



ABOUT AMERICAN EVOLUTION™, 2019 COMMEMORATION

Virginia has long been recognized as the birthplace of our nation. In a multi-year commemoration, Virginia highlighted its key role in 400 years of our nation's history. Featuring programs, education and events of national and international significance, the 2019 Commemoration, AMERICAN EVOLUTION™, inspired participants to engage in the themes of democracy, diversity, and opportunity, and showcased Virginia as a global leader in education, economic development, and tourism.

In 1607, the Virginia Company of London sponsored a journey that changed the world when it invested in the Jamestown settlement. Shortly thereafter in 1619, a series of pivotal events set Virginia on a course toward the American ideal of democracy, diversity, and opportunity, thus shaping our nation. The 2019 Commemoration, AMERICAN EVOLUTION™ explored these formative 1619 events, which included:

- **The First Representative Legislative Assembly in the New World**
Colonial Governor George Yeardley established a General Assembly from Virginia's 11 major settlements to pass laws and manage the colony. Meeting on July 30, 1619, this Assembly planted the seed of representative democracy in America.
- **The Arrival of the First Recorded Africans to English North America**
In August 1619, an English vessel arrived at Point Comfort, Virginia, carrying what John Rolfe referred to as "20 and odd" Africans. These first Angolan Africans, many of whom were traded to colonial officials as indentured servants in exchange for provisions, became crucial to the survival of the Europeans, eventually becoming the foundation of Virginia's agricultural system and essential to its economic viability. They also lived through a unique period in American history - one in which prejudice and racism were common even as slavery was not yet a legal institution. The arrival of Africans in the colonies set in motion our nation's ongoing journey towards equality.
- **The Recruitment of English Women in Significant Numbers**
Experiencing great hardship in the colony since 1607, Virginia Company officials recognized that the presence of women would be crucial to developing a stable, productive, and more permanent society. In November 1619, 147 women were

recruited to join the Jamestown male settlers and went on to help shape the nation's development in myriad ways.

- **The First Official English Thanksgiving in North America**

On December 4, 1619, 38 colonists established the settlement of Berkeley Hundred. Captain John Woodlief led a ceremony of Thanksgiving to be observed, "annually and perpetually." This event, reenacted yearly as the Virginia Thanksgiving Festival, marked the first official Thanksgiving in the English colonies.

- **The Entrepreneurial and Innovative Spirit of the Virginia Colony**

From inception in 1607, the Virginia Colony, a private joint-stock trading company, was an expression of entrepreneurialism. To diversify its economy, the Virginia Company passed laws in 1619 allowing colonists to experiment with vinification, cloth and silk production, and other industries. With these developments, Virginia became the vanguard of what has become America's free enterprise system. Much of Virginia's early survival was dependent on the American Indians teachings on agriculture specific to the local land and trade. Today, the commonwealth of Virginia remains one of the nation's strongest sources of economic innovation and entrepreneurial spirit.

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ABOUT THE PILLARS

Q: What role did women play in 1619 Virginia?

A: Women were a stabilizing force for the colony. Not only did their arrival help colonists put down roots and form families, women also ensured survival by doing domestic work – brewing beer, making clothes, preparing food – which the male colonists were loath to do. It is clear that America’s birthplace, the Jamestown colony, would not have survived without the brave Native American, African and English women who fostered stability and facilitated Virginia’s transition from a colony to a permanent home.

Q: What are some little-known facts about the first Africans’ important and changing role in the Virginia colony and today’s America?

A: Many people don’t realize how early Africans arrived in English North America. People are always surprised to learn that the first Africans, who were mostly Angolans, arrived at Point Comfort nearly 400 years ago, in today’s Hampton, Virginia. The first Africans who were among Jamestown’s English settlers had an intimate familiarity with European customs, governance systems and military tactics – which were part of everyday life for 17th century Angolans. Also, many are unaware that when Africans first arrived slavery had yet to be codified and both blacks and whites could be indentured servants. Despite this, the first Africans were treated as slaves and only a rare few were able to purchase their freedom. African American history has included both triumph and tribulation and has indelibly shaped the country we know today.

Q: How is Virginia’s Legislative Assembly the foundation for America’s democratic government?

A: The seeds of America’s democratic system were sewn in 1619 Virginia when Colonial Governor George Yeardley convened the first legislative assembly on the American continent in Jamestown. In July 1619, the first legislative assembly was called to order, and over the next six days, 22 representatives from 11 Virginia “boroughs” developed and passed laws that evolve Virginia’s colonial settlement beyond a commercial enterprise. This earliest expression of America’s democratic ideals was the formative event in establishing the United States’ current system of representative government.

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