

Williamsburg Then and Now

by
Beau Beasley
Photos courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Each year millions of visitors from around the world visit Virginia's Historic Triangle—Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown—to experience what it must have been like to be a part of the birth of our great nation. Named in honor of England's King William of Orange, Williamsburg is the jewel in the crown of this region, offering students of both history and the outdoors their fill of pursuits. For those who call it home, Williamsburg is a friendly, cultured, modern town inextricably tied to the past. Indeed, no matter the day or time or season, it is always 1775 in Williamsburg. Most interesting, though, is the fact that this focus on our country's past makes Williamsburg the place where one is most likely to catch a glimpse of our future.

Family Secret

Anne Geddy Cross gets a funny feeling in her stomach at the sound of the name Williamsburg. "I've always told my children that Williamsburg is a special place," says Cross. "We just have to be quiet long enough to listen to what it's trying to tell us." Cross may be especially eager to listen because her family was an integral part of the making of modern Williamsburg—which is to say, the reconstruction of ancient Williamsburg.

In the 1920s Dr. W.A.R. Goodwin served as the rector of Williamsburg's historic Bruton Parish Church and taught at the College of William and Mary as a professor of Biblical Literature and Religious Education. Along with all the responsibilities of a busy clergyman and a professor, Goodwin nurtured a dream that seemed impossible, even foolhardy to those who could not envision it as he did: Goodwin wanted to restore Williamsburg to what it looked like in colonial times. He wanted his fellow countrymen to connect with their future by knowing their past. "The best way to look at history is through windows," he wrote. "There are windows



Dr. W.A.R. Goodwin (l) and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (r) briefly pause in front of the George Wythe House, one of the original 88 buildings in Colonial Williamsburg.

here, and there were others, which might be restored, through which unparalleled vistas open into the nation's past."

Initially Goodwin found that few people shared his vision for the project, much less had the stomach or the deep pockets for such a massive undertaking. But all of that was about to change. In 1926 Goodwin convinced John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to tour Williamsburg. Rockefeller agreed with Goodwin that Williamsburg was a national treasure, and he wanted to help restore and preserve it but he had a couple of stipulations. First, he wanted to purchase the entire area around the old city. Second, he wanted to do it quietly. Goodwin agreed and immediately turned to just the man for the job: His good friend Vernon M. Geddy, a well-connected attorney.

Geddy filed all the necessary paperwork at the courthouse accurately—and discreetly—on behalf of the unlikely duo. "My grandfather and my father both worked as attorneys for Mr. Rockefeller on this project," says Cross. The Geddys were so discreet, in fact, that Rockefeller and Goodwin were nearly two years and two million dollars into the project before folks began to suspect that strange things were afoot in the 'Burg.

Goodwin's dream began to come to life with the purchase of the Ludwell-Paradise House; soon the project grew to

encompass other parts of the old city. Eventually workers unearthed the remains of the Governor's Palace. And then a big break came from overseas: Researchers discovered an engraved copperplate of an 18th-century architectural drawing of the colonial capital and its principal buildings in Oxford's Bodleian Library. This drawing became the basis for the reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg that we see today.

Indeed, the massive scale of the project is hard to imagine until one has visited Colonial Williamsburg. What today's visitor doesn't see is the run-up to the carefully restored buildings and the living interpretation of 18th-century colonial life: the painstaking research of deeds, letters, ledgers, and period maps both here and in Great Britain, and the extensive and continuing archeological digs.

We might easily dismiss Rockefeller as a wealthy businessman in search of a tax write-off—but in fact he was so captivated by Williamsburg, its environs, and the restoration of the colonial capital that he purchased Williamsburg's Basset Hall and brought his wife Abby with him to visit for up to six weeks at a time. In a private letter to Vernon Geddy, Rockefeller wrote, "My part in the restoration of [Colonial] Williamsburg has been a constant and ever-growing delight while my association

with the people of Williamsburg has greatly enriched my life.”

