



# AMERICANS *Becoming* TODAY

NO. 1 IN COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG



See Page 2.

1781

## Newsline

April 29

The Marquis de Lafayette and his Continentals reach Richmond\*\*

May 21

Reinforcements from Gen. Henry Clinton in New York arrive, bringing the British forces under Gen. Charles Cornwallis in Virginia to 7,000\*\*

May 27

Cornwallis forces American evacuation of Richmond\*\*

June 4

Capt. John Jouett Jr. sees Col. Banastre Tarleton's troops in Louisa County and races at night to Monticello to warn Thomas Jefferson and to Charlottesville to warn the General Assembly. Jefferson and all but seven legislators escape\*\*

June 12

Thomas Nelson Jr. of Yorktown is elected governor\*\*

June 19

Maj. Gen. Friedrich Von Steuben's men join Lafayette and Gen. Anthony Wayne, making 1,900 Continentals and about 3,000 militia under command\*

June 25

Cornwallis reaches Williamsburg\*

June 26

The main American army reaches Bird's Tavern, about 10 miles from Williamsburg\*

July 4

Cornwallis' troops leave Williamsburg and cross the James River on July 6.

July 9-24

From his base in Suffolk, Cornwallis conducts raids along the south side of the James River\*\*

August 2

Cornwallis occupies Yorktown after Clinton orders him to fortify Old Point Comfort where the land would not support heavy fortifications\*

August 19

Gen. George Washington begins to move his own and the Comte de Rochambeau's armies from the North toward Virginia upon the intelligence that the Comte de Grasse, the French admiral, is sailing with 3,000 men from the West Indies for the Chesapeake\*

August 26

De Grasse arrives in Chesapeake Bay and, on September 2, 3,000 troops land at Jamestown under the Marquis de St. Simon\*

September 5

Outside the Virginia Capes, de Grasse damages a part of the British fleet under Adm. Thomas Graves that is forced to return to New York, closing an escape route for Cornwallis' forces\*

September 14

Washington and Rochambeau arrive in Williamsburg before their troops marching from the North. After conferring with de Grasse on board his flagship, they return to Williamsburg on September 22\*

September 28

The combined American and French armies of 16,000 men march from Williamsburg to Yorktown\*

\*September 29-October 17

The Siege of Yorktown\*\*

September 30

The British surrender their outermost earthworks at Yorktown\*

October 14

British redoubts 9 and 10 fall, allowing the allies to complete a second parallel of breastworks closer to Yorktown\*

October 16

A violent storm and a steady bombardment prevent Cornwallis from escaping across the York River to Gloucester\*

\*October 19

Cornwallis surrenders the British army of 7,247 men at Yorktown. General Washington, with the assistance of the French, has won independence for the colonies\*

\*John E. Selby, *A Chronology of Virginia and the War of Independence 1763-1783* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1973).

\*\**Becoming Americans: Choosing Revolution* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1996).

# WAR COMES TO WILLIAMSBURG

News reached Williamsburg on August 2 that ended days of speculation about where the British army had gone. Cornwallis' soldiers had landed at Yorktown. That news also reached General Lafayette who was encamped west of Williamsburg. A detachment of his army marched through town to take up a position east of Williamsburg where it could keep an eye on the British. The enemy had occupied Williamsburg twice this year. Soon a large allied American army would occupy it. War had returned to Williamsburg.

During the summer, a French army commanded by the Comte de Rochambeau linked up with George Washington's Continental army north of New York City. Washington had planned to besiege the city, but success hinged on the arrival of a promised French fleet from the West Indies. However, when news that Cornwallis had gone to ground in Virginia reached the French admiral the Comte de Grasse, de Grasse decided to sail his fleet to the Chesapeake Bay instead. When word of the admiral's decision reached Washington on August 14, Washington knew that the planned siege was doomed. He quickly moved to seize this new opportunity to capture Cornwallis. He ordered a combined French and American army south on August 19.

Meanwhile, speculation about the British intentions had been a topic of conversation among many Williamsburg residents. Spies from Yorktown supplied a steady flow of information about Cornwallis' actions. It was no secret that the British were constructing strong earthworks around Yorktown and across the York River at Tindalls Point. Amidst these conversations, a rumor that a large fleet, presumably French, had anchored in Lynnhaven Bay was confirmed when several thousand French soldiers landed at Jamestown Island on September 5 and joined with Lafayette's forces in and around Williamsburg.

