

Jamestown

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE • VIRGINIA

Excavations at Jamestown have unearthed the foundations of many 17th-century structures, including those of the First Statehouse where the Virginia House of Burgesses met from 1640 to 1655. Archeologists have also recovered hundreds of thousands of artifacts (like this piece of early graffito ware) in the townsite area which tell much about the everyday life, trade, and businesses of the early English people in America.



THE JAMESTOWN STORY

On May 13, 1607, three small, storm-racked ships, 4 months out of England by way of the West Indies, were moored to the shore of a peninsula on the James River about 45 miles up from Chesapeake Bay. The ships, *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed*, and *Discovery*, carried an expedition of 105 men whose purpose was to settle in the New World. The leaders decided to make this the site of "James Fort," or Jamestown as it came to be called, their first home in the wilderness and the English toehold on the North American continent.

England came late into the colonizing field. Her efforts of the 1580's to establish a settlement on North Carolina's Roanoke Island failed, as did early efforts along the New England coast. But Jamestown succeeded and, until the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth in 1620, it was England's only settlement along the Atlantic seaboard. Within a century it grew from a rude palisaded fort into a busy community as the capital of the Colony of Virginia.

The colonists of 1607 first touched the American mainland on April 26 at Cape Henry, Va., where they lingered 4 days to search out the land, claim it for King and country, and erect a cross giving thanks to Almighty God for a safe arrival. When they sailed up the James River to establish their settlement, the land looked good. But it proved deceptive, and many surprises, much suffering, starvation, and death awaited them.

The first few years, when more settlers arrived, were a continuing struggle to overcome hunger, sickness, the ever-present wilderness, and the Indians. These problems were compounded by the squabbles and inexperience of the governing councilors. Even Capt. John Smith, the settlement's ablest and most forceful leader, had much to learn.

Jamestown reached its lowest ebb in the winter of 1609-10, the "Starving Time," when 440 of the 500 inhabitants died. Yet the belief that the settlement would succeed sustained not only the colonists but the joint-stock Virginia Company of London, which financed them, and the Royal authorities. The fort was maintained, crops were planted, and the hard lessons of frontier living were learned. Gradually the new land became home to the settlers.

Stronger, more orderly government came after 1610 following the arrival of Lord Delaware and his deputies, Sir Thomas Dale and Sir Thomas Gates. The church and a number of other institutions were already thriving. Representative, legislative government, called for in "The Great Charter" of 1618, began when the First Assembly met at Jamestown in 1619. English common law, guaranteeing individual rights, was also firmly established. By 1700, when Jamestown was no longer the capital, the Assembly had become a well-organized institution.

By 1614 "James Cittie," as the town was often called, had "two faire rowes" of houses and a street. The settlers built homes outside the fort proper, and farms occupied all of the high ground of the peninsula. Tobacco was becoming the Colony's major source of wealth.

Jamestown never became a town of appreciable size, but it served for nearly a century (1607-99) as the principal town and seat of government of Virginia. The courts and the Assembly met here. It was the official residence of the Colony's governors, although Sir William Berkeley developed his plantation, "Greenspring," about 3 miles to the north. But Jamestown did not keep pace with



the rest of the Colony and in 1699 the Virginia House of Burgesses initiated action that led to the removal of the seat of government to Williamsburg in 1700.

Jamestown declined sharply and was eventually abandoned. By the time of the American Revolution the area had become farmland; subsequently it was reclaimed by the wilderness.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

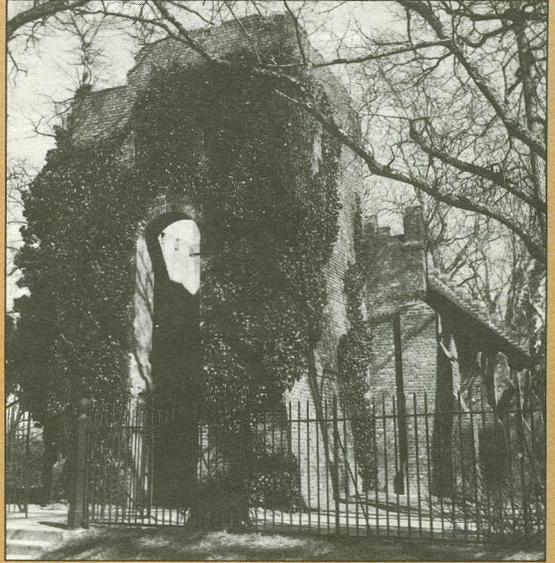
The Jamestown visitor center, containing a theater program, museum exhibits, and a gift shop, is at the edge of the original Jamestown site. Park Service personnel are available to help you. The gift shop is operated by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.

