

Jamestown and Bermuda

VIRGINIA COMPANY COLONIES



Exploring the shared history and links between England's first two permanent colonies in the New World

Four hundred years ago, English merchants and politicians created the Virginia Company to organize and fund an English colony in America. In 1607 Jamestown was established in the new colony of Virginia. Over the next several years, the Company raised funds, obtained supplies and recruited new settlers. When the largest of these early supply voyages was dispatched to Virginia in 1609, the islands of the Bermudas were accidentally “discovered” by the



Map of Bermuda, Willem Blaeu, 1633, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation collection.

English. The Virginia Company then eagerly created its second New World colony.

England's Virginia Company colonies hold much in common. Both were founded on the same principles of government and religion. Both were settled by people who shared a common cultural heritage.

Today Virginia is no longer a British colony, and Bermuda has become a British Overseas Territory. However, both continue to share benefits from the visitors to their historic sites and beautiful geographic landscapes.

SPECIAL EXHIBITION AT JAMESTOWN SETTLEMENT

March 1 through October 15, 2009



“Historic Voyage, Sea Venture and Consorts at Sea 1609,” Deryck Foster, 1984, The Bank of Bermuda Foundation, Hamilton.

The Sea Venture Wreck and The Tempest

In June 1609 the English sent a fleet of nine supply ships to Virginia carrying new settlers and cargo. The fleet got caught in an Atlantic hurricane, and the largest vessel, the *Sea Venture*, wrecked off the coast of Bermuda. Virginia’s new lieutenant governor and 150 stranded passengers spent the next ten months on the islands. They scavenged from the wreckage of their ship and built two new vessels to carry them to Virginia. Two mutinous settlers remained behind, justifying England’s claim to Bermuda.

Tales of the shipwreck reached Virginia Company officials as ships returned to England from supplying Virginia. These stories found their way into literary works such as William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, written in 1611. Bermuda held a special place in the minds of the English after they learned of the miraculous way in which the passengers of *Sea Venture* were saved on the islands’ reefs.

Speaker’s Chair, circa 1735, Virginia House of Delegates and Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. This ceremonial chair was used by the Speaker of the House of Burgesses (House of Delegates after 1776) during legislative sessions in Williamsburg and in Richmond after the state capital was moved there in 1780.



Bermuda’s Beginnings

When the *Sea Venture* wrecked on the reefs of Bermuda, the passengers and crew were able to salvage some materials and get ashore. They learned to survive tapping the native plants, birds and fish, as well as the hogs that had swum ashore from earlier Spanish shipwrecks. After ten months the settlers sailed to Virginia, anxious to spread the word about the resources they found available on the Bermuda islands.

In 1612 King James I granted the Virginia Company a new charter that included Bermuda, laying claim to its resources. The Company sent the first group of 60 settlers there under Governor Richard Moore. The colonists built small forts for defense against the Spanish, just as at Jamestown. They established their settlement at St. George’s and founded the first Anglican church, St. Peter’s. Both Jamestown and Bermuda remained primarily Anglican throughout the colonial period.

A “General Assemblie in Manner a Parliament”

In 1615 the Bermuda Company received its own charter and sent Governor Daniel Tucker. Under Governor Nathaniel Butler in 1620, Bermudians held their first General Assembly, preceded a year earlier by one in Jamestown. Within the first decades, members of both colonies established courts and surveyed the land, dividing it into parcels for settlement. In Bermuda the land was divided according to “tribes,” while Virginia’s first settlements were called “particular plantations.”

Although King James I dissolved the Virginia Company in 1624, the Bermuda Company existed until 1684 when it was replaced by royal government. Virginia’s capital at Jamestown continued until 1699 when government moved to Williamsburg.

St. George’s remained the capital of Bermuda until 1815 when it moved to Hamilton. Today Bermuda is governed by a premier and a governor, the Queen’s representative. Laws are passed by Bermuda’s bicameral Parliament and interpreted by its Supreme Court.



“Unidentified Blockade Runner Being Pursued,” circle of Alexander Charles Stuart, oil on canvas, The Mariners’ Museum, Newport News, Virginia.

The “Gibraltar of the West”

Because of its location, Bermuda has always played a key role in military activities on both sides of the Atlantic. Since early settlers at both Jamestown and Bermuda feared Spanish attacks, those at Jamestown constructed a wooden palisade while those in Bermuda built fortifications from the native limestone. Over time, both colonies added forts and raised militias for defense. In 1809 the British constructed the Royal Naval Dockyard in Bermuda to defend the western Atlantic shipping lanes.

