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Research
Colonial
Jamestown

Jamestown Today

a

National Shrine

by
Chas E Hatch, Jr
1957

Illustrations "Jamestown Today: a National Shrine"

Color Slides
Park

Captions

No. J-100

OR
Photo No. 10,125

The Old Church Tower at Jamestown, believed to have been built as a part of the first brick church begun about 1639. Behind the Tower is the Memorial Church erected in 1907.

No. J-94

OR
Photo No. 8629

The old graveyard at Jamestown where many early Virginians were buried.

No. J-47

OR
Photo No. 8587

The objects shown here represent some of the types of seventeenth century objects, used by the early residents of Jamestown, which have been excavated on the town site.

No. J-62

Clay pipes in the Jamestown collection. In excavations on the town site some 50,000 fragments (including possibly 5,000 bowls) have been recovered.

Black and White
Photographs

Captions

Park Photos

- No. 9518 Looking toward Jamestown Island from Glass House Point in the area where, until about 1780, an isthmus connected these two bodies of land. Note the "lone cypress" in the James River in the right background. Erosion of the Island at this point, the west end, has destroyed as much, perhaps, as 25 acres.
- No. 9770 Looking west from the east end of the town site of old "James Towne." The Ambler House ruins stand just beyond the veteran old walnut tree. In the background is the Tercentenary Monument and the present Jamestown laboratory building which houses the archeological collection, rich in seventeenth century materials, a preservation laboratory, and the Exhibit Rooms.
- No. 9769 Site of the first statehouse at Jamestown. The Virginia Colony's first such government building stood near the James River in the eastern part of the town. Note outline of the structure on the ground and marker which identifies the site.
- No. 2612 First statehouse foundations at Jamestown exposed during excavations in 1934-1935. This was a group of three buildings the center of which functioned as the colony's statehouse for a period of about 15 years, 1641-1656. This site was first identified by George C. Gregory, of Richmond, Va., in 1931 and fully excavated by the National Park Service four years later.

- No. 10,125
Color Slide
J-100
- The Old Church Tower at Jamestown, believed to have been built as a part of the first brick church begun about 1639. Behind the Tower is the Memorial Church erected in 1907.
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- The old graveyard at Jamestown where many early Virginians were buried.
- No. 8633
- The Pocahontas Monument designed by William Ordway Partridge. Note Tercentenary Monument on left. These monuments stand near the Old Church Tower.
- No. 9361
- Looking across the Last Statehouse Group foundations toward the James River. In the 92 years that Jamestown was the capital of the Colony there were four separate statehouse structures. The last two were on this site.
- No. 9394
- The Abler House Ruins. Although, at present, this structure dominates the east end of the town site, it was an eighteenth century plantation house type of building. It was not a part of the seventeenth century town of Jamestown.
- No. 9810
- The house that stood on the foundations shown here, in part, was a mid-seventeenth century type of Jamestown residence. Exact date of construction and owner are not known. An attempt has been made to stabilize this foundation so that it can be left exposed for visitors to see. If the stabilization proves successful other such ruins will be treated in the same manner.

No. 8387

SE
Color Slide
J-47

The objects shown here represent some of the types of seventeenth century objects, used by the early residents of Jamestown, which have been excavated on the town site.

No. 9829

A display of glass kettles and bottle necks found at Jamestown. This is one of the displays assembled for the Exhibit Rooms in an exhibit revision undertaken in 1950-1951.

No. 7321

SE
No. 7322

A representative selection of ceramic objects restored from fragments excavated on the town site at Jamestown.

James town Today

A National Shrine

By Charles E. Hatch, Jr.
Park Historian
Colonial National Historical Park

One of the most startling facts confronting the visitor who comes to Jamestown for the first time and who has not enjoyed the benefit of background reading is that today there is no town of Jamestown -- no restaurants, no movie house, no shopping district, not even a residential section. When he stops, however, to ponder the facts that this town established in 1607 was the capital of Virginia for almost a hundred years, that it lingered on as a dying town for another three-quarters of a century to expire as a functioning community about the time of the American Revolution, and that since then another 175 years have rolled by, he becomes aware of the growing oldness of our country. He then realizes that insofar as English America is concerned he is now beginning at the beginning.

