

# ROADS TO OUR ROOTS

Your RV and your inquiring mind can team up to help you trace your family's history.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JANET AND STUART WILSON

**“W**hat was the first name?" asked the elderly local woman seated at the table. The visitor across from her replied, "Lewis. Lewis Greenwood."

"No!" she exclaimed. "He was my grandfather." During a few moments' animated conversation, they worked out how they were related.

This scene played out in front of us in Massachusetts in a crowded basement room of the Gloucester City Hall. It's an example of the unexpected connections that often arise when seeking family history on the road. Searching for our ancestors enriches our travel. Walking the streets of great-grandfather's hometown brings us a little closer to him and connects us to that place. A little luck and perseverance yields a distant cousin, some old family homes, a poignant grave marker.

Some years ago on a fall trip through New England, we stopped in the small town of Machias, Maine, where Stu's grandmother said her father was born. We had little to go on. The bookstore clerk directed us to the seventh house on the left past the

Grange Hall. After knocking on the front door, two women — town historians and genealogists — greeted us. Graciously invited in, we spent an hour acquiring town history, learning of an ancestor killed in the first naval engagement of the American Revolution and discovering that we were sitting in the early 19th-century "Harper House," quite possibly built by another ancestor.

A good bit of luck helped in this discovery, but we did a couple of things to improve our chances. First, we interviewed Grandma at length. Second, we approached locals and asked for help.

We've found that a little advance research enhances our chance of success. Start with yourself and work backward. Interview older relatives and ask them about grandparents, aunts, uncles, more distant ancestors, where they came from and family stories. Write it down. Inquire about other living relatives who may have information. Perhaps a cousin is researching family history. Ask about old family Bibles, letters, other records and old photos, maybe with notes on the back. And now there's a valuable



Opening page: An old city directory and this vintage photo supplied the writers with enough information to locate the house a great-grandfather built in Eureka, Calif. Below: Local genealogists provided information about an ancestor killed during the first Revolutionary War naval battle, and the role played by this historic tavern. Right: With help from the gravedigger and some leg work, the writers found a family monument with two generations of names, plus birth and death dates, in Alfred, Maine.



tool not available when we began: the Internet. Rootsweb.com, Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, among other sites, allow you to research family names, connect with others who may be working on the same families and even search census records.

Recently we drove to an address of a second great-grandmother and found a beautifully maintained Victorian bungalow. As we parked on the residential street to photograph the old family home, we struck up a conversation with a neighbor and found that family members had lived in that house until the 1950s or '60s.

