

JAMESTOWN ISLAND  
(Jamestown Island-Hog Island-Captain John Smith Chesapeake  
National Historic Trail District)  
(James River District)  
Colonial National Historical Park  
Jamestown  
James City County  
Virginia

HALS VA-72  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

**HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY**  
**JAMESTOWN ISLAND**  
**(Jamestown Island-Hog Island-Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail**  
**District)**  
**(James River District)**

**HALS NO. VA-72**

Location: Colonial National Park, Jamestown, James City County, Virginia.

37.223475, -76.777349 (Historic Jamestowne Visitors Center, Google Earth, WGS84)

Significance: Jamestown's period of significance extends from 1607 to 1958. Jamestown is nationally significant as the location of a number of "firsts," including representing the site of the first permanent English settlement in the New World. Founded in 1607, the village of Jamestown grew up on Jamestown Island, serving as the center of the fledging Virginia Colony's government and Virginia's capital for nearly a century (Loth 1973:214). Additionally, the site was the location of the first interactions between English colonists from the Virginia Company of London and native North Americans, as well as the point of entry for the first Africans to arrive in the English colonies. Jamestown also played a significant role in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, with fortifications related to both conflicts constructed on Jamestown Island. In the twentieth century, Jamestown was key to the development of historic preservation practices and the development of historic parks. It is significant as part of the National Park Service's large-scale planning, park design, and historic resource interpretation during the 1930s through 1950s. Additionally, significant archaeological resources which hold the potential to yield important information about Jamestown's period of significance are located throughout the property.

Description: Originally a peninsula connected to the mainland by a narrow isthmus, Jamestown is today an island, connected to the mainland by a motor vehicle causeway. The presence of deep water close to shore and the island's location at an S-bend in the James River were two reasons that the English chose the site for a permanent settlement. Marshes, waterways, and dense pine, oak, maple, beech, and red cedar woodland made this site a popular hunting ground for Native Americans, including the Paspahugh, whose territory encompassed the site. The island landscape retains many of the same tree species, though the tree stand age is much younger than that observed by the first English settlers in 1607. The deforestation that has occurred over the past 400 years has been naturally infilled with species such as loblolly pine, sweetgum, red maple, and tulip poplar. The various habitats on Jamestown Island provide food, shelter, and nesting sites for birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. Jamestown Island has 1500 acres of forested wetlands, tidal wetlands, and wooded uplands which reside in the upper reaches of the saltwater zone of the James River. This creates a unique

ecosystem of fresh and brackish water conditions depending on the time of the year. Three creeks (Passmore, Kingsmill, and an unnamed tributary of the Back River) are located on Jamestown Island and drain the island's swamps and marshes. Powhatan Creek, a tributary of the James River, extends generally north to south near Jamestown, and is considered a well-preserved natural waterbody, buffered from nearby residential development with bald cypress along its banks. Powhatan Creek narrows to become the Back River and then empties into a large embayment known as the Thorofare before finally entering the James River (Lewes and Bell 2015; NPS 2008:14 and 108-110).

The circulation pattern throughout Historic Jamestowne is designed to give the visitor the experience of being transported to the seventeenth century. The sites of Old Towne and New Towne are shielded from the modern visitor's center and parking areas, which are located to the north directly off the Colonial Parkway, by distance, dense tree cover, and the pitch and tar swamp. Visitors to these two main historic areas can choose two footpaths, which lead from the parking/visitor area to the historic buildings and archaeological sites. Once past the swamp and wooded areas, the main pathways connect to looped open trails, which guide visitors through Old and/or New Towne, which is an open landscape with manicured lawns, and return back to the main pathway. Visitors to Glasshouse Point, although on a smaller scale, are also guided around the site by a looped pathway, through woods and away from view of the road and other modern intrusion, so as to experience seventeenth century Jamestowne.

The three historic sites of Jamestown accessed by curvilinear pathways – Old Towne, New Towne, and Glasshouse Point (NPS 2008:2) – include a number of foundations, partially extant buildings, cemeteries, archaeological sites, and recreated structures which are open to visitors. Much of the present landscape is the result of restoration efforts completed by 1957 for the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jamestown (NPS 2008:4-5). Several of the more prominent buildings include the c. 1639 brick church, which was later burned and rebuilt in 1676, and the Ambler House Ruins, also brick (NPS 2008:3 and 147; Lewes and Bell 2015). More recent additions to Jamestown include the recreated Glasshouse and the Archaearium (Archaeology Museum).

