

Time Travel to Jamestown

By Jeff Ives

Four hundred years after its founding, Jamestown is a historical hot spot.

Stepping into Jamestown Settlement museum in Virginia is like stepping into the past. And that's just what thousands of people are planning to do this spring. May [2007] marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in North America. Organizers are expecting nearly 90,000 visitors on the weekend of May 11 to 13, when many major events are planned.

Jamestown is a tourist destination for people who want a front-row seat to American history. "The whole idea is to give people an idea of Jamestown and the world in 1607," historian Tom Davidson told *WR News*. Davidson helped put together exhibits at the Jamestown museum for the anniversary.



Jamestown Settlement Museum

Visitors to Jamestown Settlement can try on armor and talk to tour guides. This year, more

Visitors to Jamestown Settlement can try on English armor and watch experts demonstrate how to fire muskets. Tourists can also go aboard and explore **replicas**, or models, of the three ships that brought the first settlers to present-day Virginia.

America's First Settlement

The story of Jamestown began on May 14, 1607, when about 100 English men and boys arrived in present-day Virginia. They came seeking gold and other treasures. The settlers, called **colonists**, built a fort on the bank of a river and named their colony Jamestown, after King James I of England.

The colonists were sent by **merchants**, or businesspeople, of the Virginia Company to make money in North America. But the settlers faced many problems, including disease, starvation, and conflict with the area's Powhatan people.

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At first, settlers stayed close together for protection. "There were hundreds of people living inside a wooden-walled fort," explains Davidson. Living in the fort helped the settlers defend themselves from attack, but it also made hunting for food or growing crops difficult.

Captain John Smith was one of Jamestown's original leaders. He took command of the colony in 1608. When the colony was in danger of running out of food, Smith gave an order: "He who does not work, will not eat."



Claudia Ramirez

The Godspeed spent five months crossing the Atlantic. The original *Godspeed* carried 39 passengers from England to Virginia, making two stops along the way. The new *Godspeed* traveled from Maine to Virginia, stopping along the way to let visitors see the ship.

By 1613, Jamestown had expanded into a successful colony. At about that time, the settlers began to grow tobacco. Tobacco was a **cash crop**, meaning that it could be sold in large amounts to England. In the following years, the settlers pushed the Powhatan off the land and built tobacco **plantations**, or large farms. Later, the Jamestown colonists brought slaves from Africa to work on the plantations.

Over time, Jamestown grew to become the colony of Virginia. Virginia was one of the 13 colonies that joined in 1776 to rebel against England, starting the American Revolution (1775-1783).

Digging Up the Past

Much is known about Jamestown, yet more details are being discovered. For more than a hundred years, experts thought the site of

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the original settlement had been destroyed by the James River. In 1994, **archaeologists**, or scientists who study the remains left behind by past cultures, discovered what may be Jamestown's original location.

"Visitors can see things being excavated that haven't seen the light of day in 400 years," Jamestown spokesperson Mike Litterst told *WR News*. Scientists are currently looking for the foundation of the first church that the Jamestown settlers built. If found, it will be the oldest English church ever discovered in the United States.

The skeletons of two settlers have already been uncovered at the site. They are on display beneath a glass case, exactly as they were found. Historians believe that one of the skeletons is that of Captain Bartholomew Gosnoll, a member of Jamestown's original ruling council. Gosnoll and Jamestown Settlement will have a lot of visitors in the coming weeks for the 400th anniversary. "It's the biggest event we've had since 1957, when the [Jamestown] museum first opened," says Litterst.

Culture Clash

When the English colonists first settled in what is now Virginia, a powerful Native American group had lived on the land for hundreds of years. "There were about 20,000 Powhatan people there when the English arrived in Jamestown," Virginia Indian culture expert Karenne Wood told *WR News*. She hopes that the 400th anniversary of Jamestown will help shed light on the Powhatan's story.

When Jamestown began, the English and the Powhatan tried to trade with each other peacefully, but soon fighting broke out over land and resources. Beginning in 1614, the fighting stopped for eight years when Pocahontas, a daughter of the Powhatan chief, married Englishman John Rolfe. However, the fighting quickly resumed as Jamestown expanded.

Over time, the Powhatan people lost their land to the English settlers. However, Virginia is home to many Native American descendants today. "We have changed a lot," says Wood, "but we are still here."