You may tour Jamestown Island on the 3- or 5-mile loop drives. The wilderness here is much like that seen by the first colonists. Oil paintings and markers help to tell the story of the island, and trails lead to and from the tour road to the Travis Graveyard and Black Point.

As you leave the Island, visit the *Glasshouse* where craftsmen demonstrate the art of 17th-century glassblowing, one of Virginia's first industries, established in 1608. On the left just beyond the entrance station is Jamestown Festival Park where speculative reconstructions of the first fort and the three ships, *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed*, and *Discovery*, may be seen. Two miles beyond via Va. 614 and 5 is *Greenspring*, the site of Governor Berkeley's plantation.

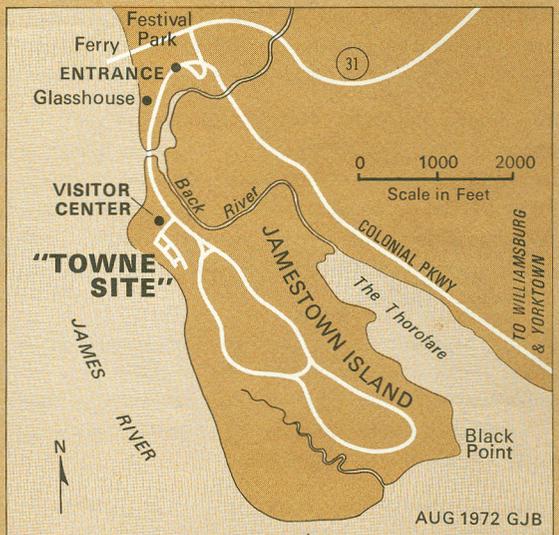
The site of the colonists' landing at *Cape Henry* is at Fort Story, within the city of Virginia Beach. This spot is a part of Colonial National Historical Park. Marked by a memorial cross, it provides the opening scene of the Colonial story. Nearby is Cape Henry Lighthouse, the first lighthouse

The only standing ruin of 17th-century Jamestown is the Old Church Tower, believed to be part of the first brick church, begun in 1639.



authorized and built by the Federal Government, and now owned by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.

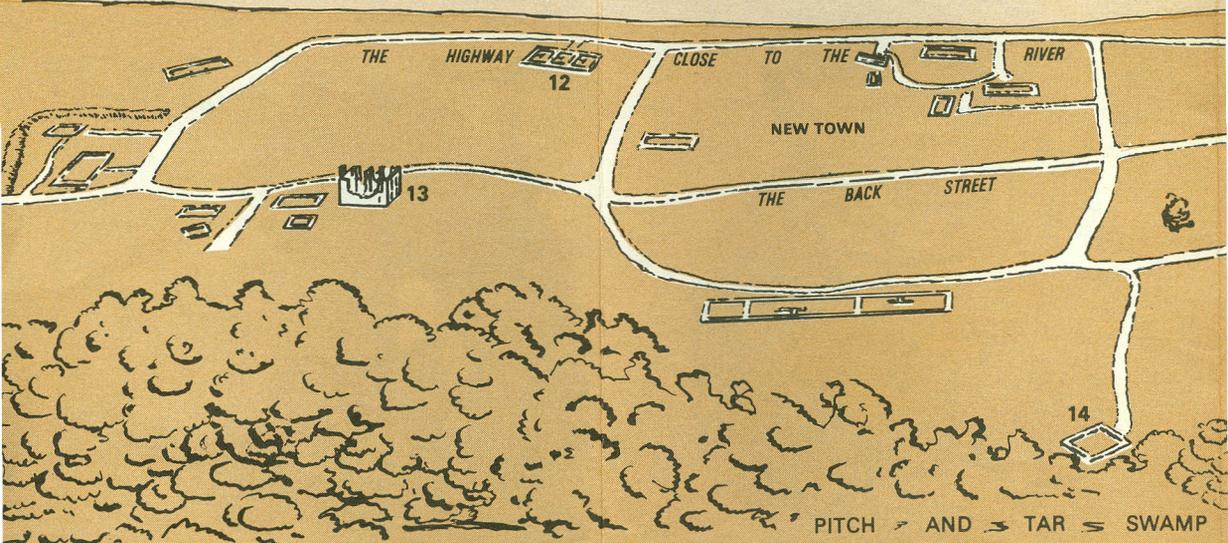
There are no eating or sleeping accommodations at Jamestown. A cafeteria is located at nearby Jamestown Festival Park, administered by the Jamestown Foundation for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Food and lodging are available at Williamsburg and Yorktown. Privately owned campgrounds are nearby, and picnic areas, open in season, are located along the Colonial Parkway. There are no service stations on the parkway.



