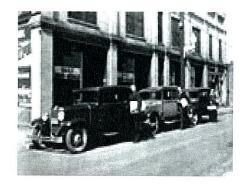# SUFFOLK'S HISTORY

The area around Suffolk, Virginia, which is now an independent city in the Hampton Roads region in the southeastern part of the state, was originally inhabited by Native Americans. At the time of European contact, the Nansemonds lived along the river later known by the same name. Suffolk was first explored by the English settlers based at Jamestown, not long after their arrival. They sought a means to survive the inhospitable environment at Jamestown Island.

The area was first part of 1634's Elizabeth River Shire and then, in 1637, part of Upper Norfolk County, part of which became Nansemond County in 1646. The English created a settlement at Constant's Wharf (named for Captain John Constant) at Sleepy Hole Point on the Nansemond River, to take advantage of commerce they could conduct along the river. In 1742, authorized by the House of Burgesses, the new town was officially named "Suffolk" after Royal Governor William Gooch's home county of Suffolk in England.

During the American Revolutionary War, the town was burned by the British in 1779. It was totally destroyed after thousands of barrels of turpentine and pitch caught fire in warehouses along the river.

Suffolk became an incorporated town in Nansemond County in 1808. As part of Virginia, it sided with the Confederacy in the American Civil War. From May 12, 1862, to July 3, 1863, the town was occupied by 25,000 Union troops under Major General John J. Peck. Peck made his headquarters in the Greek revival house now called "Riddick's Folly". Graffiti from the occupying soldiers can still be seen on the walls.

During this period, Confederate General James Longstreet unsuccessfully besieged the town with 20,000 men between April 11 and May 4, 1863. He was ordered to disengage by General Robert E. Lee to join the Army of Northern Virginia at Fredericksburg. Two months later on July 3, the Union forces abandoned the town for strategic reasons, as decided by General John Adams Dix. Confederate cavalry general Laurence S. Baker is buried in the City's Cedar Hill Cemetery.

Suffolk became a city independent from the surrounding county in 1910. At a practical level, the two remained closely linked, and the county seat remained at Suffolk after the city became politically independent. Thus it remained until 1972 when the county was converted to city status to become the short-lived lost city the City of

Nansemond. On January 1, 1974, the City of Nansemond and the City of Suffolk united to become the present City of Suffolk, consolidating with the outlying incorporated towns of Holland and Whaleyville. The end result was a new municipality encompassing a total of 430 square miles, making it the largest city in land area in Virginia. Suffolk celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2008.

In 1912, Italian immigrant Amedeo Obici came from Pennsylvania and opened facilities of the Planters Nut and Chocolate Company in Suffolk. He built on the widespread cultivation of peanuts in the area. By 1941, Suffolk had been declared "The Peanut Capital of the World". The city also became home to Planters' Mr. Peanut, a world-famous advertising icon. Today, Suffolk remains a major peanut processing center and transportation hub.