifetime tend to show the windmill installed in more than one location.

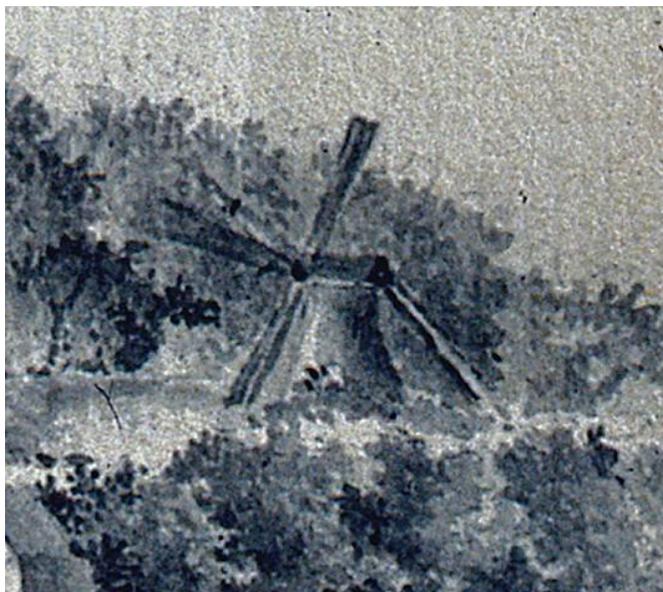


Figure 1: Detail of Windmill from 1755 Drawing

The Yorktown Windmill in Art

A View of the Town of York, Virginia from the River (1755)

The earliest documented image of the Yorktown Windmill is from a drawing produced by an officer aboard the H.M.S. Success or H.M.S. Norwich during their voyage from Nova Scotia to Virginia from 1754 to 1756.

These ships were in the fleet at Hampton Roads from March to July of 1755, at which time the artist meticulously detailed the landscape and structures on both sides of the York River.

Figure 1 shows a close-up of the windmill from the drawing. From this vantage point it is clear that this is a traditional frame, smock style windmill with a tailpole. Figure 2 shows the windmill highlighted within the context of the entire piece.



Figure 2: A View of the Town of York, Virginia from the River - 1755

Washington and His Generals at Yorktown

Charles W. Peale - 1784

The next painting of the Yorktown Windmill is among the most widely recognized. The painting by Charles W. Peale is entitled "Washington and his Generals at Yorktown". Painted in 1784, the image is a depiction of the Commanders following the siege of Yorktown. While the windmill is not the central focus of the painting, its inclusion here demonstrates that the mill survived in its original location from its construction in 1711 through the end of the American Revolution.

Of equal note is the design of this windmill. While the version from 1755 was clearly a smock mill with *canted* sides, the depiction in this image is reminiscent of a tower mill that might have been constructed from bricks and mortar. Having examined the original painting, it is difficult to distinguish if the mill in this painting is a smock mill or a tower. Recognizing that Mr. Peale's objective was to represent the people rather than the architecture and that the painting was created three years after the siege, it is likely that the windmill shown is more stylized than an accurate representation.



Figure 3: Washington and His Generals at Yorktown – 1784

Windmill Point: Yorktown, Virginia

Robert Knox Sneden - 1863

Another interesting depiction of the windmill comes from this painting entitled "Windmill Point: Yorktown, Virginia 1780" by artist Robert Knox Sneden. Although drawn during the American Civil War, it is believed that Private Sneden derived this view from an earlier image.

The inscription on the back of this print is as follows: *"During the Civil War, Robert Knox Sneden (1832 - 1918) a native of Nova Scotia, served the Union in the Third Army Corps as a topographical engineer. In nearly 400 wartime watercolor sketches, he used his skills as an architectural draftsman to record the landscape of Virginia and the violent changes wrought on it by the two armies. Although some three dozen of Sneden's sketches were engraved for the Battles and Leaders of the Civil War series, the rest*



Figure 4: Windmill Point: Yorktown, Virginia

were assembled in four scrapbooks. The dropped from sight until 1993, when they were acquired by the Virginia Historical Society."

In this presentation, the windmill is again shown as an octagonal frame structure. The tailpole, however, has been omitted.