History: In June of 1606 the Virginia Company, a group of London entrepreneurs, was granted a charter by King James I to establish an English settlement in the New World (History of Jamestown 2017; NPS 2008:3). In the Spring of 1607 three ships carrying a small group of Englishmen under the authority of the Virginia Company of London arrived in the Chesapeake Bay. The captains of each ship had been given sealed instructions by the Virginia Company describing which men among the group would be placed in charge and how to select a site for a planned colony. These instructions were not to be opened until the group arrived in the New World. Shortly after arrival in the Chesapeake, Admiral Christopher Newport, commander of the small feet, opened his instructions. The Virginia

Company's plan for establishing a colony in the New World included searching for a suitable location for the settlement. The group was instructed to search for a location up to 100 miles up a navigable river with a preference for waterways bending to the northwest as they believed that such a river would be the quickest route to access Asia. The settlement site should be located in a narrow portion of the river for protection against enemy attack via the river, and selected because it represented "the strongest, most wholesome and fertile place" (Hume 1994:130). Finally, the colonists were instructed to make sure that no native peoples inhabited the area between the new settlement and the coast. For 17 days the newly arrived colonists observed the landscape and sought a suitable location for their settlement. Finally, they arrived at a peninsula some 30 miles up the Powhatan River, which they renamed the James River. This landform, a low-lying area surrounded by marsh today known as Jamestown Island, was not a close match for the criteria set forth by the Virginia Company (Hume 1994:130-31). Nevertheless, the site was chosen and here, in the midst of lands occupied by the politically dominant Powhatan Chiefdom, the colonists established the first permanent English settlement in the New World. The newly established James Fort was triangular in shape. The wooden palisades enclosed a storehouse, church, and several houses. Each of the three corners featured a bulwark on which cannon were placed to defend the fort against potential attack by the Spanish (History of Jamestown 2017).

It would be nearly six months before the colonists met the Powhatan himself, a period during which they set about constructing defenses at the new settlement (Hume 1994:137-8). While fortifications were being constructed, Christopher Newport and several other colonists set about further exploring the region. During this period, relations with the local Indians remained friendly. However, upon the return of the explorers the settlement was attacked by a group of Indians numbering nearly 200. This group included the Paspahugh, in whose territory the settlement was situated and through which the English had recently been exploring. Tensions with the Paspahugh and other local tribes remained high during the earliest days of the English settlement (Hume 1994; virtualjamestown.org, accessed March 2017).

By 1609, James Fort was too small to contain Jamestown. The settlers were open to attack by Native Americans from the south in what is today Surry County, and were wary of Dutch and Spanish explorations of the James River. As such, they sought to construct forts on the outskirts of the fledgling colony, where small garrisons could warn the colonists of approaching enemy vessels. One such fort was constructed at nearby Hog Island (Hume 1994:232). Despite these defensive works and new construction within the settlement, disaster befell the colony. Nearly half of the remaining corn supply was lost when rats, transported on English ships, fed on the stores. The winter of 1609 to 1610, a period during which the colonists had few remaining supplies and tensions with the Indians kept them close to the fort, nearly destroyed the settlement. Known as the

“Starving Time,” that winter saw the death of over 50 percent of the colonists. Conditions were so desperate that some colonists resorted to cannibalism, a situation that was confirmed in 2012 with the archaeological discovery of human remains exhibiting cut marks in a cellar at Jamestown (Jamestown Rediscovery 2012; Fausz 1990:26).

In October of 1609, John Smith was relieved of the presidency in the Virginia colony and set sail for England (Earle 1979). Seven months later, Sir Thomas Gates arrived at Jamestown with nearly 150 individuals, survivors of a shipwreck in Bermuda the previous year. Gates and the shipwreck survivors had been dispatched to help save the failing Virginia colony (Glover and Smith 2008). When they finally arrived at Jamestown, they planned to take them back to England. However, the abandonment of the colony was halted when 250 additional colonists, led by Lord De La Warr, arrived in the Hampton Roads region. Under De La Warr’s leadership, the Jamestown colony began rebuilding (Hume 1994:270).

