

## Commemorating the start of a Nation

The 2007's highest-profile event, undoubtedly, was the 400th anniversary Jamestown, the first English colony in the new world. The tens of millions-of-dollar festivities organized by Virginia from May to November were steeped in history and pride. Among the highlights was the visit of Queen Elizabeth II to historic Jamestown in May to mark, with millions of Americans, the founding of the country's first permanent English-speaking settlement in 1607.

"Welcome to James Ford," was a greeting that echoed across four centuries as the Queen set foot on the ground by the mile-wide James River where the ragged subjects of an earlier British sovereign established the colony that would become the United States of America.



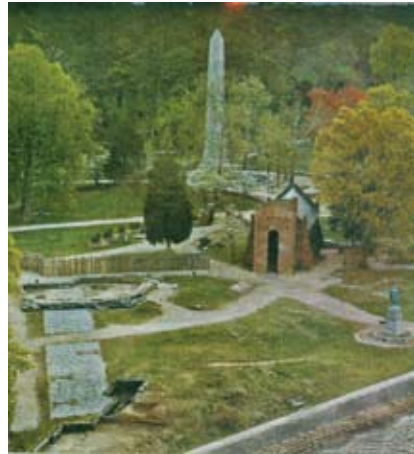
Jamestown is much richer with history than it was for Queen's first visit 50 years ago. Amid the celebration of the famed landing was also a celebration of a scientific achievement, the discovery of the original fort 13 years ago by archaeologist William M. Kelso and other artifacts giving witness within its confines centuries ago.

Kelso's findings, unfolding quietly over more than a decade, take Jamestown's story back to its beginning, experts say, and rank among the greatest in North American archaeology in the past 50 years. Their repository is the newly founded archaeological museum in Jamestown, which, together with the launch of the *Godspeed*, a replica of one of the original ships to make the crossing, were part of the 400th celebrations of founding Jamestown.

The story of Jamestown began on May 14, 1607, when after a voyage of almost five months—attended at night by what was probably Halley's Comet—a hundred or so colonists came ashore on Jamestown Island, a 1,500-acre tract of marshy land on the lower James about 150 miles south of Washington, D.C.

The colonists, who had left London in December, had sailed into the Chesapeake Bay almost three weeks earlier aboard three ships—the *Discover*, the *Godspeed*, and the *Susan Constant*. They located one likely spot for settling, but the water was too shallow for their ships to anchor close to it. At Jamestown, the river was "six fathom" deep near the shore, one of them wrote later, and so the ships were moored there. The colonists started on the fort the day they landed.

The fort was "triangle-wise," wrote George Percy, one of the expedition leaders, "having three Bulwarkes at every corner like a halfe



Moone, and foure or five peeces of Artillerie mounted in them." The enclose was complete by mid-June.

Decades passed, Jamestown grew and became Virginia's capital. The first Africans arrived in 1619, and slavery evolved. In the 1690s, the capital moved to Williamsburg, the fort crumbled, and the island was largely abandoned.

Kelso was not the first to search for the abandoned antiquity. The first to dig on the island took place between 1893 and 1903 and was led by Mary Jeffrey Galt, co-founder of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. More excavation was done in the 1930s and again in the mid-1950s—with the fort uncovered.

An expert on Colonial America, Kelso had pioneered the archeology of slavery at Thomas Jefferson's Virginia home, Monticello, and at a former plantation outside Williamsburg called Kingsmill. Finding James Fort became an irresistible quest, despite evidence claiming that it may have been washed away.

Until recently, people thought the Jamestown fort must have been erected near the spot where the colonists tied their ships. That had to be in deep water where the river channel ran close to the island.

While re-reading the accounts of the landing, Kelso found a crack in that theory—the accounts said the colonists *landed* at the spot, not that they had built a fort there. Then he found a description of the size of the fort—1.75 acres—penned about two years of the landing, which strengthened his belief that the fort was not built at the site of the landing. Finally, he lit upon an ancient Jamestown map, most likely drawn in 1608 by Spain's ambassador to Britain, which included a crude rendering of a triangular fort.

The fort was said to have had a church, in the middle of its inner confines. About fifty yards from the river there were remains of a church which Kelso correctly assumed to be on a site of an earlier church. Those remnants clinched it. In 1994, he started digging between the church and the river, guessing that he might intersect with evidence of one wall of the fort.

Within weeks, he unearthed a straight line of discolored earth that contained precise soil imprints probably made by the decayed wood of side-by-side vertical timbers set in a trench about 21/2 feet deep. Painstaking excavation over the next few years gradually revealed similar evidence of the other two walls and outlines of parts of the bulwarks at the corners. Not only was the fort site not lost to the river,

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Kelso said, but ninety percent of it survived—undiscovered for 400 years.

As the digging expanded, Kelso found evidence of buildings erected within the fort, the hole where the fort's flag pole used to be, tens of thousands of artifacts the settlers left behind, and the remains of about hundred settlers themselves. Together, these findings paint a new picture of Jamestown and its early inhabitants, rewriting the opening chapters of U.S. history itself. [Ilse Genovese]