View of Yorktown, From the Old Windmill

Robert Sears - 1848

This depiction of the Yorktown Windmill comes from the art of Robert Sears. While this image shows the windmill during its decline, it is also an exceptional presentation of the mill as an octagonal, wooden structure with canted sides. The image is entitled, "View of Yorktown, from the Old Windmill, as You Approach from Williamsburg" and is a hand-colored wood engraving. The engraving was published in 1848 by Robert Sears as part of his collection, "A New and Popular Pictorial Description of the United States."

It is likely that this depiction was the basis for the drawing that Robert Knox Sneden produced in 1863 that represented the windmill in its prime.



Figure 5: A View of Yorktown, from the Old Windmill, as You Approach from Williamsburg - 1848

References in Public Records and Literature

Deed – John Lewis to William Buckner (1711)

There are several references regarding the acquisition and construction of the Yorktown Windmill. The date of the property acquisition is set at July 16th, 1711, and the following excerpt from the Records of Colonial Gloucester County, Virginia compiled by Polly Mason detail the transaction.

“John Lewis Esqr & Madam Elizabeth Lewis wife of the said John Lewis Esqr of the Parish of Abingdon in the County of Gloucester to Willm Buckner of York for to build a Windmill upon sold one acre near Yorktown in the Parish of York Hampton on York River Side Just below a Small Creek formerly known by the name of Townshens Creek & sometimes it is Called in Ancient Patents Martues Crk but now it is called Yorktown Crk.”

A transcription from the original source is provided in *figure 6*.

p.374: DEED - JOHN LEWIS TO WILLIAM BUCKNER - 1711
 John Lewis Esq^r & Madam Elizabeth Lewis wife of the said John Lewis Esq^r of the Parish of Abington in the County of Gloucester to Will^m Buckner of York for to build a Windmill upon sold one acre near Yorktown in the Parish of York Hampton on York River Side Just below a Small Creek formerly known by the name of Townshens Creek & sometimes it is Called in Ancient Patents Martues Crk but now it is called Yorktown Crk. 16th July 1611.
 Witnesses:
 Tho^s Chisman S^r John Lewis
 John X Purvis Elizabeth Lewis
 Rec^d: York County Court 16th July 1711
 Test P: L: C: C:

Figure 6: Record of Deed from John Lewis to William Buckner

Citations from Other Publications

The account of the sale is further supported by documentation collected by William Crozier in his book the *“The Buckners of Virginia...”* and from Volume 10 of the *William and Mary College Quarterly*. In these accounts an additional condition is included on the transfer of the property, specifying that Buckner must grind 12 barrels of Indian corn each year *“for the donors”*, indicating the transfer of property was conditional on performance rather than direct payment (see *figure 7*).

In the York County records we find the following entry in regard to the building of a windmill:
 “John Lewis, Esq., and Madam Elizabeth Lewis, wife of said John Lewis, Esq., sell to William Buckner one acre of land at a point near Yorktown, on York River, just below a small creek formerly known as Townshend's Creek, and sometimes it is called in ancient patents Martue's Creek, but now it is called Yorktown Creek, one chain and a half on the river bank, for a windmill, to enter if the mill is not kept up, to grind for the donors 12 bbls. of Indian corn without toll.”
 Dated July 16, 1711.

Figure 7: Citation From *The Buckners of Virginia*

Once constructed, the windmill became an element of referential significance in both records and correspondence from the period.

Selim the Algerine (1789)

Around 1789, the windmill was featured in accounts of *Selim the Algerine* which are separately reported in Bishop Meade's *Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia*, and John Cooke's *Stories of the Old Dominion*. In both accounts, Selim is described as a Muslim who, having been kidnapped and sold into slavery, escaped his captors and made his way to Virginia where he was converted to Christianity. Having been the child of affluent parents, Selim was educated in the Greek language – providing him a common language for reading the New Testament.

Selim had an affinity for sleeping outdoors, and when the conditions did not warrant it, he was said to sleep in the old windmill in Yorktown.