A Town and Its People

Writer and photographer Chiles Larson came to Williamsburg in 1949 to attend the College of William and Mary on a football scholarship. His studies were interrupted by a stint in the Air Force during the Korean War, but by September 1955 Larson was back at school. He graduated from the College in 1959. For a while he worked for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in their Photographic Services Department, where his expertise as a young photographer were put to good use. Larson’s skills aren’t limited to photography and writing alone; his gardening skills recently landed him in the pages of *Southern Living*.

Larson’s book *Virginia’s Past Today* focuses on the lives of old Virginia families and how family members relate to one another and to the land. “The idea of continuance is the main theme of my work,” he says. His book contains over 220 images of Virginians and Virginiana, including the cradle of General Robert E. Lee as well as shots of the harbor pilots who still deftly lead commercial vessels up and down the local waterways today.



Chiles Larson in his boxwood garden in Williamsburg (Photo by Hay Hardy)

“My wife Bernice and I both grew up in Norfolk. We’re what you might call sand flat Virginians,” Larson explains with a laugh. Ironically the theme of Larson’s book, continuance, works as a metaphor for his own life: He married his beloved Bernice in the Wren Building

chapel at the College, and he now works as a volunteer for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation—in the same position in which he cut his teeth on photography skills 50 years ago.

Bobby Hornsby can tell you that Chiles Larson and his wife are not the only ones to find the siren song of Williamsburg irresistible. Hornsby, of Hornsby Real Estate, says proudly that his family “has been here since the ‘50s, and I tell you it’s a great place to live. We’re only an hour from the beach and two hours from the mountains.” A conversation with Bobby Hornsby is all it takes to make one feel right at home in Williamsburg; his down-to-earth and unhurried manner could draw in even the most hardened suburbanite.

Bobby’s brother Bruce Hornsby captured that same small town feeling in the music video for his song “The Valley Road,” shot on location in and around Williamsburg (during my wife’s freshman year at William and Mary, as a matter of fact). Among the montage of images are shots of the College’s former Blow gymnasium (closed shortly after the video was shot and transformed into the College’s business school) where brothers Bobby, John, and Bruce played pick-up games of basketball when they weren’t playing music together. Although the Hornsby boys have all grown up, none has strayed too far from home. John Hornsby is a successful attorney in Charlottesville, while brothers Bobby and Bruce still live in town. Bruce Hornsby recorded his last five albums in Williamsburg.

When Bobby Hornsby talks about Williamsburg, he’ll tell you that property values have gone up 15 percent in the last year alone. He might mention that the greater Williamsburg area, which includes James City County, the City of Williamsburg, and the Bruton District of York County, has over 500 million dollars of new construction on the books. But, he says, don’t let the numbers fool you. “Williamsburg is best thought of as a



Bobby Hornsby of Hornsby Realty (Photo by Hay Hardy)

wheel with spokes coming out of it,” and Colonial Williamsburg is the middle of that wheel. The rest of the city is built around the restored area. “Whatever development occurs here, we will always keep the integrity of the historical area in mind.”

And why does Hornsby believe that so many folks choose to lay down new roots in Williamsburg today? “I think folks move here because they want the flavor of small town life without the stigma of living in Hicksville. This is a pretty cosmopolitan place when you get right down to it. Between the College, the concerts, the shopping, and the local history, there’s always something to do here.” He points out another perk of relocating to the Old Dominion: four distinct seasons, for those who like to watch the flowers and trees change throughout the year.

Beyond Colonial Williamsburg

After touring Colonial Williamsburg, visitors to the Historic Triangle should put their 1775 history lesson in perspective. Spend time in Jamestown—to bone up on American history that pre-dates Williamsburg—and Yorktown—to see what happens when those revolutionary passions of 1775 foment into outright rebellion and Lord Cornwallis is defeated six long and bloody years later.