In July of 1619, the first representative assembly in the English colony convened at the church in Jamestown (History of Jamestown 2017). 1619 was also the first year in which Africans arrived in Virginia. The traditional school of thought concerning the arrival of the first Africans in Virginia holds that approximately 20 Africans arrived in the colony aboard a Dutch frigate which had recently arrived from the West Indies (McCartney and Walsh 2003:8). The arrival of this ship was conveyed to the Virginia Company’s Treasurer by John Rolfe, husband to Pocahontas, in 1620. Rolfe informed the treasurer that a Dutch man of war arrived in Point Comfort carrying 20+ Africans. These individuals were soon sent to Jamestown where they were sold into servitude. It has often been debated whether or not these individuals were enslaved prior to their arrival in Virginia. In recent years, further research has indicated that the Africans who first arrived in Virginia in 1619 were likely Angolans from West Central Africa. It appears that these individuals were first captured by Portuguese traders (McCartney and Walsh 2003:27-29; The First Africans 2017). In total, some 350 African slaves were captured by the Portuguese and put aboard the *Sao Joao Bautista*, bound for Vera Cruz, Mexico. Off the coast of Mexico, the *Sao Joao Bautista* was attacked by two privateer ships who managed to rob it of some of its human cargo. Although piracy was illegal in England and its colonies, both privateer ships were English. The *White Lion*, an English warship, had Captain Jope at the helm. Captain Jope had received letters of marque from the Dutch Prince Maurice, which allowed him to legally participate in privateering. The second ship, the *Treasurer*, was owned by the Earl of Warwick. Although the *Treasurer* did not carry letters of marque allowing for privateering, Captain Daniel Elfrith participated in the raid on the *Sao Joao Bautista*. Both ships initially sailed to the West Indies with their newly acquired human cargo and thence to Old Point Comfort in Virginia. Once they arrived in Virginia, John Rolfe wrote that the newly arrived Africans had been transported on a Dutch warship, thereby

deflecting any repercussions against the *Treasurer* for piracy (McCartney and Walsh 2003:27-29; The First Africans 2017). Despite the arrival of Africans to Virginia in 1619, the legal system of race-based chattel slavery did not fully develop in Virginia until the 1660s.

In 1634, the control of the Jamestown Colony was transferred from the Virginia Company to the British Crown. With the increased interest in expansion into the south side of Virginia, the colonial government decided to divide the colony into eight shires: Accomack, Elizabeth City, James City, Charles City, Charles River, Warwick River, Warrosquoyack, and Henrico (Robinson 1992). During this period of expansion within the Virginia colony, Opechancanough, the current leader of the Powhatan Chiefdom and a key player in the 1622 attacks against English colonists, maintained strained relations with the English. In 1644, he saw a chance to rid Virginia of the English. With civil war occurring in England, Opechancanough believed that little attention would be paid to what happened to the Virginia colony. In April of 1644, a second attack against the English was mounted, resulting in the deaths of 500+ colonists. Opechancanough, a frail old man of nearly 90 years, was captured and imprisoned at Jamestown. He was shot in the back by a soldier and killed (Hume 1994:393-4).

As Jamestown continued to expand, hostilities with the local Indians was still an issue. In September of 1675, a group of Virginia militiamen, assigned to arrange a peace treaty between the colonists and the Susquehannock tribe, killed the chiefs who had come to negotiate with them. The tribes soon sought revenge, and in January of 1676 they took up arms, killing 36 colonists. When this new outbreak of hostilities occurred, Governor Berkeley ordered the construction of a series of forts, to help defend the colony. The new forts would have to be supported by new higher taxes (Salmon and Campbell 1994). A group of rebellious Charles City County colonists led by newcomer Nathaniel Bacon soon took the matter of Indian affairs into their own hands. After attacking friendly and unfriendly tribes alike without official sanction, Bacon demanded a commission from the governor to continue his unlawful campaign of warfare against the native populations. Governor Berkeley declared Bacon a rebel and set out to bring him to justice. Bacon and his followers retaliated by burning Jamestown. He also offered freedom to those slaves and servants of the Governor and his allies willing to join his cause. The events in 1676, known as "Bacon's Rebellion," ended with Nathaniel Bacon's death from dysentery (Boyer et al. 2009:43).

Despite the burning of Jamestown in 1676, it remained the capital of Virginia until 1698. In that year, Jamestown was once again set aflame. The fire, reportedly set by prisoners awaiting execution in the jail, destroyed the prison and the statehouse. The following year, the capitol of the Virginia colony was moved from Jamestown to Middle Plantation, renamed Williamsburg. Although Jamestown Island was still occupied and remained in active agricultural

cultivation, the area would never again be a town (Boddie 1948:103; History of Jamestown 2017; NPS 2008:3).

