

Colonial Williamsburg

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Twenty years ago Williamsburg, in the historic Tidewater section of Virginia, was an obscure little city preoccupied with the normal pursuits of a quiet college community and county center. Today Williamsburg is still a diminutive city but bustles with preeminence as one of the outstanding visitor attractions and patriotic shrines of the Nation.

Each year more than a half million persons, citizens of every State of the Union and many foreign countries, visit the buildings and area which have been restored to their appearance of the eighteenth century by Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. In the last decade the number of annual visitors has multiplied over three times.

This unparalleled project has thrown the spotlight of public interest on this historic peninsular and Tidewater section of the Old Dominion State. At the same time it has strongly influenced a reawakened appreciation of America's heritage and the early days of the Nation and has strongly underlined the need for preservation of the priceless monuments of the past. The life of the city itself has been stimulated immensely as a result of its many visitors and the increased importance of Williamsburg as a shrine in the public mind. Although the permanent population has increased only about 4½ percent since the restoration project has been under way, the assessed valuation of property has increased 99 percent, the volume of business in Williamsburg has jumped as much as 300 percent, bank deposits have gone up 141 percent, and postal receipts have increased 160 percent.

The physical restoration of the colonial area is not yet complete and is expected to require another 10 years and as many millions of dollars in addition to the \$25,000,000 and 20 years' labor already expended. The postwar building program is now in full swing with work on additional restoration and reconstruction projects to fill in the gaps and to provide augmented facilities for visitors. To date, some 231 long-forgotten colonial buildings of the city—old homes, shops, taverns, and impressive public buildings—have been reconstructed on their original sites and 85 of the surviving eighteenth-century structures restored to their original appearance. Around these the original gardens, public greens, and streets have been restored to further complete the picture of Williamsburg as it looked in the days of George Washington, Thomas Jef-

erson, Patrick Henry, and other distinguished patriots who frequented the city.

Present-day visitors find the city a definite step backwards through two centuries. Ladies in the colorful dress of the eighteenth century greet visitors at the six important buildings of the city which have been authentically refurbished and opened to the public as exhibition buildings. These include the elaborate Governor's Palace completely reconstructed with its outbuildings and gardens; the historic Capitol, seat of government of the vast Virginia Colony; the Raleigh Tavern, famous hostelry where important decisions in the pre-Revolutionary activities were made; and the stout Public Gaol where Blackbeard's pirates were imprisoned.

In addition there is Bruton Parish Church, the Wren Building of the College of William and Mary, the Courthouse of 1770, and other famous structures. A new Reception Center has been opened in the city where visitors may view a short "briefing" program on Williamsburg's place in early American history and the story of the restoration.

The spring and summer seasons rank closely together as the two top periods of visitor attendance. Thirty-six percent of Williamsburg's visitors come in the summer and 32 percent in the spring. The fall and winter seasons are favored by many with 26 percent in the fall and 6 percent in the winter. Estimated figures compiled by Colonial Williamsburg, the organization carrying forward the restoration of the city, indicate that the average visitor stays in the city 1.9 days. It is estimated that 73 cents of the average visitor's travel dollar in Williamsburg is expended for hotel room and meals, 15 cents for tours, 10 cents at the Craft House, and 2 cents for publications including the perennial post card (these figures are based upon totals from the Williamsburg Inn and Lodge, the Exhibition Buildings and the Craft House where authentic reproductions and related items are sold—all of which are operated by Colonial Williamsburg).

Most of the visitors to Williamsburg leave with a new understanding and appreciation of life in early American days when the principles upon which this Nation is building were being formed. This is the basic desire behind the historic restoration of Williamsburg—"That the Future May Learn From the Past."