And what is there to do in Williamsburg besides tour the colonial area? Those in the know will tell you that

Williamsburg has become a golf mecca. Kingsmill is Virginia's largest golf resort and boast 63 holes of championship golf on 2,900 acres along the historic James River. Kingsmill alone has three separate courses to choose from: the River Course, home of the LPGA's Michelob Ultra Open; the Plantation Course, created in part by golfing legend Arnold Palmer; and the Woods Course, one of *Golf* magazine's "Top Ten Courses Available for Public Play." If you haven't got Palmer's swing but would like to get started in golf, you may want to try the Bray's Links, a 9-hole, par-3 golf course that Kingsmill provides as a complimentary amenity to all of its guests. And if you decide that Kingsmill isn't for you, consider the Williamsburg National Golf Club, The Tradition Golf Club at Stonehouse, The Tradition Golf Club at Kiskiack, Colonial Williamsburg's Golden Horseshoe Club, the Colonial Golf Course, or Ford's Colony, to name a few.

Golf not your game? You still have a lot to choose from when it comes to family entertainment in the 'Burg. Water Country USA and Busch Gardens remain tremendous draws. It may be 1775 in Colonial Williamsburg, but it is most definitely the 21st century at Williamsburg's Prime Outlets. Just off Richmond Road, Williamsburg's main drag, you'll find L.L. Bean, Nine West, Bostonian/Clarks, Eddie Bauer, Timberland, Brooks Brothers, and J. Crew, among many, many others. Marketing Manager Lisa Bates says that the outlet sees over 4 million visitors a year. "We recently planned an expansion, and it actually sold out before we even broke ground," says Bates. In 2006, Prime Outlets will welcome Nike, Ann Taylor, and Banana Republic to the mix.

Williamsburg's Eateries

The 'Burg is awash in good watering holes, but a few places stand out. I grew up in Southern Virginia on the Carolina border, so I can appreciate good barbeque. Pierce's Pit Barbeque is an insti-



The Saturday morning Farmer's Market on Market Square

Photo by Hay Hardy

tution in the area, with a deep, smoky flavor and just the right amount of sauce. Grab yourself a pulled pork sandwich with slaw and a side of hush puppies, and I promise you that your Pierce's order will take you where you want to go. (Don't forget a quart to go home with.)

On the main drag in the colonial area (Duke of Gloucester Street) you'll find several restored taverns open for business. For a sit-down dinner with historic flair, try the King's Arms Tavern. Dinner includes a sampling of colonial-style relishes like minced Virginia ham, corn, pickled watermelon rind, and more. Next comes Sally Lund bread and warm muffins. Order peanut soup before your meal, and wash it down with a mint julep or a rum punch. You'll be seated at a table bathed in flickering candlelight, waited on by staffers in period clothing, and serenaded by strolling troubadours singing rollicking songs of the age. If you can still breathe after dinner, try a piece of pecan pie a la mode.

My wife tells me that The Cheese Shop used to be a quaint gourmet eatery where students sprang for simple and simply delicious sandwiches (when their wal-

lets were full) or scarfed up "bread ends and house," the shop's French bread end pieces and its signature house sandwich dressing (when their pockets were empty). The Cheese Shop has moved to front-and-center in Market Square, the colonial area's main shopping block, and the secret—if it ever was one—is out. The place is a madhouse at lunch—and most other times of the day as well. Nevertheless, the sandwiches are still delicious, the house dressing is as tangy as ever, and the shop's gourmet food offerings (everything from olives to imported cheeses and wines) still tempt. If you have the patience to wait, you'll be rewarded with some fantastic fare.

Fishing

Though the James and York Rivers are nearby, I prefer to fish the Chesapeake Bay when I'm near Williamsburg. Captain Tommy Mattioli of Matty-J Charter Service, who houses his boat at a marina just a short drive from the 'Burg off of I-64, treats anglers to a good day's fishing that won't break the bank. Most of his customers are fly and light tackle anglers who want to pursue stripers



Captain Tommy Mattioli (l) and the author's father-in-law (r) on the Chesapeake Bay

Photo by Beau Beasley

and larger drum, but he's happy to put anglers on to gray trout, croakers, Spanish mackerel, and large flounder. As a matter of fact, Mattioli's fame as a flounder angler is beginning to spread since he began making his special flounder rigs available for purchase recently.