In Cooke's *Stories of the Old Dominion*, the author makes direct reference to the Windmill stating, *“He (Selim) seldom slept in a house, his favorite place being an old windmill in Yorktown, where he would lie down at night, wrapped in his blanket.”*

“When in Yorktown, the old windmill (which was blown down by a late tornado, and was long a relic of olden times, and which ground nearly all the bread used in York) was his resting-place. The only time he was ever in the York House he was coaxed by General Nelson's oldest daughter and niece to take his seat in Lady Nelson's sedan-chair. As they bore him in and rested in the passage, he rose up, and sang melodiously one of Dr. Watts's hymns for children,—
 ‘How glorious is our heavenly King!’

Figure 8: Excerpt from *Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia*

In Meade's account, the discussion actually makes reference to the loss of the windmill in a tornado. (See *figure 8*.)

The Windmill – An Elegy

Dr. Augustine Smith - 1790

A more eloquent discussion of the windmill is provided in the papers of Doctor Augustine Smith of Williamsburg. *The Windmill – An Elegy* is a poem that is included in the *Smith-Digges Papers (1789-1843)* and is part of the collection of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Written in summer of 1790, the poem laments the poor condition of the old mill as it stands on the bluff above the York River and characterizes it as both a widow and an orphan of the community that once relied on it for food and profit. Because of licensing requirements, the document is not included here, but may be available from the Research Division of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation by request.

History of the 104th Pennsylvania

W.W.H. Davis - 1866

One of the latest discussions of the Yorktown Windmill comes from the *History of the 104th Pennsylvania* by William Davis. Written in 1866, this book details the regiment's activities during the period August 22nd, 1861 to September 30th, 1864.

The windmill becomes involved in a story describing a skirmish between the 104th Regiment and the King and Queen rangers (a local cavalry) that occurred on November 16th, 1863. During the encounter one soldier was killed and two were wounded as part of a picket line shooting. In retaliation for the attack, both a local tide-mill and the Yorktown Windmill were seized and their grain and flour confiscated. Figure 9 provides an excerpt from the book that describes the aftermath of the event.

For this unprovoked attack on the pickets the neighborhood was made to suffer a severe retaliation. Two white men and a negro were arrested and taken to Yorktown, one, the young man who was clerk in the store before which the men of the 104th were shot down, and the other a physician of the hamlet. They were put to inconvenience by being detained some time, but suffered no personal injury. The tide mill on the creek at the picket line was taken possession of and run for the use of the troops. Heretofore persons living on both sides of the line had been permitted to take grists there to be ground, but this privilege was now entirely prohibited. It was placed in charge of corporal Perry and private Ellis, who gave it a complete overhauling and run it to grind flour and corn meal for the garrison. The order was afterward so far relaxed that the citizens living within the lines were permitted to patronize the mill. A small wind-mill on York river was also seized, and as they were the only two in that section of country the inhabitants were put to great inconvenience by not being allowed to use them. The grain and flour in both mills were confiscated. The Hook store was ordered to be burned, and on the following Friday night lieutenant-colonel Hart, with two companies of the 104th, H and I, were sent out to put the order into execution. Being frame, and old and dry, it was soon in flames and reduced to ashes. The country was lighted up for miles around, and it served as a warning to others.

Figure 9: Excerpt from the History of the 104th Pennsylvania

The Yorktown Windmill in Cartography

During the late 18th Century and mid-19th century, Yorktown took center stage in history. During both the Revolutionary War and the American Civil War the Yorktown Windmill was a key aspect in maps that were produced for the campaign.

Plan de l'investissement de York et de Gloucester

October 22-28, 1781

This is an excerpt from the original Revolutionary War map that shows the windmill on the east side of Windmill Creek.

The map was provided to General Washington with the following inscription, *“To His Excellency Genl. Washington, Commander in Chief of the armies of the United States of America, this plan of the investment of York and Gloucester has been surveyed and laid down, and is most humbly dedicated by His Excellency's obedient servant, Sebastn. Bauman, major of the New York or 2nd Regt of Artillery. This plan was taken between the 22nd & 28th of October, 1781. R. Scot, sculp.”*

The map is part of the Rochambeau Collection, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.



