



GRAND ILLUMINATION

AMERICANS
Becoming **TODAY**

NO. 1 IN COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG



MERRY CHRISTMAS

See page 2.

Christmas Season 1774
Newsline

- December*
Local Committee of Safety elected
Grand Jury reports for the judicial law courts
- December 1*
Continental Association goes into effect ending the importation of British goods
- December 3*
Birth of Lady Virginia
- December 4*
Return of Lord Dunmore from the Indian Wars in the West
- December 6*
Dunmore issues commissions for a court for the district of West Augusta
- December 12*
The James City Committee is the first to order an auction of imported British goods at the Raleigh Tavern on January 19, 1775
- December 12*
Fair Day for Williamsburg
- December 13*
General Court's Oyer and Terminer Court meets to try criminal cases
- December 16*
End of Trinity term at the college
- December 17*
Four young Shawnee braves arrive in Williamsburg as hostages to the good faith of their tribe's agreement to meet with treaty negotiators in the spring of 1775
- December 23*
Freeholders of Williamsburg elect a committee for the city
- December 25*
Christmas Day
The first day of the Christmas season and one of four times during the year when the Lord's Supper is celebrated in Virginia churches. Secular observance of the season includes entertaining at home
- December 26*
St. Stephen, first Christian martyr
In England and Virginia, the first day of the 12 days of Christmas, which extend through January 6
- December 27*
St. John the Evangelist
Minutes of the Williamsburg Lodge of Freemasons show that local Masons celebrated this day annually in the 1770s with great ceremony, attending church and later hosting a dinner and ball
- January 1*
New Year's Day
- January 5*
Twelfth Night: "spend the night in enjoyment and reveling" with dinners, balls or a special cake
- January 6*
Epiphany or Twelfth Day

In This Bleak Midwinter



Street Scene of Williamsburg

Williamsburg, December 1774

Traveling about the vicinage of Williamsburg "while frosty wind" of Association "made moan," your narrators of the news will endeavor to discover the pulse of the populace as regards these somewhat troubling times.

Stopping first in the Apollo Room of Mr. Southall's tavern, we chanced upon two gentlemen sharing a bowl of punch. We put the following question to them:

"The late Congress adopted a nonimportation agreement disallowing imports from Great Britain and Ireland—meaning any goods, wares or merchandise. Given that many colonists prefer British goods, what is to dissuade you gentlemen from buying British imports?"

"On the previous occasion, there was no mechanism in the machinery of nonimportation to ensure compliance. And, as you know full well, many Virginians, left to their own devices, will always find a way to bring in British imports that are much preferred to country goods. Therefore, the Congress authorized committees of safety to be chosen in each county and to enforce the resolves. And such committees might just quench a man's thirst for English goods."

"And what about your companion, good sir? Is he in agreement with you concerning the Association?"

"Association, smociation! I'm wearied to death with it already!"

"Thank you, Mr. Greenhow. We'll wager we won't see 'three ships come sailing in' on this Christmas Day!"

Wending our way through town, we espied a small gathering outside the governor's house. Are they seeking news of the health of Lady Dunmore and her new babe?

"Good people. What news have you about happenings in the Palace?"

"We have learned from Mr. Purdie that not only was the countess safely delivered of a daughter, but her ladyship continues in a very favorable situation, and the 'young Virginian' is reported in perfect health. His lordship received these good 'tidings of comfort and joy' upon returning from his successful expedition against the Shawnee."

Or as Scottish merchant James Parker of Norfolk said, "In fact, the governor is now as popular as a Scotsman can be amongst weak and prejudiced people."

Strolling past the church (Bruton Parish), we made the acquaintance of a clergyman from Pohick Parish.

"We've come to know that Christmastide is an especially pleasing time in the Virginia colony for marriages."

"'Tis true enough. There are any number of marriages during the 12 days of Christmas. I understand that the marriages of Colonel Washington and Mr. Jefferson took place during this season. However, few if any Virginians marry in churches; rather it is more likely that vows are exchanged in the minister's home or in the bride's parlor. If it 'tis the latter, I could easily travel a goodly distance to officiate the wedding but would hope to be supplied with a sumptuous dinner and ample Madeira."

