



## Flowerdew Hundred

At the end of the first decade of English settlement, the Virginia colony was still struggling to survive. The years from 1617 to 1622, however, saw a dramatic increase in the number of new settlements along the James River and of immigrants from England. The growth and prosperity of this period were partly the result of a change of policy by the Virginia Company that encouraged private investments in the colony. The most important provision of this new policy permitted private economic ventures or settlements called "particular plantations", or "hundreds". For the first time, individual investors were allowed considerable freedom in managing their operations as well as the right to whatever commodities or profits were produced. The inducements of plentiful land, greater freedom from economic monopolies, and the discovery that tobacco was a profitable staple crop generated a heavy influx of men and supplies at a critical point in Virginia's settlement.

Flowerdew Hundred was one of the earliest and most important of these particular plantations. Sir George Yeardley had already acquired the 1,000 acre tract of land by 1619, when he became Governor of the colony. He named it Flowerdew Hundred, perhaps in honor of his new bride Temperance Flowerdew. Yeardley's settlement was already well established by the summer of 1619 as it was represented in the first General Assembly at that time. The Indian massacre in March of 1622 devastated most of the plantations in the colony, but Flowerdew Hundred was well defended and only six people were killed there. When the harassed colonists decided to temporarily abandon all but a handful of strongly fortified places in the wake of the massacre, Flowerdew Hundred was one of the few settlements that they continued to occupy. By 1624 Flowerdew Hundred had a population of over sixty people and was a thriving agricultural unit raising livestock and producing corn and a yearly tobacco crop of about 10,000 pounds. The settlement also had a windmill, the first in English North America, which had been built about 1621. Only a few years after the massacre Flowerdew Hundred was one of the largest and most developed settlements in Virginia.

Sir George Yeardley sold the plantation to Abraham Peirse in 1624. Peirse was a merchant-planter who, after Yeardley, ranked as the second wealthiest man in Virginia. A census of the colony taken in 1625 provides some rare details about Flowerdew Hundred at that time. A total of 57 people lived on the plantation, including "29 servants and 7 Negroes" belonging to Peirse. The other residents included six married men, their families and servants, three single men, and a minister. All of these people were probably Peirse's tenants. There were twelve dwelling houses on the plantation as well as three storehouses, four tobacco houses, and the windmill. Ample supplies of food were on hand in the form of cattle, hogs, corn, peas, and quantities of fish. A continued concern over defense was reflected in the cannon, armour, gunpowder, and swords listed.

Both Yeardley and Peirse invested heavily in developing Flowerdew Hundred, especially by controlling the labor of large numbers of indentured servants, and it is likely that both men realized handsome profits. Even at this early date agricultural operations at Flowerdew Hundred resembled those of the successful tobacco plantation of the later seventeenth century, which would remain basically unchanged until the introduction of Negro slaves on a large scale during the next century.

By the mid-seventeenth century Flowerdew Hundred was owned by William Barker, a merchant sea-captain, and later by his son John Barker. Toward the end of the century several unsuccessful attempts were made to found a town on the James River at Flowerdew, underlining the importance of the site's location as well as its commercial and agricultural value. By 1700 the original 1,000 acre plantation had been subdivided into several smaller tracts, but Flowerdew continued to be the site of agricultural operations on the fertile fields along the river. The largest portion of the original grant came to be owned by Joshua Poythress and several generations of his descendants during most of the eighteenth century.

Shortly after 1800 John Vaughan Willcox, a wealthy Petersburg merchant, married the daughter of the last Poythress to own the plantation. Adding to his wife's inheritance through purchase, Willcox and his son John Poythress Willcox eventually reassembled the original 1,000 acre tract under their ownership shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War. Both the Poythress and Willcox families operated Flowerdew Hundred as a typical large-scale commercial James River plantation, raising livestock and producing corn, tobacco, and later grain with the labor of large numbers of Negro slaves. Flowerdew Hundred remained in the hands of the descendants of the Willcox family until the twentieth century.

Flowerdew Hundred is one of the best preserved early seventeenth-century English settlements yet to be discovered in America. Its size, preservation, and history make it a major source of information about the early colonization period and the transformation of Englishmen into Americans.

The archaeological significance of Flowerdew Hundred lies in its many undisturbed sites. The techniques of surface survey and aerial photography have located over 60 archaeological sites dating from prehistoric times to the present. Indian occupation, revealed by the discovery of projectile points, pottery, and the remains of houses and villages, dates from about 9,000 B.C. to the seventeenth century. At least twelve sites date from the earliest period of English settlement circa 1619-1630. Two of these sites have been the focus of archaeological investigations; an enclosed settlement containing the remains of three or more wooden buildings, and a well-preserved house foundation made of siltstone which is part of a larger dwelling complex. Large quantities of artifacts such as armour, gun parts, leather goods, pottery, tools, glass beads, and tobacco pipes have been found at these sites.

Other archaeological sites at Flowerdew promise to be as richly informative as those already excavated. The excavation and study of these sites is a major part of the ongoing research program being conducted by Flowerdew Hundred Foundation, Inc., a non-profit, educational organization.

Flowerdew Hundred has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Historic Landmarks Register, thereby ensuring the preservation of the property for continued historical and archaeological research. The information obtained from this research will provide invaluable resources for our knowledge and understanding of early America.

**Flowerdew Hundred is located on the south side of the James River off Route 10, about 5 miles east of the Benjamin Harrison Bridge.**

**Open Daily (except Mondays) April 1 - November 30 (or by appointment)**

**Hours: 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.**

**Admission: Adults \$4.00; over 55 \$3.50; Children (6-12) \$2.50; under 6 free**

**Discounted group rates with confirmed reservation.**

**For more information write or call:**

**The Flowerdew Hundred Foundation  
1617 Flowerdew Hundred Road  
Hopewell, Virginia 23860  
(804) 541-8897 or 541-8938**