In the early days of the American Revolution, Jamestown Island was the site of a military post. As the war progressed, the area became an important location for the exchange of prisoners of war from both sides of the conflict. In addition, Jamestown bore witness to Cornwallis' movement across the James River and served as a waypoint for those soldiers, both American and French, traveling to join Washington's army (Hatch 1958). Following the Battle of Greensprings in 1781, French soldiers also occupied Jamestown (History of Jamestown 2017).

On the eve of the Civil War, many of the agricultural fields and wetlands on Jamestown Island were owned by William Ogain Allen. Allen was one of Virginia's wealthiest men, owning 800 slaves and over 300,000 plantation acres spread across three counties. In the years leading up to the Civil War, Allen had not wanted to risk crop destruction by allowing the establishment of a military encampment on Jamestown Island for the 1857 250th anniversary celebration of Jamestown. However, in 1861 he allowed the building of defenses on the island, putting soldiers, free African Americans, and his own slaves to work in the construction of Fort Pocahontas and other earthworks. Allen also personally funded troops to garrison the island in an effort to block Union gunboats from sailing further upriver and gaining access to the Confederate capital (Maynard 2013).

By June of 1861, Jamestown Island garrisoned 1000 soldiers who manned 20 cannon, all pointed toward the James River. Fort Pocahontas stood on a point of land west of the old church tower and four additional earthworks were present on the island. The defenses of Jamestown Island were never tested during the Civil War. The Union, rather than attempt to access Richmond via the James or York Rivers, conducted an overland campaign in 1862 (Maynard 2013; History of Jamestown 2017).

By 1893 Jamestown Island had been privately purchased by Edward and Louise Barney. However, the portion of the island containing the abandoned eighteenth century parish church and graveyard had been transferred by the General Assembly to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA). In the early 1890s, the Barney's had deeded approximately 22.5 acres of the island to the APVA but undertook the development of tourism on the island themselves (National Park Service [NPS] and the Association of the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities [APVA] 2003: 3-23-3-28; NPS 2008:3; History of Jamestown 2017).

In 1900, a sea wall was built along the western shore of Jamestown Island to prevent further erosion (History of Jamestown 2017). Following World War I, the APVA erected the Robert Hunt Shrine within the Confederate fort (Fort

Pocahontas) on the island (NPS and APVA 2003:3-23-3-28; NPS 2008:3). In 1930, Jamestown, along with Yorktown and a portion of Williamsburg, was established as part of Colonial National Historical Monument, later to be re-designated Colonial National Historical Park in 1936. In 1932, an Act of Congress designated the NPS as the managing agency over Jamestown Island, except for the 22 acres owned by the APVA. The APVA, now known as Preservation Virginia, and the NPS have jointly administered Jamestown Island since 1934. Jamestown was listed to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1966 and was listed to the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) in 1983 (VDHR Site Files).

In the 1950s, the NPS launched its Mission 66. The program was intended to revitalize the National Parks and their associated visitor facilities. During this time, the Visitor Center at Jamestown was opened by the NPS and the APVA. The Visitor Center was expanded in the 1970s and by the 1990s, major research projects, including on-going archaeological investigations, were begun by the NPS' Jamestown Archaeological Assessment and the APVA's *Jamestown Rediscovery* project. These works were begun in advance of the 2007 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration (NPS and APVA 2003:3-23-28). The *Jamestown Rediscovery* project began archaeological excavations, under the direction of Dr. William Kelso, in 1994. These investigations proved that James Fort had not been consumed by the James River, rather it was located on dry land (History of Jamestown Rediscovery 2017). Today, a recreation of the fort stands in the approximate location of the original fort.

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View of Jamestown Island from Ferry from the Vicinity of Scotland Wharf (Wes Stewart,  
4/19/2017)



View of Jamestown Island from Ferry from James River (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



View from Jamestown Island towards James River (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



View from Visitor's Center Bridge towards Historic Sites (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



Church (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



Statue of Captain John Smith (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



Reconstructed Building South of Church (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



Foundations Remains in Newtown (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



Remains of a Structure in Newtown (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



Reconstruction of Glass House (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)