We take our leave of the good rector and, strolling downtown, encounter one of the city's aldermen returning home from the common council meeting. And, being of an inquisitive nature, we ask what merriment might be in store for him and his family this season.

"My wife and daughters may well attend occasions for dance and diverse entertainment. For the gentry of this colony, in years past there have been fox hunting, feasting, gaming, dancing, drinking and the firing of the Christmas guns—and less frequent and not nearly as grand entertainments for those of the lesser sorts. But we must remember the resolves from the late Congress to 'discountenance and discourage every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially like horse racing, all kinds of gaming, cockfighting.' So this may be a bleak midwinter."

"What of the enslaved Virginians and their celebrations?"

"The Christmas holidays might give leave and license to many kinds of people that ordinarily would not enjoy such at other times of the year. My field hands who work my property in Warwick County may be granted three days or more to their own devices. My house servants, however, will enjoy less time for themselves due to the demands of the season."

"We understand that Col. Landon Carter of Sabine Hall is suppressing his slaves' celebration this year, saying, 'I can't but fancy that I have been quite happy in not letting my People keep any part of Christmas.' What a master gives he can also take away."

"I hope you will excuse my abrupt leave taking, but I must to home. And conclude by wishing you the compliments of the season."

God rest you, merry gentleman. And now we will away to Mrs. Campbell's to warm ourselves with a bowl of sangaree. And wish to you, our readers, a good new year.

[Submitted by Nancy Milton and Phil Schulz]

CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW YEAR 1774/2004

- Peace at Home
- Protection of Individual Freedoms
- Prosperity for Families and Communities

James City County Committee Election and Toasts

At A GENERAL MEETING of the freeholders of JAMES CITY county, convened on Friday the 25th of November, at the house of Mr. Isham Allen, in order to elect a committee pursuant to a resolution of the AMERICAN CONTINENTAL CONGRESS:

The ASSOCIATION entered into by the CONGRESS being publicly read, the freeholders, and other inhabitants of the county, that they might testify to the world their concurrence and hearty approbation of the measures adopted by that respectable body, very cordially acceded thereto, and did bind and oblige themselves, by the sacred ties of virtue, honour, and love to their country, STRICTLY and INVIOLABLY to observe and keep the same, in every PARTICULAR. . . .

Robert Carter Nicholas, esquire, was unanimously chosen chairman [of the 28 member committee]. . . .

It was agreed, that the resolutions of the GENERAL CONGRESS should be resorted to on every occasion of difficulty, and that those resolutions ought to be considered by the committee, and the whole country, as the sole rule of their conduct, in all matters respecting their present political arrangements.

The business of the day having been carried on with the greatest harmony and decorum, and being concluded, the following toasts were proposed, and drank with great cheerfulness:

THE KING. May his Majesty long and gloriously reign in the hearts of his free and loyal American subjects.

THE QUEEN, and all the ROYAL FAMILY. His excellency the GOVERNOR and his LADY, and prosperity to VIRGINIA.

A speedy, honourable, and happy reconciliation to GREAT BRITAIN and AMERICA. The good bishop of ST. ASAPH.

LORD CHATHAM. LORD CAMDEN.

Those AMERICANS, and FRIENDS to AMERICA, who preferred to parliament, and there endeavored to support, petitions against the BOSTON PORT BILL.

Our friends and fellow subjects of BOSTON, and all other defenders of AMERICAN FREEDOM, upon the true principles of our excellent constitution.

All those WORTHIES, of whatever clime or country, who are friends to the just RIGHTS and LIBERTIES of MANKIND.

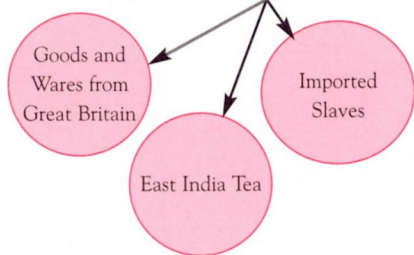
Unfeigned thanks and gratitude to the WORTHY MEMBERS of the late CONTINENTAL CONGRESS: May the wisdom of their counsels, and their unwearied endeavours to preserve the RIGHTS and LIBERTIES of AMERICA, be held in lasting remembrance; and may they be crowned with success.