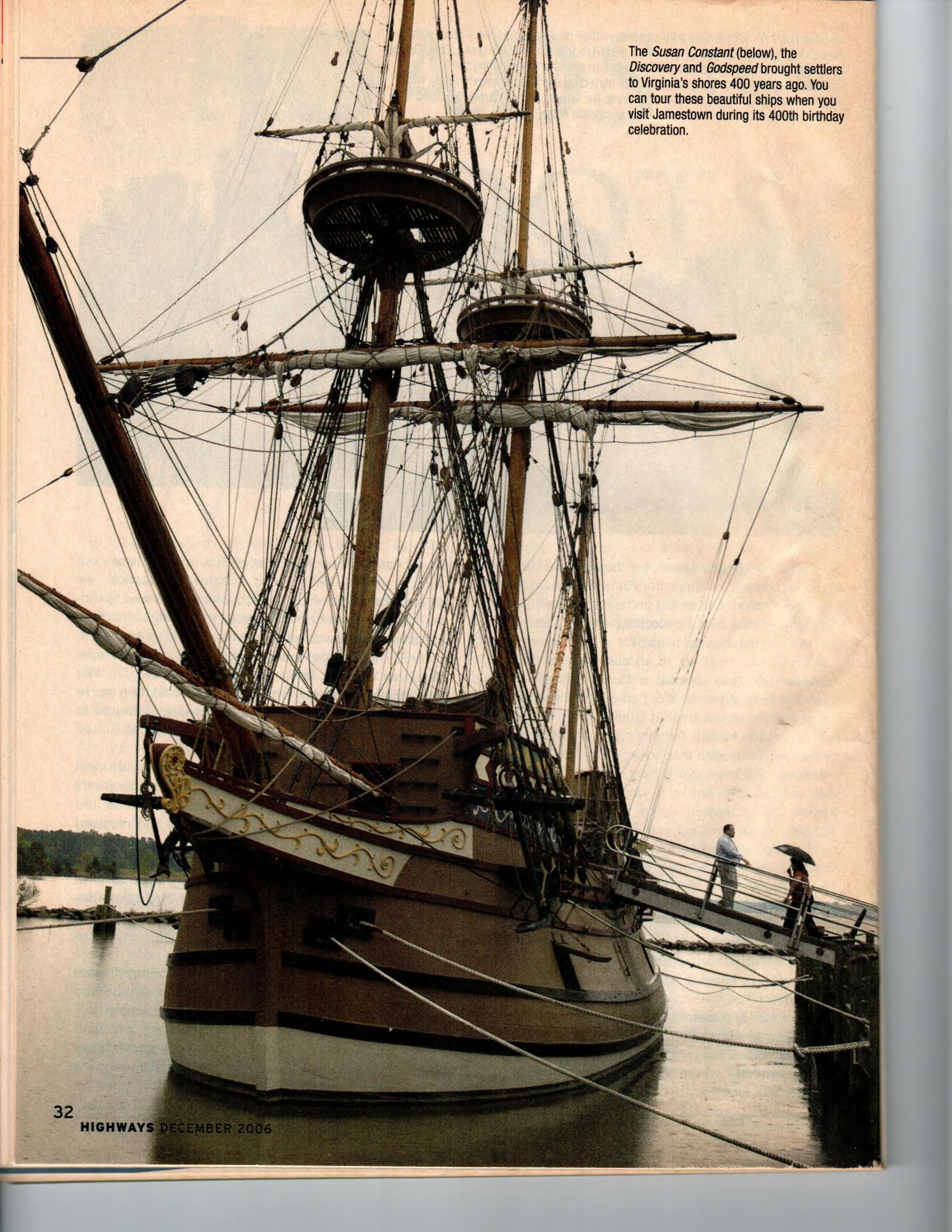
Though we have many New England ancestors, we also located the house a great-grandfather built in Eureka, Calif., tracked down houses in Albuquerque designed by an architect grandfather and stood with an aunt in front of a grocery in Moorpark, Calif., originally built as a garage by another grandfather. We even stood in what the English call a redundant (meaning no longer supported by a congregation) 13th-century stone church in Bedfordshire, England, where distant ancestors once worshipped. We chatted with locals in a rural Scottish pub who pointed us to Foreland, where the 1851 British census records suggest Stu's great-grandfather lived as a small child.

Cemeteries and memorials also connect us with ancestral places. In Alfred Evergreen Cemetery in Maine, the gravedigger directed us to older graves toward the front of the cemetery where we discovered the Day family plot. In the First Parish Burial Ground in Gloucester,

Mass., dating from 1644, a survey of markers was conducted around 1900. Based on this information, we located the grave of a fifth great-grandfather and grandmother in the overgrown cemetery. Although the original grave marker was largely destroyed due to vandalism, a 1900 headstone survey recorded these words: "Abraham Williams, Revolutionary Soldier. Also, his Wife Lois Williams. They rest from their labors and their works shall follow them." And the Fisherman's Memorial in Gloucester lists another ancestor as among the hundreds of local fisherman lost at sea.

Travel also provides the opportunity for additional family history research in local libraries and city, county and state archives. We've discovered both home and business addresses in old city directories and received valuable help from local research librarians, including locating a grandmother's high school and a family tavern. Specialized family history and genealogy libraries such as the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, and the New England Historic Genealogical Society Library in Boston, Mass., are valuable resources worthy of a visit.

Maybe thoroughly researching your genealogy doesn't appeal to you. Still, a little digging into your ancestry rewards you when you travel — meeting interesting, usually helpful local people; even finding a distant cousin you didn't know you had. But no matter who or what you find, you'll gain a sense of personal connection to places you visit. •



The *Susan Constant* (below), the *Discovery* and *Godspeed* brought settlers to Virginia's shores 400 years ago. You can tour these beautiful ships when you visit Jamestown during its 400th birthday celebration.

