

Jamestown's Legacy to the American Revolution

By the time of the American Revolution, Virginia had outgrown its original 17th-century colonial capital city. Once at the center of Virginia affairs, Jamestown ceased to be a real town in the early 18th century, and by 1775 few people still lived there. However, Jamestown's legacy endured. The descendants of the colonists who had created Jamestown and 17th-century Virginia remained a vital force within Virginia society. This special exhibition looks at the lives of some of these individuals who were caught up in the tumultuous events of the Revolution. Their stories are illustrated with more than 60 period artifacts – a sampling of objects acquired by the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation for exhibit at the future American Revolution Museum at Yorktown.

A sword inscribed with the year 1776 and the name of its owner has a silver pommel in the form of an eagle. Over the course of the Revolution, the eagle became one of the symbols of the new United States.



King George III's Virginia

King George ascended to the British throne in 1760, during the period of the Seven Years' War, and before the start of events that led up to the Revolutionary War. Throughout his rule, George III worked to strengthen and reinforce British administration in the American colonies, and in most colonies appointed a governor. The day-to-day administration of affairs was carried out by representative assemblies that clashed with the royally appointed governors. These colonial assemblies resisted attempts to enforce royal policies with which they did not agree and resented Britain's control of their trading enterprises. Eventually, King George's American subjects would rise in opposition to his policies. The American Revolution began a new Virginia that was the creation of people who were born there and called it home.



A massive portrait of King George III in coronation robes is one of several done by the studio of Allan Ramsay between 1762 and 1784. The gilt frame also dates to the 18th century.

Merchants, Planters and Farmers

In pre-revolutionary Virginia, agriculture and trade drove the economy. This legacy began with Virginia's founding and the introduction of tobacco cultivation. Scattered farms and plantations predominated and kept most people rooted in the soil, while towns remained small. Other colonists served as merchants who exported and marketed the agricultural products and imported supplies and luxury goods that farmers and planters desired.

The war had a greater effect on larger Tidewater planters who relied more on imported British goods

than did small farmers on the frontier. When the colonies decided against the importation of British goods, it was Virginia's large planters who sacrificed the most. The Ambler family suffered serious financial reverses during the war, while farmers like Azel Benthall were better able to cope with wartime shortages. The livelihoods of merchants who depended upon both internal and external trade were affected as well.



Silver coffee pot, London, 1774-75. English-made silver coffee and tea pots were sold in large numbers in the colonies.

Soldiers and Sailors

Most Virginians who fought in the war served either as militiamen or as soldiers of the Continental Line. Militiamen served part-time, patrolling the homefront and keeping watch on Loyalist activity. Continentals such as Colonel Richard Taylor served longer terms under the authority of the Continental Congress. Virginia's regiments fought in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the Carolinas.

Virginia's small naval force operated chiefly to keep the state's rivers and the Chesapeake Bay safe from the British navy and to assist in the transport of supplies for the Continental Army. Virginia's Committee of Safety both purchased ships and built a fleet of row galleys at scattered shipyards in remote locations up rivers and creeks so that they would not be easily attacked by the British navy. Experienced merchant captains like Edward Travis IV were recruited to command the ships of the small Virginia navy.



Small trunks like this 18th-century example, which belonged to a shipbuilder for the Continental Navy, were used to protect valuable objects and important papers on sea voyages.

Statesmen and Diplomats

Numerous Virginians served the Patriot cause in the public arena. Virginians who were famous for their oratory style, stirring essays and commitment to the Revolution included those who worked at both the state and national levels – men such as Jefferson, Henry, Randolph and several Lees. Planter Richard Bland II was a strong advocate for colonial control of internal affairs and served as a member of the Virginia committees of Correspondence and Public Safety and the Continental Congress.

Other Virginians traveled as diplomats. The United States Congress appointed ambassadors to European countries to solicit financial and military aid. A Virginian, Arthur Lee, helped to negotiate the French alliance. Another group of Virginians looked west.

Some of them, like General Joseph Martin, Jr., had experience dealing with Indian tribes in the western lands and were appointed agents to negotiate for the states and the new nation.



An American-made, late-18th-century gorget with a silver bear symbol exemplifies ceremonial gift-giving that took place in negotiations with American Indian tribes on the western frontier.

The Father of our Country

George Washington, like many other Virginia patriots, could trace his ancestry back to a 17th-century colonist, one who sat in the House of Burgesses at Jamestown.

Less than a decade after leading the United States to victory as commander of the Continental Army, George Washington reluctantly accepted the office of the first president of the United States, serving two terms before retiring to private life in 1797.



This creamware jug, made in Liverpool, England, about 1800 bears an image of George Washington.

“**Jamestown’s Legacy to the American Revolution**” provides an advance look at a selection of artifacts destined for exhibit at the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown, planned to replace the Yorktown Victory Center by late 2016. Located adjacent to the Yorktown Battlefield where American independence was won, this new museum is envisioned to be a nationally significant facility with state-of-the-art exhibition galleries and an expanded living-history program, providing a renewed perspective on the meaning and impact of the American Revolution.

The **Yorktown Victory Center**, which will remain open during construction of the new museum, and **Jamestown Settlement** are administered by the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, an educational institution of the Commonwealth of Virginia, accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.

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Front cover image: Statue of George Washington, 19th century, William James Hubbard after Jean-Antoine Houdon. Gift of the Library of Virginia.

All artifacts pictured in this brochure are in the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation collection.

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March 1, 2013 – January 20, 2014
Jamestown Settlement

*featuring
artifacts
acquired for
exhibit
at the
future
American
Revolution
Museum at
Yorktown*

