



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Colonial National
Historical Park

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Colonial National Historical Park News Release

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Historic Jamestowne Commemorates “First Assembly Day”

JAMESTOWN, Va. – On Saturday, July 30 and Thursday, August 4, 2016, Historic Jamestowne will commemorate First Assembly Day, the anniversary of the first representative legislative assembly in English North America convened at Jamestown from July 30 to August 4, 1619.

On Saturday, July 30, special 30-minute programs will be conducted at 10:00 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 3:00 p.m. at the Hunt Shrine. Visitors are invited to join costumed interpreters portraying Governor Sir George Yeardley and Secretary John Pory as they recreate the major events of the historic first meetings of the House of Burgesses 397 years ago. After a brief introduction, visitors will discuss and debate the laws that were important to the colonists in 1619. The interactive program will take place a short distance from the Memorial Church, which was constructed in the early 20th century to protect and memorialize the location of the original church where the first Assembly was convened.

On Thursday, August 4, a special 45-minute program will be conducted at 10:00 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 3:00 p.m., inside the Historic Jamestowne Visitor Center Theater. Participants will meet three people from Jamestown’s past sharing their stories about Virginia and its government during the colony’s earliest years: John Rolfe, a member of Governor Yeardley’s Council and an assembly counselor; John Pory, counselor and speaker of the first General Assembly; and a female resident of the colony providing her perspective of the 1619 assembly. Following each program, participants can ask questions of the settlers.

On August 4, from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., inside the Historic Jamestowne Visitor Center near the museum entrance, a staff member from the Virginia House of Delegates will be distributing free children’s materials on Virginia government.

About the First Assembly

In April 1619 Sir George Yeardley, the newly appointed governor of the colony by the Virginia Company, called for an election of burgesses as directed by his company commission:

“And that they might have a hand in the governing of themselves, it was granted that a general assembly should be held yearly once, whereat were to be present the governor and counsel with two burgesses from each plantation freely to be elected by the inhabitants thereof; this assembly to have power to make and ordain whatsoever laws and orders should by them be thought good and profitable for our subsistence.”

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The inhabitants of the colony's eleven primary settlements each elected two burgesses to represent their interests in the first assembly that convened inside the church at Jamestown on July 30, 1619. Although two burgesses were denied their seats, and one assemblyman died from heat stroke, the burgesses, the governor, and his council covered several items over a six-day period, including approval of the "greate Charter", Governor Yeardley's company instructions, that dealt primarily with land tenure and internal colonial organization. They also reviewed former governors' instructions converting many into laws for the betterment of the colony and improved relations with the local Powhatan Indians.

On August 3, the assembly discussed "a thirde sorte of laws such as might proceed out of every man's private concept." Here was initiated the right for any burgess to introduce legislation and not merely pass laws proposed by the company. Finally, on August 4, the assembly approved its first tax law requiring every man and servant older than 16 in the colony to pay one pound of their best tobacco to the assembly's speaker, clerk, sergeant-at-arms, and Jamestown's provost marshal for their services rendered during the assembly.

Although Virginia Company officials maintained governmental control over the colony, the assembly was a major reform allowing for colonists' participation in their own governance, and as one historian wrote, "It was the gradual evolution and development of this assembly in Virginia, [and] of similar bodies later in other colonies, that made it the fundamental mechanism of free government as we know it today."

If You Go

Historic Jamestowne, the site of America's first permanent English settlement, offers a wealth of family activities on the island. Witness archaeology-in-action at the 1607 James Fort excavation, watch costumed glassblowers demonstrate one of America's first industries at the Glasshouse and visit the original 17th-century church tower. Explore the Natalie P. and Alan M. Voorhees Archaearium, an archaeology museum filled with unique artifacts from the Fort James site. Also tour the remains of New Towne, the historic town site dating from the 1620s. The Visitor Center offers exhibits, a multimedia presentation and a museum store. Special living history and archaeology programs are offered throughout the year including Jamestown Day; Bacon's Rebellion; and At Christmas Be Merry.

Historic Jamestowne is jointly administered by the National Park Service and the Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation (on behalf of Preservation Virginia) and preserves the original site of the first permanent English settlement in the New World. Entrance to the site is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The Historic Jamestowne Visitor Center is open from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., and the grounds remain open until dusk.

All programs and demonstrations are included in the Colonial National Historical Park admission fee of \$14.00 per adult (which includes both Historic Jamestowne and Yorktown Battlefield). Children under age 16 and Preservation Virginia members are admitted free. Federal Interagency Passes and Golden Age and Golden Access passports to the National Parks are accepted.

For further information, visit www.nps.gov/colo or www.HistoricJamestowne.org or call (757) 898-2411 or (757) 229-4997.

