

Colonial Williamsburg



WILLIAM & MARY

CHARTERED 1693

**Williamsburg Commemorates 200th Anniversary of
Lafayette's Return, Oct. 20**

Colonial Williamsburg and William & Mary celebrate with series of special events



Image courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Download images [here](#).

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (Oct. 10, 2024) – Two hundred years ago, the Marquis de Lafayette, French hero of the American Revolution, visited Williamsburg as part of a 13-month tour of the United States. On Oct. 20, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and William & Mary invite the community to commemorate the return of America’s favorite fighting Frenchman with [a series of celebratory events](#).

“This 200th-anniversary celebration of the Marquis de Lafayette’s return to Williamsburg is only the beginning of the many anniversary events that Colonial Williamsburg is planning in the lead-up to the commemoration of America’s 250th anniversary in 2026,” said Cliff Fleet, president and CEO of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. “Just like Lafayette’s original

tour in 1824, this event invites us to reflect upon the principles that united the nation in 1776 as we seek to form a more perfect union.”

October 20 events begin with an 11 a.m. [“homecoming” ceremony](#) at the Wren Building to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Marquis receiving an honorary degree of laws from William & Mary. The original document, on loan from the Chambrun Foundation in France, is [currently on display](#) in Swem Library’s Special Collections Research Center until Nov. 15, along with other rare items related to Lafayette.

“William & Mary students, faculty and staff grew the big ideas that are still blossoming in the United States and across our global partnerships,” said Katherine Rowe, president of W&M. “We are pleased to remember the Marquis de Lafayette’s ties to William & Mary and display his honorary degree for the first time back in this country.”

The day will continue with a 1 p.m. [gathering in the heart of Colonial Williamsburg’s Historic Area](#) featuring a carriage procession, music, pomp and military salutes. Finally, the Marquis will perform in a [dramatic presentation](#) at the Kimball Theater at 3 p.m. in which he’ll reflect on the people and events he experienced during his life (Colonial Williamsburg admission ticket required).

Williamsburg is one of 200 cities across America that are participating in [the Lafayette200 Tour](#), organized by The American Friends of Lafayette in partnership with The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and cultural institutions across the nation. The tour is intended to educate the public about the life and legacy of Lafayette who was a fierce advocate for freedom, equality and democracy.

Colonial Williamsburg Nation Builder Mark Schneider has [portrayed Lafayette](#) in many of the Lafayette200 tour locations including the launch in New York in August, where he was featured on the front page of *The New York Times*. Schneider will portray Lafayette for the Williamsburg events, as well as in Yorktown on Oct. 18 and 19. On Oct. 19, he will be joined by Colonial Williamsburg Nation Builder Stephen Seals who portrays [James Armistead Lafayette](#).

James Armistead Lafayette was born an enslaved Virginian in New Kent County who worked for the Marquis de Lafayette as a double agent during the Revolution, supplying valuable intelligence that helped pave the way for the siege of Yorktown. He was granted his freedom in 1787 and added Lafayette to his name to honor the French general for whom he spied. When the Marquis returned to Yorktown in 1824, he greeted Armistead Lafayette with an embrace that was reported in the newspaper. For more information on this event, along with Mark Schneider’s additional Yorktown appearances, visit visityorktown.org/Calendar.

Lafayette biography

Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834) was born in France to a wealthy noble family. When he was 19 years old, Lafayette volunteered his services to the Continental Army. Though Congress was hesitant, his earnestness and assurance that he would serve at his own expense won him the rank of major general. He quickly fell into the company of George Washington, and the two formed a bond of will and philosophy so strong that Washington came to regard Lafayette as his son, a relationship reciprocated by the young Frenchman.

Lafayette's tactical cunning and fearlessness in battle helped to save the Revolution on many occasions. In 1779, Lafayette returned to France and helped to win formal French support for the American cause. At Yorktown, Lafayette helped to corner Britain's Lord Cornwallis, whose surrender after several days of siege was a fatal blow that ensured the American victory.

After the American Revolution, Lafayette returned to France where his popularity soared as he navigated the tenuous line between angry subjects and the monarchy. Lafayette authored the celebrated Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and advocated religious toleration and the end of slavery. When most of Europe declared war against France in 1792, Lafayette commanded a French army in the north, but was taken prisoner by the Austrians and remained with them for nearly five years. Lafayette and his wife Adrienne de Noailles had four children, including a son named Georges Washington. The general died in 1834.

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About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

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 36 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.

About William & Mary

*Founded by Royal Charter in 1693, William & Mary is the second oldest institution of higher learning in the country. The Alma Mater of the Nation is a preeminent university, combining the depth and breadth of a liberal arts and sciences education with the disciplined exploration and innovation of a leading, global research university. A vibrant and inclusive community, William & Mary cultivates creative thinkers, principled leaders and compassionate global citizens equipped for lives of meaning and distinction. As a "Public Ivy," the university convenes great minds and hearts to meet the most pressing needs of our time. William & Mary's graduate program in U.S. Colonial history was recently named the best in the country, according to **rankings** by U.S. News & World Report.*