



His Majesty James the First of England did not like tobacco. In the year 1604 he wrote a pamphlet against "this base and vile use of taking tobacco in our kingdom." He found it "lothsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, and dangerous to the lungs."

Historians have not recorded what His Majesty said when he found, a few years later, that a settlement of his subjects in the New World across the Atlantic had embarked upon an economy based upon the raising and sale of that noxious weed. According to a visiting ship captain, they were planting it along the streets, in the marketplace "and all other spare places." It brought in ready money. It was money.

Ever since that day in 1607 when they anchored their ships in deep water off of what was then a peninsula in a land of "savages," the colonists had been struggling against adversity. In one year nine-tenths of the original settlers perished from starvation and disease. They envisioned a livelihood from glassmaking, from silkworm culture, but their efforts were unsuccessful. Their hopes of finding gold were dashed when they sent back to England a keg of earth full of shiny yellow flakes. It was examined and scornfully appraised as "dirt." The pretty colors were iron pyrites, long known as "fool's gold."

So, let us say, the scene is Jamestown, and the year is 1619—the twelfth after the landing on the soil to be named "Virginia." The Governor and Council could report that "all our riches for the present doe consist in Tobacco." The larger scene around us is that of the smiling Virginia Peninsula, that thrust of tidewater land which lies between the waters of the James River and the York estuary.

But Jamestown no longer exists as a living assembly of artisans and householders except insofar as the loving labors of the archeologists, delving into the foundations and middens, have brought it to life again in the imagination of the visitor. Perhaps more vitally than the best written records could do, the Jamestown museum shows us not merely how the colonists were housed, but what they ate, the dishes they used, the pets they had, how they worked, and how they played.

Yes, in a narrow sense, Jamestown is a dead city. But in reality, no city ever dies. It may be reduced to rubble, and farmers may later plow and crop the soil over it, but before all that has occurred, it has sent the roots of new growth into the hinterlands, to carry on the ways and spirits of the fathers—a new phase of old history in the making.

Take the time to see this process in action as you visit Colonial National Historical Park and move over a beautiful path of access—the Colonial Parkway—from the now quiet Jamestown through re-created Williamsburg to the peaceful but active Yorktown. It is a unique feature of this particular historical preserve of the National Park System that within a few miles you can set foot on three areas of cardinal importance in the history of the Republic. At the risk of stating it too simply, it is substantially true that here the British Crown acquired a vast empire, debated it, and lost it. Jamestown—Williamsburg—Yorktown—the United States of America!

At Jamestown, the time finally came when it was obvious that the first immigrants had not chosen the best possible site for a settlement. The desire to have their escape-ships moored close by in deep calm waters of the river was natural. And in the month of May the soft air and sunshine

must have seemed alluring. But, as it turned out, this was not a healthful spot. Long before the destruction caused by Bacon's rebellion against the King's governor, there had been thoughts of moving inland. The burning of the final statehouse settled the matter. Middle Plantation, a crossroads, became the seat of government and was renamed Williamsburg.

When the people moved to Williamsburg, something intangible but very real moved with them. It was the spirit of self-government that had been developed in the struggling years. The first shiploads of pioneers had been composed of rather unruly bachelors; soldiers of fortune were among the sounder men! But leaders like John Smith and John Rolfe had finally infused a spirit of order in the town. And what happened is perhaps inevitable in colonialism. Outlanders cling to old ways, but they develop new ways. They retain loyalties, but the loyalties are no longer blind. Self-reliance and the struggle for existence take effect. They look like the same men, they talk like the same men, but they are stubbornly themselves, and want the fact acknowledged. It is a period of coming of age.

Williamsburg, the new capital—munificently restored by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and a host of creative minds—marks the adult period in Virginia history, a term of economic prosperity that saw the rise of a group of men who were to leave a lasting impression not only upon American history, but upon the political concepts of Western civilization: Washington, Jefferson, George Mason, George Wythe, Patrick Henry.

"The purpose of Colonial Williamsburg," the visitor is told, "is to create accurately the environment of the men and women of the 18th-century capital—to the end that the future may learn from the past." It is a worthy

hope, which everyone wishes can be achieved. It may be that the ultimate value of history comes through the mere contact with historic preservations such as the visitor to Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown may have today. In a place of great historical importance, the visitor subtly becomes part of that history. We are microscopic, but history is in us all. We find in history the explanation of why we are we, why I am I, why you are you.

You will not, for instance, fail to sense something of this when you follow that gracious highroad, the Colonial Parkway, with its soothing changes of landscape to Yorktown. Here, in the early autumn days of 1781, Americans aided by the soldiers and sailors of France under Rochambeau and De Grasse fought the last important conflict of the War for Independence. The heights above the York River, carefully chosen by the British commander for its favorable position in regard to sea support, had proved to be a trap. As the British prisoners of war marched from the town along the York-Hampton Road, tradition has it that a military band played an oldtime favorite called "The World Turned Upside Down." Perhaps the British bandmaster had a grim sense of humor.

You will have the feeling of "belonging" as you view the battlefield from the visitor center, or drive the marked route through that scene of the defeat of Cornwallis. In the eye of the mind, you look back over the long past. You even feel, as part of your history, the great triangular contest among England, France, and Spain for possession of the New World. All that you see flowed from that source. And it is your history—you are a droplet in that stream.

—Freeman Tilden

Colonial National Historical Park