Figure 10: Plan de l'investissement de York et de Gloucester

Plan of Yorktown in Virginia and Adjacent Country

Drawn 1825

This is an engraved copy of the original 1782 map of Yorktown by Sebastian Bauman. This copy was made in 1825 and presented to Lafayette on the occasion of his visit to America. The excerpt shows the windmill on the east side of Windmill Creek.

The full title of the map is, “*Plan of York Town In Virginia And Adjacent Country. Exhibiting the operations of the American French & English armies, during the siege at that place in Oct. 1781. Surveyed from the 22nd to the 28th Octr. Drawn by Jn. F. Renault, with a Crow-pen and presented to the Marques De La Fayette. Engraved by B. Tanner.*”

The original map is available from the David Rumsey Map Collection.

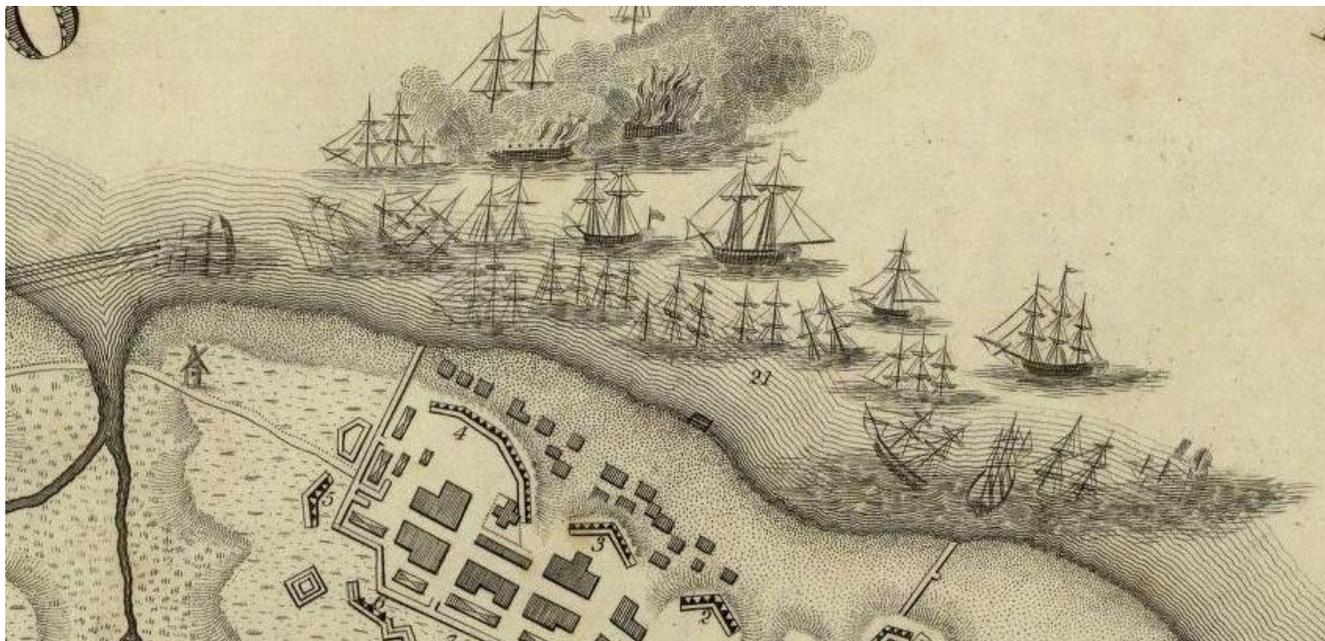


Figure 11: Plan of Yorktown in Virginia and Adjacent Country

Plan of the Union and Rebel Position at Yorktown Va

April 7th, 1862

This map illustrates a portion of York County, Va., showing headquarters camps of the various generals of the U.S. Army of the Potomac, including the Sawmill, headquarters of General Samuel P. Heintzelman, in the Peninsula Campaign, March-July 1862. This illustration shows the placement of the windmill on the west side of Windmill Creek. This may indicate that the mill was moved during this time period or a new mill was constructed across the creek.

This item is from the Robert Knox Sneden scrapbook in the collections of the Virginia Historical Society.

