



# H. You're History

By Mark Fitzgerald

A woman wrings her hands and looks around anxiously in an upstairs bedroom. A boy runs bare-chested through mist in the pre-dawn hours. A man in a puffy white shirt walks through brick walls. They've been dead for centuries, but purportedly are seen now and again at strange moments. Then they disappear. This is what happens in Colonial Williamsburg, where ghosts of old Virginia abound and the 18th century marches to a hallowed drum. History here pulses reverently as though for the first time, the present locked in the past's unflinching eye.

Strolling through Williamsburg's historic district, it occurred to me that the resident interpreters, those folks clad in colonial garb four layers thick who continuously relive the 1700s for our education and entertainment, aren't merely playing a role as much as inhabiting a time when self-determination stood at the doorstep of revolution.

I'm not much of a history buff, but amid the old shops and hitching posts, the horse-drawn carriages and cannon rumbles, fires and lanterns, all those flags — *and for you, sir, liberty or death?* — I felt a zeal for the heritage that shined before me.

In *Williamsburg*,  
Virginia, experience a history  
alive in the present,  
where the idea of America  
is just waking up.



Young drummer boys in traditional colonial attire carry Williamsburg's historic spirit through the streets of town.

listened. The music reverberating through the pipes was beautiful, but eerie in its own way, as if summoning the spirits of worshippers who had sat there long before I, including early U.S. presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

When the organist segued into a fugue, I stepped outside to the churchyard, where Edward Nott, a Colonial Virginia governor, is buried, along with many other colonists.

Walking down Duke of Gloucester Street, I heard another tune rising in the near distance. The fifers and drummers were approaching and with them a small crowd of onlookers. They marched in five lines — fifers in front, drummers in back — moving steadily through the district in time with the 18th-century military music they played. I found a circle of shade beneath a catalpa in full bloom and waited for them to come by. The players, boys and girls, some as young as 10 years old, looked sharp in their vests and knickers, buckled shoes and tri-cornered hats. Positioned in front of the centerline, the leader marched with a staff, spinning it from time to time to signal pauses and transitions. The music caught everyone's attention and seemed to give the crowd a

## *Under the spell..*

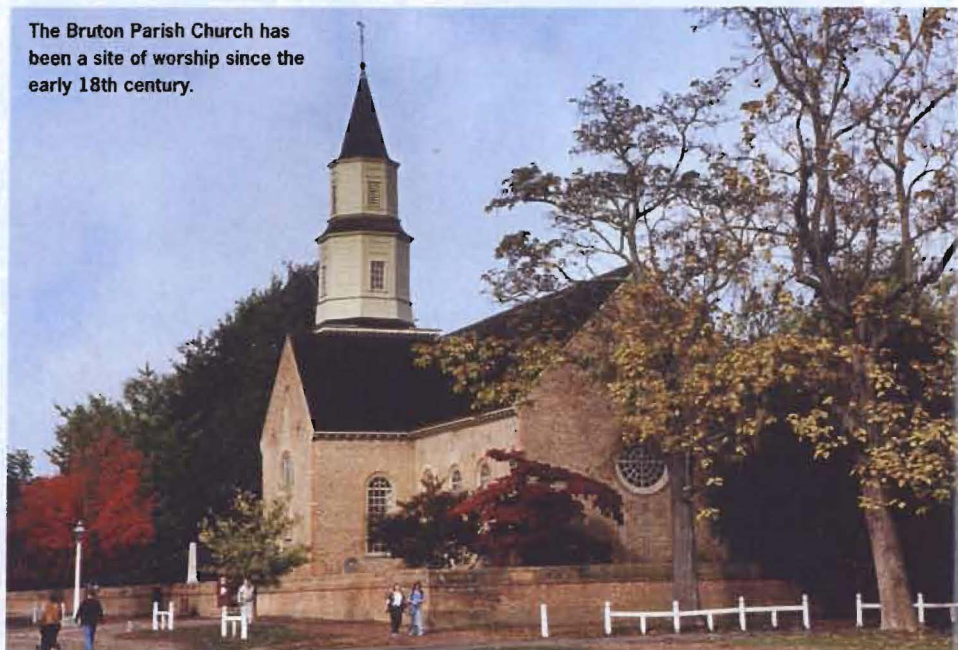
I'd begun the day with a stack of strawberry pancakes at the Gazebo House of Pancakes & Waffles on Bypass Road, just a short drive from the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center. The place has a cheerful vibe and serves more than 15 kinds of its namesake breakfast dishes, as well as a nice assortment of eggs and other morning delights. Pancakes, by the way, turned out to be the perfect starter for the exploration that followed. Williamsburg casts a spell over you. There are centuries of stories here, many still waiting to be told, and it's easy to get lost (and forget to eat) in the wonder of imagining what 18th-century life was like.

