

**Black History Month 2019:  
Special Exhibition; Featured Programs Mark 40  
Years of African-American Interpretation**



WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (Jan. 21, 2019) – This February Colonial Williamsburg celebrates Black History Month by showcasing the best of its year-round African-American programming, including the new “Music was my Refuge,” as well as tours and the grand opening Feb. 18 of a special exhibition at the Raleigh Tavern: “Revealing the Priceless: 40 Years of African-American Interpretation.”

The exhibition in the Raleigh’s Daphne and Billiards rooms memorializes by name each of the African-American men and women known to have lived in the city during the period Colonial Williamsburg interprets, from 1763 to 1785. It also examines the contributions of hundreds of interpreters, administrators, historians, archeologists, curators and community partners who have contributed to telling the story of over half of the city’s 18th-century population.

“So often our shared American story is told with brief reference to nameless ‘slaves.’ Early African Virginians were, first and foremost, people like us with lives, loves, hopes and struggles, as nearly all lived in legal bondage while others in society demanded unalienable rights,” said Actor-interpreter Stephen Seals, program manager for the 40th anniversary commemoration. “Our goal is to share their enduring stories. In February and throughout 2019 we invite guests to experience our remarkable new exhibition honoring them and those who tell their stories, along with the powerful interpretive programming we present every day.”

Black History Month programming highlights include the new “Music was my Refuge,” an uplifting journey from the 18th century to today, presented at 3 p.m. Tuesdays in the Raleigh Tavern’s Apollo Room. Special programming is presented in the Apollo Room daily in February at 1 and 3 p.m., in addition to regular themed tours of the Capitol, Governor’s Palace and Peyton Randolph House and interpretation at Caesar Hope’s Shop. At the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, the programs “Finding Diversity” and “Busting Myths!” are offered at 2:45 p.m. Tuesdays and 5 p.m. Fridays, respectively.

Commemoration of the 40th anniversary of comprehensive African-American interpretation began in January, when Colonial Williamsburg and All Together Williamsburg co-hosted a film screening and discussion series examining the ongoing impacts of slavery. Later this year, three special community conversation events at the Hennage Auditorium will examine the past, present and future of African-American historical interpretation at 5:30 p.m. May 10, July 5 and Oct. 18, respectively.

The 40th anniversary coincides with the region and nation’s commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the first arrival of Africans in English America at Point Comfort on modern-day Fort Monroe in Hampton.

Following its establishment in 1926 and the opening of its first public site in 1932, Colonial Williamsburg grew to become the world’s largest living history museum, interpreting Virginia’s capital on the cusp of the American Revolution. Over the decades, African-American employees worked increasingly in costume but almost exclusively as docents or portraying anonymous servants. Interpretation avoided aspects of their lives that risked pain or even discomfort for employees, guests and members of the community, regardless of race.

That changed in 1979, when the foundation engaged a group of students at nearby Hampton University about recruitment to work as first-person interpreters and engage guests in-character as African-American men and women known to have lived, worked and ministered in Williamsburg during the late 1700s. Their legacy is reflected today in the nation’s museums, historic sites, and popular culture, and in the work of Colonial Williamsburg’s interpreters.

The winter 2019 issue of “Trend & Tradition: The Magazine of Colonial Williamsburg,” features [special coverage](#) of the 40th anniversary commemoration, including interviews with early members of the African-American interpretive unit and their current counterparts.

“Revealing the Priceless” at the Raleigh Tavern is open daily Feb. 18-Dec. 31 from 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg remain open daily 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays and 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays in February during their \$41.7-million expansion, funded completely by donors and scheduled for completion in 2020.

Interpretive programming, historic sites and events are open to guests with Colonial Williamsburg admission or special program tickets. Space is limited and some programs included in admission require free reservations. Event and schedule information is subject to change. Tickets and current site and program schedule information are available at [colonialwilliamsburg.com/1979](http://colonialwilliamsburg.com/1979) or by calling 855-296-6627 toll-free.

Additional information is available via the free Colonial Williamsburg Explorer app, which can be downloaded from the Apple App Store and Google Play, and by following Colonial Williamsburg on [Facebook](#) and @colonialwmsburg on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

High-resolution images and video footage are available upon request.

About the 40th Anniversary logo: The sankofa bird symbol originated with the Akan people of West Africa in what is modern-day Ghana. In the region's Twi dialect, "sankofa" means "return and get it." The sankofa bird, looking back at its own tail, represents the African diaspora's recovery of its shared past in order to secure its future.

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*The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. Innovative and interactive experiences highlight the relevance of the American Revolution to contemporary life and the importance of an informed, active citizenry. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 400 restored or reconstructed original buildings, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 45 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.*

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