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**AMERICAN DEMOCRACY BEGAN 399 YEARS AGO TODAY
IN JAMESTOWN, VIRGINIA**

Virginia General Assembly is America's Oldest Continuous Representative Government Body

JAMESTOWN, Va. (July 30, 2018) – Today Virginia's 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution recognizes the convening of the [first representative legislative assembly](#) in English North America. The meeting of the first General Assembly, which took place from July 30 through August 4, 1619, in the church in Jamestown, VA, formed the basis of today's representative system of government in the United States of America.

This first General Assembly was comprised of two male settlers representing each of the 11 major settlement areas in Virginia. Governor Sir George Yeardley presided over the first convening of this new form of government, which divided political and judicial power between the governor, a council appointed by the Virginia Company of London, and the new General Assembly. The General Assembly also acted as a high court of justice and heard complaints of a judicial nature.

Democracy is a central theme in 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution events, scholarship and education programs occurring over the next 18 months. A full schedule of programming can be found [here](#). 2019 marks the 400th anniversary of formative 1619 Virginia events that forever changed the trajectory of Virginia and America's history. These 1619 events include the First Representative Legislative Assembly in the New World, the Arrival of the first recorded Africans to English North America, the recruitment of English women in significant numbers to the Virginia colony, the first official English Thanksgiving in North America and the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit of the Virginia colony.

"America's system of representative government began in 1619 Virginia in the church on Jamestown Island. This humble gathering ignited the evolution of our nation's democratic principles and their impact on the world," said Kathy Spangler, Executive Director of the 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution. "American Evolution events, programs and legacy projects encourage study and dialogue about the significant impacts and implications of 400

years of American Democracy. We also honor the role of Virginia's General Assembly as the longest standing representative government body in the United States."

Democracy-themed American Evolution programming includes:

- **Virginia General Assembly Video Series (July 30 – August 31)**

The 2019 Commemoration launched a series of videos profiling members of the Virginia General Assembly's class of 400 as they discuss democracy today. The Virginia General Assembly is the "oldest continuous law-making body in the New World," rooted in the establishment of the House of Burgesses at Jamestown in 1619. The video series can be found [here](#).

- **Jamestown Church Excavation (Ongoing)**

Jamestown Rediscovery archeologists believe they have found the remains of Governor Sir George Yeardley in the Jamestown church. Visit historicjamestowne.org for additional information about the project. The Smithsonian Channel will release a documentary about the project in spring 2019. Raw video selects from the excavation are available from the Smithsonian Channel and can be viewed [here](#), video credit Smithsonian Channel.

- **The New Virginians: 1619 and Beyond (December 10, 2018 – December 9, 2019)**

The Library of Virginia will host an exhibition showcasing the culmination of a statewide project conducted by the Library of Virginia and Virginia Humanities that explores the implications of immigration and the experiences of immigrants as they come to Virginia. More information is available [here](#).

- **Global Pathfinder Summit (May 20-23, 2019)**

The original settlers of Jamestown were by and large young pioneers who changed the world. The Commemoration brings young political, governmental and civic leaders from over 50 countries to the "Presidential Precinct." During a multi-day event, the emerging leaders, along with Virginia students from leading academic institutions, reflect on the challenges of leadership, governance and civic engagement in both 21st-century democracies and states aspiring to democracy. More information is available [here](#).

- **Presidential Ideas Festival: Democracy in Dialogue (May 21-23, 2019)**

University of Virginia's Miller Center will convene political leaders, top scholars and students – future leaders and influencers – for a three-day event in and around Charlottesville for working sessions organized around specific aspects of the presidency. Learn more [here](#).

- **Commemorative Session of First Legislative Assembly (July 30, 2019)**

The 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution will host the Commemorative Session of the First Representative Legislative Assembly in Jamestown, Va. The 400th anniversary commemorative event will convene members of Virginia’s General Assembly and other special guests. More information is available [here](#).

- **International Forum on Representative Democracy (July 31-August 1, 2019)**

The Commemoration brings together representatives from democracies around the world, including the British Parliament, members of U.S. Congress and representatives from state legislatures nationwide. The International Forum highlights the historic impact of democracy on our nation and its impact on the world. Learn more [here](#).

For more information about the 2019 Commemoration, visit AmericanEvolution2019.com.

About the 2019 Commemoration

The 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution™, highlights events that occurred in Virginia in 1619 that continue to influence America today. Featured programs, events and legacy projects will position Virginia as a leader in education, tourism and economic development. American Evolution™ commemorates the ongoing journey toward the key ideals of democracy, diversity and opportunity. Dominion Resources is an American Evolution Founding Partner and Altria Group and TowneBank are Virginia Colony Partners.

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