Their arrival brought good news. They had real money. Virginia's cash-strapped planters had reluctantly supplied the cash-strapped Lafayette with provisions. Livestock and foodstuffs that had once seemed in short supply quickly materialized. Wagons and herded animals were driven up and down Williamsburg's main street to feed this growing army. The pace of military activity picked up with the arrival of General Washington and General Rochambeau on September 14. Six days later, advance elements of the allied army arrived and began to set up camps around Williamsburg. Several thousand Virginia militiamen under Gen. Thomas Nelson soon joined them.

By late September, some 15,000 to 20,000 soldiers were encamped in the Greater Williamsburg area. While the generals and their staffs planned the siege of Yorktown, these soldiers engaged in the routine chores of army life. They drilled. They posted guards. They carried messages from unit to unit. They laundered clothes. They cooked meals. Some even took time off to go sightseeing in the old capital city. Their presence also placed heavy demand on the resources of the region. Supplying food and fuel would have been especially difficult.

By the evening of September 27, the battle plan was ready. The next morning the army set off for Yorktown. With its departure, the center of military activity shifted away from Williamsburg, but the city remained an important rear area. Hospitals, for example, were established in Williamsburg for sick and wounded French and American soldiers. Sutlers (a follower of an army camp who peddled provisions to the soldiers) supplying the troops in the field purchased their goods, especially liquor, from the city's merchants.

On the afternoon of October 9, the distant rumble of artillery fire alerted perceptive townspeople that the siege had entered a new stage. The arrival of French soldiers who were wounded taking British redoubt 9 on October 14 signaled that the siege was almost over. When the distant thunder of shelling stopped on the morning of October 17, Williamsburg residents knew that the British surrender was imminent. Some may have set out for Yorktown on the morning of October 19 arriving in time to witness the surrender that afternoon. Those who remained at home knew the victory was real when the defeated British soldiers were escorted westward through town. In early November, as victorious Americans marched along Duke of Gloucester Street on their way back to New York and the French army took up winter quarters near Williamsburg and in the lower tidewater area, the war in Williamsburg came to an end. [Submitted by Kevin Kelly]

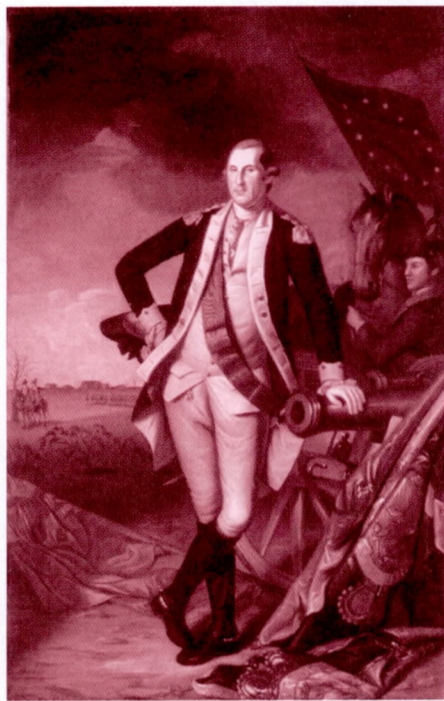
## THE DOWN SIDE OF REVOLUTION

A celebratory mood pervaded Williamsburg on May 1, 1783. Peace between Great Britain and the United States sparked an elaborate parade, public proclamations of peace and repeated toasts to independence.

Events of the day masked the realities of war: families rent asunder by opposing political views; suspicions about loyalties among old friends and associates; bad news from the front about the war and the fate of fathers, sons, brothers, husbands; the consequences for Williamsburg in the wake of occupying forces, friend and foe; rampant inflation; the perilous flight of slaves to join the British ranks in a bid for freedom; the sometimes shocking conditions these escapees endured; Williamsburg's own diminished role in the post-Revolutionary period.