Now, a day-trip on the Bay makes a wonderful solo getaway, and I heartily endorse such a plan. But if the 'Burg is the centerpiece of your family vacation and you hesitate to abandon your spouse and kids for a day to go fishing, fear not. Half a day fishing together on the Bay just might be the perfect parent-child bonding activity. Mattioli loves to introduce kids to angling, and you just might get a new fishing buddy out of the bargain.

The College of William and Mary

Newsweek recently dubbed The College of William and Mary the "Hottest Small State School" in the country—but they're a little behind the times. The College, the second oldest in the nation, has been hot since it was chartered in 1693 by the monarchs for whom it was named. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson studied here, as did James Monroe and John Tyler. Considered by many as one of the most beautiful college campuses in the country, a visit to the College is a must.

Where to Stay in Williamsburg

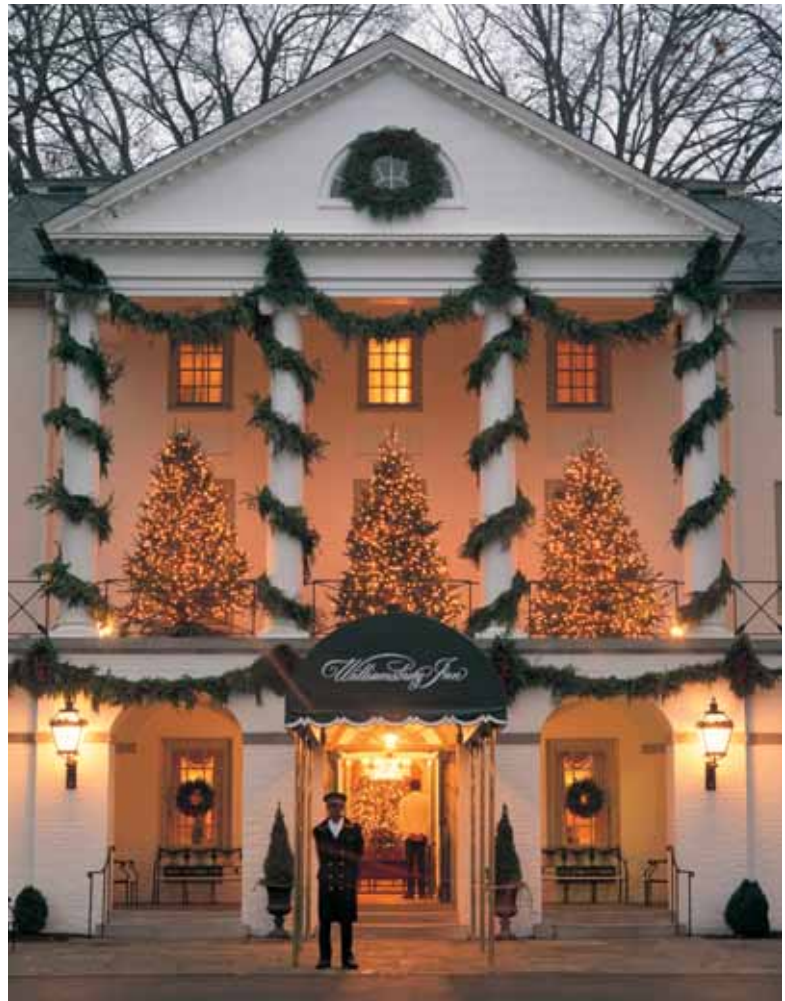
Williamsburg accommodations run the gamut from the posh resort to the

