

# Colonial Williamsburg

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation  
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## Colonial Williamsburg's American Indian Initiative Takes Center Stage During November's Native American Heritage Month



Colonial Williamsburg's American Indian Initiative explores the lives and stories of American Indians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Image courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation  
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WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (Oct. 25, 2021) – This November, celebrate National Native American Heritage Month with [Colonial Williamsburg's American Indian Initiative](#). The month will include two livestream events and a series of special performances showcasing the diversity of American Indian experiences in 18th-century Williamsburg in addition to the American Indian Initiative's ongoing research, programming, demonstrations, and interpretation in Colonial Williamsburg's historic area and art museums.

“Too many people just don’t know that American Indian programming exists at Colonial Williamsburg,” said Martin Saniga, Supervisor of Colonial Williamsburg’s American Indian Initiative, and a member of the Sappony Tribe. “That needs to change. We have this incredible opportunity to tell stories about the 18<sup>th</sup> century that no one else can tell.”

American Indians were a political and economic force in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Williamsburg, Virginia. While most did not live in the city, they came to trade, to negotiate, and to study at the Brafferton, a school for Native Americans at William & Mary. Because various tribes converged in the city for diverse purposes, Colonial Williamsburg has the unique opportunity to offer a broad range of content related to 18<sup>th</sup>-century Native American life.

“Most of us are fairly comfortable thinking about the founding of our nation through the eyes of George Washington or Thomas Jefferson,” said Beth Kelly, vice president of Education, Research and Historical Interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg. “But what happens when we start to think about this pivotal time in our country’s history through the eyes of American Indian people? How does that broaden and enrich the stories we tell our children and our grandchildren, or the stories they tell us?”

Efforts to include the experiences and perspectives of American Indians in the larger narrative of life in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Williamsburg can be seen throughout Colonial Williamsburg’s campus. Currently on display at Colonial Williamsburg’s Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum is [Navajo Weavings: Adapting Tradition](#), an exhibition of brilliantly colored, boldly designed pictorial blankets and rugs crafted by Navajo women on hand looms. Additionally, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has [recently renewed its partnership with the Omohundro Institute](#) (OI), the nation’s leading academic center of historical research on all aspects of early America.

The American Indian Initiative is a relatively new initiative for the nearly 100-year-old foundation. Established with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 2002, the interpretive initiative was designed to give a voice to the untold stories of the native people of eastern North America. Since its inception, the American Indian initiative has hosted panel discussions and lecture series, renewed relationships with American Indian descendant communities, facilitated community discussions, and created numerous programs featuring the histories of 18<sup>th</sup>-century American Indians. The program is currently seeking additional staff members to help grow this initiative. These full-time interpreter positions are filled by 21<sup>st</sup>-century American Indians from around the United States who interpret the stories, roles, and interactions of diverse indigenous people in the 1700s and today. For more information on careers with Colonial Williamsburg, visit the careers page at [colonialwilliamsburg.org](http://colonialwilliamsburg.org).

Colonial Williamsburg’s American Indian Initiative plays a vital role in the Foundation’s mission to share a fuller, more inclusive history of Williamsburg and Colonial America. Guests are invited to attend one of the following special programs featuring American Indian stories. Programs at the Hennage Auditorium located within the Colonial Williamsburg Art Museums are free with admission. Livestream events are free online.

#### **Hennage Auditorium programs:**

- [From Freedom to Slavery](#) (Sept. 29; Oct. 6, 20, 27; Nov. 3, 10, 17)
- [Lafayette and Kayewla: The Marquis and the Oneida](#) (Nov. 4)
- [Sam's War](#) (Nov. 11)
- [Captives to Citizens](#) (Nov. 18)

- [Stories of the Past, People of the Present](#) (Nov. 25)

**Livestreams:**

- [Trades Tuesday: The Indian Trade](#) (Nov. 2)
- [CW Conversation: American Indian Heritage Month](#) (Nov. 20)

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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 600 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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