Although the differences between loyalist John Randolph who left Virginia for England and his patriot son Edmund are usually portrayed almost as a polite disagreement, a poisonous atmosphere in Williamsburg marked the departure of several loyalist residents. Rumors of intimidation against people who did not conform to the Continental Association circulated widely. In late November 1774, a liberty pole was erected opposite the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg "upon which was hung a large map & a bag of feathers, under it a bbl [barrel] of tarr." In 1775 and 1776, Tories fled Williamsburg in the prevailing climate of fear during which persons judged to be "inimical to the liberties of America" could find their names and an account of their transgressions published in the *Virginia Gazette*.

As the Revolution approached, the promise as well as the pitfalls of the changing times



George Washington (Peale)

## SUMMER 1781

### UNDER THE REDCOAT

Friday-Sunday, June 24-26, 2005

From June 25 to July 4, 1781, British forces under the command of Gen. Lord Cornwallis occupied Williamsburg and imposed martial law on the town's residents, which resulted in hardship and their loss of liberties. This special weekend reenactment begins at noon on Friday as the 17<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons, accompanied by a patrol of light infantry, enter the Historic Area near the capitol. After removing the American flag from the Capitol and replacing it with the Flag of the Union, the patrol proceeds to Market Square and secures the area for an encampment of the occupation troops. More British army units converge on the town throughout the afternoon. Martial law is declared at 5:15 P.M., and the terms of occupation are read to the townspeople, who must deal with the implications of the occupation.

Guests are encouraged to experience the occupation by visiting the British encampment, observing the soldiers and their commanding officers as Cornwallis plans a trap near Williamsburg for the advancing Continental Army units led by the Marquis de Lafayette. While Cornwallis prepares his battle plan, his troops drill and pursue various activities in camp throughout the weekend.

Activities include musket drills, artillery batteries, dragoon or cavalry maneuvers, and surgeons caring for the wounded in a military field hospital. The reenactment draws to a close late Sunday afternoon as Cornwallis marches his troops out of the city to meet Continental Army forces at the James River near Greenspring Plantation.

### PRELUDE TO VICTORY:

#### Washington Prepares for Yorktown!

Friday-Sunday, September 2-4, 2005

This Revolutionary War reenactment represents September 26 through 28, 1781, the last three days of the period when General Washington and le Comte de Rochambeau, commander of the French forces, were headquartered in Williamsburg, prior to the siege at Yorktown. Eastern Virginia has been marched over and foraged over by the American armies under Lafayette and Von Steuben and British armies under Cornwallis and Arnold. There is a general shortage of food and material. General Cornwallis has moved to Yorktown. Williamsburg is now in American hands. Lafayette barely missed destruction in a trap set by Cornwallis at Green Spring. General Washington is now moving to trap Cornwallis at Yorktown. Smallpox arrived in town with the British army in June and remains a problem.

The entrance into Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area by advance units of Washington's army on Friday afternoon signals the beginning of the annual holiday reenactment. The weekend is filled with evidence of military prowess by the Continental Army troops, including artillery practice and musket drills. The reading of General Orders at the Courthouse puts the army to the tasks at hand Saturday morning. General Washington's staff formulates the strategies, tactics, and contingencies for the siege. A military field hospital is located at the Governor's Palace East Advance Building. Saturday afternoon's programs include a mutineer's trial and execution. The Gen. Marquis de Lafayette will hold a public auction at the Courthouse on Sunday morning.

Following a full day of reenactment events on Sunday, General Washington addresses his troops and issues final marching orders as the army prepares to leave Yorktown at 5 P.M. Sunday.



## NEWS

## THE DOWN SIDE OF REVOLUTION

cont. from page 1

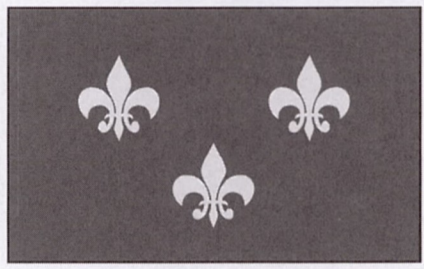
pushed and pulled families such as the Geddys in a different way. Solid and prosperous tradesmen of long standing in the community, James Geddy Jr. favored the patriot cause and was a member of the local Committee of Safety. Geddy's 1777 decision to suspend commercial activities in Williamsburg, put his house on the market and move his family to his Dinwiddie County farm affected not only his wife and children but also his brothers, his slaves and other workers on the site. Brother William remained in the Williamsburg area and drove livestock and provided goods for Virginia and Continental forces.