This respectful tribute being paid, the company partook of an agreeable, though frugal, repast, and then every one returned home in proper time.

Published by order of the general meeting.
JOHN NICHOLAS, Junior,
Cl. Com. J.C.C.

VIRGINIA TODAY SNAPSHOT

The Association Takes Effect
December 1, 1774
NO IMPORTATION!
What Will You Do WITHOUT . . .





THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

*Christmas is come, hang on the pot,
Let spits turn round and ovens be hot; Beef, pork, and poultry now provide,
To feast thy neighbor at this tide;
Then wash all down with good wine and beer,
And so with Mirth conclude the YEAR.*

Joseph Royle, *The Virginia Almanack*, 1765

“Welcome Winter”

Winter provides a special opportunity to draw connections between 18th-century Virginia and the 21st-century lives of our guests. Modern holiday traditions grew out of diverse celebrations, religious observances and cultural practices, many of which were familiar to colonists, Native Americans and African Americans. Although they would not have decorated an indoor tree or left cookies for Santa Claus, most 18th-century Virginians would have had cause for celebration sometime during the season. The following offers some highlights of the historical and present-day observances that generally occur during December.

While, for most Christians, December evokes thoughts of the birth of Christ and the traditions associated with it, non-Christians worldwide hold various celebrations and rituals in and around the month of December. Most are associated with the winter solstice. The term *solstice* is derived from the Latin words *sol*, which means sun, and *sistere*, which means “to stand still.” At winter solstice the nighttime hours are longer than the daylight hours. It is the opposite of summer solstice (when daylight hours are longer).

By the fourth century, Roman emperor Constantine had accepted Christianity. In an attempt to unify his subjects, he combined many of the pagan and Christian traditions associated with solstice and the birth of Jesus into one that would be acceptable to all. Constantine also declared Sunday as the official day of rest. (Until then, ancient Christians observed the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday.) About this time the date of the observance was identified as December 25.



DECEMBER WEATHER

- 13th More moderate, but snowing fast all afternoon. (George Washington) Hard frozen. No plowing yesterday, and I am afraid none today. (Landon Carter)
- 14th Last night cold with the snow which fell yesterday about 2 to 3 but not deep. This morning the same. (Carter)
- 25th A glorious day not only fine in the remembrance it occasions but also in the looks of the weather God be praised. Amen and Amen. (Carter)

Other holy days, rituals or celebrations observed in December include the following:

- Native Americans—Many Native American Indian tribes recognize both summer and winter solstices. Pueblo Indians had many rites observed on or near the solstices. The Hopi tribe held a ceremony called *Soyal*, which recognized the re-emergence of the sun. The many ancient stone structures located throughout the country were created by Native Americans to detect the solstices and equinoxes.
- Islam—*Ramadan* is the holiest month of the year for Muslims. Its date is calculated by the arrival of the first crescent moon that signals the ninth lunar month of the Muslim calendar. This observation honors the time when Allah revealed the *Qura'n* to Mohammed. It has fallen in December, but may occur as early as October (e.g., Ramadan 2003).
- Judaism—*Hanukkah* (also known as the Festival of Lights, Feast of Dedication or Chanukkah) recognizes the war fought by the Maccabees in pursuit of religious freedom. When the king of Syria conquered Judea in the second century B.C.E., he disallowed worship in the Temple and stole the sacred lamp, the menorah, from the altar. When the Maccabees retook Jerusalem three years later, they found sufficient oil to light the menorah for only 24 hours, but the flame lasted a miraculous eight days.

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[Submitted by Rose McAphee]



Colonial Christmas Customs

In the 18th century, Christmas was much more a “holy” day than our 21st-century holiday. The colonists observed it quietly in the home and at church. Attendance at the parish church on Christmas morning for communion was expected because the Feast of the Nativity was the major event of the Anglican calendar.