# Jamestown's 400th

Not just another birthday.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JAMES AND DOROTHY RICHARDSON

**T**here has been a celebration every 50 years for the landing of the 104 English men and boys at Jamestown Settlement in Virginia. In 1907, on the 300th anniversary, 1.5 million visitors passed through the Historic Triangle to hear Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington and Mark Twain. Who knows the magnitude of the visitation and the names of the notables speaking in 2007, the 400th anniversary.

The events of the 18 months of celebration began in October and will continue until spring 2008. New facilities are scheduled to open in commemoration of this anniversary — at Historic Jamestown a new collections building called the Jamestown Rediscovery Center is already open. In addition, there will be an Archaearium (a \$5 million, 7,500-square-foot educational building housing many colonial artifacts), a restaurant on the banks of the James River and a new visitor center (it replaces the old visitor center that was wrecked by Hurricane Isabel). At

Jamestown Settlement a new visitor center and living history museum are opening soon also.

## How It Began

It was not an easy thing to begin a new life on a new continent 400 years ago. One hundred and four passengers aboard three ships — the *Discovery*, *Godspeed* and the *Susan Constant* — sailed for 4½ months across the Atlantic Ocean from Great Britain and picked a location 50 miles up the James River from the Chesapeake Bay. They originally landed at Cape Henry, but encountered natives and decided on a less conspicuous spot. Their chosen location gave them a good vantage point for approaching Spanish warships and also provided more protection from an Indian attack.

By the end of the first year, only 38 remained of the original 104. Starvation, Indian attacks and fever acquired from the mosquito-infested "paradise" took their toll. But in January and October of 1608, other British supply ships arrived and rejuvenated



While visiting Jamestown, take time to tour nearby Williamsburg. See the sights the old-fashioned way during a carriage ride.



the settlement. Thus began the first permanent English settlement in North America.

## Today's Jamestown

A replica of the original Jamestown fort utilizes costumed interpreters in a living-history setting to guide visitors through the recreations of life inside and outside the colonists' fort. There is also a re-created Powhatan Indian village and the three ships that brought the 104 to the New World. This section, called the Jamestown Settlement, is near Historic Jamestown, where visitors can share the discoveries with working archaeologists at the 1607 James Fort excavations. There they can also view the artifacts, watch glassblowers (one of the first exports to England was glass products) and tour the 17th-century church.

Archaeologically speaking, the greatest find in recent

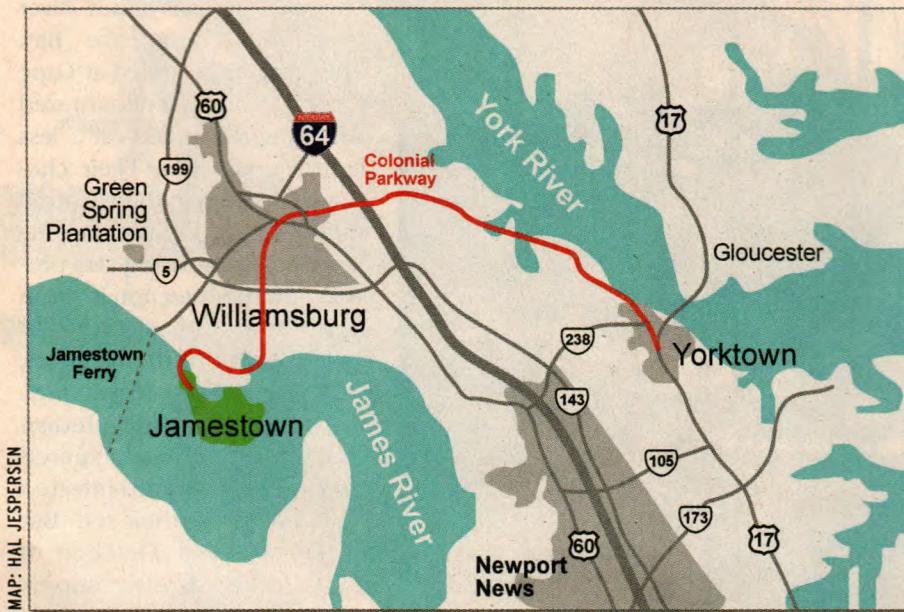
years occurred in 2003 when the entire perimeter of the original fort of 1607 was discovered. Since then several buildings have been excavated within the fort's walls, along with thousands of artifacts and numerous skeletal remains of some of the first settlers. According to William Kelso, the chief archaeologist at the site (as quoted in *Smithsonian Magazine*), "This was a huge find. We know where the heart is ... we know exactly where to dig."