Gentry leaders struck upon property ownership as a surefire way of establishing common economic ground with Virginia yeomanry in the effort to enlist lesser landowners and farmers in the Revolution. Promoted as an almost sacred right, property ownership protected the institution of slavery, even as the unsettled times and Dunmore's emancipation proclamation provided slaves of rebel sympathizers a real chance for freedom, many choosing to run to British lines in Norfolk in 1775, others joining the British as they marched through Virginia in 1781. Cornwallis used the former slaves to construct massive earthworks at Yorktown. Later, however, they became a drain on his limited resources and were abandoned to their fate, ill clad, poorly nourished and vulnerable to smallpox and other diseases.

The war weariness that settled on Virginia by 1780 was exacerbated by rampant inflation that caused real hardship and unrest in Williamsburg and rivaled the war as a major concern. Ordinary citizens of Williamsburg called a town meeting of all free inhabitants at which it was decided to fix the prices of foodstuffs and appoint an oversight committee to force compliance. Further difficulties followed first the British forces then the American as they made their way through Williamsburg on course for Yorktown. Property damage, smallpox and a plague of stinging flies increased the general discomfort and unease of local residents.

Williamsburg's own fate was sealed before war's end. On April 7, 1780, the government packed up and left town.

[Submitted by Linda Rowe]



**Becoming AMERICANS TODAY**  
is a publication of the  
**Department of**  
**Interpretive Training**

Editors:

Margot Crévieux-Gevertz  
Anne Willis

Contributors:

Bob Doares, Kevin Kelly,  
Rose McAphee, Nancy Milton,  
Linda Rowe, Phil Shultz

Production:

Susan Q. Bruno, copy editor  
Diana Freedman, graphic production

© 2005 The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.  
All rights reserved. All images are property of  
The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, unless  
otherwise noted.



## AMERICAN VICTORY AT YORKTOWN

On August 14, 1781, General Washington received news that would shape his strategy for the remainder of the Revolutionary War. In order to support the American campaign, French Adm. François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, had left the West Indies with a fleet of 28 ships of the line, six frigates, and 3,000 troops bound for the Chesapeake Bay. Washington was informed that the admiral planned to return to the West Indies by mid-October. In order to take advantage of de Grasse's support, Washington and Jean-Baptiste-Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau, abandoned their planned assault on Clinton in New York and marched their troops almost 500 miles to Virginia. They also needed to convince Adm. Jacques-Melchoir Saint-Laurent, Comte de Barras, commander of the French fleet at Newport, Rhode Island, to sail to the Chesapeake with French siege artillery and supplies for the army. By August 20, the allied army advanced south and Barras prepared to sail for the Chesapeake...

During the next two days, the French and British fleets maintained contact but did not engage in combat as they drifted about 100 miles in the direction of the Carolina Capes, thereby allowing Barras to slip unnoticed into the Chesapeake Bay with the French siege artillery. On September 14, Graves gave up hope of renewing the battle and ordered the British to sail to New York. Surrounded by land and sea, Cornwallis was unable to escape or to receive supplies.

Carte de la Partie de la Virginie depicts a dramatic, somewhat stylized, version of the important role the French navy played in the American victory at Yorktown. Designed for the French market, the map illustrates—and perhaps enhances—the French position at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. Admiral Grasse's fleet is pictured as they prepared to sail for New York.

Source: Margaret Beck Pritchard and Henry G. Taliaferro, *Degrees of Latitude: Mapping Colonial America*, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2002, pp.282-284.



Yorktown Surrender of Cornwallis

**YORKTOWN IS PROOF  
POSITIVE—THESE ARE THE  
TIMES THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS**

The town of York—20th October 1781

Silence has now descended on this port town with the signing yesterday of the Articles of Capitulation betwixt his Excellency General Washington, Commander and Chief of the combined forces of America and France, and the Rt. Honorable Earl Cornwallis, Lt. General of his Britannic Majesty's Forces.

Thus is ended a 20-day siege of York and Gloucester, pitting some 17,000 allied American and French soldiers and seamen against a reported 8,500 British troops, including German auxiliaries and loyalist Americans.