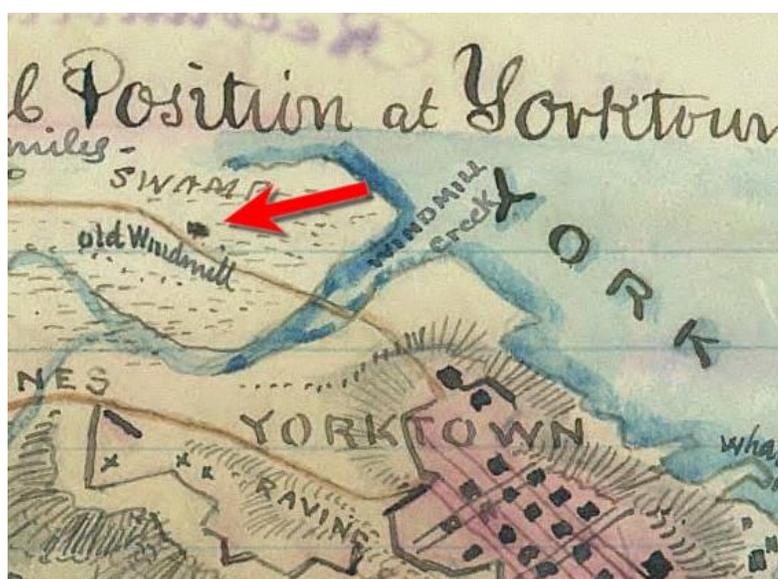


Figure 12: Plan of the Union and Rebel Positions

Map of Country Between Yorktown and Williamsbu[rg] in Virginia

Drawn 1862

This watercolor map produced by Private Robert K. Sneden shows a portion of the peninsula outlined by the York River to the north and the James River to the south. Sneden marked the Union line of march, wagon trains, and Confederate works, all related to the Peninsula Campaign, March-July 1862.

As shown in *figure 13*, Sneden provides a symbol for the windmill in this map. Although it is difficult to discern, in this case the mill appears to be located on the west side of Windmill Creek.

This item is from the Robert Knox Sneden scrapbook in the collections of the Virginia Historical Society.



Figure 13: Map of Country Between Yorktown and Williamsbu[rg]

The Union Position Before Yorktown Virginia

April 18th 1862

A regional view of Yorktown, Va., and vicinity, with Yorktown and Gloucester Point on opposite sides of the York River and indicating where the Warwick River feeds into the James, and also the Poquoson River as it branches off from the York below Yorktown. The headquarters of Gen. John Sedgwick's VI Corps is shown at Warwick Court House.

The map has the following note, *"The Rebel line of Defense from Gloucester Point to the mouth of the Warwick River on the James across the Peninsula, was 13 miles long. The ground was held by Rebel Genl. Magruder with 11,200 men and 60 guns. Gloucester Point Battery was held by 500 men only during the whole siege. Union Army at this time 85,000!"*

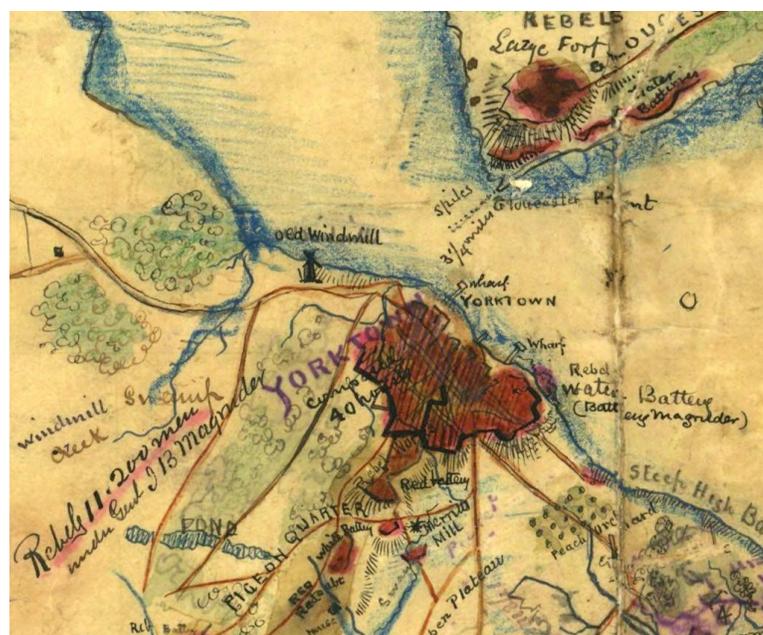


Figure 14: The Union Position Before Yorktown Virginia

This watercolor was also produced by Sneden and has significantly more detail than earlier maps. In this rendering, the windmill is prominently shown and is located on the east side of Windmill Creek. This item is from the Robert Knox Sneden scrapbook in the collections of the Virginia Historical Society.