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"JAMES TOWNE" JAMESTOWN ISLAND VIRGINIA

JAMES



SEEING JAMESTOWN

Jamestown no longer lives except in the pages of history and in your imagination. It wore many faces during its life: a tiny fort on the edge of the wilderness; a small community growing to meet the demands of the new land; the center of religious, economic, social, and political life in a prospering colony; and the scene of violence and suffering as well as of hope and success.

Jamestown was ever changing; its reconstruction is impossible. But you may understand the town if you consider the land itself—unknown, rich in potential, and peopled by a strange race who held the knowledge of survival. You must understand the men who came to settle here—Englishmen unprepared for the wildness of the land, but lured by the chance for wealth, power, and adventure.

You must feel the strange chemistry of the changes that took place—how the men changed the land as the land changed the men. In time came a tobacco economy, a different social system, altered attitudes toward politics and government, and the new institutions that have become our heritage.

Before beginning your tour see the theater program and the museum exhibits to help you acquire some of the "feeling" for Jamestown that is so hard to explain but which is so vital to your understanding and enjoyment.

Walk outside the visitor center (1) and follow the white arrows to the monument terrace (2). The 103-foot obelisk was built in 1907 for the 300th anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown. The gate through which you pass marks the entrance to the area preserved by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities since 1893.

On your right just beyond is the statue of Pocahontas (3). Daughter of the powerful chief Powhatan, she greatly influenced the Jamestown

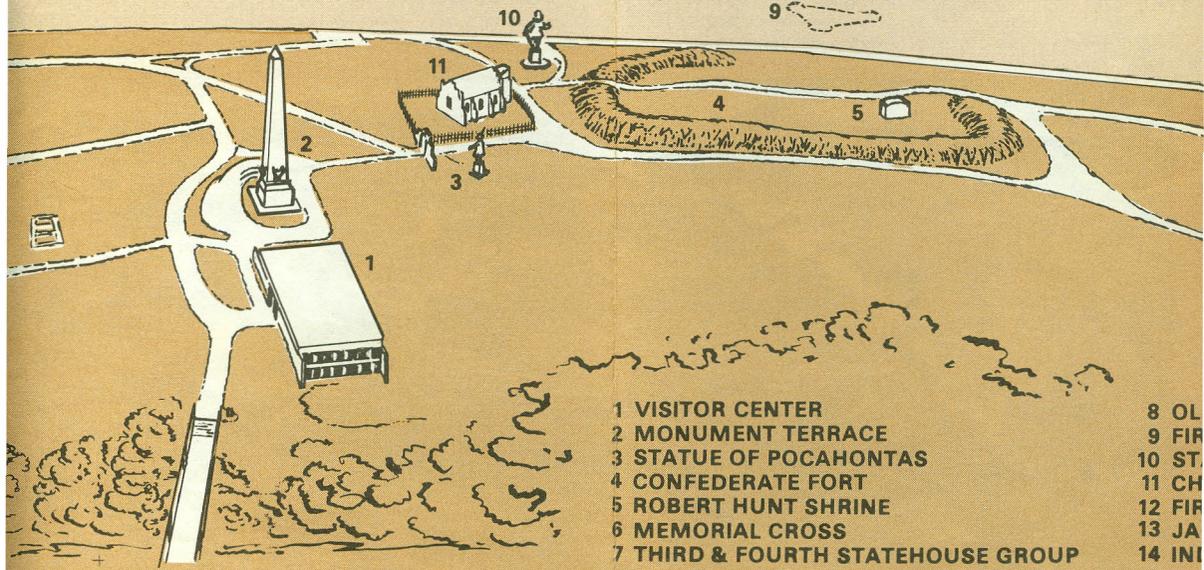
settlement, as the oft-told story of her rescue of John Smith indicates. Her marriage to John Rolfe, perhaps at Jamestown, improved Indian-English relations until the colonists were more firmly established.