Spanning 301 acres, the historic district is a restored colonial town with hundreds of brick and clapboard buildings boasting antique furniture and various period treasures. Each day is filled with special events, reenactments, and musical performances. Admission tickets, user-friendly maps, and more than enough information about local happenings and tours can be had at the Visitor Center.

I decided on the Capital City Pass (it includes access to most of the buildings, gardens, and exhibition sites), and then

began my journey at the Bruton Parish Church, which has been hosting worship services since 1715. The organist was in mid-melody when I walked in, and I was struck by the serenity of the interior. The church was fully restored in 1940, but the walls and windows are original, and there is a stone baptismal font near the pulpit, which is believed to have come from an earlier church in Jamestown. It was measurably cooler inside, and I took a seat in one of the high box pews and simply

The Bruton Parish Church has been a site of worship since the early 18th century.



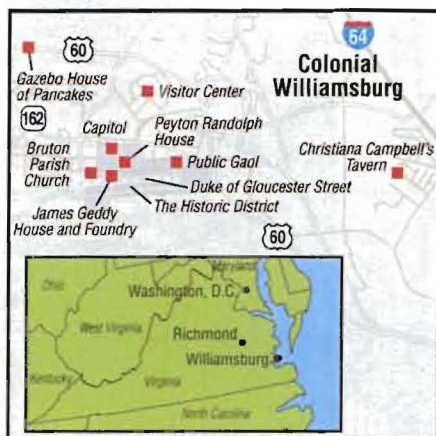


published by your House of Burgesses which makes it necessary for me to dissolve them. God save the King!"

With that, the governor promptly marched out of the Capitol, climbed back into his carriage and was ushered back to his palace. After he had gone, interpreters in the crowd expressed concern. Some questioned the validity of the decision; some defended the status quo. Tough choices would have to be made. Families would be torn apart. I could feel the weight of the dilemma echo up through the centuries, and, knowing the future, I saw ever more clearly how the intransigence of a distant monarch prompted the dawn of a self-governing republic.

### FOOD AND SPIRITS

While listening to Governor Dunmore speak was certainly worth my time, I was still hungry and very happy when I finally arrived at Christiana Campbell's Tavern, where the crab cakes and sweet cherry pie are sublime. The restaurant, which specializes in fresh seafood, also is known for its clam chowder, oyster fritters, and filet mignon. Entrées are served with spoon bread, sweet-potato muffins, and cabbage slaw — traditional tavern favorites. There's also a selection of beer and wines, some from nearby Virginia vineyards. It's a lively place, and if you're lucky, an interpreter might even stop by your table and sing you a song.



In the weave room at the Wythe House, women busy their hands weaving thread and fabrics on colonial-style spinning wheels and looms.



## fastFACTS

**RESORT DIRECTORY:** IntervalWorld.com or pages 89 to 91

**CLIMATE:** Williamsburg welcomes all four seasons, but rarely experiences extreme temperatures, even at the peak of winter or summer. Sixty- and 70°F days through the fall are perfect for exploring the historic attractions.

**DON'T MISS:** The Public Gaol on Nicholson Street. Visit the cell where Blackbeard's gang once stayed.

**INTERVAL TRAVEL:** IntervalWorld.com or 800.235.4000

**RENTAL CAR:** Recommended. You'll walk through the historic areas, but a rental car is convenient for traveling between settlements and venturing out to other regional attractions such as Busch Gardens. Purchase Busch Gardens tickets at IntervalWorld.com.

**CONTACT:** Gazebo House of Pancakes & Waffles, [thegazeborestaurant.com](http://thegazeborestaurant.com); Bruton Parish Church, [brutonparish.org](http://brutonparish.org)

### VISITOR INFORMATION:

The Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance  
888.368.6511

[www.visitwilliamsburg.com](http://www.visitwilliamsburg.com)

[colonialwilliamsburg.com](http://colonialwilliamsburg.com)

After a superb dinner, I decided to close out the day by taking a ghost tour. I don't want to leap into the unfathomable, but something happened in front of the Peyton Randolph House that I still can't figure out. Standing in the twilight beneath a quarter moon just beginning, I felt a presence that seemed related to the spirits of the woman, boy, and man I mentioned at the outset. The house, built in 1715 and restored in 1940, is said to be the most haunted building in Williamsburg. "I don't know where the source of that light is coming from," Robert, our guide, said, pointing to a front window that appeared to be flickering as though a fire was going on behind it. Then, almost mystically, he whispered, "No one knows." Suddenly, a burst of cannon sounded in the distance and the light was gone. I took this as my cue to depart, thanked Robert, and stepped away into the early darkness invading North England Street. ■

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