Plan of Yorktown Virginia

April 1862

This map shows the area of the York River coastline from Windmill Creek to Wormsley Creek with particular attention to the landforms and defenses around Yorktown and the layout of streets and buildings within the town itself. In this map of Yorktown produced by Sneden, the windmill is again located to the west side of Windmill Creek. This map differs from others in the series because it is oriented with West at the top and North on the right.

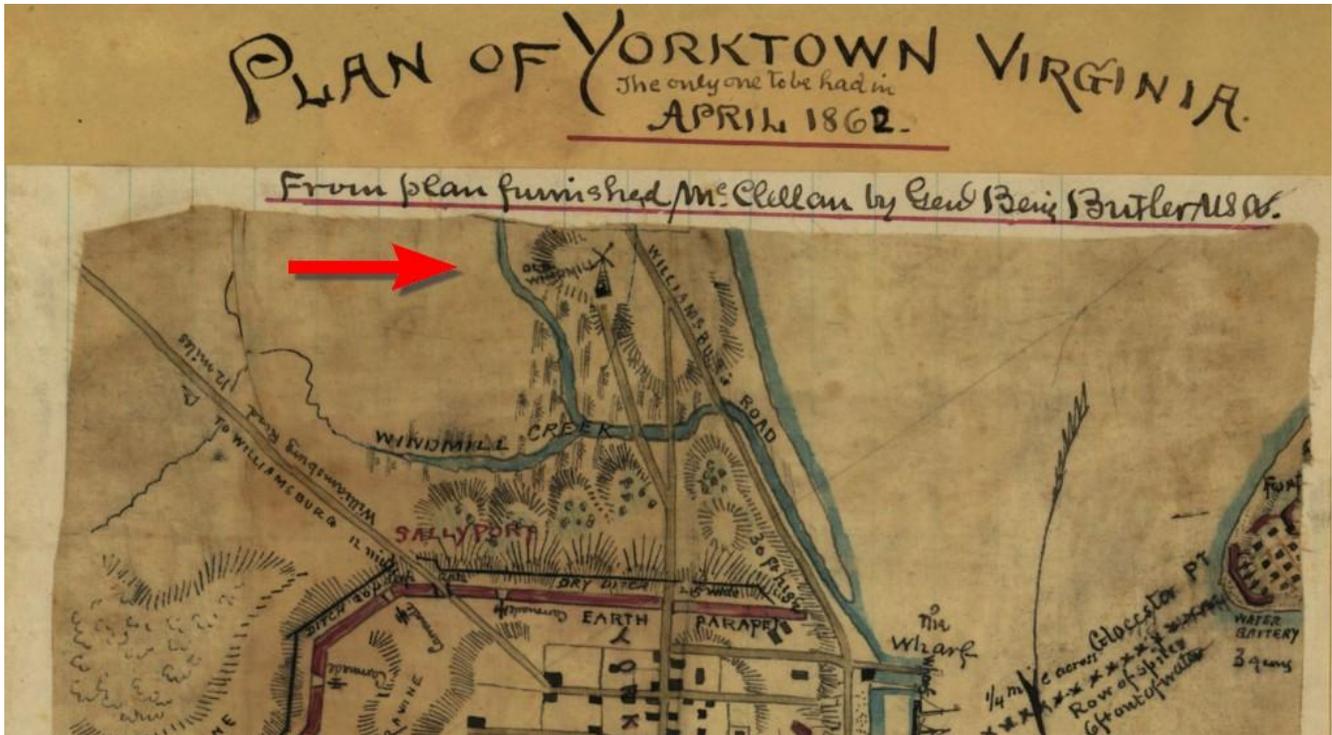


Figure 15: Plan of Yorktown Virginia

Plan of Yorktown, Virginia: showing the Rebel works after the evacuation

May 4th, 1862

This map shows the street plan of Yorktown and the fortifications surrounding the town following the Confederate removal up the Peninsula. The York River and the town of Gloucester Point are also indicated. Similar to Sneden’s prior map from April of 1862, this map also portrays the West at the top and North on the right with the old windmill shown prominently on the west side of Windmill Creek.