The Indians of Tidewater Virginia were superb farmers, and knowledge of their techniques was necessary in a colony whose whole existence would depend on agriculture. The Powhatan Confederation, forged by Pocahontas' father, was to be alternately a threat and a blessing to the colony; the potential danger was not dispelled for 20 years.

While the Confederate fort (4) is not a part of the Colonial story, it demonstrates that there are many layers of history at Jamestown.

The Robert Hunt Shrine (5) is dedicated to Jamestown's first minister of the Church of England. In times of stress, when the colonists' sufferings and uncertainties threatened to tear the group apart, Reverend Hunt played the role of conciliator and helped unite the group's effort toward survival. The bas relief plaque on the shrine depicts the first Anglican Holy Communion celebrated by Reverend Hunt in June 1607. We cannot over-estimate the importance of religion in the 17th century, for religious dissension in England finally led to civil war and the beheading of a king.

The Memorial Cross (6) tells of a bleak time that is beyond the understanding of people accustomed to prosperity. During the winter of 1609-10 the colonists felt the worst their new home could offer, and when spring came, only 60 remained of the 500 who saw winter begin. The cross marks some 300 graves—graves dug hastily, perhaps



- 1 VISITOR CENTER
- 2 MONUMENT TERRACE
- 3 STATUE OF POCAHONTAS
- 4 CONFEDERATE FORT
- 5 ROBERT HUNT SHRINE
- 6 MEMORIAL CROSS
- 7 THIRD & FOURTH STATEHOUSE GROUP

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at night, in an effort to conceal the colonists' desperate plight from the Indians.

Immediately behind the cross are the foundations of the third and fourth statehouses (7). The representative system of government which developed in Virginia grew and became stronger in these buildings, but the foundations also speak of violence and destruction. The third statehouse was *destroyed*, with the rest of Jamestown, by Nathaniel Bacon in 1676 during his short-lived and unsuccessful rebellion against the way the Colony was being administered.

The foundations of the fourth statehouse tell of the end of Jamestown as a living community. Its destruction by fire in 1698 sent the government to Williamsburg, and Jamestown's main reason for existence went with it.

At one time this old cypress (8) marked the river's edge, but time and the river have swept away some 25 acres of the island. It was on this land since claimed by the James that the colonists built their fort (9) as protection against the Spaniards and Indians. The easily defensible peninsula was most attractive in spring, and ships could tie up close to the shore. Only the Indians could have told the colonists what a bitter season lay ahead.

As you walk along the seawall (built to prevent further erosion) the river dominates the scene as it did 350 years ago. No doubt the colonists appreciated its beauty, but more important it was to them a highway and a source of food. Sturgeon 6 feet long were to be had, and schools of fish were abundant in season. There were shellfish and flights of duck. And with no roads through the forests, men and goods traveled by water. The new colony spread and grew along its rivers.

Standing before the statue of John Smith (10) one gets the impression that he was an awesome figure. He was often a man of all-too-human fail-