Dr. J. A. O. Chandler, long time President of the College of William and Mary, speaking during the Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition

in 1907, had this to say: "The settlement at Jamestown in 1607 marks the birth of the American Nation...[It] no longer exists as a place of residence, it is no longer a mart, but its part in American history was not in vain. For thirteen years before another English settlement had been established in America it was the center in Virginia of the operations of the London Company and for eighty years longer it still continued to be the central point of activity in the colony."

Jamestown was settled twenty years after the ill-fated attempts of the "Lost Colony" of Roanoke. On May 13, 1607 when the fleet of three small ships (Cusan Constant, Godspeed, and Discovery) under Christopher Newport dropped anchor, or as George Percy, one of the party, relates, "moored to the Trees" near the shore. These early settlers in stepping ashore and undertaking their part in the conquest of the American wilderness were in a real sense but continuing the dreams, hopes, and plans of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Sir Walter Raleigh and other stout-hearted Englishmen. Their task was none the less a formidable one. Alone in a strange land, 3,000 miles from their native home and surrounded by much unknown, they persevered despite hunger, disease,

hostile savages, and even death itself. Our forebears on the banks of the James were sturdy men indeed.

The choice of Jamestown as a site for settlement may not have been a wise one due to its lowness, its exposure of insect-breeding, brackish marsh, and its lack of good clear water. It did, however, have some advantages and in part -- but only in part -- met the requirements given to aid in the selection of a point of settlement. It lay 30 miles up the James River from the Chesapeake Bay somewhat removed from the occasionally Spanish infested waters of the Atlantic Ocean at a point where the James River narrows appreciably. Jamestown Island was not then an island but a peninsula, tacked to the mainland by a narrow isthmus. This isthmus gave a dry land approach to the hinterland and allowed a degree of control for the "island" itself. The isthmus was an important geographical feature until, through natural erosion, it was completely obliterated near the end of the eighteenth century. It was then that Jamestown became the true island that it is today.

In the beginning the triangular palisaded fort was built near the smaller (west) end of the pear-shaped island of some 1,600 acres. "James

"City" developed around the fort, slowly at first but gained momentum as the years passed. Homes and public buildings in the first years were flimsy structures of planks, logs, and thatch. Then came more substantial construction utilizing brick, plaster, tile, framing, and the like. Much of this material was prepared on the site itself as brick and tile factory remains attest.

The Jamestown of 1625 was a community of some 124 residents with another 51 living outside the "city" limits in the Island. The capital town of the growing Virginia colony then had a church, a guard house, 4 stores and some 33 houses. It was not until the 1630-40 period that all-brick houses began to appear. Later such construction was required by law. But all this has passed away. Today the only surviving architectural feature of seventeenth century Jamestown standing above ground is the ivy covered Old Church Tower.

Doubtless the motives in the minds of the men who settled at Jamestown as well as those in the thoughts of the backers of this colonizing venture, were many and varied. On one point, however, as the extensive promotional literature of the period will testify, there was more or less

general agreement. The enterprise should show a profit both to the colonizers and to the Company. To attain such an objective there was activity in many directions. The harvesting of timber products was partially successful as was the trade in furs. One place name at Jamestown today -- Pitch and Tar Swamp -- grew out of the attempted production of naval stores. The search for gold and other precious metals went unrewarded as did the abortive efforts to develop silk culture and to manufacture glass. To promote the latter furnaces were built and even today their foundations (excavated in 1948-1949) exist on the mainland immediately adjacent to Jamestown Island. In fact the area on which they rest is still known as Glass House Point.

It was the land that held the wealth of Virginia and it was the tobacco plant that proved to be the economic cornerstone of the entire colony. John Rolfe did much to foster the introduction of tobacco cultivation and aided in the development of the trade which this crop made possible. This same John Rolfe married Pocahontas, the daughter of the Indian chieftain Powhatan, and thereby helped to promote years of peace with the natives at a time when peace and freedom from attack were sorely needed. A monument to Pocahontas has overlooked the church area at Jamestown since it was placed there in 1907.

