

Roots of Virginia Culture: Researching and Interpreting History



HISTORICAL ROOTS run deep in Virginia; Kent County, England; and West Africa. Using everything from the remains of old structures to documents, paintings, artifacts, and photos, the staff of museums, archives, and libraries conduct research in order to portray history as accurately as possible to the public. Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown Settlement, the Museum of Kent Life, and Senegal's Goree Island (the embarkation point of many enslaved West Africans) bring history alive.

How does someone untrained in research methods go about tracing his or her family history? Asking older relatives, sifting through court and church records, and mining family photographs used to be the only ways. Today, the Internet and other high-tech tools have caused a boom in genealogy. People, such as African Americans, who often cannot trace historical documents, turn to DNA research to uncover their family origins. Kent County's Archives Service holds collections which contain a wonderful variety of material dating from 699 C.E. to the present day.



(Above) The Revolutionary City program at Colonial Williamsburg interprets life during the Revolutionary War. Photo by Harold Anderson, Smithsonian Institution

(Below) West African *griots* pass on family and community history through story and song. Photo by Gorgui N'Diaye

(Below left) The Museum of Kent Life includes small "hoppers huts," temporary shelters that housed hop pickers. Oral history projects in Kent have recorded the memories of this itinerant labor force.

Photo by Betty J. Belanus, Smithsonian Institution