From Christmas Day through Twelfth Night, January 6, gentry houses filled with visitors. Their neighbors, friends and kinsmen gathered for parties, dances and fox hunts. At-home entertainment emphasized feasting with provisions as varied and plentiful as pocketbooks would allow. Virginians continued the traditional holiday foods from England—roast beef and goose, plum puddings and mince pies—and the colony contributed additional delicacies. Native wild turkeys, ducks and venison became important additional delicacies. The ubiquitous Virginia ham had already claimed a place at center. Local waters yielded a wide variety of fish and shellfish for holiday feasts. In wealthy households dinner offerings were surpassed only by the variety and quantity of the beverages. Imported wines like sherry, Madeira and clarets counted as favorites at meals. Punch made with rum or arrack, rum flip and other mixed spirits made frequent appearances as well. French brandy and locally made beer, ale, peach brandy and cider remained immensely popular throughout the period. Eggnog did not become a seasonal favorite until the end of the century.

The middling sort and the poor probably displayed fewer outward signs of the season, but everyone tried to have more and better things to eat and drink at this time. While working people could not celebrate for days on end, stores and shops were closed at least for Christmas Day itself. Plantation slaves got three or so days off from work, while domestics probably worked even harder if their masters gave large entertainments. Household slaves and servants might have leave granted them at a later date in return for working during the holidays.

Virginia woods abound with holly, cedar, live oak, mistletoes, ivy, bay and other plants for decorating at the holidays. With greenery all around them, the colonists most likely followed the English custom of decking their homes and churches with evergreens, but no contemporary sources describe the effect.

Besides feasting, a few greens and some repose, there were not many seasonal customs during the 18th century. Virginians did have at least one distinctive way of celebrating. Colonial boys followed the custom of “shooting in the Christmas,” setting off their guns on Christmas Eve and morning. Another way of raising a joyful noise was with music, especially group singing of carols.

The Christmas tree came to Williamsburg in the 19th century. Colonial-style decorations for the holidays consist of the greenery listed above, possibly from fruits and nuts, pinecones, other natural objects and candles.

Like the Christmas tree, most of our favorite holiday practices today had their origins in the 19th century. Gift giving was not widespread, with the giving going from superior to inferior (parent to child, master to apprentice, or owner to slave or servant) but not in the other direction. Children, the poor and slaves welcomed some small luxury like a book, sweets, gloves or a few coins. New Year’s Day seems to have been just as likely a date for bestowing presents as December 25.

[Submitted by Emma L. Powers]



PUTTING SLAVIN’ ASIDE

As usual, our sources are biased toward the gentry and upper middling sort. There is no information about how poor whites and free people of color celebrated Christmas in early Virginia. For some of them, the religious aspects of the holiday probably prevailed. With limited incomes, of course, material manifestations of the season—gifts, special meals, decorations and so on—were simply not possible.

We know more about slaves’ treatment at this time of year because of letters, diaries and other documents written by the masters, mainly gentry planters. A February 1726/7 law that established patrols to guard against invasions and insurrections mentions that slaves usually congregated in some numbers at the three main yearly festivals. As part of the rationale for the patrols, the legislators called to mind the “great danger [that] may happen to the inhabitants of this dominion, from the unlawful concourse of negros, during the Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide holidays, wherein they are usually exempted from labour.”

Lorena Walsh’s research on plantation management in the colonial Chesapeake shows that slaves were allowed three to five days’ holiday at Christmastime. In 1786, for example, George Washington noted on December 29, “The hollidays being over, and the People [slaves] all at work, I rid to the Ferry, Dogue run, and Muddy hole Plantations.” A Christmas respite must have been allowed to field hands more readily than to domestics; house servants had more work than usual when guests were in the house for extended visits or if the master and mistress expected special meals and entertainments during the holidays.

Traditionally, slave owners allowed their workers to have alcohol during the Christmas break. Some masters actually made gifts of rum and other spirits to their bondsmen. This was a very manipulative move and not offered strictly for the slaves’ benefit and enjoyment. Frederick Douglass and others explained that slave owners actually encouraged drunkenness at Christmas and a few other occasions to keep slaves from running away. Some individuals, it was said, drank so much that they could not enjoy their temporary freedom. Holiday imbibing troubled certain slave owners. James Gordon, an “Old Side” Presbyterian in Lancaster County, Virginia, recorded in his diary on Christmas Day 1759: “Some of our negroes got drunk, that has given me some uneasiness.”

[Emma Lou Powers, *The Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter* (Fall 1999)]