Tobacco, always hungry for new acres, hastened the spread of settlement over the Virginia tidewater. Plantations with their own wharves and shipping facilities multiplied along the numerous bays and creeks. This condition had a decidedly adverse effect on the physical growth of Jamestown which always remained small. Throughout its history it was seldom more than a village. Even its street plan fluctuated with the years. At its maximum extent it was a thin strip of a town, sandwiched between the James River on the south and a sizeable marsh on the north, and extended perhaps as much as three-quarters of a mile in length. Visitors today have full opportunity to explore the entire town site.

Jamestown failed to establish itself as a trade center or a port of lasting importance and may even have begun to grow smaller after 1650. It functioned principally, in the last decades of the seventeenth century, as the seat of government and its business life, what there was of it, was built around catering to the needs of the governor, the councilors, the burgesses, and their assistants. There is little wonder then that after the burning of the last (fourth) statehouse, the foundations of which can still be seen,

and the decision to remove the capital to Williamsburg in 1699, the town quickly declined. Jamestown Island and even the town area itself actually became a functioning part of the Ambler and Travis family plantation units. The old Ambler House ruins are a continuing reminder of this.

Chevalier d'Asteville, with French troops at Jamestown in 1781 just prior to the Siege of Yorktown, penned this description of once flourishing Jamestown: "This little town, one of the oldest in America, had been destroyed for the most part. One finds there ruins, the debris of conflagrations, tombs overturned, other fine monuments broken..." In 1816 another visitor recorded that nothing remains of Jamestown "but the land they cultivated, and their graves."

True it is that the town had passed away as far as the eye could see, but much that began at Jamestown was still alive in 1816 and continues with us today. Some of our most cherished institutions can be traced to humble beginnings at Jamestown and on the banks of the James. Much could be expected since those first Englishmen brought with them, insofar as they could, their established way of life including their dreams for the future. The

church, trial by jury, and property rights were among those things which they helped to transplant to this side of the Atlantic. Then, too, in 1619 at Jamestown the first representative legislative assembly in America convened. Congress and our state legislatures are but a fuller realization of this first historic meeting which took place in the church whose walls may be those which are still visible in the Memorial Church standing behind the Old Tower.

A feeling for self-government and a sense of individual and group rights can be detected in numerous events within the confines of the first Virginia capital even though there was high regard, general respect, and acceptance of the decisions of the Crown and those authorities. In 1655 a royal governor, Sir John Harvey, was temporarily deposed by action of the General Assembly. Harvey was a property holder at Jamestown and his early tract in the "New Towne" section of the "Citty", developed in the years 1619-1625, can actually be located on the ground today.

In 1676-1677 came another outbreak by the angered citizens who followed the lead of Nathaniel Bacon, Jr., in open rebellion. This was one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of the English colonies and stands out as a highlight in seventeenth century Virginia. It is intimately

a part of the Jamestown story since many events associated with it took place at the seat of government and resulted in a wholesale burning of the town -- a disaster from which it never fully recovered. The rebellion failed in its immediate objective, yet it was long remembered by both home and Colonial officials.

Undoubtedly it was with these facts in mind that Governor George G. Perry of Virginia in 1936 would say of Jamestown:

This shrine of National and world interest belongs to no individual division of this great country. Jamestown Island with its inspiring traditions is the property of the whole people. It is sacred to Liberty and to the Nation.

This concise statement contains the basic reasons why the President of the United States, acting under authority granted by Congress, set aside this area "...for the preservation of the historical structures and remains thereon and for the benefit and enjoyment of the people...." Its preservation and care were entrusted to the United States National Park Service of the Department of the Interior.

Jamestown continues as a part of Colonial National Historical Park except for some twenty acres embracing the west end of the town site which is being cared for by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities as it has been since it was first acquired by this organization in 1893. A cooperative agreement made in 1940 between the AFVA and the Department of the Interior has promoted a unified program for the entire Jamestown locality and the Association area has been designated a national historic site.