The campaign began the 28th of September as Washington's forces marched on York. As his army approached the town, the British withdrew from their forward posts and dug in to await reinforcements. To his complete dismay, Cornwallis would learn that the reinforcements would never arrive.

On the evening of October 14, 400 Americans under Alexander Hamilton, stormed and captured Redoubt 10, while a like number of French, commanded by Col. Deux-Ponts, seized control of Redoubt 9. These military endeavors prepared the way for the launch of troops in a direct assault on the British.

Some at York suppose that 12 or 1,500 rounds of siege artillery have been fired on the town in a nine-day period. The bombardment has taken a horrendous toll on the inhabitants, as well as the town itself. Maj. Ebenezer Denny of Pennsylvania has said, "glad to be relieved of this disagreeable station. Negroes lie about, sick and dying, in every stage of the small pox. Never was in so filthy a place—some handsome house, but prodigiously shattered."

Article II of the Capitulation directs the "garrison of York to march out to a place—at two o'clock precisely with drums beating a British or German march.

After more than six long years of war, perhaps finally there might be a full and lasting peace. It will be a peace hard fought and dearly won.

GOD SAVE GENERAL WASHINGTON AND THE ALLIED ARMY.

[Submitted by Phil Shultz]

## PEOPLE

**TWO PERSPECTIVES**  
**War and the Slaves**  
*Slaves as Soldiers*

May 1777—Act II. *An act for the more speedily completing the Quota of Troops.*

And whereas several negro slaves have deserted from their masters, and under pretence of being free men have enlisted as soldiers: For prevention whereof, Be it enacted, that it shall not be lawful for any recruiting officer within this commonwealth to enlist any negro or mulatto into the service of this or either of the United States, until such negro or mulatto shall produce a certificate from some justice of the peace for the county wherein he resides that he is a free man.

*Black Women*

For the bulk of slave women located on southern plantations, the war entailed both physical suffering and greater latitude for personal action. Forced to make do with less in the way of food, clothing, and other basic supplies, white southerners considered the daily needs of their slaves to be a low priority (especially after 1778, when fighting engulfed the region). At least some whites fulfilled the prediction of the patriot who railed against runaway slave men seeking protection from the British: "The aged, the infirm, the women and children, are still to remain the property of their masters, masters who will be provoked to severity, should part of their slaves desert them." Untold numbers of slave women felt the wrath of "an enraged and injured people" desperate to keep the upper hand at home as well as on the battlefield.

*Slaves as Laborers*

During the Revolution, Virginia authorities sought to employ slaves as military laborers in the campaign against the British. The officials faced several obstacles, including the escape of able-bodied male slaves to Lord Dunmore and the unwillingness of slave owners to sell or hire out their slaves to assist in the war effort. (State and Confederate authorities would face similar difficulties almost a century later.) Virginia slaves who did contribute to the patriot cause as military laborers found themselves performing dangerous and dirty work, from toiling in lead mines to erecting fortifications.

**War and the Masters**

Williamsburg, July 11, 1781

My ever dear Fanny:

Here [the British] remained for some days, and with them pestilence and famine took root, and poverty brought up the rear. . . . Our friend Madison and his lady (they have lost their son) were turned out of their house to make room for Lord Cornwallis. Happily the College afforded them an asylum. Mr. McClurg has one small servant left, and but two girls. He feeds and saddles his own horse . . . Poor Mr. Cocke was deserted by his favorite man Clem: and Mrs. Cocke by the loss of her cook was obliged to have recourse to her neighbours to dress her dinner for her. They have but one little boy left to wait on them within doors. But this is not all. The small-pox, which the hellish polling of these infamous wretches has spread in every place through which they have passed has now obtained a crisis throughout the place so that there is scarcely a person to be found to nurse those who are most afflicted by it. Your old friend Aunt Betty is in that situation. A child of Sir Peyton Skipwith's who is with her, was deserted by its nurse, and the good lady was left without a human being to assist her in any respect for some days. As the British plundered all that they could, you will conceive how great an appearance of wretchedness this place must exhibit. After tyrannizing ten days here, they went to James Town where they were attached by our advanced parties. . . . Our army is in motion. Among the plagues the British left in Williamsburg, that of flies is inconceivable.

—St. George Tucker