

CAPE HENRY

M E M O R I A L



A Part of Colonial National Historical Park, Virginia

CAPE HENRY MEMORIAL

The colonists who established Jamestown made their first landing in Virginia at Cape Henry on April 26, 1607

CAPE HENRY has been described as the setting where Englishmen staged Scene I, Act I of their successful drama of conquering the American wilderness. Here, "about foure o'clocke in the morning" on April 26, 1607, the sea-weary colonists, who some 3 weeks later founded Jamestown, "descried (viewed) the Land of Virginia." They had left England late in 1606, and had spent the greater part of the next 5 months in the strict confines of their 3 small ships, the largest of which, the *Susan Constant*, was but 75 feet in length. It is small wonder, as George Percy related, that they were "almost ravished at the first sight" of their new surroundings. It is understandable, too, why, after claiming the land for God and King, they tarried 4 days in the Cape Henry area before going on to establish the first permanent English settlement in America at Jamestown.

The Events at Cape Henry

Cape Henry lay on the southernmost side of the entrance to Chesapeake Bay and it was from the southeast that the expedition came. Capt. Christopher Newport, in command of the fleet, brought his ships to anchor in protected waters just inside the bay. He and Edward Maria Wingfield (destined to be the first president of the colony), Bartholomew Gosnold, and "30 others" made up the initial party that went ashore to see the "faire meddowes," "Fresh-waters," and "goodly tall Trees" that lay back of the "white hilly sand"

which was suggestive of "the Downes" in England. As the first day neared its end and the colonists were returning to their ships, they had an encounter with Indians that left two of the party wounded.

Aboard ship that night, as directed by the Virginia Company of London, they opened a locked box and read their instructions and the identity of the councilors for the colony. However, the seven men listed were not sworn in, nor was the president selected until May 13 when the settlers reached Jamestown Island. In the interim, Captain Newport remained in charge.

On April 27 a second party was put ashore. They spent some time "recreating themselves" and pushed hard on assembling a small boat—a "shallop"—to aid in exploration. The men made short marches in the vicinity of the cape and enjoyed some oysters found roasting over an Indian campfire.

The next day the "shallop" was launched and exploration in the lower reaches of the Chesapeake Bay followed immediately. The colonists scouted by land also, and reported, "We past through excellent ground full of Flowers of divers kinds and colours, and as goodly trees as I have seene, as Cedar, Cipresse, and other kindes . . . fine and beautiful Strawberries, foure times bigger and better than ours in England."

On April 29 the colonists, quite possibly using English oak already fashioned for the purpose, "set up a Crosse at Chesupioc Bay, and named that place Cape Henry" for

Henry, Prince of Wales, oldest son of King James I. Here on the windswept shore, led by their Chaplain, Robert Hunt, they must have knelt in prayer and thanksgiving for this new land, and for their safe voyage. Thereafter, they were ready and prepared to follow their instructions to push deeper into Virginia to seek a site for settlement.

Early on April 30 they moved to a new anchorage at a place they named "Cape Comfort" (now Old Point Comfort). Following this they entered the James River. After 2 weeks of searching along both sides of the river, they elected to establish their permanent settlement at Jamestown which was to continue as Virginia's capital for 92 years.

The Site

The Cape Henry Memorial includes a quarter acre of ground (0.23 acre) on which stands a memorial cross erected in 1935 by the National Society, Daughters of the American Colonists. This marks the approximate site of the first landing in Virginia made by the Jamestown settlers on April 26, 1607. It is completely surrounded by the Fort Story Military Reservation of which it was formerly a part.

On January 19, 1939, the Secretary of War, authorized by a joint resolution of Congress, approved June 15, 1938, transferred the memorial area to the Secretary of the Interior, who was, by authority of the same resolution, to maintain the memorial as a part of Colonial National Historical Park. In addition to the memorial, this park includes Jamestown, Yorktown Battlefield, and Colonial Parkway, which connects Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown.

The Cape Henry Pilgrimage

Each year the Order of Cape Henry, 1607, aided by Colonial National Historical Park, sponsors religious and patriotic services at

the memorial. Normally this anniversary observance is on the Sunday closest to April 26, the day the settlers landed.

The Old Lighthouse

Near the memorial, but not a part of it, is the first lighthouse erected by the Federal Government, in 1791, which is described as "a beautiful octagonal tower, still a picturesque landmark on one of the highest dunes of Cape Henry." This tower of cut stone blocks served until 1881 when a new one was built nearby. In August 1930, the Federal Government deeded it to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, and the Norfolk Branch of the Association accepted its custody.

How To Reach the Area

Cape Henry is on the south side of the entrance to Chesapeake Bay. It is 10 miles east of Norfolk and 3 miles north of Virginia Beach, Va. It can be reached from Norfolk by U. S. 60. Principal routes that connect with U. S. 60 in the Norfolk area are U. S. 17, 58, and 460, and U. S. 13 by ferry from the eastern shore of Virginia.

About Your Visit

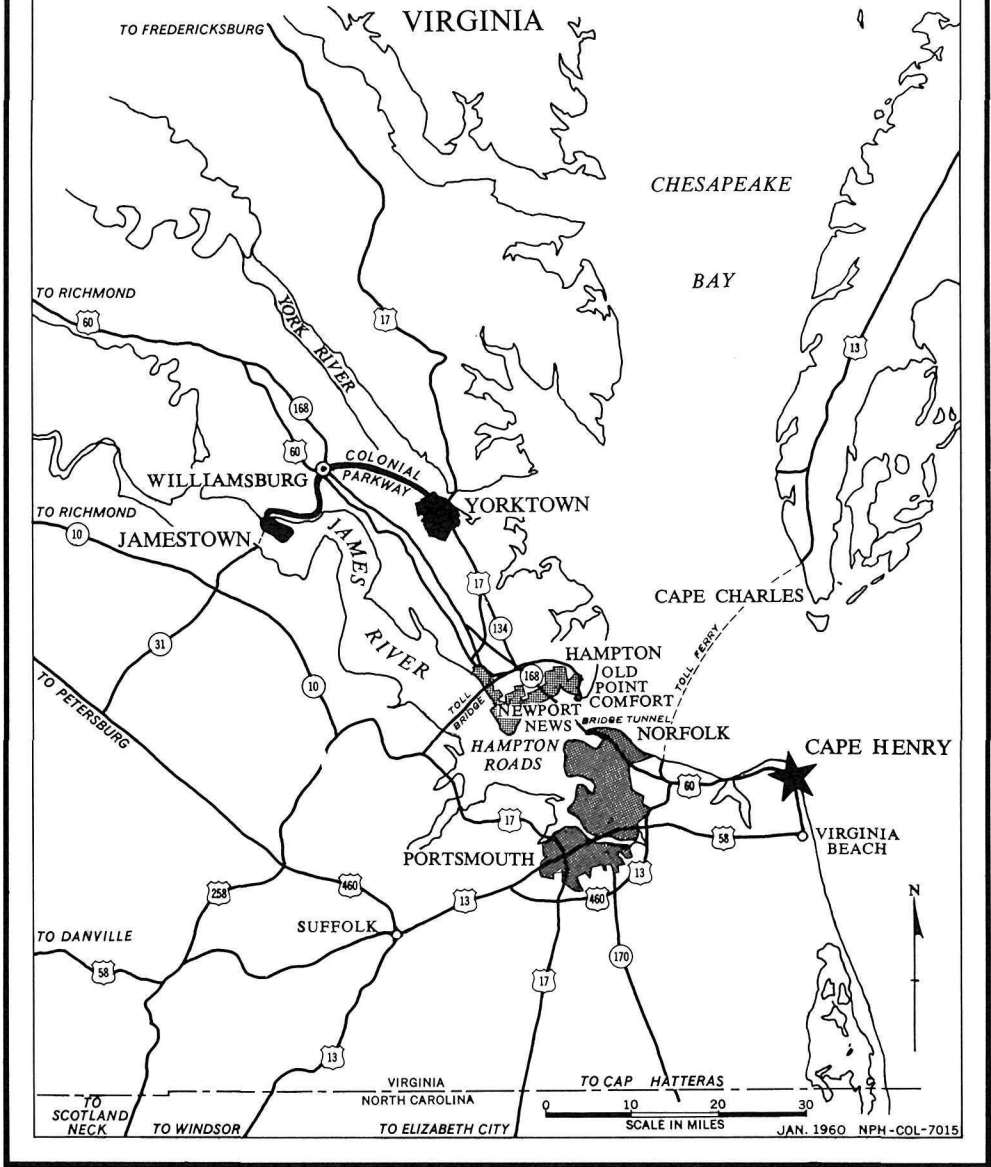
The memorial is open all year and there is no admission fee. Entrance is by visitor pass issued by military personnel at the entrance to the Fort Story Military Reservation. The memorial is unattended by National Park Service personnel. There are no facilities or special services available.

Administration

The Cape Henry Memorial is administered by the National Park Service. The Superintendent of Colonial National Historical Park, of which the memorial is a part, is in immediate charge. His address is Yorktown, Va.

The National Park System, of which Colonial National Historical Park is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

CAPE HENRY MEMORIAL COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fred A. Seaton, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*