This item is from the Robert Knox Sneden scrapbook in the collections of the Virginia Historical Society.

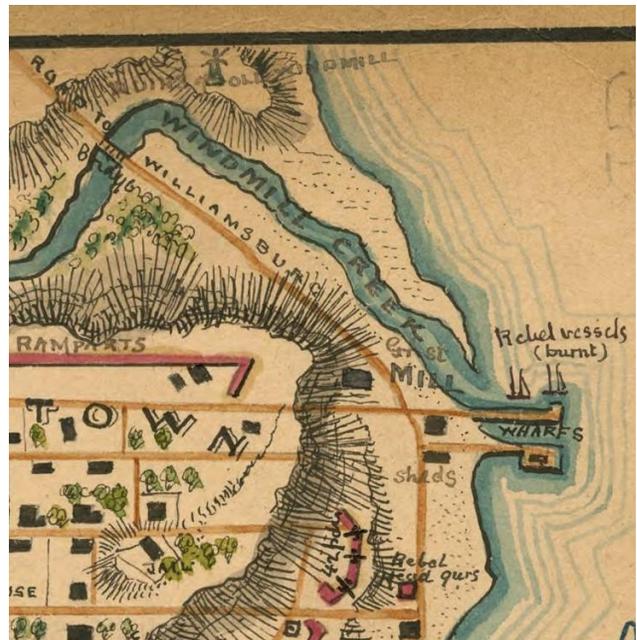


Figure 16: Plan of Yorktown, Virginia

Demise of the Mill

With the exception of Bishop Meade's citation in *figure 8*, there is little indication of how or when the windmill was finally destroyed. Based on the drawings and references that were produced across its 150 year lifespan, it appears that the mill gradually fell into disrepair, may have been revived on more than one occasion to grind corn, then eventually faded away and vanished from the landscape.

It is evident from the works of Sneden, the records of the 104th Pennsylvania, and the relatively stable condition of the mill portrayed in Sear's engraving, that the structure of the mill did survive into the Civil War and was likely returned to operation for a brief time.

There is additional commentary on when the mill was last seen. Specifically, in "*Williamsburg, The Old Colonial Capitol*", Lyon Gardiner Tyler (*then President of the College of William and Mary*) set the date of the windmill's disappearance as around 50 years prior to the publication of the book. Because his book was first published in 1907, this statement supports the possibility that the windmill may have survived into the American Civil War. An excerpt from Tyler's book is included in *figure 17*.

YORKTOWN.—The land here was first patented by Captain Nicholas Martian, a French walloon, who came to Virginia in 1621. His daughter, Elizabeth, married Colonel George Reade, secretary of state, in 1641. In 1691, his son, Benjamin Reade, sold fifty acres for a town, and in 1698 the county seat of York County was moved there from the Half-way house, between Williamsburg and Yorktown, but a busy mart grew up, and in the year 1749 the trade amounted to £32,000 sterling. During the Revolution it was occupied by the British army under Cornwallis, who was forced to surrender October 19, 1781, to the combined armies of France and the United States. It has never recovered from the injuries inflicted by the American army at that time. Its trade, however, was entirely out of proportion to its population, which never exceeded 1,000. Its population at present is about two hundred. The chief things of interest in Yorktown are the custom house, Cornwallis' cave, the Nelson house, the old church, the monument, and the revolutionary and confederate fortifications. On the hill, at the eastern point of Yorktown creek, stood, about fifty years ago, a picturesque windmill erected in the year 1717, by William Buckner. There was an old well on the shore in 1691, where the ships got their water.

Figure 17: Excerpt from Williamsburg, the Old Colonial Capitol

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