

History Travel - See Jamestown Settlement

2007 is the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia, and the sentimental "birth" of America. This is a perfect time to visit Jamestown Settlement (a living history re-creation) as well as nearby Historic Jamestowne (the original site).

Initially, Jamestown was a private commercial venture, sponsored by the Virginia Company. Its stockholders hoped to profit from the natural resources of the New World, but they also supported English goals – counterbalancing Spanish colonization, spreading Christianity among the Native Peoples, and finding a northwest passage to the Orient. Extreme hardships and Indian battles took their toll though, and in 1624, control of Virginia passed to the crown of England. Interestingly, as a royal colony Jamestown finally was able to enter a period of relative peace and prosperity. In succeeding years, it even became a land of opportunity for the English poor who signed on as indentured servants, bound by contracts to work for several years in return for their passage to America. When their contracts expired, many were able to purchase land at a low cost and begin working their own farms.

The Jamestown Settlement of today is a Living History museum, built to commemorate these important early years. For young and old, it offers much to enjoy. Begin your visit in the expansive indoor museum complex, where a film presents an overview of Jamestown's origins in England and its first 20 years as a colony. Exhibit galleries combine artifacts from the period with graphics and reproductions to expand on the Jamestown story.

After this orientation, step outside to explore four representative Living History sites populated by interpreters in period clothing. Seventeenth-century activities and special events bring Jamestown back to life.

*****Powhatan Indian Village*****At their height of power, the Powhatan Indians held a territory that stretched from south of the Potomac River to the south side of the James River. The nearby English colonists traded goods with them. They also traded "sons," who served as interpreters and links between very different people – young Thomas Savage of Jamestown lived with the Indians, and Namontack lived with the English for short periods. While both peoples realized the mutual benefit of peaceful relations, the goodwill did not last. War erupted, and the Powhatans were crushed. Around the mid-1600s, the first Indian reservations were established; they limited the land Natives

could use for hunting and fishing.

Today, the Powhatan Indian village at Jamestown Settlement is a remarkably authentic re-creation of better times. The houses, garden and ceremonial dance circle are based on eyewitness drawings and written accounts as well as archaeological findings. Interpreters in Indian attire cultivate crops, craft pottery, make bone tools, tan deerskin and weave plant fibers into rope.

*****James Fort*****Immediately upon arriving in the New World, the Jamestown colonists focused on ways to avoid the mistakes made at ill-fated Roanoke Island (England's first two attempts at colonization). The site they chose for settlement was low and swampy but highly defensible from both land and sea. They divided into three groups: one to build a fort, another to clear the land for crops and then plant the seeds they had brought, and a third to explore the river upstream for a possible passage west to the Orient. (Clearly, they didn't realize that the coveted Orient was well beyond reach.) The hope was that Jamestown would become a "factory-fort" (trading post), able to effectively protect itself and be self-sustaining. It was a very humble beginning.

James Fort played an important role until the mid-1620s, when the colony expanded into a "New Town" to the east. While the fort fell to ruin, it was not lost forever. Here at Jamestown Settlement, you can visit an extraordinary representation based on eye witness accounts, a sketch from the period, educated guess-work and information emerging from remains of the original fort being unearthed just a mile away at Historic Jamestowne. Inside the wooden palisade are thatch-roofed, wattle-and-daub structures approximating the colony's church, storehouse, homes and armory. Jamestown interpreters in period clothing are busy working around the fort, engaged in the daily activities typical of the early 1600s, including gardening, cooking, carpentry, blacksmithing and military matters such as musket practice.

*****Susan Constant, Godspeed & Discovery*****Three merchant ships loaded with passengers and cargo had embarked on the voyage from England to Virginia on December 20, 1606. Destined to set the course of American history were many gentlemen, a blacksmith, four carpenters, two bricklayers, a barber, a minister and some general laborers. They endured 4-1/2 grueling months at sea, wracked by storms and illness. And yet, of the 144 people on board – all men and boys – only one died during the voyage.

Roughly a month after Jamestown was founded, the "Susan Constant" and "Godspeed" returned to England with 39 crew members, leaving 104 courageous settlers to build a viable colony in an alien land. The smaller ship, "Discovery," stayed behind and was used by Captain John Smith to trade goods with Indian villages along the Chesapeake Bay and Tidewater rivers. It also was used to chart the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts and to obtain fish from northern waters for the Virginia colony.

Today, you can board full-scale replicas of these three English vessels and talk with costumed interpreters about the spirit of adventure that motivated the early colonists. The barque-rigged "Susan Constant" is especially beautiful. Re-created at Jamestown Settlement, she was commissioned in 1991 and now periodically plies the waters of Virginia and Chesapeake Bay as a goodwill ambassador vessel.

*****Riverfront Discovery Area*****At discovery stations along a winding pathway, historical interpreters provide a wealth of information about colonial life in America. They highlight the role of waterways in seventeenth-century travel, commerce and cultural exchange from the perspective of Powhatan Indian, European and African traditions.

*Jamestown Settlement is located at the Colonial Parkway and SR 31 in James City County, VA, near Historic Jamestowne. Open daily except December 25 and January 1. Admission charged. Tickets available for Jamestown Settlement alone or in combination with nearby Yorktown Victory Center.

Excerpted from new travel guide "America's Living History-The Early Years," Red Corral Publishing, May 2007, www.AmericasLivingHistory.com Suzanne and Craig Sheumaker, Authors.

Suzanne and Craig Sheumaker

This husband-and-wife team has driven more than 125,000 miles by car and motorhome in recent years, exploring America. While searching out scenic locations for Craig's stock photography business, they became intrigued by the many historic sites that preserve and replicate our nation's history. Ultimately, their discoveries led them to form a publishing company and produce one of their own works, America's Living History-The Early Years, as their first entry into the publishing world.

Suzanne began her career writing about travel. After nine years, she switched to biomedical writing (her other major interest), but then returned to travel writing as she became passionate about history travel.

Craig is a graphic designer and photographer who has owned his own design firm, producing both print and multi-media projects for a wide range of business clients. Over time, he has emphasized his photography business and traveled with Suzanne to all 50 states, seeking out the best photo opportunities and exploring America's living history.