## Other Corners of the Triangle

Jamestown is only part of Virginia's Historic Triangle. Colonial Williamsburg and Yorktown make up the second and third points of that triangle. Williamsburg is the premier living-history site in the country and continues to demonstrate life in Revolutionary days. Yorktown is also celebrating an anniversary — 2006 marked its 225th

year. These three sites are closely related in that the first British settlement began at Jamestown. Williamsburg, being the cultural, social and political center of the English colonies, saw a movement to become independent from Britain. And the Battle of Yorktown, the last major clash between Britain and the colonists, ended the same English rule, which began at Jamestown.

Colonial Williamsburg covers more than 300 acres and contains hundreds of buildings. The streets, lined with shops, taverns and public buildings, are the same ones walked by Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and Patrick Henry. Visitors can experience the feel of the 18th





Completing the historic triangle of Virginia is Yorktown. Tour the battlefield where 225 years ago, the Battle of Yorktown was fought.

century by seeing and hearing characters of the era. Relive the events that led to America's independence in a production called the Revolutionary City. It is enacted out on the streets of Colonial Williamsburg and is divided into two parts. Day One is about Independence and

## Signature Events of America's 400th Anniversary

- African American Heritage Events: January - September
- The World of 1607: Spring 2007 - Winter 2008
- Journey Up the James, Along the Chesapeake Bay and James River: April 26-27, Virginia Beach; April 28-29, Hampton; May 4-5, Newport News; May 6, Claremont; May 11-13, Surry County; May 23-25, Richmond; May 25-26, Henricus
- America's Anniversary Weekend: May 11-13, Historic Jamestown, Jamestown Settlement & Anniversary Park
- Smithsonian Folklife Festival - The Roots of Virginia Culture: June 27-July 1; July 4-8, 2007; National Mall, Washington, D.C.
- American Indian Intertribal Cultural Festival: July 21-22, 2007; Hampton, Va.

For updated information, visit  
[www.americas400thanniversary.com](http://www.americas400thanniversary.com)

Day Two is about being Americans. home was used for negotiating surrender terms at the end of the battle. Both are open for tours.

More changes have occurred along the waterfront of the York River. Riverwalk Landing features specialty shops, restaurants, a beach and two piers. It is just a short walk from Historic Yorktown and has free parking.

The site of the Battle of Yorktown in the fall of 1781 is commemorated by a museum with significant artifacts from the period, including a collection of tents used by Gen. George Washington. A nine-mile self-guided driving tour takes visitors past important points of interest.

Joining all three important sites in the Historic Triangle is the Colonial Parkway, almost a destination within itself. Although the length is only 23 miles, it passes through some of the most beautiful scenery in the area. It connects Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown. The main route to Virginia's Historic Triangle is Interstate 64, either through Richmond or the Hampton-Newport News area. U.S. Highway 60 follows a similar route.

The 400th anniversary of Jamestown promises to be something special. Little did those 104 colonists know how special they were in 1607. •



### GETTING THERE

### PHONE

### WEBSITE

### CLUB PROGRAMS

## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Virginia has an active Good Sam Club membership. Get more involved by joining a chapter.

For detailed driving directions, visit Good Sam's Trip Routing at [www.goodsamclub.com/trip](http://www.goodsamclub.com/trip).

800-368-6511, 727-229-6511

[www.americas400thanniversary.com](http://www.americas400thanniversary.com)

Contact state Director Aaron Mitchell, 200 Duck Run Lane, Star Tannery, VA 22654; [amitch@shentel.net](mailto:amitch@shentel.net).

GENEALOGY TO GO • DOWN UNDER WITH GOOD SAM



# HIGHWAYS

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OFF THE  
BEATEN PATH

10 UNIQUE DESTINATIONS – THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE