

# Atmospheric Williamsburg spins an authentic tale

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The crowd buzzed as Thomas Jefferson strode to the platform, looking every inch the 18th-century statesman. "I have been called here to address certain issues," said Jefferson, actually a man re-enacting his role at Colonial Williamsburg.

Jefferson discussed with the visiting tourists, or colonists, the fighting in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The day of his speech near the Governor's Palace was April 20, 1776, according to the Williamsburg calendar.

"I stand here not to voice treason," Rather, Jefferson advocated the right to hold and voice opinion, to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.

"Let us not step back but proceed forward accordingly," he said, parrying a question about his views on slavery.

"We must attend to this barbaric practice of slavery," said Jefferson, himself a slave owner, "upwards of 200 and 60." Jefferson advocated gradual elimination of slavery, and the teaching of skills to those freed.

Such re-enactments are common fare at Colonial Williamsburg, which aims to give visitors a firsthand view of life in 18th-century colonial America.

My husband, Mark Rembecki, and I took a September trip, flying into Richmond and taking an airport limo in and back.

I had been to Colonial Williamsburg in college. My husband had never been. He had an interesting experience on this trip. When we visited the old courthouse, he was put "on trial" for not attending church in the past four weeks. His defense of being Roman Catholic and unable to worship as he saw fit fell on deaf Protestant ears. The fine was five shillings.

The Williamsburg Web site is at [www.colonialwilliamsburg.org](http://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org), and information is also available by calling (800) HISTORIC. Plentiful lodging is available in a variety of price ranges. We stayed at the most economical Governor's Inn, which required crossing railroad tracks and one busy intersection to get into town but was pleasant and comfortable.



PHOTO BY MARK REMBECKI

**Paying attention:** Listeners heed the words of Thomas Jefferson. Such re-enactments are common in Colonial Williamsburg.



**Elegant surroundings:** The Governor's Palace draws many visitors to Colonial Williamsburg.

Other lodging sites are offered, and there's certainly plenty to see. We enjoyed the historic buildings, not only the Governor's Palace, Capitol and courthouse, but also the taverns and shops set up to show everyday life in Williamsburg more than 200 years ago.

The food in the two taverns we ate in was designed to be authentic, although I did get potato chips with my fish sandwich. We ate at Chowning's Tavern and King's Arms Tavern. There are two others: Christiansa Campbell's Tavern and

Shields Tavern.

We visited the DeWitt Wallace Gallery but had to pass on the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center when Hurricane Floyd cut our trip short. The DeWitt Wallace Gallery site houses the Public Hospital, showing the first facility in North America to treat the mentally ill. The modern-day exhibit shows how treatment of mental illness evolved.

We heard some of slavery but didn't have time to visit the Carter's Grove Plantation, where slavery is re-enacted. The

slavery re-enactment has generated controversy in Williamsburg, and we hope to go back to learn more.

Jefferson, in speaking, advocated religious freedom for all, "all of us free to attend to our God as we choose." He also discussed the economy, saying "Citizens, it is my firm belief that we must practice a good economy."

He favored not spending on items that couldn't be afforded, and also encouraged a sound educational system for the future. "Ignorance is not bliss. An education will always prove the true corrective for the abuses of government." The young Jefferson also advocated press freedom.

Early press history is an interest of mine, so I was pleased to visit the colonial print shop and ask questions. The re-enactments were particularly interesting, including a visit by George Washington, but the man in the print shop was able to speak to modern questions, too, which I appreciated.

Williamsburg was Virginia's capital from 1699 to 1780. A visit will reveal just how "British" our young country was on those days, with influence from across the Atlantic still felt. One day, we gathered with others as Lord Botetourt convened the House of Burgesses for the first time in his governorship. The feel was British, yet those of us watching knew the Revolution loomed.

The more recent story of Williamsburg, of how visionary clergyman W.A.R. Goodwin in 1926 convinced John D. Rockefeller Jr. to restore the site to colonial glory, is told as well. Both it and the colonial stories combine to make Williamsburg a great travel destination.

Our passes are good through next September, and we'll be checking airfares to see about going back. We'll remember to wear good walking shoes, too, although there is bus service as well.



**Getting the word out:** The print shop is one of many facilities designed to show everyday working life in colonial America.



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