GENERAL INFORMATION
ABOUT THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION

The Historical Significance of Williamsburg

From 1699 to 1780 Williamsburg was the capital of England’s oldest, largest and most populous colony and the seat of power in the new nation’s most influential state. Named in honor of William III, King of England and designed by Royal Gov. Francis Nicholson, Williamsburg is one of the country’s oldest planned communities.

In its shops, taverns, government buildings, homes and streets George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, George Mason and other Virginia patriots established the ideals – liberty, independence and personal freedom – that influenced the founding of our nation and have inspired generations of Americans and others around the world.

The Restoration of Williamsburg

Jefferson moved Virginia’s government to Richmond in 1780 at the recommendation of the General Assembly. Williamsburg became a quiet country town disturbed only by Union Gen. George McClellan’s 1862 Peninsula Campaign during the Civil War.

In 1926 the Rev. Dr. W.A.R. Goodwin, rector of Bruton Parish Church, approached John D. Rockefeller Jr. about restoring the sleepy village of his ministry to its colonial past. Rockefeller proceeded cautiously at first, investing in one property at a time in Goodwin’s vision. Rockefeller secretly authorized the purchase of the first property, the Ludwell-Paradise House, on December 7, 1926, in a telegram signed, “David’s father,” a reference to Rockefeller’s youngest son.

Rockefeller’s enthusiasm grew to match Goodwin’s. Guided by the goal of providing an opportunity to inspire future Americans by the patriotism and purpose of the past, Rockefeller supported and financed Williamsburg’s restoration until his death in 1960. He and his wife, Abby, maintained a close personal interest in the restoration and spent part of each year at Bassett Hall, their Williamsburg home, which is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Wednesdays.

The restored city is presented in the 301-acre Historic Area, which comprises 88 original buildings and hundreds of homes, shops, public buildings and other structures that have been reconstructed, most on their original foundations. The reconstructed Raleigh Tavern opened as the first public exhibition building in September 1932.
Colonial Williamsburg Today

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation is a private, not-for-profit educational foundation that receives no regular state or federal funding. The Foundation preserves and interprets the Historic Area.

Colonial Williamsburg operates the Museums of Colonial Williamsburg: the Public Hospital, which provides exhibits that document the treatment of mental illness from the hospital’s founding in 1773 to its destruction by fire in 1885; the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum that displays the Foundation’s exceptional collection of British and American decorative arts; and the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum in expanded quarters adjacent to the Wallace Museum with 11 galleries in 10,400 square feet of exhibition space. In addition, the Foundation also operates Bassett Hall, the Williamsburg home of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr.

Colonial Williamsburg’s education and preservation programs and activities include archaeology, historical research, building and grounds preservation, historic trades demonstrations, living history programs, educational outreach programs and conservation of art and antiques. Colonial Williamsburg uses interactive television and Web-based technologies for Electronic Field Trips each year to bring the 18th century to life for more than one million students throughout the United States.

The Williamsburg Lodge and Conference Center re-opened in late 2006 with an expanded conference facility offering 45,000 square feet of flexible meeting space and 28 versatile function rooms. Audiovisual and technological services are located throughout the conference center. The 12,000-square-foot Virginia Room overlooks the 24-mile scenic Colonial Parkway and is complemented by the 7,000-square-foot Colony Room and four outdoor entertainment venues. The Conference Center is located adjacent to the Historic Area and across the street from The Spa of Colonial Williamsburg and the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club.

A team of world-renowned experts collaborated to create The Spa of Colonial Williamsburg: A Continuum of Wellness, a full-service spa that exudes Southern charm, harmonizes with its historical surroundings and reflects the personality of its colonial heritage. Extensive research into treatments dating back to Native Americans, English settlers, African Americans and immigrants from near and far influenced 21st-century treatments designed to soothe, refresh and calm. The Spa of Colonial Williamsburg is open to guests of the resort and to day visitors.

Historic Area

Colonial Williamsburg’s Historic Area programming portrays 18th-century Williamsburg during the 1774-1781 period, the critical formative years of the Republic. Throughout the city, an engaging mix of sights, sounds and activities helps guests become active participants and make connections between America’s past and present. Important Historic Area sites include the Governor’s Palace, the symbol of British authority in the colony; the Capitol, the seat of colonial power and site of Virginia’s vote for independence on May 15, 1776, and home to the General Assembly from 1776-79; the Peyton Randolph site, an “urban plantation” and the 18th-century home of Randolph who served as the first and second president of the Continental Congress; Raleigh Tavern, where Virginia patriots met to discuss independence in open defiance of the Crown; George Wythe House, home of Thomas Jefferson’s teacher and friend and signer of the
Declaration of Independence; the James Geddy House and Foundry, site of an up-and-coming family business; and Great Hopes Plantation, a working agricultural plantation where free and enslaved people worked side by side.

Historic trade demonstrations, dramatic vignettes, interactive programs and encounters with “People of the Past” take place in exhibition sites and historic trade shops throughout the Historic Area. Homes, public buildings and shops are furnished with objects from Colonial Williamsburg’s extensive collection of English and American antiques and reproductions made by Colonial Williamsburg tradespeople.

Colonial Williamsburg operates four dining taverns in the Historic Area: Chowning’s; Christiana Campbell’s; Shields; and King’s Arms Tavern. Each tavern offers unique 18th-century-style menus served in authentic colonial surroundings.

The Historic Area encompasses 301 acres of greens and gardens that range from the formal splendor of the Governor’s Palace garden to the utilitarian kitchen garden of the James Geddy site. The Historic Area is protected from modern intrusions by a 2,800-acre greenbelt.

**Philanthropic Support**

As a private, not-for-profit educational institution, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation welcomes and encourages tax-deductible gifts and bequests from all who treasure the Williamsburg experience. Gifts to Colonial Williamsburg support the research, documentation and interpretive training fundamental to all its educational activities; the presentation of programs in Historic Area buildings, trade shops and museums; acquisition and conservation of art; buildings and grounds preservation and maintenance; and production of publications and audiovisual programs.

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