charming B&B to the all-inclusive family theme park and everything in between, with countless fine choices on the lodging list. Hands down, the finest lodging in the area within walking distance of the historic district is the Williamsburg Inn. This establishment has all the earmarks of pampering that you deserve when you're trying to forget the rest of the world. Quiet and

yet engaging, the Inn features 67 elegantly decorated rooms and was directly influenced by John and Abby Rockefeller who were intimately involved in its design and furnishings. If the Williamsburg Inn looks like a place that royalty would feel at home, it is: The guest list has included Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, the Emperor and Empress of Japan, and numerous U.S. Presidents. In fact President Reagan chose to hold the 1983 Summit of Industrialized Nations at the Williamsburg Inn.

After a long day of pampering or brushing up on your colonial American history you may want to lose yourself on the award-winning Golden Horseshoe Golf Course. If golf isn't your sport, then perhaps you'd like to go swimming, play tennis, lawn bowl, or take in a game of croquet before you take off on a nature

The Williamsburg Inn at Christmas



trail walk. If all this activity makes you hungry you're in luck: The beautifully decorated Regency Room is the place to go for fine dining and great wines. The Inn also offers in-room dining as well as traditional English afternoon tea.

For young families like mine, consider Great Wolf Lodge -- it's the perfect venue if you've got children 2-12 years old to engage all day. The entertainment begins in the kid-themed guest rooms and continues at the onsite, indoor water park (yes, you read that right). Older kids will enjoy an arcade in the basement. Before bed, the lobby fills with pajamed tots eager to be serenaded by a variety of woodland creatures that pop out each night (think Chuck E. Cheese goes camping). After the singing, Lodge staffers read bedtime stories to the kids.

Great Wolf Lodge has several in-house dining options, from takeout pizza to cafeteria-style meals to sit-down cuisine. Mom and Dad can relax, too: an onsite Aveda spa, Starbucks, and even a small bar cater to the older, wearier set.

Give Me Liberty

On my last trip to Williamsburg I was privileged to listen to and ask questions of Patrick Henry. Well, at least he looked and sounded a lot like Patrick Henry, told those of us listening to him that he *was* Henry, and knew an awful lot of Henry-era history. In any case, this gentleman gave us a stirring speech (we were, after all, on the brink of revolution in 1775, you will recall) and opened the floor to our questions. In a matter of moments Henry had turned his audience of mostly 50-something adults into schoolchildren fidgeting in their seats and desperately waving their hands to get his attention.

Henry shared with us his fervent Christian faith and openly addressed the slavery question. He discussed his concerns about a strong central government getting drunk off of taxes laid upon an already overworked citizenry. Finally, he

reminded us that we had an integral part to play in government: We were responsible for voting and for holding our elected officials accountable for their actions.

I had been to Williamsburg many times before and enjoyed the sights, sounds, and smells of the place, and even learned a great deal of information about our colonial past. Somehow, however, I had missed something that Patrick Henry helped me see this time. I caught glimpses of the grand architecture of the place—not the design of the buildings but rather the structure and development of the ideas that brought this country to fruition. The men and women of Henry's day set a course for a destination unknown. They didn't know where they were going, but at some point, they knew that they could not remain subjects of the British Crown. Some recognized it before others; some realized more fully what their actions would mean to all they held dear; perhaps some even had an inkling of the effects of their actions on posterity. In this age of instant gratification, drive-through windows, and the Internet, it is important to remember that the colonial rebels put everything they had on the line for the sanctity of their ideals. Anne Geddy Cross was right: Williamsburg has a lot to teach us if we will only be quiet and listen.

Winter and Fall can be a great time to experience Williamsburg in festive colors.



Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

1-800-HISTORY
www.colonialwilliamsburg.org

Williamsburg Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

757-253-0192
www.VisitWilliamsburg.com

Hornsby Realty

757-565-0100
www.realthornsby.com

The Williamsburg Inn

757-229-1000 x 2881

Matty-J Charter Service

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800-551-WOLF
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