With the actual acquisition of the major portion of the Jamestown area by the federal government in 1934, the National Park Service inaugurated a broad program of study and investigation. Before a full plan for the preservation, development, and interpretation of the area could be worked out, the pressing concern was the location and accumulation of data upon which to develop a more complete understanding of life and conditions as they existed in seventeenth century Virginia, particularly at Jamestown. Such an undertaking posed many problems, for the story of Jamestown is a vital segment of our national history involving the origins and growth of the culture of this formative period of English colonization.

A program of study involving research in its many aspects has been active since 1934. Work has been done in the leading libraries of the country, some study has been made in England, and considerable archeological work on the town site itself has been carried on. This research program is a long term one and remains far from complete; substantial progress has been made, however. Work is continuing as world conditions, appropriations by the Congress, and outside financial and research assistance permit.

At present a sizeable body of material has been assembled -- enough to permit basic planning for the future. Historical data are at hand in some bulk. A serious gap, which we hope can be filled eventually, although it is becoming more doubtful with each passing year, is the absence of contemporary plans or drawings of seventeenth century Jamestown. Specific sketches of even parts of the town or individual buildings are, up to this point, almost non-existent.

Excavations on the town site have been a fruitful source of research. From the less than 20 percent of the area that has been excavated have come thousands of objects that add immeasurably to the knowledge of seventeenth century life. The great bulk of these items are made up of objects of iron, copper, brass, bronze, pewter, clay, and earth. Occasionally there is a

wool, leather, or wood object. Some of the more interesting categories are clay tobacco pipes, glass wine bottles, pottery vessels, Delft tiles, gun and sword fragments, bullets, cannon balls, spurs, stirrups and bridles, locks and keys, nails, window glass, axes, hoes, spoons, forks, shears, pins, thimbles, buckles, combs, and rings. Many individual classifications are sorely in need of additional study and evaluation. This growing collection promises to become one of the finest of its kind in the country. In the case of sgraffito ware, for example, the Jamestown collection seems to be better even than anything found in England where this popular seventeenth century ceramic product was made.

The Jamestown material is housed in a field laboratory on the Island and is open for use by any serious student. A section of the laboratory has been set aside as the National Park Service Exhibit Rooms and here are displayed many of the finer specimens which have been unearthed. These displays are arranged for the visitor and, when taken with narrative and illustrative displays, are designed to give the story of the town and its meaning in American history as well as to impart a feeling for the life of the times. The exhibits in the AFVA Relic House are a valuable asset in the attainment of

possible the precise location of some early landholdings.

Paths which traverse much of the town site have been laid out.

These, following where possible the routes of old Jamestown streets, make

it easy to wander over much of the area and to visit the more significant

points identified as they are by markers, special exhibits, original foundations,

monuments, or Memorial buildings. As preservation techniques are perfected

it is expected that an increasing number of the original foundations will be exposed to view.

Such is Jamestown today where peace and tranquility reign. It is somewhat apart from the hustle and quick pace of modern twentieth century

America. The town has long since disintegrated and no new urban or

industrial development rose to engulf the site. Its very quietness,

separateness, and feeling of oldness constitute one of its most satisfying

inspirational qualities. This is among those things that the National

Park Service is dedicated to preserve.

this goal. Here, for example, are the earrings thought to be those worn by Pocahontas when she posed for a contemporary portrait. All of these features are temporary and a rather comprehensive museum is now being planned for the future.

Combined historical and archeological work has been instrumental, too, in locating and exposing the remains of many seventeenth century structures. More than 30 building remains have come to light. Sometimes these consist of mere footings for a frame structure, but then again there are solid brick foundations and well preserved cellars with interesting structural detail. With each sizeable foundation there are usually quantities of fragments of hardware, glass, roofing tile, and related building materials. Among the more prominent structures which have been fully excavated are the early governors' house, the home of Henry Martineau, a prominent seventeenth century Virginian, and the first statehouse. Brick kiln ruins, walls, lime kilns, drains, and even road traces are among the interesting features unearthed. The reopening of old property line ditches and the rediscovery of fence lines (by identifying post holes), coupled with documentary record, has made