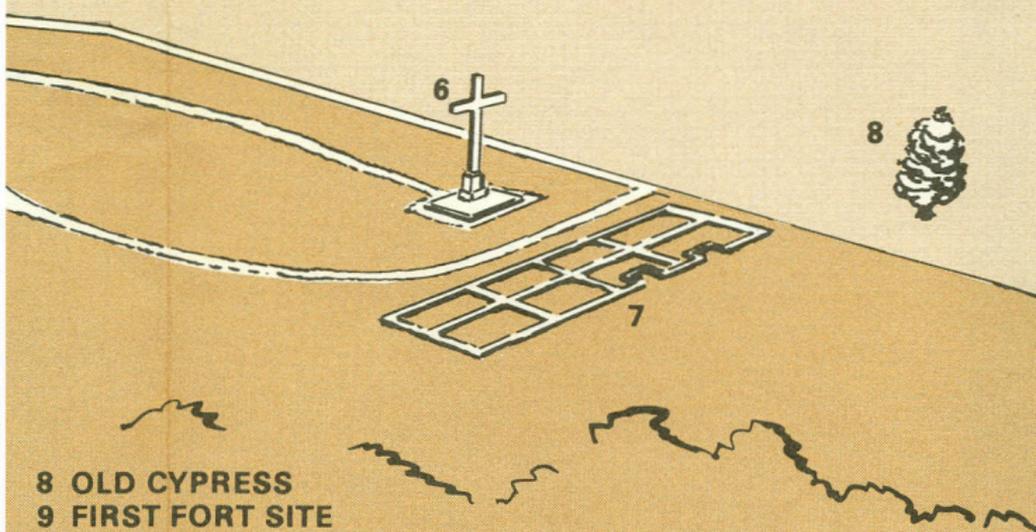
ings and a special product of a swashbuckling age. He was not always admirable, but he acted when action was needed, and he kept the colony alive. Explorer, adventurer, writer, and adviser to other colonies, Smith was captivated by America, and it dominated him for the rest of his life.

The Church Tower (11), now only a shell, is Jamestown's only 17th-century structure standing today. As you pass through, notice the holes in the walls where the beams for the second and third floors were fitted.

Beyond the tower is the Memorial Church, built in 1907 on the foundations of an earlier church. Along the walls on either side are the exposed foundations of the wooden church of 1617. In this earlier church the first assembly met on July 30, 1619, beginning on this continent our tradition of representative government. The graves speak of strong men and women subdued at last by the land they came to conquer; but we can imagine happier times here—marriages and the baptism of babies, signs that the colony was growing and becoming more stable. Still the hostile land could lash out savagely. Notice the plaque dedicated to Chanco, an Indian boy who saved Jamestown in 1622 by warning the English of an intended massacre.

As you leave the graveyard, look over the gravestones bearing the names of many Virginia families—Berkeley, Blair, Harrison, and others who shaped the future of the colony.

Leaving the graveyard, you enter a section of Jamestown known to its residents as "New Towne," where colonists, thriving on the tobacco



- 8 OLD CYPRESS
- 9 FIRST FORT SITE
- 10 STATUE OF JOHN SMITH
- 11 CHURCH TOWER
- 12 FIRST STATEHOUSE
- 13 JAQUELIN-AMBLER HOUSE
- 14 INDUSTRIAL AREA

crops, built more substantial homes. Here, then, was America's first "subdivision," yet it was much like the older part of town. Jamestown, unlike Williamsburg, was not a planned city—it simply grew. The foundations of many homes and other buildings were excavated and covered by a protective layer of whitened brick. *Please do not walk or stand on these very fragile ruins.*

Throughout "New Towne" you may get some understanding of Jamestown from the paintings and recorded messages. But you must use your imagination to round out the story.

The **first statehouse (12)** marked the importance attached to representative government. The building is also associated with the deposition of Gov. Sir John Harvey in 1635. While achieved peaceably enough, this was a bold step; ousting the King's representative was a serious matter, an act which heralded the change taking place in the men of Virginia.

The **Jaquelin-Ambler House (13)** is a remnant of the 18th century. After the seat of government was moved to Williamsburg, Jamestown rapidly declined and the plantation system took over. This once fine home was the seat of such a plantation, based on tobacco and slavery. Tobacco was developed here by John Rolfe in 1612. The first Negroes in Virginia were brought by a Dutch warship in 1619. They were traded to the colonists as indentured servants. Only later did slavery become the mainstay of the Colony's labor system.

Here in this **industrial area (14)** the colonists tried brewing, pottery-making, silk-culture, iron-working, and other experiments with only limited success. Eventually the disappointment of men who expected too much from the land was overcome when wealth was found in tobacco, and men and land finally came to terms in that most basic of relationships—agriculture.

ADMINISTRATION

In 1893 the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities acquired 23 acres on Jamestown Island. The remainder of the 1,500-acre island became a part of Colonial National Historical Park in 1934. Jamestown has been jointly administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and the APVA since 1940. Inquiries should be directed to the Superintendent, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, VA 23490.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

National Park Service

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