During the American Civil War, Bermuda was the home to blockade runners, small fast ships that broke through the Union blockade to supply the Confederacy with arms and ammunition. In World War II the United States established navy and army bases and an airstrip on Bermuda to assist England in defending the North Atlantic. The U.S. and British army bases were officially closed in 1995.

From Tobacco to Tourists – Atlantic Economies

As in Virginia, Bermuda investors hoped to profit from local products. In the islands those included pearls, whales, and a large supply of ambergris located by the first settlers. Investors also had hopes for exotic plants and tobacco, but in Bermuda none were very successful. The insufficient amount of land made agriculture difficult. In the 1670s some Bermudians went south to the Turks Islands in the West Indies to harvest salt for export to the mainland colonies. Salt production, maritime trade and privateering strengthened Bermuda’s economy.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Bermudians developed shipbuilding and furniture-making using their native cedar. Both industries flourished, and the Bermuda sloop became famous for its speed and maneuverability. Late-19th-century visits of artists, writers and celebrities launched a popular tourism industry. Tourism and 20th-century international business and finance bolstered the economy.

A Social Melting Pot

Initially, English and other Europeans settled Jamestown and Bermuda. In Virginia they interacted with the native Powhatan Indians. Investors brought the first Africans to Bermuda in 1616 to dive for pearls. Three years later, 20-some Africans arrived in Virginia. Most Africans became enslaved in both colonies, but Bermuda abolished slavery in 1834, much earlier than Virginia. In the 19th century, Bermuda attracted West Indians and Portuguese settlers from Madeira and the Azores.

The people of Bermuda established two towns, St. George’s (1612) and Hamilton (1793). When the capital moved to Hamilton in 1815, so did much of the population and most of the developing commerce, transportation and other services. While some Bermudians were drawn to the mainland colonies, the Bermudian way of life attracted vacationing artists, writers and celebrities such as Princess Louise, daughter of Queen Victoria.

St. George Tucker, an 18th-century Virginia judge and legal scholar born in Bermuda, promoted trade between Virginia and Bermuda.

Joseph H. Rainey was born in South Carolina to enslaved parents and escaped to Bermuda in 1862. He returned to South Carolina in 1866 and later served in the state senate and U.S. Congress.

Georgia O’Keeffe, one of many artists inspired by Bermuda’s beauty, lived in Williamsburg, Virginia, for part of her youth, completed high school at Chatham Hall near Danville, and briefly studied and taught art at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.



“Banyan Tree Trunk,” Georgia O’Keeffe, graphite on paper, 1934, the Masterworks Foundation and Masterworks Museum of Bermuda Art.

“Virginia and Bermuda: Virginia Company Colonies” Lecture Series

An exhibition lecture series, sponsored by the Dominion Foundation, features guest speakers on four Saturdays at 7 p.m. in Jamestown Settlement’s Robins Foundation Theater:

April 25 – “The Lion and the Mouse ... the Story of America and Bermuda” – Lucinda Spurling, Afflare Films, Bermuda.

June 13 – “The Shipwreck That Saved Jamestown: The Sea Venture Castaways and the Fate of America” – Lorri Glover, University of Tennessee Professor of History and author.

July 11 – “Sister Colonies: Virginia, Bermuda, and the Beginnings of English America” – Michael Jarvis, University of Rochester Associate Professor of History and author.

August 8 – “Somewhere Beyond the Sea: Art, Artists, and Bermuda” – Tom Butterfield, Founder and Creative Director of the Masterworks Foundation and Masterworks Museum of Bermuda Art.

Admission to the lectures is free, and advance reservations are required by contacting (757) 253-4415 or rsvp.lecture@jyf.virginia.gov.

Jamestown Settlement and Yorktown Victory Center living-history museums are administered by the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, an educational institution of the Commonwealth of Virginia, accredited by the American Association of Museums, that fosters awareness and understanding of the early history of the United States and the enduring legacies bequeathed to the nation.

Jamestown Settlement interprets the founding of Jamestown, America’s first permanent English settlement, and the diverse cultures, including Powhatan Indian, African and European, that converged in 17th-century Virginia. The Yorktown

Victory Center tells the story of the American Revolution and the development of the new nation.

“Jamestown and Bermuda: Virginia Company Colonies,” at Jamestown Settlement March 1 through October 15, 2009, is funded by grants of \$25,000 or more from James City County, the Bank of Bermuda Foundation and the Jamestown 400th Commemoration Commission, and other donations. Twenty-four lenders in Bermuda, Virginia, Canada and the United Kingdom provided objects for exhibit. The St. George’s Foundation worked with the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation to facilitate artifact loans from Bermuda institutions.



Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
P.O. Box 1607
Williamsburg, Virginia 23187-1607
(757) 253-4838 toll-free (888) 593-4682



www.historyisfun.org