

America's 400th Anniversary: The Lessons of Jamestown



BY ROSS RICHARDSON



An interpreter at Jamestown Settlement demonstrates cooking techniques in the re-created colonial fort.

WHAT DOES JAMESTOWN HAVE TO DO WITH MARS?

Surprisingly, a lot. Robert Zubrin, president of the Mars Society, a group promoting manned space exploration, put it this way:

"We'll break out of the 'valley' [of our existence on earth] when we build our first Jamestown on Mars," he says. "If we break out of the valley, 500 years from now we'll occupy many worlds. When humanity looks back 500 years from now ... they will celebrate their Jamestown."

JAMESTOWN IS REALLY THAT IMPORTANT. Most Americans covered the story of John Smith and Pocahontas in fourth grade and moved on with their lives. But with our sights set on new horizons, it's time for America to rediscover why we are who we are. The 400th anniversary of Jamestown's settlement provides the perfect occasion.

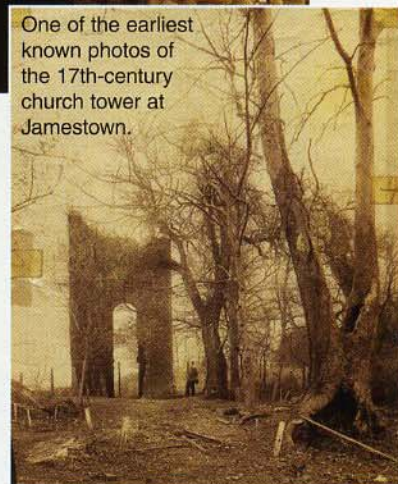
Most people know the basic story of Jamestown: three small ships land on the banks of the James River, bringing settlers who established the first English colony in the Americas. The settlement was the site of tragedy and tri-

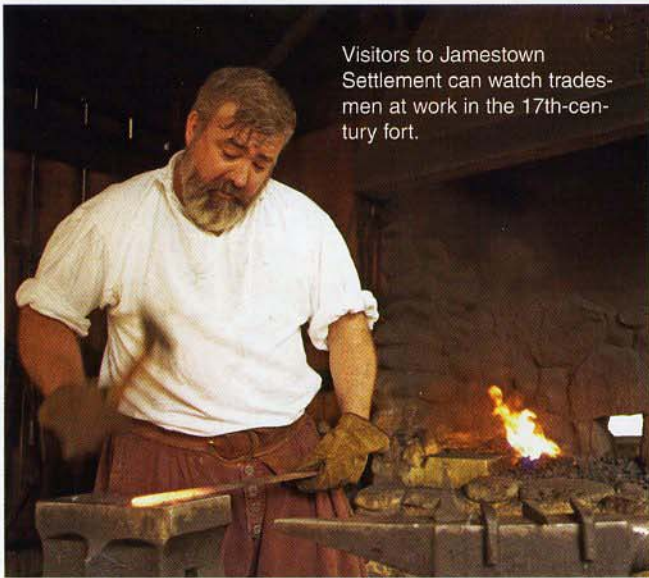
umph, the place where the melding of cultures began to produce the uniquely American society we know today.

Most Americans point to Plymouth as the site of the nation's origin, but the foundations of America were rooted in Virginia soil in 1607. Theodore Roosevelt said as much, telling Congress in his 1904 State-of-the-Union address that the settlement of Jamestown is the event "with which the history of what has now become the United States really begins." President Dwight Eisenhower identified Jamestown "as the first step toward the creation of the American Nation."

Consider how Jamestown contributed to American society in these areas:

One of the earliest known photos of the 17th-century church tower at Jamestown.





Visitors to Jamestown Settlement can watch tradesmen at work in the 17th-century fort.

- **FIRST REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT:** A House of Burgesses was formed in 1619, a body that today is called the Virginia General Assembly, the oldest democratic institution in the Americas.

- **FREE ENTERPRISE:** While the Pilgrims came to America to escape religious persecution, the settlers of Jamestown were interested in business. Contrary to the stories about lazy gentlemen settlers, recent archaeology finds are showing how the Jamestown's residents experimented with manufacturing and that they were innovative.

- **THE RULE OF LAW:** The concept that all people, including the ruler or government members, are subject to the same set of laws, was first practiced in the Americas on Jamestown Island.

- **CULTURAL DIVERSITY** – Three cultures came together at Jamestown: Virginia Indians, Africans and Europeans. While this aspect of our history has often been difficult, the close interaction between cultures is a hallmark of American society.

The case can be made that few events in history have changed the course of world history as profoundly at the founding of Jamestown. Appropriately, Virginians have observed Jamestown anniversaries every 50 years in a spectacular manner. The 1907 Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition featured speeches by Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington and Mark Twain. The exposition – held on what is now the Norfolk Naval Base – was a magnificent world's fair that drew more than 1.2 million visitors.

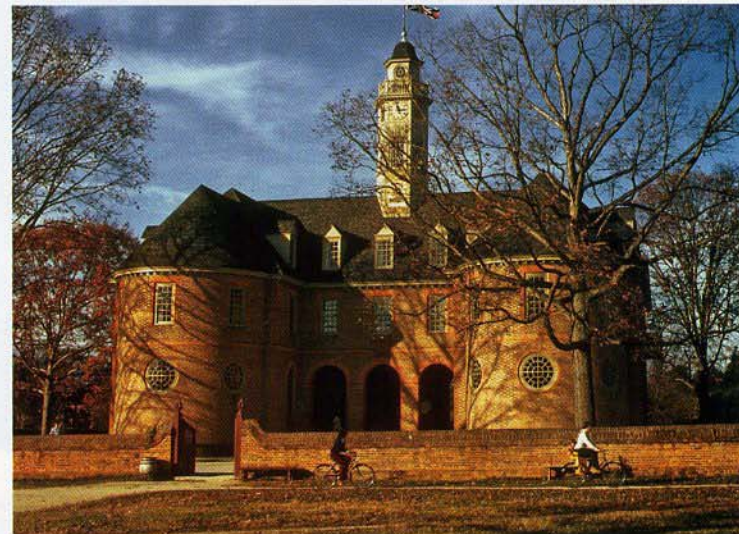
In 1957 more than a million visitors came to Virginia as the state focused on preservation and education programs. The spectacular Colonial Parkway, one of the state's most scenic drives, was completed. Jamestown Festival Park – now operating as Jamestown Settlement - brought history to life with re-creations of the ships, the fort and an Indian village. Perhaps the most memorable moment, however, came when Queen Elizabeth II addressed thousands of people at Jamestown during her first official trip to the U.S. as monarch.

Those commemorations set a high standard for Jamestown anniversaries. During 2006 and 2007 events and programs observing America's 400th Anniversary will take place throughout the state and the nation. Eleven "Signature Events" will take place over an 18-month period – beginning in May 2006 – with the highest-profile events including:

- **THE GODSPEED SAIL:** A new re-creation of the *Godspeed* will visit major ports along the Eastern Seaboard in the summer of 2006. The ship will be accompanied by a festival featuring children's theater, musical presentations, and information on Virginia's business opportunities and vacation destinations.

- **A SALUTE TO THE MILITARY:** in observation of the 225th anniversary of the battle of Yorktown, the pivotal event in winning American independence.

- **A NATIONAL "TEACH-IN,":** a network television broadcast that will put lessons about Jamestown into schools across the country.



The seat of government moved from Jamestown to Williamsburg in 1699. Pictured is the Capitol in Colonial Williamsburg.

- **AMERICA'S ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND:** A three-day observance featuring international dignitaries, celebrities and special events.

- **FORUM ON DEMOCRACY:** Virginia will host a forum on democracy that will bring leaders and students from around the world to discuss the state of representative government.

With the nation's 400th anniversary upon us, the excitement is building. The commemoration will provide lessons and memories that will be with us and our children for decades. And 500 years from now, when mankind commemorates its next great leap into the unknown, our ancestors will have several "Jamestowns" to commemorate.

More information about Virginia's 400th anniversary can be found at www.Americas400thAnniversary.org.

By Ross Richardson, Director of Marketing